



FOCUS ON SABUKO

SABUKO: Preserving nature and empowering local communities

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Survival First: Paul Bell on Georgia's Never-Ending Struggle

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

Paul Bell has had a 40-year career in journalism and strategic communications, working in over 20 countries across Europe and the Middle East. He has supported societies in transition, but, he tells Radio Free Europe/RL's Georgian Service, he believes that his five years in Tbilisi, observing politics and power in Georgia, taught him the most about the relationship between culture, politics, governance, and democracy.

EVERYBODY'S TALKING ABOUT PRESIDENT TRUMP'S COMEBACK. CONSIDERING OUR RULING PARTY'S ALMOST RELIGIOUS REVERENCE TOWARD HIM, IS HE BRINGING THEM ANYTHING TANGIBLE?

I don't think it makes much difference. Trump doesn't have a specific ideology, and his instincts are more authoritarian. He's comfortable with dictators and is fundamentally transactional.

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Paul Bell

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GALT & TAGGART										
Prepared for Georgia Today Business by										
As of 19-Nov-2024										
Markets					Markets					
BONDS	Price	w/w	m/m	STOCKS	Price	w/w	m/m			
GEORGIA 04/26	94.64 (YTM 6.77%)	+0.4%	+0.3%	Bank of Georgia (BGEO LN)	GBP 40.05	+7.8%	-2.0%			
GBAIL 04/28	98.83 (YTM 7.63%)	-0.2%	-1.6%	Georgia Capital (GCEO LN)	GBP 10.00	+3.3%	-1.0%			
GBGG 9/12 PERP	98.02 (YTM 9.74%)	+0.2%	-0.3%	TBC Bank Group (TBCC LN)	GBP 27.05	+6.1%	-4.2%			
SILNET 01/27	100.60 (YTM 8.06%)	+0.1%	-0.2%							
TBC 8.894 PERP	95.98 (YTM 11.74%)	+0.1%	-0.0%							
TBC 10 1/4 PERP	99.21 (YTM 10.61%)	+0.7%	+0.4%							
				COMMODITIES		Price		w/w m/m		
				Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)		77.46		-4.3% +8.2%		
				Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)		2 648.54		+0.2% +2.7%		
INDICES					CURRENCIES					
	Price	w/w	m/m		Price	w/w	m/m			
SP 500	5 859.85	+2.0%	+4.2%	USD / GEL	2.7230	-0.9%	+1.0%			
FTSE 250	20 817.19	-0.2%	-0.4%	EUR / GEL	2.9705	-1.5%	-0.5%			
DOW JONES 30	43 065.22	+2.6%	+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%			



President Zurbishvili. Source: IG

President Zurbishvili Files Lawsuit and Calls for Reform

BY TEAM GT

President Salome Zurbishvili this week filed a lawsuit with Georgia's Constitutional Court, challenging the legitimacy of the recent elections. She argues that the elections violated key democratic principles, including the secrecy and universality of the vote. Zurbishvili has called for new elections and an international investigation into

the electoral process to address systemic flaws.

The president's position highlights the broader political crisis in Georgia, as many citizens, opposition leaders, and non-governmental organizations have refused to recognize the election results. Zurbishvili has also called for a continuation of the current political status quo until new elections are held, warning that political instability and the government's isolation from international partners pose significant threats to the country's future.

Ukraine Latest: Ukraine Reportedly Fires UK-French-Made Missiles into Russia

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

Ukraine launched British-French-made Storm Shadow missiles at targets inside Russia for the first time on Wednesday, following an earlier strike with US-made ATACMS missiles.

Ukraine's use of UK-supplied Storm Shadow missiles to strike Russian territory was confirmed to Reuters by an anonymous official, with British media also reporting the launch. Ukraine's Defense Minister Rustem Umerov declined to confirm or deny the strike, stating, "We are using all means to defend our country."

A Russian military blogger posted photos of a Storm Shadow missile fragment on Telegram, claiming that up to 12 missiles were fired in Russia's Kursk region. The fragment, found in the village of Marino near the Ukrainian border, bore markings identifying it as a Storm Shadow missile.

The UK and France provided Ukraine with long-range Storm Shadow missiles, which have a range of 250 kilometers (155 miles), slightly less than the US-made ATACMS (186 miles).

Meanwhile, several embassies in Kyiv closed Wednesday due to a potential major airstrike threat amid growing tensions between the US and Russia. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov this week revealed that the hotline for de-escalation between the US and Russia is currently inactive. This follows President Biden's authorization for Ukraine to fire US-made missiles into Russian territory.

ZELENSKY RESPONDS TO PANIC OVER FAKE ATTACK WARNING

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky addressed panic in Kyiv following false reports of a large-scale attack on Wednesday. Authorities confirmed that Russia had staged an "information and psychological attack" by spreading a fake warning of a massive attack on Kyiv, purporting to be from Ukraine's Defense Intelligence. Zelensky urged citizens to stay calm and support the Ukrainian army.

EU EXPANDS SANCTIONS ON IRAN OVER SUPPORT FOR

RUSSIAN AGGRESSION

The EU imposed new sanctions on Iran, expanding measures in response to its military support for Russia's war against Ukraine. The decision introduces a prohibition on the export, transfer, supply, or sale from the EU to Iran of components used in the development and production of missiles and UAVs.

The EU is also introducing a transaction ban prohibiting any transaction with ports and locks that are owned, operated or controlled by listed individuals and entities, or are used for the transfer of Iranian UAVs or missiles or related technology and components to Russia. This measure includes the access to facilities of the ports and locks, such as Amirabad and Anzali, and the provision of any services to vessels. These designations include the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL) and its director Mohammad Reza Khiabani. The European Council also listed three Russian shipping companies - MG Flot, VTS Broker and Arapax, whose vessels are involved in transporting Iranian-made weapons and ammunition, including UAV components, across the Caspian Sea to resupply Russian troops fighting in Ukraine.

EU AND US CONTINUE SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE

On the 1,000th day since Russia's invasion, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen reiterated the EU's commitment to Ukraine, announcing €50 billion in aid until 2027 from the EU, and €50 billion dollars until 2026 from G7 countries and the EU. She also announced an additional €65 million in support of an initiative to buy school meals for Ukrainian children. The EU has provided €122 billion in support so far, including financial, military, and humanitarian assistance. Von der Leyen affirmed Ukraine's future in the EU, despite ongoing challenges.

In parallel, the US Department of Defense announced a \$275 million military aid package for Ukraine, including drones and artillery shells, marking the 70th tranche of US support since August 2021. Further, in a significant policy shift, the US approved sending anti-personnel mines to Ukraine, despite criticism from human rights groups over the indiscriminate nature of the weapons.

Borrell Announces Transfer of EUR 100 mln to Georgia's Civil Society Organizations



EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell

BY TEAM GT

More than 100 million euros will be frozen and, instead of going to the Georgian government, it will be given to civil society organizations - the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, told journalists on Monday prior to a session of the Council of Foreign Affairs of the European Union.

He said he was to recommend the suspension of the support of a significant number of EU programs currently run-

ning in Georgia, but added that the struggle of the Georgian people for fair elections will continue to be supported by the European Union.

"It is clear that the issue of Georgia is what everyone is discussing today. Specific decisions must be made. My proposal is to stop supporting a significant portion of the programs that flow to the government. More than a million euros will be frozen and instead of going to the government, it will go to civil society organizations. That is, we will take this money, more than 100 million, and give it to civil society organizations to support them in the fight for fair elections. The European Union will continue to support the Georgian people.

"The accession process is suspended until the Government of Georgia returns to its original path, and when it returns to its original path, many things must change, and during this time, we will use the money, which until now was directed to the government, for people who are fighting for their own destiny," Borrell said.

On Monday, the EU Foreign Affairs Council discussed Georgia's post-election situation, evaluated Russian aggression against Ukraine, with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha joining via videoconference for an informal exchange, and reviewed potential relations with the US following the presidential and parliamentary elections held on November 5.

Georgia's U23 Judo Team Wins Six Medals at European Championship

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

Georgian athletes achieved considerable feats both individually and as part of a team at the U23 European Judo Championship in Olomouc, Czech Republic this week. The Georgian team won three gold, one silver, and one bronze medal in individual events, and secured one gold in the mixed team event.

The detailed breakdown of the individual medals earned is as follows:

Giorgi Terashvili: -73kg, gold
Kote Kapanadze: -81kg, gold



Irakli Demetrashvili: +100kg, gold

Nino Loladze: -57kg, silver

Temo Zirakashvili: -66kg, bronze

In the mixed team contest, the Georgian team, including Eter Askilashvili (-70kg), Akaki Japaridze (-90kg), Nino

Papidze (+70kg), Irakli Demetrashvili (+90kg), Nino Loladze (-57kg), and Giorgi Loladze (-73kg), won against Ukraine 4-3.

The victory secured the first place for the Georgia U23 judo team.

