



## FOCUS ON THE BRITISH VIEW

Dominic Nicholls, Defense and Security Editor at the Telegraph, on the loss of Boris and what might be up next in the Ukrainian war saga

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British Prime Minister Boris Johnson leaves No.10 Downing St. in London on May 26. LEON NEAL/GETTY IMAGES

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## The Genetic Bond between Lelo & Rugby

BLOG BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

It was a huge pleasure to be one of those overexcited eyewitnesses of that outstanding triumph of Georgian rugby in Batumi on July 10. The fact the Georgian team won against the just as strong and famous Italians (28 to 19), is an internationally known fact, and I feel no need to go into the details, but the level of emotionality of that stupendous sporting event needs to be fixated in the public mind for good: the stentorian rooting chants, breath-holding silence in between, postgame hugs and kisses, tears in the eyes, ubiquitous smiles, spontaneous collective congrats, and of course the proud victory lap of the celebrating athletes around the field.

Not one fan wanted to leave the place after the game, as if wanting to make sure that the victory was ours indeed; the entire arena remaining under the impression of those potent scums between the fighting athletes, relentlessly trying to overpower each other. It was a real celebration of the Borjgali, the symbol of the sun that is regarded as the sign of the Georgian national identity. The emotions at the new, pretty and comfortable Batumi stadium were so overwhelming that the imaginable loss of the game by Geor-



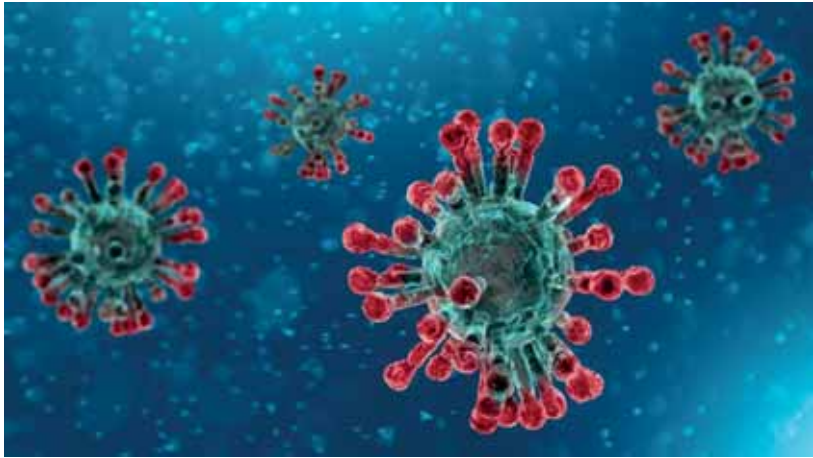
Georgia makes history with victory over Italy in Batumi. Photo by Levan Verdzeuli/Federugby via Getty Images

gians could have been a genuine national tragedy. Thank heavens the happy end did not evade the lucky nation, though, of course, it was not only a matter of luck! When those powerfully built boys dashed out onto the field like trained bulls to warm up, the feeling was that there was something genetic in the whole thing. And indeed, the game experts and researchers are eager to

corroborate the previously expressed presumptions about the natural bond between Rugby and Lelo, insisting that the latter is the ancestor of the former. Speaking generally, all sorts of ballgames have a long history, a ball having been one of the most popular details of the ancient sporting life.

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MARKETS		CURRENCIES		COMMODITIES		STOCKS	
Price	w/w	m/m	Price	w/w	Price	w/w	m/m
GRAIL 07/28	84.03	-0.7%	-0.6%	GEL / USD	2.8750	+0.3%	-2.7%
GEBGG 07/23	99.87	+1.1%	-0.2%	GEL / EUR	2.8865	-3.4%	-7.1%
GEOCAP 03/24	95.64	-0.1%	-0.8%	GEL / GBP	3.4181	-1.5%	-6.0%
SILNET 01/27	97.90	+0.5%	+0.4%	GEL / CHF	2.9260	-2.0%	-2.2%
TBC 06/24	98.55	-0.1%	-0.4%	GEL / RUB	0.0461	-9.4%	-9.4%
TBC 07/25	100.42	-0.3%	-0.1%	GEL / TRY	0.1655	-2.9%	-4.1%
				GEL / AZN	1.6967	-1.9%	-2.5%
				GEL / AMD	0.0070	-1.0%	-0.8%
				GEL / UAH	0.0978	-1.0%	-0.8%
				EUR / USD	0.9960	+3.8%	+4.8%
				GBP / USD	0.8409	+1.8%	+3.6%
				CHF / USD	0.9832	+2.3%	-0.5%
				RUB / USD	62.4741	+11.0%	+7.4%
				TRY / USD	17.3770	+3.4%	+1.5%
				AZN / USD	1.6945	+0.1%	+0.0%
				AMD / USD	411.2000	+1.3%	-1.7%



## July 4 – July 10: 5154 New Cases of Coronavirus, 3 Deaths Reported in Georgia

**F**rom July 4 to July 10, 5154 new cases of coronavirus were registered in Georgia, 2338 people recovered from the virus and three patients died, the National Center for Disease Control reports.

3310 new cases were confirmed in Tbilisi. A total of 63,659 tests were conducted across the country.

From June 27 to July 3, 2570 new cases of coronavirus were registered in Georgia, three patients died, and 1103 people recovered from the virus.

## Presence of 16 bln Cubic Meters of Gas Deposits Confirmed in Georgia



**T**he presence of 16 billion cubic meters of gas deposits in Georgia has been confirmed, Giorgi Tatishvili, the head of the State Oil and Gas Agency of Georgia, said on BMG. The presence of natural gas was confirmed during works being conducted

by the company 'Schlumberger' near Tbilisi.

Giorgi Tatishvili noted that the license block requires horizontal drilling, while under the conditions of its utilization, the country will be able to fully meet the demand for natural gas for 8 years.

## US Senators' New Bill Confirms United States' Growing Interest in and Strong Support for Region and Georgia

**O**n 12 July, the US Congress initiated an important legislative act once again confirming the US' growing interest in and strong support for the region and Georgia.

In particular, US Senators Jeanne Shaheen and Mitt Romney introduced to the Senate "Black Sea Security Act" instructing the US Administration to develop a strategy with respect to the Black Sea Region.

As the Bill notes, the Black Sea region has been a zone of increasing tension and conflict on the eastern border of the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) following President Vladimir Putin's 2014 and 2022 invasions of Ukraine and 2008 invasion of Georgia. Hence the critical importance to the national security of the Black Sea region's nations: Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, Bulgaria, and Turkey.

The Bill envisages increasing military assistance toward Black Sea countries, particularly Georgia, Ukraine, Romania,

and Bulgaria, and underlines the importance of improving the United States' high-level economic cooperation with the countries of the region. Mention is made of plans to establish regional offices of the United States International Development Finance Corporation in Georgia, Ukraine, or Romania.

The Black Sea Security Act makes reference to the Russian Federation's malign influence in the region; the focus, in particular, is on the need to counter Russian disinformation and propaganda in the Black Sea region, energy diversification, and regional market integration and supply to reduce dependence on energy from the Russian Federation.

The document refers to the need to develop a long-term strategy to enhance security and establish a permanent, sustainable presence in the eastern flank.

The Bill expresses support for the Three Seas Initiative Fund to strengthen transport, energy, and digital infrastructure connectivity in the region between the Adriatic Sea, Baltic Sea, and the Black Sea.

# Georgia's Progress on Fulfilling Recommendations of EU to Grant Candidate Status

BY KETEVAN SKHIRTLADZE

**T**he Working Group of Judicial Reforms, chaired by Speaker of the Parliament Shalva Papuashvili, convened its first meeting this week to discuss the 12-point recommendations of the European Commission. The meeting was attended by the representatives of parliamentary factions and political groups and discussed two documents drafted by the Georgian Dream and Citizens.

Together with the parliamentary majority, members of the political groups Girchi, Citizens, For Georgia and European Socialists participated in the meeting. Some representatives of the opposition party did not attend. MP Anri Okhanashvili said that the political parties which did not attend the meeting were essentially announcing a "boycott" of the country's European future.

"Those who refrained from attending today's meeting seek to undermine the country's EU perspective. They are not boycotting the Georgian Dream, but the European perspective of the state," he claimed.

"The majority of the technical work was planned and done by Georgian Dream. They provided their analysis. The main thing is to carry out this process with the involvement of as many people as possible. We have one week to prepare our positions in content and to meet for the first time to talk about the court," stated Vakhtang Megrelishvili, member of political party Girchi.

MP Ana Buchukuri remarked that organizational and technological issues were the focus of discussion and said she will definitely continue to take part in this procedure.

She added she had learned that applications for open posts in the Supreme Council of Justice were expected to be made public in the autumn.

"Of course, there are other postulates besides the Supreme Council of Justice. For instance, it is crucial to our team that the judges, not the Council, choose the court presidents," Buchukuri stated.

### WORKING GROUP FOR THE STUDY OF THE CONTROL OF ENFORCEMENT OF NORMATIVE ACTS TO BE CREATED

The Rules and Procedural Issues Committee this week discussed the issue of participation in meeting the requirements set forth by the European Union in order to grant its candidate status to Georgia, and made the decision to begin a study of the control of enforcement of normative acts, including by establishing a working group to further discuss the document obtained as a result of the inquiry.

"With the help of all parties engaged, we will be able to reach a precise outcome on the basis of this document in the working group. We will then be able to turn it into a bill and register it once we know and resolve the challenges that may exist in the form of parliamentary oversight or additional experience that we may consider necessary to share from the best European practices," the Chair of the Committee, Irakli Kadagishvili, said.

He added that the bill must be registered by September 21 and that, in order to provide parliamentary oversight, the Parliament will make any necessary legislative modifications or other sorts of legislative activities by November 1.

Kadagishvili made the point that, during this time, the Committee will, to the extent of its authority, proactively get in touch with all factions, parliamentary political groups, as well as non-governmental organizations and professionals



Image source: parliament.ge

who work in the field, in order to resolve all issues in a single working group and create the legislative proposals.

### WORKING GROUP TO BE SET UP IN HUMAN RIGHTS AND CIVIL INTEGRATION COMMITTEE

The Human Rights Protection and Civil Integration Committee set up a working group in order to develop a draft law regarding the proactive publication of decisions of the European Court of Human Rights by Georgian courts.

"A 12-point plan has been provided, and implementation has already started. On our end, we have some projects in the works, the completion of which will allow our state to receive candidate status through the preparation of changes. These changes will lead to an improved framework in many areas, including legislation and practice," stated Member of Parliament Mikheil Sarjveladze.

"We, the undersigned parliamentary opposition, are guided by Article 78 of the Georgian Constitution, which states that the constitutional bodies shall take all measures within their power to ensure Georgia's full integration into the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, taking into account the responsibility entrusted to us by Georgian citizens, the European Union, and the European Commission to fulfill the 12-point recommendation necessary to achieve the goals of the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization," reads the statement.

### PAPUASHVILI: BILL ON PROACTIVE CONSIDERATION OF ECHR JUDGEMENTS TO BE INITIATED BY SEPTEMBER 1

"The Bill on Proactive Consideration of ECHR Judgements will be initiated by September 1, and the law will be adopted in the third reading by November 18," Speaker of Parliament Shalva Papuashvili stated at the extended meeting of the Working Group on Proactive Consideration of ECHR Judgements, where the participants discussed the 11th point of the recommendations of the European Union, which provides for the proactive consideration of the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights in Georgian judicial practice and, accordingly, the preparation of the necessary changes in the legislation.

