

# GT

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ON RUSSIA VS THE WEST

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Anne Applebaum. Source: cundillprize

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## The Killers Apologize after Vocalist Brandon Flowers Pulls Russian on Stage to Play Drums, Calls Him Georgians' "Brother"

BY TEAM GT

**O**n August 15, a concert of US rock band The Killers was held at the Black Sea Arena in Georgia's coastal town of Shekvetili.

Before performing one of its songs, lead singer Brandon Flowers, as per tradition, asked if there were any people in the audience who knew how to play the drums.

Flowers picked out one of the volunteers and brought him on stage. When the drummer revealed his nationality to be Russian, Flowers asked the audience if they were okay with it.

Despite hearing the strongly negative attitude of listeners gathered in the hall, the group performed a set with the Russian drummer. The end of the song was followed by whistling from some of the audience.

After that, the frontman of The Killers addressed the audience and claimed that the listeners gathered in the hall were sisters and brothers, that a person's nationality does not matter, and there should be no borders between countries.

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The Killers' lead singer Brandon Flowers



Photo by: Adrien Fillon/Getty Images

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

# Ukraine Latest: Ukraine Seeks Agreement on Principles for Peace at Saudi-Led Talks

The Ukrainian city of Kherson was blasted this week, killing one woman, after President Volodymyr Zelensky said that air defense systems supplied by Germany and the US were "very effective."

Zelensky highlighted the IRIS-T and Patriot drones in his nightly address Sunday, and thanked all allies who had contributed resources to Ukraine's defenses.

Meanwhile, three people were killed and dozens more wounded in large-scale Russian air strikes that hit two western regions of Ukraine that border NATO member Poland.

The fatalities were reported in the northwestern region of Volyn. Officials said an industrial enterprise in the regional capital Lutsk was struck in the overnight attack. Several people were also hospitalized, Governor Yuriy Pohulyaiko said.

Fifteen people were also wounded in the Lviv region, Governor Maksym Kozlytskyi said. Six missiles damaged

dozens of buildings and a kindergarten playground in and around the regional capital. Kozlytskyi said the youngest victim was 10-years-old.

## UKRAINE CALLS SAUDI ARABIA TALKS 'PRODUCTIVE'; RUSSIA SAYS THEY'RE 'DOOMED TO FAILURE'

More than 40 countries came together over the weekend in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, to discuss a possible formula for bringing a peaceful conclusion to Russia's war in Ukraine. Delegations from the United States, China and India were present for the talks, which senior Ukrainian government official Andriy Yermak described as "productive."

The two-day meeting was part of a diplomatic push by Ukraine to build support beyond its core Western backers by reaching out to Global South countries that have been reluctant to take sides in a conflict that has hit the global economy.

President Volodymyr Zelensky, who hopes to agree principles for a summit of global leaders that he is seeking on the issue in the autumn, said it would be important to hold bilateral talks on the

sidelines of the Jeddah meeting.

Speaking on Saturday, he acknowledged there were differences among the countries attending, but said the rules-based international order must be restored.

"Different continents, different political approaches to world affairs. But all are united by the priority of international law," he said.

Russia did not attend, though the Kremlin has said it would keep an eye on the talks. Ukrainian, Russian and international officials say there is no prospect of direct peace talks between Ukraine and Russia at present, with the war still raging.

A European Union official said there would be no joint statement after the meeting, but that the Saudis would present a plan for further talks, with working groups to discuss issues such as global food security, nuclear safety and prisoner releases.

The official described the talks as positive, and said there was "agreement that respect of territorial integrity and (the) sovereignty of Ukraine needs to be at the heart of any peace settlement".

The world's top oil exporter Saudi Arabia, which has maintained contacts with both sides since Russia invaded Ukraine last February, has played a role in convening countries that did not join earlier meetings, Western diplomats have said.

Russia's deputy foreign minister said

the West's efforts to mobilize the international community to support a peace deal are "doomed to failure," according to state-owned media agency Tass.

## CHINA SAYS SAUDI ARABIA TALKS HELPED 'CONSOLIDATE INTERNATIONAL CONSENSUS'

Weekend talks about a peace formula for Russia's war in Ukraine helped "consolidate international consensus," Reuters reported China's Foreign Ministry as saying.

China, which did not attend a previous round of talks in Copenhagen, this time sent Special Envoy for Eurasian Affairs Li Hui. China has kept close economic and diplomatic ties with Russia since the conflict began, and has rejected calls to condemn Moscow.

"We have many disagreements and we have heard different positions, but it is important that our principles are shared," he said.

## RUSSIA SAYS A PEACE SETTLEMENT ONLY POSSIBLE IF KYIV LAYS DOWN ITS ARMS

Russia says a peace settlement in Ukraine is only possible if Kyiv lays down its arms, Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said in a statement.

A solution to the conflict will only be found if the "the Kiev regime puts an end to military activities and terrorist

attacks, while its Western sponsors stop pumping the Ukrainian armed forces with weapons," Zakharova was quoted as saying by state news agency Tass.

"The original foundations of Ukraine's sovereignty should be reaffirmed, that is, its neutral, non-aligned and nuclear-weapon-free status," she said.

## TOP UKRAINIAN PRESIDENTIAL ADVISER SAYS THERE CAN BE NO COMPROMISE WITH RUSSIA

Mykhailo Podolyak, adviser to the head of the Ukrainian presidential office, said there can be no compromise measures with Russia as those could give it more time to entrench its forces' positions in occupied territories.

"There can be no compromise positions such as 'immediate ceasefires' and 'negotiations here and now' that give Russia time to stay in the occupied territories," Podolyak wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter. "Only the withdrawal of Russian troops to the 1991 border."

He added that any compromise agreement would lead to prolonged war in the future. Some neutral countries have called for a compromise settlement between the warring parties that would see Ukraine cede a portion of territory to Russia; Kyiv has wholeheartedly rejected that, saying there will be no peace until Moscow withdraws from internationally-recognized Ukrainian land.

# The Killers Apologize after Vocalist Brandon Flowers Pulls Russian on Stage to Play Drums, Calls Him Georgians' "Brother"

Continued from page 1

Flowers' address was met with even greater displeasure from the audience, and a large number of the them left the hall. The concert ended amid whistles and disgruntled shouts.

Several international publications responded to the incident at the Black Sea Arena.

## REUTERS

"American alternative band The Killers have apologized for bringing a Russian drummer on stage at a concert in Georgia, and for calling fans 'brothers and sisters'.

Georgia has a long history of tensions with its northern neighbor. The situation was exacerbated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the influx of Russian immigrants.

The Killers later apologized."

## THE BBC

The Killers have had to apologize after vocalist Brandon Flowers pulled a Russian fan on stage and let him play the drums.

He also told the audience that the Russian is their "brother", which drew boos and negative shouts from the audience.

Georgia, which gained independence from Russia in 1991, has a long history of tense relations with its neighbor.

In 2008, Russia invaded Georgia.

The band later apologized on social media."

## THE INDEPENDENT

"The Killers had to apologize after frontman Brandon Flowers told Georgian fans that a Russian concertgoer was their brother.

The Las Vegas-based band's concert was held at the Black Sea Arena in Batumi (sic) as part of their world tour.

Georgia was freed from Soviet rule in 1991, and in 2008, Russia invaded Georgia.

Tensions have increased since many Russians came to Georgia after the Rus-

sian invasion of Ukraine. As a result, the Georgian people support Ukraine".

## THE GUARDIAN

"The Killers apologized. The reason was

that a Russian fan was taken on stage at a concert in Georgia. Georgia is a former Soviet republic that was invaded by Russia in 2008. The soloist told the audience that Russians and Georgians are broth-

ers and sisters.

The incident happened on Tuesday evening in Batumi. (sic)

"We don't know the etiquette of this country, but this guy is Russian. Do you

mind if he comes out?" asked Brandon Flowers, the band's soloist. The listeners met his words with noise.

After finishing the song, Flowers responded to the whistles and protests of some of the listeners with this: "Do you not know if someone is your brother? Is he not your brother? Are we all separated by the borders of our countries? I am not your brother because I'm an American? I consider you all my sisters and brothers." After this statement, many people left the concert.

Stereogum, Uproxx, Newsweek, NME, and Insider also responded to what happened at the Black Sea Arena.

## BLACK SEA ARENA ALSO APOLOGIZES

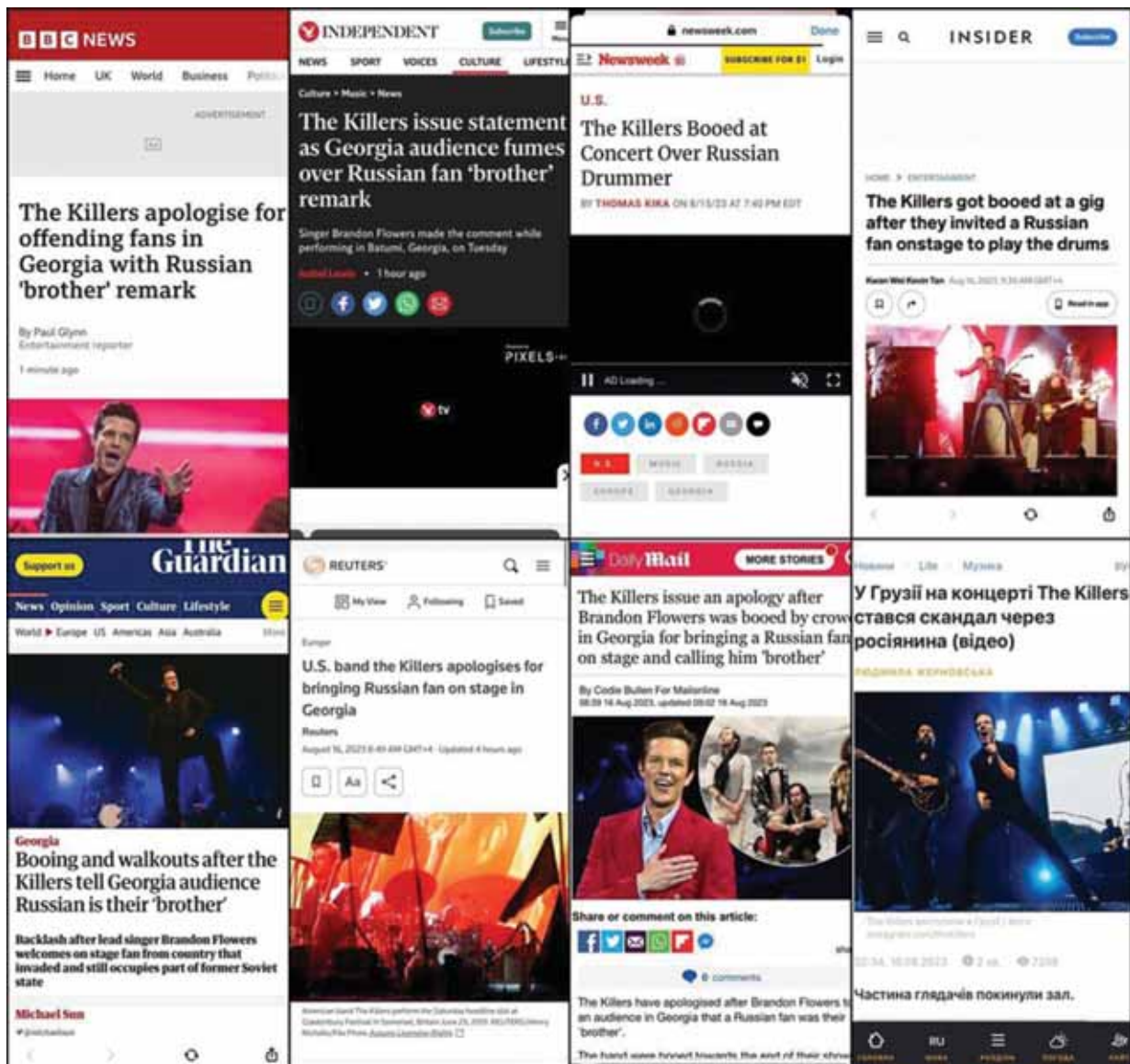
We acknowledge our share of responsibility, we sincerely apologize, - the statement of the Black Sea Arena (BSA) read in response to the audience's protest.

