

Niko Nikoladze and the French Connection: Intellectual Mediation in Georgian Modernization

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Abstract: *This article examines the intellectual contributions of Niko Nikoladze to Georgia's modernization processes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Through sustained engagement with French and broader European intellectual circles, Nikoladze functioned as a cultural and intellectual mediator, transmitting reform-oriented political, economic, and educational ideas into the Georgian context. Drawing on archival correspondence, published works, and memoir literature, the study analyzes how his European experiences shaped national approaches to governance, socio-economic development, and civic reform. By situating Nikoladze within wider transnational intellectual networks, the article highlights the dynamic interaction between individual agency and broader geopolitical transformations, demonstrating the role of intellectual exchange in the formation of modern Georgian political and cultural thought.*

Keywords: Niko Nikoladze, France, Georgian-European thought, Modernization

1. Introduction

In the complex landscape of Georgian modernization during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Niko Nikoladze occupies a central place in the intellectual and political history of Georgia, emerging as a leading thinker, economist, and reformer during a period of profound social transformation. His work reflects a unique synthesis of European progressive ideas and local Georgian realities, positioning him as a key mediator of knowledge and innovation. Through extensive study in Europe and sustained engagement with French and broader European intellectuals, politicians, writers, and journalists, Nikoladze absorbed contemporary European models of governance, social organization, and cultural development. These experiences shaped his vision for Georgia's modernization and informed his strategies for institutional, educational, and economic reform.

By analyzing his writings, correspondence, and reform initiatives, the study highlights how Nikoladze translated European thought into practical strategies that addressed the challenges of a modernizing nation. Particular attention is given to his interactions with French intellectual circles, which provided frameworks and inspiration for his reformist projects, as well as to his broader European engagements, which connected Georgia to transnational currents of progressive thought.

Employing archival research, including personal letters, memoirs, published works, and contemporary accounts, this study situates Nikoladze within the broader European intellectual landscape. Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of intellectual networks in shaping national development and highlights Nikoladze's enduring legacy as a mediator of European thought in Georgia.

2. Nikoladze's Biographical insights: Early life and Personal Formation

In order to fully understand Niko Nikoladze's personality and significance, first of all, it is essential to examine the key

formative factors in his life that influenced his character, worldview, and subsequent intellectual development. Nikoladze was born on September 14, 1843 (Old Style), in Kutaisi, into a family that combined commercial success with cultural refinement. In his memoirs, Niko Nikoladze notes that his grandfather, Mamuka (Mate) Nikoladze, was formerly a serf of the Abashidze princely family and resided in the village of Skande in Upper Imereti. In pursuit of personal freedom, Mamuka escaped from his feudal lord, first seeking refuge in Kartli before eventually settling permanently in Kutaisi. This family history of social emancipation and upward mobility exerted a formative influence on Nikoladze's worldview and was later reflected in his journalistic activity through the adoption of the pseudonym "Skandeli", one of several pen names he employed, explicitly referencing his family heritage.

Nikoladze's grandfather was the first Georgian to engage in commerce in Imereti, and arguably in all of Georgia. Prior to this, as Nikoladze notes, Georgians had largely avoided trade, leaving it to foreigners such as Jews, Armenians, and French merchants. Mamuka Nikoladze, together with his sons Grigori and Iakob, not only conducted extensive trade within Georgia but also expanded their business into Russia. They also participated in an exhibition in Leipzig, one of the largest cities in Saxony, Germany, where they acquired expertise in Saxon porcelain. Thus, Nikoladze's father, Iakob Nikoladze became one of the first prominent Georgian merchants to engage in international trade. He owned treasury houses in Kutaisi and Poti, invested in the Chiatura mines and port operations. Remarkably, despite lacking a formal classical education, he demonstrated innovative talent and actively sought to introduce and apply modern technologies in his business operations. He was also participated in the Russo-Turkish wars, receiving several awards for bravery, including the Cross of St. George. Niko's mother, Elisabed Lortkipanidze, the daughter of Phiran Lortkipanidze of the influential Jikhaishi noble family, provided a culturally rich and intellectually stimulating environment. She regularly read Georgian literary classics to her family, as well as numerous Georgian manuscripts and printed works, thereby nurturing Niko's early literary sensibility and analytical abilities. From his father, Niko inherited an entrepreneurial mindset, practical

intelligence, and a global perspective, which later contributed to his openness to European ideas, innovative thinking, and ambitious approach to national modernization. From his mother, he acquired broad intellectual horizons, an appreciation for literature, and strong analytical capacity, which complemented the practical and innovative skills derived from his paternal influence.

Niko's parents were concerned not only with his intellectual development but also with his spiritual formation. As Nikoladze later recalled in his memoirs, during his years at the gymnasium he served as an altar server vested in a sticharion. The Metropolitan of Kutaisi, Ekvtime (Tsulukidze), who was related to Nikoladze's mother, frequently involved him in liturgical services. He emphasized that from an early age he had memorized not only the prayers but the entire structure of the liturgy, knowledge he had already acquired during the tenure of Metropolitan David (Nikoladze, 1984). This early exposure to liturgical practice demonstrates the significant role of spiritual guidance in his formative years. This early exposure to ecclesiastical life demonstrates the significant role of spiritual guidance in his formative years and reflects the deep commitment to religious and moral values cultivated within the Nikoladze family.

These values extended beyond Niko Nikoladze's personal upbringing and are further corroborated by archival evidence relating to his father, Iakob Nikoladze. Among the documents preserved in Niko Nikoladze's personal archive are letters, one from Kirill, the Patriarch of Jerusalem and all Palestine, and another from the abbot of Kiko Monastery, both addressed to his father and written in Greek. In his letter, the Patriarch expressed his gratitude to Iakob and his brother Ioane for their diligence and devoted service to the Holy Sepulchre of Christ, and he encouraged them to maintain the same dedication to the sacred sites in the future.

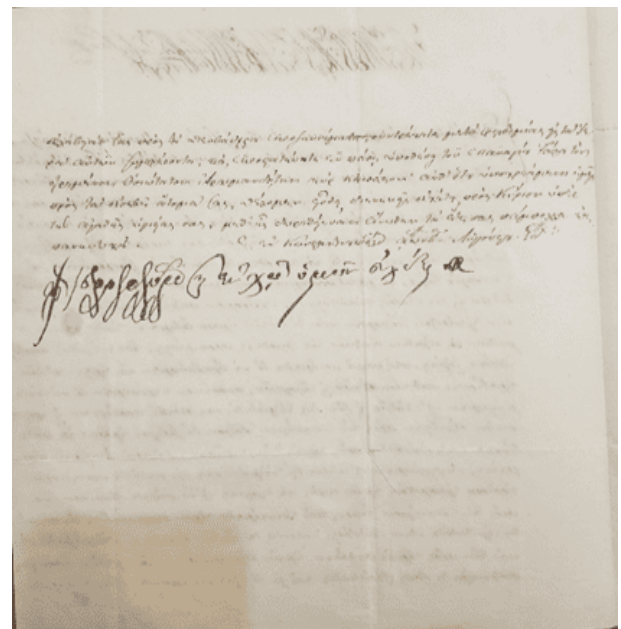
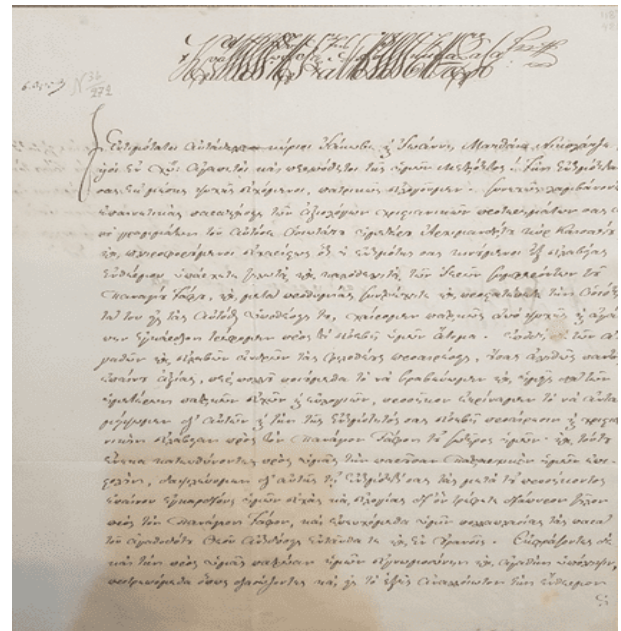
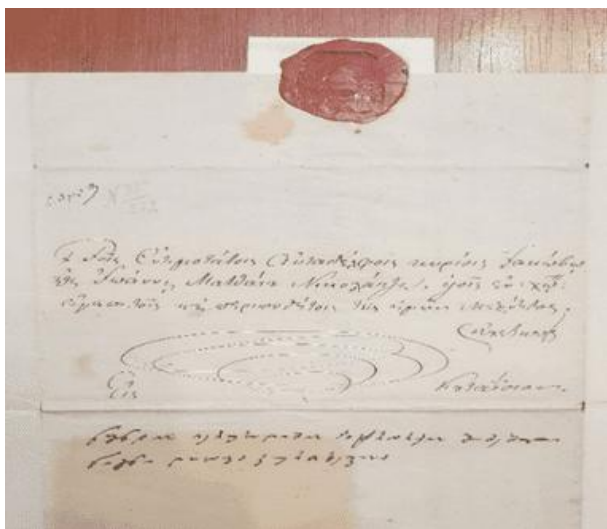


Figure 1. Letter from Kirill, Patriarch of Jerusalem and of all Palestine, addressed to Iakob Nikoladze (Kirill, 1852).

In addition, a letter from the abbot of Kiko Monastery similarly conveyed both gratitude and a blessing to Iakob, underscoring the recognition he received from prominent religious authorities for his dedication and service. Taken together, these documents testify not only to the spiritual elevation of the Nikoladze family, but also to the broader recognition and significance of their pious contributions, highlighting both the personal devotion of family members and the wider social and religious impact of their efforts.

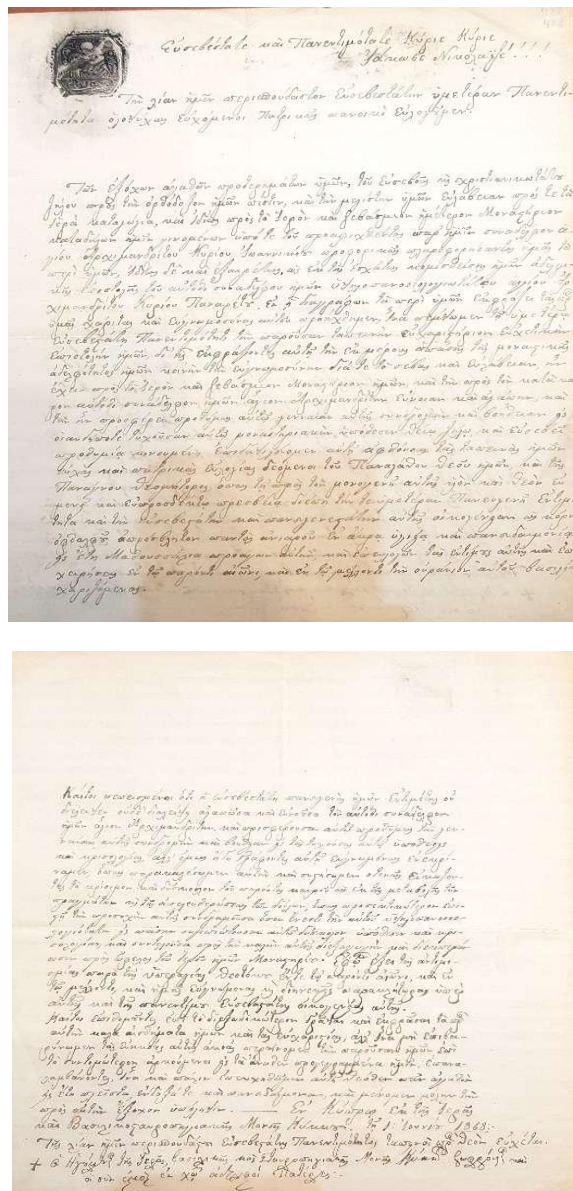


Figure 2. Letter from the Abbot of Kiko Monastery to Iakob Nikoladze (Abbot of Kiko, 1868).

