

FOCUS

ON CARREFOUR KOLMEURNEOBA

Carrefour—remodeling to revive the spirit of Old Tbilisi **PAGE 9**



Prof. Michael Clarke on Putin's Endgame: Break NATO, Dominate Europe, Cement His Legacy

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

Pease through fear, because we have shown that fear works, — that was how Dmitry Medvedev recently summed up Russia's foreign policy. And while Western leaders often brush off Medvedev's tirades as the drunken ramblings of a second-tier functionary, his formulation stuck with Professor Michael Clarke, former Director-General of the Royal United Services Institute and one of Britain's foremost military analysts. In an interview with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Georgian Service, conducted during the UGSPN (Security, Policy and Nationalism Research Center) conference at the University of Georgia in Tbilisi on June 13, Clarke lays out how Russia's war on Ukraine could evolve, how NATO might fail its next test, and why autonomous drones—not tanks—may define the wars to come.

Continued on page 5 Professor Michael Clarke. Source: UGSPN



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GALT & TAGGART CREATING OPPORTUNITIES									
Markets									
As of 18-Jun-2025									
BONDS				STOCKS					
	Price	w/w	m/m		Price	w/w	m/m		
GEORG 04/26	97.17 (YTM 5.30%)	+0.4%	+0.5%	Lion Finance Group (BGEO LN)	GBP 56.40	-1.3%	+4.3%		
GRAIL 06/28	90.02 (YTM 7.81%)	+0.1%	+1.2%	Georgia Capital (GGEO LN)	GBP 19.10	+2.1%	+1.9%		
GEORG 9 1/2 PERP	99.62 (YTM 5.39%)	+0.2%	+0.6%	TBC Bank Group (TBCG LN)	GBP 44.50	-1.3%	-2.0%		
SILKNET 01/27	101.29 (YTM 7.50%)	-0.0%	+0.2%						
TBC 8.894 PERP	97.79 (YTM 11.47%)	-0.0%	+0.4%	COMMODITIES				Price	w/w m/m
TBC 10 1/4 PERP	99.63 (YTM 9.87%)	-0.1%	+0.8%	Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	76.70	+9.9%	+17.3%		
				Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	3 369.38	+0.4%	+5.2%		
INDICES				CURRENCIES				Price	w/w m/m
	Price	w/w	m/m		Price	w/w	m/m		
SP 500	5 980.87	-0.7%	+0.4%	USD / GEL	2,7245	-0.1%	-0.5%		
FTSE 250	21 290.26	-0.6%	+1.5%	EUR / GEL	3,1278	-0.1%	+2.3%		
DOW JONES 30	42 171.66	-1.6%	-1.1%	GBP / GEL	3,6554	-1.0%	+0.5%		
Russell 2000	2 112.96	-1.6%	-0.0%	EUR / USD	1,1480	-0.1%	+2.8%		
FTSE 100	8 843.47	-0.2%	+1.8%	GBP / USD	1,3422	-0.9%	+1.0%		



"Somebody Feed Phil" star Phil Rosenthal. Source: wror

Netflix Series to Spotlight Georgian Wine and Cuisine in New Episode

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

Georgian wine and gastronomy will be the focus of the upcoming season of 'Somebody Feed Phil', one of Netflix's most popular food and travel series. The show's 8th season premieres internationally on June 18, with Episode 4 dedicated entirely to Georgia.

Filmed in autumn 2024 in Tbilisi and Kakheti, the episode captures the essence of Georgian culinary traditions, with a

special focus on the country's ancient winemaking culture. The production was co-financed by Georgia's National Wine Agency under the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture.

This feature is part of a larger effort to increase Georgian wine's visibility in the United States, a primary export market. As part of its marketing strategy, the National Wine Agency has partnered with leading US media outlets, including CBS, CNN, The New York Times, and Wine Enthusiast.

In 2024, exports to the US reached a historic high of 1.2 million liters, up 32% from the previous year.

Ukrainian House to Open in Batumi with Support from the German Government and UNDP

BY TEAM GT

The Ukrainian House is to open a branch in Batumi on 21 June, marking a step forward in supporting Ukrainian refugees in Georgia. The new hub is supported by the German Government and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), in partnership with the civil society organization 'Unite Together.'

Representatives from the Embassies

of Germany and Ukraine, UNDP, CARE Caucasus, the European Union, diplomatic missions, and the Ukrainian community will attend the event. Guests will explore a colorful marketplace of Ukrainian-made products and enjoy cultural performances by Ukrainian artists.

The Ukrainian House in Batumi will offer affordable office space, legal and humanitarian information, and a platform for refugee-led businesses and community initiatives. It will also serve as a welcoming venue for cultural events, social gatherings, and support networks.



The Ukrainian House in Tbilisi. Source: UNDP

Georgia to Tighten Rules on Foreign Labor to Combat Illegal Migration

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

The Georgian Dream party has introduced a draft law to tighten regulations on the employment of foreign nationals, with concerns over labor market saturation and unregulated migration. The proposed changes, now under urgent parliamentary review, would eliminate the current system by presenting a new framework for issuing special work permits and increasing penalties for violations.

The explanatory note of the legislation points to "an influx of unqualified or surplus labor" as a primary challenge, warning that the trend is "negatively impacting both the local workforce and overall labor market conditions."

Under current rules, employers are only required to register foreign workers in an electronic labor migration system. The government has no authority to deny employment based on labor market needs, which lawmakers now want to change.

The bill proposes:

- A new special work permit system
- Defined criteria for issuing permits
- Regulation of self-employed and entrepreneurial foreigners
- Monitoring and enforcement mechanisms



Photo: Aodmi.

- Fines for unauthorized employment and activity
- A clear division of responsibilities among enforcement agencies

As official data cited in the proposal shows, 239,334 foreign nationals stayed in Georgia for at least six months between 2022 and 2023. However, only 42,000 were formally registered as labor migrants. "This discrepancy shows that the current system fails to capture the actual scale of labor migration in Georgia," the document states.

If passed, the law would come into effect on March 1, 2026. All foreign workers registered in the current system would be required to obtain both a special work permit and a residence permit by January 1, 2027. The legislation will not apply retroactively.

Fines defined in the bill include:

- 2,000 GEL for each foreign employee hired without authorization
- 2,000 GEL for self-employed foreigners lacking work rights
- Double penalties for repeat offenses

UK Urges Georgia to Invite ODIHR/OSCE for Municipal Election Observation, Kaladze Pushes Back

BY TEAM GT

The British Embassy in Georgia has called on the Georgian government to extend an invitation to ODIHR/OSCE to observe the upcoming municipal elections scheduled for October. In a detailed statement, the Embassy emphasized that international and citizen election observation are critical components of democratic transparency, and urged the government to implement all recommendations from ODIHR's final report on the 2024 parliamentary elections.

"UK-Georgia cooperation is built on a joint commitment to strengthening democratic principles and to supporting the role of civil society," the statement reads. It also cites the 2019 Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, which both governments signed. Article 4 of the agreement commits the UK and Georgia to enhancing democratic institutions, the rule of law, human rights, and judicial reform, while Article 341



specifically pledges support for civil society engagement in bilateral relations.

"The hopes and aspirations of the Georgian people are for democracy and freedom," the Embassy continued. "We hope that UK-Georgia cooperation, as well as Georgia's cooperation with European institutions, will further contribute to those goals."

The British Embassy also defended its ongoing support for Georgian civil society, including voter education and local election monitoring, rejecting recent criticism from the Georgian government. "We reject its current description as funding 'propaganda and extremism.' Nothing

could be further from the truth," the statement said. "Georgian legislation makes provision for citizen monitoring, which is an important part of professional and transparent scrutiny of elections."

However, Kakha Kaladze, Mayor of Tbilisi and General Secretary of the ruling Georgian Dream party, dismissed the call for international monitoring. "There is no global practice of inviting OSCE/ODIHR to observe local elections, except in rare cases such as in 2021," Kaladze said. "There is no need for it today, especially given that the conclusions of these organizations were trampled underfoot."

Kutaisi Hosts International Contemporary Art Festival

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

The international contemporary art festival 'Caravan Art Forum' has opened in Kutaisi with the exhibition 'Urban Landscapes' at the David Kakabadze Visual Arts Gallery.

The exhibition features works specially selected for the forum by contemporary artists, including installations by French and Georgian participants. It points to Georgian contemporary painting alongside European graphic art and photography.

The event is supported by Georgia's Ministry of Culture and Kutaisi City Hall, while institutional partners include the MOMus Museum of Contemporary Art (Greece) and Apollonia - European Artistic Programs from Strasbourg



The 'Caravan Art Forum' in Kutaisi. Source: Ministry of Culture of Georgia

(France). There were Deputy Minister of Culture Giorgi Mirtskhulava, the head of the Ministry's Cultural Development Department Tata Svanidze, acting Mayor of Kutaisi Davit Ereishvili and Deputy Mayor Giorgi Tskhakaia in attendance at the opening gala.

