



FOCUS

ON THE PROTESTS

Police brutality, global reproach, and increasing isolation. We take a closer look at Georgia's escalating crisis

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Photo by Ezz Gaber

Interview with Terje Helland: Georgia's Crossroads and the Consequences of Inaction

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

After conducting extensive research, I have built a follower base, including many Georgians, who turn to my X feed for information about Georgia. Terje Helland, External Advisor at the European Neighborhood Council in Brussels, tells Radio Free Europe/RL's Georgian Service. Helland has become one of the most popular and trusted sources on X when it comes to reporting the Georgian news to the wider Western audience. "My motivation for engaging was the belief that the West needed to understand the consequences of inaction: what happened in Ukraine could easily repeat itself in Georgia," he says.

WHAT'S AT STAKE RIGHT NOW FOR GEORGIA? WHAT'S BEING DECIDED?

It all boils down to a matter of autocracy versus democracy. It's about whether Georgia can still be considered a democracy. From a broader perspective, Georgia has clearly abandoned the Euro-Atlantic path it has followed for decades.

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Photo by Erekle Poladishvili/GT

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| Prepared for Georgia Today Business by | | | | | | | | | | | |
| As of 02-Dec-2024 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Markets | | | | | Markets | | | | | | |
| BONDS | Price | w/w | m/m | STOCKS | Price | w/w | m/m | | | | |
| GEORG 04/26 | 94.44 (YTM 7.03%) | -0.4% | +0.5% | Bank of Georgia (BGEO LN) | GBP 40.05 | +7.8% | -2.0% | | | | |
| GBAIL 06/28 | 98.47 (YTM 7.79%) | -0.7% | -0.2% | Georgia Capital (GCEO LN) | GBP 10.00 | +3.5% | -1.0% | | | | |
| GBGGG 9/12 PERP | 98.64 (YTM 9.56%) | -0.4% | +0.0% | TBC Bank Group (TBGG LN) | GBP 27.05 | +6.1% | -4.2% | | | | |
| SILNET 01/27 | 100.63 (YTM 8.04%) | -0.3% | +0.1% | | | | | | | | |
| TBC 8.894 PERP | 95.93 (YTM 11.62%) | -0.2% | +0.4% | COMMODITIES | | | | | Price | w/w | m/m |
| TBC 10 1/4 PERP | 99.83 (YTM 10.61%) | +0.3% | +1.6% | Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl) | 77.46 | -4.3% | +8.2% | | | | |
| | | | | Gold Spot (US\$/OZ) | 2 648.54 | +0.2% | +2.7% | | | | |
| INDICES | | | | CURRENCIES | | | | | | | |
| | Price | w/w | m/m | | Price | w/w | m/m | | | | |
| 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% | | | | |

Ukraine Latest: NATO 'Waiting for Trump' on Key Decision about Kyiv Invite



Photo by Oleg Petrasjuk of the Ukrainian 24th Mechanized Brigade. Via AP Photo

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

Here are key battlefield developments as of Thursday, December 5:

A Russian ship shot at a German military helicopter over the Baltic Sea using "signal munitions," according to German foreign minister Annalena Baerbock. Talking at a NATO meeting in Brussels, Ms. Baerbock confirmed the incident between Russia and Germany, amid heightened

tensions over Berlin's support for Ukraine. NATO countries have halted their exercises in the Baltic region amid the latest disruption to pipelines and underwater cables, likely damaged in sabotage attempts.

Latvian foreign minister Baiba Braze said some NATO members were waiting for Donald Trump to enter the White House before they make a decision on whether to invite Kyiv to join the alliance. Ukraine urged NATO foreign ministers to issue it an invitation at a meeting in Brussels this week, but movement on this front appears unlikely while there

is opposition from some capitals and the ongoing transition in Washington. Mr. Trump has said he will end Russia's war with Ukraine "in a day," without explaining how, and his team's plans for the Ukraine policy remain unclear.

"Everybody is waiting for the new US administration to start working," Ms. Braze told Reuters. "That is one aspect that is said or unsaid - but it's a reality."

UKRAINE DOWNS 30 DRONES LAUNCHED BY RUSSIA OVERNIGHT

Ukraine's air force said Russia launched

44 drones and two Iskander-M ballistic missiles overnight.

Of the total 44 drones, the Ukrainian air force shot down 30 and lost track of 12, likely due to electronic warfare, with one drone heading toward Belarus, according to the statement.

UKRAINE MAKES GAINS NEAR KUPIANSK AND HALTS RUSSIA'S NORTHERN ADVANCE

Ukrainian forces have reportedly pushed back Russian troops from recently-taken areas near the northern city of Kharkiv.

The Institute for the Study of War said Ukrainian troops have "eliminated a Russian bridgehead on the west (right) bank of the Oskil River near Novomylnsk (north of Kupiansk and northeast of Dvorichna) and significantly reduced another Russian bridgehead on the right bank in the direction of Masyutivka-Zapadne area (southeast of Dvorichna)," citing Ukrainian military observer Kostyantyn Mashovets.

It added: "Russian forces continued offensive operations along the Kupiansk-Svatove-Kreminna line on 4 December, but did not advance," referring to the northern theater of the frontline.

Additionally, Ukrainian forces recently marginally advanced within Toretsk near Bakhmut, the ISW said. It cited geolocated footage published on Tuesday indicating that Ukrainian forces recently marginally advanced along Ryaboshapky Street in central Toretsk.

MILITARY INTELLIGENCE: RUSSIA HAS FIRED AT LEAST 60 NORTH KOREAN MISSILES AGAINST UKRAINE

A Ukrainian military spokesperson told

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty that Russia has fired at least 60 North Korean-supplied ballistic missiles. "Their accuracy, in principle, is not very high. We understand that the technology with which they were manufactured is outdated," Andrii Cherniak, a military intelligence spokesperson, said, answering questions about the likelihood of Russia's use of KN-23 ballistic missiles.

Along with ammunition and missiles, thousands of North Korean soldiers have been fighting in Russia's Kursk region to expel Ukrainian forces there, according to the Kyiv Independent. Ukraine launched a surprise incursion into the Kursk region in August, but has since lost more than 40% of the territory it had captured as Russian forces have mounted waves of counter-assaults.

CHECHEN LEADER KADYROV SAYS UKRAINIAN DRONE CAUSED CIVILIAN CASUALTIES

A Ukrainian drone struck Grozny, the capital of Russia's southern Chechnya region, and caused civilian casualties, state news agency RIA quoted Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov as saying on Wednesday.

Kadyrov said the drone had struck the roof of a building housing a special police regiment. There were no details on the number of casualties or whether he was referring to deaths or injuries.

Kadyrov has been a vocal supporter of Russia's war in Ukraine, to which he has contributed Chechen forces.

On November 29, the roof of a military training center in the Chechen city of Gudermes was set ablaze in what appeared to be the first Ukrainian drone attack directed against Chechnya since the start of the war.

Ukraine Imposes Sanctions on Georgian Dream Officials



Ukrainian President Zelensky

BY TEAM GT

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky signed Decree No. 816/2024, introducing sanctions against Georgian officials responsible for what he described as the country's "pro-Russian policies" and the violent suppression of pro-European protests on December 4.

Zelensky announced the decision in a video address, emphasizing the importance of a timely and firm international response.

"If the international community fails to react swiftly and decisively, we risk losing decades [of work] and depriving countries of their freedom," he said, urging the United States, the European Union, and other global powers to follow Ukraine's lead.

The sanctions focus on 19 key figures, including billionaire and founder of the ruling Pro-Russian Georgian Dream party, Bidzina Ivanishvili, as well as senior officials:

Irakli Kobakhidze - Prime Minister of Georgia

Vakhtang Gomelauri - Head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs

Grigol Liluashvili - Chief of the Georgian Security Service

Kakha Kaladze - Mayor of Tbilisi

Mamuka Mdinardze - Executive Secretary of "Georgian Dream"

Otar Partskhaladze - Former Prosecutor General of Georgia

Previously, the Kremlin speaker Dmitry Peskov stated that opposition protests in Georgia resembled Ukraine's "Orange Revolution."

