Otar Janelidze

THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA AND THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

Since ancient times, state unions and alliances have played a significant role in international relations, primarily formed to ensure collective security and to counterbalance stronger or more aggressive adversaries.

One of the earliest known alliances was formed by Sparta against the military power of Athens during the Peloponnesian Wars (431-404 BC).

In medieval Europe, the Hanseatic League, centered in the city of Lübeck, was a notable union which united around 200 cities and approximately three thousand settlements during its heyday. Although primarily a trade and economic alliance rather than a political one, the Hanseatic League demonstrated its ability to defend itself when necessary. While the League lacked a standing military force, it was capable of successfully hiring military resources when necessary.

For a long time, international politics was characterized by a hierarchical and dynastic state order. The end of the Thirty Years' War, and the signing of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, marked the beginning of a new international order in Europe based on the concept of state sovereignty. In this new system of international relations, which largely excluded dynastic factors, principles such as essential national interest and the balance of power became fundamental. In the post-Westphalian era, the phenomenon of the sovereign nation-state emerged, with the new security architecture built around it.

Following the Napoleonic Wars, the Congress of Vienna in 1815 laid the foundation for a new world order that gradually took on a global character. Political, economic, social, and cultural developments became increasingly interconnected. As a result of this redistribution, by the end of the century, a unified world system had emerged, defined by several centers of power, most of which were located in Europe.

History shows that small countries have often joined larger alliances with the expectation of enhancing their defense capabilities and gaining economic advantages. For Georgia, it was only conditionally part of such a system, especially after the 15th century, when the unified Georgian feudal monarchy fragmented into the kingdoms of Kartli, Kakheti, and Imereti, significantly reducing Georgia's role as an active player in international politics.

Another major shift in the international order came with the Versailles system, associated with the First World War and its aftermath. This period marked the institutionalization of a polycentric world, one in which major decisions were made through mutual agreement among the great powers, while also, to some extent, considering the interests of other states. The Versailles system took shape in 1917, following the collapse of the Russian Empire, and in 1918 with the disintegration of the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, and German empires. For this reason, it is often informally referred to as the "post-imperial world order."

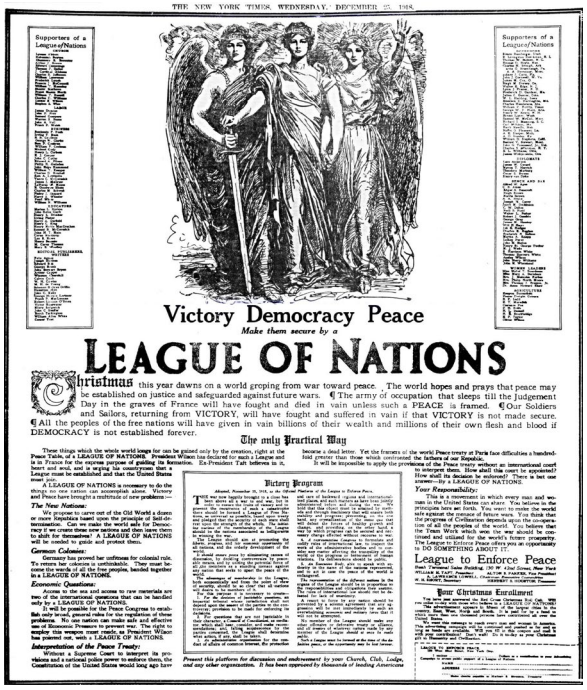
The Versailles system was defined by the Paris Peace Conference. At this same conference, under the initiative of US President Woodrow Wilson, the first universal intergovernmental organization, the League of Nations, was created, with the goal "to promote international cooperation and ensure world peace and security." The idea gained significant support from many states,[1] particularly those for whom the global conflict of 1914-1918 remained a terrible memory they wished not to repeat.

The League of Nations was tasked with fostering goodwill among states and strengthening universal peace and security. To prevent future wars, it emphasized resolving conflicts and disputes through diplomatic negotiations and arbitration. Moreover, it aimed to uphold the principles of justice and humanity by protecting the rights of smaller nations.

The founding document of the organization, the Covenant of the League of Nations,[2] consists of a preamble and 26 articles. It outlines key elements such as membership criteria, the roles and functions of the League's main organs (the Assembly, the Council, and the Permanent Secretariat), mechanisms for the peaceful resolution of international disputes, and the

[1] It is important to note that enthusiasm for the League of Nations was much greater in broader public than in government circles.

[2] The document is included in the Treaty of Versailles and constitutes an integral part of it. The Treaty was signed on June 28, 1919.



THE NEW YORK TIMES, WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 25, 1918.

Supporters of a League of Nations

Supporters of a League of Nations

Victory Democracy Peace

Make them secure by a

LEAGUE OF NATIONS

Christmas this year dawns on a world groping from war toward peace. The world hopes and prays that peace may be established on justice and safeguarded against future wars. ¶ The army of occupation that sleeps till the judgement Day in the graves of France will have fought and died in vain unless such a PEACE is framed. ¶ Our Soldiers and Sailors, returning from VICTORY, will have fought and suffered in vain if that VICTORY is not made secure. ¶ All the peoples of the free nations will have given in vain billions of their wealth and millions of their own flesh and blood if DEMOCRACY is not established forever.

The only Practical Way

These things which the whole world longs for can be gained only by the creation, right at the Peace Table, of a LEAGUE OF NATIONS. President Wilson has declared for such a League and heart and soul, and in urging the consummation, the formation. Ex-President Taft believes in it, League must be established and that the United States must join.

