



## FOCUS

ON MAQRO CITY TBILISI

High volume sales define opening phase

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## “Falling Faster, Falling Deeper”: US Diplomat Warns Georgia Risks Strategic Irrelevance

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

What's different this time is that the current 'shooting star' seems to be falling faster and deeper, with no clear bottom in sight. — That's how Thomas O. Melia, a seasoned American diplomat and democracy advocate, characterizes Georgia's current political trajectory. Having been involved in promoting democracy and human rights in Georgia for more than twenty years, including during his tenure as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State under President Obama, Melia has seen the country's progress and setbacks up close. Speaking to RFE/RL's Georgian Service at the 2025 Rondeli Security Conference in Tbilisi, he warned that Georgia's drift away from its Western allies may be pushing it toward “strategic irrelevance.” Yet he also insisted the door to democratic renewal remains open.

Continued on page 4 Thomas O. Melia at the 2025 Rondeli Security Conference in Tbilisi



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GALT & TAGGART CREATING OPPORTUNITIES									
Markets									
As of 18-Jun-2025									
BONDS				STOCKS				CURRENCIES	
	Price	w/w	m/m		Price	w/w	m/m		
GEORG 04/26	97.17 (YTM 6.30%)	+0.4%	+0.5%	Lion Finance Group (BGEO LN)	GBP 66.40	-1.3%	+4.3%	USD / GEL	2,7245 -0.1%
GRAIL 06/28	90.02 (YTM 7.81%)	+0.1%	+1.2%	Georgia Capital (GGEO LN)	GBP 19.10	+2.1%	+1.9%	EUR / GEL	3,1278 -0.1%
GEORG 9 1/2 PERP	99.62 (YTM 9.39%)	+0.2%	+0.6%	TBC Bank Group (TBCG LN)	GBP 44.50	-1.3%	-2.0%	GBP / GEL	3,6554 -1.0%
SILNET 01/27	101.29 (YTM 7.50%)	-0.0%	+0.2%					EUR / USD	1,1480 -0.1%
TBC 8.894 PERP	97.79 (YTM 11.47%)	-0.0%	+0.4%					GBP / USD	1,3422 -0.9%
TBC 10 1/4 PERP	99.63 (YTM 9.87%)	-0.1%	+0.8%						
COMMODITIES				INDICES					
	Price	w/w	m/m		Price	w/w	m/m		
Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	76.70	+9.9%	+17.3%	SP 500	5,980.87	-0.7%	+0.4%		
Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	3,369.38	+0.4%	+5.2%	FTSE 250	21,290.26	-0.6%	+1.5%		
				DOW JONES 30	42,171.66	-1.6%	-1.1%		
				Russell 2000	2,112.96	-1.6%	-0.0%		
				FTSE 100	8,843.47	-0.2%	+1.8%		





Header image: Rescue workers carry the body of a victim from a residential building destroyed by a missile strike in Beersheba, Israel [Bernat Armangué/AP Photo]

## US-Brokered Ceasefire Calms Flames in Israel Iran Crisis, but Situation is Fragile – What's at Stake

BY TEAM GT

A tense ceasefire between Iran and Israel, brokered by the United States, appears to be holding after nearly two weeks of escalating military confrontation that threatened to spiral into a broader regional war.

The truce, announced on June 23 by President Donald Trump—who has played an increasingly visible role in backchannel diplomacy—came after the US launched a series of precision airstrikes on Iranian nuclear facilities. Though the strikes were intended to send a clear message, intelligence assessments suggest they only delayed Iran's nuclear program by a few months. Nonetheless, the show of force helped pressure both sides into a temporary pause in hostilities.

Diplomatic sources confirm that both Tehran and Jerusalem have largely abided by the ceasefire terms, though each has accused the other of minor violations in the early hours of the truce. Despite these claims, no new large-scale attacks have been reported since the agreement took effect.

The crisis reached a peak after Iran fired a series of long-range missiles toward Israeli military targets in early June, prompting an Israeli counteroffensive and covert strikes reportedly conducted deep inside Iranian territory. In response, the US moved quickly, not only deploying military assets to the region but also engaging in shuttle diplo-

macy between both governments. Trump, in a televised statement, said he was “very proud” of the outcome, declaring the war “over—for now.”

Iran, while acknowledging that its capabilities have been diminished, has made it clear that it retains multiple strategic tools should the situation deteriorate again. These include control over key maritime passages such as the Strait of Hormuz, the use of proxy militias in Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen, and the ability to disrupt global oil supplies. However, with domestic economic pressures mounting, Iran's leadership has signaled a willingness to pause direct confrontation—though it remains defiant on the nuclear front, suspending cooperation with international atomic monitors.

Israel, for its part, has stated that it remains on high alert and will respond to any renewed aggression. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has thanked the US for its support but emphasized that Israel will act unilaterally if needed to protect its national security.

The ceasefire, while welcomed by many, is seen by analysts as fragile and temporary. International reaction has been cautious. European Union leaders have urged both sides to pursue dialogue, while oil markets reacted swiftly to the de-escalation, with prices falling sharply as supply fears eased.

US special envoy Steve Witkoff called the truce a “promising step,” suggesting there may be room for more substantive negotiations in the weeks ahead. Still, many in Washington remain divided on whether a lasting peace is achievable without deeper structural changes on both sides.

## Gelati Rehabilitation Committee Nears Completion of Temporary Roofing at Gelati Monastery



BY TEAM GT

The Gelati Rehabilitation Committee has announced that the temporary roofing works on the main cathedral of the Gelati Monastery, including its iconic dome, are nearing completion. The large-scale project, aimed at protecting the structure from further water damage, is being led by a team of German contractors.

“After several weeks of suspension due to disruptions in material supply,

the extensive temporary roofing project is on track to be fully completed by the end of this week,” the Committee reported.

The Gelati Monastery, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, has been undergoing urgent rehabilitation since severe roofing failures in recent years led to water infiltration and damage to priceless frescoes. Efforts to stabilize and preserve the historic monument have faced multiple delays and technical challenges. The installation of the temporary roof is considered a critical step toward protecting the site while long-term restoration plans are being finalized.

# Tbilisi Invests over GEL 1.8 bln in Infrastructure

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

Tbilisi City Hall has allocated more than GEL 1.8 billion to improve infrastructure in recent years, focusing on urban safety, transportation upgrades and housing rehabilitation, as it was revealed in the progress report presented by Mayor Kakha Kaladze and Deputy Mayor Irakli Bendeliani.

### LANDSLIDE PREVENTION A PRIORITY

Tbilisi's mountainous terrain is a persistent landslide risk. The city has implemented preventive measures, including anti-rockfall nets across 128,000 sq m in 17 high-risk locations, such as the Chabua Amirejibi highway. In Vashlijvari, slope stabilization and the construction of 12 concrete retaining walls were prerequisites for new road development. In total, around 800 retaining walls have been built across the city.

### STRENGTHENING AGING RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS

City Hall has reinforced approximately 700 deteriorating residential buildings, many of which are protected cultural heritage sites, with additional 26 struc-



Photo: 1tv.

tures being set to be completed by the end of 2025.

### SUPPORT FOR HOMEOWNERS' ASSOCIATIONS

The municipality has helped homeowners' associations modernize residential infrastructure with its €285 million support program. Achievements include the replacement of around 2,000 elevators and the renovation of more than 1,200 building entrances, rooftops and courtyards.