New Canoeing and Rowing Center Opens in Poti

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

With the support of the Georgian Ministry of Culture and Sport, a new canoeing and rowing center was launched in Maltakva, Poti, with Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze and Minister Tinatin Rukhadze attending the opening ceremony.

The facility was built with a GEL 7 million investment and includes modern sports infrastructure, accommodation, conference rooms, and other features.

Maltakva's location, with its water-rich landscape, provides perfect condi-



tions for water sports training—an issue raised by athletes in the past.

The center's goal is to promote water sports in Georgia and host international

aquatic contests at the historically significant facility for Georgian rowing, shaped by Olympic champion Viktor Kratasyuk.

35 Years Since the Velvet Revolution: Legacy and Lessons for Today



David Stulík. Photo by Katerina Cibulka

BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

These values cannot be taken for granted," he tells Radio Free Europe/RL's Georgian Service.

Stulík's words serve as both a reminder and a warning. The revolution of 1989 may have been one of the defining events, heralding the end of the Cold War and ushering in a euphoric decade of democratic triumph, but history, he notes, has proven less linear than the optimists of the 1990s imagined. What felt like a definitive victory for liberal democracy at the time now reveals itself as merely a chapter in an ongoing struggle between freedom and authoritarianism.

The Velvet Revolution's bloodless success was extraordinary, but as Stulík points out, its circumstances were uniquely favorable. "We were lucky," he notes. "The Soviet Union was collapsing, its economy in ruins. Over 300,000 Soviet troops left Central Europe without a single shot being fired."

The revolution was not just a Czech or Slovak story; it resonated far beyond. Its echoes inspired later movements, such as Georgia's Rose Revolution and Ukraine's Orange Revolution. Yet, Stulík observes, while these nations yearned for the same freedoms Central Europe achieved, their geographic and political proximity to Russia has complicated their paths. "For Moldova and Georgia, the fight remains hybrid," he notes. "Russia may no longer deploy tanks, but its arsenal now includes propaganda, cyber warfare, and economic coercion."

For Stulík, one of the Velvet Revolution's most enduring lessons is the danger of complacency. "The first decade of the 1990s was euphoric," he says. "We thought the battle was won forever." But soon enough, Russia's resurgence, fueled



Czechoslovak students shout in support of Vaclav Havel for presidency during protest rally at Wenceslas Square in Prague, 22 November 1989. Photo by Lubomir Kotek/AFP/Getty Images

by the West's continued purchase of its oil and gas, started reverting the wheel at a frightening pace.

Nowhere is this clearer than in Ukraine, where war has laid bare the costs of freedom. "They fight with weapons in hand for what we in Central Europe have taken for granted," says Stulík. "Democracy, freedom, the right to self-determination, all at the cost of thousands of lives."


In Georgia, where today the road to

democracy and EU integration seems more arduous than ever, Stulík insists it is still navigable. "The Velvet Revolution shows us that change is possible, even under the most oppressive conditions," he says. "But such changes are brought about by people, not governments. The ultimate responsibility lies with citizens."

Stulík is candid about the role of leadership, or its absence. "In 1989, we had Václav Havel, Lech Wałesa, and Madeleine Albright; leaders who thought


strategically and beyond electoral cycles," he says. Today, he observes a dearth of such visionaries. Populists, offering simplistic solutions, dominate the political landscape, making it harder for genuine reformers to gain traction.




Thirty-five years after Prague's streets lit up with candles, the lessons of the Velvet Revolution remain as relevant as ever. Democracy is not a destination; it is a journey. Sovereignty is not granted; it is earned. And freedom is never free.




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Survival First: Paul Bell on Georgia's Never-Ending Struggle



Georgian protesters in October. Source: AFP

Continued from page 1

Georgians, I think, would understand that: he'll do deals if they benefit him. After a period of harsh rhetoric from this government toward the United States, it's clear that they recognize the need to tone it down. The new US administration will likely adopt a more laissez-faire approach to Georgia's governance, which I think Georgian Dream would welcome.

YOU MENTIONED DEALS. ARE THERE DEALS TO BE MADE BETWEEN THE GEORGIAN DREAM AND THE US ADMINISTRATION?

There are certainly deals to be made. Over the past year, the foreign agents law and LGBT laws have been the focus of anger and resistance. The question

is: How necessary are these laws for Georgia's government? Could they live without them? I think they are bargaining chips, trade goods that could be exchanged in a deal with Europe, perhaps in exchange for Europe stopping pressure to overturn the election results.

SO THAT'S THE CURRENT REALITY. WHAT'S NEXT FOR GEORGIA?

I think we need to step back and evaluate what's not working. The opposition: will they go to parliament or not? I think they should go in. It's probably an unpopular opinion, but voters need to be represented. Even if you don't consider the elections legitimate, you still need to use every available legal means to represent the people who elected you. Opposition members will be criticized as traitors, but the key question is whether Georgians can sustain a more meaningful, rational debate. There's too much noise and rhetoric in Georgian politics, with little substantive discussion of complex issues.

TAKING A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW, WHERE IS THE COUNTRY HEADED?

Many believe Georgian Dream is steering the country toward Russia and China, and there's some truth to that. But members of Georgian Dream are still Georgians, and they believe Georgia is European. I don't think they could abandon that instinct, even if they are prioritizing ties with Russia or China. They also have families, and they gravitate toward Europe and the US.

LET'S FOCUS ON GEORGIAN DREAM'S LEADERSHIP. DO THEY, AT THEIR CORE, WANT GEORGIA IN EUROPE? LET'S START WITH IVANISHVILI.

Ivanishvili is harder to read, but look at how his family lives. They gravitate toward Europe and the US.

YES, BUT MANY RUSSIAN OLIGARCHS' FAMILIES DO THE SAME. ARE THEY EUROPEAN?

They want to send their children to London or Paris, not Beijing or Moscow. That doesn't necessarily mean they are vying for a European future for Russia. They want to maintain a relationship with Europe that suits their financial and political interests, but they don't want it to threaten their financial or political clout. What I see is people who are determined to hold on to their positions and their property.

SPEAKING OF EUROPE, I'M GOING TO QUOTE AN ESSAY YOU WROTE: "IF THIS [FOREIGN AGENTS] BILL BECOMES A LAW, IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE EUROPE WILL WANT TO EXACT THE SAME PRICE FROM GEORGIAN DREAM, IF ONLY TO SAVE FACE." WELL, THE BILL HAS PASSED, AND GEORGIAN DREAM IS CELEBRATING. WHERE IS THE PRICE?

So far, the price hasn't been very high. Europe has effectively frozen the accession process, which is a clear message to Georgia, but not a severe punishment. It's a punishment for the Georgian people. It sends the message that they need to put pressure on Georgian Dream to reopen the EU accession door. I'm surprised there hasn't been a bigger price extracted yet, but perhaps there will be in the future. They'll perhaps revisit the visa situation. And that would be disastrous for the Georgian people.

RETURNING TO THE DOMESTIC SITUATION, WHERE DOES GEORGIAN DREAM GO FROM HERE? HOW WILL THEY HANDLE THE IMPASSE?

If I were them, I'd let people blow off steam and hope it fizzes out. Winter's coming, and people will get tired. They know how this goes: people protest for

a few days, shout loudly, then go home, and nothing changes.

WHY DO WE EXPECT ANYTHING DIFFERENT?

Exactly. But Georgian Dream has to be careful not to close off all avenues for public engagement and governance. Pushing people to extremes could backfire. The result we're seeing shows the extent of state capture, which doesn't improve confidence in the government. In that sense, it's been a failure.

YOU'VE SAID GEORGIA HAS ALWAYS LIVED LIKE A LIZARD ON A HOT ROCK, EXPOSED TO DANGER. WHAT HAPPENS TO THOSE LIZARDS?

Georgia's biggest threat is its former colonial master, Russia. That threat reinforces Georgia's desire for a strong relationship with Europe as a safeguard for its sovereignty. Georgia's independence is fragile, and it has always struggled to sustain its identity, its sense of self, surrounded as it always has been by larger, more powerful neighbors, be it the Ottomans or the Persians, or the Russians, even the Romans.

YOU'VE WRITTEN THAT SMALL STATES LIKE GEORGIA MUST PRIORITIZE SURVIVAL ABOVE ALL ELSE. IS GEORGIA AT SUCH A MOMENT NOW?

I think Georgia is always in a survival moment. It's been like this for millennia. But today, Georgia isn't worse off than it has been in the past, like in 1921, when its sovereignty was taken. But holding onto independence since 1991 has been hard, and Georgia is still not a full democracy. It's a conservative society, and there's little difference between the parties when it comes to economic policy. The country is still far from the kind of democracy I would recognize from the UK, and the political focus is often more on retaining



Even if you don't consider the elections legitimate, you still need to use every available legal means to represent the people who elected you

power than on policy. We happened to be on version number four of this scenario; we've had more than 12 years of it, but somewhere, and I'm not quite sure where you begin, somewhere you've got to slow the wheel down.

