





# War Week 9: Ukrainian Officials Concerned ahead of Russia's Victory Day as Heavy Fighting Continues in East



Image source: Getty Images

BY ANA DUMBADZE

**W**ith heavy fighting continuing across Ukraine's east, and Moscow still trying to seize control of the Mariupol steel plant, Ukrainian officials are warning that the May 9 Russian holiday of Victory Day, which celebrates Russia's role in defeating Nazi Germany, could bring an expanded war and more destruction to the country.

The port city's Azovstal steel plant saw another day of heavy fighting on Wednesday, with Russian troops attempting to storm the plant, which has up to 200 civilians sheltering inside.

Ukrainian officials say Mariupol residents are being forced to clear debris in the city ahead of a planned "celebration" on Monday.

Ukraine's defense intelligence agency said the festivities would be part of the Kremlin's "large-scale propaganda campaign," with the destroyed city of Mariupol as a center of the "celebrations."

A total of 344 people were evacuated from within the Mariupol humanitarian corridor on Wednesday, Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk announced.

The International Committee of the Red Cross said the safe-passage operation in the Mariupol area was coordinated by the ICRC, the United Nations and "the parties to the conflict."

The evacuees included "women, children and the elderly" from Mariupol, as well as other areas in Ukraine's southeast, among them Mangysh, Berdyansk, Tokmak and Vasylivka.

"All of them have just arrived in Zaporizhzhia. Another of our little victories," Vereshchuk wrote in a Telegram post. "The Mariupol humanitarian operation

continues."

On Tuesday, the first group of about 100 civilians rescued from the Mariupol steel plant arrived in Zaporizhzhia, people who survived the horrors of sheltering for more than a month in a bunker underground that was being repeatedly bombed.

Yet, on Wednesday, heavy fighting continued at the plant as Ukrainian officials said Russian forces attempted to storm the complex using weaponry, including tanks and bombs.

Mayor Vadym Boychenko said contact has been lost with the Ukrainian forces inside.

"Unfortunately, today the connection with the boys broke off. There is no way to know what is happening, whether or not they are safe," he said, adding that he had spoken to them the day before.

In a video posted separately on Telegram on Wednesday, Azov commander Maksym Zhorin said that for the second

day in a row, Russian forces had broken into the "territory of the plant." He echoed that heavy fighting is ongoing.

"The situation is extremely difficult, but we continue to defend ourselves," he said.

Russia's Defense Ministry said its forces would open more humanitarian corridors this week for civilians to evacuate.

Only a couple thousand Russian troops remain in Mariupol, the Pentagon said, as Moscow refocuses on its eastern assault.

## DONETSK REGION

Slovyansk and neighboring Kramatorsk, both of which lie near the western border of the Donetsk region, are considered targets of the Russian advance. Capturing such targets would consolidate Russian military control of the northeastern Donbas, according to Western defense officials, as they attempt to encircle Ukrainian forces.

"So far, Russia has not made much progress outside Mariupol, the Pentagon said. Forces moving northward from there have stopped around 75 miles to the northwest in a town called Velyka Novosilka. Meanwhile, Russian forces trying to move to the southeast from Izyum have made it about 35 miles to

Lyman, a town less than 20 miles from the city of Slovyansk, a US official said Wednesday," reported The Washington Post.

Russian forces also remained about 20 to 30 miles to the east of Kharkiv, the senior defense official said.

Russia continued its attacks on infrastructure across Ukraine on Wednesday, striking a railroad facility and a bridge in Dnipro, a city that straddles the Dnieper River.

"Russian troops continue to target railway infrastructure," Alexander Kamyshin, head of Ukrainian railways, said on Telegram. No workers were injured in the rocket strike, he said.

The region's governor, Valentyn Reznichenko, said Russian forces aimed two missiles at Dnipro on Wednesday, and Ukrainian air-defense systems intercepted one. The other collided with the rail station, impacting tracks and an administrative building, and delaying train service.

Ukraine's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dmytro Kuleba, said Wednesday that there was "another barrage of Russian missiles raining down on peaceful Ukrainian cities."

"They want to break us with their missile terrorism," he wrote on Twitter.



People hug each other during an evacuation of civilians in Kramatorsk, Ukraine, Tuesday, May 3. Source: AP Photo/Andriy Andriyenko

## The Georgian Media Landscape: Pluralistic and Free?

BY TEAM GT

**O**n May 3, the world celebrated World Press Freedom Day. Georgian Prime Minister, Irakli Garibashvili, congratulated the country's media outlets and journalists, noting that "a free and independent press based on true values and professionalism is one of the key features defining the democracy of any country," and added that Georgian media has "come a long way" since regaining independence, having endured many challenges, intimidation, and pressure.

"Provision of an enabling environment for independent press has been among our prime goals from the day our political team came to power," the PM claimed. "It has been the aim of numerous reforms that we carried out. The Georgian media landscape is today pluralistic and free. Every condition is created for boosting journalism and its further development. Georgia is a leader of the region in the World Press Freedom Index and it is ahead of a number of EU member states. It is a great merit of the authorities and

society, manifesting in a huge gain for the entire country. Our authorities aspire to facilitate further development of press freedom in the country," Garibashvili said.

However, a report by OCMedia on press freedom in the Caucasus region released on the same day noted that, "on the background of lingering restrictions to public information during the pandemic, several journalists in Georgia also faced attacks while covering the parliamentary elections in the autumn of 2020."

"This all paled in comparison to the mass violence against reporters on 5 July 2021 in Tbilisi," OCMedia journalists Shota Kincha, Luiza Mchedlishvili, Ani Avetisyan, and Ismi Aghayev wrote. "Homophobic mobs mobilized by the Georgian Orthodox Church but predominantly led by far-right extremist group Alt Info chased down and attacked reporters who were only doing their job."

The same news outlet rightly pointed out that since the July violence, "Alt Info has been successful in obtaining a national broadcasting license for their TV channel, which they have used extensively to propagate hate against the 'liberal media'."

## State Dep: Georgia & Moldova are Important Partners of the US, We're Committed to Their Sovereignty



BY ANA DUMBADZE

**B**oth Georgia and Moldova are important partners of the United States. We are committed to their sovereignty, their independence, their territorial integrity. We have demonstrated that commitment in a number of

ways, Ned Price, Spokesperson for the US Department of State, stated.

Asked whether any negotiations are planned with the Georgian side about the latest developments in the region and Russian aggression, Price replied by saying:

"We're always in touch through our embassy, through the department here with our partners in the region. That certainly includes with our counterparts in Tbilisi. Those discussions are ongoing.

We know that Vladimir Putin may harbor aspirations to wage aggression against other countries in the region. I think we are demonstrating in response to how we are providing our Ukrainian partners with what they need to be effective against this instance, this egregious instance of Russian aggression - we are demonstrating that the United States and our allies and partners won't stand for that type of activity."



## The World Standing by Ukraine: More Weapons and Demands for Future Security Guarantees

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### US AND THE LEND-LEASE ACT

The administration of the US president Joe Biden has appealed to Congress for an initiative to freeze the assets of Russian oligarchs and use them to help Ukraine. Also, the administration appealed to Congress to allocate \$33 billion to help Ukraine.

The US House of Representatives overwhelmingly backed legislation last Thursday that will make it easier to export military equipment to Ukraine, reviving the "Lend-Lease Act" that helped defeat Hitler during World War Two.

The House passed the "Ukraine Democracy Defense Lend-Lease Act of 2022" by 417 to 10, three weeks after it sailed through the Senate with unanimous support. It next goes to the White House for President Joe Biden to sign into law.

"We have heard clearly from Ukrainian President Zelensky: Ukraine desperately needs more military aid to sustain its fight for sovereignty and defend its civilian population," said Rep. John Katko, one of the bill's cosponsors. "I cosponsored this bill and was proud to support it on the House floor because it will expand our nation's ability to expeditiously deliver additional defense articles to the Government of Ukraine as they fight back against Vladimir Putin's barbaric and unlawful invasion. This is a necessary step to protect the future of Ukraine and the safety of its people."

The World War II-era lend-lease program was viewed as a pivotal tool that allowed for the allies' victory against Nazi Germany. It allowed the US government to lend or lease war supplies, rather than selling them, to any country deemed vital to the United States' defense. The aid particularly helped Great Britain in its battle against Nazi Germany.

The bill's passage comes as President Biden urged Congress to swiftly pass a



Image source: ndtv.com

\$33 billion assistance package for Ukraine as it continues to block Russian President Vladimir Putin's assault. The White House says nearly all of the \$3.5 billion in draw-down authority Congress provided last month for military assistance is depleted.

