

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

*Ilia Chavchavadze*

**NEW**

**iveria**

№7 October 2024

Zurab Guruli

**THE COST OF FAILING TO GRASP:  
WHEN THE GOOD CHICKEN OUT**

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Keti Kurdovanidze

**DOWRY SUITCASE**

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Zaza Bibilashvili

**THREE LESSONS**

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Aidan Yusif, Natia Mikhelidze

**EVADING SANCTIONS:  
HOW GEORGIA FACILITATES RUSSIA'S  
MILITARY SUPPLY CHAIN**



THE NEW IVERIA  
Social and Political Journal

№7, October 2024

ISSN 3088-4071

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

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### Zaal Samadashvili

There comes a day in our lives after which the following weeks, months, or even years take on a new color, inspired by different emotions and new ambitions.

In Georgia, we are still waiting for that day. By now, the level of expectation for such a pivotal moment has become heavy, as for tens of years we have been waiting for a day that will change our lives.

It will be up to us how exactly that day will pass, and how we will remember it.

It is also up to us to decide what sort of country we will live in: a state based on justice and equality, or an estate of a rich master who gained his power in the occupying Russia, and where prosperity is granted only to his lackeys.

Against this backdrop, we must look to 26 October 2024.

We must face this day with courage and confidence. We must spare no effort and strive to make it a democratic success. Let us make the right choice and stand by it.

We are motivated by the knowledge that each of us on the right side are contributing to a great cause, one to which our ancestors, laymen and clergy, and from great educators to righteous warriors, dedicated their lives.

That cause is to struggle for Georgia's rightful place in the free world and its return to its true home: Europe. ■







Zurab Guruli

## “The Cost of Failing to Grasp: When the Good Chicken Out”

*“This is an unfair thing about war: victory is claimed by all, failure to one alone.”*

*Publius Cornelius Tacitus*

There are only a few days left until the October 26 election. For some time, I have been contemplating whether it would be worth speculating about the possible results. What would this change, and what would be the point of reiterating what has already been discussed countless times? In reality, the die has already been cast. Georgia must decide its fate through this election. Although the country has endured numerous internal conflicts, destruction, and bloodshed on political grounds, elections represent the only logical path through which to settle disputes.

The political “battlefield” has been set out, and basic civic-patriotic duty calls on every conscious citizen to do everything possible to secure victory. I can now roughly imagine how Giorgi Saakadze felt when the Georgians ignored his sensible plan and rushed into the Marabda Valley

to fight the Kizilbashes. It is of course difficult to act against one’s own reason, but there are times when it becomes necessary.

Victory has its own axiomatic regularities and rules. The philosopher Sun Tzu, author of *The Art of War*, famously wrote: “Victorious warriors win first and then go to war, while defeated warriors go to war first and then seek to win.” The question the Georgian opposition should be asking itself today is: “Are we entering this battle as victors?”

The reigning government’s “choose peace” slogan is indeed a resonant one. If you oppose it, you are condemned for apparently wanting war. While war and peace are concrete, existential conditions, concepts such as dignity, conscience,

“Victorious warriors win first and then go to war, while defeated warriors go to war first and then seek to win.”

self-respect, and shame are all more abstract and symbolic. Ultimately, the latter qualities stand little chance against the force of primitive pragmatism.

Let's examine the opposition's main slogan: "We want Europe!" The Georgian Dream has not rejected this slogan,



**War in Ukraine**

and instead occupied it as its own. Consequently, the opposition was left without a compelling slogan. In somewhat graphic terms, the Georgian Dream grabbed the slogan, chewed it up, and, ultimately, turned it into excrement. In such developments, the basic mechanisms of social-psychological marketing management can be found. No abstract concept can successfully counter concrete realities. Understanding this fact should not be unthinkable to any mindful Georgian. It does not imply, however, that the Geor-

Ukraine is dismantling a deeply entrenched ideology of Western conformism that has become comfortable. Today, Ukraine is under tremendous psychological pressure to somehow restore the global conformist balance.

gian nation is worth less than others. In-

deed, similar crises of values are happening worldwide.

"Ukrainians will never, ever agree to stop fighting. Why should anyone in today's world impose on us the brutal reality of a colonial past instead of a normal, peaceful life?" This statement by President Zelensky at the UN General Assembly carries similar weight to Emperor Haile Selassie's address to the League of Nations in 1936 where, protesting the Italian annexation of Abyssinia, he warned: "It is us today, it will be you tomorrow!"

It may be decades before we fully realize that Ukraine is actively pursuing ideological and political catharsis on a global scale. Ukraine is dismantling a deeply entrenched ideology of Western conformism that has become comfortable. Today, Ukraine is under tremendous psychological pressure to somehow restore the global conformist balance. It is fighting primarily for its own survival. If Zelensky's nerves eventually give way and he compromises, Ukraine's future will be jeopardized: possibly civil war, and perhaps even complete degradation.

The future can be predicted through reasonable analysis of the past, and that is precisely why we study history. In fact, we have many recent examples to draw from.

A case worth examining here is Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaidó. At one point, the leading countries of the world recognized him as president. The United States and the United Kingdom welcomed him warmly. Yet, the incumbent Nicolás Maduro rallied his supporters, the military, and the police—and he won. This is despite turning potentially





**Nicolás Maduro**

one of the world's richest countries into a nation of beggars, stealing the futures of his own people. Whether by force or by choice, he was elected by the very people whose futures he robbed.

How has the world reacted? Initially it was hesitant, but then it got used to it. Spain, Brazil, and Colombia soon re-established official political and economic relations with the Maduro government, and others followed suit.

Meanwhile, the case of Afghanistan exemplifies that not all societies have the same potential for development. The world's leading democracies tried for 20 years to transform Afghanistan, but eventually gave up. "After 20 years of war, I refuse to send a new generation of America's children to Afghanistan," said President Biden, leaving the Afghan people to the rule of the Taliban.

Poverty, hopelessness, illiteracy, and primitivism have all led to the aggressive proliferation of religion, with a distorted pseudo-religion becoming the only means of self-expression for desperate people. Does this mean Afghans are not

brave? Of course, not - this is a warrior nation.

Despite these claims, official statistics and our investigation reveal that sanctioned goods have crossed Georgia's borders. Today, seemingly according to the will of the country's people, Afghanistan has no future. And it appears that there is no foreign political-military force that can change the desire of the Afghans and the nation is therefore doomed.

What has caused this tragedy?

The answer is simple – cowardice.

Where good is cowardly, evil cannot be eradicated. For 20 years, Westerners tried in vain to create an army of Afghans, but even battalions armed to the teeth proved powerless against the primitive and stubborn Taliban. That is why Afghanistan belongs to them.

What are Georgia's chances of becoming a true democracy? Can Georgian society overcome the dominance of classical Russian primitivism in its own bosom? If not, what is the price of such domination? And what price is Ukraine paying today to get out of the Russian orbit and



**Afghanistan today**

join European society forever, and is it worth paying? What do we lack? Intelligence or courage? Or do we just need to

show greater courage in our intellect? Is there such a thing as cowardly and courageous intellect? What is the essence of the Georgian nation today?

**What's the point of speculating about unanswerable questions and an obscure international review?**

**The point is to go into the October 26 election in a victorious mindset and to understand fully the consequences of defeat. If we can do that, we will believe in ourselves and make others believe that we are facing a truly existential risk.**

What's the point of speculating about unanswerable questions and an obscure international review? The point is to go into the October 26 election in a victorious mindset and to understand fully the consequences of defeat. If we can do that, we will believe in ourselves and make others

**"Victory has many fathers, but defeat is an orphan" was how President Kennedy paraphrased Tacitus' admonition. And it's true. If the Georgian opposition wins, the country will remain in the family of civilizations, but if it loses, it will be cast aside, and isolated.**

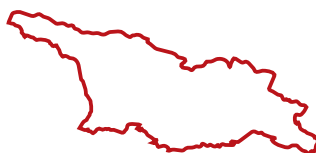
believe that we are facing a truly existential risk. The international review here describes the context in which we now find ourselves. Without knowing that, it would be impossible to perceive reality correctly. Unfortunately, our current context is harsh and ruthless.

Taking a close look at President Zelensky, he seems to have aged 20 years in two years.

That and many other factors lead us to wonder whether abstract notions can prevail over concrete ones.

They can, but on one condition - the dimension or the reality must be changed, or, rather, a new one must be created. You can only create a new reality if you refuse to play by the rules of the current reality created by your opponent. You must step out of their game, and invent and create a new game of your own.

"Victory has many fathers, but defeat is an orphan" was how President Kennedy paraphrased Tacitus' admonition. And it's true. If the Georgian opposition wins, the country will remain in the family of civilizations, but if it loses, it will be cast aside and isolated. ■



**Ketil Kurdovanidze**

## A Story Told by a Friend

I was born in a seaside town. Anyone who is raised by the sea will know how spacious and immense that can feel. It seems particularly large when you are small when the kaleidoscope of other things and an unconscious longing for them has not yet been imprinted on your perception of life. Such things gradually fill your mind, eventually leaving no room for clarity or judgment. The contamination of this innocent seaside view with goods of different cultures and their costs creeps up on you so gradually and inexorably that you can only navigate through them, rather than appreciate them. Often, the perception of these goods exceeds their real value until one day fortune smiles up-

on you, and you discover the true price of such actual mediocrity. At that point, with a broken heart, you ponder how much emotion you have wasted on things you once considered valuable and exciting.

In my seaside town, where there were abundant exotic amusements, the most vivid and mysterious memory of my childhood is connected with the Soviet ethos, which was held an honorable place in the foyer of one of the polyclinics, reflecting the cultural heritage of that era, and somehow came to life despite being in stone form. I was very young then and did not even understand what the Soviet Union was and what its spirit or ideology meant. But my childish admiration for

it touched my heart so much that when I saw the monument in the lobby, I thought that there could not be anything more beautiful in the world. So I thought anyway, and deep down I was proud that this apparently immortal masterpiece was right here, in my town, and not in Rome, Paris, or anywhere else.

As time passed, my life came to be filled with new impressions: Michelangelo Donatello, Bernini, Canova, Rodin, and

It is often the sense of inaccessibility that gives things and experiences a unique allure, especially in a closed, totalitarian system like that of the Stalinist era. In those times, the basic comforts enjoyed by much of the rest of humanity were available only to the regime's loyal servants. Ordinary people, intimidated into silence, were left without them. They could only quietly admire the "sweet life" of the ruling elite.

Bourdelle slowly penetrated my thoughts, and that aforesaid childish admiration disappeared in the clouds of my memory like the setting sun in that seaside town, as if it had never existed.

Later, one day when I returned to visit my hometown, I found the same unworldly statue that had been etched in my memory on the floor of the polyclinic's lobby, and now it appeared to me like a great and terrible monster - with a sickle and a hammer in its hands. A real Soviet ghoul, it now looked as pathetic as the dragon from Tolkien's *Hobbit* and was a symbol of failed evil.

## Osobtorg

You might be surprised, but my grandmother, who lived through the Soviet oc-

cupation of Georgia, repression, World War II, and even a coup d'état, never talked about anything as emotionally as she did about "Osobtorg," - an economic system created in the 1940s, during the Stalinist era. It was supposed to ensure the welfare of the Soviet elite, while providing the proletariat with bread and other basic products through a voucher arrangement. Under "Osobtorg," elite shops and restaurants were made available to Soviet generals and high-ranking officials who could access seemingly unlimited quantities of scarce products. Ordinary mortals were not even allowed to enter these stores, and could only look in wonder at the white bread and delicious cakes displayed in their windows, like they were museum exhibits. The specialness of these stores left a lasting and indelible impression on my grandmother, who had seen and experienced so much. However, in today's reality, there was nothing in those stores that could compare to even a single shelf in modern markets. And yet the dreamy feeling stirred by their inaccessibility felt by my grandmother every time she passed by these stores back then, which she passed on to her grandchildren, was far more powerful and memorable than the thrill I later felt when experiencing a New York mall, where everything was accessible and all were free to enter. It is often the sense of inaccessibility that gives things and experiences a unique allure, especially in a closed, totalitarian system like that of the Stalinist era. In those times, the basic comforts enjoyed by much of the rest of humanity were available only to the regime's loyal servants. Ordinary people, intimidated into silence, were left without them. They could only admire the "sweet life" of the ruling elite.





So many years have passed since the time of Stalinism and so much has been re-evaluated, yet some of its principles remain unchanged even in the post-Soviet era: “everything is fine, stay quiet, don’t question anything, just tolerate it.” After all, we should just accept that the chosen few political and artistic circles live carefree. These artists, athletes, and scientists earned your admiration and made you vote for the ruling party. Yet, they are the ones who consistently sold out and today sell out their homeland. It transpires that this so-called “elite” could neither withstand criticism nor face up to international competition. So, what’s left now for a tired, impoverished voter like my grandmother? Nothing. As she occasionally mutters at home: “There’s no government for the poor.”

## The Dowry Suitcase

After the Stalinist era, when people finally felt able to breathe, a brown suitcase with iron corners and locks could be found in the pantry of nearly every middle-class family. Inside these suitcases were carefully stored bed linen, underwear, and towels, all of which had been acquired at great cost. These were often obtained through connections returning from Moscow, or purchased from speculators. Such items accumulated over the years became rare treasures, only to see the light of day if fate would smile upon their daughter for her to get married. Having such a suitcase allowed a housewife to sleep peacefully at night, knowing she was prepared for the future. During the day, she could enjoy the status of a caring parent, safe in the knowledge that the suitcase contained her most valuable

possessions: lace nightgowns made in Germany, Chinese towels, kitchen towels with Polish designs, and a thousand other small prized possessions. In short, these were items that could only be bought “under the counter” in Soviet Georgia or after enduring long queues in the department stores of Russia.

All members of the family were forbid-

So many years have passed since the time of Stalinism and so much has been re-evaluated, yet some of its principles remain unchanged even in the post-Soviet era: “everything is fine, stay quiet, don’t question anything, just tolerate it.” After all, we should just accept that the chosen few political and artistic circles live carefree.

den to touch these suitcases (even elderly daughters, who remained spinsters), because the caring mother believed that she would never be able to have such a suitcase again, and that it could only be used for a special event such as marriage. In the minds of Soviet people, a daughter was only supposed to get married once, and that would last forever. Even though many things went out of fashion and faded, this particular tradition survived, and the fate of a Soviet bride was associated with that suitcase, even as it yellowed as it lay around for years unopened.

But the collapse of the USSR diminished the value of Czech crystal vases, once-expensive Arabic chandeliers that once held almost cult status, and even the alluring splendor of mass-produced jewelry from Russian factories. As time passed, it became clear that those vases were not worth anything, and nor were those chandeliers, while the Russian jewelry dwindled into nothing more than crude and tasteless accessories.



It was hard to come to terms with the crushing of the hopes these suitcases represented, but what could be done? At the very least, you could give them away and

**Book buyers tended to have a much better home library than readers, because in Soviet families such collections served not only an educational function, but also as an expression of the owner's social status and an indicator of belonging to elite society.**

bring some happiness to those who had never tasted the alleged “sweetness” of Soviet prosperity. And so, homes gradually rid themselves of these unnecessary relics, with only mothball-filled German musical instruments and libraries of books, accumulated through coupons, remained.

## Waste Paper

A Soviet person was not a “philistine” if they were not a book reader, as long as they were a book buyer. Books were hard to come by in the Soviet Union. There were three main reasons for that: cen-

**Who would have thought that people disappointed by the Soviet reality—built on false values—and who had begun to embrace freedom would not learn and live by this lesson forever? Nevertheless, they failed to do so. Unfortunately, the collective memory of Georgians proved to be shorter than that of the Buendía family in Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.**

sorship, limited resources, and a centralized bureaucratic publishing system. Book buyers tended to have a much better home library than readers, because in

Soviet families such collections served not only an educational function, but also as an expression of the owner's social status and an indicator of belonging to elite society. You might ask, what's wrong with making a private library a marker of prestige? The answer is nothing at all. But in a country where books were scarce, a true reader would likely spend their time in a public library or go from door to door, asking to borrow books. Yet later, many books—never opened—ended up in the darkness of garbage bins. These were the books that Soviet people had acquired through connections, enriching resellers only to be displayed on shelves as a symbol of status. Most home libraries in Georgia back then were filled with books in Russian. In many households, you could find *The Martyrdom of Saint Shushanik*, *The Life of Grigol Khandzteli*, *Aluda Ketaurauri*, and *The Snake Eater*—all published in Russian. If you asked the owner, they would have said that Georgian literature is enjoyable to read in any language. Yet, most of these books have been relegated to mere waste paper, unlikely to ever be read again.

Significant parts of such libraries were filled with bulky Russian-language multivolume works, which were a challenge not only to read, but also to store at home, especially in the cramped Khrushchev-era apartments. But a proud Georgian back then would rather sleep standing up and not buy a bed than deprive their bookshelf of the masterpieces of Seifulin, Fadeyev, or Ostrovsky. As a result, the homes of Soviet citizens were filled with what was essentially rubbish, all in the hope that their children would eventually read what they chose not to. However, it later became clear that not only did their children have no intention of



reading these discolored books, but many of them couldn't as they didn't even know Russian.

The sadness of the useless dowry suitcases and the devaluation of the crystal vases et al. has nothing to do with what intellectual trauma inflicted on society. The legend of great Russian literature was shattered as the commonly used phrase 'the literature of the enemy must be read in the language of the enemy' made way for the younger generation's less compromising approach of "I will neither learn the language of the occupier nor embrace its culture."

The general shame attributed to the ideologues who emerged from the artistic community during the Soviet era was felt acutely by Georgian society when the actors and artists they revered betrayed democratic principles recklessly and defended the interests of their occupiers. Whatever one might argue though, people still loved these figures, which made it difficult to come to terms with such a social failure. The admiration generated by the achievements of these talented artists, singers, writers, and sportsmen may seem unjustified in hindsight, but this is not easily erased from the heart.

#### The Sound and the Fury

Who would have thought that people disappointed by the Soviet reality—built on false values—and who had begun to embrace freedom would not learn and live by this lesson forever? Nevertheless, they failed to do so. Unfortunately, the collective memory of Georgians proved to be shorter than that of the Buendía family in Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred*

*Years of Solitude*. The Georgians could not learn from their past mistakes or grasp their significance because the cultural and social failures of the Soviet era left their narrative fragmented and their emotions uncontrollable. Like the "idiot" in Macbeth's monologue, or Benjy Compson, the mentally disabled character from

Despite the gloomy gravity of the situation, there is still a solution: on October 26, we must all take moral responsibility, show personal fortitude, and choose the path of change so that we never return to the era of dowry suitcases and never taste the bitterness of such disappointment again.

William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, the country was left on the brink of reclaiming an alleged former glory while denying reality.

Thus, our lives became filled with sound and fury, especially as we once again face the danger of losing our independence. It took us a long time to see and recognize who and what we were really dealing with. And even when that became clear, we could not come together, understand the mistakes of the past, and develop a unified strategy for survival.

Despite the gloomy gravity of the situation, there is still a solution: on October 26, we must all take moral responsibility, show personal fortitude, and choose the path of change so that we never return to the era of dowry suitcases and never taste the bitterness of such disappointment again. ■





Giorgi Astamadze



## Fighting Foreign Diplomatic Missions and Bolshevik Georgia (1921-1922) Deja Vu

Russia's imperialist expansion in Ukraine in 2022 had a significant impact on Georgia, exposing the hybrid regime which had ruled the country under the guise of pro-Westernism since 2012. Although the deeply anti-Western nature of the regime's figurehead, oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili, was apparent to keen observers from the start, it took a full decade—and the Russian invasion of Ukraine—for the façade of he and his entourage (encour-

Since 2022, the Ivanishvili regime has entered into open confrontation with the civilized world, accusing the West of trying to drag Georgia into war and of using all possible means - rhetoric and action - to isolate Georgia from the West. Representatives of the regime, whose political past is so insignificant that it may often be easier to remember their serial number on the electoral list than their name, berate Western diplomatic missions in Georgia on a daily basis. In reality, the fact that Georgia is an independent country and its claims to be part of the democratic world are largely attributable to the existence of these missions and their friendly policies.

Reflecting on these developments, I asked myself if there had ever been a moment in Georgia's recent history when the Georgian government had so blatantly offended Western missions. Even during

Historic parallels suggest that the Ivanishvili regime bears a striking resemblance to the first generation of Georgian Bolsheviks, who, in 1921-1922, launched a campaign against foreign missions in Georgia.

aged by pro-European parties gathered around him) to crumble, and for Ivanishvili's true stance to be revealed.

the Cold War during the Soviet era, there wasn't such vulgar anti-Western sentiment as we see today emanating from Putin's Russia and its satellite regimes, including the Ivanishvili government, with its controlled TV stations and factories of trolls and bots. In terms of historic parallels, the Ivanishvili regime bears a striking resemblance to the first generation of Georgian Bolsheviks, who, in 1921-1922, launched a campaign against foreign missions in Georgia, as examined in sequence here.

