



**GALT & TAGGART**  
CREATING OPPORTUNITIES

**Markets**

*Prepared for Georgia Today Business by*

*As of 28-May-2025*

BONDS		Price	w/w	m/m	STOCKS		Price	w/w	m/m
GEORGIA 04/26	96.36 (YTM 7.12%)	+0.01	+0.01	+0.61	Lin Financial Group (BGEI LN)	GBP 65.45	+0.85	+0.85	+12.8%
GRAIL 06/28	89.09 (YTM 8.11%)	+0.10	+0.01	+0.4%	Georgia Capital (CGE LN)	GBP 18.68	-1.77	+14.9%	
GEORGIA 9 1/2 PERP	99.01 (YTM 9.45%)	-0.14	+0.06	+0.6%	TBC Bank Group (TBCL LN)	GBP 44.55	-1.11	-3.7%	
SUKNET 01/27	101.16 (YTM 11.41%)	+0.10	+0.31	+0.3%					
TBC 8.894 PERP	97.47 (YTM 11.55%)	+0.01	+1.0%	+1.0%					
TBC 1 1/4 PERP	99.08 (YTM 9.97%)	-0.01	+1.0%						

  

COMMODITIES		Price	w/w	m/m
Crude Oil, Brent (USD/bbl)	64.90	-0.00	-1.5%	
Gold Spot (USD/OZ)	3,287.48	-0.8%	-1.7%	

  

INDICES		Price	w/w	m/m	CURRENCIES		Price	w/w	m/m
SP 500	5,888.55	+0.8%	+6.5%		USD / GEL	2,732.0	-0.1%	-0.5%	
FTSE 250	20,946.19	+0.6%	+1.5%		EUR / GEL	3,084.8	-0.5%	-1.7%	
DOW JONES 30	42,096.70	+0.6%	+7.4%		GBP / GEL	3,678.8	-0.2%	-0.4%	
Russal 2000	2,067.80	+1.0%	+5.7%		EUR / USD	1,129.2	-0.3%	-1.1%	
FTSE 100	8,236.01	+0.3%	+3.7%		GBP / USD	1,346.8	-0.4%	-0.2%	



Photo: Builder Magazine.

## Georgia Sees Slower Job Growth, Fewer Low-wage Earners

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

**P**MC Research Center this week published data revealing that Georgia recorded 991,677 salaried employees in April 2025, a 2.2% increase compared to the same month in 2024 and 7.1% higher than in 2023. However, the year-over-year growth rate slowed by 2.6 percentage points, illustrating a deceleration in employment expansion compared to previous trends.

The distribution of salaries showed a continued shift toward higher income brackets. In April, 34.0% of workers earned

2,400 GEL or more (a 7.0 percentage point increase from the previous year and 12.3 points higher than in 2023). Meanwhile, the share of individuals receiving 9,600 GEL or more (3.1%, slightly up from 2.4% in 2024 and 1.9% in 2023).

At the same time, the portion of low-wage earners has decreased. Those earning up to 600 GEL accounted for 12.9% of all salaried employees, down 2.2 percentage points from 2024 and 6.1 points from 2023.

While the overall number of salary recipients continues to grow, the pace has slowed, and the structure of income is becoming more polarized, with fewer people in the lowest bracket and a growing share in higher tiers.

## Parliament Approves Change of Intelligence Service Under State Security Control



Photo: 1tv.

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

**G**eorgia's Parliament has approved in the first reading a legislative package that transfers control of the country's Intelligence Service from the Prime Minister to the State Security Service (SSS).

The law was passed with 87 votes in favor, lawmakers unanimously supported the draft law, which reshapes

the Intelligence Service into a sub-agency within the SSS. The new entity will be called the National Intelligence Agency.

Under the new system, the head of the agency and their deputy will be appointed and dismissed by the Head of the State Security Service. The agency will report directly to the SSS chief and operate under their supervision.

The move is a significant shift in Georgia's intelligence governance, centralizing operational control within the State Security Service.

## Trump to Kavelashvili: Committed to Stronger US-Georgia Ties

BY TEAM GT

**U**nited States President Donald Trump congratulated Mikheil Kavelashvili on Independence Day on May 26.

Mikheil Kavelashvili's press service says Donald Trump's letter states that his administration is committed to strengthening peaceful and productive relations with the Georgian government.

In addition, the US President said that he looks forward to deepening economic ties between the countries in the future by supporting fair trade and expanding the scope of bilateral cooperation.

"Mr. President,

Today marks the 107th anniversary of Georgia's independence — a landmark date in the Georgian people's struggle for sovereignty, security, and national identity, which has been ongoing from generation to generation amid severe difficulties and challenges.

"My administration is committed to strengthening peaceful and productive relations with the Government of Georgia. I look forward to deepening economic ties between our countries through supporting fair trade and expanding the scope of bilateral cooperation.

"I sincerely congratulate the Georgian people on this important date, which reflects the country's distinguished and diverse history," reads the congratulatory letter, released by Mikheil Kavelashvili's press service.

# Kobakhidze: We Support EU Integration, But Not at the Cost of Sovereignty



BY TEAM GT

**S**peaking at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Budapest, GD Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze praised Hungary and Prime Minister Viktor Orbán for defending national sovereignty and supporting Georgia's European path.

Kobakhidze emphasized Georgia's ancient Christian identity and resilience through centuries of conflict, declaring that "we remain Georgian" despite the trials of history.

"We are part of the real West—built

on freedom, faith, and family—not the bureaucratic West driven by a Deep State agenda," he said. He stressed that European integration must not come at the cost of Georgia's sovereignty or values. "Being pro-European should not mean being anti-Georgian."

The Prime Minister sharply criticized what he called "liberal fascism," accusing foreign-funded movements and NGOs of undermining Georgia's traditions, spreading gender and LGBT ideologies, and interfering in national affairs. He condemned what he sees as a coordinated global effort—led by what he calls the "Global War Party" or "Deep State"—to erode national identities and manipulate public discourse.

Referring to the war in Ukraine, Kobakhidze highlighted Georgia's commitment to peace and accused international media and institutions of punishing Georgia for refusing to be drawn into conflict.

He also voiced support for former US President Donald Trump and welcomed the new US administration's efforts to dismantle the Deep State, expressing hope that this would improve US-Georgia and EU-Georgia relations.

Kobakhidze concluded by affirming solidarity with leaders who defend sovereignty and traditional values, and closed with a call for blessings on Hungary, Georgia, and a "free and peaceful world."

## Former Head of 8th Penitentiary Institution Sentenced to 9 Years for Torturing Inmate

BY TEAM GT

**T**he Tbilisi City Court has found Aleksandre Mukhadze—known by the nickname "Killera" and former director of the 8th Penitentiary Institution—guilty of torturing a prisoner, based on evidence presented by the Prosecutor's Office.

Prosecutor General's Office says Mukhadze was sentenced to nine years in prison.

The court determined that in May 2011,

at the 8th Penitentiary Facility, Megis Kardava and Aleksandre Mukhadze coerced a detainee—arrested on narcotics charges—into confessing to fictitious terrorist activities and implicating others. They reportedly threatened the prisoner with rape and, according to testimonies, even provided narcotics to create grounds for additional charges.

When the detainee refused to comply, he was forced to witness the sexual abuse of another inmate and was threatened with the same fate unless he confessed. Mukhadze also subjected the prisoner to repeated physical assaults.

Under severe psychological and phys-

ical duress, the detainee eventually wrote a false confession. Dissatisfied with its content, Mukhadze and Kardava reportedly forced the prisoner to eat the handwritten statement. Subsequently, a staged sexual assault was filmed as an additional means of coercion.

Faced with the threat of the footage being released and further abuse, the victim signed the false confession. The ongoing torture led the victim to attempt suicide.

The Tbilisi City Court concluded that Aleksandre Mukhadze was guilty of group torture and handed down a nine-year prison sentence.

## Tbilisi to Celebrate Children's Day with Citywide Events

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

**T**bilisi is getting ready for an annual celebration of International Children's Day on June 1, with events planned across multiple districts and a major gathering set to take place in Dedaena Park.

"June 1 is approaching, a day we traditionally celebrate with special love," said Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze during a government meeting. "Many children eagerly await this day."

The central event will kick off at 3 pm in Dedaena Park, featuring a wide range of activities specifically for children and families. Kaladze stated the program will include a children's concert starting at 8 pm, along with an open-air library, film corner, chess zone, exhibitions by local



Photo: FB

art schools, sports activities, and workshops in felting, calligraphy, and applied arts.

Other attractions include an artisan fair, puppet theater, story-time corner, and art therapy sessions. Entertainment

will also be provided for children with special needs.

"All events are free to attend," Kaladze said, inviting families to "come with your children and grandchildren—an exciting experience awaits."

## A Russian T-72 tank is shown in a village setting. The tank is dark green and heavily worn, with its main gun barrel pointing towards the right. It is positioned on a dirt road. In the background, there is a building with a damaged roof and some yellow scaffolding or cranes. The surrounding area is lush with green trees and vegetation.

---

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

Early Wednesday morning, the Russian Ministry of Defense reported a major defensive operation in which its air forces destroyed or intercepted 112 Ukrainian drones in just three hours. These drones were reportedly concentrated over the central and southern regions of Russia, part of what has become an almost daily exchange of drone attacks between the two nations. In a related incident, Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanyin stated that six Ukrainian drones were intercepted

Unlike traditional drones that rely on radio signals, these fiber-linked aircraft transmit video and commands entirely through the physical line, making them virtually immune to jamming. "Because there's no radio signal, electronic interceptors can't touch it," explains a drone engineer from the 68th Jaeger Brigade, known by the call sign Moderator.

The drone warfare continues on both sides. Overnight, Russia launched a barrage of 60 drones targeting several Ukrainian regions. The Ukrainian Air Force said the attacks left at least 10 people injured and caused significant damage to infrastructure. One of the hardest-hit areas was the city of Kramatorsk in eastern Ukraine, where three Russian

Donald Trump's frustration over the

In Europe, tensions simmered after Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov lashed out at German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, accusing him of “pretentiousness” following comments by Merz that several Western powers—including France, Germany, the UK, and the US—had lifted range restrictions on weapons supplied to Ukraine.