Artists from Georgia, France, Greece,

the UK, Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso are taking part in the festival which also includes conferences, seminars, and masterclasses.

The Caravan Art Forum runs through June 19, while the 'Urban Landscapes' exhibition will remain open to visitors until July 19.

Ukraine Latest: Massive Russian Attack Kills 28, Injures 134 in Kyiv

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

A devastating overnight missile and drone barrage on Kyiv Tuesday left at least 28 civilians dead and more than 130 injured, marking one of the deadliest Russian attacks on Ukraine's capital in months. The coordinated strike, lasting nearly nine hours, comes amid a critical juncture in international diplomacy over the war — and fresh divisions between Ukraine and its Western allies.

The June 17 assault began with waves of Iranian-made Shahed drones, followed by cruise and ballistic missiles, shaking multiple districts across the city. Ukraine's Air Force reported intercepting 428 out of 472 aerial threats, including 239 drones and 15 Kh-101 missiles. Still, a residential complex in the Solomianskyi district was directly hit, with entire sections reduced to rubble. Among the dead is a 62-year-old US citizen.

President Volodymyr Zelensky called the barrage "one of the most horrifying attacks on Kyiv," describing it as an act of terrorism designed to coincide with the G7 Leaders' Summit in Canada. "This is not warfare — it is slaughter. The world must respond," Zelensky said. Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko declared June 18 a day of mourning, and reported that cluster munitions had been found at the impact sites.

The attack severely damaged civilian infrastructure, including a kindergarten, a postal service center, and a key rail freight line. A major clothing manufac-

turer supplying Ukraine's military also suffered a direct hit and suspended operations indefinitely.

Just hours after the bombardment, President Zelensky arrived at the G7 summit in Alberta, Canada — a trip that had been anticipated to include a pivotal meeting with US President Donald Trump. That meeting was canceled after Trump left the summit early to address rising tensions in the Middle East.

Zelensky, speaking to reporters, implored allies for stronger military support and tougher sanctions. "We are open to peace negotiations, but we need leverage," he said, indirectly pressing the United States to take a firmer stance.

Tensions between Trump and Zelensky have flared in recent months. Their last in-person meeting ended in heated debate over what Trump described as Ukraine's "lack of gratitude." The cooling relationship now threatens to undercut Ukraine's position at a time when Russian aggression is intensifying.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen urged the G7 to "achieve peace through strength" by imposing harsher sanctions on Moscow. But signs point to waning US appetite for escalation.

On the same day as the Kyiv strike, Reuters reported that a US government task force designed to craft strategies for ending the war was quietly disbanded. Established earlier this year, the interagency group reportedly lost relevance as Trump showed little interest in applying meaningful pressure on the Kremlin.

An anonymous official told Reuters, "It lost steam... Instead of doing more, [Trump] wanted to do less." The move



Local residents look on as rescuers conduct search and rescue work in a heavily damaged residential building following the Russian missile strike in Kyiv, Ukraine on June 17. Photo by Genya Savilov/AFP via Getty Images

has deepened concerns about the future of US support for Ukraine, especially with the Pentagon announcing cuts to military aid in its upcoming 2026 budget.

Trump has repeatedly voiced frustration with both Moscow and Kyiv, calling Russia's removal from the G8 a "mistake" and openly questioning the utility of further US involvement in the war.

Trump's early G7 departure was spurred by a rapidly escalating conflict between Israel and Iran. On June 17, Axios and CNN reported that the US president is now seriously considering military strikes against Iranian nuclear sites. In a Truth Social post, Trump demanded Iran's "unconditional surrender" and hinted at potential targeting of Iran's


Supreme Leader. Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin has offered to mediate between Tehran and Tel Aviv — a suggestion swiftly dismissed by French President Emmanuel Macron, who cited Moscow's own war crimes in Ukraine.

Zelensky's government has voiced support for Israel and condemned Iran's role in supplying drones to Russia. Tehran has become a central player in the Kremlin's military campaign, contributing thousands of drones and missiles used in attacks like the one on Kyiv.

Ukraine also escalated its own asymmetric campaign against Russian infrastructure this week. On June 14, a Ukrainian drone strike hit the Nevinnomyssk Azot chemical plant in Russia's Stavropol Krai — a key supplier of ammonium nitrate and other materials used in Moscow's weapons production.





The strike forced the plant to halt operations, Ukrainian intelligence confirmed. The facility, part of the EuroChem Group owned by sanctioned billionaire Andrey Melnichenko, is reportedly integral to Russia's defense manufacturing. Ukrainian officials emphasized the strategic importance of targeting such dual-use sites to undermine Russia's war machine.


The past week has illustrated the increasing brutality of Russia's campaign, the vulnerability of Ukrainian cities, and the geopolitical uncertainty gripping Ukraine's most crucial alliances. As Zelensky continues his diplomatic push at the G7, he does so with his capital under fire, his people in mourning, and the future of US support hanging in the balance.



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Georgian NGOs Decry 'Russian-Style' Data Demands from Gov't

BY TEAM GT

A coalition of Georgian non-governmental organizations is raising the alarm over what they describe as an unprecedented and unlawful attempt by the state to access sensitive personal data of citizens under their protection. In a joint briefing held on June 17, the NGOs accused the Anti-Corruption Bureau of initiating demands through what they referred to as the "Murusidze court"—a term used by critics to describe a judiciary they believe is increasingly aligned with pro-Russian and anti-democratic governance.

The data requests reportedly target vulnerable groups, including victims of torture, survivors of domestic violence, students, pensioners, journalists, and teachers, with authorities allegedly seeking names, photos, financial information, and even health records.

"Without any legal basis, they are demanding we betray the trust of those we serve," said the NGOs. "We will not comply—even if it means our persecution or imprisonment." They characterized the move as a



Georgian NGOs protest the government's demands. Source: Multimedia.ge

blatant attempt to implement Russian-style laws aimed at dismantling Georgia's civil society and undermining its European integration path.

The organizations pledged legal resistance and reaffirmed their commitment to defending fundamental human rights. In response, Razhden Kuprashvili, head

of the Anti-Corruption Bureau, dismissed the allegations as part of a "deliberate disinformation campaign." Speaking at a press briefing on Thursday, Kuprashvili

insisted that the bureau's actions are fully legal and focused on ensuring transparency among individuals and organizations engaged in political activities.

"Our aim is not to violate anyone's privacy," Kuprashvili said. "We are investigating how some entities use foreign grants or operate politically under the cover of other missions. The public deserves to know who is influencing political processes."

He emphasized that the bureau is not targeting citizens, but is instead working to reveal hidden political agendas and ensure that organizations are accountable in their use of funds and public influence.

Despite Kuprashvili's assurances, civil society groups argue that the government is using transparency laws as tools of intimidation, disproportionately targeting organizations critical of the ruling party. Human rights defenders warn that the campaign mirrors similar tactics seen in authoritarian regimes to weaken independent voices and suppress dissent.

"The state is weaponizing oversight mechanisms to create fear and silence criticism," said one NGO leader, warning that these actions pose a direct threat to democracy in Georgia.



EU Agrees on New Rules to Suspend Visa-free Travel

BY TEAM GT

The EU's official website says the European Parliament and the European Council have reached an agreement on new rules for suspending visa-free travel for short-term visits to the EU.

The revised mechanism will give the EU greater flexibility to respond to countries that violate key principles of visa-free agreements, including security

threats and human rights abuses.

Under the new law, legal grounds for suspension will include violations of the UN Charter, international human rights or humanitarian law, and non-compliance with international court rulings. Additional triggers include hybrid threats—such as the state-driven instrumentalization of migrants—security risks from investor citizenship schemes ("golden passports"), and divergence from EU visa policy that could lead to illegal migration. Existing reasons for suspension, such as lack of cooperation on readmission, will remain in place.

EU Condemns Georgia's Media Crackdown, Demands Release of Journalist Mzia Amaglobeli



Ekaterina Zaharieva, EU Commissioner for Startups, Research, and Innovation. Source: EU

BY TEAM GT

The European Parliament has strongly condemned the Georgian government's escalating crackdown on independent media and civil society, adopting a resolution titled 'The Situation of Media Freedom in Georgia, Particularly the Case of Mzia Amaglobeli.' Passed by 324 votes to 25, with 87 abstentions, the resolution demands the immediate and unconditional release of veteran journalist Mzia Amaglobeli and calls for the repeal of legislation restricting press freedom and civic activism.

Amaglobeli, co-founder of Batumelebi and Netgazeti, was arrested during pro-European protests on January 12, 2025. Her detention, described by the European Parliament as a violation of judicial fairness, has drawn international outcry, particularly following reports of inhumane treatment during a 38-day hunger strike.

