



FOCUS ON ISRAEL
 Israel's Ambassador to Georgia, Hadas Ester Meitzad, sits down with us to discuss the atrocities happening at home **PAGE 5**

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INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

The topics were ripe for the picking when Radio Free Europe's Georgian Service sat down with Nico Lange, Senior Fellow at the Munich Security Conference. Former Chief of Staff at the German Ministry of Defense from 2019-2022, he was perfectly placed to answer our questions on Israel, Ukraine and his own country's much-anticipated Zeitenwende. "There are many elements that are quite surprising about what happened in Israel last weekend," he began. "And I think the Israelis will have to clarify some of that, because the operation looks like it took a while to prepare. And to be overrun by this operation in that way, and taking such a long time to respond, that, at least to me, is very surprising when it comes to the Israeli Defense Forces.



Continued on page 6 Nico Lange. Source: Globsec

Markets		Price		w/w		m/m	
BONDS							
GRAIL 07/28	86.63 (YTM 7.43%)	+0.4%	-0.6%				
SILNET 01/27	98.53 (YTM 8.89%)	+0.2%	+0.2%				
TBC 06/24	99.23 (YTM 6.91%)	+0.2%	+0.2%				
COMMODITIES							
Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	85.82	+0.0%	-5.3%				
Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	1,874.36	+2.9%	-2.5%				
CURRENCIES							
GEL / USD	2.6862	+0.4%	+2.6%				
GEL / EUR	2.8526	+1.5%	+1.4%				
GEL / GBP	3.3082	+1.9%	+1.1%				
GEL / CHF	2.9780	+2.2%	+1.4%				
GEL / RUB	0.0273	+1.9%	-0.4%				
GEL / TRY	0.0969	-0.1%	-0.5%				
GEL / AZN	1.5805	+0.3%	+2.8%				
GEL / AMD	0.0068	+4.1%	-0.2%				
GEL / UAH	0.0735	+0.7%	+3.8%				
EUR / USD	0.9416	-1.1%	+1.2%				
GBP / USD	0.8121	-1.4%	+1.6%				
CHF / USD	0.9020	-1.7%	+1.3%				
RUB / USD	98.3039	-1.7%	+2.7%				
TRY / USD	27.7087	+0.5%	+3.1%				
AZN / USD	1.6980	-0.0%	+0.0%				
AMD / USD	396.8100	-3.6%	+5.9%				
INDICES							
FTSE 100	7,620.03	+2.8%	+1.6%				
FTSE 250	17,876.24	+2.2%	-3.5%				
DAX	15,460.01	+2.4%	-2.2%				
DOW JONES	33,804.87	+2.0%	-2.5%				
NASDAQ	13,659.68	+3.2%	-1.9%				
MSCI EM EE	36.12	+6.2%	+1.0%				
MSCI EM	956.84	+3.1%	-2.1%				
SP 500	4,376.95	+2.7%	-2.5%				
MSCI FM	2,101.01	+0.9%	-2.4%				

Ukraine Updates: Zelensky Urges Support for Israel, Putin Issues Fresh Nuclear Threat



Photo by Grigory Sysoyev/Sputnik

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

It's been a busy week for international diplomacy in Europe as allies discuss the war in Ukraine, the Israel-Hamas conflict and oil market stability.

Oil-producing giants Russia and Saudi Arabia met in Moscow Wednesday to discuss the oil market situation amid the ongoing violence and geopolitical uncertainty between Israel and the Palestinian militant group Hamas.

The Kremlin warned Wednesday that the Israel-Hamas conflict has the hallmarks of a "hot war" right now and could potentially be "very dangerous," espe-

cially on a humanitarian level.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky was in Belgium Wednesday meeting the NATO defense minister and other allies in an attempt to bolster support and military assistance for Kyiv ahead of winter.

The meeting comes amid signs of flagging support for continuing military aid Ukraine as the war drags into its 19th month. The war between Israel and Palestinian militant group Hamas is also a distraction for Western leaders hoping to avoid a wider and more destabilizing Middle Eastern conflict.

PUTIN: RUSSIA IS ON THE RIGHT TRACK

Russian President Vladimir Putin said

Moscow "is on the right track" in a speech given during Russian Energy Week, as reported by state media outlet TASS on Telegram.

Putin said that it "goes without saying" that Western attempts to isolate Russia have failed, and that people around the world no longer want to tolerate the "colonial thinking [that] persists in the West."

ZELENSKY URGES SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS OF ISRAEL TERROR ATTACKS

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky urged the international community to support the people who were harmed during the Saturday terrorist offensive of Palestinian militant group Hamas against Israel.

The Ukrainian premier spoke at a press briefing during his first visit to the Brussels headquarters of the NATO military alliance since Russia's full-scale invasion of Kyiv. He attended to request defense aid and weapons to tide Ukraine over during another challenging wartime winter.

"We are at war, so we understand what such terrorist attacks mean," he said Wednesday. Zelensky called for international solidarity with Israel following the attacks. The NATO coalition has likewise condemned the Hamas assault.

The Kremlin has meanwhile placed blame on a failure of US foreign policy for the latest spate of hostilities in the Middle East, Reuters reports.

"I remember the first days of our full-scale war. It began from terrorist attacks from Belarus, by missile, then the Russian army entering. The biggest tragedy we had was so many dying people. It was very important not to be alone," Zelensky said.

"My recommendation to the leaders [is] to go to Israel, to support people. I'm not speaking about institutions, just to support the people who have been hit by these terrorist attacks," he stressed, adding, "Unity is more important than being alone."

VLADIMIR PUTIN ISSUES FRESH NUCLEAR THREAT

President Vladimir Putin said on Thursday that Russia had successfully tested a potent new strategic missile, and declined to rule out the possibility it could carry out weapons tests involving nuclear explosions for the first time in more than three decades.

Putin said that Moscow had successfully tested the Burevestnik, a nuclear-powered and nuclear-capable cruise missile with a potential range of many thousands of miles.

In his words, "if any country launches a nuclear attack against Moscow, no single enemy would have a chance of survival".

The United States and its allies were no longer sufficiently afraid of Russia's nuclear might, said Sergei A. Karaganov, whose commentary is often influential in the Kremlin. "Isn't it time," he asked the Russian leader, "to lower the threshold and go firmly but quickly up the escalation ladder to deter and sober up our partners?"

Putin, who a year ago was issuing nuclear threats of his own, said he was familiar with Mr. Karaganov's proposals, which include hitting "a bunch of targets," with nuclear strikes, but the Russian leader said he saw no need to alter the country's current nuclear doctrine.

He is also feeling more confident on the battlefield in Ukraine, regularly bragging about Ukraine's stalled counteroffensive, lessening the need to rely on nuclear threats. Polls show that despite support for the war in Ukraine, Russians broadly disapprove of the possible use of nuclear weapons.

TWO KILLED IN STRIKE ON UKRAINIAN SCHOOL

A Russian missile this week hit a school in central Ukraine, killing at least two people, officials said.

Rescuers were still searching for survivors under the rubble in the town of Nikopol in Dnipropetrovsk, regional governor Serhiy Lysak said.

"It has been established that the victims were employees," Ihor Klymenko, the interior minister, said on Telegram, alongside footage of rescue workers clambering through the rubble of the school.

The governor said more than 40 homes and an infrastructure facility had been damaged in the attack, and that two men aged 24 and 71 had been wounded.

Russia did not immediately comment on the incident, then denied deliberately targeting civilians, although many have been killed in frequent Russian air strikes across Ukraine since the invasion.

TWO UKRAINIAN BROTHERS ACCUSED OF HELPING MOSCOW IN CAFE ATTACK THAT KILLED 55

Two Ukrainian villagers have been accused of helping guide a missile strike that killed dozens of people in the Ukrainian village of Hroza.

The strike on October 5 saw a Russian missile slam into a cafe in the village in Kharkiv as people gathered to mourn a fallen Ukrainian soldier.

It was the deadliest attack in Ukraine this year, and one of the worst since Russia invaded, with Ukrainian prosecutors putting the death toll at 55.

The Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) said the two suspects, who are brothers, worked for the Russian occupation authorities when Moscow controlled the village for several months last year.

The SBU said the men fled to Russia shortly before Ukraine regained control of the village in September last year. After this, the agency said the men continued to work for Russia by building a network of informants in Ukraine.

According to the SBU, the brothers started gathering information on the wake in Hroza at the beginning of October.

"Under the guise of friendly conversations and correspondence in Messenger, the traitors asked people for information about the deployment of the defense forces and mass events in the region," the SBU said.

New US Ambassador Robin Dunnigan Arrives in Georgia



The new Ambassador of the United States of America to Georgia, Robin Dunnigan, has arrived in Tbilisi. "The Embassy is excited to welcome Ambassador Robin Dunnigan to Georgia," the Embassy said.

Robin Dunnigan replaced Kelly Degnan as US Ambassador to Georgia.

The President of the United States of America, Joe Biden, nominated Robin Dunnigan for the position of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary

to Georgia on February 14, 2023. Dunnigan previously served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Central and Eastern Europe in the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs. Prior to this assignment she served as Chargé d'Affaires, a.i., and Deputy Chief of Mission of the US Embassy in Vienna, Austria. Previously, Dunnigan was Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Energy Resources. Earlier assignments include US Embassies in Vietnam, Chile, Turkey, Cuba, and El Salvador.

United Nations Statement on International Day of the Girl Child

On October 11, the United Nations (UN) family in Georgia marked the International Day of the Girl Child by highlighting the urgent need for increased attention and resources to enable girls to realize their rights and achieve their full potential.

The UN in Georgia expressed its deep condolences on the murder of the 14-year-old girl in Sagarejo municipality on October 6, 2023 and called for a prompt and thorough investigation, as well as the adjudication of the perpetrator.

