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Democratic Reforms and Human Rights in the Democratic Republic of Georgia

The first Democratic Republic of Georgia, in the act of independence, laid down the construction of a democratic, western-standard state. The situation was quite difficult, because the newly created state inherited the system that practically existed during the Russian Empire, the main principle of which was a strong monarchist structure and paid little attention to the rights of the conquered peoples, while in fact the goal was their assimilation.

Since Georgia chose the style of republican governance, democratic state building, the country needed to implement the entire cycle of reforms. In this regard, there were several important factors that should be paid attention to.

It was necessary to redistribute the power so that the people of specific regions would have the right to decide what was better for them. There were also problems in terms of education. In the Russian Empire, the issue of the language of the conquered peoples was given quite bad attention, and if we take into account the fact that Georgia was a part of Russia, no one obliged or provided opportunities for the representatives of other ethnic groups living here to study the Georgian language. As a result, the First Republic of Georgia got a situation where representatives of the ethnic minority lived compactly in certain

areas of its territory, but they did not know Georgian language, which made their integration into the state difficult.

The issue of ethnic minorities was also important in that their rights were spelled out in the Act of Independence, and to strengthen their situation, separate legislative and practical reforms were needed.

Of course, it is impossible to discuss all the details of the problems on this issue within the framework of one article, but the main essence of the issue is just that.

In order to organize local self-government organizations, self-government bodies, nations, whose members were chosen by the people, were formed. It was a significant step forward in the direction of democratization to give more rights to the people. However, there was still one flaw in this regard. The budgets of local self-government bodies and municipalities were still approved by the central government, that is, they had to be reviewed and approved by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The purpose of creating local self-government bodies is, on the one hand, to increase the rights of the local population and give them the right to decide for themselves the issues necessary for their region, and also such a distribution of power creates a more flexible system. In this regard, the review and approval of their budget by the Ministry of Internal Affairs lost these advantages to a certain extent. The only justification for this decision can be that since the independence of the state was newly restored and there were many problems in terms of socio-economic or military defense, the central government wanted to have more control over the regions and in the initial stage to have more control over the reforms carried out by them or the decisions made.

The Act of Independence was the first and most important step to protect ethnic minorities and lay the foundation for a

state of modern, Western standards. At the legislative level, there was a guarantee that representatives of the ethnic minority would have the same rights to live and work in Georgia as ethnic Georgians.

According to the law of September 13, 1918, ethnic minorities were allowed to have their representatives in the highest legislative body of Georgia - the National Council. The number of representatives was one delegate for every 20,000 inhabitants. There was an exception: when the ethnic minority did not live in the country in such numbers, but they still had representatives, namely, Greeks, Germans and Jews. By this law, the representatives of the minorities themselves were given the opportunity to protect their rights. These delegates were chosen either by the national councils of these nations, or a representative who was elected to various institutions of the democratic republic was sent.

In Georgia, which was part of the Russian Empire for more than a century, it was perhaps easier to understand what rights should be given to ethnic minorities in order to avoid their oppression or harassment. For people who for some time actually was an ethnic minority, knew what problems one ethnic group might face while living in another state.

The approach of the Republic of Georgia to national minorities is precisely reflected in the speech of Akaki Chkhenskeli at the meeting of the constituent assembly in 1920:

"One's nation's happiness is another's happiness, and one's misfortune is another's misfortune. The prosperity of the state is the prosperity and enrichment of the minority. Every minority should be aware of this, so that there is no room for any misunderstanding and mistrust... The minority should understand that our republic is their republic and what hurts the state hurts them too.

However, only the mentioned laws could not create a perfect environment for the life of that part of the minorities who did not know the Georgian language, which is one of the best means of integration in an independent country. Therefore, a reform was carried out in the Ministry of Education, according to which the majority of the adolescent generation of ethnic minorities were given the opportunity to receive primary and, in some cases, secondary education for free. Also, 200,000 manats were allocated in the form of scholarships for Georgian and non-Georgian young people in regions. According to the data of 1920, there were 306 schools for ethnic minorities in Georgia: 81 Armenian, 66 Greek, 60 Russian, 48 Ossetian, 31 Tatar and 20 Abkhazian. The analysis of these facts clearly shows that the cultural and educational rights of ethnic minorities were being protected in the country, of course, based on the opportunities provided by the country's economic situation.

As for another important issue in the implementation of democratic standards in the country, it is the guarantee of free elections for citizens. In 1919, the elections of the highest legislative body, the Constituent Assembly, were held, in which all parties were allowed to participate, and the freedom of choice in this regard was not limited. This is perhaps one of the most visible examples of how the situation in terms of human rights changed after the Sovietization, when only a one-party system was established and citizens were literally no longer given the opportunity to choose.

The history of the origin of parliamentarism in Georgia is connected with the era of the existence of the democratic republic. The National Council, created on November 22, 1917, performed the function of the highest legislative body of Georgia after the independence of Georgia. On October 8, 1918, it was called the Parliament of the National Council. Although both the

National Council and the Parliament represented the highest legislative body, they were not elected by the Georgian people based on democratic election principles. The members of this body knew this very well. It was because of this that since the creation of the National Council, there was a political will to elect the highest legislative body in Georgia.

After gaining independence, a special commission was created in the National Council in a short time, which started preparatory work from June 28 to October 24, for the election of the highest legislative body, the Constituent Assembly. The election regulation was drawn up by the mentioned commission.

The elections of the Constituent Assembly literally covered the entire territory of Georgia, which gave the first Georgian supreme legislative body a completely legitimate character. At the same time, the first multi-party parliamentary elections held in Georgia, in our opinion, can be considered one of the most democratic elections in the world at that time.

The analysis of the mentioned facts clearly shows that, despite some shortcomings or economic problems during the reforms, the country was standing on the road to democratization and was gradually implementing the plans in this direction in practice. Although the existing party bodies in the country were not so newly formed and had experience, however, many problems arose in the process of forming the state, which could be a kind of novelty for them. They were not even given three full years to solve the problems on the way to democratization.