

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS:

**POLITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS,
IMAGINED UNITY, AND MEMORY
DISCOURSES**

**EDITED BY
RUSLAN BARAMIDZE
SERGEY RUMYANTSEV**



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შოთა რუსთაველის ეროვნული
საზღვნიერო ფონდი

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Institute of Presidential Power – Election Campaigns in Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia – Post-Soviet Nationalism – Memory Politics – Politicizing History – Linguistic Devices in Pre-Election Discourse

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The cover of the book uses photographs by Jemal Kasradze, taken on October 28, 1990, “Father and Son on Election Day,” and taken on October 11, 1992, “Elections on October 11,” preserved in the collection of the digital photograph archive. National Parliamentary Library of Georgia.

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Dr. Ruslan Baramidze
Batumi, 2024

In Blood, Sweat and Tears: The Use of Historical Plots in the Struggle for Political Power

An Introduction

In 1991, a few months before the official abolition of the USSR, the first presidential elections were held in Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia¹. The struggle for power took place in a context of rapid loss of legitimacy of the Soviet political elites, degradation of social infrastructure, growing economic stagnation, armed conflicts, and the growing popularity of nationalist ideologies. The creation of the institution of presidential power in this situation was an act marking a radical break with the principles of the Soviet system, when the General Secretary of the only ruling party was at the head of the state; a radical turn towards Western European democracies and the United States. It was a moment of collective euphoria and the widest possible dissemination of optimistic hopes for the rapid construction of democratic regimes and prosperous economies.

The last years of the Soviet Union and the first years of independence were also a moment of radical historicization of political discourse. In all three internationally recognised South Caucasian nation-states, historicism became an essential component of independence discourses, along with a primordialist understanding of the phenomenon of the nation². Both of these closely related attitudes underpinned patriotic-mobilisation and populist political discourses and were actively used to create images of the enemy, which were widely used in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetian, Abkhaz and Russian-Georgian conflicts³.

The speeches of politicians (presidents and the most prominent candidates for this office), those who had the power to create official state discourse, reproduced primordialist notions of nations as a result of the development of ethnic groups, which in turn were understood as some natural organisms. Presidents and their competitors juggled with various historical narratives and myths, using idealized images of historical heroes, finding them in deep antiquity and in the Middle Ages. The specialists who created national historical narratives and myths have provided them with a rich repertoire.

Reasons for cultivating collective traumas, as well as affirmations of independence rights or reasons for national pride, were sought and found in the past, in historical

¹ The first president of Georgia was Zviad Gamsakhurdia (April 1991); in Azerbaijan it was Ayaz Mutalibov (already in 1990 the Supreme Soviet of the republic appointed him president, but only in September 1991 the first elections were held); in Armenia - Levon Ter-Petrosyan (November 1991).

² "What I mean by 'historicism', - noted Karl Popper, the first known critic and researcher of this phenomenon - [...] an approach to the social sciences which assumes that historical prediction is their principal aim, and which assumes that this aim is attainable by discovering the 'rhythms' or the 'patterns', the 'laws' or the 'trends' that underlie the evolution of history." (Popper, 2002, p. 3). Vladimir Malakhov clarifies this notion in the context of the discourse on nationalism. "Historicism [...] is the belief that it is possible to understand the present from the past. It is the belief that the key to the meaning of events happening today lies in history. [...] Nationalists who share this attitude assume in the phenomena they study - 'nations' - the existence of primordial, ancestral ties that remain valid through the ages and that can be traced back centuries. [...] Historicism constructs a single Event where many different events have taken place. [...] It is quite obvious that historicism in studies of nationalism is implicitly nationalistic" (Malakhov, 2005, pp. 52-54).

³ For more on the conflicts, political transformations and regimes established in the South Caucasus see: (Sury 1993; Cornell, 2001: 131-184; Waal, 2003; Ottaway, 2003, pp. 51-70; Libaridian, 2004; Derluguian, 2007; Petersen 2008; Cornell & Starr, 2009; Waal, 2010; Bolukbasi, 2011; Waal, 2018).

narratives. All three dominant “imagined communities”⁴ in the region (Georgians, Armenians and Azerbaijanis), claiming special rights to own their nation-states, considered themselves “historical”. In the sense that, by the collapse of the USSR, lengthy narratives had long been constructed describing the history of these communities as beginning in ancient times and continuing uninterrupted into the present. Members of each of these communities, and especially those who had the power to construct historical discourses and narratives⁵, remembered their own golden age and dreamed of a new one that would surely come with independence.

In this situation, presidents not only gained real power, but also became symbolic figures representing the new era of building independent states. Often humanitarians by education, they actively manipulate historical arguments and national myths and use narratives from the past to mobilize their electorate. The very rewriting of national histories, the creation of new narratives, the renewal of the pantheons of national heroes, is seen as the most important achievement of independence.

It is generally believed that under Soviet rule the content of historical narratives was controlled by Moscow. The Soviet political system is also associated, not without reason, with the tradition of using history for ideological purposes⁶. With the collapse of the USSR, it seemed finally possible to write a “true” and “objective” national history and to abandon the practice of using it for political and ideological purposes. One can safely assume that many presidents, as well as their opponents, sincerely believed (and still believe) that they are involved in the restoration of violated justice, rather than trying to manipulate the perceptions of citizens in order to seize and retain power. Especially, since in practice these two goals are very often not contradictory. In other words, it is safe to assume that politicians themselves, while manipulating the moods of voters and continuing to use history for political purposes⁷, are in the grip of historicist and primordialist perceptions.

The Soviet versions of the Armenian, Azerbaijani or Georgian historical narrative did not require radical reconstruction. Only the last two centuries of history, associated with the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, were subjected to the most significant reworking. In the framework of the new interpretation of history, only the concepts of class struggle and friendship of peoples were sacrificed, completely replaced by the idea of an uncompromising struggle for independence lasting through centuries or even millennia and, as its inevitable culmination, the creation of a nation-state. To use Marc Ferro’s categories, we can say that already in the early years of independence, the renewed version of institutional history played a huge role in public discourse, as it expressed or legitimized politics, ideology, and regime⁸.

⁴ See: (Anderson, 1998).

⁵ Far from just professional historians, ethnographers, philologists or social researchers, but also journalists, writers, politicians and so on.

⁶ See: (Brandenberger, 2002; Platt & Brandenberger, eds., 2005; Sherlock, 2007; Konocov, 2011, pp. 77–128; Dubrovskiy, 2017; Banerji, 2018).

⁷ On the use of historical narratives and myths for political purposes in the post-Soviet years see: (Suny, 2001; Shnirelman, 2003; Rummyantsev, 2015).

⁸ The specificity of the post-Soviet situation lies in the concrete reconstruction of the Soviet text into a nationalist narrative designed to legitimize the nation-state. As far as the use of history to legitimize a particular type of government is concerned, this can be found in all types of political regimes. Analyzing a Spanish history text for children aged 7-8, created during the reign of Francisco Franco, Ferro stresses that “This summary of the text is even a caricature, and its coarseness is not simply a reflection of the way in which history is taught under dictatorship. Democracies, too, make an effort to jettison the embarrassing parts of their own pasts, and the same is true [...] of socialist regime” (Ferro, 1984, p. 97).

Popular discourses about the rights to independence and the independent administration of the territories of the South Caucasus national republics, uncontrolled by Moscow, have been deeply historicized from the beginning, and this approach, to varying degrees, can be seen throughout the post-Soviet years. “Our hero ancestors’ devotion for achieving the statehood of Georgia in blood, sweat and tears is immeasurable,”⁹ asserted Mikheil Saakashvili. The image of “heroic ancestors,” placed within the framework of a political statement, produces a timeless and always relevant association for the speaker. The heroism of the ancestors is meant to emphasize the no lesser heroism of the current leaders of nation-states, their contribution to the achievement of final independence. The descendants (and specifically the politicians speaking on behalf of the nation) become worthy successors of their “great” ancestors.

Using their power, presidents popularize myths about the direct, centuries-long unbroken link between generations, always collectively and in solidarity striving for the realization of the same goal. “More than 500 years after the fall of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia,” Armenian President Armen Sarkisian said on the occasion of another holiday of the Republic, “Armenian statehood was restored [in 1918]. It was a dream of generations and the result of centuries-long national liberation struggle. [...] For long centuries we have been bound together and accompanied by the idea of a united Armenia, which has been handed down from generation to generation. This idea is our great national vow, our political and historical heritage”¹⁰.

The president has the power to choose historical narratives and, more importantly, to make public interpretations that are convenient for him or her¹¹. The head of state can be sure that his or her words will be heard, even if they are criticized. But, as a rule, it is historical narratives and events, references to national heroes that are rarely or never criticized. In the context of the dominant nationalist ideologies in the South Caucasus, both the authorities and their opponents, drawing resources from historical narratives, use the same common narratives and national myths to create the image of “true patriots” same as many (and ideally all) members of the national/ethnic community they represent. The “first among equals”.

It can be argued that presidents and their circle seek, if not to monopolize, at least to tightly control the rights to express and interpret the events of the past. Although their voices are louder than those of their opponents, the past is difficult to control in modern society. Especially, when the statements are virtually indistinguishable. It is hard to imagine that in spite of presidents, oppositionists will start deliberately criticizing heroes of the past about whom there has long been a consensus. For example, Tigran II the Great (first century BC), David IV the Builder (XI-XII centuries) or Javad Khan of Ganja (XVIII-XIX centuries). We can hardly expect alternative interpretations for the events that are assigned the role of the most significant for the history of this or that national community, i.e. the battles of Avarayr (451) and Didgori (1121), or the battle for Baku (1918). In fact, politicians who have achieved power and their less fortunate opponents alike, draw narratives and myths from the same sources and use similar metaphors and images.

⁹ Public speech made by the President of Georgia at the Parade dedicated to the Independence Day of Georgia, <http://www.saakashviliarchive.info/en/PressOffice/News/SpeechesAndStatements?p=6488&i=13>

¹⁰ Address by President Armen Sargsyan on the occasion of the Republic Holiday (28.05.2020), <https://www.president.am/ru/statements-and-messages/item/2020/05/28/President-Armen-Sarkissians-message/>

¹¹ In December 2018, for the first time in the history of all three countries covered in this book, the presidency of Georgia was held by a woman - Salome Zurbishvili.

But in this competition for the status of patriots or “true sons of the nation” worthy to hold the highest political positions, incumbent presidents and their rivals often find themselves in unequal positions. Unlike their opponents, presidents can speak on equal footing with the heroes of the past. They have the power to make history; the right to discursively represent any events that occurred during their tenure at the head of the power vertical as historical or even epochal. After the military success in the Second Karabakh War (autumn 2020) and the return of full control over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh in autumn 2023, Azerbaijan’s President Ilham Aliyev claimed the laurels of a “victorious commander,” a maker of history. This is the new capacity in which he ran in the extraordinary presidential elections in February 2024. “This is a historic event”, claimed Ilham Aliyev, “ and this historic event has a special place in our centuries-old history. The key distinctive feature and importance of this presidential election is that it was the first time in the period of independence that an election was held on the entire territory of our country. [...] A new era begins now. We are entering this period with an open face and with our heads held high. There will be further achievements in this era, and I do not doubt that. Because the history of recent years shows that all the tasks we set for ourselves are fulfilled. Of course, the whole of Azerbaijan is entering this era, and the people who have demonstrated unity, including great unity in this election, will achieve even greater success.”¹²

Politics, nation, history, and memory of the past

The persuasiveness of any historical viewpoint, according to Philippe Ariès, is linked to the political influence of the group on whose behalf it is expressed¹³. Obviously, the institution of presidential power endows politicians with such influence. Politicians (the president and entourage), being an influential social group, modify memory so that it conforms to their perceptions. First of all, as this research shows, the memory in question is most often the immediate past, going back to the beginnings of their political careers. The events of recent history, when they were already beginning to act as politicians, were interpreted in such a way as to convincingly justify their right to power, that it was he or she and no one else who was worthy to hold the highest political office and is the one who will lead the country and the nation on the “right path” to a better life. That it was this and no other political figure who was favored by “the spirits of great ancestors” and “national heroes” of the often very distant past.

However, the actions of any politician are largely determined by the socio-political and cultural context. As Ariès points out, the priority of political history in

¹² See: Inauguration ceremony of Ilham Aliyev was held 14 February 2024 (14 February, 2024), <https://president.az/en/articles/view/63979>

Presidential elections in Azerbaijan have been imitative for decades. The regime firmly established in the country by the early 2000s can be characterized as electoral authoritarianism. In February 2024, Ilham Aliyev was elected to a fifth term in a snap election. By 2023, Heydar Aliyev’s son and heir had already held the highest post in the state for 20 years. As a rule, a long stay of an autocrat in power causes fatigue and a politician’s ratings inevitably decline. Especially when inequality, corruption and social problems are growing in the society. However, it should be recognised that Ilham Aliyev’s rating has never been as high as it was at the time of the last elections. One can safely assume that in case of a “fair” procedure, the incumbent head of state would have beaten all his competitors by a large margin. Obviously, there is only one reason for this - the “small victorious war” - the military success in the Second Karabakh War and the return of Nagorno-Karabakh under Baku’s control. For more details on the specifics of electoral authoritarianism see: (Magaloni, 2006; Bogaards, 2009).

¹³ See more about Ariès’s views: (Hutton, 1993).

our time is closely linked to the needs of the nation-state. This idea he considers a modern abstraction. Leading its genealogy from the late eighteenth century with the French Revolution, the idea of the nation-state, largely modified in the nineteenth century, has come to dominate all conceptions of society. History became the narration of the creation of the modern state, constantly repeated in the language of political idioms.

The important question is also what should this nation-state be? When primordialist conceptions of the nation prevail in society, ethno-nationalism tends to become the dominant ideology. Accordingly, the state is seen a priori as belonging to the “core nation”¹⁴. Despite the dominance of such notions, in all three republics politicians regularly use categories borrowed from civic versions of nationalism. This usually happens in situations of direct reference to representatives of different ethnic groups/minorities (Azerbaijanis or Armenians in Georgia, Lezgins or Avars in Azerbaijan).

The analysis proposed in this research comes from a critical stance towards primordialist and ethno-nationalist attitudes. In criticizing these ideological attitudes, we draw attention, recalling the title of Aleida Assmann’s famous study, to the long shadow of the past (Assmann, 2006). In other words, we show that much of the dominance of such attitudes and perceptions is largely the result of the Soviet policy of institutionalizing ethnicity and nationhood (Slezkine, 1996; Brubaker, 2000; Hirsch, 2005; Suny, 2000; Martin, 2001).

Vladimir Malakhov points out that institutionalized ethnicity was the most important basic characteristic of any citizen of the USSR. “Ascribed ‘ethnicity’ (i.e. defined by the authorities, not by the self-consciousness of individuals) was interiorised by people and gradually turned from an external identifier into a part of (self-)identity. Hence such a feature of <...> political thinking as *methodological ethnocentrism* - a view of society as a conglomerate of ‘ethnoses’ (‘peoples’). This type of thinking is shared today both by the mass consciousness and by a significant part of intellectual and political elites. It can be difficult to explain to a former Soviet person that his or her nationality is not something innate” (Malakhov, 2007, p. 50). In other words, in the three decades since the collapse of the USSR, most scholars in the South Caucasus countries have habitually used different and somewhat modified versions of the Soviet national discourse¹⁵. In addition to them, politicians tend to use similar and well understood categories and perceptions, which the populations of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan understand well.

If we refer to Michel Foucault’s ideas, we can say that politicians (as well as professional humanitarians) are a social group claiming ownership of national and ethnic discourses, “in the sense of the right to speak, ability to understand, licit and immediate access to the corpus of already formulated statements, and the capacity to invest this discourse in decisions, institutions, or practices - is in fact confined (sometimes with the addition of legal sanctions) to a particular group of individuals” (Foucault, 1972, p. 68).

But in everyday life this right has never been rigidly assigned to a single, albeit very influential, social group. The ordinary everyday person, the journalist, the scientist, the expert and the politician feel equally comfortable analyzing various socio-political processes in which the phenomena of nation and ethnicity

¹⁴ See below for more details on the core nation category.

¹⁵ This tradition of direct continuity can be seen very clearly, for example, in the definitions of nation: “A nation,” wrote Stalin in his very first scholarly effort, “is a historically evolved, stable community based on a common language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture” (quoted in Slezkine, 1996 p. 203).

are assigned the role of familiar explanatory categories. In other words, adopting categories of practice as categories of analysis (Brubaker, 2000, p. 15).

The authors of this research, in understanding the phenomenon of nation, rely on the definition proposed by Benedict Anderson. In his opinion, nation “is an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. [...] In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (Anderson, 2006, pp. 5-6).

Rogers Brubaker, analyzing situations “in the new nation-states of postcommunist eastern Europe,” identifies “several kinds of nationalism,” which “have flourished as a *result* of the reorganization of political space along ostensibly national lines.” In the case of this research focus, the most relevant of the types that he identifies should be considered to be “nationalizing” nationalism.

According to Brubaker, “Nationalizing nationalisms involve claims made in the name of a ‘core nation’ or nationality, defined in the ethnocultural terms, and sharply distinguished from the citizenry as a whole. The core nation is understood as the legitimate ‘owner’ of the state, which is conceived as the state *of and for* the core nation. Despite having ‘its own’ state, however, the core nation is conceived as being in a weak cultural, economic or demographic position within the state. This weak position is seen as a legacy of discrimination against the nation before it attained its independence. And it is held to justify the ‘remedial’ or ‘compensatory’ project of using state power to promote the specific (and previously inadequately served) interest of the core nation” (Brubaker, 1998, pp. 276-277)¹⁶.

The desire to control perceptions of the past (memory and historical politics) is also directly related to perceptions of what constitutes a nation. What happened in the past, “historical events” serve as evidence of the rights to own the state. Often wars and conflicts become the most important events of official commemorations. There were several armed conflicts in the South Caucasus during and after the collapse of the USSR, and politicians use the memory of them very actively to mobilize their electorate.

Anver Ben-Amos points to the fact that “Each political regime [...] constructs its own version of the past, which becomes the official memory of the state” (Ben-Amos, 2000, p. 4). In his view, the state (authorities, politicians) propagates the official version by all means available to it. One of the most common is the teaching of history in secondary schools. Among other means, he points to the erection of monuments, the naming of city streets, and the celebration of anniversaries. Eric Hobsbawm, for his part, points out that three innovations are of particular importance in a situation of tradition invention: the development of secular schooling, the invention of public ceremonies, and, third, the mass production of monuments (Hobsbawm, 2003, p. 271). All these institutions and traditions took root in the Soviet years and smoothly migrated into the post-Soviet era.

The authors of this research consider it correct to add to this list the speeches and statements of presidents and their most prominent opponents in which they refer to various historical narratives and invoke the images of heroes of the past. The moment of elections is a situation of the greatest tension, when the number

¹⁶ See also: (Brubaker 2000, pp. 43–66; Brubaker, 2011).

of different kinds of political statements sharply increases. At these moments, one can observe the concentration of slogans in speeches. As far as the use of historical subjects and myths is concerned, these electoral statements do not contradict all previous statements. But, as a rule, in the heat of political struggle (even if it is only imitative) politicians tend to speak louder and more often resort to historical analogies to justify their rights in the present.

Ben-Amos emphasizes that the history of the emergence of the modern type of state is also the history of the growth of control over the national past. On the one hand, no political regime can start from absolute zero, as this would risk losing the solid foundation under its feet. The Georgian, Azerbaijani and Armenian political regimes, which skilfully integrated the events of the 19th century (the dominance of the Russian Empire) and the early 20th century (the birth of nationalist ideologies, the first republics) into the post-Soviet cult of victims and heroes, have retained such a foundation. To the cults of heroic ancestors (founding fathers of nations) were added the victims and heroes of contemporary conflicts.

National memory is often also an arena of struggle between social groups possessing different versions of memory. However, in this arena, official memory is privileged according to the strength of state power, and the goal of the regime is to make official and national memory identical; the closer the regime comes to this goal, the more it can be assured of broad support (Ben-Amos, *ibid.* pp. 4-5). The politicians leading the South Caucasus regimes have certainly and not without success, strived towards this goal and not without success. We hope that this research will contribute to an understanding of the principles and discursive practices of likening the official (convenient for the politicians) memory to the national (influential historical narrative) one.

The book structure and research methodology

The analysis presented in this collective monograph is based on a critical discourse analysis of significant (primarily pre-election) speeches of politicians who held the presidential office and their most successful opponents. In addition to these materials, the authors of the chapters on Georgia and Azerbaijan also conducted a series of interviews with political activists, experts, and former political figures.

The first three chapters of the collective monograph examine the specifics of the formation of the presidential institution in Georgia in the context of Bourdieu's concept of social capital and actors (Bourdieu) and socio-political processes in the South Caucasus. In the first section, along with legal and historical reviews, the authors study the content of political discourses, the views of the creators of the new legislation, seek explanations for the reasons for various innovations and make an attempt to outline the political perceptions of presidential candidates and future presidents of Georgia. The analysis of arguments put forward by politicians (symbolic, designed to construct feelings of solidarity and national unity, perceptions of the past, etc.) makes it possible to identify the key trends of different periods of political struggle in Georgia in the post-Soviet years. The authors focus not only on the study of socio-political processes, but also on key actors, institutions and interest groups.

The second chapter analyses in detail the course of election campaigns and inauguration speeches of three Georgian presidents - Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Eduard Shevardnadze and Mikheil Saakashvili. The authors focus on the categories of time, space; on the use of symbols and discourses about sites of memory in Georgia.

The programme speeches are analyzed in the context of projects planned and/or implemented by the politicians. This approach allows contrasting the different strategies used by the presidents to mobilize voters and achieve unity. The positions of the presidential candidates were formed in the context of interaction with opponents and the opposition, which in many cases spoke from critical positions.

The third chapter analyzes political processes in Azerbaijan. As a result of the collapse of the USSR, Azerbaijan, like all former Soviet national republics, began to form a new system of state governance, headed by a president with great powers. Unlike its nearest neighbors (Georgia and Armenia), by 2024 Azerbaijan retained the same model of state structure. Throughout the post-Soviet years, the power of the president was consistently strengthened and his powers were constantly expanded. Already in the mid-1990s the regime in the country acquired the features of autocracy. Thirty years later, these trends have also only intensified.

In the history of the establishment of the institution of presidential power in Azerbaijan, this post has been held by four people at the time of writing this article. With the exception of the first president, Ayaz Mutalibov (February 1991-March 1992), former first secretary of the Communist Party of the Azerbaijan SSR, all presidents were humanitarians with degrees or scientific titles in history. Abulfaz Elchibey (June-1992-June 1993), an orientalist and candidate of historical sciences, ultra-right nationalist Panturkist, was succeeded by Heydar Aliyev (1993-2003), former First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Republic, a member of the Soviet special services and holder of a diploma in history. He left his position to his son Ilham Aliyev, who also holds a PhD in history.

By coincidence, the most prominent opponents of all Azerbaijani presidents were also professional historians: the founder and head of the National Independence Party of Azerbaijan, candidate of historical sciences Etibar Mammadov (1998 elections); candidate of historical sciences Isa Gambar, who headed the Musavat (Equality) party for many years (2003 elections); professor and doctor of historical sciences Jamil Hasanli (2013 elections).

The influence of personal biographies and professional socialization on the process of using history and the past for political purposes requires further research. Nevertheless, the participation of a large number of historians in the political struggle in Azerbaijan is not a coincidence. All the politicians listed above were socialized during the years of the USSR, when a historian's diploma served as a pass into the circles of the partyocracy. The discourses and narratives that form the basis of contemporary Azerbaijani nationalism were created in history faculties and historical research institutes during the same Soviet years.

The specifics of the formation of a new (modern) nationalist discourse, the reconstruction of the historical narrative and a new memory politics were largely determined by the Karabakh conflict. The very process of establishing independent statehood and the search for a new identity took place in the context of the three and a half decades-long armed confrontation with neighboring Armenia. Historical subjects were and still are in great demand. The right to own a particular territory is defended not only on the battlefield, but also in historical disputes and discussions.

As independence and authoritarian tendencies increased, the procedure of presidential elections became more and more imitative. But disputes about the past did not subside. On the contrary, they became more and more acute. The use of the past (including the recent past) to legitimize the current regime or, on the contrary, to criticize it was practiced by all presidential candidates. Certain additional nuances

are introduced by the inevitable reconstruction of perceptions of the Soviet past in the context of the formation of a new kind of a cult of personality. The third president, Heydar Aliyev, is given the role of the father, the founder and creator of modern independence within the framework of the official ideology. Despite the fact that the procedure of presidential elections is becoming more and more formal, all these subjects remain invariably relevant.

The author of the fourth chapter focuses on analyzing foreign policy and memory politics in the struggle for power in post-Soviet Armenia. As in the previous chapters, the analysis focuses on speeches and statements made during the presidential elections. Back in the last years of the Soviet Union, in the context of the Karabakh conflict and Armenia's independence movement, the issues of foreign policy and memory politics gained importance in Armenia's domestic political discourse.

By the early 1990s, two main positions were being formed. Supporters of the first position called it "pragmatic" (critics labeled it as "defeatist"). Representatives of the pragmatic position saw compromise with hostile neighbours Azerbaijan and Turkey on issues such as the Karabakh conflict and international recognition of the Armenian genocide in the Ottoman Empire as a necessary condition for Armenia's sovereignty and security. Supporters of the second position, calling their approach "national" (critics called it "romantic"), considered attempts at compromise on the above-mentioned issues unacceptable and/or unrealistic, and saw the solution to Armenia's security problem in an alliance with external players (primarily Russia).

The first approach was represented, for example, by the Armenian National Movement (ANM) party and its leader, the first president of Armenia, Levon Ter-Petrosyan. The second approach, in the 1990s, was represented by the opposition to Ter-Petrosyan, in particular the Dashnaksutyun party, as well as a certain part of the ruling ANM. In the late 1990s, as a result of a split within the ANM, Ter-Petrosyan ceded power to Robert Kocharyan, and the second approach prevailed, leading to Armenia's increased dependence on Russia. Despite opposition criticism and certain foreign policy maneuvers during the rule of Kocharyan's successor, Serzh Sargsyan, this approach remained dominant until the constitutional changes and the Velvet Revolution of 2018 and the 44-Day Second Karabakh War of 2020. Chapter Five analyzes the course of presidential elections in Armenia over the period of about two decades, in the context of the presence or, on the contrary, the absence of foreign policy and memory politics in the electoral struggle.

Chapter five, which concludes the collective monograph, analyzes the rhetorical and linguistic techniques used in presidential speeches. The authors describe in detail the main tendencies that characterized each of the presidential candidates in Georgia. Using rhetorical devices and specific strategies, the candidates always emphasized the exclusive truth of their views, thus justifying the uniqueness of their position and the need for such a leader for the country. The same strategies were used to create negative images of their opponents.

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The Presidency in Georgia: Subjective Understanding of Political Needs and Institutional Transformations¹⁷

Introduction

This paper discusses the formation of the presidency and the presidential rule in Georgia through attempts by leaders in power to change and strengthen their presidency. Since post-Soviet independence, the understanding of the executive power in Georgia was directly related to how specific individuals were perceived by themselves or the society. Their understanding of the state and power, as well as the others' perception of their role, place and importance, boiled down to the introduction of strong positions that enjoyed almost all kinds of rights. The institution of presidency has served as a divide, a social field, and its use and the rules of the game have usually depended heavily on the social capital of the individual holding this post.

The institution of the presidency in the South Caucasus presents a point of concentration of the ruling groups' viewpoints, thus the analysis of those processes around it – its establishment, election strategies and activities – gives an opportunity to reveal interesting features. The Georgian case reflects on pursuits of personal ambitions that use various urgent issues in the ongoing processes in the country, with the intention to influence and maintain influence on means of retaining power. Thus, in our opinion, the struggle for power actually was the intention to maintain influence over the resources of power retention. For this purpose, the paper describes a period of a strong presidential rule in Georgia, as our colleagues do for Armenia and Azerbaijan in their respective chapters.

The process of power formation in Georgia is considered within the framework of the notion that power is an important part of social relations. In Gallie's terms (Gallie, 1956), power is an essentially contested concept, and theorists are unlikely to agree on its significance and meaning. Conceptual discussions of this issue by theoretical scholars are quite comprehensive. The creation and changes of the presidency in Georgia is a chronicle reflecting realization of an individual's will (despite resistance) by using different resources. There are varying theoretical approaches to the concept of power, yet our goal is to analyze the formation of the Presidency in Georgia, therefore we only involve some of them as needed for the purpose.

In our opinion, the formation of the Georgian Presidency can be partly described through an approach implying that the change in the form of power was caused by a certain form of knowledge that changed the unity of previous views. It is the idea of "power-knowledge" (*le savoir-pouvoir*) introduced by Michel Foucault. If we take Foucault's view narrowly, the emergence and change of the Presidency in Georgia was related not only to the introduction of a specific regime of power, but also to an attempt to change the pattern and forms of knowledge and to establish new ones, i.e. change Soviet eschatological motives with post-Soviet ones, substitute shadowed post-Soviet practices with the end of the liberal "transition," change crime

¹⁷ The main theses of this work were published in: Baramidze, R., Bolkvadze, M. (2022). The Presidential Institute in Georgia: Subjective Understanding of Political Needs and Institutional Transformations, in: Open Journal of Political Science, 12, pp. 457-493

and corruption with law abiding and the rule of law, etc. In that sense, the power-knowledge (Foucault, 1999) can be seen as the intention of the new government to subordinate people and to create new forms for the content of power, i.e. during the pre-election campaign, the new power focused on reproducing the new knowledge. Thus, the change of the regimes was nothing more than breaking with the past, and not a transformation of power and knowledge. Foucault has interesting reasoning for such situations, including his critique of the political anatomy of the body, understanding of power (in categories of ownership), its immanence, and other considerations. However, they do not seem to be of any use in relation to our study question.

For the purposes of our analysis, Bourdieu's theoretical views would be most relevant, including his views on the concepts of social habitus, social capital, and social space that would help us better reflect our vision of power and governance.

Bourdieu argues that habitus is a system of dispositions, which generate and organize practices and condition perceptions of agents. The system helps the agent navigate spontaneously in the social space in order to adequately react to events and situations. Habitus is conditioned by socialization as the assimilation of explicit and implicit principles of behavior in a given life situation. Habitus is therefore an outcome of structures typical for a certain class (Bourdieu, 2002). Habitus is the principle that guides objective classification of practices as well as classification of practices in the perception of agents. In reality, the connection between certain economic and social conditions and the characteristics of the agent's position manifests in a habitus of a particular kind, which gives a meaning to practices as well as to the reasoning behind them. In this context, agents take an appropriate position for the capital and the symbolic matrix (Bourdieu, 1993). These properties represent the symbolic capital of an agent, so that agents and groups of agents are thus defined by their relative positions within that space, where each of them is assigned to a position and class of neighboring positions. One agent cannot occupy two opposite regions of the space at the same time (Ibid.). Thus, the social space is a place where social division is not only realized, but also perceived. Agents not only can occupy a certain position in the space, but certain positions themselves are being generated (Ibid.). In other words, the practical action and practices of a social agent are determined by the agent's location in the social space, which in turn corresponds to their power potential (symbolic capital), and all changes result from their interplay. In turn, the social world consists of social arenas or "fields" of politics, religion, economy, and others that are a specific system of autonomous, socially defined objective connections between different positions, which either ally (cooperate) or conflict (compete), depending on their experience in the given field. In these autonomous fields, an activity carried out in one field has no meaning for or impact on another. For this reason, ongoing processes in one field do not bring success in another (Bourdieu, 2001).

Based on the above concepts, also relevant are Bourdieu's views on the political game. According to Bourdieu, ongoing processes in the political field do not so much aim at a monopoly on objective resources of the political power (finances, rights, troops, etc.), but rather at a monopoly on (re)production and dissemination of political ideas and opinions. This allows the political agent to control the main force of mobilization. In these conditions, it is important to have a monopoly on tools for imposing ideas in order to influence the society where one agent (individual or group) can disseminate one, irreplaceable and inevitable truth (Ibid.). Controlling

the public agenda thus represents a moving space where those wishing to play on the political field struggle to conquer or dominate it. This public agenda space is represented by the media, where experts from other fields may be involved as necessary, i.e. when the dominant agent seeks to increase their influence by using the social capital of others (e.g., the intelligentsia that played an important role during that period). In this regard, the media also has the power to influence traditional criteria for distributing social capital and to change assessments and tastes in the society (Ibid.).

In this regard, the specifics of agents' actions and interplay in the political field, in terms of their habitus, occupation, dispositions and capital, are most relevant for our analysis of the processes going on around the institution of presidency in Georgia.

Zviad Gamsakhurdia

From Independence to Power

The understanding of executive power in Georgia is directly related to how presidential candidates are perceived by themselves or the society. Their understanding of the state and power, as well as the others' perception of their role, place and importance boils down to taking strong positions that enjoy almost all kinds of rights. The institution of presidency formed as a divide, a social field, its use and the rules of the game depending heavily on the social capital of the individual holding this post. Social capital also offered an advantage in the political field for subsequent creation of the rules of the game and control over compliance. Specifics of the agent's interaction with the symbolic capital also played a big role in the process.



9 April... . Owner: Ramaz Oboladze.

Chronologically, the first constitution and system of government in Georgia go back to the period of the National Council. On May 26, 1918, after the dissolution of the Transcaucasian Federation, the National Council of Georgia adopted the Act of Independence of Georgia that became the basis for creating governing bodies and the Constitution. The first Constitution of Georgia in 1921 was believed to be one

of the most progressive and advanced constitutions of the time, enshrining many social, democratic and other rights. Yet, it only briefly touched upon the issue of the structure and administration of the state (Babeck, 2013). For a variety of reasons, that Constitution became an authoritative historical, political, and legal document that everyone kept referring to, yet that was never restored or used.

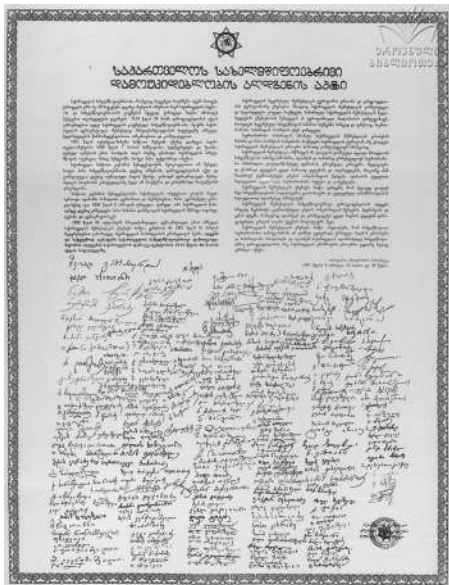
Later, the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic established the Soviet system of state administration that was reflected in the constitutions adopted in 1922, 1927, 1937, and 1978. At the same time, different groups and movements in Georgia sought to protect their rights, language, culture, and environment (protection of the national language, movement against the construction of hydropower plants and railways, protection of monuments, movement to protect the Davit-Gareji monastery complex, etc.) (Jones, 2013). Gradually, activities of separate groups served to restore the country's independence. With the weakening of the USSR and the rise of protests in its different republics, those groups also began competing for leadership. The national liberation movement struggled for the country's independence, but the issue of the country's government only gained momentum in the late 1980s, and since then has been inevitably linked to the identity of the top leaders in power.

It is also noteworthy that differing opinions on the issues of independence and state government gave rise to some processes that led to controversy and bloodshed in society, and some remain unresolved years later.

On March 11-13, 1990, opposition parties held a congress of the National Forum in the Tbilisi Philharmonic Hall in order to establish the Coordinating Council of the National Liberation Movement. Following the congress, the Movement split into two groups that had different visions of Georgia's path to independence. Zviad Gamsakhurdia's supporters believed they had to come to power first and then win independence through peaceful means, while the National Congress argued it was more reasonable to win freedom before achieving independence. The debate between the two groups moved to the streets and grew into heated arguments. On October 28, 1990 the National Liberation Movement won the majority in the Supreme Soviet of the Georgian SSR, and one of its leaders, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, was elected its Chairman (Jones, 2013). In that capacity, he aimed to use legal procedure to restore Georgia's independence.

On November 14, 1990, the first convocation of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Georgia adopted the Constitutional Law of the Republic of Georgia, "On Declaration of the Transition Period in the Republic of Georgia." The purpose of the law was to set legal grounds for restoring independence of the Georgian state (the Constitution (the organic law) of the Georgian SSR was amended to that effect – (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'is uzenaesi sabch'o, 1990). On March 31, 1991, the Supreme Council held a nationwide referendum on the restoration of state independence under the Act of Independence of May 26, 1918 (Bazgharadze, 1991), and based on its results, the Council's extraordinary session adopted the Act of Restoration of State Independence of Georgia on April 9, 1991 (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1991a). Based on the two Acts of Independence of 1918 and 1991, the Supreme Council declared the restoration of Georgia's independence. At the same session, the Council approved the law "On the Constitution and the Legislation of the Republic of Georgia," a resolution "On the Introduction of Presidency in the Republic of Georgia" and initiated drafting of a new constitution. The "Law on Declaration of the

Transitional Period on the Territory of the Republic of Georgia” served as the organic law in the country until the new constitution was adopted (sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 1991b). Although the Georgian government distanced itself from the Soviet regime, it continued to use the amended Soviet legislation.



“Act of restoration of state independence of Georgia”. Publisher: Palace of the Government. 1991.

The procedural makeover created a new reality in Georgia, which was not immediately followed by international recognition of its independence. The Soviet Union still existed and de jure recognition of Georgia by Western democracies was still ahead (Jones, 2013). In addition, despite the formation of the general framework of the public administration system, its substance, scope, rights and responsibilities remained vague. This became most noticeable as Gamsakhurdia’s opponents continued to protest against his rule and to fight for power, first trying to gain the upper hand in politics. On May 23-22, 1990 the proponents of the National Congress conducted a national assembly in the Tbilisi Sports Hall and tried to arrange elections in autumn, but failed due to the lack of quorum (Ibid.). Subsequent processes exacerbated

the crisis that eventually reached a critical point. Clashes between the supporters of Zviad Gamsakhurdia and the National Congress that occurred on September 2, 1990 put an end to the imaginary solidarity and romanticism of the National Liberation Movement, giving way to rigidity and violence (Ibid.).

The Presidency

In the 1990s, all political groups tried to win political monopoly by creating and disseminating various original ideas for the new republics. To borrow Pierre Bourdieu’s words on the logic of politics, social sciences and journalism (Bourdieu, 2001), the groups sought to monopolize tools and means for spreading ideas in order to influence their societies. They wanted to be sole possessors of the ultimate truth as to who was the genuine leader of the Liberation Movement, the defender of the country’s independence and the builder of the democratic society, and who was the enemy. Hence, potential similarities between what and how they pronounced during legal and political debates were an issue with both groups, since they could cause confusion and make people associate the two groups with each other. Therefore, after coming to power they sought to monopolize public communication channels. At the same time, being in opposition and having an opposition was useful for both groups, allowing them to demonstrate their specifics and strengths in the competition.

Thus, the presidency would allow the head of state to legitimately influence the means and ways of creating and disseminating information. After coming to power, Zviad Gamsakhurdia and his political supporters advocated for the presidency. Speaking about the country's domestic challenges and the situation in Abkhazia at a press conference on April 10, 1991, Gamsakhurdia said that only a president elected by universal suffrage would be able to meet the challenges (*sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a*, 1991c). He argued that Georgian national characteristics required a strong presidential government: "a parliamentary republic here would mean the ruin of the nation and of parliament. ...Presidential rule is the only means of salvation for our people. There should be a strong president and strong presidential rule... without this, Georgia cannot exist..." (Jones, 2013). Individual control of the political field (to varying degrees) seems to have been in the public interest not only under Gamsakhurdia, but also under his successors. Jones points out that most Georgians identify with and trust strong leaders and support their parties in elections (*ibid.*).



"Protest rally in Batumi". Owner: Ucha Okropiridze. 1990.

The Supreme Council considered the issue in a somewhat melodramatic manner. The extraordinary session of the First Convocation of the Georgian Supreme Council, held on April 14, 1991, aimed to set the legal framework for the presidency, the timing of elections (*sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a*, 1991d; *sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a*, 1991e; *sak'art'velos resp'ublik'is uzenaesi sabch'o*, 1991) and president's election by Parliament prior to the national elections (*sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a*, 1991d). Akaki Asatiani, First Deputy Chair of the Supreme Council, took the floor: "...at this stage of Georgian people's struggle for true freedom and independence, it is particularly important that the country's domestic and foreign policy is led by the President, who has the greatest authority and responsibility before the people for the state of affairs" (*sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a*, 1991f). He also named Zviad Gamsakhurdia as the only candidate, highlighting the aspects of his biography that were important for the political topology of Georgia at that time: the son of a classic of the Georgian

literature, a scholar, a dissident who had been imprisoned, a constant participant in the rallies of the National Liberation Movement, etc. (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1991g). In his turn, Gamsakhurdia dramatically emphasized that the presidency was not his choice: "I have never had such goals. This is well known to everyone who knows me one way or another. But the state of the country, the current situation of our nation has conditioned this" (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1991h). As expected, at the same session, he was unanimously elected President of the Republic of Georgia by open ballot (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1991f). This is how a unique situation was created, when a candidate was elected president (by parliament) before preparing a campaign to become president voted in by popular choice of the public.

Social Capital

Gamsakhurdia had his own understanding of statecraft and power. He believed that the head of state should be empowered by the popular will and not by the parliament (Jones, 2013). He seemed to be confident in the support of the electorate, as he showed a peculiar attitude towards the symbolic and social capital of influential groups.

Donald Rayfield believes that as a result of pressure that he experienced in the 1970s, Gamsakhurdia focused on studying religion and thus developed a particular messianic attitude and sense of self-esteem (Rayfield, 2012). After coming to



*"Zviad Gamsakhurdia".
Author: Jemal Kasradze.*

power, he often spoke about religion, used religious themes, excerpts or comparisons in his speeches, and almost always made religious appeals or exhortations. He believed that the existing problems, including crime, resulted from the destruction of faith, decline of morality, abandonment and degrading of spiritual ideals (Khositashvili, 2013a). For him the struggle for independence meant "...not only the realization of an individual's national and political goals, but above all it involved a moral revival based on religious faith and conscience. <...> ...The authority and power of the national Government must be based not only on the social and political definition of government, but primarily on religious and moral principles" (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1991i). Nevertheless, representatives of the Church (e.g., the Patriarch) rarely or never attended his public speeches or meetings (unlike those of subsequent presidents).

Gamsakhurdia was critical of the Soviet intelligentsia. He called them red, degenerate, bogus, next-to-criminal, pseudo-intelligentsia, etc. (Khositashvili, 2013a; Khositashvili, 2013b). At the same time, he sought to influence part of the intelligentsia, and before the presidential election discussed awards in science and technology (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1991j). Pierre Bourdieu refers to such practices as "symbolic violence" (Bourdieu, 2007). Through a combination of such

steps, Gamsakhurdia tried to influence and even control different fields. Overall, the inadequate policy with respect to symbolic and social capital had a significant impact on Gamsakhurdia's rule, which was actively opposed by various groups (especially members of the church and the intelligentsia).

The Power

Getting back to the main question, the presidency as perceived by Zviad Gamsakhurdia implied the existence of a strong presidential power. His presidential agenda emphasized complete subordination of the executive branch to the President. Moreover, he believed that the establishment of the Presidential Council could be a reliable guarantee of sovereignty of the executive (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1991i).

Holding the elections on short notice had an impact on the pre-election campaigns. During the campaign, one of the central newspapers sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, published statements, addresses and letters in support of presidential candidate Zviad Gamsakhurdia in all its issues. Calls and declarations of other unions and parties appeared in mass media only occasionally. Also during that period, the Supreme Council passed a number of decisions in favor of Gamsakhurdia, urgently amending the electoral law to limit participation of his influential rival (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1991k; sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1991l; Jones, 2013). S. Jones points out that during the same period Gamsakhurdia banned opposition candidates from using the government press (Jones, 2013), and a few days before the elections, adopted a law banning insults against the President (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1991m). Control on media was tightened, and media outlets were threatened with closure for disseminating insulting or slanderous information about the president. Later, after the Moscow putsch, the Communist Party of Georgia was banned and the mandates of Supreme Soviet deputies revoked (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1991n; sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1991o). At the same time, disputes (over the "South Ossetian region" and the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia) began in Georgia.

Against that backdrop, Zviad Gamsakhurdia won the presidential election with 86 percent of the vote. However, at that stage the essence of the presidency remained rather vague, as the system of government was still unshaped, the office of the president was regulated only by a temporary law, and a new constitution had not yet been adopted. Soon after, demonstrations and violent confrontation intensified in the country.

Summary of the Section

Hannah Arendt distinguishes power from both force and violence. In her opinion, individuals can only possess force; while power originates in the process of interaction between individuals, in "being together," violence originates in the interaction between unequal actors, and violence can destroy power (Arendt, 2000). Gamsakhurdia's attitude towards the presidency was expressed not in co-governing, but in the power of a single strong ruler. This fact and his desire to act and control several fields alone resulted in the consolidation of Gamsakhurdia's opponents and in extreme protests. The euphoria and romanticism of independence soon gave way to a chronicle of power struggle and critical confrontation. According to Babeck, perceived truth of one's own opinion prevailed in the specific culture of political discourse in Georgia; opposition was limited to monologues, and political

compromise was practically impossible (Babeck, 2013; Babeck, 2012). Therefore, the opposition occurred with extreme confrontation. The opponents' protest was also largely conditioned by the desire to monopolize the political game and exercise control over the objectified resources of power. Gamsakhurdia's active attitude towards the media was mainly expressed during the election period, therefore it was vital for him to establish the control over creation and distribution of information.

Zviad Gamsakhurdia came to power through his personality, accumulated capital and leadership. As a leader, he considered the one-time mandate given to him by the electorate sufficient to confront various powerful groups, transform the system of power in order to create a strong presidential government and establish control over the media. The presidency as an institution remained in an embryonic stage.

Eduard Shevardnadze

From Gamsakhurdia to Shevardnadze

In late 1991, the political crisis reached a deadlock. Opponents of Gamsakhurdia's rule (both inside and outside the country) stepped up their game. The relationship between the government and the opposition gradually evolved from the 1990s' protests to persecution, arrests, and clashes. The processes escalated into a military confrontation and ended with the overthrow of the government and a civil war. The Military Council of Georgia was formed under the leadership of Gamsakhurdia's opponents - Jaba Ioseliani, a known thief-in-law, Tengiz Kitovani, ex-prisoner and Commander of the National Guard, and Tengiz Sigua, Gamsakhurdia's Prime Minister – to make a claim for power (Jones, 2013). The President and his supporters were exiled from the country. The Military Council temporarily suspended the Constitution, dissolved the Parliament, dismissed the Prime Minister, declared a state of emergency, and took a number of other steps (Kitovani & Ioseliani, 1992a).

In that situation, the Military Council faced two crucial challenges: the problem of legitimacy and the problem of political leadership. Prior to elaborating the substance and form of the government system, the Council adopted a declaration on February 21 to demonstrate the illegitimacy of the previous government, lay the foundation for its own legitimacy, and prepare the political arena for change. The declaration proclaimed Gamsakhurdia a legal successor of the Soviet Union, since he had governed the country pursuant to an adapted version of Soviet Georgia's laws. Besides, Gamsakhurdia's government was identified as authoritarian and usurpatory. Like the ousted government, the Military Council announced restoration of the Constitution of February 21, 1921, which was to serve as the basis for the arrangement and administration of the state. However, there was one reservation: an adapted version of the existing legislation remained in force in Georgia (Kitovani & Ioseliani, 1992b). It is noteworthy that most political groups and regimes talked about the adoption and enactment of the 1921 Constitution, although in reality it remained a symbolic artifact that, although recognized, was never fully implemented. The declaration also announced parliamentary elections in the Republic of Georgia in the fall of that year (Ibid.). To create the illusion of legitimacy, the Military Council convened a so-called National Assembly, which was attended by a large number of prominent, authoritative and well-known public figures. However, it did not include representatives of the overthrown government (Babeck, 2013).

The New Old Leader

Until March 1992, the position of the country's leader remained vacant. Discussions increasingly emphasized the need for a clear, experienced and internationally recognized leader. The vacancy was finally closed in March, when the Military Council invited former Soviet Interior and Foreign Affairs Minister Eduard Shevardnadze to Georgia. In his brief interview upon arrival, Shevardnadze emphasized his own role, the need to work tirelessly to save and unify the country, and assessed the contributions of those involved in the overthrow of the previous government (Tchelidze, 1992).



"Civil War in Tbilisi". Author: Shakh Aivazov.

Upon his return, Shevardnadze was considered an excellent Georgian politician and the country's savior, and he himself maintained that reputation, seeking recognition as a new leader regardless of his Soviet past. On his arrival day, he said: "I came as a political and public figure, I came to roll up my sleeves and work together with my people, and to work for the salvation of our homeland" (Ibid.). In his speeches, he presented himself as a politician, an international authority (Orliki & Urigashvili, 1992), who had played a major role in the destruction of the Berlin Wall and salvation of Germany and its people, i.e. as an initiator of the globally important change (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1992a; sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1992b). In order for his personality to be seen in isolation from the Soviet Union and its legacy, Shevardnadze emphasized his involvement in defeating the evils of the Soviet regime (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1992c), in fighting the evils of totalitarianism and Soviet administration (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1992a; Orliki & Urigashvili, 1992; sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1992d). By positioning himself in that manner, he underlined his unconditional role in the recognition of Georgia's independence, while presenting the recognition process as an expression of trust towards him and the result of his international dialogue. "The global community trusts that we shall defend the provisions and principles reflected in the UN charter, that we are going to hold democratic elections, that we shall peacefully resolve the Georgian-Ossetian conflict, stabilize the political situation, respect human rights, and the rights of the nation, the rights of the national minorities; that we shall implement the economic reform and lay a foundation for civil freedoms"

(Shevardnadze, 1992). His new image was created and disseminated through his radio interviews, speeches and meetings.

The Enemy

As mentioned above, domination on the political field requires exclusivity. At a time when despite various domestic tensions (the so-called “Georgian-Ossetian and Georgian-Abkhaz conflicts) and confrontations with supporters of the ousted government continued with periodic success and failures in the country (Jones, 2013; sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 1993), Shevardnadze’s main problem was legitimacy, while his opponent and enemy was Gamsakhurdia. In his speeches and interviews, Shevardnadze criticized Gamsakhurdia’s steps, his legacy and his supporters. Shevardnadze believed that the previous government had awakened dark forces in the people (sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 1992e), which logically explained the people’s will to overthrow it (sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 1992f), and therefore, he supported that decision (sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 1992e). Shevardnadze’s highlighting the merits of individual leaders in those processes would lead to the recognition of their role in the political arena. He therefore described the overthrow of the government as a decision of the farsighted and wise people: “Whatever the pluralistic evaluations, the main thing is that in the events of December and January, the Georgian people made a historically important choice in favor of democratic development, and condemned and overthrew authoritarianism and dictatorship” (sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 1992f).



“A rally in front of the television building”. Author: Shakh Aivazov. 1992.

According to Bourdieu, in order to have an impact on the society, a political agent needs to control the means of producing and disseminating one irreplaceable and inescapable truth to mobilize and monopolize the political field. Existing in the political field means being unique, exclusive, while being similar to others means non-existence. At the same time, being in opposition is beneficial to both sides, because then both political subjects retain their positions in the space, benefit from them, can remain different and exceptional even in case of

comparisons (Bourdieu, 2001). Existence of an obvious rival helped Shevardnadze better express his position and emphasize his own indispensability in countering the rival. Thus, despite the challenging situation in the country (contributed to by a controversial amnesty initiated by the Military Council, creation of armed formations and gangs in Georgia, and Tengiz Kitovani's activities in Abkhazia (Jones, 2013)), Zviad Gamsakhurdia and his supporters were identified as the one major threat. Shevardnadze argued that the ousted parliament had failed to meet people's expectations, to fulfill its functions or ensure pluralism, and had sought to establish an authoritarian regime, which had led the country to a crisis (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1992f). Resulting from actions of the former government and its supporters, the economic situation had deteriorated; negotiations with Abkhaz leaders had failed and had been followed by war; clashes continued in the Tskhinvali region; the civil war that had started to overthrow the previous government had escalated into riots and arbitrary rule by criminal gangs. "Ex-president and his supporters prevent us from strengthening the friendship between the peoples. The tragedy they are unleashing resembles a political apocalypse. How many people have died in the conflicts they instigated, including military ones?! How many billions of damages have they inflicted on the Georgian economy? It is a very sad, thought-provoking negative trend" (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1992f). By the end of 1992, Eduard Shevardnadze had already called Zviad Gamsakhurdia a racist terrorist (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1992g).

Social Capital

In his struggle against Gamsakhurdia, Eduard Shevardnadze had the support, among others, of two influential groups with significant symbolic and social capital, the intelligentsia and the church whose relations with Gamsakhurdia had been dubious. Back in the Soviet 1970s, as Minister of Internal Affairs and leader of the Communist Party of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze had strengthened the intelligentsia and gained their support. He had been also actively involved in the development of Georgia's cultural agenda (Rayfield, 2012). Soviet era Georgian intellectuals created the academic and cultural content of Georgian nationalism and had their own understanding of independence and their role in those processes (Jones, 2013). Before and after his return to Georgia, Shevardnadze made effective use of his old connections and the demand for a new reality. While for Gamsakhurdia the "red intelligentsia" was guilty and represented "dark forces," Shevardnadze upon his return thanked the intellectuals for participating in the overthrow of his predecessor (Tchelidze, 1992). In his everyday communications, he replaced aggressive and intransigent rhetoric with new words and meanings - "interdependence," "civil society," "reconciliation" (Jones, 2013). He thanked the Georgian intelligentsia for awakening the people (Tchelidze, 1992), and in his programmatic address not only emphasized the role of the intelligentsia (scientists, writers, actors, composers, artists, theater and film workers, journalists, and the Georgian youth), but also announced the development and implementation of a program to support cultural development (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1992f). As a result, the intelligentsia rarely criticized Shevardnadze.

Upon his arrival in the country, Eduard Shevardnadze expressed his position on the Patriarchate: "From the airport, Mr. Eduard Shevardnadze went to the shrine of Georgia and Tbilisi - the Sioni Cathedral, where he lit a candle of hope. Later at

the Patriarchate, he met with the Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia, His Holiness and Beatitude Ilia II, who blessed the worthy son of the nation and wished him to achieve noble goals for the benefit of the country” (Tchelidze, 1992). Later, in November 1992, Shevardnadze was baptized with Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II and poet Anna Kalandadze as his godparents (Jgerenaia, 2014). Along with that symbolic act, Shevardnadze emphasized in his various meetings and speeches the role of the Church and especially the Patriarch in safeguarding the unity of the nation (Chikovani, 1992), in the relations with the Christian world (sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a,



“Always and everywhere, Georgia, I am with you”. Authors: G. Kurdadze, Architectural-design cooperative “Retro 88”. 1990.

1992f), and in addressing some other pressing issues. On November 25, he said: “...I have an icon of the Virgin Mary in my office. There used to be other images in my office. I believed in other icons then, but I want to tell you, I also had my doubts. Having an icon does not at all mean that you are purified. Purification is the result of an evolution of your mindset. For example, no one forced me to leave the [Communist] party. I did it with my own mindset, and similarly my views on religion and Christianity have radically changed. That goes for many other things as well. With regard to our people, we can say that such an evolution, such a faith, would save us” (sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 1992h). In general, Shevardnadze’s relationship with the church was more pronounced. The Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia was present at almost every public event that Shevardnadze attended, and relevant photo material was published in the press and made part of the election campaign. At the same time, Shevardnadze also took retaliatory steps on behalf of the government. For example, on August 3, 1992, before the parliamentary elections that were necessary for his legitimacy, the State Council of the Republic of Georgia exempted the patriarchy from paying taxes (sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 1992i). Another important document was the Constitutional Treaty that granted special rights and powers to the Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Georgia and specified the special status of the Church (Parliament of Georgia, 2002; Pelkmans, 2006).

Legitimacy and Mobilization

Discussing habitus, practices, capital and the symbolic matrix, Pierre Bourdieu writes that sociology is primarily a social topology (Bourdieu, 1993). Shevardnadze gradually arranged the political players, allies and opponents in Georgia’s political landscape. Thus, gaining legitimacy on the political field and asserting his dominant position were obviously on his agenda. Elections could solve the problem of legitimacy; however, had Shevardnadze been elected an ordinary MP, the issue of the country’s ruler would have been more obscure. Accordingly, two other questions were to be addressed: what the country’s political system would be and who would be its ruler.

As mentioned above, for Shevardnadze, the situation that developed in 1992 was a consequence of a legitimate and logical process. However, he viewed the lack of legitimacy as a personal challenge, as it devalued the political capital that he had accumulated over the years and that was still relevant. Everything became pointless in the face of illegitimacy: "If there are no elections, it will be a disaster for our people. If we cannot deal with a legitimate government elected by the people, I can with my full responsibility declare that I would have nothing to do then and that would contradict my principles to agree to the total chaos in the country or to the establishment of a dictatorial regime" (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1992j). Under those conditions, the potential vision of the country's arrangement was unclear, and any discussion about the specifics of the executive power was impossible.

In order to mobilize the public, Shevardnadze explained in his heartfelt texts that the situation after the overthrow had to be changed through elections (Ibid.), which would help the country out of crisis (Chikovani, 1992); would bring hope for establishing order (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1992k); would transform the amorphous government into a real one (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1992j); and would finally resolve the issue of the country's existence or nonexistence (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1992l). Shevardnadze linked the need for mobilization to the interests of the people: legitimacy was basically the wish of the people, of the society, therefore he declared the importance of elections in the name and for the interests of the people: "It is necessary to bring a civilized, democratic order in the economically and socially destabilized context, therefore holding elections of the parliament and its chairperson is a historical necessity. This is what people demand in accordance with the principles of democracy, social justice, and the constitutional legitimation of power" (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1992f).

Form of Governance and Powers

Choosing a potential model of government was rather challenging. The new regime did not want to continue Gamsakhurdia's policies. Even if a different approach had been taken, the new regime would have had to rely on the system created by the deposed government (as was actually the case with legislation). Developing a new model of government would have taken a lot of time and resources that the illegitimate de facto government did not have. Given the situation and willing to distinguish itself from the previous government, the State Council initiated a discussion about the country's future with different parties and groups of society (except Gamsakhurdia's supporters) (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1992m; sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1992f). Based on the consultations and agreements (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1992e), parliamentary republic was chosen as the system of government because: "... it more reliably rules out every possibility of dictatorship and creates foundations for freedom and democracy, for the creation of a strong democratic government" (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1992f). According to the preliminary agreement, the text of the future constitution had to be adopted after a public debate (Ibid.). Adoption of an interim constitution (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1992n; sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1992f) and control over the future executive branch (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1992f) were identified as the first priorities for the future parliament. Then the Parliament had to draft and adopt the text of the country's constitution (Ibid.). The discussion also highlighted the main challenges of the future parliament - its diversity (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1992j), low parliamentary culture

(sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1992e), and lack of experience (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1992f). Highlighting the difficulties should and did prove useful in the future for introducing the institution of strong presidency.

The question of the head of state remained open. Jones believes that Eduard Shevardnadze was aware of his own unpopularity, so he did not try to establish a strong presidential power (Jones, 2013). Yet we believe that Shevardnadze needed some degree of legitimacy that would put him in a better position for the future. By focusing on a parliamentary republic, Shevardnadze was not about to give up his dominant position in the political field. He therefore stressed the need for a strong parliamentary system of government (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1992f). Moreover, he argued to the public that a strong parliamentary system needed a strong executive branch because "democracy needs protection" (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1992o). Thus, the elections had to be held in a manner so that Shevardnadze could simultaneously receive a confirmation of his credibility and emphasize his uniqueness on the political field. The elections of October 11, 1992 had two distinguishing features. First, they were held under a mixed (parallel) electoral system in which the voter made a preferential choice in the proportional elections (having the right to vote for one, two or three electoral subjects) (Kandelaki K., 2020). Second, Shevardnadze ran as a parliamentary candidate. In his preelection speeches and meetings, he indicated that the decision had been based on a consensus (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1992f) and that the idea belonged to the Council of State (ibid.). In that election he had no rivals (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1992n). In fact, along with legitimacy, the elections guaranteed him a degree of uniqueness and exclusivity that in case of success (actually inevitable) made the idea of strong rule only a matter of time.

The newly elected parliament had its first session on November 4, 1992 and included many representatives from various spheres (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1992p). On November 5 the new parliament considered the issue of the government and possible election of the parliament speaker as head of Georgian state (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1992q). On November 6, the parliament elected Shevardnadze as head of state (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1992r) and adopted a provisional (interim) constitution (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1992s). As Babeck notes, all the state and political aspects of the constitution were well-balanced, except for one: the head of state was at the same time speaker of the parliament. For that reason, for the next three years Eduard Shevardnadze was both the chair of the legislature and the head of the executive branch, and the country's leader in that period was referred to as the "head of state."

The Constitution and the Presidency

The first stage of the political processes ended successfully for Shevardnadze, so the next challenge was drafting of a new constitution and determination of the executive model. In 1992-1993, the discussion was mainly about a parliamentary republic; the restoration of the Presidency was not considered, and even the term "president" was not used because it was associated with Zviad Gamsakhurdia (Babeck, 2013).

After his convincing success in the political processes, Shevardnadze began to consolidate and strengthen his position. In order to dominate the political field, he neutralized his main opponent and some key allies. The resistance of Gamsakhurdia's supporters was gradually suppressed, and members of the Military

Council who had invited Shevardnadze to Georgia were arrested on various charges (Jones, 2013; Dvali, 1996). In parallel, in 1993 the government began working on structuring the overall political/governing system of the country. A Constitutional Commission was set up earlier in the year (Babeck, 2013), yet active drafting of the Constitution started after the situation in the country stabilized in late 1993. Various commissions and groups with the participation of local and foreign experts drafted the constitution. On October 12-18, 1994, a special conference was held in Chicago and was attended by local and international groups and organizations. A consensus version of the Constitution was drafted (Ibid.). The 1992 Parliament was so diverse and unpredictable that discussions on any issue were theatrical and emotional. According to Jones, that was due to the fact that the Parliament consisted of "...irascible historians, academicians, and artists... whose shouting matches were televised...". Under the conditions, a large group of the "majoritarians" assured Shevardnadze a parliamentary majority on most of his initiatives (Jones, 2013).



"Protest rally on Rustaveli Avenue". Author: Jemal Kasradze. 1996.

Shevardnadze benefited from the situation and his new image as a professional, international politician, who embodied "the Georgian population's unrealistic hopes... stability and domestic peace" (Ibid.). In the process of drafting the new constitution, preference was finally given to a model of government that was advantageous to Shevardnadze and that provided the president with control over objective sources and resources of power. As Babeck notes, the final draft of the constitution was developed with Shevardnadze's participation and under his influence, and was literally adapted to him (Babeck, 2013).

The discussion on the Presidency was particularly theatrical. At a meeting with a constitutional group associated with Shevardnadze, a representative of Shevardnadze's government spoke about the need for a strong presidential power, arguing: "When discussing the models of government, we decided to analyze some new forms of the 1921 Constitution considering today's realities. Today we need certain elements of authoritarianism. By this I mean a strong hand for quickly making and enforcing decisions. There is a contradiction here: despite the direct elections and the great deal of trust, the president cannot make independent decisions. His powers should be strengthened" (Ibid.). That statement was paradoxical, given that two years before Gamsakhurdia's government had been overthrown on charges of

authoritarianism. Nevertheless, the new draft constitution gave broad powers to the president.

However, the situation was presented differently in the public domain. Shevardnadze repeatedly said that the new system of government did not limit the rights of the parliament (“strong parliament, strong president”) (sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 1995a; sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 1995b; sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 1995g); and was a necessary and desirable model: “...The form of government that has been agreed in the parliament, i.e. the presidential system, would be the most effective and the cheapest... I would like to inform the public that twice a day I receive updates on how the population reacts, and what people like and dislike. So far, the Parliament is moving in the right direction. The sentiments and wishes of the people support the model of a strong government, capable of finally putting the country on the right track” (sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 1995c). The final draft resulting from broad consensus was presented in the media. On August 9, 1995 newspaper “sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a” wrote: “...Although there was no opposition in principle to the submitted draft, the discussion continued late into the night. Finally, a rating poll found that the Parliament supported the institution of the Presidency, with the President of the Republic of Georgia as the head of state and the head of the executive power in Georgia” (sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 1995d).



“Photo from Shakh Aivazov’s archive”. Author: Shakh Aivazov. 1992.

On August 24, 1995 the Parliament of Georgia adopted a new Constitution which provided for significant presidential powers. At its extraordinary session on September 1 the Parliament passed the laws on parliamentary and presidential elections, and scheduled them for November 5 (Tatrlulidze, 1995). In the 1995 election, Eduard Shevardnadze’s advantage was even more evident: he won both as president (sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 1995e) and as the leader of the Citizens’ Union party (sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 1995f) (for more details on Shevardnadze’s governance see (Aves, 1996).

Since then, though Shevardnadze managed to introduce a strong presidential power, in reality he failed to handle main challenges in the country. He only obtained some tools to prolong his rule, including the ones for influencing elections. His credibility and support gradually deteriorated, and by the early 2000s the Georgian

society voiced the need for change. In his late rule, Shevardnadze initiated revision of the Constitution, partially for changing the executive branch, but the 2003 Rose Revolution prevented him from completing the process.

Summary of the Section

According to Max Weber, power is a probability to manifest one's will despite resistance (Weber, 1968). Although power is a product of interplay, in Georgia it was realized in a specific way. Through interplay, Shevardnadze could return to the political field, consolidate his position and develop beneficial legal mechanisms. Yet he could also effectively impose his will on his opponents as well as powerful supporters. Shevardnadze effectively used his old and new political capital. Collaboration with powerful and influential groups helped him overcome external resistance to the implementation of his will. Gradually he succeeded in arranging figures and establishing rules in the topology of Georgia's political field.

However, the arrangement and government in the country were paradoxical. Formal reasons that had resulted in the overthrow of the previous regime became relevant again under the new one. Yet, similar to the previous regime, the leader's aspiration to exist on several fields to control every facet of political life at the same time and to maintain his influence eventually weakened his power. Having neutralized most of his opponents, Shevardnadze delegated his powers. Under the inefficient patron-client arrangements, his rule was affected by his personal connections and kinship. Yet the crises were not as dramatic as previous ones because Shevardnadze's regime had its own legislative framework and cooperated with various influential groups.

Shevardnadze reminded the population of himself again and again through his regular radio interviews, speeches and comments. This factor was indeed sufficient in terms of the state media. The media, partially or totally independent from the state/government, first shook and then weakened his dominant position. Hence narratives of inconsistency between the rhetoric of the election period and the real-life irregularities and chaos had gained even more popularity than other news.

Eduard Shevardnadze was brought to power by the need for government, by his personality, his accumulated capital and the society's expectation of a leader. As a leader, he saw the need for dialogue and cooperation, yet persistently consolidated his power. He pioneered a strong presidency, but that institution was used for preserving power rather than for overcoming the crisis in the country.

