



US President Donald Trump. Photo by Morry Gash/Pool/AFP/Getty Images

FOCUS

ON THE TRUMP PARADOX

What does Donald Trump's second term as POTUS mean for America and the world?

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INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE IN BRUSSELS

When I look at Georgia, I'm very pessimistic...our line should be that if we don't do something, it will cost us. We are about to lose a partner - Petras Auštrevičius tells Radio Free Europe's Georgian Service. We sat down with him to speak about the root of that pessimism, drawing on the Belarus example, the stand-off between Brussels and Tbilisi, and asking just how much EU support he thinks Georgia can expect.

TODAY'S DEVELOPMENTS IN GEORGIA ARE VERY OFTEN COMPARED TO WHAT TRANSPIRED IN BELARUS IN 2020. DO YOU THINK THE COMPARISON IS APT? SHOULD WE EXPECT A SIMILAR OUTCOME?

I don't know which way things will play out in Georgia, maybe not exactly the same way as they did in Belarus. But for Russia, any country that wants to go towards Europe is unacceptable, and they are looking for every opportunity to make them change course and present it as if the country has failed, so it had "better come back to Mother Russia."

Continued on page 6



Petras Auštrevičius. Photo: Delfi/Domantas Pipas

MARKETS		STOCKS		COMMODITIES		CURRENCIES	
Price	w/w	m/m	Price	w/w	m/m	Price	w/w
GEORGIA 04/26	94.79	+0.3%	+0.6%	Bank of Georgia (BGEO LN)	GBP 40.05	+7.8%	-2.0%
GABAL 04/28	87.73	+0.1%	-0.2%	Georgia Capital (CGEO LN)	GBP 10.00	+3.5%	-1.0%
GBGG 9/12 PERP	98.03	+0.2%	-0.0%	TBC Bank Group (TBGG LN)	GBP 27.05	+6.1%	-4.2%
SILNET 01/27	100.76	+0.1%	+0.1%	Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	77.46	-4.3%	+8.2%
TBC 8.894 PERP	96.13	+0.1%	+0.4%	Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	2 648.54	+0.2%	+2.7%
TBC 10 1/4 PERP	99.48	+0.1%	+0.2%				
SP 500	5 859.85	+2.0%	+4.2%	USD / GEL	2,7230	-0.9%	+1.0%
FTSE 250	20 817.19	-0.2%	-0.4%	EUR / GEL	2,9705	-1.5%	-0.5%
DOW JONES 30	43 065.22	+2.6%	+4.0%	GBP / GEL	3,5548	-1.0%	+0.5%
Russell 2000	2 248.64	+2.5%	+3.0%	EUR / USD	1,0909	-0.6%	-1.5%
FTSE 100	8 292.66	-0.1%	+0.2%	GBP / USD	1,3059	-0.2%	-0.5%

Ukraine Latest: Russia Responds to Trump's Ultimatum on Ending War as 1,000 North Koreans Killed in Kursk



President Trump looks on after signing executive orders inside the Capital One Arena. REUTERS/Brian Snyder

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

Russia has given its first response to Donald Trump's ultimatum calling on Vladimir Putin to engage in peace talks or see his Ukraine invasion end "the hard way". Writing on his Truth Social platform, Trump said: "We can do it the easy way, or the hard way - and the easy way is always better. It's time to MAKE A DEAL."

The US president said he would be

forced to put "high levels of Taxes, Tariffs, and Sanctions" on anything sold by Russia if Putin refused to negotiate an end to his war.

Russia's deputy UN ambassador Dmitry Polyanskiy said Moscow will have to see what Mr. Trump thinks a "deal" to end the war in Ukraine means, and that the Kremlin sees it as a "question of addressing the root causes of the Ukrainian crisis".

Vladimir Putin believes key war goals in the "special military operation" in Ukraine have already been met, sources aware of the matter inside the Kremlin said.

These key war goals, Putin said, include

the control of land that connects mainland Russia to Crimea, and weakening Ukraine's military, reported Reuters.

Last year, Russia made its most significant territorial gains since the early days of the war, and it now controls nearly a fifth of Ukraine.

Putin has said that Russia can fight on as long as it takes and that Moscow will never bow before another power over key national interests.

On the frontline, Moscow and Kyiv are seeking battlefield gains to strengthen their negotiating positions ahead of any prospective talks to end the three-year-old war.

ONE DEAD, 25 INJURED IN RUSSIAN STRIKE ON ZAPORIZHZHIA

At least one person was killed and 25 others wounded in a Russian drone and missile attack on the southeastern Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia, regional officials said Thursday.

More than 20,000 residents were also left without power and another 17,000 without heating as a result of the overnight attack, according to governor Ivan Fedorov, who said an energy facility had been destroyed.

Russia has carried out regular air strikes on Ukrainian towns and cities behind the frontline of its three-year-old invasion, targeting the country's weakened energy grid in particular.

AROUND 1,000 NORTH KOREANS KILLED IN KURSK FIGHTING UKRAINE, OFFICIALS SAY

North Korea has suffered nearly 40% casualties among its forces fighting alongside Russia in the western Kursk region, Western officials told the BBC.

Out of the estimated 11,000 troops sent from North Korea, 4,000 were battle casualties in just three months of fighting - including those killed, wounded, missing or captured - the officials said on condition of anonymity.

Of these 4,000 losses, nearly 1,000 are believed to have been killed by mid-January.

Ukrainian officials are yet to release their own tally. North Korea has not issued any comment on the presence of its troops inside Russia.

KYIV WILL NOT AGREE TO RUSSIAN DEMANDS TO CUT MILITARY - ZELENSKY

Ukraine will not agree to Russian demands that it drastically reduces the size of its military in a future peace agreement,

President Volodymyr Zelensky said on Tuesday.

Speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Zelensky warned that Russian President Vladimir Putin would demand that Ukraine reduce its military five-fold.

"This is what he wants. We will not allow this to happen," Zelensky said.

DRONES ATTACK CITY NEAR ZAPORIZHZHIA NUCLEAR PLANT, OFFICIALS SAY

Russia-installed officials in Ukraine's partly-occupied Zaporizhzhia region said Ukrainian drones attacked Enerhodar, a city serving the Russian-held Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant.

"This is a terrorist act," Russia-installed acting mayor Maksim Pukha told Russia's RIA news agency, saying civil infrastructure and residential areas had been targeted. "Peaceful residents should in no way be targets of such an attack."

Each side has accused the other of risking a nuclear catastrophe by attacking the station. Monitors from the UN's nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, are permanently stationed at the plant.

Russian media quoted the city's authorities as saying at least four drones had attacked Enerhodar. It said there were no casualties, and no details on damage were provided.

The governor of the part of Zaporizhzhia region held by Ukraine, Ivan Fedorov, said five drones had attacked the city of Zaporizhzhia, located about 60km (35 miles) northwest of the plant, across a large reservoir on the Dnipro River.

He posted a picture on Telegram of a large fire he said had been triggered by the attack.

Vladimir Rogov, a senior Russia-appointed official in Zaporizhzhia region, said the attack had disrupted power and water supplies in the city.

Vake's Tallest Skyscraper Project Made Even Taller



The VR Vake Skyview Tower. Source: VR

BY TEAM GT

Noshrevan Namoradze, a businessman and one of the largest donors to the political party Georgian Dream, is building a new 230-meter skyscraper in Tbilisi's prestigious Vake district. The project, named VR Vake Skyview Tower, will be located at 49 Chavchavadze Street, on the site of the former Sports University. Once completed, it is expected to be the tallest building in Georgia.

According to information from the businessman's company, VR Holding, the VR Vake Skyview Tower will feature modern, premium-class facilities. The project has undergone significant changes since its initial approval. The building's

height has been increased from 180 meters to 230 meters, and the number of floors has grown from 47 to 56. Additionally, the number of parking spaces has risen from 310 to 643, following the addition of two extra underground levels.

The total area of the project is 18,664 square meters, with green spaces covering 5,639.1 square meters. The updated project details are outlined in an explanatory note: "The total area of the territory is 18,664 square meters. The total area of the green areas in the yard will be at least 5639.1 square meters. The project was changed, which provides for the number of floors to be increased to 56, the height of the building to be raised to 230 m, and the number of parking spaces to be increased to 643."

The construction permit for the modified skyscraper was approved at the end of 2024 in an accelerated manner.

Paris Saint-Germain Completes High-Profile Signing of Khvicha Kvaratskhelia

BY TEAM GT

Paris Saint-Germain (PSG), one of Europe's most prominent football clubs, has officially announced the signing of Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, the dynamic winger from Georgia's national football team. The transfer sees Kvaratskhelia move from Italian Serie A club SSC Napoli to PSG on a long-term contract, which will run until 2029. This move is expected to significantly bolster PSG's attacking lineup, further strengthening the club's ambition to remain at the top of both French and European football.

At just 23 years of age, Kvaratskhelia has already made a considerable impact on the football world. He joined Napoli in 2022 and immediately became one of the most exciting young talents in European football. His standout performances during the 2022-2023 season helped lead Napoli to their first Serie A title in 33 years, a remarkable achievement that ended the club's long drought in Italy's top division.

