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## Adam Reichardt on the Polish Elections - "Now, if Brussels decides to punish Budapest, Poland will not stand in the way"

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

Both the government and the opposition perceive Russia as a threat, so despite the change of government, the approach to Russia will not change, - Adam Reichardt, editor-in-chief of New Eastern Europe told RFE/RL, speaking of the results of the elections held in Poland on October 15. As one of the results of those elections, he also sees that "Orbán [the Hungarian Prime Minister] will have to come to terms with the fact that there will be a new government in Poland, which, if Brussels decides to punish Budapest, will not stand in the way, not anymore."



Continued on page 4 Adam Reichardt

| Markets                  |           | Price       |        | w/w       |                             | m/m      |       |
|--------------------------|-----------|-------------|--------|-----------|-----------------------------|----------|-------|
| BONDS                    |           |             |        |           |                             |          |       |
| GRAIL 07/28              | 85.64     | (YTM 7.74%) | -0.2%  | -1.7%     | Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl) | 88.07    | -2.0% |
| SILNET 01/27             | 98.22     | (YTM 9.01%) | -0.0%  | -0.3%     | Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)         | 1,970.97 | +2.5% |
| TBC 06/24                | 99.11     | (YTM 7.17%) | +0.0%  | +0.1%     |                             |          |       |
| COMMODITIES              |           |             |        |           |                             |          |       |
| CURRENCIES               |           |             |        |           |                             |          |       |
| STOCKS                   |           |             |        |           |                             |          |       |
| Bank of Georgia (BGE LN) | GBP 32.50 | -5.4%       | -11.2% | GEL / USD | 2.6975                      | +0.3%    | +1.1% |
| Georgia Capital (CGE LN) | GBP 9.08  | -5.1%       | -11.0% | GEL / EUR | 2.8568                      | +0.5%    | +0.6% |
| TBC Bank Group (TBCG LN) | GBP 26.50 | -6.4%       | -9.6%  | GEL / GBP | 3.2830                      | +0.2%    | +0.5% |
|                          |           |             |        | GEL / CHF | 3.0184                      | +1.1%    | +2.6% |
|                          |           |             |        | GEL / RUB | 0.0289                      | +5.5%    | +3.6% |
|                          |           |             |        | GEL / TRY | 0.0959                      | -0.1%    | -2.2% |
|                          |           |             |        | GEL / AZN | 1.5887                      | +0.4%    | +1.1% |
|                          |           |             |        | GEL / AMD | 0.0068                      | +0.9%    | -2.1% |
|                          |           |             |        | GEL / UAH | 0.0736                      | -        | +1.9% |
| INDICES                  |           |             |        |           |                             |          |       |
| FTSE 100                 | 7,389.70  | -3.7%       | -3.8%  | EUR / USD | 0.9443                      | -0.1%    | +0.6% |
| FTSE 250                 | 16,994.10 | -3.9%       | -8.7%  | GBP / USD | 0.8224                      | +0.2%    | +0.7% |
| DAX                      | 14,879.94 | -2.4%       | -4.4%  | CHF / USD | 0.8932                      | -0.8%    | -1.5% |
| DOW JONES                | 33,141.38 | -2.5%       | -2.4%  | RUB / USD | 93.6129                     | -4.4%    | -2.3% |
| NASDAQ                   | 13,139.88 | -2.9%       | -0.5%  | TRY / USD | 28.1043                     | +0.5%    | +3.5% |
| MSCI EM EE               | 37.51     | -3.0%       | +6.0%  | AZN / USD | 1.6972                      | -0.0%    | +0.0% |
| MSCI EM                  | 920.57    | -3.2%       | -4.5%  | AMD / USD | 399.6900                    | -0.6%    | +3.3% |
| SP 500                   | 4,247.68  | -2.9%       | -1.7%  |           |                             |          |       |
| MSCI FM                  | 2,047.84  | -1.7%       | -3.5%  |           |                             |          |       |



# Experts Gather In Tbilisi To Discuss Climate Concerns

To discuss climate-related concerns, Georgia hosted the 37th meeting of the Green Climate Fund Board held in the Eastern European region for the first time.

The meeting covered a deadly landslide in Racha killing 32 people, with foreign experts from various nations talking about the additional measures that could prevent such tragedies.

A number of concrete initiatives were announced at the meeting, aimed at preventing possible risks resulting from climate change in Georgia. These entail the prediction of natural events and the installation of appropriate monitoring stations in a bid to minimize damage. In addition, foreign specialists will participate in modernizing the advance warning system.

Georgian Minister of Environmental Protection and Agriculture Otar Shamugia, and the Executive Director of the Green Climate Fund, Mafalda Duarte, made opening remarks at the event.

A member of the Governing Board of the Green Climate Fund and the First Deputy Minister of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia, Nino Tandilashvili, representing the countries of the Eastern European region, headed the session opening.

"The negative impact of climate change has manifested itself in intensified natu-



ral events all across the planet. GCF has funded two national projects in Georgia for implementing mitigation and adaptation measures," Shamugia noted.

"We are also involved in GCF regional projects. We hope that fruitful cooperation with the Green Climate Fund will continue in the future.

"I believe that the decisions made in Tbilisi regarding the financing of important projects will be another step forward for developing countries in dealing with the global problem of climate change," he concluded.

In her remark, Duarte said: "This meeting is crucial, since the Board of Directors has to make decisions that will be implemented over the next four years."

"Our partnership with Georgia started in 2016, and since then we have been implementing several joint projects in different directions. Within the mentioned projects, we are planning to visit different locations this week," Duarte noted.

The high-ranking representatives of relevant ministries from different countries (US, Pakistan, Germany, Italy, Canada, France, Sweden, Switzerland, Norway, Denmark, Argentina, China, Great Britain, Spain, Japan, and Egypt) attended the 37th meeting.

The Green Climate Fund (GCF) is the world's largest fund that helps developing countries meet their climate change goals.



## The Church vs Halloween

OP-ED BY HELENA BEDWELL

Yet again, the Georgian Orthodox Church called on Christians in the former Soviet republic to refrain from celebrating Halloween, naming it a "pagan" festival unsuitable for believers.

Growing up, I never knew what Halloween was, while the yellow and orange pumpkins were always associated simply with the autumn season. But this harmless tradition adopted from West-

ern culture has since won the hearts and minds of many Georgians, including me. Chastized by deep Orthodox believers, I remember celebrating other pagan-like festivities, such as the Marimoba bonfire, where kids used to jump over a large fire while chanting mystical poems to ward off evil spirits, and Berikaoba, when scary masked men danced around the streets, teasing bypassers. And then there is Lomisoba, where hundreds if not thousands of sheep are slaughtered in the name of worship. The Orthodox Church never spoke out against any of them.

Continued on page 11

## President Meets with Diplomats Ahead of EU Candidacy Decision



The President meeting diplomats on Wednesday. Source: IPN

BY TEAM GT

Ambassador of the European Union to Georgia, Pawel Herczynski, says a lot has been done in the direction of granting Georgia the candidate status, although "more could have been done in a year and a half".

"Probably a bit more could have been done in a year and a half. There is still polarization in the country. In terms of de-oligarchization, there are only future steps. Following on from the visit of Joseph Borrell, clearly there is acceleration and there are a lot of positive developments including the work on the broadcasting law, including memorandums of understanding

that were signed with some civil society organizations. I'm also glad that the impeachment procedure was not successful", said the EU Ambassador to Georgia.

His comment followed his meeting with President of Georgia Salome Zurbishvili and other representatives of diplomatic missions accredited in Georgia at the Orbeliani Palace.

President Zurbishvili started the meeting with representatives of the opposition, non-governmental sector and diplomatic missions a few weeks ago.

"There is a very strong wish of the vast majority of the Georgian population to get closer to the European Union," said the Ambassador Herczynski.

"These will clearly be crucial weeks for Georgia. On November 8, we are expecting the first enlargement report

with recommendations. And at the end of this year, in the middle of December, 27 EU member states at the highest political level, at the level of presidents and prime ministers, will decide on the next steps when it comes to Georgia's integration process. The President plans to be very active in support of candidate status for Georgia.

"On the November 8, we will all see the first ever enlargement report for Georgia. This will be a purely merit-based report describing where Georgia has made progress, also describing where further progress needs to be made. And this report will include a recommendation to the EU member states. The decision itself will be taken by those EU member states. And it's extremely difficult for me to say what the outcome will be," he stated.



# Ukraine Latest: Ukraine's Counteroffensive Gaining Urgency as Winter Approaches

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

**W**hile the world is distracted by the geopolitical turmoil in the Middle East, Ukraine continues to

fight Russian forces across a swathe of the country, battling through deep Russian defenses along the south and east.

