

Learning Activity

The Freedom that Turned into a Tragedy

Authors	Levan Bukia, Tbilisi public school No. 87, Tbilisi Lela Kakashvili, Gori public school No. 9, Gori Ekaterine Maisuradze, Gori public school No. 12; Tbilisi public school No. 133, Gori/Tbilisi Tamuna Macharashvili, Tbilisi public school No. 77, Tbilisi Giorgi Labadze, American International School Progress, Tbilisi
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Age	17-18
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Time	90 min
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Key question	How are the events of 1991-1992 in Tbilisi still relevant to us?
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The Georgian coup d'état took place in Georgia in 1991-92. In this learning activity, students will read accounts of the conflict from pro-government and opposition perspectives, as well as through the eyes of the general population who were witness to the events. Working both individually and in groups, they will read and analyse historical sources using various methods, helping them to understand not only the events as they happened, but also the causes and consequences of the conflict. Students will discuss the changes of values in society as a result of the conflict, and evaluate how the war affected and continues to affect Georgian society today.

Learning outcomes

Students will be able to:

- Compare and contrast testimonies of ordinary people in Tbilisi during the conflict.
- Analyse historical sources and identify key consequences of the war on Georgian society.
- Use different types of historical sources and multiple perspectives to justify their opinions and positions on historical events.
- Discuss the values that have changed and been established in Georgian society as a result of the conflict.

Activities

Stage I

Brainstorming

10 minutes

The purpose of the activity is to spark students' interest in the lesson topic. The teacher shows the students a news report from 1991¹ (see Appendix I for a transcript) as well as a map of central Tbilisi on Google Maps,² explaining that the conflict was limited to Rustaveli Avenue and the surrounding streets. To provide more historical context, depending on the needs of the class, students can also be given the key dates surrounding the Tbilisi War (see Appendix IV).

Students should then answer the following questions:

- How might the conflict have affected civilians in Tbilisi?
- How large-scale do you think the conflict was?
- According to the map and video, which districts and streets of Tbilisi were affected by the battle?

Stage II

Source analysis

45 minutes

The purpose of this activity is for students to analyse different narratives about the conflict and compare them with one another to form a multiperspective view of the issue.

Students are split into 3 groups. Group 1 works on sources from supporters of the government; group 2 analyses the opinions of opposition supporters; and group 3 analyses the testimonies of eyewitnesses (see Appendix II for source packs). Students should answer the questions assigned to their group. After 20 minutes, each group briefly presents their work and findings (5 minutes per group).

1

See 'ABC News 24.12.1991 | Tbilisi, Georgia' on YouTube: https://youtu.be/Mg5dlAecq0g?si=y6ZT-JeBjCD_hSwaF, accessed 14 February 2024.

2

See Shota Rustaveli Avenue on Google Maps: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/6QbZ8SYjncf7m5rv9>

Group 1

- According to the sources, how does President Gamsakhurdia evaluate the actions of the opposition?
- What caused Georgian society to split in two? How is this phenomenon explained by supporters of the government?
- How did the supporters of the government evaluate the civil conflict?
- What did these people see as a solution?

Group 2

- How did supporters of the opposition view the civil conflict? What do they think were the reasons behind it?
- In their opinion, what will be the result of this confrontation? What did they see as a solution?
- What was the main accusation of the opposition against the government?
- In your opinion, were the arguments of the opposition sufficient for an armed confrontation?

Group 3

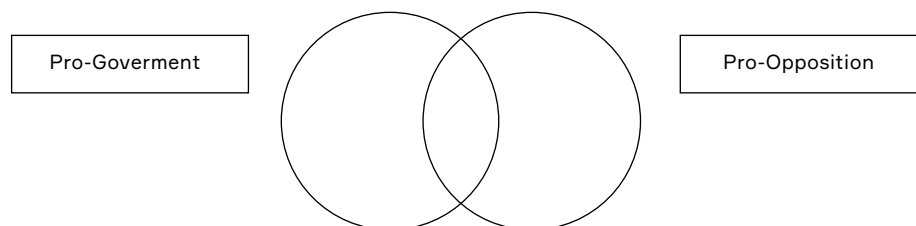
- How do eyewitnesses evaluate the events of 1991-92?
- What are the common values that public figures talk about a few years after the conflict?
- What can these events teach us? What conclusions do the sources allow us to draw?
- In your opinion, was it possible to avoid this conflict or was it inevitable?