SO, WHERE DOES GEORGIA STAND IN THE 21ST-CENTURY GEOPOLITICAL LANDSCAPE?

Georgia hopes it can have its cake and eat it too.

HOW DELUSIONAL IS THAT THOUGHT?

Pretty delusional. Georgia wants recognition from Europe while maintaining its own values and laws, but when you join a club, you have to follow its rules. Georgia finds that difficult because of its unique geography and cultural context.

YOU ASK IN YOUR ESSAY WHETHER GEORGIA IS AT A CROSSROADS OR ALWAYS HAS BEEN. MARK GALEOTTI SAID, "GEORGIA IS CURSED BY ITS GEOGRAPHY." HOW DOES THAT AFFECT GEORGIA'S FUTURE?

In my essay, I posed the question: Who will bring the bolt cutters to break the chains? I had this image of Amirani, the predecessor of Prometheus, chained to the rock in the Caucasus and the bird picking constantly at its liver and flesh, and what did I do? I reverted to, in a sense, the single person.

YOU'VE BEEN IN GEORGIA SO LONG, YOU ALSO STARTED TO EXPECT A MESSIAH TO APPEAR. DO YOU THINK A LEADER WILL EMERGE, PERHAPS FROM THE OPPOSITION, WHO CAN BE TRUSTED?

I was born in the UK but grew up in South Africa, witnessing its painful transition. Despite the struggles, we had Nelson Mandela. He wasn't perfect, but compared to other leaders I've met, he stood out. Meeting him felt like being in the presence of the Dalai Lama: his aura was powerful and filled with goodness. Though he struggled with his own prejudices, he worked hard to teach others to engage with adversaries and seek solutions. Such leaders are rare, and South Africa was fortunate to have him.

As for other leaders, some I'm fond of, but many, after years in power, haven't broken through. Take Saakashvili: he was a charismatic, passionate leader who could galvanize people, but he overplayed his hand. In Georgia, the focus is too often on power retention, and policy takes a back seat. Saakashvili was a great modernizer but not a natural Democrat, though, who truly is in this country?



Members of Georgian Dream are still Georgians, and they believe Georgia is European. I don't think they could abandon that instinct

Protests Continue at TSU against Election Results and University's Controversial Actions

BY TEAM GT

A group of students and protesters, outraged by the university's involvement in the dispersal of a peaceful demonstration against the October 26 election results, occupied an auditorium at Tbilisi State University (TSU) in the early hours of November 19, and have since moved their protest to the university territory and nearby street. The protesters are demanding the resignation of TSU Rector Jaba Samushia after footage emerged showing police forces entering the university grounds before the demonstration was forcefully dispersed.

The students are calling for accountability and an end to what they see as the university's betrayal of its academic mission. They have held a number of public lectures at the university, inviting their peers to join the protest and raise awareness about the anti-regime demonstration. The demonstration, which began as part of the Coalition for Change and Unity National Movement's 24-hour protest on Monday, has since expanded, with tents pitched around the university building. Protesters blocked traffic on surrounding streets, including Melikishvili Avenue and Chavchavadze Avenue, with several participants providing food, hot drinks, and blankets.

POLICE CRACKDOWN AND ARRESTS

During a confrontation between the police and the rally participants on Melikishvili Avenue on Tuesday, which kicked off after the police tried to remove the protesters and tents from the area, three individuals—Isako Devidze, Irakli Andghuladze, and Davit Tsotsoria—were arrested. Based on court rulings, Devidze and Tsotsoria were sentenced to 8 days of administrative detention, while Andghuladze was fined 2,700 GEL. Judge Koba Chagunava issued the detention sentence for Devidze, while Judge Nino Enukidzie sentenced Tsotsoria. Andghuladze's



Police disperse protesters on November 19. Photo by Mose for sakartvelosambebi

fine was imposed by Judge Lela Tsagareishvili.

A total of 16 people were arrested during the incident, with three of them later released. The remaining detainees are currently in temporary isolation cells, with their administrative detention period to expire on Friday morning at 08:00. At this stage, only the three individuals mentioned above have been tried, though others are still awaiting legal outcomes.

The protests, which stemmed from the alleged rigging of the elections in favor of the ruling Georgian Dream party, have been met with a heavy police response. Many of those detained report physical assault by police officers. One of the detained individuals, cameraman Sergi Baramidze from Mtavari Arkhi, was injured by police while documenting the protest. He was assaulted by around 10 officers, resulting in an eye injury. The

Special Investigation Service announced it will investigate the incident.

PROFESSORS AND ACADEMICS CONDEMN UNIVERSITY'S ACTIONS

In response to the university's role in the dispersal, the Georgian University Society issued a statement on November 19, strongly condemning the misuse of TSU space and the excessive force used by law enforcement to break up the peaceful protest. The statement, signed by professors, lecturers, and doctoral students from higher educational institutions across Georgia—some 450 people in all—condemned the actions as a violation of the university's mission.

The statement read: "The university, which should always be a sanctuary for open academic debate, closed its doors to students and allowed law enforcement agencies to forcibly disperse peaceful pro-

testers, including its own students. This action insults the university as a symbol of freedom and progress, violates academic independence, and contradicts its historical mission."

Professors emphasized that educational institutions, especially TSU, as the first national university of Georgia, should be places where fundamental rights such as freedom of expression are safeguarded. They declared that the university's actions violated the core principles on which educational institutions are founded.

The statement also pointed to the responsibility of TSU's Academic Council and Rector Samushia for failing to address the issue and remain silent in the face of these violations. "Any administration that ignores the rights of students and freedom of expression will face strong opposition from the academic community," the professors declared.

De facto Abkhazian Parliament Approves Resignation of "President" Aslan Bzhania following Protests



Protesters in Abkhazia on November 15. Photo by t.me/respublicaabh

BY TEAM GT

The de facto parliament of Abkhazia has officially approved the resignation of "President" Aslan Bzhania following intense protests and political unrest in the region. On November 19, 31 deputies took part in the vote, with 28 supporting the resignation, one voting against it, and two ballots declared invalid. The "parliament" confirmed the results of the vote, and in accordance with the agreement reached earlier, "Vice President" Badra Gunba will assume the role of "acting president."

The resignation follows several days of opposition protests that escalated after the "government" proposed a controversial Russian-Abkhazian investment agreement, which critics argued threatened local businesses and national security. The opposition movement quickly grew into a broader call for Bzhania's resignation.

AGREEMENT REACHED AFTER HOURS OF NEGOTIATIONS

After nearly eight hours of negotiations between government and opposition representatives, a breakthrough was reached on Tuesday. The terms of the agreement included Bzhania's resignation, a commitment by the opposition to vacate the occupied government buildings, and the appointment of Badra Gunba as "acting president." The negotiations were held in a 3-on-3 format, with key figures from both sides: the opposition's Leuan Mikaa, Kan Kvarchia, and Adgur Ardzinba, and the de facto government's Vice President Gunba, Otar Khetsia, and David Pilia.

The agreement stipulated that protesters occupying the "presidential office" and surrounding government buildings in Sokhumi must leave, and that, should they fail to do so, Bzhania had the right to withdraw his resignation.

KEY POINTS OF THE AGREEMENT:

- Presidential Resignation: Aslan Bzhania will formally resign, effective immediately.
- Dispersal of Protesters: Protesters in and around the government complex will vacate the premises by November 19, or Bzhania's resignation will be annulled.
- Parliamentary Review: The "People's Assembly (Parliament)" of Abkhazia will officially consider Bzhania's resignation on November 19.
- Interim Leadership: "Vice President" Badra Gunba will become "acting president" until a new election is held.
- Government Changes: "Acting President" Gunba will dismiss "Prime Minister" Alexander Ankvab and appoint Valery Bganba as the new "Prime Minister." Other ministers will remain in their posts until a new "president" is elected.

ONGOING UNREST AND POLITICAL FALLOUT

The unrest, which began on November 15, was initially sparked by the controversial investment agreement with Russia, but quickly morphed into a broader political crisis demanding Bzhania's resignation. The deal was seen as undermining Abkhazia's sovereignty and threatening local businesses. This growing opposition culminated in the occupation of key government buildings in Sokhumi and widespread protests throughout the region.



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Celebrating Improved Dairy Production with Women Farmers in Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti

BY THE FAO TEAM

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) recently celebrated the successful completion of a four-year project in the Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti region, aimed at empowering women dairy farmers. The initiative, funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented in partnership with UN Women, has made significant strides in enhancing the region's dairy production.

The event brought together local women farmers who have been actively involved in FAO's Farmer Field Schools. Representatives from SDC and UN Women, as well as project stakeholders from the

Rural Development Agency, National Food Agency, Zugdidi City Hall, and local civil society, were also present to mark the occasion.

