

JICA Georgia office is pleased to announce an opening for the position of National Staff (Clerk)



Description of the Job:
 ** Assisting to make accounting documents and payment;
 ** Conducting secretarial work for Japanese Staff and Japanese Overseas volunteers (JOCV);
 ** Making document registration, circulation and filing;
 ** Arranging business trip - to reserve tickets and accommodation, etc.;
 ** Dealing with official letters and distribute received letters;
 ** Supporting JOCV activities, including leaving, Travel in regions.
 ** Other tasks given by Resident Representative;

PREFERABLE BUT NOT MANDATORY SKILLS:
 ** Familiarity with terms related to engineering and finance is preferred;
 ** language skill is desired.

TERM:
 From June, 2022 till March 31, 2023 with possible extension
 (Probation period is 3 months. The employer will be able to terminate the contract depending on the performance during the probation period).

SALARY:
 Actual amount will be adjusted based on the experience

SKILLS AND REQUIREMENTS:
 ** University degree;
 ** Highly proficient in spoken and written Georgian and English (regarding English proficiency, certificate is necessary);
 ** Knowledge of Japanese is preferable;
 ** Computer literacy (word, excel, power point etc) and troubleshooting;
 ** At least three years work experience in the similar field;
 ** Analytical, open-minded, honest character;
 ** Excellent communication and interpersonal skills;
 ** Well-organized; strong sense of responsibility; hard working;
 ** Willingness to go to the field trips;

WORKING HOURS:
 Monday - Friday, 9:30 - 18:00 (with lunch break from 13:00 - 14:00)
 Holidays (Georgian National holidays).
 Annual Paid leave: 24 days.

NEXT STEP:
 Only shortlisted persons will be notified by email and invited to the interview. Interested candidates are required to send the CV (only in English) with two contact information from previous workplaces/schools and copies of certificates to: jicageorgia@gmail.com.
 All files must be submitted in PDF format and not to exceed 3MB size. Deadline: May 27, 2022.

Borjomi Ready to Transfer Part of Its Shares to Georgian Gov't Free of Charge

BY ANA DUMBADZE

IDS Borjomi International announced today that further to negotiations with the Government of Georgia, its controlling company has submitted an official proposal to transfer a part of shares in IDS Borjomi International to the Government of Georgia free of charge.

The company says this step will allow the Government to participate in the management of IDS Borjomi International.

“Due to the recent negative developments in the region, IDS Borjomi International has been experiencing an interruption of business and difficulties with banking services, as a result of which it shut down its production factories in Borjomi, Georgia, with over a thousand of its employees facing the risk of unemployment.

“Upon acceptance of the proposal made by IDS Borjomi International’s controlling company to the Government of Georgia, IDS Borjomi Georgia will be able to continue its operations in the ordinary course,” reads the statement.

On April 29, the company announced that it was “temporarily” suspending the production of mineral water at both Borjomi bottling plants.



The main owner of Borjomi is Alpha Group of the sanctioned Russian oligarch, Mikhail Fridman.

IDS Borjomi - Georgia has not specified what part of the share it is offering the government.



Source: Geostat

Geostat: Exports Growing, Largest Partners China & Russia

BY ANA DUMBADZE

The latest data provided by the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat) show that in January-April 2022, Georgian exports (excluding non-declared exports) equaled \$1,587.5 million, 32.8% higher year-on-year. The share of the domestic exports in total export constituted 76.1% and amounted to \$1,207.6 million, 37.1% higher than the same period of 2021.

The same source shows that in January-

April 2022 the share of the top ten trading partners by domestic exports in the total domestic exports of Georgia amounted to 79.7%. The top partners were China (\$277.2 million), Russia (\$138.3 million) and Bulgaria (\$128.8 million).

In January-April, copper ores and concentrates reclaimed first in the list of top export items, equaling \$363.3 million, or 30.1% of total exports. The exports of ferroalloys totaled \$195.4 million and their share in the total exports amounted to 16.2%. The exports of nitrogenous fertilizers occupied third place standing at \$128.3 million and constituting 10.6% of the total exports.

Irakli Garibashvili Meets with Jens Stoltenberg

BY ANA DUMBADZE

Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Garibashvili met with the Secretary General of NATO Jens Stoltenberg at his residence during his working visit to Brussels, the press service of the Georgian Government Administration reported.

The meeting once again highlighted Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic aspirations, which is a top priority of the country’s foreign and security policy.

The Head of Government highlighted the close cooperation of Georgia with the Alliance in the process of Euro-Atlantic integration, as a result of which

Georgia effectively uses all the practical tools on the path to membership.

The meeting underlined the strong support and close cooperation of both the Alliance and the partner countries towards Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic aspirations. The reforms implemented by Georgia on the way to integration into the Alliance were positively assessed.

“At the meeting with the Secretary General, the role of Georgia as a strong and reliable partner of the Alliance and its important contribution to the process of ensuring global security, as well as ensuring the security of the Black Sea region was reiterated.

“At the meeting, the parties expressed hope that Georgia’s progress and aspirations will be adequately reflected in the Alliance’s decisions in terms of political

support for the country’s aspirations and strengthening of its practical capabilities.

“The sides also discussed the issues and expectations in preparation for the NATO Madrid Summit.

“The conversation also touched on the security environment in the region and the war in Ukraine, on which the Prime Minister reiterated the solidarity of the Georgian people towards the Ukrainian people.

“The Secretary General of the Alliance reiterated his support for Georgia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.

“The Prime Minister of Georgia thanked the Secretary General for his personal efforts and for playing a key role in Georgia’s progress on the path to NATO integration,” reports the press service.



Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: Week 11



BY ANA DUMBADZE

In the 11th week of devastating war between Russia and Ukraine, the key developments are as follows:

- Russian troops in the east of Ukraine have been focusing efforts on villages and crossroads instead of major cities and expanses of territory, an apparent sign of Moscow's reduced ambitions, the Pentagon said.

- Moscow claimed that nearly 700 more Ukrainian fighters surrendered in Mariupol after Ukraine gave up its last stronghold at the Azovstal steel plant, according to Reuters. Ukraine has so far confirmed the surrender of about 250 fighters.

- Mariupol officials warned of a possible "environmental catastrophe" after Russia's siege of the steel facility. They said tens of thousands of tons of toxic chemicals stored there could leak into the Sea of Azov, and subsequently the Black and Mediterranean seas.

AZOVSTAL

This week's main event in Ukraine was the evacuation of wounded fighters from the Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol, which until now remained a symbol of the dedicated fight and resistance of Ukrainians. Azovstal was the last stronghold of resistance in the shattered port city.

More than 260 Ukrainian fighters, including those badly wounded, have been evacuated from the Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol and taken to areas under Russian control.

Branded "heroes of our time" by the General Staff of Ukraine's Armed Forces, scores of troops have been trapped in the bombed remains of the giant plant for 82 days.

Ukraine's Deputy Defense Minister Anna Malyar said that, on Monday, 53 seriously wounded fighters were taken to a hospital in Novoazovsk.

An additional 211 fighters were evacuated to Olenivka through a humanitarian corridor.

"An exchange will be worked out to get

them home," Malyar said.

The Ukrainian military reports Russian troops kept up their blockade of the plant on Tuesday.

The army's General Staff said in a post on its official Facebook profile that "in Mariupol, the enemy concentrated its main efforts on blocking our units in the area of the Azovstal plant."

Russia called the operation a "mass surrender." The Ukrainians avoided using that word, but said the garrison had completed its mission, and refused to disclose the number of fighters who remain there.

Those who have been evacuated will be interrogated, Russia's main federal investigative body has said, as part of its probe into alleged "crimes committed by the Ukrainian regime against the civilian population" in Ukraine's industrial east.

Russia's Investigative Committee said in a Telegram post that "Russian investigators will identify the nationalists (and) test whether they have been involved in crimes committed against the civilian population."

It did not provide any additional information regarding the location or legal status of the Ukrainian fighters.

Aside from the steel plant, the besieged city of Mariupol is under complete Russian control.

The full capture of Azovstal would be significant for Russia, as it would give Moscow its biggest victory of the war yet and could help free up forces for offensive action elsewhere in eastern Ukraine, a key focus of Russia's following a series of setbacks.

Against this background, President Volodymyr Zelensky asserts Ukraine is determined to reclaim control over the southern cities of Kherson, Melitopol, Berdiansk, Enerhodar and Mariupol, now occupied by Russian troops.

"All of our cities and communities under occupation - under temporary occupation - should know that Ukraine



will be returned," Zelensky said.

Meanwhile, Russia continues to focus and attack eastern Ukraine. Russian shelling in Donetsk continues. "The situation has deteriorated over the last week or so," said Al Jazeera's Assed Baig, reporting from the town of Bakhmut in the eastern Donetsk region.

"The mayor of the town has told residents to leave, the situation is very tense," Baig said, adding that those who remain have to deal with no electricity as Russian forces have destroyed power lines.

ADVISER: UKRAINE WON'T GIVE UP ANY TERRITORY TO RUSSIA

Ukraine will not compromise with Russia and will not give up any territory, an adviser to Zelensky has said.

"The only option for reconciliation is Russia's capitulation, the withdrawal of troops, and talks on compensation. This is the principle position of the government," Oleksiy Arestovych told Channel 24.

Arestovych said he believed some countries wanted a repeat of the Minsk agreements, which had sought unsuccessfully to end the war in Ukraine's Donbas region since 2014.

But, he said, although some countries would try to negotiate, "there will be no

option where we allow Russians to stay here."

UKRAINE BEGINS ITS FIRST WAR CRIMES TRIAL

Eleven weeks into the Russian invasion, Ukraine began holding its first war crimes trial on Wednesday.

Vadim Shishimarin, a 21-year-old Russian soldier, admitted to shooting Oleksandr Shelipov, a 62-year-old man, a few days after the invasion began. He, pleading guilty, faces life in jail.



POLITICS

A War of Words: The "Z" and the "L"

BY MICHAEL GODWIN

In the lead-up to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, many analysts and observers noticed military equipment bearing particularly unique markings. Social media was rife with videos of tanks painted with English letters, one in particular being not used in the Cyrillic alphabet. "Os," "As," and various other symbols painted somewhat crudely onto these vehicles. The internet was bustling with speculations and theories as to their meaning.

After the initial invasion, several open source intelligence sources began to piece together how these various insignia were organized. With the multiple invasion points, and the similarity of many of the armored vehicles used by both sides, these became an easy way to identify friends and enemies on the battlefield.

Of these "Identification Friend-or-Foe" symbols, commonly abbreviated in military circles as IFF, the most prominent was the Latin letter "Z." This rapidly became an ideogram of Russia's intentions in Ukraine. In short time, it emblazoned buildings, flags, cars, and even children's clothing. People painted this, especially in the orange and black colors of the Ribbon of Saint George, across the Russian and Eastern European world.