### TRANSPORT AND

### UTILITY UPGRADES

Tbilisi's transportation network has undergone major expansion and rehabilitation, including:

- 3 new overpasses and ramps
- 1 road bridge
- 2 tunnels connecting University and Kavtaradze Streets
- Reconstruction of important infrastructure, including the Vakhushti Bagrationi Bridge and Ponichala underpass
- Upcoming rehabilitation of the Ortachala HPP bridge

## EU Spokesperson: Arrests of Opposition Leaders Go against Basic Democratic Values

BY TEAM GT

The politically motivated persecution and arrests of opposition leaders go against basic democratic values – wrote Anitta Hipper, Spokeswoman of the European Commission for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, on social media.

She said that Georgian Dream must end the misuse of the judicial system for political purposes.

“These are authoritarian tactics, opposite of what is expected from an EU candidate country. Georgian Dream must stop weaponizing the justice system,” Hipper added.

A wave of arrests targeting prominent opposition leaders has sparked widespread outrage and mass protests across Georgia, as critics accuse the ruling Georgian Dream party of deepening authoritarian practices ahead of the 2025 presidential elections.

Over the past month, at least six high-profile opposition figures have been sentenced or detained for defying a parliamentary commission investigating the presidency of Mikheil Saakashvili, Georgia's exiled former leader. The opposition claims the commission serves as a political weapon designed to silence dissent.

On June 23, the Tbilisi City Court sentenced Mamuka Khazaradze and Badri Japaridze—co-founders of the Lelo for Georgia party—to eight months in prison each for refusing to testify before the commission. Both were also barred from holding public office for the next two years. Zurab Japaridze, leader of Girchi – More Freedom and a member of the Coalition for Change, received a seven-month sentence on similar charges.

Just one day later, on June 24, Giorgi Vashadze, the leader of the Strategy Aghmashenebeli party, was also sentenced to eight months in prison for contempt of the commission. Law enforcement officers detained him immediately after the verdict was announced.

These convictions follow earlier arrests in May. On May 22, Zurab Japaridze was detained in court for refusing to pay bail and comply with the commission's sum-



mons. A week later, on May 29, Nika Melia—a key opposition figure and former chair of the United National Movement—was also placed in pre-trial detention. Melia was charged with insulting law enforcement and failing to meet bail conditions.

Former Defense Minister Irakli Okruashvili, another vocal critic of the ruling party, was also arrested in mid-May under similar circumstances.

The Georgian government insists that the legal actions are a matter of upholding the rule of law and enforcing parliamentary authority. However, local and international watchdogs have condemned the arrests as politically motivated. Opposition supporters have staged nightly rallies outside the Parliament building in Tbilisi, demanding the release of what they describe as political prisoners and calling for snap elections.

“This is a full-scale political crackdown,” said Elene Khoshtaria, an opposition MP. “They are trying to destroy every voice

that challenges their authority.”

The ongoing crisis has drawn sharp criticism from the European Union and the United States. Brussels has warned that the Georgian government's recent actions threaten to derail the country's aspirations for EU membership.

Speaker of Parliament Shalva Papuashvili accused the EU of “persistent political interference in Georgia's judiciary,” alleging that Brussels disregards historical lessons and selectively applies European values. In a social media statement, he criticized EU officials for failing to acknowledge politically biased rulings by the European Court of Human Rights in high-profile Georgian cases, arguing that sincere adherence to European principles would have prompted formal apologies to the Georgian public. Instead, Papuashvili claimed, the EU continues to justify politically motivated actions and attacks on Georgia's state institutions, perpetuating a damaging political cycle.



# Ukraine Latest: Heavy Fighting and Diplomatic Frictions

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

The war in Ukraine has entered another week of intense violence and strained diplomacy, as Russian missile strikes killed dozens, new military appointments were announced in Kyiv, and global leaders prepared for a crucial NATO summit in The Hague.

In one of the deadliest attacks in recent months, Russian missile strikes on south-eastern Ukraine devastated the city of Dnipro, killing 17 people and injuring more than 200. Dozens of buildings and infrastructure facilities were damaged in the assault, further straining Ukraine's civilian emergency response systems. Another Russian attack claimed two more lives in the city of Samara.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky responded to the escalating violence by naming Hennadii Shapovalov as the new commander of Ukraine's ground forces. Shapovalov will also be tasked with overseeing international military recruitment as part of a renewed mobilization campaign. Meanwhile, Russian forces claimed to have captured the village of Dylivka in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region — a move that underscores Moscow's steady push through the embattled Donbas area.

In a post on X, Zelensky voiced frustration over the lack of progress toward a ceasefire, stating that Moscow remains uninterested in any negotiations. "The Russians once again openly and abso-



Russian armed forces walk along a motorway as they search for explosives and demine an area near the town of Maryinka, in the Russian-controlled Donetsk region of Ukraine, on June 24. Photo by Alexander Ermochenko/Reuters

lutely cynically declared they are 'not in the mood' for a ceasefire," he wrote. "Russia wants to wage war. This means the pressure the world is applying isn't hurting them enough yet."

Overnight, Russia said it intercepted

dozens of Ukrainian drones across various regions, including Voronezh, near the border with eastern Ukraine. The increasing number of drone incursions and missile attacks signals a new phase of warfare marked by more advanced

and relentless aerial campaigns.

Diplomatic tensions also dominated headlines ahead of the upcoming NATO summit in The Hague. The White House confirmed that US President Donald Trump is expected to meet Zelensky

during the summit — their second attempt following a missed meeting earlier this month at the G7 summit in Canada, which Trump left abruptly.

Trump stirred controversy during his flight to Europe by refusing to offer a clear endorsement of NATO's core Article 5 clause, which guarantees collective defense. "Depends on your definition. There's numerous definitions of Article 5," he said aboard Air Force One, though he added, "I'm committed to being their friend."

NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte sounded the alarm ahead of the summit, warning that the alliance's military advantage is "being aggressively challenged by a rapidly rearming Russia, backed by Chinese technology and armed with Iranian and North Korean weapons." In response, member states are preparing to support a proposal to raise defense spending to 5 percent of GDP over the next decade — a move seen as both a deterrent against Russian aggression and a strategic concession to satisfy Trump's long-standing demands.

Financial aid to Ukraine also remains a key focus. The Netherlands, host of the NATO summit, unveiled a new €175 million (\$203 million) assistance package that includes drone detection radars. This comes on the heels of a €500 million (\$580 million) bilateral deal to co-produce 600,000 drones with Ukraine — highlighting Europe's growing investment in Kyiv's drone warfare capabilities.

As both military action and international negotiations intensify, the conflict shows little sign of slowing, leaving the region — and the world — bracing for whatever comes next.

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# "Falling Faster, Falling Deeper": US Diplomat Warns Georgia Risks Strategic Irrelevance

Continued from page 1

**YOU HAVE A LONG HISTORY WITH GEORGIA, HAVING KEPT AN EYE ON THE COUNTRY CLOSE TO TWO DECADES NOW. LOOKING BACK AT GEORGIA—THEN AND NOW—WHAT DO YOU SEE? WHAT ARE THE MAJOR DIFFERENCES?**

Over the years, Georgia has gone through a series of political trajectories that resemble shooting stars. A new government comes in—full of energy, full of reformist zeal, and democratic consolidation—usually backed by strong international support. We saw that in the Shevardnadze period, then again during Saakashvili's time, and now, to an extent, with the Georgian Dream era under Ivanishvili. But, time and again, we see these governments lose interest in international advice and support, grow less tolerant of domestic dissent, and become more autocratic in different ways.

What's different this time is that the current "shooting star" seems to be falling faster and deeper—with no clear bottom in sight. That's one of the central questions here at this conference: Is it irreversible? My message is, no—it's not. Georgia can bounce back, just as countries like Poland and Brazil did after periods of rising authoritarianism. Those were turnarounds driven by elections. Whether Georgia can follow that path remains to be seen.

