



## FOCUS

### ON SAVING GEORGIA'S NATURE

SABUKO monitors invasive plant species in Kolkheti National Park for an action plan to prevent further damage **PAGE 9**

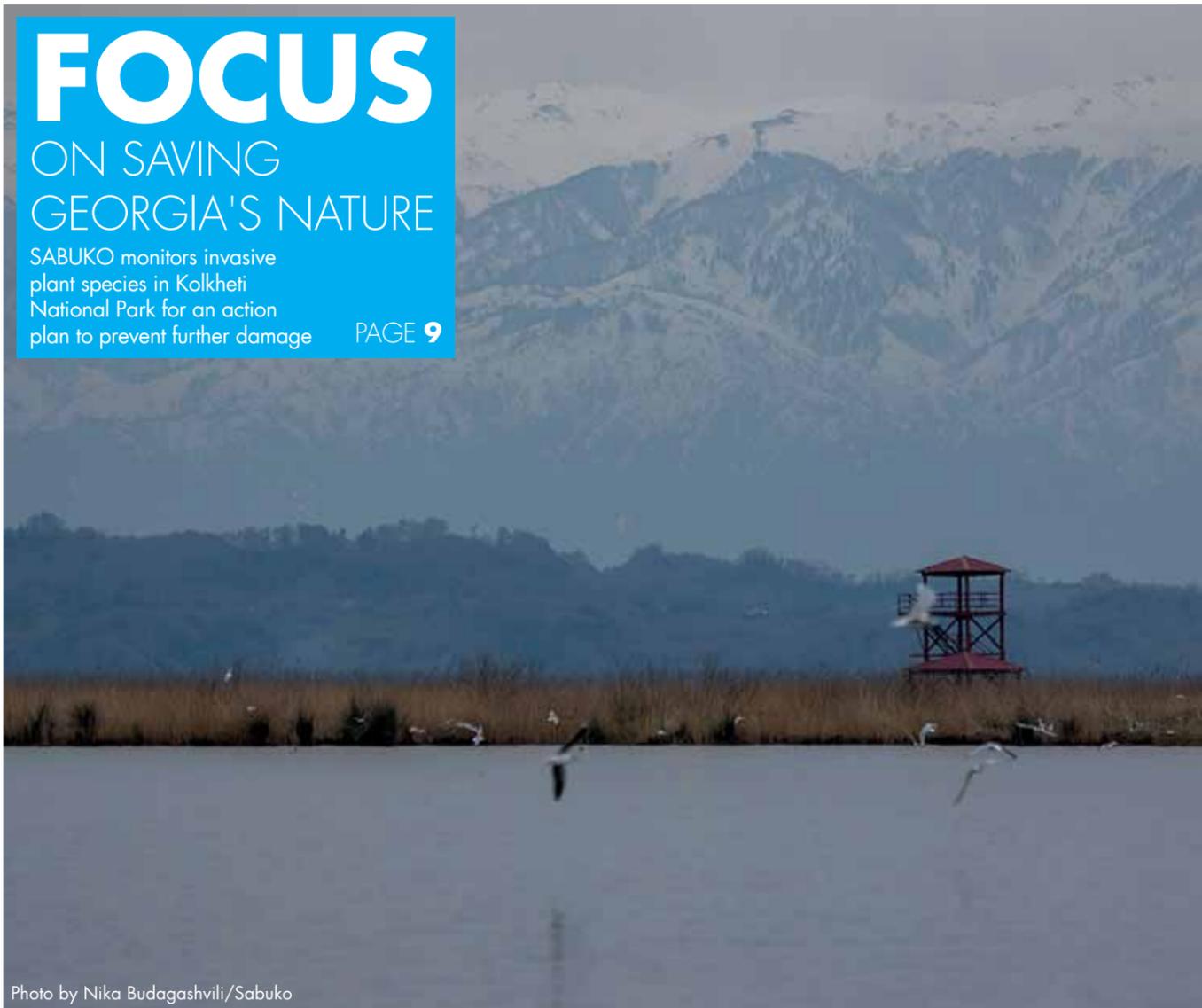


Photo by Nika Budagashvili/Sabuko

## In this week's issue...

**Latest Ukraine Updates: Russian Missile Strike Kills at Least 22 on Independence Day**  
**NEWS PAGE 3**

**Georgia's Niche in the New World**  
**POLITICS PAGE 4**

**Kakhaber Kemoklidze: Any Sort of Civil Disobedience Should Come Not with a Top-to-Bottom Principle but from the Opposite**  
**POLITICS PAGE 7**

**Overview of the Measures Taken to Support the Ukrainian Economy during the War**  
**BUSINESS PAGE 8**

**The Georgian Military Highway: Into the Mountains**  
**SOCIETY PAGE 10**

**'Night Serenades' 2022 Kicks Off in Batumi with a Traditionally Rich Program Promised for the Audience**  
**CULTURE PAGE 11**

# The Borjomi Valley Fire 2022

BY KETEVAN SKHIRTLADZE

**O**n August 19, a fire broke out in the forest of central-western Georgia, Borjomi Municipality. Initially, the fire spread over an area of about 2-3 hectares. In the process of putting out the fire, along with the local firefighters, additional groups from the neighboring municipalities were called in.

On August 22, the Government of Georgia got the defense forces involved in the extinguishing works. This week, four helicopters, over 300 firefighters and 300 representatives of the special tasks department have been involved in trying to put out the fire as windy conditions push it into new areas of forest.

"It is important for us to localize the fire so that it does not spread to other areas. At the moment, there is no risk of it spreading to populated areas, though it now covers 150 hectares," Minister of Economy of Georgia Levan Davitashvili noted, adding that it is too early to talk about damage and loss, and more information on that will be provided in the future through an investigation.

Continued on page 2



Image source: netgazeti.ge

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

As of 22-Aug-2022

BONDS				STOCKS			
	Price	w/w	m/m		Price	w/w	m/m
GRAIL 07/28	84.46 (YTM 7.33%)	-0.0%	+1.0%	Bank of Georgia (BGEO LN)	GBP 20.85	+14.1%	+45.0%
GEBGG 07/23	101.02 (YTM 4.85%)	-0.3%	+1.4%	Georgia Capital (CGEO LN)	GBP 6.74	+0.6%	+7.0%
GEOPAP 03/24	94.28 (YTM 10.23%)	+0.0%	+0.6%	TBC Bank Group (TBCG LN)	GBP 17.60	+5.4%	+41.0%
SILNET 01/27	96.38 (YTM 9.39%)	-0.6%	-0.0%				
TBC 06/24	99.06 (YTM 6.30%)	+0.0%	+0.0%	CURRENCIES			
GGU 07/25	100.39 (YTM 103.28%)	-0.1%	+0.4%	GEL / USD	2.7886	-0.4%	-0.0%
				GEL / EUR	2.7726	-2.5%	-2.7%
				GEL / GBP	3.2807	-3.0%	-2.0%
				GEL / CHF	2.8978	-2.1%	-0.1%
				GEL / RUB	0.0464	+1.5%	-3.3%
				GEL / TRY	0.1542	-1.0%	-2.0%
COMMODITIES				INDICES			
	Price	w/w	m/m		Price	w/w	m/m
Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	96.48	+1.5%	-6.5%	GEL / AZN	1.6447	-0.4%	-0.0%
Gold Spot (US\$/Oz)	1 736.30	-2.4%	+0.5%	GEL / AMD	0.0069	-0.4%	+1.8%
				GEL / UAH	0.0763	-0.4%	+0.5%
				EUR / USD	1.0057	+2.2%	+2.7%
				GBP / USD	0.8498	+2.4%	+2.0%
				CHF / USD	0.9643	+2.0%	+0.1%
				RUB / USD	60.1080	-1.9%	+3.3%
				TRY / USD	18.0706	+0.6%	+3.9%
				AZN / USD	1.6956	+0.0%	-
				AMD / USD	404.7900	-0.0%	-1.8%



## Georgian Karatekas Win 3 Gold and 1 Silver Medals at Tokyo Karate World Championship

The XV Shotokan Karate World Championship was held in Tokyo on August 6-7, organized by the World Shotokan Karate Federation (WSKF), in which the Georgian Shotokan Karate Federation team also participated. The chief referee of the world championship in Japan was the senior instructor of the World Shotokan Karate Federation, seven-time world champion, Hitoshi Kasuya.

In Japan, Georgian karate athletes competed with great success at the World Championship, winning a total of 3 gold and 1 silver medal. Chabuka Makharadze won 1st place and 2 gold medals in the individual kata and kumite absolute categories among adults, and with this victory, he won the title of world champion

for the fourth time in his sports career. It should be noted that at the Shotokan Karate World Championship in Tokyo in 2015, he won a silver medal in the individual kata. Nodar Khachishvili successfully competed among the veterans, taking first place and a gold medal in the individual kumite, and silver in the individual cat.

Chabuka Makharadze is a four-time world and multiple European champion, as well as a winner of many international tournaments and a successful instructor, he is the senior instructor of the Shotokan Karate Confederation of Georgia. He has been successfully competing in international tournaments since 2000, he has won medals of all types: gold, silver and bronze, more than 100 medals in total.

## Educational and Cultural Cooperation Agreement Signed between Governments of Georgia and United States of Mexico



Within the framework of the official ceremony held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mexico, an agreement on cooperation in the field of education and culture was signed between the governments of Georgia and the United States of Mexico.

The agreement was signed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Marcelo Ebrard Casaubon from the Mexican side, and by the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Georgia

to Mexico, Zaza Gabunia - from the Georgian side.

The aforesaid Agreement aims at developing cooperation between Georgia and Mexico in the field of culture and education. As noted in the Agreement, the parties express their willingness to promote the development of inter-agencies and public diplomacy. The Agreement also envisages further development of cooperation between educational institutions through student exchange programs, as well as deepening of ties between youth organizations.

As pointed out in the Agreement, the parties are focused on encouraging the mutual exchange of groups of artists, as well as on conducting other events through participation in international festivals of music, fine, and performing arts.

As part of the official ceremony, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Mexico and the Ambassador of Georgia addressed the attending audience.

They emphasized the importance of the agreement in deepening the relations between the two countries.

# The Borjomi Valley Fire 2022

Continued from page 1

He noted that this is a very difficult process and a lot depends on what the weather is like.

"Why the fire broke out will be determined by the investigation, although it is very hard to imagine something surprising here: It is high temperatures, the summer season. The last half of August is the most risky period, and this is not the first time we've had a fire season in the country during this period."

In 2017, Borjomi Municipality lost 943 hectares in a devastating four-day summer fire.

"If we look at the whole of Europe and the whole continent, there are the same and much larger problems. Portugal lost 10% of its protected areas to fire in just one month," Davitashvili said.

The Minister of Internal Affairs, Vakhtang Gomelauri, went to Borjomi Municipality to familiarize himself with the situation on the ground.

Gomelauri, together with the Minister of Defense Juansher Burchuladze and the Minister of Environment Protection and Agriculture Otar Shamugia, on August 23 inspected the affected area and attended a working meeting at the operative management headquarters.

