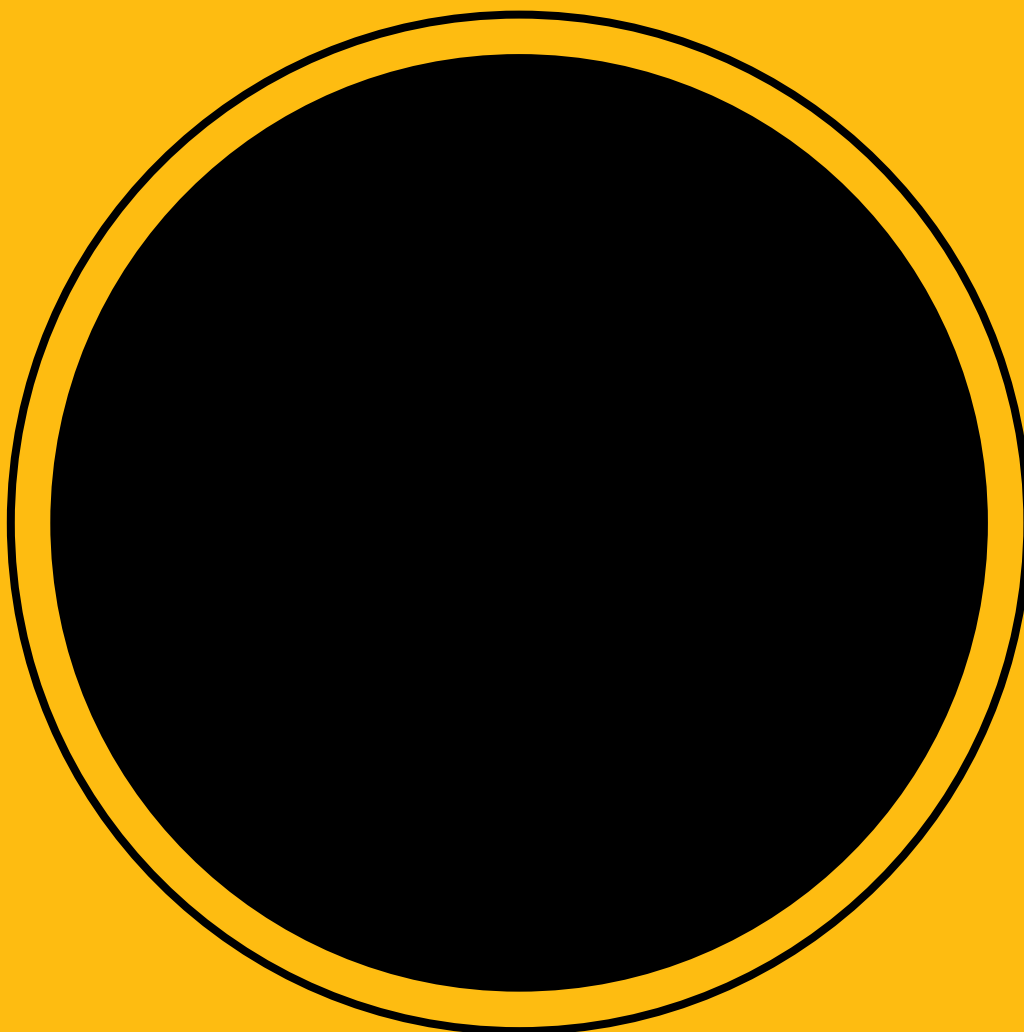


Zaza Bibilashvili
HEROES ALWAYS
WIN

Guga Sulkhaniashvili
ENDURE, AS THIS ONE
HAS ENDURED!

Timothy Blauvelt
სახელმწიფო აქტივები და
დემოკრატია თანამედროვე
სამართლებრივი





“New Iveria” - Public and Political Magazine

Publisher:

Ilia Chavchavadze Center for European Studies and Civic Education

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The magazine is published with the support of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, the University of Georgia, and the German Foreign Ministry.

Circulation 1000 pieces

www.akhaliiveria.ge



www.akhaliiveria.ge

*“In the end, heroes
always win. And if they
don’t win, well,
it’s not the end yet.”*

Prime Minister of Denmark, Mette Frederiksen
Kyiv, February 24, 2025



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HEROES ALWAYS WIN

ZAZA BIBILASHVILI



The eighth issue of the New Iveria magazine was supposed to be published shortly after the 26 October parliamentary elections, but the preparation and publication of the issue was considerably delayed. The reason is easy to guess: After the special operation called “Elections”—the main lesson of which was that Russia will not lose control over Georgia and will not give up by vote what it achieved through elections 13 years ago—all routine has ended and a new era has begun in Georgia. An era of general awakening, an era of understanding and realization, and sometimes even admission of our own mistakes. After the Ivanishvili regime’s effective rejection of Georgia’s integration into the European Union on 28 November, which shattered everyone’s illusions about the goals and motives of “Georgian Dream”, the life of Georgian society turned into a continuous force majeure. Constant, anxiety, struggle, confusion, thoughts about history revived and vague future... In this situation, who has time to write long texts or time to read them?

100 years after the 1921 Russian invasion and occupation, the moment has come again when intellectual struggle for freedom—yes, for freedom, not for European integration or simply for “new elections”—must be replaced by physical struggle. It is impossible not to recall the episode in our history when the great Ivane Javakhishvili urged his students to put aside their books and take up arms to defend their homeland.

Unexpectedly even for realists, we have found ourselves in a situation where

The life of Georgian society turned into a continuous force majeure. Constant, anxiety, struggle, confusion, thoughts about history revived and vague future...

thoughts and emotions are conveyed not in sentences but in interjections. As one conscientious Georgian intellectual said after witnessing such a blatant injustice: “Today all decent Georgians are cursing.” Indeed, everything has become so obvious that conventional rules no longer seem to apply. It is as if argument has lost its meaning when rational thought is confronted with the cynical propaganda of the post-truth era - propaganda, which repeats the same memorized nonsense despite all kinds of counter-arguments, examples and basic common sense.

Political fragmentation was preferable to unity for a common cause (even though, as they assured us, this was not an ordinary election but a referendum). They insisted it was “impossible for the regime to rig” elections, unwittingly doing the regime’s work...

But before that... before that, there was the vast spectacle of political and civic dishonesty, as party, media, and civil society “elites” orchestrated campaigns—complete with sponsored videos and voice-overs from omniscient figures—convincing us that political fragmentation was preferable to unity for a common cause (even though, as they assured us, this was not an ordinary election but a referendum). They insisted it was “impossible for the regime to rig” elections, unwittingly doing the regime’s work... What grounds did they have for such an assertion? What grounds did they have to think they could start thinking about dividing the skin of an unkilld bear?

None. Absolutely none!

When an ordinary citizen raised this concern

We have found ourselves in a situation where thoughts and emotions are conveyed not in sentences but in interjections.



As one conscientious Georgian intellectual said after witnessing such a blatant injustice: “Today all decent Georgians are cursing.”

(I understand that the voices of ordinary people do not always reach the lofty heights of the “elites”—especially when the latter rely on “research” and “polls”, dismissing the value of an ordinary citizen’s knowledge of history and ethnopsychology), the response was: Well, should we tell the people that the elections will be falsified?

Am I the only one who sees the intellectual dishonesty in this answer? No, one shouldn’t tell people that the elections will be rigged! But one also shouldn’t tell them that they can’t be falsified—that’s a lie from the outset. Unless, of course, someone genuinely believes that, in which case they’ve completely lost their grip on reality and don’t deserve a serious role in this existential fight....

As one, not-so-popular, American politician said two decades ago, if there is even a one percent chance that something bad can happen, we should act as if it will. Besides, it is the duty of any responsible person—especially the one with a claims to rule the country—to prepare for the worst-case scenario, and to have a „Plan B“ for every eventuality. What we witnessed was utter unpreparedness—at best, criminal incompetence—for which no one has taken responsibility to this day. The CEC Chairman and his handlers in the State Security Service or the ruling party must have been laughing hard watching this spectacle unfold (let us also note that Georgia is now effectively under a one-party dictatorship—thus, when we speak of “the party”, there is only one party which is means, while the remnants of other political parties remain in a state of denial about this reality).

Then came the ruthless raids and the systematic torture of hundreds

If there is even a one percent chance that something bad can happen, we should act as if it will. Besides, it is the duty of any responsible person—especially the one with a claims to rule the country—to prepare for the worst-case scenario, and to have a „Plan B“ for every eventuality. What we witnessed was utter unprepar



of protesters—exposing the absurdity of the regime’s propaganda about being somehow better than the previous government. That government had used force to disperse protests only twice during its 9 years in office, whereas Ivanishvili’s Zonder brigades sometimes staged several brutal, spectacular crackdowns in a single day. This was followed by the rushed adoption of a cascade of authoritarian laws by the self-proclaimed parliament, the appointment—by Ivanishvili—of a former footballer as president, a man utterly unfit for the role in terms of education, intellect or personal qualities, chosen solely to further humiliate and isolate the Georgian state. Then came the full-scale deployment of newly introduced repressive sanctions to intimidate citizens and economically cripple them, accompanied by cynical, Russian-style propaganda...

When people finally took a breath and regained some emotional readiness to write about all this, the world was confronted with an even greater and potentially catastrophic threat. To avoid accusations of bias, I will note here that I did not utter a single critical word about Donald Trump before his inauguration. My criticism began only when his cascade of reckless rhetoric and actions directly threatened the global order. After all, isn’t the blatant violation of international law, suggesting that Canada should become a U.S. state, Greenland will be American territory, the Panama Canal should be reclaimed, and 2 million people should be deported from Gaza without the right to return, precisely what Russia desires? The morally and pragmatically incomprehensible stance on Russian aggression, culminating in a UN vote against Ukraine, alongside Russia, Belarus, and North Korea, is beyond any reasonable justification. Equally inexplicable is the alienation of all traditional allies, effectively amounting to



the voluntary surrender of American soft power. Meeting with Russia in Saudi Arabia while deliberately ignoring Europe and excluding Ukraine from the negotiations was yet another step in this pattern. In these very talks, the message was clear: Ukraine should forget about its “old borders” (what exactly does “old borders” mean?), NATO membership is no longer on the table, and the only so-called peace plan is to remove President Zelensky through elections—eliminating this inconvenient figure to then settle with Putin.

What does America gain by pursuing a policy of unilateral concessions and sharing all the aggressor’s key demands before negotiations even begin? Doesn’t such an attitude contradict all the ideals America always stood for? Doesn’t this situation speak not of the restored greatness of America, but of the weakness and foreign policy incompetence of the Trump administration?

The foundation of America as a beacon of liberty was laid by Thomas Paine’s landmark pamphlet “Common Sense”. Today, 250 years after the publication of that pamphlet, in the age of Donald Trump and Elon Musk’s showmanship, social media and the post-truth epoch, we are frighteningly close to the end of common sense. And if that happens, it will not be the golden age of America (as Trump proclaims),

but rather the end of the American century and the collapse of the post-World War II Western order.

Events are unfolding rapidly. The topic of elections was overshadowed long ago, and the so-called foreign agent law has already been replaced by an even more draconian version (under a dictatorship, even the mechanical copying of democratic legislation becomes a tool of oppression). Meanwhile, Georgian Dream now speaks

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Today Georgia has lost not only the prospect of European integration, but also state independence. The country has effectively become part of the Russian world...



to us through a Russian propaganda playbook. It is impossible to ignore the fact that Igor Giorgadze—the KGB general accused of international terrorism—and oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili, along with the occupier's Deputy Foreign Minister and “Prime Minister” Irakli Kobakhidze, are all parroting the exact same rhetoric about the occupied territories. Against this backdrop, political parties teeter on the brink of extinction, freedom of speech and expression is being dismantled, and under the new legislation, every patriotic Georgian is a potential prisoner.

In this situation, to even think about local elections is extremely inadequate. Today Georgia has lost not only the prospect of European integration, but also state independence. The country has effectively become part of the Russian world... Many say that time is running out. Fatalists even say that time has already expired. But let's not be apocalyptic and remember what Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said during her visit to Kyiv in February:

“Heroes always win at the end. If they aren't winning, then it's not the end.” ■

**“Heroes always win at the end.
If they aren't winning, then it's
not the end.”**

Zurab Chiaberashvili

THE ANSWER TO USURPATION IS THE SAME: UNITY



Russian oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili and the executors of his will, Georgian Dream, used an unprecedented large-scale electoral manipulation scheme to rig the parliamentary elections on 26 October 2024 and usurp power (see Hans Gutbrod's article for details). The scheme involved not only the Central Election Commission, but also various state and public institutions: the State Security Service, the police, the education system, municipal authorities, and the judiciary. As per tradition, the State Security Service and the police actively enlisted the help of the criminal world.

The ruling group violated the secrecy of the vote and even campaigned that the vote was not secret, ensuring that bribed and/or intimidated voters would not dare mark anything other than "41". They took complete control of the election administration, effectively abolished the marking process at polling stations and facilitated voting through registrars using other people's ID cards and/or personal numbers (mainly of those living abroad). Using fake observer organizations, they rounded up Georgian Dream activists at polling stations to prevent impartial observers from monitoring the election process and responding to mass violations.

Such a scale of electoral manipulation reinforces the already deep-rooted belief among Georgian voters that it is impossible to remove the usurper oligarch

from power through elections. However, this scale of manipulation creates a new challenge: sceptics of Georgia's rapid EU membership are given an argument as to whether the European culture of legality exists in a society where thousands of members participate in such large-scale electoral manipulation.

