

Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: Week 14



Image source: EPA

BY ANA DUMBADZE

Top United Nations officials are leading negotiations on a package deal to ensure that both Ukraine and Russia can export stalled shipments of grain and fertilizer, "which will somehow refill a global market in dire

need of food as severe hunger crises loom," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said Wednesday.

The announcement from Guterres came the same day the organization released a bleak new assessment on the ways Russia's invasion has "exacerbated a global cost-of-living crisis unseen in at least a generation." The report warned of worldwide social and economic upheaval if world leaders do not act fast.

Russia's invasion has devastated and reshaped Ukraine, and its impact has also rippled out far beyond both countries' borders, affecting millions worldwide by sending food and fuel prices soaring and driving up the cost of living, the United Nations reported.

Key updates of the 14th week of the war include:

- The foreign ministers of Russia and Turkey said they held "substantial

talks on a proposal to create a shipping corridor to allow wheat exports from Ukraine; however, they did not announce an agreement despite the worsening global food crisis. Turkey's intention to participate in the unblocking of Ukrainian ports is motivated by the fact that the country itself may suffer in the food crisis and wants to prevent it. Turkish political scientist Onur Sinan Guzaltan noted that Ankara's participation in this matter is "anticipated and should be regarded normal," given its mediation in the negotiations between the Russian and Ukrainian delegations.

- President Biden will travel to Europe for Group of Seven and NATO summits later this month, the White House announced, as he continues his efforts to sustain international support for Ukraine.

- Ukrainian forces remain locked in a brutal fight to maintain territory in the city of Severodonetsk, a key battleground in the Kremlin's bid to capture Ukraine's eastern Donbas region.

Governor of Luhansk Oblast, acknowledging that Ukrainian troops may need to "withdraw to stronger positions." However, the Ukrainian side says their fighters are not going to surrender.

Images collected by US satellite company Maxar Technologies show the destructive path of Russia's invasion in Luhansk and Donetsk, as it intensified its attacks on the eastern provinces in recent weeks.

In Rubizhne, near Severodonetsk, before-and-after pictures show parts of the city reduced to rubble.

IN CRIMEA

Moscow claims it has restored rail and road links to the annexed Crimean Peninsula via the Ukrainian cities it now controls — including Mariupol and Melitopol. Capturing Mariupol last month after a bitter fight provided Russia with a vital land bridge to the peninsula, which it annexed from Ukraine in 2014.

The Russian military says the ports of Mariupol and Berdyansk have been demined and are ready to ship grain.

IN EASTERN UKRAINE

Luhansk regional governor Serhiy Haidai on Wednesday said Ukrainian troops were facing an onslaught of Russian shelling that is targeting Ukrainian-held supply lines in Severodonetsk, where Moscow claims it now controls 97 percent of the territory.

"Fierce battles are taking place. Our defenders are fighting for every inch of the city," said Serhiy Haidai, current

IN ZAPORIZHZHIA

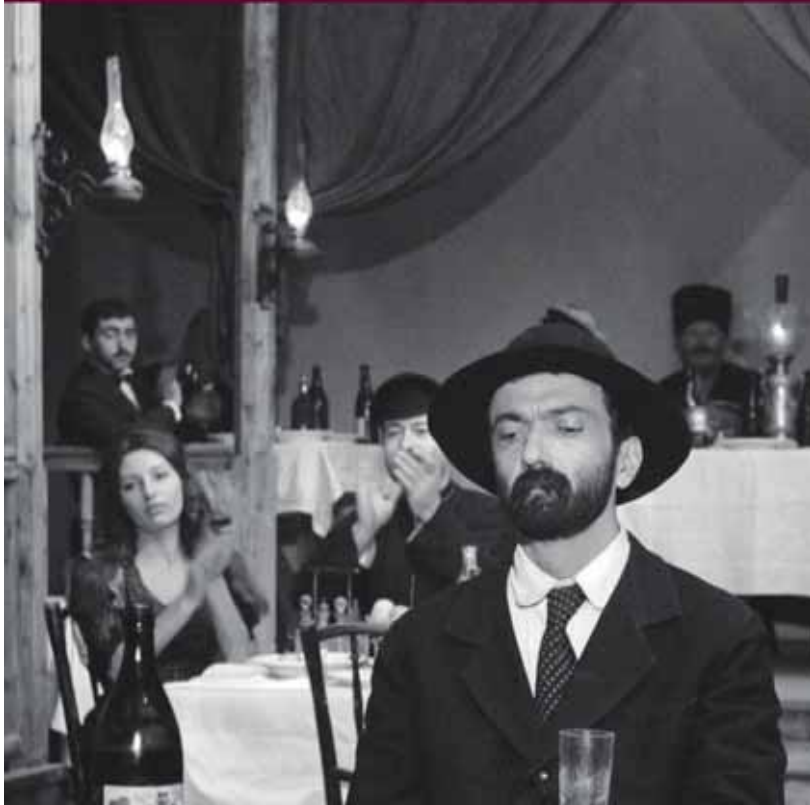
Zelensky has warned that Moscow is preparing to seize the major southeastern city of Zaporizhzhia, which would give Russian troops better access to the center of Ukraine. Ukraine has appealed to the International Atomic Energy Agency and the UN Secretary General to "liberate" the city's nuclear power plant that has been held by Russian forces since March.

Retrospective of 1960s Georgian Cinema Being Held until June 19

From May 27 to June 19, the National Film Center, in cooperation with the National Archives, is presenting a retrospective "Georgian Cinema of the 60s."

The restoration of the works of Georgian cinema classics has just been completed and viewers will see them for the first time.

Film screenings are being at the National Archives Cinema Hall and attendance is free.



Paolo Fresu Trio to Open Joseph Lagidze International Arts Festival 'Tbilisi Rhythm' on June 15th



Paolo Fresu Trio is to open the Joseph Lagidze International Arts Festival 'Tbilisi Rhythm' on June 15th at Tbilisi Conservatoire Grand Hall. "This new trio has something evocative and almost spiritual and is able to exploit the great empathic ability of its components to compose art and com-

municate life. This is what happens when we talk about Paolo Fresu, Dino Rubino, and Marco Bardoscia," say the organizers. "They confront each other's direct experiences with different styles that characterize the individual musicians; different but perfectly assimilable and complementary. A refined three-part dialogue, with a great emo-

tional and intellectual impact that consists on Fresu warm sound and vivid and creative mind, the powerful and engaging lines of Bardoscia double bass, and the elegant and vibrant Rubino's pianism."

The Festival is powered by Tbilisi City Hall and the Embassy of Italy to Georgia.

WB: Georgian Economy Shows Resilience to Economic Shock Induced by Russian Invasion of Ukraine

The Georgian economy has shown resilience to the economic shock induced by the Russian invasion of Ukraine so far, with the growth forecast for 2022 upgraded to 5.5 percent from 2.5 percent forecast in March, reads the World Bank's recent report.

The resilience is driven by the strength of the services sector, particularly in tourism, with a strong recovery in the year through May. The forecast is for a continued recovery in 2023 and 2024 with growth easing towards potential at 5-5.5%, it noted.

The report also said that the inflationary pressures are rising, with annual inflation at double-digits through the year through May, with 74% of the increase driven by higher food and fuel prices.

"Risks to the baseline forecast remain elevated with key risks including further escalation or prolongation of the war in Ukraine and any spillover from the sanctions; rising inflationary pressures weighing on economic activity going forward and COVID-19 outbreaks, particularly in the context of new variants and low vaccination rates," it concluded.



EU Membership Status - Strong Will of the Georgian People

BY KETEVAN SKHIRTADZE

The President of Georgia, Salome Zurbishvili, said in an interview with Interpressnews that Georgia has come a long way to reach where it is today. She added that statements and mistakes of the past year cannot be decisive. "I do not think they will reject us," the President noted.

She emphasized that the commission's first assessment will probably be critical of some aspects such as judicial reform and the failings following the Charles Michel agreement.

"I still hope that the political decision taken by the European Council will rely more on the geopolitical situation and not on our mistakes. The population is entirely oriented towards Europe. We have passed a long path to arrive where we are today. The statements and mistakes of the past year cannot be decisive. I do not think that they will reject us. I have high hopes that despite everything, despite our many verbal mistakes and wrong actions, a decision will be made at a higher level and will be more far-sighted," she stated.

GEORGIA'S PROGRESS TOWARDS THE EU

The Chair of the Foreign Relations Committee, Nikoloz Samkharadze participated in the GLOBSEC 2022 Forum in Bratislava dedicated to EU enlargement and the Eastern neighborhood.

In his speech, Samkharadze focused on the EU membership application of Georgia, the reforms undertaken in the country on the EU integration path, and the geopolitical reality.

"The current geopolitical reality and challenges require changes and a revision of the European security. Georgia has manifested significant progress during the last decade and, thus, I do hope the EU will make a pragmatic decision on granting EU candidate status to Georgia. It will serve an important message not only for our society, but for Moscow, to remind the Kremlin that it will no longer be able to continue its aggressive and destructive actions against our country," Samkharadze stated.

SUPPORTING GRANTING OF CANDIDATE STATUS TO GEORGIA, UKRAINE AND MOLDOVA

Estonian Ambassador Riina Kaljurand, at a discussion "Foreign and Security Policy," said she didn't want to speculate on the issue of Georgia's EU status, because the European Commission will make a decision in the coming days. However, she noted that Estonia supports the granting of candidate status to all three countries.

Asked whether the Brussels decision might be affected by problems in Georgia's justice system, she noted the arrest of the director general of Mtavari TV, was not politically timely, but that issuing (or not) EU candidate status would not be based on one specific case, but the overall functioning of the justice system, and "Georgia has made good progress in this direction, but there is still a very, very long way to go."

ITALIAN SUPPORT FOR EU CANDIDATE STATUS

"Georgia has centuries of experience, it is a member of European civilization and thus, it is absolutely logical and understandable that it should become a full member of Europe. Italy supports this aspiration of Georgia," said the President of the Italian Republic, Sergio Mattarella, at a joint briefing between the Presidents of Georgia and Italy.



Image Source: Parliament.ge

"Italy emphasizes Georgia's sovereignty and its territorial integrity. Russia's aggression in Ukraine has had a great impact on the region, and this has further accelerated the partnership between Georgia and Europe and the joint efforts to maintain peace in the region. Georgia has centuries of experience, it is a member of European civilization and thus, it is absolutely logical and understandable that it should become a full member of Europe. Italy supports this aspiration of Georgia.

