



## FOCUS ON REACH ART VISUAL

We spoke with Thea Goguadze-Apfel, Founding Director of Reach Art Visual, to discuss the key strategic collaborations for advancing Georgian art in 2024

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## Rising Political Violence in Georgia: Gakharia Attacked Amid Pro-EU Protests

BY TEAM GT

Recent days have seen an escalation of violence and political repression in Georgia, with opposition leaders, journalists, and protesters becoming targets of physical attacks and arbitrary detentions. The brutal assault on opposition politician Giorgi Gakharia, former Prime Minister and leader of the 'For Georgia' party, along with the detention and mistreatment of journalists and demonstrators, has sparked widespread condemnation both within Georgia and internationally. This surge in state-sanctioned violence has drawn sharp criticism from local civil society organizations, international bodies, and foreign governments, who are calling for accountability and an end to the suppression of fundamental freedoms.

Gakharia's attack on January 15, in Batumi, which resulted in a fractured nasal bone and a concussion, is the latest in a series of politically motivated assaults. Gakharia was attacked at the Sheraton Hotel by Dimitri Samkharadze, a member of the ruling Georgian Dream party,



Giorgi Gakharia and the scene of the attack. Source: Mtavari TV

along with his associates. According to doctors who treated Gakharia, he was conscious upon arrival at the clinic, with stable vital signs, but

left the facility on his own after receiving treatment for his injuries.

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GALT & TAGGART										
Prepared for Georgia Today Business by										
As of 14-Jan-2025										
Markets					Markets					
BONDS	Price	w/w	m/m	STOCKS	Price	w/w	m/m			
GEORGIA 04/26	94.49 (YTM 7.38%)	+0.1%	+0.2%	Bank of Georgia (BGEO LN)	GBP 40.05	+7.8%	-2.0%			
GBAIL 04/28	97.65 (YTM 8.21%)	-0.2%	-0.3%	Georgia Capital (GCGO LN)	GBP 10.00	+3.5%	-1.0%			
GBGG 9/12 PERP	97.83 (YTM 9.96%)	-0.1%	-0.2%	TBC Bank Group (TBCG LN)	GBP 27.05	+6.1%	-4.2%			
SILNET 01/27	100.69 (YTM 8.00%)	-0.1%	+0.1%							
TBC 8.894 PERP	95.95 (YTM 12.05%)	+0.1%	+0.2%							
TBC 10 1/4 PERP	99.40 (YTM 10.61%)	-0.1%	+0.1%							
				COMMODITIES		Price w/w m/m				
				Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)		77.46 -4.3% +8.2%				
				Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)		2 648.54 +0.2% +2.7%				
INDICES					CURRENCIES					
	Price	w/w	m/m		Price	w/w	m/m			
SP 500	5 859.85	+2.0%	+4.2%	USD / GEL	2,7230	-0.9%	+1.0%			
FTSE 250	20 817.19	-0.2%	-0.4%	EUR / GEL	2,9705	-1.5%	-0.5%			
DOW JONES 30	43 065.22	+2.6%	+6.0%	GBP / GEL	3,5548	-1.0%	+0.5%			
Russell 2000	2 248.64	+2.5%	+3.0%	EUR / USD	1,0909	-0.6%	-1.5%			
FTSE 100	8 292.66	-0.1%	+0.2%	GBP / USD	1,3059	-0.2%	-0.5%			

# Ukraine Latest: Russia Launches Mass Missile Attack against Ukraine



Emergency services personnel work to extinguish a fire following a Russian rocket attack in Ukraine. Source: France 24

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

**O**n the morning of January 15, Russia launched a large-scale missile attack against Ukraine, deploying Kh-101, Kh-22, and Kalibr cruise missiles, according to Ukraine's Air

Force. This attack followed Russia's threats of retaliation after Ukraine targeted military and industrial sites across Russia on January 14.

Ukraine's Air Force issued a nationwide aerial alert early on January 15, warning of a group of Tu-95MS strategic bombers taking off from Russia's Olenya airfield in Murmansk Oblast. Additionally, Russia reportedly launched ballistic

missiles from Belgorod Oblast.

Explosions were reported in Kharkiv, Khmelnytskyi Oblast, and Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast. Lviv Mayor Andrii Sadovyi confirmed that Russian forces attacked the energy infrastructure in the Lviv region. In the morning, officials from Lviv Oblast reported that critical infrastructure in two districts was hit, but there were no reported casualties, and the extent of the damage was not disclosed.

In Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast, Svitlana Onyshchuk, head of the military administration, confirmed that critical infrastructure facilities were targeted, though there were no casualties.

Ukraine's state grid operator, Ukrenenergo, implemented emergency blackouts as a preventive measure, announced Energy Minister Herman Haluschenko.

"It's the middle of winter, and the target for the Russians remains the same: our energy sector," President Volodymyr Zelensky wrote on Telegram. "More than 40 missiles were involved in this strike, including ballistic missiles. At least 30 were destroyed, and there were also more than 70 Russian attack drones overnight," he added.

Zelensky also emphasized the need to strengthen Ukraine's air defenses, noting that promises made by NATO allies have yet to be fully realized.

By mid-morning, an all-clear was issued for much of the country.

## UKRAINE BRINGS BACK 25 PEOPLE FROM RUSSIAN CAPTIVITY, INCLUDING AZOVSTAL DEFENDERS

On January 15, President Zelensky announced that Ukraine had successfully brought back 25 Ukrainians from Russian captivity, including defenders from the Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol. The returning prisoners of war (POWs) had been captured during key defense operations in Mariupol, Kharkiv, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions. Zelensky noted that some of the POWs were suffering from serious injuries and illnesses.

The exchange took place on a 25-for-25 basis, and Ukraine has made significant progress in prisoner exchanges over the past year, having conducted 11 exchanges and securing the release of 356 individuals in 2024. Since the invasion began, nearly 4,000 people have been freed, with 1,358 released in 2024.

Zelensky expressed gratitude to the United Arab Emirates for mediating the exchange process.

## ZELENSKY: UKRAINE'S MILITARY NOW TOTALS 880,000 SOLDIERS, FACING 600,000 RUSSIAN TROOPS

On January 15, President Zelensky stated that Ukraine's military now comprises

880,000 soldiers, tasked with defending the country against 600,000 Russian troops concentrated in various regions. Speaking in Warsaw alongside Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, Zelensky acknowledged that the concentration of Russian forces in specific areas gives them a numerical advantage in those regions.

Ukraine has faced manpower shortages, especially in the infantry, as Russia has intensified its offensive in Donetsk Oblast since the summer of 2024. On January 14, controversy arose over reports that members of Ukraine's Air Force were being transferred to infantry units to help address these shortages.

The General Staff of Ukraine's Armed Forces denied claims that technical and aviation personnel were being moved, stating that these resources were being bolstered instead. Critics have called for mobilization reforms to address demographic challenges and uneven recruitment.

In a positive development, Zelensky highlighted Ukraine's progress in arms production, noting that Ukraine now meets 33-34% of its annual weapons needs, up from less than 10% before the full-scale invasion. However, over 60% of Ukraine's weaponry is still supplied by Europe and the US, with each contributing about 30%.

## Georgian Public Defender Claims to Have Seen no Evidence of Election Fraud

BY TEAM GT

**I**n a statement released on Wednesday, Levan Ioseliani, the Georgian Public Defender, claimed that he had not found any evidence to support claims of electoral fraud in the October parliamentary elections, as alleged by opposition groups.

Ioseliani explained that he had not received any substantial information from domestic political parties or NGOs regarding fraud on a scale that could have impacted the election results.

"I do not have the mandate to observe elections directly, and I did not have

representatives at the 3,000 polling stations. However, those who did have representatives have not provided solid proof of any fraud that would indicate 300,000 votes were falsified or that 100,000 people were deprived of their IDs," the Public Defender stated.

He added that had he encountered evidence of fraud, his position would have changed. "None of the 100,000 people whose IDs were reportedly confiscated have come forward to present their case. I am familiar with the logistics required to rig 300,000 votes, and I do not believe such claims," he concluded.

Ioseliani emphasized that if credible evidence of electoral fraud existed, it should be made public immediately.



Levan Ioseliani, Georgian Public Defender. Source: gov.ge

## PACE Delegation Members Visit Giorgi Gakharia at his House



Giorgi Gakharia and PACE delegation members. Source: FB

BY TEAM GT

**T**he delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe visited Giorgi Gakharia, leader of the 'Gakharia For Georgia' party, at his house on Thursday.

As stated in the information released by the party, during the meeting, they discussed the developments in Georgia and the preservation of the country's European future.