In his short time at Napoli, Kvaratskhelia accumulated an impressive record, featuring in 107 matches, scoring 30 goals, and providing 29 assists across all competitions. His ability to create goal-scoring opportunities, along with his eye for goals, made him a key



player for Napoli, and he quickly became one of the brightest young stars in Serie A.

His remarkable performances earned him several individual accolades. In 2023, he was named Serie A Player of the Season, an acknowledgment of his vital contributions to Napoli's success. Additionally, Kvaratskhelia was awarded the Champions League Young Player of the 2022-2023 Season. His consistent excellence on the pitch also led to a top-20 finish in the prestigious Ballon d'Or rankings, where he placed 17th among the best players in the world.

The announcement of Kvaratskhelia's transfer to PSG was made with enthusiasm by the club's president, Nasser Al-Khelaifi. In his statement, Al-Khelaifi praised the 23-year-old Georgian winger, describing him as "one of the most exciting players in world football."

"We are delighted to welcome Khvicha Kvaratskhelia to the Paris Saint-Germain family," Al-Khelaifi said. "Khvicha is a fantastic talent, but also a player who has courage and fights for the team above all else. He was so determined to be part of our great club, and I know he will achieve all his goals with us."

Georgian Dream Reacts to US Political Shifts and Talks Strengthening Ties with Trump Administration

BY TEAM GT

With Trump back in charge, key Georgian Dream officials have been expressing their views on the changing US-Georgia dynamics this week.

Mamuka Mdinardze, the Executive Secretary of the ruling Georgian Dream party, on Wednesday suggested that the need for Georgia's domestic law on the transparency of foreign influence may no longer be necessary. His remarks followed US President Trump's executive order on January 22 to temporarily suspend all US foreign assistance programs for 90 days to reassess their alignment with US policy goals. Mdinardze claimed that Trump's decision had effectively "proven" the necessity of the transparency law. He added, "Let them now call this decision by Trump 'Russian,'" referencing Georgia's opposition's labeling of the controversial law.

Georgia's "foreign influence" law, enacted last year, requires non-commercial entities and media outlets in the country to register if they receive more than 20 percent of their funding from abroad. The law has been a point of contention within Georgia's political sphere, particularly among opposition parties, who view it as an attempt to stifle free expression.

Wednesday also saw Shalva Papuash-



Image source: eurasiatimes

vili, the Speaker of the Georgian Parliament, hitting out at Laura Thornton, Senior Director of the Global Democracy Program at the McCain Institute, who publicly criticized US President Trump, calling him a "rapist and criminal." In

response, Papuashvili accused Thornton of prioritizing her political agenda over Georgia's relationship with the United States. He criticized her approach as emblematic of the "deep state," an underground political network he claimed


Trump would "successfully deal with." Papuashvili added, "The statement made by Salome Zurabishvili's employer during a discussion about President Trump's role in Georgia-US relations reveals that it is not the issue of Georgia-

US relations that is important to her, but rather pursuing the agenda of her own political group."

In a show of optimism, Maka Botchorishvili, Georgian Dream's Foreign Minister, congratulated Marco Rubio on his appointment as US Secretary of State, expressing hopes for stronger US-Georgia relations under his leadership. "I very much look forward to fostering cooperation and strengthening ties between our two countries under your leadership," she wrote in a social media message. Rubio, who was confirmed by the Senate with unanimous support, marks the first Latin American origin person to hold the position of Secretary of State.


On Tuesday, Georgian parliamentarian Levan Makhashvili reinforced the ruling Georgian Dream party's commitment to revitalizing ties with the United States. He emphasized that US policy under Trump would be "entirely tailored to ensure that America gains as much benefit as possible." Makhashvili also suggested that Trump may take steps to dismantle or reassess liberal ideologies. He pointed to decisions such as Trump's stance on gender and traditional family values, as well as his strong immigration policies, as indicators of the direction the US under Trump might take.




Reflecting on the broader scope of these policy shifts, Makhashvili stated, "The alignment on fundamental issues gives us hope that relations between Georgia and the United States will be rebooted. We are fully prepared for this."




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Donald Trump: The Force of History We Can't Escape



US President Donald Trump - Official 2025 inauguration portrait. By Daniel Torok

OP-ED BY MARK REIN-HAGEN

It is time to embrace an uncomfortable truth. Trump is not an aberration; he is historic. As in, a maker of history. As in, someone who changes the course of a nation. Donald's second inaugural address was a spectacle as grandiose as the man himself—a gaudy, roaring, unapologetic assertion of everything his supporters adore and his adversaries fear. He was triumphant, defiant, and messianic, casting himself as both the architect and the vessel of an American revival. To his followers, he was a rockstar prophet; to his enemies, a self-anointed emperor. To everyone, in this great postmodern "attention economy" of ours, he was and will remain utterly inescapable.

Gone was any pretense of humility or propriety. Trump's declaration to "end the deep state" and "reshape the vast federal government" around his vision was breathtaking in its scope. His raucous jingoism thundered with promises of retaking the Panama Canal, rechristening the Gulf of Mexico as the Gulf of America, and dispatching federal troops to the border and to every major city. Every syllable dripped with theatrical bravado, a quality that has always defined his brand of populism and will certainly define his place in history.

But here's the thing: whether you view Trump as a savior or a scourge, there's no denying the truth that looms over this moment like a cathedral shadow:

Donald Trump is, objectively, the most consequential American (or, heck, global) figure of his era. Of our era. And we're stuck with him now.

Let's be clear—this isn't about righteousness or villainy. It's about sheer gravitational pull. For a decade, Trump has dominated not just the Republican Party but the entirety of American political discourse. He isn't an anomaly or a fluke, nor is he misunderstood. After years of relentless media scrutiny, voter revolts, and one "epically failed" presidency, Trump is back, not diminished but magnified. He's a force of history, and that force has exposed the Democrats' most tragic flaw: our insistence on treating him as a deviancy. Because that he isn't. This avatar of the age of TikTok proved it by getting reelected after trying to steal the election. He is the game changer.

THE BITTER LESSON FOR DEMOCRATS

We libturd, bless our deluded hearts, have clung to the comforting illusion that Trump is a grotesque blip on America's timeline—a mistake that could be corrected with enough fact-checks, outrage, and appeals to decency. But Trump isn't a mistake: He's a mirror.

His survival through scandals, impeachments, and even a criminal indictment isn't just a testament to his resilience—it's a reflection of his unparalleled ability to connect with a large swath of the American public. Trump speaks a language of grievance and triumph, of "us versus them," that resonates deeply with



Trump isn't a mistake: He's a mirror

his base and leaves his opponents spluttering platitudes.

For the left, Trump's re-election is a rancid stew of humiliation, served cold under the ice-covered Capitol dome. Yet within this defeat lies a brutal clarity: The left can no longer win by dismissing Trump as an illegitimate anomaly or by hoping the courts will sideline him. Trump and his MAGA movement aren't outside the system—they are the system's consequence, as its loudest expression.

The political system in the USA has long been for sale, corrupt and decadent, now it is completely openly defiled and despoiled, run by a man who has utterly no shame about it or who he is. And they love him for it.

THE TRUMP PARADOX

Trump is divisive, but so were many of the "great" presidents. Lincoln said, "A house divided against itself cannot stand" and then his election precipitated a bloody civil war. FDR said, "Judge me by the enemies I have made" and proved his mettle. And let's be honest, Trump is nothing if not a virtuoso at making

enemies. He has mastered social media like Roosevelt mastered radio, using his platforms not to unite but to galvanize and attack. His base grows stronger with every punch he throws, and his remarkable resilience in the face of legal and moral quagmires is unmatched.

But here's where the Trump myth fractures. Great presidents don't just divide—they break the system and then create a new one. A new era.

Lincoln led a new political party to shatter the corrupted system and then led the nation to a rebirth. FDR polarized a traumatized country but ushered in an era of unprecedented unity and prosperity. Trump, by contrast, broke the system himself and is now clearly rebuilding it in his own image.

The man thrives on perpetual conflict and so creates more of it to help him reap change. He is like the alter-ego of Obama in that way. His second term promises a cascade of pitched battles—on immigration, on the rule of law, on education, on America's place in the world. He might shift the terms of debate, but can he create a new level of national understanding? Can he or does he even want to reunite us after breaking us apart like the other greats did?

What is his era going to be like, can we have any hope at all? Could it be that he will tear apart what is already broken and allow something new and better to emerge?

A CRACKED MIRROR

Trump is the inevitable consequence of a Democratic Party that has grown too comfortable assuming it knows what the populace needs without actually engaging with them. He is the backlash to a politics of complacency, one that believed it could win with any candidate, regardless of connection to the people. The Democrats created the vacuum, and Trump filled it—with more than a little help from Republicans who fed the flames.

Trump embodies an America desperately clinging to a fading era, longing to cement itself as historic before it slips into irrelevance. He isn't just a political figure; he's a reflection of a broken system, a cracked mirror showing us the rot, the grime, and the grotesque reality of a nation grappling with its own moral and cultural decay.

