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THE ELECTORAL ACTIVITIES OF THE CENTRAL PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION COMMITTEE IN THE YEARS 1919-1918

The work is based on the information issued through magazines and newspapers, protocols of district and rural commission sittings, stenographic reports of the Constituent Assembly and various commissions. In addition to the above mentioned sources for better representation of events in the thesis are analyzed added memoirs, documents of that period as well and also monographs regarding the matter. Based on the sources, we have attempted to display interesting details of the Constituent Assembly actions.

KEYWORDS: constituent assembly, elections, Democratic Republic of Georgia

After the Georgian Parliament had elaborated the election regulations and general electoral principles, with the aim of holding the elections and successful implementation of the process, the Central Parliamentary Election Committee of the Constituent Assembly was formed. The members of the Committee were: from the Social-Democratic Party: 1) A. Lomtadze, 2) S. Jibladze, 3) M. Rusia, 4) G. Tsintsadze, 5) O. Sologhashvili, 6) V. Zhghenti, 7) I. Pirtskhalaishvili, 8) S. Tevzadze; from the Socialist-Federalists: 1) A. Jajanashvili, 2) I. Ghlonti; from the National-Democrats: 1) G. Gvazava, 2) I. Lortkipanidze, 3) A. Asatiani; from the Independent National-Democrats: 1) G. Veshapeli; from Socialist#Revolutionaries: 1) I. Gobechia, 2) I. Tevzadze; from Radical-Democrats: 1) A. Akhmeteli; from the "Alioni" group: 1) B. Kavtaradze; from Dashnaktsutyun Party: 1) D. Davitkhanov; from the Union of the Independents: 1) Makashvili; from the Tatar Block: 1) Abdul-Rakhim Akhverdov; from the "Kadagi" party: Dolukhanov (Georgia's Central Historical Archive, Fund 1834, Description 2, Case#74, page 2).

The Central Election Committee first gathered on November 26, 1918. The meeting was opened by the oldest member of the Committee - Silibistro Jibladze. Aleksandre Lomtadze was elected Chair of the Committee. The Board members were Deputy Chairman Archil Jajanashvili, I. Gobechia, Secretary O. Sologhashvili, Treasurer I. Lortkipanidze. At the first meeting, it was decided that the quorum would comprise seven people. The

meetings would be held on Monday and Thursday mornings (Georgia's Central Historical Archive, Fund 1834, Description 2, Case#19, pages: 1-2)

The Central Parliamentary Election Committee started its activities on the very first day. On November 27, it was decided to organize short-term organizational courses in Kutaisi and Tbilisi, with the aim of training of the Election Committee members. This training was necessary in order to avoid any misunderstanding during the elections. The time and place of reception of instructors would be announced in the newspapers.

The Central Election Committee itself managed the funds necessary for the elections. Distribution or allocation of finances was impossible without the signature of at least 2 members of the Board. The parties allocated 4 million roubles for the organization of the elections. The Ministry of Interior Affairs was asked to inform the local self-governance authorities regarding the establishment of the Central Parliamentary Election Committee and, if necessary, assist the Committee in its activities (Georgia's Central Historical Archive, Fund 1834, Description 2, Case#19, pages 3-4).

At the third meeting of the Central Parliamentary Election Committee, it was decided to start the training courses as soon as possible. The instructions for the facilitators of the trainings were to be compiled by the Chairman of the Committee. At this meeting, there was a change in the Board: instead of I. Lortkipanidze, G. Gvazava was elected Treasurer (Georgia's Central Historical Archive, Fund 1834, Description 2, Case#19, pages 5-6).

The elections of the Constituent Assembly were planned to be held in late spring of 1919. However, on December 29, 1918, member of the government, Minister of Interior Affairs, Social-Democrat Noe Ramishvili put forward a new initiative and made a statement to the Central Election Committee on behalf of the Government. He requested the Central Election Committee to accelerate the elections and explained his position as follows: in January 1918, Versailles Treaty Conference would be held. In order for the recognition of Georgia as an independent State at the given conference, the Georgian delegation was to have legitimacy and consist of members elected by the citizens. This would strengthen the position of the Georgian delegation.

Based on the above initiative, it was planned to hold the elections in Georgia in the beginning of February, 1919. However, the Committee assumed that, due to certain conditions, it would be impossible to hold the elections in some districts. The Committee also decided to order to district administrations to accelerate the process and form local electoral committees. Due to the need for the acceleration of the elections, the Committee started making amendments in the election regulations. The amendment referred to the dates of elections and aimed at the prevention

of any shortcomings in this regard (Georgia's Central Historical Archive, Fund 1834, Description 2, Case#19, pages 6-7).