Mikheil Saakashvili

From Shevardnadze to Saakashvili

After Shevardnadze came to power, the civil war and criminal violence ceased, but the economic and social situation gradually deteriorated. Apathy, resignation, and cynicism about the prospects for democracy were widespread in the country. Shevardnadze's peculiar presidential constitution resembled the rule of the Soviet Central Committee, with the president ruling the country by means of his administration (Fairbanks, 2004).

Stephen Jones argues that instead of reform, change and reconciliation, Shevardnadze brought back a reincarnated and property-acquired nomenclature by recombining structures with the ruins of communism, under which the criminals

entered politics, and the public interest merged with the private one (Jones, 2013). The system strengthened the patron-client system of governance. According to Christopher Clapham, it was a kind of neopatrimonial society in which everything was determined by one's personal relationships and status. In the patron-client system, loyalty to the leader was conditioned directly by the lines of kinship, cooperation, friendship, etc. (Clapham, 1985 as cited in (Jones, 2013)). The political field was gradually saturated with leaders of different levels and influence, and political parties became discredited and incapable (Jones, 2013). In the early 2000s, with Shevardnadze's growing age and his expiring term of office, the future of the country became more and more uncertain.



*"Mikheil Saakashvili in Batumi". Owner: Elefter Lafachi. 10 March, 2016.
Source: The National Parliamentary Library of Georgia*

Under the conditions, the ruling party was inhomogeneous; gradually, several groups emerged, and opposition leaders with some leadership experience began to fight for Shevardnadze's succession (Fairbanks, 2004). In general, ever since Georgia regained its independence, political activity in the country was associated with individual leaders (on changes of political regimes in Georgia see (Wheatley, 2005)). Thus, parties were formed from top-down, around a leader, rather than bottom-up by some organized public interest or demand (Jones, 2013) (for more details on political parties see (Nodia & Scholtbach, 2006)). Therefore, the political struggle was literally a chronicle of the struggle for power of this or that leader.

Personal Context

Zurab Zhvania, Nino Burjanadze and Mikhail Saakashvili were among the opposition leaders who changed the situation. Zhvania and Burjanadze were well acquainted with the local nomenclature and knew how to work with it (Fairbanks, 2004). Saakashvili, who was educated in the US and had once worked there, had a different approach.

In 1995, following Zhvania's invitation, Mikheil Saakashvili became an MP from the ruling party, and was appointed Minister of Justice in 2000. Saakashvili

challenged high-ranking government officials to fight corruption, which made him look like a politician with a different agenda (Civil.ge, 2001a). Almost a year later he resigned, and joined the ruling party in the parliament. Since then, he to some extent retained his different vision (Civil.ge, 2001b). According to Bourdieu, in the struggle for power on the political field, being able to influence the power resources is as important as being different from others. Saakashvili not only remained a ruling party MP until 2000, but stayed recognizable for his activism and particular agenda, using distinctive rhetoric and eclectic symbolism (Fairbanks, 2004; Civil.ge, 2001c). He participated in the establishment of an opposition party, the National Movement. In 2002, Saakashvili became Chairman of the Tbilisi City Council (Civil.ge, 2002).

The mobilization that reflected his recognisability was in turn based on talking about the interests of those groups that Saakashvili was targeting. He did not make any specific statements about the church or the intelligentsia, yet managed to gain support of part of the intelligentsia (Kandelaki, 2006). His rhetoric was adapted to the most impoverished urban population that had suffered most from the market economy (Fairbanks, 2004). He also drew attention to the neglected and abandoned population in the regions, excluded from the political agenda (Kandelaki, 2006). His supporters were young residents of Tbilisi, including those working for foreign or local NGOs, various companies, and Western-oriented Georgians at large (Fairbanks, 2004). He spoke about the need for reforms, the fight against corruption, the benefits of knowledge and education, different kinds of mobility, etc. (24 saati, 2004a).

Saakashvili's popularity was also due to the existence of independent media even though the Georgian legislation enabled the government to oddly interpret media freedom and even ban it if necessary (Parliament of Georgia, 1991). The Rustavi 2 channel that Eduard Shevardnadze tried to close, and the events around it were a kind of prelude to subsequent processes (Civil.ge, 2001d; Civil.ge, 2001e; Civil.ge, 2001f; Manning, 2007). Independent television, which distinguished Georgia from other post-Soviet republics, ensured active coverage of rallies and elections and convergence of Saakashvili's interests with those of Burjanadze and Zhvania (Fairbanks, 2004).

The Rose Revolution

In the run-up to the 2003 parliamentary elections, a lot was done to improve the electoral environment with the participation of various organizations. Reduction of the number of MPs in the next parliament was also discussed, resulting in a referendum. (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 2003a; Civil.ge, 2003; Guralidze, 2003). However, the ruling government rejected various formats of cooperation, and the elections were held in the environment of violations, fraud, chaos and tensions. Protests started in Tbilisi as significant differences were identified between the CEC outcomes and the observers' data. The ruling groups tried to legitimize the election results at the first session of the newly elected parliament but the protesters disrupted the session, which resulted in the annulment of the results, resignation of the president, beginning of a new transition period, and scheduling of early elections. Unlike the 1991 rallies, the public protests of 2003 aimed at protecting the constitution (Kandelaki, 2006). On November 25, 2003, Georgia's Supreme Court annulled the results of the proportional elections, leaving the results of the

majoritarian elections and the referendum unchallenged (Mchedlishvili, p'rop'ortsiuli shedegebi gaukmda [Proportional results were canceled], 2003; Way, 2008).



*"Mikheil Saakashvili, Zurab Zhvania, Nino Burjanadze, Eduard Shevardnadze".
Owner: National Parliamentary Library of Georgia.*

As a result of that change of government, power was accumulated in the hands of three leaders: Burjanadze, who had been acting president after the Rose Revolution until the next president was elected, Zhvania who was elected Minister of State, and Saakashvili who they considered for the presidency. Discussion began immediately about changing the presidential institution to a modified version of Shevardnadze's proposed model. However, the changes were hindered by a kind of transition period caused by the change of power. As with Gamsakhurdia and Shevardnadze, there were legitimacy issues to resolve, and various legal changes to be made. Therefore, the powers of the parliament of 1999 were extended until a new parliament was elected. In its special session on November 25, 2003 the parliament scheduled an extraordinary presidential election for January 4, 2004 (Parliament of Georgia, 2003). The de-facto ruling parties nominated Saakashvili as their presidential candidate (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 2003b).

The New Presidency

Saakashvili achieved a convincing victory in the 2004 presidential election (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 2004a). The day after the election, Saakashvili stated that he was planning to change the constitution, with the main purpose of introducing the institution of prime minister (Kvesitadze, 2004a). The constitutional amendments were also to increase the powers of the president and to somewhat weaken those of the parliament. The new leaders who came to power sought to transform the political field prior to the new parliamentary election and during the term of the old parliament. One of the amendments concerned the immunity of the MPs, yet was rejected by the parliament (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 2004b). At the same time, the attitude toward constitutional amendments concerning the government was more positive.

Though less than a month passed between the announcement of the constitutional amendments and their adoption, discussion of the issue was very

specific (Kvesitadze, 2004b; Kvesitadze, 2004c; Asanishvili, 2004a; Asanishvili, 2004b; Asanishvili, 2004c). The media periodically published articles related to continuous disputes and criticism of the amendments (Melikadze, 2004; sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 2004c; Asanishvili, 2004d; Gakharia & Sabanishvili, 2004; Zurabishvili, 2004; Apraside, 2004). Saakashvili believed that the changes and reforms in the country required creation of a new system with "much more flexible, complex and less risky mechanisms of preventing and resolving political crises" (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 2004d). The other leaders were also supportive of that idea. Nino Burjanadze spoke of necessary levers for radical reforms in a post-revolutionary context (Asanishvili, 2004c). Thus, this system would be based on the collective responsibility of the government (Tevzadze, dikt'at'ura ki ara, dzlieri khelisupleba – amt'kitsebs p'rezidenti [Not a dictatorship, but a strong government, says the President], 2004a), with the Prime Minister dealing with the current affairs, while the President would determine and control the main directions (Asanishvili, 2004e). Zurab Zhvania believed that his next post would be more independent with a stronger president who would not be the head of the executive branch, and the government would be accountable to both the president and the parliament (Kvesitadze, 2004c). He also believed that the constitutional amendments would strengthen the parliament (Tevzadze, 2004b). For that purpose, the President was distanced from the Cabinet of Ministers (Ibid.), and both the Parliament and the President might dissolve the Cabinet, and the Cabinet of Ministers could raise the issue of dissolution of the Parliament (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 2004f). In that situation, the President would have an advantage. Nino Burjanadze was not happy with the future unclear position of the Parliament and did not see her place in a weak Parliament (Tevzadze, 2004b). Nevertheless, under the agreement with her political allies, she actively advocated for the constitutional changes, especially when her opponents talked about public disclosure and discussions of the amendments. She believed that the new constitutional amendments came from the 2001 draft that had been requested by Eduard Shevardnadze, and had been published for discussion (Asanishvili, 2004b). Zhvania stated the same (Kvesitadze, 2004c). The main reaction to criticism was generally the same: the amendments were based on a draft that had already been published under President Shevardnadze (Babeck, 2012).

Thus, the president would have the primary right to dispose of the power resources on the political field; he could criticize the other two leaders and could strengthen his position, dominating the others. Representatives of the non-governmental sector (Mchedlishvili, 2004), experts (Melikadze, 2004; Gakharia & Sabanishvili, 2004; Zurabishvili, 2004; Apraside, 2004) and politicians spoke against the constitutional changes. As a sign of protest, Koba Davitashvili resigned as political secretary of the National Movement (24 saati, 2004b). The proposed model was thought to give the president special powers (Fairbanks, 2004). However, Saakashvili insisted that they were going to create a strong government according to the mandate received from the Georgian people, so the future format would not lead to any dictatorship and authoritarianism. He also noted that the draft amendments were in principle positively assessed by international organizations (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 2004d), including the Venice Commission (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 2004e). The commission's report, however, identified both positive trends and possible risks that needed further consideration and clarification. Also, the changes did not ensure a true semi-presidential system and significantly differed from other similar constitutions (Venice Commission, 2004).

Like his predecessors, Sakaashvili rejected the threat of concentration of power as illusory. He believed that the strengthening of the presidency was necessary to implement proposed plans and to save the country. During parliamentary debates, one of the MPs dramatically referred to the situation as natural, because “the rights of the President, who enjoys so much trust, cannot be severely curtailed. It would be a disregard for people’s trust. If not for the 96% support that Mikheil Saakashvili received in the January 4 elections, the Constitutional amendments would not be the way they are” (sak’art’veelos resp’ublik’a, 2004g).



“Protest”. Author: Nazi Gabaidze.

Jones believes that the constitutional reform that was supposed to increase the responsibility of the cabinet ultimately weakened parliamentary control over the executive branch (Jones, 2013). According to Babeck, Georgian constitutionalists widely believed that the 2004 constitutional reform was inconsistent in both form and content. The amendments strengthened the powers of the president in the Georgian presidential system (in many dimensions) because the institution of the prime minister was part of the system (Babeck, 2012).

Weakening of the Presidency

Similar to the institution of the president, the constitution of Georgia was amended to the needs of specific politicians. Strange as it was, Saakashvili changed the constitution as freely as did Shevardnadze: by 2012, the Georgian constitution had been amended 25 times (Jones, 2013). Yet the changes ultimately did not guarantee the form of government, its content, or relations. The “volatile” constitution and negative aspects of the presidency had caused a downfall of the previous presidential rule (Ibid.). However, Saakashvili could not further strengthen the presidency; his presidential term was also coming to an end. The only way to prolong his powers was to change the system of government by weakening the institution of the President and strengthening the institution of the Prime Minister. This could prolong his term in power and significantly change the distribution of powers between the branches.

The changes were caused by the processes and protests in the country. Mikheil Saakashvili’s rule was formally semi-presidential, yet he actually had extended

presidential rights. Zurab Zhvania died on February 3, 2005. Disagreements with Burjanadze, which started after 2007, gradually turned into a confrontation (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 2008). Thus, the power was concentrated in the hands of one person. Saakashvili annually renewed his cabinet. While under Shevardnadze the parliament periodically disagreed with similar changes (moreover, the issue of impeachment was even raised in parliament), Saakashvili's authority gave him more freedom of action, and representatives of various branches of power praised his ruling (Jones, 2013).

After Saakashvili came to power, protests against his rule gradually increased. The reasons included his authoritarianism, his methods of dealing with political opponents and leaders, the use of force, and some other issues. Despite the theatrical debates in the parliamentary chamber, the President's ruling party always dominated the Parliament (Ibid.). In addition, the President could threaten to dissolve the parliament or use his veto, and could be removed only by the majority of his own party (Skriverer, 2016). Scrivener notes that under Saakashvili the importance of parliament gradually decreased and the format of opposition changed: "Debates between the authorities and the opposition no longer took place in parliament, but rather during protests, media debates and boycotts. The opposition tried to put pressure on the government from the streets, rather than through discussions in committees" (Ibid.).

The protests had a huge impact on the Government that responded by increasing pressure on its supporters, opponents, and the media. The 2007 protests significantly challenged the government's position (Civil.ge, 2007a). In that period two TV companies were temporarily closed down (Civil.ge, 2007b; Civil.ge, 2007c; Civil.ge, 2007d; Civil.ge, 2007e; Civil.ge, 2007f; Civil.ge, 2008). Political protests never subsided after the August 2008 war. The united opposition announced multi-day rallies for 2009, starting on April 9 (Gamisonia, 2009a; Gamisonia, 2009b; Avaliani, 2009). The protests lasted until the end of June. One of the demands was to change the regime. Before the March 30 rallies, the parliamentary Christian Democratic faction proposed drafting a new constitution as a way out of the political crisis, with the purpose of changing and weakening the presidency as an institution. The idea proved acceptable to the ruling presidential party (Asanishvili, 2009a). Later, Saakashvili also raised the issue of constitutional changes in the presidential system with the purpose of limiting the rights of the president and strengthening the parliament. At the same time, he said: "Efficient presidential rule is important in Georgia, especially when a large part of the country is occupied" (Civil.ge, 2009). Yet the government gradually leant towards expanding the powers of the parliament and the prime minister whereas drastically curtailing the presidency (Asanishvili, 2009b).

On June 8, 2009 the President of Georgia signed a decree on the establishment of the Constitutional Commission. Parliamentary and other qualified parties, representatives of universities, non-governmental organizations, and various bodies and structures were invited to participate in the process.

Against the background of ongoing protests, Saakashvili also spoke about the importance of the opposition's participation in the process: "I proposed creating a commission on a parity basis, which would work out a balanced constitutional model. I [also] proposed them to agree and nominate the Chairman of the Commission" (Asanishvili, 2009c; president.gov.ge, 2010). He believed that the candidate proposed by the opposition should chair the Constitutional Commission (Gamisonia, 2009c). Yet some parties and experts refused to participate. The critical

attitude was partly caused by the fact that the same people had participated in the discussion of constitutional changes since Shevardnadze's time, representing his past arrangements (Babeck, 2012).

The commission worked for 16 months and sent the final draft to the president on July 19, 2010 (Demetrashvili, 2012). Fish believes that the amendments resulted from reflection, long and heated consultations, and often debates, which distinguished that process from other processes of constitutional change (Fish, 2012). Babeck argues that the president did not intervene in the process. It was believed that he did not adapt the constitutional reform to his personal interests, yet there could be the risk of him vying to stay in power on its back (Babeck, 2012). For his part, Saakashvili claimed that he had not seen the draft constitution approved by the Venice Commission (Civil.ge, 2010a), that he was indeed thinking about the future post of Prime Minister (Civil.ge, 2010b) but he did not adjust the Constitution to himself (Civil.ge, 2010c). Mikheil Saakashvili believed that the new constitution should help the government transition to a new stage of future reforms: "We are ready for a new revision of the constitution that will be more balanced. In the context of constructive cooperation between the government and the opposition, we will create a democratic constitution of the European type - with greater equality between the branches of power, a stronger parliament and permanent accountability of the government to the people" (president.gov.ge, 2010).



*"Military parade dedicated to Independence Day of Georgia".
Owner: Elefter Lafachi. 26 May, 2004.*

On October 15, 2010, the Parliament of Georgia adopted amendments and additions that had the President remain the head of the Georgian state, yet the Government became the supreme body of executive power in Georgia (Parliament of Georgia, 2010).

Summary of the Section

Pierre Bourdieu argues that the purpose of processes on the political field is to monopolize the production and dissemination of political ideas and opinions in

order to disseminate one irreplaceable and inescapable truth (Bourdieu, 2001). Under Saakashvili's presidency, television remained an important channel of communication, yet the role of the internet and social networks grew as well. Despite attempts to control TV channels, independent Internet resources and media offered unrestricted opportunities for Saakashvili's opponents to express their views or plan protests, thus the form of communication as well as the political field changed.

In his struggle for power, Saakashvili twice managed to change the presidency to retain his exclusive right to power in the ruling hierarchy. Nevertheless, his intention to be a lone player on the political field in order to influence all other fields brought the country back to crisis. Saakashvili lost the 2012 election, although that time it happened within the electoral system. The vertical of power, in fact, changed only its name, and the strongman presidential system was replaced by a system with a strongman prime minister (Skrivener, 2016).

The media was a strong tool for Saakashvili, however control over it was practically impossible due to social media and various internet services. In terms of diverse media services, attacking the media on their coverage of the elections had temporary consequences, but it also gradually weakened the potential of the media. New platforms for debates appeared, making the domination of creation and dissemination of news impossible.

Mikhail Saakashvili came to power with a different personal history, accumulated capital and image of a leader. As a leader, he saw the need to achieve exclusivity on the political field through a variety of means. He did not focus on any influential group yet tried to express the interests of a broader group of society by his actions aimed at changes and development. A change in the executive branch and a weak president are, by their very nature, an alternative way of keeping the ruling party in power.

Final Conclusion

Thus, in the struggle for control over power resources in Georgia, all new leaders came on a wave of euphoria and hope. In fact, periods of crisis and discord preceded the arrival of all the three presidents. They effectively used their social capital to change the political field. It was believed that the old leader needed to be replaced because the constitution was failing and had to be changed. In the process of the change, the political leaders managed to neutralize "dangerous" allies and opponents and move the political field to a dimension that they dominated. However, according to Bourdieu, one cannot exist in two or more different fields, so the desire to remake and control the fields according to one's own consideration eventually led to inevitable crises, followed by dramatic changes of power.

In the process of coming to power and retaining it, a large role was played by various agents who could influence the political field yet were vulnerable to those in power. Unlike Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Eduard Shevardnadze paid more attention to the still influential intelligentsia and the church, whose influence was growing. Moreover, he tried to preserve the position of the intelligentsia while strengthening the position of the Church. Tired of constant crises, the youth, the regions, and the poor took to streets to support Mikheil Saakashvili. Yet, despite their varied relations with more eclectic and diverse interest groups, Saakashvili's government also faced problems, which contributed to the transformation of power.

Before coming to power, the leaders viewed presidentialism as a system of government that would be effective in addressing the current challenges of the

distribution of power. Yet after coming to power, all the three presidents, for different reasons, yet for subjective considerations and with the same goal of strengthening their power and preventing other agents from occupying prominent places on the political field, gradually transformed their presidency into an institution endowed with special rights.

Fish believes that “unbridled” presidents can better deal with threats than parliaments and systems where power is divided between the president and the legislature. Thus, presidents often use crises to strengthen their positions (Fish, 2012). Gamsakhurdia used that method to create de facto independent and free Georgia; Shevardnadze applied it to stabilize the country; Saakashvili used that approach to fight corruption, implement reforms and solve other problems (Civil, 2009). However, according to Jibghashvili, the subjective understanding of strong presidency resulted in losing an objective perception of presidentialism and parliamentarism. “A presidential republic was seen as a manifestation of strong presidential power, and a parliamentary republic - as the antithesis of an effective government. That was fully evident in the psychological attitude of all three former presidents toward state power” (Jibghashvili, 2071).

However, in a situation where the number of challenges, problems and risks grew with the increasing powers of the President, the processes logically led to the weakening of the presidency and introduction of a modified, collective form of personal domination.

Every new government actually relied on the previous one in terms of legislation, bureaucracy, and even the parliament. Thus, Zviad Gamsakhurdia started his movement towards independence with the Supreme Council elected in the Georgian SSR, yet then switched to a one-mandate and one-party system. Eduard Shevardnadze’s rise to power was preceded by the abolition of the previous parliament and the government in general; yet he ruled under the laws that had been changed by Gamsakhurdia and had somewhat modified the Soviet system of government. Mikheil Saakashvili actually continued the reforms that Shevardnadze had initiated, expanded the presidential powers, and continued Shevardnadze’s policies in various directions.

Communication with the media proved quite difficult under all the three presidents. Zviad Gamsakhurdia sought to control the media, especially during the pre-election period, thus contributing to the monopoly of his own political views. Under Shevardnadze, newspapers still were the main means of communicating with the population. Due to electric power outages, Shevardnadze extensively used radio broadcasting, and his regular radio interviews were usually published in newspapers. Under Saakashvili, first television and then the Internet took the lead. Saakashvili tried to control TV channels, yet independent Internet resources and media offered unrestricted opportunities for his opponents to express their views. Social networks were also actively used for planning street protests.

In fact, the institution of presidency and related processes were a tool for the realization of personal interests and strengthening of power. They helped control the objectified resources of power, create and disseminate relevant knowledge, and influence the population. In this respect, elections were not so much a mechanism for testing one’s own political popularity as a legitimate way to maintain these opportunities.

All photos have been retrieved from the collection of digital photographs archive of the National Parliamentary Library of Georgia.

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Presidential Elections in Georgia: Political Transformations, Imagined Unity, and Memory Discourses in Election Campaigns and Inaugural Speeches

“Over the past two centuries, and especially the last seventy years, towards the Georgian people, there has been deliberately pursued a policy the goal of which was its national and cultural degeneration. However, the Georgian nation managed to preserve not only its ethnocultural identity, but also, to a certain extent, its territorial integrity.” (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1991a)

“Today the level of statehood and independence of Georgia has been the highest for the last 600 years!” (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 2000)

“The magnificent Bagrati Cathedral has been a symbol of the strength and greatness of Georgia for centuries, and for the last 300 years it has become a symbol of Georgia whose unity has been destroyed, Georgia whose freedom has been taken away and broken.” (Civil.ge, 2008)

For twenty-three years, power in Georgia was concentrated primarily in the hands of the president. The features of the formation of the presidential institution are described in the first part of the present book, “The Presidency in Georgia: Subjective Understanding of Political Needs and Institutional Transformations”. As in the first part, in this case we will also talk about the elections of the period of strong presidents, when the first person of the country was the head of the executive branch. This time, we present our analysis of the election programs and inaugural speeches of the three Georgian presidents. Also, when developing the text, we have taken into account the projects initiated in their terms, their initiatives and important events of their times. The structure of the text is as follows: first, we establish the general theoretical basis of our text; next, we will consider the addresses of the presidential candidates during the election period and their framing of the addressees, the rioters. All three presidents viewed their voters differently and formulated their addresses accordingly. After this, we will discuss the materials from the pre-election period of each president, devoted to those main topics that we identified according to the chosen theoretical framework and the positions of the presidents. The final part of the work deals with the main conclusions on theoretical and practical issues.

Preliminary remarks

We have used several approaches to analyze the election campaigns and post-election practices of presidential candidates. We consider the use of Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities to be the most productive for analyzing pre-election texts. In particular, according to Anderson, a nation is an

imagined political community – imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign (Anderson, 2006). It can be said that a Georgian presidential election campaign is an example of how candidates manage to define an imaginary unity and community and very clearly separate the society of “us” from the society of “them”.

In Anderson’s imagined community, a sense of unity among its members is achieved through a number of means. Presidential candidates in the Georgian case have all described unity in complex terms, using symbols and meanings well known to the public: history, heroes, enemies, environment, artifacts, dates, plots. Sensitive to to each election’s specific context, their iterations comprised simple examples that were logically related to common perceptions of communal unity, as well as their own views and interests. The presidential nominees explained to voters what unites their community, what common achievements and problems each of its members has, and how they differ from people outside the community.



“9 April”. Author: Jemal Kasradze.

During the election campaigns in Georgia, candidates addressed voters in different ways: as the Georgian nation, a unity of citizens, community, society, civil society, etc. At the same time, candidates did not simply appeal to voters, but, using various methods, presented their own thoughts as the viewpoints of voters, which the candidates only voiced. In this way, a feeling of unity with the community was achieved, and candidates were meant to be seen as part of this community and bearers of its interests. They also described in detail the interrelationships between different voters living in the country. Here too, in different ways, the candidates presented their views on such interrelationships as general, public views. Of course, it was clear who benefited from these descriptions.

Ernest Renan, in his lecture on the essence of a nation, pointed out that each member of a nation must be aware of the many examples of community, know what unites them, and forget what harms or destroys this unity (Renan, 1990). During the election campaigns, presidential candidates were essentially trying to achieve the same result: they talked about unifying bonds that would help each voter feel united with each other - be it horizontal unity, country sovereignty, territoriality, examples of indigenous population, lines of kinship and unity of blood, etc. - everything that Anderson called imaginary unity (Anderson, 2006). Another means of presenting

unity for presidential candidates was the use of content related to Georgia, which Anderson called delimitation (*Ibid.*). Namely, by separating his own living area from other spaces with the help of delimitation, the candidate could describe the country within the boundaries in which each voter lives. Depending on the individual goal, the politician considered this distinction statically (that is, within the limits established by existing international treaties) or dynamically (appealing to individual kingdoms and principalities in different historical periods and comparing them with each other). Also, to demonstrate the distinction, the practice of turning to historical figures was actively used, where in addition to the exploitation of historical content and meanings associated with these persons, the emphasis was placed on territorial dimensions and corresponding “heroic” examples. In these cases, the above mentioned individuals were viewed not so much in terms of their achievements or identity, but rather in terms of the sense of nationhood associated with their names. At the same time, depending on the specifics of Georgia, the candidates spoke about internationally recognized state borders, territorial integrity, understanding and restoration of the country’s unity.

The next thing that candidates often talked about was the country’s sovereignty. In the case of Georgia, sovereignty is related to borders; in particular, to those visions that link imaginary unity and territory to the execution of the will of government in domestic and foreign affairs. After the issue of independence, the emphasis was made on planned projects, imminent changes, foreign policy orientation, allies and enemies.

Finally, in their speeches the candidates paid special attention to the “horizontal unity” of community. According to Anderson, community is primarily understood as a horizontal, transverse unity. In the case of presidential candidates, this was expressed in praise of the regional diversity of Georgia, the unity of whose representatives created the Georgian identity and Georgia itself. Emphasis was also given to the fact that voters living in different regions have deep connections and, despite their place of residence and differences, have common concerns, pains, joys, past, present and future. Horizontal unity is filled with references to common heroes and heroic deeds, feelings and tragedies, common places and unifying ideas (including religion), the recent past and the ongoing present. Of course, the candidates carefully considered the future, the benefits of which would likely be felt and shared by everyone, that is, by voters, if they believed the candidate and elected him president.

In some cases, together with the local community, it seems productive to use the concept of “sites of memory” by Pierre Nora. In particular, in the texts of political leaders from the period of gaining independence, we often come across examples from history. Information related to historical figures, events, and dates was used to explain Georgia’s tragic past and present. In addition, heroic examples highlighted the potential that the people of Georgia possessed and that political leaders were able to realize. Politicians in Georgia also actively visited places of special importance - the Mtatsminda Pantheon, Svetitskhoveli, Bagrati Cathedral, graves of prominent figures, museums, etc. During the visits they talked about the memory associated with these places and their significance for Georgians. Pierre Nora noted that the interest in *lieux de memoire* where memory crystallizes and secretes itself occurs at a particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn, but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a

sense of historical continuity persists. There are lieux de memoire, sites of memory, because there are no longer milieux de memoire, real environments of memory.

Thus, through sites of memory in which the people's memory is preserved, society will constantly remember various events and understand communication with it. However, memory the bearers of which are living communities remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. Sites of memory are usually represented in the form of national symbols, geographical places, historical events, characters, monuments, holidays, literature or works of art. In Georgia, they were also presented in material form, had a symbolic meaning and performed a specific function. In contrast to memory, history represented a reconstruction of memory, which described what was no longer unique and incomplete, but was a product of intellectuals and had a claim to objectivity (Nora, 1989). When visiting specific sites of memory in Georgia, politicians used historical narratives propagated by intellectuals before them, presented an issue-oriented incomplete chronology of the site and addressed the interests of the majority or select groups. That was the history of Georgia, reflected in school curricula, which was well known to the public. In special places, politicians used selected facts and emphases on familiar symbols, which they combined with the goals and objectives expressed in their electoral platforms. All the above gave their arguments more credibility.

Another interesting approach relates to Katherine Verdery's research on the politics of bodies and the reconfiguration of time and space in post-socialist societies (Verdery, 2000). Within this approach politics as a form of concerted activity among social actors, often involves stakes in particular contradictory, quasi-intentional goals (...). They can include making policy, justifying actions taken, claiming authority and disputing the authority claims of others, and creating or manipulating the cultural categories within which all of those activities are pursued. And some actors often seek to present their goals as in some sense public ones. The goal of the Georgian presidents mainly consisted of two parts: firstly, criticism and rejection of the symbols and content created during the rule of the previous president; secondly, filling politics with new meanings and, accordingly, creating new symbols and content.

Since the 1990s, customary practices, attitudes and knowledge in the post-socialist space have lost their relevance, and everyday life has continued under conditions of restrictions, changed rules of the game and an uncertain political system. There was a feeling that new forms of activity were more productive than old ones, that particular new ideas were more relevant and promising than old ones, etc. Part of the process of reconfiguration of meanings, contents, spaces and time meant transformation of society, conflicts, crises, when social order required the use of both rational and irrational statements, in which the use of traditions based on ancient practices, including in the Hobsbawm's understanding, was well suited (Hobsbawm, 2012); it could be also based on something forgotten, ancient, even transformed or newly discovered. In this process a special role was played by politicians or groups who led these changes or used them to their advantage. Sometimes they used already familiar practices and content, only changing names, restoring conventionally old experience, or creating something new in accordance with current requirements. In this process, they also actively used human bodies (in

the form of the dead, their graves or monuments) with various sacred or symbolic meanings. In particular, the inclusion of the bodies of the dead in the political process allowed politicians to redefine or reorganize space (for example, demolishing old and erecting new monuments) and time (changing chronology, calendar). In this case, rethinking old symbols, introducing new ones, forgetting or erasing the unwanted past were all part of the practices of creating a new political order. At the same time, special significance was attached to the fact that when visiting the graves of prominent deceased persons or talking about them, politicians often spoke on their behalf. As the outstanding dead were viewed in terms of their biography, character, emotions, and specialized knowledge, members of society considered their heritage in different and heterogeneous ways. Because of such a diversity of perceptions, politicians attributed to the deceased individual actions, views, or statements that were considered relevant at the time, did not contradict widely held beliefs about the deceased, and were made useful in each new policy (Verdery, 2000).

Addressees of election campaigns

During the election campaigns in question, the recipients of the imagined unity were voters, identified as members of different groups at different times. The content of the campaigns also specified the allies and opponents of unity.



"Protest rally in Batumi". Owner: Ucha Okropiridze. 1990.

In their texts, presidential candidates first clarified the identities of the members of the community, to whom the narrative of an imagined unity, common history, heroes, tragedies, holidays or other topics was directed. Moreover, during the pre-election period for presidential candidates, the voter was seen at the same time a subject who participated in politics through elections, and also an object towards whom the election campaign was directed. The simultaneous reflection of both dimensions of the voter was thought out in the election campaigns of Georgian presidents. Taking into account the views of the candidates and the current situation, each candidate described the object of each election address differently, in general - "people," "nation," "society," "citizen" or specifically - "Georgians," "Georgian people," "Citizens of Georgia" and the like. Accordingly, election programs, addresses, meetings, speeches were created taking into account the addressee. Presidential candidates tried to be considered part of the target group and bear its characteristics. In this case, the candidate was given the opportunity to talk about his own views, as about the wishes and interests of the specified group. In case of victory, he promised to cope with challenges, problems, and enemies in order to

protect the interests of his voters. That is, a candidate, “similar to people,” would be elected president “by the will of the people” and could say that he would act based on the “interests of the people.”

The name of the target group depended not only on the views of the candidate, but also on his opponents, the previous government, in competition with whom he chose how to address voters and what to focus on. Also, it was important to consider current processes in the country, external factors, personal relationships, etc.

Gamsakhurdia’s election campaign took place during the period of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the gaining of independence and the formation of a new government. For this reason, the addressee of the candidate’s appeals was the Georgian people or nation. The Georgian people (ethnic Georgians) were presented as a group with special characteristics that managed to maintain stability and strength despite the Soviet past: “For the recent seventy years, an intentional policy has been pursued towards Georgian people, with the goal of its national and cultural degeneration. Nevertheless, the Georgian nation managed to preserve its ethno-cultural identity, as well as its territorial integrity to some extent” (sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 1991a). It was the duty of the Mrgvali Magida – Tavisufali sak’art’velo (an alliance of Georgian political parties The Round Table – Free Georgia) political group and its leader to submit to the will of the Georgian people and implement it. In this case, the Mrgvali Magida represented “the best part of the Georgian nation” - “the Georgian nation has expressed its will, it has given its mandate of trust to the avant-garde of the national liberation movement,” or “the strong majority of the population of Georgia has elected the avant-garde of our movement” (akhali sak’art’velo, 1990).

Concern for the interests of the Georgian people was the cross-cutting theme of Gamsakhurdia’s program, speeches and inaugural speech. The implementation of the will of the Georgian people was inevitable, because they gave everything for the sake of revival: “the Georgian man gives the worldly, physical well-being up in the name of spiritual, national revival” (sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 1991), and then, “for the age-old aim of our people – free and economically prosperous Georgia – to turn into reality as soon as possible” (sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 1991a).

Shevardnadze’s first election campaign took place in conditions of confrontation with representatives of the previous government, internal armed conflicts, problems of legitimacy and overall crisis. The second campaign, in some way, summed up the results achieved during his first presidential term, although the future program was not designed for significant changes. Apparently, due to the ethnic conflict in the country, and in contrast to the forms of addresses of Gamsakhurdia, Shevardnadze rarely used or spoke on behalf of the Georgian people or nation in his addresses. He also rarely used ethnic group designations. The addressee (and, in a certain sense, the author) of his appeals were people in general, society or all residents of Georgia - “all people who live here, representatives of all nations and nationalities” (sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 1995a), distinguished by optimism, hope, wisdom, foresight, etc. (sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 1991a; sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 1995b; sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 1992c).

Through this approach, he spoke about his involvement in politics, his return to Georgia, coming to power as a voter, and the will of the people, which was presented as folk wisdom. “People’s wisdom and political foresight led to the election of today’s president and parliament” (sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 1995). Farsighted and insightful people, on the contrary, should choose a leader who has only positive qualities.

He, as a part of these people, directly called on voters not to allow a “random candidate into parliament” (sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 1995d). Unlike Gamsakhurdia, Shevardnadze’s election campaign was focused on the country’s recovery from crisis and regaining prosperity. Therefore, if he were supported as a leader, voters - the people, society - would receive the desired results - the government would become stronger and fully legitimate, and the population would receive stability, peace, democracy, would “develop business, a socially oriented market economy and raise the level of public well-being” (sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 1995e).

During the election campaign, Shevardnadze rarely spoke about different peoples or nations, for example, about the violation or restriction of the rights of Georgians in conflict regions. To separate himself from the previous government, he deliberately did not talk about the exclusive rights of ethnic Georgians. In one of his speeches, he noted that the formula “Georgia for Georgians only” was unacceptable to him and he considered such “overcoming fascism” to be his achievement (sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 1995f).

Saakashvili used all terms at the same time and spoke equally about the Georgian people, the Georgian nation and the citizens of Georgia. Even in these cases, the Georgian people he mentioned can be understood as all the people of Georgia: – “...I realize how responsible I am becoming before the Georgian people for this support; but together we will do our best to fulfill the hopes of Georgian people...” (Civil.ge, 2004), or “The main character is the people, who yesterday made the history with their own hands” (Chalagaridze, 2003), or also “...Georgian people inflicted a (catastrophic) defeat on the current government” (24 saati, 2003), etc. He emphasized the fact that the people create politics through their leaders, since the people were both the creator of the revolution and the group interested in its outcome, which demanded a new reality.

The second main goal of his speeches and addresses was to present Georgia and Georgians as part of the world, or to speak more narrowly, Europe and the collective West. Unlike Gamsakhurdia, where this sentiment was presented in general, as well as Shevardnadze, who spoke about international cooperation or various regional projects, Saakashvili especially emphasized the pro-Western character (pro-Europeanism) of Georgia and Georgians: “We are only pro-Georgian movement, having European orientation and sharing western values” (sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 2003). Also in his speeches, he noted that every step of the new government is not only important for country and its citizens, but also represents a part of global processes in which Georgia must contribute: “We, Georgians, have already created the history and showed the world what a democratic our country is” (Dvali, 2003), or “We, Georgians must not only rely on others, the time has come when we should not ask what the world is doing for us, but the time has come when we must ask what Georgia will do for the world and what contribution it will make to the development of the world” (sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 2004).

To summarize, we can say that during the pre-election period Gamsakhurdia mainly used ethnonyms. In his speeches, Shevardnadze mainly spoke about civil society. Saakashvili used both approaches in his speeches, although the ethnonyms he used were understood in the context of nation-building. The definition of a voter was determined by the views of certain politicians, existing problems, and challenges, but the chosen approach, in turn, was defined by the content of the pre-election and inaugural texts. The following sections will discuss the specifics of each president’s campaign.

2. Zviad Gamsakhurdia

The coming to power of the first president of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, and the main aspects of the formation of the presidential institution were discussed in the first chapter of the work. The given part deals with the analysis of his election texts. Based on the texts of Zviad Gamsakhurdia's pre-election and inaugural speech, we will focus here on the texts of the second, general period of the presidential elections. Prior to this, he was elected president by the Supreme Soviet (Council). Gamsakhurdia's election and inaugural speech are distinguished by a number of features. The main topic to discuss was a conversation about gaining independence and strengthening sovereignty. He considered his own challenges to be the Soviet Union and its attitude towards Georgia's independence, as well as various institutions destroyed or disrupted by the Soviet regime, the internal conflict in the country. Against this background, in his speeches Gamsakhurdia mainly spoke about the horizontal unity of Georgians and the need to strengthen it.

Time

The first topic that is highlighted in Gamsakhurdia's speeches is a unique understanding of time and the calendar, which will be discussed within the framework of the corresponding reconfiguration of new time. In particular, as Verdery notes, the formation of a new political order in post-socialist societies required new orientations. One of these outstanding milestones is the rearrangement of the historical chronology, calendar and dates that determine the unity of the nation. In this process, the "true" histories, characters, and notable dates are fixed, at the same time the old dates are simultaneously criticized and discarded. In addition, these dates were in some way considered Nora's sites of new memory.



"Zviad Gamsakhurdia". Author: Jemal Kasradze.

In Gamsakhurdia's speeches there is a common past, the understanding of which begins from the twentieth century: the acquisition and loss of independence, Soviet power and repression, the Georgian people and Georgian territories during the USSR and others. Specific historical figures, events, or other historical details

do not actually appear in his texts. He summed up the Soviet period only in the context of the Georgian nation: “The Georgian nation was able to preserve not only its ethnocultural identity, but also, to a certain extent, its territorial integrity” (sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 1991a). Actually, this thought represented the main concept of his political vision.

The period of the Republic of Georgia in 1921 was presented in Gamsakhurdia’s election program as both a legal and symbolic memory. Also, the “Act on the Restoration of State Independence of Georgia,” adopted on April 9, 1991, was based on the “Act of Independence of Georgia dated May 26, 1918” (sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 1991). Therefore, in the program text of Gamsakhurdia it was mentioned that the future constitution of Georgia should be created on the basis of the Constitution of 1921 (sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 1991a).

However, during his presidency, Gamsakhurdia did not witness the creation of a new constitution. It was also unclear to what extent the basic principles of the 1921 Constitution, for example, regarding the organization of the executive branch, could be transferred to the new Constitution. However, it should be noted that the restoration of the coat of arms and flag of Georgia was an expression of connection with the 1921 Republic. Also, as Jones and Toria believe, the restoration of lost memory in the realities of Georgia became the cornerstone of a new identity politics, the purpose of which was to form a public consensus around a negative reinterpretation of the Soviet past, as well as the historical experience of Russian-Georgian relations (Jones & Toria, 2021). For Gamsakhurdia, when rethinking the dates in general, it was critically important to “correct” correlations with the Soviet Union.

This period of his speeches is characterized by different meanings. Thus, he connected the exceptionally glorious date of May 26, 1921, when the independence of the Republic of Georgia was proclaimed, with April 9, a date that in his speech had both tragic and glorious meaning. On the one hand, April 9, 1989 was associated with tragedy, but on the other hand, it was a happy day, because on April 9, 1991, the Act on the Restoration of State Independence of Georgia was adopted. He said:

On the second anniversary of the Bloody Week of 1989, April 9, 1991, the Supreme Council of the Republic of Georgia adopted the Act on the restoration of state independence of Georgia. This day took its rightful place next to May 26 as one of the most brilliant days of victory in the history of Georgia (sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 1991a).

He also added the date of his presidency to the significant dates after the general elections and declared that March 31 and April 9, 1991 were the greatest victories of the Georgian people and the national government (sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 1991). Thus, Gamsakhurdia summed up the significance of the victims, executioners and heroes associated with April 9, for new Georgia. However, it must be said that the communist authorities of Georgia also realized the importance of this date, and therefore did not prevent regional organizations of the national movement from installing memorial plaques in different regions of Georgia (Chikovani, Kakitelashvili, Chkhaidze, Tsereteli, & Efadze, 2022). As a matter of fact, the disagreement that arose regarding this date persisted in the future, and each following president or political group approached it in their own way.

We can say that Gamsakhurdia considered dates not only from the viewpoint of the politics of memory, but also tried to somehow invent the past (Hobsbawm, 2012) and connect it with the present. Using this method, the presidential candidate

tried to consolidate society in connection with events and dates that were both familiar and unknown, happy and tragic.

The most important step in terms of calendar changes Gamsakhurdia brought with his rise to power was the abolition of Soviet holidays and days off. In 1990, the Supreme Council of Georgia amended the Labor Code of Georgia, and all Soviet holidays, including May 9, were removed from the calendar to be replaced by religious holidays (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'is uzenaesi sabch'o, 1990). Since this period, a development of religious themes in both the calendar and everyday life occurred first in the context of opposition to Soviet ideology, and then in the context of the formation of a new national idea.



The poster "The round table - Free Georgia". Author: The round table - Free Georgia. 1991.

In Gamsakhurdia's pre-election and inaugural speeches, themes of national identity throughout Georgian history replaced almost any other historical topics. These historic musings came in the form of stand-alone commentary or linked to other topics. For example, in the election program, he noted that in general the Georgian people and kings "showed tolerance towards representatives of other religions and peoples, but they themselves basically remained devout Christians" (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1991a). As he attached much greater importance to religious themes, so we will separately touch upon this very topic.

the changes that began during the Gamsakhurdia's period continued under subsequent presidents. The change in the list of civic days off and holidays also became a manifestation of an alternative vision of state ideology, as a result of which the role and importance of religion in Georgia increased.

Rethinking the calendar and chronology is one of the signs of the post-socialist transformations that occurred during the presidency of Gamsakhurdia. This was the beginning of an extensive process. Moreover,

Religion

By the 1990s, a process of rethinking and rewriting the past, present and future was underway throughout the post-Soviet space. The new political agenda required the introduction of views other than socialist ones. Religion provided a ready means of presenting the post-socialist order as something different from what had gone on there before, and consisted of reintroducing explicitly sacred values into political discourse. In many cases, this has meant a new relationship between religion and the state that came along with the renewal of religious faith. Reestablishing faith or relations with the church enabled political parties and individuals to signal their anticommunism and eager return to precommunist values. This replaced the kind of sacredness that undergirded the authority of communist parties and served to sacralize politics in new ways (Verdery, 2000).

In his campaign speeches, Gamsakhurdia often referred to Christianity, the church, churchliness and religion in general. Looking back at his focus before the election campaign, leading up to the formal collapse of the USSR and the reformation of Georgia as a sovereign state, the Soviet Union appeared in Gamsakhurdia's texts as a rhetorical tool for the manifestation of negativity. The process of replacing his critiques of the Soviet legacy with religious themes occurred gradually.

Gamsakhurdia referred to the Orthodox Church and religion when speaking both about Georgian unity, Georgia's dramatic past and her desired future. The presidential candidate believed that the "cultural heritage, aesthetic and ethical values" of Georgians of the past were based on Christianity. It united all Georgians spiritually and created their "cultural identity and uniqueness" (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1991a). Such a unifying idea should have been useful both in demonstrating unity and in talking about building a future based on a common Christian past.

In the process of post-socialist transformation, Gamsakhurdia used religious content in direct connection with social and political space. In his speeches religion was discussed in connection with the state. In his opinion, in addition to cooperation between the state and religious institutions in Georgia, it was also important to understand that Christianity could revive and supply the corresponding values for Georgians, as it did in the past.

The existence of a civilized society is unthinkable without the unity of religious and secular life. Religious life is organized by the church, and secular life by the state. The organic connection between church and state was traditional in Georgia. Religious education, Christian purity, love, justice and virtue shaped the character of the layman of the Georgian state. The life-giving faith of the Georgians determined the centuries-long existence of the Georgian state in a hostile environment, and the state, in turn, supported the apostolic activity of the Church in every possible way (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1991a).

The search for a new ideology connected the past and the present. The return of the religious calendar and the reconfiguration of social life played a big role in various societies in terms of overcoming the socialist past and returning to "normal history," as Verdery noted when describing the processes taking place in the post-Soviet space (Verdery, 2000). It seems that Gamsakhurdia was guided by this opinion precisely. That is why in his speeches he noted that the Soviet period represented a "wrong historical path," a mistake, even falling into sin - "The establishment of universal atheism led to the devaluation of religious and moral values for the secularized Soviet society. Religious nihilism, the decline of religion and morality were one of the main reasons that brought Georgians to a national catastrophe" (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1991a).

Therefore, on the contrary, a return to the Christian bosom would alleviate past troubles, suffering and pain, which is a kind of "rebirth" or "resurrection" for everyone. That is, Georgians and Georgia will be able to overcome spiritual, state, national, cultural or economic decline. After the elections of the Supreme Council of the Georgian SSR, on November 14, 1990, during a speech at the first session of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Georgia, where he was unanimously elected its Chairman, he presented an extensive appeal to the public, which ended with the following words:

Dear friends! Our movement is, first of all, a religious movement, because without religion there can be no real national revival. That is why our nation and our church are together today. We are fighting the eternal night of godlessness and injustice, our just cause is protected by God and that is why we defeated the enemy. The Georgian people will not follow the path of Baraba, the path of godlessness, banditry, terrorism, the path of the Georgian people is the path of virtue, the path of goodness, the path of Christ, now and forever. Blessed is the share of the Mother of God of Georgia! God is with us! Amen! (akhali sak'art'velo, 1990).

After the general election, in his inaugural speech as president, he discussed religion as part of the future program, pointing out that a citizen of independent Georgia must be armed with steadfast faith. Gamsakhurdia believed “the unshakable faith of the Georgians determined the centuries-old existence of the Georgian state in a hostile environment” (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1991). Without this, “state revival” and “restoration of independence” were impossible. Therefore, his further plan was simple and clear - with the restoration of the independence of the state, Orthodoxy should be declared the state religion.



“Protest rally by Gamsakhurdia supporters”. Jemal Kasradze.

And finally, it should be noted that religious themes and biblical motifs are often found in Gamsakhurdia’s addresses and correspondence. It seems that this feature was connected not only with his religiosity, but also with the fact that he represented an ideology expressly opposed to the Soviet one. He considered Georgian Orthodoxy one of the foundations of the national movement and noted that the Georgian national movement is essentially a “religious-national movement” (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1991a).

Strengthening religiosity played a big role in the post-Soviet space. This was not a restoration or return to religiosity, as religious institutions and believers continued to exist in various forms in the Soviet Union, albeit under limited conditions. Thus, it was ironic that the new religiosity was based on pre-existing knowledge and practices, developed under strict Soviet curation. However, the goals of political actors like Gamsakhurdia who instrumentalized religion, were freedom from the Soviet legacy and formation of independent nations. It would also be possible to

return to the old situation, that is, to the situation that existed before the Soviet atheistic policy, and restore the “correct history,” as well as create new content and practices useful for independent nations.

Sovereignty

In Gamsakhurdia's election texts, the topic of sovereignty occupies an important place. First of all, sovereignty was the theme that created and brought to power the national movement - a promise of an independent and self-governing country with a Georgian government at its head. After coming to power, almost all of his activities were aimed at gaining and strengthening sovereignty. Secondly, the understanding of sovereignty among the political groups operating in Georgia at that time varied, and the discussion around this issue actually became the cause of disagreement. Thirdly, in Gamsakhurdia's texts, the confrontation with the Center on the issue of sovereignty was distinguished by both talk about self-determination and the identity of the nation, as well as discussions about Georgians and enemies of Georgia.

In the first case, as already mentioned, the declaration of independence and the new calendar represented the first steps towards the formation of a sovereign state. In fact, the entire election campaign was based on the necessity and inevitability of gaining independence. After coming to power, the main emphasis was placed on the reforms that had to be implemented - the desire to develop a constitution in the spirit of the Constitution of 1921 (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1991a), the issues of structuring systems of government (Ibid.), the problem of Abkhazian separatism (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1991), the question of the formation of a national army (Ibid.) and others. All the above agendas should have been dealt with by the government, which he described as “the most powerful wing of the national movement,” “a democratic, national government elected by the people.” On the other hand, the election of this government was primarily the desire and will of the Georgian people, therefore “totalitarian, imperial, communist rule was replaced by democratic, national one elected by the people” (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1991a). Gamsakhurdia's texts can be generally characterized as drama enhanced by religious themes. In his inaugural address, he discussed the historicity of gaining national sovereignty. In his opinion, such a result required sacrifice from every Georgian, both spiritual and physical - “Georgians are once again abandoning worldly, physical well-being in the name of spiritual, national revival. Rebirth means renewal and return to one's own self” (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1991).

The second topic concerned internal political contradictions. The ruling alliance of political parties, Mrgvali Magida (the Round Table), considered it necessary to fight for the country's independence in stages, with a gradual exit from Soviet space. Their opponents reasoned differently, considering it necessary to gain complete independence first and then form an appropriate system. Discussions about such differences were mainly reflected in Gamsakhurdia's election and inaugural speeches, in which he considered the use of the existing legal and state format as a way to realize national sovereignty. Thus, step by step, complete independence had to be achieved - participation in the elections of the Supreme Soviet would allow Mrgvali Magida to enter the legislative body through parliamentary means. Then, with changes in legislation, there would be a gradual transfer of power. Based on this, reforms could be carried out in various areas in accordance with national interests (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1991a). In his inaugural speech, Gamsakhurdia noted that

the parliamentary path represented the main achievement of the Georgian people and the national government (*sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a*, 1991), which in turn was an expression of a feeling of unity with voters.



“A photograph depicting the period of the Tbilisi Civil War”. Author: Shakh Aivazov.

He considered the “freedom first, independence later” position of his opponents to be wrong and even harmful for the future of Georgia and Georgians (*ibid.*). Thus, a different understanding of the country’s sovereignty was regarded as both a threat to sovereignty and a misunderstanding of national unity.

The third theme was related to relations with the Center (represented by Moscow). In fact, this line was the main means of shaping the image of the enemy in his speeches. For this reason, not only in his election and inaugural speeches, but also in other presentations, he spoke in detail about the USSR, the party, the policies directed against him personally and the country, etc. In the latter case, he began to assess the damage caused to the country since 1921. He noted that this year was when Georgia was forcibly Sovietized, but the authorities of that time did not capitulate. So, the Republic of Georgia was actually annexed, but legally retained its independence, which was the constitutional basis for the restoration of a sovereign Georgian state. Thus, Gamsakhurdia substantiated the issue of continuity of Georgian statehood (*sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a*, 1991).

Most of the negative examples of Soviet power were presented by him in his report on the abolition of South Ossetia. He spoke in detail about the history of the creation of South Ossetia, the negative impact of Soviet power on such areas as language, culture, economy and governance (*sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a*, 1990). In essence, this is how he presented the “forgotten” but “true” version of Georgian history, the framework Georgians needed to accept to understand the new Georgia.

Gamsakhurdia’s texts included many other topics that were relevant during the election period. He discussed at length the actions of the leadership of the Soviet Union, which led to crises. For example, he spoke about the agricultural crisis in the country and believed “the spoiled economic system took away the most important thing from the Georgian peasant - land and freedom, and made him hate work. This approach had a negative impact on the character of the Georgian person, his psyche, and traditional way of life. This is what marked the beginning of the development

and devastation of the village” (sak’art’veelos resp’ublik’a, 1991), or: “Demographic sabotage directed against Georgia has created a worse situation for the indigenous peoples of the republic - Georgians and Abkhazians. The demographic imbalance aggravated interethnic relations and created the possibility of provoking ethnic conflicts” (sak’art’veelos resp’ublik’a, 1991a). In these cases, within the framework of imagined unity, it was important to talk about a common enemy, the consequences of whose negative actions were equally felt by all citizens of Georgia. To a certain extent, the development of this idea was represented by his reference to the fact that the struggle of the Georgian people for independence led to certain economic problems in Georgia created by the Soviet Empire, thereby “the Kremlin tried to punish freedom-loving peoples” (Ibid.).

Thus, the speeches of Gamsakhurdia’s period are characterized by the following three important themes: new linear time, religion and sovereignty. The goal of presenting a new version of history is expressed in his speeches by emphasizing the continuity of the idea of the Georgian independent Republic. In this case, it was important for Georgian history to uncover the facts, to highlight forgotten or hidden narratives, and to show the benefits expected from talking about Soviet power that harmed Georgian unity. In this case, Soviet history was a good way to show negative examples, and the need to erase or forget it from Georgian history was not yet relevant enough.

The second topic of Gamsakhurdia’s speeches was religion. He spoke increasingly often about Georgian Orthodoxy, the church and the importance of religion in people’s lives. The goal of the new religious policy, on the one hand, was to replace Soviet ideology, and on the other hand, it created a logical chain between the “past” and “good” notions of Georgian identity, today’s experiences and the real Georgians who will be reborn in the future. Using religious motives, it was possible to point dramatic feelings in a useful direction, as well as create a new system of socialization, which was considered the main means of formation in a post-socialist society.

The third topic concerned sovereignty; although the discussion around it became the basis of Georgia’s independence, it caused significant disagreements between the parties. In fact, the image of the enemy was formed around this topic in Zviad Gamsakhurdia’s speeches. Opponents within the country were described in relatively general terms, while the ones outside Georgia were presented as the source of all the negativity and an example to be used to explain the necessity of his program.

Eduard Shevardnadze

The conflict, which began in 1991, was followed by a military coup at the end of the year, and in early 1992, power passed into the hands of the Military Council of the Georgian Republic, which invited Shevardnadze to return to Georgia. First, he headed the State Council of the Republic of Georgia, and after the 1992 elections he became both the chairman of parliament and the head of state. In 1995 and 2000 he was elected president of Georgia. On both occasions, he presented an election program, and after the elections he delivered an inaugural speech, first in public and then in the historic Svetitskhoveli Cathedral in the presence of the Patriarch of Georgia Ilia II.

Having come to power, Shevardnadze tried to transform existing approaches, views and knowledge, to fill a policy that was essentially devoid of everything with new meanings. Speaking about himself, he tried to combine two factors: on the

one hand, he mentioned the benefits that Georgia received thanks to him during the Soviet period. In the first years of his rule, he often spoke on patriotic topics (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1992), in defense of the Georgian language (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1995d), about the need to protect Georgian culture (Ibid.) and periodically supported his arguments with past merits in Georgian culture, education and other areas.

On the other hand, he tried to be the initiator of new ideas and approaches and thus associated himself with independent Georgia, and not with the Soviet Union or the crisis in the country. Shevardnadze's goal was to use the knowledge and experience of the past, which was still relevant, and combine it with the forms created by current processes. In his speeches, he promoted the idea of creating a civil society (Ibid.), with the initiative to revive the calendar and add unity-oriented values to it (sak'art'velos p'arlament'is uts'q'ebebi, 1993), with programs of economic and political change (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1995d; sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 2000) and others. He also indicated that the political space was not protected from criminal, mafia or Soviet revanchist risks (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1995d).

In Shevardnadze's election programs and inaugural speeches, great importance was attached to justifying the significance and necessity of his return to Georgia and taking lead, the need to achieve national unity, the necessity for a new understanding of time and space, and at last but not at all the least, the significance of sites of memory and religious motives. Therefore, for the analysis of his texts, it seems more beneficial to use Nora's "sites of memory" and Verdery's approaches to the reconfiguration of time and space.

Leader

The reconfiguration of social and political symbols, meanings and content in Georgia has been a difficult and lengthy process. We can say that in a certain sense it continues to this day. Shevardnadze has also contributed to this process.

However, after his return to Georgia (1992), he was still considered a former high-ranking Soviet official and member of the Communist Party. Crucially, the country was engulfed in chaos and clashes in the absence of a legitimate government. It is therefore not surprising that his 1992 election campaign and inaugural speeches were largely based on his own figure as a political actor who can calm down conflicts and build a functioning state. He discussed various topics in relation to or in parallel with himself, thereby emphasizing his abilities and skills to highlight the shortcomings of his opponents.

The 1992 elections of the head of state, parliament and chairman of parliament were held in conditions of the overthrow of the previous government, war, criminal conflict, crisis, and the absence of a legitimate government. During this period, Shevardnadze spoke about himself indirectly and tried to achieve several simple goals with various appeals: he explained to voters what they needed to overcome problems, crisis, to end war and conflict. Of course, in these explanations he mentioned the need for a strong government and an outstanding leader. There can be distinguished four main themes of his speeches of the given period:

First, he tried to show that the previous leadership needed to be replaced. He appealed to the citizens of Georgia to replace (overthrow) the previous government, and called this "true patriotism and service to one's people" since, in his opinion, only in this way one could "practically establish societal values" (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1992).



*The poster “Eduard Shevardnadze - Statehood, Democracy, Prosperity”.
Owner: National Parliamentary Library of Georgia. 1995.*

Secondly, he gathered supporters in order to connect his candidacy with big issues of the time. Therefore, he addressed the intelligentsia, youth, and the civil council with words of gratitude for saving the country (sak’art’ve^los resp’ublik’a, 1992f).

Thirdly, he tried to show that he should not be considered in connection with the Soviet Union, that he was part of the Georgian patriots and that “there is not a drop of non-Georgian blood in me. My words, feelings and actions are Georgian” (Ibid.). This is how he explained his decision to help the country on the path of “right change” (sak’art’ve^los resp’ublik’a, 1992).

Fourth, he tried to define who was the enemy and who was the friend of the country. He stated that the changes were the desire and will of the country’s patriots, and going against this will with rallies, actions and general resistance against the new government would be a “false patriotism” (sak’art’ve^los resp’ublik’a, 1992) or the result of an absence of patriotism at all (sak’art’ve^los resp’ublik’a, 1992).

In his pre-election and post-election texts of 1995 to 2000, the main themes were unity, in connection with which he talked about various historical events and figures. In his texts, he also dealt with the recent past, the events developing in the country, the opponents, the planned and implemented changes, and the conflicts. The presented unifying bonds, horizontal unity, issues of national sovereignty and territorial structure were a mixture of his vision and response to existing challenges. In these cases, the main emphasis in pre-election addresses and inaugural speeches was placed in such a way that Shevardnadze could speak about himself in more ways than one. In his two election speeches, in 1995 and 2000, he talked about the fact that he was not just a candidate Shevardnadze was both an acting leader and a presidential candidate, so his responsibility to the country was different, and therefore he had to implement his own vision for the survival and development of the country based on his knowledge and experience; his opponents, he argued, did not have such a burden (sak’art’ve^los resp’ublik’a, 1995d).

In his texts, he expressed his opinion in such a way, as if neither voters nor opponents fully understood what the Georgian presidency was. In various speeches and addresses, he explained to them what it meant to be president - "to lead and direct processes in the country," "to be a guarantor of independence and integrity," "to provide decent living conditions" (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 2000). Moreover, misunderstanding and incorrect attitude towards the government could cause chaos and lead to the "a representative of various mafia clans or an old mafia bureaucrat" coming to power (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1995d). Being unaware of these challenges, he claimed, other candidates spoke to voters only with optimistic plans and promises. Shevardnadze, on the contrary, argued that as the current leader, a politician with extensive experience and connections, he knew this topic well, and he, the acting president, also had special responsibilities; his election program was both a vision of the future and a report on the work already done (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 2000). To support this, he listed changes that had been made between 1992 and 1995. He argued that three years ago there was no legitimate government, army, police, security, stability, or development. And as a result of his rule, "today we have a state one way or another. ... great steps have been taken in this direction. ...over these three years we are dealing with the formation of a completely different type of person" (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1995d).

He concluded his speech on the presidency with a kind of call for the people of Georgia, "his people," to once again express confidence in him, which would give the re-elected president the opportunity to complete the work he started, to restore, to develop and renew the country (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 2000). In this address, as in the discussion of the essence of the presidency, he spoke of himself in the third person. As an example of an indirect conversation about himself, let us cite the part of his inaugural speech where he says that "the people in the elections approved the president's program and voted for him" (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1995). This approach allowed him to talk about his own desire or need as the aspirations of the country, people, voters themselves.

Speaking about his abilities, goals and achievements, Shevardnadze also contrasted them with the negative qualities of his opponents. Thus, he highlighted not only those negative qualities that he considered unacceptable for society and Georgia, but also called on voters to prevent these forces from coming or returning to power. In some cases, the speech was in general about "armed to the teeth," "mafia," "terrorists," "thieves," or, more precisely, "an old bureaucrat turned mafioso" personified by his main opponents. He believed that the government and voters should block their path and "the influence of money and weapons on elections should be excluded. The laws of terrorists and the 'thieves' empire' are directed against democracy and the rule of law. Power should not fall into the hands of random people" (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1995d). In the same speech, he also criticized the previous government and stated that if they had shown wisdom, "Georgia today would be one of the safest and most developed countries" (Ibid.).

Various methods of self-presentation were initially used by Shevardnadze to create a new image. Subsequently, in this way he explained to voters the only and correct choice and criticized the previous government and opponents. Moreover, when talking about various ideas, examples or opinions, he always mentioned himself directly or indirectly. So, thanks to this, when anyone spoke on these topics, the voters would be conditioned to remind others, or at least themselves, of Shevardnadze.

Unity

The discourse of Georgian history and memory politics became an important issue in state initiatives; the post-socialist transformation would reach both the administrative and the personal strata. An important part of this process were both the models for understanding unity and the framework within which the people of Georgia could (or could not) live together.

In his election campaigns and inaugural speeches in 1995 and 2000, Shevardnadze took different approaches to post-socialist transformation, Russian-Georgian relations, ethnic conflicts and the interpretation of Georgian history. He considered the topic of the country's sovereignty and regional policy in the context of society, which, in his opinion, was changing under the influence of these processes and acting differently in the new reality. In 1995, he declared that "in these three years we are dealing with the formation of a completely different type of man" and outlined the process of "taming" the chaos that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. He believed that the "social role and function" of the Georgian citizen had changed, "rights and freedom" had become real, and the "new man" should use these opportunities for his own good and the well-being of the country (*sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a*, 1995d). This kind of patriotic appeal was aimed at describing the planned prosperity in the future, in which "the flourishing and development of the spiritual and material culture of the people will be ensured" (*Ibid.*). At the same time, Shevardnadze actually declared the use of a new approach - he viewed Georgia as a unity of citizens, and the population as a civil society. His simultaneous call for concern for the welfare of the country (from the individual to the collective; or top-up) is intertwined with the top-down approach - collective to individual, where "the value of civil society in a democratic state is a person; so, both the state and society serve to protect his rights and freedoms, his well-being" (*Ibid.*). As a fellow citizen and leader, he took on this mission because "Georgia was boiling in hellish tar," where the environment and rulers were not reliable, but he still decided "I must go back!" in order to gradually change the existing reality (*Ibid.*).

Four years after that appeal, in 2000, he was already talking about a different Georgia, its government whose main concern is the unifying value of the nation, since every successful society is based on select values. "In my deep conviction, this is Georgian statehood, the Georgian state. The Georgian statehood dates back 3000 years. ...We must always remember that only in conditions of a strong statehood, every person living in Georgia would have the opportunity to fully reveal their talents and potential," because, he explained, in Georgia of David Agmashenebeli, Tamar Mepe, Giorgi Brtskinvale there was prosperity, freedom, rise of intellect and culture, renunciation of power for the commonweal; and the opposite of this was communist totalitarianism that Georgians had to leave behind (*sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a*, 2000). The discovery and use of historical facts for horizontal unity intersected with the commemorative aspect in 2000 (Shevardnadze himself often spoke about this date and its celebration): the 3000th anniversary of statehood was solemnly celebrated, as well as the 2000th anniversary of Christianity, the 1500th anniversary of autocephaly and other anniversary dates; coins were minted, a calendar was printed, scientific conferences were held, etc. (*sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a*, 2000; *mokhsenebiti tezisebi*, 2000; *Reports*, 2000; *Burdjanadze & Tevzadze*; *Poster*). During this period, Shevardnadze used to consolidate the population with carefully

selected positive stories of the past that were familiar to everyone, and thereby tried to cover up the crisis in the country.

In a lecture on the nation, Ernst Renan noted that the unity of a nation requires a sacrifice: the memory of sacrifice already made, the willingness to make new sacrifice and a sense of the meaning of the sacrifice (Renan, 1990). The concept of victimhood is one of the most important elements in political discussions, required in order to achieve an emotional, legal, rational or other kind of sympathy with the audience. Verder believes that appeals to groups as victims may be related to revenge, compensation or restitution. Also, depending on who organizes and executes the process, the moral order implied in pursuing accountability can strengthen a new government, garner international support for a party in a dispute, or restore dignity to individual victims and their families. Society's members may see enforcing accountability as part of moral "purification": the guilty are no longer shielded, the victims can tell of their suffering, and the punishment purifies a public space that the guilty had made impure (Verdery, 2000). In 1995 and 2000, Shevardnadze, setting out his own political arguments, emphasized the peaceful path to restoring territorial integrity, the negotiations with the parties to the conflict, including at the international level, and the strengthening of economy (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1995d; sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1995; sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 2000; sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 2000).

