



FOCUS ON THE ELECTIONS

We take a look at the elections, the allegations of rigging, and the impact on Georgia's relations with the West **PAGE 2-5**

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Demand for Democracy: Georgian Culture and Art, from Ancient Times to Modernity

BY IVAN NECHAEV

In Georgian culture, the echoes of democracy have always reverberated, from the ancient mountainside councils to the bold graffiti on modern city walls. Renowned for its unique blend of Eastern and Western influences, Georgian society has seen a continuous push for justice, equality, and freedom of expression. This article explores the historical and cultural threads of democracy woven through Georgian art and society, illustrating how democratic values have evolved over the ages, influencing the nation's resilience and identity.

ANCIENT ROOTS: THE KHEVISBERI AND THE COUNCIL OF ELDERS

The origins of democratic governance in Georgia can be traced back to the practices of rural and mountainous communities, where early forms of participatory governance emerged. One prominent example of this is the role of the Khevisberi—an elder who guided the community's moral and social decisions—and the Council of Elders, a group that made important collective decisions.

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Photo by the author

GALT & TAGGART CREATING OPPORTUNITIES											
Prepared for Georgia Today Business by											
As of 29-Oct-2024											
Markets					Markets						
BONDS	Price	w/w	m/m	STOCKS	Price	w/w	m/m				
GEORG 04/26	93.59 (YTM 7.81%)	-0.5%	-1.2%	Bank of Georgia (BGEO LN)	GBP 40.05	+7.8%	-2.0%				
GBAIL 04/28	98.52 (YTM 7.68%)	-1.8%	-2.3%	Georgia Capital (GCEO LN)	GBP 10.00	+3.5%	-1.0%				
GEORG 9 1/2 PERP	97.80 (YTM 9.62%)	-0.4%	-0.4%	TBC Bank Group (TBGG LN)	GBP 27.05	+6.1%	-4.2%				
SILNET 01/27	100.56 (YTM 8.09%)	-0.1%	-0.3%								
TBC 8.894 PERP	95.71 (YTM 11.65%)	-0.5%	-0.4%	COMMODITIES					Price	w/w	m/m
TBC 10 1/4 PERP	98.38 (YTM 10.61%)	-0.5%	-0.6%	Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	77.46	-4.3%	+8.2%				
				Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	2 648.54	+0.2%	+2.7%				
INDICES				CURRENCIES							
SP 500	5 859.85	+2.9%	+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%	+4.0%	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%				



European Commission Does Not Recommend Opening of Negotiations with Georgia on EU Membership



Zurbishvili to Prosecutor's Office: Do Your Job and Avoid Conflicts with the President

BY TEAM GT

President Salome Zurbishvili responded to her summoning to the Prosecutor's Office for questioning at a briefing on October 30, where she showed footage of election violations. "These materials don't need an explanation. This footage is direct proof of it, and answers the question as to what was happening and how the elections of October 26 were held," she noted.

"The Prosecutor's office expects evidence and confessions from me. It should be the other way around - the investigative body should be the one searching for and providing evidence, as is the case in any normal country. I've never heard an investigative agency asking the president to present evidence," Zurbishvili said.

"The public is asking you for an investigation. No one expects the Prosecutor's Office to start political processes against the president in this situation. It coincides strangely with the instructions issued by Medvedev," she noted.

"I don't know who is carrying out these orders, but I would advise the Prosecutor's Office instead to do its job and avoid conflicts with the president," she concluded.

The Georgian Prosecutor's Office on October 30 launched an investigation into alleged parliamentary election fraud, following a complaint from the Central Election Commission (CEC).

The CEC said it filed the complaint on October 29, citing frustration over having become a "target of intense attacks and unfounded criticism" following the elections.

The case was initiated under Article

164³ of the Georgian criminal code (violation of voting secrecy, incorrect vote counting, or miscalculation of election results). One of the first to be summoned for questioning by the Prosecutor's Office was Georgia's President, Salome Zurbishvili.

"President Salome Zurbishvili, along with representatives of certain political parties participating in the elections, is making unsubstantiated attacks on the CEC, attempting to harm the institution's reputation with baseless accusations."

"The election administration is currently reviewing existing complaints; however, the allegations of 'possible election fraud' made by these politicians have already gained significant traction," the CEC stated.

Deputy Chairman of the Security Council of Russia, Dmitry Medvedev on Tuesday, said: "The proxy President of Georgia refused to recognize the election results and went against the constitution by calling for a coup. In such cases, the standard practice is dismissal and arrest."

The President was scheduled to appear at the Prosecutor's Office on Thursday.

The Prosecutor's Office at time of going to print had 47 ongoing investigations into alleged crimes that took place during the elections - cases being overseen by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Special Investigation Service, and the Prosecutor's Office. The cases cover reported incidents of fraud, voter bribery, violations, influence on voters' decisions, threats, property damage, and media impediment.

The investigation was initiated by appeals from political parties, media reports, and NGOs.

The Prosecutor's Office calls on all those with relevant information to come forward and assist in the investigation efforts.

BY TEAM GT

The European Commission does not recommend the opening of negotiations on joining the European Union with Georgia, it is noted in the much anticipated report on enlargement, published by the European Commission on October 30.

The report assesses the extent to which Georgia has fulfilled the nine recommendations given by Brussels and, accordingly, whether it deserves to continue the European integration process after having received candidate status last December.

It is on the basis of this report that the decision-making body of the EU policy, the European Council, which consists of the heads of the member states, must make a decision. The European Council has already stated twice that Georgia's European integration is de facto stopped due to the actions of the Georgian authorities - in particular, their adoption of the "Russian law" and other anti-Western steps.

The European Commission notes that if Georgia does not change its current course, which threatens its path to the EU, and does not show tangible efforts to resolve outstanding issues and implement key reforms, they will not be able to consider recommending the start of negotiations with Georgia.

"The granting of candidate status to Georgia in December 2023 was not accompanied by sufficient political commitment of the government to implement necessary reforms on the way to the European Union," the report notes.

"On the contrary, there have been significant negative developments, includ-

ing the passage of the Foreign Influence Transparency Act and the Family Values Act. Also, the anti-EU narrative of the officials has significantly influenced the trajectory of Georgia. As a result, the accession process of Georgia was de facto stopped.

"In addition, Georgia has made little progress in implementing the nine recommendations set for 2023.

"Parliamentary elections were held in Georgia on October 26. According to the preliminary findings of the OSCE/ODIHR mission, there were several shortcomings in a tense and highly polarized environment. Among the shortcomings are: current changes in the legislation of the electoral process, frequent violations of the secrecy of the vote, procedural inconsistency, and voter pressure and intimidation, which had a negative impact on public confidence in the process.

"These preliminary results confirm the need for comprehensive electoral reform, which was already discussed in previous key recommendations. The final recommendations of OSCE/ODIHR should be implemented as soon as possible.

"Constructive and inclusive dialogue across the political spectrum is critical now. The European Union calls on Georgia to adopt democratic, comprehensive and sustainable reforms - in accordance with the key principles of European integration. Georgia should make the implementation of nine recommendations a priority.

"Also, Georgia should repeal the Foreign Influence Transparency Law and Family Values law, and refrain from other activities that undermine the rule of law and fundamental rights, which are the most important part of EU-Georgia relations. Georgia should also renew efforts to achieve gender equality.

"Georgia's adherence to the EU's foreign and security policy remains low, at 49%," the report reads.

The document also points out a noticeable rise in direct flights between Georgia and Russia and addresses Georgia's cooperation with the EU to monitor sanction avoidance.

"Although Georgia has taken steps to prevent sanctions violations through its territory, Georgia has not joined the sanctions against Russia and Belarus," it continues.

"Also, the authorities should stop spreading misinformation about EU values and instead fight disinformation and hostile political rhetoric. The authorities must ensure that attacks on the media, the opposition and activists are properly investigated and ensure that an appropriate environment is created for such investigations.

"Comprehensive and effective steps should be taken to fight the corruption in high echelons and oligarchic influences. Also, a means should be created for sufficient public and parliamentary control of law enforcement agencies and to guarantee the independence of public institutions.

"The European Union remains committed to deepening its partnership with Georgia - in line with the aspirations of the vast majority of the Georgian population.

"If Georgia does not reverse its current course - which jeopardizes its path to the EU - and shows real efforts to respond to key concerns and key reforms, the Commission will not be able to recommend considering the opening of accession negotiations with Georgia," the report concludes.

For Ukraine and Moldova, accession negotiations were opened in June 2024.

Limited Edition of 'The Knight in the Panther's Skin' from 'Natakhtari'

BY TEAM GT

Natakhtari beer has released a Heroes Limited Edition collection of 'The Knight in the Panther's Skin'. This time, the beer can packaging is presented with four heroes from the epic poem: Avtandili, Nestani, Tinatini, and Tarieli. The project was created in collaboration with renowned Georgian artist and author of the poem's graphic novel, David Matchavariani.

The Heroes Limited Edition will replace the standard Natakhtari' can packaging. Currently, only cans with designs of Avtandili and Nestani are available in sales channels. In the future, consumers will also find cans featuring designs of Tarieli and Tinatini.

"As the leader of the beer market, it is always important for us to invest in inno-



vation, consumer needs, and support Georgian culture," says Ana Karchava, Natakhtari Marketing Manager. "We are very proud to participate in such a significant project, which, to my mind, is invaluable for Georgian culture. 'The Knight in the Panther's Skin' was chosen as an intellectual treasure of Georgian heritage, as it embodies the fundamental human values of friendship, love, equality, and kindness.

"In 2020, Natakhtari used the main aphorisms of the poem, and put scenes on the packaging of its cans. This Limited Edition received very positive feedback from the public, which led us to the decision to continue the project with a new focus: the characters who embody these values.

This year, we further improved the project. We added an innovative element to the packaging and by scanning the QR on the can, it becomes possible to see each hero from a different perspec-

tion with the help of Augmented Reality.

"[AR] Augmented reality is new for us. Various global brands are also experimenting with it and actively using this method in different campaigns. With this project, we aim to present the old in the most relevant way, and showcase it to society. Scan the QR on the can, share your experience on social media, and become a part of this innovative project."

The Natakhtari marketing team began collaborating with David Matchavariani in 2019. Through the team's dedication, and Matchavariani's significant involvement, the first project launched in 2020, which resulted in a Limited Edition from the brand featuring four key scenes from the poem 'Knight in the Panther's Skin.' The values of equality, friendship, love, and kindness were expressed visually by adding aphorisms to four distinct packages.

True values [AR] unchangeable!

Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán Celebrates GD's Election Victory during Diplomatic Visit



Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze. Source: FB

BY TEAM GT

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán visited Georgia at the beginning of the week, and held a briefing at the government administration, where he discussed the recent elections. He congratulated Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze on the "democratic conduct of the elections and his victory," emphasizing that Hungary values their strategic partnership.

Orbán remarked that if the liberals had won the election, it would have represented the highest form of democracy in Western Europe. However, with the conservative faction prevailing, he noted that controversy has arisen in Europe,

similar to the aftermath of the Hungarian elections, and urged them not to take it too seriously.

He stated, "As the Prime Minister of Hungary, who has navigated many disputes, I want to emphasize that while there will be ongoing disagreements, the election results must be accepted. Free and democratic elections have occurred, yet controversy will persist in Europe. This is a familiar narrative. In Brussels, the narrative shifts depending on the winning party: if liberals win, it's democracy; if conservatives win, it's questioned. This debate is perennial, whether in Hungary or elsewhere."

Before his visit, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Josep Borrell announced that Orbán "would not be representing the European Union during his trip to Georgia."

During the briefing, Orbán highlighted the positive and mutually beneficial relations between Hungary and Georgia, attributing this to their shared history as freedom fighters. He explained that he had delayed his visit until after the elections to avoid any perception of interference, saying, "I didn't want to visit during the election campaign to prevent any misunderstanding. We decided to come to Tbilisi after the results were announced, so thank you for the invitation."

He concluded by stating, "Our relations are beneficial and positive, perhaps due to our shared history as we both fight for freedom and sovereignty amid powerful neighboring states. This historical connection fosters a strong bond between our nations. I want to congratulate the Prime Minister of Georgia on his election victory."



Ukraine Latest: Russia Advances as Zelensky Calls for More Military Aid

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

ARussian-guided bomb struck a high-rise apartment block in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second largest city, killing a child and injuring at least 29 people. President Zelensky said the attack underscored the need for more military aid from Ukraine's Western allies.

"Our partners can see what is happening every day," he wrote on Telegram. "And in these conditions, every decision that is put off means, at the very least, dozens of lives and hundreds of Russian

bombs used against Ukraine."

Russian forces have taken control of the settlement of Kruhliakivka, near the key town of Kupiansk in the Kharkiv region, the Russian Ministry of Defense announced. Moscow has made steady gains on the battlefield these past few months, pressing their advantage against overstretched and outmanned Ukrainian forces.

The US, South Korean and Japanese national security advisers expressed "grave concern" on Friday over the deployment of North Korean troops in Russia for possible use against Ukraine.

For the full article and a more comprehensive look into Russia's war on Ukraine this week, head over to georgiatoday.ge.

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Demand for Democracy: Georgian Culture and Art, from Ancient Times to Modernity

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These structures formed the bedrock of local self-governance, promoting principles of justice, equality, and communal responsibility. Their influence continues to inform aspects of Georgian cultural identity and governance today.

The Khevisberi, meaning "elder" in Georgian, was more than a community leader; they were seen as a wise and impartial figure, entrusted with safeguarding moral order and local traditions. They did not govern through imposed authority, but rather mediated conflicts, offered guidance, and upheld communal values. The structure of the Council of Elders, often composed of heads of families, meant that each household had a voice. This assembly would come together on important matters like land disputes, security issues, and local trade regulations, using consensus-based methods to reach decisions. Such councils were primarily concerned with maintaining social harmony and upholding the collective welfare of the village. In practice, they exemplified an early form of democratic governance, where every voice held weight, and decisions were crafted through dialogue and compromise.

The significance of this governance system is underscored by historians and anthropologists who have studied the highland regions of the Caucasus. As documented by Georgian historian Simon Janashia, these traditional assemblies were instrumental in shaping Georgian identity and culture, providing a model for communal governance that resisted external feudal or imperial control. In modern times, the legacy of the Khevisberi and Council of Elders has been romanticized as part of Georgia's long-standing commitment to values of fairness, respect, and communal responsibility. While these early practices might not align with contemporary democratic structures, the councils and their decision-making frameworks reflect key democratic ideals: inclusiveness, representation, and accountability. These institutions offered a unique model of governance, blending tradition with a form of democracy that prioritized collective well-being over hierarchical authority.

GOLDEN AGE DEMOCRACY: SHOTA RUSTAVELI AND HIS ENDURING INFLUENCE

The Georgian Golden Age, spanning the 11th to 13th centuries, was a period marked by cultural flourishing, intellectual advancement, and national unity. Central to this era is the literary masterpiece *The*

Knight in the Panther's Skin by Shota Rustaveli, a revered Georgian poet whose work reflects democratic ideals of equality, loyalty, and justice. Rustaveli's poetic exploration of virtue and social harmony embodies principles of justice and fairness that resonate with democratic values.

The *Knight in the Panther's Skin*, completed around 1200, tells the story of noble warriors who embark on quests filled with challenges and self-discovery. Rustaveli's protagonists pursue virtue, loyalty, and justice, transcending societal status and embodying values of equality. For example, Rustaveli often positions characters from different cultural and social backgrounds as equals, united in their quest for the common good. This humanistic approach was groundbreaking for the time and subtly advocated for equality and respect beyond social hierarchies. In addition to themes of equality, Rustaveli's work highlights the concept of mutual respect among characters—a value central to democratic thought. His portrayal of friendship and loyalty emphasizes a shared sense of responsibility and fairness, reflecting ideals that would later become foundational to modern democratic systems. Through these relationships, Rustaveli presents a worldview that promotes collective well-being, a hallmark of democratic societies.

Queen Tamar, one of Georgia's most revered rulers, reigned during this golden era, and is celebrated not only for her leadership, but also for her progressive approach to governance. Under her rule, Georgia achieved significant cultural and territorial expansion, and she emphasized justice and welfare for all citizens. Queen Tamar convened a *Darbazi* (royal council) composed of nobles, military leaders, and religious figures. Although her authority as monarch was supreme, Tamar's engagement with the council reflected a commitment to consultative governance and the voice of the people.

Georgian literature of this period also emphasized the ideals of the just leader and the welfare of the people. Epic tales like *Abdulmesiani* (*The Man in Chains*) delve into themes of sacrifice and justice, portraying leaders as moral figures who protect the people and uphold righteousness. This narrative tradition emphasized the idea that leaders should be accountable to their subjects—a concept that parallels democratic ideals of responsible governance. Through *Abdulmesiani*, as well as other tales and folklore, Georgian literature reinforced the notion that power must be wielded in the interest of the people, and leaders who abused their authority were depicted as morally cor-



Photo by the author

rupt. This literary focus on the just ruler resonated with Georgians' expectations for fairness and integrity, creating a cultural framework that supported accountability and equity.

THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY: THE ORTHODOX CHURCH AS A FORCE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

The establishment of Christianity as the state religion of Georgia in 326 CE brought with it the Christian ideals of compassion, humility, and universal equality under God. St. Nino, the woman credited with converting Georgia, is revered not only as a saint but as a symbol of social equality and compassion. Her role emphasized the idea that each individual—regardless of status or background—held inherent worth, a concept that paralleled early forms of social justice. In a society where hierarchical structures were dominant, the Church's emphasis on equality was transformative, promoting a sense of collective responsibility and respect for all members of society.

In the Middle Ages, Georgian monasteries became vital centers for education and charity, further embedding social justice in Georgian culture. Monastic communities like those at Gelati and Iqalto offered education to people from all social classes, making knowledge accessible beyond the elite. These monasteries also provided shelter, food, and medical care to the impoverished and sick, embodying Christian teachings of charity and mercy.

During times of political strife and foreign invasions, the Georgian Orthodox Church played a critical role in protecting vulnerable communities like the poor, orphans, and widows, framing social responsibility as a central tenet of Georgian Christianity. Clergy members often acted as mediators between rulers and the populace, advocating for fairness and justice. In the 16th and 17th centuries, when Georgia faced frequent invasions,

the Church provided sanctuary and rallied communities to preserve Georgian culture and language under foreign domination.

Christian influence also permeated Georgian art and literature, reinforcing social justice themes. Georgian hagiographies—biographies of saints—often emphasized moral values of humility, sacrifice, and compassion. The *Martyrdom of Queen Ketevan*, a 17th-century hagiographical text, recounts the queen's dedication to her faith and people in the face of foreign oppression, exemplifying the virtue of self-sacrifice for the greater good. These stories became cultural tools for inspiring social responsibility and solidarity. Additionally, Georgian iconography and church frescoes from this period depicted scenes of communal care, such as the acts of saints assisting the poor and sick. These visual representations served as public reminders of the values upheld by the Church, encouraging people to practice charity and justice in their daily lives.

RISE OF NATIONALISM: 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY MOVEMENTS

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Georgia experienced a cultural and national revival that intertwined the fight for democracy with a burgeoning sense of Georgian identity. During this period, as Georgia found itself under Russian imperial rule, artists, writers, and intellectuals channeled nationalist sentiment through literature, art, and public discourse, laying the groundwork for democratic aspirations. This cultural movement not only preserved Georgian identity, but also fostered democratic ideals, promoting freedom, autonomy, and national unity.

One of the earliest waves of cultural resistance to Russian domination appeared in the Georgian Romantic movement, led by writers like Alexander Chavchavadze and Nikoloz Baratashvili. These figures sought to revive Georgian history, language, and customs, embedding demo-

cratic ideals of freedom and self-determination in their works. Chavchavadze, known as the "father of Georgian Romanticism," used poetry to highlight themes of national pride and the importance of individual liberty. His works are emblematic of the era's push toward a culturally rooted democracy that respected Georgian identity and sovereignty. Baratashvili's famous poem, *Merani*, exemplifies this spirit of freedom and resistance. The poem's call for action against oppression resonated with Georgians' desire for independence, making it a powerful cultural symbol of self-determination.

In the late 19th century, Georgian intellectuals used journalism as a platform to critique autocratic rule and advocate for democracy. Prominent newspapers, like *Iveria*, founded by the esteemed writer and public figure Ilya Chavchavadze, provided a voice for the Georgian people. Chavchavadze advocated for social reform, the protection of Georgian language and culture, and a future where Georgians could govern themselves. His vision of a democratic society emphasized education, civic engagement, and social responsibility, and he famously promoted the slogan "Language, Fatherland, Faith," symbolizing the pillars of Georgian identity.

Theater and visual arts also played crucial roles in advancing democratic aspirations. The establishment of the Georgian National Theater in 1850, led by Giorgi Eristavi, provided a space where themes of social justice and national pride could be publicly explored. Productions often depicted the struggles of common Georgians, celebrating their resilience and promoting a vision of social equality. Artists like Gigo Gabashvili created works that celebrated Georgian culture and highlighted the lives of ordinary citizens. By focusing on the Georgian people's shared struggles and resilience, artists subtly advocated for a society where all individuals were valued, contributing to the demand for democratic reform.

