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OP-ED: How Neo-Conservatism Failed Georgia

OP-ED BY LASHA KASRADZE*

The great irony of the neoconservative project in Georgia is the fact that neo-conservatism in America has intellectual ties with Trotskyism. Making this historic fact a part of the social discourse in the US would most certainly serve as an irritant to the neocon gospel, especially given its political alliance with the conservative religious-philosophic outlook in the American body politic. Fortunately, the Georgian body politic does not suffer from the same limitations when discussing the roots of neo-conservatism. In Georgia, the fact that the “neo-con” ideology traces its roots to Trotskyism is frequently discussed. Although delving deeper into this issue is outside the scope of this report, it is briefly worth mentioning that the neo-conservative movement would have had a better chance of establishing a lasting presence in Georgia if it had considered the fact that Georgia is a conservative, Orthodox Christian nation.

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Georgian protesters. Source: responsiblestatecraft

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GALT & TAGGART CREATING OPPORTUNITIES									
Markets									
As of 03-Jun-2025									
BONDS				STOCKS					
	Price	w/w	m/m		Price	w/w	m/m		
GEORG 04/26	96.83 (YTM 8.50%)	+0.5%	+0.8%	Lion Finance Group (BGEO LN)	GBP 67.40	+0.4%	+11.1%		
GRAIL 06/28	99.41 (YTM 8.00%)	+0.3%	+0.7%	Georgia Capital (GGEO LN)	GBP 18.54	-3.6%	+10.4%		
GEORG 9 1/2 PERP	98.95 (YTM 9.42%)	-0.1%	+0.4%	TBC Bank Group (TBCG LN)	GBP 44.30	-3.9%	-5.7%		
SILNET 01/27	101.21 (YTM 7.58%)	+0.1%	+0.4%						
TBC 8.894 PERP	97.51 (YTM 11.54%)	+0.1%	+1.0%	COMMODITIES				Price	w/w m/m
TBC 10 1/4 PERP	99.29 (YTM 9.95%)	+0.2%	+1.0%	Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	65.63	+2.4%	+2.1%		
				Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	3 353.43	+1.6%	+3.5%		
INDICES				CURRENCIES					
	Price	w/w	m/m		Price	w/w	m/m		
SP 500	5 970.37	+0.8%	+5.0%	USD / GEL	2,7310	-0.1%	-0.5%		
FTSE 250	21 017.78	+0.4%	+3.8%	EUR / GEL	3,1053	+0.3%	+0.1%		
DOW JONES 30	42 519.64	+0.4%	+2.9%	GBP / GEL	3,6906	-0.0%	+1.3%		
Russell 2000	2 102.98	+0.6%	+4.1%	EUR / USD	1,1372	+0.4%	+0.7%		
FTSE 100	8 787.02	+0.1%	+2.2%	GBP / USD	1,3517	+0.1%	+2.8%		



Prime ministers Kobakhidze and Orbán in Hungary this week. Source: 1tv

Kobakhidze Meets Orbán in Budapest, Blasts EU Bureaucracy and Praises Hungary Ties

BY TEAM GT

On June 11, Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze commenced an official visit to Hungary, where he met with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in Budapest. The visit began with a formal welcoming ceremony at the Hungarian Prime Minister's Palace, where national anthems were played, and both leaders introduced their respective cabinet members.

During their meeting, Prime Minister Orbán praised Georgia's economic performance, stating, "If someone achieves over 1% economic growth, it is a great success. Therefore, your 7% growth is a galactic phenomenon. I know this is truly the result of your immense efforts."

Prime Minister Kobakhidze reciprocated, emphasizing the importance of mutual support, saying, "Georgia will always stand where the interests of the Hungarian people lie, and we feel a duty to reciprocate your support."

The leaders also discussed the European Union, with Prime Minister Kobakhidze expressing concerns about the EU's bureaucracy, pointing to "not only biased rhetoric, but also problematic practices, including financial support for extremist groups and interference in Georgia's electoral processes."

"We've seen repeated cases where institutions linked to the European bureaucracy have funded extremist activities and interfered in our elections," Kobakhidze claimed. "This shows a troubling lack of respect for Georgia's state sovereignty—something we find deeply regrettable."

Despite these challenges, the PM reaffirmed Georgia's commitment to its EU aspirations.

"For us, the EU has long represented justice, and we want it to remain that way. Unfortunately, some bureaucrats are undermining that image. Still, we will persist on our path toward EU membership. We hope that by the time Georgia is ready to join, this attitude will have changed."

He expressed optimism about Europe's future and reiterated Georgia's desire to be part of a fair and principled European Union: "Our goal is clear—EU membership in a union where countries are judged fairly. In this regard, I want to sincerely thank Prime Minister Orbán and the Hungarian government for their consistent and just support. Hungary stands out for its fairness, and we are truly grateful for that."

Advancing Bilateral Ties

The visit included the second session of the Georgia-Hungary Intergovernmental Commission, convened in Budapest. Kobakhidze described it as a vital mechanism for tracking progress and planning future cooperation.

"This format, launched two years ago, marks its second meeting this year. It has provided us the opportunity to assess the progress made and to map out future plans together."

Key areas of cooperation discussed included trade, energy, agriculture, education, connectivity, defense, justice, and cultural exchange. Several memoranda of understanding were signed during the summit to expand collaboration.

"We can confidently say there is vast potential for deepening cooperation in all these areas, and we are committed to realizing it fully."

Kobakhidze also underlined the importance of business-to-business cooperation, stating that beyond political support, the economic partnership must flourish:

"Our political dialogue is particularly close, as demonstrated by the frequent high-level visits and exchanges. Today's discussions also underscored the importance of enhancing not only government-to-government collaboration but also business partnerships."

The visit, marked by symbolic gestures and concrete agreements, reinforces Georgia's intent to balance deepening ties with friendly EU states like Hungary while pushing back against what it sees as unfair treatment from Brussels. The momentum, as both leaders agreed, is in the direction of closer bilateral cooperation and renewed efforts toward European integration on Georgia's terms.

UK Embassy Cancels Grants Meant to Support Georgia's Local Election Transparency

BY TEAM GT

UK Embassy in Georgia says they are compelled to cancel planned grant proposals that were aimed at supporting the transparency and competitiveness of the upcoming municipal elections.

The diplomatic mission explains that following discussions with the Georgian authorities, they were informed that the government decree "On the Procedure for Grant Approval" has not yet been finalized. Therefore, at present, there are no mechanisms or timelines in place for making decisions regarding grant approvals.

"The United Kingdom made good-

faith efforts to obtain approval for a number of projects aimed at supporting civil society in voter education and citizen election monitoring. It should be noted that these activities were recognized as valuable by the Central Election Commission," the statement reads.

"However, after discussions with the Georgian government, we were informed that the decree 'On the Procedure for Grant Approval' is still not finalized. Accordingly, there are no mechanisms or deadlines for making decisions about grant approvals at this time.

"Regrettably, due to this uncertainty, we are compelled to cancel the planned grant proposals, which were intended to support the transparency and competitiveness of the upcoming municipal elections.

"We are also concerned that, unlike during the previous municipal elections, the government has not yet invited the OSCE/ODIHR observation mission, nor is it facilitating the activities necessary for citizen-led election monitoring.

"The absence of professionally trained observers operating in accordance with international standards could be seen as a step backwards, potentially reducing public trust in the transparency of the democratic process in Georgia.

"The United Kingdom remains ready for dialogue on how it can support democratic development in Georgia and regrets the loss of this opportunity, which was intended to contribute to objective, professional, and transparent monitoring of the October municipal elections," the UK Embassy's statement reads.

Merab Dvalishvili Holds onto UFC Title with Win over O'Malley

Merab Dvalishvili. Source: 1tv



BY TEAM GT

Georgian MMA fighter Merab Dvalishvili successfully retained his UFC super bantamweight (61 kg) title at UFC 316 in New Jersey, defeating American contender Sean O'Malley.

From the opening bell, Dvalishvili set a relentless pace, keeping O'Malley under

constant pressure. Despite O'Malley's attempts to find openings, the 34-year-old Georgian secured a decisive victory in the third round.

Dvalishvili first captured the championship in September last year by defeating O'Malley and has now defended it twice—his first defense coming against Umar Nurmagomedov in January. Among the notable attendees at UFC 316 was US President Donald Trump.

