



Giorgi Kalandarishvili

FOCUS

ON THE ELECTIONS

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INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

With things ever hotter in the Israel conflict, this week Radio Free Europe/RL's Georgian Service sat down with Prof. Chuck Freilich, senior fellow at Harvard's Belfer Center's International Security Program, teacher of political science at Tel Aviv University, Columbia and NYU, and a former Israeli deputy national security advisor. We started our interview by discussing the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack.

"The year started with the worst day in Israel's history, and much of the year has continued to be quite difficult," Freilich notes. "But it ended on a more positive note, seeing Israel turn the tide. Hamas has been defeated as a military organization, not politically, but militarily. And the axis of resistance led by Iran is on the defensive and a little bit on the run even. Hezbollah has been hit very, very hard. And the Iranians are now waiting to see how Israel responds to their attack last week. Continued on page 5



Prof. Chuck Freilich

MARKETS		STOCKS		COMMODITIES		CURRENCIES	
Price	w/w	m/m	Price	w/w	m/m	Price	w/w
As of 14-Oct-2024							
GEORGIA 04/26	94.46	+0.0%	+0.2%	Bank of Georgia (BGEO LN)	GBP 40.05	+7.8%	-2.0%
GABAL 04/28	95.50	+0.0%	+0.4%	Georgia Capital (GCEO LN)	GBP 10.00	+3.5%	-1.0%
GEORG 9 1/2 PERP	98.31	+0.1%	+0.4%	TBC Bank Group (TBCG LN)	GBP 27.05	+6.1%	-4.2%
SILNET 01/27	100.77	+0.1%	+0.5%				
TBC 8.894 PERP	96.05	+0.1%	+0.1%	Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	77.46	-4.3%	+8.2%
TBC 10 1/4 PERP	98.83	+0.1%	+0.4%	Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	2 648.54	+0.2%	+2.7%
SP 500	5 859.85	+2.0%	+4.2%	USD / GEL	2,7230	-0.9%	+1.0%
FTSE 250	20 817.19	-0.2%	-0.4%	EUR / GEL	2,9705	-1.5%	-0.5%
DOW JONES 30	43 065.22	+2.6%	+6.0%	GBP / GEL	3,5548	-1.0%	+0.5%
Russell 2000	2 248.64	+2.5%	+3.0%	EUR / USD	1,0909	-0.6%	-1.5%
FTSE 100	8 292.66	-0.1%	+0.2%	GBP / USD	1,3059	-0.2%	-0.5%

14-kilometer Batumi Bypass Highway Officially Opens



Batumi Bypass

BY TEAM GT

The 14-kilometer, two-way Batumi Bypass Highway, featuring 20 bridges and five tunnels, has officially opened.

The primary purpose of the highway is to reduce transit traffic in the city and enhance the living and recreational conditions in Batumi. It also provides connections to adjacent villages.

There are claims among the population that the highway, despite the official

announcement by the Roads Department of Georgia, is not actually open or in use, and it is still blocked and closed to vehicles.

Official sources refute those complaints and say that the highway is already open and in use.

The construction of the Batumi Bypass Highway was made possible through loans from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), with additional funding from the state budget. The total cost of the project amounted to GEL 330 million. The construction has been ongoing for several years.

Russia Asks Georgia and Azerbaijan to Send Electricity "In Case of Emergency"

BY TEAM GT

The Russian energy company Inter-RAO is considering the possibility of importing electricity from Georgia and Azerbaijan during emergency situations, - the Russian media reports, citing member of the

Inter-RAO management board, Alexandra Panina.

"We asked two countries - Azerbaijan and Georgia, about the possibility of delivery during emergency periods. 300 megawatts each," said Panina.

She claims that neither country has responded.

At the time of going to press, no statement had been made from the Georgian side regarding the matter.

Mathilda Gvarliani Walks for Victoria's Secret Fashion Show 2024



Photo: Getty Images

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

Mathilda Gvarliani made history on October 15 in New York City by becoming the first Georgian model to ever walk for the Victoria's Secret Fashion Show.

The show was canceled after its 2018

edition due to dwindling sales and ratings, which were attributed to its lack of commitment to contemporary trends in the fashion industry. After a five-year break, it made a sudden comeback, incorporating changes aimed at inclusivity.

The news about Gvarliani broke this week when she shared a picture confirming the news on social media, and this achievement adds to her already impressive portfolio.



Image source: UKRINFORM

Ukraine Latest: Russia Attacks Energy Infrastructure in Ukraine's Mykolaiv Region

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

Russian forces attacked energy infrastructure in the southern region of Mykolaiv, launching 56 drones and one missile in an overnight assault on Ukraine mid-week.

Mykolaiv regional governor Vitaliy Kim said the attack had cut power to some consumers but there were no casualties.

The Ukrainian air force also reported five hits to infrastructure facilities in regions near the front line. It said 22 drones were shot down and that it lost track of 27 drones that likely fell into Ukrainian territory following active electronic warfare measures. Two more drones went into Belarus.

Kyiv mayor Vitali Klitschko said drone debris fell into the yard of a kindergarten in the capital. The authorities in Kyiv and the surrounding region reported no damage to critical infrastructure or casualties following the attack.

Regional authorities in the northeastern Sumy region said a drone attack caused a fire at an administrative building and damaged two cars.

Russian forces have pummeled critical infrastructure in Ukrainian cities ahead of the winter months, prompting Kyiv leadership to intensify pleas for additional air defense from its allies.

Russia denies targeting civilians, although it has killed thousands during its more than two and a half years at war with Ukraine.

GRANTED FRENCH VISAS AFTER FLEEING THE WAR

Six Russian soldiers who fled the war in Ukraine have been granted temporary visas as they apply for political asylum in France, in what human rights activists describe as the first major case of a group of deserters being admitted to a EU country.

The men arrived in Paris on separate flights over the last few months after initially fleeing Russia to Kazakhstan in 2022 and 2023, according to an organization that assists soldiers to flee, and to accounts from the deserters.

"When I landed in France, it was the first time I could breathe fully. I felt a sense of calmness and freedom...the worst was behind me," Alexander, a former Russian contract soldier who was sent to Ukraine and deserted during the summer of 2023, told The Guardian in an interview.

Since the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, tens of thousands of Russian soldiers have deserted or refused orders to fight, say rights activists and groups that help soldiers flee.

But the West has long grappled with the decision over whether to accept Russian soldiers who have deserted, with questions lingering over whether to treat them as heroes, potential security risks, or war criminals. While the EU and its member states have publicly discussed offering asylum to Russian deserters, no decision has been reached and it has proven difficult for deserters to get asylum.

MEDIA REPORTS REVEAL DETAILS OF NEW EU MIGRATION PLAN: CHANGES WILL IMPACT UKRAINIANS

SIX RUSSIAN SOLDIERS

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has unveiled a new ten-point EU plan to tackle illegal migration. The plan includes proposed changes that will also have an impact on Ukrainians.

Source: European Pravda, citing Polish radio station RMF FM

Von der Leyen announced "innovative ways to combat illegal migration" in a letter to EU heads of state and government two days ahead of the upcoming EU summit.

In particular, the European Commission president proposed exploring the idea of creating centers for migrants outside the EU for those who are not eligible for asylum.

This is the first time that the European Commission has welcomed a proposal supported, in particular, by Poland. Italy already runs such centers in Albania.

Ursula von der Leyen also introduced new regulations aimed at streamlining the process of sending back migrants who do not qualify for asylum to their home countries and making it more efficient.

She also highlighted that a key responsibility of the commissioner for home affairs and migration is to tackle hybrid attacks from Russia and Belarus. This effort involves, among other measures, negotiating agreements with airlines flying to Minsk and implementing a stricter visa policy.

There will also be new rules governing the long-term stay of refugees from Ukraine, though the exact details have yet to be announced.

Migration is one of the main topics of the two-day summit of EU heads of state and government in Brussels, which begun on Thursday.

Young Georgian Boxers Do the Country Proud at Int'l Tournament

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

Georgian athletes achieved impressive feats at the Boxam International Tournament 2024 held in Alicante, Spain, which specializes in boxing competitions for youth. The Georgian team attended the championship with the support of the Ministry of Culture and Sports of Georgia.

The Georgian delegation secured 12 medals: 5 gold: Zaza Mdinardze, Nikoloz Khizanishvili, Temur Pavliashvili, Gor Kazarian, and Shalva Beridze.

5 silver: Mirian Voloshin, Daniel Ramizoghli, Beka Okruashvili, Aleksandre Baladze, and Mate Voloshin.

2 bronze: Gigi Nonikashvili and Bakar Paliani.



Photo: The Ministry of Culture and Sports of Georgia

Eco Centre Training: Together for a Greener Future!



Training at the Eco Centre, Rustavi. Source: FB

BLOG BY LILY DAVIES-DOLABERIDZE

I want to share my experience from October 10 at the Eco Centre in Rustavi, where I participated in an important training session focused on environmental issues as part of the project 'Accelerating Eco-friendly Development: Raising Awareness and Promoting Sustainable Waste Management.'

A group of us teens, from Tbilisi and Rustavi, came together to learn about air quality, plastic pollution, and how to live more sustainably. The session included educational games that helped us understand the topics in a fun way, and we also had discussions about our individual roles in creating a healthier environment.

Let's take a closer look at what we learned and how we can all contribute to a greener future.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Our main topics were air quality, plastic pollution, and how we can all live in a more eco-friendly way.

One of the things we talked about was airborne particulate matter (PM). PM isn't just one type of pollutant; it's actually a mix of tiny particles in the air, some of which can be harmful to our health. There are two main types we learned about:

- **PM10:** These particles are 10 microns or less and can get into our lungs. They can come from things like construction sites, wildfires, and dust.

- **PM2.5:** These are even smaller (2.5 microns or less) and are mostly produced by burning fuels like gas, oil and wood. Because they are so tiny, they can penetrate deeper into our lungs and cause more health issues.

Understanding the difference between PM10 and PM2.5 helps us see why keeping our air clean is super important, and by looking at the Rustavi case, we got to put that into perspective.

Rustavi is one of the most polluted cities in Georgia, with 400 hectares of industrial zone, where factories regularly release pollutants without proper air filtering systems, impacting thousands of residents.

With support from the USAID Civil Society Engagement Program, the activist groups Gavigudet (We Are Suffocating) and Eco Centre monitored the Rustavi industrial zone and analyzed air quality, together with Rustavi residents. They came up with 65 reports containing photo and video evidence of the breaking of air pollution rules. Today, thanks to their work, 13 out of 15 factories have now installed air filters and self-monitoring systems, and the '2023-2025 Air Quality Management Plan for the Central Zone,' was approved by the government in August 2023.

The Ministry of Environmental Protection says air pollution in Rustavi has decreased by 40% since 2019, but the work isn't over, and we all need to work together to keep raising awareness and making changes to improve air quality in the city.

