



**CHAVCHAVADZE
CENTER**

*Ilia Chavchavadze Center for
European Studies and Civic Education*

LIBERALISM AND GEORGIA

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Civic Education

Liberalism and Georgia

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THE CENTER'S FORWARD

Liberalism is the ideological cornerstone of a democratic system of government. In a broader sense, liberalism encompasses notions that are popularly referred to as “Western values” in Georgia: fundamental human rights and freedoms, political and civil rights, property rights, separation of church and state and the rule of law in general. This is an incomplete list of the principles of liberal ideology recognized by political studies and political thought as the foundation upon which modern Western democracies rest.

It is on these values and worldview of classical liberalism that leading political parties in democratic countries, regardless of their origin, base their political manifestos and party lines. Differences in their approaches can mainly be seen in the scale of state participation/interference in economic or individual freedoms and public life. Moreover, a school of thought exists which believes that without liberalism there can be no democracy, since illiberal democracies cannot maintain stability and tend to tilt toward authoritarianism.

The original perception of liberalism has experienced significant transformation in Western Europe and the US. For many, especially in the US, it is currently associated with leftist ideology and politics that restrict individual freedoms and imply active interference and regulation by the state. Thus, the essence of modern liberalism and liberal ideas has become debatable even in Western democracies. This dilemma has also affected those countries where a liberal-democratic model of state governance has not yet solidified institutionally and ideologically. In these countries, authoritarian regimes, seeking to gain

influence over the public, use this “weakness” to discredit the very idea of democracy and Western values.

Attempts to promote a distorted picture of liberalism are apparent in Georgia too. Largely due to aggressive Russian propaganda, the concept of liberalism has acquired a negative and, hence, anti-Western connotation among certain segments of the Georgian public. The ideas of liberalism are regularly attacked by organized groups of ultra-leftist or nationalist nature, who often succeed in portraying liberalism as an anti-Georgian ideology that is incompatible with Georgia’s national identity and traditions.

This state of affairs made it clear that there is a constant need to explain what, in reality, liberalism means. We need to answer questions such as what a liberal-democratic model of governance is and what it is based on. We need to explain what caused the birth of classical liberalism and how, when, in what form and by whom liberalism was introduced in Georgia. In addition, we need to remember why the evolution of liberalism was disrupted in Georgia; what Ilia Chavchavadze and other enlightened minds thought about liberalism; and why we need to understand what liberal democracy is to determine if we support it.

“Liberalism and Georgia” is our modest attempt to fill the obvious gap in public knowledge about liberalism. We also wanted to show that classical liberalism, as taught by Ilia Chavchavadze, is neither a system of extremes, nor political correctness and clichés imposed from above. Rather it is a set of values, which gave rise to the formation and consolidation of democratic institutions in Western democracies, as well as fostered the development of free, wealthy, sovereign nations as the individual creed guaranteeing their success.

Nino Kalandadze

Director, the Chavchavadze Center

INTRODUCTION

Liberalism traces its roots back to Christianity and the civilizations of ancient Greece and Rome. Founders of this political ideology based their arguments on the conviction that all humans are given the right to liberty by God and any form of restriction of this right is evil. Liberal ideas are embedded in social and political processes and have strongly influenced them for many centuries. Over the centuries, the free world has debated the best approach to state and social orders and various ideologies have offered different solutions. Unfortunately, Georgia was isolated from those debates. It was not until the 19th century that Western ideas started to enter Georgia. That period also saw the spread of liberalism in the country, which was then followed by the spread of other ideologies and, much like in Europe, ideological debates and the search for common sense became a common feature in Georgian reality. This process was disrupted by the Soviet regime, when Marxism-Leninism became the only dominant ideology and repressions erased Georgia's pluralistic past from the memory of the Georgian people.

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the restoration of independence, Georgia got a chance to rediscover itself, to look afresh at the activities of Solomon Dodashvili, Ilia Chavchavadze and other like-minded people. However, even after 30 years of independence, this process is progressing very slowly. Liberalism and the liberal mindset, embraced by Georgia under the leadership of Ilia Chavchavadze in the 19th century, are often used today as pejorative terms. Georgia still fails to adequately understand liberalism and associates it with an anti-national, anti-Christian ideology that fights against traditions and promotes LGBT "propaganda." The causes of

this can be found in the 70-year-long rule of the communist regime, Soviet legacy and anti-liberal propaganda coming from Russia today. Radical ideas of right-wing nationalist, pseudo-liberal and libertarian groups create fertile ground to discredit the idea of liberalism. Debates about liberalism rarely include discussions on issues such as God-given liberty, property rights, human rights and equality before the law, thereby contributing to a distorted perception of liberalism.

Another significant cause of incorrect assumptions about liberalism is the lack of academic works on political ideologies, including liberalism. Therefore, this paper aims to make a modest contribution to the common cause in this area.

It should be noted, however, that academic work alone is not sufficient and political parties, civil society and the media should also make efforts and play their vital role. Unfortunately, in Georgia, civil society is not strong, political parties are not ideology-based and the media rarely covers liberalism or other political ideologies. The existence of ideology-based political parties, including intensive debates about ideological issues, would raise the awareness of citizens. Instead, we see political parties that deliberately discredit liberal ideas and promote populism to promote their narrow partisan interests. This situation needs to be improved and this can be done by informing the wider public in Georgia about liberalism as well as other ideologies; hence, it is even more important to publish essays such as this one.

Modern states built on the principles of liberal democracy offer the best standards of living ever known in the history of mankind. It is vital for countries seeking development to embrace the values of liberal democracy. Therefore, it is important to respond adequately to myths and incorrect assumptions about liberalism and to raise the population's awareness about the ideology.

CHAPTER I – WHAT IS LIBERALISM?

Historical understanding of liberalism

Liberalism (from Latin “liber” – “free”)¹ is a moral and socio-political philosophy which cherishes human rights and individual liberty as the highest values. In addition to liberty, the main principles of liberalism include tolerance, market economy, freedom of entrepreneurship, inviolability of private property, rule of law and democratic elections.² As a dominant political doctrine, the liberal ideology largely shaped the history of the modern world. The political and legal systems of the Western world were built on liberal values.

Liberalism first took root in 13th century England, when the powers of the monarch were curtailed by a royal charter of rights, Magna Carta Libertatum, and the first signs of parliamentarism appeared.³ The evolution of liberalism was significantly influenced by the Reformation, a movement launched by local religious organizations in Europe in the 14th century to distance themselves from the Roman Catholic Church and to form autonomous churches. The Reformation was spearheaded by a professor at Oxford University, John Wycliffe (1320-1384). Over time, the movement spread to continental Europe, where it was led by a German priest and professor of theology, Martin Luther (1483-1456). Luther declared the Bible, not the church (as an institution), as the only source of truth. As a result of the Refor-

¹ Definition of Liber, WordReference Random House Learner’s Dictionary of American English, 2021 – <https://www.wordreference.com/definition/-liber-> (accessed 08.12.2020).

² Charvet, J & Nay, E.K. *Introduction: what is liberalism?*, 2008, P.1.

³ Adamson, B. *Magna Carta, Liberalism and Human Rights*, 2015, PP. 380-382.

mation, countries such as England, Scotland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Finland, Switzerland, part of Germany, Hungary and others broke away from the system of Catholic Church. The countries that underwent the Reformation saw a notable decline in the influence of church on public life. In addition to social and economic transformations, the Reformation also proved conducive to the development of the arts and science.⁴

Another movement that spurred the spread of liberal ideas was Humanism. This movement sprang up in the 14th century and pursued the goal of the free and fair development of individuals. Humanism emphasized the highest value of human beings and recognized individual's rights to freedom, equality and happiness. According to the humanist philosophy, all resources should serve the aim of making human life as comfortable and safe as possible. Significant contributors to the evolution of humanism were great Renaissance thinkers such as Francesco Petrarca, Dante Alighieri, Giovanni Boccaccio, Leonardo da Vinci, Erasmus of Rotterdam, Giordano Bruno, René Descartes, Johannes Kepler, François Rabelais, Nicolaus Copernicus, William Shakespeare, Miguel de Cervantes, Francis Bacon, Isaac Newton and Gottfried Leibniz. The philosophy and main principles of humanism (freedom, equality and happiness of individual) facilitated the development of the classical liberalism doctrine⁵

Formation of classical liberalism

The first principles of classical liberalism are associated with the name of French philosopher and scientist René Descartes (1596-

⁴ Becker, S.O, Pfaff, S, Rubin, J. *Causes and Consequences of the Protestant Reformation*, 2016, PP. 22-25.

