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About Tomorrow – Remembering Yesterday While Bearing in Mind the Present Day

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The past year of 2020 was not just another year. Its dramatic nature showed us once again – and quite severely – the full intensity of the challenges that could arise when several large-scale crises occur at once. In fact, in parallel with the distortion of the international political line, economic imbalance and inadequate governance systems, the global pandemic has further exposed the old scars and added new, hitherto unknown traits to the already familiar picture.

The natural result of this process is the study of the risks and dangers posed by the pandemic, their ongoing diagnoses, and the search for effective ways of solving the crisis. Undoubtedly, it is important to deepen academic knowledge while working on the issues raised, but it is much more difficult and takes great responsibility to adapt the relevant knowledge in such a way so that it can help to actually address urgent concrete issues.

“From third to first”: Time and Necessity

Georgia is facing a multi-component task that needs to be solved. We must analyze with equal accuracy both the dynamics of global and regional trends and the anatomy of domestic challenges and determine the impact of the interrelationship of the first two and their effect on the third. Also, to determine with a minimal margin of error the forms of national consciousness and institutional development corresponding to world events. This task is aggravated by the fact that in parallel with finally overcoming the remaining, so-called Soviet legacy, the urgent objective is to materialize the idea of modern Georgian national-state unity oriented not merely towards tomorrow (time flies fast even without looking back), but the day after tomorrow.

We have mentioned before the uselessness of theoretical exercises detached from practice. However, it is also a fact that the success of any affair is based on understanding its conceptually correct beginnings, substantiating the principles that define the system, and finding the optimal point of intersection between historical memory, current process, and future mosaic. It is only possible with this condition to achieve what we often talk about: the formation of a systemic vision of the country’s development, the consolidation of society around it and, already for this time and generation, performing a modern miracle of our nation – jumping from the third world to the first.

Since the purpose of this article is not just a call and a reminder, we will try to point out some essential circumstances or factors without which long-term and consistent state development remains a hostage of routine puzzles, and national energy, talent and resources are consumed to overcome a daily, endless whirlpool of “one step forward, two steps back”. Overall, we may end up receiving an illusion “filled” with deceptive victories and ostensible successes “achieved” in one single circle. Of course, something like this is not in the interests of any of us – one of the main guarantees of our overall success is natural unity.

The environment that is formed around us

The more modest the role of Georgia in modern global processes, the greater the impact of these processes on the present-day life and development of our country. Such an inverse relationship would not be difficult to explain if not for the rearrangement of international relations from already well-known foundations to new, yet undeveloped and quite complex, risky, and – in many ways – muddy and untested beginnings.

We have been talking about this process many times over the past year, and in several articles have tried to specify and discuss its signs and peculiarities. Also, we have repeatedly related this process to Georgia’s agenda, defining as to how certain relationships are connected to key directions and what should be the purposeful response of Georgia; or what type of prevention should be in place to reduce the harmful effects of global trends as much as possible and how to keep up with positive trends and make the most out of any benefits.

The list of issues to be discussed in this regard is extensive. However, for now we will focus on just a few to highlight their natural bond with our country. We think we should unconditionally consider the role and weight of the great powers in the new system of international relations – as

well as their relationships in the global and regional contexts. Such significant attention to the “constellation of the First World” carries a simple rationale: regardless of the various teachings, schools, or practical doctrines in international relations, the nature and content of these relationships were based on one simple and unequivocal factor and will remain so in the future. This factor is in the global geopolitical and geo-economic scene of “the powerful ones of this world”: *the power of global and superregional states and their impact on processes and outcomes*. Even though it is true that the theorists and practitioners have been often “colorizing” different stages of the twentieth and this centuries with fascinating doctrinal titles, behind them stood the laws of realism imbued by the world of Hobbes. We would not make this discussion any simpler by simply stating that power always rises. Of course, this is not always the case, but for the most part it is. And we must be ready for that – both for the ideology corresponding to *Georgian realism* and for the correct and adequate adaptation of the national resource to this ideology.

Georgians have many friends and partners in the world today. We have enemies as well as those who envy us: sometimes they are open and sometimes concealed. But whatever the balance or equation of friends and foes, the message of the New World Order is unmistakably read as follows: *in advocating our development and interests, we must, first and foremost, rely on ourselves*. And whatever is the support of the international system and law, its effectiveness and efficiency must rely on the main foundation – Georgian realism, qualified pragmatism and, in terms of values, - rationalism.