THE PLASTIC PROBLEM

During the Eco Centre training, we also talked about the global and local plastic crisis. Did you know that in Georgia, plastic production has gone up by a crazy 71% in the past 10 years? And that's mostly because of single-use plastics like bottles and disposable tableware-like Georgians love to use on picnics. They say each person in Georgia uses about 85 plastic bottles a year. Most of this plastic ends up in landfills and can take hundreds, if not thousands, of years to

decompose.

Luckily, there are plans in place to tackle this issue. The government says it aims to recycle 50% of plastic by 2025 and 80% by 2030. They're working on a new program that copies the European Union's efforts to create a circular economy for plastics. Fingers crossed!

UNDERSTANDING THE TYPES OF PLASTIC AND THEIR RECYCLABILITY

The Eco Centre leaders put us in small teams competing to find the labels on different kinds of plastic waste products. Then they taught us what can and can't be recycled. Here's what we learned:

First up was PET, or Polyethylene Terephthalate. You'll find this plastic in food and drink packaging, like water bottles and containers. It's highly recyclable, but if you leave liquids in the containers for too long, they can release harmful chemicals, especially when they warm up.

Next is HDPE, or High-Density Polyethylene. This plastic is used for milk containers, detergent bottles, and shopping bags. HDPE is easy to recycle.

LDPE, or Low-Density Polyethylene, is another type of plastic you'll see in plastic bags, wraps, and some containers. LDPE is tough to recycle.

Then we have PP, or Polypropylene. This plastic is common in hot food containers, straws, and even car parts. PP has "limited recyclability."

Polystyrene, written as "PS," is used for disposable cups, food containers, and packaging. However, it has a low recycling rate and can release harmful substances when heated.

There's also PVC (Polyvinyl Chloride) used in toys, cling wraps, and some medical supplies. Unfortunately, it's rarely accepted in recycling programs because it can be toxic and harmful to the environment.

Last is the category "Other plastics," which includes mixed plastics and materials like polycarbonate. Generally, these are not recyclable and may contain hazardous substances like BPA.

So, while PET and HDPE are the most commonly recycled plastics, many others aren't as easy to recycle. It's important to remember that all plastics can release harmful substances under extreme conditions, like high heat. By understanding these different types of plastic and their recyclability, we can make smarter decisions in our daily lives. Always check



Sorting plastics at the Eco Centre, Rustavi. Source: FB

the recycling symbols, and let's try to reduce plastic use whenever we can.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

During our training, we discussed how each of us plays a role in creating a better environment. Whether it's reducing plastic use, recycling, or simply being more mindful about our choices, as every action counts!

At the end of the session, we all received digital certificates to recognize our participation. It really felt great to be a part of something so important, even though the task ahead of us is huge!

THANK YOU TO THE ORGANIZERS

I want to give a huge shout-out to everyone who participated and made this training a success, especially the Eco Centre trainers, who, even while we were sitting there learning, had local people from Rustavi coming in with big bags of plastic and paper for them to recycle. And also a special thanks to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia for supporting this training program.

Let's keep working together to create a greener future and make eco-friendly choices every day!

DID YOU KNOW...?

1. More than 8 million Tons of Plastic Enter the Ocean Every Year

We generate more than 380 million tons of plastic waste each year, and 8 million tons of it end up in the ocean. That's the same amount as the weight of two million elephants combined.

2. 3 billion People in the World Regularly Eat Fish

About half of the world's population eats fish regularly. When fish eat plastic waste, we are also eating food that is contaminated. We still don't know exactly how consuming plastic can harm our bodies.

3. Marine Animals Accidentally Eat Plastic Waste

Plastic waste floating in the water can look a lot like food to marine animals. 33% of fishes were found to have consumed plastic, which is chemical and toxic, and poses threats to their health or even kills them.

4. Plastic Waste Traps Animals

Plastic waste can trap animals easily. Unlike us, they don't have hands to untangle themselves from fishing nets or plastic packaging rings, which prevents them from eating, moving, or growing right, and can even cause them to die.

5. Plastic Breaks Down into Microplastics

When plastic decomposes, it breaks down into smaller pieces called microplastics. Although we can easily pick up plastic waste littered on coastlines to reduce pollution, it's almost impossible to get rid of microplastics as they are so tiny that they cannot be seen by the human eye. And yet, despite their size, they are just as harmful as other plastics.

6. Ocean Plastic Pollution Will Triple by 2040

It is said that ocean plastic pollution will triple by 2040 if we keep producing plastic at the current rate. However, if we take action to reduce plastic litter and start investing in new, more sustainable solutions, the amount could be cut by 80%!

7. Plastic Waste Will Never Go Away

While plastic will eventually disappear, the decomposition process takes nearly 450 years! That is why we have to take action now and stop polluting our environment and especially our oceans.

POLITICS

Giorgi Kalandarishvili: How the CEC Modernized the Georgian Elections

INTERVIEW BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

The Central Election Commission (CEC) of Georgia has been modernizing the country's election process by introducing high-end technologies that ensure transparency, efficiency, and security. In partnership with international companies like Smartmatic, the incorporation of digital solutions has been the institution's priority. The CEC has employed practices that meet international standards while safeguarding voter data, improving accessibility, and ensuring public trust. GEORGIA TODAY's interview with Giorgi Kalandarishvili, the chairperson of the organization, focuses on the recent technological advancements and their overall expected impact on the elections, as well as the future plans and goals of the CEC.

"The CEC has embraced a new approach to election technology that prioritizes transparency, efficiency, and reliability," Kalandarishvili tells us. "In the selection process, we prioritized reliability, data

safety, comfort for voters, and easy adaptation to our electoral framework.

"In line with international best practices and the recent amendments to the Election Code, we have been conducting extensive piloting since 2018. These pilot programs were informed by analyses of international standards and covered both general and extraordinary elections, allowing us to fine-tune the implementation process.

"Our partnership with the internationally renowned vendor company Smartmatic, selected through a public procurement tender, further ensured that we integrated proven technology. Notably, Smartmatic has extensive experience in modernizing elections in over 30 countries," he notes, highlighting that CEC prioritized technologies that do not require an internet connection, safeguarding against potential manipulation or cyberattacks.

"By focusing on these elements, we ensured that decisions were not only based on the best international practices, but also that they went through extensive pilot trials, which ultimately led to multi-party agreements and legislative changes."



Giorgi Kalandarishvili

HOW DID THESE TECHNOLOGIES IMPROVE THE ELECTION PROCESS?

The implementation of voter verification and electronic vote-counting technologies has greatly enhanced the effi-

ciency of the election process. Nearly 90% of voters will now benefit from these services, which simplify voting procedures, reduce human error, and ensure faster vote counting and preliminary data generation. The integration

of a paper trail and mandatory recounts ensures the accuracy of machine counts, further strengthening transparency. In remaining 10 percent of polling stations, traditional method of voting will be applied, however, ballot papers will be digitized and uploaded to Google platform, ensuring full public access and improving trust in the process. Consistent results from previous elections have validated the system's reliability.

WHAT MEASURES DOES THE CEC TAKE TO ENSURE MAXIMUM DATA PROTECTION?

Voter confidentiality is of the utmost importance to the CEC. Even though it is not mandated by legislation, we conduct regular audits to ensure system integrity and transparency. To this end, we've engaged Pro V&V, one of the two accredited firms in the US, to perform a three-stage audit of our election technologies. Since our systems are not internet-based, the risk of cyberattacks is significantly reduced, further safeguarding the election process. This comprehensive approach ensures that voter data is securely protected while maintaining public trust.

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Media Coalition: Since Adoption of "Russian Law," Gov't Intensified Pressure on Media

BY TEAM GT

The Media Advocacy Coalition claims that since the adoption of the "Russian law," the ruling Georgian Dream party has intensified pressure on independent media and for this uses its influence on the Communications Commission and the court.

The Media Coalition considers the actions of the Communication Commission and the drawing up of a protocol of violations for the opposition television stations to be an expression of the tendency of Georgian Dream to oppress state institutions. The matter concerns the use of disturbing images depicting the ongoing war in Ukraine in the election ads of the ruling party and the refusal of television stations to air these ads.

"Recent actions by the Communications Commission highlight a disturbing trend in the hijacking of government institutions. In particular, based on the complaint of Georgian Dream, the regulator issued a protocol of violations to Mtavari Arakhi, TV Pirveli and Formula TV stations, due to the non-publication of unethical advertisements using the



tragedy of the Ukrainian people.

"In its own resolution, the European Union also condemned the use of photos of the war in Ukraine by Georgian Dream, the purpose of which is to 'manipulate opinion, spread disinformation and pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian sentiments' before the elections. These punitive measures not only undermine the independence of the media, but also reinforce a propaganda narrative that fits the ruling party's agenda," the media coalition said in a statement.

"In the same period, the Regulatory Commission, on the basis of Edison

Research's research, recognized the TV company Formula as a violator of the law and drew up a protocol for granting the status of a qualified election subject to the opposition party 'Gakharia for Georgia.' This decision is further proof of systemic bias, which threatens political pluralism and is an attempt to punish the media before the elections. As a result, society is deprived of different points of view, which limits the familiarization and comparison of the messages of the political parties," the statement concludes.

In the statement of the coalition, it is

also said that the lack of independence of the court complicates the existing problems even more, because the court shares the unjustified decisions of the Communications Commission and fines critical media. The coalition claims that this is a clear attempt to silence critical coverage or dissenting opinions.

"Notably, the use of Strategic Litigation Against Public Involvement (SLAPP) lawsuits remains problematic."

"On October 11, Tbilisi City Court ordered TV Pirveli and its journalist, Sofiko Nyauri, to pay 10,000 GEL based on the lawsuit of Alexander Chikaidze, the former Minister of Internal Affairs, related to the ruling party," media coalition writes.

The Coalition cites incidents of threats, along with decisions by administrative agencies, as examples of the threats faced by independent and critical journalists. In particular, threatening and insulting messages against the director of Adjara Times, Sulxan Meskhidze. After the ceremonial opening of the new bypass road in Batumi by Dream officials, the journalist had informed the public that the road is actually not finished and it is blocked with concrete slabs.

"Such harassment reflects the hostile climate encouraged by Georgian Dream

towards media professionals, prevents the search for truth, and undermines public trust in the media. This hostile environment not only poses a threat to journalists, but also reduces the quality of information available to the public, further alienating citizens from the democratic process," writes the media coalition.

A month before the October 26 parliamentary elections, election banners appeared on the streets of Tbilisi, where Georgian Dream calls on voters to choose between war and peace. On one side of the banners, on a gray background, the cities, churches, hospitals and theaters of Ukraine destroyed by the Russian attacks are shown, and on the other side are colorful shots of different cities and buildings of Georgia. The ruling party published a video featuring the same content.

