



FOCUS

ON THE HHG EXPANSION

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BY KETEVAN SKHIRTLADZE

Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on partial mobilization in Russia starting on September 21. The decree provides for additional measures to implement the "state defense order."

"Only those citizens of Russia who are currently in the reserve and, first of all, those who served in the ranks of the country's armed forces, have a certain military specialty and relevant experience, will be subject to military service," Vladimir Putin said in his address to citizens.

He claimed that "the decision on partial mobilization was made to protect Russia, its sovereignty, territorial integrity and to ensure the security of the Russian people."

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As of 26-Sep-2022

Markets				CURRENCIES			
	Price	w/w	m/m		Price	w/w	m/m
BONDS				STOCKS			
GRAIL 07/28	79.51 (YTM 8.61%)	-2.5%	-4.8%	Bank of Georgia (BGEO LN)	GBP 20.45	-1.9%	+0.5%
GEBGG 07/23	100.70 (YTM 5.11%)	+0.1%	-0.4%	Georgia Capital (CGEO LN)	GBP 6.23	-8.4%	-9.4%
GEOCAP 03/24	94.91 (YTM 9.98%)	+0.7%	+0.6%	TBC Bank Group (TBCG LN)	GBP 17.06	-1.6%	-1.7%
SILNET 01/27	95.97 (YTM 9.52%)	-0.6%	-0.5%				
TBC 06/24	98.81 (YTM 6.48%)	+0.1%	-0.3%	COMMODITIES			
				Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	84.06	-8.6%	-16.8%
				Gold Spot (US\$/Oz)	1 622.36	-3.2%	-6.7%
				INDICES			
				FTSE 100	7 020.95	-3.0%	-5.5%
				FTSE 250	17 722.83	-5.7%	-7.5%
				DAX	12 227.92	-4.5%	-5.7%
				DOW JONES	29 260.81	-5.7%	-9.4%
				NASDAQ	10 802.92	-6.3%	-11.0%
				MSCI EM EE	23.67	-10.1%	-13.2%
				MSCI EM	888.58	-5.3%	-11.7%
				SP 500	3 655.04	-6.3%	-9.9%
				MSCI FM	2 000.03	-5.0%	-10.1%

Yet Another Exclusive Offer for Carrefour Customers: Fuel Up with Wissol at the Lowest Price on the Market

Carrefour - owned and operated by Majid Al Futtaim in Georgia - has collaborated with Wissol Petroleum to provide customers with exclusive discounts on fuel alongside their daily shopping. With gasoline prices having surged this year, the leading retailer's latest offer will supply customers with Wissol fuel at the lowest price on the market.

The coupons are now available in Carrefour stores at Tbilisi Mall and East Point and can be used to purchase Wissol Euro Regular, Euro Diesel and Premium for 17 tetris less than the market value. As fuel prices are expected to decrease in Georgia as of this month, the exclusive promotion will help to minimise the cost of travel and ease fuel access to end consumers across the country.

Jérôme Akel, Country Manager of Carrefour in Georgia, revealed: "Carrefour is constantly trying to satisfy our customer's wishes - whether in-store, at home or on the road - by offering a



seamless shopping experience. By partnering with Wissol, we are proud to be protecting the purchasing power of our

surrounding communities whilst expanding our offering and driving retail forwards."

Thanks to Wissol and Carrefour's partnership, fuel coupons will initially be sold in two hypermarkets - with

plans to expand to other Carrefour stores in the future. The Wissol Group maintains quality as the cornerstone of its business, operating over 100 petrol stations in Georgia.

Vasil Khorava, the General Director of Wissol, said: "Wissol Group and Carrefour have many years of experience of fruitful cooperation, and we are sure that Wissol, together with the international network of hypermarkets and supermarkets, will successfully establish a new consumer behaviour in Georgia."

The spectacular discount comes just in time for Carrefour's 10th anniversary, having launched in 2012. Today, Carrefour operates 5 hypermarkets, 13 supermarkets, and more than 50 convenience stores in Georgia. As one of the largest hypermarket and supermarket chains, it provides constant access to a wide selection of high quality yet affordable products - with the addition of Wissol petrol demonstrating Carrefour's commitment to fuelling daily life.

On the Russian "Deserters" Flooding into Georgia

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BBC: QUEUES ON THE GEORGIAN-RUSSIAN BORDER STRETCHED TO 10 KM

Many Russians continue to leave the country to avoid the military mobilization. The BBC reported that on September 22, there was a 10-kilometer-long queue at the Georgian-Russian border.

"Movement is very slow and some people are waiting for more than 20 hours to cross the border," the correspondent wrote.

The flow of people has also grown on the Russian-Finnish border. The Finnish authorities said the number of Russians arriving in the country had doubled in the last week and on Thursday said they would be following the example of other EU countries and shutting their borders to the Russians fleeing their country.

FSB CONFIRMS THAT RUSSIAN MILITARY HAS MOVED TOWARDS LARSI CHECKPOINT "TO ENFORCE ORDER"

The Federal Security Service (FSB) on September 26, confirmed that a Russian armored vehicle was moving in the direction of the border of Georgia, towards the Zemo Larsi checkpoint. As the agency noted, there are no plans to open an additional military checkpoint near Zemo Larsi.

"BTR is moving in that direction, but not to open a checkpoint there - we sent the military to pay attention to maintaining order. This is, so to speak, a preventive measure in case the reservists decide to break through the checkpoint and move to Georgia without signing any documents. The checkpoint is working as usual, no additional restrictions have been imposed," said an employee of the border service of the FSB of Ossetia.

Rumors that Russia might declare martial law and close its borders were actively spread immediately after the mobilization was announced.

INTERNATIONAL REACTIONS

"The nation of Georgia would be wise to close their border and not allow Russian tourists at least in the short term," American congressman Adam Kinzinger wrote this week.

"An influx of fighting-age males into this small but important ally is very dangerous. We must see it's a sacrifice, tourism is important," the congressman wrote on Twitter.

Pawel Herczynski, EU Ambassador to Georgia, stated: "Unfortunately, I cannot tell what should be the attitude. It's for Georgia and the Georgian authorities to decide. Of course, I can fully understand that the decision of the Russian President to start partial mobilization has created an influx of Russians, but it is for Georgia to decide."

The Ambassador of Austria in Georgia, Thomas Mühlmann, stated: "It is not up to me to give recommendations to the Georgian government. But I see that many Russians are trying to come to Georgia, and I know that this is a big challenge for Georgia, but I am sure that the government will be able to deal with it."

RULING PARTY RESPONSE

"One of the main reasons for not closing the Russian-Georgian state border is that our fellow citizens live in the Russian Federation and they are also interested in entering Georgia - a priori closing the border will not be correct and it will first of all harm the interests of Georgians," chairman of Georgian Dream, Irakli Kobakhidze, stated.

Kobakhidze added that "apart from this, there are many issues that should be taken into account," adding "the country's security will not be under threat under any circumstances and the situation is under control."

"State agencies are responsible for controlling the situation, and the situation is currently under control from beginning to end. Of course, it is fundamentally important for us to protect the interests of people who left Georgia and are living in Russia. All issues must be measured. This is the business of state agencies. And they work responsibly. The country's national security interests were protected and will be protected to the end," he told journalists.

Minister of Finance Lasha Khutsishvili stated: "Customs and border control are carried out according to the established rules - relevant information is collected

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PM Meets with State Minister of UAE for Economy and Trade, Discusses Cooperation between Two Countries



The UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation organized an economic delegation led by Ahmed Ali Al Sayegh, Minister of State, to Georgia.

On September 13, during the visit, Al Sayegh met with the Prime Minister of Georgia.

The meeting was focused on the cooperation existing between the two countries in various areas of the economy. It was noted that the political dialogue pursued between Georgia and the UAE has advanced upward, as evidenced by the high-level visits to the countries.

Topics discussed by the dignitaries included the favorable business environment existing in Georgia. It was noted that a number of projects are being implemented in the country with investments from the UAE, and their increasing number is gratifying. It was also noted that preliminary talks will commence in the coming months for concluding a Free Trade Agreement between the nations. As the Prime Minister of Georgia noted, the establishment of a Free Trade Zone will create a support-

ing climate for promoting and advancing economic and trade relations between Georgia and the UAE.

Garibashvili expressed his gratitude to the UAE Government for granting a visa-free travel arrangement for the citizens of Georgia.

Al Sayegh pointed to increased economic cooperation between the UAE and Georgia, including through bilateral negotiations on a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) to begin by the end of September. In this regard, he noted that UAE-Georgian economic relations have witnessed remarkable development in recent years, as total non-oil trade grew between 2020 and 2021 by 52 percent to reach \$223 million.

During the visit, the two sides signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to establish the UAE-Georgia Joint Business Council, which was signed by Abdullah Al Mazrui, Chairman of the Federation of UAE Chambers of Commerce and Industry; Giorgi Pertaia, President of the Georgian Chamber of Commerce and Industry; and Tornike Zirakishvili, Deputy Director of Enterprise Georgia.

The MoU aims to bolster coordination and cooperation between the private sectors of both countries, encourage economic exchange visits, and support bilateral commercial and investment partnerships.

Al Sayegh also held meetings with Levan Davitashvili, Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia; and Alexander Khvtisiashvili, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia.

The delegation from the UAE was hosted by The Biltmore Tbilisi Hotel. During their visit to Georgia, several events were held at the Biltmore Tbilisi Hotel.

The UAE delegation included officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the UAE Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Climate Change and Environment, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Education, Abu Dhabi Future Energy Company (Masdar), Abu Dhabi Investment Office, and Abu Dhabi Ports, as well as other entities and business professionals.

Ukraine Latest: Biden Approves \$1.1 Billion More in Military Aid Following Sham Referendums

BY ANA DUMBADZE

Voting concluded Tuesday in the so-called Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) on a referendum, with 99.23% choosing reunification with Russia, according to the final results approved by the DPR's Central Election Commission.

Shortly before the announcement of the final vote count, the UN's political chief said that Russian-backed referendums in Ukraine's occupied territories are "not a genuine expression of popular will" or "legal" under international law.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky also slammed the referendums in a speech to a session of the UN Security Council. He said Ukraine will continue to defend its people in the regions.