Fiber optic drones are a terrifying new danger on Ukraine's front lines.  
Source: Getty Images

Xeme

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  
TBILISI

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

# “I Knew I Would Die in Prison”: Ex-Investment Chief Giorgi Bachiashvili Alleges Assassination Plot and Political Persecution in Georgia

BY TEAM GT

In a dramatic interview with The Guardian conducted just days before his arrest, Giorgi Bachiashvili, the former head of Georgia's Co-Investment Fund and once a close confidant of billionaire ex-Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili, spoke of assassination threats, political betrayal, and a desperate escape from a regime he now calls dangerous and repressive.

“I was his right hand. I would say I was his consigliere. And consiglieres often deal with dark matters,” Bachiashvili told journalist Daniel Boffey in an article titled ‘How the Right-hand Man of Georgia's de facto Ruler Ended Up on the Run,’ published on May 26. Speaking from an undisclosed location for security reasons, Bachiashvili claimed he had been warned by two foreign intelligence services of an active assassination plot—allegedly orchestrated by North Caucasian groups, possibly Chechen.

Though he stopped short of directly blaming Ivanishvili for the plot, Bachiashvili speculated the order may have come from foreign actors seeking to destabilize Georgia's political elite. “If the killing is linked to him, it could ruin any chance of normal relations with the US and place him under even tighter control,” he said.



Giorgi Bachiashvili with Georgian police

Once considered one of the most powerful unelected figures in Georgia, Bachiashvili's fall from grace came amid mounting tensions with Ivanishvili, whom he now accuses of turning against him out of suspicion and fear. “For Ivanishvili, control over power is existential. He's fighting for his life. He's like a machine operating solely on reptilian survival instincts,” Bachiashvili said. He added that Ivanishvili suspected he had

become unreliable—or even a Western spy—following disagreements over Georgia's direction and Ivanishvili's alleged pro-Russian stance.

Facing criminal charges in Georgia that he claims are politically motivated, Bachiashvili fled the country in early March 2025, violating a court-imposed travel ban. According to his account, he escaped via a hidden compartment in a vehicle crossing into Armenia, using a Russian

passport and “holes in the system,” including help from insiders.

His escape was short-lived. On May 26, 2025—the same day The Guardian published the interview—the State Security Service of Georgia (SSSG) confirmed Bachiashvili's detention. According to their statement, he was apprehended near Georgia's border following a tip-off, after being listed on a Red Notice and charged with illegal border crossing

under Article 344 of the Georgian Criminal Code.

The charges against Bachiashvili include the alleged embezzlement of millions of dollars from a cryptocurrency investment project between 2015 and 2022, as well as laundering the proceeds through offshore entities. He maintains that the charges are baseless and stem from a targeted campaign to silence dissent within the ruling elite.

International legal experts and human rights advocates have since raised alarms over his detention. Amsterdam & Partners, Bachiashvili's legal representatives, condemned the arrest as politically motivated and warned that he faces an immediate risk of torture and abuse in detention.

“George Bachiashvili faces an immediate risk of torture after his forcible return to Georgia,” the law firm said in a statement. “He has been the target of an intensifying campaign of political persecution orchestrated by Bidzina Ivanishvili, Georgia's de facto ruler.” The firm cited credible concerns raised by international bodies including the UN Committee Against Torture and the European Court of Human Rights over the Georgian justice system's treatment of politically sensitive detainees.

Attorney Robert Amsterdam added, “I denounce in the strongest possible terms the abuse of legal mechanisms in Georgia's relentless efforts to jail my client for speaking truth to power.”

## British Journalist Barred from Georgia after Investigating Links to Sanctioned Russian Oligarch

Continued from page 1

According to RSF, Georgian media aligned with the ruling Georgian Dream party launched a coordinated smear campaign, accusing Neal of being part of a vague foreign-backed plot to destabilize the nation. Neal himself said he was labeled a “Soros agent” and tied to shadowy “deep state” efforts supposedly involving opposition figures and civil society actors.

“This is part of a broader effort to silence independent scrutiny,” Neal remarked, adding that the accusations were designed to discredit foreign journalists critical of Georgia's political elite.

This latest incident fits into a growing pattern of entry bans targeting foreign nationals critical of the government, including journalists, NGOs, and opposition politicians. Just days before Neal's ordeal, an EU diplomat was denied access at the Georgian border—an act the government later described as a “technical oversight,” offering only an informal apology.

Jeanne Cavelier, head of RSF's Eastern Europe and Central Asia desk, described Neal's exclusion as a troubling sign of deepening authoritarianism. “This marks a troubling new phase in Georgia's crackdown on press freedom, particularly targeting foreign media professionals. It reflects the ruling party's growing intolerance of independent reporting on its affairs,” she said. Cavelier also called on UK officials to take diplomatic steps in response to what she called a clear violation of a British national's rights.

The Georgian government has yet to issue a formal statement on Neal's case.

### HERE IS THE STORY, IN WILL NEAL'S OWN WORDS

I left London on May 19, flying into Yerevan early Tuesday morning. I got a couple of hours of sleep, met up with a friend there, who put me in touch with someone

else—another friend—whom I then paid to take me up to the border with Georgia. The reason I chose the land crossing was pretty simple: I suspected I might not be allowed back in. I'd left Georgia just a few weeks earlier, and I knew re-entry might be complicated.

The key difference is this: The thing I was worried about is—obviously—if I had flown into Tbilisi, there was a chance I'd get detained for however many hours, and during that time they could take my phone, my laptop—and obviously they've got ongoing work on them, as well as messages with sources, contacts. By using the land crossing, I figured if they said no, they'd simply turn me away at the border, and that would be the end of it.

This all really started a few weeks prior. I've been reporting from Georgia for about three years. Over time, I'd picked up on signals that certain government agencies weren't exactly pleased with some of the stories I'd written. I'd never been directly attacked, but there had been dismissive comments, pushback—denials from official sources.

Then, at the end of March, I published a story in Byline Times, a UK-based outlet. It was an investigation into Hunnewell Partners, a private equity firm that owns TV Imedi and has very close ties to the ruling Georgian Dream party and its founder Bidzina Ivanishvili—particularly through a key figure, Irakli Rukhadze. It's not exactly a well-guarded secret that Imedi has become a cheerleader for human rights abuses, disinformation, and conspiracy theories.

Now, I'd written about Imedi before, back in October. At the time, they pushed back, claiming they were pro-European, pro-Ukraine, pro-Western, the whole lot. But this new piece was different. I had obtained leaked documents showing that Hunnewell and Rukhadze had a long-standing, over a decade long, in fact, lucrative business relationship with none other than Roman Abramovich. The lat-

est deal between Hunnewell and Abramovich, though it was offshore, through a limited partnership, had ended in April 2022. So that means the relationship lasted until at least six weeks after Abramovich was sanctioned by the UK for supporting Russia during the war.

So, we ran the piece. We followed all standard journalistic procedures—right of reply, transparency about funding. We wrote to Hunnewell: “These are the things we're going to publish, here's your chance to respond.” They replied, and we included all the relevant detail in the piece we published.

It went out on a Monday, end of March. And the initial response? Well, they clearly weren't happy about it. But it was relatively muted. Kind of like, “Oh, this story is out there, but there's nothing to it.”

At the bottom of the story, I had noted that the piece had been funded by the Civil Society Foundation, which was formerly part of the Open Society Foundation. The grant had been administered by Civic IDEA—Tina Khidasheli's organization. The reason for that is that, when I applied for the grant, they said, “Since you're not a Georgian national, we need to go through an organization.” That information was all disclosed in the article.

But then Imedi picked up on it. That was the point when the narrative started to turn toward, “Ah, this is a Soros thing.” And slowly, over a few days, it escalated. “It's a Soros thing.” “It's Deep State.” “It's all coordinated.” And if you looked at reports on Imedi, Rustavi 2, POSTV—all of them claimed the article drew on opposition sources, which wasn't true. It drew on leaked corporate documents from an offshore provider. That didn't get mentioned anywhere.

The attacks kept escalating. By around Wednesday, we started seeing formal statements—none of them named me directly, but they were clearly targeting

the story's content. They painted me as part of some Soros-funded, ill-defined Deep State conspiracy. They said I was biased, and a supporter of the radical opposition.

What was alarming was that some of the statements being quoted were from Georgian Dream MPs. There was David Matikashvili, Nino Tsilosani—all parroting the same narrative.

Then on the evening of April 6, there was this hour-long “exposé” by Imedi TV—commissioned lies, basically—a kind of state narrative package. It was an in-depth dive into publicly available info about my professional history and funding, including my time at the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), which is also Open Society-funded.

Now, I wasn't particularly impressed by the quality—it was just stuff pulled off my LinkedIn or website, dressed up to make me look like some sinister operative. But what I did find disconcerting was they had included footage of me at the Coalition For Change headquarters on election night last October. It looked like footage pulled from TV—it might have been Mtavari or Formula. I'm in the background, three seconds, max. But the fact that they tracked that down...

None of this changed my travel plans. I had already booked a trip out of Georgia. I knew I'd be coming back in mid-to-late May. That was the plan. And I thought, well, given everything going on, this is a good time to lay low.

When I left Georgia, at the airport in early April, I was pulled aside at the passport booth. It wasn't a long delay, about 15 to 20 minutes, but the questioning was bizarre. They asked me how long I'd lived in Georgia, whether I had Georgian friends, and, most unusually, what I thought about the political situation in the country. That's not standard fare for a passport officer. She was clearly stalling, waiting for something to come

through on her screen. It felt like a red flag had been placed on my name.

My lawyer, who is now helping me appeal the entry denial, said that, to his knowledge, none of the other foreign journalists who were denied entry had experienced that sort of questioning. So it did seem targeted.

Fast forward to May. I arrived again in Yerevan and took the land route up to the Georgian border, hoping for a smooth crossing. On the Armenian side, everything was fine. But on the Georgian side, things changed. The officer scanned my passport, had her stamp machine poised and ready, then hesitated. After a pause, she put the stamp away and asked me to step aside. She began frantically texting. A supervisor appeared, spoke with her, then disappeared again. Meanwhile, other travelers passed through without issue.