TV companies Mtavari Arkhi, TV-Pirveli and Formula published a joint statement, stating that despite the demands and threats of the ruling party, they are not going to air the pre-election banners and videos of Georgian Dream. In response to this, the pro-government television companies Imedi and POST TV in turn refused to air the election advertisements of the opposition parties.

Giorgi Kalandarishvili: How the CEC Modernized the Georgian Elections



Giorgi Kalandarishvili

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ated, further safeguarding the process.

IS THE ELECTION PROCESS SIMPLIFIED FOR GEORGIAN CITIZENS RESIDING ABROAD?

Georgian citizens living abroad will participate in the election through traditional means. In close coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), but also utilizing other information channels, we ensured the dissemination of information related election procedures and deadlines to voters abroad. Initially, we established 60 election sites in 53 cities across 42 countries. However, due to the growing number of registered voters, we added seven more locations. While electronic voting will not be available for overseas voters, we've ensured that all logistical and organizational aspects are well-coordinated, promoting maximum engagement among Georgian citizens abroad.

HOW ARE VOTERS VERIFIED?

Voter verification involves a double-check process. A voter first presents an ID or passport, and the identity is verified digitally. The system then prints a receipt, which the voter signs to confirm participation. This ensures that each voter can only vote once, eliminating the possibility of manipulation. The verification system has undergone extensive audits, confirming that a voter is listed only once and cannot be dupli-

HOW DO YOU ENSURE TRANSPARENCY FOR MAXIMUM PUBLIC TRUST?

Transparency is a core principle of the election process. We have developed multiple platforms that actively engage civil society, the media, and international organizations, creating an openness about the election process. Regular meetings, information exchanges, and consultations have enabled us to incorporate feedback and recommendations into our systems. To further promote transparency, we launched a nationwide educational campaign about a year and a half ago, engaging over 600,000 citizens through mock voting events and direct outreach initiatives. Additionally, our efforts to combat disinformation ensure that the public receives accurate information, contributing to an election environment that is both fair and transparent.

TELL US ABOUT THE CEC'S FUTURE PLANS.

Our primary goal moving forward is the continuous expansion of online services, aiming to further strengthen election security, efficiency, and inclusiveness. We are committed to exploring innovative solutions that elevate the electoral process, adhering to the highest international standards while promoting transparency.



A Georgian crown. Source: georgia.travel

If the Kingdom Could Recur

BLOG BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

Shall we call this brief pamphlet a weekend read? I would love to wax hypothetical for a fun moment, provided my imagination takes my phantasy far enough to get the reader pleasurably involved in the development of this bizarre design. Let's assume for a second that Georgia is a monarchy. Not a semi-monarchy like a constitutional one, but a real McCoy kingdom, like one of those historically renowned countries, ruled by a king or queen. In the role of sovereign, I would love to advocate for a female ruler, seeing as Sakartvelo has healthy glowing memories of the faraway medieval past, when the nation enjoyed the brilliant reign of its adorable Queen Tamar, in what we call Georgia's Golden Age. I wish that proud past could recur for a sacred instant, but alas!

So, we are living in a monarchy, and we have a crowned head, utterly in love with her domain and people, who would do no harm to any person in her realm without having the gravest reason to do so. She is the ultimate decision-maker

and indisputable steward of the land. We, the people, work hard, make honest money and pay taxes to keep the distinguished lady in place and functional. The more efficient she is, the better for the nation. The wiser she is, the stronger are the people—the creators of their own wealth and happiness. The fields are farmed and the food is hoarded; some go out to hunt for food, and others rear the kids; horses are trained to run and labor, cattle is salubrious and productive; culprits are punished and heroes are praised, and this is all taken care of and executed by the rule of law, placed in the caring hands of that professional sage of a ruler and overseen by the royal court of justice — as pristine and elevated as one could wish for in the time this story is being told and listened to.

Nobody is obligated to hit the polling stations as often as is demanded by the forceful fiat thereof. People do not discuss elections interminably, foaming at the mouth in favor of weird political powers, or odd individuals, who have, by some hook or crook, reached a certain conventional peak to be put at the helm of the nation. Folks don't hear deafening electoral advertising round

the clock, trying to talk them into making choices without any vestige of knowledge as to whether the presented candidates will be beneficial or detrimental to their everyday reality, something which the Queen's subjects can achieve without the control and assistance of those funny electoral wannabes.

No bluffing TV sets, no loaded beepers and no poisoned cell phones. The menacing informational avalanche threatens no-one to be swept away or buried. The urban rattle and clatter are not heard at all, and the social networks currently getting on the remnants of our shattered nerves, are nonexistent. Food is organic and the ceaselessly running drinkable water is naturally pure. Nobody cares about covid vaccinations, and plastic bags do not get whipped by the polluted wind to fly through our paved streets.

And when one of the old squares in Tiflis is filled with crowds of Georgia's felicitous citizens, the radiant beauty of the Queen illuminates the place, and the noble monarch greets the joyfully exalted realm, and lets them hear her pleasing voice, full of courage and hope that the impending night will turn into happy daybreak; that life truly has value.

Prof. Chuck Freilich on Israel's War and Netanyahu's Ambition

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I think this is a period of great weakness and vulnerability for them. And, of course, that's a positive development for Israel.

"The primary part of the military campaign is behind us. The problem is that Israel hasn't stated an end goal. And even if it had, it's not clear that it would be easy to achieve. In the absence of an end goal, it's really hard to see how and when this ends," he says.

CAN THE INHABITANTS OF GAZA LOOK FORWARD TO SOME SORT OF COHABITATION WITH ISRAEL?

That's a tall order, and could be years off, even decades. The Arab-Israeli and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts have been going on for over 100 years. It's a generational confrontation. I'm a lifelong supporter of the peace process, but the Palestinians have repeatedly turned down dramatic proposals for peace with Israel that would have given them a state over 20 years ago on essentially 100% of the territory that they want. I don't think that, overall, Palestinian opinion has changed, and I don't think we know what conclusions the Palestinians are going to derive from this war yet, because the devastation in Gaza is the type of thing that one would expect to lead to a rethinking of the Hamas and Palestinian strategy generally, but we've yet to see it.

A STUDY SHOWED SUBSTANTIAL NUMBERS OF TODAY'S HAMAS FIGHTERS ARE DESCENDANTS OF FAMILIES WHO HAVE LOST MEMBERS UNDER ISRAELI FIRE. WHAT CONCLUSION CAN BE DRAWN?

People in the West always say military conflicts reinforce hatred. True, to a certain extent they are self-defeating, because they breed greater animosity. But if you take that logic too far, then you don't fight any wars because you've already lost.

The Palestinians, well, we'll see who takes over after Abbas dies. Abbas is, I believe, 89. So how much longer will he be in power? He certainly seems to be heading towards the end. If they are taken over by Hamas, that means the war will go on forever. If they, God willing, are taken over by someone more willing to reach accommodation, that would be better. We also need to see what will come when Mr. Netanyahu's era ends. It's not clear who he'll be replaced by. The next government will probably be a somewhat hawkish one from a security perspective, but will certainly be less ideological, probably more pragmatic. And that opens up prospects on the Israeli side.

The whole world has come to support the idea of a two-state solution in recent decades, but it doesn't seem to be achiev-

able. We have to look at other ways to at least achieve a separation between Israelis and Palestinians, if not a final end to the conflict, because, I hate to say it, that's not going to happen for a long time.

TELL US MORE ABOUT THE DAMAGE DONE / PREVENTED, AND HOW ISRAEL'S AIR DEFENSE SYSTEMS ACQUITTED THEMSELVES THAT NIGHT?

No air defense system is perfect - a few missiles got through. They caused minimal damage. In April, they fired half as many missiles. This time it was almost 200. So, overall, I think it was a good outcome.

ONTO THE RETALIATION. WHAT ARE THE MOST LIKELY TARGETS? WE HEAR MILITARY TARGETS, OIL DEPOTS, NUCLEAR FACILITIES, ETC.

I don't know what Israel will do, and if I did, I wouldn't say. I don't think Israel will launch a major attack against oil infrastructure because that will affect the international community, and Israel certainly doesn't have any interest in doing that, especially just few weeks before the American elections. Mr. Biden has made it clear that he does not support an attack on nuclear infrastructure at this point, or on nuclear sites. I'm less confident that Israel will accept the American position, but it will certainly take it into account.

There are a range of regime targets which could be hit. I don't think anybody really believes that it would lead to a regime change, but it might spark domestic protests in Iran, and you don't know where that might go.

There are also a range of civil targets that could be attacked that might spark a bit of a response. Israel could hit services that are important to the public, which, if they're not available, can create some unrest.

There was a cyberattack that was attributed to Israel a year or so ago, which shut down most of the gas stations throughout Iran. People were lining up for hours. But I'm just giving that as an example. There's the whole range of governmental, civil and commercial targets they could hit.

WHAT WOULD BE AN ADEQUATE RESPONSE FROM THE GOVERNMENT FROM THE ISRAELIS' PERSPECTIVE?

I think publicly, or in terms of domestic politics, Netanyahu has to respond as a way to strengthen public resilience. There's enough going on in Gaza, mostly in Lebanon, that I think the public is sufficiently preoccupied, that he's not under major pressure to respond. The response, if or when it happens, and I still believe it will, will be more for strategic reasons to deter Iran than for reasons of domestic politics.

GAZA AND HEZBOLLAH ONGOING, AND NOW IRAN. ON HOW MANY FRONTS CAN ISRAEL AFFORD TO FIGHT WITHOUT THE RISK OF OVERTRECHING?

This is a unique moment, and in many ways a unique opportunity for Israel that won't likely return for a very long time, if ever. A month ago, I would not have said that Hamas had been defeated militarily. And then the series of attacks against Hezbollah took place, some of which may have been planned, some of which may have been the result of developments that were not under Israel's control. In any event, a series of things happened which changed the picture in a matter of weeks. I don't think we have, for decades, had a period in which Iran and the axis of resistance was so vulnerable.

A critical question here is to what extent

President Biden can and will play along or take advantage of this, together with Israel. He is limited in what he can do because of the elections, because violence in the Middle East could be critical in changing the vote. I think getting Kamala Harris elected is his number one priority right now. But Biden is a true friend of Israel's, and I think the US shares the Israeli objective of preventing Iran from going nuclear, and of trying to defeat the axis of resistance as a whole. After November 5th, can there be greater cooperation to take advantage of this opportunity? Israel has to keep up the pressure for the next few weeks, then maybe something could happen. Without American approval, Israel is limited in what it can do. It may take advantage of this opportunity to go ahead in any event.

HOW MUCH SWAY DOES THE US HOLD OVER ISRAEL'S DECISION MAKING?

Netanyahu is a prime minister who seems to be willing to subordinate just about every consideration to his own personal political survival, and at times to risk Israel's relationship with the US, to risk Israel's security, to risk all sorts of domestic developments. Last year, he was promoting a so-called judicial reform which tore Israeli society apart and is largely responsible for the surprise of October 7th, because the entire defense establishment was focused on keeping itself together and not on defending Israel.