There are those who believe we're witnessing the final chapter of the American experiment, the twilight of the Republic, from which there is no return. As a friend put it, "The Republic is desecrated and destroyed. The fascists have won. And I am not being hyperbolic." But this despair, I think, is premature. Trump's presidency is a storm, yes, but it is a storm that burns through its fuel too quickly. His tendency to overreach—

pushing too far, too soon, too fast—will reveal its consequences in time. The next two years, and especially the mid-terms, will tell us just how much this once-great nation is willing to endure before it pushes back.

THE UKRAINE PARADOX

And who knows? When it comes to Ukraine and Russian imperialism, Trump might surprise us yet. Putin, once a master of leveraging Trump's admiration, seems increasingly out of step with Trump's new dynamic. He hasn't adapted to the evolving international protocol of appeasing Trump's ego or bending the knee, leaving him isolated from the new Caesar's will. In fact, Trump seems to have shed whatever intimidation he once felt toward Putin—perhaps even relishing the power dynamic now tipped in his favor.

One suspects the Don no longer fears leaked tapes of showers, golden or not.

Trump has demanded that the war in Ukraine must end. Yet Putin, unable to retreat without losing face—and likely his grip on power—cannot give Trump the one thing he craves: a deal, a compromise he can sell as a personal triumph.

The result? We may witness Trump doubling down in Ukraine, if only to impose his will and prove he can succeed where others faltered. Whether his actions are driven by a genuine belief in democracy, a desire for world peace, or simply his own ego—at this point, does it even matter? If it means Ukraine survives to fight another day, let him have his victory lap.

THE ROAD AHEAD

Trump's second term is not a historical divergence; it's a turning point. His America is one where spectacle 'trumps' substance, where division fuels power, and where grievances overshadow aspirations. But his opponents have a chance to meet this moment, not by trying to "out-normal" him, but by rallying their own transformative vision of America; by coming up with a well-crafted powerful and lyrical response as great as the one that has taken over the minds of half the nation.

If they don't, Trump's loud, messy, chaotic vision of greatness may well become the only game in town. Heck, it already is, the question is will it remain the only circus around still selling out. [We need a better circus fellow libturd!]

Prepare for chaotic greatness. Likely a greatness you won't entirely like, or like at all, but one which just might lead to a new era of reform that rebalances the republic, restores democracy, and puts limits on the power of the rich.

If/when he turns on Elon, he might turn on all of them. And if he doesn't, the country might very well turn on him. We can only hope.



President Trump's speech following his inauguration. Photo by Kenny Holston

NeoCons, the World, and Georgia



Image source: Ellie Foreman-Peck/The Economist

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

There is, nowadays, a significant debate about the so-called NeoCon (neoconservative) philosophy of life and politics. Many wonder how good or bad, how strong or weak, how gentle or vicious, and how useful or damaging it might be for humanity today. By the simplest definition, a NeoCon is someone who adheres to conservative or right-wing ideology and strongly supports a free-market economy. Neocons advocate for an old-fashioned structure of societal interaction, dismissing extreme libertarianism as an impractical and unpalatable economic and ideological stance. Neoconservatism can be described as a blend of political, social, and religious conservatism, adapted to modern times.

NeoCons have played a dominant role in the global socio-political landscape over the past few

decades, though their ideological roots trace back to the late 1960s. According to encyclopedic definitions, NeoCons promote the autonomous advancement of democracy and support interventionism in international relations. Their philosophy of peace through strength relies on militaristic and realist principles, staunchly opposing socialism and communism. The idea of peace through strength, which suggests that military power helps maintain peace, remains controversial, depending on how and by whom it is propagated. This ideology suggests that military power can preserve peace, a claim that draws both supporters and critics, depending on its application and leaders' intentions.

Neoconservatism has played an essential role in determining global policies and shaping international alliances. Their crusade influences the foreign policy of numerous nations, including Sakartvelo, as well as international institutions. Neocons emphasize democratic extension, encouraging interventionism to sustain what they ponder as Western democratic standards. Their attitude has

powered momentous military interventions, including in the Middle East, especially in Iraq and Afghanistan. Whereas their tactic in foreign policy repeatedly triggers criticism for being excessively bellicose, NeoCons argue that their actions are essential to maintain global stability. Opponents, however, highlight long-drawn-out conflicts and regional instability. The continuing drive for strategic geopolitical impact emphasizes the Neocons' durable endeavor and ability to shape the world in their own way.

As far as our little Sakartvelo is concerned, geopolitically situated at the junction of East and West, it constitutes a vivid example of the effect of neoconservatism in small but strategically dynamic nations. NeoCon policies have played a noticeable role in supporting Georgia's democratic progress, particularly in its longing to integrate into European and transatlantic alliances. Economically, neocon investments in Georgia have encouraged free-market reforms and privatization. Politically, NeoCon ideology has helped animate local elites

who view Western configuration as a protection against outside threats, particularly from the North. This way or that way, critics contend that this alignment risks distorting Georgia's political challenges while nurturing dependency on Western relief. And most importantly for this country, the neoconservative vision of peace often raises challenging questions. Is structural peace achievable solely through supremacy, or does it require teamwork and partnership, diplomacy, and common development efforts? The answers to these questions will shape not only the future of neoconservatism but also global stability.

How about Ukraine? The unending conflict in Ukraine has brought neoconservatism to the vanguard of worldwide discourse. Neocons have been outspoken backers for supporting Ukraine, encouraging wide-ranging military assistance and punitive sanctions against Russia. They view Ukraine as a crucial frontline for protecting democratic ideals against authoritarianism. Proponents argue that a strong, united front led by Western democracies is indispensable to ensure Ukraine's sovereignty and stability. However, doubters suggest heads-up that disproportionate militarization of the skirmish could aggravate tensions, expand the war, or incite further geopolitical consequences.

To conclude, neoconservatism remains a powerful ideological force in shaping global and domestic policies, and Sakartvelo remains (so far) within this previously designed modus vivendi. Its focus on military strength, democracy promotion, and traditional values continues to drive debates on issues ranging from conflict resolution to societal norms. However, its complexities require a subtle understanding. While NeoCons offer a unified vision of strength and tradition, their philosophy faces growing challenges in a rapidly changing world. Political analysts, social commentators, and policymakers in Sakartvelo must critically evaluate its benefits and limitations to address modern national challenges effectively. Neoconservatism will not fade away that easily. It will stay around to evolve its impact, and this requires an educated, well-adjusted discourse to exploit its power for constructive and helpful transformation while extenuating its hazards and menaces.

The Expiration of the Ultimatum Issued by the Vaso Abashidze New Theater



Photo source: Vaso Abashidze State New Theatre

BY KESARIA KATCHARAVA

On January 12, 2025, the artistic director of the Vaso Abashidze New Theater, Davit Doiashvili, issued a stern ultimatum to the Georgian authorities, demanding the immediate release of actors and other activists who had been detained during the ongoing pro-European protests. The deadline for the ultimatum was set for January 20, with Doiashvili warning that the theater would transition from a "passive protest" to more assertive action if their demands were not met. As of January 23, with the deadline having passed, the political and cultural landscape of Georgia is facing heightened tensions, as theater actors, directors, and artists across the country



prepare for an escalation of protests and a more confrontational stance against the government.

PRO-EUROPEAN PROTESTS AND THE ESCALATING POLITICAL CRISIS



Georgia has been witnessing a series of pro-European protests since late 2024, which were sparked by the government's decision to indefinitely postpone the discussion of opening negotiations for European Union (EU) membership. On November 28, 2024, the ruling party, Georgian Dream, announced that the issue of EU membership would not be raised for at least the next four years, igniting a wave of public outrage. The protests have been driven by a broad coalition of civil society groups, political parties, and ordinary citizens who view European integration as a critical part of Georgia's future.

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Shalva Papuashvili

Georgian Leaders Seek to Strengthen Diplomatic Ties with Armenia and Hungary amid Global Shifts

BY TEAM GT

Georgian Parliament Speaker Shalva Papuashvili and Georgian Dream's Foreign Minister Maka Botchorishvili this week held important discussions with foreign ambassadors, seeking to further grow Georgia's diplomatic relationships and position within the broader international landscape.

On Monday, Papuashvili met with Ashot Smbatyan, the Armenian Ambassador to Georgia, to reaffirm the "historically strong friendship and fruitful cooperation" between their countries. The talks focused on deepening parliamentary ties and addressed significant political developments in both Armenia and Georgia. Notably, the officials highlighted Armenia's growing interest in strengthening relations with the West, exemplified by its recent signing of the Charter of Strategic Partnership with the United States. The parties agreed that the future of Georgia-US and Armenia-US relations would heavily depend on the policies of the newly elected US President, Donald Trump.

In addition to discussing regional security, the two officials underscored the importance of maintaining peace and

stability in the South Caucasus. They also agreed on the need to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the birth of Charles Aznavour, the famous French singer of Armenian descent, who had paternal ties to Georgia.

On Wednesday, Botchorishvili met with Hungarian Ambassador Anna Mária Sikó to discuss strengthening trade, economic, and strategic ties between Georgia and Hungary. The pair reviewed their existing agreements, such as the July 2024 pact on mutual protection and promotion of investments, and highlighted the importance of Hungary's continued support for Georgia's European Union integration aspirations.

