THE THREATENING SHADOW OF SOVIET ARCHIVES IN CONTEMPORARY GEORGIA

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Abstract

The act of unveiling Soviet archives stood as a key commitment made by successive Georgian governing bodies following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the notion of transparency faces significant challenges, leading to ongoing discussions within relevant circles. Despite claims of openness, assessments by researchers suggest that Soviet archives in Georgia remain somewhat restricted. Therefore, the objective of this study is to investigate the distinctive policies governing the management of Soviet archives and their primary influencers in present-day Georgia.

Key words: *Politics of memory, Soviet archives, Transparency, post-Soviet Georgia,*

INTRODUCTION

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, one of the most requested endeavors in newly independent Georgia was the initiation of the lustration process. The popular and various interest groups predominantly voiced their support for this initiative. By the adopted memory policy, there exists a noticeable divergence in viewpoints regarding lustration within the offices of the Georgian president. Nevertheless, the primary argument put forth by each successive government to justify sidestepping a thorough lustration process was the disorderly nature of the

Soviet archives in Georgia (Karaia, 1997). Similar to other post-Soviet nations, Georgia encountered significant challenges across various facets of societal operation, including underdeveloped political institutions, socio-economic turmoil, political discord, and more. In such a milieu, the quest for transparency in Soviet archives was not a paramount concern for society. Nevertheless, it intermittently garnered attention, particularly in the wake of emerging security threats.

The concept of archives in Georgia emerged in the 20th century of XX. When Georgia's Democratic Republic was established in 1918, the nascent government endeavored to establish regulations, leading to the creation of a central historical archive in 1920. However, the country's independence was short-lived, lasting a mere three years, and the institutionalization of archives took shape during the Soviet era in adherence to Soviet protocols. In the development of the archive, we mean gathering the archival collections, establishing rules of preservation, and defining the role of the keeper of the archives.

The locution "archival revolution" has been used by historians and social scientists as a shorthand term to denote the qualitative leap in access to Soviet archival institutions since the disintegration of the USSR into fifteen separate states in 1991 (Kragh, Heldung, 375, 2015). However, this revolution did not happen in Georgia. In this study, the Soviet archival management system is considered part of the ruling system, a unity of closed, untransparent procedures, perceived archives as guardians of files repository. According to the respondents, even in the Soviet period, granting access to part of the archival records through patronage was possible, which was the general way to pass the barriers. However, some archives were entirely closed and inaccessible, including the intelligence service and military archives (In-depth interview with the former representative of the archive management 12.11.2022).

Due to how it was developed, there is an expectation that the Georgian State Archives' institutional memory wears Soviet influence. The archive as an institution and archivists as the service providers do not have experience working in different political systems; however, in the Soviet era, upgrading this practice to a democratic one was a prolonged process.

When we speak about the opening archives, we mean opening data counting from entering the eleventh army of Russia in Georgia in 1921 until regaining independence in 1991. Another essential fact that needs to be considered is that according to the official data, due to the chaotic situation and civil war in the 90th of XX, only 20% of the archival materials are left. It was caused by two reasons: 1) In particular, in 1988, after the uprising of the national movement in

Georgia, one of the main arenas of the protesters' gathering was a square in front of the Soviet Security Committee Office, where the corresponding archival files were kept. There were cases of invasion protesters in the archive office and carrying away some materials during the protests. To prevent future invasion of the archive data, the officials from Moscow decided to store them away. For this reason, approximately 800 bags packed with the secret files were sent to Russia in - Smolensk. Later, part of the shipped materials, especially the personal files of the current intelligence agents, were destroyed in Smolensk; another part was returned to the country (In-depth interview with the representative of the former archive management 15.02.2023). 2) On December 22, 1991, the civil war started in Tbilisi. The security committee building, where existing archive materials were kept, was burned in the fire. According to the data, the balance of the security committee was 230,000 archive files; approximately 80 % were destroyed, and only 20,000 were left (Public Broadcasting 18.11.2018). Precisely this: 20 % of the archival materials left is a subject that evokes fear or uncertainty in independent Georgia. Access to the archive material and its potential usage were two main parts of the debates between President Gamsakhurdia and his opponents – primarily representatives of the intelligentsia. The term "KGB agent "was the prominent epithet for blaming. In their oral interviews, respondents -former representatives of security bodies describe the interests of the political elite in checking the names of the opponents in the soviet security files and using this data against them (Sakartvelos Dabadeba, 2022). The absence of the archive regulatory legislation was another obstacle to the archive modernization process.