Some 98.42% of voters in Ukraine's separatist-controlled Luhansk region were said to have voted in favor of joining Russia, said the head of the election commission of the so-called Luhansk People's Republic (LPR).

Leonid Pasechnik, the leader of the self-proclaimed LPR, will turn to Russian President Vladimir Putin to ask him to consider folding the region into Russia.

Meanwhile, 87.05% of voters in Ukraine's Kherson region are claimed to have voted in favor of joining Russia, according to preliminary results announced by the region's so-called election committee.

Some 93.11% of voters in Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia region supported joining Russia, Russian state media reported, citing preliminary results.

The referendums have been widely condemned by the international community, with European nations and the US terming them a "sham" and saying they will not be recognized.

The United States was also preparing a new round of sanctions against Russia should it annex Ukrainian territory, and a \$1.1 billion arms package for Ukraine, US officials said.

Hastily arranged votes took place over five days in the eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, and in Zaporizhzhia and Kherson to the south, that together make up about 15% of Ukrainian territory.

It's widely expected that Russian President Vladimir Putin will announce Friday that the occupied regions are being annexed and will become part of the Russian Federation. There are widespread fears that Moscow could resort to nuclear weapons to "defend" what it will claim is its territory.

"The results are clear. Welcome home to Russia!" Dmitry Medvedev, a former Russian president who serves as deputy chairman of Russia's Security Council and an ally of President Vladimir Putin, said on Telegram.

The United States will introduce a resolution at the UN Security Council calling on member states not to recognize any change to Ukraine and obligating Russia to withdraw its troops, US envoy Linda Thomas-Greenfield said.

Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken said the United States and its allies remained committed to European energy security, after Germany, Sweden and Denmark said attacks caused major leaks from two Russian energy pipelines. It remained unclear who might be behind the leaks.

European officials continue to investigate unexplained leaks affecting both the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines that carry natural gas from Russia to Europe via the Baltic Sea.

The EU suspects sabotage, with European Commission head Ursula von der Leyen promising the "strongest possible response" if the attack is proven to be deliberate.



HIMARS in action. Image source: Defense Blog

President Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov has dismissed speculation Russia might be behind the attacks as "predictable, stupid and absurd".

BIDEN APPROVES \$1.1 BILLION MORE IN MILITARY AID TO UKRAINE

Meanwhile, the Biden administration announced \$1.1 billion in additional security assistance for Ukraine on Wednesday, bringing the US commitment to more than \$16.2 billion since Russia's invasion in late February.

The announcement of the upcoming aid package, the 22nd such instalment, follows Putin-backed referendums held in four Russian-occupied regions of Ukraine.

The latest US security package consists of 18 High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, or HIMARS, as well as munitions for those systems, 150 armored multipurpose vehicles, 150 tactical vehicles to tow weapons, 40 trucks and 80 trailers to transport heavy equipment, two radars for unmanned aerial systems,

20 multi-mission radars as well as secure communication systems and body armor.

The new weapons and equipment, being provided under the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, are aimed at meeting Kyiv's mid- and long-term needs and could take six to 24 months to arrive. The Biden administration, which has committed aid worth \$17 billion to Ukraine, has been using presidential drawdown authority to send arms more quickly.

Unlike a presidential drawdown authority, which pulls weapons directly from US stockpiles, the latest security assistance package is authorized through the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, or USAI, which uses funds appropriated by Congress.

A senior Pentagon official told reporters that the newly committed HIMARS systems are intended to be a "core component of Ukraine's fighting force in the future." Earlier this year, Ukraine received 16 HIMARS from US military stockpiles and 10 equivalent systems from western allies, but the new HIMARS will take "a

few years" to deliver, the official said.

EU VOWS SANCTIONS OVER REFERENDUMS

Following the staged 'referendums,' the European Commission has proposed an eighth round of sanctions against Russia. The latest measures would look to ban Russian exports worth \$7 billion (£6.4 billion) and tighten restrictions on goods flowing from the EU that could help Russia's war machine.

The EU executive has also proposed a price cap on Russian oil aimed at limiting how much third countries, such as China and India, pay for Russian crude, and it plans to expand its travel blacklist and asset freezes to include high-ranking Russian defense officials and organizers of the widely derided referendums.

WAR ON THE GROUND: BATTLE FOR KHERSON CONTINUES

Ukraine's progress in the southern regions of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia has been much slower than its successes in the north-east.

"Front line positions come under regular fire as both Russia and Ukraine attempt to push forward.

"Many Ukrainians who remain behind the Russian front line, in the occupied territories, are anxiously waiting for this counter-offensive," reported the BBC, adding that that's because the recent so-called referendums have brought a new threat to the local population - mobilization, which will see many Ukrainian men being drafted to fight for the Russian army.

Russian soldiers are already going house to house in some villages and writing down the names of male residents, local residents say. They claim soldiers have told them to be ready for a call-up after the referendum.

Men aged 18-35 are reportedly no longer allowed to leave the occupied territories.

On the Russian "Deserters" Flooding into Georgia

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at checkpoints, analyzed and only after that a decision is made regarding specific persons. In this direction, each agency responsible for border-crossing is working very intensively. The workload of all agencies that actively monitor the rate of border crossing and are responsible for both security and fiscal order has increased.

"In this situation, we all see that the flows have increased both in terms of cargo and physical persons. The situation is under control. There is no dramatic situation at the borders. The number of people entering and leaving the country has increased, therefore, this issue is being strictly monitored."

The Speaker of Parliament, Shalva Papuashvili, noted: "The stamp that the border guard gives can be considered a visa. It is up to the border guard to decide who should enter and who should not enter, and of course, it is controlled who should enter and who should not enter. The decision is made by the border guard based on the security interests of Georgia. Everything is controlled. There is an attempt to harm the state of Georgia on the one hand by creating hysteria inside the country, and on the other hand by damaging the reputation of Georgia outside the country. It is an ordinary anti-Georgian campaign."

"The flows at the Larsi checkpoint have increased," Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs Aleksandre Darakhvelidze acknowledged. "Usually, during the day, there were 5-6 thousand Russian citizens entering. That number has increased by 40-45%. The Ministry of Internal Affairs does everything that is defined by the law. Each citizen is examined. If they do not meet the requirements defined by the law, they are denied entry. All necessary measures are being implemented. We are controlling the situation there



as much as possible, and additional forces have been sent to Larsi."

MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS PUBLISHED STATISTICS ON NUMBER OF PEOPLE ENTERING FROM RUSSIAN FEDERATION

On 27 September, the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs published information regarding the entry standards in Georgia for citizens of the Russian Federation as well as on the numbers, rules and grounds for denying entry to Georgia.

"After September 21 of the current year, the number of people entering from Russian Federation increased at the Georgian-Russian state border," the MIA writes.

"Based on the public interest, the agency, therefore, is publishing data collected within the last 10 days. In particular, all border crossing points of Georgia have been crossed in both directions (entry-

exit) by the following number of people:

- On September 17, 6986 - 7406
- On September 18, 6606 - 6743
- On September 19, 6411 - 6782
- On September 20, 5603 - 6199
- On September 21, 6402 - 6011
- On September 22, 6150 - 6050
- On September 23, 9307 - 6214
- On September 24, 9330 - 6249
- On September 25, 11,143 - 5519
- On September 26, 10,804 - 4947 from the Russian Federation," reads the statement.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs notes that in order to effectively manage the increased influx from the Russian Federation, police teams have been additionally deployed at the Dariali border crossing point for border migration control procedures, ensuring public order in the vicinity of the border checkpoint as well as for the prevention of potential viola-

tions of the law.

"In addition to the mentioned, a unit of the State Security Service is permanently present at the border checkpoint, to ensure security and identify the risks," the MIA notes.

The report mentions order control procedures carried out with special observation, in full compliance with the acting legislation of Georgia.

"In the recent period, the number of citizens who are not allowed to enter the territory of Georgia due to the reasons stipulated in the legislation has increased. Therefore, questions are being raised more frequently on the rules of admission and the reasons for refusal.

"According to Article N12 of the Law on the Legal Status of Aliens and Stateless Persons of Georgia, any citizen of a foreign country, upon entering Georgia, undergoes an inspection at the border

crossing point, as a result of which they are either given permission to enter Georgia, or denied entrance and are not able to cross the state border. The inspection/interview of each foreign citizen is carried out in accordance with internationally recognized best practices."

It is also noted that the border guard makes the decision to grant or refuse entry to a citizen of a foreign country as a result of evaluating various factors and circumstances.

"The inspection/interview process of citizens for identifying persons with high risks at the border-crossing points, and arrangement of the checkpoint as well as road infrastructure during movement in conditions of the increased influx, to a certain extent, leads to the formation of queues, which, at the same time, requires an increased period of time for registration," reads the statement.

'BAN RUSSIANS ENTERING GEORGIA' - STRATEGY AGHMASHENEBELI

Political party Strategy Aghmashenebeli took the initiative to call for the entry of Russian citizens into Georgia to be banned, taking into account examples of other countries like Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia.

A statement published by the party this week notes that the ban should not apply to Russian citizens of Georgian origin, who should be allowed to cross the border from Russian territory.

"After Russia attacked Ukraine, Russian citizens began to enter Georgia, and by now their number is approaching a critical limit. The flow increased especially after the announcement of military mobilization by the Russian authorities. The current situation threatens the national interests of Georgia and the security of our country," Strategy Aghmashenebeli representatives claim.

Russian Mobilization: Death Knell of the Federation?



Young men walk by a sign saying "To Serve Russia is the real job" in Saint Petersburg. Source: AFP

BY MICHAEL GODWIN

Across Russia, men have begun their training in response to President Vladimir Putin's decree ordering "partial mobilization." According to the order, men with prior military service, younger than 35 years of age, and not currently studying at a university, are required to report to their local recruitment office to fulfill their patriotic obligations. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said in an interview that the number of these recruits could number as many as 300,000. This came alongside his admission that they have lost 5,937 service members in the Ukrainian conflict so far.

