

It's not destiny that makes the man, but the man who makes his own destiny.

Ilia Chavchavadze

NEW *iveria*

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Zaza Bibilashvili

FROM KIEVAN RUS TO KIEVAN RUSSIA

Dodona Kiziria

THE PUTSCH

Zura Medzvelia

FROM "I, PELE" TO "I AND PELE"

WAR: WHOSE FAULT IS IT?

Excerpt From
Salome Zourabichvili's
Scandalous Book

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The Chavchavadze Center
20 Giorgi Akhvlediani Street
0108, Tbilisi, Georgia

EDITORIAL TEAM:

ZAZA BIBILASHVILI
SHAMIL SHUGAEV
KOKA TOPURIA
LASHA GABELIA
NINO KALANDADZE
GIORGI KHAREBAVA
GIGA JOKHADZE
GIA JAPARIDZE

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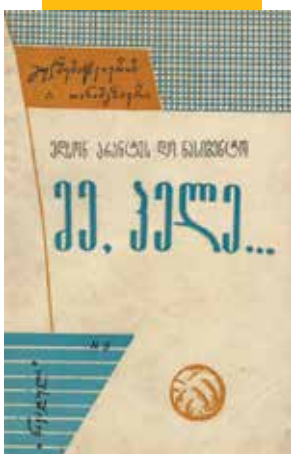
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Zaza Bibilashvili

FROM KIEVAN RUS TO KIEVAN RUSSIA

The Year of Our Lord 2022 has ended with a visible and not-so-insignificant a miracle, a miracle whose creative hero is the Ukrainian people and the group of leaders who are leading it at the moment of this historic ordeal. Who could have imagined that the barbaric war launched by Putin in the early hours of the 24th of February, conceived as a blitzkrieg of a few days, would turn out in such a way that in ten months the aggressor would have to repel Ukrainian attacks on its own territory?

The war is not yet over, but it is safe to say that its fate has been decided. Just as by the end of 1943 the defeat of Nazi Germany in the Second World War was beyond doubt, and only the contours of the future world remained to be determined, so today the intrigue is over what terms Moscow will surrender to the West, and what the new world, free of the remnants of the Evil Empire, will look like. Just as the invention of the truly unique V-2 ballistic missile at the end of the Second World War (against which the world had no means of defense at that time) was of no help to Hitler, no agonizing steps from Putin can change the final fate of this war. There is an international consensus on the Russian state – the coalition of civilized nations considers Putin’s government to be a terrorist regime. And this means only one thing: The brutal Moscovia that emerged from the Golden Horde and sought its mythological roots in the Kievan Rus is coming to an end of its existence in Kyiv.

Time will pass and some historian will publish a massive monograph entitled The Rise and Fall of the Russian Empire. It will be a dryly written, thick book about how the empire, which reached the height of its territorial expansion in the 19th century, began to decay in the same period. Then comes 1917, the revolution, the coup, the first wave of disintegration, the Civil War, 70 years of the Bolshevik reincarnation called the Soviet Union (which, from a historical perspective, is nothing, and almost half (!) of which was the era of Stalin), a new break since the late 1980s, 1991 and the collapse of the “Prison of Nations” called “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century”, the chaos of the

1990s, the bloody rise of Putin as the last battle of the empire, and finally the logical end of it all – right where it all began.

To our shame, Putin has found the Achilles' heel of Western democracy and, through a combination of propaganda, manipulation and bribery, has managed to fool the West for 20 years – making Europeans and Americans turn a blind eye to such barbarities as the explosions of apartment buildings in Moscow, Volgodonsk and Buinaksk (which this malicious, worthless little man needed to start the second Chechen campaign), the death

It is horrifying to even consider that the country that did all this was, until January 2022, a full member of the world community, and its maniacal leader was a valued participant in summits and cordial meetings with democratically elected leaders.

of the Kursk sailors, the tragedies of Nord Ost and Beslan, the cold-blooded murders of Litvinenko, Yandarbiev, Politkovskaya, Magnitsky and Nemtsov, the invasion of Georgia, the annexation of Crimea, and the shooting down of a civilian airliner full of children (MH17). It is horrifying to even consider that the country that did all this was, until January 2022, a full member of the world community, and its maniacal leader was a valued participant in summits and cordial meetings with democratically elected leaders.

Engaging so as not to alienate, cooperating so as to control, trading so as not to lose leverage – these are at best foolish and at worst criminal (and not always altruistic) illusions that have cost hundreds of thousands of innocent lives. Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that the impotent imagined himself omnipotent, the loser imagined himself macho, the knife-wielding thug became giddy from a series of successful blackmails, and Putin made a critical mistake in Ukraine. He assumed that everything was going to be fine again. Amid confusing reports from Biden and the newly elected leaders of the major European powers, he assumed – perhaps not unreasonably – that if the war were to be over quickly, the West would accept the “new realities” as it had done so often before.

But Putin did not consider the Ukrainians – that, in his view, non-existent nation that has shown not only bravery and self-sacrifice, but also intelligence, courage, humor and, above all, an indomitable will to win in the defense of the homeland against barbarians. A nation whose leaders tell us that they have no right to leave the Russian problem to their children.

Well, let's wish them victory. Let's wish them what Georgians, hardened by centuries of fighting for freedom and somewhat relaxed today, wish each other at every meeting.

VICTORY

Victory as the most solid foundation of freedom, peace, and happiness.

Glory to Ukraine!

Glory to the heroes!

God bless Georgia!

Next year in Sokhumi! ■



Irina Gurgenchashvili



Gia Japaridze

A few words on the dying concept of neutrality and the impossibility of putting it into practice

Russia's full-scale military aggression against Ukraine that began in February 2022 virtually shattered the existing order in the international system. Its narrow aim was to deprive Ukraine of its independence and completely occupy it, while the broader aim was to establish spheres of influence and restore the Russian Empire to its former borders. Against this background, the concept of neutrality, which was already dying out in international relations, proved to be an even more dysfunctional and utopian reality. Moreover, the very fragile position that the self-proclaimed neutrality of a state, not shared by others, would be a kind of international guarantee for countries – especially the weak and vulnerable ones – has been severely challenged.

Even Switzerland, whose neutrality dates back centuries and is recognized by almost every country in the world, has issued a statement about reconsidering its position. According to a spokesman for the Swiss Ministry of Defense, given the force majeure events of 2022, Switzerland could introduce clarifications to its existing neutrality and, among other changes, actively participate in joint NATO exercises and the replenishment of weapons arsenals. Neutral Finland and Sweden have decided to join NATO. These cases, individually and in combination, as well as the past experiences of other states, including Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia, convince us that, given the current developments in the modern international system and especially the revisionist aspirations of the Russian Federation, the attempt to establish real neutrality would be an unattainable and dangerous prospect.

Instead of drawing a good lesson from Georgian history and putting an end to the propaganda and illusions of and calls for neutrality, certain actors and circles associated with the Russian Federation do stop calls to “not to annoy Russia” and to join the forces of the

aggressor, further straining a society taken by fear of war and by government rhetoric. Declaring neutrality is not a solution, unilateral neutrality has failed at different stages of history to protect Georgia, Moldova, Hungary, etc. The list of failed attempts to put this concept into practice is a very long one indeed.

And in cases where neutrality “works”, the other country fulfills special conditions and favorable circumstances, while for Georgia there are neither conditions nor favorable circumstances for this. Thus, in the current situation and in the international order in which we live today, even thinking about neutrality implies, at the very least, an inability to perceive and understand the situation, the price of which is very high: To be left alone in the face of a historical enemy, without allies. Georgia does not have, and never has had, the resources and capabilities to conduct an independent foreign policy.

For example, in 1956, after the anti-Soviet uprising, Hungary declared that it wanted to become a neutral country, but none of the leaders of the Cold War camp – neither the Soviet Union nor the United States – shared this idea, so Hungary’s wish remained a wish and not just a foreign policy aspiration, and even the independence of this country, which was under the influence of the Soviet camp, became questionable.

Neutrality is the international legal status of a state when a state does not intervene in ongoing conflicts in the international system and in hostilities between other countries. This position is recognized and shared by the warring parties. Neutrality obliges a country not to enter into international security alliances and to maintain a permanent and continuous neutral attitude towards the parties of the conflict. In the eyes of the liberal order, the neutral state is an agent of world peace and “alleviates human suffering” in times of war. It should be emphasized that neutrality cannot be established if it is not recognized by the warring parties. For example, in 1956, after the anti-Soviet uprising, Hungary declared that it wanted to become a neutral country, but none of the leaders of the Cold War camp – neither the Soviet Union nor the United States – shared this idea, so Hungary’s wish remained a wish and not just a foreign policy aspiration, and even the independence of this country, which was under the influence of the Soviet camp, became questionable. Soon after this declaration, the Soviet forces drowned the Hungarian anti-communist movement in blood and re-established the Soviet regime in the country.

Neutrality is the product of a collective agreement that is broadly recognized by all countries, and at least other great powers emerge to become guarantors of that neutrality. For example, the London Conference and Agreement of 1839 recognized Belgium as a sovereign state and granted it permanent neutrality, with England as its guarantor.

Neutrality is the product of a collective agreement that is broadly recognized by all countries, and at least other great powers emerge to become guarantors of that neutrality.

In 1914, Germany violated Belgium’s neutrality and invaded its territory, and England, as guarantor of Belgium’s neutrality, declared war on Germany. We should also remember the neutrality of Austria, which is an example of forced neutrality. In 1955, under pressure from the Soviet Union, Austria was forced to declare neutrality as one of the main conditions for the Soviet occupation troops to leave Austrian territory.

Finland also has a difficult historical experience of neutrality. Neutrality, declared in 1917 under pressure from imperial Russia, ended with the Winter War between the USSR and Finland in 1939, but Finland was forced to declare neutrality again in 1948. The Soviet Union imposed such harsh conditions on Finland that, among other things, it was forced to refuse to participate in the European Recovery Programme (the Marshall Plan). Russia made no distinction between

economic and military cooperation. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Finland joined the European Union but has previously expressed no desire to join NATO. This year, however, the renewed Russian aggression in Ukraine was a wake-up call for Finland, which abandoned its neutrality and began the process of joining. This was not the case for Sweden, which had a traditional rather than imposed neutrality, but events in Ukraine and irreversible threats from Russia forced it, like Finland, to take the decision to join NATO.

The best practical expression of permanent neutrality is the Swiss Confederation. However, Switzerland is the so-called “outlier” in neutrality studies; the country’s “dizzying success” in establishing neutrality, which was conditioned by many factors, prevents the so-called newly neutral countries from recognizing the complexity of neutrality. In addition to its favorable geographical location, the success of Swiss neutrality was due to its long tradition, the right timing, the consolidated agreement of other countries, and the ability to defend itself. Switzerland’s neutrality was endorsed at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, when Europe, ravaged by Napoleon’s wars of conquest, was building a new European security architecture. At the Congress, all states agreed that Switzerland should become a kind of buffer zone on the European continent, acting as a meeting point for all sides. Before the Congress, however, Switzerland had already had a two-century tradition of neutrality. Since the 16th century, it had been an integral part of Swiss identity: the country did not take part in conflicts, did not wage wars of conquest, and had no disputed territories. As for the ability to stand up for itself, the Swiss defense system is deeply rooted in their way of life. In both the First and Second World Wars, Switzerland mobilized its defense forces at short notice (an army of almost half a million men) and was ready to defend its neutrality on its own during both wars. As a result, it avoided attack and received even greater guarantees of neutrality in the future.

The issue of Moldova’s neutrality should serve as an example to Georgia. In 1994, the state of Moldova declared permanent neutrality. The most dangerous and immediate threat to Moldova’s security and sovereignty was (and still is) the self-proclaimed Transnistrian Republic and the armed forces of the Russian Federation deployed on Moldovan territory. The Chisinau government’s attempt to use its neutral status to “force” Moscow to withdraw its occupying troops and thus accelerate the process of political settlement of the dispute with the Tiraspol administration has failed. A logical purpose of declaring a state’s permanent neutrality could be to avoid being involved in future military conflicts and not to have troops of a foreign state stationed on its territory, but in practice there has been and is no precedent for this to have a retroactive effect; therefore, the use of neutrality to withdraw troops and restore sovereignty over the entire territory on the part of Moldova was a move doomed to failure.

For historical reference, Georgia declared itself a neutral state in 1918 with the Act of Independence, although this did not prevent the Soviet Union from occupying the country in 1921 and annexing it in 1922. Here we should remember the May 7, 1920 agreement with Soviet Russia. According to Article 5 of this agreement, Georgia declared its de facto non-aligned status and promised Russia not to station troops near its territory. However, the terms stipulated in the agreement did not help stop Russia’s aggressive ambitions, and Georgia’s independence was destroyed.

When discussing the Constitution of the First Republic of Georgia, and in particular

The Chisinau government’s attempt to use its neutral status to “force” Moscow to withdraw its occupying troops and thus accelerate the process of political settlement of the dispute with the Tiraspol administration has failed.

when debating the article on neutrality, the leaders of the First Republic stressed that the declaration of neutrality in itself meant nothing if they could not defend this policy themselves and at the same time obtain international recognition. “In order to establish neutrality, it is not sufficient in international law for a State wishing to be neutral to declare, ‘I am neutral’... A unilaterally declared permanent neutrality means little if it is not also

“In order to establish neutrality, it is not sufficient in international law for a State wishing to be neutral to declare, ‘I am neutral’... A unilaterally declared permanent neutrality means little if it is not also recognized by other states... A neutral state, and in particular the Republic of Georgia, shall and must have some form of military force for its defense...”

recognized by other states... A neutral state, and in particular the Republic of Georgia, shall and must have some form of military force for its defense... A neutral state has the right to defend its neutrality by military force if any aggressor dares to harm it...” – reads the amendment to the first chapter of the Georgian Constitution. Although the neutrality clause in the Constitution of the First Republic was absolutely correct, it could not be put into practice. The founders knew a lot in theory, but they had no way of seeing in practice how vulnerable and incompatible neutrality was with Russian ambitions.

In conclusion, the citizens of Georgia should ask themselves a simple question – if Georgia’s neutrality did not prevent the Russian Federation from annexing the country once, why would it prevent it today? Given this, and regardless of Russia’s defeat in Ukraine, can Georgia afford the luxury of slowing down its movement towards the European Union and NATO? ■

On the 30th Anniversary of the Putsch

December 22, 2022, marks the 30th anniversary of the outbreak of the armed coup. The coup, which overthrew the legitimately elected government of Zviad Gamsakhurdia and set the country back several decades in just two weeks. Georgia, one of the leading countries of the post-Soviet space before 1991, the first in line for Western integration after the Baltic republics, almost immediately became the most backward, most unpromising, semi-wild territorial entity of the same space.

No one could have imagined that Zviad Gamsakhurdia's prediction a few weeks earlier, in which he painted an apocalyptic picture of what awaited the country if his opponents came to power ("violation of the state's integrity", "total anarchy, especially in Tbilisi", a city "divided into districts", where the government would be in the hands of "armed gangs", "unprecedented looting and plundering of the population", total disruption of electricity, gas, communications, food supplies, medical services and law enforcement) would come true so soon – and with such chilling precision.

The Putsch made this terrible vision a reality. A reality that lasted, in varying doses, until November 23, 2003, and which would never have triumphed without our active participation, our stupidity, or our hypocrisy.

At one of the civic commemoration events of the Chavchavadze Center, one of the then opposition members recalled with regret, "I was under the influence of the Tbilisi 'elite' and it was only on the morning of December 22, 1991, amid the roar of guns from Kashveti towards the Supreme Council, that I realized I had been deceived and my youthful idealism had been misused."

Today, no one is talking about investigating certain facts (such as who fired on peaceful rallies of supporters of the ousted government in the months that followed, killing dozens of innocent demonstrators). And there is no talk of political responsibility (how can that be – the Putschists are scattered on different sides of the political spectrum, some naturally, others cunningly by the "native" Russian security service).

It's just for the sake of knowing. Knowing to remember. Remembering so that we don't repeat the same things, so that we don't go round in circles. So that the enemy will not be able to manipulate us in the future and use our naive idealism to destroy our own country (as he did at least once after the fateful year of 1991, this time without weapons).

On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of one of the most tragic dates in Georgian history, here is an excerpt from Dodona Kiziria's book, *The Putsch* (Artanuji Press, 2018).

Zaza Bibilashvili





Dodona Kiziria

THE PUTSCH

Day One

I arrived in Tbilisi late on the evening of December 21, 1991. That was the same night that the coup, later known as “the Putsch” in Georgia, began. At the time, I was working with the Voice of America and was aware of what was happening in Tbilisi. When the management of that organization found out that I was on my way here, they gave me the task of gathering material on current events and, if possible, to do a couple of interviews.