Eventually, after about 45 minutes, a police officer came over with a printed document. He activated a bodycam, pointed it at me, and read out the decision: I was being refused entry into Georgia under the clause of “other cases envisaged by Georgian legislation.” That's the catch-all pretext they often use. He told me I could appeal. He was polite, even professional. But the damage had already been done.

Now, I'm appealing the decision. The first step is to compel the Ministry of Internal Affairs to provide an actual reason for the refusal. Whatever justification they give—we intend to challenge it. There's no real basis for it, and I believe that the stories I've written have touched a nerve. If they want to use this as a test case, fine. But I won't be backing down. Quite the contrary. This is clearly designed to discourage me and others from further coverage of Georgia. And the sole thing that I would say at this point is that it has achieved precisely the opposite. I will continue this ongoing investigation with double the enthusiasm now.

# Spheres of Influence, Boundaries, Territories: 'Remembering the Well Forgotten.' Part 1



ANALYSIS BY VICTOR KIPIANI,  
CHAIRPERSON OF GEOCASE

I have spoken many times about the trends leading from the old order to the formation of a new order. At this stage, it is not only premature but is also quite difficult to speak decisively and convincingly about the content of this new order. The main reason for such difficulty is likely to be the over-commercialization of political objectives and the transformation of national interests into one of "trade nomenclature" to bargain or deal with each other.

It is therefore no coincidence that I call the transition phase from the old to the new the "disorderly order," where strategic planning has become like strategizing, and the line between policy maker and developer has blurred.

## ON THE BRINK OF BORDERLESS '(DIS)ORDER'

The most serious characteristic of this "(dis)order" is precisely the attempt to relentlessly undermine the sound principles of the old order that formed the foundation of the international legal order. In this regard, first of all, the inviolability of the state border and the territorial

integrity of the country were considered (note: in this part of the article I translate the verb into the past tense, thus trying to emphasize the urgency of the issue).

Today we can clearly see that the pre-occupation with rewriting borders and manipulating territorial concessions has become an openly declared handwriting of virtually all actors of system-building in international relations. In addition, no actor, regardless of a particular country's governance typology, shies away from utilizing this "new norm" of "disorder" leading to a new global formation. Moreover, with the help of the created conjuncture, each powerful country (some by actions, some by words) is trying to achieve maximum results in strengthening its own spheres of geopolitical and geo-economic influence.

Although it is still too early to draw a final conclusion about the irreversibility of the global transactional political line with regard to territories and borders, the emergence or establishment of spheres of influence in a new format is already a quite practically and visibly activated process.

## FOOTNOTE COMMENT

Spheres of influence, as I have said, are basically the privilege of a strong and large country which, using military, economic or diplomatic tools, exerts pres-

sure on a particular target country or countries, or their regional or other grouping, in order to achieve desired changes in the target's foreign and domestic policies.

There are many academic definitions, monitoring indices, and supporting formulas in the field of geospatial influence. Despite this abundance, in simple language, such influence is expressed through the effective impact of coercion or/and suppression by the influencing country. Simply put, the influencer has all the skills and abilities to a) get the target to do what the influencer wants, and b) get the target to refuse to do what the influencer doesn't want to happen.

## FROM YALTA TO "YALTA"?

The word "Yalta", as a designation for the famous Yalta Conference of 1945, has become synonymous with spheres of influence among world powers and on a global scale. The Yalta Summit defined the order of things in the post-World War II world for decades to come. However, it must also be said here that the existence of spheres of influence is a concomitant phenomenon of human history, including the history of wars, and the Yalta Summit in February 1945 is rather an introduction to the spheres of influence of the modern era.

Continued on page 6



Bidzina Ivanishvili. Source: TV1

## Ivanishvili and US Ambassador Trade Blame over Cancelled Meeting

BY TEAM GT

Tensions between the United States and Georgia escalated further this week as conflicting accounts emerged over a failed meeting between US Ambassador Robin Dunning and Bidzina Ivanishvili, founder and honorary chairman of Georgia's ruling Georgian Dream party.

According to a statement from the US Embassy in Georgia, Ambassador Dunning had requested a meeting with Ivanishvili on May 22, acting on behalf of US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and at the request of Senator Marco Rubio. The purpose, the Embassy said, was to deliver a message from Washington and propose specific steps for the Georgian government to take to help restore the long-standing US-Georgia partnership. The outreach followed growing concerns in Washington over Tbilisi's recent political direction and strained bilateral ties.

However, Ivanishvili declined the meeting: a decision that the Embassy noted with disappointment, suggesting it added to already mounting concerns about the future of the 33-year-old US-Georgia relationship.

In response, Ivanishvili released a statement accusing the US side of selectively

targeting him in a way that, in his view, hinted at personal pressure tactics. He said the Georgian government had instead offered a meeting between the US Ambassador and the Prime Minister, a figure, he emphasized, who is under neither formal nor informal sanctions and is fully empowered to discuss national policy matters.

"They may argue that, as founder and honorary chairman of the ruling party, I exert particular influence on decision-making. But I can assure you that no major decision is made without the involvement of the team — and especially the Prime Minister," Ivanishvili said. "Therefore, insisting on a meeting with me alone suggests that such a meeting would only be relevant in the context of personal blackmail."

He further implied that the Ambassador's refusal to meet the Prime Minister reinforced his suspicions that undue influence was being exerted on Georgia through unofficial channels.

Despite the standoff, Ivanishvili expressed hope that the United States would engage constructively with the Georgian government's recent proposal to "reset" bilateral relations. "Each leader of Georgia's government is fully prepared to engage in this process — if there is genuine interest from the American side — and to work on a concrete roadmap for renewed cooperation," he concluded.



Photo: General Discharge.

## US Intelligence: Russia Expanding Influence in Georgia

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

The US Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) has raised alarms over Russia's growing influence in the South Caucasus, pointing out Georgia and Armenia in its most recent global threat assessment report.

The DIA claimed "Russia almost certainly aims to return Georgia to its sphere of influence." The agency mentions that the Georgian Dream-led government has created conditions that "enable Russia to increase its influence in the country," particularly after the October parliamentary elections.

The report also emphasizes worsening ties between Moscow and Yerevan, declaring: "Russo-Armenian relations deteriorated last year, as Armenia threatened withdrawal from the Collective Security Treaty Organization." It adds that Russia has deployed "information operations to denigrate Armenian democracy and its more pro-Western leadership."

The DIA's findings showcase wider US concerns about the region's destabilization as Russia seeks to reinforce control over former Soviet states through political manipulation and propaganda.

## Parliament Proposes Grant Approval Exemptions for EU, Sports, and Academic Programs



Photo: Honor Society.

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

Parliament has introduced a draft amendment to the Law on Grants that would exempt specific types of grants from requiring government approval.

As the bill puts it, grants issued by international sports associations, federations, and committees, as well as individual financial aid for education and research abroad, would no longer fall under the mandatory approval procedures outlined in paragraph 3 of Arti-

cle 5. Notably, grants under the EU's Horizon Europe research initiative and Erasmus+ education program are also included in the exemption list.

The draft's explanatory note justifies the change by stating that these programs "pose lower risks regarding sovereignty infringement, political interference, or security concerns," adding that "Georgia contributes financially to the implementation of these initiatives."

Before this draft, all grants required prior approval from the government or a designated authority. Unauthorized grant receipt or issuance was prohibited, with oversight responsibilities assigned to the Anti-Corruption Bureau.

# Spheres of Influence, Boundaries, Territories: 'Remembering the Well Forgotten.' Part 1

Continued from page 5

We've mentioned history, and with respect to the sphere of influence category, I'll "rapidly" highlight its evolution. It has already been said that mankind has always shown a desire to dominate geographical space, although the doctrinal beginning of the sphere of influence can be called the Monroe Doctrine of the United States of America in 1823. According to this Doctrine, the Western Hemisphere was declared a special zone of US interests, in which interference by other countries - countries outside the hemisphere - was considered unacceptable.

The Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, at which the understanding of spheres of influence took on a broader scope, is considered another important step in the evolution. In particular, the task of the European states participating in the conference was to agree on curatorial zones, including on the African continent.

From a historical perspective, I obviously cannot avoid the period before World War I, as the geopolitical 'cohabitation' of the four major empires (Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, Russian and German) that existed at that time was essentially based on their respective zones of influence over colonial nations.

We have already mentioned the Yalta Conference of 1945 and its significance in terms of the division of spheres of influence on a global scale. The division of that time has stood the test of time. Objectivity requires to say that the rules of the game established at Yalta, which led to the bipolarity of the world, saved humanity from the hot phase of confrontation between the USA and the USSR

during the Cold War. However, the bipolarity of that time was not characterised by absolute stability either. The fact is that these two superpowers, through their own 'proxy' forces in the so-called 'secondary geographies', in a mode of covert or overt confrontation, continued to try to further redistribute what had been distributed. However, the deterrent factor of nuclear weapons and the so-called concept of 'assured destruction' saved the world from catastrophic consequences.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent end of the Cold War added a new, often highly controversial, dimension to the understanding of spheres of influence. In this regard, we will have to cite a few not-so-pleasant passages from the recent historical past.

It would seem that the collapse of the USSR should not have caused any ambiguity with regard to the former Soviet nations, especially where the national idea and the desire for new geopolitical ties were so pronounced.

This was partly the case, as the Central and Eastern European countries that were part of the Soviet-run Warsaw Pact of 1955 were almost immediately recognized for their foreign policy choices by the West. At the same time, the process of liberation from post-Soviet-Russian influence was (and remains) much more difficult in the case of the former Soviet Union republics.

For example, US President George H.W. Bush's speech to the Ukrainian Rada on 1 August 1991, in which he warned Ukrainians of the threat of 'suicidal nationalism' (actually national independence), made the West's policy towards the post-Soviet space quite ambiguous. Rather, the interpretation of this speech in its own favour

successfully weaponised Russian propaganda in the context of declaring the 'near abroad' to be Russia's 'backyard', the geography of its privileged interests. However, Bush later justified himself by saying that the purpose of his speech was to support Soviet leader Gorbachev and prevent violence within the Soviet Union. In part, from the perspective of the events of the time, this rationale should perhaps be taken into account. But in the big picture - in terms of further 'justification' of Russian expansionism towards its neighbours - what happened was what happened.

