



## FOCUS ON EFES GEORGIA

A Modern, Sustainable Business Needs to be Innovative, Responsible, and Caring

PAGE 8

## French Ambassador Diego Colas: The Path to the EU is Long

INTERVIEW BY EREKLE POLADISHVILI

In a matter of days, Georgia will have an answer as to whether it will become a candidate for membership in the EU. GEORGIA TODAY interviewed Ambassador of France to Georgia, Diego Colas, representative of the country currently serving as President of the EU Council.

**FRENCH PRESIDENT EMANUEL MACRON SAID, "RUSSIA MUST NOT BE HUMILIATED, DESPITE PUTIN'S HISTORIC MISTAKE." DO YOU CONSIDER THIS STATEMENT HUMILIATING FOR GEORGIANS AND UKRAINIANS?**

I don't think so because I think it must be seen in the context of the policy of strong support for Ukraine. The policy of France, since the beginning of this unjustified and unspeakable aggression of Russia against Ukraine, has been one of very strong support and help: Support in terms of military equipment and help in terms of sanctions.

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INTERVIEW

Diego Colas - French Ambassador to Georgia

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Prepared for Georgia Today Business by GALT & TAGGART

As of 13-Jun-2022

Markets				CURRENCIES			
	Price	w/w	m/m		Price	w/w	m/m
<b>BONDS</b>				<b>STOCKS</b>			
GRAIL 07/28	84.58 (YTM 7.21%)	-0.8%	-0.9%	Bank of Georgia (BGEO LN)	GBP 15.30	-6.8%	+18.6%
GEBGG 07/23	99.92 (YTM 6.07%)	-0.2%	+0.4%	Georgia Capital (CGEO LN)	GBP 6.34	-3.9%	+11.4%
GEOCAP 03/24	95.84 (YTM 8.75%)	-0.8%	-0.3%	TBC Bank Group (TBCG LN)	GBP 13.64	-6.7%	+2.1%
SILNET 01/27	97.57 (YTM 9.02%)	-0.1%	-0.1%				
TBC 06/24	98.91 (YTM 6.34%)	-0.4%	-0.1%	<b>CURRENCIES</b>			
GGU 07/25	100.47 (YTM 7.58%)	+0.0%	-0.4%	GEL / USD	2.9505	+0.3%	-1.5%
				GEL / EUR	3.0703	-2.4%	-1.6%
				GEL / GBP	3.5773	-2.9%	-2.7%
				GEL / CHF	2.9625	-2.4%	-1.0%
				GEL / RUB	0.0513	+6.9%	+10.8%
				GEL / TRY	0.1704	-3.7%	-12.8%
				GEL / AZN	1.7359	+0.0%	-2.0%
				GEL / AMD	0.0070	+4.0%	+6.3%
				GEL / UAH	0.1001	+0.9%	-2.0%
				EUR / USD	0.9609	+2.8%	+0.0%
				GBP / USD	0.8242	+3.3%	+1.1%
				CHF / USD	0.9976	+2.8%	-0.4%
				RUB / USD	na	na	na
				TRY / USD	17.2641	+4.1%	+11.5%
				AZN / USD	1.6959	+0.0%	-0.0%
				AMD / USD	417.9100	-3.8%	-7.7%

# 'Home to Europe!' - on June 20, Demonstrators to Gather in Anticipation of EU Response

BY TEAM GT

At the end of June, the European Union is to announce its decision on Georgia's candidacy status. While anticipating the EU response, a rally is to take place on June 20, at 20:00. Protesters will gather in front of the parliament building on Rustaveli Avenue, Tbilisi, to demonstrate the commitment of the Georgian people to the European choice and Western values. At 21:00, demonstrators will march on to Europe Square, where the conclusive part of the event will be held. "Europe is the historical choice and aspiration of Georgians, for which all generations have made sacrifices. A tangible act of our historical aspiration is the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Georgia," reads the statement issued by the organizers of the rally. "We, Georgians, created one of the most progressive documents in the world at that time and declared our connection with Europe based on shared values. "A century has passed and the Russian Federation now opposes the Western choice of Ukraine with new military aggression. Against the background of the heroism and self-sacrifice of the Ukrainian people, there is an unprecedented chance for Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova to become part of the European Union and return to where our roots and aspirations are," they add. The June 20 rally organizers note that

the citizens of Georgia may not agree on many issues, but freedom, peace, economic sustainability, protection of human rights, and justice are the values that unite them all, which would be guaranteed by integration with the European Union.

## PRESIDENT ANNOUNCES RALLY ON JUNE 16 TO SHOW EUROPE UNITY

"We offer you the chance to gather in Rike Park from Europe Square on June 16, all of us, to see each other and to show Europe ourselves, our unity," Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili said at a briefing early this week. She noted that everyone should gather on June 16 as a sign that "we want Europe for our children, for the next generation." "There will be no speeches, no posters, no statements. If anyone can sing, they can sing. We will just stand to show that we want Europe for our children, for our future generation," said Salome Zurbishvili. At the same time, she called on the EU Ambassador and the ambassadors of the EU member states to join the June 16 event. "We will all gather in Europe Square on June 16, at 7:00 pm, for one hour, no more is needed and you will not be bothered," said the President. At the same time, she called on the organizers of the other rally to cancel the demonstration scheduled for June 20, "to avoid any incidents," to which the organizers publicly replied: "No and never!"



"It is contradictory that President Salome Zurbishvili, who calls on the civil society for consolidation for European integration, announces an alternative rally and suggests the organizers of the June 20 rally cancel the long-announced gathering," Shame Movement representatives wrote on social media. "No and never! We accept the President's invitation to the June 16 rally and offer that she, too, accepts an invitation from self-organized civil society groups and attends the "Home to Europe" rally, which begins at Parliament on June 20 at 8 PM and ends in Europe Square. "In a country where we celebrate the

New Year twice, nothing will be hurt if we celebrate our commitment to European integration twice as well," they noted. Member of the 'For Georgia' party, Mikheil Daushvili announced that the 'For Georgia' party will not take part in the rallies scheduled for June 16 or 20. "Until June 24, the number one task for us is to work with our partners, which we do daily, which we did during our visit to Brussels. Today, our main task is to convince our partners that Georgia should get the candidate status and then continue the process of European integration," he said.

Irakli Kobakhidze said the Georgian Dream will also not take part in the rally announced by the President for June 16. "We need to separate ourselves from an unprepared rally. This is not a serious initiative," he said. German Ambassador to Georgia Hubert Knirsch, said that he would be going to Europe Square. "The President of Georgia, Mrs. Salome Zurbishvili, invited people to Europe Square on June 16 to support Georgia's European future. It is noteworthy that the head of state calls on her citizens to publicly express their position on Europe," noted the Ambassador.

## Hebashi Holding Group with a New Vision of Expansion to Include Five New Countries



Real estate company OTI Estate recently received an official operating license for Georgia, UAE, Oman, Saudi, Turkey, and Egypt. In order to obtain this official license, OTI Estate had to satisfy criteria such as being closer to their customers and investors in promising markets, offering mutual interest and opportunities, being easily accessible, and willing to exchange opportunities and investors' needs. The new license makes doing business official and easier to do. To gain further

credibility, OTI Estate's plan as a global holding is to make business easier and safe as well. The company plans to make change of business and to expand their experience to cover all segments of their investors' and customers' needs. OTI Estate created GAABU to help to achieve their goals and objectives. OTI Estate operates in six countries. Customers can expect secure investment, easy access, unique opportunities, higher profit, and ROI from the company. Within the next three years, OTI Estate expects to cover at least 25 countries.

## Georgia's European Way – Conflicting Messages ahead of the Vote

BY KETEVAN SHKIRTLDZE

The European Parliament last week adopted a joint resolution initiated by five political groups of the European Parliament on violations of media freedom and the safety of journalists in Georgia. The resolution was supported by 308 MEPs, while 218 opposed. "We are deeply concerned about the destructive role that oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili is playing in Georgia's politics and economy, as well as the control he exercises over the Georgian government and its decisions, including the politically motivated persecution of journalists and political opponents," the statement read. "We urge the Council and the Democratic Partners to consider imposing personal sanctions on Ivanishvili for his role in worsening the political process in Georgia." The debate on the resolution was held in the European Parliament. MEPs expressed concern over the deteriorating media situation in Georgia and the security of journalists, intimidation, threats, violence and persecution against journalists. They called on the Georgian authorities to adhere to the criteria necessary for EU membership, including the Rule of Law, the independence of the judiciary, and freedom of the media. Viktor Kipiani, lawyer of the former Prime Minister of Georgia Bidzina Ivanishvili, said that Bidzina Ivanishvili was very calm about the EP resolution. He noted that Ivanishvili did not accept the injustice, but easily accepted the pressure. "Bidzina Ivanishvili's style and approach to this case is to keep calm. This calmness comes to our team as well, so as to allow us to approach the case academically," said Kipiani. Georgian Dream MP Aluda Gudushauri



Bidzina Ivanishvili. Source: Washingtonpost.com

says that the critical resolution adopted by the European Parliament on Georgia "contains lies." "Why do we want Europe? Why do we want to return to the family where we belong, where there is truth and justice, but where unjustified and false decisions are made? It is immoral to be told that a high standard of media and democracy was the standard of Saakashvili-Gvaramia. This is an insult to the Georgian people," he said. "It is quite clear that it has nothing to do with truth, European values or objectivity. When we say that our place is in the big European family, we mean the truth and development of democracy. The decision, dictated by a narrow political prism, directly hits on the values on which European democracy stands. It is completely incomprehensible to me, and I would say it is immoral, to say that the high standard of democracy and media was the standard of Saakashvili-Gvaramia, who directly attacked the media, physically abused it - there was zero pluralism in the media at that time and not a single critical voice was heard. Mr. Ivanishvili is the one who

defeated that regime and gave new life to the development of this country, laying the foundation for justice," Gudushauri said. Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili stated that he protests the critical resolution on Georgia because its content is "offensive." Dream MP Dimitri Khundadze noted that if Georgia receives the status of an EU candidate with unjust commitments like the unjust allegations reflected in the resolution, then the country should "give a fair refusal in response." Khundadze said he believes that the resolution was an insult to the Georgian people and that "he has never seen such an unjust Europe during the period of Georgia's independence." The MP said that "no status is worth giving up the dignity of the country for." Public Defender Nino Lomjaria in turn stated that the Georgian authorities (government, parliament, judiciary) violate the Constitution of Georgia when they do not fulfill their commitments to the European Union to implement democratic reforms.

