



# Russia's Invasion Week 23: Kyiv Says Warplanes Destroyed in Crimea

BY ANA DUMBADZE

## UN: FIRST WARTIME WHEAT SHIPMENTS FROM UKRAINE EXPECTED NEXT WEEK

Ukraine's air force has said that nine Russian warplanes were destroyed in the explosions that rocked a Russian air base in the annexed Crimean Peninsula on Tuesday.

The air force's claim, posted on Facebook alongside the overall losses Kyiv says Russia has suffered during the war, came amid speculation the blasts were the result of a Ukrainian attack that would represent a significant escalation in the conflict.

The explosions, which killed one person and wounded 14 others, according to Crimea's governor, sent tourists fleeing in panic as plumes of smoke towered over the nearby coastline.

Russia has said the explosions were detonations of stored ammunition, not the result of an attack. Kyiv, for its part, has suggested the blasts could have been caused by Russian incompetence or an attack by partisans.

The Ukrainian leader said Ukraine needed to consider how to inflict as much damage as possible on Russian forces and thereby shorten the war.

Ukraine's armed forces will respond to the Russian shelling of the town of Marhanets, which killed 13 people and wounded 10 on Wednesday, President Zelensky said in a video address.

A top UN official has said the first wartime wheat from Ukraine should ship next week under a landmark deal also signed by Russia aimed at tackling the global food crisis.

The first 12 ships to leave the three Black Sea ports designated by the agreement were carrying 370,000 tons of corn and foodstuffs, according to Frederick Kenney, interim UN coordinator at the joint center in Istanbul, overseeing the deal.

The United Nations expects to see a "big uptick" in applications for ships to export Ukraine grain after transit procedures were agreed upon by Russia, Ukraine, Turkey and the United Nations.

The number of inbound vessels is expected to "grow in the near future" as grain deals are made, said Frederick Kenney, interim UN coordinator at the Joint Coordination Centre for the Black Sea Initiative.

## UKRAINE URGES EU, G7 STATES TO STOP ISSUING VISAS TO RUSSIANS

Ukraine's foreign minister has urged European Union and G7 countries to stop issuing visas to Russian citizens, citing what he said was their support for the invasion of Ukraine.

"Russians overwhelmingly support the war on Ukraine. They must be deprived of the right to cross international borders



Image: Reuters

until they learn to respect them," Dmytro Kuleba tweeted.

His plea echoed an earlier call by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky for Western countries to impose a one-year travel ban on Russians, saying they should be forced to "live in their

own world until they change their philosophy".

Estonian Prime Minister Kaia Kallas also said this week that it is time for European countries to refuse to issue visas to Russian citizens.

"Stop issuing tourist visas to Russians.

Visiting Europe is a privilege, not a human right. Air travel from RU is shut down. It means while Schengen countries issue visas, neighbors to Russia carry the burden (FI, EE, LV - sole access points). "Time to end tourism from Russia now," she wrote.

## Helsinki Commission: We Stand Together with Georgian People Against Brutal Russian Colonialism



The Helsinki Commission responded to the August War on Twitter noting that 14 years ago, Russia's violently imperial designs were laid bare for the world to see in Georgia.

"Fourteen years ago, Russia's violently

imperial designs were laid bare for the world to see in Georgia. After launching an assault on false pretexts, Russia's forces ethnically cleansed tens of thousands, committed wanton destruction, and today occupy 20% of Georgian territory," Tweeted the Helsinki Commission.

## 12,729 Coronavirus Cases, 8 Deaths Detected in Georgia within a Week, 153 Medical Personnel Lost to Covid in Past 2 Years

BY TEAM GT

Over 12,500 cases of coronavirus were detected in Georgia within the past week. In addition, eight patients died from July 31 to August 7, the National Center for Disease Control reports.

The Center reported that 11,199 people recovered and 67,482 tests were conducted during the mentioned period.

In the 2020-2022 report of the National Center for Disease Control, it is noted that as of the first of July, 153 medical personnel died of Coronavirus in Georgia.

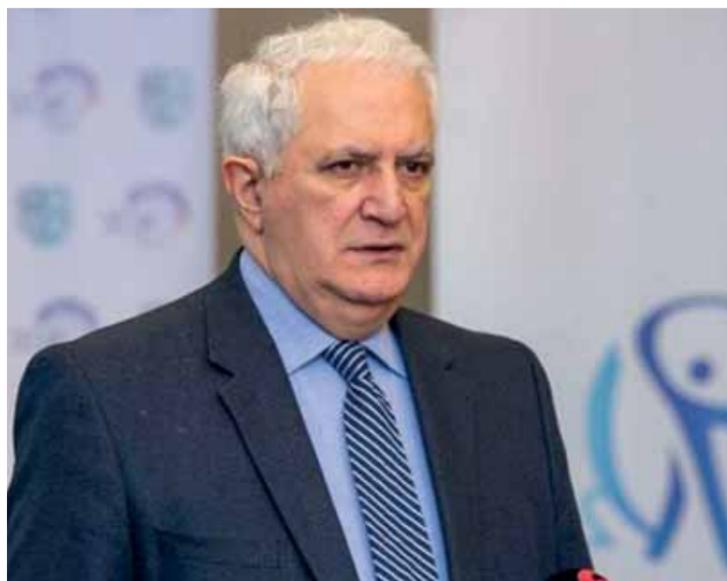
The report notes that the lethality among infected women working in medical institutions was 0.4%, and among men 1.4%. Various accompanying chronic diseases



were noted in 53 fatal cases, among which cardiovascular diseases made up the majority. Among the deceased, respiratory system diseases were recorded as

complications in most cases. The report notes, that as of July 1, 59% of patients who died of COVID-19 had various co-morbidities.

## NCDC Head Amiran Gamkrelidze Resigns



Amiran Gamkrelidze, the Director of the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health (NCDC), reiterated in a 10 August statement that he is leaving his post after 10 years in the position.

He is said to continue his work in the scientific and pedagogical direction for the benefit of the younger generation.

"We all need to realize that public health and prevention is the main focus of medicine in the 21st century and in the future, for which it is important for each of us, as a whole population, to understand its essence and importance," Gamkrelidze said.

Former NCDC Head noted that health and education should be the main priority of the country, which will be the basis for economic growth, sustainability, welfare and development.

He concluded that he remains in service of Georgia and each Georgian citizen.

# Parliament of Georgia Continues Intensive Work on Implementation of Recommendations Set Out by EC

BY TEAM GT

The Counsellor of the EU Delegation to Georgia, Julien Crampes, and the US Embassy political officers Lana Owens and Evan Elliott, held a meeting with the Chair of the Political Group Citizens, Alexander Elisashvili, Chair of the PG Lelo – Partnership for Georgia, David Usupashvili; Chair of the Faction United National Movement – Unified Opposition Unity Makes Strength, Khatia Dekanoidze, and MP Mikheil Daushvili to discuss the fulfillment of the 12-point recommendations set out by the EU.

“We overviewed the course of the fulfillment of 12 tasks the EU set out for Georgia for the reception of the so desired EU candidate status. We informed the guests about the intensive works in the working groups, the engagement of the opposition in this process and attached particular attention to the judicial reform. We revealed to the diplomats that we are the only party submitting an alternative vision to that of the Georgian Dream about the judicial reform, and stressed its importance,” Elisashvili stated.

Usupashvili stated, “speaking about the EU candidate status, the officers of the embassies expressed their commitment to aiding us in this direction. They asked about the de-polarization processes. I introduced the position of Lelo, our intention to actively participate in the Committee and plenary sessions but as to the preparatory stage, working groups, etc. the positions shall be reconciled through an open process at the Committee sittings, where we shall submit our positions.”

“We discussed the fulfillment of the EU recommendations. I introduced our position that we witness the active debates in the Committees and at the sessions about the fulfillment of these 12 recommendations. We also discussed the general political situation in Georgia, especially the foreign political course,” Dekanoidze noted.

## WORKING GROUP ON DEOLIGARCHIZATION HOLDS FIRST SESSION

The Working Group on Deoligarchization at the Legal Issues Committee held its first session to discuss the Ukrainian Law on Deoligarchization as a basic document. Chairman of the Committee and the Head of the Working Group, Anri Okhanashvili, noted they aim to adapt Ukrainian law to Georgian compliance.

“The 12 points put forth by the European Commission (EC) include de-oligarchization. Similar proposals were made for Moldova and Ukraine,” he said. “The European Commission gave Ukraine the instruction to actually put the de-oligarchization law into practice. This indicates that the EC views the passing of the law favorably, and that the law now needs to be put into effect. We require an objective benchmark by which we can determine whether the de-oligarchization requirement is achieved. We will use the EC’s position on Ukraine as an objective benchmark and, in line with it, adopt the model that the EC demanded be put into practice. We want to prevent disputes about the document’s content, as there is a considerable likelihood that this provision won’t be deemed satisfied in such a situation because the interpretations will be open-ended. Even if Ukrainian law is not perfect, we have from it established requirements for the implementation of particular issues,” Okhanashvili remarked, adding, “the working group intended to modify this statute to Georgian conformance in order to eliminate any suppositions. The process will begin with us drafting the law before moving to the political arena, the committee, and the plenary sessions. At the same time, perhaps by this point, the Venice Commission will reach a resolution regarding the Ukrainian model.”

Members of the working group included representatives of the faction Georgian Dream and the parliamentary opposition, as well as representatives of the government administration, CEC, State Audit Service, National Communications Commission and Competition Agency.

Two seats in the group are reserved for representatives of civil society (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum [EaP CSF]).

The draft law prepared by the working group should be initiated no later than October 5, and the law should be adopted no later than November 29.

## FIRST SITTING OF WORKING GROUP ON ANTI-CORRUPTION MEASURES IN EXTENDED FORMAT

The Working Group on Anti-Corruption Measures at Legal Issues Committee held its first session in an extended format.

Anri Okhanashvili, the Chairman of the Committee and the head of the Working Group, stated that the meeting helped identify a number of issues that will be further elaborated upon by the Group, including the creation of an independent anti-corruption agency in accordance with the proposal, a prevention-oriented anti-corruption direction, rapid response in case of corruption detection, and where necessary, revision of specific criminal law compositions and sanctions as well as the creation of an independent anti-corruption agency as per the proposal of the representative of the civil society.

“Each participant had the opportunity to address the topics of their choosing. From our perspective, we brought up concerns about the need to improve agency collaboration and the effort put forth to avoid corruption. We invited the representatives of the various agencies to submit suggestions regarding the danger zones and work-related obstacles in each direction. Our goal is to further strengthen criminal justice policy where necessary in addition to prevention. The civil society representative brought up the need for a distinct anti-corruption agency. The Group will discuss the aforementioned topics in its upcoming meeting, which will take place soon. It is important to emphasize that Georgia has achieved significant strides in the fight against corruption. Georgia ranks first in Eastern Europe and 45th out of

145 states according to the Corruption Perception Index, indicating that the battle against corruption is a top priority for our nation. Several efforts have been taken in this direction, and we are still working to strengthen institutions even more,” Okhanashvili remarked.

