

Ukraine Latest: Ukraine is Ready to Negotiate "Cautious" Peace, Trump Looking for "Better Terms" in Mineral Deal

Continued from page 1

Trump did not indicate when the talks took place, or whether he was personally involved in them.

"It's time to end this senseless war. If you want to end wars, you have to talk to both sides," he added.

CBS NEWS: UKRAINE NATURAL RESOURCES DEAL NOT READY AS TRUMP SEEKS BETTER TERMS

The agreement between Kyiv and Washington regarding Ukraine's natural resources remains unfinished, with US President Donald Trump pushing for a "bigger, better deal," CBS News reported on March 4, citing unnamed sources.

Originally set for signing on February 28, the deal was delayed following a public dispute between Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, casting uncertainty over its future.

Following the US decision to freeze military aid to Ukraine, Zelensky expressed regret over the disagreement and reaffirmed his willingness to sign the minerals agreement and work toward peace.

CBS News did not specify what aspects of the deal Trump seeks to renegotiate.

The long-discussed agreement was to establish a fund where Ukraine contributes to the US 50% of the revenue from future sales of state-owned mineral resources, including oil, gas, and logistics infrastructure.

Washington has reportedly presented three versions of the deal, with Ukraine rejecting the first two due to the absence of security guarantees. Despite growing US pressure, the third version also lacked firm security commitments, instead including a clause stating that the fund would be reinvested annually in Ukraine to support "safety, security, and prosperity."

The Trump administration has hesitated to provide security assurances, arguing that economic support itself serves as a security measure and that Europe should take primary responsibility for Ukraine's defense.

ZELENSKY OPEN TO NEGOTIATION BUT CAUTIOUS OF QUICK DEALS

Ukrainian President Zelensky confirmed that Ukraine is open to peace negotiations but remains cautious about the terms and speed of any potential deal.

In a statement, Zelensky reiterated Ukraine's commitment to peace but warned against rushing into a resolution. "None of us wants an endless war. Ukraine is ready to come to the negotiating table as soon as possible to bring lasting peace closer," he said. However, he emphasized that a fast-tracked deal could be detrimental. "If it is very fast, it's going to end up in a loss for Ukraine," he said, hinting at concerns over potential compromises that may favor Russia.



A woman fights for her country in Ukraine. Source: AP

Zelensky also highlighted ongoing efforts to strengthen Ukraine's security, including discussions on an agreement allowing the US access to Ukrainian minerals. This, he believes, would help solidify Ukraine's defense and economic stability.

Meanwhile, reports from Kyiv suggest that Ukraine's leadership remains skeptical of the nature of negotiations under Trump, with some officials describing past interactions with him as difficult. One senior official reportedly characterized discussions as full of "blackmail and shouting."

Despite these concerns, Ukraine is signaling its willingness to engage in diplomatic efforts—but on terms that ensure its sovereignty and long-term stability.

EUROPE AGREES ON STEPS TO PEACE IN UKRAINE, BUT THEY NEED US BACKING

At a summit meeting in London last weekend, European leaders, Canada and Turkey pledged to continue military support for Ukraine.

At the 'For the Security of Our Future' summit in London, European leaders, along with Canada and Turkey, reaffirmed their commitment to military support for Ukraine.

Diplomatic sources say Zelensky's visit to Washington ended without clear assurances of continued US military aid, raising concerns about a potential shift in American policy. President Trump, who has previously expressed skepticism about long-term support for Ukraine, reportedly urged Kyiv to pursue peace negotiations with Moscow—an approach met with frustration by Ukrainian officials.

In response, European nations, Canada, and Turkey have now pledged to step up their military assistance. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer emphasized the importance of unity, stating, "We will not allow Ukraine to stand alone. Europe, alongside our allies, remains steadfast in its support."

The French President and German

Chancellor echoed this stance, confirming that additional military aid packages—including air defense systems, ammunition, and armored vehicles—would be sent to Ukraine in the coming months. Turkish President Erdogan also reaffirmed Ankara's role in facilitating military supplies and logistical support.

This renewed commitment highlights growing European determination to back Ukraine, even as uncertainties over future US involvement persist. Analysts suggest the shift could mark a turning point in transatlantic relations, with Europe taking greater responsibility for regional security.

The summit is set to continue with further discussions on bolstering Europe's defense infrastructure and addressing long-term security challenges.

European Commission President, European Council President, and NATO Secretary-General were also at the table.

Speaking at a press conference after the summit, UK PM Keir Starmer announced that Ukraine's western allies will keep military aid flowing to accomplish the aim of a lasting peace that must ensure the liberty and sovereignty of Ukraine.

He also reiterated the readiness of the United Kingdom "to put boots on the ground and planes in the air" to defend Ukraine if necessary, evoking a "coalition of the willing" of other countries to do the same.

"Europe must do the heavy lifting, but must have the strong backing of the United States," he said.

EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said Europe has to put Ukraine in a position of strength, which included economic, energy and military resilience. She stressed the "importance" of providing security guarantees to Ukraine to turn the war-torn country into a "steel porcupine" that would be "indigestible for potential invaders" like Russia.

Then, she spoke about the need to "urgently" rearm the European Union and unleash a "surge" in defense spending that can meet the new geopolitical situation.

"We really have to step up" and "prepare for the worst," she said.

Sergey Lavrov, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, dismissed the idea of sending peacekeepers from NATO member states to Ukraine, saying Moscow would consider such a deployment a "NATO presence" and that Moscow would not allow it.

UK PLEDGES £2.26 BILLION LOAN TO UKRAINE UNDER G7 INITIATIVE

In the scope of the 7 Extraordinary Revenue Acceleration (ERA) Loans, the UK has committed £2.26 billion to Ukraine, with Chancellor Rachel Reeves and Ukraine's Finance Minister Sergii Marchenko signing the agreement on March 1. The goal is to properly aid Ukraine's military at a crucial stage in the war.

The loan money was sourced from profits gained from sanctioning Russian sovereign assets in the EU and is set to be delivered in three annual payments of £752 million. The first installment is expected this week, exclusively for military procurement.

Reeves emphasized, "A safe and secure Ukraine is a safe and secure United Kingdom." This agreement aligns with the UK's increased defense spending, projected to reach 2.5% of GDP and potentially 3% in the next parliamentary term.

Beyond the loan, the UK provides £3 billion annually in military aid. Prime Minister Keir Starmer pointed out that supporting Ukraine is essential for European stability and UK national security.

The UK maintains its stance that Russia must pay for the damage it has caused in Ukraine. This G7 initiative is a significant step toward holding Russia accountable while asserting the UK's commitment to long-term security.

US BLOCKS UK FROM SHARING INTELLIGENCE WITH UKRAINE AMID AID FREEZE

The United States on Tuesday banned Britain from sharing American intelligence with Ukraine, further withdrawing its support from Kyiv, with directives from Donald Trump freezing US military aid, a decision that has raised concerns over Ukraine being left in a critical situation. It is projected that upon this move, Ukraine will face a shortage of weapons within months.

Previously, intelligence labeled "Rel UKR" (Releasable to Ukraine) was routinely shared with Kyiv by the UK and other allies like Australia and New Zealand. However, Washington has now canceled this classification, halting UK intelligence agencies, including GCHQ, from sharing US-generated information.

The decision is expected to negatively impact Ukraine's battlefield strategy, which continues to resist Russian aggression. UK military intelligence expert Phil Ingram declared that such a restriction

shows broader implications of America's shifting stance on the conflict.

'WE NEED TO PREPARE FOR NOT HAVING THE US BY OUR SIDE' - MACRON

French President Emmanuel Macron has urged Europe to prepare for a future where the United States may not provide unwavering support. In a national address this week, he stated, "I want to believe that the US will stay by our side, but we have to be that they might not be."

Macron emphasized that Europe's destiny should not be determined by external powers, asserting, "The future of Europe cannot be decided in Moscow or Washington."

In light of these concerns, Macron proposed extending France's nuclear deterrent to encompass European allies, reinforcing the continent's defense capabilities.

He also criticized recent US tariff decisions, describing them as detrimental to both economies.

Russian officials and lawmakers accused Macron of rhetoric that could push the world towards the abyss.

UKRAINE BATTLEFIELD UPDATES

Russian forces attacked an energy facility in the Odesa region in southern Ukraine, the region's energy firm DTEK said. According to the firm's statement, this is the fourth attack on the energy infrastructure in the region within two weeks, attacks which have damaged "critical infrastructure" and resulted in power, water and heat outages in the Black Sea territory. Odesa's Governor Oleh Kiper said a 77-year-old man was killed by shrapnel in a village outside Odesa, while Oleksandr Prokudin, the Governor of Kherson, confirmed a 55-year-old was killed in Kherson City in a separate attack.

A Kremlin missile struck a building, killing three and injuring 31 more in central Ukraine's Kryvyi Rih city, Zelensky's hometown, regional Governor Serhiy Lysak said. As well as the hotel, 14 apartment buildings, a post office, shops and cars were also damaged in the attack, authorities said.

Ukraine's Air Force said it shot down 115 of 181 Russian drones targeting Ukraine in an overnight attack Wednesday. Based on a military statement, an additional 55 drones were lost and failed to reach their targets. The fate of the remaining 11 drones was not disclosed.

Russian news agencies reported Moscow's Defense Ministry as saying that Kremlin forces took control of the Pryvilne village in the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine.

Russia's Investigative Committee said Scott Rhys Anderson, a citizen of the United Kingdom, was sentenced to 19 years in prison after being convicted of a "terrorist act" and acting as a mercenary when he was captured while fighting for Ukraine.

