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## FOCUS

ON INDEPENDENCE DAY

Georgia celebrates the anniversary of the proclamation of the Democratic Republic of Georgia on May 26, 1918! Find out where to go and what to see on georgiatoday.ge

### In this week's issue...

**PM: We Were Disappointed No-one Imposed Sanctions on Russia during Our War**  
NEWS PAGE 3

**The Occupied Tskhinvali Region: Gagloyev's First Year**  
POLITICS PAGE 4

**Legal Insights with Klein Law: The Ease of Setting Up a Company in Georgia**  
BUSINESS PAGE 7

**Vato Babunashvili: Fitch's Assessment Confirms that Liberty's Strategy is Developing in the Right Direction**  
BUSINESS PAGE 9

**Free International Transfers with Terabank – Promotion for Business Customers international payments on Visa B2B Connect**  
BUSINESS PAGE 10

**Beyond the Stalin Museum: Exploring the Real Gori with Local Guide Zhana**  
CULTURE PAGE 11

## Xenophobia or Righteous Indignation? Georgia's Russian Problem

BY MICHAEL GODWIN

It's of no surprise that popular opinion of the Russian state has been abysmally low, especially since the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Georgians in particular have had more than enough reasons to despise their northern neighbor. Over a century of abuse, ethnic targeting, and forced relocations have soured relations in the eyes of many. However, the recent uptick in anti-Russian sentiment has drawn heavy criticism from some, who call it xenophobic and unwarranted.

More recently, the resumption of flights, the removal of the visa regime in Russia, and anti-Europe/pro-Russian actions of the ruling party have infuriated much of the nation. Demonstrators in front of Parliament have demanded a cessation to the flights, angered by the government's policy of appeasement towards the Kremlin and the unchecked influx of Russian citizens, many of whom are apathetic at best towards the "special military operation" in Ukraine, let alone Russia's past transgressions against Georgia.

Continued on page 4



Protestors in Tbilisi oppose the resumption of flights with Russia. Photo by Nini Gabritchidze

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

Markets				As of 22 May 2023			
	Price	w/w	m/m		Price	w/w	m/m
<b>BONDS</b>				<b>STOCKS</b>			
GRAIL 07/28	85.53 (YTM 7.49%)	+0.0%	+0.0%	Bank of Georgia (BGEO LN)	GBP 32.45	-2.8%	+14.3%
GEBGG 07/23	100.03 (YTM 5.74%)	+0.0%	+0.0%	Georgia Capital (CGEO LN)	GBP 8.47	+4.1%	+7.9%
GEOCAP 03/24	97.84 (YTM 8.99%)	+0.0%	+0.3%	TBC Bank Group (TBCG LN)	GBP 24.30	+1.9%	+9.2%
SILNET 01/27	98.26 (YTM 8.93%)	+0.2%	+0.1%				
TBC 06/24	98.61 (YTM 7.12%)	+0.1%	+0.3%	<b>CURRENCIES</b>			
				GEL / USD	2,5426	-0.4%	+1.5%
				GEL / EUR	2,7493	-0.9%	-0.2%
				GEL / GBP	3,1592	-1.2%	+1.3%
				GEL / CHF	2,8320	-1.1%	+0.8%
				GEL / RUB	0.0316	-1.3%	+2.9%
				GEL / TRY	0.1280	-1.3%	-0.8%
				GEL / AZN	1,4963	-0.3%	+1.2%
				GEL / AMD	0.0066	-0.3%	+1.3%
				GEL / UAH	0.0689	-0.4%	+1.6%
				EUR / USD	0.9248	+0.6%	+1.6%
				GBP / USD	0.8041	+0.7%	-0.0%
				CHF / USD	0.8979	+0.3%	+0.6%
				RUB / USD	80.4424	+0.9%	-1.4%
				TRY / USD	19.8122	+0.7%	+2.1%
				AZN / USD	1.6975	-0.0%	+0.1%
				AMD / USD	386.1400	+0.0%	+0.0%
<b>COMMODITIES</b>				<b>INDICES</b>			
Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	75.99	+1.0%	-6.9%	FTSE 100	7,770.99	-0.1%	-1.8%
Gold Spot (US\$/Oz)	1,971.86	-2.2%	-0.6%	FTSE 250	19,273.34	+0.1%	+0.0%
				DAX	16,223.99	+1.9%	+2.2%
				DOW JONES	33,286.58	-0.2%	-1.5%
				NASDAQ	12,720.78	+2.9%	+5.4%
				MSCI EM EE	37.03	+0.6%	+3.3%
				MSCI EM	983.27	+0.6%	+0.3%
				SP 500	4,192.63	+1.4%	+1.4%
				MSCI FM	2,104.74	+0.1%	-1.0%

# Ukraine War: Russia Facing Serious Security Threat in Border Regions, Fighting Subsiding in 'Captured' Bakhmut



COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

**T**he governor of Russia's Belgorod border region said Tuesday that a "counter-terrorism operation" was ongoing following an armed attack Monday that Russia blamed on Ukraine, calling it the work of "saboteurs."

Kyiv has denied any involvement in the incident, noting that anti-Putin militias known as the "Freedom of Russia" Legion and the "Russian Volunteer Corps" claimed responsibility for the raid on the district of Grayvoron that lies on the border with Ukraine.

A senior aide to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Kyiv had nothing to do with the armed operation in the Belgorod region.

"Ukraine is watching the events in the Belgorod region of Russia with interest and studying the situation, but it has nothing to do with it," presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak tweeted.

"As you know, tanks are sold at any Russian military store, and underground guerrilla groups are composed of Russian citizens." In a written statement to Reuters, Podolyak said Ukraine's military operates only on Ukrainian territory, and echoed Ukrainian military intelli-

gence in blaming Russian partisans for the incursion.

Several people were injured and several houses and a local administrative building were damaged in what Vyacheslav Gladkov, the region's governor, described on Telegram as shelling and drone attacks. One woman died in the evacuation of the district, he said.

Images were also posted on Russian social media channels purportedly showing a plume of smoke after an alleged strike near an FSB security service building in Belgorod.

Gladkov said that a "clean-up" operation was being carried out by the Russian Defense Ministry and law enforcement agencies, telling residents of the area that they could not return to their homes yet.

Also on Tuesday, a Russian court extended Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich's detention by three months, a move the US Embassy decried.

**'THE MORE WEAPONS ARE SUPPLIED, THE MORE DANGEROUS THE WORLD WILL BE,' KREMLIN SAYS OF WESTERN SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE**

The Kremlin placed blame on Western governments providing Ukraine with weapons, saying it is contributing to global security instability.

"The more weapons are supplied, the

more dangerous the world will be," Dmitry Medvedev, deputy chief of the Russian Security Council, told reporters, according to a TASS report.

"The more destructive these weapons are, the more likely the scenario of what is commonly called a nuclear apocalypse becomes," he added.

Over the weekend, the Biden administration announced its 38th weapons package for Ukraine worth approximately \$375 million.

**US EMBASSY IN MOSCOW CALLS FOR REGULAR CONSULAR ACCESS TO DETAINED WSJ REPORTER**

The US Embassy in Moscow slammed a Russian court's decision to extend the pretrial detention of Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich by three months.

The embassy also called for regular consular access to Gershkovich, adding that so far there have been two attempts that were denied.

The most recent incident came last week.

"We reiterate that the claims against him are baseless and call for Mr. Gershkovich's immediate release," the US Embassy in Moscow wrote in a statement.

**NO SHIPS HAVE SAILED UNDER BLACK SEA GRAIN DEAL IN THE PAST FOUR DAYS**

No ships have left Ukrainian ports for four days despite an extension of the Black Sea Grain Initiative, according to the latest figures provided by the UN-backed organization tracking the export activity.

The last ship to leave under the agreement was carrying 6,800 metric tons of wheat and departed Ukraine's port of Chornomorsk for Italy on May 19.

The deal, which reopened three Ukrainian ports and established a humanitarian sea corridor for agricultural exports, was extended last week, one day before it was set to expire.

**NEARLY 9,000 KILLED IN UKRAINE SINCE START OF WAR, UN SAYS**

The United Nations has confirmed 8,895 civilian deaths and 15,117 injuries in Ukraine since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine last February.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights added, though,

that the figures in Ukraine could be higher because the armed conflict can delay fatality reporting.

The international organization added that the majority of civilian casualties reported were caused by explosive weapons, shelling and airstrikes with a wide impact area.

**RUSSIA FACING SERIOUS SECURITY THREAT IN BORDER REGIONS, UK SAYS**

Russia is facing "an increasingly serious multi-domain security threat" in its border regions, the British Ministry of Defense said Tuesday after an attack on the Russian border region of Belgorod that Russian anti-Putin groups claimed to have carried out Monday.

"Russia is facing an increasingly serious multi-domain security threat in its border regions, with losses of combat aircraft, improvised explosive device attacks on rail lines, and now direct partisan action," the ministry said in an intelligence update on Twitter.

"Russia will almost certainly use these incidents to support the official narrative that it is the victim in the war," the ministry added.

**FIGHTING SUBSIDING IN 'CAPTURED' BAKHMUT, MINISTER SAYS**

Ukraine said fighting appeared to have subsided in Bakhmut, a town that Russia's mercenary forces claimed to have captured last weekend, although Kyiv denied it had fallen.

"This day [the past 24 hours], the activity of the enemy's offensive actions in the Bakhmut direction decreased somewhat," Hanna Maliar, Ukraine's deputy

defense minister, said Tuesday.

"In the city of Bakhmut, the fighting has subsided, the enemy continues to clear the areas under his control," she added, in a post on Telegram. At the same time, the amount of shelling remains significant.

Ukraine still controlled parts of the southwest of the town, which has been largely reduced to ruins by months of attritional warfare, and fighting continues in the suburbs.

"We have a slight advance on the flanks to the north and south of Bakhmut," she said.

Russia's mercenary Wagner Group claimed last weekend to have fully captured Bakhmut, with footage showing Wagner head Yevgeny Prigozhin and mercenary troops raising Russian and Wagner flags in the town. Prigozhin said his force would hand over the town to regular Russian units in a matter of days.

Analysts at the Institute for the Study of War said Monday that Russia's "hyper-focus on claiming victory in Bakhmut distracts from the precarious Russian military situation in and around Bakhmut."

"The Russian military situation in Bakhmut is particularly vulnerable as the Russian offensive effort in the area has likely culminated, granting Ukrainian forces the opportunity to launch further counterattacks on Bakhmut's already-weakened flanks."

"Wagner's withdrawal in contact will also likely result in the Russian MoD manning defensive lines with poorly trained and provisioned conventional units similar to those that retreated from their positions while defending against Ukrainian counterattacks earlier in May," the analysts said.



## PM: We Were Disappointed No-one Imposed Sanctions on Russia during Our War

**I**n 2008, we had a war. Do you remember anyone who imposed sanctions during our war? No-one," Prime Minister of Georgia, Irakli Garibashvili, stated this week.