The BSA then noted that Flower's words and actions do not represent the position of the Black Sea Arena itself.

"We understand the emotions of our guests. The action of the artist on stage is not the position of the Black Sea Arena. We acknowledge our share of responsibility, we sincerely apologize and share the artist's response to you regarding the incident. Russia is an occupier!" the statement concluded.

The band wrote on social media that they had not intended to offend anyone.

"Good people of Georgia, it was never our intention to offend anyone! We have a longstanding tradition of inviting people on stage to play drums, and it seemed from the stage that the initial response from the crowd indicated they were okay with tonight's audience participation member coming onstage with us. We recognize that a comment, meant to suggest that all of The Killers' audience and fans are "brothers and sisters," could be misconstrued. We did not mean to upset anyone, and we apologize. We stand with you and hope to return soon," The Killers said.



How the world responded

# Kaladze in Response to Amirejibi Highway Rockfall: Protective Nets Will Be Replaced by New Barrier Design

According to Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze, a rockfall was observed on a slope of the Chabua Amirejibi highway, Tbilisi, on Monday. As Kaladze noted at Tuesday's meeting of the capital's government, the existing nets will be removed and a new modern project will be implemented. "Yesterday, a rockfall was observed on the rocky slope on the Chabua Amirejibi highway. Although the relevant project was implemented there in the form of protective nets, another project needs to be implemented for the highway to be better protected. The danger has already been completely eliminated. We will start the implementation of further works. Anchoring will be set in place to



prevent this problem from happening again. The protective nets that are on these rocks cannot support and contain the fallen mass that was observed. Therefore, a slightly different project will be implemented. We have involved specialists in the field. The nets will be removed and a new modern project will be implemented," said Kaladze. As such, for one month from August 16, traffic will be partially restricted in the section from the tunnel leading to Sulkhvan Tsintsadze Street to Mikheil Tamarashvili Street on the Chabua Amirejibi highway. "The works will be carried out on one side of the highway, while it will be possible to move in the other lane," said Kaladze.

# Landslide Disaster Claims Lives and Sparks Political Debate



BY MARIAM GORKHELASHVILI

In a devastating turn of events, the picturesque resort town of Shovi in Racha, Georgia, became the epicenter of a disaster that claimed the lives of numerous individuals, including children on August 3, when a massive landslide swept through the area, leaving behind a trail of destruction and heartbreak.

As the rescue and recovery efforts unfold, the true extent of the tragedy is becoming painfully clear. The latest reports confirm that the death toll has risen to 26, with an additional 7 individuals still missing. A total of 210 people were successfully evacuated from the disaster zone, a process that was fraught with challenges.

The disaster ignited a heated debate, not only about the circumstances surrounding the incident but also about the response and rescue operations that followed. The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia has been at the forefront of these operations, coordinating search efforts both at the epicenter of the disaster and along the banks of the Rioni and Chanchakhi rivers.

One contentious point of discussion has been the utilization of helicopters

and drones in the search and rescue operations. The Minister of Internal Affairs, Vakhtang Gomelauri, addressed the delayed arrival of helicopters this week, emphasizing the challenges posed by adverse weather conditions. Gomelauri explained that while the Ministry has acquired night flight capabilities, they prioritize pilot safety and do not undertake risky operations unless human life is genuinely threatened.

"The helicopters arrived [in Shovi] within about three hours - a helicopter is neither a bicycle nor a car to get in and rush out; it needs preparation - the weather was very bad, they were trying to circumvent the clouds for two hours to fly into the valley, they still managed to fly in, they worked, they managed to fly into the territory where there were 70 people, they took them to a safe place, on the other side, where our policemen were with food, it was a safe place, and then night fell," Gomelauri said. "As there was a danger and we didn't want to risk flying, we took the rest of the survivors out the following day.

"As for why they didn't fly at night, I have explained this a hundred times. Those who know about aviation understand very well. Yes, we have night flight facilities, we have purchased them, we can fly, but if there is a very high risk, and unless human life is really threat-

ened at that moment, it is not appropriate for our pilots to take risks. Further, it is not allowed, nor possible. We can get people out in three hours in the morning and not risking crashing the helicopter or the death of the pilots. There is a risk factor in the mountains. Helicopters can take off at night if the weather is good and an urgent need is there," he added.

Gomelauri's statements were met with skepticism and differing viewpoints. Irakli Kobakhidze, chairman of the Georgian Dream party, emphasized the swift and forceful nature of the disaster, asserting that those caught in the landslide had little chance of survival regardless of additional resources.

Further controversy arose when Kobakhidze questioned the veracity of survivor accounts. He specifically questioned the account of Davit Jeladze, who described his efforts to navigate through the devastation to reach safety with his nephew. Jeladze responded to Kobakhidze's doubts by asserting the accuracy of his story and offering to provide evidence, including eyewitness accounts and video footage.

"I want to express my regret regarding the fact that I hurt Dato Jeladze's feelings," Kobakhidze said. "What he said, of course, is very regrettable, but I will repeat once again that we had a meeting, we had a conversation about everything, he explained his side, I responded. The main thing is that he came out of a very difficult situation, he survived, his nephew survived, his family survived, and of course, there is a lot of merit in this and the merit of the path he traveled with his nephew."

The political landscape has also become a battleground in the wake of the Shovi tragedy. The opposition United National Movement (UNM) party called for the creation of a parliamentary investigative commission to thoroughly examine the disaster and its aftermath. However, the ruling Georgian Dream party rejected the proposal, claiming the ongoing investigation by the Prosecutor's Office is enough and accusing the UNM of using the tragedy for political gain.

As the nation grapples with grief and the search for answers continues, the priority remains on finding the missing individuals and supporting the survivors. While debates and differences persist, the unity of the Georgian people in times of crisis underscores the shared humanity that transcends political divides.

This disaster serves as a somber reminder of the unpredictable forces of nature and the importance of comprehensive disaster preparedness and response strategies. As the nation mourns its losses and seeks to heal, the focus remains on honoring the memory of those lost and preventing future tragedies through lessons learned from this heart-wrenching event.



Source: ualberta

## Ilia State University Admits Master's Program on Nature Conservation and Forestry

Georgia's Ilia State University Introduces Master's Program on Nature Conservation and Forestry study program which focuses on the development of academic and professional knowledge and skills in the fields of nature conservation, biodiversity, and forest management.

The Master's program in Nature Conservation and Forestry offers the students three different blocks related to the responsible management and conservation of renewable natural resources: 1) Nature Conservation, 2) Forest Science,

3) Nature Conservation and Sustainable Development.

In addition to gaining fundamental knowledge in the field of nature management, the program offers students the opportunity to study a number of applied sciences in the fields of sustainable ecosystem management, green infrastructure planning, and forest management, as well as a wide range of elective courses, including from the related programs contributing to the effective integration of existing knowledge into the applied sciences.

For more information about the program, please visit [iliauni.edu.ge](http://iliauni.edu.ge)

## Kiketi Fest – Discover the Perfect Blend of Nature, Music and Flavors



Discover the perfect blend of nature, music, and exquisite flavors at the Kiketi Fest!

Head just an hour out of the hot capital city for a day of relaxation and indulgence in a serene oak forest environment. Immerse yourself in the cool ambiance while enjoying the finest Georgian natural wines from renowned wineries such as 'Gotsa Wines', 'Tanin Winery', 'Kiketi Farm Wine', 'Matiashvili's Wineries', and 'Naferi Wineries'. The festival will also feature the presence of the esteemed wine bar 'Saamuri' and the exquisite wine shop 'Re Wines.'

Delight your taste buds with delectable offerings curated by 'Meti Khalis,' including delicious boards, grilled delights, and more, ensuring a culinary experience like no other.

As the sun sets, get ready to groove to the tunes of Nodariko Khutsishvili, who will be lighting up the stage.

Date: 19 August  
Time: 13:00 - 23:00  
Location: 50 G. Tabidze Str., Kiketi  
Buy tickets here.

Whether you're a wine connoisseur, a music enthusiast, or simply seeking a day of relaxation in nature's embrace, Kiketi Fest promises an unforgettable experience. See you there!



Source: Formula News

# Setting a New Agenda for the Indo-Pacific Region



Biden, Kishida and Yoon met on the sidelines of May's G7 summit held in Hiroshima, Japan. Source: Nikkei

BY EMIL AVDALIANI

The US' competition with China and the latter's growing power in the Indo-Pacific region have pushed Japan and South Korea to mend their historically fraught ties. On August 18, the US hosts the first standalone summit between the three leaders, marking a significant shift in regional and potentially global geopolitical processes.

The main goal of the summit is to show

that Seoul and Tokyo can put aside their historic disagreements and double down on the rapprochement which started earlier this year. The summit is also meant to serve as a signal that the security of South Korea and Japan revolves around the US.

The three are poised to expand mutual military cooperation and embrace the idea of a free and open Indo-Pacific region, in a clear reference to the US' vision of the same geographic space. It is unlikely that there will be a treaty-like statement, but the summit will nevertheless convey a general belief that the three

states are close on security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region, and China in particular.

The summit is crucial, as it will address not only the issue of North Korea as a problem for South Korea and Japan, but will consider the projection of power of North Korea as a wider Indo-Pacific challenge. This is important, as it will help the US to garner far more quickly a coalition of the like-minded who could potentially be threatened by North Korean missiles.

The three countries will accelerate efforts to share long-promised real-time

data on North Korea's missile launches: Japan has better detection systems when it comes to where potential North Korean missiles will land, while the South Koreans possess proper technologies to monitor missile launches and initial trajectory. Another area the three would be looking at is the improvement of interoperability for conducting joint defense and forward-defense military drills.

The US will also push for Tokyo to become more active within QUAD and will encourage Seoul to show greater interest in this fledgling regional initiative. South Korea seems increasingly positive about embracing QUAD – a loose organization, without a clear-cut military component – beyond cooperation on vaccine and climate change issues. Seoul is now looking at QUAD as a tool to contain North Korea, while the US and Japan consider QUAD as an element crafted primarily to contain China. It is this major difference which the US side wants to minimize so as to streamline the thinking among the Asian actors.

South Korea and Japan are also worried about North Korea's growing tilt toward Russia, especially following the Russian defense minister's recent visit to the Asian country. China, too, will feature high on the agenda, and though Tokyo and Seoul have different perceptions of China's strength, the two nevertheless recognize the need to expand cooperation with the US as a powerful balance against Beijing.

The summit could also mark another trend: the resurgence of US influence, which has often been seen waning in some parts of the globe, especially amid the illiberal pushback. With the war in

Ukraine, the US has doubled down on its security commitments to its European and Asian allies and partners. With the expanded NATO and highly militarized Ukraine, the US has now strengthened the front against Russia, effectively to contain it.

