



European Village Management Group

## FOCUS

### ON ISRAEL-GEORGIA RELATIONS

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## Georgian Art Breaks Through: Bonhams to Host Historic First-Ever Auction Dedicated to Georgian Contemporary Artists

BY TEAM GT

There's a growing buzz around Georgian art, with many saying the country's artists are poised to become the next major wave on the global stage. Collectors, curators, and enthusiasts are being urged to act now, while prices remain relatively accessible. What once seemed like ambitious speculation now feels entirely real: Georgia's artists — long overlooked, often miscategorized, and rarely granted full visibility — are finally stepping into the international spotlight.

Bonhams — one of the world's oldest and most respected auction houses — is launching the first-ever major auction dedicated exclusively to Georgian art, in what many are calling a historic and long-overdue milestone. Titled Georgian Art Now, the online sale will run from May 19 to 29, featuring works by leading contemporary Georgian artists such as Rusudan Petviashvili, Lia Bagrationi, Niniko Morbedadze, Merab Gagiladze, and others.

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GALT & TAGGART CREATING OPPORTUNITIES									
Markets									
As of 14-May-2025									
BONDS					STOCKS				
	Price	w/w	m/m			Price	w/w	m/m	
GEORG 04/26	96.17 (YTM 7.00%)	+0.1%	+0.8%		Lion Finance Group (BGEO LN)	GBP 67.50	+6.6%	+25.5%	
GRAIL 06/28	88.94 (YTM 8.12%)	+0.1%	+1.1%		Georgia Capital (GGEO LN)	GBP 18.16	+1.2%	+34.9%	
GEORG 9 1/2 PERP	99.10 (YTM 9.48%)	+0.3%	+0.7%		TBC Bank Group (TBCG LN)	GBP 46.30	-4.7%	+8.9%	
SILNET 01/27	101.10 (YTM 7.66%)	+0.2%	+0.4%						
TBC 8.894 PERP	97.27 (YTM 11.66%)	+0.7%	+1.2%		COMMODITIES				
TBC 10 1/4 PERP	98.79 (YTM 10.09%)	+0.8%	+1.8%			Price	w/w	m/m	
					Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	66.09	+8.1%	+1.9%	
					Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	3 177.25	-5.6%	-1.0%	
INDICES					CURRENCIES				
	Price	w/w	m/m			Price	w/w	m/m	
SP 500	5 892.58	+4.6%	+9.0%		USD / GEL	2,7410	-0.1%	-0.4%	
FTSE 250	20 819.57	+2.4%	+9.7%		EUR / GEL	3,0630	-1.2%	-1.9%	
DOW JONES 30	42 051.06	+2.3%	+3.8%		GBP / GEL	3,6342	-0.3%	+0.1%	
Russell 2000	2 083.80	+4.7%	+10.8%		EUR / USD	1,1175	-1.1%	-1.6%	
FTSE 100	8 585.01	+0.3%	+5.5%		GBP / USD	1,3263	-0.2%	+0.6%	





## Missing British Teen Bella Culley, 18, Faces Life Sentence in Georgia Over Major Drug Smuggling Charges

BY TEAM GT

Eighteen-year-old Bella May Culley from Billingham, County Durham, UK, has been arrested in Georgia on serious drug trafficking charges. Culley was detained at Tbilisi International Airport after allegedly being found with approximately 14 kilograms of cannabis and 20 packages of hashish concealed in her luggage. Georgian authorities have charged her with illegal possession and importation of narcotics, offenses that carry penalties of up to 20 years or life imprisonment under Georgian law. She has been denied bail and remains in custody.

Prior to her arrest, Culley had been reported missing during a trip to Thailand. Her family lost contact with her after a scheduled phone call on May 10, prompting an international search effort. Her father and aunt traveled to Bangkok to assist in the search, and Thai authorities treated the case as a high priority. However, the situation took a dramatic turn when police in Georgia announced her arrest on drug charges.

Culley had been traveling through Asia since early May, beginning her journey in the Philippines before moving on to Thailand. She had recently completed a nursing access course and was reportedly planning to pursue a career in nursing upon returning to the UK.

If convicted, Culley faces a lengthy prison sentence in Georgia's only wom-

en's prison, Tbilisi Prison No. 5. The facility, dating back to 1912, has been the subject of criticism due to its severe overcrowding and poor living conditions.

International press is emphasizing the allegedly awful conditions of the prison, with the UK's Daily Express sharing details from a report written back in 2006 by the Human Rights Watch, which noted that the prison was holding 3,559 prisoners, nearly double its capacity, "with cells often accommodating more detainees than there were beds." Conditions were described as unsanitary, with inadequate nutrition and substandard medical care. Yet, in 2015, the Ombudsman reported the following: "During the monitoring visit there were 272 female inmates of legal age in the facility in total; of this number 52 were accused and 220 convicted. Three women were sentenced to life imprisonment and one of those was pregnant."

The UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has confirmed that it is providing consular assistance to Culley's family and is in contact with Georgian authorities. However, the FCDO has stated that it cannot intervene in the legal proceedings or secure preferential treatment for British nationals detained abroad.

Culley's arrest has sparked mixed reactions online, with some expressing anger and disbelief. Social media groups in her hometown have been active in discussing the case, with some individuals criticizing her actions, while others express sympathy for her situation.



Footage of Culley being marched up the stairs to Central Criminal Police Department in Tbilisi. Source: Prime Time/ east2west news

## Parliament Data Reveals 188K GEL in MP Travel Spending in Q1 2025

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

As the official data published on the parliament's website shows, Georgian Dream lawmakers spent over 188,000 GEL on international business trips in the first quarter of 2025.

Mariam Lashkhi, Deputy Chair of the Foreign Relations Committee, was at the top of the list, whose travel expenses reached GEL 24,507. Lashkhi visited the United States and Mexico from March 9-17, Serbia from March 23-27, and Turkey from March 27-30. She also sits on the Sectoral Economy Committee.

Levan Makhashvili, Chair of the European Integration Committee, was close



Photo: IRI.

behind, with trips to Hungary, Belgium, Albania, Austria, Slovenia, and Romania costing the state 23,140 GEL. Nikoloz Samkharadze, Chair of the Foreign Relations Committee, also spent 23,140 GEL on visits to Hungary, Austria, Romania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Egypt.

## Journalists Rally Outside Rustavi Prison for Mzia Amaghlobeli's Birthday

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE



Photo: IPN.

Supporters and journalists gathered outside Rustavi No. 5 Penitentiary Facility to show solidarity with Mzia Amaghlobeli on her birthday on Monday, May 12.

Colleagues and friends of the founder of 'Batumelebi' and 'Netgazeti' arrived with chants of "Happy Birthday!" and "Freedom for Mzia, freedom for prisoners of conscience!" as they urged media and the public to call attention on her ongoing detention.

The crowd emphasized their demand for Amaghlobeli's release and larger concerns over press freedom and political imprisonment in Georgia.

## Georgia's Tourism Revenue Stagnant in Early 2025, Says Galt & Taggart

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

The recent report published by Galt & Taggart revealed that Georgia's tourism revenue has not changed in the first four months of 2025 compared to the same period last year.

"Tourism revenue in January-April 2025 amounted to \$1.1 billion, unchanged year-on-year," the company noted in its weekly economic review. April alone brought in \$300 million in tourism-related income.

Despite the stagnant start, Galt & Taggart projects a recovery later this year. "We forecast that tourism revenue will reach \$4.5 billion in 2025," the document declared.



Photo: Georgian Tourism Association.

## Georgian Culture Day Celebrated in Basel, Switzerland

BY TEAM GT

Georgian Culture Day was held in Basel, Switzerland, showcasing the country's rich cultural heritage in the heart of the Eurovision 2025 host city. The event was organized by the Embassy of Georgia with support from the Georgian Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Culture.

Ambassador Shota Getsadze and Tinatin

Berdzenishvili, Director General of the Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) First Channel, opened the event with welcoming remarks to an audience that included international media, local officials, and members of the Georgian diaspora.

A highlight of the evening was a performance by Mariam Shengelia, Georgia's representative for Eurovision 2025, marking her debut in the host city. In a major announcement, officials confirmed that Georgia will host the Junior Eurovision Song Contest in 2025, underscoring the country's growing presence in the inter-

national cultural arena.

The program also featured a vocal performance by Andria Putkaradze, followed by a spirited show from the acclaimed Georgian ensemble Erisioni. Guests were then treated to traditional Georgian wine and cuisine, offering a taste of the nation's renowned hospitality.

The event drew attendance from representatives of the European Broadcasting Union, national delegations, and both local and international media, celebrating Georgia's vibrant culture on a global stage.



# PM Kobakhidze Calls for Renewal of US-Georgia Relations in Open Letter to Trump

BY TEAM GT

In an open letter to President Donald Trump and Vice President J.D. Vance, Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze voiced concern over the lack of high-level communication and recent unfriendly legislative measures. He called on the US administration to reevaluate its stance and reaffirm its commitment to Georgia's democratic progress and sovereignty.

The letter underscores the enduring strategic partnership between Georgia and the United States, expressing hope that a genuine confrontation with the Deep State will pave the way for a renewed alliance and restored mutual trust between the two countries.

The full text of the open letter follows:

"A few weeks ago, I addressed you in a letter concerning US-Georgia relations. That letter was preceded by my public statements, in which I openly expressed Georgia's readiness to renew our strategic partnership with the United States from a clean slate, guided by a specific roadmap. However, to this day, we have not received a response to our letter or to the public statements. Moreover, no communication has taken place at the highest level between the Governments of Georgia and the United States.

"This silence is surprising to both the Georgian people and the Government of Georgia for several reasons:

- First and foremost, for many years Georgia has been the most reliable partner of the United States in our highly volatile region—one that holds strategic importance for the USA. Georgia has stood by the United States in the world's

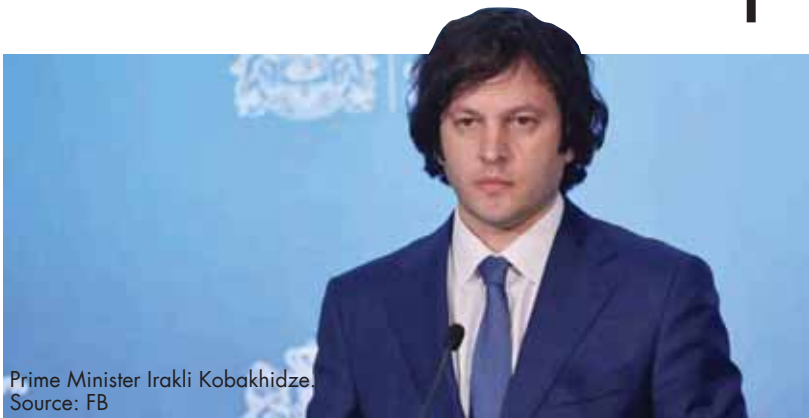
most critical hotspots, including Iraq and Afghanistan, where Georgia contributed the highest number of troops per capita. Through participation in just these two missions, our small country helped the USA save 2.5 billion USD—an amount that far exceeds the actual (!) aid Georgia has received from the USA budget. (By "actual aid," we do not mean the funds allocated from the U.S. budget during 2008–2011 to preserve the regime of former president Mikheil Saakashvili after he initiated a war with Russia at the behest of the Deep State. Nor do we consider as "actual aid" the funds channeled through the USA Embassy, USAID, NED, the Soros Foundation and other similar entities—funds that were used to incite radicalism and hatred, organize revolutions, undermine the image of the Georgian Orthodox Church, encourage religious extremism, weaken state institutions, promote gender and LGBT propaganda and pursue other such goals.) Considering that Georgia has long remained a true strategic partner to the United States—and continues to express readiness to renew this partnership—the silence from the new administration is both unexpected and perplexing for the Government of Georgia and people alike.