The Working Group is composed of: members of the faction Georgian Dream and individual opposition groups, as well as representatives of the government administration, the prosecutor’s office, the State Security Service, the Ministry of Justice, the State Audit Service, and civil society (EaP CSF Georgian National Platform.)

The plan calls for the measure to be introduced no later than October 19, and adopted no later than December 1.

## HUMAN RIGHTS AND CIVIL INTEGRATION COMMITTEE TO INITIATE LEGAL PACKAGE RELATED TO 11TH POINT OF EC RECOMMENDATIONS

“The public is aware that the Parliament of Georgia continues intensive work on the implementation of the recommendations set out by the European Council,” Chair of the Human Rights Protection and Civil Integration Committee, Mikheil Sarjveladze, stated at a briefing this week.

“The Human Rights Protection and Civil Integration Committee has set up a working group to develop a legislative package aimed at encouraging the active use of the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). The Committee decided to initiate a legislative initiative prepared by the working group, consisting of draft amendments to 11 legislative acts.”

“Following adoption of these amendments, the legislation of our country will further encourage the use of the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights by national courts, which, in turn, will contribute to the more active implementation of the standards of the protection of human rights in the country, which are the best European standards.”

“Specific spaces will be set up in all procedural legislation in order to ensure

more active use of the practice of the ECHR by courts, lawyers, prosecutors, and administrative bodies in justifying their positions. At the same time, specific obligations will be created for legal professionals to improve their qualifications in terms of the case law of the ECHR.

“Another block of issues regulated in a novel manner will concern increasing the accessibility of the decisions of the ECHR, which will be manifested in their translation, analytics, and the provision of information to the public and professional circles. The legal status of the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights, as official interpretations of the Convention, will be defined in a new way,” he stated.

Sarjveladze concluded that the Committee will further cooperate with all parties concerned and the Working Group is to develop the recommendations in view to monitor the practical enforcement of the legal changes.

## OKHANASHVILI MEETS WITH ACTING HEAD OF EU DELEGATION TO GEORGIA, DISCUSSES PROCESS OF IMPLEMENTING EC’S 12-POINTS

The Chairman of the Legal Issues Committee, Anri Okhanashvili, met with the Acting Head of the EU Delegation to Georgia, Julien Crampes, to discuss the process of implementing the EC’s 12-point plan and the activities of the working groups at the Legal Issues Committee.

“I had a lengthy conversation with the EU representative regarding the structure, objectives, and directions of the working groups, as well as how to make the process as open and inclusive as possible. I also outlined the conditions of this process and our goal for the aforementioned concerns. We had a discussion and agreed that, in general, they are fully aware of the working groups’ activities and the status of the process. Naturally, it is crucial that the EU office in Georgia is properly informed on the 12-point plan’s implementation process, which ultimately aims to further Georgia’s integration into the EU,” Okhanashvili stated after the meeting.

# PM Chairs Grape Harvest Preparation Meeting 2022

Irakli Garibashvili, Prime Minister of Georgia chaired a Grape Harvest Preparation Meeting 2022 at the Government Administration. Full readiness of the public and private sectors of winemaking for the organization of the grape harvest was highlighted at the meeting. Specific measures were discussed as well, as they

will need to be implemented to make sure that harvest collection is organized and successfully carried out.

It was highlighted that with the support of the State, every farmer with a vineyard will be able to achieve yielding sales. Further, stable development trends witnessed in the viticulture and wine-making sector in recent years will also

be maintained.

The traditional Grape Harvest Coordination Task Force is to open in Telavi on August 25 and will operate round the clock – 24/7. In line with a decision made by the government, subsidies for vineyard owners will be continued this year. Specific details of the matter will become known at the next Executive Government Meeting.



## Up to 15 Streets in Tbilisi to Be Named After Russia-Georgia War Heroes

Up to fifteen streets in Tbilisi will be named after the heroes of the August 2008 Russia-Georgia war, the Denominations and Symbols Commission at the Tbilisi City Assembly (Sakrebulo) decided during today’s meeting.

A square in Tkhinvali will be named after Georgian national hero, Giorgi Antsukhelidze. The geographic locations will be also named after those journalists who died in the war while performing their professional duties.

The initiative will be approved on August 9 at the Sakrebulo sitting.

# Giorgi Kalandarishvili on Not Being Named a Candidate: "In the current political climate, it is difficult to achieve a consensus when we are discredited by completely groundless accusations"



Continued from page 1

"In the current political climate, it is difficult to achieve such a consensus when candidates are discredited by completely groundless accusations, all the more so if we consider that among the candidates presented by the President to the Parliament, there are still representatives of the election administration. We wish success to our colleagues in the next stage of the competition. We think that their candidacies are another acknowledgment of the election administration and proof that there is no problem with the institution's credibility.

"The election administration is an independent body that works in compliance with democratic principles, with a high professional standard, transparently, and it is unfortunate that the evaluation of the activities of this institution and its representatives might not be based

on objective criteria, but on political motives.

"Regardless of the decision made by the President, the election administration and its chairman, in accordance with the law, will continue to work as usual. Two members, and myself, will perform our duties until our replacements are elected in accordance with the law.

"The decision made by the President of Georgia regarding the selection competition for the chairman and members of the CEC became the cause of political insinuations. In particular, from the side of politically interested persons, opinions are heard that the reason for the President's decision may be the political bias of the acting members of the CEC, or flawed conduct in the 2021 elections. In fact, we saw a situation where this decision became the basis for a political attack. This harms not only the professional dignity of those participating in the com-

petition, but also the reputation of the election administration as an independent and impartial arbiter. Yet, it should not be understood that the President did something illegal or unconstitutional; on the contrary, it was her authority, just, as I mentioned above, this decision put the institution under political attack."

## WHO'S TO BLAME FOR THE PRESIDENT'S DECISION? WHO MIGHT BE BEHIND IT?

In the last weeks, we've seen a number of political calls and pressures on the President regarding the formality of the competition, indicating that the President has to take responsibility for this process. This might have had some influence on her decision, because if we return to the motive of this decision, which appeals to consensus, we will see that she had already presented my candidacy twice in past contests, and there was quite a growing dynamic in relation to my candidacy in the legislative body, with multi-party support. In this case, in addition to compliance with other criteria, today we can observe that the administration of last year's municipal elections was at a high professional level, the administration of the by-elections, and technological intervention in the election procedures, increased transparency and resulted in a lot of progress, as well as positive evaluations from international organizations and some embassies. These were precisely the prerequisites that gave the basis for the expectation that the number of supporters might increase significantly in relation to my candidacy. Unfortunately, it did not. Therefore, it is unclear why we should appeal to political consensus, because the institution of the president is not a link in this process, where the issue of support/non-support is decided.

## WHAT'S YOUR OPINION OF THE CHOSEN CANDIDATES - TAMAR ALPHADZE AND REVAZ ERADZE?

It would not be ethically correct for me to evaluate them, being a former candidate, when I do not know the lady participating at all and Mr. Egadze is our colleague. The only thing I can say is that I wish both of them success. There are a number of procedures and several stages ahead. That employees of the election administration have been nominated is really gratifying, since the presentation of their candidacies is another recognition of the election administration.

## DOES THE PRESIDENT'S DECISION NOT TO NAME YOU AMONG THE CANDIDATES MEAN THAT WE'LL NOT BE SEEING YOU BACK IN THIS POSITION?

The competition is complex and has several stages, which take time. Until we see the results of the competition, it is physically impossible to talk about it. My term of office has not yet expired and my authority will continue until the CEC has a new chairman. Let's wait and see what happens. I am still in the CEC, and I will put all my efforts into the remaining period. This decision will have no negative impact on my work and its quality. My energy and attitude will be exactly the same as it has been since my first days in this position. We have no time to lose, we have mid-term elections in the Senaki municipality in early October and a number of projects to be completed and implemented.

## WHY DON'T WE HAVE AN ELECTRONIC ELECTION SYSTEM YET? WILL SUCH TECHNOLOGY

## BE BROUGHT IN IN 2024?

During my chairmanship, the decision was made by the commission that we should increase the scale of piloting, and not only did we increase the scale, we used complex technical means together with verification machines for the first time during the interim elections of the Batumi City Council this year.

Based on the results and conclusions of the pilot, the use of these tools has great prospects in Georgia, simplifying election procedures, specifically on the day of voting, minimizing human errors, making preliminary results and voter turnout known in the shortest possible time, removing stress and tension at the polling stations and putting an end to manipulations of unified voter lists.

The development of this issue needs a lot of work yet: Awareness raising, cultural transformation, appropriate support from the stakeholders, etc., but the main thing is still financing. We need to know how much the state will be able to provide these resources, and how much the contribution of donor organizations will be in this process. This is a key issue around which we are working intensively. It takes a long time to raise awareness, work on culture, and develop capabilities. We are doing our best to be able to make some progress in this direction by 2024.

At the Senaki by-election, although it is small in scale and there will be only three precincts, we will not miss the opportunity to again employ technical means of voting, vote counting and verification machines to see again in practice the opportunities of these machines and areas of practical application.

Gradual implementation is exactly the echo of the good international practice applied by other countries.

# No More Short Wars. What Can Georgia Do to Survive?

BY MICHAEL GODWIN

The face of war has changed. With the recent wars in Syria, Africa, Ukraine, and the Philippines, few had been blind to this. However, there are some of the changes that are happening below the surface that may go unnoticed by some. The comparisons to history's wars and their structure bring an interesting light to what is becoming the norm for future conflicts.

The idea of a relatively short, contained, and easily defined war is disappearing. Wars of tomorrow are turning into long campaigns that encompass more functions than a traditional army can sustain. One look at Ukraine shows us how the key resources of manpower, munitions, and morale are not as sustainable in a drawn out conflict as they might be in a short war.

These long wars are taxing on troop numbers, ammunition reserves, and the willingness of the soldiers to continue the fight. All three are items many nations don't possess in large enough quantities for sustained campaigns. Modern post-Cold War armies are small and highly professional, but lack the ability to rapidly refill their rank due to high technical requirements. This would be akin to having to replace an entire software development department within six months, and still stay competitive in the market.

In Ukraine, both sides are vehemently committed to holding the territory they have, as well as taking more. As the human and political investment increases in the conflict, the likelihood of either backing down decreases. This creates a fertile environment for a long war that drags on almost indefinitely. However, unlike wars like Iraq and Afghanistan,



Georgian Army soldiers assigned to Charlie Company, 33rd Light Infantry Battalion wait for air transportation prior to conducting operation Northern Lion II on Camp Bastion, Helmand province, Afghanistan. US Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Alejandro Pena/Released

the intensity and turnover of man and material is exponentially higher.

For a country like Georgia, the very thought of losing the numbers of soldiers that either Ukraine or Russia have is unfathomable. With a strength of only approximately 40,000, Georgia couldn't hope to sustain itself in war like Kyiv finds itself in now. Additionally, the cost in munitions and vehicle losses would render the nation almost defenseless rapidly.

The first issue of manpower, and its replacement, in a long war may seem like an easy problem to solve. Georgia's existing conscription program may have the scalability to accept thousands more than it already does. Every year, around 10,000 young Georgian men arrive to undergo basic training for a 12-month conscription service term. However, this training is inadequate for troops destined for frontline service.

