

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

Ilia Chavchavadze

NEW *iveria*

Quarterly Magazine

№1 November 2022

Zaza Bibilashvili

**SINCE WE ARE ALREADY
LITERATE**

Gia Japaridze

VENI, VIDI, PERDIDI

Davit Khvadagiani

A MEETING WITH THE PAST

Buba Kudava

**HERE IS THE STORY OF
DEMNA THE PRINCE**

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Zaza Bibilashvili

Since We are Already Literate

(In connection with the release of the first edition of
“The New Iveria”)

My generation was destined to live in interesting times. So many were born, grew up, turned grey, grew old and died in the same, boring, unpromising reality. So many accepted that reality as a given, found it irresistible and eternal. It is no joke to live at the junction of centuries, millennia, epochs and even passively participate in such tectonic geopolitical changes, which a few years ago were unimaginable even in the most daring of fantasies.

We were born in the Soviet Union. We grew up in the era of the destruction of the Evil Empire and the struggle for freedom. We gained our independence at a very young age, but were given no time to rejoice: The country and hundreds of thousands of human lives were sacrificed to a recklessness of a galactic dimension, and the joy of freedom was overshadowed by a cascade of misfortunes. When we reached adulthood, we were told that all was well, democracy had won in the world, and that it was the “end of history” (though, in Georgia, everything was very, very bad). We soon showed ourselves again; we were even a little lucky. We pulled ourselves out of the swamp by the scruff of the neck – while some parts of the body were pulling the rest down – rubbed our eyes, stopped torturing ourselves, and came out of the world of exotic myths, shattering age-old stereotypes. We saw and believed that we could be competitive, victorious, or even create a model of development for others, if we only wanted and tried to. Finally, we returned to the eternal Georgian helplessness, the comfort of provincial conformism, servility, and our self-willed mediocrity before the enemy, when we were told through the mouth of an ignorant oligarch that Georgia was a small village that should “know its place”.

All this time the average Georgian had most always been a passive observer. With us, it has always been the few who have fought. Our society has also perfectly adapted to the mantle of the public not having any function – fetishizing individual heroes and believing in their uniqueness (as if to emphasize that no one should expect such idealism from us), shifting our responsibility to these heroes and embodying in them virtually (through a poem, a toast, a TV appearance)... At the same time, a considerable number of people have always chosen “understanding”, “relationships”, or conformism as a way of life. Conformism, which, if historians and travelers are to be believed, has been our primary tradition for centuries. A tradition that has become a guaranteed recipe for poverty, misery, and failure for Georgians. The current collaborationist regime even conducts an Orwellian campaign to

ennoble this vicious tradition. They preach as though swindling is valor, cowardice is prudence, serving the enemy is pragmatism and trading state interests for personal gains (what we used to call “treason” in the olden days) is “wisdom”. No mention is made of conformism, of course, but they are trying to convince us that it was this kind of wisdom that has “saved” us...

The helpless minimalism of Georgian conformism is evident here:

“... has saved us.”

Survival is portrayed here as an achievement, as a standard worthy of aiming at.

However, if we had acted differently, we could have not only survived, but we could also have become rich and powerful. After all, more than two hundred nation-states have “survived”. And most of them are developing faster and more purposefully than us. Even those whom yesterday we looked down on with groundless arrogance – just as the Georgian nobility of the 19th century looked down on skilled artisans or rich merchants – are now becoming stronger, more prosperous, and more numerous than we are.

And we... we “have survived”.

Moreover, as Ivanishvili himself says in Stefan Toltz’s 2012 documentary Full Speed Westward, we pulled the handbrake of the country with our own hands.

At times like this, the question always arises, pathetic, meaningless and, again and again, devoid of any sense of individual responsibility:

“Shall anything help us?!”

And since we cannot avoid this question, let us think together:

What kind of country do we want to have and what should we be doing for it? I emphasize “be doing”, not “do”. That is, be doing all the time and not just once.

It seems like a trivial question, but if we look at history, there have been few that thought about it. Even fewer managed to engage in the day-to-day, consistent, “boring” work of realizing their vision – of turning their vision into such a work that it would not remain a one-off effort for the chronicler’s pen but would have appeared as a solid architrave built into the supporting wall of national history decades later.

You will say that we didn’t have time for this, and you would probably be right, however...

Maybe it was still possible to discern things better, or get better prepared for worst-case scenarios, and we failed because we just didn’t think about it? Maybe because we took pride in something that, in many cases, was nothing to be proud of, and yet we sought salvation in the mercy or goodwill of others? Just take the myth of the carefree Georgians partying heartily and being late to the distribution of land by God... How we love to tell this myth to tourists fascinated by our country!

I wonder what we were hoping for when we were late there? Didn’t we deserve to get what we, as the last in line, were worthy of getting, perhaps the most miserable scrap of land on the planet? But no! – God loved us”. We did not have to pay the price for our irresponsibility. We “survived” yet again. Perhaps this is where one of today’s most damaging, popular sayings comes from: “Something will come our way”. Again, a vague hope for time and a miracle, rather than a reflection on what will happen, how, from, where, and, most importantly, what we are doing to make it happen.

All this time the average Georgian had most always been a passive observer. With us, it has always been the few who have fought. Our society has also perfectly adapted to the mantle of the public not having any function – fetishizing individual heroes and believing in their uniqueness (as if to emphasize that no one should expect such idealism from us), shifting our responsibility to these heroes and embodying in them virtually (through a poem, a toast, a TV appearance)... At the same time, a considerable number of people have always chosen “understanding”, “relationships”, or conformism as a way of life.

We, Georgians, are always rushing somewhere. So much so that we never have time to critically analyze the past, to turn mistakes into lessons, to draw practical conclusions from the path travelled, to look ahead, to see the big picture, to recognize danger in time, to learn to distinguish between the essential and the secondary, not to lose the sense of purpose, to plan, to prepare.

The routine work is less valued by us: We are rarely interested in something that does not produce immediate and tangible results. We live in the present and hope that one day the flow of time will carry us to our goal. However, crossing out the dates on the wall calendar does not change anything. On the contrary, there are many examples of countries and even entire civilizations that remained in the dark for a long time or even disappeared due to recklessness, greed, or simple idleness.

We have been this way for centuries, and the 21st century is no exception: Addressing long-term challenges is still an exotic fruit in Georgia. They listen to you, they like you, they praise you... This is very good, they tell you, but, well, when do we have time for that now – now there are bigger and more urgent problems that need to be addressed immediately, they will add. First there is a great goal to achieve, and then, someday, we might think about it. But that “then” never comes, and we never get down to those mundane, “boring”, necessary steps without which the “then” would never come. As a result, the “great goal” is left aside, and we don’t even understand why this always happens to us and what prevents us from succeeding. At the very least, we would sigh about who has cursed us and start looking elsewhere for the guilty party...

Under these conditions, with the support of friends who share our ideas, the social and political periodical *The New Iveria* was born in the fold of the Chavchavadze Centre.

Our ambition is to create a new space of thought and clichés to help Georgians, who are tired of the imposed hopelessness, to succeed in the modern competitive world.

Our mission is a forward-looking historical self-reflection, with the awareness that the last 30 years are the most relevant and useful history, with an inexhaustible mine of must-learn chess combinations.

Why do we keep going around the same circle? Is this fate or are we doing something wrong? Why were there always so few of us? Why have we always been so weak, except for a few glorious episodes in our long history? Why did we like it when foreign travelers would write good things about us or when our enemies, impressed by our bravery, would praise us? Why didn’t we praise others? Why couldn’t our travelers describe other nations? And why did we have no travelers at all? And anyway, what do we want, to be praised or to praise? The latter, after all, implies an advantage gained by winning. If we prefer to win, what should we do to allow ourselves the luxury of receiving praise from others? What can we do to wean ourselves from finding comfort in honorable defeat and from the orgasm of praise by others, and raise new generations possessing the will and drive to win?

A century and a half ago, Ilia Chavchavadze and his associates founded the Society for Spreading of Literacy Among Georgians – the most successful and long-lived non-governmental organization in the country’s history, which introduced a new standard in charitable and social activi-

What kind of country do we want to have and what should we be doing for it? I emphasize “be doing”, not “do”. That is, be doing all the time and not just once.

We must be able to pass propaganda and misinformation through a critical filter, get rid of bias and prejudice, extract the substance from what we read or hear, see the context, determine priorities, distinguish good from evil, replace conformism with civic virtue, reunite a territorially and mentally fractured nation with a memory-based identity...

ties. Back then, literacy came first. Reading and writing meant education, education meant progress and success. Now that – at least formally – literacy is no longer an issue, Georgian society is facing new challenges:

We must be able to pass propaganda and misinformation through a critical filter, get rid of bias and prejudice, extract the substance from what we read or hear, see the context, determine priorities, distinguish good from evil, replace conformism with civic virtue, reunite a territorially and mentally fractured nation with a memory-based identity... It is to this end that we present the social and political journal, The New Iveria. Read it. Share it. Spread the word. Write to us. Get involved. Get us engaged. In the meantime, we wish you victory and peace! In that order.

Next year in Sokhumi. ■





Gia Japaridze

VENI, VIDI, PERDIDI

Seven months later, following yet another military aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, President Putin announced a “partial military mobilization” across the country. This should already be irrefutable evidence that Moscow is not able to win this war and that the goals announced before the so-called special operation remain unfulfilled. “President Putin’s call to partially mobilize Russian citizens, directing them to fight in Ukraine, reflects the Kremlin’s struggles on the battlefield, the unpopularity of the war, and Russians’ unwillingness to fight in it. President Putin is not operating from a position of strength; rather, this is another sign of his failing mission.” This is the statement of the US Secretary of State, Tony Blinken on September 21, and he is most likely not wrong this time either.

“Partial military mobilization” is a phrase used to mislead the Russian public and the world community, in fact Russia has declared a full military mobilization, but Putin cannot openly say so at this stage. A full mobilization implies Russia’s participation in a war, and Putin refers to the military invasion of Ukraine as a “special military operation”, trying to not place himself outside the framework of international law. War and any aggression are unacceptable under the UN Charter, and what is happening now in Ukraine is a war. Ukraine did not attack Russia, Russia launched a full-scale attack on Ukraine. Putin’s interpretation of the war, namely that Russia is conducting a special military operation to protect itself and the Russian-speaking population, is an attempt by Putin to present Russia as a defender of international legal norms rather than a flagrant violator. It must be said, however, that over the last 30 years Russia has successfully managed to do this while the international community turned a blind eye to Moscow’s trampling of the basic principles of the UN Charter. It is enough to recall Georgia or even Ukraine as examples.

And yet, why would Putin need to declare a mobilization? Is he losing the war or not? What were his goals and expectations before the war? If he is losing this war, then why? To answer all these questions, we have to go back to the period before the full-scale military aggression began (i.e., February 24, otherwise the war in Ukraine has been going on since 2014). Even if we set aside the numerous attempts to revise history over the years, there were several occasions in 2020 (such as the informal CIS summit in December)

when Putin openly questioned not only the post-war reality, but even the right to exist of neighboring states (for example, he openly stated that Georgia and Ukraine were created in Russia's fold, and gave a completely distorted interpretation of these states' histories). In December 2021, Putin delivered an ultimatum to the US and NATO, demanding written guarantees of Russia's security, an end to the further expansion of NATO eastwards, a document confirming Ukraine's refusal to join NATO, and the return of NATO troops and equipment to 1997 positions, which meant the withdrawal of NATO weapons and military units from Central and Eastern Europe as well as from the Balkans and the Baltics. Putin also created an imitation of a willingness for negotiations, but NATO and the US rejected his ultimatum about returning to nineteenth-century realities composed of spheres of influence and zones of existence. Putin, isolated in a bunker during the Covid pandemic, has apparently lost his touch with reality. Added to this, the age and constant dependence on medication have turned the Russian president into an irrational leader.

Putin has been preparing an ideological basis for the conquest of Ukraine for years, as well as preparing for it military-wise, too. At the beginning of 2022, he apparently decided that it was time for Russia, both in terms of public opinion and military readiness, to take the next step.

This was followed by a long pre-war speech by the head of the Russian Federation on the Soviet Army Day where, for the first time since the Second World War, a head of state, moreover, of a nuclear state, openly threatened neighboring state/s with their disappearance from the world map and expressed his desire to restore the situation of 1917 by forceful methods. Still using his own version of history and the existence of a fictitious threat to Russia, again with the intention of deceiving the world community, he voiced the start not of a war but of a special military operation.

Putin's appetite grew, he named the goal of the brutal military operation as:

1) denazification – a neologism that, with allusions to Nazi Germany, meant the overthrow and trial on charges of Nazism and oppression of Russians of the Ukrainian government, which came to power through democratic elections after the 2014 Maidan revolution;

2) Complete demilitarization of Ukraine;

3) Military neutrality of Ukraine.

The goal of a full-scale attack on Ukraine from all directions was to take Kyiv and establish a puppet government. Apparently, based on faulty intelligence information or his own beliefs, Putin hoped that the Ukrainian Armed Forces would offer no resistance, that President Zelensky's administration would be overthrown, that Ukrainian fighters, especially the so-called Russian-speaking segment, would greet the Russian army with flowers, the West would be unable to consolidate while the existing cracks in NATO and the EU would not be smoothed, the disagreements between the US and Europe would not be resolved, and he could easily wring the neck of a disengaged West.