"The cost of this fight is not cheap, but caving to aggression is going to be more costly if we allow it to happen," the President said in remarks from the White House Thursday morning. "We either back the Ukrainian people as they defend their country, or we stand by as the Russians continue their atrocities and aggression in Ukraine."

### UKRAINE DEMANDS SECURITY GUARANTEES

Ukraine has asked its international partners to decide which security guarantees they are ready to provide the country in case of any aggression in the future.

"Ukraine gave up nuclear weapons for the sake of world peace. We have then been knocking on NATO's door, but it never opened. The security vacuum led to Russian aggression. The world owes Ukraine security and we ask states to decide which security guarantees they are ready to provide," Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Dmytro Kuleba posted on Twitter.

As Ukrinform reported, President Volodymyr Zelensky said on April 28 that after the Budapest Memorandum

had demonstrated its ineffectiveness, Ukraine sought to draft a fundamental document on security guarantees which would provide utmost and real protection to Ukraine. The Head of State noted that the draft document was currently being prepared at the level of security advisers to the leaders of countries which would later become guarantors of Ukraine's security.

The Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances comprises three identical political agreements signed at the OSCE conference in Budapest, Hungary, on 5 December 1994, to provide security assurances by its signatories relating to the accession of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). The memorandum was originally signed by three nuclear powers: the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

The memorandum prohibited the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States from threatening or using military force or economic coercion against Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, "except in self-defense or otherwise in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations." As a result of other agreements and the memorandum, between 1993 and 1996, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine gave up their nuclear weapons.

## Exhibition of Photographers Who Documented Russian Aggression in Ukraine to be Held

5-8 MAY  
FACTORY, TBILISI  
A. Tsereteli ave. 114



Project supported by Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine and under patronage of the First Lady of Ukraine Olena Zelenska.

40 Documentary photographs of international photographers who documented Russian aggression in Ukraine.

On the initiative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine and under the patronage of the first lady of Ukraine Olena Zelenska, on 5-8 May, an exhibition of photographers who documented the Russian aggression in Ukraine is to be held.

40 documentary photographs by international photographers who documented the Russian aggression in Ukraine dur-

ing the months of February-April of 2022 will be presented.

The goal of the exhibition is to draw the attention of the international community to the atrocities and humanitarian crisis that is happening right now in the heart of 21st century Europe.

Documentary video and audio recordings will accompany this exhibition.

The exhibition will take place at Tsereteli Avenue 114, Tbilisi, Georgia.



# Turkey, Russia and the South Caucasus

ANALYSIS BY EMIL AVDALIANI

Overshadowed by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the South Caucasus is witnessing huge developments which could potentially decrease tensions between Armenia on the one hand and Turkey and Azerbaijan on the other. The process might also critically affect Russia's position in the region and may even give some momentum to the West's ambivalent policy.

Historical rivals, Armenia and Azerbaijan, are edging closer to a comprehensive agreement on solving fundamental issues which have hampered rapprochement for at least three decades.

The process now revolves around major Azerbaijanis' proposals for a peace deal, including the recognition of each other's territorial integrity. This would require Armenian acceptance that Nagorno-Karabakh is part of Azerbaijan, the cause of wars in 1992-94 and in 2020. If signed, this would amount to a revolutionary change from the traditional Armenian position.

The Armenian leadership's overall response was positive, though it will seek additional stipulations. Among these will be acceptance by Azerbaijan of a wide range of cultural rights for Armenians, perhaps including officially recognized autonomy. Though the Azerbaijanis are unlikely to agree to this, lesser demands on cultural rights are indeed possible.

This Armenian position builds on earlier, somewhat ambivalent statements and bilateral meetings with Azerbaijani leaders carefully indicating that the country might be willing to change its traditional policy. This amounts to a

profound, though deeply painful realization by the Armenian leadership that the balance of power has irrevocably shifted, and not in Armenia's favor.

The alternative to a deal is a policy of open, long-term revanchism. But there are significant gains to be had from a deal. Establishing positive ties with Azerbaijan could end Armenia's economic isolation and would likely feed similar positive developments in Turkey ties. After 30 years of hostility, an improvement with its large western neighbor would lead to the eventual re-establishment of diplomacy to the allure of improved economic ties. The pay-off could be significant: Armenian goods would have a better and shorter route to European markets, and vice versa.

The changes could also pave the way for region-wide changes. In the longer term, Armenia's northward dependence on Russia would gradually be diluted. The east-west economic ties would be at least as powerful as those on its current north-south trade axis.

This would not mean an end to Russian influence and importance, but it would create a more even redistribution of power, whereby the Kremlin would lose its preponderant position. Turkey could become as influential as Russia – a notable shift from the era of exclusivity.

The geopolitics of the South Caucasus are shifting. There is greater competition for influence, with powers contesting if not for primacy, then for a more even distribution of influence. Turkey and to a lesser degree Iran, see the region as a natural historical hinterland. And historical legacies continue to shape the policies of these former imperial powers.

Furthermore, trade and transport patterns are also likely to change. The routes



Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinian, President of the European Council Charles Michel and Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev, arrive for an official picture before their meeting at the European Council in Brussels on April 6. Source: AFP

through Georgia will no longer serve as the only solution. For Turkey, options to reach the Caspian Sea will multiply, and possibly open the way to securing critical energy sources for its economy from gas producers around the sea.

These developments are not in any way a dagger aimed at Russia, but they should feel uncomfortable. Its position in the region is increasingly reliant on the military element, through garrisons in all the three South Caucasus countries. Distracted they may be by the so-far

unsuccessful war in Ukraine, President Putin and his aides still possess some tools to derail peace prospects.

But Russia may nonetheless reap what it has sowed in the South Caucasus. If it is no longer the security guarantor for Armenia (it did precious little to help in the 2020 war) and it is no longer the best outlet for trade, then why have Russian troops in Armenia at all? And why would Azerbaijan continue to accept Russian peacekeepers on its territory?

This is an unenviable situation for the

Kremlin. It is waging a major war to secure the illusion of a "near abroad" beholden to its wishes, and while its back is turned, other borderland countries are thinking about how to ease its grip over their futures. If anything was needed to show the futility of Russia's approach to its immediate neighborhood, the South Caucasus would be the prime example.

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## Faced with a Choice: Second Front or a Good Life

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

At times, the absurdity of the discourse put forward by politicians and analysts in our media acquires a ludicrous hue and content on both sides of the aisle. Our people have already gotten used to those endless incriminating verbal skirmishes between the opposed political forces, but there is always something new for further, even hotter discussion.

Take, for instance, the topic of opening a second front in the Russian-Ukrainian military conflict, already prolonged beyond any expectation. Nobody would



We have barely recovered from our recent strategic errors, and now there are people who want us to get involved in the same old turmoil that put this nation at least half a century back in its development



A Georgian man cries as he holds the body of a loved one after a Russian bombardment on August 9, 2008, in Gori, Georgia, near the border of the breakaway region of South Ossetia. Photo by Gleb Garanich (Reuters)

be overly astonished if the Ukrainian political establishment demanded from the rest of the world the opening of a third, fourth or fifth front- it is quite understandable: they badly need additional headaches and pains for Russia's tired and endangered neck, even if those stings and twinges from outside feel like a mere feather touch.

Ukraine has huge moral and material support in this long-invited warfare, sup-

port that reverberates around the globe, but it is a country in need of a much bigger, stronger and more meaningful shoulder than it is getting at this very moment. Ukraine wants those helpful and loyal nations to be involved in the conflict not only ethically and politically, but physically too, 'physically' meaning wounded and dying soldiers and volunteers, burning buildings and destroyed enterprises, miserably sheltered sick and

hungry people listening to deafening alarms sounding day and night, this taking place in the lands of those nations as they are on Ukraine's unrecognizable territory today.

And Georgia is one of those nations that the current Ukrainian administration expects and wants to immediately and unhesitatingly open a second front against Russia, so that their chance of a cherished victory can be brought closer

and truer. To turn this pressing exigency into war, they go to the extent of flagrant verbal offences against the Georgian government, which in actual fact is doing all its possible best to provide affordable humanitarian aid and moral support to Ukraine, and at the same time is wisely, and with decorum, refraining from rocking the boat again, not having any substantial reason to do so.

