



Mikheil Kasyanov. Photo by Dharmikatva

FOCUS ON PUTIN'S PUPPET SHOW

Russian ex PM Kasyanov on Georgia, Abkhazia, and the man who broke Russia

PAGE 4

In this week's issue...

Ukraine Latest: Ukraine Launches Drone Strike on Moscow while Attempting to Hold off 50,000+ Russian Troops in Kursk

POLITICS PAGE 3

Dozens of Georgian Farmers Experience Income Growth: The Role of Modern Technologies, Updated Equipment, and New Knowledge in Farming

BUSINESS PAGE 6

Big Turnout for Real Estate Investment in Georgia with York Towers during Cityscape Global in Riyadh

BUSINESS PAGE 7

Georgia Showcases Reproductive Health Expertise at Int'l Congress

SOCIETY PAGE 9

Ushangi Khumarashvili's Art Depicts the Centerpoint of Chaos and Order

CULTURE PAGE 10

Lapis Lazuli: Euripides Laskaridis' Ode to Absurdity and Transformation at GIFT Festival

CULTURE PAGE 11

Climate Change and COP29: What to Expect

BY KATIE RUTH DAVIES

As the world watches COP29 this week and next, the lessons and promises from COP28 still loom large, carrying with them both hope and skepticism. Last year, negotiators gathered in Dubai with ambitious goals: operationalizing the Loss and Damage Fund and tackling the urgent need to move away from fossil fuels. While there were some positive steps, the reality of the climate crisis, now more urgent than ever, shows just how far we still have to go. With extreme weather becoming more frequent and ever more devastating, we must ask: Are we on track to meet the challenges ahead? What barriers continue to prevent real progress, and how can we make sure that vulnerable communities are prioritized in the global fight against climate change? As we look back on COP28 and face the growing threat of a warming planet, COP29 presents a crucial moment to hold countries accountable and to find new, more effective ways to work together on climate solutions.

Continued on page 8



Cop29 kicked off in Baku on November 11

GALT & TAGGART											
Prepared for Georgia Today Business by											
As of 11-Nov-2024											
Markets					Markets						
	Price	w/w	m/m		Price	w/w	m/m		Price	w/w	m/m
BONDS											
GEORG 04/26	94.27 (YTM 8.398%)	+0.2%	-0.1%	Bank of Georgia (BGEO LN)	GBP 40.05	+7.8%	-2.0%				
GRAB 04/28	89.01 (YTM 7.54%)	-0.4%	-1.6%	Georgia Capital (GCEO LN)	GBP 10.00	+3.5%	-1.0%				
GEBOG 9/12 PERP	97.79 (YTM 9.75%)	-0.6%	-0.4%	TBC Bank Group (TBCG LN)	GBP 27.05	+6.1%	-4.2%				
SILNET 01/27	100.56 (YTM 8.04%)	+0.1%	-0.2%								
TBC 8.894 PERP	95.85 (YTM 11.08%)	+0.3%	-0.2%	COMMODITIES							
TBC 10 1/4 PERP	98.53 (YTM 10.13%)	+0.2%	-0.3%	Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	77.46	-4.3%	+8.2%				
				Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	2 648.54	+0.2%	+2.7%				
INDICES											
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%				



Photo: Adjara Tourism Department

Batumi to Host International Gastronomy Forum

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

Batumi, the vibrant Black Sea city of Georgia, will host its second International Gastronomy Forum this weekend, the Adjara Regional Tourism and Resorts Department announced on Wednesday. Running from Saturday to Monday, the event will bring together

Michelin-starred chefs and renowned gastronomy experts from Greece, France, and Switzerland, alongside leading Georgian chefs and culinary professionals. The forum will feature discussions on traditional cooking methods and the latest trends in contemporary gastronomy. The final two days of the event will focus on exclusive masterclasses designed to enhance the skills of Georgian chefs. The forum highlights Batumi's growing recognition on the global culinary stage.

9th Italian Cuisine World Week to Celebrate Mediterranean Food



Photo: Mashed

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

The 9th Italian Cuisine World Week, celebrated annually with the support of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, will occur from November 16-22. This year's theme is the Mediterranean diet and its roots, emphasizing its health and sustainability. The celebration consists of a series of events focusing on Italian culinary tra-

ditions, starting with a pizza-cooking masterclass on November 17 at Expo-Georgia, followed by a dinner featuring chef Salvatore La Ragione, who holds a Michelin star. Another significant highlight of the week-long celebration is a masterclass for culinary students at the Agricultural University of Georgia, led by world-famous chef Diego Butiglione and representatives from Molino Casillo, taking place on the 19th of November. Other events include tastings, seminars, and culinary shows, paying homage to Italian gastronomic heritage.

UN Women Launches Leadership Academy to Promote Women's Political Involvement



Photo: UN Women Georgia

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

UN Women Georgia continues its pursuit to advance women's political representation in Georgia with a new initiative - Women's Leadership Academy. The academy, established in collaboration with the Eastern European Center for Multiparty Democracy, provides an intensive training course for those women who are interested in

politics and decision-making. Participants of the course will gain expertise in areas such as democracy, advocacy, gender equality, media relations, political communication, and cyber security as well as getting hands-on experience in debate, campaign strategies, and more. The academy is in the scope of the 'Women's Increased Leadership for Democracy in Georgia' (WILD) initiative, funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

Tbilisi Sports Palace to Undergo Major Reconstruction



Photo: Tbilisi City Hall

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

Kakha Kaladze, Mayor of Tbilisi, announced Wednesday that the renovation of the historical Sports Palace is to commence shortly.

The venue, primarily used for cultural, social, and sports-related events, is in an 'unsatisfactory condition' and requires considerable repairs. Planned renovative works include replacing or repairing floor coverings, seating, walls, dressing rooms, and VIP areas. Special efforts will be made to preserve historically significant materials of the

building, like its natural stone cladding, Kaladze noted.

The mayor also discussed plans to create a recreational space around the Palace, to enhance accessibility to the nearby subway, and to add a parking zone. The goal of the project is to revitalize the area and continue to have the venue serving as a multifaceted space for diverse events.

Kobakhidze Addresses COP29 Delegates on Georgia's Climate Aspirations

BY TEAM GT

This event marks a significant milestone as it is the first time that a country from the South Caucasus region is hosting the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, - Georgia's Prime Minister told the COP29 delegates. "I would like to wish Azerbaijan every success in guiding us towards a fruitful and ambitious outcome at COP29, fostering a collaborative spirit and constructive dialogue throughout the negotiations.

"This conference comes at a critical juncture, as climate change emerges as one of the most pressing challenges of our era, demanding the urgent global action and cooperation to confront its far-reaching consequences," he noted. "Regrettably, along this journey armed conflicts not only lead to profound humanitarian crises but also disrupt and slow the world's efforts to combat climate change.

"Escalating impacts of climate change, including the rapid melting of glaciers and rising sea levels, are profoundly disrupting economies of the developing countries and jeopardizing the livelihoods of particularly vulnerable nations and communities. Regrettably, Georgia is no exception in facing harsh repercussions of climate change. In recent years, acknowledgment of the links between human rights and the environment has greatly increased," the PM said.

"During Georgia's presidency of the Council of Europe in 2019-2020, one of the four priorities was human rights and environmental protection. In the final declaration by the Presidency of the Committee of Ministers, the Council of Europe's role as the guarantor of our common Pan-European legal framework was underscored, emphasizing its responsibility in integrating environmental dimensions into human rights initiatives and promoting a rights-based approach to environmental protection. This declaration laid the foundation for significant advancements in environmental protection within the Council of Europe. The Constitution of Georgia singles out the right to the environment as a basic right, while in the constitutions of a number of leading countries, the right to life is used when discussing the right to the environment, as does the European Court of Human Rights.

"In response to these urgent challenges,



Azeri President Ilham Aliyev, Georgian PM Irakli Kobakhidze, and António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations. Source: FB

it is crucial that we remain steadfast in our commitment to halve global greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. Achieving this goal is critical if we are to limit global warming to the 1.5 Degrees Celsius target set by the Paris Agreement.

"The Government of Georgia is dedicated to fulfilling its national commitments by taking concrete actions to implement the Paris Agreement. To this end, Georgia is committed to submitting its third-generation Nationally Determined Contributions by 2025, consistent with the aim of limiting global warming to within the 1.5 Degrees Celsius limit and advancing the vision of Europe as the first continent to achieve net-zero emissions. In preparing the new NDC, the Government of Georgia is actively engaging key stakeholders by embracing an inclusive, whole-of-society approach. Regrettably, due to the ongoing illegal occupation of Georgia's Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions, the Government is prevented from the possibility to implement similar measures in the mentioned regions, which make up 20% of Georgia's territories.

"The outcome of the New Collective Quantified Goal on Climate Finance will determine whether COP29 is viewed as a success. The NCQG must see a significant increase from the current \$100 billion target, and stimulate the alignment of global financial flows with the goals of the Paris Agreement. In that context, it is worth recalling that at COP28, it was acknowledged that developing countries would need close to \$6 trillion by the end of this decade to effectively address climate change. COP29 must also improve access to climate

finance for developing countries, and build capacity so that these countries can effectively utilize increased climate finance.

"In Georgia, we take our responsibility to address the climate crisis seriously, and have already undertaken significant steps to make a meaningful impact. Georgia is committed to ongoing efforts to mainstream climate action in the national budget, through annual assessments enabling us to measure the impact of climate change on our expenditures and economic development. This work identifies mitigation and adaptation costs and promotes partner collaboration, laying the foundation for coordinating climate finance to enhance resilience and achieve NDC targets.

"Effective climate policy development, alongside transformative programs and the decoupling of economic growth in developing countries, depends heavily on the successful alignment of global financial flows with the Paris Agreement's objectives. Substantial financial support, technical assistance, and technology transfer to developing nations are all crucial for effective implementation of their ambitious climate targets.

"Georgia is honored to participate in the COP taking place in our region. Let us begin the journey of turning our collective aspirations into meaningful results in the fight against climate change. We will work to support our neighbors and friends from Azerbaijan to achieve a successful outcome of COP29. Together, we are transforming the South Caucasus region into a region of opportunities and success," the Georgian Prime Minister concluded.