In 1921, following the occupation of Georgia, a difficult period began for diplomatic missions. Most of them left Georgia along with the Zhordania government, while those who stayed or returned later, to serve the economic interests of their countries, had to cooperate with the Bolshevik regime in Georgia, which, strangely enough, was considered the government of a sovereign country until December 1922 (before the official establishment of the Soviet Union).

In the first few months, the Georgian Bolsheviks—with figures like Budu Mdivani, Filipe Makharadze, and Alyosha Svanidze—maintained relatively normal relations with foreign representatives, as they needed these connections to bolster the authority of their nascent regime. Moscow even issued a special directive to treat the German representative, Ulrich Rauscher—the only high-ranking diplomat who remained in Georgia after the Bolshevik takeover—with respect. However, as the regime consolidated power, relations with Western missions deteriorated sharply.

The Georgian RevCom was irked by the activities of the Zhordania government-in-exile and the policy of non-recognition of the Bolshevik regime in Geor-

gia. In the summer and autumn of 1921, members of the exiled government held meetings with German officials and demanded the withdrawal of Rauscher's diplomatic mission from occupied Georgia, after which Rauscher and the Italian representative Franzoni were summoned to the residence of Svanidze, Commissar of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, who threat-

Hesse wrote that the orders to the Georgian Bolsheviks came directly from Russia, whose aim was to exclude foreign representations in Georgia as bodies bearing signs of Georgian independence, although it was all meant to look as though this policy was that of the Georgians themselves.

ened to create problems if the Zhordania government stopped being perceived as the legitimate government of Georgia, and if relations with the Bolsheviks did not become formalized. Soon after, Svanidze's deputy, Toroshelidze, publicly labeled Germany a hostile country and soon Rauscher had to leave Georgia for good.

From 1922 onwards, the Bolshevik regime's punitive policies against foreign diplomatic missions escalated significantly. By targeting these foreign representations, the government sought to achieve multiple objectives. Primary among those was to secure international recognition of Georgia's Soviet occupation, thereby undermining and delegitimizing the Zhordania government-in-exile. Simultaneously, the gradual reduction and eventual disappearance of foreign missions in Georgia was intended to weaken Georgian sovereignty further.

The Bolsheviks began to openly hunt down European diplomatic missions

when their countries refused to recognize the Bolshevik regime in Georgia. On his return from Azerbaijan, the German ambassador Rauscher had his carriage forcibly removed from a train by members of the Extraordinary Commission (Cheka) on the pretext that he had no proper official documents.

The Bolsheviks also targeted Rauscher's wife, preventing her from leaving Georgia by not allowing her to cross the

In 1922, the Bolsheviks even accused the German representation in Tbilisi of assisting the government-in-exile in planning a coup. In 2024, Ivanishvili's cohort and their propaganda instruments/media similarly claim that a fictitious "Global War Party," supposedly backed by the United States and the European Union, is attempting to orchestrate a revolution in Georgia to drag the country into war.

border. Her luggage was humiliatingly discarded, and she was only allowed to depart three months later. German Consul Karl Cornelsen was expelled from Batumi, as was Danish Acting Consul Heinrich Warnecke, who, despite having lived in Batumi for 35 years and owning businesses, had his properties confiscated by the state. Representatives from the Netherlands, Belgium, Finland, Sweden, and Norway were all forced to leave Georgia. The Estonian representative was arrested in Baku along with his wife, transferred to Georgia, and expelled on charges of espionage. Meanwhile, the buildings of the Swiss and Dutch consulates were sealed, and the Cheka entered them to seize materials. Rauscher's successor, Max Hesse, remarked in correspondence that his own arrest was quite predictable. After this wave of expulsions, the European diplo-

matic presence in Georgia comprised only the German and Italian missions.

The psychological terror inflicted by the Bolsheviks proved effective. The persecution of German mission in Georgia became a valuable tool through which Russian pressure was exerted during negotiations with the German government. Ultimately, in April 1922, Germany and Soviet Russia recognized each other under the Treaty of Rapallo, which helped Russia to break through from its international isolation.

In coordination with Moscow, the Georgian Bolsheviks eased the pressure on the German representation in Georgia immediately after the signing of the Rapallo Treaty. However, as the treaty did not extend to Georgia, the Georgian Bolshevik government remained unrecognized and still technically illegitimate.

In the summer of 1922, on instructions from Moscow, the Georgian Bolsheviks carried out another attack on the German mission. In July that year, the building of the German mission in Tbilisi was robbed and some documents were stolen. The robbery was orchestrated by the Cheka and executed by a former employee of the German mission, who had been recruited after his arrest for a separate crime in Moscow a few months earlier. According to his testimony, the Cheka had detained the German mission's translator, von Norman, accusing him of anti-Soviet agitation, collaboration with the Zhordania government-in-exile, and espionage.

Deputy Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Toroshelidze, told Hesse that if the consulate had been official, the Cheka would not have dared to arrest von Norman, which was a direct indication of their demand to extend the Rapallo Treaty to include Georgia. The occupying authori-



ties were trying to achieve this result via radical means. Hesse wrote that the orders to the Georgian Bolsheviks came directly from Russia, whose aim was to exclude foreign representations in Georgia as bodies bearing signs of Georgian independence, although it was meant to look as though this policy was that of the Georgians themselves.

In order to normalize the working situation, the German mission itself asked Berlin to speed up the extension of the Rapallo Treaty to encompass Georgia, as otherwise the mission would have to close down.

In September 2022, meetings between Hesse and Toroshelidze took place, culminating in von Norman's release. However, he was soon expelled from Georgia. In return, the Bolsheviks achieved a significant success on 5 November 5 1922, when Germany officially extended the Treaty of Rapallo to include Russia's satellite states, among them the Bolshevik regime in Tbilisi. This effectively stripped the exiled government in Berlin of its legal foundation. Shortly afterward, the Soviet Union was formally established, and the German representation in Georgia was transformed into the Consulate General in Tbilisi, which remained until the late 1930s.

A century later, modern Georgia has a government that mirrors the first-generation Bolsheviks in its disdain for Western representation, expressed both through hostile rhetoric and concrete actions. Like the early Bolsheviks, Ivanishvili's regime directs its aggression toward missions from Western democratic states. Similarly, back in 1921-1922, the Bolsheviks allowed Turkish and Persian representatives to operate undisturbed in Tbilisi, while targeting European missions. This

historic parallel can be linked to a shared authoritarian alignment, as Ivanishvili's regime, much like the Bolsheviks, views law-based, civilized states as threats.

Furthermore, the Ivanishvili regime mirrors the first-generation Bolsheviks in its methods of dealing with the West. The former has repeatedly used a familiar Bolshevik tactic—first escalating tensions and then achieving its goals through minor concessions. A clear example of that

In 1922, the Bolsheviks succeeded in expelling the West from Georgia, surrendering the country to Russian control for decades. This must not—and will not—be repeated in our time. The chance to prevent it is coming soon on 26 October 26, when everyone who considers themselves a Georgian, a European, and/or simply a civilized person should affirm a resounding “Yes” to the democratic West and an unequivocal “No” to authoritarian Russia.

is how the regime, with Western assistance, managed to bring the opposition into parliament following the latter's boycott in the wake of an allegedly manipulated parliamentary election in 2020. This ultimately strengthened the anti-Western Ivanishvili regime, somewhat ironically courtesy of the participation of Western actors.

The management style and rhetoric of Ivanishvili, Irakli Kobakhidze, Shalva Papuashvili, Kakha Kaladze, and others is strikingly similar to the propaganda of the Bolshevik leaders Makharadze, Mdivani, Orakhelashvili, Toroshelidze, and others, who persistently claimed that a coup d'état was being plotted in Georgia with Western involvement. In 1922, the Bolsheviks even accused the German representation in Tbilisi of assisting the government-in-exile of planning a coup. In 2024,





Ivanishvili's cohort and their propaganda instruments/media similarly claim that a fictitious "Global War Party," supposedly backed by the United States and the European Union, is attempting to orchestrate a revolution in Georgia to drag the country into war. The enemy image created by the Bolsheviks against the Zhordania government—which refused to surrender Georgia's independence to Russia—has thus been rebranded in Ivanishvili's propaganda as the so-called "collective national movement." This term now targets not one specific party but rather all who oppose the establishment of a Russian-style dictatorship and the Russification of the country, which Ivanishvili formally announced on 29 April 2024.

In the eyes of the Ivanishvili regime, anyone who thinks differently is branded part of the "collective national movement" and labeled an agent of the West. Despite so many parallels, however, it's worth noting one critical difference. In 1922, the Bolsheviks succeeded in expelling the West from Georgia, surrendering the country to Russian control for decades. This must not—and will not—be repeated in our time. The chance to prevent it is coming soon on 26 October 2024, when everyone who considers themselves a Georgian, a European, and/or simply a civilized person should affirm a resounding "Yes" to the democratic West and an unequivocal "No" to authoritarian Russia. ■





# In GenZ's Opinion

*With only a few days to go, the upcoming election on October 26 will determine the future of our country: whether we will become an integral part of the civilized world, or remain in the sphere of influence of totalitarian Russia. The views of the generation born in independent Georgia - a generation unburdened by the Soviet past or the traumas of the tumultuous 1990s - are particularly important here. Indeed, this generation has already left its mark on Georgia's modern history.*

*Accordingly, the editorial team of Akhali Iveria asked young respondents the following questions: Do you plan to vote? What will the result of October 26 decide for you? Where do you see Georgia and yourself in 2030? How do you see your path in the next five years?*

*Here are the thoughts and feelings they shared with us just days before this historic election:*



**Tini Zaalishvili**

- “The outcome of the October 26 election will shape our country's future for decades to come. In the current climate, abstaining from voting is almost a crime. Building a democratic, free state is the responsibility of every citizen, making this election a crucial referendum on Georgia's European future.

“By 2030, I hope to live in a more democratic and secure country where human

rights are protected, the rule of law is upheld, quality education is accessible, and the socio-economic situation is improved. Most importantly, I want to see significant progress in European integration, bringing us closer to the standards and values we aspire to share with the civilized world.

“My path as an active citizen is challenging in the current climate because we, the youth, are not merely participants in the process of change but also initiators of transformation. This is why I urge everyone to vote, make their voices heard, and defend Georgia’s democratic and European future.”



**Saba Meurmishvili**

- “I am going to the election, and for the first time I will also serve as an observer. The October 26 election will determine the future for generations in Georgia. Without exaggeration, this day will decide whether Georgia remains a sovereign state or not.

“I definitely envision Georgia as part

of the European Union, and I see myself as a public servant dedicated to serving the country—not any individual or party. The next five years will be challenging for Georgia, and it will take the unwavering determination and commitment of each of us to bring Georgia back to the European family.”



**Irakli Ormotsadze**

- “I’m definitely going to vote. I’ve also registered as an observer and I intend to protect our votes - there will probably be a lot of young people with us, because this year

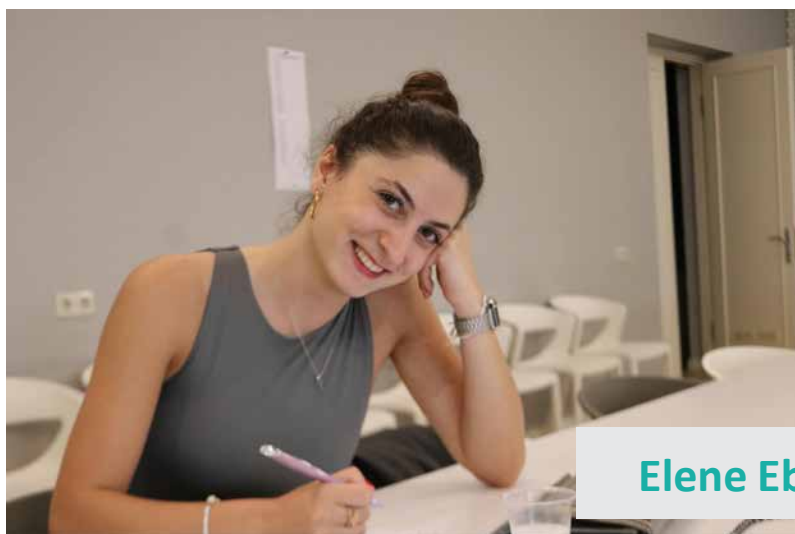
- and probably in the near future - there is nothing more important than that.

“I am eagerly awaiting election day on October 26. With only a few days left, the

political atmosphere is heating up, and society is increasingly eager for change. I am just 20, and perhaps my age might cause some to question my view. But as an engaged citizen and an active student, I believe we are participants in a critical process. Our choices and actions will shape our nation's future. So, as simple as it may sound, let's all go and vote!

"As for the European Union, NATO, the era that follows the Russo-Ukrainian war, and our democratic future, I want a 2030 where our country and its partners

are united in a political-economic union on one hand, and under the protection of collective security on the other, where the threat from Russia no longer exists, and where we can continue to progress and develop in peace. This is not so far away. So, while I won't go into my personal plans for the next five years, I will say one thing: I want to make a small personal contribution to building the Georgia of 2030, and one of my first steps toward that will be on October 26!"



Elene Ebanoidze

■ "This year's election is more important than ever, with each vote critical to our country's future as we choose between the West and Russia, and between freedom and oppression. By 2030, I envision Georgia as part of the European Union—a step that will be decisive for the well-being of the Georgian people. Achieving this goal requires unity within Georgian society as we face a common, existential

threat.

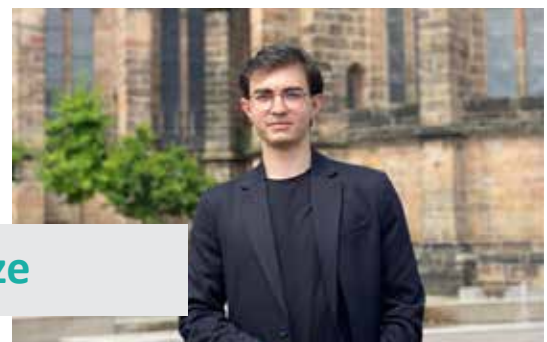
"On October 26, I will vote for Georgia's European future. In five years, I see myself serving my country, using every resource and opportunity to contribute to a brighter future. Quality education is essential in this path, and the European Union is currently providing that to me through the Erasmus program."



**Mariam Akhalaia**

- “The election is important to me because it gives every citizen the power to shape the country’s future. The October 26 election may be Georgia’s last opportunity to set the country’s course correctly and could prove decisive in strengthening political pluralism, building democratic institutions, and forging close ties with the international community. The result will also reflect the extent of society’s commitment to essential reforms, human rights, and the rule of law. Participation in elections is an important expression of active citizenship, and I consider it my personal responsibility.

“Georgia’s prospects for 2030 are determined by many factors, including global, regional, and domestic shifts leading to political, economic, and social changes. If Georgia resumes its course towards the West, continues reforms, including the strengthening of the legal, economic, and educational sectors, the country can become not only a member of the European Union, but also an important player in the Black Sea region. The main aims here will be joining European and Euro-Atlantic structures, as well as maintaining stable relations with neighbors and strengthening internal democratic development. As for me, it is important for me to deepen my knowledge, improve my professional skills, and expand my social networks and influence. In the next five years, I would like to be successful in my profession and contribute to the development of Georgia and its modernization and innovation. My main goal is continuous personal and professional development, which will allow me to benefit society and the country as a whole.”



**Alexandre Buzaladze**

- “I will definitely participate in the parliamentary election on October 26, first of all because it is my duty and responsibility as a citizen of Georgia. Besides, this year it

will not be an ordinary election. On October 26, we will have to make an existential choice - whether we will become a developed and democratically organized Euro-

pean state, or a Russian province plagued by corruption and authoritarianism. We have been moving towards the latter sad reality for years, and now it seems there is no time or place for ambiguity. Therefore, I will say once again that it is my duty and the duty of all Georgian citizens to go to the polls.

“I hope that by 2030, Georgia will be a fully-fledged member of the European

Union, supported by strong democratic institutions and, above all, an independent judiciary.

“In the next five years, I plan to pursue a European education abroad, with a clear commitment to return to Georgia. My goal is to use the knowledge and experience I gain to help Georgia realize its European aspirations.”



Sandro Jokhadze

■ “I am certain that October 26 will mark one of the most decisive days in modern Georgian history. This year’s parliamentary election far exceeds the usual stakes; citizens must now choose between European prosperity and Russian influence and stagnation. Despite my young age, I have already experienced lawlessness and injustice firsthand, which is why I am not only going to vote—I am committed to protecting my vote and the votes of my fellow citizens on election day.

“I am confident that October 26 will be a major step toward EU integration—an important event where Georgia can choose European peace and prosperity. I believe that Georgia can seize this opportunity to become a full member of the European Union by 2030.

“For now, I plan to focus on my studies and make the most of the opportunities that Georgia’s path to EU membership brings.”

**Mariam Gigineishvili**

■ “This year’s parliamentary election is particularly significant. Today, the only leverage citizens have is to exercise their right to vote. If we want our country to break free from authoritarianism and Russification, we must reclaim it from those who seek to pull it away from the European orbit. The only way to do this is by voting on October 26 and supporting pro-Western forces.

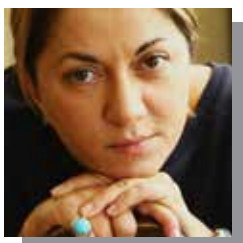
“On its current trajectory, Georgia lacks prospects for genuine development, as the government does not prioritize na-

tional interests but instead deliberately follows Kremlin directives. With a peaceful transfer of power, I am confident that Georgia can return to its Western course. Therefore, everything possible should be done to end this period of isolation and secure EU membership by 2030.

“As for my personal plans, I intend to spend the coming years gaining knowledge and experience, which I will use to help my country realize this European vision.” ■





**Tamuna Shengelia**

# SANSARA

Saturday morning pampers us with its unhurried pace. Beyond reading or watching the latest news from Ukraine or Israel, accompanied by coffee and a cigarette, there's time to indulge in browsing Facebook memories. As I was reading a post from nine years ago, a voice suddenly blared from the TV screen: "Parliament, Georgia... Watch who you're talking to! You've got problems!" warned a parliamentarian's son to a German police officer.

Immediately, I pictured the Adjarian poet Amiran, smeared with blood, lamenting "Didn't I write about it?"—and realized that arrogance had become our incurable disease. Once again, I couldn't resist Facebook's prompt "What's on your mind?" and so I composed a post. But what compelled me to share my thoughts publicly? Today, I reflect on our Georgian arrogance.

If I understand things correctly, law and the rule of law form the very foundation on which the state stands. For the state to

function, each individual must respect the established rules and legislation. However, Georgian arrogance—rebranded by the powers-that-be as "dignity"—rejects this notion entirely. This is why we are failing to keep our country in order.

Arrogance and selfishness cause distortion and wreak havoc across all spheres of our lives: traffic, the normal functioning of businesses and public institutions, urban development and upkeep, environmental cleanliness, fair competition, elections, courts, queuing culture, conscientiousness, the honest fulfillment of one's duties, genuine faith, conscious obedience (not slavery), physical education and health, loyalty, friendship, integrity, and much more.

All of these elements are either absent or distorted in us precisely because we are oriented neither toward rules and laws—whether legal, administrative, social, or moral—nor toward the knowledge and defense of our own and others' rights and obligations. Instead, we lean toward

unconscious passions, instincts, and the quick gratification of momentary desires.

A self-willed and arrogant Georgian is happy and content, considers themselves free and feels respect for their own personality only when they dominate everything, manage to subordinate everyone and everything under their opinion, tastes, comfort, understanding, or whims. If they compromise or retreat, even in favor of the law, their dignity is trampled upon, and they find it difficult to breathe freely.

The rule of law cannot stand on its own unless each of us exercises control over ourselves and our desires. Without the rule of law, there can be no order, democracy, development, prosperity, or power—all the things to which we collectively aspire.

Our individual consciousness as well as our daily actions and behaviors are directly related to the order in our country.

I believe that until we move away from

herd mentality and collective thinking, until we look inwards to understand and acknowledge our shortcomings, and until we overcome our ego and engage in personal development and refinement, nothing will work out right. The prerequisite for progress is the recognition of our own vices—something unimaginable for an arrogant person who sees themselves as flawless and infallible. This is why Georgians often blame and curse others; they consistently look elsewhere for the causes of their own failures rather than within themselves.

I often hear people whining “What a bad society we live in!” as if this society is composed of Martians, and not you and me. If we want a better society, each of us must understand and recognize our weaknesses and strive to become better. If we do not change individually, no change in external factors, government, or authorities will bring us anything.

