

Ukraine Latest: Putin Announces Partial Mobilization, Biden Calls on UN to Unite Against Russian Aggression

BY ANA DUMBADZE

On Wednesday, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on partial mobilization in Russia. Mobilization began on September 21. The decree provides for additional measures to implement the state defense order. Based on the presidential decree, only those citizens who are in the reserve and served in the armed forces, and who have a certain military specialty and relevant experience, will be subject to military service.

Putin claimed that "the decision on partial mobilization was made to protect Russia, its sovereignty, territorial integrity, and to ensure the security of the Russian people."

Shortly after Putin's speech, all air tickets from Russia to Istanbul and Yerevan for September 21 were sold out, media outlet Meduza reported.

The publication reads that shortly after the broadcast of the video message, during which the Russian President announced the partial mobilization, tickets for all flights to Turkey and Armenia were completely sold out. Russian citizens can travel to Turkey and Armenia without a visa.

The statement of the Minister of Defense of Russia, Sergei Shoigu, said that a total of 300,000 reservists will be called up as part of the partial mobilization announced by Vladimir Putin on September 21. Russia says it has the resources to mobilize 25 million people.

Russia started the war in Ukraine in February of this year and attacked with an army of about 200,000, although it has not achieved its goals so far.

Following Putin's statement on announcing partial mobilization, President Joe Biden called on the UN General Assembly to stand in solidarity with Ukraine and oppose Russian aggression, condemning the Kremlin's invasion as an attack on the global

body's founding principles.

"A permanent member of the United Nations Security Council invaded its neighbor, attempted to erase a sovereign state from the map," Biden said. "Russia has shamelessly violated the core tenets of the United Nations Charter."

Biden's call also responded to Putin again blaming the West for the conflict in Ukraine and saying it "wants to destroy our country."

Partial mobilization puts Russia on a firmer war footing (it has not yet declared war on Ukraine, despite appearances) and could mean that businesses and citizens have to contribute more to the war effort.

President Joe Biden also warned UN member states that the Kremlin's invasion of its smaller neighbor threatened the independence and sovereignty of nations around the world.

"This war is about extinguishing Ukraine's right to exist as a state, plain and simple, and Ukrainians' right to exist as a people," Biden told the UN General Assembly. "Whoever you are, wherever you live, whatever you believe - that should make your blood run cold."

The US president said the nations of the world had an obligation to put their political differences aside and defend the global body's founding principles by standing in solidarity with Ukraine.

A top Ukrainian official has described Russia's announcement of a partial mobilization of its military as a "great tragedy" for the Russian people.

Serhiy Nykyforov, spokesperson to the Office of the President of Ukraine, told NBC's Erin McLaughlin that "300,000 of people who were conscripts just yesterday, will be sent to places where recidivist thugs, mercenaries, and vaunted Kadyrov [Ramzan Kadyrov, head of the



Chechen Republic] fighters failed. It is clear what will happen to these guys there, whom, as we saw in the first days of the invasion, the army cannot properly train and provide for," he said.

Elsewhere, Russian-backed officials in several parts of Ukraine have announced plans to hold referenda on joining Russia. Ukraine has criticized the upcoming votes as an attempt to legitimize Russia's invasion and slammed the prospect of "sham" and "fake" ballots.

Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said the "sham" votes on joining Russia, announced on Tuesday by Russia's proxy leaders and officials installed in occupied parts of the country, did not change anything.

SITUATION ON THE GROUND

Russia had managed to seize large areas of the south, east and north-east of

Ukraine in the months following its February invasion, but in recent weeks, Ukrainian has made rapid gains and has recaptured territory in the eastern Luhansk region, which had been entirely occupied by Russia since July.

The cities of Izyum and Kupiansk, which Ukraine says were retaken on September 10, were both key supply hubs for the Russian forces. As such, these represent important strategic gains for Kyiv. Russia has confirmed that its forces retreated from the two cities, saying that this was a strategic withdrawal to "regroup".