It should therefore be noted that the high spiritual and moral values cultivated within Niko Nikoladze's family exerted a lasting influence on the formation of his personality. An illustrative episode from his later biography clearly demonstrates the continuity between family upbringing, public service, and spiritual responsibility. In April 1920, Niko Nikoladze traveled abroad as a member of the diplomatic mission of the Democratic Republic of Georgia. The mission's primary objective was to secure political allies for the newly established Georgian state and its government in European countries, as well as to attract foreign investors to support the republic's economic development. At the same time, he was entrusted with an additional and no less significant responsibility. As a member of the Board of the Society of St. Nino, Nikoladze received a special mandate from the Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia, Leonide, authorizing him to conduct official meetings concerning the needs of the Georgian Orthodox Church. Important information regarding this mission is provided by Nikoladze's grandson, Levan Zurabishvili, in an article published in the Paris-based journal "Kavkasioni". Noteworthy that, under the extremely difficult political circumstances of the time, the

head of the Georgian Church entrusted such a responsible mission specifically to Niko Nikoladze and to no other individual (Pantsulaia, 2023). This fact not only underscores Nikoladze's personal authority and credibility but also reflects the enduring spiritual foundations cultivated within his family environment, which continued to shape his public, diplomatic, and moral commitments.

Niko Nikoladze received his early education at home and later continued at the Kutaisi Gymnasium, where he first demonstrated a critical thinking mindset, as well as his publishing talent and social awareness. In 1860, while still a student, he published several essays in the journal *Tsiskari*, in which he critiqued the petty-bourgeois society of Kutaisi and advocated for the protection of the Georgian language. This early debut brought him considerable recognition and established him as a promising intellectual within Georgian society. Although his father wished for Niko to follow in his footsteps and assist in the family business, but historians Dimitri Bakradze and Grigol Giorgi Eristavi, an advisor to the Kutaisi Governor-General, recognized his intellectual promise and recommended sending him to Saint Petersburg for higher education. In 1861, Nikoladze completed his studies at the Kutaisi Gymnasium and enrolled in the Faculty of Law at Saint Petersburg University. His time there, however, was brief. In October of the same year, he was arrested alongside approximately one hundred other students for participating in a political demonstration, which led to the temporary closure of the university. Nikoladze spent two months imprisoned in Kronstadt, a port city near the Gulf of Finland. Relocation to Saint Petersburg represented a pivotal stage in Nikoladze's intellectual and personal development, exposing him to the ideological, social, and political tensions of the Russian imperial center. However, it was the extraordinary circumstance of his expulsion from the university formalized through a "wolf ticket", which barred him from pursuing higher education anywhere within the Russian Empire, that decisively shaped the course of his intellectual life (National Archives, 2025).

Confronted with the impossibility of continuing formal studies in Russia, he actively sought ways abroad, turning to Europe as a space where his intellectual potential could flourish. This involuntary turn, born out of repression, became a defining moment that not only determined the trajectory of his personal education but also connected his future thought and activities to the broader European intellectual sphere. In this sense, the "wolf ticket" did not close doors but rather opened a new horizon, ultimately positioning Nikoladze as a bridge between Georgian society and European thought.

3. Formation of a European Thinker

In 1863, Niko Nikoladze set his course for France and enrolled at the Sorbonne University. Studying at one of Europe's most renowned institutions marked an important turning point in his intellectual development. At the Sorbonne, he studied on philosophy and political economy, disciplines that offered him a theoretical framework for understanding state structures, economic systems, and the social dynamics of modern Europe. He also became acquainted with French socialism and the major intellectual currents of the time, including liberalism, republicanism, and early social reform

movements. Europe in the 1860s was characterized by political transformation, debates over social justice, and the rise of industrial and cultural modernization, creating a dynamic and progressive environment that sharply contrasted with the social, political, and educational conditions in Russia and Georgia. The striking differences between Europe and his homeland only intensified Nikoladze's curiosity and motivated him to study European society more deeply. The disparity between progressive European societies and Georgia's condition of dependency intensified his intellectual engagement with questions of reform and modernization. He became increasingly determined to immerse himself in European thought and culture, seeking knowledge that could later inform his vision for Georgia's modernization.

In 1865, Nikoladze transferred to the University of Geneva, and later to the University of Zurich, where he completed his studies in 1868 and defended in French his thesis "Disarmament and Its Economic-Social Consequences". The work was published the same year in Geneva as an independent book and attracted significant public interest and recognition. His work shows clear traces of intense intellectual exchange with European scholars of economics, security, and public administration. In his early academic work, Nikoladze critically examined the economic and social consequences of disarmament, arguing that it could lead to unemployment, social instability, and increased state expenses rather than economic improvement. Through this analysis, he emphasized the importance of strong state institutions and internal security for maintaining social order. These arguments reveal the early formation of his broader political and economic worldview, as the ideas and analytical methods developed in his dissertation later reappeared in his writings on statehood, modernization, and service to the homeland (Bibileishvili, 2010).

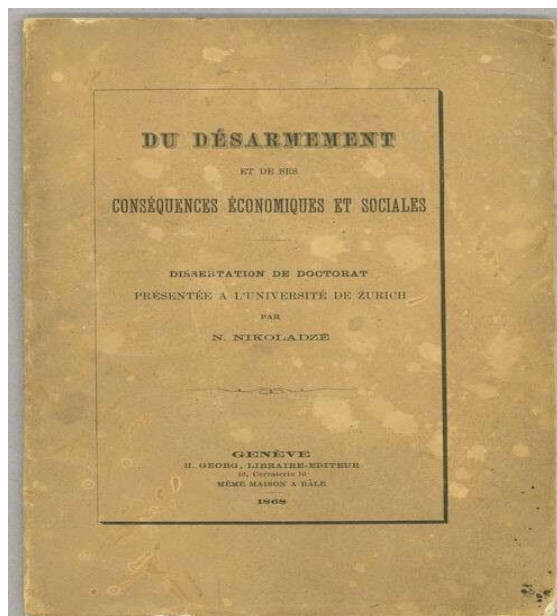


Figure 3: Niko Nikoladze's Doctoral Dissertation: "Disarmament and Its Economic-Social Consequences" University of Zurich, Faculty of Law (National Archives, 2025)

This period abroad represented a decisive stage in Nikoladze's intellectual development, during which his ideas, analytical

methods, and worldview were significantly shaped through sustained engagement with European thought. Paris, Geneva, and Zurich, became not only educational centers for him but also intellectual laboratories in which he encountered some of the most influential ideas circulating in 19th-century Europe. Upon his arrival in Europe, Nikoladze immediately immersed himself in the continent's vibrant social, political, and cultural life. Although young and technically "inexperienced", he quickly adapted to the intellectual rhythms of Western Europe, driven by enormous energy, ambition, and a clear vision for the future.

Nikoladze began publishing widely soon after his arrival, establishing close relations not only with leading figures of the Russian political emigration but also with prominent European intellectuals. He collaborated with many of them, participating in discussions that shaped the political debates of the 1860s. Beginning in 1864, he contributed to Alexander Herzen's influential journal "Kolokol", one of the most important platforms for radical political thought in Europe. In Nikoladze's stay in Paris, in 1865, coincided with the death of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, one of the most influential French political thinkers, widely regarded as the father of mutualist socialism and famous for his provocative declaration that "property is theft." Proudhon was one of the most debated public intellectuals of his time, admired by some for his radical critique of social inequality and criticized by others for his uncompromising, often confrontational style. Nikoladze attended Proudhon's funeral and subsequently devoted a newspaper article to an assessment of his personality and intellectual legacy. Although he did not share Proudhon's views and considered many of his ideas incompatible with his own principles. At the same time, he disagreed with critics who dismissed the French thinker's doctrine as entirely devoid of positive value. In his article, Nikoladze highlighted qualities he admired in Proudhon: his genuine commitment to social improvement, moral courage, directness, and the uncompromising nature of his convictions (Bibileishvili, 2010). These traits earned Proudhon both admiration and hostility across European intellectual circles. This episode highlights the early formation of Nikoladze's ethical and analytical worldview. Even as a young publicist, he demonstrated the ability to evaluate individuals and ideas impartially, recognize merit even in ideological opponents, and distinguish intellectual disagreement from personal enmity. His reflections on Proudhon thus reveal the foundations of his later development as a principled, critically minded, and morally consistent public intellectual.

In 1867, Nikoladze moved to Switzerland, settling in Geneva, where he co-founded the journal "Sovremennost" ("Modernity") together with Lev Mechnikov. The journal became one of the key platforms for his early political and philosophical thought. It published several of Nikoladze's articles in which he explored innovative concepts of state organization, including models grounded in socialist principles and informed by his observations of European political life. In Geneva, his journalistic activity expanded even further: together with Mikhail Elpidin, he published the underground journal "Подпольное слово" (The Underground Word), and prepared a two-volume edition of Nikolai Chernyshevsky's works, including the novel "What Is to Be Done?", to which he wrote a substantial and insightful

literary-critical preface. At that time, he also wrote one of the defining programmatic texts for the youth of the era, "Government and the New Generation" published in 1866 under the pseudonym Nikifore G. In this work, written in Geneva, Nikoladze responded to the failed assassination attempt on the Russian Emperor Alexander II and the subsequent execution of Karakozov. In his essay, Nikoladze argued that genuinely meaningful and beneficial social goals can be achieved only through transparent and direct action rather than through the indirect and conspiratorial methods of secret societies, which he regarded as inherently ineffective. In this context, the young Nikoladze considered legal and open activity essential for educating and enlightening society, arguing that the broader population neither understood nor supported the actions of revolutionary conspirators. He viewed the work of the generation of the 1850s positively, interpreting its mission as one centered on moral and intellectual development rather than violent political struggle. As contemporary literary figures of that period maintained, the primary means of achieving social goals was the moral development of society. The new literature of the time focused its attention on the ethical education of readers, seeking through this process to raise and enlighten broader social groups that lacked access to education and critical reflection. Nikoladze firmly believed this to be the correct path and argued that work in this direction should be continued (Bakradze, 2005). Consequently, Government and the New Generation functioned as a practical and ideological program for the new generation, outlining a strategy of open, lawful, and educational engagement as the foundation for social progress.