The opposition failed to present a unified, coherent alternative in the last election. That carries some responsibility. But there's also a larger issue: unlike past governments, even when critical of the West, Shevardnadze and Saakashvili continued engagement with Washington and Brussels. This current government, inexplicably, has turned away from Georgia's friends in the West—those who genuinely want it to succeed. And that has made it much harder for those of us who know and care about Georgia to help.

**WHAT DO YOU THINK IS DRIVING THIS STRATEGIC SHIFT? IF IT'S A BALANCING ACT BETWEEN GREAT POWERS, WOULDN'T LOGIC DICTATE YOU DON'T ALIENATE ONE OF THE KEY PLAYERS?**

I'll offer one analysis: in autocratizing governments, as they tighten control over the opposition, media, and civil society, a certain paranoia starts to emerge. This government has imprisoned members of the previous administration, including the former president, imprisoned its own former members and allies, and is threatening other independent voices—journalists, NGOs. That creates fear among current officials: if



Thomas O. Melia

they ever lose power, they might face the same fate. Whether it's legitimate prosecution or politically motivated charges, the fear is real.

So what do they do? They double down. They bend the rules further, silence critics more aggressively, and cling to power at all costs.

**IF YOU HAD TO PINPOINT ONE CORE ISSUE THAT CAUSED THE RIFT BETWEEN GEORGIAN DREAM AND THE WEST, WHAT WOULD IT BE?**

From Washington's perspective, a major turning point was when the EU offered Georgia candidate status—essentially, an invitation to join the European family. And what did the government do? They said, "We're going to pause that." That's a problem.

In the US, there's long been deep appreciation for Georgia—a small, faraway country that nonetheless played an outsized role in military endeavors like Afghanistan. Georgia's democratic progress was celebrated.

But despite all that, the rift grew. The Biden administration tried to engage Georgia, particularly around laws like

the "foreign agents" bill. They said, "Please don't do this." But the Georgian government moved ahead anyway. The way the Georgian government treated Dunnigan and her predecessor Kelly Degan—frankly, it was disgraceful—has alienated many in Washington.

The US responded by pausing some official engagement—but continued to support civil society.

**AND THAT DIDN'T SEEM TO DETER THE GOVERNMENT.**

No, it didn't. And that's part of the problem. The punishments for democratic backsliding are more about the withdrawal of affection than hard sanctions. Yes, some individuals may lose US visas, but that's hardly a major deterrent.

**YOU MENTIONED "STRATEGIC IRRELEVANCE" IN YOUR SPEECH YESTERDAY. WHAT ARE THE DANGERS OF THAT FOR A COUNTRY LIKE GEORGIA?**

Georgia is small. It doesn't have major economic or military clout. It doesn't have oil or gas. But it had significance because of its willingness to partner with the West. The contributions of the Georgian

military in Afghanistan, for example, earned it respect in Washington.

But if Georgia abandons those partnerships, it risks being forgotten. Strategic irrelevance means being left alone, unappreciated, and losing access to the very opportunities that could help it thrive.

**HAS THAT ALREADY HAPPENED IN DC?**

Yes, to a significant extent. The Biden administration tried hard. Senior officials came to Tbilisi, but found it difficult to secure high-level meetings, including with Mr. Ivanishvili and the Prime Minister. It just seems like a series of bad decisions are being made.

**THERE'S A GROWING VIEW THAT GEORGIAN DREAM WANTS TO MODEL ITSELF ON AZERBAIJAN. BUT WITHOUT AZERBAIJAN'S RESOURCES, IS THAT EVEN POSSIBLE?**

How much oil does Georgia have? How much natural gas? What regional leverage can it offer in terms of security? Azerbaijan borders Iran. Georgia doesn't. Azerbaijan has strategic weight—Georgia doesn't. So, no, I don't think the Azerbaijan 2.0 model is viable.

**LET'S TALK ABOUT THE MEGOBARI ACT. WHAT'S ITS CURRENT STATUS? WHAT ARE THE PROSPECTS?**

It passed the House of Representatives. It's been approved by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. But in the Senate, the leadership won't bring it to a vote unless the White House and State Department give the green light. That hasn't happened yet.

**WHY NOT?**

Likely because Georgia doesn't rank in the top ten or even top twenty priorities in Washington right now. That's what strategic irrelevance looks like.

**IF IT DOES PASS, WOULD IT BECOME US POLICY?**

Yes. If it passes the Senate, goes to the President, and is signed, it becomes law—and policy.

**DO YOU THINK THAT WILL HAPPEN?**

Honestly, it's hard to say. The Trump-Rubio administration is unpredictable. Even if they support it, they might not implement it. That's just the reality now.

**THE GEORGIAN PM SENT AN OPEN LETTER TO SECRETARY OF STATE MARCO RUBIO. AS A POLITICAL ACT, HOW WOULD YOU ASSESS IT?**

That letter seemed more like a domestic political move than serious diplomacy.



Americans inside and outside government still have a great deal of goodwill toward Georgia. We want Georgia to succeed, to be a democracy, to be part of the West. The door is open. The Georgian people are ready to walk through it. It's just a small group in power who are blocking the way

A better approach would've been a private letter or a direct outreach to the US government. As it stands, it seemed amateurish—more show than substance.

**AND NOW THE US AMBASSADOR IS LEAVING. NO REPLACEMENT IN SIGHT. SO IF BOTH EMBASSIES ARE LED BY CHARGÉS D'AFFAIRES, IS THAT THE NEXT CHAPTER OF IRRELEVANCE?**

Yes. It means a weaker dialogue. Less engagement. And that's a loss for both sides.

**ANY SILVER LININGS?**

Only this: Americans—inside and outside government—still have a great deal of goodwill toward Georgia. We want Georgia to succeed, to be a democracy, to be part of the West. The door is open. The Georgian people are ready to walk through it. It's just a small group in power who are blocking the way.

## PM Appoints New Economy Minister, Davitashvili Becomes Advisor

BY TEAM GT

Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze has announced a reshuffle in Georgia's economic leadership, appointing Mariam Kvrivishvili as the new Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development, replacing Levan Davitashvili. The latter will now serve as the Prime Minister's Chief Economic Advisor and Secretary of the Economic Council.

Kobakhidze praised Kvrivishvili's experience, particularly in tourism and aviation, and expressed confidence in her ability to lead the ministry effectively. "She has already proven herself in key sectors and I believe she will continue to succeed in her new role," the Prime Minister said.

Kvrivishvili, who has served as Deputy

Economy Minister since 2021 and previously headed the National Tourism Administration, thanked the Prime Minister for his trust and emphasized her commitment to continuing and expanding ongoing economic initiatives.

Levan Davitashvili, who had led the ministry since February 2022 and served as Vice Prime Minister since 2021, moves into a strategic role aimed at accelerating investment and economic development. The Prime Minister noted that stepping away from the ministry's day-to-day operations would allow Davitashvili to focus on long-term economic planning and enhancing Georgia's investment climate.

"This change will allow us to better coordinate key projects and attract investments," said Kobakhidze, who also announced plans to strengthen the Economic Council's functions and composition as part of broader institutional reforms.



In his farewell statement, Davitashvili expressed gratitude for the opportunity to serve and reflected on years of cooperation with the government, especially

during difficult times. He highlighted the importance of fast-tracking ongoing strategic projects and acknowledged the role of Georgian Dream founder Bidzina

Ivanishvili in his political career. "This has been a unique chance for me to serve my country and contribute to its development," Davitashvili said.



# From Coin Toss to High Stakes: G GATE CONF Meets Shangri La Tbilisi



BY TEAM GT

**T**his June, Georgia becomes the meeting point for the global iGaming and affiliate marketing community, as G GATE CONF 2025 takes place in Tbilisi on June 28–29 at Expo Georgia.

The two-day event is expected to bring together top industry leaders from across the sector for a weekend of networking, insights, and new opportunities.