He noted that no-one in the world had the right reaction, an adequate reaction, during that war.

"So my question is - where is the logic? Do you think our war was not a war, and only the war in Ukraine is a war? I have to say that we were very disappointed that there was business with Russia as usual after the 2008 war. Since that dev-

astating war, 20% of our country has been occupied by Russia. Russia built two military bases on our historical land, Russia recognized the so-called independence of our historical regions, and this occupation continues. So my question to my European, American friends is the following - my dear friends, you have been doing business as usual with Russia, you have not imposed sanctions.

"The European Union paid \$2.3 trillion to Russia before 2022. No-one stopped business with Russia then, nothing changed," stated Garibashvili.

## Achondroplasia Added to Rare Diseases Treated by the State Program

**T**he diagnosis of Achondroplasia was added to the list of treatable rare diseases within the framework of the state program. The corresponding change was made in the government decree "On the approval of state health protection programs for 2023".

As stated by the parents of children

diagnosed with Achondroplasia, who requested the funding of medicine for children with this diagnosis through regular demands made to the government administration, with the change, the government officially takes responsibility for the treatment of people with Achondroplasia:

"Until now, there was a state program

for the treatment of rare diseases, in which achondroplasia was not included. It has now been officially introduced by order of the Prime Minister, which means that the state officially takes responsibility for our treatment," says Makuna Gochiashvili, one of the participants of the Mothers' protest rallies.

"This already means that even if the protocol is ready at the end of May and is approved in the middle of June, according to that protocol, the state is already expected to take responsibility within the framework of their obligations."

Parents of children with Achondroplasia announced on May 5 that they would end their 24/7 protest at the Government Chancellery, the main demand of which was to bring expensive medicine into the country with state funding.

According to the parents, they reached an agreement with the authorities and received a verbal promise that in a few weeks, the authorities would take concrete steps to introduce the only medicine for the treatment of achondroplasia, "Vosoritide".

"We will continue to fight to get that medicine for our children as soon as possible," the parents said.



# On the Lavrov Wedding Clash



The situation between the police and protest participants became tense. Image source: mtavari.tv

COMPILED BY KETEVAN SKHIRTLADZE

**O**n May 20, information was spread that the daughter of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Sergey Lavrov, was in Georgia, and was staying at the Kvareli Lake Hotel.

As reported, the family was preparing for a grand wedding in Kakheti for Lavrov's son-in-law, Alexander Vinokurov's brother.

The daughter of Lavrov and his son-in-law are under Western sanctions.

Activists gathered in the vicinity of the Kvareli Lake hotel and threw eggs at minibuses leaving the hotel. "There is no place for Russians in Georgia," they shouted, and demanded that Russian citizens leave the hotel area immediately.

The administration of the hotel claimed rumors that Lavrov's daughter was staying there were not true.

The situation between the police and protest participants became tense and led to the arrest of 16 persons, who were soon released. The court will discuss

their cases on June 19 in an administrative manner.

Among those 16 persons was the leader of the 'Droa' party, Elene Khoshtaria, who was in the pre-trial detention center for almost 24 hours.

They are charged with petty hooliganism and disobedience to the police, which are standard charges for arrests at protests and usually result in 2,000 GEL fines.

President of Georgia Salome Zurbashvili held a briefing and noted that she had received a promise from the Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia that "the family, the people who were going to organize the wedding, have left Georgia and the wedding will not take place."

### OPPOSITION REACTION

"The Russian terrorist regime failed to formalize a marriage in Georgia and with Georgia today," Nika Melia, a member of the National Movement, wrote on social media.

"Lavrov's sanctioned family has left Georgia! The Russian terrorist state could not formalize a marriage in Georgia and with Georgia today! However, until we do defeat the cause of the Russification of the country, we will have to fight their

symptoms every day and everywhere!

"We will fight and celebrate the implementation of Georgia's historic European choice!" Melia said.

"Irakli Garibashvili and the Russian party like to talk about Georgian traditions, yet today they defend Putin, Lavrov, the people who are occupying Georgia, who killed Antsukhelidze, Otkhozoria, who killed many heroes, who killed our parents, tortured children - they are defending their family members," stated the chairman of National Movement, Levan Khabeishvili. "These people are zonders in police uniform, because no decent policeman can protect Lavrov's sanctioned daughter. I repeat again, in which traditional Georgian family is there a Georgian toast where they mention Putin and Lavrov?"

### THE RULING PARTY'S REACTION

"A sanction should not apply to a family member- this approach is contrary to human rights standards," Georgian Dream Chairman Irakli Kobakhidze told reporters, responding to the visit of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's family members to Georgia, and noting that Georgia is guided by the law on occupation and if said law was not violated, the customs service had no reason not to allow specific persons into Georgia.

"It should be said by what criteria the state has regarding the entry of specific people into the country. Georgia is not part of the sanctions, we have not imposed sanctions on the Russian Federation, and the reasons for this have been explained more than once. There is a law on occupation, the main criterion is whether or not there is a violation of the law on occupation. In this case, if the law on occupation was not violated, of course, the customs service had no reason to prevent specific persons from entering Georgia. The relevant agencies will take care of the rest, but you are also advised to be guided from beginning to end by



Georgian Dream Chairman Irakli Kobakhidze. Image source: netgazeti.ge

the occupation law, which is the main guiding principle for each agency.

"Regarding the sanctioning of persons, I would like to clarify two things - first, we have not joined the sanctions, and this includes personal sanctions, that is, we do not impose sanctions on the Russian Federation. Second, even theoretically, if we consider personal sanctioning of someone for something, when we are talking about Georgia, a legal state, this applies only to those people who have directly committed a criminal act. A sanction should not apply to a family member. Such an approach is contrary to human rights standards. I am a human rights specialist, I studied this field in Germany, and I can tell you directly, boldly, that sanctioning a family member is grossly against human rights standards and this is a very mild assessment," said Kobakhidze.

He also responded to the protest and noted that "the so-called protest has only one goal - escalation, creating unrest in the country, organizing provocations, and the final goal is a second front [in the Ukrainian war]."





Kobakhidze urged the population to carefully observe the events and make a correct assessment.


"I want to talk about the morality of the leader of yesterday's protest, Elena Khoshtaria. If there is anything sanctioned by the West in Russia, it is first of all the state and the budget itself, and this person, Elena Khoshtaria, who seems to be agitated by someone coming to Georgia, receives millions of Russian Rubles from this sanctioned budget. This is their moral face. I would also like to remind you that three years after the occupation of 20% of our country, after Saakashvili handed over two of our historical regions to the Russian Federation with his adventurous actions, and because of this occupation, 500 Georgians died and 30 thousand people became IDPs due to Russian military aggression, Saakashvili personally visited Mikhailkov, who is distinguished by his active participation in the propaganda of the Russian government. This is their moral face. Today, I can directly tell you that the so-called protest that we saw yesterday has only one goal - escalation, creating unrest in the country, organizing provocations and the ultimate goal is the second front. I would like to call on the public to properly observe these events and give a correct assessment," Kobakhidze said.

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# The Occupied Tskhinvali Region: Gagloyev's First Year

BY MAMUKA KOMAKHIA,  
ANALYST, FOR GFSIS

In May 2022, as a result of the illegitimate presidential elections in the occupied Tskhinvali region, Alan Gagloyev was elected as the new de facto president. Gagloyev has devoted the first year of his "presidency" to the fight against his predecessor, and we are set for a repeat this year. This article summarizes the first year of Gagloyev's "presidency."

## HIS COMING TO "POWER"

Alan Gagloyev, the leader of the Nykhas Political Party and a former security officer, defeated the incumbent de facto President, Anatoly Bibilov, in the second round of the illegitimate elections. On April 10, 2022, in the first round, Gagloyev received 36.9% of the vote and Bibilov - 33.5%. In the second round, which was held on May 8, Gagloyev secured 56.09% of the vote while Bibilov received 40.90%. Gagloyev's victory was largely ensured by protest voters unifying under the opposition wing.

Bibilov's failure was influenced by several important events, which undermined his political reputation in the local community. The first is the "Jabiev case," a black spot in Bibilov's tenure. In August 2020, Jabiev, who was arrested for allegedly attempting to assassinate the then de facto Minister of Internal Affairs of the Tskhinvali region, Igor Naniev, died as a result of violence by law enforcement officials. Jabiev's death incited a long protest from the local population and a political crisis.

Bibilov's reputation was also damaged by the so-called Chorchana-Tselneli crisis, which was caused by the deployment of a Georgian police checkpoint near the occupation line in August 2019. Bibilov was often accused of corruption - according to his opponents, Russian-allocated funds were not properly spent.

Factors that contributed to Bibilov's defeat may well become a challenge for Gagloyev. If he is unable to deal with such challenges in a timely manner, the defeated Bibilov will use Gagloyev's mistakes for political revenge. As such, this year may be a critical one for Gagloyev.

## THE GAGLOYEV-BIBILOV FIGHT

The first year of Gagloyev's rule took place against the background of both direct and indirect conflict between him and Bibilov. In this regard, several main issues can be highlighted, namely:

### Referendum Cancellation

The first thing Gagloyev did was to

cancel the referendum on the unification of "South Ossetia" with Russia. The referendum was part of Bibilov's pre-election campaign, one which the Kremlin did not support. Moscow welcomed Gagloyev's decision and accused Bibilov of using the referendum issue for political gain. Bibilov was defeated in this battle, and it became clear that the referendum was not in the interests of the Kremlin at this stage.

### The Jabiev Case

According to locals, the culprits in this case have yet to be punished and the case is being delayed, which may raise suspicions against Gagloyev that he, like Bibilov, does not intend to punish the perpetrators. Gagloyev also understands the risks here, and that is why the "General Prosecutor's Office" resumed the investigation in October 2022 and completed the preliminary investigation in March 2023. After electing Gagloyev as "president," all those militiamen who were connected with Jabiev's case were arrested. A criminal case was initiated against the former de facto Minister of Internal Affairs, Igor Naniev (who Jabiev was accused of attempting to assault), for exceeding his official powers. To insure himself, Gagloyev said that "the case is ready to be submitted to the court, however, the suspects are delaying this because they cannot timely familiarize themselves with the case materials." Gagloyev faces a dilemma here, as, while the locals demand execution of the law, the punishment of the Jabiev case suspects, in this interconnected society where everyone is a relative or friend, is guaranteed to upset the other side.

### The Donbas Front

Bibilov has also opened a front against Gagloyev in the Russian-occupied Donbas, where he spends most of his time and broadcasts propaganda videos dressed in military uniform. Bibilov wants to show that Gagloyev does not sufficiently support Russia's military aggression and that he refrains from openly backing Moscow's policy. As a counterweight to Bibilov, Gagloyev periodically turns up in Donbas or sends humanitarian aid. Nevertheless, Bibilov has the advantage of being on the front line.