"The co-rapporteurs of the Monitoring Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Claude Kern and Edite Estrela, and the Deputy Head of the Committee's Secretariat, Bas Klein, visited Giorgi Gakharia at his house.

"The main issues discussed at the meeting were the developments in Georgia after the elections and the preservation of the country's European future," the information reads.

The delegation of the Parliamentary

Assembly of the Council of Europe, on their visit to Georgia, previously met with three opposition parties: the Coalition for Change, the United National Movement, and Strong Georgia.

Georgian Dream's Interior Minister Vakhtang Gomelauri and his deputies also met with the PACE delegation on Thursday. At the meeting, they discussed the ministry's role in last year's parliamentary elections.

The meeting centered on the ministry's efforts to uphold the integrity of the electoral process, with Gomelauri highlighting the steps taken to ensure transparency and fairness. He also provided details about the police's "effective measures" during the protests in central Tbilisi.

According to the ministry's post-meeting statement, the discussions concluded with both parties reaffirming their commitment to ongoing collaboration and improved information-sharing.

At the beginning of the week, PACE also met with representatives of non-governmental organizations and people injured at the recent protests. As the representatives of non-governmental

organizations announced before the meeting, that they were to brief the PACE speakers on the recent political and legal processes taking place in the country.

The leader of 'Gakharia For Georgia,' Giorgi Gakharia, was attacked in Batumi Tuesday night at the Sheraton Hotel. Gakharia was taken to a clinic, but later left of his own accord. The doctor said he sustained a fractured nasal bone and a concussion. One of the people who participated in the physical confrontation with Gakharia is Georgian Dream MP Dimitri Samkharadze. In addition to the attack on Gakharia, a confrontation took place in the same hotel with Zviad Koridze, a representative of the non-governmental sector. Samkharadze and his entourage were involved.

Mass international condemnation has since been heard, yet Gakharia has insisted that the focus remain on the issues at hand.

"Thank you very much to all of you for supporting me. Health wise, I'm doing fine. Today, first and foremost, illegal prisoners need our support. Everything else can wait," he wrote on social media.

# Georgia's Warning Strike: Calls for New Elections and Release of Detained Protesters



Strikers. Photo by Giorgi Glenti

BY TEAM GT

**O**n January 15, a large-scale warning strike took place across Georgia, with workers from various sectors joining forces to demand new parliamentary elections and the release of hundreds of people detained during nationwide protests. These protests, which began in late November, kicked off after the ruling Georgian Dream party suspended the country's EU accession process. The strike's cen-

tral message was clear: Georgia's prospects could become dire if the government continues its anti-democratic policies, leading to international isolation.

The protest, organized by the Georgian NGO Protest 24, saw employees, employers, and businesses participate in a coordinated walkout from 3pm to 6pm. The event called attention to the potential economic consequences of Georgia's political isolation, including unemployment, economic stagnation, and poverty. As part of the action, workers from universities, cafes, restaurants, private companies, banks, and more temporarily shut

down their operations, standing outside in solidarity with the protesters.

President Salome Zurbishvili expressed her support, joining the strike and stating, "I stand with these people. This may be new for Georgian politics, but it's a familiar form of peaceful protest worldwide." Despite her term ending in December 2024, Zurbishvili continues to be a widely respected figure among many Georgians.

She warned that attempts by the Georgian Dream government to provoke confrontation among the people would fail. "The Georgian people are experienced when it comes to confronting regimes, using every tool at their disposal," she said.

The strike was not without incident, as protesters on Dolidze Street were attacked by a group of unidentified individuals. The assailants physically and verbally assaulted the demonstrators, with video footage quickly circulating on social media, and the perpetrators being publically named by media.

While Georgia's two largest banks, TBC Bank and Bank of Georgia, did not officially participate in the strike, they expressed support for their employees' freedom of expression. Lika Guntsadze, the mother of detained protester Andro Chichinadze, met with representatives from both banks, who affirmed their backing for the protest and reaffirmed their commitment to Georgia's European integration. Several employees from the institutions joined the strike in solidarity.

In addition to the general strike, some major companies, such as the pharmaceutical chain PSP, held a symbolic five-minute strike, with employees displaying banners calling for justice and new elections. Karvasla, one of Tbilisi's largest trade and business centers, also partici-



Numerous business around Georgia shut down "for new elections and freedom to political prisoners." Source: Mtavari Arkhi


pated, with nearly 250 offices and 100 retail outlets joining the protest.

The media also played a key role in the January 14 protests, with GEORGIA TODAY joining 43 TV channels and media outlets on strike in solidarity with Mzia Amaghlobeli, the detained founder of Batumelebi/Netgazeti. The media outlets shut down for three hours in support of press freedom and the release of political prisoners, displaying a powerful message: "Freedom for Mzia Amaghlobeli and all political prisoners."

Yet, Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze dismissed both the protest and the calls for re-elections, claiming that the Georgian people had already "clearly" expressed their will during the October parliamentary elections, which, according to him, were free from significant


manipulation. "All instances confirm the elections were not rigged," he said, referencing reports from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Georgian Constitutional Court, both of which dismissed claims of electoral fraud. Kobakhidze also criticized the opposition for avoiding investigations and failing to provide evidence of manipulation.




The nationwide strike highlights growing frustration with the government's actions. With support from businesses, media, and even President Zurbishvili, the message is clear: many Georgians are calling for change. Whether the government listens or not, this moment shows how important democratic reforms and the country's European future are to the people.




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# Rising Political Violence in Georgia: Gakharia Attacked Amid Pro-EU Protests



Mzia Amaglobeli, founder of the Batumelebi and Netgazeti media outlets. Source: FB

Continued from page 1

The 'For Georgia' party immediately condemned the attack as an orchestrated assault, accusing the government of using violence to silence opposition voices and intimidate those who oppose the current regime. They also called for an immediate and thorough investigation.

"This brutal attack was a coordinated group assault orchestrated by Ivanishvili's regime," the statement read, referring to Bidzina Ivanishvili, the leader of Georgian Dream.

Giorgi Gakharia was in Batumi for a court hearing concerning members of his party's youth organization, who had been allegedly unjustly persecuted. Party members have publicly expressed outrage at the attack, with one, Natia Mezvrishvili, claiming that the evidence was tampered with at the scene of the assault.

This incident is part of a broader pattern of escalating political violence, with several journalists and protesters also finding themselves targeted by police forces. Mzia Amaglobeli, founder of the Batumelebi and Netgazeti media outlets, was arrested over the weekend during a protest in Batumi. Initially detained under administrative law, she was released briefly, only to be re-arrested shortly afterward on charges of assaulting a police officer. The charges against her are widely viewed as politically motivated. Civil society organizations



This brutal attack was a coordinated group assault orchestrated by Ivanishvili's regime - For Georgia party

and human rights defenders have raised alarm over her arrest, calling it an attempt to silence a critical voice. Amaglobeli's detention has sparked further protests, with journalists, human rights activists, and opposition figures calling for her immediate release.

In parallel, actor Andro Chichinadze, comedian Onise Tskhadadze, and nine others, who were arrested on charges of participating in group violence during protests near the parliament building in Tbilisi at the beginning of December, were told that they would remain in custody. This decision was followed by dissatisfaction from the public present in the courtroom, who shouted "Slaves!" and "Russians!"

While the lawyers requested that the defendants be released on bail without a preventive measure, Judge Ketevan Jachvadze demanded that all the defendants remain in custody. The defendants have denied the charges brought against them.

President Salome Zurabishvili took to social media to strongly condemn the decision. In her post, Zurabishvili criticized the judicial system for its role in what she described as "group violence" against the citizens of Georgia. She emphasized that the actions of the judiciary could lead to severe consequences, warning, "Slavery will end badly."

Addressing Judge Jachvadze directly, Zurabishvili expressed her outrage: "Ketevan Jachvadze, it is a shame! No one should forget your name. What you and the entire judicial system are doing is perpetrating group violence against every Georgian citizen. You may not have read Kafka, but at least learn from history," she wrote.

## CONDEMNATION FOR DOCUMENTED POLICE VIOLENCE AND ARBITRARY ARRESTS

Transparency International Georgia (TI Georgia) and the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) have documented a disturbing pattern of police violence, arbitrary arrests, and mistreatment of detainees during the recent protests in Tbilisi and Batumi. Many of the detained protesters have reported physical and psychological abuse at the hands of the police. One detainee, injured during his arrest, was reportedly denied

medical attention. Some detainees have also been restricted from meeting with their lawyers in a timely manner, hindering their access to legal representation. The legal community and NGOs have called for immediate action to ensure the accountability of the police forces involved.

