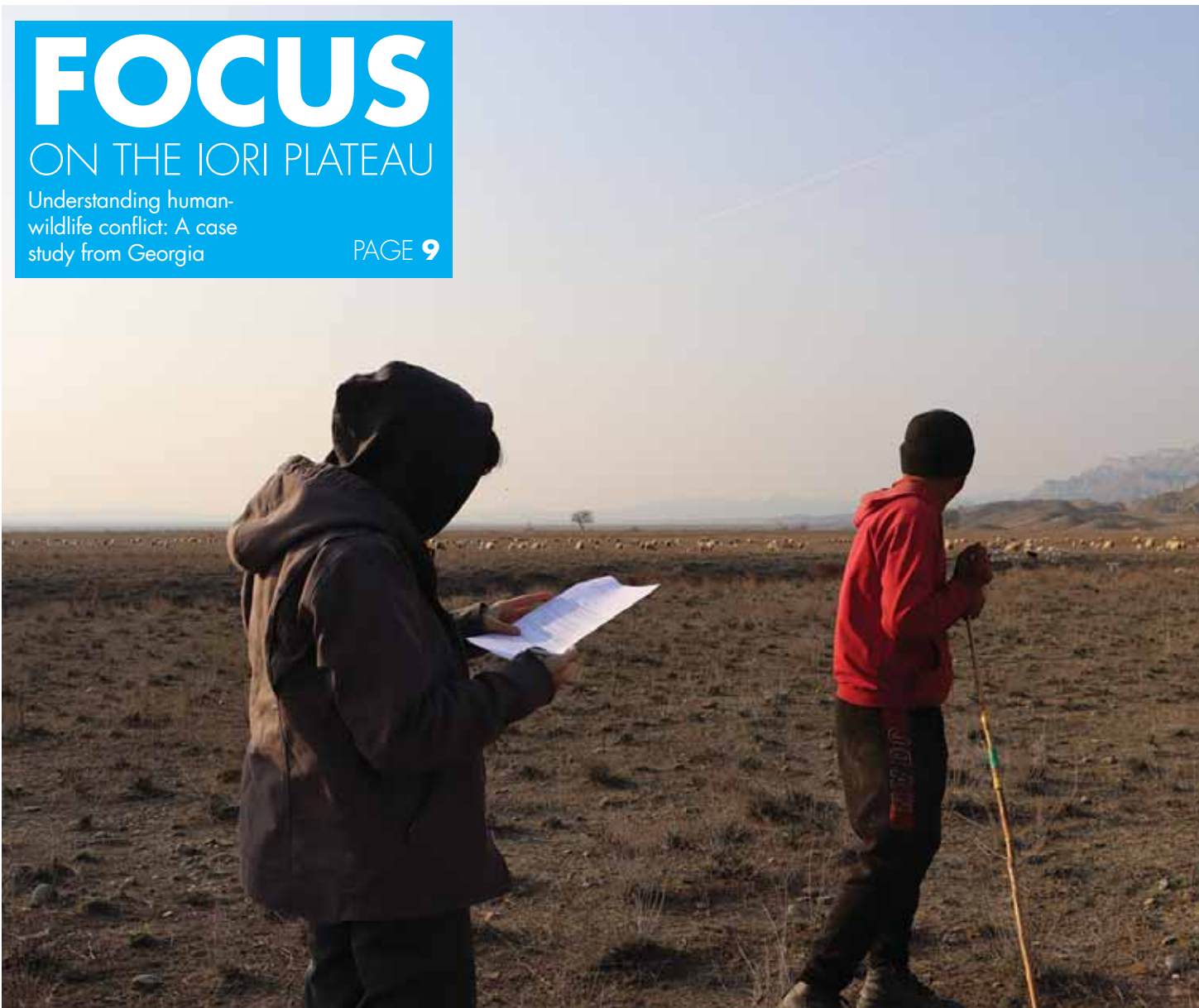


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Germany's Zeitenwende: Dead or Revivable? Dr. Benjamin Tallis on Scholz's Failure, Merkel's Legacy and Germany's Role in Global Security

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

Germany's *Zeitenwende*, the historic shift in its defense and foreign policy, has not lived up to its promises, says Dr. Benjamin Tallis. Tallis, who spent nearly two years advising top German policymakers on making *Zeitenwende* a success, argues that Chancellor Olaf Scholz has failed to deliver real change. In this interview with RFE/RL's Georgian Service, he explains why Germany is stuck in its old ways, why Merkel's legacy still weighs heavily on Berlin, and what the future may hold under a new government. Can *Zeitenwende* be revived, or will Germany slip back into business as usual?

Continued on page 6



Dr. Benjamin Tallis. Source: english.radio.cz

| GALT & TAGGART | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--------------------|-------|------------|------------------------------|-----------|--------|--------|--|--|
| Prepared for Georgia Today Business by | | | | | | | | | |
| As of 12-Feb-2025 | | | | | | | | | |
| Markets | | | | | Markets | | | | |
| BONDS | Price | w/w | m/m | STOCKS | Price | w/w | m/m | | |
| GEORG 04/26 | 94.88 (YTM 7.32%) | +0.0% | +0.7% | Lion Finance Group (LION LN) | GBP 51.70 | +11.3% | +14.9% | | |
| GBAIL 04/28 | 97.83 (YTM 8.24%) | +0.1% | +0.2% | Georgia Capital (GCEG LN) | GBP 12.32 | +3.0% | +7.5% | | |
| GEBOG 9/12 PERP | 97.92 (YTM 9.83%) | -0.1% | +0.0% | TBC Bank Group (TBCG LN) | GBP 40.10 | +18.6% | +32.6% | | |
| SILKNET 01/27 | 100.87 (YTM 7.89%) | +0.1% | +0.1% | | | | | | |
| TBC 8.894 PERP | 96.27 (YTM 11.95%) | +0.1% | +0.4% | COMMODITIES | | | | | |
| TBC 10 1/4 PERP | 99.60 (YTM 10.61%) | -0.0% | +0.2% | Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl) | 75.18 | +0.8% | -5.7% | | |
| | | | | Gold Spot (US\$/OZ) | 2,904.04 | +1.3% | +8.0% | | |
| INDICES | | | CURRENCIES | | | | | | |
| SP 500 | 6,051.97 | -0.2% | +3.9% | USD / GEL | 2,812.7 | -0.0% | -0.6% | | |
| FTSE 250 | 20,880.50 | +0.6% | +5.8% | EUR / GEL | 2,920.5 | -0.2% | +0.8% | | |
| DOW JONES 30 | 44,368.56 | -1.1% | +5.8% | GBP / GEL | 3,500.6 | -0.5% | +1.3% | | |
| Russell 2000 | 2,255.89 | -2.6% | +3.0% | EUR / USD | 1,038.3 | -0.2% | +1.4% | | |
| FTSE 100 | 8,807.44 | +2.1% | +6.8% | GBP / USD | 1,244.6 | -0.5% | +2.0% | | |



Photo: European Olympic Committees.

EYOF Bakuriani 2025: Highlights From the Festival

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

sports facilities in Tbilisi and Batumi, enhancing the infrastructure for winter sports in Georgia.

The European Youth Olympic Festival (EYOF) in Bakuriani, Georgia, is a significant event showcasing young athletic talent from across Europe. This year's festival, running from February 9 to 16, 2025, features nearly 900 athletes from 45 countries competing in eight winter sports: alpine skiing, biathlon, cross-country skiing, figure skating, freestyle skiing, ice hockey, short track speed skating, and snowboarding.

Events so far have attracted attendance from Georgian Dream's president Mikheil Kavelashvili and EOC President Syros Capralos. The opening ceremony featured performances by the Holy Trinity Cathedral Choir and an orchestra led by Nika Nikvashvili. The Flame of Peace, which was lit in Rome on December 19 and carefully transported to Bakuriani, was ignited by Koba Tsakadze and Anastasia Mirianashvili.

The festival was the first-ever of its sort for Georgia, with EYOF Bakuriani 2025 Organizing Committee President Mamuka Khabareli saying that the event will leave a lasting legacy for the country's winter sports and culture: the festival has led to the development of new

NOTABLE PERFORMANCES:

Short Track Speed Skating: On February 10, 2025, Jesper Schmitz of the Netherlands and Lisa Victoria Ngo Mouaha of France won gold medals in the 1,500-meter events in their respective categories. Schmitz secured his gold with a time of 2:27.560, narrowly defeating Italy's Filippo Pezzoni, who took silver in 2:27.753. Mouaha clinched her gold with a time of 2:42.123, while Poland's Daria Daszuta claimed silver in 2:42.562.

Figure Skating: The figure skating events have showcased young athletes demonstrating skill and artistry. Inga Gurgenidze of Georgia delivered a stunning performance in the short program, earning 58.84 points and securing third place.

Ice Hockey: The girls' ice hockey tournament concluded with Czechia triumphing over Finland in the gold medal match. The boys' tournament is currently underway at the Tbilisi Ice Arena.

Snowboarding: Snowboarding events are being held at Didveli in Bakuriani from February 11 to 15, featuring competitions in big air and slopestyle disciplines.

The festival continues to provide a platform for young athletes to showcase their talents and foster international sportsmanship.

Kutaisi Tech Hub Set to Open in Former Parliament Building



Photo: The Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development.

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

The Kutaisi Technology Hub, expected to open this autumn in the former parliament building, is anticipated to be a major innovation center for the region, the Georgian Ministry of Economy stated on Wednesday.

Deputy Economy Minister Irakli Nadareishvili called the project, now in its final construction phase, "a significant development not solely for Georgia, but for the wider region, in both scale and the multifunctionality of the project."

The hub will include:
An international IT and technology school for at least 1,000 students;
A scientific and technological museum
Georgia's National Intellectual Property Centre;

The country's largest technology park and industrial innovation lab;
3D printing, robotics, drones, IoT, VR/AR facilities, and more.

The hub will also feature a creative technologies center, AI data and competence centers, and spaces for international technology companies. Nadareishvili stated that such a unique blend will make it a regional leader in technological development.

External infrastructure and system upgrades are currently being made.

Ukraine Latest: War Talks Start Now, Trump Says after Putin Call



Donald Trump. Source: EPA

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

US President Donald Trump has said he had a "lengthy and highly productive" phone call with Vladimir Putin on Wednesday, in which the leaders agreed to begin negotiations to end the war in Ukraine.

In a post on his Truth Social platform, Trump said he and the Russian president had "agreed to have our respective teams start negotiations immediately."

Later, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said he had spoken with Trump about a "lasting, reliable peace."

The calls with the warring sides came as both Trump and his defense secretary said Ukraine would unlikely join NATO, which will be a bitter disappointment to Kyiv.

Zelensky said he would meet Vice-President JD Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio during a defense summit on Ukraine in Munich on Friday.

Trump wrote on social media: "It is time to stop this ridiculous war, where there has been massive and totally unnecessary DEATH and DESTRUCTION. God bless the people of Russia and Ukraine!"