On November 28, Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze announced that Georgia would delay EU accession talks until the end of 2028. The decision triggered mass protests in Tbilisi, where thousands gathered in Freedom Square. Clashes between police and demonstrators turned violent, with authorities using water cannons and tear gas to disperse the crowd.

On November 29, Ukraine's Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned the Georgian government for using force to disperse peaceful protests in Tbilisi and expressed disappointment over Georgia's decision to suspend talks on European Union membership until 2028.

Header image: CNN

Leaked! List of Violent Police Officers Involved in Tbilisi Protest Crackdowns

BY TEAM GT

Mtavari Arkhi reported Thursday that it had obtained a list of special force officers and their leaders who have been participating in the inhuman and violent crackdown and detention of protesters in recent days. The list was provided to Mtavari Arkhi from an anonymous source

in the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Over a week, these perpetrators have been violently attacking people protesting the illegitimate government's handover of the country to Russia," the TV company wrote on social media. "Ivanishvili's special forces operate without identification numbers while wearing masks, so that their identities remain hidden, although now their names will be known to the whole of Georgia, as well as to their family members, friends and relatives.

"We believe that everyone should know the names of the perpetrators who are kicking young people in the face, using tear gas against them, poisoning them with prohibited chemicals, and mercilessly beating those who are handcuffed after being arrested. Dozens of injured people are still receiving treatment, and a 22-year-old young man is still in a coma."

After the list was published, protesters began hunting for them on Facebook. Individuals on the published list quickly began deleting their personal pages.



Police in Freedom Square. Source: FB

Police Brutality in Georgia: A Call for Accountability and Reform

BY TEAM GT

In the past week, Georgia has witnessed escalating violence during countrywide protests against the government's controversial policies. What began as peaceful demonstrations in Tbilisi quickly turned into scenes of chaos, as riot police and special forces deployed brutal tactics to disperse protestors. The violence has sparked both nationwide and international outrage, drawing attention to the alarming pattern of police brutality, particularly against those exercising their fundamental right to peaceful assembly.

Between November 18 and 29, a delegation from the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) visited Georgia to assess the country's treatment of detainees. The CPT's focus included police custody conditions, the safety of prisoners, and the treatment of those detained during ongoing demonstrations in Tbilisi. The delegation's findings will undoubtedly play a crucial role in the ongoing scrutiny of Georgia's law enforcement practices, especially regarding the violent repression of protests.

BRUTAL CRACKDOWN ON PROTESTERS

The nightly protests in Georgia began as a reaction to last week's governmental decision to delay accession negotiations with the European Union, following on from weeks of protest against the "illegitimate elections," moves widely seen as a shift away from European values and a potential alignment with Russian inter-

ests. Demonstrators, including thousands of ordinary Georgians, opposition politicians, and human rights advocates of all ages, gathered on Rustaveli Avenue in Tbilisi to voice their dissatisfaction with the Georgian Dream ruling party and to demand the country's continued path toward European integration.

However, the protests soon became a hotspot for police violence. Special forces and riot police have been using water cannons, pepper spray, and tear gas against peaceful protesters, escalating tensions and provoking outrage both domestically and internationally. Despite the protesters' largely non-violent stance, seeing only a small group of youth reacting with violent tendencies (shooting fireworks, throwing objects and vandalizing public property to build barriers in the street), police forces have repeatedly retaliated with increasingly aggressive tactics, including the use of tear gas and chemical-mix water jets aimed at individuals.

The use of chemical irritants like tear gas and pepper spray in particular has been widely criticized for being disproportionate and indiscriminate. UN Special Rapporteur Gina Romero highlighted the risk of serious injury and even death caused by these weapons, particularly when used in violation of international standards, which clearly state that less-lethal weapons should only be used as a last resort.

On December 2, Police Chief Vazha Siradze claimed that the police were using "proportional force" against the demonstrators. Yet numerous reports from detainees and medical professionals tell a different story. According to the Georgian Public Defender Levan Ioseliani, of the 156 detainees he visited



Photo by Erekle Poladishvili/GT

at the beginning of the week, 124—roughly 80%—claimed they had been subjected to violence and inhumane treatment. Ioseliani described this as "a very disturbing number," noting that the percentage of individuals claiming police abuse was rising alarmingly with each successive protest. "This is a very worrying indicator," he said, urging the police to adhere strictly to legal norms and use only legitimate force.

Youth and journalists have also fallen victim to police violence, with a disturbing video circulating this week showing a young teen being kicked in the face by two police officers, despite already being on the ground and defenseless. A 22-year-old remains in hospital in a coma. On Tuesday, mothers across the country gathered outside police stations in a display of solidarity, calling on police officers to stand with the people, urging them to uphold their oath to serve and protect citizens, rather than perpetuating violence and injustice.

Human Rights (ODIHR) expressed concern about the excessive use of force by the police, urging Georgian authorities to facilitate peaceful gatherings and engage in non-violent dialogue.

In the face of growing public outcry and international condemnation, the Georgian government must take immediate steps to address the issue of police brutality and ensure the protection of fundamental rights. This includes holding law enforcement officers accountable for their actions, especially those who have violated the rights of protesters, journalists, and bystanders.

Mid-week, a long list of offending police officers was released, along with photos taken from social media. Many of those men have since deleted their accounts for fear of repercussions.

The CPT's visit to Georgia provides a critical opportunity to review the country's progress in addressing these human rights concerns. However, it is clear that without a commitment to meaningful reform, including improved police training, better safeguards for detainees, and a restoration of trust between the government and the people, Georgia risks deepening its political and social crisis.

As the protesters continue to demand justice, they are not only fighting for their right to free speech but for the soul of their nation. Georgia's future—one aligned with European democratic values—depends on the government's willingness to uphold the principles of freedom, justice, and accountability. The eyes of the international community are now firmly fixed on Tbilisi, watching whether the Georgian government will heed the call for reform or continue its descent into authoritarianism.

Several Georgian journalists have also been injured during the dispersal of protests on Rustaveli Avenue. Aleksandre Keshelashvili, a journalist from the online news outlet Publika, was detained while reporting on the protest. According to Publika, Keshelashvili was subjected to excessive force during his detention.

Ioseliani and his team from the Public Defender's Office continue their work, visiting detainees in isolation cells across the country to ensure their rights are respected. Ioseliani emphasized the importance of the Special Investigation Service taking strict action in response to violations as part of a broader push for justice.

A PATH FORWARD: ACCOUNTABILITY AND REFORM

As the violence continues to unfold, international bodies have also raised alarms over the Georgian government's handling of the public protests. The Office for Democratic Institutions and

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Interview with Terje Helland: Georgia's Crossroads and the Consequences of Inaction

Continued from page 1

The Georgian Dream has now essentially declared they are no longer pursuing that route, and this has led to widespread protests, with people taking to the streets in massive numbers.

ON THAT PIVOTAL STATEMENT, WHY DO YOU THINK THEY SAID WHAT THEY SAID? AND WHY NOW?

I think it was a bit of an unforced error. There was an emotional reaction when the European Parliament, with a significant majority, declared the government illegitimate and called for new elections. It seems to me that the Prime Minister's response was an instinctive reaction to hit back at the European Parliament. It's not the first time Georgian Dream has reacted in this way—remember when they decided not to invite diplomats to the government's opening ceremony after the diplomatic corps decided to skip it?

YOU WROTE THAT THE "UNPLANNED, ALMOST CHILDISH STATEMENT ABOUT NOT PURSUING EU MEMBERSHIP MAY FINALLY COST GEORGIAN DREAM THEIR GRIP ON POWER." DOES IRAKLI KOBAKHIDZE STRIKE YOU AS SOMEONE PRONE TO SUCH UNPLANNED STATEMENTS, OR DO YOU THINK EVERY MOVE IS GREENLIT BY BIDZINA IVANISHVILI?

