



FOCUS ON EDUCATION

This week's GT focuses on the plethora of educational opportunities available to Georgia's youth

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Image source: momblogsociety.com

Coffey: Western Policymakers Need to Start Thinking about the Possibility of a Ukrainian Victory

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE FOR RFE

I think when Zelensky spoke at the Congress, he was trying to speak directly to the American people, above Congress, above the presidency: straight to the American people. And I think it was well received by everyone. The United States has allocated around \$13 billion in aid right now to Ukraine, which is three times their annual defense budget. I think he's also aware of the contribution of other weapons that the US is giving, including these newer tactical UAVs, the so-called switchblades. Without Zelensky speaking at Congress the way he did, I doubt this administration would have gone that far, - says Luke Coffey, Director of the Heritage Foundation's Foreign Policy Center, in an interview with Radio Free Europe's Georgian service.

According to Coffey, who has researched the post-Soviet space for years, thanks to new supplies of American weapons, Ukraine has gained a tactical advantage over Russia.



Continued on page 4 Luke Coffey. Image source: trt.net.tr

Prepared for Georgia Today Business by GALT & TAGGART

As of 21-Mar-2022

Markets				STOCKS				CURRENCIES			
	Price	w/w	m/m		Price	w/w	m/m		Price	w/w	m/m
BONDS				Bank of Georgia (BGEO LN)	GBP 11.94	+3.1%	-15.6%	GEL / USD	3.2216	-0.3%	+7.7%
GRAIL 07/28	89.21 (YTM 6.11%)	+0.6%	-7.8%	Georgia Capital (CGEO LN)	GBP 5.96	+11.6%	-6.1%	GEL / EUR	3.5490	+0.4%	+5.0%
GEBGG 07/23	102.41 (YTM 4.13%)	-2.2%	-1.9%	TBC Bank Group (TBCG LN)	GBP 10.32	+3.2%	-25.3%	GEL / GBP	4.2420	+0.9%	+4.3%
GEOPAP 03/24	96.58 (YTM 8.05%)	-0.3%	-4.4%	GEL / CHF	3.4543	+0.5%	+5.8%	COMMODITIES			
SILNET 01/27	97.92 (YTM 8.91%)	+0.2%	-3.9%	Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	115.62	+8.2%	+21.2%	GEL / RUB	0.0302	+12.7%	-19.3%
TBC 06/24	103.61 (YTM 4.05%)	+0.1%	-0.5%	Gold Spot (US\$/Oz)	1935.91	-0.8%	+1.6%	GEL / TRY	0.2172	-0.3%	-0.5%
GGU 07/25	101.51 (YTM 7.23%)	-0.6%	-4.1%	INDICES				GEL / AZN	1.9040	+0.2%	+8.1%
				FTSE 100	7442.39	+3.5%	-0.6%	GEL / AMD	0.0066	+4.7%	+5.9%
				FTSE 250	21006.56	+2.6%	-0.4%	GEL / UAH	0.1096	+3.6%	+5.1%
				DAX	14326.97	+2.9%	-2.7%	EUR / USD	0.9078	-0.7%	+2.7%
				DOW JONES	34552.99	+4.9%	+1.4%	GBP / USD	0.7595	-1.3%	+3.3%
				NASDAQ	13838.46	+10.0%	+2.1%	CHF / USD	0.9337	-0.5%	+1.9%
				MSCI EM EE	38.15	+6.2%	-74.4%	RUB / USD	118.6895	-	+48.8%
				MSCI EM	1115.26	+5.7%	-8.5%	TRY / USD	14.8278	+0.1%	+8.3%
				SP 500	4461.18	+6.9%	+2.6%	AZN / USD	1.6958	+0.0%	-0.1%
				MSCI FM	2585.66	+2.4%	-4.2%	AMD / USD	488.9100	-4.4%	+2.0%



Municipal Spaces on Gudiashvili Square to be Sold at Auction

Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze announced at the government session of the capital that the municipal spaces on Gudiashvili Square are to be sold by auction. "Gudiashvili Square is completely in order today. The second stage of work is underway, where 16 houses have been added and their rehabilitation works are being carried out. The first part, where we have completed rehabilitation, needs an owner who will take care of it, use it in the right way. Of course, one thing is the beauty, the importance of these monuments, but, it has another side – an

economic side, as well," Kaladze said. The mayor noted that the business sector will be given the opportunity to use these spaces, which are municipal property. "We will prepare the documentation to put these spaces up for auction and sell them to the business sector so that all of them can be used properly later, however, in parallel with this process, the Tbilisi City Hall will be involved so that Gudiashvili Square is properly developed and we do not accept cafes and bars that may not be acceptable to the city and pose problems," Kaladze said.

PM Meets with NATO Assistant Secretary-General for Intelligence and Security

On March 24, Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili held a meeting with David Kettler, NATO Assistant Secretary-General for Intelligence and Security. The conversation focused on NATO-Georgia cooperation and the military

action in Ukraine affecting the security situation in Eastern Europe, with emphasis on the importance of the international community's maximal effort toward ending the war as soon as possible. The meeting underlined the successful development of practical cooperation between NATO and Georgia, also high-

lighting that it is important to further this partnership in order to modernize Georgia's defense forces and bolster the country's defense-capability. The meeting was attended by Colonel Kaupo Rosin, Head of the NATO Liaison Office Alexander Vinnikov, and Georgia's Defense Minister Juansher Burchuladze.



Georgia Beats Spain, Wins Rugby Europe Championship 2022



Image source: 1TV Sport

The Georgian rugby team, also known as the Lelos, won the Rugby Europe Championship 2022. The Georgian team hosted the Spanish team and defeated them 49-15. Georgia won the title of Rugby Europe for the fourteenth time. Vasil Lobzhanidze was named the best player of the match.

Going Back to the USSR: Russia's Cost of Living Soars by More than 14%



The cost of living in Russia is surging following the country's invasion of Ukraine, new data shows. Official figures show the price of some household staples – such as sugar – have jumped by as much as 14% over the past week, reports the BBC. Inflation is set to keep rising in Russia, where the Ruble has fallen sharply since the Ukraine war began. The value of the currency has dropped about 22% this year, and this has pushed up the cost of importing goods. "On Wednesday, Russia's economic ministry said annual inflation had jumped 14.5% in the week ending 18 March – the highest rate since late 2015. "The Federal State Statistics Service said the cost of sugar rose by as much as 37.1% in certain regions of the country and increased by an average 14%," reads the article. Sugar was the biggest gainer in the week, the government agency found. The price of onions was the second biggest riser over the week, up 13.7% nationwide and 40.4% in some areas. Meanwhile, nappies were 4.4% more expensive. Prices for black tea rose 4% and toilet paper increased by 3%. The lines for sugar in Saratov were

hard not to compare to the Soviet era, part of a recent run on Russian staples that have revived fears that the Kremlin's invasion in Ukraine will lead to a virtual slide back to the shortages or endless queues of the Soviet Union, reports the Guardian. The publication notes that bags of sugar and buckwheat began disappearing from local markets in early March, just a week after Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine. "And when the local mayor's office announced that it would hold special markets for people to buy the staples last week, hundreds showed up," reads the article. "People are sharing tips about where to get sugar. This is crazy," said Viktor Nazarov, who said that his grandmother had tasked him with visiting the special market last weekend to stock up. "It's sad and it's funny. It feels like a month ago was fine and now we're talking about the 1990s again, buying products because ... we're afraid they'll disappear." After an hour and a half waiting at the city's main square, he was limited to buying one bag of five kilograms, he said. Other videos shared on social media have shown fights for sugar in markets in other cities in Russia, all while officials have maintained that the shortage is part of an artificial crisis.



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Invites 16-20 year old young speakers to take part in the

Public Speaking Competition

The theme of the competition is "We expect too much from our heroes". Speakers may interpret this theme in any way they see fit, but they should not use the theme as their title. Each speaker will be allocated 5 minutes.

The competition will be held in three rounds. The first round, March 21, at the English Language Centre "British Corner".

The date and theme of the second round will be announced later.

The competition is sponsored by the Bank of Georgia.

Due to the pandemic the final of the competition in London will be held online.

The deadline for registration is March 15.

Contact us:
"British Corner", Vake Park
(entrance from I. Abashidze St.).
Tel.: 032 226305, 591339993, E mail: marinaesu@yahoo.com; britishcornerbc@gmail.com
www.esugeorgia.com <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mnIKLMa7rBA>

The World Standing by Ukraine: Fears of What a Ukraine Loss Could Mean, Urge for Reasonable Peace Talks

BY KETEVAN SKHIRTADZE

The Financial Times this week reported that Ukraine and Russia had made significant progress on a 15-point peace plan that includes a ceasefire and the withdrawal of Russian troops if Kyiv agrees to neutrality and a reduction of its armed forces. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's aide Mykhailo Podoliak responded by accusing FT of publishing "a draft which represents the requesting position of the Russian side and nothing more."

"FT published a draft that represents the requesting position of the Russian side. Nothing more. The Ukrainian side has its own positions. The only thing we confirm at this stage is a ceasefire, the withdrawal of Russian troops, and security guarantees from a number of countries," he tweeted.