Anyway, since the problem of countries (primarily Georgia and Ukraine) that found themselves in a geopolitical and security vacuum was temporarily 'shelved', the discussion of spheres of influence in the post-Cold War years seems to have ceased. Moreover, there was an expectation that not only would there be a convergence of governance models in the greater European area, but that common and acceptable security systems would be established involving formerly rival countries. Furthermore, with the signing of the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation in May 1997, the movement towards geopolitical cohabitation in a new regime if not towards convergence of geopolitical goals, was to begin.

Here too, such expectations have fallen victim to infantile politics. Several events, including the recognition of Kosovo's independence, Russia's now open aggression against Georgia in 2008 and the annexation of Crimea, have led to the reactivation of spheres of influence and the emergence of new dividing lines in geopolitical and military terms. A given

was created that prepared the fertile ground for the 'disorderly order' that exists today.

The fact is that the ongoing war in Ukraine, triggered by renewed Russian aggression, and the associated chaotic political process herald an era of new 'deals', including at the expense of territories and borders. This perception is further exacerbated by the hybridization of democratic regimes against the backdrop of the activation of authoritarian regimes, their deinstitutionalization and demeritocratization, and the fetishization of the 'strongman' approach, which is also directly reflected in the 'deal-making' development of international politics.

Therefore, I do not consider the subtitle 'From Yalta to Yalta' to be superfluous. The attempt to dismantle the residual construct of the international order makes it quite realistic to tear down the load-bearing walls that maintain stability in the course of international relations - territorial integrity and inviolability of borders - through extremely tough 'realpolitik'. And this is practically equivalent to a tectonic catastrophe on a global scale.

## AND MORE BROADLY...

...This tendency further emphasizes the unconditional factor of force on the part of the strong and the permissibility of 'creation of justice' or 'righting wrong' through power politics. Also, one of the consequences is the vulnerability of other compact (small) countries, such as Georgia. We believe that countries that find themselves along the line of division of spheres of influence or on the 'wrong side' of such a line are even more vulnerable.

The irresponsible manipulation of territories and borders is further exacerbated by the rapid decline of democracy worldwide. In practice, the difference between the old and new Yalta can be expressed in the substantial decline of the democratic world if not in its complete neutralization. This, I repeat, directly threatens not only the stability and predictability of international relations, but also the interests of medium-sized and compact (small) nations.

This explicit use of force and the creation of politics by 'laying hands' on spheres of influence, while ignoring the fundamental principles of international law, will revive the very unpleasant principle of Antiquity. In particular, according to this principle, the strong had the right to do whatever they wanted, while the weak were obliged to tolerate what they were obliged to tolerate. It is also worth noting that modern politics today is almost completely de-ideologized, and the leading line is the absolutization of profit-making. I would also like to point out that these principles of law - territorial integrity and inviolability of borders - have been mercilessly attacked from all sides, regardless of political order.

Anyway, this particular handwriting has become a kind of 'emerging culture' today. It is also a fact that, at this stage, such a 'culture' seems to have the prospect of further popularization, since it is fully in line with the subculture of 'strongman,' makes both diplomacy and the demand for intellectual politics redundant, and, by contributing to the creation of an 'enemy image' in the external arena, facilitates the illusion of seemingly solving internal problems of a country.

To be continued in next week's GT.



Photo: Geostat.

## Poverty Declines in Georgia as Income Inequality Decreases in 2024

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

**T**he National Statistics Office recently published data revealing that Georgia saw a significant decline in poverty in 2024, with the national absolute poverty rate dropping to 9.4%, down 2.4 percentage points from the previous year.

The downward trend was applicable to every demographic. The poverty rate among children under 18 saw the sharpest decline, falling 4.0 percentage points to 12.1%. For adults aged 18 to 64, the rate dropped to 9.3% (-2.1 points), while seniors aged 65 and older experienced a more modest decline to 6.7% (-1.3 points).

"This is the first time we've seen across-the-board improvements in both urban and rural areas, and in every age group," the statistics agency noted.

Geographic disparities also decreased. In urban areas, absolute poverty

declined by 1.6 percentage points to 7.8%, while rural areas saw a steeper improvement—3.7 points down, landing at 11.9%.

The gap between genders remained but both men and women benefited from identical 2.4-point improvements. In 2024, 9.0% of women and 9.8% of men lived below the absolute poverty line.

In addition to absolute poverty, relative poverty also changed. The share of the population living on less than 60% of median consumption fell by 0.9 percentage points, reaching 18.9%, while those below 40% of median consumption dropped by 0.7 points, to 6.7%.

Economic inequality also went downward, with the Gini coefficient, a primary measure of income distribution decreasing by 0.2.

"These figures suggest not only a reduction in poverty, but also a slight closing of the income gap," analysts at the agency said, adding, "Sustaining this momentum will depend on targeted policies and continued economic stability."

## Germany Deploys First Overseas Brigade Since WWII



Berlin pledged the long-term deployment in 2023, breaking with decades of German defense policy that avoided permanent stationing of combat troops abroad. Photo: Sean Gallup/Getty Images.

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

**G**ermany has launched its first permanent overseas military deployment since World War II, formally establishing the 45th Panzer Brigade in Lithuania as security concerns rise in the region.

The new brigade, officially inaugurated

in Vilnius, will be stationed at a military complex currently under construction in Rudninkai, just 30 kilometers south of the capital. The unit will consist of approximately 4,800 troops and 200 civilian personnel and is expected to be fully operational by 2027.

The move points out Germany's deepening role in NATO's defense posture, particularly in response to growing threats from Russia. "This is about our shared security. Germany stands firmly by its NATO

commitments," said Chancellor Friedrich Merz during the inauguration ceremony.

Berlin's deployment is in the scope of NATO's eastern flank and deter aggression near the alliance's borders. Merz also pointed to Germany's increasing defense expenditures and closer cooperation with NATO allies as a reflection of its strategic shift.

The 45th Panzer Brigade will significantly enhance NATO's readiness in the Baltics.

# From Grassroots to Government: Community-Led Change Transforming Lives in Kvemo Kartli with EU Funding and CENN Support

BY KATIE RUTH DAVIES

In Georgia's Kvemo Kartli region, something powerful is happening. Not in the halls of parliament or city-based offices: it's unfolding in village meeting rooms, kindergartens, youth clubs, and community centers. In Kvemo Kartli, local people are stepping forward to shape the services that affect their lives the most.

Funded by the European Union and implemented by CENN with support from partner organization KKM, the 'Empowering CSOs to Promote Inclusive and Green Post-COVID Recovery in Multi-ethnic Kvemo Kartli Region Project' is helping local communities strengthen democracy from the ground up. With a budget of €1,111,110 and a timeline stretching from January 2022 to December 2025, the project is active in six municipalities: Marneuli, Tetritskaro, Dmanisi, Gardabani, Bolnisi, and Tsalka.

The goal? To develop local civil society organizations, expand participatory democracy, and improve the quality and accessibility of social services, especially in communities often left behind.

"With the support of the EU, we have helped train specialists, create fully equipped centers for them to work in, and brought to these communities the beginnings of community support networks," CENN's Nino Tevzadze tells GEORGIA TODAY. "Now, people in smaller towns and villages will finally have access to services that used to only exist in big cities like Tbilisi."

## STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY FROM THE GROUND UP

For CENN, the 'Empowering CSOs to Promote Inclusive and Green Post-COVID Recovery in Multi-ethnic Kvemo Kartli Region Project' began with a comprehensive Civil Society Organizations Capacity Building Program (CDP), which included:

1. Assessing the needs and capabilities of local organizations;
2. Providing training, coaching, and one-on-one mentoring;
3. Offering consultations with Georgian and international experts;
4. Organizing study visits to the Czech Republic to learn from European best practices, and;
5. Launching the Young Professionals Program (YPP) to engage the next generation of civic leaders.

At its heart, the project is about helping local people shape the communities they live in. It focuses on three main things: giving civil society organizations the tools and training they need to grow stronger, encouraging real citizen involvement in local decision-making, and funding grassroots initiatives that make a real difference in people's lives.

The goals are: First, to strengthen civil society so that community groups are better equipped to offer high-quality social services, and to speak up for vulnerable groups who need support the most. Second, to create new ways for communities to work with their local governments, making sure services are transparent, accountable, and built around what people actually need, especially following the challenges of the pandemic. And third, to give local changemakers the funding and support they need to design and deliver services that truly respond to the unique needs of their towns and neighborhoods.

A total of six community-led projects were launched across Kvemo Kartli, each responding to specific local needs:

- An Early Childhood Development Support Center in Tetritskaro;
- A youth-led initiative to engage in



The Tetritskaro Early Childhood Development Support Center. Source: CENN

and improve social services in Gardabani;

- A project focused on increasing access to vital services for ethnic Azerbaijani children with disabilities;
- A program in Tsalka supporting parents and caregivers of children with disabilities or living in single-parent households;
- The first-ever day center for children with disabilities in Dmanisi, and;
- An intergenerational tech and learning hub in Dmanisi that connects older residents with local youth through shared skills and experiences.

"We're not just helping civil society get a seat at the table: we're helping them lead the conversation," says Nino Tevzadze. "By working closely with local governments and grassroots groups, we're strengthening local democracy from the ground up. Everything we're doing, from training to funding, is about building communities that can rely on themselves and advocate for what they need. The social services we've helped develop didn't come from a top-down plan; they were shaped by the real, everyday needs people told us about. And thanks to EU support, we've been able to give local groups the funding they need to turn those ideas into action: to expand services or make existing ones work better for everyone."

Let's explore the projects further.

## THE TETRITSKARO EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT CENTER

Project period: 24.06.2024 – 01.06.2025

Goal: To promote the harmonious mental and physical development of children living in the municipality by

creating and increasing access to early development support services for children aged 0-7 living and registered in the municipality.