Ukraine Latest: Ukraine Launches Drone Strike on Moscow while Attempting to Hold off 50,000+ Russian Troops in Kursk

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

Ukkraine attacked Moscow on Sunday with at least 34 drones, the biggest drone strike on the Russian capital since the start of the war in 2022, forcing flights to be diverted from three of the city's major airports, and injuring at least five people.

Russian air defenses destroyed another 50 drones over other regions of western Russia on Sunday, the defense ministry said.

"An attempt by the Kyiv regime to carry out a terrorist attack using airplane-type drones on the territory of the Russian Federation was thwarted," the ministry claimed.

Russia's federal air transport agency said the airports of Domodedovo, Sheremetyevo and Zhukovsky diverted at least 36 flights, but then resumed operations. Five people were injured in the Moscow region, the ministry noted.

Moscow and its surrounding region, with a population of at least 21 million, is one of the biggest metropolitan areas in Europe, alongside Istanbul.

For its part, Russia launched a record 145 drones that same night, Ukraine said. Kyiv said its air defenses downed 62. Ukraine also said it had attacked an arsenal in the Bryansk region of Russia, which reported 14 drones had been downed in the region.

As the war enters its 994th day, another key developments include:

- Ukrainian forces have repelled Russian troops near the northeastern city of Kupiansk, Ukraine's military has said. It added that Russian forces attacked in four waves and deployed tanks, armored vehicles and a mine-clearing system.

Some of the Russian forces, it said, donned uniforms resembling those of the Ukrainian military – a practice it said is a war crime.

- Heavy military activity has been reported further south in the city of Pokrovsk, with Ukrainian forces repelling all but one of 36 attacks.

- Russia's Defense Ministry has said its forces have taken control of the town of Rivnopil in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region. Ukrainian authorities have said a Russian attack killed two residents in the village of Shevchenko in the Donetsk region.

- A Ukrainian car bomb killed senior Russian naval officer Valery Trankovsky in occupied Crimea's city of Sevastopol, in what a Kyiv security source has said is one of its highest-ranking targets to date.

- Russia launched its first missile attack on Kyiv since August, with no casualties or major damage reported. Air defenses intercepted two incoming cruise missiles, two ballistic missiles and 37 drones across the country, the air force said.

NORTH KOREAN SOLDIERS IN UKRAINE

South Korea's spy agency has said it has evidence that North Korean soldiers have engaged in combat operations against Ukraine alongside their Russian allies.

The United States is concerned by Russia's growing relationship with North Korea, especially what technology the countries may be exchanging, the top US arms control official, Bonnie Jenkins, has said. Jenkins added that "we don't have anything definitive ... in terms of nuclear technology going from Russia to the DPRK [North Korea]."

North Korea has dispatched 10,000 troops to Russia, with most of them deployed in the western Kursk Oblast



Russian law enforcement officers inspect the wreckage of a drone following an attack in a village in the Moscow region on November 10. Source: AFP

and taking part in combat, a Pentagon spokesperson said during a press briefing on November 12.

Washington is echoing earlier warnings from Kyiv that Pyongyang's troops have been deployed in the warzone in an unprecedented escalation of Russia's war against Ukraine.

"I can confirm that over 10,000 (North Korean) soldiers have been sent to eastern Russia, and most of them have moved to the far western Kursk Oblast, where they have begun engaging in combat operations with Russian forces," spokesperson Vedant Patel said.

"Russian forces have trained the (North

Korean) soldiers in artillery, in UAV and basic infantry operations, including trench clearing, which are critical skills for front-line operations."

According to Patel, the effectiveness of North Korean soldiers will "in large part be dictated by how well the Russians can integrate them into their military."

Russia is mustering a force of 50,000 soldiers, including North Korean troops, to launch a counter-offensive against a Ukrainian salient in Russia's Kursk Oblast, the New York Times reported on November 10.

The new force comes as Russia saw its

heaviest losses last month. The North Korean troops could be replacing injured and killed Russian soldiers, say some experts.

Clashes between the Ukrainian and North Korean soldiers are currently underway, Ukraine's Defense Minister Rustem Umerov said on. "North Korean troops have already suffered casualties," President Volodymyr Zelensky confirmed on November 7, without specifying the number.

RUSSIA PREPARING A 50,000-PEOPLE-STRONG OFFENSIVE IN LATEST ATTEMPT TO PUSH UKRAINIAN ARMY OUT OF KURSK OBLAST


Over the past week, Russia had been gathering forces in what appears to be preparations for a decisive push in the country's Kursk Oblast.

"The situation is changing every day. Not long ago, we were on the offensive, and now we are on the defensive," a 35-year-old artilleryman with the callsign Spys, fighting in the area, told the Kyiv Independent.

In light of the recent advances of Russian troops in Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kharkiv oblasts, the country now faces a new challenge: defending the positions gained in the August cross-border offensive.


Ukrainian soldiers are holding off nearly 50,000 troops in Russia's embattled Kursk Oblast, President Volodymyr Zelensky said on November 11.




With no reduction in the number of personnel carrying out assaults in eastern Ukraine and an additional 10,000 soldiers reportedly deployed from North Korea, Russia is expected to initiate a significant offensive from the north. This move could potentially escalate beyond the now non-existent border, further intensifying the conflict.




EXPLORE OUR BELOVED CITY FROM THE BIRD VIEW

Xeme restaurant is located on the 31st floor in The Biltmore Tbilisi Hotel





The name of the restaurant Xeme speaks for itself, as it means the arctic fork-tailed gull.

THE BILTMORE Tbilisi

29 Rustaveli Avenue, 0108, Tbilisi, Georgia / T: +995 322 72 72 72 / Info.bhtg@biltmorecollection.com

Putin's Puppet Show: Russian Ex PM Kasyanov on Georgia, Abkhazia, and the Man Who Broke Russia



Mikheil Kasyanov. Photo by Tip480

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

It's been said that every political crisis leaves behind winners and losers. As Mikhail Kasyanov, Russia's former prime minister, weighs in on the recent Georgian elections in an interview with Radio Free Europe's Georgian Service, his assessment is as sharp as it is troubling: "It is a victory for Putin," he declares, though quickly downplays its scope. "I would

I don't know what promises Ivanishvili gave Putin when he left Russia with his money, but Georgia's loyalty to Putin's regime is clearly part of the bargain

say just [a minor] victory because [real] victory would be Ukraine. But of course, Putin is very much satisfied and very happy that [the elections] happened this way."

For Kasyanov, who served as prime minister under Vladimir Putin in the early 2000s, Georgia's elections signal more than just a local crisis. They represent yet another domino in the Kremlin's geopolitical playbook, one designed to maintain influence over former Soviet states. Georgia's ruling party, Georgian Dream, led by billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili, plays a crucial role in this strategy. Kasyanov alleges a shadowy deal between Ivanishvili and Moscow: "I don't know what promises Ivanishvili gave Putin when he left Russia with his money, but Georgia's loyalty to Putin's regime is clearly part of the bargain."

For now, the tactics employed by the Georgian Dream party are clear. Using fear as a political tool, they have warned voters that supporting the opposition could bring war, a credible threat in a region where the memory of Russian aggression is vivid. "That is just playing on the feelings of people so that they win votes, to make people scared," Kasyanov explains. He acknowledges that Georgians remain haunted by the 2008 war and the broader specter of renewed conflict. "Nobody wants war; everybody is terrified of it."

Putin, meanwhile, is playing out a layered strategic move: to keep Georgia out of NATO while allowing Ivanishvili to maintain a precarious balancing act. "Georgians have visa-free [travel] and

We underestimated Putin. We thought he would continue building a democratic state. But he was playing a role

other privileges [with the EU]. I think the ruling party will continue playing this game: being independent, but so as not to humiliate Putin, not too independent."

A particularly intriguing gambit of the Georgian Dream leadership is the promise of national unification: the tantalizing idea of bringing back the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. According to Kasyanov, this narrative may conceal a far more transactional agenda. He floats the possibility of a deal between Ivanishvili and Putin: "For instance, just to give back South Ossetia and to require from Georgia recognition of Abkhazia."

This trade-off, Kasyanov suggests, aligns

with Putin's strategic needs. "Putin needs Abkhazia because he's building a new seaport there [in Ochamchire]. They need this part of the Black Sea to withdraw their fleet from Ukraine, from Crimea, to a safer place." South Ossetia, by contrast, is expendable: its sparse population and isolated geography making it a low-stakes bargaining chip.

But if Moscow holds all the cards, why would it offer anything at all? Kasyanov chuckles at the question. "Perhaps Putin's idea of a 'reward' will simply be not invading Georgia. That might be all they get."

These machinations are hardly new. As Kasyanov reflects on the origins of the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the 1990s, he describes a Russia that was more preoccupied with internal chaos than grand strategy. Under Boris Yeltsin, he recalls, "there was no deliberate policy to create problems in Georgia. The focus was on maintaining peace, albeit clumsily." He dismisses the notion that today's Kremlin policy is a mere continuation of Yeltsin's. "That era was about survival. Under Putin, it's about dominance."

Kasyanov's insights into Putin's transformation from a seemingly reformist leader to a geopolitical antagonist are particularly striking. "In 1999 and 2000, we saw him as a young, consistent person who could continue the democratic policies begun under Yeltsin. He promised support for reforms, and we believed him," Kasyanov recalls. But by 2005, something changed. "Putin decided he wasn't getting the respect he deserved

Today's Kremlin policy is not a continuation of Yeltsin's. That era was about survival. Under Putin, it's about dominance

from the West. That's when he began his shift toward authoritarianism."

The former prime minister traces the roots of Putin's grievances back to events like the 2003 Iraq War and the US withdrawal from the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. At the 2007 Munich Security Conference, he infamously declared that Russia "was surrounded by enemies." For Kasyanov, the Bucharest NATO summit in April 2008 was the turning point. "After Bucharest, he decided to take a chance. Georgia appeared to be weak, and he decided to grab the opportunity."