EU Leaders Convene Emergency War Summit in Brussels

BY TEAM GT

On March 6, the leaders of the European Union's 27 member countries gathered in Brussels for an emergency summit to address pressing defense and security challenges facing the continent. The convening of this summit comes at a critical juncture, as recent developments have raised concerns about the future of transatlantic alliances and Europe's defense posture.

A significant catalyst for the summit was the recent shift in US foreign policy under President Donald Trump. The Trump administration's decision to suspend military aid and intelligence sharing with Ukraine has left European leaders apprehensive about the reliability of US support. This move has not only

strained relations with Kyiv, but has also prompted European nations to reassess their defense strategies.

President Trump has suggested that Ukraine may need to make concessions to Russia, a stance that has alarmed European allies. He warned Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky that refusing to negotiate with Russia could risk "starting World War III." This position has raised concerns about potential US concessions to Russia, leaving European nations to question their role and security in a rapidly changing geopolitical landscape.

In response to these developments, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen unveiled the "ReArm Europe" initiative. This ambitious plan aims to mobilize up to €800 billion to enhance Europe's defense capabilities. The initiative comprises several key components: 1) Suspending EU budget rules to allow member states to increase



European Council President Antonio Costa, Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in Brussels. Photo by Omar Havana/AP

defense spending, potentially unlocking €650 billion over four years; 2) Providing €150 billion in loans for joint defense projects, such as air and missile defense systems; 3) Redirecting existing EU funds toward defense investments; 4) Lifting European Investment Bank lending restrictions to support defense firms, and; 5) Creating mechanisms to mobilize private capital for defense investments.

President von der Leyen emphasized the urgency of this initiative, describing Europe's current security situation as facing a "clear and present danger."

UNIFIED STANCE ON UKRAINE'S SOVEREIGNTY

Throughout the summit, EU leaders reiterated their unwavering support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial

integrity. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz stressed the importance of ensuring Ukraine does not face a dictated peace, advocating for a fair resolution that upholds Ukraine's sovereignty. He proposed measures such as establishing ceasefires in air and sea operations, protecting Ukraine's infrastructure, and facilitating prisoner exchanges as steps toward a potential ceasefire.

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk highlighted Europe's capability to confront Russia both militarily and economically. He called for a strategic arms race, asserting that Europe must arm itself more effectively and swiftly than Russia to ensure its security.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky expressed gratitude for Europe's support, emphasizing the importance of solidarity in facing ongoing challenges. He acknowledged the critical role of European nations in bolstering Ukraine's defense efforts and pushing for a lasting peace.

Azerbaijan Kicks out UNDP, UNHCR, Red Cross- Set to Explore Other forms of Cooperation with UN



Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Bayramov with the UN's Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia Gwi-Yeop Son in Baku. Source: gov

BY TEAM GT

Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov, during a conversation with Gwi-Yeop Son, the UN's Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia, stated that Azerbaijan "has reconsidered its priorities in cooperation with the UN" based on "the realities of the new era."

During Monday's meeting, Bayramov emphasized that Azerbaijan would continue its future collaboration with "certain UN agencies" — specifically the UN Habitat Program, the UN Environment Program, and the Secretariat of the UN

Framework Convention on Climate Change — through a "project-based cooperation mechanism, aligned with national priorities."

Bayramov reportedly noted that "issues within the UN's activities are hindering global peace efforts."

On Sunday, the pro-government outlet Caliber reported that the UN Development Program (UNDP), the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) had been instructed to "leave" Azerbaijan, citing sources familiar with the matter.

Similar to Caliber's coverage, Bayramov pointed out that the socio-economic advancements in Azerbaijan in recent years have enabled the country to rely on its own resources and capabilities for

social projects, reducing its dependency on international organizations for support.

Bayramov also remarked that Azerbaijan had transitioned from being a recipient nation to a contributor, a shift that calls for a new approach to cooperation.

In response, Son expressed satisfaction with Azerbaijan's organization of COP29 and its implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

On Tuesday, Azerbaijani state media outlet APA reported that Fahrettin Altun, Head of the Communications Department of the Turkish Presidential Administration, delivered a video address during a public forum in Baku, affirming that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan also supports reforms within the UN.



The Georgian national rugby union team. Source: FB

Georgia Defeats Romania to Secure Place in European Rugby Championship Final

BY TEAM GT

The Georgian national rugby union team secured their place in the European Rugby Championship final with a decisive 43-5 victory over Romania in the semi-finals.

In the semi-final match on March 1, Spain defeated Portugal 42-31. Georgia will face Spain in the championship final,

scheduled to take place in Tbilisi on either March 15 or 16, with the exact date yet to be confirmed.

Coach Levan Maisashvili praised his team's effort, stating, "This was a tough match, but our players showed great discipline and determination. Now, our focus is on winning the final and continuing to prove that Georgian rugby belongs at the highest level."

Georgia will now look to claim yet another European title as they await their final opponent.

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"We must act like a great power — or accept being sidelined" – Sven Biscop on the Return to the Old Normal and Securing Europe's frontiers

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

There's nothing really new about the way the world works. It's just that we, the Western Europeans, stopped looking at it. International politics was always 'great power politics' [...] If Europe fails to act as a great power, we will become a playground for the other great powers. We either force ourselves into the League of the US, China, and Russia, or we accept we will be sidelined – says Prof. Dr. Sven Biscop, a renowned Belgian political strategist, and director of the 'Europe in the World' program at the Egmont Institute.

In an interview with RFE/RL's Georgian Service, Biscop discusses the return to the "Old Normal" – great power politics, Europe's role in stabilizing its periphery, and what this means for Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova amid the ongoing tensions with Russia.

WHAT IS THIS RETURN TO THE "OLD NORMAL" THAT YOU'VE BEEN WRITING ABOUT, AND WHAT DOES IT SPELL FOR THE ACTORS INVOLVED?

What I've said is that, in a way, there's nothing really new about the way the world works, it's just that we, the Western Europeans, simply stopped looking at it. The reality is that international politics was always "great power politics." These great powers can cooperate, but they are also rivals, and now this fact has forced itself back on our agenda.

The most basic issue for the grand strategy of Europe is: are we a great power or not? If not, then I think we will end up being a playground for the other great powers, which you can see already – Trump says "I talked to Putin directly. I don't need to care about the EU, I'll tell you afterwards." The alternative is we either try to act like a great power and force ourselves into the League of the US, China, Russia, or we get sidelined. In economic terms, the EU is a great power. In political terms, less so. In security terms – no, it isn't one.

AND WE CAN HARDLY FIND A MORE TELLING EXAMPLE OF THAT THAN NOT BEING INVITED TO THE NEGOTIATION TABLE FOR THE UKRAINE PEACE TALKS. HOW DOES EUROPE WIN A SEAT?

I think we can win a seat, or seek even to de facto shape the negotiations, by saying that Ukraine will be a member of the EU. Trump can't negotiate that away. We can remind him we have sanctions against Russia, and say that they will stay, or we will decide how to phase them out, and under what conditions – Trump cannot negotiate that away either. We can send peacekeepers and we can offer security guarantees. These are the things that win us a seat at the negotiation table, but we need to stick by our words.

WOULDN'T THAT LAST PART – SECURITY GUARANTEES, STATIONING ARMED FORCES IN UKRAINE, ALSO SNEAKILY GET NATO'S ARTICLE 5 INVOLVED?

Exactly. That's my point. We have to say to the Americans that, whether they like it or not, and I am sure they won't be thrilled, NATO is going to be involved, because they have asked us to provide a security guarantee. But then they say, "if you get into trouble because of that, you're on your own." And in doing so, they are breaking transatlantic solidarity. We have to say, "well, that's just not possible, because the troops there will be from the EU. You can't isolate Ukraine from the rest of the European Theater, because then you have NATO countries



Sven Biscop. Source: grenzecho

in the war with Russia, and that war will not be limited to Ukraine."

What Americans are saying might have merit legally, but it's detached from strategic reality, and we have to remind them they will be involved whether they like it or not. It's better to make it explicit, because the more obvious you make it, the bigger a deterrent will it be for the Russians.

TO REASSERT ITSELF, YOU PROPOSED THAT THE EU SHOULD "TAKE A LEAD IN STABILIZING THE ZONE OF RESPONSIBILITY, FROM UKRAINE THROUGH THE CAUCASUS TO THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA." WHAT DOES THAT IMPLY, IN MORE PRAGMATIC TERMS?

It means going beyond the current approach to security, which essentially amounts to telling allies and candidate members that, "yes, we are with you, unless a war breaks out, until you're attacked." And then we say, "now it's your problem, but should you survive, we'll be happy to talk again afterwards."

That's just not serious. It doesn't mean that you have to go to war, but at least, as a non-combatant, we should do what we've done for Ukraine for Georgia and Moldova too, if we are taking their membership bids seriously. I don't think people realize it, but for me, the day we invited Georgia to become an EU candidate, it meant that if Georgia is ever in trouble, we should do for Georgia what we did for Ukraine as a non-combatant.

IF THINGS TAKE A TURN FOR THE WORSE IN GEORGIA, WHICH OF THESE TWO IS THE MORE LIKELY OPTION: THAT THE WILL EU EMBRACE ITS RESPONSIBILITY AND GET INVOLVED AS A NON-COMBATANT, OR THAT IT WILL PLAY IT SAFE AND TURN A BLIND EYE?

I think we have arrived at a situation where all options are now risky. There are no safe options. We have now reached a stage where, if we want to carry on with Ukraine and its EU application, we have to guarantee its security after an eventual ceasefire.

