

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

Ilia Chavcharadze

NEW *iveria*

№3 March-April 2023

Andro Barnov

WHERE'S MNEMOSYNE?

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EXPIRED**

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**FORGET ABOUT SMOOTH
SAILING**



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THE EDITION WAS PREPARED BY:

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

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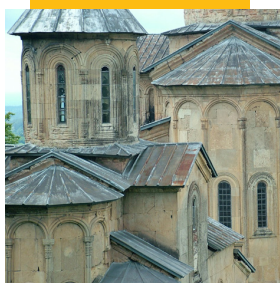


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Zaza Bibilashvili

“RADICALS”, “SATANISTS”, “GLOBAL WAR PARTY”

and the Shadows of the Planned Propaganda Insanity

In March 2023, the Georgian people repelled one of the biggest Russian attacks in recent years. For many, the reaction was unexpected – the attack was repelled in a free-spirited, spontaneous manner, accompanied with calm, serene wrath, contagious idealism and the self-confidence of a nation convinced of its rightfulness. For the first time, the newest generation, the so-called GenZ, for whom freedom is not a choice but the only natural state of being, took part in defending freedom, democracy and Georgia’s European choice. In the opinion of many, it was the unwavering stance of high school and university students which played decisive role in the March events.

By the Russian attack I mean, of course, the government-initiated “Law on Foreign Agents” (also known as “the Russian Law”), which had the effect of a bolt from the blue. If passed, it would cast an iron curtain over Georgia and the country would turn from an aspirant member of the European Union into a gray zone within a greater Russian-authoritarian swamp. The law would brand as an “agent of foreign influence” anyone who seeks to wrest Georgia from the clutches of Russia and make it part of the Western world. Moreover, this label would be attached to us by those who, as it became all too obvious in the days of March, are deliberately acting against the historic choice of the Georgian people and the good advice of Georgia’s friends.

How can we fail to remember that in the 1920s the occupying Russian Bolsheviks called the Georgians fighting for independence “agents of Western imperialism”, persecuting, arresting and executing them on this charge?

The March events turned into a rare flash of lustration and the moment of moral clarity. Unfortunately, only a flash, since Georgians are known for their poor memory and it is likely that we will forget most of the bad-faith actors of these events in a few months.

During this period, the long-awaited sense of vindication was experienced by those who from the very beginning saw Russian interests clearly behind the Ivanishvili government – those who were viewed with skepticism even by the friends of Georgia before the Russia-Ukraine war, despite numerous questions regarding the seemingly inexplicable anti-Western acts of “Georgian Dream”.



Let's remember what has led to all this:

For almost a year and a half, Georgia has been living under conditions of permanent force majeure. You may say that there is nothing surprising in this given the background of current events in the world, but I would have to respectfully disagree with you: Georgia's force majeure is almost entirely of national origin. The causes of collective anxiety are artificially induced by the masters of propaganda, the whereabouts of whom we can only guess, whose speakers we see daily on our television screens.

Every time the situation calms down a bit, a topic appears in the public space as if out of the blue, causing instant polarisation and taking the public out of the zone of psychological equilibrium. The mass psychosis fuelled by such artificial methods is so strong that even the highly intelligent and experienced people find it difficult not to take a stand, thus unwittingly becoming part of a losing game offered by an invisible enemy.

Despite the fact that we have been accustomed to being managed with special psychological operations since 2012, 24 February 2022 still served as a litmus test: the processes that had previously been going on covertly came to the surface after Russia's barbaric attack on Ukraine and evolved with geometric progression. From the very first day of the war, we heard from the highest official tribunes of the Georgian government that supplying arms to Ukraine was "not a solution", that "sanctions [against Russia] do not work", that the war would soon be over and "everyone knew who would win".

In parallel, the so-called "People's Power", a kind of personal guard of the oligarch was created, which was used to disseminate the most reactionary and chauvinist anti-Western messages.

Paradoxically, on the one hand the government was telling us that the oligarch had left politics and was no longer involved in public affairs, and on the other hand we saw how the entire vertical of government turned into a spokesperson for one private individual, thus sacrificing the interests of the state to the interests of one.

Undisguised anti-Western propaganda in the state-controlled media has become the norm. It has become the norm for reactionary conspiracy theories to be dredged up from the dark "underground" and promoted at the highest state levels. The most disturbing manifestation of this phenomenon is the absurd narrative that there is a "global war party" trying to drag Georgia into war, and that this party includes virtually the entire European Parliament, the American Senate, the British House of Lords, and many others whom we have always known as good friends of Georgia.

These messages came from top officials in the government and the ruling party, despite repeated statements from the West that the message was not only a complete lie, but "100% Russian disinformation".

In March, the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for Putin, and a number of countries have recognised Putin's rule as a terrorist regime. It is the highest echelons of this terrorist regime and its ardent propagandists who have recently been praising the Ivanishvili government, endorsing its foreign policy and resistance to the West, and wishing that Armenia, once adrift in Russia's orbit, would be as loyal to them as Georgia is now.

If someone had said in 2012 that this would become a reality in Georgia in 11



years, no one would have believed it. It is impossible to explain this reality by naively assuming that the authorities simply take a position different from that of their own people. The authors of this reality consciously and consistently devalue politics. They deliberately bring to the fore marginalised figures with no political past or capital whatsoever and endow them with symbols of power. They deliberately stir up people's primal fears, create an image of the enemy based on lies and slander in order to capitalise on it, at the expense of the interests of the country and the people.

What has recently come to light is not simply a "different opinion" of the ruling party, in sharp contrast with the vast majority of Georgians. The rhetoric of the government and associated anti-Western groups goes beyond the bounds of civilised politics and thus lies beyond the bounds of conventional criticism. Their behaviour is fundamentally incompatible with the values of the European family to which Georgia aspires. The key nuance is that demonstrating this is the aim of the authorities who actually make decisions in the name of "Georgian Dream".

Against this background, the initiation of the Russian Law should not have been unexpected. The reason for hope is that at this stage the Russian Law has been defeated. The parties have retreated to their original positions, but the greater geopolitical war continues. The forces that pushed the Russian Law and all that it embodies onto the political agenda have gone nowhere. Their rhetoric, goals and motives have not changed. Moreover, these forces have decided to attack common sense and declare to the world that the young people who took to the streets to defend freedom are "radicals" and "Satanists" ruled by the "Global War Party".

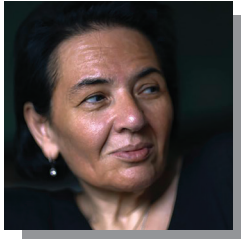
One thought-provoking fact is that the Government managed to overcome this gravest of crises without losing a single person – a person who would have followed his/her conscience and would have resigned in protest. Especially those from whom the public had greater expectations. At the heart of this inexplicable phenomenon, according to some versions, are material "incentives", according to others - compromising materials (so-called "compromats"). Perhaps the oligarchic system is based on the combination of both of these factors, facilitated by closed groupthink created by a powerful propaganda machine. In any case, it is alarming that in the most critical period, when the line between the good and the evil was so clearly marked, the monolithic nature of the state power behind the crisis was not broken.

Nevertheless, one should not despair. Looking back at history, every authoritarian regime at some point - often even shortly before their demise – seemed invincible. The main thing is to believe that Georgia is us - we repelled the Russian attack in March and saved Georgia. Yes - we are Georgia.

We are Georgia: bright, idealistic, pragmatic, emotional, rational, diverse, decent, free, patriotic, cosmopolitan, fighting for our well-deserved success. This is the Georgia that a year ago prayed for Ukraine's salvation with President Zelensky, and today is praying for Ukraine's victory.

As President Zelensky said: "We do not wait and do not ask. We are winning and creating this victory ourselves." May the grace of this spirit be poured out on us! ■





Keti Kurdovanidze

THE WAIT TIME HAS EXPIRED

Exactly a century separates us from the time when Mikheil Javakhishvili published his landmark novel “Jaqo’s Khiznebi”, which, like Ilya’s *Is This a Man?*, has come to symbolize its era. What happened to us, how we got sick, and how we were to recover – this is what both writers pointed out to us. One was killed by Georgian Bolsheviks in the service of the Soviet Empire, the other was tortured and shot by them. Such a cruel verdict was passed precisely because of the epochal significance of these texts. Both writers attributed the cause of our ills to cultural and anthropological degradation. Indeed, the social marginalisation of personalities, the loss of traditional, practical, and cultural ways of life led to a crisis of social cohesion and ultimately to its disintegration, as an individual’s culture is closely linked to their sense of identity and belonging to society. This is why Ilya said: “I write about the social plague.”

In the novel, neither Luarsab Tatkaridze nor Teimuraz Khevistavi are able to adapt to the times, they are disconnected from the socio-cultural system of the past and have difficulty understanding the present. Despite this, the cultural anthropology of these two characters is quite different: Luarsab lacks self-reflection, which is due to his illiteracy, mythological thinking, and social irresponsibility. That is why only anthropological rubbish remains of him. With great suffering Teimuraz still manages to self-identify, understand the past, and return to faith. A new man is born in him, for his problem is not his upbringing or social irresponsibility, it is simply that Teimuraz must learn to revive and use this knowledge.

It is the reflection of the combination of these two characters that is the public capital of post-Soviet Georgia, the 90s, when the new political and cultural reality became a similar challenge for everyone. Who chose to be Luarsab and who chose to be Teimuraz became clear in just one year. Who felt social responsibility and who joined the imposed cultural genocide of the occupying country, which led to despair, nihilism, polarisation, frustration, and, finally, collapse.

The collapse and degradation of values became the basis for the new challenges of the new century. And while the whole of the civilised world was taking important

steps towards technological progress, the people of Georgia, like the Neanderthals of the Palaeolithic era, were warming themselves around a fire lit in the street.

Who is to be blamed for this – the Luarsabs or the Teimurazes? Undoubtedly, both simultaneously, given that totalitarian regimes' allies extend beyond the Jaqos to include the Luarsabs and the Teimurazes. The Luarsabs represent cultural stagnation, while the Teimurazes symbolize cultural degradation. The Jaqos gain an arena by adapting to this scene.

This nourishes, fortifies, and reinforces the system, whose mechanism operates effectively and sustainably under such favourable circumstances. The existence of the Jaqos is determined by the living dead Luarsabs and Teimurazes. Something must be viable, and unfortunately this viability is determined by collaborationism and mediocrity, when one part of society enjoys itself and the other part declares capitulation.

Time flies and waits for no one, which is why it is so important to understand what it requires of us. Knowing the needs of time was considered by Ilya to be the secret for the survival of this small nation with a difficult history, because the failure to understand these needs is what gives rise to the problems of the Luarsabs and the Teimurazes.

When does the crisis of Luarsab begin? Just when his diminished skills, limited mind and infantilism cannot cope with reality – the big lies and betrayal when an ugly wife is slipped to him instead of a beauty. After this social failure, he, like the Georgian voter, tries to find a friend and admirer in the very person who first disappointed his adolescent hopes. Hence begins conformism and accommodation, moreover, the accommodation of one's own dreams to a forcibly imposed situation. And then he gets so accustomed to it that he becomes contented and even happy. And although this fact still imposes a fatal imprint on his life, he refuses to fulfil his social functions in the interests of the society that cheated him. He chooses a different path – to consume his possessions in his own pleasure, in the way he understands this pleasure, to define the existential dangers that now threaten the idyll created with his own efforts. These are: education, books, schools, the advent of the new age, the wrath of God, a brother having his eye on the property of the heirless Luarsab, who becomes the image of an enemy.

How does Luarsab cope with the pain and fear, how does he try to get out of this crisis? He talks to Darejan about these fears and threats, has a discussion with her, shares with her like his equal, shares the actual cause of his misfortune. And each time he hears from her comforting words and a cherished promise that they will soon have a child to spite David, the same David who has become the dilemma of their lives. It is these promises and consolations, the blunt self-deception and illusions that legitimise the nothingness created by Luarsab, and Darejan is the narrator and inspirer of all this bestial existence. Darejan dies, and Luarsab dies too, because the purpose of his existence has disappeared. With Darejan's death, being "Luarsab" loses its basis.

The existence of the Jaqos is determined by the living dead Luarsabs and Teimurazes. Something must be viable, and unfortunately this viability is determined by collaborationism and mediocrity, when one part of society enjoys itself and the other part declares capitulation.

The adventure of Teimuraz develops in an altogether different way. His identity crisis emerges in the process of adapting to the times. Having once been a prince, a lawyer, a man, a married man, destitute, and sheltered in Nashindari, Teimuraz is cut off from the context of a past, cultural memory. He has no basis for the starting point of his identification, and the environment he lives in is unstable and prone to decay and deconstruction, with the disappearance of ideas, meanings, morals, and values. The depersonalization of Teimuraz begins when he can no longer perceive the objectivity of the real world and his own status in this reality. He no longer has a clear self-awareness or a clear ability for self-analysis; in some ways he resembles a fictitious subject of the postmodernist narrative – a moth whose vital integrity, organisation, and consistency are broken, and whose context of personal, everyday life is dysfunctional.

In his everyday life, he is in a state of fundamental, absolute alienation, because he meets the new times unprepared. He lacks neither knowledge, education, nor social activism, but he lacks the skills to cope with the challenges of the time, he is unable to create a new narrative, and his lack of eloquence testifies to this. Besides, there are objective circumstances – his historical estate is occupied, and his personal space is getting more and more narrow, so that he finds himself in the same room with his only friend – his wife – and his honour, which, together with his knowledge, has long since ceased to function. All this makes impossible the personalisation of Khevistavi in the environment that Jaqo offers. Not only is the material culture occupied, but also Teimuraz's personal space – cultural affiliation, consciousness, self-awareness, and even values. And Teimuraz, with his blind eyes, cannot see the threat to his honour, estate and inheritance posed by the preferences granted to Jaqo.

Jaqo is a dormant essence that immediately awakens when personal culture begins to fade. Its existence therefore depends on our vitality, and the latter can only be achieved through action, struggle and endurance.

The contradictory nature of the new reality, the fracture of cultural constructs and, moreover, the anthropological crisis determine Teimuraz's disappearance as a human image. Why does he give up his abilities, why does he succumb to apathy, why does he lose faith, why does he try to commit suicide – because it is this sense of particularity that

prevents him from integrating into reality. He refuses to work at school, but he does not shy away from working in Jaqo's canteen, because he believes that he cannot teach a child what he does not believe in himself, and he is right. This is why Teimuraz's Odyssey is so chaotic and fragmented.

Amidst profound despair, anguish, and extreme decline, the “dispossessed of Jaqo” gradually comes to the understanding that he is guilty before Margo for the creation of this feral being endowed with his property, conscience, past, and future. He is held accountable for handing Margo over to Jaqo, and Margo attempts to elevate Jaqo by instructing him in literacy, writing, sewing, as well as personal hygiene and grooming, in order to imbue this creature with a cultural framework and thereby rationalize her cohabitation with her.

Teimuraz's self-reflection and self-immersion begins with the realisation that he as a person and Margo as his cultural belonging are in danger, a danger brought about by revolution, a revolution that opposes the dialectical laws of development and is a consequence of inevitable necessity. That is why, where revolution occurs, culture has no place, it goes into decline or passes into passive memory, because, according to cultur-

al relativism, cultures develop according to historical circumstances and not in a linear progression from the “primitive”.

Teimuraz realises that to facilitate communication, he must activate the passive memory. By focusing on Margo’s return, engaging in social activities, refining knowledge and memory, the “destitute” experiences that he has got rid of the smell of the dog’s corpse forever. Now he is alive and waiting for the return of what he has voluntarily given to his wild offspring, whose viability is determined only by circumstances, because Jaqo does not exist on his own, and therefore cannot create anything and become a culture. This is why Jivashvili is so keen to give his son the surname Khevistavi. Jaqo is a dormant essence that is immediately awakened when the personal culture begins to fade away. Therefore, his existence depends on our vitality, and it can only be achieved through action, struggle, and endurance.

So, it is today, in the most challenging time for our country, with the only difference being that our wait time is over. ■





Gia Japaridze

WILL ANYTHING HELP US?

Will anything help us? – This short phrase, as it seems to me, has become the most popular and somehow ironic winged phrase in Georgia, which has been enduring various crises for the last few years. The question has become rhetorical, the answer to it seems to already exist and seems to be no longer required.

Before we start looking for an answer to this question, we need to ask another question:

What is wrong with us?

If we do not determine what is wrong with us and why we need to be saved, it will be difficult to find an answer, and we will keep running in a vicious circle for many years with cries of “Will anything help us?” But soon that circle may no longer be ours, and at best we will be running around a territory without any sovereignty asking the same question. In short, we may lose our independence.

The answer to the question “What is wrong with us?” is multi-layered, but the causes can be divided into two large groups – the first, which is caused by external factors beyond our control, and the second, originates in our own head, in our state, which we ourselves have imposed. If we cannot make any impact on the external causes and we cannot significantly influence their dynamics, then the elimination of the reaction to it is entirely in our hands. Blaming only the authorities for Georgia’s

problems will not work, the blame for “what is wrong with us” should at least be equally shared between the citizens of Georgia and the former or current government. Political forces in power or in opposition are more or less accurate reflections of society. States have the kinds of rulers that the people living in them deserve.

Many political scientists agree that the political process in Georgia is either dead or on its last breath. Georgia has developed a form of authoritarianism that bears all the characteristics of parliamentary democracy with one exception: Political competition is strictly prohibited and merely a pretence; no one should challenge the ruler in keeping power. This case is not a version of the classic definition of authoritarianism, Georgian authoritarianism is softer and more flexible, everything is allowed up to the red line, and the red line is participation in politics. You can do what you want, but participating in politics – which also means struggling for power – can only be authorised from above. And up “above” is a two-headed monster (no reference to Russia): Bidzina Ivanishvili and the Patriarchate share two ends of power. The reason for this unhealthy situation is not only the government, a rope after all has two ends, and if at one end you can see the government with the naked eye, at the other end, with a slightly strained eye, you can see Georgian society.

Lack of realism and pragmatism. The absolute majority of Georgian citizens and political groups are deeply imbued with political infantilism and naivety. Presenting the desirable as possible is not only universally loved, but any reference to pragmatic policymaking, thinking, and reasoning outside the clichés created in previous years, and making policy decisions based on results in the light of reality, is rejected. Moreover, it has become an object of backbiting, hatred, slander, suspicion, accusations of treason, and more. Political naivety is the rule, and political pragmatism is an exception. Political pragmatism is baptized as populism, even immorality, and while most populism is disguised as naivety, it sometimes effectively wears the mask of idealism. It sells, it works, and why not.

The lack of realism and pragmatism is fostered by many factors, including the Soviet past, knowledge, and understanding of the state and history at the level of legends, lack of academic activity in political science, lack of analysis and evaluation of political history and political decisions, and so on.

