



FOCUS

ON PEACE IN UKRAINE

"A bad peace would be worse than no peace," says NATO Military Chairman Admiral Dragone **PAGE 4**

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Georgian Dream Official Claims Trump's Remarks on Ukraine War Validate Party's Position

BY TEAM GT

Mamuka Mdinardze, Executive Secretary of Georgia's ruling party, Georgian Dream, claims that US President Donald Trump's Tuesday comments on the Ukraine conflict validate the party's stance, which has faced criticism from domestic opposition.

Mdinardze remarked, "What American leaders are now openly discussing was just a few months or years ago enough to brand someone as pro-Russian or a traitor. Truth always finds its way, regardless of how much effort is put into shaping narratives."

Trump's comments on Tuesday sparked debate as he expressed disappointment with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky for complaining about being excluded from talks between the US and Russia aimed at resolving the war. Trump implied that Kyiv could have prevented the conflict, suggesting that Ukraine should have negotiated with Russia to avoid the war.

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Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky and US President Donald Trump. Composite: AP, REX/Shutterstock

MARKETS		STOCKS		COMMODITIES		CURRENCIES		
Price	w/w	m/m	Price	w/w	m/m	Price	w/w	
GEONC 04/26	95.07	+0.2%	Lion Finance Group (BIGED LN)	GBP 51.70	+23.5%	USD / GEL	2.8117	-0.0%
GBAIL 04/28	88.08	+0.3%	Georgia Capital (CGEO LN)	GBP 12.40	+0.6%	EUR / GEL	2.9307	+0.3%
GEBSG 9/12 PERP	98.22	+0.2%	TBC Bank Group (TBCG LN)	GBP 40.00	+30.3%	GBP / GEL	3.5381	+2.1%
SILNET 01/27	101.11	+0.2%	Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	76.04	+2.1%	EUR / USD	1.0423	+0.4%
TBC 8.894 PERP	97.07	+0.8%	Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	2,933.39	+1.0%	GBP / USD	1.2586	+1.1%
TBC 10 1/4 PERP	100.17	+0.6%						
SP 500	6,144.15	+1.5%						
FTSE 250	20,707.79	+0.8%						
DOW JONES 30	44,627.59	+0.6%						
Russell 2000	2,282.46	+1.2%						
FTSE 100	8,712.53	-1.1%						

Mzia Amaglobeli Ends Hunger Strike after 38 Days, Appeals Rejected by Kutaisi Court



Mzia Amaglobeli. Source: FB

BY TEAM GT

Mzia Amaglobeli, the founder of Batumelebi and Netgazeti media outlets, has decided to end her hunger strike on the 38th day. In a letter read by Batumelebi's editor, Eter Turadze, during a briefing at the Vivamed clinic, Amaglobeli explained that following the tragic death of two minor children in Batumi and the public's concern for her health, she would work with doctors to restore her nutrition. She also

expressed her gratitude to the 'Prisoners of Conscience' for their solidarity and urged them to end their hunger strikes as well, stressing the importance of continuing the fight for justice.

Meanwhile, the Kutaisi Court of Appeal rejected, for the second time, the appeal filed by Amaglobeli's lawyers – Maia Mtsariashvili, Jumber Katsamadze, and Razhden Khimshiashvili – against the February 14, 2025, ruling of the Batumi City Court. The appeal was deemed inadmissible, as the human rights defenders had requested the cancellation of the City Court's decision and a change to the pre-detention measure.



Mamuka Mdinardze. Source: gov.ge

Georgian Dream to Restore 'Treason' Article to Criminal Code

BY TEAM GT

By the decision of the Georgian Dream, the article "Treason" will be added to the Criminal Code. The statement about the decision was made by the Executive Secretary of the Georgian Dream, Mamuka Mdinardze, at a briefing after Tuesday's majority session.

Mdinardze claimed that the article had been removed from the Code by the National Movement.

"By our decision, the article 'Treason' will be added to the Criminal Code of Georgia, or it would be more correct to say, it will be restored in the Criminal Code, having been removed by the National Movement. No matter how surprising or not surprising that is, it happened, and it was done prior to the August War, in April 2007," Mdinardze added.

FARA AND A MEDIA LAW 'INSPIRED BY THE UK'

During the same press briefing, Mdinardze also shared additional information about two new pieces of legislation he had announced earlier in February: a law which he said would replace the

controversial foreign agent law and would be a copy of the American Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), and a 'media law' inspired by British legislation.

He said that the two laws will be submitted to parliament and that their initial versions would prevent public sector agencies from receiving benefits from foreign services, and would also exclude civil society organizations from participation in decision-making processes in the government or parliament.

Mdinardze again said that Georgian Dream's version of FARA would allegedly be an exact copy of the American law.

The foreign agent law labels any civil society or media organization that receives at least 20% of its funding from abroad 'organizations carrying out the interests of a foreign power'. Such organizations must register as foreign agents in a special registry and are subject to monitoring every six months, which lawyers have warned could include forcing them to hand over internal communications and confidential sources.

Mdinardze has said that the media law 'mainly concerns "fake news" and will be adopted 'taking into account the principles of the British model'.

Mdinardze again did not provide any further details about the two draft laws.

easyJet to Boost Georgia's Tourism with New Routes, Deputy Minister Says

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

Georgia's Deputy Economy Minister, Mariam Kvrivshvili, announced that British budget airline easyJet will play a key role in raising the country's international profile, as it prepares to launch direct flights from Tbilisi International Airport to London, Geneva, and Milan in late March 2025.

In a statement last Friday, Kvrivshvili said easyJet would utilize "all platforms" to enhance awareness of Georgia, particularly through a series of joint initiatives aimed at boosting tourism. "Together with the airline, we have planned important events and activities to increase awareness of Georgia and stimulate tourist inflows," she explained.

As part of its efforts, easyJet's in-flight magazine Traveller has published an article titled "10 Reasons to Love Tbilisi," showcasing the Georgian capital's rich culture, cuisine, and 8000-year-old winemaking heritage.

Kvrivshvili spoke of the significance of easyJet's entry into the Georgian mar-



ket, calling it a major step in boosting tourism from countries like the United Kingdom, Switzerland, and Italy. She highlighted the government's continued efforts to promote Georgia in "strategically important countries," aimed at ensuring the sustainable growth of the country's tourism industry.

Irakli Karkashadze, Director of the United Airports of Georgia, also celebrated the new routes, noting that the airline's entry into Georgia was a "recognition of the country's airline market's

competitiveness." He added that the new connections would have a "significant impact" on the tourism potential, with hopes for a notable increase in passenger flow from these key European destinations.

The new routes, launching on March 31 from Geneva and April 1 from London and Milan, will run twice a week, marking a pivotal moment in Georgia's tourism strategy. EasyJet, founded in 1995, serves over 1,000 destinations across 35 countries.

Georgia Assumes Energy Community Presidency, Ready to Lead European Energy Integration

BY TEAM GT

Artur Lorkowski, Director of the Energy Community, expressed confidence in Georgia's ability to lead the organization and foster collaboration among its member states. Speaking at a ceremonial reception in Vienna on Thursday, Lorkowski highlighted Georgia's preparedness as it took over the rotating presidency of the Energy Community.

"Georgia has the ability to be a leader and a fair player, which will lead us to success in 2025," Lorkowski said, emphasizing the country's significant progress since joining the Energy Community in 2017.

Under the leadership of the Ministry of Economy, Georgia has made notable strides in meeting the obligations it



Artur Lorkowski

assumed upon membership. "Georgia has prepared very well for this day. Over the past three years, the country has made substantial progress in fulfilling its commitments," Lorkowski added.

He acknowledged Georgia's leadership role in implementing the organization's legislative framework, which positions it as one of the top countries in the community. However, he noted that chairing the Energy Community comes with added responsibilities, particularly in overseeing processes across all member nations.

"There's much work ahead, especially in integrating member countries with EU markets," Lorkowski remarked. He also pointed to the challenging geopolitical climate, with Ukraine and Moldova's markets suffering due to Russia's invasion, stressing that Georgia's leadership skills would be crucial during this difficult period.

"We need Georgia's commitment to fairness and leadership, particularly at this critical time. We are optimistic that Georgia will rise to these challenges and effectively chair the organization," Lorkowski concluded.

Khvicha Kvaratskhelia Scores First Champions League Goal in PSG's 7-0 Victory Over Brest

BY TEAM GT

Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, the Georgian winger for Paris Saint-Germain (PSG), marked his first UEFA Champions League goal for the club in a commanding 7-0 victory over Stade Brestois on February 19. This win secured PSG's advancement to the Round of 16, with a 10-0 aggregate score.

Kvaratskhelia's goal came in the 39th minute, contributing to a match that set records for PSG, including the most dominant European performance in the club's history and Brest's heaviest defeat in their Champions League debut.

Since joining PSG in January 2025 for €70 million, Kvaratskhelia has faced challenges adapting to the team's tactical style under coach Luis Enrique. His recent performances have sparked dis-



Khvicha Kvaratskhelia. Source: MtavariTV

cussions in France regarding his integration into the squad.