Stage III

Venn diagram

10 minutes

After sharing the presentations, the class completes the Venn diagram. On one side of the Venn diagram, write down 2 or 3 positions of the supporters of the government, i.e. arguments opposing the military action; on the other side, 2 or 3 positions of the opposition supporters justifying the military action. In the centre, write any common opinions both sides had about the conflict. The diagram will help to compare the positions of the parties involved in the conflict.



Stage IV

Analysis of the presentation of the Civil War
in Georgian school textbooks

15 minutes

Students should individually read the extracts from Georgian school textbooks (see Appendix III) and separate the facts from the opinions (underline them in different colours). After 10 minutes, they should discuss in small groups which of the texts is biased and why.

Stage V

Discussion

20 minutes

In class, students should discuss the following questions:

- How can society take steps towards reconciliation?
- From the materials studied in Stage II, would you say that a reconciliation is possible in Georgia over the coup d'état? Explain why (not).
- How are the events of 1991-92 relevant to us today?

Assessment (homework)

Students should sketch a statue or monument symbolising the reconciliation of the society divided during the coup d'état. Students can present the task virtually or in the form of a model or drawing, and should think about and answer the following questions:

- What would you name your monument?
- What is the symbolism of the monument?
- How would the monument you created be a symbol of reconciliation?

Glossary

August Putsch – a failed attempt to oust Mikhail Gorbachev as President of the USSR on 19 August 1991 and keep the Soviet Union together.

Dugout – a strong structure that protects soldiers from artillery and mortar fire.

Guardsman – a member of the Georgian National Guard that fought on the side of the opposition forces during the Tbilisi War. Like the rest of the country, the National Guard was also divided during the conflict.

Mtatsminda – a street and neighbourhood in Tbilisi.

National Movement – the Georgian dissident movement of the second half of the 20th century, the goals of which were Georgia's withdrawal from the Soviet Union and independence.

Rustaveli Avenue – the main street in Tbilisi.

Zviadist - the name given to supporters of President Zviad Gamsakhurdia.

List of persons

Beria, Lavrenti (1899-1953) – chief of the NKVD under Stalin during WWII. He actively participated in the mass purges from the 1930s onwards.

Gamsakhurdia, Zviad (1939-93) – the first President of Georgia (1991-92). At the end of 1989, he contributed greatly to the implementation of the first multi-party elections in the USSR, and he died in mysterious circumstances on 31 December 1993. Sometimes known as 'Zviadi'.

Ioseliani, Jaba (1926-2003) – a member of the Military Council which ruled Georgia from 6 January until 10 March 1992, when it was replaced by the State Council led by Eduard Shevardnadze. Ioseliani's imprisonment in 1991 led to the protests of 2 September (see Appendix IV: Key Dates, below).

Kitovani, Tengiz (1938-2023) – a member of the Military Council which ruled Georgia from 6 January until 10 March 1992, when it was replaced by the State Council led by Eduard Shevardnadze.

Orjonikidze, Sergo (1886-1937) – Bolshevik revolutionary engaged in revolutionary propaganda among the workers of Tbilisi. He actively participated in the October Revolution in 1917 and the Bolshevik invasions of the Caucasus during the Russian Civil War which ultimately resulted in the absorption of the Caucasian Republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia into the USSR. As a result, he is seen as a traitor to Georgia.

Sigua, Tengiz (1934-2020) – a member of the Military Council which ruled Georgia from 6 January until 10 March 1992, when it was replaced by the State Council led by Eduard Shevardnadze, under whom he became Prime Minister.