"Z" became a symbol of Russian aggression almost overnight. Some Western media and commentary sources have compared it to the Swastika of the Nazi Party in the 1930s, along with the fascist ideological statements behind each. Many media outlets coined the term "zwastika"



A view of a gift shop in Moscow, Russia, selling souvenirs and products with the letter "Z" among other Soviet and Putin motifs. By Pavel Pavlov/Anadolu Agency

to frame this comparison. As a result, some countries, Georgia included, have taken steps to restrict or outlaw the use of the letter in public usage.

In Russia, the letter has become a symbol of loyalty to the Kremlin. The Russian Ministry of Defense has stated that the letter is an abbreviation of their battlecry "for victory," or in Russian Cyrillic "за победу." They later changed the meaning to something more palatable to Western tastes, stating it meant "for peace, or "за мир." Both statements in Russian start with the same "z" sound.

It is more likely these were reactions rather than a planned propaganda move. Many others in the military analysis community have stated that the "Z" was meant for the Russian word "zapad," or "запад," meaning "west" and was a battlefield signifier for the western portion of the invasion forces. This theory became more verifiable, as the other symbols coincided with this model. The Latin

letter "V" was theorized to be shorthand for "vostok" or "восток" meaning "east."

However, both of these statements came after the popularization of the "Z" symbol in social media. As shorthand for support for the Russian invasion, it was the easy method to show your side in the conflict. Yet, while many used the blue and gold of the Ukrainian flag to show their opposition, lately, there has been another flag making its colors known.

A recent group has begun to show its prominence in Ukraine, as well as various cities across the Russian Federation. While this new "Freedom of Russia Legion" has been seen active as a military unit in Ukraine, they have gained a following in Russia as a form of resistance. Multiple attacks on police and local infrastructure have been attributed to them.

A part of their efforts have been framed by the use of the Latin letter "L," short-

hand for "Legion" in white and blue colors. This color selection is supposedly from the Russian flag without its red bar. Many in the opposition see the Russian flag as a sign of imperialism, militarism, and authoritarianism, the red bar being a key part of this.

This resistance indicates a fracturing of Kremlin control over the country. While Russian media has scrubbed all mention of these groups, their prevalence is noticeable in some social media and open source information sources. While many of the incidents inside Russia can't be verifiably attributed to these groups, the frequency and location of these attacks lend to the probability that the "L" is targeting these vulnerable points with precision.

The Kremlin relies on a strict regime of curated information and dominion in the proverbial "town square." Any faction that splits from the authorized nar-

rative is found and crushed with impunity, as has been seen with famous dissident Alexei Navalny. An anti-corruption activist, he has been silenced and jailed due to his perceived inability to follow the Kremlin's line of information.

While these symbols are only a graphic representation of the ideological campaigns that follow them, the "Z" and the "L" are beginning to clash. This competition has the potential to tear Russian society apart, leaving the Kremlin with more than it can handle. This separation is reportedly already occurring behind closed doors at the top of Russia's elite. With many beginning to question the viability of Russian President Vladimir Putin's operation in Ukraine and the stability of his control, this war of words, or letters, could be the catalyst for significant change across the Russian Federation.



Graffiti in Russia with "свобода россия" or "Freedom of Russia" on the side of a building, allegedly from a member of the Russian Freedom Legion. By Freedom of Russia Legion (@Russialegion) via Twitter

Illegal Presidential Elections in the Tskhinvali Region: Why Bibilov Lost and What to Anticipate in Future

ANALYSIS BY MAMUKA KOMAKHIA, ANALYST, RUSSIA MONITOR PROJECT MANAGER IN GFSIS.

At the beginning of May, the 6th illegitimate presidential elections were held in the Tskhinvali region since the end of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict. The incumbent President, Anatoly Bibilov, lost to Alan Gagloyev in the second round of the elections. In the de facto republic, most presidents are unable to run for a second term.

DEVELOPMENTS BEFORE 2022

The first de facto presidential elections in the Tskhinvali region were held in 1996, with Ludwig Chibirov winning. In 2001, despite having Moscow's support, Mr. Chibirov lost to Eduard Kokoity, a businessman who had recently returned from Russia. Until now, Kokoity is the only president to manage to win a second term: He received 98.1% of the vote in 2006.

The next elections were held in 2011-2012 amid a political crisis. Anatoly Bibilov lost, despite Moscow's support (he personally met with the Russian President, Dmitry Medvedev, before the elections), after which a political crisis broke out in the de facto republic, leading to re-elections. Leonid Tibilov won in that runoff election, one in which Bibilov was no longer participating. In the 2017 elections, Bibilov beat Tibilov. Tibilov also met with the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, before the elections; however, a crucial role in determining the fate of the elections was played by Putin's influential aide, Vladislav Surkov, who is said to have lobbied for Bibilov's candidacy.

THE 2022 ELECTIONS THE PRE-ELECTION CAMPAIGN

Bibilov took the lead from the start and, using legal leverage, prevented several powerful rivals from registering as "presidential" candidates. Among them were the former de facto defence minister, Ibragim Gassiev, and an opposition member of the de facto parliament, Davit Sanakoev. Bibilov's main rivals were Alan Gagloyev, the leader of the Nykhaz Party; Gary Muldarov, an MP; Alexander Pliev, the Vice-Speaker of the de facto parliament; and Dimitri Tassoev, a former MP.

In the run-up to the election, the opponents did not intimidate each other during televised debates, during which their criticism often turned into insults. Bibilov's election campaign was also assisted by Russian political technologists. Gagloyev's brother, who is accused of triple murder, has been the subject of numerous videos, for which relatives of the deceased were also recorded in Daghestan. For its part, Gagloyev's team also freely turned to "black PR."



Alan Gagloyev. Source: Vkontakte

Bibilov made a referendum on joining Russia the main message of his election campaign to succeed. He tried to portray Gagloyev as an anti-Russian candidate who believed that the referendum issue was not in Russia's interests at this stage, and that it only served Bibilov's election goals.

Bibilov personally went to Donbas to gain Moscow's support, and facilitated the dispatch of ethnic Ossetian contractors and volunteers employed at the Russian 4th military base to Ukraine to participate in the Russian military aggression there. The issue soon turned negative on Bibilov, as a number of the military servicemen withdrew from the war, openly criticizing the attitude towards them, which had manifested in difficult conditions in conducting the war, the fact they were given damaged military equipment to use, and the incompetence of the Russian military commanders.

THE FIRST ROUND

On April 10, in the first round of the elections, Gagloyev received 36.9% of the vote (10,705 votes) and Bibilov 33.5% (9,706). A total of 28,976 people participated in the illegitimate elections, which equals 74.26% of the total number of "voters." The ethnic Georgian population displaced from the Tskhinvali region after the 1991-1992 and August 2008 wars did not participate in the elections.

In the first round, Gagloyev also succeeded in the occupied Akhlagori municipality which is populated by ethnic Georgians. He promised them he would open the so-called border with the rest of Georgia. Crossing points connecting the Tskhinvali region and the rest of Georgia have been closed since September 2019, after a Georgian police checkpoint was set up near the village of Chorchana. Bibilov temporarily opened the crossing point at Easter, April 21-25, in hopes of gaining the support of local ethnic Georgian voters himself.

THE SECOND ROUND

The second round of elections was first scheduled for April 28 but, due to complaints from three "citizens" of the so-called South Ossetia, the date of the

second round was set for May 8. The postponement of the date was presumably ordered by Bibilov, who needed some time to mobilize supporters for a decisive battle. For his part, Gagloyev also used this time to rally support from the other opposition candidates.

In the second round, Gagloyev received 56.09% (16,134 votes) and Bibilov 40.90% (11,767). 3.01% (867) voted against all candidates. A total of 29,423 people participated in the second round, 73.93% of the total number of voters. Gagloyev's advantage was so obvious that Bibilov soon conceded his defeat and wished the winner Gagloyev fruitful work. The inauguration of the new de facto president will take place on May 24.

WHY DID BIBILOV LOSE?

Jabiev's case is the black spot of Bibilov's presidency. In August 2020, Inal Jabiev, who was arrested for attempting to assassinate the de facto Interior Minister of the Tskhinvali region, Igor Naniyev, died as a result of violence by law enforcement officials. Jabiev's death was followed by a long protest from the local population. Bibilov was even forced to oust the government, but refused to release the Prosecutor General, Uruzmag Jagaev. In protest, opposition members of the de facto parliament refused to attend sessions.

Bibilov's reputation was also damaged by the so-called Chorchana-Tsnelisi crisis, which was caused by the deployment of a Georgian police checkpoint near the occupation line. He was accused of inaction. In addition, Bibilov was accused of conceding 200 square kilometers of "Ossetian" land to Georgia.

Bibilov was often accused of corruption and cigarette smuggling. According to his opponents, the funds allocated by Russia were not spent properly.

WHO IS ALAN GAGLOYEV?

Gagloyev was born in 1981 in Tskhinvali. In 2002, he graduated from the Faculty of Economics and Law of the "South Ossetian State University." In 2003, he took advanced training courses in Vladikavkaz within the framework of the Presidential Training Program of the

Russian Federation. He worked for the Ministry of Economic Development of the de facto republic in 2002, although much of his career has been connected with the State Security Committee, where he worked from 2004 to 2017. His biographical records indicate that he also participated in the 2008 Russia-Georgia war. In 2017, he participated in the illegitimate presidential elections but without success, and in 2020, he became the leader of the parliamentary opposition party Nykhas.

WHAT CHALLENGES WILL GAGLOYEV FACE?

Gagloyev will have to solve a number of problems. At the initial stage, the main political challenge will be the formation of a "government" where the interests of all his supporters must be protected. He was supported by all the opposition candidates and therefore they now expect that their assistance will be properly appreciated. In addition, public expectations are quite high. Dissatisfaction with Bibilov was so great that Gagloyev was even supported by voters with different political sympathies. Consequently, after the defeat of Bibilov, their claims will be directed towards Gagloyev.

Gagloyev's main problem will be overcoming the economic challenge. While the Russian military aggression continues in Ukraine, funding for the Tskhinvali region is being reduced, the Russian Ministry of Economy announced. Against the background of the fact that the incomes of the region are practically dependent on Russia and there are no resources to locally increase incomes, solving the economic problems of the population will be Gagloyev's main headache. A prolonged war in Ukraine will deepen the crisis in Russia, which will exacerbate Gagloyev's political and economic challenges.

ABOUT THE REFERENDUM

Despite his defeat, Bibilov said that a referendum on the unification of "South Ossetia" with Russia will be held. He claims that all the necessary documents have already been collected and handed over to the Central Election Commission. However, this issue was part of Bibilov's pre-election campaign and may lose its relevance under Gagloyev's rule, as the issue of the referendum is not a priority for Russia at this stage either. Leonid Kalashnikov, a member of the State Duma and Chairman of the 'Committee on CIS Affairs, Eurasian Integration and Relations with Compatriots,' said that Gagloyev was in no hurry to hold the referendum. This issue depends more on Moscow, on how ready Russia and Belarus are to expand the Allied State.

WHAT WILL CHANGE FOR RUSSIA?