Despite the challenges, Kvaratskhelia's goal against Brest highlights his potential to play a key role in PSG's Champions League journey. His performance in this match is a promising sign for both him and the club.



Maka Botchorishvili. Source: gov.ge

Georgian Dream Official Claims Trump's Remarks on Ukraine War Validate Party's Position

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"I'm very disappointed, I hear that they're upset about not having a seat [at the talks]," Trump said from his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida. He added, "A half-baked negotiator could have secured a settlement years ago without the loss of much land." Trump further criticized Zelensky, saying, "You should have never started it. You could have made a deal." He then labeled him a "dictator without elections" and accused him of prolonging the war for personal gain.

Trump's comments echo Moscow's demands, particularly his suggestion that Ukraine hold elections as part of the settlement, a move that would align with Russia's long-standing expectations.

The US president also indicated that he might meet Russian President Vladimir Putin before the end of the month, a statement that has raised alarm among European leaders concerned about Washington's shifting stance on Russia. Trump's approach stands in stark contrast to the strong support for Ukraine from other Western leaders, particularly within the European Union, who have voiced concerns about Zelensky's exclusion from the negotiations.

European Union officials have repeatedly emphasized the need to include Ukraine in any peace negotiations. An EU spokesperson stated, "We need American strength, not concessions to end this war."

In response to President Trump's remarks, European leaders convened

emergency meetings to discuss the potential impact on EU-US relations. A European diplomat noted, "We cannot allow President Putin to drive a wedge between the US and Europe." EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen stated, "Let's not do him the favor of dividing us."

Trump's remarks also sparked controversy at home, with US lawmakers from both parties expressing disapproval. Senator Dick Durbin condemned Trump's comments, stating, "The 46,000 Ukrainians who have died defending their country from Putin's invasion deserve more than the insulting rant President Trump delivered this morning."

Zelensky has criticized the US-Russia talks, saying that any efforts to end the war must be "fair" and involve European countries as key stakeholders. The Ukrainian president postponed his trip to Saudi Arabia, where the talks between the US and Russia were taking place.

For Georgia's ruling party, however, Trump's remarks seem to justify their more cautious approach to the ongoing conflict. Mdinardze claims the evolving narrative surrounding the war is seen as evidence that Georgia's stance on the issue has been vindicated, despite intense domestic political pressure.

The ruling party's alignment with Trump's perspective has intensified debates about the country's foreign policy direction and its relations with Western allies. Critics argue that Georgia Dream's stance may distance Georgia from its pro-Western populace and European integration aspirations.

Maka Botchorishvili Highlights National Interests as Key to EU Integration, Critiques EU Approach

BY TEAM GT

Georgian Dream's Foreign Minister Maka Botchorishvili emphasized the government's focus on "prioritizing national interests," particularly those vital for the country's European integration. In an interview with the Georgian Public Broadcaster, Botchorishvili said that security and stability are essential for Georgia's path to the European Union.

She also criticized the European Union, claiming that Brussels was building policies based on "misconceptions" about Georgia. "Georgia serves as a prime example of

how Brussels is creating misconceptions and then formulating policies based on these inaccuracies," Botchorishvili stated, arguing that these misjudgments were part of a broader effort to manipulate the country.


The Minister further claimed that the EU was being used as an instrument in a planned change of government within Georgia. "Who planned it and where it was planned is another matter, but the European Union has been used, and is still being used, in this process," she said.

Botchorishvili responded sharply to accusations from Western leaders that the Georgian government had engaged in "anti-Western rhetoric." She countered, saying that "anything that highlights the truth and emphasizes Georgia's national interests" had been unfairly labeled as

such. "We have never said that our national interest is not to be in the European Union," she clarified. "On the contrary, we have always said that our national interest is to be in the European Union, but this must be achieved through dialogue."


She further stressed that Georgia's EU membership could not be achieved without engaging with the democratically elected government, which she argued had the support of the people. "If Brussels continues to ignore the democratic government, this process will be damaged," she warned.




Botchorishvili also highlighted the importance of economic development and peace in the EU integration process, pointing out that "without stability, we cannot offer our citizens a better standard of living."




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Xeme restaurant is located on the 31st floor in The Biltmore Tbilisi Hotel





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

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"A Bad Peace... Would Be Worse Than No Peace" – Interview with NATO Military Chairman Admiral Dragone

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

I would support any peacekeeping operation accepted by the parties, going there and guaranteeing a just peace and long-lasting stability in Ukraine, its sovereignty, its freedom, its territory, and a strong guarantee for the future, - says Admiral Giuseppe Cavo Dragone, Chairman of NATO's Military Committee, in an interview with RFE/RL.

Vazha Tavberidze spoke with Admiral Dragone at the Munich Security Conference about the prospects for securing peace in the Russia-Ukraine war, Ukraine's potential NATO membership, and Black Sea security.

LET'S START WITH YOUR RECENT VISIT TO UKRAINE – THE REALITY YOU SAW THERE, ESPECIALLY YOUR ASSESSMENT OF THE BATTLEFIELD SITUATION, AND YOUR TAKE ON THE WAR'S TRAJECTORY.

I was there last week, had the chance to meet the Minister of Defense, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and President Zelensky. The spirit is still strong, they are determined. They believe they can succeed. They also think peace can be reached. I think so too. A just peace, peace through strength – because peace through weakness only makes further aggression more likely. A bad peace... would be worse than no peace. On the battlefield, it's fluid. The Russian Federation is making small advances at the price of heavy losses. From the western military point of view, they are really paying an extremely heavy price for very slow advances and small gains in terms of terrain.

THERE IS A CONSENSUS AMONG ANALYSTS THAT UKRAINE IS ON THE BACK FOOT. SOME EVEN SAY THAT UKRAINE IS LOSING ON THE BATTLEFIELD. WOULD YOU SAY THAT'S A FAIR ASSESSMENT?

I would not. The other thing I would point out is that Ukraine does have strong support from NATO member countries. They're backing them up, making an effort that has never been seen before, and they have the determination to keep doing this. On one hand, we want to speak about peace, we think it is time for peace to come. But on the other hand, we also want to strengthen the Ukrainians, so whenever they decide to sit at the negotiation table, they will do so from a very strong position.

THE CURRENT US STANCE IS ON NOT HAVING ANY NATO BOOTS ON THE GROUND IN UKRAINE, AND ALSO NOT PLEDGING ANY SECURITY GUARANTEES. WHAT ALTERNATIVES DO YOU SEE IF NATO BOOTS ARE OUT OF THE QUESTION, IF NATO SECURITY GUARANTEES ARE OFF THE TABLE? WHAT CAN BE DONE?

We can go back to our past without inventing anything new. There are international organizations, like the United Nations, that have already been doing this.

THE UN, WHICH HAS RUSSIA AND CHINA ON THE SECURITY COUNCIL?

We have to consider everything. I wouldn't keep anything off the table. We need to try and find what will support what we want to achieve and how we can do it.



To avoid past mistakes, we must ensure our soldiers, who will safeguard and monitor the peacekeeping agreement, have the power, rules of engagement, and armaments to make it happen

It could be a UN or EU operation. A coalition of the willing could also be another option. But to avoid mistakes made in the past, whenever this happens, we must be sure that our soldiers, the military who will safeguard and monitor the peacekeeping agreement, have the power, the rules of engagement, and also the armaments to make this happen. You can't go there with just your rifle because you need to be able to fight whoever breaks the rules, whoever breaks the peace agreement. So they must decide who is going there and give them the proper means, rules, and strength to enforce what they are there to do.

IF THIS COALITION OF THE WILLING MATERIALIZES, AND THERE IS A PEACEKEEPING FORCE THAT'S NOT COVERED BY NATO AND THEREFORE NOT UNDER ARTICLE 5, WHAT HAPPENS IF THEY HAVE TO ENGAGE? WILL ARTICLE 5 COME INTO PLAY SOMEHOW?

No, no. It will be nation X or Z that will send their forces.

ANOTHER US STANCE IS THAT AFTER THE TALKS ARE OVER, WHATEVER THE OUTCOME MIGHT BE, EUROPE SHOULD SAFEGUARD UKRAINE'S SECURITY. IS EUROPE STRONG ENOUGH TO SHOULDER THAT BURDEN?

Europe is increasing its defense capacities right now. This is a path to be followed with determination, strength, and speed. Europe already has some capabilities, but it depends on what the mandate is, what we want to achieve there, and in which area. So, it has some capabilities, more to come.

IF WE WERE TO TALK ABOUT A PEACEKEEPING FORCE, WHAT SIZE OF CONTINGENT MIGHT WE BE TALKING ABOUT

"Some are talking about 200,000, others about 30,000. It's early to say, as it would depend on a number of factors.

WOULD YOU SUPPORT SENDING EUROPEAN PEACEKEEPING FORCES?