Shevardnadze, Eduard (1928-2014) – Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1985-90. He led the Georgian government during the Civil War and was President of Georgia from 1995-2003. Under him, Georgia joined the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Video transcript

Source: ABC News (1991) 'Tbilisi, Georgia', 24 December, https://youtu.be/Mg5dIAecq0g?si=y6Z-TJeBJCD_hSwaF, accessed 6 February 2024.

In Soviet Georgia, while rebel forces were shelling the parliament building in their unrelenting drive to oust the republic's democratically elected leader, President Gamsakhurdia was appealing to the West for help in battling what he called "the terrorists". At least 30 people are dead, more than 250 wounded. Sheila Kast is in the capital city of Tbilisi.

The rebels are using every kind of weapon they can lay hands on to attack what has become President Gamsakhurdia's bunker. They're using everything from AK-47s to small rifles to pistols poked out of armoured personnel carriers. The rebels are well supplied with ammunition. Their shelling is relentless and answered only by sporadic sniper fire from the president's supporters. From the makeshift headquarters the rebels have set up in a tourist hotel, across the street to the government building has become a no-man's land.

It's only on this avenue, the main street of the capital, that a power struggle rages. In the rest of the city and the rest of the Republic, life is normal. Residents of Tbilisi gaze upon the shelling with detached amazement. Big majorities voted for Gamsakhurdia in free elections just last May, and many do not agree with the opposition charge that he has become a dictator. Only a few hundred people have taken up arms on either side.

"It is a putsch, it is not civil war...yet." But residents worry it might become civil war. Both sides in this conflict wanted independence from the old Soviet state, but now there's no sign of an end to this stalemate between the forces of a president who claims authoritarian rule is the only way to set up a new democracy, and rebels who see his brand of democracy as the enemy of their liberties.

Source packs

Group 1 Supporters of the government

Source A

Georgians on different sides of the barricades

“Near Government House – rallies and other actions to protect the president continue here. There is a continuous flow of workers from different regions of the republic; workers in various city factories are coming... ‘We are here to protect our president,’ Robert Ugulava told us. ‘From whom, Georgians?’ we asked. ‘Both Orjonikidze and Beria were Georgians, but don’t you remember what they did?’ ‘Are all your opponents like Beria and Orjonikidze?’ ‘I don’t know about that, but when Georgia is one step away from independence, any action organised against the president is similar to the actions of Orjonikidze.’ Eter Mchedliani, a journalist, said: ‘We are supporting our president; supporting, not defending. Zviad Gamsakhurdia doesn’t need our protection, we are protecting the future of Georgia.’”

Source: Kandelaki, E. (1991)
‘Georgians on different sides of the barricades’.
Akhalgazrda Iverieli, 21
September, N107-108, p.5.

Source B

“Democracy is not anarchy”

“Wasn’t the referendum held to restore Georgia’s independence? The president received a large share of the popular vote: doesn’t this, not to mention the publication in opposition newspapers of articles criticising the government, represent a step towards real democracy? As for the President of the Republic, September’s news once again proved that he is too liberal. Well, which country’s leader would tolerate such a display from armed opposition? At the same time, dubbing Gamsakhurdia a dictator in the eyes of the world community will not bring good results to the opposition and to Georgia in general.”

Source: Todua, T. (1991)
‘Democracy is not anarchy’.
Akhalgazrda Iverieli, 5
October, N113-114, p.4.

Source C

A group of three hundred voters

“In the last few days, a group of three hundred voters (the collection of signatures continues) has been persistently urging the President of Georgia through the press and television to immediately dissolve parliament and introduce presidential rule in the republic. ‘Do you support this call or not?’, we asked. Gela Roinishvili, a doctor, said: ‘I believe that Zviad Gamsakhurdia, even after taking full power, will not forget the main thing - the fate of Georgia will directly depend on everything he does. And, no matter what others say, Zviad loves Georgia more than anyone does.’”

Source: *Akhalgazrda Iverieli* (1991), 12 October, N115-117, p.5.

