



Institute for Development
of Freedom of Information

The Overview of the Memory Politics of Georgia



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Table of Contents

Legal Dimension	3
Lustration	3
The Prevention of the Re-Emergence of Totalitarian Ideologies and the Spread of Totalitarian Symbolic	6
The Rehabilitation of Victims	14
Institutional Dimension	16
State Institutions/Organizations.....	16
Non-Governmental Organizations	17
Memorial Dimension	19
New Memorials.....	19
Museums.....	23
Conclusion	24

Legal Dimension

After the fall of the Soviet Union and Communism, post-Communist states have started the implementation of the regulations for preventing the re-emergence of the totalitarian regimes and ideologies similar to the Communist regime. These new regulations were necessary for the rethinking of the totalitarian past and the rehabilitation of victims, which is an integral part of the democratic transition. Some post-Communist countries successfully created a legal base for the prevention of the spread of totalitarian symbols and ideologies, lustration and the rehabilitation of victims. In some countries, this process has not even begun yet. Georgia is among those countries that, immediately after the fall of Communism, attempted to implement the regulations aimed at preventing the re-emergence of totalitarian ideologies similar to the Soviet Communist regime. However, due to some circumstances, there are still significant flaws in this process until now and the steps taken in this direction are not effective in some cases.

Lustration

Although, since 1991, there have been several attempts to implement the Lustration law in Georgia, the Georgian law “Freedom Charter” was only signed after 20 years, on 31 May 2011. The main reason for this was the fire in the KGB building during the Tbilisi Civil War which destroyed 210 000 archival files (80% of archival documents). Moreover, the employees of the former Soviet security services took a great number of documents to Moscow and until today, they are preserved in Russia. For effective lustration, the existence of such documents is of paramount importance.¹

The “Freedom Charter” adopted in 2011 has three purposes: 1. Elimination of the threat of crimes against the state, and terrorism and violation of the principles of state security; provision of the effective exercise of the legislative norms of Georgia and strengthening of national security in accordance with modern practices; 2. Provision of preventive measures against the principles of communist totalitarian and national socialist (Nazi) ideologies; 3. Removal of the symbols and names of cult buildings, memorials, monuments, bas-reliefs, inscriptions, streets, squares, villages and settlements of the communist totalitarian regime, as well as the prohibition of the propaganda instruments and other means of communist totalitarian and national socialist (Nazi) ideologies. For the above-mentioned purposes, the law foresees the creation of a special commission at the State Security Service. According to the law, the factions represented in the parliament of Georgia shall be granted the right to propose one candidate to the Commission, which is an important point as long as in the countries with the best practices of lustration, the legislative organs played a central role in this process.

The Commission collects data and keeps a database of persons, who have secretly collaborated with the intelligence services of the former USSR or who might be the subject of secret cooperation with the

¹ https://idfi.ge/public/upload/IDFI_2019/archieves_idfi/Vatcharadze_Regime%20Archives.pdf

intelligence services of the former USSR as provided for by the legislation of Georgia. The Commission also collects information on the use of symbols of the communist totalitarian and/or national socialist (Nazi) regimes and the use of state or local government property by administrative bodies, as well as information on cult buildings, memorials, monuments, bas-reliefs, inscriptions, names of the streets, squares, villages and settlements and other public spaces containing elements of communist totalitarian and national socialist (Nazi) ideologies and their propaganda or the names of their ideological leaders. The Commission 1. delivers decisions on registration in the database of data related to persons who have secretly collaborated or had secret connections with the intelligence services of the former USSR; 2. keeps secret any information delivered by persons who have secretly collaborated or had secret connections with the intelligence services of the former USSR, except when required by law; 3. addresses to the competent person in order to eliminate the symbols, memorials, bas-reliefs, inscriptions and names of communist totalitarian and national socialist (Nazi) ideologies; 3. publishes personal information on the identity of and data related to a person, who has secretly collaborated or had secret connections with the intelligence services of the former USSR and who holds an official position as referred to in Article 8 of this Law only in the event that they refuse to resign from office within the period prescribed by the Law.²

² <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/1381526?publication=15>



FREEDOM CHARTER

FREEDOM CHARTER ENCOMPASSES THREE MAJOR POINTS:



Strengthening of the national security



Eradication of totalitarian Communist and Nazi symbolic and ideologies



Creation of a special commission at the State Security Service, which will create a database of those persons who have collaborated with the repressive regime

ACCORDING TO THE FREEDOM CHARTER, PEOPLE, WHO HELD THE FOLLOWING POSITIONS UNTIL 9 APRIL 1991, CANNOT BE APPOINTED TO THE HIGH OFFICIAL POSITIONS:



FORMER SECRET AGENTS OF THE INTELLIGENCE SERVICES OF THE FORMER USSR, WHO:



Have refused to cooperate with the Special Services of the independent state of Georgia



Have been dismissed from the secret intelligence agency



Have discontinued cooperation with the Special Services unidentified reasons



Officers of the Committee for State Security of the former USSR who have refused to work for or who have been dismissed from the Special Services of the independent state of Georgia



The chairman of the Georgia State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting.



The Freedom Charter Commission collects information about the display of the communist totalitarian and fascist symbols in public and addresses to the competent person. In the case of addressing the competent person by the Commission, the competent person shall eliminate communist totalitarian and/or fascist symbols.

For studying the activities of the Commission established in accordance with the “Freedom Charter”, already in 2015, IDFI requested the information based on which, it became known that until 2015, the Commission had only gathered once and discussed the mechanisms for creating a registry foreseen by the “Freedom Charter”. It is also notable that according to the 1st paragraph of the 3rd Article of the Order #167 of the Minister of Internal Affairs issued on 28 February 2014, the Commission was obliged to meet at least once in every three months. However, Order #167, ordering the creation of the commission and defining its provisions, was annulled by Order #561 of the same Ministry on July 30th, 2015. The new Order #115 of the State Security Service issued on 21 December 2015 a new Commission was created and according to the Order #122 of 30 December 2015, changes were made to the Order #115. The regulation of minimal mandatory commission gatherings was changed and such regulation does no longer exist anymore.³

In 2018, IDFI requested the information from the State Security Service again. According to the information received from there, in 2016-2017, the Commission discussed the appeals regarding the proposed candidates to the official positions and related restrictions. However, such violations were not detected. It should also be noted that the State Security Service does not specify the number of such appeals.⁴

Based on all of the above-said, there are several challenges with regard to lustration in Georgia. First of all, the problem is that 80% of KGB documents were destroyed during the Tbilisi Civil War, which makes the full-scale lustration almost impossible in Georgia. Moreover, the problem is that the part of the archives may still be preserved in Russia. While there are tense relations between Russia and Georgia, the fact that the Russian government owns such documents can be a threat to Georgia.⁵ Especially, if we consider the attempts of the Russian government since 2016 to interfere in the elections of foreign countries, which is also mentioned in the US special prosecutor, Robert Muller’s report of 2019⁶, the existence of such documents in Russia acquires a whole new meaning while the detailed examination of the portfolios of the candidates for the elections or other official positions is almost impossible in Georgia. Also, the effectiveness of the “Freedom Charter” Commission is an important issue. According to the information requested and received by IDFI, it can be argued that the activities of the Commission are relatively vague. Moreover, although the law foresees the participation of the members of the Parliament in the Commission, the engagement of MPs is low.