Putin got the opposite: Ukraine's armed forces and population have become more united than ever and now he is facing a war with an army of 40 million people. Ukraine also seems to have regained its identity, the population greeted aggressors not with flowers but with Molotov cocktails, Zelensky's government has not been overthrown but has consolidated all Ukrainian political parties around itself, and the West has become not fragmented but more united, determined and adamant than ever since the Cold War. Ukraine has defeated Russia on all fronts, has won on the battlefield thanks to the legendary dedication of the Ukrainian warriors, has won the diplomatic war thanks to the textbook maneuvers of President Zelensky and Minister Kuleba, has won the information war where the seemingly invincible Russian propaganda was simply crushed. Of course,

the mastermind of all these victories, along with Ukraine, was the West, thanks to the unwavering leadership of President Biden and the jewel-like diplomacy of Tony Blinken, as well as the sometimes belated but still vital efforts of the European politicians.

Instead of the declared objectives, after seven months of war Putin got a:

- 1) strengthened NATO at Russia's borders, expanded to include Sweden and Finland, and increased defense budgets of member states;
- 2) fully militarized Ukraine, equipped with the latest Western weapons and combat vehicles destroying Russian arms and army;
- 3) consolidated West that wants not just the defeat of Russia, but the change of Putin's regime;
- 4) Russia, with its reputation shattered by economic sanctions and international isolation, whose president is treated with contempt not only by regional leaders but also by the rulers of the Central Asia republics, whom Putin has hitherto considered to be his clients.

Putin has taken over a weakened empire, leaving it even more weakened – an international leper with a large nuclear arsenal.

This series of shameful defeats, the physical destruction of a large part of the armed forces and its moral degradation has led the President of the Russian Federation to commit yet another mistake by announcing the so-called partial military mobilization. Putin's goal is easy to decipher, apart from the fact that the Russian Armed Forces are badly in a need of manpower on the entire front line. The Russian dictator wants to hold a referendum on joining Russia in the pseudo-states he has recognized on the territory of Ukraine, still occupied by Russia, and then, in order to protect Russian territory, to involve the entire country in an already officially declared "Patriotic" war. After achieving this goal, he is likely to be driven by the more far-reaching goal of sitting down with the West after annexing the Donetsk, Luhansk and Kherson regions and negotiating the division of Ukraine. It is highly likely, as the bookmakers say, that this ticket will also be a flop for Putin, this time the reason being his own citizens, who have imperialist "Velikoderzhavni" feelings running through their heads, but only at the expense of the lives of others. Neither the West nor Ukraine is going to fall for another blackmail of Putin; all wars end in negotiations and a truce, but the end of the war in Ukraine is yet to be seen, and the terms of negotiations and agreements after the war will be dictated by Kyiv to Moscow and not vice versa. ■

Our Heroes

Zoia Kurtanidze was born on May 29, 1986, in Gori, Georgia. She graduated from a high school in neighboring town of Khashuri. Between 2003 and 2007 she studied at the Technical University of Georgia. After graduating from TUG, Zoia joined the military academy and became an officer of Georgian armed forces in due course, enrolling in air-defense unit.

Zoia is a decorated veteran of the 2008 Russo-Georgian War. In 2014, 2015 and 2016, she participated in international peace missions in Afghanistan. In 2019, she earned her Master's degree with honors in gender studies from Tbilisi State University. She is currently a Lieutenant Colonel of the Georgian Armed forces and serves for the Georgian Ministry of Defense.

During the 2008 war Zoia Kurtanidze was 22 years old. As a young lieutenant, she commanded an anti-aircraft vehicle and shot down a Russian bomber.

The painting depicted on the photo below was dedicated to Zoia Kurtanidze by a renown Georgian artist Niko Tsetskhladze in 2017. ■





Giga Jokhadze

GEORGIAN SPECIAL SERVICES AND **RUSSIA**: 2012-2022

In the view of a significant part of the Georgian population, Russia's influence in Georgia has significantly increased since October 1, 2012. A particularly important indicator of the increased influence of the Russian Federation is the Kremlin's penetration into the Georgian military structures and special services. The admission of Tristan Tsitelashvili into a secret military facility, the release from prison of Akhmed Chatayev, an international terrorist suspected of cooperation with the Russian security services, and the suspicious death of special forces officers participating in the Kodori 2007 operation in a short period adds plausibility to the above-mentioned opinion. The latter case, which the Georgian public seems to have forgotten about after several journalistic investigation stories, is particularly suspicious.

On September 20, 2007, the Georgian Special Services prevented a joint sabotage operation by Abkhazians and Russians in Kodori Valley on the territory of Georgia. The aim of the sabotage was to attack the road connecting Kodori Valley with the rest of Georgia. Georgian Special Forces managed to eliminate two Russian commanders of the saboteurs and took captive seven members of the group. The Russian government was clearly irritated by the successful military operation carried out by the Georgian special services. MPs of the Russian Duma, members of the government, and other high-ranking officials unanimously demanded punishment for the organizers and perpetrators of the attack on the Abkhazian "border guards".

Since then, the Russian Special Services have been trying to establish the identity of the members of the special forces unit participating in the Kodori operation. Dmitri Kordzadze, who was blown up in his own car in 2010, was the first participant of the special operation to be liquidated by the Russian Special Services. The Interior Ministry soon opened the case. It turned out that the murder was committed by citizens of Georgia: Otar Rogava and Temur Butbaia. The investigation of the Interior Ministry revealed that

they were contacted by well-known Abkhaz criminal Valter Butba and a member of the de facto parliament of Abkhazia, Slavik Vardanyan, who introduced the two Russians to them. The Russians showed Rogava and Butba a photograph of Kordzadze and instructed them to eliminate him. Butba and Rogava planted an explosive device on Kordzadze's car. After the explosion of Kordzadze, they met with their Russian contractors in Abkhazia and received 42,000 US dollars as a reward. How the Russian Special Services learned about Kordzadze's participation in the Kodori operation is unknown, although obtaining such secret information under the previous government would have been very difficult for them.

He was summoned for questioning in 2014, where he was asked about the details of the 2007 Kodori special operation. Those questioning were interested in who led the special operation, who were the participants, what weapons were used, etc.

The situation changed after October 1, 2012, when Georgian Dream won the parliamentary elections. Under the new government, the entire special forces of the Kodori operation were summoned for interrogation. They were questioned about every detail, especially about the identity of the participants and their personal information. Soon, in 2014, five of the involved members of the special forces died one after the other under suspicious circumstances. Even this fact itself is highly questionable: How likely was it that 1/3 of the total number of special forces died as a result of an accident in a short period of time? Let's look at the details of the deaths of all five of the special forces officers.

One of the special forces who died in 2014 was Ivane Ivanidze. The official cause of his death was a car accident. David Ivanidze, the brother of the deceased special forces officer, recalls his brother's story: He was summoned for questioning in 2014, where he was asked about the details of the 2007 Kodori special operation. Those questioning were interested in who led the special operation, who

were the participants, what weapons were used, etc. Ivanidze told his brother that the interrogation was conducted by two Russian men, whose identity was unknown to him. Soon after, Ivanidze was summoned for a second interrogation, where he arrived with a recording device installed in a cigarette pack. According to David Ivanidze, his brother was going to hand over the evidence to journalist Rusudan Mchedlidze. Before the meeting with the journalist Ivanidze had a car accident. The special forces officer was rushed to the hospital, where his brother was told by an eyewitness that a few seconds after the crash two young men arrived at the scene of the accident, peered into the driver's side of the car and disappeared shortly thereafter. Another suspicious fact was that the car of the special forces officer had bullet marks.

After his brother's death, David Ivanidze continued his investigation, but all witnesses and evidence of the incident disappeared from the case file. Unknown persons asked David Ivanidze to forget about the accident forever. One day, Ivanidze was even abducted on his way to work and physically assaulted. The death of Ivane Ivanidze raises several important questions:

1. Who were the two Russians who interrogated the special forces member?
2. Was Ivanidze's death connected to his attempt to hand over a recording of the interrogation to the journalist?

3. If the official cause of death was a car accident, where did the bullet marks on the car come from?

4. Who were the two men who appeared at the scene of the car accident a few seconds later, why did they look into the car, and why did they disappear shortly afterwards?

5. Where did the only witness to the case disappear to?

6. Who threatened the brother of the deceased special forces officer and why?

In 2014, another Kodori special forces officer, Shalva Tatukhashvili, died. The official cause of death was given as an acute respiratory failure, but there were several suspicious details in the case, including cuts on his left hand, right thumb, and left knee. In addition, before his death, Tatukhashvili claimed that he had been pressured by the Prosecutor's Office to testify against Bacho Akhalaia and Levan Kardava. Before his death, Tatukhashvili told his sister Ketevan Kobiashvili that he was physically abused and subjected to drowning in water. According to Ketevan Kobiashvili, her brother was forced to sign a false testimony, but he was going to tell the truth in court. It is interesting to know why the deceased had cuts on his body, if the official cause of death was respiratory failure. Furthermore, the witness's allegation that the Prosecutor's Office tried to use Tatukhashvili for political purposes and physically abused him in order to force him to give false testimony also raises questions.

Another special forces officer who died was Zviad Lagvilava, the head of the special forces of the State Security Service of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia. The official cause of his death was an accident. According to the Interior Ministry, a water heater exploded in Lagvilava's office and he died as a result. In the recovered video footage, Lagvilava's family noticed that shortly before the explosion, an unidentified man entered his office and left soon after. Moreover, the day after the blast, the building was completely demolished. The case of Lagvilava's death also raises several important questions:

1. Who was the man who entered Lagvilava's room before the explosion?

2. Why was the building where the head of the Security Service of Abkhazia was killed completely demolished? Was it an attempt by the authorities to destroy the evidence?

3. Why didn't the authorities investigate the incident and what caused the explosion of the water heater?

In 2014, two more participants of the Kodori special operation were killed: Alexandre Danelia and Sergo Ubilava. Danelia and Ubilava were abducted on November 13, 2012, by officers of the Interior Ministry's General Inspectorate. The Interior Ministry soon admitted that the former special forces officers were in custody. Soon afterwards, Danelia died, the cause of which was said to be suicide. However, the fact that there were two bullet injuries caused by a firearm fired upon Danelia's body raises doubts. The bullet hit Danelia in the chest and left arm. Such a trajectory for a suicide shot is strange, to say the least. As for Sergo Ubilava, he died in prison in March 2014. The cause of death was given as liver cirrhosis. Ubilava's relatives say that in order to get false evidence from him, Ubilava was given certain drugs and he eventually died of an overdose.

Why was the building where the head of the Security Service of Abkhazia was killed completely demolished? Was it an attempt by the authorities to destroy the evidence?

Some of the remaining members of the operation were arrested by the authorities, while others fled abroad and were granted political asylum. It is hard to believe that a large number of members of the special forces actually died in accidents in a short period of time, especially in light of the fact that there were many suspicious persons and circumstances in each of these cases. This looks more like revenge by the Russian security services on participants of the special operation, in which the current government of Georgia, which interrogated all participants and arrested most of them, must have been directly involved. Otherwise it is inconceivable how the Russian security services were able to identify members of the Georgian special forces unit. The story of the 2007 Kodori operation special forces demonstrates to us how the Kremlin security services were able to successfully penetrate into Georgian intelligence structures and special services under the Georgian Dream government. ■





Nana Bregadze



Mariam Kachkachashvili

WHO PROTECTS THE GEORGIAN SKIES AND HOW?



It is written in the strategic documents of the Ministry of Defense of Georgia that the enemy did not fully achieve its goal in 2008 and the risk of a new Russian aggression remains. This has become even more evident to us through the example of the war in Ukraine.

The government is telling us that though the threat of war has passed, the devil never sleeps. Moreover, over the last two centuries we have bitterly experienced the claws of the devil lurking in the Kremlin many times on our own skin.

As the 2008 war showed us, and the current events in Ukraine have also proven, a good and proper air defense and aviation are essential in conflicts of this type.