Infantilism is easy, it does not demand responsibility, no one demands answers for the words spoken and actions taken, even those who demand answers are politically naive, they like being so and demand it. One can naively believe that the Russian empire will collapse, but if we are realistic, at this stage Russia will only weaken, and this means only a new opportunity for Georgia, which should be used pragmatically, and does not mean guaranteed success (victory of Ukraine does not automatically mean de-occupation of Georgia). One may naively believe that Georgia can pursue an independent foreign policy without taking into account the interests of neighbouring states and world leaders. It would be more realistic though to understand that Georgia is located in the Russia-Turkey-Iran triangle, where the interests of other larger and stronger actors (USA, Germany, China) are directed. This narrows the zone of independent actions by Tbilisi, requiring the country to pursue a foreign policy with cautious restrictions, the choice of Georgia resembles the choice of Partazi from the famous assembly of the 6th century. You may not like the details of the West, but it is the Western value system that needs to be saved, not the choice of Aëtes from the

same assembly, which can be unmistakably described as the choice of a loser.

Democracy consolidation problem. The problem of democratic consolidation is insurmountable for Georgia; democratic state institutions could not be formed, and the democratic process lacks the irreversible character of consolidation. Recently with diplomatic delicacy, Georgia has been mentioned in the list of hybrid democracies. The reason for this, apart from the lack of will on the part of the authorities, is the Soviet legacy, the absence of a long tradition of statehood and distrust in state institutions. Democracy functions effectively where the majority of the population is the middle class, that is, the number of people who can afford to own a home and a car, pay for their children's education and family health care, eat out at a restaurant a few times a month, and vacation at an average resort once a year, forming a critical mass. This means that the income of these people minimizes the possibility that someone will buy their votes for 50 or 100 GEL. The education of these people is at a basic level or higher, which most likely eliminates the possibility of them falling victim to poor quality propaganda.

ANY STATE, ESPECIALLY A FUNCTIONING
CONSOLIDATED DEMOCRACY, RELIES ON
"COMMON SENSE" IN SOCIETY.

Here we approach the problem of poverty and illiteracy. There are not only the best weapons in the armoury of any government, but also the best means in the hands of any state opposing Georgia to buy, intimidate, or easily deceive a poor and illiterate population. It is the easiest to play with and manipulate the animalistic, ethno-nationalist, and religious sentiments of such people. More often than not it is these citizens of Georgia who become easy victims of disinformation (Russian and Georgian authorities, sometimes these two coincide) and objects of pre-election blackmail, violence, buying and selling of votes. All opinion polls conducted in recent years show the same results – the overwhelming majority of respondents live on an income below 1500 GEL per month, and if we analyse the results of the polls further, the number of people whose monthly income does not exceed 400 GEL or is even equal to zero is very high.

This part of the citizenry often expects elections as a material benefit, which for a small part of Georgian citizens it is a vicious practice, and for people with no income or low income – a short-term solution to everyday problems. According to the authoritative PISA study conducted among students, Georgia is in the last five among 150 states in terms of reading comprehension. Every year Georgian universities release an army of several thousand jobless graduates, some of whom then join the long queue of applicants for low-paid jobs or political asylum seekers in European countries, or queue up at the border of Mexico and the United States in search of a better destiny. Those who cannot or do not want to leave are left with a diploma but no real education or skills, hostages of poverty. Added to this is the generation with Sovi-

et (often bought) diplomas who have been unable to adapt to the post-Soviet reality. Citizens with such education and skills are easily influenced by propaganda and believe any misinformation; moreover, maintaining such an education system means a lack of competent personnel in all fields – an officer who is unable to read a military map, an engineer who is unable to build a safe building or infrastructure, politicians who are unable to govern effectively, and so on. Any state, especially a functioning consolidated democracy, relies on common sense in society. Poverty, lack of education and a small middle class are the reasons preventing the creation of the critical mass of citizens necessary for democracy. The problems of education and poverty are not solved by immediate prescriptions, but rather the political will of the authorities must start addressing them. In a state where the majority of schoolchildren and students do not have the opportunity to receive the nutrition necessary for the normal functioning of the human brain, it is impossible to form a critical mass, and without it, democracy will resemble a caricature of democracy, an ochlocracy or “democratic” authoritarianism.

Poverty and economic problems (unemployment, low pay, inflation) are named by citizens among the priority issues in all public opinion polls conducted in recent years. It is strange, but the political parties in Georgia do not include socio-economic problems in their agenda. Political groups that have declared themselves as parties have lost contact with citizens, they cannot express and represent them. A representative democracy does not exist without competition between political parties.

Here we come to the problem of political parties. According to the scientific definition, a party is a group of people with the same ideology, united to gain power and having an organizational structure. In liberal democracies, parties have intra-party democracy, which means ensuring the involvement of members in the work of the party through appropriate procedures and mechanisms. In the case of Georgia, there are no parties by this classical definition. “Here, more likely opportunistic political groups without ideology are gathered around one leader”, most of whom deny that they are fighting for power and justify their long-term presence in politics by claiming to care for the people and to have moral necessity. There is no thematic confrontation between the ruling power and opposition parties. At a time when there is a plethora of topics ranging from a shift in foreign policy orientations to economic hardship and the destruction of cultural heritage that probably no other parliamentary democracy has, the opposition political parties are either unwilling or unable to engage in thematic dispute, constantly protest, talk about electoral fraud, constantly give voters vague hopes, and so on. This cannot result in a democratic process.

This is just a short list of “what is wrong with us”. The full list is even longer, and even a brief summary of the reasons would exceed the scope of this article. A long-term solution to these fundamental problems requires an immediate response from all citizens of Georgia if we do not want to wake up one day on a territory deprived of sovereignty. ■



Giga Jokhadze



24 February marked one year since the unjustified and unprovoked intervention of the Russian Federation in Ukraine. In December 2021, Russian President Vladimir Putin sent the collective West a list of ultimatums in which he demanded written guarantees from NATO on the issue of no further enlargement. At the same time, Putin began mobilising a 200,000-strong military contingent near the Ukrainian border under the pretext of military exercises. On 21 February 2022, Putin took a major step towards escalating the conflict by recognising the self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Luhansk and proclaiming the Kremlin's main goal to "restore" these republics within their administrative boundaries. With this move, it became clear that the Russian president was trying to find a *casus belli* that would justify a full-scale intervention in Ukraine.

On 24 February at dawn, Putin invaded Ukraine on the pretext of protecting Russian citizens. Most international relations experts believed that Putin would limit himself to the Donbass region, but to the surprise of many, the Kremlin launched hostilities virtually across the entire territory of Ukraine and even attacked Kyiv. The attack on Kyiv showed that Putin's main goal was not to cut a land corridor connecting Crimea and to "return" Donbass to its administrative borders, but to annex the country completely and change the regime. According to the US and British intelli-

gence, Kyiv was expected to fall within the following 96 hours. Western countries offered Zelenskyy political asylum, but the Ukrainian president refused to flee and led Ukraine's fight for freedom and territorial integrity. The fighting of the first few days had a particularly significant impact on the course of the war. The effectiveness of the Ukrainian armed forces and territorial defence units, the high morale of the Ukrainians, and the logistical problems of the Russian army made a quick victory planned by the Kremlin in the early days of the war impossible.

The course of the war and the situation at the front – the Russian army launched combat operations in 4 main directions: 1. The Northern Front, where the goal was to capture the capital of the country, change the regime and quickly break the resistance of the Ukrainians; 2. The Northeastern Front, where Putin's main goal was Kharkiv, the second largest city in Ukraine and the main industrial centre; 3. The Eastern Front, where the Kremlin's goal was to "restore" the administrative borders of Donetsk and Lugansk; 4. The Southern Front, where the goal was to create a land corridor to the annexed Crimean peninsula and deprive Ukraine of access to the Black and Azov Seas. During the first phase of the war, the Kremlin scored successes on almost all fronts. On the Southern Front, the Russian army quickly captured the port city of Kherson and besieged the strategic city of Mariupol, blockading it for almost three months. The Kremlin made advances towards Kharkiv and Donbass, whilst the Kyiv front was the most unsuccessful. Putin soon realised that the Ukrainian capital was a well-defended stronghold and that taking it would pose enormous military and economic difficulties, so on 29 March 2022 he decided to withdraw Russian military units from the vicinity of the capital. Putin declared that in the second phase of the war the Kremlin would concentrate mainly on the Eastern and Southern Fronts. This was an indirect admission of defeat on the Northern Front. Since June, it has become evident that Ukraine has moved from defensive to offensive in many directions, thanks to the influx of advanced Western weaponry into Ukraine.

Particularly effective were the HIMARS multiple rocket launchers, with the help of which Ukraine reached the annexed Crimean Peninsula in August, where the Ukrainians destroyed a large Russian military warehouse.

By early September, the Ukrainians had regained the strategic initiative in the war. In the first days of September, Ukrainian territorial defence units launched a powerful counter-offensive in the direction of Kharkiv, liberating 8,500 square kilometres of territory. The Ukrainian counter-offensive eliminated the Northeastern Front, depriving Russia of the northern corridor linking it to Donbass. There have been no significant territorial changes on either front since the end of October. The Russian Federation's only success was the capture of the town of Soledar on the Eastern Front. Russian artillery has been shelling the town of Bakhmut in Donbass for months but had yet failed to capture it.

One year after the start of the war in Ukraine, we can safely say that the Russian Federation has not achieved its strategic objectives in any direction. After Kherson and Mariupol, the Russian Federation has not captured a single strategically important object. The failure of the Russian army is also evidenced by the fact that 2 of the 4 main fronts of the war (Kyiv, Kharkiv) have been completely demolished, and on the other two fronts the Russians have made virtually no progress.

International reaction - After Russia's full-scale intervention in Ukraine, the civilised world agreed that the Kremlin's Ukraine adventure would cost it dearly. In the



early days of the war, the West imposed tough economic sanctions on the Russian Federation. The most significant of these was the exclusion of the majority of major Russian banks from the global financial system, SWIFT. The West also restricted Russia's access to its foreign currency reserves, which totalled \$450 billion. Putin's inner circle, Russian MPs, and oligarchs, had most of their financial assets in the West frozen. A large number of international companies have suspended operations in Russia. Most countries have halved or stopped trade with Russia, especially in the military, oil, and high-tech sectors. And Germany suspended the Nord Stream 2 project.

The answer to the question of how effective Western sanctions is against Russia depends on how we define the West's goal. If the West's goal was the complete collapse of the Russian Federation and the change of Putin's regime, then the sanctions are not effective enough. This goal can only be achieved by imposing a complete embargo on energy resources, since the Russian economy is critically dependent on revenues from energy exports. Such a scenario is difficult to imagine. But if the West's goal was to gradually weaken Putin's regime, it has certainly achieved that goal. Most of the sanctions imposed are designed to gradually weaken Putin's regime over time. Achieving European energy independence is particularly important for weakening the Kremlin. Before the war in Ukraine, about 40 percent of the continent's gas supply came from the Russian Federation. Russian propaganda talked pointedly about the approaching winter and the threat of Europe "freezing", even though most European countries have either banned gas purchases from Russia altogether or significantly reduced their dependence on it. Dependence on Russia fell from 40 percent to 7.5 percent by the end of October. The EU began to look for new partners and by early autumn had fully replenished its winter reserves. The weakening of the EU's energy dependence on Russia finally put an end to speculation that Europe was in danger of freezing and deprived the Kremlin of an important political leverage.

In parallel with the weakening of Russia, the West has started to work actively on strengthening Ukraine's military capabilities. Over the past year, the Western world has provided Ukraine with military, economic, and humanitarian aid worth about 150 billion dollars. The most significant contribution to the assistance to Ukraine has been made by the USA, which has provided about 70 billion dollars in aid to Ukraine since the beginning of the war. Most of this aid (\$44 billion) went directly to military assistance. The European Union helped Ukraine with almost 30 billion dollars, with the United Kingdom, Canada, Poland and others providing 3 billion dollars each. Winning the war is impossible without the transfer of modern weapons to Ukraine, and the West has been particularly active in this direction since the beginning of 2023.

In 2023, the United States alone has allocated almost 4 billion dollars to Ukraine, which will be used to purchase several dozen tanks, armoured personnel carriers, anti-tank defence systems and tens of thousands of shells. In January, another meeting of the Ukrainian support group was held at the Ramstein base, where it was decided to transfer more than 500 modern tanks to Ukraine during 2023. Overall, over the past year, the West has taken significant steps to defeat Putin's regime in Ukraine. As such, it is likely that the quality and quantity of aid will increase further over time to ensure Ukraine's victory.

Future scenarios - According to Western intelligence, the Russian Federation is going to organise a new offensive campaign in Ukraine from spring, for which it is preparing new flows of reservists and massive quantities of new weapons. In response,



the West is building up Ukraine's self-defence capabilities. There is a consensus in the West that the war should end with a complete and unconditional victory for Ukraine. Against this background, it is impossible to develop a scenario in which Russia manages to annex Ukraine and changes the regime. It will be difficult for Russia to retain the already occupied territories. It is more likely that Putin's regime will try to prepare a new offensive and seize more territory to put itself in a strong position for negotiations. Putin is trying to get Ukraine to agree to negotiations on his terms. The Russian President's goal is the international legitimacy of the territories he has annexed (Crimea, Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia), Ukraine's military neutrality and the rejection of Euro-Atlantic structures.

The goal of the Ukrainian government, on the other hand, is the complete liberation of the territories of Ukraine, including the Crimean Peninsula. Given the complete incompatibility of the goals of the actors, it is practically impossible to hold negotiations between Russia and Ukraine in the near future, which is confirmed by the statements of Ukrainian officials. In international politics it is difficult to predict anything in advance, but one thing is clear, that one year after the start of the war, Ukraine firmly stands on its feet. The Ukrainian people are ready to fight for final victory until the last Russian soldier leaves the country. We wish them a swift and decisive victory in this noble cause!





Andro Barnov

WHERE'S MNEMOSYNE? or Who Will Drink the Most at a Zombie Party?

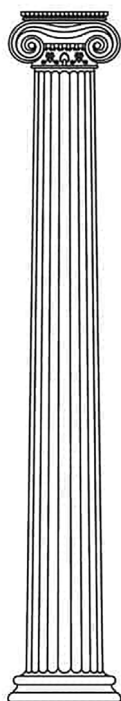
Below we will discuss collective memory and national identity, i.e. we must consider an exceptionally large topic in a very small format, and therefore we cannot avoid significant simplifications. I apologise in advance to the readers for this, but it seems to me that it is still necessary to write on this topic and in this format. We, that is, the people who feel responsible for the country's tomorrow, need not only competence, but first we need to agree on a big vision of the country's path. That means we need to start thinking about the most profound problems. What kind of army, economy, education, and health-care systems do we require? These are important questions, but first we must determine how our society can become consistent in solving and realising the big tasks. That is, we must first answer the big questions that have a devastating effect on the effectiveness of our state as a single organism.

Rarely in any society can you see so many sharp confrontations over seemingly clear and simple issues as in Georgia. Sometimes it seems that we simply cannot agree. We argue about everything, even show hostility. We tell history in different ways, perceive the present from different poles and imagine the future going in radically different directions. It is as if this country is not our common land, as if we live in different countries and someone has forcibly brought us together to demonstrate our intolerance of each other. We remember all the moments from the first moment of independence in different ways. Each of us has our own truth and we live to this day, benchmarking these truths.

That is why it is popular for all sides to complain about the lack of a national memory. It is logical – after all, someone has to be “more right” in this dispute. In short, we want to find out exactly this truth:

Who is right? Is anyone right?

A national memory implies a collective memory, and although its destruction leads to a plethora of personal conflicts, a reasonable observer realises from the outset that the problem is not an individual person. It is a deep social problem, and if we want to cure it, it is essential to find its roots.



This is a fact – collective memory has turned out to be a big problem for independent Georgia as we simply do not have it. The good memory of individuals in no way solves this problem. Not only is it meaningless for society, but it can often be taken out of context and create additional tensions in society, because a collective memory is not an objective. A collective memory expresses a kind of collective agreement on the rules for perceiving the past: It is a shared tool of the collective for perceiving the past and a trigger for the decisions and actions of that community.

There is no formed society that does not have common interests, a common perception of the past or the present. For example, you will not find a Georgian for whom Genghis Khan is a hero, just as you will not find a Mongol for whom Genghis Khan is not a hero. This seemingly obvious fact will not be so simple when we remember that Stalin is a hero for some Georgians and a criminal for others, Putin is an influential politician for some and a murderer and a criminal for others. Why is it that we agree on Genghis Khan, but not on Stalin and Putin? Why is Russia for some Georgians an occupier and an enemy, while for others it is of a single-faith and a fraternal nation?

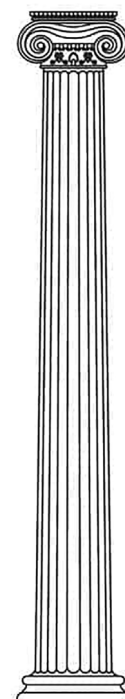
How is it that part of our population reacts sharply to the words of the government, “Georgia started a war”, and another part nods and applauds in agreement? Why is it that some of us are ardent Westerners and some of us are nostalgic for the occupying Russia? What and how has divided us to such an extent that we cannot even agree on the most important, fundamental issues. Whichever side you are on, such a radical division of the society is a problem for everyone.

There are many interesting studies in psychology on collective memory. Since this is a journalistic article and not an academic study, I will outline in general terms what these studies have revealed. Firstly, there is the flexibility of human memory arising from its imperfection. The imperfection of human memory is an advantage of collective memory because the reconstructive nature of memory is thought to give the group greater cognitive flexibility. On the other hand, this reconstructive nature is directly dependent on the personality of the memory bearers. Simply put, people often forget things that contradict their personality and then, due to the reconstructive nature of memory, reconstruct reality according to their own rules, even though this reality may not exactly match the truth.

The more similar the identities of the members of society are, the more similar they reconstruct the past, and these are the building blocks of the social identity of society. It is therefore easy to understand what happens when the identities of the members of society and the rules for perceiving reality are radically different. They reconstruct the past differently: Truth for one person is false for another, and vice versa.

Thus, the collective memory is damaged, which, to reiterate, is rooted in the problem of a people’s identity (or lack thereof).

Not to fall into the trap of theoretical reasoning, let us look at how successful soci-



eties behave. There are many possible ways of illustration, but here we have decided to look into the deep (but well-known) past and consider the society of the ancient Greeks, an important part of their thought structure. In general, when we want to delve into one or another aspect of social consciousness, mythology dictates interesting constructs. Myth is interesting because it is not a theoretical speculation, but, like Uranus (Heaven) and Gaea (Earth), one of the twelve Titans. In addition to the Ti-

Mnemosyne, is the patron of one of the rivers, like Lethe, flowing into Hades. If Lethe is the source of oblivion, Mnemosyne is the source of memory. If the dead souls drink the water of Lethe, the initiated must drink the water of Mnemosyne. Translated into our language, this means that the ancient Greeks saw memory as a necessary condition of social life

tans, science is a type of knowledge tested over centuries that tells us many interesting things about the society that is its bearer. Ancient Greek society is one of the best and most well-researched examples of a successful society. Even if not, similar constructs work in human societies, so, from a certain point of view, myth is also a description of a universal law..... In Greek mythology, Mnemosyne is the goddess of memory, occupying a special place in the pantheon. Consider for yourself that she is the daughter of Hecatoncheirons (horrifying monsters) and the Cyclopes are her siblings. Kronos, the supreme ruler of the ancient world, is her brother. Many scholars today still wonder why the Greeks placed Mnemosyne in such, almost primordial, chaos, although the answer to this question will appear below.