"Black Sea security concerns Georgia first, but it affects us all. This is also a problem of the European Community. Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity are one of the biggest problems in the Geneva talks. Italy and Georgia are united by multifaceted relations – economic, and cultural, which will be further deepened. Our cooperation is very important in terms of culture. At the meeting, we stressed the importance of friendship between our countries and the deepening of this relationship in various directions," said the Italian president.

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT DRAFTS JOINT STATEMENT SUPPORTING UKRAINE, MOLDOVA AND GEORGIA'S BID TO JOIN EU

The news agency Radio Liberty issued a statement noting leaders of political groups in the European Parliament have drafted a statement in support of Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia.

As noted in the statement, leaders of the European Parliament political groups call on the European Union to support Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia in granting EU candidate status.

"On behalf of the Conference of Presidents, the leaders of the political groups of the European Parliament will address the leaders of the member states and governments, who will meet in Brussels in two weeks to decide on the application of Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia to join the EU. We must show courage, bravery, and vision in the face of a deteriorating international environment. Changes in geopolitical data require action on our part. By doing so, we adhere to our principles and values. Ukrainians whose homeland is under fierce attack – although Moldovans and Georgians, who are moving towards a brighter future – are waiting for the signal that their place is in the European family. Therefore, this Chamber strongly urges you to grant Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, and Georgia EU candidate status, in accordance with Article 49 of the EU Treaty and [their] achievements," the text reads.

Radio Liberty reports that the text submitted is a draft joint statement and may

still be subject to change, although key issues, including the request for candidate status, will remain in the text, however, as Radio Liberty correspondent on EU affairs, key issues, including the requirement for candidate status, will remain in the text. Radio Liberty also notes that the Union of Leaders of Political Groups is not involved in the process of granting candidate status and their support is only a call to the European Commission to take the appropriate decision.

PAPUASHVILI: IT IS TIME FOR THE EU TO MAKE ITS BID AND GRANT CANDIDATE STATUS WITHOUT DELAY, GIVEN THE CURRENT GEOPOLITICAL PRESSURES

The Speaker of the Parliament of Georgia, Shalva Papuashvili, addressed Roberta Metsola in a letter, urging the granting of candidate status for EU membership to Georgia:

"Dear Madam President, Our most recent meeting during my visit to Brussels, and the very good conversation we had, inspired me to share some reflections on Georgia-European Union relations, especially at this historic juncture amidst our region's unfolding geopolitical upheaval. I write you as I learned that there will be an urgent debate on Georgia in the European Parliament this Wednesday," he wrote.

"While a discussion on media freedom and safety of journalists is always important, for the sake of fairness, a wider context of Georgia's application for European Union membership should be more relevant now than any matter related to the present political moment. Yet, while focusing on isolated instances, we should also keep in mind the impressive progress that independent media has achieved in Georgia in the past decade as a result of the country's democratic transformation.

"I, personally; my party Georgian Dream, which governs Georgia now; and every nine out of ten Georgians firmly believe the European Union to be the family and historic destination for our people. We formally applied for EU membership three months ago, and the entire country is gripped in anticipation of the decision of the European Council later this month. Rarely did any other political matter so emotionally tie our nation together before, as our application for the EU membership and the expected response from the EU member states.

"As speaker of the Georgian Parliament, I represent the democratically elected highest political body of our nation and, am confident, I can deliver the unified voice of Georgians on our European destiny to the European Parliament.

"Even before Georgia obtained independence, through the decades-long popular struggle against Communism and Soviet oppression, Europe was the cultural and political symbol and vector that drove what Georgians called our national liberation movement. Even amidst the externally imposed proxy conflicts in the 1990s, calls for European and Euro-Atlantic integration prevailed against any other alternatives in the national discourse.

"The rule of law, democratic institutions, national stability, peaceful foreign and security policy, and economic and social reforms have been driven by the notion of unity with European nations. Every government and opposition party in the past three decades, since independence, while broadly diverging on many domestic issues, have never been divided over Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations. This unity gives me the right to reiterate our arguments as to why we suggest and, indeed, claim that we have the right to be a candidate country for European Union membership.

"Most importantly, Georgia's drive towards the EU and its history of democratization have been powerfully interlinked. Georgia started implementing the EU acquis in earnest, after signing the Association Agreement in 2014, and we have done so despite existential threats. Indeed, we have successfully maneuvered through several challenging tasks of pursuing European integration, building democracy at home, and confronting near-permanent Russian aggression at the same time. At each stage, the prospect of joining the EU has only helped and

encouraged democratic reforms.

"We built peace and security together with Europe. We showed our dedication in Iraq, Afghanistan, Mali, Central African Republic, Kosovo, and elsewhere, wherever needed and called for by our European partners. In the past decade, Georgia proved itself to be a valued and reliable partner with its responsible foreign and security policy, which helped to maintain stability in the Caucasus and broader region, wherever Georgia's contribution helped to make a difference.

"There is a wide range of large-scale, successful reforms that buttress our relations. Georgia's reforms and achievements in the fight against corruption, improved practice of doing business, fundamentally upgraded customs and public services, etc. have been praised globally, including by the EU and its member states. As a consequence of these efforts, Georgia has been a full-fledged member of European Energy Community since 2017; had visa-free access to the Schengen Area since 2017; signed the Association Agreement, including DCFTA, and has implemented 45 per cent of these agreements ever since. In comparison with the closest aspirant countries for EU membership, Moldova and Ukraine, Georgia is a lead performer in all three components of the Association Agreement – political dialogue, Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement, and sectoral/economic cooperation.

"These achievements have been made in the context of actual aggressive actions and occupation of Georgia's territories by Russia and permanent threats that have become so obvious to everybody in the context of Russia's unprecedented brutal aggression against Ukraine.

"Georgia's achievements, and more so, prospects of future successes, make Georgia a desired prospective member of the EU in matters of the EU's peace and security policy, energy independence, expansion of free markets, and, last but not least, cultural diversity.

"Challenges remain. But the trajectory of the country clearly indicates a desire for progress, capacity for improvement and, above all, potential for enriching and strengthening the Union.

"Georgia has made its move. It is the time for the EU to make its bid and grant candidate status for EU membership without delay given the current geopolitical pressures. Meanwhile, a steadfast and unequivocal backing from the European Parliament towards Georgia, together with Moldova and Ukraine, and calls for the European leaders to support our countries is vital and we look forward to such support. Sincerely, Shalva Papuashvili."



Image Source: repair.eu

The Power of Example

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

Answering the question as to what the smartest way for Georgia's quick and successful development is, most respondents tend to answer that modern education is what this nation needs to take up and cling to in the first place. Easy to say, difficult to do! Even America, the greatest country civilization has ever known, lags behind in this regard, with education having that nasty proclivity to struggle to keep up with precipitous human life.

Historically speaking, only a distinguished few have managed to jump forward with salient sagacity to prompt the world what to do to improve. In the overall process of development, on top of a relevant education, the power of example also plays a paramount role.

I needed to make this little introduction to lead to where, partially, this nation's future is being built and its character is being tempered. Today, the generational difference seems to be bigger, and the gap between those genera-

tions seems wider than, say, 50 years ago, the reason being the time and the change in pace. Today's schoolchildren in the 12 to 15 age bracket behave absolutely differently from those who grew up in the 90s, not to mention the even older generations. Understandably, they can't help being so different, living as they do under the ideological influence of quickly proliferating liberal-democratic ways and means, and being the product of digitally-advanced technological innovations. And still, these overly progressive and aggressive young men and women are the subject of influence of their families, the society they are living in, the political situation in the country, globalist issues and, of course, their peers. These things more or less equally shape the lives and characters of our children, but at this particular time, I would like to emphasize the pernicious influence of political big shots, and their style of interaction on the lives of our youngsters.

It is universally recognized that the power of example can change us, totally altering a person's future, 'leading us not into temptation but delivering us from evil'. And if we could presume that this is true, our society might well be living in imminent

danger, because the example set by our grown politicians currently active in the arena, represents a serious threat to our younger generation: their way of achieving goals, their manner of expressing themselves, their tone and vocabulary, their mean way of attacking an opponent, their blurred vision of Georgia's future, their readiness to annihilate an adversary by any vicious means, their untoward physical behavior in parliament, their unbridled thirst for power, their uncanny predisposition to grab as much benefit as possible from the position they temporarily occupy in our society, and their unattractive presence on the television screen.

I just wonder if they know that their example for children, who are tomorrow's leaders and the rescuers of our nation, is not working, and needs a good number of serious corrections. Contemporary kids are smart enough not to easily fall under harmful influence, but they are still fragile growing and forming minds and bodies who need help to become useful politicians and honest taxpayers. And where is that gravely indispensable assistance? Is it in what they watch on TV every day, that screen which emanates those angry, failing,



Image source: Bakal / Getty Images

doubting, gossiping and wrongly-presuming politicians of Georgia?

The power of example needs to be given appropriate sense, shape, content and direction in this country, grafted on the power of modern education. If we

don't do that, someday in the near future, we will find ourselves in the hands of a new generation of politicians who will look, sound and act in exactly the same way as those we witness today. Do we need that? No!

Building a Lasting Peace in the South Caucasus



Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, European Council President Charles Michel, and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan meet in Brussels. Source: Charles Michel, Twitter, May 24

ANALYSIS BY EMIL AVDALIANI

Two major interrelated developments are taking place in the region, largely overshadowed by the war in Ukraine. First is a possible Armenian-Azerbaijani rapprochement

and the second a potential Armenian-Turkish breakthrough.

On May 22, Armenian and Azerbaijani politicians gathered in Brussels to discuss the peace process, which was facilitated by European Council President Charles Michel. The timely implementation of some of the items agreed upon by President Aliyev and Prime Minister Pashinyan at their meeting in Brussels suggests that

substantial progress is being made.

First, after extensive negotiations, the two nations agreed on transit lines, including the Zangezur corridor. Another important outcome of the Brussels meeting was the process of delimitation and delineation of boundaries. Both President Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan declared their willingness to organize an international com-

mittee to deal with the issue. The commission on the state boundary between Armenia and Azerbaijan met the next day (May 24) and started work.