YES, AND UNLIKE MANY OTHER AUTHORS, YOU DON'T SETTLE FOR PEACEKEEPERS, YOU

SAY "WE SHOULD BE GIVING SECURITY GUARANTEES, WE SHOULD HAVE ARMED FORCES THERE." HOW MUCH APPETITE DO YOU SEE FOR THAT IN EUROPE?

I see the appetite clearly in the UK, and Macron also clearly wants to do it – he will have to lead his country towards that, because I think France will be very divided over it. We see that Merz is being very radical on defense as well. But what's the other option? We don't do it, we abandon Ukraine – then next time the Russians attack and they take all of it. Does that leave us better off? No. There is still a risk of Russia going further. Then there's Georgia, Moldova and then on to the NATO countries, so maybe it's better to assume this risk now. I would rather take our chances with 110 Ukrainian brigades – the largest armed forces in Europe – on my side, than without!

In Western Europe, the realization is slowly dawning that this is what this all is about, and the UK in particular seems to have crossed the threshold of realization that we're no longer in 2014, we're in 2025, and if we abandon Ukraine now, Russia will be encouraged and will try to dominate Moldova and Georgia. I'm sure of it. And then you're in a different kind of game, because the Caucasus is important in its own right, because of its resources, and as part of the Middle Corridor that opens access to Central Asia. If you lose all access to the eastern flank, you lose those resources, and you cut yourself off from Central Asia, from which we also need resources. We can't afford to have that happen.

Will we have the backbone to do what's needed? I think if we stand by Ukraine, then Moldova is, in a way, less difficult, because it's wedged in between Romania and Ukraine. Geographically, though, Georgia is much more difficult.

YOU WRITE OF GEORGIA AS AN "OUTPOST." WHAT ARE OUTPOSTS USUALLY GOOD FOR, GEOPOLITICALLY?

An outpost can be a base for a deployment, but that's not so in this case, or they can be a difficult to defend place, or, conversely, an easier to defend fortress. It also depends on what Georgia wants out of it. What does its government want? What do the Georgian people want? If you look at the election results, if there had been zero Russian interference, how different would the election results have been? I have no

answer to that, sadly.

IF THERE HAD BEEN NO RUSSIAN INTERFERENCE AT ALL, THIS WOULDN'T CHANGE THE FACT THAT THE RULING PARTY PRESENTED ITSELF AS A CHOICE BETWEEN WAR OR PEACE.

Indeed. But what we do know is that Georgia, being where it is, in terms of military support, it makes things very difficult. You can only reach it with the agreement of Turkey, which cannot be taken for granted. This raises many other difficult questions, for example: What is the actual role of Turkey in the European security architecture? What sort of relationship do we want to have? There are a lot of overlapping interests.

"AT THE VERY LEAST, THE EU SHOULD PREPARE CONTINGENCY PLANS FOR NON-BELLIGERENT SUPPORT TO GEORGIA AND MOLDOVA, UP TO THE SAME MASSIVE SCALE AS FOR UKRAINE, IF NECESSARY" – YOU WRITE. WHAT WOULD THOSE CONTINGENCY PLANS ENTAIL?

I was just surprised that nobody seems to have even thought about it: if you offer candidate status to Moldova and Georgia, it entails responsibilities on the EU side as well, not just on the side of the candidates, and this includes the security dimension. And then people are surprised that there's a Russian backlash in Georgia. Of course there is, that's the game you just entered, right? Have you not noticed that you're entering this rivalry? At its utmost, it entails what we're doing now for Ukraine: massive military and financial support. That's in the case of war, of course. In other cases, it means increased cooperation in security and defense, military, investment, including in the cyber sphere.

IS THERE A CHANCE THAT YOU MIGHT BE ABOUT 10 YEARS TOO LATE WITH THIS IDEA?

Probably. We should have talked about all of this a lot earlier. But it's a matter of perspective as well, or rather, a change of it – did I think of things in these terms 10 years ago? Not quite, no. I think we're realizing belatedly that despite our best efforts, we are locked into a geopolitical rivalry with Russia, who actively tries to stop it. And not by legal means either – it's not about "oh, you have got an offer? We'll make you a better one". No.



What Americans are saying might have merit legally, but it's detached from strategic reality

SO, ON A GRANDER SCALE, WHAT DOES THE RETURN TO THE OLD NORMAL SPELL FOR THE COUNTRIES THAT ARE IN WHAT RUSSIA TERMS AS ITS "NEAR ABROAD"?

We can clearly see they are creating strategic depth, either by acquiring these territories directly or by basically creating protectorates, vassal states. What's new about this is that now China is also a player in the region. And, in a way, it's a paradox. They claim to be defending against Western encroachment, but the Chinese encroachment [on Russia] is massive. Of course, you can't say that, because Russia can do nothing about it. If you're an infallible dictator, you'd better keep quiet about such issues, right?

The Chinese are there, and this gives the Central Asian state states marginal maneuverability. But I think for Georgia it will be much more difficult to exploit this, because Russia's presence has become so strong there. I sometimes wonder whether, by offering candidate status, we perhaps went too far.

THE GEORGIAN DREAM GOVERNMENT WOULD SAY, "WELL, IF THAT'S THE CASE, WHAT OTHER CHOICE DID WE HAVE THAN TO BE SUBSERVIENT TO RUSSIA"? IF THE REALPOLITIK IS RETURNING, WHAT ARE THE ALTERNATIVES?

It's a tricky thing, because one could also say that whatever we, the EU, did or did not do with Georgia, Russia was looking to make things happen anyway. So, any EU or Western shortcomings don't absolve the Russian aggression or the Georgian government's choice to be as pliable as it has been.

Kremlin Anaconda & The Red Dragon — The New Axis of Evil

OP-ED BY MARK REIN-HAGEN

Once, America was the unshakable pillar of the free world—a nation that stood against tyranny, that led not just with power, but with principle. Now, under Donald Trump, we have become something else entirely... the enabler of despots, the betrayer of allies, and a wrecking ball smashing through the foundations of global stability.

Once, we faced down the Soviet Union; now, we shield Russia from condemnation. Once, we built coalitions; now, we tear them apart. Once, we stood as a beacon of democracy; now, we cozy up to authoritarians who see democracy as a disease to be permanently eradicated.

We have become death, the destroyer of worlds. We are in not only a crisis of leadership—but a crisis of identity. Are we still the country that defeated fascism, that rebuilt the world after war, that inspired millions to believe in the promise of freedom? Or have we become something darker, something unrecognizable—a decaying empire, rotting from within, led by a conman who trades in taunts and chaos, who sells our power to the highest bidder, and who bows before the very tyrants we once opposed?

History is watching. The world is watching. And the question before us is simple: Will America reclaim its place as the leader of the free world, or will we become just another failed empire, brought down not by our enemies, but by our own hand?

INTERNAL COLLAPSE

We would be fools to believe that America is immune to the kind of internal collapse that has shattered empires before it. If Russia and China have a grand strategy, it is not simply territorial expansion—it is to dismantle the only power capable of stopping them. And they are doing so not through conventional warfare, but through corrosion: eroding trust, inflaming divisions, and turning Americans against one another until the nation is too paralyzed by its own dysfunction to project strength abroad.

Social media is their weapon, and it is as readily sold to the highest bidder as Trump himself. Every algorithm, every misinformation campaign, every outrage cycle fuels their agenda, weakening America from within while our leaders either look away or, worse, actively participate in the unraveling.

And make no mistake—if they succeed, the civilized world as we know it is finished. NATO will be a memory, Europe left to fend for itself, and the world's fragile balance of power will tilt toward those who see democracy not as a principle, but as an obstacle to be crushed. The modern Mongolian Empire—an axis of autocracy stretching from Moscow to Beijing—will have free rein to impose its will, rewriting the rules of global power in ways that no free nation will survive unscathed.

This is not fearmongering. It is a warning. The great test of our time is not simply whether America can outmatch its adversaries, but whether we can resist the temptation to destroy ourselves from within—by surrendering to rage, by turning on each other with such blind hatred that we repeatedly elevate frauds, conmen, and incompetents to office. And not just in one party, but in both. If we fail, the consequences will not be a temporary political setback. They will be permanent. The idea of America, of democratic governance itself, will be but a blip in history, a brief and failed experiment buried beneath the weight of its own self-inflicted collapse.

THE FALL OF AMERICAN LEADERSHIP

Once, the United States stood against authoritarianism. Now, under Trump, we have joined it. His presidency has completed the transformation of America from the leader of the free world to an active participant in a new Axis of Evil. The evidence is everywhere. His open admiration for Vladimir Putin, his refusal to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine, his rejection of NATO, and his efforts to dismantle global alliances all point to a clear trajectory: an America aligned with autocrats, not democracies.

It is no longer shocking that Trump openly aids Putin's war aims. The United States, once the standard-bearer for democracy, is now one of the few nations refusing to support international resolutions condemning Russia's war of aggression. Trump has not only abandoned Ukraine, but he is



Image source: Facebook

actively bullying its government into handing over its resources as "payment" for aid provided under Biden—an outright mafia-style shakedown of a war-ravaged nation. This is not diplomacy; it is extortion.

Trump's betrayal extends beyond Ukraine. He has emboldened China, signaling that Taiwan is unprotected. He has weakened NATO, all but ensuring that Putin will not stop with Ukraine. And if Trump can strike a deal with Putin to divide the world, as he has openly suggested, what stops him from taking Greenland, the Panama Canal, or even parts of Canada? Would NATO, stripped of American support, really come to Canada's defense if Trump ordered an invasion? Would Europe risk war, or would they strike a deal as they are being forced to do with Putin now?