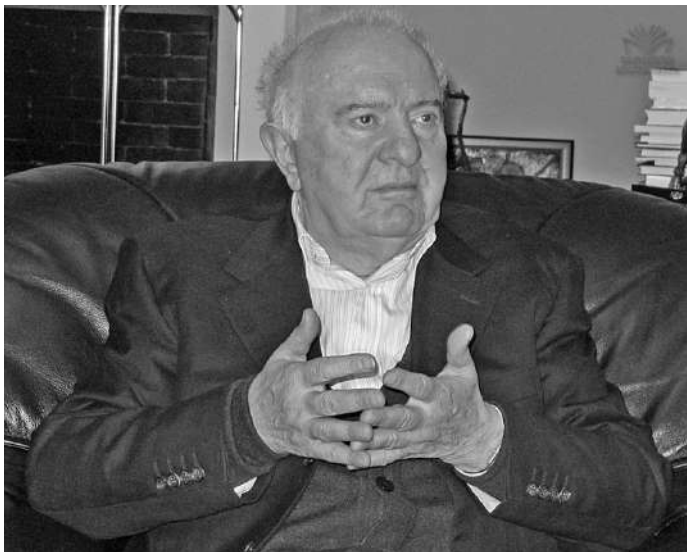
However, along with diplomatic language, he presented Georgia and Georgians (and in some cases, other ethnic groups) as victims. He promoted "through peaceful negotiations... the final elimination of the results of genocide and ethnic cleansing of Georgians and peoples of other nationalities, the return of refugees... to their native places." Although, he repeatedly noted that "In Budapest, the Abkhaz separatists were exposed for carrying out the policy of genocide and ethnic cleansing against the Georgian people. These conclusions were recognized by the UN Security Council and the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The fate of 300,000 refugees must be decided urgently. The territorial integrity of Georgia cannot be restored without this" (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1995).

It is interesting that, speaking about the events in the country, the tension and the victims, he used two mutually opposite approaches - a demonstration of powerlessness and strength. He disseminated the theme of the aforementioned sacrifice in 2000 during his inaugural speech at Svetitskhoveli Cathedral. Among other issues, he raised the problem of territorial integrity. Since the topic of sacrifice is connected with the sacred and, therefore, religious, the discussion of this problem in the church space filled it with additional religious content. At the same time, he spoke about problems both general and specific. In this case, his speech was devoid of details, not identifying victims, culprits, root-causes, solutions, etc. In his speech about ethnic conflicts, he noted with a certain distance: "Today, I have spoken with great pain about the fact that probably the president and the Catholicos-Patriarch are hurting the most, because we have not been able to reconcile and unite the motherland in these years. Yes, the problems of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region remain unresolved" (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 2000).

In the second case, speaking about the events of 1991-1992, he mentioned problems associated with "national disharmony, a divided national consciousness." He stated that he was ready for national reconciliation, although he no longer referred to themes of victim or perpetrator. As a leader and president, he was ready to prevent a repeat of the crisis: "the president of the country can still be imagined

as a defender of the interests of all citizens, his supporters or ideological opponents! But my actions will continue to be determined by the interests of the country's strength, unity and responsibility for all citizens. Those who don't want to fit into this framework will have to deal with law and justice" (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 2000).

Shevardnadze's views on the structure of the country changed from 1992 to the 2000 election period. If at first he spoke about overcoming crisis and chaos, then after his first election as president, he took the initiative to form a civil society. However, during his second term, he returned to the principles of collective coexistence within an imagined unity. Apparently, different speechwriters were involved in the preparation of pre-election and inauguration texts at different times.



"Eduard Shevardnadze". Owner: National Parliamentary Library of Georgia. 2009.

Shevardnadze's opinions and views on ethnic conflicts have not actually changed over the years, but during the 2000 election campaign he did not talk about the conflicts in Ossetia and Abkhazia, avoided these topics, and made peacemaking speeches. But when he was challenged within the country, he was not afraid to threaten escalation to prevent regime change or chaos.

Time

Time, like other social categories, is constructed (Leach, 1961), its conceptualization and practical use of temporal categories is one of the indicators of changing political regimes and complex processes in society. Speaking about post-socialist changes, Verdery notes that this is one of the visible indicators of the reorganization of social life: during the period of political changes, the calendar, the names of months, cycles, the list of holidays, and their names are changed (Verdery, 2000).

With Shevardnadze coming to power, some time categories lost their relevance. In particular, the turning point in the Soviet period was the Bolshevik revolution, in parallel with which national time functioned in the form of dates, national holidays, annual celebrations, which were developed and supported by the authors of patriotic history and included the stages of the origin, change or development of states, and also important dates (biographical information about rulers or prominent personalities, historical events, battles, victories, defeats, etc.).

Shevardnadze had a peculiar understanding of time. He negatively assessed the developments taking place in Georgia from the restoration of independence until 1992. Because of his desire to distance himself from the former power and the Soviet past, he made relevant a new scheme of linear time: within the framework of the history he supported, Georgia and the Georgians appeared on the timeline 3000 years ago (*sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a*, 2000). Since then, the country has experienced several important historical periods. In his speeches, referring to historical sources of the 4th-3rd centuries BC, Shevardnadze mentions Kudzhi and Parnavaz as the first rulers who united and consolidated Georgia (*sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a*, 2000). Subsequent historical periods and historical characters that were mainly associated with positive meanings appear in his chronology, in particular the golden age - the reigns of David Agmashenebeli, Tamar Mepe and Giorgi Brtskinvale (*Ibid.*). He always placed the period of his rule on the time scale he presented. He stated that Georgia under the rule of Parnavaz, Vakhtang Gorgasli, Bagrat III, David Agmashenebeli, Tamar Mepe, Giorgi Brtskinvali, and Irakli II was outstanding, and believed that under his leadership Georgia continues the traditions of these historical periods both in governance and organization and development of the country (*sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a*, 2000). Moreover, in one of his speeches he says that compared to the period between the 14th and 20th centuries, the situation of Georgia in 2000 was much better, especially in terms of the level of statehood and independence (*Ibid.*).

The 20th century, in its altered temporality, was largely associated with negative experiences, including totalitarian Soviet rule. In order for his personality to be seen in isolation from the Soviet Union Shevardnadze emphasized his involvement in defeating the evils of the Soviet regime (*sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a*, 1992c), in fighting the evils of totalitarianism and Soviet administration (*sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a*, 1992a; Orliki & Urigashvili, 1992; *sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a*, 1992d). Also, he considered the difficult and dark years of 1990-1992 as negative categories.

As Shevardnadze believed, the situation in Georgia began to improve in 1993; and despite the fact that there was no legitimate government, security forces, peace, or stability in the country, he considered that the main thing was achieved - the situation changed, the country stabilized and the crisis was overcome. All the above was done because he was elected chairman of parliament and head of state: "We managed to do the impossible - Georgia survived!" (*sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a*, 2000). In the pre-election period of 1995, he in some way summed up his understanding of the time and stated that the president is not just the head of the country or the executive branch, but the president "is objectively a symbol and guarantor of the connection between the historical times of the country" (*sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a*, 1995).

If we talk about the reconfiguration of time in a narrow cyclical sense, then we should note the calendar that he has changed. In particular, the names of some holidays or days off have been changed: for example, May 26 was declared Georgian Independence Day instead of the Day of Restoration of Georgian Statehood.

This minor change was part of the practice of distancing from the previous government, as well as “forgetting” it.

The change in meaning and content also affected other topics. Two days off have been added to the calendar. Until 1993, April 9 was not included in the list of public holidays in Georgia. Although, in the case of Gamsakhurdia, this day was



The poster “Renewal Policy: Turn to Economics”. Owner: National Parliamentary Library of Georgia. 2000.

integrated with other processes, Shevardnadze tried to create meaning and a commemorative practice of this day as a site of memory in which Gamsakhurdia would be less represented. The work on traumatic memory in Georgia (Chikovani, Kakitelashvili, Chkhaidze, Tsereteli, & Efadze, 2022), prepared by a group of researchers, highlights many important and interesting aspects regarding April 9. They note that this date and the space associated with it gradually became ceremonial-symbolic ones. Memorials devoted to April 9 were erected in Georgia in 1989-1992. Since 1992, time has stopped due to ongoing confrontation and war in the country and resumed after the 2003 Rose Revolution (Ibid.). Also, researchers believe that the history of independent Georgia was shaped by two events – the memory of April 9 and the civil conflict, with ongoing efforts to perpetuate April 9 presented in society as a “cry” of memory, and the memory of the civil conflict as a “whisper” (Ibid.). In any case, during Shevardnadze’s period, this date was

legally defined as “the day of adoption of the act of restoring state independence of Georgia, the day of national unity, civil harmony and memory of those who died for the Motherland” (sak’art’velos p’arlament’is uts’q’ebebi, 1993) and appeared in the calendar, although it could not (or was not) fully loaded with practical and additional significant meanings and continued to exist as a suspended memory.

Also thanks to his efforts, the celebration of May 9 was restored, although due to its distance from the Soviet May 9, its name was changed and it became Victory Day over Fascism, no longer just Victory Day, as it was called since independence and now in the Russian Federation. It should be noted, that this date turned out to be very controversial, since its content included not only a name change and the attempts to change the date from May 9 to May 8, but also the issue of Stalin, the discussion about the participation of Georgians in World War II on both sides and the significance of this day for Georgia. We can say that here the discussion is not over and the date seems to continue to exist as a “memory that won’t fully fade” (Nodia, 2021).

Another date that Shevardnadze returned to the calendar in 1995 was March 8, International Women’s Day (sak’art’velos p’arlament’is uts’q’ebebi, 1994-1995). However, before this, at the proposal of the Demographic Society of Georgia, the Georgian Parliament established the tradition of introducing Mother’s Day and celebrating it as a public day off on March 3. It was a kind of attempt to replenish or return certain meanings while distancing from the Soviet past.

Integrating historical chronicles into political texts is one of the common techniques of politicians. However, in the case of Georgia, due to the fact that Shevardnadze's rise to power occurred against the backdrop of a confrontation with the previous president, it is not surprising that he significantly changed the concept of history and memory associated with time and the calendar. He brought back patriotic interpretations of Georgian history and defined the basic historical framework. The change of calendar, initiated by him, influenced society because it reflected the specifics of the ongoing transformations in the country; also, new meanings, contents and practices have appeared in everyday life.

Religion

One of the visible signs of post-socialist change was the appearance of symbols, texts, practices associated with religion and the church, and then the growth of their role, place and meaning. Religious themes, as we have already seen, have become relevant since the period of Gamsakhurdia. Verdery notes that socialist regimes took great care to sacralize themselves as guardians of secular values, especially the scientific laws of historical progress. However, their language omitted notions of the sacred, and both outsiders and their own populations tended to view them as lacking a sacred dimension. Part of meaningful reordering of worlds then, is to sacralize authority and politics in new ways. A ready means of presenting the post-socialist order as something different from before has been to reinsert expressly sacred values into political discourse. In many cases, this has meant a new relation between religion and the state, along with a renewal of religious faith (Verdery, 2000). Of course, in this case we are not talking about a renewal of religious faith, since religious beliefs and practices continued to exist in various forms, including in Georgia (Baramidze, 2014).

Eduard Shevardnadze, upon returning to Georgia, on March 7, 1992, went to the main cathedral of the country at the time, Sioni Cathedral and then met with the Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia at the Patriarchate (Tchelidze, 1992) and a few months later, in November 1992, was baptized (Jgerenaia, 2017). Subsequently, he often spoke about the special role of the Patriarch and the importance of the church, which was also manifested in the Patriarch's frequent participation in public events.

As for the pre-election and inaugural texts, the situation here was ambiguous. In the keynote speech in 1995, he did not touch upon religious topics, the state of the church, or state policy in the field of religion. In his inaugural address he touched on this topic only lightly. However, during a visit to Svetitskhoveli and a meeting with the Patriarch, he stated that this visit was ritualistic and filled with great divine and historical content: "This is the president's approach to God, as the great Ilya would say, a 'conversation with God' about how to 'lead the nation behind you'. However, he added that the state is separated from the church despite the fact that they both care about the nation and the state, and also that the "people of Georgia" will endure crisis and adversity "with the patience of the biblical Job" and attain divine protection and a happy future (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 1995).

In 2000, the situation changed significantly. These campaign and inaugural speeches are characterized by hints of the idea of a new order based on religious motifs. In this regard, the election program mainly focused on explaining that Georgia is an outpost of Christianity in the Far East of Europe and should play an

important role between Islamic and Christian countries diplomatically, politically and academically (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 2000).

The inaugural speech, in turn, consisted of two parts. The newly elected president made his first speech at the inauguration ceremony, and the second speech - before the Patriarch and flock in Svetitskhoveli Cathedral.

At the inauguration ceremony, he continued the theme of time and spoke about the significance of religious dates in the history and memory of the Georgians. He reminded the public of his visit to Jerusalem with the Patriarch and participation in the ceremonial events associated with the 2000th anniversary of Christianity, and



*"Iliia II, Eduard Shevardnadze".
Author: Shakh Aivazov.*

noted with amazement a peculiar heavenly, divine sign - the inauguration "coincided with the great holiday - Holy Easter!" (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 2000). These accents are conveyed in more detail in his second inaugural speech, delivered in Svetitskhoveli.

The second address was different as it primarily contained references to God, His will, sin and grace in various senses. He used linguistic devices in almost every sentence: "I received his prayer blessing," "I swore to the Lord," "Thanks be to God," "I prayed to God," "God's will," "God's holiday," "God protected us," "The Lord will save us," etc. It is also about a discussion about timing, unity, common heroes and especially about himself, where he once again mentions his contribution to the survival and development of the country and his remaining goals. He placed the most important emphasis on the need to turn the country and people to God. He recalled with regret his failures and unsuccessful

initiatives and indirectly took the initiative to increase the role and importance of the church in Georgia, as an opportunity to repent of past sins: "A person cannot do the impossible, he cannot overcome an insurmountable obstacle, if it is not God's will. When I prayed to God then, I said that we would turn to the Almighty, we would try to wash away the bloody stains of the past, we would try to atone for the crime that we and the generations older than us committed before God and the nation for ten years, back in the years of the empire, and then in years of totalitarianism" (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 2000). Two years after his inauguration, in 2002, he signed a constitutional agreement between the state of Georgia and the Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Georgia, Concordat, that waived its taxes and shielded it from public scrutiny (sak'art'velos p'arlament'i, 2022). Under the concordat, the Georgian Orthodox Church was the only officially recognized religious denomination in Georgia at this time; it defined the special role of the GOC in the history of Georgia, ownership, and other special education, financial, and legal conditions.

The appearance of religious texts in Georgian political texts is mainly explained by the need to use new content and symbols. Shevardnadze's 1995 program featured less religious themes, apparently because Shevardnadze avoided any connection

with the ideas and initiatives mentioned by Gamsakhurdia. However, in the texts of 2000, when any initiatives related to the church were no longer associated with Gamsakhurdia, he brought back religion and the policies of mutually beneficial cooperation of church and state.

Sites of memory

Verdery noted that deceased famous people continue their political life in the form of monuments and graves. The monument, in this case, a statue of a specific person in bronze which stands on the surface of the earth to some extent expresses immutability by its static nature, a kind of suspension of time. In addition to biographical relevance, the grave, as a place associated with the human body located underground, is a site of themes of life, death and sacredness. As a result, it is included in “religious time,” appealing to the category of the permanence of the soul. For this reason, famous deceased people are presented in several dimensions at the same time. They come with several possible résumés, depending on which aspect of their life is being considered. They lend themselves to analogy with other people’s résumés. That is, they encourage identification with their life story from several possible vantage points. Their complexity makes it fairly easy to discern different sets of emphasis, extract different stories, and thus rewrite history. Dead bodies have another great advantage as symbols: they don’t talk much on their own (though they did once). Words can be put into their mouths, often quite ambiguous words, or their own actual words can be ambiguated by being quoted out of context. It is thus easier to rewrite history with dead people than with other kinds of symbols that are speechless (Verdery, 2000).

Both manifestations of famous people have another important political dimension - current social or political processes, transformations, reconfigurations are directly reflected in the monuments and graves of prominent people. Their condition, attitude towards them, location, involvement of the space associated with them in social or political processes change depending on how they are perceived in the new reality: they are declared heroes or enemies, they become more or less relevant, they are moved, destroyed, etc. More importantly, those outstanding personalities, at whose monuments or graves politicians gather, begin to speak through these politicians using their opinions, ideas, initiatives; the statesmen cite deceased famous figures, talk about their biographical details, or these deceased eminent figures are credited with opinions expressed in accordance with their own interests. In fact, politicians express their thoughts through these figures as if these dead themselves were speaking and sharing their thoughts with the public.

Georgia is home to pantheons, house museums, various monuments and, in a sense, even churches dedicated to bodies of distinguished writers and public figures. These places are sites of memory created to “avoid oblivion” (Nora, 1989) and symbols of group identity, consolidation and collective memory (Assman J., 2010; Assman A., 2010).

Shevardnadze often visited places associated with prominent historical figures. Among such places, he included the Mtatsminda Pantheon in the presidential inauguration events and visited it after being elected president in 1995 and 2000 (*საქართველოს რესპუბლიკა*, 2000). Mtatsminda Pantheon of Georgian Writers and Public Figures is the burial place of prominent writers, public figures, scientists and artists in Tbilisi. It is located on the slopes of Mtatsminda, in the vicinity of

Mamadavit Church and had been historically deemed a sacred place. The idea of its creation emerged in 1915 during the funeral of the famous Georgian writer and public figure Akaki Tsereteli; the Pantheon was opened in 1929, on the 100th anniversary of the death of Russian diplomat Alexander Griboyedov, who was buried here. Shevardnadze visited the pantheon not only before and after elections, but in general before all important decisions and events. These visits included the veneration of graves of great ancestors, a performance of a traditional ritual. They were acts of “symbolic loading,” thereby marking the introduction to common symbols, emotions and important memories for Georgia and Georgians.



“Protest”. Author: Nazi Gabaidze.

Chikovani notes that the Mtatsminda Pantheon simultaneously preserves the memory of important events of the 19th century, the Soviet period and the stage of independence. This is a place of special memory, which all subsequent generations filled with their own meanings and symbols that were expressed in reburials out of and back into the pantheon in the 20th and 21st centuries, as well as in the emergence of a memorial to disappeared repressed artists of the Soviet period (Chikovani N., 2020). Since its establishment, the number of graves of prominent public figures there gradually increased, and over time the authorities took care of its procedural arrangement.

At the same time, following the change of regimes, there was a reburial of individuals from the pantheon (for example, Bolshevik revolutionaries) or a reinterment into the pantheon (for example, Ekvtime Takaishvili). The rules of burial, reburial and closure of the Pantheon to new burials simultaneously indicate the importance of this place for collective memory, the reaction of society to the people buried or to be buried there, and the policies of the state regarding this memory. Therefore, conversations about this, visits there in the pre-election and post-election period, which Shevardnadze periodically made, served the purpose of discussing the Pantheon in connection with this collective memory and discourse. During his rule, Shevardnadze made visiting the Pantheon a special right and duty for a presidential candidate and newly elected president, combining this visit with election procedures. He stated that during the election period, visiting the

Mtatsminda Pantheon “becomes a traditional ritual, namely a civil, state ritual, because this is a sign that the president is not only the executive branch and head of state, but also objectively a symbol and guarantor of the country’s historical connection with time” (sak’art’veelos resp’ublik’a, 1995d).

In his election campaign, he used another site of collective memory - Rustaveli Avenue, namely the square in front of the Parliament of Georgia. He viewed this part of the avenue from the viewpoint of ordinary traumatic experiences, as well as sacred and symbolic meaning. In his 2000 election program, he described Rustaveli Avenue as the place “where, during the communist era, we all together defended the Georgian language as the state language. Here, on Rustaveli Avenue, on April 9, 1989, the holy blood of heroes fighting for independence was shed. Here, their dream came true - Georgia’s independence was proclaimed” (sak’art’veelos resp’ublik’a, 2000). At the same time, he avoided the use of extensive narratives and symbols associated with April 9 and Rustaveli Avenue, since this space was not homogeneous for society - April 9, which quickly took its place on the list of “great martyrdom” in Georgian history, had difficulty coexisting with the confrontation that took place in this territory in the 1990s, which made this memory the source of a split of society into mutually antagonistic and sometimes irreconcilable groups (Chikovani, Kakitashvili, Chkhaidze, Tsereteli, & Efadze, 2022). However, it seems that, against the backdrop of the internal conflict that still existed in the country, talking about Rustaveli Avenue was a way of working with memory, aimed at correcting it, or forgetting one or another aspect.

Shevardnadze attached great importance to sites of memory and paid attention to collective emotions and related content. In a sense, he was able to integrate this memory into the protocols of the Presidency, thereby not only emphasizing the symbolic significance of these places, but also increasing the public influence of the president’s office. At the same time, when speaking about places associated with multiple meanings and different political regimes, he tried not to give political opponents the opportunity to engage in discussions that were undesirable for him.

Shevardnadze made a large number of statements during his tenure as chairman of the Georgian parliament, head of the country and during two presidential terms, delivering two campaigns and four inaugural speeches. To sum up, he spoke about himself and the presidency, the concept of unity, the problems of sovereignty and structure of Georgia’s governing system, the new historical chronology and time categories, the relationship between religion and state, and sites of memory.

Shevardnadze was a high-ranking Soviet official and was considered to have ties to the USSR. During the period of opposition and confrontation with the Gamsakhurdia government, he was presented as a threat to the country’s independence and the realization of national interests. After returning to Georgia, he actively worked to ensure that he was not connected with the Soviet Union, terror, totalitarianism, atheism. He tried to create a new image with the help of allies and new initiatives. Moreover, during the conversation on almost every topic, he mentioned his own experience, personal participation in various projects, and his advantages over his opponents.

In parallel with the formation of his own image, he spoke about the problems of social unity that occurred in Georgia against the backdrop of civil confrontations and crises. He also related the theme to the country’s current challenges and initiatives to build a new society. He took the initiative to form a civil society. However, later he advocated unification around the idea of historically established state unity. To

substantiate this, he actively used historical periods and characters, and compared his rule with the periods of outstanding governors of the past. At the same time, he took the initiative to peacefully end ethnic conflicts, although he believed that he was defeated in this process.

Political leaders have often used various historical events to express their views. However, in his speeches Shevardnadze focused on the history of Georgia as an ancient state and a Christian culture. In his speeches, he actively used the chronology of history familiar from school curricula to explain his achievements or problems. Also during his rule, the calendar underwent a transformation when the name of a particular day off or holiday was changed, several new dates were added, and several dates that had previously been removed from the list under Gamsakhurdia were restored. He also attached great importance to sites of collective memory and their inclusion in the presidential institution. He made visiting the Mtatsminda Pantheon a mandatory tradition for newly elected presidents. Also, based on the situation, he mentioned and visited the graves of prominent public figures, although he was careful about ambiguous or controversial topics so that his positions would not be interpreted too flexibly.

The topic of religion during the rule of Shevardnadze was distinguished by important features. After both elections, he delivered his second inaugural speech in the historic Svetitskhoveli Cathedral in Mtskheta, Georgia's ancient capital. Religious figures were always represented at various events, although during the 1995 election period he spoke little or nothing about the relationship between religion and state. During the pre-election period of 2000, he brought up the importance of religion in the life of the state and came up with initiatives of strengthening the Georgian church

Mikheil Saakashvili

As a result of the processes that unfolded as a result of parliamentary election fraud in 2003, President Shevardnadze resigned on November 23, and the next presidential elections were hastily scheduled for January 4, 2004. The Rose Revolution put an end to Shevardnadze's loose reign over the country, although the political crisis in Adjara, ruled as a de facto fiefdom by its authoritarian leader Aslan Abashidze, continued and re-elections of a new parliament had not yet taken place. Due to the short period remaining before the elections, the election campaign was carried out in an accelerated manner, with a situational and person-oriented electoral program. On November 25, 2007, against the background of another political crisis, Saakashvili resigned. New elections took place on January 5, 2008. It should be noted that both times Saakashvili was elected president of Georgia, he won in early elections. Therefore, his election and inaugural texts were situational and emotional. As with his predecessors, in these texts we simultaneously encounter themes related to Georgian unity and different aspects of memory.

It should be noted here that the text versions of his campaign and inaugural speeches are largely condensed, edited or paraphrased, so the volume of material is relatively small compared to previous presidents.

Based on materials from Saakashvili's period, critics believe that he was trying to create a new political agenda and use new meanings, reconfiguring public memory to support the concept of a new Georgia and a new Georgian person (Karaia, 2015); to update new meanings and content, emphasizing the struggle and

self-sacrifice for the freedom of the Georgian nation (Kekelia, 2014); to rethink post-conflict, traumatic experience with deliberate silence on certain topics (Bursulaia, 2020); to actualize the themes of enemy and victim in collective memory through the presentation of new places (Batiashvili, 2015; Toria, 2019); to promote new narratives of enemies and heroes (Gugushvili, Kabachnik, & Kirvalidze, 2017); to put an end to endless conflicts and gather “scattered” heroes, etc.



“Mikheil Saakashvili, Nino Burjanadze and Zurab Zhvania”. Owner: Elefter Lafachi.

It seems productive to use several approaches to the analysis of materials from the Saakashvili period. In particular, Saakashvili’s political activity, ideas expressed and actions taken were aimed at creating unity, which can be understood within the framework of Anderson’s concept of an imagined community. He sought to consolidate society around common ideas, knowledge and practices, promoted and strengthened a sense of community, and used unifying concepts of the sovereign state to achieve political unity within the state.

During Saakashvili’s rule, symbolic and commemorative events represented a productive means of influencing society, which in a sense can be understood as a policy of transforming Assman’s potential memory into actual one (Assmann, 2006). In this regard, there were actively used memory sites with material, symbolic or functional loading (Nora’s *Lieux de mémoire*), interaction with which was an important part of Saakashvili’s pre-election and inauguration activities.

During his rule, great importance was attached to projects of restoration, gaining, and maintaining independence, post-Soviet transformation and de-Sovietization, post-colonial or decolonial rethinking.

On the other hand, in a number of cases, rethinking the content of enemy-friend, spatial and temporal reconfiguration, visiting the graves of prominent persons and reburials were also a reflection of current processes in memory politics (Verdery, 2000). Unlike previous presidents, the discussions about changes in meaning and content presented in his speeches were often descriptions of specific planned initiatives or summaries of current projects to cement said changes.

Time

When analyzing Saakashvili's speeches, our attention was foremost drawn to his unique understanding of symbols and content associated with time, and their abundance. In his texts, time represented the main axis of reasoning, discussions and argumentation. The basic time was the future, and his reasoning was in the future tense or future-oriented. The present served the future and the past was connected with it. The future was both the starting point and the goal. Any discussions that took place in his texts (about heroes of the past, problems before the Rose Revolution, or current challenges), were aimed at the future, in which problems would be overcome and a better, desired future would come. For example:

We must together revive our country, build our and our ancestors' dream Georgia. ...We must make this dream come true by turning Georgia into a united, stable, democratic, free and strong state (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 2004).

That's why I want to ask you now to take a bigger look at where we come from, where we are and where we want to take the country together. Let's talk about where we want to be in the coming years (Civil.ge, 2008). Georgia continues its great historical path. ...we will build a Georgia without poverty (p'ressamsakhuri, 2008).

Part of this new temporality seemed to be to shift the main focus of the performances to the youth. Even before the Rose Revolution, he devoted much attention to youth and the focus of change was largely youth. Saakashvili's speeches often dealt with the need for reforms, the main beneficiary of which should be the new generation. In pre-election and inaugural texts, young people are predominantly presented as active, creative people, creators of the future. They are divided into three groups. The first group is the youth of the past, heroic people who "sacrificed their dreams for the sake of Georgia" (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 2004); the second one is mentioned as sons and daughters whose education was to be the main priority of the new government, because this was the only way for young people to settle both in Georgia and abroad (Ibid.). The third group included youth who supported his political views and members of the ruling group, the generation with which the ongoing changes were associated, "a new, educated, energetic and patriotic generation" that should create the Georgia of the future (Ibid.).

The main event on Saakashvili's timeline was the Rose Revolution. Events before the revolution are divided into two parts: the rule of the previous government and the history of Georgia as a whole. It seems that due to criticism of the government of Shevardnadze, he is trying not to touch the historical chronicle in the form in which it was presented in the speeches of the previous president. The various mentioned historical events, facts or names were presented in relation to specific issues of the day during the election and inauguration period. He has touched upon important historical moments for society twice: in Kutaisi, after his election in 2004, when he took the oath at the grave of David Agmashenebeli the Builder, who was credited with uniting disjointed Georgian kingdoms in the XI-XII centuries (1073-1125), and then again in 2008, when he delivered his election speech in the courtyard of the Bagrati Cathedral, which was built as a symbol of unity in 1003 (Chikovani T., 2004, Civil.ge, 2008).

The main turning point in his performances were the events of the Rose Revolution and what followed. In fact, in each speech he repeated the same idea with

different examples or words. Before 2004, there was chaos, hopelessness, corruption, poverty, darkness, misery, weakness, dishonor, disrespect (p'ressamsakhuri, 2008). And after 2004, Georgians began a new stage of movement towards freedom and democracy, and during the entire period of his rule, they stood steadfastly along this path (Ibid.). In his opinion, this step was so impressive that "many generations of ancestors would have given up everything to live at this time" (Civil.ge, 2008).

Other examples or parallels were given by him situationally, when, depending on the place of his speech delivery, a corresponding element appeared in his text. Thus, the 2004 inaugural text dealt with the Soviet Union, Sovietization of 1921, the resistance and the events of April 9, 1989 (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 2004), mainly because his swearing-in ceremony took place in front of the Parliament building where the latter took place. During the pre-election period of 2008, presenting the election program from the courtyard of the Bagrati Cathedral, he noted that "for the first time in 316 years, the restoration of the Bagrati Cathedral began," making a direct connection with the restoration of the Motherland (Civil.ge, 2008).



"Mikheil Saakashvili in the Georgian presidential elections".

Owner: Elefter Lafachi. 4 January, 2004.

During Saakashvili's rule, changes were made to the calendar as well as in his predecessors' terms. The main reason for these changes was the deterioration of Russian-Georgian relations. If in the speeches delivered in 2004 he spoke favorably about possible friendship with Russia and in general about the Soviet period, then since 2006 Sovietization and Soviet occupation of Georgia appeared on the agenda.. Researchers believe that these were the first steps of a new memory policy in Georgia (Karaia, 2015), gradually followed by various initiatives. The Museum of Soviet Occupation opened in 2006. serving the task of rethinking the Soviet period and formation of a new policy towards Russia (Ibid.). As Batiashvili notes, the creation of the Museum and the associated transformations were part of the process of changing the Georgian people's entire world of meanings and creating a new history. However, it was intended not only for the population of Georgia, as the most state performances of the time were defined by triangulation of three distinct publics, in which almost any political and speech act was addressed to: its

immediate audience—the Georgian people, to its desired ally—the West, and to its enemy—Russia (Batiashvili, 2015). This policy was followed by the formation of a new discourse, part of which was the resolution adopted by the Georgian parliament in 2010 declaring February 25 as the official day of Soviet occupation (p'arlamen't'i, 2010).

The concept of time was at the center of Saakashvili's speeches and represented the main rhetorical tool. Unlike previous presidents, whose focus was on the present or the past, Saakashvili approached the reconfiguration of time and values from a practical point of view. The youth were at the center of his speeches. He spoke about specific historical details situationally and used them as additional arguments to his main ones. In parallel with the deterioration of relations with the Russian Federation, discussions about rethinking the history of the Soviet Union period were intensified, which contributed to the formation of a new memory politics in Georgia.

United nation

The main idea of Saakashvili's speeches was the creation of a new Georgia and a new Georgian. Previous presidents had expressed the same idea, and similarly to them, he periodically talked about real stories, new heroes, and forgotten enemies. Researchers believe that he considered the course of historical events inevitable. Using various historical facts, he tried to legitimize his policies and increase public support (Karaia, 2015). His approaches often took into account the need to appropriately apply the Hobsbawmian tradition, through which the government tried to unite public opinion around a specific goal through initiatives from above. In this case, decisions were made centrally, without deliberative processes (Ibid.).

In this process, his argumentation concerned the Georgian public at large. He spoke about Georgians as well as other ethnic groups and called ethnic diversity the country's greatest treasure and wealth (sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a, 2004). According to him, the inhabitants of Georgia were distinguished by two characteristics. First, he declared that "we are not only old Europeans, we are ancient Europeans" (Ibid.) and we must regain "our rightful and lost place in the European family" (Ibid.). This concept had both theoretical and practical significance, and around it he formed, invented, and reconstructed new meanings and created new practices. One such example is described in the works of Tamta Khalvashi about the urban transformations of the city of Batumi and the erection of the monument to Medea. She notes that Medea of the Golden Fleece and the Argonauts myth helped demarcate Georgia's imagined national borders and at the same time created a foundational relationship with Europe, albeit one that involved contradictory narratives. The concept of Medea simultaneously projected a world of better possibilities, although becoming part of Europe, migration or simple interaction often proved problematic for Georgians (Khalvashi, 2018). At the same time, the goal of the practice of creating new monuments in post-revolutionary Georgia was a kind of decolonization or de-Sovietization of urban space, which was combined with the search for Europeaness hidden in the national mythology (Khalvashi, 2019).

Secondly, Saakashvili professed that the Georgian nation, citizens of Georgia, or residents of the country (this would include those residing on the territory of Georgia with old Soviet passports, namely ethnic minorities) are distinguished by talent and intelligence, therefore, promoting education is the main way to realize their knowledge, skills and abilities: "From the Red Bridge to Psou, from Sarpi to



*The poster “National Movement No. 5”.
Publisher: LTD Sesan. 2006.*

Daryal, Georgia should become a country where the greatest wealth will be knowledge and education” (sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 2004); to achieve this he considered it necessary to guarantee his people equality before the law and opportunities for development: “Georgia should become and is already becoming the homeland of free, educated and proud people” (Ibid.). On May 20, 2008, in his public address in front of a live audience in the courtyard of the Bagrati Cathedral, Saakashvili identified the main values of the Georgian nation – “Freedom and Democracy” – as a new concept for the country (Civil.ge, 2008). These new values were meant to give new citizens of Georgia the opportunity for self-realization. Conceptually, this approach was supposed to show the difference between his rule and such features as chaos, hopelessness, and corruption characteristic of Shevardnadze’s government (p’ressamsakhuri, 2008). However, as the newly elected president, Saakashvili noted both during his inaugural addresses in 2004 and 2008 that poverty (Ibid.), deprivation and misery remained the main challenges for the citizens of new Georgia, which calling this legacy of the 1990s “an insult to the Georgian nation and its history, its culture, every person, every member of society” (sak’art’velos resp’ublik’a, 2004).

Speaking about history and traditions, he repeated themes raised by previous presidents in different periods. However, his emphasis was more modest, and when speaking of history, he usually referred to the indigenization of the country and people, although he did not go into detail. Only in one case did he mention the military traditions of such outstanding figures as David Agmashenebeli, Giorgi Brtskinvale, three hundred Aragvians and the heroes of the Battle of Didgori, positing that their revival was necessary for the formation of the new Georgia as well as its new armed forces (Ibid.).

Speaking about the unity of the Georgian nation, society and citizens, he drew attention to renewal of the nation and country. In the inaugural text of 2008, Saakashvili noted that “Georgia continues its great historical path to freedom and democracy. This is a worthy and proud step, our path is supported by the dedication of our ancestors and the energy of the new Georgia, historical responsibility and faith in the future” (p’ressamsakhuri, 2008). Innovation was expressed in the replacement of old symbols with new ones, including the creation of a new coat of arms, flag, anthem, Museum of the Occupation and the promotion of discourse related to the occupation (Karaia, 2015).

Finally, according to Mikheil Saakashvili’s pre-election and inaugural texts, one of the main differences from previous presidents was the spontaneity and

emotionality of his speeches, and sometimes there are inaccuracies in giving examples and content. However, the performances were situational in nature and their goal was to influence listeners at certain moments. For this reason, most printed versions of his speeches were presented as paraphrases, excerpts, or edited texts. The purpose of such appeals was to consolidate supporters, although along with emotional appeals they included excerpts from his views and initiatives. For example, “the attack has been carried out not only on the Georgian state, but first of all on the fundamental values of the Georgian nation – freedom and democracy. And the larger this attack is, the more we must show everyone our commitment to our values of freedom and democracy” (Civil.ge, 2008); or this example: “There are many parties, but one Motherland. There are many practices, but our common belief is one. There are many ethnic groups, but our nation is one. There are five crosses, but our flag is only one. Our strength is in our unity!” (p’ressamsakhuri, 2008). The five crosses of the “new old” Georgian flag that Saakashvili reintroduced stood for all parts of Georgia united in their shared Motherland. In these and other cases, according to Karaia, one of the factors of the beginning of the “new era” was a kind of messianic perception of power, according to which a new force appeared in the most difficult situation for the country in order to save it. Public sentiment was accompanied by the charismatic qualities of President Mikheil Saakashvili and his sense that he had a unique chance to make history (Karaia, 2015).

It can be said that on the question of national unity, Saakashvili’s visions were expressed in the creation and support of new concepts. However, during the pre-election and post-election period, he generally mentioned only a few carefully selected topics that he considered important. To consolidate and motivate the citizens of Georgia, he mainly used situational approaches, so the texts were characterized by more emotionality than examples and coherent reasoning.

Regions and territory

Similarly to other presidents, Saakashvili also spoke of a common place of residence, although he focused more on territoriality. The common territory, its boundaries, according to Anderson, help society see the common space in which members of the given group live, and distinguish themselves from those who live outside this space. Saakashvili not only described this common space, but also tried to fill it with the meaning necessary for the new Georgia and to indicate what is worth being proud of and what benefits or problems are associated with its location.

Compared to previous presidents, Saakashvili made two important changes to his speeches. Firstly, he boasted that he actively traveled to the regions and communicated with the people, so he knew their problems better (Civil.ge, 2008). This aspect was a way of involving and consolidating listeners, and also emphasized his difference from previous presidents - his communication with the people was direct and was not limited to television or radio messages. He personally listened to people’s problems and told them about his initiatives.

Secondly, the focus of the speeches of previous presidents was Georgia as a whole, and if the conversation was about a specific problem, they named a specific region, mainly Abkhazia, Ossetia or Adjara. Saakashvili periodically began his speeches by listing all regions, including Abkhazia and Ossetia: “I greet all of Georgia, I greet Abkhazia, Ossetia, Kakheti, Kartli, Kvemo Kartli, Samtskhe, Javakheti, Adjara, Guria, Imereti, Samegrelo, Svaneti, Racha, Lechkhumi, Pshav-Khevsureti, Tusheti

and Kiziki” (p’ressamsakhuri, 2008). Using this approach, he not only distinguished his texts from those of previous presidents, but also emphasized a different regional policy agenda in which each region was important, and which at the same time would be placed on an equal footing in a unified Georgia.

In his speeches, Saakashvili described Georgia using popular tropes the public knew well from school curricula: a country of a unique culture, an outstanding geostrategic location, a cultural crossroads, outstanding natural conditions, a Christian country of ancient civilization (sak’art’veilos resp’ublik’a, 2004). Along with these conditions, in his inaugural speeches, he pointed out the possible benefits that the country and population should receive, namely good relations with its neighbors and membership in the European family, which, in his opinion, Georgia had to return to (Ibid.). In contrast to this, the same location was also associated with challenges: a difficult historical fate, colossal trials, the need for great heroism, a crisis of statehood (Ibid.).

Speaking about the territory of residence and borders, Saakashvili’s goal was to build an imagined unity from above. Through common emotions and examples, he tried to achieve public consolidation and support for his views. To do this, he actively used opportunities of direct communication with the population and described the prospects for international acceptance and cooperation.

Conflict regimes and migrants

In Anderson’s imagined community, a group is united by horizontal unity, sovereignty, common history and territory. However, when parts of the latter become a conflict zone, the people living wherein or internally displaced persons and migrants remain outside this unity. Saakashvili tried to include them in the common space and in almost every speech he addressed “all Georgians living abroad” (sak’art’veilos resp’ublik’a, 2004) or “all Georgians in different countries of the world” (p’ressamsakhuri, 2008). The trend of emigration in Georgia has become relevant since the end of the Soviet period, when, on the one hand, in 1989 the newspaper “National Education” began publishing emigrant materials (Karaia, 2015), and on the other hand, there was talk about the restoration of independence gained in 1921, the return of emigrants of that period, the involvement of emigrated descendants of the government in the Georgian politics, etc.

Speaking about conflict regions (mainly Abkhazia), Saakashvili used two approaches. First, he called on the “Abkhaz brothers” to reunite and live all together in Georgia (Civil.ge, 2008) and noted he would ensure the restoration of territorial integrity only by redoubling peace efforts (Ibid.). This was facilitated by the attractive fact that Georgia was on the path of development (Ibid.), as there was special support from international organizations (Ibid.) and the prospect for the future integration of Georgia into European structures and NATO (Ibid.).

Secondly, he deliberately used a sort of forgetting or selective forgetting approach. Paul Connerton, listing the types of forgetting in his work, describes one of them, which is constitutive in the formation of a new identity. The emphasis here is not so much on the loss entailed in being unable to retain certain things, as rather on the gain that accrued by those who know how to discard memories that serve no practicable purpose in the management of one’s current identity and ongoing purposes. Forgetting then becomes part of the process by which newly shared memories are constructed because a new set of memories are frequently

accompanied by a set of tacitly shared silences (Connerton, 2008). For example, Saakashvili did not touch at all on the details of the conflict, the ongoing situation in Abkhazia and Ossetia, etc., although, he pointed to the existence of an international position on the issue of ethnic cleansing (Civil.ge, 2008). Moreover, in his 2004 speeches, he tried not to mention Russia as a party to the conflict and spoke only about the participation of North Caucasians in the Abkhaz conflict (Karaia, 2015). In his inaugural speech of the same year, he mentioned the need for good relations with Russia, the possibility of an alliance, partnership and friendship (*sak'art'velos resp'ublik'a*, 2004). However, since 2005, along with tensions with Russia, the term "annexation" has appeared in relation to the conflicts (Karaia, 2015). As Karaia notes, over time, Saakashvili began to represent Russia in two ways - as a partner with the prospect of friendship, but at the same time an unfriendly state (*Ibid.*). In his pre-election speech in 2008, the presidential candidate, speaking about Russia, already hinted at existing difficulties between the two countries (Civil.ge, 2008). A few years after the 2008 war, against the backdrop of extremely poor relations with Russia, on May 11, 2011, the Georgian Parliament recognized the genocide of the Circassians by the Russian Empire in the XIX century (*sak'art'velos p'arlament'i*, 2011).

Saakashvili's initiatives for the integration of migrants and the peaceful solution of conflicts in general were reflected in the texts of the pre-election period. His speeches point to peace negotiations as a way to end existing conflicts, as well as the benefits that the country will receive from international cooperation and integration into various organizations.

Graves of prominent Georgians

Another important practice for Georgia of changing meanings and symbols during Saakashvili's rule was the performance of rituals in connection to fallen soldiers and outstanding deceased public figures. As Verdery notes, the attitude towards the dead and their "proper burial" in different communities is not only an expression of the practice of honoring and mourning the dead on the part of the living, but also a regulation and organization of the social cosmos, the purpose of which is to adjust relations between the living and the dead. In some societies, it is believed that the wrong attitude towards the dead, their improper burial (including those who died during the war, who were buried inappropriately from the point of view of the family) leads to disorder in the social space and affects both society and the state. Therefore, both families and states try to rebury their fellow citizens who pass away on foreign territory, and thus regulate relations between the living and the dead (Verdery, 2000).

One of the manifestations of this is the practice of repatriation of deceased fellow citizens, persons killed in wars (or violent conflicts), and distinguished compatriots who died in other countries. As already mentioned, individual historical figures, politicians, representatives of the cultural sphere, prominent public figures, military officials and others continue their political life even after death. In addition to reburial, the respect and honor towards them can be expressed in the creation of memorials, visiting graves, performing reburials, as well as expunging of prominent figures from the pantheon, etc. There is also a widespread use of stories, quotes and memories associated with these figures in political life, literature and cinema. They could express national values, political order, hope, and heroism. Also, on the eve of the elections, Georgia's presidential candidates delivered speeches that mentioned

individual historical figures and their important role in the history of the country, visited the Pantheon, and talked about Georgians as victims of Soviet occupation.



*“Funeral of Zviad Gamsakhurdia in Grozny”.
Owner: Guram Sharadze. 1994.*



“The reburial ceremony of Zviad Gamsakhurdia”. Owner: Jemal Kasradze.

In the case of Saakashvili, he tried to create a new symbolism for the new Georgia by combining several processes which would simultaneously include outstanding Georgians from different periods. If during the time of Shevardnadze, Gamsakhurdia was considered an enemy, and his supporters were removed from political life, Saakashvili tried to change this situation, and in 2007 the first president of Georgia, was reburied in the Mtatsminda Pantheon. A step towards changing attitudes towards the first president of Georgia was posthumously awarding him the title of National Hero of Georgia by President Mikheil Saakashvili on September 26, 2013 (Chikovani N., 2020). From a certain point of view, the repatriation of Gamsakhurdia from his grave in Grozno, as well as those killed during the conflicts of the 1990s, ultimately did not solve all the problems. For example, the questions regarding the death of Gamsakhurdia, the destructive developments of the 1990s, the internally displaced persons and many others remained unanswered. However, as Saldadze notes in his analysis of various cases related to memory and identity in Georgia, the combination of already existing memory and identity frameworks together with the language that rejects the traumatizing past, and a desire to distance from this past, often did not result in the detraumatization of the Georgian society but rather contributed to its retraumatization (Saldadze, 2022).

As for those who died for the territorial integrity of Georgia, Saakashvili did not touch on this topic in his speeches during the election period, although he made his contribution (concerning changes and sites of memory) in practice, erecting a memorial to those killed in the struggle for the unity of Georgia and the corresponding memorial practice. Although this memorial erected in September 2003 at Hero’s Square in Tbilisi is an important place of remembrance, the memorial complex serves as a reminder of the trauma and exploits trauma for political goals by various political actors. The place itself serves as a transmitter of political messages to a broader audience through media, connecting events of the past with ongoing political struggles and expectations of a wider public (Saldadze, 2022).

During the time of Saakashvili, special attention was paid to the practice of reburials of public figures, and it became part of the new state policy. However, as in the case of Gamsakhurdia, and also in connection with the memorial to those killed in conflicts, such memorials and practices have also become a means of using trauma for political purposes, which in turn results in retraumatization rather than rethinking and overcoming the traumatic experience.



“Then-President Mikheil Saakashvili swears an oath at the tomb of David the Builder in January 2004.”¹⁸

It is notable that Saakashvili’s presidential election campaigns were formed in special circumstances caused by resignations. In the first case it was the previous president Shevardnadze who stepped down, and in the second, he himself resigned due to a political crisis. Therefore, his pre-election and inaugural texts were simultaneously situational, emotional and context-oriented. He spoke in different ways about such news as the formation of unity, territorial structure, memory politics, the gathering of all Georgians in Georgia, etc. Additionally, since his performances were aimed at achieving an emotional connection with the audience, they were often improvisational in nature. Text versions of these speeches appeared in the media in modified form.

Similarly to Gamsakhurdia and Shevardnadze, he tried to distance himself from the previous government and often rejected the ideas and initiatives associated with the terms of previous presidents. Saakashvili tried not only to create a new political agenda, but also to represent new content and symbols. These approaches provided for the formation

of a new unity, which, together with civil unity, was aimed primarily at young people. He considered various symbolic and commemorative events to be the main means of realizing his views related to history and memory. He also paid great attention to the formation of a policy that would be focused on ending the post-Soviet period and using new postcolonial approaches.

From this perspective, his speeches focused on Russia, Soviet occupation, annexation and victimhood. In the relevant texts, attitudes towards Russia gradually changed from neutral to negative ones against the backdrop of deteriorating relations. The changes in calendar included the introduction of Occupation Day in addition to the aforementioned Museum of Occupation; Georgia recognized the genocide of the Circassians, and an appropriate discourse was formed.

In Saakashvili’s texts, reasoning developed with a focus on the future. The future, which was at the center of the sentence, represented the task and purpose served by the present, as well as the successes and failures of the past. The countdown to the future only began with the Rose Revolution, but reforms were necessary to achieve the ultimate goal. The past was presented with negative examples, the overcoming of which began with the revolution.

At the center of the horizontal unity there were the citizens of Georgia, represented by different ethnic and religious groups. He considered knowledge and experience to be the main way to realize their capabilities, for which equal conditions had to be created for every citizen. To construct horizontal unity, new

¹⁸ Source: Photo from: Bakradze, N. The Fight To Save The Priceless Works Of Art In Georgia’s Gelati Monastery, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

symbols (flag, coat of arms...) were also created. He considered Georgians living abroad as part of the unity and actively appealed to them during the election period. Also in his speeches, internally displaced persons were considered as part of this unity, the solution of whose problems, especially the restoration of territorial integrity, was associated with Georgia's international activities and integration into various structures. He also took care of the repatriation of prominent Georgians buried abroad. In some ways, he helped end the controversy surrounding Georgia's first president Gamsakhurdia, when he was reburied in Georgia. From this point of view, he paid attention to the gathering of disparate representatives of the nation, the inclusion in public memory and a kind of consolidation of representatives of different groups around his own government.



*"Blessing of the President in Bagrati Cathedral".
Owner: Elefter Lafachi. 20 January, 2008.*

Saakashvili attached great importance to visits to the regions and active meetings with the population not only during the election period. He mentioned both Georgia as a whole and each region individually, which he considered on equal terms. When talking about Georgia, he used markers that were well known to the public and linked them to current reforms and future goals. Similarly to previous presidents, Saakashvili also often referred to prominent Georgians in his texts. Moreover, he took his first inaugural oath at the grave of David Agmashenebeli (the Builder), invoking associations of his person with the historic unifier and builder of Georgia.

Conclusion

Our study focused on five periods of presidential elections in Georgia (1991, 1995, 2000, 2004 and 2008) and the processes occurring simultaneously with them. During these periods, texts spoken by presidential candidates, subsequently elected presidents, attracted attention not only for their linguistic specifics and rhetorical techniques, but also from the point of view of political discourse and political

anthropology.

The election programs and inaugural speeches of Georgia's presidents are interesting from several points of view: first, they show us a list of issues important to society for each election period. Secondly, these texts can be used to trace the presidential candidate's attempts to influence current discussions and processes. The main positive aspects had to be associated with the candidacy for president, and the negative ones with his opponents. This in turn was to some extent exemplary of a change in the discourses of the times. Thirdly, these texts revealed topics that candidates would definitely pay attention to if elected. Along with reforms, economic and social changes, elected candidates spoke about carefully selected examples, symbols and practices of social unity. These issues and their understanding became an integral part of governance by the future president. Fourth, the chosen approaches - maintaining the status quo, spontaneous social change, radical reform, exceptional patriotism, inclusive civic unity, equality - first appeared in election texts, then reflected in inaugural speeches and, finally, manifested themselves in the specifics of governance. It is noteworthy that the approaches of presidential candidates could be mentioned in the texts in passing or in general, although their volume gradually increased. Fifthly, in the context of re-election, the candidates always referred to projects initiated during his administration, supported initiatives or individual events, and gave his own versions of their interpretation. These versions periodically diverged from the views common in society, and therefore candidates opposed their voters' versions, replacing it with the "correct" story. Sixth, a significant part of the election and inaugural texts and the promises they contained were designed to influence the audience at that moment. It seems that their implementation was not planned in the future, since no significant steps were taken for this purpose.

Why are election texts interesting? The presidential candidates were both consistent and emotional in their speeches, citing well-known examples and calling for unity, support for their candidacy and rejection of opponents. In this process, an important line of reasoning concerned history and public memory in general. The history of Georgia, historical heroes and anti-heroes, Soviet memory, restoration of independence, civil confrontation were the deep issues that gave the candidates' texts validity and an emotional connection with voters.

The reconfiguration of social and political symbols, meanings and content in Georgia has been a difficult and lengthy process. We can say that in a certain sense it continues to this day. Karaia, discussing the politics of memory, says that after the Rose Revolution, no unified state concept of memory policy was developed, and decisions were centralized and made impulsively (Karaia, 2015). In our opinion, the same can be said about almost every other policy found at the intersection of politics and academia. In particular, the initiatives of the presidents of independent Georgia on the topics of memory and history, traditions of organizing the country, commemoration and other themes were mainly situational and impulsive in nature, that is, they began to be discussed in extraordinary or unplanned situations, for example, during a crisis, disagreement, war, early elections, etc. In addition, the formulation of the issue, its discussion and execution were mainly carried out centrally. Therefore, comparative research in this direction mainly presents individual case analysis.

In our opinion, the reason for this was, among other things, the breakdown of existing models of government and old perception of the world. The collapse of the Soviet Union was followed by a transformation of previously existing practices

and especially, existing attitudes. One spectrum of common views gradually disappeared (for example, atheism practically vanished from everyday life), another became visible (for example, economic relations paralleling socialist subsidies and planned economies), and a third one changed (for example, a multi-party system gradually became commonplace). All this amounted to an interplay of paradoxes, where new and seemingly straightforward tasks resulted in complicated events. One more detail should be noted as well. Addresses on various topics during election campaigns were productive if the examples given and the emotions associated with them were familiar to everyone. History-related topics were generally familiar and acceptable, not because of academic precision, but because they were general and understandable. At the same time, the consolidation of society in specific cases was carried out with the help of such facts or events that were well known and correspond to the goals set. Karaia talks about a similar strategy used in the last years of the Soviet Union, viewing this process as a trend of past discoveries (*Ibid.*). The most common practice was the use of knowledge transmitted from history textbooks. Moreover, these narratives were predominantly official versions, which contributed to the preservation of mainstream and generally accepted historical knowledge (Jones & Toria, 2021).

However, discussions about history in the academic space have revealed the diversity of the national narrative in Georgia. Batiashvili calls this phenomenon bivocal. She believes that two groups opposed each other in Georgia. Firstly, the old “intelligentsia,” one way or another relics of the Soviet mindset, spoke of an idealized image of the national narrative, shifting focus to Georgian’s cultural uniqueness. The second group, the “liberal intellectuals,” spoke about the content of the European and democratic nation-state of Georgia. Batiashvili believes that the various memory projects influenced not only domestic narratives, but were also a factor in mutual disputes and international relations in which the “patriotic intelligentsia” played a major role (Batiashvili, *Power/Memory: New Elite, Old Intelligentsia, and Fixing of the Georgian Mind*, 2019).

Moreover, the interpretation of history from the Georgian, Abkhaz and Ossetian point of view remains a problem within the national narrative. These views are radically different, and among these groups, discussion of historical aspects of inter-ethnic relations is predominantly hostile. Some scholars believe that such a “war of historians” played an important role in the escalation of ethnic conflicts in Georgia in the 90s of the twentieth century (Toria, Pirtskhalava, Kekelia, & Ladaria, 2019).

The target audience of addresses of presidential candidates in Georgia was known under different names in different times. The identity of the addressee indicated the position of the candidate, allies, opponents, dependents, etc.

What actually helps win elections? We could not leave the question posed in the title of our project unanswered. Summarizing our articles on Georgia in this book, we offer the reader our conclusions on the subject. During the period of strong presidents in Georgia, the success of a particular candidate was determined simultaneously by several factors. Firstly, all presidents came to power in the background of confrontation with the previous government. Accordingly, one of the directions of the election texts was criticism of opponents - the lack of knowledge, experience, abilities, patriotism, confidence, and perspective was contrasted with the positive qualities of the candidate in each presidential campaign. In these cases, the space occupied by future presidents gradually expanded in the media field. The new president and his supporters talked about all the important issues and were

the first to touch on difficult topics, while their opponents mostly only reacted to their speeches.

Secondly, change represented the main reason and purpose. The previous government was replaced due to a desire for change, so the new government was talking about innovations. Along with reforms, there were always changes that affected the daily life of the population and thereby left their creator part of the collective memory. Thus, changes were made to the calendar, in which religious holidays and weekends appeared, the names of old important dates were transformed; also, certain holidays and weekends disappeared from the calendar. Along with the calendar, the names of settlements, places, streets changed, old monuments disappeared and new ones were opened, which in turn changed again under the new regime. However, these changes were presented indirectly in the election texts in order to avoid unwanted discussion.

Thirdly, each of the candidates tried to use topics related to Georgianism, Georgia or citizenship, which were well known to everyone - from school courses, films, the media, monuments, graves, everyday life. Neither of them spent much time talking about these topics, although such examples or symbols were always at the center of the discussion. These examples were at the same time combined with the personal qualities, actions, and plans of the candidates, thereby achieving a sense of involvement in something important.

Fourthly, each of them spoke a lot about Georgia, its territory, population, current challenges, and conflicts. Candidates described the benefits of this space in a variety of ways, using both simple positive, enthusiastic cues and hyperbolic forms of language. This part of the performances was mainly aimed at achieving emotional connection.

Fifthly, in all cases of change of power, it was initially impossible to predict how events would develop. In this process, it was clearly visible how the future presidential candidate was being shaped. The future image of each candidate emerged gradually. Most often, a small group of supporters talked about the new image. Together with this team, a leader was coming to power. With the help of the team and in connection with it, the image of a special person was purposefully created; he was different from his environment and opponents and was associated with certain events and personalities; he carried within himself the values, which were relevant at that moment, and could achieve an emotional connection with voters. In this process, not only real qualities or values were ascribed to the candidate, but some of them were created through conversations about history, memory, culture, or country.

All photos have been retrieved from the collection of digital photographs archive of the National Parliamentary Library of Georgia. All posters have been preserved in the Poster Collection of the National Parliamentary Library of Georgia.

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Historians and the State: The Institution of Presidential Power in Azerbaijan (1990-2024)

History and Memory Politics: Key Events and Images

On 7 February 2024, Azerbaijan will hold its ninth presidential election. Long before the elections, it was certain that Ilham Aliyev would once again be elected president. There was no real alternative to this autocrat, who has held the highest office in the country since 2003, leading up to autumn 2020. After the military success in the Second Karabakh War (September, November 2020) and the military operation in September 2023, when the entire Karabakh region came under Baku's control, the incumbent president had no need to rig the elections. All these events contributed to the fact that by the winter of 2024 his popularity was extremely high.

The president's future plans are still not obvious. But he never tires of repeating, taking every opportunity to do so, that the current capital of Armenia, "the city of Irevan was handed over to Armenia [in 1918]. However, there was no reason for that. This is an ancient city of Azerbaijan" (President.az, 2024). In January 2024, he restated that a significant part of the territory of modern Armenia is the "historical lands" of Azerbaijanis. It is difficult to say to what extent these words reflect any real plans. But what we can say for sure is that the historical and memory politics that have been implemented in the country since independence and were consolidated in the late 1990s and early 2000s will remain an important reminder that history will continue to be actively instrumentalized for political purposes.

Revenues from the oil and gas trade in Azerbaijan are not only spent on large-scale construction and reconstruction of infrastructure, the maintenance of a huge bureaucratic apparatus, the police, or the army. This same revenue source is used to finance the installation of numerous monuments throughout the country. After a short pause in the 1990s, when more monuments were dismantled than were erected, by the 2000s, the country experienced a new wave of memorial construction. This was undertaken in the context of a new stage in the nationalization of public spaces and the legitimization of the Aliyev authoritarian political regime. As a result, numerous public political monuments once again became propaganda tools and visual symbols of power (Michalski, 1998).

There are two key ongoing events that serve as background in the formation of memory politics of independent Azerbaijan: the Karabakh conflict and the establishment of the Aliyev hereditary political regime beginning in 1993 (de Waal, 2003; Ottaway, 2003; Rumyantsev, 2017). One of the main characteristics of memory politics in a rigid authoritarian regime, is that the regime claims to be the only political actor with the power to determine the past, seeking to fully control all spaces of civic expression and to marginalize all its opponents. Aleida Assman, through a successful metaphor of the "long shadow of the past," points to "the aspect of the unfreedom of subsequent generations from the traumatic past and the impossibility to deal with it at will" (Assmann, 2006). The memory of 1918-1920, the events of the collapse of the Russian Empire and attempts to create the first Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) (Swietochowski, 1985), does not always amount to a convenient past for the ruling regime. The memory of the traumatic

events of the Karabakh War of 1992-1994 and the ongoing conflict is also not always possible to manage if left without state oversight. Among the main strategies of mastering the past, as Michalski would probably say, are the industry of production of political public monuments, as well as the organization of collective/mass ceremonies and rituals under the patronage and control of the authorities. The production of new historical narratives is also important, in particular textbooks for schools and universities.



Isa Gambar (at the time an activist and one of the leaders of the Azerbaijani Popular Front) at the protest action of the workers of the Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan, Baku, 4 March 1988¹⁹.

The president himself actively uses the memory of Azerbaijani and Soviet past for political purposes, to strengthen his own power and the autocratic regime he leads. This circumstance should not be surprising. Politicians in the post-Soviet space (and not only) often act in a similar way. Ilham Aliyev also holds a PhD in history. In fact, almost all (except for the first president Ayaz Mutalibov) heads of Azerbaijan, as well as their main election opponents were and remain professional historians.

Our goal is to trace their actions and statements (speech acts) made during election campaigns, in other words, at those moments when the political struggle is aggravated to a greater or lesser extent, forcing politicians to go all-in, to actively use all available discursive and commemorative resources. Before we proceed to the analysis of pre-election statements and declarations, we will discuss the key events and images around which historical and memorial politics in Azerbaijan are made.

Commemoration of the First Republic in the Muslim East

Political figures from the beginning of the 20th century, the “founding fathers” of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) 1918-1920 – had lost in the competition with the cult of Heydar Aliyev, the late second president of post-Soviet Azerbaijan and the father of the incumbent Ilham. In the official historical narrative, Aliyev Sr. is

¹⁹ Source: www.azkataloq.org

given the role of main creator of Azerbaijan's independent statehood, and it is in his honor, most and foremost, that numerous new monuments are installed. As in other national republics of the USSR, this period of history and the characters associated with it acquired new relevance in the late 1980s, when the process of reconstruction of the historical narrative began. When nationalists from the Popular Front (PFA) came to power during the short-lived presidency of Abulfaz Elchibey (1992-1993), the figures of the "first republic" served as a textbook example of true patriots.

The role of the protagonist fell to Mammad Amin Rasulzade, the leader of Musavat (Equality), the most influential party, created by the "founding fathers" in 1911 (Balayev, 2018). A group of PFA activists led by historian Isa Gambar created the new Musavat party in 1992, presenting this event as a restoration of a party that had been defunct for many decades. In 2011, the modern Musavat celebrated its 100th anniversary, an event the authorities have done everything possible to ensure went unnoticed by the majority of the population. However, since Azerbaijan's independence itself was interpreted as one "restored," the leaders of the PFA and Musavat drew legitimacy from the symbolic continuity associated with the ADR. The most important symbols of statehood – the flag, coat of arms, and anthem – were borrowed from the same era. Independence Day, 28 May 1918 became a public holiday and was called Republic Day. From then on, the genealogy of all the most important official institutions (the parliament, the prosecutor's office, the army, the first university, etc.) were also borrowed from the times of the ADR.

Within the framework of the dominant retrospective discourse, ADR was to be spoken of first and foremost as the first republic in the entire Muslim East, whose founding fathers, "passed on to the descendants the ideology of democracy, human rights, equality of all before the law, electoral rights, gender equality" and much more (Turan.az, 2017).

In these first years of independence, the country's main university in the capital was named after Rasulzade. In 1993, a granite monument in the best traditions of Soviet monumentalism was erected in the Absheron village of Novkhani, his birthplace.. The new government planned to erect another monument in front of the university and, the most grandiose one, in the heart of one of Baku's parks. Omar Eldarov, one of the most famous Azerbaijani sculptors, prepared a sketch and a model of the monument. However all these plans were not destined to come true. In 2019, when the opposition celebrated the 135th anniversary of Rasulzade, Isa Gambar raged: "This monument has been under arrest for 25 years now. The authorities have found a place to erect hundreds of monuments but are unable to find a place for the monument to the founder of independent Azerbaijan" (Meydan. TV, 2019).

The "inability" of the authorities is explained by the specifics of Heydar Aliyev's government, under which Rasulzade was seen as an inconvenient competitor for the status of father of the nation. Under Aliyev Sr., the political and symbolic legacy of the ADR had been inevitably revised. The orientalist discourse of the "first republic in the whole East" remained popular, as did the myth of the direct succession of institutions of power. All symbols of independent statehood have also been preserved, but no funds have been allocated to install the Rasulzade monument, despite Omar Eldarov's willingness to work on it for free (Ann.az, 2013).

The university was renamed, and the status of "founding fathers" was changed to "fighters for independence," who had accomplished many things but unlike Heydar Aliyev, never succeeded, and "the first democratic state of Azerbaijan [...]"

failed" (Axc.preslib.az, 1998). During his rise to power, Aliyev Jr., whose legitimacy was based on inheriting power from the "great leader," the status of the "fighters for independence" and the memory of the first republic declined dramatically again. During the first lengthy speech given by the new president on Republic Day, only a few introductory phrases were dedicated to the person responsible for the celebration. Most of it referred to the "true" founding father, the "national leader" Aliyev Sr. The president's son, unlike his father, rarely mentioned the names of the ADR leaders in his official speeches.

A new view of the status of the first republic and its leaders was also reflected in a very modest obelisk (2007), the very remote location of which discourages holding mass events. The centenary anniversary of the ADR was also celebrated very modestly. In the now traditional manner, following a few catchphrases about the first republic, there was a detailed account of the activity of "the great leader" Heydar Aliyev and the invariable internal and external successes of the ruling party. Almost no one remembered the ADR itself. The Aliyev government did not succeed in completely pushing ADR figures beyond the borders of cultural memory, but historical figures who, in the eyes of Aliyev Jr., can compete with the image of Heydar Aliyev as a "great leader" and the creator of independent statehood, Rasulzade first among them, are being pushed to the periphery of the discourse of memory.

March Genocide of 1918 and Black January of 1990

Another 1918 event has acquired new relevance in post-Soviet Azerbaijan. One can observe the rare unity of its interpretations among not only the authorities and the opposition, but also almost the entire population of the country. In late March and early April 1918, there were clashes in Baku between Muslims led by the Musavat party, on the one hand, and the Bolsheviks in alliance with Armenian national military units led by members of the Armenian nationalist party Dashnaksutyun, on the other. For the Muslim population of the city, these clashes ended in terrible pogroms and massacres. No precise data is available, but the death toll alone may have reached upwards of 8,000 (Swietochowski, 1985; Baberowski, 2003).

These events were remembered again in January 1990, when the struggle for power between the PFA and the Soviet administration began in Baku, resulting in Armenian pogroms and military operations. As a result of the pogroms dozens of Baku Armenians died, many hundreds were wounded, thousands lost their property and became refugees (de Waal, 2003). On the night of 19 to 20 January, the Soviet authorities launched a military operation to regain control over the republic. As a consequence, over 100 people were killed and hundreds more wounded. While the Armenian pogroms remained beyond the borders of national memory, the military action was immediately designated as "Black" or "Bloody January," and became a key site of memory in post-Soviet Azerbaijan. The funeral for the city residents who died as a result of the military invasion (the Armenians who died in the pogroms were not counted among them) turned into a mass action of grief and protest, on January 22 (Vishka, 1990). These martyred heroes, who at one point were proclaimed shahids), were buried on the site of the old Chamberekent cemetery, where many of the victims of the March 1918 massacre were buried. It was on this site that Kirov Nagorny Park was built in the mid-1930s. In the same January 1990, the reconstruction of the park began in *Şahidlər Xiyabanı* (the Alley of Martyrs).