- According to international rankings, Georgia is a regional leader in terms of democracy, rule of law, human rights, media freedom, judicial independence, strength of state institutions, low levels of corruption and other key indicators. Georgia's leadership is confirmed even by institutions that your administration particularly trusts. Taking all this into account—and given that your administration actively engages in dialogue and communication with numerous states,

including some that are openly undemocratic and authoritarian—your silence with regard to Georgia lacks any logical explanation from our perspective.

- What is especially important is that, if we examine the public rhetoric of our government and your administration, a striking alignment of values and ideology becomes evident. We spoke openly about the criminal activities of the Deep State, USAID, NED and other related entities several years before you made identical statements. Our assessments regarding the war in Ukraine, gender and LGBT propaganda, and many other issues are completely aligned. Against the backdrop of such strong value-based and ideological convergence, the Georgian people initially expected that Georgia would be among the first countries to attract particular interest from your administration. Such interest, for example, has been shown toward Romania and Germany, where, with the support of European bureaucracy, undemocratic actions have taken place. However, to the surprise of both the Georgian people and ourselves, your administration has shown no such attention toward Georgia to this day.

"Moreover, the completely incomprehensible sanctions against Georgia's Deputy Prime Minister and other government officials remain in force—sanctions imposed for effectively preventing the attempted revolution and violence planned by the Biden administration and financed through USAID. In addition, just a few days ago, the US Congress passed an absurd law—the so-called Friendship Act—which is deeply hostile toward the Georgian people and the government they democratically elected. Given the meaning of the word "friend,"



Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze.  
Source: FB

this law brings to mind George Orwell's model, in which war is peace and an enemy is a friend. We have become accustomed to absurd acts adopted by various parliaments in recent times and under normal circumstances, we wouldn't even have paid attention to the Friendship Act—were it not for the fact that many actors attribute this legislation to your administration. That perception is further reinforced by the fact that your administration has not issued a single critical statement regarding the Act. As a result, this law diminishes the trust of the Georgian people not only in Congress, but—regrettably—in your administration as well, which the Georgian public had viewed with a different kind of hope.


"Recent developments within Georgian society have given rise to a growing sense that the statements about defeating the Deep State are merely attempts at rebranding it—and nothing more. People find it perplexing that, while you harshly criticize President Biden's decisions, you have yet to reverse any of his criminal actions. Nevertheless, in its public statements, our government continues to express optimism that your administra-

tion will indeed succeed in defeating the Deep State—a development that would undoubtedly lead to a reset in US-Georgia relations and the restoration of our strategic partnership. In fact, we are truly hopeful that this will be the case. Otherwise, the revolutionary scenario planned under the Biden administration will continue to unfold.

"Let us remind you that around 250 individuals—trained and funded by USAID and NED—still gather daily on the central avenue of our capital, which is undeniable evidence that the Deep State has not yet shelved its plans for revolution.

"As already mentioned, despite the growing number of unanswered questions, we continue to remain optimistic and hopeful that your confrontation with the Deep State is sincere and will ultimately lead to its defeat. The Government of Georgia is patiently awaiting that moment—one that should lay the foundation for a reset in US-Georgia relations and the restoration of strategic partnership between our two countries.


"We wish you success in this struggle! And we wish the United States of America strength and prosperity!"




EXPLORE OUR BELOVED CITY FROM THE BIRD VIEW

Xeme restaurant is located on the 31<sup>st</sup> floor in The Biltmore Tbilisi Hotel







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

THE BILTMORE

T B I L I S I

29 Rustaveli Avenue, 0108, Tbilisi, Georgia / T: +995 322 72 72 72 / Info.bhtg@biltmorecollection.com



# Georgian Opposition Urges US Senate to Fast-Track MEGOBARI Act, Zurabishvili Criticizes PM's Open Letter to Trump, Vance

BY TEAM GT

A delegation from Georgia's opposition party, the United National Movement (UNM), was on an official visit to the United States this week, urging the Senate to swiftly approve the MEGOBARI Act—a bill that includes targeted sanctions against Bidzina Ivanishvili and other high-ranking officials associated with Georgia's ruling party.

"We have begun meetings in the US Congress, first and foremost to thank the members for passing the MEGOBARI Act," said UNM Chairperson Tina Bokuchava, referring to the bill recently passed by the House of Representatives. "Naturally, we will also be meeting with senators to ensure the act is adopted in a timely manner."

Bokuchava emphasized the dual purpose of the visit: strengthening US-Georgian ties and pushing for accountability. "The act offers many benefits for the Georgian people and for Georgia as a whole, but it also includes personal sanctions against Ivanishvili and his circle."

Also part of the delegation is Nikoloz Saakashvili, son of imprisoned former President Mikheil Saakashvili. He told US lawmakers, "My father is being persecuted for standing up to Putin. But this is a fight that America, Ukraine, and Georgia will ultimately win."



March 23 demonstration in Tbilisi. Source: Transparency International-Georgia

Back in Georgia, support for the MEGOBARI Act is growing on the ground.

On Sunday, protesters gathered at Tbilisi's Akhmeteli metro station before marching to the US Embassy in Georgia to express their appreciation for the legislation. Carrying Georgian and American flags, demonstrators thanked the US for its ongoing support of the Georgian

people, describing the MEGOBARI Act as a document that "supports the citizens of Georgia."

The march featured colorful visuals, including colored smoke and chants such as: "Step down," "Sanctions are on the way," "Freedom for political prisoners," and "Down with the regime." Participants also held banners that read: "Freedom

for prisoners of conscience!" and "MEGOBARI ACT - Friendship in Act!"

The protest comes amid escalating political tensions in Georgia and rising international concern over democratic backsliding in the country. The MEGOBARI Act, which underscores US support for the Georgian people while calling for accountability for anti-democratic

behavior, has become a focal point of civic energy and mobilization.

Meanwhile, former President Salome Zurabishvili issued a sharp critique of the Georgian Prime Minister's recent open letter to US President Donald Trump (see page 3), calling it a sign of deep anxiety and political collapse within the ruling Georgian Dream party.

"The letter confirms significant unease in Georgian Dream, but I doubt the US President will ever read it—he likely doesn't have time," Zurabishvili said during a briefing.

She encouraged the public to read the letter themselves, describing it as a "shameful" display of desperation and a lack of diplomatic decency.

"I don't know who wrote it, or in what state of mind, but it clearly shows the government's despair and Bidzina Ivanishvili's failure to manage the fallout from the MEGOBARI Act. Whether or not the US President ever reads it is uncertain, but anyone who does will be disheartened by what it represents."

Zurabishvili emphasized the long-standing support Georgia has received from the United States, including military, economic, and humanitarian aid over the past three decades.

"America helped build our army and modernize our economy. For years, we were among the top per-capita recipients of US aid globally. And this is how we respond—with a letter devoid of respect and gratitude? This reflects not only political failure, but moral failure as well," she added.

# Ukraine Latest: Germany Threatens Tougher Russia Sanctions ahead of Potential Peace Talks



Putin holds a videoconference meeting with members of the all-Russian public organization "Delovaya Rossiya", a union of entrepreneurs, in Moscow on May 13. Photo by Alexander Kazakov / Pool / AFP

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

The European Union is ready to impose significantly harsher sanctions on Russia if no progress is made in halting the war in Ukraine this week, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said on May 13, according to Reuters.

His remarks come just days before a possible meeting between Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Russian President Vladimir Putin, scheduled to take place in Istanbul on May 15.

Merz emphasized the EU's backing of Zelensky's diplomatic push for a ceasefire but warned that Moscow's failure to

engage seriously would trigger a powerful new round of sanctions.

"We are waiting for Putin's agreement, and we agree that if there is no real progress this week, we want to work together at the European level for a significant tightening of sanctions," Merz stated during a press conference.

An EU official told the Kyiv Independent that the bloc's 17th sanctions package will be unveiled on May 14. The new measures are expected to target additional sectors of Russia's economy, with a strong focus on the energy and financial sectors.

Since Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, the EU has adopted 16 rounds of sanctions targeting military suppliers, state-linked entities, and individuals involved in the war effort.

Merz also cautioned against expecting further concessions from Ukraine while Russia continues to strike civilian targets.

"I believe more compromise and more concessions are no longer reasonable," he said. "We support President Zelensky's efforts, but there must be a real effort from Russia in return — starting with a ceasefire."

## RUBIO TO JOIN UKRAINE-RUSSIA PEACE TALKS IN ISTANBUL, TRUMP CONFIRMS

US President Donald Trump confirmed on May 13 that Secretary of State Marco Rubio, along with other senior officials, will attend the upcoming peace talks between Ukraine and Russia in Istanbul, scheduled for May 15.

The announcement underscores growing international focus on the Turkish-hosted negotiations, following Russian President Vladimir Putin's proposal for direct talks with Kyiv in Istanbul. Ukrainian President Zelensky has already confirmed his attendance, while the Kremlin has yet to say whether Putin will participate.

"Our people are going to be going there. Marco is going to be going there. Others are going to be going, and we'll see if we can get it done," Trump said during remarks at the US-Saudi Investment Forum.

Earlier reports from Reuters indicated that Trump's envoys, Steve Witkoff and Keith Kellogg, would travel to Istanbul to observe the talks. Rubio's inclusion marks the first official confirmation of Cabinet-level US involvement in the negotiations.

As hopes for progress rise, global attention is now fixed on whether Putin will join the table — and how far the parties are willing to go toward ending the war.

## ZELENSKY TO MEET ERDOGAN IN TURKEY, AWAITS PUTIN FOR POTENTIAL PEACE TALKS

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced on May 13 that he will meet with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Ankara and is prepared to travel to Istanbul if Russian

President Vladimir Putin agrees to attend planned peace talks there on May 15.