"This tragic case of gender-based violence is a result of gender inequality, the harmful practice of child marriage, and sexual violence," the UN statement reads. "The case demonstrates that more vigorous efforts are needed by actors involved in the State Child Protection Referral Procedures to prevent, identify, and properly respond to cases of violence. The state protection and support services for children and their families need to take proactive measures to ensure that child victims of violence, including sexual violence, receive immediate and necessary protection and support."

"Considering the importance of a multi-sectoral response to eliminate the harmful practice of child marriage, the UN in Georgia calls for coordinated actions to improve the State Child Protection Referral Procedures, law enforcement practices, child-friendly judicial processes, and adolescent-friendly health services. It is pivotal to design integrated services



for child survivors of sexual violence that provide both child-friendly justice processes and child psycho-social rehabilitation in one space and ensure that these services are accessible in all regions of the country. In addition, children should have access to child-friendly reporting mechanisms to seek support when and as needed.

"The UN in Georgia believes that urgent change is necessary in social norms and attitudes that tolerate child marriage and sexual violence against women and girls while preventing responsible professionals from acting on the cases of violence."

"Ensuring access to education, information, and health services for adolescent girls is of paramount importance as it allows them to make informed decisions about the future, protect their bodily

autonomy, and freedom of choice. Empowering adolescent girls is fundamental to ending the harmful practice of child marriage and building a more just and equitable society for all. When girls have equal access to education and healthcare, they are better equipped to realize their potential and contribute to their communities."

"The UN in Georgia remains committed to working with the Government of Georgia, civil society groups, and with human rights activists to address systemic problems that are the root causes of these tragedies. The UN in Georgia will continue its work to ensure that the fundamental human rights of women and girls are protected, they are equipped with the knowledge and skills and are empowered to make informed decisions about their lives."



Uncle Detained, Mother Charged in Connection With Forced Marriage and Murder of 14-year-old Girl

The Prosecutor's Office of Georgia has filed charges against the mother and uncle of a 14-year-old girl following the minor's premeditated murder, forced marriage and the crime then going unreported.

"The investigation conducted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs established that in the summer of 2023, in order to force a minor to marry him, the abductor illegally deprived the minor of her freedom and brought her to the village of Lambalo in the Sagarejo district, where the victim's right to free movement was limited. Despite this, the minor managed to escape, contact her

mother with a stranger's mobile phone, and report her abduction, a fact which also became known to the uncle of the abducted minor.

"Although the minor's mother and uncle learned about the serious crime committed against the 14-year-old girl, they believed that the minor did not have the right to express free will, they did not report the crime to the law enforcement authorities, and they forced the child to live with her abductor.

"Law enforcement officers arrested the victim's uncle on October 11, based on the judge's ruling. The Prosecutor's Office petitioned the court for the arrest

of the mother of the murdered girl also, but this request was rejected by the Rustavi City Court.

"The Prosecutor's Office charged both perpetrators with forced marriage and non-reporting of a crime", the Prosecutor's Office said.

On Tuesday, police arrested a 27-year-old man for the intentional murder of his 14-year-old wife, the Ministry of Internal Affairs reported. "The investigation established that the accused man fatally wounded A.Sh., born in 2009, in a village in Sagarejo Municipality," they said. A firearm was seized. The crime is punishable by up to 20 years or life imprisonment.

First-Ever eCommerce Day in Georgia



HT Solutions
ISAC
PAYZE
Phubber
Soplidan.ge
Qisabags
Retain
Tegeta Holding
TNET
UN Women Georgia
UniPAY
USAID
USAID Economic Security Program
Store
Viber
VISA
Wowchy

BY MARIAM GORKHELASHVILI

The inaugural Electronic Commerce Day is set to take place in Georgia on October 25, hosted at the Sheraton Grand Metekhi Palace in Tbilisi and organized by the eCommerce Association of Georgia.

The event aims to create a forum for both local and international companies to converge, providing a unique opportunity for networking, knowledge-sharing, and potential future collaborations.

Among the distinguished attendees are companies such as Amazon Pharmacy,

Rakuten Viber, Glovo, Evidox Meta, and others. Esteemed speakers will delve into various topics including the future of eCommerce, challenges, innovation, artificial intelligence, payments, supply chain management/logistics, and digital marketing, all drawn from their own experiences.

Noteworthy participants and partners of the eCommerce Day 2023 include:

Amazon Pharmacy
Aversi
Bank of Georgia Business
CALEN AI
Evidox META
GITA
Glovo
Homeview.ai

The event is supported by partners Tegeta Holding, the USAID Economic Security Program, the USAID Economic Governance Program, Bank of Georgia Business, and Visa, with TNET serving as the media partner.

Established in 2020, the eCommerce Association of Georgia has been dedicated to advancing and enhancing the e-commerce landscape. Over the years, they have successfully undertaken projects aimed at bolstering the association's capacity and sustainability, with this year's conference aligning seamlessly with these objectives. It provides local businesses with an invaluable opportunity to forge strategic partnerships within the Georgian eCommerce community.

Traffic Restrictions on Light and Passenger Vehicles Traveling through Rikoti Canceled

The special restrictions on light and passenger vehicles traveling through the Rikoti construction area between eastern and western Georgia have been canceled.

The Department of Highways reports that since the intensity of traffic on the Rikoti Pass road has significantly decreased, the design works for the stabilization of the slope at km 149 of the mentioned road have been completed and the preparatory construction works have started. As such, from October 12, the special regime of traffic established on the Rikoti Pass has changed.

"The special regime is canceled for light and passenger vehicles, and, therefore, they will be able to move along the Rikoti pass road at any time of day or night, without restrictions.

"A special regime of traffic for motor vehicles with trailers and semi-trailers remains in force, but is being extended



by four hours. Accordingly, the movement of motor vehicles with trailers and semi-trailers will be allowed on Rikoti,

both ways, from 21:00 to 07:00. "24-hour monitoring will continue on the Rikoti pass section.



Source: CNN

Israel Conducts large-scale Strikes on Hamas Targets as Humanitarian Crisis Unfolds in Gaza

Gaza's humanitarian crisis deepened Thursday as Israeli jets continued to pound the densely populated enclave in response to Hamas' attacks on the sixth day of the conflict.

The Palestinian Ministry of Health reported that at least 1,354 people have been killed in Israeli strikes on Gaza since Saturday. Israel has reported at least 1,200 people were killed in Hamas' attacks over the weekend. Hamas is also holding as many as 150 people hostage in Gaza, according to Israeli authorities.

Gaza hospitals close to collapse: The health infrastructure in Gaza is close to breaking point, Dr. Ashraf Al-Qudra, a spokesperson for the Palestinian Ministry of Health said Thursday. "Even after expansion, all beds are occupied, leaving no room for new patients in critical condition," Al-Qudra said. Earlier Thursday the International Committee of the Red Cross said hospitals in Gaza "risk turning into morgues" as they lose power amid escalating violence and following Israel's siege of the enclave.

Hamas warned that it would start executing hostages if Israel targeted people in Gaza without warning.

Israel's energy minister Israel Katz said Gaza will not be provided with any electricity, water or fuel until the hostages are returned home.

In other news, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is in Tel Aviv to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. In a joint news conference, Netanyahu thanked the United States for its "incredible support for Israel" during his country's "war against the barbarians of Hamas." Netanyahu repeatedly compared Hamas to ISIS: "Just as ISIS was crushed, so too will Hamas be crushed."

"No electrical switch will be turned on, no water hydrant will be opened, and no fuel truck will enter until the Israeli abductees are returned home. Humanitarian for humanitarian. And no one will preach us morals," Katz said Thursday

Blinken confirmed that at least 25 American citizens were killed last weekend's attacks. During his visit to the country, Blinken is also scheduled to meet with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, leader of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank.

Hungarian PM's Visit to Tbilisi to 'Support Georgia's EU Candidacy'



Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán came to Georgia with his wife, Aniko Leva. Photo source: Facebook

BY ANA DUMBADZE

On October 9, the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán arrived in Georgia with his wife, Aniko Leva, and fellow government members.

The Georgian government announced he would hold a meeting with Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili, followed by a meeting of the Georgian-Hungarian intergovernmental commission and a "memorandum signing ceremony."

Orbán informed journalists about his visit last week, claiming he is the most devoted supporter of Georgia's European integration. The Hungarian PM said he was coming to Georgia to show his support for it.

"It is totally unfair that you are not promised that you will become [an EU member], because you have done a good job. We need you very much," Orbán told the Georgians.

Asked by a journalist why Georgia was denied candidate status last year, Orbán opined it was because of the "selfishness" of the EU leaders.

"The leaders are selfish. They don't want to let you in and give you the financial resources you need, which is totally unfair to your country. We have to share what we have, because we need you: you have a strategic position," he stated.

As part of the official visit, the Hungarian PM held a face-to-face meeting with his Georgian counterpart Irakli Garibashvili. The government administration reported that "The close partnership between Georgia and Hungary was discussed at the meeting."

Garibashvili noted that cooperation between the countries has moved to a new stage through joint efforts, which includes a regular exchange of visits and expansion of sectoral ties, and the parties had discussed the prospects of deepening fruitful cooperation in various fields.

The Prime Minister claimed that the holding of the intergovernmental summit in Georgia is part of the practical implementation of the declaration on

strategic partnership between Georgia and Hungary signed in Budapest.

Speaking about European integration, PM Garibashvili noted that Georgia irreversibly follows the European path. He reviewed the steps taken by the Georgian government on this path, claiming that the government ensured an open, transparent and inclusive process for the implementation of the 12 priorities, and at the end of the year the country is expecting a fair and merit-based decision from the European Union. The Prime Minister thanked Viktor Orbán for his firm support of Georgia's European integration, and noted that Georgia appreciates "the steadfast support of its friend Hungary on this path."