Located in Tetritskaro Municipality, the freshly renovated Early Childhood Development Support Center focuses on children aged 0-7, coming fully equipped with sensory toys, climbing frames and even a trampoline to stimulate and entertain the beneficiary children. It's the first of its kind in the region, and aims to identify developmental delays early and offer professional intervention. Staff include two early intervention teachers, a psychologist, and a psychologist's assistant.

"The initial screening process takes place with the parents' involvement," says Nino Tikurishvili, Executive Director of the Tetritskaro Local Action Group. "We work with both the child and their caregivers. When an intervention teacher sees that formal intervention is no longer needed, the parent is guided and prepared to continue supportive practices at home."

All kindergartens in the municipality, 16 in total, are participating in an outreach effort that helps teachers and families identify early signs of developmental delays. Informational sessions with medical workers have also begun, and a dedicated intake and evaluation process is being piloted with families. The Early Childhood Development Support Center is currently undergoing certification to become a recognized service provider, and soon it will be welcoming up to 20 local children.

"This is a really sensitive area we're working in," Nino Tevzadze tells us. "When it comes to people with special



Technological Bridge Between Generations. Source: CENN

needs, there's often hesitation: families don't always feel comfortable talking about it. That's why early conversations with parents and teachers are so important. If you can spot developmental issues early, you can intervene early, and that can make all the difference."

## THE MARTKOPI YOUTH CENTER: YOUNG PEOPLE TAKING THE LEAD

Project period: 26.06.2024 – 31.03.2025

Goal: To improve the quality of social service provision in Gardabani Municipality; to promote and encourage an increase in the number of personnel in shortage professions.

Gardabani's youth are stepping up through an initiative led by the Martkopi Youth Center. Their project encourages young people to consider careers as social workers or occupational therapists: two critical but underrepresented fields in rural areas.

Twenty-one youth leaders organized 14 information sessions, reaching 129 high school students across local villages. The team also created and shared video content about the importance of social work, garnering more than 7,000 views online. They initiated a petition urging the local government to co-finance higher education for young people in these professions and conducted advocacy meetings with municipal representatives.

The result is a model of youth-led civic activism aimed at solving real local problems.

"Social work and intervention roles aren't usually on young people's radar, so we focused on showing them how important and impactful these careers can be, and that they're a real path to employment," CENN's Nino Tevzadze notes. "We took them to Tbilisi State University to explore the social services programs, hoping they'd see there's pride in this kind of work. Helping your own community isn't just a job: it's something to be proud of."

## CARE GEORGIA: SUPPORTING AZERBAIJANI CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Project period: 27.09.2024 – 27.02.2025

Goal: Improving the quality of life of ethnic Azerbaijani children with special needs living in the region by increasing access to the services they need.

The Supporting Azerbaijani Children with Disabilities initiative addresses a crucial gap in service access for ethnic Azerbaijani children with disabilities in the Kvemo Kartli region. Care Georgia organized targeted outreach in villages, meeting face-to-face with caregivers and providing informational leaflets in Azerbaijani.

Seven Azerbaijani-speaking specialists

were trained in early childhood education and developmental intervention. These professionals are now providing much-needed support throughout the region, and helping parents navigate the available services.

"The trust we've built is rooted in language and familiarity," said one team member. "We made sure our specialists could speak to families in their mother tongue, and that made all the difference in engagement."

The campaign not only provided direct support, but also raised awareness about disability rights and inclusion within the broader community.

"We've partnered with local CSOs, such as Care Georgia, because they have those direct, trusted relationships in the villages," says Nino Tevzadze. "Their face-to-face work with families really mattered. Because they're from the same communities, speak the same language, and are familiar faces, it helped build trust. It wasn't immediate, it took time, but the difference it's made is clear."

## TOGETHER FOR REAL CHANGE: EMPOWERING MOTHERS

Project period: 01.05.2024 – 20.08.2025

Goal: Socio-economic empowerment of parents/caregivers of children living alone and/or with disabilities, and promotion of their rights.

Operating in Tsalka Municipality, the Together for Real Change project empowers parents, especially single mothers and caregivers of children with disabilities. Within the project, 10 women have received psychosocial training, parenting support, and individual consultations with mental health professionals. The program also employs nannies to provide at-home care for children, giving mothers time to pursue education, employment, or simply rest.

"Many of these women hadn't had the opportunity to work for years," Nino Tevzadze says. "With emotional support and childcare, they're starting to see new possibilities."

The economic impact is also already visible: several participants are now actively seeking employment, supported by a new sense of agency and confidence.

"Parents of children with special needs don't just need support: they need to feel empowered, like they can actually manage what they're facing. That's why we offer training, emotional support, and professional consultations," Nino tells us. "But it's not just on us. The government has a responsibility too: not just to create social services, but to make sure people, especially vulnerable groups and ethnic minorities, know these services exist and understand how to access them."



Technological Bridge Between Generations. Source: CENN

Continued on page 8

# Fly Backwards

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

Go back in time with me to a different era of flight. I've been doing this for about 57 years, with conscious memories of airplane travel from about 48 years back. By the time I was four years old, I had lived on three continents! Now, between visiting Canada from Georgia and soon to return, I reflect a bit.

Even the word "airplane" was differently spelt and taught to me as a child in the early 1970s: "aeroplane", just as I learned to spell "today" as to-day. It's true. British spelling? Maybe so. But languages evolve, and we either keep step with them or become an anachronism ourselves.

There was no internet then... no seat-back video screens to watch or hear anything on from thousands of choices. Not even any headphone jack. Really? What was there? One film PROJECTED onto a large screen for everyone to watch as best they could.

Smoking? There was a smoking section in the plane, but no way of magically

keeping those noxious second-hand fumes from reaching the rest of us. What would there be, a low-level force field? That's science fiction, I'm afraid. So glad that all planes worldwide are now completely smoking free. Sorry for you smokers, but only to a point.

The first flight I remember at all was my dad taking my sister and me on a short Cessna trip in Rhodesia, in the mid-1970s, a work trip piloted by someone else. The details are fuzzy, but I'm certain it's true. First flight I was ever on? From London to probably Toronto, when I was about one-year-old. First international flight I remember? Lufthansa taking us from Rhodesia back to Canada in 1977 to settle there. I recall grinning with the effort of trying to resist the "g-force" of takeoff pushing me back into my seat. It was a 747, impossibly huge. Incidentally, "Lufthansa" comes from "luft ["air"] Hansa", the old Hanseatic League of which Germany had been a part.

Back then they would open the door to the flight deck cabin, and you could meet the pilots and have a word. Since 9/11? Forget it: now there'll be an armed marshal on board preventing this kind of access. The safety demos were all in

Quiz: Identify the airlines to which these logos belong!



person; many still are, but big-budget airlines are also trying recorded videos of this important item. The best one I've ever seen was by Malaysian Airlines and featured several Hollywood stars. Entertaining, funny and unforgettable.

Luggage allowances: 2 x 23 kg was standard check-in for international flights. Food was always free, if offered, and I have to say, always tasty to me.

My longest ever set of flights? 9 flights over three DAYS, going about 3/4 of the

way around the world from Indonesia to mid-western Canada. Stops in Jakarta, Singapore, Helsinki, Portland, Seattle, Vancouver and I don't even remember where else until disembarking, now forever more blasé about flying, in Edmonton.

I was only ever bumped up to business class from the usual economy; when my wife and I were going to from Georgia to Zimbabwe via Amsterdam. KLM, not knowing she'd had abdominal surgery

recently, gave us the upgrade for the long flight down to Harare, really just when it was needed. Fabulous, a Godsend.

Curious about airline logos, like I, a graphic designer, am? A huge set of them can be found at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_airline\\_liveries\\_and\\_logos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_airline_liveries_and_logos); with these companies appearing and disappearing, or changing their spots, like virtual particles in the vacuum, frequent visits to see what's new are recommended. It's a fascinating look at how different countries and cultures interpret the broad concept of "national or local airline". Birds, of course, dominate the set of designs; because we first learned about powered flying from studying their wings. Circles, representing the globe, are also very popular.

Now, as we seek ever more efficient and less-polluting ways of powered flight, the airborne industry is in great flux; but it always has been, from Icarus to the Montgolfiers to the Wrights to Soyuz and beyond. Stay tuned, and fasten your seatbelt for a ride into the future.

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

## From Grassroots to Government: Community-Led Change Transforming Lives in Kvemo Kartli with EU Funding and CENN Support

Continued from page 7

### DMANISI'S FIRST DAY CENTER FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Project period: 28.09.2024 – 01.07.2025

Goal: Increasing access to basic social services for ethnic minority and socially vulnerable children and youth with disabilities in Dmanisi, an area densely populated with ethnic minorities.

The introduction of the Day Center for Children with Disabilities marked a major milestone for Dmanisi Municipality, where no comparable services previously existed. Housed in a fully renovated 180-square-meter space provided by the municipality, the center is now officially registered and offers structured programming for up to 20 children aged 6–18 from ethnic minority and socially vulnerable backgrounds.

Programs include educational support, recreational activities and engagement with families, while training is underway to include therapeutic services. Local staff have been trained in inclusive education practices, and families are involved in shaping the services to meet their needs.

"This center has changed the landscape for vulnerable children here," said Maia Bibileishvili head of the project implementing organization 'Child, Family and Society.' "This is not just a place to go—it's a place to grow, and as we identify new needs, we hope to be able to expand the scope of services we can offer them."

### A TECHNOLOGICAL BRIDGE BETWEEN GENERATIONS

Project period: 02.05.2024 – 31.03.2025

Goal: Creation of an intergenerational



Empowering mothers in Tsalka. Source: CENN

mutual support social service that will help the elderly and socially vulnerable adolescents living in the municipality to improve their socialization, knowledge and skills.

This Technological Bridge between Generations project connects seniors with socially vulnerable youth in Dmanisi. Funded by the EU through CENN, the Association of Internally Displaced Women 'Consent,' with the support of the local municipality body and Support House, introduced the '60+ Day Center' service through the 'Technological Bridge' project to bring together two generations through shared activities, learning, and mutual care.