He did not set a date for a face-to-face meeting with Putin, but later told reporters at the White House: "We'll meet in Saudi Arabia." He wrote on social media the pair had also invited each other to their respective capitals.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Putin supported Trump's idea that the time had come to work together.

The phone call between Putin and Trump lasted nearly an hour-and-a-half,

during which the Russian president extended an invitation to visit Moscow, Peskov said.

Trump also told reporters at the White House that it was unlikely Ukraine would return to its pre-2014 borders but, in response to a question from the BBC, he said "some of that land will come back."

The president said he agreed with his Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, who told a NATO summit earlier on Wednesday that there was no likelihood of Ukraine joining the military alliance.

Later on Wednesday, seven European countries, including Britain, France and Germany, insisted they be part of any future negotiations on Ukraine's fate.

"Our shared objectives should be to put Ukraine in a position of strength," read the joint statement released after a meeting of foreign ministers in Paris. "Ukraine and Europe must be part of any negotiations."

They called for strong security guarantees for Ukraine, and said they were looking forward to discussing the way forward with their American allies.

Zelensky has repeatedly argued there "can be no talks on Ukraine without Ukraine," but the Trump-Putin phone call proved otherwise.

The Ukrainian president said his own call with Trump had been a "good and detailed discussion" about a variety of issues, and that he had also met US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, who is visiting Kyiv.

"No one wants peace more than Ukraine. Together with the US, we are charting our next steps to stop Russian aggression and ensure a lasting, reliable peace," Zelensky wrote.

The Ukrainian leader added: "We agreed to maintain further contact and plan

upcoming meetings."

HERE ARE OTHER KEY DEVELOPMENTS OF THE WEEK:

At least one person was killed and four others, including a nine-year-old child, were injured by a Russian missile strike in Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, the city's mayor, Vitali Klitschko, said. The strike caused damage and fires in at least four areas of the city.

Regional Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said a woman was killed by a Ukrainian drone in Russia's Belgorod region. Gladkov said the drone struck the victim's car and killed her instantly.

Ukraine's military said it shot down six out of seven ballistic missiles launched by Russia in an overnight attack. The Kremlin also launched a barrage of 123 attack drones at Kyiv, out of which 71 were shot down and 40 were likely deterred by "electronic countermeasures," the military said.

Ukraine launched a drone attack on Enerhodar city near the Russian-controlled Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, hitting a car parked about 300 metres (0.2 miles) from one of the plant's reactors, the Russian-installed regional governor for the occupied Zaporizhzhia region, Yevgeny Balitsky, said.

He also said there were no details yet about a potential Trump visit to Russia or a possible Putin visit to the US "There is a mutual invitation," Peskov said. "But there is no concrete understanding about it."

Ukraine's security service said the chief of staff of its anti-terrorist department was arrested for allegedly spying for Russia. The agency said they discovered 14 episodes of the unnamed official's illegal activities.

Tbilisi Mayor: High-Pressure Gas Pipeline Damaged at Connection Point, No Evidence of Third-Party Involvement

BY TEAM GT

At this stage, there is no evidence that the damage to the gas supply network was caused by third-party intervention, - Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze told journalists regarding the damage to the Tbilisi Energy network that left much of Tbilisi without gas this week.

Kaladze said he had communicated with the company's management, and the problem is almost resolved, with gas set to be fully restored according

to safety standards.

"There was speculation that the damage might have occurred due to third-party intervention. When they arrived at the site and saw how the high-pressure gas pipeline was damaged, they saw the problem was directly at the connection point. At this stage, there is no evidence to suggest that this incident occurred due to third-party intervention. The investigation hasn't yet begun. If there is any update, it will be made public.

"Today, we heard Tbilisi Energy saying that the problem is essentially resolved. I've also been in communication with the company's management.

The restoration of natural gas supply to consumers is being carried out under relevant regulations and safety standards," noted the capital's mayor.

However, many subscribers from various districts of Tbilisi on Wednesday claimed on social media that their gas supply had still not been restored, and noted that they had been without natural gas for three days already, during a particularly cold weather spell, especially unbearable for children and the elderly.

The natural gas supply was disrupted on February 9, affecting approximately 150,000 Tbilisi consumers due to damage to a 500 mm pipeline.

EYOF 2025 in Georgia: A Global Celebration of Youth, Sports, and Friendship

BLOG BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

There are some good things that truly make Sakartvelo an organic part of the West, and this is more than delightful. The European Youth Olympic Festival (EYOF) is taking place in Georgia from January 9 to 19, 2025. Georgia was granted the official status of the host in 2020 at the 49th General Assembly of Europe's Olympic Committees. The sporting events are being held in Bakuriani, Tbilisi, and Batumi, all of which are perfectly equipped and organized for the event. Never before has Georgia hosted the Youth Winter Olympic Games, but it is worth noting that in 2015, Georgia was chosen to host the Summer European Youth Olympic Festival, which was a tremendous success thanks to the efforts of the Georgian people, the government, and the European patrons of the festival.

The history of the European Youth Olympic Festival spans 33 years. The first festival was held in Brussels in 1991 as a summer event. Later, winter sports were introduced, with the first winter venue being the Italian town of Aosta in the Valle d'Aosta region in northwestern Italy. Bakuriani is the main venue for events, where competitions in five sports are held: alpine skiing, biathlon, cross-country skiing, freestyle skiing, and snowboarding. Bakuriani requires no introduction. This famously gorgeous place has always been a wonderful location for sports bases, training, competitions, conferences, and entertainment even before the Soviet era. Even more so now, as this year-round resort is rap-

idly developing and gaining global recognition. Indeed, this world-class mountain resort offers high-level, versatile services needed for sporting life to anyone who chooses to spend time there—be they Olympian-level athletes or just beginning skiers and skaters.

Bakuriani boasts wonderful ski tracks, 23 in total. The well-maintained trails and other infrastructural details are readily available. As part of the EYOF-2025, Tbilisi is hosting ice hockey in a newly built ice arena, featuring both boys' and girls' tournaments. Batumi, Georgia's second-largest city, a sea port and resort, is the venue for figure skating and speed skating, taking place in the newly constructed Olympic-size skating rink. Together, Bakuriani, Tbilisi, and Batumi are hosting more than 900 athletes from 46 countries competing in 8 sports!

EYOF promotes sports and various physical activities worldwide. Based on

pure Olympic principles, it fosters friendship between the peoples of our planet, promotes fair play and tolerance among human beings, and unites the youth of 50 European countries, helping with the Euro-integration process. Finally, it offers a huge opportunity for our young men and women to acquire valuable experience in organizing and running a significant event in their own country, gaining relevant knowledge and learning new skills while interacting with European youth. The festival is a great platform for demonstrating new talents and capabilities.

The visual identity of the event and the official mascot of EYOF-2025, a Caucasian lynx named Gunda, was unveiled on February 28, 2024. The name "Gunda" is based on the Georgian word for snowball, symbolizing vigorous self-expression, nonstop progress, and the birth of new opportunities. After Georgia started



EYOF 2025. Source: FB



EYOF 2025. Source: FB

its bid to host the 2025 Winter European Youth Olympic Festival, the Georgian National Olympic Committee recalled the logo created by the famous Georgian journalist and Olympic historian, Professor Paata Natsvlishvili, for Borjomi-2014, the applicant city, and proposed the Bakuriani-2025 logo to the European Olympic Committees.

Natsvlishvili explains: "The logo, with its distinctive element, represents the schematic silhouette of a fir tree, symbolizing the natural dominance of the Borjomi-Bakuriani landscape—fir and pine forests. At the same time, the fir pyramid is also perceived as a graphic representation of the pursuit of sporting victories. The presented form can also be understood as a social pyramid of sports in general—from mass and youth


sports to Olympic sports. The colorful tree in the logo resembles a Christmas tree, reflecting the festive atmosphere of the Games. In addition, within the distinctive elements of the logo or their combination, one can read the zigzag of ski, luge, or bobsled tracks, and a ski jump, figure skating jump, or a puck. Therefore, the logo captures the essence of almost all winter Olympic sports."


Georgia is currently hosting an event of global caliber, doing so with great dignity, genuine enthusiasm, and high professionalism. Congratulations, Sakartvelo! The only downside seems to be the lack of attention from some of our media, which appear indifferent to this wonderful event, as if nothing is happening. But it's alright—there are others doing the job, and that's good too!

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TBILISI

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How to 'Adjust' to Trump: Georgia's Real Expectations. Part 2.

OP-ED BY VICTOR KIPIANI,
CHAIRMAN, GEOCASE

In addition to the so-called 'doctrinal' issues, the personality of Donald Trump himself is no less important to consider. He is a politician and businessman who seeks to change reality and expand the boundaries of possibilities as much as possible.

Working with him and his team requires a special sensitiveness, because compared to Biden or other presidents of the recent past, Trump always emphasises his 'difference'. Therefore, this 'difference' also requires a 'difference' in form and content in Georgia's dealings with him.

We must also remind ourselves that when dealing with the centres of power in the United States, it is important to strike the right balance between the Republican and Democratic parties: while seeking Republican support, we must not intentionally or unintentionally displease the Democrats.

And now about the most difficult and sensitive: what are the areas of overlap or issues where Georgia's interests could find a place on the Trump administration's agenda? By integrating into the matrix of US stated objectives, where can we keep US aid and support for us? To what extent are such regional initiatives identifiable that would facilitate stronger Georgia-US ties?

Simply put, how possible is it for Georgia to sign a 'contract' with the Trump administration on renewed Georgian-American co-operation?

In my opinion, some of the areas of such a practical and mutually beneficial intersection are:

1. In the context of one of the fundamental principles of the 'America First' policy - 'Greatness of America' - the topic of the successful Georgian state as a result of years of American support

remains relevant. In this regard, it is essential that we and our American partners clearly understand that the success of the 'Georgian case' is, among other things, equivalent to contributing to the reputation and authority of the United States not only in Georgia, but also beyond its borders.

2. Against the backdrop of the recent rise of anti-American sentiment in our neighbourhood and the wider region, a shared concern of Tbilisi and Washington is the appropriate impact on countries in the region via succeeding in the war of disinformation within our country, as well as, if not completely eliminating, then significantly reducing the detrimental impact on Western interests on a regional scale.

3. The better expansion of American interests in the Black Sea area, which is directly related to Georgia's national security system. The guiding principle here is as follows: the US is not a Black Sea country, but should become a Black Sea power. The institutionalisation of US geopolitical and other representation in the waters of the Black Sea - including with the active involvement of Georgia - also leads to the projection of US interests onto the adjacent geographical areas of the Black Sea region.

4. It is possible for the practical aspects of Georgian-American relations to intersect in the following geopolitical and geo-economic axis: Black Sea - South Caucasus - Central Asia. The "Georgian bridgehead" is likely to fit seamlessly into the projection of US interests along this line. In this case, the passive geographical position of Georgia becomes an asset if we consider the country as an additional channel with 'exit' to Central Asia. Accordingly, our historically proven role as a 'locking' country for a number of cross-border projects (Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum, etc.) will be filled by new projects (e.g., the Middle Corridor).

