

Carrefour Georgia Kicks Off 'Back to School' Campaign with Exceptional Surprises and Discounts



September 6, across Carrefour stores in Georgia, parents and students will be able to find school essentials in one place, with a wide selection of school bags and stationery items available. The retail chain consistently aims to make customers' shopping experiences easier by providing everything under one roof, at the most convenient and competitive prices.

In addition, the Back to School season offers a great competitive opportunity for kids: From August 17, children can draw their school, bring the drawing to any Carrefour hypermarket until September 6, and receive exciting school gifts from Carrefour.

Another exciting Carrefour initiative for kids is the brand's collaboration with Mastercard. The joint campaign, titled 'Together for Children', will see 1% of the amount paid by Mastercard going into school bags and stationery items for students with special needs. At Carrefour, inclusivity through supporting

persons with special needs and those who require a hand, permits the brand to uplift the surrounding community.

The physical and digital expansion of the brand actively continues, and Carrefour is expected to offer ever more

innovative products to its loyal customers, aiming to improve the lives of those in the communities it serves.

Don't miss this new chance – visit your neighborhood Carrefour supermarket or hypermarket for your Back to School needs!



Carrefour, owned and operated by Majid Al Futtaim in Georgia, is preparing for its Back to School campaign with exceptional discounts

and wonderful surprises.

With the new academic year on the horizon, parents will be heading to Carrefour to pick up all the essentials their children will need. From August 17 to

Russia's Invasion Week 24: UN Chief to Meet Zelensky, Erdogan, with Focus on Grain Exports, Nuclear Power Plant

BY ANA DUMBADZE

ARussian strike killed at least three people and wounded 10 others in the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv on Wednesday, the city's mayor said. The attack started a fire in a block of flats, Igor Terekhov said via Telegram. Kharkiv was besieged in the first days of the invasion in February, however, thus far Russian troops have been unable to take control of Ukraine's second largest city.

RUSSIA SHAKES UP BLACK SEA FLEET COMMAND AFTER SERIES OF BLOWS IN CRIMEA
Russia's Black Sea fleet based in annexed Crimea has installed a new commander, RIA news agency cited sources as saying on Wednesday, after Russian military bases on the peninsula were rocked by explosions in the past nine days. If confirmed, the removal of the previous com-

mander Igor Osipov would mark the most prominent sacking of a military official in the nearly six months since Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

UN CHIEF TO MEET ZELENSKY, ERDOGAN, WITH FOCUS ON GRAIN EXPORTS, NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres will meet Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan in Ukraine on Thursday, with grain exports and concerns about the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant to top the agenda.

Ukrainian forces said on Thursday they had beaten back a Russian attack in the southern region of Kherson, while shelling by Kremlin forces in Kharkiv in Ukraine's north killed several people.

In the 24th week of the devastating war in Ukraine, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu has said Moscow has "no need" to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine, while President Vladimir Putin accused the United States of

destabilizing global affairs.

The town of Nikopol across the river from the occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant has again come under rocket fire from the Russians, Ukrainian authorities say.

Residential areas had been hit and four people were injured, said Valentyn Reznichenko, head of Dnipropetrovsk regional military administration.

Twenty rockets from multiple rocket launchers called GRAD and 10 shells from artillery hit Nikopol, he added.

Nikopol has frequently come under fire from the Russian base on the opposite bank of the river Dnipro, where the nuclear power plant is situated.

RUSSIAN TROOPS SQUEEZED IN SOUTH UKRAINE AS KYIV RAMPS UP STRIKES

Russian forces in the occupied Kherson region in southern Ukraine are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain the flow of ammunition, armor and fuel to front-line units, according to Ukrainian officials and Western analysts, thanks to a concerted Ukrainian campaign to cut off river and rail supply lines as well as target ammunition depots.

The Russians are moving command posts from the north of the Dnipro River to the south bank as bridges have been heavily damaged, Ukrainian officials say.

The first deputy head of Kherson regional council, Yuri Sobolevsky, claimed that a significant portion of the Russian military command had already left Kherson city. Ukrainian forces are about 25 kilometers (15.5 miles) north of the city, towards Mykolaiv.

Much of Kherson region has been occupied since the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. As part of Kyiv's counteroffensive to try to retake lost territory in the south, Ukrainian forces



are targeting critical bridges to disrupt supply routes in and around Kherson.

The Institute for the Study of War, a US-based think tank, said Sunday that the Russians may be leaving for the other side of the river "to avoid being trapped in Kherson city if Ukrainian strikes cut off all ground lines of communication connecting the right bank of the Dnipro River to the Russian rear."

Videos have appeared on social media in the past few days showing renewed long-range artillery attacks on the Antonivskiy bridge and a road bridge over the dam near Nova Kakhovka, rendering them impassable for heavily armored vehicles. In some areas, the river is up to 1 kilometer (0.6 miles) wide, making pontoon bridges impractical.

The Ukrainians have also targeted several railway lines from the Russian-occupied Crimea Peninsula into the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions. On Tuesday, a series of fierce explosions rocked the town of Dzhankhoy on the main line towards Kherson. Recent video showed a substantial stock of military vehicles and ammunition at the site.

Two railway lines from Crimea were

struck in the last 10 days. Last week, local residents reported several hours of explosions in the Henichesk district, a port area along the Sea of Azov, and the railway further west at Brylivka was also struck.

"Within the last week, we have destroyed over 10 ammunition warehouses and military equipment clusters. These and other hit prevent heavy equipment being transferred by bridge," said the Ukrainian military's Operational Command South.

None of this suggests an imminent Russian withdrawal from Kherson, however.

UKRAINIAN WHEAT SHIPMENT LEAVES FOR ETHIOPIA

A cargo ship loaded with more than 23,000 metric tons of wheat destined for Ethiopia has departed from Ukraine, Infrastructure Minister Oleksandr Kubrakov said Tuesday. The vessel is headed for Djibouti in the Horn of Africa, with the wheat ultimately destined for neighboring Ethiopia under the UN World Food Program's response to a drought in the East African country.



GetTransfer.com – A Platform Ensuring Fair Travel Deals for Both Travelers and Drivers

BY KETEVAN SKHIRTADZE

GetTransfer.com is the world's largest global travel mobility marketplace, and Europe's top transfers marketplace, offering an unprecedentedly low 5% commission rate for urgent rides to support world-wide driver's communities.

GetTransfer.com is considered to be one of the world's most sustainable transportation and travel enterprises. Offering first-class service, best price guaranteed, and a wide range of vehicles and light trucks, it currently operates in over 180 countries and offers services with over 1000 airports, across the globe.

The company is based on the principle that the client should always receive the best prices, and it aims to deliver even better prices during challenging times. The goal of the company is to support driver communities by decreasing commissions. GetTransfer.com charges only 5% commission of its drivers for urgent rides, which is eight times lower than the average 40% that well-known brand aggregators charge.

CEO at GetTransfer.com, Alexander Sapov, notes, "The challenging economic and social global landscapes are disrupting many industries and markets, including the markets we work in. To encourage travel and transportation for customers around the planet, we are looking for a solution that is beneficial to both parties. We want people to travel at very good prices with very good drivers, without the stress of worrying about their rides. At the same time, we want to support drivers to reap the rewards

of their time and labor."

GetTransfer.com is rapidly expanding to Georgia, providing world-class transfers and taxi services at the best prices.

To learn more about GetTransfer.com, GEORGIA TODAY got in touch with Alexander Sapov.

WHAT KIND OF SERVICES DO YOU OFFER CUSTOMERS?

The platform connects travelers with drivers to make fair deals for both sides. GetTransfer.com takes care of both passengers and drivers. The traveler has full access to the platform and gets personalized offers and discounts. The driver pays a record low commission of 5% for urgent rides. This beneficial collaboration helps to attract local drivers to the platform and provides high-quality services for our clients.

HOW MANY COUNTRIES DO YOU COVER?

The marketplace is currently available in 180 countries and thousands of cities all over the globe. We're expanding our client database every day, connecting new drivers and passengers to the platform. The locations with the highest today demand for our services are traditional tourist destinations like the UAE, US, UK, and Portugal. Now we're increasing our presence in growing markets like Georgia, since the region shows interest in demand for urgent rides and long distance transfer services. We're here to work together!

TELL US ABOUT YOUR COMPETITIVE PRICES.

The prices are totally up to the drivers and this is our strategic advantage - we give pricing power to drivers, not us nor

the clients. Of course it varies with seasons and economical conditions - for example, during the tourist season in Turkey, drivers may offer more costly rides, but which are in general cheaper than those provided by regular taxi services. Since GetTransfer.com operates by a smart bidding system, travelers always get their additional discounts and benefits.

WHAT CHALLENGES DO TODAY'S DRIVERS AND PASSENGERS FACE?

One of the most challenging problems of the industry is the high commissions that drivers pay for the aggregators they work for. This causes other problems like poor client service, hidden fees, and more. Fortunately, the global pandemic has changed the rules of this unfair transportation game and now drivers can join marketplaces. This type of sharing platforms are affordable, easy to use, simple to control and fair. That's why people are more interested in it instead of aggregators. For instance, our marketplace charges drivers only 5% for each urgent ride, which means the drivers get 95% of the revenue gained instead of the 60-70% they would be working with aggregators.

WHAT ARE THE GLOBAL CHALLENGES IN THE TRAVEL MOBILITY MARKETPLACE? WHAT LIES AHEAD?

The main challenges are the unpredictably changing market conditions, currency fluctuations, and the dissatisfaction of the driver community with the high commissions of global services. Fortunately, the global lockdown is over and we can finally travel the world and dis-



cover places we've been dreaming about. We're still living in a world with some COVID limitations, but let's be realistic, the situation is way better than before. The pandemic gave a new life to sharing services and e-commerce marketplaces, since people have started to appreciate individual services over others. I'd say that in the next five years, we will see an extremely high increase in the number of clients of sharing platforms and marketplaces. It is backed up with demand for better prices. Marketplaces do not charge clients high fees nor force them to pay hidden commissions, nor does it charge big commissions to drivers. Win-win to everyone!

Even during a time of high oil prices, global crisis, and lack of inventory, people still use transfer services. I would lie if I said the pandemic didn't boost the business. 180 countries all over the globe and millions of people trust us and choose GetTransfer.com for their daily and special trips. We got more adaptive and now we are ready to rock the industry and explore new markets.

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO ENTER THE GEORGIAN MARKET?