It is noteworthy that, from an early age, Niko Nikoladze demonstrated a strong interest in social issues, particularly concerning the role and education of women. In 1864, he wrote the short story "Provincial Portraits", which was published in "Sovremennik" and addressed the social position of women. Earlier that year, he published an article titled "Buckle and the Women's Question" in "Narodnoe Bogatstvo" responding to Henry Thomas Buckle's brochure *The Influence of Women on the Success of Knowledge*. While agreeing with Buckle that women excel in deductive reasoning, Nikoladze added that it was still unknown how women could advance human knowledge if their education and environment fully supported their intellectual development. The issue of women's emancipation constituted one of the central themes of Niko Nikoladze's publicistic work. He first addressed the problem explicitly, marking the beginning of his sustained engagement with questions concerning the social status, rights, and education of women.

By the age of twenty-one, he firmly believed that women were intellectually equal to men and that reasoning was not determined by gender. Beyond his writings, Nikoladze actively promoted women's education in Georgia. In the 1870s, he sent the first group of Georgian women to study in Europe, including his sisters Ekaterine and Olympiada Nikoladze, as well as Ekaterine Melikishvili, Mariam Tsereteli, and Olga Guramishvili, who later became his wife. Disguised in male attire, they traveled to Switzerland under his guidance. His goal was to provide them with proper education at a time when women had access only to pedagogical or medical faculties, while other fields remained

largely closed. This was indeed a remarkable achievement; however, Nikoladze's initiative faced strong criticism from members of the nobility, for whom the idea of women pursuing education abroad was unacceptable. Such reactions reflected the broader socio-political constraints of the time, which Nikoladze consistently challenged in his publicist writings (Bakradze, 2005). Indeed, in his articles published in 1864, two enduring concerns of his intellectual agenda became especially evident: the principle of equality between women and men, and the necessity of transforming socio-political conditions to allow individuals to develop and express their talents freely.

Between 1864 and 1868, Nikoladze traveled extensively across major European intellectual centers, including London, Paris, Geneva, Zurich, and Berlin, actively engaging with the social, political, and cultural life of Europe. During this period, he met, corresponded with, and established close intellectual relationships with prominent European intellectuals, politicians, and literary figures such as Victor Hugo, Alphonse Daudet, Émile Zola, Paul Lafargue, Louis Blanc, Léon Gambetta, and Jean Jaurès, among others. These encounters significantly broadened his intellectual horizons and deepened his understanding of contemporary European political thought, social movements, and cultural debates, laying an important foundation for his later contributions to Georgian intellectual and public life.

In 1865, while staying in London, Nikoladze met Karl Marx through Paul Lafargue, a leading French Marxist thinker, political activist, and Marx's son-in-law, who served as a key intermediary within European socialist circles. Through Lafargue's introduction, Marx offered Nikoladze the position of representative of the First International in the Caucasus. Nikoladze politely declined the offer. As he later recalled, he could not imagine implementing Marx's ideas in his homeland and would not have agreed to do so under any circumstances. At that time, Marx advanced a revolutionary vision that called for the dismantling of the capitalist order and the establishment of a new socio-political system led by the proletariat. Nikoladze carefully weighed these proposals and ultimately rejected them, reasoning that any idea no matter how popular, must align with progressive principles and serve the interests of his country to merit his support (Chikviladze D., 2019).

By 1873, Niko Nikoladze had returned to Paris, a city still profoundly marked by the political, social, and psychological consequences of the Paris Commune—an event whose violent suppression and tragic outcome sent shockwaves throughout Europe and reshaped contemporary debates on socialism, revolution, and state power. Immersed once again in this charged intellectual environment, Nikoladze became actively involved in efforts to engage Caucasian students with the pressing ideological questions of the time. During this period, he collaborated with David Mikeladze and Petre Izmailov in publishing a small socialist newspaper titled "Drosha" ("The Flag"). Produced using a hectograph and circulated primarily among Caucasian students studying in Europe, the publication functioned as a modest yet significant platform for political discussion, ideological reflection, and the dissemination of progressive social ideas.

In the same year, a group of young Georgian intellectuals based in Zurich established the society „Ugeli“(The Yoke/Link), an organization that soon became an important focal point for Georgian student life in Europe. Niko Nikoladze and Giorgi Tsereteli were among its founders and principal supporters, later joined by Sergei Meskhi. The society’s central objective was to familiarize Georgian youth with the most advanced social, political, and philosophical currents circulating in Europe, while simultaneously providing moral, intellectual, and practical support to students pursuing higher education abroad. Through its activities, Ugeli sought to bridge the intellectual gap between Europe and Georgia, ensuring that ideas acquired in the West could be critically adapted to the needs and realities of Georgian society (Kakabadze, 2010). Nikoladze’s European activities during the 1870s thus reveal a remarkable synthesis of intellectual inquiry, cultural mediation, and political engagement. His involvement in the publication of *Drosha* reflects an early and sustained commitment to educating and politically awakening Caucasian youth abroad, as well as a cautious but active engagement with European socialist ideas. At the same time, his role in the establishment and support of Ugeli illustrates a broader strategic vision oriented toward long-term nation-building. Rather than pursuing abstract ideological commitments, Nikoladze sought to cultivate an educated, socially conscious generation capable of contributing constructively to the modernization and development of Georgia.

During his stay in France, Nikoladze frequently met with his longtime acquaintance Marius Martens, a close friend of his father, Iakob Nikoladze. Martens, who owned hotels in Tbilisi and Kutaisi, had accumulated considerable wealth and was well connected within both commercial and political circles. Through the Martens household, Nikoladze was introduced to two deputies from Marseille in the French National Assembly, Delpech and Rouvière—the latter of whom would soon become Minister of Finance and later Prime Minister of France. In the course of one such conversation, Nikoladze observed that the French press had a limited understanding of political developments beyond France’s borders. He argued that Russia’s strategic interests were far more closely aligned with Germany than with France, and that prevailing confidence within the French press regarding strong Russo-French ties was therefore misplaced. This forthright assessment surprised his French interlocutors, who immediately urged him to present his views in written form.

This critical engagement with the French press culminated in 1875, in the aftermath of the defeat of the Paris Commune, when Nikoladze published a French-language brochure entitled *Presse de la Décadence* (“The Decadent Press”). In this work, he offered a sharp and systematic critique of the French press in the post-Commune period, exposing its intellectual shortcomings, political superficiality, and failure to comprehend broader European realities. The brochure demonstrated Nikoladze’s deep engagement with contemporary European political debates and marked a significant stage in his development as a confident public intellectual capable of addressing international audiences. The publication attracted considerable attention within European intellectual circles and received high praise from prominent figures such as Paul Lafargue, Émile de Girardin, and Louis

Blanc. Its central argument was subsequently reprinted by Émile de Girardin, then one of the most influential figures in French journalism in the newspaper “La France”, thereby bringing Nikoladze’s analysis to a broader French readership. Of additional importance is Blanc’s evaluation, preserved in Nikoladze’s personal archival collection. In a letter addressed to “Monsieur Nikoladze”, written in Paris, on 20 May 1875, Louis Blanc noted that he had read the book with great interest, acknowledging the severity of Nikoladze’s judgments and observing that some segments of the French press might find them excessive. Nevertheless, Blanc emphasized the exceptional value of the work, asserting that it was a book every French journalist ought to read and seriously reflect upon. This correspondence provides compelling evidence of Nikoladze’s active intellectual dialogue with leading European thinkers and confirms that his ideas were not merely shaped by European intellectual currents but were also capable of contributing meaningfully to contemporary debates within them (Bakradze, 2005).

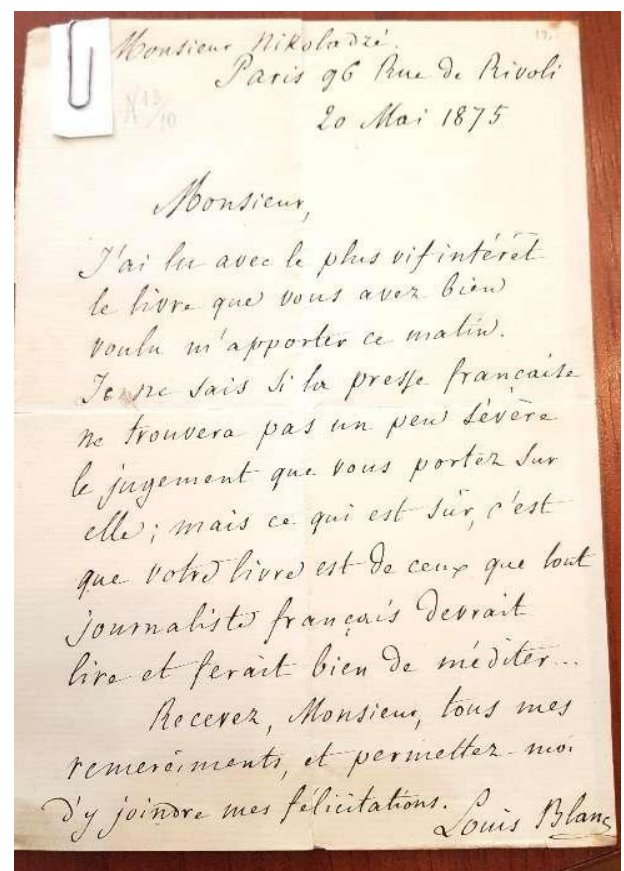


Figure 4: Letter from Louis Blanc to Niko Nikoladze (Blanc, 1875).

Equally notable was the response from the French politician and economist Yves Guyot, editor-in-chief of the journal *Radical* and a respected journalist. He expressed his gratitude to Nikoladze for sending his brochure and remarked that it was remarkable for a foreign journalist to produce such a work, adding that very few French journalists could write with comparable clarity, rigor, and precision.