"All fire sources are not yet localized. They are being worked on. As yesterday was windy, an almost extinguished and localized fire reignited and spread to another mountain. We still have small and active fire sources burning.

"There are more than 1,200 people working on this, among them representatives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, representatives of the Ministry of Defense, and the Ministry of Environment Protection. 120-110 units of equipment are mobilized, including heavy equipment and tractors working to lay roads so workers and water can reach the affected areas.

"The main danger is in the wind. If there's no wind, we can work all night



Vakhtang Gomelauri. Source: police.ge

and the situation will be better the next day. If the wind picks up, of course, there is a risk of the fire spreading, possibly to a broader area," he said.

"We have localized the fire spreading towards the villages, and fire-engines are mobilized so as not to allow the fire to move towards them, and they will remain unaffected unless something unexpected happens or a storm breaks out," Minister of Internal Affairs, Vakhtang Gomelauri noted on his visit, going on to justify why the helicopters were not put into use immediately, following criticism in the media.

"Weather conditions meant that our helicopters could not fly. They didn't consider it necessary on the first day, and when they started flying, they were only able to drop four loads of water before the wind blew up and spread the fire. There are no specific rules on when a helicopter should get involved, there

is no such thing in the world, not only in this country- it does not exist anywhere. When they considered it necessary, found it difficult to localize the fire, they called for a helicopter. They managed to get a few loads dumped, but it was so windy that we couldn't bring the rest of the helicopters.

"I would like to emphasize one aspect regarding the use of a helicopter in fire extinguishing works: Don't imagine that if the helicopter flies over and dumps water, everything is over. Without people's physical work on the ground, a fire will not be extinguished. We studied the ground, dumped water on it, dug about 30 centimeters in, and the fire was still there. The main fire source might be treated with water, but if you don't go down and treat it by hand, it can reignite in an hour," Gomelauri stated.

On August 24, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, Ilia Darchiashvili, and

the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu had a telephone conversation, where the Turkish side expressed its readiness to assist in the elimination of the Borjomi forest fires and confirmed Turkey's commitment to provide Georgia with appropriate equipment.

Darchiashvili thanked his Turkish colleague for his help and once again emphasized the close partnership between Georgia and Turkey and noted the assistance provided by Turkey in similar situations in the past.

Turkey's firefighting plane, boasting an 8-ton tank, has already got involved in carrying out fire extinguishing works in Borjomi.

"Three aircraft joined the work together with the Border Police aviation team, and I would like to express my appreciation to our friends, the Turkish side. Their assistance is very important and

greatly contributed to the fire extinguishing works," Gomelauri noted.

He highlighted again that due to windy weather, the helicopters were finding it difficult to operate, so the planes were much needed and appreciated, and, as a result of their water-dumping, the fire sources and area of expansion had already decreased.

"I would like to express my gratitude to our Azerbaijani and Armenian friends, who also offered to help us with equipment, though it is not yet possible to take them up on their kind offers as we have already mobilized equipment and are not capable of working in full force physically, owing to the difficult terrain.

"I would like to underline that there are and have been fires throughout Europe, and elsewhere, and everyone is dealing with their own issues. Firefighting aircraft are a great luxury and not every country has one, so we do not expect any aircraft from other countries to arrive in the near future," he stated.

Gomelauri emphasized that the area where the fire has spread has not gone beyond the red zone, however, fire has appeared in new locations where it was not detectable before, mostly within the pine forest.

"We have now made a full circle and inspected the area. You remember the fire in Borjomi that occurred in 2017: everything burned at once. This is not the case here, as we have only small fire zones. The area is large, but the scale of the fire is comparatively less.

"As to when the fire will be extinguished," he said, "It's a very difficult question to answer. It is largely dependent on the weather. Let me point out once again that even if we had more helicopters, they would not be able to operate in wind. Also, I would like to inform you that, as it was reported to me, there is no danger posed to strategic pipelines," Gomelauri stated.

The fire extinguishing works are ongoing.

# Latest Ukraine Updates: Russian Missile Strike Kills at Least 22 on Independence Day

BY ANA DUMBADZE

**A** Russian missile attack killed 22 civilians and set a passenger train on fire in eastern Ukraine, officials in Kyiv said, with missiles striking north of the capital as Ukraine marked its Independence Day on August 24 under heavy shelling.

In video remarks to the United Nations Security Council, President Zelensky said rockets hit a train in the small town of Chaplyne, some 145 km (90 miles) west of Russian-occupied Donetsk in eastern Ukraine.

"Chaplyne is our pain today. As of this moment there are 22 dead," he said in a later evening video address, adding that Ukraine would hold Russia responsible for all it had done.

Zelensky aide Kyrylo Tymoshenko later said Russian forces had shelled Chaplyne twice.

A boy was killed in the first attack when a missile hit his house, and 21 people died later when rockets hit the railway station and set fire to five train carriages, he said in a statement.

The Russian defense ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Russia denies targeting civilians.

"Russia's missile strike on a train station full of civilians in Ukraine fits a pattern of atrocities. We will continue, together with partners from around the world, to stand with Ukraine and seek accountability from Russian officials," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Twitter.

There were also six explosions during



a rocket attack on the Vyshgorod region directly north of Kyiv, but there were no casualties reported, regional official Olexiy Kuleba said.

"Two impacts were recorded. There were no casualties or injuries among civilians. There were no fires or destruction of residential buildings or infrastructure," Kuleba wrote on Telegram on Thursday morning. "The other explosions heard by the residents of the region were 'the work' of our air defences," he said.

Russia's military avoided Kyiv on the Ukrainian holiday and targeted frontline towns such as Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, Nikopol and Dnipro with artillery attacks, Ukraine presidential adviser Oleksiy Arestovych said.

Celebrations of the August 24 public holiday were canceled, however, many Ukrainians marked the occasion by wearing embroidered shirts typical of the national dress.

## RUSSIA EXPECTED TO PUT AZOV SOLDIERS ON TRIAL IN MARIUPOL

Separately, Kyiv submitted information

to international legal bodies about Russian plans, described by the UN officials on Tuesday, to put captured Ukrainian fighters from the Azov Regiment on trial in Mariupol, officials said.

The port city fell to Russian forces in April after weeks of intense shelling as they encircled Ukrainian holdouts at the Azovstal Steel Plant.

Presidential adviser Arestovych said Zelensky made clear Kyiv would "never, ever" consider peace negotiations with Moscow if the trials went ahead.

US Secretary of State spokesperson Ned Price said the unlawful process would amount to a "mockery of justice."

## KYIV DENIES KILLING PUTIN ALLY'S DAUGHTER, RUSSIA OPENS INVESTIGATION

The daughter of a key Kremlin adviser was killed in an explosion while driving near Moscow, a dramatic attack that became a new flash point in the six-month war.

The daughter of Alexander Dugin, referred to as Russian President Vladimir Putin's "brain," was killed in a car explosion in the Moscow region, according

to Russia's main investigative authority, which said it was opening a criminal murder investigation. Daria Dugina, 29, was reportedly driving her father's car from a festival they had both attended when the vehicle erupted in flames, reported Russia's state-run media outlet Tass.

Ukraine denied involvement and suggested it could be the result of an internal dispute within Russia.

Dugina had been sanctioned by the United States as part of a list of Russian elites and Russian intelligence-directed disinformation outlets, alongside her father, who has been designated for sanctions since 2015.

## THE KEY BATTLEFIELD DEVELOPMENTS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

Russian shelling in a small central Ukrainian city killed at least one person, injured seven others and destroyed homes and a school building, local officials said. The Sunday strike, in the Dnipropetrovsk region, is at least the second major attack on the area, which has come under increased fire as the standoff over the nearby Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant has escalated.

Western leaders discussed the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant Sunday. According to a White House statement announcing their phone call, they shared their desire to "avoid military operations" near Europe's largest nuclear plant. They also advocated for the International Atomic Energy Agency to assess the area's safety systems as soon as possible.

Putin said he supports allowing United Nations experts to inspect the plant and agreed to provide "necessary assistance" during a call with French President

Emmanuel Macron. However, Moscow has rejected broader requests to withdraw its military from the site, and has accused Ukraine of shelling the facility and preparing to cause a "radiation leak" there.

Drone attacks, including one on the headquarters of Russia's Black Sea fleet, were reported in Crimea on Saturday. The governor of Sevastopol, a Russian appointee, said a drone hit the roof of the fleet's headquarters after Russian forces were unable to shoot it down. But he later reversed his claim, saying in a "clarification" on Telegram that the drone was struck and landed on the roof, catching fire. "There was no defeat," he wrote. The claims could not be independently verified.

Russian forces' attempted advance toward the southern city of Mykolaiv, which they have shelled repeatedly in recent days, has seen "partial success," the Ukrainian army conceded in one of its regular updates. Moscow's soldiers now occupy a small settlement less than 30 miles from Mykolaiv, but "combat is ongoing," the army reported.

Two more ships carrying grain and sunflower oil left Ukraine over the weekend, Turkey's Defense Ministry said. They left the port of Chornomorsk, close to Odesa in southwest Ukraine, bringing the total number of ships to have sailed out under an UN-backed deal to 27.

The United States has presented to NATO officials instruments of ratification for Sweden's and Finland's accession to the military alliance, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said. The war has seen moves to expand NATO, and Blinken said handing in the documents was "the final step in our process to have these important partners become vital NATO Allies."

# NGOs: Georgian Dream is Trying to Disrupt Public Control Over the Activities of the Gov't

BY TEAM GT

**G**eorgian Dream's aggressive campaign against local non-governmental organizations has reached an alarming level, - 20 non-governmental organizations said in a statement released Thursday.

They claimed that "the attack on civil organizations by Georgian Dream has the goal of neutralizing public control over the activities of the government, which is another clear manifestation of authoritarianism and indicates the irreversible trend of its formation."

"After Georgian Dream blocked the participation of the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) in the working group created by it to fulfill the 12 points defined for Georgia to obtain the status of candidate for EU membership, which was followed by the suspension of work in groups created by other NGOs, the ruling party attacked the civil sector.

"Irakli Kobakhidze, the Chairman of Georgian Dream, attacking the competence and integrity of NGOs, classifying them and creating a black list of organizations unacceptable to the government due to their position on European integration, which is the most important issue in the country's national interests, is nothing more than an attempt by Georgian Dream to neutralize public control over the activities of the government, and in this way, to facilitate the implementation of its own agenda," the NGOs stated.

"The ruling party attacks those individuals and organizations that actively monitor the activities of the government, criticize the current dangerous policies,

and call on the government to review its agenda and start taking real steps towards the development of the country in the direction of European integration.

"We believe that Georgian Dream is aware of the outcome, however, with such rhetoric and steps, it is purposefully trying to break all the levers that Georgia needs for its democratic development. It is such decisions and statements that make the future of democratic development of Georgia unclear, both in the eyes of the national and international community, which is fully the responsibility of Georgian Dream," reads the statement.