### The Chorchana-Tselneli Crisis

On February 2, 2023, Gagloyev visited a section of the occupation line near the village of Tselneli and congratulated the "border guards" on their professional day. The so-called Chorchana-Tselneli crisis is connected with Bibilov's name, seeing him blamed that, due to his weakness, the Georgian side opened a police

checkpoint in the vicinity of Tselneli, thus posing danger to the Ossetian population. Gagloyev's visit and periodic statements on this issue should be considered in the context of his political struggle with Bibilov, the purpose of which is to present Bibilov as a political leader during whose "presidency" Tskhinvali ceded "Ossetian lands."

### Corruption

After electing Gagloyev as "president," projects implemented during Bibilov's tenure were thoroughly studied. The so-called General Prosecutor's Office initiated a case against the heads of several "state-owned enterprises," who are accused of exceeding their official power or for unjustified expenditure of funds. Improper spending of Russian money was one of the reasons for dissatisfaction with Bibilov in Moscow.

Gagloyev also receives Russian funding. The "budget" of the region is practically fully financed by Russia. Under the 2023-2025 investment program, Tskhinvali will receive an additional RUB 3.5 billion. If Gagloyev wants to gain the Kremlin's trust, which will serve him well in the domestic political struggle, he must prove to Russian officials that he can spend Russian money better than Bibilov.

### "Government" Formation

It took too long for Gagloyev to form a new de facto government, which can be explained by the scarcity of personnel resources and the pre-election commitments made to the opposition groups. It also took him a while to change the "ministers" of Bibilov's time. Gagloyev even managed to appoint and dismiss some of them. The biggest change during Gagloyev's almost one-year term of "presidency" came in April 2023, when he appointed a new "deputy prime minister," "ministers" of internal affairs, education, finance and construction, and a "Mayor" of Tskhinvali.

The changes were preceded by an inspection by the Russian Federal Treasury of the Tskhinvali region, which prepared a total of 87 notes, the largest number of which refers to the payment of salaries to those employees who work in several agencies. It is an established practice in the region that people are employed in several public agencies simultaneously so as to earn a higher salary. These gave Bibilov the opportunity to employ his political supporters. The Kremlin demands the elimination of such practices.

## LONG-AWAITED MEETING WITH PUTIN

Gagloyev was unable to secure a meet-

ing with Russian President Vladimir Putin for a long time, for which his opponents criticized him. Gagloyev's visits to Moscow were limited to meetings with Russian officials (Deputy Chief of Staff of the Russian President, Dmitry Kozak, Deputy Secretary of the Security Council, Rashid Nurgaliev), who supervise the occupied regions of Georgia, which raised suspicion that the Kremlin was not taking him seriously. The long-awaited meeting was finally held. Gagloyev was supposed to meet with Putin on February 22, 2023, however, reportedly, the de facto president was Covid positive and the meeting was instead held on March 16. Although no new or important decisions were reached during the meeting, the (albeit delayed) audience with Putin was still a big relief for Gagloyev, as it will give him a certain advantage in the internal political struggle in the de facto republic.

## WHAT HAS CHANGED IN RELATIONS WITH THE GEORGIAN SIDE?

In the first year of Gagloyev's "presidency," compared to the previous years, small positive changes were observed in relations with the Georgian side, which is mostly manifested in the restoration and relative simplification of movement along the occupation line.

### Restoration and Simplification of Movement

Gagloyev gave a pre-election promise to ethnic Georgian residents of the occupied Akhgori municipality to open the so-called border with the rest of Georgia, which had been closed since the "Chorchana-Tselneli" crisis. In this regard, Gagloyev fulfilled his promise and, as per an August 18, 2022 decision of the de facto Security Council, the population of the occupied Akhgori and Java districts were allowed to move to the territory controlled by the Georgian authorities through the so-called crossing checkpoints of Odzisi-Mosabrundi and Perevi-Kardzmani from the 20th to 30th each month. Since August of last year, the movement has been going smoothly, and about 2,500-3,000 people enjoy this right every month.

In addition, as per a decision of April 2023, obtaining "passes" to cross the so-called border will be eased. As a result, it will be possible to submit an application to cross the "border" in the Java and Akhgori "administrations." Previously, the mentioned application was only submittable at the so-called State Security Committee of the de facto republic. Residents of the Ksani Gorge and Sinaguri-Kardzmani zone will also be allowed

to obtain passes to cross the occupation line in the Akhgori and Java administrations.

While crossing the occupation line, residents of the Akhgori and Java districts can carry hand luggage without restrictions, including products which are subject to sanctions in Russia. The decision also made it easier for the population of the de facto republic to receive various social and health services available on the territory controlled by the central government of Georgia.

The opening of the so-called crossing checkpoints, in addition to being Gagloyev's pre-election promise, may also be Moscow's decision; in so doing, showing its "appreciation" of the position of the central government of Georgia in refusing the imposition of sanctions against Russia and opening of a "second front." Gagloyev's refusal to hold a referendum may be viewed in the same context. These two issues may be a message from Moscow to the central government of Georgia that the Kremlin "appreciates" the official position of Tbilisi on the issue of the Russian military aggression in Ukraine.

### Mearakishvili's Case

A criminal prosecution against Tamar Mearakishvili, a civil activist living in occupied Akhgori, was terminated. The so-called Prosecutor's Office of Tskhinvali closed the case due to the absence of corpus delicti in the act. The case was initiated on August 16, 2017. Mearakishvili was a sharp critic of the de facto government, especially of Bibilov, and her "legal" prosecution was aimed at intimidating and silencing her.

### Ergneti Meetings

During Gagloyev's tenure, the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) meetings in Ergneti continued without interruption. Despite the fact that during the meetings the parties make complaints to each other, a positive agenda has emerged of late: The parties agreed on cooperation during the irrigation season.

## THE CHALLENGE GAGLOYEV WILL FACE

This year, Gagloyev's main challenge will be the illegitimate parliamentary elections scheduled for 2024. Political groups have already started preparation for the elections. In recent months, several new political parties have been established and slow political regrouping is evolving. Bibilov is preparing for revenge, hoping that military success in Donbas and Gagloyev's mistakes will aid him in returning as the main political force in the occupied region.

# Xenophobia or Righteous Indignation? Georgia's Russian Problem

Continued from page 1

All of this tension came to a head when, by way of an investigation by Georgian journalists, it was uncovered that some of Russia's elite were caught in the country. Despite being subject to sanctions from the West, Georgian authorities seem to have made an exception for family and friends of the Lavrov family. Daughter of Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, along with others, were allowed to enter the country and remain undetected.

However, rather than demand their expulsion, the ruling party defended them with legions of the nation's law enforcement and lambasted the protestors. 16 of their number were arrested, but what stuck observers the most was the behavior of the Ministry of Internal Affairs following the arrests. The arrestees were denied visitation by their legal counsel or by human rights officials.

Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili ensured that the sanctioned individuals and their party had left the country, and additionally demanded that the MIA redouble its efforts to ensure sanctioned individuals were not entering the country. While lauded by many, there remained those that stood opposed to developing relations with the nation's



Police establish a defensive line along the road leading to the Kvareli Hotel where the Lavrov family members were staying. Photo by Giorgi Aladashvili/ RFE/RE

northern neighbor. For the ruling party and its fervent supporters, it is xenophobic, an economic burden, and to some even racist.

Additionally, according to Georgian Dream chairman Irakli Kobakhidze, it is a violation of human rights to sanction one's family members, despite overt evidence that multiple members of the Lavrov family in Georgia were intimately involved in Russia's pro-war economic machine. "A family member cannot be sanctioned, this approach is grossly contrary to human rights standards," he

claimed. "I am a human rights specialist, I studied this field in Germany. Sanctioning a family member directly contradicts human rights standards."

In his standard argumentative tone, he continued to say that sanctioning these people and disrupting a wedding was not congruent to the nation's values. While it's unclear what version of human rights Kobakhidze is referring to in his statements, the European Union, along with multiple other nations, have uniformly agreed that these individuals deserve no harbor. To push against that

is to side with the Kremlin, simply put.

Others from around the Georgian Dream's proverbial fan club joined in to not only laud the efforts of the government to kowtow to the Kremlin, but also lash out against the opposition. One notable foreign figure, who chairs one of the country's business associations, spread pictures of protestors with a caption calling them "racists in the rain". This individual continued, even labeling a sitting MP as a racist.

The justification for this individual's behavior, as stated by them directly, was that Georgia somehow needs the tourism from Russia to survive. Additionally, the person admits that "I have some challenges in distinguishing between racism, xenophobia and to some extent issues around skin color. My position is that hating people simply because of where they were born, in this case Russia, is bad and sometimes leads to terrible actions."

This quote is a microcosm of the misunderstanding of what drives Georgians, among others, to resist the Kremlin. While many may see the opposition to the resumption of flights with Russia, the visitation of sanctioned individuals, and increasing economic dependence as the aforementioned racism xenophobia, this is far from the truth.

A divorce with Russia is not based on targeting the average Russian citizen, and certainly not because of their Slavic race or foreign status in Georgia. This is rooted in centuries of mistreatment by the Kremlin, with the complicit support of its people and at the tip of the bayonet of its military. Georgians today still remember the atrocities in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Gori that were all at the hands of the Russian state.

For the nation to move closer to Europe, it must move farther away or even disconnect from Russia entirely. This has been true largely for a decade, but is even more confirmed following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The prospects of community with the Russian state are, for the foreseeable future, not plausible.

There is no more middle ground, and there are no more states able to play both sides for some benefit. Dollars and Euros from tourism, trade, investment, and aid can come from a myriad of others in the West. The people's righteous indignation is more than justified in its ire of the direction the government seems to desire. Ukrainian Foreign Ministry spokesman Oleg Nikolenko framed this by stating, "in 2008, Russian planes arrived in Georgia to bomb civilians. Now they are planning to bomb the European future of Georgians."

# Analyst Vladimir Socor on What's Driving the Georgian Government

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE FOR RFE/RL

Romanian-born US citizen Vladimir Socor is a Senior Fellow of the Washington-based Jamestown Foundation and its flagship publication, Eurasia Daily Monitor. He is also an internationally recognized expert on the former Soviet-ruled countries in Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia, covering Russian and Western policies, focusing on energy, regional security issues, Russian foreign affairs, secessionist conflicts, and NATO policies and programs. Radio Free Europe's Georgian Service sat down with him to discuss current issues, starting with Putin's decision to cancel the visa regime for Georgia, and restore flights.