He's a unique prime minister, and I'm not necessarily saying that positively. He's also a man with a strategic view of the world, a historic view, and he may decide that this is a time, if necessary, to defy the US and go ahead with something that is critical for Israel's future security, its future and survival, something which the US does share as an objective, even if it may not want to see it happen at this time.

HIS CRITICS SAY THAT THIS IS MORE A FIGHT FOR HIS POLITICAL SURVIVAL THAN ENSURING AND GUARANTEEING ISRAEL'S SECURITY AND STABILITY. HOW VALID IS THAT ACCUSATION?

There is truth to it. There were a number of occasions where we can say he didn't do everything he possibly could to secure the hostages' release. And I do believe that he wants to keep up low-level fighting in Gaza for his own political reasons. The wars in Gaza, and against Hezbollah and Iran, are existential for Israel. It's a great tragedy today that Israel is being led by such a prime minister. If we had a "normal" prime minister, we wouldn't have these suspicions. In the end, we will see if the people of Israel are really convinced that he's subordinating major strategic interests to his personal interests. It's going to have a political impact sooner or later.

HOW CLOSE ARE WE GETTING TO A CONVENTIONAL WAR IN THE REGION, AND HOW MUCH BIGGER CAN IT GET?

We're already in a limited regional war. We have been since day one, and it is broadening, because Iran was only involved occasionally until now. If Israel responds to the recent attack, and it probably has to, then the whole conflict with Iran will open up.

Iran's ability to hit Israel directly is significant, but still limited. Their primary option was Hezbollah, which is why they built it up as this mammoth military organization with 150,000 rockets. Israel is doing quite well at defanging Hezbollah. It's far from over. They still have about half their arsenal, but that's half after just a few weeks.



Prof. Chuck Freilich

I don't think Iran really wants to get into a major conflict with Israel. We're not talking a war with tanks and infantry and things like that; we're talking an air war - Iran firing missiles and drones at Israel, and Israel using its Air Force.

The international fear is if it will spread even further, seeing Iran hitting out at the Saudis, the UAE, Western allies in the region and other major oil producers. It's a possibility. I can't discount it. But, logically, we see the support of much of the Muslim world for attacking Israel. Part of the international community, if not the countries themselves, sees public opinion supporting it. There's a lot of anti-Israel sentiment, in Europe, the US, in other parts of the world.

ONE THING WE'VE LEARNED OVER THE DECADES SINCE THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION IS THAT EXTREMISTS, LIKE THE IRANIANS, ARE RATIONAL ACTORS. WHY WOULD THEY ANTAGONIZE OTHERS WHEN THEY HAVE THEIR NUMBER ONE ENEMY, THE ONE WHOSE DESTRUCTION THEY'RE AVOWED TO, WITH WHOM THEY ARE ALREADY IN CONFLICT?

On the Kremlin's criticism of Israel's incursion into Lebanon and attacking of Hezbollah bases - has Israel's attitude towards Russia changed?

Before the war, Russia and Israel had a good relationship. On a bilateral level, Russia has remained very critical, more pro-Palestinian, in their policies regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict in the decades since the collapse of the Soviet Union, but on a bilateral level, the relationship was very good. Russia, for its own strategic reasons, because of the war in Ukraine, has aligned itself fully with the axis of resistance, with Iran, supportive of Hamas since the war broke out, and very supportive of Iran. There's talk that SU-35s might be supplied, maybe

The primary part of the military campaign in Gaza is behind us. The problem is that Israel hasn't stated an end goal

the S-400 anti-aircraft, anti-missile system, the most advanced of its kind in the world. Russia has, in effect, turned itself into an adversary. I don't want to say enemy, because we still have relations, and I hope they improve.

DOES IT CARRY A COST FOR RUSSIA? IS ISRAEL GOING TO TAKE MEASURES?

Militarily, I don't think that would be terribly advantageous to Israel. The last time I looked, Russia was still a little bit bigger than we are. Some Israelis advocate for a change in the policy on the Ukraine issue [Israel took a neutral stance]. I think just about everybody in Israel supports Ukraine, but the government hasn't taken an official position because it didn't want to antagonize Russia. I personally would not advocate for the change. As much as I support Ukraine, I don't think it can be a winning game for us. Russia is still, for all its problems, a superpower. And it really has many ways to hurt Israel very significantly without much of an effort.

The whole world has come to support the idea of a two-state solution in recent decades, but it doesn't seem to be achievable

ICT Association Quarterly Meeting Empowering Georgia's Tech Future

BY KESARIA KATCHARAVA

On October 7, 2024, the ICT Association of Georgia (ICTA) held its quarterly meeting at D Block, Stamba, marking a significant moment for Georgia's technology sector. The event drew together industry leaders, policymakers, and stakeholders, creating a vibrant forum for discussing the latest trends, challenges, and opportunities in the rapidly evolving technological landscape. With a shared commitment to innovation and collaboration, attendees engaged in meaningful dialogues to position Georgia as a leading player in the international ICT arena.

SETTING THE STAGE FOR COLLABORATION

The meeting began with remarks from Tornike Sulaberidze, the Chairman of ICTA. "Today, we explore key issues concerning the future of the Georgian technology industry, including the role of the US tech companies in the local market," he stated, setting a tone for the day's discussions. His emphasis on the need for cooperation was echoed by Ani Dabrundashvili, Director of D Block, who underscored the importance of creating an environment that fosters innovation and partnership among tech professionals.

DEEP DIVE INTO US-GEORGIA RELATIONS

During the meeting, the day's main event focused on the bilateral relations between the United States and Georgia. Giorgi Tsikolia, Vice President of Lineate, and Mr. Marc Nordberg from the US Embassy in Georgia led the discussion. Mr. Tsikolia emphasized the historical context of bilateral relations and the role of American capital in the Georgian economy, which has created thousands of well-paid jobs and promoted knowledge sharing and innovation. He noted that American technology companies have generated 8,000-9,000 new jobs over the past three years, contributing 2-2.5 billion GEL



annually to the Georgian economy. Mr. Tsikolia highlighted the interconnectedness of the tech sector's success with the United States, which serves as the primary export market for services provided by international companies in Georgia. These jobs pay salaries three times higher than the local average and have helped to establish Georgia on the global technology map.

ADVANCING AI AND INNOVATION

The conversation shifted to artificial intelligence, moderated by Natia Sirbiladze, a Board member of the ICTA. Zaal Gachechiladze, CEO and Co-Founder of AI Lab, offered valuable insights into AI's potential for transforming Georgia's economy.

CHAMPIONING GENDER DIVERSITY IN TECHNOLOGY

Another meeting highlight was a pres-

entation by Maria Voskanyan, Chapter Director of Women in Tech® Georgia. She discussed initiatives to promote gender diversity within the tech industry. "The tech sector thrives with diverse perspectives. We must empower women to take on leadership roles," Voskanyan emphasized.

The meeting culminated in signing of two significant Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs). The first was between the ICTA and Women in Tech, which represented a commitment to fostering an inclusive environment that supports women in technology. "This memorandum is a vital step towards ensuring that women have equal opportunities in our industry," Sulaberidze stated, reflecting on the importance of diversity for innovation. The second MoU was signed with D Block to enhance collaboration and innovation between the two organizations, further solidifying their partnership in promoting technological

development in Georgia.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

After the meeting concluded, participants left feeling re-energized and motivated. "Around twenty member companies have joined us, employing up to 15,000 people in Georgia. This collaboration is vital for the growth of our industry," Sulaberidze emphasized, highlighting the tech community's united strength.

Tsikolia presented a vision for the future: "The technology sector's long-term interest in Georgia is ever growing. With the right policies, we believe Georgia can become a regional hub for American companies, serving as an operations base."

The ICTA has a clear mission: to position the IT industry as a cornerstone of the new Georgian knowledge economy. Their goals include:

- Elevating the profile of the Georgian ICT industry
- Enhancing cooperation among busi-

ness members

- Collaborating with the public sector to improve the legal and regulatory frameworks

As Georgia continues to navigate the evolving tech landscape, the ICTA remains dedicated to driving the growth of the ICT sector through strategic partnerships, investment opportunities, and a focus on professional development. The quarterly meeting catalyzed new ideas and initiatives, reinforcing the association's commitment to creating an innovative and collaborative environment for all stakeholders.

With strong leadership and an engaged community, Georgia's technology sector's future appears bright, promising continued growth and international recognition. The discussions held during this meeting, coupled with the signed agreements, will undoubtedly contribute to shaping the trajectory of Georgia's ICT industry in the future.

German Experts Address Political Instability and Economic Outlook at a Business Forum - Georgia's Political and Economic Future at Stake



BY SOFIA BOCHOIDZE

On October 10, at the Pullman Tbilisi Axis Towers, a business forum was held, organized by the German Business Association (DWV), to address the economic and geopolitical consequences Georgia is facing ahead of the upcoming parliamentary elections on October 26. This election is seen as a potential turning point in the modern history of Georgia, with the country's long-standing pro-Western

course now in question due to recent political developments and legislative changes. The forum focused on understanding how these political shifts could impact Georgia's economic future.

The forum featured prominent speakers, including the German Ambassador to Georgia, Mr. Peter Fischer; Mr. Sebastian Staske from the German Economic Team (GET); Dr. Hans Gutbrod, professor at Ilia State University; and Mr. Sascha Ternes, Chairman of the Governing Board of the German Business Association (DWV), who moderated the event. The Executive Director of the German Business Association (DWV), Thomas

Kimmeswenger, also greeted the public.

In his address, Ambassador Fischer emphasized the critical nature of the upcoming elections, stating, "This is your election, not Germany's election—you choose." He highlighted that Georgia's entry into the European Union would require meeting specific modern-day criteria and that historical ties alone would not secure membership. He warned that legislative moves, like the foreign influence transparency law, pose serious obstacles to Georgia's EU aspirations, stressing that the law restricts freedoms and contradicts fundamental European principles. Ambassador Fischer also

mentioned that they are sending informative letters to their citizens living in Georgia, warning them about potential political instability and advising caution in the days following the elections. While they hope everything will proceed peacefully, they are prepared for any scenario and are discussing potential risks. Ambassador Fischer underscored that while Germany and the EU desire Georgia's success, the choice to uphold democracy and the Western course ultimately lies with Georgia.

The ambassador also referenced the 30-year cooperation between Germany and Georgia, noting that Georgia ranks fifth worldwide in per capita aid from Germany. However, he expressed concern over the current course and voiced disappointment with claims that Germany and its partners are no longer Georgia's allies.

