

A b s t r a c t s

Dreamland Georgia Interpreting Culture and Politics

Aka Morchiladze

Tbilisi (p)revisited

Sketches of a city's history

Tbilisi is a large city in a small country. Tbilisi is an illimitable world of its own, which is drenched in history, which knows the pain of tragedy and the pleasure of comedy. The history of the city is dominated by occupation and battles for liberation, devastation and rebirth. It still retains its colour today. Without Tbilisi, Georgia would not be possible – either in geographical or ethnographical, political or cultural terms.

F. Thun-Hohenstein, Zaal Andronikashvili

The Colchis and the sea

Elements of a symbolic spatial order in Georgia

Georgia, a country in the Caucasus. This view from the outside corresponds to the image Georgians have of themselves, with the Black Sea relegated to the background. However, the ancient kingdom of Colchis, in what is now West Georgia, remained a popular destination among travellers until the 19th century, who wanted to see the sites from the Argonaut mythology for themselves. In Georgia, the first novel that dealt with the legend of the theft of the Golden Fleece was not written until 1895. During the Soviet era, the ancient myths were used as propaganda for large-scale economic projects, and to anchor the Soviet Union in the history of human civilisation. The symbolic order of space that Otar Chiladze depicts in his novel, *A Man Was Going Down the Road*, is entirely different. Here, the sea symbolises foreign influences and a loss of identity, while the Caucasus stands for the indigenous, for a sense of rootedness. The conflict surrounding opening or closure, change or preservation, sea or land, dominates the culture and politics in Georgia to this day.

Jörg Stadelbauer

Use or protect?

Conflicts about architectural cultural heritage in Georgia

Georgia is proud of its varied landscape between the Rioni lowlands and the peaks of the Greater Caucasus, between the moist Black Sea coast and the dry steppes in the

east, between open agricultural landscapes and huge tracts of forest. It is also proud of its rich architectural cultural heritage, which offers potential for tourism. Therefore Georgia wishes to have this heritage recognised internationally. However, this frequently leads to conflicts, since different interests collide with each other: local and national, economic and conservational. State authorities, commercial businesses from different sectors, the church, the local population and national and international monument preservationists all wrestle with each other. In some places, a fragile balance has been achieved, while in others, cultural heritage sites have been destroyed.

Zaal Andronikashvili

Poetry in pursuit of truth

Georgia: a literary biography 1988-2018

Georgia can look back on 1,500 years of the written word, with Rustaveli's epos 'The Knight in the Panther's Skin' being the first literary work of a secular nature in the early 13th century. However, writers found it almost impossible to liberate themselves from their proximity to those in power – even as their critics. It was only from the end of the 1980s that authors of the new Georgian literature succeeded in doing so. At the same time, they too focussed on central themes of social upheaval, such as war and violence, women breaking free of their traditionally assigned role, the new poverty and the new power of the church. Bound to a language that is spoken by only around four million people, the number of potential readers of Georgian literature remains small. However, it includes works that can without doubt be classified as great literature.

Giga Zedania

Traditional and modern

Paradoxes of Georgia's political system

In Georgia, a political system has developed that meets fundamental requirements of democracy. There is a constitution, there are elections, and there is a government and an opposition. Politics, the economy and the legislative system are differentiated, and the country has modern institutions. At the same time, neo-patrimonial politicians are undermining the political institutions and blurring the divisions between the private and public spheres. The state is characterised by the simultaneous application of modern and traditional practices. Authoritarian and illiberal tendencies coexist with a constitutional and liberal approach. The prospect of Euro-Atlantic integration and the commitments this entails Georgia are important in ensuring that the establishment of a liberal democracy remains the goal of Georgian society and politics.

Nino Lejava

Polarised, fragmented, de-politicised

Nino Lejava on politics and parties in Georgia

In Georgia, the political arena is dominated by influential men, while parties play a subordinate role. The real lines of conflict between the wealthy and the poor are not reflected in the party system. The 'Georgian Dream' party, which describes itself as being social democratic, also does not act as a representative of the interests of the weaker

sections of society. The political discourse frequently revolves around the relationship with Russia and the West. Here, the fact is ignored that the government party, which is accused of having close ties with Russia, has signed an association agreement between the EU and Georgia. Equally, people forget that all parties seek to associate themselves with the Orthodox Church, which does indeed disseminate socio-political ideas that are propagated by Moscow.

Franziska Smolnik
Georgia on the New Silk Road
Ambitions, conditions, restrictions

In Georgia, China is rapidly gaining in importance. Trade has risen and China is a major investor in Georgia. Georgia's government aims to use Beijing's vision of establishing a New Silk Road to make the country a part of the southern Eurasian corridor. In 2017, Georgia signed a free trade agreement with China. A new infrastructure, including ports and railway lines, is intended to facilitate the transit of goods. Whether this hope fulfils remains open. The political consequences of China's engagement in Georgia are unknown, too. Georgia's government holds, that western integration and intensive trade with the East are compatible goals.