In a video address, Putin said the act, the first of its kind since the Second World War, was in reaction to Western aggression. He stated that the "goal of that part of the West is to weaken, divide and ultimately destroy our country." In announcing his order, Putin stated "I find it necessary to support the proposal of the Defense Ministry and the General Staff on partial mobilization in the Russian Federation to defend our Motherland and its sovereignty and territorial integrity, and to ensure the safety of our people and people in the liberated territories."

However, many have seen this as an unjust overreach and a move that sends themselves, their brothers, fathers, and sons, into an impossible war. Over 38 towns and cities have seen anti-mobilization protests. Russian law enforcement has taken intensive measures to quell this dissent, as videos across social media show batons, pepper spray, and fists being used to subdue protesters.

In addition to this, a mass exodus is ongoing in the country. Lengthy columns of cars and people on foot have been seen at the borders of Georgia, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, and, until recently, Finland. While Finland and other European nations have shut their borders to those seeking asylum from the mobilization order, long wait times still persist at the few remaining nations.

Russia has set the parameters of the mobilization order, but several open sources report that the violations of this

are numerous. Old men and pensioners, students with no military service, protesters, and even a journalist have been given summons to report for training. Despite calls from the Kremlin that these oversights would be corrected, even retired commanders have been seen reporting for duty with no idea of what they are being called to do. One notable officer was witnessed saying so to his men, unable to explain what will happen to them, according to a series of videos recorded in secret by a new recruit.

In these new recruits being briefed on their new temporary careers, the commissars giving these introductions are curt. Two weeks of training and a likely deployment to Ukraine are what these impromptu soldiers will expect. While many mainstream and state-owned media have shown images of new uniforms, clean barracks, and hearty meals being given to these men, social media has shown the reverse. Outdated and rusty weapons, leftover Soviet-era kit, sleeping on floors or in prison-like conditions, and rampant alcoholism have been showcased in videos filmed by the recruits themselves.

The plethora of open source information has outweighed the Kremlin's narrative of a small force being pulled into reserve only to be used in emergencies inside the state. Their deployment in Ukraine, although likely only in defensive roles, would only cause higher casualty rates, sap more resources from the overstretched supply lines, and cause more uproar at home. What small gains could be made by bringing reluctant and under-trained troops to the line are few and far between.

The recent referendums in Russia's occupied territories in eastern and southern Ukraine coincide with the mobilization order. Despite virtually all countries claiming to not recognize the results of the votes, all four regions have all but unanimously elected to become a part of the Russian Federation. The conclusions of this move and its recognition by the Kremlin are predictable.

According to Russian law, these mobilized men and other conscripts are not able to be deployed outside of Russia proper. While it wouldn't be unusual for Putin to ignore constitutional requirements, it would be viewed as a grave offense socially across the country, soiling what

little legitimacy the operation in Ukraine still has. By recognizing Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhya and Kherson as sovereign Russian territory, it would open the door for these new troops to be sent in to reinforce the battered units there now and still have legal grounds.

300,000 is a significant number in terms of military manpower. For comparison, at the height of operations in Iraq, the United States had approximately 170,000

service members in the country. This high number may be difficult to achieve in a meaningful time period. Summoning, training, and deploying these mobilized troops takes time, even if they are rushed through training as they seem to be.

If this number is attempted, it may have a significant effect on Russia's already fragile economic and industrial sectors. Reports abound that Russia's military technology industry has suffered not

only by a shortage of microprocessors and materials, but also manpower. Pulling more working-age men from the production line may constrict the ability to produce.

The new group of mobilized troops may also suffer from reliability on the battlefield. It's easy to note that high hopes and smiles may be on display when reporting for service. However, once the brutal and bloody front inside Ukraine is reached, it's likely that at least 10% will begin to have second thoughts. The snap of the first round passing by one's head, or the thundering din of sustained artillery, will most assuredly cull this heart naturally.

Putin and his staff may have already seen this in effect earlier in the war. As a result, some steps may have been taken to minimize the effect of this upcoming "realization sickness." It seems to be evident and pre-calculated, as Moscow instituted a schedule of specific punishments for activities such as avoiding service and malingering, purposefully surrendering to the enemy, and pillaging.

Those online have made the comparison to the popular "meatgrinder" term to the partial mobilization order. The effectiveness of these new soldiers is unlikely to be anything but a tragic rise in the death toll, increase of single motherhood rate, and future contraction of the economy in Russia. In an obvious flailing attempt to save face, Putin has crossed a proverbial Rubicon with not only Ukraine, but NATO and the West.

In his clear desperation, as the saying goes, one must always be wary when approaching a dying beast. Just as Caesar crossed the Rubicon, perhaps this is the catalyst that will see Volodya's fate ultimately end at the tip of a dagger, clutched by the hands of his own men.



Young men board a bus to take them to the training base to serve as a part of Putin's mobilization order. Source: Telegram

Lukashenko on Visit to Abkhazia: We Should Strengthen Relations

BY TEAM GT

The so-called president of occupied Abkhazia, Aslan Bzhania, met with the president of the Republic of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, on Wednesday.

It was Lukashenko's first time entering occupied Abkhazia while in office, though Belarus does not officially recognize the independence of the occupied Abkhazia or Tskhinvali regions.

Bzhania's press service reports that the meeting took place at Bichvinta country house.

At the meeting, Lukashenko noted that the "issue of Abkhazia" had been discussed at the meeting held the day before with President of Russia, Vladimir Putin. "Yesterday, we discussed the problems of Abkhazia with our elder brother Vladimir Putin. We were discussing these issues till late night and we came to the conclusion that Abkhazia cannot be abandoned. It needs help so that this prosperous land and the people who live here can live normally," Lukashenko said.

He added that Belarus and Russia are "coordinating their actions."

"Today, more than ever, we see what the world has turned into. We will not



be allowed to live in peace. Therefore, we should strengthen relations with our friends," Lukashenko said.

He claimed that he wants to establish "serious relations" with Abkhazia.

"Abkhazia is heaven on earth, and the people are saints. We want to build not only a bridge of friendship with you, but

also very serious relations," Lukashenko stated.

Reactions from the Georgian side to the Belarusian president's visit were understandably negative.

PM Irakli Garibashvili: "I strongly condemn Aleksandr Lukashenko's visit to the Abkhazia region occupied by and

meetings with the Russian occupation regime. This step violates the law on occupied territories and contradicts international law as well as bilateral relations between our countries."

'For Georgia' party leader, Giorgi Gakharia: "I strongly condemn President Lukashenko's visit to Russian-occupied

Abkhazia. It is an obvious violation of territorial integrity and sovereignty which needs a strong response from the government and international community. We all should be firm in addressing such violations!"

Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili: "I strongly condemn Aleksandr Lukashenko's visit to occupied Abkhazia. This is an unacceptable violation of Georgia's Law on Occupied Territories and the principles of our bilateral relations and international law."

Former PM Giorgi Kvirikashvili: "Shameful step by a marginalized leader of Belarus Lukashenko - to act as a puppet of even more marginalized drowning head of Russian state Putin. NO ONE can change the destiny of Georgians and Abkhazians, to peacefully live in united Georgia - hopefully sooner rather than later."

Minister of Foreign Affairs Ilia Darchiashvili: "President Lukashenko's arrival in Bichvinta in occupied Abkhazia/Georgia in violation of Georgia's Law on Occupied Territories is unacceptable. We strongly condemn this unlawful action. Fundamental principles of int'l law must be followed."

The Georgian Foreign Ministry on Thursday summoned the Ambassador of Belarus to Georgia following Lukashenko's visit to the occupied Abkhazia region.

Dr Vladimer Papava: The Georgian Population Can't Feel the Positive Results of the Economic Growth because of Inflation

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW BY
EREKLE POLADISHVILI

Georgia is experiencing unprecedented economic growth, the country's Prime Minister Garibashvili notes at every opportunity. But few are taking this announcement seriously, as they watch the price of fuel, food and other goods going up. GEORGIA TODAY spoke to Dr Vladimer Papava, Director of the Center for Applied Economic Studies and Senior Fellow at the Rondeli Foundation, to find out more about the current situation and what's in store moving forward.

THE GEORGIAN NATIONAL CURRENCY IS GETTING STRONGER, BUT PRICES OF PRODUCTS IN THE MARKET REMAIN THE SAME OR ARE STILL ON THE UP. WHAT'S THE CAUSE?

We have to start with the Covid-19 pandemic, because nobody predicted its appearance and nobody knew how to deal with it. Many national governments

decided to lock down many companies in many sectors of the economy. This resulted in the disruption of global supply chains, and prices will grow when you have a reduction in supply. As a result, we have high inflation.

With Russia's war in Ukraine, Western countries adopted special economic sanctions, and the process of disruption of global chains of supply continued. That's why the problem of high inflation is general and is a problem for all countries, including the United States. Georgia also has a high level of inflation. For example, 2021 was a good economic year for Georgia because economic growth was 10.4%, but inflation was 13.9%, meaning inflation was higher than economic growth. That's why the Georgian population doesn't feel the positive results of the economic growth. Inflation covers economic growth, and it is not a situation only in Georgia; the same problem is being seen right now in many other countries.

WHILE MOST COUNTRIES STRUGGLE ECONOMICALLY, GEORGIA HAS DOUBLE-DIGIT ECONOMIC GROWTH. HOW IS IT POSSIBLE, AND WILL SOCIETY BENEFIT FROM IT?

Georgia is an interesting case. The country tried to continue with the same policy it had in 2021, with an open economy and no more lockdowns, and a focus on promoting touristic development. That created a situation where Georgia's economic growth was relatively high. The projected real GDP growth rate in 2022 is 3.2%, but, according to the Georgian government, it will not be less than 7%. If we have no difficulties and the situation around and inside of Georgia doesn't change, I think the government's predictions will be right, and the growth will be at least 6%, nearly 7%, two times more than the International Monetary Fund predicted.

BUT WILL THE PEOPLE BENEFIT FROM IT? WE HEAR THAT THE ECONOMY IS GROWING,

BUT PEOPLE'S POCKETS HAVE THE SAME WEIGHT.