The ministers also discussed ongoing political developments in Georgia, as well as the role Hungary could play in supporting Georgia's path to deeper EU engagement. Botchorishvili expressed her gratitude for Hungary's "unwavering support" of Georgia, emphasizing the close and strategic partnership that continues to grow through high-level exchanges.

Both sets of meetings illustrate Georgia's ongoing efforts to expand its diplomatic outreach, particularly as the region experiences shifting political dynamics, including the evolving influence of the United States under President Trump.



Maka Botchorishvili

"They Have a Plan, and It Wasn't Drawn in Tbilisi" - MEP Austrevicius on Georgian Dream's Kremlin Playbook



Petras Auštrevičius. Source: X

Continued from page 1

Georgia, compared to Belarus, is more dynamic; they've got the experience, the taste of democracy, and are better connected internationally. But still, when I look at Georgia, I'm very pessimistic. They have a plan, that many in Brussels are unaware of, and this plan wasn't drawn in Tbilisi, believe me; it was drawn up a bit further north. The strategy is to lead Georgia away from the European path.

IF WE WERE TO LOOK AT THE REGIME'S APPROACH BOTH IN BELARUS AND IN GEORGIA, WHAT DO YOU THINK THE CORE SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES ARE?

In Belarus, we have a completely authoritarian regime, which is setting its country up for integration into Russia. But it's not entirely their choice; they aren't in control, they just swim downstream. As for Georgia, the Georgian Dream think they are so smart, so secure, that they can play the game of being in two places at the same time. "With Europe, let's be partners, mainly in matters of trade, because we like the money. But on policy, we want to be the way we want," which, at the moment, happens to be an increasingly authoritarian regime.

AS FAR AS AUTHORITARIAN LEADERS GO, WHO'S DOING A "BETTER" JOB- LUKASHENKO OR GEORGIAN DREAM?

Look, these guys have been in power for how long now, 12 years? They are only 12 years old. Lukashenko has been doing it for 31 years. He consolidated power. He exterminated all opposition. He took over Belarus. He is really a chairman of "Kolkhoz", to use the soviet term. He wakes up in the morning, goes out into the fields, points fingers here and there, orders you to do this and that. That's his style. In Georgia, I think it's a bit different. They are the semi-Kolkhoz, Kolkhoz-like people dressed up in suits, with semi-market economy principles and so on. But it's all about window dressing. The common feature for both Belarus and Georgia is that if you do a deal with the devil, especially with the devil that sits in the Kremlin, then there is no way out, and the devil gets to decide what your future looks like.

IN BELARUS, THE ONE THING THAT TILTED THE BALANCE IN LUKASHENKO'S FAVOR WERE THE RUSSIAN SOLDIERS, ARRIVING IN RUSSIAN TANKS, HOLDING RUSSIAN RIFLES. HOW REALISTIC WOULD THE SAME SCENARIO BE FOR GEORGIA?

I don't think Russians need tanks on the streets of Tbilisi; they want good, loyal masters locally, following their demands. A bit of a historical retrospective: in the 19th century, when Georgia was fully annexed by the Russian Empire, the elites were reintegrated into the Russian nobility; they were given respect, career possibilities, and so on. That repeat of history will most likely be seen in Georgia, I'm afraid.

WHAT YOU THINK THE CORE MOTIVATION OF THE RULING PARTY AND IVANISHVILI IS? IS IT FAVORS FOR THE KREMLIN OR BEING TERRIFIED OF WHAT HAPPENS IF THEY DON'T- A "POLONIUM TEA" SCENARIO?

Whatever it is, those at the top are being controlled - whether it's fear, money, past records or all three combined, we don't know yet. It's a bit more complicated than just saying it's because of fear, or just money - that would be too simplistic a reading.

WHAT SHOULD ONE EXPECT FROM THE EU WHEN IT COMES TO THIS STANDOFF BETWEEN BRUSSELS AND TBILISI? THE EP REFUSED TO RECOGNIZE GEORGIAN DREAM'S LEGITIMACY. WHAT'S NEXT? DO YOU EXPECT ANY OTHER INTERNATIONAL BODIES TO FOLLOW SUIT?

I'm looking forward to a consolidated EU position. I'm not sure we have such a position in the council yet. I am very optimistic about the Polish presidency in this regard. I hope it will prevail, but it's not a given. First, we have to consolidate and have one clear position among the European Union institutions.

HOW LONG DO YOU THINK THAT'S GOING TO TAKE?

It will take time. Another part of the question is about what the ruling party

in Georgia will do in the meantime. I think they will try to pretend as if nothing happened. They'll say "we are still your partners," shake any western hand that's offered to them; say, "let's not fight, sure, things aren't ideal, but let's talk." I expect Georgian Dream representatives to come to the EU institutions, even to the European Parliament.

IN WHAT CAPACITY?

Well, they aren't banned from entering the building. If someone from among the MEPs were to issue them clearance, they could come in. There will be no official invitation, sure, but once you've met them in the corridors, pictures are taken, they can then claim things are "being done."

WITH MORE THAN 750 OF YOUR COLLEAGUES IN THIS BUILDING, HOW MANY OF THEM DO YOU THINK WOULD BE TEMPTED TO PLAY THAT GAME?

You don't need many. You only need a dozen or so. There are already some MEPs that the pro-government media talks to, sending messages that even though some are unhappy about Georgian Dream in Georgia, there are happy ones as well. They suggest they are generally accepted, that nothing has really happened, that everything's normal and under control.

AND WHAT ARE YOU - THOSE WHO DON'T SHARE THAT VIEW - GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?

My expectation is full implementation of this policy line, from the External Action Service, from the Commission, and as much as possible from the Member States. We will not get everybody on board, but the line should be that if we don't do something, it will cost us, that we are about to lose a partner.

Are we ready to lose a candidate country so easily? Because we haven't yet fought for the soul of Georgia. We've just expressed some concerns, condemned things. I hope the new EU leadership is a bit more serious and understanding of the geopolitical consequences. We cannot allow this daylight robbery. If you let it happen, if you don't fight back, what's the message you're sending? That you abandon your partners, and do so with ease!

Reshaping Trade and Regionalism

BY BUBA BAGDAVADZE,
EXPERT IN INTERNATIONAL
TRADE REGULATIONS

The landscape of global trade has undergone profound changes since the end of World War II, moving from reconstruction to complex webs of regional and multilateral agreements. Initially, the focus was on creating a rule-based international system to prevent economic conflicts, leading to the establishment of GATT and later the WTO. However, the rise of regional blocs and shifts in global power dynamics have begun to challenge this system. Today, nations navigate through a maze of economic interests, security considerations, and shifting alliances. These transformations impact small countries like Georgia in an era where trade and regionalism are being reshaped.

In 1945, after World War II, a new balance of power was created. Everything was concentrated on reconstruction, avoiding major clashes between the powers, and creating a rule-based international system.

This shift also had its reflection in economic relations, marked by the introduction of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). GATT ensured the reduction of tariffs, leading to the eventual creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO), where all members had their share. The World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and WTO established the three major pillars of the multilateral economic system, ensuring cooperation among countries.

Because of the devastating effects of military confrontation, economic battles acquired major importance. For such economic battles, the multilateral system served as a paramount arena while simultaneously fostering regional forms of cooperation. These regional forms materialized in free trade regimes and economic organizations such as NAFTA (later USMCA), the European Union Customs Union, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Eurasian Union, the Council of Arab Economic Unity, the Economic and Social Council of the Arab League, ECCAS, APEC, CAREC, and financial institutions such as the Arab Monetary Fund and the Asian Development Bank, among others.

Despite their regional nature, all these cooperation forms directly or indirectly contributed to building a rule-based system that served as a foundation for trade, cooperation, and security. It was often stated that guaranteeing free trade promoted peace, and conversely, peace



Image source: kanakkupillai

contributed to building better trade partnerships. Trade and investment opportunities have consistently demonstrated the value of a well-regulated multilateral system focused on cooperation, fair treatment, and development. This system specifically addressed developing economies with special and preferential treatment, widely accepted under the international trade regime.

As circumstances evolved, post-Cold War economic and military powers reshaped themselves. Alongside Western hegemony, counterbalancing powers like China emerged. China notably benefited from special and differential treatment as a developing economy.

In 2020, Brexit became a significant demonstration of nations prioritizing national interests over unified trade systems. This trend was accompanied by US policies under the Trump administration, including imposing tariffs on foreign products and implementing economic sanctions against competing powers such as Iran, China, and Russia. The policies related to strengthening regionalism, as opposed to multilateralism, were interrupted by global challenges like the COVID-19 outbreak and subsequent changes in the US administration. Over the last four years, these developments have contributed to questioning the further enhancement of globalization. The failure of trade and diplomatic relations to ensure peace in Europe culminated in the Russo-Ukrainian War, which further prompted revisions in European security and trade policies,

reliance on Russian energy resources, and the rise of nationalist and conservative movements in major European countries. Meanwhile, China continues to invest heavily in developing countries and expand its global influence.

