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The perfect spot for an unforgettable mountain vacation PAGE 9

Chatham House's Samantha De Bendern on the French and UK Elections

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

Radio Free Europe/RL's Georgian Service sat down with Chatham House's Samantha De Bendern to talk about two big elections, starting with the UK elections, the less controversial of the two. De Bendern, a British consultant based in southern France, has a diverse background in political risk and finance. Initially focused on Russia and Eastern Europe within security and international relations roles at the European Commission, NATO HQ, and Control Risks Group, she later transitioned to banking, until 2018, when she turned fully to political risk consulting and writing. She continues to be involved in EU affairs and actively combats disinformation in France.

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Election night event in Paris on July 7, 2024. Photo by Stephane De Sakutin/AFP

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GALT & TAGGART									
Prepared for Georgia Today Business by									
As of 09-Jul-2024									
Markets					Markets				
BONDS	Price	w/w	m/m	STOCKS	Price	w/w	m/m		
GEORGIA 04/26	91.84 (YTM 7.74%)	+0.3%	+0.6%	Bank of Georgia (BGEO LN)	GBP 42.85	+5.2%	+14.0%		
GBAIL 04/28	88.41 (YTM 7.45%)	+0.2%	+0.2%	Georgia Capital (GCEO LN)	GBP 10.48	+6.3%	+20.5%		
GBGG 9/12 PERP	97.64 (YTM 5.78%)	+0.1%	-0.2%	TBC Bank Group (TBGG LN)	GBP 28.55	+10.7%	+13.1%		
SILKNET 01/27	99.87 (YTM 8.43%)	-0.1%	-0.1%						
TBC 10/75 PERP	100.00 (YTM 9.82%)	-0.2%	-0.0%						
TBC 8/804 PERP	95.79 (YTM 10.80%)	+0.4%	+0.1%	Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	84.66	-2.8%	+6.3%		
TBC 10/1/4 PERP	98.50 (YTM 10.67%)	+0.3%	-0.1%	Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	2,364.09	+1.5%	+3.1%		
INDICES					CURRENCIES				
SP 500	5,576.98	+1.2%	+4.3%	USD / GEL	2,7529	-1.6%	-2.5%		
FTSE 250	20,645.02	+2.2%	+0.4%	EUR / GEL	2,9768	-1.0%	-2.4%		
DOW JONES 30	39,291.97	-0.1%	+1.3%	GBP / GEL	3,5193	-0.7%	-2.1%		
Russell 2000	2,029.47	+0.2%	+0.1%	EUR / USD	1,0813	+0.6%	+0.1%		
FTSE 100	8,139.81	+0.2%	-1.3%	GBP / USD	1,2786	+0.6%	+0.5%		



Perform Europe Selects 42 Partnership Projects, Including from Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine

BY TEAM GT

The EU-funded Perform Europe programme, the Creative Europe action promoting sustainable touring in the performing arts sector, has awarded €2.1 million in grants to 42 partnership projects.

The projects offered tours of 63 performing art works by 196 partners from Creative Europe programme countries, including Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine.

“The selected projects demonstrate the power of performing arts to drive social change, promote diversity and inclusivity, ensure access to all audiences, and address pressing global issues,” says a press release by Creative Europe.

In addition, 13% of the total fund will be allocated to projects supporting the Ukrainian performing arts sector.

The selected projects include, for example, one project uniting Armenia, Ukraine, and Georgia. This project will

receive a €60,000 grant to showcase the participatory performance ‘Greenhouse’ in Georgia, Armenia, and Ukraine, as these countries’ historical contexts resonate deeply with each other.

“‘Greenhouse’ tackles the issue of displacement as a result of military conflicts, and invites the audience to construct a temporary protective structure on stage,” says the project explainer. “Shared experience of migration due to the Nagorno-Karabakh, Russian-Georgian and Russian-Ukrainian war open pathways for local audience engagement, and connect to the broader issues of climate migration and climate change.”

Another project will support “Alaska – the pursuit of happiness & the abusive world”, one of the last performances to take place in Mariupol, Ukraine. It was written four months before the Russian invasion. This work gives voice to the city’s youth after their theatre was completely demolished. The performance will tour in Poland, Hungary, and Bosnia where it will meet local young actors as well as Ukrainians who live in these countries.

100 Hikers Register for the Hiking Festival



BY MARIAM MTIVLISHVILI

About 100 hikers have registered for the hiking festival “From Sea to Mountain”, which will be held in Adjara for the first time this year.

The hikers will cover the 45 km route in 5 days. The route will start on July 24 from Chirukhi Mountain and will end on July 28 in the Alpine Botanical Garden.

The participants of the festival were selected based on their trekking experience and ownership of trekking equip-

ment. With the help of hiking guides and instructors, they will head through the alpine zone of mountainous Adjara, natural and cultural heritage, such as Shratiani and Shuamta lakes, Khikhani fortress, Alpine garden and Green lake.

The festival is organized by the Tourism Product Development Agency of the Adjara Tourism Department in order to promote the tourist routes of Adjara and stimulate hiking in Adjara.

The participants of the festival pre-registered on the festival page <https://infoajara.com/ka/hiking-festival>. The hiking festival is being held in Adjara for the first time and participation in it is free.

Peter Fischer: Germany is Reviewing its Relations with Georgia – You Have to Get Back on Our Path



Image: IPN

BY TEAM GT

Germany is reviewing its relations with Georgia, the German Ambassador to Georgia, Peter Fischer, said in a conversation with journalists.

“Today we have an event organized by the German civil society, where the enlargement of the European Union is being discussed. Three members of the German parliament are present here, and this is a very important topic for Georgia.”

“Georgia is a candidate for EU membership, but we have reached a very difficult moment in this accession process. Based on the actions of the Georgian government, the European Council, which consists of 27 heads of state and government, decision-makers on enlargement, decided on June 27 to suspend the accession process with Georgia.”

“This is the policy of the European Union and it is very sad, because every-

thing could have been completely different, we have been moved forward very quickly, we want to move forward, but the speed and quality of the accession process is in the hands of the candidate.

“Germany is also reviewing its relations with Georgia. We have a very broad and deep relationship. Together with the United States of America, we are one of the largest donors of development cooperation in Georgia. But we have decided not to make new financial commitments to Georgia for the time being. Further, the German armed forces canceled their participation in the Noble Partner exercises, we canceled the big legal forum that was held in Tbilisi last year and was supposed to be held in Berlin this summer. We are considering further actions,” said Ambassador Fischer.

He highlighted that Georgians should think about how important it is for them to join the European Union.

“To sum up, the process of Georgia joining the European Union is suspended, and it is very sad. I appeal to our Georgian friends: We want you to join the European Union, but you know the pro-

cess. You must meet our standards and if you do not, then you will not be able to join.

“Georgian citizens and Georgian friends should think about how important the European Union is for you, your children, your grandchildren. If you want that, you have to get back to our course,” said Peter Fischer.

The international conference, ‘EU Enlargement – A Geopolitical Necessity and the Next Steps for the EU Candidate States’ is being held in Tbilisi. The event was opened by the Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany, Peter Fischer. Representatives of the Associated Trio and the civil society of the Western Balkans, as well as members of the German Bundestag, are participating in the conference.

The aim of the conference is to lay the foundation for a platform that the candidate countries of the European Union can use effectively on their way to joining the European Union. Within the framework of the conference, German and Georgian politicians will talk about the next steps.

EU Ambassador: 30 Million Euros Set for Georgia’s MoD Have Been Frozen

BY ANA DUMBADZE

When it comes to defense and security cooperation between Georgia and the European Union, unfortunately, we have to inform you that the leaders have also decided to freeze the money that we pay to support the Georgian Defense Forces, named the “European Peace Fund,” – the EU Ambassador to Georgia, Paweł Herczynski, told journalists in Tbilisi, where a two-day international conference entitled “Enlargement of the European Union – geopolitical need and further steps for the candidate countries of the European Union” is taking place..

“The money that we planned to transfer to the Ministry of Defense of Georgia, which amounts to 30 million euros, has been frozen. This is only the first step; there will be other steps. Our direct support to the Government of Georgia will be limited, and we will try to direct sup-



port to civil society and the media. This was announced after the Foreign Affairs Council in Luxembourg. Our direct support to the Government of Georgia will gradually decrease and focus on civil society and the media.

“I am very, very sorry to inform you that the first casualty of this policy will be our support to the Ministry of Defense, and unfortunately, the 30 million euros that we planned to provide to support the defense of Georgia has been suspended. As you know, our support to the

Government of Georgia is 10 times more than our support to civil society – we have been financing the Government of Georgia for many years. Almost half of our EU support is direct budget support to the Georgian government. A decision has been made to gradually reduce this direct support, change its direction, and increase support for civil and media organizations, which, as we know, are under great pressure in Georgia at the moment due to the law on “transparency,” the Ambassador noted.

Ukraine Latest: NATO Allies to Give Ukraine 'minimum £31 bln' in 2025, Missile Attack Hits Kyiv Children's Hospital

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

Norway has pledged to send half a dozen F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine from the sidelines of the NATO summit in Washington, becoming the fourth country to promise to send the vital weaponry.

Norwegian prime minister Jonas Gahr Støre said the jets would be delivered later this year, as reported by the local newspaper Verdens Gang (VG). The total number of F-16s pledged is 86, although they will arrive over several years.

Meanwhile, the White House announced that NATO allies are set to promise a minimum of \$40 billion (£31.2 billion) to Ukraine for the next calendar year during the summit in Washington.

The uptick in support comes after Russia launched one of its most fatal attacks across Ukraine on Monday, killing at least 41 in the capital and around a dozen elsewhere. More than 150 people were wounded. It was Russia's heaviest bombardment of the Ukrainian capital in almost four months, hitting seven of the city's 10 districts.

The Ohmatdyt children's hospital in central Kyiv was among several medical facilities destroyed during that attack.

Local mayor Vitaliy Klitschko told The Independent that the attack showed Russia was guilty of "genocide", while the United Nations refuted claims by Russia

that they were not responsible for the attack.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky promised retaliation, writing on Telegram, "The Russian terrorists must answer for this." He also called for Kyiv's Western allies to respond firmly.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk deplored Russia's attacks, saying: "Among the victims were Ukraine's sickest children."

In Russia, a fire broke out at a power substation in the Rostov region after Ukraine launched "tens" of drones overnight, according to Vasily Golubev, governor of the southern border region with Ukraine.

Three Russian civilians were killed and several others wounded in the Belgorod border region when Ukrainian shells hit a village there, the governor said.