That's a very good point. At the very least, I can say that if they indeed planned it, the timing was absolutely disastrous,



Georgian Dream has essentially been a Trojan horse, working to steer Georgia away from the Western path

and they grossly underestimated the reaction it would provoke. At a time when they are desperately trying to legitimize the elections and their new parliament, making a statement about abandoning the EU path couldn't have come at a worse moment. If that was indeed planned, it's an incredibly high-risk gamble. Now, they've handed the opposition momentum and further alienated the international community, which is horrified by how security forces are brutalizing their own citizens. It's incredibly revealing just how desperate Georgian Dream and Ivanishvili must be. Even after people are detained by the police, they are beaten severely and systematically. This goes beyond just violence—it's torture. And when you look at the police, who are faceless, anonymous figures hiding behind masks, it's not just cowardice—it's the face of oppression, the face of dictatorship. This police impunity, concealed behind masks, I fear, will only end in tragedy.

SO, IF WE'RE TALKING HYPOTHETICALS, DO WE HAVE TWO OPTIONS HERE? EITHER IVANISHVILI MADE A HUGE MISTEP, OR KOBAKHIDZE, LOYAL AS HE IS TO HIS PATRON, ACTED ON HIS OWN AND CROSSED A LINE?

I think Ivanishvili and Kobakhidze have likely discussed this before, but once again, the timing was awful.

YOU ALSO MENTIONED THE RETURN OF THE FOREIGN AGENTS BILL EARLIER THIS YEAR. COULD THERE BE A DEEPER MOTIVE BEHIND THIS, LIKE IVANISHVILI'S USING THE BILL TO UNDERMINE THE PEOPLE'S ENERGY TO PROTEST THE ELECTION RESULTS?

My theory is that Georgian Dream has



Terje Helland. Source: strandbuen

essentially been a Trojan horse, working to steer Georgia away from the Western path, which the majority of Georgians support. Ivanishvili has tried to ride two horses, claiming to support EU integration while simultaneously working against it. When the EU announced it would open accession talks in December 2023, Georgian Dream panicked, fearing that they would lose control. That's when they revived the Foreign Agents bill and pushed through anti-LGBT laws—to make EU integration with Georgia impossible.

LET'S LOOK AT PUTIN'S RECENT COMMENTS ON GEORGIA, WHERE HE EXPRESSED APPROVAL BUT STRESSED THAT "WE DON'T TOUCH IT," WHAT'S YOUR READING OF THAT?

As long as Georgian Dream and Ivanishvili are in charge, Putin doesn't need to interfere. He has influence over the process through them. Georgian Dream has orchestrated a de facto takeover of state institutions: the government, the judiciary, the security service, and other key regulatory bodies. It's an autocracy now. The only independent institution left is the presidency, but when it is replaced by this football player at the end of the month, the takeover will be complete. I'm convinced that Putin has full control over Ivanishvili, financially and probably through kompromat. The



If the population loses this battle, it could drag on for years

Kremlin is aware of the strong anti-Russian sentiment among Georgians, so they tread carefully, trying not to provoke the population. They prefer to keep their distance and let Georgians deal with it themselves.

WHAT DO YOU EXPECT FROM THE WEST IN RESPONSE TO THESE DEVELOPMENTS?

The West, particularly the EU, is standing by, ready to help if Georgia chooses the right path—one that doesn't involve Georgian Dream. The West needs to focus on three things now. First, they should not legitimize any part of the current government, whether it's the parliament, the government, or the elections. Second, they need to impose effective sanctions on the Georgian Dream party and those surrounding Ivanishvili who are responsible for the current

situation. Third, the West should demand new elections under international supervision to decide Georgia's future.

ON THE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WITH THE US, GEORGIAN DREAM DOESN'T SEEM DETERRED. THE PM SAID THEY'RE BANKING ON THE UPCOMING TRUMP ADMINISTRATION. IS THERE ANY CHANCE IVANISHVILI COULD CUT A DEAL WITH TRUMP, GIVEN HIS REPUTATION AS A SAVVY DEALMAKER?

There's strong bipartisan support for Georgia in the US, especially for its Euro-Atlantic aspirations. I'm not concerned that Georgia will lose US support due to the new administration. If Georgia loses that support, it will be because of Georgian Dream, not the new administration. The policy towards Georgia will continue to be driven by Georgia's friends in the US.

IF THE CURRENT STANDOFF CONTINUES AND NEITHER SIDE BUDGES, HOW LONG CAN THIS GO ON FOR?

If the population loses this battle, it could drag on for years. That's why it's so critical for the West to remain firm and for the Georgian people to stay vigilant and committed to this fight. It's a battle that needs to be fought to the very end.



When you look at the police - faceless, anonymous figures hiding behind masks - it's not just cowardice, it's the face of oppression



Photo by Erekle Poladishvili/GT



In Support of Georgia's Cause

OP-ED BY VICTOR KIPIANI, CHAIRMAN OF GEOCASE, A TBILISI-BASED THINK TANK

The West's support of democracy and the sustainability of Georgia has always been critical. These days, however, such support has, practically-speaking, become particularly decisive. A series of recent actions by the Georgian Dream ruling party has set in motion a cascade of risks now threatening the nation. These risks are multifaceted, ranging from the country's damaged reputation to the very integrity of its social fabric.

What should the Western policy-makers bear in mind when it comes to doubling down on Georgia's democratic resilience and institutional capacity building? How should our partners in the West react to the ongoing policy line of "disconnect" from the very Western order that this country has been pursuing for the last three decades?

To start with, we need to keep up the "name-and-shame" approach, giving timely and due assessment to the backsliding of the democratic order in Georgia, and pointing out the perpetrators behind it with no hesitation or ambiguity in wording. This is about sending a powerful message of solidarity to pro-democracy forces in the country, and such support is of paramount significance in these very uneasy times.

The next steps are political in nature and involve providing explicit, unambiguous input toward Georgia's immediate restoration of democratic order and the rule of law. The primary responsibility for this lies with the United States and the European Union. Two key initiatives, the MEGOBARI Act and the Georgian People's Act, must advance through the US Congress and be implemented without delay. In parallel, the "name-and-shame" strategy should be expanded and executed broadly.

A number of other measures could also be placed on the agenda, such as the proposal for Georgia's Marshall Plan, which would send a strong message not only to the Georgian people, but to the wider region. This plan should focus on a substantial aid package to stimulate Georgia's economy and enhance its investment profile. Beyond its economic impact, the plan would signal the United States' commitment to maintaining its influence in the region and



countering malign hybrid warfare from adversaries. Supporting Georgian democratic resilience and sovereignty has to be perceived within the larger context of the Western-led soft power order in both Georgia and the region.

The European Union must also take a strong stand. It has a clear responsibility to continue its support in "beefing up" Georgia, especially as an EU candidate country, by ensuring that the path toward European integration is meaningful and results-driven. The nine conditions set by the EU for opening accession talks should remain as the linchpin of EU-Georgia integration, despite the current suspension of talks.

In addition to the EU integration roadmap, further measures are critical to assist Georgia's pro-democracy groups. Grassroots support for Europe is the foundation of Georgian resilience in resisting any attempts to derail its pro-EU integration, institutional capacity building, and development. This support is essential in ensuring that Georgia remains on the path to democracy and competitiveness.

Yet it is important that we recognize that the challenges faced by the European Union in dealing with Georgia are complex. The EU must remain steadfast in its principles and standards while navigating the delicate political situation in Georgia. A key issue in this regard is whether to maintain or reverse the EU's visa-free entry regime for Georgian nationals. While this is a debatable issue, my view is that maintaining the current regime

serves the EU's long-term interests and strengthens pro-European sentiments among Georgians.