The Prevention of the Re-Emergence of Totalitarian Ideologies and the Spread of Totalitarian Symbolic

³ <https://idfi.ge/ge/failed-lustration-in-georgia>

⁴ https://idfi.ge/public/upload/IDFI_2019/archieves_idfi/Kldiashvili_Lustration.pdf

⁵ <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/stories/accessing-archives-in-a-post-soviet-world-the-georgian-experience/>

⁶ <https://www.justice.gov/storage/report.pdf>

Besides lustration, the Freedom Charter aims to implement preventive measures against the re-emergence of communist totalitarian and fascist ideologies, remove the symbols and names of cult buildings, memorials, monuments, bas-reliefs, inscriptions, streets, squares, villages and settlements of the communist totalitarian regime, as well as prohibit the propaganda instruments and other means of communist totalitarian and national socialist (Nazi) ideologies. This process is monitored by the commission at the State Security Service. According to the law, the Commission collects information on the use of symbols of the communist totalitarian and/or national socialist (Nazi) regimes and the use of state or local government property by administrative bodies, as well as information on cult buildings, memorials, monuments, bas-reliefs, inscriptions, names of the streets, squares, villages and settlements and other public spaces containing elements of communist totalitarian and national socialist (Nazi) ideologies and their propaganda or the names of their ideological leaders. The Commission addresses to the competent person in order to eliminate the symbols, memorials, bas-reliefs, inscriptions and names of communist totalitarian and national socialist (Nazi) ideologies. In the case of addressing the competent person by the Commission, the competent person shall eliminate communist totalitarian and/or national socialist (Nazi) symbols. Otherwise, the competent person is given a warning and in the case of a repeated breach of the law, he/she is fined with 1000 GEL.

According to the information acquired by IDFI from the State Security Service in 2018, in 2016, the Commission asked two entities to stop displaying communist totalitarian symbols and three entities in 2017. During the next years, the Commission was more active with regard to the removal of totalitarian symbolics. Publicly known facts when the Commission addressed to the competent persons also prove this.

In 2018, the State Security Service warned “Socialist Georgia” not to use totalitarian symbolics on 9 May (Victory Day).⁷ Also, in 2018, the State Security Service warned the organization “National Unity” not use fascist symbolics.⁸ The same warning was issued for the pro-Russian “Immortal Regiment”⁹ and “The Congress of the Slavs of Georgia”.¹⁰ In 2018, after the online media Samkhretis Karibche published the article “Stalin’s Statues and Monuments – Prohibited Soviet Symbolics in Satskhe-Javakheti”, in which the information about the Soviet symbolics still preserved in the region was provided,¹¹ the State Security Service addressed to the self-governments of Akhatsikhe, Adigeni and Aspindza with the request to inquire the Soviet symbolics still preserved there.¹² Municipalities started studying the above-mentioned issue and provided the State Security Service with information. However, as they declare, they have not received any further instructions for removing the symbolics.¹³

Regardless of the regulation, the monuments and other types of memorials depicting Soviet symbolics are still present in contemporary Georgia. Recently, there have been a few cases when individuals

⁷ <https://netgazeti.ge/news/274696/>

⁸ <https://bit.ly/2YtaddO>

⁹ <https://bit.ly/3hVXUjU>

¹⁰ <http://sknews.ge/index.php?newsid=22496>

¹¹ <http://sknews.ge/index.php?newsid=18381>

¹² <http://sknews.ge/index.php?newsid=18792>

¹³ <http://sknews.ge/index.php?newsid=19104>

voluntarily erected such monuments or held a protest, demanding the erection of Stalin's statue. It is notable that such cases are mostly related to Stalin's figure as long as, in Georgia, Stalin, apart from the Soviet past, is linked with the nationalist sentiments, which is mainly facilitated by the Soviet nationalism policy, history re-writing and propaganda. For this, positive attitudes toward Stalin's figure are higher in Georgia compared to the other former Soviet republics.¹⁴ For instance, the last case was monitored in the village Zikilia in February 2020, when the locals erected the iron construction of Stalin's image. The representative of the Mayor in the village said that it was the locals' will and he could not oppose them.¹⁵ Also, in December 2019, Ruben Chinchaladze erected Stalin's statue on the territory of his private enterprise. According to him, there had been Stalin's bust on the territory for decades but now the big statue was also erected. However, the state could not react on this case because the placement of Soviet symbolic on the private territory is not prohibited by the law.¹⁶



Construction with Stalin's Image in Zikilia ¹⁷

Stalin's monuments were re-erected in Upper Alvani in 2012, Shorapani in 2015¹⁸, Ateni in 2016¹⁹, Gori in 2018²⁰, Akura in 2019.²¹ In many cases, Stalin's monuments have become a subject of debates among

¹⁴ See: De Waal, Thomas (ed.), *The Stalin Puzzle: Deciphering Post - Soviet Public Opinion*, Washington DC.: Carnegie Endowment Foundation, 2013; Gugushvili, Alaexi and Peter Kabachnik, 'Stalin is dead, long live Stalin? Testing socialization, structural, ideological, nationalist, and gender hypotheses', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 31, 2015, 1, pp. 1-36.