With this win, Dvalishvili improves his professional MMA record to 20 victories

and 4 defeats. It marks his 13th straight win, placing him alongside legendary fighters like Khabib Nurmagomedov, Demetrious Johnson, Georges St-Pierre, Max Holloway, and Jon Jones. Only Kamaru Usman and Islam Makhachev (15 wins each), and Anderson Silva (16) boast longer winning streaks.

Dvalishvili hasn't tasted defeat since 2018. Since then, he has taken down four former UFC champions on his rise to the top of the super bantamweight ranks.

EU Ambassador: Visa-Free Travel for Georgians Still in Place, Despite Ongoing Discussions

BY TEAM GT

EU Ambassador to Georgia, Pawel Herczynski, addressed recent remarks by Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, who stated that Poland is lobbying to revoke visa-free travel for Georgian citizens. Herczynski confirmed that discussions on the matter are ongoing among EU member states but emphasized that no decision has

been made to suspend the current visa-free regime for ordinary Georgian passport holders.

"There are ongoing discussions among member states about what can be done, and one of the ideas is to suspend the visa-free regime," Herczynski said. "But this decision lies with the member states, and it would require a two-thirds majority."

He clarified that although the issue has been on the table for several months, the majority of EU countries currently oppose such a move. "We do not want

people to pay the price for the decisions of the authorities," he stressed.

Herczynski explained that the only step taken so far has been the suspension of visa-free access for holders of diplomatic and service passports. "Georgian citizens holding ordinary passports can still enjoy visa-free travel to the EU," he reassured.

The ambassador's statement comes amid growing tensions between the EU and the Georgian government over recent political developments, including concerns about democratic backsliding.

Ukraine Latest: Russian Onslaught Intensifies as Kharkiv Suffers Deadly Drone Attack, Frontlines Shift

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

Ukraine's war-weary population was once again shaken by a deadly Russian drone attack on Thursday, June 12, as the city of Kharkiv endured one of the most concentrated nighttime assaults in recent months. Six people were killed and 64 injured, including nine children, in the nine-minute barrage that struck Ukraine's second-largest city, say Ukrainian officials. This latest attack comes as the conflict continues to escalate across both combat zones and international political arenas. Ukrainian military forces responded by striking a major Russian gunpowder plant in Russia's western Tambov region overnight, igniting a fire at the facility. While the strategic value of the strike remains unconfirmed, it marks a bold extension of Kyiv's efforts to undermine Russia's military-industrial infrastructure beyond the frontlines.

On the ground, Russian mechanized infantry units—bolstered by a tank division—have reached the western edge of Donetsk and are now pushing into Ukraine's Dnipropetrovsk region, says Russia's Ministry of Defense. This expansion of the eastern front signals a potential new offensive effort aimed at penetrating deeper into Ukrainian-held territory. Meanwhile, Moscow's Defense Minis-

try reported the destruction of 32 Ukrainian drones overnight, with half intercepted over Voronezh and others shot down in Kursk, Tambov, Rostov, and Crimea. These frequent drone exchanges are a testament to the increasingly technological and remote nature of the war, even as intense infantry combat rages on the ground.

In a somber moment, Ukraine announced the return of the bodies of 1,212 fallen soldiers. The Kremlin said 27 Russian soldiers' bodies were returned in exchange.

In a move widely seen as symbolic posturing after Ukraine's daring June 1 strike on Russian airbases in Siberia, Moscow sent long-range Tu-22M3 bomber planes on a mission over the Baltic Sea. Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov downplayed the impact of Ukraine's recent attacks, insisting that Russia's nuclear forces remain robust and nearly fully modernized. President Vladimir Putin echoed this on state television, claiming that 95 percent of Russia's strategic nuclear arsenal is up to date.

International reactions to recent events have ranged from cautious support to veiled criticism. US Ambassador to NATO Matthew Whitaker called Ukraine's drone strike on Russian airbases "badass" but admitted it was "a little bit reckless, and a little bit dangerous," reflecting growing Western unease about escalation.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelen-



In the aftermath of Russia's deadly drone strike on Kharkiv. Source: Suspilne Kharkiv

sky, speaking at a regional summit in Odesa, warned that Russia intends to destroy southern Ukraine and poses a growing threat to Moldova and Romania. He called on neighboring countries to apply increased diplomatic and economic pressure on Moscow.

Notably, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic—a longtime ally of the Kremlin—attended the summit, marking his first visit to Ukraine in over a decade of leadership. The diplomatic move signals a possible shift in Serbia's approach to the war.

Elsewhere, Finland summoned a Russian diplomat following another suspected airspace violation on June 10—the second such breach in under three weeks—highlighting growing security concerns among NATO's eastern members.

Economic disentanglement from Russia continues across Europe. Germany reported a staggering 95 percent drop in Russian imports between 2021 and 2024, while exports fell by 72 percent. The European Union overall saw imports

fall by 78 percent and exports by 65 percent, leading to a dramatic decrease in trade volume with Russia—from a €147.5 billion surplus in 2022 to a €4.5 billion deficit in 2024, reported the German statistics office, Destatis.

Still, not all EU members are aligned on the sanctions policy. Slovakia's Prime Minister Robert Fico warned that his government will oppose the EU's 18th sanctions package unless the European Commission provides solutions to offset the impact of phasing out Russian energy.

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OP-ED: How Neo-Conservatism Failed Georgia

Continued from page 1

By contrast, one of the key reasons for Donald Trump's popularity in Georgia is that he is perceived as the president who reduced the neoconservative and neoliberal establishment's influence within Georgia. For Georgian conservatives, Trump is seen as the president who reclaimed conservatism from Washington's neoconservative clique, by reconnecting it to the socio-cultural fabric of everyday Americans.

More broadly, to Georgian citizens, Trump is the guardian of Christianity and conservative social values that they feel have been under assault from the liberal-leftist "woke" and globalist powers. For them, it makes little political difference whether it is Latin/Roman or Protestant Christianity that stands firm against this assault. Hence, even though George W. Bush's Republican party was profoundly Christian, and had the support of the traditional evangelical base, the Georgian conservative establishment perceived it as having been hijacked by the "neoconservative international" with its strict adherence to militarist and universalist dogma of the Wolfowitz Doctrine.

Noam Chomsky captured this dogmatic marriage of Christian faith with the US foreign policy when he provided a detailed account of a conversation between the then French President Jacques Chirac and Bush, during which Bush discussed an obscure passage from the Bible of "Gog and Magog" to imply that god would soon be at war with his enemies in Iraq. The implication of Chomsky's story was to describe Bush's desire to "cleanse" Iraq of evil, and to demonstrate the profound dangers of such thinking.

The point here is not that there was a scarcity of Christianity in the Bush White House, or that Georgian society would not have gobbled it all up if Bush had only shrewdly applied it to his relations with Saakashvili, but that the Bush foreign policy team applied a neoconservative internationalism that combined strong social engineering, universalism and militarism that evoked visceral feelings among Georgians that this was neither a democratic nor a Christian conservatism. It seemed instead a concerted effort to turn Georgia into a regional base for Trotskyist style permanent revolution against Russia. If Trump manages to insulate his administration from neoconservative universalism and militarism, even partially, then Georgia's relationship with the US will stand a better chance of improving.

However, a change that will most certainly guarantee better relations between Tbilisi and Washington would be President Trump's embrace of a realist foreign policy to navigate our new multipolar world. The shift from unipolarity to multipolarity has affected the regional geopolitics of the South Caucasus. Despite Trump's campaign promise and his current efforts as president to end the Russo-Ukrainian war, as well as his reluctance to pursue traditional American adventurism in the Middle East, the jury is still out on whether he will come under the sway of traditional neo-conservative ideologues, keen on embroiling the US in yet another tragic wars in the Middle East. Judging by most recent bombing campaigns in Yemen, and an increasing pressure to strike Iran as a way to prevent that country from building a nuclear weapon, Trump faces a historic challenge to resist the bombing of yet another sovereign nation in the Middle East, use strategic prudence, manage Iran's nuclear program, engage with it economically and eventually resist the domestic cabal of ideologues in Washington. However, even in the midst of such a gloomy scenario, it is



Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump. Source: Newsweek

manifestly clear that Trump (personally) recognizes that the multipolar world order has returned. On a personal level, his instinct seems to be that the repeat or continuation of the foreign policy of his predecessors will stain his political legacy, and will further strengthen the geopolitical resistance against the US in the other two major capitals of the world: Moscow and Beijing. Accordingly, Trump sees China as a possible bridge between the US and Russia in negotiations over Ukraine. More critically, Trump's view on the strategic competition with China is also apparent in his desire to "channel Nixon" and balance Russia against China. Considering that the Trump administration is engaged in a trade war with Beijing; and the complete erosion of trust of Moscow towards Washington that the neocon-neoliberal elites singlehandedly worked hard to create, the possibility of launching a fruitful dialogue with Moscow to pull off such strategic brilliance are slim to none. Nevertheless, what this shows is that Trump might be willing to exercise pragmatism, even in the face of such challenges. At the very least he is attempting to marginalize the sinister neocon influence on American statecraft.