"We had a constructive discussion about how the law might be changed to reflect this. Ideas will be gathered and afterwards handled as modifications. The proposal is to start the corresponding change by September 1 and pass the law in its third reading by November 18. The meeting's attendees, for the most part all of them, agreed that in actual practice, judges should utilize rulings, citing them more frequently and not just formally. It is crucial to improve access to case law, for instance, by providing the legal community with translations of court judgments. As a result, it is generally acknowledged that the practice may be improved. There are mechanisms in this respect, including a specific department in the Supreme Court which works to generalize the practice of the European Court of Human Rights and deliver it to judges. The implementation of the eleventh point won't likely be challenging on its own," Papuashvili noted.

### JOINT STATEMENT BY PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION

The parliamentary opposition parties United National Movement, Lelo, Republican Party, For Georgia, and Strategy Builder published a joint statement demanding the fulfillment of the 12-point recommendation.

Opposition parties appealed to the President of Georgia, Salome Zurbishvili, to convene an extraordinary session on July 18, with the following agenda:

1. Amendments to the Constitution of Georgia; Amendments to the Constitutional Law of Georgia (Registration No. 07-3/92);
2. A package of draft laws on the National Anti-Corruption Agency and its accompanying legislative amendments (registration No. 07-3/71);
3. Amendments to the Organic Law of Georgia on Common Courts (Registration No. 07-3/96);
4. Amendments to the Organic Law of Georgia on Common Courts (Registration No. 07-3/106).

Additionally, the opposition requests the Speaker of Parliament see that the required steps are taken to prepare for the extraordinary session, including expedited scheduling of committee hearings.

"Three of the twelve prerequisites are covered by our proposed agenda (eliminating political polarization, ensuring the full and true independence of the judiciary, creating an anti-corruption agency, and investigating cases of elite corruption). All four of the items we proposed for discussion have previously been brought up in the Georgian Parliament, have been reviewed and approved by the non-governmental sector, and have gotten favorable feedback from our Western allies and international organizations.

"In light of this, the extraordinary session is a significant step towards depolarization and will demonstrate whether the authorities are sincere in their desire to depolarize the processes, transfer the relationships with the opposition and the populace to a format of result-oriented cooperation, or if their objective is to waste time and mimic the process of implementing the European Commission's proposal.

"At the same time, we would like to emphasize that even if Georgian Dream rejects the practical and business-minded proposal we have offered, we, the parliamentary opposition political parties, as political forces driven by national interests, outside of the government, with widespread support from the interested public and the private sector, will continue to carry out our national task by taking the necessary actions to put the recommendations Georgia needs into practice," reads the statement.

# Russia's Invasion of Ukraine Week 19: Hopes Up that Grain Exports Can Resume

BY ANA DUMBADZE

**T**alks aimed at resuming Ukrainian grain exports blocked by Russia in the Black Sea have produced a deal, Turkey said this week.

It raises hopes for an end to the stand-off, which left millions at increased risk of starvation.

Turkey's defense minister, Hulusi Akar, said both sides had agreed on ways to ensure the safety of shipping routes for grain ships.

He said the agreement would be signed next week, when more talks are set to be held in Turkey.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres called Wednesday's progress a "critical step forward," but said more work was needed to finalize the deal, which would require "a lot of goodwill and commitments by all parties".

Russia and Ukraine produce 30% of the world's wheat supply. Before the war, Ukraine was seen as the world's bread basket, exporting 4.5 million tons of agricultural produce a month through its ports.

And while Ukraine has managed to get some exports through other channels, they have only partly compensated for the closure of the Black Sea, with export volumes down to about 30% of their pre-war totals.

Back in Ukraine, anti-Russian sentiment is rife in occupied parts of the country, Britain's Ministry of Defense noted on Wednesday, with Russian and pro-Russian officials (called collaborators by Ukraine) being targeted. A Moscow-installed mayor in Velykyi Burluk in the Kharkiv region was killed in a car bombing on Monday.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky has warned that "a really difficult road" lies ahead for Ukraine as Russia makes incremental advances in the east of the country.

**MORE THAN 5.8 MILLION REFUGEES HAVE FLED UKRAINE, UN SAYS**



Image source: Agro-pulse

More than 5.8 million people have fled across Ukraine's borders to other locations in Europe since Russia invaded in February, the UN announced this week.

Of that total, more than 3.6 million people have registered for temporary refugee protection or similar safeguards in Europe.

"The escalation of conflict in Ukraine has caused civilian casualties and the destruction of civilian infrastructure, forcing people to flee their homes in search of safety, protection and assistance," UN researchers wrote in their report.

"Millions of refugees from Ukraine have crossed borders into neighboring countries and many more have been forced to move inside the country," the report added.

**MAIN PIPELINE BRINGING GAS FROM RUSSIA TO EUROPE TEMPORARILY SHUT DOWN**

The Nord Stream gas pipeline, which is one of the main ways of supplying Russian natural gas to Europe, is to stop working for at least 10 days, due to "annual maintenance works", although this year, the EU is fearful the maintenance will be "prolonged" due to the

Russia-Ukraine war.

Through the pipeline, Russia supplies 55 million cubic meters of gas to European countries.

Last month, Russia reduced its gas supply by 40%, citing a delay in the delivery of a gas turbine by the German company Siemens Energy. The company was repairing the turbine in Canada. Canada says it will return the turbine to Russia, however, it will maintain sanctions on the energy sector.

In Europe, there are fears that Russia will prolong work on the pipeline in order to prevent the creation of supplies, thereby deepening the energy crisis.

Before the war in Ukraine, the construction and commissioning of North Stream 2 was planned, however, due to the sanctions imposed on the Kremlin, this project was stopped.

Nord Stream 1 runs under the Baltic Sea and is Germany's main source of Russian gas, which recently accounted for about 35% of the country's total gas supply. Gas is usually sent onward from there to other European countries.

**THE US CALLS ON RUSSIA TO HALT FORCED DEPORTATIONS**

**OF UKRAINIANS, CITING POSSIBLE WAR CRIMES**

The Biden administration this week called on Russia to immediately halt systematic filtration operations and forced deportations in Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine, citing the possibility of war crimes.

"The unlawful transfer and deportation of protected persons is a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention on the protection of civilians, and is a war crime," Secretary of State Antony Blinken wrote in a statement, referencing a 1949 UN agreement to which Russia is a signatory.

Blinken said the US suspects that between 900,000 and 1.6 million Ukrainian citizens, including 260,000 children, have been detained and forcibly deported from their homes to Russia.

**DEATH TOLL RISES TO 47 AFTER APARTMENT BLOCK MISSILE STRIKE**

The death toll from a Russian missile strike on an apartment building in the town of Chasiv Yar in Donetsk in eastern Ukraine rose to 47 on Wednesday.

Kyrylo Tymoshenko, deputy head of the Ukrainian President's Office, said in a Telegram post earlier that another body of a woman had been recovered from the rubble of the five-floor apartment building in Chasiv Yar struck on Saturday Russian Uranium rockets.

"In total, since the beginning of rescue works, the bodies of 47 dead people, including a child, have been found and removed from the scene. Nine people have been rescued from the rubble. Rescue works are still underway," Tymoshenko said.

Russia has repeatedly denied targeting civilian targets despite a large number of instances in which civilian infrastructure was indeed targeted, causing death and more displacement for Ukrainian civilians.

**UKRAINE SAYS IT REPELLED AN ATTACK NEAR SLOVIANSK, A KEY RUSSIAN TARGET**

Ukraine says it has successfully repelled a Russian assault on the settlements of Dovhenke and Dolyna, near the city of

Sloviansk, a key target for Russian forces trying to advance in the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine.

The general staff of Ukraine's armed forces said on Wednesday that Russian forces were shelling Ukraine's second-largest city of Kharkiv and surrounding settlements, and also reported non-stop artillery shelling of areas around Sloviansk further south in Donetsk.

"Ukrainian defenders successfully repelled an assault in the direction of Dovhenke and Dolyna. It is not excluded that the enemy will continue to conduct offensive operations to improve their tactical position and create favorable conditions for conducting an offensive towards Izium - Sloviansk," general staff spokesman Oleksandr Shtupun said in the armed forces' latest update on Facebook.

Widespread shelling was also taking place in the areas around nearby city Kramatorsk and Bakhmut, Ukraine said.

Ahead of a meeting in Istanbul between Ukraine, Russia, the UN and Turkey on unblocking grain exports from Ukraine, the armed forces said that in both the Black Sea and Sea of Azov, Russia's navy "focuses its main efforts on blocking civilian shipping. Four warships armed with Kalibr cruise missiles are kept ready for missile strikes."

**RUSSIAN ADVANCES TO CONTINUE THIS WEEK**

In the Donbas, Russian forces will likely focus on taking several small towns during the coming week, Britain's Ministry of Defense said on Wednesday. Siversk and Dolyna are likely to be targets for Russian forces as they approach their bigger objective — the capture of cities Sloviansk and Kramatorsk.

"Russia continues to seek to undermine the legitimacy of the Ukrainian state and consolidate its own governance and administrative control over occupied parts of Ukraine," the ministry said on Twitter.

"Recently, this has included an initiative to twin Russian and Ukrainian cities and regions to develop post-conflict administrations, and a decree to make it easier for Ukrainians to obtain Russian citizenship."

# Unique Frescoes of Georgia's XIII Century Pitareti Monastery In Danger

**A**s a result of the earthquake that occurred in the morning of July 11 (magnitude 4.8 and 4.5; Village of Sameba - Dmanisi municipality), the frescoes in the Pitareti Monastery of the Virgin Mary (Tetrtskaro municipality) collapsed.

The frescoes were also damaged during the May 2 earthquake.

On May 5, volunteer association the Movement for Cultural Heritage (Sakdrisi Committee) sent an official letter to the National Agency for the Protection of Cultural Heritage and demanded immediate action, but in vain.

The volunteers association issued an emergency statement:

"We would like to express concern over the alarming situation created in the Pitareti monastery complex of the Virgin Mary.

"After 4 years of rehabilitation works, water has been flowing into the 13th century cultural heritage monument of the category of national importance for the third month.

"We repeatedly addressed the problem to the National Agency for Cultural Her-



itage Protection, including an official letter on May 5, and immediately requested appropriate measures to be taken.

"Despite the fact that a group of specialists from the National Agency for

Cultural Heritage Protection was present in Pitareti to study the situation, effective measures have not been taken yet, which is why it already rains in the temple during every heavy rainfall and the unique wall painting, which was saved

after a lot of work, is still damaged.

"The unique painting of the temple is also threatened by frequent earthquakes, during which the frescoes collapse.

"The Movement for Cultural Heritage (Sakdrisi Committee) once again, this

time publicly, appeals to the National Agency for the Protection of Cultural Heritage to urgently take appropriate measures to prevent water flowing into the temple.

"Also, we call on society to pay more attention to the problems existing in the protection and preservation of cultural heritage.

"The association of volunteers will continue intensive monitoring of the Pitareti Monastery Complex in the future."