The usurpation of power by Ivanishvili also carries the risk that the outcome of such elections will look as if the Russian narrative of the Georgian Dream has won, as if Georgian voters have chosen the Russian swamp over European prosperity. Consequently, if the usurper remains in power, Russian influence in Georgia will increase: the end of the European foreign policy course will be officially formalized, and internal governance will become even more authoritarian and repressive. Ivanishvili will think he can get away with anything—from betraying Georgia's national interests to completely destroying citizens' civil and political rights.

The greatest danger in this chain of events is the de jure violation of Georgia's territorial integrity. While it has been de facto violated, it remains intact de jure due to the post-World War II international liberal order and the political and economic support provided to Georgia by its guarantors, the United States and the European Union.

Without political support from the United States and the European Union, Georgia will be unable to effectively uphold its policy of non-recognition of the territories occupied by Russia. Many countries in the Global South resist Russian pressure to recognize the "independence" of Abkhazia and South Ossetia solely because they take the West's position into account. If Georgia distances itself from the West and loses the political backing of the United States and the European Union,

nothing will prevent these countries from succumbing to Russian pressure.

Moreover, if Russia no longer sees the West as a counterbalance in Georgia, the Georgian government—even if we entertain the absurd notion that Russian oligarch Ivanishvili cares about Georgia's national interest—will be left with no

Such a scale of electoral manipulation reinforces the already deep-rooted belief among Georgian voters that it is impossible to remove the usurper oligarch from power through elections.

resources to resist Moscow. Russia will then be able to maneuver Tbilisi into a legal trap regarding its relations with the occupied regions, leading to the loss of Georgia's sovereignty over Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region.

Under such circumstances, legitimizing Ivanishvili's usurped power by entering the so-called parliament is entirely unacceptable. Doing so would not only extinguish every spark of resistance to the usurper within the country but also undermine the United States and the European Union's policy of non-recognition of the October 26 parliamentary elections. In the long run, it would deprive Georgia's patriotic forces of crucial allies in the West.

Refusing to enter the so-called parliament is a necessary but insufficient step for Georgia and its allies to resist Putin's ally and usurper, Bidzina Ivanishvili. Only

national unity and civil consensus can save us from the impending national catastrophe. When we failed to achieve this in 1991 and allowed a civil war to unfold, it led not only to the overthrow of the national government that had won the first multi-party elections but also to the loss of de facto control over Georgia's sovereign territories, the country's descent into chaos, and mass emigration.

The 1991-1993 civil war and the impossibility of reaching a consensus serve as the archetype of our political consciousness. Kobakhidze's "Constitution" is designed and/or interpreted by the regime in such a way that it does not require the consent of competing political parties to legitimize the newly elected parliament, securing 76 MPs is enough for it to begin functioning. If the regime had considered political consensus necessary to recognize the authority of the new parliament, it would not have orchestrated such a large-scale electoral fraud.

National unity and civil consensus require institutional formalization, especially now in the face of entrenched authoritarianism and impending repression.

National unity and civil consensus require institutional formalization, especially now in the face of entrenched authoritarianism and impending repression. The strong likelihood that the usurper will seize the institution of the presidency further underscores the need for the four political

groups, empowered by the people's mandate, to form a unified structure and speak with one voice on behalf of the Georgian people, both domestically and internationally. In the future, after the restoration of democracy, this would serve as an important precedent for coalition building.

In the 2024 elections, for the first time in 12 years, the practice of the two main political forces—Georgian Dream and the

Against the background of the usurpation of power and the expected Russian-style repression, it has become more all the more urgent to achieve what was not achieved before the elections—unity under one umbrella against the Ivanishvili regime

United National Movement—opposing each other was broken. The pro-Western political spectrum became more diverse, and in addition to the United National Movement, three other political groups received a mandate of confidence from the electorate. This would have been a natural phenomenon in a democratic system, but against the background of the usurpation of power and the expected Russian-style repression, it has become more all the more urgent to achieve what was not achieved before the elections—unity under one umbrella against the Ivanishvili regime. It is worth remembering that the Rose Revolution erased the boundaries between the political parties that ran separately in the 2003 elections but still had to "stand in the rain" together. And those parties that preferred to stay away

from the common cause irrevocably lost electoral support.

Setting aside party politics is certainly not a good sign. No matter how much we say, “Temporarily!” or “Until the usurper is removed from power!”, there will always be those who justifiably get outraged: Nothing is as permanent as “temporary” measures. However, it must be considered that if Ivanishvili’s regime survives the post-election turmoil, it will be vitally important for the four opposition political groups and their supporters to formalize the mandate they received in the October 26 elections, even if these elections were

massively falsified, as the alternative structure of the “parliament”.

One of the key phrases in the public speeches of the usurper Ivanishvili, “I have decoded the mechanism of the human self-preservation instinct, its structure”, also contains the regime’s self-preservation mechanism. This mechanism is based on the hope that the forces fighting against the regime won’t be able to unite. If the usurper is wrong in this main expectation, the possibility of removing him from power will increase significantly. ■



Ana Natsvlishvili

VICTORY REMAINS POSSIBLE

These are difficult times for Georgia. I don't know what is more painful: realizing where the country could be today—with new opportunities, resources, and pathways opening up before us, finally bringing peace, ensuring that no child goes to bed hungry, no elderly person is forced to search for warm clothes or leftover food in the garbage, no high-ranking official evades punishment for committing illegal acts, and no activist fears imprisonment for speaking the truth....

Is it more painful to see the future Georgia could have had—but does not—due to deliberate actions? Or is it even more painful to witness a significant part of the population either unaware of, indifferent to, or resigned to the abyss the country may soon face? Have years of neglect, poverty, humiliation and deception so eroded their spirit that, in the struggle to survive, they have lost faith in themselves and in the people?

When did we become so distant from one another? When and who the hell built this wall between us? Who conceived and carried out this great evil, so that a father no longer

understands his child, a sister her brother, a friend his friend, a godparent his godchild?

How did we fail to see this insidious plot against Georgia, a scheme that must have been in the making for years? And for those of us who did see it—why were we unable to stop it?

After the elections, my life has changed radically, as has the whole country: from a march to a march, from night to morning, from cases of torture to the cases of the unjustly imprisoned, from hopes to hopelessness and back to new hopes... Incredible strength, unity, wisdom and sacrifice have poured out directly into the streets and we go out there every night to regain the strength of life, to see each other and to feel what the words once read on the pages of a book and never fully understood by inexperienced minds mean: "The motherland, like the Lord, is one over the earth".

Of the many marches I've taken part in, one in particular haunts me: on 12 January there was a procession in Tbilisi for the families of victims of Soviet repression. I walked around and told the participants: We should be called the March of Survivors. Yes, we should say loudly that our ancestors were shot, exiled, banished, even erased from photographs—and thus from history—but they "survived" and "carried on". We are living examples of that survival and today we stand here, ready to fight again.

As I stand in the midst of this hurricane of history, I am certain that I do not stand



here by my strength alone. I stand as a representative of many generations, carrying their struggles, resilience, and hopes within me. In that moment, as I spoke these words, I saw light and courage reflected in the eyes of those around me. Yes, we have endured. We have survived. And now, we must proclaim it to the world.

But is this enough? Why is there not a single place—a memorial, a stone, a wall, a street, or even a tree—anywhere in Georgia where I can go to honor the memory and contributions to this country of the hundreds who were repressed? To pay tribute to the memory of my ancestor who was sentenced without trial and died in Soviet captivity, who incurred wrath for collecting Georgia's spiritual and material treasures and establishing a museum, for saving the relics of saints that were desecrated and scattered on streets by the League of the Godless, and for maintaining connections with church hierarchs. He was rehabilitated 20 years after his death because, according to the court's decision, "no elements of crime were found in his actions", but he was long dead by then, and his family was completely devastated, evicted, expelled from universities, branded as lepers and ruined... He died in the regime's captivity, his descendants lived in constant fear, which they gradually "domesticated" and made into a habit—we don't discuss family matters with anyone, and within the family, we speak two tones lower. I also inherited this habit by succession—even four generations later, I feel that breaking this rule will bring misfortune.

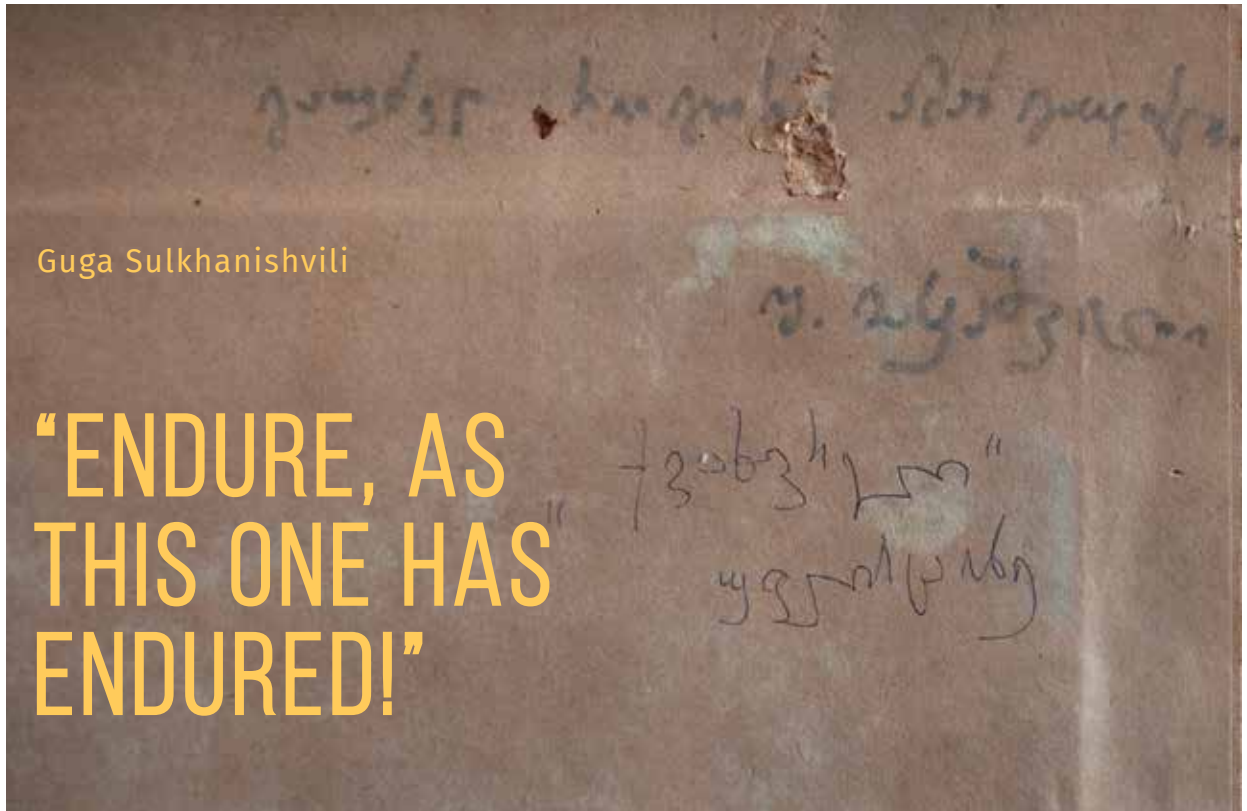
What does this story reveal about our society, our state, and our future? Perhaps if our schoolbooks, streets, and squares—our cities and villages—had been filled with these facts, if the stories of repression had been told with unflinching clarity, if our laws had been written with this truth at their core, if memorials had stood in crowded places as constant reminders, then maybe—just maybe—they wouldn't have dared to

I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE FUTURE
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ALIVE. AND AS LONG AS YOU ARE ALIVE,
VICTORY REMAINS POSSIBLE.

label the descendants and spiritual heirs of the repressed as "Western agents", and with the force of law, no less. Perhaps, if we had reckoned with our past, this new conspiracy against Georgia wouldn't have taken root a hundred years later.

These days, many people say—and I feel it too—that a new Georgia is being born. It must be born. This gives me hope, but it also scares me a little. The birth process doesn't always end with the same result...

I don't know what the future holds, but I do know that as long as you fight, you are alive. As long as you resist injustice, you are alive. As long as they cannot deceive you, cannot buy you, cannot frighten you, cannot tempt you, cannot silence you—you are alive. You may be beaten, poisoned with gas, imprisoned, or forced into temporary exile, but you are still alive. And as long as you are alive, victory remains possible. ■



I read a book titled *Зима тревоги нашей* back in my childhood. It was lying by my brother's bedside, I got curious, and he recommended it to me. Forgive me, but back then, such books were only available in Russian. The *Winter of Our Discontent*—in English if you insist. John Steinbeck's novel was published in Georgian in 2023 under the title *The Winter of Our Anxiety*. To be honest, the novel deals with entirely different anxieties, but its title perfectly suits this winter of ours.

Anxiety and turmoil have never truly left us—neither in winter nor in any other season. Yet, this winter feels different. And I'll tell you something: political events and protests have never felt as personal to me as they do now, not even in April 1989. I have always been there (and I say this without any self-praise) whenever I felt that Georgia's path toward the West was being obstructed by the government's missteps. I stood there believing that governments would come and go, but the country's Euro-Atlantic aspirations would eventually regain momentum. Just like that, in a general way, I was thinking about the political future of the country.

This winter the parent in me awakened. First, a very real threat emerged—violent beasts operating under the name of 'Spetsnaz' could physically harm my children, so I could not stay at home. Second, I refused to let my children grow up in a country deprived of freedom and dignity, like the one I lived in until I was 17. When I say I won't allow it—who am I to wield such power? But I do know this: I must do everything, exhaust every effort, to prevent it.