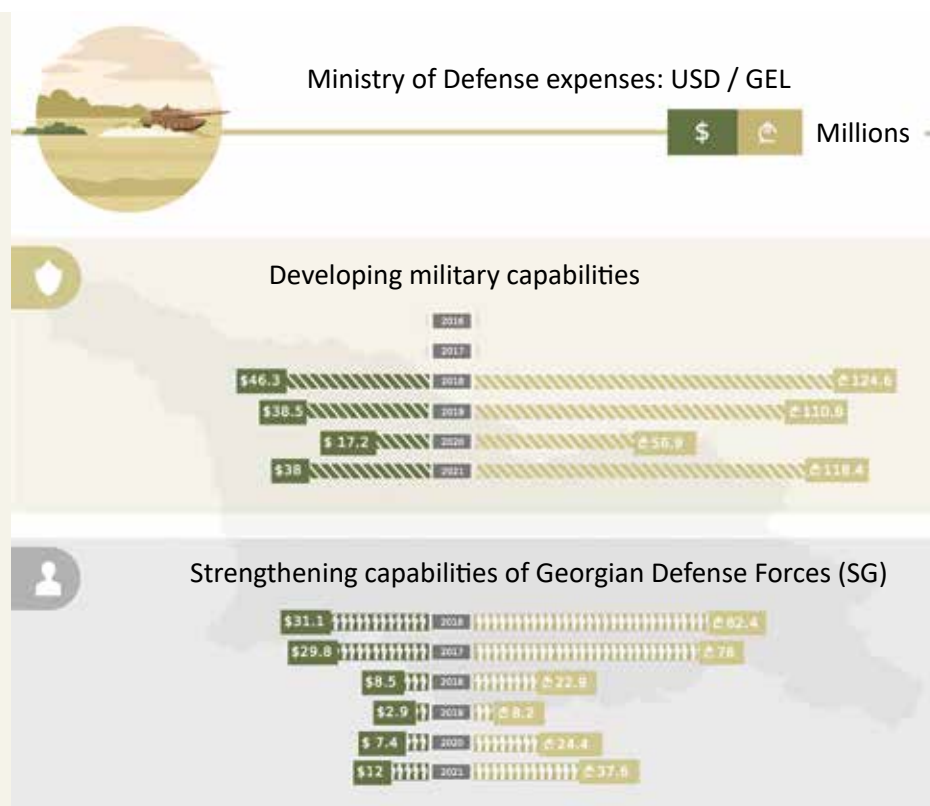
However, a multi-year study by iFact shows that our government has still not realized this after 14 years of its own war. For this article, we interviewed twenty current and former servicemen and former high-ranking officials of the Ministry of Defense. It is clear from what they tell us that the government has paid little attention to maintaining, properly equipping, and servicing air defense systems.

Moreover, not only have they failed to take care of the technical equipment, they have also contributed to the depletion of human resources. Our experienced pilots have left the army. Some are now serving in civil aviation, while others have left the sector and the country.

This investigation cannot be based on material derived from documents, as documents on this subject are considered a state secret by the Ministry of Defense. We cannot tell you here how much the Ministry has spent on maintaining or upgrading this equipment, but we will share with you what those working in this field have told us. According to the best journalistic standards, we consider information to be reliable if it is confirmed by three independent sources. Everything said in this article is verified according to this principle.

The security of the information source is important to iFact, so we do not disclose the names of some of our respondents, their official positions and current places of residence. The article uses only common names and their geographical locations, so that those interested are unable to recognize them.

From the stories of former and current servicemen, it is clear that after the August



War, flights were periodically reduced and helicopters and planes went out of order with no one taking care of them. Finally, some of the equipment was taken off the Defense Ministry's books and some were stopped for future repairs. The modernization of these units did not start until 2020.

Five different iFact sources say the helicopters have not flown since 2014. The flight crews did not have any training or instructional flights. Therefore, they were not paid by the hour. The lack of flights invalidated their certificates. All this forced the pilots to leave the country.

Current and former Defense Force officials say that when planes stop flying – meaning they cannot be used for flying or are in such bad shape that there is no point in repairing them – they are mothballed. Former military aviation official “Rezo” explains that mothballing has its own rules.

“The main components are lubricated with liquids and greases and maintained in this

condition. The engines are filled with special preservation oils. If you don't have oils, you have to run the engines once a month to complete their duty cycle. I don't have any information about how they conserved them, which liquids they used," Rezo explains.

The mothballing of the helicopters is also confirmed by a military serviceman "David", who is an active member of the Aviation and Air Defense Command: "They altogether went out of service en masse – simply they just considered it necessary, or there was some other political aspect, I don't know, but there were no more flights. Mothballing means that we don't use or don't touch or repair the equipment – we don't do anything at all. We just mothballed, sealed it up, and it just sits there."

At some point, the military tried to repair the damaged helicopters with their own resources. However, this later proved to be insufficient. They tell us that the mothballing and downtime of the helicopters was due to negligence on the part of the state.

"There has been no development or progress in aviation since 2008. We could not even properly maintain what we had. We, the mechanics, the technicians, were not getting the necessary spare parts to replace and install. We had twelve [American helicopters], some of which were damaged by cadets during training and were forbidden to fly; one of them had an engine failure and was stopped because of it. When I left the Defense Forces in 2018, there were two [helicopters] left that could fly," says aircraft technician Giorgi Kochashvili.

Giorgi Mchedlishvili, a former sergeant in the US UH-1H, aka Iroquois, helicopter squadron, says that in 2016-2017 the Americans were supposed to help us repair the damaged helicopters. However, it did not happen. Eventually, the aircraft's engines and other parts of the structure exhausted their lifespan. They were neither replaced nor repaired, so they lost their viability and eventually had to be mothballed.

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"There was a time when we had seven serviceable aircraft. When we had exhausted almost all the resources, they started talking about how to get them all back into service. An American National Guard team came to Georgia. They conducted a study, made an assessment, and prepared an estimate. They said that they could refurbish and upgrade 6 helicopters with new engines. If I am not mistaken, this was at the time of Izoria," Mchedlishvili told us.

He says that working parts from one helicopter were fitted to another, increasing the aircraft's combat capabilities. They called it cannibalization: "We tried to ensure that this minimum resource, these two or three helicopters, would be able to do at least something in the time of need and could carry out at least some task. We ended up reducing the number of helicopters to two out of seven," Mchedlishvili says.

How did military aviation lose professionals?

In addition to the malfunctioning technical base, the problem has been an outflow of pilots from the army. We were told about the mass outflow of personnel from the Air Force by serving and former members of the Defense Forces. The main reason was that they had lost their function as pilots. A pilot could no longer fly and a mechanic could no longer repair planes.

Giorgi Mchedlishvili served in military aviation for 13 years. He was a helicopter me-

chanic and used to fly with the crew. After 2018, he had to leave his job because his profession was no longer needed and he felt he had no function.

"It was like walking in a magic circle and stalling in one place. We couldn't move forward. There was no flying, no maintenance. Nothing important was happening anymore, which meant that we were just inactive, dysfunctional. I am sure that many people felt the same way as I did," Mchedlishvili told us.

Giorgi realized that without work he would not be able to support his family, and this prompted him to leave the country. His colleagues working in military aviation also found themselves in the same situation. They were very vocal in saying that if this continued, many would leave the aviation industry. The "bosses" did not care much and replied: "Go on, leave, no one is irreplaceable."

"It was terribly disappointing, because for any soldier, the army is a family. He spends the best years of his life and the most time in the sector which he serves. Actually, I was in touch with my family in the morning and evening. In general, I spent the whole day in the army and leaving was not easy for me," Mchedlishvili tells us. He has been in America since 2019 and works as a truck driver.

"Training a pilot is very expensive. Imagine you train a pilot abroad, he comes back trained, and guess what? You don't have a flying machine, he can't fly... Besides, the body has to be toned, blood pressure changes, the heart is racing... If a pilot is out of shape, then

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all his training and finances are wasted," said Davit, a member of the Air Defense Command.

Aircraft engineer Giorgi Kochashvili said many pilots had gone to America because they were unemployed and were looking for income. He is planning to do the same. He is currently working in Poland and is planning to move to America.

"Georgian military aviation has lost too many pilots who emigrated from Georgia, who gave up the profession they loved. The equipment stopped, they could no longer fly, they could no longer do their job, and they decided that if they could not do what they wanted to do here anyway, then they would get up and leave. They left and took care of their families, they will live better there than if they stayed here," he says.

Irakli Lekvinadze, Executive Director of Civil-Military Relations Centre, says that the Ministry of Defense acts inconsistently, it has no concrete plan for development of aviation; pilots do not know whether they can advance in their career and because of this feeling of instability they give up.

"It takes years and quite a lot of money to train a pilot. To build his career, he has to know what is going to happen in five to ten years' time. If you change plans every year, sometimes sell the planes, sometimes mothball them, sometimes repair them, if you don't take consistent steps, a pilot is unable to think about career growth and leaves. It is a well-paid job, and you can find a job somewhere abroad. Now 90% of pilots have left Georgia. They can be brought back if they see a perspective here," says Lekvinadze.

"iFact tried to contact the staff who had left for America and other countries to talk about their decision. Most of them did not want to talk about it, but some agreed to be interviewed under the guarantee of anonymity. "Half of Malaysia [conditionally] is packed with Georgian pilots. We have been here since 2012, some have come now, some came last year,

some five years ago. Keep in mind that we are at least 12 pilots. When they tell you that they don't need aviation and don't need pilots anymore, what other reason should there be?! There were no flights, and the pilot loses his qualifications," Rezo, a former high official of the military aviation, tells us.

Another anonymous source for "iFact", Anri, who has worked in military aviation for 11 years, claims that Mi-8 helicopter specialists were actively leaving the service in 2014-2016. The reason for this was that the Mi-8 was no longer used for flying, based on the decision of the Ministry of Defense. According to Anri, 100-120 people left military aviation during that period. They also had to terminate their valid contracts.

Those who didn't leave switched to the "Iroquois". However, it is a lower class helicopter, and operating it means degrading as a specialist. So Anri and his colleagues have opted to leave military aviation for civilian work. About 30 of them are now serving in foreign countries.

"Since 2012, the Mi-8 has actually been removed from the "table" under the pretext that foreign equipment has been imported, but this is not the case. The Mi-24, Mi-2, Ir-

"Half of Malaysia [conditionally] is packed with Georgian pilots. We have been here since 2012, some have come now, some came last year, some five years ago. Keep in mind that we are at least 12 pilots. When they tell you that they don't need aviation and don't need pilots anymore, what other reason should there be?! There were no flights, and the pilot loses his qualifications,"

roquois and Su-25 are still in the list, but the Mi-8 is no longer in service. It is on the balance sheet of the Ministry, but it is no longer used for flights. To be honest, no one tried to keep those of us who wanted to leave, no one prevented us. Everything had already been stopped, and after all, what were we supposed to do, fly brooms?" - says Anri in a conversation with iFact.

We also applied to the Ministry of Defense for an interview. We wanted them to answer questions about what had happened to the aviation and experienced pilots. They refused to talk to us face to face and asked us to send questions in writing, but even in this form they would not communicate.

One such military pilot who left the Georgian aviation was reserve colonel Soso Osorauli. He left the Georgian Defense Forces in 2015. A 41-year-old Tushi military pilot, worked in Congo and was held captive by an illegal armed group for four months in 2017. Osorauli's family members and relatives accused Georgian authorities of not responding sufficiently to free the captive man. Soso Osorauli was killed in May 2017 while repelling an operation organized by the Congolese authorities. ■



Ia Asatiani



Manana Ghoghoberidze



WHAT DO THE RUSSIANS WHO MOVED TO GEORGIA INTEND TO DO, AND WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?



Alyona is one of those tens of thousands of Russian citizens who have fled their country after the start of the war in Ukraine and have chosen Georgia as their new home. She worked in the field of marketing in Russia. However, she says she lost her income and her hope that the Russian political regime would change. This was one of the reasons why she and her family moved to Georgia in May.

"We intend to stay in Georgia. My husband and I will stay without a visa for 365 days, or whatever period of time is allowed. Then we will figure something out. My husband wants to get citizenship. I also moved my mother over here; she has obtained the status of an individual entrepreneur, so we will develop her business here," Alyona says. She refused to give her last name, saying she was afraid to come out in the open.

Russian citizens intend to stay in Georgia, settle down, and start businesses, and the numbers speak for themselves. Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine until June, 5,990 Russian citizens registered as individual entrepreneurs and 429 started businesses. According to Transparency International – Georgia, there are a total of 13,500 Russian companies in Georgia, of which 6,419 were registered after the start of the war in Ukraine.

We conducted a small survey in which we interviewed 106 Russian citizens. We asked them how long they were going to stay, what they were doing, what they knew about our

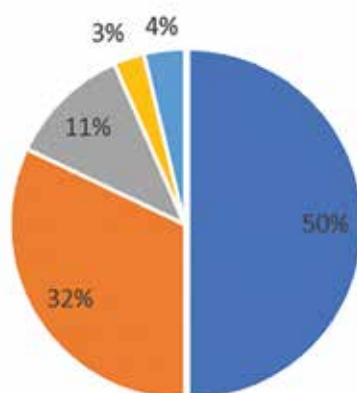
territories occupied by Russia and about the war in 2008. There was nothing encouraging in the results. A detailed analysis of the survey is presented below.

HOW HAS GEORGIA BECOME A COUNTRY WITH A LIBERAL VISA POLICY?

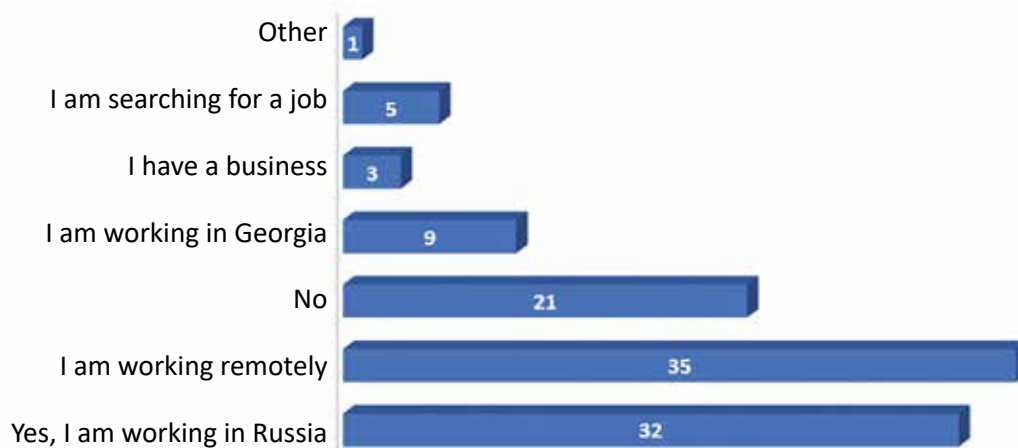
On February 28, 2012, Mikhail Saakashvili, the then-President of Georgia, passed a decree stating that citizens of the Russian Federation did not need a visa for entering Georgia and could remain visa-free for 90 days.