5. Given its policy towards Russia -

which will largely be determined by the new US administration's attitude towards the Russian-Ukrainian war - Georgia could take on the role of participating in containing Russian influence in the South Caucasus segment of the Greater Black Sea region. Naturally, such involvement will be commensurate with our own resources. This also requires two necessary caveats: first, the US itself will be determined to act as a driving force in this process, and second, the US side will ensure the resilience of the Georgian side in a very effective way, utilising all relevant resources

6. The topic of China, which is extremely sensitive for all major global players, not to mention smaller countries. Several critical circumstances in the US-China-Georgia triangle must be taken into account.

One of the most important questions is how the relationship between Trump's America and China will evolve. Despite their strategic rivalry, the interdependence and interconnectedness of these two major economies is widely known. In addition to systemic and macro-level issues, specific business interests of business circles close to Trump in China are also known. Therefore, I do not exclude that with the transition from the policy of so-called 'decoupling' to the policy of 'de-risking', the relations between the US and China will subsequently be quite 'situational' and will be characterized by a certain zigzag unevenness based on the principle of so-called ups and downs. Suffice it to say that instead of Trump's statement during his election campaign about imposing tariffs on all Chinese goods, after his election as president a relatively milder option is being considered - raising tariffs only on goods of certain nomenclatures.

As far as Georgia is concerned, the reader is well aware of the recent dynamics of Georgian-Chinese relations. Therefore, I think there is no point in describing them and highlighting their

individual aspects. It is also a fact that smooth and clear co-operation with China, as a globally significant player and leading economy, is one of Georgia's national priorities. However, even in this respect Georgian policy needs to find the right balance that will not overshadow the Western strategic vector and will not raise uncomfortable questions, of which there are plenty today. Along with appropriate safeguard mechanisms, I would name the rapid and steady integration of Georgia into the Western system, which would contribute to the economic and political stability of the country and prevent the distortion or appropriation of the Georgian main line under the pretext of non-transparent 'commercial transactions'. Among other things, it is the responsibility of our country as a member of Western political civilisation to oppose revisionist policies and to work together with the United States and other Western partners to create an effective counterweight in the wider Black Sea region.

7. Here I will briefly discuss two specific issues in the context of the South Caucasus - as a link between the Black Sea and Central Asia.

I will start with the Ankara-Baku-Tbilisi cooperation, within the framework of which various interactions between the three neighbouring countries are taking place, including in the military cooperation format. Obviously, Turkey's role in the region and beyond is very important to the United States, and a direct channel of communication has been established between the two countries. This channel is likely to become more meaningful given the personal contacts between Trump and Erdogan. The alliance between Turkey and Azerbaijan should also be mentioned, which is notable in regional affairs. Given all of this, it is worth considering the extent to which Tbilisi can amplify Washington's voice and facilitate 'message box' communication by utilising the Georgian

side's special relationship with the Turkish and Azerbaijan sides.

The next issue is US-Armenian relations, which have moved to a new stage as a result of the new charter of strategic partnership, and the role Georgia can play in further rapprochement between the US and Armenia. It should be particularly noted that by signing the above-mentioned charter, the US once again expressed its interest in the South Caucasus. It is also a fact that the US-Armenia Strategic Partnership Charter will be realized much more fully if the Georgian side promotes American interests in the region. Nor can it be denied that the western vector of the region's development largely depends on foreign policy coordination between Georgia and Armenia. Armenia's American/Western vector responds to Georgia's strategic interests, while Georgia's American/Western vector is crucial to Armenia's strategic interests.

SO, WE NEED TO REMIND OURSELVES...

That in today's world we are not required to subject Georgian politics to strict moralistic criteria. It would be much better if the effectiveness of a country's politics is determined by the relevance of specific actions in a particular context (in this respect, for example, Israel of the 1950s and 1960s offers 'best practice'). And another (controversial) consideration: it is not always possible to find the right and consistent balance between modernization of one's own system on the one hand and democracy on the other. Rational prioritization is also key here.

In conclusion, let us quote the words of the well-known Georgian diplomat Alexander Chikvaдзе: "A small country cannot afford the luxury of making big mistakes." Indeed, this very simple statement contains both profound content and an urgent appeal in terms of shaping Georgian policy.

European Parliament Passes Resolution on Further Deterioration of Political Situation in Georgia

BY TEAM GT

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the further deterioration of the political situation in Georgia.

The resolution was supported by 400 MEPs, with 63 against and 81 abstentions.

The resolution is authored by 57 MEPs from 5 political groups in the European Parliament - the European People's Party, the Social Democrats, the Conservatives and Reformists, the Renew and the Greens.

The resolution calls for the European Parliament to:

- Condemn the "officials of Georgian Dream" and urge them to immediately cease the violent repression of peaceful demonstrators, political opponents, and media representatives;
- Emphasize that Georgia's self-appointed officials are currently violating fundamental freedoms, basic human rights, and the country's key international obligations, undermining decades of democratic reforms led by the political class and civil society;
- Consider Georgia under the control of the illegitimate regime of "Georgian Dream";
- Not recognize the self-proclaimed

government of the Georgian Dream party, which emerged after the fraudulent elections of October 26, 2024, which were neither free nor fair and violated democratic norms and standards, and do not reflect the will of the Georgian people;

- Urge the European Union and its member states, as well as national parliaments and inter-parliamentary institutions, not to recognize the legitimacy of the Georgian Dream one-party parliament and their appointed president; thus, call on the international community to join the boycott of the self-proclaimed government of Georgian Dream;
- Continue to recognize Salome Zurbishvili as the legitimate president of Georgia and the representative of the Georgian people;
- Emphasize that the political and constitutional crisis in Georgia can only be resolved through new parliamentary elections;
- Demand that new elections be held in Georgia in the next few months with an improved electoral environment;
- Urge EU member states and officials to firmly demand new elections, and make any future engagement clearly dependent on the scheduling of a new parliamentary election date and the establishment of a mechanism to ensure free and fair elections;

- Urge the Council and member states, particularly EU-25 (excluding Hungary and Slovakia), to impose immediate and targeted sanctions on Bidzina Ivanishvili, his family, and his companies, freezing all his assets in the EU for his role in the political deterioration in Georgia, democratic backsliding, and actions against the country's declared Euro-Atlantic aspirations;
- Call on the French government to revoke Bidzina Ivanishvili's Legion of Honor and impose personal sanctions on him;
- Welcome the bilateral sanctions imposed by Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and the Czech Republic, as well as the sanctions already imposed by the UK and the US;
- Urge the Council and member states, particularly EU-25 (excluding Hungary and Slovakia), to impose personal sanctions on Georgian officials and political leaders responsible for democratic backsliding, electoral fraud, human rights violations, and the persecution of political opponents and activists, including Irakli Kobakhidze, Shalva Papuashvili, Vakhtang Gomeauri, the Mayor of Tbilisi, and General Secretary of the Georgian Dream party, Kakha Kaladze, and the Chairman of Georgian Dream party, Irakli Garibashvili;
- Call for sanctions to be extended to

judges, including those in the Constitutional Court of Georgia, who issue politically motivated rulings, as well as law enforcement officers and financial enablers who support the regime, either overtly or covertly, and media outlets connected to the regime, including Imedi TV, Pos TV, and Rustavi 2, for their role in spreading disinformation and attempting to manipulate public discourse to maintain the current authoritarian rule of the ruling party.

"This resolution holds no value for us, as it is yet another—already the sixth—completely unjust resolution and an attack on the Georgian state and the independence of the media," Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze told journalists after hearing the new resolution. He claimed that such acts and resolutions "have a very serious impact on the reputation of the European bureaucracy in our country."

"All of this reminds us of the nine-year period during which a harsh regime was in place, one that attacked statehood and the independence of the media in our country. This regime was controlled by the same forces that are now initiating such resolutions in the European Parliament. This is a very sad event. Such acts and resolutions seriously affect the reputation of the European bureaucracy in our country, in the eyes of Georgian society. We hope that the

European Union, European institutions, and bureaucracy will recover in the future. The current trends are quite serious," Irakli Kobakhidze noted.

Kobakhidze added that Georgian Dream is not surprised by such actions.

"I would like to remind everyone that until 2012, there was a regime in our country that operated on the instructions of the very same forces now initiating certain resolutions in the European Parliament, and their signature was the attack on independent media. It was this regime that raided private television stations such as Imedi, Rustavi 2, and other private broadcasters, as well as the Public Broadcaster. This occurred from 2004 to 2012, under the orders of the very forces that are behind the resolutions in the European Parliament today. Therefore, the attack on independent media is their signature, the handwriting of the so-called Deep State, the same global party. For this reason, we are not surprised by such actions. I'll remind you again, this is the sixth resolution adopted by the European Parliament attacking our country. It is a very sad event, but it will not diminish our country in any way, nor will it affect our statehood or the independence of the media in Georgia. However, all of this will have a serious impact on the perception of European bureaucracy in our society. This is a very sad event," he concluded.

Strategic Decline? Georgia's Risk of Becoming Just Another South Caucasus Country



Giorgi Gakharia. Source: forgeo

INTERVIEW BY LIZA ZHVANIA

In this exclusive interview, Giorgi Gakharia, Leader of the 'For Georgia' Party and Former Prime Minister of Georgia, offers his insights on Georgia's position in the changing geopolitical landscape. He discusses the country's unique advantages, the risks of losing its Western orientation, and the consequences of failing to capitalize on its strategic position between East and West.

HOW DO YOU ASSESS GEORGIA'S GEOPOLITICAL ROLE IN TODAY'S DYNAMIC INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT? WHAT IS OUR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE, AND WHAT CAN WE OFFER THE WORLD?

Georgia's geopolitical relevance and strategic importance depend on one key factor—our institutional proximity to the European Union. This is essential. Our institutional, political, and alliance-based connection to the EU is what sets us apart from other regional players like Armenia and Azerbaijan.

We must understand that Georgia's geopolitical role is not an abstract idea, but a practical matter.

Major trade and infrastructure projects connecting East and West become relevant to us only if we are institutionally integrated into the European economic space

This is not just about losing out on global projects—it's about losing our regional influence altogether

Take the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline. Had Georgia not been seen as a stable, Western-oriented democracy, the pipeline could have easily bypassed us, finding a shorter route. The same principle applies today.

As the eastern gateway to the Black Sea—not just for the Caucasus, but also for Central Asia—our relevance is entirely dependent on our ability to integrate institutionally, politically, and economically with the European and Western framework. If we fail to do so, we are just another South Caucasus country. Our strategic role will be no different from Azerbaijan's, which, geographically speaking, is even better positioned for the North-South corridor.

Right now, alternative routes are already being discussed, such as the Zangezur Corridor. If Georgia does not maintain its Western orientation and reliability as a transit hub, we will be sidelined.