International condemnation has been swift, with various foreign governments and organizations expressing grave concern over the situation in Georgia. The UK, through its Ambassador to Georgia, Gareth Ward, condemned the violence, emphasizing that the Georgian authorities must hold those responsible to account. Ward stressed that, as a member of the Council of Europe, Georgia is obligated to protect its citizens' fundamental rights. He joined other European partners in denouncing the violence against peaceful protesters, media representatives, and politicians at the Council of Europe, calling for greater protection of fundamental freedoms.

Meanwhile, international figures such as James MacCleary, a UK Member of Parliament, have proposed sanctions against Georgian Dream officials, specifically targeting Bidzina Ivanishvili for his role in undermining Georgia's democracy and facilitating Russian interference in the country's political processes. MacCleary's motion in the UK Parliament seeks to express deep concern over Georgia's suspension of its EU accession process and the increasing use of excessive force against peaceful protesters. He called for the UK to take a stronger stance against the Georgian government's actions, citing the US's sanctions on Ivanishvili as a model for similar measures by the UK.

The US State Department also condemned the actions of the Georgian government, with spokesperson Matthew Miller expressing concern over the increasing repression of opposition figures and civil society members. Miller noted that the US had already imposed sanctions on Georgian officials and reduced aid to the Georgian government, signaling a firm stance against the erosion of democratic norms in Georgia.

The US Embassy in Tbilisi released the following statement: "The United States condemns the Georgian Dream party's ongoing violence against Geor-



The judicial system is perpetrating group violence against every Georgian citizen - S. Zurabishvili

gian citizens - including opposition leaders, journalists, civil society members, and protesters. Such acts, which appear intended to intimidate Georgians from exercising their fundamental freedoms, do nothing to return Georgia to the Euro-Atlantic path the majority of Georgians want. Georgia deserves better."

The European Union similarly condemned the recent violence. Anitta Hipper, the Lead European Spokeswoman for EU Foreign Affairs, described the assault on Gakharia and other opposition leaders as shocking. "The reported involvement of Georgian Dream politicians in the brutal attack on former Georgian Prime Minister and opposition leader Giorgi Gakharia is shocking. There is no place for violence or impunity in any democracy - let alone in an EU candidate country," she said.

In addition to these condemnations, Ukrainian officials have also voiced support for Georgia's democratic aspirations, denouncing the Georgian government's actions and emphasizing Ukraine's solidarity with the Georgian people in their struggle for European integration. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha noted Wednesday: "Ukraine stands in solidarity with the Georgian people. We strongly condemn the decision to abandon European integration, denounce the numerous irregularities observed during parliamentary elections, and criticize the excessive repressive actions by Georgian authorities against their citizens. No country, including Russia, has the right to veto a nation's geopolitical choices or its

participation in international organizations and alliances."

Despite these calls for accountability, the Georgian government has remained defiant. Senior Georgian Dream officials, including Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze, have defended the actions of the police, reiterating that any offense against law enforcement officers is a serious crime.

"It is essential for everyone to understand that the police are inviolable, as they represent the authority and strength of the state," the PM said. "Particularly in the case of high-ranking officers, any action against them is not only entirely unacceptable but also is a very serious criminal offense." In another statement released Wednesday, Kobakhidze said: "[the Georgian] people expressed their will at the October parliamentary elections...the current political developments in the country are an absolutely feeble performance of the radical opposition."

Kobakhidze's remarks point to the government's increasing willingness to use force against its political opponents, while also dismissing concerns from both domestic and international critics.

As the political crisis continues to deepen, Georgia finds itself at a crossroads. With ongoing protests, violence, and arrests, the international community is watching closely to see whether the Georgian government will respond to calls for justice and reform. The future of Georgia's democracy, its European aspirations, and its commitment to fundamental freedoms hang in the balance as the situation evolves.



The police are inviolable, as they represent the authority and strength of the state - I. Kobakhidze



Georgians arrested in December try to keep up high spirits despite ongoing detention. Source: Publika

# It's Not a Diplomatic Limbo Anymore - MEP Rihards Kols on GD's Legitimacy, the Sanctions, and Western Responsibility

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

**I** call on European national parliaments to invite President Zurbishvili to address them and expose what the regime is still doing. It's no longer about the so-called Russian foreign agent law. It's way beyond that. And, of course, they continue to play this double game—saying, 'Yes, we're ready for dialogue,' while accusing others of being paid from elsewhere. I've been accused by someone saying, 'We will eventually find out who's paying you.' Well, actually, it's European taxpayers who are paying my salary, and I'm very grateful for that. I carry out my duties according to the promises I made to them. And that's also a promise to my voters—to engage with the aspirant countries and bring them closer to European integration. It is my duty to fight for a cause that aligns with the aspirations of the Georgian people as well - Rihards Kols, a member of the European Conservatives and Reformists Group and a Latvian MEP, tells Radio Free Europe's Georgian Service. A fierce critic of what he describes as "The Georgian Nightmare regime," Kols is one of the most active Western politicians when it comes to preventing international visits to Georgia that might help legitimize the government of the Georgian Dream. This was the case with the planned and subsequently scrapped visit of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President Pia Kauma. Rihards Kols spoke to Vazha Tavberidze in Brussels.

**THE OSCE PA PRESIDENT PIA KAUMA SAGA - YOU WERE THE FIRST TO RAISE THE ALARM ABOUT HER VISIT, AND THEN SHE CANCELLED IT. DO YOU THINK OTHERS WILL TAKE NOTICE NOW?**

They have to. Pia Kauma received a clear message that the Finnish Foreign Ministry's position is opposite to hers. She's a Finnish politician, a member of the ruling coalition in Finland, and her actions contradicted Finland's official stance. Some might argue that when someone becomes the head of an institution, they should be impartial and neutral. But when there is a gross violation of fundamental rights, you cannot remain neutral. Doing so would make you complicit in a crime. Therefore, the moral stance should be to not engage with the Georgian regime — or the 'Georgian Nightmare,' as it's aptly been nicknamed — that is currently running the country. Yes, this kind of pressure works on pol-



Rihards Kols. Source: RFE/RL

**Pia Kauma** received a clear message that the Finnish Foreign Ministry's position is opposite to hers

iticians because it's about their image; they care about how they're perceived back home. I don't think they care much about how they're seen in Latvia or Georgia, but they do care about their reputation at home. So, I believe it was the right move to call her out publicly.

**IN AN INTERVIEW WITH US, KAUMA SAID THAT NO EXTERNAL ACTOR SHOULD BE GIVING LEGITIMACY TO THE GOVERNMENT, AND THAT IT'S A PURELY DOMESTIC ISSUE. GD HAD A FIELD DAY WITH THAT, PORTRAYING INTERNATIONAL CRITICISM AND THE INCREASINGLY REAL POSSIBILITY OF NON-RECOGNITION AS AN ATTACK ON GEORGIA'S SOVEREIGNTY.**

**WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?**

I'll put it very simply: it's bad when leadership in these important institutions is weak, because weak leadership makes for tough times. What the OSCE PA needs is strong leadership that doesn't compromise the organization's principles. I'd love to ask Pia Kauma: Are the elections in Russia legitimate? Are the elections in Belarus legitimate? So don't feed me that nonsense, please! What I've been noticing more and more in these key institutions is that we have conformists in high positions, not people who are safeguarding the integrity and principles of the organization. Instead, they view it as a convenient position. The OSCE has status and reputation. I'm a big person with a big chair, but I care less about the organization. This is what really makes me sick to my stomach when I see things like this.

**HOW LONG DO YOU THINK THIS DIPLOMATIC LIMBO CAN GO ON FOR? WHAT WILL THE CONSEQUENCES BE?**

I don't think it's a diplomatic limbo anymore. We see that the US has imposed sanctions on the main actor, the one who's actually pulling the strings. I support what the US has already done and what the US Helsinki Commission is pushing for, and I would like to see the same kind of action from the European member states. The European Parliament, in our own capacity, has already adopted a resolution where we do not recognize the election results.

**WHAT ABOUT THE BIG EUROPEAN CAPITALS? WHO WILL THEY BE SHAKING HANDS WITH IN THREE MONTHS' TIME, DO YOU THINK? GEORGIAN DREAM OR THE OPPOSITION?**

Well, thank God that right now, the EU Presidency is with Poland. We've already seen what Poland is going to do, as they have withdrawn their invitation to the 'Georgian Nightmare' from the COSAC (Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union) conference in

In these key institutions, we have conformists in high positions, not people who are safeguarding the integrity and principles of the organization

I would rather see more decisive action, but the EU is a complex entity. Any sanction is a process that takes time

Warsaw this month. This is a testament that whatever happens in Georgia won't be overlooked; instead, it will stay on the agenda and will rise higher and higher. Next week, there will be a plenary session of the European Parliament. I wouldn't rule out the possibility of another resolution being submitted, calling for the European Commission and the Council to take concrete action, not just offer rhetoric. That will be another litmus test for where Europeans stand, how firm they are, and who is willing to undermine the situation by saying, "For the sake of dialogue or whatever, let's engage with the Georgian regime."

