

HUMAN RIGHTS CONDITIONS OF ITALIANS IN GEORGIA FOLLOWING THE SOVIET OCCUPATION

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Abstract. Following the Soviet occupation of Georgia in 1921, widespread violations of individuals' private property rights and personal security began. Italian citizens residing in Georgia were not spared from these circumstances. This paper examines the precarious legal and human rights situation of Italians in Georgia in the early years of Soviet rule. The study is based on archival material from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, specifically consular correspondence from Tbilisi and Batumi.

Keywords: The Democratic Republic of Georgia; Italians in Georgia; The Soviet Occupation of Georgia

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Introduction. Relations between Italy and Georgia span many centuries. During the 13th to 15th centuries, trading outposts of Italian city-states were present along the Black Sea coast (Khubashvili, 2004), while Catholic missionaries supported Christian life in Georgia. Evidence of unified Italy's interest in the Caucasus appears in accounts of missions sent to Persia at the end of the nineteenth century (La Mantia, *La missione militare italiana nel Caucaso (1861-1866)*, *Le fonti archivistiche dell'Ufficio Storico*, 1997). The culture found a strong resonance in Georgia. Italian operas were staged in Tbilisi, and the Italian national liberation movement profoundly influenced Georgian intellectuals. Giuseppe Garibaldi and the Italian national movement were referenced in Georgian poetry and publications (Morchiladze, 2015).

Following Georgia's declaration of independence in 1918, Italy was among the European states that recognized the new republic. In the aftermath of the First World War, it even considered assuming a mandate over the South Caucasus. The Kingdom of Italy's trade and economic interests in the Caucasus, including Georgia, had already been established during the Russian Empire. By the early twentieth century, Italian consulates were operating in Tbilisi and Batumi.

The Soviet occupation of February 1921 radically altered this situation. The Italian primary sources examined in this article, preserved in the Historical-Diplomatic Archive of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, reflect the events of the early years of Soviet rule in Georgia. The cases discussed in this study document various types of violations committed against Italian citizens, including infringements of property rights, looting, extortion, and unlawful occupation of premises.

Research Methods. This study aims to examine the social, economic, and legal conditions of Italian citizens residing in Georgia during the early years of Soviet occupation. The research is based on archival and documentary analysis, enabling the reconstruction of historical processes through both empirical evidence and interpretative approaches.

Two main analytical frameworks are employed: content analysis, involving the examination of individual cases and the identification of recurring themes; contextual analysis, through which the available material is interpreted and connected to broader political, social, and economic developments.

The study relies on primary sources preserved in the Historical-Diplomatic Archive of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as secondary literature, including historiographical works and academic publications.

Discussion. From a historical perspective, it should be noted that discourse on human rights in the early twentieth century—or even in the 1920s—was in its initial state. Nevertheless, the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Georgia prohibited capital punishment and enshrined the right to property. The Constitution was adopted by the Constituent Assembly on February 21, 1921, just days before the Soviet occupation.

Italian entrepreneurs and citizens had resided and conducted business in Georgia from the period of the Russian Empire, when property rights were protected to a certain degree under imperial law. However, the concept of human rights gained particular prominence only after the tragedies of the Second World War, leading to the establishment of international organizations and the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

It is also noteworthy that in Italy itself, the 1920s saw the rise of fascist rule, which significantly restricted human rights. Archival analysis reveals that in the early twentieth century, Italian economic interests in Georgia were substantial. Numerous small entrepreneurs, businesses, and banks were engaged in economic activities, and maritime connections existed between Georgia and Italy.

Following the arrest of E. Cook, a medical doctor and member of the Italian mission, political representations in Georgia were closed on August 23, 1922 (Mengarelli, 1998). Nevertheless, even after the Soviet occupation, a degree of economic representation persisted to safeguard the interests of Italian citizens remaining in the country. Increasing repression, however, rendered Georgia progressively less attractive to foreign nationals, culminating in the withdrawal of Italian representation.

The first document examined (Doc. 1), dated April 26, 1921, concerns a petition by Frasoni, the Italian royal representative in Tbilisi. He formally appealed to the Soviet Commissariat to block and annul the requisition of an N.A.G. automobile belonging to the Italian firm “Fratelli Ricci.” He requested that the vehicle be exempted from requisition and returned to its rightful owners (Frasoni, 1921).

The second document (Doc. 2), dated November 14, 1921, presents a petition by Angelo Andreoletti, an Italian marble artisan in Tbilisi. According to the case, his workshop premises had been unlawfully occupied—first by the office of the Ninth Residential District, and later by a canteen of the Central Auto Section. Andreoletti emphasized that these conditions created unsanitary and unsafe circumstances, including a fire hazard, and prevented him from safely storing and using his tools and materials. He appealed to the consulate to intervene and restore the property to him as its lawful owner (Andreoletti, Fondo: Ambasciata (Mosca), Consolati del Nord e Tiflis, 1921).

