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# 1989: Change of Memory

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## ABSTRACT

The following paper aims to study and analyze the process of reconsideration of the past in 1988-90 in Soviet Georgia. This process, especially the developments in 1989, made it possible to bring back the idea of independence in society, which eventually resulted in the restoration of Georgia's independence. The reconsideration of history, especially the appraisal of the events of 1918-1921, is observed by analyzing the works of historians, official documents, and statements.

Key words: Memory, Official narrative, Alternative narrative, Reconsideration of history, May 26, February 25

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## INTRODUCTION

The restoration of the independence of Georgia was declared on April 9, 1991 at a Supreme Council session. In his address given before proclaiming the independence of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, chairman of the Supreme Council, spoke about the recent history of Georgia. He represented a narration of history along with some results of an independence referendum justifying the decision made. The narrative of history presented by Gamsakhurdia would have been regarded as anti-state two years earlier. An official Soviet narrative of history legitimized Georgia's membership in the Soviet Union. But the reconsideration of history that started in 1989 deconstructed the Soviet narrative and changed collective memory. In the same year, a demand for independence went from street demonstrations to an official discourse.

## THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

Memory is not just an individual phenomenon, but a collective one as well (Halbwachs, 1992). "Identifying with the collective past of a group is part of the process of acquiring any social identity" (Zerubavel, 2003b). Shared memory about the past is an essential factor in the formation of a national identity. But memory is selective – "out of the numerous events that occurred throughout history, only a few are remembered" (Zerubavel, 2003a). Collective memory about a selective past can be crystallized in "sites of memory" (Nora, 1989). These could be history textbooks, archives, memorials, museums, etc. Considering a selective attitude toward the past makes it hard to speak about history as an objective reality. Present circumstances heavily influence the way the past is represented. The past is "constructed according to the conditions and desires of those who produce historical texts in the present" (Friedman, 1992). A construction of a historical narrative allows some events to be deliberately highlighted on one hand and on the other, allow others to be ignored and silenced. But the narrative requires a maintenance of historical continuity. That can be achieved by "bridging" different historical events (Zerubavel, 2003b). The attitude toward the past may change during a social and political transition. New political systems often aim to build a new future and "a new future requires a new past" (Foner, 2002). In such a situation "active forgetting" (Assmann, 2010) is implied – old "sites of memory" are damaged by destroying historical monuments and removing certain holidays from the calendar, through the renaming of streets, cities and even states. With the destruction of these "bridges" a sense of historical continuity disappears and collective memory changes.

A transformation of the collective memory is noticeable in authoritarian states. Here, the narrative of history is a basis for the existing system. An alternative narrative is seen as a threat to the system. Such changes activated in 1989 with the fall of the socialist bloc. The change of memory was particularly harsh in the republics of the Soviet Union as here their narratives of history were dictated by the center in order to maintain the existence of the Union. In such states re-claiming the past from the Soviet framework became a central aspect (Kuzio, 2002).

The following study aims to analyze the process of the change of memory in Georgia during 1989. There will be an attempt to identify changes that happened in the official narrative of history and the results caused by the change. I use official documents that deal with historical narratives such as the preamble of the constitution, governmental decrees, history textbooks, and school curriculum approved and adopted by the state. There are also speeches made by state officials. Such materials provide information about the official narrative and help to describe attitudes towards important events from the history of Georgia.

Since the change was a rapid one, I chose to use the Georgian newspaper *Komunisti* (The Communist) and analyze articles published during 1988-1990 in order to describe the process of transformation itself. The choice was made due to the special characteristics that the newspaper had:

- The newspaper was an organ of the Georgian Communist Party Central Committee, the Supreme Soviet of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, and the Council of Ministers of the Georgian SSR, thereby representing official attitudes towards the covered content.
- *Komunisti* was one of the main sources of information in the republic with a daily circulation of 700,000 by 1989.
- *Komunisti* covered topics about history. Historians were often invited by the newspaper to take part in round table discussions. Articles about certain events showed their mindset regarding them. By examining the historians' articles, the discourse concerning the official narrative and changes made can be identified.
- Articles about historical events and figures, photos published in the newspaper were "sites of memory". The daily newspaper expressed the official stance towards certain anniversaries as well by commemorating some of them and by ignoring others.
- The newspaper presented a reconsidered narrative that could have played an important role in changing the collective memory.