The publication quoted five anonymous sources as saying that the agreement provided for Kyiv's refusal to join NATO and the deployment of foreign military bases or weapons on Ukrainian territory, with its security guarantors being allies such as the US, UK and Turkey.

The report said the biggest obstacle remains Russia's demand for Ukraine to recognize Moscow's sovereignty over Crimea and the so-called Independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk republics.

"Russia and its leader Vladimir Putin, show no signs of participating in responsible talks and ending Russia's bloody aggression against Ukraine," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated on Thursday at a press briefing in Washington.

"We commend Ukraine for being at the table despite being under bombardment every minute of the day. At the same time, I've not seen any meaningful efforts by Russia to bring this war that it's perpetrating to a conclusion through diplomacy," he said.

Blinken noted that the US fully supports Ukraine's efforts to de-escalate through diplomacy, to reach a ceasefire and the withdrawal of Russian forces. In this regard, Blinken welcomed the efforts of other nations, including France, Germany, Israel, and Turkey.

The US top diplomat also emphasized that diplomacy requires a responsible attitude from both parties to the nego-



President Zelensky. Image source: wired.com

tiations and direct de-escalation.

"I don't see signs right now that Putin is prepared to stop. On the contrary, if you listen to his most recent remarks yesterday, it suggests he is moving in the opposite direction," he said.

"[The peace talks][are] the only chance for Russia to reduce the damage from its own mistakes," Zelensky said in a video address.

"It's time to meet, it's time to talk, it's time to restore territorial integrity and justice for Ukraine. Otherwise, Russia's losses will be such that you will need several generations to recover," he said.

Zelensky said in a video address on the night of March 18 that, "the occupation forces have been stopped in almost all directions" and "the initial plan of the Russian army to occupy Ukraine has failed."

His speech came after Putin spoke to tens of thousands of Russians at an event celebrating eight years since the annexation of Crimea.

A NOBEL PEACE PRIZE NOMINATION FOR UKRAINE?

Meanwhile, European politicians addressed the Nobel Prize Committee to extend the nomination procedure for the Nobel Peace Prize until March 31, 2022, to allow for a Nobel Peace Prize nomination for President Zelensky and the people of Ukraine.

"In light of historically unprecedented events, we respectfully call upon the Nobel Peace Prize Committee to re-open and reconsider the 2022 nomination

procedure for the Nobel Peace Prize," they wrote.

"The world is shocked by the images of war coming from Ukraine. Millions of families are now living in fear, their homes and livelihoods threatened by bombardments and an invasive army. We are witness to the courage of the people of Ukraine withstanding this war waged upon them by the Russian Federation.

"Brave Ukrainian men and women are fighting to preserve democracy and self-government. From the defiant democratically elected Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to the man with tears in his eyes saying goodbye to his family to fight for his country, people all over Ukraine are rising up to resist the forces of authoritarianism. Our words of sympathy and support can hardly do justice to the sacrifices they make for the principles of human rights and peace.

"Right now and around the world fellow democratic citizens are all asking the same question: what can we do to support the people of Ukraine?"

"We believe that now is the time to show the people of Ukraine that the world is on their side. We therefore humbly call upon you, the Committee, to consider extending and thereby re-opening the nomination procedure for the Nobel Peace Prize until March 31, 2022, to allow for a Nobel Peace Prize nomination for President Zelensky and the people of Ukraine.

"Although we are aware that this is a

break with the procedure, we do believe that this break is justified by the current unprecedented situation. It is our democratic duty to stand up to authoritarianism and to support a people fighting for democracy and their right to self-government.

"The veneer of civilization is paper-thin, we are its guardians and we can never rest," reads the letter.

RUSSIANS BANNED FROM EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament, this week tweeted that diplomatic and government staff of Russia and Belarus have been banned from entering the premises of the European Parliament.

"As of today, diplomatic & government staff of Russia and Belarus are banned from entering the premises of European Parliament. There is no place in the House of Democracy for those who seek to destroy the democratic order," she tweeted.

PRESIDENT BIDEN COMES TO EUROPE

On March 25, US President Joe Biden is to travel to Poland following his meetings in Brussels, Belgium with NATO Allies, G7 Leaders, and European Union leaders, where he will discuss international efforts to support Ukraine and impose severe and unprecedented costs on Russia. In Poland, Biden will hold a bilateral meeting with President Andrzej Duda to discuss how the United States, alongside its Allies and partners, is responding to the humanitarian and human rights crisis that Russia's unjustified and unprovoked war on Ukraine has created.

RUSSIA'S PLAN B

While it was initially thought that Russia's interest was to change the Ukrainian government and form a satellite government, thus putting the country under heavy political, economic, and military influence or control from Russia, a source of the American edition the Wall Street Journal, who is an American high-ranking official, this week said that after Russia failed to win an early victory in Ukraine, it changed its strategy and "moved to Plan B."

Under the new strategy, Russia will try to protect the acquired territorial objects and increase pressure on the Ukrainian authorities, including by bombing cities,

to pursue their own interests, the source said, adding that "Putin wants Ukraine to recognize Moscow's claims in the southern and eastern parts of the country, which will allow it to create a land corridor to connect with the occupied Crimea."

If Putin's demands are not met, Russia will try to retain all the occupied territories and further escalate the conflict, the source told WSJ.

GEORGIA AND NATO NEXT?

Evelyn Farkas, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense and former NATO Adviser this week told CNN, "If we lose in Ukraine, if the Ukrainians lose, Vladimir Putin, if he has enough strength to do anything else, will turn to Georgia and take control of it; he will turn to Moldova and take control of Moldova. And then he will challenge NATO, he will try to break NATO and he will challenge our democracy. He is not going to stop unless he is stopped in Ukraine."

The defense expert worries that the war will go on as long as both sides think they can win.

"I hate the words 'provoking Russia,'" she said. "If anyone is provocative, it's Russia. Russia chose this war and Russia chose to slaughter innocent Ukrainians. So, there is a question of 'escalation.' Yes, I like that word better. We do not want escalation; we do not want to do something that will cause Russia to escalate. Nevertheless, we cannot be so afraid of escalation that we rule out things that might actually help the Ukrainians. So we need to assess the risks carefully, but we need to be willing to accept some risks."

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said: "Russian forces are unable to advance in Ukraine despite heavy attacks on cities."

He noted that the Russian leader must hear the truth, stop the war, and try to find a diplomatic solution.

"Putin's attack has been stopped, despite the devastation it brings on a daily basis. The Russian leader must hear the truth, stop the war, and find a diplomatic solution. The war is destroying not only Ukraine but also the future of Russia.

"We are constantly tightening sanctions, but the measures taken should not hurt European states more than they hurt the Russian rulers," Scholz said.

The Chancellor said Ukraine could count on Germany and added that they welcome Ukrainian refugees.

One Month On: The Russian Invasion of Ukraine

BY ANA DUMBADZE

In the fourth week of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Russian advances have been halted or pushed back in many areas, with Ukrainian forces holding out in several cities and also launching effective counter-attacks.

Here are the latest developments on Day 28 of the invasion:

- Russian forces continue to lay siege to the southern city of Mariupol, where food, water and medicine are now scarce;
- Ukrainian forces are reported to have re-taken the town of Makariv to the west of Kyiv;
- Ukrainian forces still hold Kharkiv in the east;
- Russian naval forces remain off the coast of Odesa in the Black Sea.

Russians have made few advances in recent days.

The failure of the initial campaign to seize major cities like Kyiv, Kharkiv and Odesa could result in a "very violent and bloody" stalemate that could last for weeks or months, warns the Institute for the Study of War (ISW).

The ferocity of the Ukrainian resistance has meant Russian forces have been forced to change their approach, the UK Ministry of Defense opined this week.

"They are now pursuing a 'strategy of attrition' which could result in increased civilian casualties and greater destruction of cities in the coming days," they wrote.

A source of the American edition the Wall Street Journal, who is an American high-ranking official, says after Russia failed to win an early victory in Ukraine, it changed its strategy and moved to Plan B.

Under the new strategy, Russia will try to protect the acquired territorial objects and increase pressure on the Ukrainian authorities, including by bombing cities, to pursue their own interests.

THE FIGHT FOR KYIV

Russian forces have been attempting to encircle and cut off the capital, but large areas around Kyiv remain under Ukrainian control, especially in the south.

Russian artillery remains far away from the city center, but shelling continues to cause casualties and destroy homes.

To the west of Kyiv, Ukrainian forces have retaken the small town of Makariv. "The state flag of Ukraine was hoisted over the town of Makariv when the Russians retreated," the Ukrainian military said in a statement this week.

Makariv suffered significant damage as a result of Russian air strikes.

The Russian air force continues rocket bombing in Kyiv, Chernigov, Kharkiv

and Donetsk.

Russian advances to the west of Kyiv had previously stopped in the suburbs of Bucha and Irpin, about 25km from the city center, with Ukrainian forces preventing them from crossing the Irpin River.

Justin Bronk from the UK defense and security think tank the Royal United Services Institute says these new Ukrainian counter-attacks to the west of Kyiv could hamper Moscow's plans to capture the capital, reports the BBC.