**THE EU OFFICIALS ARE SET TO APPROVE CANCELLING OF VISA LIBERALIZATION FOR DIPLOMATIC PASSPORTS, BUT THIS MEANS THEY CAN STILL TRAVEL AND ENJOY THE LIBERALIZATION WITH THEIR REGULAR PASSPORTS. IT SEEMS MORE A SLAP ON THE WRIST THAN ACTUAL SANCTIONS.**

It's not entirely true to paint it like that. Of course, I would rather see more decisive action, but again, the European Union is a complex entity. Any sanction is a process that takes time. I wish that weren't the case. Just as an example, when it comes to Russia's aggression in Ukraine, we are now talking about 15 packages of sanctions — all of that should have been in one. On the other hand, nobody has excluded national sanctions, and national sanctions can also impact Schengen visas. So that is another layer of pressure as well. If someone is backing the 'Georgian Nightmare,' we can say, after the EU sanctions, we'll issue our own national sanctions as a bonus, and that's it.

## Georgian Dream PM and FM to "Strengthen Ties" with Azerbaijan During Baku Visit

BY TEAM GT

**G**eorgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze is meeting Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev in Baku on Friday, where the two leaders will co-chair a session of the Georgia-Azerbaijan Intergovernmental Commission on Economic Cooperation. The talks will focus on a wide range of issues, including political, trade, and economic matters, with high-level officials from both countries in attendance.

Kobakhidze's visit will be followed by

a press briefing, marking another step in deepening ties between the two nations. The Georgian delegation includes Levan Davitashvili, Georgian Dream's Minister of Economy, Maka Botchorishvili, Georgian Dream's Minister of Foreign Affairs, and several other key figures from the Georgian Dream government.

Botchorishvili is already on an official visit to Baku. Zurab Pataradze, Georgia's Ambassador to Azerbaijan, emphasized the importance of this visit, noting it would help to "foster and strengthen" bilateral relations. Discussions will cover a "full spectrum" of issues, including political, economic, cultural, and



Ambassador of the Republic of Azerbaijan to Georgia, Faig Guliev, met with Maka Botchorishvili prior to her departure to Baku. Source: FB

humanitarian topics.

Botchorishvili is also scheduled to meet with the Azerbaijani Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jeyhun Bayramov, in both face-to-face and expanded formats. Afterward, a joint press briefing will be held to outline the outcomes of their talks. As part of her visit, Botchorishvili will pay respects at the Alley of Martyrs, honoring those who lost their lives during the Soviet Army's attack in 1990 and in the First Nagorno-Karabakh War.

This series of high-level engagements is designed to signal a continued commitment to strengthening Georgia-Azerbaijan relations at the start of the year.

# New Initiative Launched in Brussels to Support Independent Journalism in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus



Marta Kos and the first wave of journalists. Source: FB

BY TEAM GT

Brussels, long a hub for European diplomacy, has recently become home to a new initiative with a different mission: supporting independent journalism in Eastern Europe and the

South Caucasus. The Maison du Medialab project, launched in collaboration with Stars4Media, aims to bring journalists from local media in Eastern Partnership countries to Brussels, with the goal of helping them become permanent correspondents and, in turn, bring the EU's message back home.

The initiative comes right on time. Journalists in these countries often face

immense challenges, including political pressure, disinformation, and limited access to resources—not to mention the ongoing war in Ukraine. Maison du Medialab seeks to counter these obstacles by providing participants with access to EU institutions and encouraging cross-border collaboration.

While the program focuses on journalism's grassroots challenges, its implica-

tions are deeply geopolitical. The battle for narratives in Eastern Europe has never been more intense, as the war in Ukraine and political crises in Georgia and Moldova continue to expose the fragility of democracies in the region. Medialab positions itself as a bulwark against the erosion of media freedoms, offering a platform to elevate stories that are often overshadowed by larger global crises, ensuring that the voices of these countries are heard in Brussels, while also ensuring Brussels' message is safely delivered back to their respective countries.

The inauguration conference was attended by high-ranking officials from European structures, representatives of prominent media outlets in Brussels, and local non-governmental organizations.

Marta Kos, European Commissioner for Enlargement and a key speaker at the opening conference, emphasized the

project's importance: "Combating disinformation together is one of our most pressing issues. As a former journalist, I know how hard it is to counter falsehoods with facts. This is where journalists are indispensable. You have the power to cut through the noise, establish the facts, and translate the complexities of our Union into stories."

The initial wave includes six journalists—two each from Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia—including RFE/RL and GEORGIA TODAY's very own Vazha Tavberidze. According to the project's founder, Christophe Leclercq, Armenian journalists are also set to join in the next wave. "By the end of the project, we aim to at least triple the number of Eastern Partnership journalists permanently working in Brussels," he said.

The program is funded by individual donations, philanthropic contributions, and sponsors, but it may become part of an EU-funded program in the future.



## BUSINESS

### GCCA Resolves 90% of Consumer Complaints in Favor of Customers in 2024



Photo: iStock  
BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

bly, women comprises 70% of applicants, while men only 30%.

#### PRIMARY FINDINGS

Violations Identified: 102 breaches of consumer rights were recorded in 198 cases.

Fines Issued: 56 traders faced penalties in 92 cases, with to 60,000 GEL for failing to comply with GCCA mandates.

Commitment Agreements: 163 agreements were signed in 193 cases, urging businesses to amend practices and restore consumer rights.

#### CONSUMER CONCERNS

67% of complaints originated from online trading, while 33% related to in-person purchases.

Common requests included: Refunds: 317 cases; Repairs or returns of defective items: 253 cases; Restoration of services: 147 cases; Timely delivery: 47 cases; Unconditional returns: 37 cases; Misleading practices prohibition: 35 cases

#### SECTOR BREAKDOWN

Wholesale and retail trade: 73%  
Transport and warehousing: 12%  
Arts, entertainment, and leisure: 3%  
Other activities: 12%  
Tbilisi led with 85% of applications, followed by Adjara (4%), Imereti (2%), and other regions.

Georgian Competition and Consumer Agency (GCCA) received 890 applications related to consumer rights and took 6,350 calls regarding customer dissatisfaction. The agency resolved 90% of the cases in favor of consumers. Nota-

## Passenger Turnover at Georgian Airports Increases by 24%

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

All Georgian airports collectively transported 7,425,399 passengers and facilitated 31,937 flights in 2024, a 24% and 25% rise in the number of passengers and flights, respectively.

#### INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCES OF AIRPORTS:

Tbilisi Shota Rustaveli International Airport:  
Passengers: 4,750,830 (29% increase).  
Flights: 22,715 (30% increase).  
Kutaisi International Airport:  
Passengers: 1,722,809 (3% increase).  
Flights: 5,078 (1% increase).



Photo: Tbilisi International Airport.

Batumi Alexander Kartveli International Airport:  
Passengers: 951,760 (53% increase).  
Flights: 4,144 (33% increase).  
Batumi Airport experienced the most significant growth, with passenger numbers increasing by 53%.

#### NEW AIRLINES ENTERING THE GEORGIAN MARKET:

The Georgian aviation market will be expanded in 2025.

British Airways begins flights in March.

EasyJet will launch direct flights to London, Geneva, and Milan in March.

Transavia France starts Paris-Tbilisi-Paris flights on April 9.

Edelweiss begins Zurich-Tbilisi-Zurich flights twice weekly starting April 12.

## Georgia's Pension Agency Assets Exceed GEL 6 billion in 2024

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

Georgia's Pension Agency's assets exceeded GEL 6 billion as of December 31, 2024, and primarily consist of: GEL 4.56 billion: contribu-

tions from 1.3 million participants.

GEL 1.44 billion: accrued interest from investments. More than 99% of pension savings are part of a conservative portfolio, with an annual real return delivery of 12.8%. Participants can select balanced or dynamic portfolios, promising returns of 14.3% and 15.3%, respectively.

The main difference between these portfolio plans is global stock allocations, with the dynamic portfolio carrying 50.8% in stocks, a balanced one of 29.9%, and the conservative 16.2%.