In the lead-up to the conference, a special travel episode — inspired by the renowned show *Heads and Tails* — was filmed in Tbilisi, with one particularly memorable scene set inside Shangri La. Following the show's signature coin toss format, the hosts explored the city on two very different budgets, only to reunite at the same destination: Shangri La.

Far more than just a filming location, Shangri La Tbilisi served as a central narrative point — and for good reason. Known for its refined atmosphere, attentive service, and elevated gaming experience, Shangri La continues to be a recognized name in Tbilisi's hospitality and entertainment scene. It strikes a balance between international standards and local charm, offering guests an environment that is both elegant and approachable.

As G GATE CONF unfolds at Expo Georgia, Shangri La invites attendees to close out their conference days with a night that matches the energy and ambition of the event itself. Whether for a relaxed evening, a celebration, or a moment of downtime in the heart of the city, the casino offers a fitting destination.

When in Tbilisi for G GATE, let Shangri La be your final stop — where connections continue, and the night is always young.

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# Maqro City Tbilisi - High Volume Sales Define Opening Phase

BY KESARIA KATCHARAVA

**M**aqro Development has launched its ambitious residential project Maqro City Tbilisi — and the early results have exceeded expectations. Within just two weeks of the project's official announcement and the beginning of sales, more than 700 apartments have been sold. It's a number that, beyond its size, reflects a well-calibrated strategy: targeted pricing, diversified offerings, and a firm focus on accessibility.

As Georgia's capital continues to expand both demographically and economically, this project offers a glimpse into how the residential market is evolving, and how developers like Maqro are positioning themselves to lead it.

## 700 UNITS SOLD IN TWO WEEKS

For a project of this scale, such rapid absorption is unusual in the Georgian real estate context. Maqro's ability to sell over 700 apartments in the first 14 days points to a few key factors: aggressive but calculated pricing, consumer trust in the brand, and a product mix tailored to prevailing market demand.

The volume of early transactions not only reflects pent-up demand, but also a growing class of buyers, both domestic and international, who are looking for properties that are already finished, ready to live in or rent out, and supported by a professional management team.

## STRATEGIC FOCUS ON ONE-BEDROOM APARTMENTS

One of the clearest insights from the first phase is the outsized role of smaller units in driving demand. Maqro Development deliberately focused its initial sales on compact, functional apartments, starting from just 45 square meters. The result: 80% of the apartments sold so far have been one-bedroom units.

This wasn't incidental. The company designed the first phase of Maqro City

Maqro City Tbilisi is, by scale and timing, one of the most consequential residential launches in recent years for the Georgian capital

Tbilisi with accessibility in mind — aiming to offer attainable homeownership and investment opportunities in a city where housing costs are steadily rising. The success of this strategy speaks directly to current market realities: there is growing demand for smaller, lower-cost apartments that don't compromise on quality or livability.

## PRODUCT RANGE

While smaller units have led initial sales, Maqro City Tbilisi is not a one-size-fits-all development. The full project includes a wide array of apartment types to accommodate different lifestyles, buyer profiles, and investment strategies.

Standard apartments make up a significant portion of the offering, and are designed with efficiency in mind. These units feature practical layouts, modern materials, and energy-efficient systems aimed at reducing long-term maintenance and utility costs.

Terrace-type apartments offer expansive outdoor space and panoramic views, appealing to buyers looking for a more open, urban-luxury feel. These terraces are positioned as extensions of the living area, intended for year-round use.

Apartments with private yards are a rarer offering in urban Tbilisi. These ground-floor units cater primarily to families, pet owners, or anyone looking for a residential atmosphere closer to nature, without sacrificing centrality.

Notably, the project also includes Mövenpick Living branded residences — a collaboration that brings the international hospitality brand into the residential market. These units are intended primarily for investors. They come with full-service management, and leverage Mövenpick's reputation for Swiss-standard service and operational quality. The model is fully hands-off: from purchase to tenant management and income generation, the entire process is handled by the operating company, offering consistent returns without daily oversight.

## FULLY RENOVATED

All apartments in Maqro City Tbilisi are delivered fully finished — a significant differentiator in a market where shell-and-core units are still common.

Buyers receive units with painted walls, laminated flooring, aluminum-framed windows, and sliding door systems. Kitchens are outfitted with ceramic tile, cabinetry, and built-in appliances, including an oven, gas stove, and extractor. Bathrooms are also fully equipped and include underfloor heating, a feature that enhances both comfort and energy efficiency.

This ready-to-use approach significantly lowers the barrier for first-time buyers and rental investors alike, who can avoid the often unpredictable costs and timelines associated with post-purchase renovation. Additionally, open and closed parking options are included in the project design, responding to the practical needs of modern urban life.

## LAUNCH PRICING AND THE PATH TO GRADUAL INCREASES

At launch, Maqro Development offered prices from \$1,250 per square meter, explicitly positioned as an introductory rate. From the beginning, the company stated that prices would increase progressively, depending on sales velocity

and project phase advancement — a tactic aimed at creating urgency in the purchasing process, while also rewarding early buyers.

Now, with over 700 apartments sold in a matter of weeks, the upward price adjustment is no longer theoretical, it is already underway. Those who acted early are now holding property that has increased in value, at least on paper, and those still considering a purchase are being met with firmer pricing.

According to Maqro, this phased pricing approach is a core part of its sales model. The structure is designed to drive early demand while protecting the long-term investment value of the units.

## TRUST IN THE BRAND

The Maqro City Tbilisi launch is not just a success in numbers. It is also a reflection of consumer confidence in the Maqro Development brand. With a track record of completed projects and transparent delivery, the company has built a degree of trust that is still relatively rare in Georgia's residential development sector.

In a market where off-plan sales can carry reputational and financial risk, Maqro's commitment to turnkey quality and transparent pricing has helped distinguish the company among both buyers and investors. The strong start to Maqro City Tbilisi suggests that this trust is translating into real purchasing behavior and quickly.

## LOOKING AHEAD - SUSTAINABILITY OF DEMAND AND DELIVERY

Building on a successful launch, the next phase will focus on maintaining Maqro Development's strong pace and delivering on its vision. The company is set to continue construction, meet key delivery milestones, and uphold high-quality standards across all apartment types and development phases.

Additionally, as pricing increases and available units decrease, the second and third phases will likely see a shift in buyer profile from early-stage individual investors and first-time homeowners to

mid- and upper-tier buyers seeking larger apartments or long-term rental assets.

Still, the fundamentals are in place. Demand remains strong, the product is diversified, and the company appears well-positioned to carry forward the momentum of its launch.

Maqro City Tbilisi is, by scale and timing, one of the most consequential residential launches in recent years for the Georgian capital. Its strong opening sales reflect not only a high-functioning sales strategy but also a clear read on what today's real estate market in Tbilisi wants: affordability, functionality, brand trust, and turn-key readiness.

If Maqro Development can maintain this trajectory through construction and handover, Maqro City Tbilisi may well become a reference point for how large-scale residential projects are designed, sold, and delivered in a maturing market.

For now, the message from the market is clear: demand is real, and Maqro's early-stage strategy is resonating but as inventory tightens and prices climb, the window for early participation is already starting to close.

Building on a successful launch, the next phase will focus on maintaining Maqro Development's strong pace and delivering on its vision





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# Advancing Safe Hazelnut Production During and After Harvest



BY TEAM GT

Georgia's hazelnut sector has once again benefitted from a specialized training initiative aimed at enhancing food safety across all stages of production. This recent round of knowledge-sharing sessions focused on practices before, during, and after the

harvest season. Organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in collaboration with AgriGeorgia (Ferrero's local hazelnut subsidiary), the training was supported financially by the European Union and Sweden under the ENPARD IV program.

