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Badri Okudjava
A STRUGGLE OVER
MEMORY

Tengo Gogotishvili
GLOBAL VI-RUS(SIAN)

Nana kalandadze
THOSE WERE THE TIMES
BACK THEN!



new **IVERIA**

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Editor-in-Chief: **Zaza Bibilashvili**

Technical Editor: **Keti Kurdovanidze**

Design: **Ani Gvelesiani**

Covering: **Lasha Gabelia**

Workers on the issue:

Shamil Shugaev

Koka Topuria

Giorgi Kharebava

Giga Jokhadze

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“Our parents paid a huge price to defeat fascism and communism. The task of our generation is to defeat the totalitarianisms of the 21st century. Long live free Ukraine, long live democratic Europe!”

Claude Malouré, French senator



TABLE OF CONTENTS

6

Katrin Bannach
GEORGIA - A WARNING
TO EUROPE
politics



10

Badri Okudjava
A STRUGGLE OVER
MEMORY

Identity and memory



14

Tengo Gogotishvili
GLOBAL VI-RUS(SIAN)
Russian propaganda



22

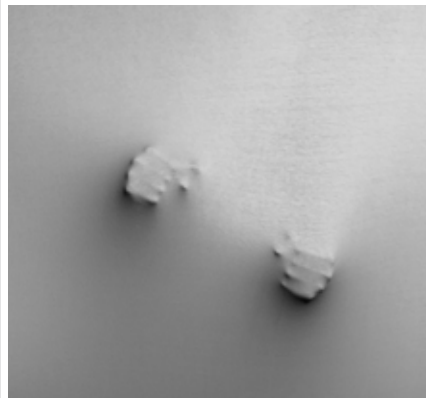
Tamar Chkheidze
RUSSIAN NARRATIVES
TO INFLUENCE GEORGIAN
SOCIETY

Russian propaganda



26

Keti Kurdovanidze
WHO KILLED FREEDOM
society



30

Ricardo Silvestre
A VIEW FROM (OF) THE ATLANTIC
politics



33

Gia Japaridze
PARTADZI'S CHOICE

choice



38

Mate Gulua, Rati Tkemaladze
THE ONION AND THE CIRCUS

student space



43

Giorgi Paniashvili
FOOD FOR THOUGHT

politics



46

Vasil Jijiashvili
REPRESSIVE LAWS AGAINST
THE PEOPLE

society



50

Gigi Gigineishvili
THE LIKHNI EFFECT

Abkhazia



55

Nana kalandadze
THOSE WERE THE TIMES BACK THEN!

living history



60

Irakli Laitadze
THE ILLUSION OF
MODERNITY

society





Katrin Bannach

Head of FNF South Caucasus



GEORGIA –

A WARNING TO EUROPE

When I moved to Georgia in February 2022, my aim was to raise awareness about the South Caucasus region in Germany and promote liberal democracy in a European context. What I didn't anticipate was that Georgia would soon become a cautionary tale—as the ruling Georgian Dream party turned its back on Western partners and broke up with its European future, against the backdrop of Putin's brutal war in Ukraine.

GEORGIA'S DESCENT INTO AUTOCRACY

Over the past three years, I have witnessed Georgia's rapid and deliberate slide into autocracy. The groundwork was laid long before 2022, through oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili systematically weakening of democratic institutions. But the shift accelerated when the EU offered a membership perspective. The pro-Western mask fell, revealing a government no longer even pretending to share democratic values. Today,

Georgia appears intent on aligning with autocracies.

The signs are unmistakable. Since the rigged elections in October 2024, the Georgian Dream is quickly pushing through one after the other repressive legislation targeting civil society, the media, opposition voices, and freedom of assembly. These laws are not about justice or stability. They are worst-case examples of rule by law, not rule of law. Meanwhile, the so-called government has been intensifying hate speech against former Western partners, rewriting history to whitewash Russian responsibility, and reframing dissent as treason.

A GLOBAL PATTERN: GEORGIA MIRRORS “AUTOCRACY, INC.”

What’s happening in Georgia is part of a broader trend that Anne Applebaum describes in her book *Autocracy, Inc.*: a loose but powerful network of modern autocrats united not by ideology, but by shared interests — self-preservation, the accumulation of wealth, and suppression of accountability. These regimes collaborate across borders, exchanging technologies, financial support, and strategies.

Georgian Dream fits neatly into this model. Its leadership borrows heavily from the authoritarian playbook: invoking “traditional family values” to

suppress LGBTQI+ rights, using “national sovereignty” to attack foreign-funded NGOs, and weaponizing “transparency” to discredit independent media. These tactics may appear domestic but echo strategies used from Moscow to Budapest to Beijing. Russian-style narratives —

These laws are the worst example of governance based not on the rule of law, but rather on governance by law.

about family, sovereignty, stability, and the “deep state”— have been amplified loudly by Georgian Dream.

ECHOES IN EUROPE: FROM TBILISI TO BERLIN

What makes Georgia’s case especially urgent is it mirrors developments in the Western world. The same narratives — about foreign interference, decline of traditional values and national identity — are increasingly voiced by far-right parties across the EU and elsewhere. One can imagine Georgian Dream dreaming of a European Union drifting into the same illiberalism.

Autocracy doesn’t always arrive with tanks. Sometimes it seeps in through slogans, inquiries, and calculated

attacks on open society. Georgia shows us where this logic leads. What starts as political messaging hardens into policy; what begins as scapegoating ends in repression. Georgia is a prism through which we can understand the trajectory of illiberalism elsewhere.

Autocracy doesn't always come in tanks. Sometimes it sneaks in quietly with slogans, investigations, and targeted attacks on open society.

AS GERMANS, WE RECOGNIZE THE SIGNS

We cannot watch this without remembering our own past. In just one century, Germany experienced two authoritarian regimes — each with devastating consequences. Georgians, too, shook off Soviet authoritarianism and dared to imagine a democratic future. What should unite us today is more than shared policy goals. It is a shared vision: open societies, human dignity, pluralism, peace — and a shared fear of suppression, cronyism, and war.

THE DESCENT DEEPENS

For many months, Georgians have taken to the streets to protest accelerated authoritarianism. Their message is clear: this is not the future they want. Yet the so-called government remains unmoved.

Laws are tighten, media is harassed, and civil society is treated like an enemy. The language of democracy remains — but only as a mask. The vision of a European future, though still cherished by many, grows dimmer. In its place rises a system built not on consensus or rights, but on loyalty, fear, and control. This is not a Georgian version of democracy — it's a calibrated system of repressive rule built on disinformation.

Why does the government continue down this road? Is it fear of losing power? Is it pressure from Russia? We may never fully know, because decisions are made by an isolated elite, with no transparency or public accountability, and no mandate to dismantle democracy. Such decision-making is obviously dangerous for the people, because it

This is not the Georgian version of democracy - it is a well-thought-out system of repressive governance built on disinformation.

serve only the interest of a few. However, such decision-making is also dangerous for the isolated elite, because one man alone might not be well informed, nor might he well-consider before he takes decision affecting a whole country. Wrong decisions have already brought down many dictators.

As Anne Applebaum writes in *Autocracy*,



Inc., “Authoritarianism is not just a different form of government—it is a negation of politics.” It thrives on

political apathy or on what is called nihilism in Georgia. And while nihilism may be growing, civic engagement remains remarkably vibrant in Georgia. Throughout my time working in Georgia, I have witnessed an impressive intellectual spirit and willingness to take action — self-determined, proactive, and deeply committed to democratic values. This admirable Georgian liberalism gives me hope that, in Georgia and beyond, democracy will ultimately prevail. ■





Badri Okudjava



A struggle over memory

WHAT SHOULD WE REMEMBER?

The latest issue of New Iveria features two articles on historical memory and archival policy in contemporary Georgia. The author of the first article is David Khvadagiani, a researcher at the Soviet Past Research Laboratory and a colleague of mine, and the second is by historian Timothy Blauvelt, a professor at Ilia State University. Both authors underscore that the study of the recent past runs counter to the interests of the ruling authorities. Moreover, the current government is unjustifiably restricting access to the former archives of the KGB and the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

It is no coincidence that the number of pages

It is evident that, in recent years, the authorities have deliberately attempted to distort or erase from collective memory events linked to the aspirations of the Georgian people for freedom and independence.

devoted to the recent past in school history textbooks has been steadily decreasing, gradually replaced by content focused on the Middle Ages or earlier periods. It is evident that, in recent years, the authorities have deliberately attempted to distort or erase from collective memory events linked to the aspirations of the Georgian people for freedom and independence.

The Soviet Russian occupation of 1921, the anti-occupation national uprising of 1924, the Red Terror, the brutal crackdown of 9 April 1989, the 1992 coup d'état, the war in Abkhazia, and the 2008 Russo-Georgian war—across all these events, Russia's role as an aggressor is being downplayed or made to disappear altogether. Why? The answer is simple: for the past 240 years, Russia has been—and remains—the sole consistent threat to the freedom and independent development of the Georgian people. Yet for the ruling Georgian Dream party, Russia is not considered an enemy.

In this article, I will explore the role of collective memory in resisting authoritarian regimes, examine the lessons of recent years, and discuss how the struggle against historical

narratives is unfolding in both physical and digital spaces.

‘If you don’t have an enemy, you have to invent one,’ Umberto Eco aptly observes in his famous essay ‘The Making of an Enemy’. Indeed, throughout history, states have repeatedly positioned themselves against real or imaginary enemies, constructing narratives around victories or failed struggles with these adversaries. As Eco notes, the enemy must be fought—but not necessarily defeated—which is precisely why authoritarian rulers and dictators are so fond of perpetually fighting a fictional enemy. Moreover, it is often by fighting imaginary enemies that such rulers stay in power. Fighting an imaginary enemy does not require bravery and courage, nor large amounts of ammunition; the necessary weapons in the fight against such an enemy



are propaganda and disinformation. This is precisely why and how the Georgian Dream regime created a conspiracy theory about a ‘global war party’ and the ‘Deep State’ behind it, intending to replace the image of Russia as an enemy in the collective memory.

DREAM’S SOCIAL AMNESIA

Amid a dramatic shift in foreign policy, the adoption of Russian-style laws, electoral fraud, unprecedented violence against citizens, and

Fighting an imaginary enemy does not require bravery and courage, nor large amounts of ammunition; the necessary weapons in the fight against such an enemy are propaganda and disinformation.

ongoing confrontation with the West, Georgian Dream has justifiably earned the label of a Russian-style regime—or simply, the ‘Russian Dream’. Propaganda media soon shifted to a strategy of openly criticizing the country’s pro-Western course, while representatives of Georgian Dream increasingly referred to Erekle II¹ as a leader with a pragmatic foreign policy and a symbol of such a policy. In short, the Dream stopped hiding its intentions behind a pro-Western veil and openly embraced its alignment with the Russian regime.

‘The 1921 scenario has not been repeated in Georgia, and that is the achievement of the Georgian authorities,’ said Kobakhidze, the Georgian Dream Prime Minister, on 25 February—the anniversary of the Soviet Russian occupation. Just two weeks later, he remarked, ‘9 April is the day when a foreign power committed violence against our fellow citizens’, attempting to rewrite the established narrative of 9 April by replacing Russia with a vague ‘foreign power’. In a similarly dismissive tone, another leading figure of the regime, Thea Tsulukiani², commented on the sacrifice

Amid a dramatic shift in foreign policy, the adoption of Russian-style laws, electoral fraud, unprecedented violence against citizens, and ongoing confrontation with the West, Georgian Dream has justifiably earned the label of a Russian-style regime—or simply, the ‘Russian Dream’.

1. King Erekle II signed the 1783 Treaty of Georgievsk, which established Russian protectorate over Georgia.

2. Thea Tsulukiani – Georgian politician, currently serving as a Member of Parliament and head of the parliamentary investigative commission. Formerly Minister of Justice (2012–2020) and Minister of Culture (2021–2024), she is known for her controversial role in the justice system and is frequently associated with repressive actions and policies during her tenure.

The Georgian Dream's version of social amnesia operates through a blend of deliberate forgetting and distortion, with the primary aim of obscuring reality.

of national hero Giorgi Antsukhelidze—who was killed during the 2008 war—saying, ‘Every child needs its parent at home, rather than senselessly sacrificed to someone’s PR.’

In the memory model constructed by Georgian Dream, the party itself is portrayed as the only force capable of preventing war with Russia.



What the leaders of the First Democratic Republic failed to avoid in 1921, Dream claims to have averted. The bloodshed of 9 April is now attributed to a vague foreign power, and the notion of sacrificing one’s life in defence of the homeland is dismissed as unnecessary. These attempts to rewrite history and

politically instrumentalize the past are clear examples of social amnesia. As a tool for shaping collective memory, social amnesia was widely employed by totalitarian regimes throughout the twentieth century, including the Soviet Union. The Georgian Dream’s version of social amnesia operates through a blend of deliberate forgetting and distortion, with the primary aim of obscuring reality.

REMEMBERING AGAINST OBLIVION

‘I have dedicated my 37 years of service to the struggle against the policy of Russification’—these famous words of Catholicos-Patriarch Ambrosi Khelaia appeared across the streets of Tbilisi alongside his image in the spring of last year. Amid anti-government, pro-Western protests, stencils depicting national figures such as Maro Makashvili³, Kakutsa Cholokashvili⁴, Ambrosi Khelaia, and Giorgi Antsukhelidze began to appear in the streets and on the walls of various institutions throughout the city. Not a single protest march took place without the tricolour flags of the First Republic of Georgia, and the names of Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Merab Kostava were invoked with growing frequency by speakers. Notably, the anti-government demonstrations planned for February 25, the Day of Occupation, were named in honour of Valiko Jugheli and Maro Makashvili.

For the first time since the restoration of independence, the heroes who had fought against Russian occupation a century ago were once again placed at the forefront of public consciousness, symbolically leading the people at the will of the public. Images of General Kote Abkhazi, Kakutsa Cholokashvili and Zhiuli Shartava⁵ were prominently

3. Maro Makashvili (1901–1921) – a Georgian Red Cross nurse and writer, became a symbol of national resistance during the 1921 Soviet invasion of Georgia. She was killed while serving at Kojori. Posthumously honored as Georgia’s first female National Hero.

4. Kakutsa Cholokashvili (1888–1930) – Georgian military officer and national hero, renowned for leading anti-Soviet guerrilla resistance following the 1921 Red Army invasion. A decorated World War I veteran, he commanded uprisings in Kakheti and Khevsureti, and later the 1924 August Uprising. After exile in France, his remains were reinterred at Mtatsminda Pantheon in 2005; he was posthumously awarded Georgia’s highest honor, the Order of National Hero, in 2013.

5. Zhiuli Shartava (1944–1993) – Georgian politician and National Hero, served as Head of the Government of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia; killed by Abkhaz militants during the 1993 Sukhumi massacre.



displayed at the marches. The ruling party's attack on Giorgi Antsukhelidze did not go unanswered either. Following another anti-government protest, the words 'Antsukhelidze is a hero' appeared on the facade of the parliament building. Remarkably, even weeks later, the cleaning service had not dared to erase the inscription from the wall.

It can be said that the blatant interference by those in power in the nation's collective memory—through the distortion and erasure of historical facts—coincided with a shift in the country's foreign policy and, in turn, sparked an opposing response within civil society: the revival and rehabilitation of the memory of national resistance.

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However, before national heroes and resistance leaders appeared in public spaces and at protests, they first reemerged in academic studies, books, and, later, social media. Told in accessible, popular language, their stories reached broad segments of society,

helping to restore their place in the collective memory at a critical moment. At the same time, parallel and competing narratives also emerged on social media, which, on the one hand, disseminated Russian disinformation flows and, on the other hand, the messages of 'Dream' and other pro-Russian groups. Unsurprisingly, these groups often contrasted the memory of the First Democratic Republic and Georgian statehood with the glorified image of Stalin. On Georgia's most popular social media platforms—particularly Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube—Stalin's persona and nostalgia for Soviet-era Georgia, especially the

blatant historical revisionism often becomes a catalyst for public protest and the formation of a new kind of collective memory through that protest.

so-called stagnation period, have emerged as the dominant alternative narrative.

The collective memory of a nation can be the object of constant manipulation. Regimes never shy away from crude interference in it and change—or attempt to change—the past to suit their political agenda. Struggles over historical narratives, forgetting, and remembering are complex social processes intertwined with political reality. The rewriting of history by the Georgian Dream and the disappearance of the image of Russia as an enemy from the watershed events of recent history are part of these processes.

It is noteworthy that blatant historical revisionism often becomes a catalyst for public protest and the formation of a new kind of collective memory through that protest. Despite restrictions on archival access and the use of other undemocratic tools, the ruling group's attempt to fundamentally reshape the past—and thereby influence present developments—has been largely unsuccessful. ■



Tengo Gogotishvili

GLOBAL VI-RUS(SIAN)

PED OF PEDOLOGISTS AND PEDAGOGUES... HYBRID WAR

Ped of Pedologists and Pedagogues... Hybrid war

'Moskvich?'¹ – 'No, it's an Opel, stolen together with the factory.'

'Lada?' – 'No, it's a Fiat. Licenced only in the beginning.'

'Volga?' – 'Not at all. First they stole a Ford, then a Plymouth.'

