

Meeting between the Presidents of the U.S. and Georgia: Bill Clinton and Eduard Shevardnadze

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Abstract

On the basis of various important and interesting literatures, the author tried to provide an answer to the question: what are the results in the field of politics and the energy sector that were brought through the U.S. diplomacy in the period of 1996 - 1997? This paper focuses on showing the U.S. diplomatic assistance, political and energy interests after the fall of the USSR, and to point out American interests in Georgia. The aim of the work is to promote, answer, and assess the United States foreign and energy policy towards Georgia and South Caucasus region, and it also shows the peculiarities that made American-Georgian partnership strategic in the region. The main result of the paper, as well as its applicability is expressed in its innovation. This is however one of the first attempts to research political relationship between the U.S. and Georgia in the XX century.

Keywords: Georgia, the U.S., Russia, Clinton, Shevardnadze.

Introduction

The United States recognized the independence of Georgia on December 25, 1991, when President George H.W. Bush announced the decision in an address to the nation regarding the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Previously, Georgia had been a constituent republic of the USSR. December 25, 1991 can be named as a starting point of Georgian-American diplomatic relations. On this date, George H.W. Bush addressed the former Soviet republics: “Today, the United States also recognizes the independence of the remaining six former Soviet republics: Moldova, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Georgia, and Uzbekistan. We will establish diplomatic relations with them when we are satisfied that they have made commitments to responsible security policies and democratic principles, as like the other states we recognize today” (Doghonadze, 2002: 22).

“The United States applauds and supports the historic choice for freedom by the new states of the Commonwealth. We congratulate them on the peaceful and democratic path they have chosen and for their careful attention to nuclear control and safety during this transition.

Despite a potential for instability and chaos, these events clearly serve our national interest” (Bush, 1991).

U.S. Embassy in Georgia was established on April 23, 1992. However, diplomatic relations were established on March 24, 1992, when President George H.W. Bush announced the decision in a press statement (Bush, 1991). Throughout these years, Georgian-American political relations have developed and have become one of the strategic relations in the South Caucasus.

In 1992, Bill Clinton, a democrat, won the U.S. presidential election. During his diplomacy, the U.S. geopolitical goals became more active in the South Caucasus. However, Washington became keen on asserting its influence in the region and Bill Clinton’s administration started the realization of American interests in the region.

Purpose and Scope

The present paper attempts to promote, answer, and assess the United States foreign and energy policy towards Georgia and South Caucasus region and show the peculiarities that made American-Georgian partnership strategic in the region. The significance of this recent study dealt with this theme based on the author’s knowledge. This has made it very interesting to discuss and analyze the important political benefits of the meeting between the Presidents, Bill Clinton and Eduard Shevardnadze, in 1997.

Methodology

This is a qualitative research study using a content analysis, and it is appropriate to the exploratory nature of the research.

Background

The President of the United States, Bill Clinton, and the President of the Republic of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze, met in the White House on July 27, 1997.

The first meeting between the Presidents of Georgia and the United States was held in 1994. In 1997, Shevardnadze visited Washington for the second time. However, the foreign policy of the United States had changed a lot by then. In particular, the U.S. interest in Georgia and

South Caucasus had increased significantly. At that time, the United States had already increased geopolitical interests toward Caucasus and Central Asia. This was caused by the existence of supplies of oil and natural gas. All this is related to the American economic interests to become more competitive in the region. The United States has been actively considering the idea of creating European-Asian transport corridor and communications links between Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey. Georgia also has high importance because of its geographic location. Thus, American interests have been growing. In 1997, during his meeting with Eduard Shevardnadze, President Bill Clinton confirmed the U.S. resolution about the readiness to support Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan project, as well as to enhance international energy projects in South Caucasus. Shevardnadze declared that they achieved a political decision in Washington - to transport Caspian oil to the international market and not exclude the use of western destinations to achieve this goal (Clinton, 1997).

Furthermore, the U.S. interest in solving problems in the energy sector in Georgia is of high priority. Eduard Shevardnadze declared that Georgia is ready to implement the new energy route, and the U.S. is ready to act together with Georgia to accomplish the idea of “Peaceful Caucasus” (Clinton, 1997). The national economic priorities of Georgia were to develop international cooperation with the U.S. and to increase the participation with the World Bank and other international institutions in Georgian financial market. Most importantly, the U.S. saw great significance of developing new projects related to oil pipelines in the energy sector. In addition, the U.S. was eager to protect the Black Sea region, its cultural heritage, as well as to secure municipal development programs. The United States was also concerned about the conflict in Abkhazia and supported an active peacekeeping role of the United Nations in the region. The American party supported a large-scale multinational peacekeeping operation. However, this operation did not mean that the Russian Federation would be out of the process. After the involvement of other states, Russia took up its significant role in Abkhazian conflict resolution.

