

## FOCUS ON GEORGIA RED CROSS

President of the Georgia Red Cross, Natia Loladze, was elected Vice-President of the Int'l Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, a great honor for Georgia

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# Georgia's EU Candidate Status Postponed, Pending Reforms

BY TEAM GT

**A**t the end of last week, the European Commission recommended granting candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova, but to set conditions for Georgia as a "perspective country." The recommendation was agreed to by the European Parliament on Thursday.

The European Parliament stated in its resolution that there should be no "quick way" to join the EU, and membership should be granted only on the basis of merit and only after the criteria are met. The resolution was supported by 529 MEPs, 45 went against and 14 abstained.

"Georgia must now come together politically to design a clear path towards structural reform and the EU," said European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen on June 17. "We recommend granting the European perspective, but to come back and assess how Georgia meets a number of conditions before granting it candidate status."

Continued on page 3



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. Source: euneighbourseast.eu

Prepared for Georgia Today Business by **GALT & TAGGART** CREATING OPPORTUNITIES

As of 20 Jun 2022

Markets				CURRENCIES			
	Price	w/w	m/m		Price	w/w	m/m
<b>BONDS</b>				<b>STOCKS</b>			
GRAIL 07/28	84.16 (YTM 7.31%)	-0.5%	-1.1%	Bank of Georgia (BGEO LN)	GBP 15.02	-1.8%	+7.0%
GEORG 07/23	99.54 (YTM 6.43%)	-0.4%	-0.7%	Georgia Capital (CGEO LN)	GBP 5.65	-10.9%	-5.8%
GEOPAP 03/24	95.74 (YTM 8.85%)	-0.1%	-0.2%	TBC Bank Group (TBCG LN)	GBP 13.32	-2.3%	+0.9%
SILNET 01/27	97.32 (YTM 9.10%)	-0.3%	-0.1%				
TBC 06/24	98.66 (YTM 6.48%)	-0.2%	-0.5%	<b>COMMODITIES</b>			
GGU 07/25	100.75 (YTM 7.47%)	+0.3%	+0.3%	Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	114.13	-6.7%	+1.4%
				Gold Spot (US\$/Oz)	1 838.74	+1.1%	-0.4%
				<b>INDICES</b>			
				FTSE 100	7 121.81	-1.2%	-3.6%
				FTSE 250	19 010.82	-0.8%	-4.2%
				DAX	13 265.60	-1.2%	-5.1%
				DOW JONES	29 888.78	-2.1%	-4.4%
				NASDAQ	10 798.35	-0.1%	-6.9%
				MSCI EM EE	30.80	+2.6%	-6.0%
				MSCI EM	1 000.42	-1.6%	-3.4%
				SP 500	3 674.84	-2.0%	-5.8%
				MSCI FM	2 203.89	-2.5%	-6.1%

# Russia-Ukraine War Week 16: Luhansk Battle Enters 'Fearsome Climax,' Kyiv Receives EU Candidate Status



Europe is already looking towards a post-war rebuild of Ukraine. Source: DW

BY ANA DUMBADZE

European Union leaders meeting Thursday granted Ukraine candidate status, a symbolic win for Kyiv amid its war with Russia.

Meanwhile, heavy fighting continues in eastern Ukraine, with key locations under intense bombardment from Russian forces.

Key updates of week 16 include:

- An adviser to Ukraine's President Zelensky says the battles for Severodonetsk and Lysychansk are entering a "sort of fearful climax".
- Luhansk Governor Serhiy Haidai says Russian forces took two more villages near Lysychansk.
- Russia claims it has Ukraine's troops surrounded south of the city.
- The EU made a historic offer of candidacy status to Ukraine at a summit that started Thursday.

The cities of Severodonetsk and Lysychansk, Ukraine's two footholds in the eastern Luhansk region, are the sites of "hellish battles" against Russia, regional governor Serhiy Haidai said. Moscow's forces are gathering near a village south of Lysychansk that was captured this week, he said, in a possible attempt to cut off the remaining defenses there.

Russian missile attacks continued to hit the rest of Ukraine, with strikes

reported near Kharkiv in the north and Mykolaiv in the south.

## UPDATES FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Severodonetsk: "Hellish battles" are ongoing in Severodonetsk, where Russia has been eyeing control. Taking the city is one of Russia's key aims as it would mean they control almost all of the Luhansk region.

The Mayor of Severodonetsk says up to 8,000 people remain in his city. The British Defense Ministry said Wednesday that Russia is pushing toward enveloping the city from the north via Izyum and the south via Popasna.

Lysychansk: The city of Lysychansk is "constantly suffering from enemy fire," Luhansk's Haidai said on Telegram. The Institute for the Study of War said Russian forces had advanced toward the city, among the few Ukrainian toeholds in Luhansk, from the south, calling the advance a "clear setback" for Ukraine. Russia will likely reach Lysychansk in the coming days, the Institute forecast, and the city is bracing itself.

Kharkiv: Heavy shelling continued on Wednesday across the Kharkiv oblast, the northeastern province that borders Donbas, Oleg Synegubov, the regional governor, said. At least 10 civilians were killed in strikes on three villages and towns, and another 10 were wounded. Local leaders expect a prolonged fight with Moscow's troops there, as they bat-

tle to keep Ukrainian forces from advancing closer to the Russian border.

Southeastern Ukraine: Petro Andryushchenko, an adviser to the Mayor of Mariupol, said large convoys of Russian military equipment were traveling toward Berdyansk and Polohy in Ukraine's southeast Zaporizhzhia region.

The Black Sea: Ukraine's military claimed that it launched airstrikes Tuesday on the Russian-occupied Snake Island in the Black Sea, saying it inflicted "significant losses." The Russian military said its air defenses "destroyed all enemy weapons" as Ukraine made "another crazy attempt" to claim the island. Satellite images released by US firm Maxar Technologies appeared to strengthen Ukraine's claims rather than Russia's.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said UK intelligence believes Russia's momentum could slow in the coming months as the Kremlin exhausts its resources, Reuters reported. The West must help "reverse" Ukraine's battlefield losses and support Kyiv's forces in mounting counterstrikes, he said ahead of a major NATO summit next week. "Russia's forces could become exhausted around August," a European diplomat told The Washington Post.

## EU CANDIDACY AND LOOKING AHEAD

Heads of state and government meeting in Brussels for a two-day European Council summit on Thursday backed

candidacy for Ukraine and Moldova but asked both countries to meet certain conditions before they move on to the next steps.

Though candidate status does not confer membership, Ukrainian and EU diplomats say Thursday's decision marks a historic step and sends an important signal to Russia.

The Kremlin falsely claims that Ukraine is "not a real country" and wants to bring it into Russia's sphere of influence by force. A pathway to membership in the EU sends the message that Ukraine is a very real country with a future of its choosing, diplomats said.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Wednesday said Ukraine would need significant economic aid to rebuild, similar to the US initiative providing foreign aid to Western Europe after World War II.

Speaking to the German Parliament, Scholz said the Group of Seven countries this month would discuss for Ukraine its own Marshall Plan, the name given to the multibillion-dollar assistance program deployed by the US in postwar Europe. Scholz added that images from Ukraine reminded him of those from

Germany in the aftermath of World War II.

Some supporters of Ukraine, who had previously been critical of Germany for its slow weapons deliveries, argued that Scholz should focus on helping Kyiv defeat Moscow before contemplating the postwar rebuild.

Also on Wednesday, Defense Minister Christine Lambrecht said Germany would start training Ukrainian troops this month to use Mars II multiple-launch rocket systems. Berlin last week announced that it would provide the systems to Kyiv. Germany is also considering backfilling the arsenals of Poland, Greece, Slovakia and Slovenia as those countries send military aid to Ukraine, the German Defense Ministry said.

The Defense Department's Office of Inspector General will scrutinize the degree to which the Pentagon has planned to restock weapons and ammunition it is providing Ukraine. The US military has provided billions of dollars in arms to Kyiv as it fights off a Russian invasion.

Since Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, the United States has provided \$5.6 billion in security assistance to Kyiv, including \$1 billion pledged last week.

## Russia's invasion of the Donbas



Source: BBC research, Institute for Study of War (21:00 GMT, 19 June) **BBC**  
The Russian advance this week

## Borjomi Georgia Management, Staff Reach Labor Agreement



Image: 1TV

The IDS Borjomi Georgia management and the employees signed an agreement in Borjomi following labor mediation, reports the Ministry of IDPs, Labor, Health, and Social Affairs.

"Following the successful negotiations, the employees will now resume work, and the company will fully restore func-

tioning soon," the Ministry said.

A representative of the Georgian Prime Minister took part in the mediation process.

IDS Borjomi workers were on strike demanding the payment of delayed salaries, the reinstatement of their dismissed colleagues, the return of previous working conditions, a 25% salary increase, and the ending of "blackmailing and threatening" workers.

