

What Should the Georgia's Legislative Body Be Titled: The Ideological Context of Re-Naming the National Council of Georgia (Based on the Verbatim Report of the October 4, 1918 Session of the National Council of Georgia) ••

Abstract

This article analyzes the verbatim report of the October 4, 1918 session of the National Council of Georgia, where the renaming of the country's legislative body was on the agenda. The study demonstrates that the terminological debates surrounding the terms "Parliament" (*Parlamenti/პარლამენტი*), "Assembly" (*Darbazi/დარბაზი*), and "Council" (*Sabcho/საბჭო*) transcended narrow philological boundaries and constituted a critical precedent of ideological and cultural-orientational struggle within the political elite of the Democratic Republic of Georgia. Utilizing critical discourse analysis, the article examines the confrontation between the Western political universalism (Social Democrats) and national-historical authenticity (the opposition). The study demonstrates that these debates reflected Georgia's transformation from the ethnocentric model of the National Council into a multiethnic, civic republic. This shift was manifested in the rejection of the word "National" (*Erovnuli/ეროვნული*) by all factions, as it was equated with ethnicity at the time. The analysis of the political anatomy of the voting process illustrates the ruling party's employment of strict party discipline and the principle of majoritarian democracy. The study concludes that the decision made on October 4, 1918, laid the foundation for the contemporary institutional and legal language of independent Georgia, which was reflected in the 1921 Constitution and to which the country naturally returned in the Constitution of 1995.

Keywords: Democratic Republic of Georgia, National Council of Georgia, parliamentarism, political discourse, civic nationalism, Ekvtime Takaishvili, party discipline.

Introduction

In the autumn of 1918, four months after the declaration of independence, the Democratic Republic of Georgia faced a critical institutional transformation. The republic's political leadership had to resolve not only pragmatic state-building tasks but also craft a new legal language that would anchor the country's ideological and cultural identity. One of the most dramatic and symbolically charged episodes of this process unfolded during the 44th session of the National Council on October 4, 1918, where the renaming of the country's legislative body was placed on the agenda. The paper aims to determine why a seemingly formal, nominal issue turned into a fierce political confrontation between the leading factions. Utilizing critical discourse analysis of the session's verbatim report, the paper aims to demonstrate that the debate surrounding the terms "Parliament" (*Parlamenti*), "Assembly" (*Darbazi*), and "Council" (*Sabcho*) was not a narrow philological whim. Rather, it represented a profound ideological struggle between the Western political universalism and national-historical authenticity.

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Furthermore, the article aims to analyze these debates as a legal and symbolic expression of Georgia's transition from the ethnocentric state model to a multiethnic, civic republic.

Before the Debate: Discussion of the Issue at the Constitutional Commission Session

On September 10, 1918, after several rounds of discussions at several sessions, the National Council of Georgia adopted a bill by virtue of which representatives of the national minorities residing in the country were integrated into the National Council of Georgia (10 Armenians, 4 Azerbaijanis, 3 Abkhazians, 2 Russians, 2 Georgian Jews, 1 Jew, 1 German, and 1 Greek). Following this, the issue of changing the name of the National Council of Georgia was placed on the agenda. As Pavle Sakvarelidze noted, the name had to be harmonized with the new reality, wherein the National Council had become a "representative of the entire people of Georgia."

In connection with renaming the National Council of Georgia, the leading political force of the time - the Social-Democratic Party, through its faction in the National Council - introduced a proposal to name the National Council the "Parliament of Georgia" (*Sakartvelos Parlamenti*). At its session on September 14, 1918, the Constitutional Commission had to urgently start working on the proposal of the Social-Democratic faction. The Commission tasked Pavle Sakvarelidze (from the "Alioni" group) with drafting the relevant bill and presenting it at the next session.[1] (CSAG, f. 1836, op. 1, d. 201, l. 78).