Even if Georgia lost its mind and started fighting Russia in favor of Ukraine, how effectively would the much-talked-about second front prove in favor of Ukraine? Is Georgia really obligated to, in essence, repeat the mistakes of the past and remobilize itself for war against Russia; in defending the Ukrainian interests, putting at stake the good lives of its own citizens, giving up all that was acquired after so many vain and futile wars and defense efforts against Russia, once again damaging this country to a tragic extent?

We have barely recovered from our recent strategic errors, and now there are people around who want us to get involved in the same old turmoil that put this nation at least half a century, if not more, back in its development. No, no more sudden and stupid moves! We finally deserve a better way of life and a chance to peacefully develop ourselves, and there should not be even a vestige of a prospect that we might lose this God-given opportunity. We have our own business to do, and no longer should our young lose their lives as if those lives are not needed for the wellbeing of their own motherland.

Is this an unfriendly speak-out against the Ukrainian people? No, it is not! I talk about our own survival in the first place, and nobody in the world has the right to dictate to us what to do or not to do when it comes to our own future and quiet progress. Moreover, nothing, just nothing, is worth subjecting our citizens to what we have already gone through. After all, those awful times are so recent that all the wounds and pains are still felt, and those excruciating images are still alive. Enough!



# Lost Hope for Russia? PACE President Tiny Kox on the War, Sanctions, and the Future of Russia

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

**W**e have to deal with this now. We can't act as if it didn't happen. There's a full-fledged war happening on European territory. History has taught us that if a war starts in Europe, you never know how it will end. No-one knows what's coming next. - Tiny Kox, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, tells RFE's Georgian service in an exclusive interview. "Does Putin have a plan?" he asks. "[Russian] Parliament doesn't know it plays a role in this - it acts as an applause machine for the president. They all just clap, and ask no questions. I think in every parliament, at least someone should ask the question: why are we doing this? The fact that we did not see that there demonstrates that the Russian parliament does not play a role in the government, and it's clear that Putin is the one who decided to start this war. But he never showed anyone a plan."

## SHOULD RUSSIA'S EXPULSION FROM THE COE HAVE HAPPENED SOONER? WAS IT A MISTAKE TO WELCOME THEM BACK A FEW YEARS AGO?

They were for 26 years, a full-fledged member of the Council of Europe. This idea that they were "out" is not factual. They were never "out" of the Committee of Ministers. The only thing that happened is that the Russian parliamentarians were for a few years not represented there, a fact not so painful for the Russian parliament. The perception was that Russia was out, while the reality was that Mr. Lavrov and his country's representatives were full-fledged members every day, all these years; there was not a moment that Russia was not involved in the decision making. And that is why I did my best to make it clear that we had to change that. And, in 2018, we changed the mechanism. I know that my friends in Ukraine were saying: "Oh, you're bringing the Russians back!" But what I said was: "You are either in or you are out. The Council of Europe is not a cafeteria; you can't decide whether you're in or out. If you're in, you're in;



It is a dangerous and reactionary idea that "Russians are Russians, so they will never develop as other countries and people can develop. It's wrong. But if it's true, we really are in deep shit, because that means that the biggest country on Earth can never develop



if you're out, you're out - it's what the statute says." And that's what we then agreed on: "Okay, from now, this will be the rule: If in the future we have, again, a blatant violation of the statute, then there will be a mechanism that gives, for the first time ever in 70 years, the assembly the right to trigger a procedure that could lead to the expulsion of a member state."

Since we've had these new rules, after we saw this blatant violation by Russia of Ukraine, it took us just three days to suspend Russia, and three weeks to expel them.

## GOING BACK TO 2008, IS IT SAFE TO SAY THAT THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE BACK THEN SHOULD HAVE DONE MORE, COULD HAVE DONE MORE, AND THEY TURNED A BLIND EYE TO IT?

I think 2008 was a different situation. The difference was that, although it was clear, to me at least, that Russia was waiting for a chance to have the war in South Ossetia [ed. Tskhinvali], the report from my good colleague Heidi Tagliavini stated it was started by Georgia, by mistake, by too much bravado or whatever.

## A COUNTRY OF THREE MILLION CITIZENS DECIDED TO ATTACK A COUNTRY OF 145 MILLION BY MISTAKE?

No, but you could perhaps say it was a preemptive strike from Saakashvili. The moment he started to shell Tskhinvali, the Russians brought their troops to the Roki Tunnel. They were waiting there. So you could say it was a bit different. The Russians then at least had an argument: "We have peacekeepers over there, they are now being shelled and we have to protect them." The story was at least good enough. And it would have been good enough if they had stayed in South Ossetia. But of course, then the Russians said, "Oh, we can go to Tbilisi," and the tanks started to head towards the Georgian capital and they started bombing the area and so on. And then the United States said, "No, sorry, that's the red line, if you go further, we'll have a casus belli." And then the Russians stopped. They destroyed quite a lot of things. They took South Ossetia and named it an independent country and so on. But the story is a bit different. And I think that the government after Saakashvili decided that what "our good friend Misha" had done was perhaps not the wisest thing. He was here, saying that "I will never use violence to get South Ossetia back". And he did start to use violence. And that gave the Russians an argument. Of course, it's no excuse [for what the Russians did]. It was not that they had to call the troops from Moscow all the way to South Ossetia. They were waiting there, hoping that Saakashvili would make that mistake. So you cannot completely compare the reaction of the international

community then and now. Then there was a negotiated settlement...

## WHICH REMAINS UNFULFILLED.

Sure, sure. But it was a war starting, a reaction and an overreaction. This assembly said, "Listen, the fact that you [Russia] went to South Ossetia was not a blatant violation of international law, because there were [Russian] peacekeepers, but when you started to destroy property and kill people in Georgia, that was a blatant violation of international law." It was a very short but devastating war, but it did end with some kind of a solution. The solution never did function, but back then, the international community did not say as it is saying now, "Sorry, but Russia has to be excluded from everything." I'm not so much a fan of saying "We should have done something else," because we did what we did. 2014 could have been a moment to say "Sorry, but this is blatant violation." This assembly said it, the Committee of Ministers said it as well. The problem was that the Committee of Ministers did not act.

## YOU SAID THAT "WE NEED THIS WAR TO END, WE NEED A CEASEFIRE". WHOSE IS THE FIRST STEP TO MAKE?

It should be the Kremlin, because the authorities from the Russian Federation blatantly violated international law. So they should step back.

## DO YOU SEE THEM STEPPING BACK?

I don't know. We have a problem that in such a big country, we have such small circles of interest. I'm not a believer of the idea that there is only one man who decides everything in Russia. It's clear that the president decides a lot and people are very much afraid of him. But there are more people with interests in Russia, and Russia is not a democracy, not a rule of law country: it's a country where the rule of power is very important [and] the rule of money. So, there are many people who are involved in this decision. I saw some figures showing what oligarchs have lost [due to the sanctions] - they have lost fortunes. The good news for them is that they have more money than you and I together. But the bad news is that they lost sometimes half of their fortune and that must be a pain for people who are more interested in money than they are human rights. I don't know what the effect will be. But there must be some growing doubts in those who see their assets, their capital, their fortunes, in danger. We know some of them. We have seen some, like Mr. Tinkoff, who says, "This is wrong." I hope that he says that because he has been enlightened, but [we know] he's also thinking about his money. We know the oligarchs are powerful in Russia and we know that the President has taken a lot of power from them. He has

told them in the past: "Steal whatever you want, but don't interfere with my business, because otherwise you will go to prison." But being realistic, I think there have to be effects, the problem is we cannot see them, so we cannot rely on them. But it would also be stupid to believe that as long as this one man makes the decisions, nothing is going to change.

## WHAT IS IT THAT MIGHT MAKE PUTIN STEP BACK?

Powerful people saying, "You are the president of the Russian Federation, but from now on, we decide." As happened with Mr. Khrushchev - he wasn't expecting people to show up at his holiday home and say, "Nikita, it's over now."

## THE POLITBURO BACK THEN WAS QUITE A DIFFERENT STRUCTURE. COULD YOU GIVE ME ONE NAME OUT OF 145 MILLION PEOPLE THAT YOU'D STAKE YOUR MONEY ON TO CHANGE SOMETHING IN RUSSIA?

No, no, that would be very arrogant. Because, if we could do that, then we'd all have failed, because we should have had negotiations with that man or woman. But I know that if powerful people are under pressure, then they act. Until now, it seems that they have been acting together with the President.