The predicted annual inflation in 2022 will be 9.9%. Inflation will be higher than the rate of economic growth. That's why the Georgian population's feeling about the financial situation is not optimistic.

EVEN AFTER THE SANCTIONS, THE RUSSIAN ECONOMY HAS NOT COLLAPSED. WHY IS THAT, AND CAN THE WEST WEAKEN THE RUSSIAN ECONOMY EVEN MORE?

Unfortunately, these sanctions have two holes. First, many countries in the world haven't joined the economic sanctions, major countries which have connections with the Russian economy being China, India, Turkey, and Israel. The other hole is inside the European Union. Yes, EU countries joined the economic sanctions, but at the same time, they continue purchasing gas and oil from Russia. During the first month of the war, the EU granted Ukraine nearly 1 billion dollars in humanitarian and financial aid. At the same time, in only one day, revenues from gas and oil Russia received from European countries amounted to nearly, daily, 1 billion dollars. Let's make it clear: The Russian economy is in a difficult situation, and these difficulties will increase, but now we have a very interesting situation with Western countries trying to use Cold War tactics against Russia's hot war in Ukraine. It is the first time in world history that we have such a complicated situation. So, how efficient these tools of the Cold War will be, nobody knows. We all hope and want to see Ukraine winning this war, but we must be realistic. We must understand the real difficulties Ukraine, Russia, and other countries face. And the energy supply for European countries is complex.

WHAT'S THE CURRENT SITUATION FOR THE UKRAINIAN ECONOMY, AND WHAT ARE YOUR PREDICTIONS?

Speaking about the Ukrainian economy is tricky because there is no data about



Dr. Vladimer Papava

the inflation rate in Ukraine. I tried to find some information using IMF and World Bank as sources, but there is simply no current data. The World Bank predicts that the GDP growth in Ukraine in 2022 will be -35%. It is a sharp decrease in the economy. As to the forecast of when Ukraine will deal with its economic difficulties - it depends on the war.

I'm sure it will be a victory. I don't want to consider any other scenario. Other situations will be much worse for Ukraine, Europe, the world, and Georgia. I only believe in the case in which Ukraine wins the war.

ACCORDING TO THE CURRENT SITUATION, HOW MUCH WILL UKRAINE NEED FINANCIALLY, AND CAN FOREIGN ECONOMIC SUPPORT BRING THE UKRAINIAN ECONOMY BACK TO ITS PRE-WAR STATUS?

Yes, I think that's possible, but nobody knows the exact answer. The war isn't over yet; the destruction of Ukrainian infrastructure continues. The problem is that nobody knows how long it will take to end this war. That's why any predictions on how much money the Ukrainian economy will need for its recovery will likely be inaccurate.

Western countries are trying to use Cold War tactics against Russia's hot war in Ukraine

ALONG WITH UKRAINE, EUROPE IS ALSO STRUGGLING. IS IT ONLY BECAUSE OF THE WAR? MIGHT WE SEE AN EVEN WORSE SCENARIO THAN WE HAD IN 2008?

In 2008 and 2009, there was a global financial and economic crisis, one which was generated purely in the economy. The crisis we have now is not generated in the economy, it was generated outside of it. The Covid-19 pandemic came first, then the war, later the economic sanctions, and all these factors are outside of the economy. I think the current situation is much worse than in 2008-2009, because economists at least knew how to deal with it during this crisis. Globally, the world is facing not only the Russo-Ukrainian war, but two other simultaneous wars. The first one is an oil war, started by Russia, and including not just an oil problem but gas as well, and the other is a food war. Before Russia's war in Ukraine, these two countries exported 25% of the world's wheat exports. Now Ukraine has serious problems with it, and only with the serious intervention of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the General Secretary of the United Nations have they managed to resolve the issue of Ukrainian ships leaving Ukrainian ports. But this doesn't fix the overall problem.

2021 was a good economic year for Georgia because economic growth was 10.4%, but inflation was 13.9%

Chef Maris Maurins: World Class Cuisine at Tbilisi Hills Restaurant

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW BY
MICHAEL GODWIN

Georgia's culinary traditions run deep, with each region having its own specific dishes. As the food scene in the country has come into line with many of Europe's celebrated traditions, the palette of the nation has opened to a broader selection. Alongside Georgia's own iconic dishes are now elevated concepts from the world's most inspiring kitchens.

One chef has brought a wealth of experience, knowledge and vision to the South Caucasus. Chef Maris Maurins has worked in some of Europe's most elite kitchens, serving some of the most exclusive of clientele. Royalty, celebrities, and the continent's leadership have had the luxury of sampling this chef's unique creations.

Sitting down with GEORGIA TODAY, his passion is palpable. Like an artist describing his own painting, his striking blue eyes almost glaze over as he describes the emotions infused into his work, sharing with us a brief glimpse into the immense work invested in the trade as he came up under the tutelage of some of Europe's great chefs. Bringing this to Tbilisi Hills Restaurant, he shares some of his inspirations, his ideas, and what challenges the area faces culinarily.

HOW AND WHERE DID YOU GET YOUR START IN THE CULINARY WORLD?

I started when I was a child, as both my parents worked very hard from early morning to late evening. When I came home from school, I would have to eat something, so I started cooking something like pancakes or eggs, and I found a love of the kitchen. After I finished my schooling, I went to culinary university.

After this, I went straight to work and never left the kitchen. For me, kitchens and restaurants are in my blood. If I was

gone from the kitchen for more than three days, I would feel uncomfortable. I need to be inside and hear the sounds of the kitchen, the sounds of glass and cutlery, visiting the customers and speaking with them.

IS THERE ANY CHEF THAT YOU WOULD SAY HAS BEEN YOUR GREATEST INSPIRATION OR MENTOR?

I think it comes from everyone I met in my life. There's always some good things to learn, but my last chef and friend Martins Ritins from Latvia made most significant impact. He gave me a lot of power. He told me one day, "Maris, today I am in your shoes. Do what you want in the kitchen, and I will follow you." At that time, he was a seventy-three year old man!

When I was a child, I watched him on television and said I wanted to be like him. After culinary school, I didn't look for his restaurant, deciding to follow my own path. I chose to challenge myself in London where, over five years, I gained various experience - kitchen work ethics, team dynamics, multiculturalism, different mentalities and, most importantly, food traditions and several cultural codes. Then suddenly my role model came to London and for several hours he was watching me cooking. He didn't know that I was Latvian, but he was really curious. We had a long conversation, after which we agreed that we should go back to Latvia and work together.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR COOKING STYLE?

I don't know. It's kind of simple. When people ask me what I'm doing in the kitchen, what food I'm making, I say I'm making the "outer-kitchen." The outer-kitchen means there is some piece of myself, some part of other chefs, and some from other books which I upgrade my way.

That's the outer-kitchen, it's about me and how I can tell stories about what I'm doing. I'm not one to put my dishes in



Chef Maris Maurins. Source: Tbilisi Hills one category, like European, Asian, or something like that. I take the best things I can find at that moment, and I use them and try to surprise my clients.

WHAT SETS YOUR DISHES APART AND MAKES THEM SO UNIQUE IN GEORGIA?

When the food is not boring. When you enjoy meals and you experience flavors - you close your eyes and suddenly you

have another flavor. I often tell my customers that if you come to my house, and you eat my food, and you don't feel emotions or you didn't find love, it means that something was wrong.

I try to surprise with flavors, spices, sourness, bitterness, sweetness, everything together. You'll never fall asleep from the food I prepare. With every meal, you must have some bitterness, some sweetness, something that when you see

the food, you expect one thing but when you eat it, you find something you did not expect.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY ARE THE GREATEST CHALLENGES CHEFS IN GEORGIA HAVE?

The challenge itself. It's challenging to work in Georgia, as quality is unstable and I still lack personal connections with local farmers. I used to order ingredients from the outer islands - Sweden, Italy and France, the UK, but due to different obstacles, it is not possible to have these products all the time. Here, it is hard to find products of the same quality and the same suppliers.

It's also hard because not many people use these products. Maybe it's too expensive or rare, but I'm trying to find suppliers to find ingredients I want to see on my menu and in my kitchen. It's difficult, because fresh fish is not here, and it has to travel a very long way and it can go off. The beef meat is different here because the cows have to travel around so much to find green grass.

But Georgia has very nice and unique products too. The fruits here are very fresh, along with the vegetables and greens. But still some things are missing.

WHAT WOULD YOU TELL TRAVELING "FOODIES" OR CULINARY TOURISTS LOOKING FOR SOMETHING NEW?

I think that every chef is unique. If you follow yourself, and follow the flavors, always try to surprise your clients. I always use stories to describe the reasons why I use these products or why I mix the products as I do. I think the stories are most important for the customers - after the flavor and the look of the dish, the stories are the best.

When I do the wine pairing dinner 'Wine, Dine & Jazz' evenings here at Tbilisi Hills Restaurant, I always go out to the customers and share my stories about the ingredients, where they come from, why I use them. It is always about storytelling.

Iran and Russia Seek New Sanctions Evasion Corridor

ANALYSIS BY EMIL AVDALIANI

Russia and Iran are advancing the idea of a transportation route termed the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), which, despite some problems, is progressing and could reshape Eurasian connectivity.

The Islamic Republic's Eurasian pivot is not only about finding a balance to the pressure Iran has been experiencing from the US; it is more concerned with successfully positioning the country as the crossroads of Eurasia: linking Central Asian countries to the Persian Gulf, and India with Russia.

The INSTC can connect the Persian Gulf and Indian ports with Russia, a dream that fired the Russian imagination during its 19th century imperial expansion, and triggered what was termed as the Great Game with the British Raj. Access to warm water ports works for both Russia and India, and provides an alternative to lengthy sea routes for trade to Russia, Turkey, and the rest of Europe. Ideally, the route would take 18 days from the Baltic Sea to reach India through Azerbaijan and Iran.

Talks about the corridor have been underway since the early 2000s, and are now nearing their final stages. What remains to be complete is the Rasht-Astara railway section between Iran and Azerbaijan, a critical link that has been lacking because of US sanctions imposed on Iran for its pursuit of nuclear weapons.

