



PM: By Deepening its Ties with EU and Regional Partners Georgia has Potential to Strengthen its Own Security

Tbilisi Deputy Mayor Ilia Elovshvili Found Dead

BY ANA DUMBADZE

Tbilisi Deputy Mayor Ilia Elovshvili was found dead in his house. The exact cause of his death is unknown.

"It's very hard to find words for the huge tragedy. It is impossible to convey the situation of how I feel about the loss

of Ilia," Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze wrote on social media. "I lost a friend and a precious person, whom I trusted totally in any matter. My condolences to his family, friends and loved ones. Nothing can fill this pain. May God bless his soul," he wrote.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs has launched an investigation into the death of Elovshvili under Article 115 of the Criminal Code, which stipulates incitement to suicide.

Ministry of Internal Affairs Launches an Information Campaign Against Child Marriage



Source of image: Interpressnews

BY MARIAM MIVILISHVILI

The Ministry of Internal Affairs has launched an information campaign—"Do not take away childhood" to prevent child marriage.

The Department of Human Rights Monitoring and the Quality of Investiga-

tion of the Ministry of the Interior are studying and monitoring all possible cases of child marriage. The information campaign will last for a month and will include a number of events, including meetings in Tbilisi and the regions with various target groups. These meetings will be held by staff of the Human Rights Monitoring and Quality Monitoring Department and representatives of police departments and other partner agencies.

Assistance to Socially Vulnerable Children Increases to 150 GEL



On June 1, the world celebrates Children's Day. The Prime Minister of Georgia, Irakli Garibashvili congratulated children on the occasion and noted looking after children's better future and creating conditions for their development, health, and growth into full citizens is a precondition of Georgia's strength, hence the government's key task.

"Since coming to power, we have imple-

mented numerous reforms and projects to this end. Last year, we doubled assistance for socially vulnerable children. Today, this assistance will grow even further to make up 150 GEL. The program will apply to more than 215,000 children, for which the state will allocate 341 million GEL. To reduce child poverty, and ensure their development, we will continue and scale up our efforts. I wish peace, health, and prosperity to our little ones and their families," noted Garibashvili.



Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili is participating in the GLOBSEC 2022 Bratislava Forum, Garibashvili wrote on Twit-

ter that by deepening its ties with EU and regional partners, Georgia has the potential to strengthen its own security. "Delighted to take part in GLOBSEC 2022. Look forward to fruitful discussions

& meetings. By deepening its ties with EU and regional partners Georgia has a potential to strengthen its own security & provide peace & stability in our region & beyond," Tweeted Garibashvili.

Queen Elizabeth's Platinum Jubilee Marked in the UK

Ninety-six-year-old Queen Elizabeth is the first British monarch in history to reach a Platinum Jubilee, which marks 70 years on the throne.

Queen Elizabeth II ascended to the throne on February 6, 1952, following the death of her father, King George VI.

Starting Thursday, the Platinum Jubilee celebration will include everything from the traditional Trooping the Colour birthday parade for the queen to a star-studded concert led by Diana Ross to thousands of street parties across the country.

The royal family gathered on the balcony at Buckingham Palace to watch the 70-aircraft flypast soar above central London.

Crowds of flag-waving royal-watchers gathered below as the Queen, wearing

sunglasses, watched on flanked by her family. To her right stood her eldest son Prince Charles, together with his wife the Duchess of Cornwall. On her left were the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge with their three children, Princes George and Louis and Princess Charlotte.

Also present were the Queen's children Edward and Anne, as well as a number of other relatives. The Sussexes, who were at the ceremony at Horse Guards Parade earlier but not seen, did not join the royals on the balcony as the Queen decided last month that only royals carrying out official duties will be included. Countrywide, streets were decorated with the Union Jack and neighbors came together to eat, drink and dance in celebration.

To mark the beginning of the Platinum Jubilee Celebration Weekend, a new portrait of the Queen has been released.

The photograph was taken by Randal Mackechnie at Windsor Castle on 25 May. Captured in the background are the Castle's Round Tower, and the statue of King Charles II which stands in the Quadrangle of the Castle.

The Queen released an official statement regarding the occasion, saying:

"Thank you to everyone who has been involved in convening communities, families, neighbors and friends to mark my Platinum Jubilee, in the United Kingdom and across the Commonwealth.

"I know that many happy memories will be created at these festive occasions. I continue to be inspired by the goodwill shown to me, and hope that the coming days will provide an opportunity to reflect on all that has been achieved during the last seventy years, as we look to the future with confidence and enthusiasm."



Image: CNN

Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: Week 13

BY ANA DUMBADZE

As Russian forces advance, Ukraine's allies in Europe have promised to increase aid, cut Russian oil imports and work to ship Ukrainian grain out of the country.

In the 13th week of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, US President Joe Biden pledged to send Ukraine more advanced rocket systems and munitions to more precisely strike key targets on the battlefield. The White House has to date been hesitant to send the weapons, which have long been requested by Kyiv.

Biden vowed that the US will "continue to provide Ukraine with weapons and equipment to defend itself" against Russia's invasion.

The \$700 million aid package, which includes an advanced rocket-launcher system known by the acronym HIMARS, will "provide timely and critical aid to the Ukrainian military," Biden said in a statement, a day after The New York Times published an opinion essay penned by Biden, who wrote that the US does not want Ukraine to fire those rockets into Russia. "We are not encouraging or enabling Ukraine to strike beyond its borders. We do not want to prolong the war just to inflict pain on Russia," he wrote.

The office of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky welcomed the \$700 million in new military aid allocated by the United States.

"The US has announced a new package of military aid for Ukraine. Thanks allies," Zelensky advisor Andriy Yermak tweeted after listing what the package would include, along with emoji showing a handshake between the Ukrainian and US flags.

But Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry

Peskov said the US is being provocative by supplying longer-range rocket systems to Ukraine.

"We believe that the US is deliberately pouring oil on the fire. They are obviously holding the line that it will fight Russia to the last Ukrainian," Peskov told reporters, according to Reuters.

His comments echo those made by Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov who claimed President Joe Biden's administration had increased the risk of direct clashes between Moscow and Washington by supplying rockets to Ukraine.

FIGHTING RAGES ON IN DONBAS

Zelensky has described Russian bombing in the front-line eastern city of Sievierodonetsk as "insanity" given the presence of a large-scale chemical plant. He reaffirmed that the situation in the Donbas region is "very difficult."

Residents of Sievierodonetsk have been warned not to leave bomb shelters due to the risk posed by toxic fumes after a Russian airstrike hit a nitric acid tank in the city.

"Russian forces have seized control of approximately 70% of Sievierodonetsk," said Luhansk Regional Governor Serhiy Haidai, adding, however, that the eastern city of Lysychansk remains "completely" under Ukrainian control.

"That said, all free settlements of the Luhansk region are under constant fire, and evacuation efforts have been suspended," he noted.

The Ukrainians are mounting a counteroffensive against the captured southern city of Kherson, partly in hopes of forcing Russia to divert forces from Donbas.

UKRAINE: RUSSIA FORCIBLY DEPORTED MORE THAN 200,000 CHILDREN



Russia has forcibly deported more than 200 000 Ukrainian children, Zelensky claims.

"These are orphans from orphanages. Children with parents. Children separated from their families," he said.

Nearly 700 children have been injured or killed as a result of Russia's attacks, with a further 139 children missing, the President added.

UNICEF reported that, on average, more than two children are killed and more than four are injured every day in Ukraine, due mostly to attacks using explosive weapons in populated areas, based on reports verified by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

UK TO SEND ROCKET SYSTEMS, GERMANY TO SEND IRIS-T AIR DEFENSE SYSTEM TO UKRAINE

Germany will supply Ukraine with the IRIS-T air defense system, Chancellor Olaf Scholz said, following pleas from Kyiv and German opposition parties to step up heavy weapons deliveries.

Scholz said Germany had been "delivering continuously since the beginning of the war," pointing to more than 15 million rounds of ammunition, 100,000 grenades and over 5,000 anti-tank mines sent to Ukraine since Russia invaded the country on February 24.

"Most recently, the government has decided that we will deliver the most modern air defense system that Germany has: the IRIS-T," Scholz told lawmakers in the Bundestag.

The United Kingdom will send multiple-launch rocket systems to Ukraine. British Defense Secretary Ben Wallace noted, "These highly capable multiple-launch rocket systems will enable our Ukrainian friends to better protect themselves against Russia's brutal use of long-range artillery, which Putin's forces have used indiscriminately to flatten patterns."

OIL GROUP OPEC+ REPORTEDLY CONSIDERING SUSPENDING RUSSIA FROM SUPPLY DEAL

Some members of the energy alliance OPEC+ are considering whether to suspend Russia from an oil production deal, The Wall Street Journal has reported, citing unnamed OPEC delegates.

This comes at a time when non-OPEC leader Russia, a major player in global energy markets, faces a barrage of Western sanctions and a partial oil ban from the European Union in the wake of the onslaught in Ukraine.

OPEC delegates are reportedly concerned about the growing economic pressure on Russia and its ability to pump more crude to cool soaring prices.

