

The Georgian Dream. Or a Russian one? – Only the Facts (Preface to the Brochure)

“Some in Georgian Dream (GD) are genuinely pro-Western,” one high-ranking US diplomat said when describing the political conglomerate that governs Georgia. This comment, made in the summer of 2017, was probably the most accurate description by a foreigner of the eclectic group converged around the oligarchic wealth of Bidzina Ivanishvili, the founder of GD, who has ruled the country since 2012.

Earlier, in 2016, practically the same admission came from Archil Gegeshidze, Georgia’s GD-appointed ambassador to the US. Gegeshidze however placed the emphasis differently, proclaiming that “there are [pro-Russian forces in the government], but fortunately they do not influence the decision-making process.”

Most recently, in the summer of 2018, a European politician, who had been rather loyal to GD from the outset, asked during a closed meeting with the opposition: “Have we in the EU been too naïve to place blind trust in GD’s unwaveringly pro-Western nature and ignore the opposition’s doubts?”

Judging from these statements, much is already clear for the West, and, therefore, there may no longer be a need for this brochure. On the other hand, in Georgia there is still some uncertainty on this issue: Georgian society’s explicitly pro-Western aspirations and anti-Russian sentiments do not always translate into a logical understanding and evaluation of the government’s actions - actions that do not always conform to the declared course of the Georgian state. Many struggle to admit that anti-Western forces are in fact rooted within the Government. On the surface, this is understandable: the negotiations on the Association Agreement with the EU were concluded and visa-free travel with the EU became possible during the GD government. Therefore, assertions that GD is an outright pro-Russian force are not credible.

At the same time, when faced with a series of uniform facts, it is impossible to not question the real motivation of key figures in the governing political force. Many GD supporters explain such facts as errors caused by incompetence or simple accidents. More importantly, they believe that these facts do not affect the security of our country.

How credible is this position? You be the judge:

Can an exposed Russian agent accidentally end up in a secret military facility? – Of course he can.

Can an occupied country accidentally have a defense minister, who, in response to the above incident, argues that the entry of a Russian agent to military defense facilities is not a problem, because there is nothing secret about them? – This too is possible.

Can a person who believes that “Putin is not an enemy” accidentally be appointed as the Minister of Reintegration of a country occupied by Russia? – In many countries that would be unthinkable, but unfortunately in Georgia under GD, this is not impossible, either. Perhaps Ivanishvili did not know about the minister’s opinion prior to his appointment? (Strangely, however, he was not surprised after learning about it.).

Can almost all key political positions in a country accidentally be held by people who believe that Georgia started the war and/or that we could have “avoided” the Russian aggression (meaning that it was up to Georgia to start or not to start the 2008 war)? Such accidents are probably quite rare, but still possible.

Can it be a coincidence that in a single year (2014) five special force soldiers who had participated in special operation “Kodori 2007” (which resulted in the killing of two Russian colonels training saboteurs to be sent into the non-occupied part of Georgia) die in various freak accidents under dubious circumstances? Theoretically, this cannot be excluded either.

What is the probability that the government would not only fail to properly investigate the deaths of special force soldiers, but would classify them as accidents? For example, instead of conducting a forensic expertise, on the day following the accident the authorities demolished the entire building where a water heater explosion in one of the rooms resulted in the death of a security officer. In principle, a way out can be found here as well. One can justify this by saying that “there are not many competent investigators around.”

Is it possible for Akhmed Chataev — a person listed by the US Government as an international terrorist; a person suspected of ties with Russian special services; a person with one arm and one leg, who was released from prison by GD under the cover of political repression soon after the party won the elections — to have crossed the Georgian border together with the members of his group without the help of the government, found an apartment in Tbilisi and filled it with weapons? The likelihood is quite small, but it cannot be excluded altogether — by some miracle this, too, could have happened.

Could it be due to a mistake or perhaps lack of information that the favorite newspaper of Georgia’s informal ruler, Bidzina Ivanishvili, who is supposedly a fighter for Euro-Atlantic values, is “Asaval-Dasavali,” the flagship of Russian propaganda in Georgia? This is indeed hard to believe.