## EU-Georgia Business Forum 2022 Opens

It is even more important now, as Georgia is taking another step forward on the European integration, that the business sector voices its interest and is heard, and elevates and advances Georgia's European agenda," EU Ambassador to Georgia Carl Hartzell stated at the EU-Georgia Business Forum 2022.

The EU Ambassador claimed that the joint agenda, energy efficiency and diversification are crucial, while the EU will continue helping the Georgian government to define strategic priorities.

"We will continue reinforcing our efforts to have small and medium-size businesses grow and find their way to the European market. The combination of all these things is going to be very important in order to make sure that Georgia's economy gets modernized, businesses are treated equally and fairly, and this is also something that we and this new platform will be able to look into, to make sure that businesses feel they can do the work they want in Georgia," Hartzell said.



# Georgia's EU Candidate Status Postponed, Pending Reforms

Continued from page 1

She noted that Georgia's application has strengths, including the market orientation of its economy, and a strong private sector.

However, she added, to succeed "the country now needs a path that concretely sets out the necessary reforms, brings on board civil society, and benefits from broad political support."

EU HR/VP Josep Borrell stated Thursday that when Georgia meets the criteria, the candidate status will be granted "automatically."

"Now, [Georgia has] a clear path. They have things to do, a schedule, so this is an important step forward. Continue work on that, you are on a good track," Borrell stated.

Asked whether Georgia would receive candidate status when the country meets the criteria, Borrell replied that, "when these criteria are met, candidate status will be granted automatically."

The European Commission and Parliament recommend that Georgia be granted candidate status once the following priorities have been addressed:

1) Address the issue of political polarization, ensuring cooperation across political parties in the spirit of the April 19 agreement.

2) Guarantee the full functioning of all state institutions, strengthening their independent and effective accountability, as well as their democratic oversight functions; further improve the electoral framework, addressing all shortcomings identified by OSCE/ODIHR and the Council of Europe/Venice Commission.

3) Adopt and implement a transparent and effective judicial reform strategy and action plan post-2021, based on a broad, inclusive and cross-party consultation process; ensure a judiciary that is fully and truly independent, accountable and impartial along the entire judicial institutional chain, also to safeguard the separation of powers; ensure the proper functioning and integrity of all judicial and prosecutorial institutions, in particular the Supreme Court, and address any shortcomings identified, including the nomination of judges at all levels and of the Prosecutor-General; undertake a thorough reform of the High Council of Justice and appoint the High Council's remaining members. All these measures need to be fully in line with European standards and the recommendations of the Venice Commission.

4) Strengthen the independence of Georgia's Anti-Corruption Agency, bringing together all key anti-corruption functions, in particular to rigorously address high-level corruption cases; equip the new Special Investigative Service and Personal Data Protection Service with resources commensurate to their mandates and ensure their institutional independence.

5) Implement the commitment to "deligarchization" by eliminating the excessive influence of vested interests in economic, political, and public life.

6) Strengthen the fight against organized crime, based on detailed threat assessments, ensuring rigorous investigations, prosecutions and a credible track record of prosecutions and convictions; guarantee accountability and oversight of law enforcement agencies.

7) Undertake stronger efforts to guarantee a free, professional, pluralistic and independent media environment, notably by ensuring that criminal procedures brought against media owners fulfil the highest legal standards, and by launching impartial, effective and timely investigations of threats against the safety of journalists and other media professionals.

8) Move swiftly to strengthen the protection of human rights of vulnerable groups, including by bringing perpetrators and instigators of violence to justice



120,000 protesters gathered in front of Parliament on June 20 to demonstrate the commitment of the Georgian people to the European choice and Western values. Source: netgazeti.ge

more effectively.

9) Consolidate efforts to enhance gender equality and fight violence against women.

10) Ensure the involvement of civil society in decision-making processes at all levels.

11) Adopt legislation so that Georgian courts proactively take into account European Court of Human Rights judgments in their deliberations.

12) Ensure that an independent person is given preference in the process of nominating a new Public Defender (Ombudsperson) and that this process is conducted in a transparent manner; ensure the Office's effective institutional independence.

## REACTIONS TO THE COMMISSION'S RECOMMENDATIONS

"Georgians' continued aspirations to secure their rightful place in the EU family has made another leap forward possible today. And every step brings it closer to making it a reality. With today's Opinion, Georgia is firmly anchored on its EU path," EU HR/VP Josep Borrell.

"There is no time for frustration or grumbling, because what happened to us today is a warning. It's our fault. We say we did not deserve it, we deserved it! After what this country has done for 30 years, we are behind our two friends and partners. It's our fault, whose else?!" said President of Georgia, Salome Zurbishvili.

Irakli Kobakhidze, Chairman of the Georgian Dream, said that the European Commission and the European Council were making a political decision, not an expert one. Consequently, in the current extraordinary political situation, the decision of the European Commission had "a logical political explanation."

"It is a difficult day for Georgia - we have fallen so far as a result of intense sabotage by the government," said Nika Melia, chairman of the United National Movement.

"What matters now, more than anything, is Georgia's readiness and ability to get to work to address this list of priorities, which will require the involvement of all political parties, as well as other stakeholders, local authorities, civil society, etc," stated EU Ambassador

to Georgia Carl Hartzell.

Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili noted that the Commission's recommendations were on the agenda of the national authorities anyway, and work "will be continued with Brussels in relation to them, and Georgia will get its candidate status."

"Many have questions as to why Moldova and Ukraine were recommended for candidacy and Georgia was not," Garibashvili said. "Moldova and Ukraine have an absolutely identical entry in terms of European Perspective; the Opinions of the European Commission on these countries also include a recommendation to the European Council to grant them perspective and status. That is, status is given to them in advance in real terms as an incentivizing advance for Ukraine, which is in the heaviest war, and for Moldova, which is also in a very difficult situation. At the same time, they also urged them to carry out a number of reforms. In our case, it is the other way round: we should first meet all the conditions that are laid out in the Opinion of the European Commission, carry out these reforms, implement the priorities, and Georgia will be granted the status afterwards," the PM said.

"We have heard assessments that Georgia's geographical location is different, the geopolitical situation is different. That Ukraine is at war is why they are being given the status, despite the fact Georgia is an unconditional leader in all the listed parameters. This does not apply to the Associated Trio only: We are ahead of many existing EU member states and NATO members in numerous parameters," Garibashvili claimed.

On the day the EU Parliament released its resolution, however, the Prime Minister's tone was one of frustration and disappointment: "One of the clearest arguments why Georgia deserved more, why [the EU Parliament] should not have done that, and why it was unfair, is the blood we have shed, our struggle, our war. We have fought against the Russian army three times. Since the country regained its independence, in 2008, our army has shown exemplary heroism. We do not compare ourselves to other armies, but the Georgians survived with two main forces: Our faith and our warrior spirit. Today, unfortunately, that was put

under question," the PM said during his speech at the opening ceremony of the wounded fighters' week in Tserovani.

"I do not envy the success of anyone; on the contrary, I am happy for the success of the Ukrainians, the Moldovans, but Georgia deserved more, and if anyone deserved it of these three countries, it was us. There are very difficult processes going on all over the world. We must meet this decision calmly and continue to move forward, to strengthen our country, strengthen our army, protect our country, protect our people and our main dream - that we all meet one day as soon as possible in a united, strong Georgia. This should be the main unifying idea of our nation and our people."

## 'HOME TO EUROPE!' - ON JUNE 20, DEMONSTRATORS GATHERED IN ANTICIPATION OF EU RESPONSE

120,000 protesters gathered in front of Parliament on June 20 to demonstrate the commitment of the Georgian people to the European choice and Western values.

"Europe is the historical choice and an aspiration of Georgians, for which all generations have made sacrifices. The tangible act of our historical aspiration is the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Georgia. 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," reads the statement issued by the rally organizers.

"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."

The organizers recognized that while the citizens of Georgia may not agree on many issues, 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.

The rally 'Home to Europe,' organized

by the Shame and civil movements, opened with the anthems of Georgia and the European Union on Rustaveli Avenue.

Citizens gathered at the rally were addressed by representatives of civil society, the Ukrainian authorities and the European Union. MEPs Rasa Juknevičienė, Markéta Gregorová, Andrius Kubilius, Anna Fotyga spoke, as did Lithuanian MP Žygmantas Pavilionis.

The MEPs urged the crowd not to feel disappointed about the recommendation by the European Commission not to give Georgia candidate status at this stage.

"The Georgian nation is pro-European and it must have a pro-European government to become a member of the European Union," MEP Andrius Kubilius said in his video address to the rally participants.

"Georgia does not need a façade democracy, but a real democracy, where the opposition is respected, different opinions are respected, freedom of speech is respected, where there will be no politicized justice. The Georgian people deserve such a democracy, because it is the only way to join the EU. The European Commission has made it clear to the Georgian Government that Georgia cannot become a candidate country if it does not respect the rules of true democracy. The Georgian Government must listen to its own people and the advice of the European Commission. This is how democratic governments in the EU behave. I wish the Georgians to have a government that will not be an obstacle on the road to the European Union, but a leader of its people," Kubilius said.