Following this introduction, we will briefly review a few sub-items.

New Cold War?

The emergence of a new geopolitical contour in Eurasia is largely driven by the so-called Cold War between the US and China. We do not use the qualifier “so-called” here randomly – the use of these words is associated with one common mistake: equating their relations with those of the Cold War between the US and the USSR.

If we consider a few fundamental differences between these two confrontations, then we can properly understand the comparison as a mistake. Let us start with the fact that the leading line of the Cold War between the US and the USSR was overwhelmingly revealed in the rivalry between two ideological camps, while the confrontation between the US and China is not as much about ideology as about the distribution of spheres of influence mainly. China believes that the centuries-long “era of humiliation” is over, and it is time for the world to not only acknowledge their desire to be, but also to at last recognize China as a great state. A number of Chinese initiatives in recent years – both within the country and abroad – have served the purpose of achieving this goal. These initiatives are well known to readers.

Beijing’s traditional official rhetoric about the non-use of force against other states is noteworthy, as is its involvement in international institutions and various projects. This activity of China became especially noticeable during Trump’s presidency, and it has been followed by a reduction in cooperation by the United States in various international formats. Also noteworthy

is the extraordinary attention paid to the Chinese model of governance during the pandemic, which has sparked a debate over the effectiveness of liberal and state forms of capitalism.

Without going into the details of drawing a comparison between the systems, this confrontation carries one very practical significance for Georgia: *we are in one of the key geographical and geopolitical areas of the Eurasian space – the macro-region of the Black and Caspian Seas*. In the context of a new series of large-scale competition of states in the Eurasian space, the growth of different interests in this macro-region is inevitable. This is directly related to the urgency of our state security and public resilience, as well as to the further deepening of our strategic alliances strengthened by the Constitution, so that it acquires new forms and essence. In addition, this line of alliances must somehow – which is utterly difficult! – be drawn in the constant mode of tension management and constant communication with large regional participants.

In short, Georgian realism must, in the shortest period, accommodate the two main tools for managing the coexistence of our national interests with the interests of others in the region, which lies *in effective restraint and effective dialogue*. We understand that the topic needs to be expanded upon, and it will be the subject of our next discussion. At this stage we will limit ourselves to a brief overview.

“More NATO in Georgia and more Georgia in NATO”

We all know this phrase by heart and have been hearing it for years now. The real meaning of which, similar to a famous Georgian song, is that the present might not favor us, but the future will belong to us (and not someone else).

Clearly, the process of integration with the Euro-Atlantic Alliance is not static: it is moving forward, acquiring new elements and content. At the same time, the significant and alarming processes around our country and allies is not motionless either – they seem to be developing at a faster pace than the intensity of NATO integration statements or even the addition of a few extra elements to the cooperation package. In this sense, despite our Foreign Ministry's promising assessments, we do not think that the summary document of the last NATO summit has created the adequate effect that would be directly proportional to this period and its needs. There is a feeling that the dynamics of our membership in the Alliance has become a subject to the “a little later, a little bit less” approach, which is detrimental to an overall Western security design in Georgia, the region, and beyond.

In all fairness, it should be noted that the lack of the desired rhythm and pace in the process cannot and should not be attributed to the political will of Brussels alone. Here again we must recall the “inverted” world left behind by the post-classic Cold War period, and the pandemic made the system of international relations even more unpredictable. The uncertainty of the general environment is compounded by the noticeable fragmentation of a single political line within the alliance itself. To illustrate this point, we will cite as examples the socio-political differences and heterogeneity between NATO countries in Western and Eastern Europe; Turkish peculiarity, “to do what will benefit Turkey in the first place”; and European “strategic

autonomy” in response to Trump’s famous policies. But all of these are clearly detached and far away from solving practical issues in the context of a country whose territory is occupied and its creeping expansion (say, annexation) is not interrupted, and the neighborhood environment requires the introduction of feasible (and not declarative) security mechanisms for the same country. At the end of the day, it is a question of fully considering the interests of a country that has not backed down for a single minute in its contribution to the common good.