The statement was signed by: Georgian Democratic Initiative (GDI); Georgia Court Watch; Transparency International Georgia (TI); Georgian Open Society Foundation (OSGF); Guardians of Democracy; Media Development Fund; Economic Policy Research Center (EPRC); European-Georgian Institute; Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies (Rondeli Foundation); Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP); Atlantic Council of Georgia; Georgian Reforms Association (GRASS); Tolerance and Diversity Institute (TDI); Rights Georgia; Women for a Common Future (WECF) - Georgia; Safari; Regional Network of Civil Activists; Caucasian Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development (CIPDD); Human Rights Center; and the Group of Independent Lawyers.

Following the government's moves against the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy, Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degnan on Wednesday said the United States has "full confidence" in ISFED.

"It's a highly respected and experienced election monitoring organization. ISFED participated in last summer's electoral



reform working group that was chaired by the current Speaker and that produced some important, very useful electoral reform legislation that was subsequently adopted by the Parliament," she stated.

The Ambassador added that she believes "it is so important that ISFED and other civil society organizations, which have expertise in election monitoring and conducting elections, are able to participate in Georgia's electoral reform working groups. That's what the European Commission encouraged: an inclusive process that ensured that all stakeholders had a chance to contribute to improving Georgia's electoral system."

"I think it's also important to remember, and perhaps review, the assessments that were made by ODIHR, OSCE, and the international and domestic election monitors for the 2020 and 2021 elections. All of them pointed to serious violations: voter intimidation, vote buying, carousel voting, abuse of administrative resources, and other violations that occurred in the weeks leading up to the election as well as on election day.

"None of the reports assessed these elections as being fair. ISFED was not

responsible for those violations. I think it's clear that they did not play a role in those violations that were the cause for the public losing confidence in the outcome of the election results.

"In fact, as soon as ISFED confirmed that there had been a PVT [Parallel Vote Tabulations] miscalculation, which was determined to be an insignificant statistical measure, ISFED informed the public immediately and released the information fully. That is why we have full confidence in ISFED as a professional election monitoring organization. They were transparent about a mistake that happened as soon as they were able to confirm it."

Ambassador Degnan was asked about the statement from ruling party Chair Irakli Kobakhidze, claiming that "former head of ISFED [Elene Nizharadze] said the US Embassy was aware of PVT miscalculation while was moderating the so-called political crisis, which raises many questions." Kobakhidze thinks ISFED was "actively involved in rigging" PVT during the 2020 Parliamentary elections which had become "one of the main pillars of the domestic radical opposition

to sabotage the parliament"

Ambassador Degnan answered: "Everyone is entitled to their opinion, but I don't see any fact or evidence to substantiate that opinion."

"The fact is that as soon as that mistake was confirmed and identified, the public was informed. It was disclosed to the public so that people could understand that it was a statistically insignificant factor, and that was made clear as well. So, I think it's a complete misrepresentation of reality to say that this was deliberate, that this was some part of a revolutionary scam. Of all people, those who were involved in the negotiations following that election should know very well that the whole emphasis and effort there was designed to deescalate a very tense situation.

"The United States' goal was to help get all of the political parties that were elected in that Parliamentary election into Parliament and working on the issues that matter to Georgians. That was our sole purpose. That's what we did for six months, and those who were involved in the negotiations know that very well," she noted.

# Georgia's Niche in the New World

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

The world is changing at a very fast pace, and Georgia is going through that metamorphosis in affordable step with the rest of the altering globe. Most of the contemporary prominent brains of international policy tell us in unison that the time is truly epochal, emphasizing that a revision of the world order is taking place, something which last happened around a hundred years ago when those revolutionary social, political and technological adjustments triggered radical transformations, providing for the survival of humanity, and creating an entirely new economic basis for the world's development.

In that complicated process, Georgia had its own commensurable role and niche, but its headache, connected with its geopolitical orientation, is yet to end. Having been colonized and finally annexed by Russia, the poor little country wreathed and wriggled as it sought freedom and independence, irritating Russia with its zeal for liberty and sovereignty, and ending that love-hate matrimony in a bloody conflict and one-third of its historical territory lost, maybe forever. The abominable status quo imposed on us seems to be written in stone, leaving the leading powers of the country feeling flagrantly impotent to change the extant state of things into something drastically healthier for the sick nation. Under the crucial influence of bitter experience in the moderately turbulent and shakily promising Russian-Georgian relations, any step can be pre-



Mother of Georgia (Qarlis deda). Source: georgiantravelguide.com

carious and fraught with potential errors. Hence, the double and even triple geopolitical game that we are constantly dragged into!

And still, the incipient configuration of the new world order is granting us a hopeful light at the end of the yet darkened tunnel. The Russian-Ukrainian crisis has created a solid background for turning a seemingly local emergency into a real worldwide clash of national

interests and geopolitical aspirations. It would be immature to say that this is just a war between two nations, as it has turned into a collision between Russia and the entire West, in the persons of the USA, EU and NATO, among whom Georgia is walking surreptitiously along the burning catwalks of the unmitigated and undying conflict.

The scientific answer to how it all happened and how the world found itself in

such turmoil has not yet crystallized, although attempts are being made to interpret the stranglimbo. Says Anthony H. Cordesman, the Emeritus Chair in Strategy at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS): "The United States needs to react to the Ukraine war in ways that fully address the reality that 'globalism' and the 'end of history' have proved to be dangerous illusions. It must go beyond simply addressing the weak-

nesses of NATO. The US cannot afford a strategy that focuses on only one major threat or region. It cannot afford to ignore or lose its major strategic partners in any part of the world. It must plan to remain a global power where its peacetime actions throughout the world will be critical in achieving deterrence and its overall strategic objectives, rather than rebalancing to one region or one small part of that region." This is just one opinion and one attitude. There are so many others out there, but none of them have earned enough respect and heed to have the whole world believe.

Thus, it is not surprising that a minor player like Georgia might be somewhat at a loss in its interminable search for the most justifiable ways to survive the game of the giants. More so because the critical global situation has not yet revealed the losers and winners, remaining just as murky and blurred as it was when the war started half a year ago. And according to an expert's promise, the winner will be the one(s) who build a new economy, maintain their extant social and state system, and keep their geopolitical position.

Georgia has so far physically eschewed the hotbed of turbulence, which does not mean that we are out of the woods, but that we have a valuable premonition that new economics, refreshed social policy, reinvented geopolitical considerations and revised global order are coming up, for which we have to be ready. Georgia's niche in the renovated world is looming, and the future belongs to those Georgian leaders and political forces on both sides of the aisle who can guess exactly what this nation needs and has to do at this crucial moment, and act accordingly.

## Georgia: A Deluge of Russians

ANALYSIS BY EMIL AVDALIANI

The Russians are coming to Georgia. This time at least they're not in tanks, but as visitors arriving either as tourists or staying in the country indefinitely. Russia's invasion of Ukraine forced many liberal Russians to flee the country, and Georgia, which offers a unilateral visa-free regime, quite naturally represented an attractive destination.

Initially, some tens of thousands came, but as the war in Ukraine has dragged on and the numbers grow, there is a rising fear in Georgia that the initial wave has now been superseded by something more ominous under the disguise of tourism.

The numbers are huge. The inflow of some 250,000 Russians to a country of about 3.7 million has increased tensions, especially in tourist areas. Some plan to stay longer — in the March-June period alone, 6,400 companies were registered by Russian citizens, in addition to a fairly high number of real estate purchases in major Georgian cities. In August, these figures are expected to increase further.

The large numbers do offer some economic recompense. Indeed, the Georgian currency, the Lari, has fared fairly well over the past months and recovered some of its losses against the US dollar. Though monthly inflation is tapering off only very slowly, economic growth is good.

But the influx has caused security concerns. The opposition claims that among the Russians there are numerous Kremlin agents. Some of those concerns were evidenced in a recent revelation made by one Russian resident claiming he had been sent into Georgia to spy on his compatriots.

Demographic fears are also rising as greater numbers of Georgians leave the country for work in Poland, Germany,

and especially the US. In 2021 alone, nearly 100,000 people departed. For a country of its size, the numbers of arriving Russians are staggering, as is the scale of Russian tourists-cum-seekers of permanent residence.

An online petition has now been launched in Tbilisi to push the government into re-introducing visas for Russians. This comes at the moment when calls for a complete ban on Russian citizens are increasing across Europe and especially in the Baltics and other border states.

The ruling party, Georgian Dream, is on the fence. And while it tries to pilot a balanced approach to the problem, the opposition accuses it of covert pro-Russian sentiment. This is not helped by the ongoing tensions between Georgian Dream and the country's Western partners, which also fuels allegations about the party's true intentions. Though it is unlikely that a major shift in Georgia's foreign policy will occur, there are indeed indications that its approach to its historically close ties with the EU and NATO are becoming more nuanced and distant. More geopolitical balancing is expected to be on display.

Many Georgians try to show their negative stance toward the inflow of Russians by exhibiting anti-Russian signs, graffiti, or Ukrainian flags. Batumi, Georgia's major sea resort, is filled with Russians, and tensions are palpable across the city. The main boulevard has signs declaring "Moscow Will Burn" and "Russians Go Home." Europe Square has nearly daily flash mobs of people waving Ukrainian flags and exhibiting banners with "Russia is a Terrorist State." Russians respond with slurs and gestures.

In one instance, a Russian protesting against Georgian songs being played in a café triggered a violent response from local Georgians, while Arab tourists watched on stupefied. Social media in Georgia is filled with similar cases of locals expressing discomfort when approached in Russian.



A Russian family builds a sandcastle on a Georgian beach. Photo by Katie Ruth Davies

While the majority of Georgians may be decidedly anti-Russian, the business sector is disregarding social tensions and is seeking to lure as many Russians as possible. Georgia is economically increasingly dependent on Russia, something that has become even clearer in recent months. Yet as bilateral trade grows and tourism flourishes, there is still very much a live collective memory of the Kremlin using economic leverage in the past.

Most Georgians are also able to distinguish between the different types of Russian arrivals. Many have fled Russia because free speech is trampled upon and because weakness or doubt are now

seen as treachery. These people understand that the war in Ukraine will be a long conflict, perhaps even decade-long, with unknowable consequences. They create cafes and live within small, mostly Russian-speaking, social groups. Their presence is seen as less threatening because they tend to blend in rather than stand out, and they often appreciate the fears and demands of the local population.

The ambiguity in the streets of Georgian cities exemplifies the challenge the country is currently facing as the regional balance of power teeters: If Russia's military successfully occupies large parts of eastern and southern Ukraine, then

the South Caucasus will look like a very different place.

If Georgia re-introduces visas, it might well anger the Kremlin, or so the government's logic goes. Social disturbances, even at the level of rioting, might potentially instigate a Russian reaction. So the Georgian government chooses to do what it does best: wait on yet another critical situation, hoping for the worst of the storm to pass.

This worked in past crises. This time, however, the situation is much riskier.