SO, WHAT EXACTLY IS GEORGIA'S UNIQUE ADVANTAGE IN THIS REGIONAL COMPETITION?

Our competitive advantage is not in our natural resources—we do not have vast gas or oil reserves, nor do we have a large domestic market. Georgia's real strength has always been our institutional and political proximity to the West.

This means the credibility of our institutions, our democratic governance, and our ability to uphold the rule of law. These factors have historically made Georgia attractive to investors and international partners. That is why major trade and infrastructure projects connecting East and West—whether

Chinese, Anglo-Saxon, or otherwise—become relevant to us only if we are institutionally integrated into the European economic space.

Without this, we are merely a transit country with no added value. The key is our ability to provide legal, state-level, and institutional guarantees for these massive trade and financial flows. Otherwise, why would global players rely on Georgia when they have alternative routes?

If we move away from the West, Georgia's geopolitical importance diminishes tenfold. We become a purely local player in the South Caucasus with no broader regional significance.

CONSIDERING CHINA'S GROWING INFLUENCE IN CENTRAL ASIA AND THE DECLINE OF RUSSIA'S DOMINANCE, DO YOU SEE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR GEORGIA TO BENEFIT FROM THESE SHIFTS?

Yes, Georgia has a geographical advantage. But geography alone is not enough. The question is: can we capitalize on this?

The more unreliable Georgia becomes—politically unstable, institutionally weak, and undemocratic—the more incentive there is for global powers to create alternative corridors that bypass us. This process has already begun, and, unfortunately, our current government is accelerating it with its short-sighted policies.

Instead of balancing regional interests strategically, Georgia is pushing away its most reliable partner—the West. Meanwhile, Turkey, Azerbaijan,

and Central Asian states are actively working on alternative routes such as the Zangezur Corridor, which could significantly reduce our role as a transit hub.

The technology and infrastructure exist today to make these alternatives viable—be it road, rail, energy transmission, or digital fiber networks. If Georgia had played a balanced geopolitical game, we could have remained a trusted partner for all major players. Instead, we are now actively colliding with the West, which will have long-term consequences.

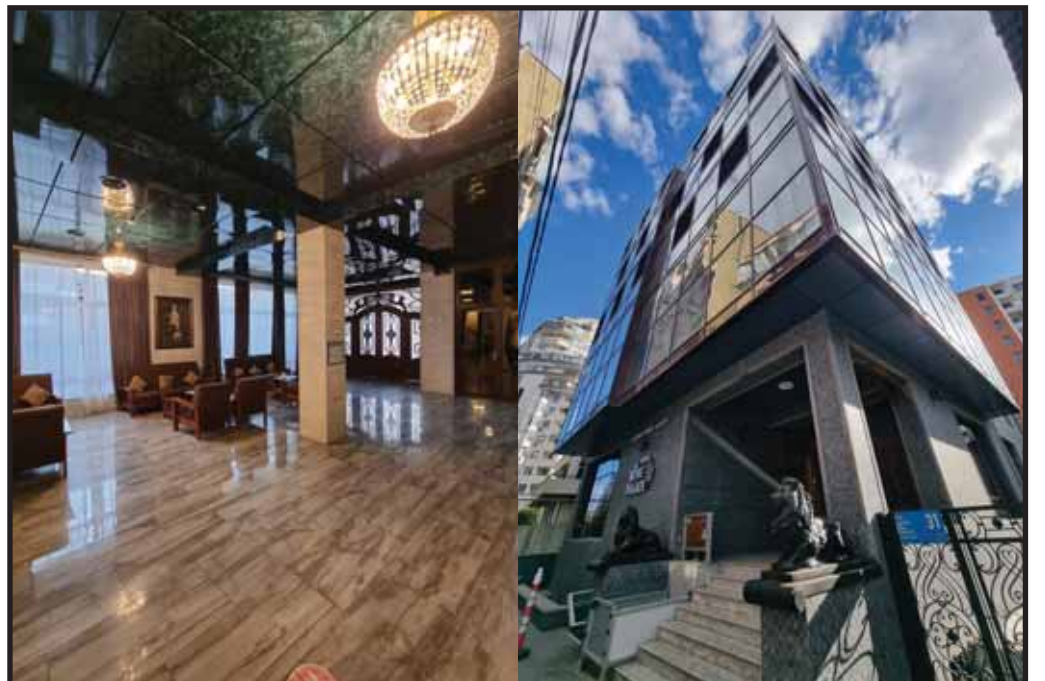
IF GEORGIA CONTINUES ON ITS CURRENT PATH, WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES?

We will be confined to a narrow South Caucasus context instead of playing a broader regional role. And in that scenario, we will not be able to withstand competition from our neighbors.

Both Azerbaijan and Armenia will secure their own strategic functions. Azerbaijan, with its energy resources, is already far ahead in economic terms. Armenia, through diplomatic maneuvering, is carving out its own geopolitical niche.

But Georgia? Under this government, we are losing our strategic advantage. This is not just about losing out on global projects—it's about losing our regional influence altogether.

At some point, the current government will realize the damage they have done. But by then, where will Georgia be? That is the real question.



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Germany's Zeitenwende: Dead or Revivable?

Dr. Benjamin Tallis on Scholz's Failure, Merkel's Legacy and Germany's Role in Global Security

Continued from page 1

HOW IS THE ZEITENWENDE COMING ALONG? HAS IT PROVED TO BE EVERYTHING IT WAS CRACKED UP TO BE WHEN IT WAS ANNOUNCED?

The opening line of my book is "Germany's Zeitenwende died on the second of July, 2024 at 3:32pm, or thereabouts, in Warsaw, when Donald Tusk publicly demolished Olaf Scholz's refusal to contribute to common European defense." It has not been a success across all of the five main areas that were promised as a sea of changes in German strategic positioning and foreign security policy. It has failed. The five areas included supporting Ukraine struggle for freedom and democracy, finding a geopolitically as well as ecologically viable energy fix, taking a tougher approach to authoritarian states, playing a stronger role in a stronger EU and a stronger NATO, and the last one: rearming Germany to actually be able to live up to its defense responsibilities. Across none of those areas has the policy succeeded to the extent which it needs to. The only one where it partially succeeded is on energy, where Germany did get off Russian gas. It was Moscow that turned the taps off, let's not forget that. But they did actually find substitutes quicker than many people expected them to. They haven't found that long term fix, though.

WHAT WERE THE REASONS BEHIND THOSE FAILURES?

Fundamentally, policy has been driven by the Chancellery. The strategic vision of the Chancellery, well, lots of people say they haven't got one. It's not true. It may not have been outlined, but it's been revealed over the last couple of years, and even stated in parts, on occasion: a multipolar world, and pursuing this multipolar vision, that would lead to not wanting Ukraine to win the war, not properly confronting Russia and China, because that would seem to be accelerating systemic rivalry and systemic competition, rather than this multipolar vision. Why is the multi polar vision appealing? Because it doesn't require Germany to change as much. It's a way of preserving the world of yesterday, a world in which Germany did well.

AND SINCE IT'S THE CHANCELLERY THAT'S BEHIND THE POLICY, HOW MUCH BLAME CAN BE PUT AT THE CABINET DOOR OF THE MAN THAT HAS BEEN LEADING IT?

Well, most of it lies with him. He promised the Zeitenwende and didn't deliver. He and his team are the ones who are primarily to blame for not delivering this change. However, the need for that change in the first place can't be blamed only on Scholz. There is 25 years of strategic, geopolitical, military, security neglect. There's 25 years of neglect of Germany internally as well. Under the good part of the Schroder government, but also particularly the Merkel government, 16 years- that's what led to Germany being in the situation where it needed this total transformation and change. So, for the failure to deliver the change that was promised, Scholz is primarily responsible, although others helped. The responsibility for getting into the mess is shared across the governing class of Germany.

SINCE YOU MENTIONED MERKEL, WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF HER UNREPENTANT ATTITUDE TOWARDS HER TIME IN POWER, AND HER POLITICAL LEGACY?

She has become a symbol of that arrogant complacency that has done so much damage to Germany, so much damage



Olaf Scholz. Source: cepa

to European security, and which has put both her country and our continent in the position where we are now geopolitically extremely vulnerable. Her "period of stability" was actually a period of stagnation, and she did not address the thoroughgoing fundamental issues that our societies need to grapple with if we're to renew ourselves for the coming century. So it's not one failure: it's a list of failures, a massive list of failures.

WHERE DOES THE 2008 BUCHAREST SUMMIT AND THE ROLE SHE PLAYED RANK IN THAT LIST?

It comes pretty high, because it's symbolic of the attitude to security politics, but it also had very practical consequences. So it's not just another symptom in the list of many that we could point to as showing the malaise. This was an active opposition to something that would have improved European security, that would have damaged the interests of Vladimir Putin and Russia, and instead, had the opposite effect of empowering and emboldening him. And I don't need to tell your Georgian readers the consequences that came shortly after that.

AND, SIMILARLY, HOW HIGH ARE THE NORMANDY FORMAT AND MINSK NEGOTIATIONS?

Again, that would be very high, because of the practical impact it actually had in terms of empowering the dictator and empowering a threat to Europe. This rewarding of Russian aggression has only emboldened the Kremlin. And this is something Merkel clearly did not understand. Whatever she says now, there is no way of looking at that time and thinking, "Yeah, we got that right." It was a huge failure.

SO WHY IS SHE SO ADAMANT THAT SHE DID EVERYTHING RIGHT?

It's not nice being wrong, is it? And it's not nice being so spectacularly wrong on the biggest stage in the world, that of geopolitics, when you basically endangered your country and your continent. There was this jarring lack of strategy that she did nothing to address, a rupture after 1989; a fundamental misunderstanding that many Germans tell

themselves. It is a selective reading of history. So this notion, for example, that Germans are pacifists after their experience of having wreaked havoc across Europe twice with the world wars and having committed mass genocide: not true. In the 1950s, Germany was armed like a frontline state. In the 1960s and 70s, you get up to half a million people under arms, 5000 Main Battle Tanks, between three and a half and 4% of GDP, a worldview fit for the kind of power they were and appropriate to the threat from the Soviet Union that we all faced in Europe at the time, and they could do strategy. So this myth that came up after 1989 that Germany is not capable of doing hard strategy, hard politics, hard security- forget it. It was invented by people who wanted a holiday from history, and there was a mixture of motivations. Some, I think, genuinely thought, "Okay, now we can do well by doing good." Others were just concerned about doing well off the Wandel durch Handel ("change through trade") approach. It was very easy for Germany to then make a lot of money, you get the Chinese market, Russian oil and gas, and you get American security. And that's awfully convenient.

BACK TO THE ZEITENWENDE THEN - IS IT TRULY PUT TO THE GRAVE? OR IS THERE A CHANCE FOR RESURRECTION WITH THE NEW GOVERNMENT COMING IN?

