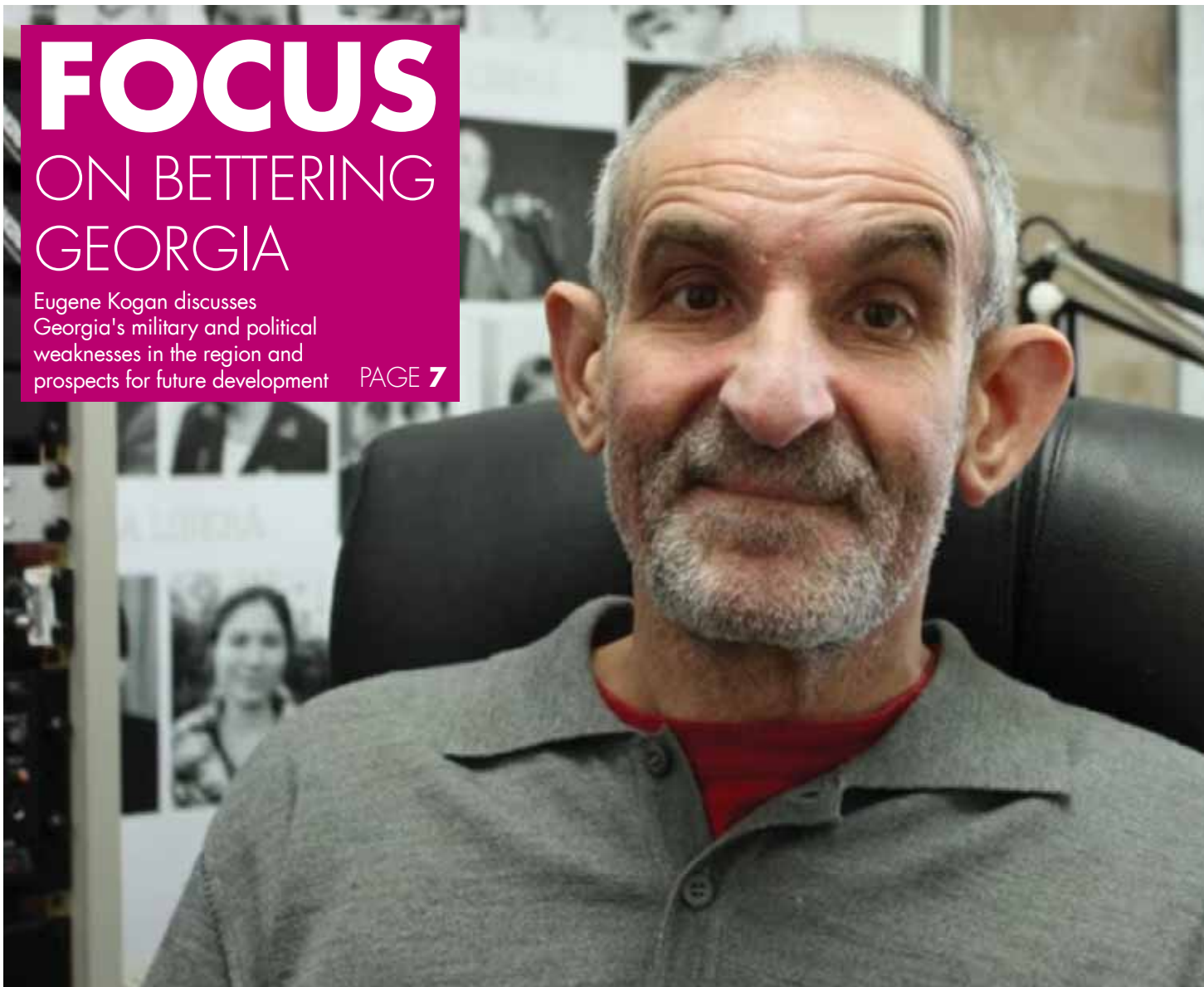




## FOCUS ON BETTERING GEORGIA

Eugene Kogan discusses Georgia's military and political weaknesses in the region and prospects for future development

PAGE 7



Eugene Kogan. Source: RFE/RL

## Politician Anna Dolidze on the Impeachment, Shovi Landslide and Georgia's Femicide Cases

INTERVIEW BY EREKLE POLADISHVILI

The historic process of impeaching the incumbent president has been the talk of the town for nearly a month now, but this is just one of the many issues GEORGIA TODAY discussed with Anna Dolidze, a professor and politician who has devoted her career to defending those who were oppressed by the people in power. The Former Deputy Minister of Defense founded her political party "For the People" two years ago, and is preparing to fight for seats in Parliament next year. She may even run for President in 2024.

### LET'S BEGIN WITH THE IMPEACHMENT PROCESS OF PRESIDENT ZURABISHVILI. WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT IT?

Well, for us, for our party, this decision or this move from the ruling party was unjustified, both from the perspective of content, as well as the timing. Continued on page 6



## In this week's issue...

Ukraine Updates: US Providing Missiles to Ukraine 'A Mistake,' Putin Says; China and Russia 'Exchange Views' on Israel-Hamas Conflict

NEWS PAGE 2

I'm afraid I won't be able to find a surrogate mother again! What will the surrogacy law change?

NEWS PAGE 2

Now Is the Time to Be Bolder in Taking More Responsibility - The Internal Dimension of External Security

POLITICS PAGE 4

Legal Aid On Wheels Reaches Remote Communities in Georgia

BUSINESS PAGE 8

First Light - Rashid Al Khalifa's Artistic Journey

CULTURE PAGE 10

Tasty Music and Delicious Wine – The Jazz and Wine Kakheti Festival

CULTURE PAGE 11

BONDS		Price	w/w	m/m	COMMODITIES		Price	w/w	m/m
GRAIL 07/28	85.57 (YTM 7.75%)	-1.2%	-1.9%	Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	91.50	+6.6%	-3.1%		
SILNET 01/27	98.32 (YTM 8.97%)	-0.2%	-0.2%	Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	1,947.55	+3.9%	+0.7%		
TBC 06/24	99.14 (YTM 7.09%)	-0.1%	-0.1%						
STOCKS		Price	w/w	m/m	CURRENCIES		Price	w/w	m/m
Bank of Georgia (BGE LN)	GBP 33.10	-6.1%	-9.7%	GEL / USD	2.6890	+0.1%	+2.0%		
Georgia Capital (CGEO LN)	GBP 9.40	-0.6%	-9.1%	GEL / EUR	2.8332	-0.7%	+0.5%		
TBC Bank Group (TBCG LN)	GBP 27.55	-6.0%	-4.3%	GEL / GBP	3.2657	-1.3%	+0.1%		
				GEL / CHF	2.9901	+0.4%	+1.9%		
				GEL / RUB	0.0274	+0.4%	+0.4%		
				GEL / TRY	0.0959	-1.0%	-2.6%		
INDICES		Price	w/w	m/m	GEL / AZN	1.5828	+0.1%	+2.0%	
FTSE 100	7,588.00	-0.4%	-0.8%	GEL / AMD	0.0067	-1.1%	-3.8%		
FTSE 250	17,403.46	-2.6%	-5.7%	GEL / UAH	0.0734	-0.1%	+2.8%		
DAX	15,094.91	-2.4%	-6.0%	EUR / USD	0.9491	+0.8%	+2.5%		
DOW JONES	33,665.08	-0.4%	-2.8%	GBP / USD	0.8237	+1.4%	+2.0%		
NASDAQ	13,314.30	-2.5%	-2.9%	CHF / USD	0.8990	-0.3%	+0.2%		
MSCI EM EE	38.09	+5.5%	+6.7%	RUB / USD	97.9712	-0.3%	+1.5%		
MSCI EM	943.12	-1.4%	-3.4%	TRY / USD	28.0039	+1.1%	+3.6%		
SP 500	4,314.60	-1.4%	-3.1%	AZN / USD	1.6980	-	+0.1%		
MSCI FM	2,073.49	-1.3%	-3.0%	AMD / USD	401.5600	+1.2%	+0.0%		

# Ukraine Updates: US Providing Missiles to Ukraine 'A Mistake,' Putin Says; China and Russia 'Exchange Views' on Israel-Hamas Conflict

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Washington's decision to supply long-range missiles to Ukraine was "a mistake." His comments came during a news conference at China's Belt and Road Initiative forum in Beijing.

The Kremlin leader said it was an error to have become "more and more personally drawn into" the conflict after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Tuesday that Kyiv had fired the first US-supplied, long-range ATACMS missile.

During Putin's visit, Chinese President Xi Jinping is reported to have praised the ties between Beijing and Moscow as the pair look to strengthen their "no limits" partnership.

In Ukraine, lethal airstrikes killed civilians in the city of Zaporizhzhia overnight.

Russia and Ukraine blamed each other for the casualties in Zaporizhzhia. Ukrainian officials attributed blame to "racist terrorist forces," while a Moscow-installed Russian official in the city said the destruction came as result of "clumsy actions" by the Ukrainian armed forces.

## AT LEAST SEVEN KILLED IN RUSSIAN STRIKES, UKRAINIAN OFFICIALS SAY

Russian strikes killed at least seven civilians overnight and on Wednesday, according to updates from Ukrainian officials.

The deputy mayor of the southeastern city of Zaporizhzhia said on Telegram

that four people were killed overnight, as two more bodies were found during search and rescue operations.

A Moscow-installed official in the part of the region controlled by Russia blamed the strikes on Ukraine.

Two deaths were reported by an official in Kherson, and one was reported in the Dnipropetrovsk region.

Ukrainian forces also launched at least 18 drone strikes on Russian field camps in the Kursk region of Russia, Ukrainian security service sources reportedly told the Kyiv Post and Ukrinform.

The drones hit military field camps near the village of Postoyalne Dvory, which is around 110 kilometers (68 miles) from the Ukrainian border, the Post reported.