Zelensky expressed hope that a ceasefire could emerge from a potential face-to-face meeting with Putin — the first direct talks between the two leaders since 2019.

"We will be waiting to meet with Putin in Turkey, so that Russia does not manipulate locations and claim that Putin is unwilling to come to Ankara but is willing to go only to Istanbul," Zelensky said during a press conference in Kyiv. "I have conveyed the signal to President Erdogan, and the Turkish side is ready."

The Kremlin has yet to confirm Putin's attendance at the negotiations. Kyiv, meanwhile, continues to insist on an unconditional ceasefire as a prerequisite for any meaningful progress.

The potential meeting in Istanbul is being closely watched by international observers and could mark a turning point in diplomatic efforts to end Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

## UKRAINE DESTROYS RUSSIAN BUK AIR DEFENSE SYSTEM, URAGAN ROCKET LAUNCHER WITH DRONES

Ukrainian Special Operations Forces have destroyed a Russian Buk-M3 anti-aircraft missile system and a Uragan-1 multiple launch rocket system (MLRS) using attack drones, the military reported on May 13.

According to the statement, Ukrainian operators identified both systems during a reconnaissance mission in an undisclosed front-line sector. Once located, attack drones were deployed, successfully striking and destroying both targets.

The Buk-M3 system, reportedly valued at around \$45 million, was completely destroyed along with its ammunition. The military did not provide details about the exact timing of the operation.

The successful strike marks another significant blow to Russia's frontline capabilities as Ukraine continues to target high-value military assets with precision drone attacks.

The Soviet-era Buk surface-to-air mis-

sile systems are used by both Ukraine and Russia. Ukraine inherited Buk systems from the Soviet Union, but the weapons typically use Russian-produced missiles. In 2023, Ukraine announced it had converted the systems to fire U.S. missiles.

The Uragan-1 is a Russian multi-caliber rocket launcher capable of swapping launch containers. It operates with calibers of 200 and 300 mm.

## DEADLY STRIKES REPORTED ON BOTH SIDES OF THE UKRAINE-RUSSIA BORDER

At least three people were killed in a Russian bombardment of Ukraine's northeastern city of Kharkiv, a regional official confirmed on May 14, as cross-border attacks between Ukraine and Russia continue to escalate.

The shelling in Kharkiv comes amid ongoing Russian offensives in the area, which has seen intensified fighting in recent weeks. Local authorities have warned civilians to remain in shelters as Russian forces continue to target critical infrastructure and residential zones.

Meanwhile, across the border in Russia's Belgorod region, at least 16 people were wounded in overnight Ukrainian drone attacks, according to Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov. Among the injured were a doctor and a paramedic. Eight of the wounded have been hospitalized, Gladkov said in a statement on Telegram.

Russia's Defense Ministry reported that its air defense units shot down 12 Ukrainian drones during the night. While the exact locations of the drone interceptions were not disclosed, Russian media suggested they were concentrated around the Belgorod region, which has repeatedly been targeted by cross-border strikes.

The latest exchanges reflect a continuing pattern of tit-for-tat attacks as both sides seek to weaken each other's military and logistical capabilities near the border. Civilians on both sides remain at high risk as the conflict shows little sign of de-escalation.



# Professor Andrey Makarychev: Russia Has Lost Sensitivity to Death. Death Validates It Now

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

**T**hree years ago, Ukrainian forces retook Kherson in what was then hailed as a major turning point in the war. At the time, Professor Andrey Makarychev, a political scientist at the University of Tartu and long-time observer of Russia's authoritarian evolution, told me that Vladimir Putin would not survive a second Kherson. But that second Kherson never came. Today, with the war dragging on and May 9th once again upon us, we return to Professor Makarychev for an update—not just on the military situation, but on what three years of war have done to Russia's psyche, its neighbors, and its dictator.

**OUR LAST INTERVIEW WAS THREE YEARS AGO. YOUR PREDICTED "SECOND KHERSON" NEVER CAME—SO HOW DOES IT LOOK TODAY FOR PUTIN?**

Well, the price that Putin and Russia pay for this war is definitely high. From that perspective, there is not much to celebrate—if you look at Russia's limited success on the battlefield, and at what cost these successes have come, the enormous price Russia has to pay for each meter of captured Ukrainian land. Especially if you take into account the correlation of forces—one of the largest armies in the world, over three years, cannot achieve militarily any of the goals and aims it set out initially. So there is no success story for Russia here.

These three years have demonstrated that Russia under Putin was and remains a retro-state that is trying to package its failures and sell them as successes—and the May 9th parade is a clear example of that. They try to sell this crawling advance into Ukraine as a success story, a story of consolidating the nation, of Russia that was on its knees rising again, asserting itself.

When it comes to this propagandistic dimension, you just need to look at how the widows of the slain soldiers and officers are expressing their public gratitude to Putin—for essentially taking the lives of their loved ones and sending them into the meatgrinder. In this sense, if that is success, he can well celebrate it.

**HE CAN TRY TO SELL FAILURE AS VICTORY, AS SUCCESS—BUT ARE THERE BUYERS? AND IF SO, WHY? WHAT'S THE APPEAL?**

In today's Russia, the predominant attitude to the war is: "Yes, perhaps we shouldn't have started it, but since we



Russia has lost its sensitivity to death, to the loss of human life; it is no longer taking death seriously. Which is morbid—but also fascinating



Professor Andrey Makarychev. Source: ut.ee

did, let's go till the bitter end." Public opinion is still not critical towards the war—and a very significant segment outright supports the war. Even people who live right next to it, in border towns, those who can see and smell and feel this war, even they accept the situation rather than challenge or revolt or try to be critical.

**WHAT IS THE MOOD AMONGST THOSE THAT YOU HAVE DUBBED HOMO PUTINUS IN YOUR RESEARCH, THOSE WHO SUPPORT THE WAR? PUTIN LOST KURSK FOR MONTHS, HAS LIMITED SUCCESS ON THE BATTLEFIELD, AND CAN'T EVEN GUARANTEE THE SAFETY OF THE SKY OVER MOSCOW FOR THE PARADE. WHERE'S THE MOB CRYING "THE TSAR'S GONE BAD—WE NEED A BETTER ONE"?**

Well, in this sense, I think Russian society is deeply, deeply sick psychologically. And this high level of support for the war is a good sign of that. I don't think I know how much time it might take to wake up. Even those who distance themselves from the war try not to notice it—that can also be interpreted as an indirect acceptance. And then there is this death cult and fascination with death, which I have been following for many years. This glorification of death has reached its peak—now it's something qualitatively different even from Soviet times. Russia lost its sensitivity to death, to the loss of human life; it is no longer taking death seriously. Which is morbid—but also fascinating.

**WHEN DID IT START?**

I suspect that this new, before unseen peak started with COVID-19, when Russia lost about 1 million people. No one noticed that. Almost 1 million people now killed in the war over three years. This kind of insensitivity to death is frankly amazing, and I am not sure that in political science we have an explanation for it. You need to go to political psychologists. The more we lose, the stronger our argument. First comes the

insensitivity, then the glorification—and now gratitude. Death validates us. The widows are grateful for their husbands and brothers having been taken to war and killed there in a senseless, absurd war.

**THE MAY 9TH PARADE—IF ZELENSKY WERE TO PISS ON IT, METAPHORICALLY OF COURSE, WHAT COULD BE PUTIN'S RESPONSE?**

Putin can easily fall victim to his own fetish. And May 9th, for him, certainly carries that kind of status. If something goes wrong with his fetish, with this ritual, he won't be happy—but it's hard to forecast how far he would be willing to go. He doesn't have many options left to escalate this war, and at the same time, he also doesn't want to completely disrupt communication with the United States. Although, of course, he did many things that displaced Trump, he still wants to keep the door ajar with the Americans, even though he doesn't have the slightest intention to stop. He is fully intent on continuing this war, no matter what might happen on May 9th. And the main reason for that is political—because should the war end, the very people you mentioned earlier, the ones not revolting now—they might start asking questions about the price they paid and what they got for it. Once they get to see the bill, so to say.

**ANOTHER THING THAT WAS VERY APPARENT IN THE PREPARATION PHASE IS THAT THE KREMLIN WAS TRYING TO UNDERSCORE THAT THIS INTERNATIONAL ISOLATION OF RUSSIA IS ENDING. WITH THE LINE-UP THAT ARRIVED IN MOSCOW, CAN THAT BE SAID?**

The isolation was always limited to the Western countries. Putin was not isolated in the Global South. But while some of the leaders are ready to play different pragmatic games with Putin, nobody much wants to be seen as a friend of his. Continuing business as usual with Russia is one thing, but going to Moscow



These three years have demonstrated that Russia under Putin was and remains a retro-state that is trying to package its failures and sell them as successes

and standing next to Putin at an ideology event? That has limited value for people like Modi, for example, who is already getting what he wants from Putin, so there isn't much point for him to go. We are increasingly living in this Trumpist, transactional world where norms and values mean less and less, and everything is judged by its material value. Putin is one of the victims of this Trumpist way of thinking—because people might ask: where are our material benefits for coming to the parade? And I don't think that he has a clear answer for them.

**WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF THESE THREE YEARS OF WAR ON RUSSIA'S NEIGHBORHOOD—WHAT IT CALLS ITS "NEAR ABROAD"?**

I think Russia had to endure a couple of very serious blows against its own ambitions. First off, two of the countries it never wanted to see in NATO became NATO members. Number two, I think the Eurasian integration received an almost mortal blow as well, because after the 24th of February 2022, speaking about Russian-led integration became a farce. A peaceful Eurasian integration project

is even less feasible now than it would have been before. It is clear that Russia is succeeding on its integration in its own way—by using force and the threat of using force. And it's a persuasive argument.

Just look at Belarus—the key argument of Lukashenko is that, "Guys, whatever you think about me, I kept Belarus peaceful."

Look at Georgia. Whatever one may think about the Georgian Dream, they capitalized on this fear that Russia can do to Georgia exactly what they did with Mariupol. And this is not fake. So Russia can definitely sell this sense of anxiety, sense of fear—basically, geopolitical blackmail. "If you want peace, if you want to keep your country in its borders, the only way would be to accept our conditions."

Look at Ukraine. Look at Georgia—what happened in 2008—minus 20 percent of their territory. This is a very cynical argument, but also very persuasive.

Forget about soft power. Forget about this imitation of European integration in the Eurasian space. They always tried to mimic or borrow whatever the European Union was doing. Now it's only fear and threats. And the only question is whether Russia has sufficient resources to subjugate a significant part of the post-Soviet area. I doubt that. Even though the sanctions are not as effective as we were hoping for, still, Russia simply doesn't have enough resources to do so. What Russia will most likely try to use is subversive tactics—to try and bring to power the most pro-Russian forces in the neighboring countries. We should take into account that many countries are divided—Moldova is almost 50/50 on pro-Russian vs. Western sentiment. In the Baltic states, Russia tries its best, but the pro-Russian forces are marginal. But then again, Alternative für Deutschland was also considered a marginal force a few years ago. Everything is changing, and Russia is steadily investing in the peaceful facilitation of pro-Russian forces taking power in its neighborhood.