"It is one way for the Kremlin to drive a wedge between Georgia and the European Union, to pull Georgia into some kind of integration arrangement with Russia, and to offer the Georgian nation what amounts to a bribe: 'We, Russians, are going to send you lots of tourists, and tourists are going to spend money in Georgia, so you don't really need the European Union,'" Socor claims. "I think this is basically a message. There will probably be a flood of Russian tourists coming to Georgia, increasing even more the number of citizens of Russia who are in one way or another present on the territory of Georgia. Their number is already very high for a small country like Georgia. Naturally, the FSB is going to put its agents among these 'refugees.' Some will even look like refugees, while others will look like businessmen. With

the influx of such Russians, there will always be corruption coming into Georgia, many of them, not all of them, but many of them, will engage in illegal business, in contraband. There will be more opportunities for government circles in Georgia to evade European sanctions against Russia. So none of this leads to good results."

## WHERE DO WE GO FROM THERE? HOW REALISTIC IS IT TO EXPECT THE RESTORATION OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS?

Proper restoration of diplomatic relations would imply that the Georgian government has accepted the loss of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. When Russia occupied officially and openly Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008, that was the reason Georgia broke off diplomatic relations. To restore diplomatic relations means Georgia has reconciled to what happened in 2008. Forget about it. Let's go to a new chapter. Let's "be friendly with the Kremlin" again.

## WHEN THE CHAIRMAN OF THE RULING PARTY CALLS THE QUESTION AS TO WHETHER RUSSIA IS AN ENEMY "SPECULATIVE", WHAT CONCLUSIONS CAN BE DRAWN?

I think he was simply trying to avoid answering the question. And I can see why: first, because he realizes that a great majority of the people of Georgia want to be part of the West. A Georgian politician, including the leaders of Georgian Dream, must take that into account. On the other hand, Georgian Dream wants to stay in power indefinitely. And it can only do so with the cooperation of Rus-

sia. So they cannot afford to upset Russia.

## THE UKRAINE WAR HAS BROUGHT ABOUT A SPECIAL CHALLENGE FOR GEORGIA - SUDDENLY, EVERYONE IS FORCED TO PICK SIDES. CAN GEORGIA JUGGLE EU/NATO AMBITIONS ON ONE HAND AND BE PRAISED BY MARGARITA SIMONYAN ON THE OTHER?

It's impossible, of course. We know this already, from the example of Ukraine until 2014, and from the example of Moldova until two years ago. Moldova is an especially instructive case, as, for almost 30 years, its governments took the position that they must be friendly with everybody; not take sides, not play geopolitical games, believing that they needed Russia and the Russian market; needed Russia to resolve the conflict in Transnistria. Of course, it all came to nothing. Russia delivered nothing. Russia will never resolve the Transnistrian conflict because Russia wants to be present in Transnistria permanently. But Moldova lived with these delusions for almost 30 years until the pro-European government and parliament were elected two years ago, and now Moldova has the candidate status for membership in the European Union.

## GIVEN THE EXISTENTIAL THREAT THAT GEORGIA IS FACING FROM RUSSIA ON A DAILY BASIS, IS THERE A CHANCE THAT, IN THE END, WE'LL END UP MARVELING AT THE WISDOM OF THE GEORGIAN STATESMEN WHO SO PRAGMATICALLY NAVIGATED



Vladimir Socor

## THESE DANGEROUS WATERS?

Georgia has a chance that it never has since the late 18th century - to be free of Russia. Not since the time of King Erekle II, for more than 200 years, has Georgia had such a chance. But Georgia is backsliding now, because the current government does not have a clear understanding of not only what Georgia's national interests are, but what national interest is, in general. This government is guided by its own interest to stay in power, which is not the national interest. The present government is only interested in maintaining its own power and wants to do that with the acceptance of Russia. They want to play Russia's game in order not to be bothered by Russia. That is why, for example, the current government is not lobbying NATO for a Membership Action Plan, or for a clearer process to join NATO. The NATO Summit is coming up, and the current government has made zero lobby for Georgia's interest in NATO, and not for the first time. They don't want to bother Russia. They want to demonstrate to Russia that Georgia is not knocking at NATO's door.

## DURING YOUR SPEECH, YOU DECLARED THAT RUSSIA'S "POLICY OF CONQUEST" TOWARDS ITS NEIGHBORS IS HISTORICAL, IT HASN'T CHANGED, AND ISN'T SUBJECT TO CHANGE. WHAT PLACE DOES GEORGIA HAVE IN PUTIN'S "ETERNAL RUSSIA" AS YOU CALL IT?

At present, Russia is not threatening Georgia with an invasion. It cannot do

so, due to the war in Ukraine, but Russia does not need to invade Georgia again. Russia is perfectly satisfied with what the Georgian government is doing now. That is, not making efforts to join the European Union and NATO.

It's happy to have Georgia in a gray zone. Russia does not want to reconstitute the Soviet Union, it does not want to incorporate Georgia as a territory into Greater Russia: Russia wants to keep Georgia in a gray zone between it and the West; a gray zone which is poor, corrupt, unsafe in terms of governance, vulnerable to Russian threats. Russia wants to become a stakeholder in Georgia's government. That situation suits Russia perfectly. And Russia wants Georgia to be militarily defenseless, disarmed. Right now, Georgia has no capacity to defend itself. That's why the government may say that if it doesn't play along, satisfy Russia, Russia might resort to military threats. Well, as long as Georgia has no air defense, no artillery, no armor or combat helicopters, it will have a very limited capacity for Homeland Defense. So, practically, since 2008, Georgia has become a military vacuum. That, of course, invites pressures and threats. And the government is not unhappy with this; the government might even be happy with this, because it can always argue "we are too weak or too vulnerable, and we must never make Russia angry." The government doesn't really want Georgia to be capable of defending itself. It uses the country's "vulnerability" in order to justify its own actions, among which is not seeking European integration.

# Could We Eat the Cake and Have It?

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

A million-dollar question, isn't it? I'm talking here about the current Georgian government's classically balanced policy of neutrality, which unequivocally purports a fruitful low-key cooperation with both West and North for the sake of peace and economic growth of the country. We are finally where we always wanted to be after the breakup of the Evil Empire. Had we managed to handle the subtle issues of Georgia's national freedom and independence in a more astute fashion, Sakartvelo would have been way more advanced and prosperous a nation than it is now, but as the saying has it, better late than never.

The only bad thing happening right now is an extensive chasm within the nation concerning the vector of its prospective development - Western or Russian. Nobody says that the Russian vector is favorable, and therefore acceptable, but the opposition wants to prove that the government's only viable view of the future is remarriage with Russia, while the current administration of the country keeps trying to explain that Georgia's long-opted for and still extant vector of development is explicitly Western, only slightly mixed with the justifiable passiveness of Georgia to Russia when it comes to Russian-Georgian cooperation on certain issues that might keep us from being involved in new conflicts and quarrels with a nation that once inflicted a lot of pain on Georgia, and still entertains

the latent likelihood to hurt us all over again if we make the same miscalculated steps.

The differences between the conflicting sides prevail also on the issue of the war in Ukraine. The nature of expectations on the subject is widely gapped between them, and their future vitality thoroughly depends on the finale of that war. Meanwhile, most of the Western experts maintain that the longer the clash is procrastinated, the worse the inflicted soreness for Russia, for Ukraine and for the rest of the world, will be, including Sakartvelo, even if it remains impartial in the process.

Specialists insist that several models for the culmination of the war can be predicted at this moment in time: using historical logic, there could be a ceasefire any time soon, which will provide a timeout to better consider the continuation of the dire scenario. A peace deal is not excluded because, as they say, every war in the past has ended in some kind of deal that gives the warring sides a chance to rehabilitate themselves. Russia's backing away is also thought to be a possibility, although a very flimsy one, in which case the conflict might freeze forever, and Georgia's neutral stance will probably be confirmed justifiable. Ukraine's victory is firmly on Western minds, with the Georgian political opposition brandishing the key phrase of the day: 'We told you so'. Further expansion of the war is also a possibility on the table, as is Western physical intervention and the consequent nuclear collision, an option hanging over Mankind like the Sword of Damocles. At the same time, there prevails

the overall hope that it will never occur to the Western military alliance that attacking Russia might be a healthy decision on its part. The truce, if any, is going to be very complicated to achieve, hence the frozen conflict is looming more than any other above-mentioned possibility as a finale.

This kind of logic makes Georgia's current stance wise enough, helping it to tolerate the painful thumps between the anvil and the hammer, as it tries very hard to eat the cake and still have it. The furious opposition would say you can't have it both ways, but our everyday peaceful life persistently proves that bad peace is much better than any good war, especially seeing as expert opinions suggest the probability of a quick end to hostilities is quite far-flung. The war rages on, and its end is not even slightly looming on the horizon. And the situation has its own iron logic: how can you possibly tell the disastrously beleaguered nation to stop fighting for its own land and survival? How can we expect the West to actually interfere when the world is so heavily packed with nukes? How can one tell Russia to sit down at the negotiating table when the nation's face is already so marred and distorted? There is too much at stake for Russia, among which is national pride and the desire to right recent historical wrongs. This is a tragic cul-de-sac the world has never seen before, and I am not surprised that Sakartvelo wants to walk on the edge of the sword surreptitiously and without any bloodshed. Living with a war that might drag on forever, our little Georgia has become allergic to taking sides, and this is very, very understandable.

