



Photo by Mindia Gabadze/Publika

## FOCUS ON THE MARCHES

The Georgians continue to march for a European future

PAGE 4

## In this week's issue...

Georgian PM Describes COE Secretary General's Visit as "Strong Show of Support"

NEWS PAGE 2

Georgia's Education System Faces Major Setback as EQAR Suspends Accreditation, Citing "Political Concerns"

NEWS PAGE 2

Trump to Continue US Military Aid to Ukraine After Inauguration, FT Reports

POLITICS PAGE 3

Free Business, Free Choice: How a Platform is Redefining Corporate Responsibility in Georgia

BUSINESS PAGE 8

Dancing Defiance: How Khorumi Became the Anthem of Georgia's European Aspirations

CULTURE PAGE 10

"All Tickets Sold Out": A New Reality for Georgian Culture

CULTURE PAGE 10

## EU Proposes Suspension of Visa Facilitation for Georgian Diplomats over Growing Political Repression

BY TEAM GT

**O**n December 20, the European Commission proposed suspending part of the EU-Georgia Visa Facilitation Agreement in response to ongoing political tensions and crackdowns on protests in Georgia. The proposal would require Georgian diplomats, officials, and their families holding diplomatic and official passports to obtain a visa for short stays of up to 90 days within any 180-day period. Additionally, facilitations such as shorter application times, lower visa fees, and fewer document requirements would no longer apply to Georgian holders of diplomatic and official passports. However, ordinary Georgian citizens will still benefit from the visa exemption for short stays in the EU.

The proposal follows violent crackdowns by Georgian authorities on peaceful protesters, opposition politicians, and independent media, which intensified after the Georgian Dream government's decision on November 28 to delay EU accession talks until 2028. Recent legislation, including the "Transparency of Foreign Influence" law passed in May 2024 and the "Family Values and Protection of Minors" law passed in September 2024, has also raised concerns.

Continued on page 4



Source: eldwicklaw

Prepared for Georgia Today Business by **GALT & TAGGART** CREATING OPPORTUNITIES

As of 24-Dec-2024

Markets				STOCKS			
	Price	w/w	m/m		Price	w/w	m/m
BONDS				Bank of Georgia (BGEO LN)	GBP 40.05	+7.2%	-2.0%
GEORGIA 04/26	94.40 (YTM 7.28%)	+0.1%	-0.3%	Georgia Capital (GCEO LN)	GBP 10.00	+3.5%	-1.0%
GLOBAL 04/28	87.76 (YTM 8.12%)	-0.2%	-1.3%	TBC Bank Group (TBCG LN)	GBP 27.05	+6.1%	-4.2%
GEORGIA 9/2 PERP	98.07 (YTM 9.77%)	-0.1%	-0.6%				
SILANET 01/27	100.73 (YTM 7.98%)	+0.1%	-0.1%				
TBC 8.894 PERP	95.72 (YTM 11.94%)	-0.1%	-0.3%	COMMODITIES			
TBC 10 1/4 PERP	99.33 (YTM 10.61%)	+0.1%	-0.3%	Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	77.46	-4.3%	+8.2%
				Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	2,648.54	+0.2%	+2.7%
INDICES				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%

# Georgian PM Describes COE Secretary General's Visit as "Strong Show of Support"

BY TEAM GT

**O**n Friday, Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze highlighted that the visit of Alain Berset, Secretary General of the Council of Europe (CoE), served as a clear indication of strong support for Georgia and its people.

Kobakhidze described the discussions with Berset as "productive and insightful" during a press briefing, noting that the two had held high-level talks earlier this week.

The Prime Minister provided an update on the political climate in Georgia, particularly addressing the ongoing protests against the government's decision to postpone European Union accession talks until 2028. He reassured Berset that the protests had calmed down significantly in recent days, with no further need for police intervention.

He also addressed the issue of administrative detentions, explaining that those involved in violent actions during the



PM meeting with Alain Berset, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe

protests had been detained but would be released by the end of the month, as Georgia's law allows a maximum deten-

tion period of 15 days. However, Kobakhidze clarified that this does not apply to individuals who face criminal charges,

approximately 30 people currently in pretrial detention.

During their meeting, Kobakhidze

assured Berset that the investigations into the protests would continue, and that the Georgian government is committed to full cooperation with all relevant bodies, including the CoE.

The two also discussed Georgia's legislative changes, particularly the law on foreign influence transparency, which requires organizations and media outlets receiving more than 20 percent of their funding from abroad to register as pursuing foreign interests. This law was passed earlier this year amid protests.

Kobakhidze reaffirmed his government's willingness to engage in dialogue about the law, stating they are open to revising its wording if valid concerns are raised. "We are open to any format for discussion," he said, adding that if the CoE proposed a specific framework, Georgia would be willing to consider it. The PM further emphasized that the government is prepared to amend the law if it is shown to contradict legal principles.

"Our stance remains unchanged: if anyone can demonstrate negative aspects in the law, we are ready to discuss and address the issue," he concluded.



Photo: The Ministry of Culture and Sports of Georgia.

## Bakuriani 2025 Peace Flame Arrives in Georgia

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

**T**he Peace Flame for the 17th European Youth Olympic Winter Festival, scheduled for February 9-16, 2025, in Bakuriani, has arrived in Georgia. It was brought to the capital by Sports Minister Shalva Gogoladze, Olympic Committee President Leri Khabelov,

and Bakuriani 2025 Organizing Committee Chair Mamuka Khabaresheli.

The flame, ignited during Rome's historic Mercati di Traiano, was carried by two-time Olympic judo champion Lasha Bekauri and will travel across the country.

The event, marking Georgia as the eighth European country to host both summer and winter European Youth Olympic Festivals, will welcome up to 2,000 athletes from 48 European countries.

## Salome Zurabishvili Calls for Election Talks

BY TEAM GT

**O**n Sunday evening, Georgian President Salome Zurabishvili addressed around 200,000 demonstrators on Rustaveli Avenue, reaffirming her commitment to resolving the current political crisis through dialogue.

"I remain loyal to the country and to the Constitution before which I took the oath six years ago," Zurabishvili stated. She called on Bidzina Ivanishvili, Honorary Chairman of the Georgian Dream, to meet with her at the President's Palace to discuss the scheduling of new elections.

"I need to sit down and discuss with him how to schedule elections. The date must be agreed upon by December 29," she declared.

Zurabishvili emphasized the urgency of the situation: "The elections were not

held, and not only were they not held, but they are also not recognized by anyone. If there is an illegitimate, unconstitutional government, then we are in a deep crisis. The only solution is new elections."

She extended an invitation to Ivanishvili, his party, other political groups, and election monitors to come to the Orbeliani Palace to discuss when and how the elections should take place. "There is little time for this negotiation," she said, stressing that the date must be agreed by December 29.

Zurabishvili added, "By then, we have a great opportunity to move this country forward, to make it an example of democracy and reconciliation." She concluded, "I will release a full speech from the presidential palace tomorrow evening. I am waiting for you."

During her speech, the President faced technical difficulties as her microphone cut off, forcing her to continue with a megaphone. Some TV stations also struggled with the broadcast feed.

## Georgia's Education System Faces Major Setback as EQAR Suspends Accreditation, Citing "Political Concerns"



BY TEAM GT

**T**he European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) has suspended the registration of Georgia's National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement due to violations dating back to 2023.

EQAR considers the appointment of Tamar Makharashvili, the Center's director, as Deputy Minister of Education of Georgia a threat to the Center's independence. EQAR experts identified this as a potential conflict of interest.

EU sanctions could impact Georgian diplomats as the European Commission suggests ending visa-free access. If this proposal is approved, diplomats, officials, and their families will only be able to enter EU countries with short-stay visas.

The report emphasizes that the director or responsible official of such a center should not hold a political role in government. Furthermore, clear procedures must be established to prevent similar practices in the future, as they pose a threat to the agency's independence.

According to local experts, ENQA's decision implies that:

Georgia's higher education quality assurance system no longer meets European standards, negatively affecting the reputation of Georgian education, trust in the system, and the country's international image;

The reliability of educational programs offered by Georgian universities will be questioned, making the recognition of credits and diplomas of students and graduates abroad problematic, particularly in EU countries and the European Higher Education Area;

Current and planned joint international

educational programs implemented by Georgian universities will be at risk;

The pace of internationalization of higher education in Georgia, including student mobility and other forms of cooperation, as well as the enrollment of international students, will sharply decline. This will negatively impact teaching quality and universities' revenues;

Loss of ENQA membership and registration could lead to the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement losing recognition from the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME). This would create difficulties in the international recognition of medical education obtained in Georgia. It would also significantly reduce the number of foreign students in medical programs at Georgian universities, causing severe and irreparable financial damage to both public and private higher education sectors.

# Ukraine Latest: Russia Launches Major Christmas Day Attack on Ukraine's Energy System



Detail from Kyiv. Source: Reuters

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

**O**n Christmas morning, a massive Russian missile attack targeted Ukraine's energy infrastructure, with over 70 missiles and 100 drones hitting various regions. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy condemned the assault as "inhuman," emphasizing that Putin had deliberately chosen Christmas to strike. The attacks caused widespread power outages, leaving hundreds of thousands without heating in freezing temperatures, particularly in Kharkiv. Kyiv and other areas also faced blackouts.

Zelenskyy vowed that the attacks wouldn't break Ukraine's spirit, while energy minister German Galushchenko confirmed that restrictions on electricity supply were imposed to minimize damage. In Kharkiv, at least three people were injured in missile strikes. Further casualties were reported in Dnipropetrovsk and Kherson regions.

Russia's defense ministry confirmed the strike was aimed at critical energy infrastructure crucial to Ukraine's defense industry. US Ambassador Bridget Brink labeled the attacks "Russia's Christmas gift to Ukraine," while UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer praised the resilience of the Ukrainian people.

Meanwhile, Ukrainians celebrated their second Christmas on December 25, following the shift to the new calendar,

further distancing themselves from Russian influence. Since Russia's invasion in February 2022, Ukraine's power grid has been severely damaged, and Kyiv has repeatedly called for stronger air defense systems to protect against Russian airstrikes.

This marked the 13th major attack on Ukraine's energy sector, as Russia's offensive continues. In retaliation, Ukraine launched drone strikes on Russian regions, including Kursk and North Ossetia. The ongoing war has seen both sides strengthen their positions as they await potential talks under the incoming US administration.

Other key developments include:

- On the weekend, a Russian ballistic missile attack on Kyiv killed at least one person and injured 12 others. The attack damaged a number of buildings in the capital and left over 600 residential buildings as well as medical facilities and schools.