BLACK SEA GRAIN TALKS GAIN MOMENTUM

Ankara is in negotiations with Moscow and Kyiv to open a corridor via Turkey for grain exports from Ukraine, a senior Turkish official told Reuters on Thursday.

An effort to ship grain stranded by the Russia-Ukraine war showed progress Wednesday, as a top Russian official

blessed Turkey's role in removing mines from the Black Sea and a top US official said Washington was working to keep sanctions from blocking Russia's exports, the Washington Post reported.

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has been leading discussions to find a way to ship grain and sunflower oil that has been blockaded in Ukrainian ports on the Black Sea, and to get Russian grain and fertilizer to world markets.

Turkey hasn't confirmed any deal but said it was negotiating with Russia toward establishing a safe sea lane to export food products from Ukraine.

NATO CHIEF TO MEET OFFICIALS FROM FINLAND, SWEDEN & TURKEY

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said he's convening a meeting of senior officials from Finland, Sweden and Turkey to try to overcome Ankara's objections to the two Nordic countries joining the alliance.

Stoltenberg told reporters that the talks will be held in Brussels "in a few days, with senior officials," but provided no further details.

"I'm confident that we will find a way forward," he said.

Roused by security concerns over Russia's war on Ukraine, Finland and Sweden applied to join NATO last month.

But Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is blocking their path, saying they're "not doing enough to fight Kurdish extremism."



Turkish Businessman Galip Ozturk Charged with Illegal Purchase, Possession of Drugs

BY ANA DUMBADZE

Businessman Galip Ozturk, director of the Metro City company, has been charged by the Prosecutor's Office with illegal purchase and possession of a particularly large amount of drugs. He was arrested in Batumi on May 31.

The information released by the Prosecutor's Office reads that as a result of a five-hour operation and search of Galip Ozturk's apartment, 7.2159 grams of cocaine was seized.

"The Prosecutor's Office of Georgia charged G.O., the founder of a company in Batumi, with illegal purchase and possession of a large amount of drugs.

"Within the framework of the investigation conducted by the Investigative Service of the Ministry of Finance of Georgia into alleged cases of tax evasion, production and use of false documents



and money laundering, as a result of the search of G.O.'s apartment in Batumi on the basis of a court warrant, a particularly large amount of drugs, 7.2159 grams

of cocaine, was seized on May 31. Law enforcers arrested G.O. the same day," reads the statement released by the Prosecutor's Office.



Germany Loosens Covid-19 Regulations for Georgian Citizens

German Embassy to Georgia reports from June 1, Georgian citizens are to be able to enter Germany with loosened corona regulations.

The embassy notes that it is no longer mandatory for those wishing to enter Germany to submit a document of vaccination, recovery from the virus, or a negative test.

The list of high-risk countries created

to protect against infection has been eliminated as Omicron is less likely to cause complex forms of the disease.

A vaccination certificate is required only for people arriving in Germany from countries where the virus has mutated. In this case, access is possible with all vaccines listed by the World Health Organization. Georgia is not considered the area where coronavirus has mutated.

Rocking the Boat: Could NATO Membership Actually Hurt Georgia?



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and the President of Georgia, Salome Zurbishvili during a meeting in March 2019. Source: NATO

ANALYSIS BY MICHAEL GODWIN

NATO has been forced to take almost unprecedented action in the wake of the Russian invasion and ongoing war in Ukraine. Finland and Sweden, once rooted in a quasi-neutral position of appeasement with both Brussels and Moscow, are now firmly in the realm of the former. The trio of Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia that still vie for membership are left wondering if it is a matter of “if” or “when.” With NATO keeping many of its cards close to its chest, it's hard to tell what the future holds for those eagerly grasping for a seat in Brussels.

Georgia has long sought a warmer relationship with NATO. With joint training centers, combat deployments on NATO missions, and annual training exercises in Europe hosting Georgian

soldiers, the relationship seems like a natural path to membership. However, the alliance has been hesitant to extend their invitation to Tbilisi. While it is expected that membership for Georgia would bring a new era of peace and stability to the South Caucasus, it could also backfire in a way both Georgia and NATO never could expect.

Georgia's commitment to Europe is understandably commendable. While there still remains room for improvement, the nation has set itself apart from many others in the South Caucasus and other post-Soviet nations in Central Asia. This warm relationship has afforded Georgia a special place in the hearts and minds of many European leaders, particularly in NATO.

However, there may be a lesser discussed reason for keeping Georgia at arm's length of the alliance and in its special “partner” status for the foreseeable future. As Finland and Sweden prepare for the onboarding process with NATO, the side effects of having this

duo in the alliance could show what would happen if Georgia took the same path.

NATO expansion has, until recently, been fueled by a desire to become more economically integrated into the European Union markets. Since NATO membership is not solely based on military standards, the accompanying economic and legislative requirements set the bar as many in central and eastern Europe sought to anchor their economy with the West. Having the collective defense against a Russian threat was a secondary or even tertiary reason for seeking inclusion in the alliance.

After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, massive numbers of citizens in the previously neutral states of Finland and Sweden changed their positions. As the primary reason for membership swayed back to safety from the Russians, a sense of collective defense was the top matter on the proverbial docket. Georgia, with a significant portion of its territory still under illegal occupation from the Krem-

lin's forces, remained steadfast in its desire for membership.

Unlike the two Nordic nations, Georgia is in a precarious geographic position with the rest of the alliance. With only Turkey bordering the country, Georgia is significantly removed from the rest of the would be allies that could come to her defense. The simple logistics of rescuing Tbilisi in the event of a renewed invasion would present an immense obstacle, possibly too much to be surmounted in a timely manner.

Another issue is the tug-of-war in the NATO geopolitical focus. Many in the alliance have debated between a northerly and arctic focus of the alliance as others demand a southern and Mediterranean prioritization. Adding Georgia would pull more attention towards the Black Sea and the South Caucasus, and NATO is unlikely to be able to balance all three regions.

With Finland and Sweden pulling the alliance north and expanding the NATO-Russian border contact length even more, it's unlikely Georgia would get the same amount of attention. In fact, it's likely that the security news of Tbilisi may prove to be more of a nuisance for many of NATO's western European members. Georgia, despite its military upgrades and reforms, still has a miniscule military force when compared to many NATO member's armies.

The matter of eliciting the further ire of the Kremlin is another point of contention that needs to be reckoned with. Having a NATO country in the South Caucasus along Russia's southern border and further contesting their grip on the Black Sea would likely trigger an exceptionally concerning reaction from Moscow. While another invasion similar to what has been launched against Ukraine is least likely, economic and cyberattacks against Georgia could have the ability to cripple the nation.

While NATO membership is still one of the goals for many in Parliament, it's unlikely to become a reality in the current geopolitical climate. The alliance is clearly focused on Ukraine, Finland, and Sweden, with little patience for South Caucasus matters. As a result, the priority of having Georgia on course for membership and a designated Membership Action Plan issued is far from being discussed.

The only course for Georgia is to continue to execute the reforms in law, economics, and in the military that will help make the nation look like an even more promising candidate when that time comes. While membership comes with its own set of unique challenges and potential pitfalls, Tbilisi needs to focus on playing the part until the dynamics across the alliance and relations with Russia change for the better.



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg unveils a new Joint Training Center in Georgia in 2015. Source: NATO

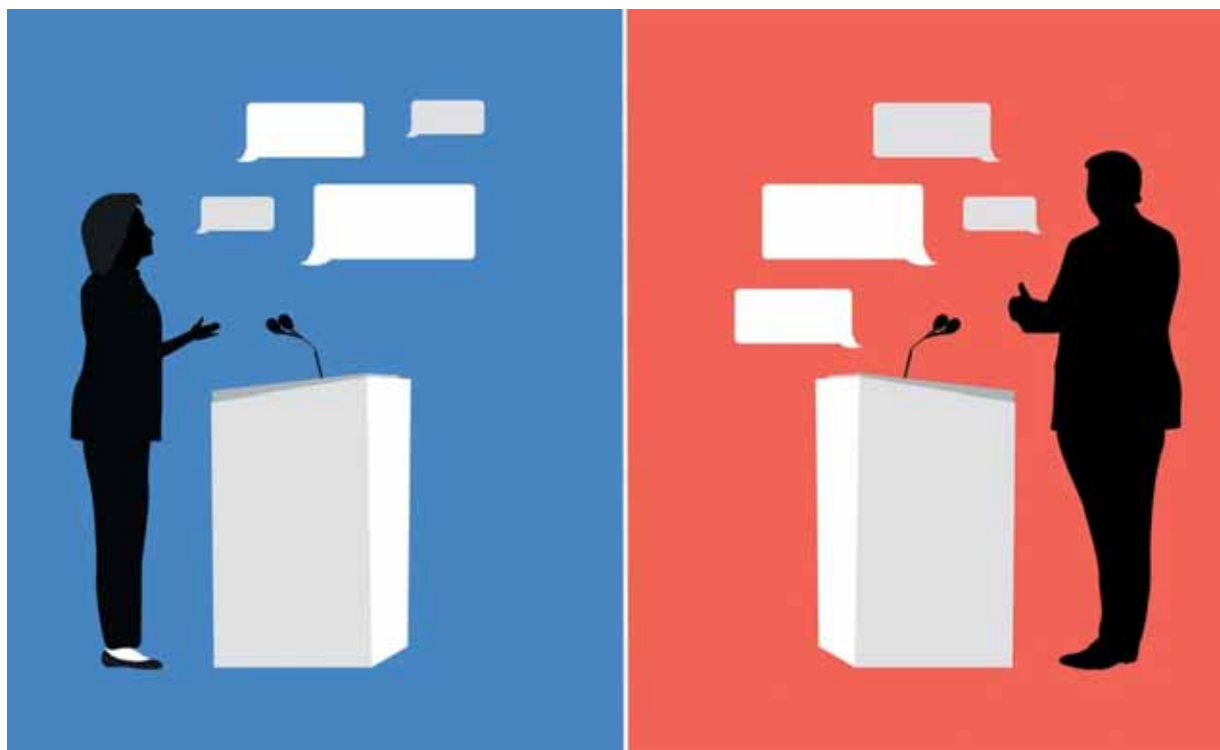
Is this Recriminatory Political Style our Historical Lot?