The session of the Constitutional Commission of September 18, 1918, was entirely dedicated to the discussion of this issue. Pavle Sakvarelidze deemed it impossible to name the National Council the "Parliament of Georgia." He stated that "Parliament" was a generic term for legislative institutions and that "in every country, the parliament has its own historical name; therefore, we should choose one from among the Georgian titles: Council (*Kreba*), Assembly (*Sakrebulo*), Hall/Chamber (*Darbazi*), Board (*Sabcho*), etc." [1] (CSAG, f. 1836, op. 1, d. 201, l. 79). Sakvarelidze considered it better to retain "Council" (*Sabcho*) instead of "Darbazi," provided that the word "National" was removed from its name. In his opinion, it could be called the "Council of Representatives" (*Tarmomadgenelta Sabcho*) or the "House of Representatives" (*Tarmomadgenelta Palata*).

Other opinions were also voiced - R. Arsenidze believed that the National Council should be named the "Chamber of People's Representatives" (*Khalkhis Tsarmomadgenelta Darbazi*), while K. Makashvili suggested the "Chamber of the Chosen" (*Rcheulta Darbazi*). Ultimately, the Commission settled on the name "Chamber of Representatives" (*Tarmomadgenelta Darbazi*), but the final decision was deferred to the next session.

The discussion of the issue continued at the session of the Constitutional Commission on September 21. Initially, they supported and adopted "State Chamber" (*Sakhelmtsipo Darbazi*) as the new name, but in the end, they settled on the title "Chamber of the Republic" (*Respublikis Darbazi*). It was precisely this name that was submitted to the Presidium of the National Council, and Pavle Sakvarelidze was appointed as the rapporteur [2] (CSAG, f. 1836, op. 1, d. 201, l. 81). It is evident that the Constitutional Commission rejected the proposal of the leading political force of the time - the Social Democrats - and submitted "Chamber of the Republic" (*Respublikis Darbazi*) for further consideration as the potential name of the National Council, rather than the "Parliament of Georgia."

Before moving on to the discussion of the legislative body's name within the National Council itself, various opinions that had circulated within the public at those times need to be scrutinized. These views provide a clear picture of the significant diversity of thoughts. Several core words

can be identified: Council (*Sabcho*), Chamber/Hall (*Darbazi*), Parliament (*Parlamenti*), House/Chamber (*Palata*), Assembly (*Krebuli*), Palace (*Sasakhle*), and Council/Duma (*Satatbiro*). These words were presented in various combinations:

- **Council (*Sabcho*)** – National Council, People's Council, Secular/Civil Council
- **House/Chamber (*Palata*)** – Chamber of Georgia, House of People's Representatives, Chamber of Deputies, Secular State Chamber
- **Assembly (*Krebuli*)** – People's Assembly, Assembly of All Secular Representatives, Assembly of the Chosen, Assembly of Representatives
- **Palace (*Sasakhle*)** – General Legislative Palace
- **Council (*Satatbiro*)** – Legislative Council
- **Chamber/Hall (*Darbazi*)** – Chamber of Representatives, Secular Chamber, State Chamber, Chamber of the Republic

The Terminological Dilemma: "Parliament" or "Darbazi"

On October 4, 1918, at its 44th session, the National Council discussed the issue of changing the name of the National Council. Considering the voting results, 70 members attended the session. The main paradox of the debate lies in the fact that the rapporteur himself, Pavle Sakvarelidze, noted from the very beginning: "This issue... does not, in and of itself, constitute a major matter of principle." However, the subsequent discussion demonstrated that for all factions, this was a highly principled, symbolic step.

The two main political concepts confronted one another:

- **Universalist-Modernist (Social Democrats):** Oriented toward Western Europeanization, political universalism, and the ease of comprehension of the term by the general public.
- **National-Traditionist (Opposition: Alionists, National Democrats):** Oriented toward historical legitimization, national identity, and the uniqueness of institutional names.