- The Russian military attacked Ukraine with 72 Shahed-type drones and other unmanned aerial vehicles overnight on December 23, Ukraine's Air Force reported on Telegram, killing three and injuring three others. Friday's attack featured Khinzal missiles launched by Russian fighter jets, as well as Iskander-Ms fired from ground platforms. North Korean KN-23 missiles – sent by Pyongyang to Moscow earlier this year – may have been deployed as well.

- Russia said it targeted arms industry and security service targets in strikes on Kyiv as a "response" to last week's strikes

by Ukraine using Western missiles on a chemical plant in southern Russia. Russia said that Ukraine had launched six US-made long-range ATACMs missiles and four British-made Storm Shadow missiles at Russia's southern Rostov region on Wednesday.

- The Russian Defense Ministry said that its forces had taken control of two more settlements in Ukraine's Donetsk region, Uspenivka and Novopustynka. Russia has been moving toward the strategic city of Pokrovsk. Pokrovsk is the birthplace of the beloved carol 'Carol of the Bells,' composed by the renowned Mykola Leontovych. It is believed that Leontovych composed the early scores of this piece, inspired by a Ukrainian folk chant, while living and working in Pokrovsk from 1904 to 1908.

- Speaking last Thursday at an end-of-year press conference, Putin claimed the war had made Russia "much stronger". He said he was ready to meet the incoming US president, Donald Trump, to discuss peace proposals. But he repeated his stance that Moscow would keep control of Crimea, plus four Ukrainian regions "annexed" in 2022.

- Pope Francis called for bold negotiations between Ukraine and Russia to achieve a "just and lasting peace" in his Christmas Day address. His appeal came after a major Russian attack on Ukraine's energy infrastructure, but Ukraine had previously rejected the Pope's calls for dialogue, emphasizing its resolve to defend against Russian aggression.

- Russia has accused Moldova of planning a military operation in the Russian-backed region of Transnistria, raising concerns that Moscow might stage a "false flag" attack. Russia's intelligence service claimed that Moldova's President Maia Sandu intended to escalate the situation, but Moldova's government denied the allegations, stating there were no plans for military action in Transnistria.



Donald Trump meets Ukraine president Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Paris. Source: Ukrainian Presidency ZUMA Press Wire/dpa

## Trump to Continue US Military Aid to Ukraine After Inauguration, FT Reports

BY TEAM GT

**U**S President-elect Donald Trump has said he plans to continue military assistance to Ukraine despite his earlier campaign promises to cut aid and demand peace talks, the Financial Times reported on December 20. Sources familiar with Trump's discussions revealed that he intends to keep supplying military equipment to Ukraine after his inauguration.

At the same time, Trump's foreign policy team has communicated to European officials that he will push NATO allies to significantly increase their defense spending. While NATO countries currently aim to allocate 2% of their GDP to defense, Trump wants this figure raised to 5%. NATO member states, including many European nations, have been reluctant to meet the 2% target, with only 23 of the alliance's 32 members doing so.

Though Trump still opposes Ukraine's NATO membership, he views supplying military aid after a ceasefire as part of his "peace through strength" approach. This marks a shift from his previous stance during the campaign, when he suggested halting US support for Ukraine and prioritizing direct negotiations to end the conflict.

Trump's team has indicated that, although he advocates for an immediate resolution to the war, he has not laid out specific plans for how to achieve this. European leaders, however, are reassured by his commitment to continue military aid to Ukraine, particularly as they face challenges in sustaining the country's defense without US backing.

During his campaign, Trump made waves by suggesting he would cut off military support to Ukraine unless European NATO members committed to higher defense spending. He also raised concerns about NATO's financial burden on the US, emphasizing that allies must meet the 2% defense spending goal. With his transition to power, Trump has shifted his position, signaling a willingness to negotiate a defense spending increase, possibly to a target of 3.5% of GDP rather than 5%.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and other European leaders, who have met with Trump's team, are optimistic that US support for Ukraine will continue. They also expressed confidence that NATO will collaborate on adapting defense policies in response to Trump's demands.

In a recent meeting with NATO and EU officials, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy warned that without US involvement, European support for Ukraine would not be enough to secure its defense.

# Xeme

EXPLORE OUR BELOVED CITY FROM THE BIRD VIEW  
Xeme restaurant is located on the 31<sup>st</sup> floor in The Biltmore Tbilisi Hotel



THE BILTMORE  
TBILISI

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

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

# 28 Days Later... Georgians Continue Their March for Democracy

BY TEAM GT

In a juxtaposition to the ongoing mass protests against the Georgian government's refusal to re-run the elections or to pursue European Union accession talks until 2028, Tbilisi has been lit up with the glow of festive New Year illuminations and "Christmas villages." Despite the political unrest and nightly street rallies, Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze emphasized the city's commitment to preserving the "joy of the season." "New Year is everyone's favorite public holiday, and we will not allow anyone to take away the feeling of joy and happiness from our children and fellow citizens. Tbilisi will be the most beautiful New Year city, we will have many festive

events during these days, and we will meet the new 2025 year as we deserve—with new victories, hope for peace, and development," Kaladze said.

As the city shines with festive lights, protests on Rustaveli Avenue continue unabated. The rally, which has now lasted nearly 30 consecutive days, remains a symbol of defiance against the government's decision. Protesters from every field and of every age have gathered with the same demands: new elections and the release of those detained during the protests. The citizens are also united in opposition to the Georgian Dream party's decision to delay EU negotiations until at least 2028.

The protest has gained international attention, with several Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) joining the rally on December 12. MEPs Reinier van

Lanschot from the Netherlands, Michał Szczerba from Poland, Tobias Crermer from Germany, Rasa Juknevičienė from Lithuania, and Sergey Lagodinsky from Germany stood with the demonstrators, receiving warm applause from the crowd. Since then, a plethora of condemnation has been heard from abroad about the riot police crackdowns on demonstrators seen earlier in the month.

In line with the mounting protests, the Georgian government has been tightening the Code of Administrative Offenses. New proposed amendments are set to increase fines and penalties for actions typically associated with protest participation, such as obstructing traffic or violating norms for assemblies. For instance, fines for obstructing traffic could rise from 1,000 to 2,000 GEL, and organizers of protests could face fines of up to 15,000 GEL or even administrative imprisonment. The amendments also introduce harsher penalties for actions such as illegal uniform use by protestors and non-compliance with law enforcement requests. Mask-wearing and use of fireworks are also set to be deemed illegal.

Rights groups, including the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA), have criticized these proposed changes, arguing that they are a means of intimidating the public. GYLA highlighted concerns that the new regulations would be disproportionately used against protesters, undermining their right to freedom of expression and assembly. "It is obvious that the government is trying to intimidate the population by increasing sanctions for actions related to gatherings, demonstrations, and protests," the group stated, pointing out the likelihood that the judicial system would favor police testimony without proper appeal.

As these new laws are considered, the protests in Georgia show no sign of abating.



On Saturday alone, there were 20 declared marches in Tbilisi and the regions. A vehicle column departed from Kutaisi Central Square toward Tbilisi at 10am, while in Tbilisi, at 2pm, a march began from Kaha Bendukidze Campus to Tbilisi City Court and social workers gathered near Tbilisi State University. At 3pm, a teachers' march kicked off from Vaso Abashidze Theater in parallel with a "Kutaisians' March" from Gabrieladze Theater and a "Potterheads' March" from D. Agmashenebeli Avenue. At 4pm, a "Svans' March" "Yoga march," and "Acharians' March" began, followed at 5pm by "Fashion Industry Representatives" and striking students and lecturers. Their destination: the parliament building on Rustaveli Avenue. At 6pm they were joined by a "Rachvelians' March", a march of tattoo artists and tattoo enthusiasts, an "Aragvelians' March," a "Kartlians' March" and an "Imeretians' March." The "Megrelians" joined them at 7pm, as did ISET students and alumni, "Gamers," and "Meskhetians." The day was nicely crowned by a mass "Khorumi" (Georgian national dance) march, uniting hundreds of youth, amateur and professional dancers danc-

ing along Rustaveli wielding Georgian and EU flags.

The demand for new elections and the release of detained protesters continues to resonate through the streets of Tbilisi and other cities across the country. The marches have seen participation from a diverse array of groups, demonstrating the widespread discontent. These groups, counting civil servants, students, and members of various areas of business, entertainment and education, are showing their collective resistance to a government they feel is betraying the country's European aspirations. In parallel, the government claims "there is no crisis."

With marches planned throughout the upcoming days and evenings ahead of the planned "presidential inauguration" on December 29, the Georgian people are making their voices heard in a powerful display of unity and resistance. The protests are not only a call for political change but also a demonstration of the deep desire among Georgians for a European future—a future they are determined to fight for, even as the festive lights of the season twinkle brightly against a backdrop of political tension.



Photo by Ezz Gaber

## Papuashvili: We Regret US Administration's "Attack on Georgian People and Gov't" in its Final Days

BY TEAM GT

On Saturday, Shalva Papuashvili, the Speaker of the Georgian Parliament, expressed regret over the US Treasury Department's announcement of sanctions against Georgian Interior Ministry officials, calling it an attempt by the "defeated" US Administration to "attack the Georgian people and government" in its final days.

"This is a serious stain on Georgian-American relations, particularly in terms of our law enforcement and security system," Papuashvili remarked. He added that it was "unfortunate" that after the defeat in the 2024 US presidential elections, the outgoing Administration, which had lost its legitimacy in the eyes of the American people, was harming relations with Georgia on behalf of the American public.

In his comments to the press, Papuashvili suggested that the visa restrictions and sanctions were being used as "instruments of coercion by various political groups, both internally and externally." Despite these threats, he emphasized that "Georgia is still moving forward," and argued that such decisions would not harm the Georgian people. "The only thing these decisions harm is the reputation of the countries and governments that impose them," he added.



Shalva Papuashvili. Source: X

Papuashvili also praised Vakhtang Gomelauri, Georgia's Interior Minister and new Vice PM, one of the officials targeted by the sanctions, and other law enforcement officers for maintaining a "safe environment in Georgia, not just for Georgians but also for foreign citizens, diplomats, and all our guests."

He concluded by highlighting the recent US State Department's Country Reports on Terrorism, which noted that "Georgia continued its robust counterterrorism efforts in 2023 and remained a strong US security partner."

## EU Proposes Suspension of Visa Facilitation for Georgian Diplomats over Growing Political Repression

Continued from page 1

These laws undermine fundamental rights, particularly anti-discrimination measures, which are central to EU values. As a result, the EU has emphasized that adherence to these rights is a critical requirement for visa liberalization.

The European Council had already expressed concerns over Georgia's democratic backsliding in June, effectively halting the EU accession process. As the situation worsened, the Commission moved forward with the proposal to suspend visa facilitations for Georgian diplomats and officials, which now requires approval from the EU Council.