Most Western militaries require 5 to 6 months before a soldier can be considered fully trained. With the war in Ukraine only five months in, the new recruits

would only be arriving at the front now. Georgia would not be able to sustain this. A movement to a modified recruitment, training, and unit personnel fulfillment model needs to be pre-planned by the Ministry of Defense. This model would have to be a condensed yet comprehensive course, specifically designed to produce fighters and not particularly soldiers. A 120-day warfighting course complete with combat skills, tactics, medical, and communications would need to be devised and tested. Additionally, this would only be able to be conducted in small groups, in continuous rotation, to keep Georgian units in the fight supplied with fresh replacements for their casualties.

Supplying these units in combat with adequate ammunition and replacement arms would be another daunting challenge for the nation. Georgia has already launched production of its own service rifle, the GI-4, through Delta CAA Arms. A copy of the American venerable M-4 rifle, this is a more than adequate rifle for the armed forces. However, being

able to produce numbers of these to replace battlefield losses and new recruits is questionable.

Supplying the ammunition, equipment, and replacement vehicles would almost certainly be unattainable for the current industry sector in the country. Trade and industry agreements such as those between NATO and EU members may be able to support this eventuality. However, arms-specific agreements could prevent a constant need for arms shipments, the likes of which Kyiv pleads for weekly.

An example of this shortcoming is the shortage of FGM-148 Javelin Anti-Tank Guided Missile (ATGM) systems and FIM-92 Stinger Man-Portable Air Defense Systems (MANPADS). At the time of writing, the United States needs at least four years to replace the number of Javelin ATGMs they have sent to Ukraine over the past five months. Additionally, it could take up to five years to replace all the Stinger MANPADS that were sent.

Georgian industry, while well developed, would be unable to support a long and costly conflict. In the event of a prolonged fight, Tbilisi would be forced to turn to the West, like Ukraine, to support its sovereignty. The only way to circumvent the possibility of being over-

run due to a lack of arms and munitions is to ensure these supply pathways are established ahead of time.

Finally, the military and public morale aspect of the nation will need to be bolstered. While the public would support the national defense mission for the first year, any more could turn the people war-weary and make them urge the government to sue for peace. For a foe such as Russia, that means total annexation.

The government's only hope, aside from censorship and attempting to hide casualty numbers, is to frame it in the way Ukraine has done. While Kyiv has been mostly transparent about casualty numbers, they have spun much of it into a heroic tale of national defense. This marketing tactic preserves much of the image the government desires, while not attempting to cover things up. Covering up casualty numbers almost never works, and certainly doesn't stand the test of time.

For distant foreign missions, encompassing governmental restructuring, army building, and civil society program administration, Georgia is not yet prepared. However, for domestic missions and the preservation of the country itself, these three points have to be reckoned with ahead of a potential conflict.



Georgian and US servicemen during a military training exercise outside Tbilisi, Georgia, prior to the 2008 war. Photo by Cliff Patrick / AP

# A Few Ideas about the Country's Ability to Compete and Adapt. Part I

ANALYSIS BY VIKTOR KIPIANI,  
CHAIRMAN OF GEOCASE

**T**he development of a nation is influenced not only by external historical and political factors, but also by qualitative indicators of nation-state organization. These very factors largely determine the competitiveness of this rather complex organizational unity and its resistance to internal or external shocks.

When talking about the strength of nation-state organization - i.e., the state, no-one questions the importance of material and military resources. However, the material component is not the only factor that determines the national strength, it only consequentially reflects the quality and interaction of the more basic and rather complex societal and social characteristics of nation-state organization. It is precisely the quality of such characteristics that creates a major source of competitive parameters for a state, a possibility to maintain a relevant role in the modern and risky environment.

In this article, we would like to touch upon and briefly overview those separate characteristics and open a discussion on practical aspects of their intersection with the internal and external political line of our country, Georgia.

## NATIONAL AMBITION

National ambition is a necessary condition for the vitality of a nation state, for finding the way in conditions of complex and rapidly changing external or internal influences. It must be noted that the passage of time does not diminish but, on the contrary, further exacerbates the necessity for constant maintenance and strengthening of ambition for nation-state identity.

When talking about the role of national ambition, one thing that remains pressing even today, in our modern times and



Image source: forbes.ge

especially from the perspective of a small state is an Athenian formula that was formed in the era of the Peloponnesian wars: being fast, brave and not fearing innovations is a prerequisite for continuous growth of [national] wealth and power. Although this formula did not bring victory to Athens, it has withstood the test of centuries, and the need to realize it has become clear in the threats and challenges of our times.

It has already been said that Georgia's cooperation with partners is of fundamental importance, but any such cooperation, be it in the security or any other sphere, must be based on the Georgian ambition of being successful, self-sufficient and self-esteemed.

Naturally, the national ambition of success and self-esteem rests on several fundamental and very practical directions. In our view, these are the energy and food self-sufficiency of the country,

the ability to become a hub of technological and modern financial services in the region, i.e., a set of those particular material parameters that improve the welfare of the country's population and also make the country beneficial for external actors.

Here, we will go back again to the need to emphasize a regional function of Georgia for the aim of enhancing existing infrastructural and transportation-logistic links and building new systems on them. We have already written once and will reiterate here again that the line dubbed as "Shevardnadze's doctrine," whereby Georgia was viewed as a country constantly standing out for its functional connotation and need, needs revising, supplementing and adjusting to the existing reality. It has also been said that projects facilitating cargo flows or new regional-transportation hub-and-spoke systems alone do not represent a

functional benefit for the Georgian state. Along with the aforementioned function, it is a road towards a greater national security, something which we so flexibly managed at the end of 20th century and beginning of the 21st. That fast, brave-and-not-fearing-innovations experiment needs to be repeated and filled with new substance. That, however, is unimaginable without national ambition.

## STRATEGY, OR PLAYING A STRATEGY GAME?

It has become a sort of fashion in the modern world to talk about strategy and to try to reflect it in conceptual documents. At the same time, an impression is created that, by putting down correct "strategic emphases" on paper, the job is done, and from that point on, things will play out themselves (and according to a described strategy). The issue becomes more odious when it concerns large, global states, and the term "great strategy" encompasses all useful and useless nuances. The key thing, however, is that (a) often, it becomes actually impossible for the author of a "great strategy" to follow the "written" strategy with real deeds, and (b) also often, the author, to achieve a tangible result, reject themselves constraining postulates of the "great strategy." But let's leave that and talk about our own selves.

The availability of a strategy, even "great" strategy, does not depend on the size of a country - whether large, medium or small; even more, the Georgian nation, considering Georgia's rich history and experience of statehood, does have a justified claim for having its own "great strategy." However, in this case too, we want to reasonably lighten the construction of the issue and adjust it to a practical need.

For example, we believe that it is more comprehensible and justifiable in the modern world to talk about strategic objectives than about an unconditional rigidly set out formal line towards these objectives. In our case, setting it out is (a) a useless exercise because global

processes are characterized by fast and often unpredictable dynamics; (b) setting out a strategic line constrains decision makers and implementers in terms of applying adequate means towards strategic objectives at the right time. As a result, a "great strategy" breaks up while the agenda remains unfulfilled.

With regard to Georgia, instead of a rather static "great strategy," it will be more relevant to speak about an "emerging strategy." This is a construction that allows one to quickly adjust to fast-changing circumstances and, towards this end, does not limit one in choosing tactical means. Georgia's strategic objectives can be divided into two broad groups: greater security and greater welfare. At the same time, a benefit could be derived for these two groups of strategic objectives from the unrestrained nature of the Georgian "emerging strategy" and a broad choice of tactical resources. We think that that would be correct, rational and productive too. As a result, the country would abandon playing a game of statehood for good and we would also spare society's nervous system from a negative, cheap, pseudo-intellectual buzz in media about playing a strategy game.

For free maneuvering to avoid risks, we also think that only within the "emerging" strategy will the Georgian foreign political line be able to maintain the so-called Georgian balance for modern international relations. That is a practice which is introduced by a number of countries under unpredictable conditions, and which we must transform into the discipline needed for state politics.

The implementation of Georgian strategic objectives supported by the "emerging strategy," requires the transformation of realistic evaluation of issues into qualitatively new, Georgian direction of "realism." This is impossible to achieve without the transformation of political culture and discourse.

Continued in next week's GT and online at [georgiatoday.ge](http://georgiatoday.ge).

## Georgia and Ukraine: From Close Friendship to Cold Ties

BY EMIL AVDALIANI

**T**he rift in Georgia-Ukraine relations began to emerge following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The existing trends indicate the ties are unlikely to improve in the near future.

What seemed to be a solid relationship is now in a shambles. Reasons vary from internal Georgian politics to the shifts in the regional balance of power. The two countries always felt particularly close to each other due to their near-identical struggle against Russian military invasions and Moscow's general approach to its sphere of influence. Both also border the Black Sea, making them two bastions against Russia's ambitions to dominate the sea.

As such, it was only natural for Kyiv and Tbilisi to cooperate and become close partners, creating an arc along Russia's southern and south-western borders that was able to resist pressure from the imperial power. The creation of GUAM reflected these aspirations. The organization (initially called GUUAM), which aimed at the development of democracy and economic progress, was established in 1997, and served as one of the first regional models linking the Black and Caspian seas, having a primarily economic role.

This was a time when the newly independent states were keen to get a geo-

political initiative in their hands. Russia was weak, while the West seemed powerful. The participant states of the project were interesting from a geographic point of view. Ukraine, controlling most of the northern Black Sea littoral, Azerbaijan as a starting point of crucial trade and a resource corridor, and Georgia in between serving as a connection point for the two seas. The GUAM member states had one common aim of limiting Russian geopolitical influence through being able to dispose of/export their own resources to world markets and not to Russia.

However, the project failed to materialize. The member states were still heavily reliant on Russian economic, military and, generally, political benevolence. These circumstances limited GUAM's effectiveness. Indeed, Uzbekistan withdrew from the project in 2005 and Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova, with all their weaknesses, were unable to keep up the prospects of the GUAM project. Moreover, although all member states shared an inner distrust of Russia, they still failed to coordinate their foreign policy moves with one another.

The GUAM initiative remained weak, and with the Russian invasion and tensions in Georgia-Ukraine relations, it might now be on the verge of total collapse. One of the rules for regional cooperation projects is that their effectiveness depends on foreign support and the geopolitical situation in the region. No

such support followed, which further doomed the project.

One might argue that presently the geopolitical situation in the South Caucasus and around the Black Sea no longer favors the reinvigoration of the GUAM initiative. All the member states share difficult relations with Russia, and Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova all have Russian troops on their territories.

## DETERIORATION OF BILATERAL TIES

Difficulties in Georgian-Ukrainian relations were observed even before the 2022 Russian invasion. A number of former Georgian government (United National Movement) members found their second home in Ukraine after defeat in the 2012 elections in Georgia. This always caused tensions between the two countries, though differences were glossed over, as both remained threatened by Russian actions and were unified by a single goal: the "Associated Trio" to attain EU membership. The unofficial body, consisting of Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, aimed at advancing the common pro-Western agenda. Georgia was a leader among them in the reforms implemented and in overall prospects regarding EU/NATO candidacy.

