

Ukraine Latest: Helicopter Crash Kills Top Ukrainian Officials; Zelensky Pleads for Western Tanks

BY ANA DUMBADZE

A helicopter crashed in fog near a kindergarten outside Kyiv on Wednesday, killed 18 people, including Ukraine's interior minister. President Volodymyr Zelensky named it a "terrible tragedy," before calling for an investigation.

The crash set off a large fire, and an entire side of the local kindergarten building was charred. The Kyiv region's governor said children and staff had been inside at the time of the crash shortly after 8 a.m.

Interior Minister Denys Monastyrskyi died along with his first deputy, Yevheniy Yenin, and the ministry's state secretary. Monastyrskyi was 42 and had been Interior Minister since July 2021.

Ukrainian officials have not suggested the crash was an attack by Russian forces waging war in Ukraine, and Air Force spokesperson Yuriy Ihnat said it could take several weeks to investigate the disaster.

The Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) said it was considering several possible causes, including a breach of flight rules, a technical malfunction, and the intentional destruction of the helicopter.

The crash was another blow to Ukraine, days after 45 people were killed in an apartment block hit during a missile attack on the east-central city of Dnipro. At least 17 people remain missing in Dnipro and 12 bodies have yet to be



Image source: EPA

identified. Another 25 people are recovering in the hospital.

Following the helicopter crash, the government quickly named national police chief Ihor Klymenko as Acting Interior Minister.

The State Emergency Service put the death toll at 18, including the three helicopter crew and six others on board. One child was killed on the ground and 11 other children were among 25 injured people, it said.

BIDENS SEND CONDOLENCES FOLLOWING HELICOPTER CRASH

US President Joe Biden and first lady Jill Biden expressed their condolences to the families of those killed in the helicopter crash in Ukraine.

"Our hearts are with the dozens of civilians who were killed or injured, including precious children, and their

families," the first couple wrote in a statement.

The Bidens highlighted the work of Denys Monastyrskyi, calling him a "reformer and patriot," and saying he "championed the will of the Ukrainian people."

"We will continue to honor that legacy through efforts to strengthen Ukraine's institutions, and in our unfailing partnership with the people of Ukraine to keep the flame of freedom bright," the Bidens wrote.

NATO WARNS RUSSIA IS PREPARING FOR A LONG WAR IN UKRAINE, VOWS TO BE READY

Russia is preparing for an extended war, so NATO must get ready "for the long haul" and support Ukraine for as long as it takes, the alliance's deputy secretary

general told top military chiefs from across Europe.

Speaking at the opening of the military chiefs' meeting in Brussels, Mircea Geoana said NATO nations must invest more in defense, ramp up military industrial manufacturing, and harness new technologies to prepare for future wars.

As Russia's war on Ukraine nears the one-year mark, NATO chiefs are expected to discuss how allies can expand the delivery of weapons, training and support to Ukraine in the coming months, and how they can further shore up their own defenses.

"We have no indication that Russian President Vladimir Putin's goals have changed," said Geoana, adding that Russia has mobilized more than 200,000 additional troops. "So we must be prepared for the long haul. 2023 will be a difficult year, and we need to support Ukraine for as long as it takes."

PUTIN SAYS WAR VICTORY IS 'INEVITABLE' AS NATO CHIEF CALLS FOR MORE WEAPONS FOR KYIV

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Wednesday that victory in the war in Ukraine was "inevitable," while NATO's Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said Putin must realize he cannot win on the battlefield.

Speaking to workers at a weapons factory in St. Petersburg, Putin said "victory is assured, I have no doubt about it," state news agency Tass reported. Putin made the comments on the same day on which he commemorated the 80th anniversary of Soviet forces breaking the

Nazi siege of Leningrad (modern-day St. Petersburg, Putin's hometown).

Meanwhile, NATO's Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg commented Wednesday that we have reached a "pivotal moment" in the war.

"President Putin has shown no sign of preparing for peace and therefore he must realize he cannot win on the battlefield. This is a pivotal moment in the war, and highlights the need for a significant increase in support for Ukraine," Stoltenberg told Reuters in an interview on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos.

"If we want a negotiated peaceful solution tomorrow, we need to provide more weapons today."

ZELENSKY PLEADS FOR WESTERN TANKS 'BEFORE RUSSIA'S NEXT OFFENSIVE'

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky told delegates at Davos that Western countries should send tanks before Russia's next offensive.

His comments come as analysts fear the Kremlin could soon launch a new mobilization drive, and once again put pressure on the country's Western allies to deliver heavily armored vehicles to Kyiv.

Speaking via videoconference, Zelensky said, "Mobilization of the world must outpace the next military mobilization of our joint enemy."

"The supplying of Ukraine with air defense systems must outpace Russia's next missile attacks. The supplies of Western tanks must outpace another invasion of Russian tanks," he said.



Photo source: pia.ge

Kaladze: Within this Year's Budget, Homeless Program is to Continue

The Mayor of Tbilisi, Kakha Kaladze, announced at the meeting of the capital's government that the homeless program will be continued within the framework of this year's budget.

He noted that around 400 homeless families are registered in Tbilisi. Last year, 60 families were satisfied with municipal housing.

"The program will continue this year, and some 80 families will be given with living spaces. Our goal is that no family

is left homeless in the capital.

"The program of replacement of dilapidated houses will also be continued, within the framework of which proceedings are underway to replace approximately 25 dilapidated buildings. Unfortunately, in Tbilisi, we have many dilapidated buildings and structures, which have been assigned different degrees of dilapidation.

"We successfully implemented the first pilot project, and this year we will have the opportunity to implement more such projects," said Kaladze.

EP's Report Reaffirms EU Future of Ukraine, Moldova & Georgia

Continued from page 1

"The EU acknowledges that Georgia was the first country to experience full-scale Russian military aggression in August 2008, when Russia attempted to forcibly change the borders of a sovereign state in Europe, to occupy regions which are an indivisible part of Georgia — Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia — and to take steps towards their de facto annexation, to expel hundreds of thousands of people from their homes as a result of ethnic cleansing and to divide societies with occupation lines. The EU is urged to keep demanding that Russia must implement its obligations under the EU-mediated 12 August 2008 Ceasefire Agreement; to strengthen its engagement in peaceful conflict resolution in the Eastern Partnership region" the report notes.

"The Union's enhanced engagement with the countries of the Southern Caucasus is welcomed, notably the swift adoption of an EU monitoring capacity mission along Armenia's international border with Azerbaijan in order to monitor the situation in the region, build confidence and contribute to restoring peace and security."

The importance of decreasing Russian influence in the region through increased EU presence is highlighted in the document, as is the call on the Council to expand the number of deployed experts and increase the mission capacity, and calls for stronger presence in the region.

The document calls on the EEAS to prepare a thorough report on violations of the 2008 ceasefire agreement, given that the EU bears special responsibility as mediator of the 12 August 2008 Ceasefire Agreement.

"The EEAS is called on to identify and communicate the provisions which have still not been fulfilled by the Russian Federation and submit recommendations which could induce the Russian Federation to fulfil them, in particular the withdrawal of its military forces from Georgia's occupied territories and allowing the establishment of international security mechanisms in the country and allowing the EU unhindered access to the whole territory of Georgia pursuant to its mandate," it notes.

The EU Parliament reaffirms that the future of the peoples of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, as well the Western Balkans, lies within the EU.

"We reaffirm the commitment to enlargement, to which there is no alternative and which is more than ever a geostrategic investment in a stable, strong and united EU; strongly believing that a prospect of full EU membership for the countries striving to become Member States of the EU is in the Union's own political, economic and security interest. We call on Georgia to tangibly deliver on the priorities drawn up by the Commission and endorsed by the European Council in its conclusions of 23 and 24 June 2022. We welcome the measures announced by the Commission for strengthening Ukraine, such as access to our internal market and lifting roaming fees, and trust that the same measures will be extended to the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, which is in equal need of strong signals of support from the EU and of concrete steps towards EU integration given the strong destabilizing forces threatening their democracies," the document reads.

The report reiterates the EU's commitment to the sovereignty, territorial integ-

ity and political independence of Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia within their internationally recognized borders, and supports their efforts to fully enforce these principles; underlining the importance of the unity and solidarity of the Member States in this regard.

The document strongly condemns the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, as well as the enabling role of the Lukashenko regime in Belarus.

"We call on the Russian leadership to end it immediately and withdraw unconditionally from the entire internationally recognized territory of Ukraine and any other country, in particular Georgia and the Republic of Moldova, whose territory or parts thereof it unlawfully occupies. We urge Russia to guarantee a free flow of grain and other raw materials across the globe; call on the Council to designate Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism and as a state which uses means of terrorism; urges the international community to support all legitimate international and national processes, including under the principle of universal jurisdiction, in order to investigate crimes against humanity and war crimes with a view to holding all those responsible for the countless war crimes and human rights violations, including mass rapes and forced deportation of Ukrainians, accountable before a court of law; and reaffirm that Russia will have to compensate all the damages and destruction it has caused in Ukraine. We note that many Russian citizens are leaving Russia to avoid conscription, and call for all those who voluntarily assisted Russia in any way in this war or in the organization of illegitimate referendums be held accountable and individually sanctioned," the document states.