Winter is long, cold, and often wet. You just want to stay in a warm house, watch films, football—or simply do nothing at all. I'm tired of going to Rustaveli as if it were a job. That, too, is human. It has taken more and more effort to push myself forward. My own will and parental instinct had become no longer enough.



And then, the instinct of my descendants awakened in me. I had never stood at rallies thinking about my grandfathers, my parents, or my brother. I stood on behalf of myself, regardless of what they had done. But suddenly, that changed. A wave of shame washed over me—shame before them. Every one of them had fought against Russia, each in their own way, yet without exception. And this gave me a new, absolutely inexhaustible energy.

My grandfather, Sulkhan Sulkhanishvili, was born in Telavi in 1904. Our family was noble, holding estates in Atskuri, and the nobility there were very close-knit. Kakutsa from Matani, it seems, used to visit our family often. In 1991, my father wanted to buy a house in Atskuri, in our ancestral lands, and we would often go there on weekends to search. One day, we met an elderly man. When he learned that my father was Sulkhan's son, he told us the following story: In February 1921, there were many guests in the family, including Kakutsa. The weather was fine, and they were sitting on the balcony. Sulkhan came to them and started speaking harshly: "The Russians are coming and you're sitting here idly, drinking wine."

Kakutsa called out, "Boy, come to your senses! What are you talking about?"

Sulkhan left, gathered boys of his age, and said, "I'm leaving to fight the Russians." Kakutsa and the elders couldn't help but laugh. My grandfather was just 16 or 17 years old at the time. Back then, guests would usually stay for several days. My grandfather came back after 3 or 4 days, head down, clearly embarrassed. Kakutsa asked, "Well?"

"Have you chased the Russians away?"

"They keep coming like ants," my grandfather replied.

Then, my grandfather stood by Kakutsa during the 1924 rebellion. These stories are well told by Zaira Arsenishvili in her book, *Wow, the Village* (ჰა,

So now they want me to call Russians the good guys? That's not going to happen. This won't work, period. It's in my DNA. Fighting Russia is part of my identity. Moreover, if something happens to me, I know for sure my children will fight. They are already fighting.

სოფელში), and I won't tire you with all the details.

Telavi historian Tengiz Simashvili showed me the prison cell from which my grandfather, who had been sentenced to death, managed to escape. In Kakheti, they took everything from him—his house, yard, and land. He couldn't stay there anymore and began posting proclamations in Tbilisi. There, too, they pressured him heavily. Along with his close friend Elizbar Makashvili, he decided to flee the country via Batumi. But the evening before their departure, they arrested him on Besiki Street while he was posting another proclamation. I also have the interrogation protocol from the same Tengiz Simashvili. In short, my grandfather was exiled to Kazakhstan for life. He married there, and my father was born in Kazakhstan as well. Somehow, he managed to return later. He passed away on November 7, 1987. My father would often laugh, saying he died on the birthday of those he had hated most throughout his life.

A frame always hung on the wall of his room with four photos: Kakutsa Cholokashvili, Sasha Sulkhanishvili, a photo of Kakutsa and Sasha together and Kakutsa's grave in France. If you believe me, displaying Kakutsa's photo in those times was no small matter.

Yes, on that evening in 1924, when my grandfather was arrested, Elizbar Makashvili managed to escape. He eventually settled in Paris. The first letter

from him arrived for my grandfather in 1986. I was there when he read it, and tears streamed down his face.

My father worked as the head of a department at a scientific institute. In Soviet times, it was understood that if you wanted to get ahead, you had to join the Communist Party. That, however, was out of the question for my family. My mother, too, kept



a stash of banned books hidden here and there: Solzhenitsyn, and a book about the Six-Day War with Israel.

One summer, we were vacationing in Sioni. My family had rented a house, and some close friends visited us there. I must have been around 5 or 6 years old. They put me to bed, but I remember being woken up by my father's loud voice: "Why can't we if Holland, Belgium, and Denmark can?!" The next morning, I found out that the guests had expressed skepticism, saying that we, as a small country, could not live independently from Russia. Yes, this was the prevailing thought at the time. It was this mindset that made my father so bitter.

The other grandfather, my mother's father, Datiko Purtseladze, was the grandson of Anton Purtseladze. His father, Levan, was a lawyer, and grandfather also enrolled in law school in 1919 at the newly opened university. When the Russians came, he joined the resistance, and his closest friend was Shaliko Makashvili, Maro Makashvili's brother. When grandfather was going to Kojori, Shaliko was ill and couldn't join him, and he asked my grandfather to keep an eye on Maro if possible, saying, "You know how reckless she is." We all know the tragic end to Maro's story. By the way, Niko Ketskhoveli was wounded in his left hand next to my grandfather. He could never use his left hand again afterwards.

Grandpa Datiko didn't get a proper job until the 1950s. He didn't try either—he wasn't that kind of person. He was arrested in '38. In early spring of '37, when he realized he wouldn't survive, he fled to Tusheti. He stayed there for a year, and as soon as he returned, they arrested him. They released him in 1940. My mother would tell me, with tears in her eyes, how he returned home. He remained silent about it but expressed his protest in his own way: in the sixties, he refused to become an academician. He also turned down an apartment in the academicians' building near the Tea House.

When my brother perished in Abkhazia, grandpa was 90 years old and in good health. But after that, he broke down. "How can I be alive and he's

*Everyone who fought against
Russia is our common ancestor.
They created our identity.*

not? I can't understand that," he once told me. He passed away in 1994. He stayed friends with Shaliko until the end, as long as Shaliko was alive. I also remember Uncle Shaliko—a tall, stately man with good looks.

So now they want me to call Russians the good guys? That's not going to happen. This won't work,

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"Endure, as this one has endured.
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We will not endure, Uncle
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period. It's in my DNA. Fighting Russia is part of my identity. Moreover, if something happens to me, I know for sure my children will fight. They are already fighting. It's like the saying, "A leopard can't change its spots." It's just not going to happen.

The other day, a friend came over. He's very active in these protest movements of ours, much more than I am. I rarely tell this story, so it doesn't come across as bragging, but that day I shared these stories with him in detail. Unexpectedly, he asked me if it was a weakness to not have such ancestors. I told him quite sincerely that they are our common ancestors. All of them! Everyone who fought against Russia is our common ancestor. They created our identity. They were defeated, but they created it. And now we stand! And we will not be defeated. And that's why we want Europe — so it doesn't matter anymore who is whose child and grandchild. Regardless of this, together we can create a modern, free, civilized, European state. We will stand until the end.

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We will not endure, Uncle Shaliko. We will win. ■

Timothy Blauvelt

STATE ARCHIVES AND DEMOCRACY IN CONTEMPORARY GEORGIA




The concept of a national archive that preserves the records of a state for the benefit of society is a relatively modern one. With the evolution of bureaucracies as institutions of state administration, records were preserved and accumulated at first for administrative use by the state's bureaucrats. The first national archive was created during the French Revolution by the National Assembly shortly after the storming of the Bastille, and the concept of institutionalizing the preservation of at least a portion of state documents for the use of the public and of future historians spread around Europe in the course of the 19th century. Together with concepts of constitutionalism, democratic governance, the rule of law, and freedom of belief and expression, the state archives represented a public space in which memory and knowledge could be directly shared between the government and the governed. In the words of Canada's Keeper of Public Records, Sir Arthur Doughty, in 1924, "Of all national assets, archives are the most precious, they are the gifts of one

generation to another, and the extent of our care for them marks the extent of our civilization.”

For the same reasons of “knowledge is power,” 20th century authoritarian and totalitarian states severely restricted access to their archives and purposefully manipulated the historical record. As O’Brien tells Winston Smith during the latter’s interrogation in Orwell’s 1984, “We, the Party, control all records, and we control all memories. Then we control the past, do we not?” Hence the Party slogan, perhaps the most famous line in the book: “Those who control the present, control the past and those who control the past control the future.” This was nowhere more thoroughly reflected in practice than in the Soviet project, where the official archives were created by a decree of Lenin on 1 June 1918. The Bolsheviks, perceiving themselves as reshaping history, documented their activities meticulously. Yet they viewed their archives as repositories for the exclusive benefit of the party and the state apparatus, protecting this valuable knowledge from the public and controlling its interpretation.

With Gorbachev’s new “openness” under perestroika and glasnost’ and then the fall of the Berlin Wall and ultimately the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, one of the most remarkable aspects of the post-Cold War “wave of democratization” was the opening of the state, party and secret police archives in many of the newly democratizing states of Eastern Europe, and to some degree in the newly independent republics of the former USSR. The “End of History” seemed to inherently involve a return of history. Yet despite the aspirations of the archival goldrush of the 1990s, when the major state and party archives in Moscow and St. Petersburg threw open their doors to researchers and began publishing (and, in some cases, selling) their

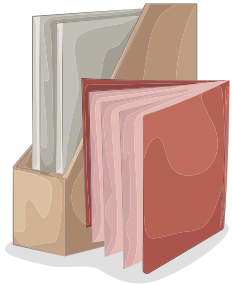
catalogues, the new archival opening in the post-Soviet space was in many ways not only ephemeral, but also uneven and partial. The most complete archival opening took place in the Baltic states, where today the degree of access and transparency rivals that of any western European or North American country. Most Central Asian republics never deemed to open their archives at all, or at best opened them only slightly. Some major central historical archives in Russia remained closed to researchers, such as those of the Soviet military and the secret police. And even before access started to again become restricted with the return to authoritarianism



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in the Putin era, the mentality of most of the archivists remained fixed in the old Soviet mold, viewing their role as one of protecting the documents – and hence, knowledge of the past – from the people, rather than of facilitating researchers’ and the public’s access.

During the later 2000s and into the 2010s, other independent states of the former Soviet periphery became the new epicenters of archival openness, such as Armenia, Moldova, and especially Ukraine briefly following the Orange Revolution of 2004-5, and then more conclusively after the Euromaidan of 2013-14. The Ukrainian Institute of National Memory was created as a non-political public entity for archival preservation, and the fully opened archives of the Ukrainian KGB (Haluzevyi derzhavnyi arkhiv Sluzhba Bezpeky Ukrainy, known as the SBU Archive)



became a major resource for understanding the Soviet secret police and the functioning of the system as a whole. Even during the current war, although the main SBU Archive reading room in Kyiv is closed to researchers

because it is a military target, they send scans of any documents requested to researchers anywhere in the world for free. Ukrainian archivists have also made heroic efforts to preserve their archives from Russian aggression and to relocate those from the regions under Russian occupation.

After the Rose Revolution, Georgia showed signs of becoming a model of archival openness in the region. The Georgian National Archives are under the Ministry of Justice and comprised of the Historical Archive holding the records of state institutions, most notably of the Tsarist regime and of the 1918-21 Democratic Republic, and the Contemporary History Archive which holds the state (commissariats and ministries)

After the Rose Revolution, Georgia showed signs of becoming a model of archival openness in the region.



records of the Soviet period. They were simple and straightforward. In my experience over a number of years, within 10 minutes of delivering the application letter I was already working in the reading room, requested files were delivered the same day, and there were no restrictions on what files could be viewed. By a presidential resolution in 2007 the massive archive of the former Georgian communist party was formally opened to the public and relocated from the basement of the IMEL building, where it had been

deteriorating, to a newer facility in a telephone exchange building in Mukhiani. New boxes for the files were provided, and restoration work was undertaken on damaged materials, with the help of experts from the National Archives. By the same decree, the archive of the former Georgian KGB was made accessible to the public, though these remained stored in the Interior Ministry “Moduli” building and were then transferred to the Police Academy. Both the party and KGB materials were organizationally consolidated under the Archival Administration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Resources were provided for their conservation, and also for their public dissemination. Under the inspired leadership of Col. Omar Tushurashvili, the Archival Administration sought to bring public attention to these national treasures, through issuing the journal *arkivis moambe* / The Archival Bulletin and other publications in Georgian and English, producing documentary films, organizing programs for high school pupils and university students and welcoming local and foreign researchers.

Even during this “golden period” of archival openness in Georgia, there was still considerable areas for improvement, especially compared to the Baltic countries. The majority of the Georgian KGB archive was destroyed by fire in the course of the conflict in Tbilisi in 1991-92. The official tally was that only approximately 20% remained. And according to the official line, all of the informant files were destroyed in the fire, leaving behind mostly criminal case files. Although lustration laws were passed in Georgia as they had been in other former socialist countries, this had little impact on society as the general consensus was that all the informant files and card indexes had been destroyed. Never mind that fire is rarely so selective and that the KGB likely had similar dossiers stored in its offices in other parts of

the country. In all of the state archives – the National Archives under the Justice Ministry and the party and KGB archives under the Interior Ministry – photography and scanning of documents with one's own equipment, something that in most western archives is allowed and free as long as regulations are followed and ownership rights observed, remained forbidden and/or prohibitively expensive, especially for local researchers and students. The passage of laws restricting access to personal data in archives less than 75 years old threatened to obstruct research on more recent history, although these were not applied consistently.