Although Andrey Turchak, the Secretary General of the ruling United Russia Party, came to Tskhinvali to support Bibilov in

the run-up to the election, Kremlin officials overseeing the direction of the Tskhinvali region did not have a clear favourite. Dmitry Kozak, the Deputy Head of the Administration of the President of Russia, responsible for the occupied regions of Georgia, met with both candidates after the first round. Russian state media also interviewed both.

The Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, Andrey Rudenko, who oversees the post-Soviet space and the occupied regions of Georgia, said that "after Gagloyev's victory in the presidential election, Russia hopes to preserve the legacy of relations with South Ossetia." He added: "We expect everything to be fine."

A delegation of the Council of the Russian Federation also positively assessed the election process. According to the Head of the delegation, the Senator Sergey Tsekov, Russian senators did not observe any violations. According to Vladimir Jabarov, a member of the Federation Council and the First Deputy Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, the change of leadership will not affect relations between Tskhinvali and Moscow, as both candidates are pro-Russian.

Various ruling groups in Russia may have had their own candidate in the elections, but in the end, Gagloyev's figure will not have any radical impact on relations with Russia. The vast majority of Ossetian politicians are pro-Russian.

WHAT WILL CHANGE FOR GEORGIA?

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia condemned the so-called presidential elections in the occupied Tskhinvali region held by Russia. "Such illegal actions violate the fundamental principles and norms of international law and grossly violate Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders," it said.

Russia's military-political influence over the Tskhinvali region is so high that it is unlikely that anything will radically change in Georgian-Ossetian relations in the short term. The current format of bilateral relations is likely to be maintained - the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (Ergneti meetings) and the fate of the Geneva International Discussions will depend on relations between the West and Russia. The only tangible issue that Gagloyev can solve in the first stage of his career is the opening of the so-called crossing points, which will be a relief for the ethnic Georgian population living in the occupied region. As for the long-term perspective (the perspective after the end of the war in Ukraine), the dynamics of Georgian-Ossetian relations will be decisively affected by the outcome of the war in Ukraine and the degree of Russian military-political or economic influence over the occupied regions of Georgia.

First printed by GFSIS

Russia, and the Rest of Us

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

Russia, the legal successor to the Soviet Union, has done all it has to act and be somewhat different from its predecessor. This is a practical impossibility, however, because the desire to reconstruct the former USSR has never fully escaped the Russian political imagination. You simply cannot erase that model of imperial social-political structure from the average Russian mind, and most Russians today want Russia to be strong and dominant as a military and political power, awing the planet with its supremacy.

As such, we don't need to go into any in-depth scholarly research to under-

stand the secret of Putin's firm grip on power, although almost the entire world wants him out. True, as a consequence of his war with Ukraine, he now appears feeble in the eyes of the world than before the war, but he is also emerging as a strongman in his own vast land. By all appearances, he is maintaining economic stability within the country, though we can't be sure whether that firmness is factual or ornamental. The ruble is hanging in there, demonstrating an unlikely tendency of healthily matching the dollar; nobody knows for sure how the western sanctions are specifically affecting the everyday lives of the Russian rank-and-file, and rumor has it that the sanctions are being efficiently eschewed; there is no clear forecast of what might happen to Russia if the country is abandoned by the hun-

dreds of foreign companies that have profusely contributed to the state budget all these fruitful years; and most analysts are refraining from giving us a clear picture of the future consumer market in Russia, whether it be the presumed economic collapse and financial default, or not.

But there is a Russian generation to come that might think differently from today's empire-minded and stuck-in-the-past older Russian patriots. Those young men and women might someday be held responsible for the damage their fathers and mothers have done to the peaceful and productive world order.

The war in Ukraine continues to rage, although it was premeditated as a regular Russian blitzkrieg. Leaders of the world, all of them, are calling for an end to it, but in vain. Russia is no longer able

or willing to stop it, because the national exigency dictates it so. Applications for NATO membership are piling up in Europe; neutrality has lost its meaning and forfeited its value; the anti-Russian sanctions have become the smartest punitive invention of our time, although they have lately been upheld as an acute subject of lengthy international discussion in expectation of frightening corollaries; and Russian gas and oil has become a bitter apple of discord because the world is willing to live without them, but doesn't feel completely capable of doing so. Discrepancies like this have shattered the earth, threatening us that this is only a harbinger of something worse to come.

Russia has introduced a new model of dichotomy, describing Mankind as made up of nations "friendly" and "unfriendly" to it. As the head of the nation is trying to prove, the Russian culture and economy will never perish - vice versa, it will survive all those temporary obscurities

and inconveniences because it knows how to adapt to crises, if there are any at all. It is not very clear whether this presidential statement is meant as a way to secure a steady future for his people, at least in terms of national morale, or if it is his actual belief that nothing much is happening. Amazingly, he is taking into his unabashed stride the inflation hitting the roof and the demand-supply combination remaining precarious, an example of the famous serenity and adaptability of the Russian people, characteristics which have been nursed in Russian men and women since the revolutionary years at the turn of the 20th century.

This is an overall description of the current Russian politeconomical landscape, as the shelling of Ukraine goes on, non-stop. Now, we ask, will the recent diplomatic choices made by Georgia towards Russia at the crucial moment of Russia's international isolation and national solitude be justified?

“The Baltic Sea Will Become a NATO Lake” – Interview with Gen. Major Pekka Toveri, Former Intelligence Chief of the General Staff of the Finnish Defense Forces

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

It's all Putin's fault... We had a balance, and it was Putin who decided to change that balance, says Pekka Toveri, a retired Finnish major general who served as Intelligence Chief of the General Staff of the Defense Forces from 2019 to 2020, when talking to RFE/RL about Finland's NATO application and the possible Russian blowback.

Finland's pro-NATO President Sauli Niinisto this week traveled to Sweden and witnessed Swedish Foreign Minister Ann Linde's televised signing of the country's official application, which she said would go to NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg alongside a similar paper from Finland.

The NATO summit will be held in Madrid on June 28-30. NATO officials have indicated that the accession protocols for Finland and Sweden could be signed at that time.

Yet, on Tuesday, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said he will not be supporting their bids, as he is “angered by their willingness to host Kurdish militants.”

Without the support of all NATO members, Sweden and Finland cannot join the military alliance.

THE USUAL RATIFICATION PROCESS TAKES AT LEAST A YEAR, IF NOT YEARS. BUT IN THIS CASE?

It's difficult to say. I don't believe it will take a year because the United States is putting a lot of pressure and trying to coerce the members to handle this as fast as possible. I would say it should be expected by the end of the year, but it will still take at least half a year.

THERE MIGHT BE POSSIBLE STUMBLING BLOCKS ALONG THE WAY – TURKEY, HUNGARY, EVEN THE CROATIAN PRESIDENT SEEMS TO BE UNWILLING TO COMMIT. CAN THE US PERSUADE THEM?

The Croatian President, as I understand, has a “special” relationship with the Russians, but, thankfully, the Croatian government has a totally different view and the president is not the one who makes that call. Turkey might be a more interesting challenge. There's been discussion between the Finnish political leadership and Turkey already about this, and I think what Erdogan wants to do now is what we in Finland call “milk the cow”: he wants to see what he can get out of this from the US or NATO before agreeing. I don't think Hungary is such a big problem - you have to remember that the biggest NATO countries, barring the UK, are also biggest EU countries, and Hungary is getting a lot of money from the EU. So I don't think that President Orban is willing to risk that and gain the hatred of both



Pekka Toveri. Source: forssanlehti.fi

NATO and the EU by making things difficult for Finland.

IT BEING A MILESTONE EVENT, HOW DOES IT CHANGE THE SECURITY PARADIGM VIS A VIS RUSSIA?

From Russia's point of view, it's a big hit because now the Baltic Sea will become a lake of NATO. Russia will retain its couple 100 kilometers of shoreline there, but it will be 90% surrounded by NATO countries. So Russia's ability to run military operations there will be practically zero.

FINNISH PRESIDENT SAULI NIINISTO FAMOUSLY SAID IF THE RUSSIANS AREN'T PLEASED, THEY SHOULD LOOK IN THE MIRROR. TO WHAT EXTENT IS PRESIDENT PUTIN TO BLAME FOR THIS OUTCOME?

It's all his fault. For years, Russia has said Finland shouldn't join NATO, but our answer was that it's Finland's decision, which would be made based on Finland's needs. But then, in December, President Putin said that Finland cannot join NATO, that there would be consequences. That was a direct threat, trying to force Finland's hand. And we saw after the aggression in Ukraine that Putin is blatantly willing to use force against even a fellow Slavic nation. That's what our President means when he says: “You should look in the mirror; it's your fault, not our fault”. We had a balance in this area, and it was Putin who decided to change that balance.

THE KREMLIN IS THREATENING “MILITARY – POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES.” IS THAT AN EMPTY THREAT?

WHAT CAN RUSSIA DO?

I'd say that [Russia's] possibilities are somewhat limited. Traditionally, they relied on political, economic and military pressure. There's no significant pro-Russian political power left anymore, so they don't have this leverage. The economic impact is very small, because even before war, our trade with Russia was something like 5% of the total trade in Finland, and now it's half of that and still going down. So there's not much they can stop. They could of course stop sending us gas. But Russian energy is a very small part of Finnish energy consumption. It might hurt for a couple of weeks while southern areas of industry replace the Russian gas, but it's not going to cripple our economy in anyway. When it comes to military power – Russia's forces are tied up in Ukraine, they don't have enough [to do anything]. Barring nuclear weapons, in conventional terms, they don't have anything with which they could seriously threaten Finland's independence and existence with in such a way that they could force our hand, especially now that the UK and some other NATO countries are giving us assurance of military support if we are attacked.

PUTIN SAYS HE WON'T OBJECT TO MEMBERSHIP PER SE, IT'S NATO INFRASTRUCTURE HE'S WORRIED ABOUT. WHAT NATO MILITARY INFRASTRUCTURE DO YOU EXPECT TO BE INTRODUCED IN FINLAND?

That is a difficult question to answer. It would totally depend on the situation. First of all, I doubt there would be separate NATO bases in Finland. If there were Air Force or Navy units arriving, they would probably use existing Finnish bases that could maybe be enlarged



Even as a NATO member, responsibility to defend Finland lies 99% on Finns, we can't lower our guard

a bit if needed. The same goes to Army units. Instead of major units, I could see perhaps a need for certain capabilities that we don't have ourselves just now, like long distance Air Defence/Ballistic Missile Defense units etc.

Overall, I don't think that there would be a need to permanently base NATO units in Finland, but to improve our capability to receive temporary reinforcement if needed.

THE SECURITY PACT WITH THE UK SEES PM JOHNSON OFFERING TO “PROVIDE SUPPORT” IF THE TWO NORDIC NATIONS ARE ATTACKED. HOW MUCH SUPPORT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT AND IN WHAT MANNER?

It's not a security guarantee. It's not a government to government agreement ratified by Parliament. It's an assurance, meaning that, that if we were attacked, we could have support which would be decided between Finland and the UK. The PM would probably have to go to Parliament, ask them to give him the powers to provide such support. So it's a bit vague, yes, and depends on the situation, what Russia would do, what's available and needed.