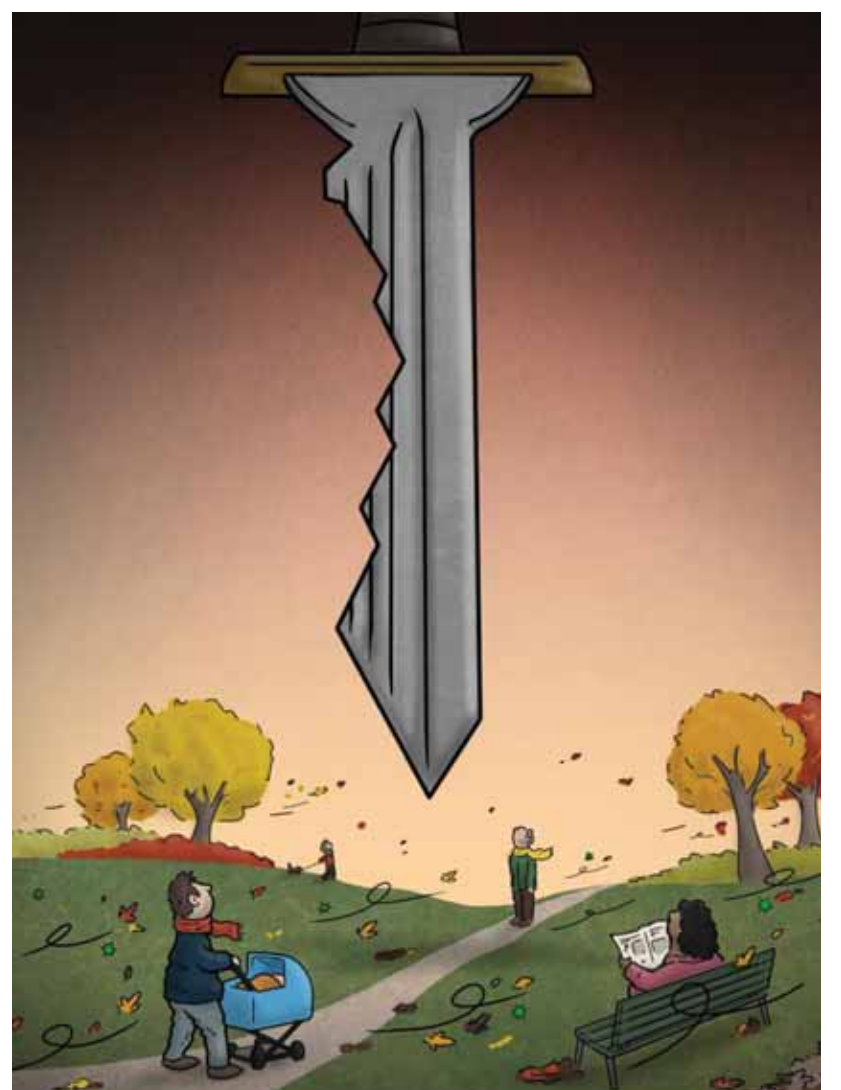


Image by Tjeerd Royaards

# Honey Production Sector in Georgia

## Sector Snapshots

### Issue 9

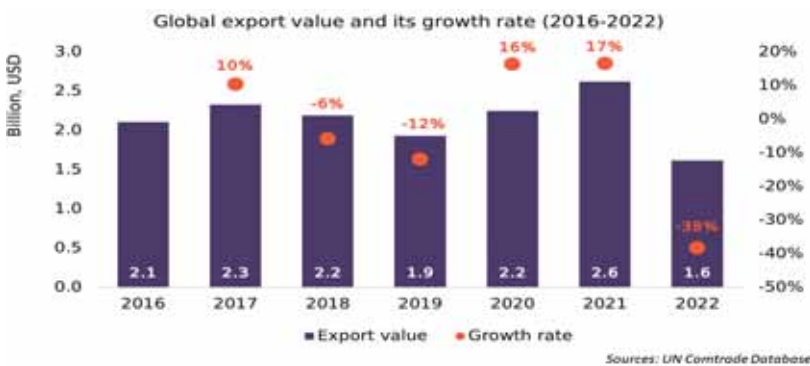
May 2023



The global honey market is expected to grow from \$8.53 billion in 2022 to \$12.69 billion by 2029. The demand for honey is being driven by consumers' growing preference for natural and organic sweeteners. Beekeeping in Georgia has a long history. Georgia is known as the land of the oldest honey specimen discovered, dating back to 4300 BC, making Georgian honey about 2,000 years older than the honey found in Egypt, which was previously considered the oldest. Natural conditions and biodiversity in Georgia contribute to the great potential of the honey production sector in Georgia.

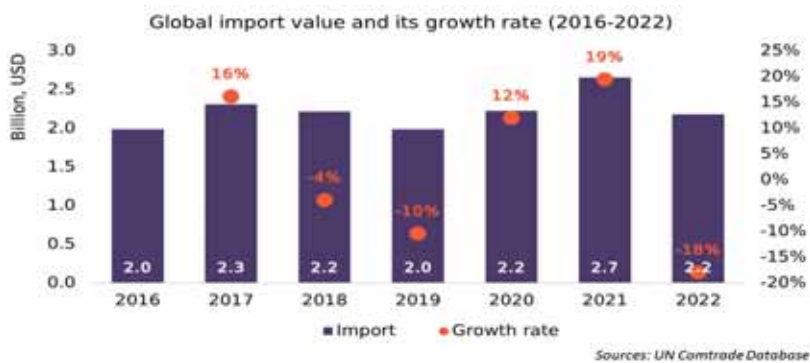
Russia had the lowest average export price (\$0.75/kg), while for the EU the average export price was equal to \$5.5/kg.

Recent developments in the honey production sector in Georgia, and expectations for the near future, reveal its immense potential. To ensure this is fulfilled, tackling existing challenges and weaknesses, such as skills gaps, infrastructural issues, and lack of cooperation, and seizing opportunities such as product diversification, bio-certification, and increasing the productivity of honeybee hives, can all help to ensure the sustainable economic development of the sector.



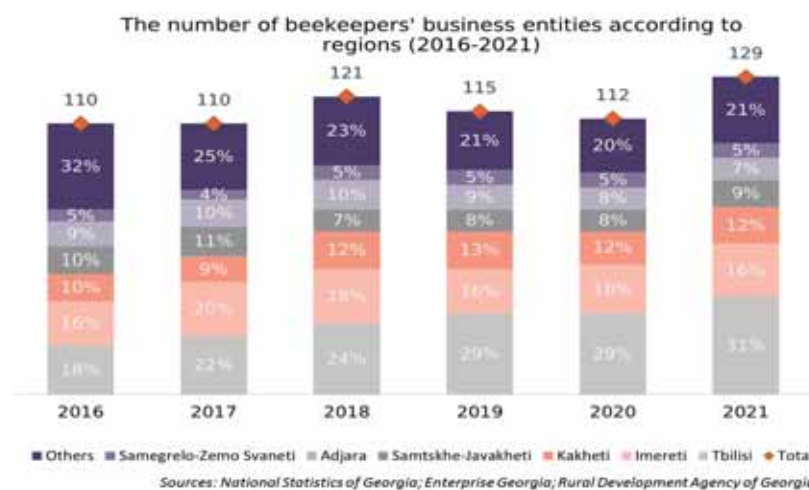
According to the Georgian Beekeepers Union, there are an estimated 14,000 operating in Georgia. Almost all production of honey comes from family holdings, while agricultural enterprises on average cover just 6% of total production. Throughout the 2016-2021 period, the top honey-producing regions in Georgia were Imereti, Kakheti, and Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, followed by Adjara. Between 2016 and 2020, the annual average growth rate of honey production was 4% in Georgia, while the average annual production over the same period was equal to 2,400 tons. In 2021, honey production showed a significant decline of 16.7% compared to the previous year, which was caused by the spread of honeybee mites. Despite that, it must be noted that the development of the honey production sector in Georgia still gave momentum to increasing exports to EU countries in 2021. The situation was further improved in 2022 as the issue of mites was suitably addressed, and honey

production subsequently recovered. In 2022, compared to 2021, the export value of Georgian honey increased by 79% and the export volume by 49%, which indicates that the price of exported honey increased significantly. This could be attributed to the improvement of honey quality in the country and the popularization of Georgian honey in international markets, especially the EU. Among all countries, France had the highest share in the export value of Georgian honey during the period of 2016-2022, at 32%, with Bulgaria - second at 19%, and Norway third at 4%. Throughout 2016-2022, among the leading countries to which Georgia exported honey, declining trend was observed in imports, where the value declined by 18% and the volume dropped by 22% compared to 2021. This decline in the trade of honey in 2022 could be explained by supply chain deteriorations due to Russia's war in Ukraine, as the latter is one of the world's biggest exporters of natural honey. Notably, based on the latest statistics, the world's biggest exporters by value in 2022 were New Zealand (17%), followed by Germany, Ukraine, and Brazil (each amounting to 9% of total exports). Only in 2022, those top countries exported honey worth \$698.2 million. In comparison, exports from Georgia amount



to only 0.07% of the total export value, while by volume it amounts to 0.01% of total exports, indicating the potential positioning of Georgian exported honey as high quality, rather than high quantity product. Meanwhile, in 2022, the biggest importers were the USA (36%) and Germany (14%), followed by Japan (8%) and the United Kingdom (6%). Those countries together imported honey worth \$1.4 billion in 2022.

to 2,400 tons. In 2021, honey production showed a significant decline of 16.7%, which was caused by the spread of Varroidea (a new species of mites), and their development of immunity against existing drugs. By the spring of 2021, because of the large-scale elimination of bees, the sector had suffered a year-on-year loss of approximately GEL 5 million. This issue was consequently addressed through a combination of mechanisms deployed by public and private entities, such as developing the skills of beekeepers, identification of infected beehives, laboratory analyses, and the introduction of new methods to repel honeybee mites. Between 2016 and 2021, the top honey-producing regions in Georgia were



INTRODUCTION TO GEORGIAN HONEY PRODUCTION SECTOR  
Georgian forests' biodiversity of flora (including the existence of endemic plants), several subtropical climate zones, and being home to of a unique breed of Caucasian grey mountain honeybee all make for ideal conditions and great potential for the production of mono-floral and poly-floral honey. Furthermore, the variety of honey in Georgia is also diverse, with the following eight types all produced there: Chestnut, Alpine, Blossom, Acacia, Linden, Solidago, Matrobela (toxic honey), and Jara wild honey.

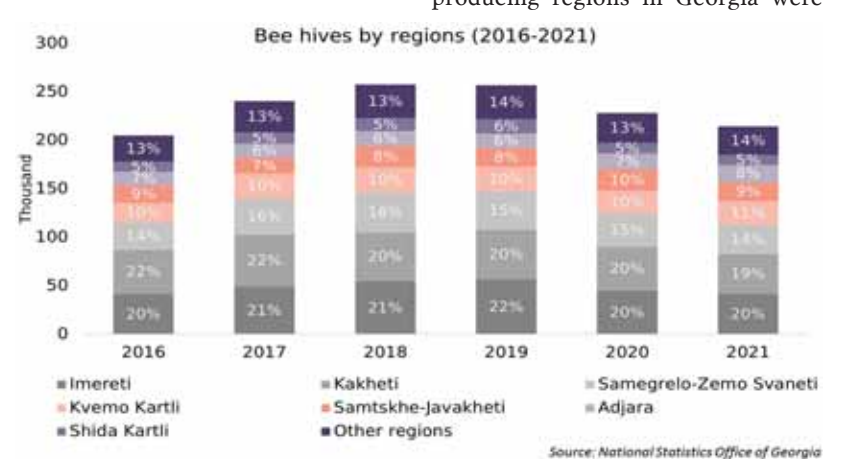
### INTRODUCTION TO GEORGIAN HONEY PRODUCTION SECTOR

The number of beekeeping business entities on average increased by 3.5% yearly throughout the 2016-2021 period. Most of the business entities are registered in Tbilisi, Imereti, Kakheti, and Samtskhe-Javakheti regions. Notably, beekeepers are often registered as cooperatives, where several individual beekeepers are united under one business entity. According to the latest statistics from the Business Register of Georgia, currently, 115 business entities are operating under the beekeeping sector, of which 11 are registered as cooperatives, 73 are registered as individual enterprises, 30 are LLCs, and one is a non-profit (non-commercial) legal entity (Georgian Beekeepers Union). It is worth noting, that many beekeepers or beekeeping entities operate without official registration, and according to the Georgian Beekeepers Union, there are an estimated 14,000 beekeepers operating in Georgia.