'Space rockets?' – 'Oh, they started with Nazi blueprints and captive designers.'

Just like the Kalashnikov. Just redesigned.

So what is Russian technology? Does it even exist?

It does exist!

1. Moskvich, Lada, Volga- brands of Russian cars

Until now, there existed only the ‘Tsar Bell’ on display in the Kremlin, which never rang. And the ‘Tsar Cannon’ from the same Kremlin, which never fired.

And now the real breaking news: Although elements of hybrid warfare have been used by humanity for millennia, it was Russia that ‘assembled’ them into a perfected form of combat. Some argue that even this was stolen—but that’s not the main point here. What matters is that Russia turned what we once jokingly referred to as the ‘three Ch’s’ into an actual policy. They thought up and designed the things that the standard Western mind would not even think of. And for this, they again used Western achievements—technology and democracy.

At the end of February in Bucharest, police stopped a car, removed one of the passengers, and took him in for questioning. It might have seemed like a routine incident, except for one crucial detail: The passenger could have been the country’s president today, had the previous president not annulled the results of the first round of elections, based, as he claimed, on information from the security services.

Calin Georgescu was released after several hours of questioning, but the investigation continued. His comrades and personal guards were arrested, hundreds of thousands of dollars and... tickets to Moscow were found during the search. This latest story seems a bit artificial, but it directly indicates where the investigation is headed—towards proving Russian interference in the Romanian presidential election.

“You can believe it’s wrong for Russia to buy social media advertisements to influence your elections, we certainly do,” US Vice President Vance said at the Munich Security Conference, taking time to address the issue. “But if your democracy can be destroyed with a few hundred thousand dollars of digital advertising from a foreign country, then it wasn’t very strong to begin with.”

That the Trump administration might have a liking

for the far-right Georgescu is not surprising. What is truly remarkable, however, is that a pedologist—largely unknown to voters (and to clarify, pedology is a branch of soil science; he’s already had enough trouble being disqualified from the race and placed under investigation)—managed to win the first round of the election.

Although humanity has been using elements of hybrid warfare for millennia, it was the Russians who perfected it into a form of warfare.

The explanation lies in technology, particularly TikTok, where over 20,000 troll accounts supporting Georgescu emerged just two months before the election. Most of them had Turkish IP addresses and Russian email addresses. The investigation estimated that the troll factory devoted 2.1 million comments to the pedologist candidate in one month, all positive, good and kind; that the number of likes (approvals) rose to 4.3 million; the number of views to 150 million; and that the entire campaign was ultimately managed from outside Romania.

The investigation estimated that the troll factory devoted 2.1 million comments to the pedologist candidate in one month, all positive, good and kind; that the number of likes (approvals) rose to 4.3 million; the number of views to 150 million

We live in such a time that it is not even necessary to specify where exactly this ‘outside’ is. What country could possibly have interest in the victory of a Romanian far-right candidate who openly opposes aid to Ukraine and NATO, but praises Putin.

Or what country might be interested in, for example, influencing elections in Serbia so that the party of Putin's ally, Vučić, retains power?

Rasha Nedeljkovic, Director of CRTA's Centre for Research, Transparency, and Accountability will

The last parliamentary elections in Serbia were significantly rigged. Although we were unable to secure a re-run, with Western support we began working to improve the electoral environment. In the most recent elections, held in December 2023, the authorities based their propaganda primarily on the threat of war—which has become a familiar tactic. Whenever public pressure on the government intensifies, state-controlled television and other media outlets begin sounding the alarm that Serbia is under threat, that if the ruling party is replaced, Kosovo, Albania, Croatia, or Bosnian Muslims will attack us.”

give you the correct answer: “The last parliamentary elections in Serbia were significantly rigged. Although we were unable to secure a re-run, with Western support we began working to improve the electoral environment. In the most recent elections, held in December 2023, the authorities based their propaganda primarily on the threat of war—which has become a familiar tactic. When-



Rasha Nedeljkovic - Director, Center for Research and Transparency, CRTA

ever public pressure on the government intensifies, state-controlled television and other media outlets begin sounding the alarm that Serbia is under threat, that if the ruling party is replaced, Kosovo, Albania, Croatia, or Bosnian Muslims will attack us.”

According to today's reports, Serbian President Vučić will attend the May 9 military parade in Moscow. If this trend continues, he may find himself among the usurper leaders of another Orthodox country—leaders who also govern their nation according to directives from Russia's FSB. Their rhetoric echoes familiar Kremlin narratives: ‘the second front’, ‘Europe is a threat’, ‘NATO wants war’, ‘they are attacking Orthodoxy’, ‘they are erasing our identity’, and ‘how can Putin be an enemy?’—and so on.

We believe we know Russia well. We believe that we have thoroughly learnt all the tricks of the FSB, since, if you look a little closer, everything is easy to see and connect. But we must also admit that Russia does not change its methods of work, nor its temperament, nor its morals, from Europe to Latin America, or Africa. Somewhere it succeeds, somewhere it fails, somewhere it completely collapses.

‘Before the 2018 presidential elections, a large group of Russians arrived in the country,’ says Madagascar-based investigative journalist Gaëlle Borgia. ‘They introduced themselves as experts in elections and communications, opened an office, and began working with various candidates. Later, we discovered that the entire team was linked to Wagner founder Yevgeny Prigozhin. They brought in large sums of untraceable, black money. They worked with roughly a third of the 36 presidential candidates, with the understanding that in the second round, all votes would go to a single agreed-upon candidate. They expected the incumbent president to win—as is often the case in Africa. But they miscalculated. He lost. And so did the Russians.’

When you manage to lure the incumbent presi-

dent and a dozen other candidates—and still lose—there’s not much to boast about. Especially when you’ve poured millions into the effort. In the BBC investigation, several candidates and their campaign officials confirmed that the Russians approached them directly, offering suitcases full of cash and assuming full control over campaign operations. One of the key figures involved was political technologist Maxim Shugaley. He later fled Madagascar, but his activities didn’t stop there—in 2024, he and his team were arrested in Chad.



Gael Borgia - Investigative Journalist

‘It begs the question: in the eyes of the Russians, how close are we to a distant African island?’

‘At the Russians’ insistence, the core message of their candidates had to be anti-Western—that was their strategy for winning the election,’ explains Gaëlle Borgia. “More specifically, it was anti-French, given that Madagascar is a former French colony. The Russians actively sought to exploit that sentiment. They even organized protests outside the French embassy, paying demonstrators to shout slogans. Beyond politics, they also had clear economic interests—namely, gaining control over the country’s strategic assets.’

If suitcases full of cash and chants of ‘the West is bad’ work in Africa, why wouldn’t they work in the post-Soviet space? Especially when it’s easier to move money across the border from Russian-occupied Transnistria? This is how Russia spent at least €100 million on Moldova’s presidential elections last autumn. That’s just the amount that was tracked—some of it discovered by police in hidden caches at opposition headquarters. Even so, most

Russia is not changing its working methods, its morals, or its color.

of the funds were successfully spent or distributed. In some cases, quite literally scattered to the wind: Russia was so determined to defeat Maia Sandu that it flew thousands of Moldovans living in Russia to Istanbul, then on to Bucharest, and finally bussed them into Moldova to vote—before sending them back the same way.

And how far away are we from Moldova, which is right next door?

According to a report released by the country’s Security Service after the second round of elections, Russia did everything it could to defeat Sandu and disrupt the referendum (on establishing EU membership as a constitutional obligation—T.G.). It is also expected to do everything possible to defeat Sandu and the pro-European forces in the upcoming parliamentary elections scheduled for May–June 2025. The Kremlin’s main tool in this effort is oligarch Ilan Shor, who has been hiding from the Moldovan judiciary in Moscow for several years. He serves as the key intermediary for delivery and distributing Kremlin money in Moldova.

Moldova, like us, has not yet fully escaped from the Soviet Union. But the Baltic States have broken free and are now trying to lock their doors so that no one can drag them back to Russia, while Russia is trying relentlessly. It uses its own specific techniques against each country, but in the end, like with all great maestros, its signature remains unmistakable.

The struggle in the digital sphere may seem to some like a mere nuisance—just a kid sitting in front of a computer—at the state level. But it has long since outgrown this stage and has become a perfect weapon.

For years now pilots in the Baltic Sea region have been complaining about GPS signal interference or complete disappearance. After 2022, such ‘nasti-





ness' intensified, and in the last year it reached a really dangerous line. Pilots on several thousand flights each year are now experiencing satellite signal problems that are potentially fatal. Everyone knows who's doing it. Everyone knows where it's coming from. In the Kaliningrad enclave, Russian electronic warfare equipment seems to be deployed in abundance.

But Kaliningrad alone is no longer enough. A few years ago, a Russian citizen was granted permission to build an Orthodox church near Västerås Airport, outside Stockholm. A Swede could imagine many things—but the idea that a Russian would use an onion-domed church for espionage surely wasn't one of them.

It wasn't until a 22-meter bell tower was constructed just 200 meters from the runway that Sweden's security services began to take a closer look. According to a spokesperson for the Swedish counterintelligence agency Säpo, representatives of the church were found to be connected to Russian intelligence spies active in the country: "Russia is using the Orthodox Church as an intelligence platform in Sweden."

The Swedes are now actively watching Russian intelligence agents, who are actively watching Swedish counterintelligence agents. The only ac-



Elina Lange-Ionatamishvili, Senior Expert, NATO Strategic Communications Center

tive action they have taken is cutting off the state funding that the Swedish budget had generously paid to the religious organisation for many years.

It's likely that even now, someone in the FSB is

chuckling at how democracy operates. Emboldened by past successes, they pushed further along their well-worn path. A large plot of land and property was purchased—this time near Sweden's ultra-modern Muskö naval base—under the name of a Russian businessman. A similar tactic was used in Norway, where two Russian citizens acquired ski resorts near the Bardufoss military airfield, providing a convenient vantage point for surveillance.

In 2016, NATO's Strategic Communications Centre, based in Riga, launched a study into Kremlin

"Russia is using the Orthodox Church as an intelligence platform in Sweden."

sabotage activities targeting the Baltic and Nordic countries. The project began, but, as the saying goes, it never really ended, because stopping Russian interference had become nearly impossible.

"I can briefly tell you, for example, what their ultimate goal is in Latvia," says Elina Lange-Ionatamishvili, head of NATO's Strategic Communications Center, who shared the results of a study published a couple of weeks ago. "They are trying to bring in a government that, if not friendly to Moscow, will at least not resist its hostile actions. It will remain silent when Russia tries to conquer other countries. This should be a silent, covert occupation, so that they have their own agent in the two most powerful alliances, NATO and the European Union."

What prevents Moscow from having agents inside NATO and the European Union? Well, they practically already have them running Hungary and Slovakia. How far, then, are Latvia or, for example, Estonia from having a fifth column at the helm?

According to official statistics, ethnic Russians make up 23.7% of Latvia's population and 22.5% of Estonia's. Typically, they have their own representative political forces, which they traditionally

vote for. However, not once since these countries gained independence have ‘Russian parties’ won a parliamentary majority—let alone secured a place in a governing coalition.

Let’s admit the uncomfortable truth: For this, both Latvia and Estonia have long faced criticism, even from within the democratic world. Phrases like ‘inclusiveness’, ‘human rights’, ‘Baltic apartheid’, and ‘minority rights’ are echoed frequently—even from Brussels.

That was until Putin launched his continental offensive. Only then did ‘old Europe’ begin to acknowledge that by advocating for the supposedly violated rights of ethnic Russians, it had been inadvertently playing into Moscow’s hands.

In the end, the story culminated in the revelation that the main lawyer for the Russian-speaking population of Latvia, Tatiana Zhdanoka, once a mathematics teacher and by that time a member of the European Parliament, was charged with having ties to the FSB.

‘Moscow sees dividing our societies as a more attainable goal than changing our governments,’ says Elina Lange-Ionatamishvili. ‘This is how it attempts to undermine our resilience. It constantly pushes the narrative that we are failed states, that this region isn’t worth defending, and that NATO allies won’t come to our aid. But that is a fundamental lie—they are already here.’

Indeed, NATO Allies are already present in the Baltics. As part of NATO’s Enhanced Forward Presence initiative, allied contingents have been stationed at military bases in these countries for the past eight years. NATO’s plan is to increase the size of the groups to brigade level (3.5-5,000 troops). After the outbreak of a full-scale war with Russia in 2022, NATO extended this experience to all other member states bordering Ukraine.

It all began when NATO ‘closed’ the skies over the three Baltic States the very next morning after their accession—on 30 March 2004. Since then, allied fighter jets have been rotating deployments every four months, first in Lithuania and now also

in Estonia, patrolling their airspace.

Who they are protecting against hardly needs to be said.

When a Russian aircraft appears on your radar, it may be too late. Are there tell-tale signs that will unmistakably indicate that Russia will attack you tomorrow? There are for tomorrow. And for the day after tomorrow. And then it gets harder and harder.

Jurgis Norvaiša, an officer at NATO’s Strategic Communications Centre, says: ‘We analysed Russian government media and social media to find un-



Jurgis Norvaiša - Officer at NATO Strategic Communications Center

mistakable signs of the outbreak of war. We started our research in 2021. Others tried to do it before us, but it turned out to be very difficult. Only since 17 February 2022 (1 week before the beginning of the large-scale war—T.G.) some other accents have been observed. The conclusion is that Moscow is constantly preparing an information attack. Every day it deliberately publishes false information so that public opinion is constantly ‘ready’.

In the study, which has not yet been published, the Russian information system is a unified space. ‘At the core is government information—as a common, tone-defining, line,’ says Vice Colonel Norvaiša in an interview with us. ‘Below that, everything is distributed. Statistically, most of the Russian population gets information from television, then comes Telegram and other platforms. There is a more interesting statistic—state TV channels are fully trusted by more than 50 percent of the population. It is a very specific fact that





even those who seek other information and, for example, regularly use VPNs, more often still trust government sources. Susceptibility to other information is very low in Russia.’

If we translate the words of a professional into simple language, then a Russian, whether you explain the truth or not, still believes what the authorities tell him.

Now, I know that many of you are wondering how far we are from Russia if, despite the availability of information, the majority of people still believe only propaganda.

The rise of social media has undeniably multiplied the volume of information we consume. But the more dangerous consequence is that it has drastically reduced the time we have to process it. Today, when someone picks up their phone, they are just as likely to absorb content without reflection as someone who swallows food without chewing. This phenomenon has been thoroughly studied by those who seek to control public per-

If we translate the words of a professional into simple language, then a Russian, whether you explain the truth or not, still believes what the authorities tell him.

ception—and, quite simply, want to ‘feed’ your mind. In an overloaded information environment, we often lack the time or energy to separate truth from falsehood, and so we end up ‘devouring’ everything indiscriminately.

Readers may recall that Meta has repeatedly purged Facebook and Instagram networks in Georgia, each time removing hundreds of accounts, pages, and groups. ‘Our investigation found links to the Strategic Communications Department of the Georgian Government Administration,’ stated Meta’s Quarterly Threat Report in 2023. According

to the same investigation, the Georgian government spent \$33,500 on Facebook and Instagram ads alone. The same thing happened in 2019, 2020, and other years, and again the trail led either to the government administration or to Koka Kandiashvili². Which is basically the same thing.

Thinking back, in 2024, Meta discovered thousands of fake accounts and pages in Moldova, the purpose of which was to discredit Maia Sandu, promote the ‘normalisation’ of relations with Russia and call for a ‘no’ vote to the European Union in the referendum. At the same time, the Moldovan authorities themselves blocked dozens of Telegram channels that were ‘trying to bribe voters’.

Even before deploying military forces, Putin sent cyber troops to Ukraine. Since 2022, Ukraine’s Security Service has uncovered more than 100 hidden ‘bot farms’. To grasp the scale of this digital terror: The infrastructure reached around 12 million Ukrainians. These operations distorted historical facts and spread Kremlin propaganda about a shared faith and common past; they promoted a narrative of defeatism, exaggerated the strength of the Russian army and its weapons, and eroded the will to fight for Ukrainian sovereignty. In essence, they carried out a classic psychological operation targeting nearly a third of the country’s active population. Some were more exposed to this operation, some less. But the FSB’s many years of diverse, multilingual, and multi-continental experience guarantee that it did not go unnoticed.

Neither fake pages nor online manipulation are the invention of Russians, let alone Georgian Dreamers. It is a widespread practice and a major headache for all social platforms. NATO has been studying the issue for years. It turns out that it is much easier to create false statistics on social media than to remove them.

Gundars Bergmanis-Korats conducted his experiment again at the end of 2024. The same one he

2. Koka Kandiashvili, a former government PR official, widely linked to pro-government disinformation campaigns in Georgia, including running fake media pages and troll networks used to discredit opposition and civil society critics.

has been conducting since 2019. First, he created fake accounts and published 44 completely harmless, apolitical and non-provocative posts on several platforms, then he bought 'statistics', a service that quickly and with a high guarantee increases views, likes and comments, from companies specialising in it.

'For just 58 euros, we got 1,150 inauthentic comments, 11,725 likes, 3,150 shares and 8,233 views on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, VKontakte, and X. If we compare it to the 2022 experiment, we got roughly the same statistics for three times cheaper,' Bergmann-Korats summarised the results. 'The most expensive of these are Facebook and Instagram comments. Because the text has to be provided to the executor and then he will post it on behalf of different users over a period of time. However, as technology advances, we expect artificial intelligence to take over the function of creating comments, and this service will become even cheaper.'