UNDP and Sweden Unite with Euronews Georgia to Inform People about Climate Change

The vast majority of Georgians, over 94%, understand that climate change affects their country, posing a threat to people and the economy. However, research shows that barely 10% are aware of specific policy commitments or requirements related to climate change, while one-third place responsibility for climate action on international organizations and civil society.

To better inform Georgians about climate change realities, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Sweden, and Euronews Georgia are launching 'Climate Magazines', a series of documentaries focused on key climate issues and their impacts on Georgia.

The series premiered last December, with the first two episodes covering climate-induced avalanches and melting glaciers. It will continue through July 2023, covering a range of topics, including the societal and economic impacts of climate change, green lifestyle, low-emission development, climate policies, energy efficiency, climate change monitoring and reporting, and Georgia's climate commitments undertaken as part of international treaties, such as the Paris Agreement and the Association Agreement with the European Union. The series will showcase a variety of opinions presented by leading Georgian and international environmentalists, economists, climate activists and public officials.

"Climate awareness helps us understand and address the impacts of climate change by making individual and collective choices that are less harmful to the environment. UNDP welcomes our growing partnership

with the Georgian media in building public awareness around this critical issue," said Nick Beresford, UNDP Resident Representative in Georgia.

"Sweden is Georgia's strong supporter in achieving its climate goals. A well-informed society is a vital step towards fulfilling a national pledge under the Paris Agreement and building a sustainable future," said Khatuna Zaldastanishvili, Program Officer (Development Cooperation) at the Embassy of Sweden to Georgia.

"Climate Magazines educate people on climate change impacts on daily lives and the roles of the Government, civil society and individual citizens in addressing this global challenge," said Marina Vashakmadze, Head of the Editorial Board Member at Euronews Georgia. "By launching a documentary series, we aim to study the issue and inform the public about its existing or expected outcomes. This is how we can build strong public support for climate action, increase accountability, and empower citizens with the knowledge, values and attitudes needed to act as agents of change."

UNDP's and Sweden's support for Climate Magazines is part of the UNDP's broader Climate Promise initiative, which promotes the timely and effective implementation of the Paris Agreement in 120 countries. In collaboration with 35 partners, including Sweden, Japan and other donors, Climate Promise covers key technical areas associated with climate action, including enhancing political will and ownership across society, strengthening targets and aligning with key national policies, assessing costs and investment opportunities, as well as setting up systems for monitoring and reporting on progress.



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Is Israel's New Government Shifting its Policy towards the Russia-Ukraine War?



Israel's new foreign minister, Eli Cohen Press conference on January 2, 2023

BY ZURAB BATIASHVILI FOR GFSIS

Binyamin Netanyahu, who won the parliamentary elections at the end of last year, was able to form the new, 37th, government of Israel together with the far-right.

One of the main questions that quickly arose regarding the new government of Israel is whether the country's policy towards the Russia-Ukraine war is going to change.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the newly formed Israeli government, Eli Cohen, in his inaugural speech on January 2, hinted that Israel will no longer publicly condemn Russia's actions against Ukraine. He also added that they will formulate a new policy towards the ongoing war in Ukraine, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will present a detailed presentation on the mentioned issue to the Security Cabinet. Even more thought-provoking was Cohen's choice of name for this policy: In his words, this would

be a "responsible" policy in relation to the war.

Shortly after this statement was made (January 3), a telephone conversation was held between Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Eli Cohen. In a statement released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, it was said the parties discussed the possibility of strengthening trade and economic relations, as well as the situation in the Middle East, North Africa and Ukraine.

All this is happening against the background of the previous Israeli government's being one of the first to condemn Russia's aggression against Ukraine. The Israeli and Russian foreign ministers held no talks following Russia's February 24 invasion. However, it should be noted here that the previous government of Israel did not donate weapons to Ukraine, the reason for which was claimed as national security in regards to Iran. In Israel, there is a fear that their manufactured weapons will end up first in the hands of Russians, and then in the hands of Israel's existential adversary - Iran, who would then be able to decipher its

schemes and be able to would deal a significant blow to the country's security.

Of no less importance is the fact that, for years, Russia has turned a blind eye to the incursion of Syrian airspace (which is controlled by Russia) by Israeli warplanes, and the intensive bombing of military bases of Iranian and pro-Iranian forces (the Lebanese "Hezbollah") stationed there.

Naturally, the above led to sharp criticism of the new Israeli government both within this country, as well as in Ukraine and the United States.

Among the critics was Republican Senator Lindsey Graham, one of Israel's most prominent supporters in Congress, who did not hesitate to say publicly: "I hope Mr. Cohen understands that when he talks to Foreign Minister Lavrov of Russia, he is dealing with a military criminal regime that commits war crimes daily on an industrial scale."

A special statement on this issue (which, of course, was agreed with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine) was also made by the Ambassador of Ukraine to Israel, Yevgeny Kornichuk, who noted

that, according to Kiev, the telephone conversation between Cohen and Lavrov is evidence that Israel's position regarding the ongoing war in Ukraine has changed.

After such harsh criticism, senior Israeli officials tried to down-play the situation, and told the media that Cohen's comments were largely related to the previous Israeli government's public statements and attempts to mediate between Russia and Ukraine, which had failed. They added that the telephone conversation with Lavrov was held based on the latter's request, and that Cohen informed US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken about it in advance.

In addition, in early January, Israeli media reported that Cohen had tried to have a telephone conversation with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, but the latter was in no hurry to hold talks with his Israeli counterpart. The official reason for the failure to hold the conversation was the New Year holidays.

Another high-ranking Israeli official, who did not wish to disclose his identity, made an additional statement on the issue. In his words, in relation to Ukraine, "there have been no changes in Israeli policy."

Interestingly, the head of the new Israeli government, Benjamin Netanyahu, has yet to comment on the issue. For months after the start of the Russia-Ukraine war, he avoided criticizing Putin, with whom he has had a very close relationship over the years. But after his party won the parliamentary elections in November, Netanyahu condemned Putin's invasion of Ukraine, adding that when he took office, he would also discuss the possibility of supplying weapons to Ukraine.

On December 30, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the President of Ukraine, and Netanyahu spoke on the phone. Israel's main request was for Ukraine not to support the UN General Assembly's vote on a draft resolution calling on the International Court of Justice to issue a legal opinion on the consequences of Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories. The representative of Ukraine did not attend the vote on this issue (Kiev had voted against Israel in previous votes), thus, according to the Ukrainian side, relations with Netanyahu were given a chance.

During this telephone conversation, the Ukrainian side also raised its own issues. In particular, Kiev requested a transfer of air defense systems from Israel. According to the Ukrainian side, they did not



Binyamin Netanyahu, head of the 37th government of Israel

receive a concrete answer on the issue, but did receive a promise that the parties would return to the question in the future. According to the same Ukrainian senior official, neither of the leaders were satisfied with the results of the talks.

In fact, Israel is in a difficult position strategically (as is everyone who tries to maintain any kind of "neutrality" in the Russia-Ukraine war) and the new Israeli government realizes the seriousness of the situation.

If Israel turns to Russia, there is a risk that relations with its main strategic ally, the United States, will cool (and indications of this have already been made in the US). This is unacceptable for its long-term security.

Yet, if Netanyahu's government moves in support of Ukraine, the Israelis suspect that Russia could transfer technology (including nuclear weapons) to Iran that will directly threaten Israel's existence. At the same time, there is a danger that Moscow will no longer turn a blind eye to Israel's actions in Syria. This creates the danger of a military confrontation between Russia and Israel, which is far from convenient for Israel.

That is why the Israeli government is trying to pursue a moderate policy towards both Russia and Ukraine. However, recent events have clearly shown us that the longer and bloodier the Russia-Ukraine war becomes, the more difficult it will be to pursue a balanced policy, and this applies not to the Israeli authorities alone - it, in turn, creates a number of threats and challenges in the field of security.

The Political Process in Georgia

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

As in any other country of the contemporary world, there is a routine political process going on in Georgia, one which existed even in the era of so-called developed socialism, carrying us, the Soviet Georgians, towards the dream world of communism (at a snail's pace, though!) The pre-soviet political process did not mean much: It was formal, diluted and ineffective: People lived beyond that process and were not concerned much with its consequences, seeing it all happen with calculated smoothness and the required veneer, but without any meaningful public participation.

Today, the picture is totally different: The political process has weight and value, along with the rest of all those indispensable parameters-length, width, depth and height. Seemingly, with this kind of significance, the current political process in Georgia should have the potential to do its main job, which is the enhancement of the quality of life of our

people, made up of the bulk of our decision-making electorate. The process is in place, and it is red hot too, but it is not having the due effect on our lives that it must, and it has no influential bearing on reality in terms of handling the most burning issues of our everyday lives.