He recounts the ominous lead-up to the 2008 war: "The whole summer of 2008, I remember people of my political party who were living in the south of Russia saying every night they could see military equipment heading towards the Georgian border. It was three months of preparation. It was long planned and they were just waiting for the right moment."

Looking back, Kasyanov doesn't shy away from the bitter truth. "We underestimated Putin. We thought he would continue building a democratic state. Yeltsin believed in this. Me, I also believed in Putin—Boris Nemtsov, Igor Gaidar, and others, just everyone from our flank. We wanted to support Putin, and we did it, but he was playing a role. By 2005, it became clear: he wanted to be seen as the equal of the US president, dictating the fate of the world."

And what of Russia's future without Putin? Kasyanov believes in the possibility of a democratic revival, but only if Russians are willing to face the bitter truth. "Right now, propaganda has created cognitive dissonance. People want the war to stop, but don't want to be defeated. The next government must clear their minds, reveal the atrocities, and rebuild trust. It won't be easy, but it's essential."

For Kasyanov, the solution lies in systemic change: "Changing the Constitution, all that Putin has already added to the Constitution, we take it away and change it from a presidential republic to a parliamentary republic. That's what I believe all opposition has agreed to."

As for how Putin might exit the stage, Kasyanov offers no predictions, only a dose of historical realism. "Dictators disappear suddenly. Everything seems under control until one day, it isn't. When that day comes, Russia will have a chance to chart a new path. If not, we're headed for disaster."

As Georgia grapples with its future and Ukraine continues its struggle, Kasyanov's words are a stark reminder of the stakes at play. Whether the West is ready to confront this reality, Kasyanov suggests, may determine not just Georgia's fate, but the fate of an entire region.

EU Leaders Condemn Election Fraud in Georgia, Urge Support for Democracy amid Rising Tensions

BY TEAM GT

Tensions in Georgia continue to escalate following the October 26 elections, as both European lawmakers and international leaders voice their concerns over widespread allegations of fraud, intimidation, and electoral misconduct. Several MEPs and key figures have condemned the lack of legitimacy surrounding the elections, calling for a thorough investigation and stronger action from the international community.

During a plenary session of the European Parliament, MEP Nathalie Loiseau, who participated in an election observation mission in Georgia, reported witnessing instances of fraud and voter intimidation. "My six colleagues and I saw clear signs of manipulation during the election," Loiseau stated, emphasizing that the October elections could not be deemed free or fair. Similarly, Markéta Gregorová, who had observed the 2021 elections in Georgia, noted a troubling increase in violations this time, including ballot stuffing, voter intimidation, and forgery. "This is part of a broader democratic backsliding under the current government," she warned, urging that those responsible be held accountable.

Margaritis Schinas, Vice-President of the European Commission, said, "These elections do not meet the standards expected of an EU candidate country. The ruling party took advantage of an uneven playing field, using its considerable resources and fear of war to portray itself as the only political force capable of ensuring peace and stability."

Former Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi



The EU delegation supporting protesters on Monday night. Source: GT

Gakharia pointed out that no international body had recognized the elections as legitimate, leaving their results in doubt. "The Georgian people deserve to know that their voices are heard and respected," Gakharia stressed, calling for an in-depth investigation to address these legitimacy concerns.

Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia pointed out that no international body had recognized the elections as legitimate, leaving their results in doubt. "The Georgian people deserve to know that their voices are heard and respected," Gakharia stressed, calling for an in-depth investigation to address these legitimacy concerns.

Amid the growing unrest, widespread protests have erupted across Georgia, with demonstrators waving both Georgian and European Union flags in a bid to secure EU support. Loiseau highlighted the heightened expectations of the Georgian people, who are looking to the

European Union for a firm stance on the issue. "The European Council failed to address these concerns at their last meeting," Loiseau lamented. "We must not remain silent while democracy is under threat in Georgia. We must debate and pass a resolution to support the Georgian people."

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell also weighed in, calling on Georgia to address the electoral issues if it hopes to continue its path toward European integration. "If Georgia wants to join the European Union, they must amend the laws they passed, investigate the issues observed during the elections, and realign with the European path," Borrell stated, underscoring the need for significant reforms if Georgia is to retain its EU candidacy.

In response to the political crisis, a delegation of eight EU parliamentarians, including Michael Roth from Germany, Zygimantas Pavilionis from Lithuania,

and Jukka Kopra from Finland, visited Tbilisi on November 11 to stand in solidarity with the Georgian protesters. Roth emphasized that democracy in Georgia remains alive because of its people, not the ruling government. "You deserve to be part of Europe," Roth stated. "The mission is accomplished, not because of your ruling party, but because of you. Democracy is alive because of the Georgian people."

Pavilionis echoed these sentiments, urging the Georgian people to continue their fight for democracy and European integration. "You are Europe," he declared. "Keep fighting for freedom, democracy, and EU membership." Kopra, who recalled his first visit to Georgia during Soviet rule, reminded Georgians of their long history of resistance and their potential to bring about democratic change. "You have everything it takes to bring democracy to your country," he affirmed.

Mihau Kaminski from Poland also expressed his steadfast support, recalling his previous solidarity with Georgia during the 2008 Russian invasion. "Georgia survived Russian aggression," Kaminski stated. "And you will win. You will be free, and Georgia will be part of Europe."

DISPUTE OVER EU DELEGATION'S VISIT: GEORGIAN GOVERNMENT REFUSES TO MEET

The Georgian government expressed disdain toward the parliamentarians' visit. Kakha Kaladze, a senior Georgian official and mayor of Tbilisi, dismissed the delegation's statements, calling them "idle people" who "sometimes visit one country and sometimes another." Kaladze accused the visiting politicians of trying to create chaos and undermine stability in Georgia. "Europe and the European

Union are built on certain values, and one of them is peace. Yet, these individuals claim to speak on behalf of Europe while doing everything possible to create chaos in our country," Kaladze asserted.

The Speaker of the Parliament of Georgia, Shalva Papuashvili, also refused to meet with the visiting EU delegation. In a written statement shared on Facebook, Papuashvili explained that he had declined the meeting request due to the critical attitude of several members of the delegation, particularly Zygimantas Pavilionis, the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of Lithuania's Seimas, who has been openly critical of the Georgian government. Papuashvili accused the delegation of meddling in Georgia's internal affairs and interfering with the country's elections. "During the pre-election campaign, some members of the delegation violated Georgian legislation by publicly campaigning against the ruling party and supporting the opposition," he stated. "This is clearly a politically biased visit."

While Papuashvili expressed his willingness to engage in dialogue with other EU members, he made it clear that he could not meet with this delegation, citing their unfriendly and biased approach. The delegation's members, which also included officials from Germany, Finland, Sweden, France, Latvia, Estonia, and Poland, have been vocal in their support for Georgian democracy and European integration, which has led to a growing rift between the Georgian government and certain EU officials.

As tensions between Georgia and the European Union continue to mount, the international community's pressure for transparency, electoral reform, and a firm stance in support of Georgian democracy is likely to intensify.



GEORGIAN HOSPITALITY SERVICES GO THROUGH GLOBAL STANDARDS



ROYAL INN




ONE STEP CLOSER TO PARADISE

WALDORF ASTORIA



AKHALTSIKHE INN



Q

Dozens of Georgian Farmers Experience Income Growth: The Role of Modern Technologies, Updated Equipment, and New Knowledge in Farming

BY NINA KOPALEISHVILI

Cattle breeding is one of the lowest-income activities in Georgia. Farmers living in highland regions face many obstacles, including a lack of access to educational resources, farming equipment, and modern technologies. Despite this, each of them still desires to develop their farm and thus contribute not only to their own well-being but also to the socio-economic development of the local community.

In recent years, many farmers have received new knowledge and financial support to purchase the necessary machinery and equipment through various donor-funded projects. Such support included not only raising farmers' skills through various educational courses and training, including artificial insemination, but also resources to develop veterinary services at the local level.

ARTIFICIAL INSEMINATION INCREASES THE PRODUCTIVITY OF CATTLE

In recent years, artificial insemination of livestock has become particularly popular, and for many reasons. This technology allows planning the genetics of the animal, while in the process, it is possible to determine the productivity, sex, and visual side of the cattle.

Dairy farms prefer females in artificial insemination, while beef farms prefer males. In addition, artificial insemination ensures the prevention of disease transfer from stock to calf, which is due to the clean insemination material required for the process.

Giorgi Varsimashvili is the only veterinarian in Pshav-Khevsureti. Although he is only 23 years old, he has been actively involved in the artificial insemination of cattle and pigs for many years, and provides veterinary services for cattle, pigs, and dogs.

Giorgi says that with the passage of time and the desire to develop, his small business needed tools to make his veterinary services even more qualitative. This is how he learned about the Caritas Czech Republic's project and won the grant competition:

"At the moment, I am working alone. I serve ten adult farms. I provide services to the rest of the population individually and throughout the entire region – Mtskheta, Kazbegi, and Tianeti. Future

plans include setting up a breeding center to offer pure genetics to the public and a demonstration farm to promote different breeds."

Like Pshav-Khevsureti, the Beshumi resort in mountainous Adjara has only one veterinary service. Revaz Bolkvadze, the founder of this service, has had a veterinary clinic and pharmacy in Khulo for many years. Revazi says that the need for such services in the Beshumi resort has been there for a long time, because when goods were transferred from Khulo to Beshumi, the need for a vet doctor and vet drugs automatically arose. There was neither one nor the other in Beshumi until now.

"I learned about the Caritas Czech Republic's project and decided to participate in the grant competition. As a result, we have organized a container that provides artificial insemination and vet services; we also have vet preparations. There are three of us – me and two vet doctors. We have a hotline, and we go from home to home. We serve twelve villages that are more or less clustered together."

MODERN TECHNOLOGY SAVES FARMERS' TIME AND ENERGY

Everyone knows that modern technology saves time and energy in any production, yet this is still a luxury for many Georgian farmers. Small family farms and newly established enterprises face this problem most acutely.

Bagrat Kadagidze is from the village of Zemo Alvani, Akhmeta Municipality. Bagrat's plan includes purchasing cattle to set up a dairy and beef farm. However, before reaching this stage, he decided to get one step ahead and began producing the combined feed needed for cattle.

