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Ukraine Latest: Putin Says Risk of World War is 'High'

BY ANA DUMBADZE

The "heaviest of battles" lies ahead in Kherson as Ukrainian troops advance on occupying Russian forces, according to a Ukrainian presidential advisor. While Russia's grip on the strategic territory is shakier than in previous months, it does not appear ready to abandon it. Rather, it appears to be digging in for prolonged fighting after ordering civilians to evacuate while inviting the remaining men to join local militias.

Russia began its annual nuclear exercises Wednesday, with President Vladimir Putin observing the large-scale drills of the country's strategic forces via video. While the drills are routine, Moscow has threatened to use nuclear weapons several times since invading Ukraine in February.



Continued on page 4 Image source: National Herald

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As of 24-Oct-2022

Markets				CURRENCIES			
	Price	w/w	m/m		Price	w/w	m/m
BONDS				STOCKS			
GRAIL 07/28	76.75 (YTM 9.40%)	+0.6%	-5.6%	Bank of Georgia (BGEOLN)	GBP 21.05	+3.7%	+1.4%
GEBGG 07/23	100.62 (YTM 5.13%)	-0.3%	-0.2%	Georgia Capital (CGEOLN)	GBP 6.10	-1.0%	-6.2%
GEOCAP 03/24	93.70 (YTM 11.20%)	+0.1%	-0.9%	TBC Bank Group (TBCGLN)	GBP 18.42	+3.5%	+8.1%
SILNET 01/27	92.65 (YTM 10.55%)	-0.7%	-3.5%				
TBC 06/24	97.75 (YTM 7.22%)	-0.5%	-1.0%				
				COMMODITIES			
				Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	93.26	+1.8%	+8.3%
				Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	1 649.78	-0.0%	+0.4%
				INDICES			
				FTSE 100	7 013.99	+1.4%	-0.1%
				FTSE 250	17 337.55	-0.9%	-3.5%
				DAX	12 931.45	+2.2%	+5.3%
				DOW JONES	31 499.62	+4.4%	+6.5%
				NASDAQ	10 952.61	+2.6%	+0.8%
				MSCI EM	842.76	-2.7%	-7.0%
				SP 500	3 797.34	+3.2%	+2.8%
				MSCI FM	1 919.50	-0.9%	-5.5%

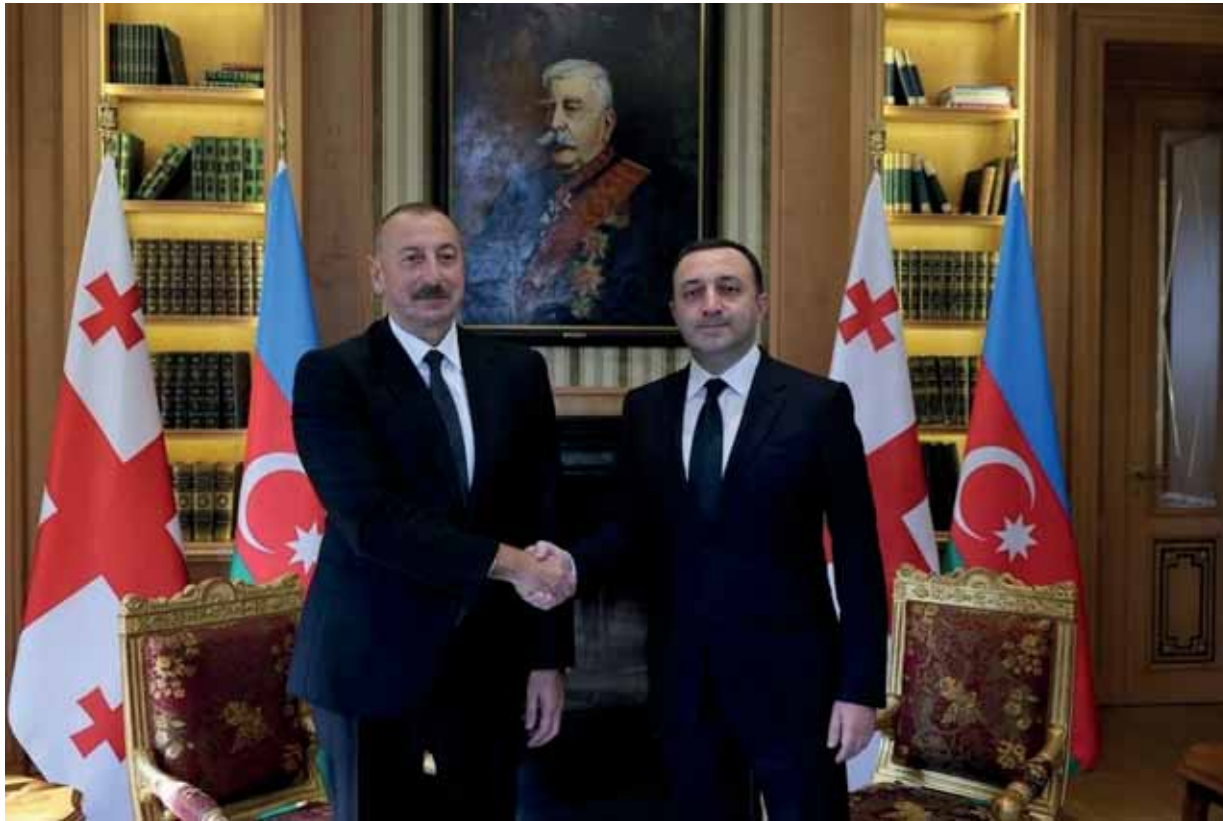
Aliyev: It's in the Interest of All Countries to Increase the Direction of Baku-Tbilisi-Kars & Use Ports of Georgia

Azerbaijan intends to export electricity to international markets, and of course, our route will pass through Georgia – through the Caspian Sea, we have the opportunity to export 157 megawatts, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, said at the briefing after his meeting with the Prime Minister of Georgia, Irakli Garibashvili.

He noted that the potential of cooperation between Georgia and Azerbaijan will increase.

“This is the indicator established by international calculations and forecasts. We believe that this will be a new target landmark. As in other directions, we believe that Azerbaijan and Georgia will successfully cooperate in this direction as well. In general, the potential of our cooperation and prosperity will increase.

“I should also emphasize the fact that cargo turnover between Georgia and Azerbaijan has increased by 75%. Baku-Tbilisi-Kars may also be used to load 5 million tons, and next year we will invest more capital in this corridor. We are going to use this route to carry cargo to Europe via the Caspian through Azerbaijan and Georgia, and develop new routes. It is in the



interest of all countries to increase the direction of Baku-Tbilisi-Kars and to use the ports of Georgia in order to take cargo from Central Asia to Europe. We believe that we have the opportunity to increase this potential. A new reality is being formed and we must be ready for it.

“Baku international trade seaport and its potential will grow, and more investments will be made. In this regard, we should closely cooperate with Georgia in the transport direction, because this should be a joint effort. In order to develop transportation capabilities, we must develop relations with our neighbors, otherwise we cannot be a reliable transit country. We have Georgia as a friend, neighbor and strategic partner.

“In general, taking into account the fact that the demand for energy carriers is growing, Georgia and Azerbaijan are represented on the same front. We will work together so that our national interests – the interests of two brotherly nations – create such important relations that will bring benefits to the world. Our friendship is the basis of this. I thank the Prime Minister for inviting me to this beautiful place. I want to wish eternal prosperity to our brotherly Georgian nation,” said Ilham Aliyev.

Working Meeting of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources Committee on Draft Law on Domestic Animals

The Environmental Protection and Natural Resources Committee held a meeting with NGOs and other stakeholders interested in protecting domestic animals, where the Committee introduced the draft law on Domestic Animals.

The bill aims to create a safe environment for humans and animals, protect them from cruel treatment, ensure animal welfare and traceability, control animal

reproduction, and prohibit animal fights.

“The primary objective of the document is for the parliament to pass legislation that will govern how domestic animals are managed, particularly when it comes to liability issues for both individuals and businesses. The issue, which is sadly real and escalating, affects all of us, including animal lovers, local governments, and common people. We continue to deal with situations that are essentially unacceptable in a humane

society, despite the fact that the law has just become tighter. We won't be able to resolve the issue if a uniform legal system is not developed and each municipality is not ready,” Maia Bitadze stated.

The representatives of various organizations discussed the main principles of the draft law and the systemic changes to be implemented.

The proposals and opinions expressed at the meeting will be reflected in the draft law, which will be initiated in Parliament.