Why is that? The most discreet response to this question is that the main participants in the process, the political forces, are busy with their own agendas of survival and self-perpetuation. To say it a little bit more incautiously, the more or less vigorously functioning political parties are totally off kilter when it comes to planning and working on a higher standard of living for us, Georgia's citizens. This, in the first place, concerns the oppositional powers, whereas it is in the nature of a ruling party of any nation to be interested in keeping that standard to a high level, for such an attitude strengthens their position in the public eye. The opposition feels better when things go from bad to worse in the country. Drawbacks and pitfalls are what make them tick. They literally breathe with the failures of the ruling power. The worse the better, each failure renew-

ing them with political energy.

To cut a long story short, the political process here in Georgia is crippled and detrimental, and it is not at all in the service of the best interests of our people. Can this change? No, not if there comes no didactic help from our Western friends and allies, who have the right experience and knowledge to share with us. If they are as good a friend as they tell us, they should have us sit down and grind at that difficult and as yet unmastered science until we get results. And here is why: Georgia will collapse if this crippled political process continues in the same familiar, infertile way, burdening so badly the already shattered nervous system of our electorate. We, the people, want to see at our disposal something healthier than this. We have been caught in this up-and-down blurry spiral for thirty years now.

In a word, enough is enough. If the process needs any serious medication, let's find and apply the necessary treatment. Keeping it the way it is right now might result in an irreversible dead end. We must all get it straight, and the West should, ideally, take it seriously, that we are no longer in a position to waste time.

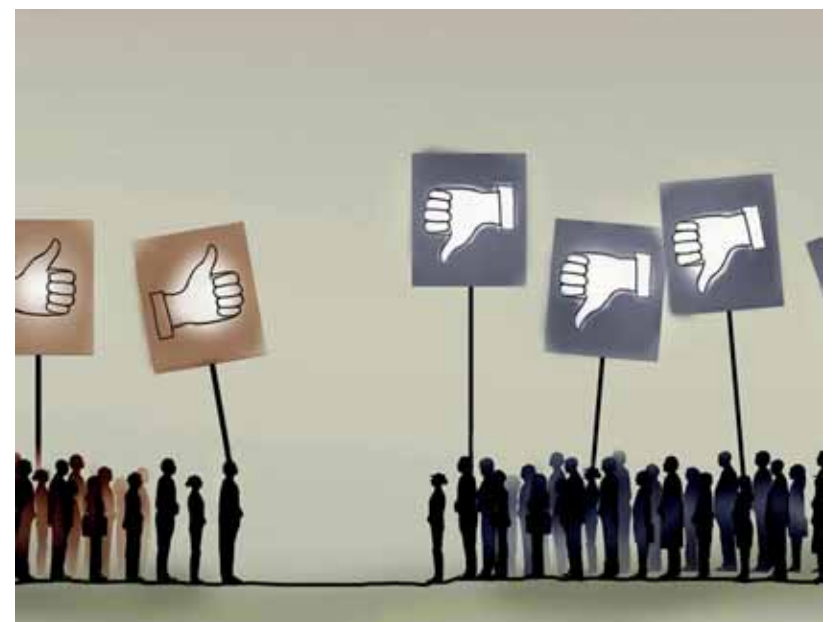


Image source: newstatesman.com

The political process has to be productive in many good ways, especially when we're talking about a better life for our people!

Incidentally, a better life is not something ephemeral; waited for interminably. A good life is a very specific thing that allows all of us taxpayers to feel better, something which boasts the power to prolong humanity. Anything short of that

or contrary to it is a sheer waste of time, so let the current political process in Georgia give us something more solid and tangible than it is putting on the table today. The political forces that pretend to be alive and functional simply must do the right job before it's too late. But I don't think we will be able to do it alone, without our wise, skilful and experienced instructors from the West.

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General Ben Hodges on Russia's Military Failings and Taking Back Crimea

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE
FOR RADIO FREE EUROPE

It's taken me a while to figure out why Russia would put so much emphasis on Bakhmut, especially the forces led by Mr. Prigozhin – Retired US Lieutenant General Ben Hodges tells Radio Free Europe's Georgian Service. "And I do think there is a symbolic aspect to this – it's almost like a vanity project for him. He clearly doesn't care how many people are killed. They've been at it now for five months, and they still haven't been able to take Bakhmut. And they just continue pouring untrained, recently mobilized soldiers into the fight. But it's recently come to light also that there are significant salt and gypsum mines in the region. And Mr. Prigozhin even talked about securing the resources there. But I don't know if that will be very comforting to the families of the thousands of people who have been killed there to know that Mr. Prigozhin's real objective was not a strategically important crossroads or intersection, but gypsum mines. I think this whole operation around Bakhmut illustrates the lack of coherence of Russia's operation. I don't think Prigozhin takes orders from Surovikin, and he certainly doesn't take orders from General Gerasimov. So who's in charge? They don't have a coherent plan. They really, fortunately, have still not learned and fixed all the institutional flaws that they showed back in February."

Retired U.S. Lieutenant General Ben Hodges commanded US Army forces in Europe from 2014 and 2017. In his interview with RFE/RL's Georgian Service, following on from the January 10 Economic Policy Research Center's public discussion with him, General Hodges discusses that Russian military lack of coherence and how new fighting vehicles and tanks from abroad could change the course of the war.

COULD IT BE THE RUSSIANS ARE LOOKING FOR THAT FAMILIAR BLUEPRINT: IF YOU THROW NUMBERS AT THINGS, SOONER OR LATER YOU'LL GET RESULTS?

Russians have always assumed that math will win. That's been their way of war for centuries, that they will eventually just overwhelm the Ukrainian forces. But, obviously, they haven't been able to do that yet because the Ukrainians have been so professional, so skilled. And we see that actually precision can defeat math,



They've impressed me with how well they've done so far to minimize casualties, and to be thorough and methodical



General Ben Hodges. Source: RFE/RL

if you have enough precision, and if you apply it in the right places. Ukraine has consistently gone after logistics, transportation networks, ammunition storage, through a variety of different means.

THERE'S BEEN A CHANGE OF PACE IN WEAPONS DELIVERY FROM THE WEST TO UKRAINE: BRADLEY ARMORED VEHICLES, MARDERS FROM GERMANY, AND AMX-10 RCS FROM FRANCE. HOW CRIPPLING HAS THE ABSENCE OF THESE BEEN FOR UKRAINE? AND WHAT SHOULD WE EXPECT NOW THEY HAVE THEM?

I wish the decision to provide Bradley, Marder, AMX-10 RC and other systems had been made sooner. But the good news is it's been made. And now they'll be the foundation for an armor brigade. You've got self-propelled artillery from the Czech Republic, a battalion, AMX-10 RCs from France, which is an excellent wheeled vehicle, a lot of mobility with a big gun on it. And then a battalion of Marders, which is a very good system, and a battalion of Bradley, which is the best infantry fighting vehicle in the world. If you put a Ukrainian Tank Battalion in the middle of it with engineers, you've got a lethal combined arms formation that could be the iron fist that helps penetrate these endless lines of Russian trenches, if they're properly supported.

They'll spend the next couple of months getting the equipment, training on it, practicing, building up the logistics for it. And I think when the Ukrainian General Staff is ready, they will employ this as a force.

SOME WESTERN SECURITY AND MILITARY EXPERTS ARE MORE SKEPTICAL, SAYING UKRAINE NEEDS PROPER TANKS LIKE THE ABRAMS. DO YOU AGREE?

It would certainly be better if they also had Abrams and Leopards. It feels like those might be coming. But there are

other things that Ukrainians are doing to build up capability for the next phase of their counter-offensive, which will be the decisive phase, which I think is the liberation of Crimea.

POLAND AND FINLAND SEEM TO BE EAGER TO PROVIDE THOSE MENTIONED LEOPARDS. THERE'S ALSO TALK IN BRITAIN OF PROVIDING CHALLENGER 2 TANKS. COULD THAT CHANGE THE TIDE OF THE WAR?

It's important in terms of real capability, assuming that they get the maintenance that comes with it, the right ammunition and the opportunity to train. It's even more important in that it signals that Western governments are taking the next step; that they are less and less concerned that Russia might somehow try to escalate, because it's so unlikely. And it's not too late to make a difference. After Ukraine liberates Crimea, they're going to have to protect themselves for a long time to come. So even though this equipment is not there right now, and I wish it was, Ukraine is still going to need it months from now.

Russia is getting drones from Iran, and cold weather gear from North Korea, but some 50 nations are helping Ukraine. Have we done it as fast as they need? No. And have we done enough? No. Is there more to come? I hope so. The Germans are giving Marder, and another Patriot battery. And they're talking about Leopards. I mean, that's got to be discouraging for the Russian side.

