
Interview: Shalva Natelashvili

Georgian candidate: 'We have no use for NATO'

Parliamentary elections in the nation of Georgia will be held on Oct. 31. Member of Parliament Shalva Natelashvili heads one of the leading slates, that of the Labor Party of Georgia. He is a politician, jurist, and one of the authors of the current Constitution of Georgia. He was interviewed on Oct. 16 by Vladimir Kilasonia, who is also a member of the Labor Party.

Q: The Labor Party's success in last year's municipal elections was rather unexpected, given its lack of financing. Please outline the situation on the eve of the Parliamentary elections.

Natelashvili: The psychological situation in Georgia is not particularly different from that in other countries. This is a time of high political passions, threatening to turn into a political show. But there is a difference, which is that the ruling power has prepared the soil for election fraud. The Central Election Commission was formed mainly out of members of the ruling Union of Citizens of Georgia. The ruling power has set the stage for all other forces and parties to be seen as enemies and destroyers of the state. The authorities have diverted huge funds from the state budget, for campaign purposes.

At present, the struggle is chiefly between two ruling forces within the state, namely the central (Tbilisi) Union of Citizens of Georgia and the regional (Adjara) Union for the Rebirth of Georgia. They are fighting with non-political methods, since they each have their "force" agencies—the military, police, security agencies, local administrative agencies, and financial levers. It is, in effect, a struggle between two parts of a single state power structure. In that setting, our party is growing in popularity.

Our slate has candidates for Parliament in almost every electoral district. Only we and the Union of Citizens of Georgia are running as independent party slates; all the others have joined various blocs and associations.

Q: How would you characterize your voters?

Natelashvili: There is no proper middle class in Georgia, naturally. Therefore, we can identify chiefly the professional layers of the population. We enjoy steady support from teachers (from kindergarten up to the level of higher education) and medical personnel (from orderlies, up to Doctor of Medical Sciences), transportation workers, jurists, many law enforcement officers, as well as peasants and the unemployed. We have the support of some 35% of the population.

The latest polls show our party in second place among the political parties in Georgia, but these are distorted data. In reality, we rank first, and we expect to win a majority in the Parliament.

Q: With the majority that you have in the Tbilisi magistrate's office, you have already taken some real steps to implement your electoral promises, such as providing free ambulance service. What about privatization, where instances such as the privatization of the Tbilisi electricity grid and other strategically important facilities were widely opposed? How will you treat these matters, when you have put together a majority in Parliament?

Natelashvili: We will proceed, according to the Constitution. The Basic Law of Georgia prohibits the sale of the power system, communications, and the customs service. These are areas of central state jurisdiction; therefore we shall restore to all these so-called privatized facilities a status that is constitutional. We do not oppose private property, and we advocate a market economy, but that market economy must work in the interests of the people, not for the enrichment of people close to the ruling elite, as is the case in Georgia today.

Q: Your party program expresses certain economic principles, and you have mentioned that you will not persecute the market economy.

Natelashvili: Of course not. We put all forms of ownership on an equal footing—state property, private property, mixed-ownership property, and cooperatives. All of these forms of property ought to be defended, with no special advantages being accorded to any of them. Thus, each will show its advantages.

What we have, however, is state capitalism, not people's capitalism. We need to turn our economy into a form of people's capitalism, where everybody can conduct business.

Q: Would you comment on the question of territorial integrity? There are various opinions, in the West and here, about the conflicts around Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and ways to resolve them.

Natelashvili: We look at this through the prism of Georgia's neutrality, which is a principled foreign policy position of our party. Russian troops should be withdrawn from Georgian territory, but NATO troops should not come there. Our salvation is absolute neutrality, the type that Austria, Switzerland, and Sweden have. Only then, will the lost territories be returned. These territories will be returned, when Georgia manages *not* to become the arena of a struggle between Russia and Turkey, or Russia and America, for spheres of influence.

Q: As a co-author of the Constitution of Georgia, do you think that the idea of a federal structure affects Georgia's territorial composition?

Natelashvili: We do not support a federal system. We advo-

cate a unitary state, preserving those areas of autonomy that already exist. These autonomous areas were, historically and politically, thrust upon us at a certain time, and they have no real basis for existing within Georgia, but we must deal with reality. The remainder of Georgia should be a unitary state, without any federation or confederation.