What was the purpose of your visit to Georgia?

■ For living purposes ■ For tourist purposes ■ Other purpose ■ For working purposes ■ No answer



Are you employed or not?



In June 2015, Prime Minister Gharibashvili signed a decree allowing foreign nationals to stay in Georgia without a visa for 365 days. Similar conditions apply to the citizens of 94 countries other than the Russian Federation.

However, this does not mean that they must return to their country in a year. There is a simple solution for them: They simply have to cross the Georgian border – even for just

one minute – in any direction before the one-year period expires and immediately return back. And from there, the countdown of the one-year period will start again, and so on endlessly.

Russian citizens staying in Georgia themselves tell iFact that they know this method and resort to it.

“I am not considering the option of returning to Russia at all right now. If I have to exit Georgia to extend my stay here, I will go to another country. It is possible because here the only issue is about crossing the border. You can cross the border to any country, be it Turkey, Armenia or any other country wherever you can get tickets,” says Maya Guseva. She



arrived in Georgia in April and says she has no intention to return to Russia, as the Russian Prosecutor's Office opened a case against her and her husband. Both of them are being persecuted by the Russian political regime because Maya openly opposed the war and her husband is a supporter of Sergei Navalny.

Even the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is aware that they resort to the border-crossing trick to extend visas. When asked how many times foreign nationals can do so, the Ministry's hotline replied: “It is not limited, as many times as they wish. The countdown for one year starts from the date of a new entry”.

IFACT SURVEY: WHEN WILL RUSSIANS LEAVE GEORGIA?

We prepared a 16-question form that covered topics such as reasons for arrival, employment issues, anticipated time of departure and attitudes towards the occupation.

We randomly surveyed 106 Russian citizens who had come to Georgia. 76 percent of them were between the ages of 16 and 35. Some of them we interviewed in person, using a printed questionnaire, and some filled out an online form that we posted in a Telegram group. This is a focus group that was created to help Russian citizens who have recently arrived or are about to arrive in Georgia.

For iFact journalists, the interview process turned out to be much more difficult than we could have imagined. Russian citizens leaving the House of Justice that we tried to meet would not say where they were from, although we saw that they had Russian passports. Some people avoided us in any way possible. Some of them pretended to be Georgians, born and raised here, though they could not even speak the Georgian language.

39% (41 people) left questions about the recognition of the independence of the occupied territories of Georgia unanswered, or wrote that they didn't know much about it, it didn't concern them, or that they were not interested in it. There were also those who chuckled at the question on the 2008 Russian aggression and called the question provocative. One interviewee also told us that it was not Russia that attacked Georgia, but it was Georgia that attacked South Ossetia. Another ironically told us: "Yes, yes. Of course, Russia attacked. Everyone is being attacked by Russia."

The study showed that 90 percent of Russian citizens surveyed (95 people) came to Georgia after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Half of them, 53 out of 106, intended to stay in Georgia.

32% of the respondents (34 people) came to Georgia for tourism and 2.8% (3 people)



for work. Our respondents told us that they had fled to Georgia to escape the Russian regime, war, sanctions and unemployment. One of them also told us that his company had moved to Georgia because of the sanctions, so he too had to change his place of residence.

We tried to find out what the 53 people who participated in this survey and intended to stay in Georgia knew about the 2008 war and occupation. 50 of them had information about the occupation. Three did not answer this question. A total of 77 out of 106 respondents knew that Russia invaded and occupies our territory.

15 out of 106 recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. 14 of them entered Georgia after the start of the war in Ukraine.

The majority of Russian citizens interviewed by iFact, 18 people, are employed in the field of computer technology. 14 of them work in the media and 15 are teachers.

We also asked Russian citizens under what circumstances they would leave Georgia. 19 out of 106 named the tightening of the visa regime. 16 – the end of the war, 10 – negative attitudes in Georgia and 6 – Putin's death and the change of government in Russia.

"I am not considering the option of returning to Russia at all now. Frankly, I do not see any possibility of ending the war under this government. Even if somehow the war ends but Putin is still in the government, I will not go back," said journalist and activist Maya Guseva, who had fled Russia.

"Russia is our homeland, we have spent our whole life there. Of course we want to

go back, because our relatives still live there. But now I don't see any way back. The government in Russia is not going to change. When the war is over, the government will remain the same. We have experienced this for many years. Everyone knows that Russia is a place where the government will not change," Alyona tells us.

WHAT DO WE INTEND TO DO TO STOP UNCONTROLLED MIGRATION?

Answers of 106 respondents were distributed the following way:



In order to prevent Russia from capturing us through migration, we have to take concrete steps and counter its efforts with our own. The Georgian government is doing nothing for this, and the actions of other actors to stop uncontrolled migration are not yielding any tangible results either.

The political party Lelo and the political union of citizens Droa presented their vision on tightening the visa policy in August. According to Lelo, tourist visas for Russian citizens should be issued directly at the border or online and only for 30 days. Those who want to stay in Georgia for a longer period should be able to obtain visas based on the best practices of the European Union.

Droa asks for shortening the tourist visa period to 3 weeks and for obliging those wishing to cross the border into Georgia to provide biometric data (including fingerprints).

All this is good, but how to make the government listen to these initiatives and decide whether to accept them or not?

Elene Khoshtaria of the non-parliamentary opposition believes that discussing these proposals with the government means acknowledging the legitimacy of the government.

"It is wrong to create the illusion that Parliament is an institution where decisions are actually made. They have stated their position on Russia. It is an absolutely proxy institution and as many times as you submit a document there and say, 'Here, I have tried', so many times you give it legitimacy," says Elene Khoshtaria.

However, even the parliamentary opposition cannot give us anything reassuring in this regard. Anna Natsvlshvili, MP of the Lelo party, tells us that they cannot hold discussions on this topic either at plenary sessions of the Parliament or at committee meetings, because the agenda is determined by the majority.

The opposition can only make political statements on this issue, which it does. Natsvlshvili tells us that she intends to address the executive body regarding this issue.

"The issue is on the agenda, although the Georgian Dream is ignoring it – but it is be-

ing raised. We do not have government levers, but this does not mean we cannot create the agenda. We will follow this issue to the end. We are actively discussing this issue in the working mode, but it would be unjustified from my side to go into details,” says MP Anna Natsvlshvili.

Another opposition party demanding introduction of a visa regime is the United National Movement. According to their initiative, the validity of tourist visas for Russian citizens should be reduced to one month.

According to Levan Khabeishvili, an MP from the National Movement of Georgia, they have written a concrete plan on how to establish a visa regime. However, they do not see the government’s willingness to cooperate.

“When the government is not interested in these proposals, does not cooperate and does not take into account the opinions of others, including those of the opposition, which represents a million and a half people, it is clear that the next bureaucratic steps make no sense. A public statement is enough for specific individuals within the government to call you for cooperation. I do not think it makes sense to work in this direction under this government,” Levan Khabeishvili told us.

Member of the Parliament Anna Natsvlshvili explains that the introduction of a visa regime for Russians is neither anti-Semitism nor discrimination, as it is presented by members of the Georgian Dream.

“The right to enter another country either for 1 day or for 1 year is not a human right, and since it is not a human right, there can be no discrimination. The right of a state to decide who it lets in and for how long is an integral part of its sovereignty. Just as we control the door to our house and are not obliged to let in an unwanted guest, the same is the visa policy for the state,” Natsvlshvili tells us.

The Chairman of the Georgian Young Lawyers Association, Nika Simonishvili, is sure that our legislation does not prevent the tightening of the visa regime. All the more, since we do not have free movement with Russia, and the occupier-state has established a visa regime for the citizens of Georgia.

“The tightening of emigration policy towards any country is its political decision and there is no xenophobia in all of this, as our government claims. This means making the decision is in the interests of the country’s security and it is fully compliant with international human rights law,” Simonishvili told us.

Similar to Simonishvili, 30 other NGOs believe that Georgia needs to establish a visa regime for the citizens of Russia. They have also addressed the government with this request. We can all see that the government is reluctant to hear anything on the subject and it seems that it will not take any appeal by the public to heart either. No one has so far taken any other, more radical steps.

iFact also contacted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to find out whether they intend to take public opinion into account and revise the visa policy, but, as expected, they left our questions unanswered. It seems that they, like other public authorities, forget that transparency and communication with the media is one of the pillars of democracy.

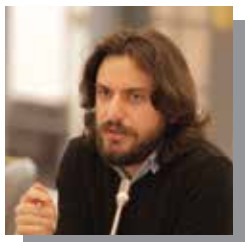
While we are engaged in this pointless bickering, European countries have tightened their visa policies, and some have even closed their borders to Russians.

Estonia, for example, has tightened its immigration policy towards citizens of the Russian Federation, making it virtually impossible for them to obtain visas. In August, the country’s Foreign Minister Urmas Reinsalu announced that the border would also be closed to visa holders.

Shortly after the war began, Latvia at first limited the issuance of visas to Russians, and from August 4 it is completely banned for an indefinite period. The Czech Republic has

stopped issuing visas to Russian citizens until March 2023. Belgium will no longer issue short-term visas after July. And we will all be watching to see how long this government will play the role of being “more European” than the Europeans, from the position of an ostrich. In the meantime, either the donkey will die or its owner. ■





Giorgi Kharebava

WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM TAIWAN



7,000 kilometers away from Georgia, between the South China Sea, the Philippine Sea and the East China Sea, lies a small island separated from mainland China by the Taiwan Strait. The island is officially considered an integral part of China, but for more than 70 years it has not been controlled by Beijing. In 1949, the civil war in mainland China ended in the victory of the Communists and the defeated side retreated to Taiwan. Thus, the People's Republic of China was established in the mainland of the country under the rule of the Communist Party, while the nationalists hiding in Taiwan proclaimed the Republic of China there. For years, the international community recognized the Taiwanese government as the legitimate government of China but, following the stabilization of relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China in the 1970s, the United Nations General Assembly recognized Communist China as the sole and legitimate representative of China.

Today, amid the rise of the People's Republic of China and its growing global ambitions, Taiwan is facing serious security challenges. Unlike Georgia, Taipei's adversary is a rising China with global ambitions, whose economy is second only to the US and whose military capabilities are growing the most. Given Russia's military collapse in Ukraine, it is safe to say that the Chinese People's Liberation Army, its navy and air force are number two in the world and are growing stronger by the day. Taiwan's situation is complicated by its status as officially it is a territory of China, whose statehood is not recognised even by its closest allies, which creates additional barriers to building and improving state institutions, economy, defense and security. Nevertheless, today's unrecognized Taiwan is much better protected from a rising China than the sovereign state of Georgia, whose security

is threatened by a weakened and declining Russia. Thus, studying the example of Taiwan could be interesting and useful for our country.

There are two major factors upon which the security of modern-day Taiwan is built. First is Taipei's own investment in defense and security, which allows it to have a strong and high-tech armed forces, and second is that Taiwan has been able to successfully integrate into the global economy. Its chip production industry is crucial to the world economy, making this small island of only 23 million people the world leader in semiconductor manufacturing.

At first glance, Taiwan is a small island with a population that is 61 times smaller than that of China (in comparison, the population of Russia is 40 times larger than that of Georgia, putting Taiwan into a worse position in this respect than Georgia), but this factor has never been a reason for Taiwan to panic. Unrecognized Taipei has managed to transform its territory into a highly developed economy over the years of correctly implemented reforms. According to the International Monetary Fund's 2021 data, Taiwan's nominal gross domestic product is nearly \$800 billion, and that's with no natural resources. Nominal GDP per capita is over \$33,000. For reference, in the case of Georgia, if GDP per capita were the same, our economy would be worth more than \$120 billion, and at least \$2.5 billion could be spent on defense, if the 2 per cent NATO standard was met, which by a rough estimate is 8 times more than the current budget. By comparison, Taiwan's defense budget is almost \$17 billion, making it a force to be reckoned with by any adversary.

Taiwan has successfully demonstrated that even small actors can ensure a strong defense. According to Global firepower, it ranks 21st in the world in terms of military strength, 125th in terms of area and 57th by population. Properly implemented reform has enabled Taiwan to build a highly developed and prosperous economy. The protection of its accumulated wealth makes the small island a strong and lethal adversary even for Mainland China. If the rulers of the country start taking care of the national interest instead of their narrow partisan interests, similar results can be achieved in Georgia. Especially since, unlike Taiwan, Georgia is an internationally recognized state, and Tbilisi is in a much better position than Taipei for establishing international trade relations and conducting foreign policy.