The election of a new administration in the United States reflects domestic and global demands for rethinking multilateralism. Developments in countries like Canada, Mexico, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and the Baltic States underscore that the older forms of globalization are undergoing transformation. This shift is evident in the World Trade Organization's (WTO) dispute settlement mechanism, which has been paralyzed due to the US refusal to appoint appellate body members, citing concerns over China's advantages under special and differential treatment. Announcements from the US to continue using tariffs as a trade tool and reshape relations with key partners like Mexico and Canada signal that security and trade will take on new dimensions in the coming years.

For developing countries, this evolving landscape presents significant challenges. The absence of a clearly established rule-based international economic and security order complicates efforts to establish strong ties that guarantee economic and security benefits. Balancing trade relations will be crucial for future development, particularly in the case of countries like Georgia. Regionalism's new approach leaves little room for reliance on the international rule-based

system for trade policy. Instead, balancing trade and security issues is paramount, as tariffs and sanctions could become more prevalent until robust cooperation frameworks emerge.

Georgia, for instance, has a strategic advantage with its aspirations for EU membership, a strategic partnership with the United States and free trade regime with China and significant trade relationship with Russia. However, its historical passivity within multilateral trade mechanisms means it must strike a delicate balance between the interests of global superpowers. Trade barriers in any form could immediately impact investments and trade, particularly for a country bordering Russia and serving as a gateway between Asia and Europe. Weakening ties with strategic partners, regardless of geographic proximity, would be detrimental and risky, as Georgia lacks the resources to thrive in an era defined by tariffs, sanctions and regionalism.

In conclusion, the evolving dynamics of trade and regionalism emphasize the need for carefully balancing trade partnerships and security considerations. While geographic conditions, trade corridors, and product pricing remain important technical aspects, they must not overshadow the risks associated with partnering with powers like China and Russia, which could trigger sanctions or other economic repercussions. Fostering balanced trade and security partnerships while maintaining loyalty to multilateral systems like the WTO and regional economic unions can provide small econo-



Georgia has a strategic advantage with its aspirations for EU membership, strategic partnership with the US, free trade regime with China, and significant trade relationship with Russia

mies like Georgia with fair opportunities in the global market. Georgia's unique position, combined with its strategic alliances, offers the potential to navigate these challenges effectively, ensuring its resilience and progress in an era of shifting trade dynamics.

Georgia's Wine and Spirits Exports Reach Record \$565 Million in 2024, Boosted by Strong Global Demand



BY TEAM GT

In 2024, the Georgian National Wine Agency reported a record-breaking \$565 million in wine and spirits exports, marking a 24% increase from the previous year. The wine sector played a significant role in this achievement, with 95 million liters of wine exported to 72 countries, generating \$276.1 million in revenue - 7% more than 2023. The Agency highlighted strong growth in key markets, particularly in the following countries:

- United Arab Emirates: +80% (70,000 liters)
- Turkey: +62% (538,000 liters)
- United Kingdom: +42% (425,600 liters)
- Azerbaijan: +34% (237,000 liters)
- United States: +32% (1.2 million liters)
- Germany: +30% (1.28 million liters)
- South Korea: +26% (72,500 liters)
- Canada: +16% (198,000 liters)
- Poland: +12% (6.7 million liters)
- Lithuania: +11% (707,000 liters)
- Israel: +2% (314,000 liters)

Alongside wine, Georgian exports of other alcoholic beverages also surged, with 48 million liters shipped to 56 countries, generating \$289 million, 47% more than the previous year.

In light of this success, the Georgian government is set to increase its support for wine promotion in international markets in 2025. The National Wine Agency announced a budget increase to €174 million (\$6.15 million), up by €1.4 million from the previous year. The Agency plans to target strategic markets such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Poland, China, South Korea, and Japan, with promotional events organized by contracted companies showcasing Georgian wines and spirits.

Additionally, the state program will continue to provide co-financing for marketing efforts aimed at key export destinations outside the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and SUAM (a regional union of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova). On the domestic front, the program will support wine exhibitions, competitions, and festivals throughout Georgia, boosting wine tourism and promoting local wine culture.

Georgia Sees Increased International Visits from EU and UK in 2024

BY TEAM GT

The Georgian National Tourism Administration has reported a notable increase in international visits from the European Union and the United Kingdom in 2024, with a total of 438,414 arrivals, marking a 3.8% rise compared to the same period in 2023. This uptick comes as part of a wider trend of growing interest in Georgia as a key destination for European travelers, driven by the country's unique cultural heritage, natural beauty, and affordable travel experiences.

Germany led the way with 78,644 visits, marking a strong 14.3% year-on-year increase. The United Kingdom followed with 32,372 visits, reflecting a 5.3% growth, indicating that British travelers continue to find Georgia an appealing, diverse, and accessible destination.



Towers in Svaneti. Photo by Tony Hanmer

Other European nations also saw significant growth in their visits to Georgia: France contributed 28,302 visits, a 20.2% increase, while Greece showed a 21.3% rise, with 27,557 visits. Italy

experienced an even more substantial boost, with a 24.6% increase, bringing the total to 19,895 visits. The Netherlands also saw a notable increase, with visits to Georgia by its people rising by

26.7%, reaching 18,759.

Spaniards, though last on the list, recorded a respectable 13.8% increase, with 14,735 visits to Georgia. This can be said to suggest a steady demand for

Georgian travel experiences, particularly from Southern Europe.

Georgia's appeal as a tourism destination can be linked to its combination of rich cultural heritage, historic landmarks, and natural attractions- from its Caucasus mountain resorts to the Black Sea coast. The country is also known for its renowned wine-making tradition and warm hospitality, making it a desirable location for both short getaways and longer cultural explorations. Additionally, Georgia's visa-free travel policy for many European countries has made it an increasingly accessible and affordable option for tourists.

The growth in international arrivals signals a positive outlook for Georgia's tourism sector as the country continues to position itself as a key player in the region's travel industry. With its growing infrastructure and ongoing promotional efforts, Georgia looks set to continue attracting European and UK visitors in the years to come.

Georgia's Banking Sector Earns Recognition from Capital Finance International



Source: nbg

BY KESARIA KATCHARAVA

The National Bank of Georgia (NBG) has received international recognition for its robust banking sector and effective monetary policies, as highlighted in an article published last week by Capital Finance International (CFL.co), a leading British publication on business, economics, and finance.

The article, titled Unveiling Georgia's Economic Potential: Strength, Challenges, and Opportunities, lauds Georgia's banking sector for its resilience, strong capitalization, and adequate liquidity, even amid a challenging global economic climate. It also acknowledges the NBG's role in driving financial stability and fostering sustainable growth in the country.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN FINANCIAL STABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

CFL.co emphasizes the NBG's success in implementing "effective" monetary policies, which have not only stabilised the domestic financial sector but also supported its growth. The article underscores the central bank's initiatives to develop a green bond market, an effort reflecting its commitment to sustainable economic growth.

In 2022, Georgia issued its first corporate green bond, aimed at supporting renewable energy projects. The article describes this as a milestone in the country's financial innovation, paving the way for environmentally conscious investments.

REDUCTION IN FOREIGN CURRENCY DEPENDENCE

Another notable achievement highlighted in the publication is the NBG's progress

in reducing the economy's reliance on foreign currency. Through macroprudential measures introduced since 2017, the share of foreign currency loans has decreased from 80% in the early 2010s to approximately 43% today. Similarly, foreign currency deposits have dropped from 80% to 52%. These measures have enhanced the banking sector's resilience to external shocks and currency fluctuations.

CFL.co commends the NBG for its proactive approach to inflation management. Despite global inflationary pressures, Georgia's inflation rate decreased significantly from an average of 11.9% in 2022 to 2.5% in 2023, with projections of a further reduction to 1.1% in 2024. Since March 2023, inflation has consistently remained below the Bank's target of 3%.

COMPLIANCE WITH INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

The article also acknowledges Georgia's adherence to international financial sanctions, particularly those imposed on Russia and Belarus. According to feedback from international partners, Georgian financial institutions fully comply with these requirements.

Additionally, the NBG's comprehensive regulatory and supervisory framework to combat money laundering and terrorist financing within the virtual assets sector has drawn praise. The Council of Europe's MONEYVAL positively assessed Georgia's measures, upgrading the country's compliance with the Financial Action Task Force's 15th Recommendation from "partially compliant" to "significantly compliant." This achievement places Georgia among only seven MONEYVAL member states to receive such recognition.

The article concludes by highlighting the broader implications of the NBG's efforts, positioning Georgia as a model for resilience and financial innovation in the region. By maintaining sound monetary policies, fostering sustainable growth, and aligning with international standards, the National Bank of Georgia continues to strengthen the country's economic foundation.

Founded 12 years ago, Capital Finance International is a quarterly magazine and online resource renowned for its analysis of global business and financial developments. Its recognition of Georgia underscores the country's growing reputation in the international financial community.

France24 Report: UAE Positions Itself for Gaza's Post-War Future



All Eyes on Gaza. Source: France24

BY TEAM GT

France24's long-form video report, titled All Eyes on Gaza: UAE Positioning Itself for the Post-War Period, features UAE's extensive aid, medical evacuations, and infrastructure projects, and positions the country as a crucial actor in Gaza's restabilization and future development while advocating for peace and regional stability.

