



JOHNS HOPKINS
UNIVERSITY

INTERNATIONAL INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE

Authoritarianism, Narratives, and Cultures:

Continuity, Disruption, and Change, Past and Present

PROGRAM

15–16 October 2026

Sponsored by

Caucasus University (CU), Tbilisi, Georgia;

**Johns Hopkins University (JHU)
Department of Comparative Thought and Literature
Krieger School of Arts and Sciences, Baltimore, USA**

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2. Program Overview & Timetable

Time	Session/title	Location/Chair
DAY 1: THURSDAY, OCTOBER 15		
08:30 - 09:00	registration and morning coffee	CU Hall
09:00–09:15	Opening Ceremony & Welcome Nana Sharikadze, CU Eavan Cully, Cultural Attaché at the US Embassy in Tbilisi Peter J.Schmelz, JHU	CU Hall
09:15–10:15	Keynote Address I: <i>The Uses of Autocracy and the Cycle of Resistance</i> Stephen F. Jones Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University; Mount Holyoke College (USA)	CU Hall
10:15–10:45	Coffee Break	CU Hall
10:45–12:15	SESSION 1 — Postcolonial Debates Chair: Kevin Karnes (Emory University) 1.1. Maia Sigua (Tbilisi State Conservatoire) <i>The Coloniality of Musical Space: Iconography, Canon, and Imperial Power in the Recital Hall of the Tbilisi State Conservatoire</i>	CU Hall



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- 1.2. Giorgi Tskhadaia** (Caucasus School of Governance, Caucasus University)
"The Ambivalent Oligarchy in Georgia"
- 1.3. Mariam Manjgaladze** (Caucasus University)
Language and Ideology: The Linguistic Dimension of Political Discourse

12:15–13:45

Lunch

CU cantina

13:45–15:45

SESSION 2 — Jazz / Folklore / Freedom

CU Hall

Chair: Prof. Peter J. Schmelz, Johns Hopkins University

- 2.1. Petr Ferenc** (National Museum, Prague)
Taking the Regime at Its Own Word
- 2.2. Kateryna Ielysieieva** (Institute of Art Studies, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences; National Academy of Culture and Art Management, Ukraine)
Staged Folklore as a Model of State Representation in Socialist Regimes
- 2.3. Cristina Pascu** (National Academy of Music "Gheorghe Dima")
Performing the Piano under Authoritarianism: Educational and Concert Life in Communist Romania

15:15–15:45

Coffee Break

CU Hall

15:45–17:15

SESSION 3 — Religion and Authoritarian Identities (part I) CU Hall

Chair: Prof. Phillip Ross Bullock, Oxford University

- 3.1. Rebecca Mitchell** (Middlebury College, USA)
Hagiographic Memory as National Memory: Sacred Chant and the Politics of Saint-Making in Contemporary Georgia



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3.2 Ruta Stanevičiūtė (Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre)

Revising the Uncomfortable Past: From Desovietization to Decolonial Approach

3.3. Tsotne Tchanturia (Georgian Institute of Public Affairs), **Vincenc Kopeček** and **Lenka Kopečková** (University of Ostrava)

Georgian Television Discourse on 28 November 2024 and Georgia's EU U-turn

Time	Session/title	Location/Chair
DAY 2: FRIDAY, OCTOBER 16		
09:00–10:00	Keynote Address II: “Safe Afghanistan — Kingdom of Wonder: On the Aesthetics of Tourism in Authoritarian Regimes” Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht <i>Freie Universität Berlin (Germany)</i>	CU HALL
10:00–11:30	Session 4: Religion and Authoritarian Identities II Chair: Laura Emmery (Emory University) 4.1. Ana Mgaoblishvili (Caucasus University) <i>Religious Visual Signs: Authoritarian Legacies and Cultural Transformations in Georgia</i> 4.2. Tsypylma Darieva (Centre for East European and International Studies – ZOIS, Berlin) <i>Religious Freedom in an Authoritarian Context: Making and Unmaking Religious Diversity in Azerbaijan and Georgia</i> 4.3. Ketevan Grdzeldze (Caucasus University) <i>War, Violence, and Indifference through the Lens of Poetry</i>	CU HALL
11:30–12:00	Coffee Break	CU HALL



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12:00–13:30	Session 5 Navigating Transitional Ambiguities	CU HALL
	Chair: Maia Sigua (Tbilisi State Conservatoire)	
	5.1. Kevin Karnes (Emory University) <i>Anarchy in the Tornis! Building Community on the Remains of Empire in Riga, 1989–1992</i>	
	5.2. Laura Emmery (Emory University) <i>Last Songs: The Magnificent Seven and Yugoslav Disintegration</i>	
	5.3. Ivana Miladinović Prica (University of Arts in Belgrade) <i>Music as Epistemic Agency in the Late Yugoslav Crisis</i>	
13:30–14:30	Lunch	CU HALL
14:30–16:00	Session 6 Global Perspectives on Authoritarianism	CU HALL
	Chair: Nana Sharikadze, Caucasus University	
	6.1. Lesar Yurtsever (Freie Universität Berlin) <i>A Modern Authoritarian Brand: Music and U.S.–Turkish Relations in the Interwar Period</i>	
	6.2. Angelina Zhivova (University of Udine) <i>Authority and Dissent in Animation</i>	
	6.3. Medea Abulashvili and Anna Berishvili (Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University) <i>Between Repression and Exile: Greek Lives across Stalinism and Postwar Greece</i>	
16:00–16:30	Coffee Break	CU HALL
16:30–17:30	Round Table: Authoritarianism, cultural memory, and the challenges of comparative perspectives and approaches.	CU HALL
	Moderators: Peter Schmelz (Johns Hopkins University) and Nana Sharikadze (Caucasus University)	



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17:30 – 18:00

Georgian Folk Music

CU HALL

performed by a Georgian folk ensemble specially
assembled and directed by Giorgi Ushikishvili¹

19:30

**Conference Dinner – Hosted for conference
speakers**

(Place TBA)

¹ **Giorgi Ushikishvili** is a Georgian folk-music specialist, ensemble leader, educator, and cultural administrator. Born in Akhmeta in 1978, he graduated from the Tbilisi State University of Culture and Arts. Since the early 1990s, he has been actively engaged in the teaching, performance, preservation, and promotion of Georgian traditional music.

From 2004 to 2013, Ushikishvili served as Director of the State Folklore Centre of Georgia, where he contributed to the preservation and revival of historically documented Georgian folk repertoire, including the reconstruction of songs from archival recordings. He worked extensively in television and music broadcasting.

An experienced leader of a Georgian traditional folk ensemble, Ushikishvili brings to the conference a deep practical knowledge of Georgian vocal traditions and their transmission. For this programme, he will assemble a special Georgian folk ensemble presenting a selection of traditional Georgian folk music.