Georgia is one of the most unique tourist countries in the world. Mountains, sea, nature, history, hospitable people, and delicious food: This country is a place of everything you need. That's why it attracts people from all over the globe. Those who appreciate aesthetic views, deep history, and unique buildings - come and visit gorgeous Georgia and feel the vibe of this land in person! We are ready for long-term partnership!

The company has already started working with local drivers and passengers, providing both fair prices and good service.

For the moment, our Georgian database has more than 1700 drivers and it is growing every day. Our top plans are to expand the local business and dive into the country to explore every single corner of Georgia. We constantly work on our service to improve it and to make it better, faster, and more convenient for both drivers and passengers. I'm sure the local clients will like GetTransfer.com very much!

Swedish PM: We Will Live up to NATO Deal with Turkey and Process Extraditions



Swedish PM Magdalena Andersson. Photo by: Ninni Andersson—Regeringskansliet/Handout via Xinhua/Alamy

BY ANA DUMBADZE

Sweden has said it will live up to the terms of the trilateral agreement signed by Sweden, Finland and Turkey over the Nordic countries' NATO membership applications, Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson said Tuesday.

"We agreed on a memorandum of understanding between Sweden, Finland and Turkey, and, of course, from a Swedish government perspective, we will act according to the memorandum of understanding we agreed upon," Andersson said at a joint press conference in Stockholm with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine prompted Sweden and Finland to abandon their nonaligned status and apply to join NATO amid Europe's worst security crisis in decades.

Sweden and Finland joined the European Union together in 1995 and gradually aligned their defense policies with the West.

The pair avoided joining NATO outright, but that changed when Russia invaded Ukraine this February, and convincing Turkey to let them join involved

negotiations over extraditions.

"The cases of extradition that are being processed in Sweden will, of course, be processed according to Swedish and international law," said Andersson. "That is also something we agreed upon in this memorandum of understanding."

Extradition cases have been one of the central points of contention between Sweden and Turkey. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had previously threatened to veto Sweden and Finland's NATO membership requests, accusing the two countries of harboring members of the separatist militant Kurdistan's Workers Party, also known as PKK.

Erdogan had said that Sweden promised to extradite 73 people to Turkey because of the memorandum, which stipulates that Sweden and Finland will address Turkey's pending extradition requests of terror suspects in accordance with the European Convention on Extradition.

Speaking alongside Andersson, Scholz said those states that hadn't yet ratified Sweden and Finland's respective bids would do so soon, "including Turkey."

"The agreements that Sweden and Finland have reached with Turkey show a good way forward," Scholz said, adding that he was looking forward to seeing Finland and Sweden in NATO and NATO needed the Nordic nations as partners.

Georgia, the EU, and the Political Sparring

BY MICHAEL GODWIN

Adorning lamp posts, emblazoned on Metro station walls, and adhered to the entrances of apartment buildings are stickers all promoting the popular movement towards European Union integration. “We Are Europe,” “Move Towards Europe,” and similar phrases echo the chants of thousands who recently gathered outside government buildings in support of advancing the membership pursuits of the nation.

Despite what seems to be a groundswell of popular support, observers have noted a lackluster approach by some in the ruling government. Conversely, leadership in the government have said many of these critics are undermining Georgia's journey Westward. The infighting appears to have created a schism between the United States and Europe, and Tbilisi.

As the upcoming EU-Georgia Association Council meeting on September 6 nears, authorities in Brussels have expressed their disappointment with progress in the country. “Georgia continues its reform path under difficult circumstances,” Josep Borrell said in an official statement. “As Georgia embarks on the new phase of its relations with the EU, with its European perspective, Georgia needs to take a responsible and conscientious approach that matches its stated objectives and its citizens' aspirations.”

Borrell, who chairs as the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, had his points echoed by Commissioner for



Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili and US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degnan during a meeting in Tbilisi. Georgian Ministry of Defense photo

Neighborhood and Enlargement Olivier Várhelyi. The Commissioner says “the ball is now in Georgia's court” and a “serious commitment to democratic consolidation, judicial reforms, strengthening the rule of law as well as the fight against corruption and organized crime will be key.”

This latest round of statements shakes Georgia's chances at EU membership as the country treads a tenuous line between Moscow and the West. Despite this, ‘Georgian Dream’ leadership have stood by their statements, with the Chairman of Georgian Dream saying that “We have been carrying ourselves with dignity throughout this period.”

The political sparring could cause a significant rift between Georgia and its Western backers. Authorities in Brussels and Washington D.C. have expressed concern, mirrored by many of Georgia's citizens, that the country is backsliding. Rather than respond to these claims, much of Tbilisi's leadership has acted

defensively.

Will this fracture relations with Europe and the United States?

Frankly, it very well could, but is unlikely in the short term. Georgia's saving grace is its strategic importance concerning Russia. Maintaining a close ally in the South Caucasus is imperative for NATO militarily, and for the EU economically.

Keeping Russia's presence in the region in a state of uncertainty by having a military bastion benefits NATO. Russia's forces in Armenia and occupied Georgia have long been an unmovable chess piece in the larger Eur-Asian geopolitical board. The deployment of a peacekeeping force in Nagorno-Karabakh only expanded this.

Georgia's military has gone through multiple recent reforms. Its proven service in NATO operations and adherence to common doctrine makes it a reliable ally alongside the alliance. For Brussels, it is a valuable counterweight against Russian superiority in the South Cauca-

sus. Additionally, its valuable intelligence community gives insight NATO might otherwise go without.

Economically, Georgia plays an important and interesting role. While the nation's exports are not a heavyweight, it does have several key natural gas pipelines. With a significant portion of gas for Europe shifting from Russia, countries like Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan have used Georgia's transit system.

With more European countries pulling away from Russian gas supplies, these pipelines will become exponentially more important. Georgia's leverage as a partner on these pipelines gives it more weight when engaging with the Union. This, combined with the immense popular support for EU membership in Georgia, makes it a seemingly prime candidate for inclusion.

However, statements from the government appear to be perpendicular to this popular opinion. When EU Ambassador to Georgia Carl Hartzell announced his retirement from the post, the chairman of the ruling political party commented in a way that seemed to attack the long-time ally of Georgia and promulgator for European inclusion. Irakli Kobakhidze claimed Hartzell “played only a negative role in the relations between the European Union and Georgia.”

This has been replicated by a new group of former Georgia Dream politicians targeting the United States ambassador. “Popular Force,” a new movement composed of former Georgia Dream party MPs, claimed US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degnan was attempting to “inflammate polarization” and coordinate with the “radical opposition” to target the government.

“When the US Ambassador does not

distance herself from the politically motivated pressure on the judge, the attempt to discredit the Government and the unsubstantiated allegations about informal governance, the rhetoric of war, and conceals information about the content of the meeting with Bidzina Ivanishvili - all this, of course, reinforces people's belief that the radical agenda of the radical opposition is coordinated by the Embassy,” their statement read.

The Ambassador responded saying that the “accusations...are reckless conspiracy theories that have no basis in truth.” She claimed they were statements against her and other western partners who have “done nothing but tried to help Georgia for 30 years along its European path”.

This schism frustrates many that see inclusion in European social, economic, political, and military spheres as a safe haven from Russian aggression. It is unclear what motivations lie behind these statements against allies of the country, and both individuals and organizations that have invested immensely into the nation. However, it is almost certainly unhealthy in the political discourse and only serves to please the Kremlin to see fireworks between would-be friendly nations. The seeds of discontent only further Moscow's agenda.

With the upcoming status meeting with EU officials, Georgia has little to show for its claims of preparedness for membership. Continuing issues with the rule of law, governance and human rights, and fighting corruption and organized crime have been noted by Europe's senior leadership. “Georgia is failing in key areas on its reform path,” Josep Borrell stated ahead of the September 6 conference.

Biting at the Russian Imperium

ANALYSIS BY EMIL AVDALIANI

Armenia and Turkey have agreed to open their borders for third-country nationals. This decision was followed by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the Armenia PM Nikol Pashinyan holding a rare phone talk in which both leaders expressed readiness to move ahead with the normalization process. This was not entirely unexpected, as the two countries had been consistently making positive statements and even concrete policy moves toward normalizing bilateral ties, for instance, with Armenia legally paving the way for trade with Turkey and putting normalization with Turkey as a foreign policy objective within the country's strategic document. Statements from both sides indicate that the countries aim at the complete opening of the border with the emerging potential for restoration of diplomatic ties.

The positive trend became realistic as a result of a number of local regional and more global geopolitical developments. Azerbaijan's victory in the 2020 war over Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding territories, which were seized by Armenian forces in the 1990s, removed a major roadblock toward Ankara-Yerevan talks. Before the war, Turkey always argued that any improvement of bilateral ties was contingent almost entirely upon Armenia making significant concessions on the Karabakh issue.

The present momentum is also powered by more or less positive rhetoric coming from Baku, which no longer regards Armenian-Turkish rapprochement as dangerous. It nevertheless watches closely how the process develops and tries to link progress with its own negotiations with Armenia where, likewise, significant progress has been made, but still remains far from producing a definitive peace agreement.



Image source: dailysabah.com/Shutterstock

Turkey's activism in all this is noteworthy, and is based on Ankara's dynamic eastern foreign policy, specifically in the South Caucasus. After the 2020 war, Turkey has been especially keen to help reshape the geopolitics of the South Caucasus. It pushes for normalization with Armenia and supports a similar trend in Armenia-Azerbaijan talks. The Turkish leadership is also intent on creating additional trade corridors to the Caspian Sea and Central Asia through Armenia.

The momentum is there. Russia's aggression against Ukraine changed the patterns of Eurasian connectivity. The effective Russia route which, for decades, helped connect China with the EU market, has collapsed. The need to find alternative roads has increased and the Middle Corridor, stretching from the Black to the Caspian Sea and Central Asia, could serve as a substitute. Turkey is actively supporting the idea and, along

with the route through Georgia, it sees the emerging rapprochement with Armenia as yet another possibility to expand the Middle Corridor.

It is still hard to tell whether the normalization process will be successful. A number of obstacles remain, and a major problem is the internal Armenian situation. The opposition and Armenian diaspora are staunchly against rapprochement with Turkey. And though these two actors have so far failed to mount a decisive offensive against Pashinyan, they nevertheless can from time to time complicate the internal political process in Armenia.

The second problem is Russia. It is still unclear how Russia benefits from the Armenia-Turkey normalization. Moscow has seemingly supported the improvement of ties, but it is also clear that the Kremlin is uneasy. Indeed, for Moscow, Armenia's isolated position between Azerbaijan and Turkey always presented

opportunities: Yerevan was an unequivocal ally of Moscow. Now, Armenia could potentially look Westward toward Turkey and use its ports to reach the EU market and actually balance its overdependence on Russia.