NDI and UNDP, with Support from UK and Sweden, Unveil Key Findings on Mandatory Electoral Gender Quotas in Georgia



Image source: whatpoliticsmeans.com

Electoral gender quotas increase women's political participation in Georgia and are supported by both citizens and political parties. Yet, to make this electoral mechanism truly effective, political parties need to introduce stronger internal gender policies and explore better ways of attracting, engaging and promoting women candidates.

These and other findings are included in the research commissioned by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), with support from the UK and Sweden, to analyze the impact of gender quotas on Georgia's politics

and society, based on the results of the parliamentary elections in 2020 and the local elections in 2021.

The research examines the outcomes of public opinion polls undertaken after Georgia introduced mandatory gender quotas in 2020, looks into policies adopted in the same period, and examines whether electoral quotas indeed supported women in entering political careers.

It also provides a set of recommendations for political parties and lawmakers aimed at enhancing electoral gender quotas and giving women better access to the resources and services they need to win in politics.

The findings and recommendations of

the research were presented to the public on 25 October, at a conference attended by representatives of parliamentary and non-parliamentary political parties, civil society and international organizations.

“Gender equality at all levels of governance is a matter of democracy and human rights,” says H.E. Ulrik Tidestrom, Ambassador of Sweden to Georgia. “Involving 100% of the talent and experience in political decision-making, not just the male 50%, also improves the development of a country in all other areas, including economic prosperity and security. Georgia has made important steps in this direction. The research by UNDP, within the UN Joint Program

for Gender Equality, and NDI, could help Georgian stakeholders to assess how the chosen quota mechanism has worked so far and how it could be developed further. Continued progress on gender equality is possible, and is also one of the 12 priorities for Georgia's EU integration process.”

“For many talented and motivated Georgian women, electoral gender quotas are an open door to a political career,” notes Nick Beresford, UNDP Resident Representative in Georgia. “However, the same mechanism reveals the remaining gaps in legislation, party rules and social practices. UNDP helps study these challenges, stir public discussion, empower women in politics, and find solutions that will bring Georgia closer to an equal, fair and inclusive society.”

“The introduction of gender quotas triggered an unprecedented increase in the number of elected women both at the national and local levels,” Teona Kupunia, Deputy Director for NDI Georgia, claims. “The number of elected women at the local level has doubled in 2021 compared to 2017. Despite this spike, Georgia is still far from achieving a ‘critical minimum’, which is at least 30% of women in decision-making. Political parties should continue empowering women meaningfully by improving internal party policies and practices, making them more gender-sensitive and interesting for women. One important finding of this research suggests that thanks to gender quotas, parties have started looking for women internally and have identified quite a few talented candidates.”

The research team, Irma Pavliashvili

and Salome Mukhradze, presented research findings and recommendations, focusing on improving the legislative framework, strengthening national gender equality mechanisms, and establishing institutionally strong political parties.

Following the adoption of mandatory electoral gender quotas in 2020, Georgian women increased their share of seats in parliament from 14 to almost 20%. In 2021, women's representation in local councils increased from 13.8 to 24%. Women received 31.4% of mandates in proportional lists (441 mandates in total) compared to 19.8% of mandates received in 2017.

Yet, even this leap in numbers leaves Georgian women with just one-fifth of seats in parliament and one-fourth of seats in local councils, far from enough to make a meaningful impact on decision-making.

The expansion and improvement of quota policies can help Georgia make further steps towards gender equality and bring a diversity of perspectives into the political agenda.

The Sweden-funded UN Joint Programme for Gender Equality is implemented by UNDP, UN Women and UNFPA and assists Georgia to achieve meaningful gender equality in all areas of life.

The program “Supporting More Responsive and Inclusive Political Decision-Making at the National Level” is carried out by NDI with financial support from the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland through the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's Good Governance Fund.



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Europe at War & Georgia at Peace

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

How come Europe is in turmoil, the world is shuddering in fear of a nuclear calamity, yet we are in no trouble here in Sakartvelo? And this incredible idyll has lasted a while so far, keeping our people and our foreign visitors, both permanent and temporary, in balance and calm. All those gigantic and typically American malls, scattered throughout Georgia's main cities, are working like crazy, packed full with buzzing people spending money like never before. Just peep into the spacious garages at the malls of Tbilisi: Overloaded with cars, standing in line to either get in or out of the shopping havens! Every single restaurant in the country is so busy that it has become a real problem to get in after twilight unless one has reserved in advance, which has to be done in good time so as to avoid the inevitable thirst and hunger. Cities all over the country are traffic-ridden, their citizens busily and speedily moving around and sucking up huge quantities of that expensive fuel, filling the guess-station owners' wide-open pock-

ets with mind-boggling velocity. Banks have not even a split second to relax, because they are being invaded by native and external clientele alike, all of whom seem to have found a comfy shelter for their miraculous surfeit of cash. Meanwhile, the suburbs of more or less sizable towns have been turned into the sites of summer house constructions, with beautiful opulent villas popping up ubiquitously at an amazing pace. And schools and colleges, both public and private, are in the heat of their academic existence, and our kids are becoming ever more competent and competitive in the schooling process.

Nobody's mind is crossed by the bad thought of bombs, shells or rockets falling on or flying over our heads. The atmosphere is truly idyllic and light-hearted, aside from those moments when our overly zealous media reminds us that somewhere not very far from here there is a war going on, and we never know when a stray bullet might hit us too. You frequently hear the question: If people are as poor in this country as many claim (a claim especially heard from the mouths of the oppositional political forces), and if no-one is making enough money, how come they can spend so much? The answer to this question



A war is going on, but in Georgia, the suburbs see beautiful opulent villas popping up ubiquitously at an amazing pace. Source: Tsavkisi Panorama

is trivially unaltered: Most of those at the malls, restaurants, and at the wheels of top-line cars, are using money transfers from their relatives who are toiling away in various foreign countries.

I don't know how true this might be, but the unbelievable thing is that in Georgia there is some kind of collective

mind in action that aims to keep up a high standard of living, turning this model of thinking into a way of life. And peace is an indispensable ingredient for that very way of life. Peace is awfully valuable. It may not be lost or traded; it has to be maintained. Georgia has not enjoyed peacetime calm and happiness in a very

long time, and its value has grown tremendously. We don't want to fight any more, not only for the safeguarding of somebody else's vested interests, but not for our own either. We want, in the first place, to keep up our own national interests without death and fire. Peace has turned out to be so sweet that none of us is ready to give it up, least of all with bloodshed and suffering.

There is war raging next door in Europe, call it proxy or whatever verbal description comes to mind, but war is war, and at this moment, Georgia has found itself in a purely peaceful zone, receiving masses of conscientious objectors from various countries, including Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and the north Caucasian republics. This is a very big thing to recognize as an asset produced by the current Georgian government, who has taken an adamant stand in proclaiming that Georgia's ways and means in the Russian-Western war are only neutral and nothing is going to change it. If we do, we will make a historically tragic and totally incorrigible mistake. We have done our share in those post-soviet inevitable wars, and we don't owe even a drop of blood to anybody in the world. Enough is enough! Away with destruction! Time for construction!

Ned Price Underlines Georgia's Democratic Backsliding, Urges Georgian Gov't to Strengthen Democratic Institutions, Rule of Law, and Human Rights

BY SOPHIE HODLER

Ned Price, the Spokesperson for the US Department of State, discussed the continuous political challenges in Georgia during a press conference.

Ned Price was requested by the journalist to convey to Georgians a clear message from the United States. He also asked Price for an assessment of the roles played by the ruling party and the opposition in the EU's implementation of the 12-point plan.

Price stated that the United States and the American people have "stood in solidarity" with the people of Georgia since the beginning, and this has continued through succeeding administrations.

"Over the course of successive administrations, we've stood with their desire to be a free and sovereign country within



internationally recognized borders," he said.

"Despite recent damaging rhetoric from some Georgian political elites, this has not changed. We remain a partner to the Georgian people. Over the last 30 years, in fact, we've become strategic partners, working together toward our shared vision of Georgia, fully integrated into the Euro-Atlantic family of nations and part of a Europe that is whole, free, and at peace," he highlighted.

"This is a vision that takes political will. It takes hard work; it takes patience; it takes significant efforts to realize," he added.

Price noted that the US has given Georgia more than \$6 billion in aid, training tens of thousands of Georgian military and sending thousands more for cultural and educational exchanges.

He claimed that among many other initiatives with the Georgian people and the Georgian government, the United States had assisted in promoting economic growth, the application of the law,

and democratic governance.

"We are open with the Georgian Government about the need to strengthen democratic institutions and processes, the rule of law, and human rights for all," Price highlighted.