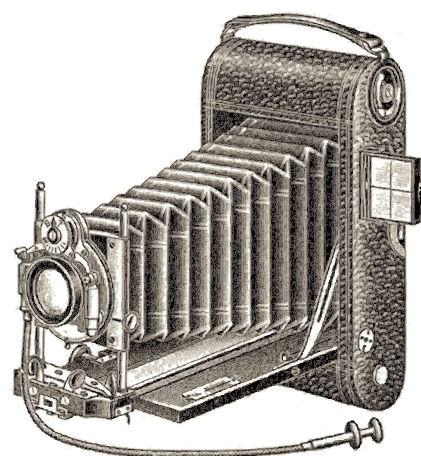
This is what’s on my mind on the 5 October 2024. ■





Zaza Bibilashvili

# Three Lessons with Coelho as a Side Dish



I turned 50 in August - a no-nonsense age, as people often say. Those five decades I have lived might as well represent several 50-year lives, each radically different from the other. My mind hasn't fully absorbed the weight of this number, but from an outsider's perspective, the only event in which someone my age is still called "young" is death: if he were to pass away at 50, people would say: "What a shame, he was so young." So you have to cultivate a youthful disposition, in the hope that it remains at least somewhat compatible with the reality of time.

More than anything, it's the age of my children that reminds me I'm no longer 30 or 35. I say this as if 35 years weren't already a substantial stretch.

After all, God took even younger souls—Mozart, Schubert, Baratashvili, Alexander the Great, a whole cohort of rock stars, and even His only son. When their time came, each had already made their mark. Yet here in Georgia, many 35-year-olds are still regarded as "talented, promising youth."

Indeed, some release the cosmic energy invested in them early on, while others journey into old age before bringing to light the "ore" they've mined in their life's travels. What youthful passion of Werther could rival the profound eroticism in Richard Strauss's *Four Last Songs*, composed at age 84? Goethe completed *Faust* at 82. Before that, at 72, he fell head over heels for 17-year-old Ulrike von Levetzow (he

would have married her, had it not been for her mother's firm position). Mark Twain and Charles Darwin were both in their fifties when they published their defining works.



But sometimes a late death can be as tragic as an early one. Imagine an elderly Don Giovanni, who settled down, stopped womanizing, and got married. Or Isolde, who, after mourning Tristan, surrendered to fate and wed King Marke, or an aged Amadeus, despite having long ago mourned himself with the first bars of *Lacrimosa*, still composing popular pieces for the emperor's praise simply to make a living. What would Christ's life have meant if he hadn't been crucified? Can you picture an elderly Nazarene, weary from wandering and preaching, handing over his mission to his disciples and retiring to tend cattle and raise grandchildren? Rossini, sensing he had nothing left to say, retired at 37 and lived another 40 years without writing another piece...

A few years ago, sitting at a Georgian *supra*, I confessed to a new friend made through wine, that I felt as though I'd accomplished nothing in my life. Perhaps my father was to be blamed for this unreasonable standard. When I turned 16, he asked me: "What are you doing? At your age, David Agmashenebeli was already a king." Years later, I found my moment to retort. When he turned 69, I said: "Now don't tell me, 'I've done my job' and 'the future is yours'—Reagan was elected president for the first time at your age."

So, as I was telling you, I opened my heart to someone beside me at the table — "I'm 30 years old and I haven't left any mark on this world". He chuck-

led, seemingly satisfied with his own achievements, and gave me an arrogant look. Or maybe he did nothing of the sort, and it only seemed that way to me, thanks to the wine. One way or another, what I meant to say is that we each have something to accomplish in this world. "Success" and "happiness" can't be the real goals. There is something else — something far greater — than mere "success" and "happiness".

\* \* \*

It was back when the Iron Curtain still split the European continent, and the Berlin Wall stood guarded by Russian occupiers, that fate sent me and a group of Georgian students to study in the US. Like Sacha Baron Cohen's character Borat, we were scarcely prepared to meet the free world. Even the English I thought I knew (gleaned from the finest Soviet textbooks) turned out not to be of any use, and I had to start from scratch. Just when I was supposed to be entering the "street academy," the Lord dropped me into the heart of "rotten capitalism," exposing me to every social extreme in a short time: I lived in abject poverty in a Black ghetto and learned the decadent luxuries of the wealthy (indeed, I learned and embraced them so naturally, you'd think my grandfather had died from swallowing snails on Avenue Montaigne). I internalized the harsh rules of a public school that felt like a prison for repeat offenders, and in a liberal private school reminiscent of Platonic Academy I made invaluable friends, most of whom were second-generation immigrants. Recalling these stories and capturing the real, unvarnished Soviet Union, and what we imagined America to be versus the real-

ity we encountered, as well as the emotional and tectonic civilizational shifts that unfolded against the backdrop of the final years of the Cold War, will soon be crystallized in a published book. But before that, I'd like to share three key lessons that three ordinary Americans taught me in that almost immemorial past.

## 1. Tom Kent, Sr.

Tom Kent was born in 1923 in a remote village of a remote county in Mississippi, America's Deep South. His childhood and adolescence coincided with the years of the Great Depression. Little Tom's life was a never-ending labor: he would wake up and be on his feet at five in the morning. First he delivered newspapers, and then he'd go to school. Then he would help his father pick potatoes, followed by homework. At the end of the day, he would fall asleep exhausted, only to repeat the same routine the next morning.

Tom Kent grew up in extreme poverty. He had no "patron" or well-wisher to lend him a hand. To his family, he was more of a laborer than a child to care for. This went on for years, decades, and even whole eras until, one fine day, he became the chairman of the board of a large insurance company. By the time I met him, he was already retired. Almost by chance, he took me along one day to his former company, perhaps wanting to show off some of his past glories.

We would jog together in the park on Saturdays. Even though he was half a century older than me, he never lagged behind or stopped. He'd run three miles without breaking stride, and occasion-

ally he'd mutter: "Don't talk while running; breathe smoothly!"

I hadn't known anything about his childhood when, after one of our runs, I sat beside him on a bench, clutching a water bottle, and told him that Georgia had always been a country surrounded by enemies, poor but inhabited by kind and hospitable people—a country that seemed forever unlucky, never graced by fortune. Luck, I explained, had no mercy, and so freedom and prosperity remained an unattainable dream, generation after generation.

Tom wiped his forehead with his cuff, put the cap on his water bottle and said:

"Remember, son, poorness is a state of mind - you may not have a cent in your pocket, your shoes may be tattered, you may even be hungry, but you are 'poor' only if you come to terms with the situation, accept it as a given and stop fighting to win."

This was my first American lesson: that both victory and defeat are born in our minds.

## 2. Michael Moore

Carrie was a beautiful Irish-American girl, from an exemplary Catholic family with five children. She was so stunning that for a long time I didn't dare approach her. Instead, I'd tease her during classes, like a third grader, unable to express my admiration in any other way. Later, much to my delight, she admitted to me: "I used to complain to my mother every day: there's a boy in my class who won't leave me alone; he keeps needling me."

When Carrie agreed to go on a date, I was at a loss and did not know how to







react. I had expected a rejection and was preparing for sadness, accompanied by my favorite love poems “The farther you are - the sweeter this gets!,” “You Were Married That Night, Mary!” and so on. Carrie turned out to be an ordinary girl. More earthy than ordinary, she was visibly tired of being held captive by her own beauty.

Soon after, like a true Catholic, she invited me to a family dinner and took me to her house, where she introduced me to her four brothers, her mother and her father. The brothers immediately began testing me and setting me up. Carrie’s father did not pick on me. He was a big, loud man. Michael Moore began by telling me his family history - he knew who they were before they had left Ireland. Then, he went into uninteresting detail and told me briefly about himself: “I sell life insurance”.

What he said left me cold; it didn’t inspire me. I couldn’t keep the conversation going, not even out of politeness. I had nothing to add to his story—neither surprise nor admiration. So, with my then Georgian idealism, I said: “I can’t sell anything, and I don’t want to. I want a life or career where that’s not necessary.” I looked down at him from the same mental pedestal from which the rather tipsy man sitting next to me at the table was looking down at me when he said: “I’ve already achieved a lot in my life.”

Mike gave me a paternal smile and remarked: “Listen, son, in a free country we all sell something: an idea, knowledge, a skill, a craft, a thing, or a service. So get off your pedestal. My wife has cooked a great meal, and it’s getting cold. I’ll tell you the rest at the table.”

It was then that I realized for the first time that selling something – a disgrace according to a retrograde Georgia tradition – is not a shameful at all, despite what we were taught at school and are still being taught today, and that craftsmanship is not a niche for ‘foreigners,’ which is deemed beneath the dignity of the average Georgian. After all, in the modern world we are all constantly selling something. It was trade and craftsmanship that made the West what it is, bringing wealth and prosperity. However, trade is still looked down upon in Georgia. We trade and sell “with two diplomas” – implying that we have to, not because we choose to. If luck were on our side, we would be princes (not even mere nobles!), sitting with our legs crossed, as would befit a dignified nation with three thousand years of cultural heritage. And though fortune has not smiled on us, this desire to sit back remains the root of our quiet existence, marked by a deep-seated fear and a desire to fit in.

That night, I couldn’t shake this thought, which gradually turned into a lesson: in reality, we are constantly selling something. Once one internalizes this notion, many things change. “I’ll sell ideas,” I thought to myself, still sitting on my pedestal. Over time, I became convinced that nothing brings greater pleasure than when your words travel far and wide, crossing “nine mountains and nine seas” only to return to you from someone else.

### 3. Bob Stafford

Bob Stafford was an old-fashioned Southern man, who had married the

much younger Vicki as his second wife. A small business he'd started years ago was well organized did not take up much of his time. The family had two dogs: Bubba, a big, sweet, chubby black Labrador; and Pete, a scrappy mixed breed rescued from a dump with his tail perpetually sticking up. Pete was known for his rude behavior and utter disrespect for Bob's guests with no trace of gratitude for being salvaged and welcomed into a paradise, where he even shared food from their plates instead of scraps.

Bob had a cozy house with a large, beautiful estate, scattered bushes, and flowers along the lakeshore. He enjoyed lying in his hammock, cracking open beer cans, chasing the dogs out of the lake and back to the yard, and barbecuing on Sundays. He also loved to hunt and had several hunting rifles. Once a month, he would put Pete and Bubba in the trunk of his old pickup truck and go hunting. He usually came back empty handed, but that didn't matter, because it was more of a ritual of walking the dogs and male bonding with his son than a real hobby. His son, Scott, was much older than me and a somewhat unstable of a guy – always looking for work, but not too actively, like a true Georgian.

We often visited Bob and Vicki as the

latter was our study coordinator and took on many mothering and mentoring roles.

I had just learned to play pool. Well, saying I had "learned" was a bit of a stretch. I'd say I knew the basics and played now and then. My favorite moment here was when the balls lined up in front of the pocket. I would aim carefully, strike with all my strength, and, often, even a well-aimed shot would bounce off the pocket walls and roll back. Watching this struggle, Bob eventually couldn't hold back. He took off his glasses, which had already slid halfway down his nose, and slowly, with a heavy Southern drawl, addressed me (fortunately, there were only two of us there at that moment):

"Son, I hope you're not like that in bed!"

I thought to myself, had Uncle Bob forgotten my age? Not only "not like that" – I was not like anything in bed yet, but thanks for the advice, I thought, I'll definitely keep it in mind for the future. Since then, his words have stayed with me, surfacing in all kinds of contexts, formulating as a third lesson:

"Don't be in a rush! Take your time and measure carefully! For every victory is victory is born in one's mind." ■





Aidan Yusif



Natia Mikhelidze

# Evading Sanctions: How Georgia Facilitates Russia's Military Supply Chain

*Our experiments and foreign trade statistics will convince you that drones, computer processors, GPS or memory cards are sent to Russia via Georgia. These dual-use items can serve both everyday needs and military purposes, including weapons assembly. Although the export of such goods to Russia has been banned since December 2022, not all countries have complied with the restrictions.*

*During the experiments, one carrier told us that there was no problem: "I'll take the drones from Georgia to Russia via Azerbaijan, we've done it before." The second carrier offered to send "computer chips" from Tbilisi to Samara in an easier way - directly, through Vladikavkaz.*

*Our seven-month journalistic investigation uncovered a scheme supplying Russia with sanctioned goods involving Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan.*

## iFact Experiment #1

### How are drones sent from Georgia to Russia? — "Through Azerbaijan"

To find out whether stories about the delivery of sanctioned cargo to Russia were true, we used the following method:

On 21 May 2024, we contacted the transport company Kairo-Logistics via WhatsApp, introduced ourselves as regular customers and requested the ship-

ment of 30 drones from Tbilisi to the Russian city of Samara. We specified that we needed them for a video editing studio.

We were contacted by an operator in Krasnodar called Evgeny. After asking us about the model, power, and quantity of the drones, he informed us about the

route: “We will take the cargo via Azerbaijan...Azerbaijan or Iran, we are currently working out these options, but most likely it will go via Azerbaijan.”

The next day, while checking the conditions, the operator reassured us: “We

an electronic signature on the contract. At this stage, we stopped the experiment, as we had collected the necessary information from the company.

Before publishing the article, we called Kairo-Logistics once again, and revealed



Instagram profile of Kairo-Logistics in March-April 2024

give you a 100% guarantee. We’ll deliver your cargo to its destination—we’ve handled sanctioned items before and know what it entails.”

It was now time to settle on a price. The operator at Kairo-Logistics asked for 500,000 Russian Rubles (15,000 GEL) to deliver 30 drones from Tbilisi to Samara. However, the website’s price calculator showed an approximate cost of 25,000 Russian Rubles (793 GEL) for transporting this weight of cargo. It appeared that Evgeny was charging us 20 times the standard rate.

When we asked the operator to explain the inflated price, he replied: “It’s sanctioned cargo. You understand yourselves; you need to communicate with positions using envelopes” (presumably alluding to paying bribes at the border).

Everything proved simple - the transport company promised us that they would pick up and deliver the cargo; all they needed from us was an invoice and

that we were journalists and wanted to record an interview. At first, Evgeny had introduced himself as the company’s manager, but now, within two seconds, he told us that he was just an intern and redirected us to a manager named Alex Bagatov.

Bagatov confirmed that, despite the sanctions, they continued to transport banned goods to Russia. The only difference now, he explained, was the route—previously, shipments went directly to Russia, but now they passed through Turkey or Azerbaijan. When we asked the head of Kairo-Logistics how he managed such a risky business amid international sanctions, he explained that they modified the origin documents for the cargo.

“Look, for the country supplying the goods, there is no problem because the goods are not sent to Russia, but to Turkey or Azerbaijan,” he said before adding: “They later reach Russia. Therefore, everything is legal for the country from

which the cargo is sent.”

**What do we know about Kairo-Logistics?**

Its legal name is Servis-Multi LLC and it also operates in Turkey, Europe, and the United Arab Emirates. Servis-Multi was registered in Moscow in 2018, its director is Dmitry Mordvinov, and its owner is Maxim Shepilov. The latter brings cars to the CIS and Russia with the help of

page that it is involved in the transportation of sanctioned cargo.

Note: “Kairo Logistics” LLC, registered in Georgia in 2013, with the website Kairos.ge, is another company and has nothing to do with the mentioned experiment.

High-quality professional videos are shot with drones like the ones we were supposed to send to Samara as part of the experiment. This drone is equipped with

*Kairo-Logistics office in Hualing Plaza, Tbilisi. A screenshot from the website of “Kairo-Logistics” confirms that they had an office in Tbilisi*



another transport company. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Kairo-Logistics had a warehouse in a building at Hualing Plaza in Tbilisi. Now the company does not have an office or a warehouse at a specific address. It publishes its service terms on its website and Facebook pages, and takes orders online. We also contacted the operator via WhatsApp. The company openly states on its website and Facebook

the same engine as FPV drones (‘kamikaze drones’), which have been used in the Russo-Ukrainian war since 2022.

Military and defense experts explained that in modern warfare, even a seemingly harmless drone can become a powerful military asset.

A military journalist explained anonymously: “Disassembling civilian drones and repurposing their motors for FPV

*The drone equipment we were sending as an experiment Model — SJRC f11s 4K pro drone, 4K professional with HD*





drones is straightforward. Reassembly takes time, but it is not particularly challenging. One person, equipped with basic tools and a working knowledge of electronics, can assemble dozens of drones in a day. The essential components are an axis, a camera, a processor (the 'brain'), and an antenna." "Some people use drones to photograph weddings, others use them for military purposes. Of course, I can tell you with certainty that the drones delivered to Russia will be used for military purposes, there is no doubt about it," Reserve Colonel Lasha Beridze assured us.

Beridze was the Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces from

equipped like a guided missile."

**In response to the war in Ukraine and the imposition of sanctions against Russia, the Revenue Service of Georgia claims to have tightened customs controls. According to reports, between 24 February 2022 and 27 June 2024, customs authorities intercepted and turned back 1,969 shipments of sanctioned goods.**

On July 2, the Customs Department wrote to us: "...all goods included in the list defined by the sanctioning countries, as well as any customs operations (including export and re-export), which may be carried out with the involvement of sanctioned persons or companies, are subject



*Russian shell attached to a drone, with the inscription "for Kharkiv"*

*Photo: ua.korrespondent.net*

2011-2013 and led Georgia's first peace-keeping contingent in Afghanistan in 2010.

Meanwhile, a cybersecurity expert told us anonymously: "The civilian purpose of FPV ("kamikaze-drone") is for sports flights, photo-video shooting, landscape, or geography studies. However, it can also be used for reconnaissance in war and surveillance of enemy targets. The drone can be used both as a surveillance tool and as a weapon of attack. It can be easily

to special customs control in order to prevent the use of the customs territory of Georgia as a corridor for the transportation of sanctioned goods."

Nevertheless, official statistics and the facts we have uncovered indicate that sanctioned goods have been allowed to pass through Georgia's borders. From Georgia, dual-use goods first go to Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Central Asia, before reaching the final destination of Russia.

## Under the Shadow of Sanctions How Does Russia Replenish its Arsenal?

In 2014, in response to the annexation of Crimea, the Council of the European Union banned the export of dual-use items to Russia and issued a corresponding regulatory document. On 25 February 2022, in the wake of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, new prohibitions were added to this regulation.

The European Union, the USA, Japan, and the United Kingdom compiled a list of items deemed high priorities for the battlefield, making it illegal to send them to Russia. This list has been updated several times and currently includes 50 named products.

**According to the definition of the Revenue Service of Georgia, dual-use items are products that can be used for both civilian and military purposes, as well as**

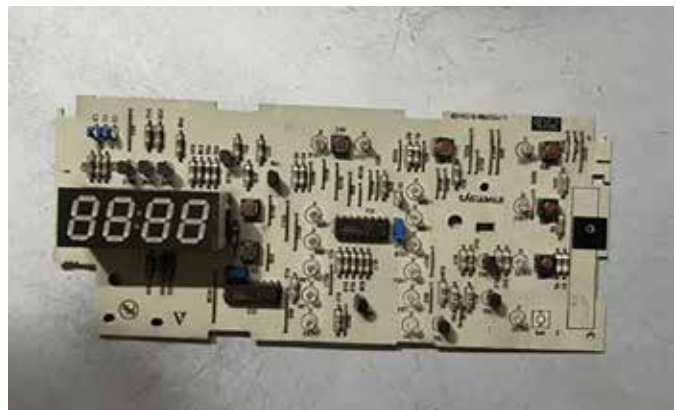
ton, we instruct the brain to wash or spin clothes, and it complies. That same brain could also be assigned to a combat mission and release a shell with similar simplicity.

The purpose of the Western sanctions imposed in 2022 was to limit access to these products for Russia and prevent the production of combat weapons. However, obedience thereto was not universal, and shipments of sanctioned products to Russia continued.

In June 2023, the U.S. State Department identified the following five countries aiding Russia to evade sanctions: Georgia, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Armenia, and the United Arab Emirates.

“There has been an increase in the import of critical electronics to Russia. For

*The “brain” of a washing machine (photo taken at a household appliances fair in Gldani, Tbilisi in September 2023).*



**for the production of biological and/or chemical/nuclear weapons or explosives containing nuclear material.**

Simply put, dual-use items can be found in everyday kitchen or bathroom appliances as well as in military weapons. One example is the so-called “brain” of a washing machine—a small component that uses an electronic algorithm to execute commands. With the press of a but-

example, chips found in your dishwashers. Some of them were found on the battlefield in Ukraine, in the debris of Russian equipment...The transit of such items from Georgia has also increased, and we hope it will decrease in the future,” said Jim O’Brien on 7 June 2023 at a European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) meeting. O’Brien is now the Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian

Affairs at the U.S. State Department. Previously, in 2022, he led the Office of Sanctions Coordination.

Meanwhile, the Revenue Service of Georgia assures us of tightened border control measures.

“Immediately after the start of the aggressive war in Ukraine, despite the significant increase in the movement of various goods/cargoes through the territory of Georgia, the Revenue Service has made a significant contribution to supporting the enforcement of international sanctions. From the very first days of the imposition of sanctions, it has consistently ensured strict control over the enforcement process. The visit of the US Ambassador once again confirms that the Revenue Service fully and firmly adheres to international sanctions enforcement procedures,” read

a statement from the Revenue Service published on 13 April 2024, following a meeting between US Ambassador Robin Dunnigan and Revenue Service head Levan Kakava.