In broader terms, similar processes are taking place in Asia. The rise of China and North Korea's increasingly sophisticated missiles are now pushing countries like Japan and South Korea to seek an outside, non-regional player which successfully manages to build anti-hegemonic coalitions against a rising continental force.

More specifically, the August 18 summit also marks a push for regional summits which allow the US to maintain its position as a power which uses its incomparable geographic to do what sea powers have been doing throughout history. The US will be a driver behind coalitions aimed to contain Russia and China, but the difference with the Cold War period is that the countries Washington will be relying on are much stronger now and can act as serious counterweights to their powerful neighbors.

Take Ukraine, which has not been defeated and is likely to sustain a longer term conflict. Nor are Japan and South Korea actors to be easily defeated in a major conflict. The US will be a principal military and economic backer, but the willingness of smaller states bordering on hegemonic actors will be no less crucial, and the US-South Korea-Japan summit is a good illustration of this.

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

## France's Geopolitical Considerations: A Closer Look at its Stance on NATO's Enlargement towards Ukraine and Georgia at the Vilnius Summit

BY MANELLE LEPOIX FOR GFSIS

The long-awaited debates surrounding Ukraine's potential membership in NATO were held on July 11-12 in Vilnius, Lithuania.

A year and a half after Russia launched the war against Ukraine, the NATO allies met at a historical summit. The event was eagerly awaited, particularly by countries hoping to see Ukraine join NATO. France's position seems to have been noticed, particularly for its divergence from certain NATO leader countries, among them the United States and Germany. This blog aims to identify the French position at the Vilnius Summit concerning the integration of Ukraine and Georgia into NATO, and the reasons for this U-turn.

### A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE FRENCH POSITIONS IN NATO

France's relations with its NATO allies have sometimes been stormy, and the Gaullist tradition seems to have lasted at least until Nicolas Sarkozy's term in office. Charles de Gaulle was the first to distance himself from NATO, leaving the integrated NATO command in 1966. To maintain total independence in the use of its nuclear forces, De Gaulle opted for a strong and independent France. Relations between the United Kingdom and the United States were seen as too close, to the detriment of France. De Gaulle considered that the role of the United States was far too strong to guarantee French independence. Since then, there has been talk of France's "anti-American" tradition, expressed mainly through its position in NATO. Furthermore, France has always been cautious about NATO's eastward enlargement. Jacques Chirac criticized the idea of NATO's expansion towards Georgia and Ukraine, fearing a deterioration of relations with Russia. Continuing in the same vein, Sarkozy also refused to allow the two countries to join NATO in 2008. We

can highlight several explanations regarding this position. First, the alleged almost historical closeness between the Russian and French elites in the 19th century seemed to justify an indestructible partnership despite Russia's aggressive behavior. Second, Russia remains an undeniable power, arguably explaining the continuation of French appeasement towards Moscow. In 2017, Emmanuel Macron welcomed Vladimir Putin to Versailles, a welcome that was roundly criticized. To abandon any prospect of Ukraine joining NATO or the European Union, President Macron even spoke of a "Finlandization of Ukraine", announcing the content of France's position concerning the enlargement process. The Russia-Ukraine war is now raging, and it seems Macron wants to become the "savior of the East", unlike his German counterpart.

### THE FRENCH POSITION ON UKRAINE'S ACCESSION AT THE NATO VILNIUS SUMMIT

In his speech in Bratislava, President Macron set the tone a month before the Vilnius Summit. Macron closed the Globsec 2023 Bratislava Forum, a first for a French President. In his speech, he focused on Russia's war in Ukraine and collective security in Europe. In his view, the guarantees offered in the past to Ukraine and Georgia were "far too weak". He expressed his wish for Sweden to join, further demonstrating his position on the potential enlargement of NATO, directly attempting to dismantle Russian ambitions. He also announced that he was prepared to give "tangible" guarantees to Ukraine at the Vilnius Summit. His positions were clear: France would support Ukraine's membership in NATO, to secure Europe and guarantee Ukraine's territorial integrity. He went on to say that Ukraine must be helped in "every way possible" to achieve lasting peace. Quoting Henry Kissinger, he also stated that Ukraine's accession to the EU is equally necessary. Moreover, it is interesting to draw a parallel between US President Joe Biden's statement in Vil-



French President Emmanuel Macron. Source: AP

nius and Macron's in Bratislava. Biden said that Ukraine was not yet "ready" to join NATO. In Bratislava, Macron spoke of two mistakes that should not be made when it comes to Ukraine's integration into the EU: closing our eyes and playing for time, or enlarging too quickly, without planning for the future (a direct reference to obtaining the Candidate Status, which does not imply that Ukraine is directly a member of the European Union). Macron demonstrated that he was capable of saying when we need to take our time, even in a crisis. However, he did not raise this argument with regard to NATO. He expressed his belief that Ukraine could become a full-fledged member of NATO. Finally, Macron declared that he wanted to "define a path to make Ukraine's membership in NATO a reality", changing his position completely between December and June. Macron and his administration have clearly expressed this wish. Shortly before the Vilnius Summit - on July 5 - French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Catherine Colonna, in a message of congratulations to NATO's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, also mentioned the desire for "long-term" support for Ukraine in order to adapt the Alliance to the new

security context.

The French arguments for Ukraine's accession to NATO can be summed up in three parts: First, Ukraine's membership in NATO means that ensuring its security is no longer uncertain. At present, ensuring its security depends mainly on the delivery of weapons (Macron announced just before the Summit that long-range missiles would be delivered to Ukraine, reversing his previous strategy of not giving Kyiv weapons that could reach Russian territory). But the delivery of weapons remains uncertain: for how long, and how much? Second, Ukraine's membership in NATO would stabilize and institutionalize aid, also in the interests of France, where more and more civil voices are being raised against spending on Ukraine. Lassitude and anger at the political situation in France could have led Macron to favor institutionalization. Third, France has an ambition to get Putin to sit at the negotiating table. Indeed, Macron believes that if Ukraine joins NATO, Putin will have to negotiate, putting an end to the war and bringing peace to Europe.

### THE FRENCH POSITION ON GEORGIA'S ACCESSION AT

### THE NATO VILNIUS SUMMIT

The Vilnius Summit focused primarily on the fate of Ukraine, yet Macron's earlier Bratislava speech also revealed the French stance on Georgia's NATO integration. As in Ukraine's case, Macron recognized that Georgia is also subject to Russian "vindictiveness". In June 2023, Macron noted that Georgia had also not received any solid guarantees. However, no official statement was made regarding Georgia. Only arguments given in favor of Ukraine's accession could hint at the French position on Georgia. In Macron's view, Ukraine should become a member of the Alliance, not least because the war is underway. Georgia is not directly facing Russian attacks at the moment - although Russia occupies 20% of its territory.

Compared with 2008, Georgia seems to have a better chance under Macron, who presents himself as open to enlargement. Nevertheless, one of Macron's arguments is to stop the war, in which he is participating - indirectly - by sending arms. He likely considers that Ukraine is the priority and that the situation in Georgia could be improved through the Ukraine-Russia negotiations. Integrating Georgia into NATO does not seem to be on Macron's immediate agenda, since the arguments put forward for Ukraine do not fit the Georgian situation.

### CONCLUSION

France has modeled its position on NATO's enlargement towards Ukraine and Georgia on those of the Baltic States and Poland. France's stance (unlike that of Germany) has changed significantly as compared to 2008. Macron is refocusing his strategy on Ukraine. Even though Ukraine only obtained promises for its future membership and no immediate guarantees at the NATO Vilnius Summit, the French U-turn in policy is noteworthy. In light of the Bratislava speech, we can guess Macron's strategy for the European Union too, with France set to become a major ally of Eastern Europe, Europe's new gravitational point.

First published on gfsis.org.ge

# Anne Applebaum, Pulitzer Winning Journalist, on the West's Unity in Support of Ukraine, Ending the War, and Georgia's Failing International Image

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

**W**ith the Polish and British asking for more gratitude, the leaked German reports suggesting Bundeswehr is critical of Kyiv's tactical acumen - saying the Ukrainians aren't using "what they learned in the Western training camps," and still no nod from Washington on ATACMS or F16s, Radio Free Europe's Georgian Service sat down with Pulitzer winning journalist Anne Applebaum to discuss the West's unity in the face of Russia's aggression, and that potential dreaded war fatigue.

"I wouldn't describe the situation right now as war fatigue," she tells us. "We're lucky that the most important European countries and both North American countries who are part of NATO remain committed to winning the war. That wasn't something anybody predicted 18 months ago. Within each country there are opponents of the war, and sometimes they're very loud. But if you look at Germany, France, Italy, the United States, Canada, the Netherlands, Britain, Poland, Romania, of Spain, you see the leaders of those countries still supporting Ukraine. There are no major cracks, though inside French, German and US politics there are opponents, and there is a danger that if any of them were to win an election, then the situation could change. But it doesn't look likely right now.

"In Poland, we have a very transactional government running the country, and one that's very worried it's going to lose the next elections in October. And although the winner will still support Ukraine, because all major political parties in Poland do, the ruling party is a nationalist party and it has some voters who are skeptical of Ukraine. There is quite a lot of propaganda around old Polish-Ukrainian conflicts during the war. And there is some fatigue with Ukrainian refugees. Some of this is being pumped up on social media backed by the Russians, but maybe by others inside Polish politics as well. But I don't think it's changed the overall picture. I don't think it alters the Polish support for Ukraine."

**PUTIN SEEMS TO HAVE RESIGNED HIMSELF TO A LONG WAR, WHILE THE UKRAINIANS ARE WILLING TO FIGHT AS LONG AS IT TAKES TO FREE THEIR COUNTRY. HAS THE WEST COME TO TERMS WITH THAT?**

You can see the Americans have adopted a mindset that it will be a long war because they've been very slow about providing advanced weapons to Ukraine, and they seem willing to do so only at each stage they think the Ukrainians are ready, when they're persuaded that it will be useful, even though it feels like to people on the ground that it's a few months too late, that the F16s are needed now, for this summer's counteroffensive. The US election campaign could complicate this further - there is part of the Republican Party which is not in favor of the war and which may well campaign against it, but I think we're still six months to a year away from that.

**IF THE UKRAINIAN COUNTEROFFENSIVE DOESN'T END UP BEING A RESOUNDING SUCCESS THAT**

**THE WESTERN POLITICIANS CAN PROUDLY TOUT TO THEIR VOTERS, WHAT ARE THE AVAILABLE SCENARIOS?**

I'm not going to predict what will happen on the ground in Ukraine because there are too many unknowns. The Ukrainians I've talked to feel confident that they are successfully destroying enormous quantities of Russian weaponry, and that they've broken through some of the first layers of defense in a few places. The demining of massive amounts of territory in Ukraine was more than they expected, and that means they need more demining equipment - they don't have enough. And what the West was training them to do, the combined arms operations, assumed that the mines would be gone. You can't bring tanks over fields that are full of explosive devices. I don't think it's being fought the way they expected it to be fought, but they seem to have some confidence that they're making progress.