A KEY HUB FOR HUMANITARIAN AID

The report follows evacuees to Emirates Humanitarian City (EHC), currently housing more than 2,200 Gazans. It depicts the support provided by the facility including a school, medical and physiotherapy facilities, playrooms, and services.

AID & INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

The report recognizes that UAE's regional peace efforts have allowed UAE humanitarian access to Gaza, notably via Egypt. Along the Gaza border, showcasing the

remains of Rafah, the documentary focuses on the work of UAE engineers.

FLOATING HOSPITAL

The report continues in the UAE floating hospital in Al Arish, described as 'equipped with cutting-edge technologies and operating theatres which can go up to 15 surgeries a day, one of the most prestigious healthcare facilities in the region.'

REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT

While the piece notes that the UAE is on its way to becoming 'the regional power best placed to influence the future of Palestine,' in an interview, HE Reem Al Hashimy sets the terms of UAE's regional engagement.

Her Excellency discussed the UAE's stance on regional security, stating that "there is no point to rebuild and then have this repeat. We need to break this perpetual cycle of violence. If Israel were to recognize that for a long-term peace, the Palestinian people are to also have their own state, that would be the game changer that would also allow the Arab world to come forward in their relationship with Israel." HE added that it is equally important that a competent and

reformed transparent Palestinian government can rise to the occasion to provide for the needs of its people.

NON-INTERFERENCE IN GAZA POLITICS

It is mentioned that the UAE claims it will not interfere in Gaza politics. The report briefly mentions Mohamed Dahlan's 'exile' in Abu Dhabi, where he has been entrusted with charitable initiatives in the past, while highlighting his controversial status.

THE FUTURE OF GAZA: A MASSIVE CHALLENGE

The documentary ends following back the young Mustafa and Ali, a month after their arrival in Abu Dhabi, while they attempt to start their lives again, far from home, and regain strength. The report ends by stating that at home in Gaza, everything would have to be rebuilt, 'a massive challenge the Emirates are also preparing for.'

The documentary will be broadcast on France24 and is available in three languages. France24 boasts a broadcasting reach of 522 million households and attracts 23 million monthly digital visits, with 213 million video views.

From Trash to Treasure: Revolutionizing Waste Management in Georgia



BY IVAN NECHAEV

When the Lithuanian entrepreneur Dainius Sklauskas announced the rollout of Sparklo's operations in Georgia, many saw it as just another international company entering the Georgian market. However, Sparklo is no ordinary enterprise. It represents a transformative vision that fuses environmental responsibility, cutting-edge technology, and socio-economic innovation—a model that has already succeeded in 14 countries worldwide. As Sparklo plans to expand its presence in Georgia from 58 recycling machines ("Sparklomats") to 200 by May this year, it's time to unpack the broader implications of this initiative for the country's ecology, economy, and society.

At its core, Sparklo operates on the principles of the circular economy, a concept that challenges the traditional linear "take-make-dispose" model of production and consumption. Instead of treating used PET bottles as waste, Sparklo reimagines them as valuable resources. The company incentivizes citizens to deposit their used bottles into Sparklomats by awarding points redeemable for high-value gifts. Furthermore, with the anticipated adoption of Georgia's deposit system law, Sparklo's initiative will enable citizens to receive monetary compensation of up to 20 tetrils per bottle.

This system is more than an economic

exchange; it's a behavioral nudge. By attaching tangible rewards to responsible waste disposal, Sparklo subtly shifts societal attitudes toward sustainability. Such behavioral economic interventions, grounded in psychological and sociological research, have proven effective in countries like Germany and Sweden, where deposit refund schemes have achieved recycling rates exceeding 90%.

Georgia's waste management crisis has been a persistent issue, exacerbated by the declining global market value of PET materials. Local recycling companies, unable to compete with cheap virgin plastics, have largely abandoned the purchase of secondary materials. As a result, vast quantities of plastic waste are buried in Georgian soil each year, posing severe ecological risks.

Sparklo's entry into the market offers a lifeline. By creating a steady stream of high-quality PET materials ready for processing, the company reinvigorates the recycling industry. Moreover, the reduction in landfill plastic could have cascading benefits for soil health, water quality, and biodiversity. In a country where natural beauty is a cornerstone of cultural identity and tourism, such ecological improvements are invaluable.

The economic impact of Sparklo's operations extends beyond waste management. The deployment of 200 Sparklomats across Georgia represents a significant investment in infrastructure and technology. Each machine serves as a micro-hub of economic activity, driving foot traffic to the locations that host them, be it supermarkets, community centers, or public spaces.

More importantly, Sparklo's model fosters a new kind of micro-economy. By converting waste into a currency of sorts, it democratizes access to goods and services, particularly for lower-income citizens who can exchange points for gifts of greater value. In doing so, Sparklo subtly addresses issues of economic inequality while promoting sustainable practices.

At its heart, Sparklo is not just a technological solution, but a cultural intervention. Georgia, like many post-Soviet countries, has historically grappled with the dual legacies of industrial neglect and consumerist excess. Waste management has often been relegated to the background, perceived as a peripheral issue rather than a societal priority.

Sparklo challenges this narrative by embedding ecological responsibility into everyday life. The act of depositing a bottle into a Sparklomat becomes a symbolic gesture of care—for the environment, for future generations, and for the broader community. Such small acts, repeated en masse, can lead to profound cultural shifts, aligning with the ethos of Georgian hospitality and respect for nature.

From an anthropological perspective, Sparklo's initiative also raises fascinating questions about the commodification of waste. What does it mean to assign monetary value to trash? How does this redefinition of waste reshape our understanding of consumption and production? These are not merely theoretical musings but practical considerations for a world increasingly driven by the principles of sustainability.

Despite its promise, Sparklo's journey in Georgia is not without hurdles. The success of its model hinges on widespread public adoption, robust legal frameworks, and sustained economic incentives. Public awareness campaigns will be crucial to educate citizens about the benefits of recycling and the mechanics of the Sparklo system. Equally important is the timely passage and enforcement of deposit system legislation, which will underpin the financial viability of Sparklo's operations.

However, the potential rewards far outweigh the risks. If successful, Sparklo could serve as a blueprint for other countries grappling with similar waste management challenges. Moreover, its integration into Georgia's socio-economic fabric could inspire a new wave of entrepreneurship, catalyzing innovations in areas ranging from renewable energy to sustainable agriculture.



Photo source: archive.gov

National Archives of Georgia Joins International Association of Book and Paper Conservators

BY KESARIA KATCHARAVA

On January 21, 2025, the National Archives of Georgia announced that it has officially become a member of the International Association of Book and Paper Conservators (IADA). This development marks a significant milestone in the institution's ongoing commitment to preserving and safeguarding Georgia's cultural heritage, particularly through the restoration of historical materials. The Archives' new membership in IADA opens up a range of opportunities to strengthen its conservation practices and further its mission to protect the country's irreplaceable historical assets.

ENHANCING PRESERVATION EFFORTS THROUGH GLOBAL COLLABORATION

The National Archives of Georgia's decision to join IADA aligns with its ongoing efforts to bolster its restoration laboratory. As the national body responsible for preserving Georgia's historical documents, manuscripts, and other significant cultural materials, the Archives is dedicated to employing the most advanced techniques and methodologies available. By becoming a member of IADA, the National Archives gains access to global best practices, cutting-edge technologies, and the latest innovations in book and paper conservation. This access will undoubtedly support the institution's mission to restore and preserve a wide variety of historical items, including manuscripts, books, photographs, miniatures, posters, and other forms of documentation that are vital to Georgia's cultural legacy.

Membership in IADA provides more than just a chance to adopt contemporary restoration techniques; it opens doors to collaboration with conservation professionals from across the globe. The Association organizes seminars, symposiums, and congresses that offer invaluable networking and learning opportunities. These events bring together conservators and experts from diverse cultural backgrounds and technical disciplines, facilitating the exchange of knowledge and experience in conservation practices. By participating in these global dialogues, the National Archives will not only enhance its technical capabilities but also contribute to the wider international conservation community.

STRENGTHENING THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES' RESTORATION LABORATORY

The restoration laboratory of the National Archives of Georgia plays a pivotal role in the country's efforts to preserve its cultural history. The laboratory is staffed by highly skilled professionals who work tirelessly to restore a broad range of materials. From ancient manuscripts that document the early history of the region to delicate photographic prints that capture pivotal moments in Georgia's past, the laboratory is a hub of expertise in materials conservation.

The Archives' restoration professionals employ a variety of methods to repair

and preserve damaged materials. Techniques range from simple cleaning and stabilization to more intricate processes, such as deacidification and re-binding. These skilled conservators utilize state-of-the-art equipment and materials to ensure that the items entrusted to them are handled with the utmost care and attention to detail. The team's work is integral to the protection of the nation's documentary heritage, which, if left uncared for, could deteriorate irreparably over time.