Proper attention has been paid to the practical aspects of this particular issue in the past and is still being addressed. Here we just wanted to point out that it is now time for politically courageous decisions and effective steps. In this case as well, there are several options for our country and its allies to consider – starting with the collective and ending with regional or bilateral security systems. We have described them in previous publications. Proper readiness and realism are required to analyze each decision in a timely manner and to implement them without any hesitation. This is necessary for Georgia to have more national and more Black Sea regional stability, and not for the purpose of being perceived as a source of threat in our neighborhood.

Having the “luck” of being a neighbor with Russia

As a result of the Russo-Georgia war of 2008 and the annexation of Crimea, Russia’s exclusivity, in their view, seemed to be unchallenged in their “near abroad”. But this status was still fragile, which from time to time has been confirmed by Georgian and Ukrainian cases. The Second Nagorno-Karabakh War and, as a result, the November 10 agreement of the previous year, *shifted Russian interest in the neighborhood to a sort of geopolitical cohabitation*. Quite important geographical zones have emerged, where Moscow has to coexist with the interests of other countries or agree on certain “cooperative” formats concerning such interests.

At the same time, it should be noted that, just like Marquez’s *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, it is inadmissible to loosen up vigilance in respect to Russia’s current capabilities. Despite the repeated “Foretold Chronicles” of the Russian power factor in recent years, its geopolitical decline has become a slow process, and even in “death” it is impressively “revived” from time to time, affecting not only the immediate neighborhood but also political events further out. For example, in recent years, Moscow’s geopolitical stance has been projecting hard and soft power in the Middle East, the Balkans, and North Africa. The manifestation of Russian interventions has been substantially diversified – starting with increasing the capabilities of its Expeditionary Armed Forces and continuing with external interventions in the form of a “public-private partnership” (for example, in some cases the use of forces like the well-known Wagner Group).

From the world’s point of view, one of the most popular research questions has remained as a dilemma since the times of Barack Obama: *is Russia a global or regional superpower?* This question has been the subject of many interesting papers and public discussions in international relations and in regional intersections, however, we believe that there is still no unequivocal, convincing answer.

But for us, as a country in the immediate neighborhood of Russia, the question of another formulation is much more relevant: is there a small probability beyond public statements that our country will remain the object of some kind of compromise between the West and Russia (“deal” is certainly not the right word)? Hopefully not. We believe the answer is no. But plausible evidence around the issue requires the effective and timely steps that we have already mentioned in this article. Otherwise, there will still be a high risk that the country will be torn between two major political-normative camps and a gray area will continue to exist for many more years. This, in turn, may at some point lead to strategic uncertainty (internal political turmoil, social stagnation, etc.) and to a negative demonstration effect in the eyes of the world (e.g., limiting transit potential, diminishing investment attractiveness).

Such convincing action and purposefulness towards the ongoing regional processes by both Tbilisi and its allies will ultimately advance our partnership. It will help us to use our unified resources more effectively for restraint, sustainability, and communication. The unity of these components does not only mean raising military standards, per se. Certainly, in the overall picture – and specifically in the military one – the objective of security is a top priority. However, the result of the Georgian-Western concentrated effort is the depiction of a much bigger and more complex outcome: *to make Georgia analogous to West Germany or South Korea in the south of Eurasia*. Achieving this high-level task requires solving a number of internal and external factors, institutional development, and perfection. This is how the country should be prepared to function fully in the conditions of long-term (hopefully not so long?) coexistence with an unfavorable environment.

Something that must be done by ourselves

The support of the international community and Georgia’s allies and partners is tremendous for the final success of the Georgian cause. Certainly, along with this support, there are issues that can only be dealt with and resolved by the citizens of our country.

Within the list of such issues, we must follow the established rule and order to be able to single out the main ones based on which the rest are built. Sure, it is difficult to enumerate all the priorities in one piece as it is a subject of much wider discussion and such discussions are not uncommon in Georgian society nowadays.

But we will be joining those expansive discussions with the present article and draw the reader’s attention to some still topical, critical issues.

About the role of societal participation

Identifying the right priorities in society and consolidating around them remains a major challenge. We cannot agree with those who claim that Georgian society is too polarized. In our opinion this statement is invalid, because radical polarization also requires at least a few value systems which would lead to a concentration of a certain segment around this or that system. This is especially true when at one stage or another there are no clear outlines of a national or state ideology from either the government or the opposition, and without a clear party system and party programs, party ideologies, and a systematic approach with regards to state-building

making the use of such a profound word – “polarization” – a nearly hollow sound. Thus, when some marginal or “mainstream” political groups and the media outlets that support them (there is still a long way before we reach the real media) ennoble certain challenges by garmenting them with “the incompatibility of political views”, “a conflict of systemic views” or any other grandiloquent language, it is nothing but the inability to offer a solution for tomorrow and a lack of courage to explain the reasons.