Ukraine's navy chief Vice Admiral Olexiy Neizhpapa told the Reuters news agency that the Russian navy's Black Sea Fleet has been forced to rebase nearly all its combat-ready warships from occupied Crimea to other locations, and its main naval hub is becoming ineffectual because of attacks by Kyiv.

US SAYS UKRAINE IS ON AN 'IRREVERSIBLE' PATH TO NATO, BUT ONLY AFTER THE WAR

Ukraine is on an "irreversible" path to NATO membership, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Wednesday, advancing American assurances that the country will be allowed to join the Western military alliance, but only after its



Rescuers work at Ohmatdyt Children's Hospital that was damaged during a Russian missile strikes on Kyiv, Ukraine July 8, 2024. Photo by Gleb Garanich/ Reuters

war with Russia ends.

A joint communique from all 32 NATO allies meeting in Washington cemented that "irreversible" NATO commitment to Ukraine, a European official said, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss it before its release.

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky has battled for at least a firm guarantee

from NATO that Ukraine can join the military alliance.

NATO secretary general Jens Stoltenberg underlined that Ukraine will not join the alliance's ranks immediately, but he insisted that must happen after the war is over to ensure that Russia never attacks Ukraine again.

Of the overall NATO assistance, he

said, "We are not doing this because we want to prolong a war. We are doing it because we want to end a war as soon as possible.

The alliance welcomed Ukraine's democratic, economic and security reforms needed to join, and said it would get an invitation "when allies agree and conditions are met."

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Future US Senator at the World Peace Forum in Georgia



OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

Let us for a second go to our beloved Wikipedia and look for the article titled '2024 Nobel Peace Prize'. We will definitely be proud to find among the candidates the name of our compatriot Beso Shengelia, "For giving the world the first early-age educational method that fits with world languages, creates common childhood memories, and makes friends with future generations of the world regardless of national, religious, ideological, or any other cultural differences." Beso got in touch with

almost the entire rest of the world to organize the first World Peace Forum in Tbilisi. Among his favorite friends and supporters to this particular end is Kimberly Lowe, candidate for the United States Senate in Virginia.

I was lucky enough to ask Kimberly if it would be correct to say that one of the highlights of her campaign for the United States Senate seat is the importance of peace among the nations of the world. There is a freshly created non-governmental organization in our country, I said, called the World Peace Forum in Georgia, and I asked if she would be interested in cooperating with it and, eventually, taking part in the first forum together with her friends and colleagues.

One of the highlights of my question package was how big and how significant the part was that concerns family and traditional values in her campaign for becoming a United State senator.

Kimberly Lowe's response followed promptly:

"When the United States is strong, then the rest of the world is at peace, and when the United States has good leadership, the rest of the world is at peace. Over the course of the last four years, under the Biden Administration, we have watched mass migrations across the globe, outbreaks of war, borders being flooded, war between Ukraine and Russia, and the devastating exit of the United States out of Afghanistan. Everything

that starts in the United States eventually starts in the rest of the world, including any agendas that affect the family.

"I have personally tried to improve diplomatic relations across the world by meeting with world leaders and pairing members of government with other members of government. I was able to attend a Summit in London in October of 2023, where we discussed issues that are affecting everyone globally, and I have also met with members of Parliament inside the European Union and outside the European Union over the course of the last several years.

"Family is an important issue not only in the United States, but globally. Our economy is hurting our families, as we are in the middle of de-dollarization, rising inflation, and rising costs. We also have similar issues globally, where we see the destruction of the family unit. In America and in other countries, we watch children being ripped away from their parents through our court systems. I say this was all planned. Because if you destroy the family, then the government can control the family and people more easily.

"The global movement seeks to remove family, remove religion, divide people based on their religion, sex, color, or political views, indoctrinate children in government-run schools, change and alter history, control the media narrative, and lastly topple countries by overrunning their borders with mass immigration, which we are seeing across Europe as well due to the wars. A big issue has been the purposeful wars driven by the American Industrial War Complex and America's three letter agencies in order to take control of global resources,

depopulate, and make money with the creation of wars.

"We have seen this can come to an end when the right people are in power in the United States. We have seen the United States topple sovereign countries around the world. Peace is simple with the election of those who can stop the ongoing global agenda, a military industrial complex that functions to profit, and government agencies that have been put in place to topple other sovereign governments.

"Peace is just around the corner, with global cooperation and initiatives such as the upcoming World Peace Forum in the country of Georgia. In order for peace to happen, we have to have global, honest and fair elections to elect leaders that are not compromised. But getting honest leaders elected is very challenging.

"I would love to participate in the upcoming Georgia World Peace Forum, along with other government political leaders, to discuss America's role in global peace and what we can do to solve these problems. I can't wait to meet everyone, as Georgia is geopolitically and strategically located next to Armenia, Turkey, and Russia. Let's work together to make the world strong, stable, and peaceful, with the best quality of life possible for all."

This is exactly what the World Forum of Peace in Georgia, headed by the Nobel Peace Prize Georgian nominee Beso Shengelia, is striving for; working round the clock to make the Forum happen, and to make it a success so that the rest of the world can hear that Georgia is one of the most outspoken nations of the world in favor of universal peace on our planet.

TI Georgia: In 2023, Georgia's Parliament Became a Closed Institution

BY TEAM GT

In 2023, Georgia's Parliament became a closed institution. It transformed into an even more inaccessible and non-transparent institution for representatives of civil society and critical media - reads the report published by Transparency International Georgia.

"The denial of access to enter the Parliament and attend committee sessions was made without providing specific justification, citing only the general security regulations of the Parliament. The Parliament has ceased the release of public information that could potentially be used as grounds for criticism against MPs," it continues.

"In response to our request for public information, the Parliament did not provide us with the information it has routinely provided for the last 10 years: the count of speeches delivered by MPs and details on disciplinary actions taken against them, complete information on the activities of the committees."

KEY FINDINGS

Granting the status of candidacy of the European Union to Georgia marked a pivotal event for the country in 2023. The role of the Parliament is crucial on the path of European integration.

In February 2023, members of the parliamentary majority from Georgian Dream's offshoot "People's Power" introduced two draft laws to the Parliament: "On the transparency of foreign influ-

ence" which was approved by the Parliament in the first reading. The discussion of the draft laws sparked considerable tension in society. The protests persisted from March 2 to March 8. After the large-scale protest the ruling party decided to withdraw the bills. The people's resistance and their commitment to a European path played a crucial role in the country achieving candidate status for EU membership.

Further improvement of the implementation of parliamentary oversight notably of the security services is one of the steps defined by the European Commission as a condition for granting the status of a candidate country to Georgia.

Some of the nine conditions defined for Georgia continue the 12 recommendations issued by the European Commission in June 2022, while some are completely new. Georgia fully implemented three out of twelve conditions.

STATISTICAL DATA

12 ministerial hours and 6 interpellations were held in 2023;

Accountable persons were summoned to the committee sittings 6 times (in 5 cases the initiator was the opposition, in 1 case the committee). The accountable person attended the session 5 times;

The deliberation period extensions were utilized in a total of 111 times for 73 legislative packages (245 bills)

The number of parliamentary questions decreased, 47 MPs sent a total of 2,997 questions to ministers and accountable persons, of which 77 were from the majority MPs, and 2,920 were from the opposi-



tion.[1] Opposition MP Tinatin Bokuchava sent the most questions (582 questions).

3 requests for the establishment of a temporary investigative commission were lodged in the parliament, all of which were initiated by the opposition. However, in none of these instances was the investigative commission formed.

THE ACTIVITY OF MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENT

A total of 1,836,033.17 GEL was allocated for overseas business trips of the 98 members of Parliament.

The highest number of bills (105 bills) from the majority was initiated by Irma

Zavrashvili, and from the opposition by Aleksandre Rakviashvili (74 bills);

Cezar Chocheli from the opposition missed plenary sessions the most times (23 absences) and from the majority Eliso Bolkvadze (13 absences)

Giorgi Godabrelidze from the opposition missed plenary sessions the most times without valid reasons (16 absences) and from the majority Mariam Lashkhi (10 absences)

[1] In 2022, 52 members of the Parliament posed 5093 questions.

IMPORTANT LEGISLATIVE AMENDMENTS

Among the laws regarded as progressive are the following: new legislation regarding personal data protection and an amendment to the anti-corruption law, which mandates prosecutors to disclose asset declarations.

The following legislative changes are negatively evaluated: an initiative for a preliminary prohibition on temporary constructions during gatherings and demonstrations, modifications to broadcasting regulations concerning the management of hate speech, and amendments to accountability and oversight provisions in the Rules of Procedure", reads the statement.

Chatham House's Samantha De Bendern on the French and UK Elections

Continued from page 1

WITH "LABOUR" WINNING A RECORD NUMBER OF SEATS IN THE UK'S PARLIAMENT, JUST HOW DEEP WAS THE HOLE THAT THE TORIES (CONSERVATIVES) HAD BEEN DIGGING THEMSELVES INTO OVER THE YEARS?

The first thing we really have to bear in mind is that, yes, this was a Labour victory, but we also have Nigel Farage's Reform Party that got just over 13% of the votes. Because of the way the British electoral system works, it only really represents very few voters, and the proportional system is such that they have a disproportionate amount of seats. But yes, the Tories dug a terrible hole for themselves, largely because Brexit has been a disaster for the United Kingdom.

Brexit promised many things: First of all, the whole ethos behind the Brexit vote was to curb immigration from European countries. The Leave campaign was a very clever campaign, using manipulation, using very up-to-date technology to penetrate social media. There was also, again, ample evidence of Russian financing behind the Brexit campaign, and it was very brilliantly done. One of the architects of that campaign, Dominic Cummings, who ended up being advisor to Boris Johnson, said: "We used emotions like snake oil; they [Stay] used facts and figures." The reality is that nobody cares about the facts and figures; they only want emotion. The people didn't have a clue what they really wanted; they just wanted to get rid of immigration and get rid of the Brussels bureaucracy, not realizing that you can't get rid of the Brussels bureaucracy, because even if you're outside the European Union, if you want to trade with the European Union, you have to deal with it.

The Tory government was unable to curb immigration. Today, illegal immigration is at an all-time high in the UK, worse than ever before. And the British can no longer send illegal immigrants back to Europe because they've left the European Union and the Dublin Agreement, which allowed them to send migrants back, so that's why they came up with this crazy scheme to send them to Rwanda.

The bureaucracy that they promised to slash got worse overnight, particularly for small companies. So none of the promises they made were able to be fulfilled. Then they were hit with the pandemic, which undoubtedly played its own role. Then there were disasters related to the way the pandemic was managed, corruption in protective physical equipment procurement, the scandals surrounding Boris Johnson and the Partygate, so it was just disaster after disaster, and they began to be hated in the country.