Presently the connection is only 70% complete and much will depend on a possible nuclear agreement. The talks are currently deadlocked, which might remove major sanctions and allow the Islamic Republic to engage the South Caucasus more actively.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to Iran in July brought about a flurry of comments on the corridor, perhaps a sign Russia now realizes just how important the project is. Previously, the Kremlin had been ambivalent. To be sure, it supported the idea from the very beginning, but has never really seriously pushed for implementation. But with the consequences of Putin's war in Ukraine now clear, there is a considerable incentive to revive the flagging scheme, which could help the two Eurasian powers dodge Western sanctions.

The fresh impetus is clear from official comments. The director of the Iranian Construction and Development of Transportation Infrastructure Company, Abbas Khatibi, said in the wake of Putin's visit that the country is willing to complete the project. On June 11, two containers set off from St. Petersburg to Astrakhan, then to the Iranian port of Anzali on the Caspian Sea, and ultimately to Bandar Abbas on the Persian Gulf. The freight was a test, but the timing is telling, as it coincided with Russia's trade troubles and Putin's visit to Iran. This followed the Iranian Roads and Urban Development Minister Rostam Qasemi's trip to Moscow in April where a comprehensive agreement on transportation cooperation was signed with the Russians. On September 11, Iran, Russia and Azerbai-

jansigned a special declaration on INSTC.

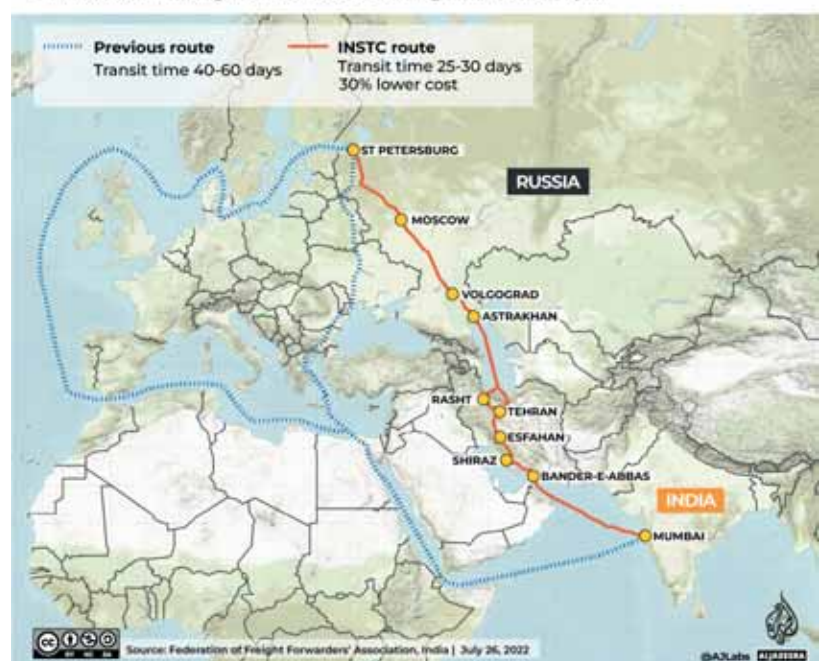
For Iran, the corridor opens access to the 10 cities of 1 million consumers or more along the River Volga, but also as a connection to Central Asia and the Black Sea. From Azerbaijan, Iranian goods could head eastward to Kazakhstan's Aqtau port. Yet another possibility is to look westward toward Georgia's Black Sea ports and the European market.

Countries in the South Caucasus have been especially active on transportation links recently. Georgia and Azerbaijan stand out in particular. For instance, the development of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Corridor was the subject of a quadrilateral statement by Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Kazakhstan on March 31, which produced a joint statement on the need to strengthen the corridor. In May, together with Kazakhstan, and Turkey, Georgia discussed the Middle Corridor (which runs from the Black Sea to Central Asia via the South Caucasus, avoiding Russia.) In a meeting held in Ankara. Later that month, the Georgian railway company announced that it was collaborating with companies from Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan to create a new shipping route between the Georgian port of Poti and Constanta in Romania.

Apart from this, Georgian leadership has been active through a series of visits to Central Asian states. Similar visits were made by the Azeri leader. The major topic in all visits was connectivity, especially so as the necessary infrastructure is already in place. The 2017 launch of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway and the

INDIA International North-South Transport Corridor

The INSTC could offer Russia an economic escape route to Asia at a time when sanctions are limiting its transit access through most of Europe.



International North-South Transport Corridor. Source: aljazeera.com

expanding network of regional roads connecting the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea provide a solid foundation for trade cooperation between China and the EU in the South Caucasus.

Yet it is true that the INSTC is made more complicated because of the sanctions now imposed on Russia. Moreover, despite a mutual desire to push back against the West, Iran, and Russia also share a number of differences when it comes to the Caucasus and the Caspian

Sea. There is also a deeply ingrained mistrust between the two.

Nonetheless, the war in Ukraine creates momentum. Should the West restore the nuclear deal with Iran, the two countries will seek to complete the corridor project: expect a possibly significant growth in sanctions evasion as a result.

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



Research

Georgia in International Rankings
Economic Outlook and Indicators

Issue #140 04.10.2022

Georgia in International Rankings

International rankings and indicators help us to understand and assess how countries are performing in different areas. In this bulletin, Georgia's positions in international rankings and the dynamics therein are reviewed based on the latest data. Georgia's positions will also be compared with other Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Ukraine, and Belarus').

The Economic Freedom Index published by the Heritage Foundation consists of four categories: Rule of Law, Government Size, Regulatory Efficiency, and Open Markets, which provide a comprehensive analysis of a country's economic freedom.

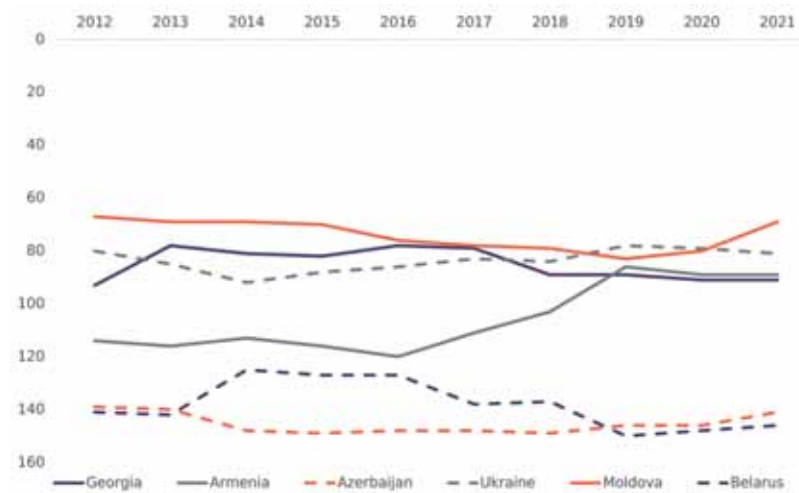
In 2021, Georgia was ranked 12th among 178 countries, retaining its 2020 position. Among the four pillars of the Economic Freedom Index, Georgia's best score in 2021 was in Government Size (87.0), while its poorest was in Rule of Law (63.6). Furthermore, compared to 2020, Georgia's score most improved in Government Size (+1.9), while it most worsened in Open Markets (-0.9).

Furthermore, Georgia keeps a leading position among EaP countries, making Georgia an exclusive "Mostly Free" country in the region. Moreover, Georgia followed a worsening worldwide trend, lowering its rank to 26th in 2022. The decline was mainly attributed to reduced business freedom and poor fiscal health. It is also important to highlight, that the country's tax burden and trade freedom performance remained stable.

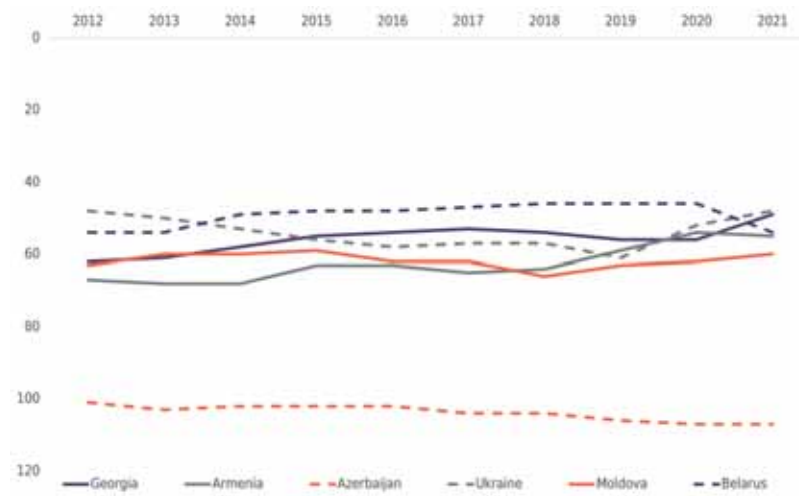
The Democracy Index published by the Economist Intelligence Unit is based on five categories (Electoral Process and Pluralism, Functioning of Government, Political Participation, Political Culture, and Civil Liberties), measuring the state of democracy within each assessed country. Based on results, each country is classified as one of four types of regime: "full democracy"², "flawed democracy"³, "hybrid regime"⁴ or "authoritarian regime"⁵.

Georgia was ranked 91st among 167 countries in the Democracy Index in 2021, retaining the 2020 spot. Accordingly, Georgia kept its classification as a "hybrid regime". Among the five categories of the Democracy Index, Georgia's best score in 2021 was in Electoral Process and Pluralism (74.2), while its poorest was in Functioning of the Government (3.57). Moreover, compared to 2020,

Graph 2. The Economist Intelligence Unit - Democracy Index



Graph 3. The Social Progress Imperative - The Social Progress Index



Georgia's score has not improved in any categories, while it most worsened in Political Participation (-0.6).

It is also essential to highlight that, in 2021, Moldova performed better than any other EaP country, raising its classification to a flawed democracy, while others are classified as a hybrid regime, except Azerbaijan and Belarus, that are classified as authoritarian.