RUSSIAN PROGRESS SLOWS IN THE SOUTH

Russian forces initially made rapid gains in the south, with their main objective being the creation of a land corridor between Crimea, which it annexed in 2014, and areas held by Russian-backed separatists in Donetsk and Luhansk.

The main target standing in the center of that objective has been the port city of Mariupol, which has been encircled by Russian forces since the start of March. Ukrainian officials say some 100,000 civilians remain trapped in the city.

On Monday morning, the government in Ukraine rejected a Russian demand to surrender Mariupol. The Russian military had given Ukraine until 05:00 Moscow time to announce the city's surrender, promising that in return it would safeguard two humanitarian corridors

for civilians to leave the city.

Previous attempts to create safe corridors out of the city for civilians through ceasefires collapsed, with those fleeing coming under fire.

Elsewhere in the south, Russian forces appear to be focusing on a drive toward Kryvyi Rih, possibly with the aim of isolating and taking Zaporizhziya and Dnipro from the west, ISW analysts suggested this week.

"To the west, Russia is likely to continue a push towards Odesa with the aim of cutting off Ukraine's access to the Black Sea. Russian naval forces off the coast have fired on the city in recent days but military experts believe capturing Odesa by landing troops from the sea would be very difficult.

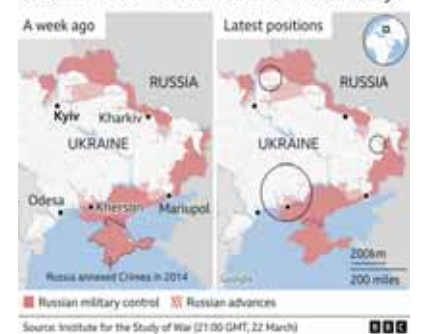
"Russian advances on Mykolaiv, which lies between Russian forces and Odesa, have slowed, and a counter-attack by Ukrainian troops and volunteers has pushed Russian forces back from nearby Voznesensk," reports the BBC.

RUSSIAN ADVANCES IN THE EAST

Fighting continues in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, where Russian-backed separatists held significant territory before the Russian invasion.

In the north-east, Russian troops have almost surrounded the city of Sumy, but Ukrainian forces have prevented attempts

Russians have made few advances in recent days



Source: Institute for the Study of War (21:00 GMT, 22 March)

to cut it off from the south.

A similar attempt to encircle Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, has also been repelled, with analysts saying Russian forces there are in short supply of ammunition.

After a month of devastating war, all the big cities are still controlled by the Ukrainian forces. Russia's failure to score a quick victory has led to a grimmer phase of the war, the end of which is not yet visible.

On the one-month anniversary of invasion, Zelensky urged the world to protest Russian war, making an impassioned plea Thursday for citizens worldwide to pour onto streets and squares in global protest against Russia's bloody month-old invasion.

"The world must stop the war," he said. "Come from your offices, your homes, your schools and universities, come in the name of peace, come with Ukrainian symbols to support Ukraine, to support freedom, to support life."

Coffey: Western Policymakers Need to Start Thinking about the Possibility of a Ukrainian Victory



President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky speaks at the US Capitol in Washington, D.C., on March 16. Source: Pool

Continued from page 1

SO MUCH NOISE WAS MADE ABOUT THESE DRONES. HOW MUCH OF A GAME CHANGER CAN THEY REALLY BE?

I don't know about a game changer, but they will certainly help Ukraine at the tactical level. Firstly, they are very easy to use. If a soldier can use a smartphone, then they can use this. They're very accurate, very effective in terms of destroying tanks, artillery, that sort of thing. While it's not going to be a game changer, it is certainly going to be helpful.

AND THE FIGHTER JETS UKRAINE HAS BEEN LITERALLY BEGGING FOR, THE WEST HAS GONE OUT OF ITS WAY TO REFUSE. WHAT'S GOING ON?

This is one of the more unfortunate aspects of US and Western support for Ukraine. I have no idea why this was announced before the deal was finalized. It's unfortunate, because it's made us look weak, and it's made us look indecisive.

ARE THE ARGUMENTS THE WEST HAS GIVEN NOT TO GIVE UKRAINE JETS CONVINCING?

Not at all. I mean, we're happy to give a random Ukrainian soldier a \$150,000 stinger missile that can shoot down a fighter jet from his shoulder, but we have a problem giving the Ukrainians a fighter jet? It doesn't make any sense. I can't get my head around this argument that one is more provocative than the other. I don't know what the problem is with Biden on this issue. But I do believe that we are beyond the point of advertising and saying publicly what we are giving the Ukrainians - we should stop doing this. Even with President Biden's speech. Don't say we're giving Ukraine Slovakia's S300 missiles - just give Ukraine Slovakia's S300 missiles.

DESPITE NOT GETTING FIGHTER JETS, KYIV DOES CLAIM THAT WITH THE EQUIPMENT THEY ARE GETTING THEY WILL BE ABLE TO CLOSE THE SKY THEMSELVES. IS THAT JUST MILITARY BRAVADO OR REALLY FEASIBLE?

I think the air space is so contested that it might as well be closed from a Russian point of view. They thought they were

going to have air superiority from the beginning, uncontested. The fact that is still contested is an Ukrainian victory. But contested airspace normally means that both sides have advantages. In this case, Russia finds itself at a disadvantage because they believed that they were going to be able to count on uncontested air support, including the quick delivery of soldiers by helicopter. None of this is possible. And the attempts they have made have been devastating for Russia. Every single day Russian jets are shot down.

So, I think a contested airspace is the best thing Ukraine can realistically push for now. Obviously, the best thing would



Whenever stories pop up in the media about neutrality, ask yourself, which country would benefit the most from Ukraine being neutral? When Russians talk about neutrality, they don't mean neutrality for Ukraine, they mean that Ukraine is under Moscow's control

be no Russian air activity, but that's not realistic and so I'm against even discussing a no-fly zone. It's a waste of time. It's never going to happen. People who advocate for a no-fly zone really don't understand what a no-fly zone is. In order to enforce a no-fly zone, the very first thing you do is take out Russian air defense missiles, which means the US would have to hit targets inside the Russian Federation - S400s with a range where they can be inside the Russian Federation, and cover most of Ukraine. Then we have to be willing to shoot at Russian jets. And then we have to be willing to take a risk about not being able to recover our downed pilots, because the only place where the US and NATO could station search and rescue teams to get to a downed pilot quickly is in western Ukraine, while most of the air activities are happening in eastern Ukraine. And people forget about this. We never do no-fly zones unless we know we can rescue a downed pilot. No one wants to be a pilot flying over hostile territory, knowing that if they get shot down, they're stuck.

A RATHER DEFIANT LAVROV REITERATED THAT RUSSIA CONSIDERS WEAPON SUPPLY ROUTES IN UKRAINE AS LEGITIMATE TARGETS. PROVIDED THEY DO INDEED TARGET THEM, WHAT WILL THE WEST'S RESPONSE BE?

Well, if it happens inside a NATO country, then there'll be a military conflict between NATO and Russia. Simple as that. If it happens inside Ukraine, then it's an unfortunate case for Ukraine. I mean, we've already seen evidence of Russian fighters capturing Javelins and Nlows and everything else. This is war. I mean, this stuff happens. A few of my friends were saying, "Oh, no, now the Russians have Javelin." And I was thinking, "Do you think they've never had their hands on a Javelin in the past, like 30 years?" Also, I think Russia has shown an inability to precisely strike moving targets of opportunity. So I don't think Russia has the airpower, or the situational awareness, to systematically target these logistics. It can't even do it around Kyiv, and Russian forces are right outside the city. So, you know, Russia might get lucky, but I don't think it's going to be a game changer in such a way that it changes or

alters the outcome of the conflict.

BEFORE WE GO ON TO DISCUSSING THE PEACE TALKS, LET'S FINISH THE WAR TALK. HOW DO YOU SEE THE SITUATION DEVELOPING FROM NOW ON?

I think anything is possible now. I think Western policymakers need to start thinking about the possibility of a Ukrainian victory. And by victory, I don't mean Ukraine marching into Russia and capturing Moscow, but it's plausible to expect that the Russian military is defeated on the battlefield due to a combination of different factors: morale, lack of supplies, maybe a coup in Russia, mutiny. Then the Ukrainians might be able to fully liberate their territory. I think Zelensky's leadership, the determination of the Ukrainians to fight for their home couples well with the low morale, the lack of readiness, on the Russian side. I mean, we've now seen these big ZAPAD exercises. They're a joke. I mean, there's no way the Russian military should be performing like this. Everyone said in 2008, that you guys gave them a bloody nose. And the Russians said, "Well, we have to reform this and reform that, secure communications, better logistics." None of these lessons were learned. And sending conscripts in. Soldiers from Tskhinvali are now going to Ukraine. The so-called peacekeepers in Karabakh have been summoned. A Russian defeat here can offer an opportunity not only for Georgia, but also for Armenia, for Azerbaijan, to get Russia off their backs for a generation.