Sebastian Staske's presentation provided a thorough analysis of Georgia's economic state, addressing risks such as the national debt and the devaluation of the currency. He raised concerns about future economic stability, questioning whether Georgia would turn to Chinese loans if EU aid was frozen. He echoed the ambassador's sentiment with a sharp remark, "Good luck with that." Staske also discussed the tourism sector, noting the shift in tourist demographics and

spending, and touched on migration challenges, pointing out the ongoing brain drain as a serious concern.

Hans Gutbrod comprehensively compared Georgia's position on the Bertelsmann Transformation Index BTI with other countries. His data illustrated how systemic political decisions shape economic outcomes and emphasized the importance of making the right choices to improve Georgia's economic standing. Gutbrod also highlighted structural risks in agriculture and tourism and provided real-world examples of how Georgian businesses could benefit from adapting to EU standards.

The forum concluded with a Q&A session, during which the panelists discussed potential post-election scenarios and their economic consequences. The discussion closed with a comparison of the European Union and BRICS models, where the ambassador humorously dismissed any real comparison, stating they are "as different as night and day."

The event ended with an informal networking session, where participants had the opportunity to engage with the speakers. The German Business Association, which regularly organizes such forums for its members, once again facilitated a critical conversation on Georgia's future, offering both insight and a call to action for the country as it stands at a crossroads.

Reimagining Urban Spaces: The 2024 Tbilisi Architecture Biennial Offers a New Vision of City and Community

BY IVAN NECHAEV

As Tbilisi cements itself as a hub of cultural and architectural dialogue, the 2024 Tbilisi Architecture Biennial (TAB) unfolds as one of the year's most thought-provoking events. Under the theme of 'Correct Mistakes,' the Biennial promises to explore new ways of coexisting with our environments—natural, social, and architectural—while taking a critical look at the legacies of modernist interventions and the role of architecture in shaping sustainable futures. The event runs from October through November, featuring an ambitious program of physical projects, exhibitions, screenings, and discussions that address both local Georgian contexts and global architectural discourses.

TAB'S VISION: A BIENNIAL FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

The 2024 Tbilisi Architecture Biennial, organized by the Tbilisi-based non-profit organization TAB, in collaboration with numerous international partners, is driven by the aim to reimagine urban spaces through socially engaged and ecologically conscious architecture. Co-founded by Tinatin Gurgendze, Giga Batiashvili, and Dato Zautashvili, TAB stands out for its focus on transforming underused and neglected urban sites, particularly those that embody past engineering and infrastructural projects. This year's theme directly addresses the legacy of these past modernist interventions, suggesting alternative futures through participatory projects and artistic experimentation.

The biennial's events are spread across various iconic and symbolic locations in Tbilisi, engaging the city's residents in discussions on ecological responsibility, water management, and collective urban participation. Projects like 'Transforming Legacy: Fog Catcher Obelisk' and 'Cenotaph' take a poetic approach to water as both a literal and symbolic resource, while exhibitions like 'An Atlas of Commoning: Places of Collective Production' delve into practices of collective stewardship and grassroots urbanism.

ARCHITECTURAL ACTIVISM IN THE TIME OF ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

The theme 'Correct Mistakes' was born from Georgia's participation in the 18th Venice Architecture Biennale and reflects the urgent need to address human exploitation of natural landscapes, disregard for ecosystems, and the worsening climate crisis. Political turbulence in Georgia,

particularly surrounding resource extraction and environmental neglect, further heightened the stakes. The TAB organizers consciously abandoned traditional architectural exhibitions in favor of documentary, research-driven projects that interrogated the relationship between humanity and nature, and by extension, architecture's role in correcting historical wrongs.

Architectural activism took center stage throughout the biennial. From workshops to symposiums, the program sought to foster interdisciplinary dialogue on how architecture could evolve to support environmental resilience. Instead of showcasing theoretical models of future cities, the biennial asked visitors to engage with the realities of Georgia's environmental degradation: the drying of rivers, deforestation, the melting of glaciers, and the mismanagement of water resources.

OPENING HIGHLIGHTS: TRANSFORMING LEGACY AT TBILISI SEA

'Transforming Legacy: Fog Catcher Obelisk,' one of the evocative projects in this year's biennial, officially opened on October 1 at the terraced waterfall near Tbilisi Sea. The installation reclaims a historic site once used for the inauguration of the Samgori irrigation system, a massive modernist achievement symbolizing human domination over nature. Designed by a team of international participants including Xenia, Michel Kessler, Pierre Musy, and Romain Iff, the fog catcher contrasts this domineering legacy by proposing a gentle, environmentally integrated technique for collecting water.

The project features a cylindrical fog catcher situated between two imposing obelisks, emblematic of Soviet-era infrastructure. Instead of reshaping nature to meet human needs, the installation collects water droplets from the air and returns them to the soil. This gesture represents a harmonious collaboration with the environment, offering a reflection on how modern architecture can evolve from a force of domination to one of ecological reciprocity. A special performance by Georgian artist Natia Chikvaizde marked the opening, further deepening the ritualistic and symbolic dimensions of this transformative project.

HIGHLIGHT PROJECTS: ENGAGING WITH ENVIRONMENTAL CRISES THROUGH ARTISTIC PRACTICE

Several standout projects exemplified the biennial's commitment to addressing environmental crises through research and activism.

One such project was 'Unmapping Energy Geographies,' a collaboration between Tekla Aslanishvili, Alexandra Aroshvili, Evelina Gambino, and Natalia Nebieridze. This exhibition focused on the interplay between energy, geography, and social justice, exploring how Georgia's energy infrastructure intersects with global dynamics of power and control. By examining the often invisible networks of energy that power our cities, the project illuminated how these systems contribute to the exploitation of natural resources.

In 'Common Water Bodies,' Lado Shonia and Nikoloz Kvatchrelishvili focused on the critical issue of water management in Georgia, a country rich in water resources but increasingly plagued by mismanagement and climate-induced droughts. Their workshop and exhibition explored the cultural and environmental significance of Georgia's rivers and water bodies, delving into the collective responsibilities and mistakes that have led to their current state of degradation.

The project 'The Weather Is Nice, Let's Panic!' by Julia Obleitner, Jan Meusburger, Helvijs Savickis, and Anna Kintsurashvili introduced a more playful yet sobering exploration of climate anxiety. Through interactive physical installations, the artists sought to evoke the absurdity of human complacency in the face of the climate emergency, using humor as a tool to underscore the gravity of the situation.

FORGOTTEN RIVERS RESURFACE IN KERA'S 'CENOTAPH'

Another key physical project in this year's Biennial is 'Cenotaph,' an installation by Swiss collective KERA that explores Tbilisi's neglected waterways, many of which have been buried underground or reduced to waste dumps. Installed near Public School 144 on Ortachala Street, the intervention draws attention to the Dukniskhevi creek, one of the city's many forgotten rivers. The concept behind the project reflects the Greek word "cenotaph"—meaning an empty tomb—paying homage to the buried rivers that continue to flow, albeit unnoticed, beneath the city's surface.

KERA's installation is defined by its subtlety. A bell is suspended above the site, its chimes mimicking the hidden flow of the creek and encouraging visitors to slow down and engage in quiet reflection. The intervention acts as both a tribute and a wake-up call, urging the public to reconnect with Tbilisi's natural waterways and reflect on the consequences of modern urban expansion. This minimalist yet powerful project seeks to revive public awareness around the city's hidden hydrological network, inviting us to imagine an urban future that honors nature rather than conceals it.

A GLOBAL CONVERSATION ON URBAN COMMONS: 'AN ATLAS OF COMMONING' EXHIBITION

One of the major exhibition highlights of TAB 2024 is 'An Atlas of Commoning: Places of Collective Production,' a traveling show presented in collaboration with the German ifa-Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen and ARCH+. Opened at the TBC Concept Flagship on Kote Marjanishvili Street, this exhibition tackles the critical issue of urban commons—the shared spaces and resources that form the backbone of social and environmental sustainability.

The exhibition focuses on the practice of "commoning"—the collective production and governance of resources such as water, land, and communal space. Featuring case studies from Berlin, Pittsburgh, Montevideo, Buenos Aires, and



'Cenotaph' / Photo by the author

now Tbilisi, the Atlas showcases grassroots projects aimed at reclaiming urban spaces for collective use. With the rapid privatization and commercialization of public spaces in post-Soviet cities like Tbilisi, the concept of the commons has gained renewed significance.

Curated by an international team led by Stefan Gruber from Carnegie Mellon University, this Tbilisi edition adds local case studies that explore how Georgian communities are organizing to protect shared spaces and resist market-driven urban development. The accompanying Commoning Tbilisi Symposium (held on October 5) brought together local activists, scholars, and urban designers for discussions on collective urban stewardship, providing a rich intellectual backdrop to the exhibition.

DOCUMENTARY SCREENINGS: CINEMA AS A LENS ON ARCHITECTURE

In collaboration with the Documentary Association Georgia (DOCA Georgia), the biennial featured a series of documentary film screenings that tackled environmental and social issues head-on. Films like 'Stormy Nights' and 'The Water Dragon / Land Underwater' explored the devastating effects of climate change on both natural and human systems. These screenings emphasized the power of documentary cinema as a tool for activism, education, and engagement, aligning with the biennial's broader mission to correct the mistakes of the past and envision a more sustainable future.

Over the next two weeks, film lovers will have the opportunity to explore critical issues related to architecture, water, and urbanization through powerful documentary narratives. The films 'History of Water,' 'Medusa,' and 'Dead Slow Ahead' will be screened as part of the program, each of which touches on different dimensions of environmental degradation, human agency, and resource management.

'History of Water' examines the role of water in shaping civilizations and controlling territories, while 'Medusa' weaves a haunting story of environmental destruction and human resilience. 'Dead Slow Ahead,' on the other hand, offers a stunning visual reflection on industrial landscapes, capturing the slow disintegration of a cargo ship as a metaphor for the decay of modern industrial society. These screenings will spark discussions on how documentary film serves as a crucial medium for investigating and narrating architectural and environmental histories.

ENGAGING MINDS: LECTURES, GUIDED TOURS, AND EXHIBITIONS

Beyond its architectural installations and physical projects, the Tbilisi Architecture Biennial 2024 offered a wide

array of intellectually stimulating lectures, guided tours, and exhibitions that deepen the public's engagement with critical architectural and environmental issues. The Biennial's opening on September 28 at the Hydrometeorology Institute featured a keynote lecture by Philippe Rahm, known for his work on atmospheric architecture and sustainability, setting the tone for the Biennial's focus on ecology and architecture's role in shaping our responses to climate change. His insights on energy geographies and the impact of architecture on the climate resonated with many of the exhibitions that follow, such as 'The Weather Is Nice, Let's Panic!' and 'Unmapping Energy Geographies.'