The Social Progress Index published by the Social Progress Imperative measures a country's ability to provide its citizens with social and environmental needs to enhance the quality of their lives and create the conditions for all individuals to reach their full potential. The index consists of three pillars: Basic Human Needs, Foundations of Wellbeing, and Opportunity.

Georgia was ranked 49th among 168

countries in 2021, which is improved by 7 positions compared to its position in 2020. Among the three pillars of the Social Progress Index, Georgia's best score in 2021 was in Basic Human Needs (86.49), while its poorest was in Opportunity (64.06). Furthermore, compared to 2020, Georgia's score most improved in Foundations of Wellbeing (+0.7), while it has not worsened in any pillars.

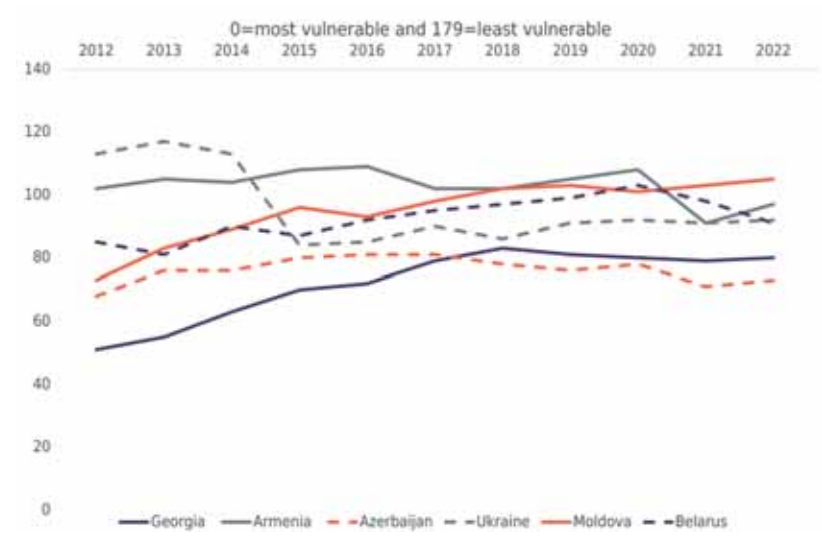
The leader in the Social Progress Index among EaP countries in 2021 was Ukraine, ranked 48th - a margin higher than Georgia. Azerbaijan performed the poorest - ranked 107th.

The Fragile States Index (FSI) is an annual assessment of 179 countries developed by the Fund for Peace. The index assesses the vulnerability of states to collapse under adverse shocks that countries face. The index consists of four indicators, including Cohesion⁶, Economic, Political, and Social and Cross-Cutting.

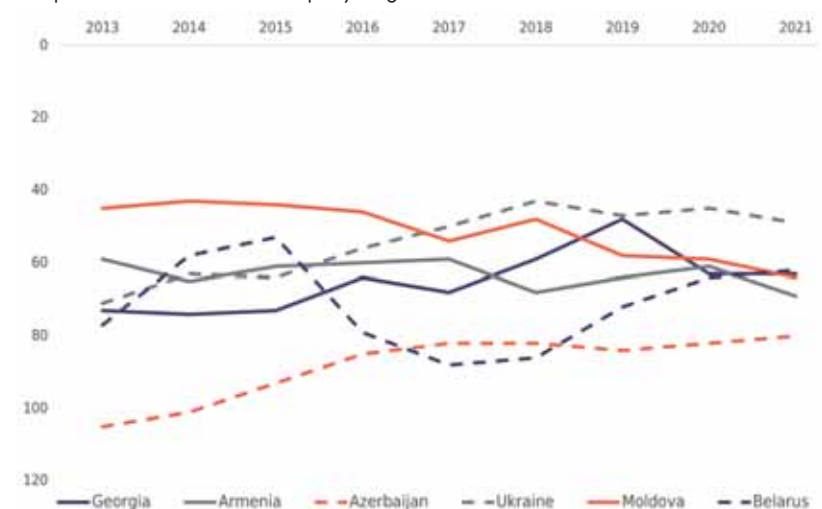
In 2021, Georgia ranked 79th among 179 countries, retaining its 2020 position. Georgia's best score in 2021 was in Cohesion Indicators (22), while its poorest was in Economic Indicators (15.6). Furthermore, compared to 2020, Georgia's score most improved in Social Indicators (+1.1), and most worsened in Cohesion Indicators (-0.6).

While Georgia was ranked penultimate among other EaP countries in 2021, Moldova (103rd) and Belarus (98th) were leaders in the region. Followings were Ukraine (91st), Armenia (91st), and further down - Azerbaijan (71st). Additionally, EaP countries are ranked closer to each other over the second half of the analyzed period of 2006-2022, while they were significantly scattered

Graph 4. The Fund for Peace - The Fragile States Index



Graph 5. World Intellectual Property Organization - The Global Innovation Index



in the first half.

It is also essential to highlight that in the case of Georgia and Ukraine, drastic falls are observable in 2009 and 2014 accordingly; Georgia fell to the lowest ranking (33rd) in 2009, after the Russo-Georgian war in 2008. Similarly, Ukraine's performance worsened tremendously after the 2014 war with Russia.

The Global Innovation Index published by the World Intellectual Property Organization measures a country's success and capacity of innovation while assessing innovation strengths and weaknesses. The index consists of seven pillars, including Institutions, Human Capital and Research, Infrastructure, Market Sophistication, Business Sophistication, Knowledge and Technology Outputs, and Creative Outputs.

In 2021 Georgia was ranked 63rd among 132 countries, retaining its 2020 position. Among the seven pillars of the Global Innovation Index, Georgia's best score in 2021 was in Institutions (76.2), while its poorest was in Knowledge and Technology Outputs (18.1).

Furthermore, compared to 2020, Georgia's score most improved in both Busi-

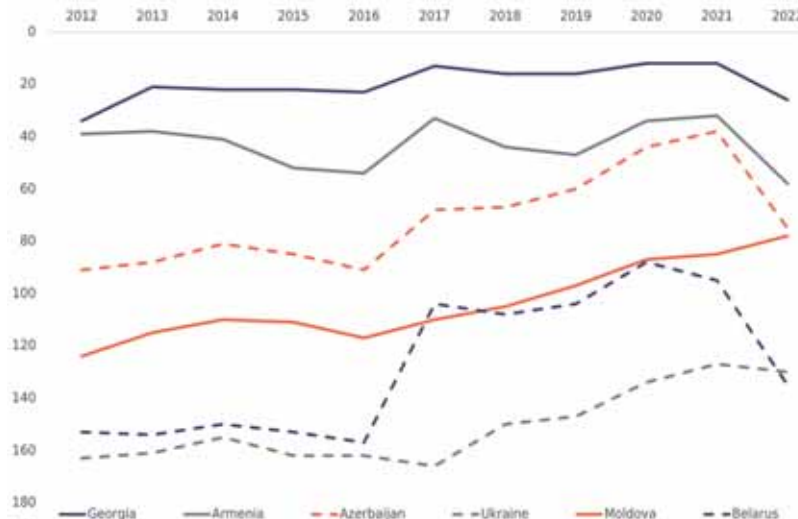
ness and Market sophistication (+2.1), and most worsened in Infrastructure (-1.1).

In 2021, Ukraine held first place among EaP countries, ranked 49th, while Azerbaijan traditionally performed the poorest - ranked 80th.

Overall, Georgia's performance in the reviewed international rankings in 2021 has been somewhat stable. In 2021, compared to 2020, Georgia retained its position in every given index, except the Social Progress Index, in which Georgia improved its position significantly. However, it is essential to highlight that Georgia has lost its drive as general YoY performance improvements in some of the discussed indexes have been inferior in 2021.

Furthermore, Georgia traditionally keeps its leading position in the Economic Freedom Index among EaP countries, while it is second in the Social Progress Index. On top of that, Georgia holds a place in the upper half of EaP countries rankings in the Global Innovation Index. However, Georgia is in the lower half of the EaP countries rankings in the Democracy and Fragile States Indexes

Graph 1. The Heritage Foundation - Economic Freedom Index



¹ As of June 2021, Belarus has suspended its participation in the EaP. (<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eastern-partnership/belarus/>)
² Countries in which not only basic political freedoms and civil liberties are respected, but which also tend to be underpinned by a political culture conducive to the flourishing of democracy.
³ These countries also have free and fair elections and, even if there are problems (such as infringements on media freedom), basic civil liberties are respected.
⁴ Elections have substantial irregularities that often prevent them from being both free and fair. Government pressure on opposition parties and candidates may be common.
⁵ In these states, state political pluralism is absent or heavily circumscribed. Many countries in this category are outright dictatorships.
⁶ Cohesion Indicators include: Security Apparatus, Factionalized Elites, and Group Grievance.

Egyptian Ambassador in Oman Receives the Founder of HHG



The Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the Sultanate of Oman, Khaled Radi, received the Egyptian businessman and owner of the Hebashi Investment Group, Mr. Hani Hebashi, at the embassy headquarters in Muscat for the purpose of discussing the new group's work in the Sultanate.

The ambassador emphasized that the Egyptian state and its representatives present in all countries of the world are keen to support the Egyptian investment sector abroad by overcoming any obstacles that may stand in the way of Egyptian investors abroad, in addition to trying to support them with all available capabilities.

The ambassador discussed with Hebashi the investment group's plan to be conducted in the Sultanate of Oman, as the Hebashi Group is keen to open a wide range of investment activities in the Sultanate as it is one of the most important and relevant Arab countries in the middle-east.

Given the in-depth knowledge of the Hebashi Group in the

economic and investment aspects in the Sultanate of Oman, it will provide appropriate services and investment opportunities for all segments of society in the Sultanate, provided that these services are different and exceptional, and all these things will give the group reliability and support, even though it has just opened its activities.

In turn, businessman Hani Hebashi expressed his thanks to Ambassador Khaled Radi for his luxurious reception. Hebashi praised the Ambassador's efforts in supporting the work of Egyptian investors in the Sultanate of Oman, and helping them to overcome any difficulties in the easiest and fastest way.

