



### **Laudatio on the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of TSU**

The first Georgian university – the first national university in the Caucasus and within the entire Russian Empire space of that period - was opened exactly 100 years ago, on February 8, 1918 (old style January 26). This important fact has largely determined future educational, cultural and even political course of Georgia.

Not only we are marking the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Tbilisi State University today, but we are also paying tribute to those two-millennia-old national educational traditions, which led to the establishment of our university. This path actually had two goals – national and European humanistic ideals. When the founders of our Alma Mater decided to found Georgian University, their concept was built on two principles: to restore distinctive Georgian educational traditions and to introduce European university model.

The national educational roots go back hundreds of years ago, when a famous rhetoric school of Kolkheti – the Kolkheti Academy - existed on the territory of Georgia in the 3<sup>rd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D.

Georgian church and monastery centers located outside our country, among them in Palestine (5<sup>th</sup> century), Syria (4<sup>th</sup> century), Byzantine Empire (10<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> centuries) and Bulgaria (11<sup>th</sup> century) were powerful educational centers.

“Georgian monasteries abroad had huge cultural importance. Besides the great cultural heritage preserved by Georgia over the past centuries, due to the monasteries located abroad, Georgia had an opportunity to closely watch the process of successful cultural development of educated countries. Everything that was new and important was written or done by Georgian public figures, writers, scientists and artists working at Georgian monasteries founded abroad; Georgia had an opportunity

to be aware of ongoing developments,” – this is how Ivane Javakhishvili assessed the significance of foreign-based Georgian spiritual and educational centers in developing national culture.

The roots of the Tbilisi University are linked to Georgian higher educational institutions existing in the Middle Ages – Gelati and Ikalto Academies, functioning in Georgia like European universities. It is known that like the oldest Bologna University, the curriculum of the Gelati Academy, which was founded in 1106, envisaged teaching the trivium and quadrivium subjects.

Until the 14<sup>th</sup> century Georgia was an advanced country in terms of its cultural development among other eastern neighbors, but following foreign invasions and Georgia’s splitting into separate kingdoms and principalities, its economic and cultural development had been stalled for a long time in our country. As a result of selfless struggle, Georgian people managed to maintain their national identity, rich spiritual and material culture as well as to restore failing centers of oldest education.

Even the Russian Empire, which invaded Georgia, failed to deprive Georgian people of their willingness to restore freedom and national identity. The idea of establishing the university first emerged in 1832 among the conspirators against the Russian Empire. However, this idea was doomed to failure like the key goal of the 1832 conspiracy.

New generation led by great Georgian public figure, Ilia Chavchavadze appeared in the country in the 1960s. New stage of spiritual revival in the history of Georgia is just associated with Chavchavadze’s name. The struggle for the foundation of the university intensified during those years.

The foundation of the Tbilisi Bank of Nobility upon Ilia Chavchavadze’s initiative opened up real opportunities for the establishment of high school. It was the only bank among other banks existing in the Russian Empire that used its revenues in the nation’s cultural, educational and economic interests.

The Society for the Spreading of Literacy among Georgians, the Georgian Historical Ethnographic Society and the Society of Georgian Nobility Helping Poor Students played a huge role in surviving and developing Georgian culture and education, also promoting national scientific activities. Members of the societies spared no efforts to establish high school in Georgia.

Graduate and Privatdozent of St. Petersburg University, Professor of Wilhelm University in Berlin, Ivane Javakhishvili assumed responsibility for founding the Georgian university at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is fairly considered that he has continued the path of Ilia Chavchavadze in terms of maintaining and strengthening Georgian national self-awareness.

Ivane Javakhishvili arrived in Georgia in spring 1917 to lead the process of establishing the Georgian University Society. The Society involving people from all strata of society played an important role in raising necessary funds for opening the university and shaping its structure.

Georgian people appreciated the idea of founding the university. January 26, 1918 – the day of solemn opening of the university – turned into the major event in the country. Abkhazian, Ossetian, Armenian, Azerbaijani, Jewish, Polish and other peoples welcomed the newly founded university. Besides donations, they expressed moral support to the initiators of the idea. Solidarity and love expressed by all nationalities living in Georgia still represents a great wealth of our university.