Pitareti Monastery, a medieval Orthodox Christian monastery in Georgia, is located in the Kvemo Kartli region, southwest of the nation's capital Tbilisi.

The Pitareti monastery consists of the Theotokos Church, a belfry, the ruined wall and several smaller accessory buildings. The main church appears to have been built in the reign of George IV early in the 13th century. Its design conforms to the contemporary canon of a Georgian domed church. The façades are decorated, accentuating the niches and dormers. The entire interior was once frescoed, but only significantly damaged fragments of those murals survive.

# Prof. Boris Sokolov: The Result of the War Will Be Defined this Summer, during the Ukrainian Counter-Offensive

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

**T**o exhaust Russian manpower resources, the number killed should be around about 15 million, but with the current rate of losses, Russia could wage war for dozens more years," - says Russian historian, Prof. Boris Sokolov in an interview with Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty's Georgian service. A staunch critic of the Kremlin, Sokolov has never shied away from saying things as he sees them - with this interview another ample demonstration.

**IN 2008, YOUR WRITINGS RAN AGAINST THE OFFICIAL LINE OF MOSCOW. IN ONE PIECE, YOU ASKED, "DID SAAKASHVILI REALLY LOSE?" YOU ARGUED THAT HE INTERNATIONALIZED THE CONFLICT AND ENSURED PRO-RUSSIAN FORCES WOULDN'T SUCCEED HIM. AFTER ALL THESE YEARS, KEEPING IN MIND WHAT HAPPENED IN UKRAINE, HAVE YOU FOUND AN ANSWER TO THAT QUESTION?**

Clearly, Saakashvili lost due to this war, because after the war he was overthrown by the pro-Russian, pro-Putin forces led by Mr. Ivanishvili, who really is a Russian agent.

**"IN BRUSSELS, THEY WILL HAVE TO SPEED UP ADMITTING TBILISI AND KYIV INTO THE ALLIANCE, SO AS NOT TO PROVOKE YET ANOTHER 'FORCING TO PEACE' SOMEWHERE LIKE CRIMEA, TRANSNISTRIA OR ADJARA." QUITE A PROPHECY THERE. WE SAW WHAT HAPPENED IN CRIMEA. ARE THE OTHER TWO DESTINATIONS STILL ON THE TABLE FOR MOSCOW?**

Not now, I think, because Moscow has too many problems in Ukraine. And now it hasn't enough forces to invade either Georgia or Transnistria.

Whether it could happen in the future depends only on the result of the Russian war in Ukraine. If Russia occupies Ukraine, then of course it also may try to occupy either Adjara or Transnistria. If, however, Russia is crushed in this war, then, of course, there will be no chances for new aggression. And then I think Transnistria would be liberated by Moldova. And, of course, there would be no guarantees of Russia remaining in con-

trol of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

**WHAT LESSONS WERE LEARNED BY RUSSIA AND THE WEST FROM THE 2008 WAR?**

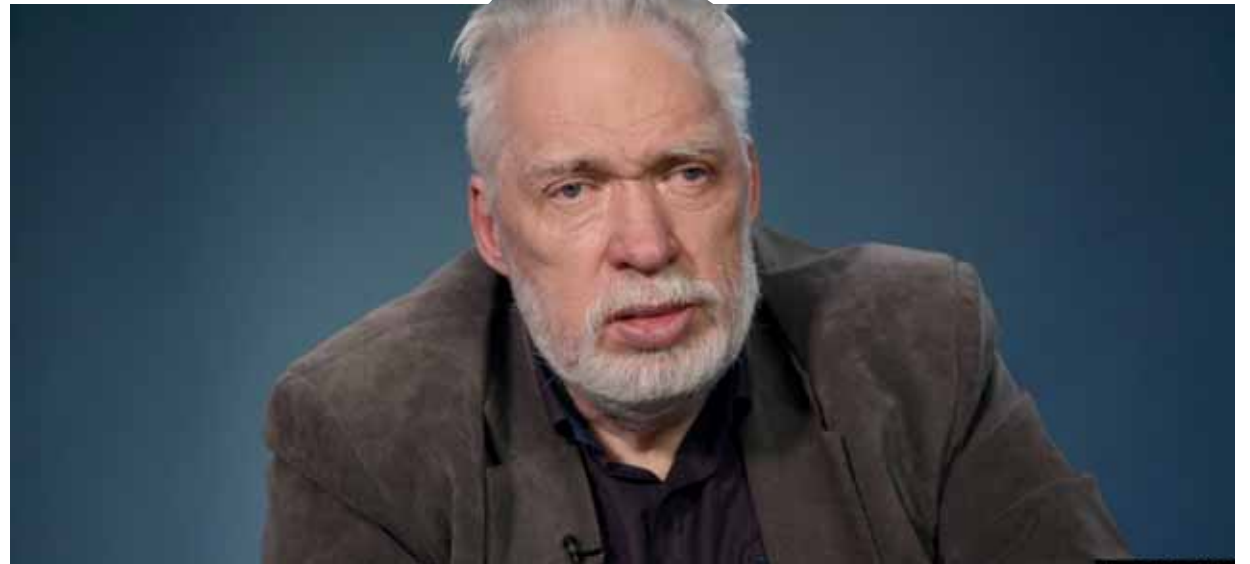
Russia learned one great lesson: that the West is rather passive in its reaction to Russian aggression in the post-Soviet territories. Practically, the West did not learn lessons in the Georgian war, because it allowed to Russia to invade Ukraine. If the West and the US had the right policy, then this war between Russia and Ukraine may have been prevented.

**IN UKRAINE, RUSSIA HAS DECLARED AN OPERATIONAL PAUSE. MEANWHILE, PRESIDENT PUTIN HAS DECLARED THAT RUSSIA HAS BARELY EVEN STARTED IN UKRAINE. WHAT SHOULD WE EXPECT?**

I think we should expect first and foremost a new Russian offensive in the Donestk region, against Slavyansk and Kramatorsk. And also a Ukrainian counter-offensive in the region of Kherson and maybe Melitopol. If this counter-offensive is successful, then the Russian army could be defeated. If the Ukrainian forces occupy all the southern regions, then the situation for Russian troops in Donbas would be very bad because their flank would be threatened by the Ukrainian army. If this counter-offensive liberates Kherson and maybe Melitopol, but fails to crush the Russian army in the south, then it would be only a partial success for the Ukrainians. And if the counter-offensive were to fail, then there is a chance for Ukraine to be defeated in this war. And the success of this counter-offensive depends wholly on the West and its support in arms.

**HOW LIKELY IS THIS WESTERN SUPPORT, CONSIDERING WE KEEP HEARING CALLS FOR A "CEASEFIRE AT ALL COSTS" FROM THE WEST?**

What Ukraine needs now is HIMARSes and other long range missile systems, and they also need Western tanks. It's very strange that Germany hasn't given Ukraine Leopard Tanks. Germany has enough Leopards of old modifications, out of exploitation by Bundeswehr now, and these tanks could have been transferred to Ukraine without any real damage to the defense of Germany. I think there are political problems, not military problems, with some influential forces in Germany and also some forces in France and Italy, but mainly in Germany trying to make some kind of compromise



Russian historian, Prof. Boris Sokolov. Photo by Roman Zhukov/RFERL

with Putin, at the expense of Ukraine. They seek a long-term ceasefire in the present positions, meaning Russia holding most of Donbas, almost all the Kherson region, and some of the Nikolaev and Zaporizhzhia regions. But I think it's quite impossible for Ukraine to have such ceasefire. I think the result of the war will be defined sometime in August and September, during the Ukrainian counter-offensive.

**HOW STOIC AND UNITED CAN THE WEST BE AGAINST RUSSIA'S INTIMIDATION TACTICS? GERMANY IN PARTICULAR IS CALLING THE SCENARIO OF A RUSSIAN GAS CUTOFF INITIATED BY THE KREMLIN "A NIGHTMARE".**

The weakest links in the chain are Germany, France, and Italy. American President Biden also has some problems with the policy towards Russia, as he is also afraid of Russian nuclear attacks. But I think that Americans may also transfer to Ukrainians not only artillery, but also American tanks. Time will be needed for training the Ukrainian crews for such tanks, and training should really begin now rather than in two or three months. The Ukrainians can make use of the American tanks, and also German tanks, but Germany doesn't want to give its tanks to Ukraine.

**GERMANY'S AND ITALY'S RELUCTANCE MIGHT BE DOWN TO ENERGY DEPENDENCE ON RUSSIA - WHAT ABOUT FRANCE?**

For France, it's more political than energy

related. France wants to be the European leader, and has a soft confrontation with America. So, traditionally, Russia is considered by Paris as an important partner, a means in its fight for European leadership.

**DURING THE FIRST 12 DAYS OF THE WAR, THE CASUALTY RATE ON THE RUSSIAN SIDE WAS 1000. AND THEN IT WENT DOWN TO 200 - 300 PER DAY. REGARDING LOSSES, WHAT FIGURES SHOULD WE GET TO MAKE PUTIN RECONSIDER HIS ACTIONS IN UKRAINE?**

Right now, the level of casualties is too small [to affect Putin]. For example, during World War Two, the Red Army lost about 27 million. The population of Russia is now about 150 million people, only 50 million people less than during World War Two. Even when the Soviet Union lost 27 million soldiers, it didn't exhaust its manpower fully. To exhaust Russian manpower resources today, the number killed should be around about 15 million, and with the current rate of losses, Russia could wage war for dozens more years. The level of losses is not a factor that will influence Putin's decision-making, but if some Russian army units were crushed and a lot of prisoners were taken, it may influence [him].

**WHAT'S THE OVERALL RUSSIAN MINDSET TOWARDS THIS WAR? WHAT'S THE PERCEPTION?**

A very difficult question to answer. We have no real polls in Russia. It's impossible to have real polls because most respondents they are afraid to speak up,

to be accused of being so called 'army fakes.' This makes it impossible to understand what part of the population is for this war, how many are against. But I think most of the supporters of the war support the idea of renewal of the Russian Empire. They think Russia can wage war with the aim to restore the Soviet borders or Russian Empire borders.

**AS DURING PETER THE GREAT?**

Not necessarily, because during Peter the Great, Russia only controlled a part of Ukraine; the other part was under Polish control.

**YOU WROTE THAT RUSSIA HAS ADOPTED CALIGULA TACTICS - "LET THEM HATE US, AS LONG AS THEY FEAR US". HOW EFFECTIVE IS IT?**

The Kremlin has only one argument - its strength, its military strength. Putin doesn't want to see sympathy from the Ukrainians. He needs them to fear Russia. He thought these attacks would destroy the Ukrainian morale. But as I see, Ukrainian morale cannot be crushed by such attacks. Putin may have won the war if his army occupied the entire Ukrainian territory, but now, it's practically impossible.

**HOW WILL THE OUTCOME OF THE WAR AFFECT THE FUTURE OF RUSSIA, THE RUSSIAN PEOPLE?**

If this war is lost, it would lead to some great internal changes in Russia. And there are chances of getting a more liberal regime. The present regime is practically totalitarian and can even be said to be at the level of the Soviet regime in the 1920s.