If Russia is defeated on the battlefield in Ukraine, it would lead to the end of Vladimir Putin. Not only has Russia suffered a lot of casualties, although they have many more they can waste, the main forces that they've been using are their best forces. They're VDV, they're paratroopers, airborne Spetsnaz, Marines. These units are taking a disproportionately high level of casualties. You cannot just go to a village in Siberia and find someone and say "You're now a paratrooper." You just can't do that.

So I think we're seeing a seismic change in transatlantic security the way we haven't seen since the fall of the Soviet Union. And we're in the early stages of it. Perhaps whoever comes after Putin will take more of an Ataturk approach,



A Russian defeat here can offer an opportunity not only for Georgia, but also for Armenia, for Azerbaijan, to get Russia off their backs for a generation

like Turkey after World War One, after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, where they just wanted to worry about their own borders. Maybe the next Russian leader won't want to worry about Abkhazia or Syria or Tajikistan or Tskhinvali or Karabakh.

PEACE TALKS ARE UNDERWAY. AND IF THE FINANCIAL TIMES IS TO BE BELIEVED, RUSSIA SEEMS DEAD SET ON NEUTRALITY STATUS AND DEMILITARIZATION. HOW FEASIBLE IS THIS, CONSIDERING THE UKRAINIAN DEMAND OF TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY?

Whenever stories pop up in the media about neutrality, ask yourself, which country would benefit the most from Ukraine being neutral? And then ask yourself, does Ukraine look like a neutral country? I think Moscow is driving this narrative, that neutrality is being discussed. But just because something is being discussed, doesn't mean something's being agreed to.

When Russians talk about neutrality, they don't mean neutrality for Ukraine, they mean that Ukraine is under Moscow's control. So I don't believe that the Ukrainians right now are seriously contemplating demilitarizing. Or becoming neutral. I mean, if you're going to be neutral, then you militarize.

IF UKRAINE IS STRONG-ARMED INTO ACCEPTING RUSSIA'S DEMANDS, WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR GEORGIA'S NATO HOPES?

It means that Russia still has a veto. If at the end of this Ukraine chooses to declare that it renounces ever joining NATO and then announces some sort of neutral status, especially where they don't arm - this sets Georgia's aspirations back a long way.

CAN RUSSIA TRY TO GAIN SOME CONSOLATION POINTS AT THE EXPENSE OF GEORGIA IF IT IS UNSUCCESSFUL IN UKRAINE?

I don't think so. First off, if they're unsuccessful in Ukraine, that means the Russian military, a large proportion of the Russian military is either destroyed or defeated. Second, it would mean more international sanctions, especially considering the pipelines in Georgia. Georgia also has stingers and Javelins, and they know how to use them. The bulk of the Russian military is located about 1600 kilometers away in Ukraine, and will have to be moved over the Caucasus mountains, and Putin would have to tell the troops that have just finished one war, "You're not going home, you have to fight another war." I don't want to rule anything out, but even right now, if the fighting stops, the Russian military has been given such a bloody nose that I don't think they're going to be trying something like this again anytime soon.

Invasion Episode 4: A Moi La Légion!



A British foreign fighter waits in Lviv with other volunteers to depart for the front line in eastern Ukraine with the newly formed International Legion of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. By Reuters/Kai Pfaffenbach

BY MICHAEL GODWIN

The sharp chill of another cold early morning breeze in Eastern Europe brushes across their faces. The smell of cigarette smoke and vehicle exhaust fumes blend together in the air around them. Large military packs and equipment of varying patterns are laden upon their travel-weary bodies. These men have come from a diverse concoction of nationalities, professions, and life stories. In a matter of days - or even hours - they will be armed members of the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

For those of the group coming from traditional military service, things are strange. New procedures, odd inquiries, and questionable practices characterize their travels. They are joining a foreign military service after all. However, unlike other full-time regular members of the army, they will be enlistees of its newest branch: The International Legion of Territorial Defense of Ukraine (ILDU).

On February 27, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed into formation this new military unit aimed at bolstering the ranks in the defense against the Russian invasion. As a type of fighting foreign legion style light infantry, the



While armored and mechanized units struggle, light and irregular infantry fighters thrive in the urban jungle, stripping the advanced force of its advantages

Ukrainian government has already begun moving these new units to the combat zones around Kyiv. Despite this large influx of support, many in the military analytical and academic communities have brought into question the efficacy and morality of this new element.

Comparisons have already been made to similar units from history. While the use of foreign fighters or even mercenaries are not something new to warfare, it is the more recent use in the 20th and 21st centuries that presents an interesting comparison and backdrop. The Garibaldi and Abraham Lincoln battalions of the Spanish Civil War are examples of large international communities flowing into the warzone. Comprising of foreign nationals, they were motivated by a fight for democracy, albeit organized and funded by communist groups.

The foreign fighters in the Spanish Civil War were almost entirely composed of volunteers with no military experience. Focused on recruiting more from those with similar ideological viewpoints, the communist benefactors tended to shy away from diversity. The ILDU has notably been a polar opposite of this, accepting anyone who will fight in the defense of Ukraine. However, this has opened it up for those with extreme and even radical ideologies, leading to the potential for what happened on both sides in the 2014 invasion.

At the outbreak of hostilities in early 2014, both Ukraine and the Russian-backed forces rushed to feed their frontlines with willing volunteers. Among the popular armed groups joining the national defense movement, some extremist organizations formed and armed themselves under the guise of a defense group. Nonetheless, the combined militia and federal forces were able to fight the Russian forces to a stalemate in the east.

A relationship of necessary tolerance was struck as the lukewarm conflict continued along the occupation line. In the aftermath of heavy fighting, the rebuilding and retraining of the regular armed forces meant the usefulness of experienced low-cost units gave way to their normalization. The full potential of the new ILDU units has yet to be seen, but the existence of a large group of socio-politically diverse, combat experienced, and heavily armed volunteers could stand to be a double-edged blade

for Ukraine.

The initial problem for these recruits themselves is the confusion and disorganization in logistics. With both personnel and equipment, reports on the ground from volunteers are somewhat bleak. Confusing orders and administration processes, language barriers, and a portion of the volunteers coming with no military or firearms experience spell out a grim vision of the ILDU. A few volunteers have even refused to serve when faced with these circumstances.

For those volunteers that make it into Ukraine, assigned to combat units, there comes another obstacle many thought would not arise. Some recent reports from Kyiv have said that there have been complications with getting the necessary weaponry for them to begin effective service. One American military veteran stated publicly "It's a little disorganized. It's nobody's fault. They weren't really expecting to be invaded, to be thrown into a war."

Despite these logistical bottlenecks, the influx of NATO arms shipments will rapidly fill those gaps, assuming the time is still there. The remaining issue is not with the equipment, but rather with the individual volunteers themselves. Those

seeking service in a wartime foreign legion are a hearty bunch. But what was seen in 2014 and in the volunteers that flocked to Syria to combat the so-called Islamic State at around the same timeframe, they bring their own "baggage."

The inclusion of foreign volunteers in a conflict has typically come with higher than average victimization levels against the civilian populace. Austin C. Doctor and John D. Willingham, both PhDs in Public and International Affairs from the United States, have studied this, saying, "...foreign fighters possess greater capacity for independent agency in war, stepping outside the chain of command to inflict harm against local noncombatants." This combined with the units becoming a breeding ground for extreme ideologies from volunteers serving solely for the purpose of experience, makes volunteer units a risky business.

It must be noted and stressed that there are very few, if any at all, reports of this conduct by foreign volunteers in Ukraine as of the time of writing. While other studies have noticed raised numbers of reprisal killings, these are skewed by the social, political, and religious landscape of other unrelated conflicts in recent history. In fact, with the circumstances of the conflict and general sentiments in the West, it is worth presuming that this conflict will be a welcome outlier in these statistics.

As a counterbalance to this weight, the increased physical support brings with it a litany of benefits for an embattled Ukraine. With the fighting centered in urban centers, and a potential assault of the megacity of Kyiv, the principles of urban warfare come rapidly into view. This form of close-range, brutal, and hyper-kinetic operations is unique in its nature, as it removes traditional equipment and numerical advantages. Despite the larger Russian numbers, Ukraine still holds the advantage in the broken cities of Ukraine.

John Spencer, an expert in urban warfare and a scholar with the Modern War Institute at the United States Military Academy in West Point, states this clearly. Spencer outlines that as the attacker, statistically, one requires approximately five times the force numbers of the defender to achieve a tactical victory. With the increasing numbers of ILDU volunteers, the math equation for Russia to seize many of the key cities is becoming a nightmare for their forces.

Additionally, Spencer speaks at length about a simple but effective tool in urban defense: concrete and obfuscation. While armored and mechanized units struggle, light and irregular infantry fighters thrive in the urban jungle. This urban jungle, uncondusive to armored units due to the rubble and rough terrain created by the shelling, strips an advanced force of its advantages. The lessons of Pavlov's House in the Battle of Stalingrad still rings true; urban defenders entrenched incredibly deep and using elevated positions can defy a superior enemy. By both



We have been putting in our time here, very hard drilling, and are supposed to have learned in six weeks what the ordinary recruit, in times of peace, takes two years to. - Alan Seeger, American poet and volunteer in the French Foreign Legion, 1914-1916

using the physical barriers and confusing layout of a ruined city, and forming strategic choke-points, the agile ILDU can turn Kyiv into a death sentence for the invader.