The high status given to these events was determined by several factors. The events of Black January (as in March 1918) formed the basis of the national myth about the heroic struggle of the Azerbaijani people for independence. The “Shahids of January” (as well as March) became the patriots and sacred victims whose blood should be used, paraphrasing Thomas Jefferson, to water the tree of freedom from time to time. “The heroism of our sons and daughters who gave their lives for their homeland has become a legend. After all, they opened the first path on the road to freedom. It is the shahids we owe first and foremost to the restoration of state independence, our free life” (Azertac, 2019).



Monument to Heydar Aliyev in Baku, unveiled on May 10, 2005, on the anniversary of his birth. Sculptors Salavat Shcherbakov and Mikhail Nogin. July 2022. Photo by Sevil Huseynova.

The events of January have also become an important component of Heydar Aliyev’s official biography, giving him a heroic halo. At that time, the future “national leader,” who was dismissed in 1987 from his high post as first deputy premier of the Soviet Union, was living in Moscow as a pensioner. The January events served as an important occasion for him to make a comeback. Immediately after the event, Aliyev appeared at the representative office of the Azerbaijan SSR in Moscow and publicly (in front of cameras), “putting his life in danger,” condemned the military operation. “This step of the great leader gave our people energy and strength, [and became a source] of support and comfort” (Ibid.). The January events were an occasion for Heydar Aliyev to return to politics. In the official biography of the “great leader,” written and published much later, the January performance was an important element of his heroic image. This event, according to the book, showed that it was because of his absence that the republic was mired in chaos and violence.

Both events also fit into the context of the modern Karabakh conflict and the confrontation with the “historical enemy.” In 1998, Heydar Aliyev signed a decree “On genocide of Azerbaijanis.” This is a detailed document listing the numerous “atrocities of Armenians” committed throughout the twentieth century. By this decree, 31 March is declared the “Day of the Genocide of Azerbaijanis.” Thus, the historization of modern conflict was declared as the official policy of the Azerbaijani

authorities. The main memorial complex was created in the city of Guba (north of Azerbaijan), where a mass grave was accidentally discovered in 2007. It was identified as the remains of the victims of the 1918 genocide. Speaking at the opening ceremony, the president stated that: “More than 50,000 of our fellow citizens became victims of Armenian fascism in a matter of five months” (Aliyev 2013). Thus, the commemoration of the 1918 events, the constructions of enemies (the collective image of Armenians) and their victims (Azerbaijanis) are discursively linked to the events of World War II and the Holocaust. In turn, the Alley of Martyrs, had become a multifunctional memorial complex, including the memory site of the Karabakh conflict. Since the early 1990s, the complex has included a cemetery where soldiers who died during the war (1992-1994) and were awarded the title of national heroes (Milli gəhrəmanlar) are buried.

Commemoration of the Karabakh Conflict: Before the 44-Day War

Here we will focus on the events that preceded the Second Karabakh War (autumn 2020), before discussing the commemoration of the conflict since then. In the context of memory politics, many events of the Karabakh conflict were given permanent relevance. The longstanding commemoration of the ongoing conflict had been added to with more and more traumatic and, to a lesser extent, triumphant events over the years (Akhundov, 2017).

The ranks of shahids also kept expanding. April 2016 and July 2020 were marked by escalations that resulted in the deaths of dozens of soldiers. But even without escalations, military personnel as well as civilians continued to perish along the lines of fire. Given the length and intensity of the conflict, these events remain part of the living memory for all generations of the country’s population (Akhundov, 2020). One of the most important commemorative events is the massacre that took place in the small town of Khojaly in February 1992, where hundreds of its inhabitants (including the elderly, women, and children) were shot dead, captured or displaced and became refugees (de Waal, 2003).

In 1998, after Heydar Aliyev’s decree, this event was officially called the Genocide in Azerbaijan. The authorities have invested considerable resources in the commemoration of the Khojaly massacre, a rare case when these efforts were fully understood and supported in all strata of Azerbaijani society. In framework of the victims’ discourse, these were acts of genocide committed by Armenians against Azerbaijanis. Separate memorial days were dedicated to each of these acts: 31 March for 1918 and 26 February to commemorate the Khojaly Genocide. At the same time, these and a number of other events had been represented, on the whole, as the entire 20th century genocide against Azerbaijanis.

Over the years, several theatrical productions have been created and staged (The Call of Khojaly, When Almonds Bloom, Khojaly - It Was, etc.). In addition, documentary and feature films have been produced, including titles such as *We Will Return*, *Nabat*, *Running Away from Darkness*, and others. Many Azerbaijani and some foreign composers have created symphonies dedicated to this event (Mammad Guliyev, Tofik Bakikhanov, Azer Dadashov, Pierre Tilua, Alexander Tchaikovsky, etc.). The Azerbaijani and foreign writers have created novels and stories – *The Captive*, by Meyhosh Abdullah; *Pain*, by Amir Gut and Arye Gut, and *Black Snowdrops* by Efim Abramov. Nazim Mammadov, the author of the first cartoon shot at the Azerbaijan Film Studio, reflected this event in a painting.

The small sculpture entitled *Mother's Scream*, erected in Baku in 1993 by the family of sculptors Aslan, Mahmud, and Teymur Rustamovs, was reconstructed into a nearly nine-meter monument in 2008. The monument became an endpoint for a collective memorial ritual. For several years now, mass public marches have been organized by the Azeri authorities, culminating in the laying of flowers at the monument. Years of investment in creating multiple forms of public memorial culture have contributed to the fact that every resident of the country takes part in one form or another in the Khojaly commemoration.

The Cult of Personality: Heydar Aliyev after his Death

The Khojaly events were used by Heydar Aliyev to marginalize his political opponents. Despite the tragedy occurring before he came to power, it has provided him many opportunities to harshly criticize his predecessors, who he claimed, had allowed the massacre of civilians to take place. However, it was not only the military defeats but also the failures of his predecessors in all spheres (the economy, the establishment of all state institutions during the country's fledgling independence, the degradation of the social sphere and education) that have served Aliyev to create an ideal image of a political figure and born leader. As part of the official discourse, such failures did not occur under his authority.

The specifics of the personalized authoritarian government created by Aliyev meant that control of power was exercised by one person – the leader, alone, with the help of subordinates loyal to him. Aliyev's cult was already created during his lifetime. In this leader cult, one can find many aesthetic elements borrowed from the Soviet tradition of representing the sole leader of the country. But there are also some similarities with modern Turkey's founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's cult, specifically where the creator of the new Turkish nation emphasized the role of the father of the nation and his Europeaness. Like Atatürk, Heydar Aliyev posed in a tuxedo for one of his most popular photographs, which was distributed throughout the country on numerous posters. Sometimes the "national leader" of Azerbaijan was also awarded the title of "father of the state" (Huseynova, 2005; Azertac.az, 2003).

After his death, Aliyev had already become a "national" and "great" leader. In the context of widespread loyalist discourses, it is thanks to Heydar Aliyev's "genius," his "political talent [...], wisdom and foresight, and strategic thinking" that Azerbaijan has maintained its independence and has not fallen into civil war.

The president's son, who inherited not only the post but also the specifics of the regime, did not have sufficient resources nor the charisma to claim a similar role as a born leader. İlham Aliyev draws his legitimacy from his father's cult because, the official line goes, "he is a worthy successor to Aliyev in the course of the 21st century" (Andriyanov & Miralamov, 2005). Therefore, since his son's presidency, considerable resources were spent on creating and maintaining the cult. The most visible element of the cult in public space is its numerous monuments. The genre of the monuments is not distinguished by diversity - the late president stands upright, sometimes with his arm raised, and looks deep into the distance. All the new granite and marble Heydar Aliyevs are usually surrounded by parks named after him. On the contrary, the Heydar Aliyev Center, created by Zaha Hadid and opened in Baku in 2012, was and is the most interesting modern architectural structure in the capital.

Numerous officials, businessmen, cultural and educational figures, employees of institutes of the Academy of Sciences and universities, have actively been involved

in creating and supporting the Aliyev cult. Such eagerness and active initiative from below should not be surprising. The installation of new monuments and busts, a variety of images, the invention of new public rituals, and the contribution to the development of discourses about the “great leader” and the “brilliant personality” have become mandatory practices for expressing loyalty to the ruling regime.

These are the key points around which the memory and historical politics in Azerbaijan have been built over the last three decades.

On behalf of the nation

What is the institution of presidential power in modern Azerbaijan? According to the latest, referendum of 2016 (third since independence), to hold the post of President of Azerbaijan it is sufficient to be a citizen of the country, “who has resided permanently on the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan for longer than 10 years, has the right to participate in elections, and has not been previously convicted for a serious crime, has no obligations to other states, has higher education, and who has no dual citizenship” (President.az, 2024). In addition to the changes made to the Constitution before 2016, a citizen of Azerbaijan can be elected to the post of President an unlimited number of times. Retirement age is not an obstacle for participation in elections.



The poster “A worthy successor to his wise father”, 2003. Publisher: Baku. “Azerbaijan”. Source: The collection of posters archive of National Parliamentary Library of Georgia

By 2023, the concentration of power in the hands of one person has reached the maximum possible limits. His powers allow him to have almost complete control over the executive branch, which, along with the de facto subordination of the judicial and legislative branches, makes the president one of the most powerful political figures in the entire post-Soviet space. Ilham Aliyev has also received the right to dissolve parliament and to call snap presidential and parliamentary elections. The president has used this right twice in recent years. However, there was a period in the history of the independent Republic of Azerbaijan when the future of the institution of presidential power was contested and its liquidation was insisted on by the opposition, which had considerable authority at the time.

How was the institution of presidency created and developed in post-Soviet Azerbaijan? Which parties and politicians fought for this post and what promises did they make to the population on their way to the political Olympus? Which promises were fulfilled and which ones were forgotten? How did the processes of constructing national identity, nationalizing the historical narrative and developing criteria of “true patriotism” influence the process of establishing the institution of presidential power? Is it possible to identify continuity in the rhetoric of the main presidential candidates before and after the elections?

Origins of Presidential Power in Azerbaijan

The origins of the institution of presidential power in Azerbaijan can be traced back to when the post of the President of the USSR, the highest official in the state, was established on 15 March 1990. Mikhail Gorbachev tried to strengthen his position with the help of this innovation (BBC News, 2015), as the introduction of the age limit for candidates (35 to 65) allowed to limit the number of possible competitors. The baton was taken up by the heads of the union republics. The post of President of Azerbaijan was established soon after, in May 1990.

The first president of the then Azerbaijan SSR, elected not by popular vote but at a session of the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan, was Ayaz Mutalibov, the incumbent head of the republic and first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Azerbaijan SSR (CPA Central Committee). Journalist Rauf Mirkadirov said in his article in the popular newspaper *Zerkalo* that many people at that moment ironized that the whole process from nomination to election took 15 minutes and suggested applying to the Guinness Book of Records. However, the journalist recalled this only after Mutalibov’s resignation in March 1992 (Mirkadirov, 1992).

The first president left an ambiguous trace in the history of Azerbaijan. His political activity is perceived in a range from negative to neutral. He is blamed for allowing the Khojaly massacre, unwillingness to defend the country’s independence and working for Moscow, as well as for insufficient firmness in bringing order to the republic, not matching his personal qualities to the difficult moment. He was considered as too soft a politician, incapable of pursuing a tough policy.

In this respect, Mutalibov is put on par with the second president of Azerbaijan Abulfaz Elchibey. Public opinion blames the first two presidents for weakness of character, particularly defined here by unwillingness to use force against opponents undermining their power. It is widely believed that political turmoil would have been avoided if both presidents had been able to act more decisively. The popularity of such perceptions can tell us a lot about the dominant mood in Azerbaijani society. Alongside talk of the need for democracy and respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms (including the right to life), the popular view is that the harshest measures should have been taken against the discontented. Perhaps this tendency indicates a prevalent craving for strong power and the hope for a way out of the crisis associated with it. These sentiments favored the return to power of the former head of the CPA Central Committee, who governed the Azerbaijan SSR in 1969-1982.

Ayaz Mutalibov. Ascent to Presidential Power

A tragic fate awaited Ayaz Mutalibov. He will remain in the history of the country as both the first president of Soviet Azerbaijan and then of the independent Republic

of Azerbaijan. Subsequently, his activity was discredited in every possible way, first by the government of the Popular Front of Azerbaijan, PFA (*Xalq Cəbhəsi Partiyası*) and Musavat (Musavat Online Social-Political Newspaper, 2024), and later by Heydar Aliyev. But in 1990, nothing foreshadowed such a development. Mutalibov was consistently climbing the professional and party career ladder. At the same time, the highest power in the republic came to him largely by chance. His appointment to the highest post in the Soviet republic was preceded by the dismissal of the first secretary of the CPA Central Committee, Abdurahman Vezirov, and the January 1990 Soviet operation in Baku, which resulted in numerous civilian casualties (de Waal, 2003; Vezirov, 2018).

Mutalibov himself admitted in a later interview that coming to power after the January tragedy was a heavy burden for him. He was largely perceived as having come to power on the points of Russian bayonets and thus unwilling to defend the country's independence. But soon after his arrival to the post of the head of the republic, another sudden zig-zag of history occurred, giving Azerbaijan SSR a rare chance for independence. Mutalibov signed the Constitutional Act on State Independence in conditions when the power of the central government practically ceased to exist and nothing threatened the authors of this document. And although the national-democratic opposition tried to take credit for the restoration of independence and its almost revolutionary role in the collapse of the USSR, the opinion of another president of the country, Heydar Aliyev, voiced by him on the eve of the 1993 elections, seems more balanced. Aiming to downplay the role of his opponents from the Popular Front camp, Aliyev called their conviction in their own merits far-fetched, and independence a gift of fate that should be appreciated, rather than doing everything to lose it (Azerbaycan, 1993).

Mutalibov became the head of the country as a hostage of the current situation and a politician with a tarnished reputation. Opposition activists did everything possible to consistently reduce his authority. However, Mutalibov was not going to play the passive role of a "whipping boy." He came from the Soviet party nomenklatura, knew the rules of the game, was no stranger to underhand intrigue and ambition, and was also keen to suppress his opponents. In the interview, Mutalibov said that the country could have been saved from the troubles that befell it if the opposition had given up its claims to power. However, he admitted that he himself was not going to share or cede power (*Xalq qəzeti*, 1992a).

Mutalibov endeavored to meet the requirements of the time and actively participated in the ongoing socio-political processes. At the same time, Mutalibov's main hopes for strengthening his power were connected with loyalty to Moscow. In practice, this meant support for the Perestroika policy and active participation in the anti-Aliyev campaign initiated in Moscow by Mikhail Gorbachev. Although without much enthusiasm, he continued the course of democratization of political life in the republic and entered into some dialogue with the opposition. The first parliamentary elections in the history of modern Azerbaijan (at that time it was still the Supreme Soviet) on a multi-party basis were held under his rule in September-October 1990. According to the results of the elections held under the conditions of the State of Emergency, representatives of the Popular Front won forty five seats (12.5%) out of 360, and another fifteen seats (4.2%) were won by independent candidates (The 1995 CIA's World Factbook). Heydar Aliyev received a cold reception when he arrived in Baku, forcing him to retreat to his native Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic to endure disgrace. Mutalibov initially strengthened his position but made a bitter enemy in the person of Heydar Aliyev, unwittingly contributing to his temporary alliance with the Popular Front.

Mutalibov and the Karabakh conflict

Political scientist and journalist, one of the founders of the Popular Front of Azerbaijan, Zardusht Alizadeh recalls that despite tough economic challenges, it was the Karabakh conflict that became the consolidating force of a popular movement that was born out of efforts of intellectuals and scientists of the Academy of Sciences. It was the only thing that worried the rebellious minds. Through the prism of this conflict the themes of historical injustice and “constant oppression by the empire” were voiced. All attempts to raise the issue of the joint struggle of the two national communities (Armenian and Azerbaijani) for democracy and the perestroika agenda were defeated by the Karabakh problem (Akhundov J. Fieldnotes. 15.01.2017). After the events of January-February 1988 (the appearance of the first Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia and pogroms in Sumgait), the conflict quickly turned violent. In the following years, the region had witnessed two wars (in 1992-1994 and 2020), multiple escalations (most significant in April 2016 and September 2022) and the border turning into a front line. In September 2023, after 9 months of blockade of the region, Azerbaijani armed forces conducted a military operation in Karabakh. By October, virtually the entire Armenian population had been forced to leave the region. The position on how to resolve this conflict and the right to own the region remains the most important marker for determining the level of patriotism of a citizen. Throughout the post-Soviet years in Azerbaijan, the only “correct” position was reflected in the slogan “Qarabağ bizimdir!” (“Karabakh is ours!”). Under such conditions, no Azerbaijani politician could ignore the Karabakh issue.



The Heydar Aliyev Center in Baku (Heydər Əliyev Mərkəzi), located on Heydər Əliyev Avenue, was opened in 2012. The author of the project is Zaha Hadid. July 2022. Photo by Sevil Huseynova.

The very formation of an independent nation-state took place in the context of the conflict and in many ways determined the criteria for the new identity of the country's citizens. In the same conflict context, politicians who used the discourses of ethno-nationalism and pan-Turkism felt very comfortable. Defending Azerbaijan's right to control Nagorno-Karabakh, Mutalibov, in his confrontation with the Popular

Front, needed both weighty arguments, control over the patriotic discourse, and the implementation of concrete successful actions.

A consistent policy of loyalty to Moscow bore fruit at first. Until it became a problem. On 17 March 1991, an All-Union referendum on preserving the unity of the Soviet Union was held in the USSR, and Azerbaijan actively participated in it. Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic (NAR) did not take part. Heydar Aliyev, who headed the Supreme Soviet in the autonomy, organized a boycott of the referendum. He subsequently used the event as a confirmation of his unyielding stance to achieve Azerbaijan's independence. However, the boycott by Nakhchivan did not affect the results of the referendum. According to the official version, the majority of the population eventually voted in favor of preserving the USSR. No referendum was held in Armenia. Perhaps, this circumstance had additional reasons for Moscow's support of Azerbaijan's position. Mutalibov himself spoke directly about this:

I would like to point out one fact. On 17 March 1991, Azerbaijan, unlike Armenia, voted in favor of preserving the USSR. Mikhail Gorbachev, who had supported Armenia until then, turned his back on them after that and ordered the Azerbaijani leadership to carry out Operation Ring in order to clear Azerbaijan of Armenian armed groups. As a result, we were able to liberate the villages of Kamo and Chaikend, which Nuru Pasha failed to do in his time (Publika.az, 2016).

On 27 April 1991, Mutalibov made an ultimatum statement addressed to the Armenians of Azerbaijan and the military leadership of the USSR:

The problem of Nagorno-Karabakh will be solved inside Azerbaijan. Every Armenian living on this land must decide for himself: he will either live in peace and tranquility in accordance with the constitutions of Azerbaijan and the USSR, or he will seek refuge outside the republic. We demand to stop helicopter flights over the territory of Azerbaijan, to put an end to attacks on border villages. We demand from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Defence and KGB of the USSR to implement the decree of the President of the USSR on liquidation and disarmament of illegal armed formations on the territory of NKAO and to implement all the requirements of the state of emergency regime. We also demand that all those who carry out separatist activities on the territory of Azerbaijan voluntarily leave the republic (Velimamedov, 2023).

The operation Ring began in late April and lasted until July 1991. As a result, ethnic Armenian combatants were arrested or killed in the confrontation. There was also a forced and complete eviction of the residents of 23 Armenian villages in Nagorno-Karabakh and neighboring areas of Azerbaijan. In response to the criticism, Mutalibov parried that no one is going to deport Armenians, although Azerbaijan has every right to do so:

Our patience has come to an end! We are not going to deport the Armenian population, although we have the right to do so: in 1989 the entire Azerbaijani population was barbarously deported from Armenia. We show humanism. But we declare: if Armenian settlements turn into strongholds of Armenian militants, the toughest measures will be taken. We need one thing, and that is for Armenia to keep its nose out of Azerbaijan's affairs (Ibid.).

Another outcome of this operation was the return of Armenia to the negotiation process for a renewed union state. Representatives of Karabakh Armenians traveled

to Baku for talks, following which they agreed to participate in the restoration of constitutional order in the region and promised to participate in the presidential elections. Success in the armed confrontation helped Mutalibov's ratings. This may have prompted him to announce presidential elections in Azerbaijan, which were scheduled for 8 September 1991.

The details of the operation had presented significant interest to historians and social researchers but remain largely unmentioned in official sources. There is no mention of it in the chronological list of the most important events of the period before and during the years of independence on the website of the Presidential Library (Nezavisimiy Azerbaijan, 2024), as well as in the textbooks on the history of Azerbaijan. The current authorities are eager to ensure that the successes of military and state building are exclusively linked to the return of Heydar Aliyev to power. This component is an important part of the state memory politics, the logic of which cannot be reconciled with the information that not only civilian Azerbaijanis but also Armenians were victims of the conflict.

From defender of the Soviet system to the first president of the independence era

With the end of Operation Ring, Mutalibov's winning streak came to an end. During the August putsch in Moscow, despite warnings from Vafa Guluzadeh, the state adviser on foreign policy issues, Mutalibov, who was on a visit to Iran at the time, supported the GKChP (the State Committee on the State of Emergency, SCSE). The Popular Front, on the other hand, condemned the coup. Twenty-five years later, Mutalibov tried to find an excuse for his mistake and claimed that he had been framed. Regardless, when his support for the GKChP became known to the USSR leadership, any informational support from Moscow on the Karabakh issue ceased. International support at that moment was almost entirely on the side of Armenia. And with elections ahead, Mutalibov urgently needed to restore his rating and find well-reasoned answers to the opposition's accusations of betraying national interests.

On 30 August 1991, at an extraordinary session of the Supreme Soviet, a Declaration on the Restoration of State Independence was adopted. This decision was justified by the state interests of the people of Azerbaijan and the fact that in 1918-1920 there had already existed an internationally recognised Republic of Azerbaijan. One of the immediate negative consequences for Azerbaijan was the proclamation of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic by the Armenians of Karabakh. The opposition continued to boycott the elections and demanded their cancellation. The Social Democratic Party of Azerbaijan, whose co-chairman Zardusht Alizadeh became the second candidate, came to Mutalibov's aid. He said the Social Democrats took advantage of this moment to gain access to the television broadcast and try to convey their own ideas to the people (Alizadeh, 2006). Shortly before the elections began, Alizadeh withdrew his candidacy and the election resulted as one offering no real alternatives to Azerbaijani voters. Mutalibov received 98.5% of votes out of 85.5% of voters who came to the elections. Neither the Armenians of Karabakh, nor the residents of Nakhchivan AR took part the elections. After the elections, Mutalibov effectively imposed an economic blockade on Nakhchivan.

But the situation required the first president to take further action to gain the upper hand over his political rivals. Mutalibov dissolved the Communist Party

of Azerbaijan, created the Ministry of Defence and adopted the Law on Armed Forces. He also launched negotiations with the opposition to discuss the possibility of creating a new state institution, the National Council (to be established on 30 October). Finally, on 18 October 1991, the historic Constitutional Act on State Independence was adopted, which was also to be the basis for the drafting of a new Constitution.

The preamble to the Act signed by Mutalibov (only recently ready to cling to Moscow's firm hand) gave a detailed explanation of the historical significance of the restoration of independence; it established a link between Russia's aggressive acts against Azerbaijan, starting with the seizure of the territory in 1806-1828 and up to its reoccupation by the Red Army in 1920. The creation of the USSR was described as legitimizing the annexation of Azerbaijan. According to the authors of the Act:

The agreement on formation of the USSR of December 30, 1922, was designed to fix this annexation. Further, for 70 years against the Azerbaijan Republic the colonialism policy was pursued, natural resources of Azerbaijan were ruthlessly exploited, and its national wealth was taken away, the Azerbaijani people were exposed to prosecutions and repressions, its national advantage was trampled. Despite it, the Azerbaijani people continued the fight for the state's independence (CIS Legislation, 2024).

All these representations later formed the basis of official historical, political, educational and cultural discourses. As new presidents came to power, they were supplemented with increasingly colorful and emotional historical stories and myths. The second and third presidents of Azerbaijan (Abulfaz Elchibey and Heydar Aliyev) tried to privatize these discourses and claimed the role of "founding fathers", while at the same time leveling the contribution of their predecessors. Although the text of the Act suited the most ardent far-right nationalists from the Popular Front, Mutalibov's position only worsened. He tried to match the moment, but he was inferior to his other political opponent, Heydar Aliyev, in making fateful symbolic decisions.

On 26 December 1991, the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan adopted a resolution on the celebration of 31 December as the "Day of Solidarity of World Azerbaijanis." The holiday was established in memory of the destruction of border fortifications in Nakhchivan on the USSR-Iran border on this day in 1989 (Azertac, 2008). The resolution was adopted on the basis of a petition of the Supreme Assembly of Nakhchivan. In the autonomy itself, the relevant resolution was adopted on 16 December 1991 (President.az, 2024).

Mutalibov, who found himself under increasing pressure from the opposition forces, had to once again prove his steadfastness in defending control over Karabakh in practice. But the forces of the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs and Defence Ministry were no longer at hand, only scattered armed detachments without centralized command remaining. Not surprisingly, the hastily organized military operation near the village of Dashalti in late January 1992 was a complete failure. Mutalibov had less and less control over the situation by the time the Khojaly massacre occurred on 26 February, which resulted in the deaths of 613 civilians, according to official Azerbaijani figures.

For a long time Mutalibov could not be forgiven for his interview with Czech journalist Dana Mazalova, published in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* on April 2, 1992, in which he accused the opposition of using the Khojaly tragedy to force his

resignation (Xocali.org, 2024). This is what eventually happened. His statements were interpreted as accusations against the opposition of organizing the event itself. Subsequently, Mutalibov made numerous refutations. But they were published mainly in the Russian and Armenian media, considered unfriendly or even hostile in the republic. All these circumstances could not but affect his rating in Azerbaijan. At the Supreme Soviet session of March 5 and 6 of the same year, the horrible footage of the Khojaly massacre was shown. The opposition organized a large rally in front of the parliament building, with its most active participants threatening to break into the parliament building. After much hesitation, Mutalibov resigned, foregoing the option to use force to disperse the protestors.

Spring 1992 - A short interregnum

Yagub Mammadov's temporary ascendancy to presidency was even more accidental and sudden than the transition of the country's leadership to Mutalibov in 1990. On 5 March 1992, when Mammadov was elected chairman of the Supreme Soviet at its



The first President of Azerbaijan Ayaz Mutalibov in Moscow, 06 July 1992, Photo by Yuriy Abramochkin.²⁰

session to replace Elmira Kafarova (Azerbaijani Soviet stateswoman (1934-1993); Minister of Education of the Azerbaijan SSR (1980-1983); Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Azerbaijan SSR (1983-1987); Chair of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet (1987 - 1990); Chair of the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan (1990 - 1991) (Archive.today, 2014), who had just resigned, he hardly imagined that he would be taking over as acting president the next day. He was, however, no stranger to ambition and at one point even vied for the presidency. Mammadov's problem was his lack of social capital. He was not a member of any significant political party or regional clan. He came from the peripheral Kedabek district of the republic. He was the author of a number of works on medicine and was serving as rector of the Azerbaijan Medical University at the time of the March events. He could also be supported by the former Soviet party nomenklatura.

In the newspaper Azerbaijan, journalist Iskander Akhundov explains Yagub Mammadov's victory by the fact that he called for effective tough measures against the opposition, when Mutalibov only complained (Akhundov I., 1992). Not a member of any regional patronage network, he was a typical representative of both the party nomenklatura and the corrupt academia. In this environment, corruption was perceived as a commonplace phenomenon, a matter of course and not affecting the degree of patriotism. The main motto of the time was "this is what everyone does."

Zardusht Alizadeh recalls that Mammadov was nicknamed "Dollar Yagub" because he accepted kickbacks in dollars. (Alizadeh, 2006). Fazil Mustafa

²⁰ Source: www.azkataloq.org

(Gazanfaroglu), a former Popular Front activist who later joined the pro-government camp among many others, adds that his notoriety as a corrupt official was such that Mammadov's picture was glued to dollar banknotes as a joke. For him, the republic was a big Medical Institute. The already mentioned journalist Akhundov (Akhundov, 1992) wrote that Mammadov owed his professional career to his friendship with Heydar Aliyev's brother Agil Aliyev and his obedience. Obviously, in 1992 Mammadov could not count on the support of the exhilarated masses.

Nevertheless, in the spring of 1992, Yagub Mammadov started his election campaign. He made many appearances on television, met with journalists, visited hospitals, traveled to the regions. He took the actions that were expected of him as the head of state. As a presidential candidate, he is remembered for his harsh statements against the opposition, blaming it directly and indirectly for the misfortunes that have befallen the country. In effect, he continued to use Mutalibov's rhetoric. This long continuity of the discourse critical of the opposition can be traced in the statements of Heydar Aliyev, and especially his son, Ilham Aliyev.

Mammadov's speeches, in terms of emotional intensity, pathos about the need for unity, frequency of use of the categories of homeland, or honor and conscience, which should be above personal interests, are practically the same as Heydar Aliyev's speeches. Except that Mammadov was inferior to the future president in the frequency of use of historical subjects (Xalq qəzeti, 1992b; Xalq qəzeti, 1992c; Xalq qəzeti, 1992d).

With each new speech, his tone became harsher and his accusations sharper. He did not consider the achievement of independence as a merit of the opposition and labeled this event as a gift from God (Xalq qəzeti, 1992b). In general, the professor of medicine often referred to God in search of a source of help for the Azerbaijani nation. However, religious discourse in principle became increasingly influential and was used by all candidates. Accusing the opposition of seeking to seize power at any cost, he lumps together events such as Black January (the events of 20 January 1990), Dashalti (a failed army operation in January 1992) and the Khojaly massacre.

In short, the abominable actions that began in 1988 have today taken an even more horrifying form. The people themselves must see this. To determine who is an enemy and who is a friend (Ibid.).

Mammadov in his "appeals to the people" demonstrated indignation at the flight of residents from regions far from the front. Armenians, in his opinion, did not leave their homes. We should have patience and willpower, he urged. He referred to the memory of the Great Patriotic War (World War II) to encourage people. The fascists had seized many lands in their time and brought destruction with them, he argued, but at the time of the speech, those territories are thriving. Since then, the images of "fascist Armenians," as well as Armenian nationalism as a variant of fascist ideology remain invariably popular and in demand. The image of the Armenian enemy, eternally ungrateful, dreaming of seizing other people's lands, treacherous and cruel, would be supplemented in the spring of 1992 with the maxim that even fascists did not commit such atrocities. From that moment on, the imaginary "Armenian fascism" would become an invariable component of the national historical discourse, designed to explain the "age-old aggression" of the neighbor. However, mobilization discourses and enemy images did not help Mammadov hold on to the presidency. His opponents used them with no less enthusiasm.

Let us return to Mutalibov and note that his resignation can be considered a triumph of the Popular Front only partially. The opposition sought power and was

not ready to make any compromises. In the euphoria of Mutalibov's resignation, the functionaries of the Popular Front did not realize that their resources were also very limited. Initially, many oppositionists intended to build on their success and achieve a transition to a parliamentary republic. This aspiration was justified by the view that with the continued threat of aggravation of the Karabakh conflict, the preservation of the institution of presidential power encouraged unnecessary and even dangerous political competition, and diverted attention and resources from the solution of the main problem.

But the Karabakh conflict, their opponents believed, on the contrary, requires not only preservation, but, moreover, expansion of the powers of the president. According to this position, strong and centralized power was required to resolve the conflict. At first, a compromise was reached. PFA leader Abulfaz Elchibey signed a protocol with the then head of government Hasan Hasanov on the creation of a coalition government and the distribution of powers between it and the National Council (*Milli Şura*). However, this decision was quickly reconsidered, and snap presidential elections were announced.

The presidential election campaign took just over two months. Officially, the main contender Abulfaz Elchibey, had three rivals. At first, it was Yagub Mammadov, acting president and chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan. His chances were finally nullified after Mutalibov's unsuccessful attempt to return to power on 14-15 May 1992. Armed supporters of the PFA marched to the Supreme Soviet and the first president left Azerbaijan, once again not risking the use of force. Subsequently, he lived in exile in Moscow for many years and only returned to Azerbaijan in 2012.

The baton of the "second" candidate was passed to Etibar Mammadov, the leader of the National Independence Party of Azerbaijan, NIPA (*Azərbaycan Milli İstiqlal Partiyası*), which was still organisationally forming but gaining popularity, a native of academic circles. Scientists, economists and journalists flocked to his party. In that period Mammadov was remembered for his open dismissal from the Popular Front, in the ranks of which he had been until 1991, and for his frank declaration of support for Heydar Aliyev in case he got the opportunity to run for election (Azadlig, 1992). However, he soon recused himself.

As a result, the main rival of Elchibey suddenly became the President of the Azerbaijan Academy of National Arts, corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences Nizami Suleymanov. This suddenness, randomness and chaos characterize the political processes in Azerbaijan in 1991-1992. It was a time of rapid change of candidates, a time of sudden ups and downs of old and new politicians, formation of new parties and a tendency to further fragmentation of the political field.

Discourse on enemies of the people in a new context

Despite the great popularity and large-scale use of the discourse about "enemies of the Azerbaijani people" under the President İlham Aliyev, it was constructed long before he came to power, and long before the short period of Yagub Mammadov's presidency. The Soviet discourses about the enemies (otherwise known as fascists) have gone through the procedure of ethnicization and were adapted to the new socio-political context, in which the long-lasting Karabakh conflict largely determined the memory and historical politics. In the same last years of the USSR and the first years of independence, the discourse on enemies was also adapted for the new political system, in which parties and groups in opposition to the ruling regime openly

existed. Soviet “alien” elements and enemies of the people were transformed into enemies of the Azerbaijani nation (as a rule “pro-Armenian”). There is an uncanny parallel between Stalin’s slogan about the strengthening of resistance of capitalist (i.e. enemy) elements as we move towards socialism and President Ilham Aliyev’s assertions that as Azerbaijan strengthens and develops, the number of those abroad who cannot put up with it grows. Moreover, the internal enemies of Azerbaijan (i.e. critics of the regime) benefit from the disruption of stability, chaos and unrest, on the wave of which they could return to power (President.az, 2020; President.az, 2019).



Official Meeting of the first president of Azerbaijan Ayaz Matalibov and the first president of Georgia Zviad Gamsakhurdia. 12 July 1991. Author: Shakh Aivazov. Source: The collection of digital photographs archive of National Parliamentary Library of Georgia

In 1992, Professor of Medicine Yagub Mammadov, calling on the population to come to their senses and not to support the opposition while at the same time appealing to parents with a request to “control the youth,” asserted that any conscientious person with Azerbaijani blood in his veins should be responsible not to call for rallies and not to participate in them himself. The front needs brave people, he added, connecting the conflict to internal politics (Xalq qəzeti, 1992e).

Representatives of the Popular Front, in their turn, actively used discourses about national traitors. The enemies, who had no moral right to represent the people, were partocrats who, after the country’s independence, could not give up their desire to rob the country and serve Moscow. Against the background of these enemies of the people, the opposition sought to present themselves as saviors and uncompromising fighters against injustice. This thesis became one of the cornerstones of the Popular Front’s political campaign. Oppositionists - nationalists and populists - created images of a great historical past, promised to restore the former greatness, restore historical justice; called to remember their roots thus attempting to construct new Turkic and Muslim identities. In such an enormous turmoil, there were few prospects for compromise.

Despite his militant rhetoric, Yagub Mammadov had no real resources to control the situation. The law enforcement agencies were controlled by the opposition.

Deputies of the National Council also staged periodic acts of disobedience. Mammadov had to rescind his decree to remove Interior Minister Tahir Aliyev, whom he accused of complicity with the Popular Front, as well as the arbitrary expulsion of regional heads of executive power and the appointment of oppositionists in their place. Popular Front activist Rahim Gaziyeu became head of the Defence Ministry. During a visit to Iran, where Mammadov met with Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosian and planned to conclude a ceasefire agreement, news came of the capture of Shusha by Armenian forces (de Waal, 2003). All opposing politicians in Azerbaijan did not fail to use this event for mutual accusations of betrayal.

Mammadov himself could not but realize that he had completely lost control over the situation. Under these circumstances, he could only support Ayaz Mutalibov's attempt to return to power. The failure of this ill-conceived attempt on 14-15 May 1992 actually cleared the way to power for the Popular Front. The rating of this opposition movement, which played the role of the savior of freedom and democracy, increased significantly. Later, under Heydar Aliyev, the actions of the Popular Front would be qualified as rebellion and seizure of power. But in May 1992, the euphoria of the virtually bloodless and quick seizure of state institutions created an atmosphere of the possibility of establishing people's power. This atmosphere was skilfully supported by opposition speakers. Only presidential candidate Nizami Suleimanov somewhat spoiled the favorable picture.

“Azerbaijan’s Zhirinovskiy”²¹

This is what Nizami Suleymanov was called. Sometimes the mention of this nickname made him furious, which he demonstrated on camera, not censoring his expressions (Akhundov J. Fieldnotes. 15.07.2014). But it was his rough manner of communication, in which he discussed social problems, that attracted many supporters to him. At the end of April 1992, according to a poll conducted by the Vozrozhdenie analytical center, 0.04% of voters were ready to vote for him, while 96.2% were ready to go to the polls. And in the elections held on 7 June 1992, he came second with 33.8% of the vote. Suleymanov immediately declared the election results falsified. At the same time, he did not recognise them as illegitimate.

What were the reasons for the lightning growth of his popularity? It was largely the same failed May putsch, which transferred to him some of the supporters of Yagub Mammadov, who supported Mutalibov. On 18 May, Mammadov was forced to resign, and Isa Gambarov, deputy chairman of the PFA, became chairman of the Supreme Soviet and acting president. Suleymanov was also supported by many old communists. Some voters voted not so much for him as against Abulfaz Elchibey, in a situation where the NIPA leader Etibar Mammadov recused himself.

Another important reason was his unbridled populism. He promised to bring prices back to Soviet levels. The slogan of his election campaign was “Elchibey gave you freedom and I will give you bread.”²² Such statements met with understanding among voters whose quality of life was deteriorating day by day. However, some statements of the leading scientist and corresponding member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, such as the promise to double the population within five years

²¹ Vladimir Zhirinovskiy (1946-2022), scandal-plagued Russian politician, founder and leader of the nationalist center-right Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR).

²² Interview with Zardusht Alizadeh about presidential elections and candidates in the 1990s. Baku, September 2019.

were not taken seriously. He did not forget about the main issue - the Karabakh conflict, promising to solve it within three months.

Zardusht Alizadeh recalls that Nizami Suleymanov was going to solve the Karabakh issue in his own way. He claimed to have invented a special cannon whose volleys would cause panic. After a couple of shots Armenians were expected to clear all the captured lands.²³ Suleymanov did not say what emotions the nearby Azerbaijani population of the region should feel at this time.

He did not take part in the 1993 elections. Explaining his position, he claimed that if Heydar Aliyev had taken part in the 1992 elections, he would not have stood as a candidate. In 1998, he rejoined the race for the presidency as the candidate of the pro-government forces. In the course of the campaign, he became noticeably radicalized in his statements. As a result, he came third, taking just over 8% of the vote from Etibar Mammadov, Heydar Aliyev's main opponent.

Abulfaz Elchibey: at the center of political processes

In Azerbaijani society, assessments of the personality of the second president²⁴ Abulfaz Elchibey (Aliyev) range from almost fanatical veneration to angry condemnation. All have their own arguments and reasons. Some consider him a selfless politician devoted to the ideas of freedom and democracy; a humanist who unconditionally sacrificed his political career to prevent the spilling of "brotherly blood" during the armed putsch of June 1993. Others, on the contrary, accuse him of political shortsightedness that brought the country to the brink of civil war; that it was his ill-considered actions that contributed to Heydar Aliyev's return to power. Some consider him a romantic, clearly unsuited to the role of head of state in an era of dramatic change. Since the late 1980s, his name has been firmly associated with the opposition Popular Front of Azerbaijan. He was not just the chairman of this mass movement, which transformed into a political party, but its ideological leader, who joined the fight against the Soviet regime in the 1970s, when the system seemed unshakable.

The socio-political movement Popular Front of Azerbaijan was formed on 17 July 1989 as a result of the unification of groups and activists of different ideological convictions. Why exactly Elchibey was given the position of the chairman remains to be guessed. By that time, he had already gained a certain notoriety for his contradictory statements and actions. On the one hand, Elchibey was a supporter of European and American models of democracy. In his election speeches in 1992, he repeatedly emphasized the priority of human rights and freedom of choice for every citizen.

However, the masses gathered in Azadlıq Meydanı (Freedom Square) were energized not by words about integration, but by passionate nationalist pan-Turkic statements. He spoke of creating a Great Turan, restoring historical justice, returning the nation to its real name, etc. Pan-Turkic ideas, which became popular in the context of the Karabakh conflict, irritated liberal-minded members of the movement. As a result, many left the movement in early 1990. Subsequent events allowed some of his opponents to argue that Elchibey's main task was to create conditions for Heydar Aliyev's return to power. After his ouster from power, he fled to his native village of Keleki (Ordubad district of Nakhchivan) but returned from this

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Not counting Yagub Mammadov and Isa Gambar, who were acting presidents.

voluntary exile to Baku in 1997. Thus, according to critics, he contributed to a much-needed split in Heydar Aliyev's opposition, which eventually decided to boycott the 1998 elections.

The Dissident or...

Even Elchibey's years of dissidence remain a topic for debate and contradictory assessments. His views on democracy or human rights were always placed in the context of ethno-nationalism. He saw the USSR as an empire that continued the Russification policy established during the tsarist years. His aim was to remind Azerbaijanis that they were first and foremost part of the Turkic world and believed that the Russian imperial power sought to erase the history of Azerbaijanis. He was impulsive in these views, often allowed himself moments of emotional outbursts, and then tried to explain them rationally. His way of thinking and consistent anti-Soviet stance was also likely formed by the trauma of the loss of his father in early childhood, Gadirgulu Aliyev, who went missing in 1945. Elchibey did not consider the war of 1941-1945 as the Great Patriotic War. It was, in his opinion, "alien" for Azerbaijanis.



The President of Azerbaijan Republic Abulfaz Elchibey, beginning of the 1990s. Author: Shakh Aivazov. Source: The collection of digital photographs archive of National Parliamentary Library of Georgia

This attitude towards the Second World War would form the basis of a new historical and memory politics which Elchibey tried to implement, as his opponents said, using national-Bolshevik methods, radical and uncompromising.²⁵ There were no celebratory veteran ceremonies or other festive events. The holiday was to be consigned to oblivion, and mention of it disappeared from the calendar. This policy would be severely criticized by Heydar Aliyev, who claimed that his predecessor had disrespected the hundreds of thousands who had died at the front:

Those people who temporarily came to power in Azerbaijan, including those who tried to forget the blood of hundreds of thousands of sons of the Azerbaijani people spilled in the Great Patriotic War, World War

²⁵ Interview with Zardusht Alizadeh. Baku, September 2019.

II, in the fight against fascism, the wounds they received, the sacrifices they suffered, the disrespect they showed to them - all of them have already been removed from power. Simply all this was a manifestation of disrespect to the people on the part of some individuals at that time, and I would even say, a kind of betrayal (Aliyevheritage.org, 1995).

Reproducing the Soviet discourse on the war, Heydar Aliyev often recalled the merits of cultural figures who continued to work for the benefit of the Motherland in those dramatic years. For example, at the jubilee dedicated to Uzeyir Hajibeyov, the President said: "During the Great Patriotic War - in 1941-1945, Uzeyir Hajibeyov wrote wonderful works - marches, songs to raise the patriotic spirit of our people, showed his merits in the victory over fascism, even bought an aircraft at his own expense and sent it to the front" (Aliyevheritage.org, 1995). Hajibeyov is considered to be the composer who created the modern music school in Azerbaijan and belongs to the pleiad of cultural and art figures whose memory was not dared to be encroached upon even by the most radical nationalists.

In March 1993, in his newspaper *Istiqlal*, Zardusht Alizadeh published an interview with Aziz Rasulov, the investigator in charge of the "Elchibey case" in 1975. The interrogator claimed that the conversations of Elchibey, then a history teacher at Azerbaijan State University, did not pose a real threat to the Soviet system. Elchibey's thoughts were mainly of a "low-brow" nationalistic nature, such as inferences about the nature of the origin of "animal" surnames among Russians, their lack of baths, so they bathed in barrels and so on (Istiqlal, 1992b). Heydar Aliyev himself partially confirms this statement, having stated at the meeting of the national security officers that he gave an order to release him as soon as he learnt the details of the case. In Aliyev's opinion, there were no grounds for the arrest other than irresponsible speech (Chernyavsky, 2003). At the same time, Elchibey, who was released in July 1976, still spent some time in prison.

One way or another, the dissident experience influenced relations between the first presidents, and in many ways determined the attitude of Azerbaijani society towards Abulfaz Elchibey. The controversy has not stopped to this day. Many years after the second president's death in 2013, blogger Emin Milli, known for his critical statements and one of the founders of the opposition media outlet *Maidan TV*, again initiated a discussion about President Elchibey's dissident past. Milli argued that he would not vote for a man who had betrayed his ideals, if he had any at all. Milli recalled a letter by Elchibey (then Abulfaz Aliyev), firmly forgotten by that time, published in the newspaper "Azerbaijan" in October 1993 (after Heydar Aliyev was elected president), addressed to the chairman of the KGB of Azerbaijan Vitaly Krasilnikov back in 1975. In this letter, the future president repents of his actions and asks for a chance to restore his membership in the Communist Party (Qavgazinfo.az, 2013).

This letter in no way corresponded to the image of a fiery fighter that had been created by that time, for example, by another opposition leader, Elchibey's associate, history professor Jamil Hasanli. In 2013, he was the main opponent of Ilham Aliyev in the presidential election and the leader of the opposition National Council of Democratic Forces. Elchibey's critics also used against him the fact that after his release he got a job at the Manuscripts Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR. Working in such institutions after serving time was usually impossible for dissidents. Supporters of the former president, who created an image of an uncompromising fighter for independence and democracy, spoke

about falsifications based on the use of some remarks of Abulfaz Aliyev at the trial. Obviously, the publication of this letter in 1993 immediately after Heydar Aliyev was elected president, in a situation when the KGB archives were closed, was a component of the “anti-Alchibeyev” campaign. The shadow on the former president and dissident, spread to the entire Popular Front party, which went into opposition after these elections. A similar, but much tougher and more aggressive policy of criticizing the opposition is pursued by the current President Ilham Aliyev.

On the way to triumph

But let us return to 1992. Mutalibov’s resignation created a situation when it was necessary to reform the apparatus of power. Elchibey at that moment was among the supporters of the elimination of presidential power and did not aspire to be a candidate for the post. However, presidential elections were still scheduled. According to contemporaries, Elchibey claimed in private conversations with his supporters that he knew the usual course of events. “I know you, now you will put me in the chair with a bang, and in a year, you will throw me out with a bang!” (Alizadeh, 2006). However, by that time he was in many ways a hostage of the situation. His name had become a symbol of the entire movement, thanks to the efforts of his comrades-in-arms. His very appearance at a rally and the cry of “Azadliq” were able to exalt the crowds, who often chanted El(!)chi(!)bey(!) in response. The slogan of that period was “Elchibey must run, Elchibey must win!”.

Gradually, his name grew into myths that are still alive among his supporters. For example, one of his many “philosophical sayings,” or at least one that was attributed to him. According to a popular version, one of the BBC journalists, having seen a reproduction of a crescent moon and a wolf in his office, asked Elchibey why exactly the wolf, an aggressive and predatory animal, was chosen as the totem of the Turkic ethnos. Elchibey allegedly answered that the English have a lion as a symbol of the nation. But the lion, called the king of beasts, is ready to jump to the right or left for the sake of three kilograms of meat. The wolf, on the other hand, can never be trained. It values freedom and dignity. The wolf will either die of boredom in a cage or break free. This statement attributed to Elchibey reflects his impulsiveness and emotionality when it came to interpreting national ideas and images.

He, for example, believed that the population of the USSR was in a worse situation than slaves. After all, the latter were valuable to their masters, who fed them and took care of their health. He was a sincere believer and militant pan-Turkic and ethno-nationalist. He laid the foundations of the Turkic identity of Azerbaijanis, in the context of the conflict and popularization of the enemy image, with little concern for the consequences and no thought for how his calls were to be perceived by the non-Turkic communities of Azerbaijan. The renaming of the state language from Azerbaijani to Turkic, which took place after Elchibey was elected president, also fits into the same logic. The contents of the president’s “table speeches” were instantly disseminated in Azerbaijani society. Therefore, in many public speeches Elchibey emphasized the “multinationality” of Azerbaijan, which set it apart from Armenia. For the latter, he predicted imminent demise due to its mono-ethnicity.

He also assured that conditions would be created in Azerbaijan for the development of culture of all nations, ensuring the rights and freedoms of every citizen (Azadliq, 1992). Both before the elections and when he was president, he could raise the problem of the situation of Uighurs in China, the powerlessness of

“Turk compatriots” in “South Azerbaijan” (northwest Iran), or express his opinion on the “ethnogenesis of the Talysh” which, in his opinion, originated from the mixing of Turks with the Persians.²⁶ When he emphasized the “pure bloodedness” of an ethnic group, racist overtones could be heard in his words. Kurds also received unflattering comments, especially after the Armenian armed forces seized the Lachin region, where they lived compactly. Kurds at that time were accused of collaborating with the enemy. The slogan “a Turk has no friends but a Turk” became a key component of the nationalist discourse and created tension in the country. As a result, the Russian-speaking population, or, for example, the majority of ethnic Lezgins, did not vote for Elchibey. Criticism of the rhetoric used by Elchibey is still used by the authorities to this day for positive self-representation. The current authorities claim that Elchibey’s speeches brought the country to the brink of disintegration and contrast them with a policy of multiculturalism that supposedly guarantees stability and equality for all citizens (Multiculturalism.preslib.az, 2024).

Being a certified historian, Elchibey often turned to historical subjects in search of arguments for the myths he created. This approach was most in demand when seeking answers to accusations of inciting inter-ethnic conflicts. He was an experienced improviser, using emotions and skillfully juggling facts and figures. Claiming that he was giving Azerbaijanis back their long-forgotten identity, Elchibey reminded the “people” (by which he meant only ethnic Azerbaijanis, or “Azerbaijani Turks”) that they were not inferior to the developed nations of Europe. “We” (i.e. “Turks”), the president claimed, should correspond to the level of the English and the French (Azadliq, 1992). All such statements were accompanied by emotional gesticulation and facial expressions. Elchibey lamented that “we” (i.e. Azerbaijani Turks) were always taught that Georgians are real men, Armenians are smart, but nothing will come out of “us.” “Aren’t we the most unfortunate people?”, Elchibey asked indignantly (Ibid.). He used historical narratives created by Soviet Azerbaijani scholars in search of arguments, while fiercely criticizing them. He argued that Azerbaijanis had created many empires: Atabeks, Elkhanovs, Ak-Koyunlu, Kara-Koyunlu, Qajars. The Azerbaijani people should restore their historical identity, historical self-knowledge. Only by comprehending its history, will the nation know itself. At the same time, the way leading to these achievements is freedom and democracy, he claimed (Ibid.).

Elchibey publicly confessed his adoration for such far-right Turkish nationalists and pan-Turkists as Alparslan Türkeş (founder of the Nationalist Movement Party and its youth organization Bozgurud - Grey Wolves). In 1992-1993, a branch of this party operated in Azerbaijan, and its own Azerbaijani party Bozgurud was created, headed by Interior Minister Iskander Hamidov.

Elchibey’s political program

Elchibey’s program for the presidential elections was announced in the pages of the opposition newspaper Azadliq, and it was based on the ideology of the Popular Front. The plans included restoration of the “historical name” of the people and language (i.e. renaming it from Azerbaijani to Turkic). De-ideologization of Azerbaijani society was proposed, implying its desovietization and decommunization, which was to be carried out, among other things, by methods of nationalization and Turkization

²⁶ Interview with eyewitness to the events, former Musavat party member Rasim Mirzaev, Baku March 2020.

of historical narratives such as renaming of toponyms. Any non-Turkic toponyms were rejected, for example, in the south-east of the country, in the regions where ethnic Talyshs live compactly. In fact, it was a development of the ideas laid down in the Constitutional Act on the Restoration of State Independence, where modern Azerbaijan was declared the heir of the Democratic Republic of 1918-1920. The Soviet period became a time of oppression, huge damage to the country, plundering of its wealth, etc. The discourse of occupation and imperialist policy of dividing the “historical lands” of Azerbaijan between Russia and Iran was also promoted. These countries were constantly criticized and relations with them were very tense until Elchibey’s resignation from the presidency in 1993 (Azadliq, 1992).

The final version of the program asserted the principle of a united Azerbaijan, but without emphasis on the name “North Azerbaijan” for the former Azerbaijani SSR. The united Azerbaijan meant not only the borders recognized by the international community, but also the territories inhabited by ethnic Azerbaijanis that were part of Iran, designated as “South Azerbaijan.” In 1998, the former president would lead the Movement for a United Azerbaijan. The Karabakh issue was also tacitly linked to the issues of South Azerbaijan. In his “table speeches” Elchibey directly said that the way of liberation of Karabakh lies through Tabriz (a city in Iran - the center of Azerbaijani-speaking provinces). Following his logic, after being elected president, Elchibey appointed historian Nasib Nasibli, known for his chauvinistic and anti-Iranian views, as ambassador to Iran (Heydar Aliyev recalled him in 1994).

Many current official ideological narratives and civilizational discourses were developed by Popular Front activists, and were actively used in election campaigns. The very next day after the Khojaly tragedy (February 1992), Elchibey made a statement about the ongoing aggression of Russian-Armenian forces and actually voiced the figure of 20% of occupied Azerbaijani lands for the first time (Azadliq, 1992). It is worth noting that this was the period when Shusha and Lachin were still under the control of Azerbaijani forces.

Both Elchibey, Heydar Aliyev and now Ilham Aliyev explained large expenditures on the army by the necessity of solving the Karabakh issue according to the principle “if you want peace, prepare for war.” Elchibey said that no one will engage with a weak nation (Azadliq, 1992). Literally the same words can be heard in almost any speech of Ilham Aliyev (President.az, 2024). The leader of the Popular Front both before, during and after the election campaign adhered to an uncompromising position on Karabakh and agreed only to the status of cultural autonomy. It allowed the deployment of peacekeeping forces, but not from Russia and only on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border. This emphasized that control over the Karabakh region was an internal Azerbaijani affair. As part of his election campaign, Elchibey promised to solve the Karabakh problem in three months, claiming that Azerbaijani forces would simply surround the rebellious region, establish a complete blockade, after which the Armenians would have to surrender to the mercy of the victor.²⁷ In 2023, the Azerbaijani authorities actually implemented this program.

Under Elchibey, a section entitled “Morality and Religion” (Azadliq, 1992) appeared in the election program and ideology of the Popular Front for the first time. It contained the following provisions: the “national and moral foundations” of Azerbaijanis should be studied on a scientific basis and become the basis for nation-state building, the development of the legal system and the realization of cultural

²⁷ Interview with Zardusht Alizadeh, Baku, September 2019.

uplift; it should become a protection against any external corrosive influence, immorality, the spread of cultural norms contrary to “national-historical self-consciousness” and national morality; the restoration of places of religious worship; the creation of conditions for the study and preaching of Islam related to the ancient traditions of the Azerbaijani people. This appeal to Islam was prompted by hopes of solidarity and assistance from wealthy Muslim countries and has been subsequently used by all presidents.



President Elchibey and the head of Musavat party Isa Gambar. Baku, beginning of the 1990s. Author: Shakh Aivazov. Source: The collection of digital photographs archive of National Parliamentary Library of Georgia

Another pre-election promise was to declare December 31 as the Day of Solidarity of World Azerbaijanis to commemorate the dismantling of the border fortifications on the USSR-Iran border in Nakhchivan in 1989. Although legal decisions had already been taken on this occasion at the end of 1991, Elchibey and the Popular Front sought to appropriate this crucial historical-political myth for themselves. In 1992, Solidarity Day was celebrated at the state level for the first time. Today, the Day of Solidarity on December 31 is firmly linked to the name of Heydar Aliyev by the efforts of official propaganda. In some texts one can find references to Aliyev’s issuance of the relevant law in 1993, but without specifying the specific date and place in the register of normative-legal acts (President.az, 2024). Often, on this day, the question of the prehistory of the holiday and the events of 1989 is not even raised.

The final push

Armed detachments of the Azerbaijani Popular Front did not allow Mutalibov to return to power. He was forced to leave the republic for many years. On 18 May 1992, Isa Gambarov, deputy chairman of the PFA, was elected chairman of parliament instead of Yagub Mammadov and became the temporary head of state. The opposition actually took power into its own hands, and now the administrative resource was on its side.

The triumph of the opposition was somewhat spoiled by the news of Lachin's loss.²⁸ Newspapers loyal to the Popular Front began to spread rumors of Kurdish betrayal. Against this background, on 21 May, the "Meeting of small peoples of Azerbaijan" ("Azsayılı xalqların nümayəndələri ilə görüş") (Azadlıq, 1992; Azərbaycan, 1992) was held at the Republic Palace.²⁹ In their speeches, the heads of ethnic communities spoke of their hopes and faith in the new government. The congress became a public platform for expressing loyalty to the dominant group (Azerbaijanis), as well as loyalty to the common homeland, where all ethnic groups were said to have lived side by side in friendship for centuries. The congress was also memorable for the anti-Russian speeches of Iskander Hamidov, the head of the Interior Ministry (an ethnic Kurd).³⁰ He decided to combine threats with recognition of Kurdish loyalty, promising to send the latter to blow up the Kremlin and bring Moscow to its knees if necessary (İstiqlal, 1992b). Representatives of the Russian community also spoke at the congress, although the Russian-speaking population (which should include ethnic Russian-speaking Azerbaijanis) turned away from Elchibey because of his nationalist statements. There were more cases of ethnic discrimination in state institutions during the PFA period. The image of Russia as the main hostile neighbor in turn contributed to tensions in the multiethnic society. On 7 June 1992, the first democratic presidential elections were held, as it was written in the press of those years (Azadlıq, 1992; Azərbaycan, 1992; Rustemov, 1992). Heydar Aliyev supported Elchibey during the May events but did not vote for him personally because of his absence from his home Nakhchivan. His earlier support did not prevent him from declaring the 1992 elections unfair. The winner received 60.9% of the votes, while his nearest pursuer Nizami Suleymanov received 33.8%.

Today, Elchibey's image is significantly mythologised and is used by the authorities and the opposition to defend their positions and criticize their opponents. For some, his name represents honesty and incorruptibility; others, on the contrary, associate his name with rampant corruption (recognising that Elchibey was not personally involved in it), as well as parochialism, nepotism, total incompetence of personnel appointed on the principle of loyalty to the party and its leader.

Presidential campaign of 1993, act one: The fall of Elchibey

In 1906-1907, the magazine *Füyuzat* (Wealth) was published in Baku with the financial backing of oil producer Haji Zeynalabdin Tagiyev. Its editor was one of the ideologues of pan-Turkism Alibek Huseynzadeh. On the pages of the magazine he formulated ideas that would later serve as the ideological and symbolic justification of the colors of the flag of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR, 1918-1920). The modern Republic of Azerbaijan is officially the heir to the ADR and its flag. Huseynzadeh wrote that "we" (as a Turkic nation) would have Turkic thinking (symbolized by the color blue), Islamic faith (green) and French appearance, or in another interpretation, European style (red) (Hüseynov, 2021). In a later interpretation, the color red means progress and modernity.

²⁸ A city on the border with Armenia and the administrative center of the district. It is generally believed that a significant part of the population of this area was ethnic Kurds.

²⁹ Concert complex and venue for state events. Former Lenin Palace. Since 2004, the Heydar Aliyev Palace.

³⁰ Hamidov served in the police during the Soviet years. In addition to his involvement in the PFA and the leadership of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, he was also the founder and chairman of the far-right nationalist party *Boz Gurd* ("Grey Wolf").

This combination of ideas, not always close to each other, was largely reflected in Elchibey's actions and endeavors in domestic and foreign policy. Trying to cover all the bases, he issued the Law on Protection of Rights and Freedoms of Small Nations and Ethnic Groups, which allowed the creation of "national-cultural" organizations and communities; he changed the name of the language from Azerbaijani to Turkic. He spoke a lot about democracy (Legalacts.az, 1992), but turned a blind eye to physical violence against journalists by Iskander Hamidov, the head of the Interior Ministry, whom he patronized. Elchibey's supporters cite a number of arguments in favor of his politics, which can be summarized as follows:

1. Creation of an unshakable basis for Azerbaijani statehood;
2. Creation of a regular army - the guarantor of independence;
3. Introduction of a national currency;
4. Creation of new curricula and textbooks on a "national basis" (i.e. nationalization of narratives for schools) and a standardized test system for entry to universities;
5. And finally, economic development. As one piece of evidence, it is pointed out that at the time he left the presidency, over 1 tonne of gold and jewelry was stored in the National Fund.

Opponents criticize the introduction of the test system, which has eliminated corruption in university admissions and opened the way to higher education for many young people. Critics note the primitivization of the examination process and the rapid adaptation of corrupt practices to the new rules. As for the concept of national education, desovietization was accompanied by a radical Turkification of the historical narrative.

By the autumn of 1992, the Azerbaijani offensive on the Karabakh front had effectively run out of steam, and from February 1993 it was replaced by a new streak of setbacks and retreats. It was at this point that a conflict arose between Elchibey and Suret Huseynov - a colonel, decorated National Hero of Azerbaijan and special representative of the president of Karabakh. He was made responsible for the failures at the front, removed from the post of commander of the army corps and deputy prime minister. All this happened as a result of the winter offensive operation, which was doomed to failure and carried out at the insistence of the president. At the same time, the economic crisis in the country was rapidly deepening, accompanied by inflation and rising prices.

These circumstances were used by supporters of the NIPA and its leader Etibar Mammadov, as well as members of the New Azerbaijan Party (*Yeni Azərbaycan Partiyası*, YAP) led by Heydar Aliyev. In foreign policy, by this time Elchibey had had time to quarrel with the leaders of the Central Asian republics, whom he accused of dictatorial tendencies; with his harsh statements and excursions into history he almost pushed neighboring Iran to establish allied relations with Armenia; he continued his traditional attacks on Russia; relations with the United States were also far from ideal.

In early April 1993, Armenian armed forces seized the Kelbajar district outside the Nagorno-Karabakh autonomy, after which Elchibey imposed a state of emergency in the country and censored the press. Despite attempts to control the situation, anti-government rallies continue in Baku and in a number of regions, where political demands were increasingly voiced alongside economic ones.

Elchibey was increasingly out of touch with reality, as can be seen in Elchibey's interview with Dmitry Furman for *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* on 5 May 1993 (*Nezavisimaya*

Gazeta, 1993). The president claimed that the situation in the country was stable, arguing that after the loss of the Kelbajar district Azerbaijan was not engulfed by popular unrest as it had been after the territorial losses in 1992. But it was after the loss of Kelbajar district that Suret Huseynov stopped obeying the orders of the President and ministers, accusing them of surrendering lands to the enemy.

In the same interview, the president expressed his belief that the NIPA and YAP are loyal to the law, but that their leaders have shortcomings that prevent them from enjoying popular support and coming to power. Communism is ideologically weak, he argued, and Islamic fundamentalism is absent as a political trend. Elchibey only recognised the weakness of government cadres. He explained this by the fact that the people's movement in Azerbaijan, as in other republics, was formed from below, not from above, as a result of which there were no trusting relations with the intelligentsia. At the same time, he expressed his conviction that the situation was changing for the better.



People welcome Heydar Aliyev, the beginning of the 1990s. Author: Shakh Aivazov. Source: The collection of digital photographs archive of National Parliamentary Library of Georgia

The situation was indeed changing, but not in the way imagined by the man about whom the national writer Akram Aylisli wrote that the Turkic world was pregnant with a prophet and his name was Elchibey (Alizadeh, 2006). At the end of May 1993, the last units of the Russian 104th Airborne Division were withdrawn from Ganja, where Suret Huseynov, who was defying the Baku authorities, was staying. Deciding to take advantage of this circumstance, the authorities sent about 4,000 soldiers of internal troops and employees of the Ministry of National Security to disarm the rebellious national hero. Thus began Operation Tufan (Storm), which ended in total collapse. The clashes led to the deaths of 35 to 80 people, according to various sources. Prosecutor General Ikhtiyar Shirinov was captured by Huseynov. He was forced to issue an arrest warrant for the incumbent president, after which units loyal to Huseynov moved on Baku.

The head of the government Panah Huseynov and chairman of the Parliament Isa Gambar resigned one after another. Elchibey insistently asks Heydar Aliyev to

come for negotiations with Suret Huseynov. He left for the talks when the rebel units were several tens of kilometers away from Baku. However, Huseynov was adamant. On the night of 18 June, President Abulfaz Elchibey unexpectedly for many actors, including Heydar Aliyev, flew to Nakhchivan, where he went to his village Keleki. There he spent the next four years, himself the legitimate president of Azerbaijan, and his impeachment and removal from power became the reason for his enmity with Heydar Aliyev.

Third President Heydar Aliyev: The biography of a politician as a component of historical narrative and official ideology

The official biography of Heydar Aliyev has long become one of the main state narratives, the most important component of Azerbaijan's recent history and memory politics. The biography of the third president is enriched from year to year and transmitted to the mass consciousness by a huge army of scholars, journalists, youth and public activists, as well as teachers at secondary and higher educational institutions. The latter are almost all members of the ruling party Yeni Azerbaijan (YAP), to which they are voluntarily and compulsorily enrolled.

In recent years, Heydar Aliyev's biography has been studied at secondary schools not only in history lessons, but also as part of various collective events organized by the executive authorities in cooperation with teachers. A programme has been developed to study the heritage of the Great Leader and a new scientific discipline, "Aliyevology," has been created. Schoolchildren are told an idealized biography of Heydar Aliyev, which begins with receiving an excellent school certificate (all schools have copies of it) and goes on to his "wise steps" on the way to creating and strengthening an independent Azerbaijani state. In general, Heydar Aliyev's biography is presented as a chronicle of unchanging successes, life victories and tireless activity for the benefit of independent Azerbaijan.

An important place in this biography is given to the Soviet period, when, as First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Azerbaijan SSR, he led the republic between 1969 and 1982; his subsequent promotion and election as a member of the highest state body, the Politburo, in 1982; and his assumption of the post of First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR. It is generally believed that his move to Moscow did not prevent him from retaining control of the republic, where his unremarkable protégé, Kamran Bagirov, whose name is not even mentioned in school history textbooks, was in power.

The next important life stage of the "great leader" is the period of rupture with the head of the USSR Mikhail Gorbachev. At that stage Aliyev fell out of grace and by the end of 1987 had lost all posts, privileges and influence. This is the moment of dramatic climax. According to the rules of the genre, the hero must endure difficulties and successfully overcome them. This is the most difficult period in his biography, full of dangers, threats and even risk to life. Within the framework of the official biography, all these difficulties he experienced because he tirelessly defended the interests of Azerbaijan at a time when the influence of the Armenian lobby on Gorbachev was constantly growing and its representatives were doing everything to remove Aliyev from power. Members of the lobby knew, the authors of the biography argue, that Aliyev would never allow Karabakh to fall under Armenian control.