The culmination of these cultural expressions and democratic ideals was seen in the establishment of the First Georgian Republic in 1918, following the Russian Revolution. This brief period of independence showcased the impact of decades of cultural work and advocacy for self-governance. The newly established democratic republic adopted a constitution that guaranteed freedom of speech, equal rights, and social protections, embodying the aspirations of Georgian artists, writers, and intellectuals from the previous century.

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How Democratically Minded Are We?

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

At the very moment of that unbelievable soviet collapse 35 years ago, the world received 15 new independent countries right out of the blue, and what a geopolitical tremor that was! All those former soviet socialist republics were in a flash embraced by the United Nations, and all of them called themselves democracies. Sakartvelo was among those newborns - as swift and easy as that! I didn't know a metamorphosis of that caliber was possible, but that's exactly what happened, with the 20th century just 10 years shy of its roaring end: just one quick step from a totalitarian into a democratic political system!

The question is if the world and these newly hatched sovereignties were ready for a change of that magnitude. My personal impression is that none was prepared to proceed hand-in-hand smoothly and successfully. And here is why: democracy is a fragile process within the realm of politics, something which requires much nursing and wooing. It is not a

mechanical structure that is built to only technically serve people who want to live a long, happy, healthy, fair and free life. It simply purports, as Abraham Lincoln would put it, that national governments have to be made of the people, and run by the people, in favor of the people. This kind of governance has to be learnt very diligently by the people, and can only come to life if that people's mentality concurs with the principles of that kind of rule.

Mastering democracy as a political system, and mustering an army of followers of its principles, cannot happen overnight, as was attempted in the former soviet countries. It takes a while, considerable political education, and a gradual elevation of political consciousness. We can't say "we want to be a democracy," and by golden-fish magic, we turn into one. Democracy needs a lot of labor put in to make it work for real.

In this strange time of ours, when our wellbeing greatly depends on political correctness, nobody is suggesting anything better and socially more functional than democracy. Certainly, there might be other ideologies and political systems out there, like dictatorship, monarchy,

theocracy and what not, but nothing sounds as optimal and humanly justified as democracy, which fits perfectly well into a parliamentary or presidential configuration, or even some sort of semi and hybrid regimes of the kind.

The world is full of fighters for democracy, who are ready and poised to plant this high-quality political system everywhere they can, be it in fruitful soil or somewhere with less favorable conditions for growing it. Yet these good and knowledgeable warriors of democracy must learn better ways to instill democracy in our utterly diversified world. No doubt, Georgia is formally a democracy, and quite a developed one at that, but I can't readily reason how democratically minded we the Georgian people are at this moment in time. If democracy is the best political system for this nation, then we have to elevate the national mentality en-masse to the level of genuine democratic values.

At the very least, democracy might allow us a chance to consider other political systems, if any such system seems to be more optimally functional for the future felicity of our people. Nothing is harmful and stubbornly deniable that could help us live better. Con-



A woman reaches into her bag, which rests on a fallen Soviet hammer-and-sickle on a Moscow street in 1991. Source: The Atlantic

ventional wisdom has it that autocracy cannot be better than the insight of the entire people, although any collective decision might have certain faults in the package, alongside a number of merits.

Popular vote, which is the main tool of expression in democracy, has an inner constructive power, but only when the voters are qualified enough to make the right decision when faced with an often-blinding ballot-box. Democracy can operate as a positive power in the hands

of a public feted for its political enlightenment and inner social conscience; likened to a fair judge, in whose hands is placed the fate of a human being facing justice.

Some nations do well with democracy, and some find it difficult to handle. It might not be very easy to say how well this nation is doing the job, but it goes without saying that an effective version of democracy asks for a sharp mind that is compatible with democracy per se.

Former President of Estonia Toomas Hendrik Ilves on the Georgian Elections

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

Radio Free Europe/RL's Georgian service sat down with Former President of Estonia Toomas Hendrik Ilves to gauge his reaction to Georgia's eventful elections.

"Well, it seems that the winner of the Georgian parliamentary elections is Vladimir Putin. Right?" he begins. "I mean, that's really the only conclusion. The voters were presented with an artificial choice between democracy and war, or non-democracy and peace. They chose the first but ended up with the second.

"The rigging of those elections was just awkward, and was, in fact, the biggest possible compliment to the Georgian people. The Georgian people didn't want this result, and they won't accept this so-called official result. It shows that the Georgian people actually won; it's just that the government couldn't stand the idea of letting it pass.

"Putin knew that, for the first time in history, there was a real chance for genuine democracy to emerge in Georgia, a democratically elected coalition government, and it's nothing that he could allow in his backyard. There's nothing particularly surprising in this, if you follow Putin's behavior over the past several years, but especially last weekend.

"The same was attempted in Moldova, and Moldova barely made it through. In Georgia, the videos you see, the accounts

of people being beaten up...the last thing I saw just a few minutes ago on Twitter was an Azerbaijani observer claiming that it was free and fair, and in the background there is a woman taking a picture of her ballot. All of this stuff is horrific, and it just shows that Putin cannot allow democracy in his neighborhood."

SO ONE SHOULDN'T LOOK AT THESE ELECTIONS AND THEIR RESULTS AS A MANIFESTATION OF THE SOVEREIGN WILL OF THE GEORGIAN PEOPLE?

What I'm saying is that the effort, the incredible effort put in to screw the results of this shows what the will of the Georgian people really is: that Georgians want to be part of the liberal democratic West; that they want an overwhelming majority, and the only way to prevent that is through massive, massive involvement on the part of a foreign country, Russia.

WHAT MIGHT THE WESTERN RESPONSE BE?

There will be sanctions. They may be strong or weak. They may be good or bad. Weak sanctions are the kind that we saw, unfortunately, after 2014 in Crimea, which basically serves Western interests, especially on the part of Germany - "well, we have to show we're upset, but not too much because we have too much money at stake." Bad sanctions are sanctions that will target the Georgian people. We want to avoid bad and weak sanctions: we want strong, effective sanctions. Strong sanctions would be sanctions that hit the clique that has just performed this obscen-

ity. We know that Ivanishvili has massive investments in the US, in Goldman Sachs, etc.; hundreds of millions of dollars. That should all be frozen, right? I mean, there has to be a price for this. We should place visa restrictions on all members of the GD elite. I don't know what you'd call them. They're not even now particularly democratically elected! I would say the clique running the country should be stuck enjoying themselves in Georgia. Of course, they have enough money to go to Dubai, other places, not to mention Russia. But in any case, what we definitely need to do is say that Europe and the United States are no longer open to people like that.

WILL EUROPE GO THROUGH WITH IT?

Well, we'll see in the coming days. Look, there are enough countries, basically, the northern arc of Europe - Poland, the Baltic countries, the Nordic states - who are willing to take tough measures. The weak spot will be Hungary and Slovakia. Those two are emerging as real proxies for Putin in the European Union. I thought it funny, but not surprising, that Orbán congratulated GD even before the results were announced. A full hour before. I mean, the Soviets used to do that. They did that in my country in 1940, right? They announced the congratulations were coming in and the vote hadn't even been announced.

AND IF THE WEST SHRUGS ITS GEOPOLITICAL SHOULDERS AND SAYS, "OKAY, WHAT'S



Former President of Estonia Toomas Hendrik Ilves. Source: RFE/RL

DONE IS DONE. YOU WANT TO BE WITH RUSSIA, GO AHEAD." HOW LIKELY IS THAT?

I don't think it's likely, given how clear it is just how huge the efforts were to manipulate the elections. Had these been free and fair elections, that would have been the response: "okay, you made your bed, now lay in it." But since it is so obvious that the elections were manipulated, it would be very difficult to take that point of view. I mean, that would be the Orbán-Fizzo point of view. But the rest of us will not accept that.

SHOULD WE GIVE UP HOPE OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION UNDER THIS GOVERNMENT? OR CAN MR. IVANISHVILI, WITH HIS TRADEMARK CUNNING, SOMEHOW SORT IT OUT WITH THE WEST, DO YOU THINK?

I don't see that. The government and Ivanishvili have really burnt their bridges to the West, to serious people in the West.

YOU SAID THIS IS A VICTORY FOR PUTIN. HOW SIGNIFICANT AND FAR-REACHING ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF THAT VICTORY OUTSIDE OF GEORGIA?

We're dealing with a psychopath, so it's hard to predict what the consequences will be in this case. I mean, this is an ego

thing for him. I understand what it is that he wants, but it doesn't make any sense anywhere else either where he's gotten involved.

THIS IS HIS STATEMENT TO THE WEST: "YOU INTRUDED IN MY SPHERE OF INFLUENCE AND I REINSTATED THAT SPHERE OF INFLUENCE. DO NOT COME KNOCKING AGAIN."

Yeah, that's maybe how he thinks, but that's not how we think. We don't say, "oh, we shouldn't have supported liberal democracy in our country because Putin might be offended." I mean, in his mind, yes, he probably thinks that he now sent a signal, "don't even come into what I claim to be my sphere of influence." Normal people here in liberal democracies don't think that way, in terms of spheres of influence, backyards, and all of those things. That's not the way people since the middle of the 20th century have thought.

The biggest tragedy of this century has been that the very firm principle of allowing countries to do what they choose has been violated by Russia ever since 2008. That's why it's personally disappointing to me, given all the efforts since the beginning of 2000 that I put into trying to get Georgia tied to the liberal democratic West in Europe, to see it all going down the drain now. I hope it is only temporary.