YOU HAVE SAID UKRAINE MIGHT LIBERATE CRIMEA BEFORE AUGUST, BUT YOU ALSO EARLIER PREDICTED UKRAINE MIGHT PUSH RUSSIA BACK TO THE ENGAGEMENT LINES OF FEBRUARY 23 BY THE END OF 2022. WHY DID THAT NOT HAPPEN?

Obviously, I was overly optimistic about that. I didn't anticipate that we would

have failed to provide longer range systems like ATACMS. I thought that was coming. I also didn't anticipate the forces that Russia was willing to sacrifice.

What matters is how Ukraine has adapted to what Russia is doing with these mobilized troops, and the West delivering to Ukraine what they need, so they can continue to attack Russian logistics and command and control. This is how I think they will liberate Crimea – there's only two roads that lead to Crimea: The Kerch Bridge and the land bridge, and one's already been severely damaged several times. That's what needs to happen over the next few months. We need to provide Ukraine with the ability to do that, not limit what we give them in terms of range. The GMLRS, the rocket fired by HIMARS, can travel up to 90 kilometers. If we don't do more, then, in effect, we create a sanctuary for Russia, allowing Russia to shoot from Crimea with impunity, or from inside Russia or Belarus. And that leads to the murder of more innocent Ukrainian civilians. So we've got to give them the longer range weapon systems and ATACMS that are able to hit every single thing on the Crimean peninsula.

This is all, of course, contingent on Western support. The big giant fat caveat is that the West has to continue to support Ukraine, at least at the level of everything that we've already said we're going to do.

IN THE IDEAL WORLD WHERE THAT HAPPENS, HOW CAN WE GO ABOUT LIBERATING CRIMEA?

They're going to continue to have to block Russian efforts around Bakhmut. They're going to have to keep an eye on Belarus at the border north of Kharkiv. I could be wrong, but it just doesn't seem likely that the Russians could make a significant attack from out there. They may mass some troops there, but they don't have the capability, I don't believe, to launch another serious threat for Kyiv. But the General Staff will have to keep watching that.



If you put a Ukrainian Tank Battalion in the middle of it, you've got a lethal combined arms formation that could be the iron fist to help penetrate those Russian trenches

In the meanwhile, I think they're going to build up their armored forces, what they're receiving, as well as what they already have trained, so that they have a large armored capability. That could be the decisive element of this liberation of Crimea. But before that, they're going to have to spend a couple of months continuing to go after the Kerch Bridge, continuing to disrupt the transportation network that runs through Mariupol and Melitopol into Crimea.

There's a lot of work to do to set the conditions. It's not going to be a big attack across the Perekop Isthmus; Ukraine is going to have to set the conditions through long range fire, Special Forces, and then, eventually, they will have to put somebody on the ground there. But I think their General Staff is smart enough. They've impressed me with how well they've done everything so far to minimize casualties, and to be thorough and methodical.

Lessons from Ukraine: Georgian Naval Defense



A US Navy Saildrone Explorer unmanned surface vessel in the Persian Gulf. Source: AFP

BY MICHAEL GODWIN

With the war in Ukraine nearing its one-year mark, many have already begun to draw conclusions and lessons learned from the action. New tactics, technologies, and weaponry have made many go back to the drawing board. The widespread use of drones has been one of the largest battlefield 'game changers' the West and its allies have noted. Georgia, ever in the Kremlin's crosshairs, should be one of these lessons' star students. With a similarly miniscule defense

force compared to the Russian military, and territories already under occupation, the use of these new drones may give the small country an edge if, or when, the bear comes back to finish its work. And the Georgian coast also offers an opportunity to employ a new devious trick against Moscow's Black Sea Fleet. Ukraine has employed, likely for the first time in combat, small waterborne drones against Russia, most notably against its naval garrison in Crimea. Through the autumn and early winter, Ukraine launched several waves of drones against ships of the Black Sea Fleet. While many of these were not counted as significant, with only two being recorded as damage, the effect

these drones have had is real.

Russia has withdrawn all of its naval assets into port and, thus far, at the time of publication, not risked any meaningful ventures into the sea again. These small yet effective drone boats are seen as a new revelation in modern warfare, particularly in Ukraine. However, they have been used in conflicts in the Middle East for quite some time.

The ongoing conflict between Houthis rebels and the Saudi Arabian forces and their allied groups was one of the first domains where these new drone platforms were deployed. Saudi ships encountered them being used, and to significant effect. Iran, the likely supplier, has also reportedly used them to reconnoiter American vessels passing through the Strait of Hormuz.

The question still remains whether or not these drones are a viable tool of defense. They are certainly lower in cost than an anti-ship missile, and even more so than a new battleship. But what is about these sea drones that makes them so deadly?

Scott Savitz, a senior engineer at the Rand Corporation, heralds the drones, labeled as un-crewed surface vessels or USVs, as the "new age of naval warfare." He says, "like prior transformative weapons such as torpedoes and anti-ship missiles, USVs could have a large impact on future naval tactics, equipment, and even the design of fleets." This allows early adopters, such as Georgia, to gain an upper hand on more advanced navies such as Russia.

Their simple construction, sometimes built using the framework of civilian jetskies, not only reduces cost but potentially allows Georgia, with limited maritime construction infrastructure to get started in a short time. The size and surface level of these USVs enables them

to detonate at the water level of the target vessel, sinking them faster. This aforementioned detonation can also be larger than a traditional torpedo or anti-ship missile, given that these USVs can be designed to carry a larger and even shaped charge.

Additionally, there is little on the current defense market to stop them from gaining the upper hand. The overwhelming number of ship defenses are aimed at aerial targets. Even though there has been some loose framework of ideas as to how to counter USVs published on the internet, little has come close to being implemented by any defense forces.

Current anti-torpedo measures focus on detecting the acoustic signature of the motor these munitions use. While these same systems could be used to thwart a single USV, their use in swarming tactics could be enough to defeat any countermeasures. In short, these new weapons are the next threat on the seas.

For Georgia, despite the pledges to stay out of the ongoing conflict, the leadership may not be able to control these levers of geopolitics. Tbilisi's focus inward

may be warranted. For the western part of the country, coastal defense may take on a new form with USVs. With multiple small units positioned at various key harbors, including Poti, Anaklia, and Batumi, these cost-effective USV platforms can give advanced warning and ward off predatory Black Sea foes.

The topic of rebuilding the Georgian Navy has been covered by this author, and remains an important piece of regaining national prestige and defense infrastructure. However, a newer facet of this could be the creation of USV units to begin the naval defense initiative. Domestically produced and tested, these may bring about a new age of Georgian maritime security.

The neutering of Russia's Black Sea Fleet at the hands of a largely outdated and incredibly smaller force shows that even a geopolitical and military underdog can still tear at the soft underbelly of the Kremlin's Bear. Georgia, the jewel of the South Caucasus, still has the ability to defend its sovereignty and protect its shores with new lessons from Ukraine's heroic actions.



Ukrainian USV captured by Russian forces in Crimea. Photo from BSV via Telegram

Germany, the EU, and the South Caucasus

ANALYSIS BY EMIL AVDALIANI

Over the course of 2022, Germany turned from being an ardent opponent to EU expansion to becoming its enabler. Reasons vary, but the war in Ukraine and the resulting changes in connectivity, availability of energy resources and diminishing economic contacts with Russia, have pushed Berlin toward supporting the EU's greater involvement in the Black Sea region and especially the South Caucasus.

The Zeitenwende speech made by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on February 27, 2022, several days after the beginning of Russia's disastrous war on Ukraine, seemed to usher in a new era for Germany's foreign policy and its perception of security threats in Eastern Europe.

As it turned out in the following months, the speech indeed was the beginning of a comprehensive process which laid out the program for changing Germany's decades-long foreign policy principles. While all attention was paid to Scholz's transformative measures in defense spending, and Germany's attitude to Russia, a critical change likewise took place in Germany's approach to the enlargement of the European Union.

Before Russia's second invasion of Ukraine, Europe was different and Germany was seen as one of the abettors of Russian influence on the continent. Reliance on Russian gas was falsely seen not as a geopolitical danger, but rather as a sign of mutual dependence. Berlin was highly skeptical about the EU's enlargement plans as well as NATO's expansion eastward. For instance, in 2008, Germany's position was critical in blocking the granting of a NATO membership action plan (MAP) to Georgia and Ukraine. Similarly, inclusion of Ukraine and Georgia in the EU was seen at best as an impractical political move. Both scenarios were regarded by the German

political elite as dangerous, moves which would damage relations with Russia and radicalize the latter's foreign policy.

Instead, abstention from expansion eastward was seen as a recipe for stable ties with Moscow. The latter was seen as a highly pragmatic actor which would tolerate NATO and EU existence, but would understandably become wary of these two Western entities' expansion along Russian borders. This status quo seemed to work. German business elites expanded commercial ties with Russia, while the latter viewed Berlin as a cornerstone of its relations with the EU. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 as well as the invasion of Georgia in 2008 were seen as aberrations in Russian behavior and rarely featured in Germany's political debates.