Another additional aspect of these volunteers is their experience. With many coming from NATO countries having served in operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other hotspots around the globe, the knowledge base of the force is expanding. From the urban fighting in Mosul and Baghdad to unconventional warfare across Afghanistan, these veterans bring ideas and methods that the Russian force most likely has never seen, let alone experienced in combat.

Assuming the command and control elements of the ILDU are adequate and confident, the unit poses a significant threat to the Russian force. Despite the Kremlin's repeated threats about their treatment of "foreign mercenaries" in Ukraine, there has been very little change in the flow of volunteers. The West has pledged a significant base of support; materially, politically, and economically. Now, with new foreign volunteer battalions being organized daily, a de facto NATO force has virtually formed, on its own, to deploy against the Russian bear and its vicious transgressions. Despite Russia's artillery, often referred to as the "god of war," the light infantry, the proverbial "queen of battle" may win out in the end.



After four weeks of war in Ukraine more than 2 million people have fled into neighboring European nations seeking asylum and over 20,000 foreign volunteers have entered the country. Photo by Oleksandr Ratushniak/AP

A Different View of the War

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

The Russian-Ukrainian now month-old fratricidal war is yet another heartbreaking example of unbecoming strife between Christians. Moreover, one that is happening between long-lived-together and successfully surviving Christian Orthodox believers who should ideally and presumably be helping each other against a mutual enemy (provided they have one), not killing one another so uncompromisingly and relentlessly. In reality, these two closely-related peoples should be the epitome of brotherhood and friendly cooperation, not maintaining and presenting to the world this horrible pattern of bitter hostility and unmitigated hatred. At the very least, their historically-shared ethnic origin, if not their joint Christian faith, should keep them clear of this interminable scary contention.

In our modern complicated and heavily interdependent world, all these political interests, national security exigencies, economic stresses and geopolitical pressures might easily be understood, but why this heinous bloodshed between members of the same genetically and culturally intertwined family, one which has in the past done many good things in their happier togetherness? I will never believe that Russians and Ukrainians lack so badly the mental and linguistic ability to reach an equally beneficial and

reciprocally acceptable agreement on things; to peacefully negotiate the matured between them issues, and to make way for further mutually useful and advantageous development.

To the most regrettable chagrin of both nations, they have needed help in the last 30 years to find a common non-violent tongue, and there are some nations out there who want and are ready to provide assistance. Yet, those who are prepared to help at times become the inciters of discord, inadvertently provoking an unwanted clash between the siblings- the abettors, if there are any, being the most civilized and well-to-do nations that the world has ever known. They may not be intentionally doing harm, but the result is very much real and present. What if those helpers give preference to nonstop go-between aid rather than continually supplying the sides with destructive armament?

The strangest thing is that nobody is for war, nobody wants death and ruin, but when push comes to shove, they all become stiff, unthinking, short-sighted, unreasonable and restrained players of the war-or-no-war game. In most cases, all of them would foist their own interests and aspirations into possible solutions in favor of world peace. Any slaughter could be eschewed if Man applied his inherent moral and mental skills to turning a contradiction into conformity. Unfortunately, violence is just as intrinsic to us humans. And that's exactly what prevails in the decision-making process worldwide.

Who told us to annihilate our brother Christians? If fairly spoken, not only Christians, but any human being of any race and faith, though I am emphasizing the mutuality of faith in this war because the Russians and Ukrainians are indeed people of the same flesh and blood, culture and faith, history and future, and it is truly difficult to bare so much spilled blood and lost souls in the unwisely unfolded gory battlefields between them.

Incidentally, neither of the fighting sides wants to remember that someday in the near future, all the direst consequences of today's belligerency between them will turn into the pretext for another war, one even more ruinous and disastrous. And who will be made responsible for the dreadful results of that war? Maybe nobody! And that's the worst cynicism of our weird times, times when human sophistication should in fact have achieved the highest possible level of development, but all remains stuck at the same barbaric level, with bloodthirsty militant powers and foolishly proud defenders of their right to reciprocate in kind.

This cannot go on. This has to be stopped at any cost of conscience and pride. Russians and Ukrainians should not plainly and heartlessly be killing each other. Better to unite; marry one another; have kids together; sing and dance together; create happiness for each other, and, hand-in-hand, show the rest of the world that this is not only possible, but inevitable too.



Image by Denis Zilber

Political Life in Abkhazia, Fragile as Ever



Aslan Bzhania, de-facto president of Abkhazia. Image source: rferl.org

ANALYSIS BY EMIL AVDALIANI

Concessions made to Moscow push Abkhazia into losing some of the last vestiges of autonomy it enjoyed in such questions as internal affairs. With the implementation of several recently signed deals with Russia, the region risks being effectively transformed into one of Russia's regions - a scenario most of the Abkhaz population has been feverishly against.

Abkhazia is notoriously unruly. It is also in a way exceptional, as it does not fit into other separatist regions managed by Russia: It has an active political culture and carries out lively debates, be they on foreign policy or methods of internal governance.

These disputes also involve discussions on the future trajectory of Abkhazia's

ties with its patron Russia. Largely regarded as instrumental for Abkhazia to stand against Tbilisi in the 1990s, Sokhumi's ties with Moscow are not as smooth as it might seem. In fact, they never were, and over the past couple of years have grown even more uncomfortable. Here, Abkhazia's exceptionalism is a major reason. It is perhaps the only actor within Russia's "sprawling separatist empire" which does not want to become part of Russia, rather aspiring to have at least a semblance of equal bilateral ties and an effective foreign policy.

Russia, however, sees things differently. Confident that the enmity Abkhazians harbor against Georgians is a powerful weapon preventing Sokhumi from rebuilding its ties with Tbilisi, Moscow can and in fact does pressure Sokhumi when and where necessary. The end result is always Moscow gaining the upper hand.

Russia has been keen to get its hand on Abkhaz lands and the existing, albeit largely decrepit, infrastructure. For Abkhazians, this is a non-starter. Sensitive to external encroachment on their land, even Russia is viewed negatively when it comes to allowing Russian businesses buy into local lands and infrastructure.

Though an obstacle, Russia plays it nicely to circumvent the objections. Economic troubles caused by the pandemic continue to bite into Abkhazia's seasonal tourism-based economy. The separatist region's budget is also heavily dependent on Russian subsidies. Electricity and gas are also imported from Russia.

Unwilling to pay Abkhazia's bills freely, Russia consistently signals to Sokhumi to make concessions which are slowly but steadily made by the Abkhazians. For instance, politicians in Sokhumi are pushing for the introduction of Russia-inspired laws on foreign agents. This

comes as a result of the 2020 socio-economic deal. The agreement essentially lays out the program of replication of Russian laws in Abkhazia. This will kill chances for the presence of Western organizations in Abkhazia, and will increase its exposure to Russian organizations.

Another major concession is about allowing Russians to get Abkhaz passports. This law on dual citizenship would remove a major legal obstacle for the sale of Abkhaz lands to Russians. At one of the meetings, Abkhazia's de-facto president Aslan Bzhania argued that buying real estate "is an economic aspect" unrelated to political rights or citizenship.

This takes place amid growing Russian demands, such as the one made by FM Sergey Lavrov that Russian properties are not safe in Abkhazia amid a "growingly unruly" situation. The concession on allowing Russian businesses to buy

into Abkhazia's energy sector is also a critical development which causes indignation in the region.

Bzhania even argued that some elements of sovereignty should be conceded for Abkhazia to exist. These developments have regularly caused protests and generated overall concern in Abkhaz society on the future of the region. For instance, in early December 2021, unrest engulfed central Sokhumi over the worsening criminal situation. The demonstrators called for Bzhania's resignation. On December 12, the protesters tried to break into the parliament building. A temporary truce between the opposition and Bzhania was reached, but its fragility is obvious.

The protests are likely to resume, which will allow Moscow to further pressure a weakened and beleaguered Bzhania into making new concessions or living up to the promises made these past couple of years.

The Abkhaz are rightly perturbed as to where these developments will take the region in the future. Hopes of true independence have never come to be realized. Uncontrolled by Official Tbilisi, the region is now effectively turning into one of Russia's de-facto regions. Resistance is futile, as any moves to counter excessive Russian influence with a limited rapprochement with Tbilisi meets significant obstacles from the Abkhaz opposition which still shares a deeply ingrained distrust toward the Georgians. Thus, balancing is out of question.

Abkhazia is increasingly pressed between two scary scenarios: first, effective incorporation into Russia; second, the necessity to talk with Tbilisi. Neither is attractive to the politicians, though occasional calls for normalizing ties with Tbilisi have been voiced since 2020. Russia's creeping encroachment is bound to create a wave of discontent. In the long run, this is a chance for Tbilisi to try build closer ties with Abkhazia, and realpolitik will dictate that Sokhumi seek at least close economic relations with Tbilisi.

Emil Avdaliani is a professor at European University and the Director of Middle East Studies at Georgian think-tank, Geocase.