## THE VERY PRESIDENT WHO ALLOWED THEM TO GET RICH, SO THEY OWE HIM.

Yes. They are committed to each other. We have to understand that there could be a moment that changes things, but we can't say when it will happen. They could stay committed to each other for months or years. You never know. So, more important is at this stage is that Russia loses its friends. If Venezuela, Nicaragua, Eritrea, and the great man in North Korea are the company you keep, and the other big powers abstain from voting, but do not say "we support the Russian President," that must be disappointing for him. International order and international law is not something for softies. It is a basis from which to prevent things from happening, from getting out of hand, especially in the case of powerful countries. They don't like to be surprised. So I think international pressure is very important. I think, for the first time ever, we are talking about sanctions that really do hurt. We've had sanctions in place for years, yet I didn't see many oligarchs or Russia falling to poverty. We kept buying Russian gas and they kept getting our euros. They weren't asking for rubles, but they got our euros and they built that filthy rich kingdom with them. So the sanctions, they are far more powerful now, but we could do far more still.

Many Western countries rely on Russian oil and gas, and it's a problem to



There's no way out for Putin, because he has burnt so many bridges already. But this also makes him very dangerous

decide whether to keep that gas supply open and stop Russia getting our euros, or to cut it off and freeze this winter. The answer is that sometimes you should freeze. Just compare that suffering with the suffering of the Ukrainian people now. We all have to pay something, we cannot liberate and protect Ukraine for free - we have to commit ourselves. And we're sending humanitarian aid, which is right. Weapons are to be discussed. But if the Ukrainian government asks for arms, governments are entitled to deliver because that is not a violation of the UN Charter - it's a matter of self-defense.

During the Covid crisis, so many governments showed that you can take enormous measures. In the Netherlands, we closed down half of our industry, with a guarantee to the companies that the money they lost would be compensated and the staff would get their salaries. Such a gesture was unthinkable before Covid. But we did it, and if you can do it during a pandemic, you can also do it now when we are talking about a third world war that is even worse than Covid.

## "THERE WILL BE A MOMENT WHEN RUSSIA COMES BACK TO THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY," YOU SAID. IN WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES DO YOU SEE RUSSIA WELCOMED BACK TO THE COE / PACE?

Let's take a small look into history. There is never a country that is isolated forever. There will be a moment. But it's not like you can say, "Let's wait a year or two." I know a lot is broken now. And to manage that will take years and years and years before the international community starts to regain a bit of trust in whatever Russian government comes next. That will take a lot of time and a lot of effort. But there being trust in a government led by the current president? I don't see it. I don't see that because he has burnt so many bridges already. For him, there's no way out, but that also makes him very dangerous. There's no way out for Russia, even if Russia withdraws from Ukraine, if it is capable of doing so. We have seen that when Russia enters, it doesn't leave. Georgia is a prime example. But even if they pull out, then there is still this breach of credibility. And I really believe that only when Russia is able to start, I will not say democracy, but of rule of law, as the basis of society, can you have a real discussion.

In Russia, there is no democracy, there is no history of it, but I do not believe that Russians are not capable of developing themselves. If you go to the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, and you see all these beautiful paintings, you will see our civilization in Russia as well. And if there is civilization, there's also a possibility to develop. And so, it is a dangerous and reactionary idea that "Russians are Russians, so they will never ever develop as other countries and people can develop." That is the wrong idea, I think, because if it's true, we really are in deep shit, because that means that the biggest country on Earth can never develop.



# The Transnistria Parallel



A billboard in Tiraspol, the self-proclaimed capital of Transnistria, and a tank monument recognizing World War II. Photo by Charles Davis/Insider

ANALYSIS BY MICHAEL GODWIN

Since its civil war in the early 1990s, Moldova has had a similar experience to that Georgia would later have after the 2008 invasion by Russia, with occupation forces in Moldova's Transnistria region since the 90s conducting training exercises with and equipping the de facto state's armed forces. Additionally, they have made life difficult for the occupied territory's residents and those living near their occupation line.

Recently, a multitude of incidents in the Russian-occupied territory of Moldova have raised fears about a potential expansion of the war in Ukraine. This began on April 22 when a senior Russian military officer stated that "control over southern Ukraine will provide another access point to Transnistria." Only three days after this statement, armed masked



Bombings and a reported incident of Ukrainian troops firing across the border were alleged, but little evidence has been given by authorities. Almost immediately, Moldovan, Ukrainian, and Russian authorities began pointing fingers

men launched shoulder-fired rockets at the Ministry of State Security office building in Tiraspol, the occupied region's capital.

The next day, two explosions occurred at the site of a radio station antenna that was relaying Russian media broadcasts. Several other bombings and a reported incident of Ukrainian troops firing across the shared border into Transnistria were alleged, but little evidence has been given by authorities. Almost immediately, Moldovan, Ukrainian, and Russian authorities began pointing fingers.

Many Russian and internal Transnistrian sources blamed Ukraine for the attacks, stating that they aim to destabilize Transnistria. Transnistria's so-called president Vadim Krasnoselsky said in a statement on pro-Russian media that "those who plotted these attacks pursue the goal of drawing Transnistria into the conflict." He continued pointing at Ukraine and asking Kyiv to investigate alleged "illegal movement of... fighters on Transnistria's territory and their committing a terrorist act on our territory".

At the same time, Ukrainian, Moldovan, and other Western sources blamed Russia for incitement and setting up a "false flag" operation. Moldovan President Maia Sandu said it was "an attempt to escalate tensions," and cited it as an intent to target "internal differences between various groups in Transnistria that have an interest in destabilizing the situation." The Ukrainian aid to President Volodymyr Zelensky posted on Twitter that, "Russia wants to destabilize the Transnistrian region and hints that Moldova should expect 'guests'."

While there are still many opportunities for de-escalation, these incidents should serve as important learning points for other nations bordering Russia. Georgia is at the center of this lesson. Repeated acts of aggression, abductions, and even alleged cross-border covert operations culminate to paint a tense picture for Georgian national defense.

This raises a notable issue in the country that may be a vulnerability for state security. The potential for subversive actions and "false flag" operations on Georgian territory is all too real, particularly to those familiar with the underground intelligence body in the country. This type of hidden framework was something many Western intelligence officials warned about for Ukraine. In

one public statement, the United States outlined this frankly.

US Pentagon spokesman John Kirby spoke about this underground tactic Russia had set up prior to the February 24, 2022 invasion. In a press release he said, "[Russia] has pre-positioned a group of operatives to conduct what we call a false-flag operation, an operation designed to look like an attack on them or Russian speaking people in Ukraine as an excuse to go in." The United Kingdom's Ministry of Defense made similar statements, including covert operations in Transnistria in their assessment.

While Moscow denied these claims as absurd, they did cite the abuse of ethnic Russians as a serious problem. The Kremlin has repeatedly claimed since the collapse of the Soviet Union that Russian-speaking peoples are being oppressed. Additionally, as the "motherland" of ethnic Russians, they had a "duty" to protect these people, even abroad.

This claim has been at the core of their invasion strategy and occupation, and continues to be the justification for maintaining "peacekeeping" forces on foreign territory. While Georgia has a minority of ethnic Russians, this has never dissuaded Russia. Those that do reside in Georgia proper should be made aware of this, particularly the use of media assets and a weaponization of emotional responses to events in Ukraine.

It is imperative that Georgian authorities take this into account. A Russian operation similar to the alleged operations in Moldovan Transnistria would be an easy task. Logistics and planning can be done exceptionally close, what with a large military presence already in occupied Georgia. Additionally, due to the kind and warm nature of the Georgian people, it makes turning others into unknowing intelligence assets all too possible. Literature, media, and private entities can help the populace be aware of such a threat.



Repeated acts of aggression, abductions, and even alleged cross-border covert operations culminate to paint a tense picture for Georgian national defense



A picture released by the Transnistrian interior ministry shows antennae of the radio center following blasts. Source: Transnistrian Interior Ministry via AFP



# EU & CENN Help Georgia and Armenia's Young Entrepreneurs and Socially Vulnerable to Get Qualified and Go Green



At Bamane, they use textile waste to create a variety of products to sell. It is also supportive to its own community, as it has a social mission to employ and re-socialize vulnerable women

BY KATIE RUTH DAVIES

**O**n 28 April, CENN, with the support of the European Union, presented the project 'Social Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Development for Green Growth in the Borderline Regions.' Media representatives were invited to Gori, central Georgia, to discover a number of recently funded local green and social business initiatives.