The archive management system has gone through the hard way of development in Georgia. Every government, purpose or not, is influenced by the archive development process. The period from 1990 until the Rose Revolution in 2003 was the hardest, according to every source reviewed during the research. In the 90th of XX, archive keepers worked in the frozen buildings using individual heating facilities. The existing infrastructural and material shortages also influenced the researchers. Archives were almost empty. This factor also influenced the process of dealing with the past.

During Eduard Shevarnadze's presidency, a few infrastructure projects were initiated; archive collections (e.g., emigrant and Harvard archive record collections) were added to the archive collection, but the significant change toward the soviet period files had not happened. However, the treatment of the archives experienced a notable shift after the Rose Revolution, during the Presidency of Mikheil Saakashvili, and his administration developed a more or less determined policy

regarding memory. The archival data was then deemed to play a crucial role in this context. Changes in legislation, inviting researchers, develop research divisions within the archive were notable steps during the period. In 2012, after the parliamentary elections, the new coalition government of the "Georgian Dream" Party also changed its policy by initiating the law of Personal data and its follow-up regulations.

Officially, the state archives in Georgia are open (The Law on the National Archival Fund and the National Archives. Article 22). However, the researchers and activists have different perspectives regarding this topic. According to them, one of the main obstacles to conducting research on the soviet past in Georgia is an unorganized and untransparent state archive system. Correspondingly, there arises the question – what type of policy of unarchiving the Soviet archives do we have in contemporary Georgia, and what are its main determinants?

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Archives and other communicational resources, such as oral and ritual traditions, help transfer information and sustain memory from generation to generation (Foote, K. 1990). Foucault examines that society's truth and reality are created by the forces that are the power and have the potential to develop their "regime of truth "(Foucault, 1975). That means that powers are engaged in the hegemonic knowledge development process, which relies on archive development and management. With the emergence of the modern state, archives became the storehouse for the material from which national memories were constructed' (Featherstone, 2006, p. 591). At the same time, it is a new organizational model, as it also marks a crucial turning point in how the preservation and interpretation of culturally significant material are understood and institutionally framed (Robinson, 413, 2012).

Correspondingly, archive management and its priorities are crucial for memory study as a scientific discipline. The emerging term "memory institution" and archives alongside museums and libraries are essential in memory policy development (Cathro, 2001; Dupont, 2007; Tanackovic & Badurina, 2009). As Dupont once mentioned," It is understood that libraries, archives, and museums can be grouped conceptually around the theme of memory because they all exist to make a better future by helping us remember and understand the past" (Dupont, 2007, p. 13).

Considering memory as a social concept, mediated through complex mechanisms of conscious manipulation by elites and unconscious absorption by members of society (Halbwachs, 1980), the archives can represent the primary source of a selection of historical facts. As much as post-Soviet countries started to deal with

the past and develop new identities that mainly confronted the previous soviet ones, the meaning of the archive for the process mentioned above was central. Scientific literature shows that the architecture of the political system influences the archive usage level and possibilities (Pell S., 2015; Sieber S., 2016). Hence, the monopolist access to the archives gives the powerholders the potential to create corresponding political discourse, monitor the process of remembrance and forgetting, and create a so-called "strategic" narrative, "representations of a sequence of events and identities, a communicative tool through which political actors – usually elites – attempt to give determined meaning to the past, present and future to achieve political objectives" (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p. 3). The archives are sources of development "history from the below, "which mainly is essential in case of totalitarian countries, where the official history was manipulated as part of the propaganda (Graziosi A., 1999). In case of limited access to the archival data, developing an alternative narrative by the societal groups takes time and effort (Wertsch et al., 2009).