The violent tactics used by Georgian authorities have drawn strong condemnation from the United States, United Kingdom, and several EU countries. In a joint statement, diplomatic representatives from these countries, including the US, Belgium, and the UK, expressed deep concern over the repression, criticizing the use of arbitrary detention and violence against critics. They urged the Georgian government to cease these tactics and release individuals detained for peacefully exercising their rights.

These countries also called for accountability for those responsible for unlawful violence against protesters, journalists, and opposition figures, and urged Georgia to return to the EU integration path that most Georgians desire. "Our countries stand in solidarity with the Georgian people and their democratic and Euro-Atlantic aspirations," the statement read, reaffirming support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

In light of these developments, the US and the UK have imposed financial and

visa sanctions on several senior Georgian officials involved in the violent crackdowns. US sanctions target Minister of Internal Affairs (and newly named Vice Prime Minister) Vakhtang Gomelauri and Deputy Head of the Ministry's Special Tasks Department Mirza Kezevadze under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act. The sanctions are a response to the brutal suppression of protests in 2024, which included the use of water cannons, tear gas, and rubber bullets.

The UK has also imposed travel bans and asset freezes on five Georgian officials: Vakhtang Gomelauri, Aleksandre Darakhvelidze, Sulkhan Tamazashvili, Zviad Kharazishvili, and Miler Lagazauri. Foreign Secretary David Lammy condemned the violence, calling it "an egregious attack on democracy."

In response, Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze announced that 11 senior officials from Georgia's Ministry of Internal Affairs would be nominated

for the Order of Honor. This includes Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Internal Affairs Vakhtang Gomelauri, along with several deputy ministers and department heads. Despite their involvement in the violent suppression of pro-European demonstrations, the Georgian government continues to honor these officials.

The US, EU and UK sanctions reflect the growing international response to Georgia's escalating political repression, with Western nations expressing concern about the erosion of democratic freedoms in the country. In addition to the sanctions, the UK recently halted support programs in Georgia and discontinued the Wardrop Dialogue, a key diplomatic platform, in response to Georgia's anti-Western moves and restrictive legislation, while US State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said on December 17: "We are preparing an additional sanctions package that we will release in the coming weeks."



# Zurabishvili Calls for New Elections in Response to OSCE/ODIHR Report, PM Says Report Proves the Elections Were a Success

BY TEAM GT

Georgian President Salome Zurabishvili has called for new elections following the publication of the OSCE/ODIHR's final report on Georgia's October 26 parliamentary elections, highlighting the need for specific actions to address the issues raised. "A call for concrete action means new elections. That is the democratic way out of the deep crisis in which these elections have thrown Georgia," Zurabishvili stated on X.

The OSCE/ODIHR report acknowledged that while election day was well-administered procedurally, the atmosphere was tense, and voters and citizen observers experienced widespread intimidation. The report cited multiple instances of voter pressure, with many feeling intimidated by surveillance linked to the ruling party and its affiliates. It also highlighted overcrowding at polling stations and concerns over the secrecy of the vote in 24% of observations, such as improper ballot handling and visible markings on ballots. The report noted that representatives from the ruling party were seen filming the election process, further intimidating voters. The counting process revealed procedural flaws, including improper handling of unused ballots and inconsistencies in determining ballot validity. While preliminary results were promptly released, essential data, such as voter turnout by polling station and the number of invalid votes, were not provided in an accessible format.

The OSCE/ODIHR offered several recommendations to bring Georgia's elections in line with international standards, including preventing voter intimidation and electoral violence, reviewing the legal framework to align with international norms, and ensuring the independence of the media regulatory body.

Other recommendations focused on ensuring transparency in resolving electoral disputes and protecting the secrecy of the vote. ODIHR also stressed the importance of enabling citizen observers to work without intimidation.

In contrast, Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze responded by claiming that the OSCE/ODIHR report "proves the elections were held successfully and all the allegations by the radical opposition have been refuted." At a press briefing, Kobakhidze highlighted that the opposition, including President Zurabishvili, had made baseless claims about the election. He dismissed accusations of ballot manipulation, voting irregularities, and electoral interference, stating that these were disproven by the OSCE/ODIHR report. The report, he pointed out, did not consider many of the opposition's claims relevant, including allegations of election rigging and Russian interference.

The Prime Minister addressed several key allegations made by the opposition and President Salome Zurabishvili. He particularly focused on what Shalva Papuashvili, Speaker of the Georgian Parliament, called "five lies," which he claimed had been exposed by the OSCE/ODIHR report. Kobakhidze emphasized that these allegations were part of a "revolutionary scenario" concocted by the opposition.

The first accusation concerned marks on ballots that had allegedly been leaked. Kobakhidze pointed out that the OSCE/ODIHR report did not consider this a substantive issue, noting that 76% of polling stations had no problems, and only isolated incidents were mentioned elsewhere.

Kobakhidze also addressed the issue of voting by Georgian citizens living abroad. The OSCE/ODIHR, he said, did not view this matter as significant, effectively refuting the opposition's claims on the issue. He also dismissed the allegations about unopened polling stations abroad, noting that the OSCE/ODIHR



President Zurabishvili and PM Kobakhidze. Source: news-pravda

did not consider these accusations substantial.

Another major claim Kobakhidze refuted was the accusation of 300,000 rigged votes and "carousel voting" — the practice of voting multiple times. Zurabishvili had also asserted that the same electorate had voted 17 times. Kobakhidze emphasized that these allegations were "completely disproven" by the OSCE/ODIHR report and were found to be without merit.

Kobakhidze further addressed accusations of Russian interference, pointing out that there was no mention of such interference in the OSCE/ODIHR report. Similarly, the Prime Minister explained that while some isolated cases of violence at polling stations were mentioned in the report, the broader claims of electoral violence made by the opposition were denied.

Kobakhidze also emphasized that, according to Georgia's Constitution,

new elections could only be called if the CEC or judiciary invalidated the results, or if Parliament voted no confidence in the government. Since the CEC had confirmed the results and the Constitutional Court upheld their legitimacy, there was, in his view, no basis for re-elections.

Additionally, the Prime Minister pointed out that the expiry of Parliament's four-year term — the second condition for calling new elections — did not apply in this case. The third condition, which would involve Parliament voting no confidence in the government, was also absent, since Parliament had declared confidence in the current government. Therefore, Kobakhidze concluded, there were no grounds for re-elections.

The Prime Minister further warned Zurabishvili against the idea of calling new elections, threatening criminal liability if she pursued such a course. He noted that Zurabishvili had met with

opposition representatives and non-governmental organizations on Saturday, during which the possibility of new elections was discussed. However, he claimed that at the last moment, Zurabishvili had been dissuaded from the idea. Kobakhidze stated, "If the president nevertheless decides to call new parliamentary elections for some other reason, she will face criminal liability for this." He ominously added, "We'll see where Zurabishvili will continue to live, behind bars or free." Earlier, Zurabishvili had expressed a desire not to become a politician in exile, referencing figures like Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who has been forced into exile following political tensions in Belarus.

As such, while Zurabishvili advocates for new elections in response to the OSCE/ODIHR's findings, the PM maintains that the elections were legitimate and that no grounds for re-elections exist under the current legal framework.

## Initiatives Empowering Georgia's Path to Europe

BY KESARIA KATCHARAVA

Within Georgia's ongoing political turmoil, a number of initiatives have sprung up to support local entrepreneurs, activists, and citizens committed to the country's European integration journey. These platforms do more than address immediate needs; they also generate important conversations about Georgia's democratic aspirations and its alignment with European values. Notable among these initiatives are Happy EU Year GE, FreeBusiness.ge, Ertobit.ge, and GZA (Georgisches Zentrum im Ausland), each playing a key role in promoting community solidarity, political engagement, and transparency in the face of uncertainty.

### HAPPY EU YEAR GE: A PLATFORM FOR POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AND BUSINESS SOLIDARITY

Happy EU Year GE is more than just a marketplace—it's a political statement. Launched as an alternative to the City Mayor's controversial Christmas market, the platform offers small business owners a chance to showcase their products while publicly declaring their support for Georgia's European Union trajectory. With the political unrest, many entrepreneurs chose not to participate in the state-backed market, viewing it as politically compromised. By using Happy EU Year GE, businesses are able to make their stance clear, letting consumers know which companies align with European integration values.

What sets this platform apart is its ability to encourage engagement. Visitors



can actively ask businesses to declare their position on Georgia's EU aspirations, generating an open dialogue about the country's political future. The platform tracks and displays which businesses support the EU integration process, who has declined to take a position, and who remains undecided, creating a transparent environment that holds businesses accountable and encourages civic participation. This initiative embodies the spirit of collective action and political involvement while supporting local entrepreneurship.

### FREEBUSINESS.GE: EMPOWERING ENTREPRENEURS IN CHALLENGING TIMES

In times of political and economic instability, small businesses often struggle to

stay afloat. FreeBusiness.ge provides essential support to Georgia's entrepreneurs, ensuring they can operate freely and navigate the complex challenges of a volatile environment. Offering resources like networking opportunities, business advice, and advocacy for better market conditions, the platform creates a community where entrepreneurs can share knowledge and grow their businesses.

FreeBusiness.ge is more than just a business resource—it's a safe space for entrepreneurs to connect and discuss their common challenges. Whether it's dealing with government regulations or addressing the broader social and political issues impacting their work, the platform fosters a resilient business community that stays true to its values, including Georgia's pursuit of democracy

and European integration. By emphasizing economic independence and solidarity, FreeBusiness.ge plays a crucial role in ensuring that small businesses can thrive, even in difficult times. Find out more on page 8!

### ERTOBIT.GE: COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT FOR PROTESTERS AND ACTIVISTS

In times of civil unrest, support for those on the front lines is critical. Ertobit.ge is a comprehensive platform offering psychological, legal, and physical assistance to individuals engaged in protests and political movements. This initiative goes beyond just offering legal advice or counseling—it provides shelter, medical care, and direct protection for activists, ensuring they are supported in all aspects of their involvement.

Ertobit.ge also plays a crucial role in keeping the public informed. Through continuous updates, the platform tracks protest activity across Georgia, reporting on which cities are seeing demonstrations and offering insights into the status of protests on the ground. This combination of real-time information and practical support ensures that activists are safe, informed, and empowered to continue their work in the face of political challenges. By offering free services to those at the heart of Georgia's political movements, Ertobit.ge plays a vital role in supporting the country's democratic journey.

