

## FOCUS ON BUSINESS EXPANSION

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Hubert Knirsch's Last Interview as Ambassador to Georgia: The Parties Must Work Together and Show that Georgia Can Rule Itself and Transform Itself to Meet its People's Expectations

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW BY EREKLE POLADISHVILI

When I first came to Georgia and then came again as an ambassador, I quickly discovered this is a very special relationship, - Hubert Knirsch, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Georgia, tells GEORGIA TODAY. "To very many Georgians, Germany means a lot, and they hold Germany in high esteem. Not all Germans know about Georgia, but as soon as they do, as soon as they come here or find out at the Frankfurt Book Fair what a country Georgia is, what rich tradition and beautiful literature you have and so on, they become very interested, and want to become part of its story.

"As an ambassador, I knew I would have to do my very best to do justice to this tradition. I tried to convey to everybody in Georgia, everybody I could meet, how much we Germans appreciate Georgia and how we value the friendship that Georgians express towards us.

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BONDS		Price	w/w	m/m	STOCKS		Price	w/w	m/m
GRAIL 07/28	83.93 (YTM 7.43%)	-0.5%	-0.9%		Bank of Georgia (BGEO LN)	GBP 15.42	+5.8%	+15.2%	
GEORG 07/23	100.91 (YTM 5.04%)	+1.1%	+2.2%		Georgia Capital (CGEO LN)	GBP 6.32	+2.9%	+5.9%	
GEOPAP 03/24	93.61 (YTM 10.56%)	-0.2%	-2.2%		TBC Bank Group (TBCG LN)	GBP 13.98	+7.7%	+14.2%	
SILNET 01/27	96.26 (YTM 9.41%)	-1.7%	-1.2%						
TBC 06/24	98.68 (YTM 6.51%)	-0.1%	-0.0%						
GGU 07/25	100.26 (YTM 7.65%)	-0.0%	-0.5%						
COMMODITIES		Price	w/w	m/m	CURRENCIES		Price	w/w	m/m
Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	100.03	-4.9%	-10.4%		GEL / USD	2.7336	-1.8%	-5.1%	
Gold Spot (US\$/Oz)	1 772.17	+3.0%	-2.2%		GEL / EUR	2.8050	-1.4%	-6.6%	
					GEL / GBP	3.3483	-0.2%	-3.8%	
					GEL / CHF	2.8845	-0.3%	-3.9%	
					GEL / RUB	0.0443	-7.9%	-14.3%	
					GEL / TRY	0.1527	-2.4%	-11.2%	
INDICES		Price	w/w	m/m	GEL / AZN	1.6115	-1.9%	-6.8%	
FTSE 100	7 413.42	+1.5%	+3.4%		GEL / AMD	0.0067	-1.2%	-5.2%	
FTSE 250	20 079.23	+1.4%	+7.7%		GEL / UAH	0.0747	-1.7%	-23.6%	
DAX	13 479.63	+2.0%	+5.2%		EUR / USD	0.9744	-0.4%	+1.6%	
DOW JONES	32 798.40	+2.5%	+5.5%		GBP / USD	0.8163	-1.7%	-1.2%	
NASDAQ	12 368.98	+5.0%	+11.2%		CHF / USD	0.9496	-1.5%	-1.2%	
MSCI EM EE	29.93	+1.8%	+1.9%		RUB / USD	61.8185	+6.6%	+10.8%	
MSCI EM	995.04	+0.8%	+0.2%		TRY / USD	17.8969	+0.5%	+6.9%	
SP 500	4 118.63	+3.8%	+7.7%		AZN / USD	1.6956	+0.0%	+0.2%	
MSCI FM	2 163.95	+2.3%	+1.3%		AMD / USD	406.9100	-0.7%	+0.2%	

## July 24 – July 31: 11,802 New Cases of Coronavirus, 10 Deaths Reported in Georgia



**F**rom July 24 to July 31, 11,802 new cases of coronavirus were registered in Georgia, 10,233 people recovered from the virus and 10 patients died, the National Center for Disease Control reports.

A total of 76,309 tests were conducted across the country.

From July 18 to July 24, 10,253 new cases of coronavirus were registered in Georgia, 5 patients died, and 7508 people recovered from the virus.

## Wizz Air Resumes Flights from Kutaisi to Estonia, France



Image source: 1TV

**T**he low-cost Air Company Wizz Air returned its second base plane to the Kutaisi International Airport and resumed flights to Estonia and France from August 1.

The Airports Union of Georgia says the first regular flight after the Covid-19 pandemic to Tallinn was carried out

on Monday with 152 passengers on board.

Direct regular flights from Kutaisi to Tallinn will be carried out twice a week, while to Paris once a week.

The frequency of flights will increase to Athens, Berlin, Barcelona, Riga, Dortmund, Memmingen, Milan, Prague, Thessaloniki and Wrocław.

## EU Special Representative Concerned about Deadly Clashes in Nagorno-Karabakh



**T**oivo Klär, European Union Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia said he is concerned about reports of increased tensions in the Armenia-Azerbaijan context

“Concerned about reports of increased tensions in Armenia-Azerbaijan context over recent days. European Union is committed to deepening its engagement

in the peace process; we are engaged on multiple levels. Important to deescalate & avoid derailing a historic opportunity to turn the page on decades of strife,” he tweeted.

Deadly clashes continue in Nagorno-Karabakh. One Azerbaijani and two Armenian soldiers are confirmed dead and at least 14 Armenians wounded after clashes broke out on Wednesday morning in Nagorno-Karabakh.



## Russia's Invasion Week 22: US Sanctions More Oligarchs, Senate Expected to Approve Finland, Sweden Joining NATO

BY ANA DUMBADZE

**I**n the 22nd week of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the key developments are as follows:

- Russia is preparing its forces for an attack on the southern battlefield, Ukraine says
- The first grain ship to leave Ukraine under the new deal heads to Lebanon
- The US Senate is poised to vote to accept Sweden and Finland into NATO
- The US imposes a new round of sanctions on Russians
- Biden speaks with the national security team about additional weapons for Ukraine

The Russian Army appears to be massing forces for an attack along the same southern battlefield where Kyiv's troops are planning one, the Ukrainian military warned on Wednesday.

“The enemy continues to wage hostilities along the occupied defense line,” the command said in a statement. The Russians are assembling troops for an assault, it said.

In the eastern Donbas region, Russia has been slowly advancing, while in the southern Kherson region, Ukraine has been recapturing territory with the help of long-range American-provided rockets striking ammunition depots, command posts and bridges deep behind Russian lines.

The strikes on bridges over the Dnipro River, which separates Kherson from Russian supply lines to the occupied peninsula of Crimea, had been seen as particularly hopeful for Kyiv. The Russian Army has begun using barges to cross the river.

But the massing of an assault force in the northern portion of Russia-occupied territory around Kherson would pose challenges to Ukraine's plans. The Operational Southern Command said Russian troops staged probing attacks with tanks, but did not break through Ukrainian lines.

In eastern Ukraine, the fighting has settled into a stalemate of Russian advances in some areas and Ukrainian counterattacks in others, with neither side moving more than a few kilometers over weeks of combat.

The Russian military has turned to its air force to try to break the deadlock, said Serhiy Haidai, the head of the Ukrainian regional administration of Luhansk

Province. On Tuesday, Russian planes attacked eight villages and small towns along a front near the administrative border between Luhansk and Donetsk Provinces, he said.

The attacks, Haidai suggested, were intended to pin down Ukrainian troops in the east, preventing them from being redeployed to other areas in Ukraine, like the south, where Ukrainian forces are preparing for a counter-offensive.

In the north of Ukraine, Russia attacked the city of Kharkiv early Wednesday morning, launching missiles from across the border near the Russian city of Belgorod, according to a Telegram post by Oleh Synyehubov, the military governor of Kharkiv. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

### THE FIRST SHIPMENT OF GRAIN LEAVES UKRAINE SAFELY

The first shipment of grain exports from Ukraine in months safely reached anchorage in Turkish waters. The shipment was inspected there Wednesday before carrying on its journey to Tripoli in Lebanon. The Sierra-Leone flagged Razoni departed Odessa on Monday, with Zelensky calling the shipment a “positive signal.”

### THE US ADDS SANCTIONS, SETS TO DECIDE ON NATO ACCESSION

The United States slapped more sanctions on Russian oligarchs on Tuesday, as the US Senate moved closer to a vote to admit Sweden and Finland into the NATO military alliance.

NATO's 30 member countries are in the process of considering the addition after Sweden and Finland set aside their longstanding stance of military non-alignment. It was a major shift of security arrangements for the two countries after neighboring Russia launched its war on Ukraine earlier this year.

Each member country in NATO needs to approve the accession of new members.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke off fears over potential for a nuclear accident in Ukraine. He told reporters late Monday that there are “credible reports” that Russia “is using the Zaporizhzhia nuclear station as the equivalent of a human shield, but a nuclear shield in the sense that it's firing on Ukrainians from around the plant.”

The Russians have been firing from the cover of the Zaporizhzhia station since

mid-July, Ukrainian military and civilian officials said, sending rockets over the river at Nikopol and other targets, in full knowledge that they will not receive counter-fire.

Blinken then announced new sanctions on Russian oligarchs and state-owned entities. Below is the State Department's fact sheet of imposed penalties on the following Russian oligarchs:

Alexander Ponomarenko “for operating or having operated in the aerospace sector of the Russian economy. He is an oligarch with close ties to other oligarchs and the construction of Vladimir Putin's seaside palace.” He has been sanctioned by the UK, European Union, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Dmitry Pumpyanskiy “for operating or having operated in the financial services sector of the Russian Federation economy.” The UK, European Union and New Zealand have also sanctioned him. Pumpyanskiy has ties to the yacht “Axioma,” which is now being identified as blocked property.

Andrey Melnichenko “for operating or having operated in the financial services sector of the Russian Federation economy.” Like Pumpyanskiy, he has also been sanctioned by the UK, European Union, and New Zealand.

“We are also imposing additional costs on Russia's war machine by designating 24 Russian defense and technology-related entities,” Blinken wrote in a statement.

“Russia has systematically focused on exploiting high-technology research and innovations to advance Moscow's war-fighting capabilities – the same defense capabilities that Russia's military is using in its vicious attacks hitting Ukraine's population centers and resulting in the deaths of civilians, including children,” he added.

US President Joe Biden tweeted a photo of a call with his national security team in which they discussed ways to help Ukraine fight off Russia's invasion.

“This morning, I held a secure phone call with my national security team. We discussed a wide range of priorities, including the United States' support of a free and open Indo-Pacific and our continued support for Ukraine in response to Putin's war,” Biden wrote in a tweet.