Source D

‘The rallies continue, the tension is increasing’

“On 7 September, at five o'clock in the evening, on Rustaveli Avenue, in front of Government House, a crowded meeting was held ... President of the Republic Zviad Gamsakhurdia gave a speech at the rally. In his speech, he said that political destabilisation in Georgia is caused by hostile forces which are controlled from Moscow. Moscow does not want Georgia's independence and freedom and is trying to prevent its international recognition in every possible way. The traitors and enemies here are pouring water on the enemy's mill, declared the president. He called on the protesters, all of Georgia, to relentlessly fight and destroy Georgia's enemies and traitors.”

Source: Koridze, T. (1991) ‘The rallies continue, the tension is increasing’. *Droni*, 13 September, N35(51), p.1.

Group 2 Supporters of the opposition

Source A

‘Georgians on different sides of the barricades’

“My father was brought up with songs about Stalin and Beria. I don't want my grandchildren to grow up with Zviadi – that would once again be proof of our slave nature. I will always be immensely proud of Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who has done great services to Georgia and the Georgian people. He did a wonderful job of destroying the communist system, but a capable destroyer is not always a good builder.”

Source: Kandelaki, E. (1991)
‘Georgians on different sides of the barricades’.
Akhalgazrda Iverieli, 21 September, N107-108, p.5.

Source B

Republic Square, 27 December 1991

"You know, we have reached a point where the issue will no longer be resolved through political negotiations and other such peaceful means. The only way to resolve this, to end it, is with guns. Zviad Gamsakhurdia will not resign of his own free will. All means have already been exhausted - ordinary, peaceful, diplomatic, or if you want, oppositional struggle: exhausted." – Anonymous citizen

Source: Kiziria, D. (2018)
The Putsch. Tbilisi: Artanuj Press, p.100.

Source C

‘The rallies continue, the tension is increasing’

“On 7 September, on Rustaveli Avenue, in front of the Theatre Institute [currently the State Theatre and Film Institute], a rally was held at the initiative of the National Democratic Party of Georgia. Its participants condemned the actions of the government and demanded the resignation of President Gamsakhurdia on the grounds that he is leading Georgia to dictatorship and totalitarianism, noting that as long as the Georgian government implements anti-democratic, anti-people policies, Georgia will not deserve international recognition.”

Source: Koridze, T. (1991)
‘The rallies continue, the tension is increasing’.
Droni, 13 September, N35(51), p.1.

Source D

Political Stagnation

As with the rest of the country, the Georgian National Guard was also divided into two camps during the conflict: the pro-President faction; and the pro-Kitovani opposition, who were camped near the State TV and Radio Department.

“The opposing sides each have their 'taboo' issues, the raising of which, for the time being at least, automatically precludes any negotiation. For the authorities, this is the demand for the resignation of the president, while for the opposition it is the disarming of the guardsmen camped near the building of the State TV and Radio

Source: Chochishvili, G. (1991) 'Political Stagnation'. *Droni*, 4 October, N38(41).

Department [currently the Georgian Public Broadcaster]. In their opinion, disarming the guardsmen would undoubtedly be followed by repression. Moreover, the guardsmen there claim that they, not the guardsmen supporting the President, are the real official National Guard. Therefore, putting forward these two proposals is a waste of time."

Source E

Statement of the National Independence Party of Georgia regarding the situation in Georgia

"[...] taking into account the fact that an authoritarian-dictatorial regime built on immorality and universal hatred has been established in Georgia, in the form of the criminal government of Zviad Gamsakhurdia , ... taking into account the fact that Georgia is still facing aggression from the Soviet Russian Empire, who annexed it and continue to occupy it ... taking into account the fact that on 2 September 1991, the government barbarically broke up a peaceful demonstration and opened fire on the demonstrators, thereby also committing a crime against her own people ... taking all this into account, the National Independence Party of Georgia, as a sign of protest against the general injustice prevailing in Georgia, is starting an indefinite peaceful political strike with the following demands:

1. The resignation of Zviad Gamsakhurdia from the presidency and the abolition of the institution of the presidency prior to an official declaration of the independence of Georgia.
2. The secession of Georgia from the USSR and the full withdrawal of all occupation troops still on Georgian territory.
3. A guarantee of unrestricted freedom of speech and a free press, television and mass media.
4. The initiation of a criminal case against the forces which broke up the demonstration of September 2, 1991."

