



Ukrainian Speaking Sector Opens For Ukrainian Students in Tbilisi

On the initiative of the Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Garibashvili, in Tbilisi, at the Mykhailo Hrushevsky Public School Number 41, a Ukrainian-speaking sector was opened for students from Ukraine, giving them a chance to receive an education in their mother tongue.

"Today is a truly historic day: by the decision of the Prime Minister of Georgia, a Ukrainian-language sector was opened at the Mykhailo Hrushevsky Public School Number 41, which means

Ukrainian students will receive their general education in their native language, in Georgia," stated the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia, Mikheil Chkhenkeli.

The opening ceremony of the Ukrainian-speaking sector was attended by the Acting Ambassador of Ukraine to Georgia, Andrii Kasianov.

For the first time since 1999, a Ukrainian sector has been established in Georgia with official status, where all subjects will be taught at the elementary, basic, and intermediate levels in Ukrainian.

Mikheil Daushvili on US Assessments: We Call on Authorities to Start Real Reforms Immediately



We urge the authorities to start real reforms immediately, as similar assessments by the US State Department report could be disastrous for Georgia's path to European integration, Mikheil Daushvili, a member of the For Georgia party, said at a briefing on the US Department of State's Report on Human Rights in 2021. The report covers all the areas that have deteriorated in the country over the past year, Daushvili notes, adding that it also included the shooting at the car of their teammate Besarion Bendeliani.

"The government has exposed and continues to exhibit unprecedented persecution and pressure against our team. We will recall, for example, the case of Akaki Bartaia, the violence against Malkhaz Toria and his minor child, the still uninvestigated violence, the illegal detention of Gela Abuladze, a member of the Tsalenjikh City Council, the illegal dismissal of hundreds of people, etc. Confirmation of all this is that the case of Besarion Bendeliani was included in the report of the State Department, namely: "On August 25, 2021, Tsageri mayoral candidate Besarion Bendeliani was shot in his car by the party "For Georgia" in order to take political revenge on him. This case is still uninvestigated," Mikheil Daushvili said.

Daushvili notes the report pays special attention to the acute problems in the

justice system, as well as the issue of corruption.

"The State Department also draws attention to the issue of corruption and cites the statement of our team leader, Giorgi Gakharia, that "one of the biggest challenges in our country is the weakness of state institutions, and when state institutions are weak, corruption and nepotism are a big problem."

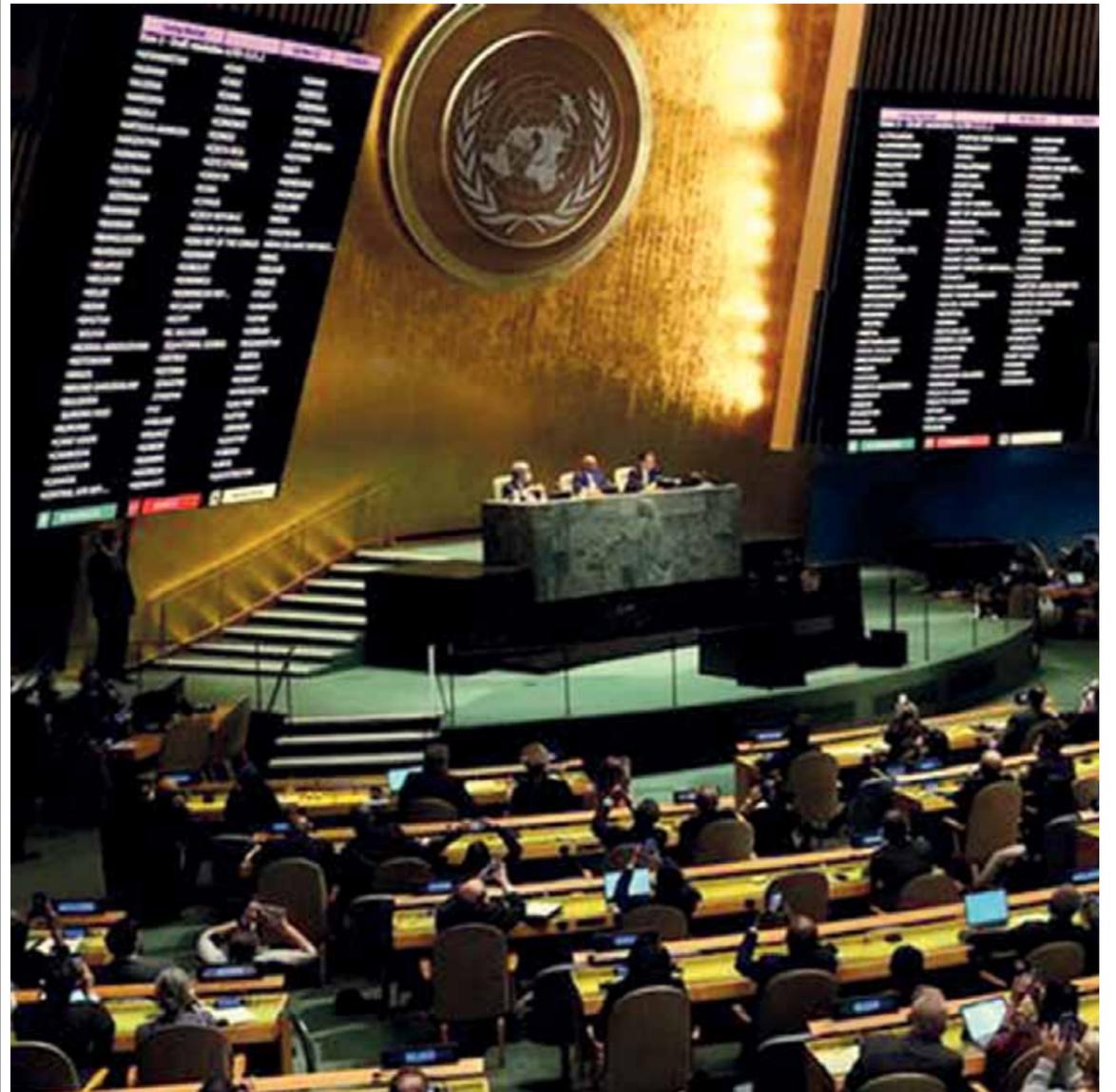
"The report highlights acute problems in the justice system, for example, the syndrome of impunity, which was sharply manifested by the events of July 5-6, 2021. In the same context, special attention is paid to the judiciary, which is one of the most important problems in the country, in particular, the High Council of Justice. In addition, it highlights the influential groups in the judiciary," Daushvili said.

The party "For Georgia" calls on the government to start real reforms immediately, as such assessments by the US State Department report could be disastrous on Georgia's path to European integration.

"Our team, we repeat, is ready to put aside all narrow partisan interests and help our country to conduct the European integration process correctly, efficiently and quickly," Daushvili said.

"The Government took steps to investigate some officials for human rights abuses, but impunity remained a problem," reads the 2021 Report on Human Rights Practices in Georgia, issued by the US Department of State.

The World Standing by Ukraine: More Support Pledged



BY KETEVAN SKHIRTLADZE

Australia's Foreign Minister Marise Payne announced further sanctions on Russian oligarchs while attending a meeting of NATO leaders in Brussels. Ms. Payne said Australia would impose sanctions on a further 67 Russians in response to Moscow's "illegal war" on Ukraine.

"Today I'm announcing 67 further sanctions on Russian elites and oligarchs, those close to Russian President Vladimir Putin who facilitate and support his outrageous actions," she said.

"The events we have seen uncovered in Bucha only reinforce the importance of strong global coordination in response to Russia for their actions. Australia condemns these atrocities in the strongest possible terms," she added.

Ukrainian forces entering Bucha after the Russian withdrawal have reported seeing mass graves and bodies of civilians left in the streets.

The country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs says after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the total number of sanctioned "individuals and entities" is about 600.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba emphasized the importance of weapons for Ukraine.

"My agenda is very simple. Weapons, weapons, and weapons," Kuleba told reporters at the headquarters of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, where NATO and G7 foreign ministers were discussing sanctions against Russia and ways to support Ukraine.

The Ukrainian diplomat says supply-

ing arms to his country was the best way "to restrain Putin and defeat the Russian army in Ukraine."

"The Ukrainian army and the entire Ukrainian nation have shown that we know how to fight. We know how to win. The more weapons we get and the sooner they arrive in Ukraine, the more lives will be saved, the more towns and villages will not be destroyed, and there will be no more Buchas," Kuleba added.

The Minister then called on the foreign ministers of NATO and the G7 not to hesitate to provide Ukraine with everything it needs, saying "no matter how strange it may sound, today weapons serve the purpose of peace."

NATO TO UP SUPPORT

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said that NATO member states are supporting Ukraine in supplying equipment to protect Ukraine's right to self-defense, which is protected by the UN Charter.

Stoltenberg is convinced that NATO "is considering the need for more air defense systems, anti-tank weapons, light and heavy weapons, and many different types of support for Ukraine."

Stoltenberg also said that NATO is to step up its cybersecurity assistance to Ukraine. Further, the Alliance will provide equipment to help Ukraine protect itself against chemical and biological threats.

"The Allies agreed that we should also help other partners to strengthen their resilience and shore up their ability to defend themselves, including Georgia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. For Georgia, we could increase our support through the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package,"

he suggested.

MONEY RAISED FOR UKRAINE ESCAPEES

The "Stand Up for Ukraine" global pledging event and campaign has raised €9.1 billion for people fleeing the Russian invasion, inside Ukraine and abroad, including €1 billion from the European Commission.

On top of that, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development has announced an additional €1 billion in loan to cover the needs of the people displaced by the invasion.

RUSSIA KICKED OUT OF UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

The highlight of the week was the United Nations General Assembly suspending Russia from the UN Human Rights Council after high-profile allegations of atrocities committed by Russian soldiers during the war in Ukraine.

The voting result was 93 in favor, 24 against, and 58 abstentions.