I would support any peacekeeping operation accepted by the parties, going there and guaranteeing a just peace and long-lasting stability in Ukraine, its sover-



Journalist Vazha Tavberidze with Admiral Dragone



In negotiations, the first thing to think about is a long-lasting, just peace. NATO membership is a secondary discussion

eighty, its freedom, its territory, and a strong guarantee for the future. Because if we don't do this properly, there is no reason to be confident that something similar won't happen again – look at 1998, 2008, 2014, 2022. Maybe there will be something again in Ukraine, or maybe somewhere else.

THE PREDICTIONS ABOUT DIRECT CONFRONTATION BETWEEN RUSSIA AND NATO, WITH RUSSIA BECOMING BOLD ENOUGH TO ATTACK NATO – WE'VE SEEN SOME FORECASTS FROM THE BRITISH, SOME FROM THE NORDICS. 5 YEARS, 10 YEARS, SO ON. WHAT'S YOUR TAKE?

I don't foresee this as being very probable, but it's not impossible either. Of course, if they attack one of the NATO countries, there will be a strongest reaction from the whole alliance. On a con-

ventional confrontation level, NATO is way ahead of Russia. Also, on nuclear confrontation, with the US, UK, and French arsenals, NATO is way, way ahead. I don't think this would be in Putin's interests.

I THINK ANY MILITARY STRATEGIST IN THE WEST COULD ALSO SAY IT WAS NOT IN THEIR INTEREST TO HAVE A THREE-YEAR-LONG, AND STILL GOING, WAR IN UKRAINE, BUT THEY ARE STILL DOING IT, DESPITE THE LOSSES.

But this started as a four-day special military operation. That was the plan. And it wasn't just a failure – it was a total failure. He probably thought he would do this like in Crimea, three days, almost bloodless.

LAST WEEK IN BRUSSELS, SECRETARY GENERAL RUTTE TOLD US THAT IF RUSSIA WERE TO ATTACK NATO TOMORROW, THEY WOULD LOSE WITHIN A WEEK. DO YOU SUBSCRIBE TO THAT VIEW?

Yes, I agree. But whether it would be over in one week or not, Russia would quickly end up as a loser.

IF RUSSIA CAN'T DEFEAT NATO NOW, IT CERTAINLY WON'T BE ABLE TO WITH UKRAINE AS A MEMBER, GIVEN UKRAINE'S BATTLE-HARDENED SOLDIERS AND RESOURCES. IF RUSSIA IS GUARANTEED TO LOSE, WHAT'S THE REASON NOT TO ADMIT UKRAINE?

Nobody says that Ukraine will never be admitted – it will, when the time and conditions are right. Let's start from the fixed point, which is the Washington summit, July 2024, where Ukraine was

told it is on a path to join NATO. That is irreversible. Whoever says otherwise is mistaken, but it does require consensus. Maybe it will happen, maybe not, but Ukraine has the long-term desire to become a member of NATO. They will go through the normal admission process that we apply to everybody. First, you must want to become a member of this club, then you do the reforms, and go through the necessary transformation. They are doing that, but they are not at the end of it. Then, the alliance will examine everything and decide. No one can say that Ukraine or any other country won't ever become NATO members – neither Mr. Putin nor anyone else."

ANOTHER FACTOR IN WHETHER A COUNTRY IS ADMITTED IS WHETHER IT ADDS TO NATO SECURITY, RIGHT? WOULD UKRAINE ADD TO NATO SECURITY?

"Of course. In negotiations, the first thing they have to think about is a long-lasting, just peace. NATO membership – yes or no – is a secondary discussion. If we are professionals and manage to achieve a long-lasting, just peace for Ukraine, that's the first step. This is the point everyone is trying to reach.

YOU BEING AN ADMIRAL, I WOULD BE REMISS NOT TO ASK YOU ABOUT NAVAL MATTERS, PARTICULARLY BLACK SEA SECURITY. HOW IS IT LOOKING?

There will be a lot to do in the future there. The coastal member states have already set up a counter-mining task force, and there will be a lot of cleaning up to be done. Then there is monitoring. These are international matters and they will remain as such. I think we will see a stronger Black Sea presence, with at least three NATO member states present.

Ukraine Latest: Trump Tells "Dictator" Zelensky to "Move Fast or Lose Ukraine"

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

US President Donald Trump denounced Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky as a "dictator" on Wednesday and warned he had to move quickly to secure peace or risk losing his country, deepening the recent standoff between the two leaders that has alarmed European officials.

The attacks, a day after Trump claimed Ukraine was to blame for Russia's 2022 invasion, heightened concerns among US allies in Europe that Trump's approach to ending the Russia-Ukraine conflict could benefit Moscow.

"A Dictator without Elections, Zelensky better move fast or he is not going to have a country left," Trump wrote on social media.

In response, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha said no one could force his country to give in.

"We will defend our right to exist," Sybiha said on X.

Later, while speaking to investors and executives in Miami, Trump doubled down on his comments, again calling Zelensky a "dictator," and suggesting the Ukrainian president wanted to prolong the war to "keep the gravy train going,"

Zelensky: Trump's claim that my approval rating is just 4% is Russian disinformation. Any attempt to replace me will fail

a reference to US military aid.

Zelensky's five-year term was supposed to end in 2024, but elections cannot be held under martial law, which Ukraine imposed in February 2022 in response to Russia's invasion.

Trump's outburst followed Zelensky's comments on Tuesday that the US president was parroting Russian disinformation when he said that Ukraine "should never have started" the war, which began with Russia's full-scale invasion three years ago.

Russia has seized some 20% of Ukraine and is slowly but steadily gaining territory in the east. Moscow said its "special military operation" responded to an existential threat posed by Kyiv's pursuit of NATO membership. Ukraine and the West call Russia's action an imperialist land grab.

The Ukrainian leader said Trump's claim that his approval rating was just 4% was Russian disinformation and that any attempt to replace him would fail.

"We have evidence that these figures are being discussed between America and Russia. That is, President Trump ... unfortunately lives in this disinformation space," Zelensky told Ukrainian TV.

The latest poll from the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, from early February, found 57% of Ukrainians trust Zelensky.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Wednesday that Ukraine would not be excluded from negotiations to end the war. Still, success would depend on raising the level of trust between Moscow and Washington.

Putin, speaking a day after Russia and the United States held their first talks on how to end the three-year conflict, also said it would take time to set up a summit with the US President, which both men have said they want, and there was "no point in meeting just to drink tea."

He praised the outcome of Tuesday's meeting in Saudi Arabia, where Russia and the US agreed to appoint negotiating teams on Ukraine and discussed ways to reset their bilateral relations, which the Kremlin described as "below zero" under Trump's predecessor Joe Biden.

"In my opinion, we have taken a first

Russian forces have taken back more than 800 square km of territory from Ukraine in the Kursk region

step to resume work in a variety of areas that are of mutual interest," Putin said in televised comments. These included issues relating to the Middle East, global energy markets and cooperation in space, he said.

"Without increasing the level of trust between Russia and the United States, it is impossible to resolve many issues, including the Ukrainian crisis."

Ukraine and European governments were not invited to the talks in the Saudi capital, which heightened their concern that Russia and the United States might cut a deal that ignores their vital security interests.

But Putin said Russia had never rejected talks with the Europeans or with Kyiv, and it was they who had refused to talk to Moscow.

'NO ONE IS EXCLUDING UKRAINE,' PUTIN SAYS

"If they want, please, let these negotiations take place. And we will be ready to return to the table for negotiations," he said.

"No one is excluding Ukraine," he added, saying that there was therefore no need for a "hysterical" reaction to the US-Russia talks.

The European Union's diplomatic service has proposed boosting the bloc's military aid for Ukraine, aiming to show continued support for Kyiv as the United States and Russia have begun talks about



President Volodymyr Zelensky. Photo by Mads Nissen

ending the war.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky has repeatedly called on his allies to honor all their promises to supply Ukraine with weapons, including those to counter Russian air attacks.

The EU proposal, in a brief paper that was seen by Reuters, suggests each member state fulfill a financial quota based on the size of its economy to produce a package that would include 1.5 million rounds of artillery ammunition to be delivered this year.

Diplomats held initial talks on the plan - first reported by Politico - this week in Brussels, and EU foreign ministers may discuss it on Monday, diplomats said. But no decisions on the proposal are expected at that meeting, they noted.

The proposal by the EU's External Action Service does not put an estimated value on the package, but diplomats said the aim was to come up with a plan worth billions of euros.

The proposal says the main goals of the package would be to supply at least 1.5 million rounds of large-caliber artillery ammunition, as well as air defense systems, missiles for deep precision strikes and drones.

The EU says its members have provided some 48.5 billion euros in military aid to Ukraine since Russia invaded its neighbor in February 2022.

Meanwhile, key battlefield updates on the 1,092nd day of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine are as follows:

Russian forces have taken back more than 800 square km of territory from Ukraine in the Kursk region of western Russia, or about 64% of the total taken by Ukraine since an incursion began last year, Colonel General Sergei Rudskoi, head of Russia's General Staff, said.