The resolution criticizes the ruling Georgian Dream party's legislative campaign—including the Foreign Agents Registration Act—as "a deliberate authoritarian strategy to silence dissent." It condemns procedural violations

in Amaglobeli's case, noting her pre-trial detention, multiple fines, and pending criminal charges. One recent offense—placing a protest sticker on the Adjara Police Department gate—led to a 1,000 GEL fine, followed by a second charge related to a confrontation with police, described by witnesses as "mild and symbolic."

MEPs also expressed concern over the broader context of repression. The resolution calls for the release of other political prisoners, including Mate Devildze, Zurab Japaridze, Nika Melia, Nika Gvaramia, and former President Mikheil Saakashvili. It denounces the abduction of an opposition leader's husband and threats against her children, framing these as part of a systemic assault on democracy.

In a powerful address to Parliament, Ekaterina Zaharieva, EU Commissioner for Startups, Research, and Innovation, underscored the symbolic weight of Amaglobeli's case. "The EU remains ready to take measures to hold human rights violators in Georgia accountable," Zaharieva declared. She cited a "growing pattern of harassment, intimidation, and politically motivated persecution" and called the treatment of Amaglobeli "unacceptable for a country aspiring to EU membership."

"These tactics are clearly designed to

silence dissenting voices and restrict democratic space," she said, referencing disproportionate sentences for young protesters and legal actions against independent media "for speaking the truth."

Zaharieva emphasized the broader risks: "Georgia's European path remains open, but the authorities must choose to follow it. This is not the behavior the EU—or more importantly, the people of Georgia—expect from a government seeking closer ties with Europe."

MEPs across party lines—among them Rasa Jukneviene, Małgorzata Gosiewska, and Petras Auštrevičius—publicly demonstrated support by displaying banners with the names of detained or persecuted figures, including Amaglobeli. Estonia and Lithuania have already imposed sanctions on Georgian officials linked to the journalist's case.

The European Parliament also urged EU Member States to consider bilateral sanctions and called on EU institutions to increase support for independent media and civil society in Georgia.

Zaharieva highlighted that independent journalism and broadcasting are essential—not only for uncovering injustice but also for challenging the rising tide of disinformation about the EU spread by those in power. "We stand in strong solidarity with Georgia's independent media," she said.

Prof. Michael Clarke on Putin's Endgame: Break NATO, Dominate Europe, Cement His Legacy



Professor Michael Clarke. Source: UGSPN

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NATO SECRETARY GENERAL MARK RUTTE TOLD THE BRITISH PUBLIC THAT 'YOU'LL STILL HAVE THE NHS, YOU'LL STILL HAVE PENSIONS, BUT UNLESS YOU INVEST 5% OF GDP IN DEFENSE, YOU'D BETTER START LEARNING RUSSIAN.' IS THAT NARRATIVE DEVICE OR METAPHOR? IS IT A REAL THREAT?

I think Mark Rutte was crafting a soundbite. He's a clever politician—he wouldn't have said that accidentally. He knew it was provocative, but he said it for a reason. And it's entirely reasonable that he should push, ahead of the NATO summit, for Allies to agree on 3.5% as a level of core defense expenditure—5% in total, but 3.5% on actual defense. That would generate, at current levels, about \$325 billion, which would add to the \$425 billion the Europeans already contribute to NATO. So you'd get a total of around \$750 billion, which is comparable to the US defense budget of \$850 billion.

So his comment, in a sense, was a reminder that we either make big sacrifices now—or soon—or we end up gifting the Russians influence over our lives. And I don't think that's an exaggeration. By "influence over our lives," I mean: if the Russians succeed in pushing the Americans out of Europe—and I think Trump may just hand that to them on a plate—then the Russians would be able to deal bilaterally with European countries rather than collectively. And they will blackmail and coerce in all sorts of ways. Exactly like the Chinese do. They'll punish states economically if they say or do something they don't like.

So when people in Britain say to me, "Well, the Russians aren't going to invade, are they?" I say, "No, probably not." But wait until you can't get money out of the cash machine because satellite communications have been disrupted. Wait until the NHS is in crisis due to a cyberattack. Wait until trains stop running for days on end. Wait until the internet goes down repeatedly. Then you'll see that living under Russian influence is no fun.

And the Russian message will be the same as Beijing's: "If you behave in the

way we expect, we'll leave you alone. If you don't, we'll punish you." That's how Russia operates. They want to be surrounded by weak states—they only feel strong, or secure, when everyone else is weak.

I often go back to Medvedev. I don't take him too seriously—he's not in the top tier of decision-makers, and he may well have a drinking problem—but a month ago, he put it very clearly. He said: "NATO talks about peace through strength. We don't believe in that. We believe in peace through fear—because we have shown that fear works." And he's right. Russia has created enough fear—certainly in Germany and parts of Southern Europe—to make itself feel more secure. The Russians will only feel safe when others are afraid of them.

THERE WAS ALSO A PROVOCATIVE QUOTE FROM UKRAINE'S FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER, MR. KULEBA. HE QUESTIONED WHETHER BRITISH MOTHERS WOULD BE WILLING TO SEND THEIR SONS TO FIGHT FOR FINLAND. ARE THEY?

Yes—in the sense that we have a professional army. People sign up knowing what the job entails. We don't have conscription, and we're not about to reintroduce it. But we are planning to significantly expand our reserve forces.

Britain has always accepted the possibility of losing service personnel in operations overseas, and I don't think that will change dramatically. What may change is a mother's willingness to see her son or daughter join up—or join the reserves in the first place. But, politically, losses have never been toxic in Britain.

SO THERE WOULDN'T BE WIDESPREAD PUBLIC ANGER ABOUT SENDING TROOPS TO, SAY, FINLAND?

I don't think so. I mean, I'm guessing—but, historically, that hasn't been the case. The British Army is over 360 years old, and we've only had conscription for 22 of those years—during the First and Second World Wars. Otherwise, it's a volunteer force, and there's a degree of pride in that. People today are more

sensitive than previous generations, yes—but I don't think that losses in a legitimate operation would turn the public against the armed forces, provided the government explains the mission properly.

We didn't see mass public outrage over losses in Afghanistan, Iraq, or even the Falklands.

KULEBA'S BROADER POINT WASN'T JUST ABOUT THE UK—IT WAS ABOUT NATO AS A WHOLE. HE SAID IF NATO DOESN'T RESPOND WHEN, SAY, RUSSIA SEIZES SOME REMOTE VILLAGE OR ISLAND, THEN NATO IS FINISHED. DO YOU AGREE?

Not finished—but gravely weakened. Let's say Russia grabs a slice of Estonia or Latvia using the "little green men" approach like they did in the Donbas. That should, in theory, trigger Article 5. If NATO doesn't respond accordingly, it wouldn't kill the alliance—but it would be a huge blow.

Russia would point to it and say to Southern European members, "See? NATO won't protect you. They didn't even act for Estonia."

AND HOW IS THAT NOT A KILLING BLOW? DOESN'T THAT IRREPARABLY DAMAGE NATO'S CREDIBILITY?

It would be extremely damaging, no question. But NATO would still have its force structure. It might try to work around the failure. Some members would be seen as more "valuable" than others, yes. But then, next time Russia tries it, NATO might say: "Right—we are definitely responding this time, because of what happened last time."

Still, if Russia tests Article 5 and NATO fails to respond, that's a serious problem. NATO is a huge alliance—now 32 nations. Originally, it was just 12. Then it was 15, then 16. I think NATO at 16 was very strong. Now, it's bigger but arguably less powerful, because consensus is harder to reach. It's more diluted.

Apart from Sweden, Finland, and Poland, most of the new members don't bring much capability—they mostly add geog-

raphy and airspace. That's the reality.

MANY WESTERN INTELLIGENCE SERVICES NOW ASSESS THAT, IN FIVE YEARS' TIME, RUSSIA WILL EITHER ATTEMPT OR PREPARE TO ATTACK A NATO MEMBER—MOST LIKELY A BALTIC STATE OR POSSIBLY FINLAND. DO YOU AGREE?

Yes, I think the Russians might well be driven by a sense of momentum—that things are moving their way. And there's also the clock ticking on Putin himself. He's 72. He probably figures he has six to eight more years to leave his mark before age catches up with him. He's a man with a historical mission, a sense of destiny.

So, I don't necessarily think he wants to conquer another country just to occupy it—though Moldova might be an exception. But breaking NATO: that would be the real legacy he's after. That would be his contribution to Russia's "security" when he's gone.

That could mean testing Article 5, driving wedges between Americans and Europeans, and spreading uncertainty and fear across the continent. If, by the time he's 78 or 79, he can say: "I've taken back part of Ukraine, maybe all of it; I've moved into Moldova, maybe into Georgia; and look—Europe fears me, the US treats me differently"—then in his mind, he'll be the greatest Russian leader since Stalin. Or even Peter the Great. "Peter the Great, Catherine the Great, Stalin, Putin." And that's what he would want to do.