## Georgia's Place as a Foreign Security Leader

ANALYSIS BY MICHAEL GODWIN

**I**n the sprawling network of foreign relations, the aspect of military assistance and cooperation is often overlooked by smaller or more regional powers. Nations that don't have such an immense defense infrastructure often tend to shy away from these overseas entanglements in favor of domestic issues. While this may be due to budgetary concerns, political shyness, or even an ongoing internal conflict, the opportunity to expand one's national reach should never be an oversight.

Georgia finds itself in this position. As a regional power in the South Caucasus only, with little influence and activity outside of this area, they have largely abstained from foreign endeavors. With notable exceptions of NATO missions, the occasional training operation in Africa, or training exercises with regional neighbors, Georgia keeps to itself.

Two new additions to the United States Army and the British Army could prove to be excellent blueprints for a new Geor-

gian pilot program. These units have the unique mission of engaging with foreign allies and their militaries by helping to train, assimilate, and bond with them for long-term cooperation. These relationships, kept warm, can pay dividends should the need arise for cooperation on the battlefield in future conflicts.

The first of these is the American's Security Force Assistance Brigade (SFAB). Founded in 2018 as a new component of the United States Army, their outlined mission is "to conduct training, advising, assisting, enabling and accompanying operations with allied and partner nations." These units are seasoned members of the Army, further trained in specific advisory skills. At a total size of approximately 800 soldiers, they deploy in small contingent teams to areas assigned globally.

These teams contain a multi-functional 12-soldier team. Each member specializes in a particular field, such as medical, logistics, intelligence, and explosive ordnance disposal. The skills they bring to their partner nations are invaluable to increasing their capabilities, particularly as most of these partner countries

are not inherently strong enough to defend their own nation.

These "weak states" may not be able to afford a large defense force or may be susceptible to corruption. Imparting these skills, modernization, and positive morals and ethics is imperative to keeping these corners of the globe under good governance. Keeping these vulnerable nations within a sphere of influence that is friendly and progressive is immeasurably valuable for any host nation.

Great Britain has also taken steps to engage these smaller partner states. The UK's new Ranger unit takes the concept a step further, as it is "based on four Infantry Battalions but selecting personnel from across the Army," according to the UK Ministry of Defense. While they were only founded in December 2021, they are planning to be fully active later this year. General Sir Nick Carter, Chief of the UK Defense Staff, said the unit will be specific for use with foreign nations, and will specialize in "relevant culture and locality."

These units are the leading edge in a new concept for global defense actors. A small but highly capable force specifically designed to cultivate a well-

trained and motivated allied force anywhere in the world is imperative. Georgia's opportunity to join this initiative is becoming apparent.

For Georgia, this model shapes into a slightly different image. The disparity in size between the US and UK armed forces and that of the Georgian Defense Forces is stark. Despite this, there is still a place for the nation at the global table of security actors. A small contingent of veterans, further trained in cooperative efforts abroad, could allow the country to ascend in status and become an invaluable asset to NATO.

For the Georgian Army, this would involve a similar selection process to that used in the US and UK. Soldiers with notable time in service and experience on overseas missions would be the primary target for selection. These veterans would be assessed in a battery of physical, psychological, linguistic, and problem-solving examinations. With a selection of suitable candidates, a company of 100-200 program volunteers would be formed for experimental review.

Over the course of several months, this unit can be partnered with existing assis-

tance units. The Georgian foreign assistance unit can gain valuable experience alongside NATO units such as the US Army's SFAB units operating across the globe. Additionally, as this unit matures, it can also be used to expand the operational knowledge of Georgia's own military. The unit, over time, could become a lightning rod of experience, knowledge, and innovation.

As Georgia becomes more of a leader in regional defense and security, the opportunity to elevate this prestige should be claimed. While budgetary concerns can be addressed, it is likely that those UK and US partners can be harnessed. As these units have already pioneered this path, using their resources, including potentially sending officers to these programs, can be realized.

Making the nation an invaluable asset to NATO and other partner nations brings more positive attention to Georgia. This attention can bring a new wave of opportunities for collaboration, growth and innovation for not only the defense forces, but the nation overall. This program can be a catalyst for Georgia to be the global player they deserve to be.

# Small State in the Context of "New Order:" Georgia

VICTOR KIPIANI, CHAIRMAN  
OF GEOCASE

**B**riefly about the created environment which is rather controversial and nonstandard. Several large-scale challenges of late, the pandemic, the war, the climate, have put an already enfeebled global system of legal and economic relations to a serious test, requiring the replacement of it with a new and more effective system.

The need for such replacement emerged before the outbreak of the pandemic, but the speed and scale of spread of the virus proved to be a totally different stress-test for the world's economy. Interrupted manufacturing, paralyzed business, closed borders, disrupted supply chains and the acute inflationary processes that ensued at the following stage further deepened economic and social inequality. Dangerous prerequisites for a rough revision of globally practiced rules of the game, as well as for the undermining of internal stability, thus emerged.

A more or less effectively operating post-Cold War system suffered a severe blow as a result of the war in Ukraine, which impaired not only the security system but also the perception of security in Europe for good. Expectations for a quick end to the military actions that initially arouse have gradually transformed, and Russia's renewed aggression in Ukraine has now taken on the form of attrition warfare.

The pandemic, first, and then the events unfolding in the center of Europe, directly affected the pricing structure: under the conditions of peaking inflation rates, limited crediting and strict monetary policy, a sharp rise in energy and food prices has become a new pressure. As a result, a traditional understanding of security, seen through a rather narrow, largely military prism, has shown the need to be revised and reconsidered. Today, the essence of self-sustained and competitive state already includes, along with energy and food self-sufficiency, a technological component and access to minerals.

The state of affairs has been further exacerbated by the challenges of Chinese economic system. Before the pandemic, it was mainly characterized by the lack of financial transparency and actual insolvency of state enterprises that comprised a substantial share of the economic structure. During the pandemic, a zero-Covid policy put a global supply chain to a severe test, when cargo turnover in Chinese seaports decreased, logistic difficulties emerged and, later, export restrictions were imposed on critical products by Beijing. All that combined had an adverse effect on the world economy.

That resulted in questioning a capacity to effectively counteract considerable climate risks. Processes related to the war and the pandemic have slowed down the rate that was set earlier for the transfer to a green economy. Although the benefit of the green economy is undisputable, a decline in living standards across the vast geographic area of the world, which can only be contained through traditional, hydrocarbon-based economic measures, has pushed up the geopolitical price of readjustment to the green economy.

In order to make the introduction "brief," we will limit ourselves to the above said for outlining the existing state of affairs and, through the lens of prospects of the Georgian state, will draw readers' attention to several specific and

pressing issues faced by this small state.

## NEW ORDER...

Order in international relations was sometimes denoted by a Latin word Pax. This word, however, does not have one semantic meaning: depending on a context, it denotes "peace," also, under the influence of a certain dominant country/alliance of countries or civilization, it denotes "order" - a set of global or regional rules of behavior established under the influence of soft or hard power.

From these two meanings, the "order" actually means a type of situation when the dominant one offers others the stability necessary for observing the rules of behavior. Even more, applying certain resources, the dominant one, that enjoys written or unwritten legitimacy, ensures the fulfillment of these rules.

Bearing in mind the processes mentioned in the introduction, we think that the order that has formed today will be different from the previous one in two main features. The first is a confrontation between large geopolitical coalitions - normativist camps - in the foreseeable future, or at least in the medium term, of such type that will leave little room for small states to have freedom of choice. To pursue "non-alignment" or their own original path, they will require great efforts, knowledge, courage and ... luck.

The second characteristic feature, which we have repeatedly discussed in previous publications, is a more intensive formation of regional hub-and-spoke systems of the new international order, whereby autonomous regional "orders" will be formed under the influence of strong regional players. It would be a mistake, of course, to say that such regional hubs will be removed from the common global format. No, they won't. Nor will it be correct to assert that super-regionalization is expected to fragment the world order. This won't happen either. With the term "hub-and-spoke," we want to indicate that strong regional players will create such a geopolitical and geo-economic gravitation within a particular region, that it is made virtually impossible for other countries in the regions to ignore.

## ...AND "SMALL STATE"

Talks about a small state should begin with the definition of "small state." An understanding whereby "small" is directly linked to quantitative parameters, for example, the size of a territory or the number of population, is stereotypical and wide of the mark. Numbers, in general, need to be taken into account, but they are only superficial and, hence, rather stereotypical indicators which invite misperceptions. Even more, today, a number of countries that are small by territory or population play such a functional role that it cannot be linked to the amount of square kilometers or number of people.

Thus, "qualitative indicators," such as the economic, diplomatic and security resources of this or that "small country" are far more important. There are a number of examples when resources ensure not only self-sufficiency but even allow the projection of soft power across national borders.

None of modern research topics tolerates rigid division, and the topic discussed in this article will not be an exception either. For example, one may also assume an option whereby a small state is marked with internal political firmness, but is extremely vulnerable to external factors. Such internal firmness is, first and foremost, ensured by the solidarity of society, rule of law and creative decision making ("shifting opinion" as PhD in

Law, Academic Mindia Ugrekhelidze calls it). However, it is easy to assume that despite the named components of internal firmness, a small state still fails to counterbalance its external vulnerability. Such disbalance may be caused by many factors, from a heavy dependence on strategic imports down to a difficult regional security environment.

Thus, it must be considered that the main determinant of "smallness" is the availability of the resource for a full-fledged relationship of a country with the external world - a correct balance of reciprocal interests, obligations and expectations. When talking about the resource, it does not suffice to operate with only economic, political-military or diplomatic parameters: it needs to be asked whether the country's society possesses the potential of will, knowledge and dignity that is needed for utilizing material and physical resources. Yet another issue to become a subject of rational discussion is whether a country possesses such resources by enacting its own capacities alone or whether it needs correct cooperation, partnership and alliance with other countries to achieve a complete result. One should also consider what type of objective restrictions exist for full utilization of the aforementioned resources. A final conclusion about "smallness" should be drawn based on precisely such an analysis.

When talking about the vitality and functionality of a small state in the context of Georgia, we should bear in mind that a correct process of political decisions requires the consideration of the following key issues:

A range of freedom of choice: which directly relates to the above-discussed self-sufficiency of the national (domestic) resource, as well as to natural or artificial limits to originality in security, economic and trade contacts with leading actors in an international format. In this regard, the needed balance helps in the making of such decisions that facilitate the adequate management of risks and, consequently, stability inside the country and threats coming from the outside.

Resilience: We believe that national resilience is not a condition that has been historically formed forever. Time passes and with it the structure of societal and social relations changes. Therefore, national resilience, which is extremely critical for a small state, needs to be continuously protected, cared for and supported. In modern times, nothing will happen by itself and even more so, owing to a historic-national code. It should be noted that only a targeted, systemic state policy that is free from partisanship and conjuncture - the so-called all-out nation approach, may become a foundation for achieving a desired result. As for key elements of resilience within the all-out nation approach, I would name the open and institutional governance, a society's attitude of co-ownership and co-participation towards their state, macroeconomic stability, "smart" regulation-based market economy and welfare state policy as such.

Economic effectiveness: This is a particularly important issue for a small state while one of effective forms is the integration of its economy into regional economic system. It is precisely the regional integration that we regard as one of the mechanisms of neutralizing macroeconomic risks and advocating collective economic interests of regional countries on global markets. At the same time, much like in case of any integration, it is recommended here as well to stick to a moderate level of interdependence and interconnection that takes into



Image source: edynamiclearning.com

account specific requirements of the national economy of a small state.