The February invasion of Ukraine, however, changed everything. Many expected Tbilisi to openly support Kyiv. Instead, the Georgian government chose

to follow a more nuanced approach. Internal pressure and wider geopolitical motives put Georgia in a precarious geopolitical position. It needed to simultaneously look attentively at how Ukraine-EU ties developed, not anger Russia, and also respond to wider pro-Ukrainian sentiment globally and in Georgia. Many remembered how Ukrainian President Victor Yushchenko enthusiastically supported Georgia in 2008, and even visited the capital when Russian troops were just 30 kilometers away. Similar actions were demanded from the Georgian government too.

By choosing this nuanced approach, Georgia has run a great risk. In an age of unified Western sentiment against Russia, neutrality could be harmful to a country that aspires to become a EU/NATO member. Indeed, hundreds of thousands of people demanded that the Georgian government become more supportive of Ukraine. Indeed, Tbilisi has supported Ukraine at international fora, sent a great amount of humanitarian aid, and offered help to Ukrainian refugees.

Yet, a rift has begun to emerge between the two countries. Geopolitically, Georgia feared that a successful Russian invasion could lead to Moscow demanding from Tbilisi a change in the country's constitution, namely the removal of the stipulation on Georgia's NATO/EU aspirations. The refusal to do so might push Russia to use the military force with likely devastating results for the Geor-

gian economy and its population.

Thus, the reticence with which the Georgian side approached the war in Ukraine is not only based on the occasional tensions between the two countries because of internal Georgian politics, but mostly because of wider geopolitical changes. From Tbilisi's perspective, the balance of power in the wider Black Sea region has further tilted in Russia's favor, and as long as this scenario persists, Official Georgia's position on the war in Ukraine will likely remain cautious.

Another factor which further pushed the two sides apart is their EU membership prospects. Ukraine has been granted candidate status, while Georgia only the European perspective. The "Associated Trio" has thus been unofficially disbanded. Tbilisi now has a different path and this will likely have further negative effects on its cooperation with Ukraine.

In short, it is the geopolitical reality together with internal politicking that has driven Georgia from Ukraine. How long-lasting the trend will be remains to be seen, but judging from the official statements from both countries, as well as the ongoing war, the tensions are likely to persist for as long as Russia manages to maintain control over large swathes of Ukrainian land it has occupied since February.

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

# On the US' "honorable failure." A 2008 War Retrospective with Amb. Daniel Fried

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA  
TAVBERIDZE FOR RFE

Russia attempted to intimidate Georgia through war and give itself the ability to continue to intimidate Georgia by manipulating the situation of the borders. But Georgia, because it fought so well during those five days, maintained its independence. Saakashvili didn't fall, he lost an election later and left power peacefully, - Ambassador Dan Fried, then-Assistant State secretary for Europe, tells Radio Free Europe's Georgian Service. "Right after the war, the US helped organize an international donors conference which gave over \$4 billion to the Georgian economy, which was enough to keep them afloat. Georgia maintained its independence, but it lost territory.

"The situation was similar to that of Finland after the Winter War, which maintained its independence; the Finns to this day are proud of what they did. They saved their country. The Georgians also saved their country, but Georgia's geography is not great and Russia has the ability to continue to intimidate Georgia," Fried notes. "The problem, of course, is that the current Georgian Government does seem frightened, or pretends to be frightened, of what the Russians can do. But I don't want to be harsh, because Russia is an aggressive power and Georgia is in a vulnerable position.

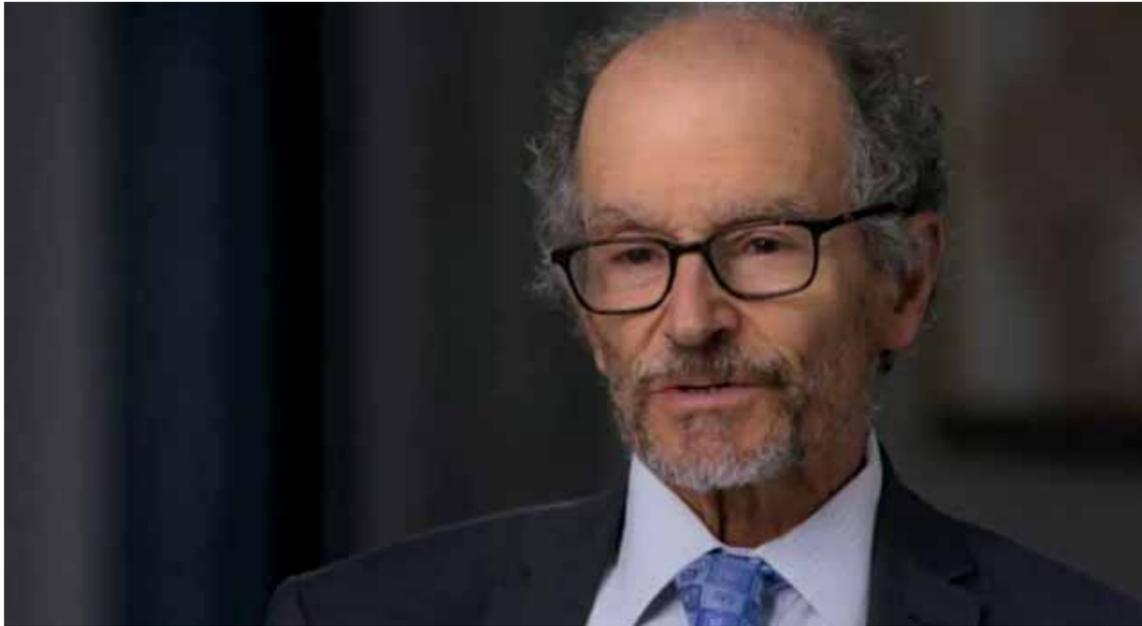
"Internationally, Putin got away with the August War, and I say that without pride or pleasure. The Bush administration, after the war, understood that its policy of reaching out to Putin had failed. But then Obama people came in and pressed the reset button. I don't mean to be critical. Mike McFaul is a serious, honorable, knowledgeable person. He's a good guy. And I understand why he did it. But it didn't work, as he will acknowledge, because he's honest. Just like our policy in the Bush administration didn't work. And it meant that Putin got away with it. And then six years later, in 2014, he attacks Ukraine, thinking he can get away with it again."

## WHAT DID THE AUGUST WAR MEAN TO YOU?

Those of us who were involved in US policy toward Georgia and Russia remember every hour of every day of that war. I remember speaking on the phone to Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Karasin. I remember speaking to Condi Rice. I remember the trip she took in July 2008 to Tbilisi, and what she said to Saakashvili, I remember the discussions I had with Eka Tkeshelashvili, Georgian Foreign Minister, on the Thursday afternoon. I remember the images of the Russian tanks rolling through. I remember the trip to Tbilisi, but first to southern France to work with the French on improving their not terribly good six-point peace plan. I remember being on the phone with the French National Security Adviser while I was in the room with Condi Rice and Saakashvili niggling about the same thing. I remember it very well. It meant in a larger sense that Putin was willing to go to war to defend his version of the



We didn't think the war would actually happen. People were going on summer vacation



Daniel Fried. Image source: pbs.org

Russian Empire. It's a lesson we have all learned with respect to Ukraine, but we learned it first with Georgia.

## ANY REGRETS, MISSED CHANCES, WHEN YOU LOOK BACK AT IT? ANYTHING THAT COULD HAVE BEEN HANDLED BETTER?

Sure. We were worried in the run up to the war, but we weren't worried enough. I'll give you a specific example. I was the assistant secretary for Europe. The next person up the chain was Undersecretary Bill Burns. He's now head of the CIA. Condi Rice told me that she wanted Burns to go to Berlin and confer with the Germans and talk to the Russians to head off the war. In retrospect, she was late. We should have escalated sooner than we did. We knew what was coming, but we were slow to believe it. We didn't think the war would actually happen. People were going on summer vacation. Rice was at a resort in Virginia, I was away in Arizona. You asked what we could have done differently. The fact that we were on vacation indicates that we thought we had more time than we did.

## WOULD IT BE TOO HEAVY HANDED A JUDGMENT TO SAY THAT YOU GUYS DIDN'T TAKE IT SERIOUSLY ENOUGH?

Look, you're a Georgian, what am I gonna do? Georgia has suffered. I'm not going to criticize the way you criticize us. You have every right to be critical. And the United States was right, but we were too slow. We were at a five or a six, we should have been at a nine on the urgency scale. Part of the problem was that the US analytic community didn't think Russia would attack. They couldn't quite understand that Putin was an aggressor. I remember on the Monday [the War started on Thursday], at the senior staff meeting, I said to Condi Rice, "I have a very bad feeling about this week, things are not going well. Putin could attack." She didn't believe me. Nobody in the wider analytic community shared the view. It was my gut feeling, but even I didn't take it seriously enough to stay home. We thought there'd been crises before, a lot of them, and we thought this was just another one, where the Russians were trying to intimidate Georgia, but they wouldn't attack.

Now, I don't want to be too hard on us. After all, President Bush, in the end, convinced Putin to pull back. We sent US planes to fly the Georgian first brigade back from Iraq, and ships. We informed the Russians we were flying them because we didn't want them surprised. They said they couldn't guarantee the safety of our aircraft, which was a veiled threat. And we said we're going in anyway. And they backed off.

On the Monday, the Russian tanks were

rolling. And the Georgian lines were broken, and the Georgian army was in retreat, and it looked like they would move on to Tbilisi. Ambassador [John] Tefft and I were having multiple calls a day, and Tefft said, "Dan, you realize where our embassy is? On the main road north of Tbilisi. The Russian army could be here tonight." He was absolutely calm, absolutely focused, and he understood what was happening. Matt Bryza, my deputy who had flown out to Tbilisi, was in the presidential palace, with [then Swedish FM] Carl Bildt. They thought it could be attacked, but they weren't going to leave. They had to show personal solidarity, which actually took some courage because that would have been an early target, and they didn't care. So, we did the right things, but you didn't ask what we did that was right. You asked what we did that was wrong. And I feel honor-bound honestly, to say so.

## IT HAS ALMOST BECOME A CATCHPHRASE THAT SAAKASHVILI WAS "PROVOKED." THE UKRAINIANS DIDN'T FALL FOR PROVOCATIONS IN 2014 OR IN 2022, BUT IT DIDN'T STOP PUTIN FROM SEIZING CRIMEA, WITHOUT FIRING A GUN, OR THIS WAR NOW.

Putin wanted his war against Ukraine. And even though the US successfully exposed all of Putin's provocations, he went in anyway. So, to blame Saakashvili [for the August War] and say, "well, he fell for the provocations, therefore the war's his fault," is nonsense. Putin would have gone in anyway, but, because Saakashvili fell for the provocations, the Germans and others had an excuse not to be as supportive as they should have been.

The Russian proxy forces were shelling Georgian villages, and we warned Saakashvili in advance not to move. Condi Rice did it when we were in Tbilisi in July. I did it that very day. But I understand that they were provoked, and let's just repeat: Putin would have attacked anyway. The problem is that you had the Germans and the French able to blame Saakashvili and half-excuse Putin. And their reaction to the Russo-Georgian war was much weaker than to the Russo-Ukrainian war.