"The democratic backsliding that we've observed, that we've talked about even in recent days, is taking Georgia away from its stated goal of Euro-Atlantic integration; but even more importantly, it's weakening its own democracy," he underlined.

"It's weakening the democracy that the Georgian people so clearly aspire to achieve," he outlined.

Price stated that the US will remain Georgia's partner as they work toward a democratic, affluent, peaceful, and Euro-Atlantic future.

He added, however, that the US "urges the Georgian Government to implement the necessary reforms to acquire EU candidate status," and that the US stands prepared to support the government in doing so.

Ukraine Latest: Putin Says Risk of World War is 'High'

Continued from page 1

The exercises came as Putin, in a meeting with the security services of former Soviet states on Wednesday, repeated the unfounded claim that Ukraine is planning to use a "dirty bomb," an explosive device that includes radioactive material. Western officials have repeatedly denounced the claim as misinformation.

Meanwhile, a member of Russia's security council has called for the "de-Satanization" of Ukraine, claiming the country is home to hundreds of satanic sects and radicalism. The claims were met with ridicule by Ukrainian public figures.

"Nobody believes the nonsense Russian accusations toward Ukraine," Estonian Foreign Minister Urmas Reinsalu said in an interview with The Washington Post. Still, recent nuclear rhetoric has Western governments concerned, Reinsalu said, because of the fear that Russia could "itself com-

mit a nuclear terror attack" as a form of provocation.

Despite the drills, Russia's ambassador to the UK said that Moscow has no plans to use nuclear weapons. "It is out of the question," Andrey Kelin said in an interview with CNN that was broadcast Wednesday. He said that Shoigu, who has spoken with his counterparts in multiple countries in recent days, has "assured every minister" that Russia is not going to use nuclear weapons.

The latest key battlefield developments are:

- Ukrainian efforts to push Russian forces out of the southern Kherson region have been hampered by rainy weather and the local terrain, Ukraine's Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov said Wednesday, Reuters reported. "The south of Ukraine is an agricultural region, and we have a lot of irrigation and water supply channels, and the Russians use them like trenches," he said, adding: "This is the rainy season, and it's very difficult to use fighting carrier vehicles

with wheels."

- A Russian antiwar group claimed responsibility for an explosion on a railway near the Russia-Belarus border this week, Britain's Defense Ministry said. The incident is the sixth carried out by the Stop the Wagons group against rail infrastructure since June, according to the ministry, which noted that the Russian military is heavily reliant on railways for its deployments to Ukraine.

- Ukrainian citizens residing abroad should not return home for the winter, a Ukrainian official said Tuesday, citing the need to save energy from power facilities recently crippled by Russian strikes. "We need to survive the winter, but unfortunately, the networks will not survive," Iryna Vereshchuk said in a plea on Ukrainian television, according to the Associated Press.

- Russia has used around 400 Iranian-made drones to attack Ukrainian civilians and infrastructure since the invasion started, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky alleged.

GLOBAL IMPACT

The Polish Senate passed a resolution Wednesday recognizing Russia's government as a "terrorist regime." In the resolution, lawmakers highlighted reports of Russian forces torturing, murdering, kidnapping and deporting Ukrainian civilians. "We know all these acts of state terrorism well from the history books. Europeans believed that they would never again be threatened with genocide and war crimes," a Senate release said.

The United States announced new sanctions Wednesday targeting individuals and entities it said were "instruments of Russia's global influence campaign" in Moldova. "In advance of the 2021 Moldovan elections, Russia planned to undermine Moldovan President Maia Sandu and return Moldova to Russia's sphere of influence," the Treasury Department said in a statement. Among those targeted are Moldovan politician Ilan Mironovich Shor and wife, Russian pop singer Sara Lvovna Shor.

Jens Stoltenberg, NATO Secretary Gen-

eral, had three important messages for Russia and the world this week: "We are ready to help Ukraine for as long as it needs us to," he said. "We cannot allow President Putin to win. It would be a disaster and a tragedy for the Ukrainians, but at the same time for the NATO allies.

"The consequences of any nuclear weapon use have been conveyed directly to Russian President Vladimir Putin. The US is tracking the Kremlin's nuclear saber-rattling very carefully but hasn't seen any reason to change our nuclear posture," Stoltenberg noted. "The US has also communicated directly with the Russians about trying to use this false allegation as a pretext for any escalation.

Finally, the NATO Sec Gen proclaimed: "President Putin is failing on the battlefield. He is responding with more indiscriminate attacks on Ukrainian cities against civilians and critical infrastructure and with dangerous nuclear rhetoric. But every week, Ukraine's forces are getting stronger and better equipped."

Hungarian PM: Decision Not to Grant Georgia EU Candidate Status was Discriminatory

BY TEAM GT

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban on Thursday called the decision made by the European Union in the summer to refrain from granting Georgia candidate status "discriminatory".

Orban stated at a briefing held in Hungary together with the Prime Minister of Georgia, Irakli Garibashvili, that this decision cannot be morally justified. The Prime Minister of Hungary claimed that Georgia deserves the EU candidate status.

"We see Georgia's spirit and desire to join the European Union. We all know that a very bad decision was made in Brussels. I would say that this decision was discriminatory, when the candidate status was granted to Moldova and Ukraine, and not to Georgia. This cannot be morally justified. This is a bad decision. Our guest and his country deserve the candidate status because that country has been working very hard in recent years. This decision was disrespectful to Georgia - to the Georgian nation, the Georgian state. What will we do? We will continue to support Georgia to get candidate status and join the European Union as soon as possible. We can do this with expert help. 16 Hungarians are working on Georgian issues within the European Union, and we are doing our best to start negotiations in this direction soon," Orban noted.

Irakli Garibashvili was on an official visit to Budapest, Hungary. Within the framework of the visit, the Hungarian Prime Minister hosted his Georgian counterpart at a working dinner.

The colleagues talked about the positive dynamics of the development of bilateral friendly relations between Georgia and Hungary and the further deepening of cooperation.

"We have to live in very difficult times - our task should not be to prolong the [Ukraine] war, everyone's task should be to stop this deadly war as soon as possible," Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili said at the final briefing.

He noted that Georgia supports Ukraine on all platforms.

"Governments and rulers have a great responsibility to their people. I want to confirm my great respect for Mr. Prime Minister [Viktor Orban] and his policies. We are also doing our best to protect the interests of our countries and people in this difficult time. War in Ukraine is absolutely unacceptable. We support Ukraine on all platforms. Our wish is that this war ends as soon as possible. Our task should not be to prolong this war; everyone's task should be to stop this deadly war as soon as possible. Of course, all this affects prices, a crisis has arisen in the field of energy and it needs to be adequately dealt with. Georgia firmly follows its path, the European choice. Our economy is developing. We have double-digit economic growth and we must do our best to bring our country even closer to Europe and European structures as soon as possible," he said.



PM Garibashvili in Hungary with PM Viktor Orban

Peter Pomerancev on Doing Deals with the Devil and Putin's Last Card to Play



INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

Radio Free Europe spoke to one of the most prominent Russian disinformation scholars in the West, Peter Pomerancev, on Russia's colonialist mindset and how it affects their decision making.

DO YOU CONSIDER RUSSIA A COLONIAL STATE?

Yes, but I've just been at this fascinating session where I was told that there's a difference between colonialist and imperialist. So I don't know if it's colonialist or imperialist, but it clearly believes it has a right to crush everybody around it.

HOW LONG DO YOU THINK IT HAS BEEN LIKE THAT?

I'm not a specialist on Russian imperial history. But I assume almost from the start, I mean, it's immediately born of this idea of its own grandeur, the third Rome; that it has a mission. That implies an imperial progress. I think it's always

been there, it's quite inbuilt. I don't think there's been a moment where it was a normal nation state. It's always doing expansion and grandeur and messianic mission.

IMPERIALIST, OR COLONIALISTS, HOW MUCH LONGER CAN IT REMAIN LIKE THAT, ESPECIALLY IN LIGHT OF RECENT EVENTS?

I can't put a timeframe on it. But it doesn't end with Ukraine and Georgia. There's internal colonialism towards ethnic minorities. And then in an even deeper way, maybe there's a sort of internal colonialism within those who have power, whether it's oligarchs, or the KGB; they see the state and its population as something to extract from and make themselves powerful with. They don't see themselves in some sort of economic unity with the rest of the country: There's the Kholopi, and slaves who work for them. I guess it'll last as long as there's Russia.