The current crisis in Georgia serves as a stark reminder to both the Georgian people and the West that we must prove again that the decades

of investing in our partnership and cooperation have not been in vain. This moment is a critical test of our shared commitment to a future together. It is a test we must pass, reaffirming our mutual faith in the path ahead.



The current crisis serves as a stark reminder to the Georgian people and West that we must prove that the decades of investing in our partnership have not been in vain



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Georgian Prime Minister Emphasizes Commitment to EU Integration despite Domestic and Int'l Challenges



Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze. Source: gov.ge

BY TEAM GT

At various press conferences over this past week, Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze has affirmed his government's steadfast commitment to securing Georgia's European Union membership by

2030, claiming that the goal of EU integration remains central to the ruling Georgian Dream party's vision for the country's future. Kobakhidze stressed that this goal would be pursued through peace, dignity, and prosperity, rejecting any attempts to use coercion or divide Georgian society.

"Our approach to this goal is through peace, dignity, and prosperity, not blackmail," Kobakhidze said. "We will not

tolerate manipulation or attempts to divide our society through artificial means."

The Prime Minister's comments came in response to a statement issued by Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, and Kaja Kallas, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs. The two officials are among many who have expressed concern over Georgia's recent political actions and appar-

ent shift away from European values, including the plan to delay EU accession talks until 2028, a decision that many perceive as a step back for Georgia's European aspirations.

Kobakhidze rejected these statements, labeling them as "completely one-sided" and stressed that Georgia had not "suspended" its EU integration process. He further clarified that the Georgian government had worked tirelessly to secure the EU membership candidate status, despite facing what he described as "artificial obstacles" from both European officials and domestic opposition.

The PM assured that Georgia would continue its European integration journey, and his government would take all necessary steps to facilitate this process and deliver on commitments made under the EU Association and Free Trade Agreements, which Georgia intends to fulfill "in more than 90% of the outlined areas."

The Prime Minister also discussed the upcoming leadership changes in the United States and the European Union, expressing optimism that these transitions would present an opportunity to reset relations with Georgia's western partners. "We have great hope that relations with both the United States and the European Union will be qualitatively rebooted," he stated.

In response to ongoing protests, which have erupted in Georgia's capital, Tbilisi, and other cities, Kobakhidze condemned

the violence associated with the demonstrations. He accused protestors of instigating clashes, particularly targeting law enforcement officers and the parliament building. While Kobakhidze acknowledged that the Interior Ministry had refrained from intervening initially, he stated that the situation escalated once the protests turned violent, with demonstrators using dangerous weapons such as pyrotechnics and throwing stones at police.

The Prime Minister also expressed concern about the international response to the violence, accusing foreign entities of supporting a "Maidan-inspired scenario," a reference to the 2013-2014 protests in Ukraine that led to the Maidan Revolution. He specifically criticized the opposition United National Movement party for allegedly inciting violence and unrest in Georgia, likening their actions to those that destabilized Ukraine.

Kobakhidze praised Georgia's law enforcement officers for their role in maintaining stability, and commended Interior Minister Vakhtang Gomelauri and other officers for their actions, which he claimed were in line with international standards.

He stated that, despite the challenges, Georgia has managed to avoid the political instability seen in neighboring countries, particularly Ukraine, and has maintained peace. "We have saved our country from 'Ukrainization' and maintained peace," he said.

BUSINESS

Int'l Grant Revenue to Drop by GEL 91 Million in 2025



Source: vibes.okdiario

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

The Ministry of Finance released a budget draft for 2025 this week, illustrating drastic changes in grant revenue predictions.

The most significant aspects are as follows:

International Grants: projected to decline by GEL 91 million, amounting to

59.9 million.

EU Grants: projected to decline due to the European Union, one of the key grant contributors, suspending a three-year program worth EUR 121 million as a result of the country's anti-democratic route.

Budget Revision: the completed draft projects the additional decrease of GEL 366 thousand

Such considerable changes reveal a major shift in international financial support for Georgia in the current political climate.

ENKA Wins Namakhvani HPP Case: Georgia Must Pay

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

Turkish company ENKA has won the international case concerning the termination of the Namakhvani hydro-power plant project, requiring Georgia to pay \$383.2 million in compensation.

On September 20, 2021, ENKA Renewables announced the contract for the Namakhvani Cascade HPP project was being terminated, following months of continuous protest by the local population and environmental activists. The Namakhvani HPP was being built in the Tskaltubo and Tsageri municipalities, north of Kutaisi, by Turkish-Norwegian company, ENKA Renewables LLC.

Georgia must now compensate ENKA, with the company stating that once the compensation is settled, they will



Photo: Caucasus Watch

announce further details to investors.

"The termination was a decision made by the company," said Irakli Kobakhidze, who was then Chairman of the Georgian Dream party. "Energy independence remains one of our top priorities. While this sends a negative signal for future

investments, the Georgian government is committed to making substantial investments, particularly in the energy sector. We have a 10-year action plan in place, which includes significant efforts in energy, with plans to attract billions of dollars in investments."

Geostat: Business turnover up 14% in Q3

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

Geostat this week released new data, revealing the growth of the Georgian business sector in 3Q2024. The detailed breakdown is as follows:

Business turnover: Increased by 13.7% to GEL 58.8 billion

Production value: Increased by 16.3% to GEL 23.1 billion

Purchases: Increased by 8.7% to GEL 30.8 billion



Business turnover. Source: numbersknowhow

Employment: Increased by 4.0% to 788.4 thousand people

Wages: Average monthly pay reached GEL 2,190.1

Interestingly, trade and arts/entertain-

ment had turnovers of 34% and 33.6%, respectively, placing these sectors at the top, whereas manufacturing, with 19.6%, and construction, with 19.5%, ranked highest in terms of production value.

International Women's Student Society- Empowering Women in the Surgical Field

BY SHELBI R. ANKIEWICZ

The International Women's Surgical Society (IWSS) at Tbilisi State University (TSU) is working to empower women who are interested in entering the surgical field, an industry that has a history of being male-dominated in most countries.

TSU's branch of the society was established in December 2023 by co-founder Shiona Fernandes. A fifth-year student studying medicine, Fernandes says there were numerous organizations for medicine, but all of them had a strong male presence, and she wanted to create one that was female-oriented to empower women in surgery. Fernandes tells GEORGIA TODAY that TSU's branch of IWSS is the first one to have been formed in Georgia.

The organization is not only for medical students, but also for female doctors to have a platform where they can share the challenges and experiences they face in the field, and how they have overcome any difficulties. Having this two-way conversation between professionals and students who are striving toward the same career gives assurance that it's a profession in which females can be successful.

Since Fernandes says male dominance in surgery is an international issue, with what she says is about a 3:1 ratio, IWSS has encouraged students in other countries to also open IWSS branches. After IWSS was formed at TSU, Fernandes and others used their connections to encourage chapters that have launched in Mumbai, India, the UAE, and Oman. Although there are several reasons why females stray away from entering surgery as a profession, Fernandes explains that sexual harassment plays a



Participants actively working during one of the workshops. Source: IWSS

decisive factor that holds students back from pursuing it.

Various international reports can be found that explain accounts of sexual abuse, or which detail sexual harassment that has occurred in the workplace, Fernandes tells us. Indeed, the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) published a report in March 2024 that explains the gender parity in the field, highlighting sexual harassment as a key indicator.

"20% of plastic surgery residents (72% of them were women) experienced sexual harassment. In addition, most (74%) did not feel comfortable reporting it," wrote ASPS in relation to a study done on plastic and reconstructive surgery.

To combat these challenges within the industry, IWSS holds events and conferences for students and professionals alike to share their experiences and educate others. On November 30 and December 1, IWSS held the 'Blades over Beauty'

conference, which focused solely on plastic surgery. Fernandes explains how various conferences can be found in Georgia in relation to the medical industry, but it's rare to come across one tailored to plastic surgery.