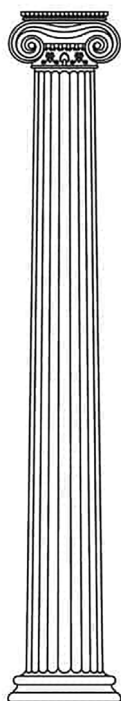
The Titans are ancient gods who were captured by Kronos's son Zeus and banished to Tartarus. Not only did the beautiful Mnemosyne escape the wrath of Zeus, but she remained a highly respected goddess, which is understandable from the point of view of the story: Mnemosyne, having entered into a relationship with Zeus, brought the Nine Muses into the world! Yes,

all nine Muses are the children of Mnemosyne. Even many scholars believe that the Muses rule the various branches of the arts, but this is not the case. In fact, the Muses oversee various aspects of the sacred rituals (collective knowledge) to keep the connection between the gods and humans unbreakable. Here, art does not exist independently of the gods, the artistic branches at that time (and perhaps even now) have no independent value. Their function is to glorify the gods, and this is why the Muses sometimes visit humans to help them serve the gods better. And this will only be possible if humans remember the wisdom already given to them by the gods. Muses are actually sectoral incarnations of Mnemosyne. It is through them that people share collective knowledge, remember, recall, and are reminded.

Why are the Muses the children of Mnemosyne (memory) in particular? There are two possible explanations.

One is a technical explanation: In the oral tradition, memory had special importance. In the absence of writing, only memory can record and transmit knowledge.

But again, any writing is in the service of memory, and so when we speak of the importance of Mnemosyne, it is not primarily to acknowledge the memory skills of an individual, but to acknowledge the importance of collective memory. It is therefore not surprising that Mnemosyne remained exceedingly popular in Greece even after the introduction of writing. Homer's poems begin with a mention of the Muses, and Mnemosyne is constantly called upon by the heroes to testify to the truth of a word or deed, almost as we say today, "According to the Constitution". In a sense, then, Mnemosyne acts as a precedent order in this society, ensuring the stability and per-



manence of the Hellenic way of life. As Hesiod explains, politicians (kings) and poets literally drew inspiration for their inspirational performances from Mnemosyne and the Muses.

That is by no means all.

For the Greeks, collective memory is a phenomenon with magical powers, a necessary condition for social life. Judge for yourself: Mnemosyne is the patron of one of the rivers that flow into Hades, like Lethe. If Lethe is the source of oblivion, Mnemosyne is the source of memory. If the dead drink the water of Lethe, the initiated must drink the water of Mnemosyne. Translated into our language, this means that the ancient Greeks regarded memory as a necessary condition of social life.

As we can see, Mnemosyne quite logically occupies such a prominent place in the Greek pantheon. She appears with the first gods, and it is she who creates society's view of everything – be it the creation of the world, the rules of social relations or any relations between the parts of this social order! Mnemosyne creates language. She makes up all the words, all the rituals and all the myths. If the Greeks knew anything about the world and about themselves, it was because of Mnemosyne.

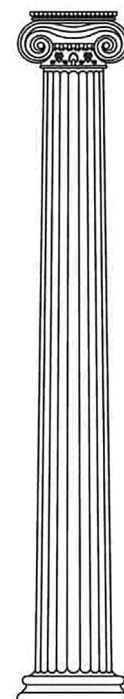
What is a Hellene? – Only Mnemosyne could answer this question. How do the Greeks see the world? – By and large, only Mnemosyne knows this. Collective memory is a kind of mega-ritual, since Mnemosyne contains all mythology, that is, Mnemosyne is the entire world seen through Hellenic eyes. Consequently, collective memory and collective identity for the ancient Greeks are synonymous concepts. However, Mnemosyne, as the source of immortality, not only creates identity, but is a necessary condition for the existence and immortality of this society itself. She is the progenitor of names, the author and preserver of language and of all traditions. Mnemosyne, or collective memory, is itself the self-perception and worldview of the society, or collective identity.

But this was not only so for the ancient Greeks. Collective memory is the identity shaper of any society. Without it, there is neither a cohesive society nor an established nation.

As a rule, individuals have a tendency towards conformism, including cognitive conformism. Therefore, members of a society shape their memories not only through their individual experiences but also through their shared experiences, specifically through the narratives they share with each other. Everyone in a society is a narrator, although there is a functional hierarchy of narrators and they have a decisive influence in shaping the identity of that society. What we say, how we say it, how we perceive it, and how we remember it are crucial processes for identity.

It exists the concept of the dominant narrator, which means both the authoritative narrator and the one who most often shares stories with the members of the community. Dominant narrators play a crucial role in the process of collective memory formation. In ancient Greece these were singers, minstrels, and basileis, while with us they are politicians, journalists, and artists, as well as various popular “influencers” – the gift of the new world. They all have a decisive influence in the process of shaping the identity of a society.

Mnemosyne, or collective memory, is in itself a society's self-perception and worldview, or collective identity.



We often blame history for the division of society – for example, conquests, the colonial past, or low levels of education – but this is only partially right. If a society's history is not constantly disrupted by radically different narratives, an effective collective memory can be formed quickly.

What destroys us is not that we must fight an unequal struggle for independence, but that we do not fight for independence at all. Or we fight occasionally, but always incompetently.

The fact that none of our governments could not or have not fully recognised the problem of “narrators” is having a devastating effect on Georgian society. The fact that everyone is trying to control the media is just an ugly understanding of the problem. Technically, the enemy understands this problem better than anyone else, and that is why the collaborationist government is rigorously following instructions to zombify the public.

Their technical competence is not suitable for us because their goals are radically different from ours. So, what destroys us is not that we must fight an unequal struggle for independence, but that we do not fight for independence at all. Or we fight oc-

asionally, but always incompetently.

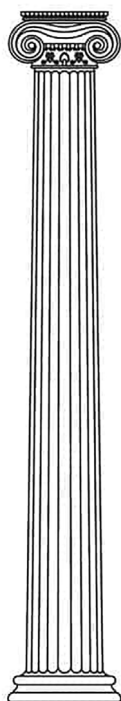
Let us take a look at how the collaborationist authorities are changing the identity of society: In a country where anti-Western rhetoric was completely unthinkable, the enemy of our nation, first by funding a large army of nameless trolls and bots, then by various propaganda or manipulation methods, and now by statements from the authorities, has gradually created a crack that has already turned into an abyss. We are witnessing with our own eyes a well-planned and executed special operation by the competent services aimed at destroying the nation. First they kill the cognitive coherence of society, then they create an army of zombies, then they become the leaders of this army, and as of today they are only one step away from open, mass violence, when islands of national spirit are destroyed by fire and sword in order to turn the entire society into tools of the enemy's narrative.

As for the past, it really destroys us. More precisely, what prevents us from living is the fact that we already “died” in the past and we do not remember it, cannot perceive it. The mental integrity of Georgia has been destroyed and the nation has nothing more than a cognitive unity of society. From this point of view, the Georgian nation as a single organism has been completely destroyed.

The Jews, and to no small extent the Ukrainians, began their revival by reviving their language. They snatched the vanished language out of oblivion, they reversed the waters of Lethe and drank Mnemosyne. They called upon Mnemosyne and began to create new names. And then they began to speak in that language and resurrected.

Some will say that we are not in such a difficult position, we have a language, and we are called a nation, but this is not true. We are in a worse position because we are not aware of the destruction of our bodies, the confusion of our minds, and the severing of a nation from its roots. We admire ourselves like a rootless tree until the first strong wind, we sit like zombies at a set table and only care about who drinks the most. We don't even want to be held accountable for the food on the table. Otherwise, we would know where it comes from, will come from, and is best earned. But no – we are choosing the easy meal, and if this continues to go on this way, our country will soon become the most successful example of a Russian fake – as it really was within the Soviet empire.

If the Jews or Ukrainians had not realised they were dying, they would not have



tried to revive themselves with such energy. And we bury murderers and bandits in the pantheon with the same honours as our sacrificed compatriots... Where did Mnemosyne go? Where has she gone?! Her enemies buried her with the dead! And every time they bury her with the new dead, they put another symbol of national identity into the ground.

A nation whose dominant narrators hide the truth from it cannot revive. We must remember that the authority of the storyteller and the intensity of the narrative is crucial here, which, among many other factors, points to the role of politicians, artists, athletes, media, and any other “agents of influence”. “Art and politics are different things”, “Don’t mix sport with politics”, and similar messages are formulas written right in the Kremlin and aimed at splitting the nation’s cognitive unity. Aimed and achieved! And one must somehow have enough intelligence to see this process clearly, on the one hand, and on the other hand, to be able to bring the truth to the masses.

We must turn on the artificial respiration and point megaphones towards people’s ears. We must make it clear to everyone that our national identity is being savagely destroyed by the enemy, that this is everyone’s problem, and we must become a kind of Prometheus who not only foresees the future but brings fire from heaven and shows people the way to that future.

We may not be revived all at once. But if we look at recent history, we will see that miracles defy time. A single impulse is enough to set off a chain reaction that brings life to all parts of the body as quickly as possible.

The key to such a revival is dominant narrators, storytellers united by a common idea, while shared values are a necessary condition for the life of a nation. Any such focal point that brings these people together will be inscribed in golden letters in the nation’s memory. As this is my first article in New Iveria, I would like to welcome this wonderful initiative and hope that it will become one of these crucial centres that will speak its weighty word in the revival or awakening of the nation. ■





Giorgi Paniashvili

GEORGIA AS SEEN FROM MOSCOW



At a press conference on 18 January, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov summed up the work of Russia's diplomatic service in 2022. Lavrov's summary press conference might not have attracted the attention of the Georgian audience had he not heaped praise on officials in Tbilisi. The long-serving head of Russian diplomacy praised the Georgian government's continued resistance to Western pressure and did not rule out the resumption of suspended flights between Russia and Georgia. He cited Georgia's double-digit economic growth as a counterweight to its refusal to join Western sanctions and reminded Tbilisi of Russia's significant contribution to this growth.

Lavrov's praise stirred up very contradictory feelings in Georgia and caused some resentment. Russia's endorsement of Tbilisi's more "restrained" policy did not go unnoticed not only in the Ukrainian capital but also in other Western capitals.

Both the content and the context of Lavrov's statement are indeed noteworthy, provide something to consider, and may serve as a new alarming starting point for the international positioning of Georgia and Russian-Georgian relations.

International Context

Had Lavrov made his comments before the war in Ukraine, a part of both Georgian and international society would have rather seen in his praising messages signs of normalisation of bilateral relations and there would have been fewer reasons for discontent. However, the year in which Lavrov spoke about Georgia was characterised by a terrible war in Ukraine and a battle with fire and sword against everything Western. Since February 2022, the overwhelming majority of Georgia's international partners have restricted all cooperation with Russia – air, sea and land links have been suspended, 10 packages of tough sanctions against Russia have been imposed, and Kremlin-linked assets have been seized.

NATO and EU countries are helping Ukraine repel the Russian invasion, and in this common ordeal they more united than ever since the Cold War. In addition, Russia has been recognised as a terrorist state or as a state supporting terrorism by such old and good friends of Georgia as Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. There are growing international calls for the criminal activities of Vladimir Putin and his government to be brought before an international tribunal.

A few words about the economy

According to the latest Geostat data, Georgia actually recorded double-digit economic growth in 2022. Trade turnover between Georgia and Russia has also increased. However, the more significant contribution to this double-digit economic growth came from Russian citizens fleeing the policies of Lavrov and his colleagues, not from Putin's Russia itself. It was the influx of tens of thousands of Russian citizens fleeing European sanctions, Putin's restrictions and mobilisation that caused the temporary economic recovery. Lavrov did not mention this in his speech, but when we speak about double-digit economic growth, we should not forget about the double-digit rise in prices that have largely absorbed this economic growth, and a large part of the Georgian population, including students, have suffered.

Nuances

It is noteworthy that a representative of Alt-Info had the opportunity to ask the main question at the final annual press conference of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia. It is no secret that this is a strongly pro-Russian media group, actively pursuing a campaign of hatred against ethnic and sexual minorities, as well as the West, with its information policy. The Alt-Info group was involved in the mass riots of 5 July 2021, during which dozens of journalists and human rights activists were seriously injured.

The very fact that Alt-Info was given such an opportunity speaks volumes. Giving the stage to Alt-Info gives us an idea of what forces Moscow relies on and cooperates with in Georgia, what forces are closer, understandable, and acceptable to it. Co-operation with groups like Alt-Info indicates that Moscow is interested in encouraging violence and oppression of minorities in Georgia, as well as in inciting hatred, i.e. everything that undermines fragile statehood, civil accord, and peace.

Other no less important details of the content of the statement

The part of Lavrov's commentary that was covered in Georgia concerned the possible restoration of flights and the endorsement of the government's courage not to join Western sanctions. However, in his extended commentary, the Russian diplomat touched on another, no less important topic – the “immoral, perverted culture and values” coming from the West.

Speaking on this topic, Lavrov noted that the Russian and Georgian Orthodox Churches were doing invaluable work in defence of traditional values and culture. He expressed profound respect for the Georgian Orthodox Church and highlighted its special contribution to the defence of traditional values.

Summarising thoughts and food for reflection

Considering the abovementioned factors, it does not require deep analysis to say that Lavrov's comment was untimely and inappropriate for Georgia's foreign policy positioning, and therefore harmful.

In the circle of Georgia's old, good friends, of course, these actions of Lavrov caused nothing but disappointment and distrust. Praise coming from a country that most of Georgia's friends consider to be a terrorist state and another part consider to be a suspect in war crimes only further undermines Georgia's already shaken international reputation. The restoration of air traffic is comparable. While the EU and NATO coun-

tries have stopped air traffic with Russia, the resumption of flights with Tbilisi would also be untimely and inappropriate.

It is clear from Sergei Lavrov's comments that for some reason Moscow sees the Georgian Orthodox Church as its most important and respected ally in the fight against Georgia's anti-Western values. Actually, this should be the most shameful and unacceptable praise for the majority of Georgian society, as well as for the Church itself. It seems that praise from Moscow is a means of seeking a stronger alliance with the Georgian Church, knowing that it has considerable influence on Georgian political life.

The Church can indeed play one of the main roles in achieving civil harmony in Georgia, which to a lesser extent represents Russia's interests. That is why Moscow is trying, by establishing and strengthening very dubious ties, to finally deprive the Church of this role and put it at the service of only one group, even if it is the largest and most dominant one in society.

It is clear that everyone is avoiding an open discussion on this topic, but the fact that the terrorist Russian regime, which has been involved in genocide and crimes against humanity, sees the Georgian Church as a highly respected ally should serve as a reason for serious reflection, including in the Church itself.

Against the backdrop of this praise and the ongoing fierce fighting in Ukraine, it is clear that Russia will have less need for a government in Tbilisi that simply favours warming relations and increasing trade. It needs a stronger foothold in Georgia that will be tougher, harder, and more ruthless against anything Western.

Lavrov's statement also suggests that Moscow will actively seek allies in its immediate neighbourhood and will certainly not give up on a stronger "alliance" with Georgia.

As a result, these songs of praise of Georgia are expected to be followed by increased pressure on Georgia's ruling political power, which has been repeatedly observed flirting with Russia, in order for it to better adapt to the new situation and Moscow's worldview in the context of a civilisational or existential conflict with the West.

Thus, both these praises and their overt or covert self-glorification of the government carry great risks and dangers for Georgia. ■





Davit Zedelashvili

Homecoming of New Masters

About the Public Pillars of the Illiberal Regime

In the indefinite future, a masterpiece of fiction in the Georgian language may be created that critically describes Georgian society in 2012 and the subsequent period of the democratic transfer of power to the Georgian Dream, strengthening of its political regime, and consolidation of social order. However, even if such a text is never written, its place will be boldly taken by the novel Baron Wenckheim's Homecoming by the famous contemporary Hungarian author László Krasznahorkai published just a few years ago (translated from the Hungarian by Otilie Mulzet, 2019).

"Baron", as the author refers to the book, is the third part of a trilogy; the previous two books, *Satantango* (translated from the Hungarian by George Szirtes) and *The Melancholy of Resistance* (translated from the Hungarian by George Szirtes) had already received international acclaim by the end of the 20th century. According to the author himself, he wanted to write only one book, which eventually became a trilogy, in the final part of which he fully conveyed what he had to say.

We cannot and will not engage in an in-depth analysis of Krasznahorkai's still-in-progress literary legacy, but the trilogy culminating in *Baron* includes, along with many literary virtues (the analysis of which literary scholars will be engaged in for a long time to come), outstanding examples of political and social commentary.

Krasznahorkai's trilogy takes place in fictional towns of Hungary, places forgotten by both God and man, where more than just material destruction, but also the destruction and collapse of society, is noticeable. Whereas in the first two novels of the trilogy, *Satantango* and *The Melancholy of Resistance*, the almost surreal characters of a crumbling social fabric diluted by the acidic shroud of Krasznahorkai's black irony miraculously find themselves in a new order, the finale changes form in *The Return of the Baron* where a catastrophe occurs and a morally degraded society is physically destroyed.

The first two novels of the trilogy, especially *The Melancholy of Resistance*, feature an apocalyptic aura of the end times. The reader gradually realizes the complete absurdity and comicality of this feeling. The announced end times will never materialize. Even the characters, who entertain the reader with their chaotic fuss and are some-

times deserving of empathy, unwittingly find themselves in a new social order, a new “normality” into which they suddenly fit organically.

The *Melancholy of Resistance* can be read as a radical critique of recent religious, secular, and, in particular, political uses of different versions of the philosophy of history. The end of times is endlessly postponed, and the closer it seems, the faster it slips away. Krasznahorkai's characters, who perceive the chaos of a collapsed social fabric as the last times, struggle with history and time. In this struggle they do not take history into their own hands, but neither do they become puppets in the hands of it.

In the indefinite future, a masterpiece of fiction in the Georgian language may be created that critically describes Georgian society in 2012 and the subsequent period of the democratic transfer of power to the Georgian Dream, strengthening of its political regime, and consolidation of social order. However, even if such a text is never written, its place will be boldly taken by the novel *Baron Wenckheim's Homecoming* by the famous contemporary Hungarian author László Krasznahorkai published just a few years ago.