The debate was opened by the rapporteur of the Constitutional Commission, Pavle Sakvarelidze (the Alionist). According to the draft he presented, the legislative body was to be named the "Chamber of the Republic" (*Respublikis Darbazi*). Pavle Sakvarelidze primarily attempted to convince the members of the Council not to adopt the proposal of the Social-Democratic faction and refrain from naming the National Council a parliament. Sakvarelidze's argumentation rested upon the principle of institutional uniqueness. He maintained that the term "parliament" constitutes a generic legal concept rather than a proper noun. He noted that in the world's leading democracies, legislative bodies possess their own authentic, historical names:

"You will not find an example on the earth where a parliament exists and does not have its own proper name... Take England, France, and other countries—everywhere the parliament has its own name: Reichstag, Sejm, Rigsdag..."

According to Sakvarelidze, retaining solely the word "Parliament" would mean leaving the institution nameless and would reflect a bankruptcy of political terminology. His goal was to find a designation for the Georgian parliamentary institution that would remain untranslated and unique on the international stage, much like the German "Reichstag."

It is worth noting the inherent contradiction within Pavle Sakvarelidze's position: on the one hand, he fights against a foreign term ("Parliament") and demands for a national name; on the other hand, he defends the word "Darbazi," which was also not of Georgian origin. Sakvarelidze himself admitted that "Darbazi" was of foreign derivation (introduced from Persian), but he

maintained that it had become "flesh and blood" with the Georgian reality. This represents a methodological double standard: why is an Asian term introduced centuries ago more "acceptable and national" than the modern European term "Parliament"? Here, the debate reveals its cultural-orientational rather than strictly linguistic character (Eastern/traditional nostalgia versus Western modernization).

Sakvarelidze's concept was fiercely opposed by Alexandre Lomtadze on behalf of the ruling Social-Democratic faction, who defended the alternative formulation - the "Parliament of Georgia." Lomtadze rejected his opponents' academic and historical arguments, placing the emphasis on a purely pragmatic, mass-oriented approach:

"We must adopt what is easy for the people to understand... The broad masses, the people, are far more familiar, one way or another, with the word 'parliament' than with the word 'darbazi'."

In Lomtadze's discourse, "Parliament" was a symbol won through revolutionary struggle, for which the people had made numerous sacrifices. For the Social Democrats, utilizing Western terminology was a demonstration of the country's modernist, pro-European vector, whereas the search for "Darbazi" represented an impractical, archaic retrogressiveness. Lomtadze went so far in his critique of his opponents' project that he employed folklore-based caricature, noting that among the common people, the word *darbazi* was sometimes associated with a "large stable," thereby attempting to strip the term of its social prestige.

This clearly absurd and populist argument by Lomtadze was a piece of political engineering—a deliberate discreditation of the opponents' term ("Darbazi") in order to strip away its aura of historical grandeur. The Social Democrats systematically discredited "Darbazi" to depict it in the eyes of the public as a feudal, obsolete vestige.

Why did the Social Democrats fight so fiercely against "national" or "traditional" terminology (such as "Darbazi")? Here, an ideological confrontation clearly emerges: the Social Democrats wished to emphasize the modernist, Western, and class-based character of the state. For them, the word "Darbazi" was associated with a feudal, monarchical past, which directly contradicted their Marxist-internationalist worldview.

On the part of the opposition, conversely, we can discern a form of linguistic nationalism: the opposition sought to find the legitimation of political institutions not in the copying of foreign models, but within their own historical memory.

Philological and Functional Differentiation in the Debate: The Phenomenon of Ekvtime Takaishvili

The discussion was elevated to a qualitatively new academic level by Ekvtime Takaishvili, a member of the National-Democratic faction and an eminent historian and archaeologist. His speech clearly demonstrated that terminological borrowing had been common occurrence within the Georgian political space historically. Takaishvili provided a detailed overview of the evolution of the Georgian state language, noting that due to Byzantine, Arabic, and, during the late feudal era (particularly during the reign of King Rostom), under Persian influences, the country had lost its authentic state terminology:

"It changed to such an extent that if *Khelmtsipis Karis Garigeba* [The Regulation of the Royal Court] had not been discovered recently, we would not have been able to fully restore all our ancient terms and the titles of state officials."