Higher security through more diplomacy: We have broadly discussed earlier the importance of collective, multilateral and bilateral formats for strengthening security. This time around we would like to underline the role of proactive-preventive, not formalistic-formulaic, diplomacy from the standpoint of imperative objective of national security of a small state. In general, the role of diplomacy is widely acknowledged and equally important for small as well as medium and large countries. However, in the conditions of limited defense resources, a creative and specific result-oriented diplomatic activity acquires a strong connotation - to avoid even a single mistake that may become fatal for a country and determine its life over a long period of time.

## GEORGIAN CASE: OBJECTIVES, POSSIBILITIES

Analysis of the Georgian case in the modern context requires the understanding of theoretical basics as well as experience gained and lessons learned of Georgia's international politics of the past few decades. The key aim of this necessary exercise is to evaluate the national interests and existing experience anew and to adjust them to the needs of social development. This will assist us not only in conversing with an adversary, but also in forming a balanced, mutually comprehensible and acceptable relationship with a partner.

The imperative of our geo-dimension or domestic politics in relation to foe or friend must rest on two key aims: a higher degree of security and a greater economic welfare.

To ensure this imperative, a corresponding Georgian strategy must organically link the above-mentioned aims, practical ways of realizing them and reasonable resources available to reach them to one another.

In terms of security, Georgian imperative must relate to (1) the country's defense; (2) improvement of regional security environment; (3) compatibility of multilateral security formats with the participation of our country; (4) unlimited functioning of trade and economic channels.

We should also bear in mind that we have limited resources in the area of protection of national security. It is therefore in our national interest to be an active supporter of international order, an active contributor to the development and perfection thereof. Firm international norms and multilateral international

formats are one of the defense shields for the interests of small states and the removal of this shield or revision thereof under the compulsion is fatal.

We believe that in practice, among other components, the linking of the Georgian security system to the international should include: (1) participation in international missions; (2) in light of own limited defense resources, maximum avoidance of engaging in military actions alone, independent of partners' coalition; (3) consolidation and continuous support of Georgian and international opinion about strengthening own security.

Even more so, in an uninterrupted dynamic, Georgia, as a small state, may find its voice and purpose in the new global order (or disorder). Georgian ego-standard - a higher degree of security and a greater economic welfare - is in the service of nonstandard ways or original solutions heading towards that. Our country has no right to stop, to freeze, to stay silent: any relaxation is tantamount to losing its voice.

Improvement and enhancement of political-military, economic and diplomatic ties should, at the end, translate into economic and social welfare of Georgian citizens. The political course of the country - today, tomorrow and thereafter - should also create the perception that the system of governance is in the service of people, not vice versa. Public institutions must break fully free from past stereotypes and become a provider of services in the eyes of citizens, whereby court is administering justice, security system is ensuring stability, legislature is stirring up a sense of belonging to citizen in political process, etc.

And last but not least: the new world, apart from other characteristic, will be more "consumer" type. This means that in a large global consumer format you, as a country, must be a carrier of your own, country-specific functional benefit. Georgia remembers the formation of this line in not very distant past - I would call it Shevardnadze doctrine - when by engaging in transborder projects, our country became a part of the scheme of regional relationships. However, time and circumstances change fast and with them, "our" and "their" expectations too: complacency about the past would not be wise, while the search and adoption of a new function is a condition for continuous renewal of the country's vitality.

Discussion of these and related issues, the use of necessary setting for needed and irreversible national dynamic is the imperative of our times.

# Dominic Nicholls on Britain Dropping Johnson and Ukraine's Fight to Survive

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

I don't like talking about victory in the big sense, like winning and losing. You could argue that all Ukraine has to do to win is survive. Russia wants to destroy this democratic, sovereign, independent, successful former Soviet country on its doorstep, and it cannot allow Ukraine to be used as an example. - Dominic Nicholls, Defense and Security Editor at the Telegraph, tells Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty's Georgian service. Nicholls served for 23 years in the British Army with operational deployments in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Balkans and Northern Ireland. We asked him about the PM Johnson saga, British support for Ukraine, and the possible outcomes of the war for Ukraine and Putin.

## WHAT'S THE BRITISH PUBLIC'S PROBLEM WITH BORIS JOHNSON?

It was a number of things that built up over a number of years. And that was why it took so long for there to be any kind of killer blow, because each individual issue in and of itself wasn't enough to finish his political career. But, collectively, there was this groundswell of opposition that eventually, when it found an outlet, was just overwhelming. Support, and therefore his political capital, just bled away, and, in the end, Boris had to bow to the inevitable. It came to a head over issues of integrity regarding a member of the government team he had appointed, and that just shone a light on everything else: the [handling of] the pandemic, Brexit and to a large extent the Ukrainian war. Many of these issues had been around for years, it just took until now to find space in the diary to address them. It's surprising it took this long, as most other prime ministers would probably have stepped down a long time ago because of the opposition they were facing.

## ON TO UKRAINE: JOHNSON AND MANY OTHER PROMINENT WESTERN POLITICAL LEADERS HAVE BEEN SAYING THIS IS THE CIVILIZED WORLD'S WAR AGAINST PUTIN, THAT IT'S "EUROPE'S WAR." IF THAT'S THE MINDSET, WHY CHANGE HORSES MID-RACE?

Well, one man doesn't make a government policy; one man doesn't make a national endeavor. Why change horses mid-race? It's not as if he had any particularly outlandish or forthright views that are not shared across the political scene here in Britain, and, therefore, it's extremely unlikely that whoever succeeds him will change the policy in any way.

People now look at these bombastic statements that come out of the Kremlin, and laugh



Dominic Nicholls, Defense and Security Editor at the Telegraph

Putin doesn't really care about casualty figures. He's quite happy with a kilometer a day, regardless of the cost, as long as he sees the line moving west

## THE IMPRESSION WAS THAT FOR BORIS IT WAS IMPORTANT ON A PERSONAL LEVEL. HOW MUCH OF AN IMPORTANT FIGURE WAS HE ON THE GEOPOLITICAL CHESSBOARD?

He always saw himself as a grand statesman. He was a big fan of Churchill; saw himself in that mold, but I don't think that was his prime motivation for visiting President Zelensky before many other Western leaders, and very early in the war, at great personal risk. I think he did it from genuine motivation, personal feelings, and perhaps a little of his personal domestic political troubles. But he really was channeling the spirit and the feeling here in Britain.

Regarding any successor, there might not be so many visits to Ukraine, but I don't see any wavering of support. The one great thing Johnson did was in the

have to do things properly. I think he was extremely unwise to think that such a move was acceptable.

## RUSSIANS, BOTH GENERAL PUBLIC AND OFFICIALS ALIKE, ARE NOW GLOATING THAT THIS WILL HAPPEN TO ANYONE WHO TRIES TO "DESTROY RUSSIA". IS THAT A WARNING THAT'S GOING TO AFFECT WESTERN LEADERS SUCH AS MACRON AND HIS ILK?

I think people now look at these bombastic statements that come out of the Kremlin, and quite frankly, laugh. They used to laugh diplomatically, when the cameras were off. Now they're openly laughing. I mean, these statements are meaningless. This is just a bunch of old men, almost exclusively in Moscow, who see themselves in some sort of cosplay pantomime from the 1960s, something from the Cold War. It's boring. Dmitry Peskov is wheeled out every day as a Kremlin spokesman, and he throws this insult and that insult, and there's always, "Oh, watch out, we'll come and get you!" Boring. They haven't updated their language; they haven't updated their ideas; they've not updated the view of the world to keep up with the pace of society and the changes going on around them and in their own society. There's increasingly a young society in Russia, who, if they're able to access free information, look around, and they see other people getting on with their lives and embracing technology and embracing new ideas and new cultures, and they see they're being left behind. It's sad to see, it's a horrible thing, because Russia is a wonderful country currently being led by a bunch of gangsters who think they're in some sort of black-and-white movie.

## ON TO UKRAINE'S FRONTLINES NOW - WEDNESDAY WAS THE FIRST DAY SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE WAR THAT RUSSIA NEITHER CLAIMED TO HAVE NOR WAS ASSESSED TO HAVE MADE ANY TERRITORIAL GAINS. WHAT CONCLUSIONS CAN BE DRAWN?

Russian forces have said that they're on an operational pause. I think they're exhausted, they've lost a huge amount of fighters and equipment, as has Ukraine. Russia has used up a lot of their better equipment, which is why we're seeing old T-62s being brought out of retirement. They've also used up a lot of fighters, certainly their best ones, in the Ukraine theater; they've drawn men and equipment from around the Caucasus to the north and Kherson to the south to fight this battle in the Donbas. And even then, they were just having to grind forward, barely a kilometer a day, very, very heavily led by artillery, absolutely pulverizing

It's extremely unlikely that whoever succeeds Boris Johnson will change the policy on Ukraine in any way

Russia is a wonderful country currently being led by a bunch of gangsters from a black-and-white movie

the place and then moving in afterwards to metaphorically plant a flag on the rubble that remains. So they do need this pause. Perhaps it has been forced upon them by Ukrainian tactics and the flow in the last few weeks of heavy artillery, the HIMARS systems, the very long range, very precise artillery system that is targeting the Russian ammunitions supply and headquarters. If you deny Russia access, either destroying their ammunition itself or access to it by destroying the railways, it can't proceed. We know Russia has a very top-down leadership model, it doesn't allow low-level initiative at the battalion or company level: Those used on the ground have to wait for the big decision to filter down through the chain of command. So, if headquarters are destroyed, then the orders are not received, and nothing is acted upon. I would imagine Putin wants his army to keep going. He doesn't really care about casualty figures. He's quite happy with a kilometer a day, regardless of the cost, as long as he sees the line moving west. But I would have thought that if he was listening to any military advice at all, and there's absolutely no evidence that he is, it would be that the army needs to rest for a few weeks.

The pause is also good as Ukraine is also extremely tired. They've been fighting a very hard war for months now, and they are in need of recuperation, to rest and fix their people and their equipment. The longer they can hang in there, the better, and the more they'll be able to train people and take delivery of these very high powered and precise weapon systems.

## OF THE LUGANSK RETREAT, YOU WROTE THAT THE UKRAINIANS HAVE ACHIEVED THEIR GOAL TO "SLOW THE RUSSIAN ADVANCE, MAKE THE ENEMY PAY DEARLY FOR EVERY MILE GAINED, AND GET OUT WITHOUT BEING DECISIVELY ENGAGED." BUT THEN, THEY DO HAVE TO RECLAIM THOSE TERRITORIES AT SOME POINT. DO YOU SEE THAT HAPPENING? AT WHAT COST?

It's a bold decision to trade ground for time, to make the gamble that you will preserve your fighting power to come back another day and take that ground back. And, of course, there are no guarantees in war. But all the messaging from Ukraine is that they will take it back. Let's say Russia takes the Donbas and then sues for peace and says, "All we wanted to do was protect the Russian speaking people in the east of the country, and we'll just hang on to the south. We've no territorial aspirations over the rest of the country, you're perfectly safe." Who's going to believe them? They've been camped out in the east of the Donbas since 2014. The Ukrainians know that they're in a fight for their very existence, so they're not going to stop now. There's no chance they're not going to go back and seek to push Russia back, at least to the February 24 boundaries.