Earlier this week, Biden approved the 17th military package for Ukraine, bringing the US commitment to \$8.8 billion since Russia invaded Ukraine.

# New Branch of Hebashi Holding Group in Saudi Arabia

BY MARIAM MTIVLISHVILI

**H**ebashi Holding Group was launched with the efficient help of a promising founder, Hani Hebashi, who possesses great passion and ambition, armed with a wealth of knowledge of scientific and practical studies and policies in the global real estate sector. The beginning of 2022 witnessed the advancement of Hebashi Holding Group (HHG) to a level that puts it at the forefront of competition with the largest international companies in Georgia. Real estate company OTI Estate (company of Hebashi Holding Group) already received an official operating license for Georgia, UAE, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Egypt.

After the huge success acquired by HHG in Georgia, OTI ESTATE expanded its branches to Saudi Arabia and opened its first and official branch in Al-Riyadh.

Before deciding to open a new branch at a new location, those who work for OTI ESTATE, made sure that it was the right next step. They created the business plan, carefully evaluated the market and, most importantly, they chose the right people to work with them, in the belief that "great businesses are built with great

people." Part of the reason they are so successful in Georgia is because everyone really has a culture of productivity and team work. The company has people who are hungry to learn and grow and to be part of something bigger.

The Arabian Gulf is one of the most important destinations for real estate investment, especially for HHG, and the customers are among the most important for the company especially after the great successes in Georgia.

Furthermore, OTI ESTATE opens new opportunities for new people who want to invest with a successful and trustworthy partner especially in the Arabian Gulf. After years of experience, real estate is a very triumphant field and adds to the economical and to the individual level.

HHG opened its first branch in Georgia, and quickly expanded to 12 other countries, the latest branch in Saudi Arabia. OTI ESTATE is clearly the strongest partner in real estate according to the success achieved in all the counties it is working in.

There are many future plans for the company, which are bigger and broader than the ones already achieved. They won't limit the investments only locally but intend to expand with branches worldwide in order to attract more investors. They believe that HHG is a clear example of progress in real estate.



# Tragic Gudauri Crash Claims 8 Lives, 1 Tourist Dead in Paragliding Accident

BY KETEVAN SKHIRTLADZE

**A** helicopter belonging to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Border Police lost control and crashed during a rescue operation for paragliders who fell in the mountainous Georgian resort of Gudauri on July 29. Eight people were in the helicopter. Soon after, Interior Minister Vakhtang Gomelauri confirmed that all eight had died.

"In the vicinity of Gudauri, during a paragliding flight, two people collided with and fell down the slope of the mountain. A helicopter belonging to the Border Police was involved in the rescue operation, but it lost control and crashed," the statement of the Ministry of Internal Affairs reported.

"There were four crew members on board the helicopter, two rescuers from the Emergency Situations Management Service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and two medics from the Emergency Situations Coordination and Emergency Assistance Center of the Ministry of Health."

The Minister announced that the foreign tourist who was flying with the paraglider pilot also died. The rescue operation was being carried out in order to save that tourist. The injured Georgian paraglider pilot was later taken to the hospital by ambulance.

"I would like to express my deep sorrow for what happened, and to express my condolences to the families of the victims," Minister Gomelauri said. "It is very hard for us, for everyone, especially for the families, their friends, the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Six of those who died were our employees."

He added that the regulations on paragliding flights should be tightened or the sport banned altogether, and that, for the time being, flights would be suspended.



Image source: netgazeti.ge

Due to the tragedy, July 30 was declared a day of mourning for Georgia.

Later that day, in response to media reports and a whirlwind of posts on social media, the Department of Strategic Communications of the Ministry of Internal Affairs released a statement, noting that "It is unfortunate that we have to publish this in light of the tragedy, but it is better for the general public to hear verified and accurate facts."

"The pilots and flight technicians on board the helicopter, Colonel Zaza Loria, Lieutenant Colonel Levan Chokheli, Major Dimitri Kaadze and Lieutenant Andro Kujoshvili, were high-level professionals in their field. The flight was being controlled by Colonel Zaza Loria, the Deputy Head of the Main Department of Special Purpose Aviation of the Border Police of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, who has been a pilot since 1992

and has commanded a helicopter squadron for many years. Under the leadership of Colonel Loria, many difficult rescue operations were carried out, and he saved many lives.

"At the base of the Main Division of Special Purpose Aviation of the Border Police, helicopters are inspected in detail before each take-off, and it is not allowed for pilots to start and fly a technically defective helicopter."

The Department noted that in 2019-2022, the Air Park of the Border Police was fully updated, which means that all helicopters are regulated, maintained, and updated.

They highlighted that in March, the Border Police, in full compliance with Georgian legislation, on the basis of the government's decree, in accordance with the international rules of aviation safety and the manual of aviation technical services, purchased and installed two

new sets of tail screws for the two Mi-8 MTV-1 type helicopters on the balance sheet of the Border Police.

"We would also like to make a clarification regarding the two Super Pumas in the balance of the Border Police, which were purchased in 2011," the Department announced. "They were bought without the necessary equipment for rescue functions, and this is why they cannot be used in search and rescue operations (for evacuating people or extinguishing fires). In particular, one of the Super Pumas was made to order with a high-class interior and design, and is used only for the transportation of high-ranking officials. The Mi-8 helicopter is used in search-rescue and rescue operations as it is equipped with special rescue inventory."

"And for further clarification, stories that the Super Puma is stuck in the Kakheti region are false. The Super Puma

has been moved from the Lagodekhi defense section and is being deployed at the base of the Main Division of Aviation for Special Purposes.

"Finally, only the best, high-level professional pilots and flight technicians work in the Special Purpose Aviation department of the Border Police, and they undergo special training twice a year," the statement concluded.

The public funeral of the deceased rescuers and medics took place at the Sameba (Holy Trinity) Cathedral in Tbilisi on August 2.

Georgian President Salome Zurbashvili, Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili, members of government, MPs, and Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze attended the funeral at the Cathedral.

Garibashvili noted that "the state will do its best to support the families of the deceased. The Interior Ministry will allocate 100,000 GEL to each family, and the Health Ministry will issue an additional 100,000 GEL to the families of the deceased medics."

Garibashvili emphasized his close acquaintance with the pilots in particular.

"We have lost our country's worthy sons and daughters, our country's citizens, crew members and rescuers, and exceptional pilots, honorable people, with whom I was closely acquainted. We traveled together frequently over the years. Once again, I extend my sympathy to their families, our society as a whole, and to the Ministry's leadership and staff, each and every employee, as well as to the families of the deceased medics. It is an enormous tragedy that has left us all devastated."

The President of Georgia requested that those who died during the rescue operation be awarded the State Medal for Civic Dedication.

An investigation into a possible violation of air transport operation rules was started immediately, and is being conducted under Article 275 of the Criminal Code of Georgia.

# How to Lift Our Political Ethics from the Nadir?

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

Nobody has ever asked if the use of dirty wit in the political arena makes any sense. It might, but only for self-satisfaction and to nourish the user's sick complacency, nothing more. Obscene language brings no political dividends to its user, and here's why: politics, as it is universally known, is an extremely serious profession that needs first to be mastered and then to be employed accordingly.

Yes, politicians are people, just like the rest of us, with all human senses and sentiments, sorrows and delights, but they serve a somewhat different cause that gives them a chance to hold power either directly or via special interest in having somebody else elected. As such, perhaps it is unfair to react negatively to the way either a ruling power or its opposition behaves publicly, the former trying to maintain its sweated-out authority and the latter attempting to grab it from them. Only their fist-fights and clashes keep the hot and viable political process up and going.

In our political reality, one of the most popular and practicable ways of fighting an opponent is the prolific use of libel-



Source: transparency.ge (2017)

ous and offensive vocabulary, which is not a very rational way of politicking, because a discourteous polemical tone and uncivil manners have no way to achieve the final goal, and ultimate goal for a politician, which, as I said, is the fact of coming to power. This aim can only be achieved with the help of wise and stable logic, with the politician try-

ing to show the electorate the prospect of a better life. We, the kibitzers of that sinuous political process, might agonize over a politician's obscenity because nobody likes to listen to those unprintable, filthy and indecent verbal expressions the Georgian politicians tend to use while addressing each other. Yet, what matters most in this presumably

democratic process is merely this: The politician's persuasive ability to make his convictions believable and his truth about a better future incontrovertible.

The opposition will never desist from talking and acting the way it thinks is most optimal for achieving power, and the ruling force should not be surprised by this. On the other hand, the opposi-

tion, for its part, must not shrug its shoulders at the government's desire and work to maintain its extant position. They do not need at all to enter into rude and boorish diatribes against each other; instead, they should use a peaceful, balanced, scientifically justified, reserved and believable way in discussion, in other words, anything that helps them to win the hearts and minds of their constituency.

Uncouth, scandalous and insolent confrontation takes time and energy, and not only that - it destroys a politician's image, speaking volumes about the level of his morality and mental ability.

The good and the comfort that we expect to come from the West have to find in Georgia a compatible model of behavior and way of life. Being proud of our ancient culture alone is not enough; to give only a cursory glance to Shota Rustveli and then brag about his genius being Georgian will not suffice. We have to follow both the spirit and letter of our exclusive culture, and make it so inclusive that our foreign friends show a desire to get involved deeply and wholeheartedly. Hearing from us on an everyday basis those nasty, vilifying, disgusting and often unfounded words addressed to one another might soon turn this culture and nation into a genuine pariah that nobody wants to identify with.

## Celebrating Swiss National Day in Tbilisi



The Bundesfeier on August 1 is Switzerland's national holiday.  
Source: iStockphoto.com/assalve

BY MICHAEL GODWIN

On 1 August, the Embassy of Switzerland in Georgia hosted Georgian government officials, foreign diplomats, business leaders, and the representatives of international organizations to mark Swiss National Day. As a celebration of the founding of the Swiss Confederacy in 1891, it also marks 30 years of diplomatic relations between Switzerland and Georgia. These 30 years have been filled with warm relations in trade, education, diplomacy and peace, and regional development programs.

During the special event, host Swiss Ambassador Heidi Grau made special mention of the first Federal Charter of 1291. This Charter between the cantons of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden laid the groundwork for the modern Swiss Confederation. Swiss National Day marks a special day, but this year marks an important landmark in history between the two nations of Switzerland and Georgia.

During the celebrations held near Tur-

tle Lake in Tbilisi, Ambassador Grau gave a toast to the future of Swiss and Georgian relations. An evening of both Georgian and Swiss fare was offered to guests. Swiss wine and cheese, prized similarly as Georgian wine and cheese, were available for sampling. During a brief speech, Ambassador Grau made comments admiring the unique similarities between Georgia and Switzerland, particularly the cuisine, the hospitality, and the beautiful mountainous terrain.