But the purpose of the experiment was not to expose those Russian and other companies that sell you this fake 'engagement'. The main thing was to establish how well the 'self-monitoring' of these platforms is working. Here, you get a notification that you are 'banned' because of this and that, and you achieve nothing by appealing. So, how do thousands of Pakistani, Sri Lankan and Chinese 'users' remain ignored by the algorithm on the Georgia government's or by other Facebook page, Instagram or YouTube? The outcome of Gundars Bergmanis-Korats' experiment is not very optimistic.

'After four weeks, on average, only 15 percent of the content on these purchased accounts had been removed,' the researcher said. 'In 2021, for example, the figure was 25 percent, and we still thought the system wasn't working well. This time,

'War is no longer fought only on the battlefield. Information attacks, cyberattacks, and disinformation campaigns have turned the digital space into a battlefield. Russia's war against Ukraine has clearly shown us that our democracy is at risk from a distorted perception of the truth,'

X (formerly Twitter) worked best—it removed 50 percent of fake comments and activity in four weeks. The worst performers were China's TikTok and Russia's VKontakte—just 3 percent and 2 percent respectively.'

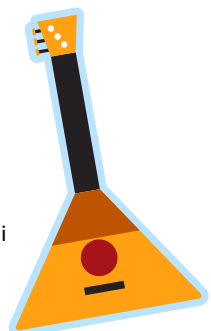
Any 'Kokakandiashvili' and 'Hakim Pasha'³ will use such statistics, won't they?! And will bring down on your head a whole cloaca of malicious lies, accumulated according to the instructions from the FSB textbook.

'War is no longer fought only on the battlefield. Information attacks, cyberattacks, and disinformation campaigns have turned the digital space into a battlefield. Russia's war against Ukraine has clearly shown us that our democracy is at risk from a distorted perception of the truth,' said President of the European Parliament Roberta Metsola—words spoken when Europe finally became, as some say, 'adequate', or in other words, awakened. The answer has come more than once. On November 23, 2023, the day the European Parliament adopted a resolution declaring Russia a state sponsor of terrorism, its website was hit by the largest DDoS attack in its history.

It wasn't the first—and it won't be the last.

Shall I say where it came from? ■

3. Hakim Pasha- a YouTube user operating under the pseudonym "Hakim Pasha" who uploaded a video titled "Saakashvili killed Mr. Zurab Zhvania," which featured graphic post-mortem images of former Georgian Prime Minister. The materials supposedly were leaked by authorities to discredit political opponents.





Tamar Chkheidze

RUSSIAN NARRATIVES TO INFLUENCE GEORGIAN SOCIETY

As a result of global and internal factors, the Russian Empire, in the form of the Soviet Union, collapsed, and Georgia regained its centuries-old independence. This was followed by several years of diminished imperial aspirations from post-Soviet Russia and the emergence of certain democratic elements, which gave the world the illusion of Russia becoming a normal state. Even during this period of weakened Russian influence, it did not cease its war of aggression against Georgia and the occupation of Georgian territories. Today, as the Russian Empire presents itself to the world in one of the most malevolent forms of its reincarnation, Georgia—as an independent state, nation, and society with its fragile yet still democratic institutions—once again faces a vital challenge. This time, virtually, together with the entire democratic world.

The Russian orientation of the Ivanishvili government was evident from the outset, based on its political background and statements made even before coming to power. Regrettably, this alignment was not immediately apparent to a significant portion

of Georgian society until Russia entered an active phase of expansion and its directives to the Georgian government became more categorical and urgent to implement.

Of particular interest are the Russian narratives that exert varying degrees of influence on a considerable segment of the population. Let us examine some of these narratives:

‘Ivanishvili and his government preserve the peace for us.’

This blatant lie failed to secure the constitutional majority the Georgian Dream party aimed for (in fact, not even a simple majority), yet it still had a significant impact during the elections and continues to influence a portion of the population. Regrettably, the opposition’s efforts to debunk and respond to this falsehood were insufficient. Some even argued that focusing on this issue was unnecessary, claiming that war is a sensitive and stressful topic. However, the opposite should have been true: precisely because it is such a sensitive subject—and because the horrors



of bombings and other war-related tragedies are so harrowing—they can compel many people to give up everything else: ‘No matter how bad the “Dreamers” are, to hell with it, just as long as there’s no war.’ This lie proved quite effective in misleading the public and required not concealment but the broad dissemination of the truth. It was followed by the well-known rhetorical question: “So, do you want war?”

The truth, however, is that Ivanishvili has nothing to do with maintaining peace (if what is happening today can even be called ‘peace’). In reality, we owe the preservation of peace to the selfless struggle of the Ukrainians. Had Kyiv fallen and Ukraine not continued to restrain the monster, the Kremlin would have invaded when the barbarian horde would find time to do so and when it itself deemed it necessary, regardless of the Georgian Dream Party’s policy of appeasement. It is true that Russia benefits greatly from the rule of the Dreamers, but it is hostile to Georgia as a country, and if it can move to the next stage of its subjugation with or without their aid, the Russophiles and hypocrisy of Ivanishvili’s rule would not deter such ambitions. It is Ukraine’s steadfast resistance that currently prevents Russia

from pursuing further objectives.

Obviously, the government propagandists are not embarrassed by the question: If peace is here thanks to the Dreamers, what other country might have a war started in parallel with Ukraine? There is also no war in Moldova, Ukraine’s immediate neighbour, which openly supports Ukraine and does not flatter the aggressor.

With the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, the Dreamers began to remove more and more openly the veil of pro-Westernism and

It is Russia that is waging a disgusting and brutal war, and they are declaring Georgia’s partners to be the instigators of the war

launched a completely unusual, shocking for world diplomacy, campaign of insults against the West. The Putinist delusion that there is a certain “global war party” which, for unknown reasons, has been persistently trying to drag our country into the war from the beginning, and that the Georgian

government is heroically resisting this evil intention, is completely illogical and comical. It is Russia that is waging a disgusting and brutal war, and they are declaring Georgia's partners to be the instigators of the war. Who would need it and why, what would be the benefit of Georgia's involvement in a war with its military capabilities and the Russian government? How much would it benefit them? On the contrary, it would be an additional burden for the world, wouldn't it?

Interference in Internal Affairs

The Georgian Dream party, much like the Soviet Union in its time, labels Western expressions of concern over human rights,

Russia seeks the neutrality of a country it intends to conquer, as it leaves the country without allies and makes it easier for Russia to subdue it.

democracy, judicial independence, election integrity, and political imprisonment as 'interference in internal affairs'. By doing so, it portrays itself as a defender of national sovereignty. This narrative resonates with a segment of the population that perceives Western advocacy for democratic values as humiliating, while viewing the rejection of such principles—and the endorsement of authoritarian practices—as a form of safeguarding national independence. Such a mindset aligns with the characteristics of totalitarian and authoritarian regimes.

In reality, human rights are not an 'internal affair' for anyone. On the contrary, there should be an international body (the UN

cannot handle this) that would be obliged, duly empowered, and equipped to respond quickly and save people's lives and rights from a usurper or group of usurpers when necessary. This process must, of course, be fully transparent and rigorously justified.

Neutrality: The Biggest Lie in the Service of the Enemy

At first glance, many might think, 'This is good. Why should we take sides. We will live in peace.' However, this is a big lie spread by the invader. Georgia is not Switzerland. Switzerland is surrounded by European countries, and no neighbour is ready to swallow it up. If a country chooses neutrality without considering its specific circumstances, that alone will not protect it. Russia seeks the neutrality of a country it intends to conquer, as it leaves the country without allies and makes it easier for Russia to subdue it.

Russia is actively promoting anti-Western propaganda in Georgia—a practice it has long pursued, but which has intensified through the use of the de facto authorities themselves. No matter how much the Georgian Dream representatives may try to present themselves as independent actors, it is clear that without direct orders from Moscow, they would not—and could not—have initiated this unprecedented anti-Western campaign. Not even the communists resorted to such unrestrained vulgarity, crossing every red line and descending into outright obscenity.

LGBT: Another favourite topic of Russian anti-Western propaganda

Naturally, the Georgian Dream representatives have seized on this theme with great enthusiasm, attempting to intimidate the public with a fabricated threat that the West will supposedly destroy traditional values and undermine Georgian identity—that mothers will no longer be mothers, and fathers no longer fathers. In this propaganda narrative,

a supposed shared faith with Russia plays a central role: Russia is portrayed as the defender and guardian of traditional values, while the West is depicted as a source of moral decay.

This is, of course, a blatant lie and pure hypocrisy. Diverse sexual orientations have existed throughout human history—indeed, in Ancient Greece, such diversity was widely accepted. The fact that a certain number of people have, and always will have, different orientations is simply a reality of human existence and should never be used as a tool for fearmongering. Regardless of whether one likes it or not.

Incidentally, this phenomenon exists everywhere and is no less widespread in any country than it is in so-called Orthodox Russia—which, in reality, is closer to a communist-fascist state. In fact, such orientations are often most prevalent in the very circles that fight them with propaganda, violence, and restrictive legislation.

The claim that the West is trying to impose a particular orientation on us is a blatant falsehood. What the West consistently demands—across all spheres—is the protection of human rights. And this,

fundamentally, is not only a Western value but also a core principle of Orthodoxy and Christianity as a whole.

Obviously, the senior officials of Georgian Dream are not genuinely concerned—if at all—about anyone's sexual orientation or so-called family purity. They are simply carrying out a political assignment handed down from the north, using this issue as a tool to fight against Georgia's Western orientation. In doing so, they falsely associate LGBT rights with Western influence in an attempt to manipulate public opinion. Interestingly, this topic once resonated more deeply with the population. But now, thanks to Georgian Dream's excessive zeal, the issue has taken on a comical tone and become a subject of ridicule—just consider absurd phrases like 'man's milk', and the like.

In short, the association of national identity with Russia in the Russian narrative—and the portrayal of the West as an enemy of national and cultural values—contradicts both historical and contemporary reality. This message, rooted in the goals of a conquering power, is designed to confuse the population by deliberately reversing the roles of friend and foe. ■





Keti Kurdovanidze

ჰინ პოქლა თავისუფლება

ბოლო რამდენიმე თვეა საქართველოში პოლიტიკური პროცესი ერთგვარად შენედა და ფრაგმენტული გახდა: თუ აქამდე ვწახდით, რომ საქართველო ავტორიტარიზმისკენ მიდიოდა და ფორმალურ დემოკრატიაზე კი აუქმებდა, ახლა უკვე ცხადად გამოჩნდა, რომ რეჟიმმა ავტორიტარული მმართველობის ჩარჩოები მოხდენილად მოირგო და უკიდურესად გაამკაცრა კონტროლის ბერკეტები: კიდევ უფრო აქტიურად დაიწყო თავისუფალი მედიის დევნა, აქტივისტებზე ძალადობა, პოლიტიკური ოპონენტების დემონიზაცია, მიიღო პოლიტიკური პარტიების აკრძალვის შესახებ კანონი, საჯარო სამსახურში კი ბოლშევიკური ტიპის წმენდა ჩაატარა, გაუგონარი ჯარიმებისა და მრავალი სხვა, აქამდე წარმოუდგენელი, ანტიდემოკრატიული ქმედების მომსწრე გავცხადა, რომლებიც ცხადყოფს, რომ რეჟიმი

დიქტატურის დამყარების აქტიურ ფაზაში შევიდა.

მაგრამ დიქტატურა ჩვენში თავისი კლასიკური ნიშნებით არ დაწყებულა: ვთქვათ, სამხედრო ან საკონსტიტუციო გადატრიალებით, თავისუფალი მედიის გაუქმებით, პარტიების აკრძალვით ან თუნდაც რომელიმე ავტორიტარის გაკერპებით - ჩვენმა რეალობამ კიდევ ერთხელ დაგვარწმუნა, რომ ყველაფერი ბევრად უფრო მარტივად და დემოკრატიის სახელით შეიძლება მოხდეს. ამჯერად რუსული მმართველობა საქართველოში რუსული ჩექმითა და ტანკით არ შემოსულა, მოვიდა „გამჭვირვალობის კანონის“ სახელით და განგვიცხადა: მე დღეიდან ქვეყნის სუვერენიტეტსა და მშვიდობას დავიცავო. პარადოქსია, მაგრამ ეს აბსურდი ბევრმა დაიჯერა, რომ ოკუპანტისა

და საქართველოს ყველაზე დიდი მტრის ემისრები ჩვენი ქვეყნის სასარგებლოდ გაირჯებოდნენ. რას უნდა მივანეროთ ეს - კარგად დაგეგმილ პროპაგანდას თუ იმ ადამიანების სიბრყველასა და ინფანტილიზმს, რომლებსაც წითელქუდასავით სჯერათ, რომ მგელი მზრუნველი ბებიაა, ბურატინოსავით ელოდებიან, რომ კატა ბაბილიოსა და მელა ალისას რჩევით საოცრებათა მინდორში დაფლული ოქროს მონეტები მეორე დღეს, ყოველგვარი გარჯის გარეშე, დიდ განძად იქცევა. ალბათ ორივეს ერთად.

საქართველოში არსებული რეჟიმი ყოველდღიურად და ჩვეული უტიფრობით გვარწმუნებს, რომ უცხოური აგენტების შესახებ კანონის მიღება თურმე ქვეყნის გადარჩენისთვის სასიცოცხლოდ მნიშვნელოვანი ყოფილა, საქართველოს ყველა დიდ ქალაქში დაწყებული საპროტესტო მოძრაობა, ახალგაზრდების ქუჩაში გამოსვლა, საზოგადოების წინააღმდეგობა კი - იმ ექსტრემისტულად განწყობილი მცირე ჯგუფებისა და ოპოზიციური პოლიტიკური პარტიების ახირება, რომლებსაც, რეჟიმის თქმით, მართავს და აფინანსებს „გლობალური ომის პარტია“, ირაკლი კობახიძის მიერ ან უკვე „დიფ სთეიტად“ წოდებული. გამოდის, რომ ფაქტობრივად, ვინც ქვეყანაში ხმას იღებს და არ ეთანხმება მმართველი გუნდის ნარატივს, ან აგენტია, ან სამშობლოს მოღალატე და ან „ნაცი“. ასე, ერთი ქოლგის ქვეშ, აგროვებს რეჟიმი მათ, ვინც უნდა დასაჯოს, პოლიტიკურ ცხოვრებას ჩამოაშოროს ან ამ ქვეყნიდან გააქციოს.

რეჟიმის მიზნებს შესაშური ერთგულებითა და მორჩილებით ემსახურებიან ძალოვანი სტრუქტურები, რომლებიც საოცარი სინქრონიტა და სიზუსტით ასრულებენ მორგებულ როლს: პოლიცია და სპეცრაზმი საპროტესტო აქციებს შლიან, სუსი გამორჩეულად აქტიურ ადამიანებს სახლებში უვარდება და ჩხრეკის პროცესს მეთვალყურეობს, პროკურატურა - ყალბ ბრალდებებს თხზავს, ხოლო რეჟიმის მარიონეტად ქცეულ სასამართლოს სასტიკი განაჩენები გამოაქვს. ასე თანდათან იქცევა ჩვენი ყოველდღიური რუტინის ნაწილად ჯარიმების ჩაბარება, უთენია ძალოვანი სტრუქტურების საკუთარ სახლებში „მას-პინძლობა“ და სასამართლოებში მგლის თავზე სახარების კითხვა. ის, რაც სულ რაღაც ერთი წლის წინ მხოლოდ დისტოპიური რომანების

მხატვრული ნარატივი გვეგონა, ახლა ჩვეულ რეალობაა. ასე შემოგვეპარა დემოკრატიის, მშვიდობის, სუვერენიტეტისა და ეროვნული ღირებულებების სახელით გამართებული და ე.წ. „გამჭვირვალობის კანონებით“ წელგამაგრებული დიქტატურის რუსული მოდელი.

ამ საბედისწერო პროცესის ათვლის წერტილად ალბათ 2024 წლის გაზაფხული უნდა მივიჩნიოთ, როცა ივანიშვილმა გადაწყვიტა, აღარ მორიდებოდა საზოგადოების რისხვას, საბოლოოდ მოეხსნა დემოკრატიის ნილაბი და რუსთაველის გამზირიდან ამაყად ამცნო საზოგადოებას, რასაც უპირებდა. ერთი წლის შემდეგ მან ყველა შემზარავი ალთქმა პირნათლად შეასრულა, განსხვავებით 2012 წლის წინასაარჩევნო დაპირებებისა, რომლებსაც ოლიგარქმა ხუმრობა უწოდა, მით უმეტეს, რომ 12 წლის განმავლობაში ამაზე პასუხი მისთვის არც არავის მოუთხოვია. მაშინ საზოგადოება საკუთარი ნებით გაჩუმდა და უმოქმედობა ირჩია. ახლა კი, როდესაც შექმნილი ვითარების გაპროტესტების ნება გამოხატა, მას ძალით აჩუმებენ, რადგან უსიერ ტყედ ქცეულ ქვეყანაში თავისუფლების ხმას ვეღარც ვეღარავის გააგონებს, კიდევ რომ ეცადო. ერთი სიტყვით, საქართველოში თავისუფლება ტრაგიკულად გადაჰყვა ადამიანების უმნიშვნელობას, კონფორმიზმს, სიხარბეს, ანგარებას, მითოლოგიურ აზროვნებას, პროგრესის სიძულვილსა და ველურ ტრადიციებს.