### GZA: RAISING AWARENESS AND STRENGTHENING THE GEORGIAN DIASPORA'S VOICE

For Georgians living abroad, staying connected to their homeland's political struggles is crucial. GZA (Georgisches Zentrum im Ausland), or the Georgian Center Abroad, is a collective of Euro-

pean-based activists working to raise awareness about Georgia's political climate and its aspirations for European integration. The platform serves as a vital resource for the Georgian diaspora, allowing them to engage with ongoing events, stay informed about political developments, and contribute to the cause of democracy and European integration from abroad.

Through organizing events, sharing updates, and creating spaces for dialogue, GZA ensures that the voice of the Georgian diaspora remains strong and visible. The platform provides a channel for emigrants to support Georgia's political reforms while fostering a sense of solidarity among Georgians living outside their home country. By amplifying the challenges Georgia faces on the European stage, GZA helps maintain the momentum of the pro-European movement, ensuring that the aspirations of the Georgian people are heard globally.

### EMPOWERING GEORGIA'S CITIZENS AND ENTREPRENEURS FOR A BETTER FUTURE

These initiatives—Happy EU Year GE, FreeBusiness.ge, Ertobit.ge, and GZA—are powerful examples of how individuals and organizations are stepping up to support Georgia's political movements and its path toward European integration. By creating platforms for dialogue, providing essential resources, and fostering solidarity, these projects are not only addressing immediate needs but also contributing to the long-term goal of a free, democratic, and European Georgia. Through their collective efforts, these initiatives are empowering individuals, strengthening communities, and ensuring that Georgia's democratic aspirations continue to move forward despite the challenges that lie ahead.

# Liam Collins on the Current State of the Ukraine Conflict



Liam Collins, executive director of the Madison Policy Forum

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

In a recent interview with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Georgian Service, Liam Collins, executive director of the Madison Policy Forum, discussed the current state of the Ukraine conflict as the war enters its third year. Reflecting on the evolving battlefield dynamics, Collins explores Russia's military strategy, the challenges Ukraine faces in securing sufficient resources and manpower, and the potential geopolitical consequences of a shift in U.S. support.

## A THOUSAND DAYS SINCE PUTIN ASSUMED HE COULD TAKE UKRAINE IN A MATTER OF WEEKS, IF NOT DAYS—WHERE DO WE STAND TODAY?

We're kind of where we were about three weeks in. I said at the time that this would last many years, and that's essentially where we are now—at a standstill, with neither side making significant territorial gains. Russia can't take any more land, and Ukraine hasn't been able to liberate much of it either.

## WITH REPORTS INDICATING THAT RUSSIA IS ADVANCING AT A FASTER PACE THAN AT ANY POINT IN THE LAST YEAR AND A HALF, IS IT STILL TRUE THAT RUSSIA LACKS THE ABILITY TO SEIZE SIGNIFICANT TERRITORY?

Without a doubt, they are making progress at a faster pace. But if you consider how long it would take them to reach the capital at this rate, it would take decades. That's not a viable strategy for

Never underestimate Russia's ability to absorb pain

If the US walks away...it could embolden the 'axis of upheaval'—China, North Korea, Iran—threatening global stability

capturing the capital or taking control of the country. In the end, it's going to come down to exhaustion on one side or the other. Yes, Russia has had some recent successes, but those have occurred when Ukraine has been artificially restricted. Historically, we've never seen a situation where a nation is being supported, but with so many restrictions on the weapons provided to them. We've seen that when Ukraine has been able to strike deeper into Russian territory, it forces Russia to reposition its forces.

## LET'S LOOK AT THE SITUATION ON THE FRONT. IF THE CURRENT TRENDS CONTINUE, WHAT CAN EACH SIDE REALISTICALLY HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH BY THE TIME THE NEW YEAR COMES?

You're not going to see Ukraine liberating any significant territory. They're just trying to hold their lines, reconstitute their forces, and get resupplied. This is really a war of attrition for Ukraine—making the war costly for Russia until Russia decides it's too expensive to continue. But that's not something that's going to be resolved in months. This is a years-long struggle. Russia will keep throwing their soldiers away—they don't care about Russian citizens—and they'll continue to make very minimal gains—talking just tens of meters or maybe hundreds of

meters, at the cost of hundreds of their own soldiers for little tactical gain. So, I expect the situation to be stagnant, with only a few areas seeing significant movement where Russia is pushing hard but suffering heavy casualties.

## THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT I WANTED TO ASK. DO YOU EXPECT RUSSIA TO MAKE ANY NEW CONQUESTS—NEW CITIES, NEW TOWNS, NEW STRATEGICALLY IMPORTANT OUTPOSTS?

No. I mean, we're in mid-November, with only a few weeks left before winter sets in. The big wildcard in all this will be what President Trump decides to push for and what US policy will be. Ukraine has fought extremely effectively, but you can have all the resolve in the world, and if you don't have the means to fight, you're going to struggle. The big question is: What will US support look like after the new year? If the US decides to reduce or halt its support, will other Western nations step in to fill that void? Ukraine absolutely needs to be resupplied. As long as they are, they can continue to fight and hold the line.

## WOULD YOU EXPECT RUSSIA TO LIBERATE THE KURSK REGION BY THE TIME THE NEW YEAR COMES?

No, I don't think so. It's not impossible, but as I said, their territorial gains have been fairly minimal. Assuming Ukraine continues to receive the aid it's been getting and can rebuild its forces, I wouldn't expect Russia to make any significant gains before the new year.

## SPEAKING OF MAKING IT TOO COSTLY FOR RUSSIA TO CONTINUE THIS WAR—COULD ANYTHING ON THE BATTLEFIELD SHIFT THE KREMLIN'S CALCULUS?

We've seen attacks inside Russia that have shaken the Kremlin. These deeper strikes are a signal that Russia and its political elite could start paying the price for this war, rather than just the soldiers on the frontlines. That calculus changes when Ukraine is free to strike anywhere, not just on their own territory. But as long as Russia has massive support from

Ukraine is playing a war of exhaustion, making it too costly for Russia to continue

economies like China and military capabilities from countries like North Korea, it's hard to make Russia bear the true cost of this war.

## IT'S STILL QUITE FASCINATING THAT THE DEATH RATIO DOESN'T SEEM TO BE DETERRING RUSSIA IN ANY WAY. AS A COMBAT VETERAN, DO YOU THINK THERE'S ANY THRESHOLD WHERE THE CASUALTIES COULD FORCE MOSCOW TO RECONSIDER?

There's obviously a certain threshold beyond which Russia wouldn't be able to continue because they wouldn't have enough soldiers left to fight. But the real question is: could Ukraine ever push Russia to that threshold? I'm not sure. Early on, I thought it was possible. But as I always tell people, never underestimate Russia's ability to absorb pain. Part of it is that we care about our citizens, and Russia really doesn't.

## WHAT WOULD THAT THRESHOLD LOOK LIKE? HOW MANY RUSSIAN DEATHS WOULD IT TAKE?

If you had asked me before the war, I might have said that 200,000 dead Russian soldiers would be the threshold. But they lost that many in the first month. That's more than Russia lost in a decade of fighting in Afghanistan. And what ended the war in Afghanistan? It was an extremely unpopular conflict, especially among Russian mothers who didn't want to see their sons coming home in body bags.

## BUT THEY DON'T SEEM TO MIND AS MUCH NOW, EVEN WITH TEN TIMES MORE BODY BAGS COMING HOME. WHY IS THAT?

Part of it is that Putin has a tighter grip on the country now, so there's less public dissent. But another part is that Ukraine is fundamentally different for Russians. In Russia's psyche, this is a core issue—it's part of their identity. Afghanistan, on the other hand, was something they never really cared about.

## YOU MENTIONED THAT UKRAINE NEEDS TO BE RESUPPLIED, AND RESOLVE ALONE WON'T BE ENOUGH WITHOUT THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT. BUT YOU CAN HAVE ALL THE EQUIPMENT IN THE WORLD, AND STILL NEED THE MANPOWER TO OPERATE IT. HOW BIG OF A MANPOWER PROBLEM DOES UKRAINE FACE?

Ukraine needs both equipment and manpower, without a doubt. They need soldiers. One thing they could consider is lowering the draft age. If you look at NATO countries, their draft ages are much higher.

## BUT MOST WESTERN NATIONS AREN'T SENDING THEIR PEOPLE TO WAR, AND IN UKRAINE'S CASE, IT'S DELIBERATE. THEY'RE SENDING OLDER PEOPLE TO MANAGE THE DEMOGRAPHIC POOL.

I understand that, but if they're fighting for their survival, it's not unusual to tap into an older demographic for military service. Another thing that could help is having more Western trainers in Ukraine—not scattered throughout Europe, but actually based in Ukraine itself. If the Russians have North Koreans fighting there, why can't Western nations establish a more significant training presence in Ukraine? There's really no reason why that hasn't been considered more seriously.

## THE BIG NEWS THIS WEEK IS THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION GREENLIGHTING THE USE OF ATACMS FOR DEEP STRIKES INTO RUSSIA. BEFORE WE DISCUSS THE POTENTIAL IMPACT, WHY DO YOU THINK THIS DECISION HAS COME NOW AND NOT EARLIER, WHEN IT ARGUABLY COULD HAVE SAVED THOUSANDS OF LIVES?

The US has self-deterrence. We should have opened the floodgates and given Ukraine all the equipment they need, instead of providing it incrementally with so many restrictions. Historically, we've never seen anything like this in war.

## WHAT MIGHT RUSSIA'S RESPONSE BE, GIVEN PUTIN'S EARLIER COMMENTS THAT THIS WOULD BE SEEN AS NATO ENTERING THE WAR?

There's not much Russia can do. If they escalate, Putin's also considering the US response. What would the US do in return? Would they send troops into Ukraine? We need to remember that we have a much greater ability to escalate than Russia. Russia is left with nuclear weapons, but they're not going to use them. Our ability to escalate is far greater than theirs.

## DOES THIS GREENLIGHT COME WITH A TIME LIMIT, ESPECIALLY WITH A NEW US PRESIDENT TAKING OFFICE IN TWO MONTHS?

I think it introduces a level of unpredictability, which can be useful as a bargaining chip. What will Trump pursue? He's a dealmaker, and he's promised to end this within days of taking office, which is unlikely. But he'll want to broker a deal on terms favorable to him. The big question is whether he gets frustrated if either side doesn't cooperate—if Putin alienates him, or if he's unhappy with Zelensky's actions. He might decide to increase aid to Ukraine, or he might threaten to cut it off. So, there's a lot of uncertainty. I don't expect anything to happen in days or weeks.