Governmental monopoly on the archive records creates the potential to develop the collective memory construction process as exclusive, nontransparent, and top-down oriented. Opening archives can also be discussed from the perspective of the rising level of democratization as much as it demands transparency, accountability, and participatory processes. Archives could serve as a democratic instrument by devolving access to data to the general public and empowering groups confronting identity insecurity. The digitalization of the archives is seen as an indicator of democracy because, in the digitalized version, archival materials do not "hold custody of the records as they would in private repositories "but "work towards the democratic interests of the general public by entitling citizens access to sizable databases and thereby enhancing state accountability" (Japanwala Z. 2021).

Opening archives in post-totalitarian countries is a "brave "decision because, from another perspective, archives represent threats, as it "evolved an official bureaucratic function, providing 'raw' content that could be mined, interpreted and manipulated by scholars, governments and other external users for, among other things, the production of historical narratives" (Robinson, 418, 2012). Correspondingly, scholars identify various challenges in the soviet archive opening process. Among these challenges, the main concerns were made toward the commercialization and politicization of archival materials (Hagen M., 1993; Mickiewicz A., 1993), which, as it seems from the collected data, are the main obstacles to opening the Soviet archives in Georgia.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research fieldwork was conducted in 2022–2023 and aimed to analyze contemporary Georgia's "unfinished" memory projects. According to our vision, one of the "unfinished" initiatives is to open the Soviet archives. The main goal of the research was to analyze archival memory policy in Georgia, its priorities and "self-preservation" strategies, and how researchers and advocacy makers are eligible to influence the policy implementation process.

The research data was collected by using qualitative research methodology. Within the framework of the desk research, we have analyzed printed periodicals from 1990–2022. We have selected four newspapers: "Sakartvelos Respublika" (Georgian Republic), "Eri" (Nation), "Ganatleba" (Education), and "Droni" (Period). Fifteen articles from these periodicals devoted to managing archival data in post-soviet Georgia were selected and analyzed. Besides, to track the discussions and debates regarding archive management, Facebook pages, and YouTube channels were analyzed by the corresponding actors (researchers, politicians, etc.). Another source of information was the TV show "Born of Georgia." Fourteen series have been analyzed where the developments of archives and related institutions were narrated. At the same time, eight in-depth interviews were conducted with the representatives of the former and current archives management, historians, and researchers included in the open archive advocacy campaigns. One of the main aspects of selecting respondents was their personal or institutional experience and attitudes.

3. THE MAIN BARRIERS TO OPENING SOVIET ARCHIVES

After the Rose Revolution in Georgia, reforms and changes started in every field of societal life, including the archive. President Saakashvili declared the policy of rejecting previous presidents' legacies as old-style and ineffective (Saakashvli M., 2004). The young politicians were invited to the governmental bodies, which would clean the system from soviet influences. In this context, President Saakashvili described the importance of opening soviet archives to screen collaborators as the potential threat to the reforms and state-building process. Moreover, he mentioned that he used to see the names of the current intelligentsia in the lists of collaborators in the archives when he was a Ministry of Justice of Georgia. Because the previous governments had not passed ahead or had no will to open archives, now it is time to start this process. He commanded the new minister of justice, Zurab Adeishvili, to open the archive and make it possible to screen the wrongdoers (Dilis Gazeti, 2004). After this command, some steps were made toward fulfilling the

promise; among them were modernizing infrastructure, granting easy access to the records, and activating the archive as a research institution (preparing publications, organizing exhibitions and presentations, etc.). The using archival data or inviting researchers was especially observable in 2006–2012 when Georgian-Russian relations spoiled and the memory policy was oriented to create a collective memory of Soviet occupation (Karaia, 2016). However, researchers underlined that due to these initiatives being part of the occupation project and mainly oriented to discovering data that would benefit the strategic narrative, they have not supported the development of modern European standards of open archives (In-depth interview with the Soviet history researcher 2.12.2022). Moreover, Saakashvili government also changed the conception of the archive from the memory repository to the donor of information as created by the National Agency of Public Registry. Correspondingly, data essential to ensure public services (e.g.registration of the property) are easily accessible.