სულ რაღაც ათიოდე წლის წინ წარმატებული და სამაგალითო პოსტსაბჭოთა ქვეყანა იმ გაუკვალავ უსიერ ტყეს დაემსგავსა, რომელიც აკუტაგავს ერთ-ერთი ექსპერიმენტული მოთხრობის მოქმედების ადგილია. ამას ისიც მოწმობს, რომ ქვეყნის ოთხივე (მედიასაც ვგულისხმობ) სახელისუფლებო შტოს მთავარი ფიგურები დასაწყვირებულნი არიან აშშ-ისა და ევროკავშირის ქვეყნების მიერ, აშშ-ის ორპარტიული „მეგობარი“ აქტი კი კონგრესში ბოლო პროცედურებს გადის.

აკუტაგავს „უსიერ ტყეში“ ვახსენე არა მხოლოდ ალუზიისთვის, არამედ იმიტომ, რომ არაფერი ისე ზუსტად არ გამოხატავს საქართველოში შექმნილ ამჟამინდელ პოლიტიკურ და საზოგადოებრივ ცხოვრებას, როგორც ეს მოთხრობა და მასში დასმული შეკითხვა - ვინ მოკლა სამურაი უსიერ ტყეში? ეს კითხვა ბევრჯერ ისმის ტექსტში, თუმცა ის

მხოლოდ ფორმალური ხასიათისაა და მასზე პასუხს არავითარი მნიშვნელობა არა აქვს, არც კონტექსტისთვის და არც ტექსტისთვის. ამ კითხვაზე პასუხი მხოლოდ გამოუცდელ მკითხველს აინტერესებს, რომლისთვისაც ეს მოთხრობა დეტექტიური ჟანრის პათოსით იკითხება.

ჩვენს სინამდვილეშიც ხშირად ისმის ამ ტიპის შეკითხვები - ვინ მოკლა თავისუფლება? ვინ გვართმევს დამოუკიდებლობას? ვინ არის დამნაშავე? არც აქ არსებობს ზუსტი პასუხი, რადგან ფაქტი მხოლოდ ისაა, რომ თავისუფლება მოკლეს, ყველა დანარჩენი ნარატივი კი ბუნდოვანი და ურთიერთგამომრიცხავია და არ ემსახურება სიმართლის დადგენას. რატომ, რისთვის, ვინ ან რამ მოკლა - ეს უკვე საზოგადოების სხვადასხვა ჯგუფის თვალთ დასახული პროცესებია, სახსე სპეკულაციებით, მანიპულაციებითა და ინტერპრეტაციებით, მისი მკვლელობის პასუხისმგებლობა კი სრულად არავის ეკისრება.

აკუტაგავას მოთხრობაში შვიდი ნარატორია და შვიდივე მკვლელობის განსხვავებულ ვერსიას ჰყვება. პირველი ნარატორი ტყის მჭრელია - პასიური მოქალაქე. ის მკვლელობის ამბავს ისე ჰყვება, როგორც უბრალო დამკვირვებელი. მართალია, მას სამურაის მოკვლაში უშუალოდ არ მიუღია მონაწილეობა, მაგრამ მაინც გადაეყარა ტრაგიკულ შედეგს. მოთხრობელი ყურადღებას ამახვილებს ნიშნებზე და არ ცდილობს მნიშვნელობების ძიებას, ყოველგვარი ნუხილის გარეშე ჰყვება მკვლელობის ამბავს და ემოციურად სრულიად დისტანცირებულია. მოწმეთაგან ყველაზე შემზარავი სწორედ მისი მონათხრობია - არა ფაქტობრივად, არამედ ემოციურად. ასეთი მოქალაქეები ჩვენს გვერდითაც ცხოვრობენ. ისინი, ერთი შეხედვით, არც ვინმეს დარბევაში მონაწილეობენ და არც ვინმეს უკანონო დასჯაში, უბრალოდ ხედავენ ხელისუფლების უკიდურეს თავგასულობას, თვალყურს ადევნებენ ქვეყნის რუსიფიკაციას, ადამიანების წამებას, დემოკრატიული ინსტიტუტების განადგურებას, მაგრამ მდუმარედ აგრძელებენ დამკვირვებლის როლის შესრულებას.

მეორე ნარატორი, მოხეტიალე ბერი, დუმილის ჩრდილს შეფარებული მორალური ავტორიტეტია, რომელსაც ისტორიულად ევალებოდა სინმინდისა და სიმართლის

დაცვა, ახლა აზრსაც კი ვერ უყრის თავს, რადგან საკუთარი თვალთ არაფერი უნახავს და ამიტომ ფორმალური თანაგრძნობითა და მორალური გამონათქვამებით შემოიფარგლება. ის გვახსენებს იმ ქართველ ინტელექტუალებს, ხელოვანებსა და ეკლესიის წარმომადგენლებს, რომლებიც შესანიშნავად ხვდებიან, რა არის სიმართლე, რომ ძალადობა დაუშვებელია, რომ ირგვლივ განუკითხაობა და უსამართლობაა, მაგრამ მოხსნილი აქვთ მორალური პასუხისმგებლობა და დუმილს ამჯობინებენ ან, განურჩევლად, ორივე მხარეს აკრიტიკებენ - „ძალადობა ცუდია, მაგრამ...“ - რეალურად კი ამით მხოლოდ მოძალადე რეჟიმს აძლიერებენ.

ტექსტის მესამე ნარატორი ჩაფარია - სამართალდამცავი სისტემის წარმომადგენელი. მისი მონოლოგი შეიცავს წინასწარგანსაზღვრულ ბრალდებას და მტკიცებულებათა მიკერძოებულ ინტერპრეტაციას. ჩაფარი ამბობს: ბოდიში, რომ საქმეში ასე ვერევი, მაგრამ საჭიროა თუ არა გამოძიება? აქ საქმე გვაქვს ე.წ. ბრალის ავტომატურ დაკანონებასთან, რაც მიგვანიშნებს სასამართლო სისტემაში არსებულ წინასწარგანსაზღვრულ შედეგზე. ჩაფარი იხსენებს წარსულ საქმეს და საზოგადოებრივი ჭორების საფუძველზე ამყარებს ეჭვმიტანილის ბრალს. ეს ძალიან ჰგავს დღევანდელ საქართველოში რეჟიმის მიერ შეკვეთილ და პროპაგანდისტული მედიის მეშვეობით გავრცელებულ წინასწარგანწყობას, ხალხს დააჯეროს აბსურდული ბრალდებები, რათა სასამართლოს გაუადვილდეს ხელისუფლებისთვის მაამებელი განაჩენების გამოტანა. ფარსად ქცეულ ქართულ სასამართლოს ბრალდებების მიკერძოებული ინტერპრეტაციითა და ფორმალური გამოძიებით, ზეწოლითა და ცრუ მოწმეებით ზედიზედ გამოაქვს უკანონო განაჩენები და, რეჟიმის ინსტრუმენტად ქცეული, სრულად უგულებელყოფს სამართლის მორალურ ღირებულებებს.

მეოთხე ნარატორის - მოხუცი ქალის - მონოლოგი მოკლულ სიძესა და დაკარგულ შვილზე ძალიან ჰგავს თანამედროვე საქართველოს პატრიარქალური საზოგადოების ემოციურ რეაქციას - გულწრფელს, მაგრამ სუბიექტურსა და დეზორიენტირებულს. მოხუცი ქალიარამხოლოდოჯახურიტკივილით,არამედ ისტორიული უმწეობითაცაა შეძრწუნებული.

ის უბრალოდ დედა კი არა, მთელი თაობაა, რომელმაც ვერ შეძლო საკუთარი მომავლის დაცვა იმ სამყაროსგან, რომელიც თავად ვერ შეცვალა, ამიტომ სამართლის აღსრულებას ტრანსცენდენტულ ძალას - ღმერთს სთხოვს. თანამედროვე საქართველოს კონტექსტით მოხუცის ხმა, იმ მშობლების სასოწარკვეთა, რომლებიც შვილების დაპატიმრებას, მათზე ძალადობას, უსამართლობასა და მორალურ განადგურებას ვეღარ ებრძვიან ვეღარც სამართლით და ვეღარც პროტესტით.

ტაჯიმარუ - მეხუთე მთხრობელი - ყაჩაღია, რომელიც აღიარებს მკვლელობას და ქალზე ძალადობას, თუმცა ამას სრულებითაც არ ნანობს. მისი ნარატივი ყველაზე გრძელი და თამამია. დიახ, მან მოკლა სამურაი, იძალადა ქალზე, მაგრამ სხვაგვარად ვერ მოიქცეოდა. ეს უტიფარი ავაზაკი, რომელიც მთელი მონოლოგის განმავლობაში საკუთარ თავს ვითარების მსხვერპლად წარმოაჩენს, საქართველოში დამყარებული რეჟიმის ალეგორიად შეგვიძლია განვიხილოთ - ძალაუფლების მექონე სისტემა, რომელიც დაუფარავად გვეუბნება, რომ საგარეო კურსის შეცვლა, პოლიტიკური ოპონენტების განადგურება, მათზე ძალადობა, მათი დაპატიმრება და დევნა დიდ მიზანს - მშვიდობისა და სუვერენიტეტის შენარჩუნებას ემსახურება, რომ მსხვერპლი თავად მოძალადე რეჟიმია და არა მის მიერ დევნილი ადამიანები. პოლიტიკური კრიზისი გამოიწვია გარე ძალების ჩარევამ, დასავლურმა პროპაგანდამ, ოპოზიციურმა პარტიებმა, სამოქალაქო საზოგადოებამ და თავისუფალმა მედიამ, მათ კი მხოლოდ დაიცვეს ქვეყანა ომისა და ქაოსისგან. რეჟიმი ავაზაკ ტაჯიმარუსავით ცდილობს ისტორიის მორგებას, თითქოს მის გადანყვევტილებებს, ავტორიტარიზმს, სისასტიკეს და რუსეთთან „ფლირტს“ ალტერნატივა არ გააჩნია.

ნამუსახილი ქალი მოთხრობის მეექვსე ნარატორია. ავაზაკი ძალადობს მასზე ქმრის თვალწინ. ქართული ოპოზიციის მსგავსად, მას წართმეული აქვთ ნება, უფლება, და, საუბედუროდ, საღი განსჯის უნარიც - ეჭვით, მაგრამ მაინც მიჰყვება ავაზაკს უსიერ ტყეში, ცდილობს თავდაცვას, მაგრამ ვერ ახერხებს - ერთი მხრივ, მებრძოლია, მეორე მხრივ კი, დამორჩილებული. ქართული ოპოზიცია წუხს, რომ დემოკრატია დასრულდა, ხალხს ხმა მოჰპარეს, არჩევნები გააყალბეს, თუმცა

საკუთარ დანაშაულს ამაში ვერ ხედავს და, შესაბამისად, არც რეფლექსია გააჩნია. დამარცხებული ქალის მსგავსად, ოპოზიციის ნარატივი ემოციური და წინააღმდეგობრივია. ის ვერ აყალიბებს, რა უნდა და რისთვის იბრძვის, ვერც პასუხისმგებლობას იღებს საკუთარ თავზე და უჭირს მარცხის გააზრება, ამიტომაც მუდმივად მანიპულირებს საკუთარი მსხვერპლობით.

ყველაზე ტრაგიკულია გარდაცვლილი სამურაის სული, რომელიც წინასწარმეტყველის საშუალებით მეტყველებს. ის ამბობს: მე, მე თვითონ მოვიკალი თავი. ესაა ჭეშმარიტების დადგენის მთელი აბსურდულობა, როცა სიმართლე ყველა მონაწილის ნარატივს უარყოფს. სამურაი - ფასეულობების, ღირსებისა და სამართლიანობის მეტაფორა - ვერ უძლებს ძალაუფლების მანქანას, რაც გვიჩვენებს, რომ სისტემასთან ჭიდილში სიმართლის მახვილი მხოლოდ დროებით ძალას ფლობს, რადგან ის ფრაგმენტირებულ და ურთიერთდაპირისპირებულ სოცუმს ეფუძნება.

პირობითად, აკუთავას ეს ექსპერიმენტი მიმდინარე პოლიტიკური მდგომარეობის აქტუალურ მეტაფორად შეიძლება განვიხილოთ. საქართველოში შექმნილი პოლიტიკური ქაოსი და ფრაგმენტირებული სიმართლე იწვევს საზოგადოებრივ ნიჰილიზმსა და უნდობლობას, ხოლო რეალობა აღიქმება პარტიული ინტერესებით მოტივირებულ ისტორიათა გროვად, სადაც გზის გაკვლევა ისეთივე ძნელია, როგორც უსიერ ტყეში.

და მაინც ვინ მოკლა თავისუფლება? ამ კითხვას ერთი პასუხი აქვს - ყველას ჩვენი წილი პასუხისმგებლობა გვეკისრება. ■





Ricardo Silvestre



A View from (of) the Atlantic

For most Portuguese, for some time, Georgia may have been Fiji: a far-away exotic place, known to our country via spirited men's national rugby matches. That notably changed when we saw, in our screens of choice, Nana Malachkhia waving, defiantly, the European Union (EU) flag against water cannons, repression, and illiberalism. That resonated in our small Iberian country that still has in its living memory what it means to live under a repressive regime, and also because we are one of the most pro-EU Member States in the bloc. This was confirmed by your columnist when, upon arriving in Tbilisi to attend last year's Black Sea Security Conference organised by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation and the European Liberal Forum, and after leaving my bags at the hotel, I walked Shota Rustaveli Avenue. The main artery was calm, as this was the in the period pre-election, but where I knew protests happened (and continue now) from the brave women and men of Georgia, fighting for the future of their country. Apart from the beauty and the story of the place, one other thing impossible not to notice, particularly for a

staunch defender of the project of building a European union, is the blue flags with the yellow stars stencilled in the walls of buildings.

The importance of Georgia was reinforced by the frank conversations during the Conference. Much of the future of the European project goes through the South Caucasus, being relating to energy, maritime transport, security, and by being a stopgap to Putin's expansionist intentions. However, there was something disconcerting for someone that have been following, very closely, the transformation of the United States (US) Republican Party. This was a party that prided itself of being a supporter of those fighting for democracy, of people's freedom and self-determination. Now it has devolved into a "MAGA" movement, populated by radical conservatives, America First nationalists, white supremacists, Christian Dominionists, antidemocratic and anti-liberalism zealots, emboldened by the Trump "era". The conviction of some of our friends at the Conference, from Georgia and the larger region, that this transformation could be

mitigated because there will still be “adults in the room” in a (possible at the time) second Trump Administration, seemed unrealistic to me.

Your columnist had the opportunity to express that opinion (twice), when generously invited to give a contribution. The Republicans in Congress, I added, were to be expected to completely fold to a “one leader rule”, that is better compared, for example, not to Georgia but to North Korea. What we have been seeing with the Grand Old Party since confirmed those fears: the almost complete abdication of its politicians, elected members, and leaders, the siding with Russia, the anti-European sentiment, the defence of the most irresponsible policy decisions, the giving up of the duties expressed in the First Article of the Constitution. There are honourable exceptions, worth mentioning, showing that some lawmakers in the US Congress have the resolve to propose laws to defend those in the struggle to decide their own destiny.

That is the case of the MEGOBARI Act, approved by the Senate’s Foreign Relations Committee, with a similar bill introduced in the House of Representatives. In both it is proposed that the US should support Georgian civil society, boost bilateral cooperation, have an interest in protecting and securing democracy in the country, uphold its constitutional obligation to advance the country towards membership in the EU and NATO. It also defends that it should be the policy of the US to support the ambitions of Georgians, to help combat Putin aggression, including through sanctions on trade with Moscow, and the implementation and enforcement of worldwide sanctions on Russia. Also crucial in these bills is the call for members of the political governance in Georgia to respect the freedoms of peaceful

assembly, association, and expression, including of the press. That these leaders should act in accordance with the rule of law and encourage a vibrant and inclusive civil society. Equally, for the Government of Georgia to release all persons detained or imprisoned on politically motivated grounds and drop any pending charges



Joe Wilson with a “Megobari Act” in his hand

against them, and to thoroughly investigate all allegations emerging from the recent national elections. These proposals are bipartisan, with the House bill having nine co-sponsors from the Democratic Party and nine from the Republican, and in the Senate two from each party.

These were not the only initiatives in Washington to stand with the Georgian people. There is also the Georgian People’s Act, submitted in the previous Congress, requiring the US Department of State to develop a long-term strategy toward Georgia, including a review of military assistance, and a pause to funding that provides support to the government of Georgia. There is also the letter to Irakli Kobakhidze (April 26, 2024), from the Democratic Senator Jeanne Shaheen, decrying the attacks on Georgian civil society, and opposing the intention of the government then to go against the wishes of the Georgian people, that consistently supports the drive for a

EU membership. However, regardless of these significant proposals, the possibility of seeing MAGOBARI Act approved in the two chambers of Congress, and then signed into law by President Trump, let's be honest, seem to be flimsy at best. There is a clear fifth column of Russian interests in the Republican Party, and especially in his leader, which is beyond concerning. This makes the actual Administration a clear and present danger to Europe and Europeans. All of it compounded by the MAGA movement actions in the EU to promote extreme right-wing parties and ideologies, or by extremists organisations like the Heritage Foundation, already in the process of dismantling the American liberal experiment, planning to attack the EU from inside.