What is more critical is that the Brussels summit is yet another indication of changing EU involvement in the South Caucasus. Ever since the end of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War, the consensus has been prevalent that the West has been distancing itself from the region. Russia was a dominant power not only militarily, but politically too, largely dictating the diplomatic game between Armenia and Azerbaijan and suspected of unwillingness to see real progress.

Now this is changing. The representatives of the two South Caucasian countries have only met through the EU's mediation since the beginning of this year, while the only Russia-mediated meeting, that of the foreign ministers on May 12, took place on the sidelines of another major event and produced no new information in the negotiations. Russian politicians have angrily noted the EU involvement, while the FM spokesperson has even accused Brussels of interference in the peace process.

While Russia still retains a powerful position in the region, it does so mainly through military means. Few, if any, truly believe that Moscow is seriously intent on helping the peace process as the latter involves opening the region up, which would likely diminish Russian influence – diversification means diminution of Russian power. There are indications that Baku and Yerevan could now be more eagerly looking at the EU as a honest broker.

To this should be added sentiments in Armenia and Azerbaijan. It has become

clear to many in Armenia that a certain document needs to be signed with Azerbaijan, which will ideally end the war between the two states. Whether that will be a definitive peace deal is difficult to say, but some hints in the rhetoric of the Armenian government indicates a shift in thinking. Many observers, including myself, believe that Yerevan might be agreeing to seeing Nagorno-Karabakh within the borders of Azerbaijan in exchange for cultural rights. This is what stirred protests in Armenia that complicate the situation for Pashinyan's government. But it is also likely that he will weather the storm – large parts of the Armenian public are unwilling to see the return of the old guard.

Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine and the slow progress it sees in Donbas is both a danger and an opportunity for the South Caucasus and Armenia-Azerbaijan relations. It is a danger because of the potential military escalation; an opportunity because Russia is not entirely interested in being an honest peace-maker. And this is where the EU made significant progress through hosting that series of Armenia-Azerbaijan summits. Russia is worried not to lose the initiative, but it could also stir things up militarily to advance its interests. Overall, Russia's position in the South Caucasus is unenviable. Moscow sees that the only way to dominate the space is through the military means. It is a weak tool, because once you are weak inside, all your military bases abroad might swiftly lose their relevance.

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

European Parliament Draft Resolution Calls for Release of Nika Gvaramia

The European Parliament will vote on a resolution on June 9, which urges the authorities to conduct an immediate independent review of former Rustavi 2 TV Director Nika Gvaramia's conviction.

The draft resolution also considers the state of Georgian media, including the report on Reporters Without Borders' (RSF). According to the document, Georgia's press freedom ranking declined from 60th place in 2021 to 89th in 2022; whereas this is the country's worst performance since 2013, when the country was placed 100th in the ranking.

The resolution also includes facts of July 5, 2021, amid homophobic violence against a planned Pride March, far right and hate groups verbally and physically assaulted at least 53 media workers in

Tbilisi; where Lekso Lashkarava, one of the journalists seriously injured, was found dead in his house six days after the aggression; where the authorities denied responsibility and alleged he had died from a drug overdose while his family claimed that it was most likely the result of thrombosis; whereas the authorities failed to identify the organizers of the mass violence or ensure an effective investigation of the violent events and instead of ensuring the safety and freedom of assembly of the Pride organizers and participants, the authorities blamed them for holding "such marches in a public space"; where, according to ILGA, Georgia ranks 34th in Europe (among 49 countries) in terms of LGBTI rights.

According to the draft resolution, on May 16, 2022, Tbilisi City Court delivered



a guilty verdict against Nika Gvaramia, General Director of opposition-minded

TV Mtavari, to 3 years and 6 months in prison accused of exceeding his powers

while running another opposition TV channel, Rustavi 2; where Nino Lomjaria, the ombudsman of Georgia, stated that no evidence of wrongdoing by Gvaramia has been found and NGOS affirmed that the case was politically motivated; where this is not the first persecution of Nika Gvaramia, he has suffered attempts of his bribery, intimidation, blackmail and surveillance of family members.

The European Parliament noted it is deeply concerned about the growing threats to Independent and opposition media in Georgia and urges the authorities to conduct an immediate independent review of Nika Gvaramia's conviction and on the meantime, calls for his immediate release; asks the authorities to release of all journalists detained for exercising their right to freedom of expression.

Col. Dr. David Johnson: "It's a grinding war of attrition, and we need to give them the means to stay in the fight"

Continued from page 1

They don't need precision for what they're doing. If your target is Mariupol, then the rocket is sufficiently precise. We are looking at this war from our perspective and we see what we would do, not what the Russians are actually doing. Now we are 100 days into the war, Ukrainians are fighting a good fight but the Russians are slowly grinding their way through Donbas. When Russians set their mind on something and pile on, it's very hard to stop.

"The biggest killer in the battlefield is not Javelins or switchblades and all the other stuff, it's artillery. Both sides say that. Clausewitz said, and I'll paraphrase, 'in wars of exhaustion, don't become exhausted first.' That's what the Russians are banking on, that they will exhaust the Ukrainian manpower and resources. What the West can do is to keep them steadily supplied with the things they need to fight with. It's a grinding war of attrition, and we need to give them the means to stay in the fight."

ARE WE GIVING THEM ENOUGH AT THIS POINT?

Quite frankly, it's impossible to tell. There have been no retreats or big defeats. Everything so far has been slow and incremental, as far as the Russian advances are concerned. There have been some Ukrainian counter attacks, so they're able to do something. This is a long war. When the Nazis invaded, during Operation Barbarossa, it took them over three months to get to Kyiv with 3 million soldiers. And now it's 100 days. I think we can have no idea how long this will go on for.

We also have no idea what the real Ukrainian losses are. We get Ukrainian estimates of what Russian losses are, but they're probably inflated. Nobody really knows with any certainty what the status of the two combatants is right now. And the only thing that matters in a war of attrition is whether the units that are engaged are able to continue. And you have empirical evidence that they are continuing. But how long that can go on is the real question. The thing we can do to assist Ukrainians is what we're doing, which is providing munitions and material.

IS THE PROCESS OF PROVIDING AMMUNITION SPEEDY ENOUGH?

We all know Ukraine wants it done faster.



You hear a lot about Russians using dumb munitions, not having precision. They don't need precision for what they're doing. If your target is Mariupol, then the rocket is sufficiently precise

If it was Amazon delivering the next day, they'd still want it faster, which is understandable. If I were them, I wouldn't want to give the impression that I'm satisfied. My sense is that there's a pretty reliable supply chain. I don't know how robust or how fast, but if they're executing counter-offensives, they have enough material to do it with, or they wouldn't be attempting them. And it's important they do, because it keeps the Russians off and keeps the balance to some degree. There haven't been any large counter offensives, but I think that's partly because there just hasn't been the opportunity. Personally, I would think the Ukrainians are doing relatively low risk operations, because the stakes of losing are so high. They're being very prudent. But I don't see a big breakthrough on either side, at this point, until one or the other is exhausted, and there's no telling when that will be.

WHAT'S YOUR TAKE ON THE LONG RANGE MISSILES DILEMMA?

Whatever we do, Russia will protest. Even though Ukraine says "we're not using them to hit Russia," Russia is going to say they did, and that there'll be consequences. But I take the Ukrainians at their word. One reason they had to be within 40 kilometers or so of the border is that the Russians are between them in that place, so they're in a standoff anyway, towards the max range of the weapon inside Ukraine. There's nothing really in Russia for them to shoot at that could really contribute to the end of fighting, other than just to say, "look, we shot at Russia." So I think what we're giving them are systems to help them in the counter firefight, and that is important, because that's what's really causing damage on both sides. And we've given them very accurate radars to help give them guidance- when Russia fires artillery, they'll know within seconds where it came from, and be able to shoot back before it can hit. But if you don't have well-trained units, if they shoot and they don't move quickly, they become a target. Moving them takes time and Russians have a lot of them.

WHEN UKRAINE WAS ON THE DEFENSIVE, WE PRAISED THEM FOR DOING THEIR JOB WELL, DESPITE THE RUSSIAN SUPERIORITY IN WEAPONS AND NUMBERS. UKRAINIANS ARE NOW ON THE COUNTER OFFENSIVE AGAINST THAT FORCE WITH BETTER ARTILLERY AND PRETTY MUCH EVERY ADVANTAGE THERE IS. WHAT CHANCES ARE THERE FOR A SUCCESSFUL COUNTER OFFENSIVE?

What is the nature of the counter offensive? What are the objectives? The Russians are extended throughout the Donbas, so you can't attack everybody. The objective may be to destroy some Russian forces, disrupt the logistics supply lines a bit. If they disrupt their supply chain, or take out some of their headquarters, it'll affect the entire operation across the front.

HOW TO EXPLAIN THE STATISTICS ON RUSSIAN GENERALS AS BEING EITHER VERY EAGER TO DIE OR VERY SUSCEPTIBLE TO UKRAINIAN FIRE?

We have become very used to having our cell phones and don't realize that they're transmitting our location every minute we're talking. And they can be located. They are also being monitored for information because they're not



What started the Arab Spring was a shortage of cooking oil and food and that's exactly what we're replicating right now

secure. The other issue is the amount of emissions coming out of large headquarters. It's like a bonfire of electric electromagnetic energy, with 30 radios blaring away inside of a building or a tent. So, if it's got that kind of activity, if there's that many radios on, you know it's not a squat, not a company, not a battalion: It's probably a headquarters for something. So those become targetable fairly easily. If you're tracking communications and they're not secure, and as I understand just from what I see in the press, a lot of Russian communications aren't secure, then you can listen in on the general's orders stating where he's going. I think that's what's happening, not "he's gotta be out there on the front because his soldiers won't do what they're supposed to do."

TELL US ABOUT THE RUSSIAN MORALE

Fighting spirit is a huge component of warfare. An army that has no morale and no will to fight is usually not successful. We're seeing that's true about the Russians, but 100 people refusing to do something out of a million is not like the world coming to an end. Those 100 will all be enjoying their new accommodation in Siberia now. The Ukrainian ability to stay in the fight is remarkable. But so is the Russian. If they're that poorly led, and they're having that much difficulty, the fact they keep pushing on is really something. We say the Russian army consists of conscripts and is poorly led, all the officers are corrupt, but that's the same kind of army they had in WW2 which beat the best army in the world. This is the same army that Tolstoy wrote about in "War and Peace." There's just something about the Russian spirit and something about the "Motherland in Russia" that we just don't understand. We all say the reason they support the war is that they're afraid of the police, propaganda, they're not really getting polled correctly. But I have a feeling that the average Russian knows what's going on, and approves. We shouldn't assume they're going to quit, that everybody is going to sit down in Red Square and protest. I don't see that. I don't see their soldiers deserting in large numbers or quitting. The worst thing you can do in a war is underestimate your enemy.