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

# Countering Disinformation in Georgia's Fight against the Kremlin



Russian President Vladimir Putin. Photo by Alexei Nikolsky/RIA Novosti

ANALYSIS BY MICHAEL GODWIN

In the battle between autocratic nations and democratic institutions, truth is often the first casualty. Sadly, the ones who suffer the most from this are the everyday people, and those living in Georgia's democracy are seeing competing information sources and blurred lines in the propaganda war.

The modern media landscape has rapidly reduced the gap between government institutions and the public's access to information. Open source intelligence, more and smaller news outlets, and increased transparency have contributed to a more diverse data pool. While Georgia has recently struggled with transpar-

ency at their federal level, it leaps ahead of the infamous shadowy sources in the Kremlin.

However, this blossoming clarity from the government is a useful weapon against the ongoing disinformation campaigns from outside the country. As has been seen by American and European governments, this very transparency can work to undermine the work of Russian efforts. As nations like Russia and China expend massive resources on restricting public access to truth in order to reinforce their own power, Western democracies such as Georgia are able to use openness as an important weapon. This information released to the public has a tendency to be more verifiable, comes ahead of state-created narratives, and can act as a unifying factor for multiple nations.

The ability to independently confirm

information released by a transparent government itself works to undermine the veracity of a manufactured story by its opposition. As has been seen by Russia in Ukraine, narratives that are created for propaganda are easily debunked by even the most cursory of searches. This simple ability to verify information at the general public's level has dug the Kremlin a hole they are unlikely to get out of any time soon.

Despite this, it is not enough for Tbilisi to simply allow its information to be checked by its constituents. The government has to make diligent strides to streamline and digitize access to this data. While some may argue that releasing such a vast trove of information to the open public could undermine national security and trust in institutions, this is not a weakness, but a strength.

Internally, the access to this open source information allows greater trust and a higher level of accountability in government offices. Trust in government is something that is generally at an all-time low across the world. The opportunity to regain some of this trust should never be missed.

Externally, the threat to national security is negated by the reactive nature of an enemy like the Kremlin. Sharing this information forces them to adjust their policies and tactics, which in turn fosters an environment of innovation and adaptability on the Georgian side. While a sort of cat-and-mouse dynamic is created, it fights stagnation, corruption, and restores trust in the defense and security sectors.

For Russia, their entire state security apparatus is built on a decades-long bedrock of secrecy. Even to its own members there is distrust and a furtive nature, something that reportedly has even hampered the entire "special mili-

tary operation" from the onset. Multiple instances of Russia's own service members exist of their being either unaware or with an incomplete picture of their invasion of Ukraine.

This, combined with unconfirmed reports that Russian President Vladimir Putin himself was either lied to or misinformed, frames the transparency issue perfectly. The side effects of maintaining a clandestine nature in government information distribution and access poisons the proverbial tree at its root. Even now, six months into the war, Russian information sources are treated by news and analysis outlets with the utmost scrutiny and mistrust.

Of particular note is the way information must be curated for dissemination to the public. Government data must avoid the dangerous attempts made in the past of "cherry picking" information, as this is a ticking time bomb that will undo any efforts to re-establish trust.

Having open source information available to the public, put simply, not only builds bridges between the government and its people but also advances Georgia's domestic and international agenda.

While no government is without its secrets, it is important to navigate this carefully. No diplomat, soldier, intelligence officer, or analyst can operate without some level of confidentiality. However, the rapid pace at which information is becoming more accessible and Western governments are increasing transparency needs to be reckoned with.

The Georgia Government, while certainly with its shortcomings, has less to hide than that of the Kremlin. Additionally, it only advances its path to NATO and the EU, something the majority of the population openly support. Transparency, for Georgia, is another weapon in the fight against misinformation from her opponents and a tool to build trust at home and abroad.



Protestors in Russia opposed to the invasion of Ukraine are arrested by police in Moscow. Photo by Alexander Nemenov/Getty Images

## Georgian President at Crimea Platform Summit: I Believe Ukraine is On The Right Side of History

For Georgia, the events that unfolded in Ukraine are unfortunately well known and reopened many wounds. The Kremlin's aggression against its peaceful neighbors follows the pattern that Georgia has experienced three times. We hence know too well, to see one's own territory invaded and occupied, and the price that your soldiers and civilians paying, - Georgia's President Salome Zurbashvili stated in her

address to Crimea Platform Summit.

"On behalf of the Georgian people, I would like to reaffirm our admiration for your valorous struggle and express firm belief that this fight will end in your victory. And already your fight has been victorious, as it has challenged Russia's sense of invincible and impunity; your fight is already victorious since it has generated an unprecedented response, the strong and united response of the international community, one that was

not seen by President Putin in 2014 and 2008. Today's response is one that will change the future.

"It is evident that war in Ukraine and occupation of Crimea and attacks today on Odesa significantly undermine Black Sea security and hence global security as the world faces an unprecedented threat of food shortages, caused by halted grain exports. We are once again reminded of an elementary principle - peace and security cannot be divided, we are all in the same boat.

"In these difficult times, the Ukrainian people have unified around European aspirations, and I would like to wholeheartedly congratulate Ukraine on receiving EU candidate status, and express our confidence that Georgia will soon join our two partners Ukraine and Moldova on this path. I am strongly convinced that this anachronistic war will end soon and Ukraine, standing on the right side of history, will emerge victorious. Occupation has no place in the XXI century. "Dear President Zelensky, I'm confident that we will witness our nations regaining unity, territorial integrity and prosperity in a peaceful and safe Europe. Happy Independence Day. Slava Ukraine!" stated Salome Zurbashvili.

## Kinzinger: I Strongly Recommend Georgia Quit Playing Footsie with Russia



Rep. Adam Kinzinger (R-Ill.) speaks during a House Jan. 6 committee hearing on Thursday, July 21, 2022 to focus on former President Trump's actions during the insurrection. Russia's days as a regional power are drawing to a close. I strongly recommend Georgia take this seriously and quit playing footsie with Russia, - American

Congressman, Adam Kinzinger, wrote on Twitter.

With this tweet, the Congressman responded to the information spread in the media, according to which Lev Dengov, the adviser and ally of Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov and the husband of Georgian singer Keta Topuria, who previously violated the Georgian law on occupied territories, was spotted in Tbilisi.



# Kornely Kakachia on Oligarchs, Political Power and the EU's 12-point Recommendations



EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW BY  
EREKLE POLADISHVILI

I would say the past six months were crucial for Georgian politics, especially in terms of foreign policy and the Europeanization of Georgia, because of the decision of the European Council to grant Georgia a European perspective but Ukraine and Moldova Candidate Status



GD are afraid that if they meet the EU 12 points, they will lose power in two years, while the opposition believes that if they engage in genuine dialogue with GD, it will strengthen their position before the election

made many Georgians unhappy. -Kornely Kakachia, Director of the Georgian Institute of Politics, tells GEORGIA TODAY. "Still, I think this was life-changing for the country because at least now we know the country has a geopolitical compass, but, of course, a lot of problems remain, including internal polarization, the radicalization of Georgian politics, and that's why what we need to do right now, primarily political actors, is to fulfil this 12-point recommendation the European Union offered to fulfil the dream of the Georgian people."

#### DO YOU BELIEVE WE WILL MANAGE TO MEET THOSE GOALS?

I don't believe it can be done in as short a term as the Georgian government believes. Georgia is currently expected to deliver this next year, but I don't think it will. I believe the parliamentary election in 2024 will be very decisive, though. If Georgia manages to administer this election properly and it is held democratically, maybe after the election, we might get some results regarding the EU's decision. But, as far as these 12 points go, it's not easy to fulfil because both the government and the opposition are reluctant to engage in honest dialogue. The ruling party are afraid that if they meet these 12 points, they will lose power in two years, while the opposition believes that if they engage in genuine dialogue with the government, it may strengthen their position before the election, seeing them winning the elections for a fourth time. So, that's why both sides are very reluctant to engage in issues like polarization, deoligarchization and other issues which the European Union highlighted.

#### DO YOU SEE THE GROWING INFLOW OF RUSSIAN TOURISTS AS A THREAT

#### TO GEORGIA'S SECURITY, ECONOMY AND SO ON?

I think many people believe that this may cause some problems for Georgia. I don't have evidence-based facts to say whether it's bad or good for Georgia, but what we need and, especially from the governmental structure, is a SWOT analysis: What are the threats this kind of inflow brings to Georgian security? Then, based on this analysis, there should be a decision made. There is definitely a need to change the policy, maybe to a stricter regime, like in our neighboring countries. Some of them allow Russian tourists to stay there for 90 days and are not as liberal as we are in Georgia. We may also need to recalculate our interests based on our security needs.

#### WHAT'S THE NAME OF THE GAME EX-PRESIDENT MIKHEIL SAAKASHVILI IS PLAYING RIGHT NOW?

I don't think anybody knows what the rationale behind it is. His lawyers probably advised him that he needs to act according to his personal interests, and I think he sees this as a good strategy to avoid the Georgian court system, which I don't think will be guaranteed. As we already know from the Georgian government's reaction, they don't buy this argument, and they are not ready, at least at this moment, to fulfil his promises. In reality, we don't know whether he will leave Georgian politics, which he promised many times before; not to interfere in Georgian politics, even saying that he left his political party. Still, he remains the shadow leader in the UNM. It isn't easy right now to say what his future will be. Still, if he manages to return to Ukraine, maybe, at some point, he will not get involved anymore. However, understanding that he's still a Georgian politician, I think it will be very difficult for him to stay away from our politics.



There is definitely a need to change the visa policy for Russians

#### IN A FEW WORDS, PLEASE, EXPLAIN TO US WHAT THE TERM "OLIGARCH" MEANS.

When we talk about the oligarchs in the post-Soviet space, in countries like Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, we mean people who have an invested interest in politics, and their influence falls not only on the economy but also on politics. They control the executive branch, sometimes legislative and court systems. This was the case in Moldova, and this is the case in Georgia, while in Ukraine, the situation is a little bit different because there you have several dozen oligarchs, and they can balance each other out, while we have only one, and there's nobody who can challenge him.

#### IS MR BIDZINA IVANISHVILI REALLY AN OLIGARCH?

Yes, definitely. He's an oligarch in many respects. Everybody agrees, and you don't need to be a scientist to see it. He enjoys a monopolized position in Georgian politics, and I think that's precisely how we understand the rule of oligarchy in Georgia.

#### WILL THE EU CONSIDER THIS POINT FULFILLED IF THE NEW LAW OF DEOLIGARCHIZATION IS

#### NOT APPLIED TO IVANISHVILI?

I don't think so. It's a consensus decision that should be made by the government and the opposition on what this new law means and how it can be applied to anybody, including Ivanishvili.

#### WHY DOES THE US NEVER NAME MR IVANISHVILI AS A SHADOW RULER BUT CONSIDERS IT NECESSARY TO SEND ITS OFFICIAL TO HIM TO DISCUSS THE COUNTRY'S CRITICAL ISSUES? HERE, I REFER TO AMBASSADOR KELLY DEGNAN'S VISIT TO HIM IN MARCH.