⁵ Smith, M. *Humanism and its Impact on the Renaissance*, 2015, P. 2.

1650). Descartes developed the theory of rationalism, which is based on the belief that reality can only be perceived through reasoning and the analysis of facts. According to the theory of rationalism, reason is the only source of understanding the world. The spread of the theory of rationalism triggered the scientific revolution in Europe.⁶ From the 17th century, European states made significant achievements in the realms of mathematics, mechanics, astronomy, navigation, political sciences, etc. The manufacturing industry expanded; exploration of the American continent began; differential calculus was created; and telescope, mechanical calculating machine, steam engine, various industrial mechanical devices were invented. Thus, the prerequisites were created for the Industrial Revolution to begin in the mid-18th century.

In parallel to those developments, a process of dismantling the absolute monarchy form of governance began in Europe in the 18th century. Absolute monarchies were considered blessed by God and supported by organized church hierarchy. The church recognized the “divine right of kings” and shored up the existing system of traditional rule. Enormous contributions to the formation of liberal ideas were made by British thinkers Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and John Locke (1632-1704). In his work *Leviathan*, Hobbes formulated the concept of the “social contract” whereby people voluntarily surrender some of their natural rights to an authority in exchange for common good (guarantee of peace and justice). Thus, Hobbes portrayed a state as an institution with a legitimate power to coerce (*Leviathan*), but, at the same time, Hobbes regarded absolute monarchy as the best form of governance. Hobbes advocated secularism and believed in the separation of the state and the church.⁷

⁶ Newman, L. *Descartes' Rationalist Epistemology*, 2005, PP. 189-191.

⁷ Hobbes, T. *Leviathan*, 1651, PP. 438-440.

John Locke, who is recognized as the founder of the theory of classical liberalism among political scientific circles, believed that every human being was granted the rights to life, liberty and property at birth. On the issue of legitimacy of power, Locke echoed Hobbes' theory that the state was created through a social contract and one of its main functions was to protect the natural rights of human beings. Locke was the first thinker that formulated the principle of separation of power into legislative, executive and judicial branches, which is also a fundamental principle of liberalism. Works by Hobbes and Locke laid the foundation for the "minimal state" model of classical liberalism, whereby the main functions of the state are to set the "rules of game" and protect the rights of people to life, liberty and property.⁸

The epochs of Humanism and Reformation were soon followed by the Age of Enlightenment. Starting in the 18th century, as the fields of science and economy advanced based on rationalism and empiricism, people became increasingly alienated from religious organizations. For a large segment of the population in European countries, the aim of life was no longer "salvation" but rather the pursuit of earthly happiness, which was seen in the harmonious relationship of body, reason and feelings. With the printing technology developed in West European countries in that period, information and knowledge travelled fast and reached the masses. The Age of Enlightenment as founded on values such as tolerance, liberty and equality.

Ideas of French thinkers of the Enlightenment Age, Charles-Louis de Montesquieu (1689-1755) and Voltaire (1694-1778), played an important role in the formation of classical liberalism. According to Montesquieu, a person is the foundation of the law while public in-

⁸ Locke, J. *Second Treatise of Government*, 1689/90, PP. 4-7.

stitutions exist only to equip an individual with actual rights and freedoms.⁹ For Voltaire, rationalism and freedom were most significant notions, but he disagreed with the idea of equality. The necessity to protect the main principles of liberalism, tolerance and freedom, was expressed by Voltaire in a famous phrase: “I disagree with what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.”

The basic ideas of the economics of liberalism were developed by Scottish economist and thinker Adam Smith (1723-1790). In his work *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of Wealth of Nations*, Smith laid down the principle of non-interference of government in economic processes. He also opined that under certain circumstances, a free market can self-regulate and achieve a higher productivity than a centralized regulated market. Adam Smith used the term “the invisible hand” to describe the ability of free market economy to self-regulate.¹⁰

The French Revolution (1789-1799) and popular revolutions of 1848-1849 in Europe facilitated the establishment of liberalism. The French Revolution resulted in the replacement of absolute monarchy with the republic. The main motto of the revolution was “Liberty, Equality, Brotherhood.” In 1789, the National Constituent Assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, which was inspired by ideas of the Enlightenment and promoted the principles of respect for natural rights, separation of powers, inviolability of property and universal right to vote (for men).¹¹ The 1848-1849 popular revolutions (also known as the Springtime of the Peoples) were mainly of a national liberation nature. The majority of revolutionaries demanded liberal reforms and democratization. Al-

⁹ Montesquieu, S.L. *The Spirit of the Law*, 1752, PP. 18-22.

¹⁰ Smith, A. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of Wealth of Nations*, 1776, PP.73-75.

¹¹ Dickey, L. *The French Revolution and Liberalism*, 1992, PP. 111-115.

though that wave of revolutions failed to achieve success, it played a significant role in the spread of liberal ideas in Europe.¹²

From the second half of the 19th century, classical liberalism displayed signs of crisis around the world, due to the emergence of a wealthy class that benefited from the free market, and accordingly, an increase in social inequality. The further spread of liberal ideas was hindered by the World War I (1914-1918) in Europe and the events that took place thereafter, including the Great Depression and the spread of fascism in Italy and Germany and communism in Russia.

Against the backdrop of these events, Europe saw the rise of the social democratic movement, which believed in a greater role of the state in assuming broader social responsibilities. Meanwhile, a group of “social liberals” emerged among liberal elites, who, based on changes to some provisions of classical liberalism, demanded a stronger role for the state to solve social economic problems.

The merger of the main principles of liberalism with socialist theory gave birth to a new ideology (social liberalism/modern liberalism). Proponents of modern liberalism believed that the state was obligated to meet the basic needs of the economically disadvantaged population.¹³ Followers of the new forms of liberalism recognized the need to correct the market in order to avoid threats created by a stronger state. The development of a wealth redistribution mechanism in the form of social services and organizations for the protection of rights of the poor was put on the agenda.¹⁴ Followers of modern liberalism support the Keynesian approach whereby a state’s intervention in economy may benefit the development of business and production

¹² Revolutions of 1848, Encyclopedia Britannica, 2021 – <https://www.britannica.com/event/Revolutions-of-1848> (accessed 08.12.2020).

¹³ Mill, J.S. *On Liberty*, 1859, P.52.

¹⁴ Gogiyashvili, O. *Political ideologies*, 2012, pg.60.

cycle. The Keynesian economic theory was implemented in the USA during the Great Depression.¹⁵

Neoliberalism – Keynesian theory was opposed by Austrian economist Friedrich Hayek (1899-1992) who wrote in his book *The Road to Serfdom* that state interference in the economy paves the way for totalitarianism. The humanistic ideas of socialism concerning equality and justice may become the ideological foundation for totalitarian regimes if liberal values are not safeguarded, he argued. To support this opinion, Hayek cited examples of German Nazism and Russian Bolshevism. In Hayek's assessment, the Soviet Union practiced equality but that was the equality of majority in poverty and in restraint.¹⁶

Similar to Friedrich Hayek, American economist Milton Friedman was also a proponent of the minimal state model. The economic stagnation of the 1970s lent new urgency to economic approaches of classical liberalism. A school of economic thought which rests on ideas of Hayek and Friedman is known as neoliberalism. Neoliberalism, like classical liberalism, supports the minimalist model of a state and opposes state interference in the economy. Neoliberalism became a dominant ideology in the Western world in the 1980s, manifested in Thatcherism in Great Britain and Reaganism in the United States.