# Activists Arrested at Annual Lomisoba Protest

BY KATIE RUTH DAVIES

As per tradition, vegans and animal rights activists of many ages and nationalities, the majority of them Georgian, united on Rustaveli Avenue last Saturday, ahead of the annual Lomisoba festival, to protest the ritual slaughter of animals in the name of religion.

Lomisoba is a festival held at Lomisa Church on the ridge of a mountain near the route to Kazbegi, where the boundary line between Georgia and South Ossetia cuts through the courtyard of the medieval church. The festival dates back to pre-Christian times, but is now celebrated as a Christian religious fes-

tival, despite the ongoing inclusion of many pagan rituals, such as mass animal sacrifice, which involves the slaughtering and beheading of sheep, calves and chickens, sometimes in front of the eyes of children.

A plethora of wine and meat is traditionally consumed during the festival, with families, having received blessings from the priests in the church, setting up picnic spots not far from the blood-soaked ground.

"Mass animal sacrifice is an integral part of Lomisoba and other local festivals. Certain mandatory rituals are performed before animals are slaughtered, including singeing off hair behind the animals' ears and on their belly," writes Veronika Malinboym of JAMnews. "The slaughter of sheep, chickens and cows is believed to grant fulfillment of all



Photo by Dato Koridze (www.datokoridze.com)



wishes and bring well-being to families in Georgia."

"We're not protesting the festival itself," one demonstrator said on Saturday. "We're against the use of animals in the process. They suffer. They feel pain and fear. They smell the blood around them before their throats are slit. And the children that go along with their parents see this. Some become traumatized. 21st century Georgia shouldn't support such traditions. It's cruel, unnecessary, outdated and unsanitary."

While the 20-odd protesters maintained their promised peaceful protest, interrupted by cries of "Free Misha" and "Hare Krishna" from other events happening nearby, police in front of Parliament

seemed restless, throwing aggressive looks towards all present.

When the group notified the police of their intention to walk with their placards to the Patriarchate (residence of the Patriarch of All Georgia, Ilia II) on the river bank, as they have done in previous years, police became agitated and circled the organizers.

"We warned the protesters that if they go to the Patriarchate, they are likely to clash with religious groups, whose feelings they will offend," one police officer said, citing a desire to protect the protesters from this outcome.

When the group quietly made to leave, the police blocked their path and, claiming public disturbance, then arrested and

took away two of the organizers. Remaining protesters were then escorted as far as Liberty Square and told to disperse. The two arrested were released later that day.

"We've never had any problems with police in the seven years we've been doing this," said another organizer. "We were just as peaceful as ever in our protest. But something changed this year."

"We just don't think animals should be killed," said eight-year-old Tornike, at the rally with his mom and elder sisters. "It makes me sad."

With precious few in the Church speaking out against animal sacrifice, the tradition continues to stick, and Georgians in the regions still rely on blood sacrifice to try to reach the benevolence of a higher power in the hopes of curing their ills. And despite recognition that it is an unsanitary practice, authorities are reluctant to position themselves against the Church and its voting members.

## THE LOMISA LEGEND

In the 13th century, when the Khwarazmid Army, headed by Jalal-Ed-Din, invaded the country, 7000 inhabitants of Aragvi Gorge were taken hostage. Those captured took the icon of St. George with them. According to the legend, the icon brought a drought on the Khwarazmid country. The frustrated Sultan asked for magicians, who claimed the reason for this disaster was the icon stolen from Georgia. The Sultan ordered the icon to be burnt, but it flew out of the fire and landed on the horns of a bull. The bull, with the icon in place, did not move until the last hostage was set free. The 7000 Georgians returned to their homeland, and in every place they stopped, they built a shrine.

# The War, Week 15: Russia Develops Long-term War Plan

BY ANA DUMBADZE

In the 15th week of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Ukrainian intelligence says Russia is developing plans for a long-term war.

Vadim Skibitsky, deputy head of Ukraine's main intelligence division, said Russian forces have extended war plans by another 120 days, until October.

"Where the first plan was for 10-14 days and the full occupation of Ukraine, the plans began to change, and amendments were made. Every 30 days they develop new plans. We have unequivocally confirmed data that they have a plan for the next 120 days," he said.

Skibitsky noted the Russian forces would adjust this plan based on their success in Donbas.

The International Organization for the Study of War (ISW) says Skibitsky's statement is likely to indicate that the Kremlin has at least acknowledged that it will not be able to achieve its goals quickly in Ukraine, and is adjusting its military objectives to address its shortcomings.

## CURRENT KEY DEVELOPMENTS FROM THE WAR THIS WEEK INCLUDE:

- The head of Ukraine's military said Russia had concentrated its main strike forces in the north of Luhansk region and were trying to attack simultaneously in nine directions.
- Russia's defense ministry accused Ukrainian forces of disrupting efforts to allow civilians to escape from a chemical plant in Sievierodonetsk, scene of a weeks-long battle.
- Two US citizens who travelled to Ukraine as volunteer fighters against Russian forces have been missing for a week and are feared captured, family members said. A White House national security spokesperson said if the reports are true, the United States 'will do everything we can' to get them back.
- US President Biden announced another infusion of \$1 billion in weapons for Ukraine that includes anti-ship rocket



systems, artillery rockets, howitzers and ammunition.

• Russia's UN ambassador denounced Western countries for supplying weaponry.

## RUSSIAN ATTEMPTS TO ADVANCE

The ISW says that as of June 11, Russian forces continued ground attacks in the Severodonetsk region, however, Ukrainian defenders retained control of the city's industrial zone. The Russian armed forces allegedly resumed attempts to cross the Hirske-Lysychansk Highway and carried out unsuccessful attacks on settlements along the Bakhmut-Lysychansk Highway.

Russian soldiers continued to attack settlements southwest and southeast of Izium in order to resume their advance into Slovyansk. Ukrainian forces are likely to have resumed counterattacks northwest of Kherson, a Russian-occupied city that straddles tributaries to the Black Sea, south of their previous operations.

The Russian occupation forces distributed the first batch of Russian passports in Kherson and Melitopol.

## KYIV PLEADING FOR FASTER, MORE FREQUENT DELIVERIES OF WEAPONS

Ukraine ignored a Russian ultimatum to surrender the eastern city of Sievierodonetsk as the United States announced more weapons for Kyiv, which warned

that arms deliveries were taking too long. Sievierodonetsk, now largely in ruins, has become the focal point of the war. Russia had told Ukrainian forces holed up in a chemical plant there to lay down their arms from Wednesday morning as it fights for control of eastern Ukraine.

Kyiv is pleading for faster and more frequent deliveries of weapons as Russian President Vladimir Putin seeks full control of the Donbas and a swathe of southern Ukraine.

Ukrainian officials are demanding the supply of offensive and defensive equipment from the West, especially to combat the superiority of Russian artillery. Dmitry Krasilnikov, head of Ukraine's Northern Operations Command, said Ukrainian forces were experiencing shortages of long-range artillery systems, while Russian artillery continued to defeat Ukrainian infantry.

Adviser to the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, Alexander Daniliuk, said that Russian forces have adopted a new unspecified strategy that allows them to make more careful maneuvers. Daniliuk added that Russian forces have more resources than Ukraine, which would be advantageous in the event of a protracted conflict. The mayor of Severodonetsk, Alexander Stryuk, said Ukrainian defenders needed long-range artillery and air defense systems to fight against Russian troops advancing in the Luhansk region.

"Ukrainian forces will need consistent

Western support, especially in terms of artillery systems," the ISW wrote.

## FRANCE'S MACRON, GERMANY'S SCHOLZ AND ITALY'S DRAGHI ON THEIR WAY TO UKRAINE

French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi took the night train to Ukraine capital Kyiv, Italian daily La Repubblica reported on Thursday.

The visit by the three European leaders has taken weeks to organize, with the three men looking to overcome criticism within Ukraine over their response to the war. Kyiv has criticized France, Germany and, to a lesser extent, Italy, for alleged foot-dragging in their support for Ukraine, accusing them of being slow to deliver weapons and of putting their own prosperity ahead of Ukraine's freedom and security. (Reuters)

## GAZPROM REDUCES GAS SUPPLY TO GERMANY BY AROUND 60% IN TWO DAYS

Russian energy giant Gazprom has begun reducing the volume of gas it supplies to Germany via the Nord Stream 1 pipeline to a daily maximum of 67 million cubic meters early on Thursday.

On Tuesday, Gazprom announced it would reduce the maximum delivery volume to 100 million cubic meters of gas per day, down from 167 million cubic meters.

Overall, the cut represents an approximate 60% reduction in gas supplies to Germany in just two days.

German Economy Minister Robert Habeck accused Moscow of attempting to create unease and increase gas prices. He added that it was still possible to source alternative gas supplies on the market, albeit at a high price. (Deutsche Welle)

## TURKEY SAYS UKRAINE GRAIN SHIPS COULD AVOID MINES, RUSSIA OFFERS SAFE PASSAGE

Russia said it has offered "safe passage" for Ukraine grain shipments from Black Sea ports but is not responsible for estab-

lishing the corridors and Turkey suggested that ships could be guided around sea mines.

Ukrainian grain shipments have stalled since Russia's invasion and ports blockade, stoking global prices for grains, cooking oils, fuel and fertilizer. The United Nations is trying to broker a deal to resume Ukraine exports and Russian food and fertilizer exports, which Moscow says are harmed by sanctions.

## BIDEN ANNOUNCES NEW \$1 BLN IN WEAPONS FOR UKRAINE

President Joe Biden on Wednesday announced a fresh US infusion of \$1 billion in weapons for Ukraine that includes anti-ship rocket systems, artillery rockets, howitzers and ammunition. In a phone call with Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky, Biden said he told the embattled leader about the new weaponry.

"The United States is providing another \$1 billion in security assistance for Ukraine, including additional artillery and coastal defense weapons, as well as ammunition for the artillery and advanced rocket systems," Biden said in a statement after the 41-minute call.

The president also announced an additional \$225 million in humanitarian assistance to help people in Ukraine, including by supplying safe drinking water, critical medical supplies and healthcare, food, shelter, and cash for families to purchase essential items. (Reuters)

## UKRAINE SAYS 2.4 MILLION HECTARES OF WINTER CROPS WON'T BE HARVESTED BECAUSE OF THE WAR

Some 2.4 million hectares of winter crops with a total value of \$1.435 billion will remain unharvested in Ukraine because of Russia's invasion, the Ukrainian agriculture ministry said on Wednesday.