Olaf Scholz's Zeitenwende is dead, but Germany's change will come. The next government will be the last in Germany that has a chance to change on purely liberal and democratic terms. If they don't deliver the change Germany needs, then the barbarians are at the gates already. They will be coming in. Germany's changes will either be delivered by forces such as the AfD in four and a half years' time, or in this time window if Germany gets its change right and it delivers on what matters for people. Germany will change, one way or another.

COULD THERE BE A [FRIEDRICH] MERZ-LED ZEITENWENDE?

I don't see a huge amount of hope for it. What I see is probably more defense spending, which is a good start, but it's

not enough on its own. Will it be enough? It's looking increasingly unlikely, especially if he goes into a coalition with the SPD. Do I see a big change on Russian policy? It's difficult to say overall, because Merz has been so all over the map on this. When he says things like, "we will only send peacekeepers to Ukraine if the UN Security Council approves," that doesn't speak to me to be a very robust attitude.

UNLESS THERE'S A SUBSTANTIAL CHANGE IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL'S STRUCTURE, WHICH COULD ALLEVIATE SOME OF THE NEED TO SEND PEACEKEEPERS AT ALL.

Exactly so. So that's problematic. Nonetheless, I do suspect there is a chance that at least he could be tougher. But again, if he governs with the SPD, it's not going to be a massive change. There is a chance he could change in terms of the role in NATO and role in the EU, where Germany became an unconstructive blocker. That may change under Merz; he may seek to align Germany's position a bit more with some of its key allies, but if he doesn't make those other changes we're talking about, the question is, how far would that really go?

MIGHT WE SEE CHANGES IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION? LIKE MORE SUPPORT TOWARDS LIFTING SANCTIONS ON RUSSIA OR RETURNING TO RUSSIAN ENERGY?

So back to business as usual? The pretense of continuity, which is the opposite of Zeitenwende, is exactly what most of the German political establishment want. I think there is a danger that that could happen, and it's a danger that's driven by the AfD and by those who see Germany as a great power that's been kept down, and see Germany's natural role as being on par with Russia, with the US, with other great powers.

AFD'S APPROACH COULD BRING UNEXPECTED CHANGES, WITH ZEITENWENDE DRIVEN BY THE "BARBARIANS," ALONG WITH INCREASED DEFENSE SPENDING AND AFD'S CULTURAL VALUES, INCLUDING

A PRO-RUSSIA STANCE.

That's the nightmare scenario, that a strong Germany rises in an illegal form. But that's again, what many Germans are looking at and saying, "no, we absolutely don't want this." The problem is, they haven't got their act together to oppose it. So until the mainstream parties find real solutions, the AfD can continue to talk about the problems and the failure to deal with them. I think there is still a latent Imperial mindset and a great power mindset there, which could activate a lot of Germans, for good or for bad. There is a reason no one uses the slogan "Make Germany Great Again," right? But, actually, a notion of a proud Germany that played its part in securing the democratic order would be great, and that's the kind of thing they should be looking to do.

WHAT MIGHT UKRAINE EXPECT FROM THE NEW GOVERNMENT, ESPECIALLY IF IT'S MERZ-LED? WOULD THE TAURUS MISSILES BE ON THE TABLE?

Merz has talked about this, about using Taurus as a leverage against Putin. But then he sort of walked it back and then walked in again. It's a shame, because there was a chance for clarity, and he brought confusion to it. And it's not of the good strategic ambiguity kind: it's dithering, and that's really unfortunate. We genuinely don't know what is going to happen, though, because of the coalition that will be needed to be formed. If he governs with the SPD alone, that brings one set of constraints and one set of opportunities. He's unlikely to govern with the Greens alone, unless the Greens get a really good result, which I'm not foreseeing at this stage- there's too much entrenched opposition between the two parties on cultural issues and so on. But if they ended up with a three-way coalition, of CDU, SPD, and Greens, then you would have one party in there, strongly pressuring for more on Ukraine. And there are a lot of people in the CDU who want that, who would be able to overwhelm the opposition in the SPD, I think. But it's too hard to say at the moment. My best guess would be, we don't get Taurus. My best guess would be that you won't get a strong upgrading of support for Ukraine.

Basisbank Secures \$15mln SME Facility from BSTDB to Help Georgian Businesses



NEW FINANCING FROM BSTDB
TO DRIVE SMALL AND MEDIUM BUSINESS GROWTH IN THE COUNTRY

Photo: Basisbank.

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

Basisbank and the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank (BSTDB) recently signed an agreement on a new \$15 million SME facility to support small and medium-sized enterprises in Georgia. The deal is another milestone of a long partnership between the two institutions, which have cooperated since

2012 in the quest to offer Trade Finance and SME loans.

BSTDB, a global financial institution founded by 11 countries, provides regional economic development through financing public and private sector initiatives, whereas Basisbank, third-ranked for business finance in the country, strengthens global financial collaborations to secure banking, insurance, and leasing services in Georgia.

"This new facility underscores our dedication to strengthening economic

resilience and fostering growth for SMEs, the backbone of the economy," said BSTDB President Dr. Serhat Köksal. "Together with Basisbank, we are building a solid foundation for long-term development."

"Our continued collaboration with BSTDB plays a crucial role in developing Georgia's private sector and meeting SMEs' financial needs. We appreciate BSTDB's ongoing support and look forward to future impactful projects," Basisbank General Director David Tsaava said.

Kazakhstan Exports Ammophos Via Trans-Caspian Route for the First Time

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

Kazakhstan recently launched exporting domestically produced Ammophos via the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TTTR), a step forward in strategic logistics. The first shipment, sent from the Batumi seaport, totaled 3,000 tons,

KazTransOil, in charge of Batumi Oil Terminal, reported.

KTO also emphasized that in 2024, Batumi facilitated the first-ever exports of Kazakh ammonium nitrate (37,600 tons) through the TTTR.

"This is the first time Kazakh Ammophos has been exported via the TTTR from Batumi," KTO stated, noting that the delivery, handled by Kazphosphate LLP, involved multidimensional transportation. The Batumi seaport will ship 50,000 tons of Kazakh Ammophos in 2025.



Photo: EY.



Photo: Life Medical Clinic.

Four Georgian State Clinics Receive International Accreditation

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

KTQ (Cooperation for Transparency and Quality in Hospitals), a German healthcare accreditation organization, recently accredited four state clinics in Georgia: the Tengiz Tsertsvadze Infectious and AIDS Center, the National Center for Tuberculosis and Lung Disease, the Rukhi Republican Hospital, and the Batumi Republican Hospital.

Mikheil Sarjveladze, Georgian Health Minister, and his deputy Tea Giorgadze,

met with KTQ Director Ronald Neubauer, with Teona Gorgadze, KTQ representative in Georgia, to discuss international healthcare standards and acknowledge KTQ's collaboration with the Georgian health sector.

Minister Sarjveladze pointed out that patient safety and easy accessibility to medical services are top priorities for the government, stating that most state program-related clinics have already been internationally accredited.

The government gave a grace period to certain medical institutions, so they can meet all the necessary emergency service accessibility standards to comply with the listed KTQ requirements.



Photo: Quartz.

Georgia's Oil Production Rises in 2024, Gas Extraction Declines

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

The Oil and Gas Corporation recently reported that oil production in Georgia increased in 2024, while natural gas extraction slightly declined. The report noted that the country produced 36.8 thousand tons of oil, a 1,500-ton increase, while the state's share equaled 14,200 tons, sold through auctions.

Historically, oil production has fluctuated:

2009: Nearly 60,000 tons extracted.
2010-2013: Averaged 50,000 tons annually.

Post-2013: Extraction declined relatively. In 2024, gas production amounted to

15.6 million cubic meters, a minor decrease of 0.2 million cubic meters from the previous year. Consistent with the trends, the state's share was 5 million cubic meters, and, through local sources, the country has received 4-5 million cubic meters.

The Ministry of Economy authorized 25 general and 8 activity licenses for oil and gas resource usage in 2024. Primary developments include:

West Gulf Petroleum Engineering Company Ltd won the X license block (4,336 km²), covering Tianeti, Sagarejo, Akhmeta, Telavi, Kvareli, Sighnaghi, Gurjaani, and Lagodekhi.

Hindustan Silichem Private Limited (HSPL), part of Astron Zircon Group, secured the VIII license area (1,175 km²), including Khelvachauri, Kobuleti, Ozurgeti, Chokhatauri, and Lanchkhuti.

Giving Voice to Joys and Struggles. On Robert Burns

BY OLIVER DIXON, SPOKEN AT THE 2025 BURNS SUPPER TBILISI

For some of you sitting here, this may be your first experience of a Burns supper. Maybe even your first exposure to Scottish culture. You've got dressed in your finest outfits, and ordered your Bolt Premium to come and celebrate an evening of sophistication and grandeur.

And now you are sitting in bemusement as a room of 200 people in bow ties have just watched a man speak in prose to a lump of meat and then attack it with a dagger (Address to the Haggis). Possibly a little unexpected.

Well Scottish culture...is.....Scottish. And Robert Burns, has come to be known as the most Scottish of them all. And my role is to tell you a bit about him.

So how did he come to embody Scottish identity? How did his work outlast his death by 250 years, and counting?

Robert Burns was born in 1759 in Ayrshire, Scotland, in the era of the great Scottish enlightenment. Scotland was producing some of the great figures of the world in medicine, engineering, law, and art.

And yet Scotland was also struggling to assert its identity, having suffered a series of defeats, including a deeply unpopular union of Parliaments with England, and a savage crushing of the Jacobite rebellion by the British at the Battle of Culloden.

Robert Burns, a son of tenant farmers, stepped into this political turbulence and achieved rapid acclaim. His poems drew on the everyday lives of the Scots, giving voice to their joys and struggles.

This is no more obvious than in his poems of love. They required no education and no politics. In his most famous poem 'A Red, Red Rose', he says:

Till a' the seas gang dry my dear
And the rocks melt wi' the sun
And I will luve thee still my dear
While the sands o' life shall run.

But Burns' world was one of extreme inequality. With privilege there was wealth and power. In poverty, there was destitution and anguish.

He was a poet, but also a campaigner. He advocated for the basic democratic interests of his fellow Scots. He didn't preach at them, tell them what they should think, or what their traditions were. He spoke to their frustrations at a failed ruling elite.

In his poem 'Man Was Made to Mourn' he protests:

If I'm designed yon lordlings slave
By nature's law designed
Why was an independent wish
E'er planted in my mind?
If not why am I subject to
His cruelty or scorn?
Or why has man the will and pow'r
To make his fellow mourn

Similarly, in a poem entitled 'Written in A Lady's Pocket Book,' he declared quite simply:

Grant me, indulgent Heav'n, that I may live,
To see the miscreants feel the pain they give

Deal freedom's sacred treasures free as air
Till slave and despot be but things which were

Burns' radical ideas sought a society where every voice, no matter whose, had a place in the conversation; where every individual had the right to determine their own fate.