"You know very well that we are critical of your government, of the situation in Georgia, but that does not change our relations, our desire that you make progress and become part of the European Union," MEP Markéta Gregorová told the crowd.

"You came today to show what you want. Thank you for caring, thank you for coming. I fully support and care for your European future and European aspirations. I think you should get candidate status. You deserve EU membership. Always remember, we stand behind you even in difficult times and when we are criticizing you. Stay strong, pro-European idealists, if it's as important to you as it is to me," the MEP said.

Another rally is set for Friday 24 June, 20:00, also on Rustaveli Avenue.

## CHARLES MICHEL: TIME TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THE FUTURE OF UKRAINE, MOLDOVA AND GEORGIA LIES WITHIN THE EU

"Now is the time to acknowledge that the future of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia lies within the EU," President of the European Council, Charles Michel, said in a video address to his colleagues.

"I invite you to grant candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova. In parallel, we will continue to provide Ukraine with strong humanitarian, military, economic and financial support. The Western Balkans are important to the EU, and the EU is important to the Western Balkans. We must therefore re-energize the enlargement process and advance the integration of our Western Balkan partners," President Michel stated.

The European Parliament resolution stresses that there is no alternative to enlargement, which is "more than ever a geostrategic investment" in a stable, strong, and united EU. The MEPs note that the prospect of full EU membership for the countries striving to become member states is in the European Union's own political, economic, and security interests, and the enlargement process should be "re-energized" and unblocked as regards the Western Balkans.

For the latest updates, go to [georgiatoday.ge](http://georgiatoday.ge).

# Georgia Got European Perspective, So What Are We Worried About?

BY KAKHA GOGOLASHVILI,  
GFSIS SENIOR FELLOW

The potential candidate enjoys approximately the same privileges (financial package, political dialogue, participation in EU programs) as a candidate state. The “European perspective” means taking the path of institutional integration into the European Union. We do not have to worry about the fact that, based on the recommendation of the European Commission, we did not receive the status of a candidate immediately. The main question and concern is – is the country ready to fulfill the conditions set by the European Commission? If not, then the candidate status would not make a difference anyway, as similar conditions would be required to start accession negotiations, and if we were not to meet the demands, we would remain a membership candidate country for many more years, at best, or forever, at worst.

## THE REASONS WE WERE GIVEN LESSER STATUS

The reversal in terms of democracy, terribly damaged communication with EU institutions (quarrels with MEPs and calling them criminals, denunciation of the April 19 agreement reached through the mediation of the President of the European Council Charles Michel, rejection of a long-term soft loan from the European Commission, EUR 70 million (because we did not want to carry out judicial reform as a condition), severe political polarization in the country), strained relations with the Ukrainian government, publicly accusing the European Union of trying to drag Georgia into the war, meanwhile, the Russian state Duma praising Georgia, and more. Given the situation we are in, if not for the war in Ukraine and, consequently, the increased degree of “securitization” (emphasis on security) in the EU’s foreign policy, and the elevation of geopolitical priorities, our application for membership simply would not even be accepted. And this, despite the fact that we do not lag behind Ukraine and Moldova in terms of “approximation” (legislative approximation). According to the President of the European Commission, Ukraine surprised Europe with the

efficiency of its state administration in the conditions of war, the high degree of decentralization, and the ability of local governments to make independent decisions. The European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Commissioner Oliver Warhel said that despite many complaints against Moldova, the new leadership gives hope that the country will tackle all problems. With regard to both countries, it was noted that the European Commission trusts their governments and cooperation with them is not difficult. In our case, the European Commission has not expressed such an attitude.

## WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS FOR US

Given the inconvenient facts above, we should probably be glad that in its recommendation, the European Commission did not exclude us from the process and instead chose to give us a serious chance to “improve” in a few months, earn candidate status, and catch up with Moldova and Ukraine. Do not forget that certain conditions were set for these two countries as well, and membership talks will not start with them until they are satisfied. So, if Georgia really has the ambition to join the EU, it can soon get the status of a candidate, even surpass these two partners, and get involved in the accession negotiations before them.

## DISSOLUTION OF THE TRIO

Due to the qualitatively different status of the partner countries, in theory, the “Associated Trio” would not have to disintegrate. We, as a potential candidate country, if this status is confirmed by the Council, will retain the usual opportunity to work with the other two partners of the Trio. The Associated Trio, in turn, is a format created for the cooperation of the three countries, and it had no legal link with the EU institutions and its policies. The cooling relations between the Ukrainian and Georgian governments are more worrying in this context. The future of the trio will be decided only by the desire and will of these three countries to cooperate.

## EASTERN PARTNERSHIP OR A NEW FORMAT?

The founding documents of the Eastern Partnership, as well as the basis of this initiative – the European Neighborhood Policy – emphasize that this framework



Demonstrators at a rally in Tbilisi, June 20, showing support for the country's EU membership bid. Source: AP Photo/Shakh Aivazov

does not imply the accession of its partner countries to the EU. Accordingly, any project or form of cooperation under this policy is not intended to serve the goals of a partner country's EU membership. It is easy to imagine that keeping Ukraine and Moldova in such a format would cause a lot of inconvenience not only to them but also to other participants of the format. It will also be necessary to change the relevant EU regulation adopted for the management of this format. The easiest way to solve this problem is to include Ukraine and Moldova in the cooperation formats for the Western Balkans (there are six formats in total) and use the pre-accession financial instrument- IPA III – as the financial instrument. However, the EU will have to increase funding for this assistance instrument, and this is likely to be through the transfer of part of the financial resources from the neighborhood policy instrument to IPA-III, as it currently has 7 beneficiaries – candidates and a potential candidate from the Western Balkans (6 countries) and Turkey. The IPA-III financial package for 2021-2027 includes €14.2 billion, while the part of the NDICI (Instrument for Neighborhood, Development, and International Cooperation) focusing on neighborhood policy countries (16 countries including the Eastern Partnership countries) is €19.3 billion. Thus, we cannot say that funding for candidate and potential candidate countries far exceeds that of the Eastern Partnership countries.

If Moldova and Ukraine, as candidate countries, are moved out from the Eastern Partnership format, they are likely to be offered access to the South East European Cooperation Formats, in which case Georgia should similarly be transferred in the same format since the other potential candidates are also members of these formats. However, such a change does not preclude the continuation of their cooperation in the Eastern Partnership format, as the former Soviet Union space is intertwined with many ties and interests. Because the nomination process took just three and a half months, no-one has yet thought about such practical issues in the new reality. In any case, we should not be afraid of being separated from Moldova and Ukraine, and to find ourselves in a format of accession characterized by a slower pace of integration with the EU.

## WHAT HAS TO BE DONE NOW

It is necessary for our government to immediately recognize the conditions presented by the European Commission, and express its full readiness to meet them. If the government does not agree with them, any discussion about it makes no sense. There have been no occasions for the European Commission to negotiate easing of the conditions. Therefore, if the current administration does not agree and refuses to meet the conditions set, it must relinquish its authority due to the constitutional obligation of the country for

European integration. A new administration must then be appointed to fulfill the conditions. This is a minimalist scenario that does not involve new elections and a change of government. The change, if it became necessary, must be implemented very quickly, and the new administration must start working on fulfilling the conditions of the European Commission immediately and effectively. The new administration will also no longer be restrained from a “negative memory” in its relations with the EU, and will work with the European Commission and the European Parliament without any problems (although to improve relations with the European Parliament, several leaders of the ruling party will have to step aside and give these positions to other colleagues). If we take into account the recommendations of the European Commission, the government should set up an advisory (working group) composed of active and qualified representatives of civil society, which will include professional experts in the field. This group should be given a broad mandate to actually lead the necessary reforms. It would also be good if a team of European experts would assist this group.

At present, we see this as the only way to reach the goal. This is a peaceful and effective way to prevent the country from facing confrontation and destabilization, in which case only Russia will be a winner, and this may be the only victory in the region for the latter.

## Seeking Happiness, the Ultimate Goal

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

Time to meditate a little: the ultimate goal is overall happiness, not just membership in any civil organization or military bloc, no matter how fine and righteous those international institutions look and sound. And there are so many ways, both good and not so good, in which to achieve that ultimate goal.

We are living in a doubting and competitive world, within which very few decisions made were or are absolutely perfect. Anything we try to do to improve life on earth needs to be double-checked and scrutinized, because most actions undertaken so far, in our thousands of years of history, have not done very much good to the Earth or humankind, especially our wars and the ways we have treated Mother Nature.