Up to 3,000 Russian soldiers and approximately 80 units of military equipment are stationed in the area, according to the reports.

"Firstly, this of course causes harm and creates an additional threat. Secondly, we will of course be able to repel these attacks. War is war," Putin said, referencing Ukraine's use of US ATACMS. "Most importantly, it fundamentally lacks the capacity to change the situation on the line of contact at all ... This is another mistake by the United States."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Tuesday that Ukraine had fired the first US-supplied, long-range ATACMS missile. Zelensky had repeatedly asked Washington for the weapons to help in its offensive.

Putin also criticized the US involvement in the war more widely.

"A mistake of a larger scale, as yet invis-

ible but still of great importance, is that the United States is becoming more and more personally drawn into this conflict. And let no one say that they have nothing to do with this. We believe they do," Putin said.

## RUSSIAN FORCES 'UNLIKELY' TO MAKE A BREAKTHROUGH IN NORTHEAST UKRAINE, BRITISH DEFENSE MINISTRY SAYS

Russian ground forces on the Kupiansk-Lyman axis in northeast Ukraine are "highly unlikely" to achieve a major operational breakthrough, Britain's Defense Ministry said, thanks to Ukrainian forces retaining a "significant defensive presence."

The ministry delivered the update Wednesday via X, formerly known as Twitter.

While there has been "a significant increase in Russian offensive activity" in the area, there has been "limited success," the update said.

It's "highly likely" that the activity is part of an ongoing Russian offensive happening across multiple axes in eastern Ukraine, according to the report.

## PUTIN TO VISIT VIETNAM 'SOON,' VIETNAMESE STATE MEDIA REPORTS

Russian President Vladimir Putin accepted an invitation from his Vietnamese counterpart to soon visit Vietnam as the two met on the sidelines of China's Belt and Road Forum in Beijing, Vietnamese state media reported.

Vietnam remains one of Russia's closest partners in Asia, ties that were developed during the Soviet era, and Hanoi



Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping. Source: Sergei Guneyev | AFP | Getty Images

is a major buyer of Russian weapons.

Vietnam's President Vo Van Thuong invited Putin to "soon" visit the country and "Putin happily accepted the invitation," Vietnam News Agency, the state's official newswire, reported late on Tuesday.

## PUTIN AND XI 'EXCHANGE VIEWS' ON ISRAEL-HAMAS CONFLICT, STATE MEDIA REPORTS

Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping had an "in-depth exchange of views" on the Israel-Hamas conflict, Chinese state media outlet Xinhua reported.

The two leaders met during Putin's closely-watched trip to Beijing for the third Belt and Road Forum. The pair also discussed the "no limits" partnership between their two countries during the meeting.

Xi said that "China supports the Russian people in pursuing the path of national rejuvenation independently and safeguarding national sovereignty, security and

development interests," Xinhua reports.

The Chinese president said that both sides should promote the high-quality development of China-Russia cooperation and "actively explore cooperation in strategic emerging industries."

## RUSSIAN LOWER HOUSE PASSES LAW TO SCRAP BAN ON NUCLEAR TESTING

A law to revoke Russia's ratification of the global nuclear test ban treaty completed its passage through the Duma, Russia's lower house of parliament, Wednesday.

Deputies passed the second and third readings of the bill with unanimous votes in favor.

"We rarely have great consolidation at all, and in this regard, our vote will be a response to the United States of America for its boorish attitude towards its responsibilities to maintain global security," Vyacheslav Volodin, the State Duma chairman, said Tuesday.

The US signed but never ratified the 1996 Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

# I'm afraid I won't be able to find a surrogate mother again! What will the surrogacy law change?



Representative image. Source: New Africa/Shutterstock.com

BLOG BY KLEIN LAW

In a significant move by the Ministry of Health, Georgia is set to undergo a major transformation in its surrogacy laws, with potential far-reaching consequences for both aspiring parents and surrogate mothers. The proposed legislation, expected to come into effect on January 1, 2024, aims to prohibit foreign couples from engaging in surrogacy services within the country, reserving this practice exclusively for Georgian citizens. Additionally, the draft law will address the compensation of surrogate mothers, emphasizing a principle of altruism.

Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili, during a government session, highlighted the need for these legal changes, citing concerns over unregulated practices, direct orders for surrogacy services online, and the ambiguity surrounding the future of children born through these

arrangements. The government's aim is to provide clarity and protection for the surrogacy process within its borders.

## CURRENT LEGAL FRAMEWORK

These proposed changes represent the latest attempt by Georgian authorities to amend the legal framework surrounding extracorporeal fertilization and surrogacy. In 2020, a legal amendment was introduced to restrict surrogacy to married couples or those in de facto cohabitation for at least one year. Tea Tsuluki, the then-Minister of Justice, aimed to combat potential threats, such as trafficking of babies born through surrogacy and transnational criminal activities.

Georgia has had legal regulations governing surrogacy since 1997. These regulations involve various legal instruments, including laws related to health protection, patient rights, civil acts, Georgian citizenship, and the legal status of foreigners and stateless individuals. Rules concerning the removal of children born through surrogacy are further outlined

in a 2016 joint order by the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Internal Affairs.

## SURROGACY STATISTICS

It is challenging to ascertain the exact number of children born through surrogacy in Georgia, especially those intended for foreign couples. According to the Service Development Agency of the Ministry of Justice, they do not maintain statistics on the exit of children born through surrogacy from the country.

## SURROGACY AGENCIES' PERSPECTIVE

The surrogacy and donation agencies in Georgia were caught off guard by the proposed changes. Agencies like "IVIEF Tours Georgia" have been operational since 2014, facilitating surrogacy programs for both Georgian and foreign couples. The potential shift towards altruism and banning services for foreign couples came as a surprise to these agencies.

While the current legal framework mandates rigorous processes for surrogacy, these agencies had been working with the Ministry of Health to establish more specific legislation. The unexpected announcement has raised concerns among agencies, who may find it challenging to operate under the proposed legal changes.

## SURROGATE MOTHERS' COMPENSATION

One of the key aspects of the draft law is the emphasis on the principle of altruism regarding surrogate mothers' compensation. While the law aims to ensure that surrogate mothers are compensated for their time and inconvenience, the exact amount remains unspecified. Some surrogate mothers fear that the reduction in demand due to the ban on foreign

couples may lead to lower compensation.

The general manager of "IVIEF Tours Georgia," Natia Janadze, believes that compensation for surrogate mothers should be logical and adequate. However, she also acknowledges the potential for a decrease in compensation due to the drop in demand.

## IMPACT ON SURROGATE MOTHERS

The proposed legislation has sparked concerns among surrogate mothers, many of whom engage in surrogacy to improve their economic circumstances. For most surrogate mothers, this income is crucial for addressing socio-economic challenges, including debt and providing for their own children.

Maya, a surrogate mother, emphasizes the importance of adequate compensation, and she is uncertain about the implications of the "principle of altruism." She worries that the proposed changes might leave surrogate mothers without fair remuneration.

Eka, another surrogate mother, highlights the transformative impact of surrogacy compensation on her life. The proposed changes may limit her ability to secure housing for her family. For women like Eka, the prospect of a drastic reduction in compensation is a major concern.

## PROSPECTIVE PARENTS' CONCERNS

The proposed legal changes have also left prospective parents in a state of uncertainty. Salome, who intended to have a child through surrogacy with her Swedish husband, questions whether they will still be able to access surrogacy services in Georgia.

While the law will limit surrogacy to

Georgian citizens, the situation is complex for mixed couples or those with international ties. Salome worries about the implications for her family's future.

## IMPACT ON THE SURROGACY INDUSTRY

Some prospective parents hope that the new law will lead to more affordable surrogacy services. They believe that the absence of foreigners will reduce prices and make surrogacy accessible to Georgian couples.

However, this optimism is met with skepticism. Others worry that prices may rise for Georgian couples as surrogacy agencies lose their foreign clientele. Surrogate mothers may be unwilling to accept lower compensation.

## AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

As Georgia stands on the brink of significant surrogacy law changes, there are numerous questions, concerns, and uncertainties among surrogate mothers, surrogacy agencies, and prospective parents. While the government's aim is to regulate and protect the practice, the consequences for those involved remain uncertain. As the draft law moves forward, the country will continue to grapple with the complexities of surrogacy, the rights of surrogate mothers, and the aspirations of families who seek the joy of parenthood through this method.

KLEIN  
&  
PANTSULAIA  
IT · AI · LAW

# Impeachment of President Salome Zurabishvili Fails, with only 86 Votes For and 1 Against

BY TEAM GT

The impeachment of President Salome Zurabishvili failed in Georgia's Parliament on Wednesday. 86 members of the Parliament supported the impeachment of the President, while 1 MP voted against it. By law, 100 votes are needed for impeachment.

Based on the results, Salome Zurabishvili remains in the post of head of state.

The voting on the issue of her removal from office by impeachment was conducted by secret ballot. During the voting, in the hall of plenary sessions of the Parliament, in addition to the majority members of Georgian Dream, members of the European Socialists, Girchi, and MP Aleko Elisashvili were present. President Zurabishvili herself was also present in the session hall.

The regulations of Parliament state that if the impeachment is not supported by at least 100 Members of Parliament, the matter is considered closed and it is not permitted to present the same accusation to the official again.

"I have not violated either the essence or the spirit of the Constitution - you could not prove that I did anything wrong, or that I did not do enough to protect our country and support it on its way to European integration," Zurabishvili said at the plenary session prior to the vote.

She went on to claim that with this impeachment process, the ruling Georgian Dream party insults the European leaders and pushes the country towards isolation.