Robert Burns, Scottish poet. Source: visitgainesville

The revolutionary ideas coming out of France made the ruling elite uncomfortable. They enforced curbs on the rights of free speech and expression.

But this didn't stop Burns. In 'A Man's a Man for A' That,' Burns tells us that wealth and power brings no true happiness. The worth of a person is not measured by their position or wealth, but by their integrity and honor. He says we should not just stand against tyranny, but laugh in the face of it:

You see yonder fellow called 'a lord,'
He struts, and stares, and all that?
Though hundreds worship at his word,
He is but a fool for all that.
For all that, and all that,
His ribbon, star, and all that,
A man of independent mind,
He looks and laughs at all that.

But perhaps, most importantly, Burns as an individual reflected the divisions of his own society. Historical figures are generally more complex than we care to admit. Burns was very much a series of contrasting characteristics, often at war with each other.

He wrote eloquently about the rights

of women, but his treatment of them might suggest he didn't really understand the principles of which he spoke. He attacked the church for their hypocrisy, whilst at times failing to hit those standards himself. He moved between patriotic nationalist ideas to praising the British royals.

Lord Byron wrote of him:

"What an antithetical mind! - tenderness, roughness - delicacy, coarseness - sentiment, sensuality - soaring and groveling, dirt and deity - all mixed up in that one compound of inspired clay!"

But Burns' own contradictions are really a mirror of the Scottish cultural experience. From the very beginning to the present day, Scotland has had to deal with apparently inconvertible opposites. Are Scots highlander or lowlander; Catholic or Protestant; royalist or republican; nationalist or Briton. What is Scottish language: Gaelic, Scots or English? Burns' own life shows us that no person, and no nation, can be summarised in a simple phrase, we are uniquely complex, and all the better for it.

In just 37 years, Burns achieved more

with a pen than many have since sought to achieve through the threat of their sword or the force of their wealth.

Burns' words stand the test of time. They are just as relevant to you and I today as they were to a Scottish farmer two hundred years ago. This is what unites Scots across generations.

Georgia is not alone in the struggle to unite and define a society. In Robert Burns, we learn to walk in the shoes of our fellow citizens, to act on the democratic principles of fairness and equality, and to see the differences in our society not as a threat, but that which makes up our national and cultural identities.

Those forces that seek to divide and distil society into warring tribes or simple tales of right and wrong, do so only for their own benefit, and at the expense of society's fabric. Because we are ultimately a collection of flawed and contradictory people - at the end of the day all left with each other.

Thanks to Burns, Scotland embraces passion for its identity, as well as its compassion for its people. And, I think, Georgia is rich for the same reason.

Every country needs a hero. It is illustrative that Scotland's greatest person was not a politician, nor a businessman, but a poet. It is, so often, civic and cultural society that is the greatest force for binding us in difficult times.

So I leave you with some simple and timeless words from Burns:

The social, friendly, honest man,
Whatever he be
Tis he fulfils great Nature's plan
And none but he.

And I ask you all...Scot or not...to fill your glasses and raise them high as I give you, the Immortal Memory of Robert Burns.



BY HELENA BEDWELL

For many, the idea of retirement brings images of peace, family, and quiet afternoons in a rocking chair, enjoying a scenic view. However, in Georgia, financial struggles and a lack of proper elderly care facilities often put this dream firmly out of reach. That's where Leliani comes in: a new, high-standard, family-style elderly care home designed to provide a dignified, enriching, and worry-free life for seniors.

But Leliani isn't just a place for elderly individuals: it has also become a safe haven for another vulnerable group in Georgian society: stray dogs.

A PLACE TO CELEBRATE LIFE—AND GIVE BACK

At Leliani, life isn't just about care, it's about joy, family, and shared moments of kindness. Just last week, the halls of

the home were filled with laughter and the sweet aroma of cake as Giuli, a warm-hearted and lively 86-year-old resident, celebrated her birthday. Her nephew and cousins came to surprise her, bringing flowers, old photo albums, and a delicious homemade honey cake.

"I never imagined I would have such a beautiful birthday at this stage in my life," Giuli, lost her husband a while ago, said, wiping away happy tears as everyone gathered around to sing to her. "I prefer to be home with my family, but now this is my home, here."

The celebration was filled with music, toasts, and stories from the past. Other residents joined in, sharing their own memories and dancing along to old Georgian songs. Moments like these are what make Leliani more than just an elderly care home: it's a place where people continue to create beautiful memories.

But Leliani's warmth extends beyond its human residents. Thanks to Nino Kiknadze, the facility's compassionate

manager, several local stray dogs have also found a place to call home.

Nino Kiknadze has dedicated her life to caring for people—but her compassion doesn't stop there. A passionate animal lover, Nino, along with the admin lady Lolita, has taken it upon herself to sterilize and care for several stray dogs in the area, ensuring they receive medical attention, food, and a safe place to live. Leliani also offers the residents the chance to bring their pets to stay with them.

The once-forgotten stray dogs now roam freely in Leliani's garden, basking in the sun and offering companionship to the residents. Many seniors have found comfort in the presence of these gentle animals, forming a special bond with them.

"The elderly and stray animals have something in common: they are both among the most vulnerable members of our society. But here at Leliani, they are safe, loved, and valued," Nino says.

WHAT IS LELIANI?

Nestled in the historic city of Mtskheta, Leliani is a community dedicated to providing top-quality care while maintaining the independence and social engagement of its elderly residents. Opened in 2024, Leliani is staffed by trained professionals, and offers personalized services tailored to the unique needs of residents aged 65 and older.

Leliani is a purpose-built nursing home designed from the ground up to meet international elderly care standards, unlike many repurposed buildings. Located in a quiet and scenic area of

Mtskheta, the facility offers a thoughtfully designed environment. The three-story building is divided into independent wings, each catering to specific care needs, such as Alzheimer's and dementia care, long-term nursing, and respite care.

The facility uses certified, eco-friendly materials, prioritizing health and safety by incorporating internationally certified, non-toxic building and finishing materials. Security and privacy are also a top priority, with 24/7 security service and a video monitoring system ensuring residents' safety, all while complying with data protection regulations.

At Leliani, elderly individuals receive the care they need while maintaining a sense of autonomy and engagement. The home offers a range of comprehensive care services, including medical and nursing care, daily assistance, personal care, nutritious and customized meal plans, and social and recreational activities. On-site doctors and nurses provide daily health monitoring, medication administration, and emergency response. Physical therapists help residents maintain mobility, improve reflexes, and prevent falls, while compassionate palliative and long-term care is available for individuals requiring extended assistance. Professional caregivers are on hand to assist with daily activities such as hygiene, dressing, and mobility, and a trained mental health team of psychologists and therapists offers emotional support. The dedicated catering team provides three balanced meals a day, tailored to individual dietary needs.

Community interaction is encouraged

through shared meals, group discussions, and engaging activities, and residents can participate in educational and cultural programs, including workshops, entertainment events, and recreational outings.

The Leliani team is composed of highly trained professionals, many of whom have received international caregiving training. The team includes medical staff such as doctors, nurses, and physical therapists who provide health support, care specialists who assist with daily living activities, and a catering team that ensures residents receive healthy, delicious meals. Additionally, a mental health team of psychologists and therapists is available to support emotional well-being, while an administrative and financial team manages day-to-day operations and ensures high-quality service.

A MISSION OF DIGNITY, COMFORT, AND RESPECT

At Leliani, the guiding principle is simple: everyone over 65 deserves a full, dignified, and joyful life. The facility is designed not just to meet residents' physical needs but also to nurture their emotional well-being and social connections.

For Giuli and many others, Leliani is not just a place to stay, it's a home where birthdays are celebrated, friendships are made, and every day is filled with warmth, care, and love.

And thanks to Nino's dedication, the presence of rescued dogs adds another layer of companionship and joy, proving that at Leliani, care is not just about people, it's about all living beings.

Understanding Human-Wildlife Conflict in the Iori Plateau: A Case Study from Georgia

BY ANA DUMBADZE

Natural resources are finite and depleting rapidly due to overuse and exploitation. By conserving these resources, we ensure that they remain available for future generations, thereby promoting sustainability and the health of our planet.

Considering the importance of preserving and protecting natural resources, the role and contribution of organizations that work selflessly in this direction becomes even more valuable.

One such organization operating locally, known for its dedicated work promoting the conservation of wildlife in Georgia, and encouraging the sustainable use of natural resources, is SABUKO, the Society for Nature Conservation and Birdlife Partner in Georgia. SABUKO aims to raise awareness about the value of nature and the importance of protecting it.

To prevent the conflict between humans and nature, SABUKO has chosen a way of cooperation and works with local communities, finding the best results come through direct contact and joint efforts.

Following the successfully implemented first phase of the project 'Restoring Gallery Forest and Grasslands in the Iori River Valley,' now, SABUKO, along with its partners, is implementing the second phase, which is building on the progress made by the completed ELSP-funded Iori River Valley project, scaling up grassland restoration and continuing work with the pastoralist community.

Human-wildlife conflict (HWC) is a critical issue worldwide, especially in rural areas where human populations and wildlife vie for resources. In regions like the Iori Plateau in southeastern Georgia, where the environment is fragile and rural communities rely heavily on livestock farming, the conflict between humans and wildlife often manifests through livestock predation. The study conducted by SABUKO within Kakheti Steppes project explores the extent and nature of HWC in the Iori Plateau, examining the challenges faced by local farmers and proposing solutions to mitigate these conflicts.

As human populations expand and encroach upon wildlife habitats, it is essential to understand the dynamics of HWC, its root causes, and its impact on both human livelihoods and biodiversity conservation. This article presents findings from a mixed-methods study conducted by SABUKO, the Society for Nature Conservation, focusing on the local community's attitudes toward wild-



life, the types of conflicts experienced, and the effectiveness of current mitigation strategies.

THE IORI PLATEAU: A LANDSCAPE OF DIVERSITY

The Iori Plateau, situated in Georgia's southeastern region, encompasses a mix of protected areas, including the Vashlovani Protected Areas, the Nugzar Zaznashvili Samukhi Multipurpose Use Protected Area, and the Chachuna Managed Reserve. This area, characterized by dry steppes and semi-deserts, serves as a winter pasture for many farmers who rely on livestock for their livelihood. The terrain's environmental challenges—scarcity of water and extreme seasonal temperatures—add complexity to farming practices, making the local farmers highly dependent on their livestock.

With a rich biodiversity, human-wildlife conflict in the region is primarily related to livestock depredation. Wolves, foxes, jackals, and other predators have been seen as a threat to the farmers' sheep and cattle. Farmers' livelihoods are directly impacted by these predators, especially during the lambing season, when attacks are most frequent.

A key aspect of the study is understanding farmers' perceptions of wildlife and the impact of these conflicts on their livelihoods. The survey included 65 farmers from diverse ethnic backgrounds, including ethnic Azerbaijani Georgians and ethnic Georgians, including Tush people, who primarily engage in transhumant pastoralism. The study found that most farmers have a deep emotional connection to the land and wildlife, yet this sentiment is often overshadowed by the economic strain caused by wildlife-related damages.