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

A political system based on liberal democracy purports debate between the government and its opposition as one of its most significant operational tools. As a matter of fact, democratic rule would make no sense without this characteristic feature in place.

We once had a system, in the notorious soviet era, when democracy was proclaimed by the constitution, but no political dispute existed as such. There was not even need for a dispute because decisions were made in an authoritarian fashion, determined by the communist mono-partisan organ called the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. If they ruled on something, further discussion of the issue would be rendered irrelevant, which meant that objections, no matter how fair and wise they might have been, were taken as a criminal act.

How lovely that those are times bygone, and we now enjoy a wonderful liberal democracy, giving us the chance to listen to one other and honor each other's utterances, regardless if they are prudent or lack somewhat in intelligence. In Georgia, we too have a democracy which allows us to have our logic heard and



Meg Kelly/NPR

our philosophy understood, and we do this via regular discussions, disputes and debates between the rulers of the country and their opposition, as well as at a grassroots level. The only negative is that the two sides of the democratic

process have lost the ability to hear each other.

The main arenas for those debates are the parliamentary floor and the mass media space, although we often take to streets too, because within the walls of

the parliament building, where, technically, the acoustics are perfect, the level of mutual understanding between the government and the opposition is almost nonexistent. They physically hear one another, but they can't understand what

they hear. This is our ongoing political tragedy.

Democracies of the world use the feature of debate to make wise and practicable conclusions for their respective peoples to live better, whereas our opposed parties only recriminate each other. Recrimination, as such, is actual stock-in-trade in the hands of both sides of the aisle. Recrimination constitutes the most commonplace political style in our reality, something we have gotten so used to that we can hardly carry on with our national cause without it. A recrimination-charged verbal skirmish is what keeps our local political spectrum ticking, our national ear only hearing those recriminations, and nothing else.

Could we somehow rid ourselves of this hideous way of doing politics in Georgia? By learning the modern-day political culture from our western friends and mentors, perhaps? There seems to be one obstacle in the way: the strength of our character and the obstinacy that prevails in it. It has always been the ABC of politics that a desirable result can only be achieved if the opposed political forces do their utmost to find a common tongue when it comes to solving the issues of national magnitude, so that the wolves are full, and the sheep are safe. I wonder, what level of IQ would a politician need to engage this simple truth in real life? Would it really take rocket science?

Gen. Sverker Goranson, Former Supreme Commander of the Swedish Armed Forces, on NATO, Trusting Putin, and Georgia's Prospects Moving Forward

Continued from page 1

WITH PUTIN TRYING TO CRAM NEUTRAL STATUS DOWN UKRAINE'S THROAT, AND MOLDOVA CONSIDERED AS NON-ALIGNED, NEUTRALITY HAS BEEN DISCUSSED QUITE OFTEN IN GEORGIA. CAN YOU AFFORD NEUTRALITY WHEN YOU ARE RUSSIA'S NEIGHBOR TODAY?

No. There is no nation on this globe with the ability on its own to handle whatever challenge comes up in a crisis or war. Maybe one, just to a certain degree, and that's the United States. But I doubt there is the possibility for anyone near Russian borders to be neutral.

SO FOR UKRAINE, MOLDOVA, GEORGIA, DECLARING NEUTRALITY WOULD BE JUST ON PAPER.

Yes, I would say so. Ukraine is not neutral [yet], because they have chosen a Western, open, democratic society with human rights, and they would love to become members of both the EU and NATO in due time.

IN 2012, YOU SAID, "IN CASE OF MILITARY INVASION, SWEDEN CAN SURVIVE FOR [JUST] ONE WEEK". IT WAS A WAKE-UP CALL FOR YOUR NATION. WHICH COUNTRIES IN EUROPE DO YOU THINK NEED TO ASK THEMSELVES THE SAME QUESTION?

I would say the absolute majority, but I would also argue that what happened in February, for a lot of them, Germany especially, made them turn around the same way as Sweden did when I put the one-week label on the debate. In 2014, NATO decided at the Cardiff Summit to up the military spending in Europe to 2% of GDP. Some of the small nations have done so, the Baltic States especially, but the big ones did not. And especially not Germany - that has been at about 1%, I think. So in that respect, the turnaround in Germany is a paradigm shift for sure, a big one, and for their economy as well. In a few years' time, Europe could be very well prepared to do a lot on its own and not necessarily be as dependent on the US as we are today and historically have been. I'm not saying we can do it on our own, but we will have more resources, and if there is good work within NATO and the EU to burden-share in different capabilities, we might be very well off. We need to be.

Going back to my quote, I realized it was no use trying to explain [to Swedish civilians] how we plan in the armed forces, because nobody understood it, except my own people in the armed forces. It was not enough. So yeah, it was a big turnaround. And it's still talked about. I'm asked if I regret saying it. Absolutely not, quite the opposite.

THE OVERALL IMPRESSION WHEN THE TWO COUNTRIES ANNOUNCED THEIR INTENTION TO JOIN WAS THAT IT WOULD GO SWIMMINGLY. BUT THE PRESIDENT OF TURKEY HAS BLOCKED IT ONCE AND CLAIMS HE HAS HIS OWN DEMANDS. WILL SWEDEN FULFILL THEM?

I would say a number of the things put forward by Turkey are not a problem for either Sweden or Finland, because PKK is labeled as a terrorist organization, yet it's also very hard to be sure who belongs to what group. There is a lot in the Turkish argument that is very hard to prove.

But in most cases, I'd say it shouldn't be a problem. [Erdogan] wants some 33 people in Sweden released to Turkey, something that I have a very strong feeling will not happen. The arms embargo, that's law in Sweden, how we can export arms to nations that are doing different things. So I don't think that will happen either. But I would say that the demand list on Sweden and Finland is also an indirect dialogue with the US concerning arms and sales and all of that. It goes back to when Turkey wanted to buy American fighter jets and wasn't allowed to. This is the way President Erdogan behaves every time he has the chance. And they always come to some sort of solution. Most of it goes back to talks with United States.

SO SWEDEN WON'T HAVE TO MAKE A CHOICE BETWEEN HARD SECURITY AND DEMOCRATIC VALUES?

No, I don't see that happening. There'll be pressure on Turkey from other parts of NATO, especially from the big ones. And I do think that the US President will send very clear signals to Turkey as well: Beware, you are milking this cow a little too much. Get back in your box. If Turkey pushes too hard, they will lose business with the US.

LET'S GO BACK TO RUSSIA. THE KREMLIN HAS BEEN TIMID ON THE NATO ISSUE, BUT IS ALSO PASSIVE AGGRESSIVELY SAYING THERE MIGHT BE SOME CONSEQUENCES. WHAT CONSEQUENCES MIGHT THOSE BE?

What we have seen; what they have in their toolbox. It started during my tenure as Chief of Defense between 2009 and 2015. For Russians, masculinity, force, and military power are important things to show that "we are big and we will decide and do what we want to do." We have seen over the years aggressive flying, forceful exercises very close to our borders, in the ocean as well as in the air. I would say those things will continue. As late as last fall, they flew over Gotland at the time the Swedish and Finnish ministers of defense were on the island. They knew very well what they were doing. It was a way of showing power. And it will continue, because that's the only language they know.

Will they go beyond? I don't think so, because they realize that both Sweden and Finland are on their toes at the moment. And they have publicly been seen talking to the UK, Germany, the US, who have all replied, "we'll be there for you now." They realize we're under the umbrella of NATO as a result of what's going on. So now I don't think they will stretch their boundaries even more.

PUTIN SAYS HE WON'T OBJECT TO MEMBERSHIP- THAT IT'S NATO INFRASTRUCTURE HE'S WORRIED ABOUT. WHAT NATO

If you want the [security] guarantee you need to be part of NATO

I would argue that the threat towards Georgia and Moldova is real

MILITARY INFRASTRUCTURE CAN WE EXPECT TO BE INTRODUCED IN SWEDEN?