Spread of liberalism in the United States of America

The ideas of liberalism played a decisive role in shaping the historical future of European colonies in North America.

¹⁵ Jahan, S., Mahmud, A.S., Papageorgiou, C. *What is Keynesian Economics*, 2014, PP.1-2.

¹⁶ Hayek, F. *The Road to Serfdom*, 1944, PP. 10-15.

In 1776, the Declaration of Independence was drawn up under the leadership of Thomas Jefferson. According to the Declaration, all people have the right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. The Declaration of Independence was followed by the Revolutionary War against the British Empire, which the colonies won.¹⁷

In the USA, liberalism evolved differently than in Europe. Lacking the experience of absolute monarchy and being free from the influence of the Roman Catholic Church, the USA was a fertile ground for liberal ideas to spread. Over time, liberalism became embedded in the American political system. Liberalism became deeply rooted in constitutional bodies as well as the political culture and judiciary of the USA.

Liberal democracy

In the Age of Enlightenment, liberalism and democracy were somewhat conflicting notions. For liberals, the foundation of society was an individual who owned property and did not have to choose between self-survival and protection of civil rights. In liberals' opinion, dictatorship of the poor could pose a threat to private property and, accordingly, liberty.

The first thinker to speak about a possibility for liberalism and democracy to coexist peacefully was Alexis de Tocqueville who wrote in his book *Democracy in America* (1835) that the principle of equal opportunities was applied in liberal democracy and the biggest threat to citizens was the intervention of the state in economic processes.¹⁸

¹⁷ The Declaration of Independence, 1776.

¹⁸ Tocqueville, A.D. *Democracy in America*, 1835, Chapter XV.

John Stuart Mill believed history had showed that democracy could become a tyranny of the majority. The rule of majority means the pursuit of the objectives of the largest and most active segment of population. If the majority may exclude a certain segment of citizens from society, instruments were needed to guard against abuses of power. This opinion was shared by Graham, who believed that democracy may turn into a tool of totalitarianism and tyranny if it is not supported by liberal values.¹⁹

The essence of liberal democracy may be briefly formulated in this way: democracy enforces the will of the majority, whereas liberalism defends the rights of minorities. Limiting the power of democratically elected governments is the main challenge of liberalism. Countries that do not observe the principle of separation of powers, independence of judiciary, noninterference of the state in religious affairs, human rights, liberty and other liberal values cannot be regarded as part of the “Western” world. Countries where liberalism is in shortage are far from liberty and justice.

A political system of liberal democracy rests on a representative democracy where the will of the majority and actions of the elected government are restricted by the obligation to protect the rights of minorities and individual citizens.²⁰ Principles that are characteristic for systems of liberal democracy include market economy, private property, universal and equal elections, political pluralism, tolerance, separation of power, and rule of law.

Today, liberal democracy is a dominant political system encompassing a group of countries where the basic rights and fundamental freedoms of citizens are protected in the best possible way.

¹⁹ Graham, G. *Liberalism and Democracy*, 1992, PP.13-17.

²⁰ Liberal Democracy, Encyclopedia Britannica, 2021 – <https://www.britannica.com/topic/liberal-democracy> (accessed 09.12.2020).

CHAPTER II – LIBERALISM IN GEORGIA

In the 17th and 18th centuries, the road to Europe for the kingdoms existing on the territory of Georgia was blocked and, consequently, Georgia was isolated from the scientific and social developments underway there. The isolation was also due to the fact that Georgia was not able to use the sea as a trade and communication means due to a variety of outside and internal factors. Liberal ideas emerged and proliferated in the countries that were closely linked to sea and sailing. By turning its back on the sea, Georgia effectively stymied the spread of liberalism to its society. Liberal ideas began to penetrate relatively easily after the Georgian kingdoms were annexed by the Russian Empire in the 19th century. However, compared to Europe, Russia was technologically backward – a feudal state built on serfdom.

Russian aristocracy who fought in Western Europe during the Napoleonic wars discovered that their country lagged far behind the rest of civilized world in terms of development. That was the impetus for liberal ideas to gradually enter and spread in the Russian Empire; secret organizations were created to pursue the liberal transformation of Russia, namely, to abolish serfdom and change the form of state governance from absolute monarchy to a republic.²¹ By that time, the kingdom of Kartli and Kakheti had already been abolished and the Russian Empire was gradually gaining foothold in western Georgia. A segment of Georgian nobility resettled to Russia; some of them even established successful careers while Georgian students began to re-

²¹ Poole, R.A. *Nineteenth-Century Russian Liberalism: Ideals and Realities*, 2011, PP. 159-160.

ceive an education in Petersburg. Consequently, Georgians also became familiar with the liberal ideas that penetrated Russia and, over time, these ideas reached Georgia too.

Liberal ideas were first introduced to Georgia by Georgians who had close ties with the Russian liberal elite. The first most prominent public figure in this regard was Solomon Dodashvili, whose opinions were somewhat influenced by ideas of the Decembrists.²² Besides, after the failure of the Decembrist revolt, a segment of rebels was exiled from the capital of Russia to the Caucasus and some 65 Decembrist officers and 2,000 soldiers found themselves in the Caucasus in 1826-1829, many of whom engaged in wars against the Ottoman Empire and Persia.

Solomon Dodashvili graduated from the faculty of philosophy at St. Petersburg University. His work *Logic*, written in 1827, produced quite an effect. Historian and publicist Pavle Ingorokva believed that Solomon Dodashvili, as one of first Kantians, deserved a distinguished place in the history of Russia's philosophy.²³

After graduating the university, Dodashvili returned to Georgia and worked as a journalist and educator. In parallel, he became the ideological leader of a Georgian plot against the Russian Empire. While some conspirators supported the establishment of a constitutional monarchy in Georgia, others, including Dodashvili, advocated the idea of a parliamentary republic.²⁴ They also tried to gain support from European countries; an example of that effort was a trip by Solomon Razmadze to Tehran to establish contacts with a representative of the British Empire.

²² Gibson J.R. *The Decembrists*, 2016, PP. 1-2.

²³ Ingorokva, P., Nikoloz Baratashvili (essay), in the book *Nikoloz Baratashvili, Works*, Tbilisi, 1968, PP. 34-35.

²⁴ Jones, S.F. *Russian Imperial Administration and the Georgian Nobility: The Georgian Conspiracy of 1832*, 1987, P.3.

The main organization plotting the conspiracy decided to establish a constitutional monarchy in Georgia. A legislative body of government would be a house of representatives – a national *Seim*, created by electoral rule. The conspiracy leadership even considered it possible to apply electoral rules in the regular army.²⁵

Solomon Dodashvili had a different view. He relied on the ideas of European Enlightenment and wanted to transform Georgia into a republic. The testimony of Vakhtang Orbeliani, one of 1832 conspiracy participants, reveals Solomon Dodashvili's vision of governance in Georgia: "... I heard Dodaev saying... I wish Georgia freedom but not to help any one of the Bagrationis become a king but to help Georgia become a republic."²⁶

Yet another proof of Solomon Dodashvili's allegiance to liberal ideas was his belief in equality. He deemed it unacceptable to evaluate people by their titles. "A man is appreciated not by his title but by his reason and deeds." "...Shortsightedness... led to such a decline in the quality of our homeland that civil liberty has been forgotten..." Solomon Dodashvili said.

Solomon Dodashvili had interesting views about Georgia's place in the world. He regarded Georgian culture as part of European culture and viewed the Europeanization of Georgia as a return to the fold where it naturally belonged. Dodashvili saw Georgia's future in integration with Europe: "...I work not for happiness but for the love of homeland in order to see that one fine day Europe will recognize Iberia de jure."

²⁵ Ingorokva, P., Nikoloz Baratashvili (essay), in the book *Nikoloz Baratashvili, Works*, Tbilisi, 1968, P. 31.

²⁶ From the *History of Georgia and the Caucasus, letters of Solomon Dodashvili, 1825-1832*. Introduction and comments by S. Khutsishvili, 1944, Part II, Tbilisi, P. 48.