These reasons are probably multifaceted, but their main essence is the ignorance of a significant part of the political class, lack of desire and will to develop their own knowledge and skills, and objective inability to offer new and reasoned solutions. Moreover, looking at the current picture, one gets the impression that our political culture is stuck in the deep past, and there is practically no power and desire of self-renewal and rejuvenation left at the hands of the active figures (those who claim to speak on behalf of society). Without adapting to the modern standards of political life, the qualitative development of the country is practically a doomed attempt.

In such a situation, the main purpose of a healthy, balanced and responsible public discourse is to prepare a proper constructive background for changing political standards. The consequent result of this process is the accumulation of the necessary dose of “internal pressure”, which leads to the regeneration of the Georgian political field and the establishment of the necessary political signature of the country.

And another point of view: We believe that the contribution of any political power in the development of the country should be determined not by the statistical index of parliamentary mandates, but by the number and scale of state initiatives and the degree of their implementation. Statistics come and go, and in historical memory their duration is short, while initiatives with profound and long-term results carry, in fact, a universal significance.

Robust institutions are the face of the country

When reviewing international challenges, we focused on the role and purpose of the country’s institutional arrangement. In this section, we would like once more to emphasize that, no matter how successful and diverse Georgia’s foreign cooperation may be, the country’s resilience, strength, and development are nourished by its internal resources, including, above all, a proper state institutional arrangement and the integrity and soundness of public service.

In order to achieve any goal, it is necessary to establish professional public-official standards once and for all, which excludes the selection and promotion of human resources on the basis of political or party affiliation. Today the situation is relatively better in this respect, although it is still sadly far from a public service culture which is based on a prestigious, trustworthy, and real meritocracy. The dominance of those “adorned with attributes” should end in the country, and the way to govern the nation – and, consequently, to responsibilities and obligations – should be opened to talented, brilliant, people with genuine intellectual potential. “Brain drain” from the public service should be replaced by a “brain inflow”.

Here we would like to note that for the sake of an authentic authority, it would be good if the legal requirement for holding a high state-political position would be defined by service in the

country's armed forces. It is also necessary to think about increasing the prestige of the Georgian National Special Services by recruiting highly-qualified personnel. Also, the new role and purpose of our foreign service and diplomacy needs to be reconsidered, which requires full-fledged and courageous measures in the personnel and structural part. These and other steps will either be planned and implemented as soon as possible – or never.

One of the necessary determinants of this whole process is the fact that many state institutions have the need to “find” themselves again. Some need to be reminded of their immediate functions, while some others, considering the modern reality, need to define new functions and modify existing ones. We think that it is impossible to elaborate further on this issue in this article at this stage but any such detailed “breakdown” in practice will be made possible only once we are firmly established on several inviolable principles for the service of the country and national affairs.

Georgian “soft power” – myth or reality?

It depends on our ambition – as well as on sensible and rational contemporaneity built on ethnocultural and national state heritage. The first is not difficult for us: the culture is historically rich and gives Georgians a deserved sense of pride. The second one is problematic: due to the long break in the line of statehood, besides, due to internal conflicts, external aggression since the restoration of independence as well as great changes in the world in such a brief period of history, the final outline of the modern Georgian state has not yet been completed.

One of the main – but not only! – conditions for the successful completion of this process is to find the functional purpose of our country and its usefulness in the regional or international arena. The basis for this was founded in the 90s of the last century, although this process later was slowed down. However, it must be renewed and the need for it can be explained by two main arguments: first – a state with a functioning purpose is a source of mobilization of its internal resources and their periodic renewal; second – international-regional usefulness contributes to the need for external attention and assistance that help mitigate threats and risks.

In addition to the above, success in the external and internal arenas is a matter of dignity not only for Georgian society, but also for our country's international allies and partners. A successful walk on this path will be the most compelling and convincing answer to the skeptical question: how right were our choices in moving through challenges and setbacks, as well as our reforms and changes? Moreover, the success of the Georgian case will be equal to the effect of the “soft power” of Georgian origin, which can create a very specific and interesting historical example in the formation of a new order of relations.

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