FINLAND SHARES A 1,340-KILOMETER LAND BORDER WITH RUSSIA. THAT'S NOT A CAUSE OF CONCERN IF THEY ARE UP TO MISCHIEF?

[laughs] The thing is that 90% of that border is wilderness, its forest terrain, no road, no network, no anything. Attacking with a land force across the border is nearly impossible. They could use the roads down south but they don't have any land force to do that, 80 % of their combat-capable land force is tied up in Ukraine.

The outposts near the Finnish border have been emptied. They could try their luck with an air attack, but our air defenses and Air force is in pretty good shape - especially considering the fact that we've seen the “quality” of the Russian Air Force in Ukraine, it's really not too impressive. So it would be a very big risk for Russia to try something like that. I'd say that the most vulnerable thing is communication networks, because Finland is logistically an island, almost 90% of our trade goes via Western sea lines of communications, and there if you go down south, that is where the major Baltic Sea forces that Russia has are, at Kaliningrad, close to Poland. But again, that's where the assurances given by some of the NATO countries are important, because NATO has overwhelming maritime force in the Baltic Sea. So I think they could help there, if Russia were to decide to do something like that.

FINLAND'S DEFENSE FORCES ARE ALREADY INTEROPERABLE WITH NATO, BUT STILL – DOES IT SPELL ANY CHANGES FOR FINLAND'S CONSCRIPTION SYSTEM?

No, I don't expect any changes. You know, we are a small country with a big defense capability. We've seen in Finland that the most important part of our defenses is building willingness to defend the country among the population - that comes through general conscription, because that way, every family more or less is tied up in the defense. And we saw that when the Cold War ended, many countries left the conscription system - in those countries, the population's willingness to defend their country went down drastically. We still need the conscription system, for sure - even as a NATO member, responsibility to defend Finland lies 99% on Finns, we can't lower our guard.

SHOULD WE EXPECT GROWING NUMBERS IN THE PROFESSIONAL STANDING ARMY?

Well, the Finnish government has already allocated some more money for defense, and part of that money will be used to increase the amount of professional standing troops, but it's not a big change. We currently have 12,500 professionals in the defense forces, and we are talking about increasing it by a couple of hundred on the longer term, +1000 max. The only standing professional force for the Finnish army at the moment is special operation units. I don't believe that we would create any professional tank companies, for example.



Erdogan wants to “milk the cow” on the Finland issue - he wants to see what he can get out of this from US or NATO before agreeing



President of Finland Sauli Niinisto, left, and Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson attend a joint news conference in Stockholm, Tuesday May 17. By Anders Wiklund/AP

Essence of Economic Sanction: A Few Opinions against the Backdrop of the War. Part II

ANALYSIS BY VICTOR KIPIANI,
CHAIRMAN OF GEOCASE

The questions raised since the start of the war are pressing today: Can sanctions enacted in several various stages stop Russia? How effective are already enacted sanctions? What can additionally be enacted to achieve full effectiveness of sanctions?

The above questions are even more pressing when the war machine instead of slowing down is, at the time of writing this article, playing out with a new force, alongside the increase in the scale of human tragedy and a sharp decrease in efforts of direct or indirect participants in the war towards a political resolution...

Economic sanctions imposed by the Western world are, however, unprecedented. Among the diverse measures applied, one should single out two: financial and energy sanctions.

A relative effectiveness of financial sanctions can be explained by two factors: one is the role of US dollar as a global reserve currency and another is a close integration of international banking transfers in the US banking system. Both factors combined facilitate the effectiveness of financial sanctions. Because of this fact, the USD 640 billion currency reserves available to Russian as of 24 February decreased sharply as a result of, first, freezing the assets of the Central Bank of the Russian Federation and then, restricting the use of gold in transactions. Hence, the reserve assets available to Russia has dropped to estimated USD 160 billion (it is unknown how much of this has already been spent on the war - by various estimates, it ranges between USD 40 billion and 60 billion). It must be noted, however, that despite the impressive measures that have already been implemented, the full mechanism of financial-banking sanctions has not been enacted yet, which mainly implies a complete disconnection of Russia from international payment systems.

The topic of Russian energy resources has become a subject of even hotter discussions. Readers are already well aware of relevant steps taken by the USA and the EU and therefore, we will avoid repetition and only focus on a few key points. It is well-known that the EU is way

more exposed to Russian energy resources than the USA: the EU consumes 60% of natural gas and 50% of oil products imported from Russian. Therefore, depleting the financing of the Russian military machine mainly depends on the EU's principled position: the thing is that the purchase of energy resources by Europeans results in Russia receiving between USD 800 million and 1 billion every day, to say nothing about the moral aspect of the issue.

The EU found it relatively easy to terminate (though, stage by stage) the import of coal from Russia, partially because the share of Russian coal in common European energy structure was small; moreover, the decrease in coal dependence is in line with the EU strategy of gradual transfer towards the use of alternative energy sources. However, it has proved significantly more difficult for the EU to say no to Russian oil products and natural gas. This difficulty is directly related not only to political and electoral conjuncture of several countries, but also to a more subtle aspect of international sanctions: it is impossible to inflict harm on a large integrated economy so that to keep your own economic system absolutely harmless. Thus, the contribution of the European constituencies to law and justice has become a challenge.

While the USA has already rejected Russian oil and natural gas, the EU is still considering the ban on the Russian oil import. According to reports, a relevant document has already been drafted but a public discussion of that document will only start after the presidential elections in France. Opposition from several countries in this matter is also apparent and we have to wait and see the specific conditions on which oil imports from Russia will gradually decrease with a view to a possible total ban on such import. For example, an assumption is to set different deadlines for banning various categories of oil products; also, for banning means of oil import (for example, a faster embargo on tanker shipments than pipeline shipments).

One must also mention a necessary precondition for replacement: what will replace the Russian oil? One of possible sources is the Middle East, but here geopolitical contradictions of different nature have emerged between the USA and other large oil exporter countries. The issue of Russian natural gas is sig-



Image source: Shutterstock

nificantly more complicated which is directly related to a political capital of imported gas for European politicians as well as a years-long adjustment of European infrastructure to the receipt of this energy resource. Factors in the policy of reducing the dependence on the import are the rise of commercial and consumer prices as well as the identification of alternative routes of supply (for example, a possibility of importing liquefied gas from the USA, Australia and Africa). In any case, the rejection of Russian gas belongs to the category of "revolutionary" decisions that lead to a fundamental transformation of the political-social and economic-social fabric of Europe. Today, a number of practical mechanisms of replacement are considered, but this is a topic of another discussion. We now wait for the sixth package of EU sanctions, which will enable us to have a more detailed discussion. At the same time, ahead of common decision by the EU bodies, several European countries have already enacted on the national level or are about to enact the ban on Russian oil and gas.

It is, however, apparent that it takes time for a real and desired effect of already taken decisions, let alone future decisions, to materialize: this is an extremely precious time for deescalating the situation in Ukraine and ending the human tragedy. It is even more puzzling if we recall that under the plan of the European Commission, the EU will fully free itself from Russian energy resources not earlier than by 2030. This makes it extremely difficult to estimate how long it will take Russia to make such changes to its foreign and military policy that will adjust this policy to established norms... unless, until then, the domestic Russian political life undergoes, with the efforts of Russian population, such a fundamental change that proves acceptable for the civilized world.

"CONTINUITY" OF ESSENCE AND "INDEFINITENESS" IN TIME

The topic of sanctions can be discussed extensively. Therefore, the aim of this article is to express opinion about only few narrow aspects of this very important topic of international relations and order. We have also tried to point out the issues extremely selectively and while partially theorizing them, to maintain the link with the existing reality.

Because of diversity of this topic, we will come back to it not once, especially in the context of ongoing war in Ukraine and its results. In general, the necessity of contextual reading of sanctions is not accidental: rarely a real policy and practice have such a strong influence on forming a problem as it is in case of sanctions. The international conjuncture, a new redistribution of influences and interests,

actually, precedes theoretic prerequisites of sanction topic, while this or that political decision adds substance to norms of material and procedural law related to sanctions. No doubt that, such feedback between a practical need and lawmaking is extraordinary. When talking about the practice and rule of behavior it is indicative that the weapon of geo-economic compulsion and fight, known as the "gradual sanction" of the 24 February war, has already took the form of economic war. In future conflicts or wars it will, perhaps, remain as such: distinguished for its totality, diversity and multiple layers. Sometimes this war/weapon will prove fully effective but more often, partially or even less effective. Such gradation has its explanation too.

Therefore, a further and even deeper research around sanctions on the national level, serves a correct positioning of the Georgian state in relation to a regional and international agenda. With a growing functional role in geo-economic relations, the development of sanctions, adherence to them or implementation in any other way will become a routine of "unorderly" order. With this in mind, the objective of Georgia is to remain on the correct, in our understanding, side of the process. This, however, means avoiding a harmful influence of the economic weapon and obtaining maximal political and economic benefit.

Painful but Inevitable Changes in the South Caucasus

ANALYSIS BY EMIL AVDALIANI

While all the attention is on Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the South Caucasus is experiencing long term geopolitical changes.

I have already talked about the impact of the invasion on the region and how each country is approaching the dilemma of balancing between Russia and Ukraine, and, at the same time, West and Russia.

But perhaps a more critical change in the region is the emerging rapprochement between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The Second Nagorno-Karabakh War has irreversibly tilted the geopolitical balance in Baku's favor. Armenia, though it managed to retain control over a truncated part of Nagorno-Karabakh, has gone through a difficult realization of the need to end its historic geopolitical isolation by improving relations with its neighbors to the west and east, Turkey and Azerbaijan respectively.

But this would require signing a definitive peace agreement with Azerbaijan, which would involve a major border demarcation effort, possible restoration of railway connections, and most of all recognition of each other's territorial integrity. The latter point has been a



President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan and Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan of Armenia greet each other before one on one meeting in Munich, Germany, February 2020. Source: President.Az

particularly sore point in Armenia-Azerbaijani historically antagonistic relations. Yerevan has so far refused to recognize its eastern neighbor's sovereignty over Nagorno-Karabakh.

This, however, could change, as, over the past several months, the Armenian leadership has been quite positive about reaching an overarching peace agreement with Baku and recognizing the troubled Nagorno-Karabakh as a part of Azerbaijan. At least, Yerevan has not officially denied it would be following this path. It is likely that Armenia will

demand autonomy, which would include special cultural rights for the Armenian population. It is impossible to say with certainty how the negotiations would unfold, but a range of cultural rights guaranteeing the use of the Armenian language is a likely solution.

The anticipation of the agreement has been also seen in the unfolding internal Armenian political situation. The opposition to Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has concentrated its remaining energies to oust him by staging continuous demonstrations in central Yerevan.

Here, too many unknowns complicate to predict how the internal situation will impact the negotiations with Azerbaijan. Yet, the indications at hand show that the opposition is unlikely to succeed. Like the neighboring Georgia, the opposition in Armenia, in many ways, is not sufficiently attractive.

Pashinyan is also likely to survive because of the growing discrepancy in expectations and motivations between the public in Armenia and the powerful Armenian diaspora abroad.