Rudskoi also said that Russia now controls 75% of Ukraine's Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions and more than 99% of the Luhansk region. He said the four regions are now legally part of Russia and will never be returned to Ukraine.

A man was killed in a Ukrainian drone attack in Russia's Belgorod region, regional Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said.

A "massive" Russian attack on the port city of Odesa in southwestern Ukraine left four people hospitalized and a large residential area - covering 14 schools and about 160,000 residents - without heat, water or electricity, Mayor Genadiy Trukhanov said.

Russia now controls 75% of Ukraine's Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions

A Russian guided bomb killed at least one person in Ukraine's northeastern city of Kupiansk, said Kharkiv region's Governor Oleh Syniehubov.

Ukraine said Russia launched 167 drones and two missiles in overnight attacks. Ukrainian forces shot down 106 of those drones, while 56 more failed to reach their targets. They did not specify what happened to the remaining five.

Ukraine's military also said they destroyed a North Korean self-propelled M-1978 Koksan howitzer in the Luhansk region, marking the first time a weapon of this nature has been hit.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has announced that fighters from the 810th brigade crossed into Ukrainian territory in the Sumy region overnight. Kyiv has denied the claim.

Putin also suggested a Ukrainian drone attack on the Caspian Pipeline Consortium in southern Russia may have been coordinated with European powers, saying Kyiv could not have carried out such an attack without Western intelligence.

Kremlin forces are a little more than 6 km from the Shevchenko lithium deposit in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region, and are advancing on it from three angles, the Reuters news agency reported, citing open-source data from Ukrainian military blog DeepState.

A NOTE ON THE ZELENSKY PHOTO

During a visit to Ukraine, Danish photographer Mads Nissen met President Volodymyr Zelensky and proposed capturing a portrait. Nissen suggested, "Just think, and I will see for myself what you feel now, what you are going through... what gives you strength in this difficult time." After a brief pause, Zelensky agreed, responding, "OK." This intimate moment was captured in a poignant photograph by Nissen.



Zelensky and Trump. Source: AP

From Western Polarization to Eastern Autocracy: How the Western Liberal-Conservative Divide Fuels Georgia's Illiberal Turn



Image source: Moor Studio/Getty Images

BLOG BY KAKHABER KALICHAVA

One peculiarity of contemporary liberalism is that, despite its claims to embrace pluralism, free speech, and tolerance, it frequently adopts a rigid stance toward conservative viewpoints. Many liberal organizations and academic societies have resorted to censorship, moral judgment, and outright rejection of opposing viewpoints rather than engaging in dialogue. As a result, right-wing groups have become more radical as conservatives, particularly working-class voters and traditionalists, have ended up being distanced from the political mainstream.

One notable aspect of leftist intolerance is the incorrect application of historical analogies, particularly the labeling of conservative and right-wing viewpoints as "fascist" or "far-right." While extreme groups undoubtedly possess these characteristics, conservative parties and individuals in general have been unfairly lumped together with them.

During the late Cold War era, people who disagreed with moderate conservative leaders, such as Margaret Thatcher, the prime minister of the United Kingdom from 1979 to 1990, and Ronald Reagan in the United States, frequently labeled them dictatorial or even "fascist." Political rivals and left-leaning news organizations gave them a lot of negative publicity. Because of her actions, such as limiting trade unions and implementing free-market reforms, Thatcher was accused of being a tyrant. Despite these claims, her administration backed democratic procedures and institutions. Similarly, the US Ronald Reagan faced criticism for his aggressive foreign policy and economic reforms. Those who disapproved of his policies labeled him "fascist," particularly in regards to military actions and backing particular foreign regimes. However, these labels were not accurate depictions of his rule and were primarily employed as insults. The Reagan administration strongly complied with the American Constitution. His actions sparked controversy, but they did not undermine democratic institutions.

Similarly, French president Jacques Chirac was frequently criticized for his stringent immigration laws and national identity beliefs, which were viewed as being overly conservative, despite his support for social welfare initiatives and European unification. During his tenure

as Prime Minister of Australia from 1996 to 2007, John Howard fought against progressive social developments and imposed stringent immigration restrictions, which led to accusations of authoritarianism. Nevertheless, a democratic mandate gave his initiatives a lot of support, indicating that the electorate supported them. Thus, it has become more difficult to see the clear picture due to political hyperbole, media prejudice, and social media restrictions.

According to Jonathan Haidt, a social psychologist at NYU, intellectual environments that are overly closed off might result in "bubble effects," which make it more difficult for leftists to comprehend or relate to conservative viewpoints. In his 2018 book, *The Coddling of the American Mind*, co-authored with Greg Lukianoff, Haidt claims that democratic discourse has been harmed by the emergence of "safetyism" - the idea that society should be protected against certain dangerous or harmful ideas. According to him, schools have actually made it more difficult for children to think critically about opposing viewpoints rather than protecting them, by excluding them from views they disagree with.

Voters' disengagement from complex political discourse can be observed in two primary ways. Right-wing views have not been eliminated by suppressing conservative ideas through political discussion, biased media, or social censure; rather, it has driven them to more solitary locations where they frequently become more radical. A growing number of conservative-leaning voters believe that the only viable political options are leaders like Trump in the US, Orbán in Hungary, and the AfD in Germany, and feel cut off from liberal news. In this context, people frequently make political decisions not because they genuinely care about democracy and government, but because they dislike their alleged ideological rivals. This involves both conservatives and leftists. Ignoring opposing viewpoints prevents real discussion and promotes ideological solidarity among liberals.

Conservatives dissatisfied with mainstream politics, on the other hand, started supporting populist leaders rather than promoting thoughtful political discourse. Because of the negative feedback loop that is produced, there is consequently less space for free expression or consensus. Both ideological factions solidify their positions even further. People who are unwilling to cooperate across party lines are a problem for democracies. Maintaining democratic institutions in

a world when gaps are widening requires reviving a culture of open dialogue and understanding.

THE THEORY OF "DEEP STATE" AND THE CONSERVATIVE ATTACK ON DEMOCRACY

Numerous conspiracy theories, including the "Deep State" theory, were able to flourish as a result of the aforementioned communication breakdown between the two ideological parties. The idea that a strong, entrenched, and unelected bureaucratic elite dominates the backroom and threatens democracy in government first surfaced in Western politics as a conspiracy theory. Although the theory originates from the Turkish political context of the 1920s, it gained popularity in the United States through right-wing populist rhetoric during Trump's first term, 2016-2020.

The "Deep State" narrative has been utilized by individuals such as Steve Bannon and Donald Trump to justify delegitimizing opposition, dismantling regulatory agencies, and conducting political purges. The conservative establishment has become an authoritarian force in its attempt to "drain the swamp," dismantling democratic checks and balances and handing over authority to unaccountable individuals like Elon Musk. Elon Musk's alleged Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) is one of the most obvious examples of this tendency. Despite being marketed as a necessary attempt to reduce bureaucracy, Musk's nomination as a private citizen with no prior government experience is indicative of a larger issue: the privatization of government and the lack of political supervision. Ironically, the conservative elite's strategy for opposing the so-called "Deep State" is modeled after the very powerful institutions they claim to oppose. They establish their own "deep state" by prioritizing unelected tech tycoons and business executives over elected authorities and institutional structures. The characteristics of this "deep state" include crony capitalism, corporate dominance, and a lack of public accountability. This reform does not eliminate bureaucratic waste; rather, it gives wealthy individuals who back the conservative establishment more influence.

Putting Musk and other unelected officials in charge of government transformation is a real attempt by the conservative elite to undermine democratic values. Musk's previous actions, such as purchasing Twitter (now X), endorsing right-wing politicians, and becoming actively involved

in politics, demonstrate how global companies are increasingly attempting to alter political narratives without following the democratic process.

The conservative elite in the US is increasingly reducing democratic institutions to issues rather than significant governmental components. Strangely enough, though, as conservatives work to overthrow the "Deep State," they also establish their own version of it, with corporate elites in charge rather than elected representatives. Many people will be impacted by this shift.

The current rise of the right-wing populist organizations in the West aims to subvert democratic governance in favor of a corporately supported authoritarianism. Right-wing populists use the claim that government institutions are corrupt and ineffectual as an excuse for dismantling them. The democratic checks and balances are weakened as a result. As unelected business leaders increasingly influence public policy, the role of elected authorities is being undermined. This is establishing a system in which companies set national goals. In their quest for power under the guise of opposing the "Deep State," conservatives' authoritarian inclinations become more pronounced. This movement has the potential to enhance the exact conspiracies it purports to oppose by transforming democratic institutions into tools for elite control over the populace.

GEORGIA'S UTILIZATION OF WESTERN IDEOLOGICAL CONFLICTS

Georgia's ruling party, Georgian Dream, has an opportunity to gain more power on a national level as a result of this ideological conflict in the West between liberal democracy and the rise of conservative authoritarianism. The administration has positioned itself as a defender of traditional values and a champion of Georgian national security by adopting the same rhetoric as right-wing populist movements in the West, while simultaneously restricting democratic rights. This tactic gives the ruling party more authority, while eliminating opposition under the pretext of defending its independence from external forces.