Accordingly, in *The Melancholy of Resistance*, Krasznahorkai shows the possibility of human freedom. Despite the fragility of the social order, which has to be created and maintained over and over again, an individual can create and maintain this order without becoming a puppet of history and can transform himself into the subject by his own action.

The Melancholy of Resistance shows the possibility of freedom for “little men” in a society constantly under the threat of collapse. This is an important development since *Satantango*, where the people trapped on the collective farms of communist Hungary are tempted to choose a messiah from their ranks and attach to him the hope of establishing a new society. This hope turns out to be false, the Messiah turns out to be a fraud, although the revelation of this still does not cause a collapse.

Accordingly, *The Melancholy of Resistance* brings a kind of spark of hope to the “little men” disillusioned with the Messiah, showing that even the “little men” can become subjects, fight against history, and find freedom in the social order that is inevitably created, if they decide to take responsibility for their subjectivity and actions and to show initiative.

Baron's Homecoming returns the motif of the Messiah to the disintegrating society of a provincial Hungarian border town. As in the previous two novels of the trilogy, the disintegration of society is shown here by strange events: a famous professor goes insane, sells everything, and builds a hut not far from the town, in an area overrun by thorn bushes. His unacknowledged son visits the professor in the hut, accompanied by journalists, and asks his father to acknowledge him as his son. To get rid of the uninvited guests, the professor fires a shotgun into the air.

After the incident with the gun, the story of the professor's disorder spreads through the town. The professor's former housekeeper, Aunt Ibolika, becomes upset and comes to the old master's hut, serving her famous pie. Aunt Ibolika tells the professor that she will never leave him, because in her family it has always been the rule: if you serve someone, you serve him for all your life.

However, Aunt Ibolika has an important story to tell the professor. She informs the

former landlord that things will soon be different, that Baron Wenckheim, from an aristocratic family that once ruled the town, is returning home from Argentina. Aunt Ibolika remembers the Baron and his family, she and her family served them long ago, during “the old good times”.

But now that the Baron is on his way, Aunt Ibolika also believes what the whole town is already saying: that things will be different with the Baron’s return. The fever of the Baron’s return, the new lord of old, is gripping the whole town.

Residents of this small town are not the only one feeling nostalgic for their old overlords. On the train to Budapest, Baron Béla Wenckheim, the novel’s protagonist, must listen to the conductor expressing his longing for the Hungarian communist dictator János Kádár:

“Things were different in Kádár’s time. Kádár provided everyone with work, bread, and housing.”

No, the conductor doesn’t want to go back to Kádár’s time, he just wants to continue the life he had. A life where everything was always in short supply and somehow everyone got by.

In anticipation of the Baron, his little town is gripped by a general fever. Everyone is waiting for the appearance of the Baron’s unheard-of wealth in this forgotten town whose only function is to receive tourists and those tourists have long abandoned it. The employees of the travel agency, who are out of work, are the clearest example of the disintegration of the town’s society.

However, only one of these employees, young Dora, who is caring for her ailing father, has retained any sanity. The flabbergasted Dora tells her father that the townspeople are so confident in the Baron’s abilities that they are already spending the Baron’s money – the large pile of money they think the Baron will bring. At the dinner table, Dora breaks into bitter laughter, “Do you believe that, Father?” They have already spent the Baron’s money before he has even arrived.”

Now, against the background of the immoral policy of the illiberal regimes of Hungary and Georgia, tolerated by their own people, the words of the anonymous author of the letter sound alarming: “...it is impossible to imagine a more indifferent people than the Hungarians. It so happened that next to them, 20-30 kilometres from the border, a terrible war was going on and they continued to live happily...”

No one in the town even questions what the Baron will do with his countless wealth – of course, he will give it away! Why else would he come back? Believing that the Baron is about to distribute his wealth, everyone prepares to become the chief vizier at the Baron’s court, so that the Baron will spend his vast fortune according to their plan. The Mayor and the Chief of Police, the nominal and real rulers of the city, are all waiting for this.

The Mayor is preparing the entire town to welcome the Baron. The Baron’s arrival will put an end to both the failed experiment with democracy and the chaos it has created, at least that’s what the town head, himself a democratically elected official, thinks. The Mayor develops a programme to welcome the Baron – he evicts the orphans from the Wenckheim family château, now an orphanage, in order to beautify it for the Baron’s arrival. Moreover, in agreement with the chief of police, the only busi-

ness operating in the town – a chain of slot machines run by the town management – is temporarily shut down.

The reason for this is that the Baron's penchant for gambling is known even in his hometown. However, they do not know the true reasons for the Baron's return. The town does not know that the Baron sacrificed his entire family fortune for his love of casinos and almost lost his freedom. Béla Wenckheim's wealthy Austrian relatives bail him out of his debts in Argentina and set strict conditions that he should live in such a way that his Argentine adventures would never tarnish the Wenckheim name.

The Baron agreed to his relatives' terms and travelled to his hometown in Hungary with a train ticket bought by them. Baron Wenckheim, whose bags of money the whole town is waiting for, has nothing but a few hundred euros given by his relatives for the trip and a wardrobe made by them distributed throughout several suitcases.

Bela Wenckheim's only reason for returning to his hometown is to see his childhood love Marika and renew his relationship with her. He even sends her a touching letter from the road, turning Marika's dreary old age upside down. The Baron doesn't understand what the owner of a temporarily closed slot business, who has imposed himself on him as his train companion and offers himself as his personal secretary, wants from him. Even more puzzling is the pompous ceremony at the station where the whole town gathers to welcome him.

Illiberal regimes cannot exist without such social footing. Their fodder is the people's choice to live in systemic lies, and they will exist until the people topple down the tower of lies they themselves have created.

The Baron loses his meaning of life when he meets Marika, and instead of the image of his childhood sweetheart that he imagined in his fantasies, he sees a dying old pensioner just like himself. The distraught Baron decides to commit suicide and runs to the railway tracks, but on the tracks, he changes his mind and decides to return. Due to the force of the black irony inherent to Krasznahorkai, the Baron is hit by a belated locomotive in need of repair and killed.

The shock of the Baron's death is followed by the realisation of those waiting to spend his fortune that his wealth had never existed. Moreover, they do not even find the few hundred euros that the Baron's relatives gave him as travelling money.

The death of the Baron brings the process of the town's collapse into an irreversible phase. Suddenly an apocalyptic situation arises. The editor of the town's main newspaper receives an anonymous letter that claims to be a kind of moral mirror not only for the town's society, but also for the entire Hungarian nation. The letter, whose style is reminiscent of that of Thomas Bernhard, pours out a torrent of perpetual rebuke, showing the moral degradation of the city and Hungarian society as a whole.

The author of the letter calls the Hungarians the most hated nation in the world and asks the Hungarian gene to cease existing and reproducing. From this continuous stream of curses comes the most scandalous sentence of the novel: "Being Hungarian is not belonging to a nation, but a disease, an incurable, terrible disease, a calamity of epidemic proportions.

“They are all slaves to some extent, for slavish obedience is one of the deepest elements of the vile Hungarian soul,” writes the anonymous author, leaving open no question as to why the town should be destroyed, just as it is in the book finale.

The counterbalance to slavish submission is contempt for all that is genuinely great and a desire to destroy the truly great at the first opportunity. The manifestation of contempt for truth is also the pillar of the submissive spirit – the lies and deceit. The author of the letter considers these two to be the only “values” of the Hungarians: “They know how to lie in two directions at the same time, on the one hand, outwardly, to others, and on the other hand, inwardly, to themselves.”

Present-day Hungary, like Georgia, is an illiberal socio-political regime for this very reason. Their people do not adapt to systemic lying but consider it organic and natural. Everyone lies, both those in power and their servants. Everyone deceives each other and themselves – they lie and deceive themselves that they elect authorities democratically; they lie and deceive themselves that they are free and their rights are protected; they lie and deceive themselves that the authorities are bound by law and safeguard the rule of law.

Moreover, this systemic lie machine is a self-sufficient and self-reproducing regime that basks in its own bubble. The regime has this quality because self-deception works well in another respect as well – it is not entirely indifferent to the joys and sufferings of others.

Now, against the background of the immoral policy of the illiberal regimes of Hungary and Georgia, tolerated by their own people, the words of the anonymous author of the letter sound alarming: “...it is impossible to imagine a more indifferent people than the Hungarians. It so happened that next to them, 20-30 kilometres from the border, a terrible war was going on and they continued to live happily...”

Baron Wenckheim’s Homecoming shows the moral decay of society, preparing to kneel to its master. As unacceptable as it may be to the liberal mind, a slave spirit can be formed voluntarily. Illiberal regimes cannot exist without such social footing. Their fodder is the people’s choice to live in a systemic lie, and they will exist until the people topple down the tower of lies they themselves have created. ■



Giorgi Kharebava



NUCLEAR BLACKMAIL THAT HAS EXPIRED

For more than 20 years, Putin has been fighting the West, subjecting the entire civilised world to nuclear blackmail and telling his citizens myths about the great Russian superpower. It took the collective West a long time to adequately assess and act decisively against Russia's megalomaniacal leader obsessed with neo-imperialist ambitions, but as the saying goes, better late than never. Thanks to Russia's impressive arsenal of weapons of mass destruction and abundant natural resources, Putin got away with a lot of cruelty, evil, and crimes and by 24 February 2022 the criminal at the head of the Kremlin had become so arrogant that he even acted to wipe Europe's largest sovereign state off the map. Here Putin, confident in his brilliant strategic mind, made a mistake.

He made his first mistake when he ordered his 200,000-strong army to launch an offensive across a battle front of several thousand kilometres and to seize the main cities of Ukraine, including the capital, Kyiv. It is highly likely that at least some Russian military officials were well aware of the folly of this operation, but how could they have expressed an opinion that contradicted the very wise Putin? It is so tricky to point out mistakes and miscalculations to the one who is always right!

Putin's second mistake was political in nature. He failed to calculate that, after such brazenness, Europe would easily and quickly give up on his gas and oil, Western companies would leave Russia, the continuation of economic relations with Russia as usual would become reprehensible all over the world, and the Kremlin regime would be severely isolated internationally.

When Russia was confronted with a united and strong Western position, and when things did not go well on the battlefield thanks to the sacrifices of Ukrainian heroes, the "master strategist" resorted to the familiar and well-tested nuclear blackmail, although, as it turned out, the West had had enough of Putin's whining, and the dictator's ploy did not work. Despite nuclear threats from Russian officials and Kremlin propagandists, the West increased its military aid to Ukraine month after month, starting with anti-tank weapons and continuing with tanks and anti-missiles by the end of the first year of the war. Russian threats were no longer taken seriously in Western capitals.

There are still propagandists in Russia and around the world, funded by Moscow's blood money, who wish it were otherwise, but the fact remains that the time is over when the nuclear blackmail in Putin's arsenal worked. Russia will not be able to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine because the headache caused by such a move would be far greater and more devastating than the potential benefits. Everyone around understands this – Ukraine understands it, Western capitals understand it, and most importantly, the Kremlin itself understands perfectly well that nuclear blackmail will no longer work, and the use of nuclear weapons would be tantamount to suicide.

If you want to survive in the international system, you need allies, and for allies to appear, you need to have common interests respected by all stakeholders. Today, Russia can have common interests with only a few solid players. First of all, China and Iran, then India and North Korea, which is not a very powerful state, but reportedly supplies the Russians' much-diminished military arsenal with artillery shells.

Probably no one would assert that these countries have taken a vow of selfless marriage with Russia and will support it with great enthusiasm both for better and for worse. Obviously, some are guided by economic interests, some need Russia's help to develop their own military industries, and some are trying to enlist the Kremlin's support in future strategic confrontations. In short, these countries need concrete benefits from Russia, and Russia's use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine would minimise them and only create problems.

Western countries have repeatedly confirmed that the use of nuclear weapons against Ukraine would result in catastrophic consequences for Russia. The decisions taken in the US and in the capitals of its allies over the past year convince us that the West is not joking and is ready to take the toughest steps. So, there are virtually no question marks here. It would be interesting to see the possible reaction of those countries that today consider Russia a partner or simply continue normal business relations with it.

It is not hard to guess the reaction of Iran, which acted as Russia's saviour during the crisis and urgently supplied Shaheed-type kamikaze drones to Russia. Ties with Moscow may be highly valued in Tehran, but even for them, Russia's use of nuclear weapons would be a red line. No one has ever used nuclear weapons to gain an advantage in a military conflict since World War II. Since such weapons have been used, the international system has had a status quo of non-use of nuclear weapons, the violation of which is not in the interest of any major power. The use of nuclear weapons to win a war would set a disastrous precedent for international security that would cause irreparable damage to the security of countries like Iran. Despite its efforts, Iran is not yet a nuclear power, unlike the United States and most importantly Israel, which perceives Iran as an existential threat. Russia's use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine would make the threat of a US or Israeli nuclear strike on Iran very real. For the record, frequent US and Israeli air strikes have recently resulted in the death of a high-ranking Iranian military official. Given this reality, Iran's top priority in the war in Ukraine is to prevent Russia from using nuclear weapons.

The use of nuclear weapons on Ukrainian territory is also a red line for China, which considers itself a major competitor to the United States and has ambitions to become a global superpower. Despite its rapid development, China still has a long way to go before it gets there, so it must continue to invest in conventional weapons and at least quadruple its rather modest arsenal of weapons of mass destruction. Decisions in Beijing are made by rational people who are not characterised by the complexes inherent



in Putin, so China has been moving thoughtfully, carefully, and systematically towards its great goal for many years. For Beijing, it is obvious that when China begins to build up its nuclear arsenal, the US and its allies will receive a serious response. The Chinese rulers intend to take this step only when the country is ready to withstand massive international pressure. In such circumstances, setting a precedent for Russia's use of nuclear weapons in hostilities would overturn China's longstanding plans. This makes the risks of using nuclear weapons in future conflicts real, and China has only up to 350 warheads, while its main rival, the United States, has more than 3,700 warheads. Whether the precedent of using nuclear weapons in a military conflict is in China's interest given this disparity is for Moscow to judge. The same can be said of India, which, while cherishing its economic ties with Russia, attaches immense importance to the fact that the use of nuclear weapons would undermine the security of India, which is at odds with Pakistan.

A nuclear strike on Ukraine would also disturb the sleep of the North Korean leader, whose warheads can be counted on the fingers of one hand and would be of little use in the event of a nuclear war. Moreover, the use of nuclear weapons would inflict such irreparable damage to nuclear non-proliferation that dozens of countries would begin working on weapons of mass destruction themselves. Among them are likely to be Japan and South Korea, with whom an impoverished North Korea has no chance of competing.

The international system is based on the interests of big countries, and in the current system the use of nuclear weapons by anyone is not in the interests of either big, regional, or small countries. If Russia goes against everyone, it will find itself in complete and final isolation. Putin will be the man who will unite the Western democracies, the Iranian theocracy, and the Communist regimes in one camp, the purpose of which will be the exemplary punishment of the international bandit who dared to go against the system's written and unwritten rules of conduct.

The use of nuclear weapons, even small tactical bombs, by Putin will ensure a catastrophic defeat of Russia in Ukraine. An obsessed Putin will put the world to a choice: either punish the criminal in an exemplary manner or continue to exist in an uncertain, dangerous, and self-destructive world. The choice is simple: no one is going to jeopardise their own security for the sake of Russia's maniacal ambitions. ■





Irina Mamulashvili

GEORGIA'S EUROPEAN WAY

The European Council took a historic decision on 24 June 2022. It granted Ukraine and Moldova European Union Candidate Status and Georgia the European Perspective. This means that the country will receive candidate status only after it fulfils 12 recommendations set by the EU. Among these priorities are the elimination of polarisation, improvement of the electoral system, judicial reform, fight against corruption, de-oligarchisation, fight against organised crime, ensuring media freedom, protection of the rights of vulnerable groups, promotion of gender equality, enhancing civil society participation, protection of human rights, and election of an independent public defender.

The year of 2023 will be a turning point in the EU-Georgia relationship, as a decision will be made at the end of this year on whether the country will be granted EU Candidate Status. Such a window of opportunity is rare, as it usually opens only because of significant geopolitical shifts. It was Russia's large-scale attack on Ukraine and the terrible consequences that followed that forced a rethinking of security issues in the EU and made the issue of its eastward enlargement relevant. For Georgia, this is a crucial opportunity for becoming part of the EU enlargement process, a goal it has waited for so long and travelled such a long way to achieve.

For hundreds of years, Georgia has been an arena for clashes and conflicts between empires and cultures. This was largely due to its geographical location at the crossroads of two worlds – East and West – which gave it cultural richness, a strategic position for trade and unique opportunities for transit. Its location at the crossroads of Europe and Asia made it a battleground for the influence of various states. However, European values were so deeply rooted in Georgia that this identity and sense of belonging to the Western world never faded.

Christianity played a significant role in the formation of Georgia's European identity. However, at the same time, it was Orthodoxy that proved to be the decisive factor, which, against the background of the attacks of Islamic countries, showed the then

rulers of the country a need to strengthen Georgia's ties with Russia, thus alienating it from Europe. During Georgia's brief period of independence in 1917-1921, the notion of a "return to Europe" emerged. However, Russia's conquest of Georgia isolated the country and separated it from Europe for many decades.

Since the restoration of independence, despite foreign policy fluctuations and internal turmoil, Georgia has expressed its desire to join Euro-Atlantic structures. This process became evident when Georgia joined the Council of Europe in 1999. It was here that Zurab Zhvania made his historic speech: "I am a Georgian, therefore I am a European".

The process of Georgia's integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions intensified further after the 2003 Rose Revolution, when a period of economic and political reforms began and the country's accession to the European Union and NATO was named among the main priorities of its foreign policy. In addition to intensified efforts towards European integration, attention was paid to the dissemination of EU symbols throughout the country, such as the use of EU flags, which were often placed next to the Georgian flag, aimed at strengthening the sense of belonging to Europe in Georgian society.

Shortly after the Rose Revolution, significant changes took place on the European continent. The European Union began to expand on its eastern flank in 2004 and 2007, reducing the borders between Georgia and the EU countries and extending the EU to the Black Sea. These developments had a significant impact on Georgia-EU relations, as the country became part of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Although this framework of relations did not involve ambitious proposals to Georgia, the issue was important in terms of recognition of the country. In particular, ENP membership gave Georgia, which had previously been perceived as a 'post-Soviet' country, the status of being a European neighbour.

In 2008, during Russia's military attack on Georgia, Europe's role in the negotiations became distinct. The then French President Nicolas Sarkozy brokered a ceasefire between the two countries. The August War caused a major stir in the European Union over security and Russia's enhanced role. It was after the war, in 2009, that the foundation was laid for the creation of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative, aimed at deepening co-operation in various fields between the European Union and six countries – Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

The following years proved to be even more important for the development of Georgia-EU relations. In 2014, Georgia signed the Association Agreement (AA), which included a component of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) bringing the co-operation between the parties to a completely new level. This had both symbolic, political, and economic significance. The agreement is a roadmap for the modernization of the economy, with extensive commitments to EU regulatory norms and standards, while creating broad institutional links in the economic, intergovernmental, social, information, and civil society sectors. The year 2017 was particularly significant in terms of co-operation between the European Union and Georgia, as Georgian citizens were granted the opportunity to visit the EU Member States visa-free.