After changing Government in 2012, the new Government of the "Georgian Dream" Party changed the priorities of memory policy. They started normalizing relations with the Russian Federation and rejected the previous strategic narrative of victims of Soviet occupation. This type of undetermined attitude influences the conditions of the archive policy. Moreover, the Government's efforts to modernize archive infrastructure are observable. However, debates on the worsening access to the soviet archives are activating time by time.

While evaluating the condition of the archives in Georgia, researchers were concerned they were "mostly closed, ""not open, "or "partially opened, "They are modernized Soviet-type archives and part of the archives or collections are more or less accessible; other parts exist still in the Soviet order (In-depth interview with the advocators of the open archive 10.03.2023). According to the respondents, the main argument of this type of evaluation is that the legislation permits access; however, its preconditions, bylaws, and infrastructure create boundaries and limit it. At the same time, respondents highlight a worsening tendency regarding the transparency of the archival collections considering the previous years: If last year was notable readiness for opening, it decreased during the years, which, according to the activists, is the worst part of the problem: "those days as Saakashvili's and Georgian Dreamers at the first years of the governance attempted to create at least the reflection of opening archive records; however, it is last 5–7 years the legislation development have been sealed to ensure the environment where researches are paused or postponed or stop and keep the tabu on the XX century" (In-depth interview with the researcher of the Soviet past 20.03.2023).

Among the reasons why this type of condition has been developed, the following were highlighted:

PROCEDURAL LIMITATIONS: Following the Rose Revolution reforms, registration as a researcher in the archive was a time-saving procedure: "It was used to check applicants' ID cards and other documents. If everything were in order, the access would be granted. Fifteen minutes was the time limit for the procedure (In-depth interview with the former representative of the state archive management 5.04.2023). However, the procedure changed after 2015: "The application evaluation time increased to five days to check the information on researchers (ibid). Another barrier is the shortened duration of access permission, which has been shorted from a year to three months, which, from the researcher's perspective, is a potential possibility to cut down researchers' access to the archive if they do not "behave wisely "(In-depth interview with the researcher of the Soviet past 20.03.2023). The researchers highlighted that this type of bureaucratic complexity has negatively influenced both the researchers and archive administrations because of increased paperwork and waste of time (In-depth interview with the former representative of the state archive management 5.04.2023). Respondents highlighted existing limitations for the researchers of their nationality. At the same time, there is observable aggression toward revising historical facts and attempting different interpretations. In this situation, the answer is not publishing the counter materials but mainly restricting access to them.

LEGISLATION: Even though archives in Georgia are regulated by a single law (the Law On the National Archival Fonds and the National Archives), various archives, except the National one, have established their regulations or charters of internal order. Therefore, different archives have different working conditions and no unified strategy for physically storing documents, keeping records, processing search queries, and using documents for scientific issues (IDFI, 2018).

For example, within the framework of the Internal Affairs Ministry of Georgia, special divisions have been developed. According to order #150/05.04.2007 of the President of Georgia, the Communist Party archive was granted to the Ministry of Internal Affairs archive governance. This division united the archives of the Soviet Party and the Soviet Security Service archives. According to the official discourse and website (https://police.ge/ge/useful-information/shss-arqivi?sub=428), they are open based on the Ministry of Internal Affairs order issued in 2009. However, the order is secret, and it is unknown which documents are available and which are not (In-depth interview with the Soviet history researcher 2.12.2022). Most of my

respondents attempted to get access to the order but were unsuccessful. The different bylaws create challenges in inter-institution archives like the Ministry of Education or Justice archives. All of them collect data and send it to the national archive. However, the detailed regulation of what type of documents are stored or destroyed is not precise.