THE WEST TALKS ABOUT THE UTMOST IMPORTANCE OF PUTIN BEING DEALT A

STRATEGIC DEFEAT. WHAT KIND OF STRATEGIC DEFEAT CAN WE TALK ABOUT IF HE ENDS UP WITH MORE TERRITORY THAN HE HAD?

The way I've understood it, and maybe there's a lack of clarity, is that we can't let Putin set an example for China and anybody else who might want to do the same thing. Who, in this day and age, measures success by territory? I mean, European colonial powers gave up on their empires partly because they were unprofitable. So it's a pretty perverse type of measurement. But maybe it's one that's attractive to China. I don't know.

IT CLEARLY WORKS WITH RUSSIA.

Yes. For the Russians, it works. There are a lot of things they can be happy about at the same time. But you're right. There is a popular rhetoric in Russia about "nashi zemly," an obsession with territory. Definitely territory and size, as a compensation for failure and everything else. So we failed everything. We failed as a science superpower, as an economic superpower. We've blown our chances as an energy superpower, which was incredibly self-destructive, but "at least we're the biggest."

RUSSIA SEEMS TO HOPE THAT WINTER WILL COME AND EUROPEANS WILL FREEZE AND THEY'LL GIVE UP ON SUPPORTING UKRAINE IN FAVOR OF NOT HAVING TO WEAR AN EXTRA THICK WOOLEN JACKET. THEY OBVIOUSLY BELIEVE THAT EUROPEANS ARE FICKLE.

I think when we say "Europeans," we are talking about one country, Germany, because they decide everything. Russia is doing everything so badly - I mean, I don't know how you manage to lose Germany when Germany is socially,

politically, leadership-wise, business-wise, so aligned with Russia. I'm not counting my chickens, but, you know, Scholz is going around nationalizing oil companies. I mean, the Germans are very weird. They clearly love doing deals with the devil. And they moralize it, which is the most surreal thing I've ever seen.

MORALLY JUSTIFIED MERCANTILISM?

Yeah. But there's something really rotten in German political culture. Something quite sadistic. But if you offend them in a certain way, and you get to their pride, they can find backbone very fast. Right now, they seem intent on making Germany and Europe energy independent. That seems to be the policy. If they manage to do that faster than we thought, respect, hats off to that. That's pretty amazing. We thought it would take two years. They seem to want to do it in one.

THAT'S MATTERS A HUGE AMOUNT TO UKRAINE.

Yes, it would be huge. Despite the slowness on the weapons fronts, if they can forge true energy security, which is what this is about, then that's pretty impressive.

LET'S DISCUSS THIS NUCLEAR BLACKMAIL THAT PUTIN IS PEDDLING. HOW MUCH OF AN IMPACT IS IT GOING TO HAVE ON DECISION-MAKING BOTH IN KYIV AND FURTHER WESTWARD?

The Ukrainians are full of resolve. They've already factored a nuclear attack in. They say this is going to be less than Mariupol. That they don't care. But if he does a Hiroshima on Vynytsa and says Kyiv is next, then I don't know. If he does that, so much changes. The wind will blow to Europe; radioactive particles will land

in Europe. We can pretty much safely assume how the Baltics and the Poles will react to that. Then he's played his last card, doesn't really have anything left. So I don't know.

IT'S ACTUALLY A CARD HE CAN PLAY REPEATEDLY, A KIND OF "RECHARGING JOKER." I KNOW IT'S NOT A NICE TALK WE'RE HAVING HERE. BUT THAT'S HOW IT IS.

We don't know what the reaction from the West would be if he did that. I'd like to hear from the West, and from others, that the costs would be so high for Russia, that it would not be worth doing. I mean, this is just about signaling.

I'VE SEEN MANY OPINION MAKERS SAY THAT THIS IS EXISTENTIAL FOR PUTIN. WHEN YOU SAY THE WEST NEEDS TO MAKE CLEAR THE COST WILL BE HIGH, HOW MUCH HIGHER CAN IT BE THAN LOSING TO UKRAINE AND THEN LOSING HIS OWN POWER?

It could be something like destroying the Black Sea Fleet. Taking out all the nuclear bases and centers inside of Russia, so he doesn't have that capability anymore. That's the main thing we're saying. Many, many, many things on our laundry list of what he cares about, and what he thinks is important. I assume that you do it in such a way that he can't do it a second time.

I think the closer he gets to nuclear, the weaker he is. I think we've completely misinterpreted this. I think this is the only card he's got left. And you never play your last card. You only use it as a threat, and if he plays it, that's going to be it for him anyway. He's the one in a bad situation, not us; his choices are terrible. We have lots of choices. We have lots of ways forward yet.

The Future Women Build: Rural Women Claim their Right to Success

Five inspirational speakers and role models met with young people and representatives of the public, private and civic sectors to showcase the role of rural women in the economy, entrepreneurship, climate action and governance.

Their sincere and honest speeches focused on personal experiences in achieving success, the challenges and obstacles they had to face, and the ways to empower rural women to build a better future for themselves, their communities and their country.

The motivational forum "The Future Women Build" echoed the theme of this year's Rural Women's Day, which called on rural women around the world to claim their right to sustainable development.

Organized by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the forum gave the floor to successful women coming from different regions of Georgia and from different walks of life. All of them take part in UNDP projects supported by the European Union, Sweden and Switzerland to promote rural development, strengthen gender equality and provide people living in rural regions with better access to vocational education and training:

- Amilona Dekanadze, an entrepreneur from Khulo Municipality
- Lali Chanqseliani, a farmer from Ozurgeti Municipality
- Luso Dostibegiani, a civic activist from Tetrtskaro Municipality
- Natia Kakhidze, an entrepreneur from Khelvachauri Municipality
- Tamar Khomasuridze, a youth activ-



ist from Oni Municipality

High-level guests introduced the speakers to the audience:

- H.E. Anne Toft Sorensen, Ambassador of Denmark to Georgia
- Danielle Meuwly, Regional Director of the Swiss Cooperation Office for the South Caucasus, Embassy of Switzerland
- Erik Illes, Head of Development Cooperation, Deputy Head of Mission

at the Embassy of Sweden to Georgia

- Iliia Tamarashvili, Rural Development Agency Director
- Ketevan Khutsishvili, Program Manager for Rural Development, Civil Protection and Crisis Management of the Delegation of the European Union to Georgia.

Nick Beresford, UNDP Resident Representative in Georgia, facilitated the forum.

"These remarkable speakers prove that in Georgia, rural women fear no challenges and are willing to take risks to achieve their goals. They run successful businesses, generate innovative ideas and actively engage in governance and civic work. What they need to build the future they want and deserve is better access to services and opportunities and greater equality in economy and poli-

tics," Beresford said. UNDP assists Georgia to make social, economic and policy strides toward achieving meaningful gender equality in every area of life. Much of this work draws on UNDP's longstanding partnerships with the EU, Sweden and Switzerland and cooperation with Georgia's Government, Parliament, civil society and the private sector.

Hobbled Russia Cedes Influence to China

ANALYSIS BY EMIL AVDALIANI

China has been active lately in Central Asia, the region which serves as a gateway for Beijing's sprawling, though much-troubled, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The current moment is especially auspicious for China because Russia, its close but geopolitically inferior partner, is heavily preoccupied with its disastrous war in Ukraine.

The two Eurasian powers, it has been suggested, have an unofficial division of labor in the Central Asian states that lie between them, a consequence of their so-called authoritarian security community. According to this understanding, Russia's military superiority is largely uncontested, while China presses ahead in its quest for natural resources and trade growth with all five countries. The unstated deal allows both Russia and China to pursue bigger geopolitical ambitions without worrying about what the other is up to in their mutual backyard. This serves as a powerful glue. Animated by their opposition to the US, the two revisionist actors have preferred to downplay their differences.

Yet, increasingly, this arrangement seems to be falling apart. Badly weakened by its invasion of Ukraine, the Kremlin is simply too feeble to resist China's widening presence. Xi's people cannot do whatever they want, but they have greatly increased freedom of action.

The recent Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit held in the ancient Uzbek city of Samarkand on September 15-16 revealed the new outlines.



The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit held in the ancient Uzbek city of Samarkand on September 15-16

As Russia's fortunes seem increasingly volatile in Ukraine, President Vladimir Putin dearly needed a public appearance with Xi Jinping and preferably open Chinese support too. Xi did not voice any support for Russia's actions, in stark contrast with his rhetoric in January, when the two proclaimed a partnership with no limits. This time, Putin had to reassure his colleague that: "We understand your questions and your concerns in this regard [Ukraine]"; a clear sign of earlier, presumably difficult conversations. (Putin had to make similar remarks to his Indian colleague).