A LEAGUE OF NATIONS is necessary to do the things that cannot be accomplished alone. Victory and Peace have brought a multitude of new problems—

The New Nations:

We propose to carve out of the Old World a dozen or more new nations. Can we make the world safe for Democracy if we create those new nations and then leave them to shift for themselves? A LEAGUE OF NATIONS will be needed to guide and protect them.

German Colonies:

Germany has proved her unfitness for colonial rule. To return her colonies is unthinkable. They must become the wards of all the free peoples, banded together in a LEAGUE OF NATIONS.

Economic Questions:

Access to the sea and access to raw materials are two of the international questions that can be handled only by a LEAGUE OF NATIONS.

It will be possible for the Peace Congress to establish only broad, general rules for the regulation of these problems. No one nation can make safe and effective use of Economic Pressure to prevent war. The right to employ this weapon must belong to the whole world. Wilson has pointed out, with a LEAGUE OF NATIONS.

Interpretation of the Peace Treaty:

Without a Supreme Court to interpret its provisions and a national police power to enforce them, the Constitution of the United States would long ago have become a dead letter. Yet the framers of the world Peace treaty at Paris face difficulties a hundred-fold greater than those which confronted the fathers of our Republic.

It will be impossible to apply the provisions of the Peace treaty without an international court to interpret it. And to whom shall this court be appointed? How shall its decisions be enforced? Only in one answer—By a LEAGUE OF NATIONS.

Your Responsibility:

This is a movement in which every man and woman in the United States can share. You believe in the principle here set forth. You want to make the world safe against the menace of future wars. You think that the United States should participate actively upon the councils of all the nations of the world. You believe that the Team Work which won the war should now be continued and utilized for the world's future prosperity. The League to Enforce Peace offers you an opportunity to DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.

Victory Program

Adopted, November 15, 1918, at the National Conference on the League to Enforce Peace.

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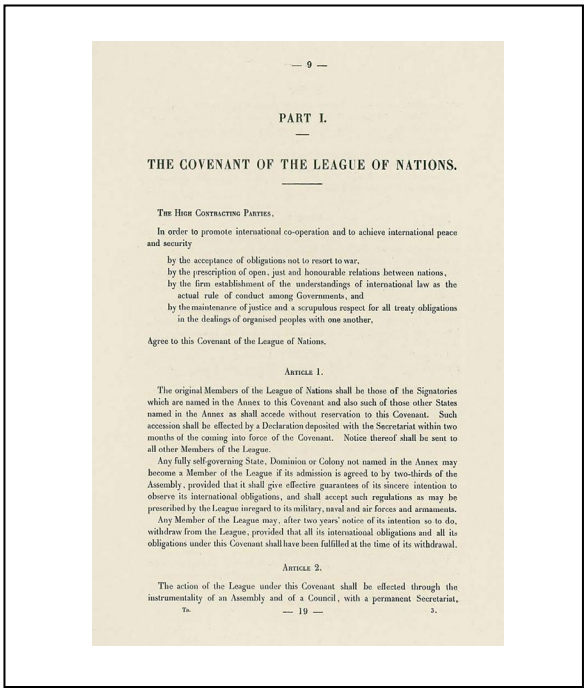
League to Enforce Peace

[illegible]

Your Christmas Enrollment

[illegible]

Present this platform for discussion and endorsement by your Church, Club, Lodge, and any other organization. It has been approved by thousands of leading Americans



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PART I.

THE COVENANT OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS.

The High Contracting Parties,

In order to promote international co-operation and to achieve international peace and security

by the acceptance of obligations not to resort to war,
by the prescription of open, just and honourable relations between nations,
by the firm establishment of the understandings of international law as the actual rule of conduct among Governments, and
by the maintenance of justice and a scrupulous respect for all treaty obligations in the dealings of organised peoples with one another,

Agree to this Covenant of the League of Nations.

Article 1.

The original Members of the League of Nations shall be those of the Signatories which are named in the Annex to this Covenant and also such of those other States named in the Annex as shall accede without reservation to this Covenant. Such accession shall be effected by a Declaration deposited with the Secretariat within two months of the coming into force of the Covenant. Notice thereof shall be sent to all other Members of the League.

Any fully self-governing State, Dominion or Colony not named in the Annex may become a Member of the League if its admission is agreed to by two-thirds of the Assembly, provided that it shall give effective guarantees of its sincere intention to observe its international obligations, and shall accept such regulations as may be prescribed by the League inregard to its military, naval and air forces and armaments.

Any Member of the League may, after two years' notice of its intention so to do, withdraw from the League, provided that all its international obligations and all its obligations under this Covenant shall have been fulfilled at the time of its withdrawal.

Article 2.

The action of the League under this Covenant shall be effected through the instrumentality of an Assembly and of a Council, with a permanent Secretariat.

To

— 19 —

2.



responsibilities of member states. The Covenant also established the fundamental principles upon which the League, a new international union based on the concept of collective security, was to be built.[3]

The League of Nations established its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. Representatives from France and Belgium had proposed Brussels as the preferred location, arguing that Belgium had earned the right to host the organization due to the immense sacrifices it endured "in the struggle for truth against violence"[4] during the Great War. However, the majority of members ultimately selected Geneva. There was also discussion around placing a commemorative plaque near the League building, bearing the inscription: "To the brave men of all nations who gave their lives for God and Fatherland in the Great War of 1914–1918," as well as publishing a complete list of countries that had participated in the war. However, by the final stages of the construction of the League Palace in Geneva, this initiative was abandoned and ultimately forgotten.[5]