Our little Georgia is certainly a part of the bigger world around, and, naturally, we are among the makers of those decisions and the undertakers of those actions. Life goes on, and we carry on making new decisions and carrying out new actions, but there is never enough



Image source: lucidchart.com

certainty that those decisions and actions are optimal. For instance, do we know exactly what kind of political behavior and which model of political behavior will work as 100% optimal in the geopolitical, social and economic situation that

Georgia has lately found itself?

Political science has not yet prompted us, with reasonable certainty, as to what might best suit this country and nation. None of us in the field of liberal arts or science has so far come up with the fun-

damental research, and the answers thereof, to timely instruct the Georgian people how best to behave, what measures to take, or what favorable directions to choose so as to make progress. The generations come and go without any persuasive or knowledge-based guidelines for our making our way toward a better future. This is why we have incessantly watched those huge crowds in the street again and again over the last 30 years. Most of our national time seems to have been spent outdoors, with placards, flags and slogans supported with loud calls for something, understood only by one part of the nation, the rest remaining in permanent doubt and suspicion.

Grassroots-level discussions, whether live at our kitchen tables or virtual on the internet, no longer make sense. People, in general, do not know where Georgia belongs and what the Georgian people need to do to achieve the ultimate goal, which is happiness. After all, the great Aristotle banqueted to us humans that happiness is the only goal that makes sense in life. And in seeking to know how to achieve that ultimate goal, people need intellectual help from wise and educated researchers who know it better because they are wiser and more educated than we, the rank-and-file in

the street. And the flip-side of the coin is that, having received those scientifically-founded recommendations, we, the people, must also be ready to listen and act accordingly. The Republic can no longer rely on popular slogans, loud calls and hysterical demands to go in this or that direction. The republic needs scientifically corroborated plans of action to move forward.

Time is passing, and this country shows no ability to get out of the situation, caught between the anvil and the hammer as it is. Some powers pull us to where life is presumed to be better, and others try to drag us back to a well-known déjà vu of an already experienced lifestyle. And the participants in the ceaselessly ongoing show try to guess where they want to end up. It has not been counted with precision where the majority of those participants stand, but the guesswork never ends. All those sporadic emotional public breakouts seem to be accidental, and the wise men of the nation, if there are any left, stand in solemn silence, afraid of being turned into pariahs or the plain subjects of derision. After all, life's not so bad when you're sitting safely sheltered, making no sudden moves, in the sweet and serene haven of “status quo,” is it?

# The Coming Storm or Losing Steam?



A militant of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) watches from a frontline position. By Alexander Ermochenko/REUTERS

ANALYSIS BY MICHAEL GODWIN

As Russia's "special military operation" continues with a focus in eastern Ukraine, both sides have traded small slivers of territory for immense cost. With casualties mounting, logistics strained, and equipment being either destroyed or captured, commanders are looking for any opportunity to exploit an opening. Many observers have begun to describe the combat as largely an artillery duel, with each side resorting to shelling the other.

Both sides have raised concerns of the sustainability of this grinding campaign. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky admitted to the Kyiv Post that "Every 24 hours, 60 to 100 Ukrainian soldiers are being killed in combat, and around 500 are injured." Supporting this, several videos released on social media show Ukrainian defenders taking heavy fire while attempting to evacuate large numbers of wounded in civilian vehicles. The recent capture of two high-profile Americans, both former American military, made the problem even more poignant.

Russia has not been spared the carnage. While their numbers have been more difficult to discern, several reports have shed light on the invasion force's woes. Russian soldiers on the front are facing

significant morale and supply issues. Ukrainian intelligence reports detailed instances of Russian commanders refusing to risk men and vehicles to resupply their forward deployed troops. An Institute for the Study of War report said the Russian military was being forced to concentrate all its efforts in single attacks rather than multi-prong assaults.

This buildup of tension and frustration, combined with pressure from senior leaders from Kyiv and Moscow, is likely to result in one of two outcomes. The first is an all-out attempt to climatically bring the conflict to some form of "victory." The second is a long, protracted conflict not dissimilar to that seen after the 2014 invasion, albeit with far more weapons to bear and much more at stake.

The first "coming storm" would likely be in the form of a mass combined assault. While Ukraine has significant combat strength and has made large gains in the south near Kherson lately, this type of operation would likely be done by Russian forces. It would have little regard for man or machine, and would simply aim at a WWII-esque display of raw power to gain territory. This terrifying possibility, while difficult to fathom, could be in the early stages of preparation now.

Multiple reports from the Russian interior have signaled that disparity is beginning to set in. Recruiting offices have

resorted to "salesman" techniques to meet high quotas. Exorbitant bonuses, promises of glory in battle, and a lofty pension upon returning from Ukraine have been promised to young men across the Russian Federation. While recruitment officers even in Western countries have been criticized for their tactics, the Russian model sets a new low bar.

According to Ukrainian intelligence analysis, Russian recruitment has pushed their numbers to near unreal limits. Quotas of approximately 200 young men a week are being pressed on the recruitment officers in Russia's far eastern and Siberian provinces.

The popular encrypted messaging and social media app "Telegram" has been an uncommon source for many disillusioned Russian volunteers to explain the dire situation. Young Russian men have shared information that the military is attempting to press men using not only money, but at times violence and threats to make their quotas. The German news outlet Spiegel said one Russian volunteer said that he received a letter asking him to report for service. He ignored the notice, saying "I know how many of our boys are dying in Ukraine. They only lie on the television." The young man stated he was offered 300,000 Rubles a month to serve in Ukraine, an astronomical military salary of over \$5,300. When he refused, citing family issues and the sickness of his parents, he was threatened and forced to write a statement outlining why he was refusing service in the "special military operation for the protection of the Donbas."

The second potential outcome for the hostilities is no less horrific. The aforementioned surge of recruitment of Russian men and equipment into Ukraine could alternatively lead to a faltered assault and prolonged conflict. This revisiting of a situation from The Great War pits two titans against each other in a long, bloody, and taxing war. Economically, socially, culturally, politically, and of course militarily, this would ruin both sides in the long term.

However, some European leaders have already reckoned with this possibility. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson stated that the NATO alliance, and the West at large, needs to prepare for this long war scenario. Upon returning from a visit in Kyiv, Ukraine, he stated, "Time

is now the vital factor. Everything will depend on whether Ukraine can strengthen its ability to defend its soil faster than Russia can renew its capacity to attack. Our task is to enlist time on Ukraine's side."

As Ukraine fights to keep its sovereignty and national identity, NATO support will be the primary item that keeps these afloat. While Ukraine has displayed significant resolve, tactical prowess, and an ability to adapt, time is a factor that Kyiv must contend with. The Kremlin is using this temporal tool to grind down the opposition and to isolate Ukraine from the West, painting them as an inefficient expense on the global economy.

Conversely, Kyiv is betting that it can bring Russia down on the battlefield through attrition and from within. Discontent in the federation is well documented on social media and in open sources online. "No to War" or "Her войне!" the White-Blue-White flag, and various deserting military and police personnel have become the symbol of resistance to the war in Ukraine.

According to open source intelligence, approximately 3,980 Russian servicemen have refused to fight in Ukraine. Of particular note is that this number does not include irregular, police, National Guard

(Rosgvardia), and South Ossetian units that have returned home rather than serve in the warzone. This growing anti-war movement could put Moscow in a non-win scenario. With Russian President Vladimir Putin unlikely to lose face by pulling out from the war, the idea of a long war becomes too real.

NATO has signaled their willingness to support Ukraine's efforts against Russia. "We must prepare for the fact that it could take years. We must not let up in supporting Ukraine, even if the costs are high, not only for military support, also because of rising energy and food prices," NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg announced. This influx of material and munitions will likely keep Ukraine from being overrun, but will fuel the trench-like long war as well.

While both options lead to a huge cost in life and destruction, it is likely only one will be the outcome the two sides face. Not unlike the old model of Mutually Assured Destruction, or MAD, the two combatants will have to find a solution to this increasing fatigue of war. NATO, Ukraine, and Russia will need to decide on a "forever war" or a climactic crescendo. Both will shape European security, society, and geopolitics for decades to come.



Young Russian men sit in line at a military recruitment office in Novosibirsk. Source: ITAR-TASS/Kirill Kukhmar

## For Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Security with Russia Equals Economic Troubles

ANALYSIS BY EMIL AVDALIANI

When a new Russian invasion against Ukraine began in late February, following the decision to recognize the independence of two separatist entities in Donbas, the prospects for Abkhazia and South Ossetia seemed propitious. The invasion plan was thought to be a well prepared campaign, one that ended with a devastating blow to Ukraine. Moreover, the expansion of Russia's separatist empire was also considered in Sokhumi and Tskhinvali as a positive sign: Russia was building a new order, and the chances that Abkhazia and South Ossetia would be getting larger recognition, for a moment, seemed more realistic.

Despite these high hopes, the opposite happened. Russian moves proved Moscow has no regard for separatist entities except to use them for military goals. The arguments, believed by many in the West, that Russian moves in Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014 were (at least partially) motivated by fears of Russian speakers being oppressed turned out to be false. Moreover, claims that NATO was an instigator of rivalry with Russia by drawing Georgia and Ukraine into the alliance likewise proved inaccurate.