THE THOUGHTLESS TRAITOR

There was once a time when betraying American allies to enrich oneself was unthinkable. Now, under Trump, it is official US policy and a daily occurrence. Trump's demand that Ukraine pay back aid with its natural resources does not benefit American citizens—it benefits his oligarchs, the billionaires who surround him. If Ukraine caves to this extortion, the ones who will profit are not the American taxpayers who funded the aid, but corporate elites, oil magnates, and mining tycoons.

This is what makes Trump unique among American leaders—not just his corruption, not just his incompetence, but his willingness to serve foreign powers at the expense of the United States itself. His foreign policy is not about making America stronger—it is about making himself richer. His alliances are not with democratic nations, but with those who share his vision of unchecked power: Putin, Xi, and a growing circle of authoritarians.

And what of his supporters? The ones who once claimed to be patriots? They are watching in silence as Trump actively sells out their country to foreign despots. The man they cheered for "putting America first" is now demanding Ukraine surrender its resources while giving Putin everything he wants, and his followers—blinded by loyalty—applaud.

AMERICA: A NATION FOR SALE

It is no longer a metaphor—America is being actively sold out. Under Donald Trump, the presidency itself has been transformed into a storefront, where influence is auctioned off to the highest bidder and policy is dictated not by national interest, but by personal profit. We are witnessing, in real time, the transformation of the United States into a pay-to-play autocracy, where billionaires, foreign despots, and shady crypto investors can simply buy their way into power.

At the heart of this corruption is Trump Coin (\$TRUMP)—a meme cryptocurrency that is, in effect, an open-market bribe disguised as a joke. Trump owns 80% of the supply, meaning every purchase, every surge in value, enriches him directly. Oligarchs from Russia, China, and the Gulf states can now pour millions—billions—into his coffers without ever having to disclose a single cent. They don't need backroom deals or secret offshore accounts; they simply pump the coin, watch their influence grow, and let Trump cash in.

And it's working. His administration, now stacked with crypto evangelists and libertarian tech bros, is rolling back regulations, shielding the industry from scrutiny, and opening the floodgates for more

ist propaganda, and a relentless campaign to divide Americans against themselves.

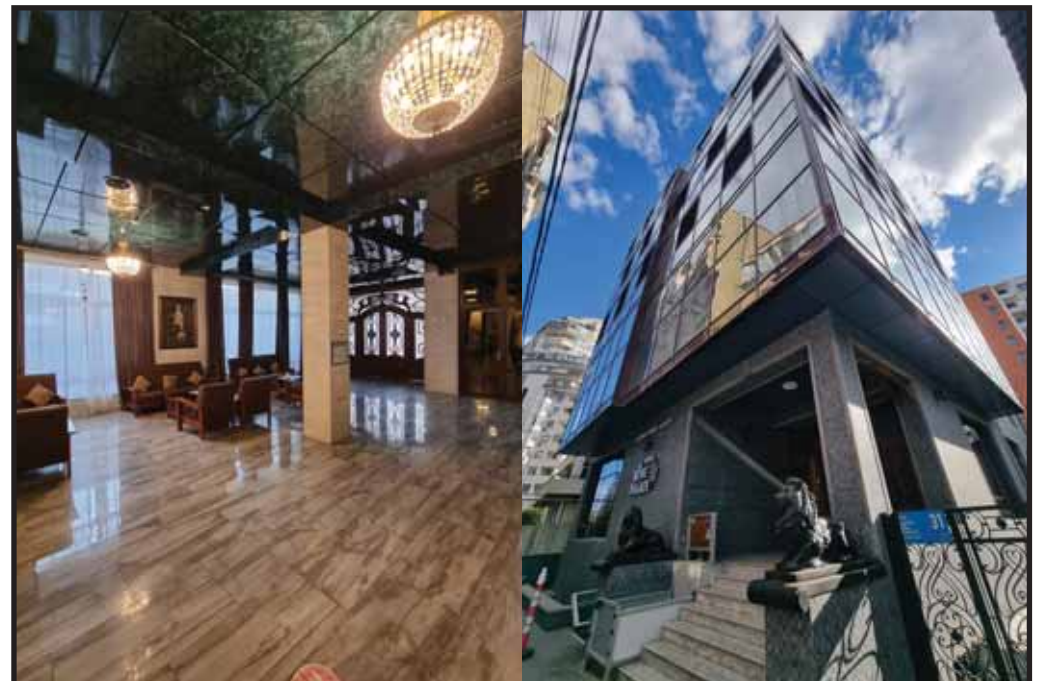
This isn't just corruption—it's the hollowing out of a superpower from within. And as Trump cashes in, selling influence to autocrats and speculators, the real price will be paid by the American people—in lost democracy, lost stability, and a nation that has gone from leader of the free world to just another banana republic, ruled by a grifter who has put the country on the auction block, and worse, has made us allies with our mortal enemies.

We have become a member of the axis of evil, the destroyer of worlds.

A RECKONING IS COMING

All this wanton destruction has consequences. And we don't need unreliable polls to sense that the tide is already turning. Trump's reckless policies are already beginning to turn his own supporters against him. Working-class Americans who once saw him as their champion are waking up to the cost of his erratic rule. His tariffs and economic mismanagement are fueling inflation, while his scorched-earth attack on federal agencies, Medicare, and soon Social Security threatens the very safety nets his supporters rely on. The illusion of strength is wearing thin, replaced by a stark reality of instability, economic hardship, and broken promises.

As this backlash builds, a new coalition is forming—one that values competence over spectacle, governance over grievance and grift, and real solutions over empty slogans. The reckoning is coming, and it may arrive sooner than expected. When it does, it will not just be a rejection of Trump. It will be a rejection of the forces—foreign and domestic—that sought to plunge America into chaos. The question is whether we will seize that moment or let it slip through our fingers. Because if we fail, history will not remember us kindly—if it remembers us at all.



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The Development Is On, And Thank God!

BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

Nobody would argue that politics is politics, and the nations of the world must pay their dues to its inevitable toll. On the other hand, there is an actual material life unfolding out there which also needs attention. The essentials of everyday life, including how we feed and clothe ourselves, do not fall from the sky like manna; they must be earned and put into place. Not the most exciting news, is it? But this is as obvious as the day is long. We are fortunate that this country is developing in this way: the politically exalted part of our public out on the streets in the evening, working to influence the minds of our good people, while businesses do their part during the day for the benefit of the same folks. Wow, what an amazing equilibrium in the everyday life of Sakartvelo!

Local routine has it that businesses open and close regularly, people get and lose jobs, children attend school or drop out, taxpayers pay their dues or evade them, some of us are born, and some of us pass on to the next world. Nothing



Grigoleti. Source: FB

extraordinary! And still, time passes, and good things happening around us remind us of ourselves. For instance, Georgia has always been known as a home of resorts, be they seaside spots or mountain retreats. Grigoleti, in West-

ern Georgia on the Black Sea coast, is one of those places. To date, it has only been developed to the extent that time and money have allowed individuals and small businesses to do so. Not anymore! Enter Sfero Holding, a multifunc-

tional corporation! Recently, a solemn ceremony took place at Expo-Georgia, celebrating the event of granting Grigoleti the status of "Climatic Resort." As part of this grandiose project, numerous residential blocks, hostels, and hotels

have already been constructed and put into service.

Most importantly, a significant partnership deal was struck between the Georgian Sfero Developing Company and Hilton Worldwide Holdings, the American multinational hospitality firm that manages and franchises a wide range of hotels and resorts worldwide. According to the signed contract, two five-story multifunctional buildings will soon be constructed in the once unlikely borough of Grigoleti, near Poti Port. These buildings will feature world-class amenities and comfortable infrastructure, including sports courts, a spa, rehabilitation center, indoor and outdoor swimming pools, high-class restaurants, a tourism center, and much more.

All of this means the opportunity for Grigoleti to become a year-round resort destination with great potential to become an internationally recognized tourist hub, complete with modern balneological and sports facilities. This is just one example of how business is taking root in this soil, beyond the ideological battles that have become ubiquitous and everlasting in Sakartvelo. Well, be that as it may, let the spirit of business and deal-making never falter here!

US Tariffs – A New Trade War or a Move for Negotiations?

BY DAVIT SHATAKISHVILI FOR GFSIS

On February 1, President of the United States Donald Trump signed an executive order imposing a 10% tariff on imports from China and a 25% tariff on goods from Canada and Mexico, set to take effect on February 4 (then, following further negotiations with the leaders of Mexico and Canada, he suspended their tariffs for one month). Trump's actions sparked criticism and prompted retaliatory tariff measures from all three countries. Trump justified the tariff hikes by citing rising immigration, fentanyl smuggling, and the U.S. trade deficit. He also warned the countries of the European Union to expect potential similar tariffs. According to Trump, the European Union restricts imports of American agricultural products, automobiles, and energy resources, contributing to a significant trade deficit. As of 2023, this deficit stands at 158 billion Euros. It is interesting to examine the positions of each party, the potential impact of these tariffs on the U.S. economy, and possible scenarios for how events may unfold.

PARTY STANCES

During a press briefing in the Oval Office, Donald Trump explained his reasons for imposing tariffs on Mexico, Canada, and China: "Number one is the people that have poured into our country, so horribly and so much... number two are the drugs: fentanyl and everything else that has come into the country... and number three are the massive subsidies we're giving to Canada and Mexico over deficits." According to a senior adviser from Trump's pre-election campaign, these tariffs do not signify a trade war, but rather "the threat of a negotiation."