Tbilisi Hills – A Comfortable and Successful Community in the Hills above the Capital



BY MARIAM MIVLISHVILI

It is already a well-known fact that Tbilisi Hills offers its customers maximum quality, comfort and innovations. Now it is preparing a new offer. This spring, Tbilisi Hills decided to accelerate the opening of a new sector, allowing customers to choose lands of different size, with various terrain and views. This makes Tbilisi Hills the best choice for those looking to own a comfortable house in a quiet place. To find out more, GEORGIA TODAY spoke to the Commercial Director of Tbilisi Hills, Maya Shanshiashvili.

IN THESE UNPRECEDENTED TIMES OF CONSTANT CHALLENGES, HOW IS TBILISI HILLS DOING, AND ARE THERE ANY NOVELTIES TO REVEAL FOR THIS YEAR?

Yes, the whole world is going through a really difficult time. The pandemic has encouraged us to focus more on ecology and a sustainable environment, which

is definitely a good change. Everyone wants to spend more time in the fresh air, people began to move from multi-story residential buildings to private houses. Based on this, the demand for land plots has increased. Therefore, this spring, Tbilisi Hills decided to accelerate the opening of a new sector and offer a large selection of land plots. Customers will be able to choose lands of different sizes, with different terrain and different views. From these lands you will be able to enjoy panoramic views over the city, the mountains and greenery, and over the beautiful Shavnabada Monastery.

WORKING IN SALES IN REAL ESTATE, YOU MUST HAVE NOTICED TRENDS - ARE THE AGE DEMOGRAPHICS CHANGING WHEN WE SPEAK ABOUT BUYERS FOR APARTMENTS AND LAND PLOTS?

Yes, age demographics show that under 30s are choosing apartments over private villas. These are mostly newlyweds, or young people who want to live independently of their parents. The Georgian

tradition that a person should live with their parents before marriage is almost gone, so young people are becoming more and more interested in buying apartments.

FOR THOSE WHO ARE NOT YET FAMILIAR WITH THE PROJECT - WHAT THREE THINGS WOULD YOU HIGHLIGHT ABOUT TBILISI HILLS?

Initially, the main advantages of our project were ecology (fresh air, greenery, mountains) and security, but now the most precious feature has emerged: our residents - people who are creating the project with us. We are proud of each

of them. This is our community - one of our mostly valued aspects of the Tbilisi Hills project.

WHO ARE THE RESIDENTS OF TBILISI HILLS, AND WHY DID THEY CHOOSE THEIR NEW HOMES WITH YOU?

As soon as the project was launched, many foreigners bought property in Tbilisi Hills, however, over the last two years, Georgians have also been buying in, which is a very positive tendency and one that makes us very happy. There are also mixed families - Georgian husband and a foreign wife, or vice versa. Among our residents you can meet people of



different professions. These are businesspersons from different fields - sports; artists; doctors; diplomats; expats.

TBILISI HILLS GOLF COURSE IS RANKED IN THE TOP 100 GOLF COURSES IN CONTINENTAL EUROPE - DO YOU PLAY GOLF YOURSELF?

The Tbilisi Hills Golf Courses are really awesome, and a great merit of the famous golf designer Lassi Pekka Tilander and Georgian nature as well.

And yes, I play golf. It's not only physical activity for me. It's a kind of therapy. It is also an opportunity to communicate with people. If you want to get to know a person well, it doesn't take much time or many years: All you have to do is get out on the fields with them and play golf. While playing golf you see all the features of the human character.

British Council Georgia on Surviving the Pandemic and Training Georgia for a Prosperous Future

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW BY
KATIE RUTH DAVIES

With this week's GT newspaper focused on the theme of "education," we spoke to one of the most prestigious educators in the country, British Council Georgia, to find out how they have been supporting Georgia on its path to developing the education sector, and what we can expect in the post-pandemic future.

"We have various programs in Arts, English and Education, alongside the well-known IELTS and various Cambridge assessment exams," says Ekaterine Patsatsia, Marketing and Communications Coordinator at British Council Georgia.

"We are running a Creative Economy program with four directions: The Creative Producers program is a development opportunity for producers in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and the Western Balkans; we are supporting the Creative Economy, a program for policymakers; we are developing a research and evidence framework for the creative industries in Georgia; and the fourth is 'Selector Pro,'" she tells us.

"Crafting Futures has a Creative Learning Module (CLM) that has recently



Stephen Shelley, Teaching Center Manager, British Council Georgia

been approved on a national level by the Georgian National Education Quality Enhancement Center, and will now feature in VET programs across the country," Patsatsia adds.

One of the British Council Georgia's flagship programs 'Creative Spark: Higher Education Enterprise Program' has recently managed to establish the Georgian Enterprise Education Alliance (GEEA). Only in Georgia, this alliance was established to create an entrepreneurial ecosystem throughout the country that is recognized internationally as best practice, and which supports the country's youth, students and citizens to develop entrepreneurial skills to enhance their careers in employment

and/or as entrepreneurs.

"At the moment, we have an open call for 'The Big Idea Challenge' video pitch competition, which encourages young people from the participating institutions of program countries to develop an innovative 'startup' and tell the world about it," Patsatsia notes.

"Our 'Learning Hubs: Improved Skills for Stronger Societies' is a three-year program that develops young people's skills so that they can build their self-confidence and get better access to educational and career pathways in the future. We will have the closing event of this program on 25 March.

"We are especially proud that British Council designed the English Teaching

Strategy for General Education in Georgia, which has officially become part of the National Education Strategy of Georgia 2022-2032," Patsatsia says.

"And, of course, the English program makes up a significant part of our operations," she points out. "As part of our Future English program, the Online Teacher Community is our new peer-led online platform for English language teachers. The platform is a unique, borderless, digital home for thousands of English language teachers across the region, where they can meet each other, share experience and knowledge, access synchronous and asynchronous learning, and document their development in a safe space facilitated by trained facilitators."

The pandemic naturally affected studies in Georgia. We asked Stephen Shelley, Teaching Center Manager at British Council Georgia, about that difficult time and how they had overcome the challenges.

"It's changed things hugely!" he tells us. "Two years ago, there was a lot of scepticism about online English classes. Now, more than a third of our students choose to have lessons online. As such, we've invested in training our teachers for online classes and in providing the platform and resources needed."

"For adults, we launched a new, more flexible course, called myClass, with a flexible timetable with a web portal or mobile app so students can manage their

schedule and preferences," he says.

"The online classes have surprising benefits: online classes for young learners allow students all over Georgia to study English with us, whereas before we relied on face-to-face classes in branches in different parts of Georgia."

"And, of course, we have been able to offer places to Ukrainian students in our classes who are not able to attend lessons for obvious reasons, which has meant a great deal to them and our team of teachers," Shelley notes.

We asked him to give his perspective on the future of education and language-learning in Georgia, post-pandemic.

"We're expecting the demand for English classes to rebound now that the pandemic is coming to an end and restrictions are being lifted," he says. "We expect the majority of students to opt for face-to-face teaching, so we are really glad to be (finally!) opening our brand new teaching center behind the parliament building, with its state of the art classrooms and environment."

"Online classes will remain popular with a number of students, though, and this will allow us to reach more students right across the country."

"And finally: parents tell us that they want their children to start learning English earlier and earlier. We would like to open up for younger children, though it's important we do this in as safe and supportive an environment as possible," he says.

Free School - a Place Where Education is a Priority



BY MARIAM MTIVLISHVILI

Free School was opened in close cooperation with the Free University and the Agricultural University. Here, children will find a comfortable space and experienced teachers. The School also aims to provide students with a basic understanding of practical life skills, among them law, management, marketing, finance and so on. To find out more, GEORGIA TODAY spoke to director of Free School, Amiran Ambroladze.

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO OPEN A SCHOOL?

The Free University and Agricultural University are the highest ranked universities in Georgia according to scores obtained by students at the national exams. There are very few good schools in Georgia, and therefore there are few good entrants. Filling this gap at least partially was one of the goals of opening our school. In general, it is clear that education is the most important thing for the development of the country, and without it, neither democracy nor the economy can develop. Moreover, democracy without education can even be harmful.

IN YOUR OPINION, WHY ARE THERE SO FEW GOOD SCHOOLS IN GEORGIA?

A good education is not a priority for all parents (a diploma, yes, but not an education). For them, school is a kind of entertainment center. They think that, in high school, they will train children with a tutor and take them somewhere - it is quite easy to become a student today. Some parents subconsciously think: If I do not have an education, can I not earn money?! Luarsab's version is: "If I do not know a book, I am no longer a man?!"

This, of course, does not apply to eve-

ryone, and this is exactly our niche: we do not try to please everyone - our school is for those who understand the value of education and that without education there is no free person.

WHAT DOES THE WORD "FREE" MEAN TO YOU?

For me personally, freedom of thought is very important, which is much more than freedom of speech. Freedom of speech is when you say what you think. Freedom of thought is when you think about what you feel.

DOES FREE MEAN FREE BEHAVIOR TOO?

Yes, but to the natural extent that, for example, one child's "free" behavior does not interfere with the normal conduct of the lesson and thus restrict the other child's right to acquire knowledge in a quiet, pleasant work environment.

In general, freedom and order are not contradictory concepts. I know two countries well, Georgia and Sweden (I have dual citizenship) and if I compare, Sweden has more freedom and order at the same time.