The 1832 conspiracy for Georgia's independence ended in failure. After thwarting the plot, Russia carried out large-scale repressions. Some 145 participants of the 1832 conspiracy were exiled, including Aleksandre Chavchavadze, Grigol Orbeliani, Vakhtang Orbeliani, Giorgi Eristavi, Solomon Dodashvili, Solomon Razmadze, and Alexandre Orbeliani. Years later the exiles were pardoned and they returned to Georgia; some of them even made a career in Russia.²⁷ Solomon Dodashvili was the only person who was not allowed to return. He died in the city of Viatka at the age of 31. It was not until 1994 that his body was returned to Georgia and buried in the Mtatsminda Pantheon of Writers and Public Figures.

The failure of the 1832 conspiracy caused a sort of crisis in Georgia and resistance to the Russian Empire subsided until 1861, when Ilia Chavchavadze returned from Petersburg. Upon his arrival, Ilia started to gather young people. He spearheaded a new public group known as Pirveli Dasi (the First Group).²⁸ *Sakartvelos Moambe*, a periodical founded by Ilia Chavchavadze in 1863, became the flagship of the national-liberation movement. He fought tirelessly to simplify literary Georgian, to bring it closer to the common vernacular; this endeavor produced an immense positive effect in terms of communication with the majority of the population, resulting in a mass improvement in literacy in the country.

In 1864, a major event helped spur the spread of liberalism in Georgia – serfdom was abolished by Russian Emperor Alexander II's Emancipation Manifesto. As a result, the majority of the population legally acquired civil rights. Ilia advocated a radical and comprehen-

²⁷ Tsertsvadze, M. *Participants of the Conspiracy of 1832 as presented in the epistolary heritage* by N. Baratashvili, 2015, pp. 1-8.

²⁸ Chkhartishvili, M. & Kadagishvili, S. *Georgian Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century: Values, Ideals, Symbols*, 2011, p.430.

sive reform that would grant not only personal freedom to serfs but also economic and social independence. He supported the idea of granting land to emancipated peasantry.²⁹ However, a group at an assembly of Georgian nobility strongly resisted this idea.

Although Ilia Chavchavadze was a representative of nobility himself, he fiercely opposed the stratification of people according to social status and granting special privileges to any title. In his paper *The Equality of Titles* (1888) he wrote: "... Success of a nation, be it material or intellectual, can only be achieved when the entire nation, without differentiating by titles, discriminating against or excluding any group, joins forces in arduous activity to move forward..."³⁰ "Only that nation was able to endure numerous perils, only that nation overcame hardships, only that nation made achievements and gained strength which understood in good time that the advancement of one group is fruitless if the rest fails to make headway; quite the contrary, the progress of one title caused the regress of the rest."³¹

Narodnik (populist) ideas of peasant revolution, having proliferated in Russia in the 1860s, and their tactics of fight that later extended to also include individual terror,³² were unacceptable for Ilia's political views. Ilia could not support an ideology that kindled class conflict in rural areas because the division of society into various strata on any grounds would have hindered the pursuit of a common national goal in Georgia and shake its foundation.

²⁹ Ingorokva, P., Ilia Chavchavadze (essay), in the book *Ilia Chavchavadze*, Tbilisi, 1962.

³⁰ Chavchavadze, I., *The Equality of Titles*, 1888, P. 2.

³¹ Ilia Chavchavadze, *The complete works in ten volumes (1951-1961)*, editor P. Ingorokva, Volume 8, diary of public life, 1957, Tbilisi, PP. 312-313.

³² Pedler, A. *Going to the People. The Russian Narodniki in 1874-1875, 1927*, PP. 130-136.

Ilia held very interesting views concerning Western Europe, believing in the necessity to “cut a wide channel via the Black Sea to let European influence and its revitalizing civilization penetrate.” He also entertained European and liberal views about the pressing issues of the time concerning the equality of women and the rights of those “born out of wedlock,” dedicating several works to these topics.³³ According to him, “it is not long before women achieve their goal and this half of the humankind will be invited to a common table to take their own place.”³⁴

Ilia Chavchavadze also compared liberalism and conservatism. According to him, liberalism fights against outdated rules that hinder development while a “genuine conservator” defends only those traditions that are still useful and necessary for modern times.

Ilia Chavchavadze’s attitude to private property, one of the main pillars of liberal ideology, fully aligned with the opinions of Western liberals. He believed that guaranteeing protection for private property and the safety of individuals was the primary obligation of the state. “The safety of people’s lives and property is one of the most important, if not a primary obligation in a state. Without this a nation cannot make any progress or achieve any success. Therefore, safety shall be given preference over many other things,”³⁵ Ilia wrote.

Through his writings, Ilia Chavchavadze became the first promoter of liberal ideas in Georgia and embraced ideals of Western liberal ideology about human liberty, private property, equality before the law and arrangement of the state. Ilia spread these ideas through various means – the print media and his leadership of the largest nongovernmental organization in Georgia, the Society for the Spreading of Lit-

³³ Chavchavadze, I., *Right of Born out of Wedlock*, 1898, P. 1.

³⁴ Chavchavadze, I., *Women’s Cause*, 1888, P. 2.

³⁵ Chavchavadze, I., *Life and the Law*, 1877-1881.

eracy among Georgians. The invaluable service of Ilia Chavchavadze and other like-minded fellows resulted in forging a common Georgia identity and popularizing liberal nationalism, which reanimated the forgotten idea of an independent Georgia.

Vazha-Pshavela (1861-1915) made a significant contribution to spreading liberal ideas in Georgia. In his letter, "Cosmopolitanism and Patriotism," Vazha-Pshavela noted that main subjects of history were the nations that fight for freedom. "Every nation seeks freedom. The development of separate nations is an essential condition for the development of all mankind."³⁶ In the same letter he opined that a genuine essence of cosmopolitanism is the love of one's own nation and at the same time, respect for other nations. "We should understand cosmopolitanism this way: you should love your nation, your country – do not hate other nations – and work for its progress until it equals the leading nations of the world."³⁷ Vazha-Pshavela also dwelled on the distorted perception of nationalism, expressing hope that the Georgian nation would manage to avoid radicalism. He wrote: "Historical Georgian character gives us hope that this 'nationalism' will always remain healthy and never degrade into chauvinism, fanaticism."³⁸ Important themes in Vazha-Pshavela's creative works are the conflict of an individual with outdated traditions and the supremacy of the idea of human liberty and equality.

Georgia restored its independence in 1918. The First Republic implemented progressive reforms that were unprecedented for those times, such as granting women the right to vote and separating religion and the state, which made the First Republic of Georgia one of the most advanced states of its contemporary world in terms of lib-

³⁶ Vazha-Pshavela, "Cosmopolitanism and Patriotism," 1905, P. 2.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Vazha-Pshavela, *Works, Volume 9*, 1964, P. 291.

eral democracy. Although the government of Georgia was led by social democrats, the Democratic Republic of Georgia, judging by the policy they pursued, was undeniably a liberal democratic state. Evidence of the degree of democratization of that period is the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, adopted in 1921, which contained many provisions of liberalism and democracy, including the equality of citizens before the law, abolition of stratification by titles, gender equality, protection of the rights of minorities, etc. Especially worth mentioning is the law on universal and equal elections.

Unfortunately, independence was short-lived and the Bolshevik regime, which was installed as a result of Russian occupation on February 25, 1921, changed a lot of things in Georgia. The most damaging among those changes were the effort to play down the importance of Ilia Chavchavadze's activity and the taboo on the success of the Democratic Republic of 1918-1921. However, despite the efforts of the communist regime to suppress them, Ilia Chavchavadze's ideas have never lost significance, although it is true that the process of re-discovering, rethinking and communicating them to broader public is still underway. If it is successful, Ilia will be able once again to make an important contribution to the cause of building a developed, Western-oriented, liberal and democratic Georgian state.