On December 31, the Committee approved Noe Ramishvili's proposal regarding the acceleration of the elections. It was decided to hold the elections on February 14. Some Articles of the election Regulations were amended, and three Articles were extracted altogether¹ (Georgia's Central Historical Archive, Fund 1834, Description 2, Case#19, page 7).

On January 2, 1919, the order of the Central Election Committee regarding the ascertainment of electoral lists was sent to districts. At the meeting of the Committee, on January 2, it was decided that the Board of the Central Election Committee would add one more secretary A. Khakhanashvili.

On January 2, 1919, the Central Election Committee sent a special address to the Parliament of Georgia, which said: "Due to the acceleration of the calling of the Constituent Assembly, for political reasons, the elections should be held on February 14 and 16. However, the elections cannot be held in every district due to bad weather and other external conditions. Yet, in the majority of districts, it is quite possible to hold the elections" (Georgia's Central Historical Archive, Fund 1834, Description 2, Case#19, pages 8-9). This letter of address was signed by the Chairman of the Central Election Committee A. Lomtadze and the Secretary of the Committee.

On January 10, 1919, the Parliament of the Georgian Democratic Republic adopted a law on electing the Constituent Assembly on February 14-16.²

On January 6, 1919, the Central Election Committee allocated advance amounts to local communities and self-governance bodies for studying the election rules, getting acquainted with the dates of elections and holding the election campaign. The community centers were allocated 115 000 roubles, and self-governance bodies of towns were allocated 122 000 roubles.

At the same meeting, the parties were asked to present the lists of candidates. The samples of identification cards were worked out. The board was charged to supervise the selection of instructors and acceleration of training courses (Georgia's Central Historical Archive, Fund 1834, Description 2, Case#19, page 9).

At the next session of the Central Election Committee, members of Kutaisi District Committee were appointed. The parties were asked to present the lists of candidates not later than January 15.

On January 10, 1919, the Committee took a decision regarding the size and form of the election cards. The size was to comprise one eighth of a double-page newspaper. The sample text on the card was as follows: "I

1 These Articles are: 35,37,38

2 According to the New Style

vote for this list of candidates of a given party, the number of the party and the surnames of candidates of the given party.”¹ In those electoral districts where there was a shortage of bulletins, the voters were authorized to write the number of the party on an ordinary paper, followed by a text: “I vote for this party”. Then the paper would be placed in an envelope. This kind of vote was considered legal.

The candidates who were abroad at the time of compilation of the candidate lists were discussed individually regarding their inclusion in the list or their deregistration (Georgia’s Central Historical Archive, Fund 1834, Description 2, Case#19, page 11).

The Central Election Committee took charge of printing of the election bulletins. However, if a certain party wished to print its own bulletins, it was granted this right. The costs of printing of the bulletins were covered by the Central Election Committee. The Committee was also responsible for the dissemination of bulletins in districts and towns. The local election committees had to send the bulletins to election districts. This decision was taken on January 16. By January 20, each party was obliged to inform the Committee regarding the number of bulletins they needed for the elections.

Upon Giorgi Gvazava’s initiative, the Central Election Committee decided to print separate documents with the Articles of the Election Regulations referring to the maintenance of public order during the elections and the voting procedure. These articles were to be sent to regional electoral districts. They would be placed on the walls near the ballot boxes. This initiative was approved and implemented by the Central Election Committee (Georgia’s Central Historical Archive, Fund 1834, Description 2, Case#19, pages 14-15).

On January 20, 1919, A. Lomtadze, the Chairman of the Central Election Committee, made a speech concerning the election situation in the districts. According to him, there were problems in Borzhomi and Tianeti districts, as well as Sokhumi district and upper Svaneti. In all other districts, the preparations for the elections were successful.

During the approval of instructors in Kutaisi province, the Socialist-Federalists and Socialist-Revolutionaries argued as to whose representative would be appointed as instructor. The Socialist-Federalists won in this argument.

Four instructors were appointed in Tbilisi province: two of them were Social-Democrats, one was Socialist-Federalist and one from the National-Democratic Party.

The Committee underlined the fact that a person who was not the citizen of Georgia could not be included in the candidate list. Besides,

¹ The election bulletins are given in Appendix #1

any correspondence and document regarding the election process was to be written in the Georgian language. By January 22, all the parties had to present the data regarding the number of bulletins necessary for the party. G. Gvazava proposed to print as many bulletins as the number of voters taking part in the election, but this proposal was rejected (Georgia's Central Historical Archive, Fund 1834, Description 2, Case#19, pages 15-16).