The parties summarized the progress achieved in the direction of economic cooperation between the two countries: In 2023, the trade turnover increased by 21% and now amounts to \$46.62 million. As the head of the government noted, Georgia and Hungary have great potential for economic cooperation, and it is important to fully utilize the existing opportunities. He stated that Georgia is interested in attracting investments in sectors such as renewable energy, logistics, and tourism.

Garibashvili and Viktor Orbán also discussed the dynamics of the Black Sea submarine electric cable project connecting the Caucasus region and Europe. The Prime Minister noted that the implementation of flagship projects initiated by Georgia is vital for realizing the full potential of energy, and for achieving common goals in the direction of energy security.

Foreign Minister Ilia Darchiashvili noted: "We have strong and positive messages from Hungary and many other EU countries regarding the fact that Georgia deserves candidate status - we have positive expectations."

He added that the Government of Georgia is working individually with Hungary and other EU member states so that the country has strong support relating to the candidate status.

"We are working individually with all member states, including Hungary, to get their strong support. Our common goal is our European perspective

and candidate status. We have strong and positive messages from Hungary and many other EU countries that Georgia deserves candidate status, and I am sure we will get it. Hungary is one of the strongest supporters when it comes to granting status to our country and our country's successful progress towards the final goal - full membership of the European Union," Darchiashvili noted.

Darchiashvili also answered a question about the Black Sea cable project.

"Hungary is one of the participants, together with Romania and Azerbaijan, of the agreement, which involves the implementation of the Black Sea electricity cable project, which will make a great contribution to the energy diversification of Europe. All of us are actively involved in the implementation of this project, and this visit also strengthens and proves the fact that we actively continue cooperation," Darchiashvili said.

To conclude the visit, on October 12, an official dinner was held in honor of the Prime Minister of Hungary and his wife, hosted by the local government.

"I am extremely grateful for the true friendship of Prime Minister Orbán and his government, as well as for the strong support for the aspiration of Georgia and the Georgian people to become a member of the European family," PM Garibashvili said at the reception, going on to suggest that Prime Minister Orbán "is an exemplary leader and role model politician."

In turn, the Hungarian Prime Minister noted that his visit underscores how important and valuable the relationship is between the two nations.

"We are proud to be invited here by you and your wife," he told Garibashvili. "It's always good when I see a couple in politics who not only talk about family values, but also set a great example. The reason for coming to Georgia is to set good examples for Hungarians. So, Irakli, thank you very much for the invitation. We have a long friendship. I hope this visit highlights how important and valuable the relationship is between these two nations."

"In the modern world, there is a discussion about whether miracles exist or

not," Orbán went on. "We Christians think there are, but those who do not yet believe that miracles exist should come into this room tonight, because there are at least two miracles here: First, this is the Georgian miracle - your history, the geopolitical environment of your nation itself: The fact that there are still Georgian people, there is such a language as Georgian and people who live here and speak this language, there is a Georgian state and that this state is still Christian - this is a miracle! The next miracle in this room is Hungarian. As you know, we, Hungarians, came from the Far East, from beyond the Ural Mountains, and occupied the country where we live 1100 years ago. As foreigners, we had neither relatives nor family members around us; we Hungarians were alone. We occupied the territory, we still have the same language, we still perfect the same culture and live our own lives. So it is a miracle that there are still Hungarians who speak Hungarian, that there is a Hungarian state and that this state is Christian - this is the second miracle."

"This is a miracle meeting between the two countries, and I believe that it will not only prepare a political foundation for the relations between the two countries, but also ensure excellent relations between the two countries at a deeper level," Orbán said.

The opposition, meanwhile, noted its skeptical position regarding Orbán's visit and of Georgia's partnership with Hungary in general.

"I don't think Orbán will be the best mediator for us with other EU states regarding the candidate status - as an ally of Russia, he is quite isolated in the EU today," Lelo MP Salome Samadashvili told journalists, adding that Orbán is Putin's ally and the only leader in the European Union who has tried to block aid to Ukraine, as well as sanctions against Russia.

"Orbán is Putin's main and, I would say, only ally within the EU. You know that Orbán is the only leader in the EU who has tried to block aid to Ukraine, as well as the sanctions against Russia. It is very significant that the 'Russian Dream' government has as its only friend in the EU one who is also a friend of Vladimir Putin."

"Yet, the granting of candidate status to Georgia should be decided through a political decision, because the important demands of the EU have not been fulfilled. The report of the Venice Commission confirmed that no reforms were carried out. I don't think Orbán will be the best mediator for us with other EU states in this decision, considering that he is quite isolated in the EU today as a representative of the government allied with Russia," she added.



Photo source: Facebook

Ambassador Hadas Ester Meitzad: Israel Is Strong, Israel Is United, and Nobody Should Underestimate Us

INTERVIEW BY EREKLE POLADISHVILI

Following the brutal attack on Israel by Hamas last weekend, GEORGIA TODAY had the honor to sit down with Israeli Ambassador to Georgia, Hadas Ester Meitzad, to discuss the atrocities and Israeli spirit at this difficult time.

“WE’RE AT WAR” – PRIME MINISTER NETANYAHU SAID. WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF ISRAEL AT THIS POINT AND WHAT CAN WE EXPECT AFTER THE CONFLICT?

Prime Minister Netanyahu, in his statement, I believe, was very clear when he said that we’re going to work to eliminate the military and terrorist capabilities of the terrorist organization Hamas, to restore security to our civilians, and to ensure that a very clear and strong message will be delivered not just to Hamas or to the Islamic Jihad who are working from the Gaza Strip, but to all terrorist organizations all over the world that any event of this kind, any attack on Israelis, will never be left unanswered.

IRAN-BACKED HEZBOLLAH SHOWS SUPPORT TO THOSE WHO KILLED HUNDREDS OF INNOCENT PEOPLE IN ISRAEL. IS ISRAEL READY TO FIGHT ON SEVERAL FRONTS?

Israel is ready to do whatever it takes. We are telling everyone, do not underestimate us. What we have experienced since Saturday are very difficult days, extremely difficult, especially because we are facing such evil brutality; barbarity that nobody should ever experience. But, at the same time, Israel is strong, Israel is united, and nobody should underestimate us or try to test us. In addition, we have the very strong support of the United States of America and its President Joe Biden, who was very clear in his statement about what the US’s response will be in case of any attempt to escalate the situation. And we had the very strong statement from the Quint, the leaders of the Quint, the UK, France, Germany, United States and Italy, in which they expressed full support to Israel’s legitimacy in its right to defend its people.

INSTEAD OF CONDEMNING THE PALESTINIAN MILITANT GROUP, KREMLIN SPOKESPERSON DMITRY PESKOV REFERRED TO WHAT HAPPENED ON OCTOBER 7 AS A “SPIRAL OF VIOLENCE”. WHAT IS YOUR REACTION TO THAT?

It’s a disappointing comment at the end of the day. Hamas is a terrorist organization and it’s a well-known fact. We’ve all seen the pictures of what they’ve done. Let’s drill down a minute about what has taken place since Saturday: We’re seeing two dimensions of this attack. One is the firing of missiles and rockets on cities in south and central Israel, millions of people unable to carry on an ordinary life. Just a few days ago we saw a massive attack that took place during the afternoon and evening on all the major cities, including Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, a mosque was hit. Israel is a mixed country, and 20% of the Israeli population are ethnic Arabs. And Hamas targeted them a few days ago. The second thing that we have seen is one of the cruelest, if not the most brutal attack, on civilians that the world has ever seen. Peo-



ple in their twenties, celebrating at a music festival – an everyday event that happens everywhere around the world, including Georgia. And on October 7, terrorists armed with automatic weapons butchered boys and girls, men and women who were trying to escape and find shelter. It was slaughter, pure and simple. At the same time, hundreds of terrorists walked from house to house in small communities of Kibbutz and small settlements located close to the Gaza Strip, murdering, among them parents who hid their ten-month-old twins in the closet. The children were not discovered, but they spent 14 hours all alone. Just imagine, 10-month-old babies left for 14 hours. And they were the “lucky” ones, because others were found and slaughtered. We’re seeing pictures of people that were taken to Gaza, the body of a young woman brutalized in the streets of Gaza while people cheered. We’re seeing babies in the captivity of a terrorist organization. Babies, toddlers, I mean, I have a young daughter... The images are unbearable.

In short, anybody at this point in time who is unable to condemn Hamas for being what it is – a terrorist organization; to understand that there is no difference between Hamas and Daesh, they are exactly the same: a radical, fanatic, barbaric organization that will stop at nothing in order to murder my people for the sake of some ideology that nobody supports but crazy people, then such people need to check which side of history and morality they are on today.

THE TERRORIST ATTACKS ON THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN EGYPT RAISED QUESTIONS AS TO WHETHER THE ISRAELI PEOPLE WHO LIVE ABROAD ARE SAFE OR NOT. WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO THAT?

Generally speaking, unfortunately, Israelis are considered to be targets around the world. We have a very bloody history of Israelis, official and unofficial, being targeted by terrorist organizations. Iran and a whole branch under the Iran Revolutionary Guard is focusing on execut-

ing terrorist attacks against Israeli targets all over the world, including in Georgia, by the way. This is very sad to say and to acknowledge. All Israelis know that extra caution is needed in times of escalation, in a situation like this. And, generally speaking, people should be more alert and aware of the fact that there are those who continue to harm and to kill us for the sake of fanatical ideology.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE FOR YOU AS A PERSON, AS A MOTHER AND A FRIEND, AS AN ISRAELI WHO LIVES SO FAR FROM HER HOME, TO HEAR ABOUT THIS HORRIFIC ACT OF TERRORISM?