It is an understatement to say Ukraine's counteroffensive, launched in June, has not been as successful as Kyiv and its Western allies hoped it would be — with Russian forces deeply dug in to defensive positions, progress has been tough for Ukraine and only a dozen or so towns and villages have been recaptured.

Russia still controls around a fifth of Ukraine, including most of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions in the east; the Crimean Peninsula and Zaporizhzhia in the south; and a chunk of the neighboring Kherson region.

"Ukraine's counteroffensive has not achieved the presumed military and political objectives so far, and the prospects of a breakthrough appear limited," Andrius Tursa, Central and Eastern Europe advisor at risk consultancy Teneo, said in a note Monday.

"Despite inflicting significant losses on Russian armed forces, Ukraine's four-and-a-half-month-old counteroffensive has not achieved major territorial gains nor managed to slice through Russia's 'land bridge' to Crimea," he added.

Muddy season is near

Ukraine has a narrowing window of opportunity for making gains before the weather turns and the infamous muddy

season, known as "rasputitsa" in Russian and "bezdorizhzhia" in Ukrainian, arrives.

"Limited progress to date tempers hopes of a breakthrough in the near term, especially as the autumn weather makes large-scale movement of heavy military equipment more challenging, and Russia is ramping up pressure in other parts of the frontline," Tursa noted.

Muddy roads and fields wreaked havoc on ground conditions and offensive operations last fall and spring, and are likely to do so again. That would put an effective halt on offensive operations for weeks before the ground freezes over and vehicles and troops can move more easily again. It was hoped Ukraine would have made more progress by now, analysts noted.

"They'll keep on fighting during the winter but what will happen is at the end of November the weather will turn pretty wet, and that will put a block on things until it turns cold, which will be sometime late December, early January," they note.

Russia making bloody drive for lynchpin town of Avdiivka

Russian forces have made a series of desperate and bloody lunges at the shattered town of Avdiivka, viewed as the gateway to recapturing Russian-held Donetsk and the rest of Donbas, made up of Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky, said the situation in Avdiivka and the nearby town of Maryinka remained "particularly tough. Numerous Russian attacks. But our positions are being held."

In the meantime, the US-based Institute for the Study of War has reported that Ukrainian forces in Kherson have crossed from their side of the Dnipro



A Ukrainian serviceman goes ashore at the frontline near Kherson, amid Ukraine's war with Russia. Photograph: Alex Babenko/AP

river to take up new positions and pursue Russian forces. The Russians occupy the east bank at Kherson while the west bank remains free and under Ukrainian control, though regularly shelled by the Russians has continued over the weekend. Russia has said that Ukrainian crossing attempts took place.

'Horrific' Russian attack on postal depot kills six in eastern Ukraine

At least six people were killed and 16 others injured after a Russian missile strike on a postal terminal in the Kharkiv region of Ukraine, officials have said.

Russian forces fired two missiles from the Belgorod region, near the Ukrainian border, at "a building belonging to a logistics company located in the Kharkiv region" on Saturday, according to Dmytro

Chubenko, the spokesperson for the Kharkiv region prosecutor's office.

Chubenko added that search and rescue operations were ongoing and that the identities of the victims were still being established.

The six people killed in a Russian missile strike on a postal distribution center were all postal workers, aged between 19 and 42. Of the 17 injured, seven are in a serious condition, and said to be "fighting for their lives".

The attack was condemned by the US ambassador to Ukraine, Bridget Blink, who wrote on X: "The Kremlin's disregard for life is for all the world to see."

The other key updates are the following:  
• Russian forces shot down three missiles targeting the Crimean peninsula

on Sunday, a Russian official said. The peninsula, which Moscow annexed from Ukraine in 2014, is crucial to Russia's military offensive, both for supplying troops in southern Ukraine and for carrying out missile strikes from the sea, AFP reports.

• It is likely that Russia has suffered 150,000-190,000 permanent casualties (killed or permanently wounded) since the Ukraine war began, according to the latest update from the UK's Ministry of Defense. If the numbers of temporary wounded (those recovered and due to return to the battlefield) are added, that number rises to 240,000-290,000, the MoD said on X.

• Russian troops attacked the village of Stanislav in Kherson region overnight on 22 October, damaging over 30 houses, though no casualties were reported.

• Ukraine fears a drone shortage due to China's move to place restrictions on exports, the BBC reports. The war in Ukraine is the first armed conflict to see such extensive use of drones, which are used by both sides. Many of them are commercially made in China and bought off the shelf, and new supplies are vital because of the large numbers lost in the fighting.

• Russia's Gazprom, looking to compensate for the loss of most of its European markets, will supply extra gas to Hungary and China. Hungary is the only member of the EU whose leader, prime minister Viktor Orbán, has maintained friendly ties to Putin and is seen as the key potential opponent to a decision due in December on whether to open EU accession talks with Ukraine, which would require the unanimous backing of the bloc's 27 members.



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# Adam Reichardt on the Polish Elections

## - "Now, if Brussels decides to punish Budapest, Poland will not stand in the way"

Continued from page 1

**THE POLISH ELECTIONS - HOW BIG A CHANGE IS THAT? SOME ARE CALLING IT "A REVOLUTION", YOUR OWN OUTLET CALLED IT A "WIND OF CHANGE." WHAT DOES IT SPELL FOR POLAND?**

This is a huge question. I think the change we're going to see is actually not going to be huge right away. It is a very important change and, in the long term, I think it will have a huge impact. But if anyone is expecting a massive new Poland to emerge within the next two weeks, that's not going to happen. There are a lot of things that need to happen before any major changes take place.

We have to remember that President Andrzej Duda, who is related to the Law and Justice Party, is still president. He has a very big and important say in what happens in the formation of the government and how laws are passed or not passed. He will still be playing this important role. That said, I think it is important to recognize that there was a definite sign that the Poles wanted change, and they wanted things to change; the majority of Poles had had enough of the last eight years and were ready for something new, but we have to recognize that while the Law and Justice Party, which has been in power for eight years, did win the election, technically, because they had the most votes, they're not able to form a government due to the fact that they don't have enough seats. They could have had a coalition partner, but declared that they wouldn't form a government with them. So they won the election, but they won't have a government.

**WHO DO YOU THINK ARE WINNERS AND LOSERS OF THIS ELECTION, BOTH IN POLAND AND EXTERNALLY?**

Let's start with the winners. First and foremost, we should say the winners are the Polish people, because a turnout of 75% is almost unheard of in a democratic country where you do not have obligatory voting. Poland has never seen such a turnout, not even at probably the most important elections in Polish contemporary history, in 1989, which led to the system changeover. So I think the Polish people are probably the biggest winners because they were wanting their voices to be heard. They weren't being heard, and so they called for change. Of course, as they name themselves, the pro-democratic forces are the winners, because they have managed to get these votes and create this pro-democratic block which will take power. So they are, obviously, another of the winners. And we can look now, who else outside of Poland is a winner. Let's say the European Union. Poland will be putting itself back on the stage, try to position itself as more liberal, but still a leading power in Europe.

Looking at what is happening in other countries in Europe, Poland will try to present itself as an example. It can drive



There is a general consensus throughout the Polish political class that Russia is a threat to Poland



Anti-government opposition march organized before the upcoming parliamentary elections in Poland in Warsaw on 1 October 2023. Photo by Maciej Luczniewski/NurPhoto

change, as an example of how populism can be defeated. And it can perhaps try to take a leadership role which will be more recognized in Brussels, in other capitals, like Berlin and Paris.

As for the poor losers, besides, of course, the Law and Justice Party, which is obvious, I think even more important, and more stunning, in some ways, is the far right in Poland, as the biggest loser. In the summer, just a few months ago, they were polling at double digits, and they managed to come out with just 7% of the vote. They were expecting a much higher result.

Externally, countries like Hungary, and Orbán, can be considered losers in this situation. He has lost an ally in Warsaw, which wasn't really, to be honest, the strongest ally he had to begin with, especially since Russia's invasion and seeing Viktor Orbán going to Beijing and meeting with Putin. Hungary is getting pulled farther and farther away from Europe, unfortunately. Orbán is good at making his own alliances and not caring about what's happening as a member of the EU and NATO. He should know now that there is a new government coming in Poland, and if Brussels decides to punish Budapest, Warsaw will not stand in the way, not anymore.