## THE OFFICIAL SOVIET NARRATIVE

There was a monolithic, uniform Soviet narrative of history in the Soviet Union, contributed to limited access to archives and a mandatory participation in festivals (Chikovani, 2017). That narrative served to justify the existence of the Soviet Union. The importance of the historical narrative in terms of preserving the state increased even more in the 70-80s, when amidst economic and social crisis, the USSR started living on memories – reminiscence of the glorious past became a key argument to justify the continued existence of the USSR (Argonov, 2017).

The memory of the October 25, 1917 revolution was the most important event in the official narrative of the history of the Soviet Union and its constituent republics. Under the Soviet narrative, the victory of the Great October Socialist Revolution marked the beginning of a new era in history – the collapse of capitalism and the ultimate victory of socialism. That was its global historical significance. The October Revolution "broke the chains" of national oppression, bringing freedom to the nations oppressed by the Russian empire (Guchua & Meskhia, 1985, p. 244). The establishment of Soviet rule under the leadership of the Communist Party headed by V.I. Lenin was followed by an epoch of sustainable well-being and continuous cultural advancement (Constitution of the Georgian SSR, Preamble, 1978). For Georgia, this era of advancement started on February 25, 1921, when the Soviet power led by the Communist Party, secured a victory in Georgia through Russia's fraternal assistance. Georgia's voluntary integration into the united family of the Soviet Republics conditioned the all-round development and prosperity of the Georgian nation (Constitution of the Georgian SSR, Preamble, 1978).

February 25, 1921 was another milestone on the ascending line of Georgia's history after October 25, 1917. A period within these two dates, i.e. the developments of 1918-1921, with exception for the revolutionary activity carried out in the aforesaid period, was scarcely reviewed and was given an explicitly negative assessment – these were the domination of bourgeois-imperialist powers in Georgia as a result of the opportunistic policies pursued by the "Mensheviks", those disloyal to the idea of revolution, reprisals against those aspiring towards revolution, and a total economic collapse (Guchua & Meskhia, 1985, p. 246-50). This narrative was consolidated by the "sites of memory". Lenin, a leader of the Great October Socialist Revolution and an initiator of the formation of the USSR, was particularly respected. Cities and streets were named after the Georgian Bolsheviks who lead the Sovietization of Georgia, their remains were buried at Mtatsminda Pantheon (a Tbilisi-based necropolis), and monuments were erected to them. Public celebrations were organized to mark the aforesaid dates and corresponding articles and photos were published in the official print media. The official narrative served to solidify the idea, under which the establishment of the Soviet rule and subsequent

integration into the Soviet Union were progressive steps in Georgian history. At the same time, it was stressed that those were absolutely voluntary decisions.

Alongside the officially recognized narrative, there was also an alternative one, which preserved the memory of the developments of 1918-1921. According to it, in February 1921, parallel to the dissolution of the Russian Empire, the Georgian community started aspiring to independence, which finally culminated in 1918 with the proclamation of an independent state. This state ceased to exist in 1921 after the Soviet Russian Red Army invaded independent Georgia and brought Georgian “Bolsheviks” into power urging the country’s legitimate government to emigrate. Such “memory carriers” were mostly Georgian immigrants and those who personally remembered the 1921 developments. This narrative did not have any “sites of memory” and was mostly spread orally. Society got acquainted with the developments of 1918-1921 via foreign radio stations or through illegally published proclamations with small press runs. Voicing this narrative in an official, formal space would be perceived as an anti-state act.

It was unacceptable to publicly express a different approach not only in the political, but also in any formal space. This is evident from a case that took place in 1985, when “February 25<sup>th</sup> 1921”, a poem by Kolau Nadiradze reflecting a negative attitude towards Georgia’s Sovietization, was published in a collection of poems. As a result, the individuals in charge of publishing the book were dismissed, the entire print run was seized, and the poet was criticized by the Writers’ Union and urged to negatively assess his own poem (Bregadze, 2008).

## **GLASNOST AND THE RECONSIDERATION OF HISTORY**

*Glasnost* became a key component of the transformation policy that was launched upon Mikhail Gorbachev’s coming into power in the Soviet Union. It implied openly speaking out about the problems existing in the country. *Glasnost* concerned, among others, the problems and controversies existing in the Soviet historiography. In February 1987, Gorbachev stated that there was “no place for blank spots” in Soviet history (Davies, 1989), which was followed by a thorough study and reconsideration of history. “Repentance”, a film directed by Tengiz Abuladze, became a symbol of *glasnost* disclosing the reprisals and aspiration towards dictatorship that had been the case in the Soviet Union’s past. The repressions of 1920-1950 became the main target of historical reconsideration. Some commissions were set up to revise the cases of the repressed and ensure their rehabilitation.