The main goal of the EU-funded project is to create a favorable environment for social entrepreneurship at the borders in Georgia (Gori, Akhmeta, Ninotsminda) and Armenia (Lori, Tavush, Shirak) in order to help develop green innovation in the regions. The project seeks to draw out the entrepreneurial potential in the most vulnerable municipalities and to support the development of youth opportunities in the field of entrepreneurship. It encourages green entrepreneurial ideas and helps to promote their development and support their practical implementation. Further, the project aims to empower vulnerable groups and increase youth employment, while addressing local and global environmental challenges.

To date, 27 enterprises with social and "green" missions have been funded, 13 of which are in Georgia and 14 in Armenia. Funded enterprises from both countries work in such fields as sustainable waste management, ecotourism, agriculture, sustainable production, and healthcare.

"The green and social component is very important for the EU," Nino Samvelidze, EU member in Georgia, Head of Delegation Youth Program, told us. "I had the opportunity to talk to some of the grant winners, and I'm very glad that with our help, these people were able, in their work, to achieve the set goals."

"The main priorities of the program are youth employment, developing entrepreneurial skills, and working with vulnerable groups. I can confidently say that the project is being implemented

successfully- CENN fully covers these three priorities," Samvelidze said.

"Gori is a vulnerable municipality, especially in terms of education, employment opportunities, and access to finances," says Nana Janashia, CENN Executive Director. "We are proud that, within the framework of this EU-supported project, CENN has been able to economically empower so many young female entrepreneurs to start and expand their enterprises. They, in turn, support vulnerable groups from their community and help them develop their professional skills for employment."

GEORGIA TODAY wanted to hear from some of Georgia's beneficiaries, all of whom are seemingly united in their desire to provide employment to the otherwise vulnerable, while doing something good for the environment around them. First, we spoke to Ketikvachantiradze of "Bamane," a textile studio located in the village of Karaleti, Gori Municipality.

## BAMANE

At Bamane, they use textile waste to create a variety of products to sell to customers, making it an enterprise that is not only friendly to the environment, but also supportive to its own community, as it has a social mission to employ and re-socialize vulnerable women. Right now, the enterprise has six such employees.

"We now focus on producing sleeping bags and children's soft toys, but I started out sewing general goods," Ketikvachantiradze tells us. "In time, I realized I had a lot of left-over fabric, and began using it to make small sewn gifts for friends and clothes for my children. But something inside me always wanted to do more, and when CENN appeared with this project, through which I was able to voice my ideas, I decided, why not? Let's produce sleeping bags and use the remaining textile for toys! Let's minimize fabric waste!"

"For years, I worked alone, with no employees to help me. But, with CENN and the EU's help, I also took on a social mission to train girls aged 14-29, free of charge. As a result, our enterprise is now both green and social due to its missions!" she says.



Leader, managed by Nino Giorgadze, is one of the first companies in the region to have developed a textile waste recycling strategy

## WHERE DO YOU SELL YOUR PRODUCTS?

Our products aren't for sale yet, customers don't know about them, but we've also won a second grant, through which our PR-Marketing direction is being funded. Me and my girls have made advertorial videos about our products, and we're in the process of planning our social media campaigns, deciding which platforms to use, and so on. Such planning takes time, and that's why we haven't reached out to customers yet, but we'll be ready very soon!

## TELL US WHAT YOU HAVE IN STORE FOR THOSE FUTURE CUSTOMERS.

I started sewing three years ago, but since we started our involvement in the CENN project over nine months ago, I've been able to actually implement my idea in physical form. Over the past 5 years, I've sewn more than 500 dresses. Now, we've switched to sleeping bags for kids, but believe me, with no less love and enthusiasm! I'm also a mother and know that there's no relationship with kids without love, and we hope ABA customers will feel that warmth and love through our products.

## TELL US ABOUT YOUR TEAM.

We have permanent employees and they do their jobs with great love and patience. I'm very thankful to them. At the same time, we have interns, entrants, girls at different levels of working knowledge, some of whom can't work every day due to their studies. But they're involved in all the important activities we do. Most importantly, they're trying to acquire sewing skills, which is not easy and needs time. We help the girls to develop these skills.

## HOW DID THE NAME "ABA" COME ABOUT?

Our enterprise is called Bamane, but we decided to name the production line of children's sleeping bags ABA, the first word my fourth child ever said! We connected the winning of the grant for this project to new life, and the birth of my child coincided with that win. I thought that this first word was symbolic and important, and it's easy to remember. Hopefully, everyone will learn to love and remember ABA.

GEORGIA TODAY also got the chance to meet other budding entrepreneurs in green and social businesses in the Shida Kartli region. Check them out below!

## SOCIAL ENTERPRISE "LEADER"

Leader is one of the first companies in the region to have developed a textile waste recycling strategy. Managed by entrepreneur Nino Giorgadze, in addition to textile waste management, the company, founded in 2016, supports the training and employment of socially vulnerable females, internally displaced persons, persons with disabilities, and victims of violence. Women and girls study the profession of cutting-sewing-clothes-making, and prepare themselves for further employment. As of March 2022, the enterprise had (re)trained 24 socially vulnerable young people aged 18-29, and employed 14.

"We take textile waste from 35 enterprises," Nino tells us. "We had an idea to create pet furniture with this material. We also accept sewing waste from the population, and then recycle it. In addition, we send recycled waste to various furniture houses, which is then used to make their products."

In terms of the environmental mission of the enterprise, in the past year alone, Nino has increased the number of companies supplying her with fabric waste so much that they were able to recycle two tons of textile as a secondary raw



Co-founder Tamar Sheitnishvili (left) says Champy's mission is to promote economic empowerment of the border region and the development of waste-free production in Georgia

material. Nino says that by the end of this year, she expects to have processed around 10 tons of textile waste to make the abovementioned products, and to create children's clothes, which are sold domestically, and internationally via the Amazon platform.

Looking ahead, the Leader founder says they plan to go to Italy and France to take part in exhibitions.

## FLORA VILLE

Flora Ville is a 200 square-meter rose and domestic flower greenhouse in the village of Patara Garejvari, Gori Municipality, which is managed by 29-year-old entrepreneur and gardening enthusiast, Natia Iremadze. There, she trains young people in greenhouse management, producing a variety of flowers and plants. Her aim is to empower and employ local women, showing the world that "women can be successful too." Today, Flora Ville employs three young women, and demand for their flowers is growing, with flower lovers now able to buy up to 400 varieties of potted flowers in any season. Natia successfully turned her passion

into a source of income, and, today, many visitors visit her greenhouse. She next has plans to open a store to make the buying process more comfortable for their customers. "At the moment, we use courier services, and sometimes I'm a courier myself," Natia tells us with a smile. "I've been interested in flowers since I was a child. Before I set up this greenhouse, I grew a lot of flowers at home. Now, I spend almost all day working with plants. Interacting with them is an antidepressant for me."

## CHAMPY

Champy, founded by three students, is located in the village of Ditsi, Gori Municipality, near the ABL with Tskhinvali. In an effort to promote healthy eating, and to make good use of the leftovers from the vast apple crop the region is known for, the Champy team use the drying method to produce apple chips. Co-founder Tamar Sheitnishvili says Champy's mission is to promote economic empowerment of the border region and the development of waste-free production in Georgia.



Natia's aim is to empower and employ local women, showing the world that "women can be successful too"

## WHY TEXTILE RECYCLING IS IMPORTANT

In this consumerist world, where clothes are cheap and easy to buy, around 100 billion garments are produced annually. Globally, we consume 62 million tons of textile per year. By 2030, this is expected to reach 102 million tons. The fashion industry, which is worth \$1.5 trillion and employs more than 300 million people along the value chain, is a significant contributor to textile waste and carbon emissions, and is responsible for as much as 10% of all global pollution, making it the second most polluting industry after aviation, "Woolly-green" reports.

As such, the importance of recycling textiles is increasingly being recognized. Once in landfills, natural fibers can take from a few weeks to a few years to decompose. In doing so, they may release methane and CO2 gas into the atmosphere. Further, synthetic textiles are designed not to decompose, and once in the landfill, they may release toxic substances into groundwater and surrounding soil.

Some studies estimate textile waste during manufacturing can be as high as 25%. Other studies estimate 15% of materials end up on the cutting room floor. To combat these trends, eco-conscious consumers are increasingly buying from sustainable fashion brands or buying used clothing instead of new. But in Georgia, the choices in this regard are still limited.

Textile recycling is a significant challenge to be addressed as we strive to move closer to a zero landfill society, and a few, small, often female-led companies in Georgia are doing their bit not only to reduce textile waste, but to train, employ and support the socially vulnerable in their communities. Let's support them, and Georgia, to go green!