HOW COMMITTED IS THE WEST GOING TO REMAIN AS THE WAR GOES ON?

My concern is that as this drags on and becomes less spectacular, there'll be less attention paid to it, because there'll be something else, like the horrific school shooting this week, which understandably totally dominated the news. But there was a poll here that said 70% of America supports NATO helping Ukraine. And that's with gas prices being fairly



high already and inflation being a problem and the baby-food shortage, etc. But if it's a cold winter in Europe and there's no cheap fuel, people are going to start wondering, "when's this going to end?"

Another issue is that a lot of agricultural commodities for the world come from Ukraine. What started the Arab Spring was a shortage of cooking oil and food, and that's exactly what we're replicating right now. Effects will start to manifest themselves fairly quickly from the perspective of food, but others will start coming in the next year. There'll be huge demands on the West to feed the rest of the world and provide them with things that Ukraine has, or to get some kind of agreement and open up Odessa, which I don't see the Russians doing.

THE HARBOR WOULD HAVE TO BE DE-MINED AND KYIV WOULD NEED SECURITY GUARANTEES THAT RUSSIA WOULD NOT THEN ATTACK THE PORT. THAT WOULD MEAN RUSSIA EXPLICITLY SAYING, "NO, I'M NOT GOING TO TAKE ODESSA"

There's an agreement that says commercial shipping can go freely into and out of the Black Sea through the Dardanelles. Any military shipping has to be approved by Turkey, but Turkey has been a little bit obstinate lately about NATO. I think this is a solution that is independent of the real problem. The real problem is, it's to Russia's benefit to have people feel shortages, and Ukraine unable to export and its economy in the tank. Why would they support a humanitarian effort that's going to benefit Ukraine? Putin has not yet been particularly accommodating of any suggestions. We're looking for an answer without really understanding what the full problem is. If I was Putin, I wouldn't do it.

My preferred outcome is that NATO and other states make up the shortages for the rest of the world. There's a lot of grain production elsewhere. The US produces an enormous amount of grain, there are countries in Asia. The price will go up, but it could be completely independent of what's going on in Ukraine. We decided we're going to make up for a lot of the natural gas shortage in Europe from the US, we're talking to OPEC countries about increasing production.

If we don't stop the war, we'll have to

figure out a way to make up for the shortages. They'll be more expensive and I don't know what the quantities would be, but there's an immutable law that something will fill the vacuum.

In the long term, the West might get tired and reduce support, but maybe the longer it goes on, the more committed we'll be to a favorable outcome. We've seen the types of weapons going in change. We sent helmets early on and now we are seeing Himars and Gepard air defense systems. We've become more committed to the success of Ukrainians over time, not less, and the stakes have gotten higher.

WHAT WOULD CONSTITUTE PARTIAL OR FULL VICTORY FOR EACH SIDE?

My sense is that the only person in the world who knows what the Russian goals are is Putin, but it looks like he wants to secure the entire region of Lughansk, which was partially separated from Crimea with the invasion, and make it into a puppet state like Chechnya. But is that enough? Or is it just like Crimea was - a stopping point before getting ready for the next one? There's a lot of talk about not humiliating Russia. Take Macron- he's even going back to the Versailles Conference, the Cartagenian peace that created the situation that allowed the rise of the Nazis 20 years later because of the privations envisaged on the Germans. Whether you share it or not, it's not an unreasonable analogy. What's missing from it is that peace was made after someone had won the war. Whether it was good or bad peace, the war had to be over before it became possible. From the Ukrainian perspective, anything but a maximalist proposition is really hard to consider after the sacrifices they suffered and the atrocities they have seen. So, if I were Zelensky, it would be hard for me to be conciliatory at this point. They'll start with this maximalist view of getting back everything they held before this war and that might change over time with diplomacy or developments on the battlefield. If the Russians turn out to be as fragile as some people say and collapse on the field, Ukraine will get it all back. If not, maybe they'll get less. You shouldn't presuppose the outcome or mandate that to either side, because one side is going to get more than they thought they were.

The Sit Down: Gunther Fehlinger Wants to Bring the Euro to Georgia, Now!



Austrian economist and proponent of expansion of the European currency, the Euro, for Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova. Photo by Vasyl Korotkyi/ ukraineinform.net

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW BY
MICHAEL GODWIN

Georgia's prospects for European Union integration have been fraught with speculation. While some claim that it is long past time for Georgia to join the European social and economic family, others have cast doubts over the compatibility given internal social and legal troubles. Despite this, one man has made it his personal mission to bring the iconic currency of the Union to the aspiring nation.

Gunther Fehlinger believes this is the first and most pivotal move to bring Georgia West. He is the President of Europeans for Tax Reform (ETR), an economist from Vienna, Austria, and Chair of Austrian Committee for European Ukraine. He says the road to EU and even NATO membership starts with the National Bank of Georgia and its adoption of the European currency, the Euro. He has traveled across Europe, particularly to Moldova and Ukraine,

sharing the model he believes can help the three EU aspirants become a part of Europe.

GEORGIA TODAY sat down with Fehlinger to discuss his project. While visiting the nation, he has spoken to various political entities, pro-European activists, and NGOs to share his ideas about Georgia's path to Westernization and prosperity. In addition to his podcast and writings, he has started a petition to push for Georgian inclusion in the EU.

FIRST, WHY THE EURO? AND WHY NOW?

It's simple. It's time for a complete Europeanization of Georgia. That's being a part of the European Union, having the currency the Euro, NATO membership, and integration and assimilation in the foreign policy. It's all one package. You cannot separate it, and that's why I call for all these things immediately. We have lost a lot of time with transition, and by giving Russia a lot of space that has caused this disaster in Ukraine.

It's very important that Georgia redoubles its European efforts. The currency

reform is one pillar, the labor market is another pillar, the economic integration into the customs union, and also political integration by following common EU foreign policy. I know it's a bit difficult, as the EU has been a bit too distant, but it's absolutely necessary to accelerate the process of European integration for Georgia, now.

SURELY THIS IS SOMETHING THAT WOULD TAKE YEARS, IF NOT A DECADE, TO FULLY CONVERT. HOW DO YOU SEE THIS PROCESS BEING CARRIED OUT?

We have seen this in the Baltic countries; Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. They were all members of the Soviet Union, just like Georgia. Georgia was a driving force that helped bring down that evil empire. But Georgia lost time, while Lithuania, for example, is a member of the EU and NATO already. Of course, they have different geographics and history, but nevertheless, the same role model is there now.

We have in the case of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine that Russia has taken many countermeasures since 1991. We lost a lot of time. If the country wants to join the EU, NATO, and Europe, we should be faster responding to this opportunity. The social situation, the economy, the lives of the people of Georgia would be so much better if they were fully integrated into the Western world.

DO YOU SENSE ANY OPPOSITION IN GEORGIA THAT COULD DERAIL THIS EFFORT?

We have a very complex challenge here. First, we have to convince the Georgian people, but everyone I talk to is very ready for the European way and a European future. Of course, we also need to convince our own leadership in the European Union. We'll have to explain

Georgia, their European-ness, their history, and the future that we belong in together. We explain that narrative, and that Georgia is ready and we believe in Georgia, that's the way for us.

YOU'VE MENTIONED HOW IT CAN BIND THE EU AND GEORGIA ECONOMICALLY, BUT WHAT ABOUT GEORGIA'S OTHER REGIONAL PARTNERS? WON'T THIS COMPLICATE TRADE AND ECONOMIC RELATIONS WITH AZERBAIJAN, ARMENIA, AND RUSSIA?

First, I'm in favor of ending the Eastern Partnership of the EU because I don't think it's the right concept. We have a better offer to make. We have to support the regional cooperation of southeastern European countries. This includes Azerbaijan and Armenia. Georgia will be the gateway for them both into the European Union.

This is very beneficial for Georgia and for us. Azerbaijan is a very important actor in the energy market and is a gateway to central Asia. A first step with them would be a free trade agreement, and then gradual access can be made through the regional cooperation council. Armenia is a bit problematic because they are a military ally of Russia in the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization). It would be expected for Armenia to distance itself from Russia.

GEORGIA IS NOT OUTSIDE THE IRE OF THE KREMLIN, DESPITE THE CURRENT FOCUS ON UKRAINE. WOULD GEORGIA'S ADOPTION OF THE EURO FURTHER DETERIORATE RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA?

That's the argument they have had since 2008 in Bucharest. The United States tried to implement this and the Europeans blocked it, saying we shouldn't pro-

voke Russia. The consequences of this non-provocative approach was the war in Georgia, a war since 2014 in Ukraine and full scale escalation in 2022, added to which, we have Russia playing out a terrible situation in Syria and Libya.

So this idea that we should take the interests of Russia into consideration led to a complete disaster. I don't see why we should continue that. We should confront Russia and make an aggressive offer to them in this region. The ones who are in this already, Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, should be added to the European Union, our economy, our customs union, and our currency system. The others that are on the periphery can be added to a secondary program, with customs unions and agreements. Europe is the future, not Russia.

LET'S SAY YOU WIN THIS CAMPAIGN. WHAT'S NEXT FOR GUNTHER FEHLINGER?

For me, it's the EU and NATO membership of Georgia. The currency integration is only the first step. Georgia should be fully integrated, politically, as a voting member in the Union and also in NATO. It's always debated that it's a partly occupied country with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. I think the role model for Georgia is Western Germany after 1948. The Americans introduced a new German Mark currency, backed by the US Dollar, and that became the basis of the nation's stability.

Then came NATO and EU membership, with a new constitution and a new Mark. This worked extremely well. It became so successful that ultimately it was possible for unification. The same model is also true for Georgia. One day, the time will come when the breakaway regions will want to reenter Georgia, economically and politically, based on the country's success and its becoming a NATO and EU member.