What can be done? Here is a small list, with the help of a friend.

Remain united. In Georgia, necessarily, but also across the democratic world that cares about the future of this country, but also others that have their democratic systems and institutions under attack.

Stay focused. Time is a great healer, it is said, but not in this case. The passage of time makes people get distracted, lose stamina, make the usurpers consolidate their power.

It looks like the world is getting more politically irrational by the day, and there is no better example than what we are seeing coming out of Washington, but we

need to keep the prize in sight: the return of democracy to Georgia, and the freedom of its people to pursue their objectives, to become members of the EU and NATO (this last one, if it exists by then).

Take it seriously. The adversaries of progress, liberalism and democracy are all in, and they will not relent until they are beaten. Their livelihood and thirst for power is always there and tends to get more brutal with time.

Help create awareness. Use your platform, whatever it is, social networks, on a podcast, on a letter to your favourite newspaper, in a communication with governments and political parties that care about liberal democracies.

Help to increase the pressure in the United States, in the European Union, and in the United Kingdom, to intensify the pressure on Ivanishvili, his family, the network that sustain his regime, and key members of his political team.

As described here, we can, we must, believe that in the end, heroes will win. If it has not happened, it is because the struggle is not ended. Georgia has a story of heroes. They are now also in the streets of the country, in the words and deeds, in the new coalitions that are formed to help Georgians have a better future. ძალა ერთობაშია is where new heroes will be forged. ■



Gia Japaridze



Partadzi's Choice

We need to go back in time and remember the history we already know. We need history in order to learn from it—it should not remain just a legend or a past that no longer concerns us.

In the mid-sixth century, the Kingdom of Lazica became a focal point of confrontation between two great empires—the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire and Sasanian Iran. In this conflict between Byzantium and Persia, Lazica fought on the side of the Romans. However, the treacherous betrayal by Byzantine commanders led to the assassination of King Gubaz of Lazica. Faced with the need to redefine its foreign policy orientation, the political elite of Lazica convened in 555. This gathering became known in history as the Assembly of Egrisi.

Among the assembly, one faction supported breaking ties with Byzantium and forming an alliance with Iran, while the other—despite the betrayal by Byzantine commanders—continued to advocate for alignment with the Eastern Roman Empire. These two opposing camps were represented by prominent politicians and rhetoricians of the time: Aietes and Partadzi.

Aietes asserted: 'The former valour of the Colchians has vanished—no longer can we dominate others. If we let this atrocity go unpunished, the Romans will never leave us alone and will humiliate us further through our inaction. Indeed, the Romans are always more arrogant toward those who submit and tend to despise those who serve them. I want the Kingdom of Colchis to regain its former



glory—so that it will no longer depend on foreign powers, but instead rely on its own strength, both in times of war and in times of peace. But when we are weakened—by the circumstances of the time, by the turns of fate, or by both—and must submit to a greater power, it is still better to submit to one that is more benevolent, one that consistently shows favour to its own people and allies.’ Does this not echo the logic behind today’s Georgian Dream reality?

Partadzi emphasized the shared values and Christian identity with Byzantium, stating: ‘The Romans remain the more acceptable choice, for the Persians will never accept that we have different faiths. We must not surrender to despair or emotional turmoil and flee like slaves. Instead, we should be filled with a desire for the freedom of Colchis, bravely endure misfortunes, and refrain from actions unworthy of our ancestors’ customs. Let us inform Caesar of what has occurred and await his response. If our just demands are rejected, only then should we consider an alliance with the Persians.’

Ultimately, Partadzi’s view prevailed.

Throughout history, the question of Georgia’s foreign policy orientation has often resembled the dilemma faced at the Assembly of Egrisi. Georgia has continually had to navigate between powerful civilizations to safeguard its freedom and preserve its national identity.

Even when the Great Powers of the East offered Georgian kings comfort, prosperity, and personal glory in exchange for freedom, Georgian rulers chose the space of European civilization. It is no coincidence that in the eighteenth century, when Vakhtang VI, the de facto governor of Eastern Georgia appointed by the Persian Empire as ruler, founded a printing press, he was the



Georgia has always faced a foreign policy choice and has always chosen the space of Greek democracy, Roman law, and Christian morality, which is what Europe and Western civilization in general is all about.

one to print the first editions of the New Testament and *The Knight in the Panther’s Skin* for the Georgian people. If anything defined Georgian identity, it was *The Knight in the Panther’s Skin*¹ and Christian philosophy. Vakhtang VI sought to restore to his contemporaries a sense of national identity and consciousness that had been lost or eroded by shifting geopolitical tides and foreign domination.

Georgia has always faced a foreign policy choice and has always chosen the space of Greek democracy, Roman law, and Christian morality, which is what Europe and Western civilization in general is all about.

Governments in Western countries will change, and political forces may periodically come to power whose foreign policy priorities do not align with Georgia’s interests. There may be moments when Western states disagree on key issues, when cracks appear in their unity, and when the West struggles to demonstrate solidarity and unity. Yet, integration into Western structures remains Georgia’s best path to ensuring its national security, preserving its identity, and achieving economic prosperity. That is why Georgia’s Western choice is existential—an imperative for its very survival.

1. *The Knight in the Panther’s Skin* (ვეფხისტყაოსანი) is a 12th-century Georgian epic poem written by Shota Rustaveli. It is considered the national epic of Georgia, celebrated for its rich poetic style, chivalric themes, and exploration of friendship, love, and honor. The work remains a cornerstone of Georgian literature and cultural



Georgia is still facing this choice today. The country cannot change its geography. It is located in a historical geopolitical triangle between Russia, Türkiye, and Iran. All three are old historical powers with constant revisionist aspirations. Changing the fixed geopolitical reality will take time; Tbilisi will have to function for a long time in this situation, with an uncertain future, no security guarantees, and no prospect of economic recovery. Pragmatically, integration into the economic and security structures of the West is the only way out for Georgia.

But there is a difference between the choice Georgia makes and the extent to which that choice can be realized in practice. International politics is, in most cases, a two-way street. The question, then, is: what interest can Europe and the United States have in Georgia?

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Europe and the United States represent a space of values—freedom, democracy, the free market, human rights, and the rule of law. These are not only principles the West upholds, but also the foundation upon which it builds partnerships with states that share the same ideals. While some proponents of political realism might disagree, the theory itself supports the idea that aiding countries with shared values serves national interests by strengthening relative power within the international system.

Russia's full-scale military aggression against Ukraine served as a sobering moment

for Europe. Until then, the European Union—experiencing what was often referred to as 'enlargement fatigue'—had little appetite for future expansion. The Western Balkan countries, by virtue of geography alone, were in a more favourable position than those of the Eastern Partnership. In fact, the Eastern Partnership itself had long been perceived as a kind of 'consolation prize' for countries waiting at a station where the enlargement train was never expected to arrive.

Russia's attempt to forcefully change borders after World War II and wipe Ukraine off the map sobered Europe, and it took geopolitical decisions by granting Georgia candidate country status and starting accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova. Today, the de facto government of Georgia is already a headache for the European Union because it enjoys the status of a candidate country for accession. If something disturbs the European Union, if something damages its reputation, if something becomes a heavy blow on the issue of the next enlargement of the European Union, it will be a 'failure' of the European Union with regard to any candidate country. Georgia can use this moment in its own interests, as a kind of extortion—in a good sense of the word.

Nowhere does the EU flag fly as high as in Tbilisi at the protests against Ivanishvili's authoritarian regime. Enlargement gives a new impetus to the European integration project, strengthens the idea of European identity, awakens the dormant concept of European unity, breaks the deadlock of the European project, and completes the process of European integration, which turns Europe into a geopolitical actor. It is no coincidence that the former German Secretary of State repeatedly said that Tbilisi today is the real capital of Europe.

Europe does not live in the realities of the Cold War; the world has changed in the last 30 years. It is difficult to imagine the security of



Europe without the security of the Black Sea region. It is therefore crucial that accession to the European Union be accompanied by a security component. Russia's full-scale military aggression in Ukraine confirmed this and reminded European capitals of the real threats. The geopolitical, geo-economic, and geostrategic importance of the Black

Black Sea into a 'lake of the West', which will forever bury Russia's ambitions to become the 'Third Rome' and have access to warm waters. The Black Sea region is as important for the security of the West as the issue of the balance of power in the Arctic region, which has recently become more acute on the international agenda.

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The fact that the Russian Federation and Iran are under international sanctions—which are likely to remain in place for the foreseeable future, even without assuming more dire scenarios such as a prolonged war in Ukraine or new conflicts in the wider region—underlines the need for the West to diversify its trade and economic routes. Despite numerous challenges facing the states involved in a potential Central Corridor project (the costliness of the project, the lack of appropriate infrastructure, the need to modernize the existing infrastructure, long-standing disagreements between some states around the Caspian Sea, the development of tariff policies, etc.), the Central Corridor project still remains a costly but optimal option for the West in terms of trade communication with Central Asia and Indo-China and transportation of energy resources. Moreover, even if Russia and/or Iran emerge from international isolation, there is no guarantee that Moscow or Tehran will abandon their revisionist ambitions and become reliable partners for the West.

Crises also create opportunities. Georgia's foreign policy must be guided by pragmatism, rationalism, and a degree of moral clarity—principles rooted in the country's long-term national interests and shaped by a constantly evolving international environment. Georgia has earned the right to be disillusioned, as history has shown: when we were excluded from the League of Nations; when Georgia was handed over to Stalin without hesitation; when Eastern Europe was effectively gifted to Russia; when Stalin's army—despite his role as an

Sea region seems yet to be understood in the West. The entry of Ukraine and Georgia into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures means the transformation of the

‘ally’—was not stopped from advancing into European capitals; and when, after World War II, refugees from the Soviet Union who had found temporary safety in the West were forcibly returned to face certain death at the hands of the man affectionately known in the West as Uncle Joe, the most prolific serial murderer in human history.

Just as we were disillusioned in August 2008, when Russian aggression was met with indifference, and the world turned a blind eye to the fact that—for the first time since the Second World War—a European state had brazenly violated the territorial integrity of another and redrawn its borders by force. It was painful to witness some Western politicians attempt to restore relations with the aggressor at the expense of the victim, or to see a symbolic reset button handed to Russia only months after the war. We were disappointed when our partners pressured

Tbilisi to lift Georgia’s veto on Russia’s accession to the World Trade Organization. We were again disappointed by the weak Western response to the annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Donbas in 2014, and by the Nord Stream 1 and 2 projects, which deepened our dependency on Russian gas. We have been disappointed by the West’s response to the Ivanishvili regime’s human rights abuses, its capture of the judiciary and, ultimately, the state itself—its crackdown on the media and persecution of political opponents. We have been surprised and disheartened by the West’s naivety and, to put it diplomatically, its excessive optimism regarding both Russia and Ivanishvili. But we have never been angry—because we have no other choice.

We have always made the choice of *Partadzi*. ■





Mate Gulua



Rati Tkemaladze

THE ONION AND THE CIRCUS

'Commission, commission, commission!' shouts the TV, the radio, the social media, even your neighbour. For almost two months, the masquerade of the Georgian Dream—otherwise known as the Temporary Investigative Commission—has dominated the 'zeitgeist' in Georgia.

'Did you hear what Tsulukiani said?', 'Gakharia has been summoned!', 'Madam Aluda!'—these are the phrases that can now be heard everywhere.

But why?

Why is Bidzina Ivanishvili's so-called Parliament staging this circus performance for all Georgia to see?

We all know that Mr. Bidzina is fond of his 'little tricks', so it's not hard to guess that this investigative commission—a clumsy, local-grotesque imitation of the Nuremberg Trials—is just another trick from Bidzina Ivanishvili's repertoire.

If we agree that this is a trick, the next question is: Where exactly is Ivanishvili deceiving us?

The short answer is 'everywhere', of course.

But in the specific context of this commission, the deception is more difficult to pinpoint.

At first glance, given that the investigative commission has completely captured the public's attention, one might think the trick's purpose was to divert society's focus—from the ongoing protests to how Gakharia and Tsulukiani are flirting in front

of the entire nation; to whether person X should have shown up when summoned; whether person Y should pay bail for refusing to appear; or how former Shevardnadze-era official and absolutely 'honest' person Z was robbed of his perfectly 'legitimately' acquired property by the National Movement... and so on.

In short, this is the classic 'bread and circuses' routine—except that in this country, many people are already struggling to get bread, and the circus has turned out to be rather pitiful.

But if this really was the purpose of the trick, then, unfortunately, we must admit—it has worked all too well.

All this is understandable, but if we should have learnt anything in the last 13 years, it is that Bidzina's tricks cannot be perceived in one dimension. Moreover, the trick in this Dream move is precisely that we should perceive it simply as a 'bread and circuses' strategy and nothing more. However, there are far more insidious and evil intentions behind it. In reality, the so-called Temporary Commission to Study the Activities of the National Movement is a multi-tentacled attack on the history, present, and future of Georgia.

In reality, the commission serves three purposes. The first—and relatively transparent—goal is to have Georgia, through Tsulukiani's so-called investigation, officially acknowledge responsibility for starting the 2008 war.

The second objective, somewhat more carefully packaged, is to discredit the nine-year rule of the United National Movement. Georgian Dream and Russia have been pursuing this narrative in tandem for at least twelve years, but now, by staging an official 'Nuremberg trial' in the name of the Georgian Parliament, they are dressing up that condemnation with an air of authority, legitimacy, and polish. No more of Mdinardze's fabricated lies about the so-called nine bloody years being passed off as idle gossip overheard in the so-called gazebo will be heard—now this rumour is to be backed by a 'serious' investigation and 'official' conclusions.

From Moscow's perspective, Georgia started the war—not because it fired the first shot, but because it dared to resist. And for that, Georgia must be punished. If we examine the fate of those who took part in the Kodori special operation, figures like Zelimkhan Khangoshvili and many others, it becomes clear: Russia neither forgets nor forgives. Anyone who opposed Russian expansionism must be made an example of. They must be exemplarily punished—only if before it was done by the hands of agents, now the Tsulukiani Commission openly does it.



The third tentacle is the most carefully disguised. In fact, it has two heads: the aim is for an illegitimate parliament, based on the illegitimate findings of an illegitimate commission, to illegitimately outlaw the opposition by branding it a 'collective national movement'. At the same time, the regime seeks to suppress public protest, call snap elections, engineer a new 'pocket opposition', and ultimately secure a constitutional majority.

Let's consider each of them in more detail.

Even to the untrained eye, it's clear whom Georgian Dream has been serving for the past 12 years: Russia, of course. And for Russia, the 2008 war—and those who stood against it—remains a matter of personal ambition and pride. Yes, you understood that correctly: Even a state like Russia operates with something resembling ambition and self-esteem, though only in its own distorted interpretation of those words.

The commission is expected to conclude that the 'crazy and bloodthirsty' Saakashvili started the war and killed innocent Russian 'peacekeepers', prompting a justified response—where the sleeping bear rose and subdued the Georgian neo-Nazi dictator. Formally, the blame will be placed on Saakashvili, but the real takeaway will be that Georgia started the war.

Beyond humiliating Georgia and its people, this narrative also serves a broader purpose: portraying Russia on the international stage as the victim and guardian of the status quo. We're already seeing the early development of this message. Until recently, Tsulukiani and Georgian Dream described the war as Saakashvili's adventure, but with the commission's launch, the rhetoric escalated. Within weeks, they told us that Giorgi Antsukhelidze¹ was not a hero, but a senseless casualty in someone else's PR campaign.

1. Giorgi Antsukhelidze (1984–2008)- a Georgian soldier captured during the 2008 August War between Russia and Georgia. He was brutally tortured and executed by South Ossetian forces. A video of his interrogation and mistreatment was later circulated online, sparking national outrage and turning him into a symbol of Georgian resistance and sacrifice. In 2013, he was posthumously awarded the title of National Hero of Georgia.

They started by discrediting Saakashvili—and have now moved to attack the most powerful symbol of that war, Giorgi Antsukhelidze, attempting to strip his heroism of meaning. One can only imagine the vile narrative that we'll be presented with once this commission officially declares Georgia responsible for the war.

the occupying power seeks to fill the existing gaps in the historical narrative of the war in a way that serves its own interests.

Now let's talk about the second tentacle. It is unacceptable for Russia not only when it is opposed, but also when you simply develop and offer the

RUSSIA DOES NOT FORGET AND DOES NOT FORGIVE. EVERYONE WHO STOOD UP TO RUSSIAN EXPANSIONISM MUST BE PUNISHED AS AN EXAMPLE - BUT IF BEFORE IT WAS DOING IT THROUGH ITS OWN AGENCY, NOW IT IS DOING IT THROUGH THE TSULUKIANI COMMISSION.