Sofia

ИТАЛЬЯНСКОЕ ПРЕДСТАВИТЕЛЬСТВО В ГРУЗИИ.
 № 390
 Тифлис, 26/4/21г.

В НАРКОМИНДЕЛ
 ГРУЗИИ.

При сем препрощаю одне заявление и копия акта о реквизиции Автомобиля и его частей марки "Н.А.Г." принадлежавшее Итальянскому гражданину фирмы Братя Риччи.

Прошу принять меры об освобождения от реквизиции, и сообщить результаты принятых Вами мер.

С почтением,
 ИТАЛЬЯНСКИЙ КОРОЛЕВСКИЙ ПРЕДСТАВИТЕЛЬ В ГРУЗИИ. (ФРАНЗОНИ)

Doc.:1

Представителю Королевства Италии в Грузии.

Гражданин Анжело Карловичи Андреолетти.

Около месяца тому назад я обратился к Вам с просьбой содействии к возврату мне помещения магазина в моем доме № 79 по Михайловской улице, которое одно время было занято канцелярией 9 Шилишного района а затем несколько месяцев пустовало.

5 ноября это помещение вновь оказалось занято под столовую гаража Центральное Авто-Сенции. Так как магазин этот совершенно не приспособлен под столовую, то приготовление на несколько сот человек обедов прямо во дворе, в привезенных для этого помедных чанах, является крайне анти-санитарным.

В этом дворе помещается вся мраморная мастерская, и, конечно, работы в ней теперь очень стеснены, так как до сего времени все материалы и инструменты у меня свободно лежали во дворе, а теперь во дворе постоянно толпится масса чужого народа.

Кроме этого есть большая опасность в пожарном отношении.

Поэтому, я вновь прошу Вашей защиты моего имущества и моего права собственности и прошу Вашего ходатайства о выселении столовой и о возврате мне моего магазина.

Итальянский гражданин *Анжело Карловичи Андреолетти*

Тифлис, ноября 14 дня 1921 года.

Doc.:2

Another document (Doc. 3) concerns the liquidation of the Batumi office of the Società Italiana per il Mar Nero (Italian Society for the Black Sea). Founded in 1920 with support from the Italian government, the organization aimed to assist European countries bordering Russia that were threatened by revolutionary developments (Tonarelli, La Società italiana per il Mar Nero, 2008). Its predecessor, established in 1919, had supported anti-Bolshevik "White" forces. With a capital of three million lire, largely financed by the Italian Commercial Bank, the company also sought concessions in mining, oil, and railway sectors. Following the Bolshevik victory, liquidation began in 1922 and was completed in 1928 after the sale of 45 steamships (Tonarelli, La Società italiana per il Mar Nero, 2008).

г. Батуми 10-1921г.
 11-8-1921

SOCIETA ITALIANA PER IL MAR NERO
 Capitale L. 3.000.000
 Sede Sociale MILANO e Agenzia a TRIESTE

Successori:
 COSTANTINOPOLI - VIGNONA (ex AGENZIA DEL
 PRINCIPATO DI GEORGIA)
 BATUSI PER LA GEORGIA
 TIFLIS
 SOFIA - BULGARIA (ex AGENZIA A VARNA)
 SALAZAR - PORTUGALIA

№ 44

г. Батуми
 ГОСПОДИНУ ИТАЛЬЯНСКОМУ КОНСУЛУ

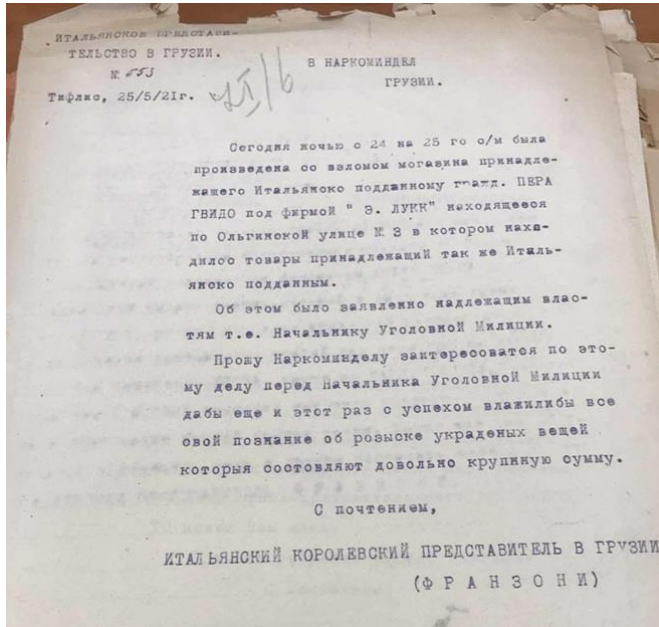
Милостивый Государь,
 Настоящим имеем честь довести до Вашего сведения, что согласно распоряжения нашего Правления в Милане, от 15-го Июля с.г. и нашего Константинопольского Отделения, за № 1256 и 1277, из с-го 1-го Августа с.г. ликвидирована деятельность нашей Батумской конторы и в настоящее время ликвидация наших дел завершается.