By reconsidering history, the state thus acknowledged the mistakes made over time that deviated from what had been achieved through the October Revolution. Those errors were attributed to the human factor (Pravda, 1988). The fragmented and individual goal-

tailored narration of history was condemned. This policy was accompanied by the facilitation of access to archives and the publication of previously unknown documents that were supposed to shed the light and fill in the “blank spots” of history (Kurin, 1988). It could be said that the restoration of historical justice was an important task set. The Soviet Union’s new leadership sought to carry out the country’s transformation through self-purification. All the historical errors were to be condemned and the values introduced by the revolution-maker Vladimir Lenin over the course of the October Revolution and during the formation of the USSR, should have been brought back. It was exactly Lenin’s image and the actions carried out based on his ideas that remained intact during this continuous revision of history. It could be easily explained: other individuals and events were part of the USSR history, while Lenin was at the origin of that history. Challenging the fairness of the Great October Revolution and the formation of the USSR would have inevitably called in question the appropriateness of the existence of the USSR and the Communist Party leading it, including those who were seeking its transformation.

The process of historic reinterpretation took place in Soviet Georgia as well. Some Georgian historians admitted that history was recorded in an incomprehensive manner and that many issues were covered and studied with bias and unfairness, which was the result of the historical approach prevailing at that time:

“The study of history found itself in a steel grip or the ‘Procrustean bed’ of the *History of the All-Union Communist Party (B): Short Course* and no one could deviate with impunity from this ‘gospel’ of Stalin’s epoch.” (Sturua, 1988).

The existence of “blank spots” was attributed to the lack of access to materials (Surguladze, 1988). However, there were some radical opinions as well, under which historians became ideologists of “the high and mighty”, purposefully avoiding discussing certain issues and deviating from the existing framework (Koranashvili, 1988).

## **BRINGING BACK THE 26<sup>TH</sup> OF MAY**

### *The October firstborn – Returned through Perestroika*

By 1988, amidst growing interest in modern history, it became particularly important to bring the microfilm records from the archives of the government-in-exile of the Democratic Republic of Georgia and the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Georgia back to Georgia (Zhvania, 1988). The information at hand and the access to archives allowed researchers to start studying those “blank spots” in the history of Georgia in the period between 1918-1921. It was impossible to ignore this era, especially since May 26 held a particular place



in the alternative narrative more actively voiced in informal circles. It was necessary to include it in the official narrative. In his article “The fog has dispersed. The problems of Georgia’s modern history in the light of transformation”, published in April 1988, Akaki Surguladze named the developments of May 26 and February 25 among the stereotypically studied episodes in Georgian history. In his opinion, the declaration of the independence of Georgia was the result of granting the peoples of Russia the right to self-determination, which was the great achievement of the October Revolution<sup>1</sup>. The Menshevik contribution to the aforesaid developments was denied in the article. As for February 25, the author believed that until then, there had been a distorted coverage of Georgia’s Sovietization process. However, given the misguided policies pursued by the Menshevik government, it still was a legitimate event (Surguladze, 1988). Grigol Zhvania further expanded the same view in an interview published in May 1988. He considered May 26 to be an echo of the October Revolution. Here also, the Georgian Bolsheviks’ failure to immediately establish the Soviet regime in Georgia was attributed to personal mistakes and their non-compliance with Lenin’s guidance. Whereas the fact that the Mensheviks’ acquired power was linked to the imperialists’ assistance rendered to them. The stance of Soviet Russia and Lenin towards May 26 was also clearly expressed. It was pointed out that Lenin highly welcomed the self-determination of the Georgian nation, as evidenced by the agreement formalized with the Democratic Republic of Georgia on May 7, 1920, by virtue of which Georgia’s independence was recognized by Soviet Russia. As for February 25, the Sovietization of Georgia was related to the Mensheviks’ mistakes, including a violation of the aforesaid agreement. The important point in this article was the partial “rehabilitation” of Noe Zhordania, the chairman of the government of the Democratic Republic of Georgia. He was portrayed in this article as a person respected by Lenin, who sought to maintain peace and comply with the commitments under the agreement with Soviet Russia, though he couldn’t handle the intra-party opposition hostile to Soviet Russia (Zhvania G., 1988). Like Zhvania, Ushangi Sidamonidze also dropped a boundary between the “Mensheviks” and May 26 in his article entitled “The October Firstborn - Born through *Perestroika*”:

“It’s time to see a great historical event in the May 26 Act, this is the restoration of Georgian statehood, besides the creation of a bourgeois state. Entire generations of pre-revolutionary Georgia had been fighting for that. Our generation must pay a tribute to their merit. We got back another “blank spot” of our history and that became possible in the epoch of transformation, democratization, and *glasnost*, on the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that event.” (Sidamonidze, 1988)

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<sup>1</sup> In 1917, the Russian Bolshevik government released the “Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia”, under which the peoples of the Empire were granted the right to self-determination.

The aforementioned historians summed up their views during the round table discussion organized by *Komunisti*. Opinions expressed at the meeting were published as an article entitled “A Centuries-Long Path”, on February 24, 1989. The article sort of offered readers a revised narrative, portraying the 26<sup>th</sup> of May as an achievement of the October Revolution and still positively assessed February 25, despite the fact that Georgia’s readiness for revolution was called into question (Komunisti’s Round Table, 1989).

By early 1989, the 26<sup>th</sup> of May, 1918 – Georgia’s Independence Day, returned to memory as the Georgian nation’s achievement, linked to the October Revolution that took place in the Russian Empire. However, the narrative concerning May 26 was devoid of those political or public figures who had participated in the declaration of independence. The activities of the leadership of the Georgian democratic republic were still negatively assessed, whereas Georgia’s Sovietization was perceived as a logical continuation of the chain of events. Thus, May 26 was regarded as a transitional stage between the October Revolution and Georgia’s Sovietization. In the beginning of 1989, the inclusion of May 26 in the official narrative wasn’t reflected in any documents of national importance. Still the issue of organizing solemn celebrations to mark that date was already discussed by the country’s top government officials (Patiashvili, 2013).

In all other respects, the official narrative was inviolable. A letter of congratulation on the anniversary of the establishment of the Soviet Union was published on December 30, 1988, where it was stated that the first multinational state was founded on December 30, 1922, based on voluntary rather than the forceful unification of peoples (Komunisti, 1988). The congratulatory statement published in *Komunisti* on February 25, 1989, stressed the importance of that date for overall progress.

“The Great October ‘came’ to the Georgian soil 68 years ago and since that date its economic and intellectual potential has developed to an immeasurable extent” (Saqinformi, 1989).

## THE RECONSIDERATION OF MAY 26

Some contradictory narratives were voiced on February 25, 1989. While officials took part in the traditional celebration, the occupation of Georgia was condemned by the demonstrators. The manifestation of the alternative narrative continued during the April demonstrations. The government continued to support the official narrative and declared that Georgia was going to “*remain a socialist sovereign republic among the fraternal nations of the Soviet Union*”.

The tragedy of April 9 radically changed public opinion about the issue of independence. Violence used against demonstrators demanding rights guaranteed by the constitution made it obvious that even during *glasnost* there were tabooed issues.

The official narrative was reconsidered in an article by Dermisha Gogoladze published on the 25<sup>th</sup> of May in *Komunisti*. The article fully rehabilitated the Democratic Republic of Georgia and its government: the political system of the republic and reforms carried out by the ruling party were positively acclaimed; the presence of German and then English troops on Georgian soil, proclaimed as a sign of dependency on imperialistic states by the Soviet version of history, was interpreted as a decision made by the government of the Democratic Republic of Georgia in the interests of state security. Most importantly, the article demonstrated that the Democratic Republic of Georgia had a strong basis for an existing: rightful government supported by a majority of the population and for *de jure* recognition by many states, first of all by Soviet Russia. Therefore, Gogoladze suggested that if Georgia had not been Sovietized, it would have overcome all existing obstacles and would have set a course towards democratic and socialist transformation (Gogoladze, 1989).