Throughout the project, FAO established 30 Farmer Field Schools across eight municipalities in the Samegrelo-Upper Svaneti region. Over 600 women dairy farmers received training in best practices for dairy production, including hygiene, animal health, nutrition, and Georgian food safety regulations. They also gained insights into cattle registration and identification, gender equality, women's rights, and business and leadership skills. These trainings have empowered farmers to engage in community activism, leading to tangible results that have positively impacted their communities.

In addition to knowledge-sharing, participants received equipment and tools



Source: FAO



Source: FAO

for milk and dairy production, enabling them to produce higher-quality products more efficiently. As part of the training, farmers learned how to make a variety of cheeses, including Caciotta and Halumi. Many of them began producing these cheeses for their households and even for commercial purposes. FAO also provided support in marketing, labeling, and branding their artisanal dairy products.

A key aspect of the project was fostering collaboration between the women farmers and the HoReCa (Hotels, Restaurants, and Cafes) sector through tast-

ings and exhibitions. Several farmers have successfully partnered with local shops, restaurants, and hotels to supply high-value cheese varieties.

Javier Sanz Alvarez, FAO Programme Coordinator, praised the project's success, stating: "Cheese is vital to Georgian culture and is traditionally made by women who pass their knowledge from generation to generation. However, these women often lack access to modern cheesemaking techniques and financing. Through training, we taught these women simple practices to improve production quality, hygiene, and food safety, as well

as how to make different types of cheese with a longer shelf life. As a result, many farmers produced more milk and cheese, leading to increased incomes. I'm proud of these strong Georgian women, and I believe this is just the beginning of their continued success."

Empowering women is crucial for resilient families and thriving communities, notes Barbara Böni, Regional Director of Cooperation at the Embassy of Switzerland in Georgia, adding: "We're proud to support this initiative, which not only enhances practical skills but also fosters women's leadership and economic empowerment. By partnering with organizations like FAO and UN Women, as well as local communities and the private sector, we're driving transformative change in Georgia."

Kaori Ishikawa, UN Women's Country Representative for Georgia and Liaison for South Caucasus, highlighted the project's impact on rural women: "At UN Women, we are committed to creating opportunities for women in rural areas, helping them boost their incomes and enhance their communities' quality of life. This project has empowered many women, increasing their self-confidence and economic standing while also improving access to social services and healthcare. I thank SDC for their support, FAO for the partnership, and the women who are taking initiative to improve their businesses and engage in decision-making processes."

This project has provided women in Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti with the tools and knowledge to not only enhance their livelihoods but also contribute to the economic and social development of their communities.

Organizations Seek to Normalize Mental Health in Georgia's Medical Sector

BY SHELBI R. ANKIEWICZ

Organizations and businesses in Georgia aspire to put mental health on the same map as the rest of the country's medical field.

The Youth Neuroscience Organization and Mental Health Center Psychea held a conference on November 16 and 17, 'Mental Health in Georgia: Its Presence, Importance, and Challenges', which brought together more than 10 Georgian professionals in the field.

The Youth Neuroscience Organization was created in 2022 by Founder and CEO Mariam Alavidze. She tells GEORGIA TODAY that what started out as a university club soon turned into an NGO with the goal of integrating psychiatry into the medical field in Georgia. Mental health, which Alavidze says is a large part of medical fields in other countries, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, is downplayed in Georgia, mainly due to cultural stigma.

Through a multidisciplinary approach, Alavidze looks at different specialties, among them cardiology, dermatology, gastroenterology, and endocrinology, to determine how mental health is integrated into each.

"When you have acne or hair loss, you go to a dermatologist, and 'everything is alright,'" she says. "You think, 'Okay, my hormones are good, my labs are good, and my vitamins are good. So what's happening?' The next part would be therapy, because, physically, there is no root cause, or what we call 'organic cause.'"

The 'Mental Health in Georgia: Its Presence, Importance, and Challenges'



Profile of Medical Doctor Irakli Mania. Source: FB

conference was held to discuss and present the challenges of psychiatry within the country. Talks focused on legal obstacles, organizational shortcomings, and solutions to the current situation. Alavidze says the conference was originally going to be international, including speakers from other countries, but she realized there had never been a conference solely tailored to Georgia and its regions, and so she opted to keep it local, inviting only Georgian speakers, some of whom came to Georgia from other

countries to share their different experiences and perspectives.

Medical Doctor Irakli Mania has his own clinic in the United States, and is a Distinguished Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association (DFAPA). He gave a presentation about interventional psychiatry and trans-magnetic stimulation (TMS), explaining how it is used in his clinic and elsewhere to treat mental health disorders such as depression. Alavidze describes it as a treatment that sends magnetic waves straight to the

brain through a hat-like device to create stimulation, and, after a few sessions, the depression disappears.

Mania shared this solution so local psychiatrists in Georgia could understand the treatment and, hopefully, find a way to implement it within their own clinics.

"We need more specialists and more tools to help these individuals. It is important to stay up-to-date with novel treatment modalities. TMS represents an important breakthrough in the treatment of depression and many other psychiatric disorders," Mania wrote in a comment for GEORGIA TODAY. "More professionals need to learn about this method, and I hope I managed to spark interest in conference participants to work towards establishing TMS treatments in Georgia."

Co-founded by MD Irakli Gamkrelidze and Dr. Giorgi Cheishvili, Psychea is a private mental health center that focuses on a multidisciplinary approach to treatments, consulting, and rehabilitation of mental health services, psychiatry, addiction medicine, and more. Gamkrelidze tells us that the main point of the conference was to share research and evidence-based data from practitioners of many disciplines of medicine, including psychiatry, addiction medicine, psychology, endocrinology, gastroenterology, and environmental health.

Another point was to raise awareness about the mental health system in Georgia, specifically its achievements, the challenges facing the sphere, and the reforms needed to develop it in the right direction.

"One of the main markers of the level of development of a country's social, medical, and human rights policy is the situation in their mental health system,"

says Gamkrelidze. "Unfortunately, nowadays, we are still grappling with the remnants of the past. It's time to overcome this hurdle."

According to Mariam Alavidze, specialized doctors in Georgia are doing the psychiatrist's job in parallel to their own. Rather than referring a patient to a psychiatrist, doctors are prescribing medication themselves, which Alavidze says should be stopped - it is a concept that has been around since the USSR, she notes.

During Soviet times, Alavidze says, people were sent to mental health hospitals as a punishment. The word 'crazy' was used for those with mental disorders, which is still a term widely used today with a negative connotation. This has caused a deeply rooted stigma that is still adopted by many people in Georgia.

To combat stigma and normalize mental health discussions, Alavidze offers several recommendations: First, explain mental health disorders in simple terms to make them more understandable. Second, encourage people to embrace mental health conditions, as they can sometimes lead to additional skills, such as multitasking and increased energy. Third, be open and direct about taking medication, making it a topic that is "out in the open."

Looking ahead, the Youth Neurosurgeon Organization and Psychea are advocating for significant reforms in healthcare across Georgia, especially in remote areas where access to even basic medications, like painkillers, can be difficult. They also aim to reduce stigma and establish mental health care as a recognized and integral part of the medical field, emphasizing that psychiatry plays a crucial role in maintaining overall health.

Council of Europe Study Highlights Educational Challenges for Ukrainian Children in Georgia and Europe

BY TEAM GT

As the war in Ukraine reached 1,000 days, the Council of Europe has called for a shift from emergency measures to long-term solutions for the education of Ukrainian children in Europe. On World Children's Day on November 20, the Council of Europe published a study outlining the key challenges and opportunities for integrating displaced Ukrainian children into education systems across Europe. For Georgia, the study points to both progress and areas in need of improvement.

The study reveals that 50% of children who fled Ukraine are still not enrolled in education in their host countries, with 60% of those enrolled attending online classes broadcast from Ukraine. This creates significant difficulties for both the children and the countries hosting them. Many children also face trauma and psychological challenges due to the ongoing war, which affects their ability to integrate into education systems.

For Georgia, the study highlights a few notable areas of response:

1. **Language Support:** Like many European countries, Georgia has introduced Ukrainian language courses and recruited Ukrainian-speaking staff to assist dis-

placed students. This has helped children continue their education in their native language while integrating into the local system. However, language support remains a key challenge in many schools.

2. **Cultural Identity:** The study also notes that Georgia, alongside countries like Estonia and Poland, offers Ukrainian as a second foreign language in schools. This is part of an effort to maintain the cultural identity of Ukrainian children while they adjust to life in their host country. Still, integrating cultural preservation into education practices has been inconsistent. The Ukrainian Ministry of Education invites host states to include New Ukrainian School Hub resources into their programs.

3. **School Enrollment Process:** In Georgia, the enrollment of Ukrainian children is based on initial assessments of their previous schooling, which allows for tailored placements. However, this process is not always smooth, and further improvements in assessment and school placement flexibility are needed to ensure children are adequately supported.