Despite considerable progress in relations between Georgia and the European Union, democratic backsliding in the country and a delay in the process of integration into Euro-Atlantic structures have become clearly visible in recent years. Western partners have recently pointed to the actions of the ruling party and the decline of de-



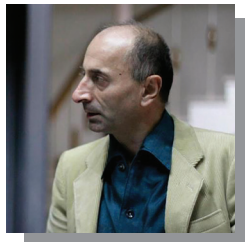
mocracy in the country. One of the main subjects of criticism directed at the Georgian government is the independence of the judiciary. In addition to this problem, the disruption by the ruling party of the 19 April Agreement by European Council President Charles Michel aimed at overcoming the country's political crisis and implementing reforms was alarming. These challenges include pressure on the media and restrictions on freedom, attempts to discredit civil society, deterioration of the human rights situation, and other critical issues directly affecting the country's democracy index. These factors led to the fact that the country was given a "perspective" rather than the status of a Candidate.

It should be noted that despite the deteriorating democracy, in the long history of integration with Europe, Georgia has never been as close to the goal as it is now. However, on the part of the country's government, instead of actively working on the 12 priorities, we see actions that deliberately hinder the democratic development of the country. A vivid example of such actions is the "Law on Agents of Foreign Influence" initiated by the members of the parliamentary majority. The attempt to pass the draft as a law has once again clearly demonstrated that the Georgian Dream government is deliberately taking such destructive steps to suppress critical voices, discredit the civil and media sectors, and prevent their activities. The country's democratic backsliding, delayed integration with Europe, and the activation of anti-Western narratives will lead the country to dangerous consequences, because if Georgia misses the chance to be part of this wave of the EU enlargement, Russian influence will increase, the transition to autocratic rails will become inevitable, and the country will find itself in isolation.

In addition, the unity of Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova in the process of integration with the European Union has been fundamentally important for each country for many years. The three countries are regarded as the "Associated Trio", which have progressed more or less equally in terms of rapprochement with European structures. Taking this into account, if the Georgian government fails to fulfil the 12 criteria properly and misses the opportunity to become a candidate state to the European Union, we will see the collapse of the trio format. This will force Georgia to distance itself from Ukraine and Moldova, and most importantly, it will indefinitely postpone the consideration of the country's membership in the EU.

History and the staunch support of the Georgian people made it clear that for Georgia, integration with Europe was never just a question of security and economic prosperity, but most importantly a question of cultural norms and values that aligned the country with the European states. This common identity was the foundation that kept the country on the European path despite multicultural influences. Georgia now has a historic and unique opportunity to realise its European identity, to bring to a logical conclusion the centuries-long efforts and path, and to become part of the European Union. ■





Davit Bukhrikidze

FORGET ABOUT SMOOTH SAILING

Let us start from afar, to return peacefully to this unfortunate present, that is, home. Sure, do we want war?!

Even before the pandemic, in 2018, when the contours of political chaos or dictatorship seemed faded or pastel to our fellow citizens, the Soviet intelligentsia (or rather, a few of its representatives), mixed with the culture of new times, wrote a letter addressed to the diplomatic corps and international organisations accredited in Georgia. The main idea of this letter was that Georgia's pro-Western policy and its goal to become a NATO member created challenges and big problems for the country in its relations with Russia; that in the Soviet reality Georgia was a republic with the most powerful economy, its people were rich and its population was 5.5 million. But pro-western policy and aspiration of Georgians to NATO military alliance "complicated Georgia's relations with neighbouring Russia, which led to a violation of the territorial integrity of Georgia. This created socio-economic problems and hindered the development of the country. People became impoverished and the population fell below 4 million."

The following passage and "concern" about the fate of the country refers to the consequences of the August 2008 war: "There is a great disappointment among the majority of the population that the risks will increase and the rest of the country will be threatened with a military conflict, and in such a case what kind of help can we count on, we already have the experience of the 2008 war. Membership in the military union attracted the Georgian population primarily because of the illusion of security guarantees, and if these guarantees do not apply to Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region, then what benefits can this membership bring to the people and the state?"

Strangely enough, in 2023, five years after the letter or statement was written, these intonations of Robiko-Dolidze-Javelidze-Amashukeli (they represented the main "striking force" of the signatories) are perceived much sharper, mockingly and prophetically in today's political context. In fact, all these years anti-Western propa-

ganda and scepticism have been based on pseudo-authoritative names and the artistic elite of the Soviet Union.

It can be said that the freedom of this elite, which had not been flushed away, was fully restored immediately after the Georgian Dream came to power, through synchronised, anti-Western and smooth sailing alongside it, for which from time to time it received awards and instructions from Sololaki's "glass palace".

Given the current, already clearly stated anti-Western policy of the ruling party, the appeal to the ambassadors written in 2018 only creates a gestalt unity of the present day and a cultural policy that also opposes Georgia's declared Euro-Atlantic direction. However, has this vector really had a Western course all this time? Was it ever considered by "the Dream" as a serious part of the state policy? The chronology of time clearly shows that at the first stage temporary games with pro-Western forces were just a simulacrum for the Georgian Dream. Later, in parallel with pseudo-patriotic appeals, the settling of politics with Russia begins, in which the reanimated intelligentsia provides it with the necessary partnership, and such trifles as the explosion of Sakdrisi, the propaganda hysteria around the David-Gareji complex and the arrest of two innocent people, or the complete collapse of restoration works in Gelati, do not interfere with the harmonious relations between the culture and the state.

In fact, with its arrival and establishment, the Dream revived the Shevardnadze-era intelligentsia, which until 2012 felt insulted and humiliated. Ivanishvili, with his differentiated feeders, gave the reanimated intelligentsia another chance after the Communist regime (remember the sacred phrase of Guranda Gabunia – "And then God tossed Bidzina upon us"). Even though the intelligentsia, already aged and having often only a decorative function, always did what "Father" wanted, it was necessary to replace it with a new generation of cultural figures.

Well, in culture there was the apparition of a new minister of the late Dream era, Tea Tsulukiani, with state security cadres from the Ministry of Justice, whom she made into her deputies. If anything was still in a critical or troubling phase of existence, Tsulukiani turned it all into impressive ruins – from the sacking of the director of the cinema centre, to the dismissal of professionals from the National Gallery or museums. The criminal process of Gelati's restoration is the subject of a separate conversation which we will not touch upon here.

Meanwhile, a new generation of intellectuals and artists has already formed, although it could not as yet become a subject of influence because it remained isolated, elusive, renegade and ideologically fragmented. There was no point in the authorities flirting with it, since the new generation of artists educated in the West was already apostate or critical of them. This distance and alienation certainly posed a certain problem, but not so dramatic that the new generation would have a radical influence on the authorities.

The 30-year experience of Georgia's independence could not be a reason for the reflection of the Georgian Dream, because cultural policy (like any other sphere) presupposes, first of all, foresight, the development of a strategy, the creation of space for reflection, the rapprochement of different areas of thought, and a policy of co-

The chronology of time clearly shows that at the first stage temporary games with pro-Western forces were just a simulacrum for the Georgian Dream.

operation with Western organisations. All this is out of the question in the hands of groups with odious clan influence, which give it power, at least formally.

Groups of artists tamed or directly bribed by the authorities, who are still called intelligentsia for politeness, live in their own autonomous mode, and are directly tied to the favour of the state budget. Such intelligentsia cannot oppose either cultural policy or a law fabricated specifically for the purpose of exposing “agents”.

Most of the diligent and meek intellectuals are still busy with their quiet lives, smooth sailing guaranteed first by billionaire money and then by the impenetrable breakwaters of Tsulukiani’s Ministry.

This space is closed to non-Robikos¹, foreigners, youth, and reformers. It will be even more closed if “agents of foreign influence” are identified legally, by decision of the legislature. Especially since there are plenty of examples of this in history: writers, directors, artists, conductors, and actors who were shot, exiled, betrayed, expelled, and labelled “children of enemies”...

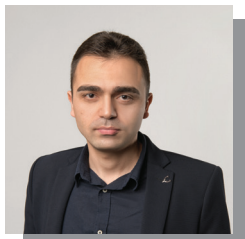
If we want peace, if we choose development, we must prepare ourselves for a long and exhausting struggle and leave behind the stormy lessons of smooth sailing.

Not only the cultural and intellectual part of the Georgian society, but the civil society as a whole, in fact, has come face-to-face with the recklessness of the Georgian Dream. We are still in the phase when the government conflicts with the critically thinking public, but not fatally so. Therefore, it is the government’s duty to explain to the citizens who wish to see a Western development and future,

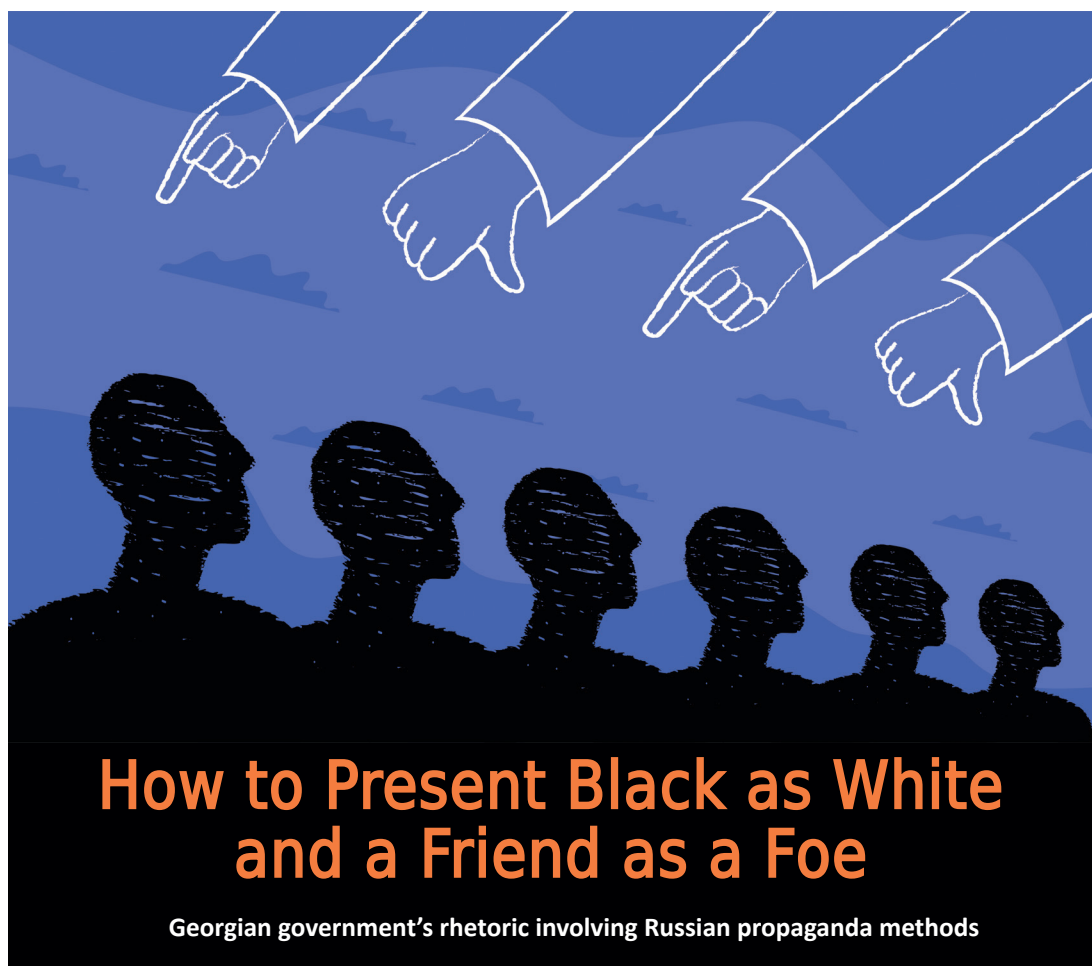
why this harmful and absurd law is geopolitically a part of the Russian world and an echo of its existence.

If we want peace, if we choose development, we must prepare ourselves for a long and exhausting struggle and leave behind the stormy lessons of smooth sailing. To have decent and proper cultural institutions, we must first elect a decent government, decent legislators, and have an independent judiciary. Remember the myth that the previous government was breeding a new breed of Georgians? Therefore, full consolidation and action is necessary to prevent the Ivanishvili government from raising a new breed of Soso Pavliashvili, Keta Topuria , and others out of us today. ■

1. Robert (Robiko) Sturua, a renowned theatre director notorious for his anti-Western stance.



Davit Kutidze



Georgia exists in a reality in which one neighbouring state commits brutal crimes against it and other countries: killing civilians, seizing territories, trying to destroy the aspirations of free societies to prosperity and turn them into a space of its influence. However, to cover up its own evil, it denies the accusations against it and attributes them to the stupidity of others, blames other countries and in general tries to present such behaviour as “liberation of the people”. Moreover, over the years it has purposefully refined the ways of deceiving the public to present to us the black colour as white and to make itself known as a desirable ally. It is not difficult to realise that this state is the Russian Federation, and that the refined strategy of passing off black as white is its propaganda.

According to propaganda researchers, the Russian Federation uses information, culture, and money as weapons for killing reasoned debate in a society. The effect of Russian propaganda is not to convince anyone or gain credibility, but to sow confusion and spread lies through conspiracy theories. Using information as a weapon is a vital part of modern Russian hybrid warfare. Gleb Pavlovsky, a political consultant who once worked on Putin's election campaign, says: "The main difference between the Soviet Union's propaganda and that of today's Russia is that in the Soviet period the concept of truth was important. Even if they lied, they tried to prove that what they were doing was 'the truth'. Nowadays, nobody is trying to prove the 'truth'. You can just say anything, create reality."

This is how Russian propaganda works: The main thing is to accuse someone, completely unfounded, without taking responsibility, and the job is done. And when the question arises, where is the proof of the accusation, the answer is: there is none, but does that mean that my accusation does not correspond to reality?

Russian propaganda creates and spreads absurd myths on the assumption that if a lie is repeated often enough and systematically enough, it will eventually be widely accepted as the truth. Russia uses many different methods to spread its false stories, but most of them have one thing in common: they are based on negativity – the un-

Russian propaganda creates and spreads absurd myths on the assumption that if a lie is repeated often enough and systematically enough, it will eventually be widely accepted as the truth.

substantiated denigration and discreditation of the opposing side. Another reason for the ease with which Russian propaganda spreads is that those who spread it give little thought to the consistency of the messages and act only based on need. In such times, it is possible to prove one thing today and the exact opposite the next day. In the flow of information, old information is lost so quickly that the propagandist is not afraid to take a fundamentally different new position.

Moreover, as we have said, Russian propaganda does not even try to prove its truth and its aim is to sow fear and confusion with conspiracy theories. It also does not leave out a single space or topic that the target audience can agree on. The tried and tested methods of Russian propaganda can be found in the rhetoric of the Georgian government, and this trend is becoming more visible every day. So, unfortunately, we must consider the public communication of the Georgian government and the propaganda of the occupying country in the same context.

One of the most common and simple methods of propaganda is labelling. It involves the fitting of a mostly negative label on a person, group, or idea. The purpose of this method of propaganda is that the recipient of the information does not investigate the facts behind the label, i.e. emotions overshadow reasoning based on facts. Thus, this technique is based on manipulating the emotions of the audience and provoking hasty, superficial conclusions based on them. Russian propaganda often uses this technique. The most recent and obvious example of this is related to the war unleashed by Putin's Russia against Ukraine. Before it launched the war and afterwards, the Russian government with its propaganda channels labelled the legally elected government of Ukraine as Nazis/neo-Nazis and fascists. Here we can recall another absurd label, "gang of drug addicts", which Putin himself repeatedly used against Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his government.



The war launched by Putin's Russia against Ukraine in 2022 has revealed many hidden and obscure tendencies. Among them is the similarity of the Georgian Dream rhetoric with Russian propaganda, particularly the use of negative labels against opponents. With the outbreak of the war, it seemed to opponents of the government and part of the public that the Georgian government's positioning on the international arena in terms of support for Ukraine, especially the rhetorical part, was insufficient. Among other things, this is one of the main reasons for the aggravation of relations between the governments of Georgia and Ukraine. And this is happening against the background of the fact that the rhetoric and behaviour of the Georgian government is becoming increasingly acceptable to the Russian Federation. In order to cover up this very detrimental trend for our country, the label "war party" appeared in the statements of the representatives of the Georgian Dream, which was used first against the National Movement and then, in fact, against all those who criticised the position of the Georgian government during the Russian-Ukrainian War. In other words, according to the Georgian Dream propaganda, anyone who believes that Georgia, occupied by Russia, should do more to support Ukraine, "wants war".

Another way of propaganda is to blame the accuser. The logic behind this is that the best defence is an attack. This process often involves absurd lies and conspiracy theories, which is called unbridled propaganda. This method is well known and has been repeatedly used by Russian propaganda, especially in crisis situations. An example of unbridled propaganda is when Russia blames its brutality against Ukrainian citizens on the Ukrainian army. A similar method was used by Russian propaganda to deny the inhumane crimes committed by its own army in Bucha, Ukraine.

The Georgian government also uses similar tactics in crisis situations. One can recall the events of 5-6 July (when dozens of journalists were physically attacked and the government was unable or did not protect them), about which the government representatives stated that while violence against journalists is unacceptable, journalists often insult the public, but psychologically. Thus, in such situations where the government's responsibility is also revealed, the government prefers not to neutralise the accusations with appropriate arguments, but to attack critical opinion with propaganda messages.

Closely related to the above method is the propaganda technique of criticism in response to criticism, which instead of answering difficult questions either puts forward counter-accusations or shifts the focus to another issue, thus trying to divert attention from the object of criticism and/or justify this object with false comparisons and manipulative moral reasoning. This tactic was widely used by the Soviet Union when any criticism was met by pointing to the problems of the West. This approach is also relevant in contemporary Russia. The Russian Federation, which lags far behind the West in terms of economy, technology, standard of living and welfare, is constantly trying to discredit Europe and the United States with various disinformation messages.

This is another vivid example of Russia's characteristic negative propaganda, which instils the following idea: "Everything may not be good in Russia, but it is even worse in the West". Many examples of this approach can be found in the public communication of the Georgian government, when instead of responding to current challenges it reminds us of the vices of the previous government. While commenting on poverty



in the country, rising prices for essential foodstuffs, problems with justice and other critical issues, Georgian Dream again and again keeps reminding us of what was happening before 2012.