There was probably an attempt to exchange views about the future and trajectory of the country. I think that was perhaps one of the drivers why ambassadors, including the US and some other countries' ambassadors, also met him, because they know that he's the one who can influence the government's decisions. This is no secret to anybody.

I think the understanding is that Georgia's situation was not so grave a few years ago; frankly, Georgia was a front-runner in reforms in the Eastern Partnership. It was also doing quite well in different indexes. But it started backsliding in the last two to three years. It's already clear that the Georgian Dream party doesn't want to give up power. They're holding tight to their grip on power, and I think the West now needs to react, because they don't want to irritate Ivanishvili and also to push the Georgian government or influence them because there's some understanding in the West, not only in the US, but among European countries, that if you press the Georgian government too much, they may be prompted to change the geopolitical choice of Georgia or even change the trajectory of Georgian foreign policy.

#### THE NEW POLITICAL YEAR IS ABOUT TO BEGIN. WHAT ARE YOUR PREDICTIONS AS AN EXPERT?

I think the next few months will be crucial for Georgia because, as I mentioned, Georgia needs to fulfil these twelve points which were set up by the European Union, and if it manages to do so, then the country may have a future, and Georgia may get candidacy status, which is very important for many reasons, both geopolitically and internally. Still, if we do not manage, and the political crisis is protracted, Georgian politics may find itself again in turmoil, and we will not see any breakthrough until 2024.

A second thing influencing Georgia's situation is the outcome of the Ukrainian war. If Russia loses this war, then it will impact Georgia, and if Russia wins, it will have significant implications for Georgia and its internal politics. So, we have to see how this war ends and how Georgia's political class will manage to fulfil the 12 points the European Union gave them.



The next few months will be crucial for Georgia

# Kakhaber Kemoklidze: Any Sort of Civil Disobedience Should Come Not with a Top-to-Bottom Principle but from the Opposite



The solid, firm ground laid for Georgia's future institutional development will mean that GD will either be obliged to share power or, at some point, leave it

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW BY  
EREKLE POLADISHVILI

As September draws near, the announcement of the renewal of protests and civil disobedience made by Zurab Girchi Japaridze of the "GirchiMoreFreedom" party becomes more real. GEORGIA TODAY continues to discuss this initiative with multiple political parties to determine whether it has the potential to become a game-changing movement or is just another predestined-to-fail protest. This time, we interviewed the political secretary of the "For Georgia" party, Kakhaber Kemoklidze, to get the answers to this and other vital questions.

## WILL YOUR PARTY JOIN ZURAB JAPARIDZE AND HIS PARTY IN THE NEW WAVE OF PROTESTS AND CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE?

In my understanding, any civil disobedience should come not from the top-to-bottom principle but from the opposite. The big mistake that the political leaders are making in this statement is that they think calling for civil disobedience will make society take this individual wave seriously and bring them out into the streets. That doesn't happen in this country: Society itself decides when they need to come out. When they want to create a wave of civil disobedience, it's going to come naturally, organically. No one needs civil disobedience unless society decides the time has come for it.

If the country doesn't go the European way, in the course chosen by Georgian society, through the constitutional margins, everything is possible. But the statements made by different political elites of the oppositional spectrum are something different, and are exactly what the Georgian Dream ruling party wants to hear; it is precisely what they are promoting through the media channels controlled by them. Politicians should be cautious in their wording so as not to create any perception in the Georgian community that there will be no stability when the current ruling party is removed from the political landscape. I always call for evolution



Political Secretary of the "For Georgia" party, Kakhaber Kemoklidze



The government has no sense of the actual danger that might be coming from the uncontrolled and unmanaged inflow of Russian tourists

and not revolution. The statements made by Zurab Girchi Japaridze are dangerous because they actually play on the ground of the Georgian Dream at the end of the day.

## DO YOU SEE THE SUDDEN ARREST OF THE FORMER DEPUTY HEAD OF THE SPECIAL SECURITY SERVICES, SOSO GOGASHVILI, AS A SIGNAL FOR YOUR PARTY, FORMED MOSTLY BY FORMER OFFICIALS OF POWER STRUCTURES, THAT SOME OF YOU MAY BE NEXT?

We consider Georgian politics like a box of chocolates: You open it, and you never know what you're going to get.

You've got to be ready for everything. Anything can happen when you enter the vast minefield of the political landscape here.

## DON'T YOU THINK GIVING UKRAINE AND MOLDOVA CANDIDATE STATUS WAS UNFAIR WHILE LEAVING THE LEADER OF THE "TRIO", GEORGIA, WITH LIKELY IMPOSSIBLE-TO-FULFIL RECOMMENDATIONS?

Within the last three decades, different Georgian governments have invested a lot in the prosperous European future of this country, and, of course, it would have been great news for me as an individual Georgian citizen to hear that, together with Moldova and Ukraine, we were granted candidate status. But at the end of the day, we have what we have. It's a fait accompli, already on the table. The most significant danger is if we split from the Associated Trio. If the Georgian Dream party fails in this regard, it would be a disastrous and very dangerous mistake.

I don't feel that Georgian Dream is motivated to fulfil the EU's 12 recommendations. They know that if they work on these recommendations, Georgia will be open to institutional change and development, and the solid, firm ground laid for Georgia's future institutional development will mean that they'll either be obliged to share power or, at some point, even leave power. They will do everything to avoid the responsibilities on the one hand, the oppositional spectrum on the other hand, and the European bureaucracy.

## THE OPPOSITION CRITICIZES THE GOVERNMENT FOR BEING RELUCTANT TO REACT TO THE GROWING INFLOW OF RUSSIAN TOURISTS. DO YOU BELIEVE THAT OUR GOVERNMENT IS RISKING THE SAFETY OF ITS CITIZENS?

I think the government has no sense of the actual danger that might be coming from the uncontrolled and unmanaged inflow of Russian tourists. We are living in an extremely dangerous geopolitical time for many reasons: For the ongoing war in Ukraine and for the other security challenges what we, as a state, as a country, have been facing for many, many years, among them the occupation, different challenges coming from other parts of the region, etc. So, I don't have the sense that the government realizes the real difficulties that can come with the Russian tourists.

As an ex-intelligence official, I know the technical, infrastructural and human resources of the Georgian security apparatus. When we have such a significant inflow of Russian tourists, you need to know who those coming in are, their profiles, their typical modus operandi, what sort of network they might establish over here, on the Georgia soil, right now. This geopolitically turbulent time might be even more dangerous than expected.

## DAYS AGO, THE DAUGHTER OF ALEXANDER DUGIN, "PUTIN'S BRAIN", DIED IN A SUSPECTED CAR BOMBING. THE FSB ALREADY NAMED A UKRAINIAN CITIZEN RESPONSIBLE. WHAT DO YOU THINK RUSSIA

## WILL DO IN RESPONSE?

As an intelligence analyst, I think the precise aim is to increase the radicalized sentiments against Ukraine within Russian society. Whether the clear goal was to somehow ready the country for military mobilization, I don't know; it might be the reason. The Russian political spectrum is already struggling to justify the war in Ukraine because they are losing a lot through military equipment and human resources. So, as long as this war is prolonged, those losses will increase, and Russian society is already starting to struggle with justifying it.

## THOSE WHO WERE REAL SOLDIERS WITH EXPERIENCE, FOR EXAMPLE, IN GEORGIA IN 2008, HAVE FAILED TO ACHIEVE ANY SUCCESS IN UKRAINE. DO YOU BELIEVE THAT CREATING A "MONGOLIAN HORDE" OF RUSSIANS WILL HAVE AN EFFECT?

The stakes are so high that I believe Russians, particularly in the Kremlin, might go ahead with such dangerous exercises. Their human resources are extremely limited, and I believe there is clear evidence in this regard. They mobilize different mercenaries, men under 50, and even prisoners, but they are still moving very slowly. Even on the Eastern front, in Luhansk and Donetsk. In this context, to get the extra resources, Russia needs to create a solid narrative in the minds of Russians. We might see different bombings and other assassinations; we might even see artificial false-flag operations, calling Ukrainians Nazis and radicals to justify unpopular actions against Ukrainians in the future.



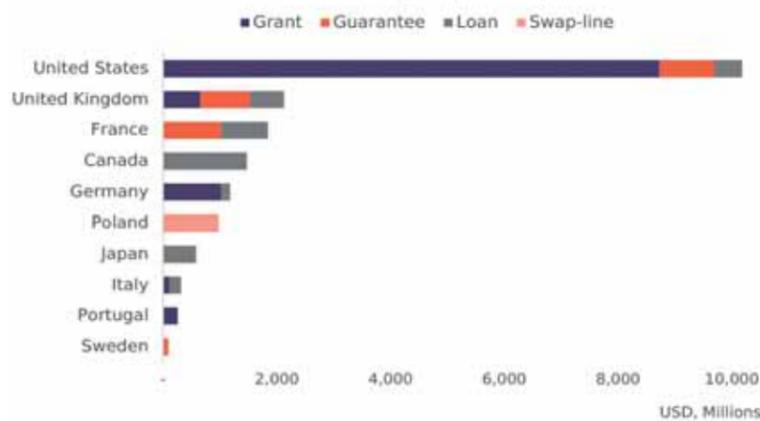
## Overview of the measures taken to support the Ukrainian economy during the war



Special Issue following the Russia's invasion of Ukraine | 18.08.2022

# Overview of the Measures Taken to Support the Ukrainian Economy during the War

Bilateral financial aid received by Ukraine as of 01/07/2022, by countries (USD, million)



Source: Kiel Institute for the World Economy, Ukraine Tracker

PMCR stands firmly with Ukraine, supports its sovereignty and territorial integrity, and condemns Russia's ongoing military aggression. We continue to maintain our long-standing commitment to support Ukraine's democratic and economic progress. This bulletin provides an overview of the measures taken by the Ukrainian government to support the economy and outline of bilateral financial aid received by Ukraine following Russia's unjustified invasion of Ukraine on 24th of February, 2022.

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, martial law has been in effect across the whole territory of Ukraine. Alongside restrictions on the movement of male Ukrainian citizens aged 18 to 60 from their places of residence, the imposition of curfews and other laws needed to repel the armed aggression and ensure national security, the Ukrainian government has also adopted special laws and measures aimed at supporting business and economic activity in the country.

Table 1 provides an overview of some of those legislative measures, as well as financial support programs initiated by the Ukrainian government in an attempt to support the economy during the war. Recently, the Ukrainian authorities have presented Ukraine's National Recovery Plan and, while it is indeed important for the government to have a plan for Ukraine's post-war reconstruction, it is also crucial to analyze what instruments the state is using now to survive the war economically and to safeguard business activity, primarily of SMEs.

The Ukrainian government's economic

policy measures in response to the war can be grouped into three areas: Business support, Monetary regulations and Labor support. It should be highlighted that to increase the effectiveness of implementation of the measures in all three areas, the state has been actively using available digital technologies. Many of Ukraine's digital government initiatives, and especially the digital public services app Diiia, which became crucial in the provision of access to state support services and funds, have proved useful during wartime and made the state measures more effective.