**BEFORE THE COUNTEROFFENSIVE, YOU WROTE IN YOUR COLUMN AT THE ATLANTIC THAT THE UKRAINIAN COUNTEROFFENSIVE NEEDED TO SHOW THE RUSSIANS THAT THE WAR IS NOT WORTH FIGHTING. HOW FAR DO YOU THINK THE RUSSIANS ARE FROM THAT REALIZATION AT THE MOMENT?**

The rebellion led by Prigozhin was an interesting indication that some part of the Russian security apparatus already feels the war isn't worth fighting. Right before Prigozhin made his quick side-trip more than halfway to Moscow, he said the war is being fought on false pretenses, that it's a war for corruption, that the Russian oligarchs wanted it because they're greedy, and they want to take Ukrainian steel companies and make money off the spoils. And that's not a war, he said; it's not worth people dying for something like that. If he said it, that means that others surely think it too. The question is, when does that number become sufficient to bring the war to a halt? When does it become possible to put pressure on Putin? Again, there's so much that we can't see, I'm reluctant to make a prediction. I'm pretty confident that it will happen, because it's a huge burden on Ukraine to continue fighting the war and a huge burden on Ukraine's allies, but it's also a huge burden on Russia. A huge proportion of Russian resources are now being spent on the military. I mean, it's almost like the Soviet days. And I'm convinced that there is a part of the country that will want to bring it to an end.

**WHAT ABOUT PRIGOZHIN'S FUTURE? HOW CRAZY WOULD YOU SAY I AM IF I WERE TO IMAGINE HIM RUNNING IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS?**

Oh, I think Prigozhin thinks of himself as a future leader of Russia. There's no question. Prigozhin's career is not over. The Wagner group is crucial to Russian foreign policy, especially in Africa, but not only. There may also be financial reasons why Prigozhin has support inside the Kremlin, considering that part of his activities in Africa involve exploiting mines and other natural resources. There may be direct lines of funding going from Africa to Moscow that people don't want to see eliminated. It's clear that he has some kind of loyalty and some kind of



Anne Applebaum. Photo by Angela Trajanoski/Poynter

support, or he wouldn't still be alive. So I don't think it's wrong to guess that he might continue to play a role in Russia's future.

**WHAT DOES PEACE LOOK LIKE NOW FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF KYIV, MOSCOW AND THE WEST?**

I can really only envision peace in one way - it has to reflect a political change in Russia. In other words, the Russians have to understand that the war was a mistake; understand that Ukraine is a separate country, that it's not going to be part of Russia, not now and not ever. And then they have to withdraw from all or most of the Ukrainian territory that they've occupied. The Ukrainian position is that Ukraine has only one set of borders, and those are the international borders agreed to in 1991. Therefore, the Russians will have to leave and find a way to make amends for the damage they've caused. Any other scenario, any kind of ceasefire or temporary ceasefire or anything that leaves the situation as it is now, is not a recipe for permanent peace, it's a recipe for a future war, which is what happened after 2014 - a line was drawn, but the Russians didn't agree to it. Until there is that moment of reflection and reckoning, acknowledgement that Ukraine is an independent country with a right to exist, the war will not be over.

**THE WAY THINGS ARE GOING, WHAT PLACE DO YOU THINK PUTIN WILL HAVE IN THE HISTORY BOOKS?**

Some of that depends on who wins the war, because history is written by the victors. I don't think there's any question that Putin will be remembered as the man who really set out to destroy his own country. And apart from what he did to Ukraine, apart from what he did to Georgia, apart from what he did to Chechnya, apart from what he did to Syria, this is somebody who has worsened the living standards and freedom and culture of Russia itself. He doesn't seem to care about the well being or

the moment when Russia was excluded from European civilization.

**DO GEORGIANS HAVE REASON TO BE ANGRY AT THE WEST FOR NOT DOING MORE? AS IT WAS APTLY PUT BY OUR PRIME MINISTER RECENTLY - "WAS OUR WAR NOT A WAR?"**

Georgia has reason to be disappointed. It's true that the West was not prepared militarily to help Georgia. There was no plan, there was disillusionment on the West's part with Saakashvili - a feeling that he allowed himself to be provoked or indeed himself helped to provoke the war. There were mixed feelings in the West about how that war began. But, sure, I think the Georgians are right to feel that not enough attention was paid to them, and not enough effort was made to prepare for that kind of invasion.

**HAS RUSSIA'S WAR REHABILITATED SAKASHVILI'S IMAGE AND ROLE SOMEWHAT?**

Absolutely. Saakashvili's warnings about Russia and about the forces of liberalism in the post Soviet world, including in Georgia, were correct. The picture of him now in prison, the photographs and video that we've all seen, have really shocked people. He's seen as a kind of Prophet of the future. He is somebody who foresaw what could happen. And he warned people and people didn't listen.

**HOW DO YOU SEE GEORGIA'S PLACE IN THE WEST NOW?**

In 2008, it felt like Georgia was aspiring to be a democracy, to reinstate the rule of law after years of lawlessness and, before that, Soviet occupation. It felt very much like a place that was improving. It doesn't feel like that now, and I'm speaking as somebody who's watching it from the outside. Imprisoning Saakashvili, imprisoning others who've spoken out against the current government, some of the language used by the current government, which can be aggressively anti liberal, anti human rights, anti free speech, that language doesn't sound like the language that should be used by democratic governments. Mind you, we all have these problems - in American politics, in Polish politics and elsewhere. But Georgia doesn't feel, from the outside, like a place where things are improving right now. The current Georgian regime is illiberal and appears to be strangely dependent on Russia, perhaps on Russian money. It's a very strange situation. It's a strange position for a government to take given that, as I understand it, most Georgians support the Ukrainians in the war. A government that far away from the views of its people is suspect. I also worry about what it conceals. What's the real relationship between Georgian Dream and Russia? What's the main party founder's relationship to Russia?

I worry about Georgia becoming the kind of place through which illegal goods can be shipped, maybe by Turkey, maybe elsewhere. If we want Russia to be convinced the war was a mistake, we should make sure the sanctions work, that the electronics that can be used to build weapons don't make it into the country. And I worry that Georgia is a weak link in that chain. So it's a bad moment for Georgians to be equivocal; it's a moment for Georgians to be in solidarity with Ukrainians, with Europeans and with Americans against this war.

prosperity of ordinary Russians. They're just cannon fodder to him. He's not interested in Russian achievements in infrastructure or art or in literature or anything else. He has impoverished Russians. And he's also brought back a form of dictatorship that I think most Russians had thought they'd left behind. What he's doing is really destroying modern Russia. And I think that's what he'll be remembered for overall.

**LET'S MOVE ON TO GEORGIA, SEEING AS WE JUST HAD THE 15TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE WAR. WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE LEGACY OF THAT WAR AND HOW SIGNIFICANT IS IT?**

I think the legacy of the war to the Western world was that it was a kind of warning shot, the first indication that Putin was not the democrat he pretended to be. I've recently spent some time looking up things he said in the first few years he was in power. He talked a lot about democracy and freedom and rule of law. He fooled a lot of people. And I think the invasion of Georgia was a wake up call to that. That was the moment people realized that he wasn't going to be the easy neighbor so many hoped for. We let him get away with mass murder in Chechnya, wrongly seen as an internal affair, but the invasion of Georgia was an aggressive act towards a sovereign neighbor. And I think that was the moment when perceptions of Putin really began to change. That was when people began to see Putin as a real problem.

It began to change attitudes, to change the way people saw Russia. But it wasn't enough. It wasn't really until 2014 that people began to understand that there was going to have to be a security shift, even a military shift, in Europe. Notably, it was after 2014 that Obama, who got a lot of things wrong about Russia, first put American troops in Central Europe. And 2014 was the moment when people began to think the Central European members of NATO might not be as safe as we thought they were. So 2008 was the beginning of the awareness, 2014 saw the beginning of changes, but 2022 was

# Green Mind-set and Green Financing: Lighting the Path for Sustainability in Georgia

BY NINO MASURASHVILI,  
BRIAN CANUP

Following the EBRD 2023 Annual Meeting and Business Forum in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, TFG's Brian Canup (BC) spoke with Nino Masurashvili (NM), Deputy CEO, Chief Risk Officer, TBC Bank Georgia, who was recognized with the EBRD Sustainability Silver Award. Read on to learn more about TBC Bank Georgia, why they were awarded the EBRD Sustainability Silver Award, and their plan for continuing to support Georgian sustainability.

## MS. MASURASHVILI, WHAT SPECIFIC SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES HAVE TBC BANK GEORGIA IMPLEMENTED IN RECENT YEARS TO PROMOTE ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY, AND WHAT SPURRED THIS MOVEMENT?

Our aspiration to contribute to sustainable development comes from our role as a leading financial institution in Georgia's development. We are aware that we have an impact on the country's economy, business development, employment and societal progress as a whole. With the international expansion of our operations, sustainable development approaches are incorporated into our subsidiaries, as well.

In 2021, we took further steps to enhance the Group's ESG framework through the development of an ESG strategy, which reaffirms our commitment to make a long-term, sustainable contribution to the country and the region. The strategy defines several key areas for the coming



years: a strong ESG governance structure at the board and executive level; a focus on sustainable financing, services, and products; employee diversity, equality, and inclusion (DEI); green and sustainable funding; and a system and approach for impact measurement and reporting.

To list key achievements in 2022:

- GEL 750 million sustainable loan portfolio target for 2022 met. Furthermore, the total volume of the sustainable portfolio reached GEL 782 million, which constitutes a growth of 15.6% in comparison with the end of 2021 (GEL 676 million).
- Climate-related framework in line with the Task force on Climate-related Financial Disclosure (TCFD) requirements established and the second TCFD report published.

• Comprehensive ESG training framework covering all employees and different responsibility levels established. DEI Policy, targets and action plan defined. ESG strategies in all significant subsidiaries developed.

Since the environmental and climate change issues are accelerated worldwide, we are committed to managing our direct and indirect environmental and social impacts stemming from our operation by developing the continuous enhancement of TBC's Environmental Management System (EMS).

In 2020, we further strengthened our EMS and obtained an ISO 14001:2015 certificate and successfully passed the third-year surveillance audit of the EMS in 2022. This certificate serves as a testament to our EMS's full compliance

with international standards.

As part of our EMS, TBC Bank implemented different initiatives to reduce its direct environmental footprint.

To list some of them:

- Since 2019, TBC Bank operates a green car fleet, which is comprised of electric and hybrid vehicles.
- Since 2015, TBC Bank has contracted a company for paper recycling. TBC delivered more than 250 tons of paper for further processing.
- In 2023, TBC Bank started collecting plastic waste and transferring it to a partner company "Polyvim" for further recycling. The goal is to reduce plastic waste, create value-added products, and promote the development of a circular economy in Georgia. As a result of several stages of plastic processing,

a high-quality fiber fabric is obtained, which can be used in other industries.

## CAN YOU PROVIDE SOME DETAILS ON WHAT LED TO TBC BANK GEORGIA BEING AWARDED THE EBRD SUSTAINABILITY SILVER AWARD?

One of the features that the Silver Award considers is transactions with our customers. One of the transactions was the replacement of street lighting in Batumi City, the second-largest city in Georgia. The transaction was structured under a letter of credit product, where TBC Bank acted as an issuing bank facilitating the import of energy-efficient LED lighting from Ukraine.

TBC Bank client ADJARGANATEBA imported energy-efficient LED lighting from its supplier, SCHREDER TOV, a lighting equipment supplier based in Ukraine.

TBC Bank issued a letter of credit with a post-import finance solution, and it was confirmed by a bank in Germany. This structure allowed the importer to re-pay for the purchased equipment within three years while allowing the exporter to receive funds on sight, upon installation of the lights.