Hebashi International Group is a holding group for more than seven companies, and these companies work in various fields, for example, the field of real estate, tourism, decoration, and media, in addition to the group owning a large number of branches all over the world, in Saudi Arabia and the Sultanate of Oman, while its main branch is located in Tbilisi, Georgia.

Carbon Trade to Promote Green Economy in Georgia

Switzerland, Japan and UNDP assist Georgia to close financial gaps in achieving climate goals

Georgia's prospects in the Global Carbon Market were the focus of a high-level conference in Tbilisi on Tuesday. The participants discussed carbon trade impacts on reducing emissions and achieving green development, steps needed to access the market, and the engagement of the public and private sectors.

The event brought together over 50 representatives of the government, financial institutions, industry associations, businesses, civil society and international agencies. Key speakers included Solomon Pavliashvili, Georgia's Deputy Minister of Environmental Protection and Agriculture; H.E. Akira Imamura, Ambassador of Japan to Georgia; Urs Beer, Deputy Head of Mission of the Embassy of Switzerland to Georgia; and Nick Beresford, UNDP Resident Representative in Georgia.

"Georgia's ambitious goals to develop a low-emission economy and promote climate-smart technologies are reinforced by our climate commitments under the Paris Agreement, the Association Agreement with the European Union, and other international treaties," said Solomon Pavliashvili, Deputy Minister of Environmental Protection and Agriculture. "Access to carbon markets will help Georgia implement its climate agenda and move forward to building a climate-resilient society."

"Swapping carbon credits is a win-win



idea that limits carbon emissions and brings much-needed financing to countries like Georgia to help in their green transition," noted Nick Beresford, UNDP Resident Representative in Georgia. "I am grateful to Switzerland and Japan for being the pioneers in Georgia under the Ministry of Environment's leadership. We now need to put this great idea into action."

Georgia's ambitious climate pledge under the Paris Agreement (35% reduction in GHG emissions compared to the 1990 baseline by 2030) makes the coun-

try a good candidate for entering the Carbon Trade Market.

Switzerland and Japan are Georgia's key supporters, and, potentially, the first trading partners, in this effort. In cooperation with UNDP, the Government of Switzerland and the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs/SECO assessed Georgia's carbon trade readiness, identified legislative and other gaps, and agreed on a technical assistance package.

Earlier in 2021 and 2022, Georgia signed bilateral agreements with Switzerland and Japan that will allow carbon trading

once Georgia is ready to activate this mechanism. The carbon trade revenues will provide Georgia with additional funding for sustainable and climate-smart development.

CARBON TRADE MARKETS

Carbon markets are international cooperation mechanisms that allow selling, buying or transferring emission reductions and removals between countries or commercial entities. The Paris Agreement enables the use of such mechanisms through Article 6.

For the country or a private company to access the carbon market, its emission reductions and removals must be real and aligned with the Nationally Determined Contributions/NDCs to the Paris Agreement. There must be transparency in the institutional and financial infrastructure for carbon market transactions, as well as social and environmental safeguards to mitigate any adverse project impacts.

For more information about carbon trade markets, visit UNDP's Climate Promise website.

Svaneti: Lessons Learned. Part I: Winter



BLOG BY TONY HANMER

Having announced our departure from Svaneti for the coming winter, it's time for me to recount some of the things I have discovered while living in this mountainous province since 2007. There are many! I will divide them up into the four seasons as these rhythms seem to rule so much here.

WINTER IS LONG

It can easily take up half the year. You need to be as ready for it as you can. Firewood cut and split one or, better yet, two years earlier so it can dry out maximally for minimal smoke and creosote buildup! This is perhaps the main preparation. We get new logs delivered by oxen-pair straight from the forest, to which we don't have logging rights as

outsiders; I then chain-saw these into the right lengths for the wood stove, and split them either then or let them dry a year before this final step and more drying. Try and store it indoors: I have had my life's fill of digging down under the snow to find the tarpaulin under which my firewood is buried! Now I have a trapdoor into the crawlspace or half-basement in our guest dining room, and there are stacked enough split lengths of wood for the whole winter at least.

My other source of firewood, especially kindling (the smaller stuff, for starting the fire with), is gathered from all the building work we've done over the last 12 years here. If it's big enough to see and pick up, it's big enough to burn. These humble scraps off the ground once filled about 60 sacks from 50 kg of flour or sugar, and I kept them all in the barn, bringing a few to the house each time as they were needed. The massive Svan wood stove makes all the difference, really. It's the largest such stove type in

all Georgia, reflecting our colder climate. You can supplement with electric heaters, as long as your electricity is strong and consistent enough, neither of which is to be counted on, however. I also keep a bottle of diesel on hand (never petrol or gasoline, much too volatile), to start the thing as easily as possible: no point in struggling to light it!

Knowing your whole system of stove-running is also essential, something which might take years to learn all the subtleties of but which really makes it as painless as possible. The cycle of cold air flowing into the firebox, heating up, circulating through the whole stove's double walls, and exiting out the chimney needs to be going before you shut the firebox door. You want to minimize indoor smoke during this time by opening nearby windows until the thing is practically roaring, then shut them. And being aware of how wind movement outside can affect smoke ingress is also vital. We only use the stove during win-

ter, unlike everyone else who keeps it going year round: we use electricity for cooking as much as possible, and a gas bottle to supplement this as needed.

Stock up on layers of clothing, because these are another key way to keep warm, from toes to head. Get the best stuff you can afford, which should also be easily washable. During the two winters I lived in Ushguli, Europe's highest village, I kept two sets of six layers of clothing ready to jump into as soon as I crawled out of bed: my unheated room got down to -4C, which gave me the best sleeps of my life but did not make for leisurely dressing!

Do all your food preserving or freezing: cheese, meats, vegetables, fruits, pickles, jams and more. You won't be cut off from food distribution services anymore by bad roads, at least not for long, but it's good to stock up in the other three seasons when work is easier. Make sure a shovel or two are ready for snow removal too, even keeping one indoors in case you can't find the top step outside in the morning...

Another very important item is water. If you don't leave a tap running, even just a little, you risk having your pipes freeze. And the more you can do to have ACCESS to those pipes in case you need to "wake them up", while keeping them insulated at the same time, the better.

1000L water tank, high enough for gravity feed and also insulated? Great. Motorized pump? Not bad, but useless if the electricity goes out (which it will eventually). Redundancy, and non-reliance on power, are good mottos.

The final step for winterizing is a mental one: preparing yourself for the sheer onslaught of whiteness, turning the world monochrome for up to six months. It IS beautiful, if you care to notice. Fall has given such splendors of warm colors as the leaves change; spring carpets the world in every shade of green, followed by its and summer's riot of all the wild-flower hues. Winter is white on black, and silent except for the occasional howling wind. But snow, too, and ice and frost, give endless variations on the simple arrangement of two hydrogen atoms to one of oxygen. Worth noticing, marveling in, and celebrating. Winter in Svaneti.

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



Adeste Fideles!

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

O Come, All Ye Faithful! This is a popular Christmas hymn based on the biblical story of the birth of Christ. It alludes to the shepherds rushing to Bethlehem to worship their infant redeemer. The hymn underlines the necessity of our coming together in adoration, and celebrates our unity in the devoted blessing of Christ, who gave up his own life for our salvation. Isn't this an amazing beginning for the most elevated faith in God?! If slightly interpreted and made easier to perceive, this means that any human life is worth living, in the belief that it was granted to us magnanimously by the Son of God. Not that we truly deserve it with our lofty faith in Him and the way we behave, just because He chose to die to let us live. Simple, isn't it? Well, not really.

Look at what the Christians are doing in the land called Ukraine. Being morbidly obsessed with some unlikely political aims and foul earthly ambitions for the sake of upholding their short-lived ideals and aspirations, they are killing each other. Many prior wars have had the same filthy content, but this time it is happening in the nuclear era of flabbergasting electronic and supersonic achievements, when the human chance of survival has achieved its acme. And it clearly means that we Christians are poised to kill not only one another, but

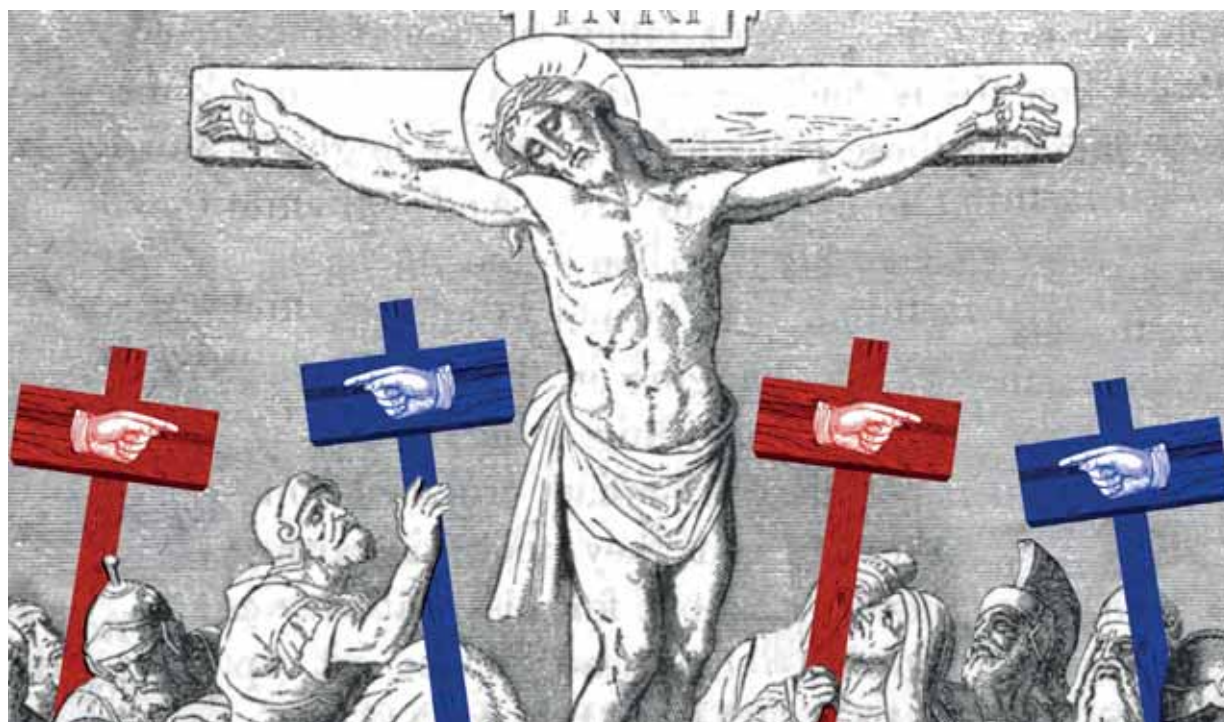


Illustration by Mallory Rentsch / Source Images: Wikimedia Commons / NSA Digital Archive / Getty

the goose that lays the golden eggs for all of us on our forgiving and beautiful Earth.