**THE 74% TURNOUT WAS QUITE STAGGERING, WITH A RATHER SIZEABLE PROPORTION OF WOMEN AND YOUNGER VOTERS PARTICIPATING. COULD THAT BE A TEMPLATE FOR GEORGIA TO FOLLOW AS AN EXAMPLE? ANY LESSONS?**

There are a couple lessons to be learned here, especially for the Georgian opposition. First is that you have to rebrand yourself. Knowing a bit about Georgian politics, I would say that you're stuck in a bipolar situation where you have just two sides, and neither very attractive to the electorate in general. And we were going in that direction in Poland as well, but the Civic Platform rebranded itself, and so did Donald Tusk, on a personal level. And they were very focused on the youth, rather than on just their core electorate. One other thing is the emergence of the so called third forces - in Poland, we have this Third Way party, which did better than expected, gaining almost 15% of the vote. And they were presenting themselves as the third way, meaning, not

as part of this bipolar system; something that's focused on being above polarization, above the dirty politics. And that was very attractive to a lot of voters across all age groups. In Georgia, they say there will never be a third force, because it just cannot emerge in the present extremely polarized conditions, but I think, looking at Poland, it can be done.

**ONE OF THE TRUMP CARDS THE POLISH RULING PARTY DOESN'T POSSESS, UNLIKE THEIR COUNTERPARTS IN TBILISI, IS THAT THEY DON'T GET TO TERRIFY THE POPULATION WITH THE PROSPECT OF WAR WITH RUSSIA IF ANOTHER GOVERNMENT COMES IN.**

Well, in fact, actually, we have the somewhat reverse situation: The Law and Justice party (PiS) had a narrative claiming that Donald Tusk is quietly pro-Russian, and that if he comes to power, he will, with Berlin, reconcile with Moscow, and then accept the Russian influence. But in the end, there is a general consensus throughout the Polish political class that Russia is a threat to Poland. We need to support Ukraine, and this is not going to change, no matter which side wins.

**AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UKRAINE WAR, ESPECIALLY CONSIDERING THE STRAINED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WARSAW AND KYIV AHEAD OF THE ELECTIONS. WHAT CHANGES SHOULD WE EXPECT NOW?**

These strained relations, which revealed themselves at the end of August, and in September ahead of the elections, was largely for the internal audience, politically. I think Law and Justice started realizing they were losing support, and they wanted to go after the electorate of the far right, the Confederation party. And that party is clearly anti-Ukrainian. Very anti-migrant; it doesn't want to support Ukraine it, wants to send the refugees back. And I think PiS was trying to go after them and it probably wasn't a very effective strategy. Polish people generally are very pro-Ukrainian, and want to support Ukraine in defense of its territory.

Once the new government comes to power, I expect to see some corrections

to repair these, I would say minor, issues. The biggest issue is the green corridor that was shut down, even after the EU said that it could be opened again. I think they will find a way to open a transit corridor for Ukrainian grain and other agricultural products, with a guarantee that they won't find their way onto Polish markets, which would compete with the local agricultural sector here, because that's the biggest concern among the farmers in Poland. I think they will find a way to do it. It's an issue that was largely instrumentalized for the election.

**THE ATACMS DEBUTED ON THE BATTLEFIELD AND WON UKRAINE THE GREATEST SINGLE DAY LOSSES TO THE RUSSIAN AIR FORCE IN ITS HISTORY. DOES THIS MEAN WE CAN EXPECT MORE ATACMS DELIVERIES FROM THE US?**

I think we will see more, because the success was so spectacular. And once the F-16s are in the air and the Abrams are on the ground, we will see more successes. We know that the counteroffensive has been very slow. It's been very good at draining Russian resources, but hasn't been very good at reclaiming territory, because of things like the helicopters which the Russians were using to slow the offensive for the tanks. When Ukraine shows how effective even the first use of the F-16s and Abrams is, how effective they are, it should convince Washington that this is a no brainer. My opinion, it should have been done a long time ago. And I don't expect any sort of Russian reaction outside Ukraine. That's the fear in Washington: escalation, not between Russia and Ukraine, but between Russia and the West. But Russia is not going to respond outside of Ukraine.

**ELECTIONS THAT UKRAINIANS WILL BE VERY INTENTLY LOOKING FORWARD TO ARE THOSE IN THE US. WHAT'S AT STAKE FOR UKRAINE THERE?**

Everything is at stake for Ukraine, unfortunately, in these elections. And we already saw the cracks in the US when they didn't have a house speaker. They were in this chaotic situation where nothing could get passed because they didn't have the infrastructure to make legislation, which is required in order to pass major new support for Ukraine,



Once the new government comes to power, they will find a way to open a transit corridor for Ukrainian grain and other agricultural products

and not only Ukraine, which is expecting support from the US, but also to respond to Hamas.

The politics in the US right now is really so polarized, so toxic, that we might end up looking at a house speaker who, the first thing he does, is stop any aid packages going to Ukraine. It shows how much is at stake. And this is just at the congressional Republican level. Now imagine the election a year from now, Donald Trump is reelected or brought back to the White House. This would be really bad for Ukraine, everybody can admit that. I think it's a pretty objective statement.

I'm very curious to see how the campaign will go through 2024. If Ukraine can have these kind of successes, like we just saw with the ATACMS, Biden can showcase this, as "look, how much we helped Ukraine to dismantle Russia's military might." But if things stay slow, and there are no more visible successes to demonstrate that American aid is directly assisting Ukraine on the battlefield, it could be more difficult for Biden. So there's a lot at stake for Ukraine in American politics. I think Ukraine is smart to try to keep the international coalition together. But we all know and we all understand that without the US, Ukraine cannot do as well as it possibly could.



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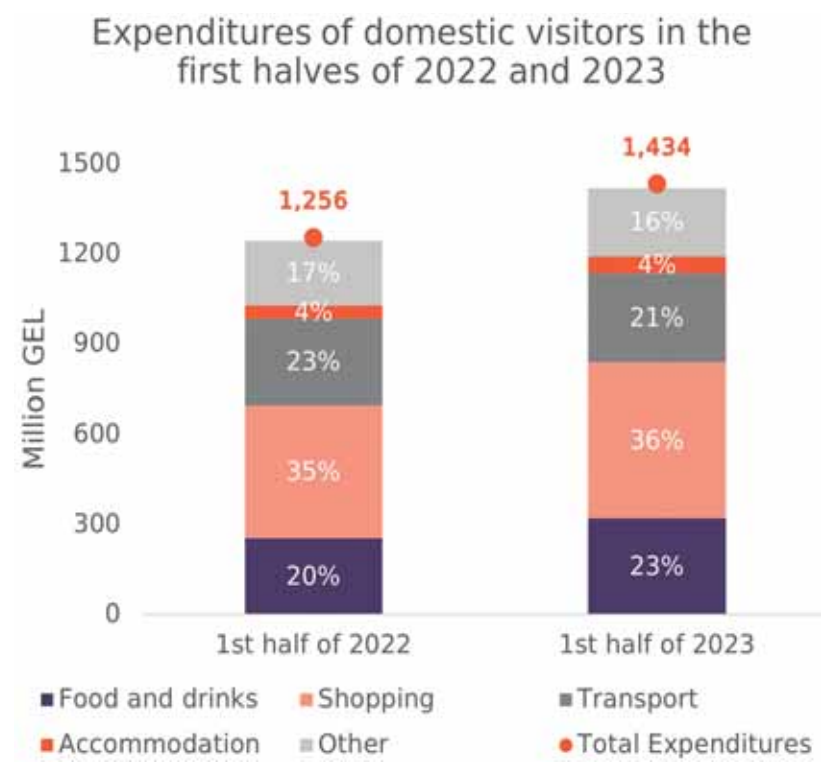
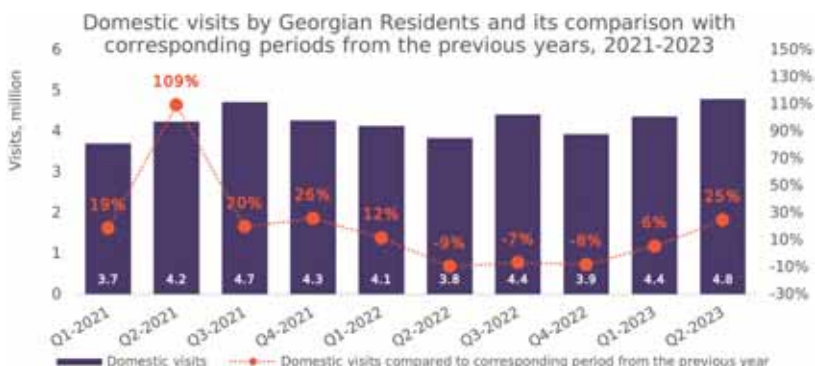


# MONTHLY TOURISM UPDATE

## September 2023 Georgia

### Georgia: Domestic Tourism in the First Half of 2023

# MONTHLY TOURISM UPDATE - Georgia Sees Increase in Tourism in the First Half of 2023



of their visit increased by 6 percentage points, exceeding the share of those who cited staying at their second/holiday home.