Despite the gains, at this moment, Russian forces still hold about a fifth of the country - areas in the south of mainland Ukraine, as well as the Crimean peninsula which Russia annexed in 2014, and the eastern Donbas region - parts of which have been contested for years.



Legal Changes to Improve Roadworthiness of Vehicles and Air Quality



At the autumn session we intend to initiate and discuss the Draft Code of Administrative Offenses, aiming at the minimization of the pollution of the ambient air due to the vehicles with poor roadworthiness, - the Chair of the Environmental Protection and Natural Resources Committee, Maia Bitadze, stated at the briefing.

She noted that MPs authored a Draft, envisaging stricter sanctions for the failure to acquire the technical inspection certificate, since one of the most acute environmental challenges in Georgia is related to air pollution having a hazardous impact on human health and ecosystems.

"Emission of harmful substances con-

stitutes one source of air pollution. In view to mitigating air pollution entailed by vehicles, various steps have been taken in the recent period, including the development of legal changes on the improvement of the fuel quality, as well as the update of parking. In 2018, we enacted the mandatory technical inspection, though respective challenges still remain. Further improvement of the reform is the very goal of the development of the Draft to ensure the roadworthiness of vehicles and air quality," Bitadze stated, noting they include updating car parking and improving the traffic conditions.

"I believe that despite the lingering challenges, the Draft will allow the full-scale enactment of the system to gradually eliminate all the gaps," she added.

Zugdidi Awarded EU Grant for Implementation of Cultural Development Strategy

Zugdidi won the grant competition of the European Union project EU4Culture and received up to 300,000 euros of funding from the European Union for the implementation of the city's culture development strategy.

The official awarding ceremony was held on September 19 in Zugdidi, in the State Historical-Architectural Museum of the Dadiani Palace. The event was attended by representatives of the EU delegation in Georgia, the mayor of Zugdidi and the employees of the EU4Culture project.

Within the framework of the project, Zugdidi, Kutaisi and Poti developed cultural development strategies with the support of the European Union of Culture. After evaluation of cultural development strategies by international and local experts, the project consortium identified the winning city according to predetermined criteria. The winning city of Zugdidi received additional funding of up to 300,000 euros for the implementation of the culture development strategy. In addition, the project will offer all three cities capacity building training programs tailored to their needs.

"We are glad that, with the support of the European Union, for the first time, the city of the region, Zugdidi, will implement the culture development strategy. The city of Zugdidi has been given a unique opportunity to increase the awareness of Zugdidi, at the regional and international level, and to activate the cultural ecosystem, which will contribute to the



economic development of the city," noted Katalin German, the Deputy Head of the Program Department of the European Union Delegation in Georgia.

The 5-year culture development strategy of Zugdidi reflects the city's main cultural topics, priorities, goals, opportunities and perspectives for 2022-2026. The city has outlined the following main strategic directions: Zugdidi as a creative city of cultural heritage, innovation, crafts and gastronomy.

"Maintenance of cultural heritage and systematic development of modern art is the most important priority of the city and a prerequisite for the well-being of the local community," said Mamuka Tsotsoria, the mayor of Zugdidi municipality. He noted that the process of developing the document itself is no less

important, in which local target and professional groups, public and private cultural institutions, independent artists, non-governmental organizations, individual entrepreneurs and other interested persons were involved.

Thanks to their active involvement, an open and transparent discussion took place on the city's cultural needs and challenges, priority tasks, and short- and long-term cultural development goals.

EU4Culture is a project funded by the European Union, the goal of which is to increase the role of culture and creative industry in the process of economic and social development of the country. The project is implemented by the Goethe Institute (leading partner), the Danish Institute of Culture, the Czech Centers and the French Institute of Georgia.

UNDP Report: Georgia Ranks High on Human Development Index

Georgia ranked 63 of 191 countries and territories covered by the Human Development Index (HDI) released by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) on September 8. As in 90% of the world's countries, Georgia's HDI score slightly decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic, but remains high at 0.802. This places Georgia in a top group of countries with very high human development and shows promise for a speedy recovery from the crisis.