This political approach, however, was fraught with dangers and practical mistakes. It demonstrated that the German political elite did not well understand Moscow's true intentions. For the Kremlin, close ties with Germany were seen as a necessary tool to sow divisions within the trans-Atlantic community. Moreover, few, if any, suspected that Moscow was intent on rebuilding a true territorial empire. For decades, numerous analysts' and some scholars' claims that Russia was willing to build a new Soviet Union were derided both in Germany and in much of the EU. Yet, Russia did not only dream about the aggrandizement of its exclusive sphere of influence, but actually reconstituting the old Russian Empire – a much more dangerous development than the pursuit of the Soviet model. In the new Russian Empire envisioned by the Russian leadership, large territories of Ukraine and other neighboring countries would one day become part of Russia proper.

The mistakes made by the German political elites became apparent in February 2022 when Russia launched a full-scale attack on Ukraine with the goal of changing the European security architecture by building an exclusive sphere of geopolitical influence over neighbor-



The Zeitenwende speech made by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on February 27, 2022, seemed to usher in a new era for Germany's foreign policy and its perception of security threats in Eastern Europe. Source: 1TV.ge

ing states. The invasion caused a major re-think in Germany, not only in regard to Russia, but generally toward the future of the EU, NATO, and the trans-Atlantic community.

First, the German leadership realized the need to expand the EU. Chancellor Scholz memorably said in one of his public statements that "We are the people of Europe and our voice must be heard throughout Europe, from the Mediterranean to the North Sea, from Lisbon to Tbilisi and beyond."

In a highly-discussed op-ed for Foreign Affairs, Scholz wrote that "Putin wanted to divide Europe into zones of influence and to divide the world into blocs of great powers and vassal states. Instead, his war has served only to advance the EU. At the European Council in June 2022, the EU granted Ukraine and Mol-

dova the status of 'candidate country' and reaffirmed that Georgia's future lies with Europe. We also agreed that the EU accession of all six countries of the Western Balkans must finally become a reality, a goal to which I am personally committed. That is why I have revived the so-called Berlin Process for the Western Balkans, which intends to deepen cooperation in the region, bringing its countries and their citizens closer together and preparing them for EU integration."

In another passage from the same article, he argued that "It is important to acknowledge that expanding the EU and integrating new members will be difficult; nothing would be worse than giving millions of people false hope. But the way is open, and the goal is clear: An EU that will consist of over 500 million free citizens."

These are not mere statements. They reflect a growing realization in Germany, as elsewhere in Europe, that the best guarantee against future Russian attacks on its neighbors is the expansion of European institutions (potentially backed up by NATO). But behind these benign designs lurk changing geopolitical circumstances. Germany needs EU expansion because the EU is now increasingly seeking new gas and oil resources. Germany, and the EU overall, also seek alternative routes to the north Eurasian transport route which largely went through Russia and connected Europe with Central Asia, and, most importantly, China.

In both cases the eastern Black Sea and the South Caucasus play a critical role. The route through Georgia would safeguard alternative energy resources from the Caspian Sea, as well as the expansion of the transport route nowadays fashionably called the Middle Corridor. The recent signing of an agreement for development of the 1,100 kilometer-long Black Sea strategic submarine electricity cable is yet another sign of how geopolitical the EU's approach to the Black Sea region and the South Caucasus has become.

The long-term perspective is thus favorable for Georgia and the wider Black Sea space. The EU, powered by changing perspectives in Berlin, is now pushing for greater involvement in the region. Though there are no guarantees, considering the existing geopolitical (prolonged war in Ukraine) and geo-economic (Europe's energy decoupling from Russia) trends, it is obvious that Germany is likely to deepen its commitment to the EU, and perhaps even NATO's expansion eastward. Amid the granting of European perspective to Georgia in July 2022, it is also fair to say that Tbilisi now has good chances to obtain European candidate status.

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

Significance of the Middle Corridor - Underestimation Is Unacceptable and Overestimation Is Impossible. Part 1

BY VICTOR KIPIANI,
CHAIRMAN OF GEOCASE

As a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the restoration of independence, the new subjects of international relations - the former "Union republics" - immediately found themselves in a geopolitical vacuum. In addition to their legal status in the world system, most of them had to prove their state capacity almost from scratch. This process was quite long and very painful - especially for Georgia and its immediate neighbors. Moreover, the heavy Soviet legacy, inexperience in modern governance, and ignorance of the basics of political processes caused serious upheavals in a number of countries. And the "triangle" of the South Caucasus has become a center of constant instability, continuing internal turmoil and fomenting external threats. Thus, it cannot be explained by coincidence that in the first years of our independence, planners of big-league politics turned away from the geopolitical or geo-economic dividends of our region because of the toxicity. This attitude, in turn, increased the destabilization of domestic processes and reduced the competitiveness of the Black Sea and Caspian Sea region. The urgent task was to find ways to take the countries of the region from the periphery of global processes and turn them into a living, meaningful political geography.

Marking out such roads and taking the region out of the post-Soviet "swamp" at the time referred to very noisy applications for transport links, transit corridors and communication networks. In fact, geography became one of the most effective factors in emerging from ultimate oblivion, and the processes derived from this factor actually got a boost of fast action. Over time, transport and communications became a regional calling card, which provided the country participating in this or that project, although with some mistakes, somewhere not completely, and somewhere with some lag, a possibility of national positioning and profitable capitalization.

Obviously, the Georgian national-state space also became an integral part of the overall process - the "Traceca" or the "Great Silk Road": in some projects, Tbilisi acted as an initiator, in some as a co-initiator. In almost all of them, the Georgian link became a necessary component of the overall chain, without which the theoretical results of any project passing through the region could not be transformed into practical results. Accordingly, Official Tbilisi was also faced with a new reality: with proper cooperation and coordination in the region, a healthy Georgian "self-interest" could be properly and fully obtained. Achieving the necessary balance between regional and its own interests was the task of Georgia's practical policy then, is today, and will be in the future.

With the difficulty of predicting future decades, compared to the megaprojects of the last century, the present day has become even more loaded with the specificity of the communications linking Asia and Europe. The necessary balancing has turned from a political craft to the art of policy-making, and the post-pandemic impact on the global supply-delivery network and the ongoing war in the heart of Europe have left Georgian and regional politics without a ready-made "guide" to meet the new challenges. However, despite qualitatively new challenges and unknown

paradigms, the cornerstone of the function of Georgia and other countries in the region in the global political ecosystem remains transportation arteries, energy supplies and cross-border communication networks.

FROM EVOLUTION TO RE-EVOLUTION

A few decades is not much in the light of historical upheavals. And if we take into account the multilayered specificity of the region in which Georgia is located, it is not a few. Against the background of regional mega-changes, it is difficult not to proceed to naming various processes, but this time, based on the purpose of the article, we will continue to focus only on the transport and communication themes.

Together with a number of key actions of political and economic nature that have had a cardinal impact on the positioning of the Georgian case, cross-border projects passing through the Georgian space have organically connected our country with the regional and foreign economic space. Much has been written about the main oil and gas pipeline projects and there is nothing new to say here, except for one thing: these projects have changed the external position of our country for the better and they will influence the reshaping of internal relations as well. Efforts made in the 1990s and major projects launched since then (railway-land, etc.) have added necessary functional and practical advantages to Georgia's participation in the eyes of others.

As a result, we went from user to contributor: Sometimes completely and sometimes relatively moderately. But importantly, and most importantly, not only did we retain the function, but the country got its voice in the foreign arena and was able to project its interests in terms of security and economic benefit, which is an even greater result of this functional co-participation. And at this stage the projection of the national interests of the Georgian state developed with relative success and is still developing, although this is already a subject of a separate discussion.

The fact is that the regional specificity noted above has allowed in a relatively short time to transform into a concrete result of this or that pleasing to the ear undertaking or initiative. This is especially evident in the spheres of transport and communication. In this regard, the Middle Corridor megaproject is no exception, quite objectively taking its unique place.

MIDDLE CORRIDOR: WHAT WE KNOW

This project is considered one of the initiatives that aim to connect the West and the East in a better, more efficient and reliable way. Discussions around the Middle Corridor have already progressed to the stage of practical solutions, the tangible result of which will be to link China, Central Asia, South Caucasus (Azerbaijan and Georgia), Turkey and Europe with an interconnected transport space to ensure safe and commercially profitable freight traffic.

It is noteworthy that one source contrasts the Middle Corridor project with the so-called "One Road and One Belt" initiative. In fact, however, the Middle Corridor and the Belt are in some ways complementary. Here, perhaps, one should look for the so-called contradiction elsewhere. In particular, there are several variants of the land-based version of the One Road and One Belt initiative (there is also known to be a maritime version). Although these options



Image source: forbes.ge

are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and connecting Asia to Europe via the Middle Corridor is "one of" the options.