Though for Russia the trip was mostly about China, for the latter the SCO sum-

mit was about advancing its ambitious agenda, which aims to cement its influence in Central Asia and the new opportunities that have emerged. Xi's itinerary underlines this thinking and heightened Chinese expectations. Before the SCO meeting, he visited Kazakhstan, a key state in China's BRI, and underlined China's support for the country's sovereignty against external threats. The official Chinese readout was particularly noteworthy in light of Kazakhstan's difficult year. The unrest in early 2022, its quashing with the support of Russian troops, and subsequent questioning of Kazakhstan's sovereignty, make the statement seem especially pointed.

This helps explain Kazakhstan's emboldened policy toward Russia. Behind such confidence, there is surely pragmatism, but also the belief that China will serve as a counterbalance. The Russian aggression terrifies its Central Asian neighbors and pushes them to seek foreign policy alternatives to stave off potential future Russian adventurism.

China's policies in Central Asia are channeled through the SCO, and are assessed on the basis of its own interests. For example, an agreement was signed in September with Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan on the construction of the regionally critical railway (CKU) connecting the three countries. Long-

delayed, partially because of the revolutions and lack of finance from Kyrgyzstan, but also because of implicit Russian opposition, the project is now seemingly going ahead. The timing is notable; with transportation routes through Russia now hampered as a result of Western sanctions, China needs alternatives. The Middle Corridor seems attractive, but it needs infrastructure to make it work.

Russia had previously objected to a project on what it sees as its own turf. The fact that this fell away signals that it was simply unable to say no to China. China may have offered lukewarm support to the Kremlin's war, but there is very clearly a price to pay. It's fair to assume the rail project is a quid pro quo.

In its Central Asian push, China also signed \$16bn worth of deals with Uzbekistan, dwarfing the \$4.6bn agreements it made with Russia. Multi-billion deals were reached with Kazakhstan too.

Even in the security area, where Russia has been regarded as an uncontested power, cracks are emerging. Tajik-Kyrgyz hostilities undermined the Moscow-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), of which both countries are members. To this should be added another slap to the Kremlin's face when the Kyrgyz president canceled his country's participation in the October 10 CSTO exercises. Sentiments in Kyrgyzstan are increasingly anti-Russian, as Tajikistan's military activism is thought to be endorsed by the Kremlin.

Given the declining Central Asian faith in Russia, China can make economic and military inroads. For now, at least, Putin can only sit back and watch.

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

Gumbati Holding Creates Modern Living Spaces in Central Areas that Offer Quality and Comfort



BY KETEVAN SKHIRTADZE

Construction development company Gumbati Holding has been successfully operating in the Georgian market since 2014. So far, the company has four completed and three ongoing projects, one of which is Hippodrome Residence, which will be finalized by the end of the year. The company has enriched its portfolio with memorable projects like Vere District - a business center in Vera, Boulevard Gate in Batumi, distinguished by its unique architectural design, its current project in Bakuriani - Villa Kokhta Mitarbi, and its most significant project Vake Residence, a multifunctional residential complex in one of the capital's most prestigious districts, on Kipshidze Street. Construction of the project started last year.

As one of the directors of the company, Soso Machaidze, tells GEORGIA TODAY, Gumbati Holding projects include the most in-demand, prestigious, and tourist-attractive territories.

"We value quality and comfort, and those are our priorities for all those who become our residents. When people trust us, it means we have more responsibility, and we work on the following projects accordingly."

Machaidze tells us that before they decide where the next construction will be, they choose the location with great care.

"We take into account the lifestyle, requirements, and wishes of our segment, and we not only choose a place based on this, but also try to adapt to their requirements as much as possible during the design process. Perhaps this is why existing customers occupy a large share of our new projects," he says.

To learn more about Gumbati Holding, GEORGIA TODAY sat down with him and co-director Nato Bochorishvili.

"Business people and business owners are our main segment, for whom quality,

comfort, and time are important, therefore they want to live in central areas, in multifunctional complexes, and receive all the necessary and important services in one space," Bochorishvili tells us. "Since we have been in the construction business for years and our customers are mostly the same segment, we already know their behavior well, and it is our own customers who dictate to us what the most desirable places they want to live in are."

WHAT IS THE COMPANY'S DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY?

"Over the years, Gumbati Holding has been a steadily growing construction and development company mainly covering the local market," Machaidze says. "This year, the company moved to a new stage of development with the construction of Vake Residence, which exceeds all the projects implemented so far. For the first time, we opened an independent sales space, where customers interested in projects can come and choose their ideal apartment on the spot. Over the last few months, we have literally doubled the number of employees, we are planning new projects and the expansion of our segment, and are set to move into foreign markets, which, in addition to the development of Gumbati Holding, will bring the possibility of creating

additional jobs and will support the implementation of investments in our country.

"After eight years of stable activity, this year we moved to a new stage of development, a rebranding of sorts," Bochorishvili tells us. "Vake Residence is truly outstanding in terms of its scale, architecture, and design. More projects are planned for the future, and the sales office in Vake is just the beginning, as we're set to open sales offices in other locations as well. We believe that we can offer customers very interesting products."

WHAT CHALLENGES DO YOU THINK CONSTRUCTION COMPANIES FACE TODAY?

"Taking into account recent circumstances, the last 2-3 years have been full of challenges for business in general, which does not necessarily mean something negative, as challenges often lead to development and the discovery of different ways and opportunities," Machaidze notes. "The most painful challenge in the construction business is the increase in the prices of materials, which in general has led to an increase in the prices of apartments for sale."

"The increase in the prices of construction materials was really a challenge for the construction business and it remains

so until now," Bochorishvili agrees, "but our company has so far managed to find alternative ways and avoid a significant increase in the prices of our projects. For Gumbati Holding, quality has always been and remains the main priority, and we can confidently say that we never spare resources to obtain the highest quality. We try our best to take into account the purchasing power of the customers and, where a price increase is necessary, to offer additional flexible payment conditions so as to balance the increased price."

Machaidze emphasizes that quality is the main priority for Gumbati Holding. The project construction company is represented by Gumbati Group, which has 24 years of experience in the construction sector. He adds that this is a company whose name is already known throughout Georgia adding, "Accordingly, we also know that by cooperating with them, we can guarantee quality."

"We use only the highest quality materials for every detail, not only for the construction itself but also for the finishing and renovation. This is why we have been trusted for years, which determines the company's name, image, and credibility," he says.

ject is a big responsible for Gumbati Holding, as one of those projects suspended by another company in 2008. We took on the responsibility to complete it. The company gave the 200 affected tenants absolutely free of charge the same premises they had been waiting for for years," Machaidze says. "Other than this, we can proudly say that there is no multifunctional complex of this scale in such a central location. The residents of the project will have all they need - all the necessary services and products - without having to leave the area, in addition to a comfortable and modern living space."

"Vake Residence, which is being developed on a plot of more than 1 hectare, will be a multi-purpose complex which will include both commercial spaces and office spaces and, of course, residential apartments."

She points out that recreational spaces of this type and scale are not available in any project in the middle of Vake. Noting a painful issue faced by the residents of the central district is parking lots, Bochorishvili tells us, "The project includes a three-level parking lot for about 600 cars. I would like to emphasize that our project meets most



CONSUMER DEMANDS ARE NOT ONLY LIMITED TO A WELL-PLANNED HOME, BUT THEIR INTEREST IN RECREATIONAL SPACES IS ALWAYS GROWING. HOW DO YOU MEET THESE DEMANDS?

"I agree with you," Bochorishvili says. "The demand for recreational spaces is increasing by the day, and it is difficult to allocate green spaces in densely populated areas. On the other hand, proximity to the city center is very important for business persons. We believe Vake Residence is the best answer to this challenge, with its 7,000 sq.m. of living area, green spaces in a closed, internal courtyard, a separate children's playground, as well as two levels of common use between the floors, with open terraces, where spaces for relaxation will be arranged and for various activities. In addition, we have apartments that come with their own terraces."

TELL US MORE ABOUT VAKE RESIDENCE. APART FROM THE UNIQUE ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN, WHAT MAKES IT STAND OUT?

"Vake Residence is distinguished by its history, as the construction of this pro-

of the requirements that are currently relevant in society. In addition, there are many more interesting elements in the complex, among them large stained-glass windowed apartments, as well as different views on both the Vake and Saburtalo sides," Bochorishvili explains.

WHAT IS THE COMPANY'S TOP PRIORITY?

