

Georgia in Europe: 1925

As the Georgian Democratic Republic was occupied by the Soviet Russian Army in 1921, the Parliament asked the government's leading figures and the army to emigrate and seek assistance abroad. Most chose to move to France. From there, the government chair and an undisputed leader of Georgian Social Democrats, Noe Jordania, used his knowledge and influence to mobilize the European nations to support his occupied country. More than ever, this seemed possible as the Socialists gained respectability in Europe and even entered government, notably in Germany and the United Kingdom.

But just as their influence grew, the European Socialists were divided: should they treat Soviet Russia (and the newly formed Soviet Union) as a socialist state? Or is the government in the Kremlin a profoundly anti-democratic one, a mere continuation of the imperialist policies of the Tsarist Empire under a different ideological guise? Jordania, an influential figure in the Socialist International, argued the latter. Leafing through his publicist papers written in 1924 and 1925 reveals a vision of

Europe – and Russia's place in it – that strikingly echoes the political dynamic and eventual configuration that emerged after World War II. Writings of the exiled leader also shed light on the permanence of Georgia's interests.

A Particular Moment in History

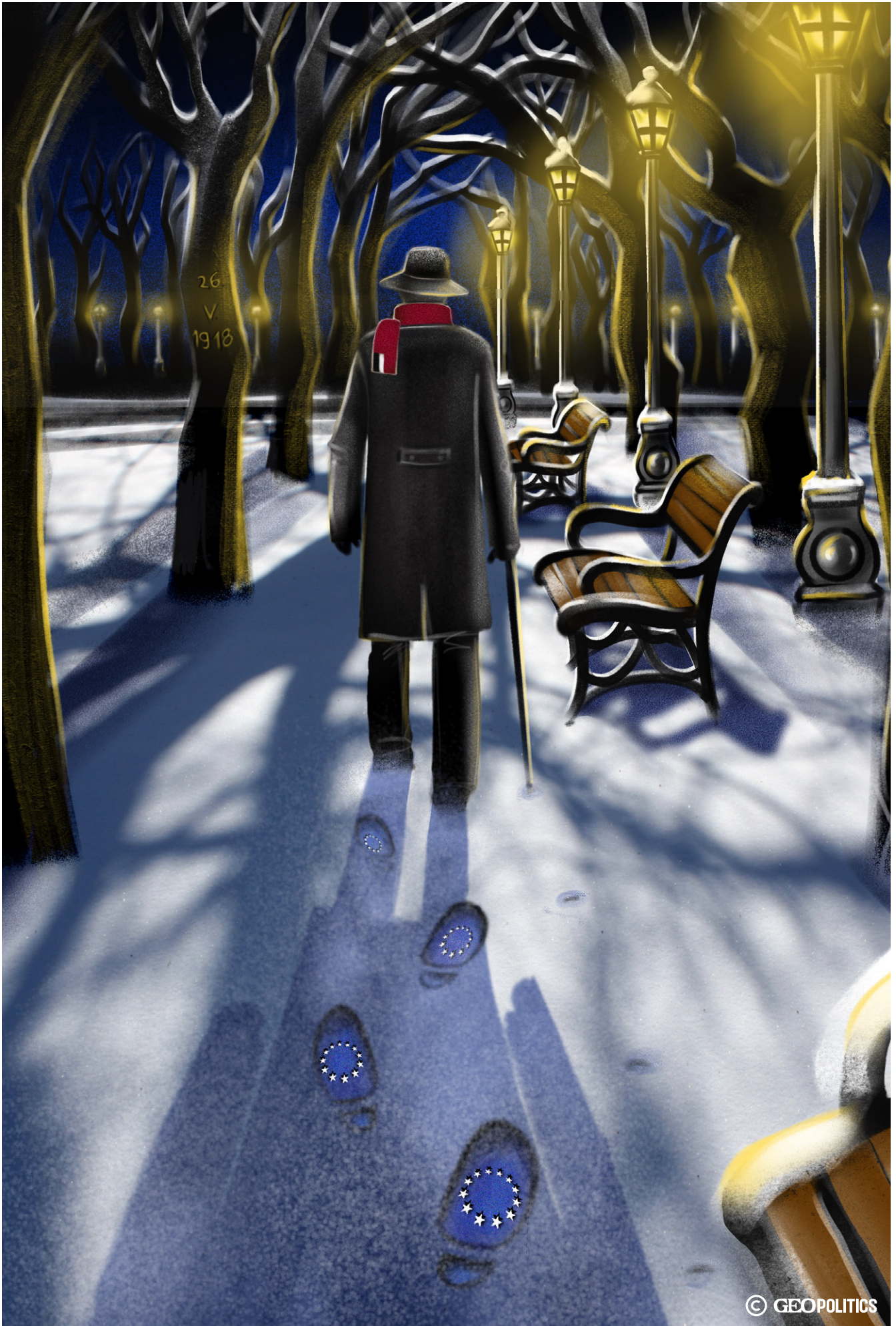
The year 1925 was a particular moment in European history with some very contemporary echoes: Russia's role was questioned, and Europe stood divided after a major war, yet hopes existed that a rules-based international system could resolve the pre-existing conflicts.