The different lines of the narrative come together. The selfless struggle for the good of Azerbaijan within the Soviet reality and the constant focus on Azerbaijan

after leaving the leadership of the republic. The confrontation for control over Karabakh, in which the Armenian side was more successful due to Aliyev's ouster. Finally, the beginning of a new phase of the struggle, culminating in the revival of the independent Republic of Azerbaijan (the continuity is built from the Republic of 1918-20) with Aliyev as its main architect. This mythologised version of the third president's biography was created immediately after his return to power in 1993. But the cult of personality of Heydar Aliyev flourished under his successor and son Ilham Aliyev.

Return to power: the start

The difficulties were not limited to his forced retirement and subsequent fall from grace in Moscow.³¹ In Azerbaijan, Aliyev's critics also emerged among those whose ascendancy he had helped to elevate when he was first secretary of the CPA. Speaking at a parliamentary session in June 1993 and calling for national unity in difficult and dangerous days for the homeland, he assured that he would not take revenge on anyone. He is above that:

There is talk about me in some circles that if Heydar Aliyev takes any post in Azerbaijan again, he will take revenge on someone. He will treat badly those who were against him in his time or treated him badly. I declare before you and all Azerbaijani people with all responsibility that there is no sense of revenge in my nature. It is just that some people have created this artificially and it is obvious that they want not only to vilify me, but also to separate us. I promise you that I will never lock myself into a sense of revenge. If someone once treated me wrongly, did something to me, believe me, I have forgiven them long ago. (Aliyevheritage.org, 2024).

The first step on his way back to the political stage was his speech at a press conference at the Azerbaijani Permanent Mission in Moscow, the day after the January 1990 tragedy. The meeting at the Permanent Mission was organized by Lala-Shovket Hajiyeva, who in turn began her political career with these events. She was one of Aliyev's closest associates, but later moved into open opposition to him. Heydar Aliyev condemned both Azerbaijani and top political leadership of the USSR for inactivity, failure to use resources to prevent the tragedy and aggression against their own civilians. He blamed them for the deaths of civilians, and called for immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops. In Zardusht Alizadeh's opinion, this speech became a cornerstone in the political-ideological justification of the necessity of Heydar Aliyev's return to power. His actions were presented in such a way that unlike the corrupt leadership he was not afraid to be together with the people and openly expose the perpetrators of the tragedy. Public criticism of negligent officials was also approved.

Nakhchivan springboard

In July 1990, Heydar Aliyev returned to Azerbaijan. After staying in Baku for a few days and facing a very cold reception, Aliyev retreated to his small homeland of Nakhchivan. In the first "democratic" multi-party autumn elections of 1990, he

³¹ Some versions of the biography claim that Heydar Aliyev himself resigned in protest against Gorbachev's policies, which further romanticizes his image.

was elected to the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan SSR representing Nakhchivan. Using his name and experience, Heydar Aliyev skilfully maneuvered between the old apparatchiks and the “dembloc” represented by the frontists. At the session of the Supreme Soviet of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic opened under his chairmanship on 17 November 1990, a few fateful decisions were made. The words Soviet Socialist were removed from the name of the republic. The Supreme Soviet was renamed into the Supreme Assembly. The most important decision was the adoption of the tricolor flag of the times of the first republic (ADR) as the state flag.

A petition was also submitted to the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan SSR to approve these decisions at the state level. Mutalibov, who was at the tail end of events, signed the relevant laws in February 1991. Then, Nakhchivan stubbornly boycotted the referendum on the preservation of the USSR. At the same time, Ayaz Mutalibov sought support from the Centre and Aliyev’s actions could not but irritate him. In the summer of 1991, relations with Mutalibov became even more strained. Aliyev, who had come to Baku for the session of the Supreme Soviet, was obstructed from speaking and returned to Nakhichevan.

On 3 September 1991, Heydar Aliyev was elected chairman of the Supreme Assembly of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. The only non-Azerbaijani official who congratulated him was Levon Ter-Petrosyan, Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Armenia. Aliyev managed to agree with him on the cessation of clashes on the border and the return of captured cattle. Official Baku considered such independence unnecessary and organized an economic blockade of the autonomy. In response, Nakhchivan again resorted to the boycott method, this time with regard to the presidential elections. Mutalibov did not go further than a threat to bring the Supreme Assembly to its senses.

The worse the situation was, the higher the popularity of Heydar Aliyev became. After Mutalibov’s resignation and the decision on presidential elections, the first speeches in favor of Heydar Aliyev’s return to power began. These demonstrations were organized by Neimat Panahov, a worker popular among the protest masses at that time. The main slogan of his supporters was the cancellation of the article of the Constitution on the upper age limit of 65 years, which did not allow Aliyev to stand as a candidate.³² Everyone, including Elchibey, spoke about the undemocratic nature of this clause, but everyone was interested in keeping it in force. This clause was canceled by Heydar Aliyev himself when he was acting president. As a result, the rallies stopped, and after Mutalibov’s attempt to regain power, Heydar Aliyev supported Abulfaz Elchibey. Alizadeh lamented in one of his articles in the *Istiglal* newspaper that Heydar Aliyev would return to power anyway (Alizadeh, 1992) and it was better to let him do it sooner before it happened under more difficult conditions for the republic.

After the election of Abulfaz Elchibey as president, Heydar Aliyev continued to govern Nakhchivan virtually independently, gradually getting rid of the protégés of the Popular Front. Elchibey accused Aliyev of almost separatism, attempts to separate Nakhchivan, numerous visits to Iran, so disliked by the Front and contrary to national interests, and frequent telephone conversations with the head of Armenia, while Aliyev never met with the head of Azerbaijan.

On 16 October 1992, the newspaper *Ses* (Voice) published an appeal of known intellectual figures of the republic (the so-called “Letter 91” (Anl.az, 2024) to Aliyev

³² We can safely assume that this article appeared in the constitution precisely because of the desire of some politicians to limit Aliyev’s claims.

with a request to return to big politics in such a difficult hour for the country. Aliyev did not give his consent. Some time later, the events that became the peak of confrontation between the two Aliyevs took place. After the Nakhchivan Supreme Assembly refused to approve Siyavush Mustafayev, a protégé of official Baku, as head of the Interior Ministry, forces (Kudrjavcev, 2003) loyal to the Popular Front occupied the Interior Ministry building and a number of other state institutions. Aliyev's reaction was immediate and cold-headed. After the address to the people, many thousands of support rallies began, which ended with Elchibey's retreat and the moral victory of the head of Nakhchivan. Later he resorted to it more than once.

On 21 November 1992, the founding congress of YAP (New Party of Azerbaijan) was held in Nakhchivan. This event is considered the starting point in the establishment of the modern political system of Azerbaijan. It was the YAP that became an example of an exemplary political force that skilfully conducted opposition activities. This party was headed by Heydar Aliyev, who initiated the establishment of its branches in other parts of the country. Initially, after he was asked to lead the party, he delayed a long period of reflection to demonstrate how reluctant and forced he was to take this decision.

A rapid comeback to capital politics

After the failed attempt to disarm the forces loyal to the rebel Colonel Suret Huseynov in Ganja and the latter's demands for the immediate resignation of the highest officials of the state, Elchibey began to persistently ask Heydar Aliyev to come to the capital to organize a mediation mission. Although Heydar Aliyev did not immediately agree, he arrived in Baku on 9 June 1993. Probably, he was still stalling to check the reaction of his supporters and opponents. In the end, according to the official version, only at the insistent demand of the people and taking into account the difficult situation, he was forced to shoulder the burden of responsibility. Already at the meeting of the Supreme Soviet on 13 June he explained his arrival by requests of Elchibey and demand of the people.

After that Aliyev left for a meeting with Suret Huseynov. Almost all researchers and experts agree that Aliyev outplayed the politically inexperienced Huseynov, using his resources to put pressure on the country's leadership. In fact, the mediation mission failed. One of the parties lost everything. After the resignation of the head of the government, the chairman of the Supreme Soviet also resigned. It was this post that Aliyev needed. The powers of the president were transferred to the head of the parliament in an emergency situation. Heydar Aliyev was elected Chairman of the Supreme Soviet.

Elchibey decided to reshuffle his cards and suddenly left the capital, flatly refusing to return to Baku despite numerous requests and even a visit by a delegation from the Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan. On 24 June Etibar Mammadov (one of Aliyev's supporters at that time) read out a demand to transfer the powers of the head of state to Heydar Aliyev. Aliyev's return to power was legally formalized in 15 days. All subsequent actions were aimed at additional legitimisation of the new power at the legislative level. There was no need to fight for support from the population. Aliyev had mass support at that moment.

Four years later, on 27 June 1997, the day of Aliyev's election as Chairman of the Supreme Soviet (15 June 1993) was declared "National Salvation Day" and included in the list of public holidays. The first large-scale celebration took place in 1998.

Aliyev himself replied to questions about the cult of personality that he could not forbid people to love him, to rejoice the end of the civil war and the emergence of hopes for a better future. This day became an important component of the new historical-political myth and related commemorative practices. It simultaneously glorified Aliyev's return, emphasized its necessity and pointed to the perpetrators of the state collapse - politicians from the Popular Front who have become oppositionists. Starting in 1998, the opposition was called a destructive force with which it was impossible to enter into a constructive dialogue.

“I promise nothing to anyone...”

In 1992, Yagub Mammadov spoke the right words about the need for unity and recalled Soviet slogans (for example, “Everything for the front, everything for victory”). However, he was little known to the Azerbaijani electorate and his statements were not listened to very much. Given the conditions under which he returned to power in 1993, Heydar Aliyev did not need to wage an intensive election campaign. And he had no rivals. Two candidates, unknown to the general public, were registered. The first of them was the leader of the United Azerbaijan party Kerrar Abilov, associate professor of the Azerbaijan Pedagogical Institute of Russian Language and Literature, campaigning on right-wing nationalist positions. The second was Zakir Tagiyev, the leader of the Gummet (Energy) party, which has no relation to its famous social-democratic predecessor that was active in the beginning of the 20th century, and which came out with a total privatization programme.



The President of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev and The President of Georgia Eduard Shevardnadze. Author: Shakh Aivazov. Source: The collection of digital photographs archive of National Parliamentary Library of Georgia

Thus, Heydar Aliyev could not bother himself with loud promises within the framework of the campaign. In 2003, a journalist of the Vesti newspaper wrote that Heydar Aliyev's slogan was “I will give you what you want” (Trushin, 1997). However, such a slogan was not reflected in the press of that time (Azerbaijan, 1993; Azerbaijan, 1993; Azerbaijan, 1993). On the contrary, if we compile a short list of theses from his speeches, we can identify the following narratives: Aliyev did not want to return to power, but he was urgently invited. Therefore, he cannot

and will not promise anything. The situation is extremely difficult. But since he was invited, he will do everything to justify the trust given to him. He is ready to give up everything, even his life for the good of the country. But is everyone else ready? Everyone should unite for the sake of saving the Motherland!

In 1993, Heydar Aliyev acted strategically. Programme speeches were made to sound as if they were not devised for the sake of winning the elections of 1993. He already considered this campaign won and even refused support from initiative groups. "Why do we need them? 15-20 people will go around and say how good Aliyev is? People already know me" (Ibid.) he claimed.

In order to hold on to power, it was necessary to lay a solid foundation and find support from different segments of the population, for which purpose a new historical, political and cultural discourse was created. New myths were constructed, old myths were revitalized, history had to be rewritten. At that time the basis of political myths such as that there was no alternative to the incumbent power, and that chaos would surely descend in case of a win by the incompetent and nationalistic opposition were laid. Heydar Aliyev immediately began to work for the future. Unlike the controversial Elchibey, Heydar Aliyev was an experienced orator capable of clearly defining the key components of the state ideology and domestic policy. These included the following:

1. Appeal to Islam. Here the factor that the majority of the population of Azerbaijan were Muslim and the importance of the religion increased rapidly with the collapse of the USSR was taken into account.
2. Youth policy. Formation of a condition of loyalty in the youth environment, aimed, among other things, at narrowing the social base of the opposition.
3. National policy aimed at stopping the "tendencies of the country's disintegration." In the same context, guarantees for the then still influential Russian-speaking minority were outlined. This was mainly about security and preservation of education in Russian (it was also a friendly overture towards Russia).
4. A new cultural and educational discourse, largely freed from the Soviet ideological legacy. It envisaged a revision of the radical anti-Soviet discourse of the Elchibey era and the content of the Act of Independence of 18 October 1991. Already on 15 June, Aliyev declared from the rostrum of parliament that Azerbaijan was bound to become a fully independent, democratic state, for which there was "our science, culture, historical traditions and the source of our faith - Islam" (Aliyevheritage.org, 2024).

Adjustments in the policy of desovietization

All these components formed the basis of the official discourse, to which the relevant memory politics and various commemorative practices that are still relevant today were subordinated. To fulfill these tasks, Heydar Aliyev held several landmark meetings and made several important statements in 1993. There was a change of attitude in assessments of the Soviet past, which under Elchibey had been completely crossed out. For Aliyev, to agree with the interpretation of the Soviet past exclusively in negative meanings meant recognising his own responsibility during his 13-year leadership of the country. Instead, this period would be presented as exemplary. It is not by chance that when speaking about the successes and achievements of

the past, Aliyev mainly spoke about the period of 1970s when he himself ruled the republic. Successes in oil and other industries, opening of workplaces, and gasification of the country were especially noted. Thus, the foundation was laid for a dual policy of representing the Soviet past, in the context of which both negative and positive features were emphasized. The system as a whole was criticized. But all stories related to Aliyev's personal activities were described in a purely positive way. The successes of the Soviet period were associated not with the general Soviet socio-economic processes, but specifically with the strong-willed and patriotic activity of Heydar Aliyev.

A characteristic reflection of the changed historical discourse on the Soviet period can be considered Heydar Aliyev's emotional and harsh answer to People's Front deputy Ibrahim Ibrahimli in a live broadcast at a parliamentary session on 29 September 1993: "For 74 years, everything was destroyed here [in Azerbaijan]? Or maybe you have built everything here? And the land where you live, and the housing, and the school where you studied and worked, and this building - all this was created during 74 years. And what have you created? Everything needs to be properly evaluated. 74 years [of Soviet power] is the history of the Azerbaijani people, our history. How many generations have changed, how many things have been built and created in 74 years. And what right do you have to cross out these 74 years? What right do you have? For what merits? Tell me, what were the merits of you and your leader Elchibey? Show me what tree you planted? Where did you put water? What kind of house did you build, what kind of building?" (Aliyevheritage.org, 2024).

"It's already two months since there is no president"

The more Elchibey remained in Keleki, and continued to call himself president, the harsher Heydar Aliyev's tone became. Aliyev's order to disband 33 volunteer battalions in Karabakh sympathetic to the Popular Front contributed to the tension. It is possible that rumors about Elchibey's alcoholism and his inability to reason soberly began to circulate at Aliyev's instigation. In July, a special commission issued a verdict on Elchibey's responsibility for the bloodshed in Ganja and an impeachment referendum was scheduled for 29 August. Heydar Aliyev talked about impeachment at the republic-wide meeting on 24 August. He argued that it was necessary for the observance of legality and democracy, although there were already good reasons for the removal of the president.

Heydar Aliyev emphasized that he did not want to "exert any influence or pressure either on the people or on individual voters." He only spoke about the current situation, "that the president has been absent for more than two months, and [he] is acting as chairman of the Parliament of Azerbaijan and exercising the powers of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan." The incumbent president, he emphasized, had fled at a very difficult moment for the republic. In the first days after his return to Baku, Aliyev accused the republic's leadership of appointing incompetent officials, but already in August he held Elchibey personally responsible. His predecessor knew about lawlessness but turned a blind eye to it. Aliyev urged the people to speak out. If the people want nothing to change or to get worse, then let them vote against impeachment.

National policy and ideology of “Azerbaijanism”

Back in June 1993, in parallel with the offensive of Suret Huseynov’s troops on Baku, his associate, former Popular Front activist, ethnic Talysh Alikram Humbatov left subordination to the central authorities and tried to create the Talysh-Mugan Autonomous Republic. At first, he pushed for Elchibey’s removal and Mutalibov’s return. Later he insisted on the removal of Heydar Aliyev. Negotiations with Aliyev and with Prime Minister Suret Huseynov, who had been appointed by that time, failed. Aliyev blamed everything on the erroneous national policy and pan-Turkism of the previous authorities. But when Humbatov’s demands became more radical, Aliyev returned to his favorite method - appealing to the people. Although troops from the front were transferred to the southern zone (which resulted in the loss of three more districts), it became clear that Humbatov did not have a broad socio-political base. The Talysh population did not support him, and the rebellion was quickly put down. Three citizens who died during these events (during a pro-government rally) were honored with the title of national heroes at Aliyev’s suggestion.

On October 1, 1993 Aliyev held a meeting with representatives of ethnic minorities. After speeches by Lezghin, Avar, Kurdish, Tatar, Talysh, Russian and other deputies, Aliyev said that he did not want to call this assembly a meeting with “national minorities” but with citizens, representatives of the Azerbaijani people. In the spirit of nationalizing Soviet discourse, he said that the greatest wealth for Azerbaijan is that many peoples and ethnic groups have lived and built on its territory for centuries. All people living on its territory are even greater wealth for Azerbaijan than its beautiful nature and other resources. Heydar Aliyev made a statement that Azerbaijan was, is and will remain a homeland for all its people. Having criticized the previous leadership, Aliyev promised guarantees for unhindered development for all citizens of Azerbaijan not in words but in deeds, excluding any discrimination (Azerbaijan, 1993). Following this logic, the Constitution adopted on 12 November 1995 returned the unifying name - Azerbaijani - to the state language.

Aliyev also put an end to the anti-Russian policy and attacks on the Russian-speaking population associated with anti-Soviet rhetoric. He regretted the large outflow of Russians from Azerbaijan, stressing that the country is characterized by its multi-ethnic composition and asserted that he would do everything possible to stop these processes. He also confessed that he loves his people, but prefers to speak with representatives of other nations in Russian, and this is good. In the future, there will be periods of rapprochement and estrangement with Russia, but the Aliyev regime will be presented as the only defense against right-wing nationalist opposition, was the message.

It was Heydar Aliyev who started talking about the need for a tolerant national policy. Later, under his son Ilham Aliyev, this thesis will be reflected in the state policy of “tolerance and multiculturalism.” One of the goals of this policy, along with presenting Azerbaijan as a positive example of tolerant relations in a multinational environment, is to contrast it with Armenia. In this context, the mono-ethnic composition of Armenia’s population is an example of an initial unwillingness to live together with other nations. Such an accusation also proves its guilt in the Karabakh conflict. The basis of modern multiculturalism, apart from the general historical premises, is considered to be the ideology of Azerbaijanism, which Heydar Aliyev raised to a new level. This ideological doctrine, eclectic in its content, is assembled from the postulates of ethnic and civic nationalism. In the international format, it is

even designed to unite all Azerbaijanis of the world (emigrants, diasporas) united by a common historical homeland.

Religious discourse

From the very beginning, historical-religious passages have been an integral part of Aliyev's speeches. He frequently referred to religion in 1993 and throughout his first term as president. In an interview with the *Izvestia* newspaper on 4 August 1993, Aliyev admitted that "the vicissitudes of fate and the trials of destiny changed me and led me to faith in Allah. Yes, now I am a believer" (*Izvestia*, 1993). This confession itself could not but cause a positive response among Muslims.

On 5 September 1993, for the holiday of Movlud (birthday of Prophet Muhammad), Heydar Aliyev visited the famous Teze Pir mosque in Baku. Head of the Caucasus Muslims Administration Allahshukur Pashazadeh (who has held this position since 1980) called this event a double holiday for Muslims and called on all Muslims of the Caucasus to unite around Heydar Aliyev.

In his speech, Heydar Aliyev spoke of Islam as a new and perfect religion. He noted the Koran, the heritage of Islam, has played a big role in people's life for centuries. The Azerbaijani people, he said, have always expressed reverence and love for their religion. Aliyev assured that opportunities will be created to fulfill rites for every believer and expressed confidence that Islam will forever preserve its greatness and lead believers to happiness.

Youth politics

Youth was at the center of protest actions and movements. Unlike the previous leadership of the republic, Heydar Aliyev immediately took youth policy issues under his control. Aliyev's first big meeting with youth representatives was held at the Republic Palace on 22 September 1993. Aliyev's speech was rich in various allusions, excursions to history (especially to the Soviet period), reminders of moral and ethical principles of the Azerbaijani people and accusations of irresponsibility and incompetence of the former leadership.

I believe that the independent Azerbaijan Republic should no longer return to Marxism-Leninism. But at the same time, we cannot live without spirituality, ideology in general. Our today's idea should be formed and developed on the basis of national, historical traditions, historical path that our people have passed, universal moral and spiritual values created by our great-grandfathers - Nizami Ganjavi, Khagani Falaki, Nasreddin Tusi, Bahmaniyar, Nasimi [further he lists more than a dozen names] and many other scientists, philosophers, writers throughout history. If we are able to deeply analyze this history and properly acquaint young people with it, assimilate the ideas contained in the works of the persons listed by me and hundreds of others and be guided by them, the Azerbaijani people will follow the right path (Lib.aliyev-heritage.org, 2024).

Aliyev began to refer so often to cultural-civilisational narratives at the moment when active discussions about Azerbaijan's accession to the CIS began, that his statements were perceived by many in the opposition as a return to Russia's sphere of influence and almost a loss of independence. Since then, the marginalization of opposition youth structures, which have been very few so far, has also become part of youth

policy. The sharp increase in the number of pro-government youth and relevant youth structures, which continues today, is due to the fact that students, as well as university teachers, are voluntarily and compulsorily enrolled in the structures of the ruling Yeni Azerbaijan Party under various threats.

Aliyev told the congress that the Karabakh war has attracted the attention of many foreign ill-wishers who want to fragment “poor Azerbaijan again.” The current crisis is the result of the policy of the former authorities, who did not think about the people. But the youth could see and taste the result of “new thoughts,” so they will be able to analyze and put everything in its place. The crisis is also connected with the loss of the sense of patriotism, an indifference to national principles. It is necessary to convey to the youth the traditions of historical heroism of their ancestors, Aliyev conveyed. Undoubtedly, he professed, the people will rise and will first of all defend their honor and conscience, the lands of their ancestors, their present life, and the future of their children, etc.

Aliyev separately dwelt on attitude to Russian language and Russia. He noted that “Azerbaijanism” (in meaning of ethnic nationalism) was understood by some politicians as privileging people who know their language while those who know other languages were treated with prejudice. Aliyev reminded the participants of the Congress that development of Azerbaijan in XIX-XX centuries was inseparably connected with Russia. Speaking of independence, some people think that everything is limited to the borders of Azerbaijan, Aliyev would say, but they forget that the same figures of ADR were educated in Russia. “We came to the world literature, world science through Russia, Russian language, Russian culture. This should not be abandoned” (Ibid.).

Aliyev also spoke a lot about the necessity of active participation of youth in defense of the motherland - “a sacred duty of every citizen.” He was indignant at the scale of desertion and persuaded the participants of the meeting that military service, which hardens and educates, should not be avoided. Service in the army and love for the motherland were linked together. Every man of honor is obliged to love his nation and his land more than life (modern textbook on history of Azerbaijan for 5th grade uses the same words). And every deserter among young men, he argued, has no moral right to be a full member of society. To be a deserter is to be an enemy. Thus, the past, present and future were combined in slogans that became the basis for a broad programme on military-patriotic education, which has been carried out since then, covering not only primary school pupils but also post-secondary students.

Re-creation of national history

On 21 September 1993, Heydar Aliyev met with intellectuals at the Academy of Sciences. At this meeting, he formulated a number of ideologies that formed the basis of the new nationalized versions of political, historical, cultural and educational discourses for independent Azerbaijan. In essence, Aliyev proposed to re-write the history of Azerbaijan, taking into account the previous Soviet experience. Thus, the head of state was not a mere observer, but brought new connotations to the historical discourse and promoted new myths. At the same time, he also worked to clean discourse and narratives of the historical and political symbols and myths adopted during Abulfaz Elchibey’s reign.

In the spirit of Soviet ideological clichés, Aliyev referred to the intelligentsia as the advanced contingent of the people. Given this status, the intelligentsia should

not be left behind despite the difficult economic situation and the resentments that have arisen in this regard (falling prestige of intellectual labor, poor funding, etc.).

With defeats at the front, Heydar Aliyev's statements became more and more sharp and bellicose. He reminded that even now, as for centuries, our honorable sons died for the Motherland, which is higher than human life. And every man must do his part, give his duty, if he was born and grew up on this land and for him the spirits of his fathers and grandfathers are sacred. The return of the land is the main task of independence. "The people" was represented as a kind of immortal body devoid of any negative traits. Its unity rests on the duties of each citizen, described in the categories of patriotic discourse:

Our nation is a mighty nation, for centuries it has been subjected to serious tests, and it will withstand the present one as well. [...] However, this is not easy to achieve. [...] Now everyone must honorably fulfill their duty to the Fatherland, to the land. It is everyone's duty, no one can say that he is free from his duty to the Motherland. If the children of the people were born on this land, if the soul of our grandfathers is sacred and dear to us, we must repay our debt. [...] Unfortunately, some people think that someone should go to defend the land while the other does his personal business. [...] Every day a new politician appears, but then his true face is revealed. It's unfortunate. But perhaps the people should see this. Probably, these alien elements inside the society should have been revealed (Aliyevheritage.org, 2024).

The speech clichés and images of Aliyev and Elchibey were similar but intended to achieve different goals. Elchibey, for example, recalled the words of the convinced pan-Turkic poet Halil Rza Uluturk that everyone should have his own trench in the war. Aliyev referred to the words of the main Soviet Azerbaijani poet, Samed Vurgun, that "from now on, from this day on, I am a soldier with a weapon in my hands." Aliyev's choice was not accidental. And it was not that this example pointed to the feats and selflessness of the Great Patriotic War (1941-45). He used the words and image of Samed Vurgun to move on to criticize the post-Soviet opposition party Musavat, whose founders claimed continuity with the party with the same name that existed at the beginning of the 20th century. Aliyev once again reminded that "our" independence is a good fortune, a gift of fate, and, at the same time, a natural result of some processes beyond the control of Azerbaijani citizens.

Our independence is the logical outcome of socio-political processes taking place in the world, including in the former Soviet Union [...]. We have gained our independence not by force of arms, not as a result of struggle, rebellion. This independence was achieved as a result of natural historical, socio-political processes. No one can claim that someone is the hero, the commander of this independence, that independence has been achieved thanks to any political figure. This service does not belong to anyone, to any organization in particular. Independence belongs to the people. It is a gift given to the people by history, fate, and we should appreciate it. However, gaining independence from the political point of view does not mean that it is integral and irreversible. Independence should be developed, protected, implemented in all spheres. [...] Unfortunately, from the day of declaration of independence to the present day nothing has been done. [...] That is why the Republic is in such a difficult situation (Ibid.).

Heydar Aliyev himself could not claim the status of a political figure/leader who led the process of establishing independent status. Neither was he ready to agree to his political opponents' monopolizing the status of heroes who had achieved independence for the country and the people. By 1993, activists of nationalist parties and movements were actively creating a myth about their key contribution to the collapse of the USSR and, consequently, to the acquisition of independence. According to this version, the start of these events was given by mass rallies that began in Baku in 1988 on Azadlig Square (formerly named after Lenin).

Heydar Aliyev used any public event to marginalize his opponents. In September 1993, he reminded the assembled intellectuals that it was inappropriate to go from one extreme to another. He would stress that if "our" history was falsified during the Soviet period, the same mistakes should not be repeated with independence. The formation of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic on 28 May 1918 was a great social-political event in the history of Azerbaijan, which influenced subsequent periods, but the republic existed only 23 months and then surrendered. The failures of the figures of that period were not limited only to the conquest of Azerbaijan by the Red Army in April 1920, argued Aliyev, who later claimed the title of the republic's "founding father." He lamented that the government changed five times in 23 months, the parliamentary system had become a serious impediment to the state's existence, and infighting between parties was a major stain on its short history. In this way, Aliyev established a direct link to modernity, pointing to the need for strong presidential power and the establishment of "stability."

He also opposed the idealization of specific historical characters. First of all, it concerned Mammad Emin Rasolzade, who was considered the herald of freedom and independence in 1918-1920. This image was publicly equalled by Elchibey. Aliyev called such behavior "the disease of idolatry" and stressed that it is historians who should help to get rid of it. He reminded the staff of institutes of the Academy of Sciences that Rasolzade was not the only figure in the first republic, that there were many bright national heroes in different periods, whose activity is not sufficiently propagandized. At the same time, he did not forget to emphasize his merits in holding commemorative ceremonies in the Soviet period, including those dedicated to the medieval poets Nizami and Nasimi.

He criticized the work of historians. He recalled that back in the 1970s he informed historians that the history of Azerbaijan had never been written at a proper level. He claimed that in those years he wondered why Azerbaijan was behind other republics in this regard. Aliyev recalled that the old parliament building was given to the Manuscripts Foundation to develop research work, and a new scientific institute was established on its basis (it was there that Elchibey worked after his release from prison). But the work was unsatisfactory. Aliyev urged those gathered to do their best to show the world "our" ancient history, the way through centuries. He promised to create all necessary conditions for this purpose, but in return historians should present works "reflecting the history with fullness for us, future generations, for our future in general" (Ibid.).

After history, it was the turn of literature. Talking about total ideologization of Soviet times, when they even tried to make Nizami into a Marxist-Leninist, Aliyev regretted that Azerbaijani poets were not presented to the world as great philosophers. Scientists could show the world the "historical truth" that world famous philosopher Goethe formulated some of his theses on the basis of thoughts of Nizami (poet of XII century). Finally, Heydar Aliyev presented a guide to action.

“For the existence of an independent state, there should be an appropriate level of mentality of the people, raising which is not a matter of a couple of days, but of several generations.” Therefore, it is necessary to study the activity of great personalities of Azerbaijan. Within the framework of this activity, jubilees should be celebrated, the role of which is to demonstrate the rich culture of Azerbaijan. All these ideas voiced by Heydar Aliyev formed the basis of the new version of nationalized Azerbaijani historiography, modern historical and political discourse.

Heydar Aliyev as President of Azerbaijan

On 29 August 1993, a referendum was held in which 98% of voters voted to impeach President Elchibey. On 1 September he was officially removed from office. On the same day, Heydar Aliyev signed a decree canceling the upper age limit of 65 for presidential candidates. There were voices from the opposition camp that said a referendum held under the state of emergency could not be legitimate. Remembering the boycott of the 1991 presidential elections in Nakhchivan under his control for the same reason, Heydar Aliyev did not prolong the state of emergency once again. This regime was canceled on 22 September.

Thus, the opposition lost its trump card, but still boycotted the elections, considering the impeachment referendum illegal. Seeking to humiliate the main opponent, Heydar Aliyev offered Elchibey to run again and prove that the people still trusted him. The elections were eventually held without the participation of the main opposition forces on 3 October 1993. According to the official version, 98.8% of voters gave their votes to Aliyev.

The next presidential elections in 1998 became the “swan song” of the Azerbaijani opposition. More precisely, that part of it, which is usually called the leading or main one, and, at the suggestion of the ruling regime, also destructive or radical. In 1998, there was still hope that the elections could change the course of events. Although President Heydar Aliyev took a number of actions that contributed to a certain stabilization of the situation in the country, his rating, given the difficult socio-economic situation, dropped significantly. The slogans of socio-economic content were actively used by the opposition.

In the face of the monolithic team of the president, the opposition forces, despite being united in one large movement, looked amorphous. In a way, the situation of 1991-1992 was repeated. At first, the main opposition forces could not agree on a single candidate and decided to turn to the boycott method again as a means of political pressure. Opposition politicians and activists justified their actions by saying that they would never allow themselves to participate in the legitimisation of presidential power if the elections were held on an anti-democratic basis.

As a result, the main opponent of Heydar Aliyev was the leader of the National Independence Party of Azerbaijan (NIPA), Etibar Mammadov, who launched an extensive election campaign. According to many experts, Mammadov was at least qualified for the second round if transparent elections were held. He had to concede only under the pressure of the authorities’ administrative and police resources. In fact, the 1998 presidential campaign led to the creation of three unequal centers of power and political activity.

New hopes for old methods

Although the camp of the so-called “irreconcilable” opposition did not nominate a single candidate, it had a considerable potential to influence political processes, one that was never realized. After the boycott of 1993, under the conditions of a difficult economic situation, when real wages lagged far behind the subsistence minimum, ordinary oppositionists had the hope that they would not miss their chance in 1998. However, subsequent events showed that these hopes were greatly exaggerated.

Elchibey never recognised the results of the impeachment referendum and the 1993 elections, and considered himself the legitimate president. In 1997, his “term of office,” which he had spent in voluntary recluse in Keleki, expired and he returned to Baku, where he attempted to restore his political authority. Negotiations on cooperation with other forces began, which resulted in the creation of a large association called “Movement for Electoral Reforms and Democratic Elections” on 26 March 1998. Thirty-six socio-political organizations took part in its creation. The main idea of the opposition was to fight for changing the Electoral Code and, accordingly, the composition of electoral commissions. But neither in 1998, nor in the following years, was it possible to achieve tangible changes.

On 15 May 1998, the Law on the Central Election Commission (CEC) was issued. 9 June, Law on the Election of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan (with additions and amendments on 10 July) followed. The law was adopted after expert review by the US National Institute for Democracy on International Affairs and the OSCE ODIHR. The final version also took into account some proposals of the opposition represented in parliament (including that the quorum for recognising the elections as valid was reduced to 25%). The issue of the composition of the CEC and its formation on a parity basis remained unresolved.

Bargaining began, to which the participants of the Movement added a number of demands that were not directly related to the conditions of the elections. These included the release of political prisoners and the return of party property (headquarters, offices, etc.). It is likely that the failure of the negotiations between the authorities and the opposition was influenced by the factor of Elchibey, who cherished the hope of regaining his former position. Elchibey’s role is also evident from the fact that after his death (in 2000) in 2003 the same principle of CEC formation did not prevent the opposition from participating in the elections, although they continued to fight with each other. The main reason for the boycott seems to be the fundamental inability of the leaders of the Movement to agree on a single candidate. We are talking about the so-called «Five»:

1. Former President Abulfaz Elchibey;
2. Isa Gambar - head of Musavat party;
3. Lala-Shovket Hajiyeva, who started her political path together with Heydar Aliyev on 21 January 1990, Aliyev’s closest associate in 1993, voluntarily left the post of state secretary in January 1994 to protest corruption and went into opposition, head of the Liberal Party;
4. Ilyas Ismayilov, former prosecutor of the AzSSR, candidate for parliament in 1992, who supported Aliyev’s return in 1993, and leader of the Azerbaijan Democratic Party in 1998; and finally,
5. Rasul Guliyev, a former associate of Heydar Aliyev and chairman of parliament in 1993-1996, who severed all ties with Aliyev and became one of his sharpest critics and emigrated to the US.

As participants of those events recall, Isa Gambar hesitated in favor of withdrawing his candidacy in favor of Elchibey, but members of the Majlis of the Musavat Party were outraged.³³ His unsuccessful rule in 1992-1993 and his lack of political participation to date were the main arguments against him. Elchibey himself was also not willing to step down. The lack of political solidarity between members of the Movement was also evident in the different interpretations of the problem of the absence of a single candidate. While Isa Gambar believed that the authorities were interested in the absence of a single candidate and in maintaining fragmentation within the opposition, Elchibey argued that the opposition was too numerous to field a single candidate and the authorities benefitted from the squabbles that inevitably arise when trying to identify a single candidate, and the opposition must not give in to provocation. Ilyas Ismailov took a balanced position at the time, saying that it is not worth hanging everything on the authorities and that personal ambitions of politicians play a role.

In the context of the boycott, the Five leaders emphasized above all the undemocratic and illegitimate nature of the elections. The opposition was returning to the romantic era of street rallies. This was its native element. The authorities used a propaganda trick to portray the opposition in an unfavorable light, as working to the detriment of Azerbaijan's interests on the principle of "the worse the better." The authorities used a letter sent on behalf of the "Five" to the State Department, Congress and the President of the United States, which spoke of corruption, the plundering of humanitarian aid and on this basis questioned the expediency of providing any support to Azerbaijan.

The second point accusing the opposition of subversion was based on an unpublished action plan entitled "Tactics of Opposition Rallies," drawn up by one of the young activists of the Popular Front. The plan contained nothing special, except for a call for consistent and uninterrupted rallies. The authorities presented the plan as the opposition's intention to destabilize the situation and seize power by armed force. The pro-government forces defiantly referred to Elchibey himself by his first and last name, denying him the right to bear the title of former president. The opposition was generally labeled as a fifth column of pro-Armenian chauvinists.

At the same time, in the ranks of the opposition itself, there was a greatly exaggerated confidence in its own strength. A letter circulated on behalf of Rasul Guliyev said that 1998 would be the last year for the dictator. The first major rally, declared a republic-wide rally, was held at an open-air motorbike course on 15 August 1998. Among the political demands such as "For free fair elections," "Down with dictatorship!" and "Resign" there was a place for the Karabakh problem. The slogan "Power, you have forgotten about Karabakh!" was heard. The issue of the difficult housing conditions in the tent cities of internally displaced people (IDPs) also worked against the authorities.

The opposition, exploiting popular nationalist sentiments and the great sympathy of the majority of the population for Turkey, launched a campaign to identify the Kurdish roots of the power elite. The "wrong" origin was explained by the unresolved nature of many issues, the authorities' dislike for the Azeri-Turks and state support for Kurdish separatists. A certain letter of the Kurds to Heydar Aliyev, written in 1993 and filled with expressions of love, should serve as proof (Hasanov, 1998).

³³ Interview with former Musavat party member and Popular Front activist Rasim Mirzaev July 2019.

The Movement's last high-profile action was an unsanctioned rally in the city center, which escalated into clashes with law enforcement forces and dozens of injuries on both sides. The authorities responded with arrests, fines, a campaign of condemnation in the pro-government press, and showy TV exposés (participants "admitted" that they had received money for participating in the action). The fervor of the Five died down and there were no more large demonstrations. The resources for mass actions were exhausted and after the election results were in, opposition leaders were only able to organize small marches. By 1999, the number of the Movement's participants had grown to 67, and their main activities centered around condemning the falsification of the elections. However, with Elchibey's death, the Movement finally ceased to exist.

Etibar Mammadov: presidential contender

Aliyev's main opponent in the 1998 presidential elections, Etibar Mammadov, was one of the most colorful politicians in Azerbaijan at the time. He became most popular during the years of the rise of the protest movement in the late 1980s and early 1990s. His radical and consistent nationalist views were based largely on anti-Sovietism, accusations of Azerbaijan's Soviet leadership, and, to a lesser extent, on the discourse of centuries of confrontation with Armenians. He was a supporter of strong state power.

According to his official biography, as a student in the mid-1970s he became a member of an underground cell at Azerbaijan State University (ASU), where he met Elchibey, who taught there. There he would write a note on the activities of the National Government in South Azerbaijan (regions of north-western Iran populated predominantly by ethnic Azeris), summarizing it with a demand for independence.

Refusing to denounce Elchibey, he was expelled from the university, but was reinstated a year later. By the time the protest movement erupted in the context of the Karabakh conflict in 1988, he was working as a lecturer and had a PhD in history. In the autumn of 1988, Mammadov became one of the most active speakers at rallies on Lenin Square in Baku, and in 1989 he initiated strikes on Azerbaijan's railways, forcing the authorities to start a dialogue with the opposition. He became one of the founders of the Popular Front. Mammadov's political baggage included his speech on 25 January 1990 at the Azerbaijani Permanent Mission in Moscow, where he spoke about the tragic events in Baku, in which he blamed the top leadership of the USSR headed by Mikhail Gorbachev. As a result, Mammadov was arrested, released only nine months later and almost immediately elected as a deputy to the Supreme Soviet of the Azerbaijan SSR.

Etibar Mammadov was a politician who was not a stranger to cooperating with the authorities. But at the same time, he took advantage of their slightest misstep to demand its resignation. His paths with the other leaders of the Popular Front began to diverge as early as 1989, when Mammadov signaled his commitment to the more right-wing spectrum of the popular movement. At that time, his insistence to include in the Popular Front Programme a demand for Azerbaijan's secession from the USSR did not meet with the approval of even Elchibey. By 1991, Etibar Mammadov decided to finally separate from the PFA and create his own party. On 3 July 1992, the Constituent Congress of the National Independence Party of Azerbaijan (NIPA) was held, and in 2 weeks it was the first to be registered with the Ministry of Justice.

Mammadov was not spared the zigzags and vicissitudes of fate. When he became Heydar Aliyev's main rival in the October 1998 presidential elections, he managed not only to resuscitate his political career, which was on the wane, and for good reason, but also to reach its zenith as high as possible. This rise was due to another political demarche against the PFA party, with which he became close again in April, but then, after assessing the risks, decided not to join the boycott of the elections. For this decision, he was attacked by the opposition movement, which labeled his previous action as an attempt to camouflage his agreements with pro-government forces. His position was also compared to the "collaborationist" position taken by the Social Democrats in 1991, although he himself was at the forefront of Zardusht Alizadeh's critics at the time.³⁴



*Etibar Mammadov, The leader of the National Independence Party of Azerbaijan, NIPA (Azerbaijan Milli İstiqlal Partiyası); Tofiq Gasimov, The Minister of Foreign Affairs (1992-1993); Isa Gambar, head of Musavat party. Beginning of the 1990s.*³⁵

After Mutalibov's resignation in March 1992, Etibar Mammadov decided to run for president as well. By this point he still wielded considerable influence as a public politician, and argued that the NIPA is the first party to end the monopoly of an amorphous opposition movement and set a clear goal of coming to power. Only in this way, he argued, was the implementation of its one-and-a-half year programme possible. Its slogan was the triad "Economy, Stability, National Security."

As the Karabakh conflict raged, his calls became increasingly pragmatic. He insisted on the need to create self-defense units and arm them, and then to form a national army. Mammadov personally went to the front and helped to provide soldiers with uniforms. As a result, by the end of April 1992, he was already in the polls as Elchibey's main opponent. But after Mutalibov's failed attempt to return to power and the de facto victory of the PFA, Mamedov abruptly withdrew his candidacy from the elections. He did not urge his supporters to vote for another candidate,

³⁴ It is worth recalling that his candidature in the elections allowed the appearance of an alternative and political competition.

³⁵ Source: www.azkataloq.org

but publicly stated that he himself would vote for Heydar Aliyev (Mirkadirov, 1992; Azadlig, 1992). With this statement he protected himself from further accusations of supporting Elchibey. From the autumn of 1992 he moved into open opposition, criticizing the economic policy of the PFA and problems in the army.

Protest actions including demands for a transition to a parliamentary republic developed into a wave of rallies that continued even after the state of emergency was declared. During the Ganja events of 1993, Mammadov once again supported the idea of Heydar Aliyev's mediation mission and then the demand to transfer power to him. Together with Heydar Aliyev, he visited Elchibey several times at his residence. According to Mammadov, he was promised the post of prime minister, but these agreements were not fulfilled due to Elchibey's unexpected flight. Anyway, but on 24 June 1993, it was Etibar Mammadov who read out in parliament the demand to transfer the powers of the president to Heydar Aliyev.

It did not take long before he was compelled to realize that he should not seek a high post. Heydar Aliyev himself, explaining the break with Mammadov, said that he refused the posts of state secretary, foreign minister and a couple of others offered to him, demanding the post of head of one of the security agencies or deputy head of the government in charge of foreign economic relations. Mammadov's stubbornness almost left him without a party. Some supporters left the NIPA because of Mammadov's unwillingness to work with Aliyev. Another part left the party for the exact opposite reasons - because of Aliyev's support for Mammadov. In early September 1993, the second extraordinary congress of the NIPA was held, at which it was decided not to nominate Etibar Mammadov, rationalized by the premise that the then leadership of the republic was trustworthy (Bakinskiy Rabochiy, 1993).

The 1998 presidential campaign gave Etibar Mammadov another chance to make a name for himself at the national level. From the outset, he had planned to campaign in alliance with the Popular Front. However, the boycott of the elections forced him to reconsider his position. In any case, it was not only Heydar Aliyev who benefited from the boycott. Mammadov pragmatically sacrificed his smooth relations with the Five leaders for the sake of the votes of their electorate, many of whom voted for him. Despite opposition's sharp criticism and accusations, including allegations of collusion with the authorities (Mammadov responded in kind), political advertisements in favor of Mammadov were placed on the pages of the *Azadiq* newspaper (the organ of the Popular Front Party). The boycott had its own peculiarities.

What did Etibar Mammadov offer to his voters? What did he count on, entering into competition with Heydar Aliyev? Aliyev, who was so confident in his strength that he allowed himself to repeat from the screens his motto of 1993 - "I need no introduction." While many candidates went to the elections with a set of populist slogans and promises, Etibar Mammadov had specialists in his team who prepared an economic programme. The full programme was never published, but Mammadov voiced its individual theses, considering it advisable to implement it after coming to power, rather than announce it in advance.

In 1998, economic issues took priority in the electoral programme, so the leader of the NIPA - a historian by education - hardly touched on historical discourse. He avoided talking points about ancient roots, centuries of hostility to Armenia and ingratitude of neighbors, or the tutelage of foreign powers; nor does he promise to return Karabakh in a couple of months. The following fact is also noteworthy: when in September 1998 the Coordinating Council of Political Parties and Public

Organisations of Azerbaijan on Nagorno-Karabakh³⁶ protested against the invitation of the Armenian delegation to the international conference in Baku³⁷, Etibar Mammadov was not among those who signed the document (Zerkalo, 1998). As experts noted, the minimum of populism in his speeches contributed to the growth of his rating. The figures about corruption and economic backwardness given by him in his speeches convinced ordinary people. Experts believed that in conditions when Heydar Aliyev did not so much promise improvements in the future as emphasize his former merits, Mammadov had a chance to be voted for (Aliyev, Rashidoglu, A., & Abbasov, Sh., 1998).

Mammadov's rhetoric was shaped by his pragmatic approach. He understood that the outcome of the elections depended not so much on the votes as on their counting and the recognition of this count as legitimate. The latter implied the participation of major regional players and international centers of power, which needed guarantees of stability and the enforcement of oil contracts, so that militaristic rhetoric and the threat of war could not entice them. Therefore, unlike other candidates, if Etibar Mammadov raised the Karabakh issue, it was only from the perspective of the need to strengthen the home economy, accusing the authorities of inactivity in this area. In July, he made an official visit to the USA at the invitation of Republican Senator Jim Nicholson, where he held a number of meetings with representatives of the authorities and business sector.

Going to the elections, Mammadov was thinking about the additional votes he had received from the Five, but of course he was not counting on them alone. The source of his electorate were two other social groups whose interests he had defended during the 1992 campaign. In the early 1990s, he managed to solve several financial problems related to the provision of volunteer units in Karabakh. At the time, his calls for mobilisation were even louder than the official ones. How did he find financial support? Some experts and political analysts, albeit jokingly, call Mammadov a "mafioso."³⁸ Etibar Hüsənli himself (during the campaign he used a pseudonym, which is most likely related to his family name) during many interviews speaks about the need to legalize the shadow economy (Azerbaijan, 1998 ; Zerkalo, 1998). He blamed its existence on an imperfect and corrupt tax system that forced owners to go into the "shadow," where they pay the same taxes but in the form of bribes. If you penalize someone, it threatens almost all entrepreneurs. Therefore, it is better to give them an opportunity to legalize their capitals and redirect financial flows into the spheres necessary for the state. It is also necessary to reduce profit taxes several times, and to abolish VAT on most products altogether. In essence, Mammadov was an apologist of the class for which the category "national bourgeoisie" was used.

The second group, which also included large property owners, oligarchs and politicians, was tacitly known as "Ağrydag" (the Turkish name for Mount Ararat) and united Azerbaijanis from Armenia. According to experts, the struggle for support from this group was the source of the rift between Etibar Mammadov and Rasul Guliyev, who had sponsored the NIPA before Heydar Aliyev came to power (Azadlig, 1998). This group's support promised about 45-50,000 votes. The authorities were alarmed at the time. The issue of the eligibility of refugees from Armenia to participate in the elections (Ibid.) was seriously discussed, although it was not on the agenda in 1993.

³⁶ This body included all the leading leaders of the Five, as well as the Liberal Party

³⁷ The conference was dedicated to the project of restoring the Great Silk Road.

³⁸ Interview with Zardusht Alizadeh about presidential elections and candidates in the 1990s. Baku, September 2019.

Heydar Aliyev also tried to keep this group under his control. As early as December 1997, a decree was issued on the mass deportation of Azerbaijanis from their historical-ethnic lands in the Armenian SSR in 1948-1953. This decree referred to the two-century-old policy of ethnic cleansing and genocide against Azerbaijanis who had lived on their “historical lands” for thousands of years and were expelled during the creation of the “so-called Armenia.” In this way, the memory policy was complete, within the framework of which the image of a long-standing and irreconcilable enemy was implanted. Azerbaijanis in this context are presented exclusively as victims of the conflict. Also, by the President’s decision, refugees were exempted from utility costs until 2010. Finally, it was decided to grant refugees citizenship, thus allowing them to participate in the elections. This was a kind of compromise of the authorities, concluded not with Mammadov, but with the representatives of Agrydag.



President Abulfaz Elchibey, The leader of the National Independence Party of Azerbaijan Etibar Mammadov, and the future head of the Republican Alternative party (REAL) Ilgar Mammadov in front of the newspaper “Ayna” (“Zerkalo”) office building. Baku, late 1990s.³⁹

The final chord of Etibar Hüsənlı’s presidential campaign was a large-scale tour of the regions of Azerbaijan, in the best traditions of Turkish politicians. Columns of buses with flags traveled through the regions of Azerbaijan, where the leader of the NIPA held rallies and criticized not only the foreign policy of the authorities, but also the internal policy, its socio-economic part, which is closer and more understandable to the people. The last rally was held in Baku just a day before the elections. All the same slogans were voiced there as on TV, including that the authorities benefit from the current state of affairs, as it is more difficult to manage well-fed people.

On 29 September, Turan news agency published the results of a public opinion poll according to which Mammadov has the highest rating (68.8%). However, voters still expected Heydar Aliyev to win, i.e. they did not believe in the fairness of the elections. On the second day after the 11 October elections, answering a question

³⁹ Source: www.azkataloq.org

at a press conference, Heydar Aliyev, ahead of the CEC, claimed that according to preliminary information he had received 76% of the votes. According to Zardusht Alizadeh, such haste of the President was due to the refusal of CEC Chairman Jafar Veliyev to carry out excessive falsifications. Etibar Mammadov threatened that if Aliyev's victory was declared with a two-thirds majority, he would not stay in the presidential chair for even six months. According to the final results, Heydar Aliyev was declared the winner with 77.6% of the votes, while Etibar Mammadov, as expected, came second at 11.8%. In this situation, Mammadov remembered his former Popular Front comrades-in-arms, signed a cooperation agreement with them, and even held a protest rally. Yet he remained the second presidential candidate.

Heydar Aliyev: The cult of personality and new practices of commemoration

By 1998, Heydar Aliyev's personality cult had grown so large that his own ban on erecting lifetime monuments or hanging his portraits everywhere did little to change it. He spoke of this at a large meeting with journalists from Russia, the CIS and the Baltic States. "Portraits should be in offices, as a symbol of the state, but not in the streets and squares" (Bakinskiy rabochiy, 1998). The first parks named after Heydar Aliyev had already appeared in the capital Baku by the end of the 1990s. On 15 June 1998, National Salvation Day, a new holiday, was celebrated. The incumbent president played the role of the saviour of the nation, so that the countdown of "real" independence was entered only from the moment of his return to power. Heydar Aliyev himself was convinced of his own indispensability. In an interview with *Komsomolskaya Pravda* journalist Andrej Vandenko, he said, "I understand that Azerbaijan cannot do without me now" (Vandenko, 1998).

The 1998 presidential campaign was not distinguished by originality. Once again, the main emphasis was placed on Aliyev's endeavor to keep power in line with the demands of the people. In 1998, he claimed that he had no plans to run for office but would not refuse if the people again asked him to remain at the head of state. According to numerous appeals published in the official media, he was seen as president by all sections of the population: elders of rural communities, women and teachers, youth and workers, believers and scholars and all others. Speaking of his indispensability, Aliyev contrasted himself with the previous President Elchibey, proclaiming "Four and a half years ago he ran away from here. He lived in the mountains, and now suddenly shouts - I want to be president. The man has no conscience at all" (Ibid.).

The central point of the election campaign was to emphasize his previous merits. But if in 1993 the image of Heydar Aliyev as a true patriot who worked for the good of Azerbaijan in any conditions was presented with a chronicle of successes from the 1960-70s, in 1998 it was time to add to them the achievements of the post-Soviet five years. Every public event, political decision, any events in the cultural and socio-economic spheres worked for the image of the president as a non-alternative candidate. The main thesis was that without Aliyev, the country will inevitably be plunged into chaos.

However, the president's rating was significantly affected by the economic problems aggravated by the global economic crisis and falling oil prices (the price of 1 barrel was below 10 dollars), which hurt the country's already very modest budget. There were delays in the payment of salaries and pensions. The average

salary of teachers was twenty-five dollars, while the consumer basket was eighty. It came to the point that the Association of Independent Trade Unions of Teachers threatened to strike if salaries were not quadrupled. At the same time, in 1997, the members of the Academy of Sciences, who were responsible for creating an ideological discourse and popularizing it through the education system, had their salaries increased tenfold (which still amounted to approximately \$60 per member of 120 academics). In addition to economic problems, the president needed to ward off the sword of Damocles of the Karabakh issue.

What was discussed at numerous conferences and meetings with voters, replicated through television and the press? An ideal image was created of a wise politician-patriot who, despite all the difficulties, successfully solved domestic and foreign policy tasks. Particular importance was attached to establishment of order and stability, disarmament of illegal armed groups, suppression of attempted coup d'état and reduction of crime. It was Heydar Aliyev who became the creator of a real army capable of defending independence. In May 1998, as part of the celebration of the eightieth anniversary of the ADR, a decree was issued to inaugurate a new holiday - Army Day, which was to be celebrated on 26 June. On this day in 1918, by a decree of the ADR government, the Muslim Corps was renamed the Separate Azerbaijani Corps, which became the basis of the forming National Army. The Mutalibov holiday of 9 October was consigned to oblivion.

Aliyev credited himself with the 1994 decree on the "Khojaly Genocide," as well as the legal assessment of the events of the January 1990 tragedy, the perpetrators of which were declared the top leadership of the Azerbaijani SSR and the heads of the USSR (Preslib.az, 2024; Preslib.az, 2024). The Khojaly tragedy occupied a significant place in the commemoration politics under Ilham Aliyev. The Bishkek ceasefire, which ended the first large-scale war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, became an important point in the representation of the president's successes. In 1998, when the opposition accused the president of inaction and inefficiency in solving the Karabakh problem, Heydar Aliyev was presented by official propaganda as a savior who stopped the bloodshed and created conditions for restoring stability.

On 12 November 1995, the first ("Aliyev's") Constitution of independent Azerbaijan was adopted and celebrated, since 1996, as Constitution Day? The establishment of the Constitutional Court in 1998 was presented as another step forward in democratic reforms. The elections themselves were presented as the first to be held under a non-Soviet constitution. Heydar Aliyev also used this fact as one of the reasons why he agreed to run for office. The constitution finally established a political structure in the form of a presidential republic, endowing the head of state with enormous powers that will only expand with each new referendum.

The President does not forget about young people. The First Youth Forum was held on 2 February 1996 and yet another date to remember, Youth Day, was established the same year. Heydar Aliyev instructed the youth that: "Since part of the territory of Azerbaijan is occupied, national-patriotic principles of education should be inculcated from childhood, should become a way of life, life charter of every citizen" (Bakinskiy Rabochiy, 1996). Ilham Aliyev also actively involves youth in projects on military-patriotic education. In recent years, the creation of youth patriotic organizations and youth sections of the ruling party is part of the policy of presenting the President as a supporter of personnel reforms and an irreconcilable fighter against corruption.

Aliyev's image as an outstanding diplomat and the detailing of a historical anti-Armenian discourse intended for domestic consumption are also linked to the unresolved Karabakh conflict. In conversations with foreign journalists, Aliyev spoke of bad leaders, nationalists and ordinary Armenians who lived quietly in different regions of the Azerbaijani SSR. By 1998, a narrative was constructed about the deportation of Azerbaijanis from the territory of the Armenian SSR in the 1940s. The apogee of memory politics employed in creating the image of a victim was the decree adopted in March 1998 on the genocide of Azerbaijanis carried out by Dashnak-Bolshevik detachments in March 1918 (Bishkek.mfa.gov.az, 2017). The decree gave birth to a new stage in historiography, a mass of historical studies, penetrated school textbooks and has since become an integral part of the dominant historical discourse. New historical narratives also helped to link and explain Russia's historical support for Armenia and Armenians.



Photographic work "National leader Heydar Aliyev at the personal exhibition of Iranian artist Vadud Muyedzi. October, 2002". Presented at the permanent exhibition at the National Art Museum of Azerbaijan November 2022, Baku. Photo by Sergey Rumyantsev.

The new interpretation of the past, politicization of national identity issues and the politics of Azerbaijanism allowed Heydar Aliyev to be presented as a champion of restoring historical justice, returning the forgotten past to the people, without which the present and future are unthinkable. A number of public meetings were organized on a nationwide scale to create such an image. One of them was the first nationwide meeting with representatives of refugees and internally displaced people, whose demands could not be ignored. These new approaches contributed to the fact that the Karabakh refugees in their masses voted in favor of Aliyev despite the fact that he promised nothing but maximum efforts to solve the Karabakh problem. In 1998 he expressed gratitude to them for their patience, and pleaded that it was necessary to continue to be patient. At the same meeting Heydar Aliyev connected the establishment of stability, order, elimination of lawlessness with the ceasefire regime he established. After that, he invited the participants of the meeting to

choose what they wanted more: a peaceful or military solution of the conflict. He particularly emphasized the duty of each of the refugees not to forget the land of their grandparents and to put the good of the Motherland above their own lives. He said that not an inch of land should be ceded to the enemy (Bakinskiy Rabochiy, 1998).

At the same meeting, Heydar Aliyev put forward another thesis, which did not exist in 1993, but which was adopted by İlham Aliyev and the entire official propaganda, and later spread to social networks. The thesis was that anti-government statements pour water on the mill of the enemy - Armenians. The more active the opposition came out with accusations of corruption, the more it was accused of working for Armenia and Armenians. In this regard, Aliyev directly raised the issue of the need to create a special propaganda system to counter "enemy insinuations." In 1999, speaking at the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the Nakhchivan ASSR, Aliyev said:

Unfortunately, we are faced with two negative trends in connection with Nakhchivan. Firstly, the land claims of Armenia against Azerbaijan and, in particular, the recently increased land claims against Nakhchivan. This is known. And our academics have noted here that many Armenian scientists - and now not only scientists, but also ordinary people, politicians - are trying to prove that the majority of Azerbaijani lands allegedly belonged to Armenia. Proceeding from this point of view, since 1988 they sharply raised the issue that Nagorno-Karabakh is Armenian land, as a result of which war, conflict started, we faced great tragedies. And now, apparently, they are launching a new offensive, an offensive against Nakhchivan.

We should give them a proper answer, prove to the whole world that all these claims are unfounded, far-fetched. And for this purpose, substantiated documents, fundamental scientific and popular works should be created. In order to protect and preserve the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan not only in the present years, but also for future generations, we must create a very strong concept, a basis. We must create such a basis so that no force can ever seize any part of Azerbaijani lands in the future" (Aliyevheritage.org, 2024).

Calls of this kind would later find their way into İlham Aliyev's speeches. The image of Heydar Aliyev himself and his attitude to the Soviet past were also being developed at the same time. The dual nature of this part of the memory politics was determined as early as 1993. And by 1998, with the strengthening of Aliyev's personality cult, his Soviet past was further interpreted. The Baku and Moscow periods of his activity are characterized by the replacement of the word "empire" with "superpower." The achievements Aliyev claimed for that era included "development of Azerbaijan to the level of an advanced republic," comprehensive redevelopment of the agriculture sector, return of Baku to the "glory of one of the most beautiful cities," cultural and educational growth. According to the new version of history, all these achievements were made thanks to Aliyev and despite Moscow's anti-Azerbaijani policy.

Another feature of the official propaganda of the time was the attempt to recreate the image of Heydar Aliyev by analogy with the image of Kemal Atatürk. The latter is practically a sacred figure for Turkish secular society, and criticism of him is subject to criminal prosecution. Heydar Aliyev was given the place of the leader of the nation with the title "Ulu Öndər" ("Great Leader"). According to this version, he saved the Azerbaijani people from destruction, put an end to external

threats and restored the country. Parallelism of images was achieved by attributing to opponents the statement that Armenians have only two enemies - Ataturk and Heydar Aliyev. And as long as the latter is alive, they will not be able to achieve what they want. This narrative, in the spirit of conspiracy theories, was also used to explain Aliyev's forced resignation in 1987, which ensured the success of the Armenian movement in Karabakh.

In 1998, Heydar Aliyev was still actively using official religious resources, validating his position. It is not accidental that religious organizations of Muslims, Orthodox and Jews nominated his candidacy for president. On July 12, the president attended the opening ceremony of the Bibi-Heybat mosque complex, one of the oldest mosques in Azerbaijan. The mosque was destroyed during an anti-religious campaign in 1935 and was restored mainly with funds from the state budget and donations. In his speech, Heydar Aliyev asserted that Islam is an integral part of the historical consciousness and moral values of Azerbaijanis:

The Azerbaijani people have always been faithful to their religion, spiritual values despite all the troubles and no power could destroy this. All this is our history. Our grandfathers, ancestors endured, but did not break, did not lose their will. Spiritual values passed from generation to generation, and now they are our greatest spiritual wealth. This mosque will become a sanctuary not only for Muslims of Azerbaijan, but also for the whole world. We are part of the Islamic world (Bakinskiy Rabochiy, 1998).

At the Tenth Congress of Muslims of the Caucasus, Aliyev, not without pride, said that in 1991 there were 18 mosques in Azerbaijan, and in 7 years about 1000 have been built (Bakinskiy Rabochiy, 1993). The identity he proposed, the ideology of Azerbaijani nationalism, was increasingly acquiring ethno-religious features.

Aliyev's speeches at the awarding of Şöhrət (Order of Glory) to figures of literature, culture, art, religion and sport and at the First Congress of Teachers of Azerbaijan in August and September 1998 should be considered no less important for understanding the specifics of historical politics. Using stories from the Soviet Azerbaijani historical narrative, Aliyev again spoke extensively about the past, great rulers and cultural figures, the need to conduct historical research and bring the "truth" to the people. The teacher's goal should be to bring up a generation capable of turning Azerbaijan into a blossoming powerful state, a citizen devoted to the ideas of independence and ready to sacrifice himself for freedom. Building a continuous line of development ascending from tribe to nation (primordialist in spirit), Heydar Aliyev returned to Azerbaijanis the right to be proud of the Soviet past, especially the level of industrial development and contribution to the victory in the Great Patriotic War. This very name was still occasionally used in official speeches, but has practically disappeared from educational discourse. "Our nation has a beautiful past, history and an equally beautiful today. And the future will be even more beautiful" (Bakinskiy Rabochiy, 1998; Bakinskiy Rabochiy, 1998).

Back in July 1998, Aliyev gave an order to start construction of the "Eternal Flame" memorial complex in the Alley of Martyrs. This place used to be the Nagorny Park, but after the burial of the victims of the January 1990 tragedy here, it turned into a site of memory and pilgrimage of the Azerbaijani people. During the burial three more unknown graves were discovered, the remains from them were reburied. It was announced that they were victims of Bolshevik-Dashnak terror against Azerbaijanis in March 1918. Later, military men killed in the first Karabakh

war were buried here. The Alley of Martyrs became a site of memory, where the images of victims and heroes of the Azerbaijani people's struggle for independence were concentrated.

The unveiling of the monument took place on October 10, a day before the elections, when any campaigning was forbidden, but not for Aliyev. At the ceremony, he did not fail to accuse the opposition of insufficient patriotism, explaining who is worthy to speak on behalf of the people and who is not. "January 20, 1990, is the most terrible and the brightest heroic page in the history of Azerbaijan. [...] The day of January 20 demonstrated the heroism, courage, pride, indomitability of the people. January 20 is a continuation of the unjust policy pursued by the Soviet authorities [...] since 1988 [...]. Those who came to power in 1990 on the blood of the sons of Azerbaijan did not show due attention and care for their souls." Aliyev went on to say that it was only under his rule that the January tragedy was legally assessed. Despite financial difficulties, the Alley of Martyrs was raised to a level worthy of the victims. "But I always wondered why there is no monument corresponding to the traditions of the Azerbaijani people? [...] We have fulfilled our sacred duty to immortalize the memory of the Shahids and propagate their heroism, to bring it to the young, new generation. [...] And we erected this monument on a point higher than where the Kirov monument stood. [This monument] demonstrates the freedom, independence, heroism, pride of the people to Azerbaijan, to the whole world" (Bakinskiy Rabochiy , 1998).

2003: New president and old opponents

2003 was a turning point in the relationship between the president and the opposition. It turned out to be the last election in which the second most popular candidate had officially won double-digit votes. In 2013, despite the relative rise and excitement in the opposition camp over the nomination of a single candidate, Jamil Hasanli, the government only recognized him for 5.5 percent of the vote. However, 2003 was still a year of great hopes, which were not destined to come true for a number of reasons.

In May 2003, the Electoral Code was adopted, combining regulations on the election of the President, deputies to Milli Majlis and municipalities. The implementation of some of its regulations was postponed until 2005. But even without these delays, the composition of the CEC, which became a reason for the opposition boycott in 1998, still left an advantage for the authorities. However, this time the opposition did not pay attention to this problem. Opposition circles believed that the main obstacle on the way to power had vanished in the person of seriously ill Heydar Aliyev, who had not appeared in public since July 2003. The opposition did not take the president's son, Ilham Aliyev, seriously, although work on his image had been underway since 2000.

Since 2003, Ilham Aliyev has won four elections in a row, which required, among other things, three changes to the country's constitution. The most difficult elections for him were in 2003, when he had to use force to quell large protests against falsification election results. After 2003, each new election became more boring, monotonous, and characterized by a decline in voter turnout, which was the result of the confidence that the outcome was already predetermined.