Bagrat says that with this production, he will not only satisfy his farm, but also supply shops and local farmers.

"I found out about the project on the Internet. I installed a mill to produce combined feed (the grain for the product is ground and mixed with different components) and purchased a granulator, which prepares the feed in the form of small pellets. That's how I became self-employed. In addition, I will need one assistant and one driver in the enterprise, which means I will create two workplaces. The purchased equipment will not only facilitate the development of my farm (the cost of beef will cost me much less than others), but I will also be able to sell the produced food throughout the region."



Bagrat says that 1,500 families live in his village, and they constantly need livestock feed.

Gigi Arabuli is another young man from the village of Sakhile in Khevsureti. Gigi is 23 years old, and, with his parents and brother, he is engaged in cattle breeding – they sell cheese, boiled butter, and beef. Like many other farmers, access to modern equipment was a big challenge for Gigi and his family: "We had a problem that we could not fully mow the fodder grass needed for cattle with our strength."

As part of the project, the Arabuli family purchased a tractor, a mower, and an electric cell, which greatly simplified their work. According to Gigi, where it used to take a month to mow manually, now, with the help of a tractor, they can do the same amount of work in half a month.

Another farmer involved in the project is 72-year-old Sanata Nakeuri, who has a 30-head livestock farm in the village of Khililo, Dusheti municipality. The primary source of income for a family of ten people is the income from the dairy products and meat sold. Within the project's framework, an animal stall was organized on Sanata Nakeuri's farm, which simplifies cattle care. In winter, cattle is milked here. The family was also given a mowing tractor, greatly simplifying their work.

AS A RESULT OF THE PROJECT, THE INCOME OF THE FARMERS INCREASED

As part of the two-year long project 'Cattle Farming in Georgia: Towards Increased Productivity, Competitiveness, and Sustainability,' supported by the Czech Development Agency, Caritas Czech Republic supported Georgian farmers' increased access to the local market by improving business development, sanitary and biosecurity standards, and linkages between clients and finance. Project experts worked with artificial insemination specialists, veterinarians, and farmers to increase their skills in artificial insemination, proper animal care, sustainable pasture management, feed production, and good cattle feeding practices.

Within the frames of the project, farmers, veterinarians, and artificial insemination specialists were trained, and demonstration plots were organized to introduce the practice of rotational grazing. In addition, grants were disseminated to purchase the equipment necessary for beef cattle breeding.

The Khulo and Aragvi Local Action Groups (LAGs) and Tusheti Landscape Protection Administration (TPLA) were actively involved in the project. Also, the project actively cooperated with state

bodies. In addition, the project cooperated with CzechTrade in organizing the Czech companies' missions and for the beneficiaries' entry in the Georgian Farmer's Association (GFA). In addition, Georgian farmers could learn about Czech agricultural practices through B2B meetings.

As a result of the project, the number of farmers who follow sustainable and more productive animal husbandry practices increased. The selected farmers have better access to the market, and their income was increased accordingly.

This material was produced in the framework of the Caritas Czech Republic's project, which is carried out in cooperation with the Czech Development Agency (CzDA). The initiative is a part of the Czech Republic's large-scale Official Development Assistance towards Georgia.



24 Companies Complete UN Women's Training on Sexual Harassment Prevention



BY MARIAM RAZMZADZE

UN Women Georgia wrapped up a four-day certification program on addressing workplace sexual harassment and its prevention strategies for private sector

leaders, with 24 companies participating. The goal of the program was to implement effective, response-based mechanisms to encourage safe and inclusive work environments.

As the representatives received their certifications, the participating companies committed to establishing work settings that employ a variety of measures to prevent workplace sexual harassment.

Georgian Railway Revenue up at 490mln, Profit Down

BY MARIAM RAZMZADZE

Georgian Railway reported revenue growth along with a significant drop in net profit for the first nine months of 2024, highlighting financial issues caused by increased expenses and exchange rate losses. Revenue increased by 2% to GEL 490 million, but net profit fell by 26% to GEL 75.4 million, with the decline primarily driven by an exchange rate loss.

Detailed overview is as follows:
Employee salaries: GEL 171.7 million allocated to its 12,000 staff members
Depreciation and amortization: GEL 48 million
Operating expenses (electricity, fuel): GEL 63 million
Miscellaneous costs: GEL 108 million
Despite revenue growth, the company faces significant debt due to the allocation of rising operational expenses. Georgian Railway is currently exploring strategies to address its economic challenges.



Photo: Georgian Railway.

Big Turnout for Real Estate Investment in Georgia with York Towers during Cityscape Global in Riyadh

BY TEAM GT

Cityscape Global, currently being held at the Riyadh International Convention and Exhibition Center, is witnessing a big turnout from Saudi and international investors looking into investing in real estate in Georgia with the leading company York Towers, which offers exclusive deals, including special discounts and valuable gifts, with unique investment returns of up to 20%.

OWNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES IN THE MOST LUXURIOUS PROJECTS IN GEORGIA

During Cityscape Global in Riyadh, York Towers is attracting investors looking to enhance their investment portfolio with ownership opportunities in the most luxurious projects in Georgia, as the company is participating with a group of its best real estate projects in Tbilisi and Batumi, which include luxury residential compounds and modern complexes with integrated services, while providing exceptional payment facilities.

Among the projects that the company announced its participation in the exhibition are Vista Garden, the best integrated and environmentally friendly compound in the capital, Tbilisi, and the Outlook Forest complex, which is the most distinguished residential destination in the Krtsanisi diplomatic district, in addition to the Tbilisi Terrace complex, a modern residential project that overlooks the Kura River in the heart of the upscale Saburtalo district.

ADVANTAGES OF REAL ESTATE INVESTMENT IN GEORGIA

Georgia is one of the most attractive destinations for real estate investment in the region, thanks to its attractive advantages, which include its official status as a candidate for the European

Union, in addition to competitive real estate prices compared to all countries in Europe and Asia, 100% freehold ownership, low taxes, with the opportunity to reside and achieve high dollar investment returns, which makes real estate investment in Georgia an ideal choice for investors looking to gain a fixed income and increase capital in the long-term.

YORK TOWERS STRENGTHENS ITS PRESENCE IN THE ARAB WORLD AND GLOBALLY

York Towers' participation in the Cityscape Global exhibition in Riyadh from November 11 to 14, comes after the great success it achieved at Cityscape Qatar last month, where the company concluded several investment deals that proved the success of its plans to expand its customer base in the Gulf region.

These participations contributed to consolidating the company's position as a reliable destination in the field of real estate investment in Georgia, as its luxury projects have proven their ability to attract Arab and international investors.

YORK TOWERS CELEBRATES AWARD FOR THE BEST ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADER IN GEORGIA

During its presence at the Cityscape Global exhibition in Riyadh, York Towers celebrated the title of 'Best Entrepreneurial Leader in Georgia' for the years 2023 and 2024, in recognition of its achievements in the real estate market, as this honor reflects the company's commitment to providing innovative and high-quality real estate projects, which contributes to strengthening its position as one of the leading companies in the real estate development sector in Georgia.

EXPANSION PLANS AND STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

York Towers, which now has eight branches in several countries, including three main branches in the Kingdom of



Saudi Arabia, stressed its continued motivation to provide projects that meet the aspirations of its customers in Tbilisi and Batumi, which enhances real estate investment opportunities in Georgia.

The company seeks to expand its strategic partnerships across the region, relying on its extensive experience and a specialized team that seeks to achieve its vision of providing properties that combine quality, strategic location, and high investment returns.

YORK HOLDING CEO PARTICIPATES IN THE INTERNATIONAL

DEVELOPERS FORUM

York Holding Group CEO, Mr. Amr Alabwaz, participated in the International Developers Forum held on the sidelines of the Cityscape Global Exhibition in Riyadh, with the participation of more than 150 entrepreneurs, investors, and experts in the field of real estate development from around the world.

Mr. Amr Alabwaz presented his vision for the future of real estate investment in Georgia and shed light on York Towers' role in providing innovative projects that keep pace with the needs of the growing global market, while emphasizing the importance of enhancing sustain-

ability in the real estate sector.

AN INVITATION TO SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY AND VISIT THE YORK TOWERS BRANCHES

Investors who visited the York Towers pavilion at the Cityscape Global Exhibition in Riyadh got to discover the best real estate investment opportunities in Georgia with exclusive discounts, facilities and exceptional benefits for new customers. York Towers now invites investors to take the initiative to visit its branches in Saudi Arabia in Jeddah, Riyadh, or Al-Khobar, or in other Gulf countries, Qatar, the Emirates, or Kuwait.

SOCIETY

Winterize: Kakheti

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

Svaneti is by now experiencing below freezing temperatures nightly. While Etseri's early dump of snow, as we were leaving on October 20, has now melted, Ushguli's whiteness more or less remains. Descending, however, means going backward a season, as you re-enter warmer lowlands. Such has been our experience returning to Tbilisi, and now, visiting my mother in law, to Kakheti, in eastern Georgia.

Here, we find that Leliani village's street, formerly named Ruisi Tsili, is now officially called Galaktion Tabidze Street. Signs, every house numbered and everything. Lali's mother is waiting for us as we roll in at about midday, lunch ready.

I voiced my strong displeasure on the way in, discovering that the reasonably young, still good asphalt between Gurjaani (famous for its brand of creamy ice cream) and Leliani is being torn up and re-done, likely to be no better than before, and I would say entirely unnecessarily. Elections are over! Give it up! Meanwhile, the short stretch between our street and Apeni village has never been paved and is just as disastrously potholed as ever. Grinding of teeth!

Lali had arranged for a truckload of firewood to be delivered and dumped in the yard and now, split, it needs stacking to feed the house's small wood

stove through the winter. Ordering it under roofs or other shelter will both protect it from rain or snow and let it dry out, as it's fairly freshly cut. There is still some from previous winters to use in the meantime, hopefully allowing some of this new stuff to cure sufficiently to be useful in a couple of months or so.