The beekeeping sector is also supported by the Government of Georgia. Throughout the 2014-2022 period, beekeepers have received some financial support from government entities, namely Enterprise Georgia (EG) and the Rural Development Agency (RDA). Under EG's micro credit program, 29 businesses operating in Guria, Mtskheta-Mtianeti, and Kakheti received a total of GEL 232,100. Meanwhile, the RDA financing to the sector amounted to GEL 730,000 and benefited 40 businesses, mainly from Imereti, Kakheti, Samtskhe-Javakheti, and Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti regions.

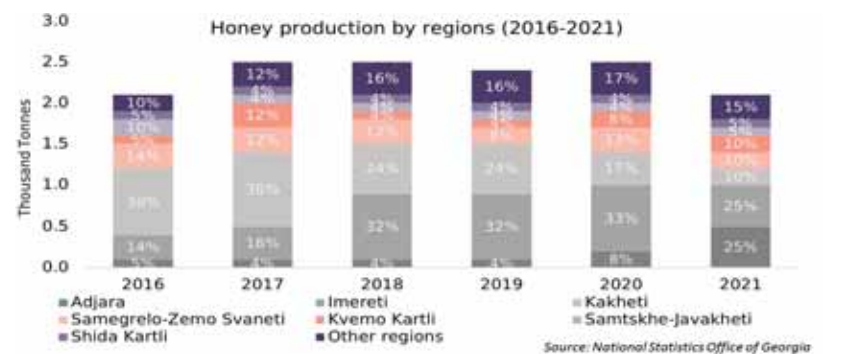
### HONEY PRODUCTION IN GEORGIA

According to the National Statistics Office of Georgia, almost all production



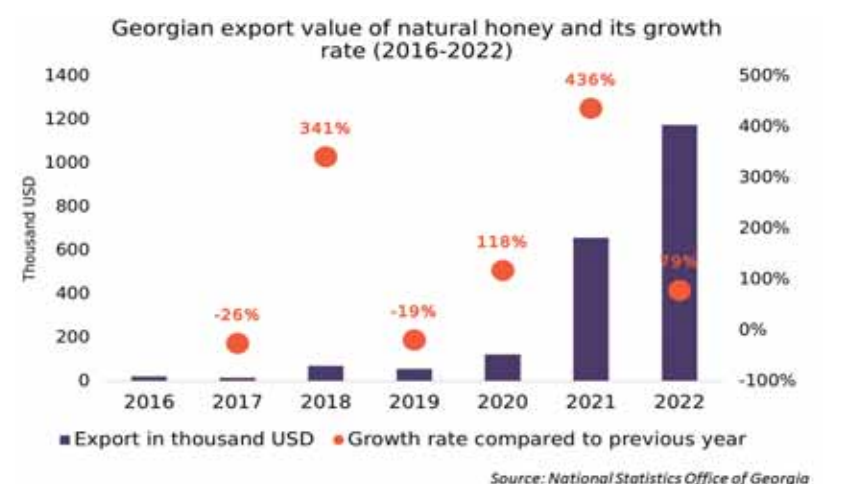
of honey comes from family holdings, as between 2016 and 2022, agricultural enterprises on average covered just 6%

Imereti, Kakheti, and Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti. However, the share of Kakheti in total honey production has been



of total production. Between 2016 and 2021, the number of beehives on average increased by 1.9% annually. Imereti and Kakheti were the leading regions in terms of the number of beehives in this period, followed by Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, Kvemo Kartli, and Samtskhe-Javakheti.

declining since 2018, while the share of Imereti was increasing up until 2021. Meanwhile, in 2021, Adjara became one of the top three honey-producing regions.



an increase in the productivity of beehives. In addition, throughout the 2016-2020 period, the annual average growth rate of honey production was 4%, while the average annual production was equal

pared to 2021, the export value increased by 79% and the export volume rose by 49%, which indicates that the price of exported honey has increased significantly.

Continued on page 7



Daniel Klein, lawyer and author

BY PARTNERS OF KLEIN & PANTSULAIA: DANIEL KLEIN & GIVI PANTSULAIA

Setting up a company is an exciting endeavor that requires careful consideration of various factors, including the business environment and ease of incorporation. Georgia has emerged as an attractive destination for entrepreneurs and investors due to its favorable business climate and streamlined pro-

cesses. Georgia's economy grew at a record rate in the past 12 months, making it one of the fastest growth rates in the world. Especially as concerns the IT sector, growth figures in this sector have spiked in recent years, coupled with an explosion of IT education programs. In addition to these two factors, there are several types of government incentive program to assist both foreign IT and non-IT companies invest in Georgia (more on this in our next column). In this article, we will explore the ease of setting up a company in Georgia, elaborate on different types of legal entities,

# Legal Insights with Klein Law: The Ease of Setting Up a Company in Georgia

and highlight the key advantages it offers to aspiring entrepreneurs, as well as for companies looking to establish a presence abroad.

## SIMPLE AND EFFICIENT REGISTRATION PROCESS

Georgia has implemented a simplified and efficient company registration process. Entrepreneurs and foreign corporations can establish a company in as little as one day, allowing for swift business initiation.

## ONE-STOP-SHOP SERVICE

Georgia's National Agency of Public Registry provides a convenient one-stop-shop service for company registration and opening a bank account, as three of the biggest banks have large branches on site. Entrepreneurs can save time and effort by accessing these services under one roof, streamlining the administrative tasks associated with starting a business.

## TRANSPARENT BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

Georgia has made significant strides in fostering a transparent and business-friendly environment. The country has implemented comprehensive reforms to combat corruption and promote accountability. The World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index consistently ranks Georgia among the top countries in terms of ease of doing business, highlighting its commitment to providing a transparent and reliable regulatory framework.

## LOW BUREAUCRATIC HURDLES AND MINIMUM CAPITAL REQUIREMENTS

Georgia has minimized bureaucratic hurdles and abolished minimum capital requirements for company formation; hence, zero capital is required for setting

up an LLC. Entrepreneurs and companies can start their businesses with minimal financial resources, allowing for greater flexibility and reduced financial barriers to entry. This approach encourages innovation and entrepreneurship, attracting both local and foreign investors. Moreover, winding down a company is also streamlined and easy compared to most countries.

## FAVORABLE TAXATION SYSTEM

Georgia boasts a favorable taxation system, which further enhances its attractiveness as a business destination. The country has a low corporate income tax rate of 15%, and a simplified tax code that minimizes complexities for businesses. Additionally, Georgia has signed numerous double taxation avoidance treaties, providing further incentives for international business ventures. Georgia's 18% VAT applies for invoicing only once revenues reach \$40K. This is a way to give very young companies an advantage over their competitors.

## DIFFERENT TYPES OF LEGAL ENTITIES

When setting up a company in Georgia, entrepreneurs have several options in terms of legal entities. The most common types include:

- Limited Liability Company (LLC): Offering limited liability protection and operational simplicity, an LLC requires a minimum of one shareholder and can engage in various industries.
- Joint Stock Company (JSC): Suitable for larger businesses, JSCs raise capital through public offerings or private placements. They require a minimum of two shareholders and have a complex organizational structure with supervisory and management boards.

## BRANCH OFFICE

Foreign companies can establish a branch

office in Georgia, serving as an extension of the parent company and subject to local laws and regulations.

## REPRESENTATIVE OFFICE

Similar to a branch office, a representative office focuses on non-commercial activities, such as market research and promotion, without engaging in profit-generating activities or entering commercial contracts.

## SOLE PROPRIETORSHIP

Operating as a sole proprietorship offers simplicity, but the business owner has unlimited liability for the company's debts and obligations.

Georgia has established itself as a very attractive destination for entrepreneurs and foreign companies establishing a local presence. With its simple and efficient registration process, one-stop-shop service, transparent business environment, low bureaucratic hurdles, favorable taxation system, and access to regional markets, Georgia provides a conducive ecosystem for business growth and innovation. Foreign corporations and aspiring entrepreneurs can take advantage of these benefits and choose from different legal entity options to boost their business.

Contact: [klein@kleinlawgroupgeorgia.com](mailto:klein@kleinlawgroupgeorgia.com)



# The Honey Production Sector in Georgia

Continued from page 6

cantly. This can be attributed to the improvement of honey quality in the country and the popularization of Georgian honey in international markets, especially in the EU. It must also be mentioned that the international demand for Georgian honey has risen markedly, resulting in honey stocks running out and Georgian exporters being unable to export until May 2023.

Export price, which is calculated as value divided by volume, fluctuated throughout the reporting period, peaking in 2019 at \$8.8/kg, while declining to \$4.6/kg in 2022. The high volatility here is explained by differences in the countries to which natural honey was traded in different years.

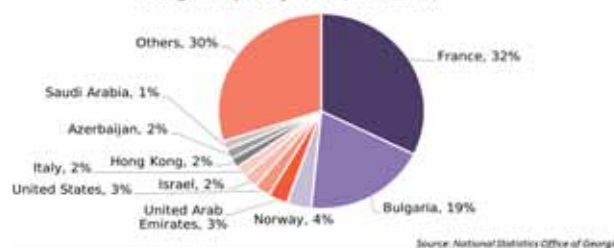
Trade in the EU has been increasing sharply and, compared to 2016, the export value has increased from \$100 to \$888,500, and the export volume went from 0.01

tons to 210.93 tons. Export value to EU countries increased by 75% and volume rose by 48% in 2022 compared to 2021. For CIS countries, value, as well as volume, declined by 68% and 93%. It is important to note here that the export value to EU countries was approximately 86 times greater than to CIS countries. Notably, The demand from EU countries is expected to increase further, especially for light-colored Acacia honey.

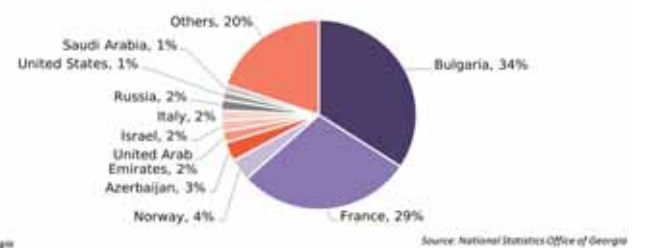
Since 2021, imports have been negligible compared to exports. Prior to that, in 2016, the import value represented 79% of the total trade value, and the import volume was 88% of the total trade volume. However, in the later years (2020-2022) the share of imports in total trade declined significantly. For instance, in 2022, the import value was 7% of the total trade value, and the import volume was 11%.

Due to the development of trade relations with the EU and the development

Georgian export by value (2016-2022)



Georgian export by volume (2016-2022)



of the Georgian honey sector towards the production of high-quality honey, the trade structure was modified significantly throughout the last few years. In particular, European countries were among the top exporting countries for 2016-2022, despite the active and high volume of trade occurring only in 2021 and 2022.