GEORGIAN HOSPITALITY SERVICES GO THROUGH GLOBAL STANDARDS






ONE STEP CLOSER TO PARADISE





AKHALTSIKHE INN




Georgia's Security: A Few Considerations for the Public. Part 2

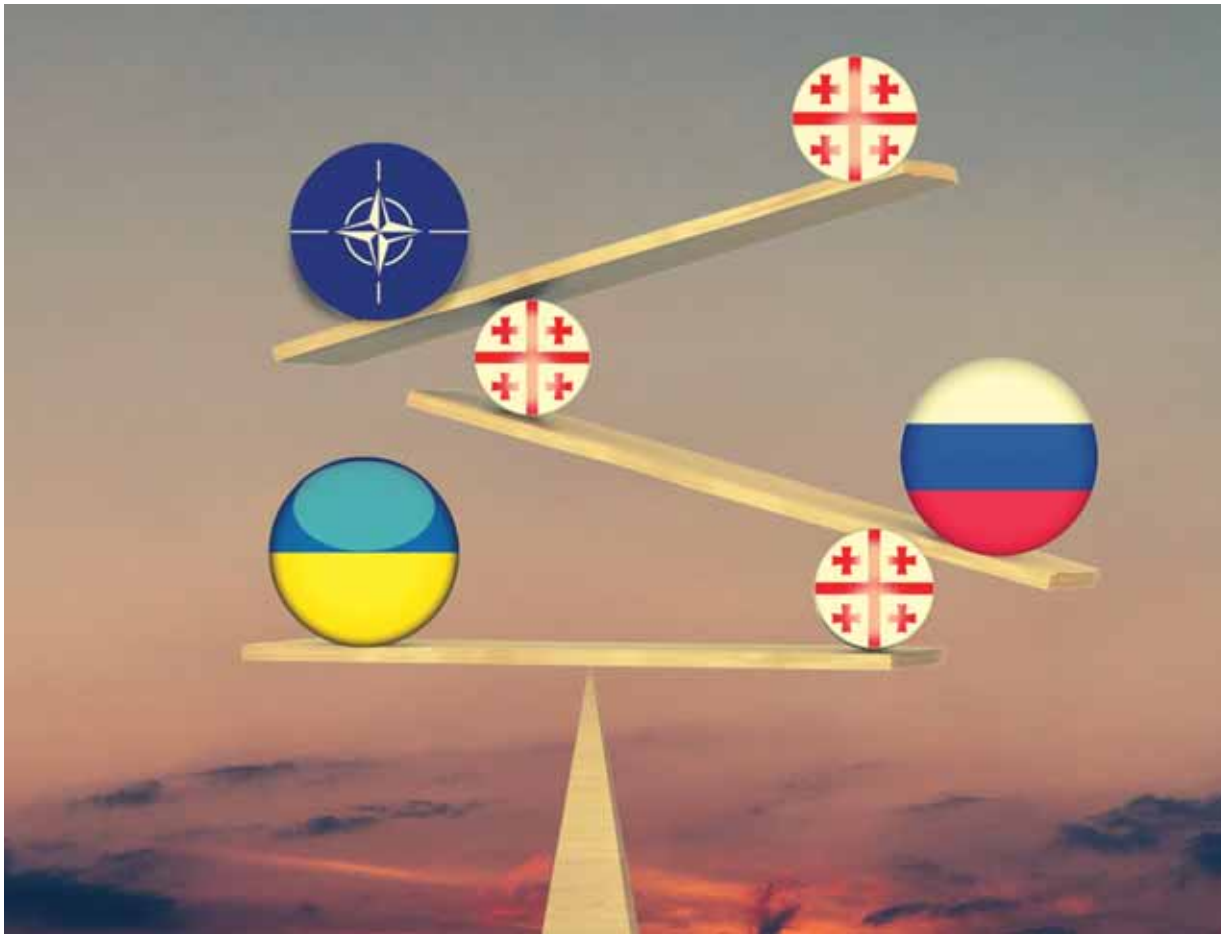


Image source: visegradinsight

ANALYSIS BY VICTOR KIPIANI,
GEOCASE CHAIRMAN

One of the central topics of discussion in political, academic and analytical circles in the United States is the positioning of the US in the changing system of international relations. It is clear that this is not an abstract discussion for us, as it is directly related to the security of Georgia.

The unified security field for the US is now seen as comprising two distinct perimeters: internal and external. This shift reflects a new understanding of US national interests and resource allocation, moving away from the post-Cold War "America Everywhere" strategy, which necessitated US involvement in every conflict. Instead, a policy of selectivity has emerged, prioritizing regional challenges based on their importance to US interests. Countries within the internal security perimeter—those deemed geopolitically vital—will receive more substantial and systematic support. In contrast, the outer perimeter, associated with secondary interests, will see limited US political, military, and economic resources.

Thus, one of the main foreign policy objectives of official Tbilisi is to preserve and strengthen its place in the internal security perimeter and, consequently, its place in the sphere of essential geopolitical interests of the United States of America as the leader of the Western order. The need for this is dictated both by the Georgian security agenda and, as we have already mentioned, by the obvious interest of our country and its partners in regional stability.

In talking with Washington about such an engagement, the Georgian side should focus on the reciprocity of the issue, coincidence of interests and rational consideration. In this sense, American partners should well understand that effective support for Georgia's security is not an act of charity. In fact, we are talking about the proper functioning of a state located on the external border of the Western political space, which will be properly motivated to protect and project both its own national interests and the joint interests of Georgia and the United States. Therefore, it should

not be about the equation of the requestor and the contributor, but about agreeing on a joint agenda and putting it into practice. It is also clear that coordination between Georgia and the Western Alliance is a very complex political art. At such a time, many things, including the already mentioned "security dilemma" given the specifics of the region, require a thoughtful approach.

Otherwise, there is a high probability for us and our partners that Georgia will be left alone in the face of existing threats. A side effect of such result will be reputational damage of a strategic partner—not only in the eyes of Georgia, but also in the eyes of other allies. And given the extent of reputational damage, a negative outcome could escalate into a systemic security crisis. It should also be borne in mind that ceding US (and Western) positions in a country located on the dividing line of global geopolitical regimes makes their subsequent recovery and return much more difficult and costly.

In short, Georgia's security should be seen in the unified context of US and Western security, without dividing or separating it. Along with Georgia's efforts to follow this path, our strategic partners equally need to adapt more quickly and boldly to the policy of "strategic clarity" in the format of the wider Black Sea region.

When discussing the region, it's essential to address Turkey as a distinct factor. In the broader Black Sea area and particularly in the South Caucasus, the regional dynamics are significantly shaped by Turkish political influence. Furthermore, in the context of unified security, it is crucial for official Tbilisi to recognize the importance of Turkey alongside the prominent American role. So, what can we say about the key characteristics of our neighbor's policy toward the southern part of the region today?

Let me start with the fact that Turkey has individualized relations with almost all of its neighbors—based on a specific "case". In addition, Ankara is guided by several key considerations regarding the wider Black Sea region, namely:

(a) The so-called "Regional Ownership", which means that, above all, the countries of the region themselves should have a decisive voice in the politics of the region;

(b) Promoting multilateral formats of cooperation whenever possible (e.g.,

Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC), Black Sea Naval Cooperation Group (BlackSeaFor), etc.);

(c) Turkey's "Balancing Act", which implies organizing relations with the major actors in such a way that no single player acting separately gains superior control over the region.

Practically, from the perspective of recent years, it can be said that Turkey's foreign policy is characterized by autonomy determined by its own situational interests. One of the hallmarks of this autonomy is that on all important issues on the regional agenda, Ankara usually tries to assert its role as one of the weighty negotiators in political and diplomatic communications.

As for direct Georgian-Turkish ties, from Turkey's point of view, Georgia's strong security system meets the interests of our neighbor. It is therefore no coincidence that the Turks have supported us over the years. Again, I would explain this support by Turkey's pragmatic policy, for which:

(a) Georgia's national security is a counterbalancing and stabilizing factor in regional security;

(b) A self-sufficient Georgian state is an unproblematic and predictable regional country between Turkey and Russia.

A few words about China: In terms of security, China emphasizes internal stability and the strength of specific political groups, contrasting with the U.S. focus on external security. This distinction presents a delicate issue for Georgia as it navigates its relationships with both the U.S. and China, both of which are significant but carry different implications. While Georgia values its economic and trade relations with China, the strategic and comprehensive partnership with the U.S. is crucial for its statehood.

Additionally, Georgia's foreign policy must consider its connections with the Global South, especially highlighted by the ongoing war in Ukraine, which underscores the importance of this diverse group. Central to this coalition is India, whose influence in the South Caucasus is likely to grow, particularly through its ties with Armenia. This evolving relationship warrants further exploration.

And our focus on the Global South is due to the geopolitical "moderates" factor. Despite the abundance of political and governance formations within the grouping, given the current challenges,

it is clear that the "Southerners" are maximizing their opportunities as well as rejecting geopolitically "monogamous" relationships.

This amorphous nature of the Global South is already having a considerable impact on the balance of power in the world; it is also likely to increase over time. And this is noteworthy for the predictability and planning of Georgia's foreign policy and security line.

At the same time, we consider it an urgent task to intensify systematic communication with the Global South and cooperation on geopolitically "neutral" issues. In particular:

(a) Promotion of trade initiatives, including the introduction of preferences in trade;

(b) Discussing practical models for sustainable development, be it scientific or technical expertise capacity, technology exchange or other projects involving up-to-date knowledge and experience;

(c) Increased capacity to mobilize funds, including soft loans and grants.

ALLIANCE AND OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

Violation of the territorial integrity of our country is referred to as one of the main obstacles to Georgia's accession to the North Atlantic Alliance. Naturally, this is a real problem and no one disputes it. However, under current conditions, the occupied territories are just a pretext for those who avoid making result-oriented decisions for the purpose of NATO enlargement by making both Georgian and collective security interests even more vulnerable with declarations devoid of substance. And existing challenges will only get worse over time as a result of the bad practice of "doing less and acting slower than necessary."

In the early years following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the North Atlantic Alliance's focus on the post-Soviet space appeared to be well-founded. Various sources at the time discussed the need for NATO to adapt in order to prevent the violence and crises occurring in former Soviet republics from spilling over into Western Europe. Thus, NATO's mission should have centered on crisis management rather than solely the defense of Alliance territory. This approach is reflected in the Partnership for Peace program initiated by President Clinton, which aimed to prepare post-Soviet countries for potential NATO membership, contingent upon meeting certain criteria.

Speaking of conditions, it is worth mentioning the so-called "Perry Principles" formulated by US Secretary of Defense Perry in the same 90s. This list is still relevant today, when we are discussing Georgia's accession to the North Atlantic Alliance. These principles are as follows:

- (1) Democratic governance;
- (2) A free market economy;
- (3) The rule of law;
- (4) Ability to defend its territory, and
- (5) Contribution to the collective defense of the Alliance.

Against the background of these principles, especially after the NATO Bucharest summit in 2008, the biggest obstacle to our country's membership in the Alliance is its violated territorial integrity. However, it should be said that this issue is not and cannot be a formal basis for postponing NATO membership, but is still (at least before the war in Ukraine) rather a pretext for refusing to make productive decisions. And this is putting it mildly, and in more popular language it is called an "evasion".

However, if there is political will on both sides, it is possible to find an adaptive solution to Georgia's accession to the Alliance, let's say "bypassing" the problem of Georgia's temporarily occupied territories. In this publication we will name two practical experiences

which, given the current situation between Georgia and Russia, are of interest.

(1) NORWEGIAN PRECEDENT:

Prior to Norway's formal membership in NATO, the Norwegian authorities pledged not to allow foreign military forces on Norwegian territory unless Norway was attacked or threatened with attack (this reservation was later extended to include the stationing of nuclear weapons in Norway).