Open Letter to Georgian People by Andrius Kubilius and Rasa Juknevičienė, Members of European Parliament

Members of the European Parliament Andrius Kubilius and Rasa Juknevičienė this week released a letter addressed to the Georgian people. Here it is presented, unchanged:

"Open letter to the Georgian people supporting Georgia's path to the EU by Andrius KUBILIUS, Member of the European Parliament, Co-President of the Euronest PA, twice former Prime Minister of Lithuania, and Rasa JUKNEVICIENE, Member of the European Parliament, EPP Vice-Chair, former Minister of Defense of Lithuania:

"In mid-June, the European Commission will come out with much-awaited recommendations on EU candidate status for Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. Then, at the end of June, the governments of the EU Member States will take the final decision in the European Council. The outcome of this process is difficult to predict. With this open letter, we want to encourage Georgian political powers and the Georgian people not to be disappointed in case the result is less optimistic, but instead, to finally join forces for common work to bring Georgia to the EU.

For a long time, Georgia was at the forefront of the path towards EU integration. A few years ago academic analyses showed that Georgia was the best-prepared country, even if evaluating not only EaP countries but assessing the Western Balkans also. However, today the prevailing perception in the European Union, and the European Parliament, is that the situation in Georgia has deteriorated in the last couple of years.

Despite many warnings, the current Government did not do a proper job to maintain Georgia at the forefront of EU integration. This also made the work of friends of Georgia in the EU and USA much more difficult.

As a result, looking with outsiders' eyes, the picture is rather bleak at this time. The oligarchization and consequently polarization in Georgia remains high and concentrated in the hands of one person who is not accountable to the people through democratic elections. Moldova, for example, had similar issues with Plakhotniuk and Dodon, but it has managed to address them through the process of democratic elections. The former President of Georgia is jailed. You all may remember how Ukraine's rapprochement with the EU was affected when former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko was imprisoned and one can draw conclusions on the solution. Regrettably, despite the unprecedented EU's highest-level efforts to help solve the political impasse in Georgia and move the pro-European agenda, the "Charles Michel Agreement" has not been implemented until now. Moreover, just as the Commission started drafting the recommendation on EU candidate status for Georgia, a sentence was issued to the owner of a media outlet critical of the Government, adding yet another dark mark to the picture of Georgia.

In addition, the Georgian ruling party's position on Ukraine and EU sanctions on Russia in the background of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine is difficult to understand. Ukrainians are defending not only their territory and



homes, but also democracy, freedom, and European values, which are important to Georgia too. Ukraine merits unwavering support from every one of us and a simple understanding that Ukraine, as an icebreaker, is also opening the doors towards candidate status for Moldova and Georgia. We know that the Georgian people think so too.

All in all, sometimes we cannot help but think that somebody in the ruling circles in Georgia is actively doing everything to stop Georgia from joining the EU. If they succeed, this will be a terrible loss not only for Georgia, but also for the EU, and big win for Putin's regime.

The European Commission is always taking into account the whole picture when evaluating the readiness of an applicant country. Respect for democ-

racy, rule of law and human rights is as important as the legal and economic alignment with the EU acquis. The political criteria of EU accession are very attentively scrutinized. There are clear historic examples when non democratic tendencies in an applicant country have been not only strongly criticized by the EU, but have also put on hold its EU accession.

This happened with Slovakia's EU bid under Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar. Meciar's power grab and poor record of human rights in Slovakia resulted that in 1997 the country did not get the invitation to join the group of Central-Eastern European states to start the accession negotiations with the EU, due to a democracy deficit. At that time, the absolute majority of Slovaks were strongly sup-

porting their country's membership in the EU. However, the popular support alone is not enough for accession. Democracy, human rights and rule of law must be sufficiently rooted in an applicant country to start the negotiations process. Only when Meciar lost the elections in 1998 did the process of catching up with the 1st accession group begin. The new Government led by Mikuláš Dzurinda had a very difficult task to mend the tarnished international image of Slovakia and prove that all faults of Meciar's era were being fixed. They succeeded, and Slovakia is a successful EU Member State since 2004.

Granting EU candidate status is not a matter of convincing us, friends of Georgia, with words; it is a matter of real commitment and a united effort that has to be demonstrated by the Government, the political opposition, and the people. The Georgian Government must realize that the solution to Georgia's problems is in Tbilisi, not in Brussels. If this challenge is too big for this Government, there are democratic ways to pass it over to others, without grabbing onto the chairs at all costs. On the other hand, the opposition parties must also find the strength to rise above separate issues and propose a credible strategy of European integration to the people of Georgia and to show a credible leadership, which is needed for such a task.

If not, it may come to a point where the people of Georgia will have to decide what they choose – the current political structure with B. Ivanishvili and the Georgian Dream leading the country, or the European future of Georgia."

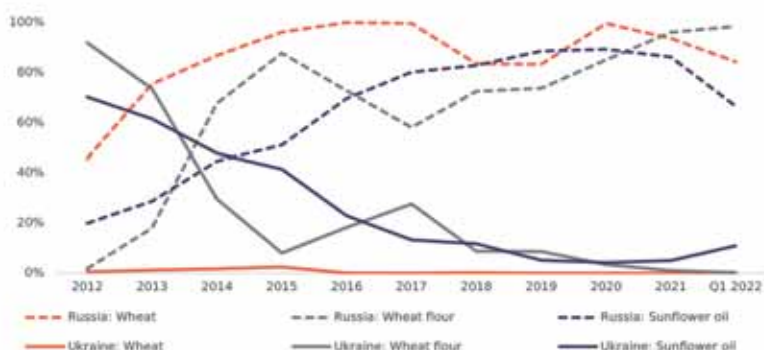


Research

Economic Outlook and Indicators

The Roles of Russia and Ukraine in Georgia's Food and Energy Security

Imports of selected food products from Russia and Ukraine as a share of total imports, 2012-Q1 2022



PM RC stands firmly with Ukraine, supports its sovereignty and territorial integrity, and condemns Russia's ongoing military aggression. At this horrible time, we will of course maintain our long-standing commitment to support Ukraine's democratic progress. While the most devastating outcome of this war is the humanitarian catastrophe of Ukraine and the destroyed lives of people, it is also essential to discuss the ramifications of this war that are being felt worldwide. In this bulletin, we discuss threats to the food and energy security of Georgia amid Russia-Ukraine War.

Russia and Ukraine are prominent players in the global trade of food and agricultural products. Pertinently, wheat exports from Russia and Ukraine accounted for 30% of the global wheat market in 2021. Furthermore, in 2021 exports from both countries combined represented 55% of the world's sunflower oil supply¹. In terms of energy provision, Russia supplies 11% of the world's oil, making it the world's largest exporter of this precious commodity. Meanwhile, Russia is the top gas exporter globally as well, supplying 19% of the world's natural gas. Thus, Russia is a major player in the global energy market, with Europe in particular being highly dependent on Russian gas and oil².

FOOD SECURITY

Considering the roles of Russia and Ukraine in the global food market and the high dependence of Georgia on imports of essential goods it is worth analyzing Georgia's reliance on Russia and Ukraine with regard to major food products. Therefore, in this issue, we analyze the top three essential food products for which Georgia has the highest dependence on imports from Russia and Ukraine. In 2018, imports of wheat from Russia and Ukraine accounted for 75.3% of the total domestic supply for Georgia, while in the same year imports of sunflower oil from those two countries accounted for 92.2% of the total domestic supply of sunflower oil in Georgia³.

Observing the dynamics of imports of

wheat from Russia and Ukraine throughout the last decade reveals that imports of wheat from Ukraine has represented only a minuscule proportion of total wheat imports to Georgia (annual average of 0.6% of total wheat imports) and Russia (86.1%) has been the main source of imported wheat by a considerable margin. This can be explained by the combination of the relatively low price of wheat from Russia (with an average annual price of \$0.24/KG), compared to Ukraine (\$0.32/KG) and the relatively low transportation costs of importing from Russia. From 2012 to 2017, Russia's share of wheat imports increased steadily, followed by a drop in 2018-2019 due to low crop yields and increased prices in Russia. At that point, Georgia began to embrace Kazakhstan as an alternative source of wheat imports⁴. Since then, the prices of imported wheat from Russia have also shown a significant increase, peaking at \$0.33/KG in Q1 2022, which could be attributed to the combination of the imposed export tariffs on wheat by Russia since June 2021⁵ and the economic shock of the war in Ukraine. However, it must also be mentioned that the share of Russia is still retained at a high level, reaching the maximum of 99.5% in 2020.

On the other hand, Ukraine represented the main source of wheat flour imported into Georgia in 2012, amounting to 91.8% of total wheat flour imports. However, it was then substituted by Russia, largely due to the relatively low average prices of imported wheat flour from Russia throughout the periods of 2013-2015 and 2018-2021. Overall, the share of Russia in total wheat flour imports to Georgia on average has been increasing throughout the last decade, reaching 98.3% of total wheat flour imports in Q1 2022. It must also be mentioned that in 2021, compared to 2020, the absolute volume of wheat imports from Russia declined significantly by 18.6%. Meanwhile, wheat flour imports have shown a drastic increase (YoY increase of 343.6%) in the same year. Therefore, Russian wheat flour imports mostly substituted the Russian wheat in response to the barriers imposed on the wheat trade by Russia.

Similar to the situation for the import

of wheat flour to Georgia, the share of Ukraine in total sunflower oil imports has also been declining throughout the last decade, while Russia's share increased steadily from 2012 to 2020, reaching 89.2%. Again, this could also be explained by the relatively low prices of imported oil from Russia (on average, throughout the last decade the price of sunflower oil was USD 1.12/KG) compared to Ukraine (1.18). It must also be mentioned here that despite the decreasing prices of Russian exports, the share of sunflower oil imports from Russia declined to 66.4% of total sunflower oil imports by Q1 2022. This could be attributed to a combination of the economic shock of the war in Ukraine and imposed export tariffs on sunflower oil by Russia⁶.

The analysis of the sum of imports throughout the last decade shows a similar picture of high dependence on Russia and a high concentration of the import market. This is especially vivid in the case of wheat, as 81% of wheat imports came from Russia, followed by Kazakhstan with 16%. Most of the wheat flour imported to Georgia also comes from Russia (75%), followed by Ukraine (18%). In the case of sunflower oil, 62% of imports to Georgia come from Russia, followed by Ukraine (30%) and Azerbaijan (7%).