As we have already mentioned, strong military forces are not the only guarantee of Taiwan's security. Just as important as the military component is the dependence of the world economy on Taiwan. Taiwan is not a large economy by international economic standards, economies of such countries as Switzerland, the Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Mexico, Spain, and Iran are much larger than that of Taiwan, but despite this, Taiwan still manages to remain a critical actor in the global economy, and it is supported in this by its own microchip industry.

Taiwan's leadership in microchip manufacturing was established in 1987 when TSMC, the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, was founded. As of 2020, this company alone controls 54% of the global chip market. American technology companies such as Apple, Google, Nvidia and Qualcomm are 90% dependent on chips made in Taiwan. Taiwan's TSMC, along with South Korea's Samsung, is the only company producing the most advanced 5-nanometer chips, and 90% of such advanced chips are produced by the TSMC. In total, the global chip market is 63 percent dependent on Taiwanese companies, providing the small island with a kind of 'silicon shield' to defend itself against Beijing.

Small, unrecognized and under constant threat of invasion, Taiwan has managed to become a true leader in the global semiconductor industry. To put it simply, without Taiwan, the world's leading countries and companies, and even China itself, would not be able to produce smartphones, laptops, cars and many other types of modern technolo-

gy, including military equipment. Withdrawal of Taiwan from the world economy could cause a very acute global crisis, which is not in the interests of any major power.

It is therefore in the vital interest of all major powers to stop any attack on Taiwan. No small country today can practically match this achievement done by Taiwan and gain such great influence on the world economy. With the right reforms and strategic thinking, though, Georgia could increase its relevance for international partners. This function could well be fulfilled by the deep-sea port of Anaklia, which unfortunately was not built because of Georgian Dream. Tbilisi's influence was also increased by the export of Caspian Sea basin energy resources to Europe through Georgia. Against the backdrop of Russia's weakening and Europe's rejection of Russian hydrocarbons, the possibility of effectively using Georgia's transit function is becoming increasingly realistic. Unfortunately, the Georgian government has not been active in this direction either.

The example of Taiwan shows us that to defend against an adversary many times your size, at least two things are essential: 1. Investing in defense and security and 2. Increasing your international weight, so that an attack on you could cause problems for larger countries, in which case security guarantees are always increasing. This is a lesson Georgia should learn. ■





Davit Khvadagiani

A Meeting with the Past

A few years ago, in my village in Racha, I accidentally found a scrap of a ten-year-old newspaper with no date or cover, although I easily understood that it was one of the 2012 or 2013 issues of the Asaval-Dasavali newspaper.

The remaining piece informed readers that “Saakashvili has been overthrown” and “Georgia has been liberated”. Below this text, with the enlarged headlines and the manipulated picture out of context, the Chairman of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation Gennady Zyuganov and the leaders of the United Communist Party of Georgia, absolutely unknown and unidentifiable to the public, congratulated the Georgian Dream coalition and its leader Bidzina Ivanishvili on their “brilliant popular victory” and expressed hope that all political forces would take their place in a “renewed Georgia” under conditions of peaceful labor and prosperity.

Ten years ago it was almost impossible for a significant part of society, deceived by Russian propaganda, to notice dangerous symptoms – the complete overlap between the worldview of the Communist Party, a remnant of the Russian imperial past, and a new political force that had come to power – and to discern their linkages. The active part of society opposed to the government of President Saakashvili and the then ruling United National Movement political party perceived such anomalies as frivolous. They persisted in convincing themselves and their opponents that the coming to power of a Russian oligarch and the expected change in the foreign policy vector was a political manipulation and an attempt to create a sham reality. However, the difficult and destructive political process that has unfolded over the past decade has repeatedly shown us the pernicious influence of Russia on the ruling political party that came to power, and has prompted an informed section of society to look for parallels with events of the recent past. But clarifying the processes of the past and discerning the logical chain linking it to present-day events has been difficult due to the ignorance of important historical and political processes that have been deliberately pulled out of the Georgian society’s collective memory over the decades.

GEORGIA AND RUSSIA

Almost two and a half centuries of Russian-Georgian relations unfolded against the backdrop of the most significant events in the history of mankind. The beginning of the 19th century, when the expanding Russian Empire was conquering and annexing one Georgian kingdom after another, coincided with the peak of the development of big empires. The empire, according to international law and the political system of the time, had a completely legal right and means to conquer and annex small nations and to abolish signs of their sovereignty and statehood. In the first half of the 19th century, the numerous attempts by the Georgian royal family and elite to shake off Russian influence failed and ended in repressions and the destruction of its fighting force, which was left face-to-face with the mighty empire. In the second half of the 19th century, when Russia finally consolidated its position in the Caucasus, the struggle for the preservation of Georgian identity and self-government began to develop through the activities of Georgian educators and social movements. However, the struggle of the active Georgian society and political parties that emerged at the end of the 19th century – for even a limited local self-government and political autonomy – ran blind into a wall erected by the Russian imperial government. In 1905-1906 revolutionary processes were ongoing throughout the entire Russian Empire, and contributed to much of the active development in Georgia, although the reaction of the Russian authorities was harsh and ruthless, which brought very serious consequences.

The seemingly hopeless and desperate situation was changed by one of the biggest and most dramatic events in the history of mankind. The great war that began in 1914, which was then called by various epithets such as the “International War”, “Industrial War”, and is now known as the First World War, completely changed the political map of Europe, especially its eastern part, as well as the course of world history. The war, which brought unimaginable human casualties and the destruction of the infrastructure and economy of all of Europe, also put an end to the era of great empires and opened a historical window and opportunity for freedom for small conquered nations, including Georgia. Despite decades of disinformation and myths propagated by Soviet propaganda, the Georgian political elite met that historic opportunity prepared. At that time there were four strong political parties in Georgia, which had the experience of almost two decades of political struggle:

- The largest and most popular Social-Democratic Party, which after a split as a result of the processes unfolding in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, unlike Russia, left the Bolsheviks in a marginal minority and fully adopted the so-called Menshevik views when their leader Noe Zhordania returned to Georgia in the early twentieth century. He had been studying and traveling in Europe and opted for a European social democratic platform in opposition to the backward Russian “narodnik” platform.
- The Social-Federalist Party, which was created in Geneva in 1904 by a group of Georgian nationalists, raised the issue of political independence and freedom of Georgia for the first time.

- The Party of Social Revolutionaries, which, unlike its popular Russian counterpart, had little support in Georgia
- The National Democratic Party, which was created in 1917 by the union of various nationalist groups.

Shortly after the Russian February Revolution of 1917, following the civil war and the Bolshevik coup that began on the ruins of the empire, the Social Democratic Party in power in Transcaucasia, which found itself amid the disastrous processes that had emerged on the ruins of the Ottoman and Russian empires, intended to position itself in the new political process by seceding from Russia, creating a Transcaucasian Federal Democratic Republic and trying to control the Baku-Batumi strategic highway, which led to the first confrontation and bloody clash with the Transcaucasian Bolshevik Organization. On February 10, 1918, the opening day of the Transcaucasian Sejm, local Bolsheviks sharply criticized the secession of the Transcaucasus from Russia with a protest demonstration, leading to their persecution by the authorities and several casualties. In the following decades this story became a landmark event for Soviet propaganda.

On May 26, 1918 the collapse of the Transcaucasian Federative Democratic Republic, caused mainly by the mutual incompatibility and permanent conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, led to the state independence of Georgia. Georgia's reformist government and political opposition, which agreed to the main rule of the game that Georgia should be an independent, sovereign, and democratic republic, brought great success to the newly established modern state. Equal elections of city and local self-governments were held, in which all Georgian citizens, regardless of gender, ethnicity or religious affiliation, had the right to fully participate. In the national elections, a woman from Karayazi became the first Muslim woman in the world to ever be elected as an MP, winning a seat on the Tbilisi Constituent Assembly. In February 1919, elections to the Constituent Assembly were held, in which the Social Democratic Party won and five women MPs were elected to the multi-party Constituent Assembly, which was a very progressive event globally at the time. For the first time judicial reform was carried out and the institution of jury trials was established. Agrarian reform and other reforms were carried out, creating a solid foundation for the existence of the newly established independent, democratic state of Georgia. The newly created state, with its regular army, people's guard, and special services, was able to repel direct attacks both by the Russian volunteer army in 1919 and an attack by the Red Army of the Soviet Union after it had won the Russian Civil War in 1920 and occupied the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan. The Georgian authorities managed to eliminate several Bolshevik uprisings and prevent Russian provocations, but in the full-scale Russian-Georgian War of February-March 1921, which lasted almost six weeks, Georgia was defeated and the authorities who, despite the efforts of the occupation government, did not capitulate or legally hand over power to the aggressor, had to go into exile.

THE ERA OF "BREATHING FREELY"

"After three years of being in shackles, the workers and peasants of Georgia were freed from the tyranny of the treacherous Mensheviks. On February 25, a red flag flew over the

Georgian capital. On February 25, the long-suffering and oppressed workers breathed freely for the first time.”

This is how The Communist newspaper announced the arrival of a new reality to half of Georgia in one of its first issues on March 4, 1921, when the occupying Red Army of Soviet Russia entered the capital of Georgia.

In the middle of March 1921, the last battle between the troops of Georgia and Soviet Russia took place on the outskirts of Guria. At that time the Revolutionary Committee, which



again arrived in Tbilisi summoned several members of the Constituent Assembly who had remained in the capital to the Palace of the Constituent Assembly of the Democratic Republic of Georgia. They were asked to mediate negotiations with the government of the Democratic

Republic of Georgia, which had relocated to Western Georgia. Upon leaving the palace, Geronti Kikodze, a member of the Constituent Assembly, witnessed the first step of the new information and propaganda policy of the self-proclaimed government: "... We saw photographs of mutilated corpses displayed on a large board, an illustration of the violence that the Menshevik Guards and militiamen used against Communists, a clear call for revenge."

On April 11, 1921, the Chairman of the Georgian Revolutionary Committee Filipe Makharadze arrived in "liberated" Kutaisi and the Chairman of the Kutaisi Revolutionary Committee David Lortkipanidze and local Bolsheviks showed him photos of the burnt bodies of famous Bolshevik terrorist Pavle Mardaleishvili and the Soviet Russian intelligence agent, Colonel Nikoloz Ivanov, "tortured and murdered by the Mensheviks".

"The twelfth-century Inquisition is nothing compared to this, just nothing!" said Comrade Filipe in a low voice," reported The Communist newspaper.

The Chairman of the Georgian Revolutionary Committee did not miss the significance of such evidence, which would "hang on a pillar of shame" their political opponents and told his fellow party members that such materials could not be left "behind closed doors" and ordered the photos to be enlarged and posted in the streets so that people could see the "butchery of the Menshevik inquisitors". Makharadze's order was immediately carried out and enlarged photographs of the dead Bolsheviks were displayed for months on the main streets of Kutaisi and Tbilisi.

The Ivanov-Mardaleishvili case was the first and most powerful propaganda action of the occupational government behind which in fact was an episode of the tough and ruthless struggle between independent Georgia and the security services of Soviet Russia, although Georgian Bolsheviks for a long time portrayed the dead as "innocent victims" of the brutality of the former authorities who suffered only for political reasons.

After the occupation, from 1921 to 1924, anti-Soviet uprisings were declared "a Menshevik venture and revenge organized from abroad with the help of European capitalists", and the exiled government of the Democratic Republic of Georgia the "restless enemy of the Georgian people". The Government of the Democratic Republic of Georgia was accused by the Bolshevik propaganda of the following:

- Secession of Georgia from Russia;
- Selling the country to Western capitalists;
- Intention to hand Adjara over to Turkey;
- Launch of war with Soviet Russia;
- Bringing in troops from foreign countries;
- Theft of Georgia's national treasures.

Most importantly, they were declared "butchers of Georgian workers and peasants", for the government of the Democratic Republic of Georgia brutally suppressed a number of Bolshevik uprisings financed and organized by Soviet Russia, and arrested or expelled many "agents bribed with Moscow gold".

Also of interest is the recollection of Geronti Kikodze when he met Mamia Orakhelashvili, a member of the Revolutionary Committee of Georgia, in the former Palace of the Constituent Assembly, and Orakhelashvili accused the Chairman of the Government of the Democratic Republic of Georgia Noe Zhordania of waging war with Soviet Russia:

“So many healthy young men died due to Noe Zhordania’s reckless policies. When I looked into the trenches of Kojori and saw the corpses of beardless soldiers and cadets, my heart nearly broke,” Orakhelashvili told Kikodze.

NEVER-ENDING OCCUPATION

In the 1920s and 30s, amidst the resistance front in occupied Georgia, the destruction of political opponents, and the devastating results of World War II, a complete information vacuum and the concept of Georgian independence, as well as elements of a free political and public culture, finally disappeared from the memory of the new generations born in Soviet Georgia.

Following the processes unfolding in the late 1980s, the collapse of the Soviet Russian Empire, and the restoration of Georgia’s state independence on April 9, 1991, the legitimate government of independent Georgia and the first President Gamsakhurdia faced exactly the same challenges and reactionary Russian revenge that were taking place almost a century earlier. However, unlike the Tsarist Russia, the political leaders, who grew up under total pressure and closed doors in Soviet Russia, for a long time did not find the ability to struggle. Resistance, followed by a military coup, was organized from Moscow and supported by the Transcaucasian Military District, overthrowing the legitimate government and president.