In the first half of 2023, the total expenditure of domestic visitors amounted to GEL 1.4 billion, which is 14.2% higher compared to the same period of 2022. However, that increase in expenditure by domestic visitors is comparatively modest when contrasted with the 45.9% increase recorded for total expenditure by international visitors during the same period in 2023.

The expenditure distribution in the first half of 2023 was similar to recent years with most expenditure going on shopping (36% of total expenditure), food and drinks (23%), and transport (21%). In the first half of 2023, compared to the first half of 2022, there were significant increases in the expenditure of domestic visitors on shopping (by 17%) and food and drinks (25%).

In the first half of 2023, the number of domestic visits amounted to 9.2 million, which was 15% higher compared to the corresponding period of 2022. Notably, in Q2 of 2023, compared to the same period of 2022, growth in the number of domestic visits (25%) was much more pronounced than in Q1 of 2023 (6%). This marked a notable turnaround from the decline recorded in domestic visits observed throughout Q2-Q4 of 2022.

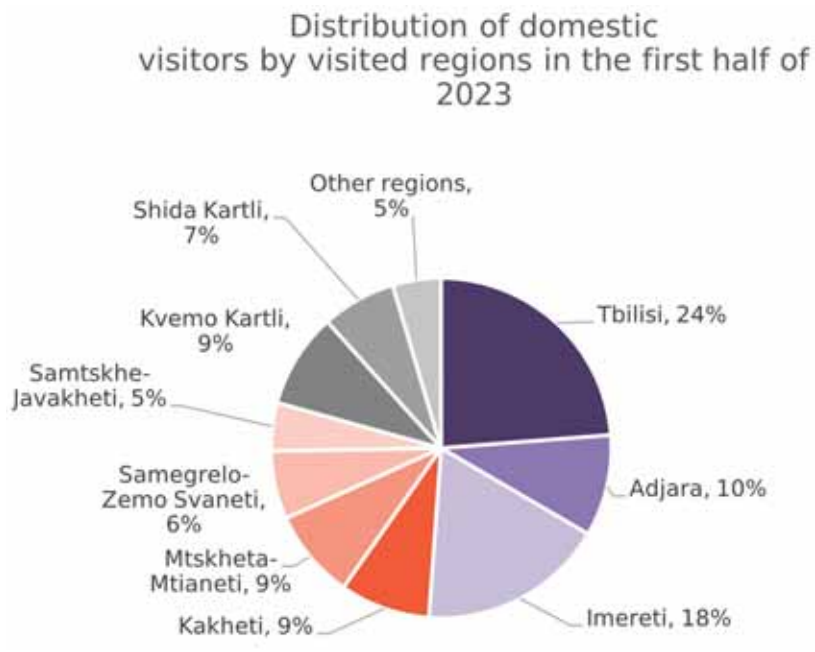
In the first half of 2023, the number of domestic visits was 38% higher than for the same period of 2019, while the number of international visits was still short of the pre-pandemic level, reaching 78% of the figure for the corresponding period of 2019.

In the first half of 2023, the average number of nights spent per visit was equal to 1.3, which is 11% lower than in the first half of 2022 (1.4 nights). Notably, in the periods after the COVID-19

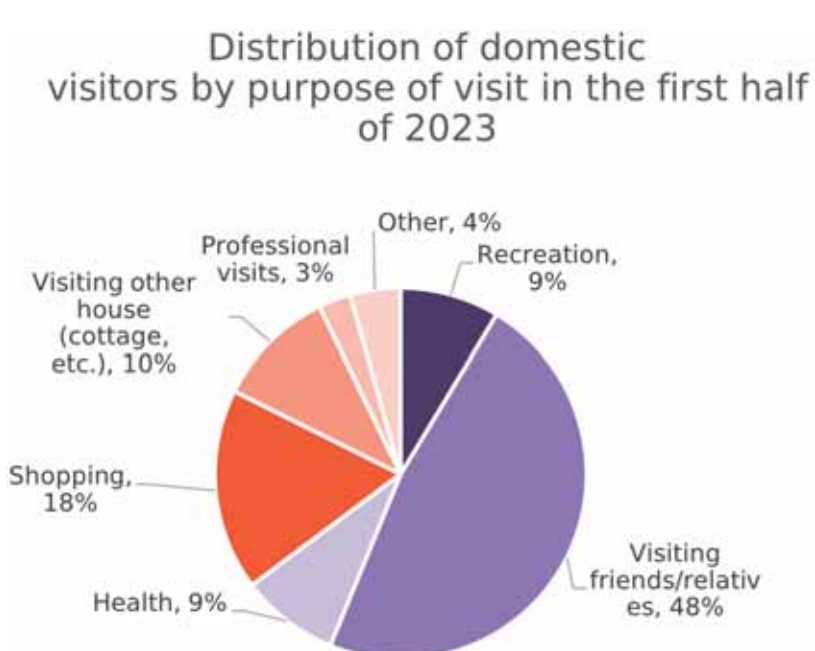
**HOTEL PRICE INDEX IN GEORGIA - SEPTEMBER**

In September 2023, in Georgia the hotel price index decreased by 6.2% compared to August 2023. The 3-star, 4-star, and 5-star hotel price index decreased by 6.6%, while for guesthouses, the price index decreased by 5.9%. The monthly HPI was the highest in Racha (26.6%) and lowest in Adjara (-21.4%).

In September 2023, compared to September 2022, hotel prices in Georgia decreased by 10.0%. The prices of 3\*, 4\*, 5\* hotels decreased by 9.8% and the prices of guesthouses decreased by 14.3%. The yearly HPI was the highest in Guria (33.4%) and lowest in Shida Kartli (-16.3%).



| Region                        | Hotel             |                   | 3*, 4*, 5*        |                   | Guesthouse        |                   |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
|                               | 2023 Sep/2023 Aug | 2023 Sep/2022 Sep | 2023 Sep/2023 Aug | 2023 Sep/2022 Sep | 2023 Sep/2023 Aug | 2023 Sep/2022 Sep |
| Kakheti                       | -0.8%             | 5.8%              | -12.2%            | -1.8%             | 4.8%              | 9.3%              |
| Imereti                       | 0.2%              | 2.5%              | 0.4%              | 6.6%              | -0.1%             | -2.6%             |
| Guria                         | -6.8%             | 33.4%             | -19.8%            | 43.9%             | 8.4%              | 14.7%             |
| Kvemo Kartli                  | 8.5%              | -                 | 0.0%              | -                 | 17.6%             | -                 |
| Adjara                        | -21.4%            | -11.9%            | -20.1%            | -11.4%            | -26.0%            | -11.6%            |
| Racha                         | 26.6%             | -0.5%             | -                 | -                 | 26.6%             | -0.5%             |
| Shida Kartli                  | -5.9%             | -16.3%            | -9.1%             | -14.1%            | -4.6%             | -18.5%            |
| Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti        | -0.5%             | 7.2%              | -6.2%             | -0.2%             | 3.8%              | 13.8%             |
| Samtskhe-Javakheti            | -8.7%             | 13.8%             | -1.7%             | 11.0%             | -13.7%            | 15.5%             |
| Mtskheta-Mtianeti             | -5.6%             | -7.2%             | -3.4%             | -1.1%             | -9.9%             | -20.8%            |
| Tbilisi                       | -0.3%             | -15.8%            | -0.6%             | -15.1%            | 2.3%              | -23.0%            |
| <b>Overall Price % Change</b> | <b>-6.2%</b>      | <b>-10.0%</b>     | <b>-6.6%</b>      | <b>-9.8%</b>      | <b>-5.9%</b>      | <b>-14.3%</b>     |



pandemic first broke out, the average number of nights spent per visit were higher in 2020 (2.1) and 2021 (1.7).

The distribution of domestic visitors by visited region in the first half of 2023 was similar to previous periods. In particular, the main destination for domestic visits was Tbilisi (24% of total visits), followed by Imereti (18%), and Adjara (10%). To compare the dynamics, the number of visitors decreased in Shida Kartli (by 12%) and Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti (7%), while the number increased in Samtskhe-Javakheti (by 23%) and Tbilisi (11%).

In the first half of 2023, the main purpose of visits (48%) was visiting friends/relatives, followed by shopping (18%), and staying in a second/holiday home

(10%). Notably, compared to the first half of 2022, the share of visitors who named shopping as the main purpose

**THE AVERAGE HOTEL PRICES IN GEORGIA - SEPTEMBER**

In Georgia, the average cost of a room in a 3-star hotel was 168 GEL per night in September 2023, while the average cost of a room in a 4-star hotel in Georgia was 268 GEL per night and the average cost of a room in a guesthouse<sup>3</sup> was 124 GEL per night.

The average cost of a room in a 5-star hotel in Georgia in September 2023 was 495 GEL per night. In Guria, the average price was 780 GEL, followed by Tbilisi - 623, Kakheti - 514, and Adjara - 460.