France had the highest share in terms of export value during the period of 2016-2022 (at 32%), with Bulgaria coming in second at 19% and Norway third at 4%. Notably, the majority of France's and Bulgaria's trade occurred in 2021-2022, while Norway's trade activity was only in 2022 during the observed period. Exports to France were recorded in 2019, 2021, and 2022. In 2022, exports to France showed a rapid increase. In particular, export value increased by 80% compared to 2021, albeit compared to 2019, the export of natural honey to France was minimal. To Bulgaria, exports started in 2020, and in 2022 the export value grew by 72% compared to 2021 and increased 92-fold compared to 2020.

The highest export volume in 2016-2022

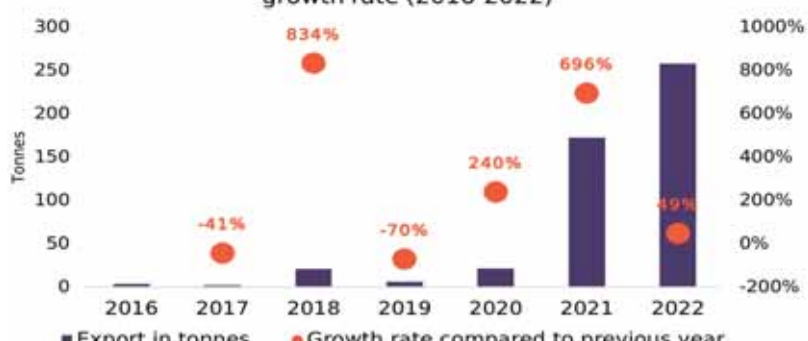
was observed in Bulgaria (34%), followed by France (29%) and Norway (4%). Notably, as Germany is among the top importers of Honey globally, it can be considered to be the potential market for Georgian exporters in the following years.

Of the top 10 countries by export value and volume, Russia had the lowest export price (\$0.75/kg) and the USA had the highest (\$8.9/kg), followed by the United Arab Emirates (\$7.7/kg) and Hong Kong (\$7.6/kg). On the other hand, among the top three countries by natural honey export from Georgia, the average prices were as follows: for France - \$5.3/kg; Norway - \$4.9/kg; and Bulgaria - \$2.7/kg.

## SWOT ANALYSIS OF THE HONEY PRODUCTION SECTOR

Based on a qualitative and quantitative data overview, a SWOT analysis of the honey production sector was conducted, summarizing the main strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the industry, reflecting the latest situation and trends, as well as the expectations/prognoses of the relevant stakeholders. Despite some existing weaknesses, most of the listed challenges have been partially addressed through different private and public initiatives, and the dynamics in terms of the development of the honey production sector in Georgia are very positive.

Georgian export volume of natural honey and its growth rate (2016-2022)



Source: National Statistics Office of Georgia

State Agency	Program	Number of businesses	Total amount of funding	Average funding per beneficiary
Enterprise Georgia	Micro Grants	29	232,065	8,002
RDA	Agro credits	19	304,163	16,009
RDA	AMMAR co-financing	3	108,179	36,060
RDA	State program for the support of cooperatives	18	317,651	17,647

Sources: National Statistics of Georgia; Enterprise Georgia; Rural Development Agency of Georgia

# Maqro Construction Officially Presents its Prestige Series Project



TRANSLATED BY ANA DUMBADZE

**O**n May 25, construction and development company Maqro Construction held a presentation of the new series "Prestige," and the first project of this series, "Prestige Kostava" in Theater.

Prestige is a new and exciting direction of the company, which includes luxury,

elite and boutique projects in the city center.

The fact that the projects of the Prestige Series will be located at central addresses and will be distinguished by high architectural taste will add prestige not only to their owners, but also to the appearance of the city.

The Prestige Series combines fashionable apartments and comfort and elegance, with all the features necessary for a spectacular life. For a higher efficiency of the comfort zone, the series is

designed for a small number of living spaces.

The first project of the series, "Prestige Kostava" includes the restoration/reconstruction process of the Sak-Navtobi administrative building, designed by one of the most outstanding architects of the 20th century, Mikheil Neprintsev, with a project that aims to preserve its architectural identity.

"Prestige Kostava" is located in the center of Tbilisi, on Heroes' Square, on Kostava Street. The mentioned location

makes it easy to reach all areas and important facilities of the city.

The project includes the restoration/reconstruction of the historical building of Sak-Navtobi and additionally, the construction of a new block created in the same aesthetics.

The historic building (Block A) will house only 17 exclusive, high-ceilinged apartments, with an area of 120 - 202 square meters each. It will be possible to reach the apartments using a modern elevator.

The apartments presented in the historical building will be handed over to owners in the condition of green frame, so that the owners can create the design of their apartment, taking into account their own taste and comfort requirements.

Next to the historical building, a new block (Block B), designed in the same aesthetics is to be added. In the process of its transformation into a residential complex, the spirit, atmosphere and aesthetics of the era in which the historical building was created will be fully taken into account.

51 one-bedroom, two-bedroom and three-bedroom apartments of relatively small square footage will be presented in Block B. When designing Block B, the architecture and historical texture of the historical building will be taken into account, so as not to violate the integrity and unified perception of the complex. Block B apartments, unlike the apartments of the historical building, will be presented fully renovated. In this case, Maqro Construction offers two options for the interior of the apartments, which are fully suited to the style of the historical building.

The advantages of the project will lead to high rates of return on investment (ROI), allowing users interested in real estate to return their investment within eight years.




**PRESTIGE  
KOSTAVA**  
BY MAQRO CONSTRUCTION



# Vato Babunashvili: Fitch's Assessment Confirms that Liberty's Strategy is Developing in the Right Direction



**Vato Babunashvili**  
Deputy CEO, CFO

The international rating agency Fitch Ratings raised Liberty's long-term credit rating forecast from "stable" to "positive". Both the long-term credit rating "B+" and the sustainability rating "B+" have remained at the same level.

According to the rating agency, the

improvement of the long-term credit rating forecast of "Liberty Bank" is due to the strong financial indicators of the bank.

Vato Babunashvili, Deputy General Director and Financial Director of "Liberty", says that the evaluation of credit agencies is crucial in the financial industry because the main goal of their evaluation is to prevent financial crises.

"We are pleased that Fitch Ratings has evaluated and upgraded Liberty's long-term credit rating from 'stable' to 'positive,' implying that the rating status will be upgraded further."

According to the rating agency's analysis, the bank's profitability has increased, and its asset quality and financing mix has improved.

As a result of this change, we are confident that our strategy is correct, we are on the right track and we will further strengthen this goal", said Vato Babunashvili, Deputy General Director of Liberty to "Business Partner".

According to his own explanation, the annual growth of "Liberty" in 2020-2022 was 31% of the total portfolio while the

market grew by 11.7%. "But if we look at the last three years, we have gradually increased our market share every year, which is exactly reflected in our growth.

The major goal of our strategy is also to "increase the portfolio mix, to be diversified, and be equally and efficiently represented in all banking segments," Vato Babunashvili explains.

## SOCIETY

# Forest Protection Brings Benefits to 1,300 Residents of Machakheli Gorge

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Government of Japan are launching a groundbreaking project aimed at safeguarding the unique Colchic forests in the Machakheli Gorge of Georgia, and increasing access to affordable green energy for local communities.

The 12-month initiative draws on \$545,000 in funding from Japan, and close collaboration with Georgia's Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture, the Ministry of Agriculture of the Ajara Autonomous Republic, and the Administration of Khelvachauri Municipality.

The initiative is set to enhance forest protection measures in the Machakheli Gorge, reduce climate-related risks, and introduce sustainable renewable energy practices, including solar energy and biomass, among the local communities residing in the area. Its implementation will bring environmental, energy and social benefits to over 1,300 residents of the villages located in the support zone

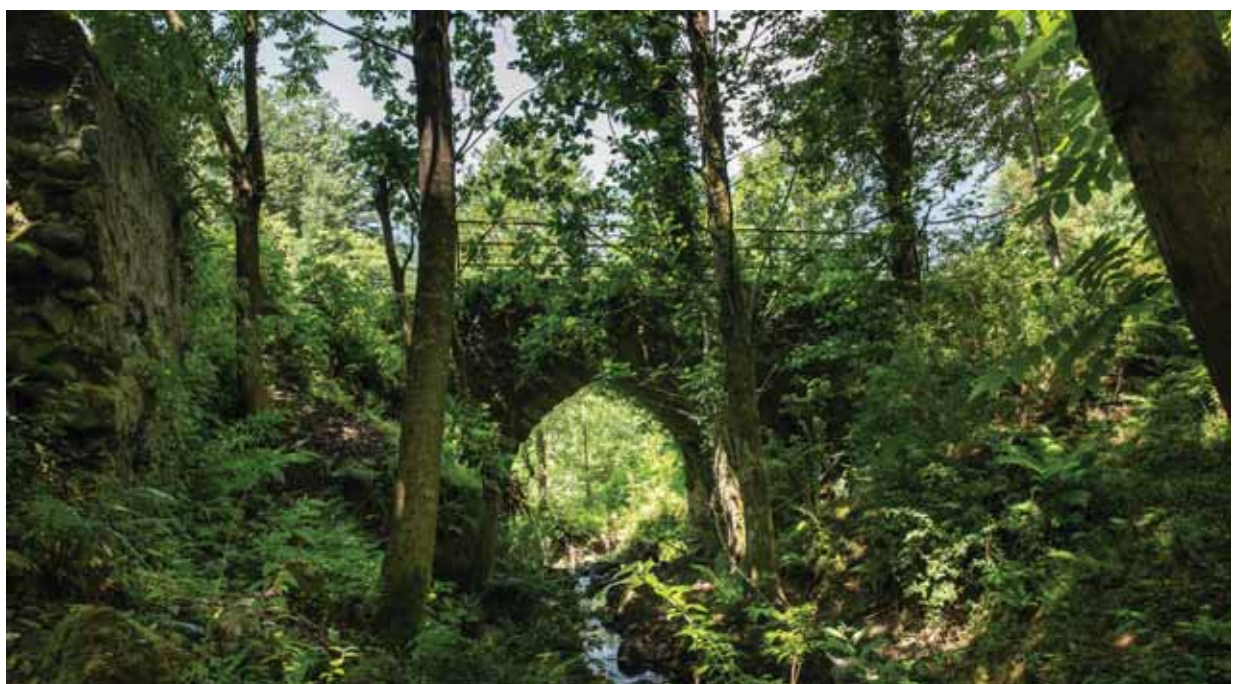
of Machakhela National Park.

By partnering with the central, regional, and municipal authorities, UNDP and Japan foster a sense of ownership and participation among local stakeholders and empower communities, especially women and youth, to take an active part in the sustainable management of forest resources.

Furthermore, this collaborative effort contributes to Georgia's commitment to the Paris Agreement by supporting a 10% increase in the carbon-capturing capacity of forests by 2030, compared to 2015 levels, and a 30-35% drop in national greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 compared to 1990 levels.