## SUPPOSE A DEAL IS REACHED, AND UKRAINE EMERGES AS THE CLEAR LOSER. WHAT GEOPOLITICAL CONSEQUENCES DO YOU FORESEE?

What we're seeing here is what someone has called the "axis of upheaval"—North Korea, China, and Iran aligning. If the U.S. stops supporting Ukraine, it's effectively handing that axis a victory and weakening its own position globally. If the U.S. walks away, we're heading into dangerous territory. We haven't seen a scenario like this since pre-World War II. Abandoning a democratic nation like Ukraine would send a signal to China, who might look at this and ask: "Was this costly for Russia? Yes. But what did they gain? A large swath of Ukrainian territory. That's a bargain for the Kremlin." If Russia absorbs minimal sanctions over a few years and then owns Taiwan, it could be worth the cost in the long term. If China is told they'll have the world against them for three years but will get Taiwan in the end, they'd take that deal in a heartbeat.

# Education as the Key to a Better Future: The Threat to Georgia's Educational Reputation and Democratic Values

BLOG BY MARIAM AVAKOVA

When you don't have someone influential or well-connected in your life, when you grow up in a middle- or low-income family, or even in a working-class household where your parents work tirelessly, like workaholics, just to meet basic needs, and even if toxic relatives can cloud the environment around you, the only true power that the younger generation can rely on is education. Education becomes the one tool that can break through the barriers of circumstance, offering the chance for self-discovery and the hope of a better life.

At first, you don't even dare to dream of competing on a global scale, or accessing prestigious Western education. Your first dream is simply to attend university, to earn any form of higher education. For many of my country's younger generations, the most basic dream is to secure a scholarship to study at a national university, to gain a degree, and to establish a future based on that knowledge. Whether the quality of education is exceptional or less than ideal, it becomes a powerful passport to the future, a tool that helps you navigate life's challenges and understand your own struggles. Education becomes a metaphorical visa, opening doors to a world of possibilities, even when physical borders remain closed.

All the struggles, the journey to understand yourself, to define your identity and to earn recognition, become surmountable through access to a great education system. It is within this system that you unlock your potential, discover inspiration, and chart a meaningful path forward. For those of us facing systemic challenges, education is not just an option; it is the gateway to a better future.

When you're lucky enough to be part of a university that offers international exchange programs and promotes student activities and projects, opportunities open up in ways you never imagined. And if you get lucky enough to be in such a university, you have a golden opportunity. If you're wisely active, smart, and able to seize these moments in given opportunities, you can use them to build a solid foundation for your career. These experiences help you develop essential skills, expand your network, and gain a global perspective, all contributing to long-term success and career establishment. It's all about making the most of the resources and opportunities available to you.

And when you see the struggle intensify within your education system, which is failing due to the mistakes of your government leaders, it becomes even more frightening. The fear that national education will no longer be recognized abroad, or that exchange programs will become a distant dream, is real. Education, once a powerful tool for personal development and career advancement, now seems like an uncertain path.

Yes, there are opportunities if you have access to the internet, free online courses offered by various global universities. But even with these, it's not enough if the education system in your country is falling apart. It's a struggle that leaves educated individuals, no matter how resourceful they are, facing an uphill battle.

This is the reality Georgia now faces: the country is in danger of losing its position within the European educational space. The European EQAR registry has suspended the registration of Georgia's National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE). This is a massive blow, a direct result of the lack of confidence in the accreditation system, reputational damage, loss of trust, complication of planned international educational programs, which will stretch the process over time, and the suspension of opportunities like double degree offerings and student exchanges.

The consequences are far-reaching. This situation threatens the international mobility of students, undermines the quality of education, and damages the credibility of Georgian universities on the international stage, casts a shadow over the global recognition of Georgian diplomas. Most crucially, it poses a risk to Georgia's European integration.

The results of the suspension of NCEQE registration by EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education) has been widely discussed by local education experts. They have emphasized the serious consequences this decision may have for Georgia's higher education system, particularly in terms of the international recognition of Georgian degrees and the country's broader European integration efforts. The suspension highlights concerns about the political influence on Georgia's accreditation system.

The suspension comes as a result of violations of European quality assurance standards, with accusations that Georgia's NCEQE is "not free from political influence" and is being used as a tool for political pressure on universities, further weakening the integrity and credibility of the entire educational structure. This is a warning, a pivotal moment in Georgia's educational journey.

A week before the suspension of Georgia's education accreditation, Tbilisi hosted a powerful march titled "With Western Education Towards Europe!" Starting at Ilia State University, it brought together graduates, students, alumni, and professors from Western and US institutions, including the EPAG alumni association. Marching from the EU Embassy to Parliament, they demanded new elections, a return to a pro-European foreign policy, and the release of political prisoners. With banners reading "Education is the Most Powerful Weapon to Change the World," the protesters called for the protection of academic freedom, quality education, and Georgia's democratic future, reflecting a collective hope for a future based on liberty and justice.

The Georgian people's overwhelming support for European integration underscores their belief in its promise of democratic governance, economic opportunity, and national security. However, this vision is at risk. Georgian Dream's series of anti-democratic actions, failing to transparently investigate election irregularities, enacting laws that suppress freedoms of assembly and expression, and recently suspending Georgia's EU accession process, have severely undermined the nation's Euro-Atlantic path.

On 28 November, Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze announced that Georgia would not initiate accession talks with the EU until 2028. He declared that the country would also refuse any EU funds, claiming that EU funding has been used as a tool of blackmail, which led to its rejection, while for Tbilisi, viewing integration with the EU as a mere act of charity is unacceptable.

This decision was more than just a political move; it marked a deep betrayal of the Georgian people's constitutional promise to pursue full integration into the European Union and NATO. By halting the EU accession process, Georgian Dream ignored the will of its citizens, weakened Georgia's international standing, and made the country more vulnerable to Kremlin influence. These actions threaten Georgia's sovereignty and its aspirations for a democratic and secure future.

The announcement on 28 November shocked the Georgian people, sparking a wave of resistance determined to protect democracy, justice, education, and a European future. Protests have continued for 24 days, driven by growing discontent over Georgian Dream's controversial actions, such as the introduction of the Foreign Agents Law in April, condemned as a threat to free speech and civil society. The first week following the announcement saw growing ten-



sions, with protests met by unlawful force, including tear gas, rubber bullets, and water cannons. Riot police arrested and assaulted protesters, injuring many, including journalists, highlighting the government's hostility toward media coverage. Despite these challenges, the Georgian people remain resolute in their fight for democratic values and a European future.

In this moment of crisis, the country's hope lies in the self-motivated citizens protesting in the streets, united for democracy and a European future, and in the leadership of President Salome Zurbishvili. Amid this turmoil, Georgia faces a divide between two figures claiming authority: Mikheil Kavelashvili, installed by Georgian Dream, and Zurbishvili, the legitimate president, who stands as a beacon of hope for the people.

President Zurbishvili, known as the "People's President," has become a key figure in Georgia's fight for democracy. A strong advocate for Georgia's European aspirations, she has earned support from the EU Parliament, European institutions, and diplomats. She fiercely criticized Georgian Dream's decision to halt the EU accession process, calling it a "constitutional coup" and a shift toward a pro-Russian course. Zurbishvili has refused to recognize the legitimacy of the current government and aligned herself with the people in their struggle for rights and European integration. Her leadership provides hope as citizens rally to preserve their sovereignty, education, and democratic values.

During the last 24 days of protests, it has been inspiring to witness the self-organized support and actions of Georgian citizens. Their creativity shines through in activities such as dancing, united marches by people from different professions and segments of society, and voluntary food deliveries. Over the past week, representatives from various regions, including Kakheti, Samegrelo, Kartli, and Svaneti, have organized their own marches. People from diverse professions, such as IT, historians, artists, and PR and marketing specialists, have united in protests. Day 24 marked a pivotal moment in Georgia's modern history, as an unprecedented wave of marches



swept through the city, all of them converging once again on Rustaveli Avenue, with over twenty marches taking place in a single day, bringing nearly 200,000 protesters in front of the parliament building.

Initiatives like "Happy EU Year GE" (happyeuyear.ge) have emerged, supporting small entrepreneurs, uniting those who refused to participate in the City Mayor's Christmas market. Web platforms that promote free business (freebusiness.ge), and also ertobit.ge offer services such as free psychological and legal assistance, among others. Another notable initiative is the self-organized platform "GZA," managed from Germany [instagram.com/gza\\_europe](https://www.instagram.com/gza_europe), which has become a source of inspiration for emigrants.

It is also inspiring and motivational to see the creativity of my Georgian people standing strong, even among the city's New Year decorations. Against this backdrop, peaceful performances and creative protests have emerged, embodying a spirit of resilience. One day, these acts of solidarity could well become a source of inspiration for films, showcasing the unbreakable warrior spirit of Georgian citizens. Even the administrators of the European Parliament's Facebook page were shocked by the actions of my country's citizens, with over 100,000 reactions and expressions of support.

And myself as a young activist and committed future EU citizen and educator, who believes in the power of education and the future of EU-Atlantic integration - I stand with my people for common values like democracy, justice, and fair elections. As someone who deeply understands the transformative power of education, I want to highlight the challenges I am currently facing. As already reported by Georgia Today, I am struggling with significant financial barriers in my pursuit of a Master's in Public Policy at the Hertie School. Due to the current circumstances, I have been forced to postpone this goal, but my determination remains unwavering.

I must mention how incredibly grateful I am for my time at Ilia State University, which opened my eyes and helped me realize my potential. Through opportunities like short exchanges and pro-

grams such as Erasmus+, the Sweden Institute's SAYP program, Leaders Labs, the Institute of Ocean at Malta University, Elda Academy, and Digital Communication-USWorld learning programs, I have come to truly understand the power of education. I deeply believe in giving back to my community, and I hope my journey can serve as inspiration to others. Education has opened many doors for me, and I feel it's my responsibility to share that knowledge and contribute to the growth of those around me.

I come from a family where hard work was not just a virtue but a necessity. My parents, who worked tirelessly to meet our basic needs, taught me the value of perseverance. However, their financial sacrifices often left little room for dreams beyond survival. Growing up in a middle-income family, I learned early on that we lacked the privileges many take for granted. Yet, amidst all the struggles, one thing became abundantly clear: education was my only way forward. It was my one opportunity to change the narrative, to rewrite my story, and to unlock my true potential.

In those early years, education became my sanctuary. It was a place where I could imagine a life beyond limitations, where I could explore ideas and dream of a brighter future. But it wasn't just about acquiring knowledge; it was about discovering myself. Each lesson, every book and opportunity, and every challenge revealed a new facet of who I was and who I could become. It was as if each step in my educational journey was peeling back layers to uncover the person I was meant to be.

The turning point came when I had the chance to pursue higher education. This was more than just an academic pursuit; it was an awakening. The rigorous environment, the exposure to diverse perspectives, and the encouragement to think critically and creatively opened my eyes to possibilities I had never imagined. Higher education wasn't just about earning a degree; it was about finding inspiration. It was about creating a life that felt meaningful and fulfilled, not just for myself but for the community I was part of.