It said the agriculture sector had so far suffered losses of \$4.292 billion. It estimated that the number of animals killed in areas affected by fighting included 42,000 sheep and goats, 92,000 cows, 258,000 pigs and more than 5.7 million birds. (Reuters)

# Where is the Gratitude?

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

Nothing is the practice of paying a tithe, one tenth of annual earnings, voluntarily given by a parishioner to their Church. I watched this noble practice for many years in the United States, a tradition entertained by many good Americans.

At the same time, I have seen very few people, almost none, in this country following in the steps of their American fellow Christians. In Georgia, we certainly pay something to our Church, but those contributions, as far as I know, are nominal. What might be the reason for such a difference between this and that land of the same elevated Christian traditions? It could very well be the dissimilarity in overall affluence, or the attitude to faith, moral tendencies or religious philosophy, or the national character or concept of charity in general.

The former soviets did not have a very sophisticated understanding of the universally accepted and respected phenomenon of "charity". Not that we were bad people and didn't want to help each other; we were simply not used to things like big charity events and prodigious contributions, most often unable to afford such expenditure in any case. The only charity maker was the state and its government, if they wanted to be charitable for some reason.

But behold, the soviet way of life evaporated and capitalism took over, a fact

widely celebrated and enthusiastically accepted by the entire soviet people, us Georgians too, so tired of socialism. And we started it all from scratch! People embarked on making money and, in the wake of intense and wild capitalist interaction, some of them became millionaires, even billionaires!

Georgia has gotten lucky enough to give the world tens of millionaires, but just a couple of billionaires. In a normal case scenario, we should all have been very happy not to have lagged behind the world, but something contrary happened: One of our famed and charity-prone billionaires passed away in not very transparent circumstances, leaving lingering doubts about his good relationships with the then government of Georgia; the other is still very much alive and kicking, and extremely functional in all charitable matters, which is very good for all of us to know and enjoy. The guy has restored myriad churches in this country, and constructed new ones, some of them really grandiose; he has built, literally, hundreds of schools all over Georgia and given new life to many prominent buildings that our people have always been proud of but needed help to keep standing; he has saved the lives of thousands of his fellow countrymen and organized medical assistance for just as many. The list of his good deeds may continue forever (and if reflected in cash value, it may climb to the billions of dollars), seeing him investing in government, culture, science, medicine, nature, and more.

And, most importantly, nobody has ever heard him emphasize that he is



Bidzina Ivanishvili's home in Tbilisi. Source: ALAMY; EPA/STR

doing this wonderful job for his people; he hates the limelight and usually tries to live beyond the public eye; he loves his wonderful family to death, no member of which has ever embarrassed him with his or her behavior, being just as modest and reserved as their dad, eschewing the spot light even more than the big man himself; he usually does his charitable thing without noise, never begrudging anybody in the world. While this all comes naturally from him, it is taken for granted by the public, and his share of luck knows not only gratitude but ungrate-

ful anger and fury, especially on the part of his political opponents, who describe him as an anti-hero and a vicious force working against the will and wellbeing of his own people; calling him names and blaming him for being an informal ruler of the country, not even mentioning the deeds done by him for the benefit of the Georgian people. Moreover, the oppositional rage against him personally has led to the idea of imposing certain sanctions on him by the Euro-Atlantic powers that be. Meanwhile, all those vile mudslingers and rabble-rous-

ers talk by inference and conjecture, never producing any tangible corroboration about his informal dictate.

Have we totally lost our sense of fairness and gratitude? Is this what European political culture is prompting us to be? All his charitable efforts in the last thirty years, undertaken in favor of our people, constitute nothing else but a purely Western way of thinking and acting, inculcated in his incessant noble actions undertaken so unobtrusively day in day out, his charity having nothing to do with politics at all.

## What's in Store for NATO in Madrid, and After?



At the Summit in Brussels in June 2021, NATO Leaders agreed to begin work on a new Strategic Concept, which will be adopted at the upcoming Summit in Madrid in June 2022. Source: NATO

BY MICHAEL GODWIN

Following NATO's summit in Brussels last year, members had a new task. There would be a Strategic Concept meeting the following year that would be instrumental in spelling out the next decade of NATO strategy and priorities. Now, as the date rapidly approaches, NATO leadership will have to reckon with a very different world from the last summit in 2010.

From July 29 to 30, Madrid, Spain, will be host to all 30 member countries, as well as several key partner nations. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said in a meeting to set the date in Spain, "We need to keep adapting for the future. And that is exactly what we will do at the Madrid Summit." This Strategic Concept is a core document that defines the

alliance's goals and vision for the next ten years and assigns member and partner tasks to achieve these goals.

The world is a far cry from what it was during the last summit. In the sphere of NATO, there has been immense change in the alliance's operations and priorities. Once-critical tasks in Iraq and Afghanistan are now history, and Russia has risen to the forefront of foreign policy agendas around the world. This massive shift includes a significant amount of development programs for partner nations, joint training missions, and a focus on the Kremlin threat.

This change from combatting terrorism and stability operations in high-risk regions to near-per conflict is one that will shape the new Strategic Concept this year. Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the ongoing war will certainly guide much of the conversation about European security and collective defense. However, this will also shape how the

alliance intends to continue its support of the embattled nation and what hybrid and cyber threats NATO could face as a result of this support.

Ukraine and its relationship with the alliance will likely take center stage, being a dependent matter in almost all of NATO's future goals. With the balance of power in the Euro-Atlantic being questioned by the Kremlin, and vague threats being leveled at NATO members and partners, Brussels has a serious problem to reckon with.

After former President Dmitry Medvedev, among others in the Russian government, made harsh statements against the West, NATO will need to take these more seriously. "People often ask me why my Telegram posts are so harsh. The answer is that I hate [NATO]. They are bastards and scum. They want death for us, for Russia. And as long as I'm alive, I'll do anything I can to make them disappear," Medvedev said on the popu-

lar social media platform.

This also comes after Medvedev said that strikes in Russian territory would result in strikes at other decision-making centers "not located on the territory of Kyiv." While some may put this bellicose verbiage down to traditional Kremlin saber-rattling, it is still a serious threat NATO will need to discuss and include in the grander Strategic Concept moving forward.

This includes key partnerships with Moldova and Georgia, both of which are flashpoints between the competing powers. Moldova is facing instability in its occupied Transnistria region. Georgia may be pulled in two directions as moves are made by politicians in occupied South Ossetia threaten to make the Georgian region part of Russia. Brussels will need to remain steadfast with these two key strategic allies and provide the right level of support to deter further encroachments by Moscow.

With the potential of NATO expansion into the Arctic with Finland and Sweden, additional concerns of threats will be included in this plan. These two, including the Baltic trio of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, have been targets of both Russian threats and alleged cyberattacks.

Settling on a strategy to contend with this, the potential for escalation will need to be reckoned with by the alliance.

A growing concern for NATO is one that is outside the Euro-Atlantic theater. The increasing pressure China is putting on allies in the Indo-Pacific will be a significant issue that NATO, and particularly the United States, will need to address. Strategic partnerships with Japan, India, and Australia must be included in the future, as well as the growing potential of Russo-Chinese collaboration. This may not come to fruition militarily, but the economic and global strategic concerns of this link are likely to become increasingly problematic within the scope of the Strategic Concept.

The vision for NATO over the next decade is complicated by these extensive global security issues. East-West relations, economic stability, and humanitarian crises all combine to set the workload for Brussels. Jens Stoltenberg summarizes this by stating, "the Madrid Strategic Concept will reflect the new security environment, recommit to our values, and reaffirm our unity, ensuring that our Alliance is fit for the future."



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg (right) visits with the Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez (left). Source: NATO

# French Ambassador Diego Colas: The Path to the EU is Long

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France as President of the EU Council, was instrumental in finding agreement on six packages of sanctions that were taken and went much beyond any previous packages of sanctions that were done before. France was also instrumental in helping Ukraine make a legal case for the various crimes committed, which will have to stand in a court of law. We have an expert from France now deployed in Ukraine, helping Ukraine make those cases and helping the Ukrainian Prosecutor Service do their work.

## HOW ABOUT GEORGIA, ALSO NAMED AMONG THOSE HUMILIATED BY RUSSIA?

There was a war in 2008. It was a horrible moment for Georgians. We are aware of that. We tried to bring peace after the conflict and find a political settlement. It was an effort to help Georgia recover as much territory as possible and as much peace as possible to maintain its pro-Western route. That was the objective, and that was largely achieved. I am aware that there has been frustration since 2008 about the Russians not fulfilling these six points of agreement and all the challenges this is creating. This is an issue on which we have a supportive position towards Georgia. On the policy towards Ukraine and statements of Macron, again, the approach is to support Ukraine very strongly, to be careful about maximalist rhetoric but to support Ukraine very strongly, and I find no reason to see grounds for the humiliation of Georgia or anybody else.

## LAST YEAR, PRESIDENT MACRON GRANTED THE FORMER PRIME MINISTER OF GEORGIA, BIDZINA IVANISHVILI, THE FRENCH ORDER OF THE LEGION OF HONOR. ISN'T IT AWKWARD TO SEE THE EU PARLIAMENT CALLING FOR SANCTIONS TO

## BE CONSIDERED ON HIM?

The award that you are referring to was given because of the solid support that the Cartu Foundation had given in Georgia, in particular to the French school here, and to the Franco-Georgian University, which is significant progress. A policy of sanctions towards the leadership, people who are thought to be the leaders of Georgia, is a very different policy from the one we have now. Our policy right now is the policy of strong support for Georgia. It's a policy that is translated into Visa-Free circulation, into ambition for the Association Agreement, one that only a few countries have. We don't see any reason to move away from that policy of firm support for Georgia.

You are right to highlight significant concerns about the state of freedom of the press, which have been expressed publicly by the European Union and myself. There are several ways to address those concerns. However, changing entirely the relationship from one of support to Georgia towards more confrontational, I'm not sure this would necessarily be the most effective way to guarantee and strengthen freedom of the press in Georgia.

## MANY THINGS WILL HAVE TO BE DONE IF THE EU GRANTS GEORGIA CANDIDACY STATUS, BUT WHAT SHOULD THE GOVERNMENT DO IF THE EU REJECTS THE COUNTRY'S REQUEST?

It's hard to know what the decision will be. I'm a little bit prudent before speculating what the European Council and the member states in the European Council will decide. The accession process is a very long one of meeting standards and conditions. My invitation would be for everyone to realize this is a long haul. I understand that this is very spectacular right now because there might be, for the first time, recognition of some sort of European perspective. So far,

Georgia has been saying "We have European aspirations," - but the EU has never said - "We agree with you that this is a shared perspective!". That makes the whole process very unique, very spectacular. But we need to be aware that this is a very long process, and if we are disappointed with where we are at this stage, it doesn't matter very much, given the length of the race. For that reason, I would invite everyone to keep a sense of perspective of this whole process.