From the 1917 revolution, Bolshevik Russia was treated as an international pariah, not only because it betrayed its allies by stepping out of World War I through the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk but also because it refused to honor the Tsarist government's debts at the 1922 Genoa Conference and nationalized foreign-owned industries. Still, the Kremlin tried to breach the unity of Europe and – unsurprisingly – found a situational ally in another pariah – a defeated Germany, signing the Treaty



JABA DEVDARIANI
Contributor

Jaba Devdariani, a seasoned analyst of Georgian and European affairs, has over two decades of experience as an international civil servant and advisor to both international organizations and national governments. His significant roles include leading the political office of OSCE in Belgrade from 2009 to 2011 and serving as the Director for International Organizations (UN, CoE, OSCE) at the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2011-2012. Currently, as a volunteer co-editor for Europe Herald, a Civil.ge project (FB/@EuropeHerald), Devdariani dedicates his expertise to elucidating European current affairs for a broader audience.



of Rapallo in 1922 to normalize relations, establish diplomatic relations, and expand economic cooperation.

In the UK, an event that we would now call a “hybrid operation” brought down the Labor government in October 1924 after the so-called “Zinoviev Letter,” purporting the spread of the Communist revolution in the UK, was published on the eve of elections. Although [we now know](#) it was an elaborate forgery (most likely by Russian emigres aided by the UK Tories), this was not known then; thus, the UK significantly hardened its position towards the USSR. Diplomatic relations established in February 1924 deteriorated and would be broken off in 1927.

As for Germany, the realization was dawning in victorious capitals of Europe that crippling reparation and the occupation of the Ruhr region may have been good revenge but not good politics. Hyperinflation and political instability in Berlin – shaken by several high-profile political assassinations – were becoming a headache, especially because they were creating an opening for the newly assertive Moscow and its vehicle for subversion – the Communist International (Comintern).

The Reparations Commission, created by the Allied Powers, put together an eminent committee in 1923 to resolve this conundrum. It was headed by Charles G. Dawes, a former army general, banker, and politician. The Dawes Commission came up with an economic model for reparations that could have been manageable without tearing Germany into pieces. Despite the acute resistance from the Nazi and Communist parties, the Reichstag voted for the plan. And economically, it worked: Germany’s economy recovered, production increased 50% in five years, and unemployment fell sharply. The years 1924-1929 became known in Germany as the “Golden Twenties.” The humiliating occupa-

tion of Germany’s Ruhr region by the allies ended in August 1925 and Dawes received the Nobel Peace Prize for his troubles.

Georgia Connection

Jordania was residing in France at the moment and reeling under the pain of the failed 1924 uprising in Georgia, which cost the lives of hundreds, if not thousands, of his party comrades and other Georgian patriots. Despite this tragic setback, the Social Democratic Party of Georgia persisted in its demand for the liberation of Georgia and its full independence.

“The demand for Georgian independence is not a utopia, is not a dream, it is a realistic demand, which lays on the highway of history as a necessary, unavoidable step.”

“The demand for Georgian independence is not a utopia, is not a dream, it is a realistic demand, which lays on the highway of history as a necessary, unavoidable step,” wrote Jordania in an article entitled “Our Tactics” published by the party organ *Brdzola (Combat)* in May 1925. Marxist to the core and committed to the dialectic view of history, Jordania argued that the “national moment is just as natural for humankind as a democratic moment [...] A democracy naturally becomes a nation, and a nation inevitably becomes a democracy. If you reject this, you are an orthodox Bolshevik; if you admit both – you remain within the framework of history.”

Based on this assertion, he argued that socialism had the development of a democratic, independent nation-state as its precondition and that the Bolshevik attempt to leapfrog that stage was leading Russia to economic catastrophe at home and conflict abroad.

Economic Plight of the Soviets and Its Foreign Policy Implications

“Georgia’s liberation is possible as a result of Russia’s internal and external conflicts,” Jordania argued. Looking at Soviet Russia, he was concluding – quite ahead of his time – that the Communist “super-structure” was trying to force its will on economic reality. By countering the fundamentally deterministic rules of economic relations, Bolsheviks, in Jordania’s mind, were engendering multiple explosive contradictions, conflicts, and aberrations in economic politics.

“Georgia’s liberation is possible as a result of Russia’s internal and external conflicts.”

His analysis was that the Communist party, through exercising naked force, was managing to keep control of the state, but this control was substantively and constantly undermined by the underlying economic forces. As an example, he presented the fundamental modification of the Bolshevik economic policy – “the crusade against the bourgeoisie and the ‘kulaks’ (rich peasantry) ended by the creation of the new bourgeoisie and the legislation that favors the ‘kulaks’” under the [New Economic Policy \(NEP\)](#), Jordania observed.