**BASIC ECONOMIC INDICATORS IN GEORGIA**

|   | 2018   | 2019   | 2020   | 2021   | 1-2022 | 1-2022 | 1-2022  | 1-2022 | 2022    | 1-2023 | 1-2023  |
|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|
| GDP in current prices for Accommodation and Food Service Activities (mln) | 1800.0 | 2223.0 | 1204.9 | 1181.8 | 390.9* | 536.2* | 831.1*  | 646.2* | 2374.5* | 436.8* | 638.8*  |
| Number of International Travelers (thousand persons)                      | 8679.5 | 9337.0 | 1747.1 | 1881.3 | 576.5  | 1049.4 | 2266.7  | 1534.3 | 5426.9  | 1208.3 | 1651.70 |
| Number of Tourists (thousand persons)                                     | 4754.8 | 5080.5 | 1067.0 | 1377.5 | 456.0  | 749.3  | 2082.6  | 948.8  | 2632.9  | 845.3  | 1085.2  |
| Revenue from International Travel (mln USD)                               | 3223.1 | 3268.7 | 541.7  | 1244.9 | 393.7* | 748.8* | 1374.7* | 999.5* | 3518.6* | 795.4* | 1009.1* |
| The Expenditures of Georgian Travelers Abroad (mln USD)                   | 524.7  | 657.3  | 180.5  | 184.7  | 72.2*  | 102.5* | 118.4*  | 114.3* | 408.6*  | 105.0* | 883.1*  |
| Foreign Direct Investment in Hotels and Restaurants Sector (mln USD)      | 106.0  | 119.3  | -247.2 | -7.4   | 21.8   | 15.5   | 24.0    | 6.6    | 67.1    | 30.2*  | -1.40*  |

\* Preliminary data



# Vake Residence - an Outstanding Residential and Investment Complex from Gumbati Holding



BY MARIAM GORKHELASHVILI

In the heart of Tbilisi, Georgia, a remarkable residential and investment complex, "Vake Residence," is taking shape under the expert hands of Gumbati Holding. This premium-class multifunctional development boasts a distinctive architectural design and an impressive array of recreational spaces, including expansive open terraces. Situated a mere 100 meters from Chavchavadze Avenue, it strategically places residents within immediate reach of key business, public, and commercial hubs, redefining urban living.

As one of the directors of the company, Soso Machaidze, tells GEORGIA TODAY, Gumbati Holding projects include the most in-demand, prestigious, and tourist-attractive territories.

"We value quality and comfort, and those are our priorities for all those who become our residents. When people trust us, it means we have more responsibility, and we work on our projects accordingly."

To learn more about Gumbati Holding,

GEORGIA TODAY sat down with him and co-director Nato Bochorishvili.

"Business people and business owners are our main segment, for whom quality, comfort, and time are important, therefore they want to live in central areas, in multifunctional complexes, and receive all the necessary and important services in one space," Bochorishvili tells us. "Since we have been in the construction business for years and our customers are mostly the same segment, we already know their behavior well, and it is our own customers who dictate to us what the most desirable places they want to live in are."

During the initial planning phase, significant emphasis was placed on creating an environment conducive to relaxation and leisure, even within the confines of a bustling urban landscape. The jewel in the crown of this complex is undoubtedly the inter-floor terraces gracing the 10th and 11th floors. From these vantage points, residents are treated to panoramic vistas, one side overlooking the central district of Vake, and the other offering views of the serene Mziuri Park. Spanning an impressive 4,000 square meters, this meticulously designed space encom-

passes areas for relaxation, entertainment, fitness, a running track, and a comprehensive range of infrastructural amenities. These thoughtful features serve to forge a tangible connection with nature amidst the urban hustle and bustle.

"Vake Residence is distinguished by its history, as the construction of this project is a big responsible for Gumbati Holding, being one of those projects suspended by another company in 2008. We took on the responsibility to complete it. The company gave the 200 affected tenants absolutely free of charge the same premises they had been waiting for for so long," Machaidze says. "Other than this, we can proudly say that there is no multifunctional complex of this scale in such a central location. The residents of the project will have all they need - all the necessary services and products - without having to leave the area, in addition to a comfortable and modern living space".

In addition to these communal terraces, Vake Residence introduces exclusive private patio-terraces for penthouse residents, providing a sense of individual sanctuary atop this multi-story structure.

This unique offering allows residents to relish the benefits of a multifaceted complex while enjoying the privacy of their personal abode.

"The demand for recreational spaces is increasing by the day, and it is difficult to allocate green spaces in densely populated areas. On the other hand, proximity to the city center is very important for business persons. We believe Vake Residence is the best answer to this challenge, with its 7,000 sq.m. of living area, green spaces in a closed, internal courtyard, a separate children's playground, as well as two levels of common use between the floors, with open terraces, where spaces for relaxation will be arranged and for various activities. In addition, we have apartments that come with their own terraces," says Bochoishvili.

Beyond the conventional recreational spaces, the development carves out a 3,000 square-meter enclosed green oasis. Additionally, a state-of-the-art, three-level parking facility is planned, accommodating up to 600 vehicles and featuring cutting-edge electric vehicle chargers from a reputable Italian brand. Notably, an agreement with "Ikma Geor-

gia" has been finalized for the installation of 26 KONE brand elevators, known for their Finnish heritage, top-tier quality, and sophisticated design elements.

Safety and structural integrity are paramount considerations for Gumbati Holding. The use of the highest-grade construction materials and strict adherence to seismic resistance standards, as mandated by Georgian legislation, underscore their commitment to residents' well-being. An independent expert report further attests to the project's structural soundness.

Vake Residence caters to a discerning demographic for whom quality, comfort, and convenient access to essential amenities are paramount. Many prospective buyers view this development as an attractive investment opportunity, given the upward trajectory of the real estate market, particularly in multifunctional complexes. A professional property management company will oversee the project, offering an additional advantage for prospective tenants.

Spanning one hectare of land, with a projected construction encompassing 100,000 square meters, the ambitious undertaking commands an estimated investment exceeding 30 million dollars. Construction progress is already underway, with the first, third, and fourth blocks having surpassed the 15th floor. Despite the scale of the project, the construction phase is slated for completion by December 2025.

Vake Residence will be a multi-purpose complex which will include both commercial spaces and office spaces alongside the residential apartments.

"After eight years of stable activity, this year we moved to a new stage of development, are branding of sorts," Bochorishvili notes. "Vake Residence is truly outstanding in terms of its scale, architecture, and design. More projects are planned for the future, and the sales office in Vake is just the beginning, as we're set to open sales offices in other locations as well. We believe that we can offer customers very interesting products."

For Gumbati Holding, a prominent player in the Georgian market for nearly a decade, Vake Residence stands as a pinnacle achievement within their portfolio. Notably, the company took up the mantle to complete this project after it was initially halted by another entity in 2008. In an exemplary display of corporate responsibility, Gumbati Holding provided accommodations, free of charge, to the 200 affected tenants who had patiently awaited their homes over the years.





# At JTI, Employees Determine Their Own Benefits Package

TRANSLATED BY MARIAM GORKHELASHVILI

In the fast-paced business world, successful companies are paying more and more attention to the well-being of their employees. The international tobacco com-

pany JTI (Japan Tobacco International) is one of those companies whose philosophy is based on the belief that the employee is the most important asset of a company.

pany JTI (Japan Tobacco International) is one of those companies whose philosophy is based on the belief that the employee is the most important asset of a company. JTI has been implementing various innovative projects focused on employee welfare for years. In this article, the compensation and benefits manager, Tamar Butsashvili, tells us about the new project called "Flexible Benefits," which was launched in the company on July 1. The new approach offers employees a different and varied package of benefits and allows each of them to create a combination tailored to their own needs.

"The company's approach to compensation and benefits is based on two main criteria: external competitiveness and internal fairness. In the compensation part, we ensure compliance with the labor market standards through an annual revision of salaries. However, we believe that in order to ensure a healthy organizational culture, additional benefits are needed, which, like compensation, should be in line with the highest standards, and we think that this is exactly what "Flexible Benefits" helps us with," she says.

Over the years, JTI employees have enjoyed benefits that included a standard package (see chart 1). "Despite the fact that the given package of benefits is quite comprehensive, we still had 30% of employees who only used their health insurance, probably the reason behind this was that they were not interested in sports or did not need to activate insurance for their fam-

ily members additionally. That is why we started working on a new project that aimed to diversify the benefits package so that each employee could find an offer tailored to their interests and needs," notes Tamuna. A list of additional benefits was determined directly through employee involvement. An internal survey was conducted throughout the company, according to which it was clear what offers most employees would prefer to be added. Transportation and lunch were highlighted as the most urgent demand. After the introduction of Flexible Benefits, our benefits package looks like this (see chart 2)

Due to the fact that the health of employees is the number one priority for the company, the principle of optionality did not affect insurance. Therefore, from an employee's first day working for JTI, the company provides 100% health and life insurance.