The next morning I went to Rustaveli Avenue. What I saw was a surreal scene: A tank in front of the Government House, armed men, not wearing military uniforms, standing in a group in front of Kashveti Church, walking back and forth near the tank. From time to time, the sound of gunfire could be heard, mainly from the Kashveti Church building, where, I later learned, Tengiz Kitovani’s guards had set up an ambush. In the church yard there were two cannons pointed in the direction of the Government House. Nevertheless, there were quite a few people standing on the pavements nearby. Most of them, like me, were stunned by this incredible sight – they were shooting in broad daylight, in the middle of the city, on Rustaveli Avenue! I asked one of the people standing there who was in charge of this operation, and they said that the headquarters seemed to be in the Tbilisi Hotel.

I was able to enter the hotel unhindered, no one stopped me, no one asked me for my documents. There were people at the entrance, but I didn’t see anyone who looked authorized, so I went up to the second floor. There, in a wide corridor, were several tables around which young men and women were sitting; some were talking, some were laughing, and at one table they were playing cards. Almost everyone was smoking, and the air was rather heavy. Their carefree expression seemed to me completely paradoxical in the context of what was going on outside. For some reason, I did not think they could give me the information I needed, and I went down the corridor. The door to one of the rooms was open, in the depths of it sat two very young, 18-19-year-old boys. The third one, who seemed to be very drunk and could not stand firmly on his feet, shouted from the corridor outside the open door: “Are you Svans?! You are fools, not Svans! A real Svan would never stand by that bastard. F...ck you!” The boys didn’t make a sound.

I passed without a word. At the end of the corridor, the door to the corner room was slightly ajar. I knocked and, when no one answered, opened the door and entered. There was no one in the room, though judging by the unmade bed, the cigarette butts and the used glasses on the table, someone or several people must have spent the night there. From the open window you could see the Government House, the building of School No. 1, and all the theater of the absurd that was going on there. You probably remember that the wall of the Tbilisi Hotel overlooking the Alexandrovsky Garden, now the 9th of April Garden, is slanted, and the only window in that particular room was open.

I stood there for a while, watching what was going on outside. I thought I was dreaming! From time to time I heard the crackling of machine guns, shouting and swearing. Two or three times I heard the sound of a grenade exploding. By the way, bullets don't buzz, they whistle – whew, whew – they make that sound. One or two came very close to the window, almost under my nose. I realized it later, when I came home late at night, then I was so dizzy I thought I was in a dream. Suddenly I heard someone's voice: "Hey, what are you doing there, who are you?!" I turned around and saw a young guy coming into the room. I immediately began to explain – I'm from the Voice of America, here are my credentials. I want to see who is in charge of this case and record him.

At the word America, his eyes widened and his face expressed joy or admiration: "From America? Really? I'm going to call our boss now," with these words he left the room and returned five to ten minutes later with Mamuka Areshidze, now known as a political expert. We introduced ourselves to each other. When I asked about his profession, he said he was from television, working in a TV studio. He immediately agreed to give an interview and I recorded it. When we said goodbye, he told me to stay away from the window because it was dangerous, and then he left the room. The young man who brought him stayed in the room and turned to me, "I want to ask you something? I want to start a good business here in Tbilisi. If I get financing from America, I will give you a share in it. It will be a very good business. Now we will win, and I can start right away." – I'm very sorry, I don't know anyone in this field and I can't help you, I said and walked out into the corridor.

The drunken jailer was no longer there. The door to the room where his two prisoners were sitting was closed. The young men were still at the table, doing the same thing – laughing, smoking and playing cards. Suddenly Tengiz Sigua, Eldar Shengelaia and several other unknown men came out of a room. At some point I decided to follow them and ask for an interview, but they hurried down the stairs without looking back and disappeared somewhere. I followed them out of the hotel and into the street.

Outside, the surreal scene continued. The crowd thinned out. Two or three trees were smoking in front of the Government House. Overwhelmed by what I had seen and heard, I walked down the street towards Rustaveli metro station. There was no transport, but I phoned an acquaintance there and asked him to take me home if he could.

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“All the elite are here.”

On December 23-24, the meeting places of supporters and opponents of President Gamsakhurdia became clearly identified. The former were camped on the stairs and in tents in front of the Government House until December 21. As soon as the military confrontation between the authorities and the opposition began, they dispersed and started gathering in different streets and squares in Tbilisi in order to organize rallies in support of the president.

The main headquarters of the opposition and supporters of Kitovani-Ioseliani was then the Tbilisi Hotel and Television building on Lenin Street, now Kostava Street. Another large group of opposition supporters gathered in Republic Square (now Rose Revolution Square) in front of the ugly arches later demolished, which were popularly nicknamed Andropov's ears. They really did look like long hanging ears, ready for eavesdropping.

I mostly walked from the TV studio building to the city center, to Rustaveli Avenue and its environs, and wherever I could I tried to record interviews or just listen to what people were saying to get a sense of the general mood. A good friend of mine gave me a jeep called Kolhoznik and I drove it back and forth.

One evening, it was about six or seven o'clock, I parked my car in front of Building 1 of the GPI (the former Georgian Polytechnic Institute, now the Technical University) and walked down to the television building. On the way I passed two men, one of them short, stocky and wearing a military uniform. They were both smoking cigarettes and laughing heartily at something. I had already reached Khiliani Street when I heard quick footsteps behind me. I looked around to see if anyone was following me, and saw this stocky man coming towards me, breathing heavily as if he had run for miles. I wasn't frightened because there was a television building nearby and I could see people gathered on the steps in front of the building. Someone was standing at the microphone, urging the crowd to fight and free themselves from tyranny. There were a number of young people sitting along the iron fence, laughing. I had nothing but a portable tape recorder and my car keys. What could I lose, I thought.

A few seconds later it became clear that this man was not interested in me at all. He ran past me, bypassed the people gathered in front of the TV building, ran up to the speaker, said something in his ear and grabbed the microphone: “People, those murderers killed our people in Shavnabada! The Zviadists killed 60 men! We must take revenge!” There was an outraged shout: “We must overthrow him! Dictator! Bloodthirsty!” If I hadn't seen that man laughing a few minutes ago, I might have thought something very bad had happened. He was screaming in such a doomed voice and pounding his fist on his chest that he deserved an Oscar for his performance.

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an with black hair that fell below her shoulders. She too spoke out against the president and his “Communist” methods, but in a more elegant way, albeit with greater emotional impact.

When she had finished speaking, the woman came down the stairs, walked down the street and was about to pass me when she turned to me and smiled: “Are you Dodona, Dodona Kiziria?” – Yes, I replied in surprise. “I have read your poems, they were printed in The Literary Georgia, and I recognized you from your photo. I’m a poet too,” she said, holding out her hand. “I’m glad you’re standing



next to us,” she said goodbye and walked off towards the zoo. A few years later, I saw this lady again at the Institute of Literature, when I gave a lecture on Giorgi Saakadze at the invitation of Rostom Chkheidze. She made some kind of affected remark that she did not see love and pride for our history in my words. After my reply, she got up and defiantly left the room. I did not remember her name then and I do not remember it now.

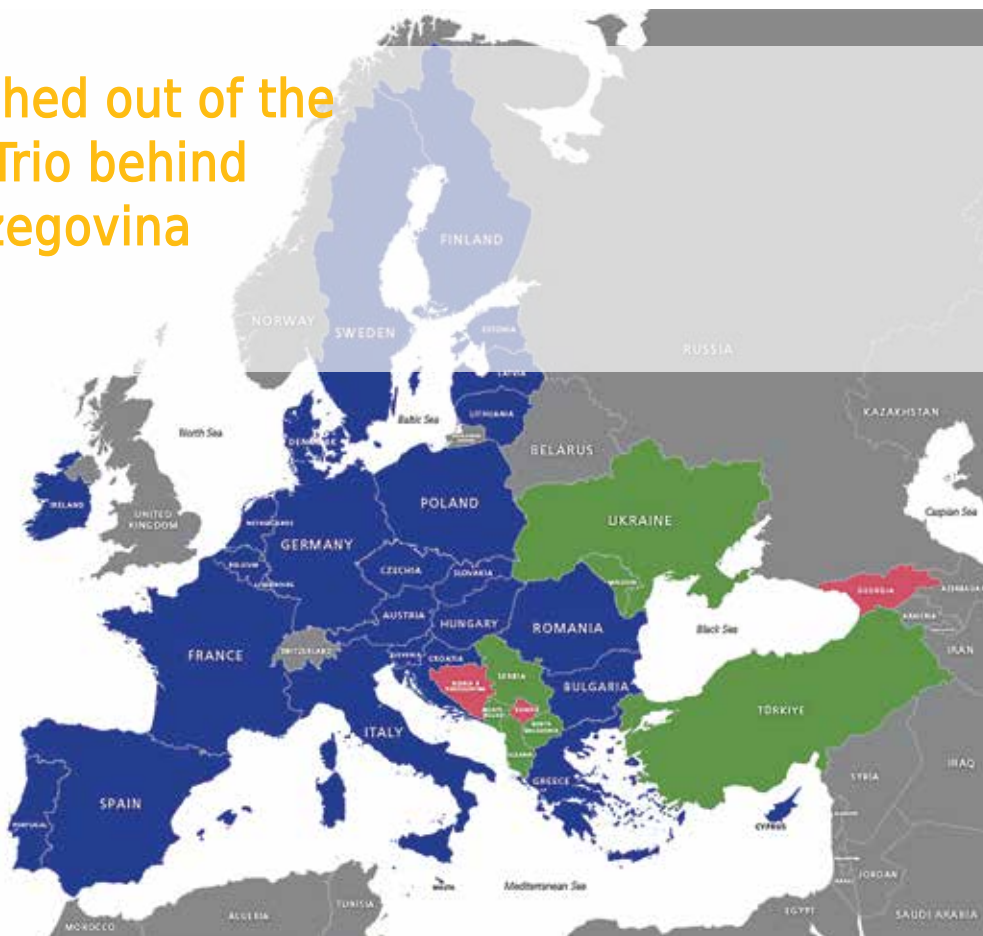
That evening, I stood outside the television building until late in the evening, listening to the speakers and participants talking to each other. I overheard the following dialogue: a young woman aged 20-22 said to a woman of the same age: “Let’s go to Rustaveli and see what’s going on there.” The other replied: “What should we do there, all the elite are here.”

In fact, every day you could see the faces of famous and honored directors, actors and writers, but that evening I did not notice anyone except my dark-haired colleague, the poet. But there were plenty of supporters of the “elite”. ■



Khatia Davlianidze

Georgia pushed out of the Associated Trio behind Bosnia-Herzegovina



After the war launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine in February 2022, the geopolitical situation in the world changed radically, affecting the EU's enlargement policy and opening a window of opportunity for states wishing to join.

As soon as this historic opportunity arose, Ukraine applied for membership of the European Union in February 2022, followed by Georgia and Moldova in March. According to the Council of Europe, unlike the two members of the Associated Trio, Ukraine and Moldova, Georgia was not granted candidate status for EU membership. While recognizing Georgia's European Perspective, the Council listed 12 points to be met before candidate status could be granted.

The granting of candidate status to a state is a key stage, as only after it is granted can accession negotiations begin. It implies that the prospect of membership will be put on the agenda only if the country fulfills the relevant conditions.

Thanks to many years of successful Georgian diplomacy, Georgia, which is located in the South Caucasus and has no land border with the European Union, has managed to find itself alongside Ukraine and Moldova. The current Georgian government has squan-

dered this achievement and taken a step backwards on the road to European integration.

Granting Georgia candidate status would be an important incentive for the government to carry out fundamental reforms. The status is also a prerequisite for improving political stability and security. In addition to the possibility of development and modernization, it also implies increased financial support from the European Union.

Candidate status would have made Georgia attractive for investment, which would have contributed greatly to the gradual elimination of economic problems and the growth of citizens' welfare. This would be a kind of opportunity to significantly increase the political and economic contrast between the territories controlled by the Georgian authorities on the one hand and the Russian-occupied territories that Tbilisi cannot control temporarily on the other, making the country more attractive to the Abkhaz and Ossetians.

Following the democratic setback in Georgia, Brussels decoupled the former Soviet republics in the European integration process, and Georgia found itself alongside Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In 2003, at the Thessaloniki European Council, Bosnia and Herzegovina was named as a potential candidate for European Union membership, along with other Western Balkan countries. In February 2016, Bosnia and Herzegovina applied for membership in the European Union. In 2019, the European Commission published its opinion on the application and the country was given 14 key priorities before being granted candidate status.

The Dayton Peace Agreement established the Republic of Srpska and the Bosniak-Croat Federation (comprising 10 cantons) on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Political power in the country is shared between Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats. Ethno-nationalist conflicts between the leaders of the three ethnic groups and political parties prevent state institutions from functioning properly, making Bosnia dysfunctional.

Bosniak, Serb, and Croat leaders have effectively seized power, and their common goal is to consolidate mono-ethnic control over state institutions, ultimately undermining the capacity for checks and balances. Along with dysfunctional political institutions, the threat of state collapse is evident. The leader of the Republic of Srpska, Milorad Dodik, supports the withdrawal of the Republic of Srpska from Bosnia and Herzegovina and reunification with Serbia. Dodik openly opposes the country's integration into NATO and wants to host a Russian military base in the Republic of Srpska. He planned to hold a referendum on secession from Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2018, but due to harsh criticism and pressure from the West, the referendum did not take place.

In September 2021, the Parliament of the Republic of Srpska voted for beginning the work on severing ties with the armed forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Supreme Court, and the tax administration. According to Dodik, his ambitions were thwarted by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but only temporarily. The threat of Bosnia and Herzegovina's disintegration is real, and it could go from a dysfunctional state to a failed one at any moment.

In October 2022, the European Commission recommended that Bosnia and Herzegovina be granted candidate status for the European Union.

Georgia's ruling party bears responsibility for the fact that the state, which for many years was a leader among the members of the Associated Trio and whose progress was evident to all, found itself first next to Bosnia and Herzegovina and then fell far behind even that country, which is one of the clearest examples of a dysfunctional state.

Russia's full-scale war in Ukraine opened a window of opportunity for countries wishing to join the European Union, which was used by Moldova and Ukraine, while the Georgian authorities missed the historic opportunity.

While new opportunities for legal and institutional rapprochement with the EU are



gradually opening up for the two members of the Associated Trio, Georgia needs to regain the EU's confidence and fulfil its 12 recommendations.

There have been only two cases in the history of the European Union where a wave of enlargement has affected only one state – Greece in 1981 and Croatia in 2013. Georgia does not have one or more supporters in the European Union like those two states, so it will not be able to open the EU's doors on its own.

Albania is a prime example of the EU not considering the accession of a single state. Its European prospects were linked to those of its neighbor, North Macedonia. With Bulgaria blocking accession negotiations between the EU and Skopje, the possibility of opening the EU's doors to Albania on its own is not being considered, delaying its accession process.

Achieving candidate status would be an opportunity for Georgia to increase pressure on the ruling government, both from its people and from the European Union, which would ensure fundamental reforms. Georgia has been significantly set back on the path to European integration by being removed from the Associated Trio and paired with a problematic state where the political leaders themselves doubt the legitimacy of a state that could fail at any moment, where the parallel strengthening of sub-state institutions makes the system dysfunctional, and where there is no corresponding political will to develop and modernize the country. Following the European Commission's recommendation to grant candidate status to Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is clear that, in the eyes of the European Union, Bosnia and Herzegovina deserves to be in the European Union more than Georgia.

Failure to obtain candidate status, falling out of the Associated Trio and being placed behind Bosnia and Herzegovina, for which the Georgian government is responsible, means less political stability, less security, less protection, less development, less reform, less progress, less financial support, less investment, less prosperity... ■



Soso Berikashvili



“People are the source of power in Georgia,” says Article 3 of the Constitution of Georgia, which is dedicated to democracy. According to the Constitution, we have a democratic republic in which people elected by the people decide the fate of the people and, within the limits of their competence, dispose of their property.

All this seems to be very easy to grasp and understand, but in practice it is not so easy – people find it difficult to understand this most important postulate of the Constitution of Georgia. There are many reasons for this. Today I would like to talk about one of them and not the least important one: It is difficult for people to realize that the budget money, which the people in power dispose of according to their will, is in fact their money!

The Georgian state budget is mainly made up of taxes (there is also Western aid and debt, but that’s for another time). And we, the people who live in this country, pay taxes. Every one of us pays, always and unconditionally, whether we are aware of it or not.