It is a pity that the U.S. as well as the United Nations still recognized Russian influence on the separatist regime in Abkhazia, when Russian Federation still ignored Georgia’s territorial integrity.

During the presidential meeting, Tedo Japaridze - Georgian Ambassador to the U.S. - said that the President of the Republic of Georgia would meet with American companies and representatives from the financial sector. Then they would discuss the issue of European-

Asian corridor and American business interests in Georgia. During the visit of President Shevardnadze, another agreement with American corporations was signed to start modernizing Georgian air space systems and to come closer to Western standards. The entire project cost 80 million dollars (Japaridze, 1997). The control of Georgian space and the modernization of airports were one of the most important parts of Europe-Asia corridor project, and they would serve as a guarantee of future entrance of American investments in Georgia.

The political cooperation between Georgian and American political groups is vital for the development of future collaboration between the countries. Also, Georgia needs to increase its economic potential and share international experience in the process of oil and gas transition.

According to Shevardnadze, he was satisfied with the meeting with Clinton, where he discussed the problems in the South Caucasus and the ongoing processes in Georgia. Shevardnadze underlined that Georgia had already achieved progress in terms of reforms, as well as finding solutions to economic problems, which was made possible with the financial assistance from Washington (Shevardnadze, 1997). The Georgian and American parties discussed the new function of the South Caucasus, which deals with the development of Eurasian corridor project. The parties highlighted the importance of the stability and security in the region and a crucial role of international pipelines.

Eduard Shevardnadze emphasized the importance of the territorial integrity of Georgian citizens in Georgia and hoped that the problem of Abkhazia would be resolved with the American political assistance. Shevardnadze believed that the U.S. should have played an active role in the process of conflict resolution.

In addition, Shevardnadze mentioned a meeting that was to be held in Abkhazia and Geneva to discuss conflict resolution formats, and Georgian government was eager to see active involvement of the U.S. in the process of conflict resolution.

However, Eduard Shevardnadze did not exclude the active role of the Russian Federation within the peace mandate. Shevardnadze once again underlined that the Georgian nation was grateful for the American humanitarian and financial aid. Shevardnadze claimed that American financial aid saved Georgia from starvation. As for the North Atlantic Alliance,

according to Shevardnadze, the alliance had already expanded, and the Russian Federation became a member of the “Big Eight”. As a result, all parties were satisfied. Shevardnadze underlined the complexity of joining North Atlantic Organization in the coming years, but noted that Alliance member countries should have been informed about Georgia’s desire to integrate in the North Atlantic Organization. Shevardnadze was aware of the statement made by the President of Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin: “Russia is against possible integration of Georgia in the Alliance.” However, Shevardnadze clarified that Yeltsin was not the President of Georgia. Shevardnadze also raised a question regarding Russian bases in Georgia and explained that the Russian Federation was to fulfill the following two conditions to maintain its bases: 1. Russia must recognize the territorial integrity of Georgia and territorial integrity must be restored; 2. Georgian army must be provided with weapons and equipment (Shevardnadze, 1997). Only upon the completion of these two conditions by the Russian party would Georgia be ready to discuss the possibility of maintaining Russian bases on the territory of Georgia. If Russia was to refuse completion of these two conditions, Georgian parliament would not ratify the following statement and everyone was aware of the result that would follow. He also mentioned that the Georgian and American parties had already signed a military cooperation agreement, but that did not mean that the U.S. military equipment would immediately move from Washington to Tbilisi (Shevardnadze, 1997).

Findings

In 1996-1997, the U.S. abandoned its traditional original policy of making energy goals secondary to other foreign policy objectives and of taking energy initiatives as specific crises emerged. In fact, Washington has specifically focused on securing more oil from foreign sources in order to support global economic growth and American geopolitical interest in the South Caucasus. It is important to note that Washington has prioritized the enhancement of the U.S. power projection so as to guarantee the continued flow of energy to the American market and major U.S. trading partners. During the Bill Clinton’s presidency, American oil diplomacy was a priority of the U.S. interest in the Caspian Basin, which, on its behalf, was very important for Georgia. Washington has had long term goals and interest to achieve economic security in the region and have also helped Georgia to achieve its international integration and development. Washington tries to implement its new and realistic foreign policy, become more competitive in regional power, and reduce the influence of Russia in the region. Bill Clinton also shaped new American foreign policy oriented on South Caucasia

region. For its geographical position, Georgia became more important to the U.S. geopolitical interests. According to this, the U.S. was eager to enhance the bilateral cooperation with Georgia and help towards achieving progress.