¹⁵ <http://sknews.ge/index.php?newsid=26009>

¹⁶ <https://netgazeti.ge/news/470856/>

¹⁷ Source: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/30457649.html>

¹⁸ <https://netgazeti.ge/news/72913/>

¹⁹ <http://www.tabula.ge/ge/photo/107529-sofel-atenshi-stalinis-dzegli-aghmartes>

²⁰ <https://bit.ly/2Ae8H67>

²¹ <https://netgazeti.ge/news/363155/>

the citizens. His statues were pained in Telavi, Akura, Alvani²², Kvareli²³, Ateni²⁴, Chokhatauri²⁵, which was followed by the negative reaction from the individuals with positive sentiments toward Stalin's figure. In this regard, the issue of Stalin's statue in Gori, which is currently kept in Berbuki, near the agency established by the City Hall of Gori, is most popular.²⁶



In 2010, the Government of Georgia removed Stalin's statue from the centre of Gori without warning either media or society. In the decision of the Assembly of Gori, it was said that the statue would be relocated to a new place, particularly to the territory of Stalin's birth-house museum in Gori. However,

²² <https://bit.ly/2ZhUm0V>

²³ <https://bit.ly/2NB59he>

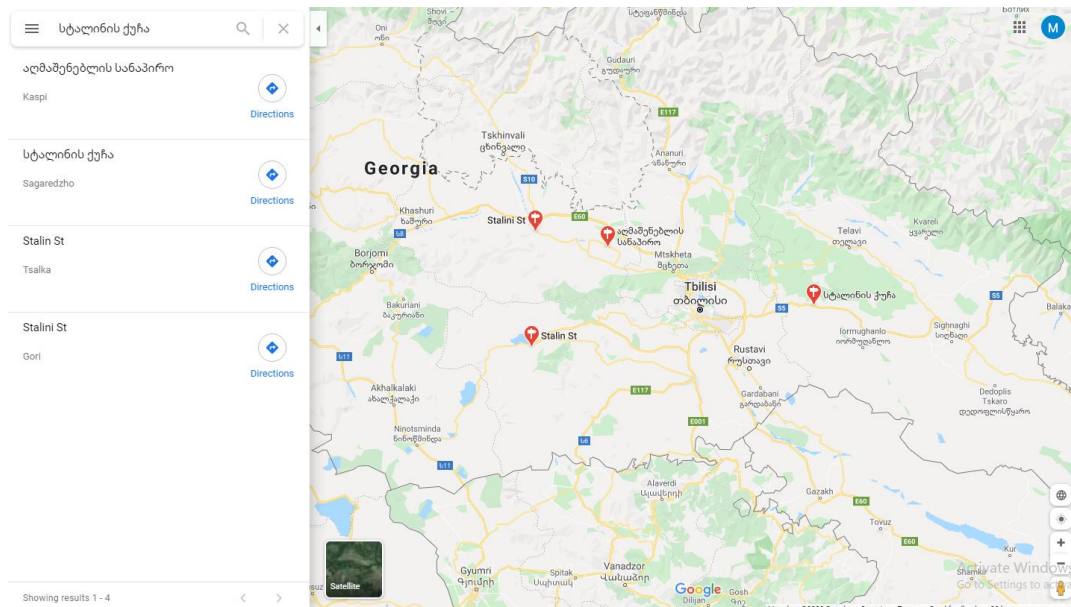
²⁴ <https://www.qartli.ge/ge/akhali-ambebi/article/2541-atenshitalinisbiustivardisfradsheghebes>

²⁵ <http://www.gurianews.com/article/mtavari/politika/14826>

²⁶ <https://www.qartli.ge/ge/akhali-ambebi/article/13952-stalinis-dzegli-gadamales->

this decision has not been implemented until now. The discussions about the restoration of the statue once again became active after the change of the government in 2012. In 2013, the local government even allocated funds from the budget for the restoration of the monument on the territory of the museum, but following the request of the Ambassadors of the Baltic states, the process was interrupted. In 2015, the organization Gorelebi addressed to the Gori City Hall with the request to re-erect the monument. Following their request, a discussion was held at the City Hall but their initiative was not supported by the municipality. Still, the discussion around Stalin’s statue is active in Georgia, which is proved by a number of demonstrations dedicated to this issue.²⁷ In 2015, the Assembly of Gori discussed the project “On the determination of the location of the monument and the placement of the monument in the square adjacent to the Stalin Museum”. The representatives of the society, both pro and anti-Stalinists, attended the meeting. Finally, the voting started in which 13 members of the self-government participated. As a result, 12 voted against and 1 voted for the re-erection of the statue.²⁸

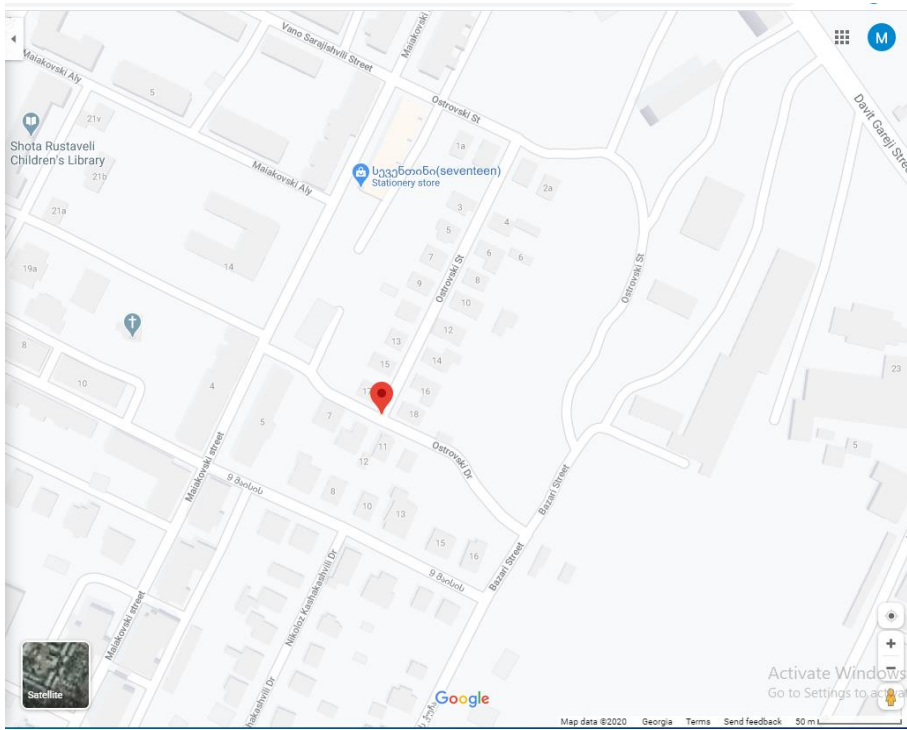
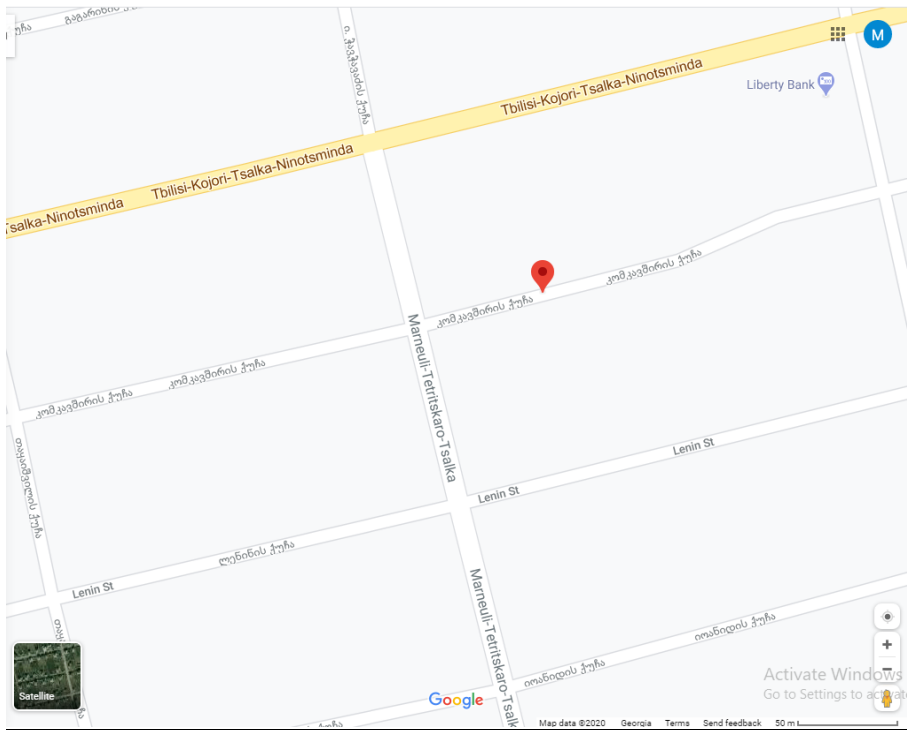
Also, it is notable that until now, there are the streets named after Stalin in Georgia – for instance, in Gori, Dusheti, Tsalka and Lentekhi. The streets named after Communists are in Samegrelo and the Transparency International – Georgia gave their list to the local government in 2018. However, even after two years, working on this issue has not started.²⁹ Meanwhile, according to the Google Maps, there are many more streets named after the Communist leaders in Georgia, which indicates that, on the one hand, the change of the street names is not reflected in Google Maps timely and, on the other hand, it is necessary to continue working in this direction and rename the street, even though at some places, such initiatives can be met with significant resistance from the locals. For this, apart from renaming streets, it is necessary to held discussions and meetings with the local population.