Within the frames of the 'Technological Bridge' program, 10 youth participants, many of whom are from low-income families, received digital skills training, including coding and basic computer literacy. This they then shared with the older members of the community over

the duration of the program. The process required patience, empathy, and communication—skills just as valuable as the technical ones. In return, five older residents with teaching experience volunteered to tutor the children in school subjects.

Nana Mikiani, a retired teacher with 39 years of experience, six of them in Dmanisi, the remainder in Tbilisi, describes the difference it has made: "If it weren't for this program, many of these socially vulnerable children would be in a much harder place. We give them educational support; but, more than that, we're offering emotional support too."

"Some of these children come from homes where there's not enough food, where they rely entirely on the government for the basics. Under those conditions, how can we expect them to thrive? But here, they've started to open up and

grow in confidence."

She highlighted in particular the progress they have seen among the Azerbaijani participants: "Their studies have improved so much this past year, especially in Georgian. A big reason for that is the way we work—in small groups of 10, not the large classes they're used to in school. That individual attention makes a huge difference."

Over time, the center has become more than a place for schoolwork: it's a true community, seeing the participants celebrating birthdays and holidays together and going on trips around the country. Together, they co-organize community events like concerts, crafting sessions, and theatrical performances.

"We've become a tight-knit group. It's not just about the school subjects: it's about loving these children and helping them however we can. We've seen friendships grow, skills blossom, and barriers come down," says Ekaterine Okriashvili, Support House manager.

Looking ahead, Ekaterine says she is committed to keeping the momentum going:

"To continue this work, we're exploring every possible form of support: businesses, young volunteers, even small material donations. The CENN (EU) grant was a big step forward for us, but this is only the beginning. We'll find a way to keep this project alive. It means too much to too many people."

### BUILDING LONG-TERM CHANGE

While these projects are already showing results, the vision is long-term. The EU funding helped launch these services,

but sustainability depends on ongoing local support from municipalities and the private sector.

"We trained specialists, we set up the centers," CENN's Nino Tevzadze says. "Now we hope the government and municipalities will keep supporting them."

She highlights the importance of awareness: "The government must not only create social services, but also ensure that vulnerable people, especially minorities, know they exist and understand how to access them."

Looking ahead, CENN and local partners plan to approach businesses to incorporate support for such services into their corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies.

"We want communities to feel empowered to demand loyalty from businesses. These are not handouts: these are investments in a stronger, more inclusive society."

### A NEW MODEL FOR CIVIC PARTICIPATION

These projects are more than "quick fixes" – they are proof that civil society can lead systemic change. By working hand-in-hand with municipalities, families and local experts, this EU-funded civil society development project is transforming how Georgians experience public services.

"We'll stay connected to our beneficiaries even after the project ends," Nino says of CENN's team. "Our work in the regions will go on. Because at the end of the day, this is for them—the people who live here."



Informative leaflets in Georgian and Azerbaijani, produced by Care Georgia. Source: CENN



The Dmanisi Day Center for Children with Disabilities. Source: CENN

# The Georgian Animal Federation (GAF) and Charitable Foundation Shemifare Expand Network of Veterinary Clinics—Built on Ethics, Compassion, and Professionalism

BY KESARIA KATCHARAVA

The Georgian Animal Federation, a fast-growing network of veterinary clinics and charitable foundation, has announced the upcoming opening of its ninth clinic. This expansion marks a continued effort by the organization to set new standards in animal healthcare throughout Georgia, combining clinical excellence with a strong sense of responsibility toward both domestic and stray animals.

Founded on what it describes as the principles of “love, professionalism and responsibility for every life,” the Federation has grown into a leading provider of veterinary services in the country. Its eight operating branches have already delivered more than a million services, with thousands of animals treated across various disciplines — from emergency surgery to long-term rehabilitation.

The ninth branch, now in preparation, is described as “another modern space for animal health and well-being,” reflecting the Federation’s commitment to not only medical care, but also to the creation of safe, welcoming environments for animals in need.

“We believe that veterinary care is not just medical intervention — it is trust, love, and responsibility for life,” the organization states.

## BUILT ON A MODEL OF TRUST AND TEAMWORK

What sets the Georgian Animal Federation apart from many clinics is its refusal to rely on individual assessments for treatment decisions. Instead, each case is reviewed by a council of veterinary professionals. These multidisciplinary

teams ensure that diagnoses and care plans benefit from multiple perspectives, increasing the reliability and effectiveness of treatment.

This model applies across all eight branches, each of which is equipped with up-to-date medical technology. Services include advanced diagnostics, complex surgical operations, vaccination programs, preventive care, and 24/7 critical care coverage. According to the Federation, surgeries range from routine procedures to specialized operations such as bone fixation and tumor excision.

The organization emphasizes that its clinics are not only medical centers, but also places of empathy and trust. The physical spaces are designed to be comfortable and welcoming, while staff — made up of both local and international veterinarians — are selected for both technical skill and compassion.

## A MISSION THAT EXTENDS BEYOND THE CLINIC

The Federation does not limit its work to private pet care. As part of its broader mission, it provides treatment to abandoned, stray, and injured animals across the country. Thousands of such animals have received professional assistance through the network — a reflection of its role as both a healthcare provider and a social organization.

Raising public awareness is also central to its agenda. The Federation works to promote better understanding of animal welfare, responsible pet ownership, and the rights of animals. Education is treated as an ongoing responsibility within the organization itself as well: internal training programs, lectures from visiting experts, and routine retraining sessions help ensure that all personnel stay current with evolving veterinary standards.

“Our values are professionalism and



David Chikviladze, Founder and General Director of the Georgian Animal Federation

continuous development, an individual approach to patients, service based on love and responsibility, and raising public awareness on animal rights issues,” the Federation states.

This focus on ethical service and continuous learning is seen as key to the network’s growth and popularity among Georgian pet owners. By combining technical sophistication with a heartfelt commitment to animal welfare, the Georgian Animal Federation has built an identity that resonates with both clients and the broader public.

## A GROWING PRESENCE, A CONSISTENT VISION

The Federation’s rapid growth reflects both rising demand for comprehensive animal care and increasing trust in its model. With eight successful branches already in operation, the organization sees its upcoming ninth clinic as a natural next step in broadening its reach and impact.

All signs suggest that its growth is not simply expansion for its own sake, but part of a consistent vision: to build a veterinary system where animals are treated with dignity, their owners feel confident in the quality of care, and the broader community sees animal health as a shared social responsibility.

In a statement from Nana Kukulava, the director of the foundation, she offered gratitude to the public for their continued trust and support:

“Thank you for trusting us. Thank you for being part of our big family.

Let’s make Georgia a better place for animals together!”

The Georgian Animal Federation is not just adding another clinic. It is extending a philosophy — one that combines science, compassion, and a belief that every life deserves respect and care.

# First Swissôtel in Gudauri – Petra Group Enters a New Stage of Development



BY TEAM GT

On May 19, Petra Group and Europe’s number one hotel operator, Accor, signed a cooperation agreement, marking a transition to a

completely new stage in the development of Georgian ski tourism.

Within the framework of the agreement, Swissôtel’s first hotel and branded residence complex will be built on 4.5 hectares of land in one of the most exclusive locations in Gudauri.

The project includes a 180-room hotel and 290 branded residences.

Petra Group plans to create a premium ski resort that will fully meet the standards of the world’s leading destinations.

Swissôtel Hotel and Residences Gudauri is distinguished by its diverse infrastructure tailored to the specifics of a mountain resort, which includes an après-ski zone, indoor and outdoor pools, a lobby, restaurants and bars, wellness centers,

ski lockers, children’s areas, and a gym.

This is the second strategic cooperation between Petra Group and Accor. Last year, within the framework of the Petra Sea Resort project, a Pullman hotel and branded residences complex was signed in Tsikhisdziri, which, in turn, also set a precedent on the Black Sea coast.

After the success of Petra Group’s flagship project, Petra Sea Resort, Petra Group is launching an equally large-scale project, Petra Ski Resort in Gudauri, for which the Swiss premium brand — Swissôtel — was specially selected.

Petra Group General Director Tinatin Kalandarishvili spoke about the details: “Today is a very important day for our company. We are moving to a new stage of development, expanding the geography of our projects, and launching a new project in Gudauri. This is our second

cooperation with Accor. For Gudauri, we have chosen the renowned Swiss brand Swissôtel, and we believe that the presence of this brand in Gudauri will significantly increase the status and tourist potential of the resort.”

As Tinatin Kalandarishvili noted, the 13-hectare Petra Ski Resort includes the construction of a Swissôtel hotel and two branded residences. In addition, seven exclusive villas will be built within the project, the owners of which will fully benefit from Swissôtel’s first-class services and resort infrastructure. Petra Group continues to implement innovative projects in the best tourist zones of Georgia, from the Black Sea coast to the Caucasus Mountains, which serves to develop the country’s real estate market, increase tourism potential, and introduce prestigious international brands to the country.



# Echoes of Georgia at Tbilisi Open Air 2025: When Legends Sing, a Nation Listens



Photo source: Facebook page of Tbilisi Open Air

BY IVAN NECHAEV

I don't have much time left — I'm already 90 — but I'm waiting for victory," said Giuli Chokheli as she stood beneath the open skies of Tbilisi Open Air 2025; a living legend lending her final years to a future she still refuses to give up on.

In a time of mounting political tension, mass arrests, and a bitter cultural standoff between artists and the Georgian authorities, the appearance of three elder legends on the stage of Tbilisi Open Air 2025 was no ordinary festival highlight. It was something more radical, more intimate, and more urgently symbolic: a generational act of witness.

Nani Bregvadze, Paata Burchuladze, and Gulli Chokheli are not just performers. They are living symbols of Georgian dignity, cultural continuity, and emotional truth. Their presence on stage during a festival explicitly shaped by resistance, against Russian occupation, against the oligarchic stranglehold of power, against the suppression of Georgia's European aspirations, was a moment of rare clarity. These voices, seasoned by time, loss, and unwavering loyalty to Georgian culture, gave the crowds something beyond inspiration. They gave them memory.

## THE BALLAD OF A CENTURY: GULLI CHOKHELI AND THE

## POWER OF PRESENCE

When 90-year-old Gulli Chokheli stepped onto the main stage, it wasn't to perform a polished set or to bask in nostalgia. She came, quite simply, to speak. And when she did, the field of thousands fell silent.