Yet another unknown in the unfolding geopolitical revolution in the South Caucasus is the emerging rapprochement between Armenia and Turkey. In many ways, a potential peace deal with Azerbaijan will depend on how Yerevan's ties with Ankara progress. Earlier examples show that achieving reconciliation with Turkey cannot go independently from the developments in relations with Azerbaijan.

Thus, Armenia is revolutionizing its foreign policy. The time is propitious for bold moves. The opposition inside the country is weakened, while the momentum to sign an overarching peace agreement with Azerbaijan and reach a rapprochement with Turkey is growing.

There are also immense economic benefits for Armenia to be reaped from the opening. Goods could reach the European market, while trade with Tur-

key could turn Armenia into a transit country. A peace deal with Azerbaijan would potentially guarantee the revival of the stalled railway project to Russia.

What remains to be seen is Russia's position. Being Armenia's security guarantor, much hinges upon Moscow's willingness to facilitate the improvement of ties between Armenian and Azerbaijan and Armenia and Turkey. It is still unclear how Russia benefits from Armenia's moves. After all, Moscow's ability to tightly control Armenia's foreign policy has been based on the latter's geopolitical isolation. Therefore, Armenia's opening would change many facets of this arrangement.

But viewing this diplomatic process as if orchestrated by Moscow might not be the right way to explain the developments. Russia might be resigned to accepting changes in the South Caucasus. This is no longer an era of exclusive control over the region, and the Kremlin is well aware it cannot exert enough influence to singlehandedly dominate Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. Moscow might simply be unable to prevent the emergence of other major actors from penetrating the region. And Turkey is one of those players.

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

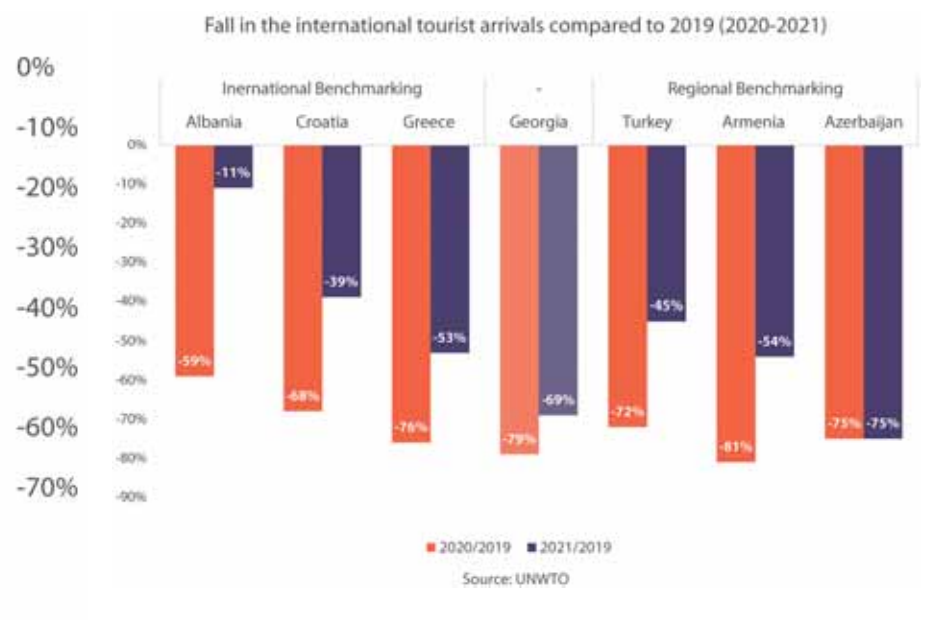


MONTHLY TOURISM UPDATE


Research

April 2022
www.pmcresearch.org

International Benchmarking: The Recovery of International Tourist Arrivals in 2021



The number of international travelers increased by 184.9% in April 2022, compared to the same period of 2021, and declined by 62.3% compared to the same period in 2019. Meanwhile, the number of international visitors increased by 160.1% (2022/2021) and declined by 61.0% (2022/2019), and the number of international tourists increased by 140.5% (2022/2021) and declined by 47.7% (2022/2019).

In April 2022, the top countries of origin of international visits were Turkey (35,959 visits), Russia (33,556 visits), and Armenia (32,228 visits). Among the major tourism markets, the number of international visits from Belarus (220%), Uzbekistan (166%), Israel (10%), Ukraine (9%), and Kazakhstan (7%) exceeded the pre-pandemic figure (April 2019).

tional tourist arrivals showed a 4% increase compared to the previous year, however, it still remained well below the pre-pandemic number (72% lower). The pace of recovery remained slow and uneven across the world mainly due to the varying degrees of entry restrictions, traveler confidence, and vaccination rates. Europe recorded the strongest year-on-year increase and recovery in the number of international tourist arrivals, increasing by 19% compared to 2020, while showing a decline of 62% compared to 2019.

In 2021, compared to 2019, the decline in the number of international tourist arrivals was the highest for Northern Europe (-82%), while Southern/Mediterranean Europe showed the lowest decline (-54%), followed by Central/Eastern Europe (-64%).

In 2021, compared to 2019, the decline of international tourist arrivals to Georgia (-69%) was higher compared both to European (-62%) and Central/Eastern European (-64%) averages, but lower compared to the global average (-72%).

INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL BENCHMARKING

It is worth analyzing the performance of the Georgian tourism sector in comparison with international benchmark countries, and within the regional context.

Among the international benchmark countries, in 2021, recovery in the number of tourist arrivals was evident in all of them, with Albania experiencing the most impressive recovery, almost returning to 2019 levels (only 11% lower). Meanwhile, Georgia performed the worst among these countries, with its number of tourists declining by 69% compared to 2019 levels.

It is also worth noting that for the other three countries, recovery was at its

strongest in Q3 of 2021, while for Georgia the recovery happened gradually, with a decline of 90% in January (compared to 2019) but rising up to 54% in December 2021.

Within the regional context, Azerbaijan has not experienced a major recovery in tourism (-75% compared to 2019) while Turkey has experienced the highest recovery in 2021 (-45%). As for Armenia, its recovery in 2021 was considerably higher (15 pp) compared to that of Georgia.

HOTEL PRICE INDEX IN GEORGIA

In April 2022, in Georgia, the hotel price index decreased by 2.0% compared to March 2022. The 3-star, 4-star and 5-star hotel price index decreased by 1.7%, while for guesthouses, the price index decreased by 6.5%.

In April 2022, compared to April 2021, hotel prices in Georgia increased by 7.7%. The prices of 3*, 4*, 5* hotels increased by 6.3% and the prices of guesthouses increased by 15.9%.

THE AVERAGE HOTEL PRICES IN GEORGIA

In Georgia, the average cost of a room in a 3-star hotel was 141 GEL per night in April 2022, while the average cost of a room in a 4-star hotel in Georgia was 231 GEL per night and the average cost of a room in a guesthouse was 103 GEL per night.

The average cost of a room in a 5-star hotel in Georgia in April 2022 was 413 GEL per night. In Tbilisi and Kakheti, the average price was 493 GEL, followed by Guria 398 GEL and Adjara 390 GEL.

RECOVERY TRENDS IN EUROPE IN 2021



Region	Hotel		3*, 4*, 5*		Guesthouse	
	2022 Apr/ 2022 Mar	2022 Apr/ 2021 Apr	2022 Apr/ 2022 Mar	2022 Apr/ 2021 Apr	2022 Apr/ 2022 Mar	2022 Apr/ 2021 Apr
Kakheti	3.9%	4.9%	5.2%	-1.3%	2.6%	12.2%
Imereti	-1.4%	5.4%	0.6%	6.7%	-4.7%	4.1%
Guria	9.4%	2.5%	9.4%	-27.6%	-	105.7%
Kvemo Kartli	-	13.4%	-	13.4%	-	-
Adjara	-6.2%	15.5%	9.0%	16.2%	-1.5%	14.0%
Racha	40.7%	52.6%	-	-	40.7%	52.6%
Shida Kartli	-0.9%	2.1%	9.5%	7.5%	-4.1%	-5.5%
Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti	3.0%	-5.4%	8.5%	-11.6%	-3.2%	5.5%
Samtskhe-Javakheti	4.3%	9.1%	-0.2%	21.3%	7.2%	-0.8%
Mtskheta-Mtianeti	-14.1%	2.7%	-16.2%	-0.8%	-11.2%	7.9%
Tbilisi	-5.3%	5.1%	-5.0%	2.9%	-7.3%	20.8%
Overall Price % Change	-2.0%	7.7%	-1.7%	6.3%	-6.5%	15.9%

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	I 2021	II 2021	III 2021	IV 2021	2021	I 2022
GDP in current prices for Accommodation and Food Service Activities (mln)	1054.1	1437.5	1800.0	2223.0	1204.5	197.8*	452.2*	602.3*	472.0*	1724.4*	-
Number of International Travelers (thousand persons)	6720.0	7902.5	8679.5	9357.9	1747.1	134.7	351.3	815.4	579.8	1881.3	576.5
Number of Tourists (thousand persons)	3297.3	4069.4	4756.8	5080.5	1087.0	116.6	305.8	670.4	484.7	1577.5	456.0
Revenue from International Travel (mln USD)	2110.7	2704.3	3222.1	3268.7	541.7	53.6*	246.1*	566.0*	379.3*	1244.9*	393.7*
The Expenditures of Georgian Travelers Abroad (mln USD)	386.3	463.6	524.7	657.2	180.5	19.7*	37.1*	62.6*	64.5*	184.1*	-
Foreign Direct Investment in Hotels and Restaurants Sector (mln USD)	120.0	109.5	82.3	123.4	-249.5	-0.9*	-1.4*	10.7*	0.7*	7.7*	-

* Preliminary data

With EU Support, Tsalka LAG, Project Beneficiaries & Gov't Reps Visit Germany, Learn about German LEADER Approach



Continued from page 1

The study visit allowed the 20 participants to discover exciting details about the European LEADER approach and German practice, as well as the chance to network and exchange information. The Georgian group met local actors and officials from the federal state level, and visited LEADER financed projects in the federal states of Northrhine-Westphalia, Rhineland Palatinate, and Baden-Württemberg.

The tour kicked off with a visit to the biodynamic farm Dottenfelder Hof in Bad Vilbel near Frankfurt. Till Bause, representative of the farm, walked the

participants around the different working units. His guests showed particular interest in the farm's approach to circular agriculture, livestock farming with a focus on animal welfare, and direct marketing of products.

On Tuesday morning, the group was welcomed by the Ministry of Economy, Transport, Agriculture and Viticulture to discuss the federal structures with regards LEADER approach. In Germany, LEADER is managed by the federal states. The aim was to get to know the practice of two federal states in order to draw conclusions for different possibilities and to compare what was learned.

A second highlight was the guided visit to the village of Herrstein, where LEADER financed the valorization of the town's historic center. The guide, former mayor Wolfgang Hey, who was involved in the project for many years, showed restored timber frame architecture and shared his experiences on managing a LEADER funding process. The Georgian side enjoyed finding out about the possibilities involved in conserving cultural heritage and cultivating places of tourist interest aided by LEADER. They also highly valued Herrstein's ambitions to train craftsmen specializing in traditional half-timbering.