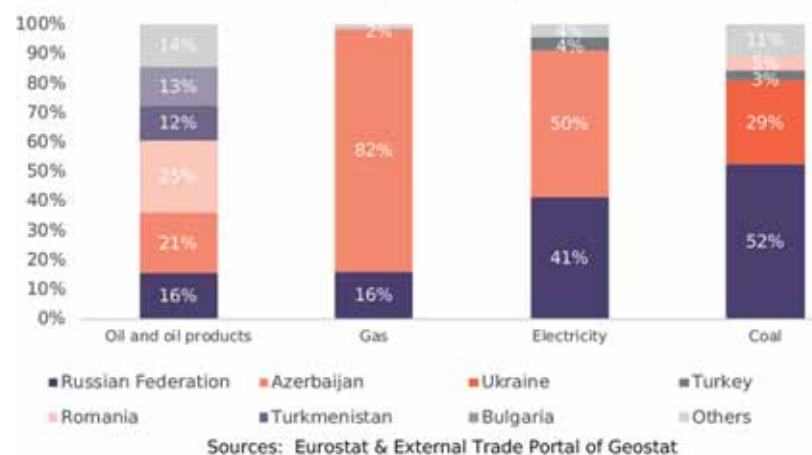
Finally, considering Georgia's lack of import diversification in the reviewed products, some of the other major global exporters of the covered products are worth mentioning. According to FAOSTAT, in case of wheat, the USA and Canada follow Russia as the top exporting countries, however, due to logistical issues other less globally prolific exporters could be more relevant to Georgia, including Kazakhstan, Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, and Hungary. For wheat flour, Turkey is among the top exporting countries, followed by Kazakhstan, both of which could be appropriate sources for the Georgian market. Apart from that, Turkey is the third-biggest exporter of sunflower oil after Russia and Ukraine. However, despite the attractiveness of Turkey as a trade partner, to stabilize local market conditions, it imposed temporary export restrictions in March 2022 on a number of food products, including grain and cooking oil⁷.

ENERGY SECURITY

The Georgian energy market lacks its own sources and is highly dependent on imports. Indeed, Georgia's energy production covered only 21.1% of its total energy demand in 2020⁸. Considering that Russia is a major energy exporter across the global market but is currently being targeted by large-scale sanctions aimed at damaging its economy and limiting its role in global trade⁹, it is crucial to ascertain any possible threats this development may pose to the energy security of Georgia.

In 2020, Georgia imported only 6,162.8 terajoules (TJ) of electricity, while producing 40,175.3 TJ itself (meaning that only 5.3% of its domestically available electricity came from imports), which suggests that Georgia is largely capable of satisfying domestic demand for electricity. However, of the electricity Georgia imports from abroad, a considerable share comes from Russia. In 2020, 23% of Georgia's total expenditure on energy imports went to Russia, but by Q1 2022 this had increased to 36%. From a longer-term perspective, Georgia's dependence on Russian electricity imports has notably declined during the past decade – the share of Russian electricity imports was as high as 95% in 2013.

Share of countries in the sum of imports of energy products, 2012 - Q1 2022



The domestic production of electricity in Georgia is tied to gas imports. Notably, 72.7% of electricity produced in Georgia was generated in hydropower plants (HPPs) in 2020, but 24.3% came from thermopower plants (TPPs), which rely on imported gas. Overall, natural gas accounted for almost half (47.1%) of the total domestic energy supply in 2020. Unlike electricity, for gas Georgia is almost fully dependent on imports – in 2020 Georgia imported 99.7% (97,050.4 TJ) of its natural gas. In Q1 2022, Georgia spent \$184 million on gas imports and 19% of this expenditure went to Russia. The average price of gas to have been imported to Georgia (\$0.20/KG in Q1 2022) is generally lower than the average price of gas to have been imported from Russia (\$0.25/KG in Q1 2022). This could be explained by the relatively low price of imports of Azerbaijani gas (\$0.20/KG in Q1 2022), which accounted for the remaining 81% of imports in Q1 2022.

Georgia also imports almost all of its oil and oil products (97.8%), though oil represents a relatively small proportion of its total energy mix (26.6% in 2020). Nevertheless, a significant proportion of Georgia's expenditure on energy imports is spent on oil. In Q1 2022, the expenditure on oil imports amounted to \$244.5 million, which was 33% more than expenditure on gas imports. High expenditure on oil imports is related to high prices – the average price of oil imported to Georgia in Q1 2022 was \$0.85/KG, which is four times the price of gas in the same period. Meanwhile, Russia's share in the oil imports expenditure for Georgia was 18%, while the price of Russian oil imports (\$0.83/KG) was close to the average price of total oil imports to Georgia (\$0.85/KG).

The majority of coal used in Georgia is imported (82.3%), but coal makes up a very small share in the energy mix of Georgia (only 4.7% in 2020). The price of coal and, accordingly, the total expenditure on coal imports, is also low but Russia is the major exporter of coal to

Georgia with 64% of Georgia's coal import expenditure going to Russia.

Looking at the sum of Georgia's expenditure on imports of energy products by country for the period of 2012 until Q1 2022, the energy market of Georgia is heavily concentrated. Moreover, the major player across all energy products is Azerbaijan, followed by Russia. Gas imports are the least diverse compared to other imported energy products, with 82% of gas being imported from Azerbaijan and 16% from Russia. The two major players when it comes to the heavily concentrated electricity imports are also Russia (50%) and Azerbaijan (41%). More than half of the coal imported during the covered period came from Russia (52%) and a large share (29%) also came from Ukraine. Georgia's imports of oil and oil products are the most diversified compared of all energy products. The major players in this case are Romania (25%) and Azerbaijan (21%), but Russia also accounts for 16%.

Reliance on energy imports from Russia is currently one of the most critical issues in global political decision-making. The EU recently adopted €300 billion plan (RepowerEU¹⁰) to reduce its dependence on Russian fossil fuels. One objective of the plan is to increase the share of renewables in the EU's energy mix, which is also relevant to Georgia, considering the potential of its hydro energy resources. As for further diversifying imports of non-Russian fossil fuels, the EU plans to increase imports from other large gas exporters such as the US, Canada, and Norway, to continue cooperation with Gulf states for oil imports, while for coal the US, Colombia, South Africa, and Australia are considered the most likely countries to fill the gap. Likewise, it is crucial that Georgia focuses its policies toward ensuring the energy security of the country, increasing its energy independence by fully utilizing the capacity of its own energy production (especially hydro energy), and diversifying its imports.

¹ Impact of the Ukraine-Russia conflict on global food security and related matters under the mandate of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

² <https://www.iea.org/topics/russia-s-war-on-ukraine>; <https://www.oecd.org/economic-outlook/>

³ <https://ourworldindata.org/ukraine-russia-food>

⁴ <https://for.ge/view/53945/saqarTveloSi-rusul-xorbals-TandaTan-yazaxuri-Caanacvlebs.html>

⁵ <https://bm.ge/ka/article/ruseti-marcvleulis-eqsporaze-kvotirebis-meqanizms-aamoqmedebs-/101831>

⁶ <https://businessformula.ge/News/5613>

⁷ <https://www.fas.usda.gov/data/turkey-turkey-imposes-temporary-ban-certain-agricultural-exports>

⁸ Geostat ENERGY BALANCE OF GEORGIA, 2020. Statistical Publication 2021

⁹ See our publication: Assessment of the Effectiveness of Sanctions Against Russia

¹⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_3131

SDSU Georgia Alumni Already Contributing Skills and Expertise to the Development of the Georgian Economy, Democracy and Women's Empowerment



INTERVIEW BY KATIE RUTH DAVIES

San Diego State University (SDSU), through funding from the US Government's Millennium Challenge Corporation and the Georgian Government, offers internationally accredited Bachelor of Science programs in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) in Georgia. It does so through its work with and training of faculty at Ilia State University, Tbilisi State University, and the Georgian Technical University.

GEORGIA TODAY met up with Dr. Adela de la Torre, SDSU's President, one year on from our last interview, and one year ahead of the end of MCC funding, to check in on progress and to find out more about the results of SDSU's valuable work here.

SDSU HAS BEEN OPERATING IN GEORGIA SINCE 2015 AND YOU ALREADY HAVE MORE THAN 400 GRADUATES. HOW WOULD YOU ASSESS YOUR RESULTS SO FAR? DO YOU THINK SDSU HAS ACHIEVED ITS MAIN MISSION IN GEORGIA?

We've achieved our goals on three important fronts. We've enrolled up to 800 students in the programs, 160 graduating this year, and more than 100 due to graduate next year. What's really great about it is that we've developed a work-



Based on the Class of 2021 survey results, 71% of alumni said they are currently working in Georgia and 25% are currently studying in graduate programs

force that is critical for the Georgian economy, and over 70% of those individuals are staying in Georgia. Those who choose not to are going on to advanced degrees throughout Europe and the United States and are set to come back even better prepared. Many will probably choose to work in the academic environment, which will help stimulate the economy.

We prepare students for all the areas of construction, manufacturing, civil engineering, electrical engineering, areas of energy, that's very important, computer science and engineering, technology, chemistry and biochemistry for the large pharmaceutical industry. Cyber security too, and digital data sciences. All are skills that the Georgian economy needs in order to grow.

Another critical area is our forging, over several years, of a long-term relationship with the faculty. This was a unique program. It paired our faculty, the SDSU STEM faculty in the College of Sciences and College of Engineering, with faculty in three institutions here: Tbilisi State, Ilia State and Georgian Technical universities. This resulted in cross-training to the point that now, in the Georgian universities, they have accredited programs similar to those in the US, and they are now also able to develop joint research projects and work with joint graduates. That's going to really solidify the relationship institutionally.

A very important area where we've been incredibly influential is creating the kind of civic engagement that enhances democracy. We've created a sense of belonging for the Georgian students. And that's led to improvement in curricular components of general education, which is a cross-curricular component that allows for a broad understanding of liberal arts issues and critical thinking, and broad engagement, but also student government co-curricular activities, where the students are largely engaged in self-government and understand the importance of self-governance.

So in those areas, I would say we've done extremely well.