²⁷ See: <https://www.gartli.ge/ge/akhali-ambebi/article/12891-stalinis-dzeglis-dabrunebis-mothkhovnith-gorshi-aqcia-gaimartheba>; <https://sputnik-georgia.com/society/20151002/228666850.html>

²⁸ The minutes N20 of the City Council of Gori, 2 October 2015.

²⁹ <https://bit.ly/2ZkBm1H>



Moreover, official holidays are regulated by the legislature. After the fall of the Soviet Union, many Soviet holidays were abolished and Georgia officially celebrates the Independence Day on 26 May and the Day of the Restoration of Independence and the Commemoration Day of the Victims of the 1989 massacre on 9 April. Still, the celebration of the Victory Day remains a contentious topic in society. While the European states celebrate this day on 8 May, Georgia is still among those countries that celebrate the victory over Fascism on 9 May.³⁰ This issue becomes especially sensitive considering the fact that contemporary Russia uses this day for maintaining its “privileged” influence on the post-Soviet space.³¹

³⁰ In 1945, the capitulation of Germany was signed at 22:43, 8 May, European time while it was already 9 May in Moscow and, historically, this is the reason why the Victory day is being celebrated on different days in Europe and Russia. However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, this difference acquired a political meaning

³¹ For more detailed information about this topic, see IDFI’s article:
https://idfi.ge/ge/russian_propaganda_and_immortal_regiment



Considering all of the above-said, in the direction of preventing the re-emergence of totalitarian ideologies and the spread of totalitarian symbolics in the countries, there are several challenges. First of all, it is necessary to create a mechanism which would enable the Freedom Charter Committee at the State Security Service to reveal and abolish totalitarian symbolics in public space more effectively and timely. Considering the fact that there are still monuments and streets named after the Communist leaders in Georgia, it is important the municipalities to become engaged in this process. Also, as long as the abolition of such symbolics at some places may cause the dissatisfaction among the local population, holding active information campaigns and discussions is necessary, which would facilitate a consensus in the society. Also, it is important to broaden the discussion about celebrating the Victory

Day on 8 May instead of 9 May. Considering the fact that this issue is very sensitive for the veterans of the Second World War, they should be involved in the discussions.

The Rehabilitation of Victims

By the end of the XX century, after the fall of the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe and post-Soviet space, the countries that chose the democratic course, took the responsibility to restore their citizens' violated rights and rehabilitate the victims. In this regard, among the post-Soviet states, the Baltic countries – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania took the most effective and timely measures. Georgia is among those countries that took the responsibility to rehabilitate the victims. According to the Constitution of Georgia, the state has a positive as well as negative obligation to protect human rights and freedom, which means that the state is obliged not to violate human rights and freedom through its activities. In the case of violation of human rights and freedom by others, the state should take measures to restore the violated rights (compensation, sanctions against violators, etc.). Due to the positive obligations of the state, Georgia is obliged to restore the rights violated as a result of political repressions on the territory of the former USSR and take effective measures in this direction. It is notable that the respect of democratic values, including human rights and basic freedom, is one of the core principles of the Association Agreement signed between Georgia and EU.

The procedures for recognizing a person as a victim and their social privileges are mainly regulated by the Administrative Procedure Code of Georgia, by the law of Georgia on the Recognition of Georgian Citizens as the Victims of Political Repressions and the Measures of their Social Protection, as well as by the decree of the Government of Georgia on the Adoption of Social Packages. According to the legislation, a victim of political repressions on the territory of the former USSR or his/her descendant should file a court application for acquiring relevant status after which he/she is eligible for the compensation and privileges established by the state. For acquiring the status of a victim of political repressions, a repressed individual, his/her heir or their representative should apply to the relevant court, based on their address of residence.

According to the Administrative Procedure Code of Georgia after acquiring the status of politically repressed, a victim of repression, his/ her heir, or their representative had the right to file an application to the Tbilisi or Kutaisi City Court with the aim of receiving an indemnity before 1 January 2018. This means that, currently, repressed individuals are deprived of the opportunity to refer to the court with the aim of restoring their rights. Nowadays, it is unclear whether these persons will be given the right to apply to the court and request compensation.

The individuals who applied to the court within the set dates had the right to receive financial compensation from 1,000 to 2,000 Gel. In total, the Tbilisi City Court received 13,525 applications out of which 11,539 applications were reviewed, 11,511 were granted and only 28 applications were denied. The Kutaisi City Court received 5,517 applications, out of which 4,957 were granted. Therefore,

in total, 16.468 individuals were recognized as the victims of repressions in Georgia and they or their heirs were given the compensation.