## AS IN ANY OF THE EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, THE EU IS WILLING TO SEE THE PRIDE PARADES HELD IN GEORGIA. IN THE MEANTIME, RUSSIA IS TRYING, SOMETIMES SUCCESSFULLY, TO MAKE PEOPLE THINK THAT THE EU IS ALL ABOUT PRIDE PARADES. WHAT MUST THE EU DO TO MAKE RUSSIA LOSE THIS HYBRID WAR?

It is a very reasonable and good question because this question exists in Georgia as it does in other member states of the EU. One of the reasons for the strong reactions to the July 5th events was that we saw that some very fundamental principles were at stake. The freedom of assembly, protection of minorities against majorities, and freedom of the press were very much under question that day. In the case of Georgia, it seems that this question of the March of Dignity of last year and various events organized by the LGBT community in Georgia in the past two or three years, raises questions that are very important for this country. Those questions are right of the individual and the duties of everybody towards the collective - What is the balance between the two? The importance of tradition and modernity in the path of development - How do we balance these things? Those are challenges that exist everywhere. Georgia wants to be a European country and strongly feels like a European one. When I studied



Diego Colas - French Ambassador to Georgia

Georgian history after I arrived, it struck me how keen Georgia was to be part of the European civilization for millennia. This is one of the great riches of this country. When you visit Tbilisi, Kutaisi, and so many other places, people proudly show this, so it is very much in the Georgia ethos, in Georgian reality, the possibility to find a place for everyone. I think this is one of the challenges coexisting in the 21st century. We also have the challenge of finding this way of accommodating our diversity in France. It is very much a challenge for all Europeans. Unity and diversity are very much European challenges, and are part of the European experience.

## SOME LEADING OPPOSITION PARTIES CONSIDER THE GEORGIAN GOVERNMENT ILLEGAL AND REFUSE TO WORK WITH THEM, EVEN THOUGH THE EU HAS NO QUESTIONS ABOUT

## THEIR LEGITIMACY. WHAT WOULD THE AMBASSADOR OF FRANCE ADVISE THEM TO DO?

Generally, I give this advice to everyone in Georgia. I admire, like, and find exciting in Georgia the way most of the people are attracted to the European civilization and European experience. This is something I encourage everyone to find. The strengths of contact between Georgians and Europeans could be between parliamentarians, lawyers contacting lawyers, artists contacting artists - it has been solid, and there are many ties. But these relations were interrupted by Covid, and I encourage people to find ways to revive those contacts again. I think this was very important for the general life balance in Georgia. This would be the sort of thing that will help everybody take the proper distance from the issue and find constructive ways forward, which is very important.

# Georgia's European Way - Conflicting Messages ahead of the Vote

Continued from page 2

## GEORGIAN PRESIDENT: ANSWER TO RUSSIA'S AGGRESSION IS THE EU, EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

"The answer to Russia's aggression is European Union and European integration," Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili said during her visit to Brussels last week, where she met the President of the European Council Charles Michel.

The Georgian President, who also took part in a discussion entitled Women in Conflict, highlighted the presence of Russia's occupation troops only 40 kilometers from the Georgian capital of Tbilisi.

"There are no words to express what we have been watching in Ukraine for 106 days. There are no words to talk about this brutal war that Russia is waging against a country that it presents as its brother and neighbor.

"The paradox is obvious - such things can't be done to a close country and close people. Women and children are dying every day. Women are the first victims of conflicts and, in Georgia, we have experienced such conflicts...Ukraine deserves our complete admiration and I want to deliver a message to Ms. Zelenska of solidarity from all Georgian women."

"My family experienced the first Russian, Soviet, occupation themselves. When Russian soldiers stand 40 kilometers from the Georgian capital, you can never say never. This is a very clear threat. It is a danger not only for Georgia, but for all European countries. What was not done during the Russian aggres-



President Salome Zurbishvili. Source: civil.ge

sion in Crimea and Georgia must now be done or even partially done - the EU and European leaders have recognized the real face of Russia and Russia's real goals, and now Russia must be held accountable, and the answer is only one: the European Union and EU integration," she said.

Opposition MP Grigol Vashadze stated, "If they think that Georgia does not deserve any European perspective under this government, then they will reject us. I expect that in the best case, we will get the Albanian version: they will send us a list with dates and tell us, 'those things need to be done if you want to

return to the European family, as you have been claiming for so many years.'"

## LEADERS OF EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT POLITICAL GROUPS CALL ON COUNCIL OF EU TO DECIDE ON APPLICATION OF UKRAINE, MOLDOVA AND GEORGIA

The following is a joint statement of the EP political groups' leaders addressed to the heads of state and government of the EU meeting on 23-24 June.

"We, the leaders of the Political Groups of the European Parliament, appeal to the Heads of State and Government

meeting on 23-24 June to decide on the applications of Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia to accede to the European Union.

"The European Union must show courage, resolve, and vision in today's context of a brutal war of aggression against our European neighbor Ukraine and a deteriorating international environment. The European Union must be a reliable partner and a credible geopolitical actor that lives up to its principles and values by showing solidarity with those who stand up for the same ideals.

"Ukrainian citizens wish to live in a free, democratic and prosperous country that is a proud and committed member of the European family. We acknowledge that those aspirations are shared by the people of Georgia and Moldova, and by the countries of the Western Balkans, whose expectations should not continue to be neglected.

"That is why we strongly appeal to you to grant EU candidate status to Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, in line with Article 49 of the Treaty on the European Union and as the start to a merit-based process, and to work towards granting the same status to Georgia, fulfilling the legitimate aspirations of the Georgian people.

"We recall at the same time that the long-standing commitment of the EU towards the Western Balkans is maintained."

The European Commission will recommend granting Ukraine official status as an EU candidate country, according to several officials familiar with deliberations that took place during a debate among commissioners on Monday,

POLITICO reports, adding that the commissioners are generally supportive of Moldova, but are less confident about Georgia.

"Moldova and Georgia have also applied for candidate status, and officials said that commissioners were generally supportive of Moldova, where a staunchly pro-EU government is now in place, but that they were less confident about Georgia, which has suffered from pervasive political turmoil and notable democratic backsliding in recent years," reads the article.

## PAPUASHVILI: DISTINGUISHING ANY COUNTRY WOULD BE THE WRONG POLITICAL MESSAGE, APPROACH MUST BE EQUAL

The Speaker of the Parliament of Georgia, Shalva Papuashvili, stated that there are talks that making a positive decision toward the three countries is under question, but noted that it is difficult even for experts to make predictions.

"The only thing I have heard these days and during my visit to Brussels is that distinguishing any country would be the wrong political message to send. The approach must be equal, especially now that a decision is being made in an accelerated mode; distinguishing between countries would not be the right or fair approach on the part of the EU," Papuashvili said, noting that all three countries need political solidarity and this will serve as a political message for Russia.

"I am convinced that Europe will make the decision with values that imply solidarity, support, and at the same time a bold message for Russia," Papuashvili said.

# David Patrikarakos: Had Ukraine Fallen in 3 Days, Putin Would Have Been Halfway to Georgia and Moldova Already

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

What can Putin boast over 100 days on from his invasion of Ukraine? This was the principle question Radio Free Europe's Georgian service asked British journalist and author David Patrikarakos, whose book, "War in 140 Characters: How Social Media Is Reshaping Conflict in the Twenty-First Century," drew from his time embedded with forces in the Russian-Ukraine conflict and reporting on the 2014 Hamas-Israel conflict, Operation Protective Edge and ISIS, to explore the increasing role played by social media in modern conflict. On its publication in 2018, Patrikarakos' book was widely reviewed in the international press, including by Ben Judah in The Times, who wrote that "War in 140 Characters should be mandatory reading at Sandhurst." In the military sphere, War in 140 Characters was placed on the reading lists for the Munich Security Conference and the UK's Royal Air Force Center for Air Power Studies and singled out as essential reading by Admiral Foggo at an October 2018 meeting of the Atlantic Council.

Russia's entire reputation as a military superpower has been destroyed. Their army is an army of serfs without adequate rations



## THE 100TH DAY OF THE WAR – WHERE ARE WE AT?

I see this lasting a very long time. I think the war is still in the early stages, unfortunately. The beginning was about whether Ukraine would completely fold – it did not. Now we're going into the end of the beginning of what I think is a long phase of frozen conflict. It just seems like it's the Donbas playbook writ large. You now have the land bridge all the way down to Crimea. You throw in your rubles and your Russian passports. The difference there is that they didn't completely flatten cities before. Right now in Mariupol, the remaining population are very unlikely to want to be part of any kind of Russian state given what's happened. So are you going to do what Stalin did and just repopulate those areas with people from Russia proper? Either way, it's a frozen conflict now.

I don't think the Russians can get a total military victory over Ukraine. I think that's gone. We got to the stage, depending what kind of weaponry comes in, where the Russians cannot take any more territory, because the Ukrainians will push back; and the Ukrainians cannot launch counter-offensives anymore, because the Russians will push them back. And once we reach that equilibrium, then I guess that's where things stay, unless something changes on either side. If you're the Kremlin, and you want to try and defeat Ukraine, clearly, you're not going to be able to march to Kyiv. But maybe what you can do is strangle it economically over months and years. This would be a partial victory for them

– "if they don't want to join us, then we make sure they don't join anyone else." **PUTIN HAS MORE LAND THAN HE HAD BEFORE FEB. 24. SOME OF WHICH CONTAIN EUROPE'S SECOND LARGEST KNOWN RESERVES OF NATURAL GAS. HE GOT UNCONTESTED CONTROL ON THE AZOV SEA COASTLINE, THE LAND BRIDGE TO CRIMEA. CAN HE REALLY BE CONSIDERED A LOSER IN REAL POLITICS TERMS?**

It depends what his objectives were. If your objectives were to take the whole of Ukraine, and annex it to Russia, then yes, he is a loser. Obviously, he's got a land bridge to Crimea. So I guess that's a bonus. But at what cost? 30,000 Russian soldiers dead.

## DOES HE CARE?

Probably not about the soldiers, but as Russia's deterrence as a strongmanpower, probably. That's vital to Russia in Syria and places like that. I just don't really think you can see Ukraine as a victory for Russia. Their entire reputation as a super military superpower has been destroyed. Their army is an army of serfs [that] don't have adequate rations.