Q: What do you think about the conflict in the northern Caucasus?

Natelashvili: We respect the territorial integrity of Russia. Any games, in that respect, are unacceptable. In its time, Russia played around with the territorial integrity of Georgia, cultivating some guerrilla fighters in Abkhazia, and then those guerrillas launched a greater Caucasus war. Russia experienced a ricochet effect. Being a state with a de facto neutral status, we respect the territorial integrity of all our neighbors. At the same time, cultural relations with the peoples of the Caucasus should continue to develop, along with traditional fraternal and friendly relations. But, all of this takes place in the framework of a single Russian state.

Q: What is the basis for Russian-Georgian relations?

Natelashvili: Today, the ruling circles in Russia and Georgia are essentially co-thinkers, in that they are doing everything possible for these two countries *not* to collaborate. These forces are playing on our disunity, which is a bad and dangerous process. We need very good relations with Russia. First of all, economic relations, because Russia is a country with tremendous economic resources. Cultural relations, as well—these traditional ties should be restored. There are hundreds of thousands of our compatriots working in Russia, not as servants and slaves, second-class citizens, as happens in Turkey, Greece, and other European countries. In Russia, our compatriots are people with a respectable salary, businessmen, and so forth, as is worthy of a real Georgian. So, we should restore first-class relations with Russia, which does not require the reestablishment of the Soviet Union.

Q: What is your opinion of relations with NATO, and the West in general?

Natelashvili: We have no use for NATO or any other military-strategic organizations, neither with Russia nor with America. Our neutrality will be our strategy and our defense. NATO has its affairs, and we have ours.

It is a fact, that Georgia is a part of European civilization. We grew up with national and European values. Our party, the Labor Party, is a party with a European orientation, developed on the basis of European moral values, so it goes without saying that Europe should be our common home, and we should be a part of that home.

At the same time, it should not be forgotten that Georgia is an Asian country. We stand with one foot in Europe, and the other in Asia. Therefore, we have serious work to do with Asia. It is our historical neighbor (Turkey and Iran, first and

foremost, being peoples with great cultural traditions). Think of even just our relations with Iran, beginning with poetry and ending with politics. Our historical relations with Turkey, with China, with the states of Central Asia, India, Pakistan, and the Arab countries. We have a 300-year history of relations with the Arab East. Thus, it does not benefit us to choose to be exclusively a partner of Europe.

Q: You are familiar with the Schiller Institute.

Natelashvili: I think that the Schiller Institute is a serious organization, which approaches problems not in some one-sided way—say, only from the standpoint of Europe, or of America. It is an institute with a global scope, which will be very useful for both Europe and America, in defining new lines of policy.

After the destruction of the communist system, I think that Europe and America have been in a state of euphoria, as if they had no more problems. But, serious dangers are visible over the horizon, such as the danger of religious or political fundamentalism, and world hunger. Half a billion people, worldwide, go hungry every day, and that is a global danger. There is the danger of mass refugee flows. These dangers are greater than the communist threat. I think that the Schiller Institute sees all of these problems clearly, and that serious politicians should take its recommendations into account.

Q: The Schiller Institute strongly criticizes the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

Natelashvili: I tell you, these are not really financial organizations. In Georgia, the IMF became an instrument of political pressure, as our authorities virtually handed Georgian financial and economic sovereignty to the IMF. There used to be Gosplan and Gosnab in Moscow, but now the IMF plays the role that Moscow did. We don't need a second Moscow. If the IMF forbids the development of our production, then there is no sense in credits or debts, or in paying interest. It is better to go hungry today, than to destroy one's reserves for tomorrow.

Q: There are Presidential elections in Ukraine, coming up at the same time as our Presidential elections. One of the candidates is Mrs. Natalia Vitrenko, a good friend of the Schiller Institute. Then, next year in the United States there are Presidential elections, in which Lyndon LaRouche is running. One would like to believe in their success, and that perhaps your party's showing will be its harbinger.

Natelashvili: Allow me to thank you, and through you, the Schiller Institute. Permit me to assure you, that we highly value friendship with such an influential organization as the Schiller Institute, and its leadership, and its president, Mrs. Helga Zepp-LaRouche, personally. I ask you to convey to Mr. Lyndon LaRouche and his associates, our appreciation and support.