"The main priority of the company is quality, as well as responsibility, which is how we approach all our projects and every detail," Machaidze emphasizes. "For Gumbati Holding customers' interests and wishes have always been important. We are the first critical assessors of our projects, we always think about what would be important for us if we were to choose an apartment for ourselves, and what are the important factors to consider when deciding important issues. We always listen to independent opinions, and often the whole team is involved in the evaluation system, because sometimes the third eye notices more than the one who is the author of this or that idea or project. As a result, we always reach the right results, and this is confirmed by the trust and confidence our residents have in us."



Liberty Wins Corporate Responsibility Award of Global Compact Network Georgia



On October 20, at Pullman Tbilisi Axis Towers Hotel, the fifth award ceremony of Corporate Responsibility Award in Georgia was held at the initiative of the Global Compact Network Georgia and with the support of the Swedish government and USAID.

The competition aims to strengthen

the culture of corporate responsibility in the country and encourage involvement of businesses in the process of implementing sustainable development agenda.

JSC "Liberty Bank" won the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 9 – industry, innovation and infrastructure, with the project: "Teleclinic MyDoc". Liberty, in partnership with telemedi-

cine company Teleclinic MyDoc and American Hospital, initiated implementing an innovative technological project a few months ago. Within the framework of the project, it became possible to conduct high-tech medical diagnostic examinations remotely for the elderly and socially vulnerable, in the most remote villages and regions of Georgia.

To date, Teleclinic MyDoc, in parallel with the Liberty Mobile Bank vehicles, has already visited 112 villages and as a result, about 2,000 elderly people were examined and referred to the relevant specialists.

"In 2022, Liberty presented its new Corporate Responsibility strategy, which is fully aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals," said Beka Gogichaishvili, Chief Executive Officer of Liberty Bank. "Due to our activity and its scale, we constantly strive to implement such projects and programs that will increase access to education, financial literacy, and the health of people. Today, we are honored to be the winning company of the Corporate Responsibility Award. This award gives each member of Liberty team bigger encouragement to keep on caring for people and creating services tailored to their needs.



I would like to thank our partners and our team members involved in this project. We are delighted that Global Compact Network Georgia gave to the project such a high recognition and evaluation."

"Business for Sustainable Development 2022" is intended for progressive and modern value-based companies operating in the Georgian market. It is an award for companies whose activities are based on a high standard, aim at sustainable development and bring long-term benefits to both the company and society.

The UN Global Compact is the world's largest corporate sustainability initiative, bringing together more than 20,000 participants from 161 countries. The goal of the organization is to create the foundations of a sustainable, global and inclusive economy. Global Agreement Georgian Network was established in 2016 and includes about 140 members. The mission of the network is to support the implementation of the ten principles of the UN Global Compact in Georgia and to contribute to the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.



ACIBADEM, the World's Leading Medical Network, Will Provide Services to ARDI Policyholders under Updated, Exclusive Terms



A memorandum was signed in Republic Event Hall between the insurance company ARDI and the world's leading hospital chain – ACIBADEM. According to the memorandum, ARDI policyholders will benefit from updated conditions and a

loyalty program in ACIBADEM's 16 hospitals and 8 outpatient clinics in Turkey.

Teona Goderidze, Business Development Director of ARDI, stated that the loyalty program – Health Point Card – was created specifically for ARDI policyholders and is unique in both the Georgian and Turkish markets. Accord-

ing to her, customers of ARDI will receive up to 10 additional privileged services under the terms of this memorandum.

"Among them are exclusive 25% discount on all ACIBADEM services, 40% discount on a full medical examination (check-up), fixed minimum prices for operations performed with a unique cyber tool (Cyber Knife) and positron-emission computed tomography (PET-CT)" – Teona Goderidze explains.

The premium service package also includes free second medical opinion (SMO) in written form, free initial dental examination, access to ACIBADEM lounge zones in Turkish airports, airport pick-up and free premium transfers, increasing discounts at various hotels and restaurants, emergency services while in Turkey, and the service of an interpreter.

Other benefits and services will be added on a regular basis to the loyalty program and will be available automatically to ARDI policyholders for the next 5 years.

According to Michael Japaridze, General Director of ARDI not only will ARDI insured individuals with a Health Point Card be able to use the mentioned services but so will their spouses and children. The ARDI family doctors will assist in activating the loyalty card.

The ACIBADEM network is one of the most popular among Georgian patients.

"Our collaboration with ARDI began in 2019 and appeared so successful that it exceeded our expectations. Accordingly, we decided to move to this new stage of cooperation. We hope that the new loyalty program Health Card with its exclusive benefits designed specifically for ARDI insureds, will provide even more comfort and satisfaction to ARDI's insured patients when they receive services within the ACIBADEM network" – says CEO of ACIBADEM, Rasim Topuz.

Together with the signing of the memorandum, a significant opportunity was also announced. According to the CEO of ACIBADEM, affiliated and partner doctors of ARDI will be able to raise their qualifications annually and retrain within the ACIBADEM University.



Teona Goderidze, Business Development Director of ARDI

The representatives of ACIBADEM discussed various relevant topics in the healthcare field. Notably, Dr. Prof. FARUK ABIKE, the distinguished oncologist-gynecologist of ACIBADEM shared his knowledge and experience using cutting-edge laparoscopic robotic surgery (Da

Vinci) with representatives of the medical field, as well as private and state sectors. The practice has been developing rapidly both worldwide and in the ACIBADEM network and serves to form the latest medical direction – Intuitive Surgery.



Michael Japaridze, CEO of ARDI, and Rasim Topuz, CEO of ACIBADEM



BEKO Celebrates Its 25th Year on the Georgian Market



BY ANA DUMBADZE

Beko, one of the world's leading household appliance brands, celebrated the 25th anniversary of its operation in Georgia with a grand ceremonial event held at Sheraton Metechi Palace, hosting 700 guests, including public figures, the business sector, and media representatives. The guests enjoyed a special festive program and an unforgettable evening.

Beko Georgia is a representative of Beko Global, named among the top three brands of household appliances in Europe. Worldwide, Beko Global is present in 150 countries on seven continents, and counts 300 million customers, includes 12 brands, and has a total of 40,000 employees.

Beko celebrated its 25th anniversary with the presentation of Beyond, a new line of completely different, sophisticated design and modern technology. The new

line will offer customers sustainable, highly efficient designs and targeted products created with the latest technologies.

All products united in the Beyond line are distinguished by a new, functional design, deeper cookers, cooling systems, smoother surfaces, wider doors, and improved product storage systems, while the DNA of the brand is united around one common goal — Live like a Pro.

The company launched its activities in Georgia in 1997 with one store in Batumi, and today Beko has 98 trading spots, 5 service centers, 800 employees and hundreds of thousands of loyal customers across the country.

At a special press conference, the company representatives noted that the company has gained the trust of customers over the years with a high level of service, innovative equipment, a wide range of products and the professionalism of its staff. This successful activity of Beko is united by its strategy -Live like a champion!

CEO of Beko Georgia, Mehmet Melek,

noted that during the past 25 years, the company closely followed the country's development, overcame a number of economic fluctuations and decently coped with the domestic and foreign challenges Georgia has faced.

"Today, we represent a strong, development-oriented and profitable company with large-scale goals, which takes a worthy place in the development of the Georgian economy in terms of budget taxes and the number of employees," Melek says. "Our work serves to create mutual benefits from an economic point of view, as well as to strengthen the strategic, friendly relationship between Georgia and Turkey from a political and social point of view."

He adds that the company develops and expands year by year, however, it does not intend to stop at what it has achieved and plans to expand in the future, offering diverse, high-quality products to customers and introducing innovative methods in the field.

"Of course, we have ambitious plans ahead and we want to offer many more innovations to our loyal customers," he tells us. "First of all, this is, of course, the expansion of the Beko store network and service centers, so that customers in all cities can use our products and quality services. In addition, it is important for us to offer our customers an even more diverse range of brands and modern standards, high-quality, energy-efficient products. Here, I would like to thank each of our customers who have been recommending us for years and remain loyal to Beko's quality."

In addition to leading positions in the consumer market of household appliances, the company Beko is a participant in many social and humanitarian projects in Georgia, and the company is proud of the results achieved in this direction, Melek notes.

Erman Korkmaz, Beko Regional Sales



Director, points out that along with celebrating the 25th anniversary in Georgia, the company is happy and proud to present the new Beyond line of production, set to provide them even more comfort and sophistication, and, at the same time, more focused on sustainability and energy efficiency, which itself is one of the priority directions of Beko.

