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Greek State in the 19th Century Print Media

Though word of mouth as an early version of mass media was practiced already in Rome and Byzantium, journalism developed much later, after the invention of a printing machine. In Strasburg, Amsterdam and Paris the first weekly newspapers appeared in the 17th century. However, it was not before the 19th century that printed media became widespread in most countries worldwide.

It did not take long the Georgian public to respond to the new European invention. Printed fliers appeared in Georgia already at the end of the 18th century. The need for publishing newspapers was pointed out by Prince Ioane, the son of the last king of Georgia Giorgi XXII in his state management reformation project, while in his literary writings, statesmen were supposed to read papers.

The publication of the first Georgian newspaper was evidently hindered by the loss of independence. Despite this, Georgia was the first among the peoples of the Russian empire to keep pace with recently started journalistic practices and in 1819 the first official national periodical was established in its capital.

The 19th century Georgian print media present unique, so far unexamined materials and may be of remarkable interest for researchers thanks to the following:

- a. Georgian print journalism originated shortly after the European;
- b. It was distinguished by broad coverage, readability and relevance of issues covered;

- c. It provides interesting evidence for the history of journalism as well as for world history;
- d. It cites reputed foreign periodicals, thereby reflecting the perspectives of its contemporary international print media.

This paper aims to reveal how and to what extent the 19th century Greece was reflected in the Georgian print media. The question deserves close attention as even against the marvelous millennial history, 19th century Greek political life attracts attention by its dynamic character: The Greek uprising and the liberation from a four hundred year yoke, the accompanying struggle for territories and the related processes, attempts to address problems, formation of a new national discourse, national self-identification and so on.

It is interesting to find out how print media in Russian Tsarism-dominated Georgia responded to it, to what extent the Georgian reader was informed about the events unfolding on the territory of its historical partner and how the Georgian population evaluated these events, whether Georgian journalists were biased or objective and how they obtained material. No less important is to scrutinize the 19th century coverage of events from modern journalistic and historical perspectives.

The Greek issues are dealt with in the very first Georgian periodical *Sakartvelos Gazeti* (later called *Kartuli Gazeti* (*Georgian Paper*)). The November issue 1820 covers the events relating to the capitulation of the fortress Preveza and Ali Pasha's sending of envoys to the cities of Italy and other states. Regrettably, earlier issues of this newspaper survive only in fragments, which prevents us from having a clear picture. It is highly likely that the newspaper covered the 1821 uprising. In fact, the records of the National Parliamentary Library of Georgia contain a note that the Georgian Papers of March 28, 1921 reported on the Greek uprising against the Ottomans. However, as this issue is not presently available because of digitalization, I will try to discuss it in another article.

The first Georgian newspaper was published till the end of 1821. Due to the ensuing several-year silence, the budding Georgian journalism missed several important events taking place in Greece. In the following decades various Georgian newspapers used to be published at different times but were closed down either because of Russian ideological pressure or some other problems. From the 1850s/60s Georgian periodicals started

appearing without interruption and even influenced public opinion in the South Caucasus.

The newspaper *Droeba (Times)*, published by the progressively-minded Georgian elite, deserves special attention. A triweekly since 1866 and later a daily, *Times* most probably¹ offered the broadest coverage of events unfolding in Greece. It closely followed them and not only referred to foreign periodicals such as *Times*, *Public*, *Temps*, *Constitutionnele*, *France*, *Partie*, *Independence Belge*, *Morning Post*, *Lerent Herald* and periodicals of Athens, but had its own reporters in Athens and Constantinople.

I will attempt to present the Greek-Turkish conflict over Crete as covered by *Droeba*:

The Ottomans deliver a notice of protest and a four-clause ultimatum to the Greek Foreign Minister, blaming Greece in supporting and funding Cretan reactionaries, deploying guerillas and engaging in anti-Ottoman and pro-Greece propaganda. In case of non-obedience, the Ottomans threaten to call their ambassadors. European states see the threat of war and try to act as mediators. However, an armed conflict cannot be prevented. Europe holds several diplomatic conferences and appeals to Greece to agree at least on several points in order to satiate the Ottomans. The Greek people categorically reject the conference recommendations. However, the high patriotic zeal is offset by low fighting capacity and poor armament, which compels the Greek government to yield and accept the European recommendations.