He doesn't need to hold Estonia or Latvia forever. But if he can do something in the Baltics—or against Finland—that causes political fragmentation in Europe, that's the real goal.

SAY THE WAR IN UKRAINE ENDS IN A WAY THAT'S SOMEWHAT FAVORABLE TO RUSSIA. PUTIN HAS HIS SIGHTS ON THE BALTICS FOR THE GEOPOLITICAL REASONS YOU JUST MENTIONED. AND THERE'S MOLDOVA, HALFWAY INTO THE EU ALREADY, AND GEORGIA—COMPLETELY UNDEFENDED. HE MIGHT ALSO ATTEMPT SOMETHING IN CENTRAL ASIA, NORTHERN KAZAKHSTAN PERHAPS. WHICH COMES FIRST ON THE AGENDA?

It would depend on how the ceasefire in Ukraine came about. If Russia was still gaining ground, they might agree to a ceasefire to consolidate. If, however, they were starting to lose territory—or Crimea was at risk—then they'd want a ceasefire just to avoid further losses. So it really hinges on the context. But if you're asking about the broader timetable, I'd say think in terms of 2030 to 2032. By 2030, Putin will be 78—by 2032, 80. That probably acts as a psychological cutoff for him. After that, staying vigorous becomes more difficult.

So say there's a ceasefire at the end of this year or next—then what? Putin looks around and asks himself: what can I do next to damage the West, to generate fear across Europe? Taking Georgia outright—or Moldova—probably won't do that.

BUT MOLDOVA HAS ONE FOOT ALREADY IN THE EU. THAT'S A CLOCK PUTIN MIGHT WANT TO BEAT.

Exactly. An EU membership timetable could very well influence his own. He might think: I need to act before that window closes. So if he puts Ukraine aside in spring 2026, then by autumn 2027 or spring 2028, we'll likely see his next move. He won't just retire to his villa in Sochi. He'll certainly try something in that 2026–28 window.

If he puts Ukraine aside in 2026, could they not just continue the current war in Ukraine for another couple of years? Given that he's in the middle of a sum-

mer offensive right now?

They're moving again in the north—in Sumy and Kharkiv—and pushing harder around Pokrovsk and Kostiantynivka. The objective is clearly to take Chasiv Yar, then move on Kramatorsk and Sloviansk. If he captures those, he essentially has the Donbas. That's what this summer is about.

AND ONCE HE HAS THAT, HE GOES TO THE NEGOTIATING TABLE?

Maybe. Maybe to please the Americans. But I suspect the Americans will have moved on by then. The Russian offensive is like a sponge, and that cuts both ways. They can't punch through for a strategic breakthrough. Their structure doesn't allow it. They're already on their third army, the first two having been spent. This current army is cobbled together from all over: a month of training, then straight to the front. It's getting less and less effective.

And yet, for Ukraine, attacking this army is like punching a sponge: it just absorbs the blow and reforms. We're looking at sponge vs. sponge.

SO, WITH THAT IN MIND—AND I KNOW PREDICTIONS ARE A THANKLESS TASK—HOW MUCH LONGER CAN RUSSIA MAINTAIN THIS LEVEL OF WARFARE?

Not much longer. By the end of this year, things will start to plateau. Their industrial capacity is maxed out—they've ramped up production, but now they're hitting limits. They're short on components, short on skilled labor. They're increasingly dependent on imports from Iran, North Korea, and China. If the US were serious about secondary sanctions on China, it could really affect those supply lines.

AND IF THAT EXTERNAL HELP DRIES UP, HOW MUCH WOULD THE TEMPO DROP?

Quite a lot. They'd mostly just sit in trenches and stop advancing. The war would shift fully into a drone war—which, incidentally, Ukraine is starting to dominate. Not in terms of sheer numbers, but in the use of AI to coordinate drones. They're on the verge of some significant breakthroughs. The Russians will then inevitably catch up to that, obviously. They will adapt. Their drone production has increased tremendously. A lot of them are fakes—decoys—meant to burn through Ukraine's ammunition. But Ukrainians too are catching up to that; they've developed two or three methods for detecting the fakes. So it's a constant arms race.

The Ukrainians are ahead in key areas. The Russians have learned how to jam Ukrainian drones, but Ukraine's adapted. Now they send drones part of the way via GPS, and then—once Russian jamming kicks in—the drones switch over to AI and carry on autonomously. They make their own decisions, like kamikaze pilots thinking for themselves. That's autonomous warfare, and Ukraine is ahead of Russia in that regard.

BUT UKRAINIANS STILL LACK IN RESOURCES TO MATCH THE SHEER VOLUME OF RUSSIAN OUTPUT.

Exactly. That's where the West could step in. Just unfreeze the Russian assets—the \$300 billion sitting in Western banks, over \$200 billion of it in Europe, mostly in Belgium. Hand it over to Ukraine. Or if that's too politically delicate, structure it as a long-term loan—payable over 40 years. We did that after WWII. We only finished paying off our war loans in 2015.

But right now, Ukraine doesn't have the money to buy what it needs—and we're sitting on a mountain of Russian cash. Yes, it's legally complicated. But these are extraordinary times. Give them the money.

340+ Enterprises Supported, 160 Jobs Created: EU-funded Project 'Collaborate for Impact' Presents its Results



The beneficiaries of 'Collaborate For Impact.' Source: Impact Europe

BY TEAM GT

The EU-funded project Collaborate for Impact, focused on building a vibrant social entrepreneurship ecosystem across

Eastern Europe, celebrated its achievements at a closing event held in Brussels on June 12. As the project concludes this summer, Impact Europe convened national partners—including Impact Hub Yerevan (Armenia), CSR DG (Georgia), EcoVisio (Moldova), Education HUB (Azerbaijan), and SILab (Ukraine)—alongside policymakers, fund managers,

and ecosystem leaders.

Over its lifespan, Collaborate for Impact harnessed EU catalytic funding to bolster the social enterprise landscape across five Eastern Partnership countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. Through a series of stakeholder engagements, capacity-building events, and mentorship initiatives, the project

played a vital role in ecosystem development.

A key milestone was the establishment of three dedicated impact funds in Armenia, Ukraine, and Georgia. These funds have collectively provided financial support to 91 social enterprises and non-financial support to over 250. More than €1.2 million in funding has been disbursed to date, resulting in the creation of 166 jobs. Despite regional challenges, the project teams successfully mobilised an additional €1 million, primarily in the form of loans.

Significantly, over 25% of stakeholders engaged during the project contributed directly to the impact funds or related initiatives. For every €1 invested in stakeholder engagement, more than €5 was reinvested into local funds—and in some cases, up to €8 was channeled into broader impact-related activities.

These accomplishments are detailed in a final project report, presented during the Brussels event, marking the culmination of a multi-year effort to advance social entrepreneurship in the region.



A 'Collaborate For Impact' training session. Source: Impact Europe



Photo: Integra-Dom.

Israeli Interest in Georgian Real Estate Grows Despite Regional Tensions

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

Investment bank Galt & Taggart published a report revealing that Israeli buyers continue to show strong interest in Georgia's real estate market, making up 11% of all property sales in Tbilisi and Batumi during the first four months of 2025. This shows a slight increase from 2024, when Israelis made up 10% of sales.

Despite ongoing geopolitical tensions, including the Israeli-Iranian conflict, demand has not dropped. On the con-

trary, crises of this sort can intensify interest in more stable and accessible markets like Georgia.

"Instead of a decline, we observed increased interest from Israeli buyers following the late 2023 events," said Zuka Tavkelishvili, Associate Researcher at Galt & Taggart. "Georgia offers a familiar and comfortable environment for investment, and this activity may continue to grow."

Tavkelishvili added that although uncertainty exists due to the regional conflict, demand for both property purchases and rentals could remain strong if current trends continue.

Concerns Grow over Georgia's Declining Business Climate despite Positive Economic Headlines



Photo: Commersant.

BY TEAM GT

Despite officially reported economic growth, experts warn that Georgia's business environment is rapidly deteriorating, marked by falling investor confidence, stagnating sectors, and increasing financial stress among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Larisa Patariaia, a consulting expert with over a decade of experience advising Georgian firms, says the shift on the ground is stark. "We will not see an investor in the company in 2025," she told BMGTV, citing a dramatic drop in investor activity and a growing reliance on crisis management services. "Today, I see no investors approaching us. We've pivoted almost entirely to anti-crisis services—helping clients boost sales, reduce costs, and optimize internal processes."

According to Patariaia, industries like tourism, hospitality, retail, and clothing

are under particular pressure. "Restaurants are closing, and many tourist facilities never opened this season due to a lack of bookings. While large businesses are adapting, SMEs are in crisis," she warned. Rising cases of loan restructuring and financial rehabilitation further signal distress across the SME sector.