A draft of the resolution says the General Assembly may "suspend the rights of membership in the Human Rights Council of a member of the Council that commits gross and systematic violations of human rights."

The draft resolution adds that the council has "grave concerns" regarding reports of "gross and systematic violations and abuses of human rights" and "violations of international humanitarian law" committed by the Russian Federation during its invasion of Ukraine.

Among the countries that supported the resolution were the United States, European Union countries, the United Kingdom, Ukraine, and Georgia.

Week Seven of Russia's War in Ukraine

BY ANA DUMBADZE

Ukrainian authorities expect a strong Russian offensive in the eastern Luhansk and Donetsk regions, with Russia lining up more firepower ahead of a potential showdown in eastern Ukraine that could start within days.

Moscow is refocusing its military offensive on Donbas, which comprises Ukraine's regions of Luhansk and Donetsk, after facing stiff resistance and battlefield setbacks in other parts of the country, including around Kyiv.

Russian President Vladimir Putin controversially recognized the independence of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions, naming them "historical Russian lands," just days before launching his invasion of Ukraine on February 24.

The major events that marked the seventh week of the war in Ukraine include:

APRIL 7

Ukrainian authorities say Russia fired a cluster munition into a railway station packed with thousands of evacuees, killing at least 52 people. The attack took place in the city of Kramatorsk in the eastern Donetsk region.

Addressing the Greek parliament virtually, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called for tougher European sanctions against Russia.

Some NATO members said they will step up deliveries of weapons to Ukraine, during a foreign ministers' meeting in Brussels. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba told the gathering that Ukraine needs the extra weapons in "days, not weeks".

The United Nations General Assembly voted to suspend Russia from the organization's Human Rights Council. Ninety-three nations voted in favor of suspension, 24 voted against, and 58 abstained.

APRIL 8

Ukraine said it had repelled Russian attacks in the east of the country, destroying nine tanks, seven armored vehicles and two helicopters.

Forensic experts started exhuming bodies from mass graves in the town of Bucha, northwest of Kyiv.

Visiting the site, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen called the killings of civilians "unthinkable". In Kyiv, she handed Zelensky a questionnaire, starting off the beginning of Ukraine's EU membership application process.

The European Union banned imports of Russian coal in reaction to Russia's apparent slaughter of civilians in Bucha. The ban, which begins in August, will deprive Russia of 8 billion Euros (around \$8.7bn) in revenue annually.

As part of this fifth round of sanctions against Moscow, the EU also banned imports of Russian lumber, cement, seafood and fertilizers.

Russian-flagged ships are also banned from the EU's ports, and Russian-registered transport vehicles from its roads. The Russian customs service noted that some of its vehicles were barred from entering EU territory on the same day.

The EU also banned the export to Russia of jet fuel and sensitive technologies and software.

Von der Leyen says the EU is looking into blocking imports of Russian oil next.

APRIL 9

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson made a visit to Kyiv, promising Zelensky anti-ship missiles and armored vehicles.

"Ukraine can never be bullied again, never will be blackmailed again, will never be threatened in the same way again," Johnson said.

Zelensky also met with Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer in Kyiv, and warned that a difficult battle lies ahead.



Image source: The Japan Times

"This will be a hard battle. We believe in this fight and our victory. We are ready to simultaneously fight and look for diplomatic ways to put an end to this war," Zelensky said.

APRIL 10

Russian missiles struck the airport in the city of Dnipro, destroying it, the regional governor reported.

Local officials said they discovered a new mass grave in Buzova, a town 30km west of Kyiv, following the withdrawal of Russian forces.

The Institute for the Study of War, a think-tank, says Russian forces have bisected Mariupol, splitting its Ukrainian defenders into two groups. One group is now in the Azovstal steel plant in the east, and another in the main port in the southwest.

The World Bank reported the economies of Europe and Central Asia will contract by 4.1% this year due to the war in Ukraine, a recession twice as deep as that caused by Covid-19 in 2020.

APRIL 11

Ukraine's defense ministry says Russia has completed its build-up of forces in the eastern Donetsk and Luhansk regions, of which Mariupol is a part.

"We forecast that active combat will begin in these areas soon," Defense Ministry Spokesman Oleksandr Motuzyanyk said, adding that Ukraine's army was ready to face the renewed assault.

Russia said its air strikes have destroyed four S-300 anti-air missile launch vehicles stationed on the outskirts of the city of Dnipro.

Austrian Chancellor Nehammer said he has "no optimistic information to bring" after meeting with Putin in Moscow.

APRIL 12

The Russian missile cruiser Moskva was set aflame and evacuated after suffering a Ukrainian missile attack in the Black Sea, according to Ukrainian authorities.

Russian State Media service TASS, quoting the Russian Ministry of Defense, confirmed the ship caught fire after being "seriously damaged" and that the entire crew had been evacuated.

US President Joe Biden announced another \$800 million in weaponry for Ukraine on Wednesday, following an hour-long phone call with President Zelensky. Biden said the new weapons package will include systems already deployed to the fight, as well as new artillery weapons, artillery rounds, armored personnel carriers and helicopters.

APRIL 13

A report from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe said Russia has committed human rights abuses and broken international humanitarian law during its invasion.

US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin on Wednesday night revealed details about the latest military aid package the US will send to Ukraine, which includes 300 armored vehicles, artillery and anti-chemical protective equipment. A post on his official Twitter account listed 200 M113 armored personnel carriers and 100 other armored, wheeled vehicles. Among the newer weapons in the package are 500 Javelin missiles and 300 Switchblade attack drones. Ukrainian defenders have used the Javelin and other shoulder-launched weapons to devastating effect against Russian tanks and other vehicles.

The presidents of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia visited Ukraine on Wednesday and underscored their support for the embattled country. They traveled by train to the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, to meet Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky, and visited Borodyanka, one of the towns near Kyiv where evidence of atrocities was found after Russian troops withdrew to focus on the east of the country.

"The fight for Europe's future is happening here," Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda said, calling for tougher sanctions, including on Russia's oil and gas shipments and all the country's banks.

Appearing alongside Zelensky in an ornate room in Kyiv's historical Mariinskyi Palace, the European leaders, Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda, Estonian President Alar Karis, Poland's Andrzej Duda and Egils Levits of Latvia, reiterated their commitments to supporting Ukraine politically and with transfers of military aid.

APRIL 14

Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Britain's Karim Khan, visited a mass grave in Bucha, on the outskirts of Kyiv. Bucha is now synonymous with scores of atrocities against civilians discovered in areas abandoned by Russian forces.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees said it has been "made aware of increasing reports of Ukrainian women feeling at risk" from sponsors in a British program called Homes for Ukraine.

The agency warned in a statement that it was concerned about potential UK hosts turning out to be a "potential threat to the safety of the refugee."

The calls for more oversight of the British program come as the United Nations brings to light more than 3,200 verified cases of rape and other conflict-related sexual violence crimes amid the new war in Ukraine.

"Every new wave of warfare brings with it a rising tide of human tragedy, including new waves of war's oldest, most silenced, and least-condemned crime," said Pramila Patten, special representative of the secretary-general on sexual violence in conflict, before the UN Security Council.

Papuashvili Says Visit to Ukraine is to Take Place in Coming Days



My wish was for the delegation of the Speaker of the Parliament to be multi-party. Yesterday, we had a conversation with the representatives of our opposition, we offered equal representation, but we could not reach an agreement, said Shalva Papuashvili, Speaker of the Georgian Parliament regarding Georgia's upcoming visit to Ukraine. He added that this visit will most likely take place in the coming days.

Papuashvili noted that they offered

their colleagues the chance to take one representative from each political group, yet the majority agreed not to increase the representation. "Although in this case the principle of equality will be violated, the opposition will be represented in the majority, but in this situation, I think this offer was correct. Therefore, I will ask the opposition to name their candidates timely. I will communicate with all political groups, as everyone understands that organizing this visit is not easy," Papuashvili said.

Parliament Adopts Bill on Amnesty



Georgian Parliament discussed with the third reading, and adopted with 87 votes against 1, the Bill on Amnesty.

In the course of countering the global pandemic, the government, to compensate for the restrictions established on prisoners, is reducing the sentences for convicts of a number of crimes, and is re-calculating their terms in the penitential department.

Persons who committed a criminal offense before January 1, 2004, will be released from criminal liability and punishment (except for those serving life imprisonment). Amnesty will also apply to those who have prepared or attempted to commit a crime. Amnestied persons will be considered as "not convicted."

As Chair of the Human Rights and Civil Integration Committee, Mikheil Sarjveladze, noted after the third reading at

the Committee, editorial remarks have been introduced to the Bill. The Bill shall become effective on the third business day upon promulgation.

The amnesty does not apply to Articles 108, 109, 137, 141, 142-144/3, 164, 179, 183, 223, 224, 236, 239, 253, 255/2, 280, 353, 378, 379, 404, 413 of the Criminal Code, as well as the crimes provided for in Chapters XXXVII and XXXVIII. In addition, the amnesty does not apply to crimes under the Criminal Code if they relate to killing, abduction, torture, severe damage to health and inhuman treatment of Georgian citizens in the occupied territories; also crimes committed by the list of persons accused and convicted of covering these crimes - as defined by resolution N339 of the Government of Georgia of June 26, 2018 on the approval of the "Otkhozoria-Tatunashvili List" and the relevant measures to be taken by the Government of Georgia.

Could Peace Be Controversial?

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

Peace has lately become a subject of controversy in Georgia, with the risk of another military surprise seeming quite real. The feeling is maturing that the current idyllic *modus vivendi*, with our people happily involved in their everyday routines, casually running their errands, nonchalantly strolling their babies in spring-stricken parks, idly driving their beloved cars and cheerfully shopping around, might in a split second become what we are seeing today in the exhausted and beleaguered Ukraine. Nonetheless, there persists a heated debate on whether Georgia must openly and directly be involved in the Russian-Ukrainian clash or should rather steer clear of the conflict so that the onrushing Russian military have no intent or desire to stage the same mayhem here as it has done in Ukraine. And most interestingly, the controversy has spread throughout society from a limited circle of politicians.

