

Guram Sharadze

Georgian academic turned opposition politician who was outspoken in his criticism of foreign influence in his country



Guram Sharadze, a Georgian opposition politician, was leader of the “Language, Fatherland, Faith” group and a prominent critic of foreign, particularly Western, influence in Georgia. He frequently denounced George Soros’s civil society work in the country.

Sharadze was born in 1940 in Gurianta, Ozurgeli region. In 1963 he graduated from Tbilisi State University with a degree in philology. Following graduation he took up an academic research position at the university, and in 1967 moved to the Institute of Georgian Literature, attached to the Georgian Academy of Sciences.

His colleagues respected his academic work, which lacked the firebrand nature of his political persona. He published articles and books on Georgian literature and language. In 1978 he was appointed head of department at the institute, and in 1985 he took up a position as the institute’s head of information and bibliography.

From 1992 he headed the Georgian Emigrant Writers department at the Institute of Georgian Literature, alongside his position as the institute’s overall director. In Soviet times, when permission to travel was often difficult to come by, he made repeated trips to visit Georgians living in exile in France and Germany.

When his son Lasha died in 1997, although the death was officially recorded as suicide, Sharadze declared it to have been a political act intended to punish him. Possibly this loss prompted his adoption of an orphan youth, Giorgi Barateli, who is currently detained in relation to Sharadze’s murder. Georgian opposition leaders have alleged that the killing was politically motivated.

Sharadze became a notorious politician on the postSoviet Georgian political scene. He was first elected as an MP as part of the “Revival” (“Agordsineba”) movement in 1995, and after 1998 continued his political career within the nationalist political groupings “Georgia First of All” and “Language, Fatherland, Faith”.

As a politician he was close to Georgia’s first President, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, and between 1994 and 1997 he was an adviser to Aslan Abashidze, then head of Adjara.

His views were extreme, and his actions matched his rhetoric. He was twice sentenced to 15 days in prison as a result of hooliganism and breaching of the peace, the latter as recently as 2004. On this occasion he was detained after he tore down works by an American poster artist on display in the national library. He branded the exhibition "satanic pornography ordered by George Soros".

He was closely associated with Georgians abroad and the difficult issue of their return. This interest became a central part of his nationalist stance, and he was the driving force behind the return to Georgia of a documentary archive which had been held in America, containing documents relating to the short-lived Georgian Democratic Republic (1917-1921).

He was a vigorous opponent of religious minorities, and led a drive to have Jehovah's Witnesses banned from Georgia. His political writing was more polemical than his academic work and many of the monographs he published were criticised as fundamentalist.

The nationalists have a difficult relationship with the pro-Western Georgian Government of Mikheil Saakashvili. Russia, as the other regional power, has been keen to influence proceedings in Georgia. But the nationalists resent the history of first the Tsarist then Soviet occupation and rule over Georgia, and prefer not to align themselves with either side, although some of their attitudes and beliefs (for example, religion) are more compatible with their powerful northern neighbour, than with Nato.

In spite of his much proclaimed love for his homeland, he had strong connections with Switzerland, and much of his family lived abroad.

Following his death, his daughter Rusudan returned to Georgia, declaring that her father had been killed for political reasons, a sentiment echoed by his widow.

He is survived by his wife, his son, George, and his daughter.

Guram Sharadze, Georgian opposition politician, was born on October 17, 1940. He died after being shot on May 20, 2007, aged 66

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