# Israeli Week and Business Forum in Georgia: Preparing for Seven Good Economic Years Ahead

TRANSLATED BY ANA DUMBADZE FROM THE "CALCALIST" NEWSPAPER

**A**s part of Israeli Week and the 35th anniversary of relations between Israel and Georgia, the Israel-Georgia Chamber of Business is preparing for its annual economic forum and beginning to address long-standing challenges. The Chamber of Business is analyzing the post-October 7 situation and recommends that businesses act as economic ambassadors. Meanwhile, despite the global crisis, Georgia is, for the first time, entering the luxury real estate market.

"We must learn to swim in a new economic sea," says Itsik Moshe, President of the Israel-Georgia Chamber of Business. He expresses hope that the biblical sinusoidal pattern will repeat—believing we are now reaching the end of the seven difficult years that began in 2019 with the COVID crisis and were followed by wars, rising global antisemitism, and widespread social, political, and economic instability.

The central question now is whether a new, prosperous seven-year cycle will begin in 2026—will there be momentum in bilateral economic activity, and will it extend beyond the borders of both countries?

The Israel-Georgia Chamber of Business has traditionally sought to shape a new reality and is now preparing for its annual economic forum. This year's event coincides with the 35th anniversary of Israel and the global Jewish community entering the post-Soviet space—a milestone marked by the official arrival of the Jewish Agency and the beginning of large-scale emigration (Aliyah) from the Soviet Union.

Reactions from antisemitic media outlets quickly followed the forum's announcement. Alongside the first Georgian article about the event, Al Jazeera published a piece targeting Israel, the forum, and Itsik Moshe, referring to it as "Israel's takeover of Georgia."

In response, Moshe asserts that Al Jazeera seeks every opportunity to disrupt Israel's bilateral relations around the world. Moshe, who has organized business forums in Georgia for three decades, is also head of "Israeli House"—an organization that Iran's Revolutionary Guard once targeted for physical elimination due to its bilateral initiatives and active presence in 25 countries.

**"The world has changed. We are in a difficult period, and while Israel undergoes an internal reboot, we must also represent the country abroad as economic ambassadors—overcoming the general decline and doing so with integrity," says Moshe.**

He explains that the purpose of the forums is to strengthen economic ties between Israel and its ally Georgia, and to meet the evolving needs of the Israeli business community in a different business culture. This time, the top priority will be solving concrete problems accumulated during the past seven difficult years, in cooperation with Georgia's highest authorities.

**Moshe emphasizes that Israel's contribution to Georgia's tourism industry and investments exceeds \$2 billion. The upcoming forum, organized in partnership with international organizations, is expected to bring over 100 businesspeople to Tbilisi,**



**with more than 1,000 participants anticipated for the Israeli Week events.**

The Israel-Georgia Chamber of Business was the first to build economic bridges between the two countries, and has initiated many related projects. Alongside members of the Knesset, it was the first to initiate the preparation of a bilateral free trade and investment protection agreement between Israel and Georgia.

The forum will cover a range of topics. Starting today, the Israel-Georgia Chamber of Business will begin collecting questions from Israeli investors, accepting inquiries and reports of problems, and working to resolve them through joint efforts.

**Itsik Moshe is also actively involved in supporting Israel and advocating for its legitimate interests on the international stage. He believes that, as an Israeli, he has a natural responsibility to his country. "I am, above all, an Israeli, a Zionist, and a Jew," he says.**

"In my work, there is genuine concern for the other side as well—but that concern also stems from Israel's own interests. Secondly, while we are not judges and must primarily think from the Israeli perspective, there are situations where improper behavior by Israeli actors harms not only the other side, but also Israel's economic image, and erodes trust in Israeli companies. Israelis are highly respected in Georgia thanks to the business community's efforts over the past 35 years—both through investments and humanitarian initiatives benefiting Georgian society."

**Despite regional wars that have devastated leading economies in the post-Soviet space, Georgia has maintained stability across the board. Following the coronavirus pandemic, it quickly returned to record levels of performance, especially in tourism.**

Georgia now hosts over 5 million tourists annually, with more than 310,000 coming from Israel. This reflects a 200% yearly increase compared to the global

average. For Israel, the growth is triple the world average, reaching 20%. For instance, in the first quarter, Israel led with a 73.7% increase in tourism, and an average spend of 114.2 million US dollars.

"Progress began in the late 1990s. Under a bilateral agreement, we opened the first official representation of Georgia's Ministry of Tourism in Israel, with the participation of tourism ministers. This changed the sector. Progress will continue, and the potential is great, as Israeli tourists are still less engaged in Georgia's cultural tourism. In this area, Georgia is one of the global leaders in classical culture," Moshe notes.

"On the other hand, it's also possible to increase tourist flow from the post-Soviet space to Israel. To that end, the Chamber of Business has prepared a plan. Hopefully, the Ministries of Tourism will put aside their egos and consider recommendations from the third sector, which could generate hundreds of millions in revenue for Israel," he adds.

According to the World Bank, Georgia ranks among Europe's leaders in "ease of doing business." Its economic growth has reached approximately 10%—one of the highest in Europe—and its currency has remained stable, despite the 30% average decline seen in many neighboring countries.

Israeli investments in Georgia's tourism industry have not slowed, largely due to high gross operating profit (GOP) rates in hotels, which exceed 50%—double the European average.

Simultaneously, cooperation has expanded into IT, software, kosher food production, and agriculture. Bilateral trade has increased by over 50%. In recent years, there has been growing demand for real estate—especially high-end apartments under international management.

**A particularly striking development has occurred in the luxury real estate segment.**

The top 10% of buyers in this market are primarily served by EUROPEAN VILLAGE, a company led by Israeli citizen

Pavlo Broyde. Prices for real estate, specifically hotel-apartments managed by international chains—especially Wyndham—now range from \$5,000 to \$12,000 per square meter, aligning with prices in top global markets. This reflects a dramatic transformation: today, the price of one square meter is equal to the cost of an entire apartment in the past.

Moshe spoke with the company's head, Mr. Broyde who manages a team of 100 realtors, and said:

**"The Georgian market has long attracted oligarchs and wealthy individuals from the post-Soviet space. With more international companies entering the tourism sector, it's easy to believe that demand will grow not just from neighboring countries, but globally—especially with declared investments from the Emirates reaching \$6 billion."**

Pavlo Broyde, with extensive experience in the high-end market, explains that from a business perspective, whether a property costs \$1,000 or \$10,000 per square meter is irrelevant, as most buyers do not plan to live in the units. They expect an annual return of 5–8%, meaning the profit is comparable whether investing in ten \$50,000 units or one \$500,000 unit.

High-value purchases offer added security, as these properties are managed by international chains. Owners avoid involvement in maintenance, repairs, and community issues.

You can view a sample website with current prices and supporting documentation for this new market trend: <https://wyndhamgrandbatumigonio.com/he>

Looking ahead, the market is expected to continue growing, with Georgia moving closer to Western standards in pricing and taxation. As a result, prestigious projects are likely to maintain consistency in quality, maintenance, and compliance.

**From a psychological and entrepreneurial perspective, an analogy can be drawn:** Some people buy a Seiko watch for \$100 to tell time accurately. Others spend \$100,000 on a luxury

watch—not because it tells time better (the Seiko works just as well)—but for status and craftsmanship. Interestingly, the expensive watch requires manual adjustment each day, unlike the Seiko. Yet, it remains highly desirable, prestigious, and a thousand times more valuable. There are different types of entrepreneurs—those who seek prestige, high-end projects, and a luxurious lifestyle. Despite Georgia's current socio-economic conditions, its five-star hotels maintain nightly rates exceeding \$1,000, and remain consistently booked.

**Beyond business, Moshe also speaks on ideological matters and the challenges of working outside Israel:**

"First and foremost, it must be emphasized that every Israeli's home is in Jerusalem—that is the source of our strength. This is respected in Georgia as well.

"Despite rising global antisemitism, Israel remains a strong brand state. Even in countries with anti-Israel sentiment, there is still interest in economic cooperation."

"Don't come abroad relying solely on written opinions from home—analyze the market independently and act accordingly," Moshe advises, going on to emphasize the need to understand the local business culture: "A major barrier for Israelis is a lack of familiarity with local etiquette and limited knowledge of the country itself."

To help address these challenges, the Israel-Georgia Chamber of Business has worked closely with the Chamber of Business for nearly 30 years.

With a 20-member team based in Tbilisi, the Israel-Georgia Chamber of Business offers free services to Israelis, including financial consulting and market research. Moshe advises becoming well-acquainted with the local business culture and seeking guidance before launching any activities in the country.

**"The homeland comes first; everything else is secondary,"** he says, going on to highlight a deeper aspect of working abroad: "As I've often said, it's only when you operate beyond your country's borders that you truly understand the meaning of that experience. So, beyond taking care of essential business parameters, another critical factor in our success is the strength and resilience of the State of Israel."

The events of October 7th and the subsequent global wave of antisemitism have triggered a red alert, reshaping thinking across all sectors. As a result, many challenges and responsibilities now lie ahead.

"The burden is heavy—not only for the business community operating outside of Israel, but also for the third sector, which must engage in public diplomacy. We must act as economic ambassadors and, together with the global Jewish community, help strengthen the State of Israel at every level."

The annual business forum, held during Israeli Week, also features a presentation on strategies for promoting Israel in the international arena.

Moshe concludes: "We know how to face the significant challenge of defining the problem.

The solution lies in maintaining control—continuing with life and work without fear or paralysis.

We will press on in our economic diplomacy and, from this point forward, prepare for seven good years ahead."

He ends the conversation by congratulating Israel on its 77th Independence Day and expressing his hopes for continued successful cooperation with friendly nations.



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# Andersen Marks a New Chapter in Georgia: Full-Service Advisory Firm Launch and Nationwide Expansion

BY TEAM GT

Andersen, the globally recognized professional services brand, is entering a transformative phase in the Georgian market, launching a comprehensive suite of services that positions the firm as a premier multidisciplinary advisory in the country. While Andersen has maintained a presence in Georgia for several years, it previously focused primarily on tax and accounting services, alongside select advisory capabilities. Now, the firm has expanded its offerings to include legal, tax, accounting, finance, business advisory, HR and people advisory, private client services, compliance, public policy, and advocacy—marking a significant milestone in its regional growth strategy. “This is not just an expansion of services—it is a redefinition of what an advisory firm can be in Georgia,” said George Svanadze, Senior Partner and Head of Dispute Resolution at Andersen in Georgia. “We are not only responding to market needs. We are setting new standards.”