Switzerland and Georgia first maintained relations, with the former even having an embassy in Tbilisi between 1883 and 1922, ending only with the invasion of the Soviet Red Army and subsequent occupation. With the Soviet occupation of the country coming to an end in the 1990s, Switzerland quickly recognized Georgian independence on the 23rd of December, 1991. Their relations continue, with both the Swiss Embassy and the Swiss Cooperation Office in Tbilisi.

The latest four-year program "Cooperation Program for the South Caucasus 2022-2025" was launched in May, covering four key areas: Promoting civic engagement and cooperation in the region, strengthening democracy and

public institutions, improving economic development and the creation of decent jobs, and strengthening climate resilience and sustainable resource management.

With the launch of this impressive initiative, Switzerland has been involved in 20 programs in Georgia that have seen over 150,000 recipients benefit from over \$34 million in additional income. Additionally, work on digital infrastructure at the municipality level has given access to over 1.5 million people across Georgia. This work is set to continue with a focus on agriculture as well as small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

The work being done through the Swiss Embassy is also through regional NGO partnerships. Smaller programs have been organized to help with gender equality, environment and climate change, inclusiveness, and digitalization. Working with the Georgian government, the Embassy is also investing time and resources into conflict prevention, peace promotion, and strengthening human rights.

The presence of these Swiss initiatives has elevated not only the principles of democracy and good governance, but also at the individual level with quality of life and equality improvements. The Regional Cooperation Office in Tbilisi, since opening in 1996, has invested over 200 million CHF in the South Caucasus.

Agricultural development in Georgia has been a particularly extensive investment of Switzerland. In early May, Swiss and United Nations officials both agreed to extend their support of the Swiss Agricultural School 'Caucasus' (SASC). The school's two-year training course in the fields of farming and cheese-making has helped over 200 local farmers. "We welcome the achievements of the school and feel proud that Switzerland's experience contributes to the development of agricultural training in Georgia and to improving the lives of Georgian farmers," Ambassador Grau said during the event at the school.

Swiss involvement in Georgia is cen-

tered around one core principle - "Leave No-one Behind." This all-encompassing vision of regional development ensures that even parts of the population that are often missed by other wide-reaching efforts are not left out of special programs. The Swiss Embassy has championed this by an "endeavor to reach the furthest behind first" in community outreach and development programs, particularly for Georgia's rural, remote, and mountainous peoples.

With 30 years of cooperation, development and successes behind them, Ambassador Grau made it clear during the Swiss National Day event that another 30 years of the same lie ahead. Even as the current programs continue, new initiatives will be considered, particularly as new opportunities to engage and support Georgia's growth emerge. The country has many friends in Europe and afar, but few come with such open arms and support as Ambassador Grau and the Swiss people.



Ambassador Grau toasts to the cooperation between Georgia and Switzerland. Source: Embassy of Switzerland in Georgia

# Hubert Knirsch's Last Interview as Ambassador to Georgia: The Parties Must Work Together and Show that Georgia Can Rule Itself and Transform Itself to Meet its People's Expectations

Continued from page 1

I did what I could to have a part in the processes going on in this country, and to play a positive role in bringing Georgia closer to the European Union. Of course, a joyous moment stands out: the 8th of March agreement in 2020 that we could witness as ambassadors. It was Kelly Degnan, Carl Hartzell, Christian Urzell of the Council of Europe, and myself. This was a glorious moment when all the political leaders were sat around one table to agree on a complex agreement that satisfied all."

**DO YOU EXPECT THE RULING PARTY OR OPPOSITION WILL CRITICIZE YOU AFTER YOU LEAVE? WE REMEMBER HOW MR HARTZELL BECAME A SUBJECT OF CRITICISM ONLY AFTER HE LEFT.**

Some of us have been the object of criticism already, and to a certain extent, this is natural. Everybody who plays a role in public life should know that you can face criticism and should not be shy.



Georgian media can make a substantial contribution to improving the situation by focusing on real issues and talking to interlocutors quietly to elucidate the readers and viewers on something new



It is best to accept that fact. However, what is happening now and lately is taking on a different quality. I have the impression that this criticism, the tendency of mutual attacks, has taken over to such an extent that it could damage the relations between Georgia and the EU, for instance, or Georgia and the US. This makes me concerned, and this should be avoided.

**YOU WERE PART OF MANY DECISIVE MOMENTS IN GEORGIAN POLITICS. WHAT WOULD YOU ADVISE MR PETER FISCHER, WHO WILL TAKE YOUR SEAT FROM SEPTEMBER?**

Peter is my good friend, and we have worked together. I have encouraged him to dive deeply into Georgia and to enjoy this country fully. This is a beautiful country, and you can see and experience many good things here, especially talking to as many people as possible outside the narrow realm of politics. To meet the people in the regions, to meet people from different walks of life - younger and older people. These conversations can give you strength and help you stand on both feet in political life, and you will not be afraid to be criticized by one or another person.

**TWO YEARS EARLIER THAN EXPECTED, GEORGIA SENT ITS REQUEST FOR EU CANDIDACY STATUS THIS MARCH. WHAT'S YOUR OPINION ON THAT? WHAT WOULD YOU, AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF ONE OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL EU**

**COUNTRIES, ADVISE US TO DO?**

The decision of the European Council to grant membership perspective to Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova is, of course, a big step forward in the EU's policy in Eastern Europe. This will create a different European Union in the future, and we want the three countries to succeed and advance on the way and become members of the European Union. We want them to meet the criteria we defined in Copenhagen many years ago for all new candidates. This means a transformation in the three countries, and specific changes are necessary, but these are things that the people in these countries also want and are part of becoming a European country in the total sense.

**SINCE THE EU POSTPONED DECIDING WHETHER TO GIVE US EU CANDIDACY STATUS, OUR WESTERN PARTNERS HAVE STARTED TO BE ATTACKED BY THE RULING PARTY. WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT IT?**

Not only Western partners have come under attack. I've noticed in the last couple of weeks that the political climate in Georgia has become even more adversarial than it was earlier. It is the government against the opposition, opposition against the government and other opposition parties. Sometimes NGOs are involved, and embassies and ambassadors are also drawn into it. It is unfortunate, of course, and just the opposite of what the EU encouraged Georgia to show. The impression for European political leaders is that the aggressive ways of Georgian politics have paralyzed the country and made it unable to progress.



The impression for European political leaders is that the aggressive ways of Georgian politics have paralyzed the country and made it unable to progress

gian politics have paralyzed the country and made it unable to progress. They would like to see parties work together and showing that this is a country that can rule itself and transform itself, and that politics can meet the people's expectations. This is what we are hoping for.

**WHAT WOULD YOU ADVISE THE OPPOSITION, WHICH DOESN'T WANT TO WORK WITH THE RULING PARTY?**

Well, this is part of political life, that you often have to work with people you do not trust to the fullest extent. It is not a circle of friends, it's not a beautiful family you are working with; you are working with political adversaries and opponents. But there can be no misunderstanding of what the EU has asked for. Point number one of the 12 points says expressly that parties should work together to achieve the reforms and the outcomes, and I don't think this is asking too much. A party which considers itself pro-European should take this request and this point into account and help Georgia move closer to the European Union. There is no excuse for different behavior.

**GEORGIAN MEDIA HAS BECOME SUBJECT TO ATTACK FROM ALL SIDES. BOTH THE RULING**

**PARTY AND THE OPPOSITION ARE MORE THAN CRITICAL OF THEM. WHAT'S YOUR OPINION?**

There have been different kinds of attacks on the media. One thing we remember vividly is the 5th of July last year, when media representatives were physically and violently attacked in the streets of Tbilisi. This was a shock to everybody who witnessed it, and I'm pleased that this year, the events around Pride Week took place in a peaceful atmosphere and were well protected. This is one kind of attack on the media. When it comes to verbal attacks to criticism, the media are part of public and political life. I've often heard the opinion, and I share it, that many media channels are polarized or even more polarized than some political parties. So, the media should not be afraid of being criticized. They should look at their role and responsibility in political life and make a significant contribution, even if they are not mentioned in the 12 points of the EU. They can make a substantial contribution to improving the situation in Georgia. Focusing on real issues and talking to interlocutors quietly elucidates the readers and viewers and tells them something new, instead of looking for sensations of mudslinging and verbal violence. This is my wish for the Georgian media and for the Georgian people, and I want to say in my last interview that I'm very grateful for these four years and for everything I've experienced here. For the friendship, for the hard work, for the intensity of this experience, and I wish Georgia well.



The tendency of mutual attacks has taken over to such an extent that it could damage relations between Georgia and the EU

# Medvedev: Georgia Can Only Be United as Part of Russia

BY TEAM GT

On Wednesday, a statement was posted on Dmitry Medvedev's page concerning Russia's imperialist views, saying that after the return of Kyiv, Russia would restore its borders, "for the expansion of which it had been shedding blood for years."

Later, the post was deleted, and Medvedev's assistant Oleg Osipov announced that Medvedev's page in the VKontakte social network "had been hacked."

The post had mentioned Georgia, saying that before the accession of Georgia, it did not exist at all. The post also mentioned the country's occupied territories, claiming that "Georgia can only be united as part of Russia."

Georgian politicians were quick to respond to Dmitry Medvedev, the former President of Russia's post, noting "it can be perceived as a warning and a possible threat to the country."

"Medvedev's statement was a warning for Georgia. Instead of actively cooperating with the Western world and receiving appropriate guarantees, on the contrary, [our ruling party] have strengthened



the anti-Western campaign," National Movement MP Levan Bezhashvili said.

He claimed the statement was intentionally spread.

"The website of the head of the Security Council cannot be easily hacked. This was a deliberate statement and a warning for Georgia, Kazakhstan and the entire progressive world about Rus-

sia's real plans. These plans are not new. The main thing here is how prepared the country is to deal with such threats. Instead of actively cooperating with the Western world and receiving appropriate guarantees, on the contrary, Georgian Dream has strengthened the anti-Western campaign, which increases these threats even more," Bezhashvili said.

"We know that a statement was made that Medvedev's page was hacked. I don't know whether it was hacked or if he was drunk when he wrote it, but what is written in this statement has been said by Putin, Medvedev and their propaganda before," said the Chairman of European Georgia, Giga Bokeria.

"This statement, be it fake or not, sum-

marizes everything. This is the spirit of Putin's regime and this is a threat to the freedom and existence of our country, as well as our neighbors and other countries of the free world.