Using narratives akin to those of Donald Trump in the US and Viktor Orbán in Hungary is a key component of Georgian Dream's strategy. The administration views itself as the final bastion of Georgian conservatism and believes that Western democracy is becoming increasingly authoritarian and intolerant. This position aids the party in undermining the legitimacy of its civil society members and political rivals by depicting them as foreign agents.

The "Deep State" theory, or the so-called Global War Party, has also been used as a political weapon by the Georgian Dream government. By promoting the notion that independent media, other parties, and NGOs are all involved in a Western-led conspiracy to undermine state stability and somehow involve Georgia in the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war, Georgian Dream has increased its hold of power.

Although Georgian Dream bases its political strategy on the rising right-wing ideology in the West, it is not attempting to emulate Western conservative models. Rather, it is utilizing this ideological shift as a pretext to impose an authoritarian regime similar to those in Belarus, Russia, and Azerbaijan, which include suppressing the opposition, limiting civil society, and undermining democratic institutions.

In contrast, Western right-wing populist politicians at least to some extent continue to operate inside democratic structures. By intentionally doing this, the ruling party of Georgia can create a government structure that closely resem-

bles the authoritarian governments it claims to oppose, while also appearing to be a member of the global conservative movement.

Using this type of ideological rhetoric to appeal to the conservative electorate, the government has implemented policies that restrict political liberties. Based on comparable legislation in Russia, the so-called "Russian Law," passed in 2024, requires NGOs that receive funding from sources outside of Georgia to register as "foreign agents." This has made it much more difficult for people to discuss politics, since the government has been able to restrict independent journalism and civil society organizations.

The violent dispersal of protests which began in early 2024 demonstrates a broader attempt to stifle opposition under the pretext of maintaining national stability. Things deteriorated after the October 26 elections, as Georgian Dream stepped up in its effort to threaten opposition organizations and NGOs. The administration has stated unequivocally that it intends to use the 2024 law to disband major opposition parties and hinder the operations of independent media.

With closer political and economic links to Baku's dictatorial leadership, the Georgian Dream administration is moving closer to the Azerbaijani political model. Although the Georgian government hasn't made any explicitly pro-Russian statements, Moscow benefits from its anti-Western position, since it lessens Western influence in the South Caucasus. This alteration was noticed by Russia when Irakli Kobakhidze, Prime Minister of Georgia, declared on November 28, 2024, that the cabinet had chosen to suspend negotiations with the EU until 2028. Within an hour after this statement, Russian President Vladimir Putin praised Georgian officials directly for their "pragmatic and independent" foreign political approach. This widespread backing was an unmistakable indication that Moscow believes Georgian Dream's principles align with its own objectives. Although the Georgian government claims that its objectives are unrelated to those of Russia, the increasing praise for Georgian Dream's programs by Russian officials indicates that Russia views them as beneficial to its overall foreign policy.

As time goes by, Georgia's future is becoming less clear. The administration may worsen domestic conditions if it continues to restrict political liberties. The 2024 violent crackdowns were met with strong opposition, particularly from Georgia's youth and civil society organizations. Large-scale protests could result from more severe measures, further destabilizing the political environment. The West may increase economic sanctions on Georgia and cut it off from crucial security and economic links if it continues its shift towards authoritarian governance. At a time when regional security is already precarious, further isolation would leave the nation more vulnerable to Russian influence.

2025 will be crucial in determining whether Georgia continues down this authoritarian path or if external and internal factors drive a shift. The administration has so far benefited from its strategy of exploiting ideological divisions in the West in terms of maintaining political power, but it is unclear what the long-term consequences of this power abuse will bring to Georgia. If the country persists in its authoritarian direction, it will mark a major shift away from its historical political commitment to democratic ideals, making it unlikely that these aspirations will be fully restored in the near future.

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Georgian Deputy Economy Minister Discusses Investment Opportunities with Austrian Industry Leaders



Georgian Deputy Economy Minister Genadi Arveladze. Source: bp.ge

BY TEAM GT

On Wednesday, Georgian Deputy Economy Minister Genadi Arveladze engaged with members of the Federation of Austrian Industries, a key organization representing the largest industrial manufacturers in Austria. The meeting centered on showcasing Georgia's economic trends and investment opportunities.

Arveladze took the opportunity to highlight the longstanding, fruitful economic partnership between Georgia and Austria, pointing out that Austrian investments in Georgia have surpassed \$430

million, spanning diverse sectors including construction, logistics, energy, food production, and tourism.

He also drew attention to Georgia's strong economic performance, noting that the country ranks third in the World Bank's inaugural Business Ready report. "Georgia's low inflation rates and economic stability further underscore our country's resilience," Arveladze added. "Our policy-driven growth, sustained by infrastructure spending, foreign investments, and ongoing structural reforms, positions us for continued success."

Arveladze emphasized the country's "attractive investment environment," citing Georgia's liberal tax rates, green energy initiatives, low risks, and access

to a vast global market of 2.3 billion people through free trade agreements.

Additionally, he highlighted the country's strategic infrastructure projects aimed at further integrating Georgia into international transport and logistics networks. Austrian postal and banking representatives also expressed keen interest in exploring investment opportunities in Georgia.

Following the meeting, the Ministry of Economy reported that the Austrian delegation showed "great interest" in Georgia's potential, suggesting the establishment of closer collaboration between the business communities of both nations. They proposed organizing joint business forums and exhibitions to deepen bilateral economic relations.

UNDP: Georgia's Energy Sector Leads in Greenhouse Gas Emissions



Photo: Live Science.

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

A recent study, developed by the partnership between the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Absorption Inventory, revealed that four primary economic

sectors are responsible for the bulk of emissions.

Emissions in Georgia are primarily concentrated in:

Energy (65.78%) - The largest contributor, primarily due to fossil fuel consumption.

Industry & Product Use (12.79%) - Emissions have nearly quadrupled since 1990.

Agriculture (11.50%) - A stable source

of emissions over the years.

Waste (9.93%) - Increasing due to rapid urbanization.

The report was put together with the support of the Ministry of Environment and Agriculture of Georgia and the Center for Environmental Information and Education. It emphasizes the necessity for urgent climate action, primarily in the energy sector, to cut emissions.



Georgia's Fuel Imports Rise, Russia Remains Top Supplier

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

Georgia imported 143,000 tons of oil worth \$107 million, an increase of 33% in 2025. At the same time, the volume of fuel imports also grew by 45%.

Data implies that such an increase can essentially be attributed to surging fuel purchases to 49% from Russia. Additionally, Georgia bought petroleum products with \$55 million from Russia in January

alone, contributing to its status as the leading supplier.

Top Fuel Exporters to Georgia in January 2025:

Russia - \$55.4 million; 78,267 tons
Romania - \$17.9 million; 23,798 tons
Bulgaria - \$17.3 million; 22,872 tons
Uzbekistan - \$3.0 million; 5,100 tons
Turkey - \$2.5 million; 2,198 tons

For comparative purposes, Georgia imported oil worth \$1.3 billion in 2024, with Russia accounting for \$520 mln of these purchases, followed by Bulgaria and Romania with \$184 mln and \$164 mln, respectively.

Georgia Hits Record Employment Rates

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

The Ministry of Economy of Georgia reported that the country had a record-breaking low unemployment rate in 2024, marking a 2.5% drop to 13.9%. In other words, the number of unemployed individuals decreased by 34,700, totaling 227,000.

Naturally, the employment rate also hit a historic high, with an increase of 67,900, marking the overall employed

population as 1.4 million. In conclusion, the employment rate grew by 2.6% to 47.1%.

"Over the past three years, we have observed a stable decline in unemployment and a growth in job opportunities. Compared to 2021, the unemployment rate has dropped by 6.7%, while the number of employed individuals has increased by 185,000," the Ministry officially stated.

The workforce composition stands at 40,000 hired employees, while the self-employed sector grew by 27,900 individuals, totaling 441,500.

Batumi Real Estate Prices and Market Activity Rise in Early 2025

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

Colliers Georgia recently published a report revealing that the real estate market in Batumi significantly grew in January 2025, with both property prices and transaction volumes going up.

The weighted average price of newly built flats increased by 8% year-over-year, reaching \$1,130 per square meter. Prices for older flats increase even more,

rising 16.2% to \$1,100 per square meter.

The market activity also strengthened:

Transactions for newly built flats increased by 3%, while old flat sales saw a 5.7% rise.

Overall, 1,049 residential flats were sold in Batumi in January, a 3.2% increase in transactions.

The total market size expanded by 17.4%, reaching \$57 million for the month.

2024 saw a sharp decline of 2% in total residential transactions despite growth in other areas, with 15,034 units sold. Nevertheless, the annual market size increased by 6% to \$778 million.



Photo: Forbes Georgia.