Source: 'Statement of the National Independence Party of Georgia regarding the situation in Georgia'. *Droeba*, September 1991, N25.

Group 3 Eyewitness narratives (representatives of different layers of society)

Source A

Paata Bukhrashvili, Professor at Ilia State University, historian

“I witnessed directly the formation of the National Movement. I was already actively involved and participated in protests consciously enough. I am not politically biased, but a representative of the affected Georgian nation. On the initiative of the then president of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the denationalisation of state property had been declared and the process was supposed to begin, and the secretaries of the Raikom [a Soviet-era local party committee] were angry about it. Besides, Georgia was quite a developed country, with its heavy and light industry, and factories; there was a shipyard in Batumi and Poti. Poti launched a unique submarine. There were machine-building and tank factories, which created economic wealth in the country. Georgia was leaving the Union with an organised economy; all this did not suit Russia's interests, and the secretaries of the Georgian Regional Committee shared the interests of Russia. They wanted to keep their existing privileges. The directors of the factories considered themselves the last directors, and therefore proclaimed those factories as theirs. The ultimate goal of the overthrow of the national government was to prevent Georgia from being freed from the influence of the Russian economy, and the result is visible: Georgia is now tied to the Russian economy. I call this coup a Russian operation. I am still alive, but I feel like I only truly lived for those three years, from November 1988 to December 1991.”

Paata Bukhrashvili (2023),
Interviewed by Lela
Kakashvili and Tamuna
Macharashvili on 14 August,
Tbilisi, Georgia.

Source B

Tamaz Makashvili, official from Gori

“The civil war arose as a result of the split in the National Movement. One part of the population of Georgia followed one part of the national movement, the other part found itself on the other side. Many weaknesses of President Zviad Gamsakhurdia's rule were revealed during that one year [1991]. There was a split in Gamsakhurdia's team. Prime Minister Tengiz Sigua and Defense Minister Tengiz Kitovani opposed him. They started a civil war. On 22 December 1991, the first bullet was fired. Right now there's a discussion about which side fired it, but that may not be of decisive importance. Back then, the majority of the population did not support Zviad Gamsakhurdia, and stood on

Tamaz Makashvili (2023),
Interviewed by Lela
Kakashvili and Tamuna
Macharashvili on 13 August,
online.

the side of the opposition. As a result of the hostilities, the government was overthrown, and the president fled to Chechnya. With the death of Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the controversy seemed to have ended, but the division remained in society: families were divided into Zviadists and non-Zviadists. These were the most difficult, shameful pages of history for our people. At that time, the freedom of the press was being restricted, and the issue of ethnic minorities was acute. Peaceful rallies of the opposition were dispersed by forceful methods: I remember a fire engine drove directly into the ranks of the protesters. But the opposition also made many mistakes. The main mistake was that all this led to a civil war. The opposition wanted a change of power quickly, but we should have at least waited until the elections.”

Source C

Eka Margvelani, teacher

Eka Margvelani (2023),
Interviewed by Tamuna
Macharashvili on 15 August,
Tbilisi, Georgia.

“I was a school student then, and I remember the atmosphere. At that moment I could not understand the facts, what was happening and why, but in any case, the fact that something bad was happening was noticed by everyone, young and old alike. With few exceptions, the largest part of the then elite, famous directors, actors, and TV presenters found themselves in the camp of those opposed to the government. Ordinary people did not want to change the government in such a radical way. The news of the trouble coincided with the winter holidays. I was already in West Georgia, and we were watching the events in Rustaveli on TV. I couldn't believe that in the centre of the city, a conventional war was going on between Georgians, of the kind I had seen in movies, with weapons, gun batteries, machine guns... I remember that we came back to Tbilisi later, after everything had already finished, and when I saw Rustaveli in ruins for the first time, I finally realised that this story had really happened here. Everything was destroyed, the buildings were destroyed. It was all so grey for several years. The place was cleaned, but the buildings were not restored until later, and every time I passed by, I kept thinking, when will they rebuild, shouldn't they build again so that it is not like this anymore, because it reminded me of the war period... Personally, those events left me afraid, and when protests take place today, no matter how peaceful they are, I'm still afraid that the same thing will happen, that they'll start shooting again...”