The leaders of the principal opposition parties, in the conditions of the government's pursuit of the historical and memory politics, with which they agreed on most points, resorted to propaganda of their ideas in the following directions:

1. Karabakh issue. Here it is worth noting the complete unity of the opposition with the authorities on the methods of conflict resolution and the fundamental impossibility of any territorial concessions. But the opposition, taking advantage of the unresolved nature of the conflict, could accuse the authorities of deliberate sabotage, extraction of certain benefits in delaying the negotiation process, and lack of success in creating an effective military. One of the main candidates for the presidency in 2003, the leader of the Musavat party Isa Gambar promised to throw all the country's resources into solving the conflict;
2. Foreign Policy. Almost all leading opposition parties represent the right-wing nationalist flank, characterized by pro-Western orientation and anti-Russian sentiments. There were accusations that Ilham Aliyev was supported by the Russian authorities on certain conditions (granting permission to develop oil fields, concessions in the Karabakh issue, etc.). All these accusations were aimed at frightening the population with the threat of a new imperial intervention by Russia and loss of independence;
3. Socio-economic situation of the population. The authorities were accused of lacking a clear-cut thought-out economic policy, the results of which are unemployment, poverty, corruption, and the country's dependence on oil;
4. The only period on which the opposition could and wanted to enter into a historical dispute was the interpretation of the events of 1988-1992, and later the topic of the First Republic (ADR). However, the discussion in this direction played very little importance and did not arouse widespread interest.

In the 2003 elections, all the leaders of the notorious Five of the times of the united Movement were present, except for Elchibey, who passed away in 2000 and whose place was taken by Ali Kerimli. Four of the five were the most active and popular: Rasul Guliyev, still in exile; Ali Kerimli, the new leader of the PFA party; Etibar Mammadov, the leader of the NIPA, who was living his last moments of political glory; and Isa Gambar, the leader of the Musavat party. The latter should be described in more detail.

Isa Gambar was another professional historian who became a politician. He was born in 1957 in Baku, graduated from Baku State University, and worked in the Academy of Sciences from 1979 to 1990. He entered active political life in 1988 and became notable for his anti-Soviet right-wing nationalist speeches. The following year he co-founded the Popular Front of Azerbaijan party and contributed to the election of Abulfaz Elchibey, with whom he was friends, as chairman of the movement. At the same time, Gambar was a supporter of political maneuvering and evolutionary advancement to power, striving to use every opportunity and adapt to new conditions. As a supporter of a parliamentary republic, Gambar was one of the first to nominate Elchibey when it was decided to hold snap elections in 1992. From May to June 1992, he was the de facto head of state, taking over the presidency of parliament and securing votes in regions where Elchibey's popularity was not very high. After Elchibey's election, Gambar retained his position as head of parliament, and in November 1992 he was elected chairman of the Musavat Party at their Third "Restoration" Congress.

This event in itself signaled Gambar's ambitions. Now he acted as an independent politician and positioned himself as the leader of the party of intellectuals, in contrast to the short-staffed PFA party. The very name of the new party allowed him to declare himself the heir to the ideas of the first Musavat, which led the national liberation movement in the early 20th century, and to challenge the claims to leadership of the PFA party (Web.archive.org, 2024).

After the Ganja events of 1993, Isa Gambar resigned and later was stripped of his parliamentary mandate and moved to the opposition camp. When the Five leaders failed to agree on a single candidate in 1998, Gambar was determined to run on his own. This was the first and last time in his political career. Back in March 2003, the creation of the electoral bloc Our Azerbaijan was announced, which turned into a political bloc after the elections. It united about 30 parties and 70 public organizations. It was left to settle relations with other candidates, but the situation of 1998, when no side would give in, willing to withdraw their candidacy in favor of one single opposition presidential candidate, was repeated. However, there was a difference, nobody thought about boycotting the elections either.

Obviously, the opposition leaders underestimated Ilham Aliyev and overestimated their hopes for support from the EU and the US. After the elections, opposition newspapers ran articles with screaming subheadings such as “Oil in exchange for democracy,” “Goodbye, West,” “Washington’s short-sighted policy,” etc. (Yunusov, 2006). Meanwhile, the opposition leaders, discussing the possibility of uniting around a single candidate, were burning valuable time in long disputes over the distribution of top posts. The post of prime minister was beginning to look very tempting given the demands of the transition to a parliamentary republic. At first, the leaders promised to support whoever made it to the second round. They were fully confident that the elections would not be limited to one round. Only shortly before the elections, Etibar Mammadov (in favor of whom Ali Kerimli withdrew his candidacy) withdrew from the race, supporting Gambar. Predictably, the consolidation of forces and resources came too late.

And yet, for many, the results of the 15 October elections came as a surprise. More precisely, the lead with which Ilham Aliyev’s won was that big surprise. Although the initial 79.5% was reduced to 76.8%, this amendment had no effect on the final outcome and 14% of Gambar’s votes. There was no “plan B” for the opposition. Choking with indignation, its leaders called on the people to stand up in defense of their votes, which led to large-scale clashes in Baku, many injured and one person killed. Amid the sad results of the clashes and apparent electoral fraud, even before the final results were announced, Ilham Aliyev was congratulated on his election by world leaders George W. Bush, Vladimir Putin, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and neighbors Leonid Kuchma and Eduard Shevardnadze. The European Union also recognised the elections as legitimate, albeit with reservations. After that, a period of consistent and gaining momentum began with the strengthening of the Aliyev Jr. regime. Repression against the opposition and journalists intensified.

2008: boring elections and another boycott

The 2005 parliamentary elections followed the scenario of 2003. The opposition went to the parliamentary elections inspired by the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, but apparently never drew any conclusions from their own bitter experience. The opposition united under the new Azadliq bloc (PFA, Musavat and Democratic Party), but in the end won no more than ten seats out of 125. At the same time, the Popular Front lost representation in Parliament altogether. Mutual criticism (of the authorities and the opposition) dealt with the same topics as in 2003. The Karabakh issue was once again activated. In every speech of that campaign, Ilham Aliyev exposed the “traitorous nature” of the PF-Musavat tandem which surrendered a number of lands, including impregnable Shusha, to Armenians in 1992-1993 in order

to retain power. Ali Kerimli, leader of the Popular Front party, emphasizes the loss of most of the districts after Heydar Aliyev came to power and the most significant loss of life during the failed Kelbajar operation in January-February 1994.



President Heydar Aliyev, his son Ilham Aliyev, and the son's wife Mehriban Aliyeva in the end of the 1990s. Owner: The National Parliamentary Library of Georgia. Source: The collection of digital photographs archive of National Parliamentary Library of Georgia

Such defiant attacks by the opposition encouraged the authorities to intensify repression. While releasing some political prisoners, the authorities soon replaced them with new ones. Meetings, demonstrations and pickets in the center of Baku were banned and allowed in its peripheries that were difficult to reach. As the ruling party continued to campaign under the guise of charity concerts, the opposition parties were deprived of their offices in the center of the capital. Naturally, there was no question of the opposition being able to propagandize on TV and radio. Newspapers, the growing use of the Internet and social networks remained the means of communication, but even there the authorities slowly established their control.

Young people were actively involved in working on the side of the authorities and this was a logical development of Heydar Aliyev's policy of using youth resources. In addition to almost universal enrolment of students in the ruling party and involvement in pro-government public organizations, young people were actively recruited in the campaign activities via Aznet. In fact, this policy persists to this day. These are groups of hackers who hack into the accounts of oppositionists and create fake pages from which state-appropriate news is disseminated; groups of so-called trolls who cut into discussions in order to prevent actual discussions; and youth propaganda groups.

The relentless marginalization of the opposition bore fruit. By 2007, it had lost its former influence, and Ilham Aliyev himself happily declared that the opposition as such did not exist in Azerbaijan's political arena. By that time Musavat had once again divorced his sworn friends from the Popular Front, leaving the Azadliq bloc.

But Musavat, albeit unwittingly, still had to share the fate of the systemic opposition, which was presented as a political scarecrow. The government threatened chaos, rampant nationalism and Islamism if the opposition came to power. When it came time for the 2008 elections, the hard-pressed “main forces” of the opposition once again remembered the imperfections of the Electoral Code and the pro-government composition of the CEC. After some hesitation, Musavat joined the election boycott announced by the Azadlıq bloc. This allowed the authorities to even discourage falsifications. Aliyev was opposed either by candidates unknown to the population or by politicians who lacked any popularity. It was joked about the 2008 elections that the CEC was committing fraud by taking votes away from İlham Aliyev and adding them to his opponents so that his 99% victory would not look too dubious. The authorities also advertized the installation, for the first time, of 500 web cameras through which people could observe the procedure, including ballot box stuffing, which occurred by inertia.



Poster at the entrance to the building of the Union of Artists of Azerbaijan. Baku, July 2022. Photo by Sergey Rummyantsev.

The outcome of the 2008 elections was as follows: İlham Aliyev won 88.78%, while his closest opponent, Ümid (Hope) party leader İqbal Aghazade (he was one of those convicted in the case of the 15-16 October 2003 riots and after his release began to drift from closeness with Musavat to dialogue with the authorities) won 2.86%. After the election, the losing candidates congratulated the president on his convincing electoral victory. They noted that the elections were free, transparent and democratic, and emphasized that Aliyev’s victory was the logical result of reforms that ensured the country’s dynamic development, successes in the socio-economic sphere, and the growth of Azerbaijan’s international prestige. “The fate of Azerbaijan will be in reliable hands in the next five years as well” (Azertac, 2008). The reaction of international organizations was also generally favorable.

Elections 2013: another historian becomes a presidential candidate

In 2013, another temporary unification of the opposition took place. However, the mistakes of the past and ill-conceived strategy made themselves felt again. The nationalist and patriotic discourse produced by the authorities was very influential. The opposition was not capable of creating an alternative. For the reason that there was no divergence in positions. The latter circumstance led even to solidarity actions of seemingly irreconcilable opponents. Thus, in 2012, almost all leading opposition parties put their signatures next to the signature of the ruling New Azerbaijan Party under a collective appeal to the European Parliament. All leading political parties in solidarity condemned the European Parliament's resolution on the extradition to Azerbaijan of former Azerbaijani officer Ramil Safarov, who was sentenced to life imprisonment in Hungary for the murder of an Armenian officer (Europa.eu, 2012). Immediately after his return, Safarov was not only pardoned by President İlham Aliyev, but was promoted from senior lieutenant to major, given a flat and paid a salary for the eight years he spent in detention. The Azerbaijani media spoke of Safarov as a hero (Lenta.ru, 2012; Musavat.com, 2012). İlham Aliyev used the Safarov case to boost his own ratings, presenting his leading role in defending the national interests and rights of Azerbaijani citizens. In turn, the opposition leaders, if there were any doubters among them, understood that by refusing to sign the appeal, they would be accused of betraying national interests and unpatriotic behavior.

The atmosphere of the elections did not change. The election campaign passed almost unnoticed. One significant event was the very unexpected unification of the opposition and the establishment of Demokratik Qüvvələrin Milli Şurası (the National Council of Democratic Forces, NCDF) on 7 June 2013. On the same day at the congress, Rustam İbrahimbekov, a well-known writer, scriptwriter and film director in Azerbaijan and Russia, was nominated as a candidate. However, the CEC refused to register him on the pretext that he had dual citizenship. İbrahimbekov's renunciation of Russian citizenship did not affect this decision. Then the candidacy of Jamil Hasanli, a professor, doctor of historical sciences, non-partisan, who would later be elected chairman of the NCDF, was put forward. Being a professional historian, Hasanli to this day gives lengthy comments on Aliyev Junior's aggressive attacks on the First Republic (ADR, 1918-1920) and accuses the president of deliberately distorting history. In his opinion, all this is done to divert the attention of the people, to exalt himself and his father against the background of belittling the merits of both ADR figures and the national liberation movement of 1988-1992.

In 2013, at his first press conference, Hasanli chose the tactic of accusing the ruling regime of creating unequal conditions for candidates and preparing for large-scale rigging of election results. With the overwhelming majority of the population indifferent to the elections (few doubted the victory of the incumbent president), Jamil Hasanli's sharp speeches, in which he accused the president and his family members of owning large properties abroad and huge bank accounts, remained just a topic for everyday discussions. By 2013, the majority of the republic's citizens had long since lost faith in fair elections. In addition, many were intimidated by either repression or the prospect of a return to the chaos of the early 1990s.

The main theses of Hasanli's programme included the following promises: 1) in the socio-economic sphere: multiple increases in salaries, pensions, scholarships and allowances; 2) improved credit and tax policies; 3) creation of one million jobs within two years and increased subsidies for agricultural development; 4) youth

policy, including the creation of conditions for buying a home, one-time allowances for every newborn, payment for education abroad and free tuition at state universities; 5) a block of socio-political and social policies, including the creation of a new education system; and 5) the creation of a new social and political system (Cavadli, 2013).

And, of course, the NCDF programme included the mobilization of all resources for the liberation of Karabakh. In this part, the main opponent of the incumbent president appealed to national-patriotic sentiments, which were also cultivated by the ruling regime. In the policy of using militaristic patriotic discourse, the opposition continued to compete with the authorities. Thus, Hasanli criticized the government's decision to join the Non-Aligned Movement (2011), while in his view Azerbaijan needed allies to restore its territorial integrity. Apparently, the rhetoric chosen by the opposition prompted the authorities to decide to stage a showdown. The CEC announced an unequivocal victory for Aliyev, who won 84.54% of the vote. Jamil Hasanli was given 5.53%. The opposition did not recognise the election and held a protest rally that made little difference.

2018: boycott again

In January 2014, the paths of the Popular Front and Musavat, who left the ranks of the NSDS, diverged once again. Isa Gambar ceded the place of *bashkan* (head) of the party to his deputy Arif Hajili, while remaining a kind of "ideological leader" of the Musavat party. In autumn 2017, the media began to talk about Isa Gambar's readiness to run in the 2018 elections. But these plans were not destined to come true.



Presidential Election in 2018. Photo by Novruz Isayev

Back in September 2016, the country held another referendum on amendments and additions to the Constitution. Among the significant changes were: increasing the term of office of the President from 5 to 7 years; elimination of the lower age limit for presidential and parliamentary candidates; introduction of the positions of vice-

presidents, as well as the First Vice-President, to whom the powers of the President are transferred in case of his early departure, as well as giving the President the power to dissolve the Parliament without giving reasons, appointing extraordinary parliamentary and presidential elections. Ilham Aliyev used this right and signed a decree on 5 February 2018 to postpone the elections from October to April 2018 (Bbc.com, 2016).

This decision entailed procedural changes in the form of shortening the campaign from four to two months and the campaign period from forty to twenty-one days. The already severely limited campaign opportunities for Aliyev's opponents were further curtailed. Under these circumstances, Musavat, following the other main opposition parties, after some deliberation joined another boycott of the elections.

Nevertheless, seven candidates officially competed with Aliyev. Most of the campaigning was limited to populist slogans. Azerbaijani human rights activist and former political prisoner Rasul Jafarov said the whole campaign was staged and resembled a game of give-and-take (Mecid, 2018). The promises of the other candidates were so unrealistic (from promises to allocate six thousand dollars to each citizen to allowing *sigheh*, temporary religious marriages) that they scared away most people. The candidates avoided criticizing the authorities. Instead, they used the free airtime to criticize the opposition for boycotting the elections.

The atmosphere of these elections is well conveyed by the interview of the self-nominated MP Zahid Oruj to the BBC Azerbaijani service. Talking about his programme, he said that he had dozens of proposals in the economic sphere. He knows how to ease the credit burden for the population. But he did not describe a single concrete step. Instead, he criticized the opposition and predicted victory for Ilham Aliyev. He argued that it is possible to be in opposition while remaining a supporter of the course of the great Heydar Aliyev. At the end of the conversation, the BBC journalist asked him directly who he urged his supporters to vote for. Oruj replied that he calls to vote for Ilham Aliyev, but to listen to him too. According to the official election results, he came in a conditional second place with 3.1% of the vote.

2023: Ilham Aliyev and historical politics

A new presidential election has been scheduled for March 2023. By this time, the incumbent president will have been in power continuously for almost 20 years. Given that he has largely adhered to the principles that formed the basis of the memory and historical politics established under his father, it can be said that there have been no conceptual changes over the years.

Every year there are calls to write more history books, to make "correct" maps, to return ancestral names (toponymy), to restore "historical justice" and bring it to the world community and the new generation of citizens. These inexhaustible topics provide an opportunity to make loud statements time after time. For example, the "war of toponyms" has lasted all these years. On the third of June 2020, at the opening of the Museum of State Symbolism in the city of Tartar, the vigilant president, noticing the toponym Sisian on the map, gave an order to erase it and indicate the "correct" one, Garakilse. He used this opportunity to declare that the absolute majority of toponyms of modern Armenia are also of Azerbaijani origin (President.az, 2020).

Youth policy now includes a large programme of military-patriotic education, covering the entire educational process. On the one hand, young people are

portrayed in official discourse as an active, patriotic, self-sacrificing and heroic social group. On the other hand, in the conditions of development of information technologies, young people are considered vulnerable to “enemy” propaganda that attempts to corrupt the Azerbaijani community from the inside out. This rhetoric is imbued with the spirit of Stalinist times. According to this logic, as Azerbaijan develops to the envy of others, the intensity of hostile subversive actions of external and internal enemies grows (President.az, 2022). Furthermore, İlham Aliyev is the undeniable successor of the policy of national leader Heydar Aliyev, which means that his political course is truly popular, and all those who oppose it are clearly “anti-national corrupt elements.”

The cult of Heydar Aliyev is the most important component of the commemorative politics of the last two decades. Pupils of the first grade memorize the lines: “when we say Azerbaijan we mean Grandfather Heydar, and when we say Grandfather Heydar, we mean Azerbaijan.” The development of this cult implies supplanting the memory of those national heroes who could compete with the memory of Heydar Aliyev. These are the figures of the first republic - ADR (1918-1920) and participants of the national movement of 1988-1991. The myth about the father of the nation Heydar Aliyev is not only contrasted with myths about his real opponents (for example, Abulfaz Elchibey), but also with myths about political figures of the past.

In 2006, the Milli Majlis, which had just started its work after the regular elections, amended the Labour Code. In essence, it was a gradual revision of the list of public holidays so that they conformed to the logic of official commemoration. Holiday dates of 18 October (Independence Day of the Republic; Constitutional Act of 18 October 1991 adopted under Ayaz Mutalibov) and 17 November (National Revival Day - 17 November 1988, the beginning of crowded rallies on Lenin Square) lost their status as non-working days. Henceforth, all festive events were reduced to dry mentions in the media. On these days, the whole country saw the emblem of Heydar Aliyev on the screen of its TV sets, to whom a significant part of programmes was dedicated.

On 17 November 2007, İlham Aliyev signed a decree on the construction of the Flag Square, and on the same day, but two years later, in 2009, another decree on the establishment of Flag Day . According to the president, the day of signing these decrees was not chosen by chance. After all, it was on November 17, 1990, on Heydar Aliyev’s initiative, that the Supreme Assembly adopted a resolution on declaring the tricolor flag the state flag of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic and petitioned the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan for the same decision (it was approved on February 5, 1991). This decision was declared the first step towards independence. Thus, according to the official discourse 70 years after the fall of the ADR, it was Heydar Aliyev who was the first to raise the flag of independence again.

Another key component of the memory politics is the Karabakh conflict. The commemorative discourse created under Heydar Aliyev did not suggest the possibility of reconciliation. İlham Aliyev consistently continued this line. Even before the Second Karabakh War he tried to make his own contribution of legacy proportions. Such an opportunity presented itself in 2007, when mass graves were discovered during construction works in the Guba district of Azerbaijan. Almost immediately Azerbaijani scientists announced that these graves were evidence of massacres of the peaceful Azerbaijani population committed by Armenian Dashnaks in alliance with Bolsheviks in May 1918. On 30 December 2009 (the day before the

Day of Solidarity) Ilham Aliyev signed an order on the creation of the Genocide Memorial Complex “in order to inform the world community about the criminal acts of Armenian nationalists, to preserve the national memory of future generations of the Azerbaijani people and to memorialize the victims of genocide” (Azertac, 2009).

After the Second Karabakh War (autumn 2020), Ilham Aliyev introduced a new kind of commemoration politics, that of military victory. The center stage was given to the already incumbent “victorious” president (Dtx.gov.az, 2020). This allowed Ilham Aliyev to step out of the shadow of his father, the “great national leader” and “saviour of the nation” Heydar Aliyev. The impressive and quick victory in the war, as well as the creation of a “victorious army” are merits that Ilham Aliyev could attribute entirely to himself. No epithets were spared: the Supreme Commander-in-Chief is “brilliant,” “victorious” and “far-sighted.”



Visit of President Ilham Aliyev and First Lady, First Vice President Mehriban Aliyeva to Zangilan and Qubati (2021).⁴⁰

The process of return of IDPs to the territories returned under Azerbaijani control was immediately labeled “great.” A call for artists to contribute to the narrative read: “Acceptance of works for the exhibition “Great Return. The end of separation.” Exhibition organized by the Azerbaijan State Art Gallery. The aim of the exhibition, dedicated to the bravery and heroism of our army, is to revive Azerbaijani culture in the territories liberated from occupation” (Azertac, 2021). The artworks that passed the curatorial selection reflected “all facets of the greatest event in the modern history of our country” (Museumcenter.az, 2024). From art to ground, the class II two-lane highway to Shusha under construction (not a speedway without a dividing strip) was proclaimed a “grandiose Victory Road” (Rzayev, 2021).

New “red days” appeared in the calendar already in the first weeks after the war, Remembrance Day (27 September - the beginning of the war) and Victory Day (8 November), which became the day of the capture of the key city of Shusha, “the beating heart of our Karabakh,” “Conservatory of the East” and “Cradle of Azerbaijani music” (Azertac, 2020). On 4 December, Azerbaijan honors the memory of 2,783 shahids with a minute’s silence, car horns and sirens - this was the number of casualties in the war, which was initially stated, but later the figure was revised upwards. A secondary school principal who got lost in the many new commemorations and confused Remembrance Day with Victory Day was dismissed

⁴⁰ Source: www.president.az

(Aliyev Y. , 2021). Any deviations from the official discourse and ritual will continue to be strictly suppressed.

On 10 December 2020, a Victory Parade was held in Baku in the presence of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, “dedicated to Azerbaijan’s great victory in the Patriotic War - Operation Iron Fist” (President.az, 2020). Two new high orders Zəfər “(Victory) and Karabakh were established, as well as a dozen new medals, including “Hero of the Patriotic War” and even a medal “For services on the home front in the Patriotic War.” (1news.az, 2020). Obviously, the cult of the new war completely replaced the Soviet cult of the Great Patriotic War yet fully reproduced its tropes. Mehriban Aliyeva used the Stalinist “brothers and sisters” in her victory address to the nation and recalled everyone from the Shahids to “the brotherly people of Turkey and personally President Recep Tayyip Erdogan” (Mehriban-aliyeva.az, 2020). In connection with the growing role of Turkey in Azerbaijani politics, a postage stamp and envelopes “One Nation, Two States. Victory Parade” were issued (Mincom.gov.az, 2020).

The Azerbaijan Composers Union announced that its members “will work on creating new works reflecting the Victory” (Babayeva, Azerbaijani composers will create works dedicated to the Great Victory in the Patriotic War , 2020). Already in the summer of 2022, Ilahi Kismet’s ballet “Iron Fist” (the codename of the Azerbaijani army’s operation in autumn 2020) (Abbasova, 2022) was presented to the audience. Famous writer Natig Rasulzadeh “in three weeks, with journalistic efficiency” wrote the novel Colonel (Babayeva, 2020). Artist Ashraf Heibatov claimed he began work on the mural Victory Celebration in Karabakh at the beginning of the war (Mamedova, 2021). At the end of 2020, President Aliyev decided “In order to demonstrate the unparalleled heroism and grandiose historical victory of the Azerbaijani people in the Patriotic War, to immortalize the bright memory of our shahids ... to establish the Patriotic War Memorial Complex and the Victory Museum in the city of Baku of the Republic of Azerbaijan” (Azertac, 2020). In May 2021, Museum of Victory and Museum of Occupation were laid in the city of Agdam as well (Azertac, 2021). In the new administrative building of the General Prosecutor’s Office already in February 2021, Aliyev was introduced to the “historical and memorial gallery dedicated to the 44-day Patriotic War” (Azertac, 2021).

The most notorious commemorative event was the open-air museum War Trophies Park, opened in April 2021 in Baku. This museum was a vivid demonstration of the change in the discourse of memory from trauma to triumph, and at the same time a very frank confirmation that the image of the enemy was, is and will remain in demand in the coming years. At the center of the museum experience was the composition of mannequins with stereotypical ethnic features, representing defeated Armenian soldiers, and trophy equipment. The most straightforward statement in the spirit of “a good enemy is a dead enemy” was the exposition with hundreds of helmets of dead Armenian soldiers and officers.⁴¹ The museum has been a popular place to visit since the day of its opening. Especially for families with small children.

In August 2021 in Shusha, the most prolific poets, like Sabir Rustamkhanli, presented ready-made, verbose poems to the audience, “glorifying the heroic scenes of the 44-day Patriotic War, as well as our people’s struggle for independence and integrity” (Edebiyyatqazeti.az, 2020). Carpet makers have begun creating a collection of Victory carpets (Vishnevetskiy, 2021). In November

⁴¹ After a heated discussion, the mannequins and helmets were removed from the museum.

2022, four new pieces were added to this collection based on the results of the competition: Fidan İlham (carpet “Those Who Brought Us Victory”) took first place in the competition, Aitay Alekperli (carpet “Iron Fist”) took second place, Tahmina Mammadova (carpet “Return”) took third place, and Maya İbadli (carpet “Entering Paradise”) became the winner according to the results of social networks (Report. az, 2022). Sculptors were not lagging behind, managing to create a number of military-patriotic statues in a short period after the war: “Tebriz Soltanly created a sculpture of Major General Polad Hashimov, Mustagil Balaev created a sculpture of Aresta Bakhyshva, the only woman who became a shekhid in the Patriotic War, and Leyla Mammadova created a sculpture of a soldier carrying a wounded friend from the battlefield,” etc., media of the time reported. (Azertac, 2021). Film, television and all the other artistic forms that previously accompanied the celebration of the Soviet sacred date of 9 May were now employed in the new victory of commemoration politics. Direct borrowings from the discourse on the Great Patriotic War and the victory over fascism as a world evil were popular in Azerbaijan throughout the Karabakh conflict and proved to be even more in demand in the days of the new war (Rzaev, 2020). The already mentioned novel *The Colonel* is dedicated to the fight against “Armenian-fascist occupants” (Asadova, I., 2020). Even the description of the heroic journey of one or another *gazi* (this is the word from Islamic discourse used to describe veterans) reproduces the Russian model “from Moscow to Berlin.”

The victory in the sacred “Patriotic War” has every chance of becoming the most important site of national memory. Public intellectuals, who enthusiastically joined the propaganda campaign of the “war to the victorious end,” spoke of the birth of a new nation in its crucible. “We are born again: in agony, in battles, in horrors, at the same time in great enthusiasm, even in a certain euphoria. This time we are born as a Political Nation” (Mirzeyev, 2020).

What is certain to persist after İlham Aliyev’s re-election in 2024 for another term (there are no real competitors in this election) in almost unchanged form is not only the cult of personality of Heydar Aliyev, but also narratives of conflict in historical and memory politics. As before, and perhaps with even more enthusiasm, enemy images and national myths will be produced and historical rights to territory and cultural heritage will be defended.

Future Perspectives on the Past

In any country, power plays an important role in shaping memory politics. However, in countries with democratic governments, a wide variety of independent agents are allowed into this field. The key specificity of memory politics in Azerbaijan is that the political regime exercises the greatest possible control over it. It is the authorities who, guided by their own goals (primarily, by increasing their legitimacy), control all public spaces in the republic.

Since the establishment of the Aliyev regime in 1993, the process of suppressing political opposition and civil society has been continuous and has intensified with each passing year. In the same context, the state’s control over the memory and historical politics has been constantly increasing. On the one hand, this control by the authorities has been quite common since Soviet times. On the other hand, the increasing control is justified by the need to produce a unified and solidary position on the Karabakh conflict.



Collage presented at the Victory exhibition at the Gallery of Arts. Baku, November 2021.

The logic of the mobilization discourse is based on the fact that in the face of the treacherous “historical enemy,” the Azerbaijanis must be united. This logic has also been successfully applied to suppress political opposition and civil society. In this context, any criticism of the authorities is labeled as a “pro-Armenian” or “anti-Azerbaijani” position. Not only are military personnel but historians are also actively involved in the Karabakh conflict, as exclusive rights to this or that territory are justified through myths about autochthony. The authorities control almost all universities and research institutes and do not allow for dissent. But even without this control, most historians and social researchers are unable to go beyond the boundaries of an influential patriotic discourse in which they are willing to voluntarily demonstrate their solidarity in confronting Azerbaijan’s historic enemy.

Control over history and memory increases as Heydar Aliyev enters the political arena. In the context of the cult of the “great leader,” his activity as Head of the KGB of the Republic and First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan (1967-1982) was aimed at creating the conditions for future independence, which took place after his return to power in 1993. Numerous monuments and museums are intended to confirm this myth in public space. The Heydar Aliyev cult can flourish only under conditions of hereditary power and an authoritarian regime that does not allow alternative versions of history to enter the public space. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that the authorities take controlling the past very seriously.

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History/Foreign Policy Nexus in Armenian Politics: the Case of Presidential Elections

Introductory Remarks

One of the distinguishing features of post-Soviet Armenian political debate is the role that issues of history and politics of memory have played in it. There has been a nexus between politics of memory, foreign policy, especially issues of conflict resolution, and internal political debate. Issues of historical memory, particularly those pertaining to the Armenian genocide of 1915 and the past of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations, influenced the post-Soviet developments, particularly the state of relations with Turkey, relations with Russia, and the Karabakh conflict. In turn, developments in Armenia-Turkey relations, Armenia-Russia relations and Karabakh conflict influenced politics of memory, and all those together influenced internal politics, determining the discourses and policies, and even, at certain points, leading to rise and fall of political leaders.



Armored Vehicles in the Streets of Yerevan after March 1, 2008.⁴²

With a certain degree of simplification one can say that post-Soviet Armenian political discourse, particularly, in the context of elections, has been dominated by three main topics: corruption, democracy and foreign policy. When it comes to the first two, a familiar pattern emerges. The opposition, whoever they might be, accuse the current government of corruption and electoral fraud, while the current government denies these allegations, and, if the opposition had been in government before, accuses them of having been corrupt in their time. However, when it comes to foreign policy and the Karabakh conflict, things are more complicated. While some politicians, such as Ter-Petrosyan and Kocharyan had represented the opposite

⁴² Source: Mediamax. <https://images.app.goo.gl/QCaj9iLnARsvW5fJ7>

positions on the spectrum of approaches to these issues, others tried to combine elements of both approaches to find a middle ground, and often avoided presenting a clear view on these issues or shied away from addressing them, in order not to alienate voters.

It is within debates about foreign policy that issues of history become quite pronounced. When it comes to foreign policy, the positions of Armenian politicians have traditionally stayed on issues such as the relations with Turkey and the campaign for Armenian genocide recognition, relations with Russia, relations with Azerbaijan and the resolution of the Karabakh conflict. These issues have an obvious relationship to such episodes of history as the Armenian genocide in 1915, history of Armenia-Turkey and Armenia-Azerbaijan relations, the role Russia has played in Armenian history, particularly the experience of the Soviet period and so on.

The relationship between history and politics in post-Soviet Armenia has become a subject of a number of studies. An overview of politics of history in post-Soviet Armenia has been given by various authors (Iskandaryan, 1999; Suny, 2001; Panossian, 2002; Zolyan, 2008; Zolyan, 2023). Armenia's relationship with its Soviet past has been studied by Zolyan and Tokarev (Tokarev 2017; Zolyan 2023). However, relatively few authors have focused specifically on the role history and politics of memory have played in the political debate, with the notable exception of Gerard Libaridian, himself a former politician and a member of the government in the early 1990s (Libaridian, 1991; 1999, 2007). Some aspects of these issues have been dealt with by other authors as well, including Stephan Astourian (Astourian, 2001). However, the question of the role of history and politics of memory in the struggle for power in Armenia, particularly in the presidential campaign has never become a subject of a specific study, so in this respect the current research is the first attempt to analyze this issue from an academic point of view.

When it comes to the link between issues of memory, foreign policy and conflict resolution, broadly speaking, one can talk about two approaches prevalent among Armenian political elites since post-Soviet independence. One, which had been championed by Dashnaktstutyun political party and Armenia's second president, Robert Kocharyan, can be described as traditionalist. It encompasses the following elements: a relatively uncompromising stance on relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan, commitment to international recognition of the Armenian genocide as a foreign policy priority, and reliance on Russia as Armenia's ally and guarantor of security of Armenia and Armenians (particularly in Nagorno-Karabakh).

This approach has been criticized as "romantic" by its opponents, particularly Armenia's first president Levon Ter-Petrosyan, and Armenian National Movement (later transformed into Armenian National Congress). The second approach, which for a long time was represented primarily by Ter-Petrosyan and his allies, had been pronounced "pragmatic" by its supporters, while its critics often called it "defeatist". The proponents of this approach advocated a compromise solution to relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan, believed that the international campaign for Armenian Genocide recognition should not be a priority and should be left to Armenian Diaspora, and, though this last point was seldom articulated, sought to reduce Armenia's reliance on Russia. Within this continuum, in which Kocharyan and Dashnaktstutyun were on one pole, and Ter-Petrosyan was on the other one, other politicians, including Armenia's third president Serzh Sargsyan, and a number of presidential candidates, can be seen as occupying a position somewhere in the middle. In case of Sargsyan, while the official rhetoric continued the trends set by

his predecessor, Kocharyan, Sargsyan's actions, particularly the attempt at Armenia-Turkey rapprochement, as well as his readiness to sign an agreement with Azerbaijan, could be seen as somewhat in line with Ter-Petrosyan's approach, though ultimately these were unsuccessful.

Before proceeding to the actual topic of this chapter, it is necessary to say a couple of words about post-Soviet Armenia's political regime. The issue of whether Armenia is a democracy or not remained one of the main issues of the political debate in Armenia throughout the post-Soviet period. As a rule, the Armenian opposition proclaim Armenia to be an authoritarian regime, and accuse the government of authoritarian behaviors, while the government side usually claims that Armenia is a democracy. Without going into this debate, which obviously has political connotations, we shall rely on the classification of leading scholars of post-Soviet and global authoritarianism, Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, who classified Armenia at the time, as a stable competitive authoritarian regime (Levitsky & Way, 2010, p 21). They defined it in the following way: "competitive authoritarian regimes are civilian regimes in which formal democratic institutions exist and are widely viewed as the primary means of gaining power, but in which incumbents' abuse of the state places them at a significant advantage vis-à-vis their opponents. Such regimes are competitive in that opposition parties use democratic institutions to contest seriously for power, but they are not democratic because the playing field is heavily skewed in favor of incumbents. Competition is thus real but unfair" (Levitsky & Way, 2010, p 5).

It is also important to note that in 2018 Armenia had experienced events that most observers saw as a democratic breakthrough (Carothers & Feldman, 2023). The mass protests which led to resignation of Serzh Sargsyan, the incumbent president who tried to remain prime-minister under constitution that he had changed himself, came to be known as the Velvet Revolution (on these events see Broers, 2021; Zolyan, 2021). However, these events are out of our scope of research, since they coincided with the transition from presidential to a parliamentary system of government. This chapter deals with developments before 2018, when Armenia had a presidential system.

The Beginning: The National-Democratic Movement and the Elections of 1991

Political elites of post-Soviet Armenia had to face the internal contradiction between romantic and pragmatic views of foreign policy from the early stages of development of Armenian statehood, even before Armenia became formally independent. This contradiction appeared in the center of the political discourse throughout the late period of the Soviet system's demise and the beginning of the independent Armenia, including the first presidential election that took place in September 1991.

The political elites of post-Soviet Armenia were heirs to the Karabakh movement, which started in early 1988 with the demand for unification of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, but also brought forward a range of demands, from environmental issues to democratic reform. However, the national(ist) agenda was the main driving force behind it, which included not only demands related to Nagorno-Karabakh, and at a later stage, demands for independence of Armenia from the USSR, but also demands for international recognition of the Armenian genocide in Turkey, and even return of Western Armenia, i.e. historical Armenian territories, which are currently

part of Turkey. It was here that the main contradiction of post-Soviet Armenia's foreign policy emerged. On the one hand, it was obvious that independence from the USSR and Russia required resolving historical issues with neighbors, first of all Turkey and Azerbaijan. However, in the mind of most Armenians demands for independence from USSR, unification with Nagorno-Karabakh, and genocide recognition, reparations and territorial claims toward Turkey all went together. All these were perceived as part of the same agenda of national liberation and rebirth. Most Armenians, who did not have experience of living in an independent state with its own foreign policy, failed to understand the deep inherent contradiction between the goal of building a sustainable independent state with a working relationship with its neighbors on the one hand, and the goal of pursuing historical justice in relations with those same neighbors, on the other.



Clashes on the street March 1 2008⁴³

However, not everyone was completely blind to the need to resolve this contradiction. Both in Armenia and in Diaspora, political activists and intellectuals were struggling with this issue. Gerard Libaridian, who at the time was a US Armenian scholar and later became one of the main advisers on foreign policy to Armenia's first president Ter-Petrosyan, formulated the dilemma in the center of the debate in the following way:

Can Armenia be an independent state? To be more explicit, one can ask: Can Armenia achieve strategic and political viability as a sovereign state capable of defining and managing its own vital interests or does her survival mandate continue as a vassal state of an imperial power in return for protection?... For too long fear of neighbors has been the dominant factor in determining the answer to the question of Armenian independence. Engendered by a series of massacres and a genocide in the twentieth century, strengthened by the image of the brutal Turk, nurtured by the surviving specter of Pan-Turkism, internalized as the psychology of the victim and the colonized, manipulated by Armenia's self-appointed protectors, that fear has, in fact, distorted the perception of national interests, and has been confused with strategic thinking... (Libaridian, 1991, p 1).

⁴³ Source: A1plus. <https://images.app.goo.gl/F5BCJMBT3ERJfvHK8>

In the center of this dilemma was the issue of the Armenian genocide. Libaridian, together with the leaders of the Armenian National Movement, argued that focusing on the historical trauma of genocide as the basis of Armenia's political identity could be dangerous for the future of the would-be independent state: "...The Genocide, its exploitation, and its denial by Turkey have paralyzed the collective psyche of the Armenian people. A nation of victims – at first of the violence, and subsequently of its denial – is incapable of sustaining a rational discourse. A nation cannot imagine its future if the only thing it can imagine the future bringing is further victimization. The denial of the future justifies the denial of the present and mandates an obsessive treatment of an overburdened past..." (Libaridian, 1991, p 1-2)

The leaders of the national movement in Armenia also were occupied with the question of how to reconcile the traditional Armenian agenda of Genocide recognition, known as *Hay Dat* (or the Armenian Cause), with the goal of building a sustainable independent state⁴⁴. Like the Diaspora parties, emerging Armenian politicians started to realize that pursuing both agendas at the same time would be impossible, but their priorities, and, hence, their answer to this conundrum was different from the answer given by the traditional parties. At least some of them fully understood that relying on the agenda of *Hay Dat* would mean being on a collision course with Turkey, hence making reliance on USSR/Russia a necessity. The ideological predecessor to the Armenian National Movement was the linguist and public intellectual Rafael Ishkhanyan, who wrote the article "The Law of the Exclusion of the Third Power". In this article Ishkhanyan criticized Armenian leaders of the past for building Armenian identity on antipathy towards the Turks, as well as blindly trusting Russia or Western Europe. Based on this critique he advocated a new approach, which was based on rejecting the idea of the savior in the form of Russia, the West or any other external actor, and consequently building a peaceful relationship with Turkey in order to reduce Russia's influence on Armenia (Ishkhanyan, 1991, p. 49-73).

This approach, which even today may seem heretical to many Armenians, was shared if not by everyone on the leadership of the Karabakh movement, at least by its most influential leaders of the time. This is how Libaridian summarized the approach of the leaders of Armenia's rising national-democratic movement at the time: "... The national-democratic movement... questioned the validity of the paradigm based on fear, raised doubts on the imminence of a Pan-Turkic danger, reestablished the right to determine a national agenda, and reintroduced rational discourse as the means to answer questions" (Libaridian, 1991, p 2.) Libaridian also criticized the Diaspora Armenian organizations for failing to see the necessity of a new approach and clinging to the old approach: "We, in the Diaspora, should have the humility and courage to recognize that our institutions were not built to face the new, and bigger challenges facing our nation... Our political thinking has been meandering over the past seventy years, just as we, Diasporans, have been moving from country to country... The time had come to reassess the issues of the past decades, to understand history and act in a way that makes real participation and real change possible. The time had come to distinguish between the real and ritualistic" (Libaridian, 1991, p. 167).

⁴⁴ Armenian Cause is the name for the ideology and political practices, which had been advanced by Armenian political organizations abroad, which are centered around the issue of recognition of the Armenian genocide of 1915, and, in its more radical versions, also demands for financial restitutions and even territorial claims on the lands of historical Western Armenia, i.e. currently Eastern Turkey.

However, many of the supporters of the movement believed that Armenia can not only become independent, but also pursue the goal of unification with Karabakh, and, at the same time, pursue the agenda of Hay Dat. While for the leaders of the movement it was obvious that these expectations were not realistic, they were reluctant to openly challenge these assumptions, since that could alienate many of their own supporters. However, these contradictions had to arise sooner or later. One such point was the discussion over the text of the Declaration of Independence, which had been adopted on August 23, 1990. Contrary to its title, the Declaration did not proclaim Armenia independent, but stated independence as a goal. When the declaration was discussed, it became a cause for heated debate in the parliament, as some MPs demanded to include provisions referring to Hay Dat (Libaridian, 2007, p.266-267). Eventually, a compromise was reached, no direct references to territorial claims were made, but references about “the dreams of all Armenians” and “commitment to historical justice” were included in the preamble of the declaration, and one of its points stated that Armenia supports the international recognition of the 1915 genocide “in Ottoman Turkey and Western Armenia” (Government of Armenia, 1990).



Protest rally in Yerevan in late 1980s⁴⁵

These contradictions became a part of the first years of Armenia’s post-Soviet experience, and, one may argue that in a modified form, they have persisted till this day. Libaridian talks about two camps that existed in Armenia in the early 1990s, those of the pragmatists and the idealists: “Ter-Petrosyan and the Armenian National Movement represented the core of the first camp [i.e. pragmatists - MZ] and promoted one worldview: to bring normalcy to Armenia and to the Armenian people, transcend its tortured past, avoid ideological constraints, and follow a pragmatic route... The second camp ascribed to Armenia and the Armenian nation the role of achieving a higher vision, ideal, mission, or status. Each in its own way, Vazgen Manukyan’s National Democratic Union (NDU), the Communist Party of Armenia (CPA), and the Democratic Party of Armenia (DPA) extolled ‘a national ideology’ that, even if left undefined, assigned the Armenian state and its people a pre-ordained role beyond the one the people would assign it” (Libaridian, 1999, p. 71).

⁴⁵ Source: Aparaj.am <https://images.app.goo.gl/Ddti5hPaNkMrYmMw6>

However, in the elections of 1991 these contradictions remained and largely did not influence the electoral debate. At the time, the USSR was falling apart, and Armenia was moving toward independence, which became a cause for euphoria and celebration among many Armenians. It was against this background that the candidate of ANM, Ter-Petrosyan, who symbolized Armenia's move toward independence was the obvious frontrunner. Ter-Petrosyan's agenda was centered on four points: development of a market economy; democratization; a realistic foreign policy unburdened by the weight of the past (particularly the legacy of the Armenian genocide and Armenia's traditional dependence on Russia); and the resolution of the Karabakh conflict (Astourian, 2001, p 2).

Other politicians took part in the election, with a clear understanding that they had virtually no chances of winning. Thus, another politician whose name was associated with independence, Paruyr Hayrikyan, a former Soviet dissident who had been persecuted for championing the independence cause, had significant influence in the society. His main point was criticizing Ter-Petrosyan for what he perceived as "conciliatory attitude to Russia and Azerbaijan" (Dahlburg, 1991). Armenian Revolutionary Federation, or "Dashnaktsutyun", the strongest party in Armenian Diaspora, had just begun its activities in the homeland, so it did not have significant resources, or even obvious leaders. In a move, which may have been inspired by the example of former Hollywood actor Ronald Reagan, Dashnaktsutyun fielded famous Armenian actor Sos Sargsyan as its candidate. Other candidates included two other dissident figures: nationalist Ashot Navasardyan, the leader of the Republican Party of Armenia, at the time a small organization that was set to become the ruling party of Armenia in the late 1990s, and liberal intellectual Raphael Ghazaryan, a famous physicist and member of the Karabakh committee (Dahlburg, 1991). The elections brought no surprises. Ter-Petrosyan won a landslide victory with 83% of the votes, or 1 260 000 votes (Abrahamyan 2019, p. 344).

However, the contradiction between the supporters of Ter-Petrosyan's pragmatic vision and the supporters of the Armenian Cause, became a major issue of conflict during the early 1990s. These issues became one of the main points of debate between the government of Ter-Petrosyan, and the opposition, particularly the Dashnaktsutyun party, which became significantly more influential in Armenia than it had been during the 1991 election. Through these years Ter-Petrosyan was losing popularity, due to the difficult conditions Armenia was going through, while Dashnaktsutyun was becoming more influential, partly due to the financial and moral support it was getting from the powerful Dashnaktsutyun organizations in the Diaspora. Dashnaktsutyun also instrumentalized a relatively radical nationalist position, which focused on both the Karabakh conflict and Hay Dat, while Ter-Petrosyan advocated a more moderate stance on Karabakh, as well as advancing relations with Turkey. Dashnak activists accused Ter-Petrosyan of treason, a position that resonated with many Armenians under the conditions of war and extreme economic hardship.

The conflict between Ter-Petrosyan and Dashnaktsutyun came to a climax when a number of Dashnak activists were arrested, allegedly for plotting murder of Ter-Petrosyan. In December 1994 Ter-Petrosyan banned Dashnaktsutyun, its official newspaper, Yerkir, was shut down. Dashnaktsutyun supporters till this day deny the existence of the plot against Ter-Petrosyan, however, the latter's supporters point out to the fact that the arrested Dashnak activists were never acquitted: they were released from jail after Ter-Petrosyan stepped down in 1998, due to the new situation. They also point to the fact that Dashnaktsutyun has used terrorist methods in the

past, as well as that the people who carried out the terrorist act of October 27, 1999 in the Armenian parliament (see below) were former Dashnaksutyun members. Interpretations of these events differ till this day, while some authors tend to believe the accusations against Dashnaksutyun's, others tend to see Ter-Petrosyan's authoritarian tendencies behind the ban of the Dashnaksutyun (for an account sympathetic to Ter-Petrosyan see Libaridian 1999, 2007, for an account critical of Ter-Petrosyan see Astourian, 2001) In any case, it is indicative of the level of the tension between Ter-Petrosyan and Dashnaksutyun, that in pro-Dashnaksutyun media, Ter-Petrosyan was compared to Talaat Pasha, one of the organizers of the Armenian Genocide in Ottoman Empire, and one of the articles argued that direct occupation of Armenia by Turkey would have been preferable to continuing rule by Ter-Petrosyan (Panossian, 2006, p. 386).

Crisis and Defeat of Ter-Petrosyan's Approach: 1996-1998

In any case, Ter-Petrosyan's victory over Dashnaksutyun was a Pyrrhic victory. In 1996 he was faced with a common opposition front, united around his former teammate, Armenia's first prime-minister Vazgen Manukyan. Dashnaksutyun and other opposition parties, with the notable exception of the Communists, supported Manukyan. The elections took place on September 22 1996. Ter-Petrosyan was declared the winner in the first stage, with 51.7%, while Manukyan received 41.29%, but the amount of electoral violations put this victory into question. Even the international monitors, who tend to use diplomatic language, issued quite a harsh statement, calling into question the official results. Apparently, a large part of Armenian society also mistrusted the official results, a circumstance that led to mass protests in the aftermath of the election. Large rallies of Manukyan supporters started immediately after the announcement of the preliminary results of the election. Several days later a large crowd of opposition supporters led by Manukyan marched toward the building of the National Assembly, where the Central Electoral Commission was situated. Manukyan himself entered the building for negotiations and told the crowd that if he would not be out in 20 minutes, they should follow him in. Manukyan did not come back in twenty minutes, and part of the protesters stormed the NA building, beating up the Chairman and the vice- chairman of the National Assembly. This act of violence by the protesters was the justification the government forces needed to disperse the protest. The next day streets of Yerevan were patrolled by government forces with rifles and armored vehicles. Most of the protest leaders were arrested or went into hiding. Ter-Petrosyan's victory was secured, but not through ballots, rather through police batons (on these events see Astourian, 2001, p. 43-45).

What was the role played by issues of memory politics in the 1996 election campaign? Both Ter-Petrosyan and Vazgen Manukyan came from the ranks of the Armenian National Movement, so at some point they must have shared the realist or pragmatic attitude that ANM had adopted when it came to government in 1991. Moreover, Manukyan was actually the son-in-law of Rafael Ishkhanyan, the author of the principle of "excluding the third force". Accepting this principle meant accepting the necessity of creating neighborly relations with Turkey. However, over the years, due to the logic of struggle against Ter-Petrosyan's ANM, Manukyan gravitated toward a somewhat different approach to these issues, as we shall see further.

In the rhetoric of the election campaign, issues of corruption and economy played a major role, however, there was also an overarching theme regarding the place and mission of Armenia in the world. Ter-Petrosyan's camp emphasized the need to protect what Armenia has already gained, particularly the victory in the war, and the economic stabilization that had begun. In order to do this, Ter-Petrosyan's side argued, it was necessary to refrain from maximalist or romantic approaches, particularly when it came to relations with the neighbors, specifically, Armenia-Turkey relations (including genocide recognition issues) and Karabakh conflict resolution. Manukyan's camp, together with the majority of the opposition, in turn, accused Ter-Petrosyan of defeatist approaches toward the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh, and compromising Armenian national identity and historical memory, when it came to Armenia-Turkey relations and the issue of genocide recognition. In addition, Manukyan spoke a lot about the "global mission" of Armenians, who in his view were "a global nation" with "a global mission," who were, allegedly, hampered by Ter-Petrosyan's corruption, authoritarianism and defeatism. Ter-Petrosyan's camp, in turn, accused Manukyan of dangerous radicalism, which could eventually lead to a new war.



Protest rally in Yerevan in the late 1980s.⁴⁶

The philosophic essence of this debate has been summarized by Libaridian, who in this debate obviously supported Ter-Petrosyan, arguing that there were two approaches during the 1990s, which he labels pragmatic ideology and national ideology. In his view, the difference between these two held the answer to the question why Armenians wanted independence in the first place, as well as subsequent questions that arose from it: "what do they do with it now that it is there? How do they keep it? Is there another goal or value for which they may or may not be sacrificing it?", "what is the mission of any government of independent Armenia?", and so on. When it comes to answers to these questions, according to Libaridian, "it is possible to discern the answers of groups representing two different worldviews... The first group consists of pragmatists, people who want to use the opportunity of statehood to return Armenia and Armenians to the fold of humanity as 'normal' people. The second group believes statehood should be used as a vehicle to achieve a 'higher purpose', quality, mission, or program" (Libaridian, 1999, p. 13).

⁴⁶ Source: lurer.com, <https://images.app.goo.gl/skS175Tqd55UvyYy7>

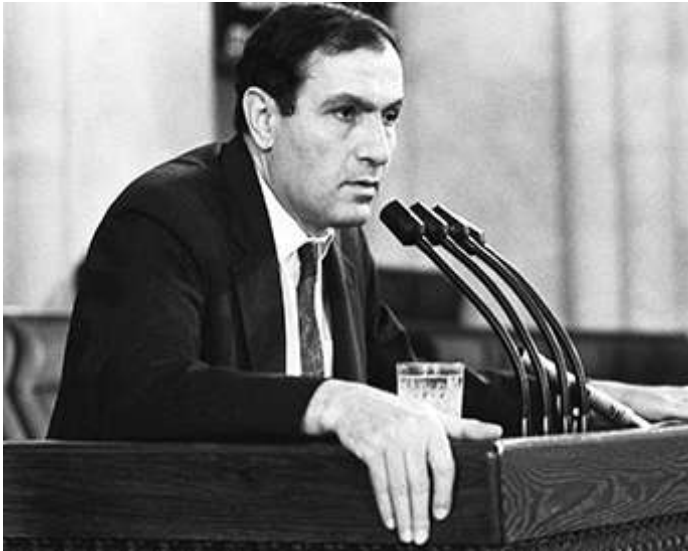
The theoretical justification for the approach of Manukyan and ARF was expressed by various intellectuals at the time, probably one of the brightest of these was the Lendrush Khurshudyan, head of the Chair of the History of Armenians at the History Department of the Yerevan State University. In the Soviet times he dealt with modern history of Armenia, as well as history of Armenian political parties. In the late 1980s he attempted to defend the Dashnaksutyun, while not breaking with the tenets of official historiography. In practice it meant that he argued that Dashnaksutyun was not a party of haute bourgeoisie, as it was considered in mainstream Soviet Armenian historiography, but a petit bourgeois party, which effectively meant that it could be seen in a less negative light (Khurshudyan 1988). In the 1990s, he sided with Dashnaksutyun and gave a theoretical background to the positions expressed by the party in the internal political debate, particularly when it came to Armenia-Turkey relations and genocide recognition. However, being an academic, Khurshudyan was able to go beyond what was permissible for active politicians. Thus, in his book *Hay Dat*, he clearly stated that the goal of Armenia's policy has to be the return of the Western Armenia, i.e. historical Armenian lands, currently within Turkey. Moreover, he considered that Armenia has an existential need to continue the alliance with Russia, since any other approach would mean "surrendering to the Pan Turkism" (Khurshudyan, 1995).

Thus, in the election of 1996 Armenian voters faced a choice between two leaders of the national democratic movement, one of which had become an increasingly authoritarian ruler, and the other one a radical nationalist. Since some participants of these events, including Ter-Petrosyan still remain a part of Armenia's political landscape at the time of writing of the chapter, the results of that election, which was marred by accusation of large-scale fraud, still remain a sensitive issue and matter of internal debate in Armenia. However, as with the contemporary elections, there seems to be enough evidence to show that the elections were not free and fair, and their results have been tampered with. This is how Levitsky and Way describe the Armenian elections of 1996:

Despite massive incumbent abuse of state resources and a virtual monopoly over the electronic media, Manukyan may have won the election; only fraud allowed Ter-Petrosyan to claim a first-round victory. The fraud triggered massive protest: at least 120000 Manukyan supporters rallied in front of the Central Election Committee and stormed the parliament. The regime's coercive structures were critical in suppressing the challenge. Ter-Petrosyan declared a state of emergency and security forces encircled and barred protesters from the capital, Yerevan; public plazas were closed, demonstrations were banned, and opposition headquarters were shut down; at least 250 opposition activists were arrested; and Manukyan was forced into hiding... The Western reaction was tepid. Although the United States condemned the election, it soon softened its stance and US assistance fell only slightly (Levitsky and Way, 2010, p. 210)

While it seemed that Ter-Petrosyan emerged victorious from the confrontation with the opposition in the mid-1990s, the long-term results were quite different. The election fraud and subsequent protests severely weakened Ter-Petrosyan, and two years later he was forced to resign. Moreover, Ter-Petrosyan's defeat was more than simply his personal defeat, or the defeat of his team. It also became the defeat of the foreign policy paradigm he was trying to advance, the paradigm, which was based on a pragmatic approach to the issue of relations with Armenia's neighbors to

Armenia's heritage of traumatic history and relations with its neighbors. While Ter-Petrosyan was able to defeat Dashnaksutyun and other opposition politicians, using the resources of the state, he was unable to defeat the ideology of Dashnaksutyun, which was based on the concept of Hay Dat, an ideology that treated historical trauma as the basis for foreign policy. In fact, the "romantic nationalism" of Dashnaksutyun became the mainstream position for Armenian political and intellectual elites, and found its way into Ter-Petrosyan's own team, leading to his downfall as a result of an internal coup. Moreover, with the events of 1998-1999, the "romantic nationalism" approach became the basis of Armenia's foreign policy for the next two decades. This change, however, did not happen due to presidential elections only, but rather, due to a sequence of events, which included, apart from presidential elections, events that can be seen as a velvet coup d'état and a major terrorist act.



Levon Ter-Petrosyan. Photo by Armenpress.⁴⁷

The final crack in Ter-Petrosyan's rule came from developments in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution process. In 1997 the mediators, the so-called Minsk Group co-chairs, which included USA, Russia and France, came up with a proposal for the resolution of the conflict, that became known as the "stage deal" (De Waal, 2014, pp. 305-308, Kazimirov, 2015, pp. 375-379). The essence of this approach was the following: since Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan were not able to find a compromise regarding all the issues at once (the so called package deal), the mediators suggested an agreement, which was dealing with the immediate consequences of the war, providing guarantees of security for Nagorno-Karabakh, and leaving the issue of status of the region to the future. More specifically, Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians were supposed to evacuate 5 out of the 7 Azerbaijani regions, which came under their control during the war. These regions were supposed to be demilitarized, and international peacekeeping forces were going to be stationed

⁴⁷ Source: Aliq Media. <https://images.app.goo.gl/HMrJZFni5VULsqgd9>

there. The status of Nagorno-Karabakh was going to be left for future negotiations, however, Nagorno-Karabakh was going to remain effectively *de facto* independent, and receive security guarantees in the form of peacekeepers. Today, in hindsight, this solution seems to be quite suiting Armenian interests. Ter-Petrosyan advocated accepting this proposal, first in a press-conference, and then, through an article he wrote, “Time to Get Serious” (Ter-Petrosyan, 1997).

Ter-Petrosyan’s approach, however, raised serious criticism in the leadership of Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, and also within the close circle of his supporters in Armenia. The opposition was led by two members of Ter-Petrosyan’s inner circle, prime-minister Robert Kocharyan and Minister of State Security, Serzh Sargsyan, both coming from Nagorno-Karabakh⁴⁸. However, it was critical for Ter-Petrosyan, that these two were able to gain the support of Ter-Petrosyan’s close ally, minister of defense, charismatic Vazgen Sargsyan, one of the people, who were credited for creating Armenia’s armed forces almost from scratch in the early 1990s. After the elections of 1996, Ter-Petrosyan had lost his democratic legitimacy and was heavily dependent on the state structures, particularly the military and the security apparatus. Thus, when the key figures in the government rebelled against him, he was left with virtually no support. In a fateful session of the Security Council Ter-Petrosyan’s suggestion to accept the proposal for Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution was rejected. Moreover, Vazgen Sargsyan, Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan demanded from him to step down. Ter-Petrosyan caved in, saying in his resignation speech that he was forced to step down in order to avoid “internal bloodshed” (Ter-Petrosyan, 1998). He also said that “the party of war had won, and the party of peace had lost,” without any further elaboration. Many of Ter-Petrosyan’s team members followed his lead and stepped down from their official posts, including the Chairman of the parliament, who would have become the acting president. The next in line was the Prime Minister Robert Kocharyan, who became acting president. Kocharyan also put forward his candidacy in the upcoming presidential election (on these events see Libaridian, 1999; 2007; Astourian, 2001).

In the presidential election of March 1998 the main adversaries were Robert Kocharyan and former Communist leader of Armenia, Karen Demirchyan. Kocharyan was supported by Vazgen Sargsyan and other former members of Ter-Petrosyan’s circle, who took part in removing Ter-Petrosyan from power in February 1998. Kocharyan’s camp was also joined by the Dashnaksutyun party, the ban over which had been removed. Members of Dashnaksutyun, who were charged with plotting terrorist acts, were released and some of them even took part in the electoral campaign. Dashnaksutyun played a major role in organizing mass rallies in support of Kocharyan. Kocharyan promised to raise the issue of Armenian Genocide and make it a priority for Armenia’s foreign policy. Of course, this meant a new confrontational style in relations with Turkey as well (Libaridian, 2007, pp. 274-276). This came along with the image of Kocharyan as hawkish when it came to Nagorno-Karabakh (De Waal, 2014, pp. 309-310). Thus, Kocharyan’s position was a clear break with Ter-Petrosyan’s legacy not only when it came to Nagorno-Karabakh, but also when it came to Armenian genocide recognition and relations with Turkey.

As for Demirchyan, he mostly stayed away from issues of foreign policy. Demirchyan’s advantage was the image of a good manager (or rather *krepki*

⁴⁸ This circumstance had become the basis for a commonly used term “Karabakh clan”, applied to the team of Kocharyan and Sargsyan. However, we do not think that his term is accurate, since the closer circle of Kocharyan and Sargsyan included people from all Armenian regions and diaspora.

kozyaystvennik, as they often say in post-Soviet space) and the nostalgia many people had for the late Soviet period, when Demirchyan was the head of Armenia's Soviet government. At the same time, Demirchyan himself was no longer a Communist, and, while many of his team members were also former Communists, his team had no intention of going back to the Communist system. The unreformed Communists were also represented in the campaign, led by Armenia's Communist Party chairman, Sergey Badalyan. Also in the race were Vazgen Manukyan, the former united opposition candidate of 1996, and a veteran of anti-Soviet struggle Paruyr Hayrikyan. Since some of the favorites of the campaign were former or current Communists, the topic of the Soviet past and nostalgia for the Soviet past became one of the common topics of the electoral debates. One extreme position was occupied by Sergey Badalyan and Communists, who idealized the Soviet period, and advocated a return to Soviet policies, as well as closer integration with Russia. On the other pole, was Paruyr Hayrikyan, a fierce critic of Soviet legacy, who had spent time in jail and exile in late Soviet years, due to his dedication to Armenia's independence. Hayrikyan fiercely criticized Badalyan and Demirchyan, as well as those who were nostalgic for the Soviet times. Kocharyan, against this background, looked as a candidate of the future, as opposed to Demirchyan, whose support was based on nostalgic feelings for the Soviet era.



Levon Ter-Petrosyan with Vazgen Sargsyan.⁴⁹

The question of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution was not on the surface of the debate between Kocharyan and Demirchyan, however, there are reasons to believe that Demirchyan's approach might have been closer to Ter-Petrosyan's approach than that of Kocharyan. While Kocharyan came to power and overthrew Ter-Petrosyan, acting as a champion of a tougher line on both Karabakh and Armenia-Turkey relations, Demirchyan stayed clear of lengthy discussions of these issues, focusing on the economy and his credentials as an "efficient manager". However, it may be indicative of Demirchyan's approach, that, in response to a reporter's

⁴⁹ Source: Aliq Media. <https://images.app.goo.gl/CuSwPFGjWtHaCw6q8>, <https://www.aliqmedia.am/2021/04/26/12244/>

question about how he would solve the Karabakh issue, Demirchyan replied that he had known Azerbaijan president at the time (and former Communist boss) Heydar Aliiev personally and he was sure that this could be an advantage in terms of finding a common solution. Ter-Petrosyan's former adviser Libaridian praises Demirchyan for this answer:

It would be hard to characterize this statement as a 'hard line' on Karabakh: it is closer to inviting a compromise solution... At a minimum it was not a condemnation of Ter-Petrosyan's approach... To interpret the votes Demirchyan received as the 'nostalgia' vote is to show a lack of respect for the ability of the Armenian voter to understand issues and personalities... Whatever else one may say about the citizens of Armenia, for the most part they shun extremes and instability and have respect for circumspection and caution (Libaridian 1999, p. 63).

As another indirect sign that Demirchyan's approach might have been somewhat closer to that of Ter-Petrosyan than Kocharyan one can consider the fact that Demirchyan's son and political heir Stepan supported Ter-Petrosyan as the presidential candidate in 2008 and joined in an alliance with him in the parliamentary elections in 2012 and 2017. Besides, back in 1988, the resignation of Demirchyan had been connected to his unpopularity among the Karabakh movement supporters, for refusing to align with their demands. There was even the famous episode, when he appeared before the crowd demanding unification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia and told them "I do not have Karabakh in my pocket, I can't give it to you" (Ter-Abrahamyan, 2018).

In the second round of the elections Kocharyan won with 58.9% against 40.1% for votes for Demirchyan, at least those were the official results. There were widespread accusations of election fraud: according to the OSCE monitors the election was characterized by uneven media access, voter intimidation and ballot-box stuffing (OSCE ODIHR 1998). However, unlike Manukyan in 1996, Demirchyan did not call on his supporters to protest the election result. Instead, he converted the support he had received in the elections into political capital, which he used to join forces with the most powerful man behind Kocharyan's candidacy, "the kingmaker" Vazgen Sargsyan. This strategy paid off, and Demirchyan was able to create an alliance with Vazgen Sargsyan. The latter was not going to surrender his dominant position among the Armenian political elites. Sargsyan created a political basis for his political role from an alliance of Yerkrpah, an organization of Karabakh war veterans, and the Republican Party of Armenia, until that a relatively minor party, which had been created during the Soviet period, by nationalist dissidents who sought Armenia's independence (Libaridian 1999, p. 24). Under Ter-Petrosyan, the Republican Party was a member of the Republic coalition, which supported Ter-Petrosyan. Sargsyan merged the Yerkrpah organization with the Republican Party, creating a force that dominated Armenia's political life for almost two decades. In May 1999 parliamentary elections took place, in which Vazgen Sargsyan and Karen Demirchyan joined forces. Demirchyan's People's Party and Sargsyan's Republican Party created an alliance called "Unity", which won the majority in the parliament. Sargsyan became prime-minister and Demirchyan – the head of the National Assembly (on the parliamentary election see Zolyan 2010, p 89).

It seemed that the Sargsyan-Demirchyan alliance had sidelined Kocharyan and gained full power in the country, while Kocharyan had to be content with a mostly formal role. However, the situation changed dramatically very soon. On October 27,

1999 a group of armed men, led by former Dashnaksutyun member Nairi Hunanyan entered the parliament, during a Q&A session with the prime-minister, and shot and killed several people, among them Vazgen Sargsyan and Karen Demirchyan. As a result of the attack Kocharyan found himself as the only powerful figure in the government. The Armenian constitution gave wide power to the president, but before that, Kocharyan was sidelined due to the disproportionate influence exercised by the prime-minister and the head of parliament. Now both were gone. No wonder that many Armenians suspected Kocharyan of being somehow connected to the attacks. No proof of Kocharyan's involvement ever emerged, so, the opinion that Kocharyan was behind the attacks, no matter how common in Armenia, remains a conspiracy theory, at least as of today. However, it is certain that Kocharyan benefitted from the attacks, whoever was behind them. Another theory common among Armenians linked the October 27 attacks to Russian meddling. Again, no positive evidence has emerged that would confirm this explanation. The only exception is a statement by former FSB agent Litvinenko, who had defected to Britain and later was murdered by Russian agents. Litvinenko made a statement in 2002 in an interview to Azerbaijani media, in which he claimed that the October 27 attack was masterminded by Russian security services in order to thwart an expected peace deal on Nagorno-Karabakh (Danielyan, 2005). So, as of today there is no hard evidence of either Kocharyan's or Russian involvement in the October 27 attacks. What is certain, however, is that after the events of 1999 Armenian political landscape became dominated by Kocharyan, who pursued policies based on close alliance with Russia, and made little efforts to mend relations with either Azerbaijan or Turkey.