The 2022 invasion showed that there was a different mentality that dominated the Russian elite when it made that fatal



Image source: cryptopumpnews.com

decision. In Russia, the imperial vision has never faded. Side-lined for some time following the Soviet collapse, it resurfaced with new force in 2010s. It is now clear that the second war with Ukraine is nothing but an attempt to build a territorial empire.

Russia has faced unexpected resistance, not only from the Ukrainian people, but from the liberal order. Weakened and denigrated by many as a historical relic no longer applicable to the realities of the 2020s, the order has once again showed its vitality and ability to re-emerge as a concept still dear to many. And this is where the hopes of Abkhazia and South Ossetia become unrealistic. Russia's sprawling separatist empire is ever more difficult to govern: Too many players and too many needs, both military and economic, put pressure on Moscow financially.

From February 2022 there are simply too many separatist entities supported by Russia. This lessens the chances for Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Few if any, especially amid the global condemnation against Russia, would go for recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia, plus the two Donbas entities.

But arguably the biggest problem for Georgia's occupied territories is the economic situation. Even before the invasion, the Covid-19 pandemic undermined a fragile balance Abkhazia and South Ossetia depended upon. Global recession, coupled with a particularly badly handled pandemic in Russia, hit the separatist territories. Abkhaz and South Ossetian leaders often had a hard time extracting money from their superiors in the Kremlin. Russian politicians too were increasingly unwilling to commit finances to the ever growing preda-

tory elites in the separatist territories.

With the second invasion of Ukraine, Russia has now come under an unprecedented range of Western sanctions. Its economy is set to plummet by year-end if not in the next several months. The seeming stability of the Ruble is very much illusory.

Dependent on Russia, the economic situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia will deteriorate. Russian tourists might visit Abkhazia this summer in much bigger numbers, but whatever scant financial aid Sokhumi will be getting, it will be contingent upon meeting specific Russian demands, and those are some big demands by Abkhaz standards. Moscow wants land and critical infrastructure of the region to be legally available for purchasing by Russians. Allowing it equals Abkhazia losing whatever minimal semblance of autonomy it still enjoys from Moscow.

Moscow has already indicated that it will be less willing to finance Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In early March, in an interview with the state-affiliated TASS news agency, Russian Deputy Economy Minister Dmitry Volvach argued that it is time that the two regions become more independent from Moscow's aid.

The situation with South Ossetia is different. It has a much smaller array of what it can offer to Russia. In fact, its geographic position is the only advantage the region has. Thence comes, in a striking difference with Abkhazia, Tskhinvali's occasional attempts to seek unification with Russia.

As such, the long-term picture seems

less promising. The two separatist regions hoping for economic development will be heavily impacted by the unfolding crisis in Russia. Perhaps in Abkhazia this will once again engender talks on some kind of economic rapprochement with Tbilisi. The Abkhaz leader Aslan Bzhania has long argued that trade relations and some kind of political dialogue with Tbilisi will be helpful. The opposition is against it, constantly threatening unrest and violence.

The fate of the two separatist regions is closely linked to Russia. This is seen as a boon in terms of security, but also as a huge liability when it comes to the economic stability of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Ramifications will be wide-ranging. Corruption and ever decrepit infrastructure will hamper the two territories' development. In a way, for Tbilisi, it is an opportunity. In the longer run, some kind of talks could be entertained with Sokhumi. Contingent upon Georgia's internal economic development, Tbilisi could become more attractive for ordinary Abkhaz and Ossetians. Some experience in that regard is already there. Before 2020, and especially following the pandemic, Georgian medical services attracted numerous residents from the two territories. Similarly, the education sector, with wide ranging state-sponsored incentives, has also attracted a large pool of future students.

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

# PACE Co-Rapporteur on Georgia Kerstin Lundgren: Leaving Georgia Out Is a Mistake



Kerstin Lundgren, Third Deputy Speaker of the Riksdag (Swedish Parliament).  
Source: Wikipedia

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

**L**eaving Georgia out is creating a situation where the Kremlin forces can easily play with and make use of Georgian distrust. Is this the way forward for us? I think this is the worst way to handle the situation, – Kerstin Lundgren, Third Deputy Speaker of the Riksdag (Swedish Parliament), tells RFE/RL. Alongside Boris Tsilevitch of Latvia (2015-2017) and later Titus Corlătean of Romania (since 2018), Lundgren serves as the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe's co-rapporteur on Georgia.

## UNLIKE THE COMMISSION, YOU DON'T CONSIDER EXCLUDING GEORGIA A GOOD MOVE. WHY?

Well, from my perspective, Georgia was the first country that was hit by Russian Imperial thoughts or behavior, during the 2008 War. And at that time, Georgia felt left alone. The EU wasn't really going for sanctions [or] for marking a strong position toward what happened. And now we have a specific situation. This is not a common membership application. This is something specific, Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia asking to become members of the EU. I think we should make a decision jointly on the three of them by deciding they are in the same "territory" – all pushed or threatened by the same aggressor. We need to do so if we want to send the message to the people in Ukraine, in Moldova and in Georgia that we are open to their membership, that we are reaching out and are telling them that this is a path for them to take. This is a way of consolidating the work that has been ongoing since the Association Agreement, and it will also be a

message to the Kremlin. But if we divide them and leave Georgia behind when the country's territory is occupied by Russia, it creates a situation the Russians and the Kremlin forces easily can play with and make use of Georgian distrust. Is this the way forward for us? I think this is the worst way to handle the situation. So, for me, it's an issue of making sure that we are not leaving Georgia behind. It is a tricky way forward for Georgia, as well as for Ukraine and Moldova, but candidate status should be given to all three countries on the same basis.

## WHAT IS YOUR TAKE ON THE CONDITIONS THAT GEORGIA HAS BEEN GIVEN BY THE COMMISSION TO COMPLY WITH?

There are obvious issues highlighted by the Commission. And I agree, there are things Georgia absolutely needs to deal with. But I don't think it's a good idea to make a way forward for the country by leaving it behind, because that could create a feeling of distrust, disillusionment, that could be used by forces inside for their own gains. I'm not sure this is a way to be helpful to the people of Georgia who want to see the Western path followed. It would be better to reach out and give Georgia the same opportunity, but also make sure the necessary changes happen not only on paper, but in reality, because otherwise nothing will move ahead. The way out of this situation would be giving Georgia the candidate status, too, but leaving all those conditions attached, then deciding on further steps based on whether the country fulfills those conditions or not. They already have more conditions than Ukraine and Moldova.

## ONE OF THE CONDITIONS THE COMMISSION IS ASKING FOR

## IS DE-OLIGARCHIZATION.

Mr. Ivanishvili has the money, the power, and the connections. And he is part of the ongoing game. I have followed Georgia for quite some time, and, for me, when I was following the election campaigns and political messages and so on, I saw two ghosts in all of them: One of Mr. Ivanishvili and the other of Mr. Saakashvili. I do think it would be a good thing for Georgian society, and for Georgia, to go ahead and leave those big personalities, those ghosts, sidelined or behind; to move forward and find solutions together. But, of course, it's up to the Georgian people to find a way forward. There have been a lot of attempts, and I know the political landscape has been changing. Hopefully, there elections will be coming up soon that will create a better situation for the country. We saw Moldova had an election that created a better situation for Moldova, and, hopefully, if the agreement on the Georgian election code is fulfilled, we will see the next election giving us a better political situation.

Georgia is a fantastic country, and the Georgian people are fantastic. So I do hope that the people of Georgia will really get the perspective that not only can they become a member of the EU, but also that they are being treated in a fair way. Like the other two applicant countries, Georgia is in a specific situation, with Russians occupying 20% of their territory. And the creeping borderization is an ongoing issue there. Simply put, this situation must be addressed. It would really be a shame if this issue disappears from the agenda, because then, once again, that would mean the EU was looking elsewhere, not at what was going on.

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## Georgia – Responding to a New Reality in the South Caucasus

BY EMIL AVDALIANI

**G**eorgia, a West-aligned country, has often portrayed itself as the bastion of the remaining Western influence in the region. But the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War of 2020 revealed the lack of the regional security architecture when neither the collective West nor the OSCE's Minsk Group (with Russia, France and the US as co-chairs) offered any viable solution to the conflict. This, much to Tbilisi's chagrin, indicated the worsening geopolitical situation around Georgia with the West increasingly distancing itself from the region.