Yet, Armenia-Turkey normalization is unlikely to signal the end of Russia's influence in Armenia. Russian troops will remain in the country, and deep economic connections will persist. But, over time, the Turkish alternative will inevitably bite into Russia's clout, balanced with economic opportunities emanating from trade with Turkey.

Another critical element when calculating what Russian perspective on Armenia-Turkey relations could be is the war in Ukraine. Russia now might be more tolerant of Turkish inroads into the South Caucasus because of its military preoccupation elsewhere. The Kremlin simply might not have enough political and economic power to prevent

Ankara's moves. Moreover, it also needs Turkey's at least neutrality over the war in Ukraine.

Ankara sees and is cleverly using this moment to push for accelerated improvement with Armenia because potential Russian victory in Ukraine would tip the balance back in Moscow's favor. For the Kremlin, Turkey's activism presents too many unknown variables entering the geopolitical game in the South Caucasus. Accustomed to exclusive domination of this geographic space, there are now growing indications that Turkish influence has turned into a constant the Kremlin cannot ignore. It is just the extent to which Russian leadership are able to modify Ankara's increasing potential. Better allow the Turks in and reshape their ambitions rather than deny them the space for movement, the latter increasingly seen in Moscow as a long-gone option.

Russia and Turkey, despite their history of 12 wars, are now seen as powers who well understand each other, more or less respect each other's red lines, and are religious about the concept of regionalism, i.e. limiting non-regional actors in the Black Sea, Syria and the South Caucasus. Yet, inherently, the geopolitics dictate that Turkey is more interested in Russia's further diminished influence. And this is where Ankara and the West have overlapping interests. The Middle Corridor, the territorial integrity of Georgia and Azerbaijan and a number of other security issues are focal issues Turkey and the West can agree and expand upon.

Thus, Armenia and Turkey are likely to continue their normalization progress. We might see a full-scale improvement of ties, but much will depend on how Russia tolerates the progress and what will come out of Baku-Yerevan peace talks.

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

US Army Colonel Robert E. Hamilton on Russian, Georgian and US Thinking during the August 2008 War

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“Before February 24, many people would have said the legacy of the war in Georgia was a long-term and comprehensive military reform and rearmament program on behalf of the Russian Armed Forces, one that made them much more capable and formidable as an adversary than they were in 2008,” Hamilton notes. “People would point to things like the Crimea operation in 2014, where Russia essentially seized Crimea with the minimal application of military force, primarily Spetsnaz, the Syria operation. The narrative has changed significantly since the beginning of a second Russian military invasion of Ukraine, a much more ambitious and comprehensive operation that really highlighted all the flaws of the Russian military – some of them the same flaws that we saw in Georgia in 2008, and some new. Now Russia has shown itself to be not as capable as most thought it was.”

WAS THE GEORGIAN WAR A TRADEMARK EXAMPLE OF A SMALL, VICTORIOUS WAR?

For the Russians? Yes, maybe. Russia was able to essentially exploit a gap in strategic objectives between the West and Georgia. It identified that the West and Georgia, although partners, had very different views of what was happening in the spring and early summer of 2008. For the West, the narrative to Georgia was always “don’t allow yourself to be provoked and drawn into a war that you can’t win and that we would not help you win.” The Georgian government’s narrative was of creeping annexation, that essentially given what was happening in the spring and early summer of 2008, Georgia had a choice: either it responded, or if it didn’t, at some point, the world would wake up and realize that Russia had essentially occupied Abkhazia and South Ossetia anyway. So yeah, it was a small, victorious war for Russia. They were determined to bring about a war in some way, or at least a crisis in Georgia. Two key events from the Russian perspective were Kosovo’s unilateral declaration of independence in early 2008 and the NATO Bucharest Summit in April, which said that Ukraine and Georgia will become members of the alliance, but did not offer them Membership Action Plans.

BACK THEN YOU WORKED IN THE US EMBASSY AS CHIEF OF THE OFFICE OF DEFENSE COOPERATION AND YOU LEFT JUST BEFORE THE WAR STARTED. WHAT ARE YOUR MEMORIES OF THAT TIME?

I left exactly a month before the war started – on July 7. That was the day Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of State for the Bush administration, flew into Tbilisi to reassure the Georgian Government, and the day that the Russian Air Force flew two aircrafts into Georgian airspace to destabilize things and raise the temperature. That day and the rest of July was a culmination of a process of escalation from the Russian Federation that had begun very shortly after Kosovo’s Declaration of Independence. After the Rose Revolution, the Saakashvili government and the Putin government initially got along fairly well, but then the more it became clear that Saakashvili’s government was serious about Western integration, NATO and EU integration, bringing Georgia toward the West geographically, the more resistance there was in Moscow to Georgia, and Saakashvili personally. So you saw things like withdrawing from the arms embargo against

Abkhazia and South Ossetia; you saw the Russian decree on direct diplomatic contact between Moscow, Sokhumi and Tskhinvali; Russians repairing the rail line into Abkhazia; the introduction of 500 additional “peacekeepers” there; an airborne battalion – these were later used to support their military operation. You saw the shooting down of the Georgian drone over Abkhazia. So my personal recollection is, in the discussions inside the US Embassy and with our headquarters in Stuttgart, Germany, and with Washington DC, there was a lot of concern that Russia was attempting to foment a crisis, initially in Abkhazia – That’s what the General Staff and Ministry of Defense officials were focused on. The Georgian Armed Forces moved a lot of their headquarter elements out to Western Georgia, I think Senaki, they set up a command post there, not because they were going to start a war, but because they were waiting for a war to start and they needed to be positioned to react. In May, things seemed to de-escalate and in early July, things started to escalate in South Ossetia. My opinion is that the Russians tried and failed to foment a crisis in Abkhazia. They were unable to provoke the Georgian government into doing something Russia could react to. Then they switched to South Ossetia, where the situation is much more prone to escalation and difficult to control. In Abkhazia, the only pockets of ethnic Georgians left in early 2008 were in Gali and Kodori Gorge, whereas South Ossetia was an ethnic patchwork of Georgian and Ossetian villages: Easier to shell, easier to escalate, easier to kill civilians. The escalation was just much more difficult to control. Russians realized it was much easier in South Ossetia to get the Georgian Government to react, which it did on August 7. Whatever your answer is to the question of who started the August 2008 war, even given that the Georgians started a major military operation late on the night of August 7, everyone to the EU Tagliavini Report, concludes and admits that prior to the Georgian operation, the Russians were pushing forces through the Roki Tunnel. Whether it was enough forces to constitute an invasion, you can argue, but I would also say that, if you’re the government of a sovereign country, one uninvited tank or BMP or BTR is enough. Those additional Russian forces were in violation of the peacekeeping agreement. They were not part of the OSCE mandated Russian-Ossetian-Georgian peacekeeping force.

What happened then, the night of August 7, was clearly enough to give Russia a casus belli, a reason to launch a more general war against Georgia, which I think was their intention all along. I do think that they thought the war would start a little later than it did and they would be in a better military position. I think they had planned to push more forces through the tunnel.

WAS THE US ASSISTANCE ADEQUATE?

During those five days, the US, like many of Georgia’s partners, was surprised by the outbreak of the war; we were not positioned. The major thing that the US was able to do is bring the Georgian brigade back to Georgia from Iraq. The agreement between the Georgian Ministry of Defense and the US Embassy was within 96 hours of a national emergency, that brigade would be returned from Iraq, and it was honored. But 96 hours is four days, so it wasn’t returned early enough to play a decisive part in the conflict. Nevertheless, that’s the major thing the US was able to do.



There was a lot of humanitarian assistance, there was a massive aid package to Georgia. But, to be clear, there was never any US plan to help Georgia militarily in that war; it was not something that was discussed between the US and Georgia, not something that was ever promised or even implied.

THERE WAS ALSO A US POLICY VETO PRIOR TO THE 2008 WAR ON ACTUALLY TRAINING AND EQUIPPING GEORGIAN ARMOR ARTILLERY AND ATTACK HELICOPTER FORCES. IF YOU WANTED TO REASSURE GEORGIANS WITHOUT GETTING INVOLVED MILITARILY YOURSELVES, THAT WAS THE WAY TO GO. WAS THAT A STRATEGIC MISTAKE?

It was specifically prohibited even to the extent of writing syllabi for academic courses for artillery armor or attack helicopter officers, our policy of not provoking Russia went that far. I think many people would say that Russia is provoked by what Russia chooses to be provoked by. Writing syllabi for armor, helicopter and artillery officers would not have won the war for Georgia in 2008, but it also probably would not have provoked Russia any more than Russia decided to be provoked. I think we could have been more forward leaning and done more. The other reason we were told not to do that is that it was not directly related to the Georgian deployments to Iraq.

I think that was a mistake on our part, perhaps selfish. But all countries are selfish. No country is purely altruistic. The US was championing Georgia’s membership in NATO, but the only thing we were helping Georgia with was their counterinsurgency capability and not their territorial defense capability. To be a member of NATO, a country has to have a robust territorial defense capability, otherwise, it’s an unacceptable liability to the alliance. Starting to assist with territorial defense capabilities with the defense readiness program only in 2018 and not earlier was a mistake. This was the first time the US said explicitly that we want to help Georgia develop its ability to defend its own territory against any external aggressor, but really, there’s only one.

HOW LIKELY IS THAT THREAT TO BE REPEATED GIVEN WHAT’S HAPPENING IN UKRAINE? AND IF IT DOES, WHAT SHOULD GEORGIA’S MODUS OPERANDI BE?

I don’t think it’s very likely in the near term. Based on unclassified numbers, the Russian army has committed 85% of its ground combat forces to Ukraine. A significant number of them, maybe 20-25%, have been destroyed. The Russian military is not in a position for another major operation. Georgia is much smaller. It’s essentially 1/10 the size of Ukraine by both land area and population. An attack on Georgia would not qualify as a major operation the way the attack on Ukraine did. But Russia has its hands full in Ukraine right now, so I don’t think there’s any immediate threat to Georgia. If the threat should materialize, Georgia should have a plan to fight conventionally hard for as long as it can, and given the size of the Georgian defense forces, that’s not very long, probably five to seven days, and then switch to essentially what amounts to an insurgency strategy: deny Russia control of key cities, of the countryside. Operate essentially the way the Ukrainians did in the first phase of the war in Ukraine, small units, javelins and NLAWs and other anti-tank weapons against Russian armor, artillery; using reconnaissance to pinpoint Russian artillery, whether it’s UAVs, or counter battery radars; firing quickly against Russian artillery and moving; making it so that every time a Russian soldier leaves his base, he’s scared that he may not come back. Georgia has an advantage there because the terrain favors an insurgency in large parts of Georgia. It’s mountainous, it’s constricted, invaders are channeled into narrow valleys and roads. You can look at what happened to the Soviet military in Afghanistan in similar terrain. That’s Georgia’s comparative advantage. I would love to see a really serious effort on the part of the GDF to develop that capability.