Due to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, the exporter had an urgent need for prompt payment, making smooth transactions crucial. Waiting until the end of the payment period was simply not feasible. Meanwhile, the importer had to prioritize the installation of LED lights and relied on receiving payments from the municipality on a quarterly basis.

TBC Bank matched this payment structure for both the importer and exporter, and satisfied both companies' requirements. The transaction was also struc-

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## City Hall Sets Deadline for Aghmashenebeli Avenue Cafe Owners to Obtain Permits

Tbilisi City Hall has given a deadline of August 24 to the owners of cafes and restaurants located on Aghmashenebeli Avenue. Before that date, they must obtain permits for the use of outdoor spaces, - Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze said at the municipal government sitting.

Kaladze explained that during the pandemic, City Hall did not restrict the owners from arranging tables, chairs, and sofas outside their facilities, and gave them full support in doing so. How-

ever, pedestrians should be able to move freely, and the territory should be accessible for the police, fire-fighters and first medical aid crews.

Tbilisi Mayor called on the Municipal Inspection to act in line with the law after the deadline expiration.

"All this should be regulated; we should act and organize the area, because many people have expressed concern. So much money was spent on such a good project, cultural heritage monuments are located here, and the current situation cannot withstand criticism," Kaladze stated.

## July 2023 Sees Decrease in Inflows, Russia's Contributions Decline

BY MARIAM GORKHELASHVILI

The National Bank's data reveals that the country received \$301.1 million in remittances in July, marking a 1.6% decrease (equivalent to \$5 million) from July 2022.

There has been a decline in remittances compared to the previous month, as July 2023 saw an inflow of \$353 million in remittances. This reduction amounts to approximately 15%.

Over 7 months, \$2.6 million was transferred to Georgia, with remittances from Russia contributing significantly, making up \$1.2 billion or nearly half of the total remittance amount.



July's largest volume of remittances, totaling \$73.8 million, originated once again from Russia. This figure reflects a

27% annual decrease in remittances from Russia compared to July 2022's \$100.5 million.

## Decrease in Georgia's Subsistence Minimum: Drop of 4.7 GEL in July 2023

BY MARIAM GORKHELASHVILI

In July 2023, the National Statistics Office of Georgia reported an updated subsistence minimum of 249.8 GEL, which showed a decrease of 4.7 GEL compared to the previous month's 254.5 GEL in June. This change also marked a 4.5 GEL less in the annual plan for the subsistence allowance.

The correlation between living costs and inflation is evident, as the subsistence index tends to follow inflation trends. July 2023 saw an inflation rate of 0.3% in Georgia.

Since 1997, Georgia has used a specific methodology to compute the subsistence



minimum, which remains in place to this day. Enacted by the Parliament, this law's primary objective is to establish a social benchmark. This benchmark sets the baseline for minimum wages, pensions, scholarships, allowances, and various other social benefits, making it a crucial factor with significant political and social ramifications in the country.

The computation of the subsistence allowance relies on a specialized food basket introduced through a minister of health order on May 8, 2003. Notably, this calculation is centered exclusively around food costs and excludes other essential expenses like utilities and transportation. Today's system is based solely on the cost of food.

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Lunch 2 PM at Parnas Restaurant

Location: Tbilisi Marriott Hotel, Grand Ballroom, 13 Rustaveli Avenue

free entry for first 40 delegates



Delegate Pre-Registration Open

[pantsulaia@kleinlawgroupgeorgia.com](mailto:pantsulaia@kleinlawgroupgeorgia.com)

cell/whatsapp +995 577 400650

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# Green Mind-set and Green Financing: Lighting the Path for Sustainability in Georgia

Continued from page 6

tured under EBRD's Trade Facilitation Program.

The goal and the most important focus of the project was energy efficiency. By implementing the project in Batumi:

4,555 outdated lights are being replaced with new energy-efficient LED lights of better quality; the smart lighting system will improve night visibility and safe movement on foot, bicycle, and car; switching to energy-efficient LED lighting will reduce electricity consumption by approximately 50%.

## HOW HAVE TBC BANK GEORGIA'S SUSTAINABILITY EFFORTS CONTRIBUTED TO THE OVERALL DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-BEING OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES?

TBC runs its multi-year initiatives that aim to sustainably empower different groups of society. TBC, as an institution with a major social and economic impact, contributes to the development of areas defined as crucial by the countries' public sector and cooperates with the National Bank of Georgia and other government institutions in key areas like financial education, job creation, investment attraction, etc.

Apart from information gathered from external sources, TBC assesses its own strengths and competencies and chooses areas of involvement accordingly. We have several principles that guide the choice of initiatives to be implemented. Each project must:

Increase its positive impact on society and the country in the long term and have growth potential; be a part of TBC knowledge and expertise: Before getting involved in a certain area, TBC builds expertise in it by increasing its knowledge internally and collaborating with external stakeholders that can contribute to the process with their experience; and aim at co-participation not just funding: TBC works with partners, supporting them not only by funding specific projects, but also by sharing expertise in communication project management and more.

Some of our priority areas are:

- Accessibility and affordability of financial and non-financial services: via our platforms [www.tbcbusiness.ge](http://www.tbcbusiness.ge) and [www.startuperi.ge](http://www.startuperi.ge), we support MSMEs, as well as promote a startup culture.
- Women's economic empowerment: among other initiatives, the empowerment of women in information and communication technologies (ICT) is a focus area.
- Educational programs for youth: scholarships, courses in ICT area, and STEM.

## IN WHAT WAYS DOES TBC BANK INTEGRATE SUSTAINABLE FINANCE PRINCIPLES INTO ITS OPERATIONS AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES?

The incorporation of our sustainable finance principles started many years ago. First of all, with the introduction of the Exclusion List of activities, we avoid ethically questionable and harmful activities. The list of activities excluded from financing by TBC Bank is based on the Exclusion Lists of the EBRD, IFC, DEG and ADB.

We reject financing activities that violate local legislative requirements, international conventions and declarations of human and labor rights.

Furthermore, all our commercial lending to SME and corporate customers are screened for environmental and social risks in line with the EBRD Performance standards.

TBC strives to increase its positive impact on society and the economy by introducing new financial products and services that are designed to deliver a specific social or environmental benefit.

Green Lending Development - TBC is a leading partner in Georgia in local renewable energy financing with a core



segment in hydropower stations. To make our contribution to the development of sustainable financing country-wide, we conducted local market research to determine how to adapt TBC's green criteria to the Georgian reality and developed Green Lending procedure, in cooperation with the Green for Growth Fund (GGF) Technical Assistance Facility, represented by Finance in Motion GmbH and financed by the European Union under the EU4Energy Initiative.

This procedure helps the Bank to identify green and environmentally friendly initiatives and encourages private companies to move to sustainable investments in their businesses. Furthermore, since 2023, we implemented the Green Taxonomy of the National Bank of Georgia, developed in line with the best international taxonomies and sustainability frameworks.

International Fund Raising - Providing solutions that contribute to the sustainable development of local businesses has been an important target for TBC's sustainability agenda. To achieve its ESG objectives, the Bank has continued to mobilize financial resources, focusing on the country's inclusive economic growth and sustainable development. In 2022, the Bank mobilized the wholesale portfolio of \$485 million in total, from its International Financial Institutions (IFIs) partners. Attracted facilities are a testament to TBC's strong commitment to supporting the sustainable economic growth of local businesses, thereby contributing to job creation and bringing long-lasting benefits to the country.

## HAVE THERE BEEN ANY STRUGGLES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF GREEN INITIATIVES INTO YOUR BANK, AND OVERALL COMMUNITY?

Customer awareness and expertise are challenging, since awareness of businesses and society about climate-related risks and opportunities is very low. This influences the readiness to engage actively in the transformation process to a low-carbon economy. Additionally, as a developing economy, short-term objectives often are more prioritized. We need to create a good base for research, and cross-sectoral analysis, including finance specialists, scientists and government institutions.

Data: Challenges currently exist concerning the availability of granular and comparable data and the development of metrics that adequately translate climate outcomes into financial impacts. To some extent, these challenges reflect a lack of underlying data, for instance on the exposures of different sectors to climate risks.

Affordable funding to finance mitigation and adaptation measures for differ-

ent (vulnerable or relevant) sectors in Georgia are needed for the agriculture, transport, buildings, construction, energy sector.

## WHAT MEASURABLE IMPACTS OR OUTCOMES HAVE RESULTED FROM TBC BANK GEORGIA'S SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES, AND HOW DO YOU TRACK AND REPORT ON THE PROGRESS?

In 2021, we published our first TCFD report and committed to making visible progress every year. In 2022, we advanced on climate stress scenarios and conducted the first climate stress testing exercise in Georgia. We have a dedicated team who is responsible for fostering the process, creating knowledge and engaging with partner organizations on additional technical and educational support.

We incorporated climate-related initiatives and aspirations in our ESG Strategy which follows a strategic road map, reflecting milestones of our sustainability journey for the following years up to 2030.

In 2022, the Group aligned loan portfolio growth planning with risks and opportunities in different sectors and defined relevant products on a sectoral level, thus supporting sustainable portfolio growth and the transition to a lower-emission economy in Georgia. In order to identify products relevant for various economic sectors, separate meetings and analyses were conducted with representatives of the various business lines and the potential for greening a sector was assessed.

As of the end of 2022, the sustainable loan portfolio of TBC Bank (GEL 782

mln) includes exposures with different purposes, such as, energy-efficiency loans, electric car loans, renewable energy financing for solar panels and hydro-power plants.

In this process, we closely cooperate with our partner IFIs, e.g. EBRD. Recently, TBC committed to developing a comprehensive transition plan in the near future. TBC is the first bank in the region with this commitment.

However, there are a number of challenges. TBC's objectives are to act responsibly and manage the climate-related, environmental and social risks associated with our operations, increase the resilience of customers, employees, businesses and society towards climate change risks, and support them in pursuing climate-related opportunities.

In 2019, we started to respond to stakeholders' demand for more information and published a GRI-referenced sustainability report. Our GRI-reference sustainability report is a full-scale report covering the areas where TBC has an impact: good governance, employee diversity and equal opportunities, environmental footprint, climate change etc.

First of all, the disclosure is proof of our commitment. It shows the company's efforts to pursue its aspirations and goals. Furthermore, it creates trust in interested parties. And finally, the disclosure is a symbol of the responsibility towards all stakeholders: customers, employees, investors, partners, environment and society as a whole.

## LOOKING AHEAD, WHAT FUTURE PLANS OR GOALS DOES TBC BANK GEORGIA HAVE IN TERMS OF SUSTAINABILITY AND HOW DO YOU WANT TO BUILD OFF THE MOMENTUM THAT LED TO RECEIVING THE EBRD SUSTAINABILITY SILVER AWARD?

This year, we are going to accomplish some challenging tasks. Two examples are: to measure the Group's direct performance in relation to the Paris Agreement targets for GHG emissions reductions and to calculate our financed emissions.

For companies in the European Union, UK and other developed countries, this has already been done. However, for Georgia, this will be a new challenge. We need to develop and validate a methodology, data, and approach, and can consider using internationally established frameworks, such as the Partnership for Carbon Accounting Financials (PCAF).