Overall, GEL 1 billion of pension investments have been placed on global stock exchanges.

# Tbilisi Increases Wages for Kindergarten Staff



Photo: Day Early Learning.

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

**T**bilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze announced that the salaries of around 13,500 full-time employees at Tbilisi's public kindergartens will

increase by GEL 125, lining up with the pre-election promise made by the Prime Minister about supporting the preschool education system.

With five new kindergartens opened across the capital and significant investments put into them, Kaladze emphasized the past year as particularly successful for kindergarten development.

Per the announcement, seven new kindergarten facilities are under construction.

Apart from supporting infrastructure, City Hall has also invested in kindergarten supplies such as food, toys, linens, and more, which, alongside the wage increase, will likely improve conditions for both educators and children.



Laguna Vere. Source: TVI

# Tbilisi to Relocate Petrol Stations and Upgrade Laguna Vere Infrastructure to Address Traffic Issues

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

**T**bilisi City Hall has revealed plans to relocate petrol stations near the Laguna Vere area, close to Heroes Square. Mayor Kakha Kaladze made the announcement during a municipal government meeting on Wednesday, emphasizing the need to modernize the area and address traffic capacity concerns.

The Laguna Vere area is considered crucial for the city's urban development, and while modernization efforts have included a new transport system with additional lanes and upgraded traffic lights, negotiations with petrol station owners have failed. In response, City Hall is offering alternative locations for these stations.

Mayor Kaladze stressed that the current infrastructure is inadequate to meet the city's growing traffic demands. To address this, the Transport and Urban Development Department will oversee the project, which will be presented to the Tbilisi City Assembly for final approval.

Additionally, the Infrastructure Development Service will soon begin road rehabilitation work in the Laguna Vere area, specifically on the stretch from Heroes' Square to the Zviad Gamsakhurdia riverbank. The road will be widened to help ease traffic congestion, especially during peak hours. The project will also include the installation of LED lighting, new traffic signals, and improved pavements and pedestrian crossings for better safety.

The mayor noted that the project is expected to be completed within two months, with night-time construction to minimize traffic disruptions.

# Georgia's Passport Ranks 44th Globally: Is Mobility the New Currency of Power?

BY IVAN NECHAEV

**I**n a world where borders define opportunities, Georgia's passport has climbed to the 44th spot on the 2024 Henley Passport Index, granting Georgian passport holders visa-free access to 122 countries. While this may seem like a modest numerical change from 45th place last year, it reflects a seismic shift in the country's global aspirations and its citizens' evolving identity. What does this mean for Georgia's place in the world, and how does a seemingly mundane document encapsulate the ambitions of a nation?

## THE PASSPORT AS A MEASURE OF GLOBAL AND REGIONAL PRESTIGE

Passports are more than travel documents; they're badges of geopolitical clout. Georgia's rise in the Henley Index highlights its growing relevance on the world stage. The inclusion of China among visa-free destinations in 2024 is particularly noteworthy. This move not only expands travel opportunities for Georgian citizens, but also signals strengthening ties with a global superpower. Could this be a step toward redefining Georgia's post-Soviet narrative? The ability to navigate between East and West has always been a hallmark of Georgia's strategy, and its strengthened passport symbolizes a nation that's trying to balance these forces more effectively.

Georgia's 44th position places it far ahead of its Caucasian neighbors. Azer-



baijan's passport sits at 70th, while Armenia's trails at 74th. This disparity is not merely statistical; it's emblematic of Georgia's ambitious foreign policy and strategic positioning. Since achieving visa-free travel to the Schengen Zone in 2017, Georgia has set a benchmark in the region. This achievement underscores its commitment to aligning with European norms and integrating into the global economy. Yet, this leadership position also brings challenges. How does Georgia leverage this mobility advantage to foster regional stability and cooperation?

## BARRIERS AND BREAKTHROUGHS: MOBILITY THROUGH THE AGES

Georgia's current passport strength is deeply rooted in its historical role as a crossroads of empires. From the Silk Road to its strategic importance during the Soviet era, Georgia has always been a hub of cultural and economic exchange. Today's Henley ranking can be seen as a modern continuation of this legacy. The question is, how can Georgia harness its historical ties while forging a distinct path in the 21st century? Mobility isn't just about travel; it's about the

exchange of ideas, innovation, and cultural diplomacy. Georgia's passport opens doors—but what it brings to the global stage remains a crucial consideration.

While the climb to 44th place is commendable, sustaining this momentum requires addressing domestic and international challenges. Economic inequality, political polarization, and concerns over national security all play a role in how Georgia's passport is perceived abroad. Moreover, Georgia's aspirations for deeper integration with the EU and NATO hinge on its ability to demonstrate stability and alignment with international

norms. The strength of a passport is as much about perception as it is about policy.

## MOBILITY AS A SOCIOLOGICAL MARKER: WHO GETS TO TRAVEL?

Visa-free travel is more than a convenience; it's a status symbol. For younger Georgians, the passport represents a tangible connection to the globalized world and a break from the isolation of their Soviet past. The ability to study, work, and travel abroad fosters a generation that sees itself not just as Georgian, but as part of a broader global community. However, this newfound freedom also raises questions. Does increased mobility risk brain drain? How can Georgia retain its talent while allowing its citizens to explore international opportunities? These are the dilemmas that come with the privilege of a stronger passport.

Georgia's 44th-place ranking is more than a statistic; it's a story of transformation. As the country continues its journey toward greater global integration, its passport serves as a mirror of its ambitions, challenges, and evolving identity. The question isn't just where Georgians can go, but how the nation's newfound mobility will shape its future on the world stage. In a world where mobility is increasingly equated with freedom, Georgia's passport is not just a document; it's a declaration of a nation finding its place in an interconnected world. The challenge now is to ensure that this access translates into tangible benefits for all its citizens, making the Georgian passport not just a gateway, but a symbol of shared progress.

# Before Unseen

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

**R**ight when you think you've got a particular place and season nailed, along comes a surprise.

My mother-in-law's vineyard and neighborhood, Leliani, Kakheti... visited so many times, with my wife, in all seasons and many weathers, during our 15 years married. But a couple of days ago it showed me something entirely new.

We had been told by a doctor that our coughs were nothing viral or bacterial, more a reaction to winter. Ironic, as we had had little to no such struggles with far colder temperatures than Tbilisi's during our many Svaneti winters. But here we were; just a cough, no tempera-

tures or other symptoms. So, at the reception of this news, she asked me if we could go straightaway to visit her mother and sister in Leliani. I had nothing keeping me in the city, and it's the Christmas season; so, sure. We packed and left.

My wife learned long ago to give me time to wander with my camera, especially in situations where she can do most of the talking. So off I went, several mornings, through the vineyard and out the end of it into the neighborhood.

Frost had come the morning we had to go to the weekly bazaar in nearby Apeni, to stock up on food for the family and ourselves. By the time we returned home near noon, that frost had mostly burned off in the sun (except where shadows still protected it).

But the next morning... frost AND fog. This was different. The fog covered eve-

rything with hoarfrost, transforming it, making magic I rarely get to see, especially here where winters are much milder than in Svaneti. Familiar subjects were spiked with white everywhere, leaves edged with it. All was different. Still wary of my cold-caused cough, I wrapped up well and said I wouldn't be long.

Ha. The magic took me in for hours, and I let it. First the vineyard, mostly tiny details with my 90mm macro lens which gives 1:1 sizes on the frame. I usually shoot macro with my aperture wide open, not trying for a wide depth of field (area of sharp focus) but narrowing in on one detail, letting the rest blur out abstractly.

Then through the back road, back to the main road and so on. There were iced-over puddles, but these offered few scenes of interest. It was more the backlit, frost-rimmed details that captivated me. Landscapes, too, were absolved of unnecessary detail by the persisting fog, becoming simpler and more exotic. Some of the far-off mountain peaks separating Georgia from Daghestan began to emerge, floating on the fog. A bird here and there appeared, stork and raptor. Other people's vineyards, too, took on a whole new look in the unique lighting and weather.

I was in time to get everything I wanted before the inevitable sunshine beat off the fog and melted the hoarfrost, turning everything back to its usual winter familiarity. But I was delighted to have had this opportunity, with my equipment ready and nothing to keep me from seeing, and recording, sheer enchantment.

My cough, too, is on the wane, as those hours in the cold seemed to have no



effect on it. So my gamble paid off in all ways, and left me with some memorable images. See, people, slow down and SEE.