On January 8, 1992, after an armed coup organized by Russia, the newspaper The Republic of Georgia, on behalf of the so-called military council and similar to the events of seventy years ago, announced in its January 8 issue that “a dictatorial regime was overthrown” and that it had manipulated the people in the name of “freedom”. Similar to the Soviet-Russian occupation, which for a long time claimed that Soviet Russia had nothing to do with it and that the “despotic Menshevik government” was overthrown by Georgian workers and peasants, the illegitimate and military coup government also denied any connection to Russia for almost the entire 1990s and presented itself as “a response to the destructive actions” of President Gamsakhurdia.

Although President Shevardnadze reversed his pro-Russian course from the second half of the 1990s and took the first steps towards integration with the West, Georgia remained a non-existent and failed country. The situation changed dramatically with the peaceful Rose Revolution of 2003, which brought to power a reformist team that made Georgia’s sovereign rights a reality. Along with making reforms, it started to get rid of Russian influence and made integration into Western structures a viable option. This was followed by Russian aggression and full-scale war in 2008. Despite the fact that the Georgian armed forces managed to resist, which was soon followed by the reaction of the West, the suspension of the war, and Russia’s failure to achieve its main goals of seizing the Georgian capital, destroying the political government, and establishing a proxy regime. A few years later the Russian hybrid war machine, financial support, and the concentration and pressure of a large number of military forces around Georgia, along with some other factors and conditions of an external environment, brought to power in Georgia the political team of Russian oligarch Ivanishvili. After 2012, it took decisive steps to hinder Georgia’s integration with the West and again linked Georgia closely to Russian influence in economic and political terms.



Based upon the tragic experiences of the Georgian history of the last century, the Georgian Dream government also began to actively persecute and demonize the previous government. It is important that after the foundation of the modern state of Georgia was laid on May 26, 1918, its three prominent political figures, Noe Zhordania, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, and Mikhail Saakashvili, despite their ideological and political differences, were moving in the same direction in the main and most important issue: Getting rid of Russian influence

and developing a separate political agenda. The reaction of the Russian imperial policy to all three of them was one and the same. Noe Zhordania was expelled from Georgia by the Russian occupation army and died in exile. Zviad Gamsakhurdia was first expelled by a military coup organized from Moscow and then physically liquidated under unclear circum-



stances. Mikheil Saakashvili, who was forced to flee Georgia due to political persecution after Russian-influenced groups came to power and returned to his home country illegally years later, was arrested on absurd charges and his life and health are still in danger.

The attacks of Russia on Ukraine in recent months, its occupation and its attempts to restore its empire have not achieved their goal. The Ukrainian Armed Forces have not only succeeded in repelling the attack at the capital city of Kyiv, but have launched a counter-offensive and are methodically liberating the Russian-occupied sovereign territories of Ukraine. The heavy losses of the Russian army and Western sanctions have raised hopes that the failure of the historically-experienced-in-big-wars Russian military machine will lead to the final collapse of the empire, and that the countries under its influence and occupation will gain freedom forever. ■



Buba Kudava

Colorful Histories

Stereotypical and subjective attitudes; narrowing the study of history to the study of facts, names and dates; misunderstanding of the historical process; failure to consider the general and international context; lyrical-heroic perception of Georgia's past; mythologization of history; sacralization of notions, events and persons; the formation of a vision in terms of positive/negative; rejection of alternative versions; exaggeration of the role of a personality; unconditional trust of local sources; protest against the revision of clichés; presentation of history as an uninteresting and useless subject: These are some of the obstacles and challenges facing our love of Georgian history today.

On top of that, the faces and deeds in history are not always as white as they are presented to us by ancient chroniclers or modern scholars. Neither the news of a different kind is as black as painted by the same historians. We too often follow this white and black scheme and justify the chosen ones of history and denounce those who are condemned by both the old and the young.

But history, beyond life and the world in general, is surprisingly rich. That's what this whole story is about.

So, let's begin – "Colorful Stories".

Here, from time to time, I will share with you all sorts of stories and colorful thoughts that I have collected over the years.

Buba Kudava



Here is the story of Demna the Prince

At the Royal Chessboard

Giorgi III, by the irony of fate or history, is mainly known as the father of Queen Tamar. However, at the time, no one could have imagined that Tamar would become the Tamar, because it was Giorgi's turn to become the Giorgi, and at home or abroad, in the royal family, within the borders of the kingdom or beyond, by the standards of that time a completely different era of great reflection and challenge had come.

The greatest achievement of Giorgi, known for his victories, was probably his coronation with a crown that did not belong to him, as it belonged to his elder brother and later to his nephew. The reign was a major victory which paved his path in the future. However, there were many more glorious days ahead and he was not satisfied with what was offered or won and continued to gain more and more with each battle or calculated plan.

It is clear from his biography that the main secret to the success of such an illustrious king was this: He was never dizzy with victories! He was always alert and spent his life pondering and judging. And how could he relax when a major concern had haunted him since that most important victory. That concern was Demna Batonishvili, the only son of his own brother.



*Giorgi III,
A fresco from Vardzia*

Let's remember these stories as we learned them: David the Builder's heirs apparently had many black cats crossing their paths. First, the eldest son of David the Builder, Demetrius I, stabbed out the eyes of his younger brother Vakhtang (whom we mistakenly call Tsvata). Then tensions grew further in Demetrius's family: his own sons could not tolerate each other and were not supportive of each other at all. Demetrius's elder son David was disobedient and stubborn; the younger son Giorgi (future King Giorgi III) was obedient. The parents favored Giorgi (although the throne rightfully belonged to the elder son). David hastened to seize the crown, forcing his father to abdicate and become a monk. Six months after his crowning, he died, the story goes. He left behind a son, Demetrius/Demna Batonishvili. The old Demetrius returned from the monastery and appointed as a co-ruler not Demna but Giorgi, "the sweet and obedient son of his father". The elder Demetrius soon died, and Giorgi III remained the king and the ruler. Demna had meanwhile grown up. The strengthened Orbeli family incited and organized a rebellion under the pretext of installing the prince onto the throne. The rebellion was crashed and the young man who wanted to take the throne was punished. After this Giorgi III, who had no son, left the throne to his daughter, Tamar.

This time, let's not touch on the unexpected or predictable death of the shortest-lived king in the history of the Kingdom of Georgia (if one of the Armenian sources expresses doubts, the other claims that Demetrius's son David was killed; Georgian chroniclers maintain the right to remain silent). Let us raise other legitimate questions: Had Demetrius really been ordained a monk, how did he return to the throne? Did he take off his monastic robes and put on his royal apparel again? At that time and in such a kingdom? It's just unbelievable, for heaven's sake. And if he did not renounce monasticism, what right did he have to appoint a co-ruler, bless a new king, or make speeches from the throne? Secondly, even if he returned as a monk or a layman, Giorgi's accession is an attempt to legitimize lawlessness and completely contradicts dynastic principles. It turns out that the king or former king had the right to pass on the kingdom to any heir at will. Does this not turn the principle of primogeniture upside down? It must also be said that the sources do not unequivocally confirm the return of Demetrius.

Some researchers believe that Giorgi's reign was formally based on the principle of succession from brother to brother according to the will of David the Builder. What kind of force should have had the paternal will, which Demetrius did not fulfill himself (not only did he not pass the reign to his brother, but crossed him out of history when he was still a youth)? And most importantly, like other researchers, I am deeply convinced that David, who fought day and night for the centralization of the country, did not write such a will. This document, which has survived in the form of later manuscripts, is a forgery and there are a number of logical arguments to suggest so.

I think it is quite clear: No matter how much the story of Giorgi's accession was embellished in the eyes of the people, the act was still unjust and illegal. The crown belonged to Demna, the son of the late king, David V. The enthronement of David's younger brother, Giorgi III, should not have deprived Demna of his legitimate rights. However, as the proverb says, both sides could have attached the handle to the pot where they preferred to, but there are general dynastic principles according to which the eldest branch of the dynasty continues the royal line, aren't there?

Yes, that Demna of ours was very young, but so what? The history of the monarchy has a lot of evidence of interim ruling of a country, with help from the inner circle, until the child came of age. Recall that Giorgi – an Armenian descendant of the Georgian Orbeli clan, Stefanos Orbeliani, confirms in the genealogical chronicles – was interim ruler until Demna came of age. If we consider this version less credible, it is still interesting as



an attempt to imagine a fair model of governance.

In short, it was Demna's crown that stood on Giorgi's head, whether his father had left it to him or he had put it on himself. And it was King Giorgi who organized this in the first place. And how could he have forgotten about it, not remembered it, and let his attention slacken even for a moment?

It did not take great predictions or the wisdom of philosophers to realize that somewhere, sometime, something would happen. Either the uncle would get rid of the nephew, or the nephew would reclaim his father's crown. Or at least he would try to. Either he would ambush him at the right moment or wait for something to happen. Such are the natural instincts of royalty.

We know little about what was happening to Demna, from orphanhood to rebellion. We do know that he became related to Ivane Orbeli by marrying his daughter. Weird, how can one understand these feudal minds: Armenian sources accuse Ivane, amirspasalar (head of the military) and the most influential nobleman at the court of Giorgi III, of



*Giorgi III and King Tamar,
A fresco from Kintsvisi*

killing Demna's father, David V, with Giorgi's consent or on his instructions he was sent to the other world, and, look how things have changed years later. Ivane and Demna have already become relatives and allies.

It is reported that Demna was originally "adopted" by the Orbeli. They seem to have been pardoned for the sin committed by this deed by their service to Giorgi: They received the right and honor to bring up the prince, they retained leverage to neutralize future threats (whether coming from Demna or Giorgi), and most importantly, this guardianship left them with a "trump card" for the future. This was also to Giorgi's advantage – yes, the pretender to the throne had to grow up in the court of an ally, not in the lair of the opponent.

When the time came for Demna's betrothal, the interests of the king and amirspasalar would coincide here too: by keeping Demna in the family, now with the status of a son-in-law, the allies would retain control over the Prince. However, the King and the Feudal lord would gain different benefits. The father-in-law would gain the prospect of his son-in-law



becoming king (King Giorgi had no sons!), while Giorgi would have an excuse to humiliate his rival: A royal man marrying a woman not of a royal line; thus, if the path to the royal throne was not blocked altogether, it was at least hindered to a great extent.

It was not just his uncle and father-in-law who had their own interests. Demna did not fail in this alliance either, he strengthened his position with a strong rear – for he lived in fear of the constant threat of being ousted. He was also waiting for a tailwind to make his way to the royal throne.

Of course, the big political players and the oppressed Batoniashvili understood each other's goals and thoughts, but that is politics – to the extent that interests overlap, so are the levers and influence shared. I am sure that Giorgi also knew that the lust for revenge was killing him and that Demetrios Jr. would one day strive for the throne. If he didn't want to, it would have been even more surprising, especially after it was finally apparent that King Giorgi would live out his life without having a son.

The fact is that the prince, unhappy, orphaned and captivated by his own status, had no choice. Either he or his uncle had to win. Either the crown or death. There was no third way, neither in his homeland nor in exile. For him there was no way into the laity, but into monasticism and monasteries, without a problem. But the question remained, would he be allowed to lead a carefree life and take care of his soul there?

Why didn't Giorgi III get rid of the royal child from the beginning? Or sooner than later? It was said above that there would be the Orbeli factor: In getting rid of David V, the interests of the respected family could not be ignored. Of course, the powerful Orbeli family would be especially concerned about Demna's safety (for a powerful family this would be a golden lever in domestic political disputes!). Therefore, even the king would not find it easy to kill the prince. Besides, it wouldn't have happened without a major confrontation with the Orbeli. There is one more thing: Getting rid of the child would damage Giorgi's already tainted moral image, and who knows what kind of resonance and fateful consequences it would have had in the future. The king was not so naive. He was well aware that to eliminate a rival one had must have a valid reason and gain a moral advantage.

Why did Giorgi III not stop a dangerous political project at its root – the far-reaching Demna-Orbeli marriage? Couldn't he refuse to give his consent, his blessing and express his royal refusal? He did not do it, because he chose a very different chess game to prepare very different moves and to think about the long checkmate.

Perhaps this question will arise from time to time among those who think about these stories: what would happen, in the end, he could have adopted his nephew Giorgi... especially after he was sure that he would not have an son to be heir. What? Wouldn't everything have been settled? It seemed to have been a velvet solution – both for the dynasty and the kingdom. But, alas, this world is not arranged like that, it has not been like this from the expulsion of Adam and Eve up to now. And then why should we judge Giorgi and why should we expect something there, where enormous power and thousands of political-economic interests are now entangled?

Our King Giorgi had very different goals, very different... his instincts of a king and a parent and his political intuition told him that it was time to cross out the history of Georgia and write a new one ...

Two Contenders for One Throne

In Georgian sources, Demna was mature, rebellious, and influenced by the Orbeli. The same is said about him in the writings of his contemporaries: He is of legal age, but has



become a puppet in the hands of the nobility, and in 1177 a rebellion was organised against the king on the pretext of his enthronement.