Find out more here: <https://woollygreen.com/fashion-industry-waste-statistics/>





# Latest Trends of International Travel from Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine



The number of international travelers increased by 266.3% in March 2022, compared to the same period of 2021, and declined by 65.9% compared to the same period in 2019. Meanwhile, the number of international visitors increased by 236.9% (2022/2021) and declined by 62.9% (2022/2019), and the number of international tourists increased by 210.6% (2022/2021) and declined by 51.5% (2022/2019).

In March 2022, the top countries of origin of international visits were Turkey (42,421 visits), Russia (22,536 visits), and Armenia (21,990 visits). For each of these countries, the recovery in number of visits was most significant for Armenia (56.4% of the March 2019 figure), followed by Turkey (48%) and Russia (22.9%).

### ENTRIES BY RUSSIANS, BELARUSIANS, AND UKRAINIANS

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, and the consequent imposition of sanctions on Russia and Belarus, a rapid inflow of international

travelers into Georgia from Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine has been evident. According to data collected by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, in March 2022, the number of Russian citizens to enter Georgia reached 45,100, which amounted to 18% of total entries into Georgia. Moreover, compared to the previous month, the number of entries by Russian citizens increased by 68.8%. Meanwhile, entries by Belarusian citizens saw a dramatic 281.1% month-on-month increase, reaching 20 000 and amounting to 8% of total entries into Georgia. The entries by Ukrainian citizens increased by 53.5% compared to February 2022 and reached 16,900, accounting for 6.8% of total entries. However, the provided data does not cover how many citizens of given countries have crossed the border to leave the country (transit).

### EXITS BY RUSSIANS, BELARUSIANS, AND UKRAINIANS

For further analysis, the number of exits by international visitors for the first quarter of 2021 should also be taken into consideration, as the statistics from the



National Statistics Office of Georgia are counted as international visitors leaving the country. From the beginning of 2021, the number of exits by Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians showed significant recovery. In January 2021, the exits by Russians reached 33% the January 2019 figure, while for both Ukrainians and Belarusians this figure was equal to 60%. However, in March 2022 the number of exits by Belarusians reached 5300 (86% higher than March 2019), while the number of exits by Ukrainians reached 6400 (51% lower than March 2019). Meanwhile, the number of exits by Russians reached 22,500 (77% lower than March 2019). An observation of the monthly dynamics revealed that the exits by Ukrainians in March 2022 declined significantly by 26%, compared to February 2022. Meanwhile, the corresponding figure for Belarus increased by 53%, and there was an 8% rise for Russia.

### TRAVEL RECEIPTS FROM RUSSIANS, BELARUSIANS, AND UKRAINIANS

Another indicator which can be used to measure the inflow from the selected countries is the travel receipts from Russians, Belarusians and Ukrainians. In March 2022, travel receipts from Russians showed a significant increase (133%) compared to the previous month, reaching \$34.3 mln. For Belarusians, the increase was even higher (551%), with income from receipts reaching \$29.3 mln. The share of travel receipts from Russians (+6 pp) and Belarusians (+13 pp) also showed a significant month-on-month increase. In total, citizens of these two countries accounted for 37% of total travel receipts. Meanwhile, despite the increased receipts (by 40%) from Ukrainians, the share of Ukrainians in total travel receipts declined to 8%.

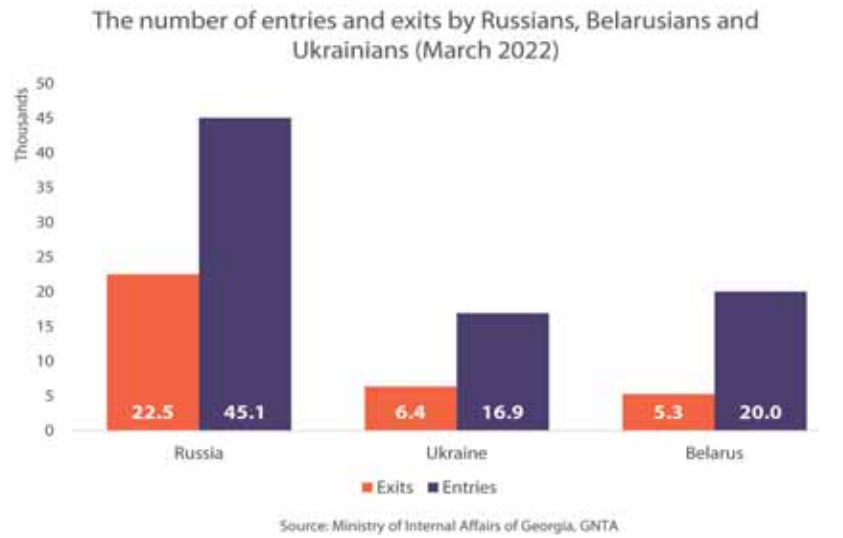
### DIFFERENCES IN EXITS AND ENTRIES

After the beginning of the war in Ukraine, the border crossing statistics have revealed significant differences in the number of entries and exits by Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians. Conceding that there may be some possible statistical discrepancies, the number of entries into Georgia in March 2022 from the selected countries was considerably higher compared to the exits in the same month. The difference is especially high for Russia, followed by Belarus and Ukraine. It should also be noted that March 2022 was the only month in Q1 2022 where such substantial differences could be observed. Complementing this trend, the receipts from international travelers have risen, with significant monthly rises for Belarus and Russia, followed by Ukraine.

### HOTEL PRICE INDEX IN GEORGIA

In March 2022, in Georgia the hotel price index increased by 8.5% compared to February 2022. The 3-star, 4-star and 5-star hotel price index increased by 7.5%, while for guesthouses, the price index increased by 4.0%. The monthly price increase was most prominent in Tbilisi (14.6%). Meanwhile, in Mtskheta-Mtianeti prices has shown the most significant decline (-12.6%).

In March 2022, compared to March 2021, hotel prices in Georgia increased by 14.9%. The prices of 3\*, 4\*, 5\* hotels increased by 16.6% and the prices of guesthouses increased by 19.0%. The yearly price increase was the highest in Adjara (25.8%). While the yearly decline was only noticed in Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti (-3.4%).



### AVERAGE HOTEL PRICES IN GEORGIA (MARCH 2022)

In Georgia, the average cost of a room in a 3-star hotel was 152 GEL per night in March 2022, while the average cost of a room in a 4-star hotel in Georgia was 246 GEL per night and the average cost of a room in a

guesthouse was 114 GEL per night. The average cost of a room in a 5-star hotel in Georgia in March 2022 was 406 GEL per night. In Tbilisi, the average price was 574 GEL, followed by Kakheti 451 GEL, Samtskhe-Javakheti 373 GEL and Guria 352 GEL.



Region	Hotel		3*, 4*, 5*		Guesthouse	
	2022 Mar/ 2022 Feb	2022 Mar/ 2021 Mar	2022 Mar/ 2022 Feb	2022 Mar/ 2021 Mar	2022 Mar/ 2022 Feb	2022 Mar/ 2021 Mar
Kakheti	-3.0%	18.3%	-1.5%	23.6%	-4.1%	11.2%
Imereti	2.5%	19.3%	2.0%	33.3%	3.1%	24.7%
Guria	-4.6%	7.2%	-4.6%	22.6%	-	-
Kvemo Kartli	0.0%	13.4%	-	28.6%	0.0%	0.0%
Adjara	9.0%	25.8%	3.9%	31.2%	19.1%	13.0%
Racha	-4.2%	8.5%	-	-	-4.2%	8.5%
Ibidia Kartli	0.0%	13.6%	0.0%	35.6%	0.0%	-4.8%
Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti	-1.1%	-3.4%	-8.6%	-11.0%	4.6%	3.7%
Samtskhe-Javakheti	-3.0%	5.3%	0.7%	25.5%	-5.1%	-11.6%
Mtskheta-Mtianeti	-12.6%	16.9%	-15.3%	27.8%	-8.4%	5.3%
Tbilisi	14.6%	31.3%	16.0%	9.3%	3.3%	26.2%
Overall Price % Change	8.5%	14.9%	7.5%	16.6%	4.0%	19.0%

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	I 2021	II 2021	III 2021	IV 2021	2022 I	2022 II
GDP in current prices for Accommodation and Food Service Activities (mln)	1054.3	1437.5	1800.0	2222.0	1204.5	197.8*	437.3*	603.3*	472.0*	1726.4*	-
Number of International Travelers (thousand persons)	6720.0	7802.5	8679.5	9357.9	1747.1	134.7	351.3	815.4	579.8	1881.3	576.5
Number of Tourists (thousand persons)	3297.3	4089.4	4756.8	5080.5	1087.0	116.6	305.8	670.4	484.7	1577.5	456.0
Revenue from International Travel (mln USD)	2110.7	2704.3	3222.1	3268.7	541.7	53.6*	246.1*	566.0*	379.3*	3244.0*	393.7*
The Expenditures of Georgian Travelers Abroad (mln USD)	386.3	463.6	524.7	657.2	180.5	19.7*	37.1*	62.6*	64.5*	184.1*	-
Foreign Direct Investment in Hotels and Restaurants Sector (mln USD)	120.0	109.5	82.3	123.4	-249.5	-0.9*	-1.4*	10.7*	0.7*	7.7*	-

\* Preliminary data



# Embassy of the United Arab Emirates in Tbilisi Organizes Charity Project – Ramadan 2022



**O**n April 28, the Embassy of the United Arab Emirates in Tbilisi, with the support of Red Crescent Society of the United Arab Emirates, organized a charity event - Ramadan 2022, during which 440 food parcels were donated to the Administration of All Muslims of Georgia in order to distribute to families in need. This initiative was implemented as part of humanitarian activities based on the directives and vision of the UAE leadership.