It's worth mentioning here that all employees have the same fixed budget, and together with the standard package, by combining the elements listed above, they can create a desired combination or spend their budget in one direction.

The Flexible Benefits package at JTI has been in place for five months now, and so far, there has been nothing but positive feedback from employees.

"I am satisfied that the model we introduced has been well adapted to our basic principles. On the one hand, it increases our external competitiveness by offering employees a variety of choices. On the other hand, the flexible approach ensures

internal fairness because the resources allocated to benefits are distributed equally among employees," tells us Tamuna.

After the implementation of the project, almost every employee fully utilizes the budget allocated to them, which means that in the updated package, every employee finds an interesting offer.

In the future, the company plans to increase the budget of Flexible Benefits and add various offers to the list according to the wishes of its employees.

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Chart 1

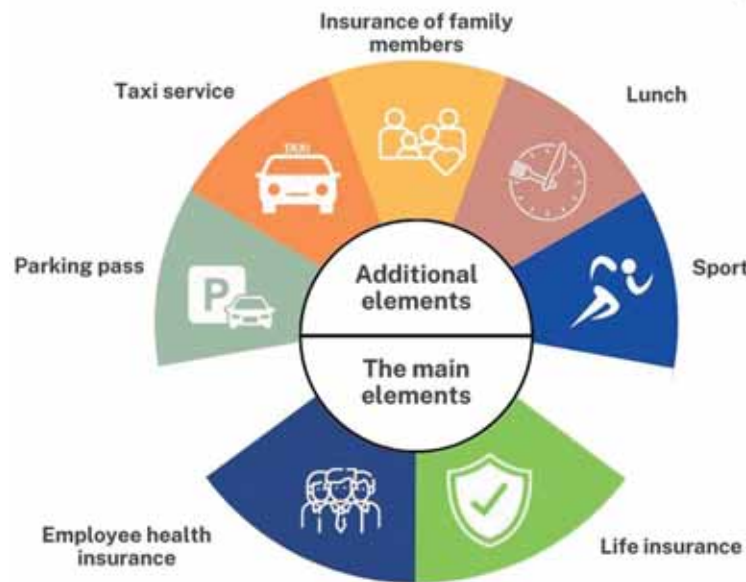


Chart 2



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### ABOUT JTI

JTI is a leading international tobacco company that is present in more than 130 countries and employs more than 46,000 people. In Georgia, JTI has approximately 100 employees. JTI's portfolio includes the following brands:

"Sobranie," "Winston," "Camel," "Winchester," and "LD." JTI is also a major player in the vape category with the Logic and Ploom brands. The company's head office is located in Geneva, Switzerland. [www.jti.com](http://www.jti.com)



## Economy Minister: Tbilisi Silk Road Forum to Host Some 2000 Participants from 60+ Countries

Over 2000 high-level guests from over 60 countries will visit Tbilisi on October 26-27 to attend the Silk Road Forum, Georgian Economy Minister Levan Davitashvili announced on Monday.

"Due to the emerging geopolitical situation, Georgia's transport and logistics potential is receiving more attention in the world; hence, the main topic will be connectivity," he said.

The forum will address a wide range of themes, including the financial sector,

trade, communication, transportation, energy, technology, and almost every other aspect of the economy.

Global business executives will debate business and investment prospects in several subject panel discussions moderated by BBC, Bloomberg, and DW journalists.

The prime ministers of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan will participate in the opening ceremony of the Opera and Ballet Theater of Tbilisi.

Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Gariashvili founded the Tbilisi Silk Road Forum in 2015.

## Georgia's Eco-Friendly Mission – Wasteless and USAID Partner to Tackle Electronic Waste

BY MARIAM GORKHELASHVILI

Wasteless, in collaboration with the USAID Economic Security Program, has undertaken a noble endeavor with a strong environmental conscience, aimed at mitigating the adverse effects of electronic waste in the country of Georgia. Giorgi Gulashvili, the chairman of the Specific Waste Management Association, while talking to BM.ge, underscored the urgency of recycling electronic equipment as a critical

step in averting environmental harm.

Their strategy includes the strategic placement of collection boxes for e-waste throughout Georgia, facilitating the proper storage, separation, and recycling of electronic components. They have set an ambitious goal of establishing 200 drop-off points in the coming months, with these collection boxes already available in Elite Electronics branches, and they have plans for further expansion to other retailers and shopping centers across the region.

The collective efforts of Wasteless have resulted in the accumulation of a substantial 500 tons of electrical equipment. These contributions include those from

partner companies that retail electronic products, highlighting the importance of collaborative action in tackling e-waste.

What makes this initiative even more intriguing is the incentive it offers to individuals who participate. Those who deliver their electronic devices to these collection networks will receive discounts on products from the same stores. This not only promotes responsible disposal of electronic waste but also provides a tangible benefit to participants.

Furthermore, Wasteless is gearing up to launch an awareness campaign to educate the public about the dangers of indiscriminately discarding electronic devices into the environment.





# Kajiri-001 – The Story of a Bearded Vulture Who Swallowed a Knife



Kajiri-001 on his big release day. Photo by Nino Toriashvili, NCG

BY NINO TORIASHVILI OF THE NATURE CONSERVATION GEORGIA TEAM.

**M** eet Kajiri-001, a bearded vulture who swallowed a knife, and who, after major surgery and rehabilitation, is now back flying around the wilderness.

The bearded vulture is one of four species of vultures in Georgia and Europe. They are known as the rarest species on the continent, and are crucially important for the ecosystem since they play a sanitary role, scavenging the detritus of decaying animals.

The bearded vulture in Georgia is known as *Kravichamia*, which means



X-ray picture showing the cutting knife. Picture from the vet clinic. Photo by Luka Tkemaladze, NCG

“lamb-eating” bird. It is still unclear why they got this name, considering the fact that their main source of food is bones. Because of this unfortunate name, they are not very admired by people, who think they will pray on their lambs and other livestock, and they are often hunted - one of the biggest threats to the species.

The main problem we see in nature conservation in general is that people simply don't have an understanding of how important such creatures as vultures are, how they live, or why we should protect them. This is one of the reasons why our organization, Nature Conservation Georgia, is focused on awareness-raising campaigns and spreading information whenever and wherever the opportunity arises.

One such opportunity was given to us



Equipping the bearded vulture with the GPS tracker. Photo: Nino Toriashvili, NCG

at the beginning of 2022, when a local found a weakened bearded vulture in Nichbisi, a small village in Georgia. They reached out to us for advice. We call it an opportunity since we were able to act on the problem, even though the incident itself was unfortunate. The fact that the bearded vulture was in such a place was already unusual, surprising in fact, since they don't usually approach human settlements.

The bird was taken to the Vetex Clinic to find out why he was so weak. An x-ray showed he had swallowed a utility knife of the snap-off kind, which was causing some irritation, and as such he needed an urgent and major operation - the knife was about the size of a human hand! Thanks to the Vetex Clinic and their qualified staff, however, the surgery was a success, and the bird was soon able to be taken to Tbilisi Zoo for rehabilitation.

Our bearded vulture spent a few months in Tbilisi Zoo, gaining back his strength. During this period, he was given some medical treatment and gradually encouraged to get back to his natural habits.

After three months, he was fully recovered and ready to be returned to his natural habitat. A release date was set.

Before the release, we got in touch with professors from Ilia State University to help get a GPS tracker to attach to him so we could collect data on his movements in the wild. We named the GPS tracker ‘Kajiri-001’ - Kajiri is an old Georgian name for vultures.

So, on the day of the release, Kajiri-001 was equipped with the GPS tracker and it was time to let him fly.

We had picked the best release spot, and supporters gathered to join us in seeing the magnificent bird head back into the wild. The scene was indescribable: everyone was silent as he took a



step, spread his wings, and took to the air again. Watching Kajiri-001 fly away, healthy and free, was a truly wonderful scene to witness.

We were left grateful that, with the help of partner organizations Ilia State University, Vetex Clinic, Tbilisi Zoo and every person who took part in this action, it had been possible to get this bearded vulture safely and healthily back to the wild.

After the release date, we waited eagerly for the first records to arrive from the GPS tracker. This was delayed by cloudy weather, as the tracker is powered by solar panels, and so the first data didn't arrive until a few days later. The news, when it came, was excellent.



Movements of Kajiri-001 since 2022



## Last Call - Tusheti, 2 of 3

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

**H**aving been summoned back to Tusheti province as it prepared to close for the winter, we answered with an enthusiastic affirmative, assembling a group of six friends for our driver friend Dato Urushadze's Delica van. This was something like his 10th trip up there just this year, he told us, and clearly we were in good hands. The road, reasonably dry and in better shape than our first visit several springs ago, gave much more confidence than it had that first time.