IS GEORGIA CAPABLE OF WITHSTANDING RUSSIA ON THOSE TERMS THAT YOU JUST DESCRIBED?

The initial 5-7 days are critical to getting the international community mobi-

lized, to drawing attention to the war, and getting assistance. Whether Georgia is capable of fighting 5-7 days that way depends on the operational plan, on how Georgia uses the very limited conventional military assets it has, things like tanks, BMPs, BTRs, artillery, very few SU25s and attack helicopters. Georgia does not have the capability to sustain the kind of fighting happening now in Donbas. The GDF needs to think hard about how it’s going to use those assets to inflict maximum damage on Russians and preserve as much of their forces as possible, maybe move it to another part of the country so it’s not completely destroyed and then in a very deliberate fashion move to an insurgent campaign and decentralize. This can’t be directed from Tbilisi: Russians will cut off communication abilities. It should be small units, mission command approach. People were surprised by the extent to which the Ukrainians were able to do that in the opening phases of the war. They did it very effectively. If I were GDF leadership, I would be studying what Ukrainians did to replicate that as much as possible. Georgia has an advantage that Ukraine doesn’t – its terrain.

WHAT DOES THE BILL IN THE US SENATE ON MAKING THE BLACK SEA A PRIORITY SPELL FOR GEORGIA, A COUNTRY WHO HAS SEA ACCESS BUT REMAINS WITHOUT A NAVY?

I think the US should have been focusing much more on Black Sea than it has. For Georgia to position itself as a Black Sea state and not South Caucasus state is very advantageous, because when you say ‘South Caucasus’ to an American, they either can’t find it on the map, doesn’t understand why it’s important, or if they do, the reaction is “Oh yah, Nagorno-Karabakh war, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, 2008 war...” It’s seen as a zone of conflict, as Zbigniew Brzezinski would call the South Caucasus, “the Caucasian Balkans.” While, for most westerners with basic understanding of geopolitics and strategy, it’s clear why Black Sea is an area of strategic importance, it’s not clear why the South Caucasus is. Georgia’s attempts to develop its relations with other Black Sea countries ought to be a significant objective in the Georgian foreign and national security policy.

YOU ENDED YOUR MONOGRAPH IN 2018 BY ASKING A QUESTION “WHAT IS TO BE DONE?” WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE NOW, FOUR YEARS ON?

The main thing Georgia can do is end really the destructive and corrosive political infighting, the zero-sum thinking in government and opposition. There is Georgian fatigue in the EU. There are people who have been saying since early 2004 Georgia has been a major focus of Western aid, assistance of all sorts – political, economic, military. People are asking what the end result of it is. When they look at Georgia, they look at endless political infighting, all the political capital the EU and US expended on April 19 agreement in 2021, with both sides essentially walking away; looking at really aggressive rhetoric towards the West from figures inside the government, also specifically directed at the US and the EU, all of Georgia’s Western partners. I think we are at an inflection point. Georgia needs to decide if it’s really committed to its Euro Atlantic path and if it’s not, no-one’s going to drag it into NATO and EU.

A Few Ideas about the Country's Ability to Compete and Adapt. Part II

ANALYSIS BY VIKTOR KIPIANI,
CHAIRMAN OF GEOCASE

Evaluation of events by the current geopolitical schools of thought mainly ranges between two extremes – idealistic and realistic. Consequently, today we have two large camps – those of “idealism” and “realism.” External political decisions and actions of Georgia’s international partners reach us through either of the two filters.

The advantage of “realism” and its comparison with “idealism” is a topic of frequent discussions. The objective of our article is not to draw parallels between the two, but before moving to the need of Georgian “realism,” we will briefly touch upon those “accusations” that can often be heard with regard to “realists.”

The main accusations against “realists” are that (1) they do not purportedly acknowledge international cooperation as well as the role of international institutions; (2) “realism” supports militaristic approach to challenges, and (3) disregards moral and ethical principles. Rejection of “exceptionality” of the US for the world order is also seen as a flaw of “realism” by “idealistic” expert circles of the United States of America, which further exacerbates the rivalry between the two aforementioned directions.

In the context of “natural moral,” the “realism” is perhaps a subject of substantiated and justified condemnation for some. However, an objective reasoning leads us to a different conclusion and we will try to briefly defend “realism.”

The point is that “realism” actually exposes all shortcomings of modern international relations as well as the inherent nature of a strong state, group or individuals to benefit from, to get hold of, to tailor to their needs and to misappropriate – this is a quality of the strong and it is understandable; especially at the time and under the conditions when supranational international structures are powerless to stand to global challenges and systemic crises while the “order” on the international arena, that time and again almost degrades into anarchy, creates a fertile ground for a spiraling growth of confrontation between various geopolitical forces.

As a result, it is a by-effect of realism that it increases the sense of insecurity, exposes the dearth of political reasoning and shortage of needed resources. All that causes unpopularity and unacceptance of “realists” among operating global elites and makes “realism” an object of open and constant attacks.

What attitude should we, Georgians, adopt under such conditions and how should we act, especially when an unfavorable environment that directly affects us has been formed without our involvement?

An instant reaction should probably be to look at our “muscles” and try to fan a national militaristic attitude. Such reaction is natural but it must not tempt us and must not turn concrete political decisions into reflexes of Hobbesian world.

It is obvious and cannot be argued that one of principled pillars of an effective state is its national army. At the same time, a modern defense and security system is not related to only issues of armament and military personnel. The main source of its effectiveness is a correct determination of a national idea, identity and prospects of resistance. Thus, the key to Georgian army’s combat motivation lies in organic symbiosis of government and people. Ejection of even one component from this triad cannot be comprehensively compensated by either modern missile launching systems or membership of alliances. We must



Image source: georgiastartshere.com

primarily rely on ourselves and our own capacities while the reliance on our selves and own capacities will hugely increase the interest of supporters and allies towards us. As a result, we will move up from a requester to the rank of truly effective and long-term partner.

Assessment of issues by a reasonable, non-ideologized, “non-affiliated” standard will speed up the introduction of Georgian standard of “realism,” in which the interaction of the country and the world beyond it will be based on an understandable equation of the right balance and reciprocal obligations. We think that two key objectives of such standard which we have already mentioned – greater security and greater welfare – will enable us to properly evaluate and correct this equation. A more correct or practically beneficial attitude than this can hardly be imagined in a de-ideologized and de-idealized new world order.

PECULIARITY OF GEORGIAN “STRATEGIC DEPTH”

As it has been already said, the strength of Georgian nation-state identity does not depend on a military component alone. We view it as a more complex phenomenon which we call Georgian “strategic depth.”

In general, the meaning of “strategic depth” has a military-geopolitical connotation. For such depth to emerge, a country, in order to neutralize an adversary or a threat, is focused on strengthening its influence (sometimes, hegemony) on bordering or even far-from-bordering territories. It is within the boundaries of this very depth that a hostile force or a risk must be contained and neutralized and their direct harmful effect on the territory and population avoided.

To demonstrate a “strategic depth” in a military-geopolitical sense, we can bring a number of examples, be it the Gaza Strip and control over the west Bank for Israel, or a recent prewar status of Nagorno Karabakh for Armenia (which is arguable for many), retaining influence over Ukraine by all means for Russia, or maintaining NATO’s role of effective containment, at least, in the European part of Eurasia for the United States. Stark differences in the aforementioned examples converge at one particular common point – to create and maintain a barrier for containing and restraining concrete threats, as you understand them,

to the national security and to neutralize them until the threats reach and cross the national borders.

Clearly, in case of Georgia, it is absolutely groundless to speak about a “strategic depth” through a military-geopolitical prism. This even needs no explanation. We, however, believe that from the perspective of Georgian realism, the Georgian “strategic depth” may have its own shade. To minimize the threats, we may create a “depth” of our own construction in which the Georgian economic function and need will be considered and which will be determined by the Georgian culture.

We have repeatedly discussed the necessity of having the country’s authentic economic function and named various examples or systemic approaches (transnational energy projects courageously implemented in the late 1990s by the then government of Georgia). It was owing to those very projects that the country gained its voice not only in the regional economy, but beyond it too, which equally meant the increase in international attention to the country and the strengthening of its security. It is also a fact that the economic function requires regular revision and renewal. This is especially critical in the conditions of such fast-changing world where only past initiatives cannot pave the way for future no matter how impressive the past projects may seem. We also think that since the economic issue is closely linked to the positioning on geopolitical and security arena, a stable and diversified with transnational projects national economy bears a connotation of Georgian “strategic depth.” In particular, the more needed and beneficial for the business world we are, the higher the possibilities and prerequisites for maintaining stability and peace, preventing an unhealthy interference in the country’s domestic affairs. Consequently, a constant revision and renewal of such economic function is in line with the strengthening and improvement of the Georgian security barrier – its “strategic depth.”

It may sound strange to some, but we would also assign the importance of protective barrier of Georgian “strategic depth” to the Georgian culture. Promotion of the national cultural treasure to the world and provision of more information about diverse Georgian art to those beyond the country (the best illustration of that is a celebration of Georgian polyphony in Vatican) must become

an additional factor of protection and preservation of that treasure and art. We should ensure that the international community fully realizes that the Georgian culture is not the wealth of Georgia alone and it is one of unique pillars of the world’s cultural diversity. Consequently, the nation and country that gave birth and maintain this unique culture, must be a nation and country that require a special care and attention in terms of international security. By emphasizing such cultural barrier, we think, the “strategic depth” necessary for the nation-state security of Georgia will acquire a qualitatively new, additional dimension: for partners and friends of Georgia to give a higher consideration to Georgian interest and for opponents and adversary to view it as an additional circumstance for refraining to infringe this interest.

SEPARATE SPECIALIZED ISSUES

Without taking timely decisions it is impossible to ensure strategic objectives and implement them in practice through the enactment of national ambition, as well as the positioning of the country. This topic is discussed time and again in media, expert and political circles and it seems difficult to add anything new to it.

