

## MAY 26 - GEORGIA'S INDEPENDENCE DAY (Some pages from the history)

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Every year on May 26, Georgians celebrate Independence Day, marking the moment in 1918 when Georgia declared its freedom from the Russian Empire. On that day 107 year ago, Georgia established the first Social-Democratic Republic in Europe that was governed by principles of democracy and equality and was dedicated to the progress and human emancipation.

During its brief, only two-year long history (1919-1921), the Democratic Republic of Georgia laid a solid foundation of the modern Georgian statehood. "The commitment to the European models of government and to an alliance with European powers began with the Georgian democratic republic".

"The Independence Act of Georgia", declared on May 26, 1918, outlined the fundamental principles of the Nation's democratic development. According to the Act, "the Democratic Republic of Georgia provides equal guarantees of political and civil rights to every citizen irrespective of their nationality, creed, social status or sex".



Independence Act. Photo: National Library Archives

On February 19, 1919, as a result of the first democratic elections, the Constituent Assembly (analogue of the modern parliament) was formed, elected through free, direct, universal and proportional elections. Fifteen political parties participated in the elections; six of them went into the parliament. Among them, the Social Democratic party gained the majority of votes.



Meeting of the Constituent Assembly. Photo: National Library Archives

Following the restoration of the statehood, Georgia focused its foreign policy on both gaining the international recognition of its sovereignty and conducting independent foreign relations. Foreign Ministers of the Republic - Akaki Chkhenkeli and Evgeni Gegechkori, both prominent Georgian politicians and public figures - represented the country abroad and cultivated widespread international ties, enabling the country to open diplomatic and consular missions in Germany, the Swiss Confederation, Turkey, Armenia, Romania, Italy and Austria. The independence of the Democratic Republic of Georgia was *de jure* recognized by Turkey, Germany, the Swiss Confederation, Belgium, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Japan, Austria, Romania, Poland, Argentina, Czechoslovakia and Estonia. Georgia became the only Trans-Caucasian nation to earn the *de jure* recognition from the Soviet Russia under the Moscow Peace Treaty of 7 May 1920.

In December 1918, the first diplomatic mission of the Republic of Georgia was opened in Bucharest, led by distinguished Georgian politician and diplomat, member of the Social Democratic Party, Sosipatre Asatiani

(1872, Kutaisi - 1971, Paris). The military attaché, Mikhail Paghava and the secretary, Anton Karpovich, also represented the Georgian mission.



The Georgian mission: military attaché Mikhail Paghava, head of the mission Sosipatre Asatiani and the secretary Anton Karpovich.  
Photo: National Library Archives

In Romania, despite its semi-official status (Georgia was not yet recognized *de jure*), mission established excellent relations with the Prime Minister's office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as with the Ministry of Economy (Georgia mission tried to facilitate import of wheat from Romania in exchange for Georgian tobacco). Sosipatre Asatiani actively collaborated with both the Romanian and French-language press in Romania. He also had very good cooperation with the Romanian Academy, in particular with Nicolae Iorga and Ion Bianu. With their help, in the Library of the Academy, he discovered the Gospel published in Tbilisi, by the printing house of King Vakhtang VI of Kartli, with the autograph of Anthim Iverieli, which is still preserved there. The Georgian mission also had good relations with the Anthim Monastery in Bucharest. In this challenging time, the Georgian diplomacy made every effort to maintain a permanent representation of Georgia in Romania well realizing the importance of its geographical location as the shortest route from Georgia to Europe as well as its waste natural resources and cultural closeness of two nations. Unfortunately, due to the lack of funds, the mission in Bucharest was closed in September of 1919. Since 2019, in the center of Bucharest, on the wall of the former Majestic Hotel, there is a commemorative plaque of the first diplomatic mission of the Democratic Republic of Georgia in Romania.



Between 1918-1921, Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, RSFSR, United States of America, Ottoman Empire, Poland, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Finland, Czechoslovakia, Persia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Estonia, and Latvia opened their diplomatic and consular representations in Tbilisi. Throughout 1919, Georgia unsuccessfully attempted to gain French or British protectorate on Georgian foreign affairs and defense and join the League of Nations on 16 December 1920.