The rivers, too, now no longer filled with silt and runoff from the spring melts, were sparkling shades of turquoise, pure and clean, though still bitingly cold. And the autumn tree colors of the late season were at their richest reds and golds, mixed in with all the coniferous green shades to make a full palette. Blue skies and a dusting of snow on the mountain peaks completed the scenes. And the sheer scale of the landscapes we could see, so high and low and wide right from the roads, also took our breath away.

Weather, carefully watched, was on our side. There is hardly anything worse

than waking up to rain pattering on the tent. While we did actually have this experience early on the morning of our final day (worst timing to pack up in!), mixed with occasional light snow, it obligingly dried up so that Dato would not have to unpack and air out his three tents at the other end. Nightmare, or at least considerable bother, averted. But this was still a day away.

Our first morning, after a breakfast of all sorts of leftovers from the day and night before, along with hot coffee, we packed lunch to take with us, and set off in Dato's van for some exploring of the region's villages, chiefly Dartlo and beyond. Three of us, including my wife and I, had seen Tusheti that first spring visit, and three were quite new to it. But for all of us, the slow going on roads of dirt and rock was certainly worth it.

It is strange to walk through these villages, mostly of slate houses and their ancient towers, when they are almost completely abandoned for winter. The last few inhabitants were packing vehicles and setting off even as we drove and then walked in, and we had the place almost entirely to ourselves. Dartlo's sad roofless church, circle of 12 “court stones” where local judgments were made, beautiful petroglyphs scattered about randomly, and pyramid-topped slate towers made a strong uni-

fied impression. I hope that the old stone buildings and carved wooden balconies will never be allowed to give way to more modern structures, which could only jar the eye and spoil the effect.

All the tourism here, I reminded myself, is being done without the help of electrical wires. If you want power, use solar panels or a generator; for heat, wood is your best option. So this is a great challenge. For all the moaning we do about bad electricity and blackouts in Svaneti, at least it's there much more than absent. Not so in Tusheti. Respect.

A new village some kilometers past Dartlo awaited us, previously roadless (at least for cars, even 4x4s) but now graced with wheeled access. We delighted like children at its towers and stack of three fortresses, one after the other off into the distance. But Dato's offer of considerably more villages we declined, still feeling tired from the yesterday's long trip up. A mid-afternoon return to the camp, so that we could cook the shish kabobs and marshmallows for supper before dark, was perfect. With sighs, we slipped, fully clothed, into our waiting tents and sleeping bags for a silent night.

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.svaneti2](http://www.facebook.com/hanmer.house.svaneti2)



# Filmmaker Saxon Bosworth on Nature Conservation in Georgia



Saxon Bosworth filming a local fisherman on the frozen Lake Tabatskuri in January this year (a scene in Mr. Velvet Scoter).

BY KATIE RUTH DAVIES

In September 2022, researcher and film-maker Saxon Bosworth released the first of a film trilogy focused on nature conservation in Georgia. “Like an Animal” (ცხოველავით) is the story of Georgian conservationist Nika Kerdikoshvili, who is working in Lagodekhi to protect the Caucasian Tur. The Tur is a wild goat species living in the Caucasian Mountains whose numbers have suffered greatly in recent decades due to poaching.

This was followed by his second film, made in the Eagle Gorge of Dedoplistkaro, Kakheti, which told us the story of two Georgian wildlife conservationists and one group of misunderstood crea-



An example of the worksheets used in the children's education classes

tures. Vultures have a commonly unknown, yet crucial role in our wild ecosystems: They are “nature’s clean-up crew”, in the words of Director of Vulture Conservation Foundation, José Tavares, who offers commentary in the film. “Vanishing Sky Lords” (ვაუჩინარებულის ცის ღმერთები) explores this role vultures have in nature, their public perception, presence in ancient mythical tales, and dramatic disappearance in recent decades.

In June this year, the final piece of Saxon Bosworth’s wildlife conservation trilogy was released: Mr. Velvet Scoter (მისტერ გარიელი), exploring the life of Nika Paposhvili, the village of Tabatskuri, and the vulnerable Velvet Scoter.

Since we last spoke to him, Saxon has taken up the role of Director of the NGO Nature Conservation Georgia. We sat

down with him to discuss his projects, inspiration and hopes for Georgia’s biodiversity protection looking ahead.

## NOW YOUR TRILOGY IS COMPLETE, WHAT DO YOU HAVE PLANNED NEXT?

I have just started a new role, joining NGO Nature Conservation Georgia. It is a remarkable, young team of people who have been a great source of inspiration since I met them last summer, when they were creating - the now iconic - velvet scoter mural in the village of Tabatskuri. It’s an honor to be working with them, and a top focus of mine moving forward. I see this as a new chapter of my mission to ‘communicate on the untold stories of the natural world!’

## WHAT ABOUT GEORGIA HAS LEFT THE BIGGEST IMPRESSION ON YOU?

For me, Georgia has been the place in the world where I have been able to find community, people to learn from and go on adventures and create with. Here, I must mention Nika Kerdikoshvili and Nika Paposhvili (the focuses of “Like an Animal” and “Mr. Velvet Scoter” respectively) whose commitment and passion to learning about nature generate an electric energy empowering to be around. Being in the field with these guys are some of the fondest memories of my entire life.

## ARE YOU OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE SPECIES YOU HAVE DOCUMENTED (AND WHAT MORE NEEDS TO BE DONE, AND BY WHOM)?

From my limited perspective, I would say with each species, the answer to that question is different. I continue to work closely with Nika Paposhvili in all ways I can to support his efforts to save the Velvet Scoters of the Caucasus, a popu-

lation that remains highly vulnerable. That reality doesn’t discourage Nika, and so I would like to imagine my films transmit the idea that each individual can make a very big difference.

## CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR NEW ROLE AS DIRECTOR OF NATURE CONSERVATION GEORGIA. WHAT DOES THE ROLE ENTAIL?

Thank you! Fresh from the print shop - we are delighted to announce the release of our new book, ‘Urban Birds of Georgia’, supported by UNDP. The idea with this book is to promote the joy and magic of connecting with nature, and birdwatching, but from an urban environment, where often the biodiversity around us can be overlooked. You can go to ‘City-birds.ge’ to learn more about our book, and sign up to get a copy!

This project is very much a representation of our goals, to work to protect the biodiversity of Georgia by raising awareness in local communities about environmental issues and their importance. To maintain and cherish the harmony between us, humans, and nature.

One of the things I believe makes Nature Conservation Georgia unique, is how they, starting from long before my involvement, have been telling stories and conveying important messages using art. For any readers with young ones, we have a Wildlife Art class for kids being run by our Art Director, Luka Tkemaladze at the Art East Studio. There are a few places left, so do get in touch for more information!

Saxon Bosworth’s films “Like an Animal”, “Vanishing Sky Lords”, and Mr. Velvet Scoter are available on YouTube. The films are with English subtitles, and come with optional Georgian and Armenian subtitles. You can follow Saxon’s future projects on Instagram, @saxonbosworth.

## CULTURE

# Good Morning, 100 Dollars!

BLOG BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

No surprise that everything has changed in the internet era: human imagination and relationships, communication, our attitude to time as such, rapidity of business deals and financial transactions, sell-and-buy ways and means, our knowledge of the world and our thoughts of the future. One of the things that has remained stable, almost untouched, is theater, the collective form of live performance on a stage, with actors and actresses in front of real-time onlookers. Talented individuals continue depicting life in black-and-white, embodying their written piece on the stage, personifying the invented characters and attracting the interested audience to witness the recital of all that, exactly as it was done hundreds of years ago. This means that we have strongly maintained the old penchant for going to the theater to watch for several hours the product of human imagination, interpreted in the form of drama, with theaters worldwide packed as full as they have ever been before.