Though in the initial stage of the 2020 war, Russia remained passive, it eventually re-asserted itself. What remained unchanged was the sidelining of the collective West. For instance, Russia's and Turkey's plans to (re-)open trade routes which would increase the regional connectivity, potentially further sidelined the West's role in the post-war settlement, which concerned not only the actual infrastructure projects. The West's limited presence is also seen in the way the Western peacemaking standards and conflict resolution methods are being trumped by Russian illiberal alternatives. The sidelining of the West is also shown in the actual long-term political visions for the South Caucasus. Russia's vision is versatile: a mixture of economic measures to keep Armenia and Azerbaijan closer, partly through military moves such as a physical presence on Armenian and Azerbaijani soil, and partly through fostering one-to-one bilateral ties, i.e. a transactional approach.

Turkey's vision is similar, as is its pur-

suit of regional infrastructure development. Moreover, at the political level, the suggestion of creating a six-nation pact, often called the 3+3 platform, involving the South Caucasus states plus Russia, Turkey and Iran, could be seen as yet another example of growing Western political regress from the region.

The war changed Georgia's perception of the geopolitics in the South Caucasus. Where, previously, the region was being increasingly attached to the West, the West's distancing and the action of the regional powers around the 2020 war signaled a different development. Though since the end of the Soviet Union the South Caucasus has held a strategically important position in the calculus of regional powers, it has not been sufficiently high on their agenda. From serving as a periphery to greater geopolitical games, the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War ushered in a major change: the Caspian basin and the South Caucasus have become inextricably linked to the Middle East. Russia and Turkey, which have since early 2010s increased their footprint in the Middle East, now look at the South Caucasus as a part of a great geopolitical game from the Mediterranean to the Caspian region. Ankara and Moscow now make their strategic moves in the South Caucasus within the context of the developments in the Middle East. This portends more challenges to Georgia, as the South Caucasus could be subject to geopolitical trade-offs. It also means that the region has been elevated in status: it is now a near primary geopolitical theater for Turkey, Russia and the West. Even for Iran, the South Caucasus now plays a bigger role.

What concretely disturbs political minds in Tbilisi is that after the war, Russia increased its military presence in the region by adding nearly 2000



A destroyed military vehicle en route from Shushi to Karintak in Nagorno-Karabakh. By Adam Jones/Flickr.

peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh – effectively establishing a new military outpost. Moscow now enjoys an unchallengeable military position in the region, with its bases in Armenia and in Georgia's occupied regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (South Ossetia). This allows Russia to establish direct military control (if it decides to) over the South Caucasus corridor, which includes critical pipeline and railroad infrastructure spanning from the Caspian to the Black Sea via the Georgian territory. For Tbilisi, this means that Russian troops are now essentially closing in on Georgia from all sides and could easily disrupt regional

connectivity, the backbone of Georgia's geopolitical importance to both China and the collective West.

Georgia's political elites view the Russian peacekeeping force in Nagorno-Karabakh with much suspicion because of the country's own experience of hosting Russian troops in the early 1990s. One of the conclusions is that Russian peacekeeping forces are a good tool for solidifying Moscow's geopolitical positions in the neighborhood. Considering the unwillingness to withdraw from Abkhazia and South Ossetia, for Tbilisi, the Russian presence in Nagorno-Karabakh is more of a long-term perspective.

Tbilisi also understands that Russia will likely play a long game where, in order to persuade Azerbaijan to allow the Russian peacekeeping mission to remain on its soil beyond the end of 2025, it will use various tools such as incidents on the contact line in Nagorno-Karabakh. If this fails, a more concrete plan could be extensive supplies of military hardware to Armenia which will be used to build a battle-ready military capable of offensive operations, a useful tool for the Kremlin to secure its continued presence in the conflict zone. The context always differs, but similar developments were taking place in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the 1990s and early 2000s. Instability provided Russia with perfect opportunities to interfere, and play a subtle game by increasing distrust between Tbilisi on the one hand and Sokhumi and Tskhinvali on the other.

Overall, Russia's policies toward Georgia's two regions have represented a building block in Russia's emerging strategy since the early 1990s – namely, the use of conflict zones across the post-Soviet space in order to keep Moldova, Ukraine, and the South Caucasus away from NATO and the EU, often through the deliberate stoking of separatist conflicts. This policy has been successful so far, as the EU and NATO have refrained from extending membership to Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. In the Nagorno-Karabakh case, the West is largely absent, but Turkish influence has been on the rise, so Russia had to step in to keep Ankara at bay, and not let Baku gain control over its entire territory, as it would free Azerbaijan from Russian influence. Seen from this perspective, the Russian move to send its peacekeepers fits into the overall strategy of keeping its neighborhood from third countries.

# CENN and IRAO, with GIZ's Support, Get Innovative to Reduce Plastic Consumption



BY KATIE RUTH DAVIES

It is a sad but deeply ingrained practice in offices across Georgia for employees to consume large quantities of plastic in their daily practices. Plastic files, cutlery, cups, bags, PET bottles and stationery are all widely used and then discarded in offices. Moreover, institutions, when holding public events and conferences, tend to opt for the “convenience” of single-use plastic within their offered catering services.

However, institutions are becoming increasingly more environmentally conscious, and are more and more often seeking out environmentally sustainable practices as part of their corporate identity and Corporate Social Responsibility strategies. According to a CENN survey, institutions show more readiness to reduce plastic usage if they have enough opportunities to do so, and are equipped with the knowledge to help them find the right alternatives. Workplaces have a lot of potential to reduce their consumption of plastic when it is made convenient, and along with this comes the ability to influence the relevant behavior of staff members by providing information and incentives.

In response to the abovementioned issues of single-used plastic consumption, which has a significant role to play

in waste management in Georgia, CENN, with the support of the German Corporation for International Cooperation GmbH (GIZ), within the frames of the 'Be Innovative' program of the 'Prevent Waste Alliance,' launched a pilot project 'Plastic Waste Reduction in Tbilisi's Offices' which aims to reduce single-use plastic waste in the Georgian capital's offices.

The first to try out the project is the IRAO International Insurance Company, and this year, IRAO and CENN signed a mutual memorandum about plastic waste minimization and environmentally friendly practices, giving the company the chance to become one of most eco-friendly company in Georgia.

The project uses a new, innovative behavior-centered design that refers to the different behavioral levers of IRAO's employees and general management.

“Behavior-centered design allows us to better understand our target group; to understand their barriers, motivations and capabilities,” – Nana Takvarelia, Communications and Outreach Specialist at CENN. “Based on this, we are able to leverage behavior change through various approaches, such as emotional appeal, material incentives, making the right choices available, and so on. We believe that sustainable change comes with approaches that change policies. For this reason, we aim to work with companies and employers to change their procurement policies and establish

46.6% of employees said that if multi-use equipment replaced single-use plastic in the office, they would “definitely use it,” while 25.2% said they would “try”

environmentally friendly practices, whilst also working with the employees to raise awareness.”

By establishing a behavior-centered design, CENN aims to strengthen the corporate environmental responsibility among the private sector and encourage its employees to become more environmentally conscious.

“Corporate Sustainability has always been very important for IRAO. We started collaborating with CENN in 2021 and organized trainings for our employees in order to raise awareness about sustainable development and to encourage eco-friendly behavior in the company,” Elene Margishvili, Head of Integrated Marketing Communications at IRAO, tells GEORGIA TODAY. “These trainings were very successful and encouraged us to proceed with bigger steps and to join this program. Each employee in our company tries to reduce waste and to recycle, but still greater actions are needed to make the world a better place. The majority of waste in our office and in society is made up of plastic bottles, plastic bags and plastic disposable tableware. We believe that if we take a deeper look at how it affects nature, then our habits will change into more eco-friendly habits.

“IRAO has shown tremendous dedication in taking a strong stand on environmental and social issues. IRAO has now established a series of activities internally that will ensure real tangible results and, more importantly, lasting results,” CENN's Takvarelia noted.

### SO HOW DOES IT WORK?

Following two months of research and analysis, CENN spent one month setting out a plan of action, during which it wrote Waste Management Audit and Green Procurement Guidelines for the IRAO Insurance Company.

This next week will see intensive awareness-raising among the people working in IRAO, from top management down, on the plastic waste impact on the environment and human health, and the alternatives to single-use plastic available to them. When asked by CENN, 46.6% of IRAO employees said that if multi-use equipment replaced single-use plastic in the office, they would “definitely use it,” while 25.2% said they would “try to use it.” In short, it clearly comes down to convenience – if it is there, it will be used, placing in-office responsibility squarely on the shoulders of the employer. Yet, with time, it is hoped that

We believe that sustainable change comes with approaches that change policies

mentalities will change, the impact of such behaviour adjustments will be better recognized, and our planet will begin to reap the benefits of a cleaner and more environmentally-aware society.

Each employee will be given their own personal reusable water bottles. The office has also reduced number of bins with plastic bags, which will lead to thousands less plastic bin bags being used within the company. The company will also install recycling bins in their offices whose contents will be collected by a recycling company.