I thought we were living in the 21st century when the content of human ideals, like courage, audacity, valor and heroism, changed their shade and content, having acquired a clearly special meaning that is miles from the foolhardiness and futility characteristic to past times. These elevated human qualities must in the first place serve the general public comfort and happiness. It is hardly understandable that peace might have



Image source: ukenreport.com

an alternative, especially for a nation like Georgia, which has in the last couple of decades lived through several wars imposed on us due to our inability to judge history and master its tragic lessons. We all know very well what is good and what is bad when it comes to making choices, and we all have a sharp enough olfactory faculty to feel the con-

tours of our future, but there are certain insurmountable circumstances that keep us from enjoying the ideal standard of living that we have been toying with the last thirty years.

The entire world knows that the best is being done by the government to keep the country balanced on the golden median. Yet, there are certain public and

political forces in the country whose vested interest lays in something absolutely contrary. For them, undermining peace has become the only available vehicle to push forward their political agenda, seeing them strongly contemplating a plan that might be brought to life not just via legal electoral efforts. Frankly, this is all *déjà vu*. The enthusi-

asts of trading peace for war are doing all they can to make the most of the strained moment and give new flow to troubled waters, within which fishing will definitely become easier for them. This is the verge where peace per se becomes controversial: where the government is telling us to be extremely careful not to upset the applecart, they are trumpeting the contrary – let us make enough waves to do just that, because our current leadership has to look ‘stronger and braver’ in the eyes of the world, calling us to get engrossed in the Russian-Ukrainian belligerency.

The already well-weathered-in-wars Georgian people are finally managing to sustain peace and calm in the land, though doing so in painful fits and starts, because keeping balance between the western idea of development and the ever-present Russian military threat is a very complicated political act to perform, as is staying on the crest of the all-engulfing wave of the current geopolitical shakes and alterations. Georgia wishes well to any nation of the world that is taking unbearable pains to survive, including the friendly Ukrainian people, but we also need to somehow keep up the peace here, and this may only happen by holding a tight and steadfast grip on every occurring chance to remain in political equilibrium among the players of the brutal military and political game that the world is involved in. As the bitter history of our recent fights well proves, keeping peace is much more difficult than making war, and if this is true, should we ever risk acting otherwise?

Internal Georgia, Illiberalism and the Dilemmas of the War in Ukraine



Russian army trucks on a riverbank in Nar, near the border between Russia and Georgia, on Aug. 15, 2008. By Natalia Kolesnikova/AFP via Getty Images

ANALYSIS BY EMIL AVDALIANI

Amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine, what is striking is the lack of attention paid to other theaters of West-Russia competition, and it is in those areas that Russia strives to gain bigger geopolitical benefits.

Russia is unlikely to win the war in Ukraine. Its demands and operations are unsustainable, especially as Moscow is unwilling to make concessions of its own. Perhaps before the invasion, a grand

bargain with the West could have been about Russia leaving Donbas along with Abkhazia and South Ossetia in exchange for Tbilisi and Kyiv slowing or entirely renouncing their NATO aspirations.

The attention on Ukraine is Moscow concealing its moves elsewhere, moves which are likely to have a more geopolitical impact. Ukraine is large and important, but Russian demands were not limited to this country. Georgia too features in the calculations. This makes Tbilisi particularly vulnerable to the ongoing struggle between Moscow and the West.

The Kremlin is well aware that it has

already lost Ukraine. But smaller Georgia is more likely to fall under its fold. Presently, internal divisions in Georgia are more acute than before. The country politics are traditionally insular, but over the past several years the trend has become starker. The country is also on the verge of re-considering some tenets of its foreign policy. NATO and EU membership will likely remain critical, but Official Tbilisi seems to have a more versatile, more nuanced foreign policy: cooperation with other powers which arm Georgia with more foreign policy tools. In other words, Tbilisi might turn to tactical shifts in its foreign policy

where, for example, an exclusive emphasis on the ties with EU might give way to more manoeuvring.

This is far more likely to play out, as there are tensions between Tbilisi and its Western partners because of the slow pace of reforms, inefficient governance, and a growing trend of criticism emanating from the ruling party, Georgian Dream, at the West. Moreover, the illiberal tide is on the rise in Georgia as nationalist groups seem to be gaining ground.

Thus, for Russia, there are a number of congenial developments through which it could exert substantial influence to

further isolate Georgia. Though it is popular to think about Moscow's approach toward Georgia often in military terms, it is more realistic that future steps will be more about diplomacy, gradually limiting Tbilisi's maneuverability, using the difficulties it has with the West.

The 3+3 platform is one of those tools, and initiative which aims at including the three South Caucasus states and three Eurasian powers, Iran, Turkey, and Russia, bordering on the region. Regionalism is a strong weapon against those powers which do not border the South Caucasus. Since Georgia is closely aligned with the US and EU, the 3+3 idea is likely to limit its foreign policy. A certain level of exclusion of the West from the region is pursued.

Some elements of measured coercion could be also used. Increased borderization in “South Ossetia,” along with a greater number of kidnappings of Georgian officials are sensitive pressure points where Tbilisi is especially vulnerable.

For Moscow, it is far more efficient to have a government in Georgia which is relatively unstable, without concerted support from the West, and unable to build a long-term foreign policy to advance its national interests. This would make Tbilisi less immune to Russia's demands and, in the longer term, such a state of affairs would actually cost Russia less and create even fewer troubles with Tbilisi.

Limited sovereignty is what Russia pursues for its neighbors. Ukraine is an important topic in US-Russia negotiations, but a real loser in this competition could be Georgia. Exposed to Moscow's ambitions in the region, Tbilisi has limited foreign policy options and even less military and economic power to withstand another attack.

Emil Avdaliani is a professor at European University and the Director of Middle East Studies at Georgian think-tank, Geocase.

"The Kremlin Has Failed to Divide Us" - MEP Lukas Mandl on the Nehammer-Putin Meeting and the Need for Unity and Tough Sanctions

Continued from page 1

Because the Kremlin is not only lying to the outside, most probably also the head of the Kremlin himself doesn't receive true information. It's important to confront him directly with the truth, with evidence about what's going on [in Ukraine], and what the assessment of the free world is of these events.

NEHAMMER'S EXACT QUOTE WAS - "HE WANTED TO LOOK INTO PUTIN'S EYES." BUT THAT'S SOMETHING WE'VE HEARD QUITE A FEW TIMES BEFORE, STARTING WITH US PRESIDENT BUSH. HAS IT EVER BEEN PRODUCTIVE?

For me, it's clear that he fulfilled his moral duty, as he himself called it. It's a positive thing that a high-ranking leader from the free world directly, personally confronts the head of the Kremlin regarding its aggression and war crimes. This is what the Chancellor did, and I greatly appreciate it.

AFTER THE MEETING, THE BIGGEST HEADLINE HE BROUGHT OUT OF THAT ROOM WAS THAT PUTIN WAS DETERMINED "TO SOLVE" THE DONBAS ISSUE, AND THAT HE WAS PREPARING FOR AN ASSAULT. AS PUTIN READIES HIMSELF FOR THAT, IS THE WEST ALSO PREPARED FOR SUCH AN ESCALATION?

The Kremlin and its entire war machine should be aware that the free world is prepared in each and every respect to fight back - with historical sanctions as the first unbloody defense against the bloody attack. And the Ukrainians are ready to fight back militarily, to defend their land. The Kremlin's war brought more unity [in the West] than anybody, and especially the head of the Kremlin himself, would have expected. If there is more aggression, there will be more sanctions. If the war goes on, sanctions will be deepened and broadened. And there are plenty of creative ideas and approaches to do so.

AND YET, AUSTRIA, MUCH LIKE GERMANY, REMAINS TIED TO RUSSIAN GAS. GERMAN POLITICIAN FLORIAN POST RECENTLY SAID THAT WHILE HE CONDEMNED RUSSIAN AGGRESSION, HE ALSO "DIDN'T FEEL LIKE FREEZING". HOW MUCH DO YOU THINK THIS SENTIMENT IS SHARED IN AUSTRIA? IF THE CHOICE COMES BETWEEN GETTING A LITTLE BIT COLD AND BEING TOUGHER ON RUSSIA, WHAT WILL AUSTRIA OPT FOR?

The overwhelming sentiment today, not just in Austria, but in all of the free world, is that of unity. We must not let this unity weaken, due to this or that issue. This unity is unprecedented. This Unity will result in new sanctions, deepened sanctions. Even Switzerland, which is in neither NATO or the EU, has agreed to join the fifth sanction package. The objective of the Kremlin regime has always been to divide us - We did not let that happen; we have become even more united now due to this attempt to divide us. There is still a risk of division, though, and we must not let it happen. If one country can be weakened more than others due to certain sanctions, of course, unity means that we deliberate on those kinds of sanctions, but we must remain united in deepening, strengthening, and broadening sanctions.

ON TO YOUR VISIT TO GEORGIA THEN. WHAT ARE YOUR TAKEAWAYS?

There were various points on the agenda for this parliamentary visit to Georgia. We met with the head of state, with the



I would like to underline that rule of law is a core promise of the European Union to its own citizens and to the world, it's not some boring bureaucratic demand from Brussels

Prime Minister and with several ministers and other officials from the executive branch. But I would especially underline the importance of the meeting with the parliament members.

We count on the parliament to make reforms which put Georgia on the level of European standards in order to pave the way for European integration. This very week, the "EU questionnaire" was handed over to Georgia officially by the European Union. The impression I had from the Georgian side was that they never expected they would receive the



questionnaire from the EU so early, and, yes, it happened very quickly.