To ensure the resilience of the wartime economy, a significant portion of assistance has already been provided to the Ukrainian government by partner countries and international organizations. Currently, as Ukraine is at the first stage of its recovery plan, also referred to as the "wartime economy" or "urgent/resilience" stage, the total funding needs for 2022 are estimated at \$60-65 billion.

The types of partner financial assistance needed for this stage include defense, emergency budget financing, rebuilding of destroyed housing and infrastructure, and enablement/de-risking of private investment. Currently, some of the required funds have been provided for the defense, security, and macro-financial stability of Ukraine.

Throughout the first five months of the ongoing war, both governments and international institutions around the world committed tens of billions in USD to support the country. By July 2022, Ukraine had received bilateral assistance of approximately EUR 76.7 (\$78.5) billion from western countries, of which \$29.8 billion was in the form of financial aid.

The USA has been the largest bilateral provider of financial aid for Ukraine (amounting to a total of \$10.1 billion), making up 34% of total financial aid received by Ukraine. Out of the financial aid provided by the USA, 85.7% has come in the form of financial grants, while 9.5% was in the form of guarantee, and only 4.8% was in the form of a loan. Moreover, the USA has also been the top contributor of military aid (\$24.4 billion, which is 68.5% of the total bilateral military assistance) and humanitarian aid (\$9.1 billion, which is 69% of the total bilateral humanitarian assistance) to Ukraine.

The USA was followed by the United Kingdom (with total financial aid of \$2.1 billion), France (\$1.8 billion), Canada (\$1.3 billion), and Germany (\$1.2 billion). All of the financial aid provided by Canada has been in the form of loans and almost all of the financial aid provided by Germany has come in the form of financial grants (87.0%). Meanwhile, bilateral financial aid provided by Poland has generally consisted of a swap line (\$0.9 billion) which was made available to the NBU by Poland's central bank in March 2022.

Looking at the EU as a whole, including its member states and institutions, it has provided \$17.5 billion in financial aid to Ukraine, which is almost double the financing provided by the USA. Of the financial aid provided by the EU, 72.2% has been contributed by EU institutions, including the European Investment Bank, the European Commission, and the Council of Europe. The latter two institutions have already provided financial aid of \$10.5 billion to Ukraine.

Among donor organizations, the already-made contribution of the World Bank Group has been the highest and amounted to \$2.4 billion, which was part of the initially estimated assistance of \$3 billion. However, under the "Public Expenditures for Administrative Capacity Endurance in Ukraine" project, additional financing for Ukraine was announced by the World Bank on 7 June (\$1.5 billion) and on August 8 (\$4.5 billion), modifying the initially estimated \$3 billion and forming part of a total support package of over \$8.5 billion.

Furthermore, on 9 July, a draft agreement was approved to provide Ukraine with a \$1.7 billion grant from the Single Donor Trust Fund created by the IBRD (the lending arm of the World Bank Group), IDA of the World Bank Group, and USAID.

The World Bank was followed by the IMF, which in total allocated EUR 2.1 bln of financial aid to Ukraine, out of which a Rapid Financing Instrument (amounting to EUR 1.4 bln) was agreed to less than two weeks after the invasion. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) has also been among the top sources of financing to Ukraine, in total providing financial assistance of \$1.9 billion.

Despite the financial efforts and commitments made by international institutions and countries, the need for funds for the recovery and development of Ukraine exceeds the assistance thus far given. According to the National Recovery Plan, for the ongoing "resilience" stage, additional funding is still needed to initiate the following 15 national programs identified by the National Recovery Council to ensure the resilience of the wartime economy, post-war recovery,

and the development of a new and modernized economy:

1. Strengthen defense and security
2. Strive for EU integration
3. Re-build a clean and safe environment
4. Strengthen integrated energy system resilience and support the EU's zero-carbon energy transition
5. Boost the business environment
6. Ensure emergency funding and competitive access to funding
7. Secure macro-financial stability
8. Grow value-adding sectors of the economy
9. De-bottleneck logistics and integration with the EU
10. Recovery and upgrade of housing and regional infrastructure
11. Recovery and modernization of

social infrastructure

12. Improve the education system
13. Upgrade the healthcare system
14. Develop culture and sports systems
15. Secure targeted and effective social policy

The total funding needed to accomplish these National Plans is estimated to be \$750 billion, with international partners expected to contribute two-thirds of this sum. Apart from partner grants, the types of funding needed to achieve the main objectives of Ukraine's National Recovery Plan would include partner debt, partner equity, and private investment. Therefore, according to the National Recovery Plan, the partner countries and international organizations are expected to further increase their funding of Ukraine in the near future.

### Business support

#### Simplified taxation system, lower taxes, and other measures to deregulate business

- The eligibility criteria (limit on turnover, number of employees, type of economic activity) for taxpayers who can use the simplified taxation system (STS) were extended and single tax rate for taxpayers under this system decreased from 5% to 2%. Though taxpayers can voluntarily choose to pay higher tax and not to join STS.
- Import taxes on essential goods, including fuel and cars, which had been abolished at the beginning of the war, were reintroduced from July 1 as incentives in the initial decision allowed the import not only of essential goods but also of luxury items and expensive cars, thereby resulting in large losses in state budget revenues.
- The tax reporting system, the submission of tax returns, and the payment of new taxes were all simplified and all tax audits and penalties for tax violations were deferred.

- Businesses were granted the right to conduct economic activity without a permit and could instead do so by submitting an online declaration to the authorities (permits or licenses that expire are automatically renewed during martial law and for the three months after it ends); and
- Reduced ecological and packaging requirements, for instance, ecological standards of imported fuels and agriculture products, marking of food product packages.

#### Government support programs

- Business relocation program - entails temporary relocation of enterprises from war-affected regions to safer areas and offers businesses state assistance in the selection of new locations for their production facilities, transportation, and accommodation for existing staff and new recruits; and

- Whistleblower project - a large-scale state business support project that started on 1 July 2022, consisting of grant programs aimed at supporting small- and medium-sized businesses, startups and training programs to acquire new skills. The project currently comprises several grant programs, including non-refundable grants of up to UAH 250,000 for micro-businesses from any sector; as well as grants targeted at enterprises and startups in IT, processing, and agriculture sectors. The project also includes the "Start to IT" scholarship program offering up to UAH 30,000 in training and visits for a junior developer, data analyst, or graphic designer; as well as the extended "Affordable loans 5-7-9%" program which issues businesses with soft loans of up to UAH 2.5 million.

#### Monetary regulations

- Capital and current account restrictions, fixed foreign exchange rate (initially fixed at 29.27 UAH/USD, where it had been frozen during the first five months of the war; from 20 July 2022 the foreign exchange rate was risen up to 35.57 UAH/USD, while the foreign exchange rate at which banks sell foreign currency, as well as the rate for card transactions abroad was allowed to float); restrictions on transactions in foreign currencies; spending limits on hryvnia card-based payments outside of Ukraine; limits on cash withdrawals from FX accounts in Ukraine and abroad. From 6 August 2022, some of these restrictions were simplified for businesses and individuals who financially support Ukraine allowing them to make the necessary payments in foreign currency with a maximum impact on the FX market.

- Key policy rate, was risen from 10% up to 23% since June 3rd, 2022. Interestingly, NBU has been postponing its key policy rate decision since the start of the war.

- Large currency interventions (for example in June, the National Bank of Ukraine was a net seller of \$3,556.3 million).

- Price regulations (price caps) for fuel were introduced at the beginning of the war and were cancelled in May;

- Prudential requirements (capital, liquidity, credit risk requirements) for banks were relaxed. NBU decided not to impose sanctions on the banks for violations of prudential standards, if such breaches occurred after February 24, 2022 and are equipped, and sustainability and recovery plans are provided to the NBU;

- Full public guarantee of all individual deposits in Ukrainian banks until the end of martial law, aimed at giving citizens confidence in the security of their savings; and

- Access to unsecured refinancing loans in hryvnia has been granted by NBU to Ukrainian banks at the beginning of the war so they could retain their liquidity. But on 4 May 2022, as NBU declared that "the banking system's liquidity has grown since the war broke out", access to these loans has been limited only to banks that have influenced their capability to take out secured refinancing loans and lost more than 5% of their retail deposits to deposit outflows since 23 February 2022.

#### Labor support

- Enter dismissed for both employees and employers: an employee can resign without notice and take unpaid leave for any period, while an employer can more easily dismiss his employee or change working conditions without notice;

- The maximum length of the working week increased from 40 to 48 hours;

- Employers may suspend wage payments until their enterprise resumes its activities;

- Simplified rules for labor-related record-keeping and archiving;

- Simplified procedures for obtaining "unemployed" status and registration of this category (SFP) can now apply for unemployment payments without identity documents and/or work records, while unemployed persons can receive unemployment payments without a personal visit to the employment centers as well and partial unemployment benefits are available during martial law; and

- A government program was launched providing compensation to businesses employing internally displaced persons, giving monthly reimbursement of salary costs in the amount of UAH 6,300 for each employee for two months.

#### Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> According to the President's Decree "On the Introduction of Martial Law in Ukraine" and the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on "Issues Related to the Introduction of and Ensuring the Implementation of Measures of Martial Law in Ukraine," this entails a special legal regime, which grants military authorities the powers (either independently or together with other relevant state bodies) to adopt special legislation in various areas.

<sup>2</sup> On 17 May 2022, the President's Decree "On the Extension of the Period of Martial Law in Ukraine" extended the period of the martial law regime until 23 August 2022, but it can be further extended unlimited times. Martial law terminates in case of expiration of its period or adoption of the President's decree on the termination of martial law

<sup>3</sup> Ukraine's National Recovery Council introduced "Ukraine's National Recovery Plan" during the conference in Lugano on 4-5 July, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Diiia portal, available in forms of web and mobile application, and allowed online access to over 50 public services. More on Diiia app can be found at: <https://ukraine.ua/invest-trade/digitalization/>

<sup>5</sup> Source: <https://financialpost.com/pmn/business-pmn/ukrainian-parliament-restores-import-taxes>

<sup>6</sup> In Ukraine, the enterprises and private entrepreneurs that use the simplified tax system (STS) pay a special tax (single tax) that replaces some of the other taxes and fees - corporate income tax, personal income tax and value-added tax (VAT).