If you conduct a survey and ask people how much they earn, in 99 out of 100 cases they will give you the amount they receive directly and not their real salary, which is 25% more than this (net) amount (for simplicity’s sake I have deliberately left out the 2% that goes to the pension fund).

Suppose a person is employed as a nurse and receives a monthly salary of 400 GEL (unfortunately, the number of such low-income people in our country is very high). During a year, such a person pays 1200 (one thousand two hundred!) GEL to the budget as income tax only. If the state gives this person 200 GEL before the elections, they will be happy, because this amount is half of their monthly salary. However, this person has paid six times as much to the budget, and they are simply unaware of it.

The solution here is simple, and many developed countries have taken this path – if you pay the full amount first and then make people pay income tax, this will greatly increase their perception of themselves as taxpayers. This is a relatively radical solution, and in this case, it will not be easy to administer, but it will benefit the democratic development of the country so much that it is worth a try!

Relatively “lighter” forms also exist. For example, on the expenditure side of the bank application, there may be a column called “Amounts transferred to budget”. Believe me, even if there is a mortgage loan, this amount will be at the top of the expenses. Or maybe when we get a text message from the bank about a salary transfer, there should also be information about the corresponding transfer to the budget. For example: “In September 2022, your salary was 1250 GEL, of which 1000 GEL was credited to you and 250 GEL to the state budget.”

The state can easily implement all this, but the state does not see it in its interest, because if citizens realize that the budget money is their money, they will demand much stricter accountability for any spending.

In the absence of political will on the part of the state, individual employers can start by informing their employees about the income tax they have paid.

People who are employed in the “informal” sector or who receive wages “in hand” (as you know, there are many such people in this country) often think that they do not pay taxes because their employer does not withhold income tax. Obviously, they are wrong. Income tax is neither the only nor the most important tax in Georgia. Value added tax (VAT) is much more important, accounting for more than half of the tax revenues in the budget. VAT is an indirect tax, which means that someone else pays the tax in the budget, but the tax burden falls on the end consumer, that is, ordinary people. For example, if you buy a chair for 118 GEL, the seller budgets 18 GEL as VAT, but in reality, you have paid that 18 GEL. If there was no VAT, you would have bought the same chair for 100 GEL. Although not everything is subject to VAT, about 80% of the products we consume contain it.

We also have other indirect taxes. In particular, excise duties and import taxes, which are also included in the cost of many of the goods we buy and which we pay indirectly. In this case, it would be good if the taxes were separated out in the cost of the goods and we knew how much we were actually paying. Only restaurants in Georgia use this practice, but they are driven by marketing goals rather than a desire to raise awareness.

If you pay the full amount first and then make people pay income tax, this will greatly increase their perception of themselves as taxpayers.

if your average income is GEL 1000 per month, you pay about GEL 500 in taxes to the state. That's not so little is it?

It would be helpful in raising awareness if, for example, we received a text message from a petrol station telling us that when we fill up our car, the cost of the petrol includes VAT, excise duty, and import duty.

The tax burden varies according to the category of goods we consume (for example, if we consume excisable goods such as tobacco and alcohol, our tax burden increases), and it can be calculated more or less accurately using the Geostat calculator (<http://mytaxes.geostat.ge/mytaxes>). According to my estimate, if your average income is GEL 1000 per month, you pay about GEL 500 in taxes to the state. That's not so little is it?

I believe that the implementation of any of the mechanisms I have suggested will help us understand that the rulers of the state are accountable only to the people, that is, to us, and that in the end it is we who should decide what our money is spent on, whether it is road construction, vintage subsidies, roofing of Gelati monastery, or subsidies for sub-standard apples. I am not saying that we should not help the farmer whose vineyard has been damaged by hail, we just need to know that in the case of subsidies we are the ones helping him and not the Prime Minister or the ruling party. ■





Gigi Gigineishvili

TKVARCHELI TRAGEDY



After the outbreak of hostilities in Abkhazia, Georgia in August 1992, an informal agreement was reached between the Georgian-Abkhazian population of Tkvarcheli and units of the Georgian Guard, as a result of which Georgian military units did not enter Tkvarcheli. According to the agreement, the town was supposed to take a neutral position in the conflict, but a few days after the agreement was signed, all entrances to Tkvarcheli were destroyed and, with the active help of the Russian military, a well-organized offensive military infrastructure was set up by the Abkhaz population of the town. It later turned out that the collection of weapons and ammunition for this purpose had begun as early as 1991. Russian officers and Abkhaz separatists set up the so-called Eastern Front in the Tkvarcheli region. This was led, among others, by members of the Abkhaz organization Aidgilara: Vladimir Antsupov (a Russian officer, historian, and karate teacher living in Abkhazia) and the separatist Aslan Zantaria. They were the main perpetrators

of the attack carried out against Givi Lominadze, the ethnic-Georgian Interior Minister of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia. They had formed a subversive group, Katran, that turned out to be both powerful and aggressive. At first, they dealt with the problems of maintaining the “defensive” (actually offensive) strip and infrastructure of the Eastern Front, and soon began systematic, ruthless attacks on villages in the nearby Ochamchire district. They deliberately burned down the houses of Georgians and ruthlessly killed the peaceful, unarmed population on ethnic grounds.



Aslan Zantaria



Vladimer Antsupov

Such a situation in the rear of the hostilities created major problems at the front. However, due to the chaotic, rash and often inexplicable actions of the military and political leadership on the Georgian side, it was not possible to repel the attacks from the direction of Tkvarcheli, Georgia. It should be noted that the Georgian army did not carry out air and artillery strikes because of the large number of civilians in the town. In the end, the Georgian command decided to place the Tkvarcheli area under a military blockade and, to ensure the needs of the civilian population, a humanitarian corridor was created in the direction of Gudauti from October 1992. According to the agreement, helicopters on their way to and from Tkvarcheli had to pass through the control of the Russian-Georgian Joint Commission at the Sokhumi airfield before being allowed to continue their journey. At this point, the identity of the people on board, the nature of the cargo and the general suitability of the flight for humanitarian purposes had to be verified. With this agreed order and route, over a thousand people left Tkvarcheli without any problems. It was clear, however, that such a peaceful arrangement was not in the interests of the Kremlin and the Abkhaz separatists. There were frequent flights from Gudauta to Tkvarcheli and back, bypassing the Georgian checkpoint. Russian Defense Ministry helicopters systematically delivered weapons and ammunition to Tkvarcheli, transported personnel, transferred field commanders and military trainers, and on the way back transported wounded fighters. Thus, the so-called humanitarian

After the barbaric ethnic cleansing in Gagra in October 1992, when Russian and Abkhazian mercenaries systematically killed the Georgian population of the Gagra region with unprecedented cruelty, the Georgian side realized that it was facing a merciless enemy operating without rules. Along with the pain came a legitimate thirst for revenge. Nevertheless, after the peace agreement of September 3, 1992, signed three weeks after the start of hostilities, the Georgian side effectively ceased offensive operations and concentrated on defending the areas populated by Georgians. The Russian-led separatists used the peace agreement to regroup, get better equipped, and plan offensive operations. While the Georgian side, guided by the peace agreement, ceased offensive operations, attacks from the Abkhaz side did not stop.



Felix Bekaldiev

route was actively used to carry out combat missions. Apparently, the Georgian special services also had information about this.

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On December 14, 1992, at 13:00, the Russian-Abkhazian side decided to conduct an-



„strela 2“



Mi 8 T

other “humanitarian” flight from Gudauta to Tkvarcheli. According to the official statement, two Mi-8T helicopters of the Russian Air Force with serial numbers “02” and “03”, operated by pilots from the Russian city of Samara under the command of Aleksey Podprugin, were to transport 6 tons of flour to Tkvarcheli. In violation of the existing agreement, the Russian pilots did not pass the inspection at the Georgian checkpoint and, accompanied by two Russian Su-25s, flew directly from Gudauta to Tkvarcheli. In fact, this flight brought to Tkvarcheli the latest weapons and communications equipment, as well as Russian military personnel to coordinate the planned offensive actions.

The helicopters were supposed to return to their base in Gudauta after approximately two hours. Although they landed in Tkvarcheli in violation of the agreement, they had both the opportunity and the obligation to at least agree on the return route with the Georgian side and to submit to inspection. However, since the return route was to be

used for non-humanitarian purposes, the Russian-Abkhazian side deliberately chose to violate the agreed order and route, hoping that Russian combat aviation would again ensure their safety and escort the helicopters. The Russian military pilots were well aware that on their way back they were to pick up Russian-Abkhazian fighters, including Lieutenant-Colonel Felix Bekaldiev from the Russian Federation (Chief of Staff of the Confederation of Mountain Peoples, who had arrived in Tkvarcheli a few days earlier on a specific combat mission), his accomplice Ruslan Shaov, and a captured Ukrainian spy of the Georgian Armed Forces, who was to be transferred to Gudauta at the request of the military command; as well as the above-mentioned Russian paratrooper Vladimir Antsupov and a close associate of Ardzinba, the fighter Aslan Zantaria. In total, there were up to twelve armed militants in the helicopter.

Apart from them, the besieged Tkvarcheli was full of people trying to leave the town. Both helicopters appeared to be full of women and children. Most of the passengers were from mixed Georgian-Abkhazian families. Along with armed militants, 35 children and eight pregnant women were allowed on board the helicopter. This happened in the presence of around 300 people. It is regrettable that there was not a single person in Tkvarcheli at that moment who would have stood up to the militants, forced them to leave the helicopter and not allowed them to use children and women as human shields. In that case, the helicopter would have been able to fly unhindered along the agreed route through Sokhumi, which was also safe and through which more than a thousand civilians from Tkvarcheli were transferred to Gudauta.

These methods of transportation were in most cases agreed with the separatist leaders, although it is not known whether this particular route was agreed with them or not. It should also be emphasized that Colonel A. Podprugin, together with his pilots, carried out a number of combat flights before and after the “humanitarian” flight of December 14, with aircraft #02 and aircraft #03 in this very area. After the war, he stayed in Abkhazia and settled in the house of one of the displaced Georgians.

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At 17:10 on December 14, the two military helicopters took off at an altitude of 1,900 meters and headed for Gudauta, passing through an area of heavy fighting and violating the agreed route for humanitarian flights. According to the pilot, this was the so-called safe altitude, because the weapons with the longest vertical range available to the opposing sides in Abkhazia, Georgia, operated at a maximum of 1500 meters, but no account was taken of the fact that if a sniper climbed a mountain of 500-600 meters, he could reach an altitude of 1900 meters. According to Alexei Podprugin, the pilot of Flight #02, it was only after take-off, already in the Lata area, that he made contact with the Russian Su-25 crew, with whom he had an agreement to provide escort for the helicopters on their return.

According to the conclusion of the Investigative Commission of the Russian Air Force (the veracity of which was doubtful from the start), at 17:39 the village of Lata was shelled with Strela-2 portable anti-tank missiles from the highest point of one of the surrounding mountains.

A shell hit aircraft #03, which crashed. All the passengers were killed: children, women, old people, fighters, Russian pilots – all of them. According to different sources, between 70 and 87 people were killed.

From the first days of the tragedy, the Georgian side seemed confused. On the one hand, it was proved that the flight was not a humanitarian one from a legal point of view. But the deaths of Anzupov, Zantaria, Bekaldiyev and other fighters were completely overshadowed by the unfolding tragedy.

Since both the helicopter and its crew belonged to the Russian Armed Forces, a Russian Airborne Rescue team arrived at the crash site the next day, at the request of the Russian Ministry of Defense, inspected the site and later transported the bodies of the dead to Gudauta, already in helicopters with Red Cross markings. Later, in an attempt to evade responsibility, the Russian pilots confirmed that they had not been able to control the boarding of passengers on board helicopter #03 (as a result, the total number of passengers on board the helicopter was three times the permitted number) and that there were in fact fighters who had been boarded by decision of the Abkhazian military leadership. They also expressed dismay at the Su-25 pilots who failed to escort the flight in time and left the helicopters unattended in the most dangerous section.

Thirty years have passed since that tragic day. The Georgian side has remained silent on the issue, while the vast majority of ordinary citizens, with few exceptions, know nothing about the Lata tragedy. Under the conditions of the frozen conflict and Russian occupation, the Lata tragedy has remained essentially uninvestigated. The Russians wrote the story for the separatists, but in reality, it is still unknown who fired at the helicopter and why, whether the shooter was a representative of the Georgian side or not (perhaps it was a Russian provocation to quell the irreconcilable feelings?), or who decided to use the humanitarian flight for military purposes, to violate the agreement and change the route of the flight.

Given that the alleged shooting came from Georgian-controlled territory, the Georgian authorities at the time did not see the need to conduct a transparent investigation and implicitly took responsibility for the incident. On the other hand, the separatist government also did nothing (apart from the usual statements by Ardzinba). The reason was simple. During the days of mourning, the separatist leaders “lost control” – it was revealed that civilians were used as human shields, that the flight was not humanitarian, and that it was carried out in violation of the agreement. An objective investigation would have identified a number of criminals in their ranks.

Under these circumstances, the Russian propaganda machine and the Abkhaz separatist groups acting in unison with it took advantage of Georgia’s silence to further incite hatred and hostility, spreading completely false information in Abkhaz society that the flight carrying women and children on the helicopter with special Red Cross markings was carried out by prior agreement with the Georgians and was of a purely humanitarian nature, while “blood-thirsty Georgians” deliberately shot it down and subsequently did not allow rescuers to reach the crash site.

In fact, it has been confirmed that there were no Red Cross markings on the military helicopter, that all published lists of casualties included military personnel, that the Georgian side allowed rescuers to reach the crash site, that the safe corridor was through Sokhumi and not through Lata, and that many Abkhazians from Tkvarcheli took this route safely, in accordance with the agreement, and that no one tried to attack them.

There is another alleged version, which has a right to exist, according to



The helicopter route: in green the route agreed by the parties, in red - the route actually taken

which, a few minutes before the helicopters took off from Tkvarcheli, the Georgian militia received information from Tkvarcheli that wanted criminals Antsupov and Zantaria, together with other militants, would be aboard a Russian military helicopter (with reference to a specific boarding number) to fly to Gudauta. It should be noted that Antsupov and especially Zantaria also had a lot of enemies among the separatists. It is possible that it was decided in advance to get rid of them, and the Georgian side was not informed that there were women and children on board the helicopter along with the fighters. This version is supported by the fact that the only shot fired was aimed precisely at the helicopter carrying the militants (helicopter #02 landed safely in Gudauta). However, this version is based on unconfirmed information, so it is impossible to discuss it in detail at this stage.

To this day, propaganda activities related to the Lata tragedy, the main purpose of which is to incite and maintain hatred towards Georgians, are financed in Abkhazia from the Russian federal budget. Lies, hate propaganda, and inexplicable silence from the Georgian side have had their effect. Today, the Lata tragedy remains the main war trauma in Abkhazian society. Reconciliation with the Abkhazians cannot be achieved without an honest discussion of it (just as

it is hard to imagine reconciliation with the Georgians without a reappraisal of the Gagra and Sukhumi ethnic cleansings and the punishment of those responsible). In these circumstances, it is surprising that, thirty years after the end of the hot phase of the war, it is still not possible to restore relations with the Abkhazians.

It is to be hoped that the time will soon come when the Georgian state, under conditions of restored territorial integrity and the return of IDPs to their homes, will investigate the terrible tragedy of Lata – along with other war crimes



– determine its causes, and identify those responsible, regardless of their nationality. Let's hope that the commemoration of the innocent women and children killed near Lata on December 14, 1992 will not be limited to Sokhumi. Both Georgian and Abkhazian society need this day and its understanding to heal the wounds of war and to continue living together. In the meantime, may the souls of the innocent victims who died in Lata rest in peace! ■



Buba Kudava

Stories of Forgotten Symbols

Where have the palaces of the Georgian kings gone?

You have probably heard concerns that the palaces of the Georgian kings have not been preserved. Or they have but very few of them. You may hear astonishment, scolding and even anger – why didn't they build something we could be proud of, how can you explain to a European that Telavi Palace, for example, was actually a royal residence.

The contrast is striking not only with European palaces, but also with Georgian churches and monasteries – the scale, the space, the decoration, the painting, the location... This has given rise to a number of myths in the history-loving community: the royal palaces almost did not survive; the Georgian kings for some reason did not build proper palaces and were mainly interested in churches and monasteries; the Georgian kings, unlike their foreign counterparts, were humble, and so on and so forth...

The fact is that this is not quite the case.