The primary laws from Georgian legislation regulating the aspects of archives are the law of Personal Data Protection and another norm of the law of national archive funds and national archives. According to them, after the person's death, to use his personal data, you have to get permission from his family member or start research after 30 years after his death (Law of Personal Data Protection, article. To access the criminal law files and conduct research, 75 years of distance is required (The law of National Archive Funds and National Archive. Article 22, B). All the above mentioned norms show that it is impossible to research developments after the 50th of the XX century. At the same time, when requesting the files, researchers have to prove that the persons included in the files are dead or executed. However, identifying or proofing is impossible because archive management covers the delivered personal information. Therefore, there arises the question of what is the duty of the archive keepers: are they responsible for keeping documents in a proper condition, or are they accountable for maintaining the contents as well; because in the current situation some archive keepers sometimes attempt to keep records out of sight of researchers and take a monopoly on the knowledge (In-depth interview with the Soviet history researcher 2.12.2022).

At the same time, respondents highlight a worsening tendency regarding the transparency of the archival collections considering the previous years: If last year was notable readiness for opening, it decreased during the years, which, according to the activists, is the worst part of the problem: "those days as Saakashvili's government as Georgian Dreamers at the first years of the governance, attempted to create at least the reflection of opening archive records; however, it is last 5–7 years the legislation development have been sealed to ensure the environment where researches are paused or postponed or stop and keep the tabu on the XX century" (In-depth interview with the researcher of the Soviet past 20.03.2023).

DIGITALIZATION OF THE ARCHIVE FILES: In 2015, it was declared that the National Archive of Georgia moved to digital format. According to the official version, it was part of the "Open Governance Program" fulfilling requirements" (IDFI, 2018). From a broader perspective, this initiative must solve various problems and support transparent access in this field. At least researchers would get open access, and archive administration would secure files from wear out or

destruction. Moreover, archive keepers would re-use scanned documents; archive records would become more systematized. However, the way of the implementation upset all actors and became "another obstacle for the researchers to harvest archive files" (In-depth Interview with the advocators of the open archive 10.03.2023). According to the general understating, digitalization means issuing requested files on the scanned version. Researchers will be charged if they request access to the original files. At the same time, scanned archive files were not sent to researchers. "The rule said that to order the copy of archive documents, you have to visit the institution to order files; after three or four days, when the copies would be ready, you have to visit the archive anew, find a free computer to get access to the digitalized copies. The archive software was inconvenient for a long time while working and usually is out of space. If you request additional files to be copied, you need to erase the previous one from the system because there is no room for the previous one due to the limited space. Then we (researchers) requested the management to make accessible already digitalized files, but the answer was negative" (In-depth interview with the researcher, involved in the advocacy campaign 10.03.2023).

The digitalization process was challenged for archive management as well. They said more than four days were needed to digitalize the requested files. Another challenge was arranging scanned documents by protocol; however, it did not happen because they needed more human and technical resources. Correspondingly, digitalization could have been more chaotic with listing and archiving. Finally, archive management declined the procedure and returned to delivering the original materials. The challangies of digitalization become more visible during the COVID 19 pandemic, because restrictions as a necessary measure to contain the spread of the virus negatively influenced the archive working process in Georgia. According to the World Health Organization guidelines, workspaces were closed, and remote services for archive material delivery were unavailable, as previously noted. Consequently, the collection of research data was halted nationwide. Despite the conclusion of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resumption of everyday activities, no changes were observed, and the archive system continued to operate as before for a long time.

REDUCING OF THE WORKING SPACE IN THE ARCHIVE BUILDINGS: Before the modernization of the archive infrastructure, the archives' working spaces were distributed based on the archive collection; each collection had its own working space. Uniting all working spaces was justified by renovating it. However, in reality,

the space was shortened. Correspondingly, "Now visitors are not guaranteed to find a free spot to work there" (In-depth Interview with the researcher 12.02.2023).