By HDI value, Georgia ranks ahead of Armenia (0.759), Azerbaijan (0.745), Moldova (0.767) and Ukraine (0.773), but is behind Belarus (0.808) and Turkey (0.838). In the region of Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Georgia's score is similar to that of Serbia (0.802), while, globally, is close to Mauritius (0.802), Malaysia (0.802) and Panama (0.805).

Georgia's human development advanced between 2000 and 2021. GNI per capita leapt by about 183.2%, life expectancy at birth increased by 2.1 years, and expected years of schooling gained 2.4 years. This notable progress consequently translated into a HDI increase of 14.2%, from 0.702 in 2000 to 0.802 in 2021.

However, UNDP's report also shows that some part of this success is being lost when Georgia's HDI is discounted by inequality. The Inequality Adjusted HDI loses 12% and goes down to 0.706, signalling that not all social groups in Georgia equally benefit from the country's economic gains and other achievements.

"Georgia is making good progress in many development areas, but the challenge of inequality requires more attention," said Nick Beresford, UNDP Resident Representative in Georgia. "To ensure that no-one is left behind, we need to redouble our investment efforts in human development, particularly in health, education and social protection programs."

Calculated throughout the last 32 years, UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI) combines health, education and income to rank the world's countries. It also includes additional dimensions, such as inequalities, gender gaps, multidimensional poverty, and planetary pressures. By providing a complex assessment of the human development landscape, HDI illustrates how world societies would change if both people and the planet were central to defining humanity's progress.

The 2021 HDI signals that human development has been declining for two years in a row, falling back to its 2016 levels and reversing much of the progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals. Nine out of 10 countries registered a decline in their HDI score in either 2020 or 2021, and more than 40% declined in both years.

To learn more about the 2021 Human Development Index, visit: <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center>

To learn more about the 2022 Human Development Report, visit <https://hdr.undp.org/human-development-report-2021-22>



Photo by Irakli Dzeladze/UNDP

New Fighting Flares in the South Caucasus

BY EMIL AVDALIANI

With Russia preoccupied in Ukraine, Armenia and Azerbaijan have clashed in the most serious fighting since the 2020 war. All the evidence so far suggests that military operations were launched by Azerbaijan against Armenia in an apparent attempt to force concessions on a potential peace deal.

The wide-ranging, surprise attack beginning on September 13 saw Azerbaijan bomb several cities deep in Armenia, marking an unprecedented turn in the long-simmering conflict between the two historical enemies.

The Kremlin, long the region's self-proclaimed peacekeeper, appeared taken by surprise. "It is difficult to overestimate the role of the Russian Federation, the role of Putin personally," said Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov. Yet the fighting served to underline Russia's impotence, with much of its South Caucasus garrison deployed to Ukraine. While Russia claimed a ceasefire agreement had been reached, Azerbaijani media said it was almost immediately broken.

Intermittent clashes have been taking place since the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War ended in Armenia's defeat and the handover of most of the disputed territory Armenia had conquered during the first war in the 1990s. Yet the present escalation is unprecedented, directed as it is at territory which is not part of either Nagorno-Karabakh or the surrounding territories.

Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan stated that up to 50 Armenian servicemen had died so far, and the figure was likely to rise further. The country has officially approached the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Russia-led military grouping, for help. Parallel to this, a



Funerals of Azerbaijani servicemen this September. Source: EPA

flurry of diplomatic activity began between the Western powers and the two South Caucasus republics. The US special representative for the Caucasus, as well as the European Union envoy for the region, made urgent visits to Baku and Yerevan.

The timing of Azerbaijan's attack is closely related to the regional balance of power, which since the 2020 war has been heavily lopsided in Baku's favor. Buoyed by gas and oil revenues, which allowed the Azerbaijanis to acquire the newest military technologies, its military

potential now far exceeds Armenia's. Meanwhile, Armenia's alliance with Russia has turned out to have little meaning.