The Norwegian precedent shows that a country bordering Russia can join NATO with reservations tailored to a specific example and unilateral commitments. The reservations made in the case of Norway served to reduce Russian risk and better address the "security dilemma" already mentioned in this publication.

(2) GERMAN PRECEDENT:

In contrast to Russia's immediate neighborhood, the case of Germany illustrates how a divided country can still find one part included within NATO's collective security framework. At first glance, this situation seems straightforward: the Federal Republic of Germany joined the Alliance, while the German Democratic Republic remained outside for clear reasons. However, a more complex issue arose regarding the interpretation of "clear borders" in relation to Article 5 of the NATO Founding Treaty. This is particularly noteworthy because it pertains to a nation split into two parts. Furthermore, West Germany officially characterized its border with East Germany as "temporary."

The decision was defined in such a way that for the operation of Article 5, which requires a confined geographical area, a "clear border" may be "temporary" and need not be internationally recognized. As a result, collective security extends to a "temporary" border until the country's territorial integrity is fully restored.

We cite these two precedents to illustrate that neither official Tbilisi nor its partners have valid reasons to oppose NATO's expansion based on the existence of temporarily occupied territories. This is particularly pertinent given the increasing relevance of geopolitical dynamics, especially in light of current security developments.

IN CONCLUSION...

Georgia's lasting security could not exist solely through military and geopolitical alliances, foreign ties and the country's defense forces. The strength of all these components must have its origin in the "soft power" of the Georgian state.

And to provide security of a relatively high caliber, especially in an era of hard power dominance, Georgia's soft power will be unequivocally identified with:

- (1) The domestic political process and its characteristic values and principles;
- (2) The legitimacy of the policies to be implemented at this or any subsequent stage, which is unthinkable without inclusiveness, consideration of the interests of those outside of power, and consolidation around a national and development-oriented agenda.

The phenomenon of "soft power" has historically played a role even when great powerful players had no shortage of hard power. Such was ancient Rome, with the appeal of its culture; This is what is being said about the US as an "empire by invitation" projecting appropriate standards; China is also trying to position itself with multi-billion dollar investments in the Belt and Road project.

"Soft power" is all the more relevant and practically useful for Georgia's competitiveness and adaptability as a small/compact country. Therefore, the time has come for Georgian soft power to be conceptualized in policy guidance documents and become a condition for the success of practical policy.

Construction Permit for Two Artificial Peninsulas and One Artificial Island of “Ambassadori Batumi Island” Issued by Technical and Construction Supervision Agency



BY TEAM GT

The Technical and Construction Supervision Agency of the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia has issued a construction permit for two artificial peninsulas and one artificial island in Batumi. The permit encompasses a total of 102 hectares of land along the Black Sea coast, including the establishment of protective embankments. The decision was based on nearly 40 international and local studies, an environmental impact report approved by the National Environmental Agency, and expert opinions from the LEPL Levan Samkharauli National Bureau of Forensic Expertise regarding the structural stability of the project's hydraulic components. These assessments were further supported by input from specially invited international experts.

Since September 2021, a comprehensive assessment and modeling of the structural stability of the two artificial peninsulas and one artificial island has been ongoing with the involvement of local and international experts. To ensure the project's sustainability, the design of the two artificial peninsulas and island was developed by the highly reputable international company YUKSEL PROJE, which has a proven track record in designing and operating two international airports

(Ordu-Giresun Airport and Trabzon Airport) on artificially developed land in the Black Sea.

The development plan concept and the creation of detailed documentation were undertaken by the globally recognized British company ARUP, known for its innovative approach and extensive experience in urban planning, incorporating best practices for future city development.

Notably, 49% of the territory of the two peninsulas and the island will be designated for publicly accessible recreational areas, including forest parks, walking trails, sports fields, and leisure spaces. The project area will also feature educational and healthcare institutions, hotels, apartments, residential buildings, villas, heliports, and a yacht club. Throughout all stages of the project's development, special attention will be paid to mitigating environmental impacts.

The company has already developed up to 15 hectares of land under the permit received in September 2022 for the construction of protective embankments, which is a record achievement in terms of both time and scale in fulfilling privatization obligations to the state.

The Ambassador Group will simultaneously develop the accompanying infrastructure for the two peninsulas and the island. The first phase includes the planned development of a public park of up to 4 hectares, an exhibition center, an administrative building, and a state-of-the-art multifunctional facility.



The Potential of Blueberry Production and Modern Practices in the Agro-Industry



BY SOFIA BOCHOIDZE

On October 29, Tbilisi hosted the conference 'The Potential of Blueberry Production and Modern Practices in the Agro-Industry,' organized by Blue Garden at the Hilton Garden Inn. The event gathered leaders in agriculture, including members of the Georgian Blueberry Growers' Association (GBGA), farmers, government representatives, and international agro-industry experts, to discuss expanding blueberry cultivation and sustainable agricultural practices in Georgia. Moderated by Shota Tsukoshvili, CEO of GBGA, the conference aimed to explore innovative solutions, share international expertise, and strengthen local agriculture for global competitiveness.

Nikoloz Didebashvili, CEO of Blue Garden, opened the conference, followed

by a detailed presentation on the company's journey and objectives. Established in 2020, Blue Garden aims to modernize Georgia's agricultural landscape through a holistic approach, offering consulting, land development, agro products, infrastructure, and export support. Tornike Chkhaidze, consulting partner at Blue Garden, emphasized their end-to-end support for agribusinesses, helping local farmers access the latest resources and expertise.

Blue Garden, established in 2020, is a pioneering agro-consulting company dedicated to transforming Georgia's agricultural landscape. With expertise spanning consulting, land development, agro products, infrastructure, and export services, Blue Garden provides end-to-end support to farmers and agribusinesses across the country. Their comprehensive services include technical land assessments, soil preparation, agronomic consulting, infrastructure setup, and supply chain management, ensuring

local farms can compete on an international scale. Through strong collaborations with global agricultural leaders, Blue Garden brings advanced methods, sustainable solutions, and modern technologies to Georgian agriculture, helping local farmers increase productivity and access broader markets.

Blue Garden showcased its significant achievements, such as boosting agricultural yields and increasing employment. By connecting Georgian farmers with international partners like Legro, Pasquini & Bini, and Borusan CAT, they enable them to meet global standards and achieve sustainable growth. The company's success stories highlight its role in transforming Georgian agriculture.

Each of Blue Garden's partner companies offered insights from their experience in the international market. They spoke about modern methods for cultivating blueberries, the latest trends in industry development, global practices, and modern technologies.

Erik Veenman, Legro Sales Manager, shared how Legro's innovative substrates support optimal plant growth. Known for its high-quality, stable peat blends, Legro manages every step of its production to ensure consistency. Veenman discussed the challenges of adapting to the Georgian market and suggested that collaboration between government and business could enhance infrastructure and awareness of sustainable practices.

Ivan Mancini, Sales Director at Pasquini & Bini, spoke about their sustainable, recycled nursery solutions. Drawing on Italy's expertise, Mancini highlighted the importance of eco-friendly materials, such as their Infinity Line pots made from Tetra Pak®. These products offer thermal benefits and are fully recyclable, demonstrating how sustainable practices can be integrated into agriculture. Man-



cini encouraged Georgia to adopt similar sustainable practices to elevate local agricultural standards.

Zafer Aksakal, Borusan CAT CEO, introduced his company's work in sustainable energy solutions, including solar and hybrid systems. Operating in five countries, Borusan CAT addresses industrial needs with clean energy solutions. Aksakal emphasized the importance of raising awareness about green energy benefits in Georgia, and shared plans to expand their offerings for more sustainable agricultural development.

The GBGA, represented by Tornike Panjavidze and Shota Tsukoshvili, presented the state of blueberry cultivation in Georgia, outlining key goals, including export expansion to non-traditional markets, and the importance of diversifying trade. The association also highlighted logistical challenges and ongoing efforts to overcome them. Plans for a demonstration garden in eastern Georgia were announced, aiming to showcase

best practices and involve industry stakeholders in collaborative efforts.

The conference concluded with a panel discussion involving GBGA members, donor organizations, farmers, and ministry representatives. Attendees discussed challenges, from logistics to market access, and explored pathways for growth. The GBGA reiterated its commitment to enhancing soil analysis and addressing excess levels to ensure optimal growing conditions for blueberries. The conference served as a platform for aligning efforts across sectors to support Georgia's agricultural future.

The 'Potential of Blueberry Production and Modern Practices in the Agro-Industry' conference highlighted the shared mission of Blue Garden, GBGA, and their partners to elevate Georgia's agricultural industry. By embracing innovation, sustainable practices, and collaboration, Georgia is well on its way to becoming a leader in blueberry cultivation and agro-industry excellence.



Photo: European Best Destinations.

Int'l Non-Resident Arrivals Rise 2.5% Year-on-Year

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

Georgia welcomed 2.8 million international travelers in the third quarter of 2024, marking a 2.5% increase from last year, the National Statistics Office reports. Of these, 2.4 million were classified as international visitors, representing a 2.9% growth.

The countries from which Georgia received the majority of visitors are the following:

Russia: 24.6%
Turkey: 17.4%
Armenia: 13.1%

The primary purpose of travel was reported as leisure and holiday, with most visitors aged between 31 and 50.

On average, tourists spent 6.2 nights in the country, marking a 7.2% increase, with overall spending reaching GEL 5.7 billion, a rise of 18.1%.

ADB Says Climate Change Could Reduce GDP in Developing Asia and the Pacific by 1.7% by 2070



Rising sea levels and falling labor productivity would cause the greatest losses in developing Asia and the Pacific's GDP, with lower income and fragile economies hit hardest

New Asian Development Bank (ADB) research finds the impacts of climate change could reduce gross domestic product (GDP) in developing Asia and the Pacific by 1.7% by 2070 under a high-end greenhouse gas emissions scenario, rising to 41% by 2100.

Rising sea levels and falling labor productivity would cause the greatest losses, with lower income and fragile economies hit hardest. The new research, presented in the inaugural issue of ADB's Asia-Pacific Climate Report, details a series of damaging impacts threatening the region. If the climate crisis continues to

accelerate, up to 300 million people in the region could be threatened by coastal inundation, and trillions of dollars of coastal assets could be damaged annually by 2070.

"Climate change has supercharged the devastation from tropical storms, heat waves, and floods in the region, contributing to unprecedented economic challenges and human suffering," said ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa. "Urgent, well-coordinated climate action that addresses these impacts is needed before it is too late. This climate report provides insight into how to finance urgent adaptation needs and offers promising policy recommendations to governments in

our developing member countries on how to reduce greenhouse gas emissions at lowest cost."