This expansion also signifies a key moment for the local legal sector: Andersen in Georgia now carries the legacy of MG Law, one of the country's most prestigious and top-ranked law firms. MG Law, renowned for its high standards and consistent recognition by global legal directories such as Cham-

bers & Partners and Legal 500, becomes part of Andersen's powerful global ecosystem.

“The integration of MG Law into Andersen is not just a change in name—it's the continuation of a legacy with global ambition,” noted Tamar Jikia, Partner at Andersen in Georgia. “We are building on a foundation of excellence and combining it with Andersen's international reach to create something truly unique for Georgia.”

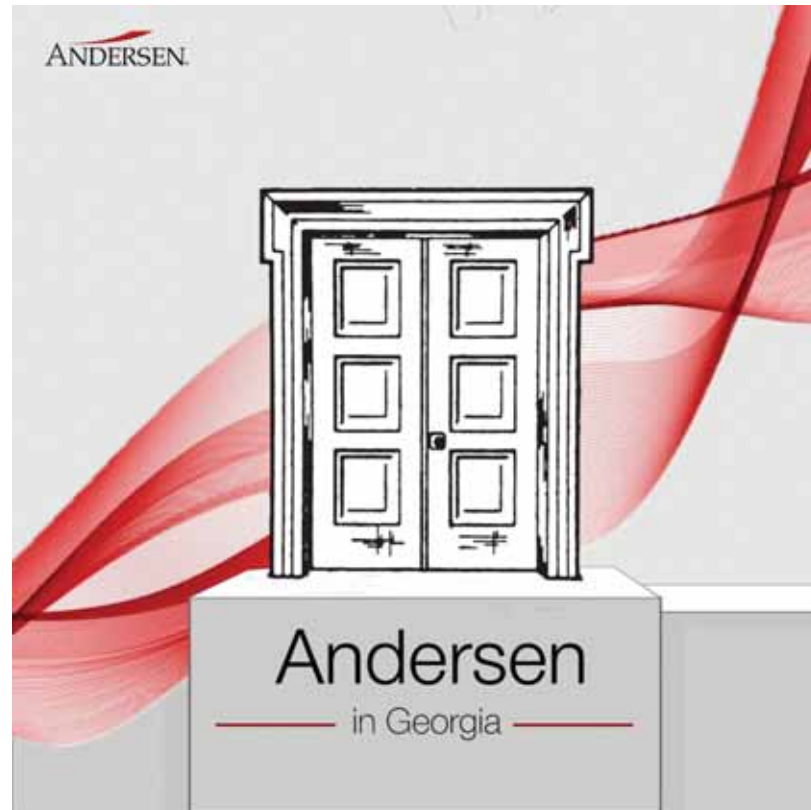
## A GLOBAL POWERHOUSE WITH LOCAL EXPERTISE

Andersen Global, the umbrella association under which Andersen in Georgia operates, was founded in 2013 with the vision of delivering a seamless, borderless model of professional services. It is composed of independent member firms across more than 170 countries, uniting over 20,000 professionals and more than 2,000 global partners. The firm's unique global structure empowers local teams in Georgia to draw on international resources and insights, offering clients world-class service grounded in local expertise.

As part of this global network, Andersen in Georgia is uniquely equipped to deliver holistic solutions that address complex client needs, from multinational corporations to high-net-worth individuals and local enterprises.

## A FIRM OF THE NATION—WITH A GLOBAL FOOTPRINT

In a bold move to redefine the advisory



landscape in Georgia, Andersen is expanding beyond the capital. With new offices opening in Kutaisi and Batumi (and soon in Telavi), it becomes the first advisory firm in Georgia to establish a multi-city presence. This strategic expansion reflects Andersen's commitment to being not just a global

firm operating in Georgia, but a firm of the nation—deeply rooted in the country's regions, responsive to local demands, and accessible to clients nationwide.

“Our goal is to become the trusted advisor for clients across Georgia, from Tbilisi to Batumi to Kutaisi,” said Archil

Giorgadze, Managing Partner at Andersen in Georgia. “We are proud to be the first consulting firm in Georgia to establish a real nationwide presence.”

The firm's growth is also reflected internally, as it welcomes new partners and team members to support its broadened service lines and growing client base. “We're growing not just in scope, but in talent,” emphasized Nicola Mariani, Chairman of Andersen in Georgia. “By bringing in new partners and expanding our teams, we're making sure our clients have access to the very best minds in every field.”

## LOOKING AHEAD

With the integration of MG Law's legacy, the deepening of service offerings, and the backing of Andersen Global's extensive network, Andersen in Georgia is set to become a powerhouse in professional services—delivering unmatched value through cross-disciplinary expertise, international reach, and a commitment to local impact.

“This expansion marks a turning point,” George Svanadze concluded. “For the first time, businesses and individuals in Georgia will have access to a firm that delivers end-to-end professional services under one roof—with the added advantage of global best practices.”

As Georgia continues to evolve as a regional hub for business and investment, Andersen stands ready to support this trajectory—providing the guidance, insight, and integrity that are the hallmarks of the Andersen name.

## SOCIETY

# The Global Peace Process – Its Merits and Flaws

BLOG BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

It is a universally recognized notion that peace is the most valuable and powerful prerequisite for a balanced and undisturbed human life on Earth. Whether steady and guaranteed peace is possible or not is

an animal of a totally different color. A peace course on our planet is designed and controlled through a complicated and multifaceted sequence of activities and international discussions, aimed at resolving conflicts and establishing long-lasting peace in the world, involving both the political and social sides of our life.

This international endeavor involves executing agreements. At the same time,

the peace process is characterized by certain intrinsic flimsiness and delicacy, which is always in the way of negotiations and conciliation attempts. The process may also include steps like ceasefires and confidence-building measures, which are not necessarily always fair and just. The most vivid basics of any peace process might envisage the official peace arrangements that are usu-

ally signed after manifold attempts at talks, and interchanges of opinions on various levels, but the agreements might only be halfway to the final target. Agreements need to be implemented, and once put into practice, they have to be supported by measures conducive to their longstanding efficiency.

When talking about the fairness and justness of negotiations and their consequential agreements, one should always remember that the possibility of human rights violations is ever-present. And, based on the perpetual idea that we modern humans are obligated to believe that accountability in this respect is extremely important, we have to behave accordingly.

On top of all that, the peace process includes our readiness and desire to prevent conflicts from escalating, sagely and dexterously using the so-called precautionary diplomacy and the potential of demilitarization. What matters most in the peace process is the chance of building confidence—meaning all specific measures oriented toward reducing tensions and building trust between the involved parties.

Societal changes must also be taken into consideration. A contemporary, healthy social structure cannot survive without promoting democratic values, always integrated into the lifestyle of currently existent civil societies. Changes in power structures—like regular, periodic elections—and, in certain cases, smaller or bigger constitutional alterations are also reckoned as a significant part of a regular peace process.

All kinds of impediments could become factors in the peace process, within which stakes could be serious and consensus very difficult to build. Therefore, the permanent monitoring of the process might not simply be helpful but absolutely essential in this complicated enterprise.

The world peace process naturally integrates the national-level effort to maintain local peace, directly working on preventing the recurrence of ethnic and other types of conflicts. For instance, the peace process in Georgia, which is

being adamantly promoted and maintained by this administration, involves the idea of de-occupation and compromise—concentrating on returning occupied territories and uniting people separated by conflict. Georgia is ready to be a unified European state where all citizens and ethnic groups are protected. The country is fully prepared to contribute to regional peace and stability.

Here, quoting the 2023 Declaration of Civil Society Organizations on establishing the Civil Platform for Peace might be relevant:

“We firmly and unwaveringly support the resolution of conflicts in Georgia solely by peaceful means, as well as supporting the integration of Georgia into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures. In the peace process, it is especially important to promote the positive transformation of conflicts by further strengthening the dialogue, sectoral cooperation, and confidence-building between the divided societies and by spreading, reinforcing, and actualizing the idea of peaceful resolution of conflicts within public discourse. We believe that it is essential to revitalize Georgia's peace policy. This will significantly improve the negotiation climate and conflict-affected populations' humanitarian and legal situation, including unhindered access to livelihoods, quality education, health care, freedom of movement, and other fundamental rights aspects. The Platform will help to mobilize the efforts of civil society with regard to the peace process, including planning and implementing joint initiatives, ensuring appropriate responses in situations that are important and critical for society, as well as implementing monitoring and advocacy practices both on the local and international level. The Platform will actively cooperate with state institutions, the European Union, and other international partners essential in peaceful conflict resolution, including the confidence-building process.”

No doubt, this is the national attitude that goes in strong unison with the peace-loving voices heard all over the world today.



An olive branch, symbol of peace. Image source: olivellaline



# Wetlands, Compared

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

I'm visiting Canada for a few weeks, having failed the theoretical test for a Georgian driver's license (long story). I couldn't renew the Canadian license online, despite assurances online that I could, so here I am for a few weeks. Staying at my sister and her husband's place, Spring Lake, rural Alberta.

A few days ago she took me on the short walk to the lake itself, and left me to discover what wildlife I could there with my 100-300mm lens and camera. It was a rich experience, with some overlap of details and other things to contrast with the wetlands near our apartment on the edge of Tbilisi.

The lake is a proper lake, much bigger than any of the ponds we have in Dighomi Meadows in Tbilisi. People have built lakeshore houses where the land allows, and they were canoeing enthusiastically when I was there. But the population close to the lake is still tiny compared to where my wife's and my apartment is, because this is a whole set of complexes with thousands of people living up to 21 stories high. The Spring Lake version is a few hundred people at most.

We have beavers in evidence hard at work here, felling trees with their always-growing teeth (thus the generic term "rodent") and making dams to live and survive the harsh Canadian winter in. None of that in Dighomi. Deer, caribou and moose can be found in the surrounding forests, too, though they are shy and uncommon. There could be terrapins or

turtles here; I didn't see any, but they would have to have a good strategy to survive -20 to -40 degree winters, especially being cold-blooded.

The birds... some overlap. Herons in both locations; mallards too, and the gulls and coots here might also be found in Georgia. Pileated woodpeckers. The species might differ, that's all.

The birds I found which I haven't yet seen in Dighomi include big white pelicans (nine of them in one flock); grebe, though not the great crested variety; beautiful honking Canada geese returning from their winter migration; and the common loon.

The loon used to be Canada's national bird, featured on our dollar coin, nicknamed the loonie because of this. This water bird, unlike ducks, coots or geese, can hardly walk on land at all. Its color-



Photo by the author

ing is beautiful speckles of white on black, and its fish-spearing bill is sharp. But its cry, which I heard three times in the couple of hours I was at the lake, is the most hauntingly magnificent thing about it, utterly and beautifully chilling, especially if you hear it in the dark of a still night. There will be many examples of this on YouTube, I'm sure. Worth listening too in a quiet evening with the lights off.