CHAPTER III – PERCEPTION OF LIBERALISM IN CONTEMPORARY GEORGIA

The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the restoration of independence enabled Georgia to put an end to a 70-year-long isolation and return to the fold of Western values. Liberalism started to reenter Georgian reality. However, liberalism was alien to the Soviet Union and the Communist Party had worked hard to discredit the liberal Western world. The communist legacy proved so powerful that even today, after 30 years of independence, distorted opinions about liberalism are still rife in Georgia and certain groups are engaged in the deliberate discreditation of liberal ideas. One may assert that today in Georgia, liberalism is misunderstood, particularly by neo-fascist, xenophobic and homophobic groups, although false ideas about liberalism are also spread by leftist organizations. To fully understand the misconceptions about liberalism in Georgia, it is necessary to discuss ultra-nationalist and extreme leftist narratives separately.

Ultra-nationalist groups include neo-fascist, ethno-nationalist, xenophobic and homophobic organizations and activists that spread misinformed opinions and myths about liberalism. They portray liberalism as an anti-Georgian, anti-Christian ideology that defies traditions, opposes the “institution of traditional family” and conducts LGBT “propaganda.” The term “liberast,” which is coined by combining the word “liberal” and an LGBT-related slur “pederast,” used by radical groups is an indication of their distorted understanding of liberalism. It shows that a large segment of society associates liberalism,

and indirectly, Western orientation, not with the core idea of this ideology, but with LGBT “propaganda” and anti-national attitudes.

A number of studies into the activity of the abovementioned organizations have exposed their anti-liberal and anti-Western narratives. According to *Anti-liberal Nativist Challenge to Georgia*, a study published by the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development (CIPDD) in 2020, anti-liberal groups promote the following messages: 1. Liberal values spread by the West are false and dangerous for Georgia because they undermine traditional Georgian culture, institutions, and morality and promote sexual minorities; 2. Liberal forces fight against the Georgian Orthodox Church, which is the cornerstone of Georgian identity and culture.³⁹

Misperceptions about liberalism are also well documented in the study *Understanding and Combating Far-Right Extremism and Ultra-Nationalism in Georgia*, conducted by the Democracy Research Institute in 2020. The interviews conducted in this study revealed that respondents portray liberalism as the enemy of nationalism, family and society, and believe that it aims to destroy the state and nation. Liberalism is seen as the promotion of the lifestyles of sexual minorities.⁴⁰

Understanding and Combating Far-Right Extremism and Ultra-Nationalism in Georgia underlines that anti-liberal extremist groups

³⁹ Nodia, G., *Anti-liberal nativist challenge to Georgia: how big it is and what can we do about it*, Caucasus Institute for Peace and Democracy (CIPDD), 2020 – http://www.cipdd.org/upload/files/antiliberaluri-eng.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2iWAA_46Wu2Ku4u-tOb2th1pe9r3tRa1y1lujPxMt4EBsdit7SqPbDjiNs (accessed 18.11.2020).

⁴⁰ *Understanding and Combating Far-Right Extremism and Ultra-Nationalism in Georgia*, Democracy Research Institute (DRI), 2020 – http://www.democracyresearch.org/files/47dri%20report%20far%20right%20eng.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3OP0bPBw7k3Ph9e7po1Y4i17DxN_sEaFxFSCq_GzSD5V2S9o2IlmugJRY (accessed 18.11.2020).

equate liberalism with the death of the nation, pedophilia, immorality and a contempt for Orthodox Christianity.⁴¹

When discussing liberalism, ultranationalist radical groups place emphasis on issues that are totally alien to liberal ideology; disinformation of this sort causes the discreditation of genuine liberal ideas.

The activities of far-left groups have not been studied as extensively as those of ultranationalist groups, but an analysis of leftist on-line editions and Internet blogs indicates several myths exist about liberalism. Unlike ultranationalist and homophobic groups, Georgian leftist groups' beliefs about liberalism partially reflect views established among leftists in the West. It should also be noted that the main target of such groups is neoliberalism. According to Georgian far-left groups, a neoliberal world order diminishes the role of nation states and enhances the influence of multinational corporations and international organizations. Based on these beliefs, far-left groups see neoliberalism as an evil force.

The Georgian-language online blog *Politcano* actively discredits liberalism and the Western world. According to articles published on this website, liberalism is an anti-democratic ideology while neoliberalism is the enemy of modern democracy. In one article, the author tries to substantiate this assertion by referring to the fact that founders of liberal thinking, who lived in the 17th and 18th centuries, were against granting the right to vote to women and, at the same time, supported granting voting rights to only property owners. The blog tries to portray liberalism as a doctrine tailored to the rich alone, with the main goal of protecting the majority from the minority, ignoring

⁴¹ Murgulia, K., Understanding and Combating Far-Right Extremism and Ultra-Nationalism in Georgia, Democracy Research Institute (DRI), 2019 – <http://www.democracyresearch.org/files/4DRI%20-%204%20vis%20angarishi.pdf> (accessed 18.11.2020).

the rights of the poor.⁴² Based on this article, the blog supports Marxist and obsolete views of liberalism as the ideology of the dominant class.

Several articles published by European.ge website argue that neoliberalism is incompatible with democracy, asserting that neoliberalism undermines representative democracy and “subordinates political rights and representative democracy, gained through centuries-long fight, to corporate capital and the interests of large investors.”⁴³

One of the articles even describes liberalism as something amounting to totalitarianism and liberals as being against partnership-based society; it also claims that terms such as “taxpayer,” “law-abiding citizen,” “voter” are all offered by neoliberalism and the main aim of neoliberalism is to indoctrinate population and demonize non-mainstream views.

A segment of active feminist groups in Georgia view liberal values as patriarchal; devoid of altruism, solidarity and emotion; and focused only on personal gain and competition.⁴⁴

It should be noted that some of the beliefs of Georgian leftists about liberalism are copied from Western leftist circles; however, the Georgian and Western realities differ by their social, economic and political life and, therefore, Western leftist criticism of liberalism does not correspond to Georgian reality.

⁴² Tag Archives: Liberalism, Politicano – <https://politicano01.wordpress.com/tag/%E1%83%9A%E1%83%98%E1%83%91%E1%83%94%E1%83%A0%E1%83%90%E1%83%9A%E1%83%98%E1%83%96%E1%83%9B%E1%83%98/> (accessed 19.11.2020).

⁴³ Beraia, A., How Neoliberalism becomes institutionalized on a constitutional level, 2017 – <http://european.ge/rogor-khdeba-neoliberalizmis-konstituciurad-dakanoneba/#> (accessed 19.11.2020).

⁴⁴ Feminist Dialogue, Union Sapari, 2017.

Causes of distorted perception of liberalism

Misperceptions about liberalism in Georgia largely stem from the Soviet period. After the annexation of Georgia by the Red Army, the Bolshevik regime destroyed liberal ideas completely. After the break-up of the Soviet Union, however, the communist legacy proved to be so powerful that it created numerous obstacles to the development of the Georgian state, including the return of liberalism in Georgia. Since Vladimir Putin came to power in Russia, the Kremlin's anti-liberal and anti-Western propaganda has intensified, posing an additional challenge to liberalism in Georgia and around the world.

Soviet period

On February 25, 1921, the Red Army toppled the Democratic Republic of Georgia and isolated it from the civilized and free world for the next 70 years. The "iron curtain" that descended on Georgia in 1921 made the further spread of liberal ideas impossible in the country; furthermore, the Soviet government started to belittle Georgian liberals of 19th and 20th centuries and diminish their work. The policy of coercion pursued by the communist regime over the period between the annexation of the Democratic Republic of Georgia and the collapse of the Soviet Union totally uprooted liberalism, which had decades of history in Georgia, from Georgian reality. The 70-year-long interruption in statehood, emigration, Soviet repressions, mass propaganda, censorship and indoctrination of the population left no room for liberalism in Soviet Georgia.