“We expect to make a real change,” Elene Margishvili tells us. “First, our employees' awareness will be much higher. We have already started the plastic bag minimization process in the office, which includes waste minimization. For instance, we swapped 150 small bins for eight 8 bigger bins in the office, which is equal to reducing annual plastic bag usage from 36,000 to 3840. This is a very important step. Waste reduction in offices is a strategy undertaken by many international companies, and IRAO, as a member of the Vienna Insurance Group, is very proud to be applying this concept here in Tbilisi. We hope that other companies will also join this initiative and step up for a green environment- we're always happy to share our experience and successes, having stepped up ourselves!”



ურნების შემცირებით, ირაო წელიწადში 33,120 ცალ კოლიეთილენის პარკს შეამცირებს, კარკების ან რაოდენობის ჯამი გომით თბილისის დინამოს სტადიონის ფართობზე მეტია.





# DFC, American Hospital Tbilisi Partner to Provide Free Medical Services to Ukrainians



**O**n Wednesday June 22, the US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) and American Hospital Tbilisi (AHT) launched a surgical and non-surgical assistance program for Ukrainian citizens. The new technical assistance partnership will benefit displaced Ukrainians in Georgia. DFC's support enables the Hospital to provide much-needed outpatient care and surgical services Ukrainians would not otherwise be able to receive in Georgia while residing in the country temporarily. It is estimated that there are 28,000 Ukrainian refugees now in Georgia. "DFC's new technical assistance partnership with the American Hospital Tbilisi builds upon our strong, existing partnership and will benefit Ukrainians in need," said DFC CEO Scott Nathan. "DFC is committed to supporting our partners throughout Eastern Europe through smart investments like this partnership, especially in the wake of Russia's unprovoked war in Ukraine." "American Hospital Tbilisi is proud

to announce this partnership with DFC to expand critical health services to Ukrainians residing in Georgia," said Gregory Kuntz, Chairman, American

**//** This new investment builds upon historic DFC support for AHT, which received \$18 million in DFC financing for its initial construction

Hospital Tbilisi. "With DFC's support, we are expanding the Hospital's services to reach Ukrainians who are unable to access other healthcare after fleeing the Russian war in their country. On behalf of the American Hospital Tbilisi, we are very pleased to be able to provide care to the citizens of Georgia. Today, we're expanding our mission and through the generosity and incredible support of DFC, we'll be able to provide care to Ukrainian citizens, now displaced and living in Georgia temporarily. They found themselves in need of critical healthcare service, and through the generosity and help from DFC, we'll be able to provide healthcare services to those most in need. We look forward to continuing to expand our healthcare services and provide high quality care and set a new landmark on the map of Georgian medical services."

DFC and American Hospital Tbilisi leadership announced the new technical assistance partnership at a grant-signing ceremony at AHT's state-of-the-art facilities in downtown Tbilisi.

**//** DFC's new technical assistance partnership with the American Hospital Tbilisi builds upon our strong, existing partnership and will benefit Ukrainians in need

This new investment builds upon historic DFC support for AHT, which received \$18 million in DFC financing for its initial construction. The technical assistance partnership will enable American Hospital Tbilisi to grow and expand its services, strengthening Georgia's health sector to support long-term development.

The grantee, AHT provides medical services to Ukrainian citizens affected by the war in Russia, including Ukrainian citizens who are currently in Georgia, as well as Ukrainian citizens who will travel to Georgia for medical treatment due to inaccessibility or lack of medical services and supplies in Ukraine. The grantee will ensure the appropriate standard of care and conduct all services in line with patient protections and safeguards.

The hospital will perform the following services for Ukrainian patients: surgeries, pediatric outpatient care and

diagnostic services, and adult outpatient care and diagnostic services.

The official signing ceremony was attended by representatives of healthcare and diplomatic circles, including Georgia's Deputy Minister of Health, Tamar Gabunia, and Chargé d'Affaires of Ukraine, Andrii Kasianov.

"I would like to express deep gratitude towards the US Government, DFC, and American Hospital Tbilisi for such an important and timely initiative," Tamar Gabunia stated. "As part of the newly launched technical assistance partnership, the Hospital will be able to provide further expanded and diverse critical health services to Ukrainian citizens in need, though its doors were open for them even before."

"Unfortunately, Russia's large-scale war against Ukraine is far from over. The flow of refugees from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine continues to increase due to Russia's blockade of humanitarian corridors towards the territory controlled by the Ukrainian government," noted Andrii Kasianov. "Brotherly Georgia has already hosted more than 28,000 of our citizens, whose basic needs are supported by the authorities, NGOs and local citizens. The US, as a key partner of Ukraine, provides large-scale and unprecedented assistance not only in the military but also in the humanitarian sphere. Today, we launch a program to provide Ukrainian refugees with a wide range of medical services at the American Hospital in Tbilisi. This brings us to a fundamentally new level of de facto tripartite cooperation between the United States, Georgia and Ukraine. We are confident that targeted funding from DFC to the American Hospital in Tbilisi will allow effective medical support and the rehabilitation of wounded, injured and suffering Ukrainians from the war. We are deeply grateful to our partners for the important and systematic support of Ukraine at such a difficult time for the world."

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# MasterChef & Carrefour Collaborate for the Third Season Running: Seventh Season of the Much-loved Cooking Competition Closes on a High



**M**asterChef Georgia — one of the most highly-rated entertainment shows on Georgian TV — has wrapped its seventh season crowning Tamar Bekauri as the winner. For the first time in the history of MasterChef, three women made it to the finals. Tamar was up against fellow finalists Mariam Bartia and Sandra Korenevich in a competitive finale which saw her walk away with the 2022 MasterChef title - the best cook in the country.

This season, like the previous two, received positive feedback and high engagement from audiences, in part thanks to the contribution of partner and general sponsor, Carrefour — who supported the show for the third season in a row. Carrefour — which is owned and operated by Majid Al Futtaim in Georgia — supplied the MasterChef contestants with high quality, fresh, and healthy products for their dishes, enabling them to impress the judges throughout the season. The leading retailer assisted participants in preparing visually attractive, delicious and unique dishes in their quest to be recognised as



the MasterChef champion.

To reward the winning chef, as well as in celebration of its tenth anniversary in the Georgian market, Carrefour awarded the winner through its loyalty program, MyClub, with points worth 10 000 GEL. This allowed the winner to choose her desired products or equipment either by visiting Carrefour stores or without leaving home, using Carrefour's new, online application and delivery service. The remaining finalists and chefs were also awarded exclusive French Carrefour products.

The recent collaboration between MasterChef and Carrefour allowed loyal fans of the show to gain more knowledge

about different types of ingredients and how they can be used to create a variety of recipes. Based on the examples of young and talented professional chefs, MasterChef and Carrefour are always seeking to further diversify and develop outstanding Georgian cuisine amongst both locals and visitors.

Moreover, the partnership highlights Carrefour's commitment to supporting the growth and prosperity of local communities. Many of the products provided by Carrefour to the MasterChef contestants were sourced locally and delivered straight from Georgian partner farms — a local initiative which will continue for many seasons to come.



# Georgian and Ukrainian Children Tell their Black Sea Dreams

**M**ore than 130 inspiring artworks were submitted to the contest 'Draw Your Black Sea Dream', supported by EU4EMBLAS (European Union for Improving Environmental Monitoring in the Black Sea), a regional initiative funded by the European Union (EU) and implemented by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Georgia and Ukraine.

The contest brought together over 130 schoolchildren from the coastal regions of both countries and helped them express their feelings about the Black Sea.

The war in Ukraine dominated artworks submitted by both Georgian and Ukrainian youngsters. Children from Ukraine pictured their hopes for peace and told a story of a war-stricken coastline where the threat of mines swept people away from once crowded beaches. Georgian children showed support for their Ukrainian peers and sent them a message of friendship and solidarity.

'Sea. Life. Peace', 'No War!', 'I send you my love, peace and smile', 'The sea will fulfil our dreams' — these emotional and heart-warming words enhanced the young artists' visual messages.

The other focus of the contest was to protect marine biodiversity and save the delicate Black Sea ecosystem. The artworks showed that Georgian and Ukrainian children care about the marine environment. They

want to protect their sea and keep it healthy and clean. Many drawings portray the abundance and diversity of life in the Black Sea waters. Some show people and sea inhabitants living in harmony and swimming and playing together.

Ten prize-winning submissions (five from Georgia and five from Ukraine) are available on the EU4EMBLAS website: <https://emblasproject.org/>

### ABOUT THE EU4EMBLAS PROJECT:

The EU/UNDP project "European Union for Improving Environmental Monitoring in the Black Sea" (EU4EMBLAS) is the fourth phase of the assistance project that has been running since 2014 with EU funding. The initiative is implemented by UNDP in close partnership with the governments of Georgia and Ukraine. It supports both countries to monitor and protect the Black Sea ecosystem. The current phase complements the need to further develop national capacities — technical and personal, to implement marine environment monitoring programmes, in line with the Bucharest Convention and the EU reporting requirements. It provides technical assistance focused on establishing modern systems and facilities for environmental monitoring, capacity building, awareness-raising and the assessment of environmental status in line with the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) and Water Framework Directive (WDF).