As for the households and utility benefits, until 1 January 2006, the Article 12 of the law on the Recognition of Georgian Citizens as the Victims of Political Repressions and the Measures of their Social Protection included the provisions on the household and utility benefits covering 50% of relevant costs. The benefits applied to the heating (gas), water, electricity, landline phone bills and the expenses of waste collection. In addition, rental allowances were given to those residing at public housing. However, the given article was repealed after the adoption of the law on Social Support on 1 January 2006. Nowadays, the household benefits are regulated by the Decree of the Government of Georgia on the Monetization of Social Benefits. According to the decree, the recipients of household benefits among the other categories of beneficiaries are victims of political repressions and their incapacitated family members. Their household benefit equals to 7 Gel.

Daily living subsidy:

- For the victims of political repressions and their family members with disabilities - **7 GEL**

Social Packages:

- For the persons recognized as the victims of political repressions - **107 Gel**
- For the persons recognized as the victims of political repressions who, at the same time, have participated in the military operations for the territorial integrity of Georgia and independence - **122 Gel**
- Social packages increased by **7 GEL** for the different social categories of the victims of political repressions (persons with disabilities, persons left without a breadwinner, etc.)

IDFI, together with the society for the commemoration of the victims of political repressions and solidarity “Memorial”, actively demands the increase of the daily living subsidy for the victims of repression (7 GEL) and its equation with the subsidy for the war and military service veterans (44) for years. In this direction, the organization carried out two important studies - [Victims of Soviet Repressions in Georgia – Legal Remedies and Their Assessment](#) and The Statistics of [Social Assistance for the Victims of Political Repressions](#), in which the detailed analysis of the state policy toward the rehabilitation of victims and statistics of the social support beneficiaries can be found. The recommendations for improving the state policy in this direction are also provided there. Also, on IDFI’s initiative, [a petition](#) was created for increasing the social support for the victims of repressions from 7 GEL to 44 GEL.

IDFI considers it necessary the rights of the repressed individuals and their heirs to apply to the court and receive financial compensation abolished since January 1st, 2018, to be renewed and the amount of compensation to be increased from 1,000 GEL to 2,000 GEL. The increase of monthly subsidy for the repressed individuals from 7 GEL to 44 GEL is also important, which is still insufficient for meeting the

daily needs but the living subsidy for the other social categories (for instance, the veterans of the Second World War) is the same and it is necessary the subsidy for the repressed to be equal to these categories at least. Moreover, the state should ensure a full waiver of utility fees for repressed individuals and those who do not own residential property should be given a monthly allowance in the amount of full or partial rental fee. It is important that repressed individuals have access to public transport benefits. And finally, social benefit and household assistance should be based on the realistic calculation of monthly expenses and should enable the beneficiaries to meet their daily needs.

Institutional Dimension

State Institutions/Organizations

Apart from the Freedom Charter Commission at the State Security Service, several commissions have been established in Georgia for investigating crimes of the Soviet regime. One of the first of such establishments was the Commission of Investigation of Tragedy of 9 of April 1989 in Tbilisi created at the Supreme Council of USSR. On 9 April 1989, the anti-Soviet demonstration in the centre of Tbilisi was suppressed violently by the Soviet state using chemical weapons and physical assault which resulted in the death of 21 people and the injuries of hundreds. Although the Soviet officials attempted to hide the information about the details of the suppressive operation and casualties, a huge protest erupted in the society. The establishment of the Commission was the result of the counter-reaction among the citizens of the Georgian SSR and international pressure. Shortly, the Commission published a report in which the events were analyzed based on the accounts of participant civil and military authorities, victims and eyewitnesses. They concluded that the decision on the violent suppression of peaceful demonstrators was made by the officials of the Communist Party and the heads of the Transcaucasian military district. However, despite such a conclusion, it has not been followed by any legal consequences, the individuals responsible for the tragedy have not been identified. Even after the declaration of independence, there has been no judgement or trial of those individuals who were responsible for the tragedy.

Another commission aimed at investigating the crimes of the totalitarian regime was also established at the final phase of the Soviet Union. In an attempt to reform the Soviet Union within the frame of Gorbachev's "Perestroika", the communist party began transforming omnipresent social protests into cabinet resolutions. For this, similarly to the other republics, the Commission of the Supreme Council of the Georgian SSR for Re-establishing Justice for Victims of Repressions that Took Place in 1930–40 and the 1950s was created. Its primary functions were to revise the cases of those individuals who had been executed during the Soviet regime, rehabilitate the victims of repressions and work on the promotion of social protection and compensation for them. The Commission was

comprised of the state as well as a few representatives of the Soviet civil organizations. However, regardless of their declared objectives, the commission was mainly focused on those victims who were the family members of the party officials. By the end of 1990, around 633 persons were rehabilitated by the Supreme Court of the Georgian SSR while conclusions for 11 203 persons for the rehabilitation process were prepared by the Georgian SSR KGB investigation division. However, neither the work of this Commission was followed by any legal measures against those individuals who participated in the mass terror. The criticism was mainly directed toward the system but not those officials who were its creators. It was only after the adoption of the Freedom Charter and the establishment of the Freedom Charter commission described above when the lustration of the individuals who have collaborated with the oppressive regime began. However, as it has already been noted above, the effectiveness of this commission remains relatively vague.³²

Another commission named “The Commission for Establishing Historical Truth” initiated by the former President of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili was founded in 2010. Unlike the commissions discussed above, the work of this group was mainly focused on the analysis of the crimes committed by Russia against Georgia and Georgians since 1801. It was comprised of historians, sociologists and the other specialists researching the Soviet and Russian imperial past. Arguably, the establishment of this commission was more of a result of tensed relations between Russia and Georgia after the war between the two countries in 2008. As a result of the work of this Commission, a 50-page report titled “200 Years of Russian Occupation” was created. “200 Years of Russian Occupation” soon became a metanarrative, which links the contemporary occupation of Abkhazia and so-called South Ossetia by Russia with the annexation of Georgia by the Russian Empire and then with the occupation of Georgia by the Bolsheviks. Therefore, it can be considered that this Commission served more to the explanation and framing of the contemporary developments between Russia and Georgia in light of the historical background than to the reassessment of the past events and the rehabilitation of victims of the totalitarian regime.