But if Saakashvili hadn't fallen for the provocation, and the Russians had attacked anyway, would the German and French position have been very different? I've been thinking about this for years. I've been critical of Saakashvili for his decision, but, let's be clear where responsibility really lies for this war: it is Vladimir Putin.

## HOW WISE WAS IT TO LEAVE THE NEGOTIATIONS TO THE FRENCH IN 2008?

## HOW SATISFACTORY WHERE THE RESULTS?

[Laughs] I remember when we were in the south of France, taking a look at the six-point ceasefire Sarkozy had negotiated as the presidency of the EU. The line of Russian controlled bisect in Georgia was a mess. Condi turns to me, and says, "the French invented cartography. Didn't anybody read a map?" Which is her version of being really angry. Sarkozy's six-point plan needed to be fixed. But we can't blame him or the French, because even if the plan had been better, it might not have made a difference. The Minsk accords had their faults, though they were much better than the six-point plan, but Putin did not respect them. He twisted them, he projected onto them a meaning that they didn't have and waited for people to accept his nonsense interpretation. The flaws were not critical, because Putin would have ignored a better document anyway. The document stopped the fighting, which is what Putin wanted. We managed to claw back some of the worst provisions and save Georgia's integrity. The flaws of the six-point ceasefire were not critical to the outcome nor the future.

## WOULD IT NOT HAVE BEEN BETTER TO HAVE AN EFFECTIVE PLAN, WITH SOME MECHANISMS ENSURING ITS IMPLEMENTATION, SOMETHING THAT YOU COULD THEN STICK TO PUTIN?

Yes, but the difference would have been tactical, not strategic. I wish it had been better. But look what happened with the Minsk accords. It was better, but it didn't make any difference. In the end, the critics, Georgians, Ukrainians, Poles, Estonians Lithuanians, who tell us the only way to deal successfully with Russia is from a position of strength, do have a point.

## ON THE SUBJECT OF DOCUMENTS OF DEBATABLE MERIT, HOW WELL DID THE TAGLIAVINI REPORT HANDLE ITS MISSION?

I wish the document had been clearer about where responsibility for the war lay. Ron Asmus and his book about the war did a very good job. I wish it had been a better report. I didn't trash it - I don't believe in intramural fights within the West unless I absolutely have to have them. We have to remember who the real enemy is. It's Vladimir Putin and his system. I wish the report had been better. But as I said about the six-point plan, even a better plan, or even a better report, would have made a tactical difference, but not a strategic one. Therefore, I don't want to spend time criticizing it except to say that I think it should have been clearer about where responsibility lies.



My view of the Obama policy is that it failed, but it was an honorable failure

## LAST YEAR, YOU SAID THE WEST WAS NOT UNITED IN 2008, SO IT OPTED FOR ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE AS OPPOSED TO IMPOSING SANCTIONS ON RUSSIA. WAS THAT THE RIGHT MOVE?

It would have been better to impose sanctions. But two problems: One, we weren't as smart about sanctions yet. We learned how to do sanctions against Iran after 2008. And then we applied them against Russia. So, one, we weren't as smart. And two, we would never have had consensus. The Germans and French would not have supported it, and had we tried, we would have lost - it would have been like the Bucharest Summit. Losing the fight on the map, we would have lost again twice in one year. That would have been bad. So do I regret we didn't do sanctions? Sure. But there were hurdles we couldn't get over.

## AND THAT EYE-POPPING RESET BUTTON A MERE SEVEN MONTHS AFTER THE GEORGIA WAR - WAS THAT NAIVETY? WISHFUL THINKING?

I was there. Mike McFaul was the architect of the reset. I know him and I respect him. He was working for Obama, the election hadn't happened. A lot of the Obama people were very critical of Bush's handling of Georgia, half of them believed the war was Dick Cheney's fault and he had egged on Saakashvili and some nonsense. McFaul was the foreign policy person. In his testimony to the Senate about the Georgian war, he blamed Putin. It didn't help them politically within the Obama campaign, so he came up with the reset. And I said, "Look, Mike, I know why you're doing it, and I'm not going to trash you for it. I'm not going to attack you because you're doing it for the same reasons we did it, but we can do it better. You'll fail for the same reasons we did. You won't be able to accept Putin's terms for a better relationship for more than a week." Later, he admitted I was right.

## WHAT DID RUSSIA DO TO DESERVE THIS DIPLOMATIC DEBIT?

The Russians were suggesting that we could get along decently. They weren't aggressive toward Ukraine. Medvedev was the President, and though we were completely wrong, the Obama people thought he was more modern, more of a 21st century person, not a KGB person. My view of the Obama policy is that it failed, but it was an honorable failure. And by that, I mean that when Putin attacked Ukraine, they responded by resisting. They should have sent weapons to Ukraine. That was a mistake. I was on the other side of that policy. I'll tell you who else was - Strobe Talbott, who had basically reached out to Yeltsin and was skeptical early on, and correctly so, about Putin. Talbott in 2000 thought Putin was bad news. He was right. Talbott wanted to send weapons to Ukraine. The Obama people said no, the argument they used was "an escalatory danger." They were wrong. I'm not going to defend it. They were just flat wrong. We should have sent weapons. But at least they organized the sanctions. Those sanctions don't look big now, but at the time, they were huge. It was an honorable failure.

# Eerik-Niiles Kross: The Georgian Government is Getting Away with Things that They Shouldn't



Eerik-Niiles Kross. Photo by VALLO KRUSER

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE FOR RFE

**E**erik-Niiles Kross is an Estonian politician and diplomat. In Estonia, he served as the head of intelligence from 1995 to 2000, and as national security advisor to former President Lennart Meri in 2000 and 2001. Dubbed by Politico as “The Baltic James Bond” and ranked the 23th most influential politician in Europe in 2018, Kross is best known as a security expert, having worked in Iraq, being responsible for creating the new Iraqi Ministry of Defense and Military Intelligence. He was an advisor to the Government of Georgia during and after its war with Russia in 2008, coordinating the Georgian information campaign.

We started by asking him about Ukraine's bombing of the Suki airbase in Crimea, and how much of a hit it was for the Russian psychology.

“It gives the Ukrainians confidence, showing them that Crimea is not out of reach. It's definitely a psychological blow to the pro-occupation population in Crimea, and the tourists there. For the Russian operational command, though, I don't think it was such a big surprise, as they've been worried about it. They've been losing ammunition depots for weeks now, some of which are 90km behind the front line. I would think the Russian operational planners took it into consideration. I wouldn't call it a strategic breakthrough yet, but the trend is positive.

## WHAT DO WE EXPECT RUSSIA TO DO IN RETALIATION?

They'll probably do more of the same: routinely targeting random Ukrainian towns and villages. They'll respond with what they know best - killing civilians. It doesn't really change the balance on the battlefield.



We're not critical enough at this point. We think there's still time to bring Georgia back

## HOW DO YOU THINK THIS WILL AFFECT THE WEST'S WILLINGNESS TO FURTHER ASSIST UKRAINE? IS THE NARRATIVE ADVOCATING FOR “NOT GIVING UKRAINE WEAPONS THAT SHOOT TOO FAR” FINALLY PUT TO REST?

It's not going away, but the same people who said in the beginning that there was no sense giving the Ukrainians weapons, because it wouldn't make any difference, the Russians would win anyway, are now saying “we can't let the Ukrainians get more weapons, because it will backfire into an escalation.” I don't understand that reasoning, myself. Russians have already escalated it to the hottest conflict since World War Two. The threat of nuclear escalation is low - they would have done it already, but we can't disregard the nuclear power plant being used as a shield by the Russians. That said, the worst thing to do in response to a blatant open nuclear threat from the Russians, because they keep bringing it up rhetorically, would be to give into it. Going down that road would mean that anytime the Russians really want something, they can say “nuclear bomb,” and they get it. When would that end, with the Russians at La Manche?

## YOUR PRIME MINISTER SEEMS TO BE UNHAPPY WITH RUSSIANS BEING ALLOWED TO TRAVEL TO EUROPE WHILE THEIR GOVERNMENT KILLS INNOCENTS IN ANOTHER COUNTRY. “TO VISIT EUROPE IS A PRIVILEGE, NOT A RIGHT”, SHE SAYS. DO YOU AGREE?

In principle, yes, of course I do. The Russians demand to be let into Europe, say they have nothing to do with the war, they just want to travel. But we can't forget that Putin and his gang were voted in, maybe not fairly, in the last elections. Anyone who grew up in the Soviet Union and witnessed Putin coming to power had enough information to understand what they were about even in 2000. So to say that the Russian voter has nothing to do with it is wrong.

And then the behavior of many Russian tourists in Europe has not been exemplary: Cases of harassing Ukrainians or demanding Ukrainian flags be taken down. I don't think we should stop giving Russians visas: we should keep open the possibility for them to defect if they want to, if someone needs protection.

I very much like the idea that has been floated by the Russian opposition, saying there should be some way for Europeans to start understanding who is who. To begin with, the idea is that in order for a Russian citizen to prolong a visa,

or apply for residency, they first need to sign a written statement that says, “I'm against the war, the war is a criminal war, the sanctions need to continue until all of Ukraine is free and the war criminals are sentenced.”

## FUNNILY ENOUGH, WE HAD SUCH AN IDEA IN GEORGIA, AND THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT CALLED IT XENOPHOBIC.

[Laughs] I see. Well, at least right now, it seems there are several countries, not just the Baltic states, that are coming to the conclusion that you can't entirely separate the Russians at war with the Russians demanding a vacation in Italy.

## ONTO THE CURRENT AUGUST WAR DEBATE. TO YOUR MIND, WHEN DID IT ACTUALLY START - ON THE 7TH OR THE 8TH?

It's a totally irrelevant debate: it started earlier and then it entered an active phase. The active planning of the war clearly started no later than April 2008. A lot of what happened during the summer can be seen as Russian maskirovka, getting ready for the escalation. On August 3, the Black Sea Fleet took off from Sevastopol towards Georgia. That was clearly part of the operation. On August 5, some units arrived in Tskhinvali. And there were already clashes-shelling of Georgian villages by the so called separatists, part of the chain of command, as we can see now in Ukraine, since 2014, this whole DNR, LNR, which is really part of the Russian military.

It's quite educational to look at the whole Ukraine dynamic now and compare it with the Georgian war. It's the same playbook and it's the same way of handling things legally.

If you look at Russian doctrine, the war includes preparing the information space so as to deceive the enemy, before the active military phase.

We certainly had a long debate over who started the war - didn't Russia invade Georgia? Or did Georgia invade Russia? It sounds crazy today, if you think of Ukraine. All the red flags were on the map in summer 2008. You had the Russian exercises, you had the railway troops in Abkhazia, airspace violations, very aggressive rhetoric. You had shelling of Georgian villages, kidnappings, you had passportization. And still nobody in the West believed, or wanted to believe, but a lot of that information was available, at least to the Western intelligence service.