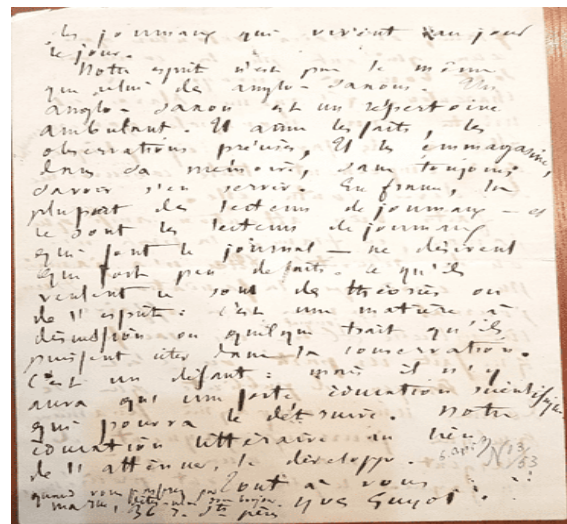
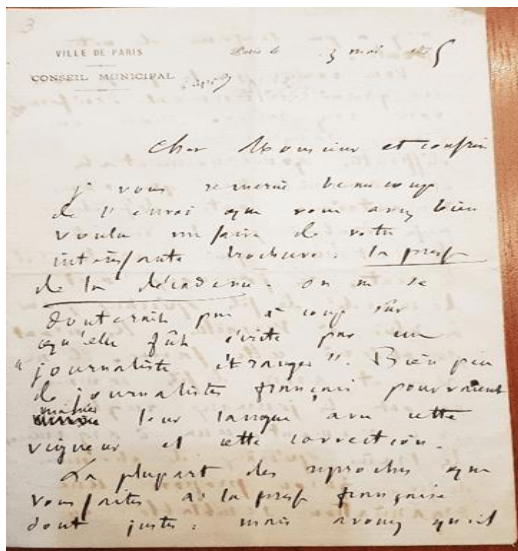
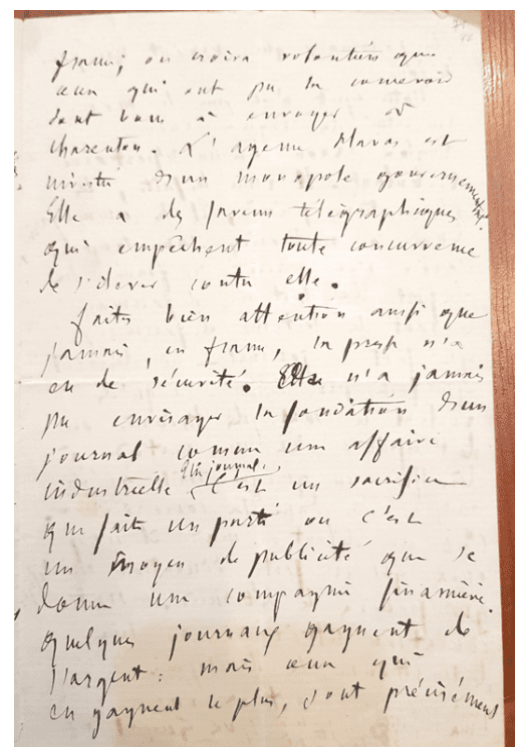
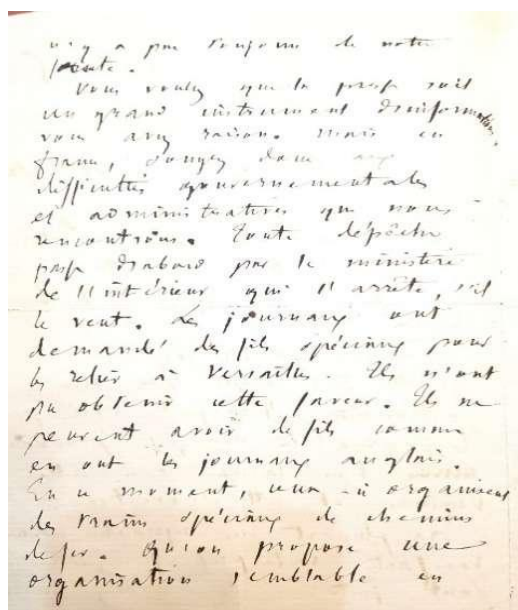


Figure 5: Letter from Yves Guyot to Niko Nikoladze (Guyot, 1875).



Nikoladze's reception by prominent French intellectuals such as Louis Blanc and Yves Guyot highlights the exceptional caliber of his work and the recognition he achieved within European intellectual circles. Their praise underscores not only his analytical rigor and clarity of expression but also his ability to engage critically with complex political and social issues beyond his native context. This acknowledgment affirms that Nikoladze was not merely a passive recipient of European ideas but an active contributor to contemporary debates, capable of influencing discussions among established European thinkers.

Another significant episode in Niko Nikoladze's life and work, recounted in his daughter Rusudan Nikoladze's memoirs, concerns his long-held aspiration to meet the French writer Alphonse Daudet and introduce him to Georgian culture. According to Rusudan, this meeting finally took place in 1885 in Paris during the funeral of the renowned French writer and political figure Victor Hugo. Notably, Nikoladze was the only Georgian present at Hugo's funeral, underscoring his active engagement with European cultural and literary circles. During their encounter, Nikoladze invited Daudet to visit Georgia, expressing his desire for the French writer to become more directly acquainted with the country and its culture. Also, during their discussion, Nikoladze and Daudet focused on Russian literature, with Daudet expressing particular interest in Ivan Turgenev and seeking Nikoladze's assessment of his significance and influence in Russian literature. They also spoke of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. At the time, works by Russian authors such as Turgenev, Tolstoy, and Lermontov were being published in French, and Daudet eagerly explored these texts, paying close attention to their style and literary approach. Reflecting on the meeting, Daudet later noted that the innovations of these Russian writers had influenced his own work, just as his encounter with Nikoladze and exposure to Georgian culture had enlightened and inspired him.

According to Rusudan Nikoladze's memoirs, the two intellectuals met again in 1889 in Paris during the World Exposition, which celebrated the centenary of the 1789 Revolution. The city marked the occasion with the construction of the 300-meter Eiffel Tower, a monumental

and technologically impressive structure. While public opinion was divided, for example, Guy de Maupassant famously criticized the tower in his writings, claiming that it spoiled the unique view of Paris. Niko Nikoladze, on the other hand, was fascinated by this technological achievement. He praised the work to his friend Gustave Eiffel, calling it a true triumph of engineering art, and rejoiced at the creation of such a monumental tower, from which the entire city of Paris and its surroundings could be seen. Alphonse Daudet also shared Nikoladze's positive admiration, reflecting a shared appreciation for innovation and progress within European culture (Nikoladze R. , 1975).

It is remarkable to note that the legacy of the French engineer also reached Georgia in 1897, when, on the initiative of Nikoladze and Mikhail Romanov, a narrow-gauge railway bridge was designed and constructed on the Borjomi-Bakuriani line. Known as the "Eiffel Bridge", it was assembled without welding, showcasing innovative techniques inspired by Gustave Eiffel's work. This project not only exemplifies Nikoladze's enduring engagement with European technological advancements but also highlights his commitment to modernizing infrastructure and promoting engineering innovation in Georgia.

This episode, as recounted in Rusudan Nikoladze's memoirs, illustrates Niko Nikoladze's exceptional role as a cultural mediator between Georgia and Europe. His attendance at Victor Hugo's funeral in 1885, where he was the only Georgian attendee, highlights his proactive involvement in European literary and intellectual circles and to represent Georgian culture on an international stage. The subsequent meeting with Alphonse Daudet reflects Nikoladze's deliberate efforts to introduce Georgia to prominent European figures, promoting cross-cultural dialogue. His admiration for the Eiffel Tower during the 1889 World Exposition, coupled with the later construction of the Borjomi-Bakuriani "Eiffel Bridge" in 1897, demonstrates his ability to translate exposure to European technological and cultural achievements into practical initiatives.

4.From Ideas to Action: Building Intellectual Bridges and Translating European Thought into Georgian Progress

During his time in Europe, Niko Nikoladze closely studied all aspects of advanced societies, including legal systems, social organization, economic structures, technologies, labor practices, and everyday culture. He returned to Georgia with a clear vision for national development, aiming not only to introduce European democratic and social ideas but also to prepare Georgian society for modernization, education, and economic self-sufficiency. While Europe provided numerous exemplary models, Nikoladze focused on those that could strengthen Georgia's economy and improve the well-being of its people. Although he highly valued Western thought, he maintained that each nation must develop its own ideology and adapt foreign models to local realities. In particular, he emphasized the importance of overcoming dependence on external powers, avoiding illusions of easy wealth, and recognizing that education and knowledge were fundamental to national progress.

Shortly after returning to Georgia in 1869, Nikoladze began working at the newspaper "Droeba" in Tbilisi alongside Sergei Meskhi. He regarded the press as a powerful instrument for shaping public opinion and promoting social and political reforms and collaborated with various journals to disseminate his ideas. From 1870 onward, he published a series of articles in the progressive Georgian monthly *Krebuli*, a journal he founded that was published between 1871 and 1873. Later, in 1895, he became one of the leading contributors to the journal *Moambe*, where he continued to advocate for education and economic development in Georgia.

Through his writings, Nikoladze explored key themes and actively promoted both economic and civic reforms. Education was central to his vision of national progress. He argued that classical education alone was insufficient and emphasized the importance of practical and technical education, including the establishment of specialized schools and, ultimately, a technical university. He promoted learning for all social groups, including women, not only the wealthy or men. For Nikoladze, education was not merely a personal benefit but a social necessity an instrument for strengthening the nation, cultivating civic responsibility, and fostering social and economic advancement. He believed that an educated population formed the foundation for rational decision-making, active citizenship, and the long-term prosperity of society. However, Nikoladze understood that in the specific context of Georgia under Russian imperial rule, education alone could not guarantee meaningful national development.

Recognizing the economic limitations imposed by imperial structures, he stressed the importance of combining knowledge with practical skills in commerce, trade, and finance. He encouraged young Georgians to engage in trade, not only as an honorable profession but also as a strategic path.

toward national empowerment. Economic self-reliance, he believed, was a crucial step toward achieving political independence: a nation that could manage its resources, generate wealth, and participate confidently in regional and international trade would be better positioned to assert its autonomy in the political sphere. To achieve this vision, Nikoladze actively promoted financial literacy and institutional development. He advocated for the creation of local banks and other financial organizations to provide the capital necessary for business and trade. He also translated European banking programs, such as Schulze Delitsch's, into Georgian, making advanced financial knowledge accessible to the public. In his writings, he emphasized that a combination of education, capital, and practical skills was essential for building a strong, self-sufficient economy that could support the nation's long-term development (Chikviladze D. , 2017)

Building on his emphasis on education and economic empowerment, Niko Nikoladze also regarded civic reform as a fundamental pillar of national progress. He believed that even a well-educated and economically capable population could not realize its full potential without active participation in public life and self-governance. Consequently, Nikoladze emerged as one of the earliest and most consistent advocates of local self-government in Georgia. He argued that local communities (*eroba*) should elect educated, capable, and morally responsible leaders, provide them with appropriate

remuneration, and entrust them with clearly defined public responsibilities. Equally important, these leaders were to be held accountable for their performance and replaced if they failed to serve the public interest. Nikoladze conceived local self-government as a form of limited autonomy intended to cultivate self-reliance, discipline, and civic responsibility among citizens. In his view, local institutions functioned as practical schools of citizenship, where individuals learned leadership, accountability, and the habit of serving the common good. Through the establishment of structured local governance, he sought to foster a civic culture capable of sustaining national development. Central to this vision was the inseparability of civic education and practical governance. Nikoladze maintained that educated and economically empowered individuals would become more effective participants in local administration, thereby creating a virtuous cycle of political, social, and economic progress. He further believed that the rational administration of the country required an effective system of governance and elections that ensured the active involvement of talented, principled, and well-prepared citizens in public life. Only through the promotion of such individuals to positions of authority, he argued, could a strong and stable state be formed. Civic institutions, therefore, were not merely administrative mechanisms but ethical and educational spaces that cultivated public responsibility and moral leadership.

Nikoladze's ideas were not limited to theory. Through his direct involvement, Dimitri Kipiani was elected head of the Tbilisi City Council in 1875, despite the council's ethnically diverse composition, and local self-government was introduced in Kutaisi. Most notably, Nikoladze demonstrated the practical implementation of his civic principles by transforming Poti into a model self-governing city. These initiatives were not isolated administrative reforms but integral elements of a broader political vision aimed at strengthening civic participation, institutional accountability, and democratic culture at the local level.