HOW BIG A JOB DOES KEIR STARMER HAVE WHEN IT COMES TO "MAKING BRITAIN SERIOUS AGAIN"? WHERE DOES ONE BEGIN WITH THAT?

He's appointed a very sensible cabinet. He's now going to focus on having good relations with the European Union and, of course, the United States. And I think he will be more driven by pragmatism than ideology. But it's a big job, because the whole world is a mess right now.

THAT PRAGMATISM RATHER THAN IDEALISM MANTRA, WHAT DOES THAT TRANSLATE INTO WHEN IT COMES TO THE WAR IN UKRAINE? WILL WE SEE ANY SIGNIFICANT SHIFTS?

From the UK point of view, I don't think we'll see any dramatic shifts. One thing that is a striking feature of the United Kingdom is that the whole political establishment, with the exception of a few fringe actors like Nigel Farage, has exactly the same view on what needs to

be done with Ukraine, and that is to support Ukraine in its fight against Russia. They understand that European security is UK security. This is a very different situation compared to France; in the UK, the war in Ukraine was not really an issue of debate or an issue of contention.

Keir Starmer was very clear about wanting to support Ukraine. Our new defense minister is already in Ukraine, and he has only been in office a few days! So, in terms of where Ukraine is concerned, the UK election is a non-event: The support will continue at the rate it is, maybe even potentially increasing if the budget allows.

NOW ON TO THE FRENCH ELECTIONS. HOW DID MACRON'S GAMBLE IN CALLING SNAP ELECTIONS WORK WHEN IT CAME TO NOT GIVING NATIONAL RALLY A VICTORY?

First of all, I think it's important to understand what Macron's goals may have been, because it is a big mystery to many people. He could have had two potential goals. I don't think he envisaged what actually happened. I think one option he had in mind was his party coming out reinforced and allowing him to govern without having to constantly fight the parliament, and the other was that National Rally would win, make a mess of things, be shown to be completely incompetent, and then we would be able to get rid of the shadow that has been hanging over French politics since 2002, the shadow of the far right government.

But what happened is something that nobody was expecting: As soon as he announced the elections, the Left came together. This was very unexpected, because the Left is a very divided coalition, particularly on foreign policy issues. You have Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who thinks Hamas are wonderful, who probably thinks Putin is wonderful as well. He's a former Trotskyist. And on the same spectrum, you have Rafael Glucksmann, a former advisor to Saakashvili, who is absolutely crystal clear as to where the threat to Europe lies, and that is Putin. He's also absolutely crystal clear that supporting Ukraine is a number one priority and, of course, he's more of a left social democrat than the crazy left.

It seemed unbelievable that these alliances would come together. But they did, coming together as a left force united by two things: Their dislike of Macron and their absolute hatred of National Rally. So in the first round, where National Rally came in first, that's when the big questions began to be asked in French society: What do we do if there's a runoff in my constituency between National Rally and whoever else, particularly Unsubmissive France? And the new National Front, were very clear the day after the first round, they said, "we will withdraw our candidates where we believe that the Macron candidate has a better chance of winning." They were absolutely unambiguous in this. And the French population saw this as a sign that they are genuine in their belief that National Rally was a threat to democracy.

The Macron party, in the aftermath of the first round, were a little bit more on

the fence. They said, "we will withdraw our candidates if we feel that the remaining candidates are not a threat to democracy." In the end, what happened is that the Macron party also withdrew, even if they felt that a far-left candidate had a better chance of winning the election.

THIS LEFT COALITION THAT WAS SO UNLIKELY TO COME TOGETHER, HOW LIKELY ARE THEY TO REMAIN TOGETHER?

That's the question on everyone's lips. With the threat of National Rally being diminished, all the in-fighting between the left and the Macron party can start again. And one of the things that the left coalition often said amongst themselves was that, "okay, we hate each other, but we'll fight after the election." So now we're going into completely unknown territory. France has a big hangover; a hangover in the sense that many people were celebrating the election results, but also it's like, "okay, what are we going to do now?"

WHAT WILL THEY DO IN REGARDS TO THE FOREIGN POLICY, ESPECIALLY WITH MÉLENCHON BEING THE GUY HE IS?

Mélenchon's party does not even have a majority in the left coalition. They are the party with the most votes, but if you then look at the breakdown of the other parties in the left coalition, he does not have the majority. And while the president does have the lead on foreign and on defense policy, the prime minister and the government will hold the purse strings; they're the ones who will control military spending. With that in mind, one can imagine that military spending for Ukraine could be one of the bargaining chips that will be used by the government to say, "okay, give me the money for Ukraine, and I will do something about retirement or do something about the minimum wage or the environment or something."

COULD IT BE USED THE OTHER WAY ROUND? MAKING CONCESSIONS AT THE EXPENSE OF UKRAINE SUPPORT?

It could go either way. But, as I said, one of the strongest pro-Ukraine voices in France today is in the Socialist Party. Inside the Left Party there are some extremely strong pre-Ukrainian voices, which will put pressure on the other people in the left. So, it's not an ideal situation, and things were better before, but it's not the disaster it could have been.

BACK TO MACRON'S GAMBLE - HOW BATTERED IS HE EMERGING OUT OF THIS SCUFFLE? AND WHAT DOES IT DO, AMONG OTHER THINGS, TO HIS DREAMS OF BEING THE LEADER OF "UNITED EUROPE"?

I think it's damaged him a lot, because he is much weaker now at home. He's gone through this very humiliating process, both European elections and the two rounds of the parliamentary elections. He's been very absent. The fact



Samantha De Bendern

that the pro-Macron party had to campaign without using Macron because he's so unpopular, shows how disliked he is. And he's definitely lost his authority on the international stage.

One thing about Macron is that he's very bad at building alliances. He's bad at building alliances at home with his political peers, even within his own party. He's bad at building international alliances. He says things without consulting his partners. So when he said, "I don't exclude sending troops to Ukraine," personally, I thought it was a great thing to say. A lot of France's partners thought it was a great thing to say. But you don't say things like that without consulting anyone, without warning at least your partners. And he does the same thing internally. He announced the snap elections without even properly informing his prime minister, and the prime minister had to do all the hard work. He's not only a maverick, he's a bit of a despot. You know, I like his policies and I'm a strong Macron supporter, but I think he'd like to just be able to be a mini dictator, a benign, friendly, well-intentioned dictator.

NOT TO DELVE INTO ARMCHAIR PSYCHOLOGY, BUT WOULD THAT EXPLAIN HIS ATTEMPTS TO STRIKE SOME SORT OF RELATIONSHIP WITH PUTIN?

He wants to be the new head of Europe and the new architect of European security, and this was evident well before the war in Ukraine, but is even more so now. He saw himself as the one who was going to be the bridge between Russia and the Western world, and this is a very, very French thing, this sort of very romantic notion of Russia, things like because Tolstoy wrote parts of 'War and Peace' in France, that means Russia is France, and they seem to forget that we had Russian troops here after the Napoleonic Wars. And there's this sort of obsession with Russia in France which also played a part in Macron's refusal to see the truth of who Putin is.

WHAT DO YOU THINK THE STRAW WAS THAT BROKE THE CAMEL'S BACK? WHEN DID HE SEE THE LIGHT?

I think it was a series of things. First of all, Putin saying one thing to him on the phone and then doing something else. And then their uncovering up all the evidence of the war crimes, Bucha, Mariupol and so on. And so, slowly, Macron began to realize that Putin was lying to him and that Russia was lying about what it was doing in Ukraine. And not to award too much importance to the role that my

own TV station played, but I work for a French television channel called La Chaîne Air 4, and we had 24-7 coverage of the war in Ukraine for two and a half years. We stopped in June this year when the election period started. I was on television four or five times a week doing two- to three-hour shows non-stop on the wall, and our show became one of the most popular TV shows in France. What we were told is that the president and the cabinet watched us, because we were showing footage from all the various telegram channels, a lot of footage from Radio Free Europe, going into a lot of detail as to what's been happening. And they also realized that the French public was interested; it resonated with them.

LET'S TALK ABOUT HIS CHIEF RIVAL DOMESTICALLY - MARINE LE PEN WHO, AT FIRST GLANCE, SEEMS TO BE THE BIG LOSER IN THIS SITUATION. IS THAT SO?

I don't think we can call this a defeat for National Rally: They have more than doubled their MPs, and have 143 members of parliament. That is enormous. This whole month of hysteria in France was because of them. They definitely didn't get everything they wanted, but the fact that between 10 and 11 million French people voted for National Rally means something.

National Rally has its roots in Vichy's France, and one of the founders is Jean-Marie Le Pen, and the second founder was a former French SS. These are real Nazis. And much more importantly, for those who read and listen to Radio Free Europe, are the links with Moscow. There's the well-documented 9 million euro loan from the Russian-Czech Bank in 2014, after the annexation of Crimea. Then you have the fact that for the five-year anniversary of the annexation of Crimea, certain members of National Rally went to Crimea to celebrate with Putin. You have the fact that some of the people who were on the ballot sheet observed Putin's re-election in 2018. People, staffers and members from National Rally, were in DNR and LNR during the referendum. This is a party that has very, very tight links with Moscow.

HOW MUCH DO YOU THINK LE PEN'S PRO-RUSSIAN RHETORIC WAS ACTUALLY A FACTOR IN THE ELECTIONS?

I think it damaged her. But the very thing that people are saying- that her getting third place instead of first place is a defeat, is already a testament to her success, because that would have been unthinkable a couple of years ago.



Labour Leader Sir Keir Starmer. Photo by Matthew Horwood/Getty Images

GIP Hosted its 9th Annual Democracy Conference #GEODEM2024

SOURCE: GIP

On June 25, the Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP) held the 9th Annual Democracy Conference, 'Georgia's Slide to Authoritarianism: How to Withstand Antidemocratic Pressure.'

#GEODEM2024, organized with the support of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Georgia and the Embassy of Switzerland in Georgia, included two panels:

- Panel I: Conversation with Parties: Concerns and Perspectives After Turmoil

- Panel II: The Future of Georgian Democracy and the Role of the International Community

Conference discussions were based on a compendium of policy briefs, published and presented to the #GEODEM2024 audience.

Prof. Kornely Kakachia, Director of the Georgian Institute of Politics, and H.E. Meline Arakelian, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Georgia, opened the conference with their opening remarks. In his speech, Prof. Kakachia focused on the importance of political parties as well as international society in the turbulent times which challenge Georgia's young democracy. As Ambassador Meline Arakelian pointed out, her country has long been engaged in developing Georgia's democracy, along the strengthened EU focus on Georgia and its European aspirations, and now in challenging times, the Netherlands stay committed to contribute to advancing democracy in Georgia.