A brief period of independence (1918-1921), despite a rather successful democratic experience for those times, did not prove to be enough to build strong state institutions, including the establishment of a stable political elite with the relevant political and technical

competences necessary to govern the country; development of a stable state doctrine; mobilization of public resources; preparation of a long-term state development program; and the creation of adequate model of state arrangement.⁴⁵ The difference is clear when Georgia's history is compared to that of the Baltic states, which were forcefully integrated into the Soviet Union in 1940. However, their relatively longer tradition of statehood (they maintained independence from 1918 till 1940) enabled the Baltic nations to build more stable public institutions, which made it significantly easier for them to transfer to a liberal democracy after the collapse of the Soviet Union.⁴⁶ In contrast, other post-Soviet countries, including Georgia, had less experience with statehood and, therefore, the transition from the Soviet system to a liberal democracy proved difficult for them.

In addition to the long interruption of its statehood, Georgia, situated on the periphery of the Soviet Union, was internationally isolated and disconnected from the rest of the world for 70 years. The Soviet system was extremely closed and citizens, save in rare cases, could only travel to other Soviet republics.⁴⁷ The "iron curtain" ensured that citizens of Georgia, living on the periphery of the Soviet Union, were ignorant of processes going on in the Western world.

After 1921 the world continued to develop, but not only was Georgia excluded from that process, it could not even observe it. In those 70 years, new ideas emerged in the West while old ideas were revised. As a result of the Great Depression, leftist Keynesianism

⁴⁵ Zafarullah, H. "Institution Building and Development: A conceptual Overview", 1980, P. 116.

⁴⁶ Huseynov, R., Baltic States are no longer ex-Soviet, 2017 – <https://modern diplomacy.eu/2017/01/20/baltic-states-are-no-longer-ex-soviet/> (accessed 21.11.2020).

⁴⁷ Egorov, B., How could Soviet citizens overcome the Iron Curtain during the Cold War?, 2017 – <https://www.rbth.com/history/326931-how-soviet-citizens-cur-tain> (accessed 21.11.2020).

gained an upper hand over liberal ideas of economics, and conversely, a course of economic liberalization was chosen to rebuild Germany devastated by the World War II. The crisis in the 1970s exposed the failure of Keynesian economics and the domination of neoliberal economics began under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. The West saw the formation of civil movements and the rise of civil society advocating human rights; the free world was engaged in hot debates and discussions, and tried to create for human beings the fairest and most comfortable environment ever possible. Geographic isolation left Soviet citizens completely uninformed and this information void was effectively filled by Soviet propaganda to kindle anti-Western and anti-liberal attitudes among citizens. Even after independence was restored, these factors added to a distorted perception of liberalism and notably impeded the transition of the country to liberal democracy.

After the forced Sovietization of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, a large segment of Georgian intellectuals had to leave the country to survive. The loss of independence, the failure of the 1924 revolt and Soviet repressions forced many people to seek refuge abroad. They included members of the government and Constituent Assembly, leaders and members of political parties, Georgian officers, fighters in the war against Bolshevik Russia, artists and scientists. In addition, Georgian diplomats who worked abroad in 1918-1921, as well as students and the segment of intelligentsia who were abroad by 1921 were not able to return to the country. The drain of intellectual resources of that scale made Georgia even more vulnerable to Soviet regime and prepared a fertile ground for the Kremlin's propaganda and indoctrination of population.

Despite the large wave of emigration, some intellectual resources remained in the country, which were crushed by the repressive ma-

chine of Bolsheviks. After the occupation of Georgia, mass arrests, exiles and executions began, which took lives of many Georgian patriots and thinkers.

Yet another severe blow to the intellectual resources of Georgia was the Great Purge in 1937 and 1938. Although the goal of the Great Purge was to cleanse the Communist Party of opponents to Stalin, it proved fatal for many Georgian writers, artists and professors. At the end of the day, the emigration and waves of repressions that began in the country after 1921 changed Georgia and the Georgian nation dramatically. The antihuman policy of the Soviet government – including mass executions, exiles and arrests – turned the country, which had embraced liberal ideas since the 19th century, into a Soviet republic that praised the cult of the leader and made the personality of Joseph Stalin part of its national identity. A proof of it is the events of 1956, when the process of de-Stalinization initiated by Khrushchev met severe resistance from a group of citizens of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia.

Starting in the 1920s, after Stalin became the leader of the Soviet Union, the Sovietization of schools and the education system began. The Kremlin worked to create an extremely centralized education system based on Marxist principles, which would imbue communist ideals in future Soviet citizens.⁴⁸ To that end, standardized curricula and textbooks were drawn up and strict rules of behavior were defined for schoolchildren. The Soviet education system became an extremely politicized institution actively propagating communism.⁴⁹ Ideological indoctrination of schoolchildren was an integral part of the Soviet

⁴⁸ *Stalinism in Soviet Schools and the Pupils' Case*, 2019, Institute for Development of Freedom of Information.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

education system.⁵⁰ Soviet pupils were taught from an early age that the Western world was based on a liberal capitalist world order which only served the interests of the bourgeoisie (in Soviet understanding, the dominant class that owns the means of production and exploits labor of hired people). The Soviet propaganda actively promulgated anti-Western myths and narratives aimed at discrediting Western political institutions and lifestyle among citizens of the USSR.⁵¹ During 70 years as part of the USSR, several generations of Georgian citizens fell victim to the Soviet ideological indoctrination.

The Soviet education system provided distorted information about the activity of Georgian liberals to schoolchildren. With strict censorship in place, it was impossible to obtain comprehensive information about Ilia Chavchavadze, Vazha-Pshavela and other like-minded Georgians, let alone critical analysis of their essays and creative works. The Soviet Union misappropriated Georgian liberals and offered Georgia the Soviet interpretation of their worldview, seen through a narrow prism of class struggle. Over the years, the Soviet education system inculcated an idea into Georgian schoolchildren that the main issue Ilia Chavchavadze was concerned with was the fight against the oppressive system of serfdom. Hence, the Soviet curricula included the poem *Kako the Robber*, but never included works in which Ilia talked about free trading, liberty, rule of law, human rights, protection of private property and equality.⁵²

Along with repressions, a characteristic feature of the Soviet Union of Stalin era was the rise of the personality cult. Under this form of indoctrination, Soviet propaganda portrayed Joseph Stalin

⁵⁰ Ross, L.W. *Some Aspects of Soviet Education*, 1960, P. 543.

⁵¹ *Soviet Youth Indoctrination*, 1975, PP. 29-31, Air Force Institute of Technology.

⁵² Chavchavadze, I., *Custom Policy in Europe, Free Trading and Protectionism*, 1887, PP. 2-3.

as the greatest Marxist theoretic and revolutionary along with Marx, Engels and Lenin. Numerous myths and legends were invented about Stalin and he was portrayed as the wisest man and the savior of people.⁵³ The creation of the personality cult started in the very first years of the history of Soviet Union. Initially, the propaganda worked in favor of Lenin to idealize him, but after Lenin's death, Stalin put the Soviet propaganda to his service and created one of the strongest personality cults in the world history. The influence of this cult lingers in Georgia to date.

These factors had an extremely strong influence on Georgia. The indoctrination of the population and the propaganda of the personality cult of Stalin changed Georgia radically; the Soviet repressive machine destroyed any possibility for liberal ideas to exist in the country; and intensive propaganda and brainwashing led to extremely illiberal views in population. In 1956, a large segment of the population was prepared to confront the Soviet government and even risk their own lives because of destalinization and relaxation of grips of totalitarianism.