Economist Giorgi Khishtovani echoed this concern, noting that Georgia's business climate has been in steady decline since peaking in Q2 2023. Citing the latest Business Association of Georgia (BAG) Index for Q2 2025, he said signs of stagnation are now visible across all major sectors except trade.

"Only the trade sector showed strong momentum this quarter, likely due to aggressive marketing campaigns," Khishtovani observed. "But whether that trend is sustainable remains uncertain." Construction, industry, and services all recorded worsening conditions, and business expectations for the future have dropped across almost all sectors. Access to financing and weak demand continue to be major challenges, especially for

industrial and service businesses.

Looking ahead, Khishtovani sees two potential scenarios: "In the best case, we may see stabilization if trade and construction recover. But more realistically, the current gains are short-lived, and we're likely to see a further decline in the business climate in the coming quarters."

In addition to economic pressures, Patariaia highlighted political uncertainty and legislative shifts as key factors undermining investor confidence. "If Georgia does not return to the Euro-Atlantic path, we will not only fail to attract new investors—existing businesses will struggle to survive," she warned.

While official statistics may paint a picture of resilience, these expert assessments suggest growing disconnects between headline economic data and the real conditions faced by businesses on the ground—particularly those outside the trade sector. As 2025 progresses, Georgia's economic trajectory may depend not just on external trade performance, but on policy clarity, political stability, and renewed investor trust.



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EFES Georgia Launches Forest Restoration Activities in Mtskheta



BY TEAM GT

EFES Georgia has started activities to support the natural restoration of up to 3,000 sq. meters of forest near Jvari Monastery in the Mtskheta Forest District. The company's employees, together with representatives of the National Forestry Agency and the media, participated in the tree planting activity dedicated to World Environment Day. Under the Forest Friend program, EFES Georgia will also take responsibility for the long-term maintenance of the restored area.

To minimize its environmental impact, EFES Georgia was the first company to join the volunteer program Forest Friend, dedicated to caring for Georgia's forests, in 2023. As part of its corporate responsibility, the Efes Special brand started taking care of the renewal of a 12-hectare forest in the Simoniantkhevi quarter of the Tianeti Forest District and taking measures to promote natural forest regeneration in the same year. As a result,

36,000 trees will grow and greenhouse gas emissions will be reduced. It is important that EFES Georgia will also take care of the long-term maintenance of the restored area within the framework of the program.

This year, another memorandum of

understanding was signed between EFES Georgia and the National Forestry Agency of Georgia. As part of the agreement, Efes Special will continue its commitment to Georgia's forests in collaboration with the agency. In 2025, Efes Special will support the restoration and care of



up to 3,000 sq. meters of forest near Jvari Monastery in the Mtskheta Forest District. As part of the project, the existing ecosystem will be restored, and a new green recreational space will be created near the capital. This area will include 25,306 newly planted trees, which will produce approximately 1,226.4 tons of oxygen.

'Achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals is a declared priority for EFES Georgia, especially in the field of environmental protection. EFES Georgia is the first company to join the volunteer program 'Forest Friend,' dedicated to caring for Georgia's forests. In addition to this involvement, which includes funding and supporting forest renewal, EFES Special's communication is fully aligned with environmental campaign. By scanning the QR code on the beer packaging, consumers can learn about the 'Forest Friend' volunteer platform, and, if they wish, they also have the opportunity to donate and become a forest friend themselves,' - explains Public Relations and Digital Communications Manager of EFES Georgia, Ketevan Zhvania.

In addition, Efes Special's communi-

cation is fully aligned with its green mission. With a simple scan of the QR code on the bottle, consumers are invited to explore the Forest Friend platform, contribute through a donation, and become active supporters of forest conservation.

Efes Special is a special beer series crafted using special brewing techniques. Through long brewing, cold filtering, and careful cultivation, the beverage gains a delicate and smooth flavor. With its distinctive packaging, delightful taste, and light color, this beer promises a new experience for consumers.

Join us and become a Forest Friend together with Efes Special!

EFES Special საქართველოს ტყეებზე ზრუნვას განაგრძობს

Forest Friend was established to unite the public around the care, maintenance, and restoration of Georgia's forests. The initiative was developed with financial support from the UNDP Biodiversity Finance Initiative (BIOFIN), and its main partner is the National Forestry Agency of Georgia.

See you in our restored forest!

Georgia's Integral Resources

BLOG BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

Georgia is a rich country—these hopeful, invigorating words, confidently voiced by the keynote speaker, resonated through the conference hall of the Tbilisi Marriott Hotel on June 17. They rang out as one of the most uplifting declarations publicly heard in this land in decades. Indeed, merely leafing through the large-format hard-cover edition presented that day—detailing the country's mineral wealth and much more—one might easily be convinced that Sakartvelo is, in fact, abundantly endowed. The challenge lies in managing this wealth wisely and effectively.

The book presented on this notable occasion is co-authored by physicist and mathematician Givi Talakvadze and economist Ioseb Archvadze—both distinguished Georgian scientists and academicians of high standing. Talakvadze also heads the International Innovation Alliance, under whose aegis the book was published and the conference was organized. The event itself was meticulously planned and executed by Teimuraz Shashiashvili, member of the Gelati Academy and one of the founding members of the Georgian Congress of Scientists. The proceedings were expertly and gracefully moderated by Medea Abashidze, director of the 'Kartuli' Joint Stock Company. Academician Vladimir (Lado) Papava, Vice President of the Georgian National Academy of Sciences, opened the conference. Several other

academicians and leading figures from Georgia's managerial and scientific spheres also addressed the audience—each of them actively contributing to the nation's scientific advancement, both in theory and in practice.

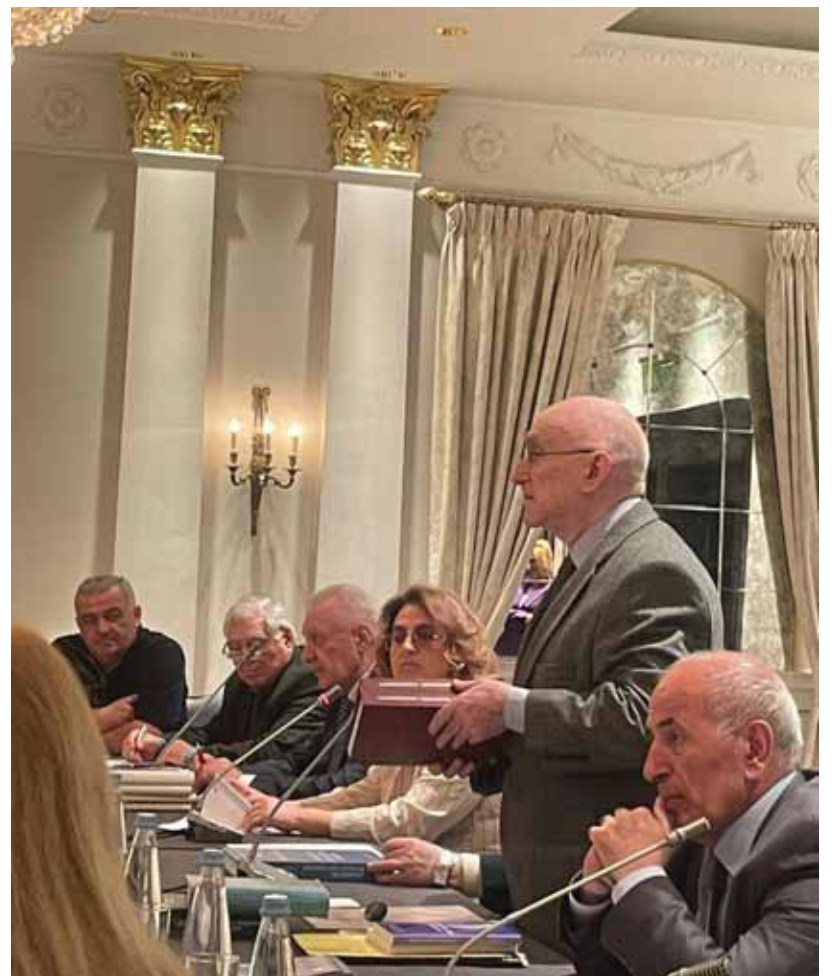
The book, the result of extensive and diligent work, offers a thorough overview of Georgia's national wealth, including land, forests, water, minerals, energy resources, biodiversity, and recreational assets—as well as potential strategies for their effective use. The authors emphasize the vital connection between Georgia's God-given natural abundance and the nation's potential prosperity, a link that depends heavily on human responsibility and stewardship. They also subtly highlight an intriguing point: some of these natural resources are being acquired by foreign partners—not for immediate exploitation, but to be kept in passive preservation for future strategic purposes. This assertion is supported by findings from the Congress of Georgian Scientists. Whether this phenomenon should be viewed as positive or negative for Sakartvelo—blessed as it is by nature—we shall leave unjudged, as the authors themselves do, with tactful restraint.