I stayed long enough to learn when the loon will rise up mostly out of the lake and flap its wings, making beautiful images. First it gets down low in the water and flaps the wings there to inundate itself, then dramatically emerges nearly vertical. What a sight.

Out of over 750 images from that evening, I achieved less than 10% good images. Motion blur, out of focus, and simply multiple similar images from holding the shutter down in burst mode, as I've learned is good practice with fast-moving birds. Enough to satisfy, though, and make me want to go back for more.

It is such a privilege, in both locations, to have the abundance of wildlife around to observe and learn from. I cherished

my time at the lake edge, seeing what was what and who was who as spring gets underway.

One huge contrast, though, is the garbage situation. I saw not one single piece of trash of ANY kind on my walk to and roving at the lake. Nothing. Dighomi Meadows, however, as you will know by now from my recent articles, has for some years been an illegal dumping ground for large-scale waste from building projects, as well as a general horror story of household rubbish, needing much attention, cleanup, and reversal of evil habits. The flora and fauna persist, but side by side with a monstrosity of human-brought ugliness. This needs us to change ourselves and it!

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/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/SvanetiRenaissance/). He and his wife also run their own guest house in Etseri: [www.facebook.com/hanmer.house.svaneti](https://www.facebook.com/hanmer.house.svaneti)



Photo by the author

## CULTURE

# The Myth of the Everyday in Tbilisi: Mario Lasalandra's Surreal Journey through 20th-Century Italy

BY IVAN NECHAEV

Walking into the Zurab Tsereteli Museum of Modern Art, one immediately senses that the exhibition, titled 'Poets, Masks, Actors, Ghosts' and curated by Lasalandra Paola with creative direction by Irakli Nassidzé, is a pilgrimage through the phantasmagoric soul of Mario Lasalandra's oeuvre. The exhibition, which runs until June 12 as a part of KOLGA TBILISI PHOTO 2025, unfolds like a theater, where the photographer's imaginary Italy, drenched in black-and-white surrealism, stretches its wings. Around 150 vintage prints, each a world within itself, speak not only to the mastery of Lasalandra's craft, but to his uncanny ability to straddle reality and myth, everyday life and staged fantasy.

### THE VISUAL RITUALS OF A MAGICAL SURREALIST

Lasalandra's art inhabits a space where the mundane is spun into enchantment. The photographer, who candidly admitted his desire to become a filmmaker—a desire thwarted by his unwillingness to sacrifice family for Cinecittà—crafted his imagery with cinematic ambition. His photographs are not mere documents, but ritualistic performances where his native Italy becomes a stage of timeless characters, ghostly poets, and masked apparitions.

Lasalandra's aesthetic roots intertwine with the Italian cinematic greats—Antonioni, Fellini, Bergman, and Pasolini—whose storytelling defined an epoch. Yet his vision remains unique, marked by a lyrical stillness that contradicts the freneticism of film. His early lessons in light and composition, drawn from the baroque vibrancy of Giambattista Tiepolo and the solemn mysticism of Saint Thecla's altarpiece, linger in the chiaroscuro that defines his prints.



Photo by Ana Sokhadze. Source: Kolga Tbilisi Photo Facebook

### GHOSTS OF THE COMMUNE: THE ENCHANTMENT OF THE EVERYDAY

One of the most striking aspects of Lasalandra's work is his ability to blend community and fantasy. The exhibition dedicates a portion to Il Magico—a project that began in 2003 in San Felice sul Panaro (Modena), where, for one day, local residents transform into surreal

characters, reviving the town's forgotten myths. Lasalandra's lens captures this temporary metamorphosis, suspending ordinary people between their daily selves and the enchanted roles they embrace.

It is in these communal rituals that the line between art and life blurs most poignantly. Lasalandra directs these events as one would a film, infusing eve-

ryday environments with dreamlike energy. This transformation is not a mere aesthetic decision, but a political one—a resistance to homogenization, a celebration of local identity through collective participation.

### IDENTITY FRAGMENTED AND REIMAGINED

The motif of masks recurs throughout the exhibition, symbolizing not only performance but the fluidity of self. In one photograph, an elderly woman stands in a dilapidated square, her face obscured, her posture rigid as if bracing against both time and modernity. Lasalandra's subjects never merely wear masks—they become them, embodying layers of memory and emotion.

This nuanced portrayal of identity—fragmented, layered, often contradictory—echoes the work of Fellini, particularly his fascination with the carnivalesque and grotesque. In Lasalandra's universe, the grotesque does not repulse but seduces, inviting the viewer to reflect on the complexity of human experience.

### SURREALISM ROOTED IN REALITY

The exhibition also confronts the notion of surrealism as escapism. Lasalandra's images are anchored in the tangible—cracked pavements, rustic facades, hands worn from labor—reminding us that the surreal emerges not from fantasy alone, but from reimagining the familiar. The rural Italian landscape becomes both a backdrop and a protagonist, its rugged beauty amplified through Lasalandra's alchemical eye.

As viewers move through the gallery, they encounter not just photographs but echoes of stories—half-forgotten local legends, peasant rituals, and a collective yearning to transcend the mundane. In Lasalandra's hands, photography becomes a form of storytelling where past and present collide, reshaping the ordinary into something eternally poetic.

### THE ECHO OF ITALIAN CINEMA IN GEORGIAN SPACE

There is a unique resonance in presenting Lasalandra's work in Tbilisi, a city where folklore and contemporary art coexist in a tenuous yet vibrant dance. Just as Lasalandra's Venice becomes a locus of myth and reality, Tbilisi's layered history and eclectic spirit find a kindred echo in his aesthetic. The creative direction of Irakli Nassidzé accentuates this cross-cultural dialogue, weaving Georgian sensibilities into Lasalandra's distinctly Italian vision.

In a world increasingly dominated by the slickness of digital manipulation, Lasalandra's tangible, textural photography reminds us of the power of crafted images—ones that do not conceal their imperfections but rather celebrate them. The exhibition's relevance lies not only in showcasing the past but in inviting contemporary audiences to reconsider how art can root us to place, community, and collective memory.

By embracing masks, ghosts, and poetic fragments, Lasalandra challenges us to confront the paradoxes of our own identities, to embrace the theatricality of daily life, and to seek the magic in the mundane. As we wander through the exhibition, we realize that Lasalandra's Italy is not so distant from Tbilisi—it too is a city haunted by its past, searching for new forms of expression amidst the ghosts of tradition.

Poets, Masks, Actors, Ghosts is not just an exhibition—it is a call to reimagine the spaces we inhabit and the selves we construct. Lasalandra's art, suspended between reverie and reality, prompts us to explore how the act of seeing shapes not only how we perceive the world but how we position ourselves within it. As we leave the gallery, Lasalandra's figures linger in our minds—mysterious, resolute, and defiantly beautiful—reminding us that art, like memory, is a masquerade we must willingly embrace.



Photo by Ana Sokhadze. Source: Kolga Tbilisi Photo Facebook



# Georgian Art Breaks Through: Bonhams to Host Historic First-Ever Auction Dedicated to Georgian Contemporary Artists

Continued from page 1

For years, Georgian art existed in a kind of liminal space — recognized in small circles, but rarely given a platform of its own. The country's complex geopolitical past has long shaped the limited visibility of its art beyond the region. Though Georgian artists occasionally appeared in major auction catalogues — including those at Christie's, Sotheby's, and Bonhams, they were often presented under the umbrella of "Russian Art" or grouped within post-Soviet aesthetics, categories that failed to do justice to Georgia's distinct cultural and artistic identity.

"There's a raw authenticity in Georgian art — a strength, a spirit — that's impossible to ignore," says Daria Khristova (née Chernenko), Head of Sales at Bonhams. With more than 12 years of experience at the house, Khristova is leading the Georgian Art Now initiative with firm belief in its potential. "For such a modestly sized country, Georgia is home to an extraordinary wealth of artists, each working across diverse styles and media," she explains. "What strikes me most is not only their technical mastery but the incredible innovation and creativity they bring to their practice."

Khristova and her team traveled to Tbilisi in early spring to hand-pick the auction's lineup. The result is a diverse selection of painting, sculpture, photography, and works on paper by both emerging and established artists — a snapshot of Georgia's dynamic contemporary art scene.



Merab Kopaleishvili (born 1967) *Untitled*, from the French series, oil on canvas. Estimate £7,800-8,000



Lia Bagrationi (born 1957) *Untitled*, 2024 From the series *View From My Window*, 2023-2024, acrylic on canvas. Estimate £8,800-10,000

## TBILISI: A NEW REGIONAL ART HUB?

Over the past decade, Tbilisi has quietly emerged as a vibrant regional art hub. Despite limited resources and inconsistent institutional support, Georgia's contemporary art scene has continued to flourish — largely thanks to the determination of a new generation of artists, curators, and gallerists. This dynamic creative community has succeeded in drawing international attention to a cultural landscape that, until recently, remained largely under-recognized.

"This new wave is global in outlook and, at the same time, unapologetically local in voice," says Thea Gogvadze-Apfel, founder and CEO of Reach Art Visual. Her consultancy has been advocating for years to establish a distinct space for Georgian art in the international market and was among the key voices lobbying for this breakthrough.

"This is more than just a sale," she adds. "It's a moment of recognition — and hopefully the beginning of a long-over-

due renaissance that puts Georgian art in the global spotlight."

Gogvadze-Apfel credits the success to the unique character of Georgian art and the persistence of the local artistic community.

"Bonhams' initiative will help position Georgian art as a distinct category in global auctions, expand its presence internationally, and establish standards for global pricing. It allows information about Georgian artists to reach new audiences and gives collectors — especially those unfamiliar with the region — the chance to discover fresh talent."

## A SHIFT IN THE MARKET

For years, many Georgian artists struggled to break into international markets. That began to change following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, which dramatically reshaped cultural and economic dynamics across Europe — including within the art world. As geopolitical focus shifted, collectors and institutions began to reassess their cura-

torial efforts.

Georgian artists and advocates, long excluded from dominant narratives, finally saw a crack in the ceiling. One of the key moments came in 2023, when Bonhams, in collaboration with Baia Gallery, held its first Georgian-Armenian visual art auction — an event that laid the groundwork for this new chapter.

"This auction is about expanding the narrative," Khristova says. "We want to give collectors and enthusiasts the chance to discover something new and exciting. And by presenting a broader selection, we hope not only to highlight exceptional talent but also to affirm Georgia's growing role in the global art market."

## BEYOND THE AUCTION

Bonhams' inaugural Georgian art auction marks a significant turning point — not only commercially, but culturally. Those behind the initiative are clear: Georgian Art Now is not just about selling works — it's about building a platform.