Post-Soviet legacy

The Soviet legacy proved to be one of main causes of Georgians' distorted understanding of liberalism. The USSR, a classical totalitarian state of the 20th century, fought against Western state order, institutions and culture; and applied its propaganda machine to spread anti-Western and anti-liberal messages among its citizens. All this strongly influenced the political processes that developed following independence. "Ethnic nationalism, insufficient social-economic cohesion of society, parochialism, clientelism, lack of traditions in democ-

⁵³ *The Personality Cult of Stalin in Soviet Posters, 1929-1953*, Pisch, A, 2016.

racy and strategic thinking, corruption, preference for strong, authoritarian leadership, weak civil society, destabilizing external influence, are all conditions resulting from Soviet legacy.”⁵⁴ According to Stephen Jones, “the Soviet legacy – however misremembered, or manipulated – is still embedded in Georgia’s present. It is an important part of why democratic institutions in Georgia are weak. The links between poor institutionalization and ‘charismatic’ leaders, weak parties and powerful presidents, frail civil society and secretive bureaucracies, environmental degradation and demographic access and the state’s failure to integrate national minorities are all related to the Soviet past.”⁵⁵

Republics in the Soviet Union were subordinated to a strict power vertical. Decisions on almost all-important issues were taken by the central committee of the Communist Party. According to Article 14 of the Soviet Constitution, the exclusive authority of the government of the USSR covered international relations, defense policy, border control, foreign trade, national security, economy, transportation, communications, health care, labor rights and legislation.⁵⁶ The powers of countries falling within the union were limited to tourism, agriculture and culture policymaking.⁵⁷ Consequently, the countries of the USSR had an extremely low degree of self-governance. Corruption represented a serious problem. By 1970, corruption-related crimes accounted for 40 percent of total crime in the Soviet Georgia.⁵⁸ Corruption of that scale hindered the transition to liberal market economy and the formation of state institutions. There were also serious difficulties concerning the separation of powers; the balance between the separate branches of the state was actually fundamentally dis-

⁵⁴ Huber, M. *State-building in Georgia: Unfinished and at Risk?*, 2004, p.28.

⁵⁵ Stephen Jones, *Georgia: A Political History Since Independence*, 2012, pg. 11.

⁵⁶ The Constitution of the Soviet Union, 1936, Article 14.

⁵⁷ The Constitution of the Soviet Union, 1936, Article 15.

⁵⁸ Kramer, J.M *Political Corruption in the USSR, 1977*, P.214.

turbed in the first years of Georgia's independence. Judiciary and law enforcement authorities were not free from political influence, hindering the development of "the system of checks and balances" characteristic of liberal democracies.⁵⁹ The state administration's lack of institutional experience, weak mechanisms of checks and balances, corruption and problems with the rule of law prevented Georgia from creating a free and democratic environment. This situation was also a serious obstacle to the spread of liberalism in the country.

For 70 years, the Soviet Union had a one-party system. The only political force, which legally existed and participated in elections, was the Communist Party. Consequently, every formally held election was won by "the bloc of communists and non-party members."⁶⁰ The absence of any experience with political pluralism was one of the main reasons post-Soviet countries failed to transfer to liberal democracy after the break-up of the Soviet Union. Although the USSR collapsed, political parties in the country have failed to consolidate multiparty political environment. The main problem of political parties is their weakness, not state repressions. It is caused by several interrelated elements. First, the model that exists in Georgia today is a "weak multiparty" model dominated by one or two large parties.⁶¹ Unlike well-established liberal democracies, Georgia's political culture is underdeveloped. The political spectrum is extremely polarized; the bipartisan system in the country has turned vicious and parties remain tied to personalities rather than platforms. A factor of leader still remains a problem in Georgia, which implies that the political party apparatus heavily depends on a single person.⁶²

⁵⁹ Huber, M. *State-building in Georgia: Unfinished and at Risk?*, 2004, P.70-71.

⁶⁰ Brim, R.J & V. Zaslavsky *The Functions of Elections in the USSR*, 1978, P. 362.

⁶¹ *Political Party Finance Report*, 2010, P.1, Transparency International Georgia.

⁶² Nodia, G., Georgia (still) without political parties, 2017 – <https://jam-news.net/georgia-still-without-political-parties/> (accessed 26.11.2020).

Characteristic traits of the party system that exists in Georgia include an acute shortage of internal party democracy, centralized party policy and the extreme polarization of the political spectrum.⁶³ The latter is an extremely serious challenge, which has been underlined by various regional and international organizations (including the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, ODIHR).⁶⁴ The instability of political parties is a separate problem, which is caused by several issues, including political parties' reluctance to create a manifesto around a particular ideology. Studies show that the link between a party and voters is most stable when it follows the party line and thus avoids unexpected change in the political course.⁶⁵ The undeveloped party system posed a challenge to the spread and adequate understanding of liberalism in Georgia beginning in the 1990s. Heavily leader-dependent and fully devoid of ideology, political organizations failed to ensure public debates and discussions about ideologies in the country. Liberalism and, in general, the issue of ideology were totally excluded from the agenda of Georgian political parties, which seriously impeded the spread of liberalism in Georgia.

The difficulty transitioning from a centralized economy to a market economy also helped create a distorted understanding of liberalism in Georgia. The economy in the Soviet Union was based on centralized planning, meaning the state apparatus controlled all the resources. Instead of private companies and entrepreneurs discovering what was in demand and in what quantity (as it happens under the free market), decision on what to produce, in what quanti-

⁶³ *Political Party Finance Report*, 2010, P.1, Transparency International Georgia, P. 2.

⁶⁴ *Extreme Political Polarization in Georgia and its Effect on Democracy*, 2017, Democracy Reporting International.

⁶⁵ *Is Democracy Possible without Stable Political Parties?* 2017, P. 1, Georgian Institute of Politics.

ties, where to sell it, at what price, etc. were made by a special state body.⁶⁶

After the collapse of the USSR, post-Soviet countries faced challenges during the transitional period, which included a fundamental problem related to the transition from a command economy to the liberal market economy.⁶⁷ Given the complexity of this process, the transformation from a centralized command economy into a free-market economy was not carried out without significant mistakes. One of main problems in some post-Soviet countries was the absence of state institutions that were necessary for the transformation. Economic reforms implemented by the government of Georgia were not an exception.⁶⁸ The Georgian economy of Soviet times was an integral part of the common economic space of the USSR and, like economies of all other Soviet republics, it was run from the “center” (Moscow). Since the country’s economy was virtually 100% dependent on the Soviet system, the economic activity in Georgia sharply declined in the first years of independence. The situation was further aggravated by civil strife and wars for territorial integrity, pushing the economy, which was already in tatters, into a deeper crisis. The crisis manifested in increased prices on energy products and hyperinflation of the national currency.⁶⁹ Economic processes driven by competition and demand-supply principles were alien to Georgia.⁷⁰ The acute crisis in the 1990s kindled some nostalgia for the Soviet Union in Georgia. The 70 percent drop in the economy caused backlash against the liberal economy and created a feeling that on average, Georgians

⁶⁶ Harrison, M. *The Soviet Economy, 1917-1991: Its Life and Afterlife*, 2017, PP. 3-4.

⁶⁷ Magstadt, T., *Understanding Politics: Ideas, Institutions, and Issues*, 2010, P. 222.

⁶⁸ Burduli, T., *Economic Transitions in Georgia: On the Path from Shock Therapy to DCFTA*, 2015, P. 32.

⁶⁹ Huber, M. *State-building in Georgia: Unfinished and at Risk?*, 2004, P.57.

⁷⁰ Krelle, W. *Problems of Transition from a Planned to a Market Economy*, 2000, P. 2.

were better off under the command economy, further discrediting the idea of liberalism.

Due to its dire economic situation after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia was urged by international organizations and partners to adopt market economy principles and privatize state-owned enterprises. For the first time ever, the law on Privatization of State-owned Enterprises in the Republic of Georgia was adopted on August 9, 1993, which began the first stage of the privatization process.⁷¹ However, the results led to understandable doubts and questions concerning the fairness of the conduct of that process. People were granted the apartments they lived in but which, prior to independence, belonged to the Soviet state. That was significant from the economic standpoint because it became possible to sell immovable property and use the proceeds to start a business for economic benefit. However, privatization was not comprehensive, and the bulk of assets remained under state ownership.⁷²

In privatization, special importance is given to the denationalization of state-owned enterprises and trade facilities. However, instead of just selling such facilities, the state decided to distribute vouchers worth \$30 to all citizens (a voucher per citizen), which they could use to buy a share in any of enterprises. But the vouchers were sold at a much lower price and they were purchased mainly by those who had amassed fortunes in the final years of the Soviet Union. As a result, the system allowed that group to control many significant assets.⁷³

A fundamental shortcoming of the privatization in Georgia was that former Soviet bureaucrats and the “red directors,” whose only

⁷¹ Eliadze, T., *Financial-Legislative Regulations of State-Owned Enterprises in Georgia*, 2014, P. 20.