## AND THIS WOULD BE A VICTORY FOR UKRAINE?

Well, victory is a very loaded term. I don't like talking about victory in the big sense, like winning and losing. I keep getting asked who's winning and losing this war, and I say "China," and people look at me in a bemused fashion. You could argue that all Ukraine has to do to win is survive. Russia wants to destroy this democratic, sovereign, independent, successful former Soviet country on its doorstep, and it cannot allow Ukraine to be used as an example.



Georgia's government representatives visited Estonia and Latvia to reinforce their partnership in rural development and agree on joint initiatives. Source: UNDP

## Rural Development Contributes to Georgia's EU Integration

As Georgia strives for EU membership, agriculture and rural development are among the areas where institutional reform will drive the country forward. The European Union (EU) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) assist Georgia's Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture and its Rural Development Agency to deliver on needed reforms and partner with relevant institutions in the EU Member States, including Latvia and Estonia.

With their vast experience in agricultural and rural development, the Baltic countries can provide the expertise needed to align Georgia's institutional, legal and administrative systems with the EU Common Agricultural Policy, European legislation that paves the way for fair and green rural development and seeks to ensure a sustainable future for farmers and rural communities. Its key areas are focused on fostering competitive agriculture and forestry, sustainable management of natural resources, climate action, rural employment, and balanced territorial development of rural

economies and communities.

Government officials from three countries discussed this far-reaching cooperation on 27 June - 2 July when representatives of Georgia's Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture visited Estonia and Latvia. During the visit, Georgia's Rural Development Agency and Latvia's Rural Support Service signed a Memorandum of Understanding to reinforce their partnership and lay the ground for joint initiatives.

"Georgia has moved a long way in the last decade by endorsing rural development programs, reforming institutional frameworks and piloting rural development approaches, such as LEADER and Community-Led Local Development. Partnership with Estonia and Latvia will help accelerate these reforms, align Georgia's rural development policies with the European legislation, and create new opportunities for rural communities," said George Khanishvili, First Deputy Minister of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia.

"The European Union assists Georgia to reform and modernize its rural development. Institutional and policy reforms

create a solid ground for practical measures to keep rural economies alive, promote green growth and ensure prosperity for rural communities," said Ketevan Khutsishvili, Programme Manager for Rural Development, Civil Protection and Crisis Management of the Delegation of the European Union to Georgia.

"In Georgia, where over 40% of the population live outside the big cities, sustainable rural development has a decisive role in eradicating poverty, reducing inequality and addressing environmental threats. Our goal is to ensure that rural communities receive the much-needed attention from decision-makers, the private sector, and educational and academic institutions to build vibrant rural economies that work for them and their country," UNDP Resident Representative Nick Beresford said.

The EU and UNDP support for rural development in Georgia draws on the EUR179.5 million EU-funded European Neighbourhood Program for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD) implemented since 2013. More information is available on the website: <https://eu4georgia.eu/enpard>

## Aslan Bzhania: Abkhazia Ready to Import Goods for Russia



BY TEAM GT

Abkhazia is ready to become a platform for parallel import of goods for Russia in light of the introduction of Western sanctions, the Russian media quotes the so-called president of occupied Abkhazia, Aslan Bzhania.

"Since a significant number of states

have announced a regime of sanctions against Russia, we certainly think that our territory can be used for parallel imports. We have two ports, we have access to other states," said Bzhania.

He claimed that Abkhazia is not afraid of the sanctions.

"Abkhazia was recognized by many states, the most important thing for us is that Russia recognized us. We are not afraid of any sanctions. On the contrary, these difficulties bring us closer," he said.

## The National Food Agency, FAO Launch Second Phase of NAITs for Animal Identification and Enhancing Food Safety

After the successful implementation of Georgia's National Animal Identification and Traceability System (NAITS), the Food and Agriculture Organization in Georgia (FAO) and National Food Agency (NFA) have launched the second phase of the project - NAITs II.

The NAITs system collects and electronically records information to mandatorily identifiable animals, their keepers, health-related information, and holding locations all around Georgia. While the first phase focused on designing, building and implementing the electronic system, the second phase will concentrate on its sustainability and bringing it to more stakeholders. Along with other state and non-state interested parties, NAITs II aims to reach out to the commercial sector related to livestock and consumers, to ensure they can benefit from the collected data.

"NAITS II aims to secure its sustainability and long-term impact on public health, animal health, food safety and access to international markets," says Project Manager Dragan Angelovski. "We aim to achieve this by creating the relevant environment and promoting the participative inclusion of stakeholders. We are glad to have the opportunity to continue this successful project and look forward to further collaborating with interested parties."

Tracing animals and animal origin

products in a prompt and timely manner is crucial in the food safety chain. It ensures the delivery of safe food to consumers, leads to an improved food system in Georgia, facilitates trade, and contributes to the effective implementation of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) agreement.

The project is implemented by NFA with the technical support of FAO Georgia and the financial support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC).

The NAITs electronic system consists of 25 modules. It brings together hundreds of system users (NFA veterinarians and inspectors) and information regarding more than 1 million bovines: their birth and origin, health condition and data about other health-related activities, and slaughterhouses, to document the full path of the animal from farm to plate. NAITs has also introduced a consumer module: with the help of a QR code, consumers are able to access essential information about the animals from which their products originate.

Georgia is the first country in the region to introduce NAITs. Confirming the robustness and quality of the system provided to the NFA, several states, including North Macedonia, Albania, Uzbekistan, Kirgizstan, and countries in the Caribbean, have expressed interest in sharing the system or system development experiences.



Image source: FAO

# THE ISET ECONOMOMIST

A BLOG ABOUT ECONOMICS AND THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

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The ISET Policy Institute (ISET-PI, [www.iset-pi.ge](http://www.iset-pi.ge)) is an independent think-tank associated with the International School of Economics at TSU (ISET). Our blog carries economic analysis of current events and policies in Georgia and the South Caucasus region ranging from agriculture, to economic growth, energy, labor markets and the nexus of economics, culture and religion. Thought-provoking and fun to read, our blog posts are written by international faculty teaching at ISET and recent graduates representing the new generation of Georgian, Azerbaijani and Armenian economists.

## Forest Fires and Climate Change in Georgia – Potential Ways Forward

BLOG BY EKA NOZADZE,  
EREKLE SHUBITIDZE

The Russian invasion of Ukraine, as well as the global pandemic, have diverted the world's attention, and in general put climate change and the green economy onto the back burner of the political agenda. However, the process of climate change has not been halted by shifts in geopolitics, rather it remains as relevant now as before the war. Moreover, the war itself has already had a disastrous environmental impact: wildlife has been destroyed, craters have opened over the terrain, and explosive releases of heavy metals and toxic chemicals have spread throughout the landscape and into the atmosphere. Missiles have created forest fires and triggered the release of radioactive material into the air, while the destruction of oil and gas facilities has also caused vast greenhouse gas emissions. According to the United Nations, the resulting pollution has created an "ecological catastrophe," with more than 530,000 hectares of protected land "affected, damaged, or destroyed" (McCarthy, 2022).

In this blog, we aim to discuss the correlation between climate change, human negligence, and summer forest fires. Moreover, since the so-called fire season is approaching (July-August), it might prove interesting for our readers to understand just how such threats can be avoided or at least minimized.

The first version of this blog was developed within the framework of ISET's "Training for Journalists on the Green Economy" project. During which one journalist from Borjomi TV discussed the topic using the example of the Samtskhe-Javakheti region and the Borjomi municipality. ISET Policy Institute has now renewed this blog to highlight the relevance of the topic once again.

### INTERLINKAGES BETWEEN THE FORESTRY SECTOR AND CLIMATE CHANGE

The connections between climate change and the forestry sector are numerous, multidirectional and, therefore, complex.

As discussed in earlier blogs, the trend in recent years demonstrates that fires are a growing phenomenon around the world, and they are chiefly associated with climate change, though the improper clearing and maintenance of forests can also contribute.

Notably, climate change potentially increases the risk of fires for various reasons:

- The longer hot seasons due to global warming – the summer and autumn months are hotter, leading to extended fire seasons;
- High temperatures cause drier weather, which in turn promotes evaporation, and soil becomes less saturated with water. These circumstances not only increase the likelihood of fires, but also make it more difficult to fight fires as they spread faster;
- The drier and warmer seasons, which, in addition to lasting longer, create



The 2017 Borjomi forest fire. Photo by Katie Ruth Davies/GT

favorable conditions for pests that more easily tolerate winter and can rapidly reproduce. Consequently, these pests can cause tree death – they dry out wood, making trees more susceptible to decay. This therefore creates an ideal environment for forest fires;

d) One of the main causes of forest fires is lightning during thunderstorms, often due to climate change.

As a direct result of climate change, fires are now even emerging in places they have never been seen before, and Georgia is no exception in this respect. The link between climate change and forest fires, however, is not unidirectional. Forest fires release large quantities of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, leading to increased climate change and drought risk (Werf, et al., 2017). Forests are also the main terrestrial carbon sink ecosystems, so they play an important role in the process of climate change, and in mitigating its negative impacts. Therefore, increased forest fires are not only polluting, but are also accelerating climate change.

### CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE FORESTRY SECTOR IN GEORGIA: THE SAMTSKHE-JAVAKHETI AND BORJOMI FIRES

Forests occupy about 40% of the total area of Georgia. They also play a crucial role in the country's greenhouse gas balance. In recent years, the evolution of the socio-economic situation has had an extremely negative impact on forests, has contributed to deforestation and fires, and is leading to a significant reduction in their carbon absorption potential. For example, in Samtskhe-Javakheti, within areas under National Forest Agency (NFA) management, 34 fires have been reported in the last 15 years; NFA data from 2021 shows that these fires covered a total area of 2425.83 ha, amounting to 2% of the Samtskhe-Javakheti forest area.

In Borjomi, the local population has increasingly been feeling the effects of such fires. The change in microclimate is especially noticeable in settlements surrounding burned forests. According to biologist Vazha Gelashvili, as a result of fires in the region, the air has become drier and continental, and the number of freshwater sources has decreased. Forest fires, increasingly frequent droughts followed by abundant rainfall, and other climate change-related shifts in the environment are moreover reducing the region's tourism potential and affecting the economy.

Nevertheless, the Georgian National Greenhouse Gas Inventory Report (1990-2017) shows that, if managed properly, land use and the forestry sector remain significant absorbers of greenhouse gases, which make a significant contribution to climate change mitigation. The sink capacity of this sector fluctuated between 8,122-10,061 Gigagram CO<sub>2</sub> eq. between 1990-2017, which constitutes 20-65% of total emissions during this period. Therefore, as forests absorb a significant proportion of emissions, more importance should be given to the issue of forest fires.

### WHAT IS BEING DONE TO REDUCE FOREST FIRES?

To mitigate climate change in the forestry sector, the Government of Georgia is upholding the following three priority measures (MEPA, 2021, p. 29):

- The establishment of sustainable forest management practices;
  - The promotion of natural restoration, and the implementation of reforestation and forest restoration;
  - The expansion of protected areas.
- According to the National Forest Agency, the country has prepared a number of documents to address climate change mitigation and adaptation, those which define the target indicators and the actions to be taken over the years. These

include Georgia's Updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) for the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change under the Paris Agreement; Georgia's 2030 Climate Change Strategy; and the 2021-2023 Action Plan within the 2030 Climate Strategy, which also covers sustainable forest management and fire prevention issues.