"Our aim is to spark a wider movement to encourage more auction houses to hold dedicated Georgian art sales, increasing the presence of Georgian artists at art fairs, and fostering genuine interest from international collectors," says Khristova.

The impact could be profound: more visibility for artists, greater access for collectors, and more opportunities for institutions to develop the critical frameworks that Georgian art has long lacked. It's also about carving out space for Georgian art to stand on its own — not

as a footnote to Russian or Soviet art, but as a fully-fledged, independent tradition with its own voices and perspectives.

Lia Bagrationi, one of the featured artists, sees this moment as both a challenge and an opportunity. "The work I presented at Bonhams is part of a series I created during the lockdown," she says. "It captures the shifting rhythm of daily life in a spatial dimension. Having a platform like Bonhams matters — it's not just about exposure, it's about context. This is our chance to break through the barriers of the past."

## LOOKING AHEAD

The Bonhams auction is undoubtedly a watershed moment — culturally, commercially and symbolically. For artists, it's a long-awaited validation. For collectors, it's a rare opportunity to invest in a region rich with talent yet historically overlooked. And for Georgia, it marks a moment of reclamation — a chance to assert its artistic identity on the global stage.

"We hope that this auction will serve as the catalyst for a series of events that will bring Georgian art to the forefront of the international art scene," says Khristova. "In my view, Georgian artists not only deserve to be recognised on the global art scene but are also poised to make a lasting impact."

As Georgian Art Now opens next week, the question is no longer whether Georgian art will break through — but just how far it will go, now that the world is finally paying attention.



Niniko Morbedadze (born 1957) *State of Emergency*, acrylic and India ink on paper. Estimate £10,000-15,000

## Zurab Abkhazi's 'Celestial Bodies' Exhibition Ongoing at Radisson Blu Tbilisi

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

From April 4 through the end of June, Radisson Blu Iveria's exhibition hall is hosting a retrospective of Georgian artist Zurab Abkhazi (Abkhazashvili) from titled 'Celestial Bodies'. The show merges a series of black-and-white works created over various periods, unified by a one central theme: Earth as just a fragment of what we call home.

The exhibition is presented in collaboration with Dédicace's Gallery and Silk Hospitality and explores cosmic order and mystery through pigment-driven forms and meditative textures. "The endless combinations of black and

white mirror the cosmos itself, mysterious, infinite," the organizers say.

Abkhazi, born in Gori in 1968 and trained at the Tbilisi State Academy of Arts, worked as an art teacher in Uplistsikhe before devoting himself fully to painting. Strongly influenced by German Expressionism's raw forms and textured surfaces, Abkhazi's bigger pieces channel both brutality and harmony.

His studio is located amid the monumental landscapes of ancient Uplistsikhe, which is also an important source of inspiration. "The archaic environment and monumental nature around me have shaped my visual language," Abkhazi has noted.

Celestial Bodies will remain open to visitors at the Radisson Blu Tbilisi until the end of June.

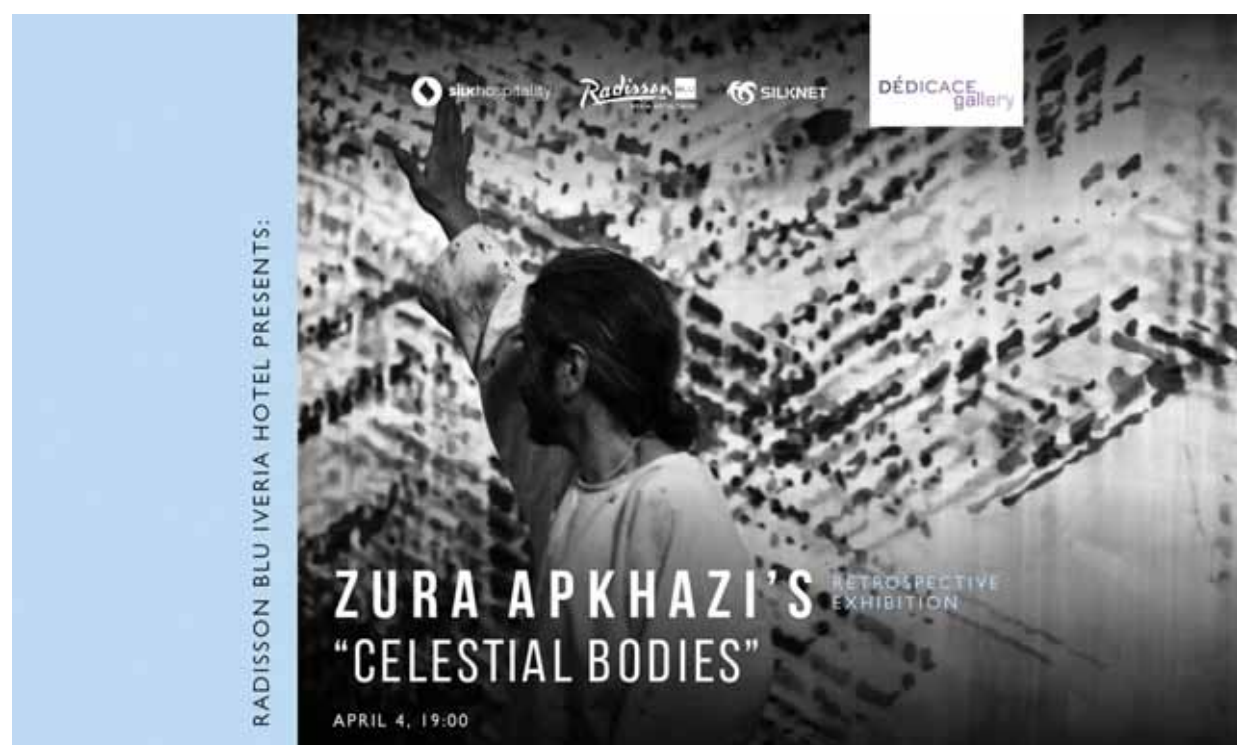


Photo: Radisson Blu Iveria Hotel, Tbilisi.



# Sacred Censorship: Georgia's Theatrical Storm and the Clash of Faith and Freedom

BY IVAN NECHAEV

In May 2025, a theatrical production titled *Liberté* by the Royal District Theater in Tbilisi ignited a fervent cultural and religious debate in Georgia. Drawing from Marquis de Sade's *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, the play delved into themes of sexuality, including same-sex relationships, and featured dialogues perceived as blasphemous. Despite restrictions on recording, excerpts were leaked and broadcasted by the pro-government channel Imedi, which accused the production of promoting "LGBT propaganda" and insulting religious sentiments.

The Georgian Orthodox Church responded by condemning the play as "blasphemous" and threatened excommunication for its creators unless they repented. Protests ensued outside the theater, with demonstrators demanding apologies from director Data Tavadze and his father, actor Nika Tavadze, as well as the cessation of municipal funding for the theater. The elder Tavadze dismissed the uproar as "talentless propaganda."

This incident is not isolated in Georgia's history. In 2006, the Georgian Orthodox Church urged believers to avoid watching *The Da Vinci Code*, labeling it as humiliating to Christian feelings. Protests erupted outside cinemas in Tbilisi, with banners proclaiming, "watching this film means crucifying Christ a second time." Similarly, the 2019 film *And Then We Danced*, which portrayed a same-sex romance within the Georgian National Ballet, faced threats from ultra-conservative groups. Leaders like Levan Vasadze and Dimitri Lortkipanidze announced plans to picket cinemas, accusing the film of opposing Georgian and Christian traditions. These events underscore a recurring tension between artistic freedom and religious conservatism in Georgia.

The Georgian Orthodox Church holds significant influence over the nation's cultural and political spheres. Its opposition to events like Tbilisi Pride Week

reflects a broader resistance to Western liberal values. In 2024, the Church called for legislative action against what it termed "a perverse lifestyle," emphasizing the need to protect the country's Christian heritage. This intertwining of religious authority and national identity often positions the Church as a gatekeeper of cultural norms, challenging progressive movements and expressions that diverge from traditional values.

Theater in Georgia has long been a medium for political and social commentary. Sandro Akhmeteli, a prominent Georgian theater director in the early 20th century, used his platform to challenge authoritarianism. His play *In Tyrannos* (Against Tyranny) became a symbol of resistance during the 2024-2025 protests against anti-democratic actions in Georgia. The play's banner was displayed in front of the Rustaveli Theater, echoing Akhmeteli's defiance against Soviet repression. This historical context highlights the enduring power of theater as a form of dissent and the risks artists face when confronting prevailing power structures.

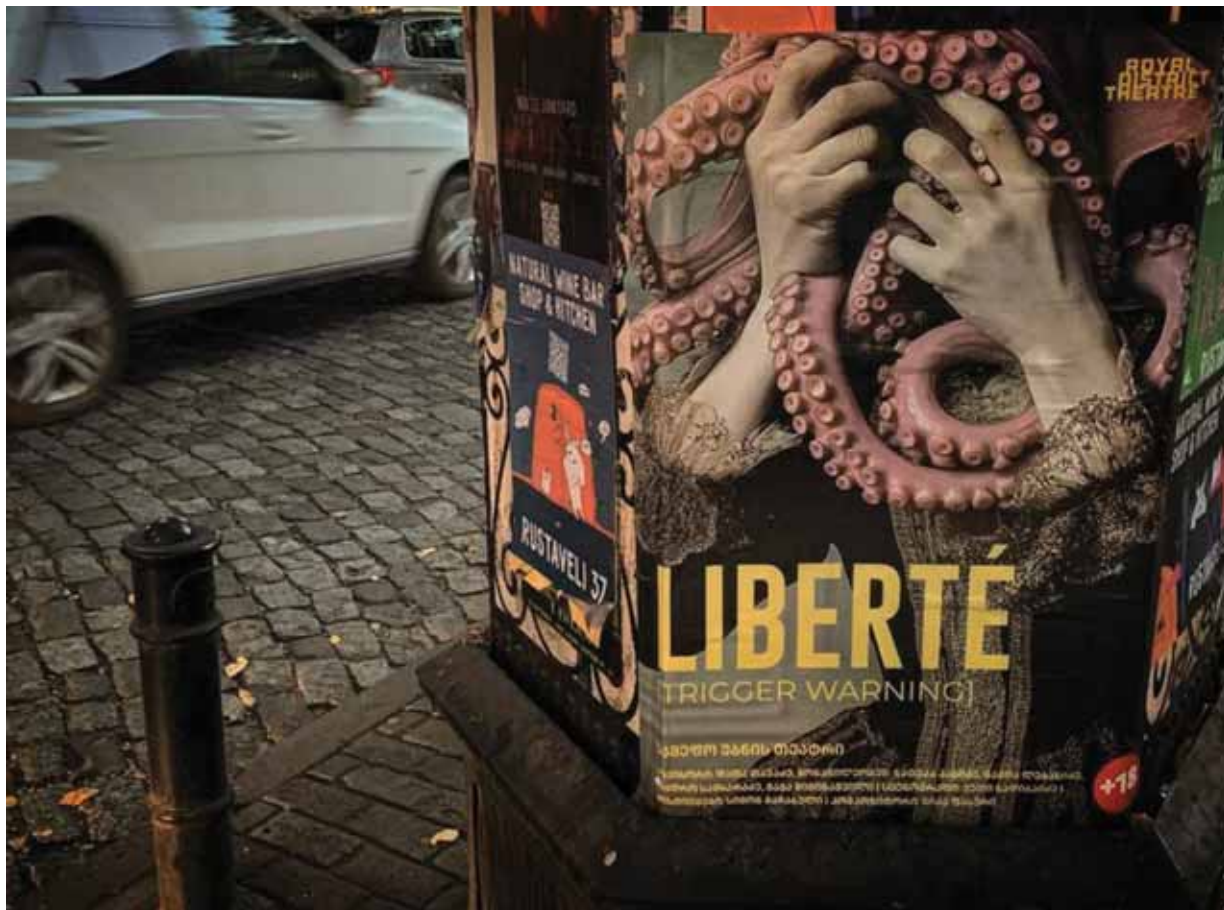
## WHEN ART AND FAITH COLLIDE: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