Despite these issues, however, for a number of years Georgia truly was something of a beacon of archival openness in the region, and the period was one of a particular flourishing of research on the history of Georgia and the Caucasus by both local and foreign scholars. Then things began to change in the National Archives, with a reversion to Soviet-style access procedures requiring a 10-day processing of a researcher's request for access (though in practice this often extended for weeks and months), a two-day waiting period before ordered files could be provided and a restriction on the number of files that a researcher could request. More ominously, according to reports of former employees, requests for access by foreign researchers had to be forwarded to the Ministry of Justice for informal review and approval or rejection. An increasing number of such foreign researchers were denied access, although never directly: they were told instead that the National Archives did not possess the materials relevant to the researcher's topic. This was the case even if other scholars had already used such documents. They might also be told the relevant materials were unavailable because of restoration or digitization, including in

some cases where the researcher did not indicate specifically what files they wanted to use. In some cases, it was known that these materials had even already been digitized. In one particularly egregious case, a document that a researcher was told was unavailable in any form turned out to have been already posted for several years on the archive's website. Often foreign scholars' request letters were reported to be "lost" when they

For a number of years Georgia truly was something of a beacon of archival openness in the region, and the period was one of a particular flourishing of research on the history of Georgia and the Caucasus by both local and foreign scholars. Then things began to change in the National Archives, with a reversion to Soviet-style access procedures.

arrived in the country to start their research, and in some such cases the eventual approval (entirely coincidentally) came just in time for their scheduled departure from the country.

In addition, researchers recently photographed a list held behind the reading room attendant's desk of the Historical Archive that were apparently off limits to foreign researchers, including some of the major collections related to the Tsarist administration of the Caucasus. Recently as well the period of validity of approval



for researchers to use the National Archives was changed from the end of the calendar year (thus permission granted from the start of January would be good until the end of December) to just three months, giving the administration more frequent opportunities to deny access. In some cases, researchers applying for renewal of permission were told the materials they had been using just the previous day were now unavailable. There was no clearly discernable logic about who was to receive such treatment and why, though it may have related to topics that are potentially politically controversial in Georgia, such as Islam and state borders, and scholars from Turkey seemed particularly likely to receive de facto refusals (though this

Georgia's former party and KGB archives, essential sources for studying twentieth-century Georgian history, are inaccessible to the public.



has happened as well to American, Russian and German scholars).

Until recently, and somewhat paradoxically, access to the Georgian party and KGB archives under the Ministry of Internal Affairs had remained open and unobstructed. Application letters had been approved rapidly, usually on the same day, and files were brought within minutes of ordering them. In my own experience, I was never refused access to any file that I requested. All of the inventories for the major fonds (finding aids that list the titles of the individual files) were available in PDF form on the Archival Administration website, a great boon to

researchers allowing them to save a great deal of time in preparatory work before arriving at the archive. However, in 2021 the Archival Administration website was taken down for reconstruction, and remains offline today. Then in late 2023 both the party and KGB archives were suddenly closed to the public. Vague explanations were proffered related to the security of the website and a supposed “re-inventorization” and about potential plans to unify these archives with the National Archives. Even the archives’ staff seem perplexed as to the reasons for the closure and unable to speculate as to when and how they might reopen. Publications and other activities of the Archival Administration have nearly ceased, and several grant projects of international donors that would have assisted them in publications, restoration and digitization were blocked and apparently cancelled.

Thus, at the current moment in early 2025, access to the National Archives remains precarious, especially for foreign scholars, and the former Georgian party and KGB archives – major resources for the study of 20th century Georgian history – are entirely inaccessible to the public. Appeals from local and international scholars, non-governmental organizations and foreign embassies have fallen on deaf ears. Foreign researchers have had to cancel long-planned research trips, and some of my Georgian MA students have had to postpone their thesis projects. One can only speculate as to the precise motivation behind these obstructions to access and at what level such decisions are taken. History and, it seems, particularly the Soviet past, seem to be considered dangerous by somebody somewhere in a decision-making position.

Compared with things like the falsification of elections, unconstitutional restrictions

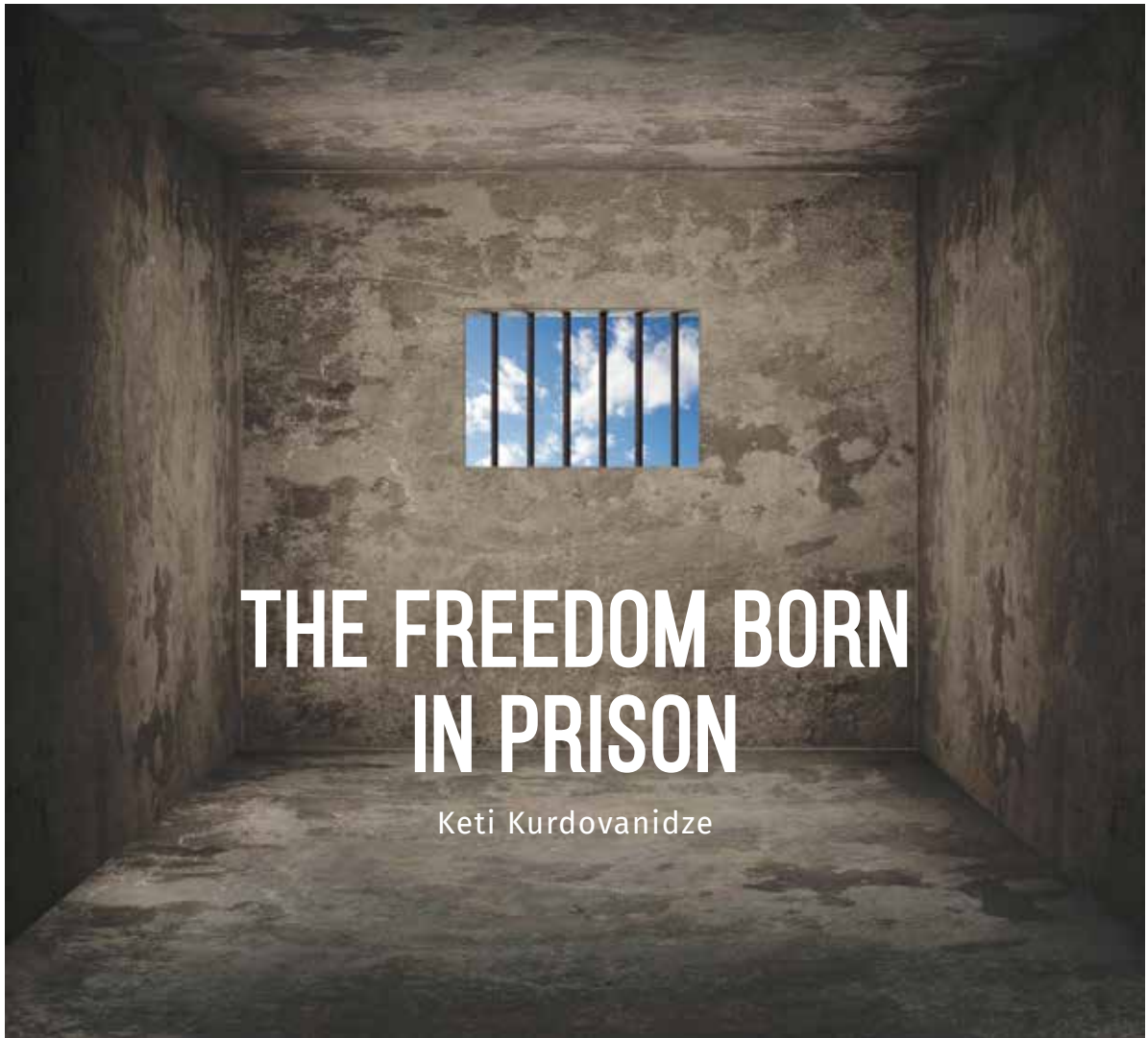
on freedoms of speech and assembly, and extrajudicial detentions and punishments, hurdles to archival access might seem relatively mild. And yet they are a subtle yet powerful indicator, a canary in the coal mine. In the words of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, “Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation.” Recently in Georgia there has been much discussion lamenting the fact that despite all of the efforts at state reform over the past 30 years, the judicial and internal security structures have remained politicized pillars of the ruling party. The direct subordination of the main Georgian archives to the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Internal Affairs – despite the continuing and well-intentioned commitment of the archivists and the administrative staffs of these archives – has meant that they remain vulnerable to the political vicissitudes of whoever is in power. As with the state structure as a whole, a non-political and

independent agency or institution for the archives is essential in the future in order for them to fully serve their potential role

One can only speculate as to what the main motive for restricting access to archives is and at what level such decisions are made. History, and it seems especially the Soviet past, is considered dangerous for someone in a decision-making position.

as a public space in which memory and knowledge can be directly shared between the government and the governed in a functioning democracy. ■





THE FREEDOM BORN IN PRISON

Keti Kurdovanidze

“At a time when the entire Republic of Georgia has been turned into a prison, it is easy to imagine what the prison itself, set up within this larger prison, will be like. Almost 80% cannot be charged—what could they possibly be charged with? Under these conditions, political prisoners are treated more harshly than criminals. Not only does the administration not meet any reasonable demands within its capabilities, but it deliberately provokes us because it is rewarded for oppressing political prisoners. The prison administration is assisted by up to 150 communists imprisoned for different crimes. These thieves, bribers and bandits are trying to make up for their dark past by denouncing and informing. From this

description you can easily imagine our situation.”

This is an extract from a letter written by a political prisoner from Metekhi prison in 1921. And yet how shockingly modern it sounds today, when Georgia’s prisons are full of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience...

It all began in 2012, when the Georgian Dream party came to power through a Russian special operation. At that time, many could not even imagine that inspired by the hope of a better future, they would soon have to fight against repression, violence, unheard-of corruption, shifts in the

country's Western orientation and Russian dictatorship, and that because of this they would face persecution, violence, dismissal from work and even imprisonment. They didn't foresee it when the leaders of the former government, who had gone over to the opposition, were imprisoned; when the third president of Georgia was put on trial for buying jackets and soap; when young people's eyes were gouged out on Gavrilov's night; when the Russian law was supposedly withdrawn forever.

justify their fatal mistake, believing that by supporting the Russian regime they were fighting for democracy and a better future. Raskolnikov himself thinks this way; in his eyes, the pawnbroker woman is a useless member of society, and her death can be justified if it serves a "great cause".

With this motive, a significant part of our society became involved in the existential "process" that Putin's Russia initiated against Georgia through Georgian

It all began in 2012, when the Georgian Dream party came to power through a Russian special operation. At that time, many could not even imagine that inspired by the hope of a better future, they would soon have to fight against repression, violence, unheard-of corruption, shifts in the country's Western orientation and Russian dictatorship, and that because of this they would face persecution, violence, dismissal from work and even imprisonment.

And yet this society has always claimed to be literate, educated, progressive and educated in humanitarian values. This is what happens when, for many, these values are not organic but formal, due to a lack of critical thinking and deep self-awareness. What kind of result can come from an education system that is focused solely on memorizing facts, rather than on analysis, solving moral dilemmas, or developing social skills? On top of that, there is a lack of individual responsibility, meaning that people often base their decisions on group conformity or populist narratives. This is why the humanism in our society is so fragile and false, rather than universal and genuine. The situation created in Georgia today is so obvious that many of these people have distanced themselves from the Russian regime. However, the vast majority of them refuse to acknowledge their role in bringing about this regime. Moreover, like Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov, they try to

collaborators. Indeed, we found ourselves in the reality of Franz Kafka's novel *The Trial*: we are being arrested without knowing why, accused without understanding what for. And when there is no crime, there are no arguments to refute the accusation. This is the very absurdity of Kafka's justice and the court—an invincible weapon in the hands of the system. And this justice is very similar to the Russian justice established in Georgia, which has long gone beyond the institutional framework and, one might say, even beyond the borders of the



country, because today trials in Georgia are conducted by sanctioned judges, who also carry out the orders of an oligarch sanctioned for cooperating with Russia, and the oligarch, in turn, carries out the orders of a dictator recognized as a war criminal by the Hague Tribunal. It is precisely this

popularity among Georgian youth far exceeds that of “The Knight in the Panther’s Skin”, but on the other hand, the oligarch’s admiration for Orwellian totalitarian rule had been openly declared from the very beginning, without any metaphorical hints. And yet, what was so unbelievable? That he

What kind of result can come from an education system that is focused solely on memorizing facts, rather than on analysis, solving moral dilemmas, or developing social skills? On top of that, there is a lack of individual responsibility, meaning that people often base their decisions on group conformity or populist narratives. This is why the humanism in our society is so fragile and false, rather than universal and genuine.



kind of labyrinth that now holds captive all those awaiting their sentences in or outside the cells, because under the Russian regime “deprivation of liberty” as a legal concept and the prison as a penal institution have lost their institutional meaning and taken on an existential character.

Was it really so difficult for our educated society to realize that an Orwellian dystopian reality awaits us? On the one hand, Orwell’s

wouldn’t dare, wouldn’t let himself, or did the people really believe that if they didn’t like him they would vote him out? No, of course not. Almost everyone knew in advance who was coming to power, but they thought it wouldn’t affect them, that the pension the oligarch gave them would be permanent, that as supporters of the Georgian Dream they would have every right, while the restrictions and persecutions would apply only to members of the National Movement.

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This is what happened in the first stage, but to establish a dictatorship it is not enough to discriminate against opposition parties; total censorship and the elimination of anything different, the destruction of potentially threatening factors to the regime and total obedience are required.

the National Movement and Saakashvili was considered ‘mauvais ton’.

We have arrived at this point under this paradigm, and despite veering off the Western course, establishing a Russian dictatorship, and filling prisons with

And yet, what was so unbelievable? That he wouldn't dare, wouldn't let himself, or did the people really believe that if they didn't like him they would vote him out? No, of course not.