Each and every citizen with certain education background had the right to study at the university regardless of their nationality, gender and religion. Noteworthy that it was a female student, who received the first student card, while Vanda Gambashidze of American origin was the first among professors and lecturers.

Three major developments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century created the entire epoch in Georgian history – restoration of autocephaly of Georgian Orthodox Church (March 12, 1917) was followed by the foundation of the university; four months later, on May 26, 1918, Georgia declared its independence.

The Tbilisi State University is especially proud of having close relations with the Georgian Orthodox Church that were established upon opening the university. This relationship had never created any obstacles to studying the world religions at a scientific level; the university had always been Alma Mater for young people belonging to different confessions.

The names of one of the founders of the university, famous public figure and scientist, Ekvtime Takaishvili, and the university student and later a cleric and public figure, Grigol Peradze, who were

canonized by the Georgian church as saints for their devotion to Christianity, homeland and humanistic ideals, are especially valuable for us.

The Tbilisi University was initially founded as a public higher educational institution, but several months later the Government of the Democratic Republic of Georgia granted it the status of the state institution and assumed responsibility for its financial and material support. Despite this status, the university maintained its academic freedom and autonomy, which was lost during the Soviet period and then restored only in 1992. It should be noted that in 2017, upon the initiative of the Tbilisi State University, an amendment was made to the draft constitution of Georgia, according to which a constitutional freedom of autonomy of a higher educational institution was added to the main principle of academic freedom.

In 1918-1921, after collapse of the Russian Empire and during 1028 days of its independence, also despite a lot of internal and external complications and challenges, Georgia managed to create one of the most democratic political systems of that period with the first Georgian university making an important contribution to it. Close cooperation between the university professors and then government is exemplary. The university professors, among them Ekvtime Takaishvili, Pilipe Gogichaishvili, Simon Avaliani and Alexander Tsereteli, also held top positions in the government. The major issues, such as creation of Georgian scientific terminology, state border demarcation, developing Georgian cultural heritage management policy, were solved through active involvement of the university professors.

The model of the Democratic Republic of Georgia as of European democratic state was built on genuine European political ideas. The Democratic Republic of Georgia was recognized as the first state in the world, where European, moderate social-democratic force came to power. Although the Social-Democratic Party enjoyed huge support (80% of votes during the 1919 democratic elections of the Constituent Assembly), it gave an example of formation and effective work of the coalition government.

European political values of the Democratic Republic were reflected in those legislative acts, which envisaged women's suffrage (five women were elected in the legislature in 1919); constitutional rights of ethnic minorities; absolute freedom of assembly, speech and press; full secularism; guarantees for social rights (eight-hour-long workday; improving labor conditions; banning child labor and mandatory insurance of workers).

The Democratic Republic actively promoted the development of education and culture. In 1918-1921, tens of Georgian young people (mainly students of the Tbilisi State University) were sent to leading European universities and schools with the financial support of the government.

The process of development of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, as the first social-democratic state caused huge interest among European politicians. The European socialist delegation's visit to Georgia in autumn, 1920 is a clear example of it. A group of people arrived in Georgia for a period of several months to study Georgia's social-democratic political model. Among them were: Karl Kautsky, leader of the Second International; Ramsay MacDonald (later twice Prime Minister of Great Britain), Thomas Show and Ethel Snowden, leaders of the Labor Party; Camille Huysmans (later the Prime Minister), Emile Vandervelde (State and Justice Minister) and Louis de Brouckère, founders of the Belgian Workers' Party; Pierre Renaudel and Adrienne Marquette, leaders of the French Socialist Party. Following the visit, European politicians released a number of articles and papers about the Democratic Republic of Georgia.

The 1921 Constitution – the major achievement of the Democratic Republic of Georgia – can boldly be considered the best political act in the world of that period. In his article on Georgia, Ramsay MacDonald wrote about the 1921 constitution that by developing the draft constitution, Georgian people proved to the entire world their high legal culture and political awareness. Karl Kautsky wrote in his book dedicated to Georgia: “Whenever a Social-Democratic Government may come into power, it will be obliged to act on the same principles, and the benefit of the Georgian experience will be at its disposal.”