The report finds that regional public sentiment supports climate action. In an ADB climate change perception study this year, 91% of respondents across 14 regional economies said they view global warming as a serious problem, with many seeking more ambitious government action.

Adaptation responses need to be accelerated to address growing climate risks, along with an imperative to greatly upscale adaptation-focused climate finance. The report values annual investment needs for regional countries to adapt to global warming at between \$102 billion and \$431 billion—far exceeding the \$34 billion of tracked adaptation finance in the region in 2021–2022. Government regulation reforms and enhanced recognition of climate risks are helping attract new sources of private climate capital, but far greater private investment flows are needed.

On the mitigation front, the report shows the region is well placed to embrace renewable energy in driving a transition to net zero, and that forging ahead with domestic and international carbon markets can help achieve climate action goals cost effectively.

ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 69 members—49 from the region.

The Differences

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

Now that we are resettling back into Tbilisi life for the next six months (we think), a number of comparisons come to mind between the nation's capital and one of its farthest-flung provinces.

Svaneti offers endless beauty- any season, any weather. You're IN nature, with towering mountain walls all around you, wildflowers, rocky cliffs, a mix of severity and loveliness. Tbilisi: well, a city of 1.5 million or so. Noise, pollution, speed, crowding, but also huge displays of culture in the creative world: music, visual arts, theater, cinema, international food, bookshops and more. And public transport, of course, of which Svaneti has much less (though not zero).

Tbilisi: regular electricity and water and gas; or if they're going off, you'll be warned by SMS, and will know the start and stop times. Svaneti: the only gas is what you bottle. Electricity and water are free, but less reliable, and never a warning of their departure for any reason. You can call the village mayor about the water, or its power guy if he knows what's with the juice not flowing, but you may not get a sure answer about resumption of these basics.

Tbilisi: unless you happen to own your own land, you can grow nothing but what fits in flower pots or window boxes. Svaneti, of course, allows farming on as big a scale as the land you own, which will always be some (unless you're one of the few there who lives in an apartment in Mestia). You'd better know what you're doing, or have a family member who does; I have my wife for this. Otherwise you can get things comically to badly wrong.



otherwise you can get things comically to badly wrong.

Svaneti doesn't mind if you do home renovation, or even building construction, on any scale (for personal or small business use), with no signage or fences to put up, no print of the proposed finished project with contact numbers and due date. Tbilisi: the reverse of all these things is required. More control, more bureaucracy, but also more following of building codes to try to ensure that you get it safe, and right.

Tbilisi: gone are the days when my parents, on their first visit to Georgia in 2004, said that after growing up in Zimbabwe and also living in Indonesia for the middle of the 1990s, they were experiencing the worst roads of their lives in the capital. Both traffic and road improvement have grown apace these last two decades.

Svaneti: also great steps forward since those years when it would take you six

hours to drive in 1st and 2nd gear the 120 km from Jvari to Mestia, on mostly dirt and gravel roads. Now these are almost everywhere cement and asphalt. BUT there are many sections on this stretch where half the road width has fallen away, and needs repairing from a single lane (bi-directional). They tried to do the restoration as fast as possible before the elections we've just had, to say, "Look how good we are," and much of the newer asphalt is from this summer as well, with many people saying it was done too fast and not well enough at all. Plus there's frost heave from some years ago now, left untouched and hazardous. So, very mixed results.

In Svaneti, heat your home with free electricity and a huge wood-burning Svan stove, for which you'd better have wood seasoned for 6-12 months or longer. In the big city, pay for central heating from piped gas warming the water in your radiators and faucets.



Tbilisi remains politically very diverse, as one would expect a decent-sized city, and the capital at that, to be. Svaneti is almost all GD, as far as I have heard from many horses' mouths. This despite Saakashvili's very energetic pacification of the place from the Aprasidze mafia-run years and restarting of its hospitality/tourism and infrastructure spheres. Rule of law was restored, violently but decisively, and the place made safe for single women trekkers, even. Now, there, most people won't dare to notice or talk of the re-flowering of corruption post-Misha; but a few will dare.

Pluses and minuses in both locations, for sure. We lasted 10 winters in Svaneti before deciding that, with no guests for the white season, we both desperately needed and could afford to winter away in relative comfort, seeing everyone in Tbilisi and elsewhere for whom we'd had little enough time that decade. And,

sure enough, the electricity on our snowy last two days in Svaneti was more off than on. They say that if the village asks for a comprehensive overhaul of the power system to prevent such outages, the money for such an undertaking will be recouped by making power non-free from then onwards. So, we've gritted our collective teeth and borne it. I'll always miss Svaneti's winter beauty, and anyway plan to return for Lamproba, the late-winter festival of torches, in February. Until then, Tbilisi wins out.

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

'Masculinities in the South Caucasus' Explores Assumptions Ingrained within Society

INTERVIEW BY SHELBI R. ANKIEWICZ

Masculinities are present in practically all cultures, and they always play a role, consciously or unconsciously, through values, learning, developing a perception of the world, and interacting with others and the environment - says Tata Burduli, the gender program coordinator with the Heinrich Boell Foundation Tbilisi Office, South Caucasus Region.

The Heinrich Boell Foundation South Caucasus Office published the book 'Masculinities in the South Caucasus' this year. The Tbilisi Office and the Yerevan branch office are part of the larger network of the Heinrich Boell Foundation, a green think tank established in Germany that operates in countries worldwide. According to the organization's website, their work focuses on various areas, including ecology, sustainability, democracy, self-determination and justice, gender democracy, equal rights, and political participation.

The foundation's regional office for the South Caucasus was established in Tbilisi in 2003. Since then, numerous projects have been created to promote democracy, feminism and gender equality, sustainable use of natural resources, and more. Under those projects is a new book about masculinities within the region. The book aims to deconstruct the assumptions and expectations of masculinities in Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia, and to reveal the complexities and dynamics that come with the topic.

The book is written in four languages: Armenian, Azerbaijani, Georgian, and English. Gender Program Coordinator Tata Burduli noted that while the region's

countries have historically had close ties, each country is vastly different, from the language and the alphabet to their political and cultural configuration, demonstrating the great diversity within this region. To showcase this variety, the writers were able to write in their native languages, which are placed side-by-side with the English translation, allowing the book to be accessible to a larger audience, and meaning that those who are less familiar with the region can experience the different cultures.

GEORGIA TODAY interviewed Burduli about the book to find out more.

HOW DID THIS PROJECT, CREATING A BOOK ABOUT MASCULINITIES ACROSS THE SOUTH CAUCASUS, COME INTO BEING?

Masculinities are omnipresent and embedded within the social fabric; they are so normalized that sometimes it can be difficult to pinpoint them or their impact, as they are perceived as a default societal set of norms. In addition, we saw that while there are several publications on masculinities in the South Caucasus countries, the field remains rather unexplored. We wanted to give space to authors and artists from the South Caucasus to reflect and share with the readers their thoughts and observations regarding the social or political issues around them, through the lens of masculinities, especially since the region and the cultures here tend to be characterized as highly masculine.

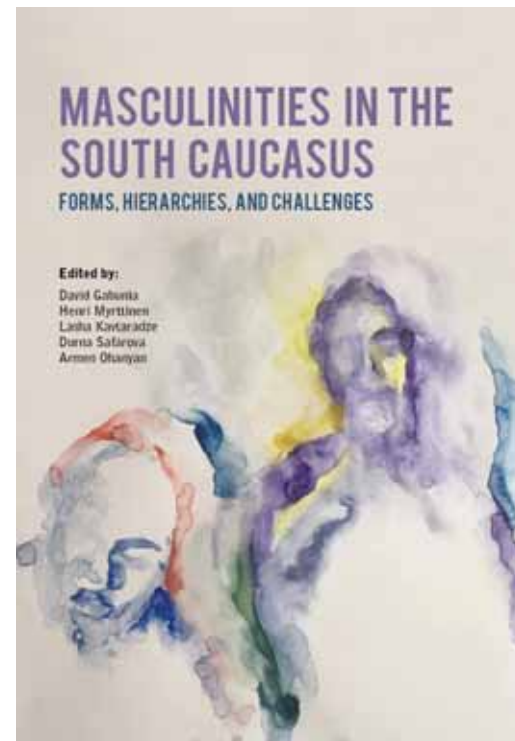
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE 'A MAN' OR TO BE 'MANLY' IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS?

I would rather pose this question to the readers. Masculinities and their manifestations are diverse, and each observer

has their point of view, therefore I would suggest readers approach and explore the experiences and reflections in the book.

'Masculinity' is commonly associated with characteristics such as physical strength, leadership and dominance, bravery, boldness, power, heterosexual virility, physical violence, etc. Feminist theories expand on these characteristics and define masculinities in higher plurality and complexity. They refer to them as a set of norms, values, roles, and behavioral patterns - to put it shortly - the expectations for 'how to be a man'. Masculinity does more than impact self-representation and image; it goes beyond the individual level and has a much larger scale of influence. It creates and impacts the structures and functioning of societies and cultures, and tends to define gender norms. It also strongly influences all social relations (with the self and others), identity politics, political and economic structures and processes, international relations and conflicts, and even relationships with nature.

Over the past decades, the South Caucasus has experienced numerous armed conflicts and wars, the flourishing and the decline of criminal culture, varying degrees and configurations of traditionalism, religiosity, authoritarianism, and democracy, and struggles of diverse marginalized groups for equality. These developments have always been hectic, but they are even more so today. Despite the vast differences in cultures and socio-political processes, the three countries represented in the book have major intersecting themes through the lens of masculinities, which



Masculinities in the South Caucasus, published in 2024

indicates the similarities of how masculinities shape and manifest in and within individuals and societies. The themes are: Forming and Embodying Masculinities, Power, War and Masculinities, Masculinities on the Margins, and Masculinities and the Gendered Other.

HOW DO THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT SUPPORT THIS CONCEPT OF MASCULINITIES WITHIN THE REGION VARY FROM THOSE IN THE WEST OR ELSEWHERE?

Every culture is unique. All processes within societies interact with each other and (re)configure how masculinities are

manifested in each society or even subculture. It is even difficult to compare the three countries represented in our book, despite the intersecting themes we have outlined within. While South Caucasus societies tend to be seen as more masculine, some but not all Western cultures are perceived as less so. Plus, there are always significant differences within societies. As a currently important point, the government can play an important role here - e.g. authoritarian or autocratic regimes promote more masculine values, traditions, structures, or even policies, compared to democratic ones, though this is definitely not dichotomous, for instance, military service and extractivism are present in all types of large political systems. In addition, there are hierarchies within masculinities which are prevalent in all types of systems, including democracies, and which relate to the position of power and accumulation of resources.