⁷² *Investor's Guide to Privatization in Georgia*, 2019, P. 10.

⁷³ *Ibid*, P.11.

experience was the socialist way of “doing business,” became the owners of means of production. The privatization process was also impeded by stereotypes held by the government and the general public. According to one such stereotype, the privatization of state-owned strategic infrastructure would harm the country. Such facilities, as a rule, included seaports, the railway, hydropower plants, etc. Therefore, enterprises of this type remained under state control, which encouraged ineffective use of these enterprises and created risks of corruption. Due to the reform’s shortcomings, a rather large segment of the Georgian population equated privatization to the capture of assets, discrediting free market economy and the basic principles of liberalism in the eyes of Georgian society.

After the disintegration of the USSR, the Russian Federation shifted its foreign policy to focus on the post-Soviet space in order to restore its influence over it. To this end, the Kremlin often exploited ethnic separatism and tried to achieve its foreign policy goal by provoking ethno-territorial conflicts, creating a desirable status quo there and then “freezing” that conflict. Soon after the restoration of independence, the Russian Federation activated separatist groups operating in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region, with the aim to destabilize the political and economic situation in Georgia. Shortly thereafter, the Kremlin set off these “time bombs.” Tensions first flared in Tskhinvali region and then in Abkhazia. The Abkhaz fight for “independence,” ethnic privileges and the institutionalization of a sort of apartheid was used by Russia to maintain control over the newly restored Georgian state. The Abkhaz war (1992-1993) had grave political and economic consequences for Georgia. Official Tbilisi lost de-facto control over one of its most important regions.⁷⁴ Moreover, the war displaced

⁷⁴ Siddi, M. “A Short History of the Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict from its Origins to the 2008 War”, 2012, P.5.

around 300,000 residents.⁷⁵ This further exacerbated the already grave social situation in the country.

The conflict in the two regions poses the following problems: 1. Jurisdiction of the Georgian government is not exercised in the occupied territories, which means that different governments represent the highest authority in the territories controlled by Georgia and those controlled by Russia; 2. Developments in the occupied territories significantly affect the bordering regions under the control of the Georgian government.⁷⁶ The strategic aim of the Russian Federation to use the conflicts to destabilize Georgia posed serious challenges to the national security of the country and the peaceful development of the state. It may be therefore said that the continuous Russian occupation of the Georgian territory has exerted an extremely harmful influence on the democratic transformation of the country, preventing it from transforming into a full-fledged liberal democracy.⁷⁷ Ethno-territorial conflicts provoked by Russia in the 1990s captured the full attention of political forces of the country in the first years of independence and created unfavorable conditions for liberalism. Furthermore, due to these conflicts, ideas of ethno-nationalism gained strong influence in Georgia of that period. As in case of all other national-liberation movements, ethno-nationalist played a decisive role in the restoration of independence in Georgia, but after the independence it hindered the spread of liberal ideas in the country.

To restore its influence on the post-Soviet space, the successor of the USSR, the Russian Federation, apart from triggering ethno-territorial conflicts, employed other means too. For example, it created

⁷⁵ Status of internally displaced persons and refugees from Abkhazia, Georgia, and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia, 2020, P. 6.

⁷⁶ Huber, M. "State-building in Georgia: Unfinished and at Risk?", 2004, PP. 45-46.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, P.28.

security, economic and trade organizations under its control such as Commonwealth of Independent States (which Georgia joined in 1993 and left in 2009), the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), etc.⁷⁸ and presented them as an effective alternative to liberal-democratic model.

To restore its influence over post-Soviet space, Moscow is trying to impede the liberal and democratic development of former Soviet republics and their approximation to Western bodies. The Russian Federation started challenging the post-Cold War international order, which rests on liberal principles, in the end of the 1990s.⁷⁹ According to liberal-democratic world order, any state is entitled to choose its own foreign policy course independently, without considering the opinions of other states. The final goal of Russia's grand strategy, however, is to dismantle the liberal world order and restore a traditional international order that rests on spheres of influence. That is why Russia spares no effort to prevent Georgia from implementing liberal reforms, because the Kremlin fears that Georgia will integrate into Western political and economic institutions (NATO, the EU) in the future and Russia will lose its influence on Georgia – and it will set a precedent of democracy, which is a threat for Russia. The aim of the 2008 war, in reality, was to hinder Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration.⁸⁰

Russia tries to discredit liberal ideas in Georgia by using hybrid warfare, the synchronized use of military, economic, diplomatic, informational and other instruments to weaken a rival and achieve

⁷⁸ Regional organisations in the post-Soviet space, European Parliament, 2015 – [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2015/545718/EPRS_ATA\(2015\)545718_REV1_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2015/545718/EPRS_ATA(2015)545718_REV1_EN.pdf) (accessed 26.11.2020).

⁷⁹ Clunan A.L. "Russia and the Liberal World Order", 2018, P. 45.

⁸⁰ Ronald D. Asmus, *A Little War That Shook the World*, 2010, P. 237.

its own goals.⁸¹ One of Russia's main strategic goals in Georgia is to prevent the advancement of pro-Western, liberally-minded groups and to stimulate the activity of the radical ultranationalist and far-right groups that openly discredit liberal democracy and the ideas of liberalism and the Western world; and portray the Russian model of governance as the most acceptable alternative for Georgia. Such organizations include some political parties, media outlets and some nongovernmental organizations as well as a group in the Georgian Patriarchate which openly discredits liberal ideas, in part by promoting the idea that Georgia should normalize relations with Russia because it shares the Orthodox Christian faith.⁸² All these efforts are part of the Kremlin's strategy to use soft power to spread anti-liberal narratives among Georgian citizens. One success of the hybrid warfare waged by Putin's Russia is the segment of uninformed Georgian citizens that perceive liberalism as an anti-national, anti-Christian and anti-traditional ideology that seeks to undermine national identity, lifestyle and religion.

⁸¹ MCDC Countering Hybrid Warfare Project: Understanding Hybrid Warfare, 2017, Multinational Capability Development Campaign, P. 3.

⁸² Kremlin Influence Index, 2017, PP. 17-22, Media Development Foundation.

CONCLUSION

Although liberalism rests on the ideas of Christianity and humanism, various leftist and ultranationalist groups are spreading misleading narratives about it in Georgia. Liberalism is portrayed as an ideology that fights against religion, identity and humanism. Unlike contemporary Georgian society, 19th century Georgian thinkers had a firm understanding of liberalism and tried to spread liberal values on a broad scale. That process was, unfortunately, stopped by the Bolshevik aggression in 1921. The communist regime and its policy of repressions, executions, exiles, emigration, censorship and state propaganda as well as the rise of the personality cult obliterated Georgia's liberal past. Following the disintegration of the USSR, the Soviet legacy – and the process of recovering from it – proved so difficult for the Georgian population that it had an extremely negative effect on the spread of liberalism and caused society to reconsider the work of Georgian liberals in Georgia. In addition, the increase in hybrid warfare after Vladimir Putin came to power in Russia posed serious challenges to liberalism across the world, including in Georgia. Russian anti-Western and anti-liberal propaganda is one of the factors that impedes liberalism in Georgia today, in part by promoting the spread of myths about liberalism among the general public.

Thirty years ago, Georgia reclaimed its independence. In order for the nation to build a successful state, it is vitally important that it reevaluates the past and reconsiders the present. It is equally im-

portant that the country strengthens the liberalism cherished by Ilia Chavchavadze and conducts healthy public debates. The responsibility for exposing disinformation about liberal ideas primarily lies with academic circles. For the country to develop, political parties must have certain values and ideological views in common, rather than a desire to obtain power and personal gains at any cost. In addition, the media and civil sectors need to step up their activities in this direction. All political ideologies try to develop a better model of arranging society and the state in the fairest and most optimal way. A political environment is healthy and development-oriented when it respects human dignity and allows citizens to make choices based on values. Liberal democracy, and the politics based on its values, represents precisely this type of environment and is the best option until the humankind devises a fairer and more successful model.

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