**DAVID BEASLEY, HEAD OF THE UN WORLD FOOD PROGRAM CLAIMED, "MILLIONS OF PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD WILL DIE BECAUSE THESE PORTS ARE BEING BLOCKED." IS PUTIN ORCHESTRATING ITS OWN MAKESHIFT HOLODOMOR**

## ON A WORLDWIDE SCALE?

I don't think it's there yet. We could have serious food security issues come July – hunger, not famine. This is going to be a worry. I wouldn't trust Russian security guarantees, to be honest. But something has to be done. Given the level of worldwide pressure, and at the end of June there comes a new crop of grain, which will make it even worse. They'll have to do something.

## PUTIN IS DEMANDING AN EASING OF SANCTIONS TO COOPERATE ON THIS.

As he would, because that's leverage for him. I'd rather not see the sanctions on Putin eased. I think pressure should be put on opening the harbor for humanitarian reasons. The international architecture needs to get that that grain out. But let's see. It may well be that they have no choice. It depends how firm they can stand in the face of food security issues. They're going to come online, really in the next month or so.

## AS A JOURNALIST, DO YOU SEE THE WAR NARRATIVE IN THE WEST FADING?

The news cycles are going to fade, Ukraine is going to drift out of the news, it already is, and things are going to move on. And that's what the Russians are waiting for. They're hoping that a lot of this stuff will die down, and then in a few months, people start to visit Russia again, things can go back, if not to normal, at least close. Some of the companies may go back in. I think that's all he is banking on. And that's a great danger for Ukraine. Unfortunately, there's nothing you can do about it – the news cycle will eventually move on. People will get tired of what is fundamentally an unpleasant subject.

## SHOULD UKRAINE BE CONCERNED THAT THE SUPPORT PRIME MINISTER JOHNSON HAS PROVIDED WILL EVAPORATE DUE TO ONE NIGHT OF DRUNKEN SHENANIGANS?

I don't think so. Boris tends to get away with things all the time. Even if Boris resigned, I don't think the support would evaporate. He was obviously quite personally invested in it, because of where he is, but also because it's a good distraction from all these parties. I think that's prob-

Georgia, like Ukraine, is cursed by its geography – maybe even more than Kyiv, because its smaller

ably the least of Kyiv's worries right now.

## UKRAINE IS PERENNIALY CURSED BY ITS GEOGRAPHY, YOU SAY. IF THAT IS THE STANDARD TO GO BY, WHAT CAN BE SAID ABOUT GEORGIA?

Well, Georgia is equally unfortunate, maybe more so, because it's smaller. All the countries around Russia who have had to live with Russia, Russian imperialism, almost the entirety of their existence, to a degree suffer a curse, and you see that in history. It's extremely unfortunate what happened to Georgia in 2008. It's a wonderful country. I think all those countries are cursed by geography. Britain is blessed by geography. The United States is probably more blessed than anyone by geography. And countries like Ukraine and Georgia are in an unfortunate position, although it does force them to become more creative and resilient, as they know they have a problem.

## WHAT DOES THIS WAR SPELL FOR POST-SOVIET COUNTRIES WITH PRO-WESTERN ASPIRATIONS BUT STILL WITHOUT THE NATO UMBRELLA?

It seems to me that if you're Georgia or Moldova, you've got to look at this and be happy to see the Russian army getting absolutely chewed up, right? If Ukraine had fallen in three days, like Putin's asslickers told him it would, he'd have been halfway to Georgia and Moldova already, because why wouldn't he?

## BUSINESS

# New Opportunities for Georgia as Transport Routes Change

ANALYSIS BY EMIL AVDALIANI

The war in Ukraine is a devastating blow to the liberal world order. Whether Russia is defeated, victorious or stalled in a long war of attrition, the balance of power prevalent in the decades following the end of the Cold War will not be the same. A critical element of the changing geopolitical landscape will be the connectivity across the Eurasian landmass.

The Russia route, which for decades served as a major corridor between the EU and China, is facing troubles, as sanctions imposed on Moscow make Beijing fearful of potential negative economic effects on the Chinese economy.

This creates favorable conditions for alternative trade corridors. And since the route via the Arctic goes along Russia's shoreline and is therefore not viable in the long run because of the sanctions, China-EU trade will become mainly concentrated through the Indian Ocean and Red Sea. Yet another possibility could be the so-called Middle Corridor, which runs from Turkey to Central Asia and China via the South Caucasus and

the Caspian Sea. Geographically, this is the shortest route between the western part of China and the EU, and quite naturally the countries on the road are set to gain most from reverberations in the global networks.

There is also the Turkey factor to consider. The country increased its outreach to Central Asia following Azerbaijan's victory in the 2020 war with Armenia. Azerbaijan's location has served as a launching pad for Ankara. True, its potential is nevertheless constrained, as Russia and China are more powerful both economically and militarily. And then the Iranian factor – Iran which, along with Russia, loathes any non-regional presence in the Caspian region.

What is important here is that the Central Asian states fearing Russia, but also in many cases feeling uncomfortable with China, seek diversification of their foreign and economic ties. They prefer to have as many foreign actors as possible to balance the two big neighbors. This creates a favorable momentum for Turkey's bigger penetration into the region. Active diplomacy (visits, pledges to increase bilateral trade) has been on the rise. The Russian invasion of Ukraine served as yet another impetus. The Central Asian states, Kazakhstan in particu-

lar, are also seeking greater Turkish engagement because of changes in connectivity patterns across Eurasia.

The Middle Corridor is now increasingly seen as a plausible alternative to the Russian route. At least this is the sentiment the Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev conveyed to his Turkish colleague during a visit to Ankara in May. The joint statement had one interesting passage on connectivity: "The Parties agreed to enhance cooperation in transport and logistics, commending the growth of cargo transit via the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad and the East-West Middle Corridor. Noting fixed complex rates for the transportation of wagons and containers on the Trans-Caspian direction of the Middle Corridor, the Parties emphasized its importance for cargo transit via the new Baku-Tbilisi-Kars network. The Parties stressed the importance of strengthening coordination between the relevant institutions for the effective and sustainable use of the Middle Corridor."

There is also the Chinese element to factor in. For Beijing, trade route alternatives are essential. As was the case with the Silk Roads in ancient and medieval times, trade corridors rarely remain static, adjusting to emerging opportuni-



A train carrying goods from Turkey to China departs from the northwestern province of Kocaeli, Turkey, 2020. Source: AA

ties and evading potential geopolitical dangers. Nor is China's massive Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as static as many have portrayed it. It evolves and adjusts to varying circumstances, and though the South Caucasus has not featured high in the BRI documents, the region can easily fall into Chinese interests amid the emerging geopolitical reality.

Critical infrastructure is already there. The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway and the growing and improving web of region-wide roads from the Caspian to the Black Sea serve as a good starting point for China-EU trade relations through the South Caucasus.

Yet geography still constitutes a major obstacle. The Middle Corridor is a multimodal route consisting of sea and land lines. It makes shipment more complex. There is also a glaring lack of necessary infrastructure in the Caspian Sea to guarantee easier transit from Central Asian ports to Azerbaijan. The infrastructure is also insufficient in the Black Sea, where the need to have a deep sea port has now attained a bigger significance. The Anak-

lia saga is ongoing, with no end in sight. And even if Tbilisi firmly decides to build the port, it would take years to complete – a critical period for establishing itself as a reliable transit route.

More broadly, China has not shown real interest in the South Caucasus. From the Chinese perspective, the region remains under Russia's geopolitical purview and intrusion from Beijing might not be welcome in Moscow. However, as other cases show, China can also go against Russian interests when and where it is critically important for Beijing. It does so in Central Asia and can do so in the South Caucasus too.

Thus, though a number of indications point to the re-emergence of the Middle Corridor as a potential transit route between Central Asia and Europe, numerous obstacles such as geography and inadequate infrastructure will continue to hamper the prospects.

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



# MONTHLY TOURISM UPDATE


Research

May 2022
www.pmcresearch.org

# Outbound Tourism Recovery



The number of international travelers increased by 228.5% in May 2022, compared to the same period of 2021, and declined by 50.3% compared to the same period in 2019.

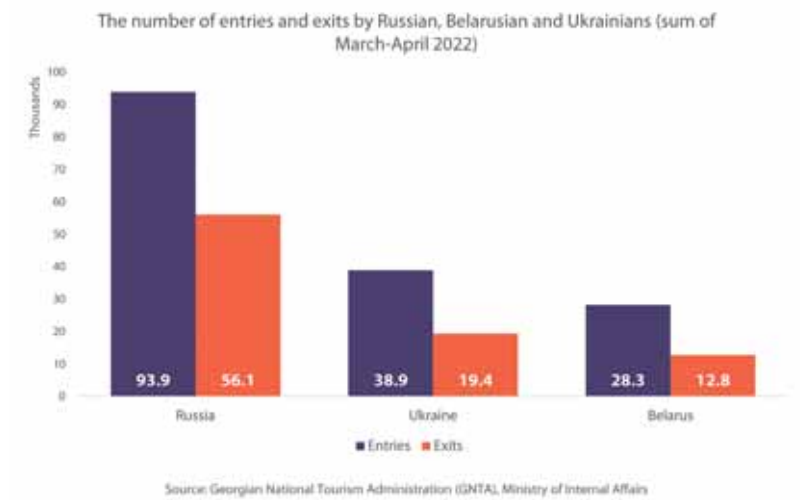
Meanwhile, the number of international visitors increased by 205.3% (2022/2021) and declined by 48.3% (2022/2019), and the number of international tourists increased by 173.9% (2022/2021) and declined by 37.7% (2022/2019).

In May 2022, the top countries of origin of international visits were Russia (40 743 visits, Turkey (38 329 visits), and

the border crossing statistics revealed significant differences in the number of entries and exits by Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians.

Conceding that some statistical discrepancies are possible, throughout March and April of 2022, the number of entries into Georgia by Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians was considerably higher compared to the number of exits in the same period.

The difference is especially high for Russians, followed by Ukrainians and Belarusians, indicating that a significant proportion of travelers from those selected countries have not left Georgia



Armenia (32 743 visits). Among the major tourism markets, the number of international visits from Saudi Arabia (1254%), Uzbekistan (372%), Belarus (139%), India (120%), and Kazakhstan (49%) significantly exceeded the pre-pandemic figure (May 2019).