But we forget to enquire about the prince before the Orbelis' intervention. Where was he, what was he like, where did he grow up, where did he live, what did the king's son and the king's nephew do, what role did he play in domestic political affairs, who did he get on with and who did he avoid? What was troubling him about his lost throne and what did his uncle, King Giorgi, think of him. Did they see each other? Was he able to arrive at the king's court unannounced, did they feast together and have conversations with etiquette, bows and expressions of mutual respect?

The children of the sibling brothers, Demna and Tamar, did they know each other? Obviously, they knew each other. It could not have been otherwise: one kingdom, one royal family, political elite, ceremonies, visits, receptions, parades, races, feasts, greetings, bows, conversations... And as children, were they visiting, having fun, playing together? They were from the same generation, but they probably had a chilly relationship.

In short, we don't recall this Demna of ours before the uprising, and it's as if we don't care, and it's as if he didn't even exist.

And do we suppose that Giorgi III would have cared either? It cannot be that such a strong, far-sighted and determined monarch would not have kept an eye on the moves of Demna or the nobles surrounding the prince. It is hard to imagine that he was not constantly in the sights of spies and that hot news did not reach the king's chambers from time to time.

Demna was the only son of the former king, and Giorgi III, who had been crowned legally or illegally, was already a crowned monarch. Both stood on their own "bell tower", both had their share of truth, and neither of them would be honest with themselves. The throne, the crown and the scepter were to remain with one of them. In such a situation, virtue among the royal men and peace in the country became difficult to achieve, and the only way remained: Either one had to win by force and intelligence, or the other.

What choice did they have?

Sometimes we naively think that if one of them had generously given up the throne, the country would have been doing well, too! Alas, there was no such thing in the Middle Ages and the land was not painted in such colors. You are not alone in making this decision, you have a whole army of adventurers and opportunists with you, and to give up the throne is to give them up. Neither would they nor the one for whom you conceded this honor leave you in peace and let you be happy. You will not be magnanimous for him, you would be weak and still a threat – what if you were to change your mind or someone made you change it and you again sought the crown? In the end, you would be left doomed and your right to a quiet life revoked.

To cut a long story short, either Demna had to overthrow Giorgi or the uncle had to get rid of his nephew. It is difficult to say from what age Demna started to dream of the paternal crown fitted on his uncle's head, but we can say with certainty that Giorgi III started thinking about Demna's neutralization from the day he ascended the throne. As we said, the murder of Demna, overt or covert, was not in his best interests. This would damage the reputation of the already crowned king and would increase anxiety in the country.

So there had to be a good reason!

And what better reason could there be than an armed rebellion against the king? None indeed.

According to the sources, it looks like Giorgi was not expecting an uprising, but let us think again: How could he not expect action from the illustrious nobles or from the heir to the throne? Especially if they were bound together by marriage and kinship ties! And



all the more so if you are King Giorgi III, well-versed in the intrigues of the royal court and having already survived many fights.

He expected, of course, he did. He had been expecting it for a long time, gathering reliable information and letting the process run its course. He let it go as if the reins had slipped out of his hands, but he did not run away; he must have had his finger on the pulse and had the enemy camp packed with his men. He was gathering his strength and was preparing to receive decisive news.

The uprising went down in history as the Orbeli Rebellion. The ruler of the lower provinces, the ruler of Ani, once the most important city of the South Caucasus, Amirspasalar Ivane Orbeli acting as leader, and in addition to his household, many other nobles involved in the uprising. This force in military terms meant hundreds (if not thousands) of professional soldiers armed to the teeth and dozens of nobles' fortresses, while in civilian terms it meant a large part of the kingdom and tens of thousands of active and passive supporters. All of them, of course, are driven by self-interest (as were the king's supporters), but they would also have had logical arguments – for example the fact that King Giorgi had no son.

In short, the traitors and those loyal to the king regrouped as per one would expect, and fighting, clashes and massacres ensued. This process would have been useful for more than just getting rid of Demna. By identifying the opposition forces and the people of his rival prince, the king would obtain the legal right to punish them. This is a unique chance to get rid of everyone at once who had been a problem during his 22 year reign. And finally, and most importantly: Giorgi III needed the most powerful, country-shaking impulses so that then, amidst the lull and victory over those fluctuations, no one could oppose the implementation of a revolutionary and completely unheard of decision – his decision to enthrone a woman!

Gradually the ranks of the rebels thinned. They began to move into the king's camp. The shrewd king received them all affectionately and promised them Orbeli estates and



The Lore fortress

honors. Among them must have undoubtedly included those who had infiltrated the rebel group beforehand. At the first stage their task would have been to get information, stir up discontent, inflame the situation and provoke mutiny, and after the mutiny move into the king's camp and thereby break the fighting spirit of the participants. Sargis Mkhargrdzeli, who was the first to leave the Orbeli-Demna camp, seems to have been sent on this mission, and because of this Giorgi III not only forgave the betrayal (this is logical), but af-

ter suppressing the rebellion elevated him and his family (this is already suspicious). This line is continued by Tamar, who glorifies the sons of Sargis, Zakaria, and Ivane, and endows them with positions, honors, and fortresses.

Anyway, let's go back: They ended up encamped in the fortress of Lore. People were sent to neighboring states to ask for help. The siege lasted six months. No help came, and the rebels broke down. At night, the nobles began to throw a rope over the besieged castle's wall, slowly climbed out, went to the king and begged for mercy. The king had mercy on everyone and, probably encouraged by this, finally the rope was lowered quietly by Demna in secret from his father-in-law, and he descended and stood before his uncle and repented. Shortly afterwards, the fortress of Lore fell.

Ivan Orbeli was blinded. The rest of the Orbeli were executed, and thus the former leader left alive was subjected to an even more bitter insult.

The uncle did not heed his young nephew. A long-running political project was nearing completion, at that time, and there was no room for sentimentality! Demna was blinded and castrated. He soon died. The trauma – physiological or psychological – was great, the situation was extremely stressful, and perhaps this time the chronicler was objective and he did die his own death, but I wouldn't be surprised if the prison guards also had a heavy hand in it. Morale was already on the king's side and who had the right to doubt or resent it!

Another episode of the royal series came to an end. The long epic battle for the throne between the brothers was over. Demna's short life ended too. He was not buried in Gelati next to his father, grandfather, and great grandfather. He was buried in Svetitskhoveli, and this too was a royal calculation: Demna's family name was honored, while Demna himself was deprived of honor.

In short, Giorgi defeated him. He outclassed him with his arm, his head, and his backbone. Outmaneuvered him in the main thing: He kept feeding his opponents with illusions and idle thoughts while he himself did not succumb.

I do not know what really happened – someone might draw their own conclusions, and rightly so, but who has forbidden us to think, to judge and to read into books written by the victors relying on facts, logic, and imagination? No one indeed.

Vanity of vanities. So quickly was the male line of David the Builder cut short. ■





Ketik Kurdovanidze

So what, I'll delete it!

If we say that time has the highest price today, we would not be mistaken, because we want to manage everything, although sometimes we don't even know what that "everything" is. The fact is that there is nothing vital here, because we exist perfectly well without it, and we do not deprive ourselves of particularly enjoyable activities, because we always find time for them. However, we are invariably good at one thing: Looking into our smartphones at every peep, finding out who is texting us or making suggestions, and then using the "delete button" to erase forever the accumulated useless information of our lives. But what we read is still involuntarily remembered, regardless of whether we will ever use the information or not.

If a short text message is so impressive, imagine how it works when it comes to the opinion of influential, nominated or recognized individuals, especially as we purposely try to remember it so that we can use it later to show off.

However, the memory is characterized by the ability to remember only subjectively, so our space is gradually filled with a thousand interpreted bits of information, and therefore, coping with it requires much more time. Since we don't have this time, we start using the delete button to free up space. So, what do we delete and what do we leave?

We delete what we have re-evaluated, that is, we forget what we once defended fiercely. We give free space to something that grips us even more strongly. A prime example of this is the biblical story of Saul, who was called the Apostle Paul and whose epistles were made into table books.

We delete the things that prevent us from reaching our goal. Mostly they are feelings. Think of Hamlet, who begins to arrange his own space by erasing his feelings, he gets rid of all the hindering instincts that will get in the way of his main goal – revenge.

We erase all unpleasant memories, including those the remembering of which would make them less likely to happen again, because we know that no one cares about how difficult our lives have been. An example of this is the biblical story of Thomas of Manasseh.

Furthermore, we also delete snapshots in which we do not like ourselves, where our flaws and blunders are visible, like in unprocessed photographs that have not yet been touched by the omnipotence of editing programs. At this time, we are very much like Joseph K by Kafka, who realizes that he has been arrested, that is, his personal development has been stopped, because he depends on other people's opinions and tries to please them, to live for them and not for himself. This is the manifestation of our authoritarian consciousness – to succumb to what is imposed on us and to erase the reality that requires us to make efforts to correct it.

In ancient times, the delete system was adapted to myth. What could not be dealt with by human effort was preserved in a myth. This system worked for quite a long time and successfully, almost until the Baroque epoch, when the society had another social responsibility to the existing cultural context – that of the Renaissance crisis. And a radical modernization began in the epoch of Realism, when life was no longer a dream but reality, and the chance of its disappearance, of its erasure, was reduced to a minimum. Since

then almost nothing has changed, except for the forms of perception of reality. Growing social pressures and political cataclysms had become an everyday occurrence, so the delete system was in full swing.

This is well seen in postcolonial literature, where writing has taken over the correlation of memory and history in order to bring public consciousness out of a traumatic, stagnant state. It believed that erased, or deformed, memory affected, distorted reality and contributed to the degradation of social perception, as well as the personality. Faulkner for one devoted his entire oeuvre to the relationship between memory and reality. In his novels, the erased memory and, therefore, the identity of the characters are unable to perceive the reality of the present. Here, even Yoknapatawpha is a fictional city, the time is fictional because it doesn't really exist and is as old and ritualistic as Quentin's stopped watch (*The Sound and the Fury*). This is how personal deconstruction begins, which, according to Faulkner, can only be reconstructed by restoring memory.

From this viewpoint, Salman Rushdie's novels are absolutely outstanding. Here memory is seen as a means for bringing the marginal man out of his crisis situation, a man who has no uniform sense of the past with the existing society, and in order to adapt he begins erasing the historical past and replacing it with a new one.

But he is so strongly attached to his own invented history that it replaces his memory, and even more so, the mythology of his country. According to the writer, the synthesis of memory and history is the only solution for those people or nations who have had a long break with their past. Rushdie is unique in that he tries to change the general discourse of postcolonial literature, which has separated memory and history from each other, that is, divided them into archaic and personal fragments – that which is experienced by ancestors and that which draws on subjective experience – and is focused exclusively on subjective memory. Though Rushdie did also leave room for archaic memory in his novels.

And how have we as a society, more or less associated with the above processes at all times, acted? With a kind of cultural infantilism and civic nihilism, the only reason for this is that we have let into our zone of existence all those infected files that break the system, and we have deleted the protection program, now we are struggling to get out of this reality and are waiting for it to be fixed, and occasionally lightly touch the delete button, which insistently responds that it cannot be done. ■





Davit Bukhrikidze

Culture as an Instrument of Russian Politics

Thirty years have passed since the collapse of the USSR, and yet the bitter experience of the post-Soviet period – wars, economic, religious, and cultural alienation – constantly makes us think not only about the psychological traces of the terminated Soviet empire, but also about the historical, declared, or potential threat coming from Russia today and in the future.

The entire history of Russian-Georgian relations is full of negative “memory cards”, starting with the manifesto issued by Pavel I on abolishing the Kingdom of Kartli and Kakheti (which effectively ended the independence of Georgia) after the death of the last King of Georgia, Giorgi XII, in February 1801. It continued with the Red Army’s occupation in February 1921 and ending with a bloody crackdown on peaceful demonstrators in front of the Parliament building on April 9, 1989 – which would formally herald the collapse of the empire.

The nearly two-hundred-year occupation, which as the classical poet said “brought much blood and tears”, slowly and with great difficulty taught us the ways of regaining Georgia’s independence and living with new awareness and hardships after gaining it. However, the colony-metropolis paradigm is full of historical traumas and dramatic mistakes and is much more nuanced, reflected in spheres of significant influence: economy, religion, language, and culture.

Obviously, it is impossible to discuss and analyze everything in one article. We shall therefore focus on the most fragile and, as my contemporary poet would say, “mined with perverted sophistication” culture, which proved to be the most flexible and indeed perverse form of the empire’s soft power. However, language coupled with culture (Russian, as the mandatory language and language of communication of the Soviet era) is no less influential and takes on a negative meaning today, especially against the backdrop of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Nevertheless, the negative-language or negative-cultural



context is still an instrument of politics.

If we travel back in time and look at the cultural kaleidoscope of the Soviet era, we will discover many important details that will give us a fuller picture, or gestalt. Our socialist past, all those trips to the cinemas and the theatres, the 37-ruble flights to Moscow, the MKHAT, the Lubimovka, the Bolshoi, the Tretyakovka or the Dom Kino (cinema

house), plus the not-so-naïve gastronomic – sensual – sexual appeal, created the illusion that Georgians were almost the most attractive and exotic sex toys of the Soviet system. Moreover, these pseudo-attitudes (prejudices) were formed over decades under the influence of sincere expectations and naïve perceptions of the nation.