Pre-February 2022, the Americans took a very different approach and made all of their intelligence public. What it did, it took away from the table the debate over who started the war, because the



Russians have already escalated this to the hottest conflict since World War Two

Russians were trying to push for the same thing: “Genocide” in Donbas. Nobody debated on February 25 who had started it. If the West had taken Georgia's warning seriously in the summer of 2008, and made the relevant information public, and tried to put some pressure on the Kremlin, it might have changed the ending. At the very least, this debate of who started it could have been avoided.

## WHEN YOU WERE ADVISING THE GEORGIAN GOVERNMENT, YOU WERE IN CHARGE OF THE INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION CAMPAIGN. DID GEORGIA WIN OR LOSE THE PR BATTLE THAT UKRAINE SEEMS TO BE SO DECISIVELY WINNING NOW?

I think at least the Russians believe that Georgia won the information war. The Western governments were very eager to see some kind of settlement. And, as we say, in Estonia, “No fish, no meat, let's agree that no side is to be blamed: We give Georgia some funds to reconstruct, and let's just stay at it.” That was the outcome. The Russians expected everybody to buy into the genocide story and thank Moscow for bringing peace to Georgia. That didn't happen. The Russian goals were not met. For the Western audience, it was quite clear that the Russians were the invaders. They tried to lie from the beginning, and it was exposed right away. They had such big holes in their story that nobody really believed them. They claimed 2000 died in Tskhinvali and then it turned out to be 180, and let's not forget it all happened on Georgian territory.

## NUMEROUS HIGH-RANKED WESTERN POLITICIANS ROUTINELY CLAIM TO ME THAT THIS PART OF THE STORY IS VERY IMPORTANT. IF THERE IS ONE THING I WOULD LIKE TO DISAGREE WITH YOU ON, IT IS THAT “NOBODY BOUGHT THE STORY,” BECAUSE PLENTY OF PEOPLE DID.

They're probably the same people who now say “let's have a ceasefire in Ukraine because of the bloodshed. Let's give Russians territory, they're asking nicely and why doesn't Ukraine say ‘we will never join NATO,’ etc.” It was absolutely clear, and it is even more so now, that Putin had decided to punish Georgia, to establish further military control over at least Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The plan was probably also to topple the government. The assumption was that “once we go in, we get rid of Saakashvili and we stop this nonsense about NATO.” So if Georgia retaliated to the days-long shelling of villages and killing of children, well, no government would be able to tolerate that, foreign military using heavy weapons against their people.

Negotiations were ongoing for months. It could have been avoided if Georgia had said, “Fine, we no longer want to join NATO. Fine, we want to be friends with Russia. Fine, we give you some of our territory”, but these would have been war goals achieved through pressure and threat. What also shouldn't be forgotten is that the Russians have not fulfilled any of the six-point ceasefire plan. For Russia, a ceasefire is never a ceasefire. It's just a continuation.

## THREE YEARS AGO, YOU SAID: “IF THE WEST CONTINUES THE CURRENT APPEASEMENT POLICY TOWARDS RUSSIA, IT MIGHT COST US A LOT IN THE NEAR FUTURE.” WHAT COURSE WOULD YOU ADVOCATE FOR NOW?

Well, right now it looks like the West has not entirely failed, and we have a chance to get this right. A lot of us would have liked the assistance to Ukraine to have happened faster and to be bigger, but, overall, mostly thanks to the Ukrainians themselves, who keep fighting, and keep the world in the fight, we're on the right path. If Ukraine, together with the Western help, manages to kick the Russians at least back to the February 23 lines, preferably from all of Ukraine, that would give us time to realign and build in Europe, too.

We will see a very new Eastern Europe, a renewal of military alliances, and you'd have, for the first time since 1919, from Finland to Romania, Ukraine, Poland, the Baltics, even Sweden, pretty much on the same page in their defense policy. There are no major frictions between those countries. It is a very hopeful situation. Of course, the Russians will do all they can to break that up and play those countries against each other, and then the Old West against Eastern Europe. But I think what this war has done is to reduce significantly the identity gap between the Old West and the new. You have Irish fishermen, asking for Ukrainian refugees to be supported through their Catholic priests; you have Spanish taxi drivers driving Ukrainian war refugees to Spain from the Polish border. It's a new thing in Europe.

## HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE CURRENT GEORGIAN POLITICAL COURSE?

It's very worrisome. Countries like Estonia and Poland, the traditional allies and friends of Georgia, countries that supported Georgia in 2008, and have always supported Georgia's NATO accession and EU accession, we'd say, “You are our friends, we need Georgia in the western realm.” It's unfortunate to say that we are making the same mistake now with Georgia, as we did when we blamed the Western governments in 2000, like the Germans, Americans and French, for what they did with Russia in the 1990s.

The signs of off-railing from the democratic path are there - we see that the government is imprisoning the opposition, it's closing down the media, it's polarizing, it's flirting with the Russians, it doesn't respect the EU facilitated agreement with the opposition. And we are still saying: “but they are our friends and they're actually good guys.” We're not critical enough at this point. We think there's still time to bring Georgia back. But if Georgia gets away with it, and says “the European values are not for us, we are different, but we still want the money,” and we say “yes,” well, back then, in the 1990s, for Berlin and Paris, it was actually in their interest: They wanted Russia to be a partner and do business with them. But you close an eye when Putin starts doing bad things, and we're doing the same thing with Georgia, now, because we want Georgia to be in NATO and with us, it means the Georgian Government is getting away with things that they shouldn't.



The West has not entirely failed, and we have a chance to get this right

# ARDI Announces up to USD 2 mln Capital Injection by International Investors and New Independent Supervising Board Member, Wolfgang Wand Joins the Company



**O**n August 9, JSC Insurance Company ARDI executed an investment agreement with the multinational investment fund “Gazelle Finance LLC” at the Radisson Hotel Tbilisi.

As a result, Gazelle Finance became the strategic shareholders of ARDI. The volume of the investment package is up to \$2 mln, aimed at fostering the further growth and development of the company, enhancing services and the implementation of advanced digital technologies.

Investors of Gazelle Finance are such highly reputable financial institutions such as DFC (formerly OPIC) and FMO.

During the signing ceremony, ARDI presented to the press and to the public the appointment of new independent member of the Supervisory Board – Mr. Wolfgang Wand. He has 40 years of experience in insurance, reinsurance, healthcare and portfolio investment management. From 2008 to 2012, Mr. Wand served Allianz SE as deputy chairman of Allianz Eurasia. Prior to this, he

headed ESG – European Specialty Reinsurance Group, S&P “A-” rated global personal lines Reinsurer, one of the largest health, personal accident and life pools supported by SwissRe, with offices in Bermuda, Dublin, London, Hamburg, Moscow, Toronto, Miami, Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur.

“The investment of US capital into the company and the addition of a highly experienced independent supervisory board member to our team are important milestones for ARDI, as a result of which we are entering a new stage of development, which will soon be reflected in an even more sophisticated service determination and best-in-class customer experience for our policyholders,” said Michael Japaridze, CEO of ARDI. “The digital ecosystem used to manage internal processes and consumer platforms will be significantly enhanced. We highly appreciate the continued and extended support of Gazelle Finance as an internationally recognized financial partner dedicated to the region with in-depth know-how of the Georgian financial market.”

“Gazelle Finance is pleased to continue its partnership with ARDI as a strategic investor in the company,” said Jeffrey Liebert, CEO of Gazelle Finance. “With the support of Gazelle Finance, ARDI has taken a critical step to bring its corporate governance structure up to international standards for the global insurance industry, including adding an experienced insurance executive to its Supervisory Board, Mr. Wolfgang Wand.”

Natia Janelidze, Chief Investment Officer of Gazelle Finance, said: “We are glad to join the ARDI event today, during which the cooperation and investment agreement was signed with Gazelle Finance. We’ve been cooperating with ARDI since 2018, and now the volume of our investment is increasing. ARDI continues to grow and develop and today, it remains a leader for its customers in terms of quality service and products. Accordingly, Gazelle Finance decided to contribute to the further growth of the company through an additional investment. Our investment currently reaches \$2 million, which will be used for further



Wolfgang Wand, Executive Deputy Chairman of ARDI

development of the company both technically and in terms of products.”

“I am excited to accompany ARDI and its highly motivated management team on the journey to best-in-class Insurer in the Georgian market,” stated Wolfgang Wand, Executive Deputy Chairman of ARDI. “The company is already ahead of its peers as to technology driven applications and customer-centric service standards. Together with my fellow directors, we will ensure the conduct of business as per western corporate governance standards and I am delighted to avail my long-standing technical expertise to the management.”

ARDI has been collaborating with Gazelle Finance since 2018, when Gazelle Finance Georgia first allocated capital of the interim financing tranche to the leading independent insurance company in Georgia.

JSC ARDI Insurance is a growing company that is rapidly expanding its operational activities throughout the country. It conducts its activities through corporate service centers. The head office is located in Tbilisi.

ARDI Insurance was founded in 2010 and quickly became one of the most stable and innovative insurance companies in Georgia. It provides customized products to corporate clients for improved risk management.

ARDI has a well-diversified customer base, which is a strong foundation for financial stability and profitability. It also boasts being an independent insurance company that does not belong to any Georgian financial institution, unlike other market leaders, which means that the company was able to grow dynamically only thanks to its internal resources and prudent management.



# Are Russian Spies Hiding in the Waves Of Migrants?



Russian citizens arrive in Tbilisi with all their belongings after traveling from Russia. Photo by Vano Shlamov / AFP

BY MICHAEL GODWIN

**T**rains, planes, and automobiles have brought over 400,000 Russian travelers to Georgia in the first six months of 2022, according to the National Tourism Administration of Georgia. Georgia, for the most part, took in these newcomers with open arms. Others were not so friendly, seeing them as unwelcome guests from a nation hostile to Georgia. A smaller contingent of both sides watches this new group of migrants with skepticism and concern.

While many of these people coming to Georgia are simple short-term tourists, numerous others have come as a result of the Kremlin's repressive policies. Moscow's crackdown last year on who they saw as dissidents and "foreign agents" forced many to find new homes. The shame of Russia's invasion of Ukraine was the final straw for them, alongside the loss of job security due to the side-effects of the massive international sanctions. Russian government actions to quell anti-war sentiment in the country

further pushed more people to take up residence in Georgia.

The group of skeptics not only contains Georgians but also Russians. The latter sees their fellow countrymen with great suspicion, and some in the security sphere would say rightly so. Russian intelligence assets are keen to keep an eye on the waves of their political opposition moving to a long-time problem country.

The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) is renowned for their activities in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. Georgia has been on their list of activities locations for quite a long time. The FSB, a modern iteration of the infamous Soviet KGB, is particularly well-known for their ability to flip compromised people to work for them. Using their legal or social transgressions as blackmail, these people are coerced to act as informants on behalf of the FSB.

With so many opposition members and supporters fleeing the country to a country that is already on tenuous footing with the Kremlin, the FSB will have to keep eyes on the ground. To do this, they will need to have people mixed in with the migration groups that seem

unassuming. As a result, Georgia's new friends are not all what they may seem.

How does such a notoriously nefarious organization like the FSB find a young political dissident and turn them into a field agent? So many of these people moving to Georgia are doing so explicitly due to their vehement distaste of the current regime. The answer lies in an old KGB methodology that has proven true again and again.