TELL US ABOUT THE ALUMNI - WHAT DID THEY ACHIEVE AND WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

The alumni are already working in various industries, so those in chemistry are in the pharmaceutical industry, those in engineering are involved in energy, particularly those in electrical engineering. A number of our computer scientists/engineers are working in data science as well as in programming and software development. And those in construction engineering are involved in both national

and international industries. We have SDSU Georgia graduates working at Facebook, Google, Richard Lugar Center, British Petroleum, Klarna, EnergoPro Georgia, and many others in Georgia and around the world.

Our alumni are all very much engaged in important sectors, both in terms of going right into the job market here in Georgia, those going into doctoral and master's programs, and those focusing on leadership opportunities down the line.

These are some of the top students in Georgia.

What amazes me is that they are very much engaged in the SDSU Community, being part of the culture of SDSU Alumni, the "Aztecs." We have half a million alumni in the world. We're in the top 20 in the US in terms of alumni. The Georgian alumni are part of this large social network. This culture is about giving back. And they're very much involved in enhancing awareness of STEM education, globally and in Georgia.

45% OF CURRENT GRADUATES ARE FEMALE. HOW DID SDSU MANAGE TO ATTRACT SUCH A HIGH NUMBER OF FEMALE STUDENTS IN PROFESSIONS THAT ARE SOMEHOW REGARDED AS MALE-DOMINATED?

In 2019, there was a club started by our students called "Empower Women." The idea was to break the stereotypes of women, particularly in STEM fields, here in Georgia, where in the past it was often perceived that women's role was not in chemistry or engineering, or computer or construction engineering. They work not only to break down that myth, but also to support each other, because they still have to address the issue of gender discrimination. They've been very fortunate that they were able to come together early on to create that synergy and success. SDSU has supported them through our own staffing model. SDSU has a strong history of co-curricular support, with curricular support, and is the basis for achieving student success. These students that graduate after four years, graduate not just into the curricular area of skills, but into the co-curricular too, which requires the development of emotional intelligence, social skills, and creating a sense of social responsibility. This is part of the culture and direction we like to see our students going in.

This year's class is about 45% women, ranging from 30-60% depending on the field, with computer engineering at 30%. Chemistry-Biochemistry seems to be the more popular among women, but they are very much present in engineer-

ing, and that is quite unusual.

I think this is because we were very effective in the outreach in the K to 12, in the high schools here. We were able to reach out to all individuals, regardless of gender or identity structure. And a lot of the recruiters we had were women, so that helped too.

One of the benefits of being a country where STEM education is seen as an anomaly, it presented the ideal platform to create a new narrative for who fits in.

We've introduced the support structure for women, listening to them about family issues, about career issues, about their own sense of place and purpose. That really validates the whole person.

Of the students graduating 4.0 this year, 4 out of 6 are women. Women are outperforming, and, indeed, if you look at the data in application pools, our women are higher achieving than the men. I don't want to dichotomize, but when you see a field that historically hasn't had success with women, it is really remarkable that we have gone beyond expectations, especially in a country like Georgia, where traditional gender roles are still fairly defined within a hierarchical and patriarchal model.

What we've done is create an environment where women were welcomed and able to be successful. We were very happy to see that trend, and we were proactive in outreach.

WHAT ARE THE SDSU GOALS LOOKING AHEAD FOR GEORGIA?

We have one year ahead with the Millennium Corporation funding grant. We are looking at transitioning to a smaller program, and we're looking at other opportunities in K to 12, and we're still continuing to work with our partner institutions which now have the infrastructure in order to move forward. Our hope is that we will continue. This will not be not at the same magnitude, largely because the funding mechanism doesn't exist, and the funding program in Georgia has to come with external dollars because of the need to support these students. Tuition in the US is much higher. In Georgia, higher education tuition is much lower. The cost of education is markedly different and the only way to fund that differential between the US educational system and the Georgian is to have external funding. We're looking at a model where we hope to have at least one cohort in Computer Science, continue with our joint degrees after this last cohort graduates, and, if possible, obtain scholarships, support additional programs, and work closely in other areas of mutual interest.

We're also looking at other programming opportunities in other areas through our world campus. We have an extended studies program, a self-support model, we're hoping to use that alongside scholarships we can get from philanthropists to support students.

HOW READY ARE THE GEORGIAN UNIVERSITIES YOU WORKED WITH TO GO ON "WITHOUT" YOU?

If you look at the accreditation and relationships that have been developed as a direct result of our faculty partnering, helping them to get international accreditation in engineering and chemistry, that means their faculty are at the same level and they can move forward teaching a curriculum at the highest level, and that is true of all three institutions we worked with here.

Ilia State University is being left with a beautiful science building. It sells in many areas in Social Sciences and Humanities, and now it has an excellent STEM building and ABET-accredited programs to offer too. Tbilisi State University has already acquired ABET for two of its programs, and Georgian Technical University will have good news soon.

With the closing of this Millennium grant next year, the three universities will evolve into providing the needed STEM education for the workforce in Georgia.

They won't be "without" us- It's a metamorphosis, so to say, of a relationship from a stage where we were "hip-to-hip" to now being "hand-in-hand." It will be an equally strong bond.

TELL US MORE ABOUT THE GEORGIAN SDSU STUDENTS.

There's a very deep sense of engagement and responsibility here in Georgia. Also a sense of emerging leadership and a group of thinkers focused on civic participation and democracy, social welfare and social equity. We can't have economic development or civic engagement without thinking about social justice. These attributes are embedded in our students, and that's what makes them special- not just their technical skills, but their intellectual critical thinking skills, emotional skills which link them to the community, a community broader than themselves.

The opportunities will expand with each alumnus. They will have shared experiences which will allow them to have those deep conversations and engagement in consideration of where Georgia should be in the broader discussion of equity and democracy. These are complicated times, and it requires highly skilled individuals to really think about the future, what we want to see in the world. There is no country in the world that doesn't suffer from influences of autocratic decision-making, and, if you don't have good critical thinking skills, you're more likely to engage in and support autocratic methods of decision-making.

These students aren't that. They're going to be thoughtful in a way that allows them, Georgians, to look forward in a way that's best for Georgians. That is what we are working for.



CENN Unites Youth and Partners to Celebrate World Environment Day



BY KATIE RUTH DAVIES

Whether we have Only One Earth, no plan B, and a disastrous plan A. Global warming, plastic pollution, air pollution, rising sea levels and other catastrophic environmental problems are bringing irreversible consequences to our planet, making our habitat gradually uninhabitable. Yet year in and year out, the governments, corporations and the society at large fail to acknowledge and recognize risks that we are facing.

June 5th was the globally celebrated World Environment Day, aiming to raise awareness and focus public attention on the importance of protecting Mother Nature. It was established by the UN at the 1972 Stockholm Conference and has been celebrated since 1974.

The theme of the 2022 World Environment Day is #OnlyOneEarth, focusing on global togetherness in the direction of creating an atmosphere conducive to peace, harmony, prosperity, and health by protecting nature and saving lives. The theme, which recognizes the need for the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature, though in essence the same as it has been for the past 50-odd years, is today perhaps more significant than ever. The pandemic alone highlighted the significance of a safe, clean and sus-

tainable environment, and enhanced in many the need to do more to that end.

In Georgia, numerous individuals, businesses and organizations are working to decrease their environmental footprint through daily activities such as recycling, clean work practices, green strategies and awareness-raising, while youth is perhaps the most active part of society in this direction, increasingly more often demanding that those with the power to do so make a difference to law and social behavior before it is too late.

While World Environment Day 2022 was celebrated countrywide in a diverse fashion by many of those Georgians mentioned above, we'll focus on three inspiring and educational events in particular.

This June 5, CENN, with the support of the European Union and Austrian Development Cooperation, recognized World Environment Day through an event held at the Argokhi Permaculture & Rural Development Center in Kakheti. The Permaculture Center promotes a green lifestyle and harmonious coexistence with nature.

"This year's theme for the World Environment Day is a reminder that we all play a crucial role in keeping our planet safe," said Nana Janashia, CENN executive director. "To tackle the challenges, we all need to take responsibility and, by acting collectively, try to limit climate change and avoid ecological collapse. However, meaningful environmental

action refers to education and green and democratic values. That is why CENN always prioritizes educational and awareness-raising activities and involves youth in order to share the knowledge and spread the right values in order to build a strong community that can positively impact people and the planet. To celebrate



this day, we gathered at the Argokhi Permaculture and Rural Development Center, where living in harmony with nature is prioritized."

During that Kakheti event, a plogging and plant discovery tour was organized

in the forest of Maghraani village, lunch with an open-air screening of the documentary "Europe and Me" took place at the Argokhi Permaculture and Rural Development Center.

The event was attended by partner organizations, local young eco-activists, and other stakeholders.

FOREST DISCOVERY

More than 30 young ecoactivists joined the guided plant discovery tour in the Maghraani forest. Inside the forest, they divided into small groups and set out to explore and understand more about the plant diversity around them.

"The Argokhi Permaculture and Rural Development Center is located in the village of Argokhi, bordered by moun-

tainian Union to Georgia, presented to the audience the values of diversity, equality, freedom and democracy, which are central to the European Union, its Member States and to Georgia.

"Ecology and environmental protection is very important to me in general and I love participating in such awareness-raising events," says Temo Geldiashvili, member of the Akhmeta Rural Innovation Knowledge Hub. "On World Environment Day, during the plant discovery tour, I gained a lot of new experience and knowledge, and I got acquainted with a lot of new plants in the Maghraani forest. After the tour, we watched a film called "Europe and Me" in which we learned that we should respect each other regardless of our nationality, sex, religion, etc. Lastly, I am happy that I made new friends too and it ended up being a very joyful and productive day."

WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY ELSEWHERE IN GEORGIA

The Kakheti visitors were not alone in uniting for World Environment Day this year, as in Gori municipality, central Georgia, some 20 young people kicked off the "Eco Cop Movement", within which the population is urged not to pollute the environment and to demonstratively clean up polluted places in the municipality.

In Marneuli municipality, with the financial support of HEKS-EPER, the Marneuli Girls' Club in Tamarisi village organized a clean-up activity. As part of the event, participants also received information on the negative environmental, economic and social effects of pollution and the importance of waste management.

"To enable an inclusive transformation of local communities, it is important to contribute to the active citizenship of young people as well as to the empowerment of women so that they can act as change-makers for their communities," notes Sopiko Babalashvili, project representative. "Marneuli Girls' Club serves to develop the opportunities for young girls and women living in Marneuli Municipality to become agents of change and to have a positive impact on the local development processes."