WHAT OTHER PRIORITIES DOES YOUR SCHOOL HAVE?

Safety first! And we fully agree with the school parents on this. Both physical and moral protection are very important to us. Bullying is completely unacceptable to us, both between children and between a child and an adult from any side.

Having fun is also an important priority for us and we believe that learning should be done in the most fun and entertaining way, taking into account the interests of the students. However, learning sometimes requires special mobilization from the learner as well.

YOU MENTIONED THAT YOU KNOW SWEDEN WELL. ARE YOU THINKING OF COPYING THE SWEDISH SYSTEM?

No. The fact that the Swedish education

system is much better than Georgian does not mean that a standard Swedish school provides a good education. This I experienced for myself, one as a parent (my two daughters were studying there and it was very difficult for me to choose a good school for them) and the other as a lecturer - very poor graduates came from the school desk, and at one of the technical faculties at Lund University (where I worked) we even introduced a regular school planimetry course as a subject to develop logical thinking for freshmen. This course was removed from the Swedish school curriculum with the simple logic: if not everyone can learn planimetry, then let no-one teach it.

Another point: the system that exists in Sweden is adapted to the Swedish character and may not work in the Georgian reality. I am reminded of such a story: when Gorbachev declared at the dawn of perestroika that he wanted to build a Swedish model of socialism in the Soviet Union, one of his opponents resolutely rejected the idea with the following simple argument: There are very few Swedes in our country.

We are not going to copy any models, but we will transfer all the advanced ideas that are appropriate to the Georgian reality. With this we will create our own model.

Since I mentioned the Soviet Union, I would also say that it would be good if we could get rid of Soviet totalitarian thinking and give more freedom to schools. Education is such a complex and inexhaustible science that no one school should consider that it has exactly the right concept of education and impose itself on everyone else. Let the diversity of schools and life shows what is right and what is wrong.

ARE GEORGIAN AND SWEDISH STUDENTS DIFFERENT?

Yes, just like a Georgian driver is different from a Swedish driver. The success of the Swedish education system is largely based on Swedish organization and hard

work. I will bring you an interesting example. When I started working at Lund University, they first explained to me what it was like and finally told me a strange thing: I could go to seminars five minutes late. This surprised me a lot. I had previously worked at another Swedish university and was well acquainted with Swedish punctuality. By the way, the Germans tell the same anecdotes about Swedish punctuality that we tell about the Germans. Now these extra Germans were telling me that I could be five minutes late for my seminars. Students took these five minutes to organize their notebooks and books, look at homework assignments, and prepare questions. Indeed, when I entered the seminar, everyone was reading books and notebooks. I have not had such a case in Tbilisi. On the contrary, it takes time for the first five minutes to calm the students down and get them concentrating.

Let me give you another example: When my two-year-old son came home from a Swedish kindergarten, he would pick up toys from the closet, play with them, and then put them back in the closet when done. Now this boy is 21, he lives in Tbilisi and we can't even teach him how to bring his used plate to the sink. More precisely, we did not teach it.

TODAY THERE IS AN OPINION THAT SCHOOL SHOULD



PREPARE A CHILD FOR LIFE AND NOT TEACH SPECIFIC SUBJECTS ... WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT IT?

One does not exclude the other. On the contrary. How will a child be prepared for life if he does not know how to count elementary percentages, or does not know two words in a foreign language? At the same time, I personally think that, for example, in biology, more time should be devoted to the study of a healthy body and way of life than to the study of the detailed structure of an amoebic cell. It is not necessary to memorize a lot of facts and dates in history either. It is very important to understand the logical connection between different events and to ask the right questions. In Free University, the exams are conducted on the principle of open book, and the student can remove all the factual data from the book directly during the exam.

Our school also plans to provide students with a basic understanding of practical life items such as law, management, marketing, finance and so on.

HOW DO YOU SELECT TEACHERS?

Very easily. We announced high salaries and we hire those who agreed. Seriously, teachers are a big problem in Georgia. Interviews have shown that, unfortunately, 80% of math teachers themselves do not know the school course they are supposed to teach. I'm a mathematician, and I'm allowed to speak in a mathematical subject that way, otherwise the situation is probably the same in other subjects. It will take a lot of time and energy to fix this.

WHAT CRITERIA DO YOU USE TO SELECT YOUR TEACHERS?

Our teachers take a test in Logical Thinking in their own subject (with Free University relevant subject professors) and demonstrate teacher skills by explaining a specific topic from the school course.

We try to ensure that our teachers are valued not only materially but also morally. They are not instructed by the school administration to, for example, raise marks for children, make parents happy, and generally do everything to please them, which, in the end, is harmful to the parents (I would also say that fortunately we have few such parents). We do not have the principle that the client is always right. For us, school is not an ordinary business.

Webster University Georgia: Unique for Its Study-Abroad Opportunities



BY MARIAM MIVLISHVILI

Webster University is accredited in the USA and is available for the first flow of students this year in Georgia too. The Georgian campus of the university plans to implement a variety of programs: Bachelor's degree – International Relations, Business Administration Management, Media Studies Master's Degree – International Relations, Business Administration, and, from next year, a master's program in Media Studies will be added to the list. The annual tuition for undergraduate programs will be \$7900 and for graduate programs \$8600. According to the decision of

Webster University, during its first year in Georgia, each student will receive a grant of \$1000 from the university. Students can graduate the university with two professions, as all students have Major and Minor classes, and can conditionally master any program we have in Georgia and when they go to another country through an exchange program, choosing an additional program that is not in Georgia, for example, Law, IT, Marketing and so on. After completing their studies, they will officially have two professions which will simplify the job search process. To find out more, GEORGIA TODAY spoke to the director-general of Webster University Global Campuses Ryan Guffey and vice-rector Emin Hajiyev.

"Webster University was founded in 1915 and so is one of the oldest American

institutions West of the Mississippi River," Guffey tells us. "Seeking to capitalize on its positive reputation internationally, over 43 years ago, the institution was invited to open its first international campus in Geneva, Switzerland, which houses our Office of Global Campuses today. Since that time, Webster has opened multiple educational study locations in Africa, Europe, Asia, and now Georgia, all with the United States Higher Learning Commission Accreditation and ACBSP Business Accreditation, a leading global business accreditation. Since 1915, Webster has fostered over 215,000 alumni between 100+ countries."

WHERE ARE THE CAMPUSES LOCATED?

Webster University is a global university, with 13 global locations in 9 different

countries around the globe. With this, we provide every opportunity for students to think about the world while in the classroom and experience it when they are ready. Webster University students can participate in our student mobility program, where we provide financial support to study for a term or a year at another Webster University location, including even the flight to and from their new international study location. Webster University uses one set of admission standards and a single academic course catalog, thus allowing any Webster admitted student to travel to another Webster site and receive the same courses and level of education as their campus.

TELL US ABOUT THE PROSPECTS FOR OUR REGION.

"The Republic of Georgia lies in the heart of the South Caucasus; we are honored to be here to offer the opportunity of American education to students from the region and beyond," Hajiyev says. "Georgia has centuries of history, great traditions, and culture. We estimate that we will have students from Azerbaijan, Israel, Jordan, and more during

the upcoming year.

TELL US ABOUT THE PROGRAMS PRESENTED IN GEORGIA.

We have decided to offer three programs at the Bachelor's and two at the Master's levels. Students will have a chance to pursue degrees in Business Administration, Media Studies, and International Relations. At the graduate level, we will offer an MBA and Master of Arts in International Relations.

Students will also have an opportunity to also register in a minor or a second major, meaning they can combine their degrees and become even more competitive on the job market.

WHAT MAKES WEBSTER UNIVERSITY UNIQUE?

We mentioned our multiple locations all over the world, so that is our uniqueness; imagine you are an 18-year-old student living in Georgia, and a year later you continue your studies in Switzerland, then move to the Netherlands, then to Athens, perhaps Ghana, or visit our main campus in Saint Louis, Missouri. This is what makes us unique.



Are Georgian Cities Ready to Introduce Recycling?



UNDP Head Nick Beresford

Residents of Georgia's two biggest cities, Tbilisi and Batumi, would welcome recycling if there was better access to municipal infrastructure and services, a behavioral experiment proved. Initiated by the UNDP Accelerator Lab in Georgia, the experiment studied household waste behavior to find out what measures would stimulate people to separate waste, and how municipal authorities could support this process.

The experiment was carried out from September 2021 through January 2022, in partnership with the Tbilisi and Batumi City Halls, municipal cleaning services and a consortium of civil society organizations - 'Speqtri', 'Parki ar Minda' and 'Chaobi'.

On 23 March, UNDP invited representatives of several Georgian municipalities, the private sector, civil society and international organizations to discuss the experiment results and look into ways to increase plastic waste separation

among households.

"We have grounds for cautious optimism if, with a small experiment, we could sort and recycle nearly two tons of plastic waste. The Tbilisi and Batumi City Halls have been great partners. I am looking forward to seeing ways to scale up this work, so together we can find practical and affordable solutions to plastic waste recycling in Tbilisi and other municipalities," said UNDP Head Nick Beresford.