As we mentioned above, one of the reasons for the easy spread of Russian propaganda is that it often makes us believe mutually contradictory messages. The communication with the population of the incumbent Georgian government (especially with its own voters) in the pre-election and post-election periods is clearly similar to this approach. Since 2013, the Georgian Dream has been declaring that its main opponent, the National Movement, is finished and its influence as an opposition party is minimal. However, before each new election, the Georgian Dream's entire campaign is based on how dangerous the return of the National Movement to power is. As a result, a space is created in which the end of the National Movement is more important than the future intentions and prospects of development. Over the years, other opposition parties, media outlets, etc., that are undesirable to the authorities are gradually added to a list of those to be eliminated.

Now let's get to the main point and talk about an extremely vicious campaign that essentially combines all of the above methods: The well-known false dilemma of "engaging in war", through which the Georgian government has reached the point of trying to portray the foe as the friend and the friend as the foe. Since Georgia (unlike Ukraine and Moldova) has failed to obtain EU Candidate Status, the Georgian Dream authorities have been looking for culprits everywhere but themselves. They want us to believe that the failure to obtain the status is not the fault of an unfair judiciary, inadequate quality of democracy, or informal governance, but a kind of punishment from the West for Georgia's failure to join the war against Russia.

The tried and tested methods of Russian propaganda can be found in the rhetoric of the Georgian government, and this trend is becoming more visible every day.

A clear example of this is the numerous statements or indirect hints that "certain forces want to drag Georgia into war". And this absurd theory, aimed at evading the responsibility of the ruling party and presenting it as a "defender of peace", is based on the beginning to the end on the fear of war. Fear of war is absolutely natural for the citizens of Georgia, because we remember well first the 90s and then 2008.

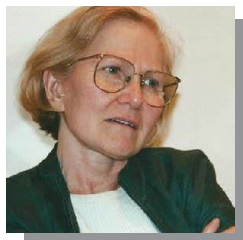
Therefore, similar to Russian propaganda, the goal of this campaign is to incite our fear in such a way that we lose the ability to judge and not question the arguments supporting this theory, since there are none. Besides, the supporters of this theory for some reason rarely or not at all mention the country that first forcibly dragged us into the USSR, then organised April 9, took away our territories, attacked us again in 2008 and has most part of Georgia occupied until now. The authors of this campaign probably do not want us to take a closer look at our history and realise that if anyone dragged Georgia into war, it was Russia.

This is a simple truth about which the great Georgian historian and public figure Ivane Javakhishvili wrote in 1919. Javakhishvili begins his work "Relations between Russia and Georgia in the 18th Century" as follows "After the restoration of independence, every citizen of the Republic of Georgia is obliged to know the past of his country". Based on relevant facts, he repeatedly exposes the "Christian state" (you have probably already guessed which country this ironic phrase refers to), which at various

times involved Georgian kings in a war against Persia or the Ottomans and then left them alone against countless enemies.

In conclusion, when we hear the rhetoric of the current Georgian authorities, which is saturated with typical elements of Russian propaganda – extremely negative labels against opponents instead of a reasoned response to criticism, counter-accusations devoid of content, contradictory messages, and ridiculous dilemmas – we should be particularly attentive and careful not to fall under the influence of malicious propaganda and false fear (the purpose of which is to make us forget the real enemy and present a friend as an enemy). ■





Dodona Kiziria

THE MARTIANS

A couple of years ago, while in Tbilisi, I had a conversation with a young man that made me very sad. Not because we were talking about some unpleasant topic, or, as Georgians are used to, because we harshly clashed with each other over opposing viewpoints on some political issue. But because I found myself in the same situation that I was in more than half a century ago when I was talking to my American students.

My debut lecture and, to put it mildly, inadequate English are described in my memoirs. But now I want to talk about something else. Every day when I entered the auditorium and began to speak, I felt like Martians were sitting in front of me. I knew absolutely nothing about them; I didn't know who they were, what they were, what they knew, what they loved, what might make them happy or, on the contrary, which topic they might be uncomfortable discussing. I didn't even know what examples I could give to illustrate what I was talking about. I didn't know what books they had read, what films they had seen, what social or political events had made an impression on them. In short, each of them was for me a kind of *tabula rasa*, a blank board on which nothing was written, and therefore the possibility of reading anything was nil.

Today, a person travelling abroad for the first time would probably not have such a feeling of alienation. Television, the Internet, mobile phones, and many other sources of information have made it much easier to orientate oneself in a foreign environment. But for a person who lived in the Soviet Union at my time, abroad was an impossibly distant, galactic reality. Therefore, when arriving there, the most difficult problem was not only not knowing the language of the locals, but also the perception of human and material connections in everyday life.

My English improved day by day, albeit frustratingly slowly, but still. But for a long time, I felt how flat, empty, completely devoid of connotative layers of meaning my every word was. When you speak a language that both you and your interlocuter have known since childhood, when you speak in the country where you were born and raised, every word you utter, whether we realise it or not, is loaded with a multitude of meanings that do not require explanation. The simplest, most elementary words, such as the name of a street, the title of a book, a reference to a famous person or even a joke, contain much more information than their purely lexical expression. Each of them is accompanied by a number of meanings that the speakers know, memories associated with them, and their connotations easily taken for granted. Moreover, when you first communicate with one of your compatriots, you get an idea of this person in five minutes. What words he uses, what facts he mentions, even

his manner of speaking – all this is a source of information that you perceive quite unconsciously, you receive certain information and draw a corresponding conclusion.

I certainly had no such experience of receiving or transmitting information during my first days in the United States. My students' words, like my own, were as one-dimensional and lacking in depth as sentences illustrating some grammatical rule in a foreign language textbook. Here, for example: "Libreville is the capital of Gabon", "The children are playing in the yard", "Robert has two brothers and a sister". Here, each word, devoid of any connotation, is the bare denotation. I'm sure that a significant part of my readers have no idea and don't really care where the city of Libreville is and what it looks like, what kind of children's game we're talking about (football, basketball, ball, dodge ball, whatever) and, of course, it doesn't matter who Robert is and what the names of his brothers and sisters are. The key is to learn how to put words together, use the verb in the right person, and so on. That was my main task – to make a grammatically correct sentence. How precisely the words were chosen, how well their connotations matched what I was trying to convey – it was hard for me to even think about it.

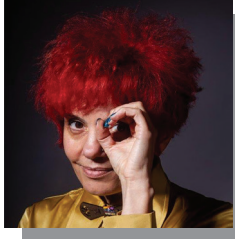
Half a century has passed since then. During those years, my "Martian" students have turned into quite ordinary, normal people. I have long since retired, but many of them still remember me and write to me their stories, recall my lectures, tell me about their activities. When I send them a reply, I am no longer flipping through a dictionary with trembling fingers, no longer looking for the right words to express this or that thought. We understand each other perfectly, regardless of whether we agree with each other on this or that issue.

The problem is that, for me, part of the Georgian youth today is like a tribe of Martians. We speak the same language, more so in the country where we were born and raised, though of course several decades apart. We have a lot in common. But I listen to them, or look at them, and feel that my words to them are as empty and meaningless as "Libreville is the capital of Gabon". I do not know who they are, what they care about, what they worry about, what they dream about. How do they perceive the Georgian language – as a mother tongue or simply as a means of communication? In general, is this word, "native", acceptable to them, or is it a sentimental, time-consuming, and lexical unit devoid of inner meaning?

Obviously, a certain alienation between generations is a common thing, old people don't always find a common language with the young. But for me this alienation is deeper, more insurmountable, and more painful. I wish I knew who they are, what they are, what they want, what they care about, and what they lack. Is Georgia a homeland for them or just a place to live that is different from other countries only in that life is less comfortable here?

How I wish I knew... ■

P.S. This article was written in the last days of February. Looking at the events of 7-9 March, the author wrote these words in a social network: "These last days have responded to my thoughts. I was dead and came back to life! Thank you, my good, my favourite, beautiful, intelligent boys and girls, my friends, acquaintances, and strangers. Georgia belongs to you; you must defend it from barbarians and the Kremlin's henchmen. You must win!"



Theo Khatiasvili

WHO IS AFRAID OF POLITICAL ART?

*sind das für Zeiten, wo Ein Gespräch
über Bäume fast ein Verbrechen ist
Weil es ein Schweigen über so viele
Untaten einschließt!*

*What times are these, when
A conversation about trees is almost a crime
Because it entails a silence about so many misdeeds!*

Bertol Brecht

As early as the 1930s, Walter Benjamin, arguing about the essential transformation of art in an entirely new technological era, believing that the final departure from the sacred would radically alter its social function and establish it in place of ritual and religion in another practice, politics.

A little later, one of the main slogans of second-wave feminists – the personal is political – would transcend the texts and rhetoric of feminist theorists and authors alike.

“Ultimately, all films are political,” the most overtly personal filmmaker in the history of cinema, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, whose personal experience becomes a poignant tool for exposing the hidden traumas of post-Nazi Germany and the Nazi legacy of his own era, said in an interview.

How is it possible for a person – I would add, even more so for an artist – to be apolitical in an era so radically different from the previous, pre-modern era? This question is the subject of judgement for many philosophers. For Hannah Arendt totalitarianism is formed and revived not only and not so much by one tyrant (leader/führer) and the political elite close to him, but his existence requires an apolitical crowd characterised by indifference to political processes. Both the National Socialists and the Communists would address this faceless mass of the population, standing apart from politics, and would feed them with appeals and populist slogans.

I believe that an apolitical artist and the art is a kind of oxymoron, if only because the artist’s freedom is a political issue.

This is my editorial column from the last (fifth) issue of Kin-O magazine, which is no longer in print, and so I offer it in its entirety. I think it will give you an idea of the

content and main theme of the issue, as well as shed some light on why the film centre that funded the magazine had refused to print it.

To be precise, they didn't refuse me – it was just that according to the standards established in the cultural sphere during the tenure of Tea Tsulukiani, there was a completely non-transparent and closed system. I hadn't received an answer for months: First, in December, the tender prepared to determine the contractor printing house was cancelled and postponed until the new year. Then they were waiting for the approval of a new budget, and without the approval of the budget the fate of the magazine couldn't be decided, so I offered to find the money for the printing myself, which was rejected. In the end, they didn't agree to the simplest solution – to upload the electronic version on the website of the Film Centre. Or rather, the answer (I'd rather call it mumbling) was still unclear, "We don't know, we'll see, we'll ask the director".

The new director of the Film Centre, aka Deputy of Minister of Culture Tea Tsulukiani, is almost a Godot character (in general, Beckett is very appropriate for describing this institution), whom the staff do not even know, and with whom it is almost impossible to communicate even virtually, for all apart from 1-2 confidants.

This unhealthy atmosphere is also mentioned in a harsh letter of the magazine, in which the author (Basti Mgaloblishvili) analyses cinema from a historical point of view as a means of propaganda and, on the contrary, as a means of provoking resistance and protest movement.

Overall, the theme of the last issue, the relationship between art and politics, is an issue that Georgian Dream propaganda has been trying to fight against since its first days in power. The war between Ukraine and Russia has highlighted the hypocrisy of attempts to separate art (sports, business, etc. or any citizen) from politics. The cultivation of apolitical artists (successfully used in election campaigns) in the context of the war that is vital for us has finally led to the idea of an apolitical or neutral state, while the entire world is involved in the anticipation and establishment of a new order.

Therefore, despite – or perhaps because of – the confused, unclear answers and the time delay, I can already say with certainty that the magazine was banned and, according to the old and, as it turns out, unforgotten practice, "put on the shelf". As Mako Chilashvili, Deputy Director of the Film Centre, said in a television commentary, this issue "expired, fell out, it happens". Incidentally, the amount spent on the preparation of this expired magazine (editorial staff and authors' fees) is almost four times more than the amount allocated for its publication. It seems that it is more reasonable for the Ministry of Culture to waste the state budget than to reproduce unwanted thoughts.

"There is no such thing as uncommitted criticism, any more than there is such a thing as insignificant art. It is merely a question of the openness with which our commitments are stated. I do not believe that we should keep quiet about them." —This quote from Lindsay Anderson's polemical article, "Stand up! Stand up!" (1956), which became a manifesto of the "angry generation" of English cinema, turned out to be symbolic. Indeed, "these are the times when talking about trees is a crime because it involves a silence about so many misdeeds!" ■



Buba Kudava

Died or Was Killed?

Digging up unsolved cases in the royal history

How many unsolved cases has our time shelved? How many questions – with or without answers – how much anger or doubt surrounds us about those who were murdered before our eyes or died of natural causes, great or ordinary people, righteous or sinners, and then let us reflect on how scarce and inconspicuous our knowledge and perceptions are about the conspiracies of the deep past, betrayals, treacheries, hidden poisonous intrigues in the corridors of the chambers, stranglings, stabbings, and then the sincere silencing of this sinfulness. Especially when these stories happened to the chosen people of history, of an epoch, a region, or a country!

Starting with Cain, murder has always been rife in ancient times, so why on earth would all of our kings be given the opportunity to die a peaceful and natural death? And why would court chroniclers open their hearts to us here?

Very often we follow the Georgian Chronicles – look, it is written this way or that way, or not written at all, and we only know what the ancient historians wanted us to know, and we do not know what, in their own opinion, we do not need to know.

Surprisingly, we are not in the habit of asking questions, we are used to rejecting data from parallel foreign sources, we are used to believing the royal versions, and we regard reconstructions of alternative histories as blasphemy.

In what follows, we will examine the deaths of several Georgian kings, consider the accounts of Georgian and foreign historians, and ask the reader, “Excuse me, is there something going on here?”

David Kurapalat

Who has not heard of Davit Kurapalat, the master of the lands of South Georgia and beyond, King of Tao, father of Bagrat III, the first king of united Georgia, the undisputed leader of the region (exaggerated or not), considered the inspirer of the unification of Georgia. We have also read poetic and historical stories about his involvement in two Byzantine wars. We have also heard that he turned out to be on the side that lost and had to sign an undesirable will. What happens after his death due to that fateful will and the might of the Empire – will the Empire receive only the lands that David conquered with the sword in the fight against the Muslim rulers, or his entire estate, with all his possessions, the Georgian-Armenian marches, we have not stopped the scholarly dispute on this.

However...

For some reason we talk less about his death. Sometimes we are unaware that other information can be found, sometimes we ignore it. David, the great Kurapalat, the son of Adarnase Kurapalates, died in 1001 – that is all our sources say.

But the Armenian chronicles of that time and later are almost unanimous in saying that David was not executed. The accounts vary, but based on their comparison, the gist of the story is this: They were betrayed by their own nobles, who mixed poison with a divine liquid and gave them Communion on Maundy Thursday (i.e. before Easter). King Kurapalat survived, and then on Easter Day Bishop Hilarion of Georgia smothered him with a pillow in his bedroom (at that time, according to Georgian sources, Bishop Ishkhneli was known by this name).

Is all the evidence from Armenian sources based only on rumours, disinformation, and a desire to defame Georgian secular and clerical circles? It should be noted that these several parallel reports probably come from different primary sources. They, therefore, carry more weight than our dry chronicle, the brevity of which in itself is questionable – all the more so in the context of such an abundance of information from the Armenian sources.

If we remember that during the last conspiracy, David supported the camp of the Byzantine Emperor's rival, who suffered defeat; if we consider that the Georgian Kurapalat was forced to bequeath his inheritance (a large share or all of it) to the Empire – with the right to take it after his death; if we realise that immediately after his execution the Emperor Basil II appeared in Tao and immediately demanded to receive the debt, then the above reports will seem plausible and the arrows of reasonable doubt will be directed towards the Byzantine Empire. If anyone was interested in getting rid of David so that the will could be executed in time and nothing would change or complicate matters, it was the Imperial court of Constantinople.

As logical as this version may seem, the silence of the Georgian sources is equally incomprehensible and suspicious. If he was not killed, why does no author (historian or hagiographer) add any further details? And if King Kurapalat died of natural causes, why do Georgian sources avoid the subject? If he was killed by Byzantium, is it necessary to hide it? Perhaps the fact that the Empire is acting through the hands of nobles is the key to this silence? If this is a special operation of Byzantium, then I ask a question: What is the role of the great son of the great father, King Bagrat III of Abkhazia and his father, King Gurgen? Complicity? Passive cooperation? Benefits in exchange for silence? Did the emperor give the father and son anything from the inheritance of David Kurapalat (with the right to rule for life)? They received the titles of Kurapalates and Magisteros and settled their relationship with their great uncle. Who knows what



Davit Kurapalat, Oshki Stella

happened and how things really were. The more silent the sources, the more room they leave for judgements, versions, and interpretations. But did David die or was he killed? And if he was killed, why do only Armenian sources speak of it and why are the Georgian sources silent?

Giorgi I

Who doesn't know King Giorgi! Who doesn't know the king who was "crushed between the two Kurapalates", the son of Bagrat and the father of Bagrat? We remember him from school. We got acquainted with him in *The Hand of the Great Master*. For the first time, Konstantine Gamsakhurdia will make young people think about this young and boisterous king. Much of what follows us for life from this novel is, of course, the writer's imagination, but even if he has created a portrait of Giorgi I only from passages of known sources, it will not leave you indifferent.

In any case, what was he like – reckless, impatient, angry, or kind, gentle, steadfast, determined? A visionary and a thinker or a fool and an empty-headed man? Or just simply unlucky? Firstly, he didn't want to reign in the same way as hundreds of others, he attacked Byzantium directly – then a world empire and then a neighbour of ours. He wanted to reclaim the possessions that the Second Rome had forced his father's stepfather, Davit Kurapalat to cede.

In the end, he was defeated. People like to berate the losers, and one can argue endlessly about whether the king of Abkhazians and Georgians did the right thing by fighting an impudent enemy...

However, this story is about something else.

This energetic King Giorgi, the second king of the newly born Georgian kingdom, who was between 25 and 30 years old, died quite unexpectedly. He simply died: in Trialeti, in the year 1027, on 16 August, in a place called Mkinvarni and then they buried him in a cathedral in Kutaisi, in the church built by his father, Bagrat III, known today as the Bagrati Cathedral.

Rarely do we know so many details about the death of a king. But behind these facts (what-where-when) lie the answers to no less interesting questions! What happened to the young king so suddenly? What did he need there? Where was he headed? A battle, a skirmish, a hunt, a betrayal...? Who was with him, what was he doing in that cold and cramped place, and where is that place today? Had the Greeks got rid of him? How many people had that thought back then? If the murder was ordered by the Empire, was one of his spouses involved? Let us remember: While his first wife, the daughter of the Armenian king, was still alive, Giorgi married a second time to the daughter of the Ossetian king Alde, by whom he also had a son. After the king's death, young Bagrat IV became the king, and the country was actually ruled by Queen Mariam, while two mother-son pairs (Mariam-Bagrat and Alde-Demetre) were dividing Giorgi's inheritance for a long time.

The writer who favoured King Giorgi described his end beautifully and sadly, but what happened in reality? Why so blindly trust an account and not search for the tentacles of the Empire that reached out to almost anyone who dared go against them and tried to turn the great geopolitical board upside down?