The primary goal of the training was to strengthen the sector's international competitiveness by promoting advanced food safety protocols throughout the

hazelnut production and processing cycle. Sessions were held in two of Georgia's key hazelnut-producing regions: Kakheti and Samegrelo-Upper Svaneti.

Participants engaged in detailed discussions on essential topics to ensure the high quality and safety of harvested hazelnuts, including:

- Efficient use of machinery in mechanical harvesting;
- Comparing mechanical and traditional

manual harvesting methods;

- Best practices for post-harvest handling, including de-husking, cleaning, and drying;
- Proper techniques for safe and efficient storage;
- Strategies to prevent Aflatoxin contamination during and after harvest at the farm level.

Led by FAO International Expert Matteo Giaccone, the sessions attracted over 100 stakeholders from Georgia's hazelnut value chain. Many of these participants will have the opportunity to join additional training events later this year, co-organized by FAO and AgriGeorgia under ENPARD IV. These upcoming sessions will further deepen knowledge on food safety and Aflatoxin prevention, particularly targeting hazelnut collectors, processors, and exporters.

"Improving food safety standards in hazelnut production directly boosts the sector's competitiveness, both in domestic and international markets—especially in the EU," said Guido Agostinucci, FAO Program Manager. "Together with AgriGeorgia, and with the generous support of the EU and Sweden through ENPARD IV, FAO is tackling critical aspects of food safety from orchard management to post-harvest practices. Applying this knowledge will lead to better-quality hazelnuts and greater economic benefits for Georgia."

Denis Reiss, Program Officer for Sustainable Food Systems at the EU Delegation to Georgia, added: "The European Union applauds the efforts of FAO and the wider Georgian hazelnut value chain in offering sustainable, practical alternatives to traditional production methods. These efforts are vital to ensure safe

handling and to meet international market standards. This educational initiative is a forward-looking investment in the future of Georgian agriculture and food safety."

As a next step in this capacity-building initiative, FAO and AgriGeorgia are planning to host a Hazelnut Sector Machinery Demonstration Day (Demo Day) in July. Also supported by the EU and Sweden through ENPARD IV, this event will bring together farmers and agricultural machinery suppliers. The goal is to foster hands-on learning, promote the adoption of modern technologies, and build stronger networks—ultimately improving productivity, efficiency, and adherence to food safety standards.

## ABOUT THE EUROPEAN UNION

For over 30 years, the European Union has been a committed partner in Georgia's development, supporting progress through knowledge sharing, innovation, and financial assistance. This relationship is rooted in shared values of peace, democracy, human rights, and inclusive economic growth. Learn more: [eu4georgia.eu](http://eu4georgia.eu)

## ABOUT ENPARD

The EU's ENPARD (European Neighborhood Program for Agriculture and Rural Development) has supported rural development in Georgia since 2013. Originally focused on boosting agricultural capacity, ENPARD has since expanded to address rural economic opportunities and, since 2021, food safety improvements. ENPARD IV's food safety component is implemented by FAO and the Czech Development Agency, with additional support from Sweden.

## SOCIETY

# Let Me Count the Ways

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

I've been experimenting a bit with my iPhone of late, using some of its video capabilities to see what it can do. It strikes me that, with a phone or a digital camera of another kind, there are actually many possibilities for altering an image or video. For example:

I'm now shooting timelapse videos. These involve fixing the device in place (any way you can: I'm using a tripod and elastic bands). It helps to have it attached to a power source as well, as the battery can be drained rather more quickly than usual. Then you set it to take an image every X unit of time, which can be anything from a fraction of a second to whatever the software allows. My setting is about 1 frame per second; standard shooting is 28-60 fps. Then note the

starting time, and leave it to do its thing. If you have clouds in the shot, their motion will be sped up to something wonderfully fast yet still smooth. My iPhone's timelapse setting seems to allow only 1 frame rate and a maximum video length of 24 seconds, so it's worth looking online for something with more flexibility.

Or you can go with slow motion video, which is the opposite: more frames per second instead of less, typically 120 fps and up. This will reveal details of fast motion in wonderful clarity, and need not be tripod-mounted or otherwise fixed.

(If you're all in with the video methods, buying a device which lets your camera move slowly through an arc while also shooting will let you change the scene as the shooting is happening).

Most digital SLRs or other digital cameras will let you shoot video as well as stills nowadays, for highest quality. So

you're not limited to just your phone's video camera anymore.

For still shots, try a very slow shutter speed on a fixed camera, choosing lowest ISO and smallest aperture size. This will also blur clouds or motion to something beautifully, ethereally smooth. I recently bought some neutral density filters for my digital SLR camera lenses, to further extend how long a shot I can make by further reducing the light getting to the camera's sensor. I'm looking for something longer than a second in daylight. This will also nicely blur the motion of water to curved lines, and turn stars into star trails at night.

There's a freaky photographic process I have really wanted to try once I found out how to automate it: slitscan. For this, you select a single line, horizontal or vertical, from each digital image of a long sequence (which is typically a set of frames from a video). Line 1 from frame 1, line 2 from frame 2, and so on.

These are all joined into either a video image or a still one, showing scenes which until now have existed only in the imagination. Searching for "slitscan" on YouTube will show how bizarre the effects can get. All the photos with this article are from several freeware slitscan programs I found for my iPhone. Surreal, to match the times we live in at the moment.

Shooting macro (extreme closeup) and want to get the whole subject in focus from back to front? That's called focus stacking. Here you're shooting a fixed object with a fixed camera, changing the focus a little each time, then asking your software to combine the set of shots but use only the in-focus part of each one. Firmly into what's called computational photography here, but this is where we are.

HDR stands for high dynamic range. When your subject is fixed but of very high contrast between highlights and shadows, you shoot a set of images from over-exposed to under-exposed (usually at least three shots, up to as many as are necessary to get detail in all the tones). Then, again, combine them, this time your software joining those exposures together to get an image with detail even

rywhere. This is easy to overdo, but when subtle can be wonderful if it's not too obvious.

Shoot in grayscale instead of color, to emphasize tones and composition with no distraction from hues. Or, on the contrary, over-saturate the colors. Shoot or process in only black and white, no grays at all even: the opposite of HDR, called a 1-bit image. Change your angle of view, from right down on the ground to child's eye-height to as high up as you can get, e.g. from a tall building. Shoot only reflections, in glass, metal, water or mirrors. Find out what controls you can use in manual mode, and play with them. Limits? Where? Only where you place them. The estimate for "world population of photos for 2025" is due to hit two trillion for the first time in history. Take part!

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





# East-West University Signs Groundbreaking Partnership with Arizona State University to Become a Regional Hub in the Caucasus for Innovative, Interdisciplinary, and International Education in Georgia

Powered by Arizona State University, East-West University joins the ASU-Cintana Alliance to transform higher education in Georgia and prepare local and international students for global careers



BY TEAM GT

East-West University is proud to announce a groundbreaking partnership with Arizona State University (ASU)—ranked the most innovative university in the United States for ten consecutive years by U.S. News & World Report (2016-2025). Through this collaboration, East-West University joins the ASU-Cintana Alliance, a global network of forward-looking universities committed to delivering high-quality, globally relevant education that meets the demands of a rapidly evolving world.

East-West University, currently centered around its flagship Medical Doctor Educational Program, is now entering a

bold new chapter. Through its partnership with Arizona State University and status as a Powered by ASU® institution, East-West University is set to accelerate its growth, redefine its academic vision, and relaunch its brand with a compelling global value proposition. East-West University students will benefit from academic experiences aligned with ASU's global standards, including access to ASU-designed curricula, world-class faculty development, global masterclasses, international research collaboration, and student exchange opportunities.