That the conditions for sustaining the liberal international order led by the US are no longer conducive to maintaining the American primacy of the post-Cold War era will soon be apparent in the new geopolitical order being shaped by the US and Russia in ending the war in Ukraine. In this new arrangement, Ukraine will be the main loser, as it faces a division of its territory by a hostile power. Its national economic wealth is up for grabs as leverage for negotiations between Russia and America. In other words, Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 ended the sovereignty of that country as the world has known it since the collapse of the USSR in 1991. Simply put, after a decades-long struggle to become a member of the western political and economic architecture, Ukraine has nothing to show for it except its destruction. It now has no prospects of becoming a member of NATO.

Europe too has been relegated to the margins as a result of the above shift in the international system. Although the US will continue to guarantee Europe's security, the "old continent" is no longer

the geopolitical centerpiece that it once was during the Cold War, mainly because the strategic threat to the continent has disappeared with the collapse of the Soviet Union.

America's continuous search for strategic relevance for NATO resulted in disasters for Georgia with the five day war in 2008, and, on a much larger scale, for Ukraine in 2022. Lurking behind these disasters has always been the deep-seated interest of the collective West to weaken Russia on its own turf, in the Eurasian Heartland. However, the West once again failed to achieve their goal. With an ideologically-driven foreign policy, the collective West manufactured baseless accusations that Russia would invade Europe, after it had finished off Ukraine. Ironically, this Western chimera to double down on Russia resulted in the strengthening of Russia on the Eurasian continent. According to NATO SACEUR Christopher Cavoli, the Russian army is now larger than it was on February 24, 2022. In other words, using Ukraine to weaken Russia might have accelerated the return of multipolarity, thus shortening the longevity of America's primacy in the unipolar world.

The thrust of this shift in the international system is also felt in the sub-region of the Eurasian heartland—the South Caucasus. With the strengthening of the Russian Federation in Eurasia, the South Caucasian region will experience less, not more insecurity. According to Saul Cohen, a geopolitical theorist, if the West succeeds in penetrating the "convergence zone" of Eurasia, which entails the South Caucasus, it will result in the emergence of "shatter zones." The question then becomes, will the West's failure to penetrate the convergence zone mitigate the further deterioration of conditions in the current shattered zone of the South Caucasus? The effects on the South Caucasus of the current shift in the international system indicate that the less successful the West is in indulging in its adventurism in the region, the better the chances are for Georgia to establish pragmatic relations with Moscow, thus mitigating the negative effects of its location in this shatter zone.

The history of the past thirty years has shown that Georgia's foreign policy of idealism, heavily dependent on the United States, has been delusional. As with

Ukraine, the US does not have vital national security interests in the region, and therefore its meddling hardly demonstrates a true geo-strategic commitment, the likes of which Washington made towards Western Europe, Japan, South Korea and the Middle East, during and after the Cold War. Moreover, throughout the long sweep of history, Russia has committed to maintaining its influence in the South Caucasus, precisely because it sees it as a "soft underbelly" from which the West has tried to weaken and divide it. In other words, the geopolitical space of the South Caucasus represents a vital national security interest for Russia. Hence, it will go to great lengths to prevent the emergence of a Western-led security architecture in the region. Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008 was a clear manifestation of this strategy in action. Therefore, Georgia, as a small state in the international system, must continue to craft its foreign policy with a strict adherence to the principles of geopolitics, and the national security interests of the regional powers.

In a significant concept paper, the rector of the Sokhumi State University (Tbilisi, Georgia), Professor Zurab Khonelidze, presented the idea that the South Caucasus is a single geopolitical space. In the book titled, 'Georgian Paradigm of Peace,' Khonelidze dedicates a chapter to the concept called "The South Caucasus, Geopolitical Space-New Format for Regional Cooperation." It offers piercing analyses of the function and role of the South Caucasus in the international system.

Khonelidze challenges the mistaken approach of the collective West, and particularly of the US, which singles out Georgia as an exclusive candidate for membership in the Western economic, political and security architecture. The author sees this as a policy that narrows and limits the functionality/operability of the entire geopolitical space for regional and outside powers. The experience of the last thirty years has shown that Western attempts to carve out specific spheres of influence in the region by singling out Georgia, have been countered by Russia with military means—all at the expense of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Instead, the proposed alternative is to widen the regional interests of the great powers without pinning their

respective interests against each other at the expense of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia. The idea being that if neither of the three republics can be singled out from its geopolitical core, which is the South Caucasus, then the geopolitical space the region offers can be widened for outside powers to implement their respective geopolitical and geo-economic interests, without subjecting the region or any individual state in the South Caucasus to proxy wars against Russia. Although the process that could consolidate this vision is complex, there is evidence to suggest that, in the long run, the region is manifesting political signs that are conducive to its geopolitics and the respective interests of its three members.

Despite its longing for a future in the West, Georgia continues to find itself at the mercy of great power politics. Nevertheless, recent months and years have shown that there is a way for Georgia to survive as a small state. The Georgian Dream government has managed to correctly identify fundamental changes taking place in the international system, and has adjusted Georgia's foreign policy to those dynamics—and against enormous challenges put up by the US and EU. This has allowed GD to avoid repeating the tragedy of the war with Russia in 2008, thereby saving Georgia's statehood. While the current diplomatic conflict with Washington and Brussels is certainly unprecedented and unnecessary, Georgia's Western partners must understand that Georgia will stay committed to its chosen Western path, but not at the expense of its national security. So far, Georgia has been able to establish and keep the correct balance between its northern neighbor and its western partners (not without challenges), and it must continue to do so.

More broadly, the non-Western world seems to be moving on from the "dogmatic slumber" the West had put it under for the last thirty years. Washington too has expressed its desire to get back to realism and end its obsession with going to faraway lands "in search of monsters to destroy." However, even though Donald Trump's White House seems to be an island of pragmatism in a sea of brittle dogmatism, the current president will continue to face challenges in creating a more stable world order.

Neoconservative and neoliberal ideologues are running out of options, but still hold to their dreams of hegemony. Energized by a visceral hatred of Russia, they continue to fume as they watch President Trump slowly dismantle Ukraine in his negotiations with Vladimir Putin.

As the night falls on the neoconservative era, it has all but disappeared as the "only game in town" in Tbilisi (and other capitals of Europe). Imposition of sanctions on the current GD government is more revealing of their failed strategic thinking, much like on Ukraine, than the possibility of destroying GD or causing yet another color revolution. Those days are simply gone.

The question now facing them is how they will sustain the fervor of their permanent revolution in Georgia against Russia, should Tbilisi find a way to restore its sovereignty with Moscow. For the neoconservative and neoliberal factions in Washington, trapped in their absolutism, finding answers to this question will remain a formidable challenge.

*Giorgi (Lasha) Kasradze is an international relations analyst with a focus on the states of the former Soviet Union. His articles have appeared in the National Interest, The New Eastern Europe and Neutrality Studies. He holds degrees in international relations from Rollins College and The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy.

Aleksander Khara: “We fight to hold onto our sovereignty and to diminish Russia’s ability to threaten the rest of Europe”

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

In the wake of Ukraine’s audacious Operation Spiderweb—a wave of deep drone strikes inside Russian territory—the international spotlight has returned to the shifting frontlines, both military and diplomatic. Yet, ten days on, the expected Russian retaliation has not materialized.