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stated that the actions of the White House have caused a rift between Canada and the United States, rather than fostering unity. He mentioned that Canada would respond by imposing 25% tariffs on up to \$155 billion worth of U.S. imports, including alcohol and fruit. Trudeau expressed that the Canadian people feel betrayed, and reminded Americans that Canadian troops fought alongside them in Afghanistan, and responded swiftly to various crises, such as the California wildfires and Hurricane Katrina.

Claudia Sheinbaum, the President of Mexico, stated that they categorically reject the White House's accusations that the Mexican government has ties

to criminal organizations. She argued that if the U.S. government and its agencies were serious about combating fentanyl use in their country, they would tackle the drug trade on the streets of their own major cities. She criticized them for not addressing the money laundering linked to this illicit trade, which has caused significant harm to its population.

On February 3, following talks with Trudeau and Sheinbaum, Donald Trump suspended the tariffs imposed on Canada and Mexico for one month, but went ahead with the tariffs on China. Canada's Prime Minister unveiled a 1.3 billion USD plan to Trump aimed at tightening controls on the Canada-U.S. border to reduce the flow of fentanyl, while the Mexican president promised Trump she will deploy 10,000 troops to the Mexico-U.S. border to strengthen border control, reduce drug trafficking, and curb the flow of illegal migrants.

China's Foreign Ministry stated that the government strongly condemns and opposes the White House's actions and will take necessary countermeasures to protect its legitimate rights. China imposed a 15% tariff on imported liquefied natural gas and coal, along with a 10% tariff on crude oil from the United States. Additionally, the import of American cars will now face an extra 10% tariff. In addition, China plans to file a complaint with the World Trade Organization regarding the additional U.S. tariffs. According to their statement, China began regulating fentanyl-related drugs as controlled substances in 2019, and has actively collaborated with the United States in the fight against drugs.

In addition to Mexico, Canada, and China, Trump announced on February 1 that the European Union could face tariffs in the coming months unless it agrees to purchase American oil and natural gas. According to Trump, the European Union should address its significant deficit by purchasing large quantities of oil and gas from the United States. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2023, the European Union exported goods worth 502 billion Euros to the United States, accounting for nearly 20% of its total exports, making the U.S. the EU's second-largest trading partner. As of 2023, U.S. exports to Europe totaled 344 billion Euros, while the U.S. trade deficit with the European Union amounted to 158 billion Euros.

Donald Trump imposed the tariffs under the 'International Emergency Economic Power Act.' It's a nearly 50-year-old law that gives the president the power to impose sanctions after declaring a



Donald Trump. Image source: GFSIS

state of emergency. The president has the authority to impose tariffs without congressional approval in cases related to national security, safeguarding U.S. manufacturing, or addressing a national emergency. This broad scope of reasons makes challenging tariffs in court particularly complex.

POTENTIAL ECONOMIC IMPACT OF TARIFFS

Some economists argue that Trump's actions heighten the risks of damaging the country's economic growth and drive inflation. According to their analyses, the 25% tariffs on Mexico and Canada, along with the 10% tariff on Chinese goods, could result in a 1.5% reduction in U.S. economic output by 2025 and a 2.1% decline by 2026. The U.S. economy, particularly the manufacturing sector, relies significantly on imports from Mexico, Canada, and China, including essential goods such as auto parts, electronics, and raw materials. Higher tariffs will raise production costs, leading to more expensive goods and shrinking profit margins for businesses. Meanwhile, retaliatory tariffs from these countries further escalate risks for American companies reliant on foreign demand, for example, sectors such as agriculture, automotive, and technology could be undermined, potentially eroding the U.S.'s global competitiveness. It is also important to note that shortly after the announcement of the tariffs, gas and oil prices surged on the stock exchanges. According to Goldman Sachs' latest forecast, the price of Brent oil is expected to rise to 78 USD this year and fall to 73 USD in 2026, compared to their previ-

ous forecast of 76 USD and 71 USD, respectively.

Their estimates suggest that inflation in the U.S. will rise by 0.7% in the first quarter of this year and increase by an average of 0.4% annually, relative to what it would have been in the absence of Trump's new tariffs. Rising inflation compels the Federal Reserve to keep the refinancing rate elevated, which in turn slows economic growth. Widespread uncertainty and inflationary expectations further undermine financial markets and the broader economy. Economists argue that President Trump's push for the Federal Reserve to cut the refinancing rate and set new tariffs is contradictory. Furthermore, this approach undermines his campaign promises to curb inflation and strengthen the middle class.

During Donald Trump's first term as president, in retaliation to U.S. tariffs on China, Beijing imposed tariffs on American imports, including soybeans, beans, and corn. This had a severe impact on U.S. farmers, many of whom relied heavily on exports to China. In response, Trump provided subsidies to farmers, whose export revenues were reduced by at least 10 billion USD due to the tariffs.

Supporters of Trump, however, view the decision to impose tariffs as a bold and necessary move to reverse decades of ineffective trade policies and to revitalize America's manufacturing and agricultural sectors. Donald Trump believes that the tariffs will not lead to an increase in prices. According to him: "Tariffs don't cause inflation, they cause success... so we are going to have great success. There could be some temporary short-term disruption, but people will

understand that..." Under the tariffs, one potential benefit for the U.S. economy could be the strengthening of local production due to the higher cost of imports, along with an increased demand for domestically produced goods. Additionally, in the long term, tariffs could encourage domestic investment and innovation, boost R&D spending by companies, stabilize supply chains, and help reduce trade deficits.

The President of the United States, Donald Trump, began his new presidential term with a decisive move, one which he claims aligns with his campaign promises to implement an "America First" policy, to significantly limit immigration, boost U.S. trade capacity, protect domestic production, stabilize consumer prices, and reduce the trade deficit. Trump believes that imposing tariffs will make the American people wealthier and that local manufacturing will be boosted. However, he is likely aware that in the short to medium term, the effects of tariffs could lead to higher prices and slower economic growth, particularly due to the expected increase in the refinancing rate. However, based on Trump's negotiating tactics, there is also a view that he will use tariffs in the short term as leverage to force solutions to existing issues with countries he has grievances against. Thus, it is difficult to predict his next moves at this stage, as they will likely depend on the fulfillment of promises made to Trump by the leaders of Canada and Mexico in the coming month, as well as the outcomes of a potential meeting between Trump and Chinese authorities.

Scandals Resurface in Georgia's Surrogacy and IVF Industry, Threatening Reproductive Tourism

BY HELENA BEDWELL

In 2016, an Israeli couple contacted me, hoping to rent my apartment for several months. They also mentioned that a surrogate mother was about to give birth to their long-awaited child. It took them several weeks to finalize the paperwork, and when they did, they happily showed me their newborn—a spitting image of his parents. At the time, I was unfamiliar with this field, unfamiliar with the fact that Georgia was fast becoming a sought-after destination for desperate couples seeking both financial and professional solutions for surrogacy.

Once celebrated as a global hub for reproductive tourism, Georgia's surrogacy and in-vitro fertilization (IVF) industry is now facing a crisis that threatens its reputation. A string of incidents involving human trafficking and unethical practices has raised serious concerns, casting a shadow over what was a rapidly growing sector.

It all began with a tragedy: the death of a baby at one of Georgia's surrogacy houses. The incident triggered an investigation that revealed troubling practices within the industry. Known for its affordable services and favorable legal environment, Georgia had become a popular destination for international couples seeking surrogacy and IVF. However, the newfound attention exposed deep flaws in the system, including the exploitation of surrogate mothers and legal loopholes that left both surrogates and intended parents vulnerable.

Recent revelations have only intensified these concerns, with allegations of coercion and unethical practices resurfacing. One of the most high-profile cases involves the BabyCam Medical Consulting Group, a Chinese-run company registered in Georgia in 2024. The company came under scrutiny after Georgian police, with assistance from Thai authorities and Interpol, removed three Thai women from a surrogacy house in Tbilisi on January 30, 2025. These women claim they were deceived by Chinese brokers, promised between \$12,000 and \$17,000 for surrogacy, but instead coerced

into donating eggs monthly at a clinic.

I visited three large houses that were not heavily secured, nor were they officially recognized as mass surrogacy houses. During one visit to a surrogacy residence in Tbilisi, I met Hom, a 27-year-old Thai woman who had arrived in Georgia five months earlier to become a surrogate mother. "I'm going to the hospital now for an ultrasound," she explained. Another surrogate, Nara, insisted that the women were not being forced into egg donation. "No one is stopping us from leaving," she said. "We follow contractual rules—no outings after 10pm, required medications—but we have passports, phones, and contact with our families." She denied any coercion, claiming that the women who had left voluntarily simply refused to comply with the contract terms.

However, the situation is far from clear-cut. Despite claims of voluntary participation, many surrogates earn only \$300-\$500 per month, with a final payment of around \$11,000 after childbirth. The Chinese representatives of BabyCam insist that the business is legal and that all agreements are notarized. "There is no Chinese cartel here," said Li Yuan, who oversees the surrogates' medical care. "These women came voluntarily and can leave anytime." His colleague, Tan Jo, who manages BabyCam's operations, added, "Some women changed their minds after being paid and falsely reported trafficking. Police have already questioned them and found no coercion."

The criminal investigation is ongoing, and pressure is mounting on the government to regulate the sector more strictly. The debate is not just about ethics, but also about the political landscape surrounding reproductive rights in Georgia. Conservative groups are advocating for stricter laws on surrogacy and assisted reproductive technologies, with some lawmakers even calling for an outright ban on commercial surrogacy. The outcome of these discussions could have far-reaching consequences for Georgia's reputation as a fertility hub.