Alongside local governance, Nikoladze considered the proper organization of the judiciary indispensable to the construction of a democratic state. He emphasized the necessity of an independent judicial system and equal access to fair trials for all citizens, viewing these principles as essential foundations of civil peace and social stability. Without an effective and impartial judiciary, he argued, the normal functioning of the state would be impossible. Taken together—structured self-government, democratic participation, ethical leadership, and judicial independence—these principles formed the core of Nikoladze's vision for a modern, participatory, and stable Georgian society.

Through his writings and public activities, Niko Nikoladze consistently demonstrated that national development required an integrated and well-balanced approach. He clearly identified the principal causes of Georgia's economic and political backwardness as the lack of scientific and technological advancement, delays in education in comparison with Europe, and a persistent shortage of skilled professionals. At a time when Europe was rapidly progressing through industrialization, railway construction, modern engineering, mechanized production, the expansion of banking systems, and the development of modern

communication networks such as the telegraph and the press, Georgia remained largely excluded from these transformative processes. Nikoladze regarded education as the cornerstone of all progress, as it enabled individuals to comprehend new technologies, apply scientific knowledge, and acquire professional skills. He argued that economic empowerment—particularly through the development of trade, industry, and financial institutions—was essential for overcoming dependence and achieving material self-sufficiency. At the same time, civic reform, especially the establishment of local self-government, ensured that educated and economically active citizens could effectively apply their knowledge and skills in service of the public good (Shubitidze, 2020). This holistic vision reflects Nikoladze's conviction that a modern, self-reliant, and progressive Georgia could only emerge through the parallel development of education, scientific and technological innovation, economic capacity, and civic participation. Crucially, he emphasized that these processes had to be adapted to national conditions and social realities rather than mechanically replicated from foreign models. In this respect, Nikoladze articulated a modern conception of development that combined European experience with local agency, positioning him as a key architect of Georgia's path toward modernization.

Nikoladze's vision of national development was not limited to abstract reflection or editorial commentary. Convinced that meaningful change required direct engagement with political and social institutions, he consciously moved from intellectual critique to active participation in public life. The mid-1870s thus represent a formative period in which his theoretical principles were tested and applied through journalism, municipal politics, and public service. Between 1874 and 1877, Niko Nikoladze actively collaborated with the newspaper *Tifliskyi Vestnik* and emerged as one of the leading figures of a Georgian populist organization, reflecting his growing influence in public and political life. In 1875, he was elected as a member of the Kutaisi City Council, further institutionalizing his civic engagement. During the Russo-Turkish War in 1877–1878, Nikoladze served on the Caucasus front as a military correspondent for *Tifliskyi Vestnik*, the *Havas Agency*, and the newspaper *Golos*, becoming the first Georgian military correspondent. His work in this role, particularly for *Golos*, went far beyond the mere transmission of information about military operations and the movements of the Russian army. Writing directly from the front, he performed an exceptionally important public function by exposing systemic flaws, administrative abuses, and social injustices associated with wartime governance and military practice. Through his critical and accusatory reportage, Nikoladze used journalism as a tool of public accountability, reinforcing his broader commitment to civic responsibility, transparency, and social reform (Bakradze, 2005).

This role is further substantiated by an official permit preserved in Niko Nikoladze's personal archival collection, which authorized him to travel to the active military corps stationed along the Caucasus–Turkish border as a correspondent representing both Russian and foreign newspapers. The inclusion of this document in the present article provides direct archival evidence of Nikoladze's formally recognized status as a military correspondent and

reinforces the institutional legitimacy of his journalistic activity during the Russo-Turkish War.

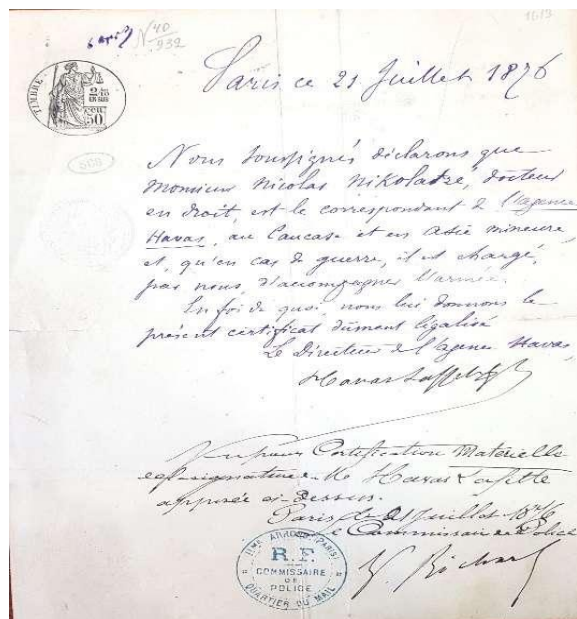


Figure 6: Certificate issued by Havas Agency (Agency, 1876)

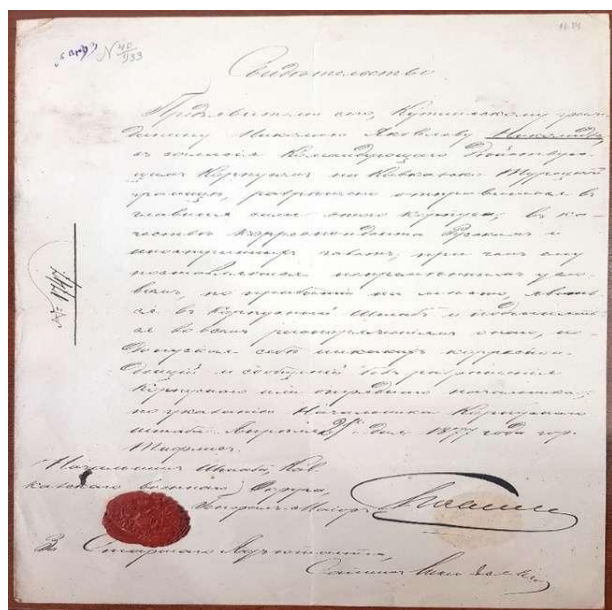


Figure 7: Certificate issued by the Chief of Staff of the Caucasus Military District (Command, 1877).

For Nikoladze, journalism was a civic duty. Writing served as a means to highlight social issues, critique injustice, and advance national development. Upon returning from the front, he founded the Russian-language journal "Obzor", once again positioning himself at the center of public debate and intellectual discourse. He was strongly criticized for publishing in Russian instead of Georgian, as many believed this choice weakened national culture. Nikoladze responded to this criticism with a clear and modern argument, especially addressed to young intellectuals. He argued that people should write in any language they knew-Tatar, French, Georgian, or Russian-but should always write about Georgia and Georgian reality. For him, the language itself was less important than the ideas, goals, and civic responsibility of writing. Through "Obzor", Nikoladze systematically exposed the failures of

local authorities, the incompetence of municipal leaders, the arbitrariness of local self-government, and the profound injustices of the legal system. He openly criticized flawed court proceedings, unjust verdicts, and administrative abuse. It is also noteworthy that, in connection with his work for Obzor, Nikoladze corresponded with Henri Rochefort, a French writer of vaudevilles and a well-known political figure. Rochefort expressed both his interest and willingness to support the dissemination of ideas of freedom in the Caucasus.

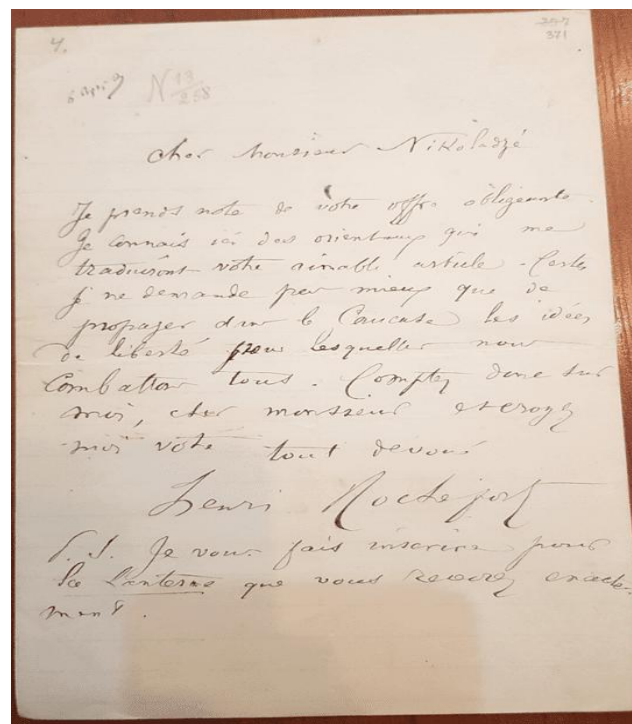


Figure 8: Letter from Henri Rochefort to Niko Nikoladze (Rochefort, 1877).

As Nikoladze openly criticized flawed court proceedings, unjust verdicts, and administrative abuses, complaints were lodged against the journal, ultimately leading to its closure. He was accused of violating state regulations-publishing issues despite bans and printing materials rejected by the censor. In July 1880, he was tried and sentenced to exile in Stavropol, a punishment that highlighted the extent to which his journalistic activity challenged imperial authority. This episode vividly illustrates Nikoladze's role not only as a public intellectual but also as a steadfast opponent of authoritarian governance, censorship, and legal arbitrariness, even at the cost of his personal freedom.

Significantly, that throughout his journalistic career, Niko Nikoladze was associated with over forty publications, collaborating with both local and foreign newspapers and journals. His work as a journalist earned him high praise from European contemporaries. Nikoladze's personal archive preserves a letter from Arthur Leist, written in 1880, which further illustrates the esteem in which he was held by European intellectuals. According to Arthur Leist, the renowned German Caucasus expert and a steadfast supporter of Georgia, Nikoladze was the most intelligent and perceptive figure among those who influenced the country. Leist described him as an exceptionally gifted and morally elevated individual, noting that he was the first Georgian journalist to

gain recognition at a European level. He emphasized that Nikoladze was far ahead of his time, identifying Georgia's most pressing social, political, and economic issues and analyzing them with remarkable clarity and insight. Leist argued that Nikoladze's work had a lasting impact on the intellectual and political development of the nation, shaping public debate and guiding the country toward modern, progressive solutions.

In his letter, Leist expresses great admiration for Nikoladze's intellect, cultural awareness, and literary work, describing him as the worthiest representative of the press in Tiflis and one of the leading Georgian writers. Leist requests information from Nikoladze about Russian authors dealing with literature, theatre, social life, history, and the affairs of the Georgian and Armenian peoples, and he asks to receive several issues of the newspaper Obzor, in which these subjects were discussed. The letter highlights Nikoladze's role as a central figure in Georgian literary and journalistic circles, capable of guiding European scholars in understanding regional literature, culture, and history. The request for Obzor underscores the value of the Georgian press as a source of knowledge for European observers. Moreover, the formal and respectful tone of the correspondence reflects the conventions of scholarly exchange at the time and illustrates the transnational networks that connected the Caucasus with broader European cultural and intellectual currents.