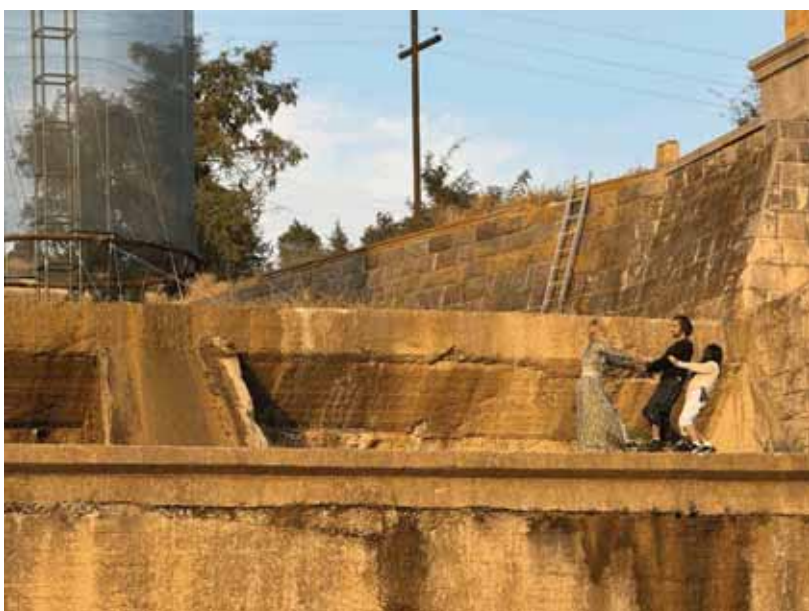
Visitors could also look forward to guided tours like 'The River Wailed Like a Wounded Beast,' offering curated walks through exhibitions that spotlight forgotten urban rivers and the consequences of rapid urbanization. For those curious about Tbilisi's complex urban forest, the guided walk through the city's green spaces provided a unique opportunity to understand the hidden ecological landscapes that lie within the city.

The Biennial's intellectual rigor continued with symposiums such as 'Commoning Tbilisi,' which brought together local and international voices to discuss urban commons, and workshops like 'Double Exposure' by la-clique, where participants could engage with cutting-edge discussions on urbanism and architecture. Guided tours of exhibitions, such as the one for 'An Atlas of Commoning' on October 5, offered a closer look at how commoning practices are transforming urban spaces around the world.

A CALL TO ACTION THROUGH REFLECTION AND COLLABORATION

TAB 2024 succeeded in transforming the architecture biennial format into a platform for critical reflection and activist engagement. Through its focus on research, documentary work, and environmental justice, the biennial challenged participants and visitors alike to confront the collective mistakes that have shaped Georgia's landscapes and ecosystems. In place of abstract architectural concepts, the biennial offered tangible, research-driven solutions for navigating the environmental crises of our time.

By centering the voices of architects, environmentalists, and the public, the biennial underscored the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration in correcting these mistakes. As we continue to grapple with the consequences of climate change and environmental degradation, events like TAB 2024 remind us that architecture must evolve to meet these challenges, serving not just as a means of creative expression but as a tool for social and ecological transformation.



'Transforming Legacy: Fog Catcher Obelisk' / Photo by the author

UNDP and Biomass Association Give Vulnerable Highland Families Eco-Friendly Stoves



the broader implications of the project, stating that it contributes to environmental protection, poverty reduction, and gender equality.

“Access to a clean and healthy environment is the fundamental right of all humans, recognized by the UN General Assembly. Fostering reusable energy is a step forward in achieving sustainable goals and prevents woodland from being destroyed,” noted beneficiary Irma Tskipurishvili from the village of Shupakho.



საგარეო ურთიერთობების მინისტრო



In a collaborative effort between the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Global Environment Facility's Small Grants Program (GEF SGP), the Biomass Association of Georgia, and several highly responsible enterprises - Esco, Dio, PSP, Clean World, Diamed, and the Reproductive Clinic of Zurab Sabakhtarashvili, socially and economically vulnerable families in Georgia's highlands are being equipped with stoves and locally sourced solid biomass to burn in them as an alternative to firewood. To date, 57 families have benefited from this project, receiving the new, energy efficient stoves free of charge.

This initiative is part of a bigger cam-

paign that includes educational and informational efforts, such as 'Energy Buses,' which have already traveled through 50 municipalities to promote energy efficiency. Demonstrations are planned in Adjara, Racha-Lechkhumi, and Samegrelo in 2024-25, aiming to continue raising awareness.

According to Anna Chernyshova, UNDP Deputy Resident Representative in Georgia, "Cultivating energy-efficient technologies is an important step toward environmental protection. The forest degradation process can be reversed by reducing unsustainable firewood practices in highland villages."

Zaal Kheladze, Director of the Biomass Association of Georgia, also emphasized

Fencing Match

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

One of the big ongoing jobs in Georgian village life is the maintaining of one's boundaries. In this case, the physical ones, not the mental or social ones: the fences, which keep out unwanted animals from one's property. I have written about this before, but it seems to be a subject to which one can add more detail as time goes on.

What animals? Cows, here, top the list, as they are the most common domestic animal in Svaneti. Their chief approach is to "test a fence to destruction", mainly from the top, as their main weapons-shoulders and horns -are high up. So we try to intimidate them with fence posts and vertical slats which are high enough; possibly weaving in some horizontal ones at the top. Barbed wire all along the top of the fence, too, is a good deterrent. It's beastly to install, grabbing everything it can as you unroll and bend and tighten it into position. Best wear cheap work gloves instead of expensive ones, as they're going to get shredded in one session anyway!

Pigs here are diggers, mostly for potatoes, and in any case are much shorter than cows. So your fence wants to be

right down to ground level, and possibly with another run of barbed wire down there too in areas where you expect trouble, to stop their sensitive snouts from pushing through.

Sheep and goats here are much rarer, while horses won't enter unfamiliar land. So the above measures are all proof against these, too.

Dogs will look for any pair of slats which can be nosed around enough to squeeze through the resulting gap, so keep the lower slat wires tight!

Recently, Lali's nephew, a monk in Nekrisi, brought his whole monastery here for a holiday. We left them to it for a week, as they would be cooking and cleaning for themselves and anyway had requested that we close the guest house to other visitors during their stay. But they also did some very useful practical work during our absence, mainly re-doing the entire 100m upper fence with new oak posts and pine slats, alternating the new slats with old ones to stretch them out. With 20 men to choose from, all villagers, the job will get done. This was a huge help to me, as it's a minimum two-person job and Lali certainly has her hands full on a daily basis.

Then friends of ours visited from Tbilisi during our last week here before closing up and flying south-east for the winter to the capital. They are a family



of four, with two small boys, all of British origin. The father helped me further with the lower fence work, replacing rotted posts and slats and adding the barbed wire there too. This job was on my winterizing list, and it's a huge relief to have it finished well before we go. All the leftover material we stacked standing up in the barn, to stay dry and either be used next year or be cut up as firewood for the big Svan stove.

All the flying or winged livestock can get itself over a fence: chickens, geese, ducks, the odd turkey or guinea-fowl. The former make up the greatest major-

ity by far in this group, and your best defense against them is done their particular area of interest: the veggie garden. But if they haven't discovered it by harvest time, you're scot-free. This was the case this year for us, and we haven't had our own chickens (or cows) for a few years now, so, no bother from them.

Moles, voles, mice, stoats or ermines or weasels, foxes, wolves, bears: the former small animals can slip through any fence slat gaps (or dig under them); the larger ones haven't made a single appearance on our land in our 13 years here. Cats will just jump over, and aren't a

bother in any case. So that's the list. Properly fenced in, you can rest assured that your land is protected whether you are at home or far away. Not, and not.

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

Exploring the Tbilisi Urban Forest Project by Ruderal

BY KATIE RUTH DAVIES

The Tbilisi Urban Forest project by Ruderal was this week selected as a finalist for the European Prize for Urban Public Space, a biennial award that recognizes the best interventions of creation and transformation in the public spaces of European cities. This recognition follows from the project's 2024 nomination for the European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture – Mies van der Rohe Awards (EUMies Awards).

"This nomination marks the first time that the European Prize for Urban Public Space has recognized a landscape architecture work in Georgia," says Ruderal's director, Sarah Cowles. "The Tbilisi Urban Forest project will improve biodiversity, habitat, build resilience to climate change, and provide new recreational opportunities for Tbilisi's residents."

In 2020, city leaders in Tbilisi initiated a project to replant the Tbilisi Urban Forest with a biodiverse palette of endemic and climate-adapted species to replace aging pine forests. Ruderal, a Tbilisi-based landscape architecture studio, was selected to design the project by proposing a novel approach to urban forestry that integrates ecology, technology, and aesthetics.

There are two pilot areas within the 700-hectare Mtatsminda territory: Narikala Ridge, a north-facing cliffside bridging the historic city center to the National Botanical Garden of Georgia, and Okrokana, a south-facing slope in a peri-urban settlement in the hills above Tbilisi.

Ruderal adapted the work of environmental scientists to create detailed spatial plans for coherent "patches" of plant communities keyed to different soil and slope conditions. The species diversity and vertical heterogeneity of the plantings provide cover for wildlife. A leader in advanced computational methods for landscape design, Ruderal developed a parametric planting design tool to reconcile typical planting conditions with precise site-specific spatial data. The tool allows designers to rapidly visualize the patches at different scales, adapt and optimize species mixes relative to nursery inventory, and simulate the interaction of diverse species over time. Trees for the project are propagated in Georgian nurseries and collected from local seed stocks, linking to the surrounding ecological context and supporting a growing network of native plant nurseries.

At the beginning of October, within the program of the Tbilisi Architecture Biennial, Sarah Cowles and her colleagues led a guided tour of the Tbilisi Urban Forest, from Gudiashvili Square up to the Narikala Ridge, giving attendees a chance to explore the young forest and to gain a greater appreciation of the discipline of landscape architecture.

REHABILITATION OF LADO GUDIASHVILI SQUARE

Despite public criticism of the gentrification of the area, the rehabilitation of Lado Gudiashvili Square and its adjacent areas in Sololaki have revitalized this historic part of Old Tbilisi. Most buildings on Gudiashvili Square and in the surrounding area have been designated as immovable cultural heritage sites, and internally and externally strengthened and renovated.

The project has also improved the square, streets, and sidewalks, incorporating new lighting, underground engineering networks, and enhanced illumination on the buildings. Notably, the park



Giorgi Nishnianidze, Ruderal architect, explains the Tbilisi Urban Forest project

in Gudiashvili Square has undergone a wonderful transformation that gives it a fresh and inviting look.

The company INSI, along with project manager Davit Kordzaia, received recognition for their exceptional contributions to the rehabilitation efforts. We met Mr. Kordzaia on our tour.

"Before our work, the square was enclosed by a retaining wall," he tells us. "We opened up the space, integrating the life of the buildings into the area. The circular, double-sided benches we placed allow for views of both the architecture and the people passing by, as well as of Ruderal's 'Georgian forest' at the center. Our goal was functionality. The steps serve as a gentle boundary between the cobbled streets and the square; the deeper steps in the lower corner helped us level the square, while two corners remain step-free to ensure accessibility for everyone."