In any case, we view this issue in the following way: a process of decisions making bearing Georgian ethnic-historic and cultural marks must be equally distinguished for a natural unity of effective state institutions and concrete leaders. Dull and unprincipled (sometimes, charismatic) leadership is not compatible with the Georgian national character, but at the same time, the containment of leadership with necessary qualities within the limits of smoothly running state institutions is in the nation-state interests.

In a small state, any public system, even distinguished for its exemplary qualities, has naturally set limits for resolving issues faced by the country. The essence of these limits has been broadly discussed in the previous publication. For the purpose of illustration, we will bring a short example: regardless of advantage of New Zealand in terms of doing business, the scale will still play a role and consequently, a particular company, to get foothold in the region, will prefer to enter the Indonesian market although it is riskier than the market of Zealand but has greater opportunities. This and other examples may be discussed extensively.

Therefore, under such limitations, a full use of existing potential in full is of particular importance in case of Georgia, the country that faces many internal and external challenges. The state management system which is still young and lacks a high political culture badly needs to familiarize itself with best practices of political alliances or coalitions, clear and transparent delegation of powers, autonomy of decision making, initiatives based on healthy meritocracy, depoliticization of “vital” structures once and for all. In short, this and many other things that will protect a decision-making process from “bureaucratic sclerosis” will turn the governance (with its ruling and opposition forces) into a true service provider and make a critical (and responsible) segment of society to feel themselves as full-fledged participant of the political process.

ART OF USING OPPORTUNITY

For a country in such a difficult geopolitical situation as our is, the use of opportunities really amounts to the art. It is a fact that the fate has not allotted “lucky longitude” to Georgia, which directly affects the essence of risks and challenges posed to the country.

That is the reality that we cannot change, but we must try to get maximum benefit from it. Examples of success in difficult geopolitical geography are many. If anything, the history of Israel clearly demonstrates that a difficult neighborhood did not prove to be a hindrance for the development of Jewish state; Israel transformed a hostile environment into a constructive national stimulus of nation-state building during many decades. Clearly, the role of structural factors (geographic location, population, etc.) is great in the formation of nation-state organization. However, they can still be outweighed by correct strategic positioning and adequate quality of a decision-making process. A lot has been written and said about this and other related issues and we would name the work by Acemoglu and Robinson as one of most interesting and comprehensive sources (Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty by Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson).

The topic of using opportunities in the context of relevant historic turmoil is not new in the Georgian reality. In the final part of this article we will offer the readers our own version in a generalized form and outline a few key principles: (1) in the conditions of rivalry of large states, a regular “stress-test” is necessary for the positioning of the Georgian state; (2) we should properly understand that any more or less successful positioning in a competitive environment requires an economic support – self-sufficiency and reliability of country’s economic system; (3) positioning of Georgia in the international context must not be narrowed to only military-political aspect, but must be seen in scientific and technological advancement of the country; this is tantamount to intellectual positioning of the country; (4) it is necessary, and we have touched upon that too, to aggressively promote a cultural resource and integrate it into the world heritage to a greater extent.

We believe that the entirety of these principles and, more importantly, use thereof with maximum efficiency is one of the optimal, modern Georgian modus operandi approaches to improving Georgia’s competitiveness and honing its adaptation abilities.

To cut a long story short, the room for open and meaningful discussion is vast. The key is not to miss, in such discussions, timeliness of adequate, correct actions at the right time. Shifting from excess focus on statics of power onto the creation of a long-term politics must become a common national demand.

Politician Zurab Girchi Japaridze Announces Renewal of Protests and Political Unrest

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW BY
EREKLE POLADISHVILI

Instead of granting Georgia candidacy status, the EU gave the country a list of 12 recommendations and a deadline to fulfil them. This decision triggered a dramatic change in the behavior of the country's political parties. Disappointed with the decision, the ruling party has become more critical of their Western partners, while the opposition is dragging its feet to start work on the 12 points while Georgian Dream remain in power. Last week, politician and the founder of the 'Girchi More Freedom' party, Zurab Girchi Japaridze, announced a renewal of protests and political unrest. GEORGIA TODAY met him and asked about his announcement, as their plan is nowhere close to what the EU asks of the country.

"I believe we have a government that rigged the last three elections," he tells us. "It was just proved in thousands of documents provided to NGOs and diplomatic missions in Georgia by the former Deputy Head of Special Security Services, Soso Gogashvili. When we have a government that has rigged the elections and has no legitimacy, I believe it's an obligation for every citizen not to obey them. We must sabotage this government or the actions of this government and do our best to get rid of them as soon as possible. That's why I said that the aim now is to achieve snap elections as quickly as possible by all means possible and when I say by all means, I mean, of course, non-violently."

DON'T YOU THINK WAITING FOR THE EU'S FINAL DECISION ON GEORGIA'S REQUEST FOR CANDIDACY WOULD CREATE MORE SOLID GROUND FOR YOU AND THE OPPOSITION TO START PROTESTING?

There is no way that this government will let go of the power they have. I don't think even in the political circles in the EU believe that Mr Ivanishvili will de-gigarchize himself. What's going to happen is that at the end of this year, the EU will do an evaluation, and it's highly likely that Ukraine and Moldova will get to the next step, will open negotiations about becoming members of the European Union, which is the next step from becoming a candidate. And there will be "no" for us again. We've already seen the evaluation of the EU regarding the

implementation of our Association Agreement. They see a lot of shortcomings when it comes to the elections and the judiciary system, the election procedures for a General Prosecutor, the abolishment of the State Inspectors Service, the violation of rights of the LGBT community, etc. There's a list. So, we will get "no", and Moldova and Ukraine will be two steps ahead of us. So, we either get snap elections before that or wait until the 2024 parliamentary elections.

Another reason I think waiting is wrong is because we have a window of opportunity right now, and the Ukrainians created it. There's a chance of moving forwards with so-called Euro-Atlantic integration at a fast pace, and we don't know what will happen. I don't believe that if we don't fight for our freedom, somebody will just grant it to us.

DIDN'T THE COUNTRY FIGHT ENOUGH ALREADY TO MAKE THEM WAIT FOR US?

Yes, the country fought. But nobody will pay pensions for past deeds, so whatever we did in the past matters, but isn't important now. The West wants to see whether we want freedom now, today.

CAN YOU NAME A SINGLE POINT FROM THE EU'S 12-POINT RECOMMENDATIONS WHICH SAYS THE OPPOSITION HAS TO START A PROTEST AS THE WAY TO ACHIEVE EU CANDIDACY STATUS?

You will never find this kind of wording in recommendations. I'm not saying someone is waiting for this type of protest in Europe or the US. I don't need any recommendations or instruction from the West for that. It's my right to protect my rights, especially the right to change the government by voting. What Ivanishvili is trying to do is to make Georgian citizens believe that nothing makes any sense. Once we show, and this is a kind of test that we as a society have developed, have moved forward, that we can change even this corrupt and illegitimate government by civilized means with elections, then we will get the status of candidacy. Then we will move forward quickly toward Euro-Atlantic integration.

DON'T YOU THINK THAT YOUR PROTESTS ARE PREDESTINED TO FAIL IF THE US OR EU DON'T SANCTION MR IVANISHVILI?

I don't believe that sanctions will end this system of government that we have, but I think that sanctions are essential.



Because, for example, if you sanction a corrupt judge who made a political decision, this might create problems inside the ruling political party. I don't believe that if sanctions are put on some GD leaders, including Ivanishvili, the regime will collapse immediately. There are many sanctions against Putin's Russia, but the system has not collapsed yet. We need to act here! It's our duty; this is my duty in the eyes of my children and future grandchildren. I need to do whatever possible myself because I took this responsibility on 10 years ago when I said I would be involved in politics.

WHEN EX-PRESIDENT MIKHEIL SAAKASHVILI REVOKED THE VISA REQUIREMENT FOR RUSSIANS, YOU DIDN'T LEAVE THE PARTY OR CALL THEM PRO-RUSSIANS. ISN'T IT A DOUBLE STANDARD CALLING THE CURRENT RULING PARTY PRO-RUSSIAN FOR LETTING RUSSIANS VISIT THE COUNTRY?

I wasn't a member of the UNM party when President Saakashvili revoked the visa regime, but I still support that idea. The problem with lots of Russians coming to Georgia has several dimensions: One is the human rights dimension, the other is economical, and the other is security. Let's look at this situation from the human rights perspective. I've always been against collective responsibility. Just saying, "We don't want to let people in because they are Russian" is unacceptable.

The second thing is the economic dimension. I've read many posts on Facebook in which some people use crazy economic logic to prove that this inflow of Russians is insufficient for Georgia, which is stupid. From a financial perspective, it's only good for Georgia.

Then there's a security dimension, and I think there is a severe security threat. We've seen what happened in Ukraine, when Russia started the war; there were hundreds and thousands of people discovered by Ukrainian security services who had entered Ukraine several months before the war began. They rented apartments, then started sabotaging and creating diversion groups, etc. A visa regime or any such leverage in the hands of this government will be used against those citizens of Russia who have problems in Russia because they've gone public criticizing the government or are members of opposition parties, human rights NGOs, etc. Such citizens of Russia who might create problems for Georgian security will be let in, as they are right now. So, the problem is not with whether we have a visa regime, but that we have a government that basically destroyed the security system of this country.

SINCE THE EU GAVE US THE 12-POINT RECOMMENDATIONS, PARLIAMENT AGAIN BECAME THE CENTER OF ATTENTION. WOULD YOU HAVE LEFT PARLIAMENT IF YOU HAD

KNOWN YOU'D HAVE A CHANCE TO BE PART OF THIS HISTORIC PROCESS?

Sure! But it's not. It would be historic if there was a 1% chance it was successful and we would get candidacy status, but nothing like that is likely, so I don't think it's historic. And about me leaving Parliament - I wasn't supporting the boycott, or, at least, my position was that we needed to discuss it. But all the opposition parties that night agreed we needed to boycott and there should be unity, and it would be leverage in our hands. It was understandable.

AND OUT OF NOWHERE, MANY OF THEM DIDN'T KEEP THEIR PROMISES.

Yeah! But when they don't do something, it doesn't mean that I should do the same. Then there were negotiations, and when we signed the [ed. April 9 - Charles Michel] agreement on my side, there was only one obligation - to enter Parliament. For the other side there were commitments, including the release of political prisoners, and that specific reforms should be made. But once they released two prisoners, they did nothing else and annulled the agreement. So, if they don't implement whatever is written in it, I said - I'm not doing my part either. That's why I left. For me, what's important is that people should trust me when I say I'll do something. And if I change my mind, I will explain why. But when I left, I had no arguments for remaining.