PANEL I

The moderator Nino Gelashvili, Senior Editor of the Radio Liberty / Free Europe Georgian office, opened the first inter-

party discussion under the title 'Conversation with Parties: Concerns and Perspectives After Turmoil.' Dr. Nino Japaridze, Senior Advisor at Edison Research reflected on Georgian voters' expectations from the political parties. According to her, voters expect unity from the parties considering the current environment and context. Political parties should not navigate within their comfort zone, and they should rather try to understand the demands from the society throughout Georgia. While 30% of society might support the Georgian Dream (GD) ruling party nowadays, it does not necessarily mean that the remaining 70% will support the opposition. According to Dr. Japaridze, this was the miscalculation of the opposition during the 2020 parliamentary elections, and they should avoid making a similar mistake this year.

After contextualizing voter expectations, members of five Georgian political parties shared their insights regarding the following questions: How do Georgian political parties see the pre-election environment and the perspective of multi-party democracy in preparation for the 2024 elections? How will political parties answer to the public demands and expectations in the current context? What major factors may hinder the democratic process before and during the elections? And what are the key challenges that Georgian political parties face in the context of the ongoing political crisis?

All politicians speaking at the panel emphasized the importance of cooperation in the context of the upcoming parliamentary elections, especially considering the increasing tensions and current political crisis. They also underlined that it will be crucial to ensure that the votes will not be lost, regardless of the configurations that the parties will agree on before the elections.

Irakli Kupradze, General Secretary of Lelo for Georgia, presented his party's

vision, according to which they are seeking to identify possible configurations for the upcoming elections, that attract rather than lose the votes of the opposition electorate. He also highlighted the need for creating common strategies against disinformation, especially considering the tense political environment created by the GD, which is trying to hijack the political process in Georgia.

Boris Chele Kurua from the Girchi More Freedom underlined that increased violence and tensions in the last few months point towards the fact that the upcoming elections are especially important for the ruling party. In that context, it will be of crucial importance for political parties to offer their electorate a renewed political system.

Giorgi Noniashvili, a member of the European Georgia party, highlighted his party's strong position that any possible configuration should be based on more fundamental grounds so that parties could cooperate even after the elections. According to him, it is important to make sure that the opposition voters also have a choice and that the pre-election campaign is based on policy issues.

Teimuraz Papaskiri representing Akhali party shared his take on what he called the "unique political environment" amid the 2024 elections in Georgia. Papaskiri underlined that Akhali party is actively consulting with the other political subjects, since losing any number of votes might be fatal in the upcoming elections. Therefore, he added, if any political party sees that they cannot overcome the 5% barrier, they should be modest enough to consider merging the party lists in order to save as many votes as possible.

Lastly, Dimitri Shashkini from the United National Movement highlighted the importance of the geopolitical changes taking place around Georgia, and the challenge of illiberal powers gaining dominance over the region. He noted that the geopolitical context makes the upcoming elections even more important.



The panel was summed up with a Q&A session, where members of the audience raised important issues with the political party members, such as the impact of poor social conditions of society in Georgia on the election process, Georgian political parties' cooperation with the European party groups, and Russia's hand in domestic political competition.

PANEL II

The second-panel discussion was dedicated to the future of Georgia's democracy and the role of the international community. Moderator Rayhan Demytrie, BBC correspondent, opened the discussion with ambassadors of four European countries to Georgia and Prof. Julie A. George, Associate Professor of Political Science, City University of New York and Adjunct Associate Professor at SIPA, Columbia University. Discussion touched upon the strategies for international community to help Georgia to return to the path of democracy, support civil society in this challenging context, and contribute to ensuring fair and democratic elections in Georgia.

Ambassador of Denmark to Georgia, H. E. Anne Toft Sørensen, stated that all the European countries are committed to supporting the civil society organizations in Georgia in the given difficult contexts, shaped by the newly adopted law on transparency of foreign influence. "We are not going anywhere", noted Ambassador Sørensen, adding that it is hard to see that the Georgian government considers the financial aid coming from the European countries to different social, agrarian programs as an "influence."

E. Riina Kaljurand, Ambassador of the

Republic of Estonia, reminded participants that "Georgia made a choice to democratize, and that is why Estonia has been supporting this country." Estonia does not need convincing why Georgia matters - "it always mattered. We need to think how to keep and improve relations in the crises" - the Ambassador noted.

H.E. Andrius Kalindra, Ambassador of the Republic of Lithuania to Georgia, admitted that "the reputation of Georgia was damaged after the [adoption of the law against the foreign influence]", which makes further progress more challenging. He hoped politicians would talk about political culture and transfer power in a peaceful way; encourage more women in politics; and focus on the future, rather than the past.

According to H.E. Bergljot Hovland, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Norway to Georgia, even though Norway is not an EU member, the country is still in line with the common European approach towards supporting democracy in Georgia, and invests in order to build strong democratic institutions in the country.

The key message from the panel was that it is up to Georgians to choose democracy; it cannot be done by the West. Once Tbilisi chooses democracy, the EU is there to show its support. Prof. Julie George commented on the issue of the "Global War Party," that it should not be understood as propaganda or disinformation, but as a tool used for spreading fear in Georgian society.

GEODEM 2024 was organized with the support of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Georgia and the Embassy of Switzerland in Georgia.

BUSINESS

A Decade of the Lari Sign: The Symbol that Embodies Georgian Identity, Pride, and Heritage



Photo from the website of National Bank of Georgia

BY IVAN NECHAEV

The symbol "ლ" for the Georgian national currency, the lari (ლარი), celebrated its 10th anniversary on July 7, 2024. Adopted through a competitive process and approved by the National Bank of Georgia's Board of Directors in 2014, the lari sign (ლ) not only represents the nation's financial identity, but also embodies a deeper narrative about Georgia's aspirations and heritage.

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The design of the lari symbol is rooted in Georgian script, specifically derived from the letter "ლ (lasi)." This choice highlights a sense of national pride and continuity, bridging the past with contemporary economic realities. The symbol's resemblance to the Latin letter "L," crossed by two vertical strokes, adheres to international typographic standards

for currency symbols, situating Georgia within the global economic framework while maintaining its unique cultural identity.

The inclusion of the lari symbol in the Unicode standard (U+20BE) further embeds Georgian culture into the digital world, allowing for seamless integration in international transactions and communications. This digital presence is crucial for a nation seeking to bolster its economic footprint on the global stage.

SOCIO-POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

The introduction and adoption of the lari symbol were not merely technical decisions but were deeply intertwined with Georgia's socio-political context. Post-Soviet Georgia has undergone significant transformations, striving to assert its sovereignty and economic independence. The creation of a distinct currency symbol was a step toward strengthening national identity and asserting economic autonomy.

The competitive process that led to the symbol's adoption reflected demo-

cratic values, engaging citizens in a collective decision-making process. This inclusivity fostered a sense of ownership and pride among Georgians, reinforcing national solidarity.

ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Economically, the lari symbol's introduction coincided with Georgia's efforts to stabilize and modernize its financial system. Over the past decade, the lari has faced various challenges, including inflation and fluctuating exchange rates. The symbol "ლ" has become a marker of these economic struggles and triumphs, representing resilience in the face of adversity.

The symbol's adoption also aimed to enhance the lari's recognition and credibility in international markets. By aligning itself as a reliable economic partner, encouraging foreign investment and trade.

HISTORICAL EMERGENCE OF CURRENCY SYMBOLS

Currency symbols, such as the dollar sign (\$), euro (€), yen (¥), and pound (£), are more than mere notations for financial transactions: They encapsulate the economic, cultural, and historical essence of nations, embedding layers of meaning and significance.

Dollar (\$): The dollar sign is arguably the most recognized currency symbol worldwide. Its origins are somewhat debated, but a popular theory posits that it evolved from the Spanish peso. The peso was denoted as "PS," which over time was simplified to the "\$" symbol. This transformation from the "PS" to "\$" symbol in the late 1700s was driven by practical necessity for a simple and standardized way to represent the dollar in financial transactions and bookkeeping.

Euro (€): The euro symbol, introduced

in the 1990s, was designed by the European Commission as part of the launch of the euro currency. The design process involved a public competition and internal selection, symbolizing the collective input and democratic values of the European Union. The euro symbol was created to unify the various national currencies of the EU, representing economic integration and solidarity among member states.

Yen (¥): The yen symbol is derived from the Chinese character for yuan (元), which means "round" and is related to the shape of coins. Adopted in the late 19th century during the Meiji Restoration, the yen symbol reflects Japan's efforts to modernize its economy and adopt Western-style financial systems. This transition marked Japan's entry into the global economic arena.

Pound (£): The pound symbol traces its origins to the Latin word "libra," meaning scales or balance, reflecting its roots in weight measures. Historically, the pound symbol was used to denote a pound of sterling silver, reinforcing its value and stability. The pound symbol's usage since the late 1600s underscores Britain's long-standing economic traditions and its historical importance in global trade.

WHY DO CURRENCY SYMBOLS MATTER?

National Identity and Pride: Currency symbols often embody national pride and identity. The dollar sign represents the economic power and global influence of the United States, symbolizing capitalism and financial stability. The euro symbol signifies unity and cooperation among European nations, serving as a cultural emblem of European identity and integration. The yen symbol reflects Japan's historical and cultural connection to China, while representing

Japan's economic strength and modernity. The pound symbol is steeped in British history, symbolizing the UK's economic heritage and stability.

Economic Stability and Trust: Currency symbols also convey economic stability and trust. The global use of the dollar sign in international trade underscores the trust and reliability associated with the US economy. The euro symbol embodies the stability and cohesion of the Eurozone, fostering economic trust among member states. The yen symbol signifies Japan's disciplined economic policies and its role as a major player in global finance. The pound symbol denotes the UK's stable financial system and its historical significance in global commerce.

Cultural Integration and Modernization: The evolution of currency symbols often reflects cultural integration and modernization. The dollar sign's transition from the Spanish peso illustrates the blending of cultures and adaptation of symbols in new contexts. The euro symbol represents the modern unification of diverse European cultures into a single economic entity. The yen symbol captures Japan's integration of traditional Chinese influences with Western economic practices during its modernization. The pound symbol's Latin roots connect modern Britain with its historical legacy, showcasing cultural continuity.

The 10th anniversary of the Georgian lari symbol is a testament to the nation's journey over the past decade. It reflects a blend of cultural heritage and modern aspirations, encapsulating Georgia's efforts to carve out a distinct identity in a globalized world. The "ლ" symbol is more than a mere typographic sign; it is a representation of national pride, economic resilience, and the collective will of the Georgian people to forge a prosperous future.