If we do not have proper knowledge, is that the fault of the kings? Secondly, the humbleness with which many, if not all, of them were endowed had little to do with the size of the royal residence, for the Hall (Darbazi), as the royal palace was called, was first and foremost a symbol of the state and the embodiment of royal authority, and only later did it become an indicator of a king's penchant for luxury.

To begin with, for some reason no one has bothered to undertake a comprehensive study of the royal palaces. What has been preserved, what has not been preserved, where to look for what has not been preserved and how to find it, what was built in what period and what has collapsed, which were the main ones, and which were seasonal or had other functions... These and many similar questions have not yet been studied professionally, the written and material data have not been properly collated, and no one has seriously analyzed the resulting picture.

Most of the remaining palaces have not been studied in detail. Some have not been studied archaeologically, and some have not been studied at all. A considerable number of them have been destroyed, especially those located in cities (urban monuments are particularly painful, especially in our country).

It is understandable that during the Soviet era one could not afford the luxury of a special study of royal residences, but now? It is about time, because the number of royal palaces confirmed by sources is not less than three dozen, if not more. Add to this the buildings unknown to the chroniclers, but identified by archaeologists, and the material is certainly not scarce.

It should also be noted that most surviving, known, discovered, or archaeologically



*Bozghano (Javakheti).
Was a place of David IV the builder's
summer residence*



*Grtila (Javakheti) -
A place of royal summer residence*

studied palaces do not receive proper publicity, care, evaluation, reconstruction, and restoration. As a result, the public is less aware of their existence, and they are rarely visited by guests. Is it acceptable that the residences of David Aghmashenebeli, his predecessors and successors, for example Tsagvlistava and Nacharmagevi, have not been excavated, studied, restored, decorated, and presented? Or Javakheti? Do schoolchildren, students, and others not ask about such places and hardly anyone knows of their existence? Of course, in some cases only ruins remain, and sometimes the remains themselves are almost untraceable, but doesn't the modern age have the art of virtual reconstruction, which can turn such places into popular centers?

Unfortunately, descriptions of Georgian palaces have survived only in later European sources. Written accounts and sketches do not suggest that the Tbilisi palace of the Kartli kings, for example, was modest. It was fully in keeping with the royal status and the level of political and economic development of the country and the city.

If you take a good look, you'll realize that the palace of Geguti isn't bad either. The surviving or excavated remains of the palace complex of Queen Tamar and her predecessors spread over 2,000 square meters, and the courtyard within the surrounding wall is considerably larger. The height of the walls and the size of the darbazi, which was once covered by a dome, suggest that the other chambers of Georgia's Golden Age would have been equally impressive. It should also be borne in mind that most of the palaces that have survived abroad and whose grandeur we admire are often centuries behind Geguti.

And yet, why have most of the royal palaces not survived?





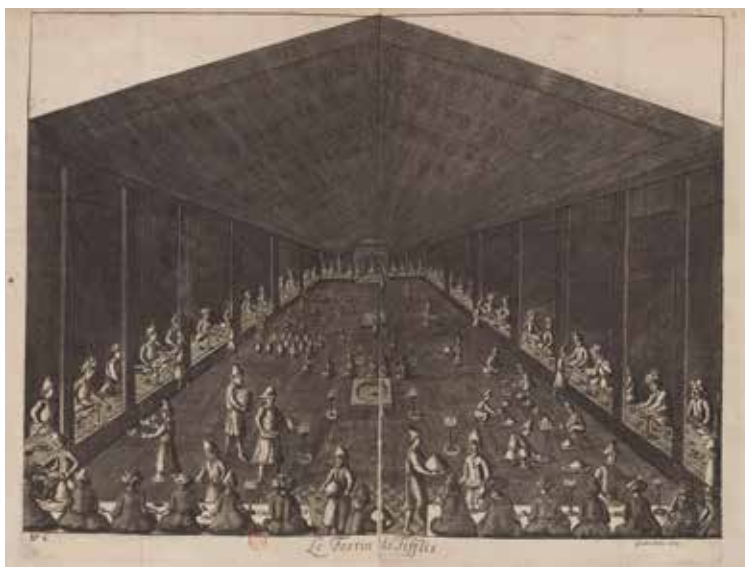
*Geguti (Imereti).
Remains of a
royal palace*

Firstly, the fact that we were born in a very unstable region and the enemy, which we have never been short of, attacked the royal halls in the first place. A royal residence is like a royal flag, capturing and burning it would be the most vivid demonstration of victory and the best way to morally break the locals. It is wrong to think that the enemy mainly destroyed churches and monasteries. Of course, there were many such cases, but it was much more effective for the invaders to loot, burn and destroy secular centers – fortresses, halls and castles – than ecclesiastical centers, especially if they intended to stay long and it was not in their interest to offend the religious feelings of the population. Destroyed and dysfunctional palaces fell apart of their own accord, and people helped – some with building materials, others by clearing space. The situation was (and still is) different with churches and monasteries: as centers with a sacred function, they are renewed and rebuilt at every opportunity, both damaged and dilapidated ones.

They did not survive because, in the constantly turbulent Caucasus, the regimes of the conquerors, the boundaries of political units, the importance of provinces and cities, and thus the political centers, were often destroyed and new ones created. It was not a stable environment and therefore there could not have been a permanent royal residence that would have remained in the same place for centuries, slowly rebuilt, expanded, and embellished. It seems that the kings of different periods also understood that in an unpre-



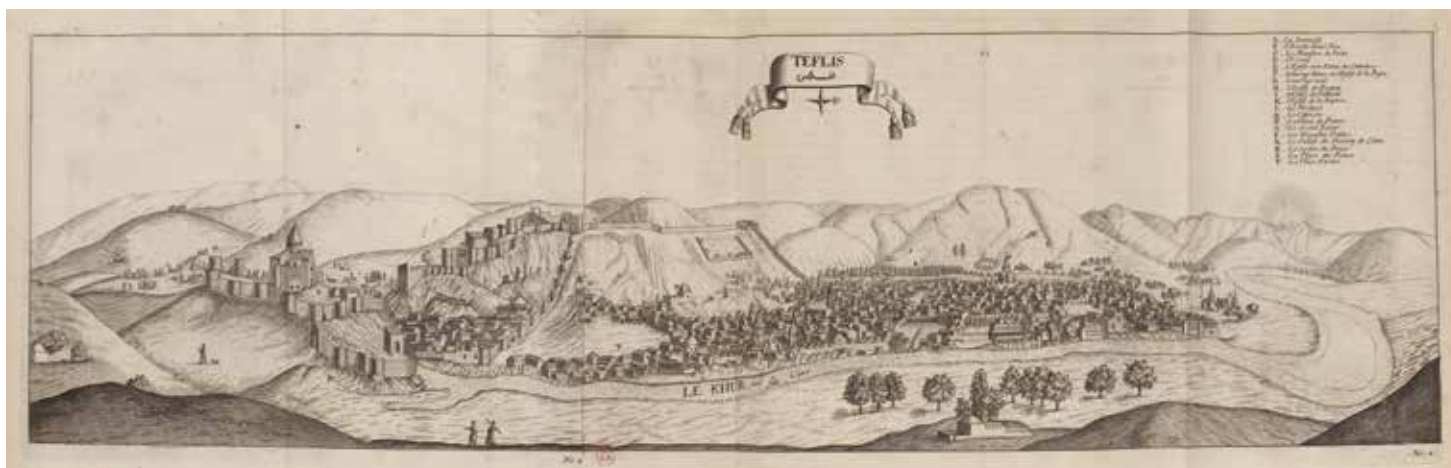
*Tbilisi.
A royal palace used to stand
next to Metekhi church.*



*Tbilisi.
A feast in the royal
palace. Engraving from
Chardins's travel diary.
17th century*

dictable environment it was not expedient to make extremely large political and financial investments in building a palace. Frankly, even after the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, there weren't always enough resources. It is methodologically incorrect to compare our tiny royal chambers of the late Middle Ages with the palaces of the Louvre, Versailles, Windsor, or St Petersburg. Most of the latter have taken on their present appearance in the last 2-3 centuries, and how can one compare the capabilities of the richest and strongest empires in the world at that time with the disintegrated-impoverished-and then conquered and annihilated kingdoms and princedoms?

They have not survived due to irreversible urban processes and the fact that in our country, unlike in many other European and Oriental countries, royalty ended in the early 19th century. For example, the palaces of Tbilisi were sacrificed for the development of the city; not only were they destroyed by Aga-Muhammad Khan, but the Russian Empire also had a hand in it – why would they need symbols and milestones of sovereignty in the Georgian capital?



*Tbilisi. Panorama. Engraving from
Chardins's travel diary. 17th century*



*Tbilisi.
In the foreground - the complex of
royal palaces. Fragment from an
engraving. Chardins's travel diary.
17th century*

It was a different epoch in our country in the 19th century when the palaces of the Dadianis, the Chavchavadzes, the Andronikashvilis and the Mukhranbatonis were being built – of course on a scale that suited their owners' abilities and the situation in the country. And where were the kings and their immediate successors? Some resting in their native land, some abroad, and some resting there. . .

Just imagine what the palace of the Georgian kings of the Golden Age looked like in Tbilisi. We know that it stood by the Metekhi Church, overhanging the cliff, and facing Kala Abanotubani. Not a single stone has survived. ■





Tamar Alavidze



Vivienne Westwood

The Queen of Anarchy

What benefits does the British royal family bring to the table? If internet sources are to be believed, in 2019, before the pandemic, the income received by the Exchequer from the royal residences and estates (the so-called Crown Estate) exceeded £410 million. That means that thanks to the royal family, more income came into the national budget than was spent on the royal family from the budget. Numbers and pragmatism aside, for the vast majority of Britons in the 70s of the 20th century, the Royal Family, each of its members, and the institution of the monarchy as a whole were an organic part of the British experience. No self-respecting Briton could have conceived of being deprived of the monarchical crown. To speak ill of a member of the Royal Family, let alone a monarch, let alone to make jokes about them, was completely unthinkable.

And now imagine a portrait of the young virtuous Queen Elizabeth II by the legendary British photographer Cecil Beaton, with Nazi swastikas painted over her eyes, a safety pin emblazoned across the queen's mouth and the inscription "God Save the Queen!" This is what a T-shirt designed for the British punk rock band Sex Pistols looked like in 1977. The band wore this T-shirt to perform a new anti-establishment song, "God Save the Queen". The notorious T-shirt was designed by the girlfriend of the Sex Pistols' manager Malcolm McLaren.

The name of the girlfriend was Vivienne Westwood.

You may have already realized that Vivienne was a born rebel. She chose fashion design as a career to give material expression to her rebellion. Her first major "rebellion"

began in the late 1960s with her former partner Malcolm McLaren: Let It Rock, their first joint shop on London's King's Road. In the shop you could find clothes, accessories and jewelry with Nazi symbols and fetish elements; clothes adorned with pins; soft, see-through, large-knit jumpers. But among the anarchist items Westwood was creating at the same time were Scottish tartan, the British Union Jack and portraits of monarchs. Westwood recalled how the name of the shop changed with each new collection: first it was Too Fast To Live, Too Young To Die, then SEX and, for the punk period, Seditious.

Anarchy, nonconformity, the fight against authoritarianism, the desire to break taboos and stereotypes – all this came together in British punk, which Westwood and McLaren are said to have inspired. True punk denounced the older generation and the political system: The former for abdicating responsibility and passing it on to the younger generation, the latter for the injustice, suffering and death that prevailed. Westwood believed this. In the midst of continuing economic stagnation, the punk wave was the perfect solution for disillusioned and unemployed British youth to “let off steam”, and they needed the right clothes and accessories to get their emotions flowing. And there was a Westwood and McLaren store for that.

The popularity of the shop was instrumental in establishing and promoting Vivienne as an independent fashion designer. Much success and recognition came in 1981 with her Pirates collection. By this time McLaren and Westwood were no longer together, and on McLaren's advice Westwood presented the collection under her own name at London Fashion Week. Pirates was a kind of cultural game: You leave your island and go in search of the historical past and the Third World. Napoleonic hats, Marie Antoinette dresses with puffed sleeves, baggy trousers made from fabrics inspired by Native American patterns, eclectic colors... Each garment repeated the pattern of historical costumes from different periods. However, this was not a collection of museum exhibits: The fabric for each costume was chosen to make the garments vibrant and contemporary. This collection was different from the others presented by the leading designers of the time at the Paris and London Fashion Weeks.

It was also a kind of provocation on Vivienne's part, a march against all things fashionable and trite. In a post, Westwood recalled that this was her rebellion against twentieth-century dogma, as if the past was over and it was time to do something new. On the contrary, Vivienne argued that true art is complete and timeless, and that today we must look to the past for inspiration: “Without roots and art, we can't have laboratories and science. Culture is essential to making people better beings.”

“Without roots and art, we can't have laboratories and science. Culture is essential to making people better beings.”

Westwood pushed the fight against dogma and propaganda through art even further in her 2005 AR (Active Resistance) collection, where she printed Rembrandt in a black beret on a T-shirt as a hero of culture: “The art lover is a freedom fighter for a better world.



He believes that studying the past will help him form his own opinions and act in the present”.

Inspired by this idea, Vivien instructed her students in Berlin to visit art galleries and,

“The art lover is a freedom fighter for a better world. He believes that studying the past will help him form his own opinions and act in the present”.

before moving from one room to another, to choose a particular work to save. According to Westwood, if they played this “game” systematically, after six months they would want to save another work because they would have trained their ability

to judge and distinguish.

As part of an AR campaign in 2007, Westwood organized small art reading evenings across the country: Friends of Vivien dressed up as twenty famous characters (including Pinocchio, Alice, and Aristotle) and spent forty minutes talking to audiences about art in eighteen different cities and universities.

In the last decade of her life, Westwood has become an environmental activist, trying to save the world from global catastrophe. She identified the actions that needed to be taken to stop global warming and, through the platform Climaterevolution.co.uk, worked with NGOs to raise people’s awareness. Even at 81, she dressed up every Friday,

“It’s my duty to understand this world. I understand it. It’s everyone’s duty in exchange for life. We can change the future. If you start thinking that way, it will change your life, and if you change your life, you can change the world.”

sat in front of the camera and spoke to millions of fans about global issues via Instagram: “It’s my duty to understand this world. I understand it. It’s everyone’s duty in exchange for life. We can change the future. If you start thinking that way, it will change your life, and if you change your

life, you can change the world.”

Vivienne Westwood died in London on 29 December 2022. ■





Zura Medzvelia

FROM “I, PELE” TO “I AND PELE”

I was told I didn't necessarily have to write about football, but it just so happened that while I was thinking what to write about, the king of our football died. Well, I will say farewell to Pele in my own way.



July 4, 1965

The two-time world champion Brazilian team came to the capital of the USSR for a friendly match... and a lot of Georgians headed to Moscow to see this amazing team and Pele himself. And they saw it. And they were fascinated, some even took pictures with him, some even got his autograph. And then they talked about the match, how the Brazilians won 3-0, and Pele, the king of football.

Here, you have read the above paragraph and I wonder if you have thought about one particular story.

Nowadays, even in a less developed country, an enthusiastic person can watch any football match on any TV, on any tablet or laptop, on any phone or even on any watch. And if you want to and find the possibility (I wanted to and I organized for myself a “Kvaratour” for three Napoli games in October), you can cheer for your favorite team or player anywhere in the world.

And this was 1965, the Soviet Union... Brazil and Pele became champions for the first time in 1958 and for 8 years after that the Soviet people had been reading and hearing how very cool Pele was, how very cool Pele was, what a cool goal Pele had scored... and what I am saying, now imagine for a moment: If you spent 8 years hearing and reading how cool Messi was, how very cool Messi was, how many players Messi had tricked, what a cool goal Messi had scored with his left foot or his right foot or head... only hearing and reading...

Not watching...

That is why so many Georgians went to Moscow in 1965 and that is why they talked at length about the match won 3-0 by the Brazilians and about Pele, the king of football. In the USSR, who would have been allowed to post any photo in a public place, and the exception, where they turned a blind eye to it, was in a car service center and a shoe repair shop. Well, there wasn't a shoemaker or craftsman who didn't have a photo of Pele somehow obtained on display. Stalin came second...

Then, in 1966, the USSR started televising the World Cup. In 1970, Pele and his team – considered by many to be the best in history – won for the third time. After that, the word “Pele” became synonymous with “the best” in Georgian.

The late 1960s

It all started with the fact that I wasn't very fond of wandering around in the woods with some wolves or other wild animals, and since I couldn't read yet, I told my mother that I didn't want those stories, and asked her to read me the one with the ball depicted on it. After that she would read to me with expression about how little Uruguay beat big Brazil in 1950, how the underdog found the World Cup in 1966 and so on. Among those books were two

autobiographical ones: one by Sir Stanley Matthews entitled 35 Years on the Right Wing and the other by Pele, I, Pele. Later, as an adult, I learned that thanks to this second book, millions of people in Brazil began to learn to read and write...