Nuclear is out, because the American, French and British ones are already strategically placed. As for bases, the initial discussion in both Finland and Sweden is that we do not want permanent deployments to our nations. I'd hope that Sweden and Finland won't make any statements initially, because this is a dialogue that you can have down the road. It wouldn't surprise me if fairly soon, especially if the environment doesn't change, some sort of combined unit was created in Finland, since they have a very long border with Russia, to have some another nation within Finland [for support]. That could very well be Sweden. The Scandinavian countries could create something similar to that now in the Baltic states and Poland. NATO also needs to look over its command structure, within its territory, because if you look at the map, it's very concentrated in Europe along the eastern border, with very few command posts up north. So it should, in due time, create some sort of command post further north as well. That command post could very well be something that's shared between Sweden, Finland and Norway.

THIS UNITY IS A GOOD THING, AND PEOPLE IN UKRAINE AND GEORGIA ARE VERY HAPPY FOR YOU, BUT STILL, WHAT KIND OF MESSAGE DOES IT SEND TO KYIV AND TBILISI, WHICH HAVE BEEN SHUFFLING THEIR FEET IN FRONT OF THE NATO "OPEN DOOR" FOR DECADES NOW?

The main signal it sends right now is, if you want the security guarantee, you need to be part of NATO, but to become a part of NATO, there are certain demands that you need to fulfill. And everybody looking at us needs to realize that. I would argue that that Sweden and Finland have become completely NATO interoperable - there is nothing within the Swedish Armed Forces that will not work when joining NATO.

THE UKRAINIAN ARMY WOULD BE ONE OF THE TOP NATO NATIONS IN THE WORLD AS A NET DEFENSE AND CAPABILITY PROVIDER, AND GEORGIA HAS BEEN PARTICIPATING IN NATO MISSIONS FOR OVER A DECADE. ALMOST EVERY SACEUR SAYS THE GEORGIAN MILITARY ARE PERFECTLY READY FOR NATO. TRUE, WE'RE TOLD WE'RE NOT READY IN DEMOCRATIC VALUES AND HUMAN RIGHTS, ETC., BUT WE CAN POINT AT OTHERS, FOR EXAMPLE, IN THE BALKANS, THAT WEREN'T READY EITHER. ARE WE DEALING WITH DOUBLE STANDARDS?

Not necessarily, though it depends how the globe continues to spin, as standards get slightly adjusted. If you go back to when the Eastern Bloc fell apart, we all



Sverker John Olof Göranson, Supreme Commander of the Swedish Armed Forces. Source: Wikipedia

thought "now the democratic and free world is opening up, help them on the way." The open door then was more open than it is now, and that opening might be smaller for a while, depending how Russia continues to behave, to make sure that we are not moving too fast or too far. No matter when the war ends in Ukraine, we need to rebuild a new security management for Europe, since Putin has destroyed it. And in that respect, we need to restore some sort of diplomatic dialogue with Russia as well. We might dislike him or them, but we need to bring them on the sheet of music. Again, under different circumstances, of course, but still, we will not want to have isolated Russia, so creating a North Korea in Europe. There are certain challenges at the moment but I do honestly think it's not double standards, simply that there will be a reluctance to continue down the path too fast. I think most people in Sweden will be among those arguing that those nations that want to join have to be helped to reach the standards that we want for democracy.

THE IMPETUS FOR SWEDEN AND FINLAND TO APPLY WAS THE UNDERSTANDING THAT RUSSIA IS MORE EAGER TO ATTACK NON-NATO MEMBER COUNTRIES, RIGHT? WHERE DOES THIS LEAVE COUNTRIES LIKE GEORGIA AND MOLDOVA? HOW REAL IS THE THREAT FOR THEM?

Russia and President Putin cannot be trusted. Many years have been spent trying to have a peaceful relationship. Russia has shown they do not follow international law, the Helsinki Treaty or the Paris Agreement. They prefer to keep Sweden and Finland outside NATO to allow them to act as they wish in relation to us, including military force if so required. The threshold with membership raises that bar dramatically.

I would argue that the threat towards Georgia and Moldova is real. In the current situation, nothing will happen in the near future. It very much depends on the outcome in Ukraine.

YOU DESCRIBED PRESIDENT PUTIN BOTH AS UNPREDICTABLE AND UNRELIABLE. WHAT GIVES YOU ANY HOPE THAT PUTIN WILL COOPERATE IN ANY DIPLOMATIC DIALOGUE, THAT HE CAN BE RELIED ON TO HOLD UP HIS END OF THE BARGAIN?

The bottom line is that you cannot trust him. He will lie as much as needed and also define his reality. Still, we have to try to negotiate and get Russia to work alongside international agreements to prevent Russia becoming a new North Korea. Technically, the first step is to try to get them to stop the aggressive war

in order to save civilian lives. If that happens, the next step would be to force them to accept their responsibility, which will be hard. There is a chance that young people in Russia will oppose him in the long-run if this continues, that might be our best chance.

It will come down to the sheer fact that if Russia continues to be isolated, their economy will not be strong enough to survive. If Putin wants his people to continue to listen to him, he needs to have an income, and the main way to do that is to sell oil and gas. In due time, I do think he will realize this and try to remain on the market. That said, I realize that hope is not a course of action.

HOW DO YOU MAKE SURE THIS WAR DOESN'T REPEAT?

The problem with Putin is that he has defined his own history and future, and it doesn't cooperate with the open democratic society we have in the West. You can most certainly count that he will lower the gas and try to focus on stabilizing eastern and southern Ukraine. And then he will re-group, try to recruit and get power again, and then put his foot on the accelerator again and restart offensive operations.

TO CONQUER ALL OF UKRAINE?

Yes. And be more forceful and expand the area he controls, mainly along the Black Sea: Odessa and then Moldova and Transnistria. That would be very bad for Ukraine since they then would be locked out of the Black Sea and all that communication for business.

WHY TALK TO HIM. WHY NOT WAIT HIM OUT?

Some say, "hit him hard so he once and for all becomes quiet." But if you force him too much, you don't really know what he will do because he has already shown that he is not a military strategy guy - if so, he wouldn't have attacked Ukraine. He'll pay heavily now, and in the long run, for this. I would like to see his calculation - whether what he will achieve is worth this impact on human life, the economy, and the destruction of the label "Russia."

We will not want to have isolated Russia, creating a North Korea in Europe

Going All In: Is Putin's Gambling a Strategy or a Problem?



Russian President Vladimir Putin today (left) and in Saint Petersburg in 1970 (right). Source: Getty Images

BY MICHAEL GODWIN

The invasion of Ukraine on February 24 caught most observers and analysts off guard. Many thought that there was no way a renewed combat operation could occur in the nation. Others, like myself, thought that an increase of kinetic operations in the occupied Donbas regions would take place. With the launch of a total invasion into the country, almost all had come to think that Ukraine would surely fall under the might of the Russian Federation.

This did not come to pass. After weeks of fighting and limited territorial gains, Russian forces have paid dearly for every inch. As Ukrainian resistance hardened, many began to think that Russian President Vladimir Putin had made a reckless gamble in throwing the mass of green-clad Russian forces he thought would surely crush a weaker and numerically inferior force. However, upon closer observation, it is unlikely that this man of infamous mystery would ever make such a move without a proverbial card up his sleeve.

Gambling inherently incurs a risk of loss, and typically a significant risk at

that. Putin is not one to allow this. Since his ascent to power, he has constantly viewed Ukraine as "the one that got away" to the West. His desire to see Russia regain its former Soviet-era greatness was through Ukraine, as well as the subjugation of Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Central Asia.

Europe, Canada, and much of Latin America is seen collectively as "The West" and under the purview of the United States in many respects. As Putin sees it, much of the former Soviet empire is seen as still in the sphere of influence of Russia. As a result, these post-Soviet nations should work within that space and symbiotically with the Kremlin, rejecting Western and American influences. Almost like the concept of divine right, Ukraine was an extension of this vision and that the nation rightfully "belonged" to Russia.

To achieve this hegemony, Putin became a master of ensuring his success by controlling the variables involved in any given social or governmental mechanism. He would never make decisive action without the "insurance policy" of either ensuring outside actors would not hinder his success or that they would support his actions.

This framework was demonstrated in much of Putin's early business dealings while working in various positions in

Moscow. In his autobiography, Putin explains how controlling the litany of mafias and organized crime groups was paramount to obtaining the control he so desired. Threats, killings, and weaponization of the police against the opposition helped him rise to national level management.

Using law alongside force worked for him at the national level. However, he ran into obstacles when attempting to exercise this same strategy on the international stage. In Georgia, he tried relentlessly to manipulate government policy and steer them away from the rising Western influence. His 2008 invasion did little but gain territory and leverage at the negotiating table, while galvanizing Western sentiment in Tbilisi.

Ukraine, while always a problem, became urgent with the 2004 and 2014 revolutions. Incredible amounts of Western sentiment led Putin to act in the same way as he did with Georgia. By seizing land and forcing Ukraine into a stalemate, they were kept from becoming too close to NATO and the EU. In both Georgia and Ukraine, Putin maximized his control of the variables involved, prepared the narrative, and used force only when he knew victory was certain.

The invasion in 2014 laid fertile soil for the invasion this past February. By "liberating" the two self-proclaimed republics, this gave him a caucus bello to offer them protection. Under the guise of what is commonly called in United Nations law "responsibility to protect" or R2P, he painted the narrative about an oppressive Ukrainian government. Using Russia's perceived R2P is just another form of Putin manipulating the law to fit his narrative.

