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### Philipp Ammon. Georgia zwischen Eigenstaatlichkeit und russische Okkupation (Georgia between Nationhood and Russian Occupation)

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**Philipp Ammon. *Georgia zwischen Eigenstaatlichkeit und russische Okkupation*  
(*Georgia between Nationhood and Russian Occupation*).  
Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2020**

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The book provides detailed analysis of political, historical, religious and cultural roots of the ongoing conflict between Russia and Georgia, which started more than 200 years ago in what is now a strategically important area of the world – the South Caucasus. That region, which includes Georgia alongside Armenia and Azerbaijan, serves as a natural corridor through which Western countries can get access to the vital hydrocarbon resources of Central Asia, bypassing Russia. At the same time, after the disintegration of the USSR, the South Caucasus turned into one of the “hot zones” where polar ideologies and economic interests of major powers collide. However, the region somehow gets neglected by Western politicians and media.

As a result of such neglect, Georgia and other small nations of the Caucasus are often left at the mercy of their powerful and ambitious neighbor – Russia. That causes disappointment and disillusionment among pro-western Georgians and increasingly weakens Western positions in the whole of the Eastern Mediterranean including the South Caucasus. Meanwhile, the recent Russian aggression against Georgia and Russian-sponsored ethnic cleansings in the occupied Georgian provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia serve as a grim reminder of how important it is to understand the volcanic forces that may explode the region, with dire consequences for the whole world.

In investigating the dramatic events of Georgian history and the origins of Georgia’s conflict with Russia, the author of the book adheres to an original cultural-historical hermeneutic method of analysis that makes his study different from the studies of the majority of his colleagues, most of whom prefer sociological and structural methods. The methodology chosen by the author allows him to sharpen his view of a number of significant historical and cultural phenomena and, in particular, to cast doubt on the concept of “invented nation”, which many contemporary researchers of recent Georgian history and Russo-Georgian conflict tend to adhere to.

Ammon’s book is rich in scope and offers a clear and concise (but not simplistic) outline of Georgian history from 1112 BC to 1924 AD, with the focus on the major events of the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries connected with the expansion of Russia in the Caucasus in general, and in Georgia in particular.

Those events, described in chapters II-VIII of the book, include but are not limited to the secret agreement between King Vakhtang VI of the East Georgian Kingdom of Kartli and Czar Peter the Great of Russia (1720), the conclusion of the Treaty of Georgievsk (1783), the annexation of Georgian kingdoms and principalities by the Russian empire in breach of the above-mentioned treaty (1801-1867), the national awakening of Georgians in the 19th century, the abolition and restoration of the autocephalous status of the Georgian Church (1811 and 1917, respectively), Georgian role in the Russian revolution of 1905 and in World War I, the restoration of Georgian independence (1918), the Soviet-Georgian war and Sovietization of Georgia (1921) and the revolt of 1924.

While appreciating the detailed and meticulous research performed by the author of the book, one should mention though that he seems to have overlooked the fact that upon incorporation into the Russian empire, Georgia never constituted an integral administrative unit. Historical Georgian lands were split into two separate provinces (gubernii) – the province of Tiflis and the province of Kutais. When a few more historical Georgian territories were incorporated into the empire following the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78, they were organized into the separate districts of Batum, Ardahan and Olty, thus further fragmenting the Georgian cultural and linguistic realm. The author also uses the phrase “Samachablo and Kartli,” which is rather questionable, keeping in mind that throughout history, the feudal fief of Samachablo comprised a part of the province of Shida Kartli.

While covering the fall of the First Republic described in Chapter VIII, the author seems to overestimate the role of Georgian Bolsheviks in the Sovietization of Georgia in 1921. Despite the fact that well-known Russian Bolsheviks of Georgian descent were quite active in undermining the independent Georgian statehood which they considered “bourgeois” and “nationalistic”, there were way more important geopolitical and economic factors that led to the loss of Georgia’s independence in 1921. Those factors include the inability of the three South Caucasian states (Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan) to come to agreements regarding the disputed territories (as they clearly demonstrated at the conference in San Remo in April, 1920), and the lightning collapse of independent Azerbaijan. These events, in turn, resulted in the failure of Lord Curzon’s doctrine of the “Transcaucasian palisade” against possible Russian and Turkish expansion into the Middle East and India, and the formation of the Soviet-Kemalist alliance and certain interests of British oil-exporters. One may also question the author’s statement that the Menshevik-dominated government of the First Republic of Georgia failed to create an effective army. In fact, the said government did not trust the professional military for protection of the country. That prejudice and mistrust was deeply rooted in the social democratic ideology of the Menshevik leadership. Accordingly, the government of the First Republic constantly exerted moral and financial pressure on its army and regularly conducted unnecessary personnel shifts thus reducing its combat readiness.

Instead, the leaders of the First Republic preferred to count on the National Guard which in 1921 proved ineffective due to the lack of professionalism and discipline.

However, in general, most of the historical facts and events of Georgian history are described in the book quite accurately. The contents of Ammon's study is supported by rich and diverse bibliographic material listed at the end of the book. The multiple sources in four different languages used by the author in his research work include more than 200 books and magazine articles, as well as dozens of dictionaries, encyclopedias, websites and other reference works in a wide range of areas directly or indirectly connected with the subject of his book.

One of the main advantages of the book by Philipp Ammon is that it not only describes the important historical events but also examines the significant processes that have been fuelling the political, cultural and military clashes between Russia and Georgia. That makes it an asset for a wide-ranging readership, from students of Georgian history to diplomats and politicians who would like to gain balanced and objective information on the backgrounds of the long-lasting conflict in one of the sensitive regions of the world. The significance of Ammon's book is further magnified by the fact that the history of Georgia still remains an under-studied and under-researched field, as there is still not enough professional literature on this subject available in the West in general and even less so in the German-speaking countries.