As for the young, they could not even imagine that the National Movement, vilified by Russian propaganda, and the demonized third president were being unjustly and illegally persecuted. They sincerely believed the fabricated stories of 26,000 raped men, the president's wife trafficking in human organs, a man-eating wolf chained to the balcony of the law enforcement minister, Abkhazia “handed over” by the former government, and “sleeping Tskhinvali” awakened by the roar of Georgian machine guns in 2008. They believed it because no one had ever explained to them what happened in 1991-1992, what kind of country the government inherited after the Rose Revolution, what challenges it faced, what mistakes the reformers made, and why they paid such a bitter price. Some heard these myths at home, others among their friends, and the “opposition to the opposition” began to reinforce these compromising narratives, and it even made them trendy—“supporting



political prisoners, we still inevitably hear the same refrain—from civil activists and political leaders who have now joined the opposition and lead the protests, from arrested and tortured demonstrators, from newly formed opposition movements, and

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from the fifth president, who has become a symbol of democracy: “Dream is acting in a way that will soon make it resemble the National Movement government.”

In other words, it’s not quite that brutal yet, but soon it will be. And if those who have been beaten and tortured think this way, it’s hardly surprising that viewers of Imedi TV, comfortably settled at home and favorably disposed towards the Russian regime, are basking in bliss. One thing is clear—this is an era of great repression. Those who once

Perhaps the most striking example of the importance of collective responsibility was given by Rustaveli: People who live successfully and comfortably abandon their personal ease, leave everyone and everything behind and unite for a greater purpose. Tariel, Avtandil, Pridon, Patman, and Asmat fight together to free Nestan-Darejan, the prisoner of conscience in “The Knight in the Panther’s Skin”, from the fortress of Kadjeti. Nestan’s imprisonment takes on new significance today as we witness how the system turns people into

This is an era of great repression. Those who once despised the National Movement now find themselves labeled by the Russian regime as part of a collective National Movement and treated exactly the same way as the original members.

despised the National Movement now find themselves labeled by the Russian regime as part of a collective National Movement and treated exactly the same way as the original members. Today, we are experiencing the personal and societal consequences of the Russian regime’s violence: unlawful imprisonment, blatant violations of human rights, and the disregard for the principles of justice, freedom and equality.

What should be the ethical attitude of society towards prisoners of conscience when it is obvious that the system violates human dignity and freedom? One part of society is silent out of fear or indifference, and the other part is fighting against this injustice, but it is obvious that what is happening now in Georgia does not only concern and harm an individual, but also society as a whole, because justice is everyone’s responsibility, and every unjustly imprisoned person is a burden on the public conscience.

both moral and physical prisoners simply because they remain true to their ideas and values.

Being a prisoner of conscience means bearing moral responsibility—being willing to endure pain, suffering, separation from loved ones, violence and isolation, yet refusing to surrender the right to free choice. Nestan-Darejan faces precisely such a moral dilemma: She must either submit to her father’s will and marry a foreign groom she has never even seen or defy his wishes and fight for her freedom. She knows from the very beginning what opposing Parsadan might lead to—leaving her homeland, persecution, separation from her beloved, tears and suffering. Yet, preserving her individuality on the one hand and upholding justice on the other are so vital to her that she chooses the path of confrontation over conformity. For her, love is a matter of freedom and dignity, not

merely an expression of romantic feelings or the fulfillment of her father's desired political or social aspirations.

teaching us that freedom and dignity are such fundamental values that any sacrifice and suffering in their defense is justified.

Today, our prisoners of conscience affirm this truth through personal self-sacrifice for the common good, preserving the very principles upon which any nation's freedom is built.

Particularly significant are Nestan's two letters sent from Kadjeti. One is addressed to Patman—a letter of gratitude for her solidarity. The other is meant for her beloved, revealing that imprisonment is, for her, a challenge that will ultimately strengthen their love even more. The suffering she endures in captivity becomes a sacrifice offered for hope and a greater purpose.

Nestan-Darejan's story has become a moral lesson for contemporary Georgia,

Today, our prisoners of conscience affirm this truth through personal self-sacrifice for the common good, preserving the very principles upon which any nation's freedom is built.

And finally, as Merab Kostava once said: A bird in the sky is merely an abstract symbol of freedom—true freedom is born within prison walls, in the struggle with them. ■



David Khvadagiani

IT IS ORDERED TO FORGET!

“Never forget that what was, is the same, and what is, will be the same forever. Be absorbed in the contemplation of all the dramas or individual scenarios that you know through personal experience or the accounts of historians. Imagine, for example, the palaces of Hadrian, Antoninus, Philip, Alexander or Croesus: the performance is always the same, only the actors change.”

Marcus Aurelius, Meditations (X, 27)

Millennia have passed since the Meditations of the deceased Marcus Aurelius were found in his military camp, but not only has the ‘performance’ of the Enlightened Emperor retained its significance, no one has since been able to describe with such precision and depth the essence of history and historical memory.

Historical memory, especially the study and understanding of recent history, is a characteristic feature and advantage of European societies. From 2014 to 2018, the 100th anniversary of the start and end of the First World War (then referred to as the “Great War” or “World War”) was marked. Almost every country in Europe was involved in the global conflict, which changed the course of mankind’s development. This war marked the end of the era of great empires and gave rise to the political order of the modern world. A century later, these countries commemorated the war appropriately, holding numerous scientific conferences and events.

For Georgia, as for many other countries, the 1910s and 1920s were associated with very important commemorative dates, although

the Russian regime in Georgia never thought to start the process of restoring historical memory—on the contrary, from 2012 onwards, the regime methodically began to restrict access to archival spaces, which remained constantly out of the public eye and posed a problem for small groups of researchers.

In 2023, the constant deterioration of the archival policy reached its logical end when the Russian regime closed the archive of the Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which combines the archives of the KGB and the Communist Party of Georgia, without the study of which it is impossible to expose the Soviet past and the crimes committed by Soviet Russia in Georgia.

Access to the National Archives of the Ministry of Justice, especially the Archives of Recent History, also became extremely complicated. Most importantly, in October 2023, under unclear circumstances, the film repository of the National Archives burned down, which was a huge loss for the research perspective of recent history. To this day, the system remains silent on the matter, and the cause of the fire has not been investigated.



Europe at the beginning and end of World War I



It is noteworthy that the most significant archives of the KGB and Communist Party lack proper infrastructure and dedicated facilities, not to mention clear structural affiliation. In any developed country, particularly in Eastern Europe—such as Poland and the Baltic states where they have experienced a totalitarian past and Soviet occupation—archival funds are typically managed by national memory institutions. These institutions operate within a transparent system and conduct essential research. In contrast, in Georgia, these archival funds remain under the control of the least transparent and most repressive entities—the Ministries of Justice and Internal Affairs.

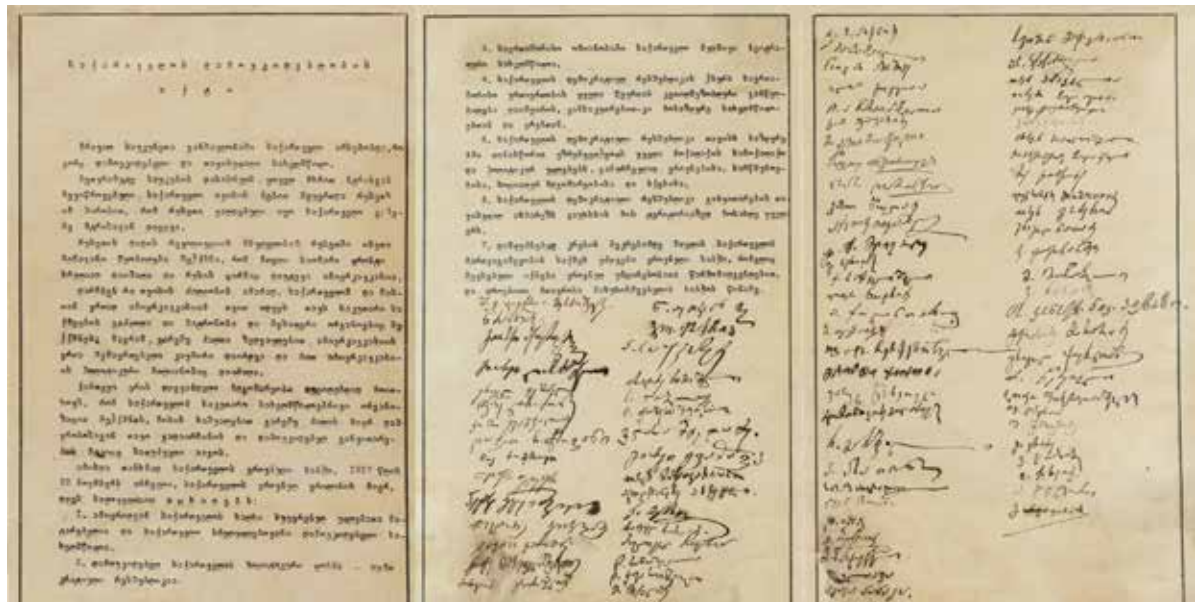
IN 2023, THE CONSTANT DETERIORATION OF THE ARCHIVAL POLICY REACHED ITS LOGICAL END WHEN THE RUSSIAN REGIME CLOSED THE ARCHIVE OF THE ACADEMY OF THE MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS, WHICH COMBINES THE ARCHIVES OF THE KGB AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF GEORGIA, WITHOUT THE STUDY OF WHICH IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO EXPOSE THE SOVIET PAST AND THE CRIMES COMMITTED BY SOVIET RUSSIA IN GEORGIA.

The most significant phase of our modern history was in the teens, twenties and thirties of the last century. This period still has a fatal influence on modern socio-political processes and can be called the starting point of our modernity. This story begins with the course and consequences of the First World War; Georgia, as part of the Russian Empire, was involved in one of the largest military theatres of the conflict, the Transcaucasian Front, which passed through the historical territory of the country. On both the Transcaucasian and Western fronts, tens of thousands of Georgian soldiers and officers conscripted into the Russian army took part in the war, suffering unimaginable casualties, although today this colossal loss has been completely erased from our collective memory and can only be found in yellowed print media or archives. Society still remembers only the catastrophic human losses of Georgia in World War II. However, this oral and superficial memory is also on the verge of oblivion and erasure due to inadequate research and lack of a memory policy.

The history of the First World War is of paramount importance for Georgia as an independent state, because it was the result of the First World War and the subsequent

Paris Peace Conference that decided the fate of the independence of small nations, which was impossible before. For example, it is interesting to try a little experiment: if we search for maps of Europe in 1914 and 1918 using the Google search engine, we will find two completely different political maps of Europe; in 1914 with large empires, and already in 1918 with many democratic republics, especially in Eastern Europe, including in the South Caucasus.

The most important period of Georgia's recent history is connected precisely to the end of World War I and the collapse of great

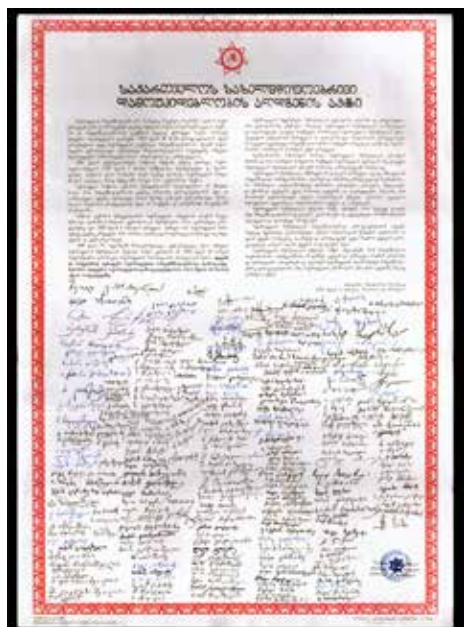


Act of Independence of Georgia 1918

empires, when the February Revolution of 1917 overthrew the Russian Empire, and soon Georgia became an independent democratic republic. The history of Georgia from 1918 to 1921 was thoroughly erased and falsified by Soviet Russian propaganda. As a result, several generations, even their educated and intellectual segments, either have a superficial understanding of this most important period in our country's recent history or have a distorted and falsified

version imprinted in their consciousness. Even today, the wider society is completely unaware of the history of 1918-1921, when, on 26 May 1918, the first modern, contemporary, democratic Georgian state was established after the feudal era—the state of which we are the legal successors today.

To this day, there are often pointless debates in social and other discussion forums about which is the real Independence Day of Georgia, 26 May or 9 April? Do we



*Act of Restoration of State Independence
of Georgia 1991*



*Speech by Noe Zhordania
on January 14, 1920*

have a 100-year-old state or a 34-year-old state? If we visually perceive both acts of independence, the answer becomes simple: the modern Georgian state was created in 1918, which was forcibly ended in 1921 by the Soviet-Russian occupation. The capitulation was not signed or recognized by the legitimate representative government of the Georgian people and the Constituent Assembly, who fought for decades in exile for non-recognition of the Russian occupation, on the basis of which the state independence of Georgia was legally restored on 9 April 1991.

The political processes that developed in the South Caucasus in 1917-1918, related to the convocation of the Transcaucasian Sejm on 10 February 1918 (which legally formalized the secession of Transcaucasia from Russia) and the creation of the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic (DFR), which united Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, have also been forgotten or distorted. According to myths and legends, later fueled of course by Soviet propaganda, the Transcaucasian Republic was supposedly created by the leaders of the then-dominant political party, the Social Democrats,

IN OCTOBER 2023, UNDER UNCLEAR CIRCUMSTANCES, THE FILM REPOSITORY OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES BURNED DOWN, WHICH WAS A HUGE LOSS FOR THE RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE OF RECENT HISTORY. TO THIS DAY, THE SYSTEM REMAINS SILENT ON THE MATTER, AND THE CAUSE OF THE FIRE HAS NOT BEEN INVESTIGATED.