Aleksander Khara, a former senior advisor at Ukraine’s Ministry of Defense spoke with Radio Free Europe’s Georgian Service, warning that proposed Western concessions—whether recognizing Russia’s annexation of Crimea, freezing NATO expansion, or easing sanctions—would not bring peace but instead “open the door to global chaos.” And if Trump believes he can simply charm Vladimir Putin into a deal, Khara says, he is deluding himself.

10 DAYS SINCE OPERATION SPIDERWEB AND PUTIN HAS NOT RESPONDED, AT LEAST NOT WITH A MASSIVE SHOW OF FORCE, AS WAS EXPECTED. WILL HE RESPOND? DOES HE HAVE THE LUXURY NOT TO?

Putin will feel compelled to respond. He does need to project strength. Only, now, he’s increasingly unable to do so. He’s not able to do anything more than he’s doing. Yes, he can send more drones, more missiles – rain down more terror on Ukrainian civilians and cities, but he has already been doing that for a long time now.

The only escalation option left to him—nuclear weapons—is highly unlikely. There’s no military need, and it would provoke a predictable backlash from key allies like China, a major supporter of Russia in this war, or Iran.

Conventional strikes face simple math: you need platforms to launch missiles. Our attacks on their strategic and tactical bombers have reduced that capacity. They can still harass us, but we’ve created a bottleneck—and proved Ukraine still has cards to play.

WHAT HAS OPERATION SPIDERWEB GIVEN UKRAINE FROM A DIPLOMATIC PERSPECTIVE? HOW WILL IT AFFECT THE ONGOING PEACE TALKS?

We showed that we are not losing this war—and that’s hugely important. Yes, Russians are making gains in the East, and now they’re trying to push into Sumy region. And for outsiders—for those without a military background—it might look like Ukraine is losing. Which then leads to this dangerous argument: “Maybe then it’s time to just accept whatever terms Russia puts forward, before it gets even worse.”

But operations like this prove otherwise. They show we have asymmetric tools to fight this war. And more importantly, that we’re not going to stop, give up. I believe it will change minds in the West—especially in Europe.

People are beginning to understand that Russia was never interested in a ceasefire—let alone peace talks or a peace agreement. All this time, they’ve been preparing for a summer offensive. And it might have already begun, starting with Sumy. It’s not yet a full-scale push, but they could escalate.

Why now? Because they see a window of opportunity—especially given the mood in the West and the position of Washington. It’s clear that Trump is not willing to impose costs on Russia for breaching agreements—including the one about the comprehensive, unconditional ceasefire that the US has been trying to negotiate. The Russians never took it seriously. Even that partial ceasefire they supposedly agreed to under Trump—they violated it repeatedly.

What we’ve seen is that Trump is not an impartial broker—he equates the aggressor, Russia, with its victim, Ukraine. He’s unwilling to support us with the



Aleksander Khara. Source: School of Ministers

same level of weapons as before. So Russia will advance, we’ll defend, and we may launch more strikes deep into Russia—not necessarily on the same scale, but they will continue.

TO WHAT EXTENT WILL THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION’S REFUSAL TO PROVIDE MORE FUNDS AND WEAPONRY AFFECT UKRAINE’S DECISION-MAKING, OR ROOM TO MANEUVER, BOTH ON THE BATTLEFIELD AND DIPLOMATICALLY?

When President Biden supplied weapons and ammo, he had leverage over Ukraine. Early on, he asked us not to strike Crimea—even though the U.S. doesn’t recognize it as Russian. We agreed and used our own drones and missiles instead. Russia didn’t retaliate, it became routine, and eventually Biden lifted the restriction.

The same happened with strikes inside Russia—initially banned, later allowed because of the dire situation on the battlefield.

Trump, by contrast, won’t have that kind of leverage. He can’t stop Ukrainian drone strikes, nor cut off their supply. That shift gives Ukraine more freedom—and more leverage.

YOU WROTE: “WITHOUT SOLVING THE RUSSIAN PROBLEM, TRUMP WON’T BE ABLE TO SOLVE THE PROBLEMS WITH CHINA, KOREA, IRAN, HAMAS, ETC.—AND THE SECURITY OF EUROPE AND ISRAEL.” DOES HE SEE RUSSIA AS A PROBLEM THAT NEEDS TO BE SOLVED? AND IF SO, HOW IS HE PLANNING TO SOLVE IT?

Unfortunately, no. Since 1991, every U.S. president has tried to build good relations with Russia—and each has failed. The core problem is that U.S. values and interests simply don’t align with Russia’s. Putin’s ideology isn’t conservative or Christian—it’s anti-Western, and it manipulates Western audiences who mistakenly see Russia as a “traditional” country.

There’s also no pulling Russia out of China’s orbit, or getting their help on Iran or North Korea. Their interests align with each other—not with the West.

Trump, however, believes his personal

rapport with Putin will work. He sees him as a role model and has echoed his propaganda. And with advisers like Mr. Witkoff—what Lenin might’ve called a “useful idiot”—he’s helping Russia without getting anything back, believing Putin is sincere.

But reality will catch up. There will be no deal with Iran. US intelligence and diplomats will eventually tell Trump: Russia is acting against our interests and backing our enemies. The same will happen with China. Trump may figure it out—but only after time is lost.

LET’S TALK ABOUT THOSE CONCESSIONS THAT THE US APPEARS READY TO OFFER—OR AT LEAST WILLING TO CONSIDER OFFERING—WHEN IT COMES TO NEGOTIATIONS WITH RUSSIA. ONE EXAMPLE FLOATED DURING EARLIER TALKS WAS THE SUGGESTION THAT THE US MIGHT BE WILLING TO RECOGNIZE RUSSIA’S ANNEXATION OF CRIMEA. WHAT WOULD THE GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS OF THAT BE?

Such a move would open the door to global chaos. Many borders in Africa and Latin America were drawn by colonial powers, yet since 1945, these regions have largely avoided wars of conquest. That’s worth preserving. Legitimizing annexation would encourage bad actors—especially in Asia—to pursue territorial grabs, leading to greater instability.

China wouldn’t welcome it either. Their claims over Taiwan rely on the principle of sovereignty and territorial integrity. Allowing forced annexations sets a precedent that undermines their long-term narrative.

And let’s be clear: Ukraine will never recognize the annexation of Crimea—nor will the EU. The European Union was built to prevent Europe’s violent past—conquest, nationalism, world war—from resurfacing. It cannot and will not accept such a precedent.

And this goes beyond Ukraine. Georgia and Moldova are in the same position. They too will never recognize the occupation or annexation of their territories by Russia or its proxies—nor should they.

ANOTHER POSSIBLE CONCESSION REPORTEDLY UNDER DISCUSSION: NATO. THE US SEEMS TO BE FLOATING THE IDEA OF FREEZING UKRAINE’S ASPIRATIONS TO JOIN THE ALLIANCE AS PART OF A POTENTIAL DEAL. THIS WAS ECHOED BY SPECIAL ENVOY GENERAL KEITH KELLOGG, WHO SAID THAT PREVENTING NATO’S EASTWARD EXPANSION WAS A “FAIR CONCERN.” IS IT?

Not at all. Russia is a major power—a nuclear power. But if you look at the recent history, there were no plans by NATO or any NATO country to attack or conquer Russian territory. None. When Russia first attacked Ukraine in 2014, we were a non-aligned country. The majority of Ukrainians were actually against joining NATO.

It was only after Russia illegally annexed Crimea and launched a proxy war in Donbas that President Poroshenko

amended the constitution to enshrine NATO membership as a strategic goal. And even then, it was mostly declaratory—we knew the West wasn’t ready to take us in. This narrative that NATO is somehow “dragging” Ukraine into the alliance is false. If anything, we’ve been desperately trying to get in.

You know this well—both Georgia and Ukraine received a symbolic promise of future membership at the 2008 Bucharest Summit. But in reality, countries like Germany and France made it clear they didn’t want us in the alliance. That hesitancy only emboldened Russia, as seen in its 2008 invasion of Georgia.

So no, NATO expansion isn’t the problem. What actually happened was that Central and Eastern European countries were fleeing Russia’s sphere of influence—it was escape, not expansion. Their fears were real, as Russia later proved.

So when Kellogg talks about “fair concerns,” he’s simply wrong. That kind of rhetoric fuels Russian propaganda. Without credible security guarantees, Russia will invade Ukraine again. That’s why NATO remains the only viable option—it’s a nuclear alliance. We don’t want war; we want deterrence.