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)



## CULTURE

# Ketevan, the Martyr Queen of Sakartvelo

BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

**G**eorgian historiography knows her as Queen Ketevan (1560-1624), Ketevan Bagrationi, descendent of the House of Mukhranbatoni of the Kartli Principality of Georgia. She was the spouse of the King of Kakheti, Queen consort of Kakheti, mother of the Kakheti monarch Teimuraz the First, and indeed served as regent of Kakheti herself in the times of the minority of her son, doing so by negotiating with Shah Abbas I of Iran, who was then the

highest authority over Sakartvelo, to approve her underage son, Teimuraz I, as King of Kakheti, and for she, as his mother, to assume the obligation of regent.

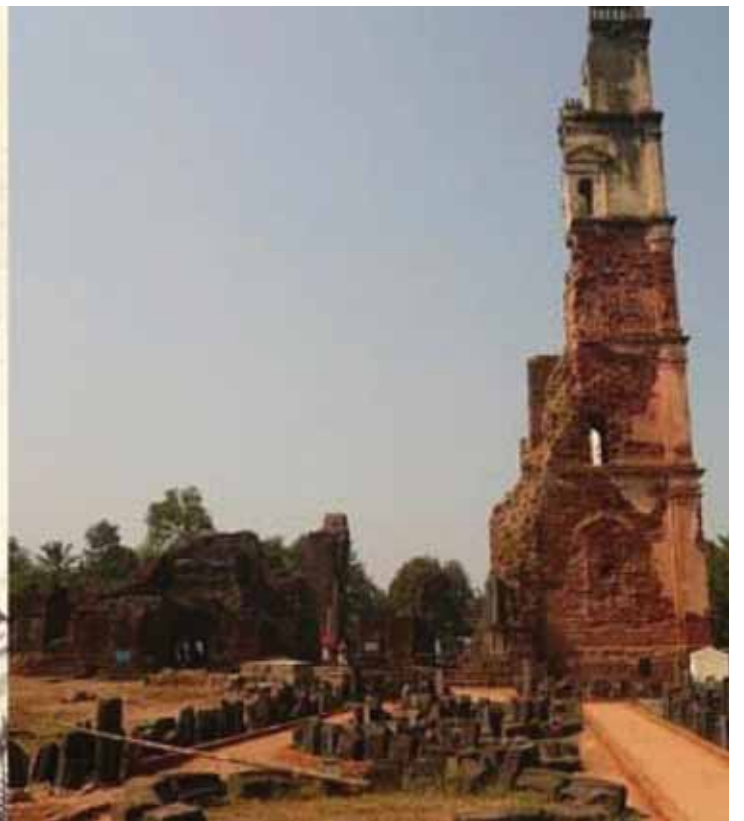
It was a fateful day in 1614 when King Teimuraz delegated his mother, Georgia's beloved queen-mother, for the trying capacity of negotiator to Shah Abbas. Ketevan thus yielded herself as a captive to Persian powers so as to keep Kakheti safe from assault by the well-armed and impeccably trained Iranian troops.

The righteous Georgian lady of honor and integrity was detained in Shiraz for a number of years, until Shah Abbas the First, in his fury of retribution for resistance put up by King Teimuraz, ordered the Georgian lady-sovereign to relinquish Christianity. Faced with her vehement and selfless rejection of their determined proposal that she give up the Christian faith and convert to Islam, the enraged Persian monarch had her tortured to death with red-hot pincers.

Queen Ketevan was killed in Shiraz, what is now the fifth most populous city of Iran, in 1624, one of the most chilling years in Georgia's history. The horrendous historical act was perpetrated by the Safavid political superpowers of Persia, which ruled Kakheti during those fearful-for-Georgia times. Part of her remains were covertly removed from her place of rest by the Saint Augustine Portuguese missionaries, who had witnessed Queen Kevan's mindboggling martyrdom. They brought the holy relics to Georgia, where they were interred at the Alaverdi Monastery.

Official public information has it that the rest of her remains were buried at the Church of St. Augustine in Goa, India. Queen Ketevan was a stateswoman, diplomat and poet, but in the hearts and minds of the Georgian people, she is forever enshrined as Ketevan Tsamebuli - Ketevan the Martyr.

Sakartvelo celebrates her magnificent memory twice a year: in the last week of March, which is her birthday, and the



Queen Ketevan and the Church of St Augustine in Goa, India. Photo by Francesco Bandarin

26th of September, which happens to be the day of her demise. In high appreciation of her undeterred faith in God and love for Christianity, Queen Ketevan was canonized by Patriarch Zachary of Georgia in the 17th century, and September 13 (September 26 per the modern Gregorian calendar) was established by the Georgian Orthodox Church as the day of her commemoration.

2024 marked the 400th anniversary of her death, and 2025 is set to be the 450th anniversary of her birth. The dates are overseen by the Queen Ketevan Society, presided over by Tamar Par-chukidze, Georgian historian, researcher, poet and composer, who seeks for 2025 to be named the Year of Queen Ketevan,

an endeavor supported by the entire Georgian nation and hopefully also to be supported by UNESCO and, in concert with the United Nations, by the entire world.

Next to Tamar Par-chukidze in this great national undertaking adamantly stands Gvanji Mania, the well-known Georgian public figure, journalist, ecologist and travelling researcher of the nation's past.

Professor Paata Natsvlshvili, an outstanding member of the Queen Ketevan Society, has gone to great lengths in the field of research and popularization of the Georgian Martyr's glorious life and unbearably painful historical fate. His multipage powerful opus about Queen Ketevan saw light on the pages of ISTO-

RIANI, a KvirisPalitra journal, published on 29 July, 2024. The work deserves not only the national eye, but the attention of international society, the corroboration of this being the supposition that, in the ongoing process of the world's spiritual deterioration, the cultural and intellectual standing of the self-same world needs to be propped up by the patriotic endeavor, brilliant ideas and meaningful scientific-research of thinkers and public figures like Tamar Par-chukidze, Gvanji Mania and Paata Natsvlshvili. These are the people who are sweating for Sakartvelo, moved only by their love and enthusiasm for the country, which nowadays matters more than anything else.



Saint Ketevan. Source: Wikimedia



# Berlin Art News: Georgian Pianist Khatia Buniatishvili at the Berlin Philharmonie, and Other Women Artists in Focus



Georgian Pianist Khatia Buniatishvili. Photos by Jon Bonde Eriksen

BY LILY FÜRSTENOW

Amidst heated debates as to whether Georgia is part of Europe, and how its integration into the EU can be solved in the most rapid and cost-effective way, local art scenes are being literally torn apart by the non-stop protests all over Georgia and abroad against the ruling party in Tbilisi, which they accuse of election and other fraud. At this historical turning point, Khatia Buniatishvili's concert in the Berliner Philharmonie got extra media attention and was bestowed with something of a symbolic meaning. Organized by Konzertdirektion Hans Adler, it was a true celebration of music— not as means to ignore politics, but as a sign that Georgian musicians are an integral part of common European cultural heritage, cherished by people deep in their hearts across borders. The concert program, including Rachmaninov and Mahler, saw Bent Sørensen using the occasion to mark the 100th anniversary of the Danish National Symphony Orchestra. On this occasion, the ensemble embarked on an extensive European tour under the baton of Conductor Fabio Luisi with Khatia Buniatishvili starring as solo pianist. The first concert of the tour took place in Berlin on January 13, and was an absolute hit with the public.

Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No. 3, often referred to as "Rach 3," is one of the most demanding works in the piano repertoire, celebrated for its emotional depth, technical challenges, and sweeping Romanticism. Its intricate interplay between piano and orchestra, coupled with its soaring melodies and dramatic intensity, makes it a pinnacle of virtuosity and expressiveness.

Khatia Buniatishvili's interpretation of Rachmaninov's Third was a powerful blend of technical brilliance and emotional vulnerability. Her playing is marked by a remarkable command of the concerto's complex passages, coupled with her unique ability to bring out its lyrical and melancholic undertones. Buniatishvili approaches the piece with a deeply personal touch, often infusing it with a heightened sense of drama and spontaneity.

Her dynamic phrasing and bold contrasts capture both the grandeur and intimacy of the concerto, making her performances unforgettable for audiences.

Gustav Mahler's relationship with politics on the other hand was complex and largely indirect. As a composer and conductor, Mahler was more focused on artistic expression than on overt political statements. However, his identity as a Jewish artist in late 19th- and early 20th-century Europe, a period marked by rising nationalism and antisemitism, often placed him in politically charged contexts. His conversion to Catholicism in 1897, likely motivated by the need to secure his position as director of the Vienna Court Opera, underscores the political pressures he faced. Despite these challenges, Mahler's music reflects a deep engagement with existential and spiritual themes, transcending the political conflicts of his time.