If we leave aside Soviet-era cultural contacts and all sorts of fondness of Bella Akhmadulina-Otar Chiladze type constructed with the sincerity of the early Christian era, we will find out that the Russian-Georgian “magnetic attraction” was most likely fueled by historical experience, cultural archetypes and orthodoxy... starting from the nineteenth century when Garsevan Chavchavadze and Grigol Orbeliani became real representatives of the Russian Empire in Georgia, while the marriage of Nino Chavchavadze and Alexander Griboedov was actually concluded as a political mesalliance, Russia completely conquered the political, religious, and cultural spheres in Georgia. The figure of Griboedov is a separate subject of research as details of his assassination in Tehran and his role in the security service of the then Russian Empire are still classified.

Behind corruption schemes in the 70s and 80s of the last century, a commendable cultural tradition was visible too, so much so that Georgian intellectuals set records in the number of theses defended in Moscow (although our neighbors, Armenians and Azeris, were not far behind either). Friendship+corruption+nepotism+pseudo-orthodoxy – this was roughly the mechanism of the USSR of the last century, which despite the anti-corruption and educational reforms of the Rose Revolution, the Georgian Dream government revived like an extinct archaeopteryx.

The paradox is that for most of the population living in Russia, Mimino is still a collective face of a Georgian, acceptable and natural. The image of a Georgian, leftover from Giorgi Danelia’s popular film and Buba Kikabidze’s hero, will probably not disappear from Russian consciousness for decades to come.

It is unfortunate that such an anti-Putinist fighter as, for example, film director Dmitry Krymov (the son of the famous director Anatoly Efros and theatre critic Natalia Krymova), who has visited Tbilisi very often since childhood and today is practically exiled from Russia, is unable to free himself from erroneous and schematic attitudes.

In the new production *Everything is Here* (2022), inspired by Mikhail Tumanishvili’s “Our Small Town”, the Georgian is still portrayed as a stupid, pot-bellied, hairy, unreasonably arrogant and childish creature, who has never managed to learn Russian and tries to flaunt his pointless stupidity in every possible way. Well, what can one demand from an ordinary Russian (who has recently mastered the streets of Tbilisi to perfection), when even the famous director himself is unable to focus on reality.

Post-Soviet Russian cultural sentiments about Georgia have not disappeared from their consciousness. A Russian citizen still associates every possible and impossible image with wine, khachapuri, dancing and partying, and sometimes with Pirosmeni. Probably those who come here for entertainment will be dissatisfied if they do not find this standard icon in Georgia. A separate issue is the different types of Russian language and culture centers in Georgia, and especially the Russian Club, which is not only an expression of “soft power”, but is also directly driven by open political messages from Moscow. However, the authorities do not respond to this fact in any way, instead they encourage a disgusting campaign “Gareji is Georgia”, which fits directly into the Kremlin’s geopolitical narrative.

Another “weird” event of 2022 was the participation of the film studio Georgian Film in the alliance of film studios of the CIS countries. The decision to create this alliance was made at a forum of the CIS countries and Georgian Film Studios’ Board of Directors, which was held online in the capital of Tajikistan, Dushanbe. An agreement on coopera-



tion in the field of cinema was signed between representatives of various film companies and studios.

If it were not for the information published in the Russian and Uzbek press, nobody in Georgia would have known about it. Only after this fact became public, the members of the Board of Directors of Georgian Film released a statement on a social network. If one considers that holding the forum in Dushanbe and restoring creative ties in the post-Soviet space is first of all in the interest of Russia, everything becomes clear. The main figure among the forum participants is film director Karen Shakhnazarov, general director of Mosfilm Concern, one of Putin's active supporters, and a regular participant in Solovyov's political talk shows.

Clearly, Russia's culturally impregnated soft power presents a particular challenge in the context of the EU and Georgia. Russia actively uses the economic, political, informational and cultural leverages at its disposal as a weapon to achieve its geopolitical goals. The Kremlin is particularly active in the countries that are loyal to Russia or see themselves in its sphere of cultural influence. The Kremlin's propaganda and disinformation campaign poses a real threat to Georgia, especially against the backdrop of the Russian-Ukrainian war. ■





Zura Medzvelia

MY WORLD

I was asked in the midst of the World Cup to write something about football and express my feelings. What else could I write about? I did some thinking and found a way out: I chose the most popular topic of blogs and podcasts of these days, “My World Cup”, and, while watching 4 matches every day and being very busy at work, I found the easiest way to avoid writing – by using my own Facebook posts from different times (with minor corrections), I have thus compiled almost an interview with myself.



My First Mundial

(This is most recent, I wrote it in October 2020, when I took the first vacation of my life and organized for myself a “Kvaratour” by attending three Naples games – the first one in Amsterdam, at the Johan Crujff Arena).

“Happy birthday to Crujff, peeeople!” – I used to shout every April 25th. A father and a son, that is, my father and my grandfather, were born on the same day, and the toast to that genius Dutchman would be heard in the family of three generations of football fans...

I am 7 years old and I am glued to a black and white television set with my father and many other men. Although I have been watching football for almost a year with pleasure and interest, I have never seen anything like it – there are some very different people playing: All with long hair, some with their gaiters down, some with their t-shirts untucked... and they play differently. They are wearing carrot-colored uniforms, my father and others say, and they also say... that Number 14 is a miracle... and I think that day in 1974, the story of my love affair with football continuing till now was finally decided... European football was not broadcast by the Bolsheviks in 1976. And Crujff was no longer at the 78 World Cup. In short, I haven’t watched him live

I'm 25 years old and I'm flying to Kyiv to see the 45-year-old Barcelona coach. The senior Laudrup and that crazy Stoitchkov arrived. But the head coach didn't come: A few hours before the flight, he became sick and needed heart surgery. In short, he could not come to Ukraine and I could not thank him for that evening...

I am 56 years old, I already know what a heart attack is, and on my last day in Amsterdam I walked to the first house of Number 14, who had been dead for six years already, and jokingly muttered something that was rumored to be often complained about by neighbors to Johan's parents: "The ball of your son smashed our window!" And since then, how many teams were smashed with his ball, and how many things he won, and how many things he changed, and how many people he raised, and how many people fell in love with football, impossible to count...

I said thank you Johan and left.

The Most Memorable Match

(This was written in the winter of 2020 – Paolo Rossi died on December 9 and I mourned him this way).

There are games after which you sit with a broken heart, angry and bewildered and cannot believe that your favorite team has lost. Like, for example, Munich in Barcelona in 1999 or Milan in Istanbul in 2005.

And there are games in which you're not particularly on someone's side, so you're not annoyed by anything, in fact, you're not even angry, you're just stunned – did that really happen?

Similarly, I was stunned after the Italy-Brazil match on July 5, 1982. Yes, there were similar ones after that too, but such a shock? No, never again. And I've watched 12 World Cups.

On one side, a totally insane Brazil with Zico-Falcao-Socraté-Eders. By all accounts one of the best teams in the history of football. And Italy on the other side, who slipped through without a win and only because Cameroon's goalkeeper stumbled. Italy wins the game 3-2. And those three goals all scored by Paolo Rossi.

The man looked like a shadow. You would have thought there was something wrong with him and he must not have been quite healthy. So, where is this Rossi of yours? Suddenly, at just the right moment, he would flash. He had a whole series of seasons like that.

Still in Juve's youth team he underwent three surgeries. Then there were a lot of injuries. Let us skip to the end and mention the 1985-86 season when he was at AC Milan. He did not score in 19 of 20 games and scored in only one, and two goals at once. Where and with whom? It's easy to guess – at the right time and in the right place – at San Siro against Inter.

Worse than being in the shadows, a 2-year suspension and, after that, in the first four games, "Well, where is he?" Then, in just one week: 6 goals and the best scorer of the World Cup, the best player and the champion. The main hero of the "Sarria Tragedy" and "the man who made Brazil cry".

Yes, he played once in Brazil after that, and whenever he happened to be at the edge of the field, so many coins were thrown at him that the man would have been rich if he had bothered to pick them up. He didn't get angry. Not only that, he once took a taxi to go somewhere during that tour. In the middle of the road the taxi driver realized who the passenger was and told him to get out of the car immediately. He didn't get angry at the driver or try to cajole him either, but the driver said, "Ok, don't get out, but I will never forgive myself for fulfilling your wish, so I will not take you where you are going, but back

to the hotel.” The Brazilians thawed out this year when, at Falcao’s request, Paolo and his fellow champions recorded a video in which they supported the Brazilians in defeating the coronavirus...

He died of lung cancer at the age of 64. He left behind three children: 38-year-old Alessandro by his first wife and two girls – 10-year-old Marie Vittoria and 8-year-old Sofia Elena by his second wife, who was 16 years younger than him and whom he met in 2008.

He was originally from Tuscany and ended up living in Tuscany in a village of 15 houses he built, surrounded by a football pitch and vineyards. He produced good wine, they say. I’m not a wine connoisseur, I’m not a drinker, but I love football and so I wanted to recall in a few words the most shocking match and its main hero.

The Most Memorable Goal

(I remembered this during the previous World Cup on Facebook, but here I will give a little preface, a story from the times when I was working in the football federation in the early 1990s: Once there was a big earthquake and naturally all the people from both floors of our federation immediately ran out onto the street – Ramaz Shengelia was among them; Ramaz thought: “I will see whether anyone is still inside” and went back in... later he was telling the staff, “I broke in, ran from room to room and then I saw Medzvelia standing on a chair carefully taking a Van Basten poster off the wall, yelled “What are you doing, come quickly!” and that crazy man replied, “Without that, there is no chance!”).

For me it was my 11th World Cup and in my forty years I have seen many different goals: The ones that delighted me, the ones that drove me crazy with joy (Dennis Bergkamp 1998!!! Dennis Bergkamp!!! Dennis Bergkamp!!!), the ones that upset me to tears... But this one stands out among them all – Ramaz Shengelia’s goal against Scotland on June 22, 1982.

Even then, at the age of 15, I didn’t care whether there were 3 Georgians on the USSR team or 10 – I was still on the side of the opponent. Scotland needed a win in this game and the USSR needed a draw. So, then come on, Scotland! And soon Scotland scored a goal, thanks to a very grave mistake by Chivadze. I was delighted with the goal but when I imagined that it was our man who would be blamed for the defeat, the advance of the Scots was no longer so joyful. Then the score was tied. And who did it? Well, Chivadze, of course! And I got rid of that “Sasha complex” and started “Come on, Scotland!” And then, there was the 84th minute: Two Scotsmen collided with each other and Ramaz Shengelia ran alone towards the goal... Six seconds passed from that collision to the goal, and in those six seconds I managed to yell out four times:

First it was “No!!!” Then it was “Go!” Then it was “No!” again, and finally, again, “Go!!!”

My favorite player back then was Ramaz. I loved him a lot and felt sorry for him. Unlike Kipiani or Gutsaev, people almost never forgave him for mistakes and scolded him severely. It was because of him that I sat behind the goal gate of the Dinamo’s rival in the first half, and in the second half too, knowing Ramaz would score, he would break through in his own manner and I would be there too, close to this happiness.

Well, that was the reason for this “No! – Go!” – your favorite player takes a one-on-one lead and of course you want him to score, but his shirt has “СССР” on it and I couldn’t care less about the USSR, but if he were to blow that chance, we’d be disgraced in front of the whole world...

He scored. Two minutes later the Scots equalized again and with four minutes left I really wanted them to score again and leave this USSR stuck in the group, but they were not able to...

I told this story to Ramaz on July 1, 1991. To be more precise, I did not tell it to him, I told it as a toast at the banquet organized by some Moldovans on the eve of the first away match of the Georgian national team in Chisinau (me and the banquet, me and the toast, who knows who would understand, but Ramaz and I were the only Georgians, and the others were toasting, and what else could I do?). So I told the story of those 6 seconds and brought the hosts to tears. Ramaz came up, hugged me, and said: "You've been crazy since childhood".

The Most...

(Crujff, Rossi, Schengelia... How much joy they have given to millions of people, and most importantly, we, the happy ones, have never once regretted this joy; however, there are exceptions... I often think back to that story, because of the footballer-politicians, and let it be here; so, a couple of words about the Algerian-born star of the French national team).

You think it was Zidane? No gentlemen, this story happened long before that.

July 13, 1930. Montevideo, Uruguay. In the first match of the first world football championship, the French national team defeated Mexico 4:1. Standing first from the right in the photo is French captain Alexandre Villaplane – the first player of Algerian origin in the French national team. I repeat: The captain of the French national team in the very first match of the historic, very first world championship.

14 years pass. On December 26, 1944, this former star and captain, now the SS Lieutenant Alexandre Villaplane, was tried by the French and executed at Christmas for collaborating with the enemy Germans during the Second World War..

My...

(I haven't dug this up from somewhere, and I'm writing honestly now so the article doesn't end with mentioning Nazis, collaborators, and other bastards).

I've been watching football for 49 years, and it just so happens that there were only 3 players who enthralled me at first sight and in just a few minutes: Marco van Basten, Andres Iniesta and... Khvicha Kvaratskhelia.

Anyway, where's the time to write so much, so let me finally just express a wish: May this Qatar be the last World Cup without us!

I'm not a drinker, as I have said, and yet I have made a good toast, haven't I?

Well, join in! ■





Photo by Levan Kherkheulidze



Photo by Levan Kherkheulidze

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BANA, TAO

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