Dream on the boundless Black Sea, by Anna Dekanadze (9)

# A Nepalling Experience



BLOG BY TONY HANMER

One of my pleasures in traveling outside Georgia is the comparison between my long-adopted home and the new country, especially as I write for GT. Nepal is no exception.

Nutshell: An ancient landlocked country with eight of the world's highest mountains among its Himalayan peaks, the birthplace sometime around 500 BC

of the Buddha, and the world's only Hindu monarchy from the 18th century until this status was changed to that of a secular republic in 2015. One of the world's poorest countries too, with a population of about 28 million. Never colonized.

My wife and I are here for just 6 days for a conference on humanitarian aid, flying through Dubai. We know that it's the monsoon season, so, completely the wrong time to see Everest, at 8848m the world's highest mountain, at all. There are just too many rainclouds interven-

ing, and while the rain itself is not constant, the peaks are hidden almost the whole of this season. We will have to buy the photographs of others, and save our own views for later. It's the 43rd country for both of us.

We must content ourselves, in the free hours on certain days, to exit our Radisson Hotel splendor and walk around the capital city of Kathmandu. The gorgeous textiles in silk and cashmere...sculptures, some demonically scary but many simply fascinating... Hindu temples everywhere... people in national dress of both



their own country and neighboring Tibet... the alphabet... architecture in wood and brick... insanely busy streets half-dominated by motorcycles or scooters, but never a crash seen. Overwhelmingly beautiful and also sometimes desperately squalid side by side.

Learning to press our palms together as in prayer and greet people with "Namastè", which I like a lot. Loving the local food, heavily influenced by gigantic neighbors India and China. Learning that there are 123 native languages here...all either Indo-European or Sino-Tibetan. Trying to cope with the idea that flags fluttering, or vertical wheels turning, in the wind, carry prayers to heaven, whether anyone is actually there and offering them or not. Many, many gods just in Hinduism; then add the systems of monotheistic Islam and non-deistic Buddhism. There is a small Christian presence here, too.

The mountains must be glorious, although very forbidding, when they appear. Many of the best views of Everest, for example, are to be found from altitudes higher than the top peaks of the Caucasus, which you must first reach to even get those views. Trips by helicopter or plane, in the right season, offer another, much faster and less strenuous but more costly way into the skies. Even these possibilities, if available now, would be a waste of money given the clouds, and likely much more risky for the same

reason. Another time, when the visit dates are up to us.

It's good for a first taste, but I'm well aware that we are just scratching the surface of a small part of even this city, and leaving the rest entirely unscathed for the future. Better than not coming at all, and enough to whet our appetites to indeed return. We feel most privileged to have had these days here at all. Covid realities at the moment required a full vaccination/booster certificate, and masking at all times on the planes; so, certainly easier than the period in which we simply stayed in Georgia. This is our first trip abroad in nearly three years. We both got visas on arrival at the airport, with no invitation letter needed, costing \$30 each. Easy.

Thank you, Nepal, for the introduction, and may our friendship only increase and deepen in the not too distant future! You have so much more to show us, of this I am sure.

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)



# Natia Loladze: Through the Georgia Red Cross, the Country Will Have an Important Role in Global Humanitarian Activities, and Will Have a Strengthened Image in the Int'l Arena

INTERVIEW BY KETI SKHIRTLDZE

**N**atia Loladze has been elected Vice-President of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

The Georgia Red Cross Society has gained great international recognition and trust, confirmed by the fact that the President of the Georgia Red Cross, Natia Loladze, has been elected Vice-President of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. This victory is a great honor for the Georgia Red Cross, as well as for Georgia as a whole. In addition, the vice-presidency opens a new window of opportunity which will further strengthen the work of the world's largest humanitarian organization in Georgia.

While studying in the UK, Loladze was a volunteer with the Georgia Red Cross Society. Subsequently, she also became a British Red Cross volunteer and was very actively involved in their activities. In 2008, the war showed her how much work the Red Cross Society, the volunteers, could do help people, a fact which strengthened her decision to become part of the Red Cross organization.

"It grew the love I had for the Georgia Red Cross and the Red Cross movement in general. Then I set the goal to become actively involved in humanitarian activities," Loladze told GEORGIA TODAY.

Since 2012, when Loladze became President of the Red Cross, she has devoted a great deal of time to strengthening the national community, resulting in the country receiving the Exemplary National Society Certificate 2015, back when 190 countries were members of the Federation - Georgia was the first among these countries to receive this certificate, which meant that the Georgia Red Cross systems were built to all the standards that met the Geneva criteria.

In 2017, the Georgia Red Cross Society was elected by the representatives of 192 National Societies as one of 20 Governing Board members of the largest humanitarian network in the world. The board has worked four years to strengthen the Red Cross and Red Crescent National Society, as a result of which they were able to solve serious problems and worked on policies to strengthen many national communities.

GEORGIA TODAY asked Natia Loladze to tell us more.

## WHAT FACTORS DO YOU THINK LED TO THE FACT THAT YOUR ELECTION AS VICE-PRESIDENT WAS SUPPORTED BY THE REPRESENTATIVES OF 192 COUNTRIES?

When I was a member of the Governing Board, I was in charge of a group that was supervising the strengthening of national societies. During these years, our work, both within the country and from the Council of the International Federation



of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, we have strongly supported precisely these problems in terms of strengthening the national community. The fact that we have the support of 192 countries around the world is very important to the national community of such a small country, and it is the result of the work that we have done on the board during these four years.

## WHAT ARE YOUR FUTURE PLANS, WHAT GOOD WILL YOU BRING TO THE RED CROSS, AND WHAT WILL BE THE PRIORITY AREAS YOU WILL CONTINUE TO WORK ON?

I will, again and again, support the development and strengthening of the Red Cross National Society, because it is the strong national societies that enable us to provide timely assistance and effective response to the victims of various crises. Based on our experience, we can confidently say that the Georgia Red Cross can have a significant impact on the humanitarian response process at both national and international levels, and we will personally work to focus more on the challenges that Red Cross and Red Crescent organizations face in countries that have the same kinds of problems. We had to do it during a very

difficult period, we know the situation in the region. In such times my role is a great honor and a responsibility as well. We will do our best to overcome all the challenges we face with more perspective and a wider position, and our efforts will be directed in different directions, one of which will be to strengthen the national community and prepare for a response, so that the Red Cross is prepared for a faster response in the country. Gender equality, the role of youth, these are the topics we will work on.

## THE GEORGIA RED CROSS SOCIETY BECAME THE VICE-CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HISTORY. HOW IMPORTANT IS THIS FOR THE IMAGE OF THE COUNTRY?

This is a great honor and at the same time a great responsibility. First of all, for our country and national society, which will help strengthen the image of the country and its role. Georgia will play its role in the field of world humanitarian activities, as well as strengthen the country in the international arena. I am proud that we have been able to achieve this success in our country and I am confident that over the years, we will be able to make a contribution.

## YOU HAVE BEEN A MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS SINCE 2017. THIS IS ALSO THE FIRST TIME IN HISTORY. WHAT HAS CHANGED IN THE ACTIVITIES OF THE RED CROSS DURING THIS PERIOD. HOW BIG IS YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO FIGHTING THE CHALLENGES IN THE WORLD?

Summing up four years of work on the board, I can confidently say that we have made a significant contribution to the strengthening of the national community. I was appointed to this role by the President, and led a working group called Local Community Localization, Empowerment, and Volunteering.

We have been able to work on documents such as the National Community Development Policy, the Volunteer Policy, and the National Society Development Compact. These are the documents that we adopted at the General Assembly in 2019, and, based on this policy and document, national societies in 192 countries are developing, and it is very important that this document was created by us.

## THE LAST FEW YEARS HAVE BEEN FULL OF MANY DIFFICULT

## CHALLENGES, FIRST A PANDEMIC, NOW THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR. HOW EFFECTIVE HAS THE GEORGIA RED CROSS BEEN AND IS IT RESPONDING TO THESE CHALLENGES?

Let's start with Ukraine. For the first time, the Georgia Red Cross became a donor country; it was the first international aid that the Georgia Red Cross provided to another country on such a scale. It is a great achievement, that we were able to be so strong that we already have such an important role in the region. Second, it should be noted that in the activities of the Georgia Red Cross, especially in recent years, we have faced difficulties, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, and of course, during the pandemic the Georgia Red Cross community was able to immediately help the largest number of beneficiaries. Our staff and volunteers worked 24/7, and our involvement was with risk groups, vaccinations, and the distribution of humanitarian parcels. About 200 people received help [from us] in the pandemic. As for Ukraine, more than 100 tons of humanitarian aid was sent from the Georgia Red Cross Society. Of course, thanks to the Georgian population who helped the Ukrainians through the Red Cross.



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