At the same time, the former KGB archive was transferred from the Police Academy building to the Academy of the Internal Affairs of Georgia. In a small building, there is no separate working space for visitors. They have to share the room with the archivists. The two computers available are usually busy; if the third researcher appears, he/she will be extra". This regulation (working in the archive space) is nonsense because researchers are working on the digitalized files in these computers. Correspondingly, It would be a great option to do the same job from home" (In-depth Interview with the researcher 12.02.2023).

The same problem appears to be in the Communist Party's archive. The archive was abandoned to destroy when the government sold the building of the IMEL (Institute of the Marks, Engels, and Lenin) in 2007. The archive supporters and activists transported the records to the office of Electronic and other communication (In-depth Interview with the former representative of the state archive management 5.04.2023). Nowedayes, This archive exists in hazardous conditions, surrounded by electronic devices, and under the permanent threat of fire. Another challenge is using this data for the researchers: a tiny working room for visitors makes the entire repository unfriendly for the working. "This unique repository is on the four flour; the lower three floors are full of the communication apparatus and cables and create a good condition for the fire" (In-depth Interview with the researcher 12.02.2023).

A HIGH PRICE FOR COPING ARCHIVE RECORDS: This issue, especially, is valid for the former KGB and Communist Party archives. According to the researchers, "These prices make it impossible to harvest and work on the data secured in the Georgian archives, or you are forced to reduce the research area" (In-depth interview with the researcher of the Soviet past 20.03.2023). The agreement between the archive and Hoover Institute provided this type of charge. The management set the price for the Hoover Institute, which later spread to the Georgian scholars". The archive management representatives confirmed that one of the main reasons for selecting that price range was precisely the above mentioned argument (In-depth interview with the former representative of the state archive management 5.04.2023). Considering the country's social and economic situation, only the scholars supported by the financed research projects can afford to copy the archive files.

4. CIVIL ORGANISATIONS ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNS AND THEIR STRATEGIES

The depiction above of the archival policy highlights the assertions put forth by researchers and civic activists engaged in historical research. Their aim is to bring

attention to this matter and place it on the political agenda. Nonetheless, the endeavor has proven to be a complex undertaking.

Discussing advocacy campaign implementation for opening archives, we consider two Civil Society Organizations representatives. They are SOVLAB – Soviet Past Research Laboratory, the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI), and a few independent researchers are also observable.

During the advocacy campaign, the activists and organizations collaborated with various stakeholders, and some even negotiated with political parties – a practice uncommon among Georgian civil movements. The primary aim of all actors was to ensure unrestricted access to archive files. During the advocacy campaign, there are the following characteristics observable: These organizations do not function as a unified coalition in this domain; each maintains its distinct perspective to achieve a goal and the involvement of partners in the process. The primary point of contention revolves around including political parties in these proceedings. Furthermore, the divergence arises from the fact that these organizations are affiliated with diverse projects and donors, with their respective requirements and sustainability objectives shaping their behavior patterns.

Among the strategies used by Civil Society Organizations, we can identify judicial and nonjudicial ones. These strategies were transformed based on their understanding of the problem's insides. The common factor of the advocator organization is that at the initial stage, researchers thought that the problem of the system's bureaucratization determined the archive's closing. "We thought that they do not know how to run the institution in a better way or they do not know our (researchers) perspective, and if we make them informed, they will review their rules" (In-depth Interview with the representative of SOV lab. 18.03.2023). This attitude can be explained by the vision of the donors (mostly German ones), who have Western European experience dealing with the system archives and consider the possibility of its transfer to Georgian reality.

Evaluating the abovementioned strategy, nowadays, advocacy makers call it a "Waste of time" because "at the beginning of the campaign, archive managers and decision makers did not enroll in the process; after our massive effort, we managed to make them attend meetings, but later, they were more aggressive than ever" (In-depth Interview with the representative of SOV lab. 20.03.2023). Correspondingly, this initiative has not found support from the governmental circle.