Collective Management Organizations and Protection of Intellectual Property Rights in Georgia

The legislation of Georgia provides safeguards for intellectual property both on an individual and collective basis. Individual protection entails acquiring authorization for the lawful use of a work by signing individual contract with the rights holder, while collective protection implies concluding a contract with an organization that manages property rights on a collective basis.

In addition to the protection of intellectual property on individual basis, the laws of Georgia envisage framework collective management of the property right. The Law of Georgia on Copyright and Related Rights (the Copyright Law) proposes the establishment of a Collective Management Organization (the CMO) – a non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity, which is granted accreditation by the National Intellectual Property Center of Georgia Sakpatenti (Sakpatenti).

LATEST AMENDMENTS TO THE COPYRIGHT LAW AND SELECTION OF THE NEW CMO

The most significant changes regarding the CMO were introduced to the Copyright Law on 3 July 2023. One of the most notable amendments was a direct clarification that specially created accreditation commission shall accredit the sole and exclusive CMO. The amendments determined the criteria for accreditation of the CMO, a specific system for royalty collection and distribution, criteria ensuring transparency in the organization's activities, and mechanisms for oversight. The adoption of these amendments introduced detailed regulations and



Image source: abounaja

conditions for establishment of the CMO. Additionally, the guidelines for its registration and accreditation, along with the functions and obligations of the authorized body responsible for granting accreditation were stipulated.

To accredit such CMO, on 26 September 2023 Sakpatenti announced a competition for granting accreditation to a CMO of economic rights and selected the new CMO – Intellectual Property Owners Association (IPOA). Effective from 1 January 2024, IPOA is the sole and exclusive CMO on the Georgian market, which manages the following property rights: (i) the right to public performance; (ii) the right to public display; (iii) the right to public transmission; (iv) copyright to audiovisual works; (v) the right of the author of fine art works; (vi) the right to use a phonogram issued for profit; (vii) the right to repro-

duce; (viii) the right to synchronize; (ix) the right to adapt the work.

RIGHTS AND DUTIES OF THE CMO

The CMO operates within the framework of rights and obligations prescribed by the Copyright Law. Specifically, the CMO possesses powers which include the following: (i) conducting negotiations on use of the work and amount of royalty; (ii) issuing licenses pertaining to the use of the work; (iii) collecting and distributing royalties to right holders; (iv) representing the interests of the right holders in judicial and administrative proceedings.

In exchange for the transfer of rights, the CMO manages intellectual property in compliance with the obligations set forth in the Copyright Law. Several pivotal obligations of the CMO include: (i) safeguarding the confidentiality of

information provided to the CMO; (ii) operating within the interests of the relevant right holder; (iii) complying with specific rules when collecting and distributing royalties, such as: ensuring regular and highly accurate distribution of royalties, maintaining separate accounts, and distributing royalties within a designated (9-month) timeframe; (iv) providing the right holder and user with comprehensive information about their rights.

The above legal framework establishes a system wherein the CMO collectively manages the property rights on behalf of the right holders in accordance with their interests and rights and duties of the CMO as mandated by the law.

AGREEMENTS BETWEEN THE USERS AND THE NEW CMO

Granting accreditation to one exclusive

CMO resulted in revocation of authority for previously established CMOs. Consequently, contracts previously executed between users and former CMOs are no longer valid. To ensure the lawful use of objects protected by the Copyright Law, it is necessary to obtain appropriate permission and enter into new contracts with the newly appointed authorized CMO – IPOA or the entity designated by IPOA. IPOA is authorized to issue sub-licenses and designate authorized entities to grant specific set of rights.

It is important to highlight that when users enter into a contract with the CMO / a sub-licensee of the CMO, the peculiarities that resulted from the operation of one exclusive CMO in the market shall be considered. In this context, issues concerning licensing and termination of a contract hold particular significance. The Copyright Law stipulates the option for the CMO to decline license issuance only in the presence of substantial grounds, necessitating a stringent standard of justification, which shall also apply to termination of the contract. It would be advisable to also address such matters directly in the contract.

In conclusion, Collective Management Organization plays a significant role in protecting intellectual property rights. Through the establishment of a collective management system for property rights, legislation facilitates a simplified mechanism for both right holders and users to protect their intellectual property rights and acquire necessary permits. The recent legislative changes have further enhanced this notion, potentially fostering greater development within the field of intellectual property in the future.

SOCIETY



BLOG BY TONY HANMER

Hammer Guest House cafe already officially had its first use, last summer when we fed about 15 guests in it. At that time, however, the place still had no water running in or out. Now it does, and we have decided to use it for most of our guests' meals this summer.

We made this decision when the bookings began piling up for a date a short while ago, and we thought we were getting 31 guests for a night! This is beyond our bed capacity, but my wife, never one to turn anyone away, made arrangements for the overflow people to stay with a neighbor, splitting the price with her.

In the end, we had a large group from

Bulgaria; a smaller one from the Czech Republic (a 5-person discrepancy from the booking, later rectified in the booking); a trio from Israel; and a couple from the UK. Everyone was trekking, spending just the one night, with supper and the morrow's breakfast for all, with a majority also wanting packed lunches, our standard overnight deal.

Complicating things was the departure the morning of the same day of 9 other guests, necessitating quick laundry and drying in the warm sun. Plus, we were a helper short, so it was just my wife and me, with a local teenage girl drafted for a few hours as well.

At least 1 of the 9 previous guests was our special handyman friend from the USA, who has come on numerous occasions to conduct repairs or do other work: He is lately famous for orchestrating the setting up of the village's new

Our Next Phase

crown, the playground set, about which I wrote recently. This time we asked him to ensure that the cafe's water supply, in and out, was fully functional. This would give us on-site hot water for washing up, and also two working lavatories. He put everything right.

For the first time ever, we were also going with a buffet-style service instead of the usual set of dishes of food. We had the space, the tables and chairs, and the numbers of guests to make this the best choice. But it did mean that all that furniture, and all the food, crockery and cutlery, had to be taken to the cafe and set up there. And yet it was the easiest choice. The machinery ground into motion.

Lali still did almost all the food prepa-

ration, hot and cold, as it's her strong point. I took care of as much of the laundry, refitting of bedrooms, and cafe setup as I could. At least we had several days for most to this; none of it was really last-minute. A few hiccups, such as not having a huge amount of beer, ended up not being significant (we don't serve any alcohol to local people, as they have demonstrated that this is a mistake).

People started arriving mid-afternoon, but we were ready for them, and no one was expecting more than a snack from the shop until supper. The several vegetarians were taken care of (we always ask about special dietary needs in advance). Despite plenty of stress due to the workload, it went off mostly

smoothly enough. Our three Israelis were the only ones farmed out to our neighbor for the night; they arrived late enough to necessitate supping en route, coming by taxi straight from Tbilisi airport, and we only saw them the next morning.

Next morning was rinse, repeat. I've long been aware that most guests will choose tea over coffee at night but have coffee with breakfast. We now have two drip coffee machines and a French press, and two electric kettles to meet this volume of hot drink requirements fairly smoothly. Everything continued well, people satisfied, while we worked like mad to get it all done at speed and with a smile.

The only other thing was that I had a pressing Tbilisi date to leave for right after breakfast. With the booking calendar showing no other sizable groups for a few more days, Lali released me, as I had been able to help her through the worst of it. She could plod through cleanup and laundry, with plenty of food to serve for anyone showing up suddenly unannounced (quite common in the summer) and just a room or two to make ready for such. Phew, we can do this. And we will.

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



Embracing Challenges: A Journey to the Hertie School

BY KATIE RUTH DAVIES

Mariam Avakova, a dedicated young professional enthusiast from Tbilisi, Georgia, has secured a coveted spot at the prestigious Hertie School in Berlin, with a 50% scholarship for the Master of Public Policy (MPP) program. Like many a Georgian student seeking opportunities abroad, despite Mariam's skills, talent and passion for creating a positive societal impact, she faces financial hurdles, particularly in securing the funds required for the blocked account mandated by Germany. In this exclusive interview, she shares her journey, challenges, and aspirations, seeking support to fulfill her educational dreams and make a meaningful difference in the world.

MARIAM, CONGRATULATIONS ON SECURING A 50% SCHOLARSHIP AT THE HERTIE SCHOOL. CAN YOU TELL US MORE ABOUT YOUR JOURNEY AND WHAT LED YOU TO PURSUE A MASTER OF PUBLIC POLICY?

Thank you! My journey has been driven by a deep passion for public policy and a commitment to creating positive societal change. Growing up in Tbilisi, I witnessed firsthand the impact of effective policies on communities. This inspired me to pursue a career in public policy, and the Hertie School, with its focus on innovation and sustainability, seemed like the perfect fit.

My journey to the Hertie School has been a testament to perseverance, and now, securing adequate financial support of €14,000 remains crucial to realizing this ambition. As a self-made individual from Georgia, driven by a profound passion for societal impact, every milestone along my professional path has been hard-earned and deeply cherished.

This passion led me to pursue a Master of Public Policy (MPP) at the prestigious Hertie School in Berlin, which is renowned for cultivating global leaders and offering unparalleled career advancement opportunities. However, this dream-come-true journey has not been without challenges.

WHAT FIRST DREW YOU TO THE HERTIE SCHOOL?

In 2022, during the Wechange Forum in Berlin, I first encountered the Hertie School while walking towards the DAAD office. Its vibrant atmosphere immediately captivated me, and, on learning about their MPP program, I found their emphasis on critical thinking, leadership, and policy analysis perfectly aligned with my aspirations as a changemaker. The school's faculty, diverse community, and Berlin's dynamic environment promised an exceptional educational experience.

WHAT WAS YOUR REACTION TO RECEIVING THE ACCEPTANCE LETTER AND SCHOLARSHIP OFFER? WHAT CHALLENGES ARE YOU FACING IN SECURING THE REMAINING FUNDS FOR YOUR EDUCATION?

Receiving the acceptance letter with a 50% scholarship was a moment of triumph. However, the reality of funding my education soon set in. Despite the generous scholarship, the remaining tuition fees, living expenses, and additional costs pose significant financial challenges. I still need to cover the remaining expenses, including the mandatory blocked account required by Germany for international students. This account ensures that students have sufficient funds to support



Mariam Avakova

themselves during their stay, but it poses a considerable financial challenge for me. Despite my skills and talent, without sufficient financial support, it will be difficult to continue my education.

HOW HAVE YOU BEEN ADDRESSING THESE FINANCIAL CHALLENGES?