I didn't learn to read and write for that reason – I was told to learn and I did. And before I started reading new books, I read and re-read my favorite books already on my own. Every five years or so, I go back to those two books and for a brief moment I am carried back to those carefree times when the word “king” reminded me of a black boy playing football in that far-away Brazil.



The 1990s

I fell in love with football when I couldn't read or write, and even more so later on. So what was so surprising about becoming a football journalist? I wrote for the newspaper Sarbieli for many years. I was editor-in-chief for a while.

Anyway, I had to publish this excerpt from my CV to tell you about one of our traditions of the time – one that, at first glance, we shouldn't be proud of, because those two words, “Pele” and “died”, were heard in the newsroom during the preparation of almost every issue. Or rather, when the issue had already been finished. “If” preceded them and “not” was in the middle. In short, so as not to speak in riddles, we used to inform the editor of the completion of the issue as fol-

lows: If Pele does not die in the next few minutes, we can send it to the printers.

Sometimes tradition gives birth to a new tradition, and this gave birth to another, more brutal one: When almost everything was ready, but there was nothing worthy of the front page, the last calls would be made and we would sit at the telex waiting for some valuable news. It was all in vain, though, as then one of us would surely say, “And how is Pele, shall we enquire?”

It's better to reveal sins, and here I have revealed it. I hope you will forgive us for this black humor. Especially in those dark and cold times.

July 2, 2000

The European Championship Final: France versus Italy. Two hours before the match, I am in the press room and suddenly, out of the blue, Pele enters. He is led to a sort of podium. All the TV cameras are already there, of course. I'm there too.

This is not my first championship as a journalist. I know the rules of the press room, but suddenly I'm overwhelmed – I'm that illiterate boy again to whom his mother read I, Pele. The inaccessible and unattainable King of Football is here, in front of me, but slightly above me, so that his hands are somewhere at the level of my face.

I am no longer a journalist. I don't understand what they are asking and what he is answering. I am holding a pen in one hand and a ticket in the other. A ticket to the final of Euro 2000. And in Rotterdam, which 7 years earlier, in 1993, was my first city to visit in the free world and therefore already holds a big place in my biography. And now this historic ticket autographed by the king. Back in Tbilisi, I will show it to my mother and we will reminisce about the old days, saying what a day that has arrived, and who could have imagined it.

Not only that, but my father, who is already completely helpless – he doesn't even recognize me sometimes – can recite the Brazilian line-up of the 1970s backwards and forwards. Such thoughts are swirling in my head and I am trying hard to stick this pen in Pele's hand... He does not react... He is only looking at the cameras and doesn't put his head down... Look down... Pele! Pele! This goes on for about 2 minutes and when I realize that the interview is over and he's about to leave, frustrated, I slap him on the hand with this pen, so to say, with medium force – if it hurts, he'll look down, right? No, he doesn't. The second time, a little harder... but no – his hands can take this pain as much as his feet did during that great and wonderful career that has turned this sport into a religion... Finally, I shook his hand – clearly, one way.

If I write now that Medzvelia has beaten Pele, would that be a big exaggeration? A journalist I know asks me after a while and we laugh... What a day that has arrived?!

... I caught my father alive (as if he had given me the opportunity to enjoy football and died a month after my arrival). He recognized me and I told him the story of my "battle" with Pele. What a day that has arrived?! He laughed at first and then cried.

December 29, 2022

The king has died. Pele is dead.

My God, in any case, my father is sitting with billions of others in some heavenly stadium right now, watching in awe Pele, the King of Football, as he did on July 4, 1965. ■



Zaal Samadashvili

Dictation

And now, recall you-know-what?

How we went to the jeweler on Maidan to sell the ring, how we wanted one hundred and twenty rubles and we got eighty from that old man with the Uzbek hat on his head, who looked a bit like Fagin from the musical *Oliver*.

When comparing someone to someone else, we were only referring to film actors; we hadn't read any books, so what were we supposed to refer to but films...

In our view, Tseto also walked like John Wayne, like Ringo Kid from *Stagecoach* – the film we saw at Cosmos – in long, straight strides.

Our buddy Tseto, who was nuts on dressing up. "Looks cool, doesn't it," he would say when trying on something new and trendy.

And trendy in those days, when the Beatles songs were distributed on "discs" made out of X-ray tapes, people wore "Button" shirts, which differed from ordinary shirts in that they had tiny buttons sewn to the tips of the collars, trousers sewn in Avalbar at Otar's, with straight slit pockets and "cuffs" that were called "shtatski", and everything made of "tweed" – caps, coats, jackets...

Remember that he was in love with a skinny girl with big, bright eyes that shone through the hair that fell on her forehead.

That he thought she was the prettiest, and so did we, but later, when the other girls started wearing short dresses, smoking cigarettes, and going to Dynamo Stadium with the boys to watch football, we realized that we were attracted not so much by her looks as by her boldness...

We were seen as trouble-seeking street kids, a target for the police. They were especially picky about Tseto; not a day went by without his pockets being searched for a jack-knife or cigarettes with weed in them, and because of the nickname, they expected more danger from Tseto – a frivolous, hot-tempered, unpredictable person...

Girls of our generation also liked street boys – they would go with them to the cinema to sit in the back rows of half-empty halls, hug and dance with uninvited "outsiders" at birthday parties, even let them kiss them...

Rarely, but still, this flirting would suddenly stop and the girls would start "going out" with some "polished" guys... By polished we didn't just mean guys who were different from us – we meant guys who tried to stay out of trouble and didn't hang around for

hours at some street-side bench in the area. The polished were inhabitants of a different world, created by people who had usurped the power of their parents, a world detached from reality, where prosperity reigned and the future was planned and calculated in their favor.

When this flirting stopped for Tseto too, when “his” girlfriend started going out with a polished guy... he didn’t show it at first, but then the refusals to meet, the unanswered phone calls took their toll, made him think, worry, and finally say: “I have to get hold of her, see her somewhere...” We thought he was going to hang around this girl’s doorstep from morning till night, but that’s not what he told us: “I want to bump into her somewhere with this guy, and it has to look accidental...”

We had no clue where we could “accidentally” bump into this couple. Our appearance in the places where the polished guy was taking Tseto’s girl would have been just as unnatural as him, or someone like him, appearing and hanging out in the street, in a place meant for standing for hours, like you see in the photo studio where portraits of actors from the Marjanishvili Theatre were displayed in the window...

The occasion itself helped us to organize a chance meeting as we were standing in front of the photo studio that day when Tseto turned up and told us that we were to go to a restaurant that evening, in case the polished guy invited the girl to a restaurant on the sixteenth floor of the newly built Hotel Iveria...

That restaurant was nothing like the district canteen or Kazbegi in Zemel, where everything cost one ruble – a pan of fried potatoes, a plate of salad and a bottle of wine... “Money?” we asked him, and in response he took his hand out of the pocket and showed us the ring on his ring finger, a thin gold ring...

Remember that he told us that it was a gift from his aunt, and we immediately believed him, that his aunt was the kindest woman, that she was like a mother to Tseto, who had been orphaned at an early age... that he just ignored us when we expressed some doubts since when were rings given to boys.

We told him to take it off, let’s see how heavy it is, how much will they give us... And he grasped the ring with his thumb and forefinger, pulled it and met resistance, he could not move it. Then he decided to wet his ring finger and went to the courtyard opposite, where we knew there was a water tap. Wetting it didn’t help, nor did applying the soap that the woman at the tap gave us in an attempt to help. The finger became red and swollen from pulling and twisting so hard...

Nothing could be done without cutting it up, and a jeweler was needed for the job. Remember, we went to Maidan first by trolley bus, then by tram, and finally on foot from Avlabari. The old man in the Uzbek hat immediately loosened Tseto’s trapped finger, and I think he even blew on it to give him some relief. He gave us less money than we wanted, explaining that once we cut it up, it was no good as an item, we were only paid by weight... What he paid us was enough for the restaurant, and we didn’t mind...

Remember we went around the neighborhood to get dressed up: Got a jeans jacket from one guy – a Wrangler – and a sweater from another, like the one that the guys from Sun Valley Serenade wore, and when the clock struck eight, we went with Tseto to the sixteenth floor of Iveria...

Tseto’s girl was sitting with the “cool” people, they were exuding glitter, she saw us with her bright eyes and pretended not to notice. We sat down at a table nearby, ordered

four bottles of wine and began to drink. As Tseto toasted, he would sneak a glance at his girlfriend after each glass...

After we had raised toasts to brotherhood until death, to those boys trapped inside four walls, to the fulfilment of our wishes, Tseto did something that no one expected and no one could have imagined.

Remember that he stood up, reached for the bottle, picked it up and walked to the balcony door. He stepped out, grabbed the balcony railing with his right hand, placed one foot on the railing, then the other... He shouted, "Here's to love!" and brought a bottle full of wine to his mouth... standing at a terrifying height, with his back to the city twinkling with ten thousand lights, he emptied it to the last drop...

The stunned, fear-filled silence that fell was only broken when Tseto jumped down from the railing. A scream broke the silence of a dozen people as the girl – his girl – ran up to him and started punching him in the chest with her fists, "Don't you ever show your face to me again, you bastard," she shouted, crying...

Remember, we left the place straight away, paid the bill and left. And we didn't utter a word either in the lift or on the street as we walked from Zemel down to Vera Bridge, waiting to see what Tseto had to say... And he kept walking forward and kept silent... When we crossed the bridge and passed a large department store, then he turned to us and said that everything had gone as he wanted it to...

He didn't hide his surprise when we asked him directly, "How's that?" Then he got angry, "So what did all this running to me and crying mean, can't you understand?" When we shrugged our shoulders, he got really angry and raised his voice, "Can't you understand that she loves me like she used to, if it wasn't like this, she would have ignored me, she wouldn't have even looked my way, whether I jumped on the railing or on the roof..."

When he couldn't read anything close to consent in our eyes, he got frustrated with us and told us, "You don't understand anything about women..." We really didn't know much about women, we couldn't boast of that, but we thought we knew Tseto well, and we thought his words were more like self-deception than knowing what was going on in the girl's heart...

Remember, since then we had all been waiting to see what else Tseto would come up with to see his girlfriend again, or when he would finally tell us that those tears and screams were from anger and not from love...

We did not have to wait for more than two weeks, and one evening, standing at the entrance to the Gorky Garden, across the street, we saw Tseto and his girlfriend walking down the street along the Mikhailov Hospital, not noticing anyone or anything around them but each other...

Our eyes widened in surprise, we became numb and only then we got happy. Confused, we admitted to ourselves that Tseto knew the secrets of women's hearts, but a few days later when he found time for us, we still asked him, "If she loves you, why the hell was she going out with that polished guy?"

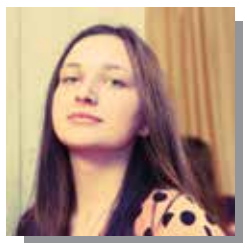
Recall, this question did not make him angry; on the contrary, he laughed heartily and said something very strange. "It turned out that that evening, on the sixteenth floor, I was behaving like the hero of the girl's favorite film, a reckless soldier who had a habit of playing with death, standing on the open windows of the upper floors of luxury palaces and drinking to the bottom of a bottle full of wine..."

This resemblance was enough to rekindle an old love that had faded with the arrival of an admirer who radiated moderation and prudence in his every movement and word...

We had to accompany Tseto to Maidan one more time, and once more we found ourselves in the little workshop of a goldsmith who looked like Fagin. Remember, he restored the ring, the cut ring he had bought from us for eighty rubles, and Tseto paid him one hundred and twenty, with money won at the races, and we thought he was going to give it to his girlfriend. But we were wrong; he took us from the Maidan to the Post Office, where his aunt worked as a telephone operator in the most beautiful, old building in the neighborhood, to say, I found the ring you gave me, which we thought was lost.

P.S. Just to say who “we” are, Guja and I - Garsik, Garsevan, the two boys described in your old stories, born with you, who wanted to bring Tseto to life by recalling this story and dictating it to you... ■





Tata Akubardia

How much is it?

There is perhaps no better phrase to express Georgian reality than this. The famous phrase has taken an important place in the Georgian urban vocabulary since the advent of digitalization, especially online sales. The situation becomes much more comical when people ask the price of an item with a clearly indicated price. Ultimately, these seemingly harmless comments, to which every mortal is accustomed, lead to a sad conclusion... a sad and serious conclusion that the persistent asking of the same question about the title of the film under the film poster, about the location in front of the store map, and about the issues already discussed in the long post above, is nothing but a massive problem of an inability to understand what one has read.

From Illiteracy to the Era of Rote Learning

“Do we have any of these merits today, suitable for our time? What can I tell you? What will make you happy?” – Ilia Chavchavadze

If there is criticism of the level of education in Georgia, a Georgian “patriot” will show you a Wikipedia article stating that Georgia is, if not in the top ten, then in the top twenty in terms of literacy in the world. In a country of 3.7 million people, a high literacy rate shouldn’t surprise anyone, and one more thing – doesn’t anyone wonder how proud one can be of having the basic skills needed to live in the twenty-first century?

In the nineteenth century, when Georgia was hard to find on a map, literacy carried more weight than what it now means for a country to be as high as possible in Wikipedia’s statistics. In the era of the Society for the Spreading of Literacy, this skill was a tool for the survival of the nation. However, our country, along with many other problems, often confuses epochs. What else could be the reason for sentences like: “I wish Stalin would come back to life!” “Gogebashvili’s alphabet should be taught in schools”; “Where was the Internet in our time?” and many others. This too has caused a problem, people have forgotten that time always brings innovations and methods of dealing with problems change.

The story starts from the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, I cannot explain the era in which I was not even born, although I am absolutely certain that the system back then needed as few thinking and progressive people as possible. The schools of that time had a sacred institution that we can call “memorization” in our mother tongue. How can you love *The Knight in Tiger’s Skin* if you are forced to memorize it even if you don’t understand its contents? The system of memorizing, trying to have as few questions as possible, learning by heart clichéd opinions, has created a huge black hole, which in turn has created many other problems. One of them, which almost no one talks about, is the problem of reading comprehension and critical thinking. This problem has spread like a domino effect to children who were not born in the Soviet Union. Quite simply, this generation grew up and began to raise the next generation the same way it had been raised. Today, it is not only the previous generation that faces the problem of reading comprehension, but also my peers.

A couple of years ago some kind of testing was conducted at school, I can’t say for sure which grade we were in. I didn’t know what kind of a test it was at the time, but pupils were chosen from two different groups. As the children later told me, there were foreigners among the observers. Then I found out that the results of this test became known in 2016, while the Ministry of Education had hidden them for two years. In the end, it turned out that according to the study, 14 percent of 9-10 year olds in Georgia do not have even minimal reading skills. Fourteen percent is a huge number for a country of 3.7 million people. Statistics aside, here is a story that happened a few months ago. In 2022, a second-choice topic in the national Georgian language and literature exams caused quite a stir. Applicants could not work out what the proposed topic meant. There was even an argument about which word – “error” or “sin” – was written in the title of the topic.

A lack of reading comprehension skills: a problem within a problem

It is often difficult for people to realize what a serious problem we are facing. And the problem is much bigger than the price issue in the comment box. The problem proves to us that we are far more easily deceived, misled, panicked and desperate than we realize. Because we misunderstand what is written or we understand it the way we want it to be. We do not question why this is so? Because we are used to it, everything is as it should be, and asking unnecessary questions won’t do any good.

The problem is most dangerous because it can be exploited by a neighboring country of “the same religion”. We have already seen that Russia is waging information warfare everywhere and in everything. Ironically, a few years ago, influential media claimed that Russia had even interfered in Madagascar’s elections with its fake news. What will happen if Georgia provides fertile ground for Russian disinformation to take root?

Playing with Weaknesses

Internet publications often use a hooking method, which suggests problems with critical thinking and reading comprehension. Usually they write an article with a completely different headline, to intrigue the reader, so to say. The readers, without reading the article, will only look at it superficially and thus get the wrong information. A few hours ago



I saw a simple example of this. A media outlet wrote about a tragedy that happened in 2003. Fourteen of the sixteen passengers in a minibus were killed. Because of the headline, which was not dated, people wrote letters of condolence in the comments section, complaining about the mess on the roads, etc. Seems like no big deal, except that such poorly written information can one day lead to the wrong results. Apart from the terrible stress it causes people, it makes us think about one thing: What would happen if an enemy state wanted to spread misinformation in the country? The fact is that fakes are much easier to spread in a country where people only read the headlines, and then only superficially.