The basic structure of the League of Nations included three main bodies: the Assembly, where all member states were equally represented; the Council, composed initially of four permanent members (Great Britain, France, Italy, and Japan[6]) along with an equal number of non-permanent members elected periodically by the Assembly at its discretion; and the Permanent Secretariat, which handled the League's day-to-day operations. The first Secretary-General of the League was British politician and diplomat Sir James Eric Drummond.[7]

Over time, the League developed several auxiliary bodies and commissions, including those focused on Mandates, Minority Protection, Disarmament, World

3 https://www.ungeneva.org/en/about/league-of-nations/covenant

4 Walters F. *A History of the League of Nations*. London, 1960, p. 36.

5 New League of Nations Building - Plan of M. Corliss Lamont for an International Peace and War Memorial, 1927. LON Archives. File R1546/32/60062/43550. URL: https://archives.ungeneva.org/3mdf-82gc-w2n9

6 The United States was to be the fifth permanent member of the League's Council; however, the US Senate did not support the ratification of the Treaty of Versailles, preventing the country from joining the League of Nations.

7 According to the Georgian periodical press, a special palace was allocated to the League of Nations in Geneva, with the Reformation Hall designated for meetings at the Hotel National. Secretary-General Drummond was granted £10,000. Newspaper Sakartvelo, October 31, 1920.

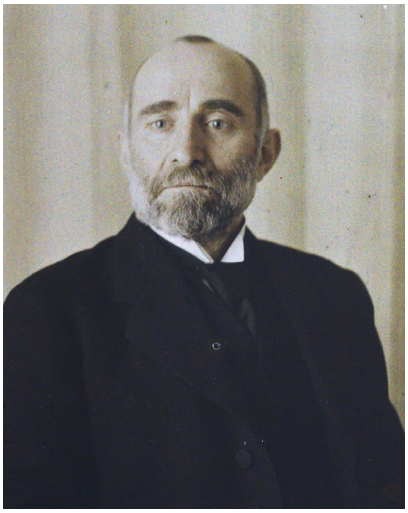
Health, Refugee Assistance, and the International Labour Organization (ILO).

Despite being declared a global organization, the League remained fundamentally Eurocentric in both structure and influence.[8] The League was ultimately a "mechanism for facilitating multilateral diplomacy, the success of which depended on the willingness and readiness of states, especially the great powers, to use it."[9] As Francis Walters, a British diplomat, historian, and former Deputy Secretary-General of the League, aptly observed, the failures of collective security during the interwar period were not due to flaws within the organization itself, but rather stemmed from the policies of the major powers, regardless whether they were League members or not.

The League of Nations was initially perceived as an "alternative to Bolshevism" and as a mechanism for protecting Central and Eastern Europe from its spread.[10] Conversely, the Soviet government viewed the League as a "league of bourgeois robbers" and a "holy alliance of capitalists," an instrument designed to oppress nations and suppress the workers' revolution.[11]

"Although weaker nations held equal rights alongside stronger ones within the League of Nations, their actual influence and capabilities remained limited. In practice, decisions of the League of Nations were largely determined by the will of the major powers. Nevertheless, it served as a forum where small and weaker states could publicly raise their concerns, voice their perspectives, appeal to the international community, and, at times, even build solidarity."[12] It has been rightly observed that the relatively equal participation of smaller states in such a global institution marked a significant historical development and a major achievement.[13]

As a result of the First World War, several small



Nikoloz Chkheidze

states emerged from the ruins of former empires, often referred to as "young democracies." Among them was the Democratic Republic of Georgia, established on May 26, 1918, alongside Armenia, Azerbaijan, the Baltic states, and others. Each of these newly formed nations sought to secure a place on the evolving world political map, which was being redrawn by the victorious powers according to a new international order.

The issue of international recognition for these new states was to be addressed at the Paris Peace Conference, convened by the Allied Powers in early 1919.[14] The government of the Democratic Republic of Georgia sent a delegation to the conference, led by the Chairman of the Constituent Assembly, Nikoloz (Karlo) Chkheidze.

For the newly established Georgian state, the recognition of independence was a top priority, closely followed by the pursuit of security guarantees. As such, the Georgian government quickly took an interest in the emerging international community of states and in establishing relations with it.

The foundation for strengthening security within the League of Nations was provided by Article 10 of its Covenant, which stipulated the protection of any

8 Ходнев А., "Зыбкая память: Отношение к Великой войне в Лиге Наций." https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/zybkaya-pamyat-otnoshenie-k-velikoy-voyne-v-lige-natsiy/viewer

9 Магадеев И., "Верил ли кто-то в Лигу Наций? Фактор международной организации во внешней политике Франции и Великобритании в 1920-е гг." https://elar.urfu.ru/bitstream/10995/94730/1/978-5-8295-0743-5_010.pdf

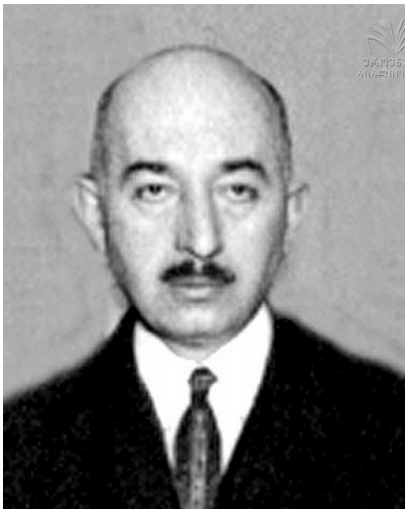
10 Temperley H., *A History of Peace Conference in Paris*, Oxford,1924, Vol. VI, p. 580.