The event, held at Juma Mosque in Tbilisi, was attended by Muslim families, the Mufti of Eastern Georgia, Mr. Etibar Eminov, Sheikh Mr. Ramin Igidov and the Charge d'affaires of the Embassy of the United Arab Emirates to Georgia, Ms. Munira Almarzooqi.

The head of the UAE mission congratulated the families gathered at the mosque the Holy month of Ramadan and the upcoming Eid El-fitr and highlighted the efforts of the UAE leadership to provide humanitarian assistance to people in need around the world, regardless of their ethnic, religious or geographical affiliation. Ms. Munira Almarzooqi also noted that the volume of foreign aid provided by the UAE governmental and non-governmental organizations reaches 60 billion USD.

In this regard, the head of mission pointed out the 1 billion Meals initiative - distribution of food parcels, which was launched at the beginning of the Holy Month of Ramadan and implemented by the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives (MBRGI) aiming

at providing food support in 50 countries around the world, which will make a significant contribution to the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

In addition, the Charge d'affaires noted that the United Arab Emirates became the first non-Western country in 2010 to rank first among the top 10 countries in the world in terms of humanitarian aid per capita and in 2019, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) named the United Arab Emirates the largest donor of humanitarian aid worldwide for the seventh time in a row.

In closing remarks, Ms. Munira Almarzooqi thanked the Administration of All Muslims of Georgia for providing the Embassy with an opportunity to assist families in need during the Holy month

of Ramadan and expressed readiness to continue this kind of cooperation in the future.

For their part, Muslim religious leaders wished the government and people of the United Arab Emirates a blessed

and happy Ramadan and thanked the Charge d'affaires for the support provided by the Embassy.

Embassy of the United Arab Emirates to Georgia



## Trendy Wooden Houses by Kohi.ge

**T**he construction company of wooden houses and cottages, kohi.ge, today offers economical, ecologically clean and low-cost wooden houses in any region of Georgia, built using centuries-old technology spread throughout North America and Europe.

Special benefits are available for the population of the regions of Georgia who want to return to the land of their ancestors or arrange a tourist complex and introduce the beautiful places of Georgia to more foreigners.

There is probably no person alive who has not dreamed of owning a beautiful wooden cabin on the edge of the forest, or their own wooden home in a village.

Kohi.ge is the company that will fulfill this dream and, most importantly, fulfill it quickly, with quality, and at low cost, in any part of Georgia. Kohi.ge will give you a house that needs no renovation and is ready to move into.

Houses built with kohi.ge technology are warm in winter and cool in

summer. Most importantly, it is cheaper than a traditional concrete house and gets built quickly.

You can order 1 square meter from 750 GEL within the summer campaign of kohi.ge, but the final price depends on the wall thickness and the materials used. The average price is 1000 GEL per square meter. However, there are also higher-priced projects available within the recently launched special product Kohi.ge Premium.

Kohi.ge houses are economical, ecological and fast to build, they are energy efficient, because they require much less money to heat or cool.

Houses include high-quality plastic doors and windows (black or brown), thermal insulation in the walls, ceiling and floor, electricity, and communications.

### WHY CHOOSE KOHI.GE?

According to Levan Pirtskhalava, company director: "This is our standard, one that sets us apart from everyone else. In general, our main challenge is to develop the wooden house con-

struction industry. Unfortunately, there are no official standards in Georgia to assess the durability and quality of wooden house construction. Therefore, our company is developing its own standard, which will be developed according to the standards of construction of the most successful Canadian wooden houses in the world.

"Our houses are suitable not only for Georgian but also for European markets, which we are going to achieve from 2022. Therefore, the choice is simple - choosing Kohi.ge means choosing European quality," he says.

595808024 is the Kohi.ge hotline. The company consultants will help you select the project you want.

Given that prices for building materials and real estate are rising, if you order a house before the end of May, you will keep the old price and this summer you will already have your new dream home ready.

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TEL: 595 808024  
www.kohi.ge, info@kohi.ge  
https://www.facebook.com/qkhi.ge



# Deals on Wheels

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

It has been interesting to compare my four automobile shopping experiences in Georgia over the years. What has changed, or not?

Three of the four times, I went to Rustavi's huge outdoor used car market, largest such in the country; never alone. Two of those three, I took a Georgian with me, and this last time I took two Americans, all people who knew more about cars than I do and can help me make a good choice. The other time I paid an experienced Georgian to fly to Germany and drive me back a vehicle which I had found in advance, online; in the end he didn't like it and made another similar choice with my approval. In every case, I knew roughly what I was looking for. My other buys were: a 2-door 1991 Niva, a 1999 Hyundai Galloper with radiator boiling problems at altitude, the great 2008 Toyota 4Runner which we lost in January's fire, and my current ride. This would be similar to the last one, but a bit newer, smaller and cheaper to run.

This last time I went online to myauto.ge and did some extensive searching based on a whole set of parameters: range of production years, engine sizes, left-hand steering wheel, gasoline or hybrid engine type, miles driven, customs-

cleared, location in or near Tbilisi, VIN number required to do a background check. This at least showed me what to expect for prices; although all but one of the 30-odd vehicles I found and examined this way had been through accidents and then been repaired. This seemed almost unavoidable.

I have a favorite brand for its reputation and longevity, Toyota, and also wanted a 4x4 or all-wheel drive, preferably as new as my budget could afford, automatic transmission to rest a bit while driving, ideally a hybrid engine for the best fuel efficiency. I had to drop this last one as it made my choices both too few and too expensive, as well as forcing them to have been made in 2017 or even more recently and driving up the price further. I compromised by allowing all-gasoline engines back into the parameter set, which then enlarged and became cheaper simultaneously.

However, I still ended up going back to Rustavi's asphalt lots with their thousands of vehicles. I dreaded having to spend all day there and choosing between multiple cars. In the end, having rejected a couple of potentials because they were too old or too expensive, my friends helped me settle on the first one, for which we went as far as the online, paid VIN check. We also took it to a nearby garage and had the mechanic examine its underside, which was rust-free and

in great condition by his estimation.

I tried and failed to get the price down at all (no surprise when three guys show up speaking English to each other), realized it was a great buy anyway, and went to the bank to seal the deal. Inspection accomplished, a new ID card for me as owner printed (same license plates, no need to change them), I handed over the wad of US hundred-dollar bills, he counted them, and we shook hands, both containing our delight. Then I took my two American consultants out for a celebratory lunch. The car? A white 2018 Toyota Rav4 in great condition.

Now I have been spending some of the money I saved from the maximum budgeted amount to buy some necessary accessories: a good but light roof rack, a dash-cam, insurance, the vital tools. The car runs nice and smoothly with little noise, and has some bells and whistles I have never had before, like a camera to show you what you're backing up towards, Bluetooth, and more computer analysis of running details like fuel use and efficiency.

We have also decided that my wife will soon start driving lessons (NOT from me) and gain some considerable independence as a result. I expect she'll do fine. Our friends' generosity following the garage fire has brought us to this financial possibility, and we are so grateful. Life as we know it has



returned a bit to the normal.

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 Renais-

sance" Facebook group, now with nearly 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)

# Working for Open, Diverse and Inclusive Civil Service in Georgia

On the way to civil service reform in Georgia, the UK Government and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) are assisting the Civil Service Bureau to study and analyze legal and procedural gaps preventing people with disabilities and representatives of ethnic minorities from getting jobs and building careers in the public sector.