THE MOST SIGNIFICANT PHASE OF OUR MODERN HISTORY WAS IN THE TEENS, TWENTIES AND THIRTIES OF THE LAST CENTURY. THIS PERIOD STILL HAS A FATAL INFLUENCE ON MODERN SOCIO-POLITICAL PROCESSES AND CAN BE CALLED THE STARTING POINT OF OUR MODERNITY.

because they were in no hurry to declare Georgia's independence. But the reality is quite different, because the political center of the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic was in Tbilisi, and Georgian Social Democrats dominated the government—the Chairman of the government was Georgian Akaki Chkhenkeli, and the Chairman of the

HOWEVER, THIS ORAL AND SUPERFICIAL MEMORY IS ALSO ON THE VERGE OF OBLIVION AND ERASURE DUE TO INADEQUATE RESEARCH AND LACK OF A MEMORY POLICY.

Sejm was also a Georgian, Nikoloz (Carlo) Chkheidze. The Transcaucasian Federative Democratic Republic was a highly significant state and political project aimed at the unity of the South Caucasus and the maintenance of the strategic Baku-Batumi corridor, which ensured the continuous interest of major Western European powers in the region. However, the intense conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan quickly rendered its functioning impossible, leading to its swift dissolution.



The first coalition government of the Democratic Republic of Georgia. From left to right: Shalva Alexi Meskhishvili, Noe Ramishvili, Noe Zhordania, Giorgi Laskhishvili and Giorgi Zhuruli



Newspaper "Sakhslikho Sakme" 22.02.1921

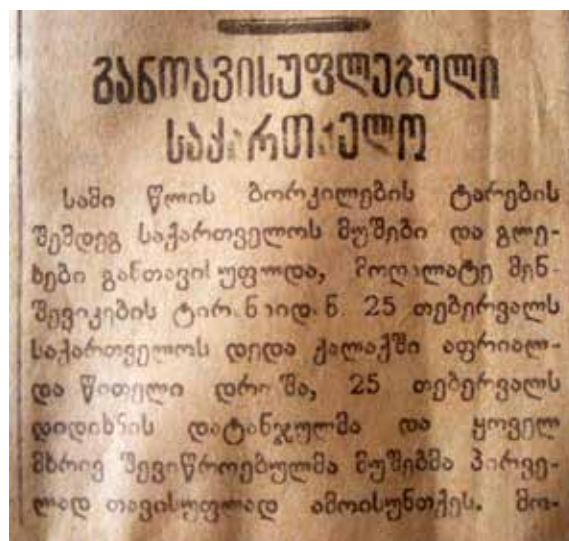


Newspaper "Sakhslikho Sakme" 22.02.1921

The main challenge for independent Georgia was finding a foreign protector and orientation that would shield the newly established Georgian democratic state from external aggression amid a turbulent international environment. Germany emerged as such a protector, making the declaration of independence and the halting of the Ottoman army's aggression a realistic prospect. However, in November 1918, World War I ended, and Germany was defeated, once again placing the Georgian government and diplomatic corps before a significant challenge. Here emerges the concept of "neutrality in international warfare", as stated in the Act of Independence. In reality, this meant non-alignment in the wars of the great European empires rather than neutrality concerning Russia—a misinterpretation that persists to this day. In this very context, victorious

Britain viewed Georgia, the former ally of its defeated adversary, Germany, with disfavor. The tragic 1918 Armenia-Georgia war was a reflection of this geopolitical reality, as the independent Democratic Republic of Armenia was a British ally, and its interests aligned with those of the British.

The breakthrough of the blockade and Georgia's de facto recognition as an independent state in January 1920 should be credited to the efforts of the Georgian government, political elite and diplomatic corps of the time. This achievement was followed a year later on January 27, 1921 by the full legal—de jure—recognition of the Democratic Republic of Georgia by the Supreme Council of the victorious states of World War I, where Britain and France played leading roles. A significant contribution to this process was made by France's newly elected Prime Minister, Aristide Briand, who actively considered the threat posed by Russia and saw the support of nations liberated from the Russian Empire as a "sanitary cordon" to contain it. He viewed the strengthening of their statehood and the supply of arms as key measures to achieve this goal. Once legally recognized, Georgia's admission to the League of Nations became a realistic prospect and only a matter of time—something that Soviet Russia, Vladimir Lenin, and especially the People's Commissar for Nationalities, Joseph Stalin, understood well. Georgia's independence and its pro-European course posed a personal threat to Stalin in the midst of the life-and-death political struggles unfolding in Moscow. At this critical moment, Stalin succeeded in persuading Lenin to launch a military intervention against Georgia. The decision for intervention was taken in Moscow on the same day, 27 January 1921, that Europe granted de jure recognition to Georgia.



Newspaper "Communist" N3, March 4, 1921

Before the Russian-Georgian War of 1921 and Soviet Russian occupation, democratic Georgia successfully repelled several threats. Together with the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan, with which it signed a military cooperation agreement in 1919, Georgia managed to halt the advance of the

PARALLEL TO THE RUSSIAN-GEORGIAN WAR, ON FEBRUARY 21, 1921, A MOMENTOUS EVENT IN GEORGIA'S STATEHOOD HISTORY TOOK PLACE. AFTER TWO YEARS OF CONTINUOUS WORK, THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA ADOPTED THE CONSTITUTION OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA—A DOCUMENT WHOSE PROGRESSIVE NATURE IS STILL ACKNOWLEDGED BY INTERNATIONAL EXPERTS TODAY. THE CONSTITUTION ABOLISHED THE DEATH PENALTY, A SYMBOLIC STEP TOWARD GEORGIA'S DEVELOPMENT AND EUROPEANIZATION. HOWEVER, IN REALITY, IT REMAINED IN EFFECT FOR ONLY A FEW WEEKS. SHORTLY AFTER, UNDER SOVIET RUSSIAN OCCUPATION, THE OPPOSITE BECAME TRUE—DEATH AND MASS EXTERMINATION OF PEOPLE BECAME A COMMON OCCURRENCE.

IN 1922-1923, SEVERAL HISTORICAL EVENTS TOOK PLACE WHICH PLAYED A DECISIVE ROLE IN THE POLITICAL LIFE OF THE TIME, BUT HAVE SINCE BEEN CAREFULLY FORGOTTEN AND ERASED FROM OUR COLLECTIVE MEMORY. THESE INCLUDE THE PROCESS OF "SELF-LIQUIDATION" OF GEORGIAN DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL PARTIES, WHICH WAS FORCIBLY ORGANIZED BY THE OCCUPYING AUTHORITIES AND THEIR TERROR MACHINE, THE "CHEKA" (BOLSHEVIK SECRET POLICE); THE SPLIT WITHIN THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF GEORGIA, KNOWN AS THE NATIONAL UKLONIST MOVEMENT, WHEN THE ELITE OF THE GEORGIAN COMMUNIST PARTY REBELLED AGAINST THE DE FACTO INFORMAL RULE OF SERGO ORDZHONIKIDZE AND THE KAVBUREAU (THE CAUCASUS BUREAU OF THE RUSSIAN COMMUNIST PARTY, LATER THE TRANSCAUCASIAN REGIONAL COMMITTEE), WHICH SERGO ORDZHONIKIDZE NEUTRALIZED WITH THE HELP OF STALIN FROM MOSCOW. THIS LED TO THE RESIGNATION IN PROTEST OF THE ENTIRE SOVIET GEORGIAN GOVERNMENT, WHICH WAS SUBSEQUENTLY 'PURGED' BY THE REGIME.

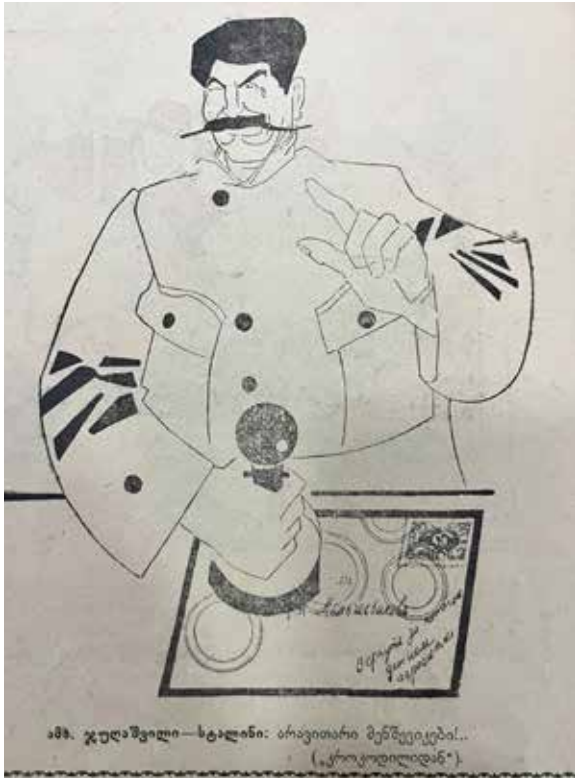
Russian Volunteer Army ("White Russians"). It also repelled an attack by Soviet Russia ("Red Russians") in 1920, while continually suppressing Bolshevik-orchestrated uprisings and fighting a relentless battle against Soviet espionage and subversive activities. However, in the fateful war of 1921, Georgia was defeated—Russia was one step ahead of Europe. Although France had already begun supplying weapons to Georgia following its de jure recognition—and even provided artillery support from its naval fleet in the Black Sea during the



*Kote Andronikashvili
Chairman of the "Damcom"*



*Catholicos-Patriarch
Ambrose Khelaia*



Newspaper "Niangi", November 18, 1923

last session of the Constituent Assembly held in Batumi on 17 March 1921, so that the enemy would not achieve its main goal of forced legitimization of the occupation by capturing the head of the government. It should be noted that during the ceasefire negotiations in Kutaisi, the representative of the Georgian government, the deputy chairman of the government, Grigol Lortkipanidze, did not sign the capitulation. The majority of the government and the Constituent Assembly remained in Georgia and joined the resistance movement. For example, 51 members of the Constituent Assembly were physically destroyed (shot) by the Soviet-Russian repression, 11 of them during the 1924 uprising, others during the Great Terror of 1937-1938, while the majority of the rest were repressed—repeatedly arrested and deported (see the chart).

In 1921, following large demonstrations that were repeatedly suppressed by the Russian

occupying regime, resistance movements began to gain momentum, starting with the uprising in Svaneti and continuing with the rebellion in Khevsureti in 1922. These movements gradually grew stronger, became more organized and multiplied. This resistance was further consolidated with the formation of the Independence Committee (Damkomi) in 1922, where Georgian political parties—Social Democrats, Social Federalists, Social Revolutionaries, National Democrats, and others—agreed to join forces in the fight against the Soviet Russian occupation regime.

In 1922-1923, several historical events took place which played a decisive role in the political life of the time, but have since been carefully forgotten and erased from our collective memory. These include the process of "self-liquidation" of Georgian democratic political parties, which was forcibly organized by the occupying authorities and their terror machine, the "Cheka" (Bolshevik secret police); the split within the Communist Party of Georgia, known as the National Uklonist Movement, when the elite of the Georgian

THE TERROR OF 1937-1938 ENDED
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DESTRUCTION AND OCCUPATION.

Communist Party rebelled against the de facto informal rule of Sergo Ordzhonikidze and the KavBureau (the Caucasus Bureau



Members of the
Parity Committee

resistance did not cease; the surviving fighters and activists continued to fight for the restoration and strengthening of illegal organizations.

Since 1926, the internal split within the Communist Party of Georgia continued, primarily taking the form of a Trotskyist movement. Former National-Uklonists were actively involved in this movement as well, which again ended with mass reprisals, arrests, and deportations.

“Such a catastrophic event as collectivization has been erased from our collective memory, and there is not a single fundamental work dealing with it. Collectivization changed the entire model of economic development

of the Russian Communist Party, later the Transcaucasian Regional Committee), which Sergo Ordzhonikidze neutralized with the help of Stalin from Moscow. This led to the resignation in protest of the entire Soviet Georgian government, which was subsequently ‘purged’ by the regime.

The political crisis reached its climax with the anti-Soviet national uprising of 28 August 1924, which, although defeated, significantly shook the occupying regime. The uprising was followed by harsh repression by the Russian occupation regime. Around 5,000 insurgents were killed, a significant loss for the resistance movement. However, the

after the New Economic Policy introduced in the 1920s, and indeed we are still reaping its negative consequences. The fierce resistance to collectivization from the late 1920s to the mid-1930s, when the population revolted en masse against the

RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA, PRIMARILY
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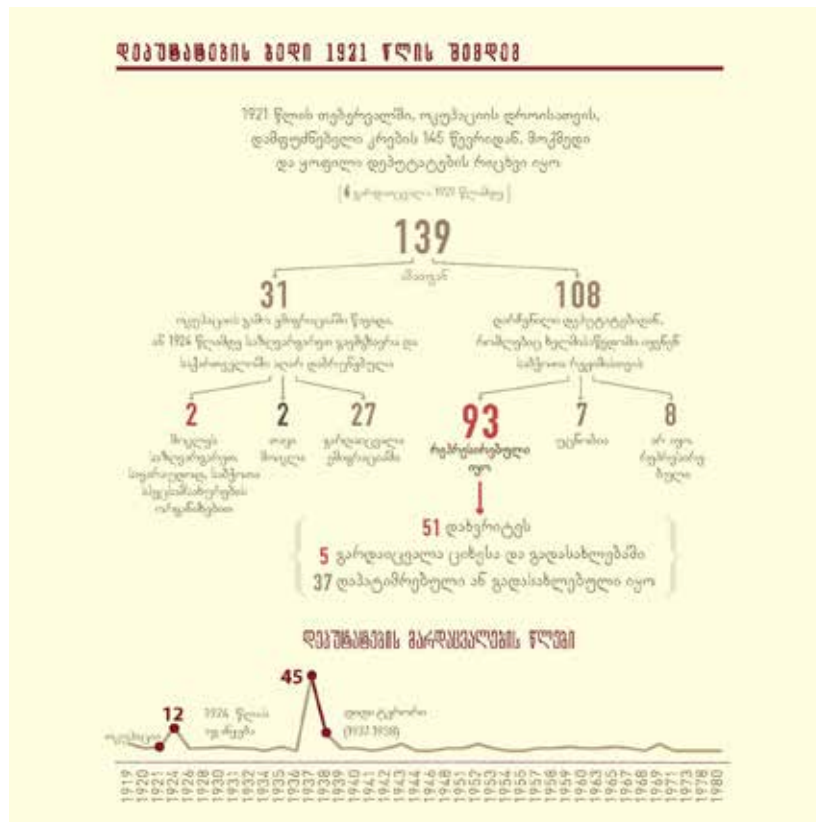
establishment of collective farms, has been completely forgotten. This process led to no fewer casualties and clashes than the resistance of the 1920s.”