Both during and after the war, the source and method of disseminating dominant narratives play a crucial role. During the 2008 war, Russia launched a large-scale information attack against Georgia. The Georgian side was unable to communicate objective facts quickly and effectively to the international media—especially given that, at the time, modern tools for rapid information sharing were not yet available. As a result, Georgia often had to confront not only military aggression but also a parallel battle against one-sided international narratives—and it did so with notable success.

However, if the parliamentary investigation commission now officially assigns blame for the 2008 war to the Georgian side, all the immense political and diplomatic effort invested over the years will immediately go to waste.

For example, while today ChatGPT can still provide mostly accurate information about the course of the war, this may not remain the case for long. As artificial intelligence increasingly relies on the most recent and widely available data, it will begin to reflect the dominant narratives disseminated by the so-called Georgian side at its own discretion. Russia understands very well the strategic importance of information warfare. Accordingly,

region an alternative model of success. The masses, who are kept in poverty by the Russian rulers in their own country, are happy and comforted by the idea that others in the surrounding countries live even worse than they do. You can talk to the average Russian and find out that he is upset when the Poles, the Balts, the Ukrainians and, for a period, the Georgians live better and more freely than he does. When thinking about this, the Russian is not wishing to live like them but rather wishing to worsen the lives of his neighbours so that they return to a condition worse than his own.

If a model of success is created somewhere, for example, as in Georgia in 2003-2012, it must be immediately suppressed and, most importantly, it must not be repeated. The task of 'suppression' has already been accomplished since 2012, but the task of 'non-repetition' is the task of Tsulukiani's Commission. Tsulukiani should tarnish the exceptionally successful 9-year period of our history and equate the National Movement with Nazi Germany, turning it into a taboo in the public consciousness. This entire performance is being staged precisely to bury the reforms of the National Movement era beneath a blanket of lies and contextual distortions. A striking example is the notorious Aphrasidze² case, when Svaneti

2. The Aphrasidze clan was a criminal group that controlled Svaneti region in the 1990s–early 2000s. Their rule was marked by kidnappings and violence. In 2004, Saakashvili's government dismantled the clan during a major law enforcement operation, restoring state control to the region.



The Aprasidzes and the special operation against them, 2004.

was controlled by a criminal clan that not only kidnapped, murdered, robbed, and raped locals, but also targeted refugees and visitors alike. Why? Because where ‘understandings’ prevail instead of the rule of law, the criminal must not be punished—otherwise, Georgia might become better than Russia. This is precisely why, as of this writing, the Tsulukiani Commission is primarily occupied with hearing stories from ‘honest’ businessmen who were allegedly oppressed by the National Movement. In reality, these individuals were the poster boys of the ‘Georgian-jigit’ style of corruption—repeatedly looting the Georgian state and, by extension, the Georgian people. Why? Because plundering the state is routine in Russia—so it must be the same in Georgia, too!

The third, most disguised tentacle is the long-term plan of the ‘Dream’ (and Russia) to seize the future of Georgia. Once the investigative commission completes its enquiry and finds that the National Movement equals (or surpasses) Nazi Germany in its crimes, the logical next step would be to ban it. However, since the Dream did not dare to appropriate a constitutional majority in the incredibly democratic 2024 elections, they simply

do not have the leverage to ban the party at this stage. Therefore, they need one more, last support of the Georgian people to defeat this fascist National Movement once and for all.

The following part of the text is speculation of the authors of the article. Please do not take it as an immutable fact or a prediction of the future, but all things considered, it is not so unrealistic.

Georgian Dream will use the motivation of gaining a constitutional majority to call new, early parliamentary elections, thus killing not one, not two, but five birds at once.

First, it will for sure falsify these elections and grant itself absolute power.

Second, it will turn to our Western partners and say, ‘Here, we are listening to the people’ and given the non-confrontational nature of our Western partners, they will turn a blind eye to this hypocrisy. A similar statement was circulated recently in which European Commissioner Marta Kosi ‘does not rule out the resumption of high-level contacts with representatives of the Georgian Dream government in Georgia, which have been suspended since 2024.’

Third, it will address the Georgian people and say: ‘Here, we hear you, your continuous year-long protest has reached us, and that is why we are calling new elections, let us return to the political process’. No matter how absurd this position may be, a certain part of the opposition spectrum is bound to take it with understanding, some for one reason, some for another, as a result of which the protest, which has already been weakened enough, will finally demoralise and break down.

Fourth, it will address the political parties behind the scenes and say: ‘You have two options. Either you take part in the elections and become a constructive opposition, or you do not take part and become a ‘collective National movement’, and you know what awaits the ‘collective National movement’ after the elections. The already weak opposition flank will not withstand this threat, there will definitely be a party or parties that will

fall for this bait and will follow Georgian Dream in this game out of fear or illusion that after the banning of the National Movement they will become the largest opposition party. And this is where your fifth bird comes from:

Fifth, they will have their own pocket opposition—those who followed Georgian Dream into this game and who won't be able to speak out against these pseudo-political processes, having voluntarily taken part in the staged elections. Their only task will be to convincingly play the role of a constructive opposition.



Elections 2024

The Dream plan is confirmed by a detail that many of us missed in this turmoil—according to the reforms of the CEC, it is forbidden to: (a) physically obstruct the movement of a voter in the voting room; (b) demand to see a voter's identity document; and (c) photograph-videotape or otherwise verify the

information displayed on the verification machine.

One wonders why Dream is preparing for mass falsification if it is simply waiting for local elections—local elections, which so far, all opposition parties have firmly (or gently) refused to participate in.

Dear reader, what may seem at first glance to be nothing more than a theatrical commission—barely worth your attention—has far more insidious purposes. The phrase 'condemnation of the National Movement' is a carefully crafted euphemism that conceals a shorter, far more consequential word: Georgia. You may have often joked, 'They still can't finish off the Nationals', or 'The Dreamers are just Nationals in disguise', or 'They've become Nationals themselves'. But when you say those things, you likely never consider that behind all these masks stands Russia—working to 'finish off' Georgia with Georgian hands. And that shouldn't surprise you. After all, for you, the National Movement and Georgia have never been one and the same—and objectively, they are not. But here's the tragedy: it's not you who gets to decide that. The decision has already been made—in Moscow. And Moscow has decided that what is good for Georgia is called the 'National Movement'. Which is why this National Movement must now be judged, discredited, and punished—by Tsulukiani. ■



Giorgi Paniashvili

Food for Thought

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Georgian government, hesitant to support Ukraine from the outset, soon began to discourage rapprochement with Europe and then openly turned against the West, leaving Georgia with no friends three years after the war. The deliberately scattered seeds of being dragged in the war and importance of family values fell on fertile soil, yielded a sufficient harvest, and significantly, if not irreparably, damaged Georgia's newly planted 'Western garden'.

Recently, circumstances have developed in such a way that people no longer lament the loss of the Western garden. Instead, they note that our way of life increasingly resembles the Russian one, and it is difficult for a decent person to survive in this country. Victory seems distant, and the chanting of brave youth—'No justice, no peace!'—often sounds more like an outcry of despair than a proclamation of inevitable victory.

And yet, if we change our perspective on the new reality, abandon outdated and ineffective habits, and align our words and actions with the current challenging circumstances, new opportunities may emerge. After all, nothing is permanent.

In recent years, the notion of 'Europe' and 'the West' in general has lost its once sacred status in Georgia. This topic has been thoroughly discussed and even vilified on numerous occasions. Therefore, periodic warnings that Georgia risks falling into the abyss if it deviates from the European path now seem ineffective. Remarkably, Georgia has already deviated from this path, worsening its relations with its Western partners. Nevertheless, life goes on: Spring has arrived and the daily routine continues unabated, even without the presence of former allies. The pride that was once associated with

Georgia's exceptional proximity to the West has been overshadowed by pervasive propaganda and the prevailing fear of war.

Georgia's history, in relation to Russia, is marked by cycles of subjugation and efforts to reclaim sovereignty—a narrative of survival rather than consistent development. A unified, strong, and independent Georgia has existed for only about a century and a half throughout its history. Russian influence is deeply entrenched; for the past three centuries, Georgia has lived under Russian dominion. This prolonged association has been likened to a chronic ailment—familiar

yet detrimental. Despite the challenges posed by Russian dominance, Georgia has managed to endure and preserve its national identity.

Indeed, the average citizen may not immediately perceive the adverse effects of distancing from Western allies and aligning more closely with Russia. It's important not to blame them for this, as they are not obliged to foresee the implications two or three years ahead. They, too, are children of their country, and like the nation itself, are more focused on immediate survival rather than long-term development.

What, then, is problematic about the course that Georgian Dream has chosen and is pursuing

periodic warnings that Georgia risks falling into the abyss if it deviates from the European path now seem ineffective

with varying degrees of success?

Our earlier emphasis on 'salvation' and 'development' was deliberate. Both Europe and the broader West have long hoped that Georgia would transform its narrative of survival into one of development and modernization. However, when presented with a choice—even a false one—between salvation and development, a Georgian is likely to choose the former and take pride in that decision.

However, the point is that at this stage of history the question of survival is not an issue, neither Russia needs to invade Georgia (it is already here), nor the West needs to drag Georgia into a war, because both know very well that this country would not survive a war—if it were to risk one, its insignificant military venture would not help anyone. Even more, Georgia is not so important for the Kremlin that it is worth waging even a short war over.

In such troubled times, exercising caution and restraint in relations with Russia was certainly justifiable. However, it is highly doubtful that Russia would have insisted: 'Quarrel with everyone from Tallinn to Washington, sever

all relations, and declare war; otherwise, I will invade Georgia with my remaining two divisions.'

Georgian Dream authorities did not need this to save Georgia, but to save their own power, while presenting it to the people as the salvation of Georgia and confusing the minds of the people against the background of war. And here we do not blame the citizens, when such a war is raging in our neighbourhood, it is difficult not to give in to fear—what if someone does really want to drag us into a war?

Meanwhile, little Georgia has lost the unique appeal that once made it stand out in this region and made it special—its close ties to the West. It was 'proximity to the West' that was the so-called added value of Georgia, which to some extent made other countries in the region speak to official Tbilisi with a certain respect, while the average citizen enjoyed the feeling of smugness and invisible moral superiority when travelling in the near abroad.

Outside the country, the authorities have traded Georgia's defining aspiration—its European path—for the preservation of their own power. They have succeeded in convincing, if not the majority, then at least a sizeable portion of the population, that the ruling party is the sole guarantor of the country's salvation and the prevention of war.

Given this context, attempts by various actors

However, when presented with a choice—even a false one—between salvation and development, a Georgian is likely to choose the former and take pride in that decision.

to influence or change the government by warning the public about the loss of a European future or the threat of falling under Russian influence appear futile. Georgia has already distanced itself from Europe, and Russian influence has markedly increased. Thus, trying to alarm people with developments that have effectively already occurred is of little use. Perhaps it would be more constructive for all parties involved in this

confrontation to demonstrate to the public that they, too, can navigate this region's complexities, establish contacts or relations with neighbouring countries—including Russia—and even avoid war altogether. After all, isn't this precisely what the average Georgian desires?

What is needed now, more than Europe, is to project a regional perspective and approach, rather than intimidating the region with assertions that we will either become like Russia or resemble Azerbaijan. Georgians will feel more at ease knowing that any potential leadership will exercise caution within the neighbourhood and fully comprehend the unique dynamics of regional relations. With Europeans, we will have something substantive to offer—not merely churchkhela and wine, but a deep understanding of this region and a commitment to assisting them in navigating its complexities.

Resistance efforts must now adapt to the intensified political climate, recalibrating timelines, messaging, and strategies to align with the current realities. Historically, progress has never been swift or straightforward, and the present circumstances are no exception. Therefore, fostering public expectations of imminent change—suggesting that the regime will collapse within weeks—is, at best,

Propaganda media and trolls spread false information that the "New Theater" was renovated by the "Cartu" Foundation. In reality, it was financed with funds allocated from the budget of the Ministry of Culture, that is, from our taxes.

counterproductive to the resistance movement itself.

The opposition's effectiveness hinges on setting long-term objectives and demonstrating consistency, composure, and a comprehensive regional vision. It must also persuade Georgians to reclaim their distinctive identity, which has been eroded in recent times. Short-term tactics or fear-based narratives—such as warnings about distancing from Europe or drawing closer to Russia—are unlikely to succeed.

While this perspective does not guarantee success, it is a path worth pursuing, provided the public do not once again conclude that 'they have learned nothing and forgotten nothing'. ■





Vasil Jijiashvili

Repressive Laws Against the People



In its thirteenth year in power, the Georgian Dream has successfully subjugated all major democratic institutions. In Freedom House's Freedom in the World Index, Georgia's score was 64 in 2017 and 58 in 2024. According to the same organisation's Democracy Quality Index, Georgia's score for 2024 has decreased by six points compared to 2017 and stands at 34 points, classifying Georgia as a transitional hybrid authoritarian regime. According to the Reporters Without Borders index, media freedom has also deteriorated: In 2020 Georgia ranked 60th out of 180 countries with seventy-one points, while in 2024 it ranked 103rd with 53 points. However, the government, which is consolidating its power, has not yet managed to fully subdue and exclude informal democratic institutions such as the media, opposition parties, and civil society organisations from the political process.

● THE RUSSIAN LAW

On 3 March 2022, Georgia submitted its application for membership in the European Union. Subsequently, on 23 June 2022, the European Council granted Georgia a European perspective, outlining twelve priorities to be addressed on its path toward EU integration. Against this background, in March 2023, the

Georgian government initiated the draft Law on Foreign Agents, labelling non-governmental and media organisations in Georgia that received more than 20% of their income from foreign funding as 'agents of foreign influence' and imposed various additional obligations on them. A considerable number of civil society organisations and independent media outlets operating in Georgia fell under this definition, as they rely heavily on foreign donor funding. On 9 March 2023, amid mass protests, Georgian Dream representatives withdrew the draft Law on Foreign Agents and pledged to the public that they would not initiate the draft law again. Despite this, the European Commission's enlargement report of 8 November 2023 identified the initiation of the law as a detrimental step in Georgia's EU Association process.

Nevertheless, in April the authorities introduced the remarkably similar draft Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence, which was passed by Parliament amid massive public protests and came into force in August. The law requires NGOs, broadcasters, and online media that receive more than 20% of their income from foreign sources to register as 'organisations promoting foreign interests' in a special registry. In addition, the law requires organisations to declare their financial income and are subject to monitoring by the

Ministry of Justice, whereby they are obliged to provide the ministry with information on special categories, among other things. It should also be noted that the adoption of the law has significantly damaged the process of Georgia's integration into the European Union, as the European Council of 27-28 June 2004 de facto suspended Georgia's European integration process. After the law came into force, only 2% of media and civil society organisations registered, and the authorities did not activate the repressive mechanisms envisaged by the law.

● FOREIGN AGENTS REGISTRATION ACT (FARA)

Against the backdrop of rigged elections and the political crisis in the country following the adoption of this so-called Russian law, the ruling party once again targeted NGOs, and in April 2025 Parliament passed a law called the Foreign Agents Registration Act. According to the authorities, this law is a literal translation of the American FARA (Foreign Agents Registration Act). During the discussion of the bill in Parliament, representatives of the ruling party did not hide the fact that the sanctions provided for in this law are stricter than in the case of the so-called Russian law, which would ultimately destroy non-governmental organisations.

The adoption of the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) in the United States was historically linked to measures taken against the threat of Nazism that emerged alongside World War II. The history of its enactment and subsequent judicial practice clearly demonstrate that FARA is not utilized against non-governmental organizations and media outlets operating transparently within the country; rather, its purpose is to prevent threats originating from hostile states. Consequently, the application of FARA-like legislation to non-governmental and media organisations by the Georgian Parliament deviates from the original intent of the law and should be regarded as another instance of repressive legislation.

The Foreign Agents Registration Act imposes strict obligations on subjects falling under its regulation. In particular, if someone, whether an individual or an organisation, on behalf of a foreign government, party, or foreign organisation, carries out political activities in Georgia, collects money, or disseminates information, they are obliged to apply to the Anti-Corruption Bureau and register as an agent of a foreign principal. According to the law, an agent of a foreign principal shall be obliged to provide the Anti-Corruption Bureau with a detailed report on its activities, and in the case of the public dissemination of information materials related to its activities, it shall indicate that the disseminated information was prepared by an agent of a foreign principal. Violation of the law entails criminal liability, which includes a fine of GEL 5,000 to GEL 10,000 or imprisonment for up to five years.

The application of this law against NGOs and media organizations inevitably recalls the 'foreign agents' legislation enforced in Russia, which has effectively excluded independent organisations from political processes. In Russia, the implementation of such laws has led to the marginalisation of civil society groups and independent media, branding the few remaining organisations as enemies of the state.

● LAWS TARGETING THE MEDIA

In April 2025, the ruling party enacted repressive legislative amendments targeting the media. The legislative amendments completely banned broadcasters from receiving foreign funding. Additionally, the amendments introduced detailed regulations concerning television and radio broadcasting standards, including requirements for factual accuracy, the right to reply, fairness and impartiality, protection of private life, guidelines for obtaining and transmitting information using covert methods, coverage of armed conflicts, accidents, and other emergencies, as well as specific provisions for the protection of minors.