Through education, I found hope, hope that I could overcome the barriers of my circumstances, hope that I could contribute to something larger than myself, and hope that I could inspire others to do the same. It taught me resilience, adaptability, and the importance of lifelong learning. It gave me the tools to not only dream but to act on those dreams.

Looking back, I see how education transformed my life. It helped me rise above the struggles of my upbringing and gave me the courage to face challenges head-on. More importantly, it gave me the ability to recognize my own potential and the confidence to pursue it. Today, as I continue to grow and learn, I carry with me the lessons of my journey, lessons of hard work, perseverance, and the undeniable power of education.

My story is a testament to the fact that education is not just a means to an end; it is a lifelong journey of self-discovery and empowerment. It is the bridge between where you are and where you want to be. And for those of us who come from humble beginnings, it is the ultimate tool to create a life of purpose and fulfillment.

However, the reality Georgia faces today is deeply concerning. With the suspension of the National Center for the Development of Education Quality from the European EQAR registry, our nation risks losing its standing within the European educational space. This is a critical issue that must be addressed swiftly and effectively. Education is the cornerstone of progress, and Georgia must take the necessary steps to restore its place in the global educational community. It is not just about maintaining access to European opportunities; it is about ensuring that future generations have the tools to succeed, build meaningful lives, and contribute to a better world.

# Free Business, Free Choice: How a Platform is Redefining Corporate Responsibility in Georgia

BY IVAN NECHAEV

In the wake of social upheavals and political crossroads, businesses in Georgia are finding themselves at the intersection of commerce and civic responsibility. The platform Freebusiness, created by entrepreneur Giorgi Chugoshvili, has emerged as a digital barometer of corporate values, inviting companies to openly declare their support for European integration and ongoing protests advocating democratic reforms. Over 1,600 businesses have registered, while a separate section, “Unregistered,” lists companies that have yet to declare their stance—fueling debates about transparency, accountability, and the role of commerce in shaping the sociopolitical landscape.

## FROM COMMERCE TO CONSCIENCE: A SHIFT IN BUSINESS CULTURE

The platform’s emergence highlights an evolving phenomenon in Georgian society: the increasing demand for businesses to take a moral stand. Traditionally, companies operated as apolitical entities focused solely on profit margins and market competition. Today, however, they are being asked to align themselves with broader social and political movements.

This is not unique to Georgia; it reflects a global trend where corporate responsibility extends beyond environmental or ethical labor practices into the realm of political allegiance. Platforms like Freebusiness challenge the assumption that the private sector can remain neutral in times of societal turbulence.

Sociologically, this shift underscores the growing interdependence between civil society and the private sector. Businesses, as integral parts of community



ecosystems, are now expected to contribute to collective values. The Freebusiness platform becomes not just a registry but a stage where companies demonstrate their alignment—or lack thereof—with public sentiment and national aspirations.

## TRANSPARENCY AND THE ETHICS OF VISIBILITY

One of the platform’s most compelling features is its “Unregistered” section, listing prominent companies that have not declared their position. The inclusion of major players like Wissol, Archi, and Adjara Group, alongside financial giants like Bank of Georgia and TBC, raises questions about the ethics of neutrality.

Philosophically, this invites a discussion on the ethics of transparency. By publicly listing companies that have not taken a stance, Freebusiness effectively pressures them to clarify their position,

potentially at the cost of alienating customers or partners. Can silence be ethically neutral in a society where silence can be perceived as complicity? The platform’s approach challenges the adage that “actions speak louder than words,” suggesting instead that inaction is equally telling.

For businesses, this dynamic introduces a dilemma: declaring a position may alienate certain demographics, but remaining unregistered risks reputational damage in an era where consumer trust is increasingly tied to corporate values.

## ECONOMIC PATRIOTISM OR PRAGMATIC POSTURING?

The platform’s premise also invites scrutiny regarding the authenticity of corporate declarations. Are businesses signing up out of genuine commitment to European values and democratic ideals, or is this a calculated move to secure consumer loyalty in a politically charged

environment?

In an age of performative activism, the line between genuine support and opportunistic branding is often blurred. While some companies might see this as an opportunity to demonstrate solidarity with public sentiment, others may view it as a marketing strategy. This duality reflects broader philosophical debates about the nature of altruism in capitalist systems: can businesses ever act selflessly, or are their actions always tied to profit motives?

## CONSUMERS AS WATCHDOGS

Freebusiness also empowers consumers, offering them a platform to hold brands accountable. By enabling users to share information about a brand’s stance—or lack thereof—it democratizes the flow of information and strengthens the role of public opinion in shaping corporate behavior.

This participatory model aligns with

the principles of deliberative democracy, where citizens actively engage in shaping societal norms. It positions consumers as watchdogs and co-creators of the ethical frameworks within which businesses operate. The platform’s impact, however, hinges on the credibility of its data and the integrity of its users.

## A NEW PARADIGM FOR CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

Freebusiness represents a new paradigm for corporate responsibility in Georgia, one that transcends traditional CSR initiatives. Its focus on political and ethical alignment with societal values reflects a growing recognition that businesses are not isolated entities but active participants in the nation’s sociopolitical fabric.

At its core, Freebusiness is a sociological experiment. It tests the extent to which businesses are willing to integrate civic responsibility into their corporate identity. It challenges the public to consider whether neutrality is a viable option in an era where every action—or inaction—carries political weight. And it pushes the boundaries of what it means to be a “free business” in a free society.

## THE ROAD AHEAD

As Georgia navigates its path toward European integration, platforms like Freebusiness may become increasingly significant in shaping public discourse. Whether they succeed in fostering genuine accountability or merely create an illusion of transparency remains to be seen.

What is certain, however, is that the conversation around corporate responsibility is evolving. Businesses can no longer afford to remain silent spectators in the unfolding drama of societal change. In Georgia, as elsewhere, the question is not just about which side businesses are on but about the role they play in shaping the future.



Photo: The National Wine Agency of Georgia.

## Georgian Wine Showcased at Foire Aux Vins in Belgium

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

Georgian wine was showcased at the Foire aux Vins, a two-day festival in Leuzen-Hainaut, Belgium, supported by the Georgian National Wine Agency and facilitated by FLOW SRL.

The annual exhibition presents wines from France, Italy, and many other Euro-

pean countries. Wine professionals and importers tasted 10 Georgian wines produced by four wineries, utilizing traditional qvevri and classic techniques.

The Georgian National Wine Agency supported Georgian wine presentations in approximately 40 international exhibitions and festivals across 19 countries, including France, Germany, Japan, China, South Korea, the UK, the U.S., and more.

The US, UK, Germany, Poland, China, South Korea, and Baltic states remain primary export markets for Georgian wine.

# Geostat: GDP Hits \$28,78 bln in 2023, Tbilisi Drives over Half

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

Georgia’s GDP amounted to GEL 90.88 billion in 2023 with Tbilisi contributing 52.7%, followed by Adjara (9.5%), Imereti (7.8%), Kvemo Kartli (7.5%), and Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti (5.4%).

## PRIMARY SECTORS BY REGION:

- Tbilisi**  
Wholesale & retail trade, motor vehicle repairs: 24.6%,  
Real estate: 11.6%,  
Construction: 9.1%
- Adjara**  
Construction: 14%,  
Real estate: 13.8%,  
Wholesale & retail trade, motor vehicle repairs: 10.5%
- Imereti**



Photo: Harvard Business School.

- Agriculture, forestry, and fishing: 11.9%,  
Manufacturing: 11.2%,  
Real estate: 10.8%
- Kvemo Kartli**

- Manufacturing: 18.9%,  
Agriculture, forestry, and fishing: 15.5%,  
Public administration and defense: 8.9%



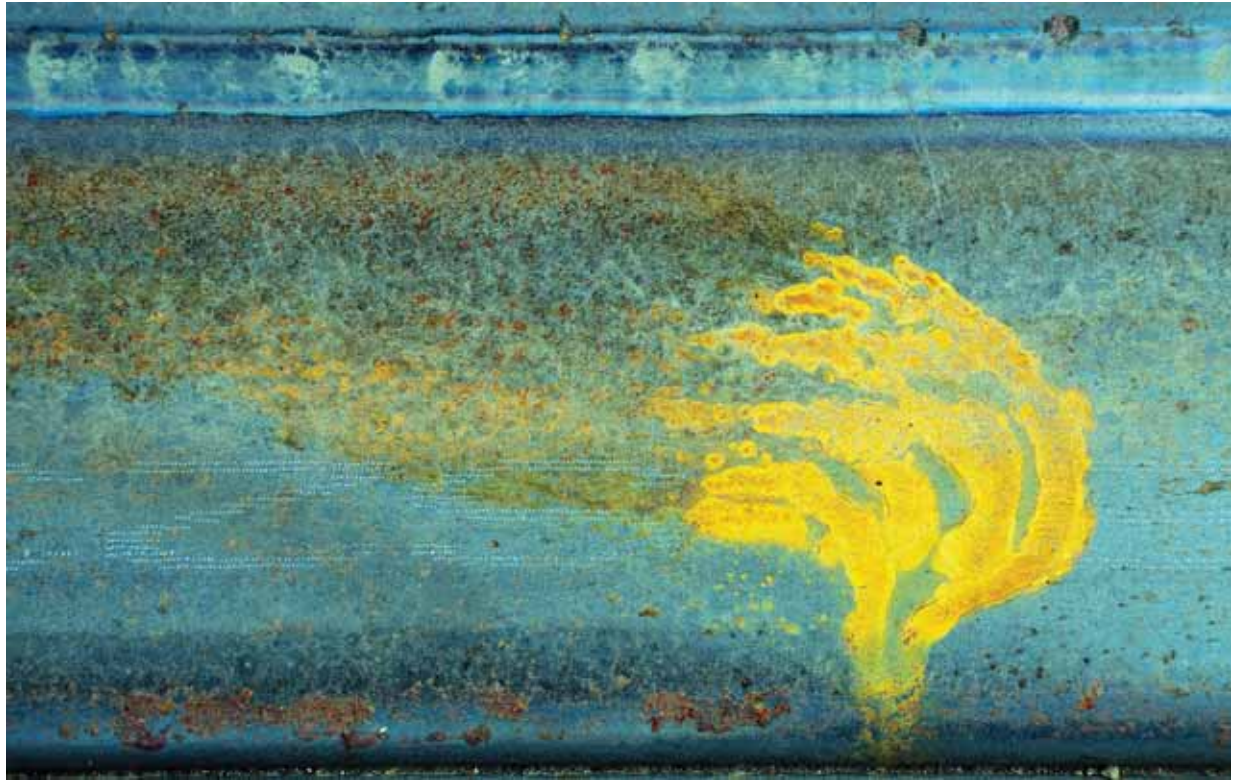
# Bated Breath

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

**T**hat's all the breath I have. First, my wife came down with a bad cold, despite trying to wrap up well against the winter temperatures. Then, so did I, even though similarly protected. Are we just getting

a bit older? We've both been hacking away, taking plenty of medicine, keeping warm in our apartment. Praying.