In reality, the mass repressions and terror of 1937-1938, aside from purging the old cadres of the Communist Party and the intelligentsia, and eliminating the remnants of political opponents, primarily targeted the prosperous peasant class that opposed the predatory policies of the Soviet regime, which was most evident in the collective farming process. The terror of 1937-1938 ended an entire era, one that began with independence and continued through the Russian occupation, physically destroying the generation of people who created independent Georgia, as well as even those who participated in its destruction and occupation.



Independence Committee's Report





The history of the years 1917-1921 and then 1921-1938 can be considered a textbook example of the process of independence and Russian occupation, a process that has been forgotten to this day and is carefully locked away in archives. Due to the aforementioned problems, countless historical documents are facing the threat of destruction—documents that could guide us in understanding how the historical process began in 1918, a process that continues to this day. These documents would help us fully grasp what the beginning was like, understand where we stand today, and identify the challenges we face in the future. For modern active citizens, this would serve

THE HISTORY OF THE YEARS 1917-1921 AND THEN 1921-1938 CAN BE CONSIDERED A TEXTBOOK EXAMPLE OF THE PROCESS OF INDEPENDENCE AND RUSSIAN OCCUPATION, A PROCESS THAT HAS BEEN FORGOTTEN TO THIS DAY AND IS CAREFULLY LOCKED AWAY IN ARCHIVES.

as a form of social immunity, enabling them to easily avoid and neutralize Russian propaganda hooks. Russian propaganda, primarily based on the falsification of recent history, often manages to disorient and manipulate opponents through the control of this process. ■

Buba Kudava



TRUTH LOST IN THE LINES

THE STORY OF DAVIT THE BUILDER'S ACCESSION TO THE THRONE

The land was in turmoil, and Giorgi II, seeing his strength wane, laid down his crown and placed it upon the brow of his son, who was but sixteen years of age. From his earliest days, young Davit showed great promise, and thus did his feeble father, lacking the will to rule, anoint him king. And lo, fortune smiled upon this deed—for of all his days upon the throne, this alone did weak Giorgi accomplish with wisdom: he passed the scepter unto him who would be known as the Builder. Long have men spoken of this as the dawn of Georgia's proudest age. Even now, many hold it to be true. Yet as the years unfurl, questions arise, doubts stir—was it truly thus? Or does some shadow lie hidden within this tale?

Like many theses rooted in our beings, this version of Davit the Builder's accession to the throne also originates from the Life of Kartli. But there is one question we must ask ourselves every time we turn the pages of the chronicles: was it really so or rather did the author of the stories want us to believe it so.

Let us begin with this—such a precedent we do not have. A man, healthy and whole, removed the royal crown and, with his own hands, set it upon his son's head. He did not name him co-king or co-emperor, as had been done before. He did not take the monastic vows, as others had. Nor did he lie upon his deathbed, bidding farewell to the world. Nay, he simply awoke one day, beheld his own weakness, and surrendered the throne. He stepped down and departed. Departed, and left the kingdom to his son—a man of fifty years yielding power to a boy of but sixteen!

Let us go on to say that there are not many such cases in the history of the world. Tradition and experience have it that a king either appoints an heir as a co-ruler, dies, is assassinated or banished or chooses an ecclesiastical office and leaves the country. Why is it that aging or fatigued kings do not quietly and voluntarily leave the throne to vigorous heirs? This is a separate question. Of the many reasons (lust for power, the fragile security of the uncrowned monarch and his cronies) the most important is perhaps the following: precedents are a dangerous thing, they can become a trend that whets the appetite of each successive prince. So be kind and wait your turn and your fate—that was the royal philosophy.

Let us turn to the sole (!) surviving account of young Davit's ascent to the throne and lend our ear to the Chronicler:

"At that time, Davit was sixteen years old, and the Chronicler was three hundred and nine (that is, the year 1089). And his father himself crowned him king. Yet it would be truer to say that the heavenly Father Himself found Davit and blessed him." What follows are verses from the Psalms, along with subtle and overt allusions to the notion that just as the Lord anointed the biblical Davit, so too did He lay His hand upon our Davit. In other words, it was divine will, and Giorgi was but its humble instrument—something of that nature.

That's all it is. And yet, how so much this blessed anonymous person knew and how stingy he was with his words! There are so many details we're interested in, which he remains silent about: What exactly led Giorgi II to this decision? What forced him, who forced him? Where did the former king go? Where did he live afterward and what did he do? Did he help his son to govern the state or did he distance himself from the royal court? What kind of relationship did father and son have after this? How long did Giorgi live and where was he buried in the end?

One gets the impression that Davit's chronicler skillfully avoids these and other questions by quoting Scripture. Suspicions are further aroused by the fact that the author of the *Life of Davit* never mentions Davit's father after Davit's

accession to the throne! He is writing a royal history about the king and is not even interested in the death of the father who blessed his crown. He devotes an entire passage to the death of Giorgi of Chqondidi, the king's right-hand man. And there he adds, "King Davit put on mourning clothes and mourned him like a father, and more than a father." Those who study subtexts will not fail to notice that this "more than a father" is written here not merely to honor his mentor and fellow warrior.

And yet, in the commemorations appended at the end of the famous monument (decree) of the Ecclesiastical Council of Ruis-Urbnisi, Giorgi II is mentioned not only among the living, but



Copper coin of David the Builder, British Museum

at the head of the living, even before Davit the Builder! Davit holds the Council 15 years after his accession to the throne, and imagine, during this time his father is alive, and Davit's chronicler nowhere mentions this fact, not even in passing. Moreover, according to another source, it seems to be confirmed that Giorgi, the former king, died in the 23rd year after abdicating the throne!

So why would Davit's chronicler not mention Giorgi's existence? This silence does not seem coincidental, so what is the news from the royal court hiding from us?

It is not that Giorgi was forced; it is not that the king did not want to go anywhere and was simply deposed or forced to resign; it is not that there was a conspiracy and a coup d'état.

He placed the crown on his son's head with his own hands—that might be the truth, albeit beautifully packaged. "With his own hands" doesn't mean by his own will and decision. If Giorgi II had been forcibly removed from power,



they would probably have taken the matter to its logical conclusion and even demanded that the ceremony of the transfer of the crown be carried out officially. They wouldn't have given him any choice, because the young king would need legitimacy, and the conspirators would leave no room for any talk or thoughts that he was not a king but a violent usurper of the throne.

Today, more and more historians are skeptical about the story of his voluntary abdication, and the version of a coup d'état is slowly gaining ground, but according to this theory, the conspirators are good, progressive and



Gelati Monastery

concerned about the country's ills. They see Davit as the path to salvation, so they take the initiative. They continue to stand by him afterwards, and you know what happens next. According to one view, this group is led by the Grand Chancellor, Giorgi, who was later given the title of Chqondidi by Davit and became Davit's first Vizier and supporter and leader of all major affairs.

It is worth reflecting on Davit's role and significance in the upheavals of 1089. Although a 16-year-old of that time differs from today's 16-year-old in terms of maturity perception, especially when it comes to a noble raised for the throne, Davit still seems too young to have spearheaded the rebellion on his own. It is only natural to assume that more seasoned and influential figures stood at the forefront, guiding events with their experience and authority.



Yet, Davit's admirers might argue—why should we dismiss the possibility that Davit revealed his true nature even in his youth and took the reins of the movement himself? Would that be surprising from a person of Davit's ability?

Finally, let us delve into the matter and ask—who truly stood in Davit's circle, and was this circle truly his own? What is there to dispute? They were feudal lords, and the very nature of power whispers that the mighty of this world sought not a sovereign but a puppet, a ruler to serve their own ambitions. Yet, such designs do not always unfold as intended. Thus, Davit grew strong, and in accordance with that same immutable law, he first turned against those who had placed the crown upon his head. If we follow this thread, we shall find among the architects of his enthronement the very figures whom he would later crush without mercy in the earliest days of his reign.

Oh my God then, should we truly count Liparit Bagvashi and his kind among Davit's initial circle? Should we be grateful for their insatiable ambition and miscalculations that hastened Davit's early coronation? The questions are endless. And new ones will certainly arise, each as unresolved as the last. Yet history does not dwell on uncertainties—it judges by results, weighs by outcomes.

Thus, whether the father crowned him willingly or unwillingly, whether Davit himself reached for the crown or was lifted to it by his entourage, whether they placed certain hopes upon him or entirely different ones—all of this fades before one undeniable truth:

The 16-year-old boy proved himself right—and what a triumph it was. A triumph beyond the imagination of those times, be they opponents or supporters, skeptics or optimists, short-sighted schemers or far-seeing strategists. Even the conspirators, who thought they were shaping the future, could not grasp the true nature of the ruler they had placed on the throne. Nor could the young king himself yet fathom the great battles that awaited him. ■

Tamuna Shengelia

“THE FAIRY TALE’S HAPPY ENDING”

A Dystopian Sketch

We hear endless analyses and interpretations from both pro-government and opposition speakers, weary of their own wisdom. One “respectable” analyst even claimed that the Georgian people’s struggle for a bright future is currently in the phase of stripping the husk off maize—an essential step before breaking the oligarch like an ear of corn and throwing him into the pot—I am not joking. While the opposition remains stuck in the husk-peeling stage, let’s examine the cold, hard facts before us and the tangible results Ivanishvili has delivered by the end of 2024.

The opposition is virtually neutralized, the parliament is one-party and completely obedient, all state institutions are controlled, the constitution is ignored, the issue of European integration, and even more so NATO membership, is closed. As politicians, political scientists and lawyers have unanimously noted, the coup d’état and the constitutional overthrow are a fait accompli.

The only legitimate and internationally recognized authority, President Zourabichvili, left the presidential palace without classifying the gravest crisis as a constitutional coup, without pardoning the regime’s political prisoners, without attempting to call new elections, without declaring a state of emergency, and without calling on the army to restore constitutional order and protect innocent citizens from

informal armed assailants. She also failed to unite the warring, ambitious and arrogant opposition leaders, who remained deadlocked over how to divide nonexistent influence.

But instead, she repeatedly contained the spring protests, especially the enraged uprising following the elections, and helped the Cartu group get through the critical period.

It could also be considered a success for Salome Zourabichvili that, despite coming to power through numerous legal violations (let’s recall that the election that brought her to the presidency was described by international observers as “free but unfair”, which is why virtually no high-level international guests attended her inauguration) and despite her many damaging statements and actions (her role in the Gareji operation alone speaks volumes!), she left office with more support than she had when she took office (the opposite is usually the case).



By the end of her term, she had managed to rehabilitate her reputation: Both opposition political forces and the critically-minded society recognized her as the only legitimate leader. Together, they may have swallowed another of Ivanishvili's tricks. The fact is that the people themselves calmly left the site of Kavelashvili's inauguration to concentrate on Zourabichvili's pompous farewell.

Now, Zourabichvili has a journey around the world ahead of her—attending inaugurations and receptions, meetings between vacations and new impressions, photo ops, tweets, enjoying honors, indulging in privileges, and basking in an honorary status without responsibility—a perfect retirement life.

The fact that Salome remains president in our



hearts reminds me of those Gamsakhurdia supporters (sorry for the harsh comparison) who waited many years for the return of their deceased and buried president.

Although she did not deliver much for the people, they are still longing for this president, because her successor is an ignorant lowlife, exactly the kind of “typical Georgian” Ivanishvili described to us at the outset of his rule.

The “elite” Ivanishvili has built is an exact match to the way he once described Georgians. The country he has shaped

(I deliberately avoid calling it a state) is precisely the kind he envisioned.

So, what other outcomes do we have?

The lari has depreciated twofold and the cost of living has doubled. Corruption has reached an unprecedented scale. Falsification, lies and arrogance. Celebrating the “victory” of the losing team. The devastation of Gelati. Expansion of the list of intangible cultural heritage, which now includes Georgian supra (feast) and Mtskheta “perashki” (pies).

“There is still much to be done, but not that much.” The oligarch will cope with minor shortcomings.

The sanctions are indeed severe, but their imposition did not come as a surprise. The precautions were taken a long time ago. The luxury of Ivanishvili and his family has not been threatened.

Isolation? Ivanishvili is not known for his love of travel. For him, isolation is a natural state. For others, it means shopping in Dubai, holidays in the Maldives or the Seychelles.

Reputation? He's never cared about it. Recognition inside the country interests him even less. When a journalist shouts “Russian!” at Kobakhidze, uses the prefixes “illegitimate”, “so-called”, “self-proclaimed” or a thousand sharp epithets from witty Facebook statuses—all this does not even deserve his attention. He never learnt Russian, but he fully internalized the principle “Собака лает—караван идет”(a dog barks, the caravan goes on), which he demonstrated again and again. But who and how it is perceived is another matter.

