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"A Letter to a European Peer – From Independence to Freedom"

There was a time when Georgia, worn down by the tempests of centuries, trampled beneath the feet of invaders, yearned to break free from the yoke of foreign domination. In the centuries-long chronicle of pain written by history itself, Georgia sang a relentless song of freedom—often without even the hope that the song would ever echo into reality. Yet April 9, 1991, like a sunbeam piercing through a sky full of clouds, became that singular moment which shattered the chains of old servitude and set the country on the path to independence.

“Independence is merely the form of a state, but not its soul,” wrote Ghia Nodia, a renowned political scientist. Indeed, independence is not merely proof of statehood. It is not confined to a constitution, an emblem, or a flag. Independence can be the beginning of a distant road, at the end of which lies the dazzling horizon of freedom—or it may lead to the threshold of a new darkness. That is why independence is but a **form**, while **freedom** is the **essence**. After declaring independence, Georgia found itself in a labyrinth of sharp internal turmoil. The state collapsed from within—fratricidal wars in Abkhazia and Samachablo, economic devastation, the absence of electricity, water, and hope. The very person who once dreamed of liberty found themselves caught in cold, hunger, injustice, and fear. **Political scientists often describe this period as a “phase on the verge of state failure.”** How can such an existence be called freedom, when speaking your mind can cost you your job, your dignity, or your life? When justice exists only on paper, and in practice, is nothing more than a theory with closed eyes? **Freedom is not only about united land; it is about spiritual wholeness**, where a person is not just a citizen but a value in themselves. A place where justice is not an empty declaration, but the daily standard of life. **As Václav Havel wrote: “Freedom is not the absence of power; it is responsibility.”** Freedom means that the voice which rises from the heart is not silenced by power—on the contrary, it embodies the dignity of a nation.

Even today, after so many years, the road from independence to freedom remains incomplete. It is still shrouded in mist—a path that demands wisdom, unity, and moral strength. We have a state, yes, but we are still striving to build a **free society**. Independence was the first deep breath after a long sleep; **freedom is the continuous harmony of that breath**. We will be truly free only when democracy, justice, and human dignity are not abstract ideals or empty slogans, but the natural rhythm of everyday life. **Georgia's history is filled with pages soaked in blood**—but that blood has not always meant defeat. Often, it was the color of sacrifice, of steadfast will, and of an immortal longing. The Georgian heart, like steel forged in fire, has upheld the nation's identity for centuries. Independence, dressed in political finery, cannot conceal the wounds that lie deep in our roots and still burn today.

When a nation hears the echo of Russian tanks behind its back, when it suffers the pain of estrangement from the West, and continues the endless search for balance in power—then freedom still feels like an illusion, a **dry thirst** with no water in sight. **“Freedom is never easy—it is the product of constant belief, action, and choice,”** wrote Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Freedom is often hidden behind the illusion of external liberty—but in truth, it is born within, in the human soul. Its measure is not defined by political borders, but by dignity, tolerance, education, and civic consciousness. Today, we stand before a new page in our history. The pen is in our hands—but whether we write with wisdom is the question. In the modern world, freedom is not won from invading armies but fought for against falsehood, informational manipulation, irresponsibility, and rhetoric steeped in hate. If in 1991 the struggle was against external oppression, then today's fight is against internal enslavement—against harmful habits, fear, apathy, and silence. One could say that Georgia's journey from independence to freedom is a journey **from one person to another**—a quest to create a space where a citizen is not just a statistic, but a *living cell in the moral conscience of society*. Freedom does not mean chaos, but discipline framed by responsibility—not the liberty to do everything, but a mechanism of conscience and shared values. We must not deceive ourselves into thinking that history ended with the declaration of independence—it only **began**. The pursuit of freedom is an **eternal** process—a fire that requires care, protection, and constant movement forward. If independence granted us the right to own our destiny, freedom places upon us the duty to become better. Today, as we stand between a double mirror—reflecting the vast lessons of the past and the unspeakable expectations of the future—**it is up to us** to decide whether we will be merely an independent state, or truly become a **free nation**. **Freedom begins where fear ends—and responsibility is born: to ourselves, to each other, and to our country.**