"If the Constitution has crossed the

line of conscience, now it is your turn! I am not going to prove anything here, nor to convince anyone of what is already obvious. I have not violated either the essence or the spirit of the Constitution," she said. "You needed to provide evidence to support your allegations, your false claims that I sabotaged our European path, failed to produce results, sometimes conducted negotiations, and yet you failed to provide that evidence. You could not prove that I did anything wrong or that I did not do enough to protect our country and support it on its way to European integration. If you don't believe me, you can call Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Charles Michel, Emmanuel Macron, or even Alar Karis, Edgars Rinkevics, Gitanas Nauseda. I can go on with the list: All leaders on whom the granting of our EU candidate status depends, and it must be said that with this impeachment process you insult not only me, and not me at all, but these leaders, and it leads the country to isolation," she added.

"Everyone who takes an active part in Zurabishvili's project in Ivanishvili's game, staged with Russian technology, is either a fool, or makes a fool of himself," former Georgian president, Mikheil Saakashvili wrote in a Facebook post from prison before the voting results were announced.

He claimed the "impeachment" was a cover for the real topics that might insight protest.

"The 'impeachment' will fail, and Salome will take the ticket, go to Europe, and will be praised for Georgia getting candidate status," Saakashvili predicted.

"The EU has already decided to grant status with certain reservations, and Salome will be praised for this, thereby removing Ivanishvili's responsibility in



President Salome Zurabishvili, still in power. Source: Instagram


the eyes of the Russians."


He said this does not indicate that Bidzina Ivanishvili is "smart," but that a large number of politicians are playing

along with the rules of his game because they are weak.

"The oligarch knows that the Dream will not have the majority in the next

elections, and he is considering as a main option to build a new project around Salome and isolate the main force related to me," Saakashvili wrote.





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# Now Is the Time to Be Bolder in Taking More Responsibility - The Internal Dimension of External Security



Source: BrainyQuote

BLOG BY VICTOR KIPIANI,  
GEOCASE CHAIRMAN

Today, the post-Cold War world "order" is in a phase of renewed competition and rivalry between major powers, which is equally felt by medium and small states. Moreover, by sharply increasing their role in the regional and sub-regional format, medium-sized states have turned into "assisting actors" in the renewed confrontation, while small countries are looking at a wide range of ways to pave the way for the external security vector, which offers them a multitude of choices - from balancing to hedging their own interests.

## RECALLING A FEW AXIOMS

At first glance, it seems as if the essence and dynamics of the competition and rivalry of modernity are determined mainly by two factors - military and economic - but this is only a momentary and superficial impression. In reality, the basis for the effectiveness and efficiency of both factors is determined by the stability of a country's political and social system, its acceptance by society, fair participation in it, and equal access to existing opportunities. Otherwise, any military or economic capability, even if it has an effect over a certain period of time, gradually wears out and declines. As a result, the failure of public and social resilience is broken, a significant number of citizens become apathetic and indifferent to public and national interests, the system of governance closes in on itself, and thus only accelerates the erosion of trust in it, the thread of solidarity between the state and the citizen is torn, and all this worsens the country's position in the external arena and leads to the deterioration of its security system.

Numerous examples in today's world clearly show that the view of international influence by the government or society of a country on the basis of the traditional and classical approach, as a mere compound of external components, is the result of an extremely narrow view and leads to (irreparable) mistakes. Certainly, the danger of external aggression, intervention and interference in the internal life of a country by foreign forces is not debatable, but we believe that harmful and destructive influences emanating from within a country are no less, if not more, dangerous than influences of the same nature from the outside. Moreover, it is endogenous factors - a sense of injustice in society, unequal distribution of public resources, selectivity based on political, social or faith

grounds, or any other imbalance or inequality - that can provide fertile ground for the full realization of potential exogenous factors, tenfold and hundredfold increase the effect of virtually any plan or intention directed against the sovereignty and national interests of the country, often - turning the impossible into the possible, turning the irreversible, turning the unthinkable into a tangible given.

So, for us, too, avoiding the stereotype of security in the narrow sense of the word when voicing or making decisions is a necessary starting point for both governors and the governed. As a result, both the concept and the phenomenon are seen only as a combination of external (economic and military ties, diplomacy and behind-the-scenes advocacy, "soft power") and internal factors (inclusiveness of the political process, social solidarity, equal access to economic opportunities, clear and open resource allocation system), and are collectively transferred to the practical field for the purpose of implementation.

Before turning to the specific issues of practical interest to us, a few key, very brief remarks are appropriate. Each of these leads to a new reality of internal security (and related external security):

(a) The past period of the 21st century has been characterised by a high degree of fragmentation of the democratic process and institutions. This process is likely to continue in the near future;

(b) The sense of social responsibility and the accountability obligation has significantly decreased among the leading actors of the market economy - representatives of the corporate world;

(c) In the process of asset accumulation and growth, the gaps created between different sections of society continue to widen, which is a major source of intense political and social storms;

(d) Taking democratic rights and freedoms "for granted" can be a fatal mistake, since these rights and freedoms do not come and take root on their own. They need constant care, support and nurturing if they are to be maintained and improved. Otherwise, to paraphrase a famous saying, every nation ends up in the environment it deserves...

## ON THE STATE FUNCTION OF DEMOCRACY: GENERALISED 'LESSONS' ...

Before we focus on this functional purpose, we believe it appropriate to mention a few important "lessons". It is necessary to talk about them not only for the purpose of theoretical discussion of the issue, but also from a practical point of view: including in order to better see and understand where the development of the Georgian state has "stopped" today, in particular, what the problem is with

its political culture, and what has made Georgian society hostage to its own clichés and weaknesses.

Specifically, let's start with:

(1) Democracy does not create an unconditional counterweight to economic inequality. Thus, relying only on self-regulation and self-governance of the democratic process can lead to a fatal outcome, namely, it can damage the reputation of democracy as a form of governance, facilitate the emergence of populism and radicalism, and, as a result, the creation of suitable conditions for the establishment of autocracy.

Such "evolution" is particularly noteworthy for Georgia and those countries for which poverty remains the main challenge, with the risk of possible autocracy and multiplication of external threats through institutional erosion increasing proportionally.

(2) Particular stress tests for democratic governance are periods of crisis, when speedy decision-making and consolidated execution of decisions made are crucial for security and functional self-sufficiency. In this regard, any inefficiency and delay due to the democratic nature of the process is reflected in serious damage to the reputation of the political system. The recent pandemic is a vivid illustration of this complex and contradictory equation.

(3) To realise security in a broad sense, taking into account the risks of the present and foreseeable future, practically useful are:

(a) Reasonable "etatism" in the current socio-economic processes within the country - emphasizing the constructive and facilitating role of state institutions. This will be useful both for timely prevention of the above-mentioned "evolution", negative developments (undermining and deterioration of democracy - radicalism and populism - "creeping" autocracy) and for strengthening solidarity between the state and its citizens, which is necessary for national security;

(b) Introduction of elements characteristic of the welfare state in legislation ("smart laws") and in practice. The prerequisite of social welfare and justice, as well as reasonable "etatism" is crucial for the security of the Georgian state, its competitiveness and its ability to adapt to changing international circumstances;

(c) In a democratic process, a misstep is not irreversible if it is aided in time by the necessary openness, exchange of views, a culture of listening and accepting, by the appropriate use of free debate - so-called "moving" opinion. At the same time, deviating from this approach, trying to turn the country into a "quasi-democracy" or a "semi-free" one, reduces the possibilities of providing aid in times of missteps in the democratic process. And in the end, it again affects the dete-

riorating international security, the source of which is the viciousness and untrustworthiness of the political process inside the country, the deteriorating internal security itself, both for the political and business elites and for all other segments of society;

(d) Political consensus that accompanies a healthy political process and promotes security from 'within'. The purpose of consensus is to create a situation in which, in representative institutions - provided they actually function - the will of the majority is duly respected and the discontents of the political minority are properly recognized and "discharged".

However, in our view, there is a "but" here as well. This is directly related to the requirement of internal political stability and inclusiveness, and thus security. The fact is that democratic majority rule presupposes, first and foremost, a proper decision-making process. In other words, the factor of being in the majority does not equal domination by the power of the majority. Moreover, listening to opposing opinions by the majority, and open debate, respecting the culture of so-called "moving" opinion, gives the majority decision more political legitimacy and moral force in the end. And without such a culture, not only the Georgian political system but also Georgia's security will always stand on quicksand. The period from the restoration of Georgia's state independence to the present day is a documented example of this vulnerability;

(e) Placing power in formal structures, introducing the necessary mechanisms to prevent the "spillover" of power from these structures, and the proper distribution of power between the structures. In other words, we consider one of the determinants of a healthy state within a state-constitutional system with real power to be the democracy of decision-making within the same system - a kind of "democracy from within". However, it should be noted that, given the "moving" opinion, open reasoning and competence, not only the authorities of Georgia (in the sense of formal and influential groups), but also political parties, civil society and the media suffer from an acute lack of "internal democracy". Thus, without the necessary practical characteristics for a proper political and creative process, the listed actors inadvertently create a risk to the necessary balance within the country, reject each other and a large part of society and, as a result, create a threat to stability and security.

## ... AND GEORGIAN "LESSONS"

A number of systems - mainly in Western countries - have achieved rapid development, including through deregulation. However, the complete delegation of responsibility for the laws of the market economy has also led to the systemic challenges we are seeing now. We have already talked about this topic in detail many times and will talk about it another time as well, its unfolding is beyond the scope of this article. This time we would like to convey the main idea of the Georgian case.

In particular, based on the goal of resilience and security of our country, a complete emphasis on military and political ties or alliances alone is correct but insufficient. Stability and external risk management based on predictability and internal security are largely based on an understandable and acceptable agreement between the state and citizens on political and business processes in the internal life of the country.