As for perceiving and acknowledging the reality that society itself has largely created: let's not overlook another unforgettable day—New Year's celebration on Rustaveli Avenue, Christmas Alilo (Christmas Eve

caroling), that fleeting sense of unity in ecstasy, singing, dancing—another stage for showcasing creativity and talent. Once again, we marveled at how gifted and extraordinary we Georgians are. Then, as tradition dictates, we dispersed—only to retreat into our own bubbles, once more divided by someone's hatred or envy.

Meanwhile, the de facto president continues to draft new laws. Those who stubbornly refuse to recognize the self-proclaimed president and disobey his orders will be dealt with by "Khareba" (head of special forces); sanctions imposed won't stop him. Activists and over-active people who don't let themselves be restrained by the instinct of self-preservation will end up in prison or in emigration, with the image of Salome Zourabichvili in their hearts. If necessary, one of them will end his life in suspicious circumstances. And the remaining politicians will devour each other.

Soon there will be complete peace and harmony. Noshiko (Noshiko Namoradze, businessman, biggest donor to Georgian Dream and supporter of the so-called Russian

law) will breathe a sigh of relief. Much more money will be made than ever before. The bitcoin factory is humming... Ivanishvili has fulfilled everything that he set as a goal and promised his electorate to do in 2012, 2016, 2018 and subsequent years—not all at once and not perfectly, but he did.

True, this voter changed his demands or instructions along the way (depending on whether he was standing on one foot or two), but what of it? The main and most fundamental demand—"just get rid of the UNM"—was met 100%.

Georgians and Georgia? This fairy tale's ending is happy! Georgians have been left at the mercy of fairy tales, illusions, visions, hopes, dreams; hoping for sanctions imposed from the outside, for the Ukrainians to win the war, or for the Virgin Mary... If none of this works, the regime will eventually collapse of its own accord, I'm sure of it! Until then... these are the facts, and I'll remind those who don't acknowledge them of the old joke: "Let us who believe pass!" ■



Irakli Laitadze

ILLUSION OF MODERNITY

PART 1: THE SUCCESSFUL PERSON

The value we place on external thing, subjugates us to it.
Epictetus

When I hear—a successful person—I feel a slight sense of incomprehension. And as I often come across such a description, I decided to understand what is behind this feeling.

Where it is said—a successful person—it is also implied that there are others, unsuccessful ones. Social Darwinism is unacceptable to me. So, I do not think it is right to categorize people in this way. Very often this label is burdensome for the “unsuccessful” and toxic for the “successful”.

What is success? According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, success means the achievement of a favorable or desired result, as well as the attainment of wealth, favor, and/or public fame. It is with these two definitions that the difference begins. Let's discuss them: Let's say a person is a philatelist and buys/is given a rare stamp which he is happy to add to his collection. This stamp has value only to him and a few other philatelists. According to the first definition of success, our philatelist is successful because he has acquired the desired stamp. According to the second explanation, he is unsuccessful because he hasn't been able to make money or gain fame.

What do you think, is the latter conclusion

wrong or not? In my opinion, it is wrong, it is flawed. Nevertheless, when we define success, we are guided precisely by the criterion (criteria) of money, status and/or public recognition. The media and social networks often present to us “successful” people and their melodramas about how they started a business with \$1,000 of borrowed money, or how they fell and rose like a phoenix from the ashes. At the same time, mainstream media and social networks almost always reflect the dominant views and opinions of society. Countless live and online courses claim to teach the secrets of success, and their sheer existence—along with the demand for them—further confirming society's obsession with achievement.

As social beings, we do not live in isolation like Robinson Crusoe. Resisting the prevailing cult of success is difficult, and most of us inevitably find ourselves caught in an endless, exhausting marathon for progress and wealth. By joining this race, we all but ensure that we will be running in circles like a squirrel in a wheel for the rest of our lives.

Additionally, people begin comparing themselves to others. Since social media and television only highlight the best



aspects of our professional, personal, and entertainment lives—often enhanced or embellished—those who compare themselves are left in a constant state of dissatisfaction. There will always be someone cooler, stronger, more beautiful, or wealthier. A separate issue arises when individuals actively seek attention through social networks or mass media (excluding those whose profession involves working in media, such as journalists or show hosts) and systematically strive to remain in the spotlight.

Some openly showcase and promote themselves, while others do so more subtly, under the guise of a noble cause. The relentless craving for praise and external validation of one's actions is, at its core, a manifestation of an inferiority complex. If I am genuinely happy collecting postage stamps, then in the face of such emotional fulfillment, symbols of success—such as an expensive car or a luxury watch—or even associations with such successful people (often one-sided relationships) become largely insignificant. At such times, it does not even matter whether our philatelist is known only to his neighbors or is hounded by reporters. The relentless pursuit of so-called success and constant comparison with others consumes an enormous amount of energy and fuels exhausting emotions such as envy, anger and sadness.

These emotions become chronic and have a direct impact on our mental well-being. But even for those who have achieved success, the race is not over—they are always craving for more, be it money, status or recognition. Moreover, society often takes this obsession with success to an absurd level: If someone is a successful businessman and a millionaire, then why isn't he a multimillionaire or billionaire? If he's a talented writer, why hasn't he won the Saba award? And if he has, then why not the Booker Prize? He's a brilliant physicist? Then why doesn't he have the Wolf Prize? The list goes on, endlessly and pointlessly. Pointless because the Nobel Prize in Literature was never awarded to Franz Kafka, James Joyce, Federico García Lorca, Leo Tolstoy, Jorge Luis Borges, Marcel Proust, George Orwell, or Ryūnosuke Akutagawa. Can we say that they or their books lacked something because they didn't receive the Nobel Prize? No, they lacked nothing.

Labelling someone as a failure—directly or indirectly—can psychologically break our already burdened “unsuccessful” friends, acquaintances or even strangers. Meanwhile, success measured solely by our own standards can sometimes seem grotesque. Fundamentally, we are all the same. What I have told you is just my opinion. Als ich kan, as Pieter Bruegel the Elder would say. ■



David Bukhrikidze

NO LONGER SHALL FEAR EAT THE SOUL

We are a group of actors striving to spark a non-violent and beautiful anarchist revolution... The audience responds: Yes, the world is in turmoil! Wars rage on, political and social conflicts persist and disasters unfold everywhere. But who am I? Where do we stand? And what can we do to change the world? It is precisely to awaken this understanding and empower people that we create Living Theatre...

Indeed, theatre has always been a political, social, and contemporary art form—from Greek tragedy to Molière’s itinerant troupe, Shakespeare’s Globe, and French classical drama. In the twentieth century, theatre became even more incisive, political, and relevant as the works of Bertolt Brecht, Antonin Artaud, and Samuel Beckett radically transformed its language, meaning, and message.

The humanitarian crisis after the Second World War made the existence of a bold and experimental form of theatre even more relevant. This demand was based on overcoming the classical textual framework and getting closer to the people, talking about intense and concrete stories and empathy. It is somewhat paradoxical that such a theatre was born in America after the wars and traumas that Europe had gone through.

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This is a fragment from the manifesto of Judith Malina, an actress, writer and director born in Germany to a Polish Jewish family and a student of the renowned Erwin Piscator. Together with her husband, the American artist and performer Julian Beck, she founded a radical political theatre company, The Living Theatre, in New York in the 1950s.

This was a completely new direction in theatre that moved away from traditional buildings and into different spaces: bus stops, abandoned buildings, squares and public gardens. Julian Beck and Judith Malina wrote texts that corresponded to the political and social reality and tried to revive public and social impulses through this form. Indeed, in the early 50s, The Living Theatre became one of the most distinctive and experimental theatres, and not just in the United States.

By its very nature and concept, The Living Theatre aimed to transform the organization of power within society. The destruction of the hierarchical system and the establishment of horizontal relationships with the audience by provoking their own problems was one of the main ideas of The Living Theatre. Beck and Malina's troupe was clearly opposed to the commercial nature of Broadway shows. Given the location, they staged performances with social, expressionist or political content and were constantly involved in demonstrations and protests in New York.

Georgian theatre had little experience of anything like The Living Theatre. Cemented in the Soviet system for decades, it remained confined to performing the works of Shakespeare, Molière and Kldishvili within a rigid, nomenklatura-approved framework.

So, when the musical "I Will Swim Across the Sea", directed by David Doiashvili, who originally staged it at the New Theatre in 2023, was performed in the streets outside the theatre during the January protests, the audience witnessed not just a performance, but a modernized fusion of protest manifesto and theatrical expression.

It was a performance inspired by clear political messages, impressive civic stance and social theatre. Irakli Charkviani's music and lyrics, which form the basis of Basa Janikashvili's dramaturgy and Davit Doiashvili's directorial accents, take on a completely new, lively and political resonance. It can be said that the New Theatre that took to the streets, with its boldness and specific messages, was very similar to the social and political statement of Julian Beck and Judith Malina's The Living Theatre.

The social and political events taking place in the country, in particular the arrest of the members of the theatre troupe as well as Andro Chichinadze, forced the actors to leave the building and resort to a form of protest.

Propaganda media and trolls have spread false claims that the New Theatre was renovated by Cartu Foundation. In reality, the renovation was funded by the Ministry of Culture's budget—that is, by our taxes. Therefore, any discussion of Ivanishvili's

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so-called charity is irrelevant. Moreover, the funds the Cartu Foundation spent on the rehabilitation and repair of various theaters have long been reimbursed through various means. The project to renovate the New Theatre was approved during the time of former minister Mikheil Giorgadze. However, the honor of inaugurating the renovated theatre fell to Tea Tsulukiani, who never visited it again. The invisible tension between the Ministry and the New Theatre was always felt during Tsulukiani's time, and after the adoption of the Russian Law and the ensuing protests, this tension became undeniable and fully exposed.

"We are launching the manifesto of the New Theatre! This has been our fight, but friends, other theaters and actors will surely join us. And I'm announcing that the New Theater is heading to the regions! We will go everywhere, speak to everyone, expand across different areas, and then go and try to chase Georgian theater!"

This loud and passionate declaration by the theater's artistic director, David Doiashvili, seemed to serve as a direct signal for the government's troll factory to spring into action. In a coordinated attack, they unleashed a wave of insults and abuse against the theater's actors and director—as if they weren't the same people who had been begging for a couple of tickets just a few months before.

As part of the "Protest Manifesto", performances were held in Batumi, Zugdidi, Kutaisi, Ozurgeti... The improvised musical, performed in the open air, was attended by many people, although the government's mobilization was also considerable. But the most moving part was the letter written by Mzia Amaglobeli from prison, read on stage by her relative, a young girl... The uplifting refrain of the actors, dressed in colorful cloaks and warm clothes, of "I will swim across the sea!" was delivered like

an electric current to the audience of both old and new generations. The artistic and musical energy of the performers seems to force us to look anew at The Living Theatre as an expression of impressive, sincere protest.

Energetic movements and gestures, slightly tired but unbroken voices come together in the finale with the main message: "Freedom to Andro Chichinadze! Freedom to the prisoners of the regime!" which sounds even more impressive against the backdrop of total political madness and police violence.



It is symbolic that the musical "I Will Swim Across the Sea" is a kind of summary of Irakli Charkviani's music, and today it

sounds in the streets, on the squares; it sounds bold, on the protest stage, and alive... It would be an irony of fate if the ghost of Irakli's grandfather, Kandid Charkviani, the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Soviet Georgia in the 1950s, would appear mockingly as the Commander to the oligarch of the Georgian Dream government and lead him exemplarily to where "no traveler has returned from" (don't think anything bad, it's just a quote from "Hamlet").

The musical is also interesting in that it accurately reflects the signs of Soviet Georgia in the 1980s, that is the era of "stagnation" ("Zastoi"). It is noteworthy that the performance begins with a reference to a specific time, the preparations for the parade of the 1980 Summer Olympics in Moscow, and also ends at a specific time, 1989, the period of the awakening and manifestations of the national movement.

In David Doiashvili's interpretation, the main characters of the musical do not so much carry the signs of the "stagnation" period of Soviet Georgia, but rather the protesting gaze of today's youth with their personal dramas and problems. Irakli Charkviani's music and Ketato Popiashvili's compositions seem to be the main accelerator of this "stagnation", a kind of aesthetic catalyst of the past time, which includes about twenty musical pieces and songs and, moreover, dictates the main plot lines to the director and playwright.

Strange as it may seem, The Living Theatre has been recreated after nearly 70 years depicting events in Georgia much more eloquently and correctly than works of Brecht and Shakespeare, which were deemed dissident at the Rustaveli Theatre, since converted into a museum space. Because the accumulated fear of past generations has turned into a reactionary social swamp there, and "fear eats the soul" (this is the title of a film by the great German director Rainer-Werner Fassbinder).

Fortunately, the protest manifesto of the New Theatre and the new generation no longer acknowledges fear, because a return to the past is impossible and unacceptable. The Living Theatre not only breaks the boundary between conformism and rebellion in our imagination, but also concretely points to the crisis and death of the system... Andro Chichinadze and many other artists, painters and writers are still in prison. And the New Theatre is still on the streets, trying to encourage the prisoners of the regime with live performances and to finally free them...

We shall swim across the sea, and fear shall no longer eat our souls. ■



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The magazine uses photos of
Ivane Goliadze and Levan Kherkheulidze

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NEW IVERIA
Social and Political Journal
www.akhaliiveria.ge

№8, March 2025
ISSN 2720-8729

NNLE 'Chavchavadze Center'
20 Giorgi Akhvlediani Str., 0108 Tbilisi, Georgia

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ISSN 2720-8729



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