It’s difficult, very difficult, because it’s all very personal. Israel, like Georgia, has a very warm society. We all know one another. All of us are have been hearing the names of friends and acquaintances who lost their lives, be they innocent civilians or part of the security forces, IDF or the police forces, those at the front line when everything started. It’s not just about being a parent; anyone who has a heart can’t be indifferent to what we are seeing. It took me quite some time to find out what it is that they feel, and I think that the feeling is disgust, because this brutality, the cruelty shown in nine-months-old and four-years-old brothers being taken to Gaza, is disgusting.

DOES IT EVEN MATTER, HOW OLD THEY ARE?

You’re right! They are all children, but we simply cannot understand how can they deliberately go after children, after elderly women. You know, there are very disturbing images of what they are doing to them. And the scale of loss, to lose 1000 people in a country of such a small size is very difficult for us to mentally overcome.

People should understand that Israel is still very strong, however, still very united, and what we are seeing today is a mobilization of entire society to support the communities and security forces. There are hours-long lines of people wanting to donate blood. Yes, we are targeted by rockets and missiles, but people are still

going to work and doing what needs to be done for the economy to function. We are all human, compassionate. The sights are horrible, but it doesn’t mean that we have fallen apart. We’re very far from it, and we are determined to restore what needs to be restored.

MESSAGES OF CONDOLENCE FROM THE POLITICAL LEADERS, AND THOUSANDS OF SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS OF GEORGIANS SHOWING SUPPORT TO ISRAEL, WERE FOLLOWED BY THE TBILISI TV TOWER AND BATUMI ADJARABET STADIUM BEING ILLUMINATED IN THE COLORS OF THE ISRAEL FLAG. IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE THE PEOPLE OF GEORGIA CAN DO FOR ISRAEL?

First of all, I want to say thank you so much for the overwhelming amount of support that we’re receiving, and I keep on seeing Israeli flags, not just here and in Batumi, but also in different streets throughout Tbilisi, and people posting Israeli flags on social media. I’m thankful for it. Besides that, from the government’s side and from the parliament’s side, we received messages of support and this is very important for us, we appreciate it. I don’t think this is going to be a short war. We don’t know how long it will last, but we are prepared for as long as it takes, and we will need Georgia to keep on standing by Israel and not forget what has been happening here and how it all started on a Saturday morning, 6:30am, with a massive invasion of terrorists coming to slaughter people in Israel together with widespread indiscriminate use of massive firepower on Israeli’s cities. We need Georgia to keep standing by Israel and not to be confused and not to try to make it into a two-side story – There are no two-side stories.

IS ANY HUMANITARIAN AID NEEDED AT THE MOMENT?

No. Israel is a strong and rich country. I know that there are a lot of people all over the world who are donating, and it’s lovely, and it happens because people want to do something to show support

and solidarity, but there is no official appeal. Israel is capable of taking care of all its needs.

UNLIKE MOST GEORGIANS, SOME CONSIDER HAMAS NOT AS A TERRORIST ORGANIZATION BUT AS A LIBERATION FORCE. WHAT WOULD BE YOUR MESSAGE TO THEM?

My message to those people is that they are either brainwashed, confused or antisemitic. If someone is condemning Daesh for killing people in Paris, or the removing of heads of British and American journalists, but is trying to justify and give context to the same kind of slaughter that is happening just because the victim is Israeli or Jewish, because of another nationality or religion, then this is pure antisemitism or anti-Israel belief.

I want to point out that Hamas does not represent the Palestinian people; Hamas is not aspiring to or advocating for a two-state solution. On the contrary, Hamas is advocating the total destruction of Israel. The agenda of Hamas is the elimination of the state of Israel, elimination of the Zionist Jewish entity. If someone, after witnessing what has been taking place since Saturday in Israel, is still unable to condemn that, such a person can no longer claim to be part of the civilized world or part of the fight against terrorism. If somebody wants to support terrorism, I’d advise them to acknowledge what they are standing for – if you stand for Hamas, Daesh, Al Qaeda, you stand for terrorism.

WHAT WOULD YOUR MESSAGE BE FOR THE PEOPLE OF GEORGIA, FOR THOSE ISRAELIS WHO LIVE IN GEORGIA?

My message to the Georgians is thank you for supporting and standing by us! To our Israeli community, well, we’re in close regular contact, and we’re sharing the same pain watching our country in that situation while being so far from home. There is no doubt that there will be scars, but we’re strong, we’re together, and we will overcome!

"It's Iran and the proxies of Iran that are attacking Israel" - Nico Lange on Israel, Ukraine and the Slow-to-Move Zeitenwende

Continued from page 1

"It is extremely difficult to protect yourself against terrorism. We have seen before that it's difficult to prevent terrorist attacks. But still, the level of this, the scale of preparation, the communications that must have happened between Hamas leadership and Iran, it surprises me that it was not on the radar of the Israeli defense. Maybe the Israelis felt too secure about defense and the border barriers. That might be what's at play. And I'm sure that Israel society will discuss this after the war is over. I mean, now is not the time. But questions will be asked. Another new element to the warfare is that it's increasingly the case that barriers or structures of protection are not working the way they were intended to. Because there are new drones or new kinds of cheap and accessible equipment that you can use to destroy or overcome expensive barriers. It started in Ukraine with commercially cheap drones being used in drop detonations, and now we have seen the same technique applied to Israeli watchtowers. So there are some new developments that make defense more complicated, and we have lessons to learn.

"I do not see a connection between Ukraine defending itself against Russia, Azerbaijan attacking Armenia, or Hamas attacking Israel. But the US and its partners definitely have to support Israel and Ukraine now in parallel, and it will surely lead to a resource management issue. There is no priority: we simply have to do both."

IS IT TOO EARLY TO TALK HERE ABOUT WINNERS AND LOSERS?

The history of warfare shows that even if a smaller force has initial success by generating an element of surprise, the true balance of power will only show over time. If that law of military warfare applies here, then I say Hamas might have brought destruction upon itself by this initial success they've had.

In terms of winners and losers, it's early. It's very difficult to tell if, for example, Hezbollah will join in and make the life of Israel extremely complicated with a warfare on two fronts. Surely Iran will try to mobilize their proxies? Because I think that's what we're seeing. It's Iran, and the proxies of Iran, attacking Israel. It seems to me that other parts of the Arab world are not interested in joining. That's why Iran is also not fighting openly, but using Hamas and Hezbollah. So it's early.

ONTO THE UKRAINE WAR. DO YOU SEE EUROPE STEPPING UP, PROVIDING A HELPING HAND, IF WASHINGTON'S ATTENTION IS DIVIDED BETWEEN KYIV AND TEL AVIV?

At the moment, what the US is supplying to Israel and what it is supplying to Ukraine are different things, so there is no immediate problem. But the longer

With the scale of preparation needed, it surprises me that it was not on the radar of the Israeli defense



Nico Lange. Source: RFE/RL

this goes on for, there will be conflicts when it comes to air defense and air defense ammunition, because that is what both Israel and Ukraine need very much. The US took artillery ammunition from stocks from Israel to supply to Ukraine, and while, at the moment, the Israeli Defense Forces don't need it, if the conflict broadens, they too will need it, and then there is this conflict of resources. The Europeans must now increase the industrial capabilities in these areas to be prepared for a possible conflict of resources.

"MUST" IS A PECULIAR WORD. WILL THEY?

I know. And I understand your question, because the reality is they did not scale up to industrial production to the amount that is needed. And I'm worried, and I will continue to argue for it, because the European countries should not try to return to normal order of business. In fact, in the two days after the terror against Israel began, I would have expected to see the European leaders sitting together to discuss how Europe can step up, to realize that this will not solve itself. And, unfortunately, and this includes my country, Germany, the industrialists in Europe are ultra-slow in scaling up the industrial production. They started, but they have to speed up, especially in air defense and artillery ammunition. That's really critically important.

SPEAKING OF GERMANY, HOW IS THE ZEITENWENDE GOING?

There was a lot of hope in the beginning, because of the speech by Chancellor Schultz. Everybody thought, "ok, now they understood. Finally, Germany is getting on track." We see that in some areas Germany is doing better now, and I think Germany has to get credit for that, for example, military assistance to Ukraine is much better than its reputation. But in other areas, unfortunately, Germany has a habit of falling back into old patterns of behavior. And that is, of course, not a Zeitenwende. That's the opposite of Zeitenwende. And you start wondering, what is supposed to happen before Germany really changes their security defense policy? We have a major war in Europe; we have an attack on Israel. So what is needed to really wake

in a bureaucratic reactive mode most of the time. That is not enough.

IF GERMANY DOES NOT DELIVER ON ZEITENWENDE, WILL THERE BE A PRICE TO PAY DOMESTICALLY?

Well, I can give you a provocative answer. The idea was, "oh, let's go slow, let's not do too much, because there will be resistance, there will be populism." Well, guess what? We had federal elections in federal states yesterday, and despite them going slow and despite all of these arguments, there are bad results for the governing parties and there is a rise in populism. So maybe this whole theory is wrong, and it's better to just show leadership instead of being hesitant and slow.

ONE EXAMPLE OF SHOWING LEADERSHIP WOULD BE TO PROVIDE TAURUS MISSILES TO UKRAINE. AND BUNDESKANZLER SCHULTZ SEEMS TO BE VERY RELUCTANT TO DO SO. WHY?

Looking at things from a military perspective, it's not understandable to me at all. I think the initial mistake was that Germany didn't deliver Taurus immediately, when Britain and France decided to deliver Storm Shadow and SCALP-EG. Because of that, it became a widely debated issue and much more complicated than necessary. There is this paradigm of escalation that seems to motivate the White House and the Chancellor's Office to overthink things. The Ukrainians have shown that there is no further escalation if you attack Crimea or the bridge or do other things. But still, that seems to be a paradigm that is in the heads of the decision makers: always worried about escalation. I'm afraid they may make escalation even more likely because, the Kremlin will perceive their hesitancy as a sign of weakness.