"There is nothing new in this. It was the same before the aggression in Ukraine. Russian propaganda has been saying this for years - that Georgia 'doesn't exist.' Not long ago, Defense Minister Shoigu said that the Soviet Union would be restored," Bokeria said.

"Medvedev is not only a former president, he is a high-ranking official. Now I'm waiting to hear what Irakli Kobakhidze [Chairman of the Georgian Dream] has to say about it," said Giorgi Vashadze, Chairman of Strategy Builder.

"No-one hacked anything; This is Medvedev's personal position and not only his," he went on. "This is Russia's attitude towards Georgia as a whole. Russia does not recognize Georgia or other countries as states. If we do not understand this well, if we do not understand how dangerous this is, we will not be able to move forward. I wonder what the Georgian Dream party thinks about the Russian government, especially considering Medvedev made a statement and tried to falsify history and humiliate the Georgian people," Vashadze noted.

# Gerard Biard on Charlie Hebdo and Covering the War with Satire



Gerard Biard, Chief Editor of Charlie Hebdo

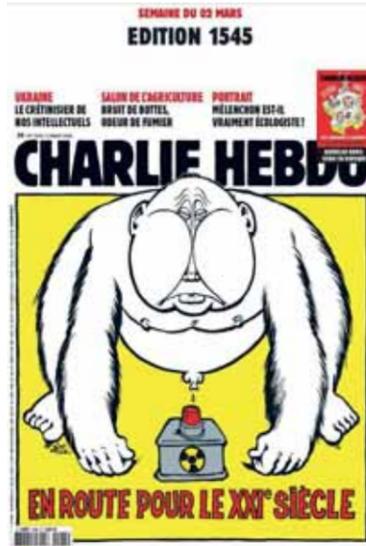
INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

**T**he main fear with the war is that it will degenerate into a third world war. But I think WW3 has already begun – it's a war between countries who have democratic values and democratic political systems on one side, and those who don't have democracy on the other, - Gerard Biard, Charlie Hebdo Editor-in-Chief, tells Radio Free Europe's Georgian Service. "It's not

only about Russia – there is China, Iran and others even in Europe, such as Turkey; countries who don't have a culture of democracy. The main problem with Russia, and you could say the same about China, is that there is no culture of democracy, no foundation for it. And war is easy for dictators. Democracies work differently – why did Trump fail with his "coup"? He tried his best, but failed. Because in the United States, you do have this political culture of democracy, you have institutions, you have something to defend. And there are no such things in Russia. It never was a democracy. How do you sell democracy in a country where they don't buy it?"

## WHAT IS IT LIKE TO LOOK AT THIS WAR THROUGH THE PRISM OF POLITICAL SATIRE?

The problem when you talk about a war through satire is that you have to deal with civilian deaths, and that's one of the major taboos. You have to be very precise, very accurate in what your message is, as satire is usually open to many interpretations. You have to tread very carefully. Looking at the frontpage cartoons we've published, most of the time we use the war in Ukraine to deal with French political realities. For example, I'm right now looking at this cartoon we made a while ago, during the French elections: On it, Putin is toying with a drone, but this is not just a regular drone – we've made it into Madame Le Pen,



and the text says: Putin's drone – can it win? And then we have various cartoons dealing with the character of Putin himself. He is so easy to work on – he really is a classic cartoon character. He is a dictator, and dictators are easiest to draw for a caricaturist, although by far not the safest. But we're used to being threatened, not only by dictators, but by almost anyone who is on social media nowadays. And not just cartoonists – anyone can be threatened by anyone these days. That's the new reality, brought about by social media.

## OF THE MANY CARTOONS CH HAS DONE ON PUTIN, WHICH IS YOUR FAVORITE AND WHY?

There is one where he was made into an ape, a gorilla-man, naked, with a teeny tiny sex, hunched over the red nuclear button. You don't even need to explain this cartoon, it's immediately obvious who he is and why he is portrayed that way. You look at this cartoon and you go – yes, that's Putin alright.

## ON TO MACRON. EYEBROWS ARE RAISED AT HIS PERSISTENCE IN PHONING PUTIN, DESPITE THE FACT PUTIN IS NOT SHOWING ANY SIGNS OF COOPERATING, AND AT HIS REMARKS ON HOW WE SHOULDN'T HUMILIATE RUSSIA AND PUTIN. WHAT'S YOUR TAKE ON MACRON'S POSITION?

Macron wants to be seen as a leader, his main objective is to lead. He tried, but he failed, because it's not so simple. He tried to lead the "European action" regarding the war in Ukraine. He tried to remain the main interlocutor for Putin in Europe, but he didn't understand that Putin doesn't want one. He's not the only one who tried to do that. Sarkozy, in 2008, when Putin attacked Georgia, went to Moscow, to the Kremlin. We didn't know what he said to Putin, but when he came back, looking at his face, we

could see what Putin replied with. It was a "fuck off"! That's the only response Putin knows. Maybe he said the same to Macron, too.

## HOW TELLING IS IT THAT THERE ARE NO NOTABLE SATIRICAL OUTLETS IN RUSSIA? EVEN IN SOVIET TIMES, THERE WAS ONE WHICH WAS IMMENSELY POPULAR AND QUITE OFTEN POKED FUN AT THE SYSTEM TOO.

Putin is a real autocrat. The Soviet Union was a system; with Putin, you have one person who wants to control everything. He doesn't tolerate objections, criticism, nothing. He managed to cancel satire in Russia. You can still do it, but you'll go to jail, or even worse, you'll die. And you won't die in a pleasant way.

## A KREMLIN SPOKESPERSON BLASTED YOU AND YOUR OUTLET FOR A 2015 COVER OF THE RUSSIAN PLANE CRASH IN EGYPT. HE USED THE WORDS "SACRILEGE" AND "BLASPHEMOUS". IRONIC, CONSIDERING WHAT WAS TO COME IN 2022?

Putin doesn't care about the dead in Ukraine or Russia, civilian or otherwise. Unlike us, he doesn't have taboos. He doesn't see dead bodies, he sees numbers. Numbers that are the result of his "special operation."

# Prof. Alexander Etkind on Russian Defederalization and the Expected Outcomes

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

**I**predict Russia's defederalization. It's going to happen, but I can't predict when. It could happen in a year, or decades from now, - Prof. Alexander Etkind, Russian historian and cultural scientist, Professor of History and the Chair of Russia-Europe Relations at the European University Institute, tells Radio Free Europe. "The key issue is the political economy of oil. All that comes from Siberia goes to Moscow, and Moscow redistributes it. When and if Moscow can't do it, they will not have these billions. Then people in Chuvashia will be surprised, and people in Chechnya will be protesting, as this is their bread and butter and weapons. And if they don't have it, they will have to find some other source of existence. It will change things for everyone. Whoever has a river, whoever has access to the sea, railway; whoever has national resources or manufactured goods, or educational facilities to attract foreign students, they will try to get by with that. "The trigger for this defederalization is the war, which has triggered a chain of events which almost unavoidably leads to the collapse of the Russian Federation. The most important people in this development are the locals, the native peoples of Tatarstan or Bashkortostan, Siberia, northern Russia. They have not been listened to for a very long time, because they had no relevance. Some of them are almost extinct, like the Khanty-Mansy, but some of them are numerous and prolific like the Tatars."

## YOU CLAIM THIS DISINTEGRATION COULD HAVE BEEN AVOIDED BY SIMPLY NOT STARTING THE WAR. WHY WAS THAT SUCH A FATAL MISTAKE?

There are people who believe that if Russia wins, everything will go back to the status quo of February 23, back to "business as usual". The "rational elite" hope the damage will be undone and the trade partners will come back to the table, and everything will be fine. There will be losses, but acceptable losses. But even if Russia wins, and I don't believe it can possibly happen, it will take at least three generations, some 50 years, to create some kind of civil peace with Ukraine. Though technically the sanctions could be stopped or reversed, they will be connected to the reparations of Ukraine. And then of course, there is the tribunal of war crimes, of genocide. It will have material consequences, but people cannot be resurrected; someone who is has been raped cannot be unrapped.

## DO YOU EXPECT THIS DEFEDERALIZATION TO HAPPEN PEACEFULLY?

No. The mammoth Soviet Union dismembered itself peacefully, there was not much blood on the streets, but then came war in Chechnya, followed by war in Georgia, and then the war in Ukraine. The violence was delayed, but it happened nevertheless. When it comes to Russia, the best scenario for the dismemberment process is if it follows the established administrative borders and structures. The existing administrations have only rudimentary powers, because they have been curtailed by Putin's government over decades. They may take power and start negotiating amongst themselves, but, of course, these borders would not satisfy everyone, as they were drawn by Soviet officials.

And Russia will do everything to prevent this development, allowing it only when it is unable not to. But 85% of all the Russian troops are deployed in Ukraine, and they came there from Siberia, Sakhalin, Ossetia, from the Chinese



Professor Alexander Etkind

border, where they were stationed for a purpose: the disputed Chinese border has had to be patrolled since the times of the Russian Empire. If something happens, Russia will have either to stop the hostilities in Ukraine and send the troops back, or have no troops available at all. Of course, there is always the nuclear option, although, as Russia hasn't used them in this major, existential war on the territory of Ukraine, people in all those federal subjects, on the territory of the Russian federation, will have good reason to believe that they won't be used against them either.

## THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION HAS OVER 20 FEDERAL SUBJECTS. WHO WOULD YOU EXPECT TO LEAVE IF DEFEDERALIZATION REALLY HAPPENED?

The ethnic republics, especially those with borders with foreign countries. They will have better chances of survival than those who are landlocked within

Russia. Sea routes, river routes will also help. Foreign borders, transportation, natural resources, goods to trade with. And, of course, having coherent ethnicity will be a major determinate. In Tatarstan, for example, there are fewer Tatars, because they started viewing themselves as Russians. Identity is changing. Religion will play a role – Islam is blooming. Language issues are critical.

## WHAT WOULD HAPPEN WITH RUSSIA'S NUCLEAR ARSENAL?

That will be a major concern for everyone, despite the treaties of non-proliferation. We know from the Budapest Memorandum that the Ukrainian case has given a very bad example of how it should not work. One scenario will reproduce 1991, where all the missiles and nuclear pride would stay with Moscow, and everyone would sign whatever was necessary and it would be Budapest 2.0. There could be other scenarios, but to talk about them now

would be pure speculation.

## WITH 80% OF RUSSIAN FORCES BEING DEPLOYED IN UKRAINE, WHICH NEIGHBOR MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO EXPLOIT THE SITUATION?