The documentary "Europe and Me," created by the Delegation of the Euro-



Kass Group: When the Periphery Becomes a World Tourism Center



Yossi Sagol
Chairman of SAGOL Holdings.
Israeli leading company

Yehiel Hilik Bar
Former vice speaker of the Knesset.
Partner of KASS GROUP

Hanoch Kass
Owner of KASS GROUP.
Head of the financial group

Itsik Moshe
President of Israel-Georgia Chamber of
Business. Chairman of Israeli House

The long-awaited 240-meter glass bridge over the Tsalka (Dashbashi) Canyon, alongside a plethora of attractions, including a restaurant and zipline, will officially open on June 14. Accepting visitors will start from June 15, although visiting the canyon has been possible since last year. The project was implemented by KASS LAND, one of the companies of KASS GROUP, with Jewish investment.

As Director of KASS LAND, Eka Tordia, told "Business Partner", the entrance to the canyon was built up, boasting panoramic views of the canyon, and a safe and easy 1.5 km long trail leading visitors to the cascading waterfalls within the canyon was laid.

As part of the project, accompanying ecotourism trails were built, and a visitor center, hotel, cottages, restaurant and other tourist infrastructure were arranged in the surrounding area. According to Tordia, at the initial stage, 20 cottages will open, and this number will increase to 62 in the same season, while the hotel is set to open next year.

Visitors will be able to see the canyon on the same principle as it is possible to see the Martvili and Okatse canyons.

Tordia notes that entrance to the KASS LAND side of Tsalka Canyon requires a ticket. "From June 1, prices will be renewed

as the whole area opens up. Discounts will apply to residents and Georgian citizens," Tordia said.

At the initiative of the Agency of Protected Areas of the Ministry of Environment and Agriculture, an electronic public auction was held to lease the Tsalka Canyon, through which, in 2019, the object was handed over to the Jewish company KASS LAND.

The investment cost of the project is 120 million GEL.

"Georgia is a very friendly country to Israel and is full of entrepreneurial potential in many areas," says Hilik Bar, an entrepreneur-partner. "It is also rich in attractive natural resources, which contributes to investments in the development of tourist destinations, nature and the environment.

"It is a very popular place for Jews and other tourists from all over the world and we are very proud of the completion of this unique and huge project that will attract international level visitors to this incomparable land. It has been created entirely by Israeli entrepreneurs together with Georgian professionals. We believe in Georgia's potential, as well as in strengthening the business partnership between Georgia and Israel," Bar notes.

"We are proud that Israeli investors are leading international projects in foreign countries, and Georgia is special



Those planning a family vacation can enjoy the wonders of the place as they would in any country in Europe

among them," added entrepreneur-partner Yossi Sagol.

Within the framework of the project, the construction of villas will start in Tsalka. Director of "Issta Real Estate" Shimon Sibon told us more about it.

"Tsalka project is a merger of tourism and our company," he said. "Georgia has a convenient location for international tourists. Those who are planning a vacation with the family can enjoy the wonders of the place as they would in any country in Europe, and relax in a com-

fortable, ecologically clean forest and beautiful scenery, 35% cheaper than in Europe. Flight duration [from Israel] is also a great advantage for those who plan to travel with children."

Itsik Moshe, President of the Israel-Georgia Chamber of Business, says: "KASS GROUP's investment is a major event and a change in investment standards in Georgia. The company has turned Periphery into an international tourism hub. This biggest event will be an impor-

tant step forward for Georgian tourism. We will talk about KASS GROUP's future projects and plans at the Glass Bridge Opening Ceremony. It should be noted that KASS GROUP in Georgia and other countries works with the method of development of Ben-Gurion, which means turning the Periphery into a center of world tourism. The Chamber of Business is pleased and supports the implementation of this volume of investment in Georgia."



Light Learning: Etseri, Svaneti

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

Now, plumbing and electrical work are two things I really hate even trying to do. The former at least does not offer the prospect of instant shock or electrocution or worse if you get it wrong, but it too stretches what I call my quotient of "mechanical patience," which is dismally low. Sometimes, however, needs must, so I plunged into rewiring a light bulb socket in our guest dining room today. Yesterday I had warmed up my confidence level on making a toilet mechanism work, so I figured that in the absence of the usual electrician upon which to call, he being in faraway Zugdidi, I would attempt this next hurdle solo.

While the wife was away at school, I found the necessary socket from our shop inventory and began experimenting with it, taking apart its minuscule screwed-together components and trying to memorize how they fit together into the whole. It was not at all difficult, however, to get the thing wrong, which I proceeded to



do in several ways on the path to success. I had to stand on a table and reach up to the ceiling-mounted wiring, and with several tiny parts to coordinate, found myself wondering how electricians manage, or even like, this work.

I had to strip two thin wires of their

plastic covering with a knife, exposing the copper "business part," actually made of many hair-thin strands, which I then twisted together to keep them as one. Then to bend this around and back on itself, and screw it into place on the socket. Having made the mistakes of

assembly aforementioned, I finally resorted to comparing my item's wiring setup to an already properly done one in the same room.

Dropping 3mm-length screws several times and having to hunt for them on the floor on hands and knees, I was reminded of a passage in the cult classic book, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, which I dig out and re-read once every few years. The section is called Gumption Traps, and refers to unnecessary mistakes which the person doing a repair or assembly job can make which steal all the joy or good feeling out of the proceedings. If I was doing this work over a deep-pile carpet, for example, I would have huge frustration over losing screws in it. Best practice would be to have some sort of hanging mini-container nearby, into which I could simply reach and take out the part I needed. But I was satisfied with the compromise.

Eventually, I got the thing right in comparison to its neighbor, feeling that even my thin fingers are hardly suited to such work; my mouth doubled as the temporary container when called on, and nothing got swallowed, even. The moment

of truth came when I turned the switch... and there was light! I then had to call back my electrician neighbor, whom I had asked to come tomorrow and do this job, because I had accomplished it myself. The feeling was quite profound.

Having succeeded does not make me suddenly an electrician, I am totally aware: I still don't know my way around volts, amps or watts, for example, or what should be a ground-wire. But these are baby steps I am taking, not standing still. YouTube can be a great help in getting previously unknown skills too, with literally millions of searchable video clips in its how-to sections. So I have hope that, even 10 years from official retirement age, this dog can learn something new.

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

USAID and PH International Partners for a New Civic Education Program



A panel discusses the potential for the new USAID and PH International partnership Civic Education Program. Photo by Mike Godwin

BY MICHAEL GODWIN

A USAID Civics Education Program is being implemented across the country by PH International. The program aims to help Georgia's youth become more adept in democratic principles, develop student-led civics programs, and provide technological resources to get students engaged in public democratic governance and social discourse.

USAID has a long history of supporting a wide range of social and cultural development programs. This partnership program is the latest endeavor specifically aimed at youth development. Since the mission started in 1992, the United States has invested over \$1.8 billion in a litany of development and sustainment programs, some of which are not dissimilar to the new Civic Education Program. With the support of Georgia's Ministry of Education and Science, a multitude of bright young minds have been afforded unique opportunities through teaching, technology, and new partnerships.

Among these partnerships is the inclusion of a familiar organization in Georgia. PH International has been present here since 1996, and has helped with both adult and youth development programs, focusing on harnessing technology to advance people's opportunities and businesses. They have also been instrumental in helping language teachers expand their capabilities through seminars and in-person training sessions at schools.

As Georgia has moved immensely close to the democratic spheres of the West, many younger Georgians have been left

hungry for more involvement in their local and national government. Aside from some outreach programs run by a few political parties, only small politically active groups in universities were vocal about this need. With this new partnership, USAID is making these student-led organizations more accessible, and is equipping them with more resources.

USAID/Georgia Mission Director Peter Wiebler leads this new initiative. He became the Mission Director of USAID/Georgia in July 2018 after serving in the United States under the Office of Budget and Resource Management. His outlook on the program signifies that there is immense potential between both USAID and the partner organizations that are coming together to make the Civic Education Program a reality.

When discussing why USAID has targeted the youth development sector, he tells us, "Georgia's democratic development is the key to Georgia's broader

development." Wiebler explains that the young people of the country are the ones that are ultimately left with the task of further integration into Western spheres. Informing these youth of the duty of citizenship is what connects the people to their government, as he continues, saying, "we support civic education to

help Georgia's young people not only understand their rights but also their obligations in a democracy."

He notes that education is the core of the program's main effort. Reaching these young people in their formative years is the opportune time to help them understand the society and culture they are a part of.

"Essentially, education is at the base of all of the elements that drive Georgia's development projects. They need well educated and informed workers to modernize its economy and increase broad based prosperity for all Georgians," he says. "It also needs well-informed, active, and educated citizens who know their rights and obligations in order to help Georgia move closer towards Europe and the Western family of countries."

The USAID director reiterates that the organization has a firm commitment to the nation, and that its aim is heavily woven into the betterment of Georgia overall.

"USAID's commitment to this area is very strong, we're very proud of the program that we're launching today and we know it's going to be successful."

He stresses that it is not only the USAID and partner organizations that are involved in this shift. Wiebler says that it is a community effort, with particular emphasis on students, teachers, and community leaders that play an important role in the program's goals.

"It's important to seize this moment, this opportunity, to provide the insights and chances to change the mindset of Georgia's young people to understand that Georgia's democracy and this country is really theirs," he emphatically says, referring to the unique role many of the program's potential student participants have. Supporting organizations are



We support civic education to help Georgia's young people not only understand their rights but also their obligations in a democracy

numerous, including over 650 schools from across the country. Others that have a stakeholder partnership in this project include Civic Education Teachers Forum, The Guivy Zaldastanishvili American Academy in Tbilisi, GeoLab, Resonance USA, and an additional 11 regional partners.

In addition to these invaluable components of this immense undertaking, Wiebler states that the real effort is done at the ground level. The teachers and students in the community have the most important work ahead of them.

With excitement in his voice, Wiebler concludes by saying, "The program we are launching today can only be successful if we have [the communities'] help and contributions, but most importantly partnerships so we can work with the communities to make this program as successful as possible."



Georgia's democratic development is the key to Georgia's broader development



Panel members explain the network of partnerships that come together to enable the program's success. Photo by Mike Godwin



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