Further, the Ukrainians have the right to destroy military targets on the territory of the Russian Federation. The artificial distinction that Western partners brought into this war by giving weapons and saying "do not attack targets on Russian territory with them" created the false impression that it would somehow be illegal. But it is not. It's perfectly legal. And I think the Ukrainians should do it. German policymakers should ask themselves a question: If Germany was attacked by missiles from Russia, from a Russian ship, here in the Baltic Sea, do you then

The Europeans must be prepared for a possible conflict of resources in air defense and artillery ammunition

argue, "oh, we cannot destroy the ship, we just have to defend ourselves?" Or argue to destroy the ship? And I give you a 100% guarantee if it would be the ship destroyed. So why are there different standards for Ukraine?

PUTIN BELIEVES THAT IN THE END, HE'LL OUT-SUFFER THE WEST, THAT THE WEST WILL BREAK FIRST. WHO WOULD YOU BET ON IN THIS SITUATION?

It's not about suffering. That's the Russian perspective. But I think the capabilities of democracies are far higher than the capabilities of Russia. The question is, what does it need for us to unlock the capabilities we have? How bad does it have to get? I think there's the false idea in the heads of policymakers that somehow if you support a little bit, it will lead to a stalemate, and then there will be negotiations. This is a totally misread judgment on Putin's intentions, because he will immediately make further demands. I have no doubt the democratic countries will prevail in this, but I would argue that they should unlock the capabilities much faster and not wait for wonders to happen. Our dragging out feet ends up with dead Ukrainians and Ukraine being devastated as a country. If you look at the material side of this - Germany spent 300 billion euro on social output to dampen the effect of the energy prices - 300 billion euro! And weapons for Ukraine so far is 3 billion euro, so I mean, if we unlock our capabilities, then we could do much more and help more decisively.



The ongoing conflict in Israel. Source: AFP

John Sweeney - "This Is an Existential War between Good and Evil"



John Sweeney: I have a Vladimir Putin funeral hat... to celebrate the happy day when he dies. source: RFE/RL

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

A newspaper and then investigative journalist for more than two decades before he moved into broadcasting, the award-winning John Sweeney has worked for The Observer and the BBC's Panorama, among others, covering wars, revolutions and chaos in more than 60 countries including Romania, Algeria, Iraq, Chechnya, Burundi, Sierra Leone and Bosnia. John Sweeney sat down with Radio Free Europe's Georgian Service this week to discuss Putin's eventual death, the declining support for Ukraine, and Elon Musk. We began by asking him to explain the initials on his renowned hat.

"Well, actually I have three hats," he tells us. "This Saturday, Vladimir Putin turned 71, and to celebrate his birthday, and celebrate is not the right word, some Ukrainian friends and I staged the 'Vladimir Putin Fuck Off Festival,' the VPFO. We're about to launch these hats and sell them and send all the profits can go to Ukraine charities. I've also got one with VPHFO - Vladimir Putin Has Fucked Off! That's my Vladimir Putin funeral hat for when he gets killed or if he dies. I mean, the idea of wishing somebody dead is a dark thing, but Putin has got [the blood of] so many innocent lives on his hands, not just the people who have been killed here, but also in the First and Second Chechen War, which I think he started deliberately. His claim that Chechen terrorists blew up flats in Moscow in September 99 - the evidence is overwhelming that this was a black operation by the KGB. Then there's the war in Georgia 2008. All the issues could have been resolved peacefully. Instead, Russia invades. Then when Bashar Al Assad's brutal crackdown on the opposition in Syria turned into a civil war, Russia sides with the dictator. And then he's invaded Ukraine twice. So this is a man who's got a history of invading countries or of creating and helping dictators fight wars for no good reason. So it's true to say, with that kind of record, I do wish and I do want him gone."

ASSASSINATION OR NATURAL DEATH, WHICH DO YOU THINK IS MORE LIKELY?

Well, the problem is, how can we know which is which after the fact? What happened to Prigozhin is interesting for a number of reasons: it proves my thesis that the West can't do a deal with Vladimir Putin, because you simply cannot trust

his word. Prigozhin did a deal with this man, he stopped his mutiny 150 miles off Moscow, and they do a deal. And then Prigozhin and all the high command of Wagner are blown to bits in the sky, in a fireball. So if Putin dies, or falls ill and dies naturally, has he died naturally or has somebody poisoned him? And how good and how robust will the autopsy be? So there's an issue. But I think that Putin has ruined the good name of Russia for generations, in the same way that Adolf Hitler destroyed the good name of Germany for generations. And it's going to take a very, very long time for Russia to be forgiven for what it's done. They have to do two things, the first of which is to say "sorry," in the same way that Willi Brandt went to the Warsaw ghetto and got down on his knees and said sorry. And they have to pay massive reparations to the Ukrainians for the damage they've done.

I'm a passionate supporter of Ukraine, and I feel scared because I believe that Vladimir Putin has been at war with the West since he took over. And we've known about this, and we are not doing well in this war that we don't know we're fighting. And that is a great danger for us. I believe that Ukraine's war is honorable. We've got to stand up to Russia and fascism, because if Putin wins in Ukraine, then we're next.

YOU'VE BEEN RECORDING WAR DIARIES - AND YOU'RE NOW ON VIDEO 585. HOW MANY MORE DO YOU THINK YOU'LL GET TO MAKE?

That's a tough question. It's a grim one. I've done today's war diary, where I've said the problem is not with Ukraine; the problem is with us in the West, because we're fearful. And we're timid. And we're fickle, and we're bored. And we've got war fatigue, and war fatigue helps Vladimir Putin because of his hatred. This is what's so difficult with a psychopath, his hatred: it doesn't go, it doesn't dial down, it doesn't get bored, it doesn't get exhausted. He carries on hating Ukraine and hating the people who support Ukraine. And while the Western rhetoric has been good, our delivery has been less so. And the Ukrainians are suffering and paying in blood for the price of greed and our timidity and our failures, and our failure to understand.

HOW REALISTIC WOULD IT BE TO ASSUME THAT THE RECENT US CONGRESS FUNDING CUT IS A TREND THAT'S NOT GOING TO STOP?

Taiwan far more likely. And that speaks to me as bloody obvious. But, as we're talking, Elon Musk, the world's richest man perhaps, is using his money to poison the Twitter platform, and to mock Zelensky, a leader of a democratically elected country, which was invaded by a fascist neighbor.

AT THE BEGINNING OF THE WAR, MUSK WAS HAILED AS A HERO FOR PROVIDING STARLINK TO UKRAINE. AND NOW WE SEE HIM PARROTING PUTIN'S PROPAGANDA, BEING HAILED AS ELON THE MUSCOVITE ON RUSSIAN STATE TV. WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE REASON FOR HIS TURNAROUND?

I don't think he's been bought; I think he's got too much money. But I think he's a fool. And he's got something about power. He's the world's richest man, but he can't do everything, and he can't shape other people's political opinions completely, whereas Vladimir Putin can, and I think part of Elon Musk's problem is that he feels jealous of Vladimir Putin. Because when Putin says black is white in Russia, most people will say black is white, because they know if they don't, they will die. It's Elon Musk's Messiah Complex that envies this bigger god in Putin who can actually change reality. All that Elon Musk can do is change our perception of reality. And he's doing it very well: he's got Twitter. But Twitter isn't everything, and he doesn't control it completely. So I think there is a kind of strange envy for the social control. Every time Elon Musk puts forward his Kremlin narrative, people like me, or the Ukrainians, an awful lot of people say, "you're talking rubbish, what's wrong with you?" And I think he envies Putin, because in Putin's Russia, people like me and people like you don't exist, or they're in prison, or they fall down a flight of stairs, or they fall out of the window, or they drink the wrong kind of tea. And in his heart, Elon Musk is a fascist who wants that degree of social control, and he's jealous of Putin. And he's trying in some way to woo him, hoping some of his dark magic will rub off on him. That's my best guess for this matter.

I've now written two books and made a film about this war. And the evidence is overwhelming: Russia tortures, Russia castrates Ukrainian POWs, Russia tortures anybody in occupied Ukraine, they rape women, they rape children. And

Putin sits on top of this. Vladimir Putin is a psychopath who invades his neighbors, who runs a fascist state. And that state torments, rapes and castrates and tortures and kills children. And for the world's richest man, Elon Musk, who commands a platform which is based on free speech, who favors a man who kills free speech and kills people who try and practice it in his country and actually, as it happens, abroad too - it's almost incomprehensible. And my best possible explanation for it is that Musk wants the social control that Putin has.

I THINK IT'S FAIR TO CHARACTERIZE THIS AS A JOURNEY. THE QUESTION IS, WHAT'S THE END GOAL?

I don't think Musk is good enough to work that out. He's an engineer, but he's not a very good engineer. He's a showman who's good at finding clever people who can do smart things for him. And then he's risen and risen and risen, in part because he's ruthless, in part because his father was horrible to him. And what you've got here is a kind of toddler who's very good at making money, who is suddenly being asked: "what do you think?" And guess what, if you ask a two-year-old what they think the future is, they will say, "I want this, and I want that, and get out of my way if you don't let me have it." And you need a good mom and a good dad to say "no, no, come on. Be nice. Play nicely." But we're only seeing this fascistic side of Elon Musk now. I want to buy a Tesla, they're a beautiful car. I like driving them. I'm a rational human being, you know, it's a great car. But Henry Ford made great cars. And he was a fascist admirer of Adolf Hitler and was anti-Semitic. And Elon Musk makes great cars, or his company does. And he's a fascist, and he supports Russia and fascism. And he likes Vladimir Putin, and there's something wrong with him.