It's an issue of cost-benefit analysis. China would benefit most, but also Japan. Japan has been trying to get the Kuril Islands back for decades, and now we're reading that some of the submarines and artillery battalions from Kuril that Russia redeployed were killed in Ukraine. Kuril is a disputed territory, there was no peace agreement, so if the Japanese land there, they won't violate any international law.

China is another issue – can they afford it? For American observers, wouldn't it better if China showed some interest in Siberia rather than Taiwan? There is much more to gain in Siberia. If there is a new Henry Kissinger sitting somewhere in the depths of the State Department, if they really wanted to do something new, original and creative, they'd strike a deal with Russia – go to Siberia, leave Taiwan. But maybe there are no such people in the State Department.

## WHAT WOULD IT MEAN FOR GEORGIA AND ITS TWO RUSSIAN-CONTROLLED ENCLAVES?

Georgia would have to see how to use this new configuration to its benefits. They would probably be interested in new border concepts with the new neighbors. As for Abkhazia and Ossetia, clearly Russia has more important things to do, seeing as more than 80% of the troops they had there have gone to Ukraine. Ossetia and Abkhazia will feel the heat once things start happening, and they would have to decide, unable to rely on the military power they are used to. The people of those two "republics" will also have their say, with not that much to fear.

# TI Georgia Claims Economic Dependence on Russia Is Increasing

BY TEAM GT

**T**ransparency International (TI) Georgia on Wednesday published a study “Georgia’s economic dependence on Russia: the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war” which claims that Georgia’s economic dependence on Russia has increased.

TI Georgia analyzed the existing data on trade between Georgia and Russia, tourists from Russia, remittances, foreign direct investments, and registration of Russian companies in Georgia, and concluded that Russia poses a threat to the country.

“In January-June 2022, Georgia received about \$1.2 billion in income from Russia through remittances, tourism and goods export, which is 2.5 times more than the income received from Russia in January-June 2021 from the same sources. Before the pandemic, it exceeds the income received from Russia in January-June 2019 by 36%.”

This means that compared to previous years, Georgia’s economic dependence on Russia is increasing. This growth is mainly due to the jump-like increase in remittances. Exports of goods taken separately decreased.

Among the specific findings of the study, the following was noted:

“In March, April, May and June of this year, about 6,400 Russian companies were registered in Georgia, which is seven times more than the annual rate of 2021. A total of 13,500 Russian companies are registered in Georgia, and half of them were registered after the start of the war in Ukraine. 93% of registered companies since March are individual enterprises, which indicates that a part of Russian citizens moved to



A man holding a poster saying ‘deport Russians’ at a 3 April pro-Ukraine rally in central Tbilisi. Photo by Mariam Nikuradze/OC Media.

Georgia to live and do business.

“In January-June 2022, Georgian exports to Russia decreased by 2.8% and amounted to \$256 million. After the start of the war, in March-June, the export decreased by 16%, which was mainly caused by the decrease in the export of wine and non-alcoholic beverages. Traditionally, wine exports are highly dependent on the Russian market. In January-June 2022, \$58 million worth of wine exported to Russia was 58% of Georgia’s total wine exports.

“In January-June 2022, imports from Russia increased by 51% and amounted to \$706 million. The share of imports from Russia was 11.9% of the total imports of Georgia, which is the highest in the last 15 years. After the start of the war, the import of oil products (fuel) from Russia increased the most – by 280% (by

\$118 million). Electricity import increased 4 times (by \$9 million). Import of coal and coke tripled, and totaled \$23 million. Despite the increase in imports, Russian electricity accounts for only 3.5% of Georgia’s domestic consumption. Russia’s share in the domestic consumption of natural gas is up to 8%. Georgia’s dependence on Russian wheat and flour is still high. In January-June 2022, the share of Russian wheat and wheat flour in the total import of Georgian wheat and wheat flour was 95%.

“In 2022, the growth rate of the arrival of visitors from Russia accelerated significantly, and 247,000 visitors arrived in January-June. However, compared to January-June 2019, the number of visitors from Russia is still three times less. In January-June 2022, the share of Russian visitors in the total number of visi-

tors to Georgia was 15.2%, which was lower than in 2018-2019.

“In April-June 2022, remittances from Russia to Georgia increased 6.5 times and amounted to \$678. The main reason for such a high growth is Russian citizens moving to Georgia, who are bringing money from Russia. In the first quarter of 2022, direct foreign investments from Russia decreased by \$11.2 million.

“Significantly, increased imports of Russian goods, remittances, and the establishment of companies by Russian citizens in Georgia increase the risk that Georgia will be used to circumvent sanctions imposed on Russia. Regardless of whether or not Georgia is used to circumvent sanctions by a specific sanctioned individual or company, increased economic ties mean that Russian businesses and Russian citizens in general

can use Georgia to escape the economic hardship created by sanctions in Russia.”

TI Georgia recommended that the goal of the Georgian government should be to minimize economic dependence on Russia. It also advised what should be done to reduce economic dependence on Russia.

Parliament Speaker Shalva Papuashvili responded to the report by saying that the study is part of a campaign whose purpose is to create a narrative that Georgia is moving away from the West.

“They create false perceptions and then fight against them themselves. In the end, it turned out that Georgia is the least dependent on Russia economically in comparison to other countries.

“It is important for the public to see that this is a campaign, part of a hybrid war, and is directed against Georgia and the Georgian authorities. This is a part of a campaign aimed at shaking the government. The main thing is that people see this and react appropriately,” Papuashvili said.

He further noted that “It is irrelevant to make a comparison with 2020-2021 because there was a pandemic and at that time it was difficult to move around the world. As for the number [of Russians entering Georgia], nothing special is happening. This campaign is not new. In March we saw how far this [propaganda] campaign led us. It has turned into a xenophobic campaign, it has turned into the fact of someone throwing a stone at a Russian citizen in the middle of Chavchavadze. This campaign is a new source of xenophobia,” Papuashvili said.

He added that those coming from Russia are mostly young people with good incomes.

“This is the middle class, coming from Russia because they want the stability, democracy, freedom that can be found in this country,” he concluded.

# The Sit Down: “Web3 Tbilisi” Brings Awareness and Tech Opportunities

BY MICHAEL GODWIN

**T**bilisi has become a hub of tech skill, investment, and opportunity. Local startups and large corporations have staked out their claims to the region’s blossoming talent pool, driving the value of software experts. A women-led duo have taken a leap into this sector to bring more awareness to the next wave of web-based innovation.

CandiKandy is an education startup founded by Mariam Sharmiashvili and Ana Ediberidze. The two have focused their energy on bringing tech-based education to Georgians in an easily understandable and accessible way. Through their training courses and development programs, they aim to create a new generation of Web3 developers, armed with the knowledge and opportunities to drive Georgia’s tech sector.

In their monthly meetings, they bring veterans of Georgia’s tech industry to speak about what to expect, and new happenings in Web3. Interpreted as the next wave of decentralized internet, these experts claim the dominance of “Big Tech” is coming to an end. As a result, this allows for smaller players to gain more share on the web, enhanced privacy, and incorporation of blockchain and token-based technologies.

GEORGIA TODAY sat down with Mariam and Ana to explore their new

venture, comment on the criticism, and find out what’s in store for CandiKandy in the future.

**THE WEB3 CONCEPT OF DECENTRALIZATION OF THE INTERNET OPENS A LOT OF SPACE FOR SMALLER COMPANIES TO GET INVOLVED. HOW IS CANDIKANDY A PART OF THIS?**

All the companies who are moving to Web3 or are starting from scratch need team members who can do the job related to Web3. There are many new roles that appeared within the concept of Web3, yet there are few educational resources available for one to learn effectively in the local language.

That’s where CandiKandy comes in. Our goal is to train people to become Web3 developers. We do this through in-person classes, led by a lecturer, and held in Georgian. By creating more professionals in this field, it benefits the growth of the Web3 ecosystem. On the one hand, we give people opportunities for career growth, and on the other we help Web3 companies who are looking to hire in Georgia.

**SOME, INCLUDING ELON MUSK, HAVE SAID THAT “WEB3” IS JUST A “MARKETING BUZZWORD.” WHAT IS YOUR TAKE ON THIS PERCEPTION OF THE NEXT ITERATION OF THE INTERNET?**

It’s always good to have people with different opinions about the topic, since it triggers healthy criticism that leads to good questions. If we follow the facts and you see the market, then you see the growth and you see the demand. There is more demand for jobs than supply of roles.

This means there is an opportunity for people to transition their career and have a better quality of life, since the skills are very highly paid. Call it “marketing buzzword” or whatever you want, the fact is that there is opportunity that you can grab and run with.

**THE TECH INDUSTRY IS ALREADY A CROWDED SPACE. WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES TO YOUR GROWTH AND WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO STAND OUT?**

The biggest challenge at the moment is raising awareness of opportunities in Web3 in Georgia. There are many people who still aren’t sure what Web3 is. They have heard this word many times yet don’t fully understand the meaning of it, or why they should transition their career.

That’s why CandiKandy organizes monthly events, called “Web3 Tbilisi,” where invited speakers talk about opportunities and share with us their experiences in the field. We want to attract more women into the tech since at the moment the market is dominated by males. That’s something we are very



Ana Ediberidze (left) and Mariam Sharmiashvili (right) are the founders of education startup CandiKandy. Photo by Mariam Sharmiashvili

passionate about changing, and for which we are actively partnering with different communities.

**HOW DO YOU SEE YOU AND YOUR TEAM GROWING IN GEORGIA WITH REGARD TO THE EXPANSION OF**

**TECH OPPORTUNITIES IN THE REGION?**

I think expansion of tech opportunities in Georgia is directly related to our growth. The more companies transitioning into Web3, the more jobs will appear locally. We will fill out those roles with our students.

# The Outstanding Conference Spaces of Golden Tulip Design Tbilisi

A new international brand design hotel - Golden Tulip Design Tbilisi - has opened in Georgia's capital city. The workspaces and conference rooms presented there are a completely innovative product on the Georgian market, being spaces that are as ideal for an official meeting as they are for a larger seminar. Sopo Azariashvili, Marketing Manager of Golden Tulip Design Tbilisi, talked to us about the hotel.

"Golden Tulip is a strategic brand of Louvre Hotels, the world's leading multi-brand guest host group, focused on introducing new, innovative approaches in the industry," she tells us. "The group currently runs 1,600 hotels in 54 countries. PlayTime. Anytime - is the brand slogan, and it means we pay close attention to each small detail, as we believe that every minute is a new opportunity to create a good mood. This concept is echoed by all the hotel services and conference spaces."