I've explored various avenues for additional scholarships and grants via the Hertie Funding Navigator and other platforms, which revealed constraints such as German language criteria, partner university affiliations, citizenship requirements, and deadlines, complicating the process. This necessitated finding alternative funding solutions, prompting me to initiate a crowdfunding campaign. While challenging, this endeavor underscored the invaluable support I received from both familiar faces and unexpected allies who recognized and backed my passion. I have been exploring various avenues for financial support. I've reached out to Hertie alumni via LinkedIn too, seeking guidance and potential funding opportunities. Alongside all this activity, which is not enough, I am actively seeking business sponsors who can support my education and help me achieve my goals.

WHAT DRIVES YOUR COMMITMENT TO PUBLIC POLICY?

My commitment to public policy stems from a deep-seated drive to address climate change, promote sustainability, and preserve natural resources. At Hertie School, my focus within the MPP program will center on Organization and Leadership, particularly emphasizing sustainability and the green economy. The thematic intersections of sustainability, innovation, and policy design inspire me to craft impactful solutions, contributing to a more sustainable and

prosperous future. I aim to work on projects that promote social equity, environmental sustainability, and economic development. My goal is to leverage my education to drive sustainable and innovative public policies that can address pressing societal issues. The Hertie School's curriculum and network is an excellent opportunity to provide me with the tools and connections needed to make a meaningful impact.

WHAT MESSAGE WOULD YOU LIKE TO GIVE TO POTENTIAL SPONSORS AND SUPPORTERS?

I am deeply passionate about public policy and committed to making a positive difference in society. With your support, I can overcome the financial barriers and complete my education at the Hertie School. Your investment in my education is not just an investment in me, but in the future of public policy and sustainable development. Together, we can create a brighter future.

CAN YOU SHARE MORE ABOUT YOUR PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND AND ACHIEVEMENTS?

My career has traversed diverse fields, advocating passionately for climate action, ocean conservation, and youth engagement. As an activist, I've initiated numerous projects and volunteered extensively. Early in my diplomatic journey, I proudly represented Georgia as both a Young European Ambassador and Black Sea Ambassador, as a Youth4Ocean Advocate, pioneering our nation's participation in European Maritime Day Events. My commitment to promoting ocean literacy and climate awareness among youth has been further amplified through my role as a country coordinator for COP COY initiatives, locally and internationally. Additionally, serving as a Mobile Journalist for Ocean missions has allowed me to

spotlight Georgian startups leading the charge in marine conservation and environmental protection.

Equipped with a robust international education from esteemed institutions such as the Swedish Institute (SAYP - Sustainable Public Management) and Malta University (Ocean Governance), along with a Master's in Natural Sciences, and having participated in several high-level EU conferences as a delegate or speaker, I am embarking on a transformative journey into public policy at Hertie School. This decision marks the enhancement of self-built skills and early career achievements, positioning me to drive profound global change.

HOW HAVE YOU BEEN MANAGING THE FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS, PARTICULARLY THE BLOCKED ACCOUNT NEEDED FOR A GERMAN VISA?

I haven't managed it yet, and I am in the process of conveying my needs to potential sponsors and supporters. While studying abroad has long been a personal aspiration and a significant milestone, I've encountered the stark reality that financial support is crucial to navigating challenges like the stringent German visa regulations. These regulations mandate a blocked account holding €12,000 for a needs-based scholarship, underscoring the necessity of substantial financial resources. For many, including myself, lacking that safety net of supportive relatives, this poses a formidable barrier. Thus, securing adequate financial support is pivotal in realizing my ambition.

WHAT STEPS HAVE YOU TAKEN TO SECURE THE REMAINING FUNDS?

Initiating a crowdfunding campaign on GoFundMe and co-managing "Better Place" with a former Erasmus group mate are steps towards this goal. Beyond funding my education, these efforts symbolize unlocking my potential to drive sustainable global change. My journey to Hertie School stands as a testament to resilience, innovation, and a shared commitment to shaping a brighter future, not just for Georgia but beyond.

YOU HAVE EVEN REACHED OUT TO ALUMNI. WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO DO SO, AND DID IT WORK OUT?

Honestly, no, it didn't. Only three Alumni responded and donated. But while reaching out to them, I got the idea of proposing the Alumni Foundation. I believe in the power of community and the positive impact that alumni can have on current students. The idea of the Alumni Foun-

ation stems from the concept of experienced professionals investing in the education of future leaders. It's about creating a supportive network where alumni can give back and help students overcome financial barriers, much like angel investors do in the business world.

HAVE YOU EXPLORED OTHER FINANCIAL OPTIONS LIKE SCHOLARSHIPS OR PROGRAMS?

Yes, I've explored several options, including Brain Capital, but I face restrictions due to my non-EU citizenship. Many scholarships and programs have specific eligibility criteria or expired deadlines, which has been quite challenging. Even in reaching out to foundations, decision-makers, and NGO heads such as KAS, de, DAAD, FNF, and others, securing support has been challenging. Many opportunities had expired deadlines, required German language proficiency, or were limited to specific demographics like U.S. citizens or EMPA applicants. Despite these obstacles, I remain determined to find a solution.

WHY DO YOU BELIEVE IT ESSENTIAL FOR YOU TO COMPLETE YOUR EDUCATION AT HERTIE SCHOOL?

In today's political climate, Georgia urgently requires leaders nurtured by institutions like Hertie School, capable of thriving in dynamic and diverse communities. This is why I am reaching out to businesses to secure adequate financial support, which is not merely about funding my education but also about unlocking my potential to drive sustainable change on a global scale.

THANK YOU, MARIAM, FOR SHARING YOUR INSPIRING STORY. WE WISH YOU ALL THE BEST IN YOUR JOURNEY AND HOPE YOU FIND THE SUPPORT YOU NEED.

Mariam's journey to the Hertie School reflects her resilience, dedication, and unwavering commitment to making a positive impact. By supporting her education, sponsors have the opportunity to invest in a future leader who is poised to drive significant change in public policy and sustainability on a global scale.

Support Mariam:

- GoFundMe: <https://gofund.me/8737bd19>
 - BetterPlace: <https://www.betterplace.me/unterstuetze-mariams-weg-an-die-hertie-school>
- Connect with Mariam:
- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/mariam-avakova/>



Hotel Gistola in Mestia – The Perfect Spot for an Unforgettable Mountain Vacation



Svaneti is a region of Georgia with great potential for tourism, an ideal place not only for people who want to relax with their families in fresh air and beautiful surroundings, but also for those who are interested in extreme sports and exciting adventures.

Located in Mestia, the premium class hotel 'Gistola' promises just that - interesting adventures and enjoyment for all.

On hot summer days, everyone seeks a calm, cool spot to spend their well-deserved vacation in; to get away from the heat and noise of the city and recharge their bodies and minds.

For this, Gistola, surrounded by amazingly beautiful mountains and views of Svaneti, offering all the comfort that guests may need, is an unmissable opportunity. Gistola is the only 5-star hotel in the region. The hotel management

invested hard work and numerous resources in achieving this category, while the results of their dedication are clearly visible for every visitor to see. The status of a 5-star made Gistola one of the most in-demand hotels in the region, especially in terms of gaining the interest of high-spending tourists.

The company notes that the demand for hotel services has increased by 20-25% this year, which is an important result for the hotel, which opened during the pandemic and had to overcome a number of obstacles to achieve today's success.

Gistola was opened in Mestia in 2021. The name was taken from the name of a glacier higher than even Ushba in Mestia, which is 4,860 meters above sea level.

The hotel is located 1.8 km from the Museum of History and Ethnography of Mestia and other attractions of Svaneti,

which also makes it a perfect stay for tourists. Further, to promote local employment, half of the hotel's employees are Mestia residents.

Imagine waking up to the breathtaking views of the Caucasus mountains, breathing deep of the fresh air, and starting your day with a delicious breakfast prepared by the hotel's professional cooks, where, from freshly baked pastries to local delicacies, every bite is a taste of paradise. The hotel's kitchen is famous for its delicious dishes, letting you feel the authentic spirit of Svaneti. This is the Gistola experience.

The hotel includes 45 DELUX and SUITE category rooms, a swimming pool, terrace, restaurant, lounge, bar, night entertainment club, conference space for 80 people - with the necessary equipment, and a children's entertainment space. You will never feel bored at

Gistola, as it offers entertainment day and night - from indulgent spa treatments to exquisite dining experiences; every day spent here feels like paradise.

You can also spend time with friends or family members in the Gistola lounge space. A sauna, recreation and children's entertainment spaces are ready to serve. In fact, in an act of generosity, the hotel management also allows local residents to make use of the children's entertainment zones.

If you are interested in sports and skiing, the hotel's Ski Depo allows you to store your ski equipment.

2023 was special for Gistola, seeing a year-round pool for 60 people built on the territory of the hotel, available not only for vacationers, but also for local residents. More than 600,000 dollars were invested in the project.

The hotel is meeting the 2024 summer season with a lot of exciting novelties and offers for its guests, from its new terrace on the second floor and the Olympic pool with mountain views, to its tanning studio. This is the first year

that Gistola guests, in parallel with other relaxing and entertaining activities, can also tan in peace, while enjoying mountain views of Svaneti.

Gistola's terrace is an excellent choice for those hot summer days - chillier days, too; indeed, guests can head there any time of year to try the kitchen team's delicious desserts. Along with all that comfort and coziness, guests can enjoy views of snow-covered mountains and the harsh, wild beauty of Svaneti. On the same floor there is a bar with a wide range of drinks.

All this makes Gistola the perfect spot for a holiday, one that guarantees a memorable, unforgettable vacation with family and friends of any age and taste.

Notably, hotel Gistola won the nomination of Best Conceptual Hotel 2023 at the Welcome to Georgia! National Tourism Awards. And it's no surprise - this is a place where traditions and history harmoniously combine with the innovations of the future; an attractive, unique and individual environment, distinguished by exceptional comfort!



CULTURE

Class and Classy - Fashion Week SS25 Round up with Georgian Designers in Focus

BY LILY FÜRSTENOW

Fashion fever added extra flair to Berlin's social calendar during the Berlin Fashion Week, July 1 - 4. Hardly is there any other place in the world that has a trendier party scene and fashion community thriving on diversity and inclusion than the German capital. Music, fashion and night-life go hand in hand, attracting young designers who aren't scared of trial and error. In the current world, torn apart by military conflicts and environmental catastrophies, radical renewal of fashion is a necessity. Berlin Fashion Week Spring/Summer 25 attempted to address the challenges that fashion faces today.

Once again, Berlin Fashion Week (BFW) was full of expert meetings, round-tables and gala dinners, with local and international guests, discussions with trade insiders and spectacular run-way shows presenting collections by an impressive variety of designers, brands and labels at different stages of evolvement and market success.