And following the news in our beloved country. Wave after wave of protests from all sectors of society, not yet abating at all: professionals, media, artists, the provinces. ("Svans! I should have been there with you... but one night's solidarity in the cold would mean bed-ridden weeks for me in this state, I fear.")



A week left as I write this, mere days after its publication, and the standoff between the current president and the newly chosen, highly controversial one must come to a head. She will lose her security detail on the day her term finishes, the 29th of December, but she has vowed to stay on. How? Are we heading into another revolution?

Lord knows we've had enough of those: the despair, rage, overturning, euphoria, followed by gradual disillusionment; rinse, repeat. Georgians, you are made of stern stuff, but even a Man of Steel (Stalin) will rust. And anyway, such Steel proved to be your biggest catastrophe in living memory...

With all my heart and caught breath I want this country to enter peace, prosperity, a situation to which its emigre population will want to return instead of eking out a living abroad as foreigners in Greece or Italy or wherever, sending money home. It's happened in Poland... what will it take to bring it about here? Are there just too many big powers either bent on preventing it or apathetic to it, not having perceived vested interests? Just... not on our cards?

How much of what we read is disinformation? In this day and age of too

much media, instantly available and received unfiltered by a population with skepticism turned down nearly to zero, what news can we trust? The war on the information front is raging more fiercely than ever. This is true everywhere, indeed, but also here. I despair of offering advice, except: don't believe everything you read, or see, but check it. Please. Even live video can be faked.

I also know this of you Georgians, from my quarter-century here: ancient, big-hearted, deep-souled, generous, proud, fierce in defense and profound in friendship. If I ever got locked out, away from you, I would have lost the longest-term home I have ever had in my life, and left my heart behind, bereft. Better locked in than out, if I had to choose. I mean it. Coming here in 1999 was love at first sight, and it has never let up, despite ups and downs.

So we wait, in the unbearable tension, each day and night with new marches, new speeches, new denunciations and assertions. Hoping against hope. The powers that be are trying to play a waiting game, a war of attrition; the weather does not appear to be on their side, staying mostly dry. It might be a key factor, such a prosaic thing. Do they really

believe they are right, or just believe in the sanctity of their own pockets and scepters? Which would be worse?

Dare I say, Happy New Year? Please? Time will soon tell.

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/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/SvanetiRenaissance/)

He and his wife also run their own guest house in Etseri: [www.facebook.com/hanmer.house.svaneti](http://www.facebook.com/hanmer.house.svaneti)



# Education Might Be a Game-Changer

BLOG BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

**C**ompared to adults in their families and neighborhoods, young people may have less experience, limited knowledge, be overly sensitive, hasty, immature, overly energetic, and behave incongruently. However, they also possess a huge advantage when compared to the adult population: their youth. When all of us, the now-fully-grown individuals, are no longer around, these young people will still be alive and kicking. In about three to four decades, Sakartvelo will find itself in their hands—hands that, at present, may seem slightly unsteady and fragile but which will, in time, become weathered and capable when the moment arrives.

The premonitions that many of us feel overwhelmed by may be telling us something significant. Most of today's youth, many of whom are naively but passionately protesting for change, are facing a reality that is not always clearly or wisely interpreted by the adults around them—adults who, themselves, are at a certain, hopefully temporary, loss. The best New Year's wish for any thoughtful citizen of this currently unstable country is likely universal peace and the regained opportunity for successful development—one based on our most cherished spiritual values: national freedom, independence, and a fair, democratic system of governance.

Theoretically, we all know that in this rapidly changing world, development can lead to unexpected outcomes. But



there are things that our fragile democratic republic may not be able to withstand. Every society has its limits when it comes to conflict, and crossing certain red lines could bring about disastrous consequences. If our national judgment and our people's historically accumulated wisdom fail to guide us toward a better future, all that is unfolding across

Georgia right now could have the worst possible impact on the nation—one that we have never imagined.

There is something wrong with our national mechanisms of discernment. Hatred between different groups is stoking dangerous conflicts, potentially leading to mutual destruction. Misunderstandings of each other's words and

thoughts are more common than a genuine desire to reach a consensus. The internet is flooded with self-styled "fighters for truth," each making their own deductions, unwilling to listen to alternative opinions, and rejecting the guidance of sages who could at least attempt to reconcile these zealous groups. All this is happening right before the eyes

of teenagers, who have taken to the streets in overexcited swarms, often driven by youthful enthusiasm to "right the wrongs" in a way they believe is most optimal at the peak of their excitement.

This is where the indispensability of relevant education must play its unique role. Well-distributed, carefully thought-out information, delivered within the framework of strong, modern education, could serve as a game changer in the quagmire we find ourselves in today. I sincerely believe that the demands and standards of contemporary, well-calculated education will make a significant difference and give our youth a better chance. Street politics, of which we have plenty of experience, has a role in societal development, but it cannot accomplish everything. The Western civilization that Sakartvelo is aspiring to was largely built through the education of the masses, alongside the cultivation of a culture of labor and behavior. No democracy, no freedom of thought, no fair judicial system, and no overall societal success could have emerged in the West without the long-term, persistent education of all societal strata.

Instinctive fairness and emotional decision-making are not enough to build a better life. Education could be the key to making the necessary corrections on the road to a better life. We can no longer afford to focus solely on physical growth; we need to develop intellectual foundations to address the mistakes already made. There may be other challenges ahead, and without the right education, we will never be able to handle them as we should.

# Dancing Defiance: How Khorumi Became the Anthem of Georgia's European Aspirations

BY IVAN NECHAEV

Tbilisi's Rustaveli Avenue is no stranger to history, having hosted countless protests, parades, and cultural celebrations over the years.

Yet, in recent days, it transformed into something unique: a living stage where Georgia's ancient heritage and contemporary struggle converged. Thousands marched from the Philharmonic Hall to the steps of the Parliament, united by a singular message of resistance and hope. Among the flags of Georgia and the European Union, and the chants of "Long live Georgia," an electrifying sight unfolded—citizens and professional dancers performing Khorumi, the iconic Georgian battle dance. What began as a protest against the government's decision to delay European Union negotiations until 2028 has evolved into something far greater. Khorumi, an ancient dance rooted in Georgia's martial traditions, has emerged as the rallying cry for a nation demanding freedom, dignity, and a future within the European family.

## KHORUMI IN THE STREETS: THE REBIRTH OF AN ANCIENT RITUAL

The decision to make Khorumi the centerpiece of the protest was no mere artistic flourish. This martial dance, born in the Adjara region, was historically performed by warriors preparing for battle. With its precision, discipline, and unity of movement, Khorumi is a visual embodiment of strength and strategy—qualities that resonate deeply in a nation long accustomed to resisting foreign domination.

In today's context, Khorumi has transcended its original function to become a symbol of peaceful resistance. By marching through the streets performing this dance, protesters turned the

public space into a theater of defiance. Their choreography—fluid, synchronized, and unyielding—sent a clear message: The Georgian people will not waver in their pursuit of justice and democracy.

## A DANCE OF RESISTANCE: HISTORY REWRITTEN IN MOVEMENT

To understand the power of Khorumi in this protest, we must first understand its origins. Traditionally, Khorumi was performed by small groups of men, enacting the preparation and tactics of war. The dance begins with stealthy movements, mimicking reconnaissance missions, before building into an explosive display of strength and coordination.

This structure is a metaphor for Georgia's historical resilience. For centuries, the nation has faced invasions, occupations, and political upheavals, yet it has endured, thanks to its ability to adapt and unify. In the context of the current protests, the dance's progression mirrors the trajectory of the movement itself—from isolated voices of dissent to a powerful collective demanding change.

## CULTURAL IDENTITY ON THE MARCH: THE MEANING OF KHORUMI TODAY

Khorumi has always been more than just a performance—it is a statement of identity. Its every movement speaks to the Georgian spirit: bold, resilient, and deeply connected to the land and community.

By incorporating Khorumi into the march, the protesters invoked this cultural heritage to strengthen their message. This was not simply a display of traditional art, but an assertion of what it means to be Georgian in the 21st century. The inclusion of the European Union flag in the performance further underscored this point, suggesting that Georgia's future lies in embracing its unique identity while aligning with broader democratic values.



The dance's communal nature—where individual dancers move in harmony to create a cohesive whole—reflects the unity of the protesters. It symbolizes the idea that Georgia's strength lies not in isolated efforts but in the collective will of its people, whether they hail from Kutaisi, Adjara, Racha, Samegrelo, or Svaneti.

## KHORUMI AS A METAPHOR FOR EXISTENCE

On a deeper level, Khorumi encapsulates a profound philosophical duality. It is a dance of contrasts: stealth and action, chaos and order, individuality and collectivity. These contrasts mirror the existential struggles of a nation caught between past and future, tradition and progress.

In the protests, Khorumi became a metaphor for the ongoing battle within Georgia itself—a nation striving to reconcile its ancient heritage with its aspirations for a European future. The choreography's disciplined yet dynamic nature reflects the balance Georgia seeks: preserving its cultural identity while embracing modernity and change.

The decision to perform Khorumi alongside slogans like "Long live Geor-

gia!" underscores the inseparability of culture and politics. In this context, the dance becomes a form of nonviolent resistance, a way of asserting values without resorting to aggression.

## BRIDGING TRADITION AND MODERNITY

From an anthropological perspective, the performance of Khorumi in the streets of Tbilisi represents a fascinating evolution of traditional rituals. While the dance has long been a staple of cultural festivals and staged performances, its adaptation for a political protest signals its enduring relevance.

In this new context, Khorumi serves as a ritual of resistance. Its public performance transforms the act of protest into a communal event, where participants and spectators alike are drawn into a shared experience. The presence of amateur dancers alongside professionals further blurs the line between art and activism, demonstrating that culture is not the domain of an elite few but a living, breathing force that belongs to everyone.

By performing Khorumi while marching for EU alignment, the protesters made a powerful statement: Georgia's

identity is both deeply rooted and outward-looking. This act of cultural diplomacy also highlights the role of art in fostering dialogue. While political rhetoric often polarizes, the universal language of dance has the power to connect people across boundaries. The sight of Khorumi performed in this context is a reminder that culture can be a bridge, not a barrier, in the pursuit of shared values.