## TELL US ABOUT THE INNOVATIVE WORK AND CONFERENCE SPACES OF YOUR HOTEL.

Our team of professionals is ready to successfully organize any type of event - be it an official meeting or a corporate event. The Tita Conference and Creative

Rooms are fully equipped with modern audio-visual equipment. Both areas have an ultra-modern monitor that combines a screen, projector, and computer. It is important that the monitor is adapted to all types of electronic devices and is distinguished by high-quality imagery

and audio.

The Tita Conference Room is the best choice for different types of events. There, you can plan a conference, workshop, or any business event. 60 people can be seated in the hall.

The creative room is a completely dis-



tinctive space. These days, there is a special demand for locations for workshops and team building, and the creative atmosphere here will help you do better work, having been designed specially to help you relax, with iconic furniture made abroad. During brainstorming, you can write any idea directly on the walls of the room, and you'll find Georgian board games that will help you spend time during your breaks.

## THE HOTEL HAS A SPECIAL PLACE FOR RESTAURANTS. CAN GUESTS IN THE CONFERENCE ROOM USE THESE SPACES?

Yes, guests will have the opportunity to have their coffee breaks or lunch in the hotel restaurants, from which you can see an unforgettable panoramic view of Old Tbilisi. Golden Tulip Design Tbilisi combines a restaurant of three different concepts: Tita Restaurant, Tita Terrace and Coffee & Co, which offer guests special technology international cuisine enriched with Georgian flavors.

# On the Systematic Land Registration Reform

In January 2022, the National Agency of Public Registry (NAPR) of the Ministry of Justice of Georgia launched an ambitious nationwide reform of systematic land registration.

Since 1992, despite several reforms related to land registration and the creation of cadastral maps, the initial registration process of land has yet to be completed. 1/3 of land (except for the occupied territories) in Georgia is still not registered and/or accurately recorded in the unified cadastral database. This means that a significant part of land is excluded from the economic turnover.

The nationwide systematic land registration reform is a three-year project aiming at completing the land registration process across the country.

The private, state or municipal land plots in all municipalities of Georgia (except for occupied territories and self-governing cities - Tbilisi, Batumi, Kutaisi, Rustavi and Poti) will be systematically surveyed and registered in 2022-2024. The reform covers more than 1000 administrative units of the country.

The Systematic Land Registration reform will support:

- Protection of owners' rights,
- Development of social projects,
- Implementation of effective land administration and land use policies that will promote sustainable economic growth in the agriculture and agribusiness sectors.

We spoke to Oleg (Bacho) Tortladze, Chairman of NAPR, to find out more.

"The Systematic Land Registration Reform covers all municipalities of Georgia (except for occupied territories and self-governing cities - Tbilisi, Batumi, Kutaisi, Rustavi and Poti)," he says. "Within three years, according to the approved schedule, 1,200,000 hectares of unregistered land will be surveyed and registered. Meanwhile, the accuracy and quality of already registered data also will be verified and improved.

"The schedule of the areas for conducting systematic cadastral survey and registration was determined according to the following criteria:

- Lack of registered area;
- Number of land plots to be registered;
- Population size;
- Geographic location;
- Climate conditions.

"Within the framework of systematic land registration, from January 1 to June 30, 2022, more than 730 employees were recruited (6 coordinators, 251 registrars, 10 registrar managers, 437 real estate surveyors, 20 managers of immovable property surveyors and 10 public

announcement specialists) at NAPR," Tortladze notes. "Apart from human resources, special off-road vehicles and surveying instruments have been procured, used for field cadastral surveys.

"Innovative methods are leveraged in the process to ensure anti-corruption practices and enhance the transparency and efficiency of the registration process, for instance, web application of e-minutes. UAVs (drones) are also actively used to get accurate and high-resolution orthophotos, allowing technical inspection of the field surveys of land plots.

"Cadastral survey works were completed (with WB support) in 21 administrative units. 47,400 (12,088 ha) land plots were surveyed and, to date, 14,540 land plots have been registered. The total number of owners is 18,489, with unique female owners amounting to 9,030," Tortladze tells us.

## SYSTEMATIC AND SPORADIC LAND REGISTRATION

Systematic registration is the proactive process when the government initiates a systematic survey of land plots in specific areas, collects relevant documentation, and registers land titles. Sporadic registration means registration of land titles on the basis of an application and registration documents submitted by an interested person.

Within the framework of systematic registration, citizens will receive the following services free of charge:

- Land cadastral survey works;
- Preparation of a cadastral plan;
- Retrieval and systematization of titling documents;
- Certification of the signatures of the parties to the transaction;
- Recognition/legalization of ownership of illegally occupied land plots;
- Notary mediation;
- Statement of facts;
- Determination of compliance of titling document with the location of the land plot;
- Registration of land ownership rights and making changes to the registered data

## CITIZEN BENEFITS

Citizens register land free-of-charge, at no additional cost. The registered land means that ownership is secured and guaranteed by the state. Initial registration allows the citizens to enjoy the ownership rights fully, i.e. that initial registration is a pre-condition for conducting any transaction on the immovable property whether it is mortgage, sales or lease. It will enable the citizens to use their land to secure a loan and use

it at their discretion.

Citizens living abroad also can register their land under the systematic land registration reform and enjoy the benefits of having registered land ownership.

Systematic registration does not affect the "social status" of the citizens.

## THE REGISTRATION PROCESS

Once systematic registration is started in the administrative unit, citizens who own/possess a land plot in the registration area receive SMS notification on the commencement of works, and they have the opportunity to register the land plot. In the registration process, citizens need to correctly indicate the boundaries of the land plot to an employee of the National Agency of Public Registry, attend the survey process, confirm the use of the land plot by the owner/landholder/user of at least two adjacent land plots located in the same registration block, or by the owner/landholder/user of at least three non-adjacent land plots and sign the on-site minutes in the presence of a witnesses.

The project envisages a multi-step system for registering land ownership rights, which ensures the accuracy of cadastral and legal data on the registered land.

The following steps will be implemented according to the registration areas:

- Preparatory works (including document retrieval and processing);
- Awareness campaign and social mobilization;
- Field cadastral survey works;
- Quality control of data;
- Public display of data (part of publicity).

Following the completion of the above steps, the right to the land plot will be registered.

Within the systematic land registration, all private, state or municipal land plots in all municipalities of Georgia (except for occupied territories and self-governing cities - Tbilisi, Batumi, Kutaisi, Rustavi and Poti) will be systematically surveyed and registered.

A person who wants to register unlawfully occupied land, should correctly indicate the boundaries of the land plot to a NAPR employee; attend the survey process; confirm the fact of squatting/unlawfully occupying the land plot by the owner/landholder/user of at least two adjacent land plots located in the same registration block, or by the owner/landholder/user of at least three non-adjacent land plots; sign the on-site inspection minutes with a witnesses.

## RAISING PUBLIC AWARENESS

The awareness-raising campaign is a very important component for the suc-



cessful implementation of the reform. It involves proactive information dissemination to all the state bodies, local authorities and NGOs operating in the country, private sector and Georgian citizens, and immigrants through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia. To that end, various media are used, for instance, the NAPR website and Facebook page, YouTube and the reform web portal (napr.gov.ge). The awareness campaign also includes providing information to the local population in their native languages using all the available information channels (such as local and national television stations, radio, printed materials, social networks, etc.).

Social mobilization in the administrative unit starts with collection of the contact data of the interested persons. According to an agreed schedule, the population is informed when the field works (cadastral survey/measurements of land plots) will be conducted; Georgian citizens abroad are informed and the data on the land parcels in their ownership are received electronically. Following verification of the landowners' data, information is distributed and a detailed description of the land title registration process and procedures are provided (especially the recognition of

property rights to unlawfully occupied/squatted land parcels).

Social mobilization is also important for public display of the collected data, seeing all the relevant information channels used to inform interested persons on the surveyed land parcels, period and place of the public display and the procedures for getting more detailed information. Social mobilization also focuses on women's engagement and security of property rights of people with disabilities.

## THE BUDGET

The total cost of the systematic land registration is estimated at 120 mln GEL, of which 15 million GEL is contributed by the World Bank. In view of the importance of the reform, other costs will be allocated from the state budget on an annual basis. More than 730 surveyors/registrars have been recruited at NAPR for implementation of the systematic land registration reform. These newly recruited surveyors take intensive training courses and go through a certification process before starting field surveys.

Apart from human resources, technical resources, special off-road vehicles and surveying instruments have been procured, which is used for field cadastral surveys.

# Cities of the Eastern Partnership Countries Share Experience in Creating Innovative Development Solutions

**A**s the region of Eastern Europe and Central Asia faces a manifold crisis brought on by the devastating war in Ukraine, a regional Show&Tell event brought together 300 local self-government entities from the Eastern Partnership countries to discuss ways to overcome the growing challenges and share knowledge about building sustainable systems and livelihoods.

National participants of the Show&Tell meetup, which took place in the Georgian city of Kutaisi on 28 July, represented municipalities united in the Mayors for Economic Growth (M4EG) Facility, a regional initiative supported by the European Union (EU) and implemented by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

Representatives of 56 municipalities attended in person, while member municipalities from Armenia, Azerbaijan, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine joined the event online.

The Show&Tell meetup posed an experience-sharing opportunity, with 13 municipalities presenting their work-in-progress on designing 'municipal transformation portfolios' and applying 'urban imaginaries', two innovative approaches supported by the robust grant programmes designed to promote initiatives that seek to reimagine or reinvent key aspects of local living.

Four cities (Areni, Batumi, Kutaisi and Ceadir-Lunga) that had embarked on a 'municipal transformation portfolio' journey, presented their work aimed at addressing the complex development challenges by supporting the initiatives of local authorities and bringing addi-



Photo by Vladimir Valishvili/UNDP

tional capabilities to the local level.

Each of the four cities has a unique approach to building a transformational portfolio. The Armenian city of Areni is focusing its portfolio on sustainable tourism, while Batumi in Georgia is pursuing a concept of a start-up ecosystem that contributes to a renewed urban identity and encourages a culture of entrepreneurship. Another Georgian city of Kutaisi is exploring a smart eco-city model to support the municipality in

transitioning towards a green and sustainable life using nature-based urban innovation. Ceadir-Lunga in Moldova is creating a resilient, inclusive and sustainable energy system in the municipality, designing new avenues for diversifying energy sources, increasing energy efficiency, and providing individual households with low-cost energy solutions.

Nine municipalities selected for the 'urban imaginaries' program shared their

achievements in improving public transportation, economic and infrastructure development and waste management. Representatives of the Association of Ukrainian Cities spoke about their experience managing the cities during the unfolding crisis.