###

The UNDP's and Japan's support for sustainable forest management in Georgia aligns with UNDP's global Climate Promise effort to assist 120 countries and territories in achieving their climate goals. Georgia is one of 23 countries where the Climate Promise is funded by Japan, the largest supporter of this pioneering initiative.



The Machakheli Gorge. Photo by: Irakli Dzeladze/UNDP

# Free International Transfers with Terabank – Promotion for Business Customers international payments on Visa B2B Connect

**T**erabank's business customers will be able to transfer USD to 107 countries with the Bank's transfer fee waived for a special promotional period starting on May 15, 2023. This special promotion applies to international transfers through Terabank's use of the international payment platform Visa B2B Connect, and Terabank business customers will be able to use the terms of the promotion up to August 15, 2023. On completion of the promotion period, a fixed preferential rate of USD 15 per transfer will be applied on all transactions through Visa B2B Connect.

As a reminder, the Visa B2B Connect platform is a fast, flexible and secure international payment service that will allow Terabank's business customers to take advantage of today's most modern, innovative, non-card-based, bank-to-bank messaging and settlement service, in order to make and receive secure and flexible international payments to 107 countries around the



world. Visa B2B Connect differs from traditional methods primarily in speed which is achieved through the reduction of using multiple correspondent banks for different currencies and destination countries. The aim is for transactions to be reflected in 24-48 hours, depending on the payment currency and recipient country.

"Because of its innovation, the Visa B2B Connect platform provides various interesting possibilities for our business customers, who are a strategic sector for Terabank, to promote the development of their business and activities. This promotion is one such opportunity and we hope that many of our customers will benefit from its beneficial conditions," said Terabank.

In partnership with Visa, Terabank is the first bank to introduce the Visa B2B Connect platform in Georgia. The service can be used both remotely – through the Internet bank and mobile application, as well as by visiting the branches.

## CULTURE

# Pain in Paris

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

**O**f COURSE we didn't have enough time in Paris: what's three days in the capital city of the country which gets more tourists than any other in the world? But we made the most of it. Lyon's week prior to that, at least, gave us much more to see. And we came away intent on getting more; although now Italy beckons too...

One mistake which I kick myself for, a little, was in the Louvre, which we had to dash through on Free Museum Night, May 13. I missed seeing the Venus de Milo, another hugely important sculpture: zut! Never mind, she's waited these many centuries and can wait some more. At least La Gioconda and Nike gave me thrills. That night, we also missed the Pompidou Center, which has a fabulous

collection of Impressionists. But you have to choose: skim more museums, or dip deeply into a few? We went with the latter, and were well rewarded by Picasso and Rodin.

I became aware of how much French and English are linked when seeing so much of it written everywhere. We have so many words which are identical in both spelling and meaning, although their pronunciation is usually quite different, so this similarity comes out less when listening to French being spoken. These links come partly from the centuries when the Normans, starting in 1066, invaded and took over Britain; partly from our two languages being in the same family, and also having many common roots in both Latin and Greek. About 30% of English comes from French!

But there are also words which, written, are the same in both languages but mean completely different things, so-called false cognates. "Pain" in English

means "bread" in French. English "or" is French "gold". So one has to be careful with what one reads. Here's a short list of other "faux (false) friends" in both languages: bras, cent, attends, coin, con, crayon, douche, comment.

If English, with its tortured pronunciation, can have hugely popular spelling competitions up to national level in North America (called spelling bees), why not French, with its perhaps equally challenging pronunciation? Apparently they have a dictation competition, which is a similar thing: writing the words instead of spelling them out in speech. Many languages, though, are simply too phonetic for this to work, including Georgian. Ask any child who knows the Georgian alphabet to spell or write any Georgian word, and they can.

There are also many French words or phrases simply borrowed into English and left untranslated, such as a la carte, agent provocateur, au pair, bon voyage,



carte blanche, coup d'etat, deja vu, en route, grand prix, hors d'oeuvre, RSVP and many more.

We did our best to say "Bon jour" (good day) when entering any building with people present, as instructed: this is "de rigueur" (required by culture) in France. If you fail to say it, you can be ignored! At least my attempts to start speaking in French before asking to switch to English were met with approval everywhere, which was a relief. I had been instructed how to say "My French is bad": "Mon Francais es mauvais"; what I wanted to try as a joke, but didn't, was "Mon Francais es un enfant terrible" (my French is a terrible child, those last two words having their own slang meaning in French).

I am glad that my years of learning French from school in Canada, ending 40-odd years ago, were waiting to be dug up and dusted off, and my wife and I were both surprised by how much I remembered. Au revoir (until we meet again), la France!

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



# Beyond the Stalin Museum: Exploring the Real Gori with Local Guide Zhana



Zhana Odiashvili, a native of Gori, has a passion for showing visitors that there is more to Gori than the famous Stalin Museum

BY BAI A DZAGNIDZE FOR GEORGIA TODAY BUSINESS MAGAZINE

**Z**hana Odiashvili is a 29-year-old native of Gori with a passion for showing visitors that there is more to Gori than the famous Stalin Museum. In 2019, Zhana decided to turn her love for her hometown into a business, offering visitors free walking tours of Gori.

Despite the challenge of juggling two jobs and feeling exhausted at the end of the day, Zhana pursued her passion for sharing the history and culture of Gori through tourism.

And while the Covid-19 pandemic damaged tourism in Georgia and worldwide, she remained committed to her dream, never regretting her decision to start her own tour company and keeping hope for a brighter future.

GEORGIA TODAY sat down with her to learn more as she shared her story and passion for showcasing Gori's best landmarks and activities.

## HOW DID YOU COME UP



It is interesting to meet Stalin fans, listen to them, and think about why people are nostalgic for those old days

## WITH THE IDEA OF OFFERING TOURS IN GORI?

I used to work at Envoy Hostel. I loved the experience, since I could meet travelers from all over the world and make new friends.

I was a receptionist, so guests were always asking me for recommendations. I noticed that almost everyone was visiting the Stalin Museum, and at that time, I could not advise any other place to visit or activity to do in Gori.

I joined the travelers several times and did a small tour for them. I enjoyed it very much. They were also pleased to spend more time in Gori than 40 minutes at the Stalin Museum.

As a young person who was born after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it is of great importance for me to show travelers alternative Gori beyond the Stalin Museum and tell them that not everyone worships the tyrant. Actually, that was my primary motivation to protest against "love for the monster." So, Gori Walking Tour is not only a three-hour tour for me, but a type of social activism too.

Another reason for starting Gori Walking Tour was that I would have an opportunity to speak up about Russian aggression

and the war in 2008, which affected my family and me as we were displaced for some time with many others, and lived at a public school in Tbilisi.

I aim to be a responsible citizen, and being a guide allows me to raise awareness about the 2008 war and the current creeping occupation.

The tour I created is authentic, with personal stories and opinions, which is exactly what travelers seek.

## HOW LONG DID IT TAKE TO FINALIZE THE TOUR ROUTE? DID YOU FACE ANY CHALLENGES?

It took some time to research places to show and histories to tell, but not too long. One can learn better from doing, so I decided to give it a try.

My friend helped me create a Facebook page, and I was very excited when I got the first booking. After my first tour, I modified the route and sights, but that is a normal process.

Naturally, there were and still are some challenges. For example, I live in Tbilisi, and traveling back and forth is time-consuming.

Additionally, there were cases when I had bookings for different tours, and since I am the only one doing these tours, I had to find the best solution.

All in all, these obstacles help us grow, so I have nothing to complain about. I have learned a lot and developed many personal and professional skills.

## WHY A FREE WALKING TOUR SPECIFICALLY AND NOT A TYPICAL TOUR?

I wanted to do an explicitly walking tour based on tips because I wanted to bring a bit of Europe to Gori, and also, every traveler would be interested in joining, no matter the budget.

My main interest is social responsibility, not money.

## HOW DID YOU ATTRACT TOURISTS TO JOIN YOUR TOURS?



Memorial of Georgian Warrior Heroes consisting of sculptures of Georgian Warriors

Initially, I posted in Facebook groups such as Expats in Tbilisi and Georgian Wanderers, and organized Couchsurfing meetings. Later, travelers spread the word, and writers included me in their blogs. I also registered on Freetour.com.

It took time, but I want to express my gratitude to all those who helped me immensely. Without their support, I wouldn't have been able to achieve such success.

## DO YOU ALWAYS FOLLOW A SET ROUTE, OR DO YOU LIKE TO MIX IT UP?

I follow a set route but always pay attention to travelers' interests, so I ask beforehand and plan the tour accordingly.

## IT WAS NATURAL TO ADD THE SOVIET TOUR OF GORI BECAUSE OF ITS HISTORY. WAS IT CHALLENGING TO CREATE THIS TOUR?

I created the Soviet Tour, as travelers wanted to drive around in a Soviet car, which is exciting for them. I discovered Soviet-era bas-reliefs and more sights connected to the USSR in the town. Stalin was born in Gori, making the city perfect for a Soviet-themed tour.

It is also interesting to meet Stalin fans, listen to them, and think about why people are nostalgic for those old days. We should listen to everyone's perspective, and try to look at things differently. I am a sociologist, so I really enjoy observing and learning from others.

## WHAT ARE YOUR OTHER INTERESTS OR HOBBIES BESIDES BEING A TOUR GUIDE?

I don't have much free time now, but I like visiting museums, galleries, opera, or theater. I also love traveling abroad

when I have the time and finances.

## YOU OPENED A WINE BAR/SHOP IN GORI. WHAT DOES IT OFFER VISITORS?

I opened the first wine shop in Gori near the fortress in the old historical part of the town. I always wanted a social space where people could enjoy a glass of wine, play games, and make new friends.

There are several restaurants in Gori, but my idea is to have a wine store where travelers can buy wine from small wineries, and popularize wine-tasting and networking events. For instance, visitors can find wine from the villages near the occupation line, and supporting these locals to stay and not leave their homes is of great significance to me.

I have many ideas, and I hope to fulfill them soon.

## ANY OTHER PLANS/DREAMS YOU HAVE FOR GORI?

I wish people would spend more time in Gori so we could develop some kind of nightlife. It would be great to run a hostel that offers many activities to its guests.

My biggest dream is to transform the Stalin Museum so that it is not a falsification of history, and serves the purpose of giving people knowledge about Soviet terror and totalitarian regimes.

I am ashamed that we have a museum like this in a country that wants to be a part of the European Union. We have lived under a dictator's shadow for a long time. It is time to end this toxic relationship - we must move on and create a better future.

You can contact Zhana via facebook (fb.com/GoriWalkingTour). Check out her instagram: GoriFreeWalkingTour



Zhana: I follow a set route but always pay attention to travelers' interests, so I ask beforehand and plan the tour accordingly



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