As many readers as this description will have, as many images will the history allow us to imagine, and as many questions will be raised that will be left unanswered.



Byzantine miniature of Giorgi I defeated in battle with Basil II

Davit V

The son of Davit Aghmashenebeli, Demetre I had two sons, Davit and Giorgi. The elder was disobedient, so Demetre singled out Giorgi, his faithful son – this is the official line of the royal historical record. Obviously, there was no tripartite peace in the family and no virtue between the brothers. Davit V prematurely, even before the death of his father, laid on himself the royal crown and also prematurely, after 6 months, left this world.

This is an anti-record for the duration of the reign in the history of united Georgia. Davit was young (he was not even 30 years old) and the Georgian Chronicles do not say a word about the cause of his death and other details. These circumstances alone are enough to arouse suspicions, but, alas, these suspicions are confirmed by foreign sources:

Some Armenian chroniclers affirm, and others doubt, that King Davit was killed. He was given poison to drink; a heavy and prolonged sorrow engulfed the country. If we compare this account to the Georgian Chronicles, there seems to be no mourning at all, on the contrary, in one place something amazing is written: God heard the pleas and shortened Davit's days, taking him before his father. You can read between the lines, as if the dethroned father (in the official version – he became a monk) is reciting this plea. In short, King Davit was killed. The Orbeli are pointed to, and one of the chroniclers adds that they had an agreement with the brother Giorgi. This essential and controversial detail (detail!) overturns our idea, based on the dry accounts of the Georgian sources: They say that Davit forced his father to give up the crown, then became king, then died suddenly, and then Demetre returned to the throne and proclaimed his second son Giorgi co-ruler.

Actually, it does not overturn, but, perhaps, on the contrary, puts everything in its place – clan conflicts, Demeter's abdication or his going into monkhood, Davit's accession to the throne, the silencing of his reign (historians of Tamar's time do not even mention Davit as a king), his sudden death at a young age and the stories that he was singled out by his father.

The reason for my doubts is the same silence that is so striking in the Georgian sources. Yes, King Davit was killed, in my opinion, King Davit was poisoned, and what do you want, he committed a sin and raised his hand against his brother, but the information from the source and other circumstances leave me with a doubt – a reasonable doubt, as representatives of jurisprudence would say today – that Giorgi was also involved in this case. The confrontation between Demetre and Davit, the alliance between Demetre and Giorgi, and the rivalry between Davit and Giorgi had many causes, but the root of all of them must be recognised as power and political camps. Three powerful and ambitious men gathered in a small space, and it is understandable that personal and political disagreements soon arose between them, disagreements over personnel decisions and the promotion of individuals, disputes over the allocation of roles in the royal court or the acquisition of influence. In short, it went on and on and on, and eventually two major parties were formed. It seems that Demetre finally grew old and let go of the reins of power. The brothers became the leaders of the political groups, and the feudal lords rearranged themselves accordingly, some to the right, some to the left. At first, Davit won. But soon the defeated took revenge in a way that was forbidden but has been tried and tested throughout world history.



Lasha-Giorgi

In olden days, when medicine was not so advanced and the reigns of kings were not so pleasant and enjoyable as they are now (long and tedious journeys, much of life in the open air, cold and heat, wars, battles, diseases, lack of medicines, epidemics, dangerous environment, etc.), it is obvious that premature death was more common than in modern times, and death generally occurred at an earlier age.

This Lasha-Giorgi of ours also died young, 30-31 years old, and apparently very suddenly. So, judge for yourself: He arrived in the easternmost part of the kingdom, Bagavani (today in the territory of Azerbaijan), to arrange the engagement or marriage of his sister, Rusudan, and died there accidentally. Before that, the source mentions a fight with the suddenly appearing Mongols, that “the first wound was inflicted by them”. Based on this phrase, it is assumed that this refers to the king’s wound. Lasha seems to have been wounded in a battle and his death was later caused by a complication of this “wound”.

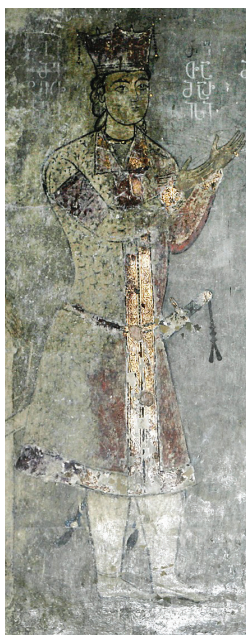
This may have been the case, and that is why the anonymous writer emphasises that the wound was the first, but why is he silent about the cause of the sudden death? God punished us for our sins and King Giorgi died in Bagavani on the 13th of January, Wednesday of the year.... – says the Chronicle. We see that he did not find it necessary to mention any additional details. Perhaps this silence means nothing, we do not know the exact causes of the deaths of the kings, but it is the right and, I would say, the duty of each of us to delve into the data of these sources, to question them or to believe them.

Wasn’t king Giorgi possibly murdered?

Obviously, the decline of the kingdom and the weakening of royal power was to the advantage of many both outside and inside the country (the illegitimate son of Lasha-Giorgi could not become the king and Rusudan would certainly take the throne). It did decline, and it turned out that under the weak Rusudan, the powerful spread their wings better than in the times of the “capricious” and “wilful” Lasha. The narrative of the second chronicler, the so-called Chronicler of the Times, adds to the doubts. There is no mention of the king’s wounding, nor of the betrothal or marriage, nor of Lasha-Giorgi’s departure for Bagavani. That looks as if all of a sudden, the king fell ill, gathered his nobles, begged his sister and asked Rusudan to become king. As soon as he finished his will, he “passed away”. There was mourning and sorrow unspeakable and weeping for many days. He was taken to Gelati and buried there.

We will never know if he was murdered or died of natural causes, even if a miracle happens and a source with direct evidence is found, who knows? But who is to stop us from speculating about cause and effect, imagining the stories of death, and asking questions that are unacceptable to some? Was he poisoned? Was his life taken in some other way? Was he lured to Bagavani? If so, who planned the operation? What was Rusudan’s role?

Bear no false witness but let us remember that this is the same Rusudan who, according to the same chronicler, does not fulfil her brother’s will and makes her own son king instead of her nephew (Lasha’s illegitimate son); moreover, she dooms Lasha, the son of Davit, to death and sends him to hell. Every time the enemy invaded, she left the throne city and fled to Kutaisi. If Rusudan, emboldened by the precedent of her mother’s rule, was to succeed her brother on the throne, marriage to her eastern neighbour, Shirvanshah, would obviously block her path to the throne, and so the marriage project had to be stopped somehow. In addition, political opponents



*Lasha-Giorgi,
Painting of the
Betania Church*

needed to get rid of Lasha before she married and gave birth to a legitimate heir - the “crowned son”.

It is also questionable why Rusudan was not married (given in marriage) before 1223. At that time, she would have been 30 years old, which we know was quite an advanced age for marriage at that time. Was the idea of Rusudan’s accession to the throne prepared in secret? Was Lasha’s desire to marry her off to Shirvanshah an attempt to keep Rusudan off the throne? Was the king’s death Rusudan’s response to neutralise Lasha’s actions?

Either way, whether it was planned or unplanned, whether he was killed or died, like the other Giorgi, this Giorgi was unlucky in his death as well...

Demetre II

The Mongols summoned the king to the Horde. The Horde camp was the residence of the Khan, a sort of military and administrative centre. The Vizier Bugha was exposed in the conspiracy. Demetre was innocent, but according to Mongol custom, the whole entourage was responsible, and Demetre and Bugha were brothers-in-law.

Arghun Khan hesitated: If he punished Demetre, the country would be left without a king. And a king was necessary, since in a conquered country he acted as the guarantor of tax collection and military service. On the other hand, impunity was not good either, as it would violate the Mongol principle of collective responsibility and set an undesirable example.

Khutlubugha, the Georgian king’s Amirspasalar (commander-in-chief), who was nearby, made the choice easier: “I have a worthy candidate! Davit Narin rules in the west, Demetre in the east, Beka Jakeli in the south, and he does not bow to any of them as he is directly subordinate to the Khan. Vakhtang, the eldest son of Narin, has already been declared locum tenens by his father. If you replace Demetre with a West Georgian, you will have the whole of Georgia under your control,” King Demetre’s dignity assured the Khan.

The Mongols had no influence in western Georgia, so the Khutlubugha project appealed to the Khan. Demetre was beheaded and Vakhtang was made king in the east. To this day, we blame Khutlubugha for the betrayal of Demetre the Devoted, and we explain this with his resentment: He was the son of a very influential official, Sadun Mankaberdel. After Sadun’s death, Khutlubugha received only the title of Amirspasalar from his father’s position, while Demetre gave the title of Atabeg to someone else. Khutlubugha had another reason: Demetre’s father had earlier executed his grandfather (on his mother’s side).

That’s all well and good, but... where is Davit Narin’s responsibility? Obviously, the King of the Western Georgia is not innocent either. Together with Khutlubugha, he seems to have been interested in the murder of King Demetre, as was his son Vakhtang. In this way, father and son were trying to expand their kingdom and influence and, if you will, restore a single Georgian kingdom.

According to the source, it was Khutlubugha who brought the idea of making Vakhtang king to the Khan of the Horde. The Khan then sends a message to Davit, and Khutlubugha brings confirmation from Imereti. Only then is Demetre put to death. It is hard to believe that Demetre Amirspasalar did not coordinate his plan with Davit Narin from the very beginning, before leaving for the Horde. Otherwise, if the plan had failed, the blade of the sword would have touched his neck as well. It is also pos-



Demetre II, the Devoted, painting in Ud-abno monastery, Gareji



sible that Davit Narin was the author of the plan, and then Khutlubugha joined him and told the Khan.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that Vakhtang, son of Narin-Davit, became king in East Georgia, which could not happen without the consent of both father and son, and that consent required the execution of Demetre.

We still accuse Khutlubugha and believe that Rusudan's son Davit is innocent. They do not seem innocent, neither Davit nor Vakhtang. Davit Narin and Davit Ulu (Demetre's father) were grandsons and cousins of Queen Tamar. But what is there to be surprised about? Who has ever shown mercy to anyone in the struggle for the crown – in our country or elsewhere?

Vakhtang II

King Demetre was proclaimed as “the Devoted”. Vakhtang ascended the throne. The anonymous chronicler, known as the Chronicler of Time, was for some reason very fond of the young king and spared no kind words to praise his talents. As if everything was in order, he settled his relations with both Khan Noen and the people of Eastern Georgia. Divided into two kingdoms, Georgia seemed to have nothing standing in the way of reunification, but he reigned for three years, fell ill, and died...

Even in those days, the death of a young man from a minor illness is surprising, but such a sudden end does not inspire unconditional trust. Especially when the king sits on a throne that belongs to someone else, when he is involved in the death of that someone else, when a whole army of sons is left as heirs to that someone else, when each of them (especially the eldest son) will be joined by his supporters or accomplices, when the “western clan” is bound to clash with the eastern clan, and when the evil Khutlubugha still enjoys influence. This time he opposes Vakhtang and wants to enthrone Davit, the eldest son of Demetre II, whom he had sacrificed.

We have already mentioned Davit, and in this connection the chronicler has this interesting emphasis: As if Davit had learned of Vakhtang's death and was greatly saddened because of his kindness and youth, he mourned him according to all the rules, honoured his memory and sent his body to Gelati to be buried in the royal tomb. If we can believe such magnanimity on the part of the crown-deprived Davit VIII, whose father had been killed and who was to become king after Vakhtang, it is easy to imagine how much the honourable and experienced Davit Narin would have trusted in his grief or innocence.

As it turned out, Davit Narin grieved deeply for his beloved son. “He suffered a pain that cannot be described, he was so sad that he could find no joy,” the chronicler tells us. Who knows, maybe he was disappointed and felt lost because he had dragged his favourite son into such a risky business, putting a noose around his neck. The grief-stricken father died shortly afterwards. The Georgian reunification project had failed – no matter whether it had been carefully thought out or not...

* * *

It is true that the statute of limitations on the death of kings has long since expired, but what power prevents us from seeking the truth in the official versions, in the minute details hidden between the lines, or in the stories that have been carried off into the other world... ■



*Davit Narin,
Painting at Gelati*





Nika Vacheishvili

Let's save Gelati!

The historical and artistic value of Gelati – its space and depth, its versatility, its distinctiveness in the face of our history and our future – is absolutely unique and cannot even be described in simple words. Complexes of similar value in Western Europe have long been rehabilitated, the problems of antiquity have been reduced to daily management or a pre-planned conservation process by the regular work of powerful private and public institutions.

It is not only the past damage that is diagnosed, but also the future risks, the levelling of which is the main task of the monument management process.

When we began the restoration of the Gelati complex in 2008, we encountered many problems that had accumulated over the years: A third of a century had passed since the last (Soviet-era) restoration. Not only were there no regular or episodic monitoring materials from that period to assess the condition of the monument, but also the scattered international reports gave a very general picture, useless for the conservation strategy, and other types of “point interventions” over the years (e.g. the beautifully restored mosaic of the apse in the 1980s or, on the contrary, the extremely artisanal intervention during the creation of the “Observatory” at the Gelati Academy in 2002) have made the state of the antiquity even more patchy and the conservation strategy even more obscure.

There was no master plan, no plan for a layout of the entrance area that would combine the growing tourist flows with the cosiness of monastic life,



Gelati. Chaotic booths at the entrance to the monastery



Gelati infrastructure 2012 project, author Davit Bakhtadze



Gelati before restoration, 2007

replacing an infrastructure of chaotic and faceless market stalls. There was no vision for the exposition of Gelati archaeological conservation and its place in the whole complex, not to mention the relatively invisible but essential components of the complex like the splendid Sohaster complex spread nearby, or the earlier, almost unknown monastic infrastructure on the slope of Gelati (small cells, buildings with fireplaces, walls, fences), or the architecture and mural paintings of the churches of St. Nino, St. Saba, St. Elias on the same slope, the absolutely outstanding Tower of David...

The physical problems accumulated over the years were clearly visible: rusty tin roofs, concave areas due to damaged wooden rafters that moved like sails in the wind and damaged the upper parts of the walls (cornices), carvings long covered with moss, weathered walls, etc.

The state of the wall paintings in the two churches of the complex, the Church of St George, and the Church of the Virgin Mary, was also unfavourable.

This series of problems meant that, on the one hand, it was necessary to act quickly and, on the other, to think and strategize slowly. The restoration of such antiquities requires not only physical effort, but above all it aims at preserving and renewing a living authenticity, and preserving historical value (both tangible and intangible), where the contemporary authenticity of the restoration grows organically out of the open context of the past authenticity. The planning of the design started in 2008 included the preparation of much more complete and accurate measurements using modern technologies (we invited German specialists to work together with a Georgian team on the preparation of the measurements), the identification of the reasons of the damage, the determination of the types and causes of damage, the levelling method, the master plan, the zoning, the compatibility of tourist and monastic spaces, the evaluation of the resources of the secular buildings and the differentiation of old and new functions, the determination of the sequence of works, the design of the Gelati access area for modern infrastructure...

All the main stages of the design were agreed with the World Heritage Centre, and all the international UNESCO missions were kept informed of



Gelati. St. Giorgi's Church, roof with broken cornices

the project and the progress of the work on site. To achieve a high conservation standard for the project, a multi-stage workshop for Georgian specialists was held in key institutions in the UK, Switzerland, and Georgia.

It was important for me that the project involved foreign colleagues who, in parallel with their work on the Gelati project, introduced best conservation practices in Georgia, for example, how to determine what is happening in the walls of Gelati that is invisible to the eye and can be a factor in damaging the monument, how to determine whether the structure is eroded or not (endoscopic examination), why the facades change colour and how to restore them to their original appearance, how to determine the type of harmful micro-organisms and the correct remedy for their elimination, what is the methodology for testing the façade's stone conservation with the final selection of the method and design, and much more.

In addition to the main restoration, it was also important that the routine work (e.g. the numerous crack-filling tests and the filling with the chosen sample) was not carried out by one-off craftsmen hired from just any LLC on the market, but by students specially trained for this purpose by the Academy of Arts and the Faculty of Fine Arts of Akhaltsikhe University.

Thanks to this successful experience, several of the young project specialists were invited by conservation centres and international projects to participate in similar projects in Europe and Asia.

The sequence of work on the complex was planned as follows: from general and "easy" (the kind of experience that we have had) to complex, step by step, in circles about which we knew less with the systematic participation of Western colleagues and training of the implementers here and in Europe (Italy, UK, Switzerland) to maintain quality.

The physical work began with the peripheral buildings of the XIX century, located around the complex, with the restoration of the houses of the time of Bishop Gabriel. At the same time, archaeological research began to clarify a particular question in the history of Gelati: What was the temple historically roofed with in the High Middle Ages?



Gelati. Depreciated tin roofs, 2007



Gelati. Davit's Gate under restoration, 2010



Gelati. Davit's Gate after restoration, 2010

When was the subsequent renovation carried out? What else was there in the complex that has not survived or cannot be seen today? One of the main research questions was the structure of the Gelati Academy without a roof, with deformed walls – the building, which had long lost its function, needed not only to be strengthened, but also to be given a new life in the renovated complex.

The first phase involved the restoration of relatively small buildings around the complex:

1. Gabriel Kikodze's 19th century building
2. Cleaning the upper gate of Davit Aghmashenebeli's tomb from sediment, restoring and roofing the weakened walls

3. Restoration of the upper gate of the monastery with a rickety roof

4. Archaeological research and cleaning of the building known as the Gelati Academy, full preparation for restoration. At that time, the interior and surrounding area were excavated, revealing impressive remains – corridors, the ground floor of the building, the kvevri... The testing of roofing options helped to unify the building and make it an important part of the complex

5. The damaged façade stones and masonry of the main cathedral and other churches have been restored, conserved, and strengthened by a suitable method, freed from inappropriate cement mortar

6. Under the guidance of foreign consultants, the facades, blackened and greened by bacteria, were cleaned, and treated with a special solution

7. The frescoes of St George's Church of the complex have been conserved

The main task of 2008 remained bringing a new life to the Gelati Academy, which included a series of works to uncover archaeological objects, such as benches, an underground household section, the re-roofing of reinforced walls and a complex wooden structure, which resulted in the replacement of an unsafe, non-functioning building in the centre of the monastery with a spacious religious and secular space for people to meet.

During this period, archaeological work carried out on the monastery's territory for this purpose brought to light issues that are essential for the conservation and restoration of the complex: What the roof of the Gelati Monastery looked like

in its time and in the later medieval period. Glazed tiles from different periods showed that Gelati (like many architectural masterpieces of Unified Georgia and later periods) was decorated with multi-coloured glazed tiles.

The Soviet-era tin roofs were replaced for the first time with traditional red clay tiles on the secular and peripheral buildings of the monastery, and a distinction naturally arose between them and the sacred buildings, which were covered with coloured tiles at the time of their construction.