The Youth of Uzbekistan – The Driving Force of Progress



BY NURULLO RASULOV

It is a simple yet profound truth: the future of a nation lies in the hands of its youth. To ensure that this future is bright and prosperous, the education and upbringing of young people must be at the heart of state policy. Today, educating the younger generation in line with modern requirements is a complex challenge. Where, 50 years ago, knowledge was updated every 30–32 years, just 20 years ago, this period shortened to 15–16 years, and today, changes are occurring even more rapidly. In such conditions, nurturing the youth according to new standards, fostering a generation capable of elevating their country's prestige on the international stage—one that possesses deep knowledge, advanced thinking, and entrepreneurial skills while driving economic growth—requires significant state investment and unwavering determination.

With a population of around 38 million, of which 60% are young people, Uzbekistan has elevated youth policy to the level of national priority. Thanks to government support, many young people, particularly those from financially disadvantaged families and remote regions, are given the opportunity to realise their potential and find their place in life. This enables them to actively contribute to shaping a bright future for their homeland.

Uzbekistan is implementing large-scale reforms in higher education. One of the key measures aimed at providing young people with access to excellent education is the creation of opportunities for studying at prestigious foreign universities. As part of this initiative, 1,000 talented and promising young individuals are selected annually and awarded government grants to study at universities ranked among the world's top 100. Upon graduation, they are directly included in the National Talent Pool, allowing them to secure employment in government institutions without undergoing a competitive selection process. This, in turn, paves the way for them to contribute to state governance



in the future.

Additionally, young scholars who obtain academic degrees from TOP-100 universities can benefit from interest-free loans to purchase housing, further encouraging their return and integration into national development efforts.

In recent years, Uzbekistan's youth have also actively demonstrated their abilities in the field of information technology on the international stage. By winning international competitions in

mathematics, programming, and engineering, young specialists are strengthening the country's reputation.

Particular attention should be given to the start-up ecosystem: youth-led projects in artificial intelligence, financial technology, and block chain are rapidly developing with support from venture funds and the government. The establishment of the IT Park in Tashkent has turned it into a hub of innovation for young developers. Thanks to this, many start-ups — such as Paymart, AIMobile, and others — have successfully entered the global market. Moreover, Uzbek IT specialists are increasingly participating in international hackathons and forums, representing the country on a global level.

In recent years, Uzbekistan has witnessed the emergence of numerous successful youth-led start-ups in e-commerce, financial technologies, and environmental solutions. One of the most prominent projects, Makro Express, founded by young entrepreneurs, has made online delivery of goods convenient and accessible across the country.

Agricultural and environmental start-ups are also gaining momentum. Young farmers are introducing innovative projects for organic farming using modern technologies. State programmes like

“Yoshlar – kelajagimiz” (Youth – Our Future) provide vital support to young entrepreneurs, helping them launch projects, attract investments, and contribute to economic growth and sustainable entrepreneurship.

The remarkable achievements of Uzbekistan's youth in recent years are a testament to the country's ability to keep pace with the times, fostering advancements in science, sport, culture, and business. With strong government support, ambition, and perseverance, young specialists are achieving success not only within the country but also on the international stage. Given the current momentum, one can confidently assert that the future of Uzbekistan is in the capable hands of talented and determined young people.

ABOUT NURULLO RASULOV

Based in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, Nurullo Rasulov is a UN Youth Champion for Disarmament, an SDG activist, and an international relations journalist. He represents Uzbekistan in Youth4Health (WHO Europe and Central Asia) and graduated from the Preventive Diplomacy Academy of UN Regional Centre for Central Asia. He is also a Masdar's Future Sustainability Leader and cohort of the Youth for Sustainability Program.

What Did You Expect?

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

Authority on photography Ansel Adams described good landscape work as giving people what they think they'll see, in an image. Not reality, exactly, but what they imagine it to be. In monochrome work, blue skies a suitably dark shade of gray, for example; not the washed-out near-white a typical shot on film might give you. Use an orange or even red filter if you have to, he would say, to darken those skies to a tone more fitting of “sky blue in black and white.”

This idea was running through my mind on February 16 as new snow was bucketing down in Etseri, Svaneti, where I have been for a couple of weeks now, hosting a team of volunteers to help villagers with snow removal, woodcutting and more. I went out in the snowfall, camera wrapped in a plastic bag, to see what images would call out to me.

I have shot much of what I saw today, walking around in snow along our road's

wonderfully irregular wooden slat fences and gurgling stream. But today I really wanted to capture the feel of the large, soft flakes floating down, in a dramatic way, through the silence.

So I worked like this. See a scene to capture. Take the camera from its bag;



focus using autofocus. Switch to manual focus (so autofocus stops trying to change at all); recompose the frame. Shoot from 5 to 12 frames, moving the camera as little as possible (you could put it on a tripod, but I didn't feel like lugging one around this time. I opted instead to crop out the edge bits where my stack of images didn't quite line up). Each frame in the set will show the same scene, but with different snowflakes moving through it: some far away and point like, others closer and out of focus.

On the computer, open each stack of images of that scene together, aligned. Choose Lighten as their interaction mode. This ensures that only the parts of each image which are lighter than average (the snowflakes) will be added to the whole scene which emerges from this stack.

Why depict so many snowflakes together, instead of just those captured in a single frame? It's all about what the witnessing eye remembers having seen, or what another person expects to see: Lots of snowflakes coming down, as they eye moves around the dynamic scene and notices so many of them. THIS is



what I saw (or expected to see)! It was quite a dump of snow, not a sprinkle; more is expected. So I was re-shooting familiar scenes of fences and snow and trees, and old house roofs and walls, with the addition of these random white visitors shooting through and making everything magical, different from the way it usually looks; dramatically so.

The irony is that most adults here hate having so much snow coming, as winter considers retreating but decides not to. The children love it: more skiing and other seasonal sports! But their parents anticipate much more shoveling. I get it.

But I'm with the children, delighting in the beauty and how it transforms everything. I can't help it; this is who I am and am glad to be, childhood wonder surrendered. May it always be so.

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

Sound as Memory, Play as Composition: The Radical Interactivity of Close Encounters 2025



Photo by the author

BY IVAN NECHAEV

The Close Encounters Festival has long served as a bridge between Swiss and Georgian experimental music scenes, evolving over its 20-year history to embrace an ever-expanding array of sonic explorations. The 2025 edition, held from February 15-17 in Tbilisi, was a concentrated yet deeply immersive experience, packed with avant-garde performances, technological innovations, and cross-cultural collaborations that challenged and redefined the very nature of sound.

THE LONG NIGHT OF ENCOUNTERS: A SONIC ODYSSEY AT TBILI ORGIA

The festival's opening night unfolded at Club Tbilisi Orgia, an epicenter of Georgia's experimental electronic scene. The venue's raw industrial aesthetic provided the perfect backdrop for a night of boundary-pushing performances. Ensemble KIOSK set the tone with a program that honored both Georgian contemporary composers and the late Ryuichi Sakamoto. Their nuanced approach to experimental classical music resonated with the audience, seamlessly blending the ethereal vocal textures of Russudan Meipariani with the electronic undertones of Nika Machaidze.

Following KIOSK, trio u/r ventured into uncharted sonic territories with a 30-minute composition crafted specifically for Close Encounters 2025. Their interplay of prepared piano, feedback loops, and live sampling blurred the lines between composition and improvisation, immersing the audience in a fluctuating soundscape of tension and release. The night culminated in a thrilling sequence of live sets by Georgia's electronic pioneers. Nikakoi, TBA, TINA, and TeTe Noise unleashed an electrifying blend of drone, techno, and noise textures,



Photo by the author

proving once again that Tbilisi's electronic scene remains at the cutting edge of global experimental music.

LOST IN SOUND: THE INTERSECTION OF TECHNOLOGY AND MUSIC

The second night of Close Encounters 2025 at the Mutant Radio Concert Space was a deep dive into interactivity, offering two groundbreaking performances that expanded the festival's conceptual framework. Giorgi Koberidze's 'MurMur' and Alexandre Kordzaia's 'Lost in Sound' redefined the traditional relationship between audience and sound, turning listeners into active participants in their own auditory journeys. These performances not only challenged the conventional concert format but also raised profound questions about sound, memory, and digital creativity.

After the structured performances, Koberidze and Kordzaia came together for an improvised B2B set, seamlessly blending a kaleidoscopic array of tracks from across genres. This final segment of the evening felt like a release—a moment where the rigid boundaries between composed work and spontaneous creation collapsed entirely. The set transitioned from ambient textures to industrial beats, from classical motifs to fractured electronics, mirroring the themes of transformation and fluidity that defined the night.

MURMUR: THE SOUND OF A DISAPPEARING WORLD

Giorgi Koberidze's 'MurMur' was not just a sound installation, but a meditation on loss—of history, of human imperfections, and of organic artistic evolution. The piece transformed the concert space into an intimate zone of listening, requiring audiences to physically lean in, press their ears to the installation, and engage in an almost whispered dialogue with the work.