The personal side of the Russo-Ukrainian relationship also plays into Putin's strategy. Former Ukrainian presidents prior to Volodymyr Zelensky were either able to be manipulated, or acted in a way that never threatened the Kremlin "sphere of influence." Zelensky's desire for EU and NATO membership, removal of Russian media influences, and a renewed attempt to change the tide with the separatists caused the fire in the Kremlin to ignite.



A young KGB officer Vladimir Putin with his daughters Katerina (left) and Maria (right) during their time with their father in Dresden, East Germany. Source: Russian Archives Photo via Getty Images

Next, the Russian leader took time to prepare the homeland and his forces. Just as Moscow had done after Georgia, they launched widespread reforms in the military and the development of new weaponry, or improving the arms in stock. Reforming the economy to lessen the impact of foreign sanctions, building a proverbial "war chest," and divesting of foreign dependencies made the country insulated from tough long-term sanction campaigns.

Then came Afghanistan. The poor performance of the United States and other NATO military forces attempting withdrawal from the collapsing nation assured Putin that the Americans would be unlikely to interfere with any other foreign missions for quite some time. With Europe secured by Russian natural gas deals, America looking weak on the world stage, and Ukraine left begging with little hope of any security promises, the time was nigh.

However, a seemingly unassuming event would halt even the entirety of a Russian invasion force, and Putin himself. Enter the Beijing 2022 Olympics. In leaked communications obtained by a

US intelligence source, Xi asked Putin to delay the invasion so China could score its propaganda victory for the world to see, and not be marred by the background of a European war. Putin, with his foreign trade likely being restricted to mainly China post-invasion, had no choice but to bow to this request.

However, with the 2022 Olympics completed, the plan he had prepared since the close of 2014 was ready for action. Despite setbacks due to tactical and operational leadership, he would not let this prey escape his clutch. Even with the Russian redeployment to the east of Ukraine to seize the Donbas region, it is unlikely this will be the end.

Putin's thuggish history and vindictive nature will not allow transgressions, particularly those by NATO and the West, to go unanswered, even if it takes the rest of his life. For as long as he holds his position of power, it is likely he will not let up. Like a villain escaping capture by the hero, this is not the last we've seen of the brutal rolling of the dice by Vlad. Putin is more than happy to go all in, as long as his strategy includes always coming back to the table.



Papuashvili Meets with President of Republic of Armenia, Discusses Fruitful Cooperation Between Two Countries

The Speaker of the Parliament Shalva Papuashvili met with the President of the Republic of Armenia, Vahagn Khachaturyan.

As the Speaker stated at the meeting, the first visit of the President of Armenia to Georgia is symbolic, which once again emphasizes the importance of the relations between the two countries.

The sides discussed the fruitful coop-

eration between Georgia and the Republic of Armenia in various domains. The increase in the dynamics of high-level visits was regarded as a positive development.

The sides also dwelt on the current developments in the region and discussed the steps taken toward establishing regional peace and stability.

The sides pledged to continue to enhance the bilateral relations between the two countries.

Head of Empathy Center: Ex-President's Medication at Vivamedi Inadequate

BY ANA DUMBADZE

Empathy Center Head Mariam Jishkariani visited ex-president Mikheil Saakashvili at the Vivamedi Clinic on Wednesday and assessed his

medication as "inadequate."

Jishkariani says the prognosis was not good, and the penitentiary service was to blame for making the wrong diagnosis.

"We have stated several times that the medication and diagnostics were incorrect, the medical treatment doesn't address the diagnosis, and the result is zero," Jishkariani said.

The Empathy Center Head stated that Mikheil Saakashvili has deteriorating neurology issues and should be transferred to a multi-profile clinic abroad.

Currently, the ex-president is undergoing treatment at the Vivamedi Clinic. The opposition United National Movement (UNM) party and family members demand his transfer abroad for treatment.



Is NATO Already in a Conflict with Russia?

ANALYSIS BY MICHAEL GODWIN

While a war of words escalates between Brussels and Moscow, it is rapidly becoming apparent that militaries in Europe are becoming more kinetic. NATO, once a force only dedicated to small peacekeeping-type operations and assistance missions, is now facing the prospect of being on the frontlines. With Ukraine locked in heated combat with the Russians, recent events from both Western and Russian sources paint an eerie picture along NATO's eastern front.

NATO officials have adamantly opposed any escalation with Russia. However, the majority of its member states have been actively arming Ukraine in its war. This is amplified by the multitude of volunteers traveling to fight for Ukraine coming from NATO countries. Evidence of this has sadly arisen from Russian sources displaying captured fighters and equipment clearly displaying non-Ukrainian documentation or insignia.

While leadership in these countries have been hesitant to either condemn or support these volunteers, little to nothing has been done to cap their growing numbers. In addition, they have been sending arms to many of the units of these volunteers via the Ukrainian government. In response, the Kremlin has vowed to destroy any NATO vehicle found in Ukraine.

In early May, Belarus announced snap military drills. While they assured that there was no threat to Europe, Ukraine, or NATO, many military leaders were not so certain. Given the warm relationship between Minsk and Moscow, officials in Kyiv have expressed concern. NATO, already mobilizing many of its rapid reaction forces, finds itself in a position it hasn't seen since its inception 1949.

While the definition of a nation being in conflict with another may be described in various ways, it may very well describe what NATO is facing now. Of course, the alliance has yet to engage in open com-

bat with Russia and her ally, Belarus. Despite this, there is the propensity now for both sides to meet on the battlefield.

One may see this as a type of Frozen Conflict. This relatively new term has only been used in a select group of ongoing incidents. Cornell International Law Journal says, "The expression 'frozen conflict' has acquired no definite meaning and was not heard at all in State practice before the end of the Cold War."

Russia and NATO will likely have a combative relationship as a result of this proxy war in Ukraine. While not directly engaged, it is mostly NATO arms and equipment being leveled against the Russian military machine. As a result, it is not a far connection to draw between the two coming to blows, as the only difference is that the finger pulling the trigger is Ukrainian rather than a NATO nation's.

This war by proxy lends itself to the thought that NATO is in fact already at war with Russia. With many NATO nations arming themselves, calling on reserves, and sending units to forward deployed positions, it's hardly a difficult picture to paint. These NATO multinational battlegroups, while having existed for years prior to recent events, bring a curious eye when their numbers are observed.

According to NATO, prior to Russia's annexation of Crimea, there had been no plans to deploy these battlegroups. It was only in 2016 and 2017 that NATO authorities agreed that placing additional forces in the Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia would be a prudent move against rising instability in the east.

The three nations were assessed as being particularly vulnerable due to their proximity to Russia, as well as the only land route to the trio being through the Suwalki Gap. This gap is between the Russian territory of Kaliningrad and Belarus and connects Poland to Lithuania. In the event of open warfare, this would be the only means of overland support to the Baltic countries, as they would be cut off and isolated by Russo-Belarusian forces.

The recent applications sent by Finland and Sweden stand to extend this NATO front in the northern direction. Additionally, their inclusion will make the



United States President Joe Biden signs the Ukraine Democracy Defense Lend-Lease Act of 2022 in the Oval Office of the White House. Source: AP Photo/Manuel Balce Ceneta

Baltic Sea a so-called "NATO Lake." With this control, it would remove the Suwalki Gap as being the primary support route to the Baltic States. It would also stand to close off the usability of the Kaliningrad and Saint Petersburg naval assets for effective use against NATO navies.

Both of these potential new members bring with them significant military power. Since the end of the Cold War, neither has been shy from investment in military power and civil defense. In the event of open war, they would not only be able to resist an invasion, but would be able to threaten key military and civil infrastructure within Russia itself. The Kola peninsula, riddled with military installations and the only port available year-round, would be in dire threat of being cut off.

Running north-south along this peninsular region is a military highway and

support railway. This support route, known as the Murmansk Corridor, runs from the aforementioned city in the western Kola peninsula down almost 700 kilometers. If a NATO force in these Scandinavian allies threatens, Russia loses the ability to support a significant amount of naval, air, and even nuclear capabilities in its northern region.

With these dangers carefully calculated, the Kremlin has not been silent in its objections. Russia has threatened action if these nations are added to the alliance, though these likely come from a place of insecurity. Former President of the Russian Federation and Deputy Chairman of the Security Council of Russia, Dimirty Medvedev, said in a statement, "If Sweden and Finland join NATO, the length of the land borders...will more than double. Naturally, these boundaries will have to be strengthened."

These actions may not mean war at the tactical or operational level, but the movements almost mirror the grand strategic movements of a large scale conflict. Russian missile forces have already been seen via open sources online maneuvering near the city of Vyborg, near the Russo-Finnish border. It seems many of the pieces of the Russian and NATO game are coming into place.

War for NATO may not, and hopefully will never, mean open combat with a near-peer such as Russia. However, a more modern and nuanced meaning of the word may mean that traditional weaponry need not be used as with wars of yesteryear. Economic, cyber, logistical means, coupled with geographic positioning to pressure an enemy into a position of incapacity, may be the new future of NATO's strategy to defeat Russian aggression on the continent.