Kocharyan coming to power signified an important change in Armenia's foreign policy, which was also connected to issues of politics of memory. The main differences between Kocharyan and his predecessor Ter-Petrosyan lay in how they addressed two issues that were the most important for post-Soviet Armenia: Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution and Armenia-Turkey relations. While Ter-Petrosyan advocated a compromise with Azerbaijan, more specifically, accepting the so-called step-by-step approach which would leave the question of status of Nagorno-Karabakh to the future, Kocharyan had a more hawkish position. While he never openly questioned the necessity of a compromise solution, he insisted on the package resolution. i.e. resolving all the issues related to the conflict with one package. Ter-Petrosyan's supporters argued that this effectively meant that Kocharyan was against resolution per se, since the likelihood of the package deal succeeding was quite low. In turn, Kocharyan's supporters accused Ter-Petrosyan of defeatism and even hinted that Ter-Petrosyan's position was tantamount to treason.

When it came to Armenia-Turkey relations and genocide recognition, the position of Ter-Petrosyan was that relations between the two countries should be decoupled from the issue of genocide recognition. Moreover, Ter-Petrosyan and his team believed that, even though memory of the genocide had to remain an important part of Armenian identity, it was not the job of the Armenian state to advance the agenda of international recognition of Armenian genocide. A commitment to genocide recognition on the part of Armenia as a state, would have taken too many resources and, most importantly, it would have further complicated the already bad relations with Turkey. Thus, the issue of genocide recognition could be left to the Armenian diaspora organizations, which were campaigning for it anyway, while

Armenia as a state should have focused on its immediate interests, which required mending relations with Turkey, rather than issues of historical justice.

Kocharyan's position on the issue was very different. In this issue, Kocharyan's policies were in line with the ideology of Dashnaksutyun, which became one of the parties that formed the coalition that supported Kocharyan. Moreover, Dashnaksutyun was instrumental in forging links between Kocharyan and Armenian Diaspora, and, particularly, attracting financial aid and investments from Diaspora to Armenia. The contrast with Ter-Petrosyan's period was strong, especially, since, under Ter-Petrosyan, relations between Armenian government and parts of Diaspora have been strained, to a large extent due to Ter-Petrosyan's position on genocide recognition and Armenia-Turkey relations. Now, Armenia under Kocharyan claimed that international recognition of the Armenian genocide was its foreign policy priority.



Vazgen Manukyan at a rally in 1996.⁵⁰

Libaridian argues that Kocharyan's decision to make genocide recognition campaign a priority was largely a tactical one: "Kocharyan, whose interest in history was minimal as opposed to his predecessor, who was a historian, argued that Armenia would raise the problem of Genocide recognition with Turkey and would make international recognition of the Genocide part of its foreign policy agenda... Kocharyan's reasons for this change were rather tactical. He thought that by raising the question, a thorny one for Turkey, he would counter Turkey's insistence on the resolution of the Karabakh conflict before normalization proceeds" (Libaridian, 2004, p. 275). In addition, Kocharyan needed support of Dashnaksutyun, for which, as a Diaspora based political party, the issue of Genocide recognition was a major priority. He also expected that the decision to make Genocide recognition the centerpiece of Armenia's foreign policy agenda would help to win over the sympathies of the Diaspora, which had been alienated by Ter-Petrosyan's policies, and bring into Armenia a flow of investments and financial support (Ibid.).

⁵⁰ Source: Vazgen Manukyan's website. <https://images.app.goo.gl/KG8pJW3xkTnGP2wR9>

The next election took place in 2003, in which the main competition was between Kocharyan and the son of murdered Karen Demirchyan, the leader of the People's Party, Stephan Demirchyan. Numerous other candidates also took part in the election, including the already mentioned Vazgen Manukyan and a former Communist mayor of Yerevan, Artashes Geghamyan. The political debate was mostly centered on allegations of corruption and election fraud against Kocharyan's government, while opposition leaders mostly debated which one of them would be able to get rid of the current government. Issues related to historical memory were not widely discussed, whether related to the Soviet past, or relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan. It seemed that Kocharyan's position on the latter issue had by this time become a virtual consensus, which other candidates did not question. Ter-Petrosyan and his Armenian National Movement, which had an opposing view on these issues, had been keeping silent since Ter-Petrosyan's removal in 1998.

The elections took place in two rounds. The first one took place on February 19, 2003. Kocharyan and Demirchyan received the most votes. Demirchyan received 28% of the votes, while Kocharyan's votecount stopped at 49.83%, a number that, in the atmosphere of numerous reports about electoral violations in favor of the incumbent, gave rise to suspicions. Many Armenians believed that it was the decision of Kocharyan's camp, which had control over all state institutions, including the Central Electoral Commission, to hold a second round in order to disperse tensions and avoid massive protests. Amid accusations of electoral fraud, a run-off round took place, and Kocharyan was declared the winner with 67.45% of the votes, against Demirchyan's 32.55%. Reports of violations were abundant once again, and large-scale protests ensued after the election, led by Demirchyan and some other candidates in the election who decided to join him. The opposition appealed to the Constitutional Court to abolish the result of the election. However, the protests slowly fizzled out, while the Constitutional Court rejected the demands of the opposition (Zolyan, 2010, pp. 90-92).

However, the Constitutional Court suggested holding a referendum of confidence in the incumbent president, as a measure designed to resolve the tense internal political situation. The opposition used this opportunity, and called its supporters to the streets once again next year, in spring 2004. This time Armenian opposition was inspired by the Rose Revolution in Georgia, which took place a few months earlier. Armenian opposition supporters demanded to enact the decision of the Constitutional Court and hold the constitutional referendum. However, Kocharyan's government was much better prepared for such protests now. On April 12, 2004 when opposition supporters held a sit-in protest in front of the building of the National Assembly on Baghramyan avenue, special police units attacked the protesters' camp, dispersing the protests. Unlike 1996, this attack was not provoked by any violent actions of the protests. The dispersal of the protest was followed by arrests of opposition activists and raids on media outlets. Eventually, the majority of the arrested activists were released, however, the protest movement had been broken (Zolyan, 2010, pp. 92-95; Ishkhanyan and Babajanyan, 2004) and Kocharyan continued to rule without any significant challenges from opposition until the end of his term, which was due in 2008. However, as it often happens in authoritarian regimes, succession proved a major issue, plunging Armenia into a dire internal crisis in 2008.

The Final Battle: Elections of 2008

There were three main political figures in the electoral campaign of 2007-2008 and the interplay between them defined the electoral campaign and the subsequent political crisis, which resulted in bloodshed. Ter-Petrosyan, who seemed to be completely defeated in 1998, came back into active politics and presented a serious challenge to the incumbent government. In the government camp there was informal competition between two main leaders, the outgoing president Robert Kocharyan, and his prospective successor, Serzh Sargsyan.



Pro-Demirchyan protesters in 2003-2004.⁵¹

This complicated interplay between various leaders manifested itself in fierce debates, which also touched upon issues that are of interest to us, particularly issues of history in connection to issues of foreign policy. By late 2007 it became obvious that Serzh Sargsyan had achieved a decisive victory in the struggle within the government camp and positioned himself as the only viable successor to Robert Kocharyan. While it could be tempting to compare the relationship between Kocharyan and Sargsyan to that between Putin and Medvedev in Russia, this analogy would be a faulty one. While Medvedev was a figure completely dependent on Putin, Sargsyan was much more than simply an ally of Kocharyan, but also a powerful player who was never going to settle for a symbolic role. Sargsyan created his own powerbase in the Republican Party, which had been part of the government coalition since 1998. Kocharyan had never associated himself with Republicans, or any other party (his slogan was “My people are my party”). Sargsyan, however, made his bet on the Republican Party, and by strengthening the party, he was able to secure for himself the position of the successor. Kocharyan, who, in his own words, had no intention of becoming “Armenia’s youngest pensioner”, tried to counter Sargsyan’s move by investing in another coalition party, Prosperous Armenia, led by a famous oligarch, the wealthy businessman Gagik Tsarukyan. According to the rumors, Kocharyan’s preferred successor was Minister of Foreign Affairs Vartan Oskanyan, who would have been much more dependent on Kocharyan, had he become president. However, in the parliamentary election of 2007, Republicans scored a confident

⁵¹ Source: Aliq Media. <https://images.app.goo.gl/eqL28cD9xL1XcLgT6>

victory, leaving Prosperous Armenia a distant second. This outcome settled the issue of the successor in the government camp, leaving no doubts that Sargsyan would be the pro-government candidate.

However, it turned out that things were not going to be so easy for Sargsyan. Armenia's first president Ter-Petrosyan, who had maintained silence for almost a decade, returned to active politics, in order to challenge Sargsyan. While many Armenians resented Ter-Petrosyan for various real and imagined misdeeds in the 1990s, he had both symbolic and organizational resources, which made him a dangerous rival for the acting government. Both Kocharyan and Sargsyan were masters of political intrigue, however, none of them could claim to be a successful public politician, while Ter-Petrosyan was a skillful public politician, forged in the fire of the mass protest movement in the late 1980s. Ter-Petrosyan was able to capitalize on the resentment many Armenians felt toward Kocharyan's and Sargsyan's close circles.

Election fraud, corruption, repression of protests were all factors that contributed to the unpopularity of the incumbent government, and Ter-Petrosyan masterfully used these issues to amass support for his candidacy. Realizing that many Armenians had a negative image of him, Ter-Petrosyan called on the voters to perceive him as "an instrument" to remove the corrupt regime, which he characterized as "kleptocracy" and "Tatar-Mongolian regime". Ter-Petrosyan even promised that if other opposition candidates withdrew from the race and he would get elected, he would resign after 3 years, since that would be enough for him "to clean the Augean stables", as he characterized the state system. Another potential strength of Ter-Petrosyan lay in the fact, that as the first president of independent Armenia, he could have hoped to command the support of some members of Armenia's elite, state officials and powerful businessmen, who had risen to prominence under Ter-Petrosyan and, though integrated into Kocharyan's system of government, maintained loyalty to Ter-Petrosyan.

While Kocharyan and Sargsyan could still rely on the resources of the state, they had few resources to counter Ter-Petrosyan in the public sphere. None of them was a public politician, and, what was worse, many Armenians shared the view of the incumbent government as corrupt and undemocratic. There were, however, two arguments Kocharyan's and Sargsyan's camp could use against Ter-Petrosyan, and both had to do with the past. The first one was the reference to the socio-economic difficulties that Armenia experienced under Ter-Petrosyan in the early 1990s. The early 1990s even became known as "the cold and dark years", a term, which was widely used by pro-government speakers to describe the rule of Ter-Petrosyan. The other argument was related to Ter-Petrosyan's views on Armenia-Turkey and Armenia-Azerbaijan relations. Pro-government camp accused Ter-Petrosyan of selling out to Turkey and Azerbaijan on the issues of Genocide recognition and Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution. They accused Ter-Petrosyan of being defeatist on Nagorno-Karabakh, and being "ready to surrender Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan". In addition, Kocharyan and his supporters accused Ter-Petrosyan of defeatist approach to relations with Turkey, which they contrasted to the dedication that Kocharyan had to the issue of Armenian Genocide recognition. Kocharyan's supporters argued that it was due to his efforts that several countries recognized the Armenian Genocide in the course of Kocharyan's term.

Ter-Petrosyan himself understood that his views on Nagorno-Karabakh resolution and genocide recognition were probably less popular with voters than his criticism

of the corruption of the government. So, he did his best to keep the pre-electoral discourse centered on domestic issues. Moreover, he stated that while his views on Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution had not changed, resolving this issue was not going to be his priority had he been elected. As for the genocide recognition issue, he, however, responded quite harshly to the criticism of Kocharyan's supporters. He argued that for Kocharyan genocide recognition has never been an ideological issue, but a way to win over the sympathies of Armenian Diaspora, which, in turn, was necessary to bring the financial resources of the Diaspora into Armenia. In this way, he again brought the focus of the discussion back to the issue of corruption, since one of the most widespread accusations against Kocharyan's regime were accusations of corruption in relation to activities funded by Diaspora charities.

When it came to the issue of "cold and dark years", allegedly a result of Ter-Petrosyan's mistakes and corruption, Ter-Petrosyan's camp also was able to create its own counter-narrative. Ter-Petrosyan's supporters claimed that "the cold and dark" was a result of the war in Nagorno-Karabakh, which had been won, to a large extent, due to the political and diplomatic talent of Ter-Petrosyan. In this narrative, Ter-Petrosyan was seen not only as "the founding president of the Republic of Armenia", but also the author of the first war victory that Armenians have achieved in centuries. Moreover, Ter-Petrosyan's image as an academic and man of simple lifestyle was contrasted with the corrupt lifestyles of members of the incumbent regime. Finally, Ter-Petrosyan and his supporters focused the debate on the October 27 attack of 1999. While they did not directly claim that Kocharyan was behind it, it was often implied in their speeches, as for example in a lengthy speech on the topic, which Ter-Petrosyan gave at a rally on October 26, 2007 (Zhoghovurd, 2015).

The electoral campaign of 2007-2008 was one of the harshest ones in terms of rhetoric in the history of Armenia's elections. It was not surprising that it also led to the most violent internal clashes in Armenia's history. Culminating on February 19, 2008, Serzh Sargsyan was declared the winner with 52.8% of the votes. Ter-Petrosyan was given 21.51%, while two other candidates for "systemic opposition" received 16.89% and 6.18% respectively. Among numerous reports of violations and accusations of fraud, Ter-Petrosyan rejected the results, claiming that the results were entirely fabricated and he had actually won the elections. Ter-Petrosyan's team launched a case at the Constitutional Court, while Ter-Petrosyan called his supporters to the streets. Large-scale rallies started in the Liberty Square in the center of Yerevan. While not all Armenians were convinced by Ter-Petrosyan's claim that he had won the election, Sargsyan's alleged victory in the first round was perceived with wide skepticism. The numbers of the opposition supporters were surging day by day, even in spite of the fact that police prevented his supporters from the regions from entering Yerevan. Moreover, some members of the ruling team started declaring their support for Ter-Petrosyan (Human Rights Watch, 2009, pp. 13-15).

In this situation, Kocharyan took matters into his own hands. On the evening of February 29, 2008 he returned from Moscow, where he had a meeting with Putin, and on the next day, the riot police raided Freedom Square, beating up and arresting protesters. Ter-Petrosyan, who had immunity from criminal prosecution as former president, was escorted to his residence where he effectively was put under house arrest. Opposition supporters, however, returned to another square in central Yerevan. As the news of the severe attack on protesters in the morning spread, more and more people were joining the protest. Clashes between riot police and

protesters were taking place, in which pro-government forces used live ammunition. As a result of these events, which most Armenians refer to simply as “March 1”, ten people died, including eight protesters and two members of the police force (for a detailed account of these events see Human Rights Watch, 2009, pp. 25-37).

This was the bloodiest episode of internal political struggle in Armenia. After the protests were dispersed, many of the protest leaders and activists were imprisoned or went into hiding. Martial rule was declared in the country, which also included



*Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan.*⁵²

restrictions on the freedom of speech and freedom of gatherings, and the opposition movement was forced to go underground. Later, when Serzh Sargsyan was inaugurated and there was no longer any threat to his power, restrictions were removed, the majority of detained activists were released, and the opposition movement was transformed into an opposition political force, led by Ter-Petrosyan. Robert Kocharyan, however, was not able to maintain an informal influence over his successor. The March 1

crackdown helped Serzh Sargsyan to maintain power in the country. Sargsyan ruled for two terms, and lost power ten years later, as a result of the protest movement that came to be known as the Velvet Revolution.

The last direct election of the president in post-Soviet Armenia took place in 2013. Issues of history, however, played relatively little role in this election. In this election the incumbent Serzh Sargsyan faced Raffi Hovannisian, former minister of foreign affairs. Hovannisian was born and raised in the US and moved to Armenia when it became independent, becoming Armenia’s first minister of foreign affairs. As such, Hovannisian became known as an ardent supporter of the genocide recognition campaign. In fact, he was removed from his post by Ter-Petrosyan since he openly disobeyed his instructions and raised the issue of genocide during his visit to Turkey. Hovannisian’s party Heritage heavily criticized Serzh Sargsyan, and Robert Kocharyan before him, for corruption and lack of democracy, and supported Ter-Petrosyan during the election of 2008. However, Ter-Petrosyan’s approach to the issues of genocide recognition and Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution was not shared by Hovannisian and his supporters. In fact, they criticized Serzh Sargsyan for not being decisive enough on these issues, and even raised the issue of recognition of independence of Nagorno-Karabakh in the parliament, though the suggestion was rejected by the parliamentary majority (Musayelian, 2013).

Due to these circumstances, the issues of politics of memory, and particularly the ones related to Armenia-Turkey and Armenia-Azerbaijan relations were not central to the 2013 campaign. The campaign mostly focused on Armenia’s internal issues, as Hovannisian emphasized the need for democratization, fighting corruption, ending election fraud, etc. When it came to foreign policy, the main question was whether Hovannisian, a former US citizen, would be accepted by Russia, Armenia’s main ally at the time. Hovannisian emphasized that he would not try to take Armenia in a Western direction, but would work with the Russians, the same way Armenia’s post-Soviet rulers have been doing before him. He even made a couple of trips to

⁵² Source: Hraparak.am, <https://images.app.goo.gl/2Pqns7dfrPdffd6fq8>

Moscow, though it was not clear what kind of meetings he had participated in there. However, it is important to remember that Hovannisian had not changed his views on Turkey-Armenia relations, and according to the US embassy cables that had been leaked by WikiLeaks, he maintained his “strong stance” on Turkey into the 2010s (Barsoumian, 2013).

In any case, when the election took place in 2013, it seemed like a rerun of the 2008 events, but with less drama and violence. Sargsyan was declared winner by the CEC, with 58.64% of the votes, while Hovannisian, who had officially received 36.75% of the votes, claimed that these results were fraudulent and it was in fact him who had been elected. Protests followed, which at some point gathered quite a large following, however, the government was able to deal with these protests, and without resorting to major violence. Hovannisian held a major demonstration on April 9, the day of the



*Raffi Hovannisyan.*⁵³

inauguration of the president, however, it seemed that he did not have a clear plan for the protests. By the evening of the day he suggested that he would go to pray at the Memorial of the Victims of the Genocide, where he was joined by the head of Armenian police, Vladimir Gasparyan (Tamrazian & Shoghikian, 2013). This step, which was supposed to gather support for Hovannisian, in reality was perceived as a failure and raised sarcastic reactions not only from the government side, but also from other opposition figures. Thus, protests fizzled out and Sargsyan had once again secured his grip on power.

2013 was the last presidential election by popular vote. In 2015 the process of constitutional reform was launched, which turned Armenia from a presidential republic to a parliamentary one. Serzh Sargsyan, who was accused of using this process simply to prolong his term in power, claimed that he would try to remain at the helm after his presidential term was over. However, he reneged on this promise and in April 2018 he was elected prime-minister by the parliament, in which his party, the Republicans had a majority. However, his term was destined to last only a week. When Sargsyan was being elected, the streets of Yerevan and other Armenian cities were full of people protesting against him and demanding his resignation. What became known as the Armenian Velvet Revolution had begun. But this is a story outside the scope of this chapter.

Conclusion

As we have seen from the context of the Karabakh conflict and the Armenian independence movement of the late Soviet years, the intertwined issues of foreign policy and memory politics had acquired significant importance in the internal political discourse of Armenia. By the beginning of the 1990s, two main approaches to this problem were formed. First one, called pragmatic by supporters, and defeatist by its critics, held that a necessary condition for ensuring the sovereignty and security of Armenia was reaching a compromise with Armenia’s hostile neighbors Azerbaijan and Turkey on such issues as the Karabakh conflict and the

⁵³ Source: RFE/RL Armenia [azatutyun.am](https://images.app.goo.gl/FxHLmn9rkwpw4Lmr7), <https://images.app.goo.gl/FxHLmn9rkwpw4Lmr7>

international recognition of genocide. Supporters of the second approach, who called their approach national (their critics called it romantic) considered attempts to compromise on the mentioned issues unacceptable and/or unrealistic, and saw the solution to Armenia's security problem in an alliance with external players (first of all, Russia).

The first approach was presented in particular by the Armenian National Movement (ANM). Among its chief theorists and practitioners were Armenia's first president Levon Ter-Petrosyan and his foreign policy adviser Gerard Libaridian. In turn, they were influenced by the ideas of an Armenian intellectual of the late Soviet period Rafael Ishkhanyan, whose essay "The Law of the Exclusion of the Third Force" was an attempt to deconstruct the traditional narrative, which saw Turkey (and by extension Azerbaijan) as Armenia's mortal enemies who cannot be reconciled with and Russia as a protector and guarantor of Armenians' security. Following the path outlined by Ishkhanyan, and then leaders of ANM, including Ter-Petrosyan and Libaridian, argued that it was possible and necessary to find a mode of co-existence with Turkey and Azerbaijan. This approach also meant that Armenia should not and cannot rely on Russia as a sole guarantor of its independence and security. However, reality brought its corrections into the practice: in spite of their ideas, it was precisely ANM that presided over the first Karabakh war in 1992-1994 and had accepted the necessity of a security alliance with Russia.

The second approach of the 1990s was represented by the opposition to Ter-Petrosyan, in particular the Dashnaksutyun party, as well as a certain part of the ruling ANM. What was probably even more dangerous for Ter-Petrosyan and his team, was that this way of thinking was also represented within the ANM. A major split occurred in ANM in the early 1990s, leading to the emergence of the opposition National-Democratic Union, led by one of ANM's prominent leader Vazgen Manukyan. Even later some of Ter-Petrosyan's closer allies, such as the Minister of Defense Vazgen Sargsyan and the first President of Nagorno-Karabakh Robert Kocharyan (who became prime-minister of Armenia in 1996) were not convinced by Ter-Petrosyan's idea of compromise with Azerbaijan. These controversies played out during the elections of 1996. Among other factors, Ter-Petrosyan was criticized for reneging on the "national" agenda. The elections were marred by fraud and repression, and, though Ter-Petrosyan was declared the winner, he was severely weakened and had to rely on the army and police to sustain his rule. Hence, two years later, when he advocated concessions on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue which were deemed too far-reaching by an influential part of his own team, he was left without public support and had to resign.

Thus, at the end of the 1990s, as a result of a split within the AOD, Ter-Petrosyan gave up power to Robert Kocharyan, and the second approach prevailed, which led to the strengthening of Armenia's dependence on Russia. The presidential elections in 1998 and 2003 were dominated by internal agenda. In 2008 the return of Ter-Petrosyan as an opposition candidate revitalized the discussions that were taking place in the 1990s to a certain extent, but the internal agenda, particularly issues of democracy and corruption remained in the center of the debate. However, the issues of foreign policy, conflict resolution and politics of memory were obviously at stake in the 2008 election, and had Ter-Petrosyan won the election, Armenia's policy might have undergone significant changes. In an ironic flashback to the disputed elections of 1996, the 2008 election was again marred by fraud and political repression, however, this time Ter-Petrosyan was the opposition candidate who

had arguably been robbed of victory. The official election result announced Serzh Sargsyan, Kocharyan's ally and appointed successor as president. Mass protests that followed the election were crushed by force.

Since 2008, the national/romanticist approach to foreign policy, politics and Karabakh conflict resolution has not generally been challenged by the opposition. Instead, the government itself attempted to maneuver within this approach, as was the case during the Armenian-Turkish normalization attempts in 2008-2009. However, the normalization did not work and Armenia's official discourse went back to the agenda that became dominant in the late 1990s. The last popular presidential election of 2013 did not challenge these policies, as the main criticisms by the opposition candidate Raffi Hovhannisian were related to internal issues, such as democracy and fighting corruption.

Thus, we may conclude that at the heart of the political debate of post-Soviet Armenia was the issue of how to deal with its neighbors and how to maintain Armenia's independence and security in a situation of conflict. Since the early 1990s there were two general approaches promoted by various groups within the Armenian political elite. Eventually, the approach, which considered conflicts with neighbors insolvable and advocated reliance on Russia, had won. It was only after the revolution of 2020 and the disastrous 44-Day War of 2020 that this approach became questioned again. But that is a topic of a different study.

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Pre-Election Discourse in Georgia: Presidential Candidates and the Linguistic Devices They Use⁵⁴

Introduction

Political discourse is a complex object of study, as it is on the verge of convergence of various disciplines - political science, social psychology, linguistics, as well as the analysis of the form, uses and meanings of the discourse used in certain situations. Defining political discourse, Dijk says that it (political discourse) is determined by its actors or authors (politicians). Much of the research on political discourse is concerned with the texts and speech of professional politicians or political institutions (Dijk, 1997). As Schaffner notes, from the point of view of linguistics and discourse analysis, political discourse, political language and political text themselves are vague terms (Schaffner, 1997). Political language is saturated with such contexts, political views and emotional elements in which intention and ideology are implicitly expressed (Schaffner & Bassnett, 2010). In linguistic literature, political language has been used to denote the use of language in the context of politics, i.e., particular language uses and iterations, with the purpose of achieving a specific, politically motivated function; or it is connected with specific political vocabulary, such as words and phrases referring to extra linguistic phenomena in the domain of politics (Schaffner, 1997). It is believed that political activity and language are interrelated, politics does not exist without language (Chilton (a), 2004), and language is not just a good addition to politics, but is central to political activity (Lakoff (a), 2014), since all political activity is carried out and controlled by language and its influence (Schaffner, 1997). Texts created in this context reflect political ideas, beliefs and social practices (ibid.).

Political texts, speeches in particular, are especially significant in pre-election periods. As numerous scholars stress, presidential rhetoric affects people's beliefs and attitudes and has the power to inspire (Pieniżek-Niemczuk, 2016). The language of political campaigns should emphasize the values of society (Lakoff (b), 2013), it is needed to appeal to attitudes and emotions that are already within the listeners (Charteris-Black, 2005). In political speeches during election campaigns, ideas and ideologies need to be conveyed through language so that they are agreed upon by the receivers as well as by others who may read or hear parts of the speech afterwards in the media. Words and expressions are either used or omitted to affect meaning in different ways. A political speech is not necessarily a success because of correctness or truth, rather it may be a matter of presenting valid arguments (Beard, 2000). Depending on political activity, political texts perform different functions (Schaffner, 1997).

One can argue that the function of texts created for a pre-election campaign is persuasion. Speaking the "right way" to persuade an audience—whether through spoken words, written texts, or a combination of both—is probably a fundamental political knowledge or skill (Martin, 2014). "As Kane and Patapan observe, because

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public discussion and debate are essential in a democracy, and because leaders are obliged to rule the sovereign people by means of constant persuasion, rhetoric is absolutely central” (Condor et al., 2013). In this context, the ability to convey the message that speaker and listener want the same thing plays a decisive role in the process of establishing an ideology (Jones & Wareing, 1999). To achieve a sense of congruence between audience and speaker, politicians often make use of symbols to foster national unity (Ball & Peters, 2000).



“National movement”. Author: Givi Nakhutsrishvili. 1989.

The purpose of our study was to analyze the use of linguistic devices in the formation and dissemination of a political vision in Georgia and the implementation of the political goals set.

We believe that upon having conducted our analysis of the pre-election (presidential) discourse in Georgia, we clearly demonstrated clear tendencies, and identified, and described ways in which Georgian presidential candidates use linguistic/rhetorical devices, features and strategies to influence Georgian voters. Such rhetoric devices include repetition, broad use of metaphorical language, emphasis, just to name some. The mentioned strategies/methods were used by each candidate’s campaign in their own way.

Research Methodology

The chapter uses quantitative and qualitative methods of research to analyze pre-election speeches presented in the print media

The pre-election texts of three Presidential Candidates (and later presidents) of Georgia Zviad Gamsakhurdia (1991), Eduard Shevardnadze (1995) and Mikheil Saakashvili (2004), which were published in newspapers “sak’art’velos respublika” (The Republic of Georgia), “24 saat’i” (24 Hours) have been chosen as the materials for analysis. For the first two candidates, we tried to single out a text which collectively reflected the general mood and views of the candidate on various events. In the case of Gamsakhurdia, the newspaper “sak’art’velos respublika” published the “Speech by the President of the Republic of Georgia, Mr. Zviad Gamsakhurdia”

on Georgian television on 28 April 1991. In the case of Shevardnadze, we took the text of the appeal published in the same newspaper, which was delivered at the rally on August 30, 1995 held in response to the terrorist attack on Shevardnadze a day before. In the case of Saakashvili, we used excerpts from various texts that similarly communicated the candidates general attitudes and attitudes. In particular, as a result of the study, it was revealed that during the pre-election period, the speeches and appeals of the candidate in the print media were actually published incomplete, only in the form of excerpts or opinions (or paraphrases) presented by journalists. Taking this into account and trying to create a complete picture, we have examined three texts from Saakashvili's pre-election period (including one text from the newspaper "sak'art'velos respublika" and other ones from the newspaper "24 saat'i" (24 Hours).

We refer to a broad spectrum of definitions of rhetorical devices, based on those offered by Robert A. Harris (2018). In particular, during the pre-election periods, candidates' appeals are aimed at the ideological or social needs of society, therefore, in this regard, various positive expectations are created to overcome existing problems. Thus, the research methodology was aimed at identifying the rhetorical devices and strategies that Georgian presidential candidates have used as the building material of their political texts in order to influence public opinion, mobilize the public and achieve political success.

As a result of the study, the following groups have been identified many correspondences between used figures of speech, and rhetorical devices, presented by Robert A. Harris, grouped, as follows:

1. Parallelism and Antithesis (balanced structural order);
2. Emphasis (among them Climax, Asyndeton, Sentential Adverb, Hyperbole, Procatalepsis and Hypophora);
3. Syntax (among them Hyperbaton, Appositive, and Parenthesis);
4. Figurative language (among them Simile, Metaphor, Metonymy and Personification);
5. Repetition (expressed by Anaphora, Epistrophe, Anadiplosis, Conduplicatio and Epanalepsis) and the last device
6. Rhetorical Questions.

Different rhetorical devices are used with various frequency in the texts of each candidate. Therefore, during the analysis, we additionally used a quantitative approach to identify the frequency of use of different methods for each candidate for specific indicators.

Pre-election Context in Independent Georgia

The process of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the formation of independent Georgia, which took place against the backdrop of great difficulties and important state changes, was quite uneven and difficult. The nation's three presidents all won elections as charismatic figures who dominated a sizable following in the legislature (Baramidze & Bolkvadze, 2022; Matsaberidze, 2007). In each of the three instances (1991, 1995, and 2004), a serious political crisis led to the holding of the presidential elections. In all three instances, the presidential candidates who prevailed were excellent leaders in light of the political climate at the time. Each of them provided an action plan for the welfare of the nation after evaluating the current situation

and the needs of their country in their own unique ways. Each of them attempted to demonstrate their uniqueness as sole and unrivaled presidential contenders, attempting to acquire public acceptance by highlighting their personal leadership abilities. Their election texts were therefore based on their own political philosophy.

For instance, Gamsakhurdia prioritized independence and secession from the Soviet Union; as a result, during the 1991 first presidential elections, his texts were largely centered on this subject. As a result of a coup d'état in the country, the first president was forced to leave Georgia and could no longer fulfill his obligations. The ongoing transition period, which lasted four years against the background of legitimation problems and crises, was also reflected in the texts of the next presidential candidate, Eduard Shevardnadze (1995), who had peacemaking as one of his key objectives. Later, as a result of the 2003-2004 Rose Revolution, presidential candidates also paid no less attention to the struggle for legitimacy and the restoration of political life than to the fight against current challenges. Accordingly, during the pre-election period in Georgia, all presidential candidates' speeches reflected the current challenges and problems that were at the center of public attention at the time.

Each address or speech of the candidate was contextually related to a certain topic or event and in some way, was a reaction to it. For example, the main thematic line of the text of Gamsakhurdia's televised address, chosen in the framework of this article, was the reaction to the opponents' accusations, since the main topic of the agenda was the ongoing discussion around the accusations; that is why the candidate begins the text of the speech with the following words: "In a sense, I would like to clarify some things, especially with regard to the speeches of our opponents" (sak'art'velos respublika (c), 1991)." A similar approach is present in the text selected from the speeches of Shevardnadze, which was also built around the last major event - the adoption of the constitution (which was supposed to solve the problem of legitimacy). However, the statement was made the day after the attack on the candidate, and the candidate begins his speech with an emphasis on this: "Yesterday could be truly fatal for the country ..." (sak'art'velos respublika (a), 1995). Saakashvili's pre-election agenda was formed in terms of Georgia's challenging socio-political environment, the existing president's resignation, and extraordinary elections. The presidential candidate's texts in this case were also primarily intended to respond to recent events.

"We" as a Means of Political Belonging

The use of the first person plural pronouns *we*, *our*, and *us* was frequently used as one of the strategies by Georgia's presidential contenders to connect with their target audience. By doing so, they conveyed to the target audience their unwavering commitment to resolving the nation's issues in the national interest. With this tactic, the candidates made it clear that they were working together with their listeners or supporters to accomplish a common objective. The mentioned strategy and the emotional impact were particularly strong, when political leaders used personal pronouns in relation to shared national ideals, history, national identity, bravery, and common sense. The personal pronoun "we" "appears to be of utmost importance in the discourses about nations and national identities" (de Cillia, Reisigl and Wodak, 1999), which helps to draw clear distinction between members and non-members, between us and them (Peterloo, 2007).



"Zviad Gamsakhurdia". Author: Jemal Kasradze.

To compare and contrast, the first-person plural pronoun has frequently been noted in studies of English political discourse as a marker of national or sub-national identity. In fact, "we" is semantically sparse so far as linguistic coding goes, but pragmatically rich in the sense that many, often ambiguous, meanings may arise in contexts of actual use (Chilton (b), 2007). The scope of the deictic (relating to or denoting a word or expression whose meaning is dependent on the context in which it is used) "we" varies depending on the purpose and particular rhetorical point the speaker is trying to make, making the first-person plural one of the most useful tools of persuasion for politicians and the media (Riggins, 1997). This strategy, which is common in the speeches of Georgia's presidential candidates, gave them the freedom to associate themselves with almost any group in various contexts. So, Gamsakhurdia positioned himself within the confines of a single speech as a member of the party, the government, as well as the people - the wider society [italics added for emphasis]: "False charges were made against *us* and the Round Table alliance"; "*We* listened to *our* opponents' speeches yesterday. (sak'art'velos respublika (c), 1991). Here the candidate spoke on behalf of his party and therefore positioned himself as part of the party.

Then, Gamsakhurdia easily introduced himself as part of the government: "Some politicians today criticize *our government* for not being too flexible"; "...this is primarily done by the apostles of the Kremlin, whose goal is to discredit *our party* and *our government*." (ibid.)

In the next examples, the candidate represented himself to be a part of the society: "<...> but the state of the country, the present state of *our nation* is what caused all this."; "<...> *our economy* is in isolation. *Our republic* will have no economic borders"; "*Our country* is advancing towards complete independence." (ibid.) Here, by using the phrases *our government*, *our economy*, *our republic*, *our country*, the politician attributed himself to the people and society.

Thus, Gamsakhurdia placed himself, his own "I" between society and the state and, apparently, considered it as a single, collective *we*. Thus, this was achieved by the same method in general, as a whole, and besides, using the rhetorical method it was also easy to distinguish *us*, as independent Georgia, from *them*, as the USSR.

In his political text, Shevardnadze used the above technique to speak on behalf of the state and entire country: "*We* will create a product and *our* foreign friends,

will help *us*, because *we are* a legal country...”; “...as it is necessary for the unity of *our state*.” (sak’art’velos respublika (a), 1995); however, most often the candidate identified himself as a member of the community, what can be seen in the following examples:

I want to assure you, dear friends, that *we* can be proud of this constitution;
Today *we* had to express the *will of the people of Georgia* that *we* no longer want to live under the terrorism...;
The Constitution <...> is the legal basis for the unity and integrity of Georgia, for the return of *our* lost Georgian lands. (ibid.)

Shevardnadze tended to speak first of all on behalf of the group - the Georgian people, the country, the population at large (Bolkvadze & Baramidze, 2022). He prefixed personal pronouns to nouns and verbs which highlighted purposefulness, correctness, unity of nation being “the will of the people of Georgia” opposing the negative concepts: “*we* no longer want terrorism, armed people.” In this way, a feeling of unity and collective action with this group was achieved, and he, as a candidate, not only spoke on behalf of this group, but also knew better what it needed.

In the case of Saakashvili – the third presidential candidate, the trend of previous two candidates is somewhat repeated when the politician presented himself as a part of society: “...the immovable moral compass on which *we* were all raised” “<...> *our people* are incredibly talented.” (Chigladze, 2003); or when he speaks on behalf of his party: “*We* have not taken over this government easily <...>; *We* were fiercely resisted.” (Dvali, 2003) In this case too, the politician used personal pronouns in positive connotative contexts, however, unlike previous presidential candidates, Saakashvili sometimes along with the pronoun of the first person, used the pronoun of the second person plural “*you*” as well, to address Georgian people as a group:

“*You* all took part in those events that ended a few days ago with *our* and *your* victory. <...> *We* need *your* support to build a strong state.”
(Dvali, 2003)
“*Each of you* took a very right position in trying times for Georgia.”
(Chigladze, 2003)

As we see from the examples, Saakashvili addressed the public at large as an actor separate from it, in this case, he spoke on behalf of a single political movement, although contextually he attached great importance to the people, highlighted the role of the people and spoke of the need for their support in order to achieve overall social success. In this context, we are also interested in Saakashvili’s tendency to use the first person singular pronoun *I*, which was not the case in the speeches of the two previous politicians. For example:

I don’t want to live in Georgia of sycophants, flatterers, liars and traitors.
I want to live in Mukhran Machavarian’s Georgia and *we* are those who create this Georgia.” (Tevzadze, 2004); “Yes, *I* preach the superiority of the people living in Georgia and the Georgian nation. Yes, *I* think *we* are better than many (Ibid.).

Depending on how often these rhetorical devices were used by politicians, we can also view them as a deliberate strategy for achieving success. Saakashvili, spoke on behalf of a certain group, and on his own behalf. In his speeches, he also made an effort to distance himself from society in its current form while highlighting the

special significance of the people. We believe he saw that it is vital for a politician to portray himself as a leader who follows the wishes of the people and acts in the common good.



"Tbilisi War". Author: Jemal Kasradze. 1992.

Thus, the use of personal pronouns is a trending rhetorical device of Georgian politicians. The personal pronouns are employed by political figures to refer to common national goals, history, and national identity as well as to combat prowess, intelligence, and relevance. In this way, an emotional impact was created on the public, which served as the inspiration for a particular action on its side. It should be emphasized however, that for each of them, such technique may have been centered around presenting oneself in various ways, depending on the circumstance. For example, if Zviad Gamsakhurdia presented himself relatively equally as part of the party, government and people, Eduard Shevardnadze was largely part of the people, and Mikheil Saakashvili was more separated from the people, although he gave a decisive role and importance to the people. With the use of this rhetorical device, political leaders were able to forge a unique bond with the people and portray themselves as members of an amenable group, which assisted in persuading the listeners and winning their support.

Linguistic Devices and Strategies in the Pre-Election Discourse of Georgia

As mentioned above, to achieve success in the pre-election period, the language of candidates' appeals must meet the ideological or social needs of society, as well as the pressing problems of this period. By doing this, the voter is persuaded, his trust is earned, and society as a whole is given reason to be optimistic. Political leaders employ a variety of rhetorical strategies in their text structures to portray their worldview, position, and attitudes as well as to argue that a particular course of action is required.

Within the framework of this article, as we have tried to identify those rhetorical devices and strategies that Georgian presidential candidates used, we collected a vast number of examples of what weaved into their political texts to influence

public opinion, mobilize the public and achieve political success. In what follows, the identified results are presented in a systematic form of component analysis with relevant examples.

4. Gamsakhurdia

Parallelism and Antithesis (balanced structural order)

Parallelism is the presentation of several ideas of equal importance by putting each of them into the same kind of grammatical structure:

Gamsakhurdia: “We should prepare for this day (the day of presidential elections) to show foreign guests *how the Georgian nation celebrates the Independence Day and how it fights for independence.*” (sak’art’veelos respublika (c), 1991)

Shevardnadze: “*God stands for us, people stand for us, the world, all progressive humanity and democratic forces stand for us...*” (sak’art’veelos respublika (a), 1995)

Saakashvili: “...in the building of a new Georgia, *an intellectual mind and honest workforce* are the most important things.” (Chigladze, 2003)

Antithesis contrasts two ideas by placing them next to each other, almost always in a parallel structure:

Gamsakhurdia: “<...> Thus we have a choice between, *on the one hand, declared national and civil disobedience with the goal of achieving complete and final independence, and, on the other hand, a flexible attitude towards the Kremlin and the Center, acquiescence, and ultimately, betrayal of the nation.*” (sak’art’veelos respublika (c), 1991)

Saakashvili: “Today they claim that *the elections will fail. The elections will be held* in Georgia regardless of how much they discuss and plan.” (Tevzadze, 2004)

Emphasis

Emphasis helps the reader distinguish between more and less important ideas by emphasizing the more important ones, calling attention to words or ideas by the structure of presentation. In our case emphasis has been used to enhance the emotional expressiveness of speech; among the ways to achieve this effect we revealed Climax, Asyndeton, Sentential Adverb, Hyperbole, Procatleipsis and Hypophora in the texts.

Climax is the presentation of ideas in the order of increasing importance, to produce the effect of increasing strength and emphasis:

Gamsakhurdia: “<...> *a flexible attitude towards the Kremlin and the Centre, acquiescence, and ultimately, betrayal of the nation.*” (sak’art’veelos respublika (c), 1991)

Shevardnadze: “I want to assure you, my *brothers, sisters, children, and grandchildren*, that no matter how many conspiracies are organized or whatever happens, they will not be able to intimidate us; we will

fight to the last end for a *unified, unbroken, and indivisible* Georgia.” (sak'art'velos respublika (a), 1995)

Asyndeton consists of omitting conjunctions between words, phrases, or clauses in a list:

Gamsakhurdia: “Our route is *the way of moral revival of Georgia, the way of revival of our religion, the way of Christ.*” (sak'art'velos respublika (c), 1991)

Shevardnadze: “Georgia, our people – *Georgians, Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Russians, Jews, Abkhazians, Ossetians, Greeks, all who live here will elect the best from among the best.*” (sak'art'velos respublika (a), 1995)



“Eduard Shevardnadze at a rally”. Author: Shakh Aivazov.

Sentential Adverb is a word or short phrase, often interrupting a sentence, used to lend emphasis to the words immediately before and after:

Gamsakhurdia: “I want to emphasize that *first and foremost*, I don't want to be perceived as someone whose primary goal in life is to become a president.” (sak'art'velos respublika (c), 1991)

Shevardnadze: “Literally speaking, these will be the years of emergence of a new style of thinking in our society, *after all*, the years of our emergence from the crisis and moving into a new arena.” (sak'art'velos respublika (b), 1995)

Saakashvili: “Unfortunately, 60 percent of pupils from rural areas are no longer able to attend school because they can't afford to buy not only books but, *simply*, shoes.” (Chigladze, 2003)

Hyperbole, exaggeration of certain events and issues was commonly employed:

Shevardnadze: “Yesterday, *might have been really disastrous for the nation.*” (Shevardnadze commented after being attacked and accidentally saved) (sak'art'velos respublika (a), 1995)

Saakashvili: “We stood together and proved that we are worthy and there are *no more peaceful people than us!*” (Tevzadze, 2004)

Procatalepsis anticipates an objection that might be raised by a reader and responds to it, thus permitting an argument to continue moving forward while taking into account opposing points:

Shevardnadze: "I know they will argue that I've started the pre-election campaign. Yes, I have! I haven't said it before but I'm saying it now: I've accepted the proposal of the Union of Citizens of Georgian and decided to run for the presidency." (sak'art'velos respublika (a), 1995)

Saakashvili: "I get asked a lot if we should punish people who kill. I don't think now is the appropriate moment for punishment." (Tevzadze, 2004)

Hypophora involves asking one or more questions and then proceeding to answer them, usually at some length.

Shevardnadze: "Why have these forces turned so embittered right now? They became irate, because the parliament did not fail to pass the constitution, which is the calling card of the country on the whole planet." (sak'art'velos respublika (a), 1995)

Saakashvili: "It turned out that the university's annual contribution to the budget amounts to 2 million Georgian Lari, and it turns out that this is more than the contribution of the second largest importer of oil products in Georgia. Why? Because you, professors, turn out to be the 'objects of scorn', while the owner of gas stations is untouchable..." (Chigladze, 2003).

Syntax

Syntax concerns ordering words and phrases in such a way as to bring the important component to the fore. In order to achieve this effect, our candidates use such rhetorical devices as Hyperbaton, Appositive, and Parenthesis.

Hyperbaton refers to any departure from normal word order. The unexpected arrangement of words calls sharp attention to the word or words that are out of their usually expected place, thus emphasizing them:

Gamsakhurdia: "This is primarily done by the apostles of the Kremlin, *discrediting of our government is the goal of theirs.*" (sak'art'velos respublika (c), 1991)

Saakashvili: "With active participation and knowledge, you now should become ministers and parliament members." (Dvali, 2003)

Appositive is a noun that redescribes another noun standing next to it. They are just one more way you can guide the voters to identify with the bigger narrative presented by the speaker:

Gamsakhurdia: "...but *the state of the country, the current situation of our nation* caused all this." (sak'art'velos respublika (c), 1991)

Shevardnadze: "...And the reason for this was that *the people, our population*, were disposed to receive the country..." (sak'art'velos respublika (b), 1995)

Saakashvili: "Otherwise, Georgia will lose *its main treasure - the resource of education.*" (Chigladze, 2003)

Parenthesis consists of a word, phrase, or entire sentence inserted as an aside into the middle of another sentence:

Gamsakhurdia: "In my opinion, the cause of all our misfortunes historically, *even today, not just our own, but of all humanity in general*, lies in this moral negligence..." (sak'art'velos respublika (c), 1991)

Shevardnadze: "The fact is that the constitution, which we enacted in the parliament, *for which we are grateful to our parliament ten thousand times, thanks for the mutual understanding and cooperation*, is the legal basis for the unity and integrity of Georgia, the return of our lost Georgian lands." (sak'art'velos respublika (a), 1995)

Figurative language

Figurative or metaphorical language is constructed with the use of similarity and comparison.. Among the modes of metaphorical language our candidates used Simile, Metaphor, Metonymy and Personification.

Simile compares two very different things that have at least one quality in common:

Saakashvili: "*Like a ship with a raised anchor* the country has slowly progressed towards peace." (Chigladze, 2003)

Metaphor compares two different things:

Saakashvili: "They believe *I am a bomb*, I think. They might not be mistaken; for the enemies of Georgia, I might turn out to be a bomb, together with my friends and everyone else, that *explodes in their hands*." (Chigladze, 2003)

Metonymy is a type of metaphor in which something closely associated with another thing is named instead of the other thing:

Gamsakhurdia: "<...> *The Centre* (the government of the USSR) will happily lend us a helping hand." (sak'art'velos respublika (c), 1991)

Personification metaphorically gives human attributes to animals, objects, or ideas.:

Shevardnadze: "*Weapons and money* earned through the use of arms cannot *govern* in a democracy and a strong state." (sak'art'velos respublika (a), 1995)

Repetition

This device is the strategic restatement of words and phrases that enables the writer to stress an idea, maintain or regain focus, define a term, and even enhance the stylistic quality. It is expressed by Anaphora, Epistrophe, Anadiplosis, Conduplicatio and Epanalepsis.

Anaphora involves the repetition of the same word or words at the beginning of successive phrases, clauses, or sentences, often using climax and parallelism:

Gamsakhurdia: "[Actually] *as long as* Georgia remains a part of the centralized Soviet Empire, where our economy is in isolation, the real economic changes are unimaginable. *As long as* our republic does not have economic borders <...> it is possible to improve the level of living." (sak'art'velos respublika (c), 1991)

Shevardnadze: "...*today* here, at this meeting, we had to meet each other; *today* we had to express the will of the Georgian people that *we no longer want* to live under terrorism, *we no longer want* to be surrounded by armed people, *we no longer want* criminals in politics, *we no longer want* armed people to win the elections <...>." (sak'art'velos respublika (a), 1995)

Saakashvili: "Today I see highly respected people in this room; *people* who created a remarkable period in Georgia's recent history of Georgia; *people* who brought our culture and all that is best about us to light." (Dvali, 2003)



"Mikheil Saakashvili". Owner: National Parliamentary Library of Georgia.

Epistrophe forms the counterpart to anaphora, the repetition of words or phrases comes at the end of successive phrases, clauses, or sentences:

Gamsakhurdia: "I think there will be much greater efforts than there were *in the case of the referendum*, or there were *in the case of the declaration of independence*." (sak'art'velos respublika (c), 1991)

Shevardnadze: "I want to tell you plainly, dear friends, we can be proud of this *constitution*. On the European continent it is one of the most outstanding *constitutions*." (sak'art'velos respublika (a), 1995)

Saakashvili: "Yes, I think *we are better than many*. We have proven that *we are better than many*." (Tevzadze, 2004)

Anadiplosis is formed by the repetition of the last word or words of a sentence or clause at or very near the beginning of the next. The immediate repetition calls attention to the words, reinforcing them:

Gamsakhurdia: "...the country is advancing towards complete *independence*. The *Declaration of Independence* is the first significant step." (sak'art'velos respublika (c), 1991)

Shevardnadze: "...we <...> don't want the elections to be won by *armed*

people and *armed people* to exist in the parliament.” (sak’art’velos respublika (a), 1995)

Saakashvili: “Today, in this room, I see highly respected *people*; *people* who created a remarkable period in Georgia’s recent history of Georgia <...>” (Tevzadze, 2004)

Conducuplicatio repeats a key word from a preceding clause or sentence at or near the beginning of the next:

Gamsakhurdia: “...that *tragic* past of Georgia would not be so *tragic* if it had lost its faith.” (sak’art’velos respublika (c), 1991)

Shevardnadze: “The constitution *grants us a lot of rights*. It *grants a lot of rights* to the parliament and also *grants quite a lot of rights* to the president.” (sak’art’velos respublika (b), 1995)

Epanalepsis repeats the beginning word or words of a clause or sentence at the end. Placing the same idea in the two major positions of emphasis in the sentence calls extra attention to it, while the echo of the beginning at the end creates a feeling of return to the first thought, in spite of the intervening words:

Gamsakhurdia: “*Our way is the way* of moral revival of Georgia, *it is the way of revival of faith, it is the way of Christ.*” (sak’art’velos respublika (c), 1991)

Rhetorical Questions

Rhetorical questions are used to heighten the impact of drama. It differs from hypophora in that the writer does not answer the question because the answer is self-evident:

Saakashvili: “How should we fund education, health care services if the state machinery does not enforce discipline?” (Chigladze, 2003)

Analysis

The quantitative analysis of the linguistic strategies used in the candidates’ texts looks as follows:

The text of Zviad Gamsakhurdia is distinguished by the most frequent use of repetition (4.5.), which was expressed by Anaphora, Epistrophe, Anadiplosis, Conducuplicatio and Epanalepsis (21 times in total). Second most frequent device was Syntactic changes (Hyperbaron, Appositive, Parenthesis) – thirteen times in total; also revealed were Figurative language (expressed by Metonymy) - eight times and Emphasis (Climax, Asyndeton, Sentential Adverb) - six times; the least common device (used five times) was structural balancing, expressed by Parallelism and Antithesis (4.1.).

The most frequently used rhetorical device in the text of Shevardnadze (similarly to Gamsakhurdia’s text) was Repetition (4.5.), which was expressed by Anaphora, Epistrophe, Anadiplosis and Conducuplicatio (in total, Repetition was used fourteen times); second most frequent device was Emphasis (4.2) (Climax, Asyndeton, Sentential Adverb, Hyperbole, Procatalepsis, Hypophora) – ten times in total; Syntactic changes (4.3) (Hyperbaton, Appositive, Parenthesis) – seven times and

Figurative language (4.4) (Personification) – four times; the least common device was Parallelism (4.1.) - only once.

The main rhetorical strategy in Saakashvili's texts was Figurative language (4.4) (twelve times in total), which was mainly expressed by Metaphor, although there were also Simile and Analogies. The use of Repetition (4.5.) was revealed eight times; the Structural Balancing (4.1.) (expressed by Parallelism and Antithesis), Emphasis (4.2.) (expressed by Sentential Adverb, Hyperbole, Procatalepsis, Hypophora) and Syntactic changes (4.3.) (expressed by Hyperbaton and Appositive) were used with the same frequency, six times each; the least often (only two times) the politician used a Rhetorical Question (4.6.), although this technique was not found in the speeches of any of the above candidates.

Summary

Each candidate defined his viewpoint in his own unique style of utilizing rhetorical devices, and depending on frequency of use, it is possible to identify the candidates' priorities and attitudes. Our study showed that repetition is the linguistic device that predominates in texts of Gamsakhurdia and Shevardnadze, however it is also a feature of texts of Saakashvili. This technique is widely used in campaigns and political rhetoric. As Lakoff argues, when a word or phrase is repeated in a speech, it has the same effect that memorization has when we study; it tends to be retained more effectively (Lakoff (c), 2006), it might also integrate into people's worldviews and ideas. Repetition is often used in slogans, banners and appeals (Minin-White, 2017). Another strategy that is typical of Gamsakhurdia's text is the use of syntactic alterations to help the candidate arrange words and phrases in a way that highlighted the key element for him.

The politician also used figurative language, particularly metonymy, which is used to replace an idea or a concept by a single word that is connected to it. According to Beard, metonymies can be useful in political speeches as they reduce or increase responsibility (Beard 2000). This can be seen in Gamsakhurdia's text as he used the metonymies "Kremlin" and "The Centre" to refer to the leadership of the Soviet Union and it is interesting to note that each and every use of them was usually in a negative way, increasing the responsibility of Soviet leadership for all the challenges Georgia was facing at the time. Out of all rhetorical devices, antithesis or contrasting to ideas, was employed in Gamsakhurdia's text the least frequently, however in our opinion, it was one of significant device in terms of mental load as by using it, the candidate forged a solid foundation for his stance, attitudes, and behavior by contrasting two ideas, such as: on the one hand "declared national and civil disobedience with the goal of achieving complete and final independence" and, on the other hand "a flexible attitude towards the Kremlin and the Centre, acquiescence, and ultimately, betrayal of the nation."

Shevardnadze's text most frequently employs repetition, much like Gamsakhurdia's, and the significance of this strategy has already been mentioned above. Other language devices used in Shevardnadze's text were emphasis and syntactic alterations, all helping the candidate call attention to the ideas by the structure of presentation enhancing the emotional expressiveness of his speech. Unlike the other two candidates, Shevardnadze also used personification to draw attention to a matter that was important to him at the time. In politics, "Personification is persuasive because it evokes our attitudes, feelings and beliefs about people and

applies them to our attitudes, feelings and beliefs about abstract political entities” (Charteris-Black, 2005); personification is powerful because the source of the message is authoritative (Graesser et al., 1988). For example, “Weapons shall not govern” or “the Constitution grants us powers.” The candidate used this strategy several times in his text, and it was always used in relation to the Constitution. Adoption of the constitution was one of the most significant political events during Shevardnadze’s period since it served as the foundation for his legitimacy.

There were various linguistic devices used in Saakashvili’s texts, but figurative and metaphorical language was by far the most prevalent. Figurative language helps the audience grasp what the speaker is saying by linking ideas or people to concepts and objects they are familiar with. As Van Dijk (1997) argues, positive metaphors are used for self-presentation, portraying the speaker and his/her actions as good and virtuous; whereas the opponents are linked to negative associations. The aforementioned tendency is evident in Saakashvili’s texts, when he compared the country to a “ship with a raised anchor” that “has slowly progressed towards peace” in the context of the political changes initiated as a result of the Rose Revolution while comparing the retired president to an “averted disaster.” Asking rhetorical questions is another language device that set Saakashvili’s texts apart from those of the other two candidates. The politician would draw the public’s attention to a particular issue which he needed to base his argument on, and by using a rhetorical question he led the listener to understanding of the issue pre-framed for them, adding drama and enhancing the effect of persuading the target audience.

The analysis of linguistic devices and strategies has shown that for Gamsakhurdia, it was important to formulate a specific problem in such a way that, on the one hand, the main problem would be presented more clearly for the audience by juxtaposing sides, and at the same time it would remain the central theme. To do this, he did not consider it necessary to change the structure and content of the language. In addition, since in his speeches Gamsakhurdia put his / between society and the state, he appeared as a carrier of the content necessary for the personality of the voter and, at the same time, for the state, emphasizing his importance as a candidate.

It is noteworthy that Shevardnadze, like Gamsakhurdia, was characterized by an approach in which he stated a specific problem using such a variety of language so that the problem and his vision were understandable to all audiences. He made little use of “contrasting meaning” with the use of structural balancing; he presented himself as a speaker on behalf of the country, people, or society and, as such, knew better what that group wanted. Therefore, in declaring this knowledge, he did not consider it necessary to change the content for different audiences, which would lead them to different interpretations.

As for Saakashvili, he influenced voters with many examples and figurative expressions. However, he used the method of promoting his view of an issue by asking specific or rhetorical questions when communicating with constituents less than other strategies. In our opinion, such selective use of this device was a way to sound less detached but closer to the language of the voters. In fact, he himself asked questions and gave answers to them as well.

Conclusion

Oratory and public speaking have long been significant in politics. The truth of their own point of view and their own leadership are consistently emphasized by

skilful politicians as they use a variety of rhetorical techniques and strategies to evoke affirmative responses from their target audience, successfully persuade and encourage them to take action (in our case to vote for them).

The linguistic devices and strategies revealed by the candidates during the pre-election period in Georgia are in some cases similar, although due to their positioning during the election period, their focus would change. In any case, as Charteris-Black points out, the effect of rhetorical strategies in political speeches is often a result of them being combined (Charteris-Black, 2005) since the rhetoric of a politician cannot be reduced to a single language device. The combined use of rhetorical devices forms an argument's framework, which has the effect of persuading and influencing the audience and is strengthened by contrasting meanings, rhetorical questions and repetition of specific speech patterns.

Based on the objectives of this article, we made an effort to provide a brief description of the rhetorical devices employed by each of the three presidential candidates for Georgia in 1991, 1995 and 2004 elections, and the value of such strategies as a whole. However, it should be noted that each of the identified strategies is a separate research object based on its contextual, referential meaning or content. The positive response from the target audience may determine the success of a particular politician during the election period, therefore, the study of rhetorical techniques and strategies, as well as the frequency of their use, allows us to evaluate the relationship between the target audience and political success.

All photos have been retrieved from the collection of digital photographs archive of the National Parliamentary Library of Georgia.

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**საპრეზიდენტო არჩევნები სამხრეთ კავკასიაში:
პოლიტიკური ტრანსფორმაციები, წარმოსხვითი ერთობა და
მეხსიერების დისკურსები**

რეზიუმე

კოლექტიური მონოგრაფია წარმოადგენს ავტორთა ჯგუფის მიერ შოთა რუსთაველის საქართველოს ეროვნული სამეცნიერო ფონდის ფუნდამენტური კვლევებისათვის სახელმწიფო სამეცნიერო გრანტის 2018 წლის კონკურსში გამარჯვებული საგრანტო პროექტის “რა იგებს არჩევნებს საქართველოში” (#FR-18-8649) ფარგლებში მომზადებულ ნაშრომს. მასში ასახულია საქართველოში, აზერბაიჯანსა და სომხეთში საპრეზიდენტო ინსტიტუტის ჩამოყალიბება და საპრეზიდენტო არჩევნების სპეციფიკა.

საპრეზიდენტო ინსტიტუტის ფორმირების სპეციფიკა, საპრეზიდენტო არჩევნების პერიოდში გამოყენებული სტრატეგიები და მიდგომები სამხრეთ კავკასიის რესპუბლიკებში საინტერესო თავისებურებებით გამოირჩევა. საარჩევნო პერიოდში კანდიდატები აქტიურად იყენებდნენ ხალხთან, ერთან, ისტორიასთან, კულტურასთან, სამინაო და საგარეო პოლიტიკასთან დაკავშირებულ სხვადასხვა მიდგომებსა და თემებს. წინასწარჩევნო პროგრამები და საინაგურაციო მასალები, ისევე როგორც პრეზიდენტების მიერ განხორციელებული ცალკეული პროექტები, საინტერესოა ეთნოლოგიის, სოციოლოგიის, ანთროპოლოგიის, ლინგვისტიკის, პოლიტოლოგიის, სამართალმცოდნეობის და ისტორიის თვალსაზრისით. ამიტომ, ნაშრომის მომზადებისას ძირითადი ყურადღება ექცეოდა როგორც დისციპლინათაშორის მიდგომებს, ისე რეგიონალური თანამშრომლობის შესაძლებლობებს. ავტორების მიერ მომზადებული ნაწილები განხილულია ძალაუფლების, მეხსიერების, პოსტსაბჭოთა ტრანსფორმაციების და ლინგვისტიკის თეორიული მიდგომების გამოყენებით.

1. საქართველოში, ისევე როგორც სამხრეთ კავკასიაში, ძალაუფლებაზე ზემოქმედების რესურსებზე კონტროლისათვის ბრძოლაში ყველა ახალი ლიდერი ეიფორიისა და იმედის ტალღაზე მოდიოდა. საქართველოში ე.წ. ძლიერი საპრეზიდენტო ინსტიტუტის პირობებში ხელისუფლებაში სამივე პრეზიდენტის მოსვლა კრიზისის და დაპირისპირების ფონზე მიმდინარეობდა. ისინი ეფექტურად იყენებდნენ საკუთარ სოციალურ კაპიტალს პოლიტიკური ველის ცვლილებისათვის. მიიჩნეოდა, რომ ძველი ლიდერის შეცვლა უნდა მომხდარიყო იმიტომ, რომ კონსტიტუცია არ მუშაობდა და ამიტომ იგი უნდა შეცვლილიყო. ცვლილების პროცესში პოლიტიკური ლიდერები ახერხებდნენ „სახიფათო“ მოკავშირეების და ოპონენტების განეიტრალებას და პოლიტიკური ველის იმგვარ განზომილებაში გადაყვანას, რომელშიც მათ დომინანტურ მდგომარეობაში ამყოფებდა. თუმცა, საკუთარი წარმოდგენით ველების გადაფარვისა და კონსტროლის სურვილი საბოლოო ჯამში გარდაუვალ კრიზისებამდე

მიდიოდა, რომელსაც ხელისუფლების სპეციფიკური ცვლილება მოსდევდა.

ხელისუფლებაში მოსვლისა და მისი შენარჩუნების პროცესში დიდ როლს თამაშობდნენ სხვადასხვა აგენტები, რომლებსაც ჰქონდათ საშუალება როგორც გავლენა მოეხდინათ პოლიტიკურ ველზე, ისე ხელისუფლების მხრიდან იყვნენ მოწყვლადი. ზ. გამსახურდიასგან განსხვავებით ე. შევარდნაძე უფრო ყურადღებით მოეკიდა იმ პერიოდში ჯერ კიდევ გავლენიან ინტელიგენციას და მზარდი გავლენის მქონე ეკლესიას. მეტიც, იგი შეეცადა ინტელიგენციის მდგომარეობა შეენარჩუნებინა, ეკლესიისაკი გაეზარდა. მ. სააკაშვილის დასაყრდენად ახალგაზრდები, რეგიონები, მუდმივი კრიზისებით დაღლილი ღარიბი მოსახლეობა გამოვიდა. თუმცა უფრო ეკლექტური და განსხვავებული ინტერესების მქონე ჯგუფებთან არაერთგვაროვანი ურთიერთობის ფონზე მ. სააკაშვილის ხელისუფლებას ასევე პრობლემები გაუჩნდა და ხელისუფლების ტრანსფორმაციასაც შეუწყო ხელი.

ლიდერები საპრეზიდენტო ინსტიტუტს ხელისუფლებაში მოსვლამდე განიხილავდნენ როგორც მმართველობის ერთ-ერთ ფორმას, რომელიც ხელისუფლების დანაწილების პირობებში ეფექტური იქნებოდა მიმდინარე გამოწვევებთან გამკლავებისას. სამივე პრეზიდენტმა ხელისუფლებაში მოსვლის შემდეგ, სხვადასხვა მიზეზებით, თუცა სუბიექტური შეხედულებებით და ერთი მიზნით - გაეზარდათ თავიანთი ძალაუფლება და პოლიტიკურ ველზე სხვა აგენტებისათვის არ მიეცათ საშუალება, რომ ჰქონოდათ გამორჩეული პოზიცია - საპრეზიდენტო ინსტიტუტი თანდათან განსაკუთრებული უფლებების მქონე საპრეზიდენტო სისტემად აქციეს.

საქართველოს კონსტიტუციის მკვლევარი ვ. ფიში მიიჩნევს, რომ პრეზიდენტები, რომელთა უფლებები არ იზღუდებოდა, უკეთ უმკლავდებიან საფრთხეებს, ვიდრე პარლამენტები და მთავრობები, სადაც ხელისუფლება გაყოფილია პრეზიდენტსა და კანონმდებელს შორის. ამიტომ პრეზიდენტები კრიზისს ხშირად იყენებენ საკუთარი პოზიციების გასამლიერებლად. ზ. გამსახურდიას ამ გზით ფაქტიური დამოუკიდებელი და თავისუფალი საქართველოს შექმნა სურდა; ე. შევარდნაძემ იგი ქვეყნის სტაბილიზაციისათვის გამოიყენა; მ. სააკაშვილს ამგვარი უფლება კორუფციის, რეფორმებისა და სხვა პრობლემების დასაძლევად სჭირდებოდა. მაგრამ, როგორც მკვლევარი ზ. ჯიბლაშვილი მიიჩნევს, - ძლიერი პრეზიდენტის ინსტიტუტის სუბიექტური გაგების გამო დაიკარგა მმართველობის საპრეზიდენტო და საპარლამენტო სისტემების ობიექტური აღქმა. საპრეზიდენტო რესპუბლიკა ძლიერი საპრეზიდენტო ძალაუფლების გამოვლინების ფორმად აღიქმებოდა, ხოლო საპარლამენტო რესპუბლიკა კი ეფექტიანი ხელისუფლების ანტითეზად. ეს სრული სიცხადით გამოვლინდა სამივე ყოფილი პრეზიდენტის ფსიქოლოგიურ დამოკიდებულებაში სახელმწიფო ხელისუფლებისადმი.

თუმცა იმ პირობებში, როცა პრეზიდენტის უფლებამოსიფლების

გაზრდასთან ერთად მატულობდა გამოწვევების, პრობლემების და რისკების რაოდენობა, ამ პროცესების ლოგიკურ გაგრძელებად ამ ინსტიტუტის დასუსტება და პიროვნული დომინაციის სახეცვლილი, ერთგვარად კოლექტიური ფორმის შემოღება იქცა.

ყოველი ახალი ხელისუფლება ფაქტიურად ეყრდნობოდა წინა ხელისუფლებას - კანონში, ბიუროკრატიაში, პარლამენტშიც კი: ზვიად გამსახურდიამ ჯერ კიდევ საქართველოს სსრ-ში არჩეული უზენაესი საბჭოს მეშვეობით დაიწყო სვლა დამოუკიდებლობისაკენ, თუმცა რაღაც პერიოდის შემდეგ ერთპიროვნული და ერთპარტიული სისტემისკენ გადაიხარა. ედუარდ შევარდნაძეს ხელისუფლებაში მოსვლას წინა პარალმენტის და ზოგადად, ხელისუფლების გაუქმება უძლოდა წინ; თუმცა, ქვეყანაში მოქმედებდა ზ. გამსახურდიას დროს სახეცვლილი კანონები და გარკვეული თვალსაზრისით საბჭოთა მმართველობის სახეცვლილი სისტემა. მიხეილ სააკაშვილმა ფაქტიურად გააგრძელა ე. შევარდნაძის დაწყებული რეფორმა, გაზარდა პრეზიდენტის ინსტიტუტის უფლებამოსილება. ასევე გააგრძელა შევარდნაძის კურსი სხვადასხვა მიმართულებით.