The following conditions should be ensured for the viability and reliability of this agreement - both in writing and

in operation - as well as for the sense of citizenship of one's country:

(a) Social capital of institutions and institutional governance, i.e. trust in them;

(b) Equal access to economic resources and opportunities;

(c) Striking the right balance between capital on the one hand and the development of the state and society on the other; The advancement of capital is the most important prerequisite for a rich and self-sufficient country, although it is in the interest of capital itself to make consistent, systematic and inclusive progress on a national scale;

(d) The provision of quality services by the state;

(e) The realisation of real rather than illusory meritocracy in politics and governance;

(f) The existence of at least several political and business centres competing within a framework of law and publicity which prevents the "capture" of all power by one particular group or individual;

(g) The availability and use of information and other technologies for the inclusive development of the country as an "obstacle" to retreat.

We consider the implementation of these and other possible conditions in real life, their establishment as a rule and their transmission from generation to generation as a state, political and social heritage, as a practical mechanism for strengthening internal Georgian, and thus national security to a greater or lesser extent.

In addition to the above, the combination of these conditions contributes to the already mentioned "democratization from within" of a process and to a better awareness of different actors, which also creates an opportunity for a more orderly and consistent defense of national stability and national and state interests in the external arena - without internal fluctuations, radical polarization and crossing of "red lines".

Otherwise, the national security system will be so saturated with vulnerable areas that the aggravation of the problem of even one of them may be contagious to the rest and lead to the disintegration of the entire system, which will diminish the country's sovereignty and increase harmful influences from outside and within, moreover: at such times, there is an illusory notion that concentration of power is better, especially for effectively overcoming external and internal challenges. In fact, the opposite consequence of this notion is the slide of the concentration of power towards authoritarianism and the dangerous transformation of the country into a so-called "besieged fortress", which further multiplies and aggravates the risks of national security. For such a situation, we do not have enough resources for self-sufficiency and, most importantly, we do not have the will determined by our own historical past and present.

## IT HAS BEEN SAID AND WRITTEN ABOUT MANY TIMES...

... that security in the modern sense is more than armour and bullets. From the point of view of the present and future of the Georgian state, a correct and acceptable balance between the institutions of the state and the citizens is also necessary. Only on such balancing of relations, mutual control and mutual participation does the load-bearing wall of our own security and competitive development hold. It is also a practical way to manage today's risks and minimize future threats where possible. Now is the time to be bolder in taking more responsibility.

# The Silver Linings of the Impeachment Cloud

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

**W**e, as a rather fresh, democratic, political culture, are not terribly pampered by providence with an opportunity like an impeachment of a political bigwig for a wrongdoing. The history of this nation does not know of anything of this sort and caliber, but behold, there came a rare, but unique opportunity to hone our political ethos.

The President of the Republic herself fell under the rumble of truly out-of-the-blue impeachment thunder. Hardly believable, but a fact of life! The lady in question was not even born in Georgia. Had this happened in America, she would never have been elected to the uncannily attractive position of head of state, a post with a minimum of obligations and a maximum chance to trot the world at the expense of our yet to rebel taxpayers. Well, the President has not lost her enviably cushy job as an outcome of the trial in the country's legislative body, but this might be far less important than the political takeaways we are going to gain as a result of this overly talked about political cause célèbre.

In the first place, the given option of impeaching a high-ranking official is something significant as such, carrying a novel rationale of democracy, freedom, and national independence in itself. If West is the destination, then nothing could be more western than the political will, freedom and readiness to attempt to thwart a breach of law. Secondly, it was a serious opportunity to publicly try, on the parliamentary floor, the persuasive skill and political acumen of our still-young politicians, the entire nation wondering if they can cope with their

imperative function of plaintiff and defending side; their clash before a renowned bunch of competent judges can spark in the nation either the hope that the state has a chance to survive, or the fear that it is doomed in its underdeveloped ability to reveal the truth. Thirdly, this kind of bombastic trial will become a series of lectures in jurisprudence for a good number of our young men and women majoring in law at numerous universities of the country.

I remember the trial of attorney Anita Hill and Justice Clarence Thomas in the United States in 1991, which turned into the most widely taken crash-course ever; this analogy between the American and our Georgian trial cases might very well be justified if we look deeper into our lady president's impeachment case, which will definitely turn into one of the most powerful practical courses in constitutional law in the history of Sakartvelo.

There is a fourth reason why this presidential impeachment trial in Georgia might do a good service to this nation: it is a clear and present signal to our politicians that nobody can remain above the law, and impeachment for a high-caliber political misdemeanor can be anybody's lot in the future, so beware every single politician who wants to go against the functioning law to perpetuate his or her political philosophy and serve one's personal career target.

No less important than the previous ones, is the fifth reason why this impeachment trial could be beneficial to our people: we did it fairly and correctly, and, of course, to a high professional level, so the European family of nations has one more reason to reckon us a truly deserving aspirant to the Western ranks.

I have nursed one more, and final, argument for thinking that this impeachment trial makes us look better than we could have looked without it, and that is the



President Salome Zurbishvili entering Parliament to hear the final decision on her impeachment on Wednesday. Source: Instagram

naturally-born necessity to better think of the next challenger of presidency before the candidate is offered to our public to vote for. "To think better" in this context means nothing less than the creation of the candidates extremely detailed truthful profile, created by the services that be, well in advance of the

election time, so that the electorate knows for sure who exactly the votes are being cast for, and whether the made choice is actually conducive to the indisputable well-being of our people.

Working in mutual understanding and fruitful cooperation, the triad of legislative, executive and judicial powers, assisted

and balanced by impartial and helpful presidential authority, even as formal as it happens to be, could seriously contribute to that kind of teamwork. Anything short of this would unquestionably distract the country and its government from the main job they are doing, again, to the detriment of our good people.



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# Politician Anna Dolidze on the Impeachment, Shovi Landslide and Georgia's Femicide Cases

Continued from page 1

From the perspective of content, compared to the number of issues that Georgian Dream has at hand and amount of governance decisions they have to make, from climate change to the collection and export of walnuts from Georgia and relevant assistance to Georgian farmers, to the plethora of other questions and obligations that Georgian Dream has, instead of this, they are chasing an issue where the results are not at all as significant. As such, I believe the objective of GD is to divert the attention of the public from pressing issues to this.

Further, the timing of it is very wrong, because right now Georgia is awaiting the decision from the European Union in relation to its candidacy status and we need to be fulfilling those recommendations which were given us. Instead of a very serious business discussion on fulfillment of the recommendations, where we stand and what we need to do to receive candidacy status, Georgian Dream is trying to impeach the president. Naturally, this is not going to impact the reputation of Georgia abroad at all well. The move is all-round unjustifiable.

**ONLY A FEW MONTHS REMAIN BEFORE WE HEAR WHETHER GEORGIA IS TO BE GRANTED EU CANDIDACY STATUS. EU HIGH REPRESENTATIVE JOSEP BORRELL SAYS ONLY THREE OF THE 12 RECOMMENDATIONS WERE FULFILLED. TELL US ABOUT YOUR EXPECTATIONS.**

Yes, unfortunately, it is indeed the case that Georgian Dream did not put enough effort into drafting the reforms, to meeting the recommendations and I have to say, knowing very well Georgian public service, they are very much capable of delivering on these recommendations and drafting these reforms. There have been a myriad of ideas and proposals in relation to the area that I know best—judicial reform. They could have been written and delivered to the EU in a fortnight, yet GD chose not to do so.

I can speak specifically of a couple of areas: One is judicial reform, where the reform has not been as robust, as serious, as impactful as necessary to get rid of the informal group that is running the courts right now, and to ensure the independence of the court. The same concerns, for example, the measures to be taken in relation to violence against women. We are in a really dire situation on this issue and I haven't seen any reforms in this regard. The same could be said about fighting organized crime—a specific recommendation, or deoligarchization, where we have a specific proposal in relation to the people who have been working for the businesses and for the family of Bidzina Ivanishvili. So, unfortunately, it's true and it makes me very sad that GD did not invest enough in delivering on those recommendations.

**OUT OF NOWHERE, THE UNITED STATES SANCTIONED MR. PARTSKHALADZE. WHAT WAS YOUR REACTION WHEN YOU HEARD IT AND DID YOU SEE IT COMING?**

The US first sanctioned the group of justice that I would say really deserved this kind of pressure, in fact, this sanction came a little late, if you ask me, because the campaign against the organized, informal group that runs the court's so-called clan or quasi mafia group, was in its heyday, maybe, in 2018-2019. I was its leader among others, and that is when we needed it—when there was a serious grassroots movement and it would have been nice to receive a serious response from abroad not only the various reports from international organizations and partner states.

The sanctions against Mr. Partskhaladze—I personally didn't see it coming. Mr Partskhaladze is an informal



actor of the system right now, a person who has accumulated credible wealth, who has served at high levels of government, and who continues to exercise this power as a mediator between various echelons, various levels of government. To my mind Mr Partskhaladze deserved this sanction as a response. If he and actors like him are removed from the scene, the power of informal governance will diminish, and I expect that these sanctions will not stop at Mr Partskhaladze alone.

**AND YET, UNLIKE MR. IVANISHVILI, YOU'VE NEVER CALLED MR. PARTSKHALADZE OUT AS AN OLIGARCH. I WONDER, HOW DID YOU NOT KNOW ABOUT HIM?**

No, we raised his name many times a couple of years ago, publicly, not requesting a sanction but raising the issue of him as an actor, because he was allegedly engaged in this large-scale fraud scheme, which amounts to seven hundred million Lari, related to AT taxation. He was implicated in various shady deals, however, you are right in the sense that we didn't identify him specifically as an informal interlocutor and it's good that the US with its intelligence sources could identify him as an interlocutor with Russia.

We know how the informal government structure is run. I know personally, because I've observed the judges in the high council of justice. The formal government structures need an interlocutor, a go-between person, who will take back and forth the messages between the informal governor and the established structure, and we identified other people, among them Mr. Chinchaladze, one of the judges, Mr. Murusidze, another of the judges, and other people in the judicial system. However, we never pointed to Mr Partskhaladze per se. I guess, he was too skillful at staying out of the public eye.