THERE'S A RATHER UNSAVORY ASPECT TO IT: HOW MUCH CAN UKRAINE AFFORD TO ALIENATE MUSK ENTIRELY, CONSIDERING ITS DEPENDENCE ON STARLINK?

It feels that there's something very weird about Elon Musk, in that his political drive is separate to his money-making genius. And the two coexist in the same chassis. And he hasn't quite got the wits to work out that the one will affect the other, and he's slightly irritated about that. But my sense of it is that he won't kill Starlink.



Elon Musk is a fascist who wants the degree of social control that Putin has, and he's jealous of him, Sweeney says. Photo by Mandel Ngan / AFP / Profimedia Images

Navigating the Entertainment Landscape in Georgia: Insights from the Tbilisi Gaming Festival



The Tbilisi Gaming Festival held on September 15-16, 2023, brought together industry experts and entertainment operators to discuss the ever-evolving landscape of land-based casinos in Georgia. Among the discussions, the panel focused on "Land-Based Casino Operators in Georgia –

Opportunities and Challenges of the Growing Market." John Harrak, Director VIP & Player Development, Executive Board Member of Storm International – a prominent figure in the industry, shared valuable insights on several key topics.

ADAPTING TO POST-PANDEMIC TRENDS AND

OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES WITHIN THE GROWING MARKET IN GEORGIA.

John began by addressing the market trends in Tbilisi, noting that the casino industry was gradually recovering from the pandemic's impact. While Tbilisi and Batumi represent distinct markets, he highlighted Tbilisi's appeal as the

capital city, offering a range of attractions for players and their families. With a majority of players being foreigners, Tbilisi's summer season remained vibrant, dispelling concerns about seasonal fluctuations.

Regarding the state of the casino business in Georgia, John Harrak emphasized that it was not in a developmental phase but a fully developed industry. New casinos continually enter the market, but they do so within an already mature sector. He stressed the importance of maintaining high service standards and adapting to evolving customer needs to thrive in this competitive environment.

NAVIGATING PROHIBITED ADVERTISING

A major challenge facing land-based casinos in Georgia is the prohibition of advertising, which aims to protect the local market. However, John explained that more than 90% of their visitors are foreigners, and the goal is not to attract Georgian players. The advertising restrictions primarily affect online casinos, creating a challenge for land-based operators. Despite these challenges, John emphasized the necessity of advertising to ensure a steady influx of customers.

COEXISTENCE AND COOPERATION

"All the players that are coming to Batumi are already spoiled. Most of them went to Cyprus and Cyprus has very few government regulations. In general, Batumi has great operators with even greater service levels. They understand what they can do to make sure the business is safe. They protect and look out for

their customers." John highlighted the unique dynamic and collaborative spirit among casino operators in Georgia.

MAINTAINING A SKILLED WORKFORCE

Addressing the issue of retaining staff, John noted that the casino business is typically favored by younger individuals. In Tbilisi, where there is an established casino presence, attracting and retaining staff is somewhat easier. Shangri-La, for instance, runs training schools to nurture young talents and offers them opportunities for career advancement. The focus is not solely on monetary incentives but on providing a pathway to a promising future. This approach helps mitigate the challenges of staff turnover.

SUPPORTING THE GOVERNMENT AND INDUSTRY

John emphasized the importance of collaboration between the government and the casino industry. Casinos have actively supported government initiatives, recognizing the mutual benefits of a thriving tourism and entertainment sector. This collaborative spirit has been particularly crucial during the pandemic, highlighting the intertwined interests of both parties.

In conclusion, the panel discussion shed light on the intricacies of operating land-based casinos in Georgia. Despite challenges such as advertising restrictions and staff retention, the industry continues to grow and adapt. The harmonious coexistence of operators and their support for government initiatives bode well for the future of the casino industry in Georgia.

Restructuring and Subsidies: Georgia's Railways to Be Transformed in 2024

BY MARIAM GORKHELASHVILI

In 2024, announced Georgia's Deputy Minister of Finance, Giorgi Kakauridze, a significant restructuring plan for one of the country's largest state-owned companies. This initiative, in line with Georgia's commitments to the European Union, seeks to enhance competition and liberalize the railway sector.

Currently, Georgian Railways operates as a unified entity, managing tracks, stations, and trains. However, following the proposed changes, the company will be divided into three distinct entities. One will oversee track ownership and infrastructure, another will handle freight transportation operations and own freight trains, while the third will focus on passenger transport operations.

This strategic move is poised to bring about a more competitive and efficient railway system in Georgia, benefiting both the industry and its clientele.

"Dividing the railway is an obligation. Three different companies should be created here. Passenger, freight, and the company that owns the infrastructure itself, i.e. tracks. Inside the company, all three directions are divided, although next year we will have to



divide them legally.

"Passenger transportation being subsidized by freight transportation is prohibited by the European Union, and there is a direct reference to this," said Kakauridze.

The Deputy Minister of Finance further disclosed that the government intends to support railway passenger transport through dividends generated by the railway company itself. According to Kakau-

ridze, the company recorded a profit of up to 400 million GEL last year. A portion of this sum will be allocated from the budget to subsidize passenger transportation.

Additionally, Kakauridze highlighted that within the ongoing corporatization reform, an independent board will determine the extent of employee optimization. Presently, the company employs a workforce of 12,000 people.

"So far, we have not provided 50 million GEL for the subsidy, and it is not included in the budget. We will make this subsidy from the dividend withdrawn from the company. Last year, the railway had a rather large profit of 400 million. I will not say that we will take all this money into the budget, because the railway will have to make a large investment – the resources it has are on the verge of exhaustion, and it is necessary to improve and renew the infrastructure in this regard. Accordingly, we will take at least the amount of dividend or more that is needed for the subsidy into the budget. In the end, there will be no direct subsidy, but the budget will include the revenues from freight transportation, and passenger transportation will be subsidized from the budget.

"As for the number of employees, it is quite difficult to fire 3-5 thousand people from a company in one year, yet I do think that optimization is necessary. An independent board should decide what the optimal number of employees is," said Kakauridze.

Scriptwriter and Film-maker Michelle Gagnon on Finding Her Muse in Georgia



Michelle with some of the crew members for Wires documentary, including Mehرداد Ruien on the far right.

INTERVIEW BY KATIE RUTH DAVIES

Michelle Gagnon, a scriptwriter and film-maker by profession, is also the curator of the “Rust” photo/textile exhibition at The Exchange Gallery, featuring GEORGIA TODAY’s Tony Hanmer. We sat down with her to find out more about what inspires her work, and what brought her to Georgia.

“Most people I meet have an interesting story of how they ended up in Georgia. Mine isn’t glamorous,” she tells us. “It came down to a spreadsheet deduction. Georgia kept topping the list for

safety, affordability, and of course the important stuff... good food, good wine, good people. My husband’s online business gave us mobility, so we sold everything in Canada and arrived on one of those terrible 3am flights, with two small kids, eight suitcases, and a labrador retriever. We had never visited Georgia or met a Georgian. It was both calculated and impulsive, really.

“But the reality of living in a foreign culture can be difficult and lonely. You don’t fit anywhere and the culture shock can be severe. I had a really tough time making friends for five years, because of the transient expat community. No one was around long enough to build deep connections and locals already had their extensive family networks. But I

found an inroad. My tribe turned out to be the local filmmakers and painters. That turned everything around for me.

“Now, I work in Georgia as a full time creative. I split my time between script writing and development, short documentary directing and producing, and working as an art gallery curator. Most of my work is self-generated and self-funded. My next goal is to find partnerships that will increase my capacity for larger projects and the number of artists I collaborate with and support,” she says.

YOU HAVE BEEN PRODUCING A FILM ABOUT TONY HANMER. WHAT ABOUT HIM CAPTURED YOUR INTEREST



Michelle with Eli Moyer, Director of Caucasus Culture Exchange, and Tony Hanmer at the opening of RUST exhibition. Photo by Chris Noh

AND HOW’S IT GOING? WHAT IS YOUR BACKGROUND IN FILMMAKING?

My father worked in the TV industry in New York, so I grew up around the industry, but never expected I’d end up in it. In Canada, I did some theater acting, but that wasn’t possible for me in Georgia, so I decided to get an interdisciplinary degree in Film and Art History online from an American university during the Covid lockdown. But when I finished my degree I hit a block. “What now? How do I make this work in a foreign country?” The answer was always the same: just do the work. No one is going to give you the opportunity, so insert yourself. Find your own way.

My friend Ana Kvichidze, a local filmmaker, gave me good advice: “Start with documentaries.” She was right. Rent some equipment, find something interesting, and just start rolling. I decided to shoot a short documentary called Wires in collaboration with my dear artist friend, Giovannino, which we premiered at her art exhibition last July. I have another short film project about a young Georgian man in a wheelchair that is starting post production soon. I hope to raise awareness about disabilities here in Georgia. This young man is really inspiring. His voice should be heard!

About a year ago an Iranian friend, Mehرداد Ruien, approached me with an idea to make a doc about our artist friend, Tony Hanmer, a Canadian expat who has lived in Georgia for 25 years. I believed in the project and was eager to support and develop some new talent. I decided

and am excited to learn from them. These are the kinds of people I’m looking for and want to work with, people who have a lot of heart, are passionate about their work, and are really professional. That inspires me in my own work. And animation is just cool. My friend Nika Kobaidze, a Georgian animator and painter, is teaching me a lot about this process. It’s good to have smart friends who are willing to pass on their knowledge!

WHAT ABOUT GEORGIA DO YOU LOVE BEST, AND IS THERE ANYTHING IN PARTICULAR THAT WAKES UP YOUR MUSE HERE?

I think Georgians are artistic people at heart. There is the language of the poets. And they are a really ancient and noble culture. I really admire their creativity, a lot which I think has been out of necessity. They are a resilient people and manage to create beauty and maintain a sense of cultural identity despite their history of invasion and occupation. It’s the people here who inspire me, my friends, and their stories. The deeper I go, the more I fall in love with this place.