Emile Vandervelde, Belgian social-democrat, said while assessing Georgian democracy that if there is a nation, which deserved this recognition due to its heroic aspiration and awareness of unity, it is undoubtedly the Republic of Georgia.

The gravest cataclysms taking place in Georgia in 1921 had an adverse effect on the university's life. Three-year-long independence was followed by Georgia's annexation by Soviet Russia. The Constituent Assembly called on Georgian youth, entire country to defend their homeland. The university professors and students actively supported the call. The Rector of the University wished students good luck in their struggle for defending homeland.

The situation was changing rapidly on the frontline. All necessary measures were taken at the Tbilisi State University. Rector Ivane Javakhishvili sent a letter to the Defense Committee of the Presidium of the Constituent Assembly: “a) Professors, assistant professors, lecturers, assistants and personnel

of the scientific and educational divisions of the Tbilisi State University are ready to sacrifice their knowledge, experience and life to protect freedom of the endangered precious homeland and request the committee to use their intellectual and physical strength in the best possible way it considers to be needed. 2) The doors of the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, as well as of the clinics of the Faculty of Medicine are open for wartime needs.”

Along with Georgian cadets, the university students also sacrificed their lives in the struggle against the Red Army. Among them was Maro Makashvili, student of the Faculty of Philosophy of the Tbilisi University, who fought near Tbilisi as a volunteer nurse and died on the battlefield. Despite the Georgian people’s resistance, the country failed to avoid Russian occupation for the next 70 years.

A sense of protest and resistance against the occupying force was either weakening or strengthening from time to time at the university, which gently kept the idea of freedom. Grigol Robakidze said on this occasion that “Georgian University has turned into the laboratory of Georgian consciousness.” Special attention should be paid to the anti-Soviet organizations of the 1940s, among them “Tetri Giorgi” (1941) led by student of the Faculty of Law, Levan (Mustafa) Shelia; “Samanelebi”, which was created in 1942 and was led by Giorgi Kadagidze, postgraduate student of a famous Georgian teacher, Prof. Mikheil Zandukeli. Later in 1978, then Soviet Union was shaken by the demonstration of Georgian youth and teaching staff, which was held upon the initiative of the Tbilisi State University to protect Georgian as the official language. The student movement of the 1990s led by students of the Tbilisi State University played a huge role in liberating Georgia from the Soviet regime.

Since the very first days of its foundation, the Tbilisi University has turned into the major center for the development of Georgian science. Famous Petersburg-based schools in Kartvelian Studies and Caucasiology moved to Georgia and achieved the highest level of development. Universally recognized schools of psychology, physiology, mathematics, Georgian historiography, literary studies, philosophy, art studies, Georgian and Caucasian linguistics, eastern and classical philology were created and developed at the Tbilisi State University during years.

It was a logical fact that in 1941 the absolute majority of founders of the Georgian Academy of Sciences were professors of the Tbilisi State University.

Scientific research is still a priority for the university. The university’s computer network provides access to popular international scientific electronic databases.

TSU incorporates 16 research institutes and about 85 laboratories, among them FabLab, SMART|Lab, SMART|AtmoSim-Lab, Bloomberg Laboratory, physics and chemistry labs modernized with the support of San Diego University, the Center of Anatomical Pathology, the Multimedia Center, archaeological field base on Grakliani Hill, fine arts studio, etc. that further increases the university's research potential and productivity.

Scientific activities had always been considered very important at the university. Today, the role of science and education is as high throughout the world as never, because the new century is prioritizing science and education. The Tbilisi State University tries to keep in step with the common process of globalization.

It should be said to the credit of our scientists that in parallel with scientific activities, they spare no efforts to participate in learning process that largely determines the maintenance of a high level of university education. Just due to this parameter, our university is among front-runners. Today, the university's primary goal - not only to maintain, but also to raise the level of university education – envisages enriching curricula and education plans by modern scientific achievements.

Presently, up to 22 000 students are studying at the Tbilisi State University with girls constituting 61% and boys – 39%.