Gov't Decree to Increase Infrastructure for Supply of Natural Gas to 244 Georgian Communities

In line with a Government Decree, the total allocations for the design and construction of the infrastructure is increasing for the supply of natural gas to 244 communities throughout the country.

The adjustment implies a three-year plan of gas supply, with the Georgian Gas Transportation Company to ensure the implementation of design and construction works for the supply of natural gas to 39,698 subscribers in 244 communities of the country during 2022-2024. The total cost of work is GEL135,272,350. In line with the Government Decree,

the required financial resources will be solicited by the Ministry of Finance of Georgia and the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia, which will ultimately be reflected in budget earmarking for 2022-2024. Design and construction works for natural gas supply will be funded from the State Budget allocations for 2023.

Amendments have been made to the Government Decree N2120 dated October 29, 2020, On the Implementation of Measures in Support of Natural Gas Supply to the Population of Georgia in 2022-2024.



MONTHLY TOURISM UPDATE

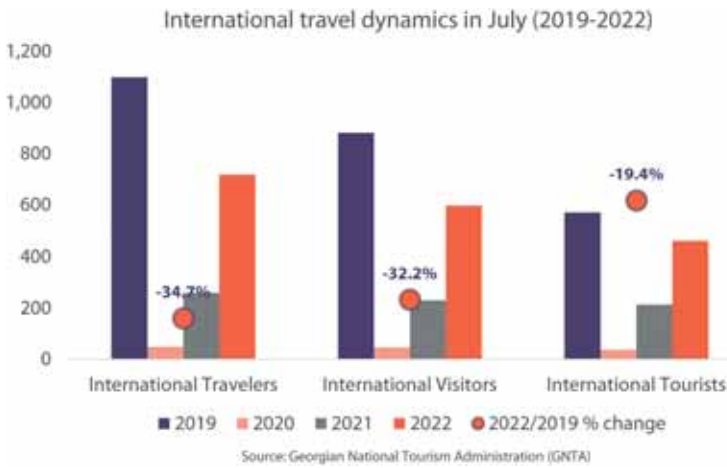


Research

July 2022

www.pmcresearch.org

Hotel Price Dynamics in Georgia (January – July 2022)

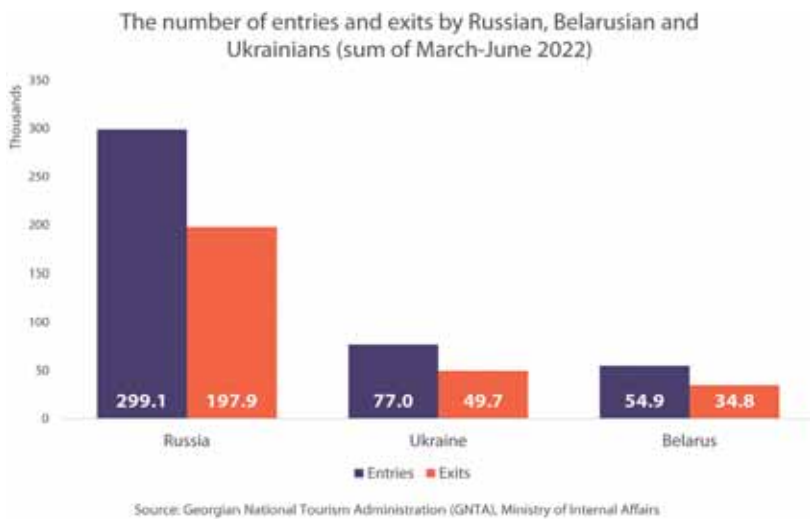


The number of international travelers increased by 176.7% in July 2022, compared to the same period of 2021, and declined by 34.7% compared to the same period in 2019. Meanwhile, the number of international visitors increased by 158.9% (2022/2021) and

the pre-pandemic figure.

ENTRIES AND EXITS OF RUSSIANS, BELARUSIANS, AND UKRAINIANS

Since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, the border-crossing statistics reveal significant differences in the number of



declined by 32.2% (2022/2019), and the number of international tourists increased by 115.3% (2022/2021) and declined by 19.4% (2022/2019).

entries and exits to and from Georgia made by Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians.

In July 2022, the top countries of origin of international visits were Russia (156 737 visits), Armenia (103 906 visits), and Turkey (95 989 visits). Among the major

In June 2022, entries from Russia were approximately 45,000 higher compared to exits. The corresponding figure for Ukraine was around 4000, while for Belarus this number was equal to 3000.



tourism markets, the number of international visits from Belarus (65.6%), Kazakhstan (46.7%), and Saudi Arabia (21.7%) significantly exceeded the pre-pandemic figure (July 2019). Besides, the number of international visits from Russia (-1.5%) has almost returned to

Throughout March-June 2022, the total number of entries by Russians was approximately 101,000 higher compared to exits, while for Ukrainians and Belarusians the corresponding figures were 27,000 and 20,000, respectively. The monthly differences (i.e. more entries



than exits) were especially high for Russians in this period, followed by Ukraine and Belarus.

HOTEL PRICE DYNAMICS

In recent months, there have been notable increases in hotel prices due to a combination of factors, such as the partial recovery of international tourism, the rapid inflow of Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians since the beginning of the war, higher domestic tourism demand among Georgians, and the increase in prices for goods essential for hotel services, as well as the low base effect in February and March of 2022.

For the first seven months of 2022, the HPI was at its highest in February (17.7%), followed by March (14.9%) and July (13%). In general, the HPI was higher for guesthouses compared to 3-, 4-, and 5-star hotels. When compared to pre-pandemic values, the HPI was negative in January 2022 but positive for every subsequent month. The magnitude of the price change relative to the pre-pandemic values was at its highest in July (20.5%), followed by June (10.3%) and May (10.1%).

Throughout the past year, average hotel prices have been increasing steadily for all types of hotels with the biggest increase being for 5-star hotels. For guesthouses (25.4%), 4-star hotels (11.8%), and 3-star hotels (10.5%), the monthly average price increase for the year so far was highest in July 2022. Meanwhile, for 5-star hotels, the monthly average price increase (11.2%) peaked in May 2022.

PRICE INDICES FOR RESTAURANTS AND HOTELS

Key indicators used to observe price changes for accommodation services is the CPI change for restaurants and hotels and the PPI change for accommodation services and food services. Both indicators have been consistent with the observations from the YoY HPI.

The CPI for restaurants and hotels reached a peak YoY increase of 14.3% in July 2022, compared to July 2021. Meanwhile, the YoY increase in HPI in July 2022 amounted to 13%. Elsewhere, the PPI for accommodation services has shown some fluctuation throughout the last year as a whole, albeit since February 2022 it has been increasing sharply, peaking at 23% in June 2022. At the same time, the PPI for food services has also been showing some fluctuation, but of a smaller magnitude: a sharp decline was recorded at the end of 2021, followed by a relatively stable increase throughout 2022.



Source: National Statistics Office of Georgia
*note that the data for PPI index for July 2022 was not available yet



HOTEL PRICE INDEX IN GEORGIA

In July 2022, in Georgia the hotel price index increased by 13.3% compared to June 2022. The 3-star, 4-star, and 5-star hotel price index increased by 12.7%, while for guesthouses, the price index increased by 15.9%. The monthly HPI was the highest in Samtskhe-Javakheti (30.1%) and Adjara (22%) and the lowest in Kakheti (1.6%).

In July 2022, compared to July 2021, hotel prices in Georgia increased by 13%. The prices of 3*, 4*, and 5* hotels increased by 12.2% and the prices of guesthouses increased by 20.2%. The yearly HPI was the highest in Racha (24.2%) and Samtskhe-Javakheti (20.5%) and the lowest in Shida Kartli (-1.6%).

skhe-Javakheti (20.5%) and the lowest in Shida Kartli (-1.6%).

THE AVERAGE HOTEL PRICES IN GEORGIA

In Georgia, the average cost of a room in a 3-star hotel was 173 GEL per night in July 2022, while the average cost of a room in a 4-star hotel in Georgia was 276 GEL per night and the average cost of a room in a guesthouse was 118 GEL per night.

The average cost of a room in a 5-star hotel in Georgia in July 2022 was 563 GEL per night. In Guria, the average price was 1001 GEL, followed by Tbilisi - 619, Adjara - 612, and Kakheti - 522.

Table 1: Hotel price index

Region	Hotel		3*, 4*, 5*		Guesthouse	
	2022 Jul/2022 Jun	2022 Jul/2021 Jul	2022 Jul/2022 Jun	2022 Jul/2021 Jul	2022 Jul/2022 Jun	2022 Jul/2021 Jul
Kakheti	1.6%	16.5%	4.4%	15.6%	0.5%	16.9%
Imereti	2.0%	12.8%	1.1%	20.2%	2.3%	9.5%
Guria	17.9%	14.5%	12.6%	23.7%	35.4%	6.0%
Kvemo Kartli	14.4%	0.3%	10.0%	18.9%	19.0%	-28.6%
Adjara	22.0%	17.9%	17.1%	17.1%	35.1%	26.6%
Racha	11.9%	24.2%	-	-	11.9%	24.2%
Shida Kartli	13.3%	-1.6%	11.1%	-3.8%	14.0%	0.5%
Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti	10.7%	0.9%	8.2%	-4.1%	12.3%	5.3%
Samtskhe-Javakheti	30.1%	20.5%	36.2%	15.5%	27.5%	23.1%
Mtskheta-Mtianeti	6.3%	8.8%	10.4%	10.8%	3.5%	7.6%
Tbilisi	9.3%	10.3%	9.4%	9.2%	8.4%	20.9%
Overall Price % Change	13.3%	13.0%	12.7%	12.2%	15.9%	20.2%

Table 2: Basic Economic Indicators in Georgia

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	I 2021	II 2021	III 2021	IV 2021	2021	I 2022	II 2022
GDP in current prices for Accommodation and Food Service Activities (mln)	1054.1	1437.5	1800.0	2223.0	1204.5	197.8*	452.2*	602.3*	472.0*	1724.4*	372.8*	-
Number of International Travelers (thousand persons)	6720.0	7902.5	8679.5	9357.9	1747.1	134.7	351.3	815.4	579.8	1881.3	576.5	1049.4
Number of Tourists (thousand persons)	3297.3	4069.4	4756.8	5080.5	1087.0	116.6	305.8	670.4	484.7	1577.5	456.0	749.3
Revenue from International Travel (mln USD)	2110.7	2704.3	3222.1	3268.7	541.7	53.6*	246.1*	566.0*	379.3*	1244.9*	393.7*	748.8*
The Expenditures of Georgian Travelers Abroad (mln USD)	386.3	463.6	524.7	657.2	180.5	19.7*	37.1*	62.6*	64.5*	184.1*	72.2	-
Foreign Direct Investment in Hotels and Restaurants Sector (mln USD)	120.0	109.5	82.3	123.4	-249.5	-0.9*	-1.4*	10.7*	0.7*	7.7*	12.1*	-

* Preliminary data



Research

www.pmcresearch.org

SABUKO: Making Life in the Iori Floodplains More Diverse & Saving the Home of Unique Biodiversity



ALEKSANDRE KESHELASHVILI

Floodplains are a special and vital part of the ecosystem, and floodplain forests contribute many free ecological services to our society, being home to a diversity of wildlife.