"Alongside the developmental, economic and climate-related challenges, some of the cities across the region carry an additional burden caused by the humanitarian and refugee crisis that fol-

lowed the Ukraine war. Innovative and sustainable solutions can assist the cities to resolve pending issues while maintaining operational systems," said Colombe de Mercey, Attaché - Team Leader of Governance and Human Capital at the European Union Delegation to Georgia.

"Managing a city today requires a holistic approach to development and the innovative tools to address emerging challenges," said UNDP Deputy Resident Representative in Georgia, Anna Chernyshova. "The EU and UNDP offer municipalities complex support to help the cities' managers design and implement such solutions, meet citizens' needs and create sustainable growth opportunities."

Other speakers included Thibault Charlet, Program Manager, Directorate-General for Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG Near), and Tina Stoum, M4EG Regional Project Manager.

Georgia's Deputy Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure Mzia Giorgobiani addressed the Show&Tell participants on behalf of the Georgian Government.

###

The M4EG Facility draws on the Mayors for Economic Growth Initiative, launched and funded by the European Union in 2017. Starting from 2021, the M4EG Facility has been managed by UNDP in close cooperation with the EU, local authorities, and a range of partners.

Focused on intermediate cities in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, the M4EG program offers learning and knowledge exchange on the development of innovative growth strategies adapted to the local context.

# Public Defender Checks Implementation of Free Meal Programme

**I**n February and March 2022, the Public Defender's Office monitored 59 randomly selected soup kitchens operating in 25 municipalities of Georgia.

The free meal program is being implemented in almost all municipalities, which is an important service for realizing the right to adequate food. The right to adequate food implies access to the food necessary for a healthy and active life, including the minimum ration of adequate calories, protein and other nutrients.

As noted in the statement, the Public Defender considers that the situation in some municipalities, both in terms of food delivery service and sanitary-hygienic conditions, meets the minimum requirements, however, the overall situation is unsatisfactory.

In particular, the monitoring revealed the following:

There is no uniform standard for the management or delivery of free meal service in the country, and therefore, no amount or calories of food to be served, no mandatory requirements relating to the arrangement of physical environment, safety or sanitary-hygienic conditions, are defined by the relevant standards.

When implementing the service, the nutritional needs of the beneficiaries are

not considered, and the ration mainly depends on the amount of money allocated from the budget. Accordingly, no energy value of the dinner, age of the beneficiaries, their health conditions or religious beliefs are considered when planning the menu.

No relevant specialists are involved in the menu planning. There have been cases when the menu was planned by an accountant and not by a specialist.

In most cases, the menu is not changed throughout the year.

It is noteworthy that in some cases, especially in Tbilisi, beneficiaries take only bread from the soup kitchens. In particular, on specific days, when only soups are served (pea soup, bean soup, vegetable soup), beneficiaries take only bread. This can be explained both by the fact that beneficiaries may not like the taste of the meal or by the lack of calories. Nutritious meal containing meat is served only two days a week. The number of beneficiaries arriving at the soup kitchens increases on those days. In addition, some of the soup kitchens forbid beneficiaries to take only bread.[1]

The small amount of money allocated for soup kitchens is especially noticeable in the Tbilisi municipality, where the amount per beneficiary is GEL 1.30, which is less than the daily amount per beneficiary in the regions (for example,

GEL 2.47 in - Borjomi, GEL 2.50 - in Kutaisi, GEL 2.05 - in Akhaltsikhe, GEL 2.20 - in Samtredia, GEL 2.65 - in Telavi).

Report notes soup kitchens are usually located in the administrative centers and beneficiaries living in the remote villages have to travel long distances to receive the service. For example, the beneficiaries living in the farthest village in the Baghdati municipality have to travel about 30 km daily to use the free meal service, while the residents of the Chkhorotsku municipality have to travel 15 km.

Some of the municipalities do not have additional lists along with the major lists of the beneficiaries. Accordingly, the municipality explains to the waiting persons that they will be able to receive free meals only if a person is removed from the major list due to death or other reasons.

"The monitoring made it clear that the majority of facilities do not meet universal design standards. The facilities do not have elevators, some entrances do not have ramps and buildings are only accessible by stairs. Almost every entrance, including those with a ramp, has a threshold that prevents wheelchair users from moving independently.

Production of segregated statistics on service users according to disability is another problem. No information is processed on the beneficiaries' special nutri-



tional needs (including the nutritional needs of people with critical health condition, children, pregnant women, geriatrics).

The challenges identified make it clear that it is important for the Government of Georgia to ensure the development and approval of minimum standards for free meal services, which should take into account issues relating to the management of the service, menu calories,

food quality, safety, sanitary and hygienic requirements, rehabilitation and equipment of food facilities, compliance with hygienic norms, etc. It is also important for the local municipalities to study the local food-related needs and to collect statistical data, as well as to increase the municipal budget and seek additional funds in order to ensure access to food according to the existing needs," reads the report.

# Why I Danced. Part II

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

**C**ontinued from Part I: Four young men of Etseri are heading towards a giant snow figure to attack it and seek to change the fortune of their village.

Soon the landscape of the Greater Caucasus on the other side, north of Etseri, rose into view to meet them, a day's horseback and more away. Of all the mighty peaks in that long chain, only one was free of the cloud which drifted across them, dominating the scene in typical fashion, cutting upwards like an axe blade: Ushba. The sight both cheered and sobered them with its harsh splendor; indeed, they felt that the seeing was in both directions, the Mountain watching too. Their target came nearer, not far below the top of the Mountain Wall itself.

From up close, the Dancer was much different in form from what they had seen from their homes, becoming merely several connected masses of snow and ice several feet thick. His limbs' edges and outlines were fuzzy with melt, delicate and dripping in the hot sun. But it might be days or even weeks before he completely disappeared into the Enguri before being reborn again, a frozen phoenix made of the same water which had created him every season back into the distant past: frozen, melted, evaporated, and then dropped down again as new snow, an unending cycle repeated as long as the world itself remains. And they knew exactly which parts to work on, and which one to leave to suit their purposes.

They tied their horses to scrub to graze on the mountainside grasses and drink from meltwater puddles, and stopped similarly to eat their bread and cheese to gain energy before attacking the task which was their whole reason for journeying up here. As it was Demetre's idea and persuasion which had brought the four, he directed them, a natural leader: "Ramiz, you take that arm over there. Start where it's widest and thickest, breaking up the snow and shoveling it



downhill where the warmer ground will melt it fast. We don't want anyone else have time to see and interfere! Guladi, this leg here nearest me, same thing. Try to shovel where Ramiz isn't working. Tengo, that arm. I'll help you as it's the biggest."

They split up and threw their backs and arms into it, far out of the usual snow-shoveling season but still tightly muscled from plowing, hay-scything, woodcutting and wrestling one another just for fun. The sun bore down on them, but they were used to the elements and inspired for the job. If only they could better the life of their whole village even if it meant at the same time taking some success from others! Here, the jealousy had almost always run high, leading to age-old quarrels, feuds, bitternesses, instead of the farther-seeing cooperation which would have benefited all and made

the Svans famous, not infamous. Hurt was piled on hurt over decades, centuries; memories running deep, grudges held dearly.

However, these young men did not know what they were awakening: me. I felt pain cutting into me instead of the usual slow dissolution which the sun's rays brought over weeks. Turning my head, I focused a lens of ice and brought it to bear on my little tormentors, seeing them. Their speech and intentions vibrated through my crystals, and I understood their intentions: to dismember me for their own gain and others' expense. This would harm not only me but most of Svaneti, which would at least hear of their willfulness and seek retaliation, only perpetuating the ancient pains. It was intolerable: not only that they were cutting me up ahead of my time, but that their hearts were twisted,

thinking good but trying to accomplish it through malice, which can never in the end work as intended. There must be a reckoning. The dance began.

I fell upon them, rolling over and over, bearing each writhing boy down the mountain inside my arms and legs and torso. I was going to perish for the year soon anyway: better now, like this, than to allow such wrongness to take root and become an unnatural, even anti-natural tradition! The laws of the world would be strained to breaking point, and untold chaos given rein.

[Original ending, which I replaced for being too bleak- read the chosen ending next week: We rushed on towards the frothing Enguri and suddenly were lost in its churning, borne away downstream and gone. The horses I left, rearing in fright, because they were innocent of all ill will.

One person, sister to one of the boys, had seen them go up but did not know their plans. And she thus also saw their terrible fall in the strange avalanche. She screamed out their names, ran home sobbing, had to be calmed down before her parents could get the story out of her: Ramiz is gone, I saw it through the telescope! Also Tengo, Guladi and Demo! Oh God, why, why did this happen! Take me instead, but bring them back to us!

Soon the whole of Etseri had heard, and was in an uproar of wailing. Not only were the young men dead, but there would be no proper wake for them as their bodies could not be found! Just empty suits laid out in coffins, hat to shoes, going into otherwise graves, and the agonized hearts of those abandoned for a stupid wish. The hardest funeral of all kinds, one for the lost. The valleys echoed with cries for days.

But had they learned their lesson?

It took time. At first there was a desire, especially among the fathers of the dead boys, to continue attacking me in revenge every year, every time I formed. Eventually, after some more losses attributed to avalanches, there was an actual turning around in the whole region, a communal promise sworn to leave me to come and go as I will each year. To not worry so much about fate, but rather to work towards making things better for each other as well as for oneself. This is the good which came out of death and sorrow.

May they one day understand, forgive me for my part, and grow wiser and stronger for it. Otherwise we are all lost: I, the Dancer, and the people which are part of creation's pinnacle, small though they are.]

To be concluded next week.

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)

## EU and UN Support Human Rights Training for Public Servants, Civic Activists and Journalists

**H**uman rights and liberties are safeguarded by Georgia's Constitution, policy documents and international commitments, undertaken under the UN conventions and treaties. However, Georgia is still on the way to ensuring meaningful human rights protection for all citizens, especially for the vulnerable and marginalized groups.

Recent research shows that Georgian people are paying greater attention to human rights and expect more proactive steps from the authorities to safeguard the rights of all citizens. Two out of five respondents (38.6%) believe that the state does not respond adequately to acts of violence and discrimination against LGBTQI+ people. The vast majority of the respondents think that the state should better protect the rights of people with disabilities, including greater support for inclusive education (70%), inclusive infrastructure (85%) and disability assistance (82%).

With the belief that education and awareness are critical steps toward a human rights-based society, the European Union (EU), and the United Nations (UN) work in partnership to equip Georgia's public and civic sectors with real-world, practical insights into human rights protection.