As a result of its membership in IADA, the National Archives is positioned to further strengthen this laboratory, gaining access to more advanced tools and resources that will enable it to provide an even higher standard of care for the country's priceless artifacts. The move promises to bring renewed expertise to the restoration process, making it easier to confront the complex challenges that come with the conservation of fragile materials. Additionally, the collaboration with international professionals will help to refine the National Archives' existing practices, making them more effective and sustainable over time.

A COMMITMENT TO PROTECTING CULTURAL HERITAGE

Georgia's rich history is reflected in the myriad of manuscripts, documents, books, and photographs that are housed in the National Archives. These documents span centuries, chronicling the development of the country, its people, and its cultural evolution. As such, the preservation of these materials is not just a matter of historical interest but also a crucial component of national identity. The work of the National Archives in safeguarding these materials ensures that future generations of Georgians—and indeed, people from around the world—can continue to access and learn from the wealth of knowledge contained in these artifacts.

Through its new membership in IADA, the National Archives has solidified its commitment to preserving this invaluable cultural heritage. The decision to join the global conservation community underscores the Archives' dedication to using the most effective methods available to ensure that the country's history is maintained for posterity. By embracing international standards and practices, the institution demonstrates its proactive approach to facing the growing challenges posed by the passage of time, environmental factors, and the inherent fragility of paper and ink.

LOOKING AHEAD

With its newfound membership in the International Association of Book and Paper Conservators, the National Archives of Georgia stands at the forefront of efforts to preserve the country's cultural heritage. The access to international expertise, collaborative opportunities, and state-of-the-art technologies will enhance the institution's capabilities in conservation and restoration. Moreover, this development signifies a long-term investment in the country's historical legacy, ensuring that Georgia's rich history will continue to be preserved for future generations.



MetaLit (About Writing)

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

What shall I jot down today? I was thinking of going outside, to the rush-edged ponds near the house, just before sunrise for an hour to see what develops. But it's an uninspiring morning; dull, flat and gray. Windless, at least, but no sun visible through the clouds at all as I type. No ice to fascinate my camera; it's a little too warm for that, though one can hope for just a few degrees below freezing before winter bleeds into spring. I do want to sit and wait at one of the ponds to see if a moorhen, or whatever they are, will emerge, instead of flying off in a panic when I approach too suddenly. But in better weather, I think.

A look back on the past 12 months' personal highs and lows, traditional at year's start. I don't feel like patting myself on the back, or commiserating with said self either.

I HAVE been getting ready for tomorrow's talk at Fotografia Gallery, just below the Opera House off Rustaveli. I stumbled across it while ambling through the neighborhood, went in, met the manager, and we struck off a fine friendship. Definitely watch this space for more news on that front: it'll become quite active. Writing the talk (called *How I Learned to See*), pen on paper; rearranging the paragraphs with numbers; separately listing sets of example photographs to illustrate the various sub-themes. Ending up with far too many images, then having to weed out the similar or unsuitable ones, hopefully to leave the best. I won't have trouble filling the requested 20 minutes at all; on the contrary. Good things afoot there.

I've been writing since before I started school, and even have a piece here with



me from Grade 1 Composition, when I was six, in Rhodesia. Highly derivative of what I was reading at the time, but also somehow partly me. TV, absent at home until I was 10, was completely

unable to steal my attention away from BOOKS, which we had aplenty. Except for occasional visits to TV-possessing friends' houses for *The Six Million Dollar Man*, the dread box would have to

wait. Good absence.

Creative and other hopes for the coming year? These do include the aforementioned gallery relationship; a "quarter-century in Georgia" retrospective; trying

to stay positive, joyful even, in a world not at all getting more conducive to such. Wanting to be a better believer, husband, friend, artist in the various media I use. Hoping for Svaneti not to get more violent, and for Georgia to find her way. Wanting further to synchronize the creative streams I have (especially literary and visual), to see them move into more of a self-nourishing feedback loop.

But how to find an IMAGE, or a few, to illustrate all this waffly rambling in a concrete or abstract way? Something from my admittedly beyond-vast collection of shots from the last 46 years, or something just dreamed up now? Wait, I have it. I'll fling the fine coffee grounds from the bottom of my mug (usually in hand when I write) into the sink; see what chaos remains in the bottom of the mug; add a pen to link back to writing; and take a few detail shots with my phone camera. Done. Upload them to Google Drive while I give this piece a second look-through; then I can download them onto my laptop and attach them to my email to the Editor.

Okay, I've finished describing a few nothings or almost nothings. I'm sure real inspiration will hit in time for next week, when I'll have something much more concrete to DESCRIBE than all this fluff. That's X minutes of your life you can lever get back, dear reader. Forgive me... and either abandon me in disgust, or dare to hope for better from me in the near future. I'll stop now.

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

The Expiration of the Ultimatum Issued by the Vaso Abashidze New Theater

Continued from page 5

At the heart of the protests are two central demands: the immediate release of those detained during the rallies and the call for new, fair elections. For almost two months, demonstrators have gathered in various cities across Georgia to voice their dissatisfaction with the current government and its policies, particularly regarding EU accession. Among those detained during the protests is Andro Chichinadze, an actor at the Vaso Abashidze New Theater, who was arrested under criminal charges, along with 44 other protestors. These individuals face long-term imprisonment, a move that has sparked outrage in the artistic community.

THE VASO ABASHIDZE NEW THEATER'S ULTIMATUM

The Vaso Abashidze New Theater has become a prominent institution in the ongoing protests. The theater's leadership, particularly Doiashvili, has not shied away from using its platform to challenge the government's actions. Doiashvili's ultimatum to the authorities on January 12 represented a critical turning point in the theater's involvement in the political protests. His demand for the release of the detained activists, including actor Andro Chichinadze, reflected the broader concerns of the cultural sector in Georgia, which has increasingly aligned itself with the pro-European movement.

The ultimatum also made clear that the theater would not remain a passive observer in Georgia's political crisis. Doiashvili signaled that if the government did not respond favorably to their demands by January 20, the theater would step up its involvement in the protests. The tension surrounding the ultimatum

was palpable, as artists and actors prepared for a more forceful response should the government fail to meet their expectations.

THE DETENTION OF ACTORS AND POLITICAL REPRESSION

Among the most vocal figures in the protests has been Andro Chichinadze, whose detention has become a symbol of the broader crackdown on dissent by the Georgian authorities. Chichinadze, along with 44 other demonstrators, was arrested under criminal charges after participating in the pro-European rallies. The arrests were widely condemned by human rights groups, who argued that they represented a gross overreach by the state in its efforts to suppress political opposition.

The government's response to the protests, particularly its heavy-handed tactics in dispersing demonstrations, has drawn criticism both domestically and internationally. Human rights advocates have raised concerns about the erosion of civil liberties in Georgia and the increasing political repression faced by activists, journalists, and ordinary citizens who oppose the government's policies.

In response to these developments, artists from across Georgia have united in solidarity with the detained protestors, calling for their immediate release and for an end to the government's repressive tactics. The cultural community's involvement in the protests has been significant, with theater actors, directors, musicians, and other artists all playing an active role in shaping the political discourse. Their vocal opposition to the government's actions has added an important layer of visibility to the pro-European protests and has underscored the deepening division between

the Georgian government and the population's pro-European factions.

THE RESPONSE FROM THE RUSTAVELI THEATER AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS

The Rustaveli Theater, one of Georgia's most well-known cultural institutions, has been at the center of controversy in recent weeks. Its head, Robert Sturua, publicly stated that the theater remains apolitical, a position that many critics argue is insufficient in the face of Georgia's ongoing political crisis. This stance has been heavily criticized by artists and theater professionals who believe that the cultural sector must take a more active role in defending democratic values and supporting the pro-European movement.

In a show of solidarity with the detained protestors, several actors from various theaters, including the Vaso Abashidze New Theater, began a strike on January 21, 2025. This collective action aimed to draw attention to the plight of the arrested activists and to pressure the government into addressing the key demands of the protestors. The striking actors and their supporters gathered outside the Rustaveli Theater, demanding to meet with the theater administration, but were denied entry to the building, further fueling their frustration with the institutional response to the political crisis.

A CALL FOR POLITICAL CHANGE

As the protests continue, the cultural sector has articulated several key demands. The most urgent of these is the call for new elections to be held in a fair and transparent manner. The artists argue that the current political system is rigged in favor of the ruling Georgian Dream party, which has undermined the democratic process through election



manipulation and political repression. The demand for political neutrality among law enforcement agencies and the election administration has become a central issue in the protests, with citizens insisting on a free and fair electoral process that reflects the will of the people.

In addition to calling for new elections, the artists are demanding the immediate release of the protestors who have been detained by the government. These individuals, many of whom are engaged in peaceful demonstrations, are seen by the cultural community as political prisoners who have been unjustly targeted for their activism. The protestors argue that their arrests are part of a broader effort to stifle dissent and maintain the current political status quo, which many citizens see as increasingly authoritarian.

THE ARTISTS PREPARE FOR ESCALATION

As the ultimatum issued by the Vaso Abashidze New Theater has now expired, the focus shifts to the next phase of the protest. The theater community, including directors and actors, is preparing for

an escalation in their resistance to the government. While the precise details of their next steps remain unclear, the message is clear: the artists are not backing down.