Let’s see what comes out of the upcoming NATO summit. I expect some positive language in the final communiqué. And Trump can’t override NATO’s consensus-based process. He might promise Putin Ukraine won’t join while he’s in office—but he can’t force NATO or Ukraine to change their positions.

ON THE THIRD POTENTIAL CONCESSION, EASING SANCTIONS: SOME SAY THE TRUMP TEAM IS PRESSURING SENATOR LINDSEY GRAHAM TO SOFTEN THE LANGUAGE IN A SANCTIONS BILL TO MAKE IT MORE PALATABLE TO MOSCOW. WHAT WOULD THAT MEAN IN PRACTICE?

From the beginning, I believe the Obama administration made a key mistake in its assumptions about sanctions. The idea was that sanctions would serve as leverage—that they would be incremental and aimed at changing Putin’s behavior.

But Washington was always cautious not to harm its own interests—or those of its partners. Oil prices and other economic considerations took priority.

What’s been underestimated is how deeply Russia wants to reassert itself as a global power. That ambition outweighs money, the wellbeing of its people, even Russian lives. Nearly a million Russians have been killed or wounded in this war—but for authoritarian leaders, human loss is acceptable if it serves geopolitical goals.

If the Obama administration had treated sanctions as a weapon of war—not just diplomacy—they might have been able to strike at the Russian economy so effectively that it would cripple the Kremlin’s ability to fund its aggression.

But we’re still far from that kind of resolve. Neither the US nor Europe has shown it.

Sanctions now feel like Senator Graham’s personal mission. He’s balancing between Ukraine, Europe, and Trump—staying polite to Trump while pushing for tougher measures on Russia. But I doubt these sanctions will break the Russian economy, especially with China still backing Moscow.

Secondary sanctions are supposed to target countries that enable Russia—India, China, Turkey to some extent, and several Middle Eastern nations. All are helping Russia circumvent sanctions. But what’s worse is that Trump’s team wants to water down the language of these sanctions—and that won’t have a positive effect. Putin believes time is on his side. He can sacrifice another 100,000 soldiers without blinking. He believes the West will eventually falter, that it won’t keep up military aid to Ukraine.

He’s also banking on Russia’s Trojan



For us, this is a matter of survival. Putin made his genocidal intent clear in that infamous historical essay—denying the existence of a Ukrainian nation and Ukrainian statehood

horses within NATO and the EU—Slovakia, Hungary, and now even Poland, which despite knowing the threat Russia poses, has taken a harsher stance towards Ukraine. It’s not just historical grievances—there are other motivations as well.

Putin’s calculation is simple: if he pushes hard enough, Ukraine will be seen as unable to win. The world, then, will pressure Kyiv to accept unacceptable terms.

WILL THAT PRESSURE WORK? YOU’VE SAID SEVERAL TIMES THE US HAS LOST LEVERAGE OVER UKRAINE, THAT THEY CANNOT FORCE CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES OR COMPROMISES. GENERAL KELLOGG INFAMOUSLY SAID: “SOMETIMES YOU HAVE TO HIT THE MULE IN THE FACE WITH A 4X4.” AS UNSAVOURY AS THAT COMPARISON IS, DO THEY HAVE ANYTHING LEFT TO HIT THE “MULE” WITH? AND WILL THE “MULE” THEN “BEHAVE”?

No. Because for us, this is a matter of survival. It’s a genocidal war. Putin made his genocidal intent clear in that infamous historical essay—denying the existence of a Ukrainian nation and Ukrainian statehood. What Russian troops did in Bucha, Mariupol, and elsewhere were acts of genocide.

That’s why we cannot agree to these terms. It’s a historical and philosophical struggle. A century ago, our predecessors lost the Ukrainian People’s Republic to the Bolsheviks. We were fighting both the Bolsheviks and the imperial Whites, without national unity and without real external support. Our only ally, Germany, was on the losing side of World War I.

We lost that war. We lost our independence. And a few years later, came the Holodomor—genocide by starvation. Then came the repression of our intellectuals, the destruction of our language, our culture. We remember that.

Others remember their own tragedies. In the Caucasus, people recently marked the genocide of the Circassians—a deep historical wound. Some remember, but many have tragically embraced a Russian imperial identity. They’re not ethnically or culturally Russian—but they’ve become mentally Russian. It’s like a disease.

So no, we can’t accept this war on Russian terms. We know what extinction looks like. But unlike a century ago, we now have national unity, a capable and growing defense force, a developing defense industry, and allies—not just in Europe, but also in Canada, South Korea, Japan, and beyond. This is Ukraine’s historic chance to preserve sovereignty and, possibly, restore territorial integrity.

We understand that.

That’s why we fight—to preserve our sovereignty, and to diminish Russia’s ability to threaten the rest of Europe.



Ukrainian soldiers in 2023. Photo by Anatolii Stepanov/AFP/Getty Images

Controversy Surrounds Secretive Deportation of Activist Temur Katamadze from Georgia to Turkey

BY TEAM GT

The deportation of political activist Temur Katamadze, also known as Gapar Yilmaz, has sparked intense public debate in Georgia, seeing allegations of legal violations, coercion, and lack of transparency in the process publicly voiced. Katamadze, a Turkish citizen of Georgian descent and a known figure in Batumi's protest movements, was forcibly removed from Georgia on June 10 and transferred to Turkey under disputed circumstances.

Katamadze's final attempt to remain in Georgia centered on his fear of persecution in Turkey, where he said he had supported members of the Gülen movement through legal and translation services. Despite this, the Georgian courts denied his claims for protection, paving the way for his controversial removal.

Initially detained in Batumi on administrative grounds, Katamadze was rearrested for lacking legal residency after his release. Despite applying for refugee or humanitarian protection—citing fear of persecution in Turkey due to his association with the Fethullah Gülen movement—Georgian courts ultimately denied his request, concluding a legal process that went through eight judicial reviews.

According to his wife, Nino Kakulia, Katamadze's deportation took place in secrecy and deviated from established procedures. Speaking to Interpressnews, Kakulia said the transfer was not carried



Temur Katamadze. Source: Netgazeti

out through the usual Sarpi border crossing, but instead via southern Georgia near the Armenian border. She also revealed that the activist had been under psychological pressure at the migration detention center and had begun a symbolic hunger strike days before his removal.

"We believe he may have suffered an emotional breakdown and was coerced into agreeing to leave — although we're still trying to clarify the circumstances. What's clear is that he was transferred

last night," Kakulia said Wednesday. "Turkey suspended his passport in 2020, but we only discovered this recently when we requested his documents. They also refused to issue him a one-time travel document, yet he was still deported."

She claimed she only learned about the transfer indirectly—through a friend who received a call from a police station in Armaghani. Katamadze, she added, now faces uncertain and potentially

dangerous conditions in Turkey, a country she believes targets political activists like her husband despite its outward support for diaspora communities.

"There's no specific charge against him at this point, but the repressive machinery there is much more aggressive. Temur believes this is directly connected to his activism. While Turkey publicly supports diaspora communities, it seems they are threatened by active leaders and attempts to silence them.

"Temur met all the legal requirements for residency in Georgia. There are numerous legal violations in his case. The bottom line is that a person was deceitfully removed from the country," Kakulia concluded.

In an official response, Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs Aleksandre Darakhvelidze defended the operation, stating that the deportation was conducted lawfully following a court ruling that had entered into legal force.

"We inform the public that Gapar Yilmaz's expulsion was conducted in compliance with Georgian law," Darakhvelidze said in a press briefing. "Since he did not leave voluntarily, authorities proceeded with forced removal as allowed by legislation."

He also noted that the activist's legal defense had appealed to the European Court of Human Rights, but the request for interim protective measures was denied.

The case drew strong criticism from human rights advocates and political observers, who argue that the removal of Katamadze was carried out with a lack of transparency and may have violated both domestic and international legal standards.

Among the most vocal critics was Georgia's fifth president, Salome Zurbishvili, who condemned the deportation on social media, calling it "a departure from the Constitution and the legal foundations of the state." In her statement, Zurbishvili said the secretive nature of the transfer raised troubling questions about the country's democratic integrity.



Parliament Approves Amendments to Law on Grants in First Reading

BY TEAM GT

During a plenary session on Tuesday, Parliament fast-tracked and approved in the first reading amendments to the Law on Grants, with 83 MPs voting in favor, according to the Parliament's press service.