The book navigates content created by 16 contributors, including academic articles, essays, and art. The themes in the book are also related to the most common issues the contributors saw in their countries during 2022-2023 when the book was being developed. According to Burduli, socially constructed masculinities are everywhere, and the way to combat them is to acknowledge, reflect, discuss, and challenge them. Since they are created by society, she says they have the potential to be adapted and reconstructed into something else.

To learn more about this topic, an e-book is available at: Masculinities in the South Caucasus | Heinrich Böll Stiftung | Tbilisi - South Caucasus Region

About COP and Why We Should Care

BY THE EUNEIGHBOURSEAST TEAM

COP stands for "Conference of the Parties" and refers to the international meetings held under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which facilitates negotiations aimed at limiting dangerous climate change.

The COP serves as the main decision-making body of the UNFCCC, consisting of representatives from all participating countries, known as the "Parties."

Held annually, the UNFCCC COP provides a platform to negotiate new initiatives and assess the progress of Parties toward the overarching goal of the UNFCCC, particularly regarding the Paris Agreement—a legally binding international treaty on climate change adopted by 196 Parties at COP21 in Paris in 2015.

The overarching goal of the Paris Agreement is to hold "the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels" and pursue efforts "to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels".

To limit global warming to 1.5°C, greenhouse gas emissions must peak before 2025 at the latest and decline by 43% by 2030.

COP29 will take place in Baku, Azerbaijan, from 11-22 November 2024.

WHY IS CLIMATE CHANGE SUCH A PRESSING GLOBAL ISSUE?

Climate change refers to long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns. Such shifts can be natural, but since the industrial revolution in the 19th century, human activities have been the main driver of climate change, primarily due to the burning of fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas.

Burning fossil fuels generates greenhouse gas emissions that act like a blanket wrapped around the Earth, trapping the sun's heat and raising temperatures.

The average temperature of the Earth's surface is now about 1.2°C warmer than it was in the late 1800s, and warmer than at any time in the last 100,000 years. The last decade (2011-2020) was the warmest on record, and each of the last four decades has been warmer than any previous decade since 1850.

Many people think climate change mainly means warmer temperatures. But this is only the beginning of the story. Because the Earth is a system where everything is connected, changes in one area can influence changes in all others.

The consequences of climate change now include intense droughts, water scarcity, severe fires, rising sea levels, flooding, melting polar ice, catastrophic storms and declining biodiversity, and climate change can affect our health, ability to grow food, housing, safety and work.

Scientists agree that limiting global temperature rise to no more than 1.5°C would help us avoid the worst climate impacts and maintain a liveable climate. Yet policies currently in place point to a 3°C temperature rise by the end of the century.

Switching energy systems from fossil fuels to renewables like solar or wind [Editor's note: and cutting out or down on animal agriculture] will reduce the emissions driving climate change. But we have to act now. While a growing number of countries is committing to net zero emissions by 2050, emissions must be cut in half by 2030 to keep warming below 1.5°C, requiring a huge decline in the use of coal, oil and gas.

HOW IS THE EU ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE EASTERN PARTNER COUNTRIES?

"Together towards environmental and climate resilience" is one of the five long-term Eastern Partnership policy objectives beyond 2020. Among others, the EU has pledged to "help partner countries fulfil their nationally determined contributions to the Paris Agreement and modernise their economies, reduc-



COP28 in 2023, UAE. Source: consilium.europa

ing their carbon footprint and moving towards climate neutrality".

Under its Economic and Investment Plan (EIP) for the EaP, the EU aims to:

- strengthen climate policies and green investment.
- help partner countries to implement their nationally determined contributions to the Paris Agreement.
- scale up climate and green financing targeting municipal infrastructure, sustainable urban transport, the energy sector and SMEs.
- strengthen EU product and eco-innovation policies.
- support improved waste management and increase recycling.

In Armenia, this includes Investing in Green Yerevan under the EIP, supporting energy-efficient solutions to the Armenian capital, such as the delivery of green buses and energy renovation of 51 kindergartens.

In Azerbaijan, the EIP has set a focus on investing in sustainable infrastructure and solutions for green cities, delivering significant energy savings by upgrading more than 80% of street lighting infrastructure in the city of Ganja.

In Georgia, the EU is investing in cleaner air and energy efficiency for 1 million

people, while thanks to EU investment, Georgia is now home to the first commercial wind farm in the Caucasus.

In Moldova, the Economic Investment Plan targets the energy-efficient refurbishment of district heating systems in residential buildings in Chisinau and Balti, while 15,700 additional people now have access to safe drinking water thanks to EU support.

In Ukraine, the EU is working through the Ukraine Facility for recovery, reconstruction, and modernization in the face of Russian aggression. Under the Ukraine Facility, at least 20% of overall investments will contribute, to the extent possible in a war-torn country, to climate change mitigation and adaptation, environmental protection, including biodiversity conservation, and to the green transition.

In addition, the EU funds a number of regional programs working across the countries of the Eastern Partnership. These include:

- EU4Climate Resilience supporting the green transition and climate resilience.
- EU4Environment Green Economy helping to preserve natural capital and increase people's well-being.

• EU4Environment Water Resources and Environmental Data supporting a more sustainable use of water resources.

At the same time, European Financial Institutions such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the European Investment Bank (EIB) provide significant support for transition to the green economy by supporting low carbon and climate resilient growth, as well as investing in green infrastructures. The Eastern Europe Environment and Energy Efficiency Partnership (E5P) – a multi-donor trust fund of which the EU is the major donor – facilitates investments for municipal projects that improve energy efficiency and environmental protection. The EU also significantly contributes to the Green for Growth Fund (GGF).

Climate action is also high on the priorities at country level, with EU-funded programs focusing on areas such as air quality, water management and marine pollution, energy efficiency, waste management, tackling pesticides and industrial pollution, and sustainable forest management.

Pick up a copy of next week's GT to find out how YOU can join the global movement and help the planet.

CULTURE

A Space to Listen and Reflect: The Georgian Philharmonic Orchestra Ignites the New Auditorium



Photo by the author

BY IVAN NECHAEV

On October 25th, the Georgian Philharmonic Orchestra inaugurated the Georgian Philharmonic Orchestra Auditorium in Tbilisi with a performance that was, in itself, a quiet exploration of the hall's potential. Conducted by Temur Kvitelashvili Junior, the program wove together Elgar's ceremonious marches, Ravel's atmospheric sensuality, and Beethoven's resolute rhythmic energy. The concert opened a new page for classical music

in Tbilisi, casting this hall as a venue that could foster both intimate and ambitious musical experiences for the city.

ELGAR'S POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCE: THE QUIETLY REGAL OPENING

The evening began with Edward Elgar's Pomp and Circumstance March No. 1, a piece traditionally associated with celebration, here delivered with a subtly dignified tone. Kvitelashvili directed with attention to structure and balance, allowing Elgar's themes to unfold with clarity rather than ceremony. The familiar melody, often presented as an anthem of grandeur, was executed here with

restraint, allowing space for its more reflective qualities to come through. The orchestra responded to Kvitelashvili's nuanced direction with a well-blended sound, providing a steady introduction to the evening's program.

THE COLORFUL HUES OF RAVEL'S DAPHNIS ET CHLOÉ

Following Elgar's march, the orchestra shifted into Ravel's Daphnis et Chloé, Suite No. 2, evoking a sense of dawn's quiet mystery. Kvitelashvili led the ensemble with a particular focus on Ravel's rich textures, guiding each section of the orchestra with precision. The suite's opening, *Lever du jour*, conveyed a muted,

almost hazy light, capturing the impressionistic quality of Ravel's writing. Woodwinds, strings, and subtle brass interjections melded seamlessly, creating a tonal palette that invited close listening.

In the final section, *Danse générale*, the conductor coaxed out a reserved yet lively energy, allowing the rhythmic layers to build with natural momentum. Rather than aiming for a jubilant finale, Kvitelashvili held the intensity in check, resulting in a restrained conclusion that left a lingering sense of Ravel's delicate balance between exuberance and introspection.

BEETHOVEN'S SYMPHONY NO. 7: AN ANALYTICAL APPROACH TO RHYTHMIC VITALITY

The evening's culminating work, Beethoven's Symphony No. 7, brought with it an analytical perspective on Beethoven's characteristic rhythmic drive. Kvitelashvili's interpretation avoided indulgence, emphasizing structure and form over sheer force. The symphony's introductory movement unfolded with steady confidence, and Kvitelashvili's pacing provided a foundation that allowed the orchestra's musicians to engage with Beethoven's spirited motifs with careful control.

The *Allegretto*, perhaps the symphony's most introspective moment, was played with measured sensitivity. The movement's persistent rhythmic pulse, almost meditative in its effect, was maintained with deliberate focus. Rather than drawing the audience's attention to the movement's more dramatic qualities, Kvitelashvili emphasized its subtle textures,

creating an atmosphere that felt both thoughtful and spacious.

In the symphony's final movements, Kvitelashvili guided the orchestra through Beethoven's energetic demands with precision, opting for a controlled, forward-moving tempo. While some might have wished for a more overtly vigorous interpretation, the conductor's approach allowed Beethoven's compositional structure to take precedence, highlighting the architecture of each movement. The evening concluded on a note that was strong but understated, leaving a reflective sense of Beethoven's musical intentions.

A CONCERT OF QUIET PRECISION AND MEASURED ENERGY

This inaugural performance marked a restrained yet meaningful beginning for the Georgian Philharmonic Orchestra Auditorium. Temur Kvitelashvili Junior's measured approach brought cohesion to a program that balanced ceremony, color, and rhythm. Each work was presented with a tone of quiet precision, more reflective than rousing. In this new concert space, the orchestra explored the range of acoustic possibilities without forcing resonance, allowing the natural attributes of the venue to inform the evening's sound.

For Tbilisi, the concert presented another introduction to a space where music can be explored with focus and clarity. This hall has potential to become a respected fixture in the cultural landscape, offering a setting in which classical music can be experienced as much for its subtlety as for its power.

The Georgian Talent that Reminded Europe of Georgia Once Again

BY TEAM GT

The story of Georgia's emerging presence in the world of table tennis gained renewed attention this past week, thanks to the impressive performance of 15-year-old Anastasia Chkhartishvili at an international table tennis tournament held in Riga, Latvia. Anastasia, a rising star and the current Georgian champion in the under-17 categories, took on Europe's best in a prestigious event that ran from October 24-27, showcasing her talent on a truly international stage.

This annual ranking tournament attracted champions and top players

from 13 European nations, seeing nearly 200 competitors participating across different age categories, making for an intense competition. Despite the challenging field, Anastasia's performance set her apart. She emerged victorious in all her group-stage matches, advancing confidently to the 1/8 finals and continuing her winning streak all the way to the final match.