The *Liberté* controversy encapsulates the ongoing struggle within Georgian society to balance respect for religious traditions with the embrace of artistic freedom and progressive values. As Georgia continues to navigate its identity in the modern world, the dialogue between sacred beliefs and secular expressions remains a defining aspect of its cultural landscape. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for appreciating the complexities of Georgian society and the challenges it faces in reconciling its rich heritage with contemporary global influences.

The conflict between religion and secular art has sparked intense debate across the globe, often putting freedom of expression at odds with religious sentiments. As societies evolve and grapple with questions of modernity, tradition, and identity, these clashes reveal the complex relationship between cultural production and religious beliefs. Examining recent controversies from various countries can shed light on how these tensions are managed, and whether coexistence is feasible in a pluralistic world.

In France, the concept of *laïcité* (secularism) is deeply entrenched in the state's identity, often placing art at odds with religious conservatism. In 2011, *Golgota Picnic*, a provocative play by Argentine director Rodrigo García, sparked outrage among Catholic groups for its explicit content and its perceived mockery of Christian symbols. Performances were met with protests, prayer vigils, and even threats, prompting increased security at theaters. However, the French government firmly defended the play under the principle of artistic freedom. The Ministry of Culture emphasized that, while the content could be seen as controversial, the state would not yield to censorship based on religious pressure. This stance underscored France's commitment to maintaining a clear separation between church and state, even when faced with public outcry.

In 2015, Russia witnessed a high-profile clash between religious and artistic communities with the staging of Richard



Instagram: Royal District Theater

Wagner's opera *Tannhäuser* at the Novosibirsk Opera and Ballet Theater. The production, directed by Timofey Kulyabin, reimagined the medieval knight as a filmmaker producing a controversial film about Jesus. Orthodox activists accused the director of blasphemy, sparking mass protests. The Russian Orthodox Church, bolstered by the state's conservative turn, called for Kulyabin's prosecution. The director was charged under the country's anti-blasphemy law, introduced in 2013 after the infamous Pussy Riot trial. Despite public support from artistic communities, the theater's director was dismissed, and the production was canceled. This incident highlighted the state's willingness to enforce religious sentiments through legal means, curbing artistic expression to align with dominant Orthodox values.

In India, where religion permeates public life, cinema has often been a flashpoint for controversy. The 2018 Bollywood film *Padmaavat*, directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali, faced violent protests from right-wing Hindu groups, who claimed that the film distorted historical facts and disrespected the legendary queen Padmavati. Rajput groups, in particular, took offense at rumors of a dream sequence depicting a romantic scene between the queen and a Muslim ruler. Despite the Indian Supreme Court's ruling allowing the film's release, several states imposed local bans, arguing that public safety was at risk. Violent protests continued, with attacks on cinemas and threats to the actors. Eventually, the central government intervened, emphasizing the importance of both artistic freedom and public order. The film's eventual success at the box office signaled a victory for creative liberty, though the compromise of local bans revealed the persistent power of religious mobilization.

Satire and religion have a contentious history in the United States, but the Broadway musical *The Book of Mormon*

by Trey Parker, Matt Stone, and Robert Lopez broke new ground in 2011. The irreverent portrayal of Mormon missionaries provoked some criticism from religious communities, but was largely celebrated for its bold humor and critique of organized religion. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, rather than condemning the play, responded strategically. Instead of protesting, they purchased ad space in playbills, inviting audiences to learn more about the real beliefs of Mormons. This adaptive approach not only defused potential backlash but also demonstrated a pragmatic embrace of dialogue over confrontation.

Music, like theater, often becomes a battleground for cultural and religious ideals. Nigerian artist Falz faced harsh criticism from Muslim groups over his 2018 song *This Is Nigeria*, which tackled corruption, social issues, and religious hypocrisy. A segment of the video depicted women in hijabs dancing, which some Islamic organizations called blasphemous. The Nigerian Islamic group MURIC demanded that Falz withdraw the video and apologize, threatening legal action. However, Falz refused, defending his work as social commentary. The controversy prompted national debates on artistic responsibility and freedom, with many artists rallying behind Falz. No legal action was taken, marking a tentative victory for free expression in a country where both secular and religious values coexist uneasily.

Across these examples, responses to religious-artistic conflict vary widely, reflecting each nation's sociopolitical context. France's strict secularism stands in stark contrast to Russia's intertwining of Orthodoxy and state ideology. India's regional political pressures often overshadow national legal principles, while the US shows a capacity for satire to coexist with faith when handled with a

As Georgia continues to navigate its identity in the modern world, the dialogue between sacred beliefs and secular expressions remains a defining aspect of its cultural landscape

touch of irony. In Nigeria, music serves as a critical lens on societal issues, albeit under constant scrutiny from conservative groups. What unites these cases is the enduring challenge of accommodating both artistic freedom and religious beliefs. The way forward seems less about finding a universal solution and more about understanding the local dynamics that shape each conflict. By fostering open dialogues rather than imposing strict verdicts, societies can better navigate these complex intersections of art, belief, and public life.

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**Layout:**  
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**Photographer:**  
Aleksei Serov

**International Relations & Communications**  
Sofia Bochoidze  
E: sbchoidze@georgiatoday.ge

**Website Editor:**  
Katie Ruth Davies

**Webmaster:**  
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**Circulation Managers:**  
David Kerdikashvili  
David Djandjgava

**ADDRESS**  
22 Janashia Str.  
Tbilisi, 0179, Georgia

Tel.: +995 32 229 59 19  
E: info@georgiatoday.ge  
F: GeorgiaToday

**ADVERTISING & SUBSCRIPTION**  
+995 577 72 52 61  
E-mail:  
marketing@georgiatoday.ge

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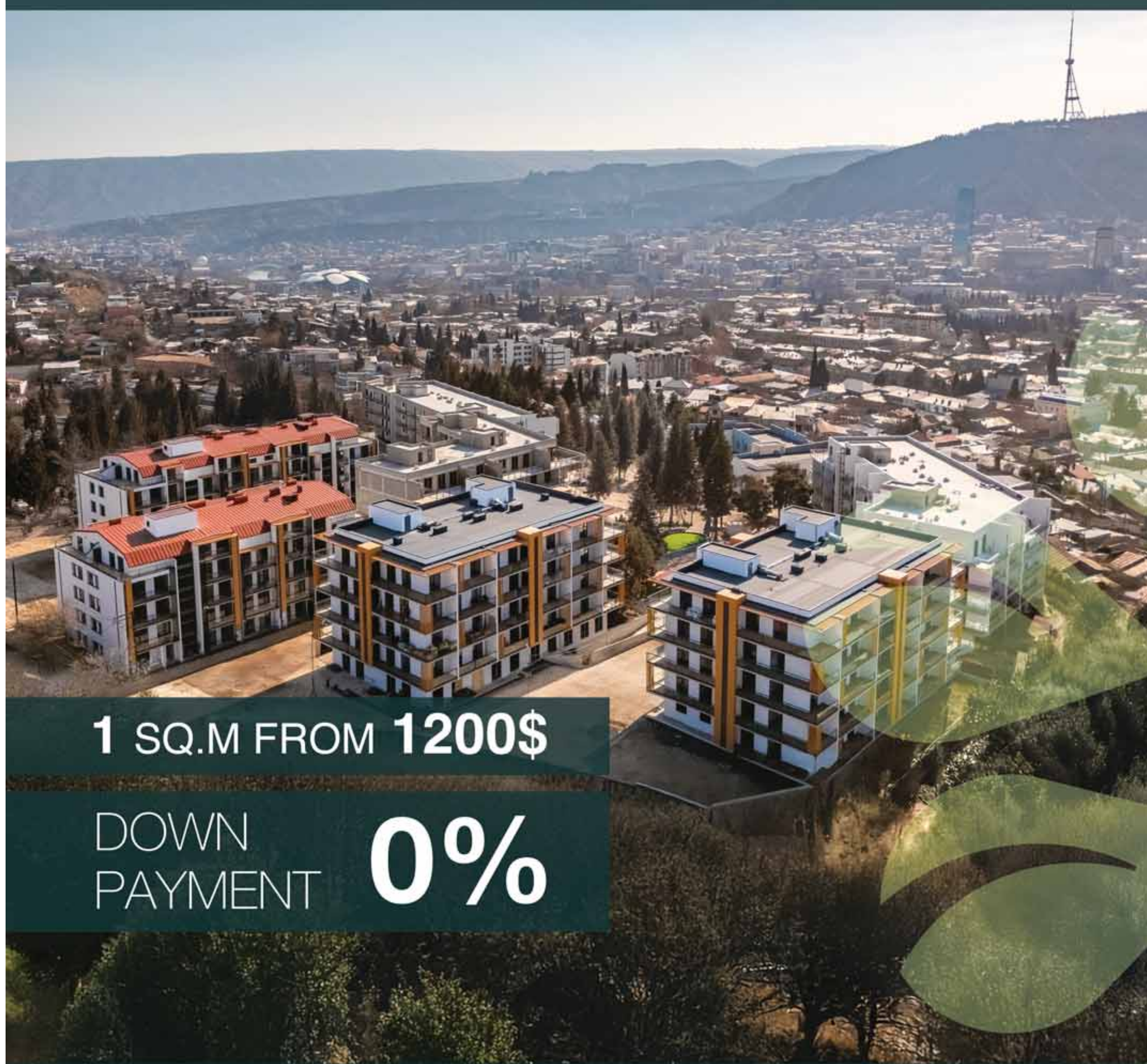
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