Non-Governmental Organizations

In the turbulent 1990s when Georgia experienced civil war and inter-ethnic conflicts while the corruption and crime were flourishing, only two civic organizations were founded that worked on the rehabilitation and commemoration of the victims of Soviet repressions. One of them was the [Association of Germans in Georgia, Einung](#), established in 1991, immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Until now, the primary function of the association has been to research the Soviet deportation and resettlement of Germans to the Soviet Union and support the recovery and preservation of their national, cultural and religious traditions. For this, it has assisted the ethnic Germans living in Georgia to acquire the status of victims and relevant compensation according to the

³² [http://www.cevro.cz/web_files/soubory/democracy-guide/MoN-DTG%202018%20-%20\(6\)%20The%20Georgian%20Experience.pdf](http://www.cevro.cz/web_files/soubory/democracy-guide/MoN-DTG%202018%20-%20(6)%20The%20Georgian%20Experience.pdf)

law “On the Acknowledgment of Citizens of Georgia as Victims of Political Repression and Social Protection of Repressed Persons”. Additionally, they actively hold various events for commemorating the mass deportation of Germans in 1941.

Another organization functioning in the 1990s was the society Memorial, founded in 1992 by the successors of the victims of Soviet Repressions. It has worked on the archival materials to acquire the information about the victims of repressions and their families and created a unique archive, containing a card index of 30 thousand repressed persons, application forms of 9 thousand repressed individuals, publications on Soviet repressions and repressed people, audio and video recordings of meetings (so-called Memorial Wednesdays) organized by Society Memorial. In the 1990s, the society was also publishing a newspaper Memoriali. Memorial has been an active advocate of the rehabilitation of the victims of Soviet representations and their social protection on a political and legal basis.

In 2009, the [Institute for Development of Freedom of Information \(IDFI\)](#) was established. Since then, it has been actively involved in the studies of Georgia’s Soviet past and in order to preserve the memory of the victims of Soviet repressions, the organization has assisted families in finding information about their repressed relatives as well as in seeking compensation. One of IDFI’s principal directions includes enhancing the openness of state archives. As a result of its advocacy, the former archive of the Georgian Communist Party was saved from destruction and the former archive of the Committee of State Security (KGB) of Georgia was opened to the public. The organization was also engaged in the launching of an [electronic database](#) of documents related to the events of March 9, 1956 – the massacre of citizens in Tbilisi during a demonstration, by Soviet Militia and troops. In 2017, the organization, in collaboration with international partners, started the assessment of the openness of state archives in the former Soviet and Eastern Bloc countries and created the [international rating](#) of the archives. Within the frame of the same project, IDFI has submitted [a legislative proposal](#) to the Parliament of Georgia on necessary amendments to the law “On the National Archival Fund and National Archives” and the law “On Personal Data Protection”. Moreover, the organization has hosted a number of international conferences involving archivists, historians and other scholars working in the archives of post-Soviet Space.

IDFI also actively cooperates with Memorial. After Memorial’s building was sold in 2009, IDFI allocated a part of its office for its employees and archival materials. They have also launched the following joint projects: Stalin's Lists on Georgia - the first electronic database in Georgia that contains brief biographical information about victims of 1937-38 repressions; an exhibition on the 1937-1938 repressions for the purpose of understanding the country’s totalitarian past, including unique documents and photos depicting tragic events in Georgia gathered from the archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Society Memorial, as well as private family archives; several events and lectures on Stalinism, mass terror and commemoration of its victims.

Another civic organization researching the Soviet past of Georgia and its legacy is the [Soviet Past Research Laboratory \(SovLab\)](#), established in 2010. It has created “[Topography of Red Terror](#)” –

a historical and educational tour; a map with stories of the sites, places, houses of the old cities and the people living there. The organization, also, actively advocates the openness of state archives in public as well as in the Parliament. However, similarly to IDFI, their attempts to make amendments in the archival legislature have not paid off until now.³³

To sum up, there are not many civic organizations in Georgia working on the Soviet past and related research. However, the existing ones advocate the openness of archives, effective memory politics and the rehabilitation of victims very actively. Still, these issues remain beyond the primary interests of the state as they are not considered to be the priority. Therefore, it is necessary to enhance cooperation between the civic organization, researching the Soviet past, and the state in order to ensure the implementation of effective memory politics in the country.

Memorial Dimension

New Memorials

Besides the Soviet statues, memorials and other symbolics discussed above, new memorials and sites of memories are also an integral part of memory politics. The main function of such sites is the rethinking of totalitarian past and the narratives emerged through it as well as the commemoration of its victims.

Since the day of announcing independence, regardless of tense internal as well as the foreign political environment in the 1990s. For instance, if during the 70 years of the existence of the Soviet Union, the propaganda against the government of the First Democratic Republic of Georgia, Mensheviks and the fighters against the Red Army in 1921 was launched, after gaining independence, the memorial, commemorating the Georgian Junkers, appeared in Kojori. Also, the main square of Tbilisi, which had been called Lenin Square since 1953, was renamed in 1990, on Zviad Gamsakhurdia's initiative, with its old name – Liberty Square. Also, Lenin's statue standing there was demolished on 29 August 1990 and the fountain was constructed on its place. It is known that the “operation” was led by the head of the Council of Deputies, Niko Lekishvili. Following the Rose Revolution, the statue of St. George, which was called by the author, Zurab Tsereteli and the former government of Georgia “the monument of freedom and victory”, was erected on the square.³⁴ In the context of the Rose Revolution, this monument is often associated with the successful revolutionary movement, as its decisive day was 23 November, St. George Day – official holiday in Georgia.³⁵

³³ [http://www.cevro.cz/web_files/soubory/democracy-guide/MoN-DTG%202018%20-%20\(6\)%20The%20Georgian%20Experience.pdf](http://www.cevro.cz/web_files/soubory/democracy-guide/MoN-DTG%202018%20-%20(6)%20The%20Georgian%20Experience.pdf)

³⁴ <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/1543918.html>

³⁵ <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/24095095.html>

In the beginning of the 1990s, different memorials depicting the Soviet symbolics disappeared from the territory of Georgia: two statues of Sergo Orjonikidze from Mushthaid Garden and Gabashvili street; Statue of Nestor Kalandarishvili – Lisi Lake Square; Two statues of Boris Dzeladze – G. Leonidze Garden and the City of Boris Dzeladze; Statue of Sergey Kirov – Vera Park; State of Vasil Kikvidze – Kikvidze Park; Statue of Kamo – Uznadze street; Statue of Rosa Luxemburg – Nadzaladevi Park; Statue of Aliosha Japaridze – square on Chitaia street, etc.³⁶ Also, the monument “Labor, Science, Technology” (sculptors: V. Topuridze, Sh. Mikatadze) was removed from Rustaveli Avenue, where it was standing in front of the Parliament building.