<sup>7</sup> For more information see: <https://new.bank.gov.ua/en/news/all/natsionalniy-bank-zdiysnyuye-kroki-dlya-pidtrimki-diyalnosti-volontiriv-ta-biznesu>

<sup>8</sup> Source: <https://new.bank.gov.ua/en/news/all/utochneno-poryadok-nadannya-kreditiv-refinansuvannya-dlya-pidtrimki-likvidnosti-bankiv>

<sup>9</sup> Source: <https://www.ifw-kiel.de/publications/kiel-working-papers/2022/ukraine-tracker-17204>

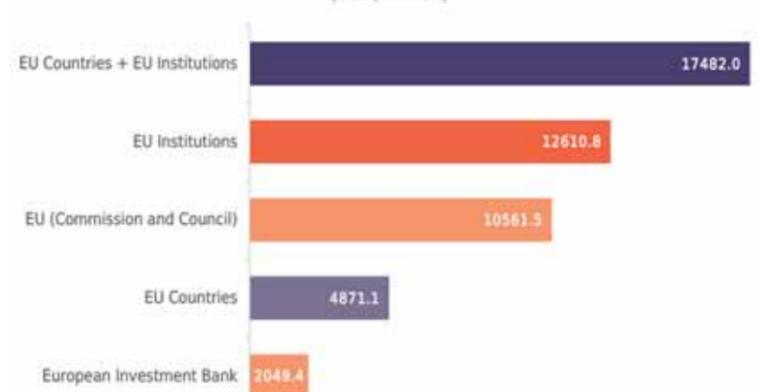
<sup>10</sup> For the simplicity throughout the text the values provided in EUR will be exchanged in USD with a rate of EUR 1 = USD 1.0234 (9 August 2022, European Central Bank)

<sup>11</sup> Source: <https://www.euronews.com/next/2022/03/21/ukraine-crisis-poland-cenbank>

<sup>12</sup> Source: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/08/08/world-bank-mobilizes-4-5-billion-in-additional-financing-for-vital-support-to-ukraine>

<sup>13</sup> Source: <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2022/04/21/opening-remarks-by-the-managing-director-ukraine-roundtable-april-21-2022#:~:text=The%20IMF%20has%20played%20its,direct%20financial%20assistance%20to%20Ukraine.>

Financial aid provided by EU countries and EU institutions (USD, million)



Source: Kiel Institute for the World Economy, Ukraine Tracker

# Invasive Plant Species Monitored by Drone and Remote Sensing in Kolkheti National Park



BY KATIE RUTH DAVIES

**I**nvasive plant species (IPS) are species that are not native to an ecosystem which invade and take over another territory, mostly as a result of human activity- being either deliberately or accidentally introduced. Some of these might harm the ecosystem, while other introduced species may have little or no negative impact. IPS can grow and spread rapidly and widely, competing with the native species and sometimes replacing them in the ecosystem. This in turn can impact the overall economy and many components of the ecosystem.

The general characteristics of most invasive plant species are rapid dispersal, rapid growth and reproduction. They also have a high tolerance level, making them more competitive than the local species, often replacing them in the ecosystem and leading to a decrease in plant species diversity. Some IPS also affect other components of the natural environment, such as water quality, or can lead to soil erosion, resulting in the decline of the ecosystem sustainability.

Several such invasive plant species have been identified in Kolkheti National Park: "Invasive species are a big problem in Kolkheti National Park. *Gleditsia triacanthos* (L), *Amorpha fruticosa* (L), *Sparganium emersum* (Rehmann), *Solidago virga aurea* L., and *Solidago canadensis* L. have already caused a lot of damage to local ecosystems," Vasil Metreveli, Forester, Iliia University, says. "Amorpha fruticosa actively occupies

the banks of rivers and canals and has practically replaced the local flora.

"The invasion is actively promoted by human activity in this area," he notes. "For example, as we know, grazing is a big problem for forests in general. In the case of Kolkheti, grazing causes a big problem for the saplings and seedlings. However, not in the case of *Gleditsia triacanthos* (L), because it is a thorny plant. Accordingly, representatives of the local flora are grazed, and this promotes the invasion of *Gleditsia*.

"Mowing is also a big problem. Locals mow areas where there are mossy (*Sphagnum palustre* L. and *Sphagnum papillosum* Lindb.) swamps. The mentioned species are relics of the last glacial period, and their development takes a long time. Besides mowing, mossy swamps are also burned for other purposes. These actions limit the growth and development of the moss, and make it a good base for invasive species such as *Sparganium emersum* (Rehmann), *Solidago virga aurea* L., and *Solidago canadensis* L., which easily occupy mossy bogs."

In order to develop a common methodology for monitoring the condition of natural habitats and the presence of invasive species, and to conduct monitoring that will guarantee the collection of compatible data and topical information about the location and size of damaged areas, the types of pressure and the evaluation of potential sources and forms of threat, a new project was launched in 2020, financed by the European Union, in four countries of the Black Sea Basin - Romania, Bulgaria, Armenia and Georgia: "Joint monitoring of environmental protection in the Black Sea basin coun-

tries — BSB Eco Monitoring". The study areas in Georgia were selected by SABUKO, a non-governmental organization for the protection and conservation of wildlife in Georgia, taking into account the abundance of species and habitats presented, as well as the challenges faced by national parks. As part of the international project, Vasil Metreveli, along with Luka Kokiashvili, both researchers of the SABUKO research team, used remote sensing and a DJI Phantom 4 Multispectral drone to study the IPS in Kolkheti National Park.

"The drone is equipped with six sensors: RGB, Red, Green, Blue, NIR, and RE and it allows us to sample the surface reflectance in six spectral bands of the electromagnetic spectrum," Metreveli tells us. "Remote sensing itself is widely used to study different characteristics of the surface by measuring and analyzing the reflected and emitted radiation. The physical characteristics of the material determine what type of wavelength will reflect the most from its surface, therefore there are different reflectance values from the different surfaces in different bands of the electromagnetic spectrum."

This variety of sensors allows the researchers to differentiate between the different materials and their characteristics, such as determining different types of soil, detecting healthy and unhealthy vegetation, measuring the temperature and moisture of the surface, and more.

The research in Kolkheti National Park started in 2021, aiming to detect invasive plant species, work on a plant invasion monitoring plan, and to differentiate between habitats of Kolkheti National Park.

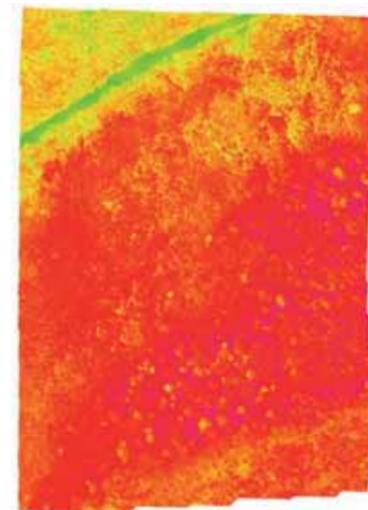
In the first stage of the project, researchers framed the study design and selected sample plots where data needed to be obtained. 25 sample plots were chosen to sample each habitat type of Kolkheti National Park. The area of the sample plots varied from 3 to 6 ha. All drone flights were conducted in an automatic flight mode and all flight parameters were planned before each flight. The flight speed and altitude, side and frontal overlap between the aerial images and the camera angle were the same for all the flight missions, the only difference between flight missions being the area of sample plots (depending on the habitat diversity) and the times of the day. As the radiation during the daytime fluctuates, the data requires radiometric calibration, which in this case was done



automatically by the sunlight sensor on the DJI P4 Multispectral which captures solar irradiance and maximizes accuracy and consistency of data collection at different times of the day.

After the data were obtained, researchers made orthoimages and vegetation

sample plot (Image 3). The dynamics of invasion will be monitored over several years and the results will show the speed and the direction of the spread. Including environmental variables in the analysis will also reveal the provoking factors and possible barriers to invasion. The

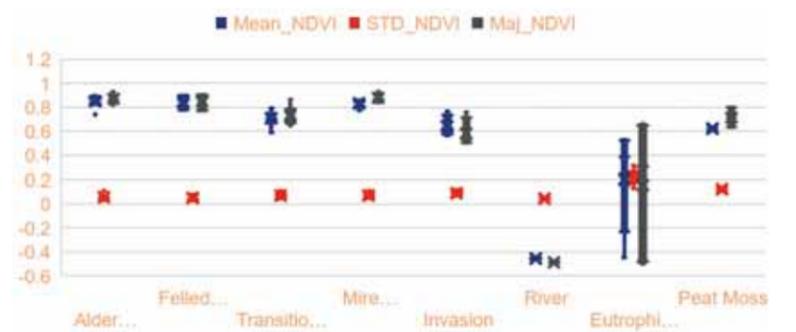


index maps of each sample plot using DJI Terra software. Vegetation index maps show the chlorophyll content, healthy and unhealthy vegetation, biomass, and the density of green leaves. The sensors of the DJI P4 Multispectral drone allowed the researchers to calculate all the vegetation indices and generate vegetation index maps (Image 1).

Using the vegetation index maps, the researchers detected invasive plant species and found significant differences

monitoring results will ultimately prove highly beneficial so that the administration of the Kolkheti National Park can act effectively against the plant invasion and decrease the harm to the ecosystem of Kolkheti.

On August 8-10, a Cross-Border Meeting was held in Georgia, where representatives of four countries met within the framework of the "Joint Monitoring for Environmental Protection in BSB Countries" project. Experts made reports,



between the habitats. Data analysis showed that NDVI (Normalized Difference Vegetation Index) values were significantly different between the habitat types, especially between the forest habitats and bogs and mires (Image 2). The areas covered by the invasive plant species were characterized by relatively low NDVI values than the local plant communities.

As the invasive plant species were detectable on the orthoimages, the researchers were able to calculate the area covered by those species on each

and on August 10 visited the Kolkheti National Park.

The research project is ending at the end of August, and a monitoring plan will be given to the Kolkheti National Park administration. Further monitoring will take place in collaboration with them.



Common borders. Common solutions.

# The Tower Speaks. Part 2

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

**F**ifteen-year-old Khalina has been dreaming of a Svan watchtower with only two top “eye” windows on each side, which to her resembles a warrior’s helmet. A face appears there, and it begins talking to her; she has just learned that each tower is also a whole city-state for thousands of denizens of all shapes and sizes.

—All happening right around us, and under our feet, as we walk through you towers ourselves... I had no idea. I must be careful whom I disturb!

Now, I’ve heard tell that the towers in faraway Ushguli are much more varied than ours in Seti, which all have either two or three eyes on a side. There, you can see a twin pair built touching all the way up—six eyes on the wide sides, three on the others! And a short, fat one with four eyes on opposing sides, five on the others. Plus, many other differences in size and shape. So... did the builders experiment there first, and settle on the standard forms which they then made in Seti? Or did they standardize here, and then grow bored and play with the



form there?

—Ahhh, this is a deeper question than you realize; or perhaps you are that cunning, girl? On the answer hangs the AGE

of the towers in these two communities. And a mountain-sized dollop of your petty pride to go with it. This I will not answer, and have one of your communi-

ties strut over the other! For now, I will also not comment on the question of whether the Mongols who plagued the lowlands have ever reached your highlands—or is this yet to come?

—I did not mean to offend...

—Oh, I am not offended. I merely point out that centuries of watching have shown us more of you little builders than you know of yourselves, perhaps. And our memories are as old as we, many of your lifetimes. Do not fret: you are what you are, although you can also improve much.