One of the best examples of Georgia’s drama life is a tiny theater located on the Atoneli Street of downtown Tbilisi, named ‘Theater-on-Atoneli’, founded by Georgian businessmen and theater lover Revaz Salukvadze, whose daughter Tinatin Salukvadze is now managing this small but quite famous theatrical pearl of Georgian culture. The minia-

tures the theater is producing are extremely popular, and their stage life is enviable to many bigger theaters of the country. One of the most lasting shows on the repertoire of the Atoneli Theater is ‘Good Morning, Hundred Dollars!’ The play was written about twenty years ago by the Georgian playwright Pyotr Khotyanovski and his late wife Inga Garuchava, the Russian-language Georgian poet. It was just the luck of the theater and its thespians that the well-known Georgian theatrical director and public figure Ketii Dolidze noticed the story and realized it on the stage of the Theater-on-Atoneli. This happened 15 years ago, and since then, the play has never left the stage, having lingered on firmly and successfully to the delight of its happy spectators. Moreover, the play has conquered the stages of Paris, London and Edinburgh, and is now set to further delight Georgian immigrants in Madrid, Spain. The playbill proudly says that the Embassy of Georgia in the Kingdom of Spain and the Ministry of Culture of the country have organized the presentation of the mentioned play at the Spanish cultural Center Eduardo Úrculo in the city of Madrid, Thursday evening, October 26th, Director - Ketii Dolidze, actors Nana Pachuashvili, Nineli Chankvetadze, Ramaz Ioseliani and Nugzar Ruhadze, art director Shota Glurjidge, and choreographer Mariam Aleksidze, all organized in Madrid by Zurab Mchedlishvili, Deputy Head of Mission of Georgia. Attendance is free.

As if the stars have lined up deliber-

ately, the spectacle will take place exactly the day when this issue of Georgia Today is coming out. Rumor already has it that the entire Georgian diaspora in Madrid, and not only, is breathlessly awaiting the performance to make history, which, incidentally, boasts a story about the most commonplace model of life of our emigrants all over the world: a well-educated married young woman ventures to try herself as a nurse to an elderly American woman who is rich but very sick. On top of the caretaker, she hires a fiddler to entertain her, using her Stradivarius violin, and a physical consultant to give her massages and help her stretch - four characters all in all, each playing their own part in her senile and infirm life. The happiest and the brightest part of the play is the finale, when the old American lady turns out to be a Georgian and out of the blue starts speaking her native tongue. In the end, they all display the sincere desire to go to Georgia together with the Georgian lady returning home, and even the fitness specialist learns the Georgian language and jumps on the bandwagon.

It is definitely the content of the play (set aside the perfect performance of the participants in the show) that has attracted those thousands of viewers throughout the show’s long years. Success is guaranteed in Madrid too, and in the rest of the world where part of this nation has found another home. Good luck to all of them, sitting in pits and stalls, and to those who act and live on the stage for those magical two hours!

Por la invitación de la Embajada de Georgia en el Reino de España  
El teatro "ATONELI" presenta la obra

**¡BUENOS DÍAS,  
¡CIENTO DÓLARES!**

Ficha artística: Nana Pachuashvili, Nineli Chankvetadze, Ramaz Ioseliani, Nugzar Ruhadze  
Dirección: Ketii Dolidze  
Dirección Artística: Shota Glurjidge  
Coreografía: Mariam Aleksidze

La obra se realiza en idioma georgiano el  
**26 de octubre, a las 19.00 h.**  
en el Centro Cultural Eduardo Úrculo. Dirección Pl. de Donoso, 5, 28029 Madrid

madrid.es/tetuan



# Graffiti Icon Banksy Arrives in Tbilisi



"Banksy: Birth of an Icon" will be available during the next four months. Image source: Georgian Museum of Fine Arts Facebook page.

BY SHELBI R. ANKIEWICZ

To commemorate the Georgian Museum of Fine Art's 5th year anniversary, it's housing an exhibition showcasing works of the infamous street artist Banksy.

"Banksy: Birth of an Icon" opened on October 18 and will be available throughout the next four months. Banksy is an anonymous graffiti artist who began to rise in popularity in the 90s when his street art started to gain recognition. His work tends to resemble themes of anti-authoritarian statements and is often deemed controversial.

The leader and curator of the exhibi-

tion is Steve Lazarides, the former agent of Banksy who worked with him for more than 10 years. Lazarides started his career with many titles such as painter, builder, picture editor, etc., then he met Banksy and began photographing his artwork.

"This journey with Banksy encompasses a creative partnership that lasted nearly twelve years. A partnership with me as his photographer, driver, manager, and much more," Lazarides wrote on the museum's website. "I met Banksy as he started out as an unknown young graffiti artist from Bristol in 1997. This exhibition depicts Banksy's path from the very outset. You will enjoy his oeuvre from two different angles: documentary photos taken by me—which will introduce you to his origins, meaning how it all started — and his originals to show how

far Banksy has transcended the boundaries and how far ahead of time he was. Gradually, as you proceed through the exhibition, you will see for yourselves why the art world iconizes him and what makes this vandal a cult figure."

Banksy is commonly recognized by his stencil-styled graffiti and messages usually containing relation to militarism, capitalism, war, or politics. He is most popularly known for his work which depicts a young girl in black and white who is reaching out to a red string balloon in the shape of a heart. This piece alone is replicated in many places around the world and sold on various pieces of merchandise, portraying Banksy as a "global brand."

The majority of street work produced by Banksy can be found in the United

Kingdom, however, his art started to seep its way from the street into galleries years ago. Exhibited in cities such as Melbourne, Chicago, Tel Aviv, and many others, the works of Banksy have debuted in several major cities around the world, finally making their way to Tbilisi.

Graffiti, something that was once perceived as a form of vandalism in most places, has become more acceptable over time and widely loved by people. When walking around the cities of Georgia it's very common to find installations of street art, which is why the Georgian Museum of Fine Arts believes the Banksy exhibition will be a popular one.

"Over the five years of operation, the Museum of Fine Arts has hosted tens of exhibitions and gripping gatherings and over 100,000 visitors. Our goal has always been to support Georgian arts and to create yet another hub of Georgian arts at 7 Rustaveli Avenue," the museum team wrote on their website. "Now our international-scope exhibition of Banksy's works is an event we take with due diligence. This exhibition serves several purposes, such as, among others, to enable our local viewers to celebrate the museum's 5th birthday by savoring an exclusive exhibition and meeting the legend. But on top of that, our museum steps up supporting Georgian street art. Besides, we are determined to put Tbilisi - with the help of this exhibition - on the world map of arts, posed in this way to attract

greater tourist flows into the country."

Since the museum wants to also portray and support Georgian street artists, "Banksy: Birth of an Icon" will not only showcase works from Banksy but also from Tbilisi locals. There will be one showroom in the exhibition curated by Elene Kapanadze that will feature works from Georgian artists Gagosha, Mishiko Sulakauri, Semichka, Koska, and SICK'N TIRED. These artists are currently creating content on the streets of Tbilisi, and they've been chosen for display due to the impact their work has on Georgian culture.

Lazarides believes that the worth of a piece of art is not determined by whether it's hung in a museum, but by how many people know that piece of art.

"It's hard to work out the yardstick, right, for who wins in the art world. The art world's version of who wins is who sells their paintings for the most amount of money," wrote Lazarides on Sky News, a British news channel. "I think my version of who wins is the artist who is most recognized and has their work in the most places. That is Banksy by a country mile. You know, there are cab drivers in Karachi who know who he is. There are fridge magnets, posters, and stickers. He's probably the most famous artist of all time." Wrote on the news website.

The exhibition will run until February 13, 2024.



## The Church vs Halloween

Continued from page 2

"We regret that so many Christians are taking part in so-called Halloween show-bizness," the Patriarch's Office said, and went on with a lengthy and bizarre explanation of the roots and the history of Halloween. "It is unacceptable for a believer to take part in this," the statement concluded.

I have read similar statements before from the Georgian Church, which is in dire need of reforms itself. I even remember how, in the capital, Tbilisi, some years ago, the mother of a preschooler said pumpkins intended for Halloween had been confiscated. "We wanted to make jack-o'-lanterns," she said, declining to give her name. "When we got to the school, the director told us that a priest had come, and that she had then removed the pumpkins."

The owner of that particular preschool said by telephone that a priest had visited the school to distribute leaflets, after which she had called off the Halloween celebrations scheduled for the week.

"We decided not to carve pumpkins, but rather to boil them and make a dessert for the children," Bojadze said. "The parents didn't complain much."

Many modern style political and economic experts say the Georgian Orthodox Church should be expected to take a conservative stance on issues like Halloween, and on protecting Georgian culture from outside influences, and it's very natural for the small Orthodox Church to be worried about how to preserve its culture in a globalized world.

Christianity has been a state religion in parts of Georgia since the fourth century and is the dominant religion in the Black Sea country of 3.7 million people.

Nodar Ladaria, a professor of theology and history of religion, notes the Church doesn't have the authority to ban other traditions.

I love Halloween, Christmas, anything that makes families come together, dressed scary or festive, but since returning to Georgia after living in many countries, where Halloween is embraced and not in conflict with the local traditions, I have caught myself asking permission from my relatives and neighbors when inviting them over for a fancy-dress party related to Halloween. Recently, I decorated my apartment entrance with Halloween decorations, and the neighbors' kids loved it. I am worried after reading today's statement from the Church that some may now complain when they see my cute scary creature at the entrance, and as to the fate of the 10 pumpkins...



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