Georgia's European Way

BY KETEVAN SHKIRTADZE

I expect that the assessment of the European Commission will be published in the coming days, - EU Ambassador to Georgia Carl Hartzell stated this week. "After that, there will be discussions between the member states about a possible decision that they should take. I will not start speculating on the results of the European Commission evaluation and the final decision of the Council. I'll just say that no matter what the outcome is, one major conclusion will again be the same: it is time for Georgia to start working on ensuring that steady progress is made in terms of what it needs to do to join the EU."

He noted that the strength of politicians in this matter is certainly the fact that they rely on the majority of the population, which supports this strategic task.

KOBAKHIDZE: EUROPEAN UNION HAS NO REASON TO REJECT GEORGIA'S EU CANDIDATE STATUS

"The European Union has no reason to reject Georgia's EU candidate status, especially if it grants the status to Ukraine and Moldova," the ruling Georgian Dream party Chairman Irakli Kobakhidze said on Monday.

Kobakhidze said Georgia had achieved "all tangible results" for EU integration under the Georgian Dream government, and "the country is ahead of the other

applicant countries in all relevant parameters."

He also mentioned that "the radical opposition" keeps saying Georgia does not deserve EU candidate status.

"The opposition wants the country to face status rejection, which according to their plan will be followed by public outcry, a UNM-led coup, and the country's involvement in the war," Kobakhidze said.

The GD Chair added that he believes granting the status to Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova will send an important political message in two respects: "First, that the EU expresses solidarity with the three countries having territories under Russian occupation. And second, that the EU states are not afraid of a Russian reaction and take a principled position in supporting those three countries," he said.

EU - THE COUNTRY'S HISTORIC CHANCE

MEP Viola von Cramon responded to her meetings with representatives of the Georgian opposition parties Lelo and Giorgi Gakharia's "For Georgia" in Brussels.

"For the record, in the last weeks, in Brussels, I met two opposition parties from Georgia - Lelo & Gakharia's For Georgia. Both strongly demanded EU candidacy for Georgia, despite the democratic backsliding, stating it is 'a historic chance for the country & is above all party lines,'" von Cramon wrote on Twitter.

The MEP thus contradicted the claim of the ruling Georgian Dream party and

Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili that the opposition campaigned against Georgia's EU candidacy during their trips to Brussels.

In recent weeks, Georgian officials have said that "certain politicians from the radical opposition are walking in the corridors [of EU structures] and agitating against Georgia's candidacy for the EU."

REVIEWING APPLICATIONS FROM UKRAINE, MOLDOVA, AND GEORGIA IS TO TAKE PLACE IN JUNE

"The European Council takes note of the preparation of the Commission's opinions on the application for EU membership of Ukraine as well as the Republic of Moldova and Georgia and will revert to the matter at its June meeting," reads the statement issued after this week's meeting of the European Council.

"The European Council resolutely condemns Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. It urges Russia to immediately stop its indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure and to immediately and unconditionally withdraw all its troops and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. The atrocities being committed by Russian forces and the suffering and destruction being inflicted are unspeakable. The European Council calls on Russia to allow immediate humanitarian access and the safe passage of all civilians concerned. The European Council expects international humanitarian law, including the Geneva



Image source: thenewfederalist.eu

Convention relative to the treatment of prisoners of war, to be fully respected. It also calls on Russia to immediately allow the safe return of Ukrainian individuals forcibly removed to Russia.

"The European Council hails the courage and determination of the Ukrainian people and its leadership in their fight to defend the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and freedom of their country. The European Union is unwavering in its commitment to help Ukraine exercise its inherent right of self-defense against Russian aggression and build a peaceful, democratic and prosperous future. In this regard, it will continue to work closely with international partners," reads the statement.

It was also noted the European Council follows closely the impact of Russia's war against Ukraine on neighboring countries and the Western Balkans. It emphasizes the need to provide all relevant support to the Republic of Moldova as it deals with the interlinked energy and economic crises, and migration pressure arising from the war.

"The European Council reiterates its call for an end to repression in Belarus and recalls the democratic right of the Belarusian people to new, free and fair elections," reads the statement.

US SUPPORTS EUROPEAN ASPIRATIONS OF GEORGIA, UKRAINE, AND MOLDOVA

Ned Price, Spokesperson for the US Department of State, stated that the United States, as a strategic partner, strongly supports the European aspirations of Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova.

He was then asked by the press whether he believes the three countries would reach this major milestone at this juncture.

"These are questions for those three countries and for the EU, but in the case of all three countries, the United States, as a strategic partner, strongly supports their European aspirations. We have stood by them as they have gone down the path from independence to where they are now, and we will continue to stand by them as they continue down that path," Price responded.

Improving Georgia's Agriculture Sector is Central to Sustainable Economic Growth, says New World Bank Report



Source: FAO

Agriculture, water, and land in Georgia can be a source of increased economic productivity, including a transition from low agriculture returns to high-value crop production, if supported by targeted policies and complementary public and private investments, says a new World Bank synthesis report. "Agriculture, Water, and Land Policies to Scale Up Sustainable Agri-food

Systems in Georgia" was launched today at an event hosted jointly by the World Bank and the Government of Georgia.

The report summarizes the main constraints and opportunities facing Georgia in efforts to boost the contribution of the agriculture sector to economic growth, as well as its contribution to diversification, job creation, poverty reduction, food security, and climate resilience and mitigation. Successfully

achieving these objectives requires an integrated set of multi-sectoral policies, which the Government of Georgia has already identified and prioritized by urgency and technical readiness.

"Years of focused policy interventions and investments in Georgia's agriculture sector have started to bear fruit. In the past decade, the value of food production has increased sharply, with some export-oriented producers and agri-

businesses successfully developing value chains, and showing that sustainable growth is feasible," said Sebastian Molineus, World Bank Regional Director for the South Caucasus. "Agricultural competitiveness is crucial for Georgia's sustainable economic growth, which means that it needs to invest in improving production, processing, compliance with international market standards, and efficiency of supply chains."

The report emphasizes that resolving agriculture sector constraints is a necessary but insufficient condition for improving the sector's performance. The availability and efficient use of water resources in a reliable, timely, and flexible manner for farmers is critical for the sector's growth, while improved land management and administration are necessary for secure land ownership, as well as a sustainable and productive management of resources. Thus, simultaneous interventions will be required in addressing core sector constraints in Georgia's water and land sectors, and the timing is even more urgent when factoring in increasing climate change variability and risks.

"The Government of Georgia has been implementing significant investment projects in the agriculture sector during recent years, and the international financial institutions have played a big role in this process, among them the World Bank, which is an important partner and with which we have had very fruitful cooperation for many years," said George Khanishvili, First Deputy Minister of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia. "Amidst the current situation in the region, increased agricultural production is becoming ever more crucial for the country. Accordingly, the current and future engagement of the World Bank in the agriculture sector of Georgia is very important for the further growth and development of the entire economy of Georgia."

This synthesis report builds upon the following sectoral notes that are available as research companion pieces: Constraints to sustainable, efficient, and resilient irrigation systems in Georgia—What is a Possible Way Forward?, Policy note on agricultural land market development in Georgia, and Climate Smart Agriculture Country Profile for Georgia.

Geostat: Poverty Reduced in Georgia

The National Statistics Office of Georgia reports that in 2021, the share of the population below the absolute poverty line in Georgia (absolute poverty rate) decreased by 3.8 percentage points compared to the same period of the previous year and amounted to 17.5%.

Based on the same source, in 2021, the absolute poverty rate in urban type settlements decreased by 2.1 percentage points and amounted to 15.0%, while in rural type settlements it decreased by 6.3 percentage points and amounted to 21.3%.

In 2021, the absolute poverty rate decreased compared to the previous year in all age groups of the population. Particularly, the indicator was 22.7% in the age group under 18 years (-3.7 percentage points), in the 18-64 age group -17.3% (-3.9 percentage points), and in the age group 65 and older -11.9% (-3.5 percentage points). Absolute poverty rates for both women and men fell by 3.8 percentage points and amounted to 17.1 and 17.9%, respectively.

In 2021, the share of the population under 60% of the median consumption decreased by 0.8 percentage points and amounted to 18.9%, while the share of the population under 40% of median consumption increased by 0.4 percentage points and amounted to 7.4%, said Geostat.

In 2021, the value of the Gini coefficient in terms of total incomes has not changed compared to the previous year and is at



Source: Geostat

the level of 0.37. Also, the value of the Gini coefficient in terms of total cash

inflows has not changed and is at the level of 0.39. The Gini coefficient is

reduced from 0.36 to 0.34 in terms of total consumption expenditures, while

it remains unchanged in terms of total cash expenditures and stands at 0.42.

UNICEF and Carrefour Collaborate: Supporting Social Integration of Children with Special Educational Needs



Carrefour, the largest hypermarket and supermarket chain, represented by Majid Al Futtaim in Georgia, actively supports people with special needs and works with organizations such as 'The Deaf Union of Georgia' and 'The Union of the Visually Impaired of Georgia'.