It is clear that all options for a "belt" connecting two geographies of this scale are considered by different geopolitical or geo-economic actors from their own perspectives. Moreover, from the point of view of Georgian interests, the Middle Corridor bears a completely unique and special load. That is why we specifically said "in some ways complementary" and "one of" for Georgian readers, because in the context of our country's medium- and long-term interests, the Middle Corridor is actually neither "complementary" nor "one of". For Georgia's sustainable and competitive development, the Middle Corridor project is unconditionally the only one and has no alternative.

There are several factors that contribute to this framing of an issue, which we will discuss in the chapter on Middle Corridor Challenges. It may seem strange, but the importance of a project is best seen against the backdrop of related problems and controversies. Thus, we will discuss the role of the Middle Corridor based on this approach.

The tasks of the project are multilayered and multifaceted. Despite their abundance, we believe that they can still be classified according to general characteristics. And, since we intend to make a classification, we will divide the Middle Corridor implementation challenges into three main groups, each of which is either (1) directly related to technical operation, (2) related to the competitive environment, or (3) caused by a complex security situation.

OPERATIONAL AND TECHNICAL CHALLENGES

Bringing a geography of this scale and area into a unified transport belt depends not only on a declaration of political will. It is clear that the success of the project as a business requires the streamlining of many operational aspects and technical nuances.

The main challenge, from this point of view, is to create an interoperable and synchronized business ecosystem across the corridor. And it involves monumental work, if we remember that the corridor stretches across several large, medium or small, politically-culturally and socio-economically different countries. According to the current version of the Middle Corridor, the project covers the land borders of five states, at least one and at most two seas, which requires

harmonization of relevant procedures, norms and standards.

In addition to harmonization of standards for uninterrupted transportation, it is no less challenging to maintain appropriate infrastructure. In this regard, the countries of the Black Sea and Caspian Sea have an additional opportunity to integrate more closely into global economic structures by creating a favorable business environment in the region. It is also indicative that the result of such integration will be the improvement of internal economic relations in this or that country, including Georgia, increasing the competitiveness of the national economy and improving the quality of life of the average citizen.

In order to ensure that all this does not remain an insurmountable challenge, it is also critical to ensure proper transparency of the Middle Corridor project. For this purpose, quite concrete measures are the development of preferential tariffs for the entire route and their unification, the establishment of regulatory framework standards for different carriers, appropriate coordination to establish optimal transportation times, etc.

Here we should also add that to ensure a unified business ecosystem of the Middle Corridor, the countries participating in the project are required to join efforts at the supranational level to attract more cargo flows from China. As cargoes of Chinese origin equal to the vitality of any artery of the Belt, by transferring the flow to the Middle Corridor as much as possible, this project will acquire much greater operational capacity.

To ensure the carrying capacity of the Middle Corridor, the timely and full implementation of one of its key components - the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad - should also be emphasized. The importance of this rail line in the overall context of the megaproject explains the recent announcement of official Baku to invest additional 100 million U.S. dollars, which will probably invalidate the excuses about lack of funds. Such demonstration of Azerbaijan's readiness should be sufficient motivation for the Georgian side to fulfill its obligations. In short, the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars direction for the Middle Corridor is so unique that shifting the blame between the parties here is, to put it mildly, inappropriate.

COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT

Just a few years ago, speaking of the competitiveness of the Middle Corridor, we would have said that this route was significantly inferior to the so-called

northern route (from China through Russia and, therefore, bypassing the South Caucasus) and was still probably in competition with the southern route (from China through Iran and Afghanistan and here too - bypassing the South Caucasus).

Today, the situation has changed dramatically, to such an extent that the competition factor has sort of lost its relevance. However, the pulse of global processes will keep supporters of the Middle Corridor, including the Georgian side, in constant readiness for possible changes for many years to come. This is not surprising if we remember the high instability and unpredictability of geo-processes.

One way or another, it is a fact that in early 2023, the Middle Corridor "beat" its competitors due to a number of circumstances.

One is the attempt to rearrange the global delivery and supply network in the post-pandemic economic structure. The fact is that the sudden effect of the pandemic created the need to diversify this network, which was to reduce the West's dependence on unpredictable or, in Western terms, unfriendly countries. The United States and Europe, in some places because of legislative and in others because of financial measures, were determined to "move away" from risky geographies and to keep the production base as close as possible. This was especially true for such commodity nomenclature, which conditioned the resilience of this or that country in a crisis economy. As a result, it became necessary to identify routes along which the delivery of goods would be free from "blackmail" or "ideological" overtones.

The growth of the Middle Corridor perspective was also particularly facilitated by the withdrawal from the global economic structure of the key player in its most competitive northern route, Russia, which was sanctioned because of the re-invasion of Ukraine. However, the northern route was already well-proven and the shortest route for transporting Asian goods; And, despite considerable congestion during the pandemic, it offered the market optimal services both in terms of price and time. Added to this was the fact that against the background of aggression in Ukraine, any Russian "business offer" was actually tied to Russian foreign-military tasks, which made doing business as usual virtually impossible for a certain category of cargo carriers.

The so-called southern route was practically doomed to the negative effect caused by the sanctions, from which it could be saved only by the renewal of the agreement on Iran's nuclear program (hypothetically). Moreover, the southern route, blocked by the Iranian factor, was additionally burdened by the challenge posed by Taliban Afghanistan. And this created an insurmountable obstacle to the movement of a large flow to Europe through the southern route, and an additional advantage to the Middle Corridor.

The geopolitical advantages that emerged have obviously made it more urgent to mobilize political and financial capital to implement the Middle Corridor, as well as to solve the operational problems mentioned in this article. The window of opportunity opened by the war and pandemic has forced Georgian politics to act more proactively to reactivate a solid (and in the foreseeable future, irreversible) role for our country's renewed historical functionality. At one time seen as an apparently profound theory, the Middle Corridor project and Georgia's participation in it became a tangible reality.

Business and Human Rights Forum 2023



BY KESARIA KATCHARAVA

On January 18, the UN Global Compact Network Georgia and the publisher of Economist magazine in Georgia, Georgia Today Group, held a Forum on Business and Human Rights at the Sheraton Grand Tbilisi Metekhi Palace Hotel.

Salome Zurabishvili, Executive Director of the UN Global Compact Georgia Network; Giorgi Sharashidze, founder and General Manager of Georgia Today Group; Tinatin Genebashvili, National Program Officer at the Embassy of Sweden in Tbilisi; and General Manager of Sheraton Grand Tbilisi Metekhi Palace, Iva Trifonov delivered the welcome speeches at the event.

"It's a great honor and a pleasure for me as a publisher of the Georgia Today newspaper and the founder of Georgia Today Group to be amongst the main partners of such an important event, one that is dedicated to a discussion of the UN Sustainable Development Goals," said George Sharashidze.

"The main areas we aim to touch upon during this forum are diversity in the workplace and marketplace; how to promote diversity in the business sector, and also how to ensure a decent working environment for the employees of the

companies based in Georgia," Salome Zurabishvili noted.

During the first part of the event, Niko Tatulashvili, Adviser to the Prime Minister on Human Rights Issues, presented business and human rights at the policy level in Georgia. He shared interesting insights into what the government is doing and how business and human rights is integrated into the human rights

strategy, as well as the action plan the government is to start working on in the upcoming months.

The goal of Georgia's human rights strategy is to establish a systematic approach that ensures the fulfilment of human rights obligations in everyday life and ensures that all people in Georgia understand the essence of their rights and are able to exercise them to



achieve greater prosperity and dignified life. Tatulashvili highlighted that this is impossible to accomplish if the business sector does not actively participate. He also mentioned learning courses on the subject that are to be offered on a regional level in the near future.

The second part of the event was devoted to panel discussions. Invited speakers from the private sector talked about the implementation of SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, with a focus on Georgia, on the first panel, while the second panel was dedicated to a discussion on creating a diverse and inclusive environment in

and we are encouraging more and more girls and women to be a part of this direction."

"As a takeaway from this event, I can say that we, the big companies, should share our experience, especially to the small and medium enterprises, for them to have a good understanding of how these policies will contribute to their development," Khundzakishvili stated in rounding up the first panel.

UNDP Human Rights, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Unit Manager Lela Akiashvili was moderator on the second panel, which welcomed Rector of Business and Technology University, Nino Enukidze; Anano Dolaberidze, CEO



the workplace.

Salome Zurabishvili led the first panel as a moderator, and guest speakers included Nikoloz Khundzakishvili, Corporate Affairs Director of Efes Georgia; Gvantsa Murghvliani, Head of Human Capital Management Department at TBC Bank; Ana Kukhaleishvili, Head of Business Development and Administration at Bim Cube; and HR Director of GPI Holding, Nino Khachapuridze. All shared their experiences and opinions on corporate responsibility with regards to human rights.