Throughout the visit, the participants were able to connect with representatives from local action groups (LAGs): LAG Erbeskopf, LAG Mittelrheintal, LAG Hunsrück, and LAG Hohenlohe-Tauber.

The final event was a working brunch with county administrative executive Dr. Matthias Neth from the Hohenlohe district in Baden-Württemberg. He was accompanied by Dr. Thomas Winter (Department for Rural Areas), Thomas Schultes (LEADER Regional Management Hohenlohe-Tauber), Olivia Gerspach (Office for Economic Development and Tourism), and

Nicole Hoffmann (Office for Economic Development and Tourism).

"All of them shared their experiences with LEADER and the different ways of

working due to different work priorities. Mr. Schultes has over 20 years' experience as a regional manager. The exchange with him was considered very valuable," IflS said.

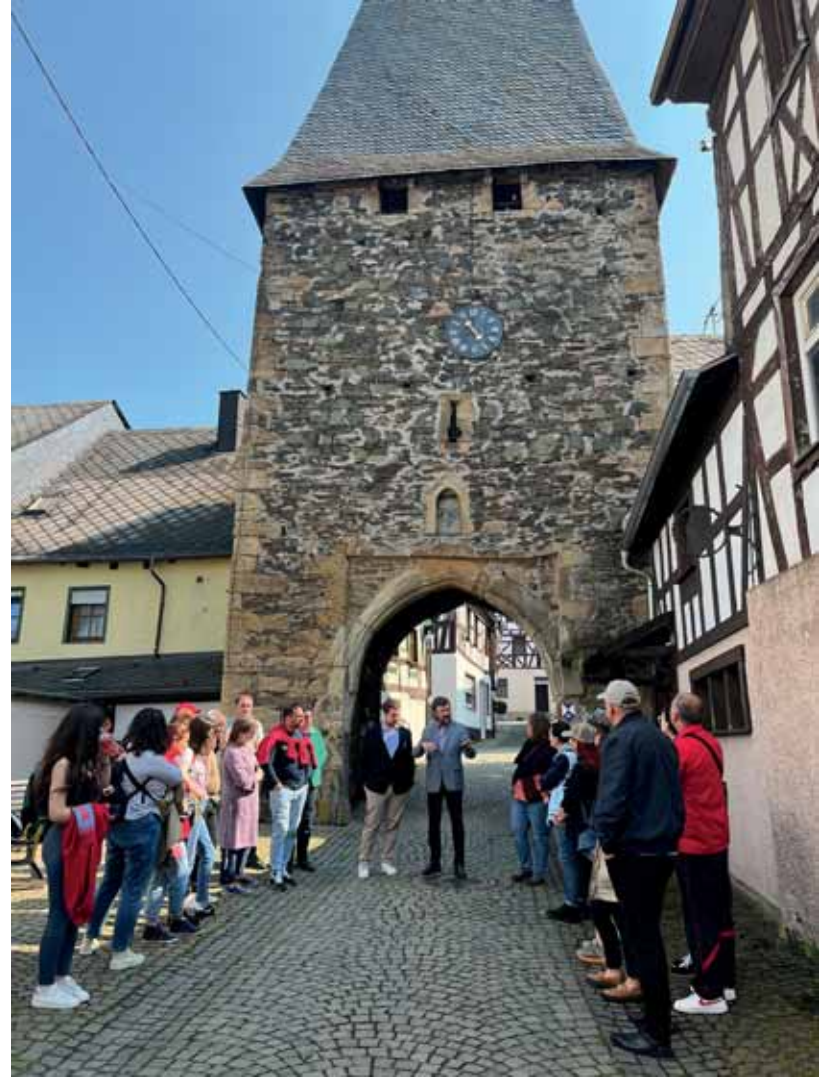
The Hohenlohe District wrote an article on their website, translated by IflS, entitled "Great interest in LEADER projects and the work of the LEADER Association Hohenlohe-Tauber."

"The delegation from Georgia spent a total of seven days visiting various LEADER action groups in Germany. Projects were visited, discussions were held with local actors, and an intensive exchange of ideas took place," the Hohenlohe District reporter wrote. "The topics were agricultural cooperatives, milk production and processing, tourism, processing and marketing of regional products, business start-ups, projects especially for women and youth and the European LEADER funding program."

"Promoting Rural Development in Georgia is a significant progress on the country's path to the Euro-Atlantic Alliance," noted Melano Tkabladze, CENN Project Manager. "The ENPARD program has an important role to play in this regard. The introduction of the LEADER approach and the formation of local development groups (LAGs) in different municipalities of Georgia are especially interesting and meaningful. This practice significantly teaches us and accustoms us to the effective involvement of all stakeholders in the decision-making process through a participatory approach."

"The 1-week practice of the Tsalka LAG visiting the German lags is a visible demonstration of these processes," she added. "The tour and the impression gained on the institutional arrangement of German LAGs, the recognition of LAGs by local and national government agencies, their funding sources and necessity, the degree of local involvement, etc., will significantly help the Tsalka LAG to continue to operate more effectively in the municipality in terms of its development and socio-economic sustainability."

//
The delegation from Georgia spent 7 days visiting various LEADER action groups in Germany. Projects were visited, discussions were held with local actors, and an intensive exchange of ideas took place



"The exchange visit was very productive and interesting both in terms of professional aspects as well as values," said Milena Georgieva, Tsalka LAG member. "We got acquainted with many interesting communities, projects, entrepreneurs, and mayors, whose goal is not only personal but also public welfare, and every day they try to contribute to the economic or social development of the community."

"This visit made me even more convinced that with the right set of priorities, your activities and responsibilities take on a completely different look, you look at the picture from a different angle, it is important to set your personal interests in accordance with those of the community's and love your business not only for financial gain but also because the process is valuable to you. It was obvious when we visited the farmers in Germany," Georgieva noted.

The project 'Local LEADERs Embrace Sustainable Development in Multi-Eth-

nic Tsalka Municipality (EMBRACE Tsalka)" aims to reduce rural poverty and improve living conditions in Tsalka municipality, addressing economic, social, and environmental concerns by improving agricultural competitiveness, promoting sustainable management of natural resources, and building climate-resilient rural economies and communities. In addition, through the LEADER approach, the project will strengthen family farms, entrepreneurs, women, youth and other local groups by providing access to knowledge, innovations and new technologies, by supporting business development and creating jobs.

The project "EMBRACE Tsalka" is implemented under the European Neighborhood Program for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD) by EU's partner organization CENN, in partnership with the Georgian Farmers' Association (GFA) and German partner organization - Institute for Rural Development Research (IfLS).



Oasis in the Desert: What to Know about the Biodiversity of the Iori River Floodplain & Why it Matters

Floodplain forests contribute many free ecological services to our society: they help filter pollutants to prevent them from entering streams, improve water quality, are critical in controlling erosion, and help buffer rivers against catastrophic flooding. Floodplains are home to a diversity of wildlife.

SABUKO - a nature conservation organization, a local partner of BirdLife, has played a big role in the restoration and preservation of floodplain forest in Georgia as part of the project 'Restoring Gallery Forest and Grasslands in the Iori River Valley,' aimed at revitalizing the ecosystem while enabling local pastoralists to manage the land sustainably.

They also work to preserve the biodiversity of the Chachuna Managed Reserve, which has faced a severe problem of degradation due to unregulated grazing. SABUKO has been studying the Chachuna Reserve since 2019.

5032 hectares of Chachuna is located in Dedoplistskaro municipality, on the border between Georgia and Azerbaijan. Due to its distinctive ecosystem, it is included in the list of emerald network areas established by the signatories of the Bern Convention on the Protection of Natural Habitats of Europe in 1989.

SABUKO and its partner organizations are actively working to preserve endangered rare species of wildlife existing on the ground.

SABUKO, in collaboration with Ilia State University, assessed the condition and health of the Iori River floodplain forest, the aim of which was to describe and assess the condition of the Iori River floodplain forests, to determine their natural boundaries, to compare them with the present boundaries, and to determine the reasons for the changes. Also, to find out whether the Dali Reservoir specifically reduced the area of floodplain forests in the Chachuna Reserve, whether it had an impact on the changes in the floristic composition on the ground, etc.

In addition, a hydrological report of the Iori River and flood modeling was developed. The upper and lower part of the reservoir differ from each other in floristic composition: the lower part of the reservoir is less characterized by floodplain forest species than the upper part due to the reservoir and hydrological regime. A written and oral agreement with the relevant authorities on the periodic release of the Dali Reservoir has already been reached. In addition, the recommendations made in the report are reflected in the EU Water Initiative Plus under the Alazani-Iori River Basin Management Plan.

The research area (2232.9 ha) covers the Iori River and Chachuna Managed Reserve gallery forests and adjacent areas.

Grazing is the biggest challenge for such Tugay type gallery forests. The Dali Reservoir has transformed the ecosystem since the 1980s, though the impact needs a more thorough study.

The study results show that the forest cover (area covered with trees and bushes) has generally reduced in the research area, yet there is a tendency of growth over the last decade. Chachuna's forest cover increased over the last two decades, although it is still less than in 1978. This may mean that the Dali Reservoir has not had a significant impact in terms of forest areas over the past 30-year cycle, as it was put into operation in 1992 (Benjankar et al., 2016).

In order to reduce grazing cases in the floodplain forest, SABUKO also assessed the potential location of the areas where sheep drink water. Based on the results of the study, SABUKO arranged more than 10 facilities for sheep to drink, wells and a 6-kilometer corridor, which will significantly help to reduce the impact of sheep grazing on floodplain forests and the River Iori.

"During the process, cooperation with

local farmers was very important. We observed the shepherds for two years before we planned to arrange the corridor, studying their route and access roads to the Iori River," Aleksandre Mikeladze, Project Manager, tells us. "In accordance with this, we built fences, the so-called corridors, that shepherds now use to access the water.

"We also developed the Chachuna Reserve Management Plan detailing patrolling and law enforcement, monitoring of core biodiversity values and threats, natural resource management, fire management, ecotourism and visitor education, and a public relations program. The completed project will be put up for public review by the Agency of Protected Areas and then the approval process will start."

The SABUKO team is working with local farmers to raise awareness. They introduced rotational grazing and talked to them about the value of biodiversity and the importance of floodplain forest, which is a shelter for different species of animals.

GEORGIA TODAY wanted to find out more from SABUKO's representatives and partners.

Vasil Metreveli, Forester, Ilia University: Floodplain forests are mainly located in the east of Georgia. Their resources are actively used by locals, which eventually results in their degradation. The Iori floodplain and surrounding area represents a very dry territory, for which this forest is a kind of oasis. The mode of flooding of floodplain forests is very important. There are several dams arranged on the Iori River, which slows the water flow. The Dali Reservoir posed a threat for Chachuna, so we conducted a study in collaboration with SABUKO. We saw that the area of green cover had reduced and, in terms of species, there were significant changes. We concluded that the lower part of the river should be flooded more often, as the process of desertification is underway there. The river bed is washed away, the water can no longer flood the territory, so vegetation is changed and replaced. To solve this problem, a gabion has been arranged on the spot, which will slow the water flow and the area will be flooded. Through such measures and gabions, the situation has been partially improved in terms of species restoration, however, even more work is necessary so as not to lose this oasis, which is so important for the whole region."