Special mention among this incessant kaleidoscope of events and locations, ranging from exclusive hotels and museums to metro stations, is deserved by PLATTE, a true fashion hotspot and a highlight of Berlin's genuine fashion spirit that has preserved its innovative sprinkle throughout the recent couple of years and has continuously shaped style trends in this melting pot of cultures and life-style trends. Situated in an edifice typical of the former GDR, in the city center near the famous Alexan-

der Platz, PLATTE has evolved into a staple of BFW. It's name, quite a derogatory reference to poor quality architecture for the masses common to East Berlin, has acquired new connotations, at least for fashion crowds that associate it with kind of a symbolic "plate" on which foods, drinks and fashion would be served to visitors hungry for the new.

As in previous years, this hub for non-traditional styles didn't disappoint current audiences, and presented a carefully selected variety of Berlin-based and international brands and labels specializing in LGBTQ+ community dress-up trends, gender fluid looks, flamboyant summer outfits, street- and sportswear in its NEXT GEN POP-UP Concept Store. Collections of MAJÈRE, WESTERKOWSKY, WARA.H, JUN MAYERS, BZRKNA, with their androgynous, bold and expressive looks, were as hot as ever, fit for club wear and self-expression. This setup was the official format of STUDIO2RETAIL as part of the Berlin Fashion Week supported by the Berlin Senate Department for Economics, Energy and Public Enterprises in cooperation with the Fashion Council Germany. With the slogan "YOU can be part of Berlin Fashion Week," STUDIO2RETAIL opened up fashion to people at large, making it accessible to everyone without tickets or special accreditation required to get in. Subverting the strictly hierarchical and exclusive fashion establishment in this way, PLATTE sets new standards in going about fashion industry's traditional routine.

At NEXT GEN POP-UP Store, visitors could not only try out the latest collections created by a daring new generation of designers, but relax or get free tooth

gems from KRISTALL.Pearl, and, most importantly, participate in or watch the workshops offered in situ. The legendary Puma brand set up Puma Style Lounge in PLATTE as part of the NEXT GEN Pop Up, presenting the new inspiring version of the Puma Speedcat sneaker. The invited designers offered Speedcat customization workshops. Fashion as an open lab for exploration and insight into avant-guard clothing and footwear production methods, environmentally conscious life styles, and up-cycled accessories-making, works as a more inclusion-oriented alternative to conventional presentation modes of haute-couture and pret-a-porter collections for the privileged few. The workshops on mending, re-cycling and DIY hosted by PLATTE are an integral part of this creative hub, forming the tastes and environmentally conscious approaches to fashion industry among its community.

Alongside Berlin Fashion Week, the city guests and locals this season got an alternative show program of designers presenting their newest collections at the About You-Fashion Week, which was also scheduled at the beginning of July. The abundance of celebrities, famous brands and well-known designers attending and participating in this counter event, which was organized in cooperation with the local Roncalli Circus, turned into an extra destination for fashion crowds, media and influencers, to the immense joy of all involved, because more style and fashion for Berlin can do this metropole only good.

The Georgian fashion industry, which is an integral part of the European fashion scene, also focuses on Slow Fashion,

less waste and more diversity. Georgian designers based in Tbilisi have it particularly hard due to the ongoing economic and political crisis in this former Soviet republic, yet there's much potential and promising talents coming from the region, among them less well known but inspiring Europe-wide successful labels and brands like RM ATU GELOVANI, Situationist - founded by designer Irakli Rusadze, VelTauri - producing hand-painted garments by designer Tata Veltauri, and KHAKO specializing in Teka accessories by Khato Kobeshavidze.

Luckily, Tbilisi Fashion Week has been generously supported by Mercedes Benz throughout the recent years promoting the burgeoning local scene and offering young Georgian designers access to international markets, more customers, as well as lavish opportunities to show brave new visions of fashions to come based on the local folklore costumes of the mountainous Caucasus region and inspired by healthy lifestyle and sports. One of the most talented female artists who turned into a designer and influenced contemporary Georgian styles is undoubtedly Tamuna Karumidze a former film-maker who later founded TAMRA label. Inspired by "When the Earth Seems to Be Light (2015), an award-winning documentary that she co-directed together with David Meskhi and Salome Matschaidze, Tamuna took to fashion design that she pursues to this day with much acclaim. In collaboration with artist and skater DRO (Sandro Popkhadze), born and based in Tbilisi, the Tamra Skateboards brand was born in 2017. Tamra Skateboards has become a keystone for the young generation's quest for identity. The universe where TAMRA



Fashion on display at PLATTE. Source: PLATTE

garments belong seems to lie in the deserted dry plains of some dystopia. Asian influences, at times bordering on exoticism, contribute to the mysterious appeal. Tamra is about interdisciplinary design, the relation between art, movies, music, skateboarding and fashion.

In spite of the success story of TAMRA, there are many queer designers in Georgia who don't enjoy the recognition they deserve. Due to frequent cases of intolerance and violence against the LGBTQ+ communities in the Caucasus, these designers tend to be more underground and low profile, or turn to pursuing their careers abroad. Fashion statements and self-expression through the clothes one wears are thus for the younger Georgian generation of special significance, defining who one identifies with and where one belongs. Clothes speak volumes about one's identity, background and social class. As we know from the history of fashion throughout the centuries, only aristocrats were allowed to wear luxurious outfits that used to cost a fortune, or which were exchanged for villages, with peasants replacing cash payments as purchase. It was strictly prohibited for lower classes and common folks to wear anything else but work outfits or tattered rags. Looking classy has always been a matter of class.

Resisting Oblivion: Magic Mountain Unveils the Hidden Lives of Georgia's Forgotten

BY IVAN NECHAEV

Magic Mountain, directed by Mariam Chachia and Nik Voigt, stands as a poignant testament to the power of documentary cinema in illuminating the lives of society's forgotten. This 73-minute film, a joint production between Georgia and Poland, transports viewers to Abastumani, a remote Georgian mansion where tuberculosis patients live in isolation. The film's special screening, organized by KineDok at the picturesque Fabrika Rooftop, provided a unique backdrop that echoed the film's themes of solitude and resilience. Additional screenings with English subtitles will be held at various locations around the city this weekend.

A JOURNEY INTO ISOLATION

The narrative of Magic Mountain is driven by Mariam, who is haunted by a recurring nightmare of being trapped in Abastumani. Her quest to confront this fear leads her to the actual mansion, unveiling a microcosm of human existence marked by illness and societal neglect. The mansion, a relic of the past, serves as both a physical and symbolic space, where the patients' isolation mirrors their social marginalization.

Chachia and Voigt's direction is meticulous in portraying Abastumani not just as a setting, but as a character in itself. The mansion's decaying infrastructure, overseen by Soviet-era doctors, speaks volumes about Georgia's historical and cultural landscape. This backdrop serves to highlight the tension between the preservation of cultural identity and the



Photo by the author

inexorable march of modernity, epitomized by the buying and demolishing of the building by a Georgian oligarch.

CINEMATIC REALISM AND MAGICAL RESISTANCE

The film's visual style is stark yet intimate, employing natural lighting to capture the rugged beauty of the mountainous landscape. This choice underscores the physical isolation of Abastumani, while also imbuing it with an ethereal quality. The directors' documentary roots are evident in their observational approach, allowing the audience to witness the unvarnished reality of the patients' lives.

A particularly striking aspect of Magic Mountain is its use of magical realism. The film suggests the presence of faded voices that accompany the oligarch's demolition of Abastumani. The element of the supernatural serves as a metaphor for the indomitable spirit of the marginalized community. This metaphor echoes

the themes of Thomas Mann's novel *The Magic Mountain*, where the isolated sanatorium becomes a microcosm for exploring broader existential and societal issues.

COMMUNITY AMIDST ADVERSITY

Despite the bleakness of their circumstances, the residents of Abastumani form a tight-knit community. The film deftly captures their daily routines—from the morning queues for medicine to the afternoon social interactions and the night-time struggles with alcohol and cigarettes. This depiction of communal life amidst adversity highlights the resilience and solidarity of the human spirit. It's a narrative that resonates deeply, offering a glimpse into how people find connection and support in the most challenging environments, especially in self-destruction.

DIRECTORIAL VISION AND



Photo by the author

AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

Chachia and Voigt's backgrounds in documentary filmmaking lend authenticity and depth to the narrative. Chachia's personal story of stigmatization and Voigt's experience as a documentary photographer enrich the film with cultural specificity and visual poignancy. Their collaborative vision results in a film that not only tells a compelling story, but also prompts reflection on broader themes of isolation, community, and resilience.

The screening at Fabrika Rooftop, with the directors in attendance, added a layer of engagement that enhanced the viewing experience. The picturesque setting, juxtaposed against the film's themes of isolation, provided a contemplative space for the audience. The post-screening question-and-answer session allowed viewers to gain deeper insights into the filmmaking process and the directors' motivations, fostering a greater appreciation of the film's intricacies.

Magic Mountain is more than a documentary; it is a cultural exploration of marginalized lives and the spaces they inhabit. Through its evocative cinematography and poignant storytelling, the film offers a window into a world where the past and present collide, and where the human spirit resists in the face of change. The special screening event at Fabrika Rooftop, with Chachia and Voigt's personal engagement, underscored the film's impact and the importance of communal viewing experiences in appreciating cinematic works.

In an era where the boundaries between documentary and narrative cinema continue to blur, Magic Mountain stands out as a powerful example of how film can capture and convey the complexities of human existence. It invites us to reflect on the ways in which we relate to and support those who live on the margins, urging us to see beyond their isolation to the shared humanity that connects us all.

'Festival of Georgian Regions' Shows Off Georgia's Cultural Variety



BY SHELBI R. ANKIEWICZ

Hosted for the second year on June 6 and 7, the 'Festival of Georgian Regions' aimed to promote different cultures throughout the country with varieties of wine, cuisine, dances, and folklore.

Founded by the Tsiskvili Group and co-hosted this year with the Meidan Group, the festival brought together tourists and locals alike. It featured six different regions of Georgia, among them Imereti, Racha, Guria, Svaneti, Samegrelo, and Samtskhe-Javakheti. The Marketing Specialist for the Tsiskvili Group, Mariam Sagliani, said the festival worked to showcase cultures and encourage

people to travel outside of Tbilisi.

"We're helping people get to know different regions of Georgia and, after this festival, people will be more interested and want to go there to see with their own eyes the places and the mountains," said Sagliani.

This year's festival was moved from the Tsiskvili yard garden to Meidani Square, a central touristic hub in Tbilisi on Sioni Street, where many people stopped to visit as they walked through the Old Town. Sagliani said that the 'Festival of Georgian Regions' is for locals as much as it is for foreigners, as they love experiencing their own culture and traditions.

