



USSR

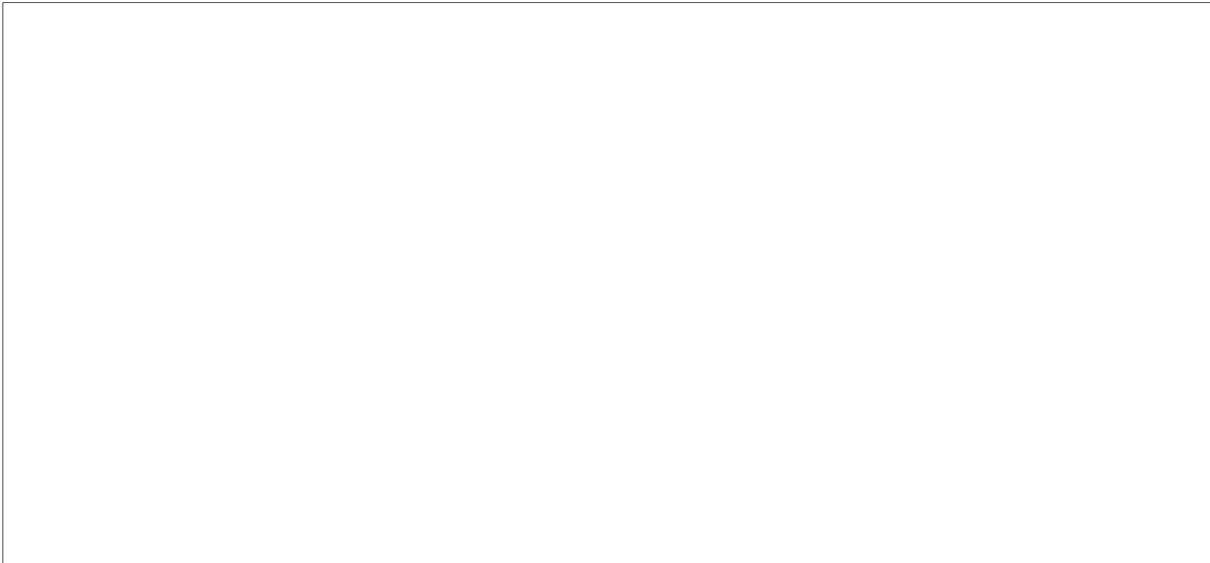
Zviad Konstantinovich GAMSAKHURDIYA
GAMSAKHURDIYA
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President, Republic of Georgia (since May 1991)

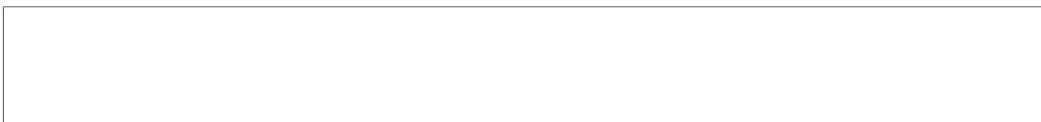
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Georgia's first popularly elected President, Zviad Gamsakhurdiya is a rabid proponent of republic independence who has often found himself at odds with Moscow. Contrary to the claims of some members of the opposition in the republic, he did not support the coup attempt of 19-21 August 1991, but his voice was conspicuously absent from the chorus that condemned the coup outright. He probably kept a low profile to avoid provoking the Emergency Committee into using force against the Georgian government. Before the coup, Gamsakhurdiya was adamant in his refusal to sign a union treaty; in light of the decisions made by the now disbanded Congress of USSR People's Deputies on 5 September regarding the future structure of the union, Georgia appears likely to gain full independence soon. He probably will seek some form of economic cooperation with other former Soviet republics, however.

Despite the new momentum toward independence, Gamsakhurdiya faces the prospect of internal political instability. has alarmed the republic's non-Georgian population, particularly the South Ossetians, whose campaign for autonomy has resulted in violent unrest over the past several months, creating a serious public relations problem for the Georgian leadership. In addition, Gamsakhurdiya's confrontational attitude toward his opponents--and Moscow--has exacerbated Georgia's economic woes. Growing unemployment, shortages of food and energy, and a recent price increase have eroded popular support--as well as Gamsakhurdiya's own, apparently--for quick economic reform.



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Gamsakhurdiya, an ethnic Georgian, was born in 1939. He has been active in Georgia's dissident community since age 17, when he received a five-year suspended sentence for making anti-Soviet speeches. He later graduated from Tbilisi State University and worked at the Institute of Georgian Literature. Through the 1960s and 1970s, his reputation as an opposition figure grew. Gamsakhurdiya was elected Chairman of the Georgian Supreme Soviet in November 1990 after leading his roundtable coalition to a decisive victory over the Communists in the October 1990 republic parliamentary election. He resigned from that post in April 1991 after being appointed interim President. [REDACTED]

A philologist, Gamsakhurdiya is a specialist in American poetry, citing Robert Frost as a favorite, and he has published several books of poetry and fables. In a recent interview he expressed admiration for former President Ronald Reagan and cited the late French statesman Charles de Gaulle as the ideal modern politician. Gamsakhurdiya speaks German, French, and impeccable English. He divorced his first wife after accusing her of collaborating with the KGB in a plot to kill him and his father. His second wife, Manana, is a pediatrician; he has denied rumors that he plans to appoint her to a ministerial post. Gamsakhurdiya has three sons, ages 30, 14, and 12. [REDACTED]

LDA M 91-14366
8 September 1991

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