Giorgi Guliasvili, a hydrologist, recently conducted a study where the positive results of gabion in the floodplain of the Iori River were revealed. "The process of desertification in the Chachuna Reserve has been accelerated by the construction of the Dali Reservoir, which has slowed down the flow of water from the Iori River and virtually blocked it," Giorgi tells us.

"In the lower part of the river, on the Chachuna Reserve territory, the process of natural flooding and water supply was stopped, accordingly, the mentioned area was affected. Reservoir-induced water shortages were compounded by high evaporation, high temperatures in the face of climate change, which led to soil drying out. At the same time, the scarcity of water caused the groundwater level to drop. The floodplain forest plants could no longer get the moisture they needed.

"As such, the process of species change in the floodplain forest has begun. In the floodplain forest, which was constantly flooded, drought-loving plants emerged. So it was decided to arrange a gabion on the spot. If that worked, similar gabions would be arranged elsewhere.

"The results of the hydrological research which I've conducted have shown that the gabion arranged by SABUKO has significantly contributed to proper distribution of water in the area and it was already noticeable by the improved condition of the floodplain forest plants, which is a very good achievement and a positive effect.

"If this continues, of course the positive impact will increase and will cover an even bigger area. However, the problem we detected was still a shortage of water resources, despite the rainy year. However, despite this, positive changes are still observed.

"At the next stages of the project, we're thinking of arranging additional gabions at several more areas to flood a bigger territory of the floodplain. This issue is being discussed with relevant agencies and stakeholders. In the long term, this will bring even more benefits to the health and condition of the Iori River floodplain, which is a home to many unique wildlife inhabitants and is vital to the local environment.

"In June, we're planning to conduct another study on the ground, which will allow us to draw additional conclusions and assess the entire situation," the hydrologist explains.

Zura Gurgenzi, Conservation Studies Manager at SABUKO: Chachuna is home to about 60 birds protected by the Bern Convention, including the Imperial Eagle. However, scarce information about Chachuna species is one of the reasons why SABUKO started research there.

We have 50 camera traps in Chachuna reserve, covering the floodplain forest and the ravines surrounding Chachuna. The photos taken with show that wild boar, jackal and jungle cats are very common there. SABUKO's camera traps first spotted a lynx in Chachuna, which is critically endangered in Georgia. Near Chachuna, in Vashlovani, there is a fairly solid population of lynx, although it has never been observed in the Chachuna area.

Other animals and birds living in Chachuna include jungle cats, wolves, black francolins, and others on the red list. The disappearance of the Iori floodplain forest means that all the above-mentioned rare species will be left without shelter, habitat or food.

Therefore, in order to restore the Iori floodplain forest, SABUKO plans to flood the pre-studied and defined area using the Dali Reservoir, which has never performed its initial function.

CONSERVATION OF THE EASTERN IMPERIAL EAGLE IN GEORGIA

Research on the Eastern Imperial Eagle is one of the priorities for SABUKO when exploring the biodiversity of Chachuna.

The Imperial eagle is considered a vulnerable species in the world, while in Georgia it is included on the red list. SABUKO was the first in Georgia to install a GPS navigation system for the imperial eagle. GPS transmitters are either attached to the young chicks before they learn to fly, or to adult individuals.

"We use GPS to monitor their migration route, and we can see what problems they may face. Unfortunately, among the individuals to which we attached the transmitters, 80% died due to power lines," Zura Gurgenzi explains.

At the end of the Chachuna Biodiversity Survey, SABUKO hopes that detailed information on the species and their routes will play an important role in the development of the Chachuna Biodiversity Conservation Strategy.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ECOTOURISM SERVICES PROJECT TO BIODIVERSITY

SABUKO, within the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Small Grants Program (SGP), is implementing a two-year project "Creating and Developing of Nature Conservation-Oriented Visitor Services in Chachuna Managed Reserve" with the aim of conserving ecosystems and endangered species.

A business plan for the development of the ecotourism of Chachuna Managed Reserve will be created and next implemented in cooperation with the administration of Chachuna MR and also involving local service providers.

Ecotourism infrastructure will be



WHAT'S BEEN DONE FOR THE FLOODPLAIN FOREST

Natia Zurashvili, Representative of the Administration of Chachuna Reserve: "An important issue was water supply to floodplain plants, as the River Iori is the main source of water on the ground. SABUKO implemented a project that sees the level of water artificially raised using stones, meaning the floodplain plants were watered.

"Development of ecotourism services is also carried out on the spot through the efforts of SABUKO. Tourists can watch unique species of birds living here, such as the Eastern Imperial Eagle. Soon, the infrastructure will be further improved and more hiking trails will be added to the area," noted Zurashvili.

There are eco clubs in Dedoplistskaro for youth, and Natia shares with the students the materials developed by SABUKO: board game "Playing In Iori Floodplain", the main goal of which is to slip into the role of a Georgian shepherd and to learn and think about steppe ecosystems and their conservation, a film entitled "Facing the Desert," - the first documentary about the Chachuna Reserve that covers the ecological problems existing on the ground and possible ways to establish sustainable use of natural resources, etc.

There are eco clubs in Dedoplistskaro for youth, and Natia shares with the students the materials developed by SABUKO: board game "Playing In Iori Floodplain", the main goal of which is to slip into the role of a Georgian shepherd and to learn and think about steppe ecosystems and their conservation, a film entitled "Facing the Desert," - the first documentary about the Chachuna Reserve that covers the ecological problems existing on the ground and possible ways to establish sustainable use of natural resources, etc.

RAISING AWARENESS/ CONTRIBUTING TO BUILDING HARMONIOUS NEIGHBORLY RELATIONS

To raise awareness, alongside the multimedia materials, SABUKO hosted an exhibition of photographer Natela Grigalashvili with photos of the Chachuna Reserve. Under the Artists' Residence Program, supported by the Cambridge Conservation Initiative, the photographer worked for a year in the reserve to document the interaction between Man and nature.

SABUKO also presented footage of rare wildlife species living in the territory of the reserve, taken by its camera traps.

Similar exhibitions are planned for the future to raise awareness of the ecological problems existing on the ground, degradation and sustainable land management.

SABUKO is also contributing to building harmonious neighborly relations among the Georgian and Azerbaijani farmers living together on the ground, and it helps the Azerbaijani population overcome still existing language barriers. The SABUKO team constructed a bridge for a local Azerbaijani farmer, which allowed him to connect his land plots and introduce rotational grazing.

German expert Marinus Gebhardt, a Natural Resources Manager at SABUKO, highlights the importance of the Iori River Floodplain for the entire local environment and biodiversity.

"We installed over 50 camera traps and actively check the data, and now fully understand which species of animals live there. It has been proven that the Iori floodplain in Chachuna is very important, as it is the only shelter for wild species, who come to drink water, hide from extreme heat during summer, forage and survive.

"We periodically continue to raise the awareness of on-site rangers, who jointly patrol to reduce grazing cases in the floodplain forests," he notes.

By taking such diverse and important steps, SABUKO is achieving significant progress on the ground and is also convincing the local population to take care of the Iori River floodplain forest for the sake of the environment they live in.

arranged on the ground, including a bungalow, campsite, vulture restaurant, and bird watching point. Online and print information materials will support to popularize the area. Informative boards and signs to ensure the safety and comfort of visitors will also be upgraded.

An MoU will be signed with tourism service providers to diversify ecotourism services, improve partnership and increase the number of visitors to the Chachuna Managed Reserve.

Various informative excursion programs will be developed, enabling the local administration to improve communication with visitors. In addition, maps of adventure-information trails will be updated and made available online and in print. The project also includes cooperation with locals and their periodic training in ecotourism business management. 20 locals involved in ecotourism are being trained during the year, including at least 10 women.

POLICY FOR THE IORI RIVER FLOODPLAIN FOREST

For two years, the SABUKO team has been trying to introduce a definition for the permissible amount of cattle grazing per hectare, in cooperation with state structures, by sharing research. Legislative changes have been made to define that permissible amount, which is very important for biodiversity conservation, and currently applies to state-owned pastures.

"Legislation regarding pastures was very general- there were no relevant normative acts," Tinatin Arveladze, Policy Manager, explained. "The change was one of the first steps towards the sustainable development of pastures the state could make."

"SABUKO contributed to this process even prior to introduction of the legislative regulation, as it developed a rotational grazing scheme. Adopting the legislative act was a big goal for SABUKO, and a result of a lot of enthusiasm, which was also met by the local municipality and the Agency for Protected Areas.

"But a legislative act alone is not enough, as protecting and restoring biodiversity is also a matter of each shepherds' personal responsibility," she said.

WHAT IS BEING DONE FOR THE IORI RIVER FLOODPLAIN

Nata Sultanishvili, Head of Planning and Development Service at the Agency of Protected Areas, assesses collaboration with SABUKO as "very active and successful."

"There was no management plan for or relevant studies of the sustainable management of pastures in the Chachuna Managed Reserve. Thanks to SABUKO, in a close collaboration with the Agency of Protected Areas, this was achieved and a plan was developed that defined the permissible amount of cattle per hectare in the area.

"There is a very good international and local practice that protected areas are managed with a Management Plan, where programs of various directions are determined and the relevant actions and steps are taken. The Chachuna Reserve didn't have such a plan until now.

"The management of the Agency of Protected Areas and our rangers will be actively involved in this process to verify compliance.

"Measures have been taken to prevent cases of overgrazing, such as fencing off certain areas, and the organization works to protect the biodiversity existing on the ground. This serves the goal of strengthening the eco-tourism in the country, which is crucial for the economy," Sultanishvili notes.

Truckin': Etseri, Svaneti



BLOG BY TONY HANMER

We get very few guests who have driven their way here from another country; even fewer from as far away as Germany. And this couple are our first visitors to arrive in a camper-converted French Army vehicle from the late 1980s.

Gerhard and Dorothee Rühle, both in

their early 40s, have spent months slowly crossing Western Europe and the Balkans to reach us in their slow but sure diesel-powered machine. It functions as transport, bedroom, kitchen and (in a pinch) even bathroom. They are staying with us for about a month, with two main areas of focus.

Keen mountaineers, they found themselves on Elbrus (5642m), highest mountain in the Caucasus, watching the unfolding of the Russian-Georgian war of August 2008. Having begun their ascent in darkness as the day would be very long, they

saw the flashes of light of Russian bombing as the campaign began.

Here, they are exploring the mountains around Etseri with great interest, as well as making contacts with Svan mountaineers and offering to teach local children some of the basics of harnessed rock-climbing. A watchtower stub above our house will serve as a wall for this latter pursuit.