4. **Compulsory Education:** The study mentions that compulsory education for Ukrainian children is required in Georgia, aligning with many other Council of Europe member states. However, the implementation of compulsory education varies, and some children are still not attending formal education due to

barriers such as language or lack of school capacity.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Expand Access to In-Person Schooling:** Encourage greater enrollment in local schools and provide support to parents and guardians regarding the benefits of in-person education.

- **Increase School Capacity and Teachers:** Provide additional school places and hire more qualified teachers to meet the demand from displaced children.

- **Improve Tracking Systems:** Develop more effective systems to identify and enroll children who are currently out of school.

- **Individualized Education Plans:** Create learning plans based on initial assessments of the children, rather than relying solely on fixed class placements.

- **Inclusive School Environments:** Promote a more inclusive, "whole-school" approach to support children from diverse backgrounds, including building teachers' skills to manage multicultural classrooms.

The Council of Europe study stresses that countries like Georgia need to take more proactive steps to build inclusive and resilient education systems for displaced children. While progress has been made, there are still significant gaps in providing consistent, quality education for all Ukrainian children in the country.



Children line up for their first day at Tbilisi's new Ukrainian school in 2022. Photo by Giorgi Lomsadze for Eurasianet.

The Mapping Study, based on research conducted in May-June 2024, examines the educational practices of 32 Council of Europe member states and 13 other countries with high numbers of Ukrainian refugees. It serves as a comprehensive analysis of the current state of educational access for Ukrainian children across Europe, providing a roadmap for improving educational integration and

support for displaced children.

Georgia, like other countries, faces significant challenges in meeting the educational needs of Ukrainian children. Moving forward, it will be essential for the country to implement more sustainable, long-term educational solutions to ensure that all children, regardless of their background or displacement, receive the support they need to succeed.

The Twists & Turns of Gen-Z



Gen-Z scrolling. Source: iStock/Getty

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

They have their own vernacular, hardly comprehensible to the folks of other generations, but mind, they are loath to use punctuation and uppercase characters in writing. Just try to get this one: russia is mighty un-lit and going to western school is lit but i might have a bad FOMO in europe and get ghosted by kids around as i feel salty about my english no cap yes nothing to

flex about but i'd rather stay lowkey about it as i might get thrown shade at in the bunch of western peers. Need a translation? Here we go: "Russia isn't really that cool. What's cool is going to a Western school, but I might get left out in Europe and feel awkward because my English isn't that good. I don't have anything to brag about, so I'd rather just stay quiet. I feel like my messages and calls would get ignored by the other kids." How about that?

Gen-Z, alias Zoomers, are a penultimate demographic cohort on the so-far-known list of social generations of the Western

world, preceded by the Millennials and succeeded by Gen-Alpha. They have become the real talk of the world of late; here in Sakartvelo, too. One can often hear from the mouths of their parents, teachers and grandparents that "an amazing new generation is coming up" in Sakartvelo, in whose hands the motherland will relax and flourish, someday in the foreseeable future. Blessed are the believers!

All generations differ in one way or another from the previous one, and we always exude some hope that they will have enough smarts and talent to put

the homeland on the right track to historical development. I feel exactly the same way, more so because I teach hundreds of kids every year, and am very much in the swim of the matter when it comes to the Gen-Z species. They definitely are our hope and main powerhouse, emanating both vigor and brilliance. Yet, at the same time, we are made to feel dubious about their ability to carry the burden of Georgia's survival not only as an independent nation, but as an attractive part of our civilization, capable of peacefully and fruitfully living in the family of nations, as intricate and multifaceted as it is now.

The chances are fifty-fifty, based on my discreetly modest evaluation. These kids are extremely well-informed and intelligent, but just try to take their phones away for a second, and they might just fall victim to a psychological disorder; if they accidentally leave home without their phones in their pocket, they feel like their hands have been cut off; sitting together, they will communicate with each other via text, having no desire to go physical; without their favorite gadgets, they are crippled; they will panic if disconnected from Wi-Fi; they malfunction when their phone batteries are dying; their childhood happens indoors, seeing them suffering from the clearly symptomatic "outdoor-phobia."

Zoomers grew up exceptionally well in the digital era, fundamentally linked to social media, within which they interconnect, acquire knowledge, and proliferate the crops of their imagination. But these enticing platforms also trigger anxiety and even paranoia among Gen-Z users, one of the most influential among them being the famous TikTok, which has a crucial role in shaping their perception, introducing a certain number of fear-inducing trends, conspiracy theories, alarming news, sense of uncertainty, mistrust, weird health tips, overload of conflicting information, emotional exhaustion, enlarged fear of being left

out (FOMO), and other challenges of our time, conducive to sharp incredulity and causing them to ceaselessly scroll.

Gen-Z, as an everlasting user of social platforms, are usually hyper-aware of their online presence, painfully fearing judgment, criticism or cancel culture, falling under the impact of penchants like digital detox, which puzzlingly inspire paranoia about being too connected while accentuating the indispensability of staying updated. Gen-Z's dependence on social media for endorsement and linking can make them feel secluded or overawed when faced with online disapproval. The psychological bearing of all this might end up as an interminable exposure to distressing content, instigating mental health problems, leading to ever-growing unease, despair, and even paranoia.

To conclude, the internet in general, and TikTok in particular, is a double-edged sword for Gen-Z. To address this paranoia, Gen-Z must advance their digital literacy skills and practicable intake of online content, and achieve an equilibrium between their digital and real-world lives. While they like to exaggerate, by nurturing critical thinking and concentrating on regular human happiness and security, Gen-Z can repossess control over their online involvement, and circumnavigate the digital age more self-assuredly.

Hitting their cognizance via the internet happens very easily, because their minds and souls are extremely malleable. The question is if these young, hyper-modernized geniuses will be ready to take over the country after a couple of decades to embark on various kinds of needed activities beyond the tinkering with their computers and the programs thereof. Wherever the digital epoch is leading us, we still have to have our share of hoes and spades, cars and bikes, clothing and heat, board and lodging. Are Gen-Z learning today how to provide for all those trivialities tomorrow? Let's hope so!

SABUKO's Efforts to Preserve Nature and Empower Local Communities



BY ANA DUMBADZE

In today's world, where environmental challenges are becoming increasingly urgent, preserving natural landscapes and supporting local communities has become crucial. Society for Nature Conservation - SABUKO has been helping to address these challenges through a landscape restoration project on the Iori Plateau, where, unfortunately, unsustainable agriculture and overgrazing by domestic animals has led to severe soil erosion, seeing the habitat of local wildlife species increasingly reduced.

To improve the current situation, SABUKO has been implementing a landscape restoration project since January 1, 2019, with the support of the Cambridge Conservation Initiative.

The first phase of the project covered the Chachuna Managed Reserve in Dedoplistskaro municipality, while the second phase includes Chachuna, Kotsakhura Ridge, Samukhi Valley and the Vashlovani Protected Areas. After the successful implementation of the first phase, Sabuko, together with its partners, launched the second phase, during which the scale of pasture restoration and the circle of stakeholders, including local farmers and herders, was augmented.

The main goal of the project is the

conservation of species and habitats within a single ecological network, where wildlife and human activities will continue to coexist harmoniously. SABUKO's activities include the implementation of sustainable grazing systems to restore and improve pasture conditions and biodiversity; scientific research on the status of species populations and habitats, and the development of conservation actions; improvement of legislation and practices related to nature protection and use of natural resources; restoration of the Iori floodplain forest and other ecosystems; raising environmental knowledge and awareness; and promoting the development of the system of protected areas.

DOCUMENTARY ABOUT NOMADIC SHEPHERDING

SABUKO, in collaboration with the production company Wingmen, has begun filming a documentary about the local wildlife and the lives of shepherds.

The documentary depicts the daily reality of local shepherds, as well as the challenges associated with sheep farming and the daily activities of shepherds - from making Guda cheese and shearing sheep, to processing wool and other authentic traditions.

Nomadic pastoralism has been a traditional activity in Georgia since ancient times; it is an ancient farming method, seeing shepherds use high mountain

grassland ecosystems as pastures in the summer, and lowlands during the winter. The shepherd and his sheep spend several months each year on the road - from summer pastures to lowlands, and vice versa. At different stages of this cycle, shepherds receive wool, meat, leather and dairy products from their flock.

Shepherds stay on the winter pastures and tend to their sheep until around April-May, after which they move on foot to the summer pastures with their sheep - a tradition that is one of the most memorable moments and attractions of the Georgian mountains. From the Iori highlands, where SABUKO is implementing the landscape restoration project, in the summer, the shepherds move their sheep to Tusheti.

The documentary depicts this adventurous and exciting journey, highlighting its challenges, difficult climatic conditions and terrain, and the ecological and social problems created by sheep overgrazing.