A sizeable portion of the detailed regula-

tions outlined in the draft law are derived from the Code of Conduct for Broadcasters, which was previously governed by the Code of Conduct for Television and Radio Broadcasting. With the new amendments, the Communications Commission has been granted the authority to review cases where broadcasters violate content obligations. It is important to note that the activities of the Communications Commission have repeatedly faced criticism from both local and international organisations for their perceived loyalty to the ruling party. In 2025, Lithuania imposed sanctions on the head of the Commission, Kakha Bekauri.

The proposed legislative changes will further deteriorate the media environment in Georgia, limit freedom of speech and expression and make it difficult to exercise public control over the activities of the authorities.

● LAWS TARGETING OPPOSITION PARTIES

According to the Constitution of Georgia, the Constitutional Court has the authority to ban a political party if its purpose is to overthrow or forcibly change the constitutional order of Georgia, infringe upon the independence of the country, violate its territorial integrity, or if it engages in propaganda of war or violence, incites national, ethnic, regional, religious, or social discord. The establishment of a political party on territorial grounds is inadmissible.

In March 2025, the ruling party initiated an amendment to the law, according to which, in addition to the abovementioned cases, the Constitutional Court shall be empowered to ban a party whose stated purpose and/or essence of activity (including personal composition and/or composition of the party list submitted to the relevant election commission) essentially repeats the stated purpose and/or essence of activity (including personal composition) of the party banned by the Constitutional Court of Georgia on the basis of paragraph 1 of this Article.

For a democratic society, interfering with the activities of a political party, abolishing

it, or banning it is the most serious and, accordingly, the most cautious decision. Although it is possible to ban a party within the framework of the so-called defensive democracy allowed by the Constitution, such a measure is extremely dangerous, as it leads to the cessation of the party's political activity, participation in elections, and communication with the electorate. According to the Venice Commission, the banning of a party is a measure of last resort that should be conducted with the utmost caution, by a decision of an impartial court with clear justification and without political influence.

The amendments to the law provide for the banning of political parties if they duplicate the goals or essence of the activities of a party that has been banned by the Constitutional Court, including on the basis of similarity in personal composition. For years, the ruling party has referred to the opposition parties operating in Georgia as the 'collective national movement', and before the 2024 parliamentary elections, it promised voters in its pre-election campaign to ban these parties. Thus, the real purpose of these amendments is to create the possibility of banning so-called successor parties, which carries the risk of suppressing political opponents and limiting the political spectrum. The Constitutional Court, controlled by Georgian Dream, could use a broad interpretation, especially of the criterion of personal composition, which would turn into a tool for persecuting parties and individuals. The ruling party has already passed this legislative initiative in two readings, and it is expected to be finally adopted this month.

● LAWS TARGETING FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY AND EXPRESSION

In parallel with the legislative amendments adopted against the media, non-governmental organisations, and opposition parties, the ruling party introduced several repressive legislative changes in 2025, making it extremely difficult to exercise freedom of speech, expression, and assembly in the country. Specifically, as a result of legislative changes:



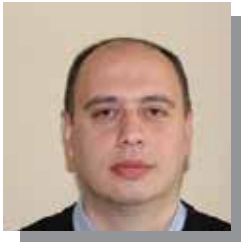
- The placement of temporary structures at rallies (including tents) is prohibited.
- Concealing one's face in any manner at a rally is prohibited, with a fine of 2,000 GEL imposed for violations.
- Liability for failing to notify the local municipality of a rally five days prior to its commencement was established, punishable by a fine of 2,000 GEL.
- Holding meetings or demonstrations in enclosed spaces or buildings without the prior written consent of the owner is prohibited.
- Administrative fines for offences such as petty hooliganism, disobedience to lawful police orders, and artificial blocking of roads have been significantly increased. For instance, the fine for artificially blocking a road has been raised tenfold, from 500 GEL to 5,000 GEL.
- The maximum period of administrative detention has been extended from 15 to 60 days.

The proposed legislative amendments unduly restrict freedom of speech and expression, as well as freedom of assembly,

and are aimed at intimidating participants in the ongoing protests in the country.

● CONCLUSION

The repressive laws adopted by the Georgian Dream—restricting the freedom of the media, civil organisations, opposition parties and freedom of assembly—are aimed at consolidating power, suppressing opponents, and destroying mechanisms of public control. The real aim of these laws is to 'clean up' the political space and strengthen the authoritarian regime. They will lead to the restriction of freedom of speech, association, and political participation in the country, as well as the weakening of civic activism and the destruction of democratic institutions. These laws are disastrous for European integration because, following the European Council's suspension of the process, they completely block Georgia's European perspective, alienating it from the European Union and worsening its international image. ■



Gigi Gigineishvili

The Likhni Effect



In Abkhazia, five kilometres from Gudauta and just fifty metres above sea level, lies the village of Likhni (Abkhaz: Лыхны). At its centre stands the 10th-century cross-domed Church of the Dormition of the Virgin Mary, where numerous fascinating Georgian inscriptions have been preserved. Among them is one of particular interest—the inscription, “On the Appearance of the Comet”. Although well known to Georgian historians, this inscription is not widely known to the general public.

This is a one-line inscription, executed in a distinctive and aesthetically refined manner: The initial letter of each word is written in the Asomtavruli script¹ and is enlarged, while the remaining letters of each word are smaller and extended horizontally. The script features rounded forms, and in some cases—such as the letter ან—smaller letters are inscribed within the “belly” of the larger letter. The entire inscription is rendered in red cinnabar pigment. The text reads as follows:

**„ა. ღურთხეულ ხარ, იმერთო, ყოვლად ყოველსა შინა. ესე იქმნა
დასაბამითგან ზელთა ხედთა — 1065 წ.), ჟორნიკონსა სჟჟ
(სვჟ — 1066 წ.) მეფობასა ჯაგრატ ჟიორგის ძისასა ნინდუკტიონსა ზ-
(ლჟ), ჯპრილსა ძვესა ჟარსკულავი ჟამორნდა, ჟომელ შისსა ჩიანსა
ჯღმოლიდის ზა ჩინა შისსა ჟითარცა ჟარავანდელი შიდი, შოკიდებით
შასვეა. ესე იქმნა ჯზობითგან ჯღვსებადმის.“**

ქ. ღურთხეული ხარ, იმერთო, ყოვლად ყოველსა შინა. ესე იქმნა
დასაბამითგანთა ზელთა ხედთა, ჟრონიკონსა სჟჟ. მეფობასა ბაგრატ
გიორგის ძისასა, ინდუკტიონსა ლჟ აპრილსა თუესა ვარსკულავი
გამორნდა, რომელ მისსა წიანსა აღმოვილიდის და წინა მისსა.
ვითარცა შარავანდი დიდი, მოკიდებით მასვე. ესე იქმნა ბზობითგან
აღვსებად-მდე“.

*“Blessed art Thou, O Lord, in all things. In the year 1066 from the creation
of the world, in the 38th year of the reign of Bagrat, son of Giorgi, in the
month of April, a star appeared—rising from the depths and going before
him, surrounded by a great radiance that touched it. This occurred in the
period from Palm Sunday to Easter.”*

1. Asomtavruli is the oldest of the three Georgian scripts, characterized by its monumental, rounded capital letters, and was primarily used from the 5th to the 9th centuries for religious and official inscriptions.



Halley's Comet inscription, 1886.

In 1848, the inscription was first studied by the academician Marie Brosset. It is believed that the inscription in the Church of the Dormition in Likhni describes one of the appearances of Halley's Comet within the Earth's visible sphere, which occurred in 1066. Based on the beginning and duration of

on the Likhni Church: the inscription of Vache the Protospatharios and Peter the Patrician; the inscription of Giorgi Kuropalates; as well as about ten inscription fragments dating back to the 11th century. Additionally, more than ten inscriptions from the 14th century accompany the frescoes



18.03.1989. Village of Likhni

Bagrat IV's reign, the dating corresponds to 1065, while the astronomical chronology points to 1066. The text states that the comet appeared in April, from Palm Sunday to Easter (in 1066, Easter fell on 16 April, making Palm Sunday 9 April), thus the date of the inscription should be considered as 1066. Accordingly, the comet was observed in Georgia between 9 and 16 April of that year.

Other Georgian inscriptions can also be found

As Vakhushti Batonishvili reported in the 18th century, "There was a great plague in Odishi, as we have described, and it came particularly from the Abkhazians, for they came by boat and by land, capturing and settling as far as the River Egrisi, and there were no more bishops of Dranda and Mokvi."

of that period, identifying the figures and scenes depicted.

The Likhni inscriptions are among the most important sources for the history of Georgia, though much transpired later in Abkhazia, and likely many comets have since passed by. As Vakhushti Batonishvili² reported in the 18th century, "There was a great plague in Odishi, as we have described, and it came particularly from the Abkhazians, for they came by boat and by land, capturing and settling as far as the River Egrisi, and there were no more bishops of Dranda and Mokvi." The situation turned bitter for Georgia due to internal wars and the actions of traitors within the country.

On 18 March 1989, in the village of Likhni, Abkhazians no longer wrote inscriptions about Halley's Comet or Giorgi Kuropalates, but about secession from the Soviet Republic of Georgia and unification with Russia, and those inscriptions they wrote in the Russian language.

In parallel with the revival of the national movement in Soviet Georgia, the Abkhaz People's Forum—Aidgylara (Abk. Аҧсны Жалар Рforum 'Aidgylara'—Unity) was established in Abkhazia with the support of the Russian security services. It was a socio-political movement founded on 13 December

2. Vakhushti Batonishvili (1696 – 1757) was a Georgian royal prince, geographer, historian and cartographer.

1988 as an Abkhazian nationalist movement. In the initial stage, Aidgylara's main function was to show Georgian communists and 'informals' the threat of Abkhazia's secession and, in general, to make Abkhazia a deterrent to the Georgian national movement, but later it was assigned other, more destructive tasks. 'Aidgylara differed from other similar organisations (except for Adamon Nykhas, which was established in South Ossetia by the Russian security services in the same period) in that party workers, officials, police, and security officers of Abkhazian origin represented the real, albeit shadowy, driving core of the organisation. It was on the initiative of Aidgylara that on 18 March 1989 a congress of thousands of Abkhazians was held in the village of Likhni.

The rally was officially authorised—a rare occurrence for such gatherings under the Soviet system. Notably, it was attended by the entire Abkhaz segment of the party elite of the Abkhaz Autonomous Republic.

The meeting adopted a document known as the Likhni Appeal, which was sent to Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and other top Soviet officials. In recent years, this fact—and the document itself—has been filtered through layers of Russian disinformation and presented to Georgian society in a distorted form. It is important to set the record straight: The claim that the Abkhaz population allegedly demanded independence at Likhni is far from the truth. In reality, the authors of the Likhni Appeal clearly called for remaining within the Russian Soviet empire.

Such demands were not isolated. Prior to the Likhni Appeal, a similar letter from the Abkhaz 'red intelligentsia', dated 17 June 1987, was sent to Moscow with nearly identical content. Later, on 23 March 1993, the Abkhaz delegation of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia sent another appeal to the Russian Duma, requesting the annexation of Abkhazia into the Russian Federation—under any form that Russia deemed beneficial. In addition to the Likhni Appeal, Aidgylara actively participated in the 17 March 1991, referendum aimed at preserving the Soviet Union and promoted loyalty to Leninist ideals within Abkhaz society—not the idea of freedom, as it is often misleadingly portrayed today.

The text of the appeal consisted of the following main demands:

1. To approve the letter addressed to the General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR Mikhail Gorbachev and Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR Nikolai Ryzhkov;



18.03.1989 Village of Likhni

2. To request that the Supreme Soviet and the Council of Ministers of the USSR restore the status of the Abkhaz Soviet Socialist Republic in the form it held during the Leninist era;

3. To reconsider all transformations that had constituted a gross deviation from principles of national equality in the USSR.

The fact that the Abkhazians demanded independence in Likhni is very far from the truth, because the authors of this document were simply demanding to remain part of the Russian Soviet Empire.

On 24 March of the same year, the Likhni Appeal was published in Sovetskaya Abkhazia and other regional newspapers of Abkhazia, including the newspaper Bzip.

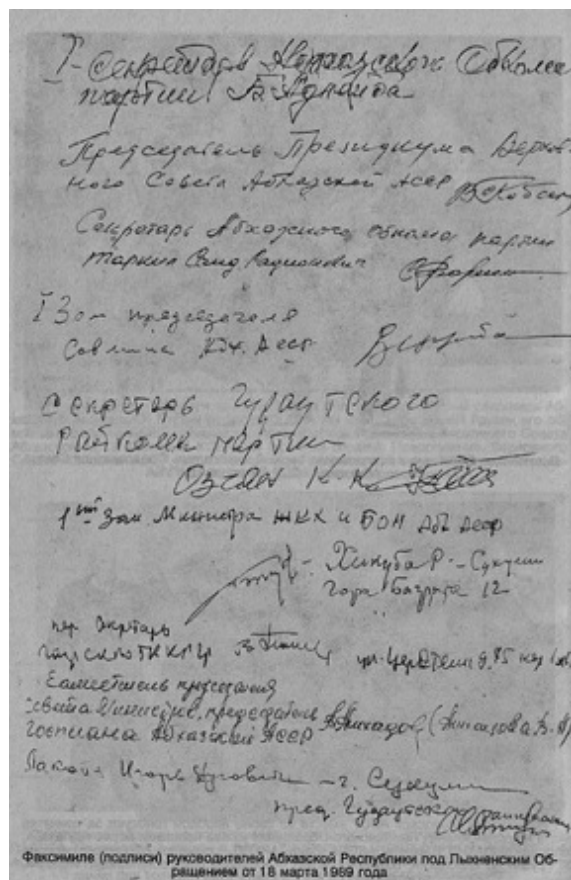
The Likhni Appeal was signed by: Boris Adleiba, First Secretary of the Abkhazian Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia,



Member of the Supreme Council of the USSR, Member of the Abkhazian Regional Committee Bureau; Valerian Kobakhia, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Abkhaz ASSR, Member of the Supreme Council of the Georgian SSR, Member of the Abkhazian Regional Committee Bureau; Konstantin Ozgan, Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Abkhaz ASSR, Member of the Supreme Council of the Abkhaz ASSR, First Secretary of the Gudauta District Party Committee; Alexander Gvaramia, Rector of the Abkhaz State University, candidate for People's Parliamentary Deputy of the USSR; and others. It was the signature of the latter that caused particular resentment among Georgian students at Sukhumi University, as Georgian students felt special affection for Aleko Gvaramia and it was from him that they could not bear this signature, which was seen as a betrayal.

The appeal was accompanied by the signatures of over 30,000 people of various nationalities—Abkhazians, Georgians, Russians, Armenians, Greeks, and others. Beginning on 19 March, information about the appeal was relayed directly to Georgian communist officials from Moscow, often with threatening undertones and veiled warnings. The content of the appeal sparked widespread outrage in Tbilisi, Gagra, Sukhumi, Gali, Kutaisi, Zugdidi, and other cities across Georgia. Protests and demonstrations erupted. Georgian students at Sukhumi University refused to continue their studies and, among other demands, called for the resignation of the rector, Alexander Gvaramia.

Few in Georgian society remember that it was the Likhni Appeal that set in motion the chain of events leading to the tragedy of 9 April, 1989. Protests against the appeal began in Tbilisi in March of that year, but starting from 4 April, they



Signatures of the Soviet elite of Abkhazia on the appeal of 18.03.1989.

became more organized and soon evolved into broader anti-Soviet demonstrations.

ამ გამოსვლებს იხევ მოსკოვმა უპასუხა: Moscow responded to these demonstrations again: on 9 April 1989, at dawn, Soviet airborne units, including the 345th Independent Guards Airborne Regiment, deployed in Tbilisi, surrounded peaceful demonstrators and violently dispersed them using sapper spades and toxic gas. The brutal crackdown

Aidgylara actively participated in the 17 March 1991, referendum aimed at preserving the Soviet Union and promoted loyalty to Leninist ideals within Abkhaz society—not the idea of freedom



A. Gvaramia and V. Ardzinba

resulted in the deaths of twenty-one civilians—most of them women—and left hundreds more injured. This tragic event became a pivotal moment in Georgia's struggle for independence from the Soviet Union.



In response to the barbaric actions of 9 April 1989, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Council of Ministers of the USSR issued a statement attributing the incident to 'riots provoked by extremist, anti-social elements.' They claimed that during the suppression of these riots in Tbilisi, a number of people, including civilians and military personnel, were injured, stressing that none of them had cut or stab wounds. This statement was an example of the traditional Soviet tactic of deflecting blame by blaming the violent deaths of people on the Georgian side.

At that time, Georgian society was unaware that the Likhni Appeal was merely the initial phase of a broader conspiracy against Georgia—a catalyst that triggered a series of devastating events orchestrated by Russia. ■





Nana kalandadze

Those were the times back then!

No one truly remembers how they came into the world—how many grams of milk or spoonfuls of porridge they consumed each day. From early childhood, only a few vivid fragments remain, scattered across memory, preserved simply because they made a strong impression.

Yet as time goes by, you begin to realise that certain moments, objects, or situations from the past stay with you not just as memories, but as something you're connected to in a more profound way. These fragments have been resurfacing in my mind for quite a while. Every now and then, one or another rises unexpectedly, tugging at my attention. So, I decided to give each of them its own 'shelf' in the archive of memory. The subject I want to begin with doesn't belong to any specific time, place, or role in our lives. It is a physical and spiritual part of us, without which we simply would not exist in this world.