As for why there are so many of us towers in each community: It has become clear to us that your own worst enemy always comes not from without, but from within: you, yourselves! You are so jealous of each other’s success that none of you can bear it. You fight against one another, bitterly remembering past wrongs instead of laying them to rest. And so it goes on. We towers are more than a symbol: you attack each other with rock, arrow and spear from our fastness, spit on each other from one of us to the next! If you ever banded together, you would be a mighty force indeed. Do you not know of the description one of your own ancients wrote of you, even before we were raised, that you could summon an army of two hundred thou-

sand men? Or is this yet to be rediscovered among you, though known to the outside world? I sometimes get my times mixed.

—I’m afraid this description does match what I have heard and seen. How wrong we are! How can we ever change or go back to those glorious times of unity?

—If you did, now, you might reach out far beyond your own determined borders and do some conquering of your own. Your nation is only now in the process of uniting for the first time as one kingdom; it would be a shame to undo all of that, ringed about as you are with so many enemies eyeing your beauty and resources. Let the main enemies of Georgia be from outside, at least, not from inside!

Continued in next week’s GT and online at [georgiatoday.ge](http://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/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/SvanetiRenaissance/). He and his wife also run their own guest house in Etseri: [www.facebook.com/hanmer.house.svaneti](http://www.facebook.com/hanmer.house.svaneti)

## The Georgian Military Highway: Into the Mountains



The Georgian Military Road through the Jvari Pass north of Gudauri. Photo by Mike Godwin

BY MICHAEL GODWIN

**O**nly a limited number of passageways exists to cross some of the highest and most brutal mountains in all of Europe. The Greater Caucasus has for centuries been an almost insurmountable obstacle for armies, merchants, and travelers of all kinds. With peaks that reach more than 5,000 meters (16,404 feet), it’s no surprise that it would take a monumental project to make it passable.

The Georgian Military Highway is one of the few safe, mass-transit passageways through these prohibitive heights. Now a paved and well-kept roadway, it has not always been this way, requiring constant updating throughout history. This history goes back centuries into Georgia’s earliest civilizations, being an influential part of the entire region.

The route has been a passageway for travelers since ancient times. While not as developed as it is now, it has been road for merchants since the early Georgian kingdoms. Greek cartographer Strabo talks of this in his *Geographica*, and Roman Pliny the Elder describes the

mountain pass in his writings, leading to the history this road has in the region.

Throughout the Middle Ages, it served as a trade route as well as an invasion route for Chechen and Dagestani tribes into Khevsureti. Mongol hordes in the 13th century used this route to claim much of the land, bringing the kingdom of Georgia into the fold of Mongolian generals Subutai and Jebe.

However, it wasn’t until the late 18th century that it would begin to see its construction into a modern thoroughfare. Gottlob Heinrich Curt von Tottleben, a German-born Russian general, was one of the first to pioneer into the mountain pass, with his army, crossing through the Darial Pass to help fight off an Ottoman force in the south of Georgia.

Following the Treaty of Georgievsk, the road became the primary route into the new protectorate of the Russian Empire. As this treaty removed any dependence on Persia from the Georgian Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti, the road was firmly established as an economic thoroughfare.

It became more modernized under the brutal rule of Russian General Aleksey Petrovich Yermolov. When asked why it was so necessary to be harsh on the Caucasian peoples, he replied to the Tsar, “I desire that the terror of my name shall guard our frontiers more potently than chains or fortresses.” Despite this, he was instrumental in ensuring a good surface and width for the road for the mass transportation of troops, supplies, and the increase of commercial traffic.

The road grew from the immense

military importance of the Russian wars against Persian, enemy Caucasian, and Circassian tribes during the Caucasian War (1817-1864), the Russo-Circassian War (1763-1864), and the Murid War (1817-1864). Into the 20th century, the road played a principal role in the social, economic and cultural development of Georgia and the rest of the South Caucasus.

In the 20th century, with the advent of automobiles, the road became a paved highway capable of transporting thousands of tons of goods. However, the new construction brought new hazards. Continuous drilling and advanced modernization threatened the stability of the rock faces that the road was hewn from. Landslides and rockfalls are even today a common problem for the government authorities tasked with upkeep of the road.

As a military road, it has largely diminished in importance due to modern equipment, technology, and tactics. Tracked and heavily armored vehicles are not able to traverse the road safely,

being vulnerable to ambush and road-blocks, and today, the majority of issues stem from large transport carriers navigating the narrow mountain road.

While it is primarily a trade route for Georgia and Armenia to Russia, it is still an impressive region of the country. Along with several locations along its length, the road itself offers tourists impressive views of the vast Greater Caucasus Mountains. Its jagged peaks, remote monasteries, and largely untouched beauty give visitors a look into the eyes of an ancient Georgian merchant.

Heading north of Tbilisi, past the ancient fortress of Ananuri, it is an easy road to the Russian border. Popular places such as Pasaunauri, Gudauri, Stepantsminda, Gergeti Trinity Church, and finally the Dariali monastery complex near the Lars border checkpoint, are close by the route. While its historic importance may have passed, its value as a travel destination, ranging 212 kilometers (132 miles) between Tbilisi and Vladikavkaz, continues.



An outpost tower located along the ancient trade route. Photo by Mike Godwin



View of Stepantsminda from the Gergeti Trinity Church. Photo by Mike Godwin

# 'Night Serenades' 2022 Kicks Off in Batumi with a Traditionally Rich Program Promised for the Audience



BY ANA DUMBADZE

The traditional introductory press conference of the Batumi-Tbilisi International Classical Music Festival 'Night Serenades' was held in the Iliа Chavchavadze State Drama Theater of Batumi this week. There, Giorgi Isakadze, artistic director of 'Night Serenades'; Nina Tsagareli, Director of the festival; Merab Kidzinidze, Head of the Education, Culture, Sports and Youth Department of Batumi City Hall; and Tamar Gudava, Head of the Adjara Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports, spoke about this year's festival.

"I am very happy that the anniversary festival is being held in Batumi this year. We created a very interesting program, we did a great job," Isakadze noted. "Interesting musicians will be presented to the audience from Batumi and Tbilisi, among them excellent pianist Katie Mahan, born in America and living in Salzburg, and Sabine Grofmeier, a sophisticated and very interesting clarinetist representing the Western School.

"At the concerts in Tbilisi, we will meet the trio 'Gloria Campaner,' made up of

Alessandro Carbonare, Mario Stefano Pietrodarchi and Gloria Campaneri, with the program 'Astori'. And Andres Gabetta, a representative of a great musical family, an excellent violinist, will perform Antonio Vivaldi's concerts in baroque style for the audience," Isakadze said, summarizing with: "A lot of surprises await the festival guests. The listeners will be satisfied with the rich program. We are looking forward to the opening of the festival!"

Nina Tsagareli, festival director then spoke about the organizational aspect of the 2022 Festival.

"Four concerts will be held in Batumi and Tbilisi over a month," she said. "Traditionally, the festival opens in the city of Batumi. The concerts on August 25 and 26 will be held in the Iliа Chavchavadze Drama Theater with brilliant soloists Sabine Grofmeier and Katie Mahan, and our excellent base orchestra 'Georgian Virtuosi.' Then the festival will move to the Grand Hall of the Tbilisi Conservatoire. The Tbilisi concerts will be dedicated to the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations between France and Georgia, and Italy and Georgia.

"On behalf of the festival, I would like to thank our partners and media supporters," Tsagareli added. "During the project, there will be many masterclasses,

workshops, art exhibitions, as well as the presentation of the book 'Celebration of Music.'"

Merab Kidzinidze, Head of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth Department of Batumi City Hall talked at the press conference of the importance of the Festival.

"The festival 'Night Serenades' is very important; it is connected with the cultural life of the city. This is a tradition. We support this festival both financially and organizationally, because it stands out for its solidity, high skill of performers and high taste."

"Night Serenades celebrates its 40th anniversary this year," Tamar Gudava noted. "It is symbolic that it was established in Abkhazia, and restored in Adjara, and it is being held for the 14th time since its restoration. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports of Adjara traditionally supports this very important festival, and we hope that the festival will return to Abkhazia one day soon."

\*\*\*  
The founder of the festival is Liana Isakadze, the artistic director is Giorgi Isakadze, and the director is Nina Tsagareli. The Night Serenades festival is organized by "Art Alliance" company and supported by: Batumi City Hall; the Ministry of Education, Culture and

Sports of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara, Tbilisi City Hall, the Italian Embassy in Georgia, the French Embassy in Georgia, and the French Institute at the French Embassy.

The official insurer of the festival is "Ardi".

Hilton Garden Inn Tbilisi is the host of the festival.

Partners: furniture house "Nita", the best guarantee of quality and design, "Food Alliance" company, "Lutecia" perfume store chain, "Aromateca" perfume boutique, "Sarajishvili" company, "Khomlis Marani", "Tiesvi" winery,

pharmaceutical company "PSP".

Media supporters: Adjara Public Broadcaster, First Channel of Georgia, Rustavi2 TV Company, Imedi TV Company, Pos TV, Georgian Times Media Holding, Ertuloenba Patriarchal Television, Artarea - the first channel on culture, TV25, Media and digital communications agency Clip Art, Eword, news agency Prime Time, Georgian Press, English-language newspaper Georgia Today, daily English-language newspaper Messenger, Sarke magazine, Newspaper Adjara, Fortuna radio and website Fortuna.ge.



**PUBLISHER & GM**  
George Sharashidze

**COMMERCIAL DEPARTMENT**  
Commercial Director:  
Iva Merabishvili  
Marketing Manager:  
Natalia Chikvaidze

**EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT:**  
Editor-In-Chief:  
Katie Ruth Davies

**Journalists:**  
Ana Dumbadze,  
Vazha Tavberidze,  
Tony Hanmer,  
Emil Avdaliani,  
Nugzar B. Ruhadze,  
Michael Godwin,  
Ketevan Skhirtladze,  
Mariam Mtvilishvili,  
Erekle Poladishvili

**Photographer:**  
Aleksi Serov

**Website Manager/Editor:**  
Katie Ruth Davies

**Layout:**  
Misha Mchedlishvili

**Webmaster:**  
Sergey Gevenov

**Circulation Managers:**  
David Kerdikashvili,  
David Djangigava

**ADDRESS**  
1 Melikishvili Str.  
Tbilisi, 0179, Georgia

Tel.: +995 32 229 59 19  
E: info@georgiatoday.ge  
F: GeorgiaToday

**ADVERTISING & SUBSCRIPTION**  
+995 555 00 14 46  
E-mail:  
marketing@georgiatoday.ge

Reproducing material, photos and advertisements without prior editorial permission is strictly forbidden. The author is responsible for all material. Rights of authors are preserved. The newspaper is registered in Mtatsminda district court.

Reg. # 06/4-309



## HOTELS & PREFERENCE HUALING TBILISI



Book a **private meeting room** at the Hotel's 10th floor and get exclusive service, access to the **Club Lounge** and personalized **VIP Coffee break**.



For more detail information,  
please contact us: [info@hotelspreference.ge](mailto:info@hotelspreference.ge);  
+995 322 50 50 25