"We've a long history in Georgia, just as we have in the European market, and we're very excited to celebrate the 25th anniversary here today," Korkmaz notes. "Further, we're happy to be launching our new production line for the Georgian consumers and presenting our new feature, the cutting-edge product, in the local market. Beko, as a company with particularly high Corporate Social Responsibility, continues to work hard to provide its customers with energy efficient, eco-friendly products, and our new line Beyond, now also available for Georgian consumers, is yet further proof of it. Georgia is a unique and important market for Beko, and we have very ambitious plans to expand our business and activities here," he says.

Khatia Tkebuchava, Head of PR & Marketing, tells us more about the new

Beyond line.

"Beko globally presented a new product line, Beyond, which envisages eco-friendly and energy efficient products, maximally aimed at the comfort of its users. It has a minimalistic design, which means wider screens, for washing machines wider doors, and innovative technologies. Our new stoves boast AeroPerfect technology, which allows steam cooking. Our new washing machines offer steam care, washing with steam, and our new refrigerators present the Harvest Fresh system, which is inspired by nature and keeps fruit and vegetables fresh, just as if they were in a natural environment. Georgian consumers have been able to buy Beyond products in Beko store and online at technoshop.ge since January, however, from October, we'll further increase the assortment of product available," she says.

Against the background of its successful operation and impressively long history in Georgia and worldwide, Beko does not intend to stop here, and continues to expand its chain and change the lives of its customers with innovative products that both meet their needs and are more sustainable for the environment.

Transformative Human Capital Program Launched in Georgia, with World Bank and AFD Support



On October 25, Georgia officially launched a Human Capital Program, with World Bank and AFD support, which aims to unlock the country's growth potential through investments in health, education and social protection. This is the largest World Bank investment ever extended to Georgia during the three decades of partnership, and the Bank's first cross-sectorial operation comprehensively targeting three critical areas of human development.

In order to support Georgia's Human Capital Program, the World Bank invested \$400 million, and Agence française de développement (AFD) contributed by co-financing amount of EUR100 million. The official signing ceremony of the co-financing agreement took place at a launch event on Tuesday in Tbilisi.

"Along with the Government of Georgia, we are investing in the people of Georgia and in their future. And we believe that our joint efforts in strengthening Georgia's human capital will be a significant boost to the country's social and economic prosperity," said Sebastian Molineus, World Bank Regional Director for the South Caucasus. "By helping to implement transformative reforms in education, health and social protection, the Human Capital Program will play a crucial role in accelerating Georgia's long-term development trajectory and in strengthening its pathway towards becoming a member of the European Union."

"This program is an opportunity for continuation of the long-standing cooperation between AFD and the Government of Georgia for social policies and health since 2016, and an opportunity

for more ambition and more impact for the people of Georgia, especially women," said Raphaël Jozan, Director of AFD Office for the South Caucasus. "It is a demonstration that climate smart action can be aligned with social policies, beneficial for the people and the State as well. Implementation will require continuous consulting with beneficiaries, CSOs, and joining forces with other development partners."

The Human Capital Program aims to help improve the quality of life for all citizens of Georgia by enhancing efficiency, inclusion, and connectivity of human development services. This will be achieved by ensuring fair and equal access to high quality education, better targeted social benefits, and strong preventive healthcare with lower costs of treatment and medicine.

"The Government of Georgia deems human capital development among its most significant priorities, and acknowledges the need of investments towards this end," said Lasha Khutsishvili, Minister of Finance of Georgia. "The World Bank has vast experience and tremendous potential in developing human capital. It is equally important to note that Agence française de développement (AFD) is willing to make its own contribution in the successful implementation of this milestone reform. We believe that our joint effort will lead to empowered human capital in the country that will facilitate further advancement and major productivity growth in Georgia."

The Human Capital Program will enhance the skills and competencies of Georgia's children and youth to better tackle increasingly complex problems

facing modern society. From early childhood through secondary education to university and beyond, the Program will support the transformation of Georgia's education system to improve overall learning outcomes, while creating greater equality and opportunities for the poorest and most vulnerable.

The Program will also expand access to improved health services by supporting telemedicine consultations and by strengthening pharmaceutical management to reduce medicine prices, which comprise a significant share of out-of-pocket spending in Georgia.

To improve the efficiency of the social protection system, the Human Capital Program will help to rapidly identify poor households with children and respond to their needs by expanding access to employment services across

the country, including rural areas.

Showcasing Georgia's commitment to the global climate change agenda, the Program envisages including modules on climate change and energy efficiency in environmental education, training teachers and holding workshops on climate resilient and energy efficient schools, as well as promoting access to skills training necessary for green jobs.

According to the World Bank's Georgia Human Capital Review, boosting inclusion and quality human capital is critical for Georgia to address emerging productivity, aging, and inclusion challenges, and to steering the country towards sustainable and inclusive growth.

To learn more about the World Bank in Georgia, go to <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/georgia> or <https://www.facebook.com/WorldBankGeorgia>.





Pulling Teeth: Etseri, Svaneti

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

That's what it feels like trying to leave Svaneti for Tbilisi for a whole winter, first time ever.

Winterizing is a big part of it. Gate and fence replacement to better keep out marauding cows and pigs, which can wreak havoc on our precious fruit trees! (Our pears, hard on the outside, are the juiciest and tastiest I have ever crunched). Gates on hinges for the first time, SO much easier to open when driving in and out.

Putting all things under roofing which should not get a whole winter's worth of snow wetting them: firewood in sacks, uncut wood for later, scrap metal, more. Extra locks for gates, and warnings to the neighbors that the place will be shut, so please don't wander through anymore.

Buying and installation of all-weather outdoor video cameras on house and café. These need their own modem indoors, so I can see what they're seeing from my laptop or phone anywhere in the world. But the installers, coming up from Zugdidi, are waiting on extra cable to come from Tbilisi, so they're late, so we're late.

Shutting the shop down, a long process. It begins with not receiving or buying

any more goods, trying to minimize what's left. Painful for all as their goods run out, but they have to get used to it. Also trying to minimize the outstanding credit which villagers have with us. We're aware that we cannot reduce this to zero, at least not without repo men making threats, but we do have a solution for when we actually leave, which I will only reveal when that has happened; it will satisfy all, and give us peace of mind instead of our wondering who will remember to honor their debts when we return next spring, their being written down notwithstanding.

Packing up everything to take or leave behind. So many different categories: clothing, food, books, papers, electronics. Lists of lists. Boxes, bags, suitcases, backpacks, straps, tape, string. We only have the one car to fill, which we certainly will, including the roof rack.

Goodbyes to all neighbors and friends that we can manage, including a last (for now) visit to the school, with cake and coffee, reminiscing. Yes, we'll be back! But not for the teaching, or likely for the shop, either. Someone else must take up these batons and run on.

New door hinges to weld onto the still roofless burnt-out garage, to keep out the curious.

In the midst of all this, seeing the worst water flow (often cutting out altogether)

and electricity outages in years, it seems. Just another thing to play on the nerves. Some events spurring us away, others holding us back, in a seemingly endless tug of war... We won't miss those water or power issues, that's for sure, although we continue to feel for those who don't have the luxury of the choice we have made to depart from them for a while.

So many friends and relatives await us in Tbilisi, Kakheti and elsewhere, those with whom we have had little time the last 12 years to stop and catch up. Renewing of old friendships will be precious. I feel like some people must be wondering if we are actually still a couple, so seldom have we been appearing anywhere together except in Svaneti! Rest assured, we are, and we'll prove it.

A few days more to go until our migration south-east. Although the Big City beckons us on, the Little Village is having a hard time letting go. Here we are.

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

Teacher Knows Best: English Language Education in Georgia

INTERVIEW BY MICHAEL GODWIN

One of the most fast-paced aspects of Georgia's education scene has been its English language sector. Teachers both in school and private tutors working independently are in demand more than ever before. With opportunities abroad in education, business, and remote work, learning English at an early stage makes these experts key for success. With over 13 years' experience, one teacher has cultivated a following of both online and in-class pupils.

Erika Copeland has a litany of qualifications behind her when introducing herself to her latest students. A Bachelor in Speech Communications with a concentration in Media Studies from Colorado State University, veteran of the Teacher Ready Program from University of West Florida in Primary School Education, a Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) Certificate holder, experience in South Korea through the year-long Gyeonggi English Program in Korea (GEPK) program, and three years in the France-American Village.

More locally, she has also worked in the Teach and Learn with Georgia (TLG) and taught at the British International School. Sourcing most of her clients through social media, she keeps a highly active presence on Instagram and Facebook, with a website on the way. GEORGIA TODAY sat down with Erika to discuss her inspirations, her teaching methods, and the education industry at large.