Later, on July 26, the Revenue Service wrote the following to us: “Georgia fully and resolutely complies with the procedures of international sanctions and there is no evidence to the contrary. “Since the first days of the introduction of international sanctions, a relevant working group was established in the Revenue Service of the Ministry of Finance of Georgia, which exercises centralized control over compliance with the said sanctions.”

Not taking this as read, we have explored whether there may actually be “evidence to the contrary.”

## What Do Export Statistics for Dual-use Items Tell Us?

After the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, Georgia has sometimes been labeled as Russia’s “lifeline” and accused of being a participant in a trading scheme for sanctioned goods. Such assertions have been made repeatedly in the European and American media.

In June 2023, a journalist asked U.S. State Department spokesman O’Brien which countries he was referring to when he spoke of sanctions evasion. “It’s a real problem, and that’s why I often travel to Kazakhstan, Georgia, and Armenia...” O’Brien replied.

Elsewhere, on 27 November 2023, the Financial Times wrote: “In the first nine months of 2023, Turkey sent prod-

ucts worth \$158 million to Russia and five post-Soviet countries suspected of acting as intermediaries for Russia.”

**We have explored the basis of these accusations in official statistics and foreign trade data.**

Ultimately, we discovered that sanctioned cargo enters Russia from Georgia, sometimes via direct or short routes and sometimes through longer, indirect routes, crossing two or three national borders.

We studied the export, import, and re-export of all 50 sanctioned products. Relatedly, when we showed the list to programmer and physicist Ucha Abashidze, he told us:

“From the products listed under these codes, the following military equipment can be made: FPV drones, ‘Lancets’ (kamikaze-drones), aircraft electronics, and electronics for any modern armored vehicle; targeting, calculation, and navigation tools; and radio receivers and transmitters, stationary observation systems, and remotely controlled mines.”

We interviewed Abashidze in September 2023. He was later arrested on 9 May 2024 and is still in pre-trial detention. We have since contacted him through his lawyer, Shota Tutberidze, and he agreed to the publication of the above statement.

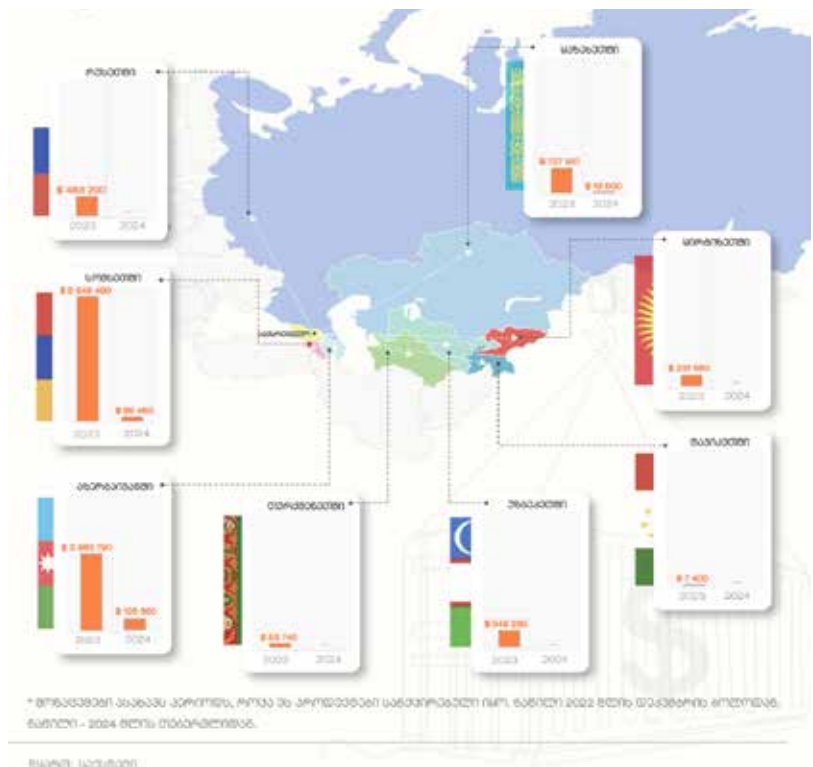
**According to official statistics, dual-use goods worth \$10.7 million were exported from Georgia to Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Central Asia in 2023-2024.**

From the long list of sanctioned goods,

we have highlighted the following five products whose export to Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Central Asian countries has increased significantly since 2023:

- Radio navigation equipment (satellite/GPS devices)
- Integrated circuits - processors and controllers
- Television, digital, and recording video cameras
- Digital data processing blocks (internet modems and routers)
- Devices for receiving, transmitting and converting sound, image or other data (tape recorders, microphones, and mixing consoles)

Export statistics analyzed by iFact: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1SendTx5JUCLnrEBjHVAIMqR-PLptRUiCn52eEHX0XBy8/edit?gid=1881081819#gid=1881081819>



Export of dual-purpose items from Georgia  
Source: Geostat

## Radio Navigation Equipment

This category includes GPS receivers or mobile-phone-like devices that work without the internet and display a map with coordinates and the taken or planned route. Hikers, for example, use these devices to find their way in the mountains.

“Of course, this equipment can also be used for military purposes. Military GPS has strong protection, making it hard to jam or disable, but if you don’t have that, you can even use a civilian GPS,” Beridze told us.

velocity of a bullet) can be downloaded to a Garmin navigation device,” explained a military journalist anonymously.

In 2023, Georgia experienced a notable 41% increase in the import of radio navigation equipment compared to 2021. Exports saw an even more dramatic rise of 213%, underscoring the growing role of Georgia in the regional trade of dual-use technologies. In 2023, sanctioned products under this category with a total value of \$304,520 were exported from



Garmin GPS mounted on a Russian aircraft  
Source: globaldefensecorp.com

Documentary footage from the Russo-Ukrainian war shows Russian aircraft equipped with ordinary civilian navigation systems. British and Ukrainian publications, citing defense departments, have reported that in the summer of 2022, American brand Garmin’s civilian GPS devices were found on downed Su-34 aircraft in Ukraine. The same finding was also revealed during the interrogation of captured Russian pilot Andrey Fedurchukov.

“Applications such as a ballistic calculator (which measures the direction, distance, and

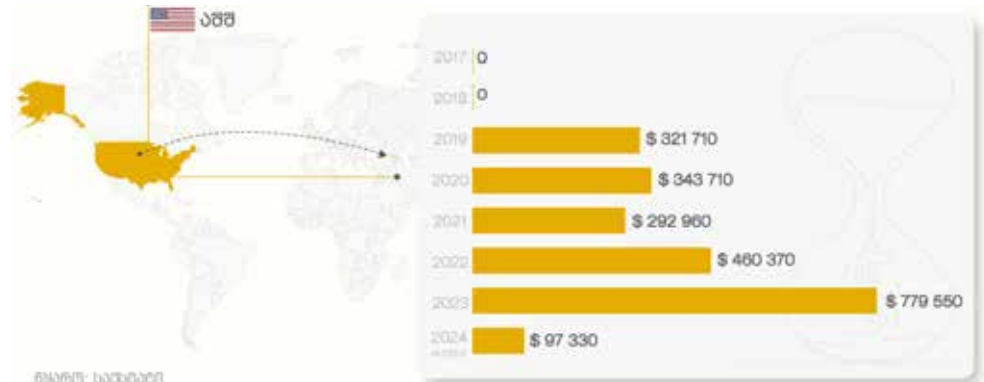
Georgia to Azerbaijan.

From 2017 to 2024, the export of radio navigation equipment has been on an unprecedentedly large scale. While Georgia traded this product in the past, it did so in much smaller quantities. The relevant statistics reflecting this trend are available here:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1hsP2h4OWuyxoy-AVg9i6Cx-BwXZsKs09Y/edit?gid=2081102031#gid=2081102031>



Imports of radio navigation equipment from the USA to Georgia  
Source: Geostat



Exports of radio navigation equipment from Georgia to Azerbaijan  
Source: Geostat



## Electronic Integrated Circuits - Processors and Controllers

The international trade code for these products is 854231, covering several small electronic components, the purpose of which we asked specialists to explain. They clarified that an integrated circuit includes a computer processor that can control robotic military equipment, aim weapons, conduct surveillance, and collect information.

“This code includes microcontrollers used directly to control military equipment, allowing you to program direction and assign specific functions. These components are so small that, roughly speaking, you could fit several hundred thousand dollars’ worth in a shoebox,” explained Giorgi Kurulashvili, Director of Research and Development at the British IT

manufacturing company Cott Electronics.

Georgia imports integrated circuits worth approximately \$2-3 million annually. While the import figures have not increased since the start of Russia’s war in Ukraine, the same cannot be said for exports.

In 2023, Georgia exported integrated circuits worth \$261,580 to other countries, the highest such figure in its history and a 36% increase compared to 2021.

In 2023, integrated circuits were exported from Georgia to the following nine countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Malta, the Netherlands, Turkey, and Ukraine. The cases of Uzbekistan, Armenia, and Kyrgyzstan are particularly noteworthy here.

Uzbekistan is a completely new market for Georgia, having never had any history of trading integrated circuits with the country. In 2023, it exported integrated circuits worth \$36,720 to Uzbekistan.

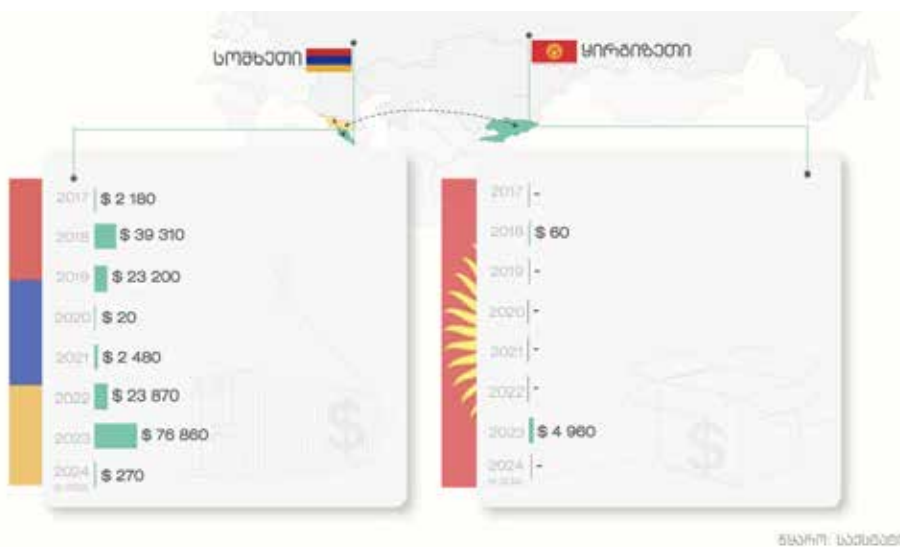
Elsewhere, although Georgia has previously exported integrated circuits to Armenia, it did so in relatively small quantities compared to 2023.

As for Kyrgyzstan, such exports hit a seven-year peak in 2023.

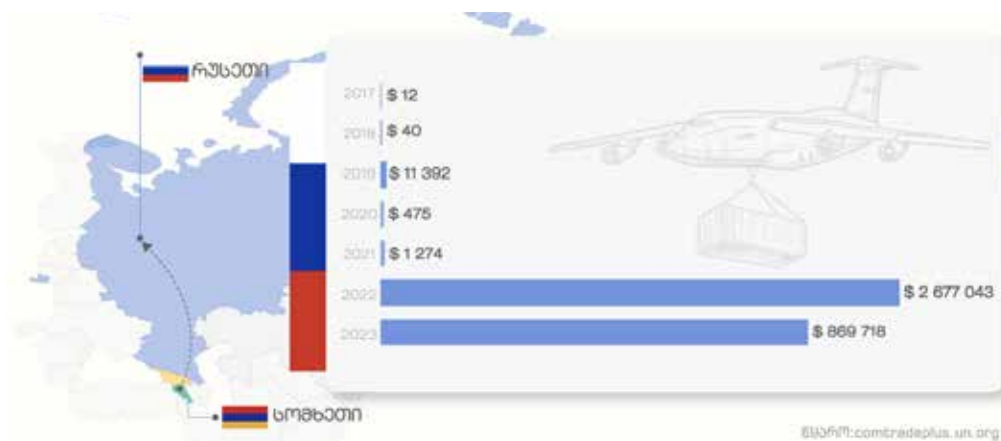
The UN (comtradeplus.un.org) has confirmed that Kyrgyzstan and Armenia send integrated circuits to Russia. In 2023 alone, Kyrgyzstan exported over \$3 mil-

lion worth of integrated circuits to Russia, while Armenia exported \$869,718 worth, which is 683 times more than in 2021.

Note: It is important to bear in mind that although the UN's database does not show that Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan sent sanctioned products to Russia in 2023, such data are collected from the countries themselves. Therefore, it is possible that some countries do not provide them with sufficient or accurate data. Therefore, we cannot be sure that dual-use goods sent from Georgia to Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan did not ultimately reach Russia.



Exports of processors and joysticks to Armenia and Kyrgyzstan  
Source: Geostat



Exports of processors and controllers (joysticks) from Armenia to Russia  
Source: comtradeplus.un.org

## Data Processing Digital Units

A typical example of this sort of device is an internet modem, which has a single casing with several compartments inside and plugs for cable input and output.

Physicist and programmer Abashidze explained that such units are essential elements of modern digital electronics. For example, they are found in laptops and PlayStation joysticks. At the same time, they can also be found in drones or tanks.

“To illustrate such versatility, such a unit is used in flight controllers and kamikaze-drones (author’s note: Russia has been using Shahed-136/131 kamikaze-drones in its war with Ukraine), and there is also such a unit in the Arduino microcontroller applied for educational purposes. They can otherwise be used to make door locks, drones, or light switches. In general, all modern weapons rely on Arduino, which can be taken out of any electronic device,” Abashidze told us.

In 2023, Georgia exported this sanctioned product to 15 countries in Europe, Asia, and Africa. Two of these are of partic-

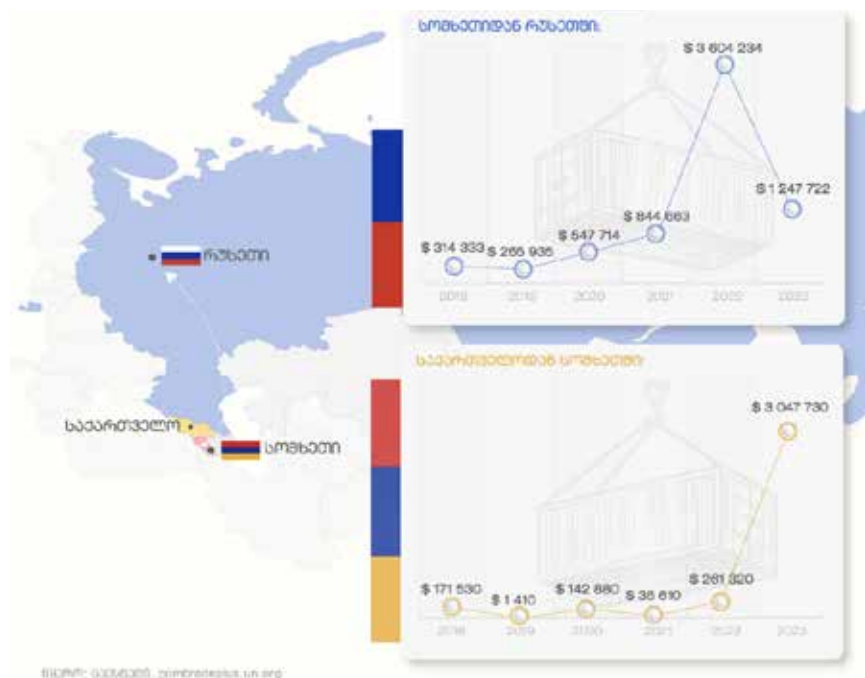
ular interest: Kyrgyzstan and Armenia.

In that same year, Georgia exported digital data processing blocks worth \$3 million to Armenia. To put that into context, the total of such exports from 2017 to 2022 was just \$644,210.

Meanwhile, Georgia exported \$225,760 worth of such products to Kyrgyzstan in 2023. Prior to that, there was virtually no history of Georgia trading these products with Kyrgyzstan.

### The UN’s foreign trade data confirm that Kyrgyzstan and Armenia supply these dual-use products to Russia.

A cybersecurity specialist explained anonymously: “Digital data processing devices—such as modems—can be used for communication purposes. They may also support the creation of communications infrastructure and networks, which could be advantageous in combat situations. Additionally, audio or image reception devices can be used for communication, intelligence, and surveillance.”



Exports of digital data processing units  
Sources: Geostat, comtradeplus.un.org



Exports of digital data processing units  
Source: comtradeplus.un.org

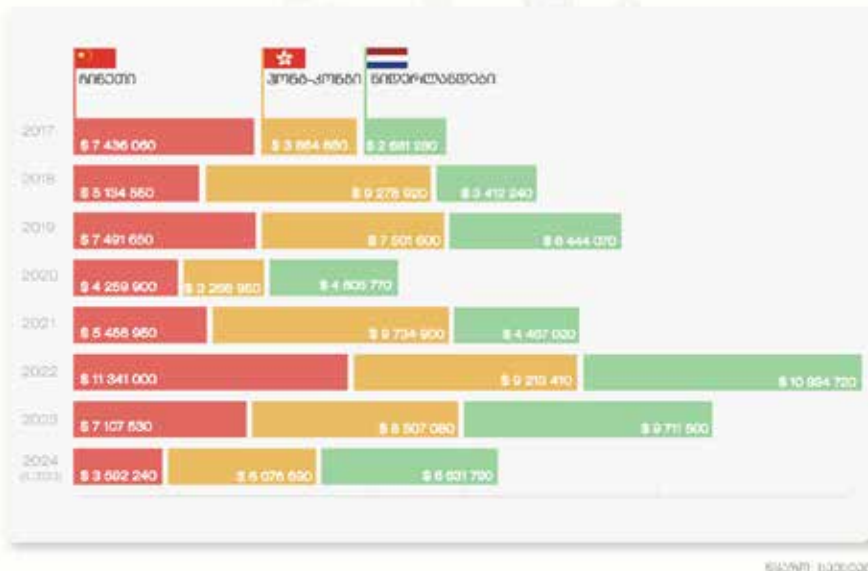
### Equipment for Receiving and Transmitting Sound/Images

This equipment is also of dual-use nature and is included in the list of sanctioned products. **From 2021 to 2023, exports of this equipment from Georgia increased by 34%, while imports into Georgia increased by 74%.**

In the past year, sound/image receiving and transmitting equipment was exported from Georgia to 30 countries, in-

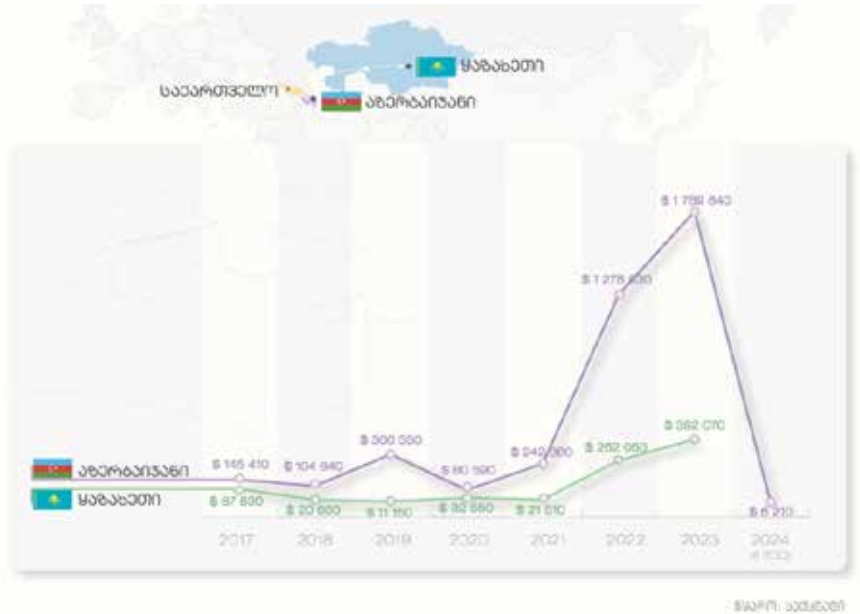
cluding Armenia, Azerbaijan, and several Central Asian countries. Notably, over that period, there has been a sharp increase in exports to Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan in particular.