Source D

Nugzar, eyewitness

“The war in Tbilisi can be called the ‘War of Mtatsminda’, because in other areas of the city, normal life continued, and in the Dezerter Bazaar (a market in Tbilisi), New Year's trade was in full swing. I sat at home and watched continuously for the first days from the balcony of my apartment overlooking Besik Street. They did not shoot at residential houses in the first days. This was after the hail of bullets

started and not a single building was left unscathed in the area surrounding Government House. Our attic caught fire several times and the neighbours put it out. Firefighters stopped attending fires: some people shot at them to keep the fires going for a while longer. At home, the windows were broken in their frames, the balcony door was broken. Only the huge outer load-bearing wall was bullet-proof, and right behind this wall, in the corner of the room, I made a dugout – I put a mattress on the floor, moved the TV and books... Despite the incessant banging of machine guns, casualties were still few as neither side fired on target. At the corner of Besik Street, three guards were standing by the bakery. I talked to them, and they turned out to be Gori people. One of them moved away from the wall for a second, knelt, and fired several times from the corner of Dzmebi Zubalashvilebi Street in the direction of Government House. “Did you hit someone?” asked the other. “No, and thank God, I haven't hit anyone yet.” The war, which decided the fate of Georgia for a long time, and which is still shyly referred to as ‘the events of 1991-92’ in Tbilisi, took place on a total of 2-3 square kilometres, from Zemeli Street to Sololaki. And a small number of the city’s residents, if they still had an interest in what was going on while preparing their New Year's festivities, approached as far as Zemeli Street to see what was going on. They came to look at a literal theatre of war...”

Source: Gachechiladze, G. (2017) 'One Man's Memories of the Tbilisi War', *Ambebi*, 16 September, <http://tinyurl.com/yc3upu7h>, accessed 12 February 2023

Source E

Dato Turashvili, writer

“Not a single problem was a sufficient reason for us to engage in a gunfight with the democratically elected government. That's why I think that there was no justification for that violence, and we are still bitterly reaping the consequences of that irreparable mistake... We also held a rally in the yard of the university and found out there that many people really wanted war in Georgia. When we started talking about peace and an immediate end to the war, the people who came to the rally immediately turned on us. There were only a few people left in front of the university, and Gia Abesadze was the self-sacrificing one among us. Very publicly, he set himself on fire on Rustaveli Avenue, killing himself as a sign of protest. I'm not sure that any other civil war in any other country has had such a victim... However, in the classical sense, the Tbilisi war was not a civil war. It was more like an uprising or a revolution in the classical sense. It was more of a coup, but only in Tbilisi; there was fighting along Rustaveli Avenue, while not too far away, almost in the neighbouring districts, people were living a different life. But even they still came to Rustaveli to see the real war; the Tbilisi war had far more spectators than participants... The international situation was exactly the same as it always is, when you destroy your country yourself and then wait for help from others.”

Source: Turashvili, D. (2012) *Once Upon a Time 1987-1991*. Tbilisi: Bakur Sulakauri Publishing House.

Source F**Levan Berdzenishvili, writer, former dissident, opposition supporter**

“Unfortunately, during his presidency, a civil war occurred. Society became divided, with one part developing a strongly negative attitude towards Zviad Gamsakhurdia. However, I’m sure that history will be kind to Zviad Gamsakhurdia. Of course, they will not forget his mistakes; they will not forget that during his time there was a civil confrontation, in which it is impossible for any party not to be guilty... For Zviad Gamsakhurdia, ‘the independence of Georgia was front and centre.’ He was obsessed with this one idea, and that prevented him from seeing the roads leading to this idea as they were - first freedom, then independence; first human rights, then independence, etc. Georgia was more important to him than anything else, and the idea of Georgia’s independence erased all other ideas from his mind!”