I begin, reminding myself of the joke about how one eats an elephant (or, say, a 1-ton pumpkin): a bite at a time. First, stacking the wood right close to where the pile is, against the neighbor's fence, where two runners of wood are ready for it to sit on and get it off the ground. Here I go with armfuls, as I only have a couple of steps to this stack.

Then, the rest under the house's roof, in a couple more long stacks. These being a few more meters away, I use the family's wheelbarrow, so I'm able to move more wood at a time. I work until encroaching darkness prevents me, then retire for the night, the cool air giving us both a great, deep sleep.

Next day, aside from some local visits to Lali's relatives and neighbors, I'm back at the stacking. It needs a bit of care so as to minimize the risk of the stack falling in any direction: to keep it stable, in other words, even as it's being depleted. By evening's end, with a last push of help by Lali and her sister, who also lives here, we finish. I'm a bit surprised at not being more tired or work-sore, but the rhythmic pace over two days and the non-huge loads have allowed us to do the job and

not collapse at the end of it. We put aside all the little scraps in one place, as these will dry out much faster and are useful for starting the fire each day.

I also go back into the family's vineyard, as I do on every visit, to re-acquaint myself with its grapevines, camera in hand. Mostly black and white close-up work: the grapes have been harvested, the vines are looking a bit sad, but strong graphic forms present themselves to my eye. Same when I see a stick of newly made churchkhela, the Georgian national sweet. The walnut or hazelnut strings are dipped in flour-thickened boiled grape juice and hung in pairs to dry. These are still nice and fresh, not chewy at all, and are also another beautiful macro subject. I only resort to color for them, and backlit barberries and few remaining autumn grape-leaves.

We say our goodbyes and drive back to Tbilisi, hoping our next visit will be longer and less rushed. With the new Kakheti highway extending farther east every week, it's already only a two-hour trip from Tbilisi. See you again soon!

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



Photo by the author

Protests Erupt in Abkhazia amid Arrests of Opposition Leaders and Growing Tensions over Russian Influence

BY TEAM GT

Tensions flared in the de facto Republic of Abkhazia this week following the arrest of five prominent opposition figures: Omar Smyr, Garry Kokaia, Almaskhan Ardzinba, Ramaz Jopua, and Aslan Gvaramia. The arrests, linked to resistance against a controversial legislative package that would enable Russian investments and property ownership in Abkhazia, sparked widespread protests. Local social media broadcast tense confrontations outside the State Security Service headquarters in Sokhumi, and unconfirmed reports on Tuesday suggested the presence of military vehicles, raising fears of further escalation.

The opposition, especially in Gudauta, has staunchly opposed the deal, which they see as another step toward Abkhazia's erosion of autonomy under Russian pressure. In response, they are planning a major rally on November 15, timed with the de facto parliament's discussion of the investment package. The legislation would grant Russian companies preferential tax exemptions on property investments in Abkhazia, which many fear will tighten Moscow's economic grip on the region. Aslan Bzhania, the Russia-backed de facto leader, has defended the move as necessary to fulfill Sokhumi's obligations to Moscow, despite growing criticism of his handling of the situation.

GEORGIAN GOVERNMENT'S INACTION DRAWS CRITICISM

The escalating crisis has drawn sharp rebukes from Georgia's human rights community. The Social Justice Center (SJC) condemned the Georgian Dream



Protesters blocking access to Sokhumi. Source: AP

government's "policy of silence and inaction," accusing it of allowing Russia's annexation efforts to advance unchecked.

The watchdog criticized the government's failure to make political statements either domestically or interna-

tionally to challenge Russia's actions in Abkhazia. "This passive approach undermines Georgia's sovereignty and contradicts its obligations to protect human rights in occupied territories," the SJC stated.

In addition to its silence, the Georgian government has faced growing international pressure as Moscow, frustrated by Abkhazia's delays in implementing key agreements, drastically reduced financial support to the region in September. This has only heightened the tension and exacerbated security concerns for the Black Sea region. The SJC called on the Georgian government to strengthen its diplomatic efforts to counter Russia's encroachment.

PROTESTS INTENSIFY, LOCAL BLOCKADES PERSIST

In response to the arrests, residents in

Abkhazia's Gudauta and Kodori regions, demanding the release of opposition leaders, blocked three bridges that give access to the capital, Sokhumi, resulting in long backups on the region's twisting roads. The protests reflect wider discontent with Russian influence and the continued erosion of Abkhazia's political autonomy. The planned November 15 rally coincides with the de facto parliament's expected ratification of the Russian-backed investment deal, making it a pivotal moment in the growing resistance to Moscow's control.

Authorities warned that blocking critical infrastructure is a criminal offense and vowed to take action against those responsible. But on Tuesday night, the arrested activists were released and the protesters lifted the blockades.

Despite the local opposition, Bzhania's government has clearly aligned with Russian interests, further straining Abkhazia's already fragile relationship with Georgia and complicating efforts at conflict resolution.

THE NEED FOR A PROACTIVE GEORGIAN RESPONSE

The SJC has called for the Georgian government to adopt a more proactive stance, urging it to engage diplomatically to counter Russia's growing influence in the region. The watchdog stressed the need for a new peace policy that prioritizes regional stability and Georgia's sovereignty, noting that the government's failure to update its peace policy document only deepens the perception of inaction.

As the situation in Abkhazia continues to unfold this week, it is clear that the Georgian government must act swiftly to safeguard its territorial integrity and address the growing security risks posed by Russian expansion.



Gari Kokaia, Ramaz Jopua, and Omar Smiri are three of the five Abkhazian activists who were detained on November 11 following protests in Sokhumi. Source: RFE

Climate Change and COP29: What to Expect

Continued from page 1

COP28: ACHIEVEMENTS AND SHORTCOMINGS

When COP28 kicked off, there was a clear benchmark for success: the implementation of the Loss and Damage Fund, agreed upon at COP27, and a firm commitment to phasing out fossil fuels. While both goals were technically met, they didn't go far enough to deliver the meaningful change that many had hoped for. The Loss and Damage Fund will be available to all developing countries that are "particularly vulnerable" to climate change's destructive impacts - though precisely who qualifies as the most climate-vulnerable has been up for debate. The fund was approved right away, though, with several countries making pledges, including \$100 million from the UAE, \$100 million from Germany, and \$70 million from the UK.

The creation of the Loss and Damage Fund was a significant achievement, one that represents years of advocacy by leading countries and civil society groups pushing for climate justice. Two years ago, an agreement like this, especially with the UK leading contributions, seemed unimaginable. Indeed, it was a hard-won victory, and one that shows the power of relentless lobbying and international solidarity.

Yet, despite the fund's creation, its structure and management raise serious concerns. The fund will be administered under the UNFCCC, but its secretariat will be hosted by the World Bank. This decision sparked natural controversy, given the Bank's long history of financing fossil fuel projects, including over \$15 billion invested in fossil fuels since the Paris Agreement. Critics worry that this fact will not only undermine the fund's credibility, but will also hinder its ability to deliver real benefits to the communities most affected by climate change. Perhaps the biggest disappointment

from COP28 was the failure to decisively address the fossil fuel industry—the root cause of climate change. While last year's conference did see some movement toward a global consensus on the need to phase out fossil fuels, the results were less than conclusive. COP28 was the first major conference where the global need to transition away from fossil fuels was widely recognized, but the question remains: how do we make this transition fair and equitable?

We saw little to no commitment from high-income countries—those most responsible for global emissions—to take real action. Several of these nations continue to ramp up fossil fuel production, leading many low- and middle-income countries to question how the transition will be financed and how their interests will be protected. Without clear, actionable commitments from wealthy nations to stop expanding fossil fuel extraction and to increase financial support for renewable energy transitions, adaptation, and the Loss and Damage Fund, it will be hard to expect meaningful progress.

COP29 will need to address these gaps, particularly when it comes to climate finance. One of the biggest tasks ahead is establishing a new, more ambitious collective finance goal to replace the previous \$100 billion annual commitment—a crucial step to ensuring a fair and just transition for all.

AZERBAIJAN: HOST OF COP29

Azerbaijan, the host of COP29, is clearly looking to strengthen its international standing while navigating a difficult political and economic landscape. With an economy historically dependent on fossil fuels, Azerbaijan is trying to balance its energy ambitions with the realities of climate change, all while managing a regime that has been criticized for its authoritarianism and poor human rights record. The country's oil and gas sector remains its economic lifeline, but



COP29 in Azerbaijan. Source: FB

production is declining, and the government now faces the difficult task of diversifying its energy portfolio.

Despite some efforts to diversify into renewables, progress has been slow, and the government's climate policies remain unimpressive. While Azerbaijan has signed various climate agreements, it has yet to show the commitment or follow-through needed to make a significant impact. The EU is its key trading partner, and Azerbaijan has become an important supplier of natural gas following on from Russia's invasion of Ukraine. However, its future role in the global energy transition remains uncertain.

Azerbaijan views COP29 as a chance to attract investment in renewable energy and improve its global reputation. However, the country's initial handling of the conference's organizing committee, made up entirely of men, has raised red flags about its commitment to diversity and genuine representation.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM COP29

With the above very much in mind, democratic countries and civil society

groups are approaching this year's climate conference with caution. While the event offers an opportunity to push for meaningful climate action, it also risks becoming a stage for greenwashing—where Azerbaijan, in particular, might use the global spotlight to promote its image while sidestepping substantive change. COP29 offers a chance to highlight critical environmental issues in Azerbaijan and the broader South Caucasus region, but it will be up to activists, journalists, and governments to ensure that the conference doesn't become another exercise in rhetoric over results.

KEY ISSUES FOR COP29

The ongoing conference is expected to be shaped by several critical issues:

- **The Global Stocktake:** A five-year review of global progress on the Paris Agreement. This will assess mitigation, adaptation, and climate finance efforts, and countries will be expected to revise their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) based on this assessment.
- **Fossil Fuel Phase-Out:** There is growing pressure for countries to set defini-

tive deadlines for phasing out fossil fuels, with an eye on the renewable energy targets that must replace them.

- **Climate Finance:** Rich nations must deliver on the \$100 billion annual climate finance commitment they made to developing countries, while also working to establish a new finance goal post-2024.