More immediately though, Russia's preoccupation with its brutal war in Ukraine has created a geopolitical vacuum that Azerbaijan has tried to fill. Nominally, Russia has nearly 2,000 peacekeeping troops in Nagorno-Karabakh, and remains a major player in the South Caucasus. But the war in Ukraine (and rumors that Russia had withdrawn some of its peacekeepers), along with the recent victories scored by Ukrainian

forces in its eastern Kharkiv region may have been too tempting a prospect for the Azeris.

The country's leadership is also aware that its bargaining position is extremely strong, and getting stronger. The EU is desperately seeking alternative sources of natural gas to replace curtailed Russian supplies. Moreover, Azerbaijan is a key state on the emerging Middle Corridor which runs from Turkey through Georgia to Azerbaijan and Central Asia, the main alternative land route now that Russian transportation infrastructure is

unusable due to sanctions.

Russia too needs Azerbaijan's help. The country serves as a land bridge to Iran through which the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) is planned to run and connect India and Iran to Russian ports. Amid the sanctions imposed on Russia and the expansion of the Middle Corridor, the Kremlin now pays special attention to Azerbaijan. In other words, both Russia and the West have good reasons not to act too harshly against this important state.

Russia has the means to act if it chooses. CSTO could respond, as it did at Putin's behest in Kazakhstan in January. But so far the reaction has been muted.

It is possible that Azerbaijan is miscalculating, but it should be noted that it has excellent relations with other CSTO member states. Links to Kazakhstan and Belarus are expanding, and though Russia is the decisive actor in this grouping, the resistance from Kazakhstan and Belarus might not be easy to overcome.

More cynically, Russia might also benefit from hostilities. The timing is crucial here, as the fighting followed yet another peace meeting in Brussels between Armenian and Azeri leaders. From Putin's perspective, the fighting clearly undermines Western peace efforts. Acting swiftly by brokering a ceasefire, the Kremlin has thus tried to snatch the initiative from the EU.

There is now a contradictory cluster of competing considerations at work in the South Caucasus. Azerbaijan's nationalist leader, Ilham Aliyev, seems, perhaps opportunistically, determined to press the advantage it has held since 2020. Russia is supposed to be Armenia's defender. The ultimate result of these differing factors will determine not only the outcome of these clashes, and perhaps another war, but also Russia's future influence in its borderlands.

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NAFO - Internet Culture in Ukraine's War



Ukrainian army soldier Dasha checks her phone after a military sweep on the outskirts of Kyiv. Photo by Rodrigo Abd/The Associated Press

BY MICHAEL GODWIN

One of the most fascinating facets of the fighting in Ukraine is the digital front that has taken a presence online. People from across the world, using the natural anonymity the web offers, have taken up virtual arms in a multitude of ways. With smartphones making any global conflict as accessible as logging into one's social media account, this has highlighted the "meme" war that is going on alongside the battlefield.

Unlike past wars, and even recent conflicts such as Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, and the Russian invasion of Georgia, the internet has now taken center stage. "Memes," or images stylized to make a comedic reference to current events, have popularized the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine. Additionally, it makes what would otherwise be a dismal and tragic affair, seem relatable and palatable to those outside the combat zone.

In one example, a Ukrainian 2S7 "Pion" 203mm artillery cannon was adorned with an anthropomorphized Shiba Inu dog in military uniform. Along with "NAFO," or North Atlantic Fellas Association, and "Superbonker 9000" written

along the immense barrels, it is a microcosm of a movement appearing on the front. The absurdity of the juxtaposition has resonated with online crowds, so much so that it has taken on a life of its own, even assisting with donations and volunteer missions in support of the war effort.

Interestingly, it has even made its way into official channels. United States Congressman Adam Kinzinger, former Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, and Ukraine's Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov have all used the abovementioned stylized canine on their social media channels. The latter even tweeted his appreciation, saying "My personal salute to #NAFOfellas. I'd like to thank each person behind the Shiba Inu cartoon. Your donations to support our defenders, your fight VS misinformation is valuable. I'm changing my profile picture for a few days. Cheers @marlowc2324 NAFO expansion is non-negotiable!" The dog, popularized in the now famous "doge" internet meme, has become a keystone of the NAFO and other related movements.