Political and Financial Benefits

The meeting between the Presidents of the United States and Georgia was rather dynamic and fruitful. For example, Georgia gained international support from the U.S. Moreover, Washington officially declared that initiatives of Georgia were welcomed to be more actively engaged in the peace process. Resolution of the Abkhazian conflict was of crucial importance for the United Nations, and the U.S. hoped that other states would actively participate in the conflict resolution (Georgian Archive, 1997).

Additionally, the Bill Clinton administration also welcomed the reforms in Georgia and was ready to support Georgian Government in implementation of new strategies. The U.S. government increased the foreign aid up to 100 million US dollars for Georgia. It was crucial that the American party understood how important it was to achieve a high level of security in the Caucasus region and support the initiative “Peaceful Caucasus” (Georgian Archive, 1997).

During the visit of President Shevardnadze in Pentagon, Georgian and American parties signed an agreement on cooperation between the U.S. and Georgia against the spread of weapons of mass destruction. Most importantly, the agreement contained elements to enhance the military and defense cooperation. The above-mentioned agreement gave Georgia an opportunity to implement modern systems, which were also part of American aid. The United States were ready to share the experience of non-proliferation of nuclear, chemical, biological and related technologies with Georgia. For this purpose, the American party would finance specialists and relevant laboratories (Georgian Archive, 1997).

Eduard Shevardnadze brought guarantees of American investments in Georgian energy sector. American companies such as “Shelley” and “Arco” had long-term interest in the energy sector of Georgia and resource investment issue (Georgian Archive, 1997).

In 1997, the U.S. adopted a decision to transfer American helicopters to Georgia. In addition, the U.S. government increased military funding for Georgia. Due to territorial integrity

conflicts and civil war, Georgia had serious problems in terms of arms and equipment of national forces. However, American aid was not delayed and the U.S. sent a coast guard ship to Georgia. The U.S. decided to help create Georgian National Armed Forces. The American party also shared its practical knowledge and experience with Georgian professionals. In addition, the United States made a decision to open another English language-training lab in Georgia, which would provide military trainings in the field of defense. The Georgian side was also ready to assist other states in their fight against drugs and cooperate in the region as much as possible to defeat terrorism (Georgian Achieve, 1997). Nevertheless, sharing American experience was important for the Georgian party in terms of training the military personnel and other professionals in any field. This was a guarantee of the institutional development in the country and the increase of the level of democracy. On January 7, 1997, the White House Press Speaker, Mike McCurry, said that the U.S. Senator, Jude Greg, actively worked in Bill Clinton's Administration to grant another 30 million dollars' aid to Georgia (McCurry, 1997).

Bilateral Cooperation with the U.S. and Georgia

In 1997, the U.S. Ministry of Defense and the Department of Border Protection of Georgia signed an agreement to assist the Georgian party in avoiding the spread of weapons of mass destruction and creating a special system for its export control. This cooperation helped the enhancement of political, self-defense, and military ties. In 1997, Georgian and American parties signed several agreements in military field to cooperate against terrorism and instability in the South Caucasus (Georgian Archive, 1997).

In 1997, the U.S. signed an agreement to enhance collaboration with Georgian Military Forces (Clinton, 1997).

On March 12, 1997, the Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia, Zurab Zhvania, met with the Chairman of the U.S. Senate Foreign Committee, Mitch McConnell. The Committee decided to strengthen American foreign policy towards Georgia. The visit was of utmost importance since by this step, the U.S. policy makers demonstrated their support towards Georgian territorial integrity and sovereignty (Georgian Achieve, 1997).

In 1997, the United States Department of Agriculture and Food sponsored 20 million dollars to Georgian market to achieve food stability in Georgia. In addition, in 1997, the U.S.

Investment Group Fund "NCD" allocated 1 million dollars to invest in real estate sector and tea factories in Georgia (Georgian Achieve, 1997). Georgia is seen as an economically unstable country, and foreign investment plays a crucial role in its development. However, the American investment companies are interested in Georgian market and this will be the guarantee of creating a stable and competitive economic atmosphere in the country.

Conclusion

In 1996-1997, the political relations between Georgia and the United States developed quite dynamically and efficiently. The meeting between Eduard Shevardnadze and Bill Clinton was a starting point of diplomatic and bilateral cooperation between Georgia and the U.S. This was a guarantee for deepening and enhancing the Georgian-American political relations in the future.

In 1996-1997, Georgia and the United States already had some real diplomatic consequences in Georgian-American political relations. This was crucial for future collaboration in the region. Thus, American political messages prove that Georgia is really in the area of the American geopolitical interests. In 1996-1997, Georgia and the U.S. already had diplomatic relations based on mutual values that guaranteed strong political contacts. Georgia gained important international support from Washington. It is also very vital for Georgia to be competitive and secure in the South Caucasus. Consequently, these political peculiarities made American-Georgian partnership strategic in the region.

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