Such unprecedented trade statistics led us to suspect that Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan have been supplying Russia with this dual-use product, which would



Georgia's imports of sound/image receiving and transmitting equipment  
Source: Geostat

Exports of sound/image receiving and transmitting equipment from Georgia  
Source: Geostat

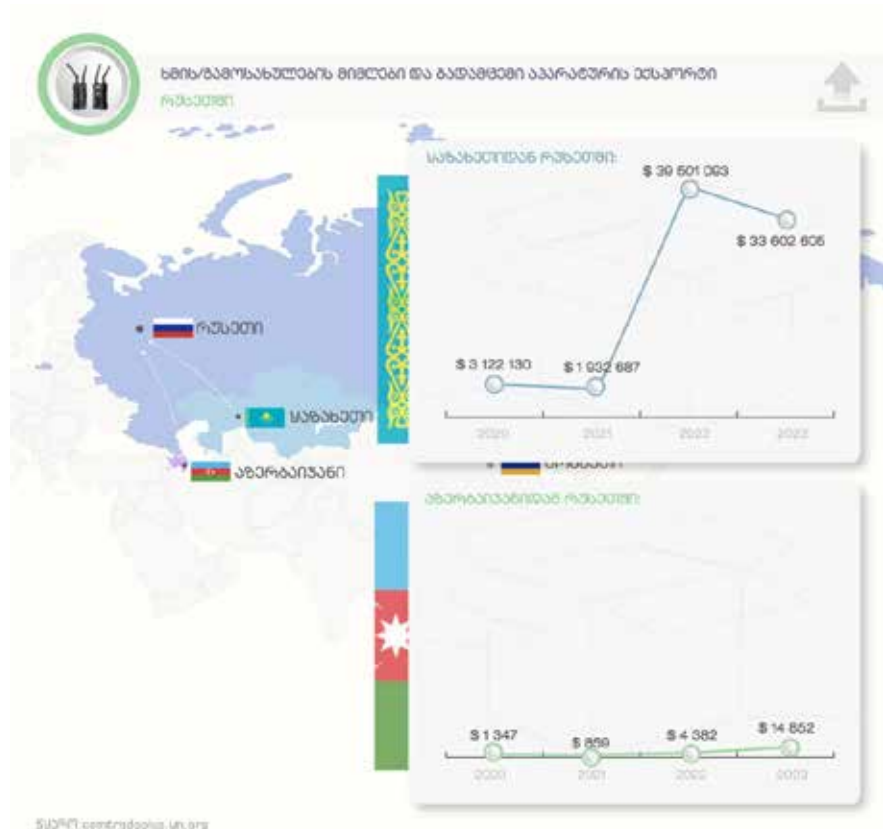


potentially explain the increased demand. Accordingly, we checked the UN’s foreign trade statistics to verify this suspicion.

The statistics confirm that since the start of Russia’s war on Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan have increased their

exports of sound/image receiving and transmitting equipment to Russia. We asked the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat) which parties import sanctioned dual-use items to Russia or to third countries. However, Geostat de-

Exports of sound/image receiving and transmitting equipment to Russia  
Source: comtradeplus.un.org





clined to provide this information in full, citing confidentiality reasons.

Nevertheless, we were able to find out that, in 2023, seven companies exported digital data processing blocks to Armenia. In the same year, 16 companies exported sound/image receiving and transmit-

ting equipment to Azerbaijan, while three companies exported such products to Kazakhstan. It appears that the export of dual-use items to third countries has not been restricted.

## iFact Experiment #2: How Do Integrated Circuits Reach Russia?

Following our investigation into drones, we wondered whether it would be as easy to send another sanctioned item to Russia, namely integrated circuits. For this experiment, we selected two sample items—a computer processor and a hard drive.

We contacted five transport companies via WhatsApp, expressing our interest in shipping processors and internal memory cards from Tbilisi to Samara. One of the carriers refused outright, stating: “We can’t arrange such a shipment for anyone.”

In contrast, Cargo Rapido LLC readily agreed to transport the sanctioned goods. We discussed the shipment of 60 Intel processors and 30 internal HDD memory cards with the company’s operator, Natalia. She informed us that the rate to ship one kilogram of cargo to Samara was 15 GEL, but that we would also need to pay “insurance” equal to 10% of the total value (\$2,300.)

“By insurance, we mean this option, which means exporting the cargo without formal paperwork,” Natalia explained.

After clarifying the price, we approached the delicate issue of sanctions. Specifically, we told Natalia that we were worried about potential problems due to

international bans. We also mentioned that other companies had turned us down and asked why her company would be willing to take such a risk.

In response, she reassured us, saying: “We’ll handle everything, but unofficially.”

She then added: “What others tell you is true—sanctions and so forth. This type of goods legally... [she didn’t finish]. Regarding export, it will go unofficially from Georgia and then to Russia, without export declarations or similar procedures. We have a company and will formalize the contract. However, the cargo description won’t be included. We’ll just state that we received such and such cargo from you, and the insurance is 10%. If I couldn’t transport it, I’d tell you directly. Since I’m explaining how we will do it, it means we will do it. The price includes all risks.”

Cargo Rapido’s transportation route is



*The dual-use items we purported to be shipping as part of this experiment*

Tbilisi–Vladikavkaz–Samara, with an estimated delivery time of about four weeks.

“What documents do we need?” we asked. “None,” Natalia replied, before continuing: “I don’t need anything because it’s done unofficially. The only thing is that we’ll sign a contract with a physical person, and the payment will be made to a physical person. Just to be clear, it can’t go through the company’s account. Why would you need customs clearance

that Tokazov only comes when customers call to send cargo.

We called with the apparent intention to send such cargo. Tokazov answered Natalia’s number, and we told him we wanted to send cargo to Russia. Tokazov scheduled a meeting at his office in three hours’ time.

When we arrived, we told him that we were journalists and that we had questions for him. Tokazov became confused



*Tbilisi Office of Cargo  
Rapido*

in Russia? We’re doing this unofficially.”— Natalia then sent us a standard contract.

Cargo Rapido LLC was registered in Georgia in 2020. Its director and owner is a Russian citizen Taimuraz Tokazov, originally from North Ossetia. The company has an office at Zakariadze Street #5 in Tbilisi’s Saburtalo district, on the first floor of a residential building.

An employee from the neighboring office of Yandex revealed: “They’ve been here for about five or six months, maybe more. They send and receive packages. Two or three clients come daily,” adding

and refused to be interviewed, citing his lack of knowledge of the Georgian language. Previously, he had been speaking clearly to us in Georgian. He then said he was in a hurry to pick up his children from kindergarten.

When we asked if he was transporting cargo to Russia, he denied it, immediately turned off the lights, started locking up the office, and quickly headed to his car. We followed him, asking about the illegal transportation of sanctioned cargo, but he remained silent.

## What Does Georgian Law Say About the Export of Dual-use Items?

As a rule, it is not easy to export dual-use items from Georgia, and a special license is required.

According to a 2014 government decree, there is a list of military and dual-use

items spanning nine product categories including electronics, computers, nuclear materials, and navigation and communication systems.

Anyone seeking to export, import, or

transit these items must apply to the Revenue Service for a permit. Thereafter, a final response is issued by the Non-Tariff Control Division of the Customs Department within 20 days.

The process runs as follows: before submitting a formal application, the person should contact the Revenue Service to explain what items they want to export, who will ultimately use them, and for what purpose; they must then com-

scanner and then by a customs officer at the checkpoint.

We asked exactly what information the border-installed scanners can detect, but the Revenue Service did not answer this question. Instead, we were told that providing such information could jeopardize customs procedures.

Meanwhile, we were informed in writing about the controls in general. The written response outlined that if the bor-



*RPG 7 anti-tank launcher system on a "kamikaze-drone"*

plete an application form, detailing the name, value, quantity, origin, and intended direction of the goods for import/export.

In addition, the applying person is also required to provide information on who will ultimately use the item and declare whether it could potentially be used for military purposes.

The Revenue Service informed us that from 2020 to 22 May 2024, all 649 applications received were approved. Among these, 67 permits were issued specifically for exports of network devices used for receiving, transmitting, and converting sound, images, or other data. Notably, in 2023-2024, after sanctions were imposed on the export of this dual-use product to Russia, the Revenue Service of Georgia issued 63 permits for the export or re-export thereof to other countries.

The export, import, or transit of dual-use items must be checked at the border. Vehicles are first inspected by a quick

der guard suspects a violation of the law during the cargo's transportation, he initiates a detailed inspection of documents, goods and/or vehicles, and physical persons. Furthermore, if a violation of the law is established, they draw up a violation protocol and send the materials away for investigation.

In the fall of 2023, we went to the Sakhlo and Larsi checkpoints and observed the inspection of light vehicles. Here, we tell you what we saw with our own eyes.

Routinely, the customs officer would inspect the trunk, the front and rear seats, and all four doors of the vehicle. After this inspection, the driver would then be allowed to proceed to the point at which their documents are checked, with the corresponding process taking about 2-3 minutes. Sniffer dogs are also positioned at these checkpoints to examine the cargo further if necessary.

## The Story of Elektromek-BT and Lazika Import How Georgian Companies Assist Russia

A journalistic investigation conducted by Lithuanian media published in May 2024 stated that a Lithuanian transport company, Delamode Baltics, allegedly transported sanctioned cargo to Russia via Georgia.

Analyzing the Import Genius international trade database, we found out that the Georgian company Elektromek-BT Ltd. had assisted Delamode Baltics in transporting the cargo to Russia. The company was registered on 19 June 2021, while its director and owner is Mari Sarapyan, and its official core activity is classified as “construction.”

sia through Elektromek-BT, including ball and cylindrical roller bearings, electronic equipment, plugs, and sockets.

Sarapyan has also owned another transportation company called Lazika Import since December 2022. This company is also listed in the Import Genius database. According to the latter’s data, in 2023 sanctioned cargo worth \$29 million was sent to Russia with the involvement of Lazika Imports.

Sarapyan confirmed that these two companies were indeed run by her. However, when she found out that we were



*Communication systems installed on a Russian FPV drone, March 2024  
Sources: Serhii Flash, mil.in.ua*

In July-October 2023, this company participated in the transportation of sanctioned dual-use goods to Russia 365 times. Sometimes it transported the cargo itself, while on other occasions they assisted others to do so. During this period, more than \$24 million worth of sanctioned products were sent to Rus-

journalists and wanted to interview her, she refused to talk. We still tried to ask her questions, reminding her that her companies had sent sanctioned cargo to Russia last year. She claimed that the companies had been out of business for a year, and hung up. We called again. This time she told us: “Don’t bother me, I’m a 62-year-

old woman. I have heart problems and I am busy right now, call me in two days," before she hung up again. When we called Sarapyan two days later, she told us: "I have neither the possibility nor the desire to talk to you."

Sarapyan's claim that the companies are no longer active is not true. Both companies are active in the register of taxpayers of the Revenue Service. Import Genius is an international database which collects official foreign trade data from Europe, Asia, and North and Latin America. In this database, we found two more Georgian companies involved in sending sanctioned cargo to Russia.

On 24 August 2023, LLC Face Plus sent sound/image receiving and transmitting equipment worth \$40,000 to the Russian company Emmas in the Rostov region in

collaboration with a Polish company. Face Plus is not listed in the public registry under that name though. We only know that Face Plus is located at 264 Omar Khizanishvili Street, Tbilisi, which is inside the Tbilisi Free Industrial Zone.

In January-February 2023, the Russian company Khort Trade in St. Petersburg received three shipments of dual-use cargo, including printed circuits, static converters, and plugs. These sanctioned products were sent to Russia by LLC Astery Group and the carrier was the Latvian company Ultra Trade Service.

Astery Group has been registered in Tbilisi since May 2022, and its director and owner is Vladimir Sapozhnikov, a Latvian citizen, who is also a board member of Ultra Trade Service.

## Household Appliances Sent to Russia End Up in the War

Here, we set out to explain why refrigerators, washing machines, and dishwashers cannot be supplied to Russia. Naturally, you may be wondering what such appliances could possibly have to do with war. iFact spoke with military industry experts, current and former military personnel, former senior defense officials, and an international economic sanctions analyst.

All agreed that assembling combat weapons in modern warfare no longer requires extensive expertise. Weapon parts can be found in everyday items, some of which we carry on our person routinely, such as laptops or smartphones.

"Practically every Russian drone and military missile contains components that are also used in household appliances, like refrigerators. In simple terms, the metal you have at home could be given to someone in Russia who might use it to kill Ukrainians. It may sound like an exaggeration, but this is a true illustration of the scale of impact of these dual-use products," said Giorgi Shaishmelashvili, an analyst with Civil Idea.

Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the export of refrigerators, dishwashers, and washing machines from Georgia to the following countries has increased significantly: Rus-



sia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. In 2023, washing machines worth \$286,660 and dishwashers worth \$41,390 were directly exported from Georgia to Russia.

“I now know for a fact that the drum motor of a washing machine can be used in unmanned military vehicles - ‘copters’ - to spin the rotor (rotating part). When you run out of military parts, you use what you have. There’s no other way, and that’s why military parts are so expensive that you can now buy five washing machines for the same price. It’s not a problem; you take what you need and throw the rest away,” explained Reserve Colonel Beridze.

washing machine, and a military drone all have the same chip.

Abashidze outlined: “I can take the ‘brain’ of any modern TV set and reprogram it into the ‘brain’ of a drone..... People think you have to be a rocket scientist to work with military technology, but times have changed. The Javelin missile system used to be a marvel, but now even my 14-year-old son can build one using this circuit (showing us the Arduino). It won’t be high quality and reliable, but when the war moves into the exhaustion phase, anything will do.”

Giorgi Kurulashvili, Director of Research and Development at the British IT manufacturing company Cott Electronics added: “The Russians, as



*Photo of a TV “brain” from Navtlugi spare parts market*



*Photo of a washing machine “brain” from Gldani household fair*

Programmer and physicist Abashidze explained that if you are determined, it is relatively easy to disassemble household appliances and reassemble their parts into military weapons. According to him, this is due to the fact that, for example, a telephone, a

it turned out recently (in the war on Ukraine), have used civilian semiconductors (chips) that are available for regular sale. This means that the semiconductor could be in a washing machine or a coffee machine.”



Exports of washing machines, dishwashers, and refrigerators from Georgia in 2017-2024  
Source: Geostat

## What is Tantalum and How is it Used on the Battlefield?

“Tantalum capacitors are essential to assembling electronics. By themselves, they aren’t much—they’re small—but even if you have chips and everything else, without tantalum, nothing works,” explained Abashidze.

Tantalum capacitors are an essential component of electronic devices that store the positive and negative charges of electric current, and the Russian military uses them to produce artillery shells.

Several months after Russia began its war on Ukraine, in November 2022, 710 kilograms of tantalum worth \$2,400 was re-exported from Georgia to Armenia. This was an unprecedented case, as this product had seldom been exported from Georgia before other than in 2018, when tantalum worth \$160 was exported to Bangladesh.

In the Import Genius database, we found that this sanctioned product arrived in Russia from Georgia in October-December 2023. Tantalum capacitors worth \$12,800 were shipped from China

and entered Russia via the Georgian border. These transactions are not included in the foreign trade portal of Geostat.

Military analyst Koba Naroushvili told us: “Russia needs tantalum primarily for the production of shaped-charge projectiles. These projectiles can also be made from copper, but their effectiveness is four to five times lower—tantalum is optimal. We know the Russians are facing challenges with tantalum extraction and, logically, should have depleted their reserves by now.”

When asked if Armenia’s high demand for tantalum made sense, Naroushvili replied: “Armenia itself doesn’t produce high-tech, tantalum-based shells. They haven’t developed this technology. It’s easier for them to purchase ready-made shells.”



Tantalum capacitors, Photo: E-bay

## What is the Solution? — Lithuania's Experience

In April 2024, the Lithuanian investigative media outlet LRT.lt published an article detailing how a Lithuanian company was transporting sanctioned dual-use goods to Russia. According to information gathered by LRT.lt, €130 million worth of dual-use products had been transported from Lithuania to Russia since the start of the war in Ukraine, with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan serving as transit countries.

Based on this journalistic investigation, Lithuanian law enforcement agencies launched an investigation in May 2024 and soon identified four suspects. The case is still under investigation.

We spoke with Ruta Juknevičiūtė, the author of the article, and asked her to provide more details about the measures taken by the Lithuanian government to fill the “black hole” they uncovered. According to her, after Russia’s war on Ukraine began, import-export controls in Lithuania became lax, and companies continued to supply Russia with sanctioned items through third countries such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

“...Lithuania has taken steps to tighten export restrictions; the government has imposed national sanctions on priority battlefield items. Additionally, land transit of such products through Lithuania has been banned, although this has not yet affected sea shipments,” Juknevičiūtė outlined.

If the Georgian government decides to strengthen control over the export of dual-use goods to Russia, it could, for example, draw from Lithuania’s experience and implement similar national-level sanctions.

Following the Lithuanian media’s in-

vestigative report, the Lithuanian government banned the export of dual-use items not only to Russia but also to non-EU countries.

Nino Evgenidze, Executive Director of the Economic Policy Research Center in Georgia, claimed that the currently uncontrolled situation will only be regulated when Georgia imposes independent internal restrictions in addition to international bans.

“If you detain the head of a transport company and ask him why he is transporting drones to Russia (via a third country), you can’t take any legal action against him because there is no law restricting this right. The state is facilitating this. What’s the problem? They should use those international databases listing prohibited products and issue a decree. This information severely damages our reputation and will lead to a loss of trust in us as a country,” said Evgenidze.

We also spoke with Maximilian Hess, a political risk and sanctions analyst at the British Foreign Policy Research Institute and author of *Economic War*, a book that examines Russia’s war on Ukraine and the sanctions imposed on Russia.

“If the government is truly committed to enforcing sanctions and wants to avoid becoming a violator, the best course of action would be to publish a separate list of high-priority battlefield items and impose additional export restrictions on them. In practice, this would mean requiring exporters to specify the final destination of their cargo. This measure is essential to prevent prohibited goods from reaching Russia via Georgia,” Hess suggested.

A week before publishing this article, we also reached out to the Revenue Ser-

vice to arrange an interview. Its press office requested that we send our questions via email and assured us they would select an appropriate respondent. However, after two days, we received only a generic written response and consent for the interview has still not been granted.

They acted similarly in February 2024

when iFact exposed a scheme involving the supply of sanctioned cars to Russia and had critical questions for the Revenue Service to answer. At that time, their response was neither prompt nor adequate. After the article was published, the Revenue Service accused us of spreading disinformation against the country. ■

*Contributors to the article: Ia Asatiani (interviewer); Nanuka Bregadze (interviewer); Manana Ghoghoberidze (Editor); Nino Gagua (Designer); Robi Zaridze (Videographer).*





Elene Ebanoidze

## The Election and the Role of Europe



For us students, Georgia's accession to the European Union is by far the most important thing. Since the restoration of Georgia's independence, this idea has united representatives of all spheres and ages.

Today, this European aspiration is no longer something distant. My generation knows Europe intimately, and has a good idea of what it would be like to be a full part of it. We know how free and secure one can feel as an EU citizen.

Becoming part of the European Union requires a country and its people to take on a high level of civic responsibility, social justice, protection of human rights, and the rule of law. However, perhaps what we need most of all is access to quality education.

On the one hand, we are closer than ever to this pivotal moment. On the oth-

er hand, a so-called Russian law, a homophobic law, and a so-called offshore law are all being adopted in the country, which is fundamentally at odds with the values, spirit, and concept of the European Union.

In this context, the 2024 election is as pivotal for modern Georgia as the historic 1990 multi-party election, where the Georgian people overcame the Soviet Communist Party. Today, every Georgian citizen faces a profound choice: to realize the centuries-old dream of joining Europe, or to fall prey to propaganda, risking the country's isolation behind a new iron curtain.

For young people, this election holds even greater significance. Over the past two years, we have endured beatings, water cannons, tear gas, and unjust fines. Yet, rather than instilling fear, this has



strengthened our resolve. Such determination is underscored by the fact that Georgian students abroad have been registering in large numbers and traveling (in some cases, long distances) to polling stations across various cities (wherever the government has allowed or could not prevent opening of polling stations) to ensure that their voices are heard. This mobilization highlights not only the importance of Georgia's European future for us but also the value of every single vote in steering our country in the right direction.

This election may also decide whether Georgia's visa liberalization regime with the European Union continues or is suspended. The outcome will also shape the broader future of civil society in Georgia, impacting the work of non-governmental organizations engaged in essential educational and civic initiatives.

We must also confront a potential dystopian scenario: if the October 26 election brings no meaningful change, Georgia

risks falling entirely under Russian influence, setting the country on an openly anti-Western, authoritarian path—one that my generation cannot and will not accept. This would close the door to the European Union, anchoring Georgia within Russia's orbit. Our return to the broader European family would be indefinitely postponed. Georgia would face international isolation, sanctions would target those responsible for the country's backward shift in foreign policy, and large-scale repression could begin—a grim prospect that government representatives have already hinted at unambiguously.