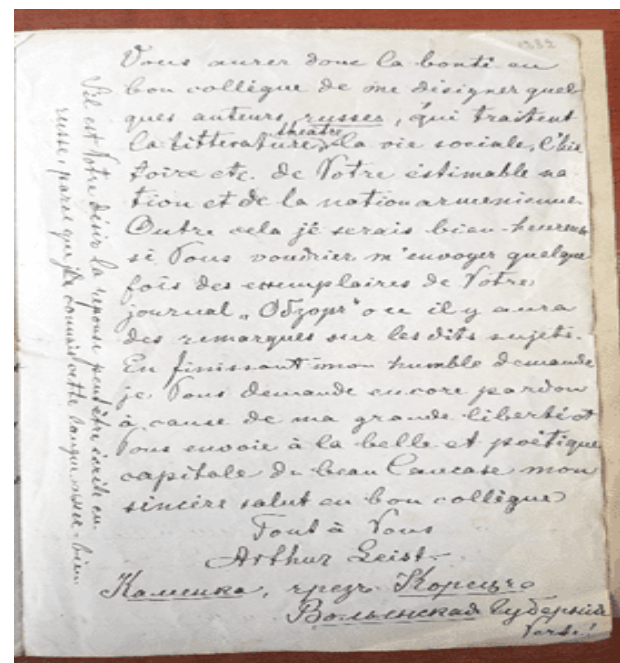
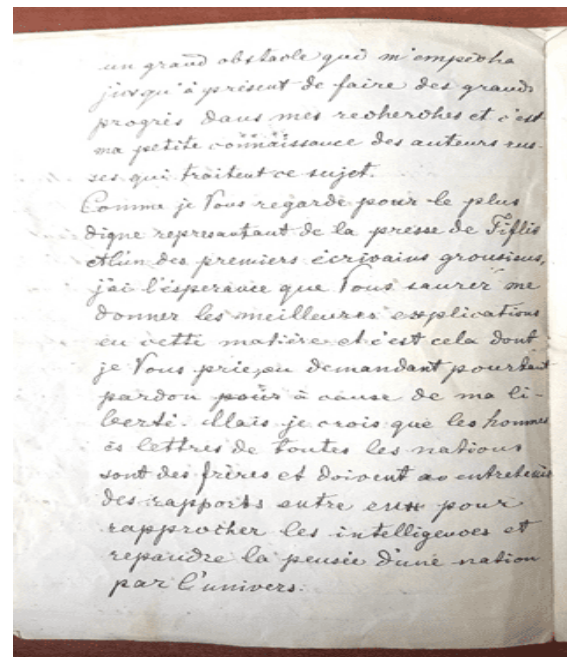
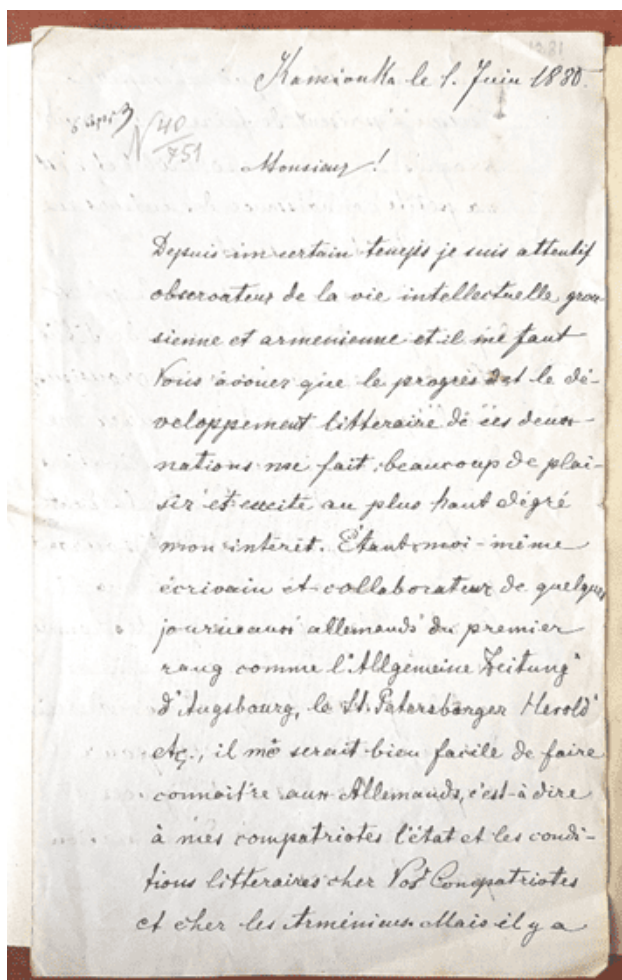


Figure 9: Letter from Arthur Leist to Niko Nikoladze (Leist, 1880)

Notably, Niko Nikoladze stands out as a unique figure in Georgian history, unmatched in combining extensive social, literary, and journalistic engagement with concrete, practical contributions to his people and country. He embodied the role of a multifaceted practitioner, whose work extended beyond theory into tangible national development. His guiding principle reflected this seamless integration of thought and action: he believed that a writer's words must always be accompanied by deeds, and that every statement should carry practical significance. Following his guiding principle, Nikoladze devoted himself to a wide range of practical initiatives aimed at modernizing Georgia. His efforts spanned infrastructure development, engineering projects, and the introduction of new technologies, all reflecting his commitment to turning ideas into concrete improvements for his country and its people.

From the 1870s onward, Niko Nikoladze laid the foundations for large-scale economic and infrastructural projects in Georgia. A major dimension of Nikoladze's work was his involvement in railway construction and industrial development. He played a significant role in the construction of the first Transcaucasian railway line, Poti–Tbilisi (1872), as well as in the development of railway branches connecting Tkibuli, Chiatura, Tkvarchali, Zugdidi, and other regions. His participation in the construction of the Surami Tunnel (1884–1888) was particularly crucial, as this project ensured reliable connectivity between Eastern and Western Georgia. For his contribution to the Poti–Tbilisi railway, Nikoladze was awarded a gold railway token, granting him the right to travel free of charge in first-class railway carriages throughout the Russian Empire. In 1915, he was elected Director of the Board of the Kakheti Railway Society, further confirming his authority in the field of transport infrastructure.

Parallel to railway development, Nikoladze initiated and supported major industrial and investment projects. He founded Georgia's first international joint-stock company, "Nakhshira", which focused on the extraction, processing, and export of Chiatura manganese and coal from Tkibuli and Tkvarchali. Through active engagement with European businessmen, he promoted Georgia's mineral resources abroad and sought to integrate the country into international economic networks. His constant mobility-between Tbilisi, Poti, rural Georgia, Russia, and Europe-was driven by a deliberate strategy to use personal connections for strengthening the national economy and advancing political objectives (Chikviladze D., 2019).

Nikoladze's impact on Tbilisi was especially pronounced in the sphere of municipal governance. Between 1878 and 1892, he was repeatedly elected as an opposition member of the Tiflis City Council, the institutional predecessor of today's Tbilisi City Assembly. At that time, the city was governed by Mayor Alexander Matinov, whose tenure has been described by contemporaries as the most distinguished period in Tbilisi's municipal history. The City Council was politically divided: the majority consisted of wealthy Armenian representatives, while the opposition was largely composed of Georgian and Russian councilors. Within this structure, Nikoladze emerged as the key intellectual force behind municipal reform. Despite holding an opposition position, he exerted substantial influence over urban planning, infrastructure, and public services. Contemporary observers emphasized that there was scarcely a municipal project that was not either initiated by Nikoladze or realized with his practical support, earning him a reputation as a true generator of ideas. His authority derived not from formal power, but from his strategic thinking, administrative competence, and ability to adapt European urban experiences to local needs. One of Nikoladze's foremost priorities was public health and sanitation. He persistently demanded the appointment of a municipal sanitary physician, a position that did not previously exist in Tbilisi. As a result of his efforts, the city officially appointed a sanitary doctor in 1886. Closely connected to this reform was the construction of a disinfection chamber on Madatov Island, designed to combat the spread of infectious diseases. The technical project was prepared at Nikoladze's request by Petre Melikishvili, head of a chemical laboratory in Odessa. These measures marked the first

systematic attempt to address Tbilisi's severe sanitary conditions through institutional mechanisms.

Nikoladze also raised the issue of centralized water supply, criticizing the city's dependence on polluted river water collected directly from the Mtkvari and sold by water carriers. He categorically insisted on the construction of a pumping system and the development of a modern water-supply network. Through his initiative, a water pipeline was built from the Avchala springs, significantly improving water quality and reducing the spread of bacterial diseases. Although his proposals to extend water supply systems to the Tsalka and Natakhtari–Bulachauri sources were not realized during his lifetime due to financial constraints, these ideas later informed projects implemented in the Soviet period.

Another critical aspect of Nikoladze's urban program was the creation of a sewerage system. He advocated for a comprehensive sewer network that would serve both banks of the Mtkvari River. The project, financed by the City Council and designed by the French engineer Lindley, envisioned two main collectors running along the riverbanks and connected to secondary channels from the upper districts. Despite its technical sophistication, the project was rejected by the municipal leadership due to its high estimated cost. Nevertheless, its conceptual framework later influenced the city's twentieth-century sewerage infrastructure. In the field of urban transport, Nikoladze played a decisive role in introducing Tbilisi's first municipal public transport system. Until the 1880s, transportation was limited to private phaetons and omnibuses. At his insistence, the city introduced a horse-drawn tram (konka), which operated on rails and represented a major step toward organized municipal transit. This innovation facilitated mobility and contributed to the spatial integration of the expanding city. Nikoladze also actively promoted urban connectivity and engineering projects. Recognizing the lack of effective links between Chugureti, Vere, and the central districts, he supported the construction of the Vere Bridge (today's Galaktioni Bridge) and the development of the Vere descent (present-day Mikheil Javakhsishvili Street). These projects physically united previously disconnected parts of the city and stimulated economic and residential growth. Additionally, his ambitious idea to create a cascade of artificial lakes in the area of today's Tbilisi Sea reflected his concern for climate moderation, urban ecology, and long-term environmental planning. Nikoladze also advocated for the construction of a representative municipal building for the city administration, embodied in the former Tbilisi City Hall.

He also proposed the development of balneological and resort zones in Abanotubani, Kharpukhi, and parts of Ortachala, envisioning Tbilisi as a therapeutic and recreational center. Niko Nikoladze had a deep admiration for European spa towns, particularly Baden-Baden. During his travels, he carefully studied the therapeutic properties of its mineral waters and their applications for health and wellness. Inspired by this, he examined Tbilisi's mineral springs, comparing their qualities to those of Baden-Baden, and concluded that Tbilisi's waters were not inferior. However, he was dissatisfied with the idea of using the springs solely for local or limited purposes. He envisioned establishing a major balneological resort in Tbilisi, which would elevate the city's

status as a center for health, wellness, and tourism. His plan was to integrate the resort into the historical part of the city, creating a destination that would benefit both residents and visitors. Documents preserved in his archive further illustrate his active involvement in this initiative. A letter dated April 1920, addressed to Nikoladze, was sent by the owners of the mineral baths of Tiflis. They formally requested him to begin preliminary negotiations with Western European companies and investors concerning the organization of a spa. The letter stipulated that any draft contract prepared by Nikoladze would only become valid after examination and approval by the owners. This correspondence highlights Nikoladze's reputation as a trusted intermediary with the expertise and international contacts necessary to negotiate such projects.