Source: Berdzenishvili, L. (2022) *A Story of a Man and a Country*. Tbilisi: Artanuji Publishing House.

Source G**Revaz Mishveladze, writer, opposition supporter**

“It turns out that I live in a truly amazing time. There has been a real war between Georgians in Tbilisi for twelve days. Maybe Moscow is leading this operation? About three hundred people have been killed and about five hundred wounded. All the beautiful buildings on Rustaveli Avenue have been demolished. The bank, the first school, the ‘Tbilisi’ hotel, and the artist’s house have been burned. The opposition insists on the resignation of Zviad Gamsakhurdia. Zviadi stubbornly clings to the president’s chair. Georgia is dying. The culprit is the opposition. History will justify Zviad, despite his mistakes.”

Source: Mishveladze, M. (2013) *Twenty-five furious years*. Tbilisi: Palitra L Publishing House.

Presentation of the Civil War in Georgian school textbooks

Source A

'History of Georgia', 11th grade textbook

"The creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States took place without Georgia. Russia was not able to persuade the national government of Georgia to compromise. Obviously, after the creation of the Commonwealth, Russia, the legal successor of the Soviet Union, did not show goodwill towards the national government of Georgia. This meant that the Georgian government would not receive support from the Commonwealth of Independent States. Foreign complications became a sign of the re-emergence of opposition to the government in Georgia. The opposition should have been more active before the countries of the world recognised the independence of Georgia, because recognition would only strengthen the government of Zviad Gamsakhurdia. On 22 December 1991, armed opposition, which was given hope by Russia's cooperation and practical help, started in Tbilisi. From the end of December 1991 to the end of January 1992 battles were fought in the capital, as a result of which the opposition ('putschists') overthrew the legal government. President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, together with members of the Supreme Council and the government, took refuge first in Armenia and then in Chechnya. Power was taken over by the military council (Jaba Ioseliani, Tengiz Kitovani). The events of December and January in Tbilisi cost the lives of many Georgians. The military coup gave rise to civil war in the country."

Source: Vachnadze, M. & Guruli, V. (2004) *History of Georgia*. Tbilisi: Artanuji Publishing House, p.175-176.

Source B

'Recent History', 12th grade textbook

"The overthrow of the Georgian national government by force was planned after the August 1991 putsch in Moscow. On 22 December 1991 the opposition forces, with the support and help of the Russian troops stationed in Georgia, began to attack the parliament building. Until 6 January 1992 there were battles between the opposition and the supporters of President Zviad Gamsakhurdia in the vicinity of Government House in Tbilisi. [...]"

In December 1991 and January 1992, the legitimate government in Tbilisi was overthrown by military force. The military coup gave rise to civil strife in the country. Supporters of exiled Zviad Gamsakhurdia continued to fight."

Source: Abdaladze, G., Kvitaishbili, N., Kupatadze, B. & Januashvili, K. (2008) *Recent History*. Tbilisi: Publishing House of Georgia Matsne, p.291-2.

“The conflict between the Georgian government and the opposition intensified after the August putsch [in Russia, 1991]. On 2 September 1991, during the visit of a delegation of American congressmen to Tbilisi, an opposition rally was dispersed on Rustaveli Avenue. Anti-government speeches became more frequent. Both sides erected barricades on Rustaveli Avenue. On 25 September 1991, a state of emergency was declared in the capital. Events became irreversible. The rallies turned into military confrontations. On 22 December 1991, the opposition forces, with the help of equipment and ammunition obtained from the Russian military bases located in Georgia, began to attack the Parliament building. The battles between the opposition and the supporters of President Zviad Gamsakhurdia cost the lives of many Georgians. On 6 January 1992, Zviad Gamsakhurdia left Tbilisi with his supporters and took refuge first in Armenia and then in Chechnya. The legal government was overthrown by the use of military force, and the military council (Jaba Ioseliani, Tengiz Kitovani, Tengiz Sigua) took power.