"East-West University is undertaking a strategic initiative to become a regional leader in international education, supported by its partnership with Arizona State University and the extensive global expertise of the Cintana Alliance," said

Giorgi Khurodze, President of East-West University.

In addition, East-West University's expanded programs will be developed as dual degree pathways with ASU, giving students the opportunity—pending future regulatory approval—to earn both a Georgian degree from East-West University and an American degree from Arizona State University. These flexible, phased pathways will empower students to customize their academic journey, enhancing their employability and impact in both local and global markets.

"ASU is engaging with the intention of being part of a movement around the world to expand access to higher education and to expand high quality outcomes," said Michael Crow, President of Arizona State University. "Our work with Cintana is focused on taking educational attain-

ment and helping it to become more ubiquitously available. Wisdom is considered rare, something to be granted to other people and scarcity is considered to be good. That will not get us where we need to be as a species and as a global society. Our goal is to do something about that, at scale, and that's exactly what we are doing."

"East-West University is embarking on one of the most ambitious transformations we've seen in the region," said Douglas L. Becker, Founder and Chairman of Cintana Education. "By joining the ASU-Cintana Alliance, East-West University is not just expanding its academic offerings—it's reimagining what a modern, globally connected university can be. We're proud to support this bold vision to build a new kind of institution that delivers international-quality education and prepares students in Georgia to lead on the world stage."

East-West University also plans to strategically expand and diversify its portfolio of programs, aiming to become a truly international, innovative, and interdisciplinary institution. With this transformation, East-West University aspires to establish itself as a leading academic destination in the region—attracting both local and international students—and achieve an enrollment of over 7,000 students by 2034.

This ambitious growth will be driven by both the enhancement of its medical program and the launch of 22 new academic programs over the next five years. These new programs will span health sciences, business, digital technologies, and social sciences—fields where demand for high-quality education is growing both in Georgia and across the broader region. The initiative comes at a pivotal moment for Georgian higher education, where international student enrollment is increasing at a rate of 24% annually, and private universities now account for nearly 70% of total market growth.



## A Star for Gaioz Kandelaki



Gaioz Kandelaki. Source: [tbilisi.link](https://tbilisi.link)

BLOG BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

A star is being added to the soil of Tbilisi—the star for Gaioz Kandelaki, the art and music guru of his beloved Sakartvelo. This outstanding cultural figure of the country is turning 80 on the 27th of June, and our grateful society is celebrating his octogenarian jubilee. And that's the day when the beautiful Park of Roses (formerly Gorki Park, on Agmashenebeli Avenue in Tbilisi) will witness the unveiling

of the star dedicated to Kandelaki—the recipient of many honors and awards, including honorary citizenship of Tbilisi, the Order of Merit, and the title of Merited Arts Person of Georgia.

Big Band, his beloved creation, will perform in his honor at the Sheraton Grand Tbilisi Metechi Palace on the same day.

Although Gaioz Kandelaki is an engineer by profession, he has devoted his entire youth and adulthood to art and music, having led the Metekhi Drama Theater, Tbilisi State Philharmonic, and Marjanishvili Drama Theater. In his salad years, during the still-thriving Soviet

Georgia, he created and presided over the Youth Club, which roared with popularity among the younger generation of Georgians in the 1960s through the 1980s.

Amazingly, he managed to organize an international jazz-rock festival right before the collapse of the Soviet Union, giving a powerful impetus to a new era of freedom and democracy. In fact, the progress of those times could never have happened without the efforts and tireless contributions of volunteers like Gaioz Kandelaki.

He created and successfully managed various recording studios, consulted for the Tumanishvili Drama Theater, and co-founded the Sachukari (Gift) theatrical festival with Ketil Dolidze, the renowned Georgian director.

And finally, the crown of his amazing career is the famous Tbilisi Big Band. Kandelaki has devoted to this cherished project all the knowledge and experience he has accumulated over decades of honorable service to his country.

Gaioz Kandelaki deserves all our kudos and appreciation. His sense of faith, professionalism, and dedication to the work he has done—and continues to do—is a vivid example for generations to come.

This wonderful family man is not yet done. Gaioz Kandelaki will carry on for a long time because he does not recognize rest or relaxation. His main source of life is work and action—the more, the better!

Georgian Voices Make Historic Debut at Cannes Lions with Powerful Message on Freedom and Values



BY TEAM GT

For the first time in the history of the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity, Georgian speakers took the global stage, delivering a bold message on the role of creativity in defending human rights and democratic values.

The session, titled "Creative Fighters: World War for Values," was led by Vato Kavtaradze, creative director at Windfor's, and Salome Asatiani, journalist and host at Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Their appearance marked a historic milestone for Georgia's creative and media communities, placing them at the center of an urgent global conversation about conscience, resistance, and the power of storytelling.

During the presentation, a striking photo featuring prisoners of conscience was displayed on the screen—a symbolic gesture of solidarity with individuals unjustly persecuted or imprisoned for their beliefs. The speakers used the moment to emphasize the moral respon-

sibility of creatives to stand on the side of truth and justice, especially in regions where democratic values are under threat.

Asatiani echoed this message, highlighting the growing pressure on independent journalism and the critical need to uphold the values of freedom of speech, dignity, and resistance to authoritarianism through both media and creative industries.

Their appearance was met with warm reception and emotional resonance among international attendees, many of whom praised the courage of the speakers and the clarity of their message in a time of rising global polarization.

This debut not only brought Georgia's creative talent to one of the world's most prestigious platforms but also reminded the international audience that creativity can—and must—be a weapon in the global fight for values.

Cannes Lions is the world's leading festival celebrating creativity in marketing, media, and communication. The inclusion of Georgian voices in 2025 is seen as a significant recognition of the country's emerging creative sector and its growing role in the global conversation around values-driven storytelling.



# The Image and Its Witnesses: Magnum Arrives in Tbilisi with Its Most Daring Retrospective Yet



Photo by the author

BY IVAN NECHAEV

In the darkened hall of the Tbilisi Photography and Multimedia Museum, nine screens glimmer with images that breathe through silence. The space fills not with declarations, but with textures — of memory, rupture, displacement, and proximity. With *Those Who Know Secret Things or Else Alone*, the flagship exhibition of the 2025 Tbilisi Photo Festival, curated by Nestan Nijaradze in collaboration with Magnum Photos, reveals photography as a threshold — a membrane where the visible and the unspoken pass through each other. The exhibition forms no single story, but unfolds as a field of encounters, where every frame gathers the atmosphere of a world suspended between forces, bodies, and time.

Thomas Dworzak's *Kavkaz* begins like a song of return. Georgia, the Caucasus, becomes a terrain where devotion, trauma, and belonging are fused. His images hold both the heat of wartime memory and the cool intimacy of everyday life. They emerge from within the social fabric — not as portraits of the other, but as gestures of fidelity. Dworzak raises a visual toast not to an idea, but to people and their textures, to the accident of having belonged somewhere with the depth of obsession.

In *Niagara*, Alec Soth turns his lens toward a landscape soaked in metaphor. The falls shimmer behind motel curtains, above pawnshop glass, inside letters that trace love and its evaporation. The project unfolds as a murmured ballad of disillusionment, with every frame thickened by absence. Soth composes with restraint, letting the emptiness of rooms and the soft decay of ritual speak to a broader sense of emotional gravity. His photographs linger at the edge of confession, where vulnerability loses its urgency and becomes form.

Black's *American Geography* unspools

across highways and hollows, forming a dense map of economic exclusion. His stark monochromes do not flatten time but concentrate it. Each image arrives with a quiet pressure — faces, fields, corners of forgotten towns. The United States appears less as a nation than as a network of statistical blind spots, connected through poverty zones that never touch center stage. Black writes in the language of evidence and accretion, assembling a geography that insists on being seen in its totality, one contour at a time.