Titled Georgia's Integral Resources, the book is based on data officially published by the National Statistics Office of Georgia. Far from being a dull or purely technical text, it is a compelling, multifaceted, and informative desk reference. As one of the event's speakers aptly remarked, it deserves a place in every Georgian home and should be used as an academic aid to educate and inspire a deeper sense of national self-

awareness. However, with a retail price of 100 GEL, it may not be accessible to all. Given its unique value, the book certainly warrants translation into English for presentation to the international community.

It is also worth highlighting the commendable support Georgian business has shown toward national scientific endeavors—endeavors that represent one of the country's brightest hopes for future progress. Standing out among these supporters is Gocha Dzasokhov, a respected businessman, public figure, and longtime patron of science. Since the earliest efforts to elevate Georgian science to a position of national priority, Dzasokhov has been a key partner in close collaboration with Teimuraz Shashiashvili, whose vital role in this initiative is widely recognized.

Reflecting on Georgia's international connections at the dawn of its renewed independence in the 1990s, I can't help recalling how a group of Georgian enthusiasts—Professor Irakli Bokuchava and myself among them—believed that the country's development had to begin with an honest self-assessment, a "snapshot" of our internal and external wealth. With this in mind, renowned American expert Lawrence De Bivort was invited to Georgia to meet then-President Zviad Gamsakhurdia and explore development prospects rooted in our natural endowments. The initiative was titled The Georgia Initiative. The meeting took place, plans were drawn up, and everything seemed poised for takeoff. But, alas, history took a different turn. The first Georgian president was ousted and forced into exile, with consequences all



At the presentation of the book 'Georgia's Integral Resources.'

Source: International Innovation Alliance

too well known to our people.

And now, after all these years, it is almost unbelievable—and deeply moving—to witness the realization of a dream once shared by hopeful patriots. It may have taken an entire generation, but that dream has finally come true. As the authors note in the introduction to this

remarkable edition, the primary task of the state is to secure the well-being and sustainable development of the country and its people.

Now, here is a book that shows us the way. Let us read it, learn from it, and work together toward that meaningful goal. Let us make good use of it!

Rooted in History – Carrefour Revives the Spirit of Old Tbilisi



BY TEAM GT

Carrefour, the largest hypermarket and supermarket chain in Georgia which Majid Al Futtaiam owns the exclusive rights to operate in the country, will be redesigning its branch located near Kolmeurneoba (collective farming) Square within the GTC Shopping Center, to fuse nostalgia with innovation - paying a living tribute to Tbilisi's rich past while continuing to serve the evolving needs of the community. The project stands as both a commercial renovation, and a cultural revival. Carrefour has long been a familiar and trusted presence in the daily lives of Georgians, and this initiative reaffirms its role as a steward of local heritage and

shared identity. In a concept that bridges tradition and modernity, the renewed branch will pay homage to the old Tbilisi market, merging a century of local trade culture with world-class retail standards.

"Buildings like this — that revive sentimental memories and narrate forgotten stories of old Tbilisi — are nearly extinct today. Their aesthetic remains only in archives and the city's collective memory," explains Givi Machavariani, the project's architect. "We conducted deep research and sourced information from every possible avenue. Key stylistic elements were then carefully integrated into Carrefour's brand identity, giving birth to a concept that is both emotionally rich and commercially vibrant."

Design elements, including mosaic, ceramics, enamel, old bricks, and concrete, have been intentionally preserved

to create an immersive experience that evokes a meaningful journey through time. In addition to being a functional space, the store reflects Carrefour's belief that the retail environment can inspire emotional connection, celebrate cultural identity and create a sense of civic pride.

Architect Tengiz Alavardashvili adds: "During our historical research, we discovered that the building's stained-glass partitions had once been replaced, stripping it of its identity. Restoring the original glazing style was essential to recapturing the spirit of the period."

David Karkashadze, Country Manager at Carrefour Georgia, commented: "This project is a heartfelt tribute to Georgia's rich history and cultural identity, and we are proud to bring it to life in the heart of Tbilisi. By weaving traditional design elements and local storytelling

into the shopping experience, we're honouring the past while reinforcing our long-term commitment to this region and its people. For over a decade, Carrefour has been part of the fabric of everyday life in Georgia, and this is a continuation of that journey."

The market near Kolmeurneoba Square—historically known as Orbeliani Square—has long been a central part of Tbilisi's commercial and social life. Established in 1828 as Post Square, it has served various communities through changing times and names, from Soldier's Market, to the Soviet-era collective farmers' market, which gave rise to the name "Kolmeurneoba" (meaning "collective farming"). The market became a Sunday gathering point for locals, bustling with soldiers and citizens selling everything from produce to personal items. It is even reputed to be the site where Tbilisi's first Christmas tree was sold.

While the area has since seen major redevelopment, including a public garden, foundation, and the Carrefour supermarket, it retains the charm of its historic 19th and 20th-century architecture, with multiple structures preserved and designated as Cultural Heritage

Monuments. The presence of Carrefour in this space represents a seamless bend of past and present, bringing renewed relevance to the square while supporting the day-to-day needs of the community. Today, Orbeliani Square continues to be a vibrant part of Tbilisi, blending its rich history with contemporary urban life.

Set to be completed by the end of the year, the Carrefour branch reconstruction is a powerful example of how a retail space can preserve and celebrate the city's cultural identity. While renovations are underway, the store remains fully operational, ensuring uninterrupted access to essentials for customers who have long counted on Carrefour's presence.

Through this project, Majid Al Futtaiam Retail reinforces Carrefour's deepening role in Georgia as a trusted destination for quality and value, and as a space that nurtures community and honours shared history. Every detail, from the architecture to the in-store experience, invites Georgians to reconnect with their heritage and rediscover the stories woven into everyday life — in short, a shopping destination with a story to tell.



In the Details

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

Not necessarily the devil in the details, but something is.

It's a season of mixed weather so far in Svaneti, as across much of Georgia. Sometimes sunny and warm, sometimes enough to make you add layers of clothing during the day and an extra blanket at night. Rain and cloud, mist too, sweeping in. Half of our own land is now scythed by neighbors, the other half waiting until rain stops so it can also be cut and then dried on the ground for hay. My wife hoes and plants in the garden; I add borrowed cow manure around most of the fruit trees for extra nourishment.

And I watch the mountain wall across from us, on the other side of the Enguri River. Quick cloud motion there can transform sections of it in an instant. While I rush to grab my camera, what I saw changes; although what it becomes may at least be as alluring. Wisps of white snaking among the forests and mountain faces, pushing everything into firm three dimensions, adding depth. The longest lens I have, 70-300mm, is perfect for isolating these frames. I'll later enhance contrast in Photoshop, and convert what are nearly colorless images anyway to pure gray tones.

A savage leering face appears in melting snow just to the left of what, next month, will become the annual revelation of the Dancer, about whom I have written a fantastical whole story already.

This face I must add to the tale. Others slowly come and go in the changing snow, some comical, most disquieting at best, nightmarish at worst, like this one. Cloud changes are instant, or nearly so; shadows shift over hours if not many minutes; snow melt is much slower, taking days, unless there is a rockfall or avalanche bringing sudden collapse and possible permanent change to the usual annual beings I see and record. Rock only changes over a lifetime or longer, unless snow melts into it and then freezes, which can crack it apart suddenly. These are the timescales of the menagerie around me, now that I am attuned and alert to it all. It took years and years living here for this to happen.

The day after the cloud/wall drama, I am asked by a client to drive his car to neighboring Becho while he guides his two hikers across the Baki Pass. I agree, and of course take my camera, not at all expecting to see even a glimpse of mighty Ushba, but you never know. Indeed, I am rewarded by several glimpses as I drive, watching and ready. I stop suddenly, jump out with the camera, and get my precious, fragmentary, momentary, moody shots.

And that same evening, as the clouds lift just enough off the mountain wall, new SNOW is revealed on the heights. In mid-June. I quickly shoot a video, and the frames of a stitched panorama, from upstairs. No wonder it's been so cold.

The landscape here was always beautiful to my foreign eyes (although much less so to the local people dwelling here: partly from being used to it, partly from fearing the deep winter or the caprices



of weather as farmers). As a photographer, I was always going to look for beauty; but here whole new levels of surprise eventually entrusted themselves to me, past what I was usually seeing. I say surprise, because much of what I now see is not only beautiful. It does bring other much less happy emotions too; but I would not change the quality or nature of the vision at all. Let it come.

I could have left the things I see to come and go; but I chose, first, to photograph them, to make them permanent instead of transitory, in part to show other people. Then, having asked some questions ("Is there a story, legend, or history behind this?"), I decided to write, either something quite new or a setting down of what someone told me. A coherent whole emerged, connecting Svaneti's towers, its flora and fauna, its denizens of cloud and rock and shadow, and finally its people, together. Fantastical, indeed, but based on actual photographs of things which exist for a moment or lifetimes.