The conference united more than 200 attendees, including students, volunteers, and medical professionals. Its aim was to focus on the precision of the blade and the empowerment of women. There were presentations, workshops, discussions, and more during the two-day event. Numerous procedures fall under plastic surgery, including breast implants, liposuction for fat removal, facelifts, reconstruction after skin burns, aesthetic gynecology, and many others.

Nearly all of these topics were covered, even those involving dentistry, which Fernandes says many people don't often associate with medicine. There were various workshops during Blades over



Attendees waiting to make incisions on chicken limbs. Source: IWSS

Beauty to get participants actively involved in the learning process. One was a plasma pen workshop where attendees did incisions on chicken limbs; then there was a cosmetic suturing workshop. During this, Fernandes says everyone took needles and sutured, which is similar to sewing or stitching, on a suturing pad. Then there was lingual suturing, where participants took extra skin from an animal tongue and practiced suturing and reconstructing it.

Although IWSS was established to empower women in the surgical field, males were also allowed to attend the conference: it was open to all medical and dental students regardless of which university they attended. Fernandes tells us that this field is especially important to highlight within Georgia, because the profession sees a smaller amount of plastic surgeons coming in compared to other countries.

"Plastic surgery is still not fully discovered in Georgia. There were Georgian students in attendance, so I hope that, through this, plastic surgery can start to get recognition in the country," says Fernandes.

Among the speakers were Dr. Mariam Tamar Miladze (aesthetic doctor), Dr. Sopiko Azrumelashvili (dermatologist and cosmetologist), Dr. Lika Kakachisvili (plastic surgeon), Dr. Noury Adel (oral and maxillofacial surgery specialist [MSc]), and Dr. Tamari Darjania (dermatocosmetologist). This is the third conference IWSS has held since it opened its chapter last year. Previous conferences focused on general surgery, and one was carried out in collaboration with Dandy Georgia, a neuroscience club. IWSS is currently available for all medical students at TSU, and there is also a dentistry division to empower females entering or working in dentistry surgery.

Rustaveli Avenue, our Post-Soviet Battleground

BLOG BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

This is not about politics. This is about our socio-political culture, which we have either cultivated in the last 35 years or have relinquished due to our inability to digest the post-soviet vicissitudes of life. National freedom and independence are of course two sweet marvels to taste, but they are also extremely hard to live by. The finally achieved independence was preceded by the infamous 70 years of dubious socialist moral inertia and economic sluggishness, packed with those weird dreams about communism. Most of us see it as 70 years of lost time, buried talent, depressed wits, oversized lies and universal premeditated personal or public denunciation.

Let's call it good luck that the soviet power waned, together with its morbid social, political, moral, cultural, philosophical and economic attributes and ingredients, eventually to be declared defunct. As a substitute for the erstwhile anomalous social order, there came good old capitalism, but it came in its wildest form; with a misrepresented market economy and distorted industrial relations. The collapse of the Soviet system, including in Sakartvelo, caught many off guard. And that's where it all rapidly started: privatization of land and means of production, private property taking precedence over public, emergence of new "haves" and "have-nots," interminable fights in-earnest for political power, lost jobs, annihilated scientific and administrative titles, a shattered educational system, the metamorphosis of interpersonal relations, an alteration of values, modification of traditions, painstaking handling of various types of maladjust-



Photo by Erekle Poladishvili/GT

ments, and the ubiquitous street manifestations and never-ending demonstrations petitioning the frequently-changing authorities for something unlikely.

In Georgia, the main venue for turning up the vox populi to full blast is Rustaveli Avenue, the main thoroughfare of the capital city. Rustaveli Avenue has weathered a myriad of political outbursts and social explosions. This street, beloved by Tbilisians of many generations, has gone through hundreds of marches up and down the avenue by millions (aggregately) of protesters of every possible ilk that our civilization knows. The protesters' march started 35 years ago and has not stopped since. Some of those

marches have ended in ad-hoc attempts at a coup d'état or even revolution, changing the governments to good or bad.

The famous Rustaveli Avenue has seen thousands of motley political slogans of various content, and has heard the sounds of innumerable megaphones of tens of different makes. The protesting measures staged on Rustaveli have consumed hundreds of millions of Lari, which could have easily gone to the development of national industries or been used for the educational purposes of many generations, not to mention the lost chances to feed the hungry and to clad the naked. Our Rustaveli Avenue has seen armed men and women with bombs

and bullets, their armored cars and their machine guns; it has witnessed the clatter of the Russian tank caterpillars, ready to crash into peaceful demonstrations of Georgians. Bestsellers could be written on the scary days and nights suffered by this nation right here on the beautiful Rustaveli Avenue, built in an eclectic architectural style for the people to enjoy and spend life on.

The saga of Rustaveli Avenue started in 1989. Everything happens and has happened here, from soviet-type public and military parades to angry people in the street shouting 'Sakartvelo' for reasons that be, tearing their throats and killing their nervous systems. And, behold, we

are still there, day and night, certainly each time with a new reason to revolt and to demand the world hear our desperate battle cries.

Yes, we are still there, and goodness knows how long we are going to be the fixture of our good old avenue. The political decision-making process has moved from the parliament building onto the street, which may look good at first sight, but if deliberated on, may well leave the impression of incongruity, especially considering the process has continued on and off for 35 years already. I feel like crying 'Help, help' but who will answer? God? God will help only those who are ready to help themselves.



Photo by the author

In Praise of Buckthorn

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

I offer an alternative to all the vital reportage on Georgia's national crisis. I know it's happening, am witness to it, and pray for peace and good outcomes. And here are other stories too.

The marvelous bright orange berries (katsvi in Georgian), appearing in a few of Georgia's markets, very sour but superb when sugared, shouldn't all go to the birds which love them. They're about the highest thing there is in vitamin C, and need no pectin added to make jam by boiling with at least their own weight of sugar. But you can get something almost as thick as jam with no boiling at all.

Sea buckthorn (its full name in English) is only now coming down from early frosts on its bushes in the mountains into the markets of east Georgia and Tbilisi, while remaining virtually unknown in the west of the country. In Gldani, though, there's been only one seller that I could find in the whole large bazaar, so you might have to look around. The first batch I bought was 20 GEL/kilo, the second 15, and it'll come down in price as it gets more available, then quickly disappear sometime in December. Act now to avoid disappointment!

I buy a couple of kilos at a time. Put them either all together or in parts into a bowl well covered with water; the small

leaves and bad berries, darker in color all the way to black, will float to the surface, where you are waiting with a small strainer to remove and discard them. Do this until all you have is the good stuff. Then strain this of all its water and put into a bowl or pot with enough room leftover for at least the same weight of sugar.

Mash the berries with a potato masher to get a good deal of juice; you don't need to burst them all, each with its single seed. Then add the sugar and mix well. Stir and cover. Leave on the counter, stirring a couple of times a day, until all the sugar is dissolved, usually in a few days. Put it all into a blender, and blend on low speed.

Strain this through something fine enough to get everything but the syrup; coarser than a coffee filter, for sure. Put it into clean, sterilized jars and cover. Keep the jars in a cool place or fridge. Leave the lid off the jar currently being used, and it will slowly thicken to spreadable consistency.

I first encountered sea buckthorn jam in late autumn of 1993, in the Ural Mountains of Russia, visiting there with a friend from St Petersburg. I instantly fell in love with its exotic sweet-tartness, unusual for someone who doesn't eat enough fruit. We've been inseparable ever since. The western world hardly knows what it is, to our detriment.

Pour it on vanilla or chocolate ice cream; make a soothing drink by adding it to hot water; mix it with sparkling Georgian

mineral water for a fizzy drink. Put it on bread, or crackers. Find a cheese to pair it with, maybe something of the strong cheddar or gouda types. Use it as the main flavor in sweet & sour sauce, or as part of a marinade. Flavor cake or muffin mix or icing with it... such possibilities!