One of my passions is spotlighting up-and-coming artists, those who will be leading the Georgian art scene in 10-15 years. One of my new favorites is Iru Meladze, an abstract painter. Her work is so full of raw emotion and color on the canvas. It really speaks to me. Over time, as I work closely with artists, friendships are forged. This is my favorite thing! Working for the local NGO, Caucasus Culture Exchange, as the curator for The Exchange Gallery, gives me



Michelle at The Exchange Gallery. Photo by Mehرداد Ruien

to fund and produce it myself. With a crew of 9, we shot about 35 hours’ worth of footage over several months. This included a week of intense conditions up in Svaneti with power outages, snow up to our waists, and carrying equipment on our backs into Ushguli when the vans couldn’t get there. There were many challenges, but it has pushed me to grow. Those are the opportunities I am looking for. It’s in editing right now. It’s called Geosynchronicity, so be on the lookout for it in the New Year.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR OTHER FILM PIECES AND ARTWORK - WHAT INSPIRES YOU?

I am just finishing an original feature-length screenplay with a wonderful Georgian scriptwriter, Nikoloz Mdivani. He is rocking the European film festivals right now with the film he co-wrote with Elene Naveriani, Blackbird Blackbird Blackberry. It is inspiring to see Georgian filmmakers getting the recognition they deserve on the international stage. Nikoloz is a talented writing partner and dear friend. I have learned a lot from him and owe him a lot for connecting me with the Georgian film family. I’m excited to see what happens with this original story we have written.

I’m also developing a potential series with a local animation studio. I really admire their work and artistic integrity,

amazing opportunities to go deeper into the local art scene, build connections, and support and celebrate all the creativity in this amazing part of the world.

TELL US ABOUT THE RUST EXHIBITION AND YOUR PLANS LOOKING AHEAD IN TERMS OF EXHIBITIONS, FILMING, ETC.

“Rust” was a really fun collaborative show to put together. We’ve had a great turnout and wonderful feedback from the community so far. People can still stop by and check it out through the month of October. Our next show will be in December. I am still thinking about the concept, but something like concrete might be fun. And of course I am always on the lookout for new artists!

We are also building a music studio at The Exchange this winter, so I am looking forward to getting to know the local music scene.

Most of my projects are long-term. I’m the kind of person who likes to see a project through from beginning to end, and that sometimes takes years. And the risk with creative work is never knowing if it will become a reality. I’m really lucky to do work that I love here with the support of the Georgian arts community. So I just keep showing up, doing the hard work, making friends, hoping for a bit of magic, and we will see what happens.

Things in my Coffee Mug

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

Yesterday was not the first time I finished my morning brew and realized that I had to take a photo of the inside of the bottom of my mug once it dried.

I'm currently using a French-pressed espresso coffee, bought already ground and vacuum sealed, so, not exactly top-shelf gourmet, but certainly an improvement to the drink I have three times a day. My list of gadgets now includes a grinder with no axle and an espresso press, both hand-powered for those times, be they in Svaneti or camping or elsewhere, when there's just no electricity to be had. I may eventually get around to buying green beans and roasting them on the balcony with a paint stripper, a glorified hair drier which almost throws a flame, but not yet. Small steps. I digress.

So there is a bit of residue in the bottom of the mug.

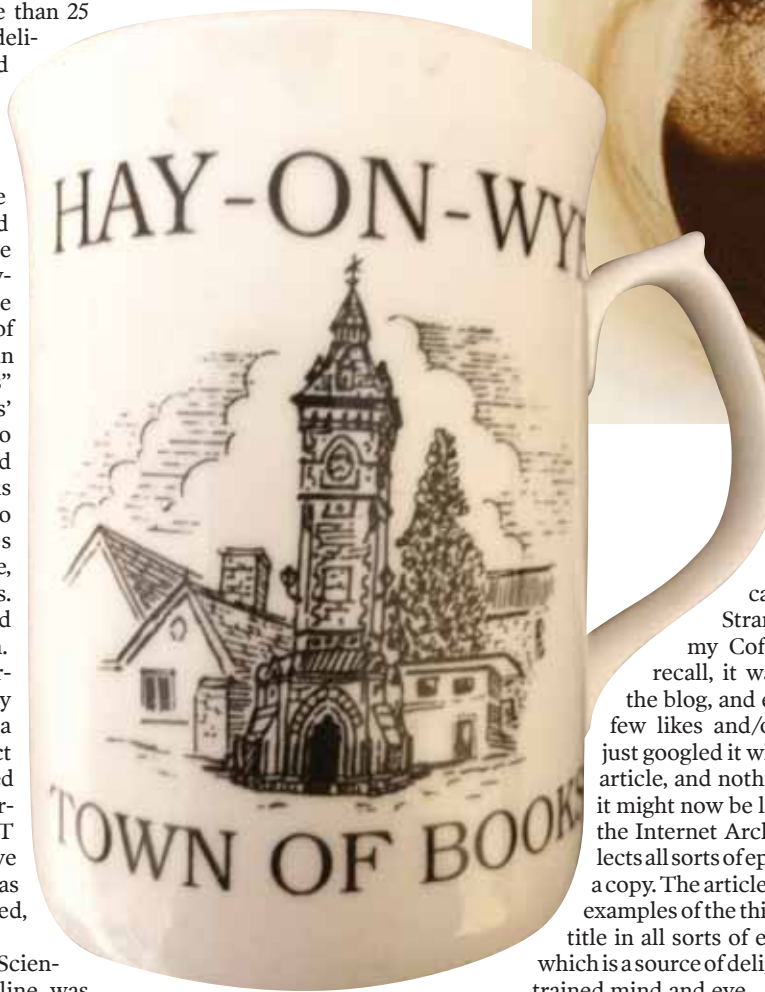
This time it included BOTH a face and beautifully mathematically chaotic fractal branching, so, a win all round. Some hours later, I took the shot, but I haven't yet broken down and washed the mug. I did contemplate trying to seal that pattern with some food-grade varnish which could also withstand having nearly boiling water poured onto it regularly... but that's not very realistic. Could I instead just use ordinary varnish, not use the mug anymore, and leave it at that? Well,

it happens to be my all-time favorite mug. Just the right size, more than 25 years old, bone china, with a delicate rim to avoid dribbles, and best of all, "Hay-On-Wye, Town of Books" printed on the side.

This village, in south-west Wales near the English border, is THE best place in the whole world for lovers of second-hand books. A friend took me there to browse once, when I was living in south England. The place has more than 20 bookshops of all sizes and specialities, and in the UK, "second hand books" might include a few centuries' worth of material. Needless to say, I had a fantastic time, limited only by my budget, realizations that eventually I would have to fly away with my purchases (expecting to live elsewhere, like, the USSR), and time constraints. It remains a fond memory, and a place to which I must return.

So the mug has huge importance for me, as the repository of that trip's recollections, a proper souvenir, and as an object of regular use which has survived moves to Austria, Russia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. I don't WANT to stop using it. A photo will have to do: and I can even print it as large as I want and have it framed, if I so desire. This will do.

Quite some years ago, when Scientific American Magazine online was



allowing its online members to submit blog articles, I wrote a piece called "There's a Strange Attractor in my Coffee Mug". As I recall, it was accepted for the blog, and even garnered a few likes and/or comments. I just googled it while writing this article, and nothing came up, so it might now be lost. Not even in the Internet Archive, which collects all sorts of ephemera, is there a copy. The article is about finding examples of the thing named in the title in all sorts of everyday places, which is a source of delight to my chaotically trained mind and eye.

I also once took a shot of a centipede-like creature which had fallen into another mug, this one at my parents-in-laws' home in rural Kakheti. So I suppose there is a small history of such things presenting themselves to me, and me recording them for posterity. With that said, I hope you enjoy the current find, and that you may be stirred to seek such things yourself. They do bring a certain amount of joy.

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 over 2000 members, at www.facebook.com/groups/SvanetiRenaissance/. He and his wife also run their own guest house in Etseri: www.facebook.com/hanmer.house.svaneti

The Scientific Boom among Our Georgian Youth



BLOG BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

In the wake of the soviet collapse, Sakartvelo, like any other one-time soviet socialist republic, has maintained the soviet system of running its National Academy of Sciences, within which the members are periodically elected, based on available quotas, and salaries are paid, as was the case in soviet times. There are two things that have changed in terms of our academic life: a) the educational system was put on the rails of the well-known Bologna Process, which is the series of agreements between European countries to ensure comparability in the standards and quality of higher-education qualification, and b) the road was paved for volunteer-based alternative academies

of science, among them the academies of natural science, engineering, agriculture, medicine, pedagogy, etc.

Amazingly, but truly, some of these scientific clubs, within which members are elected but not paid, are sometimes no less effective in their activities than the National Academy itself. For instance, The Academy of Natural Sciences, headed by the well-known physicist Professor Paata Kervalishvili, is intensively involved in the significant activity of promoting the young scientific cadres of the Republic.

A couple of days ago, in the beautiful atrium of the Tbilisi City Council, an interesting event took place that deserves the attention of our society. Hosted annually in various European countries, the European Union Contest for Young Scientists (EUCYS) is the most significant student science competition in Europe and beyond, revealing the strongest

among youth's scientific accomplishments, and bringing together the brightest young minds to present their projects to a panel of international judges.

Based on the decision of the EU educational and scientific directorate, Georgia was first admitted to the contest with a limited participation of no more than three participants, which nonetheless put Sakartvelo on the EUCYS permanent mailing list. Since 2004, Georgia's quota in the contest has doubled, which is very encouraging.