Khatia Buniatishvili's piano virtuosity is marked by her breathtaking technical skill, bold interpretive choices, and an emotional intensity that captivates audiences. Known for her dynamic stage presence, she brings a distinctive blend of power and sensitivity to her performances, effortlessly navigating the most demanding passages while imbuing each note with profound expressiveness. Her interpretations often push boundaries, making familiar works feel fresh and deeply personal. Whether tackling the fiery drama of Liszt or the nuanced poetry of Rachmaninoff, Buniatishvili consistently

delivers performances that are both technically dazzling and deeply moving. For those who haven't had the chance to attend the event this Monday good news is that her next concert in Berlin is already scheduled for spring 2026.

## REVIVING NUDE DANCE: KYSY FISCHER'S BOLD REINTERPRETATION AT TANZTAGE BERLIN

It's common knowledge that women in arts have it particularly hard. Institutions therefore are now more likely to go off the beaten path and introduce female artists into their programs. Superficial by Kysy Fischer on January 9 ushered in the Tanztage Berlin at Sophien-saele, reviving the centuries long tradition of nude dance. Naked dance movement in Berlin during the 1920s used to be part of the broader cultural and artistic experimentation of the Weimar Republic, characterized by a spirit of liberation, modernism, and rebellion against traditional norms. Often associated with the Freikörperkultur (Free Body Culture) and avant-garde performance art, these dances combined elements of expressionism, naturalism and social critique.

Now almost a hundred years later, choreographer Kysy Fischer, together with her dance counterparts, managed to get to the very core of it showing what's going on beneath the superficiality of appearances. Her whole piece was an outburst of rage pushed to the limits, with spells of idyllic elegance followed

by outbreaks of savage fierceness of contorted muscles, grimaces nurtured by the accumulated force of protest against the long established canons of grace as we know it from art history. Citations from Greek antiquity with its immediately recognizable postures clashed with rebellious denial to fake these for the sake of commonplace demands and public pleasures. The performance was a spectacular attempt at bodily liberation celebrating the return to primordial natural powers, orgiastic female frenzy reminiscent of Dionysian rituals of Maenads losing themselves in ecstatic dances combined with a witty take on female desire. The performance took place as a double bill with WET HOT WOMBS - Bathing into other Bodies by Tentacular Figurings. Tanztage Berlin will go on till 25.1.2025. According to Stuttgart based Georgian actress Mariam Jincharadze in "100 Seconds for Arts" film trailer on Otto Dix's portrait of Berlin's most notorious nude dancer Anita Berber, she never grew as old as she looks in that picture.

## DRAMA REIMAGINED: CONSTANZA MACRAS' DORKYPARK CRITIQUES WOMEN'S STRUGGLES IN THE ARTS

Times change, but the destinies of women in the arts remain largely the same. Female artists around the world suffer most from the effects of old-age poverty, disease, and neglect. This formed the core of Constanza Macras'

Drama by DorkyPark, which garnered high praise at Volksbühne Berlin. The piece explored the depths of the genre through historical and feminist perspectives. The essence of human drama was staged through a series of spectacular performances arranged like a variety show in a revue theater, nostalgically longing for the former glory of such venues. Some segments were connected by a general plotline, while others stood alone. The performance dazzled with costumes, showbiz extravagance, and excess, revealing the personal dramas of the protagonists, private existential crises, or critiquing the incompetence of contemporary theater directors, who prefer bizarre yet fashionable politically charged concepts for box-office success instead of delving into the true art of dramatic direction.

Various showbiz injustices were brought to light, from the gender pay gap to the financial precariousities faced by performers with migration backgrounds, and the despair of aging. The performance commemorated strong female characters from theater history, such as La Revista Argentina and its stars, Nélide and her rival divas.

Most importantly, the relevance of drama itself—despite all its circus-like thrills—was questioned in our contemporary digital age, where old-fashioned notions of authenticity, aura, and immediacy are replaced by digital copies on social media: endless reiterations of the same. The history of drama itself, from Antigone to Shakespeare and beyond, was paraded in a dramatic, witty, hilarious, and nostalgically touching way, accompanied by impressive stage effects and acrobatic stunts. The performance illuminated this make-believe world of unfulfilled promises of fame and glory. Not to mention the spectacular stage props, which were given extra prominence in enhancing the spirit of the drama—such as the shaking trees, literally shaken by the protagonists in a broken rhythm, leaving us shaken by it all.

In the decades following the fall of Berlin Wall, the city has been struggling on its uneasy way towards establishing itself as the cultural capital of Europe. With an impressive variety of theaters, operas, concert halls and off-spaces of all sorts attracting an ever-increasing number of artists one would presume that quantity would go into quality. Probably not good enough for the Berlin local governments that recently opted for the drastic cuts of the cultural budgets. Berlin's vibrant cultural life will certainly lose some of its flair, therefore the events reviewed here are of particular significance as they took place directly in the aftermath of the massive protests by artists and respective culture institutions demanding the revision of the local fiscal policies, which once again confronts us with the essential question of how relevant art is for us today in times of political turmoil and digital transformations.



# 2024: A Landmark Year for Reach Art Visual and Georgian Art on the Int'l Stage

INTERVIEW BY TEAM GT

The year 2024 has been a groundbreaking year for Reach Art Visual (R.A.V.), with Georgian art making waves on the international stage like never before. From powerful exhibitions to new collaborations, R.A.V. has played a key role in bringing Georgian artists into the global spotlight. We caught up with Founding Director Thea Gogvadze-Apfel to reflect on the highlights of the past year and to hear what exciting plans are in store for the future of Georgian art.

## WHAT ABOUT LAST YEAR IN PARTICULAR BEST DEMONSTRATED THE GROWING INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION OF GEORGIAN ART?

2024 was exhilarating, and, frankly, a little surreal, to see Georgian art not just present but truly resonating in multiple international venues.

This year, our collaboration with the Art Foundation Anagi (AFA) marked a major milestone in archival research, cataloging over 5,000 artworks and uncovering the histories of 220 artists. Among them, Tbilisi-based painters Gregor Danelian and Alexei Balabouev emerged as pivotal figures. Both artists, of minority ethnic origins, reflect Tbilisi's rich multicultural heritage and its vibrant art scene from the Soviet era.

Danelian's work gained acclaim at Bonhams' British and European Art auction in London, where his piece was a star lot, while Balabouev's legacy was spotlighted at the Osenat International Auction in Paris and the Collin du Boccage auction in France. These events not only celebrated their artistry, but also introduced their overlooked contributions to a global audience, reinforcing the unique narratives of Georgian art.

In 2024, our participation in the Tbilisi Art Fair covered very meaningful collaborations. We collaborated with Vere Gallery to present a unique collection of Iliko Zautashvili's works, and showcased Liu Kandareli Guangwen, whose series 'Beyond Artistic Censorship' had been largely unseen by the public and provided a deeply personal insight into the artist's creative journey. In addition, in the framework of TAF, our partnership with Gallery FotoAtelier brought to light rare still-life photographs from the set of Sergei Parajanov's Surami Fortress. These images, showcased during Parajanov's 100th anniversary celebrations, offered an intimate glimpse into the creative process of this legendary filmmaker.

A big discovery this year was Merab Kopaleishvili, whose expressive paintings and papier-mâché sculptures blend Georgian cultural motifs with universal themes. His works debuted at the Tbilisi Art Fair and later reached ASIA NOW - Paris Asian Art Fair, in collaboration with Gallery 4710, symbolizing a new



wave of Georgian art making its mark globally. Alongside Merab Kopaleishvili, acclaimed Georgian artists Tamar Nadiradze and Merab Gugunashvili were presented.

The Tbilisi Independent exhibition in London at Frieze No.9 Cork Street highlighted the summer. It brought together five Georgian galleries: E.A Shared Space, Gallery 4710, The Why Not Gallery, MAUDI, and CH64, including Reach Art Visual, to showcase artists like Lia Bagrationi and Alexandre Bandzeladze. The exhibition received high praise, with London based collector and art manager Bjorn Stern describing the works as dignified and quietly powerful. Collaborating on this project was a meaningful step in sharing the essence of Georgian art with a wider audience.

These moments are not just about individual successes, they're about a collective shift. And it's thrilling to be a part of it, to feel that momentum building. This is why initiatives like ZEGAVLENA (the first bilingual online magazine about Georgian Visual Art) are so close to my heart. It's about creating a space for dialogue, for critical reflection, for documenting this very evolution that we're witnessing.