- **Loss and Damage Fund:** COP29 will be a crucial moment to discuss how the fund will be operationalized, focusing on the contributions of wealthy nations and how the fund will be managed.

- **Adaptation and Agriculture:** We can expect calls for a global adaptation goal and stronger alignment of agricultural policies with climate targets, recognizing that food systems are a significant source of emissions.

The success of COP29 will be measured by how much progress is made on decarbonization, climate finance, and the operationalization of the Loss and Damage Fund. Countries, particularly the wealthier ones, will need to show that they are committed to real climate action and that they are willing to help finance the transition to a low-carbon future for all.

Georgia Showcases Reproductive Health Expertise at Int'l Congress

BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

Between November 7 and 9, the 22nd World Congress on In-Vitro Fertilization took place in Marrakech, Morocco. The event could easily have escaped my mind and eye had it not been for the direct demonstration of Sakartvelo's outstanding medicinal success there. Practically no other international get-together of that caliber of recent times, including even the Olympic Games, can boast a solid delegation of 62 members representing a single country. The program of this paramount medical forum was notably rich and meaningful, featuring 30 sessions with more than 50

speakers from around the globe, and our Georgian medics came up with their solid professional word in almost all of them— a genuine parade of our national talent and efforts!

The World Congress was a huge success, and gave universal recognition to the fact that the field does an irreplaceable service to humankind. It offered an exchange of fresh medical ideas and recent developments in the field; millions of dollars spent with an explicit eye on the future, and, most importantly for us, featuring the active and vigorous participation of this nation's strong human resources in the affair. Among the key topics of the Congress was Repeated Pregnancy Loss, Reproductive Endocrinology, and Genetics in Artificial Reproductive Technology. It was attended



22nd World Congress on In-Vitro Fertilization

by over 1500 participants, the Georgian bunch being the largest national group.

One of the most appreciated highlights of the Marrakech Conference on In-Vitro Fertilization was Professor Archil Khomasuridze's chairmanship of the session which opened the congress with keynote presentations about the Polycystic Ovary Syndrome. Khomasuridze, with 50+ years of experience in the field, was like a fish in water in the company of his old and comparably younger colleagues, most of whom he has mentored and put on the right track to building a medical career. The trust he enjoys among his fellow doctors, both in Georgia and beyond its boundaries, is truly incredible. His renowned monographs and hundreds of scientific papers on reproductive medicine have wide international recognition, and the number of quotes from his works knows no bounds. Indeed, our nation boasts a real guru of reproductive medi-

cine, a branch which incorporates a diversity of reproductive conditions, their preclusion and evaluation, as well as their eventual diagnosis and treatment.

Literally every member of the Georgian delegation was proactive at the congress, doing his or her job at a level recognized by international standards. Among the many Georgian speakers was Dr. Anna Ghviniashvili, who spoke on the postpartum condition of newborns. The presentation analyzed the health status of the children, with the aim to prove that health complications associated with In-Vitro-Fertilization babies was due to maternal and paternal age and other reasons for infertility, and not due to the procedure itself. Dr. Nata Nakaidze in turn enlightened the audience on mitochondrial replacement therapy, a novel solution to decrease diseases of that class. Indeed, she did it so well that she later received a certificate of excel-

lence for having been the best oral communicator at the World Congress.

I can't help emphasizing that reproductive medicine, including the currently trendy IVF, a field led in this country by Professor Archil Khomasuridze, has, over the last decades, become one of the most important medical directions for the Georgian nation. Indeed, perhaps it is one of the most significant human activities possible, because what Sakartvelo needs first and utmost is the guarantee that we will still be around 50 or 100 years from now, so that our culture, our language, our faith, and our belief in the future are alive and ticking. It is truly quite feasible, as long as we know well what to do and how to bring that cherished future to life. Certainly, international forums like the Marrakech Congress on In-Vitro Fertilization, embracing minor nations like Georgia as they do, are indeed conducive to that end.



22nd World Congress on In-Vitro Fertilization

CULTURE

The Timeless Echo of Baroque: Jean Rondeau's Harpsichord Brilliance at the Tbilisi Baroque Festival

BY IVAN NECHAEV

The 2024 Tbilisi Baroque Festival unfolded a unique moment in musical history on November 9, as French harpsichordist Jean Rondeau brought his captivating charisma and virtuosity to Rustaveli Theater. In a program dedicated to some of the greatest French Baroque composers—Jean-Philippe Rameau, François Couperin, and Joseph-Nicolas-Panrace Royer—Rondeau delivered not just a recital, but a rich, multilayered experience. His performance underscored the transformative power of Baroque music, defying any notion that it is only the music of a distant past. Rondeau offered a window into an 18th-century world of opulence, intrigue, and emotional depth, as he showed how the harpsichord, an instrument too often dismissed as merely ornamental, could become a powerful storyteller in his hands.

A MODERN-DAY MAVERICK OF THE HARPSICHORD: RONDEAU'S REVOLUTIONARY TOUCH

Jean Rondeau has always approached the harpsichord with a unique, almost rebellious style. Known for his fluid interpretations, he brings a natural dynamism to the Baroque that feels as bold as it is respectful of tradition. In Tbilisi, he played with the passion and freedom of a jazz artist, while still delivering on the meticulous precision required by French Baroque composers. Rondeau's hands, often a blur in motion, traversed the keyboard with a sensitivity that turned each piece into a living, breathing narrative. His inventive use of tempo and phrasing breathed new life into each

piece, drawing listeners into an experience that was intensely personal and yet almost sacred in its reverence for history.

JEAN-PHILIPPE RAMEAU'S SUITE IN A MINOR: A JOURNEY THROUGH DANCE, DRAMA, AND DELIGHT

Rondeau opened with Rameau's Prelude in A Minor, a stately, intricate work that immediately set a reflective tone. The quiet beauty of this piece, under Rondeau's delicate touch, seemed to ripple through the theater, drawing the audience into a shared space of contemplative stillness. The Suite in A Minor, following on its heels, showcased the formal yet emotional richness of Baroque dance music.

Each movement was a vignette, evoking the elegance of a distant era. In the Allemande, Rondeau displayed a refined restraint, balancing stately form with expressive nuance. The Courante brought a burst of energy, as Rondeau infused each phrase with a kinetic rhythm that suggested the exuberance of courtly gatherings. Yet it was in the Sarabande that Rondeau's interpretative genius truly shone; his phrasing captured a haunting melancholy, as if unveiling the hidden sorrows beneath Baroque grandeur. The centerpiece, Les Trois Mains, known for its dazzling hand-crossing techniques, was a masterclass in technical brilliance, while the Gavotte avec les Doubles built to a climactic flourish, each variation adding layers of complexity that Rondeau dispatched with elegance and ease.

FRANÇOIS COUPERIN'S LA MISTERIEUSE AND LA TENEBREUSE: THE SOUL OF THE HARPSICHORD UNVEILED

Moving to the works of François Couperin, Rondeau ventured into an even



Photo by the author

more introspective realm of French Baroque music. Couperin's compositions are marked by a poetic quality, a tenderness that requires an interpretive sensitivity that few can achieve. Rondeau began with L'Art de toucher le clavecin: Prelude in C Major, drawing out the gentle lyricism of this instructional yet surprisingly intimate piece. His interpretation captured the subtleties of each phrase, making the Prelude feel like a personal reflection rather than an academic exercise.

The emotional depth grew richer with La Misterieuse and La Tenebreuse. Rondeau approached La Misterieuse with a spectral lightness, making each note seem to hover in the air like a whispered secret. With La Tenebreuse, his touch turned darker, reflecting the piece's pensive quality and drawing the audience deeper into Couperin's haunting landscape. The Sarabande La Lugubre emerged as a profoundly moving lament, as Rondeau allowed each note to resonate with an air of solemnity and nostalgia. Finally, La Favorite, a Chaconne with a lively yet stately character, brought a balanced close to Couperin's selection, as Rondeau shifted into a more grounded, rhythmic style, accentuating the harpsi-

chord's dance-like qualities.

JOSEPH-NICOLAS-PANCRACE ROYER: THE BOLD AND THE DARING OF LA SENSIBLE AND LA MARCHÉ DES SCYTHES

The final works on the program took the evening to an exhilarating conclusion. Royer's La Sensible and La Marche des Scythes are challenging compositions, characterized by their boldness and dynamic contrasts. In La Sensible, Rondeau demonstrated his expressive mastery, capturing the fragile beauty and tenderness embedded in Royer's melodies. His ability to coax subtle emotional shades from the harpsichord gave La Sensible a haunting, almost vulnerable quality.

However, it was La Marche des Scythes that provided the evening's most electrifying moment. This piece, often celebrated for its martial intensity and rhythmic vigor, allowed Rondeau to unleash the full power of his instrument and his technique. Each percussive passage, each thunderous chord, resonated through the theatre like a drumbeat, commanding the attention of every listener. Rondeau's fingers flew across the keys with breathtaking speed, his tech-

nical control turning this composition into a whirlwind of sound and energy.

REVIVING THE BAROQUE: RONDEAU'S PERFORMANCE AS A CULTURAL BRIDGE

Jean Rondeau's performance was a true revelation, challenging the common misconceptions of Baroque music as stiff or overly formal. His approach made it clear that these pieces, though composed centuries ago, possess a vibrancy and emotional depth that can speak powerfully to today's audiences. Through his masterful interpretations, Rondeau transformed Rustaveli Theater into a portal to the past, evoking the spirit of French salons, where music was a vehicle for both personal reflection and communal experience.

This concert at the Tbilisi Baroque Festival was more than an exercise in musical heritage—it was an exploration of the Baroque's enduring capacity to express universal human emotions. Rondeau's passionate, almost theatrical presence brought the audience into a shared emotional space, where the harpsichord was no longer a relic, but a vibrant, resonant storyteller.

In an age when classical music is sometimes sidelined, Jean Rondeau's artistry is a reminder of why these compositions matter and why the Baroque's expressive language remains relevant, centuries later. His performance was a living argument for the harpsichord's capacity to communicate timeless beauty, his playing as intricate and enigmatic as the music itself. For those fortunate enough to attend, the concert was a rare, transformative experience—one that lingered long after the final note had faded, leaving the timeless resonance of the French Baroque echoing in Tbilisi's Rustaveli Theater.