Various initiatives and programs to support the targets set by the ESG Strategy:

Sustainable Financing - Sustainable loan portfolio growth KPIs - In 2021, ESG KPIs were linked to senior management remuneration over the medium term to reflect our mid-term strategy. In 2022, we continued to incorporate ESG-

related KPIs for bank-level positions and established sustainable loan portfolio growth targets for business segments - retail, MSME and corporate: the target for green and social loans for 2023 has been set at a total volume of GEL 1 billion.

ESG awareness - ESG Academy - Our expertise is essential in driving the transition, providing relevant solutions to the economic actors and increasing knowledge about climate-related and ESG matters. In 2023, we are taking a more structured approach and launching an ESG Academy with an extended scope for both our employees and customers. The academy will cover various topics, including green and social financing, financial inclusion, regulatory requirements, diversity and affirmative approaches, and sustainable business models and practices.

The first training program, 'Green mind-set and green financing' will include extensive training over two days for 900 employees and a one-day training for 300 retail, MSME and corporate customers. The program will be supported by partner IFIs - the Green for Growth Fund (GGF) and the European Fund for Southeast Europe (EFSE) and will run for 22 months.

Paris alignment - Science-based targets - In 2022, we built internal capacity on relevant GHG emissions calculation methodologies and approaches. This was achieved via training and the use of external consultancies. As the next step, we are committed to measuring our performance in line with internationally-established standards and aligning with science-based targets.

ESG awareness among employees and customers - In 2022, 98% of TBC Bank employees participated in ESG-related training. In 2023, we aim to develop a framework for measuring ESG awareness among employees in order to track the results regularly and identify areas for further improvement. Furthermore, we will establish an approach for customer engagement on ESG topics. Talent programs for Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) - As technology is key to TBC, ICT is a priority area. In 2023, we will commence a new ICT program, consisting of eight new training courses in programming, information security and other technologies. Our diversity targets focus on the empowerment of women, girls, and talented young people from the regions and rural areas as well as on age-diverse recruitment. Under the industry-led skills program co-funded by USAID, around 750 people from a diverse range of backgrounds, ages and genders are expected to participate in the program over the next 24 months. A number of the graduates will be employed by TBC and TBC's partner companies. ESG Strategies in significant subsidiaries - In 2023, we will have several priorities: establishment of ESG-related governance structures, implementation of ESG-related policies and training framework, development of regular reporting, as well as internal capacity building in our subsidiaries.

TBC Group's ambition is to be the leading supporter of ESG principles in Georgia and the wider region. We aspire to make our direct environmental impact net zero by 2025 and develop a plan to drive our indirect impact through financing to net zero.

Our ESG Strategy is guided by a strategic road map that outlines the key milestones for our sustainability journey through 2030. Our commitment lies in reaching an advanced level of compliance with TCFD requirements and integrating the local Green and Social Taxonomies set by the National Bank of Georgia.

And last, but not least, it is important to be transparent about work done, challenges in the process, limitations of approaches and future action plans. It is important to show that this is a consistent journey and not a completed project.





# THE ISET ECONOMIST

A BLOG ABOUT ECONOMICS AND THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

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The ISET Policy Institute (ISET-PI, [www.iset-pi.ge](http://www.iset-pi.ge)) is an independent think-tank associated with the International School of Economics at TSU (ISET). Our blog carries economic analysis of current events and policies in Georgia and the South Caucasus region ranging from agriculture, to economic growth, energy, labor markets and the nexus of economics, culture and religion. Thought-provoking and fun to read, our blog posts are written by international faculty teaching at ISET and recent graduates representing the new generation of Georgian, Azerbaijani and Armenian economists.

## Attracting High Spending International Tourists to Georgia

Figure N1. International tourism expenditure by country, 2019-2021 (US\$ billion)



Source: World Tourism Organization

### BLOG BY ELENE TSKHOMELIDZE

In 2022, Georgia's tourism sector still heavily relied on visitors from neighboring countries. The combined share of Russia, Turkey, Armenia, and Azerbaijan accounted for 62% of the total international visitors' trips. It is important to note that these countries had relatively low levels of expenditure per visit. On average, visitors from Russia spent 2,240 Gel per visit, visitors from Turkey spent 1,636 Gel, visitors from Armenia spent 757 Gel, and visitors from Azerbaijan had an average expenditure of 1,447 Gel per visit. In comparison, among the top tourism source markets in 2022, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Kazakhstan, had the highest average expenditure per visit. Saudi Arabian visitors spent an average of 5,391 Gel per trip, visitors from Israel spent 3,781 Gel, and visitors from Kazakhstan spent 3,387 Gel. However, despite their higher spending, these countries accounted for only 10% of the total international visits. Accordingly, one of the main challenges in attracting high-spending tourists to Georgia lies in diversifying the international tourism source markets.

Attracting high-spending international tourists and diversifying target markets are Georgia's top tourism development priorities. This objective is included in the Georgian Tourism Development Strategy 2025, the Government Program 2021-2024, and the framework for the planned Tourism Sector Reform. The aforementioned reform is aimed at enhancing the quality of tourist services,

the protection of consumer rights, and enforcement of safety standards in an effort to attract high-spending visitors to the country and increase the revenue generated from international visits.

With regard to the aforementioned, the purpose of this article is to assess Georgia's post-pandemic progress in attracting high-spending travelers and to analyze global trends in this direction. In order to identify source markets of the high-spending tourists, we'll determine the countries with the highest outbound tourism expenditure and average spendings per visit.

China is one of the world's fastest growing market for international tourism. Despite a 58% decrease in outbound tourism expenditure during the pandemic, in 2021, China still was the leading country in this regard. The United States is second, followed by Germany and France. Furthermore, the recovery rate of outbound tourism for China in 2019-2021 was 41%, 43% for the United States, and 51% and 69% respectively for Germany and France.

Among the top 15 countries by international tourism expenditure, the United Arab Emirates (118%), Qatar (106%), and Saudi Arabia (80%) have experienced the greatest recovery in the post-pandemic period. It is also worth noting that the EU countries rank high in terms of outbound tourism spendings (5 of the top 15 countries are EU member states).

Overall, the evaluation of global tourism trends highlighted the growing significance and progress of Asian and Middle Eastern countries in international tourism, while indicating a relatively weakened standing for Western countries (USA, Germany, United Kingdom,

France, Canada, and others) in 2021 compared to their positions in 2019.

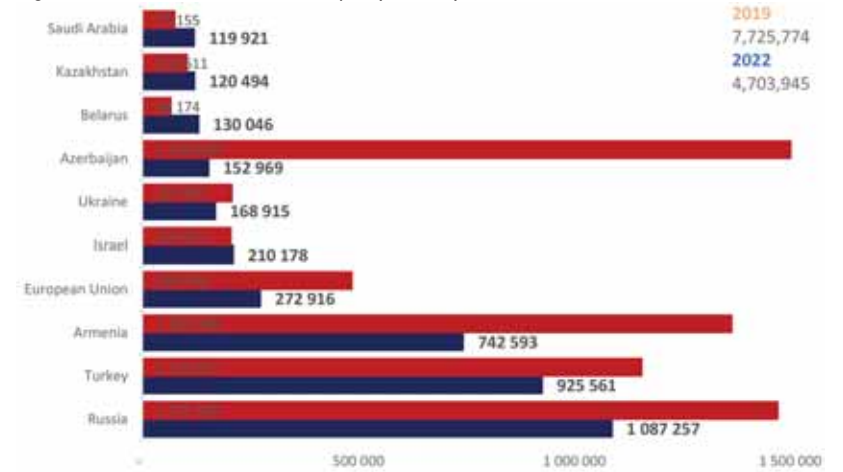
Based on the average expenditure per trip, South Korean tourists emerge as the highest spenders among international travelers. Also, China experienced a significant surge of 151% in its average outbound tourism expenditures between 2019 and 2021, securing the second position with a substantial amount of \$4,125. Furthermore, notable increases in average expenditures were observed in the United Arab Emirates (198%), India (96%), and Saudi Arabia (82%) during this period. These rises in average spending by visitors from the Middle East and Asia align with the growing share of their expenditure in the global market. Among the top European countries, France (\$2,533), Belgium (\$1,705), and Spain (\$1,688) stand out with the highest average expenditure per trip.

Upon identifying the primary markets for high-spending tourists worldwide, it becomes compelling to delve into the specific trends within Georgia. Evaluating the issue of attracting high-spending travelers to Georgia requires a comprehensive examination of various indicators, including tourism recovery in the post-pandemic era, revenue generated from tourism, average expenses of international visitors per country, and the duration of their visits.

In 2019-2022, the number of international visits to Georgia recovered by 61% (2019: 7.7 million, 2021: 4.7 million). In addition, there is a strong positive trend in international tourism receipts. In 2022, the figure increased to \$3.5 billion, a 7% increase over the amount in 2019. During the same period, the average duration of international visits increased from 4 nights in 2019 to 6 nights in 2022. By 2022, the average expenditure per visit has been multiplied from 1,102 GEL in 2019 to 2,298 GEL. The rise in international travel receipts can also be attributed to the influence of the Russian-Ukrainian war and the influx of migrants coming to Georgia from Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine.

In regard to the diversification of the source markets of international visitors, it is crucial to highlight Georgia's heavy reliance on visitors from neighboring countries. According to Figure N3, approximately 60% to 70% of the total visits in 2019 and 2022 were attributed

Figure N3. International visitors' trips by country, 2019-2022



Source: Georgian National Tourism Administration

to neighboring countries. The share of visitors from EU countries remained unchanged, while the share of visits from other countries increased by 10%. The decline in the share of visitors from neighboring countries during 2019-2022 can be linked to a substantial decrease of 90% in the number of Azerbaijani tourists. The decline in tourist flows from Azerbaijan in 2020 can be attributed to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically the closure of the land border by Azerbaijan with its neighboring countries. This closure resulted in a significant reduction in the number of tourists coming from Azerbaijan to Georgia. In terms of the rise in the share of visitors from other countries, notable increases have been observed in the number of visitors from Belarus (97% increase), Kazakhstan (16% increase), Saudi Arabia (60% increase), and Israel (3% increase). In addition, following the onset of the war between Ukraine and Russia in 2022, there has been a significant surge in the number of visitors from Russia and Belarus.

Based on the data from 2022, the distribution of international visitors by country reveals that the top 10 countries account for 84% of the total international visitor trips.

To evaluate the country's current progress in attracting high-spending visitors, it is crucial to assess the average expenditures and length of stay of the visitors from main source markets, and to compare them with countries identified at the international level. Among the top 10 countries, visitors from Saudi Arabia (5,391 GEL), Israel (3,781 GEL), and Kazakhstan (3,387 GEL) have the highest average expenditures. In the case of visitors from Belarus and Ukraine, their higher spending patterns are related to

a longer-than-average duration of visit. Germany's (2,996 GEL) expenditures were the highest among the three EU member states. It is worth noting that among the top source markets of international visitors in Georgia in 2021, countries such as Israel (\$1,070), Belarus (\$1,178), Saudi Arabia (\$1,447), and EU member states (France - \$2,543, Germany - \$982) were in the category of high spending countries (high expenditure per trip) on an international level.

In conclusion, it is evident that despite the gradual recovery of tourism during the post-pandemic period, accompanied by an increase in income from international tourism, average lengths of stay, and expenditures per trip, there are still challenges associated with diversifying the source markets of international visitors and a high dependence on visitors from neighboring countries. The planned reform in the tourism sector aims to diversify and enhance the quality of tourist services, with the goal of attracting a greater number of high-spending visitors to the country. Based on the evaluation of countries with high expenditure on international tourism on a global scale, and considering Georgia's existing connections, it is crucial to attract high-spending tourists from target countries in the West, such as the United States and European countries, as well as to capitalize on the growing outbound tourism markets of Asia.