On January 22, A. Lomtatidze made a statement regarding the election envelopes. According to the election law, envelopes of one and the same colour had to be used throughout the entire Republic. However, it was impossible to purchase envelopes of one colour in the necessary amount. Therefore, it was decided that the committee of each district would choose the colour of the envelope. Only one colour of envelopes had to be used in one electoral district (Georgia's Central Historical Archive, Fund 1834, Description 2, Case#19, pages 17-18).

On January 23, the Central Election Committee started to discuss the lists of candidates. Before that, they agreed that the identification cards would not be valid without the seal of the Central Election Committee.¹

The first party whose list of candidates was discussed by the Central Election Committee was the Social-Democratic Party. This party had problems regarding some candidates, because they did not have the documents proving the membership of this party. These candidates were: A. Chkhenkeli, V. Tevzaia, V. Akhmetelashvili and K. Gvarjaladze. However, based on a formal document presented by the Social-Democratic Party, nobody doubted the membership of the above-mentioned candidates. Only one candidate was extracted from the list. This was Sharipov, who did not have a Georgian citizenship. Instead of him, Osman Shavqi Efendi Mikeladze was included in the list under number 66. The party was also asked to write N. Katsiashvili's patronimic in the list of candidates. The party also had to present a document in which I. Eligulashvili expressed his readiness to take part in the elections.

The list of candidates of the Social-Democratic Party was approved, the number of the party was 1, and Shalva Abdushelishvili was appointed the Party's representative in the Election Committee.

Another party whose list was discussed was the National-Democratic Party. Its candidates – I. Tsintsadze (Ia Ekaladze), Ghoghoberidze and Jandieri were wiped out of the list based on their own agreement (Georgia's Central Historical Archive, Fund 1834, Description 2, Case#19, pages 18-19).

Discussion of the list of candidates of the National-Democratic Party continued at the session of January 24. Mikhako Tsereteli was wiped out of the list, because he was included in the lists of two parties

¹ The sample of the identification card is given in Appendix #2

simultaneously¹. Neither of these parties had a document proving the willingness of this candidate to take part in the elections. Therefore, he was extracted from both lists.² The number attached to the National-Democratic Party was #2.

Party number #3 was Socialist-Revolutionaries. Based on personal application, Solomon Adanaia was excluded from the list. The party was assigned to present letters of agreement of three candidates.

The Dashnaktsutyun revolutionary party was registered as number #4. Two members who were not citizens of Georgia were wiped out of the list.³ The number of Socialist-Federalist Party was #5. This party lacked the letters of agreement of several members, hence, it was asked to present the applications of these members.

Number #6 was the party of the National Council of Moslems, number #7 was Georgian Radical-Democratic Party, and number #8 was Georgian National Party, number #9 was Georgia's leftist Socialist-Federalist Party, number #10 was Shota Rustaveli Group. Candidates of these parties who were not citizens of Georgia were wiped out of the list. The parties were asked to fill in the necessary documents. Discussion of the list of candidates of Borchalo district was postponed due to the absence of its representative.

The Independent Union (of candidates not belonging to any party) was attached number #11 (Georgia's Central Historical Archive, Fund 1834, Description 2, Case#19, pages 20-22).

At the session of January 25, the Central Election Committee discussed the lists of the remaining parties and registered them. The Party of Moslems of Borchalo district was registered under number #12. They were to decide in which language their bulletins would be published.

The Russian Social-Democratic Workers Party was registered under number #13, but their candidate list had certain shortcomings. They did not have the documents proving their Georgian citizenship. Besides, they had to present citizenship documents of those 50 people who had signed the recommendation of the list of candidates of this party.

Number #14 was attached to the Aesthetic League of Patriots and number #15 to the Hellenic Democratic Party.

The parties that had presented perfect lists of candidates, were given the right to print election bulletins (Georgia's Central Historical Archive,

1 The National-Democratic and Socialist-Federalist parties.

2 Regarding this fact, O. Janelidze notes that Mikhako Tsereteli was wiped out of the list of candidates of the National-Democratic Party for some unknown reason. The author considered that Mikhako Tsereteli was wiped out from the list of candidates because he had hostile relations with the Social-Democratic Party. As it turned out, the reason for his extraction was totally different. This fact was identified based on archive materials.

3 Haik Ialjian and Mikheil Zargaryan.

Fund 1834, Description 2, Case#19, pages 22-24).