Tornike Cheishvili, First Deputy Chairman of the Legal Affairs Committee, explained that under the proposed changes, grants awarded through the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation program, Erasmus+, the German Academic Exchange Service, and the Creative Europe Program will no longer require prior government approval when issued within the framework of cooperation between Georgia and the EU.

Cheishvili noted that the amendments also broaden the legal definition of a

grant to include technical or expert assistance, knowledge sharing, and similar forms of support. The changes provide technical updates regarding the allowable use of grant funds, expanding eligible sectors to include humanitarian aid, defense, and security. In addition, the list of entities permitted to issue grants is being further specified.

An earlier amendment passed in April had introduced a requirement for government or authorized approval of foreign grants to safeguard national sovereignty. However, Cheishvili said that experience with the law's implementation revealed practical issues, prompting the need for further clarification and greater administrative flexibility.

He emphasized that some international grant programs present minimal risk to national sovereignty and security and could therefore be exempt from the approval process. "Existing regulations already provide exceptions, especially in the fields of education and science," Cheishvili added.

OP-ED: The Price of Sovereignty

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

Throughout history, the main national idea in this country has been freedom from the dominance of other nations, the desire to live without external dictates, and the opportunity for independent decision-making—all encapsulated in one sacred, comprehensive word: Sovereignty. It doesn't take much wisdom or effort to understand that all these desirable achievements have come at a tremendous cost, paid in an ocean of sweat and blood.

From the standpoint of inspiration and values, nothing has changed over the centuries. The Georgian people's attitude toward national sovereignty remains exactly as it always has been. But the times have changed. Today, national sovereignty is not only the privilege of independent existence and the freedom from the will of others imposed upon our own—it is, first and foremost, a profound responsibility.

Sovereignty is no longer regarded merely as the ability to defend the country from interference. What matters most now is the government's accountability for both domestic and international affairs. The state is responsible not only for the people's welfare at home but also for managing complex multilateral relations with the rest of the world. Sovereignty is a heavy national burden to bear, and carrying it with faith and dignity requires immense resources—resources that are often not readily available.

When an economic issue arises within the country, or a diplomatic dilemma presents itself abroad, the government of a sovereign nation like ours must confront it with full responsibility and competence. At the same time, not every formally independent country can function as a truly sovereign regime, because the world has become small and interconnected, governed largely by universally adopted rules and norms.

That is why sovereignty as responsibility puts forth an agenda that guides both



Sovereignty. Illustration by D. Thompson/ US State Department

national governments and the international community—each with their respective duties. Thus, sovereignty, as responsibility, becomes both a national obligation and a global necessity—an ever-present imperative.

Modern interpretations of national sovereignty also encompass the rise of radical pluralism, the evolution of human rights, and every other humanitarian standard produced by this century—all shaped by contemporary domestic and international responsibilities. Moreover, if internationally recognized legitimacy is not firmly and naturally linked to the well-being, will, values, goals, and aspirations of a country's own people, then

the value of that sovereignty becomes questionable—if not altogether null.

Properly linking sovereignty with responsibility, and practicing both fairly and wisely, becomes a moral and material prerequisite for strengthening and consolidating any nation, whether it is already developed or still on the path to development. Judging by the current state of affairs in this country and its international position, it is clear that Sakartvelo is indeed living within this very kind of national and international reality—presumably being managed in accordance with the current dictates of the world.

So far, so good!

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Maqro Development Introduces Maqro City Tbilisi, Expanding Its Vision for Sustainable City Living

BY KESARIA KATCHARAVA

Maqro Development has announced the Launching of its newest large-scale project, Maqro City Tbilisi, continuing the company's established tradition of creating eco-friendly, green residential complexes. Located at Noe Ramishvili Street 30, adjacent to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, this new complex occupies an expansive 100,000 square meters, with nearly half of that area dedicated exclusively to green and recreational spaces. This significant allocation reflects Maqro Development's unwavering commitment to sustainable urban living, a principle that has been a hallmark of its previous successful projects such as Green Budapest and Green Diamond.

BUILDING ON A PROVEN ECO-FRIENDLY PHILOSOPHY

Maqro Development's core concept remains unchanged: the company is



A city within a city, designed for the future

dedicated to designing and building residential complexes that integrate natural elements and environmentally conscious design into urban settings. Through this approach, Maqro Development has set a new standard in Georgia's real estate development sector. Maqro City Tbilisi serves as the latest example of this commitment, reinforcing the company's vision of sustainable city living where green spaces are as integral as residential and commercial functions.

A MULTIFUNCTIONAL COMPLEX FOR LIVING, WORKING, AND RELAXING

Unlike traditional residential developments, Maqro City Tbilisi is designed as a multifunctional complex that combines living, working, and recreational opportunities in a single space. This holistic approach responds to the evolving needs of city dwellers who increasingly seek convenience and quality of life, without sacrificing access to nature and essential services.

The residential blocks are designed to accommodate a wide variety of family sizes and living preferences. Apartments range from standard units to terrace types and include options with private yards. The layout options include two, three, and four-room apartments, with a particular emphasis on accessibility: the project offers smaller-sized apartments starting at 45 square meters. This approach broadens the market reach and provides affordable, quality housing options for a diverse customer base.

All apartments come fully renovated with high-quality finishes. Interior fea-

tures include painted walls, laminated flooring, aluminum windows with sliding door systems, and underfloor heating. Kitchens are equipped with built-in furniture and modern appliances such as ovens, gas stoves, and extractors, while bathrooms are fully tiled and come with complete sanitary sets. The complex also offers both open and covered parking spaces to meet residents' needs.

EXTENSIVE RECREATIONAL FACILITIES FOSTER COMMUNITY AND WELLBEING

Maqro City Tbilisi sets itself apart through its wide array of recreational facilities, which are thoughtfully integrated to encourage an active and healthy lifestyle. The complex will include four swimming pools, three tennis courts, and two basketball courts. Both indoor and outdoor fitness areas will be available, alongside cycling and running tracks designed for residents' use. For families, dedicated children's entertainment zones and an on-site kindergarten enhance the community-oriented environment and provide convenience for parents.

COMMERCIAL AND OFFICE SPACES DESIGNED FOR ACCESSIBILITY AND FLEXIBILITY

In addition to residential and recreational elements, Maqro City Tbilisi includes modern commercial and office spaces tailored to meet the demands of businesses ranging from small startups to large enterprises. Commercial premises are strategically positioned in blocks whose facades face both the interior and exterior of the complex, maximizing

accessibility for both residents and external visitors. This thoughtful layout supports a vibrant commercial environment within the community.

The office spaces are designed to be flexible and contemporary, offering a range of options that cater to various corporate needs. This versatility ensures that Maqro City Tbilisi will be not only a residential hub but also a dynamic business center.

MÖVENPICK LIVING

A notable feature that distinguishes Maqro City Tbilisi from other developments in Tbilisi is the inclusion of a Mövenpick Living hotel. This internationally acclaimed Swiss brand will make its debut in the Georgian capital within this complex, providing high-quality hospitality services. The presence of Mövenpick Living enhances the project's prestige and offers additional investment value, attracting both local and international attention.

PRE-SALES LAUNCH ON JUNE 14: EARLY BUYERS BENEFIT FROM EXCLUSIVE TERMS

The official presentation of Maqro City Tbilisi will take place on June 14, marking the start of the pre-sales phase. Maqro Development is offering special conditions to early buyers to encourage timely investment. Prices during pre-sales start at \$1,250 per square meter, with flexible, interest-free installment plans available domestically. Monthly payments begin from \$900, and initial down payments start at just 20 percent, making ownership more accessible.

It is important to emphasize that these favorable terms are exclusive to the pre-sales period. Maqro Development's marketing campaign, titled "Prices Will Rise," clearly signals that prices and financing conditions will become less advantageous as the project advances toward completion. This creates a strong incentive for prospective buyers to act quickly and take advantage of the best financial terms available.

A STRATEGIC INVESTMENT IN SUSTAINABLE URBAN LIVING

With half of its 100,000 square meters devoted to green and recreational space, Maqro City Tbilisi represents one of the most ambitious eco-conscious developments the city has seen. Combining modern residential planning with business infrastructure, hospitality, and extensive leisure facilities, the project raises the bar for mixed-use urban design in the capital.