## A NEW GENERATION TAKES THE LEAD

The involvement of students and educators from institutions like the Kakha Bendukidze campus adds another layer of significance to the protests. By embracing Khorumi as a form of expression, these young leaders are not only preserving their heritage, but also redefining its meaning for a new era.

This integration of education and culture into the protests highlights the role of academia in shaping a politically engaged and culturally aware society. It is a testament to the power of youth to drive change, using tools as old as their nation itself.

## KHORUMI AS THE HEARTBEAT OF A MOVEMENT

The sight of thousands performing Khorumi in the streets of Tbilisi is a moment that will be etched in Georgia's history. It is a testament to the power of culture to unite, inspire, and amplify the voices of a people striving for a better future.

Khorumi has always been a dance of warriors, but in this context, it has become a dance of citizens—citizens who refuse to be silenced, who embrace their heritage even as they demand change. As the rhythms of the doli drum echoed through the streets and the dancers' movements spoke volumes, the message was clear: Georgia is a nation that dances not just to celebrate its past, but to fight for its future.

# "All Tickets Sold Out": A New Reality for Georgian Culture

BY IVAN NECHAEV

In a remarkable display of solidarity with the arts sector, and deeply shaken by the recent political protests, TBC Bank and the ticketing platform TKT.ge have united to breathe life into Georgia's cultural landscape. TBC announced its intention to purchase tickets for all cultural events planned before January 1, 2025, that were canceled due to ongoing disruptions. Their statement, "All tickets sold out: in theaters, opera houses, and the conservatory," reflects a profound gesture toward supporting struggling cultural institutions.

## CULTURAL STAGNATION AMID POLITICAL TURMOIL

The crisis stems from the political fallout of Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze's decision to freeze EU membership talks on November 28, triggering widespread protests. Cultural events across Georgia were canceled as institutions and artists joined the national outcry, leaving the arts sector in an unprecedented state of limbo. This cultural solidarity aligns with the Georgian tradition of intertwining art and political activism—a legacy forged during Soviet rule and revived during the country's independence movements.

Meanwhile, the initiative by TKT.ge builds on earlier efforts by Biletebi, another ticketing platform that invited users to purchase tickets for canceled events as a symbolic act of support. However, TBC's large-scale intervention signifies a transformative shift, suggesting that corporate responsibil-

ity can go beyond mere financial backing to actively reshape the relationship between culture, economics, and civic engagement.

## REIMAGINING SOLIDARITY THROUGH CULTURE

From a sociological perspective, this phenomenon highlights the role of cultural institutions as spaces of collective identity and solidarity. By purchasing tickets, TBC doesn't merely save theaters or concert halls from financial ruin; it reinforces the public's connection to culture as a shared heritage. Sociologist Émile Durkheim's theory of "collective effervescence" becomes pertinent here—through communal experiences like theater or music, societies renew their moral and social fabric.

In a nation grappling with political uncertainty, TBC and TKT.ge's initiative symbolizes the restoration of a fractured

social order. By ensuring the future of cultural spaces, these entities are preserving the arenas where Georgian identity, history, and aspirations are most vividly expressed.

## ART AS RESISTANCE

Philosophically, this partnership echoes the writings of Hannah Arendt, who argued that art's permanence offers a form of resistance against the transience of political upheavals. Georgian cultural institutions, through their alignment with protests, affirm art's capacity to challenge the status quo while also serving as a sanctuary for reflection and hope.

This initiative also touches on existential questions about the role of art in times of crisis. Does art exist solely for aesthetic pleasure, or does it possess an ethical responsibility to respond to soci-

etal issues? The Georgian response seems to favor the latter, demonstrating that art can both critique and heal, standing as a bulwark against political and social despair.

## THE ART OF CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

On an economic level, TBC's intervention underscores the evolving role of corporate entities in cultural life. Traditionally seen as patrons or sponsors, corporations like TBC are now stepping into the role of cultural mediators, directly influencing the survival and accessibility of the arts.

This move also raises questions about the commodification of solidarity. While the initiative is undoubtedly altruistic, it also generates significant goodwill for

TBC Bank, positioning it as a champion of civic values. This duality—a blend of ethical commitment and strategic branding—represents a new model of corporate responsibility in the 21st century.

## THE BROADER CULTURAL IMPACT

The collaboration between TBC and TKT.ge extends beyond immediate financial relief. It introduces a new narrative about the interdependence of cultural institutions, corporate entities, and civil society. This model could serve as a blueprint for other nations grappling with the intersection of art, politics, and economics.

Moreover, the symbolic act of "selling out" tickets for canceled events transforms a moment of cultural loss into one of resilience. It reaffirms the value of artistic labor, reminding society that even canceled performances hold intrinsic worth as expressions of human creativity and solidarity.

## A TESTAMENT TO GEORGIAN RESILIENCE

Georgia's cultural sector has long been a mirror of the nation's struggles and aspirations, and the partnership between TBC Bank and TKT.ge adds a new chapter to this storied history. By stepping in during a time of profound uncertainty, they not only ensure the survival of theaters and concert halls but also uphold the cultural soul of the nation.

In the words of Georgian writer Nodar Dumbadze, "Art is the conscience of the nation." In this moment, that conscience is alive and thriving, reminding Georgians—and the world—that culture is not a luxury but a necessity, especially in times of crisis.



# Niko Pirosmani in Paris: When COMME des GARÇONS Brings Georgian Primitivism to the Avant-Garde Streets



Comme des Garçons, instagram page

BY IVAN NECHAEV

**N**iko Pirosmani, Georgia's enigmatic primitivist painter, has stepped into the heart of Parisian chic. Thanks to a daring project by Rei Kawakubo, the founder of the iconic Japanese fashion brand COMME des GARÇONS, Pirosmani's evocative canvases have found a new audience—on the streets of Paris. This installation not only bridges Georgian cultural heritage and global fashion, but also offers a profound commentary on the intersections of art, commerce, and public space.

## PIROSMANI AND KAWAKUBO: A DIALOGUE ACROSS TIME AND MEDIUMS

Rei Kawakubo's engagement with Georgian culture dates back to 1989, when she orchestrated a surreal campaign shoot for COMME des GARÇONS in Soviet-era Georgia. Georgian traditional costumes were reimagined within the brand's avant-garde aesthetic, a juxtaposition that celebrated both the rugged authenticity of local traditions and Kawakubo's radical minimalism. Fast forward to 2024, Kawakubo has reigned through this cultural dialogue, this time through the haunting simplicity of Pirosmani's works, which often depict everyday Georgian life with an unfiltered, almost naive sincerity.

By placing Pirosmani's art in Paris, Kawakubo transforms his legacy into a universal language of human connection. His unpretentious depictions of farmers, tavern keepers, and animals serve as a counterpoint to the ultra-modern, fast-

paced aesthetic of global fashion capitals.

## THE SOCIOLOGY OF PUBLIC ART: A NEW FORM OF DEMOCRATIZATION

The decision to display Pirosmani's art on Parisian streets, as opposed to a gallery or museum, redefines the relationship between art and the viewer. Sociologically, this act democratizes access to cultural heritage. By placing Pirosmani's paintings in everyday urban spaces, Kawakubo invites passersby to engage with his work in an unmediated and personal manner. This bypasses traditional cultural gatekeeping, where art is often confined to elitist spaces, and instead brings it to the public sphere, making it part of the fabric of daily life.

For Georgia, this act of public art has

significant implications. It positions Georgian culture on an international stage in a way that is accessible and inclusive, showcasing its unique artistic contributions to a global audience. Simultaneously, it challenges Eurocentric narratives of art history by placing a Georgian primitivist alongside modern global fashion in the heart of a Western metropolis.

## PHILOSOPHY OF THE EVERYDAY: PIROSMANI'S AESTHETIC AS RESISTANCE

Pirosmani's work, often described as naïve or primitivist, reflects a philosophical embrace of the everyday. His subjects—simple meals, modest portraits, and rural life—capture the essence of existence without pretense. By elevating these ordinary moments, Pirosmani cre-

ates a visual resistance to the alienation of industrial modernity.

Kawakubo's decision to feature Pirosmani's art echoes this resistance. In a world dominated by digital screens and hyper-consumerism, the raw honesty of Pirosmani's brushstrokes disrupts the polished façade of the fashion world. It reminds us of the value of authenticity, imperfection, and the human touch in an increasingly artificial environment.

## FASHION MEETS CULTURAL PRESERVATION: A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD?

The collaboration also raises important questions about the commodification of culture. While Kawakubo's installation introduces Pirosmani to a new audience, it also risks reducing his art to an aes-

thetic accessory within the context of a luxury fashion brand. This tension between cultural preservation and cultural appropriation is worth exploring.

On one hand, Kawakubo's work amplifies Pirosmani's legacy, bringing it to audiences who might never encounter it otherwise. On the other hand, the integration of his art into a commercial framework could dilute its deeper cultural and historical significance. For Georgians, Pirosmani is more than an artist; he is a symbol of national identity and resilience. How does this new global spotlight affect the way his work is perceived at home?

## THE GLOBALIZATION OF LOCAL STORIES: A FUTURE FOR PIROSMANI

Kawakubo's installation in Paris can be seen as part of a larger trend in the globalization of local cultural narratives. By presenting Pirosmani's art in a global fashion hub, it reinforces the idea that local stories have universal resonance. In this sense, Kawakubo acts as a cultural mediator, bridging disparate traditions and aesthetics in a way that fosters cross-cultural appreciation.

However, the challenge remains to ensure that such collaborations respect the integrity of the source material. Pirosmani's art, deeply rooted in Georgian traditions and struggles, must retain its voice amid the noise of globalized commerce.

## A DIALOGUE WORTH CONTINUING

Rei Kawakubo's installation of Pirosmani's work in Paris is a fascinating cultural experiment, one that transcends boundaries between art, fashion, and public space. It invites us to reflect on the power of simplicity, the democratization of art, and the ways in which local traditions can find new life in global contexts.

For Parisian pedestrians, it's a moment of unexpected beauty; for Georgians, it's a moment of pride and contemplation. For the rest of us, it's a reminder that the most profound connections often come from the simplest stories.



**PUBLISHER & GM**  
George Sharashidze

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

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

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

Layout:  
Misha Mchedlishvili

Photographer:  
Aleksi Serov

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

Website Editor:  
Katie Ruth Davies

Webmaster:  
Sergey Gevenov

Circulation Managers:  
David Kerdikashvili  
David Djandjgava

**ADDRESS**  
22 Janashia Str.  
Tbilisi, 0179, Georgia

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

**ADVERTISING & SUBSCRIPTION**  
+995 577 72 52 61  
E-mail:  
marketing@georgiatoday.ge

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

Reg. # 06/4-309

ბანიყორღე

შაურე ნახებელი

ბეზო

FANTA