At the core of 'MurMur' were four bells, each housing a carefully curated sound-

scape: the rustling of a tree from San Bartholomew, the distant echo of musicians practicing in a conservatory, the accidental yet poignant clatter of broken glass, and the resonant toll of a bell—a symbol of Georgian tradition and continuity. These sounds, individually rich yet threatened by urban modernization, were reimagined through live processing, creating an ever-evolving composition that blurred the boundaries between decay and preservation.

Unlike typical sound installations, 'MurMur' did not seek resolution; rather, it invited reflection. By requiring listeners to approach closely, it evoked the act of eavesdropping on a world slipping away. The experience was hauntingly tactile, as if the audience was cradling fragile sonic memories in their hands. In an era where cultural erasure often goes unnoticed, Koberidze's work served as a quiet but urgent act of defiance.

LOST IN SOUND: A GAME THAT COMPOSES ITSELF

If 'MurMur' was about listening to what is vanishing, Alexandre Kordzaia's 'Lost in Sound' was about creating something entirely new. Blurring the line between composer, performer, and player, Kordzaia's project transformed composition into an interactive, evolving process where each participant left with a unique sonic artifact of their own making.



Photo by the author

At first glance, 'Lost in Sound' appeared to be a conventional 2D platformer, with players guiding a small creature through obstacles and landscapes. But every movement, every jump, and every solved puzzle was also a musical decision, generating tones, harmonies, and textures that shaped the game's soundtrack in real time. Unlike traditional video game scores, which serve as atmospheric backdrops, Kordzaia's sound design was fully integrated into the mechanics, making the player's choices inseparable from the composition itself.

The sheer breadth of Kordzaia's sound library—ranging from acoustic instruments and electronic tones to percussive noises and everyday recordings—ensured that no two playthroughs were alike. The resulting compositions were deeply personal, reflecting each player's instinctive responses, hesitations, and bursts of creativity. After experiencing the demo, festival attendees were even given the opportunity to take home recordings of their own gameplay—a deeply novel approach to audience participation.

More than just a game or a performance, 'Lost in Sound' was an experiment in agency. It questioned the rigid hierarchies of composer and performer, offering instead a fluid and democratized approach to music-making. Kordzaia's work hinted at a future where music is not only something we listen to, but something we actively construct through play.



Photo by the author

WHISPERS AND PILLARS: A NIGHT OF CONTEMPLATION AND SONIC MONUMENTS

The festival's closing night, also at Mutant Radio, provided a more introspective contrast to the previous evenings. Ensemble KIOSK, joined by cellist Karolina Öhman and electronic music visionary Natalie Beridze, curated a program of deep, contemplative works.

From Sandeep Bhagwati's storytelling-

A FESTIVAL THAT DEFIES CATEGORIES

"Music shouldn't be silent, music should speak..." - This is how the pianist and creative director of Close Encounters Festival, Tamriko Kordzaia, answered a question about the ethics and challenges of holding a festival during times of political instability. Close Encounters 2025 was more than just a music festival—it was a testa-

ment to the power of artistic exchange in an era of uncertainty. At a time when cultural expression in Georgia faces mounting challenges, the festival's compact yet bold programming served as a declaration of resilience and innovation.

With plans for a Swiss edition later this year, Close Encounters continues to expand its reach, fostering new dialogues between artists and audiences across borders. If this year's edition is any indication, the future of experimental music lies not in predefined genres, but in the fearless collision of ideas, sounds, and perspectives.



Photo by the author

Niko Piroshmanashvili's Life and Art: A Long-Awaited Tribute to Georgia's Most Mysterious Painter

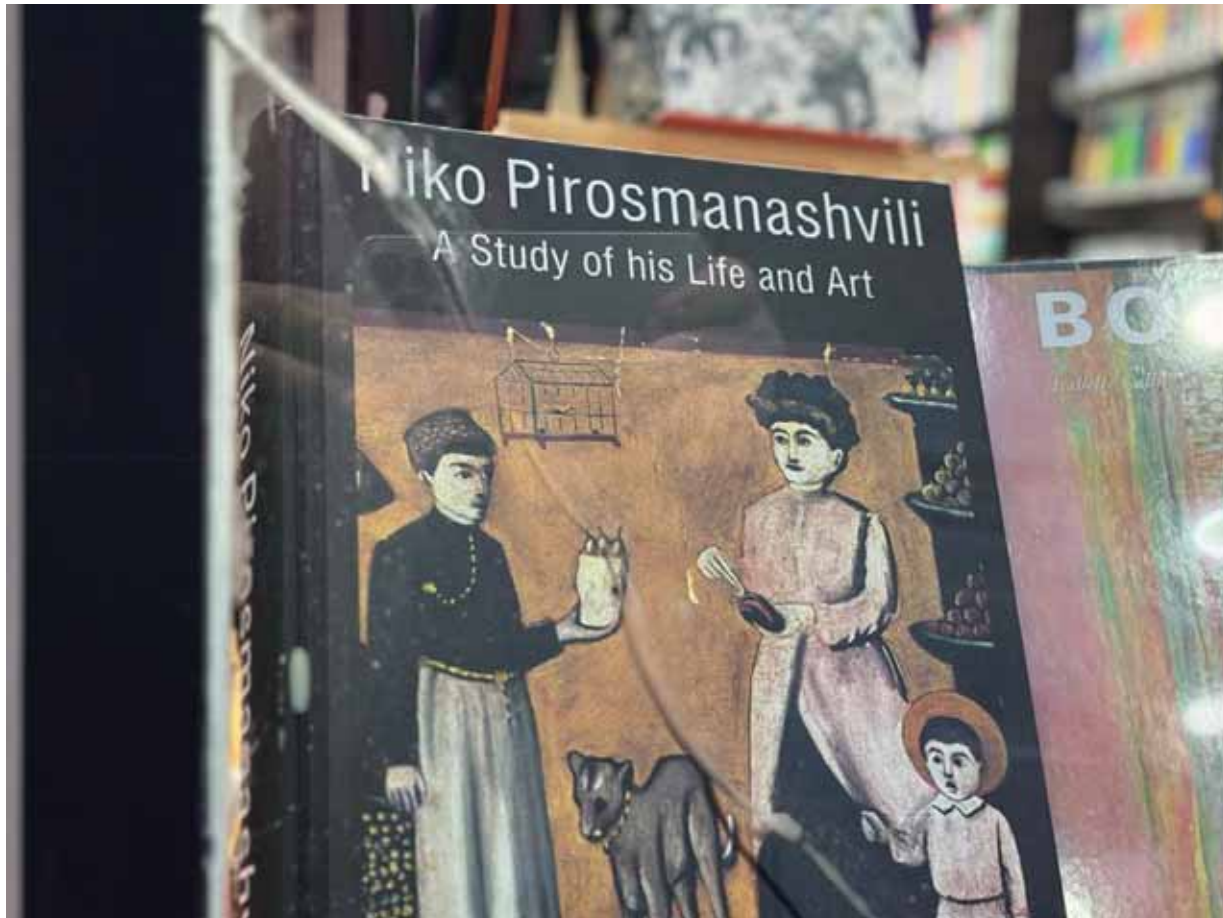


Photo by the author

BY IVAN NECHAEV

Few artists embody the myth of the tormented genius as profoundly as Niko Piroshmanashvili (c.1866–1918), the self-taught Georgian painter whose work, once ignored by his contemporaries, now stands at the forefront of national and global artistic heritage. The newly published book, *Niko Piroshmanashvili: A Study of his Life and Art*, is an extraordinary and long-overdue deep dive into the life, art, and influence of this enigmatic figure. With a foreword by Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk, the book presents a comprehensive exploration of Piroshmani's artistic journey, his struggles, and his eventual recognition as a visionary.

The book's publication is an event in itself—conceived in the 1970s, the project remained unpublished for decades, only to be revived by a dedicated team led by Svetlana Dragayeva. It is a meticulously curated work, blending first-hand recollections from those who knew Piro-

shmani with contemporary scholarship and visual documentation, providing an unparalleled portrait of the artist. The result is not only an art-historical study, but also a cultural investigation into a period of Georgian history that saw both artistic flourishing and deep social divides.

A LIFE SHROUDED IN MYSTERY

One of the book's greatest strengths is its handling of the paradoxical nature of Piroshmani's life. As outlined in the forewords by Aka Morchiladze and Erast Kuznetsov, the artist remains a puzzle even within his own era. Unlike many forgotten painters rediscovered centuries after their deaths, Piroshmani lived in a thriving urban environment—Tbilisi in the early 20th century—with newspapers, magazines, and theaters. He experienced technological advancements, such as electric lights and trams, and even participated in an avant-garde exhibition in 1913. Yet, despite these modern influences, his name remained largely unknown during his lifetime, overshadowed by more academically trained artists.