This time, on the occasion of Children's Day, Carrefour joined a one-week communication campaign organized by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to reduce stigma against children with special educational needs, so that all children, regardless of their needs, have unimpeded, equal access to formal and non-formal education.

with special educational needs in the teaching process. As part of the campaign, Carrefour's chain of stores will feature visuals and informational cards with relevant content that will help raise awareness about inclusive education, eliminate stereotypes and increase social integration. Carrefour not only cares about raising awareness of people with special needs, but also actually takes steps to integrate them into society and actively employs them in the company. As part of the 'See Every Color' campaign, Carrefour employees with special needs are sharing their stories in order to encourage and promote their social integration.



The overall campaign of Carrefour's and UNICEF will help raise awareness of the importance of inclusive education and increase the involvement of children with special educational needs in the learning process.



CoE on the Adverse Impact of Covid-19 on Vulnerable Groups, Racism in Policing, and Intimidation of LGBTI People

The continuing Covid-19 pandemic that has further marginalized vulnerable groups, the ongoing problem of racism in police forces and the rise of anti-LGBTI public discourse were the main trends in 2021, said the Council of Europe's Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) in its annual report published today.

The Covid-19 pandemic that continued in 2021 led to an increased digitalization of services (including in education, in the healthcare sector or in the delivery of residence or work permits), and further marginalized vulnerable groups that were not in a position to use digital technologies. Persons with a migration background were often overrepresented in the service sector where remote work and a home office were not possible; and were therefore running a risk of greater exposure to the virus. Besides, the hospitality, food, entertainment, and tourism sector, as well as informal economy where many immigrants are employed, were badly affected by the prolonged lockdowns and by the resulting general economic downturn. On the positive side, the important role of migrant workers in the health sector and other vital public services was further highlighted in some countries.

In the field of education, the various Covid-related restrictions imposed on schools negatively impacted those children who already faced the most difficulties, such as migrant children and Roma: online learning was often challenging due to the lack of suitable space, equipment, and Internet connection. While in some countries the authorities took measures to help disadvantaged children catch up with their schooling, this was not the case across all Council of Europe member states. Many adults, too, were hit by the disruption of education services, in particular recently arrived migrants enrolled in integration and language courses.

Racism in policing continued to be an issue in a number of countries, including in the context of enforcing pandemic-related restrictions (curfews, lockdowns). The ECRI report refers in particular to racial profiling in stop-and-search activities, the use of racist language and excessive use of force against individuals,



Image source: Tbilisi Pride

which not only targeted individual victims, but stigmatized communities as a whole. Victims of such practices have often felt insufficiently supported by the authorities. At the same time, some member states took action to address these problems, including through independent complaints mechanisms and improved police training, and by trying to diversify police forces.

While the situation of LGBTI people and their communities continued to vary widely across the continent, the Covid-19 crisis had its toll on it, too. Young LGBTI people who were still residing with their parents were often exposed to disrespect and intimidation. Person-to-person psychosocial counselling offered by NGOs became restricted. In general, several states saw strong political rhetoric against a perceived "LGBTI-ideology" or a "gender ideology" amplified in the media and in general public discourse.

These attitudes became more entrenched with the adoption of laws specifically targeting LGBTI people and their rights or the provision of information about homosexuality and gender identity in public institutions and settings, such as schools and advertising. Condemnation of such attacks and strong cases of clear public counter-speech from high-ranking officials continue to be few and far between.

ECRI stressed in its report that the LGBTI-community organizations felt increasingly intimidated and restricted in their outreach work and public awareness-raising, and that the situation was made worse by violent attacks against LGBTI community leaders or venues

which were the ultimate results of pernicious hate speech, especially online and through social media.

Georgia saw homophobic violence and tragic loss of life in the run-up to the Pride March in July last year. In December 2021, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe expressed profound concern over the 2021 Tbilisi March of Dignity, underlined the importance of meaningful investigations and adequate sanctioning, and reiterated its call for the establishment of a specialized investigative unit for hate crimes within the police.

The European Court of Human Rights, the judiciary branch of the Council of Europe, has already ruled on several cases against Georgia concerning the lack of protection by state authorities from homophobic or religiously-motivated attacks

by private individuals during marches or meetings, police abuse committed with homophobic/transphobic bias, and the absence of effective investigations into these incidents. The judgments were delivered on abusive police conduct during a search of premises of an LGBT NGO in 2009, on failure to protect participants of the Pride March from homophobic attacks in May 2012 (case Identoba v. Georgia) and in May 2013. Georgia is still in the process of executing these judgments of the Strasbourg Court.

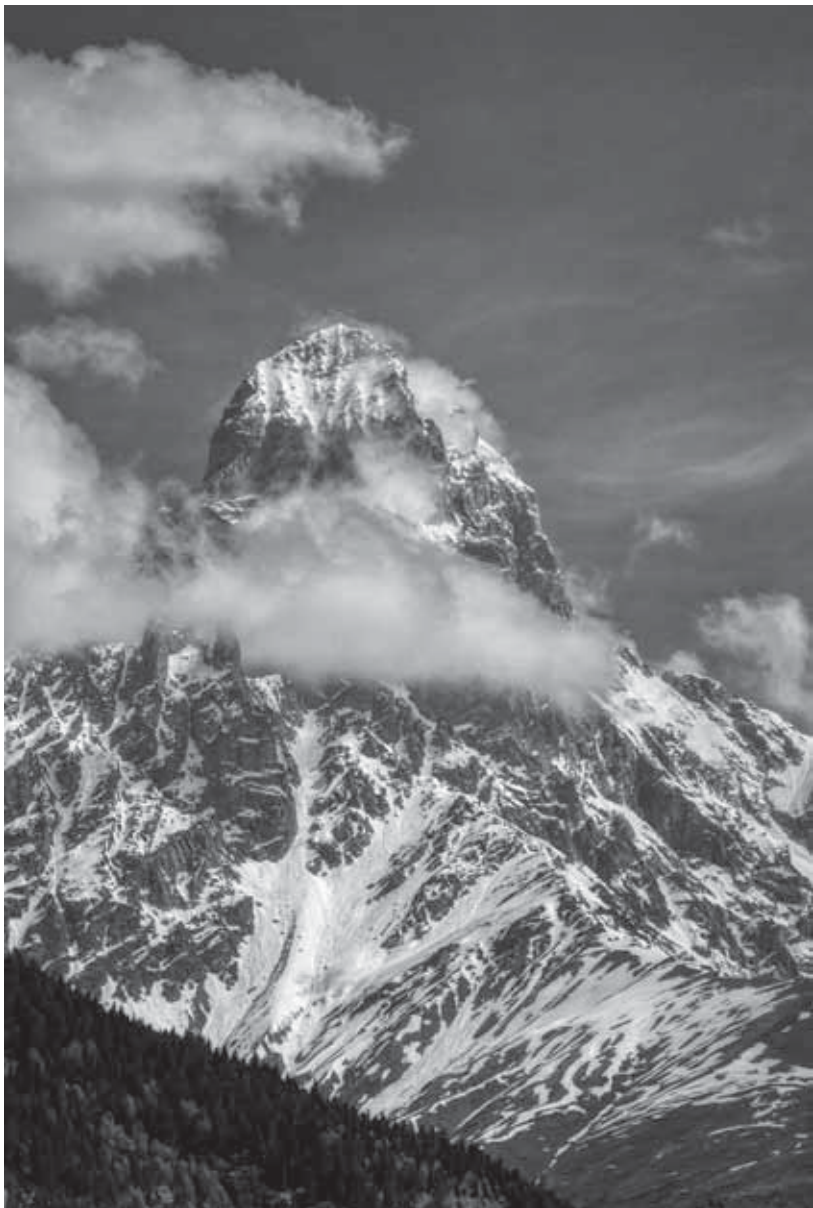
On the occasion of the publication of the annual report for 2021, the Chair of ECRI, Maria Daniella Marouda, stated that the danger of ultra-nationalist political statements and hate speech must never be underestimated.

"This is the ultra-nationalist political discourse and propaganda that has preceded and accompanies the ongoing aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine which started in February 2022 and has resulted in the immense suffering of the Ukrainian people," she stressed. "ECRI commends the authorities, equality bodies and civil society actors of the Council of Europe member states offering protection to people fleeing from Ukraine by helping them to ensure access to their rights, such as their rights to healthcare, social welfare, housing, education and employment. It trusts that reports about unjustified differential treatment of Roma and people of African or Asian descent coming from Ukraine will be effectively investigated and that the authorities will ensure that there is no discrimination against any of the people who should be offered protection and assistance."

All people fleeing war and other emergencies, irrespective of their national or ethnic origin, citizenship, skin colour, religion, language, sexual orientation or gender identity, should be promptly offered adequate protection, she concluded.

The military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine led the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to end the 26-year membership of the Russian Federation in the Organization on 16 March. This decision also terminated ECRI's monitoring work regarding racism and intolerance in the Russian Federation.

Obsessed



BLOG BY TONY HANMER

There might be much worse things to be gripped by and want to explore from as many angles as safety allows, in all seasons. My muse remains Mt. Ushba.

I have got used, over the last two-odd decades, to expecting the Mountain to

be at its most visible in the morning, often shrouding itself in cloud by mid-day and seldom reappearing until one or more mornings later. However, recent trips towards and through the village of Becho proved me very wrong.