**WHO ELSE DO YOU EXPECT TO BE ON THAT LIST?**

There are a number of people who serve very important roles below Bidzina Ivanishvili. For example, small oligarch Vano Chkhartishvili, who isn't small in terms of what ordinary people could afford, but in terms of the wealth above him. He is quite influential. A very nice Russian scholar who lives in the UK notes how hard it is to identify these forms of influence and power because all of it is secret and remains non-transparent and informal, but it refers to anybody who exercises a lot of influence and power over economic, as well as political processes.

**ANOTHER GENERAL ELECTION IS AHEAD OF US. ARE YOU PREPARED FOR IT, AND IF SO, WHO DO YOU CONSIDER A POSSIBLE ALLY? WHICH PARTIES WILL BE ON YOUR BLACKLIST?**

2024 will not be an ordinary election. Georgian Dream has been in power for more than 10 years and has overstepped the usual democratic cycle of two terms, and I think there is a lot of discontent among the public. There is an impetus for change. These are going to be transformative elections, just like the 2003 elections and 2012 elections. We have to prepare for it very well. I wouldn't say we're already in campaign mode, we're in the preface to that intense period. We are preparing for the election messaging specifically. A lot will depend on what the EU decides—That's a very serious variable.

The peculiarity of Georgian politics is that we have two dominant parties right now: the ruling party and the United National Movement. The problem is not the polarization per se, but the recent past of Georgian history, meaning a lot of undecided voters will not vote for UNM due to its human rights record. So, when we speak of alliances, it's really important for my constituency to delineate who our potential allies are, because an alliance with UNM then has to be clarified in terms of type of alliance and vision for the judiciary, because UNM's record with judges, with human rights, with prisons, has been abysmal.

As such, for us, an alliance is not a consideration with either GD and UNM, and we will instead develop relations with parties that are beyond these two poles. These relationships could be just collegial, could be a real alliance, could be a partnership, could be an issue-based partnership. What form they will take, the future will show.

**WOULD YOU WORK WITH THE LELO, GIRCHI, GIRCHI MORE FREEDOM, CITIZENS, DROA OR FOR GEORGIA PARTIES?**

I would first say that we are a very European party in terms of the European tradition of governance, in the sense that we collaborate with the various parties on an issue basis. So, above all, we are a party which has a very strong issue-based agenda, which will be close to the Social-Democratic agenda worldwide, and we collaborate with other parties in other countries who share the same agenda. Domestically, we have an issue-based collaboration with everybody you mentioned. So, for instance, on gender issues in Tbilisi Council, we collaborate both with Lelo and the For Georgia parties.

On other issues, we collaborate with Lelo without a problem, and we had the same position in relation to conscription and recruitment in the military with Girchi.

We will continue working in that vein. Right now we don't know what cards are on the table in the sense that we don't know what kind of support each of us has. It's too far ahead of the elections. I would not like to delineate a specific partner. One thing is true though, it will not be UNM among the opposition parties and definitely not GD.

**IN 2024, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN OUR HISTORY, 90% OF THE POPULATION OF GEORGIA WILL VOTE VIA ELECTRONIC DEVICES. TELL US YOUR OPINION ABOUT THIS MAJOR CHANGE.**

So, as I understand, it's currently being tested in two election districts. We come from a specific dramatic Soviet past, where people lived with the idea that the government was watching them, that they were being wire-tapped, that there was no division between private and public life and no privacy. So, we first have to see what the people think about the new mechanisms, what mechanisms there are to ensure the privacy and secrecy of choice. It's been a serious problem, cellphones with cameras being used as a pressure instrument on the public to monitor how they vote, seeing them asked to take a screenshot of their ballot and show it to their bosses at their workplaces. I initiated a proposal to ban cellphones in voting booths, but it was never heard by GD. My point here is that people here are under a lot of pressure during the elections, and they are used to being threatened with surveillance, monitoring, their votes being shown. The secrecy of ballots is very often violated. So, I see danger in the electronic voting, but I also see very big benefits from it. In many countries, including the United States, people still vote via old-fashioned ballots. Let's see what the reports will be from these two districts, what the feelings are among the population and what both technical and political experts say. Then we will arrive at a judgment, on whether or not this is a step forward.

**TWO MONTHS HAVE PASSED SINCE THE SHOVI LANDSLIDE. WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE MEASURES TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT?**

That's one of the most serious challenges for this government right now. Not only Shovi but climate change and sustainable development overall. The govern-

ment here is failing miserably. It is a reality that sustainable development and climate change are the issues that are at the top of the agendas of all governments. Unfortunately, we're not doing our homework. What happens, and how are we affected?

We live next to the Caucasus mountains and we know a lot from experts that ice on the Caucasus mountains is melting. We demand the government be vocal, internationally and domestically, about the environment and climate change. If this had been the case, we wouldn't have had the Shovi disaster, and relative measures in terms of an early warning system and civil defense system—everything would have been in place. When I was growing up in the Soviet Union, we used to have regular training for civil defense, for environmental issues and for sudden problems that could happen, like explosions or earthquakes. This system was abolished with no replacement, so the government wasn't ready for Shovi, they weren't paying attention to climate change at all. Even now, we don't know what happened, even now, we don't know the truth, and the biggest question people from Racha have is will it happen again? We need a government vision and strategy to tackle climate change, and while it doesn't exist, we remain unprotected and questions in relation to Shovi remain unanswered. I think one of the reasons we need to change the government is that we need to put in place those people who understand what sustainable development is, not just development and economic development, but sustainable development.

**FEMICIDE IS A PROBLEM OUR SOCIETY FACES EVEN TODAY. WOMEN ARE BEATEN AND KILLED BY THOSE WHO SHOULD LOVE THEM MOST. WHAT IS THE WAY OUT OF THIS PROBLEM?**

It's a very sensitive issue and if anybody is watching the news, they can see that, at least once a week we hear a horrible story of femicide. Last week there was a woman who was killed in front of her kids and parents. I would say, in general, family violence, broadly violence against kids and violence against women is a serious problem, and I'm very thankful that the EU mentioned this in its agenda because it let us highlight that this is a serious issue. Yet, so far, we don't have a single measure taken by the government to avert this, and we will be paying price for this for many years to come. Everybody impacted by this is deeply traumatized, and they will need rehabilitation, healthcare services, to become members of society and all of these stories will keep working, unfortunately, in a negative way. We know this from trauma scholarship and, unfortunately, awareness of this government on relation to this is very limited. So, we have to keep up the pressure. Thankfully, there are lots of NGOs, there is foreign aid, and there is a great demand from the public for measures to be taken.

**YOUR POLITICAL PROFILE IS FULL OF STORIES OF DEFENDING THOSE WHO WERE OPPRESSED BY THE POLITICAL LEADERS. SANDRO GIRGVLIANI IS A GOOD EXAMPLE. WITH SUCH A REPUTATION, WILL YOU BE RUNNING FOR THE PRESIDENTIAL OFFICE IN 2024.**

Oh, what a question! I haven't thought about it, though I've been told to do so by the public on social media. I certainly don't exclude it. First, we have parliamentary elections and then the indirect election of the president. There are no more direct elections, and I fought a lot against this change. So, first, we have to work on the political transformation in the parliament, where the power and policy-making lie. I want to devote and will devote all the best of my resources to making sure we succeed in this realm. Then we'll speak about the rest.

# Defense and Security Expert Eugene Kogan - Georgia is Losing, and Losing Badly

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

**G**eorgia is not ready to defend itself if Moscow decides to invade again. And this is a very big weakness, one which should have been solved years ago and remains unresolved to this day... In Georgia, they don't bother to ask themselves difficult questions... it's something Georgian politicians seem to be averse to - Eugene Kogan, a researcher at the Vienna Institute of International Politics, an expert on defense and security issues in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, who has been living in Georgia for the past 10 years, told RFE/RL's Georgian Service. We spoke to him about the role of Georgia in the region, territorial integrity, Karabakh, and the new war in the Middle East. We started with the Israel-Hamas conflict.

"It must have taken them at least six months to prepare, to do what they did that Saturday," Kogan says of the recent Hamas attack on Israel. "It was well orchestrated, well coordinated. And I think the end result came as a surprise even to them, to be able to break the Israeli defense and to kill as many, and in such a short time, as they did. It certainly sent shockwaves around the State of Israel. I put the blame on the political and military leadership of the State of Israel, and in particular, on Prime Minister Netanyahu - over the last nine months there was a huge wave of demonstrations in the State of Israel with the participation of military and reserve forces. The state of the armed forces (IDF) has become drastically downgraded. And what we saw was the result of a well prepared onslaught on the state of Israel by Hamas.

## WHAT IS ISRAEL'S RESPONSE MEANT TO ACHIEVE?

The entire operational business moving against Hamas is an extremely difficult issue because of the local infrastructure in the Gaza Strip, but also because of the approximately 150 kidnapped Israelis. This is a major difficulty at the moment for the IDF: to not only destroy the Hamas infrastructure, but also to rescue the captured Israelis' alive.

During the first days, there was a huge aerial bombardment of the Gaza Strip. The aerial bombardment we've seen so far has destroyed not only the Hamas infrastructure, but also civilian infrastructure, but the problem is that these two issues are so strongly intertwined. It's a huge Hydra. We know the Hamas soldiers use the civilian population as a shield, so when people start pointing the finger at Israel, they'd better remember that. They'd better remember those atrocities that were committed by Hamas - more than 1000 Israelis dead in three days.

## THERE'S THIS FAMOUS QUOTE FROM GOLDA MAYR, THAT PEACE WILL COME TO ARABS WHEN THEY START LOVING THEIR CHILDREN MORE THAN THEY LOVE KILLING JEWS. HOW FAR ARE WE FROM THAT MOMENT TODAY?

When it comes to Gaza, I think we are very, very far away. What we are seeing today is the mistake of the Israel government. They thought Hamas could be a real partner. This onslaught from Hamas really made everyone open their eyes and realize that no, Hamas cannot be a partner. It's very difficult to keep a brave face and offer your hands to somebody who is going to cut your fingers off.