In the final, Anastasia faced Lithuanian Morkunaite Smilte, a skilled player who had previously defeated the tournament's top-seeded Estonian player, Irina Litvinova, in a close 3-2 match. But Anastasia demonstrated poise and strategic prowess, dismantling her opponent in a stunning 3-0 sweep with scores of 11-8, 11-5, and 11-7, leaving her Lithuanian competitor little chance to get into the game.

This victory is historic for Georgian table tennis, marking the first time a Georgian player under the age of 19 has captured the championship at such a prominent international tournament. It's not Anastasia's first notable win either: last year, she became the first Georgian to secure the championship title in Greece's European Youth Series for girls under 15, proudly raising Georgia's flag.

Anastasia's success reflects her disciplined and determined spirit, qualities that make her stand out in her sport. She exhibits a calm demeanor under pressure, exceptional focus, and unyielding



resilience—traits essential for any athlete aiming for the top of their game. As she continues to progress, there is growing hope and anticipation in Georgia that she could one day be a world champion.

As Georgian table tennis continues its

gradual rise in popularity with young players like Anastasia leading the way, her achievements are a testament to the power of dedication, the support of her family and community, and the promise of even greater successes ahead.

Demand for Democracy: Georgian Culture and Art, from Ancient Times to Modernity

Continued from page 4

SOVIET SUPPRESSION AND ARTISTIC RESISTANCE

During the Soviet era, Georgia was under strict political and cultural control by Moscow. Despite Soviet-imposed censorship and repression, Georgian artists, writers, and intellectuals mounted a subtle yet powerful form of resistance, using art, literature, film, and music to express their desire for freedom and to preserve Georgian identity.

Georgian literature during the Soviet period served as a crucial space for dissent and the preservation of Georgian identity. Writers like Galaktion Tabidze, often referred to as the "King of Georgian Poetry," used symbolic and metaphorical language to express complex emotions and critique Soviet restrictions. Although Tabidze's works were frequently scrutinized by Soviet authorities, his poetry subtly conveyed a longing for personal and national freedom, becoming deeply influential among Georgians who shared his sentiments. His poems, filled with imagery of Georgian landscapes and historical references, became coded messages of defiance and pride in Georgian culture.

Georgian theater and cinema also became vital forms of artistic resistance. In particular, director Tengiz Abuladze's *Repentance* (1984) stands out as a landmark of Soviet-era dissent. Although filmed during a period of censorship, *Repentance* critiques totalitarianism through a fictional portrayal of a tyrannical ruler. The film uses allegory to address the horrors of dictatorship, resonating with audiences who understood its commentary on the Stalinist legacy. Initially banned, it was later released during the perestroika period, when it sparked significant conversation about freedom, justice, and the national trauma experienced under Soviet rule.

Music also played a subtle yet influential role in Georgia's cultural resistance. Georgian folk music, for instance, became a form of cultural preservation and resilience. Traditional polyphonic singing, which is unique to Georgia, continued to be performed and celebrated, defying Soviet attempts to homogenize cultural expression across the republics. Groups like the Rustavi Ensemble maintained and popularized Georgian folk songs, subtly reminding audiences of their unique heritage and fostering a sense of unity and national pride. This music served not just as entertainment, but as an enduring symbol of identity and resili-

ence, allowing Georgians to stay connected to their cultural roots amidst Soviet pressure to conform.

The visual arts were another sphere where Georgian artists subtly defied Soviet narratives. Many painters and sculptors incorporated elements of Georgian folklore, landscapes, and history into their works, reinforcing cultural pride. Artists like Elene Akhvediani, known for her distinctive portrayals of Georgian villages and urban life, conveyed the beauty of Georgian life without directly confronting Soviet ideology. Her art celebrated Georgian culture and became a cherished reminder of what was at stake under Soviet control.

THE POST-SOVIET ERA: A SURGE OF DEMOCRATIC EXPRESSION

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked a turning point for Georgia, as the country faced the dual challenge of establishing a new democratic system and rediscovering its cultural identity. During this period, Georgian artists and intellectuals played a key role in shaping the discourse around democracy and freedom, using their work to express the hopes, frustrations, and aspirations of a society in transition.

Following independence, Georgian writers and poets addressed the complexities of the transition from authoritarianism to democracy. Poets like Besik Kharanauli used metaphor and symbolism to express both the pain and hope associated with newfound freedom. His works, filled with introspective and existential themes, spoke to the Georgian experience of loss, survival, and resilience amid political uncertainty. Kharanauli's poetry, often introspective and reflective of Georgia's complex history, captures the tumultuous emotions associated with national change and the deeply personal costs of the transition. His work is emblematic of a post-Soviet generation that both celebrates independence and grapples with its challenges.

In the post-Soviet period, Georgian visual artists explored themes of identity, nationhood, and social change. Painter and installation artist Irakli Gamrekeli, for instance, used mixed media and modern techniques to explore post-Soviet society's realities, creating works that question both the effects of Soviet rule and the rapid transformations in Georgian society. By addressing issues like alienation, consumerism, and cultural displacement, his art became a platform for examining the costs of sudden tran-

sition. Another example is artist and photographer Maka Batiashvili, who captured the Georgian spirit of resilience through her depictions of everyday life. Her focus on ordinary people and Georgian landscapes allowed her to document the country's evolving social fabric, using art as a medium for expressing solidarity and national pride amidst economic hardship.

Theater and film also became powerful forms of social commentary in post-Soviet Georgia. Filmmakers like Otar Iosseliani and Nana Ekvimishvili created films that reflect on the cultural and social complexities of post-Soviet Georgian life. Ekvimishvili's acclaimed film *In Bloom* (2013) is a particularly notable example, focusing on the lives of two teenage girls in the 1990s who navigate the challenges of coming of age in a newly independent but chaotic Georgia. Through nuanced storytelling, Ekvimishvili's film delves into themes of resilience, friendship, and the struggle for personal freedom in a society recovering from conflict. In theater, playwrights like Lasha Bugadze explored the intersections of politics, identity, and freedom. His plays, often laced with satire, question authority and highlight the contradictions within Georgian society. His work contributed to the larger discourse around democratic ideals and the role of the individual in post-Soviet life, using theater as a platform to challenge societal norms and advocate for progressive change.

Georgian music in the post-Soviet era reflected a mix of traditional and modern influences, signaling a reassertion of national pride and identity. Folk ensembles like the Rustavi Choir continued to perform traditional Georgian polyphony, preserving and celebrating Georgia's unique musical heritage as a source of national pride. At the same time, modern musicians blended traditional elements with contemporary styles, creating a sound that resonated with younger generations seeking to define what it meant to be Georgian in a post-Soviet world. Modern musicians like Niaz Diasamidze, the lead singer of the popular band 33a, incorporated folk motifs, Georgian themes, and social messages into their music. Their works often reflect themes of freedom, resilience, and identity, speaking directly to the post-Soviet experience and the complex journey toward democracy.

CONTEMPORARY REFLECTIONS: ART AND DEMOCRACY

IN TODAY'S GEORGIA

In recent years, Georgia's evolving democracy and dynamic art scene have become intertwined, with young artists, musicians, and activists using creative expression to explore and critique political and social issues. From street art to music festivals, contemporary Georgian art increasingly reflects the nation's democratic aspirations, challenging societal norms and sparking important conversations. Emerging artists, inspired by Georgia's past and present struggles, are redefining cultural identity and using art as a vehicle for social change.

Street art has gained popularity in Tbilisi, transforming public spaces into sites of expression and protest. Artists like Tamoonz and Gagosh have pioneered politically charged graffiti that critiques issues such as corruption, inequality, and environmental neglect. Their works are bold, colorful, and often located in prominent urban areas, making them highly visible and accessible to the public. Tamoonz, for instance, has created murals that comment on women's rights and social inequality, encouraging dialogue on these important topics.

Young Georgian photographers and filmmakers have begun using their lenses to capture the realities of Georgian society, focusing on themes of poverty, displacement, and the LGBTQ+ community. Photographer Dina Oganova, for example, explores identity, gender, and marginalization in her projects, offering an intimate look into the lives of those often overlooked. Her photo series 'I Am Georgia' features portraits of people from diverse backgrounds, highlighting the country's complex social landscape and challenging stereotypes. In film, young directors like Rati Tsiteladze are gaining international attention for their explorations of Georgian life. His award-winning documentary *Prisoner of Society* (2018) follows the story of a transgender woman in Georgia, delving into themes of acceptance, isolation, and family conflict in the face of social prejudice. By addressing topics that are often taboo, Tsiteladze's work underscores art's role in promoting empathy and understanding within a democratizing society.

Georgia's electronic music scene, centered around iconic venues like Bassiani, has become both a cultural and political movement. Since its founding, Bassiani has stood as a symbol of resistance, particularly against police crackdowns and government restrictions. The club gained international attention in 2018 when a

government raid sparked massive protests known as the "Rave Revolution." These protests were a significant moment for Georgia's youth, who rallied for greater freedoms and an end to state repression. The club continues to serve as a space for free expression, fostering a sense of community among Georgia's progressive youth. Music festivals like Tbilisi Open Air also play a vital role in fostering democratic ideals. Bringing together international and local artists, the festival promotes messages of tolerance and peace, allowing young people to explore their identities freely and connect with global movements. These events create temporary spaces where freedom of expression is celebrated and encourage young Georgians to think critically about societal issues.

With a rising focus on feminism and LGBTQ+ rights, young Georgian artists are boldly addressing issues of gender and sexuality. Platforms like Open Space and Haraki create installations, performances, and multimedia art that confront issues like patriarchy, gender norms, and discrimination. Their work often sparks debate, revealing the deep social divides within Georgian society.

ART AS A CATALYST FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

From ancient tribal councils to contemporary protest art, Georgia's cultural journey reflects an enduring pursuit of democracy. Through literature, religious teachings, nationalist movements, and modern art, Georgians have consistently advocated for freedom, justice, and equality. These democratic ideals are woven into the fabric of Georgian identity, continuing to inspire each generation in its quest for a more equitable society. In this way, Georgia's art and culture not only preserve history but also shape the future of democracy in the region.

In contemporary Georgia, art has become an essential medium for expressing democratic values and driving social change. Young Georgian artists are using diverse forms of expression to explore and critique societal issues, breaking down barriers and encouraging dialogue. Through street art, photography, music, and activism, they are actively shaping Georgia's cultural landscape, demonstrating that art can be a powerful force in the pursuit of a democratic and inclusive society. These creative movements highlight the importance of freedom of expression in a rapidly changing Georgia, where art serves as both a mirror and a catalyst for transformation.



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Reg. # 06/4-309

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