Or make a liqueur with the whole berries and Smirnoff Red Label vodka (no taste of its own), steeping for at least a month in a covered jar, stirring daily. Mash well, strain finely, add boiled sugar syrup to taste, bottle, let sit in darkness for a month. Ready, and so good. This is how to make any liqueur, by the way. You'll need more time if your main ingredient is larger than these tiny berries, to extract the flavor. You can use any other strong spirit: brandy, rum, whisky and so on, although these will add their own flavor, as will any other sugar than plain white sugar. Honey, maple syrup, brown sugar and others are possibilities.

Buckthorn: something to get you through the winter in fine style. Enjoy. Worth the effort.

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

Empowering the Next Generation of Human Rights Defenders through Education and Partnership

BY TEAM GT

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP), in partnership with Free University, hosted an engaging moot court competition this week, focusing on human rights education. With 42 teams from nine Georgian universities participating, the event provided a platform for students to develop their advocacy skills. Teams argued as either claimants or respondents, sharpening their critical thinking and deepening their understanding of human rights protection.

Free University of Tbilisi emerged as the winner of the competition, while Tbilisi State University secured second place. This event is part of the broader LEAD: Leadership, Equality, Advocacy,

and Democracy project, aimed at supporting changes that protect minority rights and combat discrimination in Georgia.

The LEAD initiative, which is funded by Norway with a \$4 million budget for the 2022-2025 period, focuses on a three-pronged approach: empowering vulnerable minorities, tackling the most challenging human rights issues through evidence-based campaigns, and supporting both state institutions and civil society organizations. By creating platforms for collaboration, LEAD is working towards a more inclusive and democratic Georgia, fostering a society where everyone's human rights are respected and protected.

This competition, alongside other LEAD initiatives, is integral in shaping the future of human rights advocacy in Georgia, encouraging young people to take an active role in defending equality and justice.



The Free University of Tbilisi winning team. Photo by UNDP/Gela Bedianashvili

New Eurobarometer Survey Shows Record High Trust in the EU



Youth supporting Europe. Source: EUneighbourseast

BY TEAM GT

The latest Eurobarometer released this week reveals the highest level of trust the European Union has seen since 2007, including among EU candidates.

The Standard Eurobarometer 102 (Autumn 2024) was conducted between 10 October and 5 November 2024 across the 27 Member States and in nine candidate and potential candidate countries (all

except Ukraine) and the United Kingdom. 58% of Georgians said that they tend to trust the EU. 82% said that their country will benefit from EU accession.

In Moldova, 52% tend to trust the EU. 56% Moldovans think their country will benefit from being an EU member.

The Eurobarometer also surveyed Europeans' attitudes to the Russian war against Ukraine and its consequences. Nearly nine Europeans in ten (87%) agree with providing humanitarian support to the people affected by the war. More than seven EU citizens in ten (71%) support economic sanctions on the Russian

government, companies, and individuals, and 68% agree with providing financial support to Ukraine. Six out of ten approve of the EU granting candidate status to Ukraine and 58% agree with the EU financing the purchase and supply of military equipment to Ukraine.

The war in Ukraine continues to be considered as the most important issue at EU level (31%) out of 15 items (followed by immigration at 28% and the international situation at 22%), while 76% of European respondents agree that Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a threat to the security of the EU.

UAE Embassy in Tbilisi Celebrates 53rd National Day Highlighting Unity and Progress

BY SOFIA BOCHOIDZE

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) National Day, celebrated every December 2nd, is a significant occasion marking the union of the emirates in 1971. This day honors the vision of the UAE's founding leaders and the nation's remarkable progress in becoming a global hub for innovation, culture, and sustainability. Over its 53-year journey, the UAE has grown into a leader in economic and technological advancement, while upholding values of tolerance, collaboration, and forward-thinking governance.

This year, the UAE Embassy in Tbilisi organized a grand celebration at the Paragraph Hotel on Freedom Square, bringing together an esteemed gathering of dignitaries, government officials, and prominent figures from the business and diplomatic communities. Attendees

included the First Deputy Prime Minister of Georgia - Levan Davitashvili, the U.S. Ambassador to Georgia - Robin L. Dunnigan, and representatives from various sectors.

The event began with an inspiring welcome speech delivered by Mr. Ahmed Alnuaimi, the Ambassador of the UAE in Georgia. He expressed the significance of the day, reflecting on the UAE's transformative journey and its enduring vision for a brighter future. Ambassador Alnuaimi highlighted milestones in the UAE-Georgia relationship, such as the signing of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) to boost trade and investment, and the soft opening of the Tbilisi Dry Port project, a cornerstone of enhanced connectivity and economic growth.

"Since 1971, the UAE has transformed into a global leader, driven by innovation, tolerance, and sustainability," the Ambassador noted, adding that the ties between the UAE and Georgia continue to deepen across areas such as trade,



Mr. Ahmed Alnuaimi, Ambassador of the UAE in Georgia



UAE Ambassador, Ahmed Alnuaimi, and First Deputy Prime Minister of Georgia, Levan Davitashvili

culture, and education. He also thanked Fly Dubai and Air Arabia, the event sponsors, and invited guests to visit their stands for a chance to win tickets to the UAE.

Levan Davitashvili followed with a congratulatory speech, underscoring the growing importance of bilateral relations between the UAE and Georgia. He highlighted how collaboration between the two nations has fueled economic development and opened avenues for partnership in key sectors. Davitashvili congratulated the UAE on its 53rd National

Day and reaffirmed Georgia's commitment to strengthening ties with the UAE.

Guests had the opportunity to explore the sponsor stands by Fly Dubai and Air Arabia, where they participated in exciting giveaways. The event's atmosphere was warm and celebratory, with attendees enjoying a delightful reception and networking in a more informal setting. The gathering fostered dialogue and collaboration, symbolizing the shared vision of mutual prosperity and friendship between the two nations.

Events like the UAE National Day cel-

ebration reflect the vital role of UAE embassies in fostering international partnerships and building cultural bridges. By hosting such meaningful gatherings, the UAE Embassy in Tbilisi continues to strengthen the UAE's reputation as a leader in global collaboration, while supporting local communities and highlighting shared values. These occasions not only celebrate milestones but also inspire greater cooperation and understanding of important topics that shape our interconnected world.

Exploring the Future: 5th Graders Discover the World of IT at IT Step Academy



BY TEAM GT

On November 3, a group of enthusiastic 5th graders from LEPL Tbilisi Public School No. 28, along with their younger brothers and sisters, embarked on an exciting educational adventure at the IT Step Academy. This international educational center, known for its practice-based IT training, welcomed the students for a hands-on tour that left them not only amazed, but also eager to learn more about the world of technology.

The IT Step Academy, located in the heart of Tbilisi, offers cutting-edge courses designed for individuals of all ages, ranging from 9 to 55 years old. Whether you're just starting your career or looking to upskill, the academy provides a wide range of options to meet the needs of every student. From beginners to experienced developers, those who attend can acquire the essential knowledge and skills to succeed in the fast-growing IT field.

During their visit, the 5th graders had the opportunity to attend a lecture on 3D modeling and robotics engineering—two fascinating areas of the tech world that captured the children's imaginations.

The session, led by one of the academy's practicing lecturers, gave the students a glimpse into how technology can transform the way we design, create, and build. They learned how robotics and 3D models are used in various industries, and were introduced to the tools that make these exciting innovations possible.

Before heading home, the students received memorable gifts, and spent time taking photos and videos to capture the moment. They returned to school full of excitement, sharing what they had learned with their schoolmates, and looking forward to what they could achieve in the future.

As one of the students said after the visit, "I never thought I could print my own game or robot!"