The continuation of protests on January 23 will likely involve more targeted actions, as the cultural community intensifies its demands for the release of political prisoners and the calling of new elections. The artistic community has shown that it will not simply retreat into the background of Georgian political life, but will instead remain at the forefront of efforts to hold the government accountable.

The expiration of the ultimatum from the Vaso Abashidze New Theater marks a significant moment in Georgia's ongoing political crisis. The involvement of the cultural sector in the protests highlights the growing discontent with the Georgian Dream government and the demand for democratic reforms. The artists, who have become key figures in the struggle for a pro-European future, are preparing for a more confrontational approach as they continue to push for the release of detainees and the holding of new elections.

Merab Dvalishvili Defends UFC Bantamweight Title in Dominant Victory Over Umar Nurmagomedov

BY KESARIA KATCHARAVA

On January 19, Georgian mixed martial artist Merab Dvalishvili successfully defended his UFC bantamweight title in a highly anticipated showdown at the Intuit Dome arena in Los Angeles. Dvalishvili, known as "The Machine" for his relentless fighting style, put on an impressive performance against Russian challenger Umar Nurmagomedov in a five-round battle.

The fight began with both fighters showing their skills early on, with Nurmagomedov managing to keep pace with Dvalishvili in the first two rounds. However, Dvalishvili's superior conditioning, pressure, and tactical adjustments throughout the fight allowed him to take control from the third round onward. His ability to keep up an unrelenting pace and adapt in the later rounds was key to his victory.

As the fight continued into the championship rounds, Dvalishvili's dominance became increasingly apparent. His high-output striking, paired with his strong wrestling and clinch game, wore down Nurmagomedov, who struggled to counter the relentless pace. Despite Nurmagomedov's attempts to rally, Dvalishvili's defense and counterattacks remained sharp throughout the final rounds.

At the end of the five rounds, the judges unanimously awarded Dvalishvili the victory, confirming that he had successfully retained his bantamweight title. With this win, Dvalishvili extended his 12-fight winning streak and improved his professional MMA record to 19 wins.



DVALISHVILI'S JOURNEY TO THE TOP

Merab Dvalishvili's ascent to UFC bantamweight champion has been marked by impressive consistency and a strong work ethic. Born in Tbilisi, Georgia, the 34-year-old fighter has earned a reputation for his tireless approach inside the octagon. "The Machine" is known for his high pace, incredible conditioning, and strategic adjustments, which have allowed him to dominate his opponents.

Dvalishvili first entered the UFC in 2017, and since then, his rise through the ranks has been nothing short of impressive. His victory over American fighter Sean O'Malley in September 2024, which earned him the bantamweight title, was a major milestone in his career. Saturday's successful defense against Nurmagomedov only further solidifies his place at the top of the bantamweight division.

Known for his relentless cardio and exceptional work ethic, Dvalishvili has

worked tirelessly to develop his skills across all areas of mixed martial arts. His well-rounded game, which includes strong wrestling, clinch control, and effective striking, has made him one of the most difficult fighters to deal with in the bantamweight division.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DVALISHVILI'S VICTORY

Dvalishvili's win over Nurmagomedov is significant not only for his career but also for the wider MMA landscape. The victory proves that Dvalishvili is a dominant force in the bantamweight division, with his ability to defeat a tough challenger like Nurmagomedov cementing his status as one of the best in the sport.

The bantamweight division in the UFC has seen a surge of talented fighters in recent years, and Dvalishvili's victory adds to the competitive narrative in this weight class. Fighters like Dvalishvili, O'Malley, and Nurmagomedov continue

to push the boundaries of what is possible in the division, making it one of the most exciting in the UFC today. As Dvalishvili's reign continues, he will likely face additional challenges from rising contenders, further intensifying the competition at the top of the division.

For the country of Georgia, Dvalishvili's success is a source of national pride. His accomplishments in the UFC have drawn international attention, and his relentless fighting style has inspired fans and athletes alike. Dvalishvili's success highlights the global nature of the sport and the growing talent emerging from countries around the world.

THE FUTURE OF MERAB DVALISHVILI

Although Dvalishvili is 34 years old, his combination of skill, conditioning, and mental fortitude suggests that he has many more years of high-level competition ahead of him. His 12-fight win streak speaks to his durability and ability to adapt, and his unyielding determination makes him a tough champion to dethrone.

As the bantamweight division continues to evolve, Dvalishvili will likely face new challenges from both familiar and unfamiliar opponents. Fighters like Sean O'Malley, who he defeated for the title, and other rising stars will undoubtedly be looking to take the belt from him. However, with his exceptional work ethic and well-rounded skill set, Dvalishvili seems poised to remain a dominant force in the division for the foreseeable future.

In conclusion, Merab Dvalishvili's successful defense of his bantamweight title against Umar Nurmagomedov at the Intuit Dome in Los Angeles only serves to further solidify his place as one of the top fighters in the UFC. As he continues his reign, Dvalishvili will likely face even tougher challenges, but his proven ability to rise to the occasion makes him one of the most exciting champions in recent UFC history. For now, Dvalishvili remains the undisputed bantamweight champion of the world, with a 12-fight winning streak that highlights his place at the top of his division.



CULTURE

No Fines Yet? The Battle Over Tour Guide Registration in Georgia

BY IVAN NECHAEV

When the Georgian parliament passed amendments to the "Law on Tourism" in December 2024, the new rules seemed poised to reshape the landscape of the tourism industry. The law requires all tour operators, agents, and guides to register in the National Public Registry. However, one of its more controversial provisions, fines for unregistered guides, has been delayed until June 2025. Officially, the government attributes this postponement to the need for "comprehensive communication with the tourism sector." But is this explanation the whole story? And what deeper cultural and historical currents does this legislative moment reveal about Georgia and its tourism industry?

In December 2023, when the initial law was introduced, Georgian guides lobbied heavily for stronger protection. They demanded not only mandatory registration but also a language requirement for guides to ensure they spoke Georgian. Although this demand was not included in the final law, the National Tourism Administration has hinted that relevant regulations might appear in forthcoming subordinate legislation.

Throughout the world, debates over who gets to "tell the story" of a place have sparked conflicts. In countries like Italy and Greece, local tour guides have similarly clashed with unlicensed competitors who they accuse of lacking cultural sensitivity or historical accuracy. In these cases, as in Georgia, the issue is not merely economic; it's existential. Who owns the past? And who has the right to interpret it?

A CLASH OF NARRATIVES: TOURISM AND NATIONAL IDENTITY
The protests by Georgian guides tap into broader questions about the role of tourism in shaping and disseminating national identity. Tourism is often viewed as a stage for cultural diplomacy, where nations project their histories and values to the world. For a country like Georgia, with its rich but contested history at the crossroads of empires, the stakes are particularly high. Allowing unchecked foreign narratives, critics argue, risks diluting or misrepresenting the country's historical and cultural heritage.

LEGISLATION MEETS RESISTANCE: A SNAPSHOT OF THE DEBATE

The requirement for registration (Article 11, Paragraph 2) is already in force. Tour operators, agents, and guides must now document their activities in the National Public Registry, signaling a move towards regulation and accountability. Yet, the enforcement mechanism — fines — is delayed (Article 48, Paragraph 8). This decision follows signifi-

ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

From an anthropological standpoint, the debate over tour guide registration reflects deeper dynamics of globalization. Tourism, as an industry, thrives on the commodification of culture, transforming intangible heritage into marketable experiences. Yet, this commodification often creates tension between preserving authenticity and catering to international audiences. The protests by Georgian guides reveal a desire to control not just the economic benefits of tourism but also the narrative framework within which their culture is presented. Sociologists might frame this as a classic case of "boundary maintenance," a concept introduced by Fredrik Barth. By regulating who can guide tourists, Georgian authorities are implicitly drawing boundaries around who can claim authority over Georgian culture and history. Registration becomes not just a bureaucratic hurdle but a symbolic act of asserting national sovereignty in the cultural domain.



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LOOKING AHEAD: JUNE 2025 AND BEYOND

As the June 2025 deadline for enforcing fines approaches, the tourism sector faces a period of uncertainty. Will the government succeed in "comprehensively communicating" the new rules? More importantly, will these regulations achieve their stated goals of improving the quality and accountability of Georgia's tourism industry without stifling its growth?

The delay also offers an opportunity for broader dialogue. How can Georgia balance the economic imperatives of a booming tourism industry with the cultural and historical sensitivities it inevitably touches upon? And what lessons can it learn from other nations that have faced similar challenges?

The debate over tour guide registration is about more than just fines and paperwork. It's a microcosm of the broader tensions shaping Georgia's identity in an increasingly globalized world. As the country navigates its path forward, it must grapple with fundamental questions about who gets to tell its story, how its heritage is preserved, and what kind of nation it wants to project to the world. Whether June 2025 will mark the beginning of a more regulated, professional tourism industry or the continuation of unresolved tensions remains to be seen. One thing, however, is clear: the story of Georgia, like its history, is still being written.

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I am Georgian and therefore I am European

Zurab Zhvania, Council of Europe, 1999