Gregory Halpern returns to Buffalo in *King, Queen, Knave* and photographs its psychic atmosphere rather than its monuments. The city emerges as a series of symbolic fragments: gestures, shadows, collisions of light. His camera attends to the uncanny without theatrics, assembling a lyrical system where hope and entropy meet in the folds of ordinary places. The work reads like a slow, continuous dream — one in which meaning floats just below the surface of objects and people, always about to announce itself.

Jacob Aue Sobol's *With and Without You* spans continents, relationships, and years, but it orbits around a single center of gravity: the act of intimacy. His black-and-white frames pulsate with warmth and fracture, drawn from encounters in Bangkok, Tokyo, Guatemala, Siberia, Copenhagen. The photographs breathe with the rhythm of someone who walks beside, who listens, who enters the moment without asking it to perform. Sobol's practice is anchored in human connection, built through participation rather than distance, shaped by the repetition of emotion rather than narrative.

In *Valparaíso*, Sergio Larraín returns to the port city of his youth and lets it unfold like a remembered verse. The city, perched between ocean and Andes, slips through his lens as if composed of fog, angles, and memory. Larraín does not pursue spectacle but invites the everyday to reveal its own choreography — staircases, window frames, empty

alleys. Each photograph appears to have been found rather than taken, as though it arrived from another dimension of time, still pulsing with the breath of its original moment.

Nikos Economopoulos gathers his images of the Balkans like fragments of an epic poem. Faces, ruins, gestures flicker through a region governed by feeling rather than resolution. His camera moves through spaces charged with emotional contradiction — celebrations that tremble with foreboding, silences that vibrate with unspoken tension. The work does not settle into narrative arcs; it gathers intensity through accumulation, assembling a region of pure symbolic saturation, where identity and danger live inside the same breath.

Ferdinando Scianna composes *The Sicilians* as an act of cultural attention, turning his lens not on a place but on its people as living scripture. His photographs carry the weight of custom and the force of simplicity, building a visual architecture of posture, gesture, and dignity. The work is infused with a rhythm that belongs to ritual and ancestry, not to the news cycle. Sicily is not captured. It reveals itself through the faces and ceremonies of those who carry its continuities forward, stone by stone.

Larry Towell enters the world of the Mennonites with a patience that allows time itself to change tempo. Mennonites is both document and diary, built from the trust between observer and observed. His photographs are filled with hushed moments — domestic scenes, ploughed fields, silent kitchens — drawn from a community that marks its difference not through resistance, but through devotion to continuity. Towell gathers these images as a liturgy of small details, as a way of witnessing lives shaped by humility, repetition, and spiritual precision.

Lua Ribeira constructs *Subida al Cielo* as a constellation of deeply theatrical encounters, each charged with the tension between representation and transformation. Her images borrow their symbolic weight from mythology, religious ritual, and vernacular gestures. Migrants, cognitively disabled women, processions of *Semana Santa* — each subject is staged not for clarity but for resonance. Ribeira creates a grammar of figures suspended in symbolic space, where identity dissolves into movement, and gesture replaces explanation.

Antoine d'Agata, in *Method*, turns the lens into a tool for confronting structures of power that shape contemporary violence. His images carry the texture of delirium, mapping a world in which brutality hides inside normalization. Bodies appear in fragments, faces blur, spaces collapse into heat and darkness. This is not a photojournalistic account, but a psycho-political meditation on extremity. D'Agata distills the forces that govern the present — surveillance, media, religious orthodoxy — into raw visual sensation, one that vibrates with moral exhaustion.

Sohrab Hura, in *The Coast*, follows the edge of the sea as if it were a psychological fault line. The images carry the volatility of sudden shifts, mirroring the emotional climate of a society frayed by tension. Faces contort, bodies shiver, weather presses against skin. The shoreline becomes a membrane that barely holds together a fragile sense of order. Hura allows chaos to surface gently, not as explosion but as accumulation, composing a suite of images that feel like aftershocks of an invisible quake.

Yael Martínez's *Luciernagas* begins in grief and ends in a visual rite of illumination. After the disappearance of family members in Guerrero, Martínez reimagines mourning as a symbolic process. His photographs are pierced and backlit, turning absence into architecture. These images radiate — not from the center, but from the wound. Fireflies become the carriers of memory, carriers of ritual, carriers of a luminous language that refuses to let violence



Photo by the author

erase what it cannot name.

Moises Saman composes *Discordia* from years of immersion in the Arab Spring. The sequence builds not from reportage but from a deep listening to atmosphere — repeated gestures, haunting fragments, gestures in flux. Through layered spreads and open-ended sequences, Saman portrays the emotional weather of revolution. Faces recur. Streets blur. History reconfigures itself without resolution. The book reads like an epic told through ellipses, through the silence between moments, through the untranslatable weight of surviving unrest.

Cristina de Middel, in *Journey to the Center*, constructs a migration narrative that traverses myth, danger, and political opacity. Her images, often staged and interwoven with found material, assemble a kaleidoscopic account of the journey through Mexico toward the U.S. border. She draws from magical realism not as style, but as structural possibility — where fiction and fact coexist in a shared geography of longing. The result is not a linear testimony but a visual epic, where the dignity of movement and the chaos of crossing coexist in a tapestry of cinematic suggestion.

Jérôme Sessini returns to Ukraine across the years, from Maidan to Donbass, gathering a long arc of geopolitical trauma and resistance. His images do not fix events. They render states of being. The war becomes a mood that saturates surfaces — buildings, hands, eyes, air. Sessini's camera listens to exhaustion, records the textures of siege, frames the fragile gestures that persist when ideology collapses into rubble. His Ukraine is not abstract. It is inhabited, haunted, and unfolding in the space between memory and the next alarm.

This exhibition offers a terrain of attention. Each image carries the density of another's life — the rhythms of their language, the scent of their fears, the gravity of their gestures. Here, the image becomes a position, a way of holding space for reality in its layered forms. The viewer walks not along a path of interpretation, but through a landscape of presences, held in light and silence. Photography, in this constellation, approaches the power of ritual: a way of staying close to the pain of others, and of recognizing the fragile architecture of being alongside.



Photo by the author



Photo by the author



Photo by the author



# The Architecture of Touch at Tbilisi Piano Fest: A Week of Pianistic Revelations Across Georgia's Capital

REVIEW BY IVAN NECHAEV

In a musical landscape increasingly saturated with spectacle and sameness, the Tbilisi Piano Fest (June 17–28, 2025) offers a rare counter-example: a festival that curates instead of merely programs, that listens as much as it plays, and that — above all — believes in the piano as a thinking, breathing, emotionally volatile protagonist of the 21st century.

Under the artistic direction of Dudana Mazmanishvili, the festival has grown into one of the most intellectually vital and aesthetically coherent events in the region — and not just by Caucasian standards. Mazmanishvili, a pianist of strong convictions and wide musical horizon, demonstrates that curatorial taste is not just about picking big names, but about building a narrative — one that stretches across borders, styles, and generations. Rather than rely solely on celebrity status, this year's edition of Tbilisi Piano Fest offered a collection of uncompromising musical personalities, each of whom brought their own grammar of touch, silence, and timing.

Andrius Žlabys, the Lithuanian-American pianist and former protégé of Alfred Brendel, gave one of the most elegant and introspective recitals of the series. Each work unfolded as an extension of breath and structure, as if drawing from a common source of meditative clarity.