It is precisely this election that will determine what Georgia we wake up to on October 27, what direction our country will take, and what future awaits young people (my generation). I am firmly convinced that with the support of our partner countries and friends who stand beside us, we will succeed. ■

**We must also confront a potential dystopian scenario: if the October 26 election brings no meaningful change, Georgia risks falling entirely under Russian influence, setting the country on an openly anti-Western, authoritarian path—one that my generation cannot and will not accept. This would close the door to the European Union, anchoring Georgia within Russia's orbit. Our return to the broader European family would be indefinitely postponed. Georgia would face international isolation, sanctions would target those responsible for the backward shift in foreign policy, and large-scale repression could begin—a grim prospect that government representatives have already hinted at unambiguously.**



Mikhail Antadze



# Androphages

In ancient times, man-eaters lived where Moscow stands today. Herodotus, known as the “Father of History,” describes this in his encyclopedic work from the 5th century BC, a compilation of all the knowledge available to the civilization of that time on history, mythology, scientific thought, and geography, known as *The Histories*. He writes that beyond the land of the Scythians - located, according to the maps of Herodotus, in what is now Ukraine - in the dense forests and swamps northeast of pres-

ent-day Chernihiv, lived barbarian tribes whom Herodotus calls the Androphages (Ἀνδροφάγοι means “cannibals” in ancient Greek). Herodotus marked their settlement area on his maps, covering the region roughly stretching from modern-day Smolensk eastward through Moscow to Kostroma. These barbarians lived deep within cramped forests and thickets. While the Scythians to the south had already adopted agriculture, kept domestic animals, lived in houses, and established rural communities,

the Androphages still relied on gathering and hunting. They were part of a rare group that hunted not only animals but also humans. Herodotus notes that the Androphages observed particularly savage customs. This was an epoch when civilizations flourished in Greece, Persia, Egypt, and Phoenicia. Alphabetic writing and literary works emerged, seafaring and trade expanded, and the Greeks and Phoenicians dominated North Africa and Southern Europe. Philosophical thought was flourishing, and trade routes expanded in all directions, extending even to the Scythian territories inhabited by so-called barbarians and to the Sarmatians further east. Civilizations like Mesopotamia, Egypt, China, and India had already existed for three centuries. Although trade routes extended toward barbarian lands as well, Herodotus notes that both civilized and barbarian peoples alike avoided the dense, forested region where the Androphages roamed. Neighboring groups were well aware of their bloodthirsty customs and kept their distance. Herodotus emphasizes that any foreigner who fell into the hands of the Androphages was burned alive according to their custom; if they had no foreigner, they could buy their own from their own people, and the same fate awaited these unfortunates. They were tortured for a long time, burned slowly with flaming torches, and finally devoured with gusto. The skulls of the victims with their hair were pinned to their chests and worn proudly as medals or decorations. Obviously, this was due to the rules of their cult and primitive mythology. However, the craze for medals and epaulettes in the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union suggests that ancient mythological archetypes endured. According to Herodo-

tus, the skulls of the slain were also used as cups.

Called Androphages by the Greeks, the indigenous cannibals of Moscow and the surrounding areas remained in the Stone Age for the longest time, hunting and fighting with flint arrows, while the Bronze and Copper Ages were already forgotten in the ancient world, and the ancestors of the Georgians, the Chalybes, already possessed know-how of processing iron and steel, which was used across the whole civilized world. Even during the heyday of the Roman Empire, there were no major changes in the lifestyle of the Androphages. Pliny the Elder, who lived in the first century A.D., says in his Natural History that the Androphages have the wildest customs among men, they have no law and justice, they roam the forests, but wear the same clothes as the Scythians and generally try to imitate them, however, by nature they are all ruthless robbers and murderers and in this respect they are much worse than the Scythians.

According to the view of modern Western historiography, the Androphages migrated from the north in prehistoric times, but stopped at the northern border of the Scythian settlement and took over the so-called "Polesie" (the territory of modern-day Moscow).

For a long time, the Androphages did not experience any progressive development, except for their imitation of Scythian clothing and the fact that, according to Pliny the Elder, the Scythians taught



*Scythian warrior  
Ancient picture*



them to wash their hands and wipe their bottoms. Meanwhile, Christianity spread throughout the Western world - including the Georgian kingdoms, Kartli and Egrisi - and after a few centuries was declared the state religion of the Roman Empire. After the collapse of the western part of the Roman Empire, the long process of forming the modern European ethnos began.

In the East, Rome maintained its empire for another thousand years. Before that, a new religion, Islam, was born in the Arabian Peninsula and spread rapidly in Asia and North Africa. The conquest of countries with high culture and civilization (Syria, Egypt, and Antioch) turned the Arab Caliphate into an empire with a developed culture and contributed to the revival of ancient culture in Europe, including Georgia.

However, the Arabs also converted the nomadic peoples of Central Asia to Islam, which led to a long Turkish expansion. The Seljuk Turks conquered much of the Arab Caliphate and suppressed the Eastern Roman Empire. Meanwhile, the Androphages living in Polesie remained in the Stone Age. Many medieval maps are accompanied by

drawings of the Androphages feasting on human flesh. However, it is clear that in the northern territories adjacent to Byzantium, great changes characteristic of that era took place: as a result of a great migration from the southwest to the Scythian territories, people of Slavic origin appeared, with whom the Vikings (Varyags) from the north mixed. The closest of them to Byzantium was Bulgaria, from where Christianity and its writings spread to the north. The Eastern Slavs created a centralized state, Kievan Rus, the main cities of which were Kiev and Novgorod. At the same time, Slavic tribes - Elmins, Vyatiches, and Kiviches - invaded and settled in the southern territories of Polesie, and later these territories became part of the Christianized Kievan state, but even then there were still man-eating Androphages there. The Turks, whose expansion extended not only southwest but also north of the Caspian Sea, referred to these people as kasabi (i.e. butchers), whom they shunned due to their cannibalistic practices. In the territories occupied by the Slavs, the indigenous Androphagous people were assimilated, adopting agriculture and animal husbandry. This led to the emergence of Finno-Ugric ethnic groups, such as the Chud, Moksha, Mari, and Murom. Most of these names have Turkic origins and are derived from the word "mordva," which again means "cannibals." In the Russian Federation, there is still an ethnos called Mordva (indeed, the Patriarch of Russia, Kirill, is a Mordvin). The Mordvins tried very hard to resemble civilized people, but, according to Turkic sources, because of jealousy and stupidity they could not tolerate the Slavs and their states, often attacking, robbing, and oppressing them. De-



*Meeting of Slavs and Varyags,  
19th-century illustration*



spite the forced conversion to Christianity, they still fled to swamps and dense forests, where they worshipped their idols and performed rites of the cult of the dead.

It should come as no surprise that the Genghis Khan-style Mongol-Tatar invasion established some governmental order and discipline among these savage peoples. However, the Mongols and Tatars themselves, who possessed one of the most developed, tolerant, and civilized empires of their time, held these people in very low esteem, and every local leader or boyar called every other local leader or boyar a puppy of Khan, or a lick of dust from his feet and similar humiliating epithets. Khan's vast empire, the largest continental empire of all time, soon disintegrated. For example, they left Georgia after 70-80 years, the siege of Vienna lasted only a few months, although before that they had completely conquered Eastern Europe, the Kingdom of Kiev, Poland, and Hungary. But the powerful state of the Mongol-Tatars - the "Golden Horde" - remained in the Volga region and the former territories of the Androphages for another 200 years, which led to a strong assimilation of the local population. To cannibalism was now added the idea of world conquest, similar to that of Genghis Khan. In the 15th century, when the Byzantine Empire was destroyed by the Ottomans, the local princes were still considered Mongol-Tatar vassals. The Mongol-Tatars founded the Moscow Ulus, which differed from other ulus in that their local elite were the first to propose to Khan that they collect tribute from the locals themselves, rather than bothering the army to do so. At the cost of their own people's lives, the Muscovite princes ex-

panded their sovereign powers, though they were still seen as subservient to the Khans. Ivan Vasilyevich III, a great Muscovite leader and vassal of Sayyid Ahmed Khan, the ruler of the Golden Horde, bore the official title of "sole-licker" as a mark of submission. Yet, in him, the old animosity of the Slavs rekindled with renewed vigor. With the help of the Mongol-Tatar army, he burned the city of Novgorod (Kievan Rus was disintegrated after the Mongol invasions, and Novgorod, as a republican city-state, served as an important economic center for a long time). It was during the reign of Ivan III that two crazy ideas were conceived in the Principality of Moscow - the first being that Moscow should replace Constantinople in the Christian world and be called the "Third Rome," and the second being the ambition to unify the so-called "Russian lands" under Muscovy control.

A long period of wars and confrontation with European countries began, when the Muscovy rulers appropriated the heritage of old Kiev in their princely titles, calling themselves "Princes of All Russia." The Muscovy princes revived their unifying ambitions and began again with Novgorod. In the 16th century, as the age of land exploration began in Europe and a new era of ecclesiastical reformation started, Moscow's Tsar Ivan Vasilyevich IV, grandson of Ivan III, also known as Ivan the Terrible, returned to Novgorod. This time he destroyed, burned, and ravaged the city, effective-



*Grand Prince of Muscovy Ivan III  
(engraving from the 16th century)*





ly ending its independence as a republic. This time Ivan the Terrible no longer needed the help of the Mongol army, and he himself created the so-called “Oprichnaya” army: with brutal ruthlessness they began to conquer neighboring ethnic groups and destroy their independence. Oleg Panfilov, a historian and journalist, and a great friend of Georgia, in his book *Anti-Soviet Stories* develops the opinion that the “Oprichnina” started by Ivan the Terrible never ended, and that modern Russia is not an ordinary country of typical origin, created on the historical basis of ethnic and feudal sovereignty, but rather is a gran-



*Batu Qaen,  
Iranian miniature*

diose conquest project based on Genghis Khan’s “idea of world domination.” Following the conquest of the Ural lands to the west, Moscow’s expansion turned eastward. Over 200 years of bloody wars led to the decimation of numerous Siberian ethnic groups, extending Moscow’s reach beyond Siberia to Kamchatka, Chukotka, and the Far East. Turkestan (Central Asia) soon followed. Meanwhile, in Europe, the “gathering of lands” continued unabated. The Caucasus, the Carpathians, Bessarabia, Poland, Finland, and other regions were absorbed into this reconstituted empire, echoing the legacy of Genghis Khan.

We have not once referred to the conqueror as “Russia” up to now. This is because the country only began to be known by this name in the 18th century. Prior to that, even on European maps from the 16th and 17th centuries—such as those King Louis XIV might have seen—this territory was labeled as “Tartaria,” or the land of the Tatars, evoking associations with the ancient Greek Tartaros (i.e. hell). The locals themselves called their state “Muscovy.” It is also worth noting that until the 18th century, in the forested swamps of the region, numerous huts stood on slender supports, reminiscent of chicken legs. These huts, where the deceased were cremated in ovens, may reflect traces of an ancient custom, with some researchers suggesting that cannibalistic practices survived within these pagan traditions. This setting also likely inspired the folk character Baba Yaga, or more precisely Babayagha—a name stemming from Turkish origins, with “Babai” and “Agha” roughly meaning “father” and “lord.” The strong influence of the Mongol-Tatars is further underscored by the Russian word батя (father), which is derived from Batu Qaen’s name.

An attempt to end Baba Yaga’s rampage was made by the Moscow Tsar Peter I, a representative of the Romanov dynasty, after he had traveled to Europe. His great-grandfather, Mikhail Fedorovich, had ascended the throne following the overthrow of the self-proclaimed Tsar False Dmitry II, after the “Time of Troubles”—a decades-long power struggle in Moscow. The Romanovs began their rule by publicly executing Dmitry II, his wife, the Polish princess Maria Mnishkek, and their three-year-old son in front of the Kremlin. This unprecedented-

ed punishment of a young child would, in a tragic echo three centuries later, be repeated when the last Romanov, Tsar Nicholas II, along with his own young children, was executed by the Communists.

.Now let us return to Peter I, known to us as Peter the Great. It was he who officially named his country Russia in the first quarter of the 18th century. It should be noted that in the ancient name of the country (Kievan Rus) and in later terminology this word was always pronounced with the letter “u,” and the question is therefore where the “o” came from. Obviously, it is from Greek, because the letter “u” does not exist in the Greek alphabet, and in Byzantine documents this word was written with the letter “o” (still written this way – Ρωσία). Peter, trying to Europeanize a wild country, on the one hand appropriated the name of the old Kievan kingdom, and on the other hand changed it in a foreign way, thus emphasizing the supposed Byzantine ties of his country. This, of course, was a lie designed to enhance his prestige in the eyes of Europe. For the same purpose, with the help of invited Europeans, he built a completely Western city near Europe, called it Petersburg in the Western manner, and moved the capital there from Moscow. For the same reason, Peter laid the foundation for rewriting, mythologizing, and falsifying the history of “Russia.” He forced the nobility (boyars) to shave their beards and required them to observe elementary standards of hygiene, although nothing changed in the lives of ordinary people (slavery was abolished in Russia only in 1861). Peter also “took care” of the Church, abolishing the Moscow Patriarchate and entrusting the ad-

ministration of religion to a collegium headed by an Ober- Prokurator (senior prosecutor). In the 18th century, along with the forced Europeanization of the country, there was a great reform of the language, because the language of the inhabitants of Muscovy was a mixture of Finno-Ugric, Tatar, Turkish, Mongolian,



*The hanging of Marina Mnishek's 3-year-old son in Moscow in 1614, 20th-century illustration.*

and Old Slavonic languages that came with Christianity. That is why even the texts of the 17th century are completely incomprehensible to the present-day Russian reader. The reform was completed only at the beginning of the 19th century, and the Russian language came to conform to modern parameters. It is generally recognized that the creation of the modern Russian language is mainly due to one particular person, Alexander Pushkin. The Europeanization of the empire led to a great cultural upsurge in the nineteenth century, although in reality it all lasted little more than a century. The Bolsheviks, who moved the capital from St. Petersburg back to Moscow shortly after the bloody coup, caused a rapid degradation of culture, and modern Russia re-presented Russian culture as the antithesis of everything Western. In the end, Peter the Great's project of Europeanization failed (except for the idea of communism, which was imported from



*Peter I, 18th-century painting*

Europe and implemented with unprecedented cruelty). The main essence and business of this state remained to “gather” the “Russian lands” and to wage wars of conquest again and again.

Now, “Russia” is trying to “reclaim”

Ukraine. From all of the history introduced above, it is clear how baseless the idea is of the Slavic origin of the Muscovites and the claim to the unification of the Slavic states. However, this is only one part of a cannibalistic tactic. The false, propagandistic version of modern Russian history has already taken deep root in the consciousness of Russian citizens. A chilling impression is left by an interview of a Moscow teenager circulating online, in which he says that Russia must conquer not only Europe, not only the world, but the entire solar system. When asked by a surprised journalist how it is that the Russian army, for example, will enter Paris and she would bathe in the fountains there, the teenager responded bluntly: “All the French, and indeed all people, will be Russian; we will conquer the solar system, and everything will be fine.”

Today, terrible propaganda poison is produced in the Kremlin, where the chief Androphagous seemingly still resides... ■







Levan Gurielidze



# Tbilisi Chronicles of the 1990s

## In the Italian Courtyard Neighborhood

Beyond “Kodzori Gate” in the neighborhoods of Sololaki, Mtatsminda, and Vere, there are many private spaces that Tbilisi residents call “Italian courtyards” because of their resemblance to images of Italian neorealist cinema. I spent all my childhood and youth there, and know them very well. Today, people claim that these courtyards lived like one big family, but that is not ex-

actly true. A lot of gossip and joys were shared and, God forbid, if someone died, none of the neighbors would dare to turn on the TV. If someone was sick, the courtyard took care of them together; and when it was time for a wedding, the neighbors were first to be invited, even before the relatives!

In the slow and traditional course of life in our courtyard, which even the storms of Zviad Gamsakhurdia’s national movement could not change, people played backgammon and dominoes,

talked about sports and the weather, and in the evenings sipped one of the neighbor's village wine - the toast to "our red fence" was sometimes replaced by a toast to "the dogwood-colored flag" with black and white stripes. At that time, the newspapers were full of previously unknown and forbidden political topics, and the air shook with the sounds of yelling coming from the avenue. But I had no co-demonstrators or co-protesters among my neighbors



*January 3, 1992, shooting at a demonstration*

apart from Victor. Our courtyard was still living its sluggish life, and, frankly speaking, I wondered if there were only two people from each courtyard in Tbilisi coming out to the rally, what impact could it possibly have?

Victor was a lonely, aged man. He had been living in Moscow, but had to leave everything to return to Tbilisi to serve in some corporation. Victor and I never missed a single rally or demonstration; we would visit even the most remote districts of Tbilisi and would return home late at night, exhausted. Sometimes we acquired new friends at the rallies, and some faces familiar from television would come to visit us. The neighbors would invite them to the table, drink to their health from special

glasses, and in toasts Victor and I were given a special mention.

Gamsakhurdia's era was short-lived, and the national government soon fell. The triumphant cheers from the avenue faded, but rallies and demonstrations—now against the military council—continued unabated. A rally near Didube metro station was raided and fired upon, and soon after, another rally near Delisi metro station faced a similar attack. Victor and I were together again for a further rally, where the head of the demonstration, which stretched all the way from Station Square to the university. Special-purpose vehicles from Kadjeti Fortress sprayed us with water, dispersing the crowd. The next day, we set off again from Station Square. On the side of what was then Chelyuskin Street, residents of high-rise buildings opened their doors and windows on every floor: men raised glasses of wine to us, while women tossed flowers, openly wept, and wiped their tears. We marched in the front rows of the demonstration. As we approached Chelyuskin (now Tamar) Bridge, Victor was called by an acquaintance and stepped aside. I moved with him onto the sidewalk to wait. Within a few minutes, a deafening gunshot rung out. Firing from the circus had struck the front rows, and people were forced back, sweeping us down the slope at the edge of the Kura River.

Many people were injured and killed that day. After 2 February 1992 the noise of the demonstrations quietened for a long time. The sounds of the roaring protests faded away, but we, the faithful "Zviadists" who stood for freedom, continued to resist the junta in every way we could including through



newspaper protests and by hanging proclamations on trees. Our courtyard remained silent though, and Victor was my only companion in all overt and covert acts of protest.

With the arrival of the president, the spirit of resistance reawakened in Tbilisi. The junta was worried and, fearing that troops sent from the west of Georgia would attack Tbilisi, began preventive arrests and threw people into prison or to serve as human shields. Women and the elderly were not spared.

One evening, a distant relative of mine who worked in the police approached me, panting. He pulled me aside, first showing me the letter he held in his hands, then quickly explaining that there was an informer in every courtyard—both for the police and for the security services. He added that this letter had just arrived at their department. Taking a piece of folded paper from the envelope, he read it to me. It was addressed to the chief of police, stating that in our courtyard, where 50 families lived, about five families were suspected of sympathizing with Gamsakhurdia. It also claimed that one resident, Levan Gurielidze, along with his family, was an active and especially dangerous supporter of his. The letter was signed by Victor.

Standing before my relative, I felt the crushing reality. Sensing my shock, he took my hand and said: “Now is not the time to faint. Get dressed quickly and bring your wife and children.” He hurried us into his car and drove to a village where he had a small country house. He instructed me not to leave the house under any circumstances. After a month, he agreed to my suggestion and helped me to fast-track the sale of my

apartment. I used the money to buy an apartment in a high-rise building outside the city, close to his house.

Since then, I have lived here for three decades. I know only my house and flat



*Demonstration of February 2, 1992*

number, the block, and the district—I don’t know the numbers of any other buildings, and I don’t know any of my neighbors. The only person I know here is the shoemaker who works in a booth at the entrance to my building.

My relative explained that informers for the police and security forces are often minor officials working nearby—such as cooperative chairmen, shopkeepers, or small-scale traders. So, I deliberately lied to the cobbler, claiming that I was only temporarily staying in this apartment rented out by my relative, and I assure him every year that I’m about to move out. But, in reality, it’s not the cobbler I’m lying to—it’s myself; after all, if he were truly an informer, wouldn’t he already know all about me?

P.S. As readers will understand, Victor’s real name has been changed in this otherwise true story.

## A Wedding Ring

A wedding ring, circular and unending, symbolizes eternal love. I’ve always

found it natural to see such a ring on a woman's finger as emphasizing her nurturing nature and prudence. At the same time, it subtly signals to strangers: "My heart and body are committed—don't waste your efforts." However, a wedding ring on a man's finger always irritated me, as I saw it as an ostentatious display of masculinity or as an exaggerated show of fidelity—often, ironically, by those who betray it.

I would never have considered wearing a wedding ring myself if it weren't for an unexpected turn of events. Those who remember Georgia in the 1990s will recall how citizens loyal to the president were often dismissed from their jobs without reason. I was among them. Raising two children was possible only through the help of my wife, who worked as a nanny for a family aligned with the new regime, while I stayed home with the kids. In those days, only a few wealthy families could afford generators and gas to cook with, while the rest of us made do with candles and "tin stoves." We vented the smoke through pipes stuck out of our windows, and soon the building was blackened with soot. Firewood was expensive, so the children and I would go to the nearby coniferous park, where I turned gathering into a game. We'd compete to see who could collect the most pine cones, which we used, along with fallen branches, to fuel the stove. For food, my wife would bring home leftovers from the family she worked for, and we got clothes from close relatives whose children had outgrown theirs. I could endure these hardships, but what pained me more was when the ice cream seller came to our courtyard and my children

didn't ask me for ice cream—or when we passed toy stands on the street, and they wouldn't even glance at the toys.

