**GEORGIA**

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*Tolerance, peaceful coexistence, support, respect for diversity, equality, love for liberty and aspiration towards it, have never been unfamiliar to me. Neither are they now. The main square of my country is called Liberty Square. I want you to believe that we have common ideals.*

**Transfiguration**

**(Sincere letter to a friend)**

I do not know what kind of attitude Europe has today towards the God, but the alterations that occurred over the last half-century, should be called a transfiguration.

It’s not easy to live here, in the village located at the bottom of gloomy rocks and glacial peaks of Caucasus Mountains, where the public transport is available just once a week and disappears in the snow white winter like a warrior in the battle. Teachers are educating us on the ideals and preconditions for building a better life in deserted classrooms. The voice of the teacher is echoed through the class of two or three children around the wood-burning stove and the sound waves ricocheting from the walls, repeat these words as if trying to stick in our memories: “Europe - exhausted from the wars fought - came to the conclusion that the right of every human, liberty, dignity and property is inviolable. These values should lay the foundation for a united, stable, developed Europe. These are the values that break the ridiculous barriers between a person and the State."

It is amazing, how those people have arrived to the spirit of unity, stability, and equality and to the concept – “My liberty ends where the liberty of another begins”. Yet, the impressions received from the history course on the early ages of Europe used to send me the terrifying shivers down my spine. Is this not the continent where the states spent centuries in pointless massacres from the time of Trojan War? Sometimes, for the purpose of usurping the throne, sometimes for the territorial expansion, feverishly yearning to acquire new lands. Europe witnessed the “witches” burned at the stakes, oftentimes for the different religious beliefs, the “Spanish boots” of inquisition and the guillotines. The rebellions and revolutions of dog-poor people, weary with toil, were beyond the count... And finally, two World Wars - caused by fanaticism, leading to eighty million casualties.

The contrast between the present and the past is truly impressive. First off, this is probably the evolution of thought, the transfiguration of mind-set.

I was wondering how I am supposed to address you. With praise? To introduce your own self to you? To tell you how the peaceful and developed Europe was created, on which foundation of ideals? Who were the authors of theories or decisions made? Who are the members today? What scope of action do they have? What are the structures and results shown by the statistics in figures? Why is it necessary? I guess you already know all of this. So, now I think I should speak more about myself and my attitude towards you, about my feeling when you are far away. This feeling is a great pain and a great hope at the same time that have been expressed out too many times already. I am afraid you might not like something, but people speak about pain to show that support is necessary. I want to have the faith of this support, to believe in your capabilities.

Glorious Europe, despite the fact that throughout the centuries I endlessly fought imperial aggressions threatening to devour me, oftentimes on the verge of physical extermination, I stood alone, in defence of my identity, without a single supporter. While this country refused to exercise death penalty eight centuries ago, allowed peoples of different religious beliefs and ethnic origins to coexist peacefully for centuries from the very beginning of its statehood, and regardless of nature of the ideals cherished, still, the whole world remains unable to tell whether this is Europe or Asia. When the teacher asks me to draw the boundary between Europe and Asia on the world map, the red line from the peaks of the Caucasus Mountains makes my heart sink as if saying to me: “you don’t belong here”.

Today is February 25, one of the most terrible days in my history. On that day, I recited myriad monologues of despair to the world, written on the black paper with red ink... I did not see you there standing by my side on that day either.

I had times of power and upheaval as well. It was eight centuries ago. At that time, Shota Rustaveli wrote the poem, called “The Knight in the Panther's Skin” included among the top seven world's literary masterpieces of all time. Please, read it once again. Your current ideals can be found there. Among them is the following: “the lion's whelps are equal, be they male or female.” *(Translated by Marjory Scott Wardrop)*.

After all this, you will probably ask me – “where do you stand today?” I will tell you. I had acknowledged many of your current ideals in the past but I forgot them, to be more precise, I was forced to forget. There was no time left to revisit them. I had to struggle for my survival first.

I do not know what kind of relationship Zezva and Mzia - the oldest Europeans found in Georgia - had in terms of gender equality but anthropologists call them “the first Europeans”. This baptism, although symbolic still makes me happy. Each sentence, thought, action and relation that connects me to Europe makes me happy. Why was I rushing so ardently towards you in the past and why am I trying so hard at present? Because I feel most secure, equal and dignified in this space... I believe that this space allows me to manifest my utmost capabilities.

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Have you ever seen a church, a synagogue and a mosque erected together on five hundred square meters? This peaceful coexistence counts three centuries in the centre of Tbilisi. All this determined my desire and aspiration towards you and the chanted historical phrase *“I am Georgian and therefore I am European”* delights me.