The social experiment in Batumi and

Tbilisi kicked off in September 2021 when 40 transparent collection bins were installed in the residential areas of the two cities. This was followed by a targeted educational campaign in several pilot districts that aimed to check whether awareness-raising helps increase plastic waste collection. The results obtained in the pilot districts were compared to other sites where no additional information was provided to the residents.

The experiment revealed important behavioral patterns and provided ground for practical recommendations.

It showed that adequate infrastructure and public awareness could have a notable impact on waste management practices. It also suggested that the use of transparent containers improves the quality of collected material as people can see the contents of the bins.

In addition, the experiment revealed that visibly branded collection trucks could help overcome the popular notion

that collected plastic waste ends up in a landfill.

The probe on the awareness-raising aspect of the experiment proved that more educational activities are needed to reinforce the recycling habits among the citizens.

Around 900,000 tons of waste is generated annually in Georgia and more than 75% ends up in landfill sites, increasing pollution and posing long-lasting threats to the environment and human health. Georgia's 2016-2030 National Strategy on Waste Management outlines concrete steps to lead the country to sustainable waste management policies and practices. Georgia is committing to recycling 50% of its plastic waste by 2025 and 80% by 2030.

UNDP will continue working with Tbilisi, Batumi and other municipalities to help introduce effective plastic waste separation practices and promote sustainable lifestyles.



40 transparent collection bins were installed in residential areas of Tbilisi and Batumi

The Success Story of "New School"



BY MARIAM MTIVLISHVILI

New School, International School of Georgia, is the first International Baccalaureate World School in Georgia offering Primary Years, Middle Years and Diploma Programs for ages 3 to 19. As a school clearly demonstrating its commitment to the values of the International Baccalaureate Organization, GEORGIA TODAY, wanting to find out more, spoke to Founding Director of New School, International School of Georgia, Marina Zhgenti.

"There are almost 800 students from 40 nationalities attending our school. We understand that young people are facing many challenges in today's world and, therefore, we aim to educate the "whole child" by developing a learning mindset, critical thinking and research skills in an atmosphere of inquiry and student agency," she says.

TELL US ABOUT SUCCESS STORY OF NEW SCHOOL.

I'm very proud that in 2018 New School was selected by the European Union as a pilot school for the first Eastern Part-

nership European School Program and opened its doors to 30 of the best students from Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. Following its successful launch in the 2018-19 academic year, we at New School, with the support of the European Union and the International Baccalaureate Organization, selected the fourth cohort of students and are hosting 80 successful students from Eastern Partnership countries, chosen from the top performing students in the region. The students live and learn at New School, being comfortably accommodated in a purpose-built boarding facility named after Commissioner Johannes Hahn, whose initiative and vision made it possible for this program to function at our school.

TELL US ABOUT HISTORY OF THE SCHOOL.

Our history started 20 years ago in 1999. The nineties in Georgia are marked as a decade of civil war, of ethnic and regional conflicts and barricade-building in the streets of Tbilisi. Those events greatly influenced the educational system of Georgia, which was almost ruined. It was at that time when we started looking for a school for our youngest daugh-

ter. There was not much choice, so we decided to start our own school. In the beginning, there were only 30 students and six enthusiastic educators, in five rented rooms, with limited resources. But the school grew rapidly and soon expanded to cover classes from Kindergarten to Grade 6.

In 2003, after one more move to a rented facility, New School finally settled in Bagebi, a green residential area of Tbilisi, and changed its name to New School, International School of Georgia. Throughout its 22-year history, New School, International School of Georgia has been providing a first-rate international education to a diverse international and local community of students. We owe today's success to many dedicated teachers and professional administrators, devoted parents and committed students. Each of them left their lasting legacy with us!

TELL US ABOUT YOUR PROGRAMS.

Our Primary Years Program (Grades Kindergarten-5) is an inquiry-based curriculum which provides students with a foundation of essential concepts, knowledge, skills and attitudes. A strong emphasis is placed on how students learn, as well as what they learn. We encourage our students to act responsibly and to reflect on their learning. Our teachers inspire and challenge each child to achieve their full intellectual and personal potential.

The philosophy of the Middle Years Program (Grades 6-10) reflects the philosophy of New School. It provides an inspirational learning environment for both students and teachers and ensures that our students receive excellent preparation for the IB Diploma Program. The IB Diploma Program (Grades 11-12) offered at New School combines academic excellence with a specialized teaching system. The program provides an international and internationally recognized university-entrance qualification for our students. The IB's goal is to provide students with values and opportunities that will enable them to develop sound judgment, make wise choices, and respect others in the global community. Students attend classes in a multilingual



and multicultural environment. Our commitment to international education is reflected in our Modern Languages program that offers English, German, French, Spanish and Italian and includes various different mother tongue study opportunities.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR GRADUATES.

The IB Diploma Program builds students' inquiring mindset, fosters their desire to learn, and prepares them to excel at their careers and lead meaningful lives. Our graduates study in the top Universities

of the world. The amount of full or partial scholarships won by them in 2021 alone is equal to \$900,000. They develop into lifelong learners who thrive and make a difference. I strongly believe that they will change this world for better!

Choosing a school for your child is one of the most important decisions you will ever have to make. We recognize this at New School, and ensure that every child here reaches their potential and more. I encourage our potential parents to come and visit our campus. We will be extremely pleased to welcome you and share our school's achievements.



Ice Dragons, Part II



BY TONY HANMER

Conclusion from last week's story (Anzor is dreaming a conversation with an ice dragon, having seen one).
—There's more?
—Certainly! Seemingly disintegrated, we take to the air (as flakes or motes of snow)... grow much, much larger... and then re-form ourselves behind or uphill from the same fences along which we used to lie. This version of us, however, is only visible by its breath. It looks like... well, describe it yourself, if you can. (He was permitted to view this too).

—Frozen waves, that's what I see. The waves of a rough wind-tossed sea, only not moving at all. Forcing themselves through the gaps between the fence slats, and even over the tops of the fences, so much snow is there. It continues to warp the fences out of true, though. If that's just

your breath, how large are you behind it?
—Up to the size of a whole field, each one of us. There we lie, until the spring sun's growing strength erodes us away. We melt or dissolve straight into the air, again flying without wings, which earlier served as more a prophecy of our flight than the means of it. Our next form is even bigger, and also the shortest-lived and hardest for humans to observe.

—What in the world could come after a whole field's worth of snow?
—How about a whole cloud, half a sky's worth or more? But you hardly ever notice us there, and even if you do, after a few of your breaths we have changed into another shape entirely, which looks like nothing your imaginations could contain or name. (A blink, and he glimpsed their shapes in the clouds). So you fail to notice us anymore. But... we rain down sooner or later, or our melt gathers into the Enguri, and we end up in the Black Sea, a hundred miles or so away from your Svaneti. This all summer and autumn long, until the

next snows come. They return us to you, as foot-long icicle spirals hanging off roof edges, and it all starts over again.

—But why, WHY? What's it all for?
—Two answers. Our favorite and most powerful way of reproducing is in the eyes and minds of those who can still feel wonder, and tell each other what they have seen. And: the reason for all this is... to eliminate or at least greatly reduce the real calamities I mentioned earlier. We break and warp fences with a few hundred tons of snow, so that millions more will not sweep down off jealous Ushba, Tetruldi, Shkhara, Ailama every winter and destroy you all, utterly bury you and your towers and villages in inescapably fast avalanches or equally inexorable glaciers! Which would you rather: a few tens or a hundred or so of us every winter scattered through your villages, wreaking mild occasional havoc on the fences you build, or an utter apocalypse each cold season, wiping the very memory of you away? This is the agreement we have made with Winter himself and his

God: our sacrifice and your annoyance instead of total destruction! Look on us, on all our life cycle's forms; love but do not worship us; notice beauty everywhere in the world our Maker made, and be glad!

Finally—If you would be so kind, allow me to break too, so that I can join the rest of my family and continue to mature. Otherwise, holding on to my smallest form, you condemn me to melt instead of necessarily shattering as I must, to flourish.

Anzor woke after what had seemed days of dreaming, and found that it was only early morning, the first light of day just beginning to banish night's blackness. Somehow, the last gift of his Ice Dragon had been a good rest, despite all the visions he had experienced.

He dressed in the many layers of winter; slipped outside as daylight gathered; looked long and hard at his treasure in the lean-to, wrestling inside. It was the only one left! But keeping it here would kill it, and perhaps disallow him to see its kin in all their glory. He picked up the Dragon and cradled it; and ascended the ladder again, to the edge of the roof. Carefully turning it upside down as he

had first found it, he wished it farewell, and let it fall to uncountable shards.

Then he allowed himself a quick walk around his snow-bound hamlet. Truly, his eyes had been blessed. Now, everywhere he looked glinted scales, teeth, tails, claws, eyes, whole waves of stilled breath. The Dragons were everywhere. He rushed to show people, to fulfill his part of the bargain. Wonder would return. And the avalanches would be held back to a small part of their awful potential, his people allowed to coexist with their unimaginable but not impossible partners, sharing Svaneti, each needing and serving the other. Such was ordained, and he saw that it was good.

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 nearly 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



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Reg. # 06/4-309

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