International demand for surrogacy in Georgia remains high, particularly from couples in countries where surrogacy is illegal or heavily restricted. However, the recent scandals have led many to



Image source: silkmedical

reconsider Georgia as a viable destination for reproductive services. As scrutiny intensifies, couples may seek alternatives in other jurisdictions, potentially diminishing Georgia's status as a global leader in reproductive tourism.

Further complicating matters, Thai authorities are also investigating claims from four Thai women who allege they were lured to Georgia with promises of lucrative surrogacy contracts. They were assured earnings of up to \$17,000, plus a \$600 monthly wage, only to find themselves trapped in exploitative conditions.

The Thai women's alleged ordeal highlights the risks of the surrogacy trade. Despite initially claiming coercion, some later retracted their statements. Nonetheless, the allegations underscore the exploitative potential of cross-border fertility operations. One Facebook ad, for example, promised "recruiting beautiful women to donate eggs," offering as much as 100,000 Baht per cycle and targeting donors from countries such as

Thailand, China, and Cambodia. It is evident that vulnerable women are being lured into a system with little oversight.

Georgia's surrogacy and egg donation industry has long been a beacon of opportunity for couples seeking reproductive assistance, particularly from countries like China, where surrogacy remains banned. Demand has skyrocketed in recent years, largely driven by Chinese clients, leading to the rapid growth of clinics such as LeaderMed. Its founder, Natalia Khonelidze, insists that her clinic adheres strictly to voluntary participation. "I do not believe anything illegal was done," she said in a phone interview. "Let them investigate."

Despite mounting pressure, clinics involved in these scandals, such as LeaderMed, continue to assert their innocence. Khonelidze emphasized that all procedures at her clinic are documented and voluntary, and denied any involvement in coercive practices. "Many clinics engage in this practice, but it is always

voluntary," she stated, claiming once again that her clinic operates within the bounds of the law.

The future of Georgia's surrogacy and IVF industry now hangs in the balance. As the government faces increasing calls for reform and stricter regulations, the negative publicity surrounding these scandals threatens to derail the country's reputation as a top destination for reproductive services. The coming months will be crucial in determining whether Georgia can regain the trust of international clients and continue to thrive as a global leader in reproductive tourism—or if the industry will suffer irreversible damage from the controversies that continue to surface.

During the preparation of this article, Kinderly, a major reproductive clinic, suspended its program of bringing surrogate mothers from abroad after an interview surfaced with a woman who was left pregnant and raising a child alone, without any financial support.

New (Old) Cheese Alert

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

One revelation I had in the sphere of Georgian cheeses was my first taste of dambalkhacho ("moistened cottage cheese"), on my first overnight trip in Khevsureti, in the country's north-east. This was in 2004, on the way back from Shatili. Our car had a flat tire and the four of us had to stop for the night at two connected railway wagons on the side of the road. There, the two families who were looking after flocks of their sheep welcomed us like long-lost relatives, and one of the dishes they fed us was this fabled product, a revelation to my European-cheese-raised tastebuds but (at the time) unavailable outside the region, it seemed.

Next, about 10 years later, at the opening evening of an exhibition of my photos connecting the themes of Svaneti and food in the now-defunct Focus cafe in Vake, Georgia's "Cheese Queen", Ms. Mikadze, brought a whole large basket of Georgian regional cheeses the like of which I had never even imagined. These perfectly accompanied the wines which were part of the event. Most of them never appear in Tbilisi markets, although the lady's shop had them all



Dambalkhacho cheese. Photo by the author

and more, including dambalkhacho. She knows her stuff, and has done her best to preserve and popularize it to the benefit of its producers and us all.

I used to dream of such old or special

cheeses here. To my tastes, the usual Georgian cheeses are either too salty from a long soak in brine or too mild from being very young. The former I would soak in water at least overnight

to leach out much of that salt, then dry them uncovered in the fridge. The latter, just wrap in plastic and forget about them in the fridge for a few months to age. THEN they begin to get interesting, at least for me.

I was planning to get into cheese making in quite a big way up in our house in Svaneti, in the years when no end of our living there was in sight. I read all I could of the science and art of the subject, observing and noting all the variables: temperature, pressure, whey extraction, cut cheese size, humidity, wax covering or no, length of aging time and more. Then, soon after I had spent some money to make a food-safe cheese press, that apparatus became a casualty of our garage fire. At a similar time, we decided to give up on our small herd of cows altogether, as they were keeping us more bound to our village than we wished to be, with relatives at the other end of Georgia and also of the world. So, there went our milk supply, and with it my own will to continue... Though I still de-salt and/or age what cheeses I can get my hands on up there and also in Tbilisi.

Also, Mingrelian and Svan smoked cheeses tend to be so hard, you practically need an axe or power saw to cut them! I have tried smoking my own, for a few hours followed by a week or so

in the fridge for the smoke to penetrate right through, and they retain their softness this way.

Dambalkhacho is aged, hard, crumbly, with a bit of blue or green in it, but quite a mild taste compared to European blue or green cheeses like Gorgonzola or Stilton. It has now appeared in the Gldani bazaar near Metro Akhmetelis Teatri, at 70 GEL per kg, in small round amounts. Buy it, savor it, relish it: it's worth it. I haven't any idea how it is made, but it is good to try and, if you like it, to support. It makes a fine fondue-type dish in a clay plate as well, as we recently discovered at the Mogoneba Cafe in Telavi. Great to dip bread into.

In short, Georgia has many, many more cheeses to discover than the two or three we typically buy, tucked away in its many regions and villages. They all deserve discovery, savoring, buying and being made famous.

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/hammer.house.svaneti

Quadrum Gudauri: A Hidden Gem for Culinary Delights, Wellness, and Adventure



Quadrum Gudauri exterior



Quadrum Gudauri pool

BY KESARIA KATCHARAVA

Tucked away in the scenic beauty of Gudauri, Quadrum Gudauri offers an exceptional experience that combines adventure with peace and relaxation. This boutique hotel, part of the Small Design Hotels category, has become a hidden gem for travelers looking to escape the hustle of everyday life. Designed by the well-known Georgian architect Sandro Ramishvili, the hotel blends modern design with eco-friendly materials, creating a harmonious connection to the natural landscape. Its unique architectural style is complemented by the impressive sculpture of Vazha Mikoberidze (Prasto), which serves as both an artistic and cul-

tural statement at the entrance.

While Quadrum Gudauri is admired for its elegant rooms and panoramic mountain views, the focus here goes beyond just the comfortable accommodations. The hotel excels in its culinary offerings and wellness amenities, making it an ideal destination for guests looking to indulge in both relaxation and adventure.

CULINARY DELIGHTS AT THE HOTEL'S RESTAURANT

The dining experience at Quadrum Gudauri stands out for its variety and quality. Guests can enjoy an authentic taste of Georgian cuisine in the hotel's restaurant, which uses locally sourced ingredients to craft flavorful dishes that showcase the region's culinary heritage. Under the expert supervision of Chef Irakli Dvalidze, the menu is carefully

curated, ensuring every meal is not only satisfying but a true reflection of the local food culture.

From traditional Georgian stews and grilled meats to fresh salads and seasonal vegetables, the offerings are designed to please every palate. Despite the exceptional quality, the restaurant's prices are surprisingly competitive, offering excellent value for such delicious and thoughtfully prepared meals. For many visitors, the affordability of the food is a pleasant discovery, especially considering the level of service and the unique flavors on offer.

In addition to the restaurant, the hotel features a cozy lobby bar where guests can enjoy a wide selection of cocktails, local wines, and a variety of beverages. It's the perfect place to unwind after a day of outdoor activities, whether you're sharing stories with friends or

relaxing in a quiet corner.

WELLNESS RETREAT WITH AN UNMATCHED VIEW

The hotel's spa area is another highlight, offering a sanctuary for guests seeking rest and rejuvenation. The indoor pool, which provides a spectacular view of the mountains, is a favorite spot for guests to relax and unwind. Whether you're swimming or simply lounging by the water, the serene surroundings and breathtaking scenery enhance the experience.

Beyond the pool, the spa also includes a sauna, hydromassage, and an array of massage treatments aimed at helping guests recover and relax after a long day. The peaceful atmosphere of the spa, combined with the stunning mountain views, makes it the perfect place to disconnect and recharge.

YOGA AND FITNESS WITH A SCENIC BACKDROP

For those looking to maintain their wellness routines or seek a more serene experience, the hotel offers a dedicated yoga hall with sweeping views of the Caucasus Mountains. The yoga space is designed to provide a peaceful environment for both group sessions and private practice. Guests can participate in yoga classes or use individual video tutorials created by experienced yoga masters to guide their practice.

To complement the yoga experience, Quadrum Gudauri also offers a specialized yoga menu that includes nourishing dishes made to support a wellness-centered stay. These dishes focus on fresh, healthy ingredients that promote vitality and balance, ensuring that guests can truly embrace a holistic approach to their time at the hotel.