A GLIMPSE INTO A PROMISING FUTURE

For those interested in pursuing a career in IT, IT Step Academy offers more than just theoretical lessons. The academy's courses are designed to help students build practical skills and develop their portfolios, with the ultimate goal of helping them secure their first job in a leading IT company. Whether you want to work in cybersecurity, game development, or website creation, the academy provides everything needed to start your journey toward a modern, in-demand profession.

In addition to adult education, the Step Junior IT Academy provides children with the opportunity to explore technology from a young age. Students learn how to create websites, develop games,

and work with robotics—skills that will set them up for success in an increasingly digital world. By gaining hands-on experience, they not only develop technical know-how but also learn important soft skills such as teamwork, problem-solving, and creative thinking.

Whether you're a beginner or looking to deepen your expertise, IT Step Academy provides the tools, environment, and expertise to help you succeed in the world of technology. This visit by the 5th graders is just one of the many ways the academy is inspiring the next generation of tech leaders.

If you're looking for a modern, promising career or want to introduce your

child to the professions of the future, IT Step Academy is the perfect place to start.

Check it out online at itstep.org.



Violence, Faith, and Redemption in Akaki Popkhadze's 'In the Name of Blood'



Shot from the movie 'In the Name of Blood'

BY IVAN NECHAEV

On December 4th, at Amiran Cinema in Tbilisi, Akaki Popkhadze's debut feature *In the Name of Blood* captivated audiences as part of the European Forum session at the 25th Tbilisi International Film Festival. Uniquely, this screening stood out in a festival overshadowed by violent crackdowns on demonstrators and Georgia's stalled European Union aspirations, which led to the cancellation of all films in the Georgian Panorama section. Yet, due to significant international commitments, the European Forum remained intact, allowing this gripping drama to shine through the chaos.

A RIVETING TALE OF DUALITIES AND IDENTITIES

Akaki Popkhadze's debut feature, *In the Name of Blood* is an intense exploration of the dualities inherent in faith, violence, and family. Set against the contrasting

backdrops of Nice's sunlit glamor and its shadowy underbelly, the film crafts a narrative steeped in genre traditions while infusing it with a deeply personal resonance. The tension between the sacred and the profane, the familial and the communal, forms the crux of this gripping tale. Popkhadze's Georgian heritage and French upbringing imbue the film with a unique perspective, allowing it to transcend the conventions of crime drama and delve into broader themes of identity and redemption.

The film's opening shot immediately establishes its thematic dichotomy: a picturesque view of Nice transitions into the grittier, unseen layers of the city. This visual motif underscores the narrative's central tension between surface appearances and underlying realities. The opening sequence—a brutal torture and mistaken assassination—plunges the audience into the murky waters of a crime-ridden world where honor and violence are inextricably linked. The victim, a Georgian immigrant mistaken for his employer, symbolizes the precarious existence of immigrant commu-

nities caught in the crossfire of larger conflicts.

SACRED STRUGGLES: HOW FAITH SHAPES THE PATH OF REDEMPTION

Popkhadze structures the narrative into three chapters and an epilogue, each bearing religiously evocative titles such as "In the Name of the Father" and "Thou Shalt Not Kill." These titles frame the story within a moral and spiritual context, drawing attention to how faith and religious doctrine shape the characters' choices. Tristan's aspiration to priesthood and his rejection of violence are driven by his understanding of Orthodox teachings, which contrast sharply with Gabriel's more impulsive and worldly approach. This interplay between spiritual values and human imperfection underscores the gravity of their decisions, offering audiences a deeper comprehension of their struggles. Tristan (Florent Hill), the younger son, embodies this conflict most explicitly. Aspiring to become an Orthodox priest, Tristan's journey is marked by his resistance to the cycle of violence perpetuated by his community. His martial arts practice—a discipline rooted in control and balance—acts as a metaphor for his internal battle between faith and fury.

Gabriel (Nicolas Duvauchelle), the estranged elder brother, represents the film's darker axis. Haunted by a troubled past and ostracized by his community, Gabriel's return to Nice is fueled by a desire to redeem his family's honor. The interplay between the brothers, polar opposites in temperament and ideology, forms the emotional core of the film. Their relationship evolves from mistrust and conflict to a tenuous reconciliation, mirroring the film's broader exploration of fractured identities and familial bonds.

SHADOWY NIGHTS AND GRITTY REALISM: VISUAL STORYTELLING AT ITS BEST

Justin Vaudaux's cinematography is instrumental in shaping the film's mood. By eschewing the sunny vistas typically associated with Nice, the film immerses viewers in shadowy, nocturnal landscapes where danger and duplicity lurk. The use of wide-angle lenses creates a sense of intimacy and disorientation, pulling the audience into the characters' turbulent world. This visual language mirrors the instability of the protagonists, emphasizing their struggles to find equilibrium. Popkhadze's directorial style blends realism with stylization. Tracking shots reminiscent of Scorsese's *Goodfellas* convey the allure and chaos of the criminal underworld. Yet these flourishes are deliberately imperfect, grounding the film in a gritty authenticity. The frenetic energy of Finnegan Oldfield's Marco—a cocaine-fueled crime boss (Denis Lavant)'s nephew—is mirrored in the film's dynamic camera work and editing, creating a visceral portrayal of chaos and excess.

CULTURAL CONTEXT AND PERSONAL RESONANCE

Popkhadze's personal experiences as a Georgian immigrant deeply inform the narrative. The film's depiction of the Georgian community in Nice—grappling with issues of displacement, identity, and intergenerational conflict—resonates with authenticity. The filmmaker's own struggles with cultural integration and the pull of violence find expression in the characters of Tristan and Gabriel. Tristan's faith, evident in his solitary moments of prayer and his commitment to Orthodox practices, Gabriel's recklessness, vividly illustrated by his impulsive confrontation with Marco, and their mother Catherine's longing for familial harmony, seen in her determined yet gentle efforts to mediate between her sons, are all drawn from Popkhadze's observations of his environment and upbringing.

The inclusion of Orthodox religious

imagery and rituals adds another layer of cultural specificity. These elements not only ground the story in a particular community, but also elevate its universal themes of redemption and reconciliation. Catherine, portrayed with quiet strength by Ia Shugliashvili, serves as the moral anchor of the narrative. Her presence underscores the enduring influence of maternal figures in patriarchal societies, highlighting their role as custodians of familial and cultural continuity.

GENRE CONVENTIONS AND INNOVATIONS

While *In the Name of Blood* adheres to many tropes of the crime genre—revenge, moral ambiguity, and familial loyalty—it distinguishes itself through its introspective approach. The film's exploration of faith and morality sets it apart from more conventional gangster narratives. Popkhadze's deliberate pacing allows for moments of introspection, giving the characters space to grapple with their decisions and their consequences—most notably during Tristan's solitary prayer in the church, where his silent anguish speaks volumes about his inner conflict and growing disillusionment.

In the Name of Blood marks a confident debut for Akaki Popkhadze, showcasing his ability to navigate the intersections of genre cinema and personal storytelling. The film's portrayal of the Georgian diaspora, coupled with its meditation on faith and violence, offers a compelling narrative that resonates beyond its specific cultural context. Popkhadze's nuanced direction, combined with strong performances and a striking visual style, signals the arrival of a bold new voice in contemporary cinema. As both an exploration of human frailty and a critique of societal structures, *In the Name of Blood* succeeds in marrying the personal with the universal, crafting a film that lingers in the mind long after the credits roll.

Launch of the AI World Championship in Abu Dhabi

BY TEAM GT

Abu Dhabi, UAE, 05 December 2024: AIM Congress 2025 is proud to announce the inaugural AI World Championship, an international competition designed to challenge and advance the multiple frontiers of artificial intelligence. Taking place over the course of four days, from January 30 to February 2, 2025, with the grand finals set to be hosted live on April 8, 2025, at ADNEC Centre Abu Dhabi during AIM Congress 2025, the championship will bring together innovators, businesses, developers, and investors in AI.