For buyers and investors seeking a combination of convenience, quality, and long-term value, early involvement offers clear advantages. Maqro Development has confirmed that pricing and payment terms will become less favorable in later stages of the project. Acting early ensures access to the most attractive conditions available.

Set to become a landmark of contemporary urban life in Tbilisi, Maqro City Tbilisi reflects Maqro Development's long-standing commitment to building sustainable, self-contained communities that balance private living with public benefit — a city within a city, designed for the future.





Photo: ASB Georgia.

ASB Georgia Supports Clay Therapy for Children with Special Needs

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

Sixteen-year-old Artur, who fled Ukraine with his family over two years ago, now spends his days at Georgia's Ialoni center where he found peace through clay therapy.

As part of the SEGI project (Sport, Education, Gender, and Information), ASB Georgia recently donated a pottery devices to the center, expanding its creative therapy options. The project is carried out in partnership with SSK and UT and funded by Aktion Deutschland Hilft. Arthur is the beneficiary of the

program among many others. "I really like it here, the atmosphere is beautiful," he says while painting a turtle figure he sculpted himself. "I have many different interests, and one of them is working with clay. I especially enjoy painting the clay figures in various colors."

Artur is one of many children and adults with disabilities who attend the Ialoni day center regularly. For many, including Ukrainians displaced by war, the center is not just a place for creativity, it's a space for healing and emotional support.

The center continues to serve a growing community of vulnerable individuals with special needs, offering daily programs that combine care, art and community.

Back in Business

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

As is the case all over Georgia's mountains, our Hanmer Guest House is now open again for the summer and autumn; as of mid-May, actually. We have the largest number of advance bookings ever this year, carefully marked on the calendar, which is a good start. Yesterday, the Barents tour company from Poland, our most regular client, sent us 14 of its citizens, with another 6-8 such groups to follow. We were ready, my wife and I, despite the current absence of regular local help in the house. Lower down in Georgia, where it stays warmer, or in the big ski resort towns, of course, the hospitality industry might stay open year round.

One issue which we have worked hard to get on top of is water. How many times, over the years, have we known that a large group would come in the evening, only to have the water off or gurgling air the whole day! If that doesn't cause blood pressure and stress to rise, little will.

So, some handyman friends of ours came up from Tbilisi to improve the system last month, as I wrote recently.

The whole neighborhood is complaining about the gurgling, spitting air-in-water mix, more air than water

The combination of a 1000L tank and an electric pump is a vast improvement. Just as well, as yesterday and today there's more air than water in our and our neighbors' pipes, though we were still able to satisfy everyone's liquid needs. But the cafe building, where they eat, is not served by the new system. So in the end I gave up trying to wash dishes there and took them all over to the house. This morning, we have all 14 sets of laundry



to wash and hang on the lines: sheet, duvet cover, towel, pillowcase and bathroom hand towels. Without that tank and pump, we'd be lost.

The whole neighborhood is complaining about the gurgling, spitting air-in-water mix, more air than water. Some people, though, are on the old water system instead of, or as well as, the new; unlike us. We're now contemplating running a separate 32mm pipe from the nearest "well" (more a local water branching system) straight to the house and cafe. First, run and connect the line to test it. Then have someone with a machine dig it at least half a meter into the ground, against frost. It should then free us of the above problems, which can be solved for one branch only at the expense of worsening them for other branches simply by turning a wheel at that point, changing flow ratios between the branch pipes. Anyone is free to do this. Recipe for conflict if I ever saw one. It needs to be set and fixed (if such a thing is even possible), so no one can change these ratios.

We've had several pumps fail over the years, due to bad electricity; we hope this one will last us through until our departure in mid-October. We're planning to use it only when we have guests or urgent need, such as after their departure. Ideally, the water system should be

free of local electrical vagaries, or even free of electricity in general, which means gravity-fed. It pays to think of the strengths and weaknesses of the whole thing and its parts, and of how to eliminate weak points instead of making them dependent on each other: a process which can take at least a year of living with it, tinkering, monitoring. You have to get it right eventually, or suffer potentially catastrophic consequences.

Easy to say: we're open again. Behind those three words is a lifetime of interconnected events. But here we are.

Tony Hanmer has lived in Georgia since 1999, in Svaneti since 2007, and been a weekly writer and photographer for GT since early 2011. He runs the "Svaneti Renaissance" Facebook group, now with over 2000 members, at www.facebook.com/groups/SvanetiRenaissance/. He and his wife also run their own guest house in Etseri: www.facebook.com/hanmer.house.svaneti



"To Sing Is to Reign": The Toradze Festival Crowned Tbilisi as an Operatic Capital



Toradze International Music Festival. Source: FB



Toradze International Music Festival. Source: FB

BY IVAN NECHAEV

Opera has always been more than music—it is a theater of power, desire, fate, and freedom. On the night of June 10th, within the golden-hued walls of the Tbilisi Opera and Ballet Theater, these forces returned in full majesty. The Opera Gala Concert—a centerpiece of the 3rd Toradze International Music Festival—was not merely a parade of arias but a statement of cultural intent: Georgia belongs to the world of serious music, not as an outsider or consumer, but as a producer of its future.

At the helm of the evening stood Carlo Montanaro, one of today's most subtle yet commanding conductors in Italian repertory. Beneath his baton, the Tbilisi Opera and Ballet State Orchestra became a dramatic narrator in its own right. Five internationally acclaimed vocal soloists—Ludovic Tézier, Rachel Willis-Sørensen, Annalisa Stroppa, Francesco Demuro, and Giorgi Andguladze—each

brought their individual instrument to bear on a meticulously constructed program of Rossini, Verdi, Donizetti, and Bizet. What emerged was not a conventional gala, but a drama in fragments: a distillation of 19th-century operatic ideology performed with 21st-century urgency.

Rossini's *Barber of Seville* overture was the evening's spark—and a shrewd programming choice. Montanaro led it with dynamic elasticity, not allowing the charm to slide into parody. The winds were crisp, and the crescendo curves were carefully carved rather than inflated. This was not Rossini as comic relief, but Rossini as a formal architect—a composer who understood the nervous theatrical engine of opera and how to wind it with cunning precision.

Annalisa Stroppa's "Una voce poco fa" followed like lightning after the overture's thunder. Her Rosina was not a flirt but a strategist, playing with dynamics and articulations like a master chess player. Her chest register was rich, even defiant, while the upper reaches of her mezzo sparkled with crystalline agility.

Every ornament felt purposeful—a testament to bel canto's theatrical intelligence, not mere virtuosity.

Verdi dominated the central arc of the program—and rightly so. His operas are less about "drama" than about pressure: emotional, political, metaphysical. Rachel Willis-Sørensen opened the Verdi sequence with "Tace la notte placida" (*Il Trovatore*), offering a vocal line of glowing steel. Her voice has both amplitude and emotional control—she lets the line breathe, never pushing for effect, but always letting it expand toward its natural emotional crest.

In the duet "Udite come albeggi," Willis-Sørensen was joined by Ludovic Tézier, whose vocal authority is as undeniable as it is understated. Tézier brings old-world discipline and Gallic refinement to Verdi's long baritone arcs—his phrasing was sculpted, with an legato that made every phrase a paragraph, not a sentence.

Then came Giorgi Andguladze's colossal "Ella giammai m'amò." This is an aria of pure psychological theater—Philip II is not so much singing as unraveling. Andguladze gave a performance of remarkable restraint and depth: no bombast, only gravity. His dark timbre, perfectly centered pitch, and unforced resonance evoked a monarch crushed by his own grandeur. When Tézier and Andguladze later performed the Simon Boccanegra duet, it was like a summit meeting of two ideologies—nobility in crisis, authority transfigured into doubt. Montanaro shaped the orchestral line like a sea in flux, both men nearly whispering over it.

The tenor turn came via Francesco

Demuro, whose "La donna è mobile" was sung not as a circus trick but as a bitter joke—Verdi's satire of male cynicism, here delivered with ironic elegance. In contrast, his "Una furtiva lagrima" was introverted and lyrically shaded, less a public confession than a secret murmured to oneself. The emotional weight moved from outside to inside—and in this contrast, Demuro revealed his true artistry.

The climax of the evening, in terms of pure theatrical integration, may well have been the sextet from Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Rarely is this number performed with such tight structural balance and vocal independence. Each singer occupied their emotional territory—demonstrating the genius of bel canto's polyphonic psychology.