Gidon Kremer and the Giya Kancheli Tbilisi Youth Orchestra: A Masterful Meeting of Icon and Innovation in Tbilisi



Photo by the author

BY IVAN NECHAEV

The concert featuring renowned violinist Gidon Kremer alongside the Giya Kancheli Tbilisi Youth Orchestra was a convergence of masterful artistry, historic repertoire, and a reverent tribute to Georgian composer Giya Kancheli. Led by conductor Mirian Khukhunaishvili, the program unfolded as a narrative exploring musical endurance, human introspection, and the haunting beauty of shared silence, each piece reflecting unique facets of the performers and composers alike.

THE MAESTRO ON STRINGS: GIDON KREMER'S ARTISTIC LEGACY AND DISTINCTIVE STYLE

Gidon Kremer is no ordinary violinist; he is, in many ways, a living legend. His career spans over five decades, characterized by an unwavering commitment to artistic integrity and a boldness in exploring lesser-known works and composers. Kremer's repertoire is as distinc-

tive as his style, encompassing not only the canonical masterpieces, but also a rich tapestry of 20th- and 21st-century compositions, particularly those by Eastern European composers like Mieczyslaw Weinberg and Giya Kancheli. For Kremer, music is an act of cultural preservation as well as personal expression, often taking him to emotionally intense territories that few performers dare to explore with such raw honesty.

Kremer's playing style is instantly recognizable, defined by a distinct sensitivity to phrasing, a meticulous attention to detail, and an openness to vulnerability. He is known for his restrained, almost introspective sound, which he weaves into his interpretations to create a sense of intimacy between himself, the orchestra, and the audience. His sound can be strikingly delicate, yet it always carries an underlying intensity that speaks to his rigorous understanding of both technical prowess and emotional expression. Critics have often described Kremer as a "painter with sound," using his bow to etch out musical landscapes that are as hauntingly beautiful as they are intellectually challenging.

What sets Kremer apart is not just his technical mastery, but his approach to musical collaboration. Kremer views the orchestra as an equal partner, rather than a mere accompaniment to his solo line, and this ethos was palpable in his performance with the Giya Kancheli Tbilisi Youth Orchestra. Rather than dominating, Kremer's playing sought a conversational dynamic, allowing the orchestra space to express its own voice, especially in the interplay with second soloist Madara Petersone in Kancheli's *Twilight*. This humility and mutual respect, rare in a soloist of his stature, brought a unique dimension to the performance, making the music resonate on a deeper level with the audience.

THE GIYA KANCHELI TBILISI YOUTH ORCHESTRA: A RISING STAR IN GEORGIAN MUSIC

Despite its title as a "youth" orchestra, the Giya Kancheli Tbilisi Youth Orchestra has firmly established itself as one of Georgia's most distinguished and respected ensembles. Founded to nurture the next generation of Georgian musicians, the orchestra has quickly risen to prominence, often outshining larger, more established orchestras in the country. Under the baton of conductor Mirian Khukhunaishvili, the ensemble has become a hallmark of precision, taste, and musical sensitivity that rivals any seasoned symphonic orchestra in the region.

Khukhunaishvili's influence on the orchestra cannot be overstated. As a conductor, he brings a combination of rigorous discipline, a refined ear for balance, and an exceptional ability to coax both energy and restraint from his young musicians. This commitment to excellence has fostered an ensemble sound that is not only unified, but also rich in emotional complexity, allowing the orchestra to navigate the most challenging repertoire with grace. For many, the Giya Kancheli Tbilisi Youth Orchestra has become synonymous with qual-

ity and artistic dedication, a guarantee of musicality that even the largest Georgian orchestras sometimes struggle to deliver.

The orchestra's performance during this concert was a testament to Khukhunaishvili's painstaking efforts to shape an ensemble that operates with both technical precision and an intuitive sense of musicality. Particularly in Weinberg's *Violin Concerto*, the orchestra showcased its capacity for subtlety, supporting Kremer's meditative solo line with a restrained yet emotionally charged accompaniment. The brass and strings melded seamlessly, maintaining a balanced yet dynamic soundscape that allowed Weinberg's introspective themes to unfold with clarity and emotional weight.

MIRIAN KHUKHUNAISHVILI: A CONDUCTOR SHAPING THE FUTURE OF GEORGIAN MUSIC

As the artistic force behind the Giya Kancheli Tbilisi Youth Orchestra, Mirian Khukhunaishvili has emerged as a leading figure in Georgian music. Known for his precise yet passionate approach, Khukhunaishvili has shaped the orchestra into an ensemble that is highly responsive and sensitive to both soloist and score. His conducting style is both assertive and adaptive, allowing him to handle complex, nuanced compositions, while encouraging his musicians to engage with the music on a deeply personal level.

Khukhunaishvili's ability to bring out the best in his musicians was evident in every piece on the program. During Schubert's *Polonaise*, he deftly guided the orchestra through the piece's light-hearted phrases, creating an infectious sense of joy that resonated with the audience. His interpretation of Kancheli's *Twilight* was equally compelling; he allowed silence to become part of the performance, shaping the space between notes to evoke the piece's reflective tone. In Kancheli's world of subtle dynamics

and extended pauses, Khukhunaishvili demonstrated a profound understanding of how to allow silence to speak just as powerfully as sound.

A CONCERT FOR THE AGES: BRINGING NEW DEPTH TO WEINBERG, SCHUBERT, AND KANCHELI

This concert will be remembered as a landmark event, bringing together Gidon Kremer's storied career and interpretive genius with the Giya Kancheli Tbilisi Youth Orchestra's rising talent. It was an evening that celebrated not only music, but also the shared cultural and historical ties that bind Georgia to the world of Eastern European and Soviet-era composers. The program was expertly curated to showcase a range of emotional tones, from the solemn resilience of Weinberg to Schubert's lightness and Kancheli's introspective poetry.

Through Kremer's masterful interpretations and Khukhunaishvili's inspired leadership, each piece was not merely performed, but fully realized; revealing new depths and layers of meaning. For the Tbilisi audience, this concert was more than a recital; it was an affirmation of Georgia's place in the broader landscape of classical music, and a reminder of the transformative power that music holds, even in the hands of the youngest performers.

In the wake of this concert, it's clear that the Giya Kancheli Tbilisi Youth Orchestra is setting a new standard for orchestral performance in Georgia. With a conductor of Khukhunaishvili's caliber at the helm, and the endorsement of artists like Gidon Kremer, this ensemble is poised not only to shape the future of Georgian music, but to become a vital cultural ambassador on the world stage. For those who were present, the evening was a rare convergence of legendary talent and youthful promise—a moment in Georgian music that will undoubtedly inspire the next generation of musicians and audiences alike.

Ushangi Khumarashvili's Art Depicts the Centerpoint of Chaos and Order

BY SHELBI R. ANKIEWICZ

Georgian Artist Ushangi (Khuma) Khumarashvili's exhibition depicts the meeting point of chaos and order in society, while also giving a glimpse into his biography, artistic style, and transformations. Closing on November 16 at the Georgian Museum of Fine Arts, "Chaotic Order" is the first exhibition which has shown Khumarashvili's work since he passed away in 2023.

Khumarashvili was born in 1948 in the town of Dedoplistskaro, Kakheti. From 1967 to 1973, he studied at Tbilisi State Academy of Arts in the faculty of fine arts. Once he completed his education, he started working at the Telavi Drama Theater. According to his portfolio, it wasn't until 1994 that he had his first solo exhibition at the Georgian National Gallery, showcasing his work. Prior to that, he participated in various group collaborations and large international art exhibitions.

Known as one of the founders of the modern art scene in Georgia, Khumarashvili's work was not influenced by the Soviet Union. What was popular during

the 1930s to the end of Soviet times was "Soviet Realism," a style that was intended to glorify Russian life and depict everyone as happy in the USSR.

This concept applied to everything considered art: literature, music, sculptures, and more. In Georgia, there were two waves of abstract art within the country: the first came in the 1950s-60s, then again in the 1980s-90s.

"Both waves, and their adherent artists, employed abstraction as a form of protest against Soviet rule. In the case of Ushangi, however, it was a natural expression and an artistic imprint of his way of thinking and lifestyle," reads the exhibition's description. "The artist is beyond conformist or nonconformist art. His artistic thirst is an archeology of creating one's own self or something else."

The "Chaotic Order" exhibition is comprised primarily of Khumarashvili's oil paintings: 19 paintings, all differing in color and size. Some are paired with Khumarashvili's quotes, further playing on how his 'chaotic words' march at the order of his paintings.

The works on display were collected over several decades, spanning from the 1980s to 2023. While Khumarashvili's primary medium was oil paint, he also explored other forms of expression, including graphic art, performance, video,

and collage. Among the small collection of collages are at least 10 pieces made with a combination of paint, paper, and drawing materials. These collages feature a range of subjects, from depictions of people to more surprising themes, such as an image that seemed to reference the crucifixion of Christ, and another illustrating Germany's street food, döner.

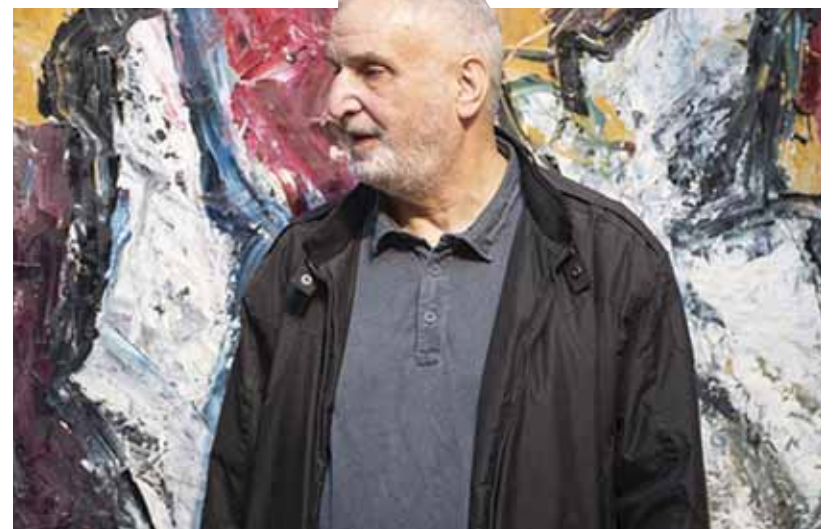
Despite his frequent use of oils, no two pieces in the exhibit are alike. Each artwork stands out with its own powerful color scheme, offering a unique expression and inviting viewers to uncover its hidden meanings.