As the old saying goes, when it rains porridge, the beggar has no spoon. And so it was for us. My wife's babysitting job ended, leaving us with nothing. Complaining wouldn't help—our children were hungry. We saw a notice in the newspaper from a book dealer and called him; there was no other choice—I had to part with some of my beloved library.

A burly man arrived, parked his van in the yard, climbed up to our floor, and hauled two large sacks with him. He pulled up a stool and began sorting through the books on my shelves. Standing by the corner, I couldn't bear to watch, so I stared out the window instead. For just a moment, I turned to see him brandishing two volumes of *Don Quixote* in his hands, wetting his index finger as he thumbed through the pages, as if to test the books' condition.

This was a two-volume set from the 1950s, inherited from my grandmother's library, translated by Niko Avalishvili, with the characteristic cover illustration. Back in eighth grade, I had taken those hefty volumes with me to the village. Captivated by Hidalgo's adventures, I lost myself for a whole month, forgetting about the river, hunting, and even football on a real grass field—I spent my days reading, sometimes squealing with delight, sometimes rubbing my hands in excitement.

"Stop!" I shouted suddenly. The bookseller's hands shook in surprise, and the books fell from his grasp. "Stop! I am not selling any more books!" Startled, he quickly emptied the books from

his bag, stuffed the sacks under his arms, and fled from the house.

I opened my wife's small trunk, took out my wedding ring, and took it to the nearest pawnshop. They gave me some money - and a month to reclaim the ring. For that month, I found refuge, working at the Eliava market. My hands, accustomed to holding only a pen, turned to heavy lifting, which soon nearly broke my back. The wages were meager, but by the end of the month I managed to scrape together almost the entire amount - only to miss the dead-

line by a single day.

When I leaned into the pawn shop window and handed over my receipt, the cashier looked at me and rolled her eyes. "Oh, it's you! I have your ring right here—I was just about to put it up for sale!"

"Give me the ring!" I said, reaching out. With my thumb and forefinger, I quickly snatched it from her grasp before she could put it on display. I slipped it back onto my finger and have worn it ever since, without ever taking it off. ■





Gigi Gigineishvili

# Battle of Gumista

16-19 March 1993

The year 1993 began in Abkhazia with an unusual and blood-soaked coldness. After the slaughter of Georgians in Gagra in October 1992, the public learned every day about the horrifying details of the crimes committed in Gagra, Gantiadi, Leselidze, and other settlements by the Russians and separatists acting with their support. At that time, there were constant disputes and conflicts among the population of Abkhazia, but no one expected there would be such cruelty from their neighbors. A commission was set up in Tbilisi to investigate the fall of Gagra, although it was immediately clear that this would not

bring any real results. After the Gagra genocide, there was substantial evidence that the Russian Federation was involved in the process, but the Georgian Investigative Commission, as well as numerous people in power in general, were not yet ready to call Russia an enemy or an occupier. This led to an unprecedented wave of anti-Chechen propaganda in the Georgian media, shifting the focus away from the Russian Federation's actions. For context, during the entire war in Abkhazia, only around 350 Chechens sided with GRU agent Shamil Basayev. The majority of Chechen fighters refused to join the Russian ar-



my to fight against Georgia in Abkhazia (barely one-third of the number of Adyghe who joined the fight). However, the Georgian political elite, unwilling to criticize Russia and keen to discredit Zviad Gamsakhurdia (who was in exile in Grozny at the time), directed blame toward the Chechens. Absurd claims circulated, alleging that “the Chechens declared a holy war—jihad—against Georgia” or that “5,000 Chechens were sent into Abkhazia,” and so forth.

In December 1992, a Russian Defense Ministry helicopter was shot down in the vicinity of Tkvarcheli, near the village of Lata, in Georgian-controlled territory. A great tragedy ensued, in which innocent women and children, including those from mixed Georgian-Abkhazian families, lost their lives. According to an agreement, the Russian helicopter flying from Tkvarcheli to Gudauta had to pass through Georgian-controlled territory in Sukhumi and then continue to Gudauta. The Russian crew of the helicopter deliberately violated the agreement, taking on board 12 armed militants and promising to “sneak” them through the Kodori Gorge to Gudauta. As a result, the Russian military helicopter - a legitimate target - was shot down near the village of Lata by people whose identity is still unknown.

The Abkhazians called this flight a “humanitarian flight,” and along with the women and children lost, they also wept bitterly for the Russian and Abkhazian fighters killed in the same helicopter. This incident has never been fully investigated, giving the Russian-Abkhazian side an opportunity to use the

issue to propagate hatred against Georgians.

The Gagra genocide and the Lata tragedy brought an unprecedented level of cruelty to the clashes in Abkhazia. On New Year’s Day in 1993, Abkhazian forces twice attempted to invade Sukhumi, but were thwarted, losing about a hundred fighters. Desperate for reinforcements, the Abkhazians appealed to Russian forces. In late January 1993, Russian generals began preparations for an attack on Sukhumi. On February 9, a battalion named after Bagramyan was formed in Abkhazia, led by Albert Topolyan, an agent of the Russian special services.

The battalion comprised a total of 1,500 men and was financed by a group of businessmen of Armenian origin working in Russia. In addition to Armenians living in Abkhazia, the battalion’s ranks included both Karabakh and Armenian fighters. It fought mainly under the Armenian national flag and was particularly brutal against the peaceful Georgian population.

In September 1992, the Russian Federation had issued its final verdict on Georgia regarding Abkhazia. As a result, Russian bases and generals sta-



*Albert Topolyan*



*Warriors of Bagramyan Battalion*



tioned throughout Georgia and the entire Caucasus, especially Viktor Sorokin and Alexander Chindarov (who were in the inner circle of Russian Defense Minister Pavel Grachev), had already openly engaged in punitive measures against Georgia.

Specifically, for this operation, the



*Colonel-General Alexander Chindarov (Deputy Commander of the Airborne Forces of the Russian Federation, awarded the title of "Hero of Abkhazia"; according to the official Russian version, he was engaged in peacekeeping activities in Abkhazia) and Vladislav Ardzinba.*



*Pavel Grachov, Yuri Skokov, and Yevgeny Primakov*

Russian-Abkhazian units fighting in Abkhazia received an additional four units of "Grad" equipment, 15 units of infantry fighting vehicles, up to ten D-44 cannons, and a large quantity of 120mm and 82mm grenade launchers, machine

guns, large quantities of automatic fire weapons, communications equipment, special means for forcing the river, and equipped medical vehicles.

The active involvement of the Russian Federation and the harsh measures against Georgia were personally led by the Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, Yuri Skokov, about whom the Georgian public had less information. He was the main initiator of a multi-stage plan to wrest Abkhazia from Georgia. Apart from Skokov, separatist leaders were in active personal telephone contact with the President of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin, and had several personal audiences with him during the year-long war.

By order of the Russian general Chindarov, the development of a plan of attack on Sukhumi was entrusted to the headquarters of the Russian base in Gudauta and to Sultan Sosnaliev (a colonel of the Russian Federation, who was appointed the so-called Minister of Defense of Abkhazia on the recommendation of the GRU). The plan was devised by Russian officers and then presented to the Abkhazians, who formally approved the plan and agreed to everything. In addition to the transfer of weapons, officers of the Russian Parachute Regiment N345 from Gudauta trained the Abkhazian fighters on the Bzyb River, in the vicinity of the Gagra zone.

On 13 March 1993, the whole of Sukhumi was gripped by the news that a major attack on Georgian positions was being prepared from the right bank



March 1993,  
Bzyb River.

of the Gumista River. In response, Eduard Shevardnadze and most of the Cabinet of Ministers became personally involved in organizing the defensive line.

At dawn on 14 March, the Russian Air Force dropped 49 units of 500-kg bombs along the entire perimeter of the Gumista River frontline, close to the Georgian defensive line, all timed to detonate at 00:05 on 16 March to signal the beginning of the attack on Sukhumi. However, for unknown reasons, not a single bomb exploded at the appointed time, causing some confusion in the enemy camp. The start of the assault was postponed because the separatists, who were supposed to go on the offensive, worried they could be killed by their own bombs. The Russian generals said that the bombs would be deliberately set off, but that failed too, leading to disagreements between the Russian

and Abkhazian fighters. The so-called Chief of the Abkhaz General Staff, Sergei Dbari, refused to launch an attack, supported by other Abkhaz commanders. Russian generals were able to convince the Abkhazian fighters that this was the ideal moment for a successful assault and that they would not be given such a chance again. They also promised that the Russian Ministry of Defense would compensate for the unexploded bombs with massive air strikes and that additional artillery would be especially powerful. Ultimately, the Abkhazians agreed. At 03:00 in the morning, a furious attack on the Georgian positions began, starting from the Black Sea side and ending at the upper road bridge over the Gumista River (in the direction of Achadar), covering a total stretch of 10 kilometers.

The Russian Air Force attacked with



unprecedented intensity and for the first time used so-called “military garlands,” which illuminated the Georgian positions in the middle of the night. This was also a novelty and a surprise for the Georgian defensive line, as most of

tary District (ZAKVO) provided logistical support to this conflict in Abkhazia, naturally against Georgian forces, even though they were reputed “supporters” of the region.

The plan of attack also included the landing of fighters from the sea, in the area of the Kelasuri River in the Bay of Sukhumi. To this end, at 03:00, five small boats left the port of Gudauti, heading towards the rear of the Georgian positions.

At 05:00, it was the turn of the Russian-Abkhazian infantry units, composed of Russian regular army officers, including fighters from the Russian Army’s Airborne Combat Regiment No. 365, the “Tapir” group, the Cossack group, the Slavic battalion, the newly formed “Bagramyan” Battalion, the Chechen group, the Confederate battalion, and units named “Katran,” “Berkut,” “Eucalypt,” “Grad,” as well as Russian riot police from Riga.

Although the Georgian armed forces were on alert for an attack, the sheer scale of the assault allowed was overwhelming. Hundreds of fighters penetrated the Georgian frontline, advancing in the north near Gumista Bridge, close to the village of Achadar (previously demined by Russian special forces), and in the center, where they crossed the river at a railway bridge and two other locations.

Hand-to-hand combat erupted in the trenches in several areas, and the enemy appeared in another section of Sukhumi. Amid the ensuing chaos, Georgian fighters wrapped white bandages around their left arms to distin-

the Georgian fighters were not professionally trained.

At 04:00, intense artillery bombardment of Georgian positions and residential neighborhoods began, carried out by the Pskov Division.

The scale of this assault was unprecedented: around 20 pieces of artillery equipment of various types fired continuously for about an hour. This battle, one of the largest in modern Georgian history, contained an element of tragicomedy. Officers from the Russian Airborne Combat Battalion No. 901, stationed in Sukhumi’s Shukur district, were officially there to ensure the city’s security. Yet, quietly, they assisted in adjusting artillery fire on Georgian positions across the Gumista River,

relaying information to the Pskov artillerymen. These same officers, who had fostered friendly relations with the local Georgian population ultimately facilitated the destruction of Georgian lives.

In addition, the Tbilisi base of the Transcaucasian Mili-



*Aviation chandelier*



*March 16, 1993, Gumisti Line*





guish themselves from their foes.

According to the overall plan, five boats departing from Gudauta Port entered the Bay of Sukhumi undetected by 06:00 and proceeded toward Kelasuri River. By sheer chance, artillerymen from the “White Eagle” battalion stationed in Agudzera—specifically Officer Aleksandre Papashvili and his team—spotted them. Without formal orders and acting on their own initiative, Papashvili’s unit, which had been sent to the rear for artillery maintenance, opened fire using partially disassembled artillery installations. Within minutes, the Georgian artillerymen managed to sink two boats and damage a third, forcing the remaining two to change course and return to Gudauta.

The Russians’ plan to land forces behind Georgian lines failed on this occasion, though they would successfully execute a similar maneuver months later during the so-called Tamish landing.

The most intense fighting took place on the Gumista front, where Russian and Abkhazian units advancing on Georgian positions were met by Georgian artillery under the command of Colonel Temur Lomtadze and Colonel Emzar Chochua. From early morning, they launched strikes across the Gumista River toward enemy reserves and firing points on the right bank. Within hours, they had destroyed seven trucks loaded with fighters and weaponry, five armored vehicles, and multiple artillery positions. With several precise shots,



*Gumista Bridge and the railway bridge*

they eliminated Russian fighters who, in a panic, attempted to find new cover—only to be effectively targeted by Georgian artillery, even in their new positions. By March 16 at around 02:00, the separatist formations on the right bank of the Gumista (under Russian control) were in a far more difficult position than



*Russian SU-27 in the sky over Sukhumi*

those attacking on the left bank.

As a result, the enemy's assault groups were left without a rear, halting their advance. This development ultimately determined the outcome of the battle. Facing heavy losses and with reinforcements failing to arrive, the Russian-Abkhazian forces decided to retreat by the afternoon. By that time, Georgian units had consolidated their positions, stabilized the frontline, and

obtained precise information about enemy locations. As the retreating forces came under intense Georgian fire, they suffered devastating losses—the heaviest during the entire conflict. Significantly, the separatist forces sustained their greatest casualties while attempting their own offensive. Chaos abounded among the enemy ranks. The Russian-Abkhazian artillery fired erratically, and many Abkhazian fighters reported being struck multiple times by their own artillery bombardment on the left bank of the Gumista. By the evening of March 16, the fighting had subsided, though small skirmishes with isolated enemy groups on the left bank of the Gumista continued until March 18. Active hostilities came to a halt on March 19, when Georgian military forces shot down Russian Air Force SU-27 fighter jet, serial number #11, near Sukhumi. The aircraft, piloted by Major Vatslav Shipko, had been targeting both combat positions and populated areas using typical Russian bombardment tactics.

The officer had various documents with him and was found dead in the



*Russian Federation's Major V. Shipko and his identity documents*

**The Russian-Abkhazian artillery fired erratically, and many Abkhazian fighters reported being struck multiple times by their own artillery bombardment on the left bank of the Gumista.**

plane's cockpit by Georgian law enforcement personnel, who handed his body over to the Russian side after completing investigative procedures. This incident provided the first indisputable



and historic evidence of Russian involvement that the Georgian side had obtained since the start of the conflict. For much of the Georgian political elite of that time, this evidence posed a profound moral and psychological dilemma. Despite opposition from his team, Shevardnadze visited the crash site in the high mountains near Sukhumi, accompanied by Georgian and foreign journalists, and ordered that the inci-

dent be publicly reported. ratists to succeed, mere arms deliveries would be insufficient; they would need to replicate a strategy similar to the seizure of Gagra—signing a peace agreement only to break it at a strategically opportune moment, following a well-worn Russian approach.

Historically, the Russian-Abkhazian side used this method repeatedly. They seized the Gagra zone by violating the peace agreement of 3 September



dent be publicly reported.

Within days, photos and videos of the downed Russian military plane spread worldwide. As a result, from 19 March 1993, the so-called “brothers in faith” once again became, in the eyes of many previously hesitant Georgians, the embodiment of a bloodthirsty and ruthless enemy.

This battle clarified three key points for the Russians and Abkhazians. First, from a purely tactical standpoint, a direct assault on Sukhumi from the Gumista was unfeasible. Second, despite chaos and resource shortages, the Georgians had shown the ability to unite and concentrate their forces during critical moments. This meant that for the sepa-

1992, occupied the northern heights of Sukhumi, Shroma, and Kamani, breaching the agreement of 14 May 1993, and finally captured Sukhumi, Ochamchire, and Gali, disregarding the 27 July 1993 agreement.

The third revelation here was the exceptional accuracy of the Georgian artillery, which consistently won duels despite the adversary’s superior and more

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numerous weaponry. This effectiveness likely influenced the terms of the 27 July 1993 peace agreement, under which Georgian artillery installations were to be stationed in the Gulripsh district. Yet, for reasons still unknown, Russian generals moved these artillery units far from Abkhazia—to Poti—using their own ships. This relocation warrants thorough investigation by the Georgian state.

In recent years, more than a hundred Russian-Abkhazian books have been published describing the triumphant military actions of the so-called Abkhazian army. For example, there are tales of how an Abkhazian group of 250

side lost about 500 fighters in the battles near the Gumista on 16-19 March, and about a hundred fighters were captured by the Georgian side. In order to quell the panic caused by the heavy losses, the separatist propaganda media officially announced an easy-to-remember and reduced/falsified figure of 222 casualties, and to this day the number 222 is mentioned and disseminated in their articles and documents. However, the Abkhazians themselves are well aware that this figure does not correspond to the real losses. Unfortunately, the March 1993 clashes also resulted in heavy losses on the Georgian side: 135 fighters and about 40 civilians were killed in the treacherous attack on Sukhumi. Many buildings were damaged and destroyed during the conflict; today, Abkhazian tourist guides often showcase these ruins to tourists as examples of supposed Georgian brutality. The military operation bears resemblance to the Battle of Aspindza, led by Erekle II, who was betrayed by the Russians. In that battle, Erekle allowed half of the Ottoman army to cross the Mtkvari River before blockading and damaging the bridge, ultimately destroying the forces that had crossed first, and then slaughtering those that remained on the opposite bank.

On 19 March 1993, the enemy fled the battlefield. The excitement of the Georgians in Sukhumi knew no bounds, but the danger was still truly great. Volunteers from all over Georgia gathered in Sukhumi, and a big counterattack was planned. There was hope that it would all be over soon, but Gudauta

**It was precisely as a result of the violation of the peace agreement that the Russian-Abkhazian side treacherously occupied the Gagra zone (as a result of the violation of the agreement of 03.09.1992), the northern heights of Sukhumi, Shroma, Kaman. (in effect of violating the agreement of 14.05.1993) and finally, Sukhumi, Ochamchire and Gali (in effect of violating the agreement of 27.07.1993).**

men defeated a 5,000-strong Georgian unit in Gagra, and how 1,200 Abkhazian fighters defeated 25,000 Georgian soldiers in Sukhumi. However, these works ignore the fact that Georgian combat-ready units and artillery were withdrawn from Abkhazia at that time due to the peace agreement, and their “congenial” attacks ended before the peace agreement was signed, as can be seen from this article and other sources of information available in abundance.

In the end, the Russian-Abkhazian

was gripped by extreme sadness and hopelessness. Vladislav Ardzinba was so depressed that he almost committed suicide. The situation proved a turning point, but despite the expectations and categorical demands of the Georgian fighters, for unknown reasons a counterattack on Gudauti was not carried out. This decision naturally led to

The situation proved a turning point, but despite the expectations and categorical demands of the Georgian fighters, for unknown reasons, a counterattack on Gudauti was not carried out.

significant dissatisfaction, prompting plans for military operations aimed not at Gudauta, but at Tkvarcheli. Preparations were underway, with artillery units navigating challenging terrain to occupy the area surrounding Tkvarcheli. However, on 20 March 1993, at 07:40, they received orders to turn back. The Georgian fighters were taken aback, as

the instruction was unequivocal: “There will be no more attacks!” This development remains cloaked in mystery. Some assert that the counterattack was called off due to threats from high-ranking Russian officials, while others attribute the decision to the army’s lack of preparedness. Regardless of the reasons, it is undeniable that during that critical period, Georgia lost its most significant opportunity to bring the ongoing military campaign in Abkhazia to a victorious conclusion. Choosing not to go on the offensive at that time was both

Choosing not to go on the offensive at that time was both a grave mistake and a crime, the consequences of which became apparent just six months later, in September 1993.

a grave mistake and a crime, the consequences of which became apparent just six months later, in September 1993. ■



**Amiran Pachuashvili**

## Signs Seen on the Walls

Whether watching TV, scrolling through Facebook, or discussing the events with friends and family, she found herself overwhelmed by emotion, tears flowing uncontrollably as she absorbed the horrors unfolding in Ukraine. She couldn't help but cry and she didn't even try to stop. How could she not cry over this catastrophe? How could she not take the tragedy of friendly people and the pain of a brotherly nation to her heart? It was impossible, and so she cried, sometimes silent and sometimes loud, her tears hot and frequent. They rolled uncontrollably down her cheeks, overflowing to the point that she didn't even wipe them anymore. She cried whether she was standing, sitting, or lying down. She tried not to show her emotions to her 14-year-old daughter, but sometimes couldn't. The girl, who was going through her own adolescent turmoil, longed to comfort and reassure her mother. But an awkwardness or clumsiness held her back, leaving her mother inconsolable.

Tina and Sasha stayed in an ordinary Tbilisi house, in an ordinary Tbilisi neighborhood, and they lived ordinary lives. Before the war they had nothing to worry about: Tina worked and Sasha studied. Before the pandemic, they were out during the day and at home at night. That period gave them more time to spend at home. They were still counting the number of new COVID-19 cases and deaths and discussing the pros and cons of a third booster shot, when suddenly the tragedy of Ukraine struck. Sasha was old enough to properly perceive the horrors of the war, but she somehow seemed to have a psychological immunity and did not compute information about mass murders and rapes of her Ukrainian peers as devastatingly as her mother. The horrifying footage and chilling stories from Bucha finally shattered Tina. The horrors of Bucha overwhelmed her, reducing her to relentless tears and curses directed at the perpetrators. Each news update deepened her anguish, making the tragedy feel un-

bearably personal.