We asked Ruderal's Sarah Cowles to tell us a little more about the square's "Georgian forest," which cleverly brings the wild of the ridge into the community space, offering visitors a sense of intimacy and natural seclusion from the busy urban surroundings.

"This little fragment of forest was a really new idea in urban planting for the

city," she notes. "The city planners are very much focused on greening right now, but they really like a certain kind of tree, certain shapes, imported trees not very well tied into the local ecology in any way. We chose to highlight endemic species here instead, aiming to represent a fragment of Georgia's native forest. You can see hawthorn and berries here, growing wild."

From Gudiashvili Square, the tour moved up the beautiful Betlemi stone steps to the Narikala trail and ridge.

ON THE NARIKALA RIDGE

Our first stop was half way up; a lookout point which offered wonderful views of the cityscape, including Gudiashvili Square and a former project of Ruderal's on the Metekhi Ridge.

Giorgi Nishnianidze, architect and studio director at Ruderal, told us more: "Work on transforming the former Russian military base on the Metekhi Ridge taught us valuable lessons about applying new landscape techniques, particularly in altering existing drainage patterns," he said. "Some of these methods were then scaled and adapted for the adjacent Narikala Project."

The ridges around Tbilisi consist of artificially created forests. In the 1920s,

the area faced a dry climate with little shade or shelter, prompting efforts to establish a forest. However, many older methods proved unsuitable for the landscape and current climate change challenges. The new initiative to restore and enhance the forest is crucial, Nishnianidze noted, with the primary focus on ensuring its sustainability over the next 50 to 100 years.

The Narikala Ridge area features the historic city wall, steep cliffs, and a popular tourist trail that begins at the Betlemi Stairs. As hikers ascend, they pass through various ecological patches, including the Cedar Forest, Silver Forest, Flowering Thicket, and Tbilisi Chaparral.

"The Narikala Ridge connects the city with the Botanical Garden, continuing the ecological narrative," Nishnianidze said. "However, the conditions here are challenging for tree planting; the steep, rocky slopes provide little soil. In the mid-20th century, foresters used the rather brutal method of dynamiting to create planting pockets, a method that is no longer feasible due to nearby urbanization.

"Our project relies on using the existing planting pockets, densifying the greenery and introducing new patches where possible. We adopted a landscape

ecology approach, planting multiple species in a single area. By analyzing the existing flora, we identified which species would thrive best together," he noted.

A PAUSE OVERLOOKING THE BOTANICAL GARDEN

Before heading back down to the city, we took a break at the top of the ridge. Our eyes on the Botanical Garden, we took time to appreciate that ecological narrative Nishnianidze had mentioned.

Ruderal's guiding principle, Sarah Cowles informs us, was to cultivate a forest with a distinctly Georgian character, moving away from the old monocultural approach that favored a single species; a strategy that was not only less biodiverse, but also ill-equipped to adapt to climate changes.

"Historically, Mtatsminda has faced a cycle of logging, planting, and replanting, with Himalayan cedar being particularly favored during the Soviet era," Cowles says. "In recent years, the pine trees became infected with fungus, leading to the removal of the diseased trees in 2020. Much of the deadwood was repurposed to reinforce embankments and stairs on new trails across the area. Though tree mortality rates decreased towards Kojori and Betania, annual snowstorms put immense pressure on the pines, resulting in substantial damage to branches. The positive side is that this has led to natural light wells forming in the forest, allowing native Georgian deciduous trees to regenerate."

Indeed, it seems that while pine trees inhibit much growth beneath them, they enrich the soil by increasing humus.

"When the pines were cut down on the ridge and Mtatsminda Mount, sunlight flooded in, enhancing diversity in the understory," Cowles tells us. "Now, you can find blooming Teucrium, jasmine in the spring, and poppies, along with a range of interesting succulents. The herbaceous layer has become much more varied. However, in areas where the slope hasn't been replanted, the risk of landslides has increased since the removal of the diseased pines. That is something that is being looked into by the city," she assures us.

The Tbilisi Urban Forest Project is a model for sustainable and resilient urban afforestation that can be replicated in cities worldwide. The project integrates ecology, technology, and aesthetics to create a biodiverse and resilient urban forest that will benefit people and wildlife for many years to come, standing as a testimony to positively changing perspectives on city-making. If you haven't seen it yet, do – your mind and body will thank you.

ABOUT RUDERAL

Ruderal is a landscape architecture studio based in Tbilisi, Georgia that designs and develops sustainable site projects where ecology, culture, and history harmonize with the surrounding context. Ruderal works with partners with municipalities, institutions, community groups, and private developers to guide the design and planning process, from research and concept development to construction supervision.

ABOUT THE EUROPEAN PRIZE FOR URBAN PUBLIC SPACE

The European Prize for Urban Public Space is a biennial competition organized with the aim of recognizing and making known all kinds of works to create, recover and improve public spaces in European cities. The Tbilisi Urban Forest has been selected by an international jury as one of 5 finalists from a pool of 253 submissions. The winner will be announced later this month.



The Ruderal plan for mixed-species "patches" on the Narikala Ridge.

Metrica to Offer Platform for Georgian and Int'l Fashion Brands

BY SHELBI R. ANKIEWICZ

The fashion show Metrica is set to showcase up-and-coming Georgian and international fashion designers while advocating for their prominence throughout the region and beyond.

Metrica was co-founded in 2022 by organizer Gita Dzhavid and designer Maia Chkhartishvili. For several years, Dzhavid worked in business consulting for a Metaverse company that also did some projects within the fashion realm. Once she switched to a new career path as a catwalk model, her attention shifted solely to the fashion industry and its development.

The Metaverse is a virtual world made up of communities, where people can meet, work, and play using virtual reality headsets, smartphone applications, and more. The Metrica Fashion Show will be the first fashion project in Georgia that is displayed in the Metaverse. Dzhavid tells GEORGIA TODAY that she sees this as an important opportunity because of the exposure it will bring to the cooperating designers.

"It erases the borders of fashion, especially since it can be viewed in any part of the world by anyone, which accelerates the connection from A to B in participation with the brands," she says.

A large department of the fashion show is the 'Fashion Fusion Foundation,' which, Dzhavid explains, focuses on promoting

Georgian designers abroad by projecting their culture, vision and industry objectives out into the world. The foundation also aims to promote international designers within the region and beyond. "Metrica allows every designer worldwide to bring a part of their identity, their DNA, and introduce it through this platform," Dzhavid notes.

Several Georgian designers and brands will be presented during the event: Janelidze, Diana Kvariani, Love Mark, Tako Mekvabidze, REM, Zardouz (Georgian/Iranian), and Kinto. REM is a popular Georgian brand that used to be called UMI, which in the old Georgian language translates to 'Raw'. It has recently undergone a rebranding and will be the opening show for Metrica.

Other international brands and designers have also partnered with Georgian brands as collaborations. Japanese brand Miyabi will be present, rooted in Georgia and using Japanese fabric to create clothing pieces that merge the two cultures. In recent years, Central Asia has become a hot spot for the creative industry, fashion included.

Another country in the fashion spotlight, according to Dzhavid, is Turkmenistan. She says this year the brand Arslan will be presented, one of the first times in recent history that a Turkmen designer is presented at an international fashion event. Dzhavid tells us Arslan's work plays with his country's traditional clothing, while adding a very modern twist.

The Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates,



Metrica Fashion Show cover photo. Source: FB

have also been on a creative rise in recent years. Dzhavid says that to further strengthen ties with this creative industry and region, embassy representatives and designers from these countries will also be present at Metrica. She adds that the fashion show is talking about host-

ing the 2025 event in Saudi Arabia.

Enterprise Georgia, under the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia, aiming to establish the country on the world map through business, exports, and investments, supports Metrica, as does the Italian Embassy in

Georgia, allowing potential partnership with other parts of the world.

Of recent trends in the Georgian fashion industry, Dzhavid mentions that the country's designers and brands have their own vision that doesn't necessarily follow worldwide tendencies.

"Freedom is often translated through our collections, clothes, and accessories. Black has always been Georgia's fashion color, with a hint of grunge," she says. "In recent years, though, the direction of fashion here has changed—people have started wearing more comfortable, oversized pieces of clothing, decorated with numerous pockets. You have to know that the way Georgia deals with black in their clothing is pretty unique, and you can't see it anywhere else in the world."

Georgia's fashion industry has been on the global watchlist for a number of years already, especially since the rise of Demna Gvasalia and George Keburia. Over time, the industry has been highlighted in various outlets, among them Forbes, The Economist, and FASHION Magazine.

Other brands and designers to be present at this year's Metrica are Reverie (Georgia), Mriyou (Ukraine), Diana Rakhmaninova (Azerbaijan), Pentatonika (Kazakhstan), Lilia D Ulat (Uzbekistan), Cut & Desh (Kyrgyzstan), Raazmoon (Iran), and Aisha (Azerbaijan).

Metrica will hold its fashion show on Sunday, October 20, at the Axis Towers in Tbilisi, in hopes of promoting local designers, showcasing up-and-coming brands, and displaying international brands within the region.

An Evening with Jirí Kylián: Ballets of Depth, Discipline, and Dark Humor Illuminate Tbilisi Opera

REVIEW BY IVAN NECHAEV

On October 11-13, the Tbilisi Opera Ballet Theater staged three masterworks by the legendary choreographer Jirí Kylián: *Petite Mort*, *Falling Angels*, and *Sechs Tánze*. This celebrated revival, guided by the hands of artistic director Nina Ananiashvili and conductor Levan Jagaev, provided a powerful meditation on the intricacies of human existence. Each ballet, while vastly different in tone and theme, was unified by Kylián's signature fusion of emotional depth, discipline, and playfulness.

PETITE MORT: BEAUTY, POWER, AND THE PROXIMITY OF DEATH

Kylián's *Petite Mort*, set to the slow movements of Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 23 and No. 21, explores the delicate intersection between life and death, pleasure and finality. With David Aladashvili's exquisite live performance on piano, the dancers seemed to evoke both the ecstasy and fragility of human existence, echoing Kylián's statement that life's greatest pleasures are often tinged with the presence of mortality.

The choreography, featuring duets framed by the poignant metaphor of the "petite mort," was a dance of subtle tensions. Fencers swayed their swords as symbols of masculine power, yet it was the vulnerability of their movements that caught the eye. Each torso-like motion, paired with Mozart's somber adagio, felt stripped of embellishment, leaving behind raw, visceral images of human bodies grappling with their impermanence. The ballet itself, a conversation between life and death, evoked a hypnotic stillness in the audience, as



Photo by the author

they bore witness to a dance where time stood suspended—contemplating the inevitable.