On a national level of competition, the participating age bracket is between 14 and 20, including high school juniors and seniors, as well as college students within that age frame. No less importantly, English-language fluency is one of the main preconditions for a contender to take part in the contest.

The potential projects hit almost every

field of knowledge, among them natural sciences, social, liberal arts, applied science, engineering, information technology, and medicine. The procedure for presenting a project is simple enough to facilitate participation, but to defend a thesis in front of a strict and competent jury is not easy, thus revealing only the best works for presentation to the European Commission.

Winning candidates are provided with the necessary funds, materials, literature and appliances to continue their work and prepare for the European contest. The expenditure for further action is covered by the Euro Commission, and includes board and lodging, transportation, and certain cognitive programs for national-level winners. The international jury evaluates the candidates and their projects during interviews with them.

Georgia is a regular participant in those

Western scientific contests, and Georgian participants have over the years distinguished themselves as very promising young scientists. Some of them have even merited the attention of certain eminent scientists of international standing!

The EUCYS-2023 was hosted by Belgium, in Brussels, on September 13-15. Three projects won at the national-level competition, and were, therefore, presented for judgement to the European contest jury: First place went to the project 'Web Application Firewall Based on Machine Learning and Artificial Intelligence' by Andria Kelekhsaev and Alexander Mizandari, the runner-up was a project titled 'Making a High-Aperture Varifocal Membrane Reflector Telescope' by Irakli Veshapeli and Anastasia Bolvadze (this one received the EURO-Fusion prize); and the third place was won by the project 'Curved Space Displacement Monitoring' by Ninia Mikautadze and Nia Macharashvili.

Our sincere thanks and congrats go to these wonderful young sons and daughters of Georgia! EUCYS happens to be a huge opportunity for our young thinkers of various fields of knowledge, giving them a chance to acquire new contacts, get involved in actual scientific life with elevated topicality and significance, make progress, and grab a chance to push Georgian scientific thought into the international market. What else could be more important for this nation's prominence and prosperity?

Professor Paata Kervalishvili, the dedicated patron and sponsor of our young scientists, is firmly supported in this great endeavor by his loyal, steadfast and just-as-devoted colleagues Professor David Aladashvili, serving as the Secretary-Academician of the Georgian Academy of Natural Sciences, Michael Cowgill, President of Georgian-American University (GAU) and Vice-President of the Georgian Academy of Natural Sciences, and Tamar Khulordava, Director of Executive Education Program Foundation. Serving as genuine volunteers, these important public figures of their beloved country are enthusiastically promoting the Georgian national science on a global level by means of nonstop work with the crème-de-la-crème of our younger generation.



Photo by Eike Walkenhorst

Puccini's Timeless Operas in the Deutsche Oper Berlin - Il Trittico

BY DR. PHIL. LILY FÜRSTENOW

In our prosaic age, veristic operas resonate with particular force with audiences, creating special moods and emphasising affects. As in early years of the last century, when Giacomo Puccini's "Il Trittico," a collection of three one-act operas, premiered at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City on December 14, 1918, so now at the Berliner premiere at the Deutsche Oper on September 30, 2023 the three operas: "Il Tabarro" (The Cloak), "Suor Angelica" (Sister Angelica), and "Gianni Schicchi" made a profound emotional impact on the audiences.

"Il Trittico" as a whole represents a departure from the grand romantic operas that Puccini had previously composed, and can be seen as a reflection of the musical trend towards realistic opera and the exploration of more diverse and contemporary themes. Verismo opera is characterized by its focus on depicting the lives of ordinary people and addressing real-life issues, often with a gritty and naturalistic approach. "Il Trittico" demonstrates Puccini's versatility as a composer, as he successfully combines elements of both drama and comedy within this collection, contributing

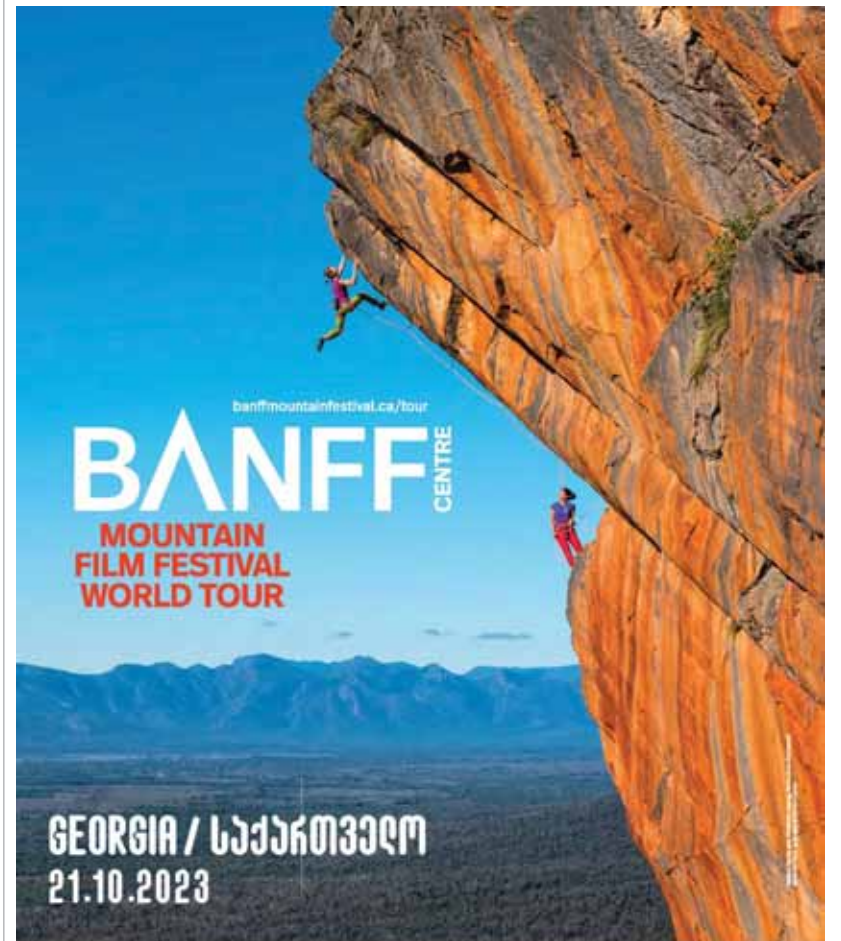
to the evolution of operatic storytelling. Tragic life constellations and everyday gloomy routine, emotional intensity, strong, complex and independent female characters received in Berliner staging incredible emotional power due to phenomenal singers performing with admirable virtuosity and sincerity, particularly impressive was the part of Suor Angelica by inspiring Mané Galoyan with her heavenly soprano, Jonathan Tetelman as Luigi in Tabarro, and Misha Kiria from Georgia as the unforgettable Gianni Schicchi. Puccini's meticulous orchestration and use of leitmotifs that assign musical themes to specific characters and situations establish the opera's setting and atmosphere.

Sadly, the staging by Pinar Karabulut could match neither the incredible brilliance of the singers nor the depth of Puccini's music. The attempt to translate the mood into grotesque and exaggeratedly trashy aesthetic devalued the force of the human tragedies that took place on the stage, making the human sorrow appear insignificant and circus-like. Excessively overdone hairstyles would not justify their function as the protagonists' personal characteristics, looking simply odd, whereas the unappealing aspects of female physiology made the female human drama, the humiliation and abysmal destiny of a

woman, as a victim of the injustices of the church and family, and her suffering appear as a distasteful and repulsive farce rather than an attempt at analysing the taboos of menstruation blood on opera stages.

Only in the final Opera, Gianni Schicchi, were the caricature costumes, settings, make-up and silhouettes fitting wittily in place, adding to the whole action an extra touch of irony and comedy. Misha Kiria starring as the cunning and manipulative Gianni Schicchi was magnificently convincing in his spectacular performance, and especially in his final appearance on stage addressing the public. For our Georgian opera fans, it is of special interest to know that Misha Kiria studied at the State Conservatory in Tbilisi and at the Accademia Teatro alla Scala in Milan. His repertoire includes roles such as Bartolo in Il Barbiere di Siviglia, Don Magnifico in La Cenerentola, Don Alfonso in Così Fan Tutte, and the title role in Falstaff. He has been invited to such renowned stages as the Teatro alla Scala, the Dutch National Opera, the Teatro Filarmonico in Verona, the Bregenz Festival and others. In the 2019/20 season, he sang the role of Fra Melitone in Frank Castorf's new production of La Forza del Destino at the Deutsche Oper Berlin, conducted by Paolo Carignani.

Banff Mountain Film Festival – World Tour in Georgia



19:00 | კინოთავიანი პიკნიკი, კომპლექსი ქარაი N36
22:00 | AMIRANI CINEMA 36 KOSTAVA ST.



BY MARIAM GORKHELASHVILI

The upcoming Banff mountain film festival, organized by the non-governmental organization "Transcaucasian Trail," promises to be an exhilarating event. Scheduled for October 21, it aims to unite mountain aficionados from across the Caucasus at Amirani cinema.

Attendees can look forward to lineup of fantastic films, the chance participate in a raffle, receive gifts, and join in various other captivating mountain-related activities.

Rima Beridze, the grants manager of the organization, shared these exciting details during her visit to Women's Narrative.

"Hundreds of films enter the competition each year, and each fall only 80 are selected to be presented at the week-long Banff festival." We present a pre-selected two-hour program from these best films in Tbilisi. The films will be presented with Georgian subtitles," Beridze said.

Each ticket for the event is priced at 32 GEL, covering both admission to the cinema and one raffle ticket. The funds generated from this event will be directed towards the advancement of the ambitious long-term Transcaucasian Trail project in Georgia. This remarkable initiative is dedicated to establishing a trail along the majestic Caucasus range, linking three nations: Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia. It is a significant endeavor that promises to promote unity and exploration across borders.



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