A positive view of the Democratic Republic was presented in articles published on the 26<sup>th</sup> of May. Alexandre Mujiri praised political achievements such as multiparty elections, a coalition government, and a progressive constitution (Mujiri, 1989). Achievements made in the public sphere were also praised:

“Not only was the 26<sup>th</sup> of May, 1918 a political and historic act of the revival of the sovereign republic, but also the starting point of modern Georgian science, culture, literature, and art” (Tevzadze, 1989).

The 26<sup>th</sup> of May was widely commemorated as a day of the restoration of independence and statehood. *Komunisti* broadcasted celebrations from different cities of Georgia. May 26 became part of the official narrative. But that did not end the process of reconsideration. Articles published during May strongly differed from the articles published before the events of April 9. Articles published after the tragedy of April 9 not only mentioned the 26<sup>th</sup> of May, but emphasized the importance of the independence achieved in 1918 and drew a positive image of the Democratic Republic of Georgia.

## THE RECONSIDERATION OF FEBRUARY 25

*“I have lost the will for life or death,  
since February has turned May into winter forever!”*

- Kote Makashvili, 1921

A positive representation of the Democratic Republic of Georgia raised logical doubts about the need for a change of government in Georgia in 1921 and the Sovietization thereof. In an article published on May 25, 1989, Dermisha Gogoladze expressed an opinion with regard to the February 25 developments, thus opposing the official narrative:

“[Due to Soviet historiography the government of the Democratic Republic of Georgia] was antisocialist, anti-national and its defeat and withdrawal from the historic arena, as well as the establishment of the Soviet regime through deployment of the Russian troops in Georgia, was quite logical. In fact, the abolition of the Democratic Republic of Georgia on February 25, 1921, was a violation of international legal norms, a breach of the treaty of May 7, 1920” (Gogoladze, 1989).

It soon became clear that the official narrative was unacceptable for all groups of society. The First Congress of the People’s Deputies – the supreme body of the Soviet government, started operating in Moscow on May 25, 1989. On May 26, a group of people’s deputies from the Georgian SSR made public their position concerning the Congress, raising the issue of the condemnation of Georgia’s annexation in February 1921. According to the deputies, the developments of 1921 constituted a gross violation of Lenin’s approved treaty of May 7, 1920, signed between equal, sovereign states - democratic Georgia and Soviet Russia. The deputies demanded legal recognition of the aforesaid treaty in the current context, which would consequently serve as a guarantee for ensuring real and full sovereignty of the Georgian Soviet Republic (Saqinformi, 1989b). Tamaz Gamkrelidze, a deputy, voiced the aforesaid position at the People’s Deputy Congress on May 29 (Gamkrelidze, 1989). The people’s deputies admitted that the Georgian nation should have known the truth, i.e., that Georgia regained its lost independence in 1918, and then lost it again on February 25, 1921. Such a desire to restore historical justice was tightly linked to Georgia’s acquisition of political, economic and cultural independence. The need for gaining independence was conditioned by the developments of April 9, which proved that the constitutionally defined independence of the Georgian SSR was not consistent with reality:

“April could recur not only on the calendar, but in real life, too. And that could happen, because we are so far lacking what any nation should possess” (Machavariani, 1989).

The position of the people’s deputies implied that a negative assessment of the February 25 developments was no longer a stance merely within informal circles. Formal and informal parts of Georgian society jointly demanded the assessment of February 25, as well as recognition and condemnation of the annexation (Putkaradze, 1989b). At the

same time, it was necessary to conduct an in-depth study of Georgia's Sovietization, since the developments of February 25 were linked to the relationship between the two nations, i.e. to international law. Therefore, lawyers also got involved in discussions on this issue alongside the historians. For them, the legitimacy of May 26 already seemed justified from a legal perspective and now it was time to focus on February 25 (Putkaradze, 1989a).

The main focus of the lawyers and historians was on the May 7, 1920 treaty between the Democratic Republic of Georgia and Soviet Russia, under which the Soviet Russian leadership recognized Georgia's independence and desisted from interfering in its internal affairs. Consequently, the Soviet Red Army's actions against Georgia in 1921 should have been considered on the basis of this agreement. The researchers rebuffed the Soviet narrative's offered version, under which the Democratic Republic of Georgia had been continuously violating the May 7, 1920 agreement. There was a need for substantiated analysis, and for that purpose it was necessary to identify the primary, original sources and relevant documents (Sharadze, 1989).