BRANDING SHEEP PRODUCTS FOR GREATER SUSTAINABILITY

Given the complex challenges, SABUKO implements sequential actions in various directions, including: strengthening and improving the system of protected areas; research and restoration of target species populations; restoration of pastures, forests and floodplains using various active management methods (introduction of rotational grazing, fencing of pastures and floodplains, promotion of natural restoration, arrangement of artificial gabions on the river to improve water access for floodplain vegetation, etc.); research and advocacy for the improvement of legislation and practice, including in terms of illegal extraction of natural resources, etc. Measures for the protection and restoration of species and habitats are aimed at improving pasture management.

With many years of experience in landscape restoration and cooperation with farmers, SABUKO created the brand "DOVLATI". DOVLATI is an umbrella brand that allows farmers to unite their resources and create a production and supply chain for secondary sheep products. Modernizing the production of Guda cheese, raising awareness about it on the international market, improving the quality of products and bringing them into line with a single standard, and establishing fair market rules will provide an incentive for sheep farmers to produce more and better quality Guda cheese. Farmers will be able to reduce the number of sheep, receive long-term high income from Guda cheese and other secondary

products, and improve their situation.

The long-term benefits that restored and healthy grassy ecosystems - natural pastures - bring should become visible gradually. Ultimately, it will contribute to the preservation of the centuries-old tradition of sheep farming, the restoration of pastures, and the conservation of biodiversity.

To learn more about the film and the brand Dovlati, GEORGIA TODAY spoke with Irakli Matcharashvili, Director of SABUKO.

"Our organization has been working on the Iori Plateau since 2019, a south-eastern territory of Georgia which is distinguished by its biological diversity," Matcharashvili tells us. "It is also an important place in terms of the use of natural resources. The natural pastures in this area have been used by Tushetian shepherds as winter pastures for centuries. Over the years, a certain harmony existed between human activity and nature, but, especially during the Soviet period, as a result of the incorrect and excessive use of natural resources, this harmony between nature and man was violated, and now it is necessary to work in many different directions to restore this harmony, and for nature and man to strengthen each other.

"It often happens that the degradation of nature has economic foundations, and it is not always enough to carry out conservation or administrative measures to solve the existing problems. If the root of the problem is economic, then certain economic perspectives must be introduced to solve the problem.

"One of the most serious problems," he notes, "is overgrazing on winter pastures. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a large number of winter pastures were lost. At that time, there were many more sheep than now, but these were taken to the neighboring Soviet republics for the winter - to the Russian Federation or Azerbaijan. Now the only winter pastures left in Georgia are the Iori Plateau: Samukhi, Vashlovani, and Shiraki Valley. As a result of overgrazing, soil erosion is intensifying, and this is a chain process - its deplorable consequences are gradually increasingly reflected on nature, people, and the economy."

Matcharashvili says they have a plan to engage interest through their film: "This film will be intended for people who are involved in sheep farming. They should see the benefits of the brand DOVLATI we created, perceive us not as a competitor, but as a way to better sell their products and increase the price of their products."

Yet, the film is aimed at the entire society, Matcharashvili notes - "it's for anyone who is a fan of nature, and we give them a way to unite their appreciation of Georgian nature and products. Ultimately, when they buy Guda cheese, it will be a payment not only to the local entrepreneurs from whom they purchased this excellent product, but also to the survival of a species living in this ecosystem, be it a gazelle, a striped hyena, an eastern imperial eagle, griffon vulture, black francolin, ring-necked

pheasant or other living creature."

WHAT DOES THE BRAND DOVLATI HAVE TO DO WITH BIODIVERSITY?

The SABUKO team aims to address this issue by introducing an economic component: the creation of an umbrella brand called DOVLATI. This brand will allow farmers to pool their resources and establish a supply chain. The primary hypothesis behind this initiative is that the higher the price of Guda cheese—whose production involves numerous challenges—the more farmers will be motivated to sell their authentic Guda cheese, made according to traditional methods. The long-term goal is to demonstrate to farmers that they can earn more by having fewer sheep grazing in the same area, thereby reducing pressure on natural resources.

This initiative is part of a broader conservation effort that will, on one hand, support local farmers and shepherds by encouraging the public to purchase Georgian products, and on the other hand, use the revenue generated to fund the restoration of a healthy population of gazelles and other wildlife in the region. The process of desertification will be halted, and diverse ecosystems will be restored. Most importantly, this will help restore harmony between humans and nature.

However, this is not the only issue that needs to be addressed. The challenges are multifaceted, ranging from poaching to gaps in legislation. While DOVLATI seeks to tackle one aspect of this complex problem—reducing pressure on natural resources by increasing the value chain and providing sustainable income for farmers—other areas must also be worked on. Alongside income generation, there is a critical need for an education program aimed at shepherds, encouraging them to avoid overgrazing and to manage pastures sustainably. This approach will help them realize greater long-term economic benefits. Without such efforts, natural resources will be depleted, and farmers may eventually have to abandon their economic activities altogether.

We are thinking and will work in this direction in the future to include nomadic shepherding in the UNESCO World Heritage List as an intangible cultural monument.

HOW WILL THE PRESERVATION OF TUSHETIAN SHEPHERDING HELP PRESERVE PASTURES AND BIODIVERSITY?

As I mentioned, the key is that both must be preserved, and a way of harmonious coexistence must be found, because over the centuries, humans and nature have become an inseparable part of a single ecosystem. Nomadic pastoralism is also an essential element of this ecosystem. We do not view humans and nature as separate entities; rather, humans, with their cultural diversity, are an integral part of the ecosystem. In fact, failing to preserve this relationship would mean losing a crucial part of the ecosystem.



Mapping the Past: How Modern Technology and Archaeology Intertwine to Reveal Georgia's Hidden Civilizations

BY IVAN NECHAEV

On the evening of November 15, the National Trust of Georgia transformed its office into a gateway to the ancient world. The screening of a documentary chronicling a decade of research into the Khrami Canyon's ancient settlements and megalithic structures captivated the audience. Directed by seasoned researcher David Gogvadze and featuring young archaeologist Giorgi Burjanadze, the film bridged past and present with a mix of meticulous historical inquiry and cutting-edge technology.

THE KHRAMI CANYON: A TIMELESS CROSSROADS

Imagine a canyon where millennia of history converge; a place where ancient civilizations once thrived, leaving behind enigmatic megalithic structures that have puzzled researchers for years. The Khrami Canyon, a hidden jewel of Georgian archaeology, was the central character of the evening.

The documentary opened with sweeping aerial shots, immediately setting a tone of wonder. The rugged landscapes of the canyon seemed alive with stories, their mysteries amplified by the persistent curiosity of those who have explored them.

David Gogvadze's calm and reflective narration paired perfectly with the energetic curiosity of Giorgi Burjanadze, brought a modern lens to ancient questions integrating geoinformation systems (GIS). Together, they unraveled the history of civilizations that called the can-



Photo by the author

yon home, showing how human activity shaped and reshaped this land over thousands of years.

MEGALITHS AND MODERNITY: TECHNOLOGY AS A TIME MACHINE

One of the film's standout elements was its portrayal of technology as a key to unlocking ancient secrets. Using GIS, lidar, and other advanced tools, the research team revealed pathways, settlements, and structures buried beneath centuries of erosion and vegetation.

In one particularly striking sequence, lidar scans exposed a hidden network of ancient roads that suggested trade routes and migrations. Visual reconstructions added another layer of depth, turning cold data into living, breathing his-



Photo by the author

tory. These moments weren't just informative; they were transformative, allowing the audience to witness the past coming back to life.

THE STORIES STONES TELL

The megalithic structures of Khrami Canyon are more than remnants of an ancient world; they are symbols of resilience and transformation. The documentary delved into their possible functions, from places of worship to fortifications, while also exploring their spiritual and cultural significance.

Gogvadze and Burjanadze emphasized the importance of viewing these sites not in isolation but as part of a broader narrative. The canyon was a crossroads of civilizations; a place where cultures met, exchanged ideas, and sometimes clashed. These stories were etched into the stones, waiting for modern explorers

to interpret them.

AN INTERGENERATIONAL EXPLORATION

At the heart of the film was a compelling partnership between two researchers from different generations. Gogvadze's decades of experience and Burjanadze's innovative approach symbolized the evolution of archaeology itself; a field increasingly defined by collaboration and interdisciplinary methods.

Their dynamic interaction was not just inspiring, but also instructive, demonstrating how experience and innovation can coexist to create a fuller understanding of the past.

A LOCAL EVENT WITH GLOBAL RESONANCE

The choice to screen the film in the National Trust of Georgia's office added an intimate, conversational tone to the event. The free entrance drew a diverse audience, and the inclusion of English subtitles ensured accessibility for international viewers.

This accessibility was crucial, as the documentary is as much a celebration of Georgian heritage as it is a call to global audiences to appreciate and protect the country's archaeological treasures. The post-screening discussion added another layer of depth, allowing attendees to engage directly with the filmmakers.

The documentary was more than a recounting of historical discoveries; it was a reminder of the vital role history plays in shaping our present and future. By combining science, storytelling, and cultural reflection, Gogvadze and Burjanadze highlighted the interconnectedness of human civilization.