SABUKO – a nature conservation organization, a local partner of BirdLife, has played a big role in the restoration and preservation of floodplain forest in Georgia as part of the project ‘Restoring Gallery Forest and Grasslands in the Iori River Valley,’ aimed at revitalizing the ecosystem.

They also work to preserve the biodiversity of the Chachuna Managed Reserve, which has faced a severe problem of degradation due to unregulated grazing.

SABUKO and its partner organizations are actively working to preserve endangered rare species of wildlife existing on the ground.

SABUKO, in collaboration with Ilia State University, assessed the condition and health of the Iori River floodplain forest, the aim of which was to assess the condition of the Iori River floodplain forests. Also, to find out whether the Dali Reservoir specifically reduced the area of floodplain forests in the Chachuna Reserve, whether it had an impact on the floristic composition on the ground, etc.

The Dali Reservoir posed a threat for Chachuna. The study concluded that the lower part of the river should be flooded more often, as a process of desertification is underway there. The river bed is being washed away and intensive deep and lateral erosion is taking place, the bed is deepening, and the small amount of water released by the Dali Mountain Reservoir in the lower basin cannot ensure flooding of the area, so vegetation is changing and being replaced.

To solve this problem, a gabion has been arranged on the spot, which will slow the water flow, raises the water level mark and allow the area to be flooded.

Through such measures and gabions, the situation has been partially improved in terms of species restoration, however, specialists note that even more work is necessary so as not to lose this oasis, which is so important for the region.

In July, another survey was conducted by both hydrologists and foresters, where the positive results of the gabion in the floodplain of the Iori River were revealed.

GEORGIA TODAY wanted to find out more about the study results from SABUKO’s representatives and partners.

“As you remember, we arranged a gabion that helps flood the floodplain forest,” says Aleksandre Mikeladze, Project Manager. “Initially, our goal was for the gabion to be maximally natural and adapted to the environment, which was successfully implemented. The recent study on the gabion operation results was carried out by various specialists, including a hydrologist and a forester, with different methodology. In both cases, the results are promising and detect positive changes for the environment, which makes us very happy and proud. In addition, SABUKO has been advocating the process of reaching an agreement with the

relevant authorities on the periodic release of the Dali Reservoir, which has already been reached. Therefore, in order to restore the Iori floodplain forest, SABUKO plans to flood the pre-studied and defined area using the Dali Reservoir, which has to date never performed its initial function.”

Giorgi Guliashvili, a hydrologist who conducted the study on the spot, highlights the positive and promising changes in terms of flooding the area and the gabion’s contribution to it.

“I evaluated the area from a hydrological angle. The first positive fact that was revealed was that the artificial dam contributed to the flooding of the floodplain forest in the upper reaches of the dam, as well as the wateriness generated

in the dry ravines as a result of the atmospheric precipitation in June added to the water released in the lower canal pound of the Dali Mountain Reservoir and helped to flood the floodplain forest as much as possible.

In addition, in the dry ravines from the Dali Mountain Reservoir to the artificially created reservoir, when the water availability was observed, the river sediment entered the bed of the Iori river together with the water. Due to the influence of artificially arranged dam, the accumulated material was deposited in the vicinity of the arranged gabion and in its upstream, which contributed to the reduction in the intensity of the scale of depth and lateral erosion (shore washing).

Importantly, the floodplain forest in the lower part of the reservoir was flooded to about the same scale as in May. The gabion arranged on the river played a positive role in this process, and the area of flooding is approximately a kilometer. The gabion regulates water flow and supplies the algae and vegetation there with the water it needs, regularly. Research has clearly shown this. However, the maximum effect we expected still couldn’t be reached, as from the Dali Reservoir, the planned 70 cubic meters of water per second couldn’t be released due to technical issues. If not, the maximum area we planned would have been completely flooded. However, the gabion performed its function successfully and moreover, it turned out to be a very timely and vital measure for the local biodiversity and floodplain forests. The gabion also reduced erosive processes and the washing away of the river banks around it through its regulatory function, which is also very important for the environment.”

Vasil Metreveli, Forester, Ilia University, during the study observed how intensively the green cover in the area had started to regrow.

“As a result of the study I conducted,

I can gladly conclude that new plants characteristic of the floodplain forest have appeared and the area of the floodplain forest has expanded,” he says. “Therefore, it is clear that along with the period of abundant precipitation, the gabion arranged on the river significantly contributed to this process. In the end, taking such measures can lead to partial restoration of unique floodplain forests on the ground and thus save the home of the local biodiversity, including rare species of animals and birds included on the Red List.

“The recent study we conducted in collaboration with SABUKO has shown that through such measures and gabions, the situation has been partially improved in terms of species restoration, but even more work is necessary to preserve the unique Chachuna biodiversity, which is so important for the whole region.”

Zura Gurgenidze, Conservation Studies Manager at SABUKO, notes that the installation of the gabion on the river made life around it more diverse.

“Following the arrangement of the gabion and rising of the water level, a certain microclimate has formed around it. The rising water level made life on the spot more diverse. Although the gabion is new and it’s a bit early to speak about conclusions until at least a year passes, positive changes and signs as a result of its operation are already visible. For instance, the growth of certain kind of vegetation created relevant conditions for sparrows living in the Iori floodplains, which started building nests, and we already have their nestlings there. As I said, it’s still early to talk about its effects and changes thoroughly, but what we have at this stage of the study is promising. Moreover, the gabion was arranged in full compliance with environmental protection standards, so we only expect that this concrete project and similar measures in the future will play an important role in the process of the Chachuna Biodiversity conservation,” he elaborated.



ALEKSANDRE KESHELASHVILI

The Tower Speaks. Part I

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

This one, Svan Tele number 4, I dedicate to Nodar Aprasidze, my blood brother and one of two best men at my wedding. You're the reason I live in the village of Etseri, your own home place. And it's your portrait which eventually will be revealed to be looking out from the tower too.

Khalina dreamed that she saw a stone watchtower with two main top windows on each side; and was struck by its resemblance to a warrior's helmet, with the windows spaced just right for eyes to look out from. Then she woke up, but she could not get the image out of her mind. Once her morning chores of milking and mucking out were done, she went on a walk around Seti to see what she would find with her newly opened eyes.

Sure enough, there were a number of two-eye watchtowers mixed in with the three-eye ones, and only the former gave her the returning stare of a helmeted man in the crisp spring air. Strange how she had never noticed them before in all her fifteen years' life here! But she kept this thing to herself for now, trying to make sense of it. The towers were everywhere, dominating the landscape of this town, as well as most other villages of Svaneti and some communities quite far away. But there were no enemies threatening to invade at the moment, had not been for the memory of all the elders still alive as far as she had heard. In the lowlands of Georgia, yes, plenty of trouble from every greedy side, more of it than peace. Svaneti was so inaccessible, though, that it had become the repository for the country's royal treasure. Horse load after load had been sent up, quietly, during calm years, fabulous painted or chased gold or silver icons, handwrit-



ten Bibles in the original script of the country with jeweled metal covers, now locked up in ancient village churches and displayed usually only on their saint's day. So the watchtowers, in the absence of marauders, were watching... what?

That night, tired out from helping her mother with cooking and washing up for the family, she went to bed and fell

asleep almost instantly in the cool mountain air. And was transported.

She stood before one of the Helmeted Ones, as she now called them. A face appeared, but the mouth was sealed with a black vertical slash: one of the narrow windows from which to fire arrows. And yet there was a voice to go with the eyes coolly regarding her form frozen below. He was talking straight into her mind!

—Do you accept, girl, that most of what I tell you must remain between us for now? Not an easy burden, but a necessary one. I would tell you because you have perceived me for what I am: not just a place for others to watch from, but a being who himself watches.

—Y-yes, alright. How could I say no?

—You could easily refuse, and then this would be as far as our communication

went, a fanciful though short dream. There is more, though, much more, if you are willing.

—I still accept. Tell me, Helmeted One.

—It should be no wonder that I watch, along with most others of my kind. Svaneti itself is full of life, in its very bones the rocks and mountains, as well as in things which you humans know to be alive, the trees, flowers, animals and birds. And we towers are made of those living bones, their life even concentrated in us by the act of your people's quarrying, gathering and mortaring the rocks of which we are made. Plus, our foundations go deep, deep into the earth, and there connect with all that life.

—Surely, though, the enemy is an outsider? Would not one of you suffice for each village's protection, put in a high enough place to see danger coming from any side? Why are there so many of you here, for example, in Seti, but also in every village of my province?

—There is a sad truth here. I will work up to it. First, more of ourselves.

Each of us is not only the edifice which you see, but a whole city-state. The inhabitants are varied: the raptor-birds making their nests high up in our structures; their prey, the rodents of all sizes which run through us, our little crevices their streets, as well as the smaller birds; and their own prey, the myriad insects and worms for whom one of us is like a whole world.

Continued in next week's GT and online at georgiatoday.ge.

Tony Hanmer has lived in Georgia since 1999, in Svaneti since 2007, and been a weekly writer and photographer for GT since early 2011. He runs the "Svaneti Renaissance" Facebook group, now with nearly 2000 members, at www.facebook.com/groups/SvanetiRenaissance/. He and his wife also run their own guest house in Etseri: www.facebook.com/hanmer.house.svaneti

Cartu Fund's Lung Center: A Drop in a Very Large Bucket



BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

In a cruel twist of fate, the righteous and dignified activity of the famous International Charity Foundation Cartu and its unfairly and regrettably beleaguered founder has become controversial in Georgia: on one side of her scale, Lady Justice sees thousands of people helped, many of them rescued from hunger and even from the vicious claws of death, tens of thousands aware of the Foundation's outstanding charitable doings all over the country, and hundreds of thousands enthusiastically recognizing the significance of the free assistance to those of our compatriots who have found themselves in difficulties that would have been absolutely insurmountable without our native Good Samaritan's goodwill and mighty shoulders. On the other side of the Themis Scales, we are looking at an extraordinarily sizable crowd of ungrateful folks that are so tightly blindfolded that they are unable

to see anything positive that is taking place in the land in general, and in the field of charity in particular.