The historians published the full text of the May 7, 1920 treaty in the June 8<sup>th</sup> issue of *Komunisti*. Whereas the amendments appended to the treaty on May 12, 1920, were released on June 9. The historians claimed that Soviet Russia recognized the independence and territorial integrity of Georgia (Menteshashvili & Surguladze, 1989). However, having added the secret provisions to the treaty, Soviet Russia thus immediately violated the agreement, calling into question Georgia's territorial integrity (Saitidze, 1989a).

In June, *Komunisti* started publishing a series of Guram Sharadze's articles entitled "The Materials for the History of the May 7, 1920 Georgian-Russian Treaty". Those articles included the memoirs of the members of the Social-Democratic Party directly involved in formalizing the May 7 agreement on behalf of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, as well as foreign authors' assessments of the aforesaid agreement. Apart from their research value, those articles had another significance - they brought back the memory of the Georgian political elite: their images and merits, their personal attitude towards the developments of May 7 and February 25. Levan Toidze, a historian, released a series of articles dedicated to the May 7 Agreement and the Sovietization of Georgia. The articles referenced heretofore unknown original sources related to both the conclusion of the May 7 Agreement, as well as the Red Army invasion of Georgia on February 25. The materials proved that the Red Army and the Georgian Bolsheviks themselves were well-aware that there hadn't been any popular uprising in Georgia. They themselves assessed the developments of February 25, 1921 as an intervention, occupation, and annexation (Toidze, 1989).

## REFLECTING UPON THE RECONSIDERATION OF FEBRUARY 25

The released articles further solidified the already widespread negative opinion with regard to February 25. The process of erasing the names of those related to Georgia's Sovietization began along with a devaluation of the February 25 developments. At the May 10 session of the Commission on Administrative Territorial Entities and Settlement Issues under the Presidium of the Supreme Council of Georgia, an initiative was put forward for the restitution of the historical names of settlements in Georgia. In this regard, the Commission called on the executive committees of the People's Deputy Regional Councils to consider the restitution of the historical names of cities and regions. The issue was soon settled by taking into account the public opinion, with the initiative being approved at the Gegechkori, Tskhakaia, Makharadze, Orjonikidze, and Tsulukidze regional sessions and the historical names of those regions were restored.

The reconsideration of historical figures had to be followed by more important change - an official reconsideration of Georgia's Sovietization. For this purpose, a commission for reviewing political and judicial violations of the Treaty of May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1920 signed between Georgia and Soviet Russia was created by the Supreme Soviet of Georgia SSR on June 20, 1989. The commission consisted mostly of historians and lawyers. They concluded that the invasion of the Soviet Russian army into Georgia in February 1921 and the occupation of its entire territory was a military intervention from a judicial point of view, an occupation with the aim of demolishing the existing political regime. It was also a factual annexation from a political point of view. The conclusion was endorsed by the Supreme Soviet during a session held on the 18<sup>th</sup> of November 1989. The statement was included in the decree on "Guarantees of Protection of the State Sovereignty of Georgia" issued by a special session of the Supreme Soviet on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March 1990. This document acknowledged all the treaties signed after February 1921, including the Union treaty of December 30, 1922 as being illegal and asked for negotiations on the matter of the restoration of Georgia's independence. Amendments appended to the decree on June 20, 1990 proclaimed that the government structures created after the occupation and annexation of Georgia – firstly - non-elective revolutionary committees and then - class-based Soviets were not reflecting the will of the Georgian nation. On the same day, the Supreme Soviet acknowledged that Georgia had a right to restore its independence that was lost in 1921 after the violation of the treaty of May 7, 1920 by the government of the RSFSR and therefore issued a decree on the "Creation of the legal mechanism for restoration of the state independence of Georgia" in accordance with the norms of international law.

Starting in November, 1989, official decrees began to outlaw Soviet rule in Georgia. The annexation of Georgia was officially condemned. This was simultaneously accompanied by the reconsideration of the whole history of Soviet Georgia.

## THE RECONSIDERATION OF THE HISTORY OF SOVIET GEORGIA (1921- 1989)

*Komunisti* did not commemorate Sovietization on the 25<sup>th</sup> of February. February 25 was re-established as a day of annexation and an end of independence. Events and figures connected with the struggle against Sovietization and Soviet rule started to return into the collective memory. In an article written by historian Gela Saitidze, it was stated that contrary to the Soviet version of history, Tbilisi didn't cheer for the Red Army's arrival. In reality, the city resisted. Saitidze encouraged readers to remember those who died for their beloved homeland (Saitidze, 1989b). Diary of the young nurse Maro Makashvili who died during the Red Army invasion of Georgia was published in *Komunisti* on the 26<sup>th</sup> of May 1990.