Sara Anna Modzmanashvili-Kemecsei: A Life Dedicated to Helping Georgia's Forgotten Animals

BY KESARIA KATCHARAVA

For Sara Anna Modzmanashvili-Kemecsei, working with animals, particularly those in need, is not just a passion: it is a way of life. Born in a small Hungarian town, she grew up surrounded by animals, her home always filled with the presence of dogs and cats. "Nature and animals were always part of my life," she recalls. Though her degree is in social sciences, Sara's innate love for animals guided her to a path where she could make a difference in their lives.

Her journey took a pivotal turn when she moved to Georgia with her family. While searching for a dog to adopt for her children, Sara visited several shelters across the country. Though she briefly volunteered at all of them, it was Dog Organization Georgia (DOG) that captured her heart. "The level of care towards its residents made me want to volunteer long-term," she explains. What began as casual involvement soon grew into a deep commitment. Over time, Sara transitioned from being a foster parent and volunteer to becoming one of DOG's leaders, alongside her friend and fellow advocate, Maite Iniesta.

Sara's leadership became indispensable after 2016, when DOG's founder, Fiona Coxshall, relocated abroad. Together with Maite, Sara stepped up to ensure that DOG's vital mission—rescuing, rehabilitating, and rehoming Georgia's stray and abandoned animals—continued.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN ANIMAL ADVOCATE

Managing the welfare of countless animals is no small task. For Sara, every day begins early and ends late. No two days are alike; emergencies can disrupt even the most carefully laid plans. "When you work with animals, things can change immediately," she notes. Sara often finds herself structuring her social and private life around the needs of the animals she

cares for. For example, if a dog in her care requires medical treatment every few hours, that becomes her top priority.

The work is physically and emotionally demanding, but Sara's motivation stems from the small successes she witnesses daily. She recounts how building relationships with adoptive families and staying in touch with them helps her stay inspired. "We receive updates, photos, and news about the dogs we've helped, and seeing them thrive gives me extra motivation when I need it."

HEARTWARMING SUCCESS STORIES

Among the many animals Sara has helped, certain cases stand out. One of her favorite projects involves reuniting US Marines stationed in Georgia with the stray dogs they cared for during their deployments. Through DOG's partnership with SPCA International, these dogs find loving homes overseas. One particularly memorable case was Peggy, a stray puppy from the Rustavi Training Base, who now lives in New York City. Peggy has even become an honorary FDNY dog, donning a special vest at her new home in a firehouse near the World Trade Center memorial.

Another remarkable story involves a small puppy found paralyzed by the roadside in Kakheti during one of DOG's community outreach programs. Left in scorching heat without access to water, the pup's survival seemed unlikely. Yet after months of surgery, rehabilitation, and care, he made a full recovery. Today, he lives happily with a family in Tbilisi, his once-tragic life transformed. "Seeing these transformations keeps us going," Sara says.

CHALLENGES IN ANIMAL WELFARE

Despite the rewarding aspects of her work, Sara is candid about the challenges she and DOG face, particularly the lack of government support. "There is no comprehensive policy to address the problem of stray animals in Georgia,"

she explains. While there are localized efforts, they are fragmented and lack enforcement.

Sara believes that any successful strategy must include three key components: regulations, enforcement, and accessible services. For instance, it is unreasonable to expect families in rural areas, living on limited incomes, to neuter and vaccinate their pets when affordable services are unavailable. "It's difficult to blame people when they are left alone without support," she notes.

One of Sara's primary concerns is the unregulated breeding of dogs. She emphasizes the need for stricter laws and societal awareness to combat the trend of purchasing purebred dogs from backyard breeders. Many of these dogs, such as huskies and other high-maintenance breeds, end up abandoned because their owners cannot meet their needs. "Instead of buying a purebred dog as a status symbol, people would be better off adopting a mixed-breed dog, which often has fewer health issues and is easier to handle," she argues.

RESILIENCE AMID ADVERSITY

In addition to these systemic challenges, Sara and DOG have had to contend with political obstacles. The controversial foreign agent law proposed in Georgia threatens the survival of NGOs like DOG, which rely heavily on international funding. "It's immoral to stigmatize organizations that do the job the government is paid to do," Sara states. The law not only undermines the work of animal welfare organizations but also jeopardizes other groups providing critical support to vulnerable populations.

Without foreign donations, Sara warns, DOG's operations could come to a halt, and the government has shown little willingness to step in. "If we're stigmatized and cut off from funding, the problems we address will only escalate," she says.

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Despite these obstacles, Sara remains optimistic about the future. Her goals



Sara Anna Modzmanashvili-Kemecsei with Peggy

for DOG are ambitious yet grounded in the belief that change is possible. She hopes to expand their reach and help even more animals in need. On a personal level, Sara's mission is simple: to ensure that every dog in her care recovers and finds a loving home. "Dog by dog, one day at a time," she says.

Her message to society is one of empowerment: "The only way to create a better world for our children is by getting involved," she notes. She believes that activism, whether in animal welfare or other causes, fosters a sense of responsibility and community. "We've seen so many young people start helping street animals and then become active citizens in other areas of their lives. It shows that change is possible when people take action."

BUILDING A BETTER SOCIETY

For Sara, the journey to creating a better society begins with compassion. She encourages people to support local organizations and to view problems not as insurmountable challenges but as opportunities for growth and improvement. Whether through adopting a stray animal, volunteering time, or advocating for systemic change, every small action contributes to a larger, more compassionate world.

Through her work with DOG, Sara Anna Modzmanashvili-Kemecsei exemplifies what it means to be a change-maker. Her story is a testament to the power of perseverance, empathy, and the belief that even the smallest steps can lead to extraordinary transformations.

Tbilisi's Sonic Avant-Garde: Mutant Radio and Goethe-Institut Redefine Live Performance



Photo by the author

BY IVAN NECHAEV

November 15 became a landmark evening in Tbilisi's experimental music calendar, as Mutant Radio and the Goethe-Institut Georgien joined forces to deliver a captivating trifecta of live performances. With Scott McCulloch, Baal & Mortimer, and Vladimir Ivkovic at the helm, the night pushed the boundaries of sound and storytelling.

SCOTT MCCULLOCH: TURNING NOISE INTO NARRATIVE

Scott McCulloch's name is synonymous with sonic storytelling, and his performance didn't disappoint. Known for his work with Christian Love Forum and Kpor, as well as his 2023 album *A Round of Drinks* (Live Adult Entertainment), McCulloch brought an otherworldly blend of spoken word, experimental

soundscapes, and raw emotion.

Against a backdrop of ambient textures and deliberate dissonance, McCulloch delivered a set that felt like an auditory novel, each track unfolding like a chapter. His Tbilisi-inspired creative evolution added a local resonance to his globally recognized craft. McCulloch's ability to bridge the personal with the universal captivated the audience, making his set both intimate and monumental.

BAAL & MORTIMER: SYNTHESIZING THE SACRED AND THE STRANGE

When Berlin-based Alexandra Gruebler, performing as Baal & Mortimer, took the stage, the atmosphere shifted. Her sound, an intoxicating fusion of vocals, spoken word, and synth, enveloped the room. Drawing heavily from her latest work, *The Fifth Jar* (2024), and earlier album *Deixis* (2020), Baal & Mortimer explored themes of alchemy and autonomy with haunting precision.

Her performance was less about spec-

tle and more about immersion. The deliberate interplay of her ethereal voice with intricate synth patterns created a sonic alchemy that blurred the line between human and machine. Gruebler's command over her craft was evident in the room's silence, broken only by the crescendo of her melodies.

VLADIMIR IVKOVIC: MASTER OF THE ECLECTIC UNKNOWN

Vladimir Ivkovic's set was nothing short of an auditory odyssey. The Serbian-born DJ, founder of Offen Music, and master of the unpredictable, closed the night with a set that defied expectations. Seamlessly blending Serbian experimental music, ambient synth-pop, and rare psychedelia, Ivkovic created a soundscape that was both disorienting and entrancing.

Known for challenging his audience, Ivkovic didn't simply play music; he curated an experience. His ability to juxtapose deep, dark rhythms with fleeting moments of lightness created a tension that kept the crowd on edge, waiting for what would come next.

THE MUTANT RADIO EFFECT: TBILISI AS A CULTURAL VANGUARD

This wasn't just an evening of music; it was a statement about Tbilisi's evolving role as a hub for experimental art. Mutant Radio, a cornerstone of the city's creative scene, paired with the Goethe-Institut to bring together global and local talent in a way that felt fresh and essential.

The evening's lineup reflected a thoughtful curation that appealed to seasoned audiophiles and curious newcomers alike. By weaving together McCulloch's narrative depth, Baal & Mortimer's ethereal explorations, and Ivkovic's chaotic brilliance, the event encapsulated the limitless possibilities of experimental sound.