მედიასთან ურთიერთობა სამივე მმართველის პირობებში საკმაოდ რთული აღმოჩნდა. ზ. გამსახურდია ცდილობდა მედიის კონტროლს, განსაკუთრებით საარჩევნო პერიოდში, რითაც საკუთარი პოლიტიკური შეხედულებების მონოპოლიურ გავრცელებას უწყობდა ხელს. ე. შევარდნაძის პერიოდში გაზეთი კვლავ ინარჩუნებდა მოსახლეობასთან კომუნიკაციის ძირითადი საშუალების ადგილს. ელექტრონერგიის მიწოდებასთან დაკავშირებული პრობლემების გამო შევარდნაძე აქტიურად იყენებდა რადიოს და მისი ტრადიციული რადიოინტერვიუები ჩვეულებრივ გაზეთში იბეჭდებოდა. მ. სააკაშვილის პერიოდში უფრო მეტი მნიშვნელობა შეიძინა ჯერ ტელევიზიამ, შემდეგ კი ინტერნეტმა. იგი უფრო ცდილობდა ტელეკომპანიების კონტროლს. მაგრამ დამოუკიდებელი ინტერნეტ რესურსების და მედიის პირობებში მისი ოპონენტებისათვის საკუთარი ნაზრების გაზიარება არ იზღუდებოდა. სოციალური მედია აქტიურად გამოიყენებოდა პროტესტების დაგეგმვაშიც.

ფაქტიურად, პრეზიდენტის ინსტიტუტი და მასთან დაკავშირებული პროცესები პიროვნული ინტერესების რეალიზაციის და ძალაუფლების განმტკიცების ინსტრუმენტს წარმოდგენდა. იგი ეხმარებოდა ძალაუფლების ობიექტივირებული რესურსების კონტროლში, შესაბამისი ცოდნის შექმნასა და გავრცელებაში და მოსახლეობაზე ზემოქმედებაში. ამ კუთხით არჩევნები წარმოადგენდა არა იმდენად საკუთარი პოლიტიკური პოპულარობის შემოწმების მექანიზმს, რამდენადაც ამ შესაძლებლობების შენარჩუნების ლეგიტიმურ გზას.

2. საარჩევნო პროცესებში ხალხის მონაწილეობაზე აქცენტი ქართული პოლიტიკური დისკუსიის ერთ-ერთი ფუნდამენტური ელემენტია, რადგან ეს ტექნიკა მუდმივად ჩნდებოდა სამივე საპრეზიდენტო კანდიდატის საარჩევნო გამოსვლებში. მეორე მხრივ, კანდიდატები თავად

განსაზღვრავდნენ თუ ვინ იყო ამომრჩეველი (როგორც ჯგუფი, შესაბამისი მახასიათებლებით, თვისებებით და საჭიროებებით - საუკეთესო, პრეზიდენტობის კანდიდატების აზრით). თითოეული კანდიდატი თავის საქმიანობას ახორციელებდა იმის აღნიშვნით, რომ ყველაფერი ხალხის ნებით, ხალხის სახელით და ხალხისვე ინტერესების გათვალისწინებით კეთდებოდა.

თავად კანდიდატები წარმოაჩენდნენ რა საკუთარ თავს სახალხო ლიდერებად, ასე აღწევდნენ ერთგვარ ერთობას ხალხთან. ეს იყო გარკვეული გარანტია იმისა, რომ მომავალში ისინი სათანადოდ მიუდგებოდნენ საზოგადოებაში არსებულ უკმაყოფილებას და იბრძოდნენ მათი ინტერესების განხორციელებისათვის. სხვა სიტყვებით რომ ვთქვათ, კანდიდატებმა ამგვარად მოახდინეს თავიანთი ქმედებების ლეგიტიმაცია და გაამართლეს ისინი, როგორც „ხალხის მიერ სანქცირებული“. მათ კენჭისყრის შედეგად, საზოგადოების ნებისა და სურვილის შესაბამისად, გადაეცათ საზოგადოების ნებისა და სურვილის გამოხატვის უფლებამოსილება.

ქართველი ხალხი და ერი განსაკუთრებით შესამჩნევი იყო ზ. გამსახურდიას გამოსვლებში. ის ქართველ ხალხს თვლიდა გადაწყვეტილების მიმღებ მთავარ ჯგუფად და სხვა ეთნიკურ ჯგუფებთან ურთიერთქმედებას ორმხრივი თანამშრომლობის ფორმატში ხედავდა. ე. შევარდნაძის საარჩევნო ტექსტები მოკლებული იყო ეთნიკურ შინაარსს. იგი ქართველ ხალხს მხოლოდ კულტურასთან, სახელმწიფო სიმბოლოებთან, კონფლიქტებთან და საგარეო პოლიტიკასთან დაკავშირებით ახსენებდა. მ. სააკაშვილი ქართველ ხალხზე საუბარს „დაუბრუნდა“, მაგრამ თავის გამოსვლებში იგი ხან საქართველოს საზოგადოებას მიმართავდა, ხან ზოგადად, სამოქალაქო ერთობის ფარგლებში. ამრიგად, ამომრჩეველი იყო „უცვლელი ჯგუფი“ კონკრეტული პრეზიდენტების პერიოდში, რომლის რაობა და სურვილები განსაზღვრული იყო მმართველი ლიდერების მიერ. ამიტომ, ახალი პოლიტიკური ლიდერი თავის საარჩევნო კამპანიის პერიოდში ქმნიდა „ამომრჩევლის ახალ იმიჯს“.

3. ჩვენი კვლევა საქართველოში ხუთ საპრეზიდენტო საარჩევნო პერიოდს (1991, 1995, 2000, 2004 და 2008 წლები) და თანადროულ პროცესებს ეხება. ამ პერიოდში საპრეზიდენტო კანდიდატების, რომლებიც შემდგომ არჩეული იყვნენ პრეზიდენტებად, მიერ წარმოთქმული ტექსტები ლინგვისტური სპეციფიკის და რიტორიკული ხერხების გარდა ყურადღებას იქცევს პოლიტიკური დისკურსის და პოლიტიკის ანთროპოლოგიის კუთხითაც.

საქართველოს პრეზიდენტების წინასაარჩევნო პროგრამების და საინაგურაციო გამოსვლები საინტერესოა რამდენიმე თვალსაზრისით:

პირველი, ისინი ვკიჩვენებენ თითოეულ საარჩევნო პერიოდში საზოგადოებისათვის მნიშვნელოვან თემების ჩამონათვალს.

მეორე, ამ ტექსტების მიხედვით შესაძლებელია თვალი მივადევნოთ საპრეზიდენტო კანდიდატის მცდელობებს, რომ მოეხდინა გავლენა მიმდინარე მსჯელობებზე და პროცესებზე. ასე, ძირითადი დადებითი

ასპექტები დაკავშირებული იქნებოდა მის კანდიდატურასთან, ხოლო უარყოფითი - ოპონენტებთან. ეს, თავის მხრივ, გარკვეულწილად მიმდინარე დისკურსის ცვლილების მაგალითს წარმოადგენდა.

მესამე, ამ ტექსტებში ვლინდებოდა თემები, რომელსაც არჩევის შემთხვევაში კანდიდატები აუცილებლად მიაქცევდნენ ყურადღებას. რეფორმებთან, ეკონომიკურ თუ სოციალურ ცვლილებებთან ერთად კანდიდატები საუბრობდნენ საზოგადოების ერთიანობის კონკრეტულ მაგალითებზე, სიმბოლოებზე და პრაქტიკებზე. ეს საკითხები და მათი გაგება იქცოდა მომავალი პრეზიდენტის მმართველობის შემაღენელ ნაწილად.

მეოთხე, შერჩეული მიდგომები - არსებული ვითარების შენარჩუნება, თავისთავადი საზოგადოებრივი ცვლილება, მკვეთრი რეფორმები, ექსკლუზიური პატრიოტიზმი, ინკლუზიური სამოქალაქო ერთობა, თანასწორობა თავდაპირველად ჩნდებოდა წინასაარჩევნო ტექსტებში, შემდეგ აისახებოდა საინაგურაციო გამოსვლებში და საბოლოოდ ვლინდებოდა მმართველობის სპეციფიკაში. საყურადღებოა, რომ საპრეზიდენტო კანდიდატების მიდგომები შეიძლება გაკვირით ან ზოგადად ყოფილიყო აღნიშნული ტექსტებში, თუმცა მათი მოცულობა თანდათან მატულობდა.

მეხუთე, ხელახალი არჩევნების პირობებში კანდიდატი ყოველთვის ეხებოდა საკუთარი მმართველობის პერიოდში ინიცირებულ პროექტებს, მხარდაჭერილ ინიციატივებს თუ ცალკეულ მოვლენებს და იძლეოდა მათი ინტერპრეტაციის საკუთარ ვერსიებს. ეს ვერსიები პერიოდულად განსხვავდებოდა საზოგადოებაში გავრცელებული შეხედულებებისაგან და ამგვარად კანდიდატები უპირისპირდნენ მათ „სწორ“ და „საჭირო“ ვერსიებს.

მექვსე, წინასაარჩევნო და საინაგურაციო ტექსტების მნიშვნელოვანი ნაწილი და მათში გაჟღერებული დაპირებები გათვლილი იყო იმ მომენტში აუდიტორიაზე ზემოქმედებაზე. შემდგომში მათი შესრულება, როგორც ჩანს, არ იგეგმებოდა, რადგან მათი რეალიზებისათვის მნიშვნელოვანი ნაბიჯები არ გადადგმულა.

რატომ არის საინტერესო წინასაარჩევნო ტექსტები? საპრეზიდენტო კანდიდატები თავის გამოსვლებში ერთდროულად თანმიმდევრულები და ემოციურები იყვნენ, იყენებდნენ ცნობილ მაგალითებს და მოუწოდებდნენ ერთიანობისკენ, საკუთარი კანდიდატურის მხარდაჭერისკენ და ოპონენტების უარყოფისკენ. ამ პროცესში მსჯელობის მნიშვნელოვანი ხაზი გადიოდა ზოგადად ისტორიაზე და საზოგადოებრივ მეხსიერებაზე. საქართველოს ისტორია, ისტორიული გმირები და ანტიგმირები, საბჭოთა მეხსიერება, დამოუკიდებლობის აღდგენა, სამოქალაქო დაპირსპირება წარმოადგენდნენ იმ გამჭოლსაკითხებს, რომელიც კანდიდატების ტექსტებს სძენდა დასაბუთებულობას და ემოციურ კავშირს ამომრჩევლთან.

საზოგადოებრივი და პოლიტიკური სიმბოლოების, მნიშვნელობებისა და შინაარსების რეკონფიგურაცია საქართველოში რთული და ხანგრძლივი

პროცესი იყო. შეიძლება ითქვას, რომ იგი, გარკვეული გაგებით, ჯერ კიდევ მიმდინარეობს. მკვლევარი თ. ქარაია მეხსიერების პოლიტიკაზე მსჯელობისას ამბობს, რომ ვარდების რევოლუციის შემდეგ მეხსიერების კვლევის მიმართულებით არ შემუშავებულა ერთიანი კონცეფცია, ხოლო გადაწყვეტილებები ცენტრალიზებული იყო და იმპულსურად მიიღებოდა. ჩვენი აზრით, იგივე შეიძლება ითქვას პოლიტიკისა და აკადემიის კვეთაში მყოფ თითქმის ყველა თემაზე. კერძოდ, დამოუკიდებელი საქართველოს პრეზიდენტები მეხსიერების და ისტორიის თემებზე, ქვეყნის მოწყობის ტრადიციებზე, კომმემორაციაზე თუ სხვა თემებზე ინიციატივები ძირითადად სიტუაციურად იმპულსური იყო, ანუ მათზე საუბარი კონკრეტულ სიტუაციებში იწყებოდა, მაგ., კრიზისი, დაპირისპირება, ომი, არჩევნების მოახლოება და ა.შ. ასევე, საკითხის დასმა, მასთან დაკავშირებული დისკუსია თუ აღსრულება ძირითადად ცენტრალიზებულად ხდებოდა. ამიტომ, ამ მიმართულებით შედარებითი კვლევა უფრო ცალკეულ შემთხვევებს ანალიზს უფრო წარმოდგენს. ჩვენი აზრით, ამის მიზეზი, მათ შორის, სამყაროს მოწყობის და აღქმის არსებული მოდელების რღვევა იყო. საბჭოთა კავშირის დაშლას მანამდე არსებული პრაქტიკების და განსაკუთრებით ხედვების ტრანსფორმაცია მოჰყვა. შეხედულებების ერთი ნაწილი თანდათანობით გაქრა (მაგ., ათეიზმი პრაქტიკულად გაქრა ყოველდღიურობიდან), მეორე ხილული გახდა (მაგ., სოციალისტური სუბსიდიების და გეგმიური ეკონომიკის პარალელურად არსებული ეკონომიკური ურთიერთობები), მესამე კი შეიცვალა (მაგ., მრავალპარტიულობა თანდათან ჩვეულ ამბად იქცა). საქართველოს სუვერენიტეტის და ქვეყნის მოწყობის თემის გააზრება ამ პერიოდში ერთდროულად გასაგები და გაუგებარი იყო.

აქვე უნდა აღინიშნოს კიდევ ერთი დეტალი. სხვადასხვა თემაზე აპელირება წინასაარჩევნო კამპანიების დროს იმ შემთხვევაში იყო პროდუქტიული თუ ნახსენები მაგალითები და მასთან დაკავშირებული ემოციები ნაცნობი იყო ყველასთვის. ისტორიასთან დაკავშირებული თემები ძირითადად ნაცნობი და მისაღები არა აკადემიური სიზუსტი გამო, არამედ იმიტომ რომ ზიარი და გასაგები იყო. ამ შემთხვევაში საზოგადოების კონსოლიდაცია, კონკრეტულ შემთხვევებში, ისეთი ფაქტების ან მოვლენების გამოყენებით ხდება, რომელიც კარგად ნაცნობია და შეესაბამება დასახულ მიზნებს. საბჭოთა კავშირის არსებობის ბოლო წლებში გამოყენებულ მსგავს სტრატეგიაზე საუბრობს თ. ქარაია, რომელიც ამ პროცესს წარსული აღმოჩენის ტენდენციად მიიჩნევს. ყველაზე უფრო გავრცელებულ პრაქტიკას ისტორიის სახელმძღვანელოებით ტრანსლირებული ცოდნის გამოყენება იყო. ამ შემთხვევაში ეს ნარატივები ძირითადად ოფიციალურ ვერსიებს წარმოადგენდა, რაც დომინანტური და სტანდარტული ისტორიული ცოდნის შენარჩუნებას უწყობდა ხელს.

მიუხედავად ამისა, აკადემიურ სივრცეში ისტორიის ირგვლივ განვითარებული დისკუსიები საქართველოში ნაციონალურ ნარატივის არაერთგვაროვნებას ავლენდა. ნ. ბათიაშვილი მას ბიოკალურს უწოდებს.

იგი თვლის, რომ საქართველოში ორი ჯგუფი უპირისპირდებოდა ერთმანეთს. ერთი, საბჭოურ გაგებასთან სხვადასხვაგვარად დაკავშირებული „ინტელიგენცია“ ნაციონალურნარატივის იდეალიზებულ ხატზე საუბრობდა, რომელიც არ განიხილებოდა კონკრეტული კონცეფციის ფარგლებში, თუმცა ძირითადი ყურადღება გადატანილი იყო ქართველთა კულტურულ განსაკუთრებულობაზე. მეორე ჯგუფი, „ლიბერალი ინტელექტუალები“ საუბრობდნენ საქართველოს ევროპული და დემოკრატიული ერი-სახელმწიფოს შინაარსებზე. ის მიიჩნევს, რომ მეხსიერებასთან დაკავშირებული პროექტები არა მარტო შიდაეროვნულ ნარატივებზე ახდენდა გავლენას, არამედ ერთაშორისი დავების და საერთოშორისო ურთიერთობების ფაქტორი იყო, რაშიც დიდ როლს თამაშობდა „პატრიოტული ინტელიგენცია“. ამ პირობებში ფუნდამენტური დილემა რუსეთის როლის და ადგილის შესახებ საქართველოს ისტორიაში და დღევანდელობაში ჯერ კიდევ მნიშვნელოვან საკითხად რჩება.

გარდა ამისა, ნაციონალური ნარატივის ფარგლებში პრობლემად რჩება ისტორიის ინტერპრეტაციები ქართული, აფხაზური და ოსური პერსპექტივებიდან. ეს შეხედულებები რადიკალურად განსხვავებულია და ამ ჯგუფების წარმომადგენლებს შორის ერთი კონკრეტული ეთნოსის ფარგლებში ისტორიული ასპექტების განხილვა უმეტესწილად დაპირისპირების ხასიათს ატარებს. მკვლევარები მიიჩნევენ რომ ამგვარმა „ისტორიკოსთა ომმა“ მნიშვნელოვანი როლი შეასრულა მე-20 საუკუნის 90-იანი წლების საქართველოში ეთნიკური კონფლიქტების ესკალაციაში.

საქართველოს პრეზიდენტობის კანდიდატების მიმართების სამიზნე აუდიტორია სხვადასხვა პერიოდში განსხვავებული სახელებით იყო ცნობილი. ადრესატის რაობა აზუსტებდა კანდიდატის პოზიციას, მოკავშირეებს, მოწინააღმდეგეებს, დამოკიდებულებებს და ა.შ. წინასაარჩევნო პერიოდში ზ. გამსახურდია ამომრჩევლებზე საუბრისას ძირითადად ეთნონიმებს იყენებდა. ძირითადად საუბარი იყო ქართველებზე და ქართველ ერზე, მნიშვნელოვნად ექსკლუზიური უფლებებით. ე.შევარდნაძე მმართველობის დასაწყისში ერიდებოდა ეთნონიმების გამოყენებას და აქცენტს სამოქალაქო საზოგადოებაზე აკეთებდა. მეორე არჩევნებში იგი უფრო მეტად კოლექტიურ ერთობას უსვამდა ხაზს და საერთო ისტორიის, კულტურის და რელიგიის მქონე საქართველოს მოქალაქეებზე საუბრობდა. მ. სააკაშვილის გამოსვლებში იგრძნობოდა ერთდროულად ზ. გამსახურდიას და ე. შევარდნაძის გამოსვლებში გამოყენებული *the power of the words and images*. ამიტომ მის ტექსტებში გვხვდება მიმართვები როგორ ქართველ ხალხთან, ქართველ ერთან, ქართულ საზოგადოებასთან, ისე საქართველოს მოქალაქეებთან, თანამოქალაქეებთან. მის მიერ გამოყენებული ეთნონიმები შეიძლება გაგებული იყოს ინკლუზიური ერის მშენებლობის კატეგორიებში.

ზვიად გამსახურდიას წინასაარჩევნო და საინაგურაციო გამოსვლების ტექსტებიდან ყურადღებას იქცევს მეორე, საყოველთაო საპრეზიდენტო არჩევნების პერიოდის ტექსტები. 1991 წელს მისი მთავარი სათქმელი

ეხებოდა დამოუკიდებლობის მოპოვებას და სუვერენიტეტის გაძლიერებას. ძირითად გამოწვევებად იგი ასახელებდა საბჭოთა კავშირს და მის დამოკიდებულებას საქართველოს დამოუკიდებლობის მიმართ, საბჭოთა რეჟიმის მიერ განადგურებულ ან მოშლილ სხვადასხვა ინსტიტუტებს, ქვეყანაში არსებულ შიდა დაპირისპირებას. ამ ფონზე ზ. გამსახურდია საკუთარ გამოსვლებში ძირითადად ქართველთა ჰორიზონტალურ ერთობაზე და მის განმტკიცების საჭიროებაზე საუბრობდა. მის გამოსვლებში იკვეთება სამი მნიშვნელოვანი თემა: ახალი ლინეარული დრო, რელიგია და სუვერენიტეტი. ისტორიის ახალი ვერსიის წარმოდგენის მიზანი მის გამოსვლებში დამოუკიდებელი საქართველოს რესპუბლიკის იდეის განგრძობადობის ხაზგასმამი გამოიხატება. ამ შემთხვევაში საქართველოს ისტორიისათვის მნიშვნელოვანი იყო ფაქტების აღმოჩენა, მივიწყებული ან დამალული ნარატივების წინ წამოწევა და ქართველთა ერთიანობისათვის საზიანო საბჭოთა მმართველობაზე საუბრით მოსალოდნელი სიკეთების ჩვენება. საბჭოთა ისტორია ამ შემთხვევაში კარგი საშუალება იყო უარყოფითი მაგალითების საჩვენებლად და საქართველოს ისტორიიდან მისი ამოშლის ან მივიწყების საჭიროება ჯერ არ იყო აქტუალური. ამ შემთხვევაში კალენდარის და ქრონოლოგიის ცვლილება პოსტსოციალისტური ტრანსფორმაციების დასაწყისის ერთ-ერთი ნიშანი იყო.

ზ. გამსახურდია გამოსვლებში ძალიან ხშირად საუბრობდა ქართულ მართლმადიდებლობაზე, ეკლესიაზე და რელიგიის მნიშვნელობაზე ადამიანთა ცხოვრებაში. რელიგიურობის გაძლიერებამ პოსტსაბჭოთა სივრცეში დიდი როლი ითამაშა. ახალი რელიგიურობა ნაწილობრივ ემყარებოდა საბჭოთა კავშირში არსებულ ცოდნას და პრაქტიკებს, ინსტიტუტებს და ყოფით ტრადიციებს. რელიგიის ინსტრუმენტალიზების ავტორების მიზანი იყო ძველი, ანუ საბჭოთა ათეისტურ პოლიტიკამდე არსებული, ვითარების დაბრუნება და სწორი ისტორიის აღდგენა, საბჭოთა მემკვიდრეობისაგან განთავისუფლება და დამოუკიდებელი ერების ფორმირება. ამიტომ ახალი რელიგიური პოლიტიკის მიზანი, ერთის მხრივ, საბჭოთა იდეოლოგიის ჩანაცვლებაში გამოიხატებოდა, ხოლო, მეორე მხრივ, იგი ქმნიდა ლოგიკურ ჯაჭვს „წარსულ“, „კარგ“ ქართველობას დღევანდელ განსაცდელსა და მომავალში აღორძინებულ ჭეშმარიტ ქართველს შორის. რელიგიური მოტივების გამოყენებით შესაძლებელი იყო როგორც დრამატული განცდების წარმართვა სასარგებლო გზით, ისე სოციალიზაციის ახალი სისტემის შექმნაც, რაც პოსტსოციალისტური საზოგადოების ფორმირების მთავარ საშუალებად ჰქონდა მიჩნეული.

ასევე, პირველი პრეზიდენტის წინასაარჩევნო ტექსტებში მნიშვნელოვანი ადგილი უჭირავს სუვერენიტეტის თემას. სუვერენიტეტი იყო ის თემა, რამაც შექმნა და ხელისუფლებაში მოიყავნა ეროვნული მოძრაობა - დამოუკიდებელი და თვითმმართველი ქვეყანა ეროვნული ხელისუფლებითსათავაში. ხელისუფლებაში მოსვლის შემდეგ ფაქტიურად პრეზიდენტის მთელი საქმიანობა სუვერენიტეტის მოპოვებისა და

განმტკიცებისკენ იყო მიმართული. მეორე, სუვერენიტეტის გაგება განსხვავდებოდა იმ პერიოდში საქართველოში მოქმედ პოლიტიკურ ჯგუფებს შორის და ამ საკითხის ირგვლივ განვითარებული დისკუსია ფაქტიურად გახდა დაპირისპირების მიზეზი. მესამე, ზ. გამსახურდიას ტექსტებში ცენტრთან დაპირისპირება სუვერენიტეტის საკითხის გამო გამოირჩეოდა როგორც ერის თვითგამორკვევის და თვითმყოფადობის შესახებ საუბრებით, ისე, განსაკუთრებით, ქართველთა და საქართველოს მტრებზე მსჯელობით. ფაქტიურად ამ თემის ირგვლივ ფორმირდებოდა როგორც ქვეყნის შიდა, ისე ქვეყნის გარეთ არსებული მტრების ხატი ზვიად გამსახურდიას გამოსვლებში, რომლებიც ყოველგვარი ნეგატივის წყაროს წარმოდგენდნენ. ასევე, ამ სუვერენიტეტზე ზრუნვით და მტრების დამარცხების მოტივებით აიხსნებოდა დაგეგმილი სამუშაოების და რეფორმების აუცილებლობა.

1991 წელს განვითარებულ პროცესებს წლის ბოლოს სამხედრო გადატრიალება მოჰყვა და 1992 წლის დასაწყისში ძალაუფლება საქართველოს რესპუბლიკის სამხედრო საბჭოს ხელში გადავიდა, რომელმაც საქართველოში ე. შევარდნაძე მოიწვია. იგი ჯერ საქართველოს რესპუბლიკის სახელმწიფო საბჭოს ხელმძღვანელობდა, ხოლო 1992 წლის არჩევნების შემდეგ ერთდროულად პარლამენტის თავმჯდომარე და სახელმწიფოს მეთაური გახდა. 1995 და 2000 წლებში იგი საქართველოს პრეზიდენტად აირჩიეს. მან ორივე შემთხვევაში წარადგინა წინასაარჩევნო პროგრამა, ხოლო არჩევის შემდეგ საინაგურაციო სიტყვა წარმოთქვა ჯერ საჯაროდ, ხოლო შემდეგ სვეტიცხოველში საქართველოს პატრიარქის თანდასწრებით.

ე. შევარდნაძის წინასაარჩევნო პროგრამებში და საინაგურაციო გამოსვლებში დიდი მნიშვნელობა ენიჭებოდა საკუთარი მნიშვნელობის და საჭიროების დასაბუთებას, ეროვნული ერთიანობის მიღწევის საჭიროებას, დროის და სივრცის ახლებური გააზრების აუცილებლობას, მეხსიერების ადგილების მნიშვნელობას და რელიგიური მოტივებს. ხელისუფლებაში მოსვლისთანავე ე. შევარდნაძე ცდილობდა პოლიტიკა იმგვარი მნიშვნელობებით შეეცსო, რომლის ფარგლებში მას ცვლილებების, სიახლეების, სტაბილურობის გარანტიად მიიჩნევდნენ. ამისათვის იგი ცდილობდა გამოეყენებინა წარსულის ის ცოდნა და გამოცდილება, რომელიც ჯერ კიდევ აქტუალური იყო და შეერწყა იგი მიმდინარე გამოწვევებთან. ასე იგი ხაზს უსვამდა იმ სარგებელს, რაც მან საბჭოთა პერიოდში საქართველოს მოუტანა. თავის არგუმენტებს პერიოდიულად ამყარებდა წარსული დამსახურებებით საქართველოს კულტურის, განათლების და სხვა სფეროებში. ასევე, იგი ცდილობდა ყოფილიყო ახალი იდეების და მიდგომების ინიციატორი. ამისათვის, იგი ამომრჩეველს უხსნიდა ერთადერთ და სწორ არჩევანს და აკრიტიკებდა წინა ხელისფულებას და ოპონენტებს. ასევე, ნებისმიერ თემაზე საუბრისას იგი ყოველთვის, პირდაპირ და ირიბად, ახსენებდა საკუთარ თავს. ამის გამო, ნებისმიერ დროს როდესაც ამ თემებზე ვინმე ისაუბრებდა, მას

ან მის მხარდამჭერებს ექნებოდათ შესაძლებლობა ამომრჩევლისათვის გაეხსენებინათ ან შეეხსენებინათ ე. შევარდნაძე.

საკუთარი იმიჯის ფორმირების პარალელურად იგი საუბრობდა საზოგადოების ერთიანობის პრობლემებზე, რასაც ადგილი ჰქონდა საქართველოში სამოქალაქო დაპირისპირების და კრიზისების ფონზე. ამ თემას იგი ასევე უკავშირებდა ქვეყნის მიმდინარე გამოწვევების და ახალი საზოგადოების მშენებლობის ინიციატივებს. საქართველოს ისტორიის და მეხსიერების პოლიტიკის გააზრება ამ მიმართულებით წარმოებული დისკუსია, სახელმწიფო ინიციატივები და ცვლილებები სხვადასხვა დონეზე იყო გათვლილი. ამ პროცესში მნიშვნელოვანი ნაწილი იყო, როგორც ერთიანობის გააზრების მოდელები, ისე ის ჩარჩოები, რომლის ფარგლებში საქართველოს მცხოვრებთ შეეძლოთ (ან ვერ) თანაცხოვრება. იგი გამოდიოდა სამოქალაქო საზოგადოების ჩამოყალიბების ინიციატივით. თუმცა მოგივანებით გამოდიოდა ისტორიულად ჩამოყალიბებული სახელმწიფოებრივი ერთიანობის იდეის ირგვლივ გაერთიანებისაკენ. ამის დასასაბუთებლად იგი აქტიურად იყენებდა ისტორიულ პერიოდებს და პერსონაჟებს და საკუთარ მმართველობას ადარებდა წარსულში გამოჩენილ მმართველების პერიოდებს. ამასთან ერთად იგი გამოდიოდა ეთნოკონფლიქტების მშვიდობიანად დასრულების ინიციატივით. ე. შევარდნაძის მოსაზრებები და შეხედულებები ეთნოკონფლიქტებზე ფაქტიურად არ იცვლებოდა წლების განმავლობაში, მაგრამ 2000 წლის საარჩევნო პერიოდში იგი უმეტესად პრობლემების წინაშე დამარცხებული და უიმედო პოზიციებით გადიოდა. მაგრამ როცა საკითხი შიდა დაპირისპირებას ეხებოდა იგი ავლენდა სრულ მზაობას არ დაეშვა რეჟიმის ცვლილება ან ქაოსი.

პოლიტიკური ლიდერები ხშირად იყენებდნენ სხვადასხვა ისტორიულ მოვლენებს საკუთარი შეხედულებების წარმოსაჩენად. იმის გამო რომ ე. შევარდნაძე ხელისუფლებაში წინა პრეზიდენტთან დაპირისპირების ფონზე მოვიდა, ამიტომ მან მნიშვნელოვნად შეცვალა დროსთან და კალენდართან დაკავშირებული ისტორიის და მეხსიერების კონცეფცია. მან დააბრუნა საქართველოს ისტორიის პატრიოტული ინტერპრეტაციები და განსაზღვრა ძირითადი ისტორიული ჩარჩო. მის მიერ ინიცირებულ კალენდარის ცვლილება გავლენას ახდენდა საზოგადოებაზე რადგან ასახავდა ქვეყანაში მიმდინარე ტრანსფორმაციის სპეციფიკას; ასევე, ყოველდღიურობაში ჩნდებოდა ახალი მნიშვნელოვანი, შინაარსები და პრაქტიკები. ასე, ე. შევარდნაძე საკუთარ გამოსვლებში აქცენტს აკეთებდა საქართველოს უძველეს ისტორიაზე - როგორც უძველეს სახელმწიფოზე და ქრისტიანულ კულტურაზე. იგი გამოსვლებში აქტიურად იყენებდა სასკოლო პროგრამებით ნაცნობ ისტორიის ქრონოლოგიას საკუთარი მიდევნების ან გამოწვევების ასახსნელად. რაც შეეხება ყოველწლიურ კალენდარს, მისი მმართველობის პერიოდში შეიცვალა არა მარტო უქმე თუ სადღესასწაულო დღეების რაოდენობა, არამედ, ცალკეული მნიშვნელოვანი თარიღს კალენდარში შეეცვალა დასახელება, დაემატა

რამდენიმე ახალი თარიღი, ხოლო რამდენიმე თარიღი, რომელიც მანამდე ზ. გამსახურდიას პერიოდში ამოღებული იყო სიიდან, ე. შევარდნაძის პერიოდში აღდგა. იგი ასევე დიდი მნიშვნელობას ანიჭებდა კოლექტიური მეხსიერების ადგილებს და მათ ჩართვას საპრეზიდენტო ინსტიტუტში. მან მთაწმინდის პანთეონზე ვიზიტი ახლადარჩეული პრეზიდენტებისათვის სავალდებულო ტრადიციად აქცია. ასევე, სიტუაციიდან გამომდინარე, ახსენებდა და სტუმრობდა გამორჩეული პირების საფლავებს, თუმცა სიფრთხილით ეკიდებოდა არაერთმნიშვნელოვან თემებს, რათა მისი მოსაზრებები სხვადასხვაგვარად არ ყოფილიყო ინტერპრეტირებული.

პოლიტიკურ ტექსტებში რელიგიური ტექსტების გაჩენა ძირითადად დაკავშირებულია ახალი შინაარსების და სიმბოლოების გამოყენების საჭიროებასთან. ე. შევარდნაძის 1995 წლის პროგრამაში რელიგიური თემატიკა ნაკლებად იყო წარმოდგენილი, რასაც, როგორც ჩანს, განაპირობებდა ის ფაქტორი, რომ ე. შევარდნაძე ერიდებოდა ზ. გამსახურდიას მიერ ნახსენებ იდეებთან და ინიციატივებთან ნებისმიერი სახით კავშირს. თუმცა 2000 წლის ტექსტებში, როცა ვითარება შეცვლილი იყო და მისი გამოსვლები მეტი დრამატიზმით გამოირჩეოდა, იგი ბევრს საუბრობს რელიგიაზე და ურთიერთსასარგებლო თანამშრომლობის შესაძლებლობებზე.

ასევე, ე. შევარდნაძე დიდ მნიშვნელობას ანიჭებდა მეხსიერების ადგილებს და ყურადღებით ეკიდებოდა მათთან დაკავშირებულ კოლექტიურ ემოციებს და შინაარსებს. გარკვეული თვალსაზრისით მან მოახდინა ამ მეხსიერების ინტეგრირება საპრეზიდენტო ინსტიტუტის პროცედურებში, რითაც ხაზი გაუსვა არა მარტო ამ ადგილების სიმბოლურ მნიშვნელობას, არამედ გაზარდა საპრეზიდენტო ინსტიტუტის საზოგადოებრივი დატვირთვა. ამასთან ერთად რამდენიმე მნიშვნელობასთან და სხვადასხვა პოლიტიკურ რეჟიმებთან დაკავშირებულ ადგილებზე საუბრისას იგი სიფრთხილეს იჩენდა, რათა არ მიეცა საშუალება პოლიტიკური ოპონენტებისათვის მისთვის არასასურველი დისკუსიების საწარმოებლად.

2003 წელს განვითარებული პროცესების შედეგად პრეზიდენტი ე. შევარდნაძე 23 ნოემბერს გადადგა და შემდგომი საპრეზიდენტო არჩევნები დაჩქარებულად, 2004 წლის 4 იანვარს, დაინიშნა. 2007 წელს ნოემბრის პოლიტიკური კრიზისის გამო უკვე მ. სააკაშვილი გადადგა. ორივე შემთხვევაში ჩატარდა რიგგარეშე არჩევნები, რამაც გავლენა იქონია კანდიდატების საარჩევნო კამპანიებზე. თუ პირველი არჩევნების დროს მ. სააკაშვილის არჩევნებამდე დარჩენილი მცირე პერიოდის გამო წინასაარჩევნო კამპანიის სრულფასოვნად არ ჩატარებულა. მეორე შემთხვევაში წინასაარჩევნო კამპანიის პერიოდი უფრო ხანგრძლივი იყო, თუმცა ორივე პერიოდი გამოირჩეოდა ემოციურობით, კამპანიების სიტუაციაზე და პიროვნებაზე ორიენტირებით. თუმცა მისი საარჩევნო კამპანიის მასალების მოცულობა შედარებით მცირეა.

მიხეილ სააკაშვილის საარჩევნო საპრეზიდენტო კამპანიები

ფორმირდებოდა განსაკუთრებულ ვითარებებში რისი მიზეზიც პრეზიდენტების გადადგომა იყო. ერთ შემთხვევაში ეს წინა პრეზიდენტი იყო, ხოლო მეორე შემთხვევაში, პოლიტიკური კრიზისის გამო, თავად გადადგა. ამიტომ, მისი წინასაარჩევნო და საინაგურაციო ტექსტები ერთდროულად სიტუაციური, ემოციური და კონტექსტზე ორიენტირებული იყო. თავის გამოსვლებში იგი სხვადასხვა სახით საუბრობდა სიახლეებზე - ერთობის ფორმირებაზე, ტერიტორიულ მოწყობაზე, მეხსიერების პოლიტიკაზე, ქართველთა შემოკრებაზე და ა.შ. ასევე, რადგან მისი გამოსვლები მიმართული იყო მსმენელთან ემოციური კავშირის მიღწევისკენ, ამიტომ ისინი ხშირად იმპროვიზაციული იყო. ამ გამოსვლების ტექსტური ვერსიები სახეცვლილი სახით ხვდებოდა მედიაში. ასევე, მისი საარჩევნო კამპანიის მასალების მოცულობა შედარებით მცირეა.

ისევე როგორც ზ. გამსახურდია და ე. შევარდნაძე, იგი ცდილობდა წინა ხელისუფლებისგან დისტანცირებას და ხშირად უარყოფდა იდეებს და ინიციატივებს, რომლებიც წინა პრეზიდენტების მმართველობას უკავშირდებოდა. მ. სააკაშვილი ცდილობდა არა მარტო ახალი პოლიტიკური დღის წესრიგის შექმნას, არამედ ახალ შინაარსებს და სიმბოლოებს აყალიბებდა. ეს მიდგომები ითვალისწინებდა ახალი ერთობის ფორმირებას, რომელიც სამოქალაქო ერთიანობასთან ერთად, ძირითადად გათვლილი იყო ახალგაზრდებზე. ისტორიასთან და მეხსიერებასთან დაკავშირებული საკუთარი შეხედულებების რეალიზების ძირითად საშუალებებად იგი სხვადასხვა სიმბოლურ და კომემორაციულ ღონისძიებებს მიიჩნევდა. ასევე, იგი დიდ ყურადღებას უთმობდა იმგვარი პოლიტიკის ფორმირებას, რომელიც პოსტსაბჭოთა პერიოდის დასრულებაზე და ახალი პოსტკოლონიური მიდგომების გამოყენებაზე იქნებოდა ორიენტირებული.

ამ თვალსაზრისით მის გამოსვლებში გვხვდებოდა აქცენტები რუსეთზე, საბჭოთა ოკუპაციაზე, ანექსიაზე და მსხვერპლზე. შესაბამისი ტექსტებში დამოკიდებულება რუსეთთან ნეიტრალურად უარყოფითისკენ იცვლებოდა თანდათანობით, ურთიერთობების გაუარესების ფონზე. ასევე შეიცვალა კალენდარი, რომელშიც გაჩნდა ოკუპაციის დღე, იქმნება ოკუპაციის მუზეუმი, საქართველომ აღიარა ჩერქეზთა გენოციდი და ფორმირდებოდა შესაბამისი დისკურსი.

დრო მ. სააკაშვილის გამოსვლების ცენტრში იყო მოქცეული და ძირითად რიტორიკულ საშუალებას წარმოადგენდა. განსხვავებით წინა პრეზიდენტებისაგან, რომელთა ფოკუსში აწმყო ან წარსული იყო, მ. სააკაშვილი დროის და მნიშვნელობების რეკონფიგურაციას პრაქტიკული თვალსაზრისით უდგებოდა. მისი გამოსვლების მთავარ ფოკუსში ახალგაზრდები ექცევან. ასევე მის ტექსტებში მსჯელობა მომავალ დროზე ორიენტირებით ვითარდებოდა. მომავალი, რომელიც აზრობრივად წინადადების ცენტრში იყო მოქცეული, წარმოადგენდა ამოცანას და მიზანს, რომელსაც ემსახურებოდა აწმყო, ისევე როგორც წარსულის

წარმატებები და მარცხი. მომავალი დროის ათვლა ერთგვარად ვარდების რევოლუციიდან იწყებოდა, თუმცა საბოლოო მიზნის მიღწევისათვის საჭირო იყო რეფორმების გატარება. წარსული წარმოდგენილი იყო ნეგატიური მაგალითებით, რომლის დაძლევა რევოლუციით დაიწყო. კონკრეტულ ისტორიულ დეტალებზე იგი სიტუაციურად საუბრობდა და იყენებდა თავისი ძირითადი მსჯელობის დამატებით არგუმენტებად. რუსეთის ფედერაციასთან ურთიერთობების გაუარესების პარალელურად მის გამოსვლებში იმატა მსჯელობებმა საბჭოთა კავშირის პერიოდის ისტორიის გადაზრების შესახებ და ხელი შეუწყო ახალი მეხსიერების პოლიტიკის ფორმირებას.

ჰორიზონტალური ერთობის ცენტრში საქართველოს მოქალაქეების იყვნენ მოქცეული, რომლებიც წარმოდგენილი იყვნენ სხვადასხვა ეთნიკური და რელიგიური ჯგუფებით. მათი შესაძლებლობების რეალიზების ძირითად გზად იგი მიიჩნევდა ცოდნას და გამოცდილებას, რისთვისაც თანაბარი პირობები უნდა შექმნილიყო თითოეული მოქალაქისათვის. ჰორიზონტალური ერთობის უზრუნველყოფისათვის ასევე ხდებოდა ახალი სიმბოლოების (დროშა, გერბი...) და პრაქტიკების (ღონისძიებები, მედია პროდუქცია...) შექმნა. ერთობის ნაწილად იგი განიხილავდა საზღვარგარეთ მყოფ ქართველებსაც და საარჩევნო პერიოდში აქტიურად მიმართავდა მათ. ასევე, მის გამოსვლებში იძულებით გადაადგილებული პირები განიხილებოდნენ როგორც ერთობის ნაწილი, რომელთა პრობლემების მოგვარება, განსაკუთრებით ტერიტორიული მთლიანობის აღდგენა დაკავშირებული იყო საქართველოს საერთაშორისო აქტიურობასთან და სხვადასხვა სტრუქტურებში ინტეგრაციასთან. იგი ასევე ზრუნავდა უცხოეთში დაკრამაღულ გამორჩეულ ქართველთა გადმოსვენებაზე. ერთგვარად მან შეუწყო ხელი საქართველოს პირველ პრეზიდენტთან დაკავშირებული დაპირისპირების დასრულებას, როცა იგი გადმოსვენა საქართველოში. ამ თვალსაზრისით, აქცევდა ყურადღებას ერის გაბნეულ წარმომადგენელთა შემოკრებას, საზოგადოებრივ მეხსიერებაში ჩართვას და სხვადასხვა ჯგუფების წარმომადგენლების ერთგვარ კონსოლიდაციას საკუთარი მმართველობის ირგვლივ.

მ. სააკაშვილი დიდ მნიშვნელობას ანიჭებდა რეგიონებში ვიზიტებს და მოსახლეობასთან აქტიურ შეხვედრებს არა მარტო საარჩევნო პერიოდში. ასევე, თავის მიმართებებში ერთდროულად საუბრობდა როგორც მთლიანად საქართველოზე, ისე თითოეულ რეგიონზე, რომელსაც განიხილავდა როგორც თანაბარ პირობებში მყოფ სუბიექტებს. საქართველოზე საუბრისას იგი იყენებდა საზოგადოებისათვის კარგად ნაცნობ მარკერებს და მათ უკავშირებდა მიმდინარე რეფორმებს და სამომავლო მიზნებს. ისევე როგორც წინა პრეზიდენტები, მ. სააკაშვილის ტექსტებშიც გვხვდება საუბრები გამორჩეულ ქართველებზე. მეტიც, თავისი პირველი საინაუგურაციო ფიცი მან დავით აღმაშენებლის საფლავზე დადო.

და ბოლოს, მაინც რა იგებს არჩევნებს? კითხვას, რომელიც ჩვენი პროექტის სათაურში იყო გამოტანილი, ვერ დავტოვებდით პასუხის

გარეშე. საქართველოში ძლიერი პრეზიდენტების პერიოდში კონკრეტული კანდიდატის წარმატებას ერთდროულად რამდენიმე ფაქტორი განაპირობებდა:

პირველი, ყველა პრეზიდენტი ხელისუფლებაში წინა ხელისუფლებასთან დაპირისპირების ფონზე მოვიდა. შესაბამისად, საარჩევნო ტექსტების ერთ-ერთი ხაზი ოპონენტების კრიტიკა იყო - ცოდნის, გამოცდილების, უნარის, პატრიოტიზმის, ნდობის, პერსპექტივის არქონა თითოეული საპრეზიდენტო კამპანიაში შეპირისპირებული იყო კანდიდატის დადებით თვისებებთან. ამ შემთხვევებში მედია ველში თანდათანობით მატულობდა ის სივრცე, რომელიც მომავალ პრეზიდენტებს ეკავა. მომავალი პრეზიდენტი და მისი მხარდამჭერები საუბრობდნენ ყველა მნიშვნელოვან საკითხებზე და პირველები ეხებოდნენ რთულ თემებს, მაშინ როცა მათი ოპონენტები ძირითადად რეაგირებდნენ მათ გამოსვლებზე.

მეორე, ცვლილება წარმოადგენდა მთავარ მიზეზს და მიზანს. ცვლილების სურვილით შეიცვალა წინა ხელისუფლება, ამიტომ ახალი ხელისუფლება საუბრობდა სიახლეებზე. რეფორმების გვერდით ყოველთვის იყო ისეთი ცვლილებები, რომლებიც მოსახლეობის ყოველდღიურობაზე აისახებოდა და ამგვარად მის შემოქმედს დატოვებდა კოლექტიური მეხსიერების ნაწილად. ასე იცვლებოდა კალენდარი, რომელშიც გაჩნდა რელიგიური დღესასწაულები და უქმე დღეები, ტრანსფორმირდა ძველი მნიშვნელოვანი თარიღების დასახელება; ასევე, კალენდარში ქრებოდა ცალკეული დღესასწაული და უქმე დღე. კალენდართან ერთად იცვლებოდა დასახელებების, ადგილების, ქუჩების დასახელებები, ქრებოდა ძველი და ჩნდებოდა ახალი ძეგლები, რომელიც თავის მხრივ ახალი რეჟიმის პირობებში ისევ იცვლებოდა. თუმცა წინასაარჩევნო ტექსტებში ეს ცვლილებები ირიბად, არაპირდაპირ იყო წარმოდგენილი, რითაც შესაძლებელი იქნებოდა არასასურველი დისკუსიისგან თავის არიდება.

მესამე, თითოეული მათგანი ცდილობდა ქართველობასთან, საქართველოსთან ან მოქალაქეობასთან დაკავშირებული ისეთი თემების გამოყენებას, რომელიც კარგად ნაცნობი იყო ყველასათვის - სასკოლო კურსებიდან, ფილმებიდან, მედიიდან, ძეგლებიდან, საფლავებიდან, ყოველდღიურობიდან. არც ერთი მათგანი დიდ დროს არ უთმობდა ამ თემებზე საუბარს, თუმცა ყოველთვის ასეთი მაგალითები ან სიმბოლოები მსჯელობის ცენტრში იყო მოქცეული. ეს მაგალითები, ამავდროულად, შერწყმული კანდიდატების პიროვნულ თვისებებთან, მოქმედებებთან, გეგმებთან, რითაც მიიღწეოდა მნიშვნელოვანთან თანაზიარობის განცდა.

მეოთხე, თითოეული მათგანი ბევრს საუბრობდა საქართველოზე, ტერიტორიაზე, მის მოსახლეობაზე, მიმდინარე გამოწვევებზე, კონფლიქტებზე. კანდიდატები სხვადასხვაგვარად აღწერდნენ ამ სივრცის სიკეთებს, რომლის დროს იყენებდნენ როგორც მარტივ პოზიტიურ, აღფრთოვანებულ მინიშნებებს, ისე ჰიპერბოლიზებულ

ენობრივ ფორმებსაც. გამოსვლების ეს ნაწილი ძირითადად ემოციური ურთიერთკავშირის მიღწევისკენ იყო მიმართული.

მეხუთე, ხელისუფლების ცვლილების ყველა შემთხვევაში დასაწყისში შეუძლებელი იყო იმის პროგნოზირება თუ როგორ განვითარდებოდა მოვლენები. ამ პროცესში ნათლად ჩანს მომავალი პრეზიდენტობის კანდიდატის ჩამოყალიბების პროცესი. თითოეული კანდიდატის მომავალი სახე თანდათანობით იქმნებოდა. ყველაზე ხშირად ახალ სახეზე მხარდამჭერთა მცირე ჯგუფი საუბრობდა. ამ გუნდთან ერთად ლიდერი მოდიოდა ხელისუფლებაში. ამ გუნდის დახმარებით და მასთან კავშირში მიზანმიმართულად იქმნებოდა გარემოცვისაგან და ოპონენტებისაგან განსხვავებული, განსაკუთრებული პიროვნების სახე, რომელიც ცალკეულ მოვლენებთან და პიროვნებებთან იყო დაკავშირებული, ატარებდა ისეთ ფასეულობებს, რომლებიც აქტუალური იყო იმ მომენტში და შეედლო ამომრჩეველთან ემოციური კავშირის მიღწევა. ამ პროცესში კანდიდატს მიეწერებოდა არა მარტო რეალური თვისებები ან ღირებულებები, არამედ მათი ნაწილი იქმნებოდა ისტორიაზე, მეხსიერებაზე, კულტურაზე, ან ქვეყანაზე საუბრის მეშვეობით.

4. სსრკ-ს დაშლის დროს, აზერბაიჯანში, ისევე როგორც ყველა ყოფილ საბჭოთა ეროვნულ რესპუბლიკაში, დაიწყო მმართველობის ახალი სისტემის ჩამოყალიბება, რომელსაც სათავეში ედგა პრეზიდენტი, რომელსაც ჰქონდა დიდი უფლებამოსილებები. უახლოესი მეზობლებისგან (საქართველო და სომხეთი) განსხვავებით, 2024 წლისთვის აზერბაიჯანში ხელისუფლების სტრუქტურის იგივე მოდელი არის შენარჩუნებული. პოსტსაბჭოთა წლების განმავლობაში პრეზიდენტის ძალაუფლება თანმიმდევრულად ძლიერდებოდა, მისი უფლებამოსილება მუდმივად ფართოვდებოდა. უკვე 1990-იანი წლების შუა ხანებში ქვეყანაში რეჟიმმა ავტოკრატიის თვისებები შეიძინა. ოცდაათი წლის შემდეგ, ეს ტენდენციები მხოლოდ გაძლიერდა.

საპრეზიდენტო ხელისუფლების ინსტიტუტის დაარსების ისტორიის მანძილზე ეს პოსტი ოთხ ადამიანს ეკავა. პირველი პრეზიდენტის, აიაზ მუტალიბოვის (1991 წლის თებერვალი - 1992 წლის მარტი), აზერბაიჯანის სსრ კომუნისტური პარტიის ყოფილი პირველი მდივნის გარდა, ყველა პრეზიდენტი ჰუმანიტარი იყო და დიპლომატი ან აკადემიური წოდებები ისტორიის მიმართულებებით ჰქონდათ. აღმოსავლეთმცოდნე და ისტორიულ მეცნიერებათა კანდიდატი, ულტრამემარჯვენე პანთურქისტი ნაციონალისტი აბულფაზ ელჩიბეი (1992 წლის ივნისი - 1993 წლის ივნისი) შეცვალა საბჭოთა სპეცსამსახურების თანამშრომელმა, რესპუბლიკის კომუნისტური პარტიის ყოფილმა პირველმა მდივანმა, ისტორიკოსის დიპლომის მფლობელმა - ჰეიდარ ალიევმა (1993-2003). მან თავისი თანამდებობა მემკვიდრეობით დაუტოვა შვილს, ილჰამ ალიევს, რომელსაც ასევე აქვს კანდიდატის ხარისხი ისტორიულ მეცნიერებებში.

სხვადასხვა ფაქტორის გავლენით, აზერბაიჯანის პრეზიდენტების ყველაზე თვალსაჩინო ოპონენტები ასევე იყვნენ პროფესიონალი

ისტორიკოსები: აზერბაიჯანის ეროვნული დამოუკიდებლობის პარტიის დამფუძნებელი და ხელმძღვანელი, ისტორიულ მეცნიერებათა კანდიდატი ეტიბარ მამედოვი (1998 წლის არჩევნები); ისტორიის მეცნიერებათა კანდიდატი ისა გამბარი, რომელიც მრავალი წლის განმავლობაში ხელმძღვანელობდა პარტიას მუსავატი (2003 წლის არჩევნები); პროფესორი და ისტორიის მეცნიერებათა დოქტორი ჯამილ ჰასანლი (2013 წლის არჩევნები).

პირადი ბიოგრაფიების და პროფესიული სოციალიზაციის გავლენა ისტორიისა და წარსულის პოლიტიკური მიზნებისთვის გამოყენებაზე დამატებით კვლევას მოითხოვს. თუმცა, აზერბაიჯანის პოლიტიკურ ბრძოლაში ისტორიკოსების დიდი ნაწილის მონაწილეობა შემთხვევითი არ არის. ყველა ზემოთ ჩამოთვლილი პოლიტიკოსი სოციალიზირებული იყო სსრკ-ს წლებში, როდესაც ისტორიაში დიპლომი პარტოკრატიაში მოსახვედრ საშვს წარმოადგენდა. იმავე საბჭოთა წლებში ისტორიის განყოფილებებმა და ისტორიულმა კვლევითმა ინსტიტუტებმა შექმნეს დისკურსები და ნარატივები, რომლებიც საფუძვლად დაედო თანამედროვე აზერბაიჯანულ ნაციონალიზმს.

ახალი (თანამედროვე) ნაციონალისტური დისკურსის ფორმირების სპეციფიკა, ისტორიული ნარატივის რეკონსტრუქცია და მეხსიერების ახალი პოლიტიკა დიდწილად განპირობებული იყო ყარაბაღის კონფლიქტის მიმდინარეობით. თვით დამოუკიდებელი სახელმწიფოებრიობის ჩამოყალიბებისა და ახალი იდენტობის ძიების პროცესი მეზობელ სომხეთთან შეიარაღებული დაპირისპირების კონტექსტში მიმდინარეობდა, რომელიც სამნახევარი ათწლეული გაგრძელდა. ისტორიული სიუჟეტები იყო და რჩება უკიდურესად მოთხოვნადად. კონკრეტული ტერიტორიის ფლობის უფლების დაცვა არა მხოლოდ ბრძოლის ველზე, არამედ ისტორიულ დავებსა და დისკუსიებშიც ხდებოდა.

დამოუკიდებლობის გამოცხადების პერიოდიდან დაშორების და ავტორიტარული ტენდენციების გაძლიერების კვალობაზე, საპრეზიდენტო არჩევნების პროცედურა სულ უფრო იმიტირებულ ხასიათს ატარებდა. თუმცა კამათი წარსულის შესახებ არ ცხრება. პირიქით, ის სულ უფრო მწვავე გახდა. წარსულის გამოყენება (მათ შორის, უახლესი) თანამედროვე რეჟიმის ლეგიტიმაციისთვის ან, პირიქით, მისი კრიტიკისთვის, იყენებდნენ საპრეზიდენტო პოსტის დაკავების სურვილის მქონე პრეტენდენტობის ყველა კანდიდატი. ამ მხრივ გარკვეული დამატებითი ნიუანსები შემოაქვს საბჭოთა წარსულის შესახებ იდეების გარდაუვალ რეკონსტრუქციას, რაც ახალი „პიროვნების კულტის“ ჩამოყალიბების კონტექსტში ხორციელდება. მესამე პრეზიდენტს, ჰეიდარ ალიევის, ოფიციალური იდეოლოგიის ფარგლებში ენიჭება დამფუძნებელი მამის, თანამედროვე დამოუკიდებლობის შემქმნელის როლი. მიუხედავად იმისა, რომ საპრეზიდენტო არჩევნების პროცედურა სულ უფრო ფორმალური ხდება, ყველა ეს სიუჟეტი უცვლელად ინარჩუნებს აქტუალობას.

5. სსრკ-ს არსებობის ბოლო წლებში, ყარაბაღის კონფლიქტისა და სომხეთის დამოუკიდებლობისათვის მოძრაობის კონტექსტში, საგარეო პოლიტიკისა და მეხსიერების პოლიტიკის საკითხებმა განსაკუთრებული მნიშვნელობა შეიძინა სომხეთის შიდა პოლიტიკურ დისკურსში. 1990-იანი წლების დასაწყისისთვის ამ პრობლემისადმი დამოკიდებულების ორი ძირითადი მიდგომა გაჩნდა. ერთ-ერთ მათგანს მხარდამჭერებმა “პრაგმატული”, კრიტიკოსებმა კი “დამარცხებული” უწოდეს. მისი წარმომადგენლები თვლიდნენ, რომ სომხეთის სუვერენიტეტისა და უსაფრთხოების უზრუნველსაყოფად აუცილებელი პირობა იყო კომპრომისის მიღწევა სომხეთისადმი მტრულად განწყობილ მეზობლებთან - აზერბაიჯანთან და თურქეთთან - ისეთ საკითხებზე, როგორცაა ყარაბაღის კონფლიქტი და გენოციდის საერთაშორისო აღიარება. მეორე მიდგომის მხარდამჭერებმა, რომლებიც თავიანთ მიდგომას უწოდებდნენ „ნაციონალურს“ (კრიტიკოსებმა მას „რომანტიკული“ უწოდეს), თავის მხრივ, მიუღებლად და/ან არარეალურად მიიჩნიეს ამ საკითხებზე კომპრომისის მცდელობები და სომხეთის უსაფრთხოების პრობლემის გადაწყვეტას გარე მოთამაშებთან (პირველ რიგში რუსეთთან) ალიანსში ხედავდნენ.

პირველი მიდგომა წარმოადგინა, კერძოდ, სომხურმა ნაციონალურმა მოძრაობამ (სნმ). მის მთავარ თეორეტიკოსებსა და პრაქტიკოსებს შორის იყვნენ სომხეთის პირველი პრეზიდენტი ლევონ ტერ-პეტროსიანი და მისი საგარეო პოლიტიკის მრჩეველი ყირაირ ლიბარდიანი. მათზე, თავის მხრივ, გავლენა მოახდინა გვიან საბჭოთა სომეხი ინტელექტუალის რაფაელ იშხანიანის იდეებმა, რომლის ესეე „მესამე ძალის გამორიცხვის კანონი“, წარმოადგენდა ტრადიციული ნარატივის დეკონსტრუქციის მცდელობას, რომელშიც თურქეთი (და, თავისთავად, აზერბაიჯანი) სომხეთის სასიკვდილო მტრად ითვლებოდა, რომელთანაც შერიგება შეუძლებელი იყო, ხოლო რუსეთი - წარმოდგენდა სომხეთის უსაფრთხოების მფარველს და გარანტს. იშხანიანის მიერ დასახული გზის შესაბამისად, ენმ-ის მაშინდელი ლიდერები, მათ შორის ტერ-პეტროსიანი და ლიბარდიანი, ამტკიცებდნენ, რომ თურქეთთან და აზერბაიჯანთან თანაარსებობის შესაძლებლობა შეიძლებოდა ყოფილიყო და იგი უნდა გამოძებნილიყო. ეს მიდგომა იმასაც ნიშნავდა, რომ სომხეთი არ უნდა და არ შეიძლება დაყრდნობოდა რუსეთს, როგორც მისი დამოუკიდებლობისა და უსაფრთხოების ერთადერთ გარანტს. თუმცა, რეალობამ საკუთარი კორექტირებები შეიტანა პრაქტიკაში: მიუხედავად მათი იდეებისა, სწორედ სნმ-მა წამოიწყო 1992-1994 წლების პირველი ყარაბაღის ომი და აღიარა რუსეთთან ალიანსის საჭიროება უსაფრთხოების თვალსაზრისით.

1990-იან წლებში მეორე მიდგომას წარმოადგენდა ტერ-პეტროსიანის ოპოზიცია, კერძოდ, პარტია დამნაკუტუნი, ისევე როგორც მმართველი სნმ-ის გარკვეული ნაწილი. ტერ-პეტროსიანისა და მისი გუნდისთვის ალბათ კიდევ უფრო საშიში იყო ის, რომ ეს შეხედულება ასევე იყო წარმოდგენილი სნმ-ში. 1990-იანი წლების დასაწყისში სნმ-ში დიდი განხეთქილება მოხდა, რამაც გამოიწვია ოპოზიციური ეროვნულ-

დემოკრატიული კავშირის გაჩენა, რომელსაც ხელმძღვანელობდა ენმ-ის ერთ-ერთი გამორჩეული ლიდერი ვაზგენ მანუკიანი. მოგვიანებითაც, ტერ-პეტროსიანის ზოგიერთი უახლოესი თანამოაზრეც, როგორებიც იყვნენ თავდაცვის მინისტრი ვაზგენ სარქისიანი და მთიანი ყარაბაღის პირველი პრეზიდენტი რობერტ ქოჩარიანი (რომელიც სომხეთის პრემიერ მინისტრი გახდა 1996 წელს), არ იზიარებდნენ ტერ-პეტროსიანის იდეებს აზერბაიჯანთან კომპრომისის თაობაზე. ეს წინააღმდეგობები გამოჩნდა კიდევ 1996 წლის არჩევნების დროს. სხვა საკითხებთან ერთად, ტერ-პეტროსიანი გააკრიტიკეს „ეროვნული“ დღის წესრიგის მიტოვების გამო. არჩევნებმა გაყალბების და რეპრესიების ფონზე ჩაიარა და მიუხედავად იმისა, რომ ტერ-პეტროსიანი გამოცხადდა გამარჯვებულად, იგი ძალიან დასუსტდა და თავისი მმართველობის შესანარჩუნებლად იძულებული გახდა დაყრდნობოდა ჯარსა და პოლიციას. ამიტომ, ორი წლის შემდეგ, როდესაც იგი მხარს უჭერდა დათმობებს მთიანი ყარაბაღის საკითხზე, რომელიც ძალიან შორს მიმავლად მიიჩნიეს მისი გუნდის გავლენიანმა წევრებმა, იგი საზოგადოების მხარდაჭერის გარეშე დარჩა და იძულებული გახდა გადამდგარიყო.

ამრიგად, 1990-იანი წლების ბოლოს, ენმ-ის განხეთქილების შედეგად, ტერ-პეტროსიანმა ძალაუფლება დაუთმო რობერტ ქოჩარიანს და გაიმარჯვა მეორე მიდგომამ, რამაც გამოიწვია სომხეთის გაზრდილი დამოკიდებულება რუსეთზე. 1998 და 2003 წლების საპრეზიდენტო არჩევნები დომინირებდა შიდასახელმწიფოებრივი დღის წესრიგი. 2008 წელს, ტერ-პეტროსიანის ოპოზიციურ კანდიდატად დაბრუნებამ გარკვეულწილად გამოაცოცხლა დისკუსიები, რომლებსაც ადგილი ჰქონდა 1990-იან წლებში, მაგრამ დებატების ცენტრში რჩებოდა შიდა დღის წესრიგი, განსაკუთრებით დემოკრატიისა და კორუფციის საკითხები. თუმცა, ცხადია, რომ საგარეო პოლიტიკის, კონფლიქტების მოგვარებისა და მეხსიერების პოლიტიკის საკითხები 2008 წლის არჩევნებში ინარჩუნებდა აქტუალობას და არჩევნებში ტერ-პეტროსიანის გამარჯვების შემთხვევაში, სომხეთის პოლიტიკას შეიძლება მნიშვნელოვანი ცვლილებები განეცადა. თუმცა, ირონია იმაში მდგომარეობდა, რომ 1996 წლის სადავო არჩევნების მსგავსად 2008 წლის არჩევნები კვლავ გაყალბებისა და პოლიტიკური რეპრესიების ფონზე ჩატარდა, მაგრამ ამჯერად ტერ-პეტროსიანი იყო ოპოზიციური კანდიდატი, რომელსაც, როგორც ჩანს, წაართვეს გამარჯვება. არჩევნების ოფიციალური შედეგები გამოაცხადა პრეზიდენტმა სერჟ სარქისიანმა, ქოჩარიანის მოკავშირემ და დანიშნულმა „მემკვიდრემ“. არჩევნების შემდეგ მასობრივი საპროტესტო აქციები ძალის გამოყენებით ჩაახშეს.

2008 წლიდან მოყოლებული, საგარეო და საშინაო პოლიტიკაში და ყარაბაღის კონფლიქტის მოგვარებაში „ნაციონალურ/რომანტიკულ“ მიდგომას ოპოზიცია ზოგადად არ ეწინააღმდეგებოდა. პირიქით, თავად ხელისუფლება ცდილობდა ამ მიდგომის ფარგლებში მანევრირებას, როგორც ეს იყო სომხურ-თურქული ნორმალიზაციის მცდელობების

დროს 2008-2009 წლებში. თუმცა, ნორმალიზაცია ჩაიშალა და სომხეთში ოფიციალური დისკურსი დაუბრუნდა დღის წესრიგს, რომელიც დომინანტური გახდა 1990-იანი წლების ბოლოდან. 2013 წელს უახლესმა საყოველთაო საპრეზიდენტო არჩევნების დროს ეს მიდგომა არ გამხდარა სადაო, რადგან ოპოზიციური კანდიდატის რაფი ჰოვანიის მთავარი კრიტიკა ორიენტირებული იყო საშინაო საკითხებზე, როგორცაა დემოკრატია და კორუფციის წინააღმდეგ ბრძოლა.

ამრიგად, შეგვიძლია დავასკვნათ, რომ პოსტსაბჭოთა სომხეთში პოლიტიკური დებატების ცენტრი იყო საკითხი, თუ როგორ დამოკიდებულება უნდა ჰქონოდა სომხეთს მეზობლებთან და როგორ უნდა შეენარჩუნებინა მას დამოუკიდებლობა და უსაფრთხოება მიმდინარე კონფლიქტის პირობებში. 1990-იანი წლების დასაწყისიდან სომხურ პოლიტიკურ ელიტაში სხვადასხვა ჯგუფის მიერ მხარდაჭერილი იყო ორი ძირითადი მიდგომა. შედეგად, გაიმარჯვა მიდგომამ, რომლის ფარგლებშიც მეზობლებთან კონფლიქტის მოგვარება გადაუჭრელად მიიჩნეოდა და ემხრობოდა რუსეთზე დამოკიდებულებას. ეს მიდგომა კვლავ კითხვის ნიშნის ქვეშ დადგა 2020 წლის რევოლუციისა და 2020 წლის დამღუპველი 44-დღიანი ომის შემდეგ.

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■ In 1991, institutions of presidential power were established in the countries of the South Caucasus. This was an act that marked a radical break with the principles of the Soviet system.

■ Presidents not only received real power, but also became symbolic figures representing a new era of building independent nation-states.

■ The belief that it is possible to understand the present from the past - historicism - was initially a crucial component of official discourses on independence.

■ To this day, presidents of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, often humanitarians by training, continue to actively manipulate historical arguments and national myths and use stories from the past to mobilize their electorate in the present.

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