The Fourth National Communication of Georgia further identifies that the problems associated with climate change are becoming more pressing and that important steps need to be taken to adapt to it. It also explains the actions the agency has already taken. The document additionally highlights the development of fire prevention measures, namely:

- The arrangement of roads and paths for fire-fighting;
- The clearing of forests;
- The development of early notification and detection systems.

In addition, a methodology for forest fire risk assessment has been prepared, fire-hazardous areas have been identified – where monitoring is tightened during problematic periods, including supplementary hired firefighters – and the designation of sites for lighting bonfires and the placement of information boards have been implemented. Furthermore, in 2021, 107 agency employees and 30 volunteers were trained in forest fire management across all regions.

### WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE, WHAT DO WE KNOW, AND WHAT CAN THE POPULATION DO?

Rezo Getiashvili, a representative from CENN, an environmental NGO, explains that responding to climate change is a difficult process where complex decisions must be taken, and that the whole world is struggling to discover how to cope with climate change and with the consequences already faced. In his estimation, during the season when fire risk

increases, additional hazard measures are required; for example, the prohibition of bonfires or in general even banning movement in woodlands, as well as arranging tourist-recreational infrastructure within forests. Burning waste in agricultural plots is another harmful practice in Georgia that causes fires. Since 2015, there has been a law regulating this issue, including the relevant sanctions, nevertheless we still have no enforcement. Thus, effective enforcement mechanisms need to be enacted.

A lack of information on the negative impacts of climate change and the role of the populace in slowing the process down is another core problem. One small survey conducted in Borjomi reveals that although part of the local population believes in climate change, they do not think these processes have an impact on them today, nor do they consider their role to be significant.

Similar attitudes were identified in a study conducted by the Caucasus Environment Center (REC Caucasus), commissioned by the European Union and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Georgia from August-September 2020:

- 97.6% of the citizens surveyed have heard about climate change;
  - 91.35% of the population believe that climate change is a real process that threatens life on Earth;
  - 25.9% of respondents believe that international organizations will be able to manage the effects of climate change;
  - 36.19% of the population think they can do nothing to tackle climate change.
- Despite the public perception that individuals cannot change anything, there are a few simple steps that can be taken to slow climate change, to prevent periodic fires, and to sustain forest management, in particular:
- Avoid artificially starting fires;
  - Avoid lighting bonfires in woods during dry summer months;
  - Follow fire safety rules while in the woods;
  - Do not incinerate waste on agricultural land;
  - Reduce the excessive consumption of firewood;
  - After cutting trees down, clear the area of any remaining branches;
  - Use energy efficient ovens.

### CONCLUSION

There is an apparent link between climate change and forest fires – climate change on the one hand increases the likelihood of forest fires, while in turn forest fires accelerate the process. The issue is gaining worldwide urgency, and it is also necessary for Georgia to be actively involved in the communal response. As the contribution of every single person can help slow climate change and reduce the incidence of forest fires, active state policies on these fronts should be accompanied by further awareness and information campaigns to the benefit of the population. This should be done not only in large cities, but across regions like Samtskhe-Javakheti – thereby highlighting the linkages between individual actions and the forest fires that have been hitting these regions lately.



# Embassy of the United Arab Emirates in Tbilisi Organizes Charity Project on the Occasion of Eid Al-Adha 2022



to Georgia, Ms. Munira Almarzooqi. The head of the UAE mission congratulated the families gathered at the mosque Eid El-Adha and highlighted the efforts of the UAE leadership to provide humanitarian assistance to people in need around the world and noted that the volume of foreign aid provided by the UAE governmental and non-governmental organizations reaches \$60 billion. Ms. Munira Almarzooqi thanked the Administration of All Muslims of Georgia for providing the Embassy with an opportunity to assist families in need on this important religious holiday and expressed readiness to continue and expand this kind of cooperation in the future. Ms. Munira Almarzooqi thanked the Administration of All Muslims of Georgia for providing the Embassy with an opportunity to assist families in need on this important religious holiday and expressed readiness to continue and expand this kind of cooperation in the future.



**O**n July 10, the Embassy of the United Arab Emirates in Tbilisi, with the support of Red Crescent Society of the United Arab Emirates, and in cooperation with the Administration of All Muslims of Georgia, organized a charity project - Al-Adahi 2022, on the occasion of Eid Al-Adha (Feast of Sacrifice) during which several cows and sheep were slaughtered. Sacrificed meat was distributed to Muslim families in need. This initiative was implemented as a part of humanitarian activities based on the directives and vision of the UAE leadership. The event, held at Juma Mosque in Tbilisi, was attended by Muslim families, the Mufti of Eastern Georgia, Mr. Etibar Eminov and the Charge d'affaires of the Embassy of the United Arab Emirates



# Georgia's Rocky Road to Europe

ANALYSIS BY EMIL AVDALIANI

**T**he European Union (EU) has granted Georgia a "European perspective", meaning it is on course for ultimate integration with the bloc.

Yet this is not what the majority of the population had hoped for, which was the same candidate status awarded to Ukraine and Moldova. The lesser status means Georgia will need to fulfill a certain number of conditions to become a full candidate.

EU politicians had praised Georgia's progress. So had Georgia's ruling party, the Georgian Dream. The majority of the people, however, felt that the political class has not done enough, and this provoked large-scale protests.

Before 2022, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, the countries with territorial problems caused by an unwanted Russian military presence, had little hope of advancing their EU aspirations. But the Russian invasion of Ukraine has since upended the geopolitics of the wider Black Sea region. Brussels re-invigorated its push eastward in a move to finally break Russia's determination to dominate its pro-Western neighbors.

Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, said that "the door is wide open. It is up to Georgia now to take the necessary steps to move forward." In a last desperate attempt to influence the decision-making process, Georgians took to the streets. On June 20, an unprecedented gathering of some 120,000 people in the central Tbilisi demanded reconsideration of the com-



mission's recommendation. On July 3, tens of thousands again turned out to demand the government's resignation. Yet the EU decision was not totally unexpected. The ruling party and the EU have for months been trading criticism. To this should be added internal troubles in the country, arrests, demonstrations and divisions within the political class. The implications of all this are not yet clear, but some early analysis suggests that the geopolitical situation in the region was the main driver. The

government was probably nervous about any unfriendly signal from another country promised NATO membership and with a history of resistance to Kremlin aggression.

It therefore tried to pursue a balancing game vis-à-vis Russia over the war in Ukraine. The fear of Russia might not be entirely overblown. Although Vladimir Putin followed the EU Commission's decision by stating that Russia has nothing against the EU's enlargement, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov was critical about

the Union's ambitions. Moreover, Russia has for years crusaded against the EU as much as against NATO.

Whatever the reason behind the Georgian leadership's behavior, there is little hope the country will be able to make significant progress. First, the problem lies in the very nature of Georgian politics, which is extremely polarized, leaving little room for constructive dialogue between opponents. The EU's 12 recommendations for Georgia include "the commitment to de-oligarchization"

by eliminating the excessive influence of vested interests in economic, political, and public life. Other areas include addressing political polarization, where both the opposition and the ruling party are to blame. No less important is to build a "transparent and effective judicial reform based on a cross-party consultation process." The recommendation package also includes the strengthening of the Anti-Corruption Agency, which has seen some critical damage to its functioning over the past couple of years.

But the inherent problem is that realization that these and other recommendations would Georgian Dream's. This leaves little hope for changes before the next parliamentary elections in October 2024. Moreover, the opposition parties are too divided and disconcerted, as the July 3 demonstration showed, to mount a decisive struggle to force a change.

Looking ahead, despite some progress on its EU path, Georgia's position will remain weakened by internal division. The political battle risks undermining the country's Western credentials, as does the fear of a hostile Russian response. No less traumatic will be the ties with EU officials - acrimonious exchanges of the past several months are likely to haunt future bilateral relations.

And although the ruling party unveiled an ambitious program which aims at fulfilling the EU recommendations, the very nature of the internal Georgian politics (its diminished culture of political language included) will hamper real prospects of progress.

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

# Swiss Made: Etseri, Svaneti

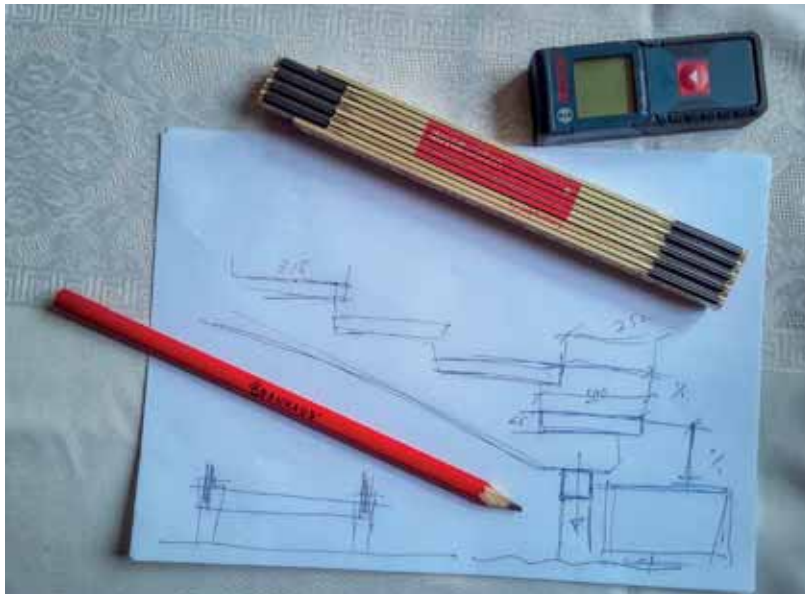


BLOG BY TONY HANMER

Our café, like our house, is getting “signatures” on it from all over the world: the handiwork of those who have worked on building or renovation projects over the years. The house includes its first bathroom (built by Canadians, with finishing touches by Mingrelians) as well as many smaller but vital elements done by Americans, our own village’s Svans, and others.

We now have a pair of Swiss men, one of whom I have known for 31 years, newly arrived for work. Originally, they were to replace the burnt-out garage roof, but the previous pair of café workers had a look and urged us to strengthen the garage walls with cement and rebar before re-roofing. Our Swiss guys are here for only 10 days, and this won’t be long enough to finish the garage roof work; so we are having them make a staircase to the café balcony instead.

Measure twice, cut once, says the phrase in English. In Georgian, measure 100 times! In any case, this phase, planning



and drawing the project after some back and forth to establish our ideal staircase, is now under way. They will make a complete list of needed small materials (nuts, bolts, screws and so on) which I can quickly go to Mestia to buy instead of all the way to Zugdidi. They brought some power tools with them from Aus-

tria, where they live, and I picked them up from Kutaisi airport last night, after a direct WizzAir flight from Vienna: basic but nice and cheap. It was 10 hours of driving in a day, but broken by several hours; we came home through thick fog in Svaneti without incident. I have borrowed an angle grinder and welding

apparatus from a kind neighbor, and we’re off.