The military coup started a civil war in the country. Supporters of the exiled Zviad Gamsakhurdia continued to fight. The crisis continued to worsen, which created favourable conditions for the Abkhaz and Ossetian separatists. The Georgian intelligentsia proposed bringing Eduard Shevardnadze from Moscow as a way to get the country out of the crisis. In March 1992, Shevardnadze returned to Georgia. The military council transferred power to the state council, whose chairman was Eduard Shevardnadze.”

Source: Abdaladze, G., Kapatadze, B., Akhmeteli, N. & Murglia, N. (2012) *History-12th grade*. Tbilisi: Diogenes Publishing House, p.323-4.

“The military action, which was limited only to the centre of the capital, lasted for several days. More than 100 people were killed and about 550 were wounded. Several important buildings were destroyed: the Kashveti temple was hit by bullets, and the entire residential quarter on Mtatsminda was burned. On 6 January, the president, members of the government, and a number of deputies from the ruling majority left Tbilisi. The Military Council consisting of Tengiz Kitovani, Jaba Ioseliani and Tengiz Sigua took power, declared the government of Zviad Gamsakhurdia overthrown, dissolved the parliament, and suspended the adoption of the constitution.

The overthrow of the government of Zviad Gamsakhurdia was dubbed by the new leaders of the country as “democratic” and a “people’s revolution”. In March 1992, the Military Council brought Eduard Shevardnadze to Georgia. He was a long-time Georgian Communist Party leader, who had been appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union in 1985. He was elected Head of State of Georgia.

On 11 March 2005, the Parliament of Georgia assessed the events of December 1991-January 1992 as an “anti-constitutional armed military coup”. The coup d’état caused a civil war in the country and great damage to the reconstruction process of the state of Georgia.”

Source: Janelidze, O., Tabuashvili, A., Tavadze, L. & Iremashvili, N. (2012) *History of Georgia*. Tbilisi: Klio Publishing House, p.364

YOUR TASK

Read the extracts and answer the questions

- List the most important facts presented in the textbooks.
- What do you think are evaluations and interpretations presented in the textbooks?
- Do you think some of those texts are biased? If yes, which one is the most biased? Justify your answer.

Key dates

1921 – Soviet troops occupy Georgia, and the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic is established. It is incorporated into the USSR in 1922.

1970s – this decade saw a re-emergence of Georgian nationalism and an intensification of the national liberation movement. With *glasnost* and *perestroika* came calls for independence.

9 April 1989 – the ‘April 9 tragedy’ in which Soviet troops crushed an anti-Soviet, pro-independence rally in Tbilisi with gas and weapons.

9 April 1991 – the Georgian Supreme Council unanimously passes the declaration of independence on the 2nd anniversary of the April 9 tragedy. Zviad Gamsakhurdia becomes the first President of the independent country.

18 August 1991 – the first signs of discontent with Gamsakhurdia become apparent when Tengiz Sigua, Chairman of the Council of Ministers, and Giorgi Khostaria, Minister of Foreign Affairs, resign their positions to join the opposition.

2 September 1991 – demonstrators, organised by the National Democratic Party to oppose the imprisonment of Jaba Ioseliani, clash with the Ministry of Internal Affairs near the Rustaveli monument in central Tbilisi. Three people are wounded by bullets. Anti-government sentiment intensifies.

11 September 1991 – 27 political parties, formerly opposed to each other, unite with the common demand to remove Gamsakhurdia.

22 December 1991 – The two-week Georgian coup d’état begins.

6 January 1992 – the coup ends with the flight of Gamsakhurdia via armoured car to Chechnya. During the war, 107 people die and 527 are injured. The Military Council forms a provisional government with Sigua as its chairman.

10 March 1992 – Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze arrives in Georgia after being invited to head the State Council. Around this time, Gamsakhurdia returns to Georgia and unsuccessfully tries to return to power.

31 December 1993 – Gamsakhurdia is found dead under mysterious circumstances. Exactly how he died or who killed him remain disputed to this day.