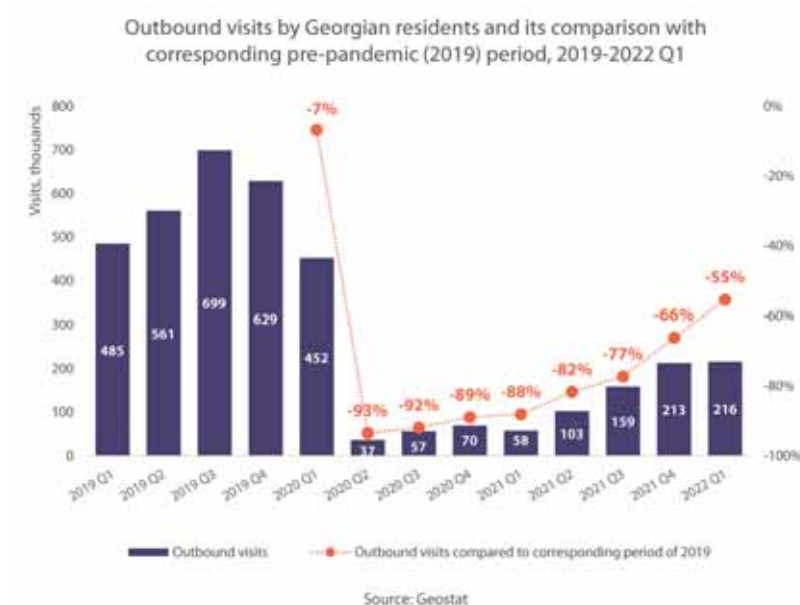
### ENTRIES AND EXITS OF RUSSIANS, BELARUSIANS, AND UKRAINIANS

Since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine,

since arriving. It should be noted that in 2022, such substantial differences were only noticed in March and April of this year.

### OUTBOUND TOURISM DYNAMICS

Since the beginning of 2021, a growing number of countries around the world have eased their travel restrictions. Therefore, international tourism's recovery has gained momentum. Globally, in



Q1 2022, tourist destinations welcomed almost three times as many international arrivals as in the same period of 2021.

In Q1 2022, the number of outbound visits made by Georgian residents showed a drastic increase of 274% compared to Q1 2021.

The recovery of outbound tourism from Georgia has been gradual. In Q1 2022, the number of outbound visits reached almost half of the pre-pandemic figure (55% lower compared to Q1 2019).

The top destination countries for outbound visitors from Georgia were similar to the pre-pandemic breakdown. In Q1 2022, a significant proportion of the outbound visitors chose Turkey (46%) as their destination, followed by Russia (12%), Armenia (12%), and the EU (12%).

Meanwhile, in Q1 of 2022, Azerbaijan represented a standout case taking only 1% of Georgian outbound visits, significantly lower compared to 23% in Q1 2019. This could be almost entirely explained by the strict land entry restrictions maintained by Azerbaijan.

### OUTBOUND TOURISM INDICATORS

The distribution of outbound visits by the main purpose of visit in Q1 2022 shows a similar pattern to those of Q1 2020 and Q1 2019. In Q1 2022, the main purposes of visit were visiting friends/relatives (31% of total visits) and shopping (31%), followed by professional (20%) and recreational (12%) purposes.

The expenditures of outbound visitors in Q1 2022 reached GEL 285 mln, which is 14% lower compared to Q1 2020 and 21% lower compared to Q1 2019.

The considerable recovery of expenditures could be partially attributed to an increase in the average nights spent on visits. In Q1 2022, the average number of nights spent was equal to 6.5 nights, which is 2.5 and 3.1 nights higher compared to Q1 2020 and Q1 2019 respectively.

The expenditure distribution is similar to previous periods (Q1 2019 and Q1 2020), with the exception of a significant increase in the share of shopping (40% of total expenditures) and a decline in the share of recreation (2%) in Q1 2022.

### HOTEL PRICE INDEX IN GEORGIA

In May 2022, in Georgia the hotel price index increased by 8.1% compared to 2021. The 3-star, 4-star and 5-star hotel price index decreased by 9.1%, while for guesthouses, the price index decreased by 6.5%. The monthly HPI was the highest in Guria (22.3%) and Adjara (10.9%) and the lowest in Racha (-15.6%).

In May 2022, compared to May 2021, hotel prices in Georgia increased by 8.9%. The prices of 3\*, 4\*, 5\* hotels increased by 8.1% and the prices of guesthouses increased by 13.5%. The yearly HPI was the highest in Shida Kartli (28.8%) and Kakheti (21.4%) and the lowest in Adjara (-9.8%)

### THE AVERAGE HOTEL PRICES IN GEORGIA

In Georgia, the average cost of a room in a 3-star hotel was 148 GEL per night in May 2022, while the average cost of a room in a 4-star hotel in Georgia was 255 GEL per night and the average cost of a room in a guesthouse was 105 GEL per night.

The average cost of a room in a 5-star hotel in Georgia in May 2022 was 468 GEL per night. In Kakheti, the average price was 581 GEL, followed by Tbilisi - 558, Guria - 474 GEL, and Adjara - 457 GEL.

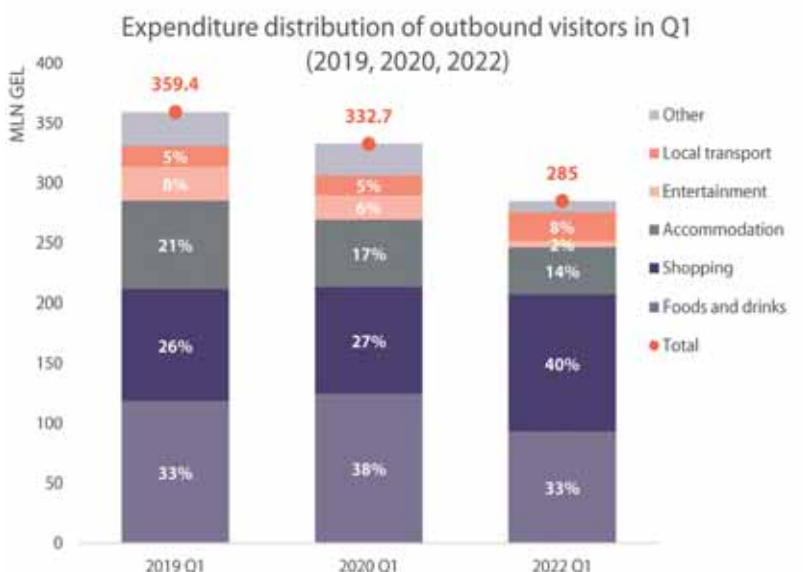
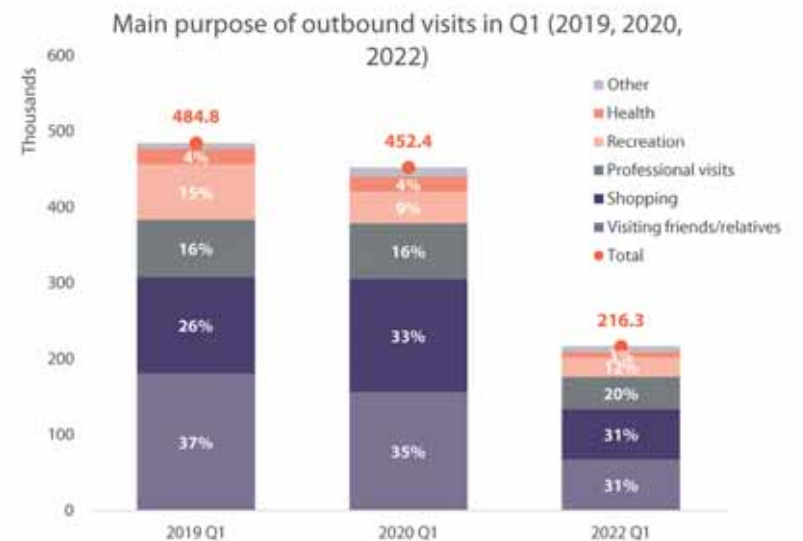


Table 1: Hotel price Index

Region	Hotel		3*, 4*, 5*		Guesthouse	
	2022 May/2022 Apr	2022 May/2021 May	2022 May/2022 Apr	2022 May/2021 May	2022 May/2022 Apr	2022 May/2021 May
Kakheti	5.6%	21.4%	10.7%	21.2%	2.4%	21.4%
Imereti	1.4%	12.4%	1.0%	-1.8%	1.7%	25.3%
Guria	22.3%	-4.1%	30.7%	-1.0%	0.0%	-12.8%
Kvemo Kartli	0.0%	-9.8%	0.0%	13.4%	0.0%	-42.9%
Adjara	10.9%	12.6%	13.4%	13.3%	8.3%	10.7%
Racha	-15.6%	-28.8%	-	-	-15.6%	28.8%
Shida Kartli	4.6%	1.7%	0.9%	4.6%	6.5%	-6.5%
Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti	7.0%	0.0%	6.5%	-7.0%	7.5%	6.1%
Samtskhe-Javakheti	-1.1%	0.2%	-2.4%	7.4%	-3.6%	-6.5%
Mtskheta-Mtianeti	2.7%	2.5%	-0.1%	-1.9%	5.2%	6.7%
Tbilisi	9.3%	8.5%	9.6%	7.4%	6.5%	18.7%
Overall Price % Change	8.1%	8.9%	9.1%	8.1%	5.5%	13.5%

Table 2: BASIC ECONOMIC INDICATORS IN GEORGIA

	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	1204.3	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	116.8	305.8	670.4	484.7	1377.5	436.0
Revenue from International Travel (mln USD)	2110.7	2704.3	3222.1	3268.7	541.7	53.6*	246.1*	566.0*	378.3*	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*	12.1*

\* Preliminary data

# A Modern, Sustainable Business Needs to be Innovative, Responsible, and Caring



INTERVIEW WITH THE GENERAL MANAGER OF EFES GEORGIA, ERTAN KURT

I would first like to mention that the Anadolu Efes Basketball Team became the Back 2 Back Euro League Champion recently. Anadolu Efes basketball team started

as a social responsibility project and continues with great enthusiasm for 46 years.

The last few years have seen unprecedented challenges for businesses and other sectors as well. The main lesson that my company and I have learned over this time that we can turn challenges into opportunities, and we remain determined to continue to do so. In addition to production and marketing novelties,

we increased our focus on new CSR projects on top of our well-known sustainable projects.”

**THIS YEAR, THE COMPANY LAUNCHED A NEW ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION CAMPAIGN: COLLECTING AND RECYCLING PLASTIC (PET) BOTTLES. COULD YOU TELL US MORE ABOUT THIS INITIATIVE?**

We are very proud of this new project, and I am sure it will gain many supporters and more and more people become aware of and involved with our campaign. Just a few weeks ago, the #ForTheEnvironment campaign was launched; this is a project where we — EFES Georgia, together with Nikora Supermarket and Eco Geo Pet, initiated a project to encourage the collection and recycling of plastic bottles.