Stalemate Situation? – A Simple Solution!

We are certain that the problem is deep and widespread. We cannot replace generations, but we can change them. The education system has so many shortcomings that a separate article is needed to explain them in detail. The quickest and easiest solution is media literacy. Introducing it into schools will give future generations new reading comprehension and critical thinking skills. Media literacy won't hurt adults either, if nothing else we will at least win the information war.

Over time, priorities, approaches, and problem-solving methods change. Today, Georgia is struggling with the legacy of its dark past, the problem of reading comprehension. If the problem is not to become contagious, it must be addressed. I would like to wake up in Georgia one day where the comment box only says "How much?" when the product does not actually have a price tag. ■



*In 2009, Salome Zourabichvili, the current President of Georgia and the then leader of the opposition, published a book in French entitled *The Georgian Tragedy, 2003-2008*. This book was submitted by the Russian Federation to the International Court of Justice in the Hague to support its position in a counter-claim brought against Georgia after the war. You have before you the thirteenth chapter of this book, translated by Mr. David Natroshvili at the request of the Chavchavadze Center. The translation retains the often confused and unacademic style of the French original – the translator and editors have deliberately not ennobled it. The comments in dark italics are those of the journal’s editors. Their purpose is to remind the reader of the relevant historical context and to expose the propaganda messages embedded in the text. The text is published for civic education purposes.*

War: Whose fault is it?

The peaceful revolution that began as a kind of fairy tale ends in a nightmare of bombing, broadcast live on Georgian television on the night of August 7. Tanks and soldiers that I thought I had negotiated out of the country (a kind of revenge for the past that my family had to go through when they were forced to leave Georgia as a result of the Russian army’s invasion) invade and destroy the center of Georgia.

Here Zourabichvili touches on the issue of the withdrawal of Russian military bases from Georgia and presents it as her achievement. In fact, the decision to withdraw Russian bases from Georgia was taken at the OSCE Istanbul Summit in 1999. It was precisely this summit that was the decisive factor in this case. During the many years of international diplomatic efforts, Zourabichvili represented Georgia only at the final stage of the negotiations, when the decision had already been taken and the negotiating process was practically over. One could say that her tenure as minister simply coincided with the withdrawal of Russian military bases from Georgia.

The question that everyone has been concerned with ever since is twofold: Whose fault is it? Could this war have been avoided? The culprits and perpetrators are many. First and foremost, it is the lack of a clear line in relation to Russia. Is the lack of a clear line towards Russia.

The very phrase “Whose fault is it?” in military aggression by one state against another implies that the target of the attack may itself be guilty of provoking the aggressor and waging war. It is doubly difficult to put the question in this way when we are talking about tiny Georgia on the one hand and a nuclear superpower, the heir to the Evil empire, on the other. The use of military force by another country against a sovereign state for the purpose of violating its territorial integrity and changing its govern-

ment is a flagrant violation of international law. In such circumstances, the legitimacy of the target to defend its sovereign territory cannot be questioned. However, it is not true that “everyone is concerned” about whose fault it is for the outbreak of war, as if there were any substantial ambiguity about this: The international community unanimously recognizes that Russia carried out aggression against Georgia in August 2008 and that Georgia was the victim of that aggression. The victim cannot be blamed for starting the war. There may have been some questions in certain circles about the provocation of the Georgian government, but this position was never universally shared. In subsequent years, this position of Zourabichvili and of her political partners was “re-fined” and formulated in a new cliché – “Georgia failed to prevent the war from the very start”. Representatives of Ivanishvili’s government tried to use this cliché with regard to Ukraine as well, but only a small percentage of domestic users remained listeners in the context of a global consensus.



A Facebook post of Salome Zourabichvili. August 7, 2014

From the very beginning, two lines clashed: confrontation and normalization. Behind this declared policy of confrontation and toughness with Moscow, there is also a trend that contradicts it: Selling the country’s resources to the main enemy, trying to make secret deals. This blurring of the lines has made the purpose, and therefore the consistency, of this policy unclear.

Here Zourabichvili contradicts herself. On the one hand, she claims that the line of confrontation has prevailed over the line of normalization, but on the other, with a conspiracy unbecoming of a formally high-ranking diplomat, she claims that the Georgian government has made secret deals with Russia and handed over the country’s resources to it. It is unclear what secret deals Zourabichvili is talking about, and she does not provide a single example. Furthermore, the two claims are incompatible. Moreover, this is a well-known Russian propaganda cliché that Zourabichvili repeats for a French-speaking audience. It should be noted that these two lines are developed simultaneously by Georgian Dream and Georgian-language Russian propaganda in Georgia.

In fact, immediately after coming to power, Saakashvili sought to establish good neighborly relations with Putin as a matter of priority. His first visit in his capacity as President was to Moscow. However, it soon became clear that Russia was not interested in equal relations with Georgia, the so-called normalization was only considered at a subordinate level, at the cost of concessions to Georgia’s national interests. It is also worth recalling an episode when, after the expulsion of Russia’s proxy Aslan Abashidze from the Ajaria ASSR and the restoration of the jurisdiction of the Georgian central au-

thorities in Ajaria, Putin told Saakashvili directly and unequivocally: “Don’t expect any more gifts from us”. It is telling that Zourabichvili does not mention this key nuance at all.

From Normalization to Confrontation

The outlines of normalization will remain incomplete. On the second day of the Rose Revolution, Ivanov’s visit to Tbilisi, facilitating the overthrow of Shevardnadze and Moscow’s official blessing of the ongoing revolution, is a gesture of reconciliation. Saakashvili, for his part, extends a hand of reconciliation to neighboring Russia in his inaugural speech. This is accompanied by a period of détente in bilateral relations, which I have successfully used to advance bilateral negotiations. But this normalization is in fact accompanied by serious counter-maneuvers.

Already in the summer of 2004, this détente almost suffered a serious blow as a result of the first “missteps” in Georgian policy: The escalation of tensions in the Tskhinvali region and the deaths during the attack in August almost brought us back to the past, to the period of confrontation. But the situation is calming down and relations seem to be getting back on track.

When reading this passage, one gets the impression that Russia was ready for full normalization of relations with Georgia and that this was only prevented by the actions of the Saakashvili government. The fact that this was not the case was known to any reasonable Georgian of average intelligence, and should have been known to an experienced French diplomat who, because of Saakashvili’s serious staffing error, continued her mid-level diplomatic career as a minister in Georgia. From today’s perspective, the inappropriateness of these attitudes and expectations is even more obvious.

At the beginning of 2005, the line of confrontation with Russia appeared at the most inopportune moment. Just when the first rounds of negotiations had given us a chance to sound out the ground, the Georgian parliament passed a resolution demanding the withdrawal of the military bases I was negotiating, as an ultimatum, without any warning or reason. This challenge, thrown at Russia just as the talks are under way, could derail them. It is unacceptable in its form, because I have not even been consulted on this issue, as Foreign Minister and the main actor in these negotiations. Everything is happening independently of me, and one day the President will summon me to Parliament to persuade the Majority Leader, Maia Nadiradze, to drop this ultimatum.

I had not yet arrived at the parliament when I was contacted and told to call off my demarche: “There is no need, the decision of the parliamentary majority is so unshakable. The resolution would be passed on March 22, accompanied by a series of punitive threats ranging from water and electricity cuts to harsher measures in case of non-compliance.”

At the time, I must have been too naive to believe that the president did not have enough power to subdue the majority. Nadiradze was, and still is, very obedient. In other words, I was lied to. It is even more absurd to think that he needed my intervention to stop an initiative that he disagreed with. Simply put, it was not Nadiradze’s initiative, like many others that have taken place in this Parliament.

In addition to destroying me politically, this ultimatum could also destroy the negotiations I was conducting. In general, any ultimatum is a “killer” in negotiations, because the other side will see it as a preconceived malicious act. I was fortunate to be able to take advantage of [the Russian side’s] trust and mutual desire to succeed, which saved us from a deliberate failure. The maneuver was designed to damage both my personal success and the popularity it would have brought me, and the normalization of bilateral relations that the agreement would have brought. Be that as it may, this time the attempt failed and the process of negotiations survived.

The most striking thing about this passage is the inadequate, bordering on comical, self-assessment of a middle-ranking French diplomat who appeared in Georgian politics by chance, if you like, at Saakashvili’s personal whim. It was probably intended for the same French-speaking readers, because this text reads too ridiculously in Georgia. It should be remembered that she became Georgian Foreign Minister at the request of President Saakashvili to the French President. Before that, she was the Ambassador of France to Georgia. Now imagine: Rose Revolution, Adjara Revolution, the government still at the height of its popularity, Georgia’s historic attempt to free itself from Russian influence... and in this context Zourabichvili brings her personal popularity into the picture as a factor. For any observer with the slightest understanding of Georgian politics of that period, Zourabichvili’s self-aggrandizement is laughable. The passage only shows the subjectivity and inadequacy of the author, who seems to have represented herself more than the state in the matter of withdrawing bases.

At the same time, Zourabichvili claims that the agreement she reached could have normalized bilateral relations, which is absurd. In 1999, at the OSCE Istanbul Summit, Western diplomacy, at a time of Russia’s historic weakness and wielding great economic pressure, forced Russia to agree to the closure of such important military bases in Georgia, significantly weakening Russian influence over Georgia and the region as a whole. Putin’s inauguration and subsequent presidency soon became a symbol of anti-Western revanchism in Russia. So the fact that it turns out that Zourabichvili was warming up Russian-Georgian relations, which Saakashvili thwarted in order to prevent her personal popularity, is a mockery of the intelligent reader.

However, this maneuver will be repeated again. In October 2005, more important talks began at a completely different level, as this time it was a direct discussion between the United States and Russia on the separatist conflicts. The dialogue on South Ossetia begins between the Bush administration and Putin during their meeting at the UN General Assembly in Washington DC in early September. It will soon be followed by a meeting between Lavrov and Condoleezza Rice on the same subject. The question is whether it is possible to work with Russia to resolve the conflict, the key to which lies in the hands of the Kremlin. The aim is to bring the issue to the attention of the OSCE at the Ljubljana Summit in December. The Bush administration is determined to move forward, and the Russians are not shying away from discussion. That is already enormous progress. For our part, we are ready to see concrete results from these bilateral talks. In the summer, when the Russians begin to leave the Batumi base, the Russian Foreign Ministry suggests that the Georgian side begin consultations on the situation in the North Caucasus.

Here, most likely, the conversation refers to the so-called joint anti-terrorism center, the opening of which the Russians demanded in exchange for the withdrawal of mil-

itary bases. This meant that in reality the bases would remain, but under a different name and this time with a legitimate status.

This is happening for the first time! At the end of August there was the CIS summit in Astana, where Putin and Saakashvili met. They agreed to meet again and discuss the possibility of an official visit to Georgia once the vintage was over. On the plane ride back to Tbilisi, I reassured the President that it was essential to make the invitation official. On my return, my office sent a draft letter to the State Chancellery, but it was never sent! Someone had blocked it and replaced it with another letter full of Russian mistakes and with Saakashvili's facsimile. Everyone who saw it, including the Russian ambassador in Tbilisi, wondered if this was not a deliberate attempt to disrupt a visit that could have brought progress in bilateral relations.

Zourabichvili deliberately continues to paint a false picture of Russia's full political readiness for normalization, which is manifested in its civilized, constructive approach and behavior. The impression is given that the West has also spared no effort in normalization and that the only obstacle in the way is the Georgian government and its incomprehensible motives. Zourabichvili again mocks the self-respecting reader by claiming that the discussion on resolving this conflict was decided at the level of Bush and Putin and that Saakashvili blew it. In reality, there have been constant high-level meetings on the so-called conflicts since 1993, but there has been no breakthrough in resolving them, for the simple reason that Russia has created, instigated, used and frozen these "conflicts" as leverage over Georgia and would never give up this leverage of its own volition. In fact, there is one big conflict between Russia and Georgia and it affects the present the situation and the future of Georgia itself.

Instead of the expected breakthrough, the situation is deteriorating very rapidly. In mid-October, in parallel with my dismissal, the Parliament will consider a resolution containing a new ultimatum. This time the target is the Russian peacekeeping forces, who are urged to leave Georgian territory, the Tskhinvali region by mid-February and Abkhazia by mid-July. If this demand is not met, Georgia will denounce the agreements that give them legal status and thus declare them an occupying force.

It is true that the Russian forces had a peacekeeping status, which they were given virtually by force as a result of Georgia's defeat in the war, but at no time was there any real sense that these forces were truly a neutral, peaceful contingent. In fact, they were the guarantors of the maintenance of the harsh reality created by Russia's use of force on the ground. It was not an impartial peacekeeping force, as is required by good practice. Zourabichvili simply ignores this key fact and continues to refer to the Russian forces as peacekeepers, deliberately misleading the reader once again.

This double ultimatum, unlike the one issued in February, achieves its goal: it stalls the negotiations between the Russians and the Americans. The same goes for the OSCE plans that were due to start in Ljubljana in December 2005. Georgian-Russian relations are deteriorating. Tbilisi has never left an international meeting without condemning the bias of the Russian peacekeepers in statements and communiqués. My attempt to negotiate a ceasefire in this war of communiqués was unsuccessful. After I left, the new minister, Gela Bezhushvili, engaged in a real verbal escalation. There is no room for dialogue at the Ljubljana Summit. This opportunity was missed.

Zourabichvili once again claims that it is all Georgia's fault and that even the defense of Georgia's own interests within the diplomatic framework is unacceptable. This time it is the so-called war of communiqués. The author herself recounts how Saakashvili's government tried to make the international community realize that the Russian military was not in fact a peacekeeping contingent and was acting against the Georgian state, while Zourabichvili, who as a minister was obliged to be at the forefront of this effort, made no attempt to do so. She spared no effort to hide the truth and save face for Russia.

In January 2006, an explosion in a gas pipeline between Russia and Georgia, which left the country without gas in the middle of winter, sparked a war of words between the two presidents. Saakashvili had no hesitation in accusing Putin, whom he calls a "Lilliputin", of being behind the terrorist attack. Russia denies any involvement in the incident and accuses Georgia of trying to damage relations. Tensions are rising and Georgian exports are under the first Russian embargo. Who is really responsible? Both parties are.

This astonishing paragraph deserves special attention. Let's follow the facts: (a) Russia's use of energy as a weapon of political blackmail against its neighbors is a common method of Russian foreign policy under Putin; (b) in January 2006, during the coldest days of winter, three power lines exploded simultaneously on Russian territory near the border with Georgia, knocking out all three facilities and leaving Georgia without electricity and gas; and (c) the probability that this was an accident and not deliberate Russian sabotage against Georgia is next to zero.

The purpose of the sabotage was probably to change Georgia's independent, pro-Western policy and to halt successful domestic reforms. In this situation, Salome Zourabichvili is not talking about Russia's aims, the leverage of Georgia's response and the form of Saakashvili's response! She is concerned that, as it turns out, Georgia blamed Putin "without hesitation" for this barbaric, inhuman sabotage (but maybe these three explosions were really a coincidence, as the Russians said, right?). Zourabichvili also repeats the Russian propaganda narrative that Saakashvili allegedly called Putin a "Lilliputin" (there are no facts to support this, apart from Russian propaganda rumors allegedly spread by the author), which was one of the causes of the problems between the states. Zourabichvili concludes that Georgia is to blame for subversive acts committed against Georgia on Russian territory ("Who is really responsible? Both parties are"), thus completely diluting the responsibility of the aggressor and shifting the conversation from the perpetrator's motive to the victim's reaction... Isn't this exactly what Russia wants?

After that, both sides continue to aggravate the situation: On the Georgian side, insults continue unabated, which is the weapon of the weak. From the Russian side, there is an enormous range of possibilities that are allowed by force (distribution of Russian passports to the residents of Abkhazia, numerous border crossings by official Russian delegations without Georgian visas, direct investments on the Abkhazian Riviera without the permission of the Georgian authorities), and all this in contradiction with international law and the commitments signed by the Russian side, by which it recognized the territorial integrity of Georgia. Russia begins to pursue a policy of "creeping annexation" of separatist territories.

That same summer, President Saakashvili gives the order to open fire on Russian ships

that violate Georgian territorial waters. Russia condemns this “criminal order”, accusing Tbilisi of threatening civilians and highlights Georgia’s bellicose attitude.