The procedural gap in techniques is huge. In most of Western Europe, you cannot build or renovate any structure without a daunting list of permissions and bureaucratic hoops jumped through. This is for safety, uniformity, standardization and more. The freedom here in Georgian villages, though, means that you bypass all this stuff... and the protection it brings.

The very materials you can choose from here range from scarily bad to beautifully high-quality. The continued existence of the bad things, instead of their disappearance in the face of such competition, sometimes surprises me, who would always choose the expensive and long-lasting version over the cheaper one which might need replacing more often and also even be dangerous. (Electrical fixtures, I’m looking hard at you, for example). But there are plenty of people here who cannot afford such high-end choices, and are forced by economy to buy cheap and often. So the poorer quality things persist on the market. It’s not called “the luxury of choice” for nothing.

Gone are the years when we had a garage full of good power tools for our workers to use: that all burned up in January, and much of it will never be replaced, as we wind down building and renovating things on our Svaneti property.

Materials (wood and steel), foundation (steel set in concreted holes in the ground) and finish are all vital, as are joining

methods (welding, and screws or bolts as opposed to nails, which will loosen over years of weight-stressed use and cannot be tightened). One of their first jobs, though, is to make some of the tools they’ll need, such as a strong sawhorse, which will become the legs of my next workbench after the men go. This tool-making follows the understanding that every tool in existence was made by other tools, farther and farther back in time, until we arrive at the original proto-tools such as the first hammer. (PLEASE don’t plane the sawhorse’s corners, though—we don’t need it to have so much beautiful form that its function is a pity!)

Just the drawings and the questions give us confidence that we are in good hands, full of both knowledge and experience (including some in Africa). We are coming to a mutual understanding, and feel that our exchanges will yield long-lasting fruit. This is what you get standing behind the name of Swiss made, with its centuries of reputation for quality, precision and longevity! One more set of signatures to add to the collection, thank you.

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)



## SPORTS

# The Genetic Bond between Lelo & Rugby

Continued from page 1

Lelo has been played in this country since ancient times, though today its supporters are seen in just one location of West Georgia, in Shukhuti of the Lanchkhuti region. The contesting teams in this rough, manly game were historically made up of tens, maybe hundreds, of participants. The fight should take place on terrain crossed by a river and other natural obstacles, so as to make those pursuing the ball more entertaining to watch. Per the rules, two groups of males compete from two different parishes, never defining the number, but it is a matter of pride that no strapping man, be he young or old, miss the chance to get in there. A very heavy ball of up to 18 kilos, stuffed with sand and sawdust, is placed in the middle of the battlefield, and the final aim is to get it to a definite place, say the opponent’s side of the field, the boundary of the opponent’s settlement, the base of the hill, or to any other special spot chosen before the game. While crossing the battlefield, the players have to overcome obstacles like water, elevations, marshes, woods and what not. It is a game of brave folks, and was sometimes



Leloburti. Photo by Maksym Balandiukh

played even on horseback. Interestingly, it is believed that the winning side guarantees a season of plenty for their fellow villagers.

Today, the traditional game of Leloburti is played in Shukhuti on Easter Sundays. Last year, they skipped the event because of the pandemic, but were enthusiastically

ready for the following season. Interestingly, and amazingly, the exact same ballgame, the Royal Shrovetide Football (“hug-ball”), a medieval annual

football game, is played on Shrove Tuesday and Ash Wednesday in the town of Ashbourne in Derbyshire, England. History has it that the Shrovetide ball games have been played in England since the 12th century. What astounding coincidence!

And this is not the end of the story: a group of Georgian cinematographically-minded gentlemen have decided to reflect the Lelo saga and its significance in an incipient documentary, not yet precisely titled, but meant to be out shortly in its two linguistic versions, Georgian and English. Interesting, isn’t it? The screenwriters are two famous Iraklis – Tripolski and Papava, or Papava and Tripolski. I am sure neither would mind the order of reference. Davit Gogvadze is the producer of the future picture, as well as its editor and the second camera, and Levan Pataria is the chief photographer. Your obedient servant and the author of this piece happens to be the narrator of the film, with occasional flashes on the screen. Good luck to this wonderful bunch of Ethnofilm Studio professionals, who will soon tell the world another good story of ballgames, marking the astonishing parallel between the Lanchkhuti and Ashbourne folk sporting events.

# From “Mikhailov” Hospital to Art Center – to Implement the Idea, Tbilisi Hosts the Greats of World Architecture



**O**n July 6, the new owner of the former “Mikhailov” hospital, Georgian businessman Shalva Breus, hosted media, a group of world-leading architects, and representatives of the art field in the yard of the former hospital, where he talked in detail about what the modern art museum will be like.

The businessman bought the property at an auction in March for 16 million GEL on the condition that he would open a museum of modern art there and would invest 30 million GEL in it.

At the presentation of the idea of the modern art museum, Breus said that he could have set up the museum in Venice or Brussels, but as he was born and raised in Georgia, he chose Tbilisi:

“Brussels city hall offered us a place in the city center for free, but, to be honest, I have nothing to do with Brussels. The second option was Venice, I am there more often and spend a lot of time there. We chose a place in Venice, it was a very good line, but I decided to build a museum in Georgia instead. The reason is very simple – I was born and grew up in Georgia, I love Georgia,” the businessman said.

Breus also talked about the concept of the museum and how this space will be different:

“This museum will not be a temple where people come and pray... It will be a home for young people – one can enter

our museum with a skateboard, put it against the wall, sit down, open a laptop, work, and leave. We will not call the museum a museum. The museum is granted the status of a museum by the state. We will be an art center. Independent. For example, the Pompidou Museum is an art center, the Jokhtaberidze Museum is a museum. Everyone has their choice. I choose the Art Center to be absolutely free from all kinds of bureaucracy,” – this is how Shalva Breus expressed his vision.

Breus says that along with the museum, a “sculpture park” should be organized there, and one of the competitive requirements for the architectural firm will be experienced in this field. As for the exhibits, the businessman notes, initially the works from his personal collection will be exhibited there, after which the museum itself will work on expanding the collection.

Shalva Breus made a promise that as a major collector of modern art, he will make the works collected over the years the main collection of the Tbilisi Museum and will keep the works in Tbilisi.

“My private collection will be the basis for the museum itself. But the main thing and it is very important that the museum not be limited to one person’s collection. Therefore, our task is for the museum to work independently on the distribution, enlargement, and promotion of the collection,” Breus stated.

Reconstruction of the Swiss National

Museum (Christ & Gantenbein), Municipal library in Nembro, Bergamo (Archea Associati), Istanbul Museum of Painting and Sculpture (Emre Arolat), Memphis Art Museum (Herzog and De Meuron), Keio University (Shigeru Ban), Paris Ephemeral Grand Palais (Willemte & Associes) – this is a list of world-renowned projects implemented by the architects invited to Georgia. These companies will try to win first place in the competition and give new life to Mikhailov Hospital.

All companies and architects participating in the competition have one vision and one goal: to preserve the old while enriching it with new visions.

“What we saw here is very attractive. It will not be art for art’s sake. It will be a public space. We have wonderful antiquity and there is no need to change it absolutely. It gives the impression of ruins, but the initial structure of the buildings is very good. An architect not only builds but also destroys. Mistakes are also common. We should pay attention because what we saw here is very valuable,” said Gantenbein.

“When we got familiar with this space, we were convinced that after the implementation of the project, it will play a very important role in the cultural life of Tbilisi and the cultural landscape of Tbilisi,” said the representative of Emre Arolat.

As the representative of the Shigeru Ban company says, Georgian architecture is very similar to Japanese architecture.

“As soon as I arrived, I saw the convergence of Georgian and Japanese architecture. In Japan, we have this kind of doctrine, there is no boundary between the outside and the inside. The biggest challenge is that we don’t try to fundamentally change anything about this building, we leave the original, but we add to it and make it new,” said Taro Okabe.

“This is an incredibly impressive place, it can be said that it will bring fantastic results. We have carried out such works many times in London, Madrid and elsewhere. This is an incredibly good way to preserve the old, on the one hand, to give it some freshness and to trace the way to the future. It will be a fusion, using the old through a new vision,” says

the architect and representative of Herzog and De Meuron Olga Bolshanina about the project.

Borina Andrews, a representative of Willemte & Associates, says that working on this project is a unique moment:

“This is our first experience working in Georgia. This is a truly unique moment. It is rare to have such a large area in the middle of the city. There are a lot of antiquities here, and our company has the expertise to bring those antiquities together with the modern,” says Andrews.

As for the company Archea Associati and its representative, Francesco Simonin called the project “an emergency.”

“We always follow a certain design, but this is an extraordinary case. This type of space requires persistent work, and I think we will get quite positive results in the future,” said Simonin.

Academician Valery Asatiani was present at the meeting/dialogue with the invited guests. As he mentioned in conversation with us, the connection of eras will be reflected in the project.

“After a dialogue, we were convinced how seriously the problem is viewed. A project is to be decided, what is conceived. In this case, we are talking about preserving the historical appearance, the importance of the architectural monument. The projects that the companies present architecturally will be the subject of very serious judgment. All this will be highly transparent and public, everyone will participate in the discussion. Foreign architects, who have a great background, are very careful to take into account the national specificity, climate, character, appearance of the city, traditions, and the specificity of the park culture. All this will happen in cooperation with Georgian colleagues. Overall, it’s a very important idea. The space opens up for a new quality of education, not only in fine arts, but in general, I mean culture in a broad sense. It will be a hub of multicultural purpose, where all the muses will have a place, as well as fine arts, musical arts, verbal arts, and theater, it will be a meeting place.

As I see it, everything is moving towards turning it into an educational center, which is most important for the future of Georgia. In this great project, the connection of times will be reflected,” says Valery Asatiani.

The Museum of Modern Art, which Shalva Breus plans to set up in Tbilisi, should be opened in 2028, as per the investment conditions and we will have to wait until November 2022 to find out which architectural company will take over the project and which of them will be able to turn the Mikhailov Hospital into a modern art museum.

Shalva Breus, who was born and raised in Georgia, is known among modern art lovers around the world as a contemporary art expert, and a member of the jury of a number of international competitions, including the Marcel Duchamp Prize and the Guerlain Prizes for painting and graphics, a publisher, collector, and philanthropist. His collection of modern paintings is also recognized worldwide, the core of which is the works of German expressionists. The collection is rich with samples of modern Georgian paintings.

Breus has founded an international fund under his own name, the Kandinsky Prize founded by him, along with the British Turner Prize and the French Marcel Duchamp Prize, the 3 leading prizes in the world of contemporary art.

The Museum of Modern Art is not the first to be built under the initiative and leadership of Breus. The modern art expert has implemented a number of charitable projects in Georgia, among which the restoration of the Neveli Church in Abastumani and the preservation of unique frescoes by Nesterov are noteworthy; The construction of the Holy Trinity church complex on the Mount of the Holy Trinity in Batumi, which has already become a niche of the city and due to which it was awarded by the Catholicos-Patriarch of Georgia with the highest ecclesiastical order, the Cross of St. George. His name is also associated with the restoration of the lost tradition of church mosaic in Georgia.



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Reg. # 06/4-309

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# მსოფლიო 2022



ISSN 2253-3649  
9 772253 364006