According to the 19th century print media, Greeks wage several parallel struggles: in the diplomatic arena, on the battlefield, at sea and within the country, via media. I will try to briefly describe each of them.

The Military Conflict

Georgian newspapers provide exhaustive coverage of the events preceding the conflict as well as the war itself. The events developed quite rapidly:

As reported from Athens, the Greek government has started intensive armament, is increasing its fleet, has invited specialists from abroad.²

Abdul Azi Khan appeals to the Muslims to unite under the flag of Allah and fight the Greeks, who support the rebellious Cretans.

¹ *Droeba*, 2, 1869.

² *Droeba*, 40, 1869.

On December 2, the Ottoman admiral Hobart starts hunting Greek trade vessels to prevent foot supply to Crete and establish a blockade around the island.

300 men are sent from Crete to collect weapons and food. They are sieged by the Ottomans unnoticeably in the fog. The Greeks give up their weapons but the Ottomans slaughter all the disarmed captives.³ One of the participants to the uprising of 1821 reports that the Ottoman barbarians outdid the events 45 years ago. They slaughtered even those families who surrendered. The Greeks were unable to hide women and children in secret places. 200 women and children were massacred in one grotto. 2 women and a man were burnt alive – they are trying to terrorize Christians in his way. “For God’s sake, for the sake of humankind, please try your best to make this known to the rest of the world,” - the Greeks appeal.⁴

One Greek priest exploded powder and blew up 600 Ottoman soldiers.

Greece adopted a law on borrowing 100 million drachms. Cash collection points opened everywhere to raise money, whatever one can effort. Rich Greeks from abroad donate money to the government. Neither fleet nor land forces were left without attention. 300 battalions were made up from volunteers, each containing 500. “Almost the entire Greek army was deployed along the Turkish border. They toil to fortify every single spot.”

The newspapers describe in detail the story of Petropoulakis surrender, his nephew’s death, etc.

Information War

Some contradictory information can be found in Georgian newspapers regarding the Cretan conflict, which can be qualified as the evidence of information war unfolding in parallel with the military conflict. Here are some examples:

According to the newspaper *Droeba*, Gavas’ correspondence of January 5 is not likely to be true. The spread of the information about the Cretan appeasement must have been spurred by the Ottomans. 27 December news from Retimnos totally contradict the ‘Ottoman tales’, the newspaper concludes and adds that the insurgents had been fighting the Ottomans for the whole week at Amaron.

³ *Droeba*, 4, 1869.

⁴ *Droeba*, 43, 1866.

Droeba 22,1 869 write that a Venetian reporter from Constantinople categorically denies some Greek newspapers' information about insurgent activities under Hadji Mikhalis and Korakos in Crete (Kandia). The reporter claims that both commanders had surrendered long before and had been pardoned.

Public Sentiments

Georgian newspapers write that the Greek people await with fear the government's decision regarding the diplomatic conference recommendations. They want to believe Greece will not accept these recommendations – otherwise, the country will lose its influence over the eastern issue. He who signs the protocol first will not escape death from the Greeks. People gathered at coffee houses (*kahwa khanas*) only talk politics. People are elated by the volunteers' determination and the government's patriotic mood.⁵ Public gathering started on February 5. Loud threatening messages are being delivered towards the king, as he accepted the conference declaration. The protesters could only be mollified through the application of force.

Official Position

The Georgian newspaper coverage of the Greek events may help us make inferences on the Greek official position: if the government yields to the European recommendations, people will proclaim them traitors, but if they follow public sentiments, they will be held accountable before the history. The only way left is to persuade the population, but the high patriotic passions interfere with sober judgment. 'Even the most miserable person talks proudly of politics.' The government has two options: put on a selfless hero's mantle and lead the country to a sheer destruction or choose the label of a traitor and save Greece from the war doomed to defeat. The new government takes the less popular but more sensible decision, agrees with the European conference declaration and disseminates a message among the population that "Greece did not refrain from warfare because of the Ottoman threats, or in order to win the favor of foreign states, but only yielded to the force of circumstances" (The President P. A. Zaimis, the Minister of Foreign Affairs K. Delian, P. Petzzali, Saravis, A. D. Avgerino, S. Stutzo, D. Tringeta, Athens, January 25, 1869).