Noticing such things, called by the Greek word pareidolia, is available perhaps to anyone who takes the trouble to slow down and look, with expectation, for them. I grew up photographing from age 11, and writing from grade 1 in school too. So I suppose I've been primed my whole life, but it's never too late to start to see. Anywhere. Anytime.

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

Iron and Mercury: Giorgi Gigashvili Confronts the Prokofiev War Triptych

REVIEW BY IVAN NECHAEV

In a culture that often seeks refuge in the velvety certainties of Chopin or the romantic escapism of Rachmaninoff, Giorgi Gigashvili's June 16 recital at the Georgian Philharmonic Orchestra Auditorium arrived like a serrated edge. An ambitious soloist tackling all three of Sergey Prokofiev's "War Sonatas"—Nos. 6, 7, and 8—is not just a pianist making a statement. It's a political, emotional, and philosophical confrontation. On this stage in Tbilisi, where Soviet ghosts still occasionally walk among us, Gigashvili didn't just perform music. He entered into dialectical warfare with the material, with the era, with the instrument.

Gigashvili—long regarded as a meteoric presence on the Georgian and European scenes, moving with unsettling ease between jazz improvisation and classical rigor—has now planted himself squarely in the lineage of pianist-thinkers. With this program, he turned away from stylistic pluralism and embraced something monolithic: three sonatas forged in wartime metal, each pulsing with paranoid tension, formal audacity, and tectonic force. It was not a night of aesthetic comfort. It was a night of danger.

The evening began with the Piano Sonata No. 6 in A major, Op. 82, and with it, a landscape of shattered tonality and twitching memory. Prokofiev's Sixth, composed in 1939–40, carries the bleak symmetry of a totalitarian dream turned nightmare: its opening chords are like ruins already half-buried.

Gigashvili's approach was unflinch-



Photo by the author

ing—no rhetorical softening of the harsh angles, no attempt to domesticate the brutal first theme. His articulation was skeletal, almost clinical at times, revealing the structure's mechanical logic. Yet it was not cold. On the contrary: his dynamic control and pedaling kept the dissonances hovering like psychological vapor, subtly unstable. The second movement's waltz was not danced but stalked—a dream that turns grotesque midway through.

Where many pianists inject pathos into the final Vivace, Gigashvili opted for something sterner: an acceleration that bordered on manic, conjuring a sense of a man fleeing his own reflection. The final chords—violent, unresolved—landed not as closure but collapse.

Now the audience returned to the more familiar (and more dreaded) territory of Sonata No. 7 in B-flat major, Op. 83. If the Sixth sonata gazes into the mirror of war, the Seventh walks straight into the inferno. Written in 1942 and premiered by Richter under Stalin's anxious gaze, this sonata has become a terrifying classic—a kind of litmus test for the modern pianist's psychological and physical limits.

Gigashvili passed this test by breaking it. He refused to deliver the Seventh as a heroic display of virtuosity. Instead, he dragged it, breath by breath, through layers of inner resistance.

The opening movement, with its obsessive three-note motif, was hammered into the keyboard like a Morse code of

fear. Here, Gigashvili's phrasing turned brutalist: short, clipped, almost percussive, reducing the piano to a box of rhythm and noise. The slow movement, *Andante caloroso*, was whispered with such restraint it felt like the aftermath of an interrogation—the melody barely daring to exist.

And then, the final Toccata-like *Precipitato*. Often taken as a triumphant race to the finish, Gigashvili's version was mechanical, almost dystopian—a runaway train with no driver. There was no victorious gesture at the end, only a machine's convulsion. If you closed your eyes, you could almost hear bombs falling in the chords.

The final sonata of the night, No. 8 in B-flat major, Op. 84, is the most complex of the three. Composed in 1944, it is longer, more ambiguous, and—paradoxically—the most lyrical. But this is not the lyricism of peace. It is the nostalgia of someone who knows they are being watched.

After intermission, Gigashvili leaned into this tension with extraordinary sensitivity. The first movement's wandering themes were spun out with a peculiar kind of slow burn: every phrase was allowed to drift, hesitant, unstable. It was like watching a man remember something too painful to describe.

But perhaps the most striking part of the entire recital came in the second movement, the *Andante sognando*. Here, Gigashvili found a sound-world entirely his own: not just dreamlike, but distorted, like a reel of film melting in the projector. It was haunting, even surreal, with tiny hesitations and touches of rubato that turned each phrase into a kind of question.

The final Vivace movement, with its angular rhythms and off-kilter folk echoes, was no resolution. Gigashvili resisted the urge to rush; instead, he unfolded the movement as a farewell to clarity. By the end, the music seemed to be escaping from itself.

To play all three War Sonatas in a single evening is a statement. To do so in Tbilisi, a city still metabolizing its post-Soviet dissonances, is an act of cultural clairvoyance. Prokofiev's sonatas are more than music—they are historical documents encoded in sonic form, recording the spiritual corrosion of a society under authoritarian pressure.

Gigashvili's recital was not "beautiful" in the sentimental sense. It was something far rarer: necessary. It asked the audience to listen not with ears, but with memory. Not with taste, but with ethics. This was Prokofiev as trauma—Prokofiev as resistance—Prokofiev as modernity's cracked mirror.

And Giorgi Gigashvili? He did not perform these sonatas. He survived them. Sergey Prokofiev composed the "War Sonatas" between 1939 and 1944, a period marked by Stalinist terror, global conflict, and artistic repression. Sonata No. 6 explores fragmentation and paranoia; No. 7 embodies terror and mechanized violence; No. 8 drifts into memory, nostalgia, and quiet despair. Together, they form a triptych of modern existential unease. Performing them today is not just an artistic challenge—it is an invitation to revisit the unresolved tensions of 20th-century history and to reconsider music as a medium of historical memory. If this recital is any indication, Gigashvili is not here to decorate the past. He is here to interrogate it.

Natalia Osipova in Tbilisi: A Ballet Ritual, Flesh, and Memory at the Rhythm Festival 2025

REVIEW BY IVAN NECHAEV

On June 15, at Tbilisi's Griboedov Theater, Natalia Osipova presented *Force of Nature*, a curated selection of classical and contemporary pieces performed alongside a cast of international dancers. The evening marked the Georgian premiere of the program and Osipova's first performance in the country — part of the Soso Lagidze International Art Festival Tbilisi Rhythm, now an established fixture in the city's cultural calendar.

Rather than a gala performance showcasing familiar crowd-pleasers, *Force of Nature* offered a relatively austere proposition: a sequence of solos and duets shaped more by structural tension than theatrical flourish. The program traced a line between ballet's codified past and its more gestural, contemporary permutations. Osipova, a principal at The Royal Ballet with an increasingly independent curatorial agenda, positioned herself at the intersection of those modes — at once channeling classical syntax and disrupting it.

She was joined onstage by a group of dancers from a wide range of stylistic and institutional backgrounds: Jason Kittelberger, choreographer and long-time collaborator; Vienna State Opera's Victor Caixeta; English National Ballet dancers Francesca Velicu and Daniel McCormick; Mariinsky Theater's Daria Pavlenko, also associated with Tanztheater Wuppertal; and Joseph Kudra of Sharon Eyal's company. Rather than forming a coherent ensemble, they functioned as a rotating cast — each bringing

distinct vocabulary and affect, generating a kind of curated polyphony.

The choreography, drawn from a range of sources, avoided narrative and theatricality. Instead, it leaned on spatial tension, fragmentation, and contrasts in weight and dynamics. At times, the works felt more like studies than performances — analytical rather than emotional in register.

Osipova's physical presence remains striking, though her interest here seemed to lie in restraint rather than display. She modulated her presence to the demands of each piece: expansive in some, nearly minimal in others. She did not attempt to unify the program through a dominant persona; if anything, she worked to defer to the internal logic of each duet or solo.

The technical achievement was not in question. More pertinent was how the program resisted familiar arcs of virtuosity or romantic catharsis. The evening neither sought to overwhelm nor seduce. It was built with a kind of choreographic neutrality — rarely indulging in emotive crescendos, often retreating into ambiguity.

Osipova's appearance in Georgia carries particular cultural resonance, not least because of the country's significant contribution to 20th-century ballet history. She acknowledged as much in her remarks following the performance, citing names like Vakhtang Chabukiani, Nino Ananiashvili, and Irma Nioradze. Her program, however, did not attempt to directly engage with or respond to that lineage. Rather, it existed in parallel — a European project inserted into the Georgian context, without overt gestures of local reference or adaptation.

Still, the performance comes at a moment when Georgian dance institu-



Photo by the author



Photo by the author

tions and audiences are reexamining their relationship with the international ballet circuit. Osipova's project, with its curated eclecticism and controlled aesthetic framing, offered one model of what international ballet now looks like when unmoored from company affiliations and repertoire constraints.