Despite recognizing the beauty and value of wildlife, many farmers expressed frustration over the lack of effective support from the government in managing wildlife conflicts. Most farmers rely on traditional methods, such as using guard dogs, fences, and firecrackers, to protect their livestock.

The study also sheds light on the legal and policy frameworks governing HWC management in Georgia. According to the Law on the Protection of Wildlife, the regulation of wildlife populations is primarily managed by municipalities, with the Ministry of Environment and Agriculture issuing quotas for species removal. However, the quota system has faced criticism for lacking scientific data and often being unresponsive to the actual dynamics of wildlife populations.

Farmers expressed their frustration over the current policies, noting that compensation for livestock losses due to wildlife is not practiced. This has led to a lack of trust in government institutions, with many farmers opting to address the problem independently, even resorting to illegal hunting in some cases.

Effective mitigation of human-wildlife conflict requires collaboration between farmers, local communities, government bodies, and conservation organizations. The study highlighted several strategies that could be implemented to reduce conflict, including strengthening shepherds' knowledge on livestock protection, improving livestock management

practices, and promoting non-lethal deterrents.

Farmers suggested that regulated hunting should be reintroduced as a measure to control the wolf population. They also advocated for financial compensation or insurance schemes to cover the losses incurred from wildlife attacks. Moreover, there was a strong call for greater community involvement in decision-making processes related to wildlife management.

The findings from this study underscore the complexity of human-wildlife conflict in the Iori Plateau and the need for a more integrated approach to managing these challenges. While technical solutions such as predator deterrents and compensation schemes are essential, addressing the social and political aspects of the conflict is equally important. Engaging farmers in decision-making, improving communication with local authorities, and developing tailored conservation education programs are critical steps toward fostering coexistence between humans and wildlife.

As human populations and wildlife continue to interact in shared spaces, it is crucial to find sustainable solutions that balance the needs of rural communities with the conservation of biodiversity. By incorporating local knowledge,

addressing resource scarcity, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders, Georgia can develop a more effective and equitable approach to managing human-wildlife conflict.

To find out more about the results of the studies conducted by SABUKO, GEORGIA TODAY spoke to Tamar Uguzashvili, Conservation Manager.

"To assess human-wildlife conflict, we conducted a survey in two regions, Racha and Kakheti. The data from Racha is still being processed and the results will be available soon.

We already know the results from Kakheti. We used semi-structured and in-depth interviews in the survey.

Since human-wildlife conflict is not only of ecological but also socio-economic importance, we divided the semi-structured questionnaires into 8 sections, which included the following issues: demographic characteristics, farm and livestock, knowledge and attitudes towards wild animals, type and frequency of human-wildlife conflict, local knowledge and attitudes towards reintroduction, introduction and recolonization of different species, mitigation, prevention and communication with government representatives, and participation in political decision-making processes and ways to solve problems in the long term.

Our study area in Kakheti is the only winter pasture in Georgia. Farmers bring sheep and sometimes cows from different parts of the country from November to April. Shepherds say that the most problematic wild animal for them is the wolf, and they suffer the most damage from it. 96.4% of the total damage is caused by wolves.

The results showed that predator attacks were most frequent in winter, followed by spring. One possible explanation for the higher number of attacks in winter could be the length of time farmers spend on the territory during this season. Farmers usually spend the entire winter and two months of spring on the territory, and spend less time in autumn - only half of the season or less. We also calculated the losses for each farmer, which ranged from 0 to 7.96%. We obtained these percentages by dividing the number of livestock lost to predation by the total number of livestock owned by each farm. In interviews, shepherds noted that with a good dog and an attentive shepherd, the damage is minimal.

Such studies are important because properly planned measures to reduce conflict are a crucial component of harmonious coexistence between humans and wild animals. Based on the results of these studies, we, the SABUKO team, will be able to plan preventive measures, reduce farmers' negative attitudes towards wild animals and do our best to mitigate the results of Human-wildlife conflict and ensure their harmonious co-existence."



Toast to the Lassies: Burns Supper Tbilisi, 2025

BY HANS GUTBROD

These are dark times. The clearest sign that this is a rough moment is that the organizers put me here. This is meant to be a funny toast - and they chose... of all people, a German.

The good people at my table, their heart sinks even more. They recall that at the beginning of this evening, the waiter came around and put that little green card, with a big V, where I sit. They already realize what for you is only just about to sink in: you booked and paid for Scottish whisky - and now you got a German vegetarian.

But it's time to get to the lassies. And today, admiration is what I want to talk about. Burns speaks about admiration in his poem 'Rights of Woman' as something we, the lads, owe the lassies. Admiration and poetry are linked by requiring undivided attention. Poetry is often likened to music, but it's also different, because it only works if you give it your full attention.

BRAVE LASSIES OF GEORGIA

When we pay attention, today's 15th Burns is different from the earlier Suppers, and Tbilisi is also different from all the other suppers people have around the world. While we celebrate here, good people are under assault. You are enti-

led to different opinions on politics; but no decent person should cheer on the violence against citizens that we have seen in recent weeks and months.

In standing up to that violence, brave women have inscribed themselves into history: the elegant President, and many others to admire, the iconic lady holding the EU flag, the brave woman climbing into the formation of shields; Mzia Amaglobeli [journalist prisoner currently on hunger strike]; and those of you who have been at the demonstrations know, you know in your bones, that women are often the first in line to protect the male protesters behind them from an onslaught. Some of these women are right here today. Robert Burns admired Joan D'Arc, and he would have admired many here in this country.

LASSIES IN THE ROOM

When it comes to those of us in this room, there is also much to admire.

Look at how pretty it is here! I do not just mean the lassies in their fabulous gowns. Look at the decorations. The reason this place does not look like a kitschy restaurant where Georgian judges go to feast is that half a dozen marvelous women put the Scottishness into this room, the tartan, and more than 200 napkin holders, and this work of the lassies was fortified by, I gather, about 200 glasses of wine that you downed.

Pam Oliver - you are our oldest guest and likely our oldest dancer also. We admire you for your joy of life. When

Pam comes into the jazz bar Zazanova, the faces of staff show awe, or even fear. They know that Pam will party and dance until way after midnight, when many of the staff, who are a third or even a quarter of her age would really like to go to bed.

Pam - you are closer to celebrating your 100th birthday than many of us development people are to finding another job. With your incredible energy, Pam, you are, to use a Burns phrase, "like a red, red rose, That's newly sprung in June."

Betsy Haskell - for many, you are our collective memory and an entrepreneur who stood at the beginning of many things we hold dear, including AmCham, which has just given scholarships to more than 60 students, generously sponsored also by some people strongly represented in this room. At the recent award ceremony, one young student spoke on how that scholarship had set her life on a new track - and it was an event that made some grown men in this room cry. Betsy, to making strong men weep, and to the impact of what you helped to create reaching decades into the future.

Tonight, we lads should also recognize someone else. Corinne Rothblum who for three years worked with AID governance programs. In that tricky field, we never directly worked together, but I heard from many, you had the reputation of getting good things done and that you listened.



Hans Gutbrod. Photo by Irakli Chelidze

In addition to that work, Corinne engaged in many causes - such as helping dogs - with warmth, because you believed it was the decent thing to do, and one never had the impression you did that to ever be the center of attention (I am sorry to impose that on you today). Next to many complicated feelings that you and USAID colleagues have right now, for us here this *has* to be a moment of expressing our immense gratitude, Corinne, to you and to all your USAID colleagues and partners in the room, thank you for touching so many lives and all you did to improve them.

Coming back to Georgian lassies, Nana Dvali is an extraordinary figure amidst us. If you know her, you admire her not just for her ability to consume any khachapuri that is in her sight. If you don't know her, Nana is one of the pillars of rentals.ge. Not everyone immediately has a warm fuzzy feeling when you think of real estate agents. But what Nana has done is find a home for hundreds of people who moved to Georgia. Nana, you also helped people find a home of people, by creating now almost 30 years ago the International Women's Association, IWA, one of the best organizations in Georgia, which has done many good things, including the Christmas bazaar, that has been a real community supporting its members and many other causes. Nana, to you finding and making homes, to the IWA, and to your khachapuri.

I spoke of four admirable ladies, and I want to speak of one more. When Burns writes on the red rose I cited, he has that stanza that goes:

"Till a' the seas gang dry, my Dear,
And the rocks melt wi' the sun:
I will love thee still, my dear,
While the sands o' life shall run."

The sands of life - I need to speak of one woman of luminous beauty. That woman is no longer with us. Nana Janashia founded and ran the Caucasus Environmental NGO Network, CENN, and was a presence here and everywhere. She stood for what she believed in and was always generous.

If you squint, you can just about imagine her, in a dress that is a riot of colors, another rose (to use Burns' phrase), bubbly, a smile bigger than any room she was in - such a force of nature that only another extreme force, lightning, could strike out the sands of that life. We lost her in August 2023, but in our best moments, she is still with us.

Perhaps, for the Burns Supper, we should introduce the annual Nana Janashia award for the most exquisitely flamboyant dress!

SEEING LIGHT IN DARKNESS

It's time to bring this to a close. I said repeatedly that these are dark times, and Burns writes about nighttime in the poem 'Tam o' Shanter'. When shadows grow longer is also when you see where the lights really shine.

When we toast these admirable lassies, as Burns reminds us, we celebrate the full range of human experience, the heroic in Georgia, the dancing, the entrepreneurial, the selflessly engaged, and the colorfully radiant. When we toast lassies - we toast life, and that inevitably entails loss, as several among us also experienced in recent months.

The brief suspension of time that a poem - or perhaps a toast - brings, allows us to take stock of a moment and of people that otherwise we may pass without recognizing them for what they really are. Taking stock can give them the admiration that Burns suggests they are due. Poetry should make strange things familiar and familiar things strange, and I hope you feel a little bit more familiar, and a wee bit more strange now. This, in my mind, is what in dark times a bright night like ours stands for, and are we not lucky that Robert Burns brings us together here for that purpose?

I would ask the lads in this room to stand, as a sign of their admiration. This is to the braveheart ladies of Georgia, to Pam, to Betsy, to Corinne, to Nana Dvali and Nana Janashia, and to all the other lassies that are sitting in this room or residing in your hearts.

To the lassies!!



Toasting at the 2025 Burns Supper. Photo by Irakli Chelidze

Participation: Lamproba, Etseri, Svaneti

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

This was the very first time I brought my own cut birch torch, burning, to the festival where every man or boy in Svaneti does the same thing. Every hamlet of every village has this tradition, though with variations and on slightly different dates. Lamproba, it's called, its origin a military victory won up here with such torches, though the details seem to be lost to the mists of time.