Under the pretext of violations of sanitary norms, the Russian blockade extends to the import of wine and mineral water, dealing a serious blow to the Georgian economy. Defense Minister Okruashvili challenges the Russians in front of the cameras: He responds to accusations of wine falsification with an aggressive formula, “Our wine, even if it is mixed with feces, is still good enough for Russians!” Russian society reacts painfully, taking it as a national insult. For Georgians, the wine embargo touches not only the vital nerve of the economy but also patriotic strings: In Georgia, the grapevine is a symbol of nationality and religion. With this confrontation we take another step into the realm of irrationalism and emotion.

September 2006 marks the beginning of another new phase – the arrest of four Russian intelligence officers. These agents are arrested and extradited publicly, with the accompanying anti-Russian rhetoric, that is not usual procedure in the disclosure of such cases. Moscow responds by deporting four hundred Georgians brought into the country on cargo planes. This is the most blatant form of racist campaign supported by the official authorities, which takes the form of a “manhunt for Caucasians” in the streets of major Russian cities. Add to this the blockade of air routes, the abolition



Salome Zourabichvili’s pre-election billboard, depicting Bidzina Ivanishvili 2018 presidential election

of visas, the embargo on all kinds of agricultural products and finally the recall of ambassadors.

Note that Zourabichvili presented all of Russia’s criminal actions as a response to Georgian provocations. However, let us not go too far, the arrested spies were involved in subversive, destructive and terrorist activities in Georgia (remember the terrorist attack in Gori that they organized).

It’s not a war yet, but we’re getting closer to it.

Not to be outdone, the Georgian Defense Minister makes a loud promise: “I will celebrate the first of January 2007 in Tskhinvali”, which everyone sees as a major political breakthrough. Georgia is no longer ruling out a military solution to the problem. All the more so as no one is contradicting the words of the Defense Minister.

Both sides are involved in the escalation, each playing its part and effectively putting

the ball in the other's court. And both benefit from it. The Russian people are grateful to Putin for giving free rein to racism, which until now has been latent and unexpressed. Anything that looks like teaching Georgia a good lesson increases Putin's popularity. Saakashvili, for his part, is also playing on patriotic sentiment, fulfilling the expectations of citizens and winning the local elections of October 5, 2006, thanks in part to Russian spies. In this war of nerves, any means are acceptable. Two non-democratic regimes are using symmetrical means to awaken the sleeping demons of their populations in order to gain popularity. The year 2006 marks the end of hopes for progress in the conflicts. And also the first serious crack in the calendar of Georgia's rapprochement with NATO and the European Union.

Here Zourabichvili acts as a cynical "expert" representing a third party. With her feigned distance and moral neutrality, she places the aggressor and the victim on an equal footing. This is Russia's aim – to show that Georgia is guilty too, that Saakashvili's Georgia (which many in the world regard as a beacon of democracy and an example of successful reform) is just as much a regime as Putin's Russia. Zourabichvili deliberately discusses Russia's fascist policy of persecuting Georgians on the basis of their ethnicity, and even if it is a populist but legitimate attempt by the sovereign government of Georgia to expose the secret services of an enemy country on an equal footing... but no Russian official's words can be as credible and convincing to the outside world as the text of a formally "Georgian" politician. It is precisely this role that Zourabichvili plays.

In 2007, we are one step closer to open confrontation. Russia is reinforcing its policy of applying double standards and gradually gaining a foothold in conflict zones. The Olympic Committee's acceptance of Sochi as a candidate city for the Olympic Games is a new challenge for Georgia. Massive investment in Abkhazia's neighborhood could push it towards Russia. Russia is increasing its presence in the separatist territories.

In this confrontation, Russia is emboldened by the change in the balance of power: It feels that Georgia is weak because of the divisions that have arisen as a result of the revolution, that its social and economic crisis is being exacerbated by the political crisis. Russia is particularly sensitive to changes in the global balance of power: Georgia's main ally, the United States of America, is weakened. This is no longer the triumphant America of 2004, but the America of 2007, bogged down in Iraq and Afghanistan, with a president whose approval ratings are falling and who is no longer a reliable protector. Russia, on the other hand, is more confident in its own strength, and the rise in the price of oil and natural resources is increasing its revenues and strengthening it.

According to Zourabichvili, Georgia weakened after the Rose Revolution, which is not true, it is a lie and is not backed up by figures. According to all the data, Georgia was making significant, measurable, internationally recognized progress. The economy was growing, law and order was being strengthened, Georgia was being ranked as a progressive reformer in international rankings, the country's international recognition and image were growing, which was reflected in an increase in foreign direct investment, investments were being made in defense and security, which was making Georgia more secure, and the so-called disagreements that arose after the Rose Revolution did not weaken Georgia. In the early years, President Saakashvili enjoyed a very high level of trust, which, although weakened in 2007, was still high enough to maintain a stable socio-economic and political environment in the country. So Zourabichvili is ly-

ing when she says that Georgia has weakened after the revolution. It is also absurd to claim that the seemingly diminished role of the US has had a negative impact on Georgia's importance to the West. In fact, the Bush administration's foreign policy at the time gave Georgia a prominent place because it was a successful example of reform and democratic transformation in the region. Based on the foreign policy of the USA, in which the spread and promotion of democracy in the world was of key importance, the American support for Georgia in this period was historically high, which Georgia also used. It is significant that in this paragraph Zourabichvili refers to the US as a "protector", another Russian propaganda cliché woven into the text.

Russia is tempted to take advantage of Georgia's weakness, to make a show of force and intimidation at lower cost, to regain a foothold in the Caucasus that it could not bear to lose, and to avenge its humiliation. It is looking for an excuse, it is organizing provocations. It wishes to push Georgia into making a mistake. It will achieve this more easily than it could have hoped.

Zourabichvili claims that Russia has lost the Caucasus, which is unfortunately a lie. Russia never completely left the Caucasus, it had its own military representation in the region and occupied territories, which in 2008 though they did not have the status of "occupied territories", they were in fact occupied. Zourabichvili tries to show that Russia needs a mistake on the Georgian side in order to return. But Russia had a significant military contingent in both Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region.

Saakashvili is ahead of expectations and is entering the game. The more the Georgian president feels his popularity waning, the more he is tempted to play on patriotic motives, to use military rhetoric and to make promises about the return of territories.

The more the Russian president senses the growth of his own strength and the weakness of his neighbors, Ukraine and Georgia, or their patron, America, and the division in the Western camp over the admission of these two countries to NATO, the more he is tempted to take advantage of this division and raise his voice.

Zourabichvili again uses a Russian propaganda cliché when she says that Ukraine and Georgia (meaning the governments that came to power as a result of the color revolutions) have "protectors" in the West.

This dynamic of escalation leads to conflict, and neither side is willing to stop. At the beginning of 2008, the framework is in place, the script is written, and this is the script of the announced war.

The option of maximum confrontation is supported by the idea that the strategy of tension helps to gain maximum support from the American allies and increases the strategic importance of Georgia. So why not follow this logic to the end and try to get the discreet Americans to take action to protect Georgia, which is in open conflict with Russia – why not put Washington in a situation where it will no longer be able to abandon its small and loyal ally? Wouldn't it be better to take the risk of cutting out the tumor rather than engaging in futile and time-consuming negotiations that will exhaust the country? What is a better way than war to show Russia's true face and aggressiveness and make Georgia look like a victim?

Faced with Russia's consolidation of its positions, its constant seizure of territories and its provocations, Saakashvili is trying not to fall behind and not to disappoint his people's

expectations. He made the return of the territories his main electoral promise, vowing that he would not leave the government without restoring Georgia's territorial integrity; he had to show his people that he could stand up to Russia and achieve success.

Instead of real victories, false achievements and lies feed the propaganda. But this will come at a price in the future...

For example, the police operation has made it possible to regain control of Kodori Valley near Abkhazia, which had been held by local Georgian armed gangs for 15 years. The Georgian authorities have not stopped trying to portray the restoration of control as an annexation of territory. To support this view, the high mountain valley is called Upper Abkhazia. In fact, this is a lie, since the valley in question never belonged to the Abkhazians and therefore could not be taken away from them.

This lie will come at a high price: During the war of August 2008, Abkhazian and Russian troops will enter Kodori Valley, taking Georgia at its word. If the Kodori valley is part of Abkhazia, then its return is legitimate!

This paragraph would have been shockingly incompetent even if it had been written by a first-year political science student in Greenland. Given that it is written by a senior, experienced French diplomat, the version of incompetence here is hard to believe. There is only one explanation – that this is being done deliberately, on purpose, to mislead the world community, to point the arrows at Georgia and to justify Russia's war of conquest. It is a fact that Kodori Valley was included in the administrative borders of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia, Georgia, much of which was controlled by the Russians and their separatist proxies after the 1992-1993 war. The claim that the reason the Russians seized the Kodori Gorge during the 2008 war and expelled the Georgians from it was just because it was called Upper Abkhazia is such a blatant lie that repeating it would make even the most brazen Russian propagandist blush. But not Salome Zourabichvili.

A different kind of manipulation is taking place in South Ossetia, known in Georgian as the Tskhinvali region. Saakashvili decided to create an alternative separatist government loyal to Tbilisi in order to defeat the separatist regime of the Moscow puppet Eduard Kokoi-ti. In a show of generosity, he gives this loyal government the capital (Kurta), the administration, the budget (several million dollars), the president (Dimitri Sanakoev) and the territory (the Liakhvi and Akhagori valleys, populated mainly by Georgians and under Tbilisi's control since the 1992 war). Saakashvili will even hold presidential elections in the part controlled by Tbilisi in order to give his separatists the legitimacy they need. Thus, in order to consolidate the scheme of two separatist regimes with two presidents, Saakashvili is establishing the name of South Ossetia and legitimizing for the time being the borders that Russia will recognize tomorrow as the borders of an independent Ossetia.

Rather than showing generosity, the appointment of Sanakoev was a political move by the Georgian government, the wisdom of which is debatable. But the main point here is that Zourabichvili is once again blaming Georgia for Russia's illegal actions, as if Saakashvili's domestic decisions caused the Russians to occupy the Akhagori region during the 2008 war. In fact, Russia was guided by Russian and Soviet maps, which showed Akhagori as part of the former South Ossetian Autonomous District, and as such, for them subject to occupation.

Attempts at secret negotiations with Moscow

Saakashvili knows that his popularity is waning. He is increasingly dependent on patriotic propaganda built around the return of lost territories. He expresses impatience with the hopelessly frozen process of conflict resolution and the excessive caution of American and European allies. Expectations of rapid progress towards NATO membership, which he seeks more for his own popularity than for strategic vision, are receding.

As Zourabichvili's narrative style is rather chaotic, it is difficult to tell which period she is talking about in which paragraph. In the previous paragraphs, the author is talking about the situation before the war. If this paragraph also refers to the same period, then Zourabichvili is lying when she claims that expectations of rapid progress towards NATO membership were receding. In 2007-2008, Georgia's integration into NATO was at its peak. The first disappointment came in April 2008, at the Bucharest summit, when Merkel blocked Georgia's and Ukraine's accession to NATO, though it was written in the declaration that Georgia and Ukraine would definitely become members of the Alliance at some point. It is also a lie to say that Saakashvili's decision to join NATO was driven by domestic rather than strategic considerations. Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations took on a systematic form during the UNM's rule.

The attempt to negotiate with Moscow is understandable. Moscow holds the key to resolving the conflicts and, indirectly, to power in Tbilisi. Especially since democracy is paralyzed. Saakashvili knows his Western partners too well not to know that his move towards autocracy will one day end with the harshest criticism of him. For the moment, is he not tempted to move closer to Russia, from which lessons in democracy are less expected? Publicly, such a rapprochement is unthinkable because the threat of Russia is needed to feed the populism in which the regime reigns. Therefore, if an agreement is to be reached, it will have to be a secret one.

According to Zourabichvili, Saakashvili knew that the West would react with criticism to the move towards autocracy, and so it was logical that Saakashvili would try to get closer to Russia, from which lessons on democracy were less expected. The only thing that could bring Saakashvili's government closer to Russia was the issue of the re-integration of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali. But even in this case, Saakashvili's attempts to negotiate with Russia came to an end when he realized that there was no point in negotiating with Russia. Zourabichvili's thesis that the Georgian government is tending towards Russia is unsupported, speculative and, in the style of Russian propaganda, designed to confuse the reader. Even more incomprehensible is the conspiratorial assumption about possible secret negotiations, for which there is no evidence.

Shortly before the August conflict, Saakashvili recalled that during his first and longest meeting with Putin in 2004, which lasted three hours, Putin asked him to give him some time to "digest" the revolution in Adjara and then he would deal with the South Ossetian issue "in a year or two"! But only on one condition: Saakashvili should not try to speed things up.

If this is true, then we can assume that Putin perceived the 2004 incident as a blow to this secret deal. This, in turn, raises questions about the reliability of commitments made by the Russian side, especially secret ones.

It is telling that Zourabichvili gives a high degree of credibility to Putin's alleged

words, the source of which we do not even know and which have no basis whatsoever, and confidently offers us the version that Saakashvili allegedly “dumped Putin”.

How can we trust the secret agreement with Russia? Why should we, when we know the history of Russian-Georgian relations?

Zourabichvili continues the same line. Let’s remember that the fact of a secret agreement has not been proven by any evidence. Not even by a single speculative argument. This conspiratorial version is based only on her assumptions and the rumors she herself spreads. Nevertheless, Zourabichvili is already selling this rumor as fact and attacking the phantom that she herself has created.

And how can we believe that Russia, eager to restore its great power credentials, would be willing to agree to the terms of a confidential agreement that the world would perceive as its withdrawal from the Caucasus, where it has been retreating for decades? The Ganmukhuri episode in October 2007 provides some answers to these questions. President Saakashvili, accompanied by several armed men, personally confronted the Russian peacekeepers and “pushed them back”. It is possible that this symbolic retreat convinces the Georgian president that the partial withdrawal promised to him by the Russians is real. He is seduced.

In this paragraph, Zourabichvili’s conspiracy theory takes on a new tone. In fact, the version is completely speculative and lacks any factual basis, as it is clear that she has no information about the issues discussed behind closed doors during the meeting of the two presidents. It is completely unclear what Zourabichvili is relying on other than her own imagination to accuse Saakashvili of a secret deal with Putin, when such a deal is not backed up by any facts.

Internally, after the demonstrations of November 2007 and the crackdown of November 7, which culminated in the raid on the Imedi television station, a movement towards authoritarianism is gaining momentum. After the elections and the partial opening of the media under American pressure, Saakashvili knows that the clock is ticking on his “forced democratization”. The presidential and parliamentary elections have failed to resolve the crisis facing the country. In order to restore his image abroad and his popularity at home, as well as to recover the money spent on the elections, bought at the price of gold, there is only one solution: war. The number of incidents in Abkhazia has increased since the spring. But a categorical warning from the US administration, accompanied by a visit by Condoleezza Rice in July 2008, temporarily halted this drive. Such a clear warning poses an acute dilemma for the Georgian regime: US calls for caution, growing criticism of the lack of democracy, lack of progress in the conflict zones, delayed expectations of NATO membership at the December 2007 ministerial summit and the April 2008 Bucharest summit leave little room for consolidation and strengthening of domestic authorities.

What are the frequent incidents to which the author refers? What proof do we have that these incidents are staged by the Georgian side and not a Russian provocation? The statement without evidence is speculative and aims to provide readers with false information in order to deliberately mislead them. The assumption that Saakashvili needed the war repeats the Russian propaganda message to justify Russian aggression. It is not supported by any evidence and is not shared by any (!) serious researcher, diplomat, or politician.

The scales are beginning to tilt towards the northern neighbor, who holds several keys: economic development, as it is the only potential market in the near future and one of the main shareholders in the privatization of Georgian assets; conflict resolution; and finally, Tbilisi knows that it is a partner whose advice on democracy is not to be feared. These are genuine arguments for some in the Georgian government, who are beginning to seriously consider the Russian option.

It is difficult for the Western mind to imagine how Saakashvili and Putin could hate each other and at the same time the interests of the two leaders could coincide. However, such interests do exist: Saakashvili wants to return at least a small part of the territories and regain the trust of his population in order to strengthen his position again. And Putin is trying to force Saakashvili into a move that would ultimately cut off his path to NATO and deprive him of unconditional American support. For each of them this is about consolidating their own power.

At the very least, it provides a better understanding of what happened in August 2008. It is difficult for us to imagine that Saakashvili would have embarked on this adventure in defiance of a publicly expressed call from Washington, knowing that he could not count on American and European support, especially from the French president, whose sympathies for Georgia were weak because of the traditional pro-Russian sentiment in Paris.