Based on this historical perspective, Takaishvili put forward a crucial methodological and semantic argument that challenged both the options of the Social Democrats ("Parliament") and of the Constitutional Commission ("Darbazi"). The scholar classified the terms according to their substantive and functional characteristics:

- **Spatial/Physical Category:** The terms *Darbazi* (borrowed from Persian), *Palata* (Chamber/House), and *Parlamenti* (derived from the French *parler*) actually designate only a place, a premises, a large building, or a room (for example, in a royal palace – *Sefe-Darbazi* [the royal hall], in a fortress – *Tsikhe-Darbazi* [the castle-hall], and in peasant life – the reception room for guests).
- **Functional/Substantive Category:** The word *Sabcho* (Council/Board), which originates from the indigenous Georgian word *bchoba* (deliberation), denotes not physical walls, but the process itself - the exchange of ideas, discussion, and decision-making.

By Takaishvili's logic, the supreme body of the republic should be named not after a building, but rather after a name that expresses its function:

"Therefore, the institution in which the representatives of the people deliberate on state affairs must absolutely be called a Council (*Sabcho*)."

This academic argumentation influenced a part of the opposition spectrum; they rejected "Darbazi" and supported a new formula: "The Council of the Republic of Georgia" (*Sakartvelos Respublikis Sabcho*).

The Transition from Ethnic Nationalism to a Civic State

The most significant political shift underlying these debates, that manifested during this session, was the rejection of the word "National" (*Erovnuli*). It is noteworthy that despite their terminological disagreements, all factions (Social Democrats, Federalists, Social Revolutionaries, and National Democrats) unanimously agreed that the name "National Council" had to be changed. At the time, the word "National" was widely associated with "ethnic."

This decision was driven by the ideological evolution of the First Republic - a transition from an ethnocentric model to the principles of a civic, territorial state. The "National Council of Georgia," created in May 1918, primarily represented the interests of ethnic Georgians. However, by the autumn of the same year, when representatives of the national minorities living in the country (Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Abkhazians, Ossetians, Germans, and Russians) entered the Council through proportional quotas, the old name was deemed politically unacceptable.

Replacing the word "National" (*Erovnuli*) with either the "Parliament of Georgia" or the "Council of the Republic of Georgia" was a clear legal act. It declared that the supreme body of the republic represented the entire civil society of Georgia, rather than one specific ethnicity. As Ekvtime Takaishvili noted, the title had to be the "Council of the Republic of Georgia" instead of the "National Council" in order to fully reflect the new state political order.

Name	Proponent / Author	In Favor	Against
The Chamber of the Republic of Georgia (<i>Sakartvelos Respublikis Darbazi</i>)	Constitutional Commission	19	39

The Parliament of Georgia (<i>Sakartvelos Parlamenti</i>)	Social-Democratic Faction	40	30
The People's Council of Georgia (<i>Sakartvelos Sakhalkho Sabcho</i>)	Socialist-Revolutionary Faction	5	-
The Council of the Republic of Georgia (<i>Sakartvelos Respublikis Sabcho</i>)	Socialist-Federalist Faction	26	40

The minutes of the session reveal a significant behind-the-scenes details that the rapporteur, Pavle Sakvarelidze, voiced publicly. He noted that prior to the plenary session, a preliminary consensus had existed among leading intellectuals (including Ivane Javakhishvili and Ekvtime Takaishvili themselves) around the term "Darbazi"; however, immediately before the vote, the political conjuncture shifted.

Sakvarelidze anticipated his defeat beforehand due to the fact that his position was defended by a representative of the right-wing opposition (Rezo Gabashvili), which served as an automatic signal for the leftist majority to block the proposition:

"It is very unfortunate when a representative of an independent faction defends me. This means that the proposal will inevitably be rejected."