“Labor, Science, Technology”

The second wave of removing the Soviet statues started in the 2000s and the most renowned case was the removal of Stalin’s statue in Gori, already discussed above. Also, the demolition of Stalin’s bas-relief from the main Ortachala Hydroelectric Station Building was a notable event. It should be mentioned that in this period, especially after the 2008 Russian-Georgian war, the new memory places were being created. Mainly, the function of these places was the representation of the narrative of the “200 years of Russian occupation”. One of the most vivid examples of this policy was the erection of the Memorial of the Soldiers Who Died in the Wars in Abkhazia and Samachablo in front of the memorial of the Soldiers Who Died in the Second World War.

³⁶ <https://bit.ly/3gKMA6D>



The Memorials of the Second World War and Wars of Abkhazia and Samachablo in Gori

Generally, in independent Georgia, great attention has been paid to the erection of the memorials of soldiers who died in the wars in Abkhazia and Samachablo as well as of those who died in the war of 2008. In this regard, the most grandiose project was in Tbilisi, on Heros' Square where two such memorials are located. One is the memorial plaque in front of which a guard of honour is standing and another one is a grandiose monument with the names of soldiers who died in the above-mentioned wars, standing in the middle of the overpass.

Even though, after gaining independence, under the different governments, through erecting and demolishing memorials, there were attempts to rethink the Soviet past, the adequate commemoration of the victims of Soviet terror always attracted a little interest. The fact that while in many other countries on the places of shooting and burial sites of the victims of repressions memorial complexes are erected, through the governmental support, different educational and other types of events are held and research in this direction is enhanced, such places practically do not exist in Georgia.

In this regard, the issue of the mass grave of the victims of Soviet repressions discovered near Batumi in 2019 is the most interesting. In April 2019, the Diocese of Batumi and Lazeti spread the information about the discovery of mass graves of the repressed persons executed between 1937-1938 under the Soviet Union near Batumi, at one of the military bases of the Ministry of Defense where the Soviet tank division had been allocated before. Up to 150 bodies were found in the graves. Considering the fact that these five graves were the first such burial sites to be discovered in Georgia, they required significant attention from the state. In the beginning, particular steps were taken by the government in the direction of studying the graves, which created an expectation that adequate attention would be paid to this place.

After the spread of the information by the Diocese, the Government of Adjara created the special commission at the Ministry of Health of Adjara which was obliged to study the issue, work on the

identification of the remains, the organization of burial and the arrangement of the memorial; LEPL Levan Samkharauli National Forensics Bureau took DNA from the remains and created the relevant database; for the studies of the newly-discovered graves, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport of Adjara was requested to create a special task force; for the discovery and studies of the graves at the location indicated above, the situational sketch was created and the information regarding the territorial security was requested from the Ministry of Defense of Georgia. However, soon, the state interest and attention toward this issue decreased and there has been no significant progress in this direction for a year.

IDFI has been actively involved in the search for archival documents about the people repressed in Batumi and Adjara since the beginning. Through the archival research carried out by the organization, it has been established that between 1937-1938, through the various means of punishments totally 1050 were executed in Adjara, out of whom there were 11 women as well as Orthodox and Muslim religious figures. This means that, if the remains of any of the women will be identified, it will be possible to establish when the people in different graves were shot dead. Also, it is essential the number of the minutes of the executions carried out at different times preserved at the MIA Archives to be compared with the number of bodies discovered in the graves because, as a rule, dozens of people were being executed simultaneously, and in case of the coincidence of numbers, the identification will simplify. IDFI gave this list to the representatives of Diocese of Batumi and Lazeti.

In 2019, IDFI sent a letter to the Government of Adjara and then to the Prime Minister of Georgia and called for taking rapid and effective measures toward studying the remains and burying and commemorating the victims of the Soviet repressions. However, event after a year of the discovery, the graves remain underresearched, the preparation for the erection of the memorial at the place has not started and the educational or the other types of activities have not been initiated. Most importantly, the decision on the identification of the bodies and returning them to their families has not been made.

IDFI's recommendations for the state remain the same after a year:

- The Government of Adjara should assign a separate budget for the studies of the burial site of the repressed people near Batumi in 1937-1938, their commemoration and the identification of the remains.
- A special group of archaeologists and specialists should be created which will be working on already discovered graveyards and will continue looking for new sites of burials.
- The territory where the graves were found should be transferred to the Mayor's Office of Batumi from the Ministry of Defense and the memorial complex of the victims of the Soviet repressions should be set there.
- An active campaign should be carried out for the identification of the remains which would encourage the descendants of the repressed people to provide their DNA which will be compared to the samples taken from the remains. The list created by IDFI reveals that during the repressions, dozens of people were executed simultaneously and they were placed into the same grave together (only five such graves have been found until now). If even a few bodies are identified, it will be

possible to define certainly when the people in these graves were executed.- Campaigns for raising public awareness especially among the school and university students should be held and the government, clergy and specialists should be involved in this process in order to spread the information about the Stalinist terror in 1937-1938.

- The agreement should be reached between the Orthodox Church of Georgia, and the Supreme Religious Administration of Georgia's All Muslims and the state should also be involved in it.

Museums

Museums play an important role in rethinking the totalitarian past and the creation of the new, fact-based historical narratives. After the Collapse of the Soviet Union, the Eastern European countries worked actively in this direction, where many museums on the thematic of the Soviet and Nazi occupation as well as the Holocaust can be found. Georgia, unlike the other countries, inherited the unique museum – Stalin's birth-house museum, which could have played an important role in rethinking the Soviet past. However, until today, it remains as a space, where the visitors listen to Stalinist narratives about Georgia's past. Numerous ethnographic researches carried out in the museum³⁷ reveal that a little attention is paid to the Mass Terror led by Stalin in the museum while Stalin's cult is enhanced. You can find Stalin's "patriotic" poems, portraits, listen to the stories from the guides that "Stalin did not have an information about the mass shootings"³⁸ and that he was very much in love with Georgia. Such representation of Stalin's figure enhances Stalinist sentiments in society and neglects the issue of the repressed individuals.