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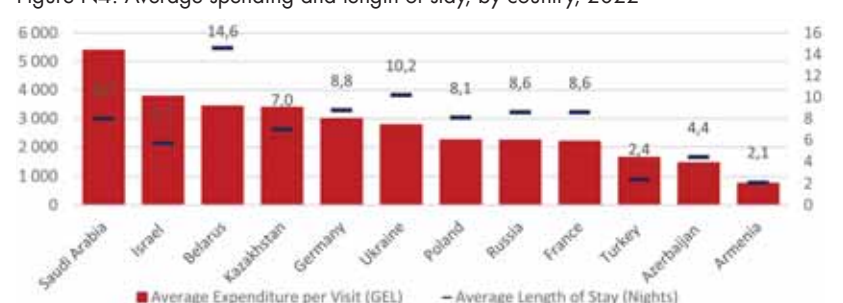
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Figure N2. International tourism expenditure per trip, by country of origin, 2021 (US\$)



Source: World Tourism Organization

Figure N4. Average spending and length of stay, by country, 2022



Source: Georgian National Tourism Administration

# One More Episode of the Tragedy



BLOG BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

This is a story for summer reading, but not reading for a trivial fleeting pleasure. This is a reading we should all take close to heart, not only to mind. I am talking about Mirian (Mikka) Chelidze, the

Georgian policeman whose heart stopped beating as a result of his being an overstrained witness to the tragic details of the Shovi natural disaster in northwest Georgia at the beginning of this month. I was lucky enough to have known him in person in his salad years. We met in his native village Cheliagele of the gorgeously beautiful Racha about three decades ago. The now late ardent patriot's house is located right across

the street from the yard-gate of my closest friends and soulmates – the Kobakhidzes, an old-core, traditional family with centuries-old local, but still flourishing, roots. The Kobakhidze-Chelidze kinship is well-known and long-established in this strong and reverent neighborhood. So, to not be at odds with my own self, I needed to have a last farewell look at our good Mirian, whose erstwhile benevolence and hospitality will

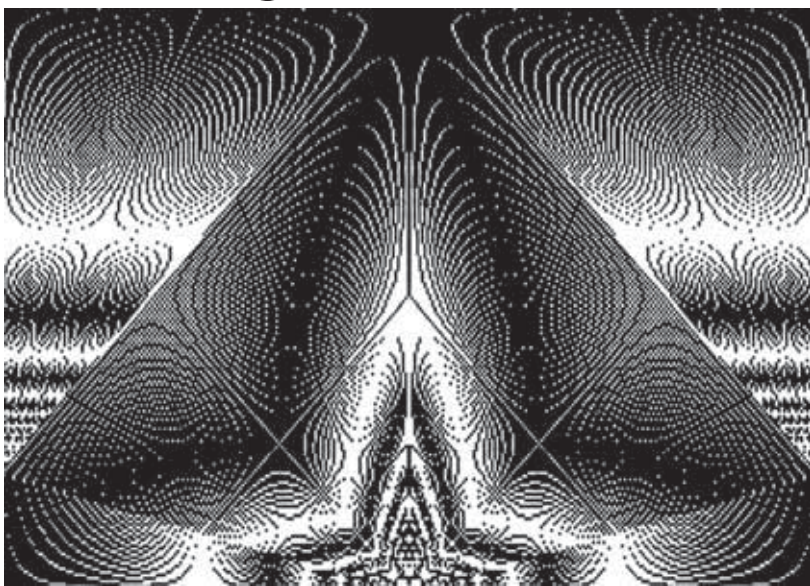
never be forgotten as long as I am alive.

It was the 10th of August that our wonderful Mikka was last seen lying in state under the dome of Nikortsminda, one of the most stunning churches of 11th century Sakartvelo. I arrived to see the churchyard and the entire neighborhood full of respectfully soundless and sincerely saddened people from all around Georgia. I was internally shocked to see those handsome young men, standing motionless in a guard of honor at the cathedral entrance, as if fortifying in advance the memory of their beloved Mirian, no longer talking and encouraging them in the deeds they are all prepared for, any time their country needs their dedication. Major Mirian Chelidze was indeed a genuine comrade-in-arms for the scores of bereft policemen who stood together to perform their last duty to their elder friend and associate. The expectation of the last appearance of the draped-in-flag casket in the church door was painfully stressful, but so unanimous at the same time that one would wish for this kind of nobility and high-mindedness to vibrate throughout the entire nation, it being the kind of feeling that would annihilate, with just one stroke of a hand, the nonsensical political gibberish that ensued as a vicious ideological consequence of the 3rd-of-August Shovi tragedy, smearing Georgia even

worse than the thousands of tons of dirt brought down by the calamitous avalanche.

We all followed the funeral procession to the very brink of the grave, where the burial volley was discharged while the precious body was lowered into its final abode. Nobody wanted to talk. Nobody wanted to comment. Nobody wanted to move. They were all reminiscing the heartfelt and selfless effort of their native villager Mirian Chelidze, the father of three minors and the former favorite boy of the neighborhood, who found himself on the spot of the disaster, together with his team, in practically no time to help the victims of the unheard-of ruin. He, like all of them who were mobilized, certainly did their possible best to save lives, but Mikka could not survive the unimaginable emotionality that accompanied the whole rescue process. His heart, as his friends and relatives told me with tears in their reddened eyes, was big, but so tender that it turned out to be unable to take so much pressure, tension and anxiety. No first aid, no friendly assistance, no further medical interference could save him. He passed away serving his people and honoring the human conscience that builds our ethics and integrity. Thank you, Mikka, our dear man, and rest your soul in peace. Sit Tibi Terra Levis!

## Getting to be a Bit Too Much



BLOG BY TONY HANMER

Do you remember the first computer to arrive in your home? I do. I was 17, so this was 1984: interesting coincidence of year, although this device would not be watching us as we used it, per George Orwell's novel, 1941, published in 1948.

This was a Commodore 64. It had (gasp!) 64 KILOBYTES of RAM memory... 16 colors (not 16 million) and a 200 by 320-pixel screen. Wow. It had actually floppy disks that you could put into a slot in it to play games or use programs. These disks were squares of plastic 5.25 inches on a side, and each of them held 700 KB of data. The really cool hack was that you could take 2 of them back to back, and using SCISSORS, carefully cut out an extra notch in each, positioned where the other disk's notch was. This DOUBLED a disk's capacity. Pow.

For my 18th birthday, in January 1985, my sister and her husband gave me a graphics program for the C64 called Doodle! Now, you might think, what kind of graphics could you come up with using such a low-spec system? There weren't yet even any vector graphics, so it was all very clunky, pixelated and primitive. But I took it and ran. This might be the first instance of my taking a program and going far outside the manual with it, into uncharted territory, testing it past its defined limits.

Forget the 16 colors: I stayed with black and white, no grays even. But I soon

learned that you could make a line, say from corner to diagonally opposite corner... then move only one endpoint of that line a single pixel (or both, if you wanted), and draw another line. The line being made of shorter horizontal or vertical segments, which were quite visible given its coarseness, you could then specify how you wanted these two lines to interact. Would shared black pixels stay black, or go white? Then you'd increment the line, 1 pixel at a time. If you had chosen for overlapping black pixels to cancel each other out to white, a pattern would emerge as the screen's rectangle filled up with lines. I can't prove it at this point, but I believe the patterns were my first fractals, although I wasn't setting out to make these, nor did I even know yet what fractals were. (A new word in mathematics, coined by Benoit Mandelbrot in the 1970s, from the Latin for "broken". It would take quite a while to percolate into math education).

I was off, making hundreds of these weird monotone abstract images and saving them to my hacked double-storage floppies. They're still around, in my parents' storage of my things in Canada, maybe in a completely obsolete file format which retro/nostalgia specialists can rescue for me, for a fee.

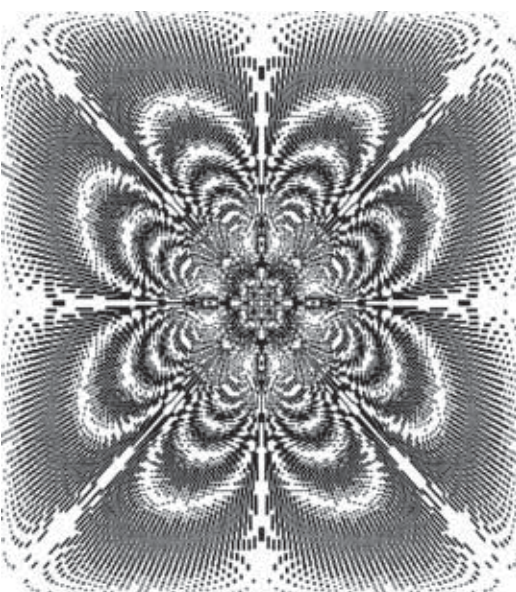
The simple way I made these images fascinated me, and I had never seen any-

thing like them before. Soon I started working for a screen printing company, while still in my last year of high school. I put together a whole exhibition of my work in an actual gallery in my small town: dot-matrix printed, then screen printed in darker black ink on better paper. It was a blast.

I look back on those simple computing days with nostalgia, compared to the arrival of the Internet and the flood of (dis)information which bombards us today at the speed of light. As a potential info-junkie, I have to be careful, as Google will do its best to answer anything I ask. Even in rural, high-mountain Svaneti: we have internet up here too, you know! Turn it down, look away from the screen, go for a walk in nature, read a physical book, put on the skeptic's glasses, breathe.

I did ask the mathematician father of a school friend how many distinct images a screen of 200 by 320 pixels could produce in two colors. The answer?  $2^{(200 \times 320)}$ , or  $2^{64000}$ , or roughly  $10^{19264}$ . Given that the estimated number of atoms in the known universe is "only" about  $10^{80}$ , this number is inconceivably larger. Wow, pow.

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)



## Writers, Translators & Publishers Protest Appointment of GD MP as Head of Writers' House

Georgian writers, translators, publishers and people employed in the literary field have issued a joint statement regarding the appointment of "Georgian Dream" MP Ketevan Dumbadze as the head of the House of Writers.

The signatories of the statement declare disobedience to the policy of the Ministry of Culture and refuse to recognize the new head.

The statement, which has more than 80 signatories, states that the Ministry of Culture has an undemocratic, Soviet, anti-state character.

They demand that a commission be formed with a working group appointed by the writers, which will select a candidate for the director of the House of Writers and develop a new governing-board document.

"The House of Writers is the central institution of the Georgian literary process, which promotes the destruction of the isolation wall created by Russia around Georgia, and ensures Georgia's cultural involvement and participation on various important international platforms.

"This most important institution for Georgian literature, from the day of its establishment, was headed by Natalia Lomouri, who during all these years, together with the team of the House of Writers, created and implemented the most important projects for Georgian literature and Georgian culture in general.

"There can be a different opinion on the activities of every person, the head of every institution can be changed, but for the sustainable development of the state, it is important that the work done by a person in the public service is always properly appreciated and recognized. It is also important that areas of common national interest, such as culture, education and national security, are always free from narrow political and party-official interference and decisions. Therefore, the dismissal of the head of such an important institution and the appointment of a new head without consultation with the people working in the field, with a narrow party vision and behind closed doors, is completely incompatible, unacceptable and incredibly insulting to any sane person.