## LET'S LOOK AT THE EXTERNAL ACTORS - WHO HAS BENEFITED FROM WHAT'S TAKEN PLACE, AND WHO HAS SUFFERED?

Well, we have to be extremely extremely careful. I don't have enough real evidence

to point my finger at one country. Everyone is saying Iran, but I would be very cautious to say its Iran and only Iran who is benefitting from this. At least one other beneficiary at the moment is Hezbollah in Lebanon. But we see that they are not rushing to Hamas' assistance. They know that the country they've made a home in is at a tipping point, and if they do something, the Lebanese will put their thumb on Hezbollah. So they are being very calculated, cautious, not giving in to overplay. President Assad of Syria has enough troubles as it is, so I don't expect Syria to get involved in what is happening in the Gaza streets. Egypt, Qatar and Turkey will do their best to play a game of mediating between the sides.

## WHAT ABOUT RUSSIA? NOT IN TERMS OF INVOLVEMENT, BUT IN TERMS OF BENEFITING FROM SHIFTING THE ATTENTION FROM UKRAINE?

I don't think the European Union, NATO or United States have shifted their attention away from Ukraine. I've seen nothing that would make me think so, anyway. Even if it happens, it will be short-term.

## ONTO THE LAST KARABAKH WAR AND ARMENIA'S SUBSEQUENT RECOGNITION OF KARABAKH AS AZERBAIJANI TERRITORY - WHAT CHANGES WILL THAT BRING TO THE REGION?

I'd urge everyone to be very, very careful, because there have been a lot of articles rushing to conclusions: "The chapter is closed! Russia is out. Turkey and Azerbaijan are celebrating and Armenia is done." In terms of economy, in terms of political influence, in terms of Russian military bases and peacekeepers in Armenia, Russia still has a pretty strong hand. So, to say that Russia is out is a bit of a wishful thinking, I'm afraid. Let's see what Russia does with its remaining political, military and economic leverage there in the next 6 months or so.

And there is still the very tricky issue of the Zangezur Corridor, on which neither side wants to compromise. For Armenia it's non-negotiable, and Aleyev and Erdogan aren't willing to give anything away.

And on that note, the Georgian proposal to offer itself as negotiating ground between Armenia and Azerbaijan is similarly premature and naïve. It's a nice gesture, but it isn't taken seriously by any of the involved parties, because both Azerbaijan and Armenia want bigger actors to be involved: Europeans, Americans, Russians. From that perspective, Georgia is a lightweight boxer, a featherweight even.

## HOW IS GEORGIA NAVIGATING THESE DANGEROUS WATERS THAT IT FINDS ITSELF IN TODAY?

"There is one very strong vulnerability - this country has no real partners in the region. When you have partners, you have to be extremely cautious. I don't think Turkey is a real partner to Georgia in this respect. Azerbaijan is a nice friend, but not a military partner. The Americans are too far away. And, for Europe, Georgia is situated somewhere very much on the margins of the Black Sea; unlike Moldova, which is very close to Romania and EU member states, Georgia is not close to Europe at all. It is too far away."

Kogan recently wrote: "Putin knows that Turkey, despite its friendly relations with Georgia, will not come to its rescue should Russia decide to attempt to bring Georgia under its control. Moreover, if Putin and Erdogan decide one day in the future to divide Georgia into their spheres of influence, the international community will be stunned but will not involve itself militarily on the side of Georgia." We asked him how realistic he thinks that scenario is.



"It's very unrealistic at the moment," he tells us. "But you never know what to expect from President Erdogan. My idea was, what if one day in the future, let's say in the next five years, President Erdogan is invited by President Putin over to Sochi for a nice dinner and stay. And then they have a nice chat about this very strange territory, Georgia, and then Putin offers Turkey a free pass on some of the territories close to Turkey, while the rest will become a protectorate of Russia. It's an unlikely scenario, but it's not unthinkable at all."

## SOME MIGHT SAY YOU ARE PUTTING RUSSIA, A KNOWN AND CONFIRMED AGGRESSOR, AND TURKEY, ON EQUAL FOOTING AS A POTENTIAL AGGRESSOR. IS THAT FAIR?

I think it's fair enough, because let's not forget that some territories that used to belong to Georgia, as recently as last century, today are part of Turkey. I agree that these things seemingly belong to the past, but if they were to divide Georgia, I think the larger part of Georgia would be taken by Russia, somewhere around 2/3, and one third would go to Turkey. So, that wouldn't put them on equal footing, if that helps.

## WHY WOULD TURKEY RISK DOING THAT AND BECOMING ANOTHER RUSSIA IN THE EYES OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY? NOT TO MENTION THAT IT'S A NATO MEMBER.

Turkey is still a member of NATO, I agree, but I would argue that over the last 6-7 years, Turkey has been growing increasingly distanced from its so-called Euro-Atlantic perspective, while Turkey's affinity with Russia, and Erdogan's with Putin personally, is only growing. So if Putin were to make a tempting offer, I think Erdogan would consider it.

## WHAT'S YOUR TAKE ON GEORGIA'S STRATEGIC PATIENCE POLICY?

To realistically pursue a pragmatic policy, there are certain very important requirements which Georgia doesn't satisfy at the moment. First, you must have a proper military in order to defend yourself, because the case of Ukraine showed us that if there is a military and a home front, which stands squarely behind the military, then there is a chance for a real fight. In today's Georgia, there

is a minuscule military force and no real home front. Georgia is not ready to defend itself if Moscow decides to move in. And that's a very, very big issue, because things should have been done over the last 10 years so Georgia had not just a 20- to 30,000 standing military force, but at least 150,000 reserves too. It has 0; such forces do not exist in Georgia, and it's very difficult to imagine these things will exist in the foreseeable future. At the same time, the situation is rapidly changing in the world, especially in this region, and if they aren't prepared, then they will be punished. It's as simple as that. The way Georgia is navigating today, that's how a weakling navigates - instead of doing what's needed, it quietly hopes for the best. If Georgia wanted to be in better shape, then Georgia and the United States would have formed a deeper military relationship. There was discussion about construction of a joint military airfield in Georgia - that's something the Americans would really be interested in and happy to contribute to, but what Georgia did is first said yes, and then started hesitating. That's not how a reliable partner operates - if you want Americans to be here, you have to offer them something. If you need a degree of protection against Russia, then you must be straightforward and frank in discussion. Instead, it became a game of politics, and as it happens often with the Georgian politics and politicians, nobody took matters seriously enough. They say let's do it. And then when the time comes to do something, they say, no, let's wait. The current government is a government that is unwilling to do almost anything but sit on their seats and worry about the next election. That's not a policy line.

## THE CAMP GEORGIA NOW FINDS ITSELF IN - NOT ALIENATING MOSCOW, STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WITH CHINA AND BUDDING RELATIONSHIP WITH EU PARIASH ORBAN - WHAT ARE THE REWARDS, OR PRICES, THAT COME ATTACHED?

Before doing anything, Georgians must ask themselves - what is there for Georgia and what is there for China? What is there for Georgia and what is there for Russia? What is there for Georgia and what is there for the EU? What is there for Georgia and what is there for the US? I don't think the Georgians bother asking such hard questions themselves.

## AND THE EXPANSION OF RUSSIAN NAVAL PRESENCE AT THE OCHAMCHIRE BASE? WHAT'S YOUR READING OF THE SITUATION? WHAT DOES IT SPELL FOR GEORGIA'S AMBITIONS, HOWEVER FAR-FETCHED, TO REINTEGRATE ABKHAZIA?

I think the first question you should ask yourself is what is going to happen to the at-the-moment-only-on-paper Anaklia port project? I think this is the Russians basically saying - no Anaklia for you, not now and not later. And yes, reintegrating Abkhazia is really far-fetched. Solving questions like these requires thinking in terms of hard realism, which Georgian politicians seem to be averse to. Now Russia, on the other hand, is a pure hard-realism power, they won't give away anything, unless forced to, and even then, they will try to cling to whatever they can. There is a very well-known Russian saying, "What's ours is ours, and what's yours we'll negotiate."

When it comes to Georgia, any kind of "get-together" with Abkhazia is a very unrealistic scenario. Georgia's "Ministry of Reintegration," should take a good look at the mirror and ask themselves what they have achieved, in terms of reintegration, in the last 10 years? Zero. Abkhazia has no desire whatsoever to deal with Georgia, while South Ossetia wants to merge with North Ossetia, and be fully integrated into the Russian Federation. So when Prime Minister Garibashvili says "we are still on the path to bringing those two territories back," I find it hard to take him seriously! Wake up and realize that you've lost, and you lost a long time ago.

## AND WITH THAT REALIZATION COMES WHAT? ACCEPTANCE? OR UNDERSTANDING WE WILL NEED TO FIGHT TO REGAIN THOSE TERRITORIES?

Not acceptance. Take Azerbaijan - it never accepted its losses. For the last 30 years, they patiently worked to regain what they lost. And so Georgia too will need to be extremely patient. But, if there is any regaining to be had, Georgia will have to invest a lot of resources, hard work and money into bringing its army up to speed. The first step would be realistic acknowledgement of the situation - that Georgia is losing, and losing badly, and it needs to change things if it doesn't want to lose for good. It will have to sit down and make a good list of pros and cons for the present and for the future.

# Georgia and World Bank Launch Project to Improve Agriculture, Irrigation, and Land Management

The Georgian Government, in partnership with the World Bank, this week launched the Georgia Resilient Agriculture, Irrigation, and Land Project (GRAIL), which will benefit farmers and agricultural enterprises by enhancing irrigation services, land management, and agricultural support. The project will directly benefit the country's rural population, leading to increased productivity and improved livelihoods.