Why birch, specifically? I once asked. "Because Christ was once running away from someone, in the forest, and only the birch tree offered Him shelter." Huh. Now I know. Plus, it burns well.

I wrote last week about my Dutch friends and I making the arduous trek to place above Etseri's abandoned hamlet to cut our own torches, each about 2m long and the thickness of a man's upper arm. Then, back home to dry them out as well as we could; split the wider



Photo by the author

end of each with an axe and hammer; dry some more; soak that end in diesel; then light and carry them in the darkness of this morning's dusk to the waiting bonfire of our hamlet of Iskari.

But...we nine men should have: cut them earlier; dried them out more; made

more than two splits in each; pointed the other end with an axe; and soaked them in the diesel for at least an overnight if not longer. We really struggled to keep them alight, in the end bringing a burning bucket of the fuel with us to re-dip and -light each torch just before

we came around the corner to the waiting bonfire. At least we showed up with them burning, though. And if anyone joked about our efforts, they were polite enough to do it in Svan, none of us understanding!

The men and boys received us well; even a visiting lady from the lowlands was allowed, unusually, to carry in a torch: Anuka Maisuradze, freelance journalist, pictured here. Then our ladies showed up with their three little round loaves of bread and wine and some cut cheese, as is custom. Others came with these things too. One after another, we faced the rising sun, raised our bread and prayed out loud (to the Big God) for each family the loaves represented, and for each family in the village.

Then it was all just community time, getting to know or catching up with one another, enjoying the bonfire. I drank a shot of cognac from my inverted Svan cap. We ate kubdari, khachapuri, bread and cheese, drank wine and a bit of moonshine too. Lamproba is one of the events in which I am delighted to participate every year, wherever I am in Svaneti,

whenever possible. We are one here.

Later that day, I reviewed my photos and video, posted a few of the best on Facebook, and saw in other posts that this holiday was being enacted all over the province, by many other people now familiar to me, even outside Svaneti, where they gathered for it. Wonderful to see how it is interpreted by other eyes, in stills and motion. Eventually, maybe next year, someone will capture it extensively by moving drone for the first time ever (I think). This medium has been gaining in popularity since I first saw it here a few years ago. Cheers to Lamproba! May you meet many more of them, as the saying goes!

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

Inner Blooming Springs: How a Young Georgian Filmmaker Brought Protest to Berlinale



Shot from the movie

BY IVAN NECHAEV

When 22-year-old Georgian filmmaker Tiku Kobiashvili took to the streets of Tbilisi in 2024, she did not yet know that the protests against the controversial "Foreign Agents" law would not only change her own life, but also place her among the filmmakers selected for the prestigious 75th Berlin International Film Festival. Her 43-minute documentary 'Inner Blooming Springs' (Shinagani gazapkhulebis q'vaviloba)—a deeply personal account of the youth-driven resistance—has been selected for the Forum program, a section dedicated to politically and socially engaged cinema.

In the Georgian context, the connection between film and politics is deep-rooted. The Soviet-era censorship of cinema shaped an entire generation of directors who learned to encode political dissent into poetic allegories. Directors like Otar Iosseliani and Tengiz Abuladze navigated these constraints, producing films that spoke in whispers yet carried seismic cultural weight. Today, Kobiashvili follows in their footsteps, albeit in a digital age, where immediacy, rawness, and direct confrontation define protest cinema.

BERLINALE: A PLATFORM FOR SOCIALLY ENGAGED CINEMA

Unlike Cannes, which leans toward the glamorous and auteur-driven, or Venice, which balances art-house and Hollywood, the Berlin International Film Festival (Berlinale) has positioned itself as the most politically conscious festival of the "Big Three."

Films awarded at Berlinale frequently reflect urgent social themes. The 2023 Golden Bear winner, Nicolas Philibert's *On the Adamant*, was an intimate portrayal of mental health care in France. In previous years, Gianfranco Rosi's *Fire at Sea* exposed the European migrant

crisis, while Jafar Panahi's *Taxi* was an act of defiance against Iran's censorship regime.

Georgia has made an impact at Berlinale before. In 2021, Alexandre Kobleridze's 'What Do We See When We Look at the Sky?' won the FIPRESCI Prize. In 2024, Levan Akin's 'Crossroads' (Perestroika) won the Teddy Award and the Audience Award, signaling a growing international recognition of Georgia's film industry. Kobiashvili's 'Inner Blooming Springs' continues this trajectory, proving that Georgian cinema remains a crucial voice on the world stage.

THE "FOREIGN AGENTS" LAW AND THE ROLE OF FILM IN PROTEST

The protests that Inner Blooming Springs documents were sparked by the "Foreign Agents" law, a piece of legislation requiring organizations receiving foreign funding to register as "foreign agents." Critics condemned it as a Kremlin-style measure to silence independent media and NGOs. Georgia is not alone in this struggle. Similar laws in Russia and Hungary have curtailed civil society, while the Hong Kong protests of 2019-2020 saw government crackdowns on freedom of expression. Documentaries like 'Do Not Split' (2020) and 'Winter on Fire' (2015) chronicled those movements, just as Kobiashvili's film now captures the Georgian fight for democracy.

The role of documentary film in protest movements is profound. According to sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, media representation shapes public perception of social struggles. By documenting unrest, filmmakers create counter-narratives to state-controlled messaging. Film thus becomes both a historical record and an act of resistance. Anthropologists argue that collective memory is central to national identity. Historian Benedict Anderson described nations as "imagined communities," constructed through shared symbols and stories. If history books are written by the victors, documentary film provides an alternative history—one told from the streets,

not the halls of power.

In Georgia, this practice of counter-history is crucial. The Rose Revolution of 2003 and the 2008 Russia-Georgia War have been depicted in films, shaping how younger generations understand their past. Kobiashvili's work continues this tradition, ensuring that the 2024 protests are documented not as abstract political events, but as lived experiences of resistance.

A BLOOMING REVOLUTION IN GEORGIAN FILM

With a new generation of filmmakers like Kobiashvili emerging, Georgian cinema stands at a crossroads. Will it continue to serve as a tool of political expression, or will it shift toward commercial viability? The success of Inner Blooming Springs at Berlinale suggests that global audiences are eager for films that blend personal storytelling with social urgency. Historically, national cinemas have evolved in response to political climates. The Iranian New Wave, for instance, flourished under censorship, producing deeply allegorical works. Similarly, Polish cinema during the Cold War used symbolism to challenge state narratives. Georgia's filmmakers now face a similar challenge: to navigate political pressures while maintaining their artistic and ethical integrity.

The selection of Inner Blooming Springs at Berlinale is more than just a milestone for its young director; it is a testament to the power of film as a cultural force. It reflects the urgency of Georgian youth, the resilience of its artistic community, and the ability of cinema to serve as both a mirror and a megaphone for social change. In an age where information is weaponized, documentaries like Inner Blooming Springs become acts of defiance, resisting erasure and preserving memory. Through Kobiashvili's lens, we do not just witness a protest—we experience its hopes, its fears, and its unyielding spirit. And that, perhaps, is the greatest power of cinema: to turn moments into movements, and stories into revolutions.



Nino Jvania / Facebook

The Silence of the Stage: How Tbilisi Ignored, and the Public Honored, Paata Burchuladze's 70th Anniversary

BY IVAN NECHAEV

theater and letting music fill the air of Tbilisi.

AN OPERA FOR THE STREETS

While the world's most prestigious opera houses—Covent Garden, La Scala, the Vienna State Opera—competed to host Paata Burchuladze's 70th birthday celebration, the great Georgian bass insisted on one thing: "I must turn 70 in my homeland." But in a baffling display of institutional and political neglect, the Tbilisi Opera and Ballet Theater refused to provide a stage for Georgia's most internationally acclaimed opera singer. Teona Jorbenadze's request for the theater's stage on May 30, 2024, was met with silence. Not even an explanation, let alone a counteroffer.

A MAESTRO WITHOUT A STAGE—BUT NOT WITHOUT HIS PEOPLE

For decades, Burchuladze's profound bass voice has resonated across the most legendary stages of the world. His performances of Boris Godunov and Mefistofele were not merely roles; they were seismic cultural moments. He was not just a singer, but an ambassador of Georgia's artistic spirit, placing the country firmly on the global operatic map. One might assume that such a monumental figure would be celebrated without hesitation by his homeland's most prestigious opera venue. After all, in 2015, for his 60th birthday, the Tbilisi Sports Palace was filled to capacity with thousands of admirers. What has changed in a decade?

It is that Burchuladze's influence in Georgia extends beyond music. In 2016, he entered the political arena, running in Georgia's parliamentary elections. Though his campaign was unsuccessful, he remained a vocal opponent of the ruling Georgian Dream party. In December 2024, he organized a protest of elderly citizens—grandmothers and grandfathers—against police violence, proving that his voice carries weight not only on the opera stage, but also in the country's social and political life.

And the people of Tbilisi made their own decision. On February 12, 2025, a procession moved from the Tbilisi Philharmonic Hall to the Parliament, commemorating the 70th birthday of Paata Burchuladze. Along the way, in front of the Tbilisi Opera and Ballet Theater, a musical performance took place where music lovers could stage a symbolic act of defiance: stopping in front of the

What does it mean when an internationally acclaimed opera singer is denied a stage in his homeland? In a world where culture is increasingly weaponized by political forces, Burchuladze's concert was more than just a birthday celebration—it was an act of resistance. It asked the question: who owns art? The institutions that gatekeep it, or the people who create and cherish it?

The opera house has always been more than just a venue for music. It has historically served as a stage for political power, national identity, and ideological contestation. From La Scala in Milan, which was a rallying point for Italian unification in the 19th century, to the Bolshoi Theater, long a symbol of Soviet cultural dominance, grand opera institutions are not just buildings—they are mirrors of the political forces that control them.

By moving the 70th birthday celebration to Rustaveli Avenue, the heart of Tbilisi's political life, Burchuladze and his supporters engaged in an act of cultural defiance. The choice of location transformed the concert from a celebration into a statement. In doing so, it aligned with a broader historical pattern: when institutions close their doors, artists take to the streets.

THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF OPERA

Opera, once the preserve of aristocrats, has always wrestled with its elitist reputation. But street performances, from Maria Callas's spontaneous arias outside La Scala to the makeshift concerts of protest movements worldwide, challenge the notion that high culture belongs only within gilded walls.

Burchuladze's anniversary concert in an open, public space followed this trajectory. It was reminiscent of the performances given by tenor Plácido Domingo in public squares and of the 'Opera for the People' initiatives seen in Latin America, where grand arias are sung in city streets rather than in grand halls. In Georgia, where folk traditions deeply intertwine with national identity, relocating an operatic celebration from an institutional stage to the heart of the city reclaimed music for the public sphere. For one evening, Rustaveli Avenue was not just a street; it was an opera house. And Georgia once again witnessed the profound truth that music, when removed from gilded halls, can become the voice of a nation.



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I am Georgian and therefore I am European

Zurab Zhvania, Council of Europe, 1999