THE ARTIST OF THE PEOPLE: INNKEEPERS, MERCHANTS, AND THE STREETS OF TBILISI

One of the book's most fascinating revelations is how Piroshmani operated within Tbilisi's vibrant but challenging economic and cultural landscape. Unlike his European counterparts, who often had the backing of wealthy patrons or institutions, Piroshmani relied primarily on innkeepers and merchants for commissions. As detailed in the forewords, his art was judged by its ability to create a lifelike resemblance of objects, particularly food and drink, which adorned the walls of local dukhans (taverns). Yet, ironically, many of his portraits were criticized for their lack of likeness, sometimes forcing him to refund commissions.

Despite these challenges, his style flourished under these constraints. He painted quickly, often in dimly lit basements, using oilcloth and whatever materials he could afford. The book uncovers his incredible adaptability, from

painting over soot-covered surfaces during wartime shortages to copying images from matchboxes and newspapers to create compelling compositions.

AN UNLIKELY INFLUENCE ON MODERNISM

Though his peers often dismissed him, Piroshmani's art later resonated with avant-garde circles, influencing movements far beyond Georgia. This book offers crucial insight into how his simple yet deeply evocative works found their way into the hands of Russian and European modernists, including the likes of Pablo Picasso, who admired his raw and instinctive approach to form and color. Comparisons to Henri Rousseau and Vincent van Gogh, two other self-taught painters who defied traditional academic expectations, further position Piroshmani as a unique figure within global art history.

A BOOK WITH A STORY OF ITS OWN

This publication is as much a story about Piroshmani as it is about the perseverance of those who sought to bring his legacy to light. The book is the result of nearly fifty years of work, initiated in the 1970s but long delayed. Two individuals stand at the heart of this monumental endeavor: Tengiz Mirzashvili and Arkady Troyanker.

Tengiz Mirzashvili (1934–2008) was a highly regarded Georgian artist, stage designer, and book illustrator whose work bore a strong resemblance to Piroshmani's in its atmospheric depiction of landscapes and everyday life. His profound connection to the painter led him to dedicate years to researching Piroshmani's life, collecting oral histories, studying his techniques, and advocating for a deeper understanding of his artistry. As a practicing artist, Mirzashvili brought a unique perspective to the book, ensuring that it not only documented facts but also captured the painter's artistic soul.

Arkady Troyanker, an award-winning graphic designer, played a crucial role in shaping the visual narrative of the book. Having worked with major pub-



Photo by the author



Photo by the author

lishing houses since the 1960s and serving as the creative director of *Itogi* magazine from 1995 to 2001, his expertise in design and layout ensured that the book became a rich visual experience. His skill in balancing text and imagery makes this volume more than just a scholarly study—it is an immersive journey into Piroshmani's world.

A TESTAMENT TO PIROSHMANI'S LEGACY

Despite the uncertainty that surrounds much of his biography, one fact remains undeniable: Piroshmani was a genius whose vision transcended the limitations of his time. *Niko Piroshmanashvili: A Study of his Life and Art* serves as both a corrective and a celebration—offering clarity where mystery has long prevailed

and elevating Piroshmani's place within the international art canon.

The book is not just for art historians but for anyone fascinated by the intersection of art, history, and culture. It is a must-read for those who wish to understand not only Piroshmani's work but also the complex world that shaped him—a world where art was both an escape and a necessity, where talent was often unrecognized, and where genius could go unnoticed until long after its time.

With its comprehensive research, stunning visuals, and compelling storytelling, this book stands as the definitive study of Piroshmani's life and art—a long-overdue tribute to a man who gave everything to his craft, leaving behind a legacy that, even today, continues to be explored and redefined.



This book offers crucial insight into how his simple yet deeply evocative works found their way into the hands of Russian and European modernists



Photo by the author

Meskhi & Messi

BLOG BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

While the ideologically overcharged Sakartvelo is infatuated with extremely confrontational political bouts; while, on a daily basis, streets are full of ardently protesting demonstrators; while our opposition chiefs and pro-governmental influencers are engaged in endless hostility, inadvertently doing harm to this nation's future, there are some patriotically poised, dig-

nified men and women around who are not giving in and continue doing their share of summum bonum for their beloved motherland, stating that they will never lay down arms to keep benefiting the land they love to death. A couple of weeks ago, the premises of the Georgian Federation of Journalists witnessed something truly outstanding. Under the aegis of the Federation, a newspaper was created, the title of which sounds like a real heart-and-mind opener – Meskhi & Messi. The late Mikheil Meskhi was a Georgian footballer, nicknamed the Georgian Garrincha, one of the most creative players, representing the Soviet

Union in the international arena; Lionel Messi is an Argentine professional soccer player, reputed as one of the best in the world. The 50-year difference in age between the two great athletes of our time was no obstacle to putting their universally cherished names in one editorial team.

Newspaper Meskhi & Messi is a Georgian-Argentine journalistic project, which is going to dwell upon various walks of life, such as culture, science, history, sports, tourism, agriculture, and business. It will be published in Sakartvelo in the Georgian language and in Argentina in Spanish. The project is meant to promote friendship and cooperation between Sakartvelo and Argentina in various spheres of activity, one of them being the development of football in this country. The planned scope of the project envisages the creation of enterprises of many different profiles, as well as the opening of the international Valley of Fame, dedicated to friendship and peace between the peoples of the world, specifically expressed in the real images of internationally renowned football stars.

The Argentine side expressed the desire to hold the presentation of the project in Argentina as well, where the supporters of the project and the representatives of Georgian authorities will be invited to participate in the future event. Notably, all the local expenditures of the Georgian guests, incurred by them in Argentina, will be provided for by the Argentine side. The great get-together will take place in March of the current year.

Concerning the Valley of Fame, it will accommodate the Argentine, Brazilian, and Uruguayan football academies and the school of soccer coaches, named after the late César Luis Menotti, known as El Flaco (Slim), who was an Argentine former football manager and player, the winner of the 1978 FIFA World Cup as the head coach of Argentina. In the future school campus, proudly will stand the sculptural composition of the figures of legendary football players like Giorgi Sichinava, Slava Metreveli, Pele, Mikheil Meskhi, and Anzor Kavazashvili, based on the photo taken in 1965. The composition will also reflect the most compel-



Nikoloz Makharadze-Patarklishvili. Source: FB



ling moments of plays by these soccer stars.

The famous stars, mostly the world champions from Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay, will lay the foundation of the future Valley of Fame by planting trees there. Together with them, well-known members of society and representatives of the governments of those countries will participate. According to the plan, the Valley will be turned into a park for the Georgian citizenry as well as the guests of the capital city and visiting tourists to spend time and have fun.

The thorough consideration of the project by the government of the country started as early as the beginning of September 2024. By the end of the month, the relevant services of the administration began taking care of its details. Now, the prevalent issue is to find the plot of

land where the Valley of Fame will be built and developed, and to register it as the property of the pertinent organization. The best location for this purpose could be the territory in the vicinity of the Tbilisi Airport, all meant to promote Georgia's popularity in the world.

Incidentally, the project was presented to Ilia II, Patriarch of Georgia, who blessed it and wished God's Grace upon it. The author and organizer of this grandiose international project is Nikoloz Makharadze-Patarklishvili, Chairman of the House of Argentina in Georgia – Cultural and Business Cooperation International Organization, Chairman of the UNO Sports Arts International Council, and the Ambassador of the Dance International Council in Georgia. The man has a huge burden of responsibility, and let's wish him well!

Georgia Defeats Spain in Rugby Europe Championship

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

The Georgian National Rugby Team won against Spain with the final score of 62-32 in the scope of the 2025 Rugby Europe Championship on Sunday. Spain hosted the game in their capital of Madrid at Estadio Nacional Complutense.

The Lelos put on a memorable performance, scoring ten tries against the Spain team, marking their third consecutive win in the tournament after victories against Switzerland and the Netherlands.

The latest triumph secured Georgia the place at the top of Pool A, with the top two teams from each pool getting a spot in the next phase which is the qualifier for the 2027 Rugby World Cup.



The Georgian National Rugby Team. Source: Fb

Ilya Topuria Vacates UFC Featherweight Title, Moves to Lightweight Division

BY TEAM GT

Ilya Topuria has vacated his UFC Featherweight Championship title to move up to the Lightweight division, confirms UFC President Dana White. Topuria cited challenges with weight management as the primary reason for his decision.

"Topuria feels that he has done everything in this division. He has left his legacy. His body can no longer lose weight, so Topuria will move to lightweight, and his title will become vacant" White said in a video address.

In response to Topuria's move, a Featherweight Championship bout between former champion Alexander Volkanovski and Diego Lopes has been scheduled for UFC 314 on April 12, at the Kaseya Center in Miami, Florida.

Topuria's transition to the Lightweight



Ilya Topuria. Source: MtavariTV division has generated significant interest, with potential matchups against top contenders like Charles Oliveira and a possible rematch with Alexander Volkanovski being discussed.

As of now, no official date has been announced for Topuria's debut in the Lightweight division. Fans are eagerly awaiting updates on his next fight and potential opponents.



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I am Georgian and therefore I am European

Zurab Zhvania, Council of Europe, 1999