Stanislav Levchenko, a defected spy from the KGB, said in a 1988 interview that the key to exploiting a potential asset lies in one word: MICE - Money, ideology, compromise, and ego are all pressure points that can be used to persuade one to stray from their values and principals. Many of these young and impressionable Russian expats are vulnerable in one or more of these areas.

Leaving hearth and home and settling in a foreign country is expensive. Even the revenue from selling a home, apartment, or car is likely not enough to hold a small family together. A young Russian couple migrating to Georgia will have to contend with temporary housing, travel, initial rent and "moving-in" costs, and even job hunting.

This financial vulnerability could open the door for the new migrant to seek unconventional sources of income. With a nearly unlimited bankroll, the FSB has more than enough resources to offer lucrative compensation packages in return for inside information. While their targets are not trained in espionage, they are not tasked with such assignments. They are only the eyes and ears of the Kremlin in Georgia.

Ideology is unlikely to bring on any new recruits, but compromise and ego are both open options given the individual expats' personal situation. The FSB, and their precursor, have been well documented to have used compromising information, photographs, and videos against potential agents. Should a Russian migrant have something in their

past that could ruin a marriage, destroy their social status, or ostracize them from their family, this could make them a ripe asset.

The ones that find themselves at the end of their proverbial rope and take the FSB up on their offer are immediately pushed into service. They network with other Russian expats, gain the trust of NGOs, and simply listen into conversations for anything that could be of value. Unlike the popular image of James Bond or Peter Gunn, these simply gather information and let the FSB sort out the data.

But why would the FSB trust young and unreliable field assets when they surely have the resources to train and deploy formidable intelligence officers?

The FSB, like any of the large intelligence agencies of the world, are wary of risking too much for too little on unpredictable individuals. The tactic may shed light on a different approach by Moscow. Playing a game of probability, the cost of flipping a large number

of potential but undependable individuals may turn more results than one highly trained spy. Simply put, the larger the number of listeners, the higher likelihood of hearing something of worth.

While this certainly does not represent the majority of Russian migrants to the country, there does lie a risk. As the 14th anniversary of the Russo-Georgian war in 2008 arrives, many still bear the scars of Russian military aggression. The idea that subversion and intelligence activities are still being carried out is unsettling.

Georgia's internal security elements are likely already investigating these reports of young expats being caught in the FSB's web. However, Georgia's famously warm hospitality should be the greatest tool to dissuade newcomers from turning against their welcoming neighbors. Already, a small handful of young, would-be agents have shed their cloaks and daggers to come out as victims of the FSB's intelligence operation in favor of Georgia's open arms.



Russian President Vladimir Putin at the headquarters of the Russian General Staff's Main Intelligence Department (GRU). Photo by Dmitri Astakhov/ AFP via Getty Images

# The Sit Down: An American Volunteer in the Service of Ukraine

INTERVIEW BY MICHAEL GODWIN

**F**rom the outset of the Russian invasion, and even prior, going back to 2014, Ukraine has seen an influx of foreigners eager to support the nation. From medical and training support to logistics and warfighting, thousands came to help in any way. However, the task of defending the country by strength of arms took immediate priority.

Georgia was one of the most supportive in terms of volunteers. Many Georgians saw Ukraine's struggle parallel their own troubles with Russian aggression. Not all the volunteers coming from the South Caucasian nation were Georgian, though. One particular volunteer, who had made his home in the mountains of the Racha region, fared from the mountains of north Georgia in the United States. Ryan had grown up in a warm family with a love of the outdoors, and in the country of Georgia, he had his own business offering guided hiking tours in the highly visited Racha region. February 24th changed everything for him.

Upon returning to Kutaisi from conducting his business in the remote mountains, he learned of the Russian invasion. GEORGIA TODAY sat down with Ryan to discuss his journey to Ukraine, the training and first experiences, and what the future holds for this seasoned member of what is arguably Ukraine's most famous military unit.

## HOW DID YOU FIND OUT ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL LEGION AND WHAT CONVINCED YOU TO ENLIST?

I was actually already on my way to Ukraine before the Legion was formed. I came down from the mountains on a trip with my clients and as soon as I got cell service, I saw the news of the invasion. I immediately handed off all respon-



Volunteers in Ukraine's International Legion of Territorial Defense pose for a photo. Image source: File Photo/The Washington Post

sibilities to the rest of my team and I went to Kutaisi to get on the fastest flight I could to Poland.

I arrived in Poland on the 26th of February. The Legion didn't exist. It was formed during my travels. I decided to join it because I thought it would be the most legal, official, and best supported way to join the Armed Forces of Ukraine as a foreigner.

## CAN YOU EXPLAIN YOUR JOURNEY FROM HOME TO THE RECRUITMENT OFFICE IN UKRAINE?

It was a bit strange early on. I was in Racha, and I had a big GAZ-66 truck and I took it down the mountain to Kutaisi where I put it into storage. When I got to the airport, I tried to get on the quickest flight to Poland, but all the flights were booked up, as many Georgians were also trying to go. I ended up flying to Frankfurt, then to Barcelona, then to Krakow.

There, I got on the train and could see all the refugees at the train stations near the border. From there, I took the train

to Lviv. I only got into the Legion through a contact I had whose friend was in the security services of Ukraine. I had lived in Ukraine for two years prior to Georgia, so I still had a lot of friends and contacts.

This security friend came and picked me up in quite a fancy car. He drove me to the first Legion pickup point, and from there I went to the training base. There was nothing really official at this stage, as this was only February 27th and everything was still ad hoc. When I arrived at the international legion, I was among the first 20 people.

## WHAT WAS YOUR TRAINING LIKE? DID YOU FEEL READY FOR WHAT LAY AHEAD?

It was a complex situation at the beginning. They were forming a new military unit in the middle of a war, so there's a shortage of everything, including personnel. In the beginning, there were so few of us there wasn't really the ability to organize anything yet. We had maybe 20 or 30 people, so we were organizing our own training sessions to get to know each other. We started looking at what

skills we had and what we could learn from each other.

For example, I was teaching people how to use a compass and navigate with a map. It wasn't until later when we started to get more people that we had trainers from the Ukrainian army. Then we started having more formal courses.

## WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST TASTE OF COMBAT AGAINST RUSSIAN FORCES LIKE?

There's so many things I'd love to mention, but we're not allowed to say. I think the most interesting thing is the experience of being under heavy shelling or cruise missile strikes. That's something people in Western militaries can't really relate to. Maybe the Taliban can relate to that better. Not many soldiers have been on the receiving end of massive conventional cruise missile strikes, and in Ukraine there is no safe place: Every military base is a potential target and there is no safe zone. The feeling of being in combat has a blurry line, because you're never really safe.

I was involved in a few very interesting smaller missions, but I wasn't in any high intensity firefights. They just weren't all that common at the beginning of the war

for us. There was fierce street fighting, and it was nasty stuff, but that wasn't our task. We did normal infantry stuff, like being in holes. I would say that we had tasks that you would associate with the term 'light infantry.'

## THE FIGHTING IS NOT LOOKING AS IF IT WILL END ANYTIME SOON. WHAT DOES YOUR FUTURE HOLD WITH THE LEGION AND OVERALL?

That's a pretty easy question for me to answer. I'm going to stay a while longer. I don't have plans to leave in the near future. We're all ready to start pushing back, and everyone's ready for the word that we're going to start to retake territory. This is what everyone is preparing for and where everyone's mind is at. I was worried people would begin to accept a malaise; to accept a static situation and it remaining that way, but that's not the feeling at all. My forces, all the other forces I meet, are ready and eager to start hitting back and retaking land. Everything we do is about preparing for that, such as getting more equipment, building our cohesion, and working out how we can help other forces. We're preparing and waiting for that opportunity now.



A Ukrainian soldier rests on the side of the road with an anti-air missile system. Photo by Diego Herrera/Xinhua

# Why I Danced: Part III

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

Continued from part 2: The chosen ending.

I deposited them, bruised but alive, in a slightly less steep place, and continued on my way, to be lost in the frothing Enguri. At least I had that much control over my yearly ending. This would be a warning; what the village would do next was up to them, not me. They had a year to think it through.

The seasons came on: complete melt on the Mountain Wall; the leaves losing their brief spring's unnatural color and returning from greens to reds and golds as the air heated, then cooled. Snows fell and fled, until finally it was cold enough for them to stay for the rest of the winter. They built up, layer on layer, clinging to all but the most sheer vertical faces. The world turned almost totally black and white.

Then it began to reverse again, as the air warmed again, days grew longer and sunnier, and the familiar drip began, aching slowly at first. The occasional avalanche sped things up with a roar and a whoosh of whole snowy or icy sections. The darker earth and rock took more of the sun's rays, warmed up, and it became unstoppable. Gradually, my ages-old form emerged again.



To my dismay, the boys returned, a year older but not much wiser; filled with thoughts of revenge on me now, as well as their own community's prosperity. I

sent them flying again, this time with worse injuries, but none died, and I dissolved once again.

Eventually, Etseri had a village gather-

ing about the matter. It would end either in deaths and endless sorrow, or a turning away, said the elders, and it was up to the young men to choose their fate

instead of trying to improve it falsely and bring down the lot of others. Time to come together, decide, swear, and leave it at that.

Again, Demetre proved himself a leader. After much thought, he stood up.

"Let this be our way forward: into life. I don't have a wife and children of my own yet, a continuation of my father's line. We will likely die if we continue battling the Dancer, and thus negate any good we might think we could do for our village. It's too risky. Brothers, are you with me?"

His parents wept for joy instead of grief.

The news reached me too, and I also shed tears of pure water, relieved that, together, we had understood each other.

Let my coming and going be only natural, and let the humans strive, with the Maker's help, to better the lives of all, not just themselves. They are, after all, the pinnacle of His creation, and have much to teach the world, me included. Now, I dance only in happiness.

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/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/SvanetiRenaissance/). He and his wife also run their own guest house in Etseri: [www.facebook.com/hanmer.house.svaneti](http://www.facebook.com/hanmer.house.svaneti)



## Sabina Chantouria's New Music Video For the Song 'Blood On Your Hands'

In connection with the current events in Ukraine, singer and composer Sabina Chantouria decided to make a music video for the song "Blood On Your Hands" which she wrote in 2008 and dedicated to the Russian-Georgian war.

The music video is directed by Tea Vatsadze. Tea recently released a short film debut, which received high praise at festivals. She is currently working on a feature film.

War and the fate of refugees is what Sabina's family experienced in Abkhazia in 1993, and in 2008, the singer experienced it herself.

The song describes the suffering of people during times of war and conflict and the price that ordinary people pay during such times. The song "Blood on Your Hands" expresses the strong hope of a return to the land that used to be called home.

This song is for those who survived the war. The author refers to the memories and hopes of people who were forced

to leave their homes.

The music video Blood on Your Hands was released on August 8 on Sabina Chantouria's YouTube channel.

There is also a Georgian version of this song, which was released as a CD in Georgia in 2013.

From August 8, it is also possible to listen to it through digital platforms.