Yes, I mean parents.

In the past, death announcements were published daily on the fourth page of the Tbilisi newspaper. From the number of signatories, one could easily determine the circle of a person's relatives, friends, or the sphere of professional activity of him and his relatives... On 26 March 1968, my aunt, at whose home I was temporarily staying due to my father's illness, quietly placed the newspaper in front of me, folded open to the fourth page, where among many announcements I saw a single name, Grigol Kalandadze!

Spouse... son... brother... sisters... friends... with deep sorrow...

I must have read those words ten times. Then the lines and letters began to blur, twist, and swirl until they all dissolved into one large, heavy drop that fell silently and painfully onto the newsprint...

I was only nine years old...

My father was tall, slim, and with strong shoulders... He had wheat-coloured hair with grey at the temples and green-khaki eyes (he



My father, Grigol (Grisha) Kalandadze, 18 years old, a few days before his deportation to Siberia

often said he had also inherited the Zhgenti¹ colours). He had a happy, pleasant laugh, was an excellent singer and a skilful performer of krimanchuli².

A classic Gurian³ — quick, hot-tempered, but soft-hearted, with a soul full of immense



Mom and Dad's "wedding" photo, Kazakhstan

kindness and the capacity for boundless love. He was born in Chokhatauri and was absolutely crazy about the place. After returning from exile (what was he doing there? I'll tell you later), he built an oda⁴ on the foundation of an old house with his own hands. He planted varietal hazelnuts along the path leading to Supsa and lined it with hornbeam trees. 'The Odesa⁵ gets its special flavour from the kvevris buried at their roots,' he used to say. He fenced the yard with climbing roses growing along a towering linden tree, made a winepress from an old chestnut cut down in the Bukistsikhe forest, planted rows of 'black apple' trees behind the pear tree known as 'katsistava', and even repaired the old kukhna-sakhli, the kitchen-hut.

This special love was deepened by a longing carried from childhood. To begin with, until the age of seven, he was raised in the village of Jvartsma, in the Bolkvadze family. Let me explain why: Our family's close relative and irreplaceable helper, Iason Bolkvadze—father of eight

daughters—was expecting his ninth child, while at the same time my grandmother was pregnant with my father. There were no ultrasounds or horoscopes back then. A person would be born and follow the path life set before them. No one knew in advance who was coming into the world. And since Iason never had the chance to fire a gun in honour of the birth of his son, he asked us: If you have a boy and I have a girl again, let me raise him at least to school age, I will not let a cold breeze touch him and apart for the maternal care of Pelago (his wife), the older girls will treat him like a brother.

There were already two boys and three girls in our family, but what did it matter for such a serious decision. They gave it careful thought... Neither my grandmother, Gulnara Zhgenti, was a nobleman's daughter, nor had my grandfather, Alexander, grown up in luxury or with nannies. But for Iason—who loved our family deeply and had always been loyal—they saw the fulfilment of his long-held dream as a worthy deed and agreed: If a boy was born, Pelago would become his nurse. And so, without his knowledge, the fate of Grisha, that was my father's name, was decided, which he did not grumble about until he was seven years old, spoilt by the care and love of his foster parents and newfound sisters.



Georgians at the grave of one of the exiled Georgians in Kazakhstan. Kyzylkum 1952 (?)

1. Zhgenti — A Georgian family name

2. Krimanchuli — A distinctively flowing, thin, high voice in Georgian polyphonic singing

3. Gurian — A native of Guria, a region in western Georgia known for its vibrant culture, quick-witted and humorous people. Gurians are often characterized in literature and folklore as sharp-tongued, spirited, and deeply kind-hearted.

4. Oda — A traditional wooden house common in western Georgia, especially in regions like Guria and Samegrelo.

5. Odesa — A type of wine traditionally produced in the Guria region of western Georgia, made from a specific local grape variety. Known for its distinctive flavor, Odesa is often aged in clay vessels (kvevris), which enhance its aroma and character.

The time had come to return to the Kalandadze family. His parents embraced the longed-for boy, while his brothers and sisters kept a distance at first. But his older brother, Shalia, quickly bonded with him. They played together, studied and read together. Despite the difference in age, they had mutual friends and would often gather under a large linden tree in the yard talking, arguing, and exchanging ideas.

Grisha felt that Shalia and his like-minded friends were opposing some prevailing movement. But he was still too young, and his understanding was too limited to fully realise what was happening. His elder brother and his comrades, meanwhile, were in no hurry to involve him in their Federalist passions.

He was never afraid of challenges. His determination and curiosity were clearly reflected in his passion for sports. He played Leloburti brilliantly, and by the age of fourteen or fifteen, he already had fans across all Guria. But Leloburti⁶ paled in comparison to the great passion and love that was football. At the time, Poti was the heart and soul of the sport in Georgia. Young and old alike, inspired by the legacy of English sailors and their 'autograph' on the game, spoke with awe about this magical sport. It was no surprise, then, that my father fell asleep and woke up dreaming of football.

He enjoyed playing ball with the Chokhatauri boys more than anything, but he knew that there was a completely different football life in Poti, and he felt drawn to it. Besides, he had heard that a guy from Onchiketi (a village in Chokhatauri district), Boris Paichadze, lived in that town, who had barely got off the ground and had already made the whole world crazy with his game. In short, Shalia fulfilled the dream of Gritsko (as brothers and sisters called my father) and took him to Poti. In one of the games my father was released 'for a trial' in the match and was even approved. There he got acquainted with Boris, and inspired by their common Chokhatauri origin, they once even 'showed class' together, despite my father being six years older than Boria. 'In a year or two, we'll take you to the youth national team, but in the meantime, don't

stop training,' they told my father.

Well, a year passed, then two, three, and four... but Poti and football remained just a dream, and this time, for good... Our family became the focus of a thousand watchful eyes and listening ears. Even a simple trip to the vegetable garden was subject to scrutiny by the so-called guardians of the country's well-being. The reason? Shalia, who had never accepted the Soviet regime, had emigrated. And what could have kept him in a country where injustice, indifference, betrayal, and cruelty met him at every turn? A country where his father had been killed under mysterious circumstances and where threats were the only response he received when he sought justice?

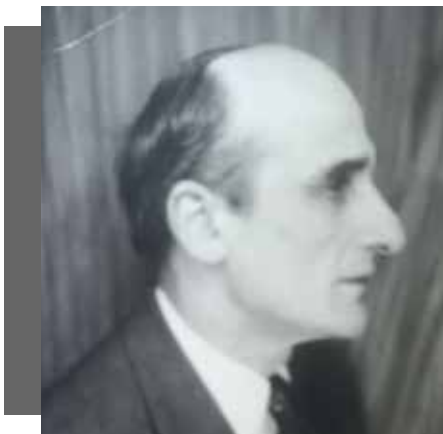


My aunt Ketevan (Chito) Kalandadze, a famous pediatrician, whose husband was shot in 1937 and who was then deported to Kazakhstan with her two children.

Shalia left for France, and with him, he took my father's youth, his future, and his dreams... Shalia's Tail, our relatives and close friends used to call my father affectionately. But that nickname was soon replaced by what is in Russian two devastating words: Enemy of the People. The label clung to his back like a heavy burden for more than twenty years.

The Siberian Gulag camps became his new

6. Leloburti – A traditional Georgian ball game, often compared to rugby, played primarily during festivals.



Shalva (Shalia) Kalandadze, whose father was deported to Vorkuta in Siberia due to his emigration to France (13 years apart), and then to Kazakhstan, my grandmother, my older aunt, my younger aunt with two children, and my father again.

address. He laboured there, forced to descend into rotting mines. One day, that cursed mine collapsed, but somehow, he crawled out with frostbitten legs (irony of fate, what else could you call it?). He loved life, but he was never allowed to enjoy that love. He survived. He returned. And soon after, he was exiled again, this time to Kazakhstan, along with his mother, sisters, and nephews. The biting cold of Vorkuta was replaced by the scorching heat of the Kyzylkum. Yet not once did he utter a word of reproach toward his brother, who at the time was walking freely through the streets of Paris. None of this, not even the harshest hardship, could overcome the kindness that defined him. And that kindness did not go unnoticed among the exiled Georgians scattered across the deserts of Central Asia, especially by one young woman who had been deported with her parents to a neighbouring kolkhoz.

This was my mother.

Mother especially could not stand two sounds: The loud and forceful ringing of the doorbell, and the clatter and rattle of cutlery. 'Everyone has their quirks,' you might have thought, but these were the 'intrusive' sounds that disturbed the peace of many families on 25 December, 1951. Yes, in the Varazi Ravine, in the settlement of the Udeli Winery, at midnight, the door of a beautiful red brick house was brought down with banging

and the uninterrupted, hysterical ringing of the doorbell by uninvited guests, who came to inform that Alexi Peikrishvili, along with his wife and children, had to appear at the Department to answer a few simple questions.

'We'll help you find the documents to expedite the process,' they said. Since they had to visit somewhere else, they kindly offered to help and started searching through the dresser, wardrobe, cupboard, and cutlery drawer. 'Oh, we'll even determine the age of these silverware. Let's take them with us.' There was no limit to their kindness.

The railway station was in complete chaos. The doors of the oily, blackened freight wagons gaped open like the jaws of a monster, greedily devouring the people sacrificed by men in military uniforms of unknown rank. Weeping, dazed, silent, deceived, or bitterly smiling faces vanished behind the doors, which were then slammed shut from the outside.

The train moved heavily, as if burdened by the weight of its cargo. In the carriages, packed with supposed enemies of the people like cattle, sorrowful moans and cries were drowned out by the rumble of the wheels. Mother, grandmother, and grandfather huddled silently in a corner. Even the merciless cold of December could not numb the unbearable pain and insult.

It was a relief to learn that Vakhtang was alive and had started working. His knowledge of German probably made life easier for him there... my mother thought to herself. Deep down, she was even glad that her only brother had not returned—who knows what misfortune might have befallen him after his return from



My mother Keto Peikrishvili in Kazakhstan, 1951.

captivity... I worry for my mother and father. How will they endure so much pain and horror? Will this road ever end? Are we to travel forever? Will this damned train ever arrive anywhere...? We'll see.

Through the cracks in the carriage boards, we caught glimpses of endless stretches of water. Someone said it was the Volga River, and then we passed the Caspian Sea. The train continued to rush steadily eastward.

The development of northern Kazakhstan was a political and economic programme launched after the Second World War. What better solution could the regime of that time have found than the forced resettlement of people to these territories? There were constant labour shortages on the cotton plantations; most of the local population was dying of tuberculosis, so who would willingly choose to live in that hell? So, the enemies of the people and prisoners of war were seen as a godsend.

They lived in a dugout. Water was drawn from a canal where camels and donkeys came to cool their sand-scorched hooves—and, naturally, to relieve themselves. This putrid water was used by the locals to wash everything they owned, disgusting as it was. And they had to drink it too, boiling it several times over. For that, they needed firewood, which could only be bought at the bazaar in the neighbouring village. But to get there, they had to walk several kilometres across a desert crawling with snakes.

Once, a young man with green eyes helped her fetch firewood. He had a limp in his right leg, but that didn't stop him from carrying a heavy load. He was invited home as a gesture of thanks for helping their daughter. But before long, he excused himself, citing the approaching darkness, and set off toward his settlement with a heavy heart. All the way, he was tormented by a single thought—how to get this quiet, timid girl out of that terrible dugout. Her sad face had long haunted him. Then, one day, he heard that the school was looking for a Russian language teacher...

The job was followed by a move to a 'better' settlement.

'May your joys be as deep as your sorrows,' said a Georgian, and they continued to live by that proverb.



*Vakhtang Peikrishvili,
my mother's brother,
who was deported
to Kazakhstan due to
emigration to Germany.
My grandmother,
grandfather, and mother
are buried in Bavaria.*

'That guy' was happy, too, now that 'that girl' lived closer to him. Soon, in their shared archive—alongside 'Vrag Naroda' and a thousand other vile documents—an important and auspicious document appeared:

'Неке туралы куәлік'—a Kazakh marriage certificate. Written in Russian with a pen dipped in an inkpot, it read:

Kalandadze Grigory Aleksandrovich.

Peikrishvili Guguli Alekseevna.

Actually, her name was Ketevan. She was used to both names and didn't particularly bother to correct it—she had far more serious concerns at the time. Who would worry about such trivialities in that situation, anyway? As my mother used to say, 'Even if I had seven names, they would not make me renounce my Georgian identity or take away my love for my country.'

My mother and father even managed to have a 'wedding' while in exile in Kazakhstan, and my grandmother somehow found a way to give her daughter-in-law a gold brooch (this brooch, set with a fiery opal from the Pamir Mountains, is now mine—I cherish it like the apple of my eye). In short, those united by a shared misfortune became one large family, adding nine repressed souls to my biography: my grandmother (my father's mother), two aunts (one of whose husband had been shot in '37), two cousins, my grandparents on my mother's side, and of course, my mother and father—who, thanks to the cursed purges of 1937, had already spent thirteen years in exile in the farthest reaches of the country, a place called Siberia. As for my grandfather, who was 'accidentally' killed in Trabzon... well, let's just say no more.

All right now, what are you so surprised about? Those were the times back then! ■



Irakli Laitadze

The Illusion of Modernity

Part 2: Leaving the comfort zone

*Stress is caused by being here
but wanting to be there.*
Eckhart Tolle

Today I am continuing the theme I started in my previous blog on the illusions of modernity. The previous blog was about success and its illusory nature. That success is ultimately a big lie. Let me briefly remind you of the excerpt from the aforementioned blog, 'Whenever it is said, "successful person", the implication is that there are others who are failures. Social Darwinism is unacceptable to me. So, I don't think it's right to divide people in such a way. Very often the label is heavy for the "unsuccessful" and intoxicating for the "successful". Success tailored to oneself and one's own size is grotesque. At a fundamental level we are all equal. What I have told you is just my opinion. Als ich kan.'

In this blog, I will also try to substantiate that stepping out of the comfort zone is also illusory.

What is a comfort zone? According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, 'The comfort zone is the level at which one functions with ease and familiarity.'

Western business circles—and not only business circles—are flooded with calls: 'Step out of your comfort zone', 'Success starts outside your comfort zone', 'You will only grow outside your

comfort zone', and so on. The same trend is quite noticeable in Georgia.

For me, the call to get out of the comfort zone and climb from there to the heights of dreams (with a cascade of selfies to accompany the process) is based on fundamentally flawed assumptions. Namely, people by default have various levels of ambition, different interests, and unique ways of setting and achieving goals. In this case, there is no right or wrong. Someone likes the colour green, and someone likes the colour blue, which one is wrong? Neither.

The same is true for the way goals are set and achieved. An adult decides for oneself what they want and how they want to achieve it. Accordingly, in my opinion, there is no need to listen to superficial advice from self-appointed educators, so-called successful people and mentors, and admire their lives. It is not worth spending a minute on that. Besides, very often such mentors need to cope with their own inferiority complexes, and, also, very often they show/tell the viewer/listener a cosmetically embellished facade, quite far from the reality of their affairs and life.

There are probably mostly two cases when people step out of their comfort zone, and in fact, even that's not true.

Let's break it down.

There are no brave men and heroes on stage, only caricatures of brave men and heroes.

The first option is when there is nothing to lose, and the second option is when being out of one's comfort zone can be enjoyable—what feels like a challenge to one person might be a thrill to another. It turns out that neither the first nor the second option mentioned above is a real way out of the comfort zone—one is forced to do so because he has nothing to lose, and for the other it is a pleasant activity. And yet, both cases are presented to the viewer/listener as some kind of courageous or heroic act. The problem is that what we're being shown isn't real risk or courage. On stage, there are no true daredevils or heroes—only caricatures pretending to be.

Do we truly want to understand and discover something new? Then—back to the future! The ancient Greek maxim γνῶθι σεαυτὸν (know thyself) still holds. Before we criticize or try to change others, perhaps we should first turn inward and work on ourselves. That is the real path, the true exit from the comfort zone. Because searching for, discovering, and confronting our own darker sides is difficult—

Professional growth or geographical travel cannot be compared to an expedition in itself.

and deeply uncomfortable. But if we manage to dissect our own soul (psyche, mind, thoughts—call it what you will) thoroughly and honestly, then we might come to understand nearly all of humanity—their desires, their fears, and their passions.

From experience, I can say the following: no professional achievement or physical journey

compares to the inner expedition into the self.

In conclusion, let us remember that Immanuel Kant never left his hometown of Königsberg during his 79 years of life and was not particularly concerned about leaving his comfort zone. This did not prevent him from becoming one of the world's greatest thinkers. Kant is one of those giants on whose shoulders humanity stands, and to realise the magnitude of his thinking one phrase is enough: 'Zwei Dinge erfüllen das Gemüt mit immer neuer und zunehmender Bewunderung und Ehrfurcht [...], Der bestirnte Himmel über mir und das moralische Gesetz in mir.' "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, [...] the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me". ■

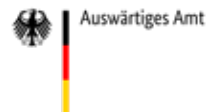






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Shamil Shugayev and Ivane Goliadze

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