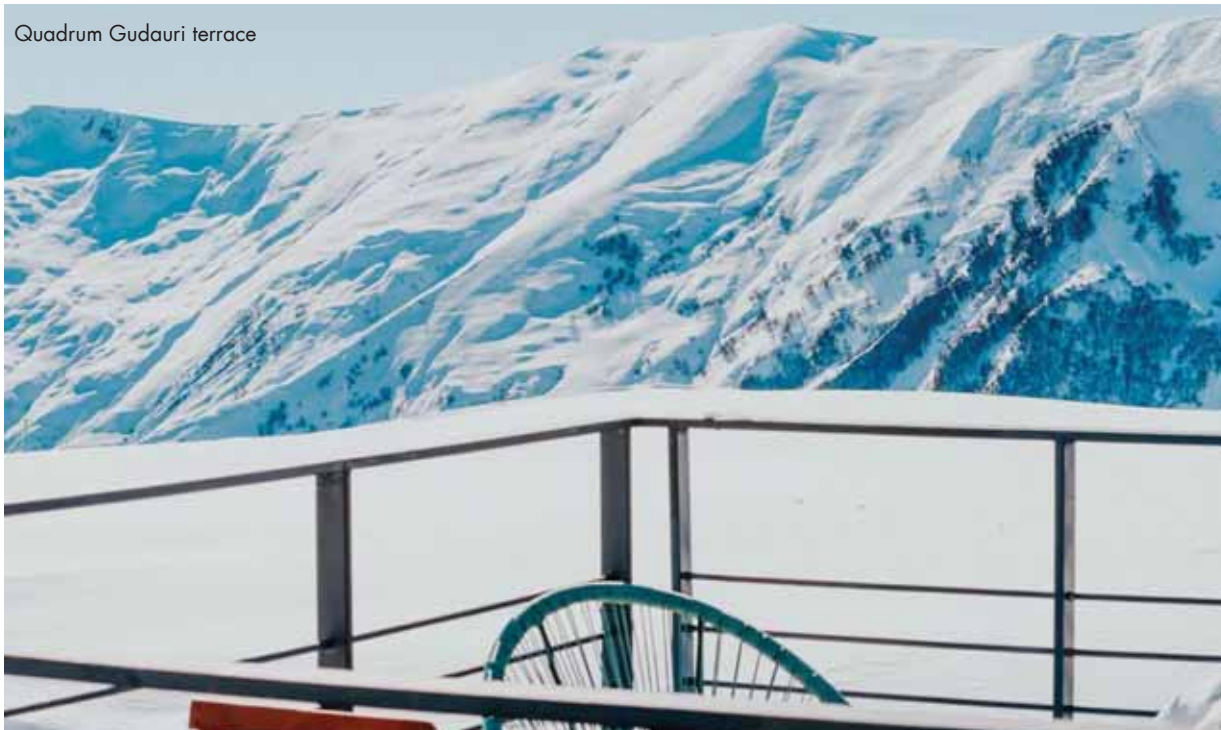
A SKI DESTINATION WITH EASY ACCESS

Quadrum Gudauri's location makes it an ideal choice for skiers and outdoor

enthusiasts. Just a 10-minute walk from the Shino Ski Lift, the hotel offers easy access to over 70 kilometers of ski slopes, making it a prime spot for those looking to experience the best of Georgia's ski destination. The hotel also provides special rates for ski passes, equipment rentals, and ski lessons, allowing guests to make the most of their time on the slopes.

Whether you are visiting for the skiing, the food, or the wellness experiences, Quadrum Gudauri offers a diverse range of options to suit all types of travelers. With its exceptional cuisine, peaceful spa and yoga facilities, and access to outdoor adventure, this boutique hotel offers a unique combination of comfort, luxury, and value.

In a region known for its ski resorts and natural beauty, Quadrum Gudauri stands out not just as a place to rest, but as a destination that caters to all the senses. Its hidden charm, competitive prices, and focus on high-quality service make it a true standout in Gudauri, offering an unforgettable experience for anyone seeking a blend of relaxation and exploration.



Quadrum Gudauri terrace



Echoes across Continents: Ensemble Kobe Bridges Japan and Georgia in a Stirring Musical Dialogue



Tadahiro Yano and Ensemble Kobe. Photo by the author

BY IVAN NECHAEV

The Grand Hall of the Tbilisi State Conservatoire witnessed an extraordinary convergence of musical traditions and histories as the Japanese string ensemble Ensemble Kobe took to the stage. Led by flutist-conductor Tadahiro Yano and violist-conductor Zaza Gogua, the evening's program wove a profound narrative of resilience, remembrance, and reinvention, spanning from Beethoven to contemporary Georgian and Japanese composers.

BEETHOVEN, MAHLER, AND THE WEIGHT OF HISTORY

The evening opened with Ludwig van Beethoven's String Quartet No. 11 in F minor, Op. 95, aptly nicknamed *Serioso*, arranged with Gustav Mahler's characteristic orchestral sensibilities. As the strings plunged into Beethoven's unrelenting intensity, the tension between storm and serenity felt palpable. Ensemble Kobe's interpretation emphasized the quartet's compressed energy, its terse statements and explosive bursts of emotion made all the more vivid in this larger orchestral arrangement. The Mahlerian expansion of the work amplified its late-Beethovenian drama, transforming the quartet into something orchestral yet intimate—a bridge between chamber

music's intricacy and the symphonic vastness that would define the 19th century.

SAEGUSA'S REQUIEM: A LAMENT FOR THE FRAGILE EARTH

A striking shift in tone followed with Shigeaki Saegusa's Requiem for the Earthquake Victims. This solemn piece, dedicated to those lost in natural disasters, carried a raw emotional weight that resonated deeply with both the Japanese and Georgian audiences, two nations familiar with the devastating power of seismic tremors. Yano's delicate conducting sculpted the ensemble's sound into an ethereallament, the strings evoking waves of sorrow and resilience. The music's stark beauty was not merely a tribute but a reminder of the impermanence of human existence.

TSINTSADZE'S SIX MINIATURES: A GEORGIAN JEWEL IN A NEW LIGHT

A highlight of the evening was Sulkhan Tsintsadze's Miniatures for String Orchestra, a work that captures the essence of Georgian folk idioms within a refined classical framework. Under the baton of Zaza Gogua the ensemble approached Tsintsadze's rhythmic dynamism and modal richness with remarkable sensitivity, allowing the intricate interplay of voices to unfold with both precision and passion. Each miniature offered a different facet of Georgian musical heritage, transforming the concert hall into a



Zaza Gogua, Tadahiro Yano and Ensemble Kobe. Photo by the author

vibrant sonic landscape of ancient dances, playful exchanges, and melancholic reflections.

NISHIMURA'S ADAGIO: A JAPANESE ELEGY FOR A EUROPEAN MASTER

Akira Nishimura's Adagio in Memory of Wolfgang Schulz served as an elegant meditation on loss and legacy. The work, dedicated to the late Austrian flutist, felt both personal and expansive, as if time itself had momentarily stood still. The ensemble navigated Nishimura's shimmering textures with a sense of reverence, the music unfolding like a series of gentle waves. Subtle dissonances and delicate phrasing lent the piece an otherworldly quality, reinforcing the evening's overarching theme of remembrance and transcendence.

AZARASHVILI'S CELLO CONCERTO REIMAGINED: VIOLA'S LAMENT AND DEFIANCE

In a bold move, Zaza Gogua presented

a viola arrangement of Vaja Azarashvili's Cello Concerto, transforming the piece into an introspective dialogue between soloist and ensemble. The viola's darker timbre lent a new shade of expressivity to the concerto's lyrical passages, while its agility brought new nuances to the more dramatic sections. Gogua's playing balanced vulnerability with virtuosity, making a compelling case for the viola as an instrument capable of carrying the weight of a concerto traditionally reserved for the cello.

AKUTAGAWA'S TRIPTYCH: A FIERY FINALE

The evening closed with Yasushi Akutagawa's Triptych for Strings, an exhilarating fusion of Japanese and Western influences. The piece's driving rhythms, sharp contrasts, and relentless energy provided a fittingly electrifying conclusion. Ensemble Kobe's execution of Akutagawa's rapid shifts between aggression and lyricism highlighted the work's cinematic qualities, leaving

the audience enthralled.

A NIGHT OF MUSICAL DIALOGUE BEYOND BORDERS

The concert was not merely a showcase of virtuosity but a deeply thoughtful exploration of cross-cultural musical expressions. By juxtaposing Western classical cornerstones with contemporary Georgian and Japanese compositions, Ensemble Kobe illuminated the interconnectedness of musical traditions across continents and centuries. In a world often divided by cultural and historical differences, the evening served as a testament to music's power to transcend borders, offering a space where memory, mourning, and celebration could coexist in harmony.

As the final notes faded into the grandeur of the Conservatoire's hall, it was clear that this was more than just a concert—it was a bridge, an echo, and a deeply resonant conversation between Japan and Georgia, past and present, grief and hope.

Feminist Film Festival 'From Rosa to Simone' to Spotlight Resistance and Environmental Justice

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

The Feminist Film Festival 'From Rosa to Simone,' organized by the Women's Initiative Support Group (WISG) and financially supported by UNDP and RFSU, will take place in Poti, Georgia, from March 14 to 16. It will bring together films and discussions that explore resistance to authoritarianism, environmental degradation, and social inequality. The curated selection will showcase local and foreign films addressing systemic oppression and capitalism's role in ecological crises. Organizers emphasize the urgent need to address the global rise of authoritarianism, the commodification of nature, and the marginalization of vulnerable

communities. As they stated in their announcement, "Today's dominant system seeks to sever human connections, with each other, with nature, and even with our bodies. It devalues lives that do not serve profit or power, framing control and exploitation as progress."

FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHTS

March 14 - 'Destruction in the Name of Development': Films from Georgia and Japan examine how exploitation of land and people is sometimes executed in the name of 'progress'.

March 15 - 'Narrating Place and Displacement': Stories of spaces reshaped by political and economic changes.

March 16 - 'Caring for Life as Resistance': Films on community resilience and activism during crisis.

The festival will be held at Limena Café in Poti and is free to attend.



Illustration by Ele Garuchava. Photo: WISG.