Enumeration of all the projects that have successfully been carried out by the Cartu Foundation in the last twenty years is simply impossible in this brief newspaper article, but one of them is the beautiful Abastumani Lung Center, headed by experienced pulmonologist and tireless manager Revaz Zhgenti, who told us the story of the Center's creation and its current work.

The idea of creating the Lung Center in Abastumani belongs personally to the founder of the Cartu Foundation, who knew very well that the resort's specific air quality is directly curative for lung diseases. Abastumani used to be one of the most famous soviet resorts, having rescued many a patient from the perfidious attack of tuberculosis. Today, TB patients have become rarer than in the past, and the place is wide open to the general public.

Just a couple of kilometers from the very heart of Abastumani, in an open, unpopulated space, on a charming hill-

ock, stands a pretty white hotel-type three-storied construction, built by the Cartu Foundation with a whopping GEL 7 million investment which covered furnishings, state-of-the-art medical and kitchen equipment, fitness gear, and the well-nursed trees, shrubs and lawns around. The Foundation constructed the Center and transferred it into state ownership for further exploitation.

The National Center for TB and Lung Disease (NCTLD) created a special post-Covid program for the purpose of rehabilitating former Corona patients, and all this free of charge! Eligible for participating in the 20-day program is any person who has recovered from Covid-19 or one of its sub-strains, and who belongs in one of the following social groups: physically challenged persons, temporarily displaced people, socially vulnerable individuals, war and armed forces veterans, and personnel employed in hazardous and harmful jobs.

The Abastumani Lung Center was created in 2019 and has since served as the first medical enterprise of its sort not only in Georgia but in Transcauca-

sia too. It is staffed with perfect medical personnel, among them the 79-year old skilled and knowledgeable doctor Tamaz Jijeishvili, who spends most of his time at the Center, taking most qualified care of his patients. The Center can at a time accommodate 100 patients. The building is full of light and life, with a beautiful eating area catering to every possible appetite, and the three-meals-a-day nourishment regime is exactly what the patients of the above categories need to enjoy!

One of the most noticeable features to even the outsider's eye is the way Director Revaz Zhgenti treats the dwellers of his health hub, and the way his fatherly care is reciprocated by the patients. The Center feels like home and family. I could not believe my ears when I heard from him that in the concert space on the upper floor, the patients were going through a dress rehearsal for that night's amateur show, organized by Batoni Rezo for the Center staff, and performed by the patients

themselves. What else might be human happiness? Believe it or not, the overall environment at the Abastumani Lung Center and its friendly spirit might even have a bigger power on restoring health than all those medications, daily inhalations and the famed Abastumani air.

I am not surprised that Revaz Zhgenti was awarded the respectable title of Honorary Citizen of Adigeni, the district where the Abastumani Lung Center belongs. He is also the winner of the 2021 Georgian Brand nomination for "Trust & Reputation". The Center is successfully cooperating with various municipalities. It takes care of patients from Abkhazia, too. The Center has attracted the attention of American and German embassies, which have stated their readiness to provide financial assistance for the purchase of certain indispensable equipment. In a word, it is the worthy child of the Cartu Foundation - just a small drop in the huge bucket of its charitable deeds.



Baia Gallery Presents Irakli Parjiani



Annunciation. Oil on canvas. 1987

Cultural Heritage of Georgia from Private Collections – is a project within the frames of which Baia Gallery has been studying and popularizing pieces of art kept in private collections. These items are often rarities in an artistic, stylistic, or epochal sense: to extricate them from the hidden area of private collections, to study, exhibit and popularize them is an obligatory condition for researching the Georgian culture. Contemporary Art covers the group of artists acting in the two last decades of the 20th century and

the present day.

From its inception, Baia Gallery has presented and prepared exhibitions of numerous exceptional Georgian artists, among them Merab Abramishvili and Irakli Parjiani.

Irakli Parjiani is a pivotal figure in Georgian art. He belonged to a generation of artists who revived Georgian easel painting and whose fierce opposition to Soviet ideology and censorship rekindled an interest in religion, aristocratic heritage, and national identity. One of the great inspirations for these artists, and Parjiani in particular, was the tradition of Georgian fresco painting.

Born in Mestia, a mountainous region of Georgia famous for its distinctive style of religious art, the artist was a descendant of the medieval Latali Parjiani fresco painters. Arguably the artist's signature painting style comes in part from this deeply embedded genetic knowledge.

In 1978, Parjiani joined the Tbilisi Anthroposophist Circle and was greatly influenced by its prevalent concepts. Encouraged to investigate the spiritual world, the artist explored religious motifs, often returning to the same subject matter: 'Sometimes I think I am through

with the theme of the Annunciation, but the more variations I paint, the more ideas crop up and it has become an endless, inexhaustible theme in my work. Concentrating on one subject for its profound conceptualization and perception is by far more important to me than a rapid progression and variety.'

Parjiani rethinks and reinvents Christian iconography and therefore assigns it a place in contemporary art. In employing the Christian color symbolism, the artist approaches color philosophically. White plays a particular role in Parjiani's oeuvre; he uses it to portray a range of emotions. White epitomizes chastity and purity, but also holiness and divinity, which in traditional fresco painting is signified by gold.

Parjiani moved to Berlin in 1989, where he worked for a year. What later became known as the Berlin Cycle was completed a year before his death. It has come to exemplify the final stage of Parjiani's career and is arguably the culmination of his oeuvre, encapsulating his comprehension, perspective, and experiences of the world. Characteristically, the cycle revolves around religious themes, landscapes, and abstractions. By this time, Parjiani had already painted a series of portraits and flowers, illustrated the Gospel, Goethe's Faust, Homer's Odyssey, and Galaktion Tabidze's poetry, as well as various Georgian and German myths and fairy tales. The Metaphysical Landscape ties into the overall feel of the cycle; it is hard to decipher the composition, the objects seem to be reflected in the water with their weight and physicality removed. The canvas emanates the majestic calmness of a snowy landscape and of a taintless soul. This is the mysterious serenity of being; everything has grown torpid while waiting for resurrection.

Baia Gallery has organized over 20 exhibitions of Parjiani's works, produced three catalogs, and traced more than 100 of his unknown works in private collections. In 2021, Baia Gallery curated an

exhibition: 'Irakli 2 Baia Tsikoridze, Ed., Irakli Parjiani: Paintings, Graphics, Tbilisi 2011. Parjiani and Niko Pirosmiani' at The Dimitri Shevardnadze National Gallery. The exhibition presented 80 works (paintings, graphic works, and illustrations) by Irakli Parjiani, drawn together from the museum and private collections. Some of the works (approximately 30 pieces) were displayed for the first time.

Baia Gallery is an art gallery specializing in modern and contemporary art with two locations in Tbilisi, Georgia. Since its foundation, the gallery has been at the forefront of the Georgian art marketplace with highly desirable works of leading artists, historical scholarship, and insightful market analysis. Established in 1992 in post-Soviet Georgia by Baia Tsikoridze, Baia Gallery is the first private structure operating in this field.

The establishment of the gallery connects with events such as war and crisis. It is paradoxical because the gallery started working at a time and in conditions unsuitable for the existence and development of such an institution.

There was a civil war in Tbilisi and the war in Abkhazia raging. The war, fire, crisis, and the survival instinct strangely made for the setting up of the Orient gallery (now Baia Gallery), when in an old part of Tbilisi, in the abandoned and empty Chardin street, they found a small, two-story house and started to work under the conditions unimaginable for a gallery as well as for any other institution. Under those circumstances, few factors made this possible, the first being the mutual desire of artists and the gallery to collaborate. Since the day of its foundation, the gallery has been working in two main directions: cultural heritage from private collections and contemporary art, thus operating in the primary and secondary spheres of the art market.

Baia Gallery, Ingorokva Street, Tbilisi; Baia Gallery Razmadze Street, Tbilisi; New space coming soon

On Levan Songhulashvili's Noli Me Tangere

BY LEKSO DOREULI

Noli me tangere (John, 20:17), - says the risen Christ to Mary Magdalene while still on the verge of the physical and metaphysical worlds, where physical contact between them can no longer take place. Levan Songhulashvili's canvas with the same title can be perceived as completely detached from its original evangelist source as a way of exploring the concepts of touch, spiritual metamorphosis, and transitory mental states.

The canvas depicts characters that are frozen at the moment of touch. The background presents interwoven silhouettes, remains of bodies, biological masses, the ruins of the sky, and the shells of blackbirds. The evolutionary vortex they jointly create becomes part of an endless spinning. Like another monumental work of Levan Songhulashvili, Elysium, they are shown with their backs to us, while the depths of the chaos unites their bodies in a state of vaporization, faded motion that connects them to the horizon, giving birth



to the figures of children who stare at us.

In the center of the canvas, the procession of the human metastases carries a female body as if it wants to dissect the space with the help of an imaginary crucifixion. Why are these particular figures born from these blurry currents of turmoil and transformation, the tributaries of individualist hordes?

Here, we can easily recognize a child who was lost in a war. He happens to be the smallest inhabitant of the vast canvas. His persistent concreteness makes us think that the arrangement of

the main characters and the accompanying background noise is entirely conditional and accidental. The imaginary movement continues to let the ghosts emerging from the work's depth appear in the fore. We see their fading faces and the characters who, this time, join the spaces of a distant horizon. The child's figure gradually approaches us, grows, and takes its place.

In the right corner, we see the bird mines, the explosion of which creates the colors of the canvas. The fire that captures the grass slowly engulfs the bodies of the images. Everything transforms, with the author wanting to register a moment which is hard to catch in terms of changes and time.

One can feel that there are several times being acted out simultaneously on the canvas. They transform the spiral movements, an incredible and exciting image of inner transformation in an endless process. As if everything has happened, happens, and will occur at the same time. With Noli Me Tangere, Levan Songhulashvili creates a crack in our consciousness where the past, present and future will collide to show us the objects and ourselves from the perspective of this wholeness.

Noli Me Tangere is a work that changes with every touch of a gaze. No matter how many times one looks at it or is being looked at by the image, they will always see it and be seen for the first time.

LEPL Adjara Museum – Museum of Art and Window Project presents an exhibition of Levan Songhulashvili's work Noli Me Tangere, at the State Art Museum of Adjara until August 25th.



Noli Me Tangere



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