After the Rose Revolution and especially after the 2008 war, the government of the United National Movement had numerous attempts to reconstruct the museum. However, such attempts were not directly aimed at commemorating the victims of the Soviet regime and rethinking the cruelty of the Soviet Union, but at linking the contemporary Russian occupation with the Soviet Occupation under the narrative of the "200 years of Russian occupation". During this period, the "Repressions Room" was added to the museum, which is located in the cellar. Interestingly, the "Repressions Room" includes not only the memorial of the repressed but the photos of the 2008 August War. There is also a symbolic wall in the room with the names of those citizens of Gori, who died in the war. The same can apply to the Soviet Occupation Exposition at the National Museum of Georgia, established before the 2008 war, in 2006 by the former President of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili and the member of the Parliament, Nikoloz Rurua. The museum includes important documents and photos about the Soviet repressions. In the same museum, significant attention is paid to Stalin's repressions. After the 2008 war, a big screen

³⁷ Bendsten Gotfredsen, Katrine. *Evasive Politics. Paradoxes of History, Nation and Everyday Communication in the Republic of Georgia*, University of Copenhagen, 2013; Kartsivadze Megi, *Georgian Nationalism and Stalin: Anomalous Love or the Logic of Cultural Memory?*, Unpublished work, Free University of Tbilisi, 2017.

³⁸ Kartsivadze Megi, *Georgian Nationalism and Stalin: Anomalous Love or the Logic of Cultural Memory?*, Unpublished work, Free University of Tbilisi, 2017.

was installed at the entrance of the museum, on which the documentary film is screened, which includes the footage of the 2008 August war, Vladimir Putin, Dmitry Medvedev and the public demonstrations after the war. The instalment of this video in the museum was a message that the contemporary Russian occupation is the continuation of the Soviet occupation.

The creation of museums, focused on the research of the Soviet past and commemoration of its victims, is still a challenge for Georgia. For this, first of all, the reconstruction of Stalin's birth-house museum in Gori is necessary in order to change its concept. It is expected that this decision will be met with considerable resistance from the local population and Stalinist organizations but it is necessary for the government to start working in this direction timely. Dialogue and discussion with locals should be a part of this process. Also, it is important, the research component to be integrated into the Museum of Soviet Occupation. Young researchers should be actively involved in its development and expansion. A good example of such collaboration was the cooperation between IDFI, MIA Archives and the National Museum of Georgia in 2019, as a result of which the Gorgasliani stand was renewed in the museum.³⁹ It is highly desirable such collaboration between the museum and the educational institutions to be enhanced and broadened.

Conclusion

In this report, IDFI discussed the memory politics of independent Georgia since 1991, achievements and challenges in the three basic directions – legal dimension, institutional dimension and memorial dimension. Based on the report, it can be argued that there are challenges in the three directions.

First of all, one of the most important challenges is that 80% of KGB documents were destroyed during the Tbilisi Civil War, which makes the full-scale lustration almost impossible in Georgia. Moreover, the assumptions that the part of the archives may still be preserved in Russia should be considered. This could possess particular threats for Georgia within the context of tense relations between Russia and Georgia. The existence of such documents in the hands of the Russian government can be an effective weapon for interfering in Georgia's internal political affairs. Also, according to the information requested and received by IDFI, it can be said that the work of the "Freedom Charter" Commission is relatively vague and its effectiveness should also be questioned. An important issue. According to the information requested and received by IDFI, it can be argued that the activities of the Commission are relatively vague. Moreover, although the law foresees the participation of the members of the Parliament in the Commission, the engagement of MPs is significantly low.

Moreover, there are challenges in the direction of preventing the re-emergence of totalitarian ideologies and the spread of totalitarian symbolics in the countries. First of all, it is necessary to create a mechanism which would enable the Freedom Charter Committee at the State Security Service to reveal and abolish totalitarian symbolics in public space more effectively and timely. Also, holding

³⁹ http://www.idfi.ge/archive/?cat=read_topic&topic=140&lang=ka

active information campaigns and discussions is necessary, which would facilitate a consensus in the society based on which the totalitarian symbolic will be abolished and/or replaced.

State's activities in the direction of commemoration and rehabilitation of the victims of Soviet repressions is especially important. IDFI considers it necessary the rights of the repressed individuals and their heirs to apply to the court and receive financial compensation abolished since January 1st, 2018, to be renewed and the amount of compensation to be increased from 1,000 GEL to 2,000 GEL. The increase of monthly subsidy for the repressed individuals from 7 GEL to 44 GEL is also important, for which IDFI continues its active campaign. Moreover, the state should ensure a full waiver of utility fees for repressed individuals and those who do not own residential property should be given a monthly allowance in the amount of full or partial rental fee. It is important that repressed individuals have access to public transport benefits. And finally, social benefit and household assistance should be based on the realistic calculation of monthly expenses and should enable the beneficiaries to meet their daily needs.

As for the institutional dimension, the past experience has shown that the commissions established for researching the Soviet repression, served more to the explanation and framing of the contemporary developments between Russia and Georgia in light of the historical background than to the reassessment of the past events and the rehabilitation of victims of the totalitarian regime. Therefore, it is necessary for the state to enhance Soviet Studies research in the country, which is essential for raising public awareness about the Soviet terror and the prevention of re-emergence of similar totalitarian regimes in the future. Although there are some civic organizations in Georgia working on the Soviet past and related research, their number is not big. Often, the issues advocated by these organizations such as the openness of archives, effective memory politics and the rehabilitation of victims are neglected by the state. Therefore, it is necessary to enhance cooperation between the civic organization, researching the Soviet past, and the state in order to ensure the implementation of effective memory politics in the country.

For the memorial dimension, IDFI considers that the site of the mass graves of the victims of Soviet repressions discovered near Batumi is the most challenging issue because while in many other countries on the places of shooting and burial sites of the victims of repressions memorial complexes are erected, through the governmental support, different educational and other types of events are held and research in this direction is enhanced, such places practically do not exist in Georgia.

In 2019, IDFI sent a letter to the Government of Adjara and then to the Prime Minister of Georgia and called for taking rapid and effective measures toward studying the remains and burying and commemorating the victims of the Soviet repressions. However, even after a year of the discovery, the graves remain underresearched, the preparation for the erection of the memorial at the place has not started and the educational or the other types of activities have not been initiated. Most importantly, the decision on the identification of the bodies and returning them to their families has not been made. Regardless of IDFI's numerous calls, even after a year of the discovery, the graves remain underresearched, the preparation for the erection of the memorial at the place has not started and the educational or the other types of activities have not been initiated. Most importantly, the decision on

the identification of the bodies and returning them to their families has not been made. IDFI still actively calls the state to consider IDFI's [recommendations](#) and start working in this direction.

The creation of museums, focused on the research of the Soviet past and commemoration of its victims, is still a challenge for Georgia. For this, first of all, the reconstruction of Stalin's birth-house museum and changing its concept is necessary, which should be carried out in parallel with the dialogue with the local population. Also, it is important, the research component to be integrated into the Museum of Soviet Occupation and young researchers to get involved in its development and expansion. IDFI expresses its readiness to collaborate in this direction with the state as well as the representatives of specific museums.