And finally, *Carmen*: *L'amour est un oiseau rebelle* is an aria so often over-sung, misunderstood, flattened by cliché. But Annalisa Stroppa reclaimed it. Her voice—earthy, rhythmically alert, and charged with subtext—reimagined *Carmen* not as an exotic seductress but as a political figure, a woman at war with society's need to possess her. The rhythm pulsed like a heartbeat; Montanaro let the tempo breathe as if the orchestra itself were following her.

Montanaro conducted with astonishing vertical clarity. He does not impose himself on the music but draws its internal architecture into visibility. Tempi were flexible but never indulgent. Phrasing breathed without distortion. The Tbilisi Opera Orchestra responded to this precision with renewed energy and became full partners in the dramatic contract. It reflects the Festival's grow-

ing ambition: to elevate Georgian orchestral performance to international operatic standards by grounding in serious repertoire and thoughtful leadership.

Named in honor of Alexander Toradze—the late Georgian-American pianist whose combination of volcanic expressivity and Slavic-French intellectualism made him one of the most singular artists of the late 20th century—the Toradze Festival is about more than remembrance. It is about realignment.

By inviting international stars like Maxim Vengerov, Gianandrea Noseda (the festival's patrons), and a cohort of elite performers to collaborate with Georgian institutions, the Festival reasserts Tbilisi as a center of classical excellence—not peripheral, but integral. Backed by the Toradze Foundation, Ministry of Culture of Georgia, Georgian Chanting Foundation and supported by institutions like Tbilisi City Hall, the University of Alabama, and Smart Capital Group, the festival is both inward-looking and globally engaged. It fosters Georgian musicians while anchoring them in networks of international exchange. The opera gala concert distilled this mission: to make world-class music here, and to make here part of the world.

As flowers rained down and the curtain fell, the applause was not just for the performers but for a new cultural horizon being carved in Georgia. The Toradze International Music Festival is not a spectacle—it is a process. And this Opera Gala, with its towering interpretations and sensitive craftsmanship, may well be remembered as one of its defining moments.



Toradze International Music Festival. Source: FB



Toradze International Music Festival. Source: FB

Cinéma et Constellations: A French Summer of Imagination and Intimacy in Tbilisi

BY IVAN NECHAEV

In a cinematic summer that stretches from June to the edge of August, a constellation of films quietly rewires the cultural map of Tbilisi. The annual festival *Cinéma sous les étoiles*, initiated by the Institut français in Georgia, is an elegant and necessary intervention into the rhythms of the city, a gift of aesthetic plurality, emotional complexity, and timeless Frenchness, shared in the most democratic of ways: for free, in the open air, in the space between two languages.

This year's edition, running from June 5 to July 31, marks a particularly rich and resonant curation. Combining modern and classic works, animation and documentary, family-friendly tales and probing adult dramas, it showcases the broad palette of contemporary French cinema while reviving older masterpieces that remain vibrantly alive in today's world. Every Thursday evening at 20:30, on the grounds of the French Embassy on Khazina Street (with the exception of the June 5 opening at Amirani Cinema), Georgian audiences are invited to immerse themselves in a world where cinema is not a commodity, but a shared dream.

FRENCH CINEMA AS MEMORY, MOVEMENT, AND MULTITUDE

The program opened with a cinematic requiem: Jean-Jacques Annaud's *Notre-Dame brûle* (2021), a visceral dramatization of the 2019 Notre-Dame fire. A blend of documentary precision and thriller pacing, it reflected Annaud's obsession with architectural fate, collective trauma, and the sublime absurdities of institutional machinery. It was also a reminder that French cinema could engage the symbolic, political, and technical simultaneously—an ideal inaugural gesture for a festival that sought to bridge past and present.

From there, the selection fans outward. On June 12, *L'Odyssée* (2016) by Jérôme Salle presents a biopic of Jacques-Yves Cousteau, that mythic hybrid of scientist, adventurer, narcissist, and poet. The film is a rare feat: a popular biography that doesn't collapse into hagiography. It allows us to see not just the marine landscapes but also the emotional and ideological abysses of a postwar France grappling with the idea of heroism.

Next, *En Fanfare* (June 19) offers tonal contrast: an intimate, idiosyncratic comedy about identity and fatherhood, a chamber piece on the comedic potential of generational misrecognition. Then comes *Ernest et Célestine – Le voyage en Charabie* (June 26), a tender, painterly sequel to the beloved animation franchise. With its gentle critique of authoritarianism cloaked in a whimsical fable, it functions as a politically lucid gift for



Institut Français in Georgia. Source: FB



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children—and a reminder that animation is one of France's most refined cinematic traditions.

GEORGIA IN FRANCE, FRANCE IN GEORGIA

On July 3, a thematic pivot transforms the festival. *Le Paris des Géorgiennes*, projected in French with Georgian subtitles, offers a rare reversal of the usual cultural optics. Rather than French directors gazing out at the world, we see Georgian women navigating the labyrinths of Paris—its promises, alienations, and the strange intimacy of foreign belonging. This film is a documentary not just of migration but of affect: how language, labor, and memory entangle in diasporic life. For a Tbilisi audience, it is an act of self-recognition across borders. This choice signals a profound understanding by the festival curators: that the politics of cultural exchange must sometimes involve giving the mirror to the other.

ON LOVE, SHAME, AND THE TENDERNESS OF OLD FILMS

On July 10, *Chronique d'une liaison passagère* (2022) by Emmanuel Mouret delivers a deceptively minimalist drama about fleeting love. With its Rohmerian rhythm and disarming intelligence, it speaks in a language of glances, hesitations, and unspoken codes. Here, French cinema returns to its most prized aesthetic: the moral conversation as erotic form.

This is followed by *L'argent de poche* (July 17), a 1976 classic by François Truffaut. One of the most celebrated portraits of childhood ever committed to film, it blends vignette with reverie, cruelty with innocence. Truffaut, the godfather of the New Wave, appears not only as director but as a kind of historical ghost throughout this festival, reminding us that the French cinematic tradition always carries a double burden: to modernize and to mourn.

On July 24, *Je verrai toujours vos visages* (2023) by Jeanne Herry enters the conversation as one of the most affecting and socially relevant films in recent French cinema. Focusing on restorative justice and the complex dialogues between victims and offenders, it wrestles with themes often ignored in both film and public discourse. It is a documentary-like drama that neither senti-

mentalizes nor flattens pain but structures it within a collective therapeutic process. Watching it in Georgia—a society still bearing many invisible wounds—lends it urgent relevance.

Finally, the festival closes on July 31 with *À ma Gloria* (2023), directed by Marie Amachoukeli, whose own Georgian heritage bridges the festival's emotional geography. A film about the bond between a little French girl and her Cape Verdean nanny, it explores absence, memory, and the slow crystallization of loss through a child's perspective. Its images linger like dreams that refuse to leave.

A CULTURAL STRATEGY FOR EMPATHY, THOUGHT, AND AESTHETIC EDUCATION

What unites this diverse program is neither genre nor ideology, but something deeper: a belief in cinema as emotional pedagogy. These films teach how to grieve (*Notre-Dame brûle*), how to imagine futures (*L'Odyssée*), how to live with contradiction (*Chronique d'une liaison passagère*), and how to recognize each other across languages and borders (*Le Paris des Géorgiennes*, *À ma Gloria*).

Moreover, the choice to subtitle films in English or Georgian—rather than dubbing them—preserves the auditory texture of the French language. This respects both the original artistic intent and the linguistic sovereignty of the audience. It also opens access without flattening difference.

For Georgian viewers—many of whom grew up under the legacy of Soviet-era French cultural prestige—this festival is a reconnection, not just an introduction. It reminds us that French cinema is still one of the world's most sophisticated mirrors for human experience.

And for younger audiences encountering these films for the first time, it is a form of aesthetic education rarely offered in mainstream cinema spaces. It says: film can be quiet, complex, slow; it can contain questions without answers; it can show you the world without explaining it.

In a summer where entertainment is increasingly algorithmic and cinematic space ever more commercialized, *Cinéma sous les étoiles* provides something rare: a non-transactional, communally curated, affectively generous experience.



PUBLISHER & GM
George Sharashidze

COMMERCIAL DEPARTMENT
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EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT:
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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

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