The battleground, now also in cyberspace, has been championed by a large team of meme posters who have taken it upon themselves to combat the Kremlin's information war using their status as influencers, armed with algorithms and steered by legions of followers. As sanctions and animosity reduce the con-

tact many in the West and in Russia have with each other, the internet has become one of the last platforms these two worlds can collide in.

The pro-Ukrainian NAFO members, self-appointed as "fellas," are pitted against the so-called "Vatniks" - a Russian pejorative for all Kremlin sympathizers. They attack pro-Russian accounts online with memes, viral videos, and pro-Kyiv slogans, using their ill-named "article 69" or "article 5," a reference to the NATO article for collective defense, as hashtags.

Russia has struggled to respond to this phenomenon, something military and cyber strategists scarcely include in their planning. To ignore them is to grant them the space they crave. Yet, to acknowledge them is to give them the spotlight they thrive off of, and enhance their legitimacy. Additionally, they are almost immune from attack from Russian government officials, as the very act of engaging with a perceived internet troll can spell disaster for any politician.

For NAFO, combining geopolitics, news, and a gratuitous serving of humor has combined well for these digital fighters. They have been able to mock the Kremlin while also remaining outside their reach. Russian officials that do engage are quickly shut down, bombarded with pro-Ukrainian messaging, and their statements made into memes themselves. The fight has framed an interesting

insight into Russian information tactics. Similar to their military tactics on the ground, their information strategy seems woefully outdated. While the Kremlin and its brigade of news networks attempt to drive a narrative, a pack of Shiba Inus wrestle that narrative to the ground, only to make anyone who attempts a counterattack look like a fool online for arguing with a stylized dog picture.

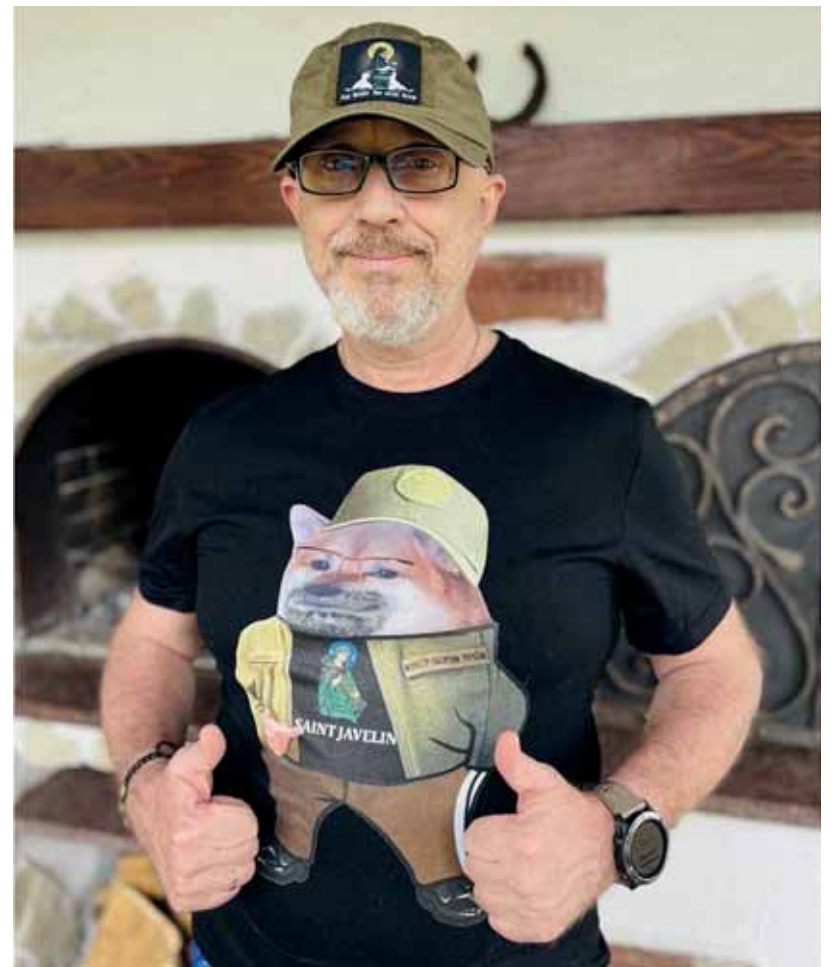
The anti-Russian effort doesn't end there, though. Thousands have donated to the NAFO cause, receiving their own Shiba Inu dog avatars in return for donating to the war effort. The group has raised over \$400,000 for the Georgian Legion alone, much of it going towards gear, electronics, and enhanced warfighting capabilities against the Russian "special military operation" in Ukraine.