On February 21, 1921, the Constituent Assembly of Georgia adopted the most progressive constitution of that time in Europe. This document, which received great recognition in the world at that time, determined the political division of the State and its territorial organization, as well as wide spectrum of rights and freedoms, including the rights of women, religious and ethnic minorities. It also abolished the death penalty, introduced the legal system, both fiscal and monetary policies, and provided a series of regulations on defense, national language, agriculture, ethnic minorities, and the national system of public education.

Regrettably, the first Georgian constitution lasted only four days. On February 25, 1921, Georgia was occupied by the Russian Red army of Bolsheviks that brought Soviet rule and halted Georgia's democratic development for about seven decades before re-establishment of the Independence in 1991.

The Government of the Democratic Republic of Georgia in exile continued to be recognized internationally as the only legal government and unrelentingly proceeded to oppose the Soviet regime.

The 26 May, the day of the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Georgia - the Independence Day, holds significant place in hearts and minds of Georgians. It represents the collective aspirations of the Georgian society to determine its own destiny, to strengthen independence, consolidate

democracy, and join the European family. On that day, all country pays tribute to the visionaries who paved the way for an Independent Georgia. Among them, the first Georgian women parliamentarians have a special place.

After Norway, Georgia was the second European state where women were elected at the National Parliament. This happened on November 22, 1918, when the Georgian National Council approved the law - "Regulations on Elections to the Constituent Assembly". The law was highly progressive due to its substantive and political significance. It states that "the Constituent Assembly is composed of members, elected by the general population, despite gender, by equal, direct and secret ballot with proportional representation, according to the rule;" "citizens of both genders of the republic are entitled to vote in the Constituent Assembly Elections if they attain the age of 20 on election day". In the elections of 1919, five women were elected to the Constituent Assembly, at a time when in the majority of countries in the world women had no right to vote; furthermore, Kristine Sharashidze was elected as a member of presidium (Secretary). In 1919, the Constituent Assembly of the Legislative Body of the Democratic Republic of Georgia consisted of 130 deputies, five of which were women:

### ***Minadora Orjonikidze-Toroshelidze***



Photo Courtesy of the National Parliamentary Library of Georgia.

In 1918 Minadora Orjonikidze-Toroshelidze assisted the National Council of Georgia to adopt the Act of Independence, which established the Democratic Republic of Georgia in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution

of 1917. Ms. Orjonikidze-Toroshelidze was one of the signatories of the act. In 1919, Minadora was elected a member of the Constituent Assembly of the Democratic Republic of Georgia and she was appointed to become a member of the Labour and Public Health Commission. In February 1921, during the attack of the Soviet Russian army, Ms. Orjonikidze-Toroshelidze worked for the Georgian Red Cross. After Georgia became a part of the Soviet Union, she joined the anti-Soviet movement. After an uprising in Georgia, Minadora was exiled to Moscow and she was not allowed to return to Tbilisi until 1950. She passed away in 1967.

### ***Eleonora Ter-Parsegova-Makhviladze***

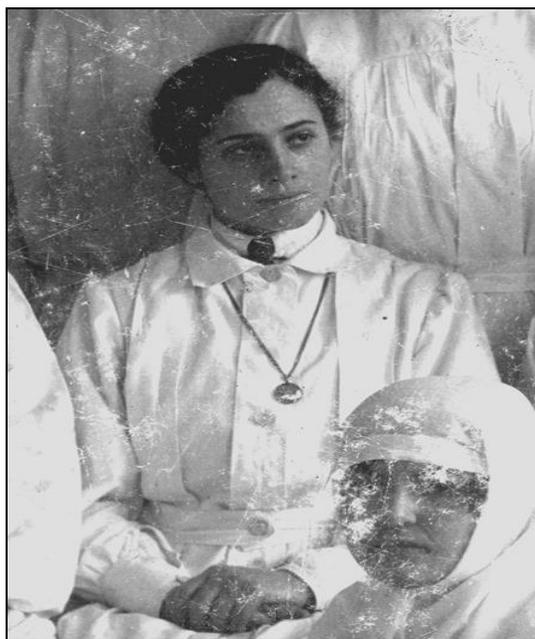


Photo Courtesy of the Soviet Past Research Laboratory

Ter-Parsegova-Makhviladze joined the Georgian Social-Democratic Labour Party in 1902. After the Manifesto of October 17, 1905, the Sukhumi branch of the Batumi Committee of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, of which Ter-Parsegova was a member, took effective control of the town, briefly replacing an Imperial administration. She was frequently seen marching at the head of demonstrations and she propagated revolutionary ideas among her students. After the revolution was crushed, she was