What drives us at Reach Art Visual is this belief in the transformative power of art. It's about connection, about dialogue, about creating spaces where structures and meaning flourish. Seeing Georgian art taking its place on the international stage is incredibly gratifying. It feels like we're on the cusp of something special. It's a privilege to be a part of this journey, to witness this unfolding, and to help, in our own way.

## HOW IS THE INTERNATIONAL PERCEPTION OF GEORGIAN ART EVOLVING, AND WHAT ROLE HAS REACH ART VISUAL PLAYED IN SHAPING THIS NARRATIVE?

There's a palpable shift occurring, a distinct evolution in how the world is perceiving Georgian art. It's moving beyond a niche interest, beyond the realm of the exotic or the undiscovered. We're witnessing a growing appreciation for its

unique DNA, for the particular blend of historical depth, cultural specificity, and contemporary dynamism that defines it. There is a recognition of a certain 'dignity,' as some have observed, a quiet intensity that permeates the work of many Georgian artists.

Tbilisi's growing recognition as a regional art hub is reflected in its dynamic art scene and the increasing visibility of Georgian artists on the global stage. Events like the Tbilisi Art Fair and participation in major international platforms, including the Venice Biennale and the Chinese Biennale, highlight the caliber and unique perspectives of creative minds from Georgia. Additionally, initiatives like the Art & Travel International Film Festival underscore the broader cultural and economic impact of Georgian visual art.

## ON THE CURRENT POLITICAL CRISIS IN GEORGIA - THERE IS SIGNIFICANT POLARIZATION, CONCERNS ABOUT DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING, A STRAINED RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR WESTERN PARTNERS, AND GROWING SECURITY THREATS BOTH REGIONALLY AND GLOBALLY. HOW DO THESE FACTORS IMPACT THE ART SCENE, AND HOW DOES RAV NAVIGATE THIS COMPLEX ENVIRONMENT?

This political upheaval and the ongoing dramatic developments cast a shadow over every aspect of our lives—not just the art scene in Georgia. The creative community, at the forefront of the protests, is facing some of its most difficult times. I am deeply shocked by what is happening. The future generation of Georgia is on the streets, and the country's very future is at stake. To ignore this or attempt to violently suppress the anger and frustration of these people would be an unforgivable mistake—a betrayal of Georgia's future.

This is precisely where art can have a powerful impact. In times of turmoil, it provides a vital space for dialogue, reflection, and resilience. At Reach Art Visual, we remain steadfast in our commitment to fostering an environment where artists can thrive and where their voices

can be heard without fear.

While navigating this complex environment is undeniably challenging, we believe that by continuing our work—promoting Georgian art internationally and building bridges through culture—we can contribute to a more open and democratic Georgia, one that aligns with the European aspirations of its people.

## LOOKING AHEAD, WHAT ARE R.A.V.'S PLANS FOR 2025, AND HOW DO YOU ENVISION CONTINUING TO BUILD UPON THE MOMENTUM OF 2024?

The energy surrounding Georgian art right now is undeniable, and building on the momentum of this past year is our driving force. For Reach Art Visual, 2025 will be about deepening our international collaborations. We are committed to forging stronger connections with galleries, institutions, and curators worldwide, creating more opportunities for Georgian artists to shine on a global stage. We will continue to advocate for Georgian art, share its unique stories, and ensure it resonates with ever-expanding audiences. Platforms like ZEGAVLENA will remain central to this mission, providing critical context and fostering meaningful dialogue within the art community. Additionally, we aim to expand our work on collaborative projects, creating more carefully curated moments where Georgian art can truly speak for itself.

Art Foundation Anagi is poised to make significant strides in 2025. While the full scope of its activities will be unveiled in due course, I can say that it's all about creating a sustainable ecosystem for Georgian art, about nurturing talent from the ground up. AFA is set to become a significant pillar of stability and support for artists, researchers, and the entire art community. It's about ensuring that the momentum we've seen in 2024 isn't just a fleeting moment, but the beginning of a lasting legacy.

In 2025, we're determined to continue fostering vital connections between Georgian art and the world, and to help Georgian art and artists achieve their European aspirations. The journey is ongoing, and the future is brimming with possibilities.

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# FEARLESS in Tbilisi: The Emergency Art Market Redefining Resistance through Creativity

BY IVAN NECHAEV

In the heart of Tbilisi, where cobblestone streets intertwine with centuries of cultural resilience, a bold experiment unfolded in January 2025. The Tbilisi Photography and Multimedia Museum transformed into a crucible of creative defiance with the FEARLESS emergency art market, a dynamic and urgent response to the political, societal and artistic crises shaking Georgia. Over three intense days, from January 11 to 14, visitors entered not merely an art market, but a manifesto of unity and resistance.

## WHEN ART FIGHTS BACK: THE BIRTH OF FEARLESS

How does a society under strain respond creatively? FEARLESS was born in the crucible of Georgia's socio-political turmoil, where protests dominated streets and cultural spaces faced closures. The organizers aptly termed it an "emergency art market," signaling urgency and purpose. This wasn't simply a marketplace; it was a declaration that art is an essential lifeline.

FEARLESS exemplifies what cultural theorist Stuart Hall describes as "cultural resistance," where marginalized voices claim space against dominant narratives. By situating itself at the intersection of crisis and creativity, the event spotlighted art as a medium for both survival and transformation.

## A VIBRANT COALITION: PARTICIPATING GALLERIES AND ARTISTS

Who dared to be fearless? FEARLESS brought together a coalition of Georgia's most dynamic galleries and platforms, including Artbeat, Window Project, Patara, Obscura, and 4710 Gallery. These participants, ranging from established institutions to emerging collectives, embodied the rich diversity of Georgian contemporary art.

The diversity of participants—from the avant-garde experimentation of Kunsthalle Tbilisi to the intimate, reflective works showcased by Patara Gallery—underscored a collective ethos. It was a rare and powerful convergence, where



Fearless. Source: Tbilisi Photography & Multimedia Museum's Facebook page

established institutions like LC Queisser shared space with smaller, independent initiatives like E.A. Shared Space and Kurorti.

Three days of FEARLESS sparked a wave of inspiration that continues to shape Georgia's cultural landscape. Participating galleries reported renewed interest and expanded collaborations, while artists gained both financial support and heightened visibility.

The event's impact wasn't confined to Georgia. FEARLESS has become a blueprint for cultural activism globally, urging institutions to prioritize resilience and solidarity in times of crisis. Its legacy challenges art spaces worldwide to rethink their roles—from passive exhibitors to active agents of change.

## SOLIDARITY AS A MASTERPIECE: THE PHILOSOPHY

## BEHIND FEARLESS

What made FEARLESS more than a market was its underlying ethos of solidarity. Borrowing from sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, FEARLESS redefined the value of art. Here, purchasing a painting or photograph was not merely a financial exchange but an act of socio-political support.

The event's structure mirrored principles of "commoning," as described by sociologist Massimo De Angelis. FEARLESS treated art as a shared resource—a communal asset rather than an exclusive commodity. Visitors became stakeholders in a collective effort to sustain Georgia's cultural fabric.

Can art be both a commodity and a tool of resistance? FEARLESS challenged this dichotomy by reframing the market as a site of ethical engagement. Philosopher Jacques Rancière's "politics of aes-

thetics" finds fertile ground here; the event disrupted traditional hierarchies of art consumption, prioritizing intent and solidarity over exclusivity.

FEARLESS also raised critical questions about the commodification of struggle. Could selling art dilute its message? Or does it amplify its reach? The event's success suggests the latter: each transaction became an act of allegiance, aligning buyers with the artists' fight for cultural and political autonomy.

## A MUSEUM TURNED ARENA: THE POWER OF SPACE

The Tbilisi Photography and Multimedia Museum, nestled in the iconic Stamba Hotel, served as more than a venue. It became a symbolic battleground where art and activism converged. The museum's industrial aesthetic—raw concrete juxtaposed with polished exhibition

spaces—perfectly encapsulated the event's ethos of beauty born from struggle.

By dedicating its space to FEARLESS, the museum blurred lines between institutional authority and grassroots activism. It elevated the participating artists while grounding their works in the immediacy of public engagement. Visitors described the experience as "intensely personal," where art's emotional resonance met its political significance.

FEARLESS was more than an event; it was a movement. It declared that art is indispensable, especially in times of uncertainty. It united artists, curators, and audiences in a shared mission to preserve and protect Georgia's cultural vitality. It seeded a future where creativity thrives against all odds—a future that is, above all, fearless.



**PUBLISHER & GM**  
George Sharashidze

**COMMERCIAL DEPARTMENT**  
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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

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**I am Georgian and therefore I am European**

Zurab Zhvania, Council of Europe, 1999