On January 26, 1919, the main parties defined the number of bulletins necessary for their parties. The Social-Democratic Party #1, required 1 692 000 bulletins compiled in Georgian, 367 000 in Armenian, 335 000 in Russian, 220 000 in Azerbaijani. In all - 2 612 000 bulletins.

The number of approved bulletins for the National-Democratic Party: 1 550 000 in Georgian, 40 000 in Russian, 65 000 in Azerbaijani. In all - 1 655 000 bulletins.

The bulletins of the above-mentioned parties were printed by the Central Election Committee. The bulletins of the Socialist-Federalist Party, 1 200 000 in all, were printed by the Party itself. The Socialist-Revolutionary Party printed 1 922 000 bulletins: 1 000 000 in Georgian, 335 000 in Russian, 367 000 in Armenian, 220 000 in Azerbaijani.

The Party of Moslems of Borchalo district printed only 83 000 bulletins in Azerbaijani language. There were some parties that printed only a few thousand bulletins. For instance, Shota Rustaveli Group printed 7 000 bulletins, out of which 6 000 were in Georgian and 1000 in Russian (Georgia's Central Historical Archive, Fund 1834, Description 2, Case#19, pages 24-25).

On January 27, the lists of candidates of parties were finally approved. The number of candidates was different in each list. The lists are appended to the given paper (Georgia's Central Historical Archive, Fund 1834, Description 2, Case#19, pages 27-31).

On January 31, 1919, the final session of the Parliament of Georgia was held. The Parliament approved a decree on the termination of its authority on that day. The Parliament would be considered annulled as soon as the Constituent Assembly gathered. The Constituent Assembly would be convoked by the Board of the Parliament and the Central Election Committee.

On February 2, there was another session of the Central Election Committee. The Committee discussed the issue of mobile ballot boxes. Approval of the issue was postponed until the following session. The Committee decided to authorize every party to disseminate the bulletins among the voters. The bulletins would be picked at the district and town committees. If a representative of a party did not appear at the committee within one-day period, the district and town committees would allow the voters to take the bulletins.

On February 2, A. Lomtadze made a speech at the meeting of the Central Election Committee. He talked about the number of citizens in the lists of voters of various towns and districts of Georgia. In districts the numbers of voters were as follows: Ozurgeti - 47 778, Akhalsenaki - 80 000, Zugdidi - 63 243, Kutaisi - 113 949, Shorapani - the number is unknown, Lechkhumi -27 000 (not including upper Svaneti), Racha - 18 795.

The small amount of voters in Racha district is due to the fact that the National Council of Ossetia declared a boycott to the election of Georgian Constituent Assembly. Thus, in the villages where Ossetians lived, it was impossible to compile precise voting lists. As for the towns of Western Georgia, the number of voters was as follows: Ozurgeti - 3 500, Lanchkhuti - 3 500, Poti - 8 114, Samtredia - 6 030, Akhalsenaki-2 250, Zugdidi - 3 553, Khoni - 5 249, Kutaisi - 30 000, Kvirila - 3 500, Chiatura - 2 358.

The number of voters in the districts of Eastern Georgia was as follows: Gori- the number is unknown, Akhalkalaki - 25 000, Akhaltsikhe - 29 970, Tbilisi - 55 557, Dusheti - 33 000, Telavi - 40 000, Tianeti (with the exception of Pshav-Khevsureti)- 13 000, Signaghi- 60 000.

Towns of Eastern Georgia: Khashuri - 3 300, Surami - 2 500, Gori - 5 700, Telavi - 5 000, Signaghi - 6 000, Dusheti -900, Tbilisi - 70 000. In all, in the above-mentioned towns and districts the number of voters comprised 768 746.

Based on the decision of the Central Election Committee, the committees of districts and towns were responsible for lawful implementation of the elections. Local administrations were warned not to interfere in the election process. Otherwise, a corresponding protocol would be filed and transferred to the Central Election Committee (Georgia's Central Historical Archive, Fund 1834, Description 2, Case#19, pages 31-35).

Due to the scarcity of protocol forms, questions were sent by telegraph to some election committees. Based on these questions, the election committees had to compile protocols.

On February 3, the Central Election Committee took a final decision regarding the introduction of mobile ballot boxes. Such boxes would be used in highland places with bad roads. The mobile box was to be arranged according to the election regulations, with the consent of at least 2/3 of representatives of the election committee of a given district (Georgia's Central Historical Archive, Fund 1834, Description 2, Case#19, pages 35-36).

On February 8, 1919, the Central Election Committee decided to check the election lists in the districts where the lists had not been checked and made precise yet, so that the population of these districts could vote in additional elections (Georgia's Central Historical Archive, Fund 1834, Description 2, Case#19, page 38).