A series of training organized in July by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the South Cauca-



Photo by Leli Blagonravova/ Vladimir Valishvili/UNDP

sus Field Presence of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), with EU support, brought together representatives of state institutions, media, professional associations and civil society. This educational ini-

tiative focused on the available tools and mechanisms to ensure respect for human rights in all areas.

On 15-16 July, a training session for journalists carried out in partnership with the Office of the State Minister for

Reconciliation and Civic Equality, addressed the impact of misinformation and disinformation on protecting the rights of ethnic and national minorities. The training program highlighted the critical role of the media in combating hate speech and fake news and providing the public with reliable and trustworthy information.

On 17-18 July, lawyers from the Legal Aid Service and the Georgian Bar Association participated in a training on the rights of people with disabilities. They discussed international standards in protecting disability rights and the challenges faced by people with disabilities in Georgia in getting access to justice.

On 19-20 July, human rights activists and representatives of the organizations engaged in protecting and promoting the rights of LGBTQI+ persons learned how to prepare and submit alternative reports and communications to the UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies and how to use the UN human rights mechanisms for advocacy and strategic litigation.

On 28-29 July, representatives of Georgia's Public Defender's Office discussed how to better protect the Right to Health in Georgia and refreshed their knowledge of international standards in this area.

"At UNDP, we deeply believe that respect for human rights is the foundation of democracy," said Anna Chernyshova, UNDP Deputy Resident Representative in Georgia. "A democratic

society is primarily assessed by how it protects the rights of minorities and not just the rights of the majority. With this in mind, we join hands with the European Union and our partners to assist journalists, lawyers, civic activists and the LGBTQI+ communities to better understand and more effectively protect human rights, ensuring that no-one is left behind."

"Education and awareness are crucial investments in the effort to achieve a just society in which all human rights of all persons are valued, respected, and protected," said Vladimir Shkolnikov, Senior Human Rights Advisor for the South Caucasus Field Presence of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

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The European Union and the United Nations, through their 'Human Rights for All' program, promote a human rights culture in Georgia and help increase public awareness of human rights values and principles. Working with a wide range of local and international partners, the EU and the UN seek to ensure that all citizens - with no exception, can enjoy the rights and freedoms safeguarded by Georgia's Constitution and major policy documents in line with the country's national priorities and international commitments under the Association Agreement with the European Union, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the UN human rights treaties.

# Successful Georgian Pianist in New York - Meet Liana Pailodze Harron



Photos by: Asiya Korepanova, Antek Olesik

Georgia in the 1990s, the capital of Tbilisi is dark without electricity, but a 6-year-old girl's heart is full of hope and light. The room is candlelit, and young Liana is playing the piano. That little girl would never imagine that many years later, she would end up on the stages of brightly lit concert halls in New York City. There, she would tell her listeners all about her beautiful little country that gave her the love of music: The Republic of Georgia. And it was through diligence and hard work that she was able to achieve all of this.

GEORGIA TODAY introduces you to this very talented, humble, and fascinating pianist, Liana Pailodze Harron, who has been living in New York City for years, as her career unfolds with the speed and energy of the fast city.

"I left my beautiful country to study in the United States 21 years ago, where I attended the University of Miami, Frost School of Music and earned a doctoral degree in Piano Performance," she tells us. "While in Miami, I had the opportu-

nity to study many different genres of music, and in 2013 I moved to New York City to pursue my career as a performer and educator. New York offers wonderful opportunities, and it was important for me to be closer to the large Georgian community living there. In addition to my performing career, I give clinics and masterclasses in various universities, such as Slippery Rock University, Texas A & M University - Corpus Christi, Oklahoma University, and Berry College, to name a few," she says.

#### HOW BUSY ARE YOU AT PRESENT? WHAT IS YOUR REGULAR DAY LIKE?

Currently, I am very, very busy. The fast pace of New York is contagious, and it is impossible to slow down. At present, I am booked to perform at different concert venues, festivals, and conventions across the states. Also, I'm working in a piano faculty at a music school in Manhattan called 92nd Street Y, with approximately 16 students in my studio. And with all this, I'm also a mother. Being a

mother is the most important job to me, and balancing my career and personal life isn't easy, but not impossible. What works for me is planning ahead and staying extremely organized. It's not possible any other way for me. Women are super multi-taskers, and I'm able to be a full-time mom and professional musician without giving up much, except for having to ignore the sense of feeling tired. In many ways, becoming a mother helped my career as well. It gave me more self-assurance and confidence. I believe that women can do it all, be great at their careers and being amazing moms. The key to it all is being a hard worker and keeping your eyes on your goals.

#### WHAT ARE YOU LIKE AS A MOTHER AND WHAT ARE YOU LIKE AS A PIANIST?

I'd like to think that I'm a patient and a kind mother, but also strict. It is important to me that my son grows up knowing his culture and Georgian language. As we speak, he's playing in the Manglisi forest with Georgian kids. We try come to Georgia often.

As a musician, I play different genres of music and try to avoid being labeled as only a classical or a solo musician. There are so many interesting avenues when it comes to creating music.

#### HOW DO YOU SELECT YOUR REPERTOIRE AND WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SAY WITH YOUR RECORDING OUTPUT?

I approach them in very different ways. If I'm choosing pieces for a concert, I keep in mind my audience and what they might relate to. And, of course, I always try to include a piece by a Georgian composer whenever possible. However, when it comes to my recording projects, it is extremely important to me for my next project to be unlike any of my previous releases. For example, my solo album Light-Year was recorded during the Covid lockdown, and is composed

of short cinematic pieces that depict the state of uncertainty and loneliness. Whatever I do, I always try to tell a story.

#### WHICH GEORGIAN COMPOSITIONS DO YOU PERFORM MOST FREQUENTLY?

My favorite compositions to perform are by Meri Davitashvili, mostly because it reminds me of my childhood, as I knew her very well and loved her like a grandmother. But of course, it's impossible not to have a blast performing fiery pieces by Laghidze and Machavariani.

#### TELL US ABOUT VESNA DUO AND THE GRAMMY AWARDS.

Vesna Duo was born during the early months of the pandemic, when I called Ksenija Komljenovic, a very talented Serbian composer and percussionist, and asked if she wanted to create a project together. We decided to do something bold, and that's when she arranged Stravinsky's The Rite of Spring for marimba and piano. The rest happened very quickly. We started to get invited to different events, and, in a way, Vesna Duo turned into a brand. We've submitted our debut album to the Grammys for the upcoming awards season.

Our most important goal is to share the music of our countries. Vesna Duo's next album will consist of the music of Serbia and Georgia, for which I will be arranging the Georgian compositions, with Ksenija arranging compositions from Serbia. 2022-2023 is looking very busy for us and we are hoping to perform in Georgia sometime soon as well.

#### NOW TELL US HOW YOUR WORK WITH AEROSMITH AND STEVEN TYLER CAME ABOUT.

Steven Tyler was invited to the Humanitarian Award at the United Nations, where he was to perform two songs. When I met him, he asked about my accent. We both had a big laugh when I said I was from Georgia, as I did not have a southern accent from the state of Georgia in the United States. At that point he asked if I would play one of his songs. I

wanted to scream and jump, but instead answered very calmly "Of course, Mr. Tyler." I ran out very quickly and tried to memorize his song "Livin' on the Edge" as fast as I could. The rehearsal went very well, and so did the performance. Mr. Tyler is very kind, humble, and funny. He performs only on white pianos and must have his scarves wrapped around the microphone. One of my favorite moments was backstage, when we were just about to walk on stage to perform. We were all dressed in black, and I had my curly hair straightened for a professional look. He walked up to me and asked if he could fix my hair - who says no to that?! Well, he shook all my hair until it looked crazy, and then he said "now this is rock & roll!"

#### LET'S TALK ABOUT YOUR CHILDHOOD.

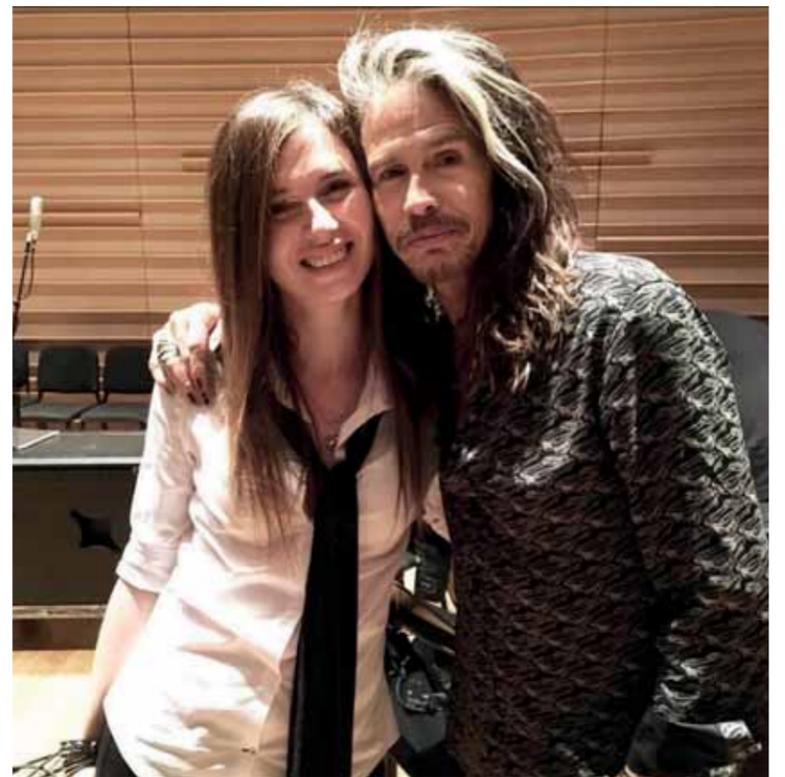
I grew up in Tbilisi, Georgia and studied at the music school for gifted children. My teacher, Marina Gelashvili taught me everything I know today, but I fell in love with playing piano when I was 4. Like in most Georgian families, music was everywhere, and one of my favorite memories is playing four-hands with my mom during the power outages.

#### YOUR FATHER IS A JAZZ DRUMMER. WHAT ROLE DID HE PLAY IN YOU BECOMING A MUSICIAN?

I truly have the coolest dad. Despite having a very tough life during and after the soviet collapse, he never gave up on music and early-on taught me to follow my dreams no matter what. He's a successful musician, but he never got involved in my career, believing that one must achieve everything by themselves.

#### WHAT ARE YOUR FUTURE PLANS AND HOW DO THEY RELATE TO GEORGIA?

I hope to keep performing and creating new projects that tell the story of my country and my heritage. I'm looking forward to bringing my projects to Georgia very soon.



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# THE WORLD AHEAD 2022