There are seven faculties at the university: Faculty of Economics and Business; Faculty of Exact and Natural Sciences; Faculty of Law; Faculty of Medicine; Faculty of Social and Political Sciences; Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences; Faculty of Humanities.

The university library collections contain about eight million books.

Ivane Javakhishvili paid huge attention to international integration of the university.

As far back as 1920, the university board developed a notification text about the foundation of the Tbilisi University and sent it to famous European and American universities. During the very first years of its existence, a lot of famous foreign scientists arrived in Tbilisi to deliver lectures.

During the Soviet era, TSU's international relations were mostly limited by its relations with socialist countries.

Since 2005, when Georgia joined the Bologna Process, the Tbilisi State University has got involved in the EU-funded programs, including Erasmus Mundus, Erasmus+, Tempus, FP7 Marie Curie, Horizon 2020, ERC, institutional development programs, etc.

TSU has signed the Memorandums of Cooperation with about 200 foreign universities from up to 50 countries; in addition, it cooperates with about 100 European universities through exchange programs in frames of Erasmus+ and bilateral cooperation. It has intensified cooperation with neighboring countries and a number of agreements have been signed with partner universities.

Over the past three years, several hundreds of TSU students (BA, MA and PhD students) participated in exchange programs. During the same period, TSU hosted over 500 foreign students from partner universities. Academic and administrative mobility is also carried out in frames of these programs. A number of joint educational programs, among them 22 foreign language programs, are being implemented at TSU in collaboration with partner universities.

We are also proud of latest achievements made by the University. I mean, its position among the top 2 percent of the world's best universities that ranks TSU at No. 359 (the U.S. News & World Report – Best Global Universities Ranking 2017); TSU was ranked at No. 801+, according to Times Higher Education World University Rankings (2016). According to Shanghai Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) in Physics (2017), TSU is ranked at No. 151-200. According to Thomson Reuters World University Rankings, TSU is among the world's best universities for physics and is ranked 184<sup>th</sup> among the world's 248 universities.

It should also be noted that TSU students received most state education grants for master's degree for the 2017-2018 academic year. 328 out of 895 MA students, who obtained state grants, study at TSU.

Our joint efforts are directed towards the future. The university's strategic development plan was developed in 2016 and it covers quite a lengthy period – 2017-2021. The plan outlines those strategic directions, which should become a cornerstone for the university development. The document was developed by a special working group set up upon the Rector's initiative. The working group dedicated three months to working on the following issues: university management;



infrastructure development; student life and student service; scientific, research and educational activities; work quality assessment; public relations, etc.

Significant steps have already been taken towards infrastructure development. A new student dormitory was officially opened in 2017. The new complex is set to accommodate 320 students and it consists of three four-storey buildings, public and administrative buildings and areas for sports.

The university has over 300 000 alumni. On December 15, 2017, TSU hosted an event dedicated to the restoration of Georgian University Society. The society unites the university alumni and its supporters. Its key goal is to develop research and science at TSU and create favorable learning environment for students. Just this was the first event marking TSU's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, which is being held under the auspices of UNESCO in 2018. A special government commission has been set up to plan and organize the events marking the 100th anniversary of TSU countrywide and internationally. The commission is led by Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili and it consists of members of the government, the Parliament, the Georgian Orthodox Church and the National Academy of Sciences.

Continuation of renowned traditions and further development of achievements is the key goal that the University has today. TSU prioritizes on the integration of learning process and research activities, involvement of students in research activities that will help them improve their skills and will guarantee generation of new ideas.

Titsian Tabidze, Georgian symbolist poet and member of Tsisperkantslebi (The Blue Horns – a group of Georgian symbolist poets) swore publicly during the fifth year of founding the university that “January 26 (new style February 8) should become the second Christmas for each and every Georgian.”

During one century, Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University bore the name of a flagship of the country's higher educational system with dignity. Along with other higher educational institutions and scientific centers, it created the 20<sup>th</sup> century Georgian science, education and entered the new century of its praiseworthy history with new goals and hopes!

Let me congratulate our university, its students and professors, entire Georgia, modern global university community on this anniversary date!

Giorgi Sharvashidze

Rector of Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University

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