Despite being largely dedicated to "shitposting," they have also launched other projects, such as "Sign My Rocket." The initiative, taking social media by storm, allows people who donate the ability to have a message written on an

outgoing piece of Ukrainian Artillery munition. A simple paragraph or less is written on the shell before being fired towards Russian positions; a simple but unique way of funding a war.

Wrapping a war effort fundraiser in the cloak of a cute dog has proven to be an effective means of not only supplying the military but also stumping Kremlin activists. Additionally, it continues to draw support from even the most remote and unobservant supporters of Ukraine. Working-class parents, internet denizens, and politicians have embraced NAFO's movement.

The trend of internet mobilization, particularly from a tech-savvy youth, seems unlikely to fade. Online trolls, operating in a realm largely inaccessible for politicians and international organizations, are capable of engaging at a level never seen before. With the natural trend of slow governmental adaptation, it is this digital offensive that will make the largest waves outside of actual combat.



Ukrainian Minister of Defense Oleksii Reznikov sporting a stylized Shiba Inu meme t-shirt. By Oleksii Reznikov via Twitter



OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

In the modern world, there is nothing more powerful than the means of mass communication, not even the big money that keeps Mankind ticking. Scarier than

media is only the nuclear potential accumulated in the world. Media has our hearts and minds, and it shapes the model of our public and private behavior. An uncountable number of most valuable hours is spent on the production of news and commentary, watched, read and listened to by the public worldwide, day in, day out.

The War News & Us

This is the Media-Public interaction formula, meaning in one specific case that the winner in the Russo-Ukrainian war is the side that is winning the information war, thus imposing a certain type of ideology on the unsuspecting populace. The question is how truthful the picture is, pushed as it is into the ears and eyes of the watchful global society. The overall image of the situation cannot be absolutely correct and trustworthy for the simple reason that we humans tend to describe the world emotionally and in favored colors.

So, how to get down to the most believable nitty-gritty of this strange war? This might be impossible considering the contradictory nature of the news stories we hear from numerous informational sources. For instance, should we believe that Ukraine is winning the war? That's what the Western propaganda machine has been bawling into our ears since the Ukrainian counteroffensive against Russia began, and even prior to that. Or should we trust the Russian PR system, albeit infirm and miserable compared to its Western counterpart, that Russia has temporarily hushed its machine guns and is sitting in the ambush and preparing for a decisive assault? How credible and plausible might be the Western hope

and presumption that Russia has already found itself on the verge of an imperial collapse? Or should we better listen to the optimistic narrative of Russian political scientists who want to perpetuate as a given the idea of the invincibility of their motherland.

The West wants to suggest negotiated peace might be a possibility in the war theater, confined to Ukraine, but the question is if Russian and American leaders, the main players of the game, care at all about anything except their own prestige and the mood of their respective electorates. Each of them is determined to build the world's future the way they think is right, but what is right and what is wrong has not yet been made clear enough to understand. Russia thinks that its special military operation in Ukraine is a divine move, saving the two brotherly peoples from chimerical perils, and America takes its counteraction as historical manifest destiny, where it must rescue the innocent Ukrainians from Russian murder. It looks like both want to rule the world in their own way, their respective