On his first trek to the Baki Pass between Etseri and neighboring Mazeri, Gerhard was startled to discover that he was being watched by... no less than a Caucasus Leopard. He only noticed it when it started to move towards him from some distance away, which prompted him to slide downhill in case it was actually serious about hunting him. It was mostly in silhouette, and too far (and he was too hurried) to get a photograph, but he is positive about its form. It could not have been a wolf, bobcat or lynx.

When he returned later that day and told me the news, I immediately looked online to see what he could have seen, initially thinking of rumors of the Russian (re)introduction of Snow Leopards into the North Caucasus, the border of which is only a few km away from us. These accounts and the possible results are inconclusive, but what is clearly documented is that there does exist a subspecies of big cat called the Caucasus Leopard. These are colored more like African leopards, not to blend in with winter landscapes.



The couple have since returned to the location of the sighting, but not found any more evidence of the creature. There are, however, many large wild birds like grouse in the area, on which it could feed. And leopards are known to have large territories. Plus, my neighbors can testify that they have been reported here, very rarely, and one was even shot by a villager decades ago (with nothing remaining of it now). So this news is very exciting.

The Rühles are also helping us with some spring projects, such as removing a large pile of dirt and rocks and using it to level some of the land around the house. They have moved all our outdoor construction wood under the shelter of the café which we must finish this autumn, and we have a list of other things for them to do in between exploring the mountains. Their website for those inter-

ested is www.ruehletours.com (It's mostly photos, with captions in German; very interesting and worth a good look.)

We are enjoying this longer-term stay, the extra pairs of helping hands around the place multiplying what the two of us can do on our own, and making new friends to last as well. The timing of their arrival is perfect for our needs as well as their own, and it's a good fit. Willkommen!

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



Puzzle - Evidence-based Services Using Behavior, Adapted to International Standards



BY MARIAM MTIVLISHVILI

information, GEORGIA TODAY talked to the Executive Director of Puzzle, Tamar Sekhniashvili.

Evidence-based interventions Based on Applied Behavior Analysis Behavior center Puzzle has been hosting children with for 6 years and offers services adapted to international standards. Puzzle is presented in three locations in the capital and will soon be found in Adjara too. At this stage, 102 specialists are employed in Puzzle. For detailed

TELL US HOW PUZZLE CAME ABOUT.

We founded Puzzle in 2016. When my daughter was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, I realized that therapy alone was not enough and it was important for the parent to be involved in order for her behavior to be easily managed and for me to communicate properly with her. I started taking courses

for parents and then I decided to change my profession and gain knowledge in Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). Soon, I finished the training module for pre-preparatory behavioral analysts, passed the exam, and now I'm Board Certified Assistant Behavior Analyst (BCaBA) and I'm preparing for the Board Certified Behavioral Analyst (BCBA) exam. When I was studying, the idea came to me to establish a center. Initially, I worked as a registered behavior technician (RBT) at the Ilia State University in Child Development Institute, and then we set up Puzzle. We started with 25 employees, now we have 102 and we three branches in Tbilisi - in Gldani, Isani district, and Vake.

It was also very important for us to choose the locations of the branches correctly so that the parents would not find it difficult to bring their children every day.

TELL US HOW PUZZLE WORKS.

We are the providers of the City Hall Autism Program. Our main focus is to implement evidence-based intervention, Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). We also work with children with sensory dysfunction with sensory integration. We also serve children who need to

acquire academic skills, which means that we conduct mock school lessons, thus preparing the child for school. This service is important because due to the pandemic, kindergartens were temporarily closed and the children had to stay home all this time.

WHAT DOES A PUZZLE CENTER LOOK LIKE?

The interior is fully tailored to the needs of the children. It is important for us that this place is safe and enjoyable for each child. All of this ensures the development of their skills.

WHAT MAKES PUZZLE SPECIAL?

We work to internationally recognized standards. We have certified specialists and that is why we are the providers of the City Hall Autism Program. Also, our branches are geographically distributed. It is also important that we provide ongoing training for our employees.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR FUTURE PLANS.

The first branch of Puzzle outside Tbilisi will open in Adjara, as there is a large number of people from this place who need our services.



Child and adolescent rehabilitation Centre "Puzzle".

The EU and CENN Foster Dialogue on Youth Challenges and Opportunities in Georgia



BY MARIAM MTIVLISHVILI

Organized by CENN and supported by the European Union, Tbilisi hosted a youth conference dedicated to the European Year of Youth. The conference brought together up to 150 people, including motivated young people from all over Georgia; local, national and international actors active in the fields of youth, education and social entrepreneurship; and green economy organizations to address key issues concerning sustainable youth development.

"I am glad to see many young people here today, who have come from different regions of Georgia," Deputy Head of Cooperation of the EU Delegation to Georgia, Catalin Gherman, told us. "It is essential to analyse the role that young people can play in the development of society and to consider their involvement not only in the long run, but first and foremost in the present. We are investing in this and the European Year of Youth, and the purpose of this conference is to support young people par-

ticipate in change not only in the future, but today."

The meeting was held in an informal setting. Participants had the opportunity to ask questions and be interviewed by representatives of various organizations at the conference. This was a unique opportunity for the participants to acquire interesting information on the following topics: Youth Policy in Georgia - the Current Situation and Future Vision; Economic empowerment of young people through entrepreneurship - young social entrepreneurs from Georgia; Youth empowerment tools and best practices - the importance of youth hubs, clubs, eco-clubs and spaces; and Youth volunteering and its benefits.

"First of all, I would like to congratulate the youth of the Year of Youth," said CENN Executive Director, Nana Janashia. "I want to thank all of the participants, the youth organizations, the youth agency, and of course, the EU delegation for being here and for the political support it is providing in general. Today's meeting has two purposes: to connect young people and organizations with each other and to discuss and advocate for youth policy and strategy. I hope this day was a success for our guests and the youth



will gain new opportunities."

The conference was dedicated to the 2022 European Year of Youth, which is an important step in recognizing the significant contribution of young people to their rights and society. The Year of Youth also represents one of the main tools of youth support and a symbol for overcoming the pandemic's severe consequences. During the pandemic, the health status of young people and their employment rate significantly deteriorated. Furthermore, online learning posed many challenges to young people in Georgia and across Europe.

Youth organizations, leaders, stakeholders, and participants had the opportunity to attend discussions and to network.

Thematic discussions at the conference were held in four stages: "Youth Policy in Georgia," moderated by World Vision representative, Irakli Giorbelidze. The

panel participants were the EU Delegation to Georgia; Youth Agency of Georgia; UNFPA; NCYOG; and APD. This panel gathered experts from different sectors working on the development of youth policy in Georgia. During the first half of the panel discussion, the speakers brought up key aspects of the development of the sector and shared the main challenges in the establishment and maintenance process of the youth policy strategy with the audience. Youth attending the conference were also able to ask questions and share their opinions and views regarding the youth policy.

"The EU for the Economic Empowerment of Young People" panel was moderated by CENN representative Natela Lagurashvili. This session was particularly interesting as it was a topical issue: the employment and empowerment of young people. This panel featured young entrepreneurs from various regions. The panel participants were "@Rundtea", production of herbal tea in the Javakheti region; "Bamane", a sewing enterprise from Gori; "Almazi", a tourism centre from the Javakheti region; "Steps", a youth development and socialization centre from the Javakheti region; "Ecolife Consulting", an environmental consulting centre from Kvemo Kartli; and the European Business Association. Within this panel, guests had the opportunity to see a presentation about the project under which this event was held. The speakers spoke about the main results of this project and what opportunities it has provided to young people over the last two years.

"The importance of Youth Hubs, Clubs and Centers (results and future plans) panel was moderated by Natela Lagurashvili. Its participants were: World Vision Georgia - SKYE clubs; UNAG - Youth Centres; Gori Rural Innovation Knowledge Hub member; Ninotsminda Rural Innovation Knowledge Hub member; and an Akhmeta Rural Innovation Knowledge Hub member.

The main topic of the third session was to discuss the importance of educational and co-working spaces, especially in rural areas where many vulnerable young

people are living that do not have access to any technologies or education. During this panel, a variety of perspectives were presented. On one hand, young people shared their opinion as to why they consider co-working spaces to be crucial for local youth communities and what their needs and wishes are for the future in terms of establishing additional co-working spaces. On the other hand, international organizations such as UNAG and World Vision Georgia, who provide various services for rural youth, shared information about their ongoing opportunities and programs for the youth who would like to engage themselves in various activities.

"Youth Activism and Non-formal Education" offered a thematic discussion highlighting the success stories of young volunteers and youth eco-activists. The session was moderated by CENN representative Giorgi Kavteladze. The panel participants were the Volunteer Ambassador; Europe Foundation; Volunteer Hub; Helping Hand; Volunteer, EU4Youth beneficiary; Sachkhere N2 Public School Eco-club; and the Young European Ambassador. During the fourth session, the speakers spoke about youth activism and non-formal education. Former volunteers who volunteered for a number of projects and had a major impact on the decision-making process in the municipality attended this thematic discussion.

The aim of the conference was to hold discussions and debates about current trends, challenges and opportunities for youth. During the conference, participants also discussed challenges and ways to address them, based on examples from youth organizations, associations and groups, and best practices.



PUBLISHER & GM
George Sharashidze

COMMERCIAL DEPARTMENT
Commercial Director:
Iva Merabishvili
Marketing Manager:
Natalia Chikvaidze

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT:
Editor-In-Chief:
Katie Ruth Davies

Journalists:
Ana Dumbadze,
Vazha Tavberidze,
Tony Hanmer,
Emil Avdaliani,
Nugzar B. Ruhadze,
Michael Godwin,
Ketevan Skhirtladze,
Mariam Mtvilishvili

Photographer:
Aleksi Serov

Website Manager/Editor:
Katie Ruth Davies

Layout:
Misha Mchedlishvili

Webmaster:
Sergey Gevenov

Circulation Managers:
David Kerdikashvili,
David Djangigava

ADDRESS
1 Melikishvili Str.
Tbilisi, 0179, Georgia

Tel.: +995 32 229 59 19
E: info@georgiatoday.ge
F: GeorgiaToday

ADVERTISING & SUBSCRIPTION
+995 555 00 14 46
E-mail:
marketing@georgiatoday.ge

Reproducing material, photos and advertisements without prior editorial permission is strictly forbidden. The author is responsible for all material. Rights of authors are preserved. The newspaper is registered in Mtatsminda district court.

Reg. # 06/4-309



HÔTELS &
PRÉFÉRENCE
HUALING TBILISI
ჰოტელს & პრეფერენს
ჰუალინგ თბილისი



MEETING VENUES

Hotels & Preference Hualing Tbilisi offers perfect venues for holding conventions, seminars, workshops, incentives, exhibitions, fashion shows, corporate parties, New Year celebrations and other varieties of events.



DREAM WEDDING

If you are planning to celebrate your dream wedding party somewhere in a luxury ambience and taste a real sense of perfection, then our biggest ballroom in Tbilisi with its elegant interior is a perfect spot, providing with all facilities for your special day.



For detail information, please contact us: +995 322 50 50 25, info@hotelspreference.ge