The GRAIL project is designed to help irrigation water services and the irrigated agricultural sector adapt to drought, warming temperatures, and the anticipated long-term reduction in precipitation. Irrigation modernization and rehabilitation will foster greater resilience through improved water conveyance efficiency and upgraded irrigation structures; improved control of water delivery to farms, and the introduction of water metering. These measures are expected to reduce water use, crop water stress, and soil erosion.

"The GRAIL Project will lead Georgia towards a greener and more resilient future," said Rolande Pryce, World Bank Regional Director for the South Caucasus. "By investing in irrigation and land management, we are both improving agricultural productivity and ensuring



the long-term sustainability of the sector. Most importantly, this will open new opportunities for farmers, enterprises, and rural populations across the country."

With a total cost of \$150 million, the GRAIL Project is co-financed equally by the Government of Georgia and the World Bank. This financial collaboration showcases the commitment of both parties to promoting sustainable agriculture and enhancing sustainable land management practices in Georgia.

"The World Bank is an important development partner for Georgia with timely and efficient delivery of assistance in line with the country's development priorities. The GRAIL Project is another illustration of our significant and suc-

cessful partnership," said Lasha Khutishvili, Minister of Finance of Georgia. "I am deeply convinced that this project will make substantial contributions in strengthening the agriculture sector of Georgia."

Aiming to boost the resilience of irrigated agriculture in Georgia, the project will finance civil works, goods, equipment, and related services, as well as technical training for agency staff and farmers. The irrigation and drainage infrastructure investments will improve reliability of water supply for irrigation, reducing risks associated with climate-induced precipitation variability for water users.

"We are looking forward to the implementation of the GRAIL Project, which

will greatly benefit the rural population of Georgia," said Otar Shamugia, Minister of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia. "Along with the large capital investment part, the project will also support institutional strengthening of state agencies, including Georgian Amelioration, Rural Development Agency and Land Development Agency."

In terms of institutional strengthening for climate adaptation, the GRAIL project aims to invest in establishment of a multi-agency center for tracking agrometeorological parameters for improved irrigation and land management monitoring using remote sensing and advanced the hardware for tracking river flows, precipitation and other parameters. This will significantly enhance the capacity

of institutions within the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture to plan for and respond to climate risks.

By improving land management capacity, the GRAIL Project will enhance national land administration and management systems, enabling access to and use of geospatial data. Advancing these systems will activate agricultural land markets, facilitate investments into agribusinesses, and contribute to climate change adaptation measures.

"The launch of the GRAIL Project marks an important step towards enhancing land administration service delivery and digital infrastructure," said Tamar Tkeshelashvili, First Deputy Minister of Justice of Georgia. "A well-functioning National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI) underpins social and economic development, facilitates effective public administration, and brings greater alignment with the EU regulations."

To ensure effective management, two Project Implementation Units (PIUs) will be established under the Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection and the National Agency of Public Registry. These PIUs will coordinate and technically supervise the GRAIL Project implementation, as well as oversee social and environmental standards and gender-focused activities.

# Legal Aid On Wheels Reaches Remote Communities in Georgia

## Germany and UNDP Support Legal Aid Service in Launching Mobile Legal Clinic

Georgia's Legal Aid Service, in partnership with the Government of Germany and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), has introduced a new initiative to bring legal assistance to remote and hard-to-reach areas in the country. This innovative mobile service aims to provide free legal services to people living in the highlands, villages affected by conflict, and hard-to-reach regions.

On 18 October, the Legal Aid Service's team of lawyers and consultants embarked on their first ride to the Shida Kartli region, targeting the Zemo Nikozi village situated at the Administrative Boundary Line with the South Ossetia/Tskhinvali region.

H.E. Peter Fischer, the Ambassador of Germany to Georgia; Anna Chernyshova, UNDP Resident Representative a.i. in Georgia; and David Simonia, Legal Aid Service Director, met with the mobile consultation team before their journey to discuss the most effective ways of offering free legal services to those who need it most.

"With the support of the Government of Germany and UNDP, we are extending our reach to remote areas in Georgia," David Simonia noted. "Our mission is to create lasting change by empowering vulnerable communities and increasing their access to justice by providing free legal services."

"The rule of law is indispensable in European democracies," said Ambassa-



dor Fischer. "I am delighted that we are contributing to all Georgians knowing their rights and how to defend them."

Established in 2007, the Legal Aid Service is one of Georgia's leading rule-of-law institutions, providing free legal services to socially and economically disadvantaged people in need of legal

assistance. The Legal Aid Service extends its assistance to various social groups in Georgia, including representatives of ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, people affected by conflict, and economically vulnerable populations.

"Access to justice is a fundamental right, and this initiative will play a cru-

cial role in ensuring that hard-to-reach populations can exercise their legal rights effectively," Anna Chernyshova says.

Over the years, the Legal Aid Service has received support from various international organizations, such as the European Union and UNDP. Currently, this assistance is part of a broader US\$1.62

million initiative funded by German Cooperation and implemented by UNDP. The initiative aims to strengthen the capacities of rule-of-law institutions, enhance access to disability-inclusive infrastructure, and ensure the legal empowerment and socio-economic resilience of disadvantaged communities.



# Last Call - Tusheti, 1 of 3



made an excellent, easy fire, with hardly a pop.

Most of the food was cooked in advance by one of our accompanying friends, along with her sister and mother, who gamely pitched in. So that made food chores much lighter at the camp, which had no table and only one stool. We did, however, have marshmallows (a little small, but tasty) to skewer on the kebab sticks for dessert.

It was cool, as expected, but we all had enough clothing, and winter sleeping bags to boot. (Well, except for me: I used two summer ones, and was fine in all my clothes.) Most of us already being friends, we got along well, and had much merriment together. The crisp air was totally silent except for the incongruous sound of airplanes: it seemed we were on their flight route into and out of Tbilisi airport. But no worry, they were not close enough to be much bother. No food at all in the tents, for risk, however slight, of bears!

That was our first day. To follow would come several villages not far away, mostly the next day, our only full day in Tusheti. It would be plenty. More to come next week.

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/](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)

## BLOG BY TONY HANMER

Our great new friend of the past few years and travel arranger, Dato Urushadze, recently called Lali and me to find out: Did we want to accompany him on a second trip to Tusheti? Our first, when we met him, was a few springs ago, when CoVid made leaving Georgia virtually impossible and reawakened a desire to see the parts of Georgia still new to us. Next came a wonderful October journey to Racha, and now this. In each case, we were free to fill the Delica van he drove with 6-8 people of our choosing. Dato would drive, and take tents, sleeping bags, mattresses and a gas bottle for cooking. We would pay him for the driving, and take and prepare food for all, including him.

We jumped at the chance.

This time, our departure for Tusheti would take place just a few days before the snow clearers' contract would run out. After October 20, staying in the province is at your own risk of being shut in for the whole winter. Unless you are a local, we discovered, in which case you could take your time and make use of the border guards' helicopter to leave.

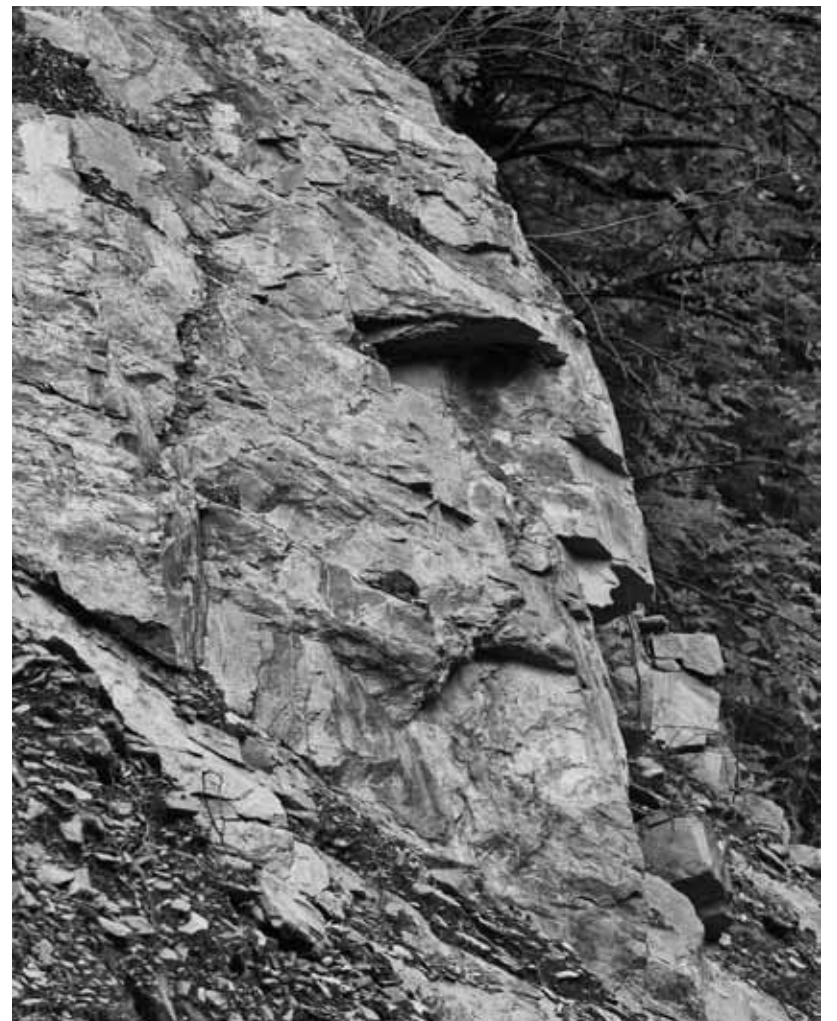
We gathered our motley crew of regulars and newcomers, and met Dato at 7 am in the center of Tbilisi. Our road went through Telavi and then north into those wild mountains and impossibly vast landscapes.