While the first, secular part of the conceptual vision for the roofs was easy enough to solve, and red clay tiles were naturally chosen for the peripheral and secular buildings, the domed ecclesiastical buildings – the Academy, the gates and the monks' living quarters – required a different approach. And here again we were faced with a choice: to cover the temples in the standard way with tin or to enter a new stage in the protection of antiquities in our country and to recall the colourfulness of the old architecture, the colourfulness that later, especially during the Soviet period, gave way to black and white tones.

We embarked on this new path with great care. Difficulties had to be overcome in several directions: We had to determine the form of the temple coverings – the shape of the coverings and the specification of certain tiles – and ensure their compatibility. The colour spectrum and the amplitude of its movement had to be defined and chosen, its limits had to be defined so as not to go beyond the traditional, simple colour, to achieve the desired result, both technologically and artistically. And above all, there had to be technological reliability, which is determined by the quality of the workmanship.

We started by carefully testing the new tile on the small buildings of the monastery. The shape of individual tiles, the uniform pattern and colour of the roofs were, of course, based on the analogues of Georgian architectural monuments preserved in Tao-Klarjeti. The material, shape, thickness, and colour were chosen from various versions of tiles carefully made in the workshop of the Academy of Arts, which were optimal and considered the characteristics of the ancient tiles. The restrained colouring of the new tiles included various shades of



Gelati. Entrance gate before restoration, 2009



Gelati. Entrance gate after restoration, 2010



Gelati. Fresco in the Church of St George before conservation, 2007



Gelati. Painting of St George's Church. Conservation process, 2008

the old material, which in turn made it possible to prepare for the main task, finding and determining the colour of the roofs of the central temple, thus achieving unity and diversity of the entire complex.

The dull green-emerald colour of the low churches (Tskaro, St Nicholas, St George), harmonising with the colour of the bricks, served as a good base mirror to reflect the colours of the roof of the monumental, massive main cathedral. The main cathedral could reflect the final gamma, a colour that naturally grows out of (rather than contrasts with) this hue.

Personally, I had in mind that the main temples in the future should be covered with a brownish purple, deep burgundy colour typical of Tao-Klarjeti, foreshadowing the Crucifixion and Ascension of the Lord. I thought that an imperial, warm purple should be the main speaking colour for Gelati in the future. However, this choice was not without its challenges and required a lot of teamwork and experimentation with alternatives.

This is how we approached 2012: with the restored Gates of Gelati, the Academy, a real approval of the main directions of conservation, where all the directions of multilateral work were tested, implemented, guided in the right direction and international consultants were involved.

By 2012, when the government changed, the issues defined in the 2008 project had largely been implemented. In 2013-2014, funding was again allocated to update the existing project and specify new work. Work was then carried out in accordance with this edition.

It is noteworthy that since 2013 the Western specialists who provided high quality international expertise on the issues raised and, where necessary, training for local restorers, have gradually left the project. It is also noticeable that the issues within the project are no longer constantly discussed and the mechanisms for getting answers to them are not improved, for example, the previous concepts of the main issue, the traditional coloured tiles, are emphasised and the approach is radically changed. As a result, the colour, material, preparation and laying techniques of the roofs became "green", reaching a mono, artificial mark of deep and nuanced possibilities, which is particular-

ly noticeable on the edges of the roofs of the main temple where the arcatures hang down like functionless decorations.

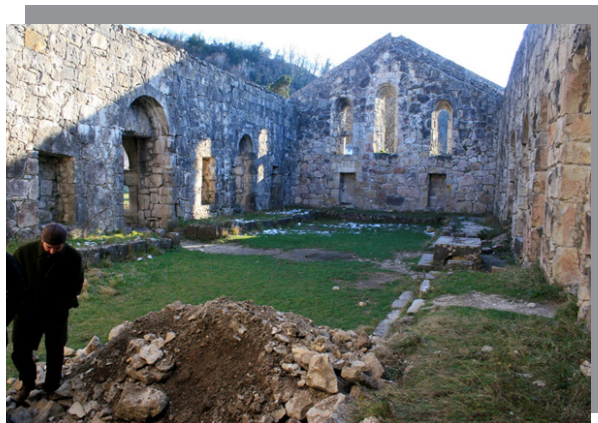
Essential questions about the temple are not addressed, such as the method of laying the tiles on the arms (until 2012, the tiles were only laid on the domes, on the old, dry surface, using the traditional method) – the old tin has been removed, the action plan has not been worked out, and the main questions yet remain unanswered. Over the centuries, in Gelati, as in the corresponding hot and humid climate zone of the dry Mediterranean, roofs have historically been made on a dry basis, with air insulation. It was the same in Gelati – under the roof, the upper spaces of the apse remained unfilled, to keep it dry. And now, without taking this “small” nuance into account, they are being filled in. According to the locals, a large amount of material is being brought into the monastery courtyard by trucks to fill in the previously empty spaces. Unfortunately, “talking to the locals” is necessary here, because the updated project does not include calculations of the amount and volume of insulation material in the temple spaces needed and verbal decisions have become the main principle of project management.

The size of the spaces above the arms accounts for the large amount of “insulating” material needed, which apparently led to its chaotic nature. Furthermore, assessments by Western experts note that the non-uniformity of the infill is incompatible with the monument and large volumes...

It is a pity that, to replace the historic air-insulating function, the empty spaces are again filled with irregular materials (the workers name cement, reinforcement, cement-lime mortar, in different proportions, etc.).

In parallel with the filling of the traditionally empty spaces in the upper parts of the churches, the project management began to manufacture and procure tiles. The old clay tiles of the first phase were replaced by plaster or gypsum tiles, which, contrary to what was stated on paper, proved to be neither frost nor heat resistant, had a fragile density, and began to deteriorate as soon as they were placed in the church courtyard.

In addition, the unpreparedness of the work-



Gelati Academy before restoration



Gelati Academy after restoration, 2009



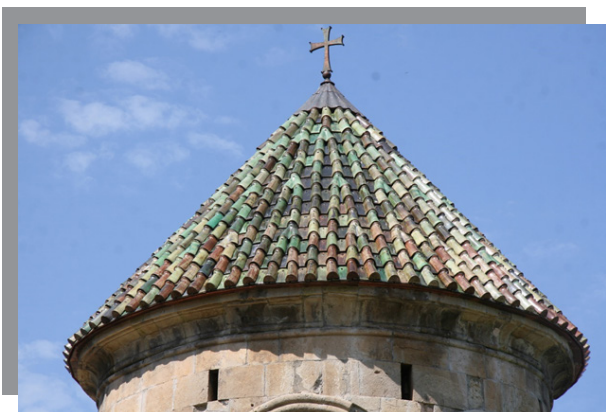
Gelati. Archaeological excavations of the Academy, 2009



Gelati. Glazed tiles from different eras found during archaeological research, Middle Ages



Gelati. St. Nicholas Church under restoration, 2011



Gelati. Newly laid tiles, 2011

ers makes it difficult to lay tiles on difficult surfaces. The response to technical difficulties is spontaneous, arrived at on the spot, varying from one team to another and lacking a benchmark.

The gutters and downspouts that drain the water are also faulty. When it rains, the moisture damages the previously preserved cornices and part of the walls of the temple. In the end, both the material and the way in which it was laid prove to be of inferior quality. Damaged and poorly laid tiles allow water to penetrate.

A large amount of incoming water wets the inert thermal insulation material laid in the upper spaces of the temple, it collects moisture, soaking it up like a wet sponge, which becomes the main factor in damaging the previously dry paintings in the interior. The frescoes get wet, become loose, the process of salting begins and the frescoes crumble.

In response to criticism from specialists, the state is banning them from visiting the temple and secretly repainting and smearing over the wet frescoes: such interference accelerates the process of destruction, and the methodical repainting of ancient frescoes is an attack on antiquity and its authenticity. Western experts, echoing the Georgian specialists, speak of the losses and the difficulties of getting out of the impasse, and of the demanding work that needs to be done to overcome the current situation.

What needs to be done to save Gelati from the critical process of daily deterioration?

The main task, after so many years, is to remove the factor that is damaging the monument, the moisture, and to create a dry environment. Since the Gelati paintings are a collection of frescoes from different periods, techniques, and compositions, the processes of damage occur in different ways, with different intensities and results. To understand these processes, to determine the way of their recovery and the method of their treatment, it is necessary to carry out a complex and constant monitoring, mapping, and identification of the damages, tracing of the processes, emergency intervention in case of need, and, in general, to create an initially healthy environment in order to stop the destructive processes.

And to do that, we need to address the improvement of substandard roofing. In fact, we will have



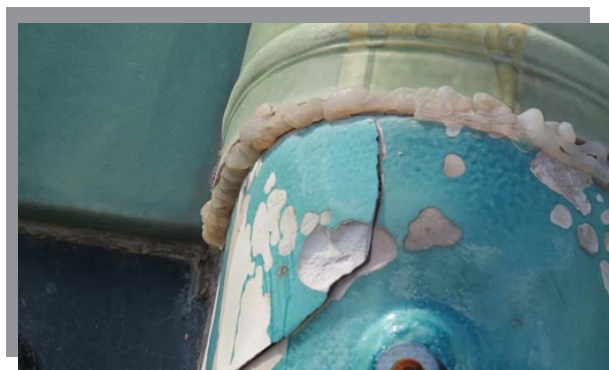
The main temple. Unfit tiles, 2020



Unfit tiles, 2020

to go back at least to 2017. After that, when water will no longer enter the temple under a quality roof, it will take 3-5 years for the wet walls to dry out, according to preliminary calculations.

Where to start? It is necessary to provide the temple with an additional roof that will protect it from precipitation and allow specialists to remove the unsuitable roof and free the building from tonnes of inert insulating material. Such a roof is known as a tent roof, an extremely expensive and technically difficult project to implement. The same needs to be done to the fully frescoed Church of St George.



Unfit new tiles, 2020



Unfit tiles of Gelati, 2021

Once again, we are faced with the need to share Western experience, which will require the formation of a Gelati management team of highly professional specialists who will write a conservation plan and report regularly to stakeholders on the ongoing process.

Only international openness, the integration of the best conservation practices and clear steps at the national and international levels will save Gelati from the destructive processes taking place here. This depends on a calm, healthy, non-aggressive environment for the professionals in the country. ■



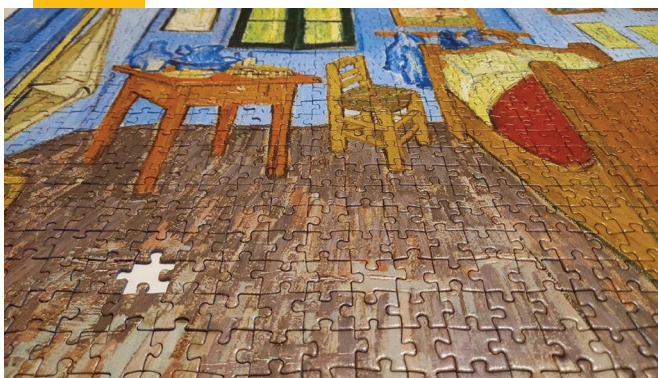


Zura Medzvelia

NOTES OF AN ENVIOUS MAN

What a wonderful thing this author's column turns out to be – you can write about anything you want. Well, I'm going to write about what I've been thinking about the most in the last few days, but first I need to talk about a few of my family members' current lifestyles and post a couple of photos from my family album. So, if you're sick of reading about the personal lives of others like me, stop here – this magazine is free, you have nothing to lose.

This is the one before the last one. After that we did a New York jigsaw, but I must start with this Van Gogh story. But first let me say that we did not argue about who was the coolest in the family, but we argued no less fiercely about who was the coolest jigsaw puzzle master (we know all about all the other virtues – who is the coolest at something and who is the best at something else). Yes, Maiko would put together 20-30 pieces, I would add one or two, but then I would explain that it was due to those one or two that I found that allowed her to assemble 20-30 in a row. And justified it by saying that I graduated from a technical university, which means that in a job like assembling puzzles, I should be the supervisor or something like that. In response to this, Maiko said that then naturally I should always remember for how many and which pieces I found a place in a thousand-piece jigsaw puzzle.



any and which pieces I found a place in a thousand-piece jigsaw puzzle.

This remark of hers would not at all spoil the joy of finding a piece or two, and I simply would head for the study, only to return from there with my diploma and read aloud the name of the department I graduated from, which I couldn't quite remember...

Anyway, let's leave these passions aside and let's focus on what has happened to this Van Gogh: We are approaching the finish line and

we have noticed that this piece (see the first photo) is gone. There's not a single fragment of this floor, or figure, or whatever it is. Well, we started looking here and there.

Maybe it's under the couch, we started getting down on our knees and looking under the couch and all that stuff... Oops, Manana was here today, she tidied up... she might have emptied the Hoover and threw it out with the rubbish? Yes!

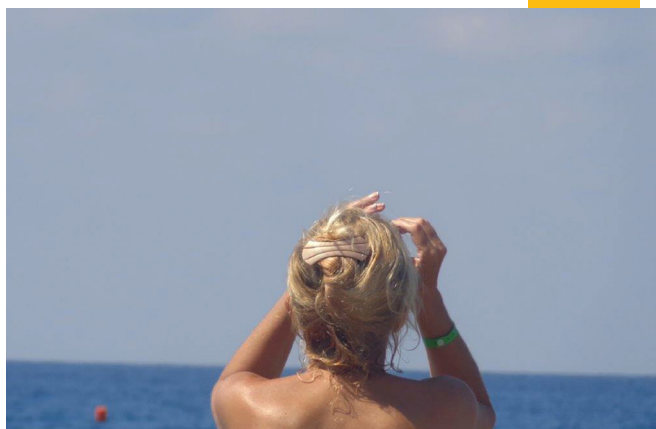
What can you do!!!? And this in the last battle, and the last stretch of the finish line. Here it is! – shouted Maiko. We were very happy, very happy... when you start over, and when you find it, you are even more happy... in short, these are the little joys of playing a puzzle game...

Warning: Now I'm going to have to get to the more intimate details, and before it's too late, stop asking questions – I'm going to talk about what these two family members are doing when they're literally naked...

Well, I couldn't stand it since childhood, and neither old age nor anything else helped – 5... 15 minutes at the most, then it's an agony. Maiko can lie down for about an hour straight. You have to lie down, too – you've hardly got out, you've come to a nice beach and you need to sunbathe, don't you – well, won't it transform us this time and all that, but... anyway, while Maiko is reading for an hour under an umbrella, I'm walking along the beach, picking up nice shells and writing something in the sand with them. It's really fun. Sometimes I intercept these shells from the wave at the last second. I spot a shell, but the wave is already here and if it gets ahead of me, it will sweep it away into the depths. And I am happy when I get ahead of it.

I add to the writing and go back for more shells. For an example, see the second photo, which I titled "NASA's Latest Photo from Mars, 2014". It took me around 15-20 visits to the beach to "create" it. It's a nice beach in Tel Aviv, where we combined our week-long holiday with a concert of my favourite Rolling Stones, because during that time nobody destroyed the future masterpiece... Anyway, such are the little joys of shell collecting...

The impression that Maiko only swims and lies down would be mistaken. No, she also walks and searches. Often, we look for pierced stones together. It's Maiko's infatuation, she's been doing it with her dad since she was a little girl. It's not the same as looking for shells – you walk over a lot of rocks, and there you have to find a stone or a pebble with a small hole in it. It was hard for me at first, but then I got into it. Some of them make you bend down and pick them only due to some premonition or inner feeling, and when you do, you immediately see the hole. And there are some that you take in your hands and do not see any hole, but you are not lazy, look at it in the sun at different angles, and suddenly, it turns out that it still has the smallest hole! In short, this is the joy of searching for the hole, and those who still follow this column should know that so far, I have told this story publicly only to the customs officers



at the Tbilisi airport, who were surprised to see so many ugly stones and pebbles in our suitcases.

Beyond that, Maiko cannot be called a searcher, whereas I have other search hobbies. I have a football collection and I'm always happy when I add something to it. Especially when (and it has happened many times) the hope of finding something dies out and you suddenly find it not in a second-hand bookshop, but in wastepaper left by the rubbish bin.

And I have found things in perfect condition. In my dreams and fantasies, since the days of Captain Nemo, I have often searched for sunken objects at the bottom of the ocean. I watch and read about such stories, though I have put off pursuing professional searching until my next life. Like so many other things, including...

... I'm almost done. Yes, it turned out to be rather long but I started by saying that I am writing about what I've been thinking about the most in the past days. So here we are.

Imagine you're walking on cobbles, rocks, scrap irons and a thousand other things. And it's not a beach, it's a huge collapsed building,

and you're not looking barefoot, carefree in beautiful weather for a stone with a hole in it or a seashell, or a book, or a photograph, or even the grave of Queen Tamar... there seems to be something, quickly..., but... No, it's something perished. In a terrible way.

...and here's the second one... and this one too... and that one... and one more... and another one... another hundred, two hundred, a thousand, forty-five thousand... in front of your eyes, in the dark and at minus five. When I walked around in a nice safe place for half an hour and would not find what I was looking for, I'd get nervous and upset. Can you imagine?!

And all of a sudden! Yes, the child is alive!!! After three days and nights! And again, even after a week...

Seeing something like this, I immediately give a shout out to Maiko. So, even yesterday, 261 hours (11 days) after that damned earthquake, they found a boy. With distraught eyes, who got even worse when a familiar voice from a mobile phone reached him, and he heard that all the people dear to him had survived and were coming to hug him... He kissed the hands of the owner of that mobile phone, the rescuer.

It's an amazing joy. One that you will never forget, and every memory of which will delight you anew, sincerely, and deservedly.

You might have guessed that I am envious. ■

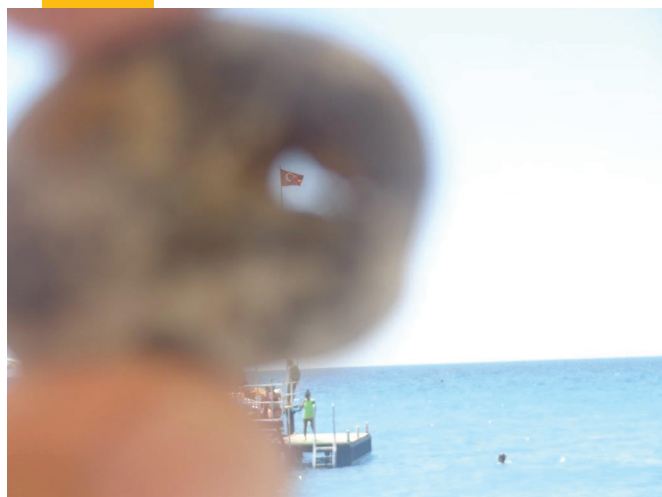




Photo by Levan Kherkheulidze



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8th of March. "2 hours Before the Raid"
Photo by Badri Okujava