11 Donald I. Buzinkai, "The Bolsheviks, the League of Nations and the Paris Peace Conference, 1919." Soviet Studies, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Oct., 1967), p. 259. The leader of the Georgian Socialist Revolutionary Party, Leo Shengelaia, also called the League of Nations an "organization of robbers." See: *sakartvelos dampudznebeli kreba, skhdomis okmebi (Constituent Assembly of Georgia. Session Protocols)*, Vol. VII, July 9 - December 31, 1920. Tbilisi, 2019, p. 505.

12 Rondeli A., *saertashoriso urtiertobebi (International Relations)*, Tbilisi, 2003, p. 192.

13 Handel M., *Weak States in the International System*. 1990, Routledge, p. 269.

14 Following Woodrow Wilson's address to the US Congress in February 1918, it was widely expected that "self-determination" would serve as the guiding concept of the post-imperial order after World War I. However, when the League of Nations Covenant was debated at the Paris Peace Conference, the term was ultimately omitted. Malcomson Scott L., "The Disappearance of Self-Determination from the League of Nations Covenant, January–February 1919," *The Historical Journal* (2025), p. 1. https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/historical-journal/article/disappearance-of-selfdetermination-from-the-league-of-nations-covenant-januaryfebruary-1919/2A341B0C88A200BB906C072D10D06C5B



Evgeni Gegechkori



Giorgi Gvazava

member state in the event of an attack.[15] The core idea of this article was to ensure the security of nations and to condemn international aggression, as such threats were seen as endangering the territorial integrity and political independence of states. However, while the article held great promise in its principles, it ultimately delivered less than expected.[16]

Georgian politicians interpreted this crucial article as follows: "The members of the League of Nations ...offer each other a form of guarantee against all attacks. Therefore, the admission of these states into the League means that any attack on them will be considered an attack on the entire League, and it will become the duty of all League members to defend them. This represents a great hope for smaller states and strengthens their sovereignty."[17]

As soon as the establishment of the League of Nations had been formally announced, the Democratic Republic of Georgia expressed its desire to join. A Georgian delegation submitted[18] a formal note to the League's Secretariat during the Paris Peace Conference on May 21, 1919, prior to the League's official establishment.[19] In this regard, Georgia was the first among the South Caucasian republics to take such action.

The note stated: "The Covenant of the League of Nations, recently ratified at the Peace Conference, offers a brighter future for peoples who long for peaceful labor and care for an international order grounded in law and justice. For the nations liberated by the World War and born through revolution, newly formed as independent states, this agreement holds particular significance: it provides them with the strongest and most effective guarantee for freedom and independence. The Georgian people, who have regained their freedom, hope that their newly acquired independence will be safeguarded by the League of Nations, standing alongside these other nations in their quest for peace and security."

In response to the aforementioned note, the League Secretariat sent a letter to the Chairman of the Government of Georgia on August 24, 1919, requesting the official submission of the necessary documentation.[20] A second letter from the Secretariat, dated September 6, 1919, and received in Tbilisi on October 20, proposed the appointment of a representative to the League. The Georgian government promptly complied, submitting the required materials[21] and designating a representative. This esteemed mission was entrusted to Evgeni Gegechkori, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who was in Paris at the time. Gegech-

[15] Article 16 of the League of Nations Covenant outlined mutual assistance obligations among member states, but, in practice, these provisions were reduced to mere "moral obligations." For instance, despite Poland being a founding member, the League of Nations refrained from intervening in the Russo-Polish War of 1920.

[16] Sharadze G., *sakartvelos pirveli demokratiuli respublika da sagareo politika (The First Democratic Republic of Georgia and Foreign Policy)*, Tbilisi, 2003, p. 171.

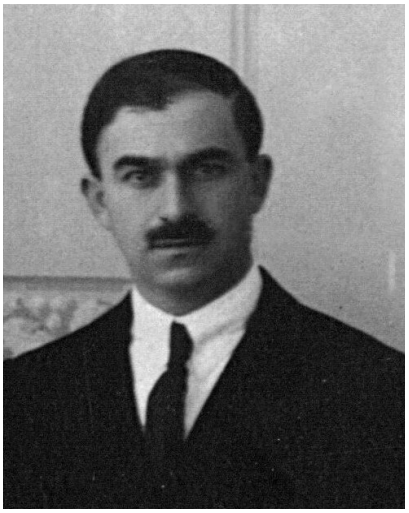
[17] Magazine *Tavisufali Sakartvelo*, Istanbul, 1921, №9-10, p. 4.

[18] http://iccn.ge/files/1920._08.13_draft_statement_by_legal_section_relating_to_the_admission_of_georgia.pdf
According to the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, K. Gvardzhaladze, a note from the Secretariat of the League of Nations was delivered on May 26, 1919. See: *Constituent Assembly of Georgia. Session Protocols*, Vol. VII, July 9 - December 31, 1920, Tbilisi, 2019, p. 509-510.

[19] Materski W., "The Problem of the Access of the Republic of Georgia to the Universal Security System (1919-1920)", PRO GEORGIA, *Journal of Kartvelological Studies*, №30, 2020, p. 241.

[20] http://iccn.ge/files/1920._08.13_draft_statement_by_legal_section_relating_to_the_admission_of_georgia.pdf

[21] National Archive of Georgia, Historical Central Archive, Fund 1864, Inscription 2, Case 117.



Konstantine Sabakhtarashvili



Leo Shengelaia

kori received the appropriate mandate[22] and was instructed to travel immediately to Geneva.[23]

However, this activity of the Georgian government was not publicly disclosed. As a result, neither the general public nor the members of the Constituent Assembly were aware of these developments.