This collaboration between a beverage producer, retailer, and plastic recycling company aims to implement a pilot project on environmental protection. The project envisages the large-scale collection and recycling of plastic (PET) bottles in the future. This partnership between our companies will include several environmental activities. #ForTheEnvironment campaign was initiated by EFES Georgia, as we are a company committed to social responsibility and achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Along with collecting and recycling plastic bottles, the campaign will include actions to clean up the Black Sea seaside.

ful, we will steadily place more bins in more locations. We sincerely hope our campaign will be a resounding success in Tbilisi and eventually extend nationwide. Our information campaign will inform more people of our project and its importance, and together we will protect the environment. We hope that with the participation of more companies and other stakeholders, recycling activities in Georgia will increase exponentially.

**YOUR COMPANY IS RENOWNED FOR ITS CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY, AND YOU HAVE RECEIVED NUMEROUS CSR AWARDS. I WONDER, WHAT HAS CHANGED IN THIS REGARD AND HOW ACTIVE ARE YOU IN IMPROVING CSR DURING THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC AND OTHER CRISES?**

This is not EFES Georgia's first environmental CSR project. Since 2012, we have had a modern, highly efficient wastewater treatment plant in our brewery to reduce our environmental impact. Our water treatment system collects, treats,



It is worth noting that EFES Georgia is the first company to promote proper plastic waste management and, most importantly, to involve our partners and consumers in the campaign: this is not just our project; it is a project of the country and for the country. It is our corporate responsibility to reduce the negative environmental impacts of plastic.

**AS YOU MENTIONED, IT IS A PILOT PROJECT. WHAT DO YOU ENVISAGE FOR THE CAMPAIGN INITIALLY?**

We selected about 20 locations in Tbilisi for the initial stage: Special bins where people can put plastic bottles have been placed in front of Nikora Supermarket outlets. In these bins, plastic bottles that would have otherwise gone to trash sites will be collected separately and then recycled by Eco Geo Pet, a recycling company. I want to highlight that the public's engagement is very important for this project to succeed; therefore, we will have many educational and informational activities.

**WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR THE FUTURE OF THIS CAMPAIGN?**

We hope that Georgians will be actively involved with and support this campaign. I want to emphasize that this is a non-profit project for us, and if it is success-

and recycles the wastewater from our entire production process.

I want to highlight that corporate responsibility is hugely important to our company. We have been implementing CSR projects in various fields since 2008. All of these projects are sustainable, and all our employees are proud of what we have contributed to the community and the environment. We believe that businesses and all those involved with them should act responsibly. It should be noted that we are guided by and fully committed to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and Global Compact International Standards.

**LET US DISCUSS YOUR BIGGEST NEWS OF THIS YEAR. 2022 HAS STARTED SUCCESSFULLY FOR THE COMPANY, AS A NEW TASTE OF BEER "NATAKHTARI" WON THE SUPERIOR TASTE AWARD**

Indeed, 2022 started with yet more international recognition for EFES Georgia. The smooth taste of our leading beer brand, Natakhtari, won the Superior Taste Award, organized by the International Taste Institute in Brussels. Our product was evaluated by a 200-member jury composed of sommeliers, chefs, and professional experts from around the world. Natakhtari become choice of Georgian consumers with the new taste, which is confirmed by its double-digit growth in sales.





# The EU and CENN Make Tsalka a Promising New Destination

BY MICHAEL GODWIN

**C**ENN and its partner organizations have organized to support business and growth in the Tsalka municipality. As part of an EU-supported venture, the representatives of local government, agriculture, and businesses came together last week to promote development and drive tourism in the growing region.

Back in March 2019, the European Union, together with CENN, officially launched a rural development project in Tsalka, 'EMBRACE Tsalka,' aimed at providing support to smallholders, entrepreneurs, women, youth and other local actors by improving access to knowledge and innovation, introducing best practices, creating public-private partnerships and business links, as well as generating new employment opportunities by utilizing the development potential of the area.

The project is part of the EU's ENPARD program supporting agriculture and rural development. Since then, the 'EMBRACE Tsalka' project being implemented by CENN has significantly improved the socio-economic situation



European Union representative Georges Dehoux speaks in Tsalka, Georgia. Photo by Mike Godwin

on the ground and contributed the development of tourism potential of

the Tsalka Municipality.

As part of the project, a Local Action group (LAG) was established in Tsalka, which has been working tirelessly to improve the conditions of locals and establish higher standards of living across the municipality, which was already known for its ethnic diversity and agricultural opportunities.

Local business and public projects are prioritized by Tsalka LAG and financed in line with the Local Development Strategy to create employment and livelihood opportunities, especially for a poor and marginalized population, while socioeconomic integration of vulnerable households is improved by empowering women and youth.

Thanks to the grants received as part of the 'Embrace Tsalka' Project, locals with interesting business ideas have managed to grow and develop both personally and as business people, opening new tourism and agricultural facilities across the municipality and sharply

changing the overall picture of Tsalka for the better.

Georges Dehoux, Program Officer for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food Safety with the European Commission, presided over last week's event to celebrate Tsalka's achievements. He said the project is not just the "responsibility of the private sector and the government" bringing all components together, but rather all peoples in the region. Tsalka, an exceptionally diverse region already, stands to grow further with this initiative.

The town of Tsalka is a very unique look into the ethnic diversity that many southern towns have in the region. With less than half of the population ethnically Georgian, the rest is Armenian, Caucasus Greek, and Azerbaijani, for a total of around 2,400 people living in the local area.

It has a unique population and cultural affinity to the Greeks, with over 90% of the population being Greek prior to 1990. This influence is still here, demonstrated by Greek letters and signage visible in some businesses. With the immense agricultural development, the increasing commercial presence, an eager workforce, and this week's opening of an international standard glass bridge over Dashbashi Canyon (funded by Israel's Kass Group), the town is ripe for further investment and expansion.



Natia Ninikelashvili (left), Project Manager with the Georgian Farmers' Association, and Diana Tsulukidze (right), Chairwoman of Tsalka LAG, sign an agreement of collaboration. Photo by Mike Godwin



Gogi Meshvelani, Member of the Parliament of Georgia, speaking to attendees in Tsalka. Photo by Mike Godwin

# Council of Europe Anti-torture Committee Reiterates Recommendations to Address Inter-Prisoner Violence, Informal Hierarchy in "zonas" in Georgia

**T**he Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) on Thursday published the report on its May 2021 ad hoc visit to Georgia, together with the response of the Georgian authorities.

The objective of the visit was to review the implementation of the CPT's recommendations made in the report on its 2018 periodic visit concerning steps required to combat the phenomena of inter-prisoner violence, intimidation and extortion and the influence of informal prisoner hierarchy in semi-open penitentiary establishments for sentenced prisoners (so-called "zonas"). The delegation concluded that the issues still exist, and reiterated its 2018 recommendations, which remained fully valid.

The delegation visited all three semi-open penitentiary establishments in the country: Prison No. 14 in Geguti, Prison No. 15 in Ksani and Prison No. 17 in Rustavi. Further, the delegation went to closed-type Prison No. 2 in Kutaisi and to the secure ward of Vivamed clinic in Tbilisi to interview inmates recently transferred there from Prisons Nos. 14 and 17.

The Committee welcomed the Georgian authorities' stated determination to implement the measures to address



Image source: Civil.ge

the outstanding issues as a matter of priority under the Strategy and Action Plan on the Development of the Penitentiary and Crime Prevention Systems, in particular as regards semi-open penitentiary establishments ("zonas").

In their response, the Georgian side provided information on the measures taken to implement the recommendations made in the CPT's report.

The CPT report and the response of the Georgian authorities have been made public at the request of the Georgian Government.

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The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) visits places of detention in the States parties to the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture in order to assess how persons deprived of their liberty are treated with a view to strengthening, if necessary, the protection of such persons from torture and from inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. These places include prisons, juvenile detention centres, police stations, holding centres for immigration detainees, psychiatric hospitals and social care homes. After each visit, the CPT transmits a report containing its findings and recommendations to the government concerned.

# For my Collection: Nakra, Svaneti



BLOG BY TONY HANMER

One of my goals in Svaneti is to spend some time in every village. I still have some way to go, despite having lived in Georgia for 22 years. Now, at least, Nakra is off the list.

My wife and I had been talking about visiting this community, less than an hour's drive below ours, for more than a year, and finally bit the bullet, just for a night and a hike. She found a promising place to stay; with no guests in our own place, we packed and drove off, despite the weather (light rain off and on).

Nakra consists of about 100 families and relies heavily on two industries: wood products, a centuries-old affair, and hydroelectricity, which is, of course, recent. The road up to it from the main "highway" is pretty long and rough, but certainly navigable by ordinary cars. Situated in a forested valley with high mountains on all sides, it does make one wonder how much sun it can get in the winter: but the locals say that this is not a problem.

We found the guest house with no trouble, a handsomely stuccoed three-story house made to look like a Svan tower. A garden and umbrella-covered sitting area offered views down the valley and across to the mountains. Our hostess, Nino Vibliani, seems to be as energetic and business-minded as my wife, though 10 years younger and with four children; they hit it off straight away,