Excerpts from Khumarashvili's personal diary are also on display at the exhibition. These writings, like his visual art, are abstract and fragmented, documenting his observations and reflections on everyday life. Though the meaning is not immediately clear, the writing conveys a sense of depth and complexity, much like his paintings.

KHUMARASHVILI'S QUOTES

"There is the Centaurus silhouette in my being. The thrown space in abandoned windows. The bed is terrifying me. Wind is in windows. I find night sheds. Telavi is dark all along the way." - July 18, 2000.

"Ugly years. I am turning fifty. I will



Profile of Khumarashvili in front of his work. Source: Vanda Art Gallery

have to live in terrible Tbilisi." - February 14, 1998.

"I have become the subject of an aping ridicule." - September 5, 1998.

"At least this heavy-hearted art won't pass in vain... I get out. Get in. Start the engine. Cigarettes in the Harry Krishna in silence. There's a descent. I do not think about anything. The feeling of inability is torture." - December 22, 2017.

"There is a serious order in my thoughts. Desperate existence is logical. The herd-like existence of animals excludes order. Idleness is my existence." - July 22, 2018.

A TRANSLATION FROM THE DIARY

"Morning, wine leaves are being shaken from the wind and with the silhouettes

of the trees. You can hear the birds singing. The sky is quiet, the atmosphere has no color, and the warm day is close. It's giving me a death sentence. Loneliness is not sparing me... There in the street is a broken police car. They put them on the ground and are tying their hands. She's looking at me with those eyes. Bibi is close, scratching at me with her paws and looking at me with her hands."

Together, the works in the exhibition, both visual and written, create a fascinating interplay of order and chaos, with each piece enhancing the understanding of the other, and showing Georgian society, past and present, interestingly through Ushangi Khumarashvili's unique perspective.

Lapis Lazuli: Euripides Laskaridis' Ode to Absurdity and Transformation at GIFT Festival



Photo by the author

BY IVAN NECHAEV

WEREWOLVES, SEAHORSES, AND THE POWER OF PATAPHYSICAL COMEDY

At this year's Georgian International Festival of Arts in Tbilisi (GIFT), Euripides Laskaridis's *Lapis Lazuli* broke the boundaries of conventional theater, captivating audiences at the Marjanishvili Theater with a surreal, multi-sensory journey that unraveled the depths of human transformation. For 80 minutes, spectators were transported into a world where the mystique of a semi-precious stone became a metaphor for identity and resilience, underscored by the director's singular, absurdist vision.

THE "STONE FROM HEAVEN" AS A THEATER OF THE ABSURD

In *Lapis Lazuli*, Laskaridis taps into the symbolic richness of the stone's name, often called the "Stone from Heaven," to explore contrasts between earthly resilience and celestial fragility. Much like the mineral, whose stunning blue color masks internal fractures, the performance suggests that under pressure, human identity is both enduring and unpredictable. This notion is rendered on stage in scenes that veer from the comic to the grotesque, transforming the theater into a space where contradictions and surprises unfold without the constraints of logic or linearity.

BLURRING REALITIES:



Photo by the author

original music to Stefanos Droussiotis's intricate lighting design, each element builds a world that is both visually and sonically immersive. Droussiotis's use of shadow and bold color mirrors the gem-like vibrancy of lapis lazuli, while Poullos's soundscape amplifies the eeriness, combining electronic distortions and acoustic textures that reflect the surreal transformations occurring on stage.

Laskaridis's choice of collaborators brings together varied theatrical and visual traditions, adding depth to a performance that, much like the stone, gleams with a spectrum of cultural influences. Set designer Sotiris Melanos, in collaboration with Christos Delidimos and Alegia Papageorgiou, crafted costumes that evoke other eras and artistic movements, creating an atmosphere where time itself seems fluid. This intricate layering of styles from Kabuki to Greek tragedy to classic Hollywood horror, as noted by the critics, reinforces the theme of fractured identities and the ambiguity of the self.

BEYOND THE SURFACE: A PERFORMANCE OF TRANSFORMATION UNDER PRESSURE

Much like the stone it takes its name from, *Lapis Lazuli* reflects the theme of transformation under pressure, which serves as a central metaphor in the performance. As audiences watch the performers mutate from one form to another, cloaked in intricate costumes or contorted into impossible postures, the performance draws attention to the constant flux of human identity. Laskaridis's work reveals how pressure, both external and internal, molds individuals, pushing them to embrace or reject certain aspects of themselves in moments of crisis.

Laskaridis, described as a "visual artist, choreographer, dramaturg, and ingenious constructor," approaches theater as a space for metamorphosis. In *Lapis Lazuli*, the stage becomes a pressure chamber where the performers' bodies respond to unseen forces, contorting, collapsing, and re-emerging in altered states. This exploration of change reaches its height in the final scenes, which, like the stone itself, conceal a profound beauty beneath their fractured exterior.

THE TIMELESS APPEAL OF HANDMADE ART AND THE BEAUTY OF IMPERFECTION

The handmade aesthetic of *Lapis Lazuli* is as much a statement as it is a stylistic choice. With each prop, costume, and set piece crafted meticulously by hand, the performance rejects the polish of digital precision in favor of an organic, tactile quality that draws viewers into the world Laskaridis has created. This "handmade, but far from simplistic art," as noted by critic Eleni Koutsilaoui, is a celebration of the imperfect and the raw, qualities that lend *Lapis Lazuli* an authenticity that polished productions often lack.

The physicality of the performance, grounded in tangible materials and crafted objects, encourages audiences to experience theater as an intimate and direct encounter with art. The props and costumes, manipulated and transformed on stage, reflect the transitory nature of identity, emphasizing the idea that beauty



Photo by the author

often resides in moments of imperfection and transience.

THE GROTESQUE AND THE SUBLIME: REACHING FOR THE HEART OVER THE MIND

Laskaridis has stated that *Lapis Lazuli* is designed to appeal "to our hearts, not our minds." This approach aligns with Maro Vassiliadou's observation that *Lapis Lazuli* is "entertainment for our hearts," bypassing intellectualism in favor of pure sensory engagement. By deliberately rejecting clarity and linearity, the performance allows viewers to engage with the material on an emotional level, experiencing the strangeness of Laskaridis's world as they would a dream—disjointed, confusing, yet ultimately resonant.

As each character wrestles with their own transformations, Laskaridis invites the audience to surrender to the performance's rhythms and contrasts, to embrace the beauty and bewilderment that arise from letting go of intellectual analysis. Through this process, *Lapis Lazuli* fosters a space for open-ended contemplation, where meaning is found not in logical conclusions, but in sensory impressions.

THE "PATAPHYSICAL" MIND OF EURIPIDES LASKARIDIS: BREAKING FREE OF CONVENTIONAL THEATER

Lapis Lazuli exemplifies Laskaridis's pataphysical approach to theater, a style rooted in paradox and absurdity that defies conventional analysis. In a time

when much of contemporary theater leans toward abstraction and minimalism, Laskaridis's work is a vibrant counterpoint. By embracing classic theatrical techniques and reinterpreting them through an avant-garde lens, he creates an experience that is both nostalgic and refreshingly new. This duality enables *Lapis Lazuli* to resonate with viewers on multiple levels, reminding us that theater can be both a reflection of society and a space to escape its boundaries.

As the performance closed, the audience at Marjanishvili Theater rose in applause—a testament to *Lapis Lazuli*'s ability to captivate, perplex, and ultimately transform. In an era where theater often seeks to impart meaning through seriousness and intellectual rigor, Laskaridis's work stands out for its joyful embrace of the absurd. In *Lapis Lazuli*, we find a work that is at once beautiful, grotesque, and ultimately human; a piece that invites us to look within ourselves and discover the hidden, sometimes contradictory facets that make up our own inner worlds.

In the end, *Lapis Lazuli* does more than entertain; it changes us. Like the lapis lazuli stone, the performance exerts its own kind of pressure on its viewers, prompting us to reflect on our own transformations, our own capacity for change under the weight of life's challenges. Euripides Laskaridis, through his whimsical, grotesque, and deeply human vision, offers not just a performance, but a mirror in which we glimpse both the beauty and fragility of the human experience.



Photo by the author



PUBLISHER & GM
George Sharashidze

COMMERCIAL DEPARTMENT
Commercial Director:
Iva Merabishvili
Marketing Manager:
Natalia Chikvaidze

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT:
Editor-In-Chief:
Katie Ruth Davies

Journalists:
Ana Dumbadze
Vazha Tavberidze
Tony Hanmer
Nugzar B. Ruhadze
Erekle Poladishvili
Shelbi R. Ankievich
Ivan Nechaev
Mariam Razmadze

Layout:
Misha Mchedlishvili
Photographer:
Aleksi Serov

International Relations & Communications
Sofia Bochoidze
E: sbochoidze@georgiatoday.ge

Website Editor:
Katie Ruth Davies

Webmaster:
Sergey Gevenov

Circulation Managers:
David Kerdikashvili
David Djandjgava

ADDRESS
1 Melikishvili Str.
Tbilisi, 0179, Georgia

Tel.: +995 32 229 59 19
E: info@georgiatoday.ge
F: GeorgiaToday

ADVERTISING & SUBSCRIPTION

+995 555 00 14 46
E-mail:
marketing@georgiatoday.ge

Reproducing material, photos and advertisements without prior editorial permission is strictly forbidden. The author is responsible for all material. Rights of authors are preserved. The newspaper is registered in Mtatsminda district court.

Reg. # 06/4-309

ბანიყორღე

შაურ ნახებელი

ბეზო

FANTA