"When the Minister of Culture is unable to talk to the representatives of the liter-



ary field, has no desire to come to the House of Writers, to appreciate and recognize the enormous work done by his employees for ten years, he loses his legitimacy.

"The decision taken by the minister to select the head of an institution such as the House of Writers behind closed doors on the basis of party affiliation is categorically unacceptable. It is a disgusting expression of the Soviet totalitarian tradition and is damaging to the international relations vital to Georgian culture.

"We, Georgian writers, translators, publishers and people employed in the literary field declare our disobedience to the policy of the Ministry of Culture, which has an undemocratic, Soviet, anti-state character. Accordingly, we do not accept a new director who voted in favor of the "Russian law" against the Georgian society. We do not accept interference in literary life and processes by Soviet methods.

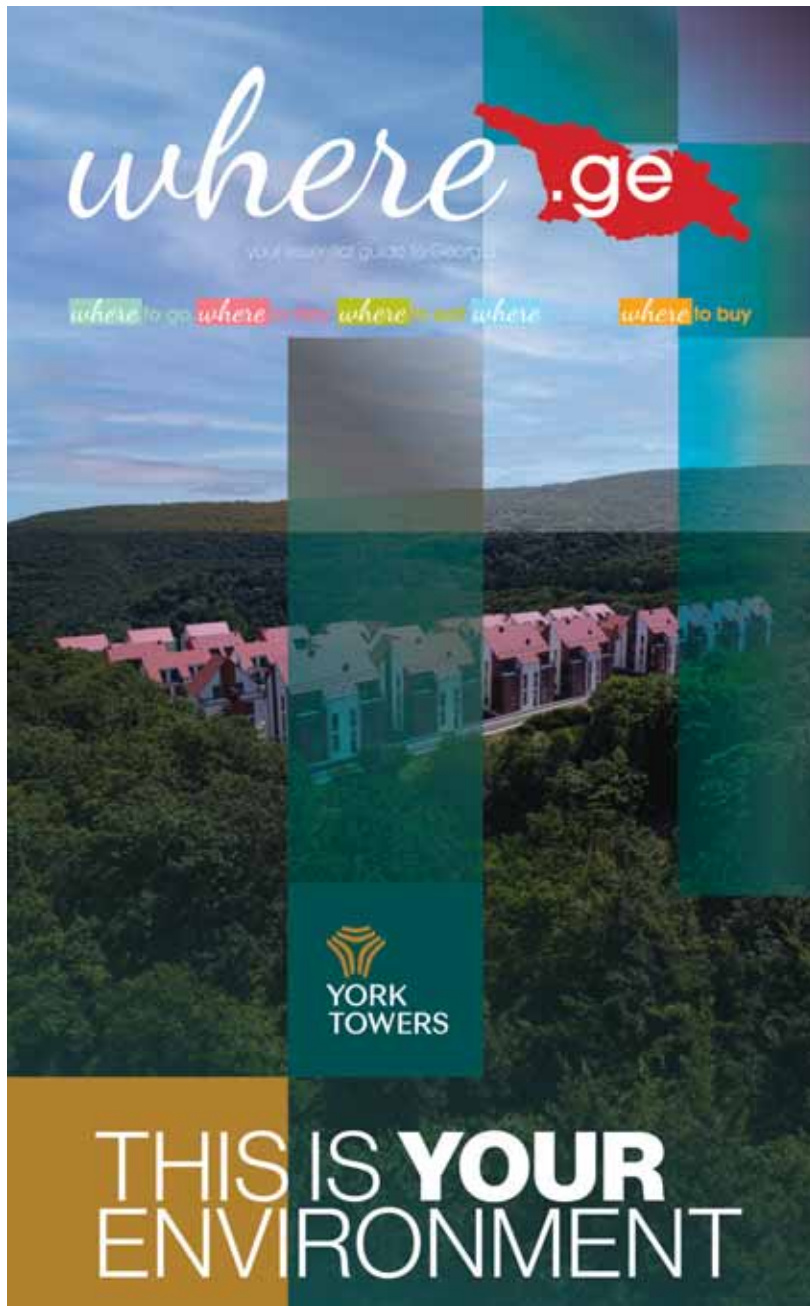
"We demand the creation of a commission together with a working group appointed by the writers, which will select a candidate for the director of the House of Writers and develop a new management-board document, in order to avoid interference in the work of the House of Writers with individual and party decisions in the future," the statement said.

More than 80 individuals and organizations have signed the statement so far. Signing of the statement continues.

From September 4, 2023, Ketevan Dumbadze, MP and daughter of the late children's writer Nodar Dumbadze, is set to head the Georgian House of Writers. The order of the Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth of Georgia has already been issued.

According to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, in the autumn session of 2023, the authority of Ketevan Dumbadze will be terminated as a Member of the Parliament of Georgia, according to the law.

# WHERE.ge: Your Ultimate Guide to Exploring Georgia, Back and Better Than Ever!



In a world that has been through unprecedented challenges due to the global pandemic, the revival of travel and tourism brings a ray of hope and excitement. We're thrilled to announce that WHERE.ge, your go-to travel guide magazine, is back with renewed vigor and a commitment to not only showcase the beauty of Georgia but also champion responsible and eco-friendly tourism. After a hiatus caused by the pandemic, WHERE.ge returns with a determination to make a positive impact on both travelers and the environment.

"This issue holds a special place in our hearts," Sopho Bochoidze, project manager of Where.ge says about this special comeback. "We have directed our efforts towards promoting a green environment and eco-friendly practices. In every section of the magazine, we have highlighted

the importance of responsible tourism. It's crucial for us all to travel in a way that nurtures our planet and leaves a positive mark on the destinations we visit. Responsible tourism is a very important aspect and we all have to focus on it."

The focus on global environmental issues in WHERE.ge's latest edition couldn't be more timely. The world is grappling with ecological challenges that require immediate attention and collective action. By weaving this vital theme into every aspect of the magazine, WHERE.ge encourages readers to travel mindfully, emphasizing that responsible tourism is a key factor in preserving the delicate balance of our planet.

Sopho extends heartfelt gratitude to the general sponsor, "York Towers," for making this revitalized project possible. In a world where the environment is at



**Adventure Experiences in Ajara - Thrilling Adventures Await**

Batumi's location on the coast makes it a great place for water sports like jet skiing, banana boat rides, and windsurfing.

Zip line through Ajara's lush forests, enjoying a thrilling and unique perspective of nature. Zip lining offers an exhilarating adventure amidst the region's natural beauty.

Try river rafting on Acharskhal River, combining adrenaline-pumping fun with breathtaking landscapes. The river offers varying levels of difficulty, suitable for both beginners and experienced rafters.

**Gonio Fortress - A Glimpse into the Past**

Discover the ancient Roman-Byzantine citadel of Gonio Fortress, dating back to the 1st century AD. The fortress is steeped in history, and legends suggest it may have been the final resting place of Saint Matthew, one of the twelve apostles of Jesus. Visit the museum within Gonio-Apsaros Fortress, uncovering artifacts and historical treasures. The museum offers insights into the region's ancient past, including its role as a strategic military center.

**Mtskheta National Park - A Nature Lover's Paradise**



where to go



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Ajara boasts a rich tradition of dairy farming, and its pristine natural environment, landscapes, and favorable climate contribute to the production of exceptional dairy delights.

Acquaintance with the traditional cuisine should begin with Apruli khachapuri that is the culinary pride and landmark of Batumi. Kaimaghi, Sinoi, Aprion Achva, Borso are some of the culinary wonders of the region.

**Ecotourism in Ajara - Heavenly Experience**

If you are an eco-tourist seeking the perfect destination, you will find everything you need within the unique nature of Ajara. This area

offers a verdant landscape, a safe environment, natural diversity, various ecological zones, aesthetically pleasing landscapes, and areas untouched by urbanization and culturalization.

You can enjoy birdwatching and observe the impressive raptor migration in Batumi, attracting birdwatchers from around the world. The Batumi Flyway is a major route for migrating birds, providing a unique opportunity for birdwatching enthusiasts.

Experience the beauty of Ajara's landscapes on horseback, riding through forests and meadows. Horseback riding allows for a unique and serene way to connect with nature.



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where to go

the forefront of concerns, "York Towers" stands out as a beacon of environmental consciousness among real estate companies in Georgia. Their commitment to green living and unique eco-friendly projects aligns seamlessly with WHERE.ge's mission of promoting responsible and sustainable travel.

But that's not all! WHERE.ge has exciting new directions in this fresh phase. In addition to showcasing businesses operating within the country, the magazine will now be shining a spotlight on Georgian businesses making waves abroad. If you're a proud Georgian enterprise operating locally or internationally, this is your chance to be featured. Get in touch with us at [sopho@where.ge](mailto:sopho@where.ge) and let us tell your inspiring story to the world.

WHERE.ge is the winner of the 2017 National Tourism Award in the nomination 'Best Tourism Marketing Campaign.' Where.ge was also the third runner-up in its category, "Tourism Campaign of the Year 2018" at the Emerging Europe Awards.

"I am very proud to see Where.ge back on its feet again, sharing this beautiful and packed-with-potential country with the world; sharing its culture, its history, its culinary delights, and the successes and determination of its small business owners, large development companies and all those who work together to raise the standards and make

Georgia a must-see destination on every tourist's list," says Editor-in-Chief, Katie Ruth Davies.

The heart of WHERE.ge lies in its unique approach. Beyond the regular tourist spots, WHERE.ge allows you to uncover hidden gems and insider tips that even your tour guide might not know.

George Sharashidze, the publisher of WHERE.ge, conveys the essence of Georgian hospitality in his message: "For Georgians, the guest is sacred. We embrace the phrase 'Sautskhoo,' which means 'for a stranger' or 'for a guest.' As you, our cherished guest, explore Georgia through WHERE.ge, we're dedicated to making your experience truly 'Sautskhoo.'"

WHAT makes WHERE.ge stand out? Clear Content: Where to GO, STAY, EAT, DRINK, BUY - all meticulously curated for a comprehensive travel experience.

Professional Team: Behind every page

is a team of seasoned professionals dedicated to bringing you the best of Georgia.

Trustworthy Listings: Our listings of hotels and restaurants are regularly updated and double-checked to ensure accuracy.

Extensive Distribution Network: WHERE.ge is available not only in Georgia but also internationally at various expos and events.

This isn't just a relaunch; it's a celebration of the joy of travel and the responsibility we all share in protecting our planet. WHERE.ge is your guide to discovering the heart and soul of Georgia, while also advocating for a greener future. So grab your copy at airports, hotels, and various locations throughout Georgia, or simply purchase it at Prospero's bookshops, then plan your adventure and let WHERE.ge be your compass in exploring the vibrant landscapes, rich culture, and warm hospitality of this beautiful country.



**PUBLISHER & GM**  
George Sharashidze

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

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

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

**Photographer:**  
Aleksi Serov

**Website Editor:**  
Katie Ruth Davies

**Layout:**  
Misha Mchedlishvili

**Webmaster:**  
Sergey Gevenov

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

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

Tel.: +995 32 229 59 19  
E: [info@georgiatoday.ge](mailto:info@georgiatoday.ge)  
F: GeorgiaToday

**ADVERTISING & SUBSCRIPTION**  
+995 555 00 14 46  
E-mail:  
[marketing@georgiatoday.ge](mailto:marketing@georgiatoday.ge)

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