FALLING ANGELS: THE DELICATE BALANCE OF DISCIPLINE AND FREEDOM

In *Falling Angels*, Kylián shifts the focus to the complexity of female existence within the strictures of art and society. Eight female dancers, never leaving the stage, performed against Steve Reich's rhythmic *Drumming*, Part I. The minimalist score, pulsing and repetitive, formed the backdrop for a ballet that explored the tension between discipline and freedom.

Kylián's choreography dissected the stage into geometric sections, highlighting both the interdependence and the

individuality of the performers. The dancers seemed trapped within these structures, yet their subtle yearning to break free was palpable. The work, both a tribute to and critique of the pressures placed on female performers, moved seamlessly between moments of quiet vulnerability and bursts of contained rebellion.

The physicality of the dancers, coupled with the intense focus Reich's music demands, was mesmerizing. It was clear that each movement was both carefully controlled and deeply felt, embodying Kylián's signature blend of emotional expressiveness and formal rigor. The ballet left the audience with a sense of the constant push and pull between belonging and independence—an existential struggle that defines much of

human experience, particularly for women navigating the world of performance.

SECHS TÄNZE: A DANCE OF ABSURDITY AND WIT

The final piece of the evening, *Sechs Tánze*, offered a stark departure in tone. Yet beneath its surface playfulness lay a reflection on the absurdity of life—a theme that ran through all three works. Set to Mozart's *Six German Dances*, KV 571, this ballet was a whirlwind of exuberance, wit, and physical comedy.

The dancers donned powdered wigs and 18th-century costumes, but these formalities quickly gave way to a sense of chaotic liberation. The piece was filled with bizarre juxtapositions, from whimsical group movements to sudden moments of stillness. The absurdity was contagious, and the audience responded with laughter—a rare reaction in the world of ballet, but one that felt perfectly in tune with Mozart's playful score.

Despite its lighthearted veneer, *Sechs Tánze* delved into deeper questions about the nature of performance itself. Kylián seemed to suggest that, beneath the masks and costumes, life is nothing more than a farcical dance—a fleeting moment before we confront the mysteries beyond. It was a fitting conclusion to a program that consistently returned to the themes of life's brevity, beauty, and madness.

A CREATIVE EXPANSION FOR TBILISI OPERA BALLET

For the Tbilisi Opera Ballet, regularly performing Kylián's works represents more than just an artistic challenge—it is an essential step toward expanding their range beyond classical ballet. Kylián's choreography requires dancers to engage not only with technical precision, but also with deep emotional and

intellectual material. His works balance minimalism with intense expression, and this blend of restraint and emotional release can help dancers develop a more nuanced understanding of movement. For a troupe traditionally grounded in classics like *Giselle* or *Swan Lake*, working with Kylián's innovative style fosters a new approach to physicality and narrative.

Moreover, the frequent performance of Kylián's works opens the door for the Georgian dance scene to be more prominently placed on the international contemporary ballet stage. As Georgian ballet continues to build its reputation globally, mastering Kylián's repertoire signifies the versatility and artistic depth of the Tbilisi company. This continuous exposure to contemporary works will contribute to a richer, more diverse dance culture in Georgia, challenging audiences and performers alike to engage with ballet in new and profound ways.

BALLET AS A MIRROR TO THE HUMAN CONDITION

Jirí Kylián's works are not merely dances—they are explorations of the most essential elements of human life. Through movement, Kylián speaks of love, loss, discipline, rebellion, and the fleeting nature of existence. The Tbilisi audience on October 13th was treated to an evening of deeply intellectual yet emotionally resonant performances, where each ballet offered its own distinct reflection on life's paradoxes. In the hands of Tbilisi Opera Ballet's talented dancers and musicians, Kylián's timeless themes were given a new vibrancy, leaving the audience with much to contemplate.

For those in search of art that challenges as much as it entertains, this evening of Jirí Kylián's ballets was nothing short of sublime.

O Fortuna: Gábor Hollerung and Georgian Choral Masterpiece at Autumn Tbilisi Festival

REVIEW BY IVAN NECHAEV

The October 12, the performance of *Carmina Burana* at the Djansug Kakhdze Tbilisi Center for Music & Culture was more than just a concert—it was a convergence of musical forces, featuring the Tbilisi Symphony Orchestra, the Georgian State Choir, and the Choir of Batumi State Music Center, all under the expert baton of renowned Hungarian conductor Gábor Hollerung. This performance, part of the 'Autumn Tbilisi' International Music Festival, showcased Karl Orff's masterpiece with a nuanced intensity that made for a night of musical grandeur and emotional complexity. Vocalists Sophie Gordeladze, Irakli Mujiri, and Mikheil Abramishvili provided captivating solo performances that added further depth to this already monumental work.

THE ORFF PHENOMENON: A RITUAL OF HUMAN EXISTENCE

Karl Orff's *Carmina Burana* is a landmark in 20th-century choral-orchestral repertoire. First performed in 1937, it draws upon medieval Latin texts that meditate on fate, fortune, and the pleasures and perils of life. Orff structured the work as a scenic cantata, merging visceral rhythmic drive with lush harmonic textures. His use of repetition, pulsating rhythms, and declamatory vocal lines lends the work a sense of ritualistic grandeur, where the music's raw power mirrors the primal themes within the text.

GÁBOR HOLLERUNG: THE ARCHITECT OF MOMENTUM AND PRECISION

At the helm of this performance was conductor Gábor Hollerung, whose reputation as a specialist in large-scale choral and orchestral works has made him a sought-after conductor in the international music scene. Hollerung's career spans decades, marked by a distinctive style that emphasizes structural clarity, rhythmic precision, and an unerring ability to sculpt vast musical landscapes. His background as both an orchestral conductor and a choral director imbues his approach with a deep understanding of how to integrate the vocal and instrumental forces in a seamless and organic manner.

One of Hollerung's greatest strengths is his ability to maintain momentum without sacrificing nuance. *Carmina Burana*, with its relentless rhythmic underpinnings, requires a conductor capable of harnessing its energy while controlling the shifts in mood and tone. In this performance, Hollerung's technique shone in his pacing—he allowed the music to build organically, never rushing through Orff's powerful climaxes, but also never letting the energy dissipate during the quieter sections. This balance created a dynamic ebb and flow, keeping the audience on edge while



Gábor Hollerung. Photo by the author

allowing for moments of lyrical beauty to shine through.

His gestures on the podium were economical yet expressive, providing the performers with clear, unambiguous direction. Hollerung's experience in navigating complex textures was evident in his treatment of the choirs and orchestra; under his baton, the rhythmic intricacies of *Carmina Burana*—from the opening, ominous strikes of "O Fortuna" to the boisterous energy of the drinking songs—were executed with precision. His attention to detail ensured that every section of the orchestra and choirs worked as part of a larger whole, yet still maintained their individual sonic identities.

Moreover, Hollerung's understanding of choral timbre allowed him to highlight the choirs' textual articulation without sacrificing the orchestral colors. In sections like "Veni, veni, venias," where the rhythmic interplay between voices and instruments could easily become muddled, Hollerung maintained a crisp, driving tempo, allowing the text's clarity and emotional intensity to ring out. His skillful balance of the vocal lines with the often thunderous orchestral accompaniment underscored his mastery of orchestral-choral integration, a hallmark of his conducting style.

THE GEORGIAN CHORAL TRADITION: A DEEP WELL OF POWER

The choral forces—comprising the Georgian State Choir and the Choir of Batumi

State Music Center—were another standout feature of the evening. Georgia has a rich choral tradition, and this was reflected in the choirs' performance, which combined technical brilliance with emotional depth. Hollerung capitalized on this tradition, working with the choirs to produce a sound that was not only forceful and full-bodied but also flexible enough to handle the dynamic demands of Orff's score.

In *Carmina Burana*, the choirs carry much of the emotional weight. Whether invoking the capriciousness of fortune in "O Fortuna" or reveling in the raucous pleasures of spring and summer in "Veris leta facies," their role is to embody the very forces of nature and fate that the text so powerfully evokes. Hollerung, ever the architect, shaped their performance with precision, bringing out both the drama and the lyricism in their parts. The contrast between the biting articulation in the more rhythmic sections and the smooth, flowing lines in the lyrical passages demonstrated not just the choir's skill, but also Hollerung's ability to coax a wide emotional palette from them.

SOLOISTS: VOICES THAT SOAR

Soprano Sophie Gordeladze, baritone Irakli Mujiri, and tenor Mikheil Abramishvili each delivered performances that added another layer of intensity to the concert. Gordeladze's voice was particularly luminous in the sections that required lightness and clarity, such as "In trutina," where she effortlessly bal-

anced the fragility and sensuality inherent in the music. Her voice floated above the orchestra, embodying the delicate tension between desire and restraint.

Mujiri's baritone brought a dramatic heft to his roles, particularly in "Estuans interius," where the vocal line's turbulent, restless quality was underscored by his dark, resonant tone. He captured the fire and frustration of Orff's character, delivering a performance that was both passionate and finely controlled. Abramishvili, with his versatile tenor, lent an unexpected emotional depth to his parts, especially in the notoriously challenging "Olim lacus colueram," where the irony of the roasted swan's lament was matched by Abramishvili's deft navigation of the piece's humor and pathos.

THE TBILISI SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA: A LANDSCAPE OF SOUND

Of course, no performance of *Carmina Burana* is complete without an orchestra capable of delivering both the raw power and the intricate details that Orff's score demands. The Tbilisi Symphony Orchestra rose to this challenge with vigor and skill. Under Hollerung's precise baton, the orchestra created a soundscape that was both overwhelming in its intensity and delicate in its attention to detail. The brass section, with its bold, declarative statements, laid the foundation for much of the work's dramatic impact, while the strings provided the lush, often sensual undercurrent that gives *Carmina*

Burana its sense of inevitability.

The percussion section was particularly crucial in maintaining the relentless rhythmic drive that propels much of the work. Hollerung's ability to blend the sometimes overwhelming force of the percussion with the more subtle sections of the orchestra allowed for a cohesive performance, where every instrumental voice was part of a greater whole.

A NIGHT OF POWER AND POIGNANCY

In this performance, Gábor Hollerung and his assembled forces—soloists, choirs, and orchestra—brought *Carmina Burana* to life in a way that captured both its monumental scale and its intimate emotional core. The success of the evening lay in Hollerung's ability to maintain a balance between these two poles, creating a performance that was both overwhelming in its power and deeply personal in its emotional resonance.

For the audience at the Djansug Kakhdze Tbilisi Center for Music & Culture, this concert was not just a display of musical virtuosity, but an exploration of the timeless themes of fate, fortune, and human passion that *Carmina Burana* so powerfully evokes. Through Hollerung's clear-eyed vision and the performers' extraordinary execution, this was a night where music transcended its form, becoming a communal experience that spoke to the very core of human existence.



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I am Georgian and therefore I am European

Zurab Zhvania, Council of Europe, 1999