⁵ *Droeba*, 10, 1869.

Meanwhile, the young and prudent king tried to calm people down. However, when he saw that nothing worked, he took a decision to abdicate and leave for Paris. 'Such daring had a due effect.' The Greek elite realized the responsibility they were about to assume, with no prospects for money and friends and with no king above them.

Diplomatic Controversy

At the onset of the Ottoman-Greek conflict, the European states seemed to sympathize with Greeks. Some European (e. g. French) volunteers even fought on the Greek side. German newspapers write that they would not recommend any country to accept the Ottoman ultimatum. Belgrade declares it is not going to agree if the Ottomans require the deportation of Greeks from Serbia. The Greek Foreign Minister's report to the Chamber of Deputies contains the following noteworthy information: As the Cretan conflict was unfolding, the fighters for independence receives donation and support from all sides, while later Greece was their only supporter.

European states were not happy with the Greek-Ottoman conflict. After standing by and scrutinizing awhile, they attempted to soothe the conflict. The Georgian print media highlighted expectations of Greece regarding the European support but later publish a passage from an Athens newspaper translated into Georgian: "Instead of allies, we encountered a European coalition that united against us." According to the Georgian media, Greek newspapers had started 'railing against' Europeans (January 24). French and Russian policies incurred the most criticism, as they pinned special hopes on the latter⁶ (The Russian censorship must have overlooked this information).

Georgian newspapers also present foreign media coverage of the conflict. *Droeba* publishes an article from *The Morning Post*, which qualifies Greek sentiments regarding European recommendations as ignorance and impatience and expresses a concern that European states have spoiled Greeks, who failed to understand what Europe was proposing.

The Greek king received a letter from Napoleon advising him to accept the Paris conference decision, as it reflected the whole Europe's position.

The following information published in the newspaper *Iveria* is particularly important: "Austria and Germany are against the Ottomans'

⁶ *Droeba*, 10, 1869.

withdrawal from Thessaly.” What probably remained then unnoticed but can be inferred from the modern perspective is that Germany was preparing for the first world war and envisioned Turkey as his ally.

The Position of the Georgian Print Media

19th century Georgian newspapers do not confine themselves to a mere account of facts. They also convey expectations, hopes and suppositions. The events unfolding in Greece are often reported so vividly and eloquently that even the modern reader can feel the emotional charge. It is not difficult to guess what effect the articles could have had on the 19th century public: they obviously stirred strong emotions and compassion. A proof to this is a poem by an anonymous author from Kutaisi, published in *Droeba*. The poem describes the pain of a Cretan woman who holds a little boy in her hands and vainly awaits her husband, gone to fight for liberation (I. M., *A Cretan Woman from Morea*, Kutaisi, February 22, 1869).

Georgian newspapers not infrequently disclosed their position by means of the following evaluative phrases: “The Greek ambassador acted in a way befitting the dignity of his country”, “Greeks do not spare anything for their independence”, “They do not allow themselves more”, etc. The newspapers also offer deeper insights and more profound analysis. In this regard, the newspaper *Iveria* is particularly noteworthy, especially so that it shaped its contemporary public opinion.

Here is an extract from a newspaper article by Iase Rachveli, a reporter for *Iveria*, in connection with the 13th European Congress held on July 26:⁷ Europe is split into 3 camps: Austria and Germany are against the Ottomans’ withdrawal from Thessaly; England, Italy and France insist thereupon, while Russia will not let the Ottomans do whatever they want. “Apparently, this is how European states have come to an agreement over the Eastern case,” the reporter adds ironically. The he continues: “As you see, the Ottomans have enough room for maneuvers and knows what they are about. They have undertaken a surprising enterprise – the Ottomans intend to trade in Crete for Thessaly. Turkey has lost Crete anyway. However, if this situation persists, Greece is going to lose it either. Greece may accept the Ottomans’ condition, as Crete is better than devastated Thessaly, unless the Europeans meddle once again.” Thus, while all foreign

⁷ *Iveria*, 6, 1867.

newspapers report on Europe as a benefactor, the Georgian newspaper *Iveria* appears quite bold and critical towards the European policy.

Abstract

The 19th century Georgian print media present unique, so far unexamined materials and may be of remarkable interest for researchers thanks to the following:

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