On October 10, 1920, Giorgi Gvazava, the Chairman of the parliamentary faction of the National Democratic Party, addressed the Presidium of the Constituent Assembly with a proposal: the government should take immediate action to secure Georgia's membership in the League of Nations, and appoint representatives to participate in the general sessions of the League, which were scheduled to begin in Geneva on November 15, 1920.

On November 9-12, 1920, the Constituent Assembly held a plenary session to discuss the proposal from the National Democratic faction regarding the initiation of a petition for the admission of the Republic of Georgia to the League of Nations.

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Konstantine Sabakhtarashvili provided a detailed account of the government's efforts on this matter, updating the deputies on the actions already taken.

Giorgi Gvazava and the National Democratic Party faction expressed satisfaction with the government representative's explanation. However, the discussion of the issue took a different direction. Specifically, the debate focused on whether Georgia should seek to join the League of Nations, and whether membership in this new international organization would prove beneficial to the Georgian state.

The issue was thus outlined by Leo Shengelaia, the Chairman of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, who argued: The League of Nations is a union of victorious imperialist states, not a coalition of free nations. The imperialists have never believed in the self-determination of nations, and the League's program includes articles that are unacceptable not only to socialists, but even to democrats. Membership in such an organization would not be advantageous for the Georgian people; on the contrary, it could even harm them. If Georgia's entry into the League of Nations is necessary, given our situation, the decision should not rest with the government or the Constituent Assembly, but should be put to a referendum, Shengelaia asserted.[24]

Giorgi Gvazava called Shengelaia's concerns a misunderstanding, and pointed out: "If there exists a movement in which all of humanity is involved, we cannot exclude our homeland from it. If we wish to develop, we must follow the path that humanity is taking. There is no danger in this." Gvazava firmly explained that by joining the League of Nations, Georgia would have a platform to advocate for its interests, including the protection of political independence and territorial integrity. Therefore, instead of criticizing the League, Georgia should focus on securing its place within it.[25]

Grigol Rtskhiladze, a representative of the Socialist Federalist Party, expressed cautious criticism of the League of Nations. He believed that the Allied powers would primarily use the organization to advance their own interests, and that the League would likely serve to protect the legal order which the victorious Entente sought to strengthen. However, Rtskhiladze also acknowledged that "for Georgia, this issue is not as crucial as the fact that joining the League of Nations... would be a recognition of our independence

[22] https://www.iccn.ge/files/1920.10.16_mr._gueguetchkori__mr._avaloff_to_the_admission_of_georgia.pdf

[23] *Constituent Assembly of Georgia. Session Protocols*, Vol. VII, p. 501.

[24] Ibidem, p. 503-505.

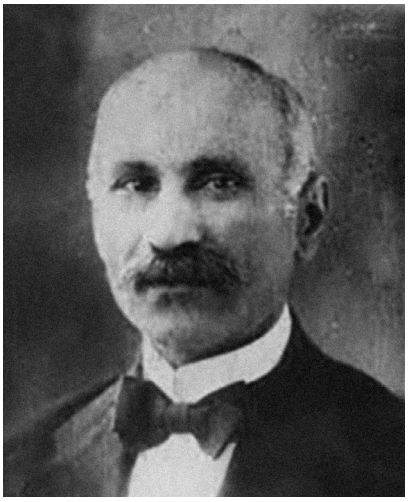
[25] Ibidem, p. 508.

and statehood by the Entente," and this "is a sober interest from the point of view of Georgian politics." While Rtskhiladze was skeptical about the possibility of equality among member states, he remarked, "we will not have the same voice there as some romantics believe. We will be members of the League of Nations, but our influence will not be equal to that of other states. The word of England will carry far more authority and weight than the word of our or other states[26] (it should be noted that, in general, while Georgian federalists were dissatisfied with the structure of the League of Nations, which was in the process of formation, they viewed it as a seed that, in future, would turn into a "real union of free nations"[27]).

Akaki Chkhenkeli, the Chairman of the parliamentary faction of the ruling Social Democratic Party, supported the entry of the Democratic Republic of Georgia into the League of Nations, and pointed out: We will play the same role there as we do in the Second International. He further expressed hope that "politically, Georgia, as a state, will demonstrate the same level of integrity in the international community as its ruling party has shown in the International."[28]

The supreme legislative body of the Democratic Republic of Georgia adopted the following resolution: "The Constituent Assembly approves the steps taken by the government regarding the entry of the Republic of Georgia into the League of Nations, and instructs the government to continue working towards ensuring that the Democratic Republic of Georgia is accepted as a full-fledged member to the League of Nations." The Socialist Revolutionary faction and non-partisan deputy Geronti Kikodze voted against the resolution.[29]

Certain segments of Georgian society expressed significant interest in understanding the essence and objectives of the League of Nations, as well as Georgia's relations with this universal international organization. The well-known lawyer and politician Giorgi Gvazava played a significant role in promoting the League of Nations among the wider public. Noteworthy is his extensive article titled, "The League of Nations," which was published[30] in four issues of the newspaper *Sakartvelo* (Georgia) in October-November 1920. In his article, Gvazava discusses "how history and the events of the time steered the world towards the pursuit of freedom and truth." He elaborates on the origins and development of the idea of world peace,



Grigol Rtskhiladze

and emphasizes the importance of the national issue. Notably, Gvazava argues that the Treaty of Versailles gave priority to the principle of rights in the national question, rather than the theoretical provision of self-determination, a meaningful advance toward resolving this pressing issue for humanity.