14 key competition categories will take center stage during the AI World Championship, including AI innovations in the fields of Finance, Agriculture, Logistics, Sport, Education, Media, E-Commerce, Manufacturing, Customer Service, Marketing & social media, Robotics, Cybersecurity, Healthcare, and Games. These individual categories will be grouped under their respective technical domains as: Natural Language Processing (NLP), Computer Vision, Games, Healthcare AI, Financial AI, and Ethical AI, highlighting the multidisciplinary nature of AI development and its potential to address global challenges.

The event welcomes participants from across the world, with AI talent from regions as diverse as The Americas, Europe, Africa and Asia already confirmed. The championship will serve as an unparalleled opportunity for global AI developers to showcase their creativ-



قمة AIM للاستثمار AIM CONGRESS

ity, technical expertise, and innovation.

Participants' submissions will be evaluated on criteria such as innovation, technical complexity, real-world applicability, performance, and ethical considerations. A distinguished panel of AI experts, academics, and industry professionals will assess projects to ensure the highest standards of excellence and impact.

The championship offers more than competition. Workshops, seminars, and networking sessions will provide participants and attendees with opportunities to connect, collaborate, and exchange ideas. An exhibition area will showcase groundbreaking projects, while match-making events will foster relationships between participants, mentors, sponsors, and investors.

Dawood Al-Shezawi, Chairman of the

Organizing Committee for AIM Congress, stated: "Artificial intelligence plays a crucial role in enhancing new industries and generating innovative ideas. Therefore, the upcoming edition of the AIM Congress 2025, under the theme 'The New Wave of a Globalized Investment Landscape: Towards a New Balanced World Structure,' aims to create a unique platform for innovators and professionals in artificial intelligence to showcase their capabilities, attract foreign investments, and establish a dynamic and inclusive AI ecosystem that fosters collaboration. This ecosystem will drive transformative solutions and economic transformation by promoting innovation, leveraging modern technologies, and nurturing professional talent to shape a brighter and more sustainable future."

The finals of the championship will include live demonstrations, expert commentary, audience Q&A, and an award ceremony recognizing outstanding achievements. Winners in each category will receive prizes, research grants, and opportunities for further collaboration or investment.

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?

The competition is open to individual developers, teams, organizations, AI specialists, investors, and government representatives. The inclusive nature of the championship ensures that AI talent from all corners of the globe can demonstrate their innovations on a world stage.

The AI World Championship is a defining moment for the AI community, a global platform for breakthroughs that

push the boundaries of possibility while fostering ethical AI development.

APPLY NOW

Don't miss this chance to be part of a defining moment in AI history.

ABOUT AIM CONGRESS

It is worth noting that the 14th edition of the AIM Congress will be held from April 7 to 9, 2025, with the participation of over 25,000 prominent figures from 180 countries worldwide. The event will feature a range of activities, including forums, panel discussions, workshops, high-level meetings, an exhibition, the AIM Investment Awards competition, and a startup competition, focusing on themes such as Foreign Direct Investment, Global Trade, Startups, Future Cities, and Digital Economy.

25th Tbilisi Int'l Film Festival in Tumultuous Times: Resistance, Heritage, and Global Voices



Still from Zaza Buadze's *My Carpathian Grandpa*. Source: FB

BY IVAN NECHAEV

This December, the 25th Tbilisi International Film Festival (TIFF) unfurled its banners at Amirani Cinema amidst a politically charged atmosphere, offering a weeklong celebration of cinema. Yet, this year's TIFF wasn't just a cinematic event—it was a cultural statement, an act of defiance, and a space for reflection on freedom, equality, and justice. While the screens flickered with world-class films, the festival echoed with the tension of Georgia's current political climate.

A EUROPEAN VISION IN FILM

Opening the European Film Academy section was Pedro Almodóvar's *The Room Next Door* (Spain, 2024). Almodóvar's latest work is a return to themes of solitude, familial bonds, and suppressed desires, delivering a narrative both intensely personal and universally resonant. Set in a single apartment complex, the film unravels the lives of its inhabitants, drawing viewers into their secret struggles. Almodóvar's characteristic vibrant color palette contrasts poignantly with the emotional bleakness of the characters. Themes of isolation and connection in *The Room Next Door* feel especially poignant in today's fragmented world, marking the film as a high point of the festival.

The Oscars Contenders section launched with *The Girl with the Needle* by Magnus von Horn (Denmark/Poland/Sweden, 2024), a harrowing psychological drama. Von Horn crafts a narrative centered on a young woman grappling with the scars of childhood abuse. The film's stark visual style mirrors the pro-

tagonist's journey of reclaiming her identity. Sparse dialogue and a haunting score amplify the emotional weight, creating a tension that lingers long after the credits roll. This piece epitomizes the festival's commitment to showcasing films that delve into the depths of human resilience and vulnerability.

The European Forum presented *Sex* by Norwegian director Dag Johan Haugerud. As an audacious exploration of societal taboos, the film weaves together stories of individuals navigating the complexities of desire, consent, and identity, offering a nuanced critique of contemporary sexual politics. Haugerud's ability to balance humor with poignant social commentary sets *Sex* apart as a provocative yet deeply empathetic work. The director employs a fragmented narrative structure, compelling viewers to piece together the characters' motivations and moral dilemmas.

EXPLORATIONS BEYOND BORDERS

The Tour d'Europe section showcased Cyril Schäublin's *Those Who Are Fine* (Switzerland, 2017), a minimalist masterpiece that examines the alienation inherent in modern capitalism. Set in Zurich, the film follows a series of loosely connected vignettes, capturing the mundane interactions of its characters. Schäublin's deliberate pacing and static camera work highlight the disconnection between individuals in an increasingly transactional society. Despite its understated tone, the film delivers a sharp critique of how technology and bureaucracy dehumanize relationships, making it a standout in this year's lineup.

Zaza Buadze's *My Carpathian Grandpa* (Ukraine/Italy, 2023) opened the Ukrainian Story section, offering a heartfelt

intergenerational narrative. The film follows a young man returning to his ancestral village to care for his grandfather, uncovering long-buried family secrets in the process. Buadze masterfully intertwines personal drama with broader reflections on the resilience of Ukrainian culture amidst political turmoil. The lush Carpathian landscapes serve as both a literal and metaphorical backdrop, emphasizing the enduring connection between people and their heritage.

A SILENT GEORGIAN PANORAMA

The festival's most striking absence was the Georgian Panorama, canceled as an act of protest. TIFF's organizers released a powerful statement condemning the Georgian government's actions against peaceful protesters and its decision to

halt EU integration processes.

"Every film we show tells about the struggle for personal freedom, equality, and justice," read the statement. The festival vowed to screen Georgian works in the future, "when the country returns to the European path."

This decision resonated deeply within the festival's walls. On opening night, Amirani Cinema transformed into a platform for Georgian filmmakers to express their solidarity with protesters, substituting what would have been the screening of Tato Kotetishvili's *Holy Electricity*. This absence spoke volumes, emphasizing the critical interplay between art and activism.

CINEMA AS RESISTANCE

TIFF was always more than a film festival; it was a crucible of resistance. By

curating a program that juxtaposed intimate human stories with grand socio-political narratives, the festival reflected Georgia's ongoing struggles and aspirations. In a year when the festival celebrated its silver anniversary, TIFF became a reminder that cinema is not just entertainment, but a vital medium of discourse and dissent. The cancellation of the Georgian Panorama was not a loss—it was a profound statement that resonated louder than any film could.

The 25th TIFF proves that art and activism are inseparable. As Georgia navigates its uncertain political future, TIFF stands as a bastion of cultural resistance. Whether through Almodóvar's intimate storytelling or Buadze's intergenerational narrative, the festival affirmed that cinema has the power to challenge, unite, and inspire.



Georgian filmmakers expressed their solidarity with protesters, substituting the screening of Tato Kotetishvili's *Holy Electricity*. Source: FB



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