She said it gives local people a good feeling and a chance to see the dance and music from different regions and to taste the cuisine, especially since destinations

outside of Tbilisi are not easily accessible to everyone. Sagliani explained how some guests who came to the festival from Svaneti were nearly 90 years old, showing how much they loved and desired to share their culture with others.

"We wanted people to discover the culture of different regions of our beautiful country in one place," Sagliani told GEORGIA TODAY.

The festival began on June 6 with an opening ceremony, followed by ensemble performances from the Imereti, Samtskhe-Javakheti, and Svaneti regions. The second day featured ensembles and folk music from Racha, Guria, and Samegrelo. During the concerts, performers wore traditional clothing from their region so attendees could see the differences and look in awe at the numerous designs and colors. Throughout both days, there were around 60 companies set up, mostly winemakers, and large

and small sellers, to assist in transporting visitors to alternative regions in Georgia.

Natia Tsetskhladze is the organizer and representative of Meidan Group, a real estate development company in Old Tbilisi. She said nearly 300 Georgian wines were presented at the festival, as the substance is a core component of Georgian culture.

"It's our company's social responsibility to participate in social festivals such as this throughout the year to promote all things Georgian, since they are in the heart of the city," she said.

First and foremost, Tsetskhladze said they promote wine because they are proud of it and the culture that surrounds it. This pattern follows them at other events, using wine as the main representation of Georgia.

The festival had various partners, including UN Women Georgia, which

supported nine female entrepreneurs so they could present their products. Tsetskhladze said this was a valuable aspect of the festival for the Meidan Group.

"For us, it's very important to have entrepreneurs included in events like this, especially women entrepreneurs," said Tsetskhladze. "It's important for our two companies but also for the country and Georgian culture."

The Tsiskvili Group is a large restaurant chain in Georgia that was founded in 2002. In addition to providing food, Sagliani said they rely heavily on promoting Georgian hospitality, architecture, culture, cuisine, and folklore. The chain currently has eight restaurants, two markets, and a dining theater where they offer performances and cuisine to locals and tourists.

Sagliani said the owners of Tsiskvili Group always wanted to start a festival so people could see the united culture of the country and to further preserve the rich heritage of Georgia.

Other festival supporters included the Ministry of Agriculture, the City Hall, and partner municipalities from Kutaisi, Oni, Chokhatauri, Akhaltsikhe, Senaki, and Mestia.

According to Sagliani, the festival will continue annually, in hopes that it will grow from representing six regions, to all of them. There are more than ten regions in Georgia made up of different terrain, languages, cuisines, and garments.

"Tusheti is quite new for tourists – a lot of nature, no big hotels, so it's a very interesting and unique place in Georgia... but of course, every region has unique sights," she said.



Art Amidst Turbulence: Navigating Georgia's Transformation through Contemporary Art



Photo by the author

BY IVAN NECHAEV

In the heart of Tbilisi, the Window Project gallery's latest exhibition, 'Change—Part Two,' offers an intricate tableau of Georgia's recent history through the lens of contemporary art. Spanning works from 1989 to 2024, this group exhibition encapsulates the nation's journey through political upheavals, social transformations, and cultural rebirths, all while reflecting the resilience and dynamism of its people. The exhibition is open to the public until September 20, 2024.

A HISTORICAL TAPESTRY: GEORGIA'S PATH TO MODERNITY

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked the dawn of a new era for Georgia, a country that would soon find itself grappling with wars, territorial occupations, and political turmoil. These seismic events have left an indelible mark on the nation's collective consciousness, a theme that reverberates through the artworks on display. The exhibition serves as a visual chronicle of these times, portraying the ceaseless quest for

sovereignty and self-determination.

At its core, 'Change—Part Two' urges viewers to reexamine Georgia's past and present critically. The artists engage in demythologizing historical narratives, challenging established perspectives, and fostering a deeper understanding of the country's multifaceted identity. This intellectual endeavor is crucial for a society in flux, striving to reconcile its heritage with contemporary realities.

The exhibition does not shy away from the pressing issues of human rights and individual freedoms. Through their works, artists underscore the importance of civic engagement and the defense of democratic values. The portrayal of personal responsibility in shaping public discourse resonates strongly, especially in a landscape marked by political instability.

ARTISTIC EXPRESSIONS: A SYMPHONY OF MEDIA AND GENERATIONS

The diversity of media, ranging from painting and sculpture to photography, video art, and installations, enriches the narrative tapestry of the exhibition. Each medium provides a unique vantage point, collectively offering a comprehensive exploration of the themes at hand.

By featuring artists from various gen-



Photo by the author

erations, the exhibition fosters a dialogue between the past and the present. This intergenerational exchange highlights the continuity and evolution of artistic practices and ideas, demonstrating how contemporary artists build upon and respond to the legacies of their predecessors.

SPOTLIGHT ON ARTISTS: VOICES OF CHANGE

With a penchant for the provocative, the works of Andro Dadiani, Irakli Rusadze, and Giorgi Gagoshidze delve into themes of power, identity, and social justice. Their art challenges viewers to confront uncomfortable truths and engage with complex socio-political issues. The fusion of performance and social intervention blurs the lines between art and life, urging a reconsideration of conventional boundaries. Their pieces juxtapose historical and contemporary experiences, creating a compelling dialogue between different eras and inviting reflection on collective memory.

Erekle Getsadze, Mariam Mzesu Giunashvili, Shotiko Aptsiauri, Vakhtang Kokiashvili, Nika Machaidze, and Koka Ramishvili offer personal yet universally resonant perspectives on the human condition, exploring identity and nature. Their work provides a nuanced lens through which to view contemporary Georgian protest, capturing the quotidian struggles of Georgian people and grounding the exhibition in real-world experiences and emotions of corruption and betrayal. Their art challenges perceptions of time and space, explores the intersection of technology and human experience, and emphasizes themes of freedom and resistance. Often inviting viewer participation, they highlight the active role of artists in shaping society, and offer a metaphysical exploration of existence, inviting contemplation and introspection amidst the exhibition's more politically charged pieces.

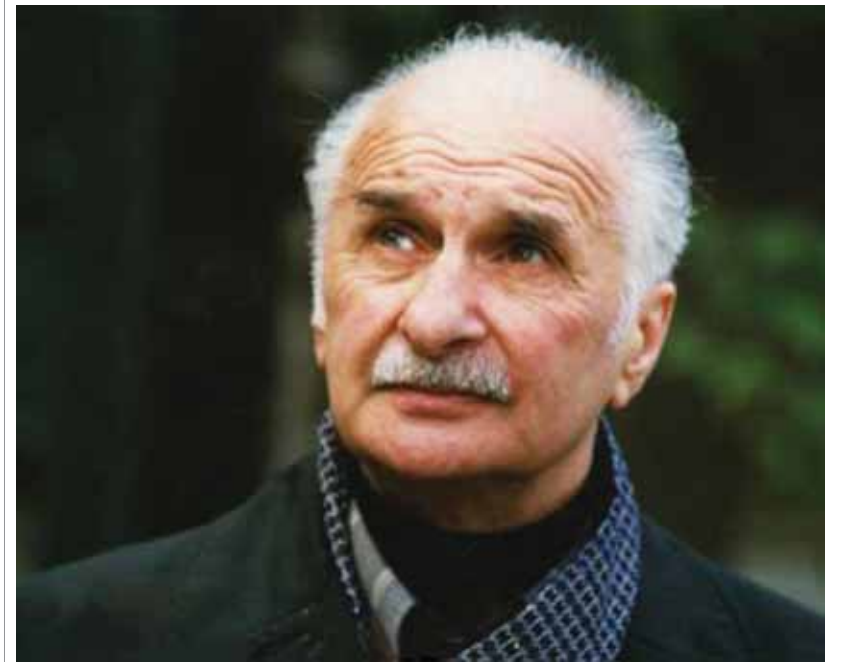
Gvantsa Jishkariani, Dato Koridze, Sandro Sulaberidze x Guram Tsibakhashvili, Uta Bekaia, and Tamara K.E. explore themes of memory and transformation, creating tactile connections to the past. Their vibrant works reflect on Georgia's cultural heritage, blending traditional motifs with contemporary artistic styles. Drawing on their backgrounds in fashion and design, they explore identity, gender, and the body with visual and conceptual sophistication. Their art addresses themes of language and perception, encouraging viewers to question their assumptions and engage with new perspectives.

A NATION IN FLUX, CAPTURED IN ART

'Change—Part Two' at Window Project is not just an exhibition; it is a vivid exploration of Georgia's contemporary soul. By bringing together a diverse array of artistic voices and media, the exhibition paints a complex and nuanced picture of a nation navigating its way through profound transformations. It challenges viewers to rethink their understanding of Georgia's past and present, emphasizing the vital role of art in shaping a resilient and forward-looking society.

Window Project Gallery, 9 Erekle Tatishvili St, Tbilisi. Open daily except Mondays 12pm - 7pm

Georgian Poets: Tariel Chanturia



TRANSLATED FROM GEORGIAN INTO ENGLISH BY KETEVAN TUKHARELI

Appeared and instantly, Everything in space Disappeared.

There stood only This wonder - , Silent, wise and Tall - god!

Tariel Chanturia, born in 1932, graduated from the Journalism Department of Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi University in 1956. His first poetry collection, 'Attraction,' debuted in 1964, marking the start of his notable career.

I wished to look At it - and it at me! I didn't want anything More!

Chanturia quickly gained acclaim for his bold experimentation with language and verse forms, using irony, grotesque imagery, parody, and slang to engage readers. His notable works include 'The Swings' (1965), 'Stone and War' (1967), 'The New Moon' (1970), 'The Two' (1972), 'Shredded Serpentine' (1973), 'The Year of a Calm Sun' (1975), 'The Honeymoon Century' (1978), 'Long Poems' (1979), 'Stresses and Words' (1980), 'The Selected' (1982), 'The Writer's Red Book' (1985), 'The Colchis Capriccio' (Merani, 1988), and 'The Honeymoon Century - 2' (2002).

*** Poet's life - Is catastrophe! Divided into a thousand Strophes!

In addition to poetry, Chanturia is recognized for his contributions to children's literature, critical essays, and translations, which have earned him international acclaim with translations of his poetry into numerous languages.

*** Though the call Of my soul, Long ago, has been Closed, I hope, somebody Whenever, will look into It close! ***

SAMEBA Suddenly the cathedral

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR: It is with deep regret that we inform our readers that Ketevan Tukhareli, the talented translator of the many poets we have shared in GEORGIA TODAY over the past six months, passed away on July 6. We thank her for enlightening us and sharing with us this legacy of Georgian culture. RIP Ketevan.



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I am Georgian and therefore I am European

Zurab Zhvania, Council of Europe, 1999