Now, it's very important that Georgia carries out its commitments towards the reforms, especially the judiciary reforms, with a particular focus on the rule of law. I would like to underline that rule of law

is a core promise of the European Union to its own citizens and to the world; it's not some boring bureaucratic demand from Brussels.

Second, of course, is that this war has changed the geopolitical scenery. It's important to know each other's posi-

tions, to stick together, to reflect together on the challenges these new, geopolitical shifts bring about, especially considering that Georgia has specific experience in this regard: as we all know, there are two areas, 20% of Georgian territory, occupied by Kremlin-backed forces.

And I must say I was highly impressed and highly appreciative of the fact that there are so many Ukrainian flags appearing on houses in Tbilisi's streets. The population of Georgia is not only taking care of many refugees from the war in Ukraine, but also spending a lot of money and offering other kinds of support for Ukraine. So, there is obviously high empathy from the Georgians for the Ukrainians - of course, they know better than most what it feels like.

YOU'VE WRITTEN EXTENSIVELY ON THE SUBJECT OF CHRISTIANITY IN EUROPEAN POLITICS. HOW MUCH OF A ROLE DO YOU THINK THE FAITH AND THE CHURCH, THE FACT THAT GEORGIA, UKRAINE, RUSSIA ALL SHARE THE SAME FAITH, PLAYS IN ALL OF THIS?

I deeply believe that Christianity, the Christian faith, provides important principles which clearly define that human dignity, individual freedom, and free will are our inherent, fundamental values. Christianity is not the only source for these values, but one of many. The second point would be that one of the biggest achievements of enlightenment, of the free world as such, is the separation of state and the Church. It's a free choice whether to believe or not, and not something to impose on people. This is part of human dignity. In modern civilization, it must be clear that the political sphere and the religious sphere are separated and remain separate. And here I have my doubts about Russia - there is obviously an alliance between the current leadership of the Moscow Orthodox Church and the Kremlin. And this is something called the political misuse of religion - it harms everything, individuals, societies, the Church and the state. Today's Kremlin leadership is quite simply threatening humanity and its values, and that's why we are all in this together. And what we defend is not this or that country, not this or that political affiliation, but humanity itself. We defend universal values like human dignity and individual freedom, that's what is threatened today by the Kremlin.



Putin's New Empire: Will Russia Build New Republics in Ukraine?



Head of the Donetsk People's Republic Denis Pushilin inspecting combat training exercises of the DPR People's Militia. DPR Official Photo

ANALYSIS BY MICHAEL GODWIN

As a significant portion of the Russian invasion force in Ukraine refits, resupplies, and repositions to the east, the momentum in the occupied areas will begin to pick up. Unlike the rapid advances from the south and initially towards Kyiv, little progress has been made by the puppet-government's forces in the Luhansk and Donetsk so-called "people's republics." Just as they did in 2014, Russia has already been seen replacing the leadership in some of the smaller captured municipalities. As more ground is taken, will Russia continue to create more of these miro-protectorates?

To understand this model of territorial gain, an examination of the initial 2014 invasion is necessary. Russian-backed militias, augmented with Russian forces, managed to seize control of the Luhansk and Donetsk centers. Little time was wasted in installing a loose governance structure. However, some of the individuals put in positions of power had little to no political or business background.

In one instance, the "people's governor" for the Donetsk region had the previous employment of a "Santa-for-hire." As reported by the BBC at the time of the invasion, they said, "Before developing a reputation as a militant secessionist, Pavel Gubarev cut more of a granddad figure, posing as Grandfather Frost - the Russian version of Father Christmas." Gubarev was arrested during the early conflict but released as a part of a prisoner exchange.

Another instance highlights this model further. Valery Bolotov, the first head of the Lugansk "People's Republic," was plucked from obscurity as a private driver in the region. With little military experience outside mandatory Soviet service, even his own associates had to admit his weaknesses. A Russian source commented at the time of his death in 2017, saying that Bolotov "surfaced out of nowhere and had a reputation as a good military commander, but a weak politician."

These false starts with Russia's attempt

to legitimize its holdings led to something of a regime of terror in the occupied cities. Multiple weak and hastily promoted leadership were purged, being either arrested, disappearing, or dying in curious circumstances. At the same time, with the use of brutal local security forces and their repression techniques, any popular opposition was removed. Coupled with intense and hyper-focused propaganda campaigns via all media channels, Moscow sealed any cracks left behind.

The Kremlin knew that any minor fracture in the social and political terrain of this territory would spell death for their future ambitions. As a result, leadership could only be chosen based on their allegiance to Russia rather than on any actual management or leadership credentials. This led to the notorious corruption, breakdown in infrastructure, and hostile environment seen in Russia

and any Russian-controlled territory. The Kremlin, in typical fashion, funneled incredible amounts of funding to smooth over the issues altogether.

Now, in the newest territory that Russia has managed to seize, the early symptoms of this same formula are beginning to be seen. Reports from Ukrainian military, prosecutorial, and individual private citizen sources have documented these actions. Russian forces, and more often their follow-on troops in the Ministry of Internal Affairs or Intelligence services, are already in motion.

Several villages of small towns and significant villages have been abducted or detained under house arrest. Poignant examples of this are seen in the Kherson and Zaporozhye regions of Ukraine, as it has some of the most significant Russian gains. As was seen in Donetsk and Luhansk, abductions, violence against civilians, and replacements

of the local government bodies have been recorded.

In the city of Melitopol, the mayor was seen being led out of the city administration building by Russian soldiers. For several days he was held captive before being released in a prisoner exchange arranged by the Ukrainian government. During his captivity, new members of an "interim government" announced they would be installing a so-called "committee of people's deputies" to govern the city. Peaceful pro-Ukrainian demonstrations were dispersed with gunshots and hand grenades.

The major cities are not the only places seeing these effects. The citizens of the small town of Genichesk, north east of the Crimean Peninsula, saw their mayor removed by force. Russian forces announced that Mayor Alexander Tulupov had resigned, however, many noted that this was not a voluntary deci-

sion on his part. Beryslav, Hola Prystan, Dniprorudne, and so many other small townships have seen the same treatment, as well as abductions of any local citizens that display opposition to the new Russian leadership or military presence.

However, it is unclear if the Russian forces can maintain their long term presence. Unlike the seizure of Crimea, Donetsk, and Luhansk, the recently captured regions are more unstable. The former regions held more ethnically Russian peoples, with less propensity for resistance or facilitation for anti-Russian support.

Kherson and Zaporozhye regions harbor far more pro-Ukrainian, and even some vehement anti-Russian, sentiment. This can manifest itself in two crucial ways. They can become an active insurgency against the occupation force, or as an enabling and supporting force for Ukrainian special operations to work in the area.

The logistical, economic, and administrative burden of employing the military repression and defensive structures of these areas will be exceptionally onerous. In addition, the immense project of holding some type of rigged referendum in the captured territories, as they did after 2014, would be gargantuan. These steps would be required if Moscow has any intention of truly holding these lands, as it has outlined in its Novorossiia plan.

With their forces already stretched thin, it's unlikely this would be completed in any timely manner. Ukrainian forces would be offered ample time to destabilize Russian positions and undermine any attempt to plant their proverbial flag on their soil over the long term. European and NATO allies should support this effort through counter-information warfare and underground channels of support for both unarmed and armed resistance organizations in the occupied territories.

The lessons from 2008 in Georgia should be carefully heeded. Allowing Russia to build the necessary infrastructure for long-term occupation has to be countered before they start. Both economic sanctions as well as military support should be angled at making the establishment and support of these areas unsustainable. Russia will most likely attempt to cement their gains through these tried and tested avenues. It is the job of not only Ukraine but NATO, Georgia included, to counter this threat to global stability.



Valery Bolotov, the first head of the Lugansk "People's Republic" from May 18 to August 14, 2014. By Valery Matytsin/TASS

The Black Sea Factor: from Words to Deeds – Like Never Before

ANALYSIS BY VIKTOR KIPIANI,
CHAIRMAN OF GEOCASE

The Black Sea factor has become a typical topic in talks about the geopolitics and security of our region in the past few years, which is perfectly understandable, needing no additional explanation as to why. However, while the standard is to speak about the importance of the abovementioned factor, the less-standard is a full and timely implementation of it within the pan-Western security configuration with the aim of a full-fledged and fast integration of Black Sea democracies. The war being waged in Ukraine has once and for all left no room for pointless theorization of discussions about the practical benefit and purpose of the Black Sea, and has exposed the need for concrete, result-oriented solutions.

The attempt by the Russian Federation to turn the Black Sea into a zone of its exclusive influence, into a sort of “Black Sea Kalinigrad,” by introducing anti-access/area denial systems, makes it incomprehensible and even harmful for the Western partners of Georgia to still not have a comprehensive strategy for the Black Sea region. In the light of events unfolding in and around Ukraine, it is also a fact that what is to be said has to be said openly, not shyly or by using empty phrases. Openly because the sharply deteriorated security situation in the greater Black Sea region makes leisurely talks at academic conferences absurd: these very real threats to Georgian national interests, along with many other urgent issues, require a meaningful discussion.

This is not the first article about the importance of the Black Sea, as a geopolitical and geo-economic bridge, for Georgia; in the distant and recent past, we have spoken repeatedly about this topic in various formats, but since that cardinal transformation process started in Europe on 24 February, this is the first talk about this crucial nautical artery of our region. The war in Ukraine, which by its result and impact is way broader than the war itself, as well as the mistakes which were made after the Cold War and led us eventually to this war, urges maximum openness and frankness in such talks.