Such political opportunism by a single party conceals “its combat with itself, its beliefs and its own program.” If it wants to allow individual economic relations, the Communist government would have to sooner or later concede to the democratic political form and “recognize the sovereign power of people,” Jordania forecasted. He saw the attempt to impose a state economy as a dead end but as a process with strong foreign policy implications: “In the private economy, the expansion of industry leads to an inevitable expansion of wealth,” Jordania argued, “but in the Soviet economy, this

rule does not hold – on the contrary, the growth of industry may be accompanied by impoverishment.” This is because instead of people generating and re-investing wealth, the Soviet state economy takes wealth from people and inserts it into inefficient, state-directed production, which cannot possibly identify, let alone meet, the needs of consumption, Jordania wrote.

This breakdown of fundamental economic logic makes Soviet Russia extremely exploitative and necessarily repressive at home to control the backlash from the disgruntled masses. But its foreign policy is inevitably aggressive, too, so that “it can compensate for the fundamental internal weakness by external resources.” By incessant intervention in affairs of the foreign states, the Kremlin is trying “to exert influence, covert or overt, so that they can be forced to sustain the Soviets by money or goods.”

Europe United

This is why an overture of the Allied Powers to Germany and the Dawes Plan was filling Jordania with the hope that Soviet Russia, exposed to its internal contradictions and facing a potentially united front of Europe, would transform or shed the Bolshevik regime – through evolution or revolution – and that Georgia’s “moment” of liberation would come again.

Jordania saw that “the disappointment is forcing Germany to look for allies and help in Europe.” However, beset by a chronic economic crisis, the Soviet Union failed Germany’s hopes of building an axis with Moscow against the Allied Powers. If Berlin (re)joined Europe, Russia would have to either mobilize against a united Europe and ultimately lose or join the League of Nations and, by doing so, recognize the principle of democracy and national self-determination. Jordania hoped this “means that the Georgian question will be raised and have to be resolved through arbitration” (Noe Jordania,

“Ongoing Political Moment,” Brdzola, 1925).

While this hope has proven naïve in retrospect, the analysis of the sources of Moscow’s conduct remains quite astute. Jordania argued that the “clearing up of the atmosphere in Europe demands first and foremost the elimination or, at the least, the pacification of the conflict [between Germany and France], the establishment of concord and good-neighborly relations between them.” The existence of what we now call the “European motor” would, in Jordania’s mind, isolate Russia and prevent it from playing the role of either an “international gendarme” or an “international spoiler” – the dominant foreign policy that Tsarist Russia pursued and the one that Bolshevik Russia is now “fully copying.”

In Europe, based on the understanding between Paris and Berlin, Jordania sees a “complete stabilization of international affairs” as the essential hope for small nations because the value and rules-based order becomes possible. He sees the system of “international arbitration of disputes” expand beyond the initial propositions of the Socialist party and become a generally accepted aspiration, while Russia “remains within the barbarian international rights of Tsarism.” For Jordania, this is “Europe’s fundamental political question: strengthening of the West’s moral unity which would leave its Eastern [despotic] enemy sidelined.”

While a united Europe was Jordania’s hope for the rights of oppressed nations, he was not naïve – he saw many socialist comrades flirt with Moscow and fretted about them denying Soviet Russia’s imperialism simply because it claimed to be socialist.

But while a united Europe was Jordania’s hope for the rights of oppressed nations, he was not naïve –

he saw many socialist comrades flirt with Moscow and fretted about them denying Soviet Russia’s imperialism simply because it claimed to be socialist.

“There are two political societies in Europe,” he wrote in his commentary about the Second Congress of the Labor and Socialist International held in Marseille in 1925, “the one of the West and the one of the East, which exist in two different realities. The first is threatened by capitalist imperialism and the second – by communist imperialism.” He argues that socialist principles reject war based on the values of solidarity and mutual understanding. These values are expressed through understanding and domestic compromise between classes within the democratic system and practiced internationally through common rules and arbitration. Communists, on the other hand, “are disciples of militarism and bloodshed.”

Jordania argues that the Western socialists “worry about their own troubles and often fail to adequately assess the ones beyond Western Europe” where “the national states are newly established, some like Georgia lost their independence again and are threatened by newly resurgent Bolshevik imperialism – not only threatening their economy, or some private parties, but their very existence, sovereignty, and independence.”

Jordania worries that the Marseille summit was ambiguous in stating that the parties reject “aggressive policies against Soviet Russia” – he thinks some may interpret it as a call to support the USSR in its conflict with “Western imperialism.” An early warning about the “Russia-understanders,” which still resonates today.

Permanence of Interests

This overview of only a small part of the infinite works and articles of only one—even if the most important-Georgian political émigré reveals the

permanence of Georgia's interests in relation to Europe and Russia.

Support for both the rules-based world order and European solidarity is thus a foreign policy condition sine qua non for Georgia.

Whatever ideological preferences, any party governing Georgia may only hope to retain independence in conditions of a rules-based international order underpinned by European – in Georgia's case, Franco-German – unity. Support for both

the rules-based world order and European solidarity is thus a foreign policy condition sine qua non for Georgia.

Telling is also the analysis of the Western weaknesses when confronted by the Russian ideological “smokescreens” – such as the formal adoption of the socialist doctrine following the October Revolution. The Soviet Union was always imperialistic, Georgia tells us, because its internal political logic of repression and economic logic of exploitation are mutually reinforcing. This is the lesson that still applies today ■