After failing the campaign of cooperation with the archive management, the advocacy strategy moved its interest toward raising awareness among the members

of society. At that stage, Civil Society Organizations attempted to spread information by posting videos on social networks on existing conditions in archives, their challenges and peculiarities, and organizing discussions with the participation of various stakeholders and meetings with the representatives of civil society organizations, academia, political circles, etc. The campaign's primary goal was to raise society's awareness and make them believe that this problem exists, influences various topics of societal life, and needs to be solved.

A critical part of the advocacy campaign was the collaboration of the political parties[1]. Regarding this decision, advocators had diverse attitudes. Some choose the opposition one, while others avoid it due to the unwilling affiliation and potential negative influence from the ruling party, which has majority seats on the legislative body. The SOV Lab's idea of collaboration with the opposition political party "The European Georgia" aimed to register an initiative to improve archive policy in the parliament, ease personal protection law, and allow researchers to photocopy archive files. Two parliamentary committees proved the initiative, first the financial and then the juridical. This type of initiative's success "switched the alarm in the system" (In-depth Interview with the representative of SOV lab. 25.03.2023), and they developed counterarguments. Concretely, the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Internal Affairs representatives addressed parliament and asked to reject the abovementioned changes. Due to governmental resistance, the initiative has failed.

The same faith had the initiative of the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information in the parliament (N1-7153/19; 10.04.2019), which, besides the two things mentioned above (ease the law of personal protection and allow researchers to photocopy archive files), additionally demanded shortening the date of registration of the researchers in an archive and publicizing the list of the destructed or lost archive records. They attempted cooperation not with a single or opposition political party but with the entire parliament; however, the initiative, like the previous one, has failed.

Advocators, besides the collaboration, the society and governmental bodies also attempted to use judiciary resources. For example, the SOV lab applied to the court to cover information in the archive catalogs of the rehabilitation cases of the Soviet repression victims (Gvadzabia M. 2020). However, this direction of the advocacy was unsuccessful as well.

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[1] We must mention that the movements in Georgia do not accept collaboration with political parties, especially with the opposition, because they would be affiliated with the opposition side, and it will close the potential collaboration possibilities with the decision-makers.

Evaluating the advocacy outcomes, activists highlight the main factors influencing the process. The primary is a lack of interest in the archive data and research, which is affected by a lack of deliberative process toward dealing with the soviet past and educational system, where the research component is under development (In-depth Interview with the researcher 12.02.2023).

CONCLUSION

Based on the aforementioned data, it can be inferred that there exists a disparity between the official and societal interpretations of open archives.

In the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, there emerged an anticipation for the unveiling of Soviet archives, rendering them accessible and transparent. Yet, this aspiration was accompanied by apprehensions of potential disharmony. Such a mindset endures to this day. Amidst these concerns, another pertinent argument pertains to external threats.To the political system, the archive gives a monopoly to control the information. The general argument for this type of decision was to ensure state security. However, it is hard to understand why most data are included in this type of category.

On the road to democratization, one of the main aspects are effective governance and transparency of the data. The prior law on archives declares them open; however, subordinated regulations create additional barriers. In the legislation, there is the possibility of finding gaps that give interested persons the possibility of manipulation and interpretation. Some notable cases of that type of manipulation are granting permission for the work in an archive, infrastructural challenges, restrictions on making photocopies, higher fees for making copies, etc.

Besides, the activists' attempt to open the topic-opening archives can't gather social attention, which can be explained by the fact thatthorough the Georgia's independent history this topic is not popular in the social and political agenda despite the activists' attempts. This can be explained by the fact that every initiative to construct the collective memory in Georgia aimed to spread and internalize the official master narrative. This process has not promoted deliberative processes, including research in the archives, discussions, etc.

Researchers and Civil Society Organizations interested in the open archive cannot manage to uniting resources to make the resistance effective and result oriented. Moreover, developing distinguished strategies by the advocators is not a precondition to success in the archive opening process. Correspondingly, in independent Georgia, the the archive as an institution that uses a self-defense

system for preservation and do not follow upgrade process as it is declared in the official discourse.

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