BROADER ALLIANCE IN THE REGION

In the past, the North Atlantic Alliance was represented on the Black Sea by limited potential and resources, and rightly so. This shortage on the Eastern flank of the Alliance’s perimeter – from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, inclusive, was exacerbated by an apparent asymmetry or inequality. The result was and continues to be relative. Namely, against the inequality between the tailored forward presence on the Black Sea and the enhanced forward presence on the Baltic Sea, NATO’s approach is unexplainable because today, the security of Black Sea requires, at least an approach of a standard similar to that applied to the northern part of the Eastern flank. Although the decision to deploy an additional contingent in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe was taken at the recent extraordinary NATO summit, this still does not answer several key questions: How is the balance of power being changed (or it can it be changed) on the Black Sea? How secure can Georgia feel, and owing to which concrete measures? What are the practical steps that would further convince Georgian society that threats have decreased and at times of possible threat, that the Western unity will provide Georgia with effective and instant support?

These and other similar questions gain urgency considering the difficulties of NATO’s Eastern enlargement, which have been made even more apparent by the war in Ukraine and the negotiation process. The problem acquires extraordinary urgency also because we, in the absence of NATO’s collective security umbrella, cannot hear talks, from any of the parties, about other,

similarly effective “compensation models” for the security of our country in exchange for the postponement of speedy membership to NATO. Meanwhile, the aggression in Ukraine continues and, hearing the Russian rhetoric, it becomes clear that the revisionism with its brutal force is not going to stop at Ukraine.

For the sake of fairness, it must be said that the failure to form a common Western vision has its objective reasons. In particular, the “fragmentation” of the of Black Sea and Black Sea coast policy may be explained by various historical-geographic and foreign policy layers which exist within the region, namely: the relative isolation of Romania and Bulgaria; the harsh present reality of Georgia and Ukraine determined by a common “post-Soviet” past; “abstract specificity” in Turkey’s approach to regional processes, etc.

Of course, such a geo-polyphony has also impeded the emergence of the above-mentioned strategic vision. At the same time, it is also a fact that the existing challenges can no longer justify references to the past, while future risks nudge Georgian and Western leaders towards making “harsh assumptions” and taking clear-cut political decisions. If anything can be found positive about the situation created in the region, it is precisely the effect by which it can galvanize processes in a proper direction and at a proper rate.

“CONSOLIDATION” OF BLACK SEA COASTLINE COUNTRIES

For the countries of the Black Sea region, located at the geo-crossing between the East and West, the policy of balancing, sometimes successful and sometimes unsuccessful, is not, historically, strange. However, the 20th century and the post-Cold War period uncovered an acute shortage of knowledge and skills needed for a proper and wise balancing which, primarily, implies prevention or minimization of threats. This, however, has become a very serious challenge for those countries, including Georgia, that had and have to realize their civilizational choice in parallel with handling threats coming from the neighborhood. Balancing and at the same time, heading towards a set aim have become more difficult in a situation when international norms in the region lost ground to naked aggression, and a lawless infringement of borders and sovereignty for the redistribution of spheres of influence has openly confronted a lawful containment. All this created an inevitable necessity to swiftly and adequately adjust “lawfulness” to the tactics of “lawless” fight.

This topic is multifaceted and we have discussed its separate aspects in various publications in the past. This time around I will focus on a few aspects that will better highlight the greater Black Sea region within the so-called regional hub-and-spoke structure of the new world order/disorder. It should be noted that the formation of the greater Black Sea region as a new gravitational center in the global system cannot materialize only with the efforts of strategic allies or partners: a large part of this work must, primarily, be done by the countries of the region and its leaders with the support and involvement of societies.

It is also essential that such “free unity” built on a healthy foundation of the Black Sea region will over time help the region break one important stereotype, bringing to an end the association of the region with conflicts, destruction and confrontation; instead, revamping it and gradually associating it with development, stability and peace. In this rather difficult and long process, the abovementioned platform must be properly adjusted to existing and expected challenges and be distinguished for the flexibility and mobility of multilateral approaches. Furthermore, a Black Sea declaration would emphasize the unity of interests of countries of the Black Sea region as well as firm and unwavering interest of collective West in the region. As a result, the regional Black Sea unity, its prospects and competitiveness, would be determined by renewed principles – *modus operandi*.

To be more concrete, the consolidation of free nations of the greater Black Sea region, in our opinion, depends on two main things: one of them is a policy geared towards a greater synergy and better coordination of common regional interests, the second is the introduction of new mechanisms of cooperation in the field of defense and security.

FOR BETTER COORDINATION IN THE REGION

We would like to put again forwards the initiative of framework declaration which would serve a political and economic integration of regional countries, including serve a modern consultation format adjusted to the time and need of new communication channels.

Such declaration would highlight the importance of Black Sea region for the world and regional peace and stability. Alongside a number of urgent topics, such declaration would: (1) underline the partnership of parties for regional security; (2) view the region as the area free from corrupt influences and “zones of special interest;” (3) emphasize the necessity to mobilize means for the diversification of regional infrastructure as well as the need to implement socially and environmentally sustainable projects in the region; (4) note frozen seemingly ethnic, but in reality geopolitical conflicts, also, express support to sovereignty and territorial integrity of the countries in the Black Sea region; (5) ensure a platform for discussing issues of regional security, for example, terrorism and challenges of illegal migration; (6) identify areas of free trade agreements and trade blocks of the regional scale.

At the same time, to ensure necessary coordination, one should consider a regular conduct of high-level summits with the participation of leaders of declaration member states, high-ranking representatives of US, UK, EU and other strategic partners. The main purpose of regular summits would be the support of independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of regional countries; topics of discussion at summits should be truly geopolitical (not so-called “ethnic”) conflicts in the region, regional security in general, international terrorism, cybersecurity, illegal migration and other pressing issues and challenges.

As noted above, we deem it a necessary objective to draw declarants’ attention to the necessity to attract additional investments to the region. In our opinion, one of concrete initiatives could be the announcement in the declaration of a large regional project, for example, under the name of “Black Sea Welfare (Development) Belt.” The aims of the project would include the mobilization of financial resources for the development of regional infrastructure, reduction of dependence on certain energy sources, implementation of targeted social and environmental programs, etc.

In terms of economic sustainability, characteristics of the Three Seas Initiative needs to be scrutinized for the aim of projecting it on the Black Sea. Naturally the specifics of our region differ from that of the Baltic Sea. However, considering an organic interconnection of security and economy, a greater deal of attention should be paid to modernization of energy and transportation routes running across the Black Sea region, creation of necessary infrastructure, including digital. Otherwise, talks about defense and other alliances will not be sufficient for regional stability and true global competitiveness.

FOR HIGHER SECURITY IN THE REGION

At the beginning of the article, we mentioned only one concrete NATO-related aspect of systemic flaw of regional security. There are other aspects too, of course.

In any case, the key message of adjusting this or that security to the region should be dispelling doubts of our strategic allies and partners about a “peripheral” or “second-rate status” of the region. The Black Sea paradigm for Georgia, however, is that the region for us is simultaneously a potential of national

development and a source of threats. This strange equation can be explained by the location of the country in the mega-conflict zone between two large political and social formation. Towards this very important cause, the Georgian state and political circles must arm themselves with “realism.” Time of “love” and “hate” in geopolitics is passing into oblivion and will be and has been already replaced by “need,” “necessity,” “tailoring to oneself,” and “use.”

As geopolitical “taste” and paradigm of vision change, so do behavioral rules and constructs in the security field. One of such fundamental changes is compact alliances (in modern vernacular – clusters) of several participants (something between narrow bilateral formats and large alliances), which offer member states an improved mobility and optimal use of resources for attaining a set goal. Such alliances are sometimes dubbed as “small NATO” though this comparison is not adequate.

In any case, the abovementioned trend is of practical interest for governmental, specialized and analytical circles of Georgia. Research and modeling in this area may help us eradicate flaws, and in certain cases even anachronisms, existing in security models or approaches established long ago: help in obtaining a necessary support for the statehood of Georgia, to the maximum possible extent, in reality, in the form of deeds, not words.

In reality, the essence of above-mentioned “cluster” (so-called “small NATO”) system is the coherence and overlap of factual, not declarative, interests of member countries. Such coherence may develop from several areas of cooperation into a broader agenda. Consequently, real effective security is ensured precisely by those liberated-from-idealism “clusters” in which countries unite naturally.

As a concrete example, I will name the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) involving the United States, Japan, Australia and India. This project is noteworthy for us so much so that it provides very practical material for the discussion of the topic described in this article. Yet another very interesting precedent is AUKUS which was created a bit later. To cut a long story short, the process of regional hub-and-spoke of security has been launched. It is also a fact that the accession to NATO with the aim to create more guarantees for our country requires the determination of clear timeline and shortest procedures, but the situation in this regard is unsatisfactory for the time being.

Also, a sort of “spare” option, in our opinion, would be a discussion with the key strategic partner of an issue of transfer onto a strategic contractual alliance in the field of defense and security. Likelihood as well as “experimental” nature of this in the light of Black Sea regional context has been discussed in several previous publications. It is worth to note that this option, even in case of protraction or even postponement of NATO membership for an indefinite time, can be regarded as an effective “compensation model” for the enhancement of Georgian security.

TRENDS, TENDENCIES....

Prospects of this or that security model on the Black Sea must be, of course, assessed within the context of ongoing and global processes. The aim of this article is not and cannot be the discussion of all events or circumstances related to the greater Black Sea region, but we would mention some of them.

If we agree that Georgia needs the engagement of USA as a strategic partner for ensuring lasting and effective regional security on the Black Sea, then it is equally necessary to be aware of its vision of current distribution of powers in the world and corresponding emphases. In this regard, the national defense strategy of the US represents a useful source for drawing certain conclusions.

The most recent version dates back to 2018 and alongside mentioning Russia, it mainly focuses on China. It should be also noted that the strategy pays lit-

tle attention to so-called local wars or military operations against revolts and is mainly focused on rivalry and confrontation between large states. It is clear that the war in Ukraine will have its effect on the future national defense strategy of the US and will make it more “Europe-centric.” A new redistribution of emphases between Asia and Europe must affect the defense budget of the country and logistics and deployment of the army. It is a fact that a distribution of defense resources according to priorities of the USA is a logical response to the threat that has emerged in Europe since 24 February of the current year.