One day prior to the elections, the Committee found out that elections could not be held in Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki districts. The committees of these districts were ordered to preserve the bulletins for additional elections. The elections were postponed in Kazbegi and Kobi communities due to heavy snowfall (Georgia's Central Historical Archive, Fund 1834, Description 2, Case#19, pages 39-40).

Alongside with the protocols of the sessions of the Central Election Committee, I would like to focus on several letters and telegrams which

provide interesting information regarding communication between the Central Election Committee and the district committees. For instance, in January, a letter was sent to Dusheti district committee. The letter says: "By February 4, the district committee must send someone to take the election bulletins". Another interesting issue is the answer of Aleksandre Lomtadze to a question from a district committee regarding the voting of the regular army. Lomtadze answers: "Representatives of the regular army have only a passive voting right. In the letter sent to Dusheti district committee, I asked the committee to give a precise list of districts where elections cannot be held due to heavy snowfall. I asked them to compile the lists of voters so that they take part in the additional elections. Those who manage to vote this time, will not be allowed to take part in the additional elections." (Georgia's Central Historical Archive, Fund 1834, Description 1, Case#5, page 4).

In some cases, the district committees failed to send their representatives for taking the bulletins. There are telegrams sent by the Central Election Committee asking the district committees to send their representatives as soon as possible and take the bulletins to the districts. One example of this is Khashuri town election committee which was asked to send its representative to the Central Election Committee and take the bulletins to Khashuri as soon as possible (Georgia's Central Historical Archive, Fund 1834, Description 1, Case#62).

The committees of districts and towns often sent telegrams to the Central Election Committee and informed them about the pre-election process. The telegrams contained information regarding the voting lists, expenditures and similar statistical data. The district and town committees also asked questions to the Central Election Committee. One example of this is a telegram sent from Khoni, asking whether students aged above 20 had the right to vote. The answer was that students of both middle and high schools have the right to vote as well as ballot. There was additional explanation saying that the army had the right for passive voting (Georgia's Central Historical Archive, Fund 1834, Description 1, Case#31, pages 6-12).

The letters and protocols mentioned above clearly illustrate the pre-election activities of the Central Election Committee. There were cases when representatives of certain parties sent complaints to the Central Election Committee regarding acts of infringement and violation. I will illustrate this by bringing a few examples, with the description of content of the complaints and the reasons for the latter. The committees of districts and towns tried to exclude the representatives of their rival parties from the committee. Special mention should be made of the facts when the representatives of the National-Democratic Party were blocked by the committees of certain towns and districts. For instance, on February 6, 1919, a representative of the National-Democratic Party,

Spiridon Kedia declared at the session of the Central Election Committee that the committees of Khobi and Bandza hampered the activities of representatives of the National-Democratic Party. The Ministry of Interior Affairs was asked to investigate these facts, and letters were sent to the above-mentioned committees regarding the prohibition of such actions. Aleksandre Lomtadze also sent a letter to Dusheti district committee, asking it to admit the representative of the National-Democratic Party.

In some cases, representatives of the military units of the Social-Democratic Party (Guards) were forced to vote for their party. For instance, at the session on February 2, the party of Socialist-Revolutionaries declared that in Navtlughi the guardsmen attacked the representatives of their party, forcing them to vote for the Social-Democratic Party instead of the Socialist-Revolutionaries. The Central Election Committee decided to start investigation of the matter (Georgia's Central Historical Archive, Fund 1834, Description 2, Case#19, pages 31-35).

Although the guardsmen interfered in the pre-election process and representatives of certain parties had problems in the district committees, the pre-election process went more or less peacefully and legally. The above-mentioned violations occurred only in a few districts, and the Central Election Committee tried hard to eradicate these shortcomings. However, the facts of violation cannot be ignored. Despite the above-mentioned, we can conclude that the pre-election process was democratic. There were certain violations and problems, but, in general, the pre-election activities were satisfactory.

Separate mention should be made of the approach of the Social-Democratic Party to the issue of the Guards and the regular army and their participation in the elections. Representatives of the regular army had only the passive voting right¹. This was definitely a correct decision aimed at the protection of democratic principles. This regulation would have been quite fair if the given Article had also embraced the representatives of the Guards. Although the Guards represented a military unit of the Party, it was still an armed unit. Hence, participation of their deputies in the elections from the list of the Social-Democratic Party was incorrect, because they managed to elect several deputies of the Constituent Assembly thanks to the list of candidates of this party.

¹ According to the election regulations of the Constituent Assembly, a passive right of vote implied only the right to vote.

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