The mathematical results of the vote precisely reflected the fractional balance of power:

- The Constitutional Commission's option ("Chamber of the Republic") received only 19 votes (against 39).
- The synthetic formula of the Social-Federalists and National Democrats ("Council of the Republic of Georgia") secured 26 votes (against 40).
- The proposal of the ruling Social-Democratic faction ("Parliament of Georgia") secured 40 votes (against 30).

These figures demonstrate that the Social Democrats carried the decision through absolute mobilization, voting as a unified bloc exactly according to their fractional core (40 deputies). Even the Social Democrats who were members of the Commission and had previously supported "Darbazi" guided themselves by strict party discipline during the plenary session. The opposition, conversely, failed to forge a unified alternative due to the fragmentation of their votes (between "Darbazi" and "Sabcho") and suffered a defeat.

The ruling party carried its proposal with exactly 40 votes (the core of their faction). Interestingly, the Commission's option ("Darbazi") was supported by only 19 deputies. This means that even those members of the Social-Democratic party who had supported "Darbazi" within the Commission abided by strict party discipline during the plenary session and voted against their own commission's proposal.

The fragmentation of the opposition became evident: the Federalists' option ("Council of the Republic") gathered quite a significant number—26 votes (it is obvious that the National Democrats also supported them following Takaishvili's speech). Had the opposition maintained a

unified alternative instead of splitting their votes between "Darbazi" and "Sabcho," they would have posed serious competition to the 40 votes of the Social Democrats.

This verbatim report serves as a classic example of how language policy becomes an instrument for the demonstration of power. For the Social Democrats, passing the term "Parliament" was an ideological marker of Western modernization. For the opposition (Takaishvili, Sakvarelidze), it was an attempt to protect national identity and historical roots. Ultimately, political pragmatism and the power of the majority prevailed. It was precisely due to these 40 deputies that the term "Parliament" established its place within the Georgian constitutional space.

The term "Parliament" triumphed not by consensus, but by a purely political/fractional majority (thanks to the Social Democrats); nevertheless, time has granted it legitimacy. The institutionalization of "Parliament" led to the emulation of the Western political model, which ultimately replaced the concept of traditional institutions (such as the *Darbazi*). Article 46 of the Constitution of Georgia adopted in 1921 stated: "The representative body of the Republic of Georgia is the 'Parliament of Georgia' (*Sakartvelos Parlamenti*).\" The contemporary legislative body bears this very name as well. Chapter Three of the 1995 Constitution is entitled "The Parliament of Georgia."

Conclusion

The session of October 4, 1918, was a democratic, highly academic (notwithstanding a few ironic remarks), and principled struggle. This debate laid the foundation for our present reality: it was on this very day, as a result of the political will and rigorous voting process of the Social Democrats, that the term "Parliament" was granted official citizenship within the Georgian legal language—a legacy that was subsequently adopted, unaltered, by both the 1921 and the contemporary 1995 Constitutions.

A discourse analysis of the October 4, 1918 session demonstrates that changing the name of the National Council of Georgia marked a crucial stage in the ideological maturation of the Democratic Republic of Georgia. This debate transcended narrow philological boundaries and revealed several fundamental findings:

- **First**, the country's political elite clearly recognized the necessity of building a multi-ethnic, civic state; consequently, everyone unanimously rejected the term "National" (*Erovnuli*) as ethnocentric and reconfigured the parliamentary space upon the principle of equality.
- **Second**, two ideological approaches emerged during the debate: the search for historical authenticity (*Darbazi*, *Sabcho*) versus the promotion of Western modernity and universalism (*Parlamenti*). The political will of the ruling team rejected nostalgia for the past, choosing instead to opt for a European political brand.

Ultimately, the decision of October 4, 1918, exerted a profound influence on the development of Georgian legal culture. The adopted term "Parliament" firmly established itself in the country's political life, a fact solidified by the 1921 Constitution. Following a 70-year interruption caused by the Soviet occupation, the modern Georgian state naturally returned to this designation upon the restoration of independence in 1995. It can be asserted with emphasis that the contemporary Georgian parliamentary institutional language was formulated at this single, on a specific historical day.

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