Gvazava also authored another important publication, prompted by Anton Zhorzholiani's article "Due to the Upcoming Assembly of the League of Nations," published in the social-democratic newspaper *Ertoba* (The Union). Zhorzholiani argued that the correct name for the League of Nations was "Society of Nations," as written in the Treaty of Versailles.[31]

In the response titled "Around the League of Nations," Giorgi Gvazava explained: "The Treaty of Versailles is written in two languages - French and English, both of which are equally valid. The French version uses "Societe," while the English original uses "League." It is clear that the use of either term is equally acceptable." Additionally, Gvazava clarified several inaccuracies in Ertoba regarding the structures of the League of Nations and the process of admission to its membership.[32] A few days later, Gvazava translated and published the "Covenant of the League of Nations," allowing readers to understand the core issues.[33]

In December 1919, the Georgian Association of the League of Nations was founded in Tbilisi, with Aleksandre Lomtatidze, the First Deputy Chairman of the Constituent Assembly, serving as its president. By October of the following year, the association was unanimously accepted as a member of the World Association of the League of Nations at a congress held in Milan.[34]

[26] Ibidem, p. 509.

[27] *Constituent Assembly of Georgia. Session Protocols*, Volume VIII, p. 43-44.

[28] Ibidem, p. 512.

[29] Ibidem, p. 513.

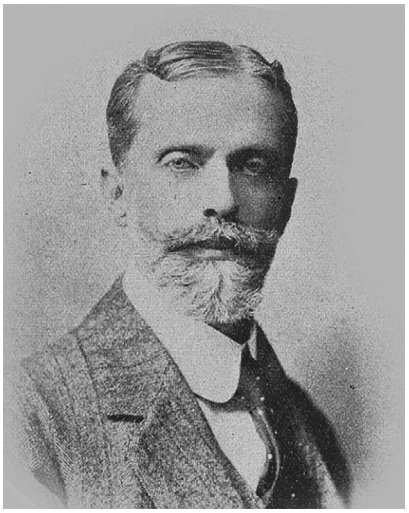
[30] Newspaper *Sakartvelo*, October 17-23; November 4-5, 1920.

[31] Newspaper *Ertoba*, October 21, 1920.

[32] Newspaper *Sakartvelo*, October 26, 1920.

[33] Newspaper *Sakartvelo*, October 30; November 2, 1920.

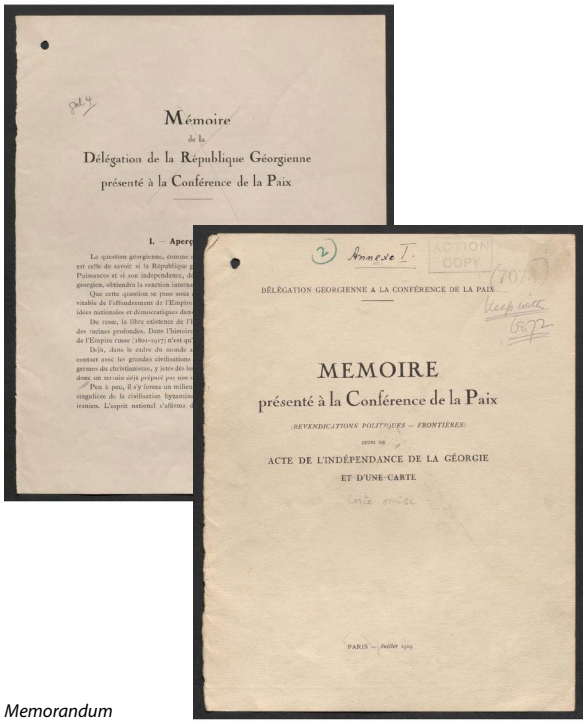
[34] "Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-1921)," Encyclopedia-Dictionary, Tbilisi, 2018, p. 139-140.



Antonio Huneeus

To consider the applications of countries wishing to join the League, the General Assembly established a special committee known as the Fifth Committee, comprising 36 members and chaired by a Chilean delegate, Don Antonio Huneeus.[35]

On September 18, 1920, the Democratic Republic of Georgia submitted a memorandum to the committee. The memorandum emphasized Georgia's strong aspiration for independence, highlighting key milestones, such as the declaration of state independence, the formation of its own government, the election of a constituent assembly through democratic processes, and ongoing work on a constitution. The document underscored Georgia's sovereignty, pointing to its de facto recognition by the Allied states and its legal recognition by Soviet Russia. The Georgian government also drew attention to the country's distinct geographical, ethnographic, and religious differences[36] from Russia. Furthermore, the memorandum argued that Georgia's membership in the League would strengthen its sovereignty and stability, while also enhancing the security of its communication lines connecting Europe with Persia, Armenia, and Central Asia.[37] "The unity of all the states of the Caucasus is crucial to ensure that the front part of Asia does not fall prey to rivalry and discord," the memorandum emphasized.[38]



Memorandum

The issue of the Democratic Republic of Georgia was referred to Sub-Committee No. 3, chaired by Norwegian representative Fridtjof Nansen. The sub-committee also included Professor T. Ionescu (Romania), E. D. Millen (Australia), E. de Palacios (Spain), N. Politis (Greece), M. Spalahikovich (Yugoslavia), and Tsaan-Tsahi-Fu (China).[39]

The sub-committee reviewed the documentation submitted by the Democratic Republic of Georgia, listened to explanations from Zurab Avalishvili and Mikheil Sumbatashvili, and prepared a report, which was subsequently presented to the Fifth Committee.

In the report of Sub-Committee No.3, prepared by Nansen and presented to the Fifth Committee by Brazilian representative Rodrigo Octavio,[40] the Democratic Republic of Georgia was described as a "developed and stable" state unit. The report highlighted that Georgia's political system, including its mechanisms for electing governing bodies, met the fundamental criteria and formal requirements for membership in the League of Nations.