"Human rights are very intertwined and closely related to the economy; how companies and countries develop. All of us have a responsibility in our scope to use everything that is available to us to create working spaces for people to have good opportunities and a healthy work environment," said Khachapuridze.

"Gender equality is very important to us, especially in the field of IT technologies," Murghvliani noted. "Currently, at TBC, technologies are represented by more than 30% females,

& Co-Founder of Phubber; and Managing Partner of BDO Georgia, Zurab Lalazashvili.

"We firmly believe that the role of businesses in achieving sustainable development goals is vital, and there is no way these results could be achieved without business participation," Akiashvili noted following the discussion.

"The representatives shared really valuable experience regarding sustainability, and all the documentation, all the legislation, which works in their organization," Enukidze added. "I was happy to be among the panelist members, and I do hope that the sustainability discussion will continue so as to cover organizations in the regions too."

The Forum on Business and Human Rights was held within the framework of the UN Global Compact Georgia Network project Leadership for Sustainable Development in Georgia, with the support of the Swedish government. Georgia Today and Sheraton Grand Tbilisi Metekhi Palace were partners of the event.

PM Meets CEO of Qatar Investment Authority, Discusses Prospects of Cooperation



Today, Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili met with Mansoor Bin Ebrahim Al-Mahmoud, CEO of the Qatar Investment Authority.

At the meeting in Davos, prospects of cooperation on energy and infrastructural projects and the development of hotels and resorts were discussed.

The Prime Minister and the members of his delegation briefed the holding's leadership on Georgia's rich resources and enormous potential.

The Qatar Investment Authority is Qatar's state-owned holding specializing in domestic and foreign investments. The holding was established in 2005 with the goal of empowering the country's economy by diversifying into new asset classes. In 2021, the Qatar Investment Authority has about 300 billion USD in assets. The holding's representatives visited Georgia last year.



Geostat: Foreign Trade Turnover Up by 32.8%

Foreign trade turnover went up by 32.8% and amounted to USD 19,043,0 million in 2022 year-on-year, the Georgian National Statistics Service (GeoStat) reported.

Exports increased by 31.8%, while imports grew by 33.2%. The negative trade balance of foreign trade turnover in 2022 made USD 7,857,3 million, which is 41.3%



BLOG BY TONY HANMER

Between and following the two funerals of murdered young men I attended in my “home” village of Etseri, Upper Svaneti last week, I had time to do what I know brings huge joy back into my life when things are just too sad and painful. I walked and took photos.

Wandering around the village, at first the edges of our stream caught my eye. Constantly here, grasses dangling down to the water get splashed with the rushing water. As temperatures fall below zero, this turns to ice and accumulates. The results are a perfect visual inspiration for Georgia’s national sweet, churchkhela: strings of walnuts dipped in flour-thickened grape juice and hung to dry. I used a slow shutter speed, about 1/30 second, to allow the water flow to blur enough while keeping the still ice sharp.

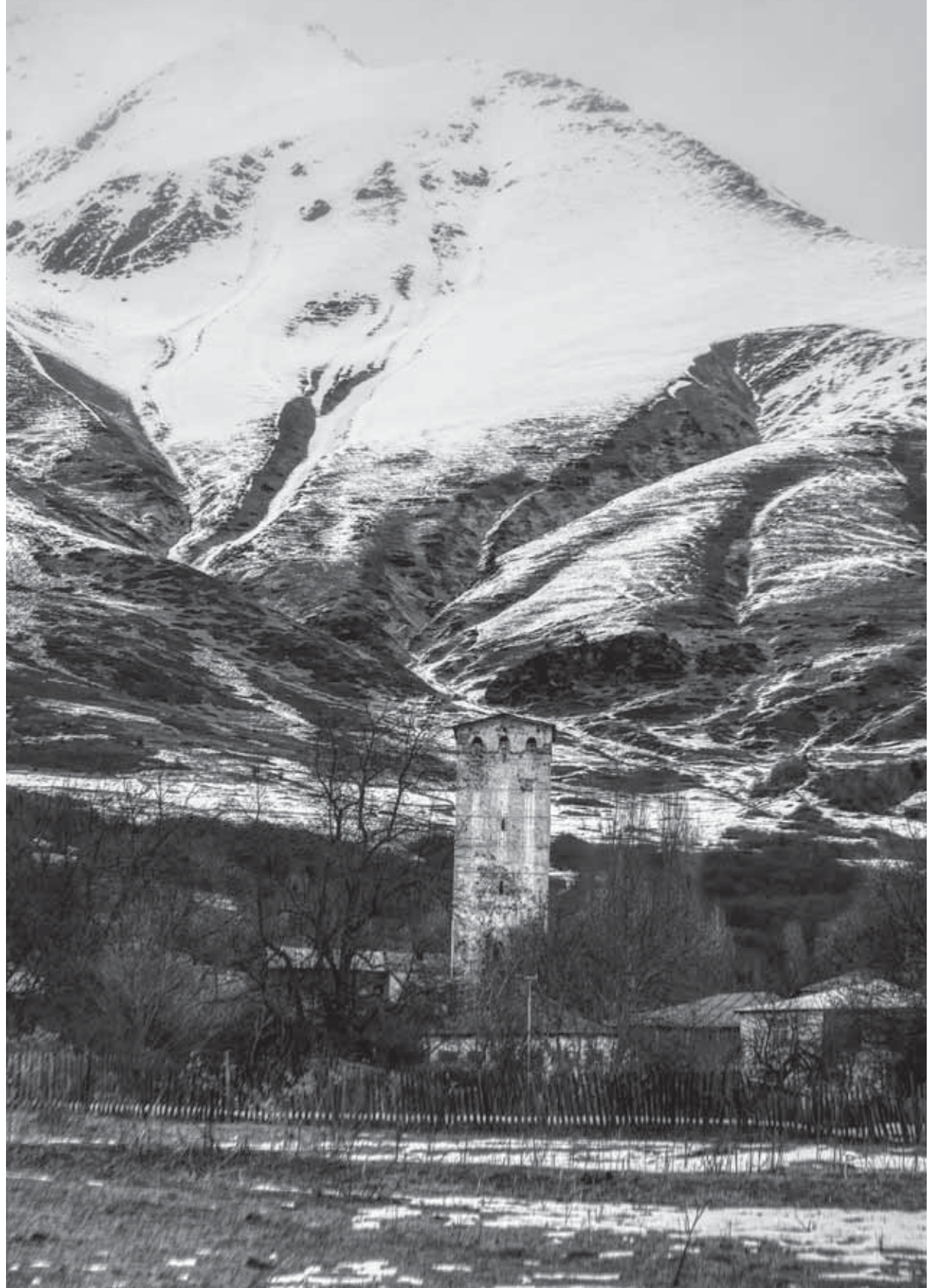
Fences and fields getting snow-covered

make intriguing patterns too. If the snow is wet at near freezing, it sticks to everything; otherwise, in colder temperatures, it can be blown around the fields. Either case makes for wonderful textures, which are a mix of random and ordered. There is no need for color: indeed, it would be a distraction, so I’m post-processing everything in black and white and grays only. Eventually, later in the new year, there can be enough snow to nearly or completely cover unmoving vehicles, transforming them utterly. I have already started to write fables about the dragons and other beasts of cloud, snow and ice which inhabit Svaneti; now that my eyes are attuned to them, I see them in more and more places, on all scales, from millimeters to miles.

I was also pleased to point out to a lifelong resident of Etseri and good friend of mine the enormous mandrill’s face which appears every winter, looking south-east from high above the village. He had never seen it before, but now will see it always.

The Dadeshkeliani Watchtower, claimed to be Svaneti’s tallest, appeared

Soul, Restored



like a ghost through the mist (see last week’s photo). I often look for new visions of this prominent landmark, and that one was unique. In a few other shots of it, there was just enough snow on the mountain behind to highlight its texture down to the tiniest crack and crevasse.

Taking a minivan-bus down all the way to Tbilisi meant that I was free from having to concentrate on the road, not driving, and could look out the window. There was just enough snow to half-cover all the roughly vertical mountain wall faces. However, not driving also meant that I was not free to stop anywhere, everywhere, and take photos at will, the hundreds of thousands of them which beckoned to me. The myriad faces of angels or gargoyles, people or animals or simply mythical or cartoon creatures, passed me by. (I am afflicted, or I would say blessed, with an acute case of permanent pareidolia: the finding of patterns among the random forms of nature.) They grinned or grimaced at me, leered or laughed silently, and I let them all go. The time for telling their story will come.

We didn’t stop to eat breakfast in the village of Barjashi, a first ever for me on this much-traveled route. We did, however, make an ablution stop just at its edge. I used the 10-minute opportu-

nity to take some more hurried shots of something new the light snow had etched in sharp relief: The bottom of what used to be the Enguri Dam lake, which is still these last two years at its lowest level I have ever seen it in my 22 years here. New fractal cracking textures dazzled me, although my frustration at distracting electricity wires made me long for my next photographic purchase, still in the future: A drone, to go where my feet can’t. Must get.