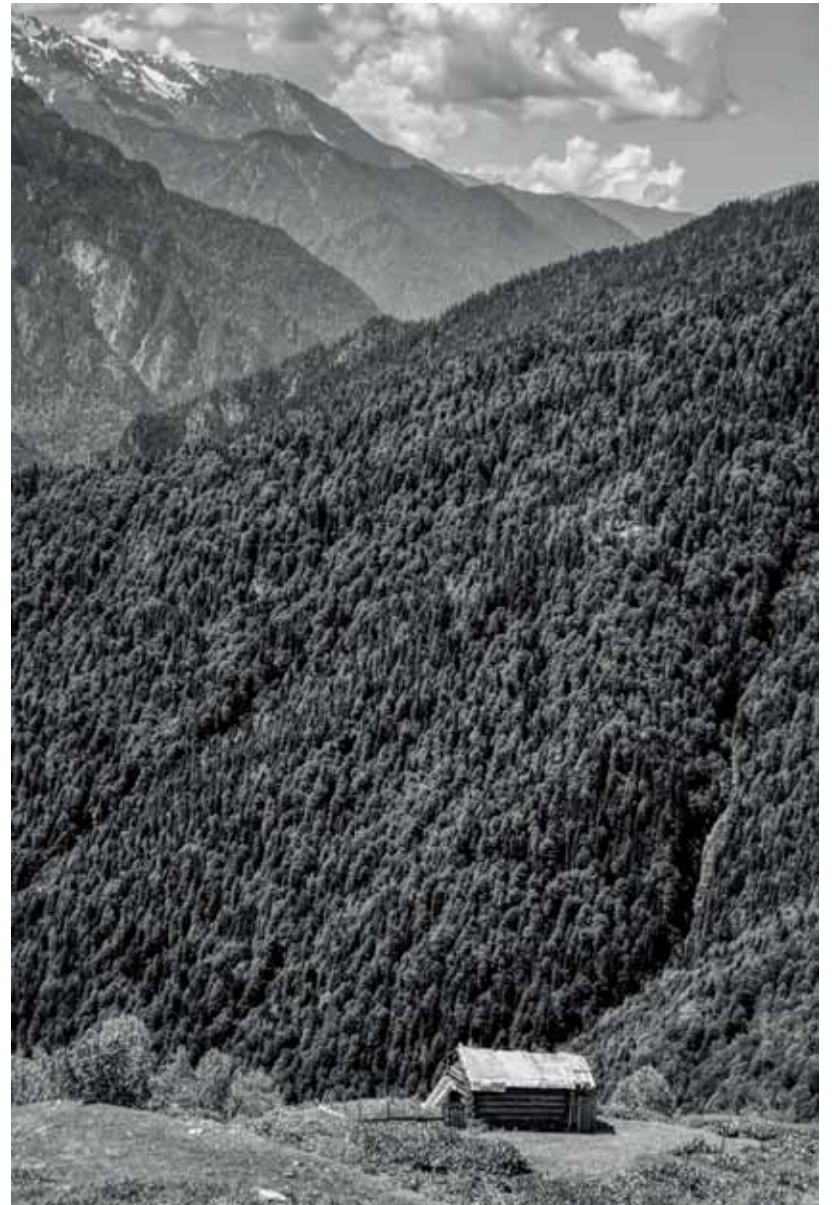
swapping stories of trying to develop things in their respective villages. Plenty of common understanding, long talks getting to know each other, along with her husband and younger daughter, who is due to enter first grade in September. We had a good supper and retired to our room for the night.

Next morning, after a sumptuous Svan breakfast and some poking around taking photos of the many log cabins and new fences with spring flowers in all their bright colors, I was ready for our guide, our hosts' young son, who works for the local border guards. This is clearly a wood-based village, as I discovered, whereas Etseri is much more dominated by stone or cement-block dwellings.

Our outing was to start by car, as far as I could drive, followed by a hike. We

had to choose from several main attractions that the village surroundings offer. These include its old part, which is mostly stone and towers; a German-Svan WWII battlefield apparently with bones and Nazi relics scattered about exposed, but a full day's trip on horseback; and a view which would take in both Elbrus, highest mountain in the whole Caucasus, and Ushba in the same sweep. Another possibility was getting up to a view of just Elbrus, somewhat less strenuous, and we chose this.

I was glad of my 4x4 with reasonably high clearance, both features needed on this day's drive, which was about 5 km either way. The rain had not made things too slippery, though, less than I had feared. The numerous forks would have presented a conundrum to us, but our



guide took us through, as he uses these ways almost daily. There were a couple of steep inclines and rocky bits, and I found myself most impressed that the road was there at all: it represents huge effort, both in initial construction and then in maintenance from the avalanches of winter and rockfalls of any season. Eventually, we could go no farther, because of the condition of the road, and stopped to walk the rest, about 3 km each way.

More far mountain landscapes opened up to us, dramatized by a mix of cloud and blue skies. Tiny wooden cabins far below added scale to the vastness, which otherwise might be lost on a viewer. Even the top of Nakra itself showed, little doll-houses in the distance; and, many km further off, the village of Tskhumari. We left Lali to rest, and trudged on.

Then Goga said: "There it is!" and before us loomed the two rounded, snow-covered peaks of an extinct volcano, the higher at 5642m. This is Elbrus, in the Russian North Caucasus. On our side of the border, a more pyramidal peak showed to the left, but this is much lower: Elbrus shows its height by being visible at all, although the distance is deceptive due to the clear air. It seemed to be right

there, but is in fact much further off, as Shkhara, Georgia's highest mountain, is above Ushguli.

I was thrilled to get a view of Elbrus at all, having seen the amount of clouds around. Sometimes Nature is kind. Not knowing when I will be back this way, I took quite a few photos, then we began the slow walk and careful drive back down.

The other sights I have mentioned are still to come, but it was a good introduction to Nakra, and a reminder to me that every village here does have its unique offerings, all worth exploring. On the beaten track or off, Svaneti will delight.

<https://www.facebook.com/Guest-House-Nakra-სათჯახბო-სასტუმრო-ნაკრა-2626866130663656/>

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/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/SvanetiRenaissance/). He and his wife also run their own guest house in Etseri: [www.facebook.com/hanmer.house.svaneti](http://www.facebook.com/hanmer.house.svaneti)



# Literature Museum Hosts Ukrainian-Georgian Contemporary Art Exhibition 'Tomorrow'



**O**n June 10-20, the Literature Museum in Tbilisi (8 Gia Chanturia St.) is hosting a Ukrainian-Georgian Contemporary Art Exhibition 'Tomorrow'. Visitors will be welcomed daily, 10 am-6pm, except Mondays and Sundays. 'Tomorrow' is a joint project of Ukrainian and Georgian artists and writers

within the framework of the Artisterium 15th, Tbilisi International Contemporary Art Exhibition and Art Events. The exhibition tells the story of the people affected by the war. The project supports Ukrainian artists and disseminates information about Ukraine nowadays. Among the participants: Maria Proshkowska, Masha Vyshedsky, Nikita Vlasov, Zoya Laktionova, Vitaly Yankovy,

Lilya Chavaga, Aleksandra Krolikovska, Maksym Kozlov, Andrii Zelynskyi, Mariia Prokopenko, Anton Karyuk, Mariia Drozdova, Zhenya Machkovska, Mykhailo Zharz Armianovski, Anton Logov, Lado Pochkhua, Mariam Natroshvili, Detu Jincharadze, Beso Uznadze, Guram Tsibakhashvili, Anna Kordzaia-Samashvili, Nino Haratishvili. Curators: Magda Guruli and Victoria Denelian

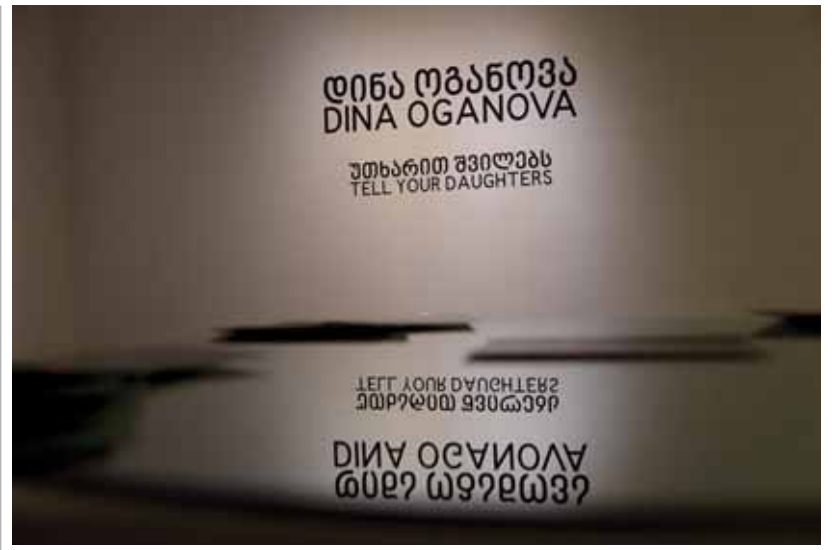
# Guardian Includes Georgian Film 'Taming the Garden' in List of Best Films of 2022



**N**ews organization The Guardian published a list of the best films of 2022 so far, in which the documentary film "Taming the

Garden" by Georgian director Salome Jashi was included. "A documentary following the bizarre but revealing story of Georgian billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili's plan to dig up

and transport hundreds of trees from across the country to his own private garden," the Guardian noted. [Editor's note: The garden, in Shekviteli, Guria, is open to the public. Entrance is Free] At the end of April, the Georgian Film Academy canceled the screenings of Jashi's Taming the Garden. Jashi posted on her Facebook: "Those of you who were going to come to the screening of Taming the Garden at the Cinema House, all the sessions except today's were canceled by the Film Academy. The reason for the cancellation, as director Mindia Esadze, President of the Georgian Film Academy, implied, is that it is unacceptable for them to show 'a work that causes differences of opinion and divides society on political grounds.'" The film director noted that Esadze had not seen the film, adding that the film causes more diversity of thought as well as feelings, than differences. "Georgian politics is not mentioned in the film, and even if it was, so what?" wrote the director. The film was nominated for the European Film Academy Award.



# Photo Exhibition "Tell your Daughters" Opens

**Z**urab Tsereteli Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) is hosting the photo exhibition "Tell your Daughters", authored by photographer Dina Oganova. The photo exhibition has been organized within the framework of the "UN Joint Program For Gender Equality" funded by the Government of Sweden. Head of the UNFPA Georgia Country Office Lela Bakradze, Deputy Public Defender of Georgia Ekaterine Skhiladze, author of the Exhibition Dina Oganova and the participants of the photo project have addressed the audience.

higher levels of education. Bodily autonomy is a cornerstone for achieving gender equality and universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights. Bodily autonomy for girls and women means they have the power and agency to exercise their choices about what happens to their bodies. In matters related to reproduction and sexuality, bodily autonomy means that women and girls determine their lives and their future, and have the information, services and means to do so free from discrimination, coercion and violence.

The photo exhibition which opened on June 10 will run through June 24. The event is held in Georgia, in cooperation with the Embassy of Sweden and Kolga Tbilisi Photo Festival. The photos exhibited are available for sale. The proceeds will be fully transferred to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) account to finance the provision of essential reproductive health services to women and girls affected by the war. In 2021, UNFPA's annual flagship report - The State of World Population was dedicated to Bodily Autonomy. Through this groundbreaking report, UNFPA measured both women's power to make their own decisions about their bodies and the extent to which countries' laws support or interfere with a woman's right to make these decisions. The data show a strong link between women's decision-making power and

Yet women and girls—and indeed, all people throughout the world — face constraints on their bodily autonomy, and the consequences to their health, well-being and potential in life can be devastating. Intertwined with bodily autonomy is the right to bodily integrity, where people can live free from physical acts to which they do not consent. In the modern world, art is a powerful medium for communicating human rights-related issues and advocating for women's and girls' empowerment. With the photo exhibition - "Tell your Daughters" - we tell the stories of more than 20 women, their lives, choices, and the opportunities and challenges they have faced. By means of the power of visual art and documentary photography, we want to explain why bodily autonomy is important for women and girls and what their empowerment means for society.



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