imprisoned until the 1917 revolution toppled down the Russian monarchy. In 1918 Ms. Ter-Parsegova-Makhviladze was elected a member of the Constituent Assembly of the Democratic Republic of Georgia. Later, in 1926 she was arrested by the Special Commission of the Georgian SSR and she was deported from Transcaucasia. After returning from exile in 1930, Eleonora engaged in private pedagogical activities. Her date of death is unknown.

### ***Kristine Sharashidze***



Photo Courtesy of National Archives of Georgia

Kristine Sharashidze joined the Georgian Social-Democratic Labour Party in 1905. She actively participated in revolutionary demonstrations in Tbilisi between 1905 and 1906. In addition, Ms. Sharashidze wrote in the newspaper. In November 1905, during the Armenian-Tatar clashes in Tbilisi, she provided medical assistance to the injured. In 1917 Kristine was a member of the board of the Society for the Spreading of Literacy among Georgians, as well as a member of the founding society of Tbilisi State

University. In 1919 Ms. Sharashidze was elected a member of the Constituent Assembly of the Democratic Republic of Georgia. She was a member of the Secretariat of the Presidium and a member of the Library, Editorial and Public Education Commissions.

### ***Anna Sologhashvili***



Photo Courtesy of National Archives of Georgia

Anna Sologhashvili joined the Georgian Social-Democratic Labour Party in 1903. From 1918 she contributed to the activities performed by the National Council of Georgia and signed the Act of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Georgia. In 1919 she was elected a member of the Constituent Assembly of the Democratic Republic of Georgia and she was appointed to become a member of the Library and Editorial Commission. After Georgia became a part of the Soviet Union, she was involved in the anti-Soviet movement. She was arrested in 1937 by the regional department of the South Ossetian Autonomous District. On November 27, 1937, the so-called Troika accused Anna Sologhashvili of anti-Soviet and anti-collective propaganda and “chauvinist” sentiments, as well as links with the Menshevik leader Ramishvili. She was sentenced to death.

***Elizabeth Nakashidze-Bolkvadze***



Photo Courtesy of the Soviet Past Research Laboratory

Elizabeth Nakashidze-Bolkvadze joined the Georgian Social-Democratic Labour Party in 1904. She worked with the peasants in the Guria region. In 1905, after a split in the Social Democratic Party, she sided with the Mensheviks. In 1907, she was elected a member of the Guria Committee of the Social Democratic Party. After the arrest and deportation of the members of the Guria Committee in 1907, Elizabeth was expelled from Transcaucasia and she returned to Georgia after the February Revolution of 1917. On March 20, 1917, Ms. Nakashidze was elected chairwoman of the Guria Women's Society. In March 1918, she was a candidate for membership in the Central Committee of the Georgian Social-Democratic Labour Party. In 1919 she was elected a member of the Constituent Assembly of the Democratic Republic of Georgia and became a member of the Labour Commission.

Even though Georgian women were one of the first in the world to win the right to vote, the race for equal opportunities still is going on. Despite

challenges, women in Georgia have repeatedly proven that they can break stereotypes and they have a great potential.

Since May 26, 1918, Georgia witnessed numerous trials and turbulences, including historic changes, economic hardships, wars and the continued occupation of Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/South Ossetia (20% of country's territories) by the Russian Federation. Despite these challenges, over the past three decades after the restoration of independence in 1991, with strong efforts of the Georgian people and support of our friends, Georgia has emerged as a trusted and committed partner on the international arena, with its geopolitical, economic, and cultural interests extending globally. As the EU candidate country since 2023, Georgia remains firmly committed to the process of the European and Euro-Atlantic integration that is a civilizational choice of the Georgian people enshrined in the Georgian Constitution.

In 2025, we mark the National Day of Georgia on the background of the challenging security environment in region in times of distractions and unpredictability. Sustainable and just peace is essential for a better future and Georgia is committed to strengthening stability in our region in close partnership will all likeminded partners.

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