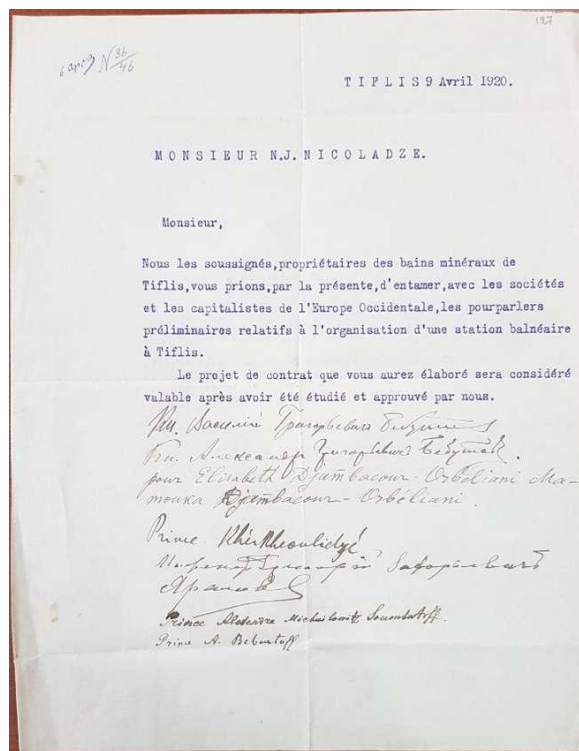


Figure 10: Collective letter from the owners of the Tbilisi mineral baths to Niko Nikoladze (Djambacour–Orbeliani, 1920).

Niko Nikoladze played a pivotal role in the early development of telecommunications in Georgia, actively supporting and promoting the experimental Tbilisi–Kojori telephone connection in 1893. This project was among the earliest worldwide attempts to enable the simultaneous transmission of telegraph messages and voice communication over a single line. The technical implementation was carried out by the Russian inventor E. Gvozdev, whose innovative system attracted significant public and professional attention due to its unprecedented feasibility. Contemporary newspapers extensively documented the experiment. Tifliski Listok reported on 11 July 1893 that “Tbilisi and Kojori have been connected by Gvozdev’s telephone, which operates simultaneously with the telegraph on a single line”, and its issue of 15 July further noted that test calls between the two locations were conducted successfully, with voices from Kojori heard clearly at the central telephone station in Tbilisi using Gvozdev’s apparatus. Similarly, Novoe Obozrenie (15 July 1893) emphasized that the telephone system—manufactured abroad by the firm Obrist—was installed

experimentally at the Post and Telegraph Office under the supervision of the inventor and the prominent railway official A. Bunge. Nikoladze’s involvement in this initiative was both strategic and facilitative. Residing in Kojori at the time and maintaining close personal and professional ties with A. Bunge, he likely influenced the decision to conduct the experiment along the Tbilisi–Kojori telegraph line. Through his coordination efforts and advocacy for European technological innovations, Nikoladze contributed significantly to the realization of the project. The Tbilisi–Kojori telegraph line thus became one of the first in the world to transmit telegrams and telephone calls simultaneously, a technical achievement closely associated with Nikoladze’s vision and support (Bibileishvili L., 2020).

Niko Nikoladze was the first to conceptualize and plan the transit of Baku oil through Georgian territory. He developed an original project for the Baku–Batumi oil pipeline, and in the 1880s he convinced millionaires, the Rothschilds, to finance and implement it in Georgia. The pipeline was built along the Rioni River valley (“the Rioni route”) and its engineering backbone was completed between 1884 and 1888. Nikoladze personally oversaw the construction and operation of the Baku–Batumi pipeline, recognizing that Georgia could earn significant economic benefits from controlling the transit of oil. Later, in 1926–1927, he also developed a separate project for the Grozny–Poti oil pipeline, ensuring that both pipelines would operate through Georgian territory, a strategic position that he had long advocated for, including in discussions with the Nobel family, who were also involved in the oil industry. bibileishvili

Niko Nikoladze consistently positioned himself at the forefront of contemporary scientific and technological developments, demonstrating a keen awareness of innovations capable of contributing to the modernization of his homeland. His involvement in the early electrification of Paris, Poti, and Tbilisi underscores both his intellectual foresight and his practical influence on technological advancement. In 1881, Nikoladze attended the International Congress of Electricians in Paris, where the French physicist and engineer Marcel Deprez presented his groundbreaking concept for the long-distance transmission of electricity through thin conductors. Although the proposal was revolutionary, it was initially met with skepticism, including among members of the French Academy of Sciences. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Nikoladze recognized not only the technical feasibility of Deprez’s invention but also its far-reaching economic and social implications. When Deprez’s initial attempt to secure financial support from the Rothschild family proved unsuccessful, Nikoladze intervened anonymously by sending a detailed explanatory letter to the Rothschilds, outlining the scientific principles and transformative potential of the invention. As a result of this advocacy, the project received the necessary funding, ultimately leading to the electrification of Paris in 1886, powered by hydroelectric energy from the Creil waterfall (Shubitidze, 2020). This episode had a profound impact on Nikoladze. Deprez later acknowledged his decisive role, stating that “no one but you would have made this possible”, a remark that underscores Nikoladze’s rare combination of vision, initiative, and persuasive authority. Their professional cooperation developed into a lasting friendship, and Deprez frequently invited Nikoladze to

Paris and other European cities to observe contemporary electrification projects and engineering innovations firsthand.

Nikoladze's engagement with technological progress was not limited to observation or advocacy abroad; he sought to apply this knowledge directly in Georgia. The first city in the country to be illuminated by electricity was Poti, where Nikoladze supervised the construction of a small hydroelectric station on the Kaparchin River. As early as 1903, he began developing plans for the electrification of western Georgia, identifying the Rioni and Enguri rivers as promising sites. In later years, his son Giorgi Nikoladze joined these efforts, and together they concluded that the Enguri River offered particularly favorable conditions for a hydroelectric project. Acting on Niko Nikoladze's instructions, Giorgi Nikoladze and Baron von Ropp spent five months conducting a detailed survey of the Enguri valley. Although the project could not be realized at the time due to financial constraints, the initiative proved visionary.

Niko Nikoladze's election as mayor of Poti in 1894 marked the beginning of a transformative phase in the city's history and represented the practical implementation of his European-inspired economic and urban vision. Although Poti had formally been granted city status in 1858, its development prior to Nikoladze's leadership remained limited and inconsistent. Contemporary travelers described it as a marshy, village-like settlement dominated by wooden structures and lacking coherent infrastructure. Recognizing both the strategic importance of Poti as a Black Sea port and its underdeveloped condition, the local population elected Nikoladze—a European-educated, practically minded reformer—as city head, entrusting him with the task of comprehensive modernization. From the outset, Nikoladze approached Poti's development through systematic study and international comparison. He adapted urban planning principles from major European cities, particularly Paris, designing a radial, sun-like city layout. At the center of this plan stood a reinforced concrete cathedral inspired by Istanbul's Hagia Sophia—the first reinforced concrete structure of its kind in the Russian Empire. Twelve main streets radiated outward from this central point, symbolically and functionally organizing the city's spatial development. Importantly, Nikoladze did not apply European models mechanically; he carefully adapted them to local climatic, environmental, and geographic conditions, ensuring their long-term sustainability.

Between 1894 and 1914, Nikoladze oversaw Poti's transformation from a swampy settlement into a modern European-style port city. A key component of this transformation was the construction of port infrastructure. To prepare an optimal project, Nikoladze traveled to Europe and North Africa, he visited twelve port cities in North Africa, studying the best international practices. This illustrates his approach to professional work in general: he first studied the issue thoroughly, examined it from multiple perspectives, and familiarized himself with the best existing examples, before ultimately making decisions adapted to the specific realities of Georgia. This method reflects a truly exemplary model of practical and informed decision-making. Archival evidence further illustrates the international scope of Nikoladze's work. A document dated 16 June 1899 records instructions issued by a senior official of the Russian Empire's Ministry of

Foreign Affairs to embassies in Berlin, London, and Paris, as well as diplomatic missions in The Hague, Brussels, and Cairo, directing them to assist the Mayor of Poti in studying foreign ports. Nikoladze's activities even attracted attention in the European press; his travels related to the construction of Poti's port were reported in *Le Figaro*.

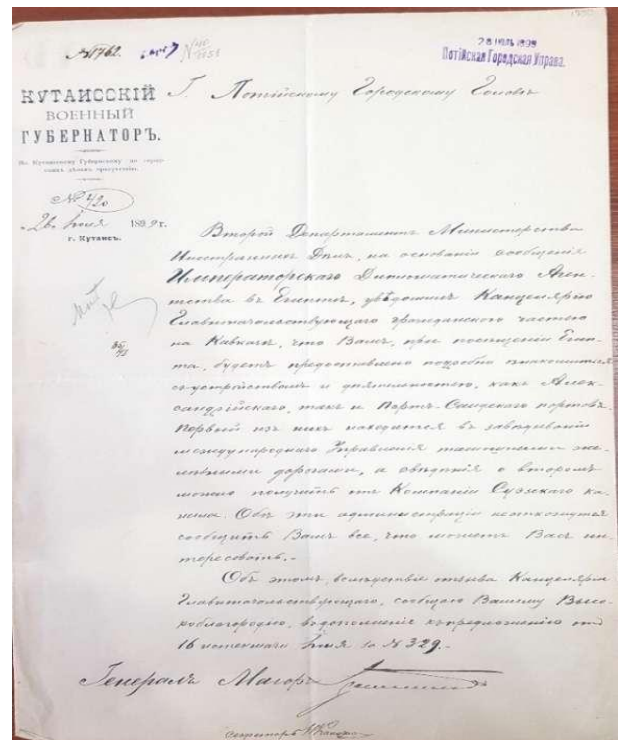


Figure 11: Granting Niko Nikoladze the Right to Inspect Alexandria (Affairs, 1899)

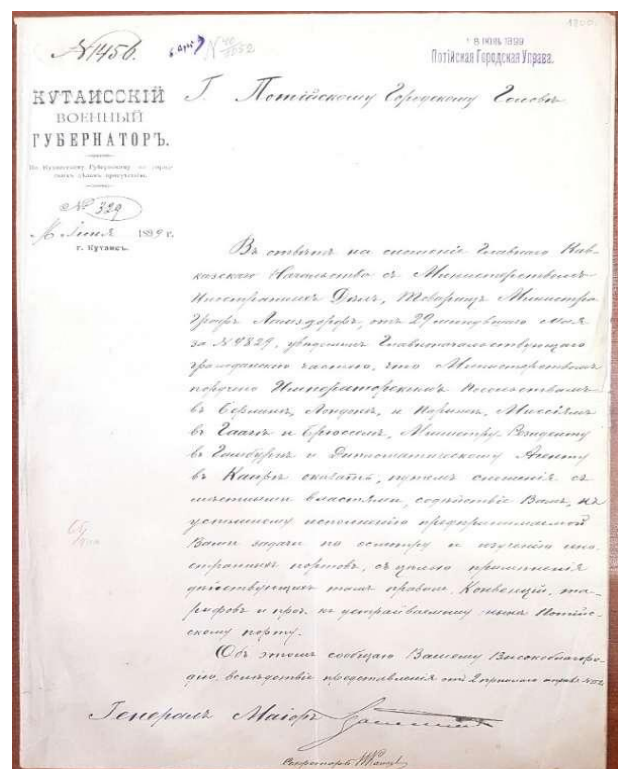


Figure 12: Assistance Granted to Niko Nikoladze for Inspecting Foreign Ports (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1899)