Relying on your own military might against the Russians is unbelievable! There is not even one chance in a thousand. The Georgian army is incapable of defeating the Russian Armed Forces, despite considerable expenditure on armaments and despite the progress made thanks to the American "Train and Equip Program". Despite all this, the Georgian army is still in its infancy, unable to stand up to its large northern neighbor. Nor can it count on its reservists, since these young men have had only two weeks' training. And he can't count on the effect of surprise. The fact is that the number of incidents in the conflict zones has increased since the beginning of the summer, and everyone's attention is riveted on them. And while official Georgian rhetoric makes no secret of its military ambitions, the constant Russian air strikes and the large-scale "Caucasus" military exercise held on the Russian side of the border in July, involving hundreds of tanks and thousands of troops, show that Moscow will go to any length.

How can we assess the operation carried out when it is clear that it cannot count on the effect of superiority, nor on the effect of surprise, nor on the help of others, and that the power ratio is one to thirty? Either it is a suicidal operation, in which only an insane president could involve his country, or it is an operation designed to cover up something else, such as a secret deal.

And in this paragraph, Zourabichvili again puts all the responsibility for the outbreak of the war on Saakashvili, who, as if with rational, personal motivation, planned and carried out the whole series of actions that culminated with the 2008 war. She still talks about the "secret deal" she invented, which remains a myth because its existence has never been confirmed by her or by any other circumstances. She calls the government's response to the aggression against Georgia a suicidal operation and uses the traditional Russian cliché that the country has an insane president (remember – the same rumor was spread about Zviad Gamsakhurdia). They have not changed the cliché – why should they, when it worked the first time and Georgians have a memory of no more than 2-3 years? While she puts all the responsibility for the August war on Geor-

gia, she makes no mention of Russia's responsibility. She does not mention the West's recognition of Kosovo in early 2008, to which Putin promised a disproportionate response. For some reason, she does not mention Russia's withdrawal from the CIS agreement, the demonstrative introduction of railway troops into Abkhazia, the shooting down of a Georgian drone by a Russian military aircraft, Russia's rejection of all peace proposals (including Steinmeier's initiative)... All this not only raises doubts and questions about the author's good faith, but also contains the only obvious answer to these questions: Zourabichvili's book serves Russian interests.

There are many indications in the official statements that this is the case. For example, Deputy Defense Minister Batu Kutelia admitted in an interview with Figaro: "We warned the Russian forces that we would see to illegal formations. They gave us the green light to intervene (...) We didn't think the Russians would go that far". Other Georgian officials admit that they "did not expect" such a reaction from Russia. It turns out that they were waiting for something else!

We can also recall the surprisingly conciliatory address of the Georgian president to the Russians in his televised speech on August 7, when he offered to guarantee the ceasefire he had announced. The head of state addressed the commander of the Russian peacekeepers, Kulakhmetov, forgetting that for months Georgia had been questioning the legitimacy of the peacekeepers and demanding their withdrawal.

There may have been some agreement that if the Georgian operation was quick and limited to Tskhinvali, the Russians would not have an immediate response. This theory is supported by the fact that the Ossetian government cleared Tskhinvali of a significant proportion of the civilian population a few days before the Georgian attack, as if to create space to persuade the Georgians to enter. It is also reported that the commander Kulakhmetov has received 4 million dollars for his "non-intervention".

Again unconfirmed rumors, again in the style of the Russian secret services. Zourabichvili offers no proof of the deal. The fact that Kulakhmetov allegedly took 4 million dollars in exchange for non-interference is also just a rumor. It looks like such actions are a usual modus operandi for Zourabichvili. Let us recall the bombing of the Tseluban radar by Russia on August 6, 2007, during the visit of U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, about which Salome Zourabichvili, already in the opposition, said it could have been staged by Georgian special services to "blacken" Russia. In this way, she tried to portray the Russian threat to the US as a provocation by the Georgians. No one has made such a claim against Georgia since the days of General Grachev, who said during the 1992-1993 war in Abkhazia that the Georgians were painting their military aircraft in Russian colors and bombing their own positions in order to blame everything on Russia. In reality, the Kremlin could not come to terms with the reforms that had begun in Georgia, leading to the rapid modernization and westernization of the country's economy.

Whether these agreements were public or secret, one thing is clear: Russia did not keep its word. It managed to trap the Georgian president, known for his impulsiveness.

The scenario is catastrophic. In three days, Georgia loses everything: It loses 10% of its territory instead of regaining it; it has hundreds of casualties that have yet to be fully counted; the prospect of NATO membership is closed for a long time; it pays an econom-

ic price that affects the driving sectors of its economy (tourism, transit, foreign investment). It is also losing international credibility: In particular, the Georgian president's belated and erroneous version that Georgia was merely responding to Russian aggression does not stand up to factual scrutiny. This damages Saakashvili's personal credibility and his image as an unblemished democrat.

Of course, Russia is loudly condemned and criticized for its transgressions, for its illegal and unjustified advances into Georgian territory, but the mistakes of the Georgians mitigate its guilt somewhat.

Again, Zourabichvili's attempt to bolster Russia's narrative and mitigate its guilt by blaming Georgia is clear: What mistakes is Zourabichvili talking about when she accuses Georgia as a whole of starting the war? It is inappropriate to talk about mistakes on the part of Georgia, because we would not have been able to avoid war under any circumstances, as the war in Ukraine has amply demonstrated. And even if there were mistakes on the part of Georgia, none of these mistakes could have mitigated the guilt of Russia for invading and occupying the sovereign territory of Georgia.

Exaggerated statements lead to a loss of credibility for both protagonists: The destruction is not as brutal as the Georgians first claimed, and the accusation of genocide by the Russians first diminishes and then disappears.

The Russians wanted to impress and intimidate. They demonstrated a war from the last century, designed to shock the post-Soviet population, with tanks and an archaic scenario that they did not want at all, instead of the modern type of war, which consists of destroying the strategic and economic centers of a country. The Russians were careful not to target anything important except military facilities: Neither the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, nor the main presidential residence in Shavnabad, nor the East-West railway and highway, nor Tbilisi's civil airport, which would continue to function throughout the war and allow international delegations to arrive unhindered. They leave the country's economic apparatus untouched. Is it not because they already own much of it?

In this paragraph Zourabichvili offers us two lies and a propaganda rumor: First, that the Russians bombed only military targets. The bombed civilian houses in Gori, the blown up theatre in Senaki and a number of other civilian objects prove the opposite. The Russians bombed the houses of civilians and peaceful people. As for the fact that the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, railway and road were not bombed, there are other reasons. Bombing Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan would mean going beyond the framework of the Georgian-Russian conflict and would also damage other actors, spoiling relations with whom it was not in the Kremlin's interest. It was also illogical to bomb the highways. The Russians needed the highways for unimpeded movement. As a rule, the highways are damaged by those defending themselves in order to limit the enemy's movement on their own territory. The same logic applies to the railways. The Russians would only have bombed it if the Georgian army had been using it effectively for its logistical tasks. The second lie is that the international delegations would arrive without any problems. Representatives of delegations from various countries claim that the Russians caused them significant problems in the air, which made their safe arrival to Tbilisi questionable. As for the propaganda rumor, it is again about the Russians taking over the Georgian economy, which is simply a lie. However, the fact that Salome Zourabichvili's knowledge of economics doesn't even reach the level of a schoolchild is some-

thing that many remember from her TV debate with Lado Gurgenzidze before the 2008 elections, in which Zourabichvili, a candidate for the post of prime minister (!), said that she didn't know or care about certain economic terms and indicators. Of course, if all you have to go on are rumors and your opponent's propaganda clichés, what need is there for facts and figures?

In short, this war will be the result of a labyrinth of lies in which, in the end, no one knows who is betraying whom and who is lying to whom. We do not know what is more real – the confrontation, the deals made and rejected, or the lies about the return of territories. This war, which began with lies, is ending with the apotheosis of lies: Convincing our own people that we have won the war we have just lost. And on August 12, Tbilisi celebrates a “victory” on Freedom Square that leaves a bitter aftertaste.

In this situation of mutual responsibility between Moscow and Tbilisi, I do not want the emphasis on the responsibility of the Georgian side to be interpreted as an exemption from the responsibility of the Russian side. Quite the opposite. But what Russia has done, inexcusable as it is, was not unexpected or surprising for those who know its nature, its history and the history of Georgian-Russian relations. On the contrary, the fault of the Georgian side lies in the fact that the Georgian government, knowing that Moscow was trying to deceive it, did not resist the temptation until the end.

Although in this paragraph Zourabichvili tries to present herself as an objective and noble arbiter, she repeats the Russian propaganda message that, despite Russia's actions, Georgia should not have succumbed to the provocation, as if it had any other choice. In the first sentence of the paragraph, Zourabichvili says that the Georgian side, along with Russia, is responsible for starting the war. Even in this paragraph she is inconsistent, because in the previous pages she argued that Saakashvili planned and unleashed the war because it was in his own interests.

There is a shared responsibility beyond these two actors. And first and foremost, it is the responsibility of the Bush administration. But not in giving the green light to any kind of military operation, as the Russians and some people close to Saakashvili have claimed. On the contrary, I witnessed repeated warnings that were the leitmotif of all the American visitors. Nor do I have any doubt that there has never been any encouragement or pressure on the Georgian authorities to consider military solutions to conflicts, or to hope that they would be supported. This has not prevented them from perceiving their own wishes for reality. Just as after the war, while hosting his Polish counterpart, Saakashvili dreamed that by provoking the Akhlagori incident he could involve Europe in protecting Georgian territory.

The actual responsibility of the Americans does not lie here. The responsibility is political: It lies in their silence about other misdeeds and failures immediately preceding the war. The lack of democracy is at the heart of Georgia's chaos. The democratic regime would not go to war: The decision of the President on August 7 would have become the subject of discussion, it would have been published in the press, questions would have been asked in the parliament, obstacles would have been created. In the absence of a democratic system of checks and balances, no one dared protesting against this personal decision. No meeting of the Security Council, no discussion in the parliamentary committee. It is an isolated and total power (authority) that decides on issues of war and peace, conducts negotiations and is accountable to no one. That's exactly what the Americans should have

prevented since they were engaged in the promotion of democracy in Georgia.

There is also a functional weakness of the American system: How is it that despite an embassy with several hundred personnel in the country, military advisers under the Train and Equip Program, a USAID hired consultant close to the president (Daniel Kunin), despite frequent visits by Matthew Bryza, no one raised the alarm when the military was mobilized, when the presidential address was broadcast? Why did no one denounce the military budget, which was about a third higher than in 2007? Why hasn't Washington used its influence to more clearly curb the military ambitions that have become increasingly apparent over the past two years? We are dealing with a systemic error, caused by negligence (when one foresees consequences and does nothing to prevent them) and weakness, when it chose to support individuals rather than the country's institutions. The Americans seek stability more than they seek democracy. Democracy and stability have paid a price.

In this paragraph Zourabichvili says that the increase in the defense budget was an indication that Saakashvili's government was going to start a war with Russia, but the increase in the defense budget only indicates that the government was trying to increase its defense capabilities. What is very important in this passage is that here Zourabichvili is repeating and elaborating the main messages of Russian propaganda. She portrays Georgia's main strategic ally as complicit in the war. At the same time, in order to belittle the US state and security system, she presents it as incompetent, failing to recognize the true intentions of their ally. Finally, the author is traditionally inconsistent when she claims that the Americans saw no danger of war, while a few paragraphs above Zourabichvili speaks of a series of warnings from the Americans, which she says she witnessed personally. What this is – getting lost in her own lies, incompetence or acting in the interests of the enemy – the reader can determine for themselves.

The European and international institutions, including the OSCE, the Council of Europe, the European Parliament and the ODIHR, which failed to speak out and recognized the elections as democratic enough for Georgia, also bear their share of responsibility. The suspension of Georgia before the second round of the presidential elections is also a missed opportunity to avoid war. If President Saakashvili had been elected in a democratically conducted second round, he would not have been the same president, nor would he have participated in the reckless gambling that his illegitimate victory rendered inevitable.

In this paragraph, Zourabichvili undermines the reputation of international democratic institutions (which, in light of the 10-year rule of Georgian Dream, is no longer really surprising) and casts doubt on their objectivity (which suspiciously coincides with the consistent policy and rhetoric of Putin's Russia on the same issue). Zourabichvili still blames everyone, except Russia.

The Americans clearly wanted to pardon their protégé. The surprising silence of President Bush during the first three days also explains the Russian advance towards the capital. The Russian plan to mislead Tbilisi and then use force to teach Saakashvili a lesson, certainly did not go beyond asserting control over Tskhinvali in the name of the peace-keeping mission. However, as the red light was not switched on by the Americans as a sign of prohibition, the Russian war machine, happily engaged in its favorite pastime, had no reason to stop its advance towards the capital.

Europe once again stood up to the challenge and acted swiftly, combining adherence to principle and conciliation. Sarkozy showed flexibility and firmness, and the results were achieved largely thanks to him. Europe's entry into Georgia not only marks the end of the offensive, but also delivers a real blow to Russia's ambitions to regain the zone of exclusive influence in the Caucasus. Some have criticized the agreement for being ambiguous on some issues... The negotiations could not prevent a war, eliminate its immediate consequences, or regain lost territories. They saved the main thing: Georgia and its independence. The rest needs to be done.

Here Zourabichvili is trying to distance the US and Europe from each other, presenting the US as an incompetent partner in the adventure and putting Europe in a better position, thus trying to bring dissonance to Euro-Atlantic unity. At the same time, it is unclear if the US showed mercy to its protégé, as the author describes it. Then by what logic did it not help him to avoid war, moreover – “turned on the green light” for the Russian offensive? Furthermore, what is the explanation for Moscow stopping and not advancing towards the capital after Bush’s call? Finally, and here it is important to emphasize that Zourabichvili still talks about the responsibility of everyone except Russia, whose responsibility she mentions once or twice and in a casual manner. But nowhere does she refer to this state as an aggressor and occupant. A whole page is devoted to the responsibility of the USA and democratic institutions, and a whole chapter to the responsibility of the Saakashvili government. There is virtually no mention of Russia’s responsibility.

However, the idea of a deal with Russia, or rather the idea of division, has not gone anywhere. It appears again, this time in connection with Abkhazia, and implies division of the territory according to the Cyprus model. A division that would have given Georgia the southern part with the Gali district, so to speak, leaving the northern part to the Abkhazians. Saakashvili would later confirm that he had indeed sent a letter to his Russian counterpart in which he hinted at such a solution.



Salome Zourabichvili blamed Georgia for the 2007 tsitelubani bombing - “Stratfor”

Trying to make a deal with Moscow is just beating the air. It is a last-ditch attempt to find a way out of the situation. There is a widespread belief among Georgians that Russian soldiers are corrupt and can be bribed. We will not win the war with Russia, but maybe we can negotiate the limitation of the conflict with them through a deal to which both protagonists will agree: Georgia will get the territories and the Russian side will benefit from the fact that the prospect of Georgia joining NATO will be reduced to zero and its ties with the West will be severed (territories returned to Georgia, NATO membership prospects reduced to zero, and ties with the West severed for the Russian side).

Fourteen years have passed since the publication of this book. In 2014 and again in 2022, Russia launched unprovoked and unjustified attacks on sovereign Ukraine. After open military aggression, Russia was recognized as an aggressor attacking neighboring states because of their Western vector and Euro-Atlantic aspirations. The Russian president has been recognized as a war criminal and Putin's regime has been condemned as terrorist by many countries. All doubts that the then Georgian government was responsible for the August war have been dispelled. Instead, it has been proven that Russia was the aggressor, that it planned and started the war, that Georgia was defending itself against an illegitimate aggression in order to protect the freedom and independence of the state. There is no evidence of a secret deal between Putin and the then Georgian authorities even now 14 years after the book was published. Moreover, even under the conditions of the Georgian Dream government, not a single international document mentions anything about Zourabichvili's accusations of a secret deal between the Georgian government and Putin and the disregard of national interests. The results and facts show the opposite. They show that Zourabichvili deliberately lied and acted against the interests of the Georgian state.

Today, Salome Zourabichvili is the president of Georgia. Formally, she ran as an independent candidate, but after her defeat in the first round of the 2018 presidential elections, the oligarch Ivanishvili showed his cards and declared that Salome Zourabichvili was his "principled candidate" for the presidency. In line with this choice, the special operation, called the second round of the 2018 presidential elections, was carried out with a full mobilization of state, administrative, financial, criminal and other resources. The OSCE/ODIHR international observer mission assessed these elections as "free but unfair".

Translation by Davit Natroshvili



Levan Kherkheulidze Photography

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ცენტრი

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The Chavchavadze Center
20 Giorgi Akhvlediani Street
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