The issue of the Democratic Republic of Georgia was first discussed at a preliminary meeting of the Fifth Committee of the League of Nations on December 2, 1920, with an official session and vote taking

35 Don Antonio Ricardo Huneeus Gana, a professor at the University of Chile, was a prominent political figure and statesman. Throughout his career, he held several key positions, including Minister of Justice, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Minister of the Interior of Chile.

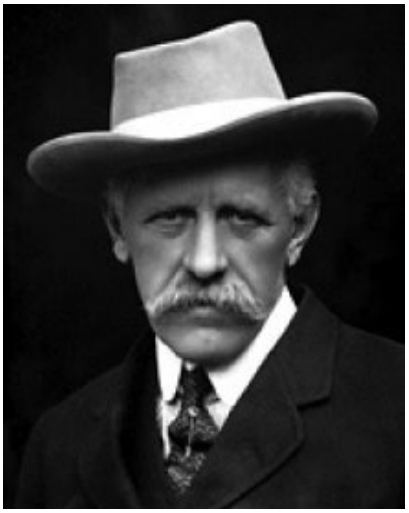
36 Gzoyan Edita G., "The Admission of the Caucasus States to the League of Nations: the Role of Soviet Russia," *Caucasus Survey*, July 2017, p. 5.

37 Olszewski P., "Kwestia zakaukaska na forum Ligi Narodów w 1920 r." Piotrkowskie Zeszyty Historyczne 1, 1998, p. 105.

38 Newspaper *Ertoba*, December 7, 1920.

39 Avalishvili, Z., *sakartvelos damoukidebloba 1918-1921 tslebis saertashoriso politikashi (Georgia's Independence in International Politics of 1918-1921)*. Tbilisi, 1926, p. 364-365.

40 A famous Brazilian lawyer, writer, professor, and statesman, he was also the Vice-President of the Assembly of the League of Nations.



Fridtjof Nansen



Zurab Avalishvili

place on December 9. A total of six countries voted in favor of Georgia's immediate admission to the League, nine supported a proposal to postpone the decision for one year and revisit the matter later, while four abstained.

The Committee conclusion stated: Georgia's application was viewed with sympathy, but prevailing circumstances did not permit a final decision. Until such a decision could be made, Georgia was permitted to participate in the League's technical organizations of general importance.[41]

The matter was subsequently brought before the Assembly of the League of Nations on December 16, 1920.[42] Among the delegates who spoke in support of Georgia's membership were Fridtjof Nansen, Lord Robert Cecil, and Emir Zoka ed-Dowleh.

Nansen emphasized that Georgia's admission would be significant not only for the Georgian people, but also for the League itself. As he stated: "If the League wants to oppose Bolshevism, it must accept Georgia as a member. Otherwise, it would be a direct service to Bolshevism, and the League's refusal to admit small nations would only drive them toward rival political regimes."

Lord Cecil, who at the time represented South Africa in the League, also strongly supported Georgia's admission. The representative of Persia, Emir Zoka ed-Dowleh, stated: Georgia "is an organized country, with a strong government and an army capable of defending itself against two enemies that attacked it over several years. I visited Georgia in 1919. It is a cultured state, and I know it well. In my opinion, Georgia has every right to become a member of the League of Nations."[43] Emir Zoka ed-Dowleh went on to emphasize that the admission of the Democratic Republic of Georgia was a moral obligation for the League of Nations.



Mikheil Sumbatashvili

A particularly noteworthy statement came from a Colombian delegate, Antonio Restrepo. He once again underscored the strategic importance of admitting states bordering Soviet Russia into the League. Restrepo openly concluded that the hesitation to accept these nations stemmed from a fear of Bolshevism, which exposed the weakness of the League.

The French representative, René Viviani, a prominent socialist, political figure, and one of the founders of the newspaper *L'Humanité*, was notable for his frank and uncompromising stance. He argued that Article 10 of the League's Covenant obliged members to

41 Avalishvili, Z., *Georgia's Independence in International Politics of 1918-1921*, p. 366.

42 At the same session, the issue of the Baltic states was also discussed. See: Javakhishvili N., "Admission of Georgia and the Baltic States into the League of Nations," in the compendium - *Zurab Papaskiri - 60*, Tbilisi, 2010-2013, p. 481.

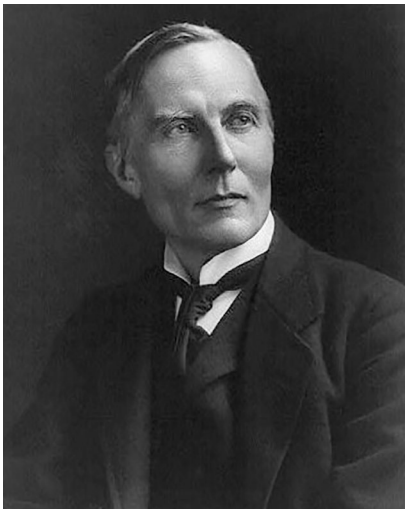
43 Newspaper *Sakartvelos Respublika*, February 3, 1921.



Lord Robert Cecil



Rene Viviani



Herbert Albert Laurens Fisher

come to the aid of any fellow member in danger. "The most futile policy," he stated, "is to reinforce false hopes and illusions among people by convincing them that help will come when, in fact, it cannot. Therefore, anyone who believes they cannot extend real assistance to the fringes of Europe" should vote not for full membership of these states, but only for their admission into the League's technical organizations.