Compared to the peoples of other beliefs, demography among Christians is both dire and hopeless. We are dwindling away, assisted by man-made deaths. And the world is looking at this fratricidal confrontation as if nothing much is happening. The impotence of the

Christian world is unbelievable, not to mention the absence of the relevantly commensurate-with-the-problem desire and qualification to stop the mutual extermination of fellow Christians in the generally peaceful world because of some idiotic geopolitical blunders and misunderstandings.

This is not another pacifistic flicker of an aging journalist who no longer has

much to talk about in the colorless days of his dotage. No! This is a cold-minded but hot-blooded, long-maturing and internally tempered analytical piece on a painfully specific theme: the slaughter of Christians by the hands of Christians in a war made by Christians. I just wonder what the believers of other faiths think of us. Do they think we are savages, having nothing to do any longer with 'O

Come, All Ye Faithful? Could they be contemplating us as a species that has never walked in close vicinity to civilization? I just wonder if tens of thousands of young lives fit and ready to procreate the Christian progeny is worth disappearing from the surface of the Earth so as to guarantee the safety of one nation. And what safety are we talking about? Where is the safety? Not even one human life is worth the fight for that phony safety.

Can anybody in the world say how many lives of any faith will be sent to the next world before this despicable military adventure comes to a logical end? You know what? A worldwide military call-up might be a good idea, to put together, say, a hundred-million-strong peacemaking force who will go to Ukraine without even a slingshot in their hands, to scream at the maximum pitch for a stop to the sinister military action, to rescue the Christian gene pool from inevitable annihilation. Why am I talking so ardently about Christian lives? Because it is a war between the Christian believers of two brotherly nations, who are so close to each other in blood and history that there can't be a stronger sin before God and His Son than this. What is, after all, more important? To have lives intact, or to murder each other in search of safety for those lives? The absurdity of this is reaching a point where we are losing face in an attempt to save face from losing. This would sound comic if it were not tragic, so Adeste Fideles!

On Georgia's Mural Uprising, Tbilisi Street Art Festival 'Tbilisi Mural Fest'



Tbilisi Mural Fest 2022 Street Art by Sasha Korban on 75 Chavchavadze St. Tbilisi, Georgia. Photo by Barbara Picci

BY SOPHIE HODLER

Tbilisi street art festival 'Tbilisi Mural Fest' began on August 20 and is scheduled to end on October 4.

Since its establishment in 2019, Tbilisi Mural Fest has brought together a number of artists to create remarkable murals in Georgia's capital. Local and world-renowned muralists display their work during the festival. The vision of the annual festival is to turn the entire city into a single, massive public exhibition space that showcases some of the finest works of contemporary street art. Sightseers have the opportunity to observe artwork being created up close and interact with artists at public events including workshops and podium discussions throughout the festival.

Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, is a historic city that is now in the midst of major transformations. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia's artistic community has been progressively growing. On the streets of Tbilisi, this is obvious. Tbilisi Mural Fest produces examples of successful post-soviet urban intervention, and aspires to transform unattractive buildings into pieces of art after years of disorganized and chaotic construction projects.

"The streets of Tbilisi and other southern nations are incredibly vibrant and lively, providing a fantastic chance for the creation of high-caliber street art. Due to this, we established the Tbilisi Mural Festival, for which we have received widespread acclaim," stated Besik Maziashvili, the founder of Tbilisi Mural Fest.

The festival has been working to foster new artistic relationships, viewpoints, and experience to be exchanged between mural artists. Allowing some great Geor-

gian artists, such as Dante, Musya, Luka Japaridze, V45, Kade90 and David Samkharadze to collaborate alongside their famous colleagues in the line-up.

Since the festival's inception, Tbilisi Mural Fest has sought to provide encouragement and inspiration to the next generation of talented artists by entering academic settings. Students were thrilled to take part in workshops at the prestigious State Art Academy, to see the building's façade being painted, or to watch murals being created at the brand-new Kutaisi University of Technology.

Unknown to the street art world until recently, Tbilisi has emerged as one of the most intriguing places for it. Famous artists from around the world, like Faith47, Case Maclaim, 1010, Monkeybird, Artez, JDL, Innerfields, El Bocho, and many more, have produced a vast number of big-scale works, ranging from stencils to abstract murals.

The festival invites artists to use the



Tbilisi Mural Fest 2022 Street Art by Sasha Korban on 75 Chavchavadze St. Photo by Barbara Picci

power of art to voice global messages and leave a legacy. Sasha Korban, Fintan Magee, Tina Chertova, David Machavariani, Mohamed I'Ghacham, Luis Gomez, Vesod, and Artez are among the performers at the Tbilisi Mural Fest 2022. The aforementioned mural painters come from Italy, Germany, Ukraine, Georgia, Serbia, Portugal, Australia, the Netherlands, and Spain. Each participating artist comes from a distinct background and walk of life, which is reflected in their variety of styles.

The 2022 Tbilisi Mural Fest artists, countries, dates, and locations:

Sasha Korban, Ukraine, 20 Aug - 04 Sep, 75 Chavchavadze St.;

Tina Chertova, Georgia, 20 Aug - 01 Sep, 12 Bakhtrioni St.;

Fintan Magee, Australia, 25 Aug - 10 Sep, 12 Bakhtrioni St.;

David Machavariani & Kade 90, Collaboration of two Georgian artists, 29 Aug-10 Sep, 24 Chonkadze St.;

Mohamed I'Ghacham, Spain, 08 Sep - 19 Sep, 31 Makashvili St.;

Artez, Serbia, 20 Sep - 30 Sep, Mindeli St.;

Vesod, Italy, 30 Sep - 04 Oct, 18 Tabidze St.;

Luis Gomez, Portugal, 01 Oct - 04 Oct, 1 Mindeli St.

Take a virtual tour of some of the city's most colorful streets without the need to lose time in Tbilisi's alleys to discover some fantastic street art. Here is a visual tour of the diverse urban artworks so far created at the Tbilisi Mural Fest 2022, which range from an inspiring proud Ukrainian lady to traditional Georgian elements. These are those recently finished; the remaining pieces have yet to be revealed.

SASHA KORBAN

Sasha Korban, this year's Ukrainian artist of the Tbilisi Mural Fest, stated that the wall on which he painted the mural was the hardest wall he has ever worked on in emotional terms. He recalled the conversation he had with Maziashvili, in which he found out that Tbilisi Mural Fest had prepared a special wall for him opposite of the Russian Federation Interests Section at the Embassy of Switzerland in Tbilisi.

"I portrayed a Ukrainian woman in a traditional embroidered shirt holding a huge bouquet of wildflowers with ears of wheat," Korban noted. "She is proud and full of light. She looks straight ahead, with a barely noticeable smile, at all the obstacles and fears before her. It symbolizes our strength, inner energy, freedom and will. Despite the terrible and cruel war, we, as a nation, will endure, become even stronger, and we will live!"

"There were several situations when people from the opposite building tried to stop me from working on the mural just because a Ukrainian was drawing there," he added.

TINA CHERTOVA

"The inspiration for this mural came from Georgian traditional ornaments. I made a mix of old Georgian ornaments from books and composed a Georgian Blue Tablecloth that I spread on the wall. My goal was to show traditional ornaments in a modern art shape and space. As a bonus, there is a hidden story of a woman entrepreneur - a writer, a doctor, an agronomist, and a winemaker," said Tina Chertova, one of the Georgian artists participating in the 2022 Tbilisi Mural Fest.



Tbilisi Mural Fest 2022 Street Art by Tina Chertova on 12 Bakhtioni St. Photo by Tiku Kobiashvili



Tbilisi Mural Fest 2022 Street Art by Tina Chertova on 12 Bakhtioni St. Photo by Tiku Kobiashvili



Tbilisi Mural Fest 2022 Street Art by Fintan Magee on 12 Bakhtioni St. Photo by Tamta Elizabarashvili



Tbilisi Mural Fest 2022 Fintan Magee Working on His Artwork on 12 Bakhtioni St. Source: Tbilisi Mural Fest

FINTAN MAGEE

Tbilisi Mural Fest artist Fintan Magee said, "I'm taking part in the Tbilisi Mural Fest for the first time. I genuinely enjoy it. I draw inspiration from the people living here. The painting on the wall will feature two ladies, one of whom will be holding artifacts. The festival is an opportunity to send out the right message and make homes a lot more colorful."

MOHAMED I'GHACHAM

Mohamed I'Ghacham's artwork is known

as "Ilia's house."

Tbilisi Mural Fest is partnered with Tbilisi City Hall, ReBank, Adjara Group, Alpina Paints, and Montana Cans. Along with the Embassy of Ukraine in Georgia, the Embassy of Italy in Georgia, Dephani AD, Artarea, and Unfound Door are supporters.

In 2020, Tbilisi Mural Fest created an app called Tbilisi Murals, which enables users to locate murals from Tbilisi Mural Fest, as well as to see the murals and learn more about the artists that created them.



Tbilisi Mural Fest 2022 Mohamed I'Ghacham Artwork on 31 Makashvili St. Source: Mohamed I'Ghacham



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Circulation Managers:
David Kerdikashvili,
David Djangava

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

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