Sabina Chantouria is a young Swedish-Georgian singer, the author of music full of deep emotional strings. She received a European university musical education and was invited to the "World Championship of Performing Arts" in Hollywood (2011). After that, they became interested in the young singer and the famous Hollywood director Chad Schollmeyer shot two music videos in a row.

In 2017, Sabina participated in the Georgian National Eurovision Finalist Contest.

Sabina still lives an active concert life and participates in various music festivals in Georgia, Europe and America, among them Copenhagen Songwriters Festival, Stockholm Folk Festival, The Viper Room (Hollywood), and others.

## EU, UNDP and Georgian Farmers' Association Work to Create an Agricultural Map of Georgia

Over 50 rural locations are pinpointed on Georgia's AgroMap, an interactive Google-based information system that contains vast data on agricultural businesses, service providers, training institutions, professional associations, and other players in the agricultural and food sectors. Along with the private companies and non-governmental organizations, the AgroMap also lists state programs and initiatives supporting agricultural entrepreneurship.

Users can search information by location or industry and get in touch with specific companies to place their business requests. They can also assess the quality of obtained information and the effectiveness of business interaction.

The AgroMap was launched in 2020 through a pilot initiative focused on Dedoplistskaro Municipality. At present, the resource lists over 50 locations across

Georgia and offers information on 500 companies and organizations, arranged by 24 activity sectors.

The Georgian Farmers' Association, the country's largest agricultural union with up to 4,000 members, created the AgroMap with support from the European Union (EU) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

"The European Union assists Georgia to introduce new technologies in agriculture and rural development. Digitalization has the potential to transform rural living by making farming jobs more attractive for younger generations and helping farmers work more precisely, efficiently and sustainably," said Ketevan Khutsishvili, Program Manager for Rural Development, Civil Protection and Crisis Management of the Delegation of the European Union to Georgia.

"UNDP supports Smart Agriculture as part of the digital transformation agenda. The AgroMap connects rural businesses

with new market opportunities, business partnerships and training. It is a great digital tool that can boost progress in Georgia's agricultural sector," said Anna Chernyshova, UNDP Deputy Resident Representative in Georgia.

"The AgroMap is a step forward in the digital transformation of Georgia's agricultural sector and food industry. It helps rural entrepreneurs make business contacts online and pins Georgian villages on the world's electronic map," said Nino Zambakhidze, Georgian Farmers' Association Chairperson.

###  
The EU and UNDP's support for rural development in Georgia draws on the EU-funded ENPARD programme. Implemented since 2013 with a total budget of EUR234.5 million, ENPARD seeks to provide economic opportunities in rural areas and reduce poverty in Georgia. More information on ENPARD is available at: <https://eu4georgia.eu/enpard>



# The Georgian Who Has Witnessed Eleven Solstices

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

In his lifetime of 74 years, he has indeed watched 11 full solstices with his own physical eyes, whenever and wherever they were taking place around the world. Vazha Kulijanishvili, the currently active scientific researcher and second-in-command at the Abastumani Astrophysical Observatory was once told by his firmly established three sons that it was time for him to retire and move to Tbilisi for a more relaxed lifestyle. He laughed the proposal off, having told the kids that he can't even imagine his existence without his native Abastumani 'astro-climate' and his space-weathered eyesight, equipped with his beloved telescope, ceaselessly trained onto the cosmos for the last 50 years.

Batoni Vazha grew up in the salubrious woody resort of Abastumani, gorgeously located at the feet of beautiful mountains of the Samtskhe-Javakheti Region of Georgia. He proudly ushered me into his old house of childhood to tell me the long and enticing story of his turning into a solar astrophysicist. Still very young and vigorous at his solid age, he wistfully but pleasurably reminisced of all those solstices he was lucky enough to be present at in different parts of the globe in the years between 1973 and 2009: Mauritania, Mexico, Brazil, India, Turkey, Zambia, Egypt, China, and Russia on three different occasions. The next solstice is expected to come by on the 8th of April 2024, covering two locations - Mexico and America. The guru of Georgian solar astrophysicists is getting ready to be there by all means, but he is not yet sure of the exact location he'll be heading to, as the next full solstice line is presumed by the scholars to stream all the way from north Mexico to the south-east of the United States towards its north-east area. Meanwhile, my new friend kindly let me observe via his telescope the solar spectral alterations as well as the nocturnal lunar surface, but I was not lucky enough to say hello to Saturn and Jupiter because the sky was overcast that night.

The Georgian National Astrophysical Observatory, the first of its kind on the territory of the former Soviet Union, was founded in 1932 by Academician Evgeni Kharadze on Mount Kanobili near Abastumani, at 1700 meters above the sea. All of them, the Georgian astrophysicists, are this outstanding scientist's and distinguished gentleman's scholarly heirs, Dr. Vazha Kulijanishvili and his wonderful boss, the well-known Georgian astrophysicist and director of the observatory Dr. Revaz Chanishvili being among the most prominent disciples of the late Academician Kharadze. Incidentally, the Observatory administration has caringly and lovingly preserved his study in the building where the world-renowned scholar spent many years of his life.

History also has it that in 1890s, the prominent Russian astronomer Sergei von Glasenapp, a good friend and attendant to the Russian Tsar Nicholas II's brother, spent two years in Abastumani, doing his research, which partially served as one of the prerequisites the erecting of the now famous Observatory there. The initial structures were built, tele-

scopes installed and the first research conducted in the autumn of 1937. Those valuable observations eventually grew into serious scientific property. Unfortunately, much of the glory and glitter of this fascinating astrophysical hub of soviet times has now vanished, but some of its splendor is still present. Suffice it to say that more than half of the equipment here belongs in the soviet-era scientific research and academic realm. Concerning the schooling part of the Observatory, there is not much to write home about. Georgian youth are not very intensively involved in the field. The reasons could be myriad and versatile, one of them being the abrogation of the once solid and influential Chair of Astrophysics at the Tbilisi State University.

Speaking about Abastumani proper, some 60-70 years ago, it was a real pearl of the country with tens of various healing centers, spas and sanatoriums hosting thousands of visitors per year. The recently bygone cruel post-soviet times of destruction and devaluation have told on almost everything here: science, education, architecture, roads, infrastructure, and the medical service and vacation industry. The place likely needs years to be rehabilitated and billions to be pumped in to look and function at least the same way it did so many decades ago, but the good news is that there are people around who are taking care of the future of this magnificent spot on earth, including its celebrated Observatory, now resting on the shoulders of workaholic scholars and executives like Revaz Chanishvili and his right-hand Vazha Kulijanishvili.



## SPORTS

# Georgian Women's Chess Team Wins Silver Medal of 44th Chess Olympiad

Since the 2008 Olympics, the Georgian women's chess team showed the best results and won a medal at the Chess Olympiad for the ninth time in the history of independent Georgia.

The Georgian women's national team took second place at the Chess Olympiad held in Chennai, the capital city of the Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

In the XI round, the Georgian chess players beat the Azerbaijani national team 3:1 and won silver medals. Meri Arabadze and Nino Batiashvili managed to win the party, while Nana Dzagnidze and Lela Javakhishvili ended the game with their Azerbaijani with a draw.

The Ukrainian women's national team became the Olympic champion. The Indian women's team took third place.

Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili congratulated the Georgian women's chess team on winning the silver prize at the 44th Chess Olympiad 2022.

"I congratulate our pridesworthy ladies and wish them future success," PM said.



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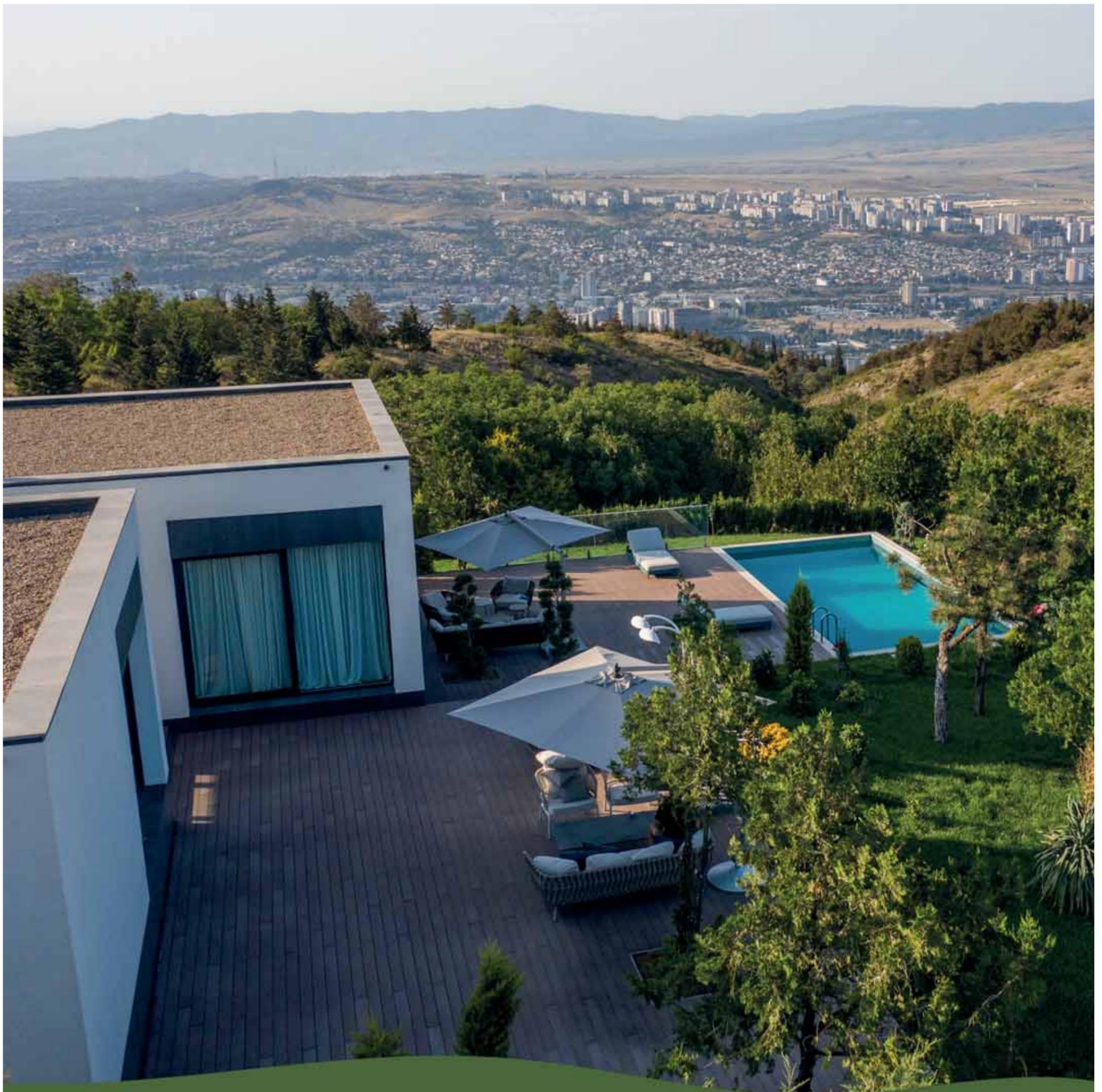
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