Viviani's view was supported by British delegate Herbert Fisher, who was then the UK's Minister of Education. "We must not be swayed by emotions; instead, we must exercise clear, rational judgment, as befits those in charge of state," he said. According to Fisher, although the situation in Georgia appeared relatively safe and stable, there remained a risk that Bolshevism could spread to this "warm-hearted and small state" should "the need arise." Therefore, the British delegate urged that the threats facing Georgia be taken seriously.[44]

The vote on Georgia's admission to the League of Nations concluded as follows: 10 votes in favor, 13 against, and four abstentions. A key factor influencing this outcome was the Russian context.[45]

Among the European countries Italy, Norway, Portugal, and Switzerland supported the admission of the Democratic Republic of Georgia; from South America Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, and Paraguay voted in favor; Persia backed the proposal from Asia, and South Africa did so from the African continent. Opposition came from a diverse group of countries, including the United Kingdom, France, Spain, Denmark, Greece, the Netherlands, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Cuba, and India. Belgium, Sweden, Poland, and Romania abstained from the vote.

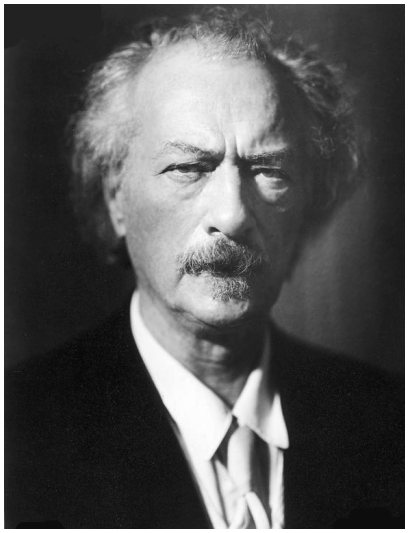
Poland's representative, renowned pianist, composer, and statesman Ignacy Jan Paderewski, expressed deep sympathy for Georgia. Highlighting its long-standing tradition of statehood, he addressed the Assembly: "Ancient Georgia looks at you with eyes full of entreaty, eyes illuminated by the hope for the return of freedom, which even long years of slavery could not extinguish." Yet despite his emotional appeal, the Polish delegate chose to abstain from voting. "Poland wants to say yes, and therefore it cannot vote against. That is why, gentlemen, I have abstained."[46]

Following Paderewski's decision, a diplomatic representative of the Democratic Republic of Georgia in Poland, Giorgi Sidamon-Eristavi, received the following explanation from Polish Foreign Minister Eustachy Sapieha: "Our representative acted according to the circumstances. He did so after a prior meeting with representatives of England and France, and

[44] Avalishvili, Z., *Georgia's Independence in International Politics of 1918-1921*, p. 368.

[45] Materski W., "The Problem of the Access of the Republic of Georgia to the Universal Security System (1919-1920)," p. 247.

[46] Newspaper *Sakartvelos Respublika*, February 3, 1921.



Ignacy Jan Paderewski



Khariton Shavishvili

could not go against their position, as the resolution of many critical issues for Poland depends on the will of the Allies."[47]

Cuban delegate Aguero, who played a significant role in the voting process, speaking frankly, told Georgian representatives Zurab Avalishvili and Mikheil Sumbatashvili: "Of course, the Central and South American republics could have used their number of votes to admit Georgia and the Baltic states to the League, as justice demanded. But you know very well that such decisions are not made on the basis of justice. For the American republics, it is awkward to oppose the great European powers on a matter that is of greater importance to that very part of the world! If England and France, even if England alone, had voted in your favor, we would have followed as one man."[48]

Thus, the Assembly of the League of Nations declined to admit Georgia and the Baltic states, but allowed them to participate in the technical structures alongside the member states.[49] "This refusal contradicted the fundamental principles of the organization's charter and carried a political rather than a legal significance."[50] In practice, however, this refusal meant that the League of Nations was effectively withdrawing its support for the protection of Georgia's state independence.

As for the right to engage with the League's technical structures, this decision provided a glimmer of hope, which was even reflected in the media of the time. For instance, the newspaper *Sakartvelos Respublika* (Republic of Georgia) reported, "the French press announces that, due to the postponement of Georgia's admission to the League, Leon Bourgeois stated that the League of Nations will revisit this matter at its next session. Furthermore, Leon Bourgeois expressed that he would personally support Georgia's membership in the League."[51]

One of the main reasons for the League of Nations' refusal to admit the Democratic Republic of Georgia was the lack of its legal (de jure) recognition at the time. Although the Allied powers granted de jure recognition to Georgia in January 1921, an important step that should have opened the door to League membership, this progress was swiftly undermined when, in February-March of the same year, Soviet Russia invaded Georgia and established a Bolshevik regime there. These developments made it impossible for the country to gain admission during the League's Second Assembly, while all three Baltic republics were successfully admitted as members.

The government-in-exile of the Democratic Republic of Georgia maintained active contact with the League of Nations, which remained a vital international platform for promoting Georgia's case. In this context, the "Georgian delegate to the League of Nations," as he was referred to at the time, Khariton Shavishvili, continued to carry out meaningful and persistent diplomatic work. The League of Nations also expressed support for Georgia's independence through a number of official documents adopted during the interbellum, the period between the world wars.

47 Janelidze O., Essays from the History of Georgia. XIX-XXI Centuries, New York, 2021, p. 217.

48 Avalishvili, Z., Georgia's Independence in International Politics of 1918-1921, p. 369.

49 These structures included: the Permanent Court of International Justice, the International Labour Bureau, the Health Organization, the Economic and Financial Organization, and the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation.

50 Gzoyan Edita G., "The Admission of the Caucasus States to the League of Nations: the Role of Soviet Russia," p. 14.

51 Newspaper *Sakartvelo*, January 19, 1921.