Vakhtang Chabukiani's Othello Reimagined: Marching with Giants



Tomone Kagawa and Amilcar Moret Gonzalez. Photo by the author

BY IVAN NECHAEV

As March begins, the Tbilisi Opera and Ballet Theater is once again at the center of Georgia's cultural calendar with a grand tribute to the legendary Vakhtang Chabukiani. Marking his 115th birth anniversary, the State Ballet of Georgia has staged a spectacular revival of *Othello*, with performances on March 1, 2, 8, and 9. This new choreographic edition, created by Artistic Director Nina Ananiashvili in 2022, revisits Chabukiani's groundbreaking 1957 production, preserving his dramatic intensity while embracing contemporary artistic sensibilities.

THE SPECTACLE UNFOLDS: A CAST OF UNRELENTING FORCE

From the opening tableau, this *Othello* declares itself as a force of nature. The

principal dancers wield their movements like weapons—sharp, precise, and devastatingly expressive.

Cuban virtuoso Amilcar Moret Gonzalez, in the role of Othello, is a revelation. His portrayal of the doomed general does not merely rely on brute strength; rather, his physicality pulsates with psychological complexity. Each grand jeté is an exclamation of anguish, every tour en l'air a moment of inner torment. Moret Gonzalez's partnering with Tomone Kagawa's Desdemona is breathtakingly lyrical, a study in contrasts—the weight of his possessive love set against her ethereal fragility. Kagawa's movements offer an otherworldly grace, her adagios imbued with a heartbreaking sense of foreboding.

Efe Burak's Iago slithers across the stage, his movements infused with sinister precision. Unlike the sweeping grandeur of *Othello*'s choreography, Iago's role is marked by a serpentine economy of motion—his steps clipped

and cutting, his gestures as venomous as the lies he spins. Elene Bujishvili as Emilia offers a striking counterpart, her performance brimming with quiet defiance, culminating in a searing final act that lingers long after the curtain falls.

CHABUKIANI'S FIRE: A CHOREOGRAPHIC LEGACY UNFOLDS

To understand the essence of this production is to understand Chabukiani himself. His approach to movement was revolutionary—he redefined male ballet, elevating it beyond its traditional supporting role into a dazzling spectacle of strength and artistry. His *Othello* was a masterpiece of kinetic drama, where every step carried the weight of Shakespearean tragedy.

Ananiashvili's version remains deeply faithful to Chabukiani's ethos. She has retained the sheer athleticism that defined his choreography, while refining its narrative structure, ensuring that each



Amilcar Moret Gonzalez. Photo by the author

variation serves not only as a technical showcase, but as a vehicle for emotional storytelling. The famed duets between Othello and Desdemona are more intimate than ever, infused with both tenderness and tension. Iago's solo passages emphasize not just his scheming intellect but his manipulative prowess, his movements coiling and uncoiling like a spring-loaded trap.

A SCORE THAT BREATHES WITH THE DANCERS

No ballet exists in isolation from its music, and Alexi Matchavariani's powerful score pulses through the production like a second heartbeat. Under the expert baton of Levan Jagaev, the Tbilisi Opera and Ballet Theater's Orchestra delivers a performance that is both lush and unsettling, its crescendos mirroring Othello's unraveling psyche.

Matchavariani's composition is singular in its ability to blend symphonic grandeur with balletic precision. Its motifs are not merely atmospheric, but deeply integrated into the choreography. The strings weep with Desdemona's sorrow, the brass erupts in Othello's rage, and the percussive undertones lend an air of looming catastrophe. The score, like the ballet itself, is a work of controlled intensity—never indulgent, always purposeful.

BEYOND THE STAGE: THE DOCUMENTARY AS A WINDOW INTO PROCESS

In parallel with these live performances, the State Ballet of Georgia has also unveiled a documentary chronicling the journey of this production. Released on the company's YouTube channel, the film offers an illuminating look at the

creative process, featuring interviews with Ananiashvili, the staging team, and the dancers themselves. Archival footage of Chabukiani's original work juxtaposed with present-day rehearsals reveals the meticulous care taken to honor his legacy, while forging a contemporary path forward.

More than a behind-the-scenes glimpse, this documentary serves as an essential companion piece to the performances, allowing audiences to appreciate the depth of thought and artistry involved in resurrecting a ballet of this magnitude. It situates *Othello* within the broader context of Chabukiani's influence, cementing his role as a titan of 20th-century ballet.

A BALLETTIC STORM OF PASSION AND POWER

In an era where ballet continually wrestles with the tension between tradition and innovation, this *Othello* stands as a testament to the enduring power of legacy. It is a work that does not merely revisit the past but reignites it, allowing Chabukiani's artistic fire to burn brightly for a new generation.

The standing ovations that greet the close of the performance are more than just accolades—they are affirmations. Affirmations that Chabukiani's vision remains as vital as ever. Affirmations that the language of movement, when wielded with this level of mastery, can pierce through time, culture, and history. Affirmations that, even 115 years after his birth, Vakhtang Chabukiani is still shaping the future of ballet.

For those fortunate enough to witness these performances, one truth is undeniable—*Othello* is not simply being revived. It is being reborn.



Photo by the author



Efe Burak and Amilcar Moret Gonzalez. Photo by the author

Threads of Time: The Living Heritage of Adjarian Embroidery at Novo Gallery

BY IVAN NECHAEV

Embroidery is one of the oldest forms of artistic expression, a craft that turns thread into a storyteller, fabric into a canvas, and patience into beauty. Nowhere is this more profoundly embodied than in Adjara, where embroidery has long served as a form of cultural transmission, a silent yet eloquent dialogue between generations of women.

Novo Gallery's ongoing exhibition, Adjarian Embroidery, running until March 16, immerses visitors in this world of intricate patterns and meticulous handiwork. More than a mere display of textiles, the exhibition unfolds as a testament to the resilience of tradition, the power of female artistry, and the evolution of craft from household necessity to cultural emblem.

EMBROIDERY AS A WAY OF LIFE IN ADJARA

To understand Adjarian embroidery is to understand the rhythm of life in this region. For centuries, embroidery was not just a skill, but an essential part of everyday existence. It was how women connected to one another, how they passed time through long winters, and how they embedded personal and communal narratives into fabric.

In the pre-industrial era, women in Adjara relied on embroidery to create dowries, decorate homes, and mark significant life events. It was a form of self-expression at a time when written language was not always accessible, particularly for women. Each stitch carried meaning: motifs represented nature, protection, fertility, and love, forming a secret language passed down through generations.

Long before the idea of luxury craftsmanship took hold in the modern fashion industry, Adjarian women perfected a slow, meditative form of textile art,



Photo by the author

where each piece bore the unmistakable imprint of its maker. Unlike industrially produced fabrics, which strip away individuality in favor of mass production, these handcrafted embroideries were deeply personal. The slightly uneven stitches, the variations in color, and the organic asymmetry were not imperfections—they were signatures of authenticity.

THE RITUAL OF THE DOWRY: A MARRIAGE OF ART AND TRADITION

Among the most significant aspects of Adjarian embroidery was its role in marriage rituals. The moment a young woman became engaged, preparations for her dowry began in earnest. This was not just a decorative endeavor but a rite of passage, a way of preparing the bride for her new life.

The dowry was a display of skill, devotion, and social standing. The more intricate the embroidery, the greater the admiration it received. These handmade pieces—tablecloths, bedspreads, curtains,

and ceremonial garments—were carefully prepared over months or even years, intended to impress the groom's family and assert the bride's place in her new home.

But the significance of these works extended beyond aesthetics. Embroidery was an emotional archive, preserving a woman's personal history in tangible form. Some patterns and symbols had protective meanings, believed to ward off bad luck or ensure prosperity. Others incorporated family-specific motifs, making each dowry unique. In a sense, every stitch was a silent conversation between past, present, and future.

Even today, despite changing lifestyles and modern conveniences, many Adjarian families continue to value this tradition, preserving heirloom pieces that carry the weight of time and memory.

A TRADITION STITCHED INTO MEMORY

Novo Gallery has transformed its space into a living museum of Adjarian embroidery, showcasing an extraordinary selec-

tion of works that span more than a century. Visitors will encounter early 20th-century textiles, their once-vivid colors softened by time, alongside contemporary interpretations that reimagine traditional motifs in a modern context.

The curators have carefully arranged the exhibition to reflect the evolution of this craft. On one side, visitors will find antique pieces—dowry cloths, ceremonial garments, and everyday textiles—that bear the marks of their makers. On the other, more recent works demonstrate how embroidery is still alive, thriving in new hands while retaining its deep historical roots.

Among the most striking exhibits are textiles featuring geometric and floral motifs that were once believed to hold protective powers. Some patterns resemble ancient petroglyphs found in the Caucasus, hinting at embroidery's pre-

Christian origins. Others are purely ornamental, a testament to the extraordinary technical skill of Adjarian artisans.

In a world dominated by disposable fashion and mechanized production, Adjarian embroidery stands as a defiant symbol of patience, artistry, and continuity. It is a reminder that craftsmanship is not simply about decoration—it is about preserving identity, storytelling through stitches, and honoring the labor of those who came before us.

Novo Gallery's exhibition is an invitation to reflect on the value of tradition in an era of rapid change. It asks us to reconsider what it means to make something by hand, to slow down, and to appreciate the beauty of imperfection. Those who visit before March 16 will discover that every thread, every pattern, and every carefully woven detail tells a story—one that is still being written, stitch by stitch, across generations.



Photo by the author



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I am Georgian and therefore I am European

Zurab Zhvania, Council of Europe, 1999