The program began with Bach's Partita No. 6 in E minor, rendered in a style that emphasized its rhetorical shape and emotional undercurrents. Žlabys shaped the ornamentation not as surface detail, but as part of the phrasing logic, connecting gesture to harmonic motion. Weinberg's Children's Notebook and Kancheli's Simple Music for Piano introduced a gentler, more introspective

dimension. In these smaller forms, Žlabys revealed an attention to nuance and stillness, with silences that framed each miniature like an epigram. With Franck's Prélude, Choral et Fugue, the recital moved toward a deeper harmonic density. Franck's architecture, cyclical and devotional, emerged with solemn pacing and luminous counterpoint. The program concluded with Žlabys's own composition, Echoes of Light — a distilled, harmonically ambiguous landscape of resonances. Through it, the pianist extended the evening's introspection into a tonal space shaped by memory, reflection, and acoustic decay.

Aleksei Volodin's recital was both dazzling and architecturally rigorous — a traversal of Romantic narrative forms, anchored in the duality of restlessness and return. The program's fulcrum was Schubert's "Wanderer" Fantasie, a work that Volodin approached not as a showpiece but as a philosophical arc: the fantasy as existential mapping. His structural command and rhythmic logic lent weight to even the most bravura passages, turning technical virtuosity into conceptual rhetoric.

He began with Grieg's Lyric Pieces, framing them not as sentimental trifles but as fragments of inward experience. The interplay between "To Spring" and "Elegy," for instance, functioned like polar emotional poles — light refracted through distance and loss. Liszt's "Funérailles" was unsentimental, almost stoic in its grandeur. Unlike many pianists who succumb to its emotional excess, Volodin kept the funeral march taut and the rhetoric lean. His Beethoven "Les Adieux" Sonata was less about theatrical farewell than about the tonal politics of departure and return — each movement internalized as argument. The encore — Schubert's "Das Wandern" — tied it all together: the wanderer as metaphor not just for Romantic longing but for the

pianist's own aesthetic route through the evening.

The young Spanish pianist Martín García García brought an evening of Romantic maximalism, filtered through a unique Iberian temperament. His Chopin Polonaise-Fantaisie was massive yet personal — the opening chromaticism less an invitation than a question. García García refuses to flatter the piano: he exposes it.

A revelation was Chopin's early Sonata No. 1, rarely heard and rarely played with such fierce linear clarity. It was not a "young" work in his hands — it became prophetic. From here, the recital took an Iberian detour, with Mompou's Variations on a Theme by Chopin, whose ascetic dissonances and modal dissolutions García García executed with minimalist tact. But the summit was Albéniz's "La Vega" and "Iberia" Book III — not as picturesque national color, but as complex textures of modernism and memory. "Lavapiés" in particular, with its polyrhythmic combustion and jagged inner voices, revealed García García's orchestral imagination: pedal as palette, not effect. The concert's architecture was deliberate: Romanticism as both cradle and crucible of invention.

Konstantin Lifschitz, always the philosopher-pianist, brought an austere and intellectually formidable program that explored the dialectics between structure and fracture. His Bach (BWV 989 & 944) was precise, yes, but more importantly, discursive. Each variation in the Aria Variata functioned as commentary on the previous one — a form of hermeneutic play.

But the concert turned in a darker direction with Shostakovich's Sonata No. 2 — a work that shivers with disintegration. Lifschitz did not play the sonata as Soviet gesture, but as post-tonal lament: the final movement's hollow chords echoed like failed attempts at closure. The



Photo by the author

final ascent — Chopin's 24 Preludes, Op. 28 — was neither an anthology nor an emotional diary. Lifschitz structured them as a cycle of contradictions: brevity against density, charm against violence. Prelude No. 20 (C minor) bled directly into No. 21 (B-flat major) like a dissonant resurrection. His pacing was daring: silences expanded, phrases stretched, registers carved like architectural masses. This was not Chopin the poet — but Chopin the builder, haunted by collapse.

Italian pianist Francesco Libetta closed the main concert series with an almost anachronistic recital: technically stunning, unapologetically beautiful, and emotionally radical.

The opening Weber "Invitation to the Dance" set the tone — stylized, urbane, but under Libetta's fingers, ghosted by melancholy. His Schumann Études Symphoniques were nothing short of revelatory. Libetta reimagined the variations as psychological stations, each one deconstructing a facet of Schumann's

fragmented identity. There was tenderness, yes, but also an undercurrent of agitation — the composer's elusive center mirrored in the pianist's unstable rhetoric.

Then came Chopin — not as salon fare, but as metaphysical study. His choice of Études (from Op. 25) leaned toward inner turmoil rather than fireworks. The sequence of Ballade, and Scherzo that followed functioned as thematic variations on the idea of circular time. There was an uncanny calm in Scherzo No. 3, like someone playing through memory. It was no longer about pianist versus instrument — but about a strange fusion, a kind of pianistic Gesamtkunstwerk.

Across the last five nights, Tbilisi Piano Fest 2025 offered a sequence of pianistic perspectives marked by intellectual coherence and tonal imagination. The artistic direction of Dudana Mazmanishvili ensured that each program contributed to a broader narrative — not as isolated recitals, but as episodes in a living dialogue about form, silence, virtuosity, and harmonic meaning.

The festival is not over yet. Still to come is the long-awaited solo concert of Dudana Mazmanishvili herself, whose presence as performer will offer a deeper, more personal insight into the very aesthetic she so carefully fosters as curator. That this performance is placed toward the end of the festival is no accident: it suggests an epilogue, a coda where ideas converge into personal expression. The final open-air concert on June 28 is a joyful, democratic gesture in the heart of Tbilisi. Featuring celebrated Georgian pianists David Aladashvili, Valerian Shiukashvili, and the Tbilisi Youth Orchestra the event will bring the festival into the public square — quite literally. It's a statement that classical music is not just for the initiated, but for children, families, and passersby who might hear a piano and pause.

## Reflecting on Growth: Mako Lomadze's Journey after the 2020 BI Auction Competition

BY TEAM GT

Another month, another excitement to introduce one more successful young artist of the first BI Auction Competition for Young Artists (2019–2020).

Mako Lomadze participated with many artworks that immediately catch the eye and hold the viewer's attention. "Not only the sharp, striking colors she uses but also the themes she explores make you curious about her personality—one she keeps at a slight distance from the viewer," says Bengü Akçardak Küçük, Co-Founder of BI Auction.

In 2020, Mako Lomadze was selected as the BI Auction Competition winner. In this interview, she shares how that moment impacted her career, her thoughts on the current state of the art world, and what she's working on now.

### YOU WON THE BI AUCTION COMPETITION IN 2020. WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN YOUR ARTISTIC JOURNEY SINCE?

The BI Auction in 2020 happened to be the first auction I participated in. Around that period, I was already immersed in expanding my practice and exploring



new directions.

Over the past five years, my career has evolved steadily and meaningfully—both in Georgia and internationally. I've developed major projects, exhibited abroad,

and taken part in multiple artist residencies.

My works have entered institutional and private collections across Europe, Georgia, and North America. It has been



a time of consistent growth, deepening my vision and widening my network, with a focus on emotionally and conceptually layered storytelling through painting and installation.

### HOW DO YOU FEEL/ EVALUATE THE SITUATION REGARDING ART AND ARTISTS THESE DAYS?

The art world today is both fragile and vibrant. While structural challenges remain—especially for emerging and independent artists—I sense a growing global urgency to support meaningful art practices that address our social, political, and ecological realities. Artists are adapting, building new communities, and reimagining ways of working.

Despite the difficulties, I remain hopeful and inspired by the resilience and

solidarity I see in the creative field.

### WHAT IS AHEAD IN TERMS OF PROJECTS AND EVENTS FOR YOU?

I'm currently preparing for upcoming art residencies in Spain and Italy, as well as an exhibition in Switzerland. In parallel, several other projects are in development, both solo and collaborative, which I look forward to sharing more about soon.



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