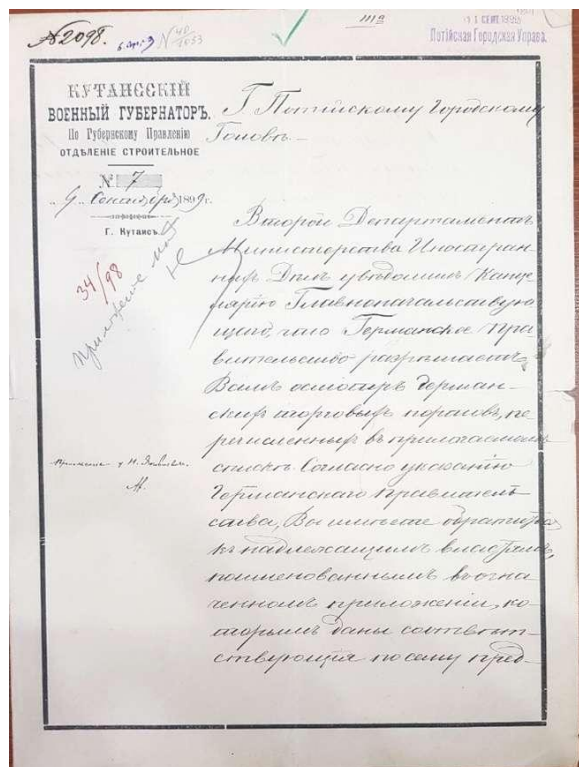


Figure 13: Permission Granted to Niko Nikoladze to Inspect German Commercial Ports (Second Department, 1899)



Figure 14: Mission russe à Cherbourg: Niko Nikoladze's Visit to the Port of Cherbourg, 1899 (Figaro, 1899).

Financing the port and urban development required innovative economic solutions. In 1896, Nikoladze issued the first municipal bond in the Russian Empire—a silver-backed, interest-bearing security—to fund the construction of Poti's large seaport. The total bond issue amounted to 1, 400, 000 maneti, with the initial tranche successfully placed under municipal supervision. In addition, he introduced a half-kopeck customs tax, the first such duty in Georgia, and secured state loans through extensive negotiations with St. Petersburg. These loans were repaid within two years through port revenues, demonstrating the financial viability of his model. Under Nikoladze's leadership, Poti became a

precedent-setting "self-sustaining economic zone", in which urban and port infrastructure were financed primarily from municipal revenues. Parallel to port construction, Nikoladze prioritized the systematic development of urban infrastructure. Recognizing that industrial growth was outpacing the city's physical connectivity, he initiated the construction of three major bridges to integrate the port, railway, and surrounding regions. The most significant of these—a drawbridge connecting the city to the port—was built in 1897–1898 with the participation of the renowned engineer Tadeoz Kveshelava, allowing uninterrupted navigation along the Rioni River. A second bridge connected the port with the railway network, while a third linked Poti with Guria. Together, these bridges integrated all major transportation routes, greatly enhancing trade, mobility, and economic circulation.

Urban improvements extended beyond transportation. Central streets were paved, and an extensive drainage canal system was constructed to protect the city from frequent flooding. Nikoladze also paid close attention to public safety and administration, prioritizing the construction of a modern police station and establishing effective municipal governance structures. To support architectural development, he invited the German architect and engineer Edmund Frick, who served as city engineer from 1907 to 1909 and designed key landmarks, including the city library, the Bristol Hotel, the State History Museum, and numerous residential buildings.

Education formed another pillar of Nikoladze's urban vision. He oversaw the construction of purpose-built school facilities, including women's gymnasiums distinguished by architectural precision and functional design. These buildings featured spacious classrooms, wide corridors, and carefully planned natural lighting standards that remain evident in their continued use today. Through such projects, Nikoladze demonstrated that urban modernization required not only economic and industrial growth but also long-term investment in human capital. By 1905, Poti had become one of the strongest port institutions in the region, attracting ships from numerous countries and experiencing rapid growth in population and cargo turnover. To further enhance efficiency, Nikoladze introduced mechanization into port operations, installing a mechanical elevator to replace slow manual cargo handling. This innovation significantly accelerated port activity and reinforced Poti's position as a major commercial hub.

Nikoladze's work in Poti exemplifies his broader approach to national development: rigorous study, international comparison, practical adaptation, and ethical public service. Although the doors of Europe were always open to him, his ultimate commitment remained firmly rooted in Georgia. The transformation of Poti stands as one of the most tangible and successful realizations of his belief that ideas must be translated into action and that modern, self-reliant development could be achieved even within the constraints of the Russian Empire through knowledge, discipline, and visionary leadership.

Niko Nikoladze was the first to develop the idea of Georgia's modern geopolitical functions. In 1918, he presented this concept to German diplomats, based on an idea he had

formulated as early as the 1870s regarding routes connecting Europe and Asia—specifically, the Berlin–Poti–Beijing route. He drew historical analogies to justify this plan. Through the construction of railways and roads, the development of Poti's functions, the management and growth of the city and its port, Tbilisi's transit potential, and Rioni River navigation projects financed with the Rothschilds' support, along with advancements in electroengineering technology, Nikoladze's work practically determined the historical function of this route and revealed the potential for Georgia's independent development (Bibileishvili L., 2020).

Niko Nikoladze practiced almost all branches of agriculture according to modern agricultural principles. He sought to set an example for the population in plant care, cultivation, and land management. He also fought against drought. In 1894, under his leadership, the Khoni irrigation canal was built, which was effectively the first irrigation system in all of Western Georgia. In 1910, Nikoladze demonstrated the use of wind power by constructing the first wind engine in the Russian Empire. He also promoted the introduction of electrification in agriculture. Interestingly, in 1918, during a village assembly, Niko and Giorgi Nikoladze discussed the idea of building an electric power station in Didjikhaisi, with a project prepared by Giorgi Nikoladze, but due to various reasons, it was not realized at that time.

The events of 1918 represented the culmination of Niko Nikoladze's decades-long intellectual, political, and practical efforts dedicated to Georgia's national revival. Throughout his life, he consistently worked to prepare the social, economic, and diplomatic foundations necessary for statehood, believing that independence could only be sustained through educated leadership, international engagement, and economic self-reliance. His participation in the processes leading to the proclamation of independence was therefore not accidental but the logical outcome of his sustained commitment to national development and sovereignty. Drawing on his extensive diplomatic experience, deep knowledge of European political culture, and long-standing engagement with economic modernization, Nikoladze played an active role in preparing the ground for Georgia's independence in 1918.

Possessing considerable expertise in Caucasus–Ottoman relations and relying on a wide network of international contacts, he joined the Georgian delegation led by Akaki Chkhenkeli in Batumi in the spring of 1918. At that stage, German support for Georgia had already been secured, and the final prerequisite for declaring independence was the conclusion of a truce with Turkey. On 25 May 1918, Nikoladze wrote from Batumi to Noe Zhordania, urging him not to delay the proclamation of independence. The following day, on 26 May, the Act of Independence was read in Tbilisi. Immediately thereafter, Nikoladze, together with Zurab Avalishvili, traveled from Batumi to Poti to draft an economic development program for the newly independent state. Within days, he departed for Germany, where he served as Georgia's principal negotiator on economic affairs. In this capacity, Nikoladze sought to integrate Georgia into international economic networks by attracting leading European industrial and financial actors. Within the economic hub he had personally designed, Nikoladze succeeded in attracting major

German corporations, including Krupp and the Gelsenkirchen Mining Joint-Stock Company, among others. In negotiations with the German Foreign Minister Richard von Kühlmann, Nikoladze proposed the creation of a Beijing–Poti–Berlin transit corridor, envisioning the transportation of Asian goods from Beijing through Georgia by rail, followed by their distribution to Europe via the port of Poti. This initiative represents the first historically documented articulation of the concept now known as the “Middle Corridor”, a geopolitical and economic vision that has since come remarkably close to realization.

Nikoladze's contribution to the independence movement was formally recognized by the Georgian Independence Committee operating in Germany, which awarded him the Order of the Georgian Legion bearing the image of Queen Tamar. As the first recipient of this distinction, Nikoladze symbolically embodied not only individual merit but also the collective legacy of the Tergdaleuli movement, whose ideals of national awakening, modernization, and self-determination he had consistently advanced throughout his life (Janelidze, 2010).

In 1921, Nikoladze was in London, where he worked intensively on issues related to the international joint-stock company “Chemo” (Chiatara manganese). He made significant efforts to preserve the company's operations in Georgia, hoping that through his extensive international contacts and personal reputation he could provide tangible support to the country's fragile economy during a critical period. His return to Georgia in 1924 marked yet another phase of practical service: he was invited as chief consultant to the construction of ZAGES, the first hydroelectric power station in the Soviet Empire. Working closely with his nephew, Besik Chichinadze – the first Georgian hydroelectric engineer – Nikoladze once again applied European technological knowledge to Georgian realities.

Niko Nikoladze's life spanned four markedly different historical contexts: he was born during the era of feudal landownership, lived and worked in Georgia under Russian imperial administration, witnessed the establishment of the first Democratic Republic of Georgia, and passed away during the early Soviet period. Across these successive stages, Nikoladze consistently exemplified the qualities of a progressive, European-oriented thinker, demonstrating intellectual foresight, civic engagement, and an unwavering commitment to the political, economic, and cultural advancement of his nation. His enduring influence reflects not only his adaptability to shifting political circumstances but also the continuity of his vision for a modern, self-reliant, and democratic Georgia.

5. Conclusion

Niko Nikoladze's life and work exemplify the profound impact of transnational intellectual engagement on national development. Throughout his life, Nikoladze consistently sought to adapt the lessons of European social, political, and technological advancements to the specific needs and realities of Georgia, demonstrating a rare combination of intellectual foresight and practical application. His work illustrates that genuine modernization is not the mere adoption of foreign

models but the thoughtful integration of external knowledge into a contextually informed vision for national progress.

By actively mediating between Georgian and European intellectual currents, Nikoladze fostered a culture of critical engagement, civic responsibility, and educational advancement. His emphasis on practical implementation alongside theoretical understanding highlights the inseparability of ideas and action in the pursuit of societal transformation. Moreover, his approach underscores the centrality of education, civic participation, and institutional development as foundational pillars for sustainable progress.

Nikoladze's enduring influence demonstrates that cross-cultural dialogue is a powerful catalyst for national renewal. His ability to synthesize diverse intellectual currents and channel them into coherent strategies for economic, political, and cultural development set a precedent for subsequent generations of Georgian thinkers and reformers.

Ultimately, Niko Nikoladze's life exemplifies a universal lesson: wherever a Georgian may live, and whatever language or field they work in, they should carry in their heart a love for their homeland and dedicate their knowledge, skills, and efforts to its service. Nikoladze himself became a living example of this principle, inspiring the Georgian people to act, to create, and to act again. Even two centuries later, as Georgia continues to face challenges and the process of state-building remains ongoing, his life reminds society of the indispensable role of active, civic-minded, and nation-oriented citizens in shaping the future of their country.

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