"I grew up practically living at the high school my father was a teacher at," she tells us. "He was a physics teacher at a small high school in Page, Arizona. He was also the head American football and basketball coach. He was very well known in the community, respected, and would often be voted the student body's 'Teacher of the Year.' His students loved him and, even 20 years after his passing, his former students still rave about how much they loved him as a teacher. Watching my father be an amazing teacher and coach really inspired me to one day follow in his footsteps."

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN TEACHING IN GEORGIA, AND WHAT MADE YOU CHOOSE TO TEACH HERE?

I came to Georgia in 2011 with the Teach

and Learn with Georgia created by former President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili. I had already been teaching abroad for about two years, and while teaching in France, one of my friends recommended me to come to Georgia. He was very convincing. Over 11 years later, I have worked at many schools and institutions throughout Tbilisi, and even in Kutaisi and Rustavi. Now, Tbilisi is my home and the place I hope to grow my business.

WHY DO YOU ENJOY TEACHING, AND WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO TEACH ENGLISH?

I started my teaching career in 2009 in Incheon, South Korea. I was working at a public school and I was the only foreign teacher. I realized after about six months of working there that I was actually pretty good at teaching. I never knew it would come so naturally for me and it was my first teaching experience. I enjoy teaching so much because I love seeing the gradual progression of my students. I have taught so many young students who barely knew any English before starting with me and by the end of the academic year, they are speaking English naturally. I create a safe space for them. I always say "it's okay to make mistakes."



Erika Copeland teaches American English to her students in Tbilisi. Photo by Erika Copeland via Facebook

WHAT WERE THE GREATEST CHALLENGES YOU FACED IN GETTING STARTED HERE?

I decided to start my own small business called "English with Reeka" this year after returning from the US in December. I was away during most of the pandemic and I was trying to figure out what I wanted to do with my career as a teacher and basically as a "person." Once I decided to start teaching in Georgia again, I was really disappointed in how little the schools were willing to pay not just teachers, but native English teachers. It was shocking to me. They are paying the same salaries as they were in 2012. I knew that for me to survive as a single parent here, I had to quit working in these schools and language centers. That is when I decided that I would be my own boss.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR TEACHING STYLE?

I would describe my teaching style as extremely "modern" with new-age methodologies. I never use any books during my lessons. All my lessons are extremely interactive and I have gathered a ton of resources from online to use. I like to use visuals during my lessons, play games, have discussions about a wide range of topics, and overall find out what my students are interested in and create my



Erika has taught in both the United States and Europe. Photo by Erika Copeland

lessons around their interests. I believe learning a new language should be fun and interesting. Most importantly, I make my student's feel very much "at home" when they come to my house. My house has an American feel and style, and I try to make my student's feel very comfortable. They literally feel like they have entered American territory the moment they walk into my living room.

GEORGIA'S ENGLISH PROGRAMS FOR ITS YOUTH HAVE COME A LONG WAY IN RECENT YEARS. WHERE DO YOU SEE THE NEED FOR THE MOST DEVELOPMENT?

To be quite honest, I do not believe Georgia's English programs have developed very much since 2012. Pretty much the end of TLG has caused the English language programs to slow down. Once the TLG program ended, teacher development seemed to not be a priority anymore. I would love for the government to invest in a program like TLG again, or at least teacher development programs throughout the country. It is really important for teachers to receive professional development throughout the academic year. Teacher's also deserve steady raises and incentives. Teacher burnout is a real issue throughout the world. All teachers deserve credit where credit is due.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY ABOUT THE STATE OF EDUCATION OVERALL IN GEORGIA?

I am very adamant about continuous professional development for teachers and bringing back a program to the public schools like TLG. Many private institutions are thriving academically and have a plethora of teachers from around the world working at their schools. However, this kind of education is only affordable to a very small percentage of the population. Unfortunately, the public schools are not receiving any of these benefits now. I hope to start my own NGO or partner with one in the future. All children deserve a proper education and all children deserve to learn the English language properly.

COMING BACK TO YOU, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO A PROSPECTIVE STUDENT THAT ISN'T SURE IF AMERICAN ENGLISH IS RIGHT FOR THEM?

Very interesting question. All I can say is, why not? Honestly, there isn't a huge difference between American English and British English. The biggest difference is the accent. I believe that American English is more understandable, especially with the constant American TV shows and movies coming out of Hollywood. Also, there are over 350 million Americans plus Canadians who have similar accents and dialects, while there are only 68 million people in the United Kingdom. Maybe I am biased, but in my opinion American English is the best English and easiest to learn and pronounce.

Halloween in Georgia: The Chinka



Henry Fuseli's oil on canvas work "The Nightmare", from 1781. Source: Detroit Institute of Arts

BY MICHAEL GODWIN

Halloween is a time when some enjoy the thrills of horror stories, mysterious disappearances, and cryptic entities. Each culture has its unique and iconic fears: North America has Bigfoot, Russia has its Baba Yaga, and Romania has its infamous Dracula. However, Georgia has its own cryptid that many may not have heard about.

The Chinka is the country's own mysterious creature that is said to prey upon locals, particularly in the remote villages and wooded areas. The Chinka is a pagan creature, can be female or male, and originates from ancient Georgian mythology. In the Georgian writings of Sulikhan-Saba Orbeliani (1658-1725), a writer and diplomat, the Chinka is described as a creature of the night, a harmful dwarf, a wicked soul of soil, and an evil spirit. Georgian Chinkas are often compared to Scandinavian Trolls, and Gnomes from Germanic mythology.

The Chinka, while considered a creature from the pagan era, remained after Christianity spread in Georgia, staying in the folk stories told in the rural and forested areas of the region. As with many myths, it became intertwined with Christian attributes or religious persons, such as St. George, of whom Chinkas

harbor a deep fear. Archangels Michael and Gabriel are said to collect them and drive them away every December 7th each year, sending them to either the sky or water until the next season.

In one story from old Georgian mythology, a woman with many children lived in an isolated village. When an angel arrived and called to her, the woman showed only three of her children to the heavenly messenger, while the others were secreted away in a secret room. Seeing this, the angel said that only these three children would be blessed and protected, while the others whom she was hiding will always be hidden and no-one will ever be able to see them.

When the angel left, the woman opened her secret room and saw the remaining children were not there. According to the story, they had become Chinkas and had disappeared.

The myths continue, stating that because Chinkas are invisible, no-one knows their

exact appearance. According to the surrounding folklore, they live in a rotation of three days in the water, three days in the sky, and three days in the fields. While in the field, there is lore that says Chinkas spend their time with horses. They catch them, braid the mane of the horse,

and ride them at night. As the story goes, if the owner of a horse sees its mane is braided, they know a Chinka has visited them.

Interestingly enough, the autumn months of September, October, and November are considered as the height of Chinka activities in Georgia. During these months, the prevention methods taken by villagers are all aimed at warding away the Chinka. Village members would place iron tools outside the doors of barns and livestock sheds, as it was understood that Chinkas were afraid of the metal. Chinkas are especially afraid of St. George, and therefore people would install a religious icon at the entrances and hearths of the home. Travelers and merchants, armed with a dagger or sword, would have a portion of the blade exposed from the sheath as a warning to any nearby Chinkas.

What little lore there is on the appearance of the Chinka describes them as small in stature. Chinkas typically do not cause overt examples of violence, but rather rely on trickery. Their body is small, like a child, and has a child-like voice, often crying like a baby. When someone walks nearby forests and hears a baby's crying, they are often compelled to render aid. Upon entering the forest, Chinkas launch their attack. They are also known to call a person by name, especially if this someone is alone. The rule ancient Georgian villagers vehemently remind people is to never answer that calling.

Places close to human dwellings, riverbanks and various dark and overhanging nooks and crannies are considered breeding grounds for them, where they live in groups. The small black body and the strange movement of the hands and feet while walking make the Chinka seem possessed. Today, the Chinka legend is still observed.

The Chinka is said to appear to people who believe in their existence, or hear the story of their mischievous and devilish exploits. While Halloween in the typical Western sense has not caught on in a widespread way, Georgia still has its tales of mythical creatures lurking in the shadows. With the Chinka season in full swing, those that spend their autumn evenings in nature may want to take additional precautions to not encounter this ancient legend face-to-face.



The Chinka is described as a creature of the night, a harmful dwarf, a wicked soul of soil, and an evil spirit



Image source: gettyimages



PUBLISHER & GM
George Sharashidze

COMMERCIAL DEPARTMENT
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Marketing Manager:
Natalia Chikvaidze

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT:
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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

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