Those intellectuals who stayed in Georgia after the occupation were praised for their courage to continue their resistance and for receiving the fact of Sovietization as a national and personal tragedy. *Komunisti* published a poem by Kote Makashvili from 1921 in which the poet mourned his homeland and beloved daughter Maro.

The government-in-exile was freed from the stigma of being a "counterrevolutionary gang" and praised for not capitulating, thereby judicially leaving Georgia an independent state. Guram Sharadze's series of articles titled "The French Diary" introduced then forgotten politicians-in-exile to society at large.

Several articles were dedicated to the Patriarch of Georgia Ambrosi and his efforts to bring international attention to the annexation of Georgia. An article published about the revolt of 1924 condemned the cruelty used against rebellions and innocent people and criticized the biased coverage of the events by the press. Georgians who fought among Wehrmacht Georgian legions were also remembered. An article published in September 1990 dedicated to the Georgian soldier mentioned his desire to liberate the homeland.

The events of March 9, 1956 and the demonstrations of 1978 also became part of the narrative about the national liberation struggle. Furthermore, the tragic event of April 9 became the main symbol of the national liberation narrative. The 9<sup>th</sup> of April and the idea of independence became interlinked within the collective memory. It was remembered

that the site of the April 9 tragedy was the fraternal burial place of Georgians killed during the defense of Tbilisi in 1921 (Saitidze, 1989b).

## NEW GEORGIA

The historic reconsideration process immediately found reflection in the official historical narrative – in 1990, under the history curriculum, classes in modern history mostly offered a description of the national liberation struggle (Ministry of Education of Georgia, 1990). Based on the changed memory, Georgia was no longer a Soviet socialist republic that had voluntarily integrated into the USSR, but was rather an “heir” state of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, which had been living under annexation for 70 years, though it had never come to terms with such a condition.

‘The Round Table - Free Georgia Bloc’ won the multiparty election on October 28, 1990. On November 14, the newly-elected Supreme Council started embodying the memory changes - the “Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic” was renamed into the “Republic of Georgia” and the symbols of the Democratic Republic of Georgia - the national flag, emblem, and anthem were restored. Rejeb Zhordania, the son of Noe Zhordania, addressed the Supreme Council in the following days. All the aforesaid underlined the fact that the Republic of Georgia was a legal heir of the Georgian state of 1918-1921 and has had legal grounds for declaring independence. A preamble of the Georgian Constitution was entirely changed, reflecting the narrative of the updated history, under which, after the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917, the Georgian nation restored state independence on May 26, 1918. In February-March, 1921, Soviet Russia flagrantly violated the peace treaty and carried out Georgia’s occupation through military aggression, which resulted in actual annexation. Forceful integration into the USSR was accompanied by continuous repressions, the latest manifestation of which was April 9, 1989. The Supreme Council announced the beginning of a transitional period during which the actual grounds for the full restoration of Georgia’s independence were to be prepared. The abolition of work-free days and public holidays existing in Soviet Georgia and introduction of the new ones in their stead turned into an act of dissociation from the Soviet past. The transitional period ended with the declaration of the restoration of Georgia’s independence on April 9, 1991.



## CONCLUSION

An official narrative of history served as a basis for keeping Georgia as a part of the USSR. The narrative represented the October Revolution and the Sovietization of Georgia as a progressive chain of logical events. The role of the official narrative remained the same during the first years of *perestroika* as the reconsideration of history under the frame of *glasnost* served the purpose of maintaining the Union. But *glasnost* played its role by creating more free space for historians. The tragedy of April 9, 1989 became a turning point, after which the demand for independence entered the official discourse.

Increased publications on previously tabooed issues such as the Democratic Republic of Georgia, the reconsideration of the Sovietization of Georgia, and the whole history of Soviet Georgia changed the collective memory of Georgian society. Bridges supported by the official Soviet narrative between the present and the past were destroyed. Newly remembered events and public figures rapidly constructed a new official narrative. Due to the symbolic acts of November 1990, the present was bridged with the Democratic Republic of Georgia. Reconsidering Georgia as a successor state of the Democratic Republic of Georgia provided legal basis for the restoration of independence.

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