Her words — "Who could possibly defeat these young people?" — struck deeper than any slogan. Her age, far from diminishing her presence, lent her an oracular authority. She had lived through Soviet domination, the brutal 1990s, the hollow promises of the 2000s, and the slow disillusionment of recent years. Her statement was not rhetorical. It was a final bequeathal: a transfer of hope from one generation to the next.

Chokheli's voice, frail and luminous, reminded Georgians that resistance is not only youthful but also ancestral. Her gesture of love — "I can't kiss you all at once, but I love you so much and trust you completely" — was, in itself, revolutionary. In a time when the political elite speaks in threats and police batons, her maternal tenderness became an act of moral opposition.

## THE OPERA VOICE OF PROTEST: PAATA BURCHULADZE AND THE GRAVITY OF SONG

Opera singers rarely appear at pop festivals. But Paata Burchuladze is no ordinary bass. His presence at Tbilisi Open Air — where he led the crowd in the now-iconic protest anthem "I Am Georgian" — transformed the gathering into something approaching liturgy.

Burchuladze's voice is known across the world, from La Scala to the Met. But on that night, it belonged entirely to his country. And when he sang, he did not perform; he invoked. The anthem, with its blend of defiance and sorrow, has become the sound of Georgia's democratic struggle — a vocal reminder that beneath the slogans, beneath the daily grind of protest, there lies something sacred: a collective longing to live with dignity.

His involvement, moreover, was pointedly political. As an outspoken critic of the ruling Georgian Dream party, Burchuladze has long been targeted for his civic engagement. By standing on the same stage where younger artists shouted anti-regime slogans, he collapsed the artificial divide between high culture and popular resistance.

When he sang, it was as if Verdi had descended into the square, and taken the side of the people.

## MTVAREO REBORN: NANI BREGVADZE AND THE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE OF ELEGY

If Chokheli spoke from the edge of time and Burchuladze sang with operatic gravitas, then Nani Bregvadze brought something more elusive: emotional precision. Her duet with Kordz — a reimagining of Gogi Tsabadze's 1973 classic "Mtvareo" — was not merely a nostalgic moment. It was an act of aesthetic intervention.

Bregvadze, the grande dame of Georgian song, has always stood apart: elegant, melancholic, and exacting in her phrasing. On this night, she allowed her voice to be filtered through a new generation's lens — through Kordz's stripped-down, ambient production. The result was neither kitsch nor reverent. It was a conversation across decades, a gentle dismantling of time.

"Mtvareo", long associated with the bittersweet lyricism of Soviet-era Tbilisi, found a new context — a context of civic struggle, cultural preservation, and generational realignment. In allowing herself to be remixed, Bregvadze did not lose authority; she extended it. She reminded her audience that Georgian identity, like Georgian music, survives through adaptation — not imitation.

## THREE LEGENDS, ONE NATION: THE CULTURAL ETHICS OF TESTIMONY

What unites these three figures is not simply age or fame. It is their refusal to

detach from the present. Too often, elder cultural figures retreat into ceremonial roles, confined to awards galas or official receptions. But here, at a muddy, politically charged festival — where tear gas was only months removed and where young artists risk arrest for speaking truth — they chose to show up. To sing. To remember.

Their very presence constituted a political gesture: a refusal to allow the narrative of Georgia to be claimed by censors or politicians. They stood in solidarity with youth. They lent their gravitas to protest. And they performed a collective rite of cultural survival.

In an age of disinformation, their testimony — unmediated, unfiltered — became an antidote.

## THE ANTHEM OF A NATION ON FIRE

On the 26th of May, 2025, the fields outside Tbilisi did not just resonate with guitars and basslines. They rang with the fury of a silenced people, the cry of a young generation reclaiming history, and the aging voices of icons who had seen the Soviet shadow and lived to sing beyond it. Tbilisi Open Air 2025 — the largest music festival in the Caucasus — erupted not into mere celebration, but into a historic fusion of performance and protest. The atmosphere was electric, not with fireworks, but with something rarer: a collective act of political clarity.

This year, the festival didn't simply coincide with Georgia's Independence Day — it embodied it. While the government marked the date with military parades and institutional platitudes, Tbilisi Open Air turned its stage into a platform of resistance. And it was there — amid slogans, national songs, and choreographed defiance — that the very meaning of independence was rewritten through sound.

## A STAGE AS BATTLEFIELD: PROTEST IN CHORDS AND CHANTS

Music festivals usually aim to escape politics. But Tbilisi Open Air 2025 leaned directly into it. From the first beat to the final curtain, the event was engineered not just as a celebration of musical freedom, but as an artistic counterweight to a political regime increasingly hostile to dissent.

Georgian performers exclusively graced the main stage — a deliberate choice following months of government pressure against cultural institutions. The National Ballet ensemble Sukhishvili delivered a breathtaking closing performance, culminating in the singing of the Georgian national anthem alongside indie rock icon Nika Kocharov. It was a moment of choreographed national unity — bold, elegant, and charged with historical memory. Every movement, every crescendo seemed to whisper the names of those whose bones lie under this land.

The festival pulsed with the ongoing unrest that has rocked Georgia since November 2024, when the ruling Georgian Dream party halted the EU integration process. Since then, more than 500 protesters have been detained; dozens remain behind bars. Open Air gave voice to those silenced — literally.

On the main stage, the slogans roared: "Freedom for the regime's prisoners", "Oligarchy to the flames." As if the microphones themselves had turned into megaphones for the movement.

## THE PERFORMANCE THAT SHOOK TWO NATIONS

But the most incendiary moment came from singer Erekle Getsadze. In a furious and unapologetic performance, he threw the Russian flag to the ground — and simulated urination on it. Russian media and officials immediately responded with threats and outrage. The Russian Investigative Committee even opened a criminal case. Meanwhile Getsadze's gesture reminded the crowd that the wounds of 1921 are still open. That Soviet shadows still linger — not only in Abkhazia and South Ossetia but in the daily political maneuvers of the Georgian elite. Getsadze's act was vulgar, but symbolic and primal.

## THE AFTERLIFE OF THE PERFORMANCE

Tbilisi Open Air 2025 will be remembered for many things: Getsadze's scandalous flag performance, the protest slogans that shook the stage, the mass singing of anthems once confined to protest squares. But without the presence of Bregvadze, Burchuladze, and Chokheli, it might have risked being ephemeral — powerful but passing.

Instead, the appearance of these legends tethered the event to a deeper historical consciousness. They reminded us that freedom is not only a political condition. It is a cultural inheritance, and it must be sung into being again and again.

Their voices linger, not just in recordings, but in the moral architecture of the Georgian present. In a country that has known conquest and erasure, their participation felt like a rebuke to silence.

When legends speak, a nation listens. And this time, it answered back.

# Chidaoba in the Spotlight Once Again

BLOG BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

Chidaoba — the Georgian national style of wrestling — is back in focus. May 24 and 25 were very special in the village of Shilda in the Kvareli Municipality, where a copious and well-equipped international base for Chidaoba is located. This base was founded and is owned by successful Georgian businessman Giorgi (Gia) Shiukashvili, who also serves as the General Secretary of the National Federation of Chidaoba.

During those days, a conference was held, dedicated to the future development of Chidaoba in Sakartvelo and, without any feigned modesty, in the world. Notably, UNESCO upholds a list of Intangible Cultural Heritage, comprising countless cultural practices and skills preserved by generations. The list currently includes 678 elements from 140 nations around the world. Its main goal

is to preserve and protect traditions at risk of vanishing and to encourage admiration for the cultural diversity of civilization. The term 'UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list' encompasses all that is meant by the diverse cultural legacy existing on Earth today, and that valuable list now includes Chidaoba as one of the latest four nominees. This very fact gave impetus to the Shilda Conference, which was organized under the aegis of the Georgian National Federation of Chidaoba.

Invited to participate in the conference were Chidaoba coaches, referees, Federation members, sports education managers, and both local and foreign fans of Chidaoba. The Rector of the University of Sports, Professor Tristan Gulbiani, told the participants that Chidaoba is not just another wrestling style enjoyed by the Georgian public, but an integral part of the national identity of a Kartveli, i.e., a Georgian person. He emphasized that it is thanks to Chidaoba that Georgian athletes in other Olympic events are so successful on the international

stage. He also spoke about the potential and prospect of promoting and recognizing Chidaoba as a global sporting event.

The Chief of Staff of the same university, Merab Metreveli, informed the audience that, starting from the upcoming school year, Chidaoba will be added as a separate specialized discipline in the curriculum. On top of that, by the initiative of the State University of Sport and the IFGW (International Federation of Georgian Wrestling), the Academy of Chidaoba was founded. Within this institution, applicants have the opportunity to take a certified course in Chidaoba coaching and refereeing.

The General Secretary of the Federation, Giorgi (Gia) Shiukashvili, introduced the already well-tested (on the international level) club system in sports, which Georgia has successfully adopted and implemented. As a matter of fact, Gia underlined, Chidaoba clubs are already operating in numerous countries around the world, teaching this wrestling style to young people of various nationalities.

The foreign participants in the conference also delivered enthusiastic speeches, discussing the realistic chances of making Chidaoba one of the internationally recognized sporting events. It was especially interesting to hear from Mr. Davit Tabatadze, who, together with his veteran wrestler father Temur Tabatadze, founded a Chidaoba school in America. He is now ready to open a Chidaoba club in Philadelphia, where the sport will be taught on a professional level. The club will help Georgian emigrants connect, while also promoting interaction between Georgian and American youth and sharing Georgian sporting traditions and cultural values with American friends.

The Italian guest of the conference, Umberto Giovanni, spoke excitedly about the simplicity and uniqueness of Chidaoba. He said he had been observing training sessions for five days at the Shilda premises of the Chidaoba Academy and had already made the decision to open a Chidaoba club in Italy.

At the conclusion of the conference,

proceedings moved to the halls of the Academy, where judges and coaches discussed rules, evaluation systems, and the granting of additional wrestling time. A decision was made to create two specific groups under the leadership of the Federation: one to work on Chidaoba attire and the other on rules and regulations.