The first such jaunt happened when I was rather overwhelmed with running the shop in our home during my wife's absence in Kakheti and Tbilisi. Ice cream was flying from the freezer faster than we could re-stock it, and I needed a break

from people. No offense, people, from this introvert.

I packed my camera gear into the new 4x4 mid-afternoon, and headed off to Becho, whose crowning glory is Ushba, visible from almost the whole long village, while Etseri has to make do with glimpses from here and there. (Our guest house is bereft of the Presence, for example, although a walk of 5-10 minutes will bring it into view.)

My first excursion that day took me to the abandoned Becho hamlet of Guli, where a young walking partner and I spent our 2nd of 17 nights a couple of summers ago on a grand circle tour of Svaneti on foot. This time I drove there, having proved to myself that I could also walk. The road is rough for the last few km, but doable in a vehicle such as my Rav4. The Mountain did not disappoint, offering new glimpses through old stone window-frames and a river running below it.

Then I gave a ride back down to a local cowherd, relative of my Svan blood brother, and he offered to show me the location of another lake, one I had heard of but not yet seen. So, another bad but navigable side road. We did reach the lake (more a large pond), in which he proudly pointed out to me the trout fingerlings waiting to be caught or grow up a bit first. But Ushba was absent from the scene, hidden behind a high ridge. What good is a reflecting pool with nothing to reflect IN it, I didn't say! He suggested that we take the last bit of road to the other side of the ridge, back into view of Ushba's base.

This road I had already been on, although not driving myself the first time. I knew that there was another pond where we would stop the car, and my only other time up there I had spent another couple of hours trekking farther up, as high as I dared before safety considerations for this non-mountaineer took over. Great shots did ensue, that time and this. Ushba once again did not disappoint, even so late in the day.

Today I had to go to Mestia twice, hunting and finding a plumber and general repair person to do some urgent faucet-cleaning and door-handle-changing before guests arrive tomorrow evening. I have little mechanical patience for such intricate work; but give me a



blank piece of paper or memory card and I'll fill them with words or images. I did score the help, drove him out and back, and on the way got even more images of Ushba. The first set shows the Mountain doing what I thought was something rare: UNclothing itself of cloud and standing there revealed once again in glory. I shot away in great humble thanks, and am still processing the many photos I shot from these last two days.

I am reminded that Ushba seldom fails to surprise; and that even the smallest part of it coming into view is something, which may even lead to more and more. Perhaps my having to leave the house, either on foot or by car, to see if I'll see

it, is much more satisfying than merely looking out the window for such knowledge. I have to chase my obsession, and for this reason I think it remains a rarer delight, when it cooperates. In the meantime, I shall continue to be one of its portraitists as often as time allows.

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



Source of image: Travel Lemming

Georgia Ranks 44th in WEF World Tourism

BY MARIAM MTIVLISHVILI

The World Economic Forum (WEF) has published a report entitled "Travel & Tourism Development Index 2021," which assesses the pace of tourism development in different countries.

The Travel and Tourism Development Index is conducted by the World Economic Forum every two years.

The new report presents a rating of 117 countries, where Georgia ranks 44th.

As a result, Georgia is the best in its neighborhood, ahead of Armenia, Azer-

baijan and Turkey, having moved up 24 places from the 68th spot in 2019. Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan were ranked 45th, 61st and 63rd, respectively.

"Georgia ranks 44th in 2021, largely because of the proper pandemic management and the rapid dynamics of tourism recovery," said Acting Head of the GNTA, Medea Janiashvili. "This is very important recognition. According to this index, we compete with and overtake countries such as Turkey, Egypt, Israel and Croatia. This is very important for Georgia," she noted.

The Travel and Tourism Development Index ranks countries based on a set of factors that enable sustainable and resilient development of their travel and tourism sectors.

PM Participates in Ceremonial Land Gift to Georgia near River Jordan

Today, a piece of land has been officially transferred to us, where we will build a center of Georgian culture. It must be a day all Georgians have been dreaming about because we Georgians are returning to the Holy Land after 300 years of absence, Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili told the press near the River Jordan, in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

Garibashvili, joined by Prince Ghazi of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, participated in the official ceremony of transferring to Georgia a piece of land near the place of the Savior's baptism in the River Jordan.

The Prime Minister unveiled a memorial stone with the signatures of the Catholicos-Patriarch of All-Georgia Ilia II and Irakli Garibashvili.

The Prime Minister thanked Prince Ghazi for transferring the land to Georgia. The Head of Government pointed to Prince Ghazi's decisive contribution to the final decision, a fact Georgia deeply appreciates.

"Let me reiterate the enormous contribution of King Abdullah II, Prince Ghazi, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, our Patriarch, and our Government. We have all worked hard to ensure today's historic event we are witnessing now. Once again, I congratulate every Georgian, every Orthodox Christian, on this far-reaching achievement, and I once again express gratitude

to the King of Jordan and everyone involved in this cause. As for our concept, we will launch active work, and the Patriarchate and the National Museum will be engaged. The Ministry of Culture will receive necessary instructions, so that we may start working together, and the concept will be finalized very soon. I want us to start building very soon. And we will do everything to make sure that the concept is agreed on in a timely manner. Of course, we will introduce this project to the public, and then construction work will kick off," Garibashvili said.

The 4,000 m2 land, now property of Georgia, is located 15-20 meters from the place of the Savior's baptism in the River Jordan.



Beauty of Italian Design Again Displayed in Georgia



The beauty of Italian design was again displayed in Georgia. The Italian Embassy in Georgia and the Desk of the Italian Trade Agency (ITA) hosted the traditional, annual event related to the promotion of Italian design and Architecture in Tbilisi on May 30-31. Through a wide engagement of the respective scientific, academic and business communities, including prestigious universities and architectural studios, a rich “menu” of initiatives was offered to the Georgian public, creating an immersive experience in the beauty of Italian design.

As part of the event, H.E. the Ambassador of Italy in Georgia, Mr. Enrico Valvo and H.E. the Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia, Mr. Irakli Karseladze co-inaugurated

three exhibitions, which will remain available for the visitors of the Museum of Modern Art Zurab Tsereteli - MOMA of Tbilisi until 3 June, 2022.

The one prepared in collaboration with the Italian National Council of Architects, Planners, Landscapers and Conservatives (CNAPPC) revolves around the main theme of the initiative: “Re@Generation: Design and new technologies for a sustainable future”.

The iconic magazine “Domus”, through its Georgian edition – the first to be activated and the only one active across Eastern Europe and Eurasia – will build on such key theme with an exhibition structured around an evocative question: “Can History and The Future Cohabit?”.

To complete the exhibitions program, the original projects by Georgian young designers awarded by the Italian Embassy

and the Istituto Europeo di Design - IED, within the creativity contest (titled “When Italian Design meets Georgian Creativity”) were announced and included in the exhibition spaces.

Istituto Europeo di Design - IED made available to the winner a scholarship in one of its Italian facilities, plus a free of charge “Smart Creativity” online course for the second place, while the Embassy delivered a surprise prize to the winner of a “Jury Prize”.

“I am extremely glad to inaugurate the Italian Design Days in Georgia, organized by the Embassy in collaboration with Tbilisi’s Desk of the Italian Trade Agency (ITA). This is indeed becoming a tradition, which we are proud to move forward and make ever more substantial, year after year. My gratitude goes to the large team of public and private partners, both from the Italian and Georgian sides – including prestigious universities and architectural studios – that we managed to gather. They made it possible to offer, building on the success of last year’s event, quite a rich menu of initiatives. First, let me just emphasize a general point: through exhibitions and the strong engagement of the respective scientific, academic and business communities, the main goal of this initiative is to provide the Georgian public with an immersive experience in the beauty of Italian design and shedding light on cooperation between Italy and Georgia in such field.

“I take this opportunity to thank the Istituto Europeo di Design - IED, which pledged to make available to the winner of the first prize a full scholarship in one of its Italian facilities, plus a free of charge “Smart Creativity” online course for the second place. The Embassy will award to the winner of the “Jury Prize” a 100% made in Italy kit of coffee making and service, with quite a unique design. I will proceed now to announce the names of the winners: Ms. Ani PERIASHVILI is

awarded with the first prize, while Ms. Nino DAPKVIASHVILI will be awarded with the second prize and Ms. Tika SHELIA with the “Jury Prize”. To all of you, I wish to express my warmest congratulations for being able, in spite of your very young age, to show such an accomplished understanding of design in several fields, from interior to fashion. This is our symbolic, although significant, award for the creativity of Georgian young generations, as well as their ability to compete according to the highest European standards, which has huge potential to further grow in the next years. We are glad to be such a close partner of yours on this path,” H.E.

Ambassador Enrico Valvo thus addressed the winners and other participants of the event.

Many renowned actors in the field of architecture and design, including representatives of companies, scholars, experts and professional associations, participated in the main workshop on May 31. Among these: the University of Florence, Architecture and Poli.design Specializing Master (founded by Politecnico di Milano), the Municipal Development Fund (MDF) of Georgia, the Academy of Fine Arts and Tbilisi’s Center of Architecture, Design and Creative Industries, in addition to IED and the editorial team of Domus - Georgia.



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