This time, I determined not to make a nuisance of myself with too many breathless requests to stop the car so I could get out for photos. Less of that; more shooting from the window with a much shorter stop, or even while we were still moving. Of course, we would still be free to wander

around and away from our forest campsite, and also to explore on foot each day the villages that Dato drove us to.

My first major shot was a literal rock face, of the kind I have become more and more prone to seeing in recent years, and not just in Svaneti, but anywhere. This was a stern warrior and defender of Tusheti, in magnificent profile.

Waterfalls; glorious autumn colors; sheep being herded down for the winter; the pass at about 2900 m; the campsite itself, near Old Omaha's slate towers. We set up camp mid-afternoon, several of us setting out to find firewood, of which there was no end, and dry, so dry. This was my sister's and my first job as children whenever the family would arrive at our campsite of the day or week, over years in Zimbabwe and then Canada. We were in evergreens now, and their fallen deadwood and cones and needles, still full of sap though not freshly fallen,



# First Light - Rashid Al Khalifa's Artistic Journey



BY MARIAM GORKHELASHVILI

The Zurab Tsereteli Museum of Modern Art in Tbilisi, Georgia, unveiled "First Light," an exhibition featuring a selection of recent installations by Bahraini artist Rashid Al Khalifa on September 19. This showcase will be accessible to the public until November 17, 2023.

Shaikh Rashid bin Khalifa Al Khalifa, a member of the Bahraini royal family, an artist, and the chairman of Bahrain's

National Council for Arts, serves as the first and current honorary president of the Bahrain Arts Society.

Rashid Al Khalifa, inspired by his surroundings, creates artworks that harmonize traditional and contemporary architecture with the natural environment. The distinct light, colors, and atmosphere of Bahrain's landscape play a significant role in shaping Rashid's resulting creations, which manifest as prominent wall sculptures and immersive installations.

"It brings me immense joy to be here in Tbilisi and present my inaugural solo exhibition. Stepping into this exquisite space for the first time is a moment I've

eagerly anticipated. It's a true honor to showcase my works spanning different periods in this setting. The series I'm presenting, named 'First Light,' is crafted from aluminum; first, I sculpt it, and then I apply the paint," the artist shared with us.

GEORGIA TODAY asked for more details.

### WHAT IS YOUR INSPIRATION? WHAT DRIVES YOU?

It can be nature. In general, I relish experimenting with diverse forms and materials.

### COULD GEORGIA SERVE AS A WELLSPRING OF INSPIRATION ALONGSIDE OTHER COUNTRIES?

From what I've witnessed thus far in Georgia, it's undeniably splendid. I'm certain there are abundant fountains of inspiration. Personally, the color green left a lasting impression on me, and I'm determined to infuse it into my works.

### ARE THERE SPECIFIC PIECES THAT HOLD A SPECIAL PLACE IN YOUR HEART?

Truth be told, they're akin to my children, each one of them. Every series I create evokes a distinct emotion. However, if I were to choose, the 'Waves' series holds a special significance. It bursts forth with an array of colors, evoking excitement for some, yet it brings me a sense of tranquility.

### WHAT DO YOU ENVISION FOR THE FUTURE?

"I'm optimistic that this exhibition will pave the way for other Bahraini artists to share their works in Georgia, and vice versa. We'd be delighted to welcome Georgian art in Bahrain. This kind of cultural exchange holds great importance in connecting our people through art, so I look forward to more collaborative endeavors in the future," he says.

Rashid Al Khalifa's "First Light" exhibition is a testament to his innovative approach, blending nature with diverse materials. Rashid's aspiration for cultural exchange between Bahrain and Georgia underscores the unifying power of art. This exhibition not only showcases his talent but also lays the foundation for



future artistic collaborations. "First Light" leaves an enduring mark on the cultural landscape, fostering a more interconnected and vibrant artistic community.



# Georgian Civilization Added to Popular Video Game Age of Empires

BY ANA DUMBADZE

Georgian civilization has been added to the video game Age of Empires.

Fans of the popular strategy game will meet Georgia during the era of King Tamar in the story.

In addition, in the game, you will find unique monuments and examples of Georgian cultural heritage, such as UNESCO World Heritage Svan towers, monastic complexes and many others.

The Mountain Royals for Age of Empires II: Definitive Edition has been officially announced. The second part of the game will debut on October 31.

Fans on the Age of Empires forum say that the DLC added two new civilizations to the game: Georgia and Armenia.

Along with interesting visual effects, The Mountain Royals for Age of Empires II: Definitive Edition will introduce video game lovers from all over the world to the history of Georgia, the "Golden Age" of the country - the era of David IV the Builder and King Tamar.

"The kingdom of Georgians is located in the shadow of the Caucasus mountains. Their fighting unit is called Monaspa, whose strength is determined by the number of soldiers," reads the description of the updated game.

"Build a powerful kingdom in the



shadow of the Caucasus Mountains and use the harsh local terrain to your advantage to repel countless enemy incursions. Monaspa is a unique Georgian unit, the strength of which increases with the increase in the number of fighters."

"Players will also see the story of the reign of the glorious king of Georgia, Tamar, who, as the first queen of Georgia, must defeat the skeptics and leave a mark in history with her achievements. "Georgia was revived at the beginning

of the 12th century, during the reign of David IV the Builder, who carried out important reforms, established political stability and strengthened the army - the country's military power. This trend was continued by the first ruling queen of

Georgia, Tamar (1160-1213), who raised the power of the kingdom to new heights. Tamar was such a powerful ruler that in the last years of her reign, she turned her kingdom into a country ready to participate in the Crusades."

# Tasty Music and Delicious Wine – The Jazz and Wine Kakheti Festival



Image source: Jazz & Wine Kakheti

BY SHELBI R. ANKIEWICZ

**K**akheti's seventh annual Jazz and Wine Festival was held this year on October 14 at the Tsinandali Estate with special guests from Italy. Like many other wine festivals around Georgia, the main component was trying the varieties of wine from around the country, but at the Wine and Jazz Kakheti Fest, guests were also able to try wines from Italy. In 2022, Jazz and Wine Kakheti made it a tradition to invite a different guest country to cohost the festival each year, and in doing so, the country brings wine of their own. This year, in addition to just bringing wine, Italian chef Maurizio Siciliano featured a cooking show and tasting of his traditional Italian dishes for attendees to enjoy.

There were more than 30 Georgian wine producers: most of them small entrepreneurial businesses. Kakha Kandelaki, one of the organizers of the event, says Jazz and Wine Kakheti wants to support local businesses, and this is a way to accomplish that.

"The most popular Jazz and Wine Festival in the US is held in California, the main audience of which is wealthy, aged people," Kandelaki wrote on Hammock

Magazine's website. "There is practically one main show at the Bordeaux festival, around which the whole event is assembled. With us, the festival is more 'democratic' in the sense that everyone can come, there are many places in Kakheti where guests can stay, we have a variety of programs... You can come here alone, with friends or family. We want the Jazz and Wine Festival to be the kind of experience that you will share with your loved ones."

Jazz and Wine Kakheti opened the event with a wine tasting, followed by the first jazz performance at the amphitheater with the Salt Peanuts Show. Embodying both jazz and rock 'n roll, the Salt Peanuts Show takes their inspiration from Elvis Presley and Roy Orbison, promising to have everyone dancing on their feet once they hit the stage. With them was Sara Jane Ghiotti, a Sammarinese jazz singer, and chef Maurizio Siciliano preparing dishes in parallel.

In the evening, the Theo Croker Quartet arrived on stage at the ballroom, led by Grammy Award nominee and three-time Echo Award nominee, Theo Croker. Croker is an American jazz trumpeter, composer, and producer whose interest in music started when he was a teenager. The quartet has played at numerous venues over the years and plays sounds of hip-hop, R&B, and electronic, in addition to jazz.

"Trumpeter Theo Croker exudes an unmistakable air of chill, an easy smile on display," NPR wrote on Croker's website. "That chill is the result of a clear musical approach and determination that dates to Croker's teenage days forming big bands and fearlessly pushing the bounds of the music played by his grandfather, trumpeter Doc Cheatham. His reach includes collaborations with various musicians: vocalists Ari Lennox and Jill Scott, rappers J. Cole and Wyclef Jean, and mentors including NEA Jazz Master Dee Dee Bridgewater and saxophonist Gary Bartz."

The Jazz and Wine Kakheti Fest returned to the amphitheater with a final show from the band Mo'Horizons. Created in 1999 and originally from Hannover, Germany, Mo'Horizon is a duo that plays a mixture of acid-jazz, soul, funk, and dub. They just released their seventh studio album and were happy to celebrate their 25th anniversary at Jazz and Wine Kakheti.



Image source: Jazz & Wine Kakheti

The festival took place in Kakheti, famously known for its history of winemaking, at the Tsinandali Estate, known as the foundation place of wine in Georgia.

"Tsinandali Estate is recognized as a historical site of wine's origin, with the first recorded bottling of wine taking place there in the 1800s," it is noted on the Wines of Georgia website. "It since maintains production with the traditional methods of Georgian winemaking as well as using modern technology to produce classical European vintages."

Eastern Promotions is the organizer of Jazz and Wine Kakheti. Eastern Promotions dates back to 1978 when several of its members helped organize the first annual Tbilisi Jazz Festival and the 1980

Rock Festival. "Offering music since 1998, Eastern Promotion has promoted in the Caucasus region notable and highly acclaimed musicians," written on the Eastern Promotion website. "The company is owned by five enthusiasts and music aficionados who are dedicated to promoting world-class music in the region, as well as promoting the best Georgian music and artists overseas."

The official sponsor of the festival was Visa, while other supporters included the National Tourism Administration of Georgia, the Italian Embassy, Radisson Collection, Park Hotel Tsinandali, TV Imedi, Radio Fortuna, the magazine "Homeland of Wine," Radio Fortuna, and Online Magazine Marketeer.ge.



Image source: Jazz & Wine Kakheti



Image source: Jazz & Wine Kakheti



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