В виду изложенного просим не отказать нам на означенное заявление к сведению и оградить нас от возможных недоразумений при раскладке налогов и т. подбон. Вместе с тем доводим до Вашего сведения, что при предидущем Правительстве мы не были обложены налогом и сдавали лишь по сильное пожертвование в размере 250.000рубле

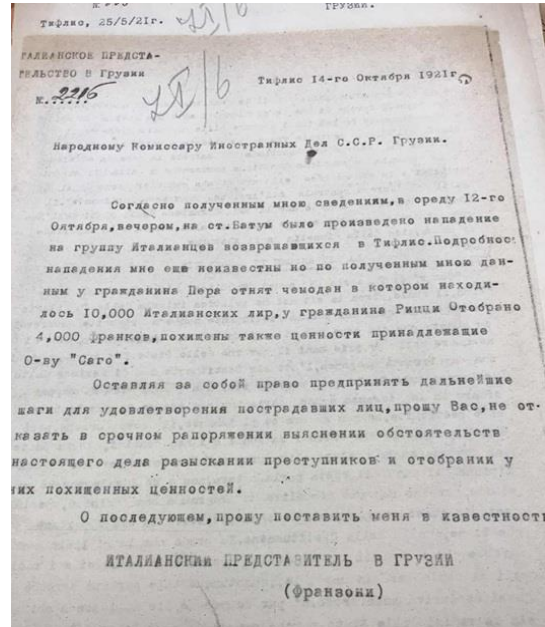
Съ совершенным почтением
 SOCIETA ITALIANA
Carlo...

Doc: 3

Additional documents document instances of robbery involving Italian citizens. One case, dated May 1921, concerns the looting of the workshop “E. Lucc,” owned by Guido Pera (Doc. 4), who formally requested the restitution of the stolen property (Fransoni, 1921). A further note, dated October 14, 1921 (Doc. 5), reports attacks on Italian citizens, acts of robbery, and damage to property belonging to the company “Sago” (Fransoni, 1921).



Doc: 4



Doc: 5

The documents analyzed represent only a portion of the archival material reflecting the condition of Italians in Georgia. They demonstrate how Italian citizens and their enterprises faced severe challenges following the Soviet occupation of the Democratic Republic of Georgia.

A clear pattern emerges: Italian residents and businesses found themselves in a hostile environment. Private property was violated, economic activities were forcibly terminated, and personal security was threatened due to systemic injustice and widespread criminality.

While these processes reflected the Soviet regime’s general attitude toward private property, they had a particularly strong impact on foreign nationals, whose expectations of legal protection were not met under the new system.

Not only individuals but also Italy itself—as a state that had considered assuming a military mandate in the South Caucasus after World War I—was effectively pushed out of the region. Italy’s planned mission ultimately failed due to internal political disagreements and the growing Bolshevik threat.

Georgia became part of the Soviet Union and, in subsequent decades, was further isolated from the West, especially during the post–World War II international order. The country remained behind the Iron Curtain.

Nevertheless, Italian influence endured in Georgia's architecture, industry, and music. Because Italy belonged to the Western Bloc, the Soviet Georgian public had limited access to information about the country. Records from the Georgian SSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs show that Italian delegations visited occasionally, focusing mainly on cultural exchange.

By the 1970s and 1980s, Italy no longer exhibited ambitions toward the region, and Georgia itself was not perceived as an independent actor. This contrasted sharply with the early twentieth century, when Italian

Prime Minister Francesco Nitti noted in his memoir *Peaceless Europe* that many Italian statesmen, financiers, and intellectuals believed in the success of an Italian mandate in the South Caucasus and recognized the region's importance (Nitti, *L'Europa senza pace*, 1921, p. 140).

During the Soviet period, the factors that shaped Italy as a Western democracy were largely absent from official discourse. Instead, Italy was portrayed primarily as a country of culture, fashion, cinema, music, and picturesque landscapes. In reality, following the fall of fascism and the restoration of democracy, the protection of human rights and freedoms became central in Italy.

Full-fledged relations between Italy and Georgia were restored only after Georgia regained its independence.

Conclusion. The examination of cases involving Italian citizens in Georgia after the Soviet occupation demonstrates how rapidly foreign nationals and their economic activities were marginalized under the new regime. Their property was requisitioned, businesses were liquidated, and personal security was compromised.

Although Italian consular authorities attempted to intervene, their efforts yielded limited results. Ultimately, these conditions led to a significant restriction of Italian activity and their eventual withdrawal from Georgia.

Future research would benefit from a comprehensive study of the archival materials and the identification of additional sources related to the individuals mentioned, both in Georgia and Italy. It is worth noting that Italy has a strong tradition of preserving private and family archives, as well as historical materials and monuments. Such studies are valuable for the broader understanding of Georgian history, as they shed light on important facts and create opportunities for further interpretation.

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