Tbilisi Rhythm, supported by the Ministry of Culture and the Tbilisi City Hall, continues to broaden its programming beyond music into interdisciplinary and hybrid forms. This season will conclude with a concert by French accordionist Richard Galliano, suggesting an interest in contrasting sensibilities — from cho-



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reographic abstraction to lyrical improvisation.

The inclusion of Osipova's program signals the festival's desire to position itself within a more transnational conversation, aligning with the kind of flexible, artist-driven formats now common in European dance and performance festivals.

Force of Nature did not deliver revelations, nor did it seek to. It functioned more as an aesthetic dossier — a survey of tendencies, performed by dancers who understand their craft and can move between codes without rhetorical excess. What the Tbilisi audience received, then, was not a spectacle but a set of propositions: about movement, about authorship, and about the body as a site of curated uncertainty.

The Mind at the Edge of the Hand: Marc-André Hamelin Opens Tbilisi Piano Fest 2025

BY IVAN NECHAEV

On Tuesday evening, the Tbilisi State Conservatoire hosted a performance by Canadian pianist Marc-André Hamelin as part of the 2025 edition of Tbilisi Piano Fest. The appearance of a figure long respected for his analytical clarity and technical control lent a measured gravity to the festival's opening, which otherwise leans toward showcasing virtuosity and international appeal.

The program spanned Classical precision and Romantic interiority, moving from Haydn and Beethoven to Medtner and Rachmaninov. Hamelin's choices—neither crowd-pleasing nor obscure—reflected a characteristic interest in works that test the pianist's ability to navigate between formal discipline and expressive ambiguity.

Hamelin opened with Haydn's Sonata in D major, Hob. XVI:37, a compact but structurally intelligent work often underestimated in recital settings. His interpretation avoided exaggerated contrast or decorative phrasing, instead allowing the rhetorical shape of the piece to speak through restrained articulation and clarity of texture. The approach served as a statement of method—eschewing effect in favor of attention to structure.

Beethoven's Sonata in C major, Op. 2 No. 3 followed. Hamelin's reading was marked by precision and a refusal to dramatize beyond the score's inherent momentum. The first movement's rhythmic insistence emerged as a kind of architectural challenge—form pushing against itself. In the slow movement, Hamelin resisted sentimentality, maintaining an internal tension that kept the lyricism from collapsing into expressive vagueness. This was a Beethoven shaped more by contour and cadence than by psychological drama.

In the second half, the program shifted toward the early 20th century with works by Nikolai Medtner—the Improvisation in B-flat minor, Op. 31 No. 1, and Danza Festiva, Op. 38 No. 3. Hamelin is one of the few pianists today who approaches Medtner not as a curiosity, but as a composer with a self-sustaining formal logic.

In the Improvisation, he traced the line of variation with patient control, allowing motivic development to unfold without rhetorical inflation. His approach to rhythm was flexible but unsentimental; rubato was used not for emotional effect but for structural clarification. The Danza Festiva, lighter in tone, was treated with similar economy, revealing the underlying counterpoint beneath its surface gestures.

The recital concluded with Rach-

maninov's Étude-Tableau in E-flat minor, Op. 39 No. 5, and the Second Sonata in B-flat minor, performed in the composer's revised 1931 version. Hamelin approached these pieces with notable restraint. Rather than emphasizing the work's inherent drama, he foregrounded the sonata's compressed structure and motivic interrelations.

This was not Rachmaninov as an exercise in late-Romantic excess, but as a study in thematic condensation. The final movement's virtuosic demands were navigated with clarity and discipline, but without ostentation. It was an interpretation shaped by internal coherence rather than expressive projection.

INTERPRETATION AS INQUIRY

Throughout the evening, Hamelin offered not a display of pianistic personality but a set of interpretations grounded in formal attention and musical literacy. His playing remains a reminder that virtuosity, when subordinate to structure, can serve as a vehicle for thought rather than an end in itself.

In a festival context that will include performers with more demonstrative styles and extroverted programming, Hamelin's recital stood apart—less an event, more a reading. For audiences willing to listen closely, it was a lucid proposition: that the pianist's role is not to entertain or emote, but to think in sound.

Tbilisi Piano Fest 2025 continues through June 28, with upcoming performances by Konstantin Lifschitz, Francesco Libetta, Andrius Žlabys, and Martín García García, among others.

Founded and curated by Dudana Mazmanishvili, the Tbilisi Piano Fest has, over the past years, developed into one of the region's more thoughtfully assembled platforms for pianistic exchange. Eschewing superficial glamour, the festival focuses on presenting a broad spectrum of interpretative aesthetics—from historically informed performance to modernist virtuosity—within a setting that encourages close listening and critical engagement. Held across several of Tbilisi's academic and public venues, the festival aims not merely to showcase technical brilliance, but to position the piano recital as a site of cultural discourse. With its combination of international guests and Georgian artists, it also serves as a bridge between the city's conservatoire tradition and its more contemporary musical ambitions. Under Mazmanishvili's direction, the festival operates less as a spectacle and more as a curatorial proposition: what does it mean to listen with seriousness—and what does the piano still have to say in a culture saturated with images and noise?



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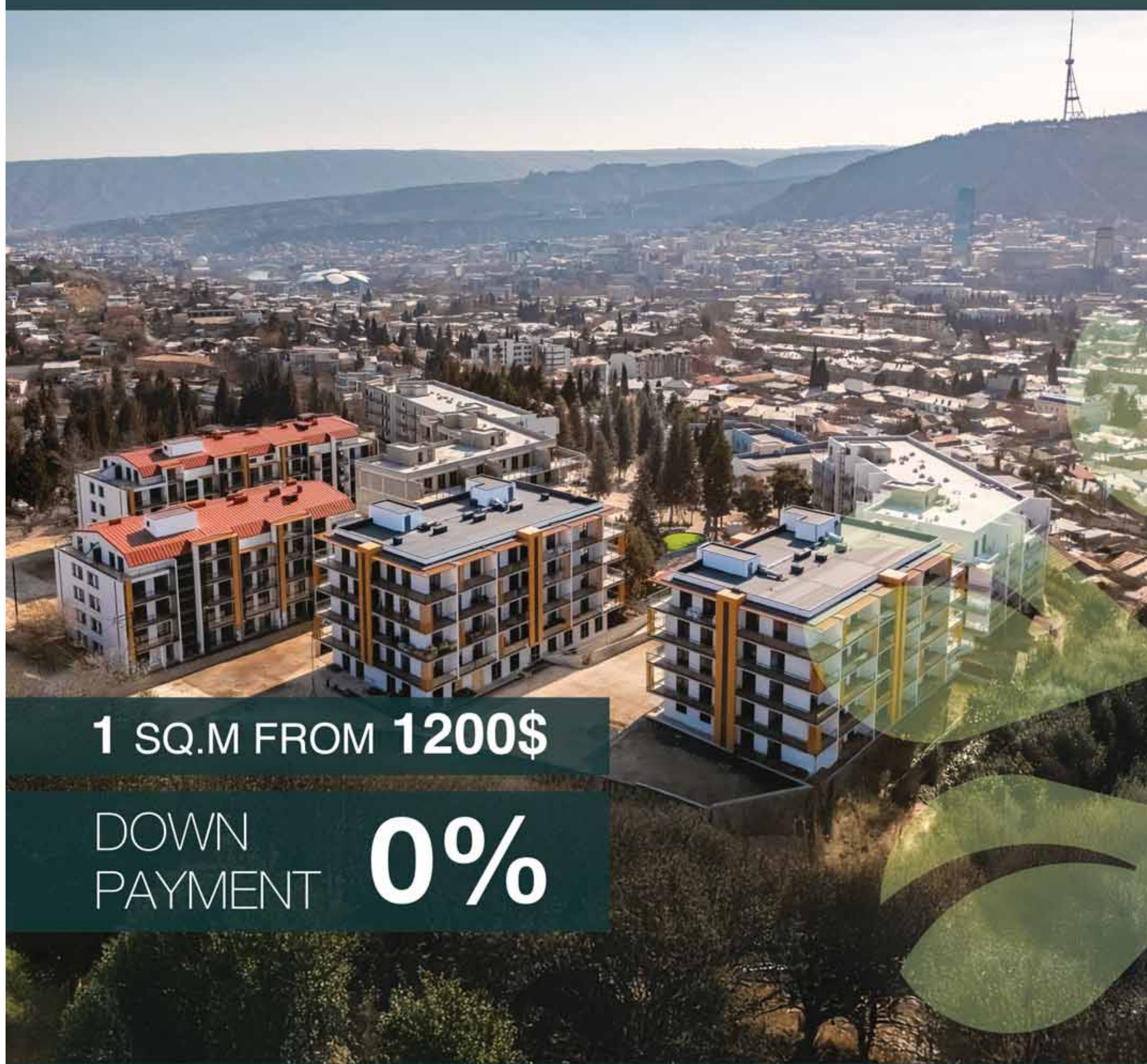
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