The conference was moderated by the President of the National Federation of Chidaoba, Temur Khubuluri, with secretarial duties handled by Yuri Imerlishvili and media support provided by Silknet sports journalist Tamaz Gogibedashvili.

At first glance, this might seem like just another get-together in Georgia. But let's be assured that the discussions and interactions that took place during the Shilda Conference are a major service to our national sport. Thanks to such efforts, we may one day witness Chidaoba becoming an Olympic event. That's exactly what happened to Judo — once solely Japanese, now one of the biggest sporting events in the world.

# The Blooming Electric Now: How DOCA Film Club's 'New Georgian Films' Program Captures a Nation Mid-Transformation

BY IVAN NECHAEV

From street protests to neon crucifixes, deliverymen turned prophets to AI companionship—Georgia's cinema of 2024–2025 dares to document, distort, and dream the country into new focus.

It begins with trembling hands and a slogan. "We were afraid, but we came anyway," says a voice off-screen in *Inner Blooming Springs*, Tiku Kobiasvili's tender chronicle of protest and friendship that opened the "New Georgian Films" program at DOCA Film Club on May 26—Independence Day. The date wasn't accidental. Nor is the decision to launch a cinematic reflection of Georgia's recent past and fragile present on a national holiday that increasingly functions less as a celebration and more as an uneasy ritual. What does it mean to be "independent" when your voice is under surveillance, your agency is under question, and your identity is split between the ghosts of empire and the mirage of Europe?

Across the next two months, the Amirani Cinema becomes not just a screening hall but a diagnostic chamber, a séance, a confessional. The films are recent—2024 and 2025 productions—but their concerns stretch both forward and back: to the archival wounds of 1991 in *Limitation*, the economic rot of the present in *Temo Re*, and the emotional futurism of *Air Blue Silk*. This is cinema as collective psychoanalysis.

Premiered at Berlinale, Kobiasvili's *Inner Blooming Springs* functions as both witness and elegy. Set against the backdrop of the 2024 protests against Georgia's controversial "foreign agents" law, the film eschews spectacle for intimacy. Tina, Luka, and the director herself, Tiku, resist not through grand acts

but by standing together, crying together, talking late into the night. The camera lingers on faces: blurred by tears, strained by fear, illuminated by solidarity.

The film's structure is deceptively simple, almost diaristic. But its political impact is cumulative. This isn't a polemic—it's a portrait of what resistance actually feels like: heavy, ambiguous, deeply personal. It suggests that political change begins not in the square, but in the quiet courage of staying.

In the Q&A that followed the screening, Kobiasvili noted: "I wasn't trying to explain anything. I just didn't want us to forget." That ethos haunts the entire program.

June 9 will bring the Georgian premiere of *Temo Re*, already crowned a winner at the Rotterdam International Film Festival. Directed by Anka Gujabidze and based on Courier's *Tales* by Temo Rekhviashvili (who stars as himself), the film is a black-and-white tragicomedy that merges autofiction with documentary grit.

Temo, a failed actor-turned-delivery man, scooters through a city of broken balconies and spiritual exhaustion. The humor is dry, almost Kafkaesque, but not cynical. Each delivery he makes becomes an existential monologue, each absurd encounter a commentary on a society where performance has replaced meaning.

Gujabidze plays with temporality through elliptical editing and the eerie stasis of monochrome—creating a Tbilisi that feels both ancient and post-apocalyptic. The city becomes a dream-space where nothing quite resolves, echoing the social fatigue of a population trapped between historical repetition and neoliberal drift.

If *Temo Re* is Kafka on a scooter, then *Holy Electricity* is Pasolini in a scrapyard. Directed by Tato Kotetishvili and awarded at Locarno, this full-length feature traces two cousins who discover a

suitcase of rusty crosses and transform them into neon crucifixes to sell door-to-door. The premise is absurd, but the result is luminous.

Gonga and Bart's journey becomes a pilgrimage through Tbilisi's spiritual decay, where churches become dollar signs and religion is just another marketing scheme. But *Holy Electricity* resists easy satire. Instead, it asks: what if commerce is the last place where belief still lives?

In this Georgia, kitsch is theology and scrap metal is revelation. It's a film about the sacred profaned—and the profane, maybe, sacred again.

Irine Jordania's *Air Blue Silk* takes a quieter path. Two characters, Eka and Niko, each retreat into private cocoons: Eka mourning her aunt's suicide through voicemail messages, Niko constructing an AI companion to stave off isolation. The two barely meet—one brief contact in a world of screens and absences.

This is Georgia as interior landscape, where the political manifests not in protest but in psychic architecture. If *Inner Blooming Springs* is about togetherness, *Air Blue Silk* is about the loneliness that remains when collective hope erodes.

Its most radical gesture may be stillness: long takes, minimal dialogue, the sound of a city outside a closed window. The film doesn't judge its characters' retreat—it mourns it. And in doing so, it renders a collective diagnosis: loneliness is no longer personal. It's a national condition.

*Limitation* by Soso Dumbadze and Elene Asatiani offers the most overt historical reckoning. Composed entirely from found footage—YouTube clips, news broadcasts, VHS fragments—the film reconstructs the 1991 civil war between rival political factions in Georgia. No narration, no re-enactments. Just images and echoes.

But this isn't nostalgia or documentation. It's confrontation.



Inner Blooming Springs. Photo source: doca.ge

Three decades later, *Limitation* asks: what does it mean to rewatch your own erasure? And perhaps more dangerously: who controls the edit?

As media manipulation, historical denial, and cultural amnesia increasingly shape Georgian public discourse, this film becomes an act of resistance. It reclaims the archive from both state narrative and private oblivion.

## A FINAL NOTE: TIME CAPSULES AND UNEARTHED FUTURES

The program will end in late July with a return to the past—short documentaries made 15 to 20 years ago. Their titles are still to be announced, but their function is already clear. They will serve as time capsules, markers of a country that believed in something else, something still unfixed.

This backward glance is not a nostalgic one. Instead, it's a gesture of recalibration. History, these films insist, is not

linear. It loops, replays, erodes and resurrects. The future, in Georgia, is not ahead—it's waiting to be re-edited.

The 2025 edition of DOCA Film Club's "New Georgian Films" is not just a showcase of recent cinema—it is a curatorial act of national attention. These films demand that viewers stay awake: to memory, to contradiction, to each other. They reject both the comfort of victimhood and the delusion of resolution.

What emerges instead is a cinema of alertness: to political fragility, economic absurdity, spiritual exhaustion, and private grief. It is a cinema that stares back. Not to accuse. But to ask: are we still here?

And if so—what stories are we brave enough to tell?

Upcoming screenings continue every Monday, 19:00 at Amirani Cinema. All films come with English subtitles. Discussions with filmmakers follow each screening.

# BI Auction: Sandro Gvinashvili Reflects on His Journey Since Winning the BI Auction Competition



BY TEAM GT

his artistic talent and vision, but he also demonstrated how vital it is to support young artists. His success is proof of the transformative impact such platforms can have on the future of art in Georgia," says Bengü Akçardak Küçük, Co-Founder of BI Auction.

Since his win, Gvinashvili's career has taken on an impressive international trajectory. In this candid conversation, he reflects on the growth of his artistic journey, shares his perspective on today's art world, and reveals what's next in store.

**YOU WERE THE WINNER OF THE BI AUCTION COMPETITION IN 2020. LOOKING BACK, HOW DID THIS EXPERIENCE IMPACT YOUR ARTISTIC JOURNEY? WHAT POSITIVE CHANGES HAVE HAPPENED IN YOUR CAREER SINCE THEN, BOTH IN GEORGIA AND INTERNATIONALLY?**

Winning the BI Auction Competition in 2020 was a turning point for me. Shortly after the competition, I was able to rent my own studio, which marked the beginning of a profound, inward creative jour-



ney. Since then, I've produced over 150 canvases.

My works have been sold and exhibited internationally, and they continue to represent me in ways that words sometimes can't. Here's a brief overview of my exhibitions:

2022 - Group exhibitions in New York (USA), Vienna (Austria), and Paris (France)

2023 - Another group exhibition in Vienna; A major solo exhibition in Tbilisi, Georgia, featuring over 80 works

2024 - A group exhibition in Tbilisi  
The competition definitely opened new doors and expanded my visibility both at home and abroad.

**HOW WOULD YOU EVALUATE THE CURRENT SITUATION FOR ART AND ARTISTS TODAY?**

Art is evolving rapidly, especially with the integration of technology. We're seeing more diversity among artists, and this is part of a natural, ongoing process of transformation. Art is becoming more

inclusive and accessible, which I think is essential for its continued growth.

**WHAT ARE YOUR UPCOMING PROJECTS? WHAT SHOULD WE LOOK FORWARD TO?**

I'm currently working on several new projects and plan to move to France in the near future. My goal is to hold a solo exhibition there, which I'm very excited about. It's an important step for me personally and professionally.

**WE LOOK FORWARD TO FOLLOWING YOUR JOURNEY. THANK YOU, SANDRO, AND CONGRATULATIONS ONCE AGAIN ON ALL YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS.**

Thank you. It's been a pleasure to share my story.



**PUBLISHER & GM**  
George Sharashidze

**COMMERCIAL DEPARTMENT**  
Commercial Director:  
Iva Merabishvili  
Marketing Manager:  
Natalia Chikvaidze

**EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT:**  
Editor-In-Chief:  
Katie Ruth Davies

**Journalists:**  
Ana Dumbadze  
Vazha Tavberidze  
Tony Hanmer  
Nugzar B. Ruhadze  
Erekle Poladishvili  
Ivan Nechaev  
Mariam Razmadze

**Layout:**  
Misha Mchedlishvili

**Photographer:**  
Aleksei Serov

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

**Website Editor:**  
Katie Ruth Davies

**Webmaster:**  
Sergey Gevenov

**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

Reproducing material, photos and advertisements without prior editorial permission is strictly forbidden. The author is responsible for all material. Rights of authors are preserved. The newspaper is registered in Mtatsminda district court.

Reg. # 06/4-309

ბაიყორღე

შაურ-ნახევარი  
ბავშვ

FANTA