Tbilisi is fast becoming a meeting point



Photo by the author

for international creatives, and events like this underscore its growing reputation. Mutant Radio's dedication to fos-

tering cross-cultural dialogue and experimental artistry makes it a beacon in the city's cultural landscape.

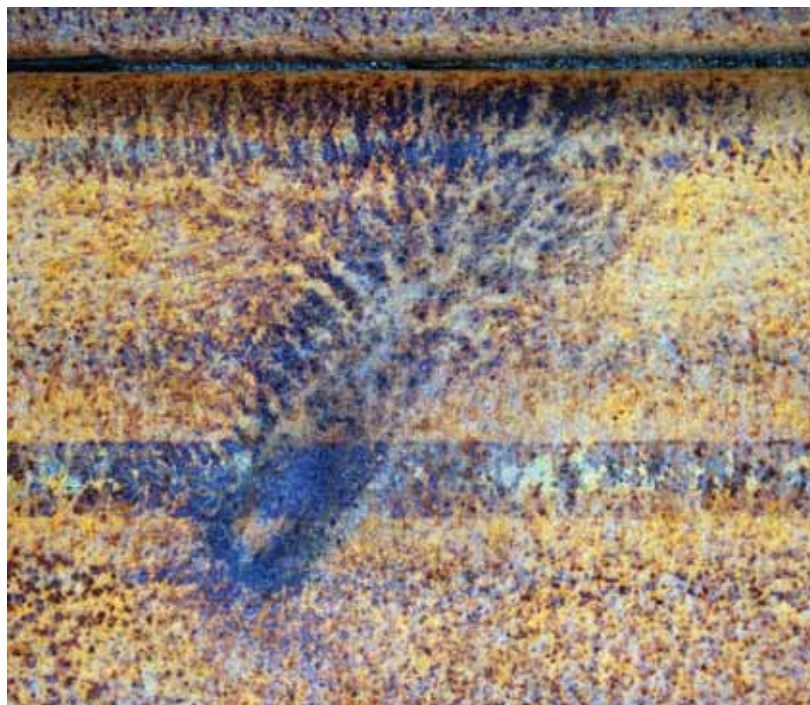


Photo by the author

tRUST me on this.

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

No, I can't stay away long from the massive Soli steelyard in Tbilisi's industrial Eliava district. I found it a few years ago when seeking exactly this kind of place. Lots of new steel, but no roof, so it is exposed to the elements, especially rain and snow. I was looking for that contrast between the blue of the new metal and the corrosion colors, yellows through reds, that light rust will bring. Two atoms of Fe



Photos by the author

(iron), three of O (oxygen): iron oxide, technically. The rust will pop out and come forward from the receding cool-toned background. There are infinite abstract possibilities here. My lifelong fascination with science fiction, and a good dose of pareidolia (seeing forms in nature's random places), combine here with perfect and always surprising results. I never know what I'll get.

It also doesn't hurt, too, that my wife shares a last name with the place's director; so we're related! (He calls me son-in-law, "sidze".) Or that I've given him a

couple of my rust prints for the walls there, with more coming. He gives me free rein to spend hours clambering over everything to find what is waiting for me. Last time, yesterday as I write this, I took an American photographer friend, who had an equally enjoyable time.

The colors also range across the whole visible spectrum, though: you'll never know what you'll find. Nature's processes work their mundane magic and leave me in awe. Purples, greens, blacks, whites all make appearances, sometimes iridescently, sometimes incandescently. I shoot

almost entirely flat surfaces (wanting the whole plane to be in focus), and my choices can be a few inches, or a few meters, in size. Then I edit minimally in Photoshop. Straighten lines to be parallel with the frame edges; heighten color contrast. That's mostly it. Title each piece if I can: I'm looking for what concrete forms or events these abstract images evoke, as whimsical as they might be.

I might eventually get around to using something other than my simple, cheap "kit" lens, the 18-55, which is very versatile. A can also shoot macro, 1:1, with a 90mm lens, if I want to get super-close and perhaps leave most of the frame blurred instead of sharp. That will give an entirely different look. One day.

My new images include "Mary Meets Elizabeth," where two pregnant woman, cousins, from the New Testament compare their situations, one destined to bear Jesus Christ, the other John the Baptist. A fuzzy figure is "Yell". There's a rocket ascending in "Liftoff". Some shots will need time for their names to emerge. Some will suggest various things to different people, and I might leave them untitled. I always invite the viewer to impose their own name anyway. A few will really stand out from every occasion.

This is me at play, freed by familiarity to use my eyes and camera without thinking of technical details. I allow no time limit (except the all-day working hours of the steelyard, closed on Sundays). I will wait some months at least between visits, to give time for both new steel to be exposed as one or more top layers are bought, and for more precipitation to wreak its slow changes. Weather, I do have to watch out for. I need at least a day or two rainless before going, so the steel will be dry. It doesn't matter if shooting day is cloudy or sunny, though cloudy means I don't have to avoid unwanted shadows. Such excursions aren't for everyone, I get that. But for me they are pure joy. They kind of sum up different aspects of who I am as a person and an artist, everything coming together. I wish such delights for everyone, artist or not.

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



Dancing with Destiny: Tragedy of Man as a Visual Feast of Hope and Struggle



Photo by the author

BY IVAN NECHAEV

FROM MADÁCH'S WORDS TO A SYMPHONY OF MOTION

Imre Madách's 19th-century masterpiece is a sprawling exploration of humanity's journey through history, guided by the devilish yet enlightening Lucifer. Geliashvili and Tavdishvili abandon Madách's rich verbal tapestry, replacing it with an expressive choreographic language. In this version, movement becomes the medium for wrestling with humanity's grand questions, turning the stage into a physical and emotional battleground.

Through ensemble sequences and intimate solos, the performers conveyed an existential journey that was at once deeply personal and strikingly universal. Each gesture, pause, and breath seemed

laden with meaning, transforming the original text into a visual and emotional symphony.

TEMPTATION TAKES CENTER STAGE

At the heart of Tragedy of Man is the provocative idea of temptation—not as a moral failing, but as a gateway to self-discovery. The character of Lucifer, subtly embodied through sinuous and predatory choreography, became both a tormentor and a guide. The captivating performances of the soloists vividly depicted the complex interplay of resistance, surrender, and enlightenment that temptation entails.

In their hands, the concept of tempta-

tion was stripped of its binary connotations of good versus evil. Instead, it emerged as a force of duality, one that both challenges and refines humanity's understanding of its purpose.

AN ABSTRACT ODYSSEY: SET, COSTUMES, AND SYMBOLS

The production's visual design was a triumph of abstraction. Geliashvili and Tavdishvili, doubling as set and costume designers, created a minimalist stage punctuated by evocative chaotic defoliation and shifting lightscapes. This stripped-down aesthetic allowed the performers' movements to dominate, while the symbols hinted at deeper metaphysical themes.

Costumes blurred historical and contemporary influences, making the characters feel timeless yet immediate. The performers seemed to exist in a liminal space, their attire suggesting both primordial origins and futuristic possibilities.

SOUNDSCAPES OF STRUGGLE AND HOPE

Michél's original score provided a haunting and atmospheric backbone to the performance. Pulsing rhythms mirrored the performers' movements, while swelling crescendos amplified moments of collective tension. The music wasn't merely an accompaniment; it was a co-creator of the performance, binding the choreography and set design into a cohesive emotional journey.

Notably, Michél incorporated moments of stark silence, allowing the performers' movements to resonate even more profoundly. These pauses felt like metaphysical gulfs, inviting the audience to reflect on the nature of struggle and the fleeting clarity of hope.

PERFORMERS WHO EMBODY THE HUMAN SPIRIT

The ensemble cast delivered a collective performance that was both dynamic and deeply cohesive. Each dancer brought their own layer of nuance, reflecting the diversity of the human experience while maintaining the unity of the overarching narrative.

Standout moments, which captured the fragility of human hope, and anchored the ensemble in scenes of collective



Through ensemble sequences and intimate solos, the performers conveyed an existential journey that was at once deeply personal and strikingly universal

chaos was a depiction of interdependence and tension that seemed to encapsulate humanity's perpetual dance between connection and isolation.

UNIVERSAL THEMES, PERSONAL QUESTIONS

Tragedy of Man transcended its origins as a philosophical text to become an experience of universal resonance. By replacing traditional narrative structure with abstract, symbolic movement, the production invited the audience to project their own questions and fears onto the stage. What does it mean to hope in the face of despair? How do we make sense of our struggles when the answers remain elusive? These questions lingered long after the final curtain, a testament to the production's emotional and intellectual power.

In this bold reinterpretation, Tragedy of Man became more than a theatrical performance: it was a meditation on existence, a mirror held up to the audience's own inner struggles. By daring to strip away conventional storytelling and embrace abstraction, Geliashvili and Tavdishvili created a production that was both deeply personal and profoundly universal.



Photo by the author



Photo by the author



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