Tina and Sasha's ordinary Tbilisi home had a basement, cluttered with garbage and filled with a foul smell of sewage. The door was locked, leaving it accessible only to flea-ridden cats.

Representatives of the Georgian government had just returned from Bucha, and the Georgian heroes Arkady Kasradze, Zaza Bitsadze, and Aliko Tsaava had not yet arrived in Georgia when Tina, returning home from Nikora supermarket, noticed a strange image on the wall of her apartment building. She couldn't quite comprehend what it was; it resembled a human head with eyes and a mouth drawn as a pentagon, like an inverted triangle. Between the bases of two horns, an inverted cross replaced the forehead. The blue outline was filled in with red. There was also a handwritten inscription, likely in Cyrillic, along with an Arabic numeral seven.

Tina felt a surging confusion and unease at the sight. She recalled hearing about how saboteurs who had settled in Ukraine shortly before the war marked various objects with specific signs. Fear crept in, prompting her to call 112. She reported what she had seen, but the operator responded that similar graffiti had been spotted in other areas of the capital and that there was nothing alarming about it. "It's just someone painting foxes, as they say" the operator reassured her. However, this explanation did little to calm Tina. With no other options, she could do nothing but return home. As she entered, she somehow remembered Kadebostany's *Mind If I Stay* and played it on her laptop, then approached the window, pulled back the curtain and looked out. In front of her stood a massive, once white, now faded to grey, eight-sto-

ry building with eight entrances. Despite its generic Soviet appearance, there was something familiar and alive about it. Some of the tenants were standing on their balconies, and some were peeking out of the windows. In some places, colorful laundry was hanging, and some lights were on, even though it was still light. Tina suddenly imagined a heavy missile hitting this building, making it collapse right in the middle, catching fire with doomed screams of the people inside. She was terrified and frozen, imagining the building turn black, smoke billowing into the sky, and people leaping from windows and balconies. Tears flowed once again, this time more intensely. "How can you listen to that?" she heard her daughter's voice from the doorway, snapping her back to reality. Tina closed her eyes and opened them again, relief flooding through her as she saw that the building she had been staring at was still intact. Wiping her tears away, she turned to her daughter and asked for a hug, opening her arms wide. But the girl turned away coldly, leaving Tina feeling dejected as she dropped her hands in frustration.

At the time, there was significant hype on Facebook regarding these signs. Some speculated that recently arrived Russians in Georgia were responsible for painting them, while others claimed that members of a pro-Russian TV and party were using these symbols to intimidate people. Some even suggested that Georgian special services, in collaboration with their Russian counterparts, were involved. Interpretations varied: some saw a fox, others a cat, while some identified the figures as characters like Huggy Wuggy and Kissy Missy, and others thought they represented emo or gothic symbols. Panic quickly spread across the capital and the country.





People were scared, especially because similar signs (mostly crosses within a circle) were reportedly drawn in Ukraine before the war broke out. The anxious public, haunted by memories of past wars, feared another potential war.

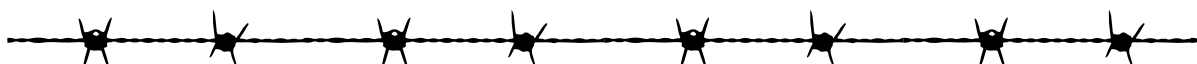
Tina suggested to Sasha that they go out for cheeseburgers, and Sasha agreed. They dressed lightly and headed outside. The cold winter, which had overstayed its welcome and lingered on through spring, had just ended; the weather was warm, and their walk was pleasant. They strolled to a fast-food place, ordered at the self-service kiosk, and took a seat outside. Both were quiet—Sasha absorbed in her phone, while Tina looked up and noticed a glass police building across the street. It was one of those modern, transparent structures built during the UNM administration, often jokingly nicknamed the “police supermarket” chain.

Once again, in her imagination, a missile flew by with a whistle, this time striking the police station. Glass shattered everywhere, raining down on people walking by. Uniformed officers, some on fire, rushed out of the building and rolled on the asphalt to extinguish the flames. Bystanders sprang into action, stamping out the fire on them. Suddenly, a deafening noise erupted as the police station collapsed entirely, sending a cloud of dust into the air.

“Are the two cheeseburger meals yours?” a voice called, again shaking her back to reality. “Yes, they’re ours,” she replied, turning to look at the police building again. It was undamaged, the blinds installed by the Georgian Dream covering the formerly transparent windows built by the UNM. She let out a breath, feeling a sense of relief.

She saw on Facebook that members of the youth wing of the political party “Lelo” had removed some of the signs using special cleaning solutions, which made her happy. Yet, she remained concerned: in many areas, the symbols remained, and, more troublingly, the police had not taken any steps to identify those responsible for painting them, nor had they issued fines or arrests, claiming they did not know who the perpetrators were. Meanwhile, they were quick to detain civil and political activists from the “Shame” movement and other organizations for trying to place small stickers—just five centimeters in diameter—on the sidewalk. The public remained in an information vacuum, left in a state of fear of the unknown. A video of a bearded and bespectacled Russian man speaking Georgian appeared on the internet. Local residents caught him drawing these symbols and demanded an explanation. With a heavy accent he replied: “Drawing on the walls is culture. I was just drawing.” In Ukraine, such a man would most likely have been beaten up, but here he got away with it: the police arrived at the scene and apparently let him go.

Returning home, Tina went into the bathroom, washed her hands, undressed, and tossed her t-shirt into the laundry bin. Noticing it was full, she opened the washing machine door—and imagined seeing a mine, which exploded. Her daughter’s scream then jolted her back to life. Realizing there was no mine and no explosion, she took a deep breath, but a scream came again, feeling urgent and real. She rushed out of the bathroom and into the living room, where she thought she saw five Russian soldiers. Two of them held her daughter’s arms, one was tearing wildly at her clothes, and the oth-



er two were beginning to unbutton their pants. She was paralyzed, unable to move or make a sound, though she tried to scream. Her daughter looked at her with terrified eyes, silently pleading for help. The girl had been stripped completely, turned around, and laid down on the table. The men, their pants down, laughed as they moved toward her. One, who had been undressing, grabbed a pair of pliers and told the others he'd pull out her teeth "to make things easier." Just as they were about to begin, a bearded Azov fighter burst into the room, taking down all five men with his automatic rifle. She wanted to thank him but couldn't remember how to say it in Ukrainian; not wanting to use Russian, she finally said "danke" in German. Then she quickly ran to her daughter, wrapping her in a blanket.

"Mom, will you have some tea?" her daughter's voice swiftly and mercifully returned her to reality. "Yes, I'd love some," she replied, hugging her tightly. That evening, she thought deeply and came to the conclusion that Crimea is the Abkhazia of Ukraine. She concluded that the symbols on the walls were likely painted by agents of the Georgian security service, indirect associates of Russia, or even Russian agents—the "mini-Putins" of a violent pro-Russian TV station and party.

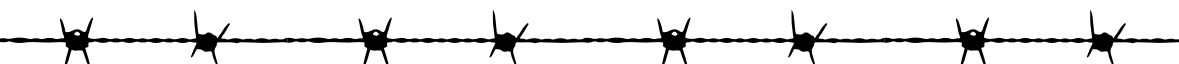
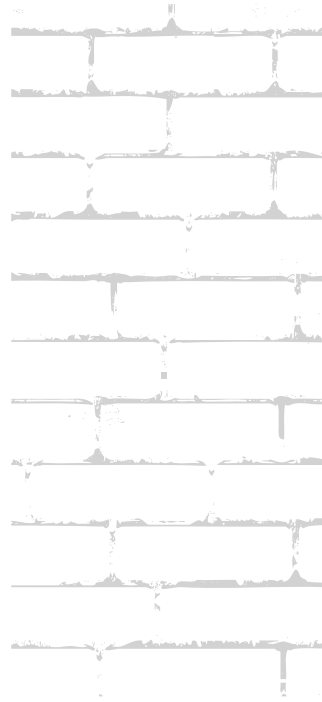
Later, she read on Facebook about the horrors in Bucha, where Russian perpetrators had reportedly used prepared lists, with the assistance of pro-Russian collaborators, to carry out a systematic slaughter of Ukrainians.

She thought again, questioning whether only groups with an openly pro-Russian stance were collaborators, or if representatives of the Georgian government could be involved as well.

Night had fallen. She looked out the window and this time dreamed of seeing seven tanks rolling toward the darkened metro station, each marked with the last letter of the Latin alphabet, painted in blood. Russian and Chechen fighters armed to the teeth climbed out. They approached the station slowly, their heavy steps echoing as they neared the glass doors where one of those ominous signs had been painted. Inside, civilians were taking shelter, having learned that the government—led by a man, allied with sanctioned Russian oligarchs, who was Georgian by birth but Russian in spirit—had surrendered the country to the Russian-Chechen-Abkhazian-Ossetian forces, allowing them to enter without resistance.

This makeshift fortress in the snow seemed on the brink of falling, waiting to be seized by the occupiers. The next morning, Georgian citizens received an ultimatum: if they handed over their property to the "soft" occupiers—who had invaded Georgia from Mordor as "refugees" following the Russian Federation's military aggression against Ukraine and the sanctions imposed by the civilized world against Russians—within seven working days, they would be given the opportunity to leave the country unharmed. Otherwise they would be ethnically cleansed.

The president, who had swiftly fled to Iran via Armenia, issued a special decree banning the use of the Georgian language in Tbilisi. Pro-Russian brokers roamed the streets with megaphones, chanting "Do you want war?" The people remained silent, as did Sioni Cathedral (alluding to the famous poem of the Georgian symbolist poet Kolau Nadiradze dedicated to the Soviet occupation). ■



## Notes of a Soviet Traveler



Giorgi Antadze

# Territorial Conflict between Chile and Russia

You won't find this conflict in any history book, yet it's real and still ongoing today. Antarctica remains the only continent without a permanent human population, hosting only a few dozen research stations from various countries. According to the International Antarctic Treaty, the continent doesn't belong

to any nation. To me, Antarctica is the most beautiful place on Earth precisely because it is uninhabited.

The route from the Argentine city of Ushuaia to the Antarctic Peninsula has been considered one of the world's most challenging sea passages, since Drake's time. The Drake Passage

is among the stormiest regions on the planet, difficult to navigate even with modern technology. Only two things got me through a two-day, eight-point storm confined to my cabin: churchkhe-la and Richard Wagner. As the ocean tosses cruise liners like a mere splinter, you're forbidden to leave your cabin (and even if you weren't, standing upright would be impossible), leaving you virtually chained to your bunk. In such moments, what else can save you but headphones delivering unearthly music?

This would be the perfect storm for *Götterdämmerung*. In the end, Valhalla burns, the gods fall, and a new world is born before your eyes—a calm ocean dotted with icebergs.

Once, whalers hunted in these waters. Onshore, they built large workshops where they processed their massive prey into valuable spermaceti. Remarkably, the wooden buildings from that era remain almost untouched, and large pieces of whale skeleton are scattered around. Could these be Moby Dick's bones? If so, Ahab's must be here too, lying nearby.

The squawking of penguins snaps me out of my rambling thoughts. Penguins are adorably amusing in photographs and on television screens, but in reality their charm comes with an overwhelming smell that hits you the moment you enter their territory.

Although thousands of them live together, penguins are among the most asocial creatures. They lack empathy, a "herd instinct," and any sense of altruism. Evolution has granted them neither collective nor individual intelligence. The reason for that is simple: for penguins, survival means only evading

the occasional, sluggishly moving seal. They're fortunate that polar bears don't inhabit the southern hemisphere.

Yet, I hold no grudge against these beautiful, exotic creatures; they didn't choose this existence—evolution assigned them this path. This evolutionary dead end reminds me of some things (or maybe someone).

Peace—without struggle or victory.

Gluttony—monotonous food "shoved" into an open mouth.

Reproduction—without love.

Perhaps this is what their ancestors once dreamed of.

...and again, that smell—the unbearable odor of excrement.

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We're on a British research station. Over there on the shore, a seal is watching me via a sideways glance. Its expression seems to say: "Do you really need this?" Maybe it's just too lazy to talk, but its face is so expressive that it's hard to believe it's mute.

A British flag on a small hill is surrounded by a group of penguins, and so I took a photo for which I later won a prize in a competition after inscribing "Brexit" on it. British traditions are also present at this base: a photo of the Queen, souvenirs from Harrods, hot tea, and a British post office. I put the Christmas card in the British post box in Antarctica, to arrive in Tbilisi in exactly one month. I can only blame the Georgian post office for that prolonged delivery, as the British post office runs like clockwork. The scientific station is almost a century old. One of the buildings houses a museum, while the murals made by the first explorers have survived, mostly naked women. There is a cookbook

with some local recipes. The omelette recipe is interesting. "Ingredients: 2 seal brains, 4 penguin eggs, 2 ounces of butter." I wonder where they got the butter.

I really want to see the night sky of the southern hemisphere, but it doesn't get dark at this time of year. The temperature outside is bearable; you can even go out on deck. The coldest it gets is -16 degrees Celsius. December here is summer. Thanks to this, our ship navigates waters covered by only a thin layer of ice, and the surrounding icebergs don't seem threatening. What's an iceberg to us, anyway? We're not the Titanic, right?

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Antarctica is the only continent on Earth that has never seen war. There have been clashes of titans, heroic expeditions, tragedies, and ambitions of great powers, but the greatest folly of homo sapiens - war - has fortunately never reached Antarctica.

The story of the first expedition to the South Pole is both interesting and sad. In 1911, Norway faced off against the mighty British Empire. Roald Amundsen's ambitious plan to be the first to reach the South Pole posed a serious threat to the aspirations of the British

Captain Robert Scott. Both expeditions started in December and Amundsen's team reached the South Pole first on 17 January 1912. It took Scott 35 days to reach his destination, where he found a tent left behind by Amundsen, flying a Norwegian flag. In the tent, Amundsen had left supplies and food for the members of Scott's expedition, as well as a letter to be delivered to the King.

"Terrible disappointment, my heart aches for my faithful friends, the dream is over," Scott wrote in his diary.

Sadly, Scott and the two remaining members of his party died on the way back, just 20 kilometers from the final camp. Scott had on him a letter from Amundsen which he was unable to deliver.

This is a story of true heroism. We say that hope dies eventually, but not for heroes.

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In the evenings, we all gather in the ship's bar. Iceberg-iced whiskey has a completely different flavor. In the distance, a group of Moscow tourists drink heavily at a table. As true followers of Marx and Engels, they believe that quantity equals quality, and they're making quite a noise.





I make friends with some Americans and join their merry group. Later, as I return to the bar, one of the Muscovites approaches me and asks point-blank “You live in America, right?” I reply in the negative, and confirm I’m from Tbilisi. He can’t hide his surprise: “You’re Georgian? What do you want with Americans? Join us!”

“Americans are good people,” I say coldly, and I quickly head back to my friends, finishing the thought in my mind: “We joined you once, and we regretted it dearly.”

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An interesting day awaits us. We are to visit the Chilean scientific station and the Russian base next to it.

The Chilean burgundy-colored buildings are beautiful, and a small church has been built on the hill. Everything is neat and tidy. Visitors are rarely received, and for 20 scientists our arrival was a special event. They treated us to hot chocolate and cookies, opened a souvenir shop, and showed us the church. This church was built a few years ago on the highest point. No one cared about this place for decades, but as soon as the Chileans started building, the neighboring Russian base made ter-

ritorial claims. The dispute has escalated into physical clashes several times, commonly on the days when the Russian base was supplied with alcohol. Fortunately, according to the Antarctic Treaty, the placement of military facilities, as well as the entry of military and armed ships south of the 60th parallel is prohibited. Otherwise, we would likely see another territory occupied by Russia.

After a while, we moved to the Russian base. Instead of houses, the area is scattered with large iron containers, and the road between the containers is broken and muddy. In these containers they live and work, and in one container there is a canteen and a souvenir shop. For souvenirs, they have items depicting the greatness of Russia, and you can even buy a portrait of Putin himself. A hungover lady works slowly and there is a long line at the souvenir shop. I turned to my American friends and said:

“I really feel like I’m in Soviet Russia here!”

“What are you talking about?” replied an American from Odessa, with a mischievous smile.

“Because everyone is hungover, the roads are ruined, and we have to stand in line at the store,” I clarified.



The only sober person we met here was the priest of a wooden church built in defiance of Chile on another hill. He was a part-time priest; otherwise, he wouldn't have been wearing a military uniform inside the anaphora. There was no queue at the church because the priest announced from the very beginning: "Only Orthodox Christians are allowed in here!" I think I was the first Georgian in history to visit an Orthodox church at the southernmost point of the planet, and the only Georgian who

benefited in any way from "being of the same religion" as Russia.

After that, we soon left the "conflict zone," much like OSCE observers, and continued sailing in neutral waters until an impassable cliff of icebergs halted our progress to the south. No one knows how the Chilean-Russian territorial dispute over the vast expanse of Antarctica will end. What is clear is that this is by far the most "frozen" conflict on our planet. ■



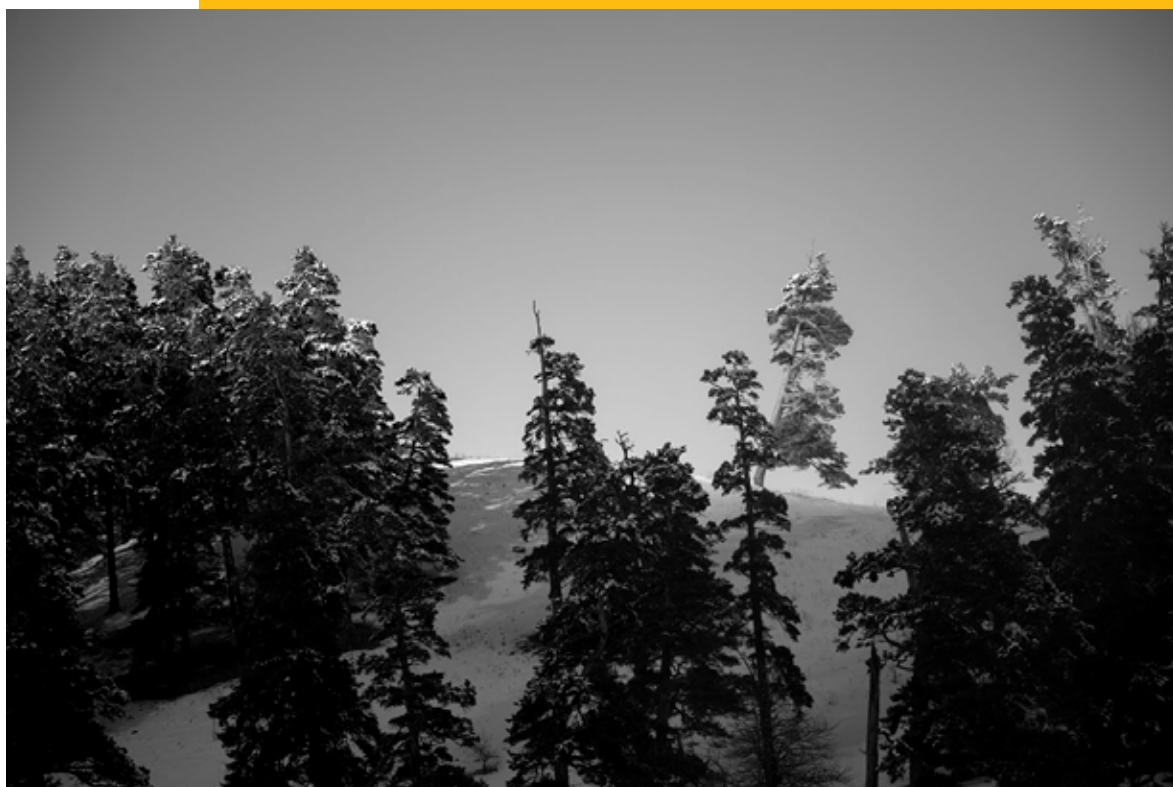












The front cover features a photo by Lasha Gabelia, dated 20 October 2024. The back cover showcases a photo by Nina Alavidze. Works by Giorgi Gagoshidze are included in this journal.

The opinions expressed in letters published in the journal are those of the authors and may not reflect the position of the editors of New Iveria.



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South Caucasus



NEW IVERIA

Social and Political Journal

[www.akhaliiveria.ge](http://www.akhaliiveria.ge)

№6, October 2024

ISSN 3088-4071

NNLE 'Chavchavadze Center'

20 Giorgi Akhvlediani Str., 0108 Tbilisi, Georgia

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NEW *iveria*



ISSN 3088-4071



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