Everywhere I went, I felt my soul topping up with delight, having been drained utterly by the anguish of the recent funerals. Perhaps because of this, the 450 km journey home to Tbilisi, which can be quite draining, seemed the lightest I’ve had in some years. Home to my wife’s waiting arms, central heating, almost permanent electricity and water; but memories and images of the beauty filling me sustain me even now.

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

Berlin Fashion Week 2023. Sustainability - the Future of the Clothing Industry. Georgian Designers in a Glimpse

BY LILY FÜRSTENOW

Unlike Balenciaga's Georgian-born designer Demna Gvasalia, who was recently severely criticised following the scandal about his latest campaign featuring bondage bears and kids, the designers participating in the Berlin Fashion Week 2023 focus on true values like sustainability, environmental consciousness, fair pay for all, up-cycling, slow fashion, and rethinking of consumer attitudes.

This year's edition of the Berlin Fashion Summit "Active Alliances for Positive Fashion" addressed sustainability through the topics of collaboration, transformation and regeneration with regard to economic, cultural and ecological action within the fashion industry.

The Berlin Fashion Summit has always been the hub where change-makers share solutions and signals for fashion's necessary transformation on a corporate and cultural level. The main topics of the 5th Berlin Fashion Summit were "Regenerative Business", "Regenerative Culture", and how these two cannot be separated in order for the fashion industry to contribute to holistic positive change.

CEO and Co-Founder Hasna Kourda of Save the Wardrobe talked about how changing our consumer behavior can save the planet, while in his presentation on Regenerative Agriculture at Scale, Nick Ericsson from UGG presented how regenerative leather can be brought into the industry at scale, sharing the successes and challenges of his brand's latest sustainable endeavor. Katya Kruk from Armed Angels, Manuel Schweizer from Oceansafe and Essi Glomb from the Weißensee Kunsthochschule to name but a few gave presentations on the different perspectives of implementing new materials and business practices.

Berlin Fashion Week started with The Yes Men taking over and staging Adidas supposedly introducing its Reality Wear Collection which was game-changing with its new attitude of raising awareness about the appalling conditions in its textile factories in a resolute attempt to take action to end the exploitation of its workers. Vay Ya Nak Phohan from Cambodia was asked to take to the catwalk. She had once been employed in an Adidas textile factory in Cambodia until, as a whistleblower and journalist, she publicly denounced the appalling working conditions. It was announced in a solemnly orchestrated ceremony that Adidas supposedly appointed her as co-managing director, and she put her signature next to that of Bjorn Guldens (CEO of Adidas) under the binding "Pay Your Workers Agreements".

Bad Bunny, Pharrell Williams and Philip Leyesa contributed to the REALITY-WEAR line launched at the Berlin Fashion Week. Instead of the conventional cool and glamour, the models were trudging, stumbling and crawling down the runway with torn, run-down Adidas outfits; make-up was replaced by skin abrasions and the Adidas logo "branded" into their cheeks. Quoting Vay Ya Nak Phohan from Cambodia, if the three Adidas signature stripes stand for cool and sport in Europe and elsewhere, for her and her people, these stripes are associated with prison bars, something that



At Berlin Fashion Week, Adidas introduced its Reality Wear Collection, raising awareness about the appalling conditions in its textile factories in a resolute attempt to take action to end the exploitation of its workers. Source: rp-online.de

will hopefully change once proper action is taken.

VORN Fashion show presented dynamic and inspiring looks by famous brands, as well as pieces by Berlin-based younger designers and independent brands. The carefully selected outfits, with pieces by Vladimir Karaleev, DSTM, Isabel Vollrath and #Damur, among others, spoke volumes about the typically Berlin style of care-free, freedom and experimental touch in clothing design. Unlike that of other European fashion capitals, the Berlin signature style is all about the non-conventional, where fashion is about each one of us focusing on personality. The pieces by Vladimir Karaleev, for example, his jackets, dresses and tops, are characterized by asymmetrical shapes, unexpected incisions, material and fabric contrasts, all inspired by architectural shapes, often conceptual but always having a functional purpose. DSTM bodywear, made with ecological fabrics of the highest quality with pieces thoughtfully designed with cuts that flatter and accentuate the natural body lines while giving shape and support, are made to be worn as underwear, outerwear or swimwear. Pieces by Berlin-based Therapy brand impressed by their innovative use of used garments, unconventional

color combinations and the philosophy behind - to revise the consumerist fashion trends and to create something new out of used materials that expresses one's individuality and care for nature through the use of re-cycled clothes. MLI by Svensson presented strong pieces with elegant details, strict silhouettes and an authentic aura, with a special emphasis on creating long lasting fashion without environmental damage. The VORN Fashion Show showcased the best of national and international sustainable fashion in a curated and editorial format. The concept of VORN focused on diversity and collaboration to reflect the current zeitgeist. All participating brands underwent a sustainability check by the studio MM04 team.

For this season, VORN chose the theme of 'Role Models' to focus on. At a time when there are many uncertainties about upcoming developments in politics and society, and when the fashion industry has to undergo profound changes in the face of the great challenges of our time, role models are needed as orientation and inspiration. The VORN Fashion Show takes role models as inspiration for the looks presented on the catwalk. Current and former role models and influential personalities are researched

and different perspectives on fashion and style were shown, reflecting sexuality, sustainability, courage and diversity, just to name a few keywords.

#Damur, who also presented a separate high-end street wear runway show in the St. Elisabeth Church in Berlin's old city center is all about the non-conventional, non-standard stylistic forms. Vibrant luminous fabrics, bold heart-shaped cut-outs, skilful use of fabrics almost sculpting human bodies out of materials, richness of details, e.g. applied patchwork-like elements and ornamental patterns carefully merged together in harmonious unity. Decorative elements, impressive color combinations and the abundance of flowers made the show a special experience. The brand follows sustainable and up-cycling design practices, using ecologically friendly materials. The sustainability of the human resources involved in the production process is of great importance for the brand, and all collections are produced under ethical working conditions, with fair wages, in Poland. Each person's voice is ever-present in clothing: That's what the # logo stands for. It is the new generation's means of self-expression. Damur (Shih-Shun) Huang, the designer behind the brand, is creative but resilient. With

his collections, he undermines stereotypes, including gender categories.

One of the Berlin Fashion Week highlights was Astro Noir Lab - the immersive mixed reality presentation of Esther Perbandt's new collection at the Art Library of the Berlin State Museums. As sustainability is important for the designer, she started cooperating with FFB / Fashion for Biodiversity, who produce chips that digitally visualize the supply chain and origins of the materials the garments are made of, and that are elaborately integrated into Esther Perbandt's clothing. Astro Noir Lab included features of a digital fashion show with elements of 3D, virtual reality and projections. The vast dark hall of the Kulturforum came to life under the holographic projections, mysterious light dots and stripes projected onto clothes, with electrifying sound accompanying her opulent new collection of robes, tops, pants and veils in all shades of black. She played with transparency and opacity of materials. For certain looks, fabrics were arranged into cascades of rounded forms, calling to memory baroque-like dresses. Some tops reminded one of geometric conic formations, imitating natural forms or exotic plants that came to life as the models moved. Bodies clad in these fairy-tale looks appeared surreal and dreamy, the holographic projections in constant movement giving the presentation a special atmosphere of authenticity; a daring experiment inspired by a rich tradition of fashion history that is preserved in the Berlin State Museum Art Library. Since fashion history plays an important role in her works, it's no wonder that Esther Perbandt's designs are in a lively dialogue with the Museum collection of costumes.

There is a new wave of creative Georgian designers active outside their home country on and off-line who continue to influence and inspire us, irrespective of where they work. One such example is Lasha Mdinardze, creative director of the GUDU brand, founded in 2015 in Kyiv. GUDU's core mission is female empowerment through the creation of exquisitely tailored looks emphasizing femininity. The aesthetics of the brand are revealed in Mdinardze's self-sufficient designs, which require no accessories to complete the look. GUDU garments, with their eyes-stopping silhouettes and strong shapes, beautifully adorn and revere the female body. "The woman is always in the very center of my attention," says Lasha Mdinardze. "I wish to create outfits for her that reveal her gentle power, personality and passion all at once."

GUDU's previous collections were inspired by the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv. The music, art and style of Kyiv's streets are combined: prints referring to the works of Malevich meet with vintage denim, and the brand's signature tailoring takes on new facets through the play of volumes. In the new collection, for the first time, the designer does not cover the faces of his models, because the search for individuality is the main goal of this collection. Mdinardze's looks for the new collection are exceptionally vibrant, with clear cut shapes, combining bold geometric silhouettes with zipper details, pleated fabrics, belts, and with extra long trousers elegantly wrapping the body. GUDU's recent collection has received international acclaim and was featured in German Vogue in November 2022.



GUDU, founded in 2015 in Kyiv, has as its creative director Georgian designer Lasha Mdinardze



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