On 3 May, UNDP and the Civil Service Bureau unveiled four studies that were carried out in partnership with local experts and civil society organizations - the PMC Research Center and the Disability Research Center (DRC) of Tbilisi State University.

The research reveals that insufficient knowledge of the Georgian language is one of the main barriers for Armenian- and Azerbaijani-speaking people in seeking public employment. It also shows that in municipalities with a high concentration of ethnic minorities, the representation of women in the civil service is lower than the national average and does not exceed 33%. The research assesses the effectiveness of state-funded



We acknowledge the existing challenges and work to involve people from diverse backgrounds in creating public policies and services - Catherine Kardava, Head of the Civil Service Bureau



The studies examine staffing and recruitment policies in the civil service. One of these focuses on women, people with disabilities, and representatives of ethnic minorities. Photo by Gela Bedianashvili/UNDP

initiatives, including the internship programs for ethnic minorities, and offers recommendations for improvement.

In the case of people with disabilities, the study focuses on professional qualifications and education and training opportunities, and highlights unsupportive attitudes from civil service employers and staff. The research analyzes the issues associated with the physical accessibility of public buildings, including transportation and inclusive infrastructure.

Two specific studies examine staffing and recruitment policies in the civil service. One of these focuses on women,

people with disabilities, and representatives of ethnic minorities, while the other analyzes the inclusiveness and accessibility of HR.GOV.GE, the main recruitment resource of the civil service.

"Equality and diversity are the core values of civil service. We acknowledge the existing challenges and work to involve people from diverse backgrounds in creating public policies and services," said Catherine Kardava, Head of the Civil Service Bureau.

"The UK is proud to support systemic reforms in Georgia's civil service. Credible research and solid evidence will help achieve the reform goals and ensure

transparency, representation and inclusion of the public sector," said Ellen Wichmann, Head of Programs, British Embassy in Georgia.

"Modern civil service is a diverse workplace committed to promoting and ensuring equality and valuing diversity. Our research will help Georgia's civil service to better understand the needs and gaps of minorities and people with disabilities and ensure equal job opportunities for them in the public sector," said Anna Chernyshova, UNDP Deputy Resident Representative in Georgia.

The studies are available on the UNDP website.



Credible research and solid evidence will help achieve the reform goals and ensure transparency - Ellen Wichmann, Head of Programs, British Embassy in Georgia. Photo by Gela Bedianashvili/UNDP



# Energy-Efficiency Modernizations in Public Buildings Improve Learning Environments & Support Energy Transition in Georgia



**T**he celebration of Nefco's first implemented energy-efficiency project in Georgia coincides with the signing of a new EUR 6.5 million project which will support energy-efficiency modernizations in public schools in remote mountainous regions in the country.

Nefco is an international financial institution (IFI) that finances the initial scale-up of Nordic green solutions on international markets. Founded in 1990 by the five Nordic countries, it serves the interests of its owners, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, and takes concrete actions to accelerate the green transition.

Nefco officially inaugurated its first implemented project in Georgia this week, which encompasses the renovation of 26 public buildings across the country. The energy-efficiency modernizations carried out from autumn 2018 until the end of 2021 have resulted in improved indoor conditions and energy savings, and supported Georgia towards its green transition by using renewable and alternative energy sources. The project has also contributed to the implementation of Georgia's national goals to combat climate change and demonstrated the applicability of new building codes in various types of buildings with different functions and usage and how these new codes work in different climate zones.

In addition to Nefco loan financing of EUR 2.8 million, the project was grant-financed by the Eastern Europe Energy Efficiency and Environment Partnership (E5P) with EUR 1.87 million, to which the European Union and Sweden are the largest contributors. Denmark supported the project with EUR 956,000 for technical assistance during both the implementation and project preparation phases.

Together with its project partners, including the Ministry of Finance of Georgia, the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia, the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia, E5P and its contributors, and the LEPL Municipal Development Fund of Georgia, Nefco inaugurated the project on 4 May 2022 and visited two of the modernized schools, Public School No. 55 and LEPL First Experimental Public School in Tbilisi, to present the implemented energy-efficiency measures.

"We are very pleased to celebrate our first implemented project in Georgia," said Trond Moe, Managing Director at Nefco, in Tbilisi. "Together with our project partners, it has been a privilege to see the country's progress in implementing its energy reforms and moving towards a green energy transition. We are happy to continue supporting Georgia through the new project, which was signed today and will benefit, in particular, the more vulnerable communities."

Both the implemented project and the

newly signed project 'Rehabilitation and Energy Efficiency Improvements in Public Schools in Mountainous Regions in Georgia' are characterized by their significant environmental and social impacts in Georgia. The implemented energy-efficiency project is expected to result in annual reductions of about 5,000 MWh in heat and electricity consumption, with a decrease of 1,100 tonnes of CO2 emissions. The actual savings will be monitored on a continuous basis for a ten-year period. The implemented project has created good and comfortable learning environments for schoolchildren and municipal workers. The second Nefco project in Georgia will support energy-efficiency modernizations and renovations in 15 public schools in mountainous regions in Georgia.

"We greatly appreciate Nefco's and E5P's role in helping Georgia overcome the challenges we are facing and for ensuring that they are responsive to our priority needs," said Lasha Khutsishvili, Minister of Finance of Georgia. "The project 'Rehabilitation and Energy-efficiency Improvement in Public Schools in Mountainous Regions in Georgia' is supporting Georgia's transition to a green economy and helping to build more resilient and efficient infrastructure, while improving the learning environment for students in less-developed parts of our country and benefiting vulnerable social groups of the population. I believe that the project will have significant environmental and social impacts and bring many benefits, such as meeting the minimum requirements for appropriate infrastructure for teaching and improved comfort levels and safety for students and teachers. I am confident that this will be a catalyst for greater energy efficiency in the future."

Nefco's second project in Georgia will build on the lessons learned from the first completed project and be expanded into more challenging settings in less-developed parts of the country, benefiting vulnerable social groups of the population. Alongside the positive environmental impacts and energy-efficiency improvements, the new project will support the development of other UN Sustainable Development Goals, especially education, health and gender equality. Both Nefco projects are aligned with the

new laws on energy efficiency and energy performance of buildings introduced by Georgia and are part of the wider reform agenda associated with the EU Georgia Association Agreement.

"The E5P donors are proud of this first Nefco project and its continuation in remote mountainous regions of Georgia. The E5P donors, led by the European Union, remain committed to such crucial investments, delivering a multitude of environmental and social benefits alongside the reform agenda," commented Ewa Manik, Associate Director at E5P.

"The EU, the biggest contributor to the E5P Fund, is pleased to support energy-efficiency renovations of schools in Georgia. The E5P projects implemented by Nefco bring the economic, environmental and health benefits of energy-efficiency measures to municipalities across the country. We are looking forward to boosting renovations of buildings in Georgia with large-scale investment programs underpinned by reform assistance together with our Team Europe partners," said Carl Hartzell, EU Ambassador to Georgia.

The total investment of the new project, signed today in Tbilisi, is EUR 6.5 million. Nefco's loan financing totals EUR 3.9 million and E5P grant financing EUR 2.6 million. Sweden has financed the project development costs and is expected to allocate financing for technical assistance during the project implementation, which is due to start at the end of 2022.

"Sweden is pleased to contribute to

Georgia's green transition, including improved energy efficiency," said Ulrik Tideström, Ambassador of Sweden to Georgia. "We have invested over EUR 8 million in the E5P fund for Georgia, as the largest bilateral donor. Similarly, we are one of the main stakeholders in Nefco, the Nordic Green Bank, together with the other Nordic countries. Together, we provide co-financing grants for municipal sector projects across Georgia to improve energy efficiency and boost progress on a multitude of other environmental and social issues. The Swedish assistance should be seen in the wider context of our strong political, financial and technical support to Georgia's reforms for European integration."

Energy-efficiency measures in the new project will include insulation of building envelopes, replacement of doors and windows, installation of new heating and ventilation systems as well as measures for reducing electricity consumption. Structural improvements are also included in the projects due to the poor conditions of the school buildings. The implemented renovations and installed energy-efficiency measures will extend the lifetime of the buildings.

Since 2010, Nefco has financed over 170 similar energy-efficiency modernization projects in public buildings in Ukraine, and it is currently implementing its initial projects in Moldova, the first of which was completed in autumn 2021. Together with E5P, Nefco has completed 36 energy-efficiency projects in Eastern Europe.



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