Moreover, is it possible that the pro-Russian “Asaval-Dasavali” has mistakenly supported “pro-Western” Ivanishvili for years?!

In theory, all of the above may indeed be a long line of strange coincidences. But what do we do about the mass amnesty of “political prisoners” by GD in 2012, which was definitely not an accident? Under this amnesty, GD released, as political prisoners, Russian spies and active officers of Russian intelligence, citizens of Russia, the country that is illegally occupying Georgian territory. The Law on Amnesty was vetoed by President Saakashvili, who explained his reasons in his response to the Parliament. However, GD’s fully informed Parliamentary majority unanimously (!) overrode the veto. Naturally, every government is entitled to express its political will and start relations with an enemy with a clean slate (for example, release its spies, even unilaterally and without any reciprocal benefits). This is a matter of political taste / feasibility. However, stating that your predecessor persecuted enemy spies on political (!) grounds carries a completely different message. This is an act that does not fade away as long as the political force responsible remains in power, the one which requires an objective assessment and proper response from a self-respecting society.

This force – both parts of its name (“Georgian” and “Dream”) are either a joke or an Orwellian cynicism – is presenting Salome Zurabishvili as an “independent” candidate for the 2018 presidential elections. It is backing her candidacy and is promising, as Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee of Defense and Security Irakli Sesiashvili stated, that it will “use all its available resources to ensure the victory of this candidate in the elections.”

This is the same Zurabishvili, who said Russia’s 2007 anti-radar bomb attack in Tsitelubani was staged by the Saakashvili government in order to embarrass Russia – a statement she never retracted.

This is the same Zurabishvili who, echoing Russia’s own position, has repeatedly blamed Georgia for initiating the 2008 war and only once, but still very incredibly, “explained” her position, thus giving GD the possibility to state ambiguously that “Salome Zurabishvili’s position regarding the 2008 war is in line with the position of the Georgian Dream” (Statement by Irakli Kobakhidze, Chairman of the Parliament).

This is the same Zurabishvili, who ran unopposed by any candidate from GD in the 2016 parliamentary elections (hers was the only district in Georgia where GD did not field a candidate). Currently, she does not have a rival from any of the active, openly pro-Russian politicians for the upcoming 2018 presidential elections. Apparently, Burjanadze, Inashvili & Co. have decided not to participate in these elections in order not to confuse the pro-Russian segment and to avoid splitting the votes. Is this a genuine miracle or yet another miraculous coincidence?!

Unlike Ivanishvili and GD, there seems to be a full consensus among the rest of Georgian public about Zurabishvili's candidacy. We will therefore not burden this brochure by recounting every treasonous statement she has made over the course of the presidential campaign. Instead, we will try to demonstrate that there is no difference between Zurabishvili and the government that supports her. What Zurabishvili says today is merely a repetition of Ivanishvili's original creed and the building stone of GD's political identity.

There will be many who will not doubt the authenticity of these facts, but will not believe that these facts have any material influence on the security and future of our country. "What are the specific results of these facts? Why should they be of any concern for an ordinary Georgian citizen?" – That will be the question posed naively by supporters of GD or those pretending to be "apolitical" and, therefore, neutral.

The answer is simple: sometimes a deadly cancer is not revealed until its last, terminal stage. For a long time it causes only mild discomfort. If all symptoms are present, why should we wait for the total destruction of the Georgian state or international recognition of Abkhazia's "independence" before we acknowledge what we are dealing with? In addition, everything that has been happening since 2012 — the slowdown of economic growth, the suspension or termination of infrastructural projects, the stable devaluation of the Georgian Lari, effective stagnation of pensions and salaries, the return of corruption and crime, the drop in the efficiency and authority of armed forces and police — is it just "mild discomfort"? Does it not make us weaker? Does it not affect our everyday lives? Are these not the direct results of GD's values, rhetoric and actions?

This brochure contains only well-documented, easily verifiable factual materials. Far from exhaustive, it does however include enough information to help raise legitimate questions and encourage the search for logical answers. We believe that digesting and passing our own judgment on the information compiled hereunder shall be tantamount to taking a small step on the road called civic virtue and individual responsibility.

Zaza Bibilashvili
October 14, 2018