We have already talked about a special role which the Russian Federation attributes to the Black Sea and the attempt of Russia to turn it into its “internal sea.” Consequently – and this was mentioned repeatedly too – that is up to the Western security system and effective implementation of this system in the region through deeds, not words. Frankly speaking, at this stage, the Black Sea region is an integral component of Eurasian security context as it is simultaneously connected to Europe as well as Middle East and Asia. It is also a fact that two “capping” infrastructures of interest for the Alliance in the Black Sea – one in Romania and another in Turkey, would have fallen short of the demand of that time even before the outbreak of the war in Ukraine.

Thus, in parallel with the war in Ukraine as well as the formation of final position about the geopolitical fate of the entire post-Soviet space, several necessary working directions have already been identified. List of them, of course, requires greater systematization, but it is already possible to identify needed actions such as the deepening of cooperation in the field of intelligence between relevant countries of the Black Sea region, strengthening of armed forces of vulnerable countries by providing relevant armament and training, training of national personnel for neutralizing hybrid risks and establishment of special centers. For this and along with the enhanced forward presence on the Black Sea better coordination, it would be logical to create a regional leadership center. This and other steps taken by the West will have the meaning of true recognition of the Black Sea region and actual support to the regional countries. A political message will also be clear and comprehensible: a united consolidated flank against common threats.

WAITING FOR CLARITY

There is virtually no doubt that the war in Ukraine will result in a new iron curtain descending in Europe and drawing dividing lines again. On the path towards that reality, the priority of Georgia is to ensure, to the extent practicable, that discussions about Georgia are not held without us, that Georgia’s fate is not decided without our involvement and without hearing the opinion of Tbilisi. In the light of created circumstances this is the most difficult but necessary objective which must be achieved by any means.

Against the created ambiguity which is further exacerbated by political events unfolding around Ukraine, the official Tbilisi must find power and resources to avoid facing an unpleasant fact as a result of rearrangement of great powers. The modern politics seems to have freed itself from flirting and hypocrisy once and for all and we must not shy away from asking, inquiring and demanding, because although the rhetoric about norms of international law and rules of civilized behavior are pleasant to hear, it is intended only for ignorant and impatient audience. Fortunately, we are none of that and therefore, let us ask for more details and demand concrete deeds. Georgian public and social sphere, united by common national efforts, must today take efforts to prevent a total loss by the Georgian side, a total “removal” from the country of Georgia’s present and future levers, while at the same time, to use modest means available to us as effectively as possible for the preservation and development of the identity of Georgian nation and statehood.

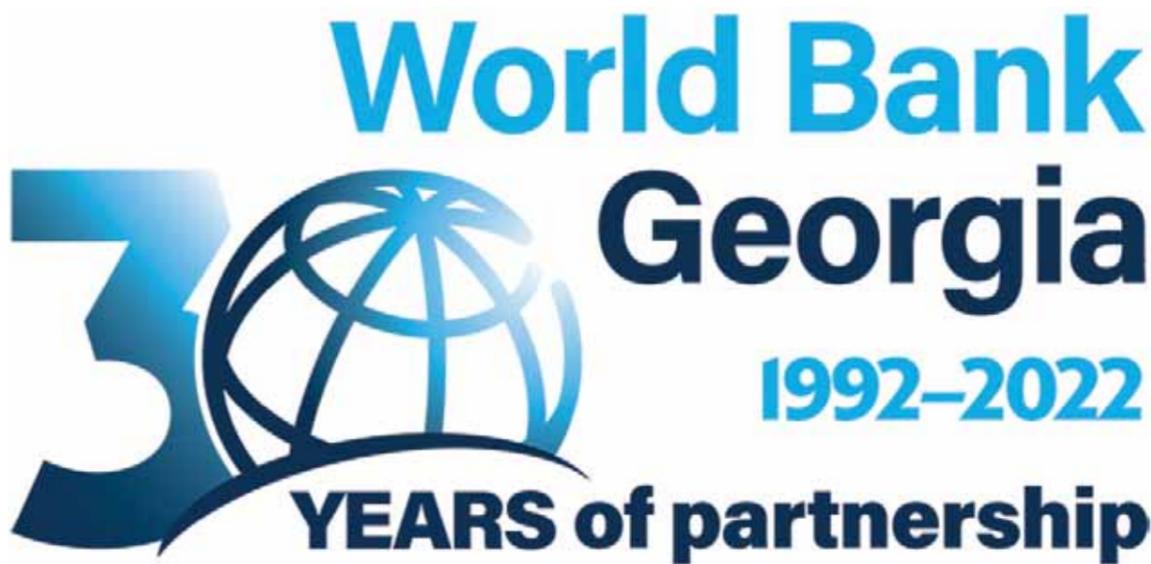
Georgia's Economic Growth to Slow Amid Impacts of War in Ukraine

The war against Ukraine and sanctions on Russia are hitting economies around the globe, with emerging market and developing countries in the Europe and Central Asia region expected to bear the brunt, says the World Bank's Economic Update for the region, released today.

The region's economy is now forecast to shrink by 4.1 percent this year, compared with the pre-war forecast of 3 percent growth, as the economic shocks from the war compound the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. This would be the second contraction in as many years, and twice as large as the pandemic-induced contraction in 2020.

Ukraine's economy is expected to shrink by an estimated 45.1 percent, although the magnitude of the contraction will depend on the duration and intensity of the war. Hit by unprecedented sanctions, Russia's economy has already plunged into a deep recession with output projected to contract by 11.2 percent in 2022.

"The magnitude of the humanitarian crisis unleashed by the war is staggering. The Russian invasion is delivering a massive blow to Ukraine's economy and it has inflicted enormous damage to infrastructure," said Anna Bjerde, World Bank Vice President for the Europe and Central Asia region. "Ukraine needs massive financial support immediately as it struggles to keep its economy going and the government running to support Ukrainian citizens who are suffering and coping with an extreme



situation."

The war in Ukraine is likely to also adversely impact the Georgian economy through reductions in trade, tourism and remittances, as well as elevated commodity prices. Oil and food prices have increased sharply since the beginning of the war due to uncertainty and disrupted supplies from Russia and Ukraine. These impacts will cause a slowdown in growth, with growth initially forecast at 5.5 percent for 2022 expected to drop to 2.5 percent. The baseline outlook envisions growth recovering from 2023 onward, as easing monetary policy, recovery of tourism,

and the restoration of economic links are partly offset by the gradual withdrawal of fiscal stimulus.

"While we foresee a slowdown in growth for 2022, Georgia is well placed to manage the economic fallout of the war due to reasonable fiscal and external buffers and a credible macro-financial framework. The banking sector is entering the crisis in relatively strong shape, government deposits are sizeable, and debt is likely to remain sustainable," said Sebastian Molineux, World Bank Regional Director for the South Caucasus. "What is needed now is to continue with prudent economic management,

provide support to affected businesses and households while reinvigorating the structural reforms to improve productivity, improve human capital and address consequences of climate change."

The war has added to mounting concerns of a sharp global slowdown, surging inflation and debt, and a spike in poverty levels. The economic impact has reverberated through multiple channels, including commodity and financial markets, trade and migration links and adverse impact on confidence.

The deep humanitarian crisis sparked by the war has been the most pronounced

of the initial global shockwaves and will likely be among the most enduring legacies of the conflict. The wave of refugees from Ukraine to neighboring countries is anticipated to dwarf previous crises. As a result, support to host countries and refugee communities will be critical, and the World Bank is preparing operational support programs to neighboring countries to meet the increased financing needs from the refugee flows.

The war-triggered spike in global oil prices also serves to underscore the need for energy security by boosting energy supply from renewable sources and stepping up the design and implementation of large-scale energy efficiency measures.

WORLD BANK GROUP RESPONSE TO THE UKRAINE WAR

The World Bank Group is taking fast action to support the people of Ukraine. Since the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, the Bank Group has mobilized an emergency financing package of \$925 million in support for Ukraine. This fast-disbursing support will go to help pay wages for hospital workers, pensions for the elderly, and social programs for the vulnerable. The rapid financing is part of a \$3 billion package of support that the Bank Group is preparing for Ukraine over the coming months. The invasion has already caused the largest refugee crisis in Europe since World War II. The Bank Group is looking at how to support refugees in host countries.

ADB: Georgian Economy to Slow to 3.5% Growth in 2022 Due to Ukraine War

The Georgian economic growth is expected to slow to 3.5% in 2022 due to ongoing hostilities in Ukraine, after the "promising double-digit growth" last year, a new report of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) reads.

In Asian Development Outlook (ADO) 2022, the bank's flagship annual economic publication, ADB projects Georgia's gross domestic product (GDP) growth to recover slightly to 5% in 2023 due to increased internal and external demand, fueled by faster credit growth, with exports facilitated by structural reforms to trade and connectivity.

"Georgia is going to see the effect of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in the form of diminished tourism, exports, and remittances," said ADB Country Director for Georgia Shane Rosenthal. "To help the economy grow, the Georgian government needs to carefully prioritize expenditure after 2 years of expanded pandemic-related spending. It should also invest in urban areas in line with decentralization and invest in social sectors. And to ensure that all can participate in the economy, it is crucial to ensure high-quality education that reaches all parts of the country."

Inflation is forecast to slow to 7% in 2022 and 4% in 2023. The current account deficit is projected to widen to equal 10% of GDP in 2022 with a forecast rise in oil prices before narrowing to 7.5% in 2023. Exports are projected to increase by 12.1% in 2022 and 14.9% in 2023. As economic sanctions cut growth in the Russian Federation, remittances are forecast to decrease to \$1.8 billion in 2022 and \$1.7 billion in 2023.

The ADB report highlights the need for Georgia to strengthen subnational public finances that will enable more



Source: ADB

efficient and equitable provision of services, including complex services that are critical for large population centers, water supply and sanitation systems in secondary cities and towns, and health care, education, and social protection for disadvantaged populations. Fiscal

decentralization would improve service delivery and support growth.

"Georgia can benefit significantly by building capacity in municipalities. The success of fiscal decentralization will depend on developing financial management capacity in local governments and

training local officials in policy development and implementation skills, such as health and education budgeting and social service delivery," reads the report.

ADB has supported Georgia since 2007 and is one of the country's largest multilateral development partners. Sovereign

and nonsovereign loans to Georgia total \$3.9 billion. ADB's key development priorities in Georgia include fostering inclusive and sustainable economic growth, reducing poverty, enhancing regional connectivity, and improving public service delivery.

The Georgian Fish and Caviar Farm



and patriotic sentiments. This explains the idea behind it: to protect nature and save endangered species.

The most interesting part about the farm is its scientific importance. For the first time in history, the farm is observing the Colchic sturgeon and is working hard to enrich the aquaculture by bringing it from the wild. Georgian Fish and Caviar is the first and only company to produce local and clean fish species after the Soviet Union. Because the Colchic sturgeon is an important species of aquatic wildlife, creating an accurate habitat for it is critical. To date, the facility has successfully bred 600 specimens of Colchic sturgeon. This trial is an important scientific event because there is no single study or information on the subject prior to this.

The farm is located on the Kintrishi River, which is one of Georgia's cleanest rivers. Kintrishi water is also used to produce natural nutrients essential for the perfect caviar and healthy fish. Since the river provides nearly 18% of the natural food for the fish, workers can replenish the farm with nutrients. Furthermore, Georgian Fish and Caviar only use fish food made in Europe, such as Biomar, Skretting, and Coppens.

The farm has a wide variety of fish. However, the Siberian sturgeon accounts for 70% of the total. Of 20,000 fish, workers chose 3,000 of the best female fish



Malkhaz Shubalidze came up with the idea of creating a Georgian Fish and Caviar farm back in 2013. Team members actively began working on setting it up in 2016, and quickly took the business to the top. Today, that farm is currently the most valuable player in the Caucasian market. Leri Chichinadze, a St. Louis University graduate, is the farm's Chief Technology Officer. He has been with the organization for six months and the company is pleased to have him on board.

Currently, the farm is the largest producer of sturgeon caviar in the region. The fishery is located on the western

side of Georgia, in Kobuleti, and has a total area of about 4 hectares.

Georgian Fish and Caviar is built in the Black Sea basin, using Georgia's cleanest river, Kintrishi, as its source. The farm protects the environment and wildlife, saves endangered species, and produces high-quality products. This is precisely what distinguishes this startup from the majority of others: a big idea and a great mindset.

Malkhaz Shubalidze, the farm's owner, says that the motivation for creating a unique fishery originated from national

to breed. Now, the farm has a unique chance to nurture and raise the purest, healthiest generation possible.

The fish milking process is also very challenging and interesting. They have to move fish from cold water to warm water to make them feel as if they are in the summer. The fish are naturally ready to spawn once the water has been changed. They are fed a hormone derived from cobra brains to help them reproduce naturally. It should be noted that caviar extraction does not involve the killing of fish, and this is exactly what makes the farm special.

Later, when they are ready to spawn, workers milk the fish carefully without damaging their organs, as keeping the little swimmers healthy is very important to the farm. The milking process is

very exciting, as you realize that the breeding of the new generation is entirely in your hands.

The facility is currently focused on protecting nature and wildlife and producing high-quality products. Georgian Fish and Caviar is part of a nationwide initiative that has already resulted in the release of 15,000 trout into the wild. In addition, the farm aims to restore Colchic sturgeon populations in the Black Sea.



SOCIETY

Global and Regional Challenges Top the Agenda of the UNDP Regional Director's Visit to Georgia

UNDP reaffirms support for Georgia's sustainable, inclusive and climate-resilient development.

UNDP reaffirms its assistance to Georgia at a time of global challenges brought on by the pandemic, climate challenge and, most recently, the war in Ukraine. Mirjana Špoljaric Egger, UN Assistant Secretary-General (ASG), UNDP Assistant Administrator, and Director of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, wrapped up her three-day visit to Georgia with a strong message of support and cooperation.

"This is a decisive time for the entire region. My message to Georgia's leadership and people is that the United Nations Development Program is committed to supporting their country in key areas of national development," Špoljaric Egger said.

On 7 and 8 April, ASG Špoljaric Egger met with Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili and President Salome Zurbashvili. During her visit, Špoljaric Egger also met with Members of Parliament, ministers, civil society representatives, women entrepreneurs and representatives of embassies and international organizations.

While in the country, Špoljaric Egger checked on the progress of some of UNDP's flagship initiatives in Georgia, including complex support for programs



Source of image: Vladimir Valishvili/UNDP

to strengthen parliamentary democracy, achieve gender equality and build a climate-resilient society.

At the Parliament, together with Deputy Chairperson David Sergeenko ASG Špoljaric Egger joined over 100 schoolchildren from 50 public schools at a 'My Parliamentary Adventure' event. In part-

nership with the Parliament of Georgia and the European Union, UNDP assists schoolchildren to participate in a new educational initiative that provides an enjoyable way to learn about the roles, functions and history of the Georgian Parliament. The initiative also introduces tools and mechanisms that citizens can

use to engage in parliamentary work.

Špoljaric Egger also visited Women Entrepreneurs' Program participants to discuss gender equality and business development. Drawing on the partnership between UNDP, the Government of Sweden and the Bank of Georgia, this initiative helps women build on proven

business development models to identify their best prospects and devise effective strategies to realize their business goals.

Georgia's efforts to achieve climate resilience and green development were a significant focus of the Regional Director's visit. Together with Ambassador of Japan to Georgia Imamura Akira and Georgia's Deputy Minister of Environmental Protection and Agriculture Nino Tandilashvili, Špoljaric Egger launched a new initiative that will help Georgia sustainably manage its forests and promote green livelihoods. The program is part of the UNDP Climate Promise initiative, which scales up UNDP support to turn national climate pledges into concrete action in at least 100 countries.

"Georgia's ambitious climate agenda will lead the country to better protect its rich nature and unique biodiversity, create sustainable livelihoods, explore advanced solutions for green growth and reduce the risks associated with climate-related disasters," Špoljaric Egger said. "UNDP fully supports this transformation and will assist Georgia's strive for a climate-smart future."

On 9 April, Špoljaric Egger travelled to the Kakheti region where UNDP, with funds from the Green Climate Fund and the governments of Georgia, Sweden and Switzerland, helps protect people and the economy from floods and other climate-induced disasters.

Not to Be Cynical or Anything

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

My recent short visit to Tbilisi to take care of some apartment renovation details also gave me time to catch up with old friends and meet some new people.

I also learned more, firsthand, of the spectrum of opinions about the War in Ukraine. A young man and his uncle almost came to blows on the long Mes-tia-Tbilisi minivan trip, the longest single public transport route currently available in Georgia, some 520 km and 8 hours or so long, with two meal stops en route. The two had opposing views, which they expressed in crescendoing volume for some hours, until finally other passengers begged them to take it down a notch or two. There are certainly still some fans of Russia's current president to be found among Georgians, oh yes...

This end of the spectrum continued when an old friend introduced me to two friends of his, all three being Svans, at a small outdoor feast at the home of

one of them. He warned me in advance not to bring up the subject of the War, but the others were only too happy to wade into it. I mostly maintained silence about it, which as it turns out may have been wiser than I knew. One of my new acquaintances was a very vocal (and sometimes directly threatening) opponent of Mikheil Saakashvili when the latter was president, leading to consequences including self-exile and some wrist-slapping jail time upon return. I wonder if the photo of the four of us together will surface on Facebook and plague me, but so far there has been restraint, which I have appreciated. I learned the man's history only upon returning to Svaneti and dropping his name to a friend of mine here whom I can trust to be discreet about it.

Said local friend also filled me in on some of the news I had missed from an absence of TV time while away. The scandal of "call centers" in Georgia billing pensioners across the world of millions of dollars of their hard-saved pension funds in fake investment schemes broke during my week away. These thousands of linguistically talented young Georgian citizens call their prey, don't



divulge their location, and persuade them in their native language to part with small but increasingly larger sums of their pensions in the hope of multiplying returns. Said returns are entirely nonexistent in reality, but by the time each willing pensioner has climbed the ladder of greater and greater "success", most if not actually all of their future

income is gone into black holes from which it may never emerge. Delightful. I have been aware for more than a decade now that when someone in North America calls a toll-free 1-800 number for technical help, they are actually reaching someone in India who does the job for relative peanuts, even though the time difference may mean that the latter

is working through the night. But this is a whole new twist on such endeavors, offering help while stealing. I can only hope that those behind such robbery of vulnerable and often clueless aged foreigners will be brought to full justice, all funds restored, and future crimes of this type clamped down on. But I have my doubts, especially hearing how high into Georgian "power structures" this mess stinks.

During my early years in Georgia, President Shevardnadze's government was sternly warned by America's leadership that unless the sea of items marked "humanitarian aid, NOT for sale" disappeared from Georgian bazaars (I saw them too, many times), said aid would dry up. It's time for another ultimatum.

Tony Hanmer has lived in Georgia since 1999, in Svaneti since 2007, and been a weekly writer and photographer for GT since early 2011. He runs the "Svaneti Renaissance" Facebook group, now with nearly 2000 members, at www.facebook.com/groups/SvanetiRenaissance/. He and his wife also run their own guest house in Etseri: www.facebook.com/hanmer.house.svaneti

Telavi: Throne of the Old Empire



A statue of Georgian King Erekle II in the central square of Telavi. Photo by Mike Godwin

BLOG BY MICHAEL GODWIN

Telavi is one of the oldest cities in the nation. As a former capital of the Kingdom of Kakheti, it holds a special place for a lot of the modern residents. Even today, as an administrative center and economic hub, it commands the region.

From as far back as the Bronze Age (3300 BC to 1200 BC), this has been a settlement full of human traffic. Through the Middle Ages, it remained a political and economic node for the eastern Georgian kingdoms. Persian, Russian, and Mongolian armies punished themselves for the opportunity to control this otherwise unassuming ville.

However, spending a weekend here is an easy and inexpensive adventure. The journey out to Telavi is scenic, albeit very rustic in its visual offerings. While the traditional Marshutkas are available, for a slightly additional charge a shared taxi can be acquired from Tbilisi's Isani bus station. Simply saying "Telavi" will

alert the drivers which vehicle you should load into. After the driver finds the additional passengers to fill the vehicle, albeit sometimes over capacity, it's onto the highway east.

Meandering through the hills, the view is incredible. For one used to urban city centers, it is a welcome sight to see fields of crops, livestock, and snow-capped hills in the distance. As we near the town, the massive peaks of the Caucasus mountains begin to dominate the northern horizon. Distant farms and miniscule country homes pepper the fertile Alazani Valley, a place known very well for its incredible vineyards and wine production.

Entering Telavi from the west, it has an unassuming charm to it. A place that remains outside the grasp of so much outside influence. Even Tbilisi, unique unto itself, has succumbed to some of the trappings of European city stereotypes.

Upon stopping in the center of the town, the first smells of the open bazaar hit, and it's on foot from here. Navigating to most guest houses is easy, although many are uphill. For myself, the home is a small family operation. Greeted by the

husband and father, I am promptly shown to my room. A small and simple affair, it is perfect for the minimalistic attitude I have imbibed for this journey.

Complete with a common area, kitchen, and courtyard, it offers far more than a standard hotel room, however. A short walk into the town's central area unveils plenty of curiosities. Spice markets, fresh meat, live fish, vegetables that most likely were grown less than a few kilometers from town, and, of course, the homemade wine. For culinary needs, the town has a litany of small restaurants, bakeries, and street food vendors. One cannot go hungry in Telavi.

After a quick bite to eat, it's off to the main attraction: the castle. Telavi is home to one of the best preserved medieval castles in the country. This citadel also houses a museum, church, and a restoration of the home of Georgian king Erekle II. It is also an excellent place to capture breathtaking views of the Alazani Valley, Caucasus Mountains, and the city itself. The museum holds many incredible ancient Georgian treasures, something any history or culture enthusiast must experience.

With exceptions such as the public service building and a few of the big brand hotels, much of the town looks the same it has for decades. It is a place of immense beauty. The city sits atop a hill, and on the slopes of a small mountain range that almost separates the valley from much of western Georgia. In a position that has long held the same importance, the town has watch over the entire area.

Looking back historically, a Kakhetian noble, or even Erekle II himself, could see any activity as well as have early notice of enemy movements. This dominating position has, as mentioned, made it an important hub for centuries. Trade routes in the region all had to pass through the town, making it also a center of culinary traditions for eastern Georgian cuisine.

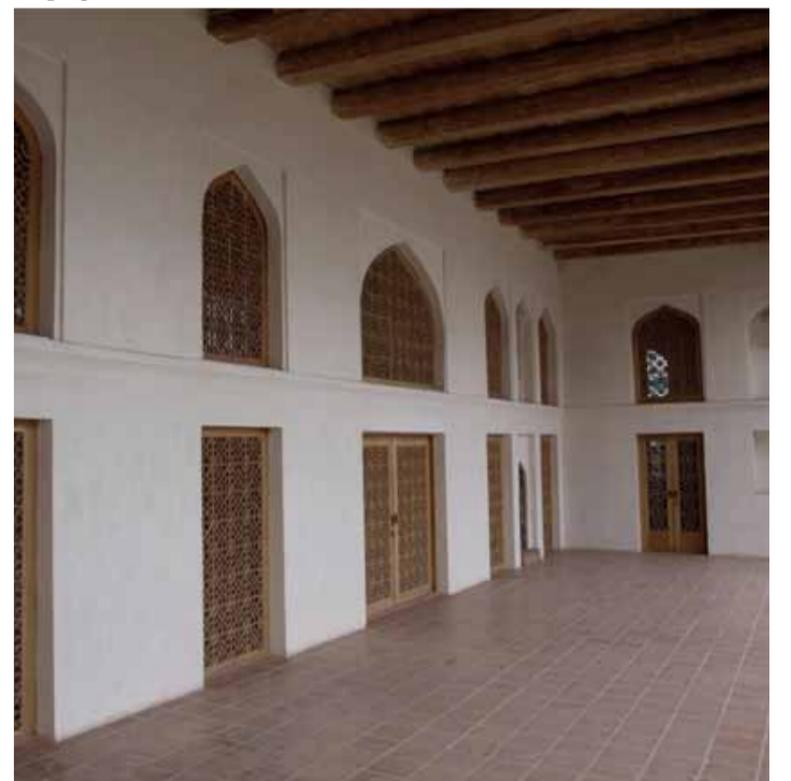
Another walk through the city's bustling bazaar shows how so many of these traditions are still alive. Local fish in a large tub of water, smoked meats hanging from display hooks, and mounds of spices and vegetables fill the stalls. Bolts of cloth of various fabrics, a litany of home-goods, and even raw iron ready to be wrought at one's home are other simple goods available. So much of these

have likely not changed since the king held court in the city between 1744 to 1762.

Towards the closing of my stay in Telavi, it was surprising to find a ride out of town. Walking towards the center of town, a taxi driver asked me if I was going to Tbilisi. It might have been the large pack on my back that gave it away, but indeed I was. After a quick stop to pick up additional passengers, we're off on the road.

The drive back is almost just as majestic as the town itself. Curving roads through immense mountain valleys, still with their snow caps, are everywhere. Small homely villages and the occasional ancient or Soviet-era ruins are all along the road. If needed, the way also has several opportunities to stop for a small meal, coffee, or any traveling needs.

Upon returning to Tbilisi, I'm very satisfied with my impromptu decision to escape the big city. I had my worries, as Telavi doesn't have the popularity as other places such as the Black Sea jewel Batumi or the ski resort town of Gudauri. Nonetheless, the small mountain town was a much needed respite, offering the change in environmental dynamic I so desired.



The entrance to the home of King Erekle II, where the king was allegedly born and died. Much of the home is still furnished with period pieces. Photo by Mike Godwin

Corona Updates: The End is in Sight



Image source: thedrum.com

BY TEAM GT

On April 7, Georgia reported 324 new Covid-19 cases, but no deaths, leading NCDC head Amiran Gamkrelidze to suggest we may this year see an official announcement from the WHO that the pandemic is over. Since that momentous day, however, there have been more cases and more deaths - one or two losses of life from the illness each day, and an average of 250 new cases per day, with a high of 392 on April 12. On the day of going to print, 237 new cases of coronavirus were registered in Georgia, 2 people died, and 648 people were said to have recovered. A total of 1,652,472 cases of coronavirus

were thus confirmed in Georgia since February 2020, of which 1,632,842 had recovered and 16,783 died.

Thursday's confirmed cases were divided by region as follows:

129 cases were confirmed in Tbilisi, Adjara - 6, Imereti - 26, Kvemo Kartli - 15, Shida Kartli - 9, Guria - 8, Samegrelo - Zemo Svaneti - 11, Kakheti - 24, Mtskheta-Mtianeti - 2, Samtskhe-Javakheti - 2, Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti - 5.

2,869,848 people have been fully vaccinated so far.

On April 11, Georgian PM Irakli Garibashvili said that Coronavirus in Georgia has almost been "defeated," while "the system has not faced any challenges in terms of virus management."

"I want to tell our citizens with joy that Covid is almost defeated. I would like to remind the skeptics who criticized

my statements two months ago. Green cards were abolished after Omicron came into circulation because they became pointless. We were criticized by some experts, but we saw, in just two months, that the process was being well managed by the Minister, the Government, and the Council, and the situation stabilized. The system had no challenges in terms of management. There are around 100 cases today, which means the crisis has been overcome. We have lifted a number of restrictions, we have abolished the obligation to wear a mask outdoors, citizens will have more freedom in this area, and this stress and pressure will be removed," said Garibashvili.

On February 1, the regulation that citizens need to show proof of vaccination ("Green Passports") in order to access facilities in Georgia was withdrawn by the government.



US Report Critical on Human Rights Practices in Georgia

The Government took steps to investigate some officials for human rights abuses, but impunity remained a problem, reads the 2021 Report on Human Rights Practices in Georgia, issued by the US Department of State.

"Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: serious problems with the independence of the judiciary along with arbitrary or selective detentions, investigations, and prosecutions widely considered to be politically motivated; unlawful interference

with privacy; violence and threats of violence against journalists; limited respect for freedom of peaceful assembly and association; and crimes involving violence or threats targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex persons and activists.

"The Government took steps to investigate some officials for human rights abuses, but impunity remained a problem. The Government's failure to credibly investigate and prosecute the organizers of violence on July 5-6 resulted in impunity for those abuses," reads the report.

CULTURE

Rehabilitation of Culture House in Marani Village Kicks Off

At the initiative of the Ministry of Culture, the design of the restoration of the unique culture house in the Abasha Municipality village of Marani has been completed and its rehabilitation is starting, after which it will become a multicultural center of modern standards.

The building was given the status of a cultural heritage monument in 2016. It is claimed to have been designed by Italian architects.

At the initiative of the Ministry of Culture, the rehabilitation project of the Marani culture house was carried out in

December 2021, for which the Ministry spent 133,331 GEL. The design work has since been completed.

The reconstruction-rehabilitation of the Shroma Culture House is currently underway, as a result of which, the historical look of the building, all the architectural elements, and the artistic decor left in the exterior or interior of the building will be fully preserved and restored.

The Shroma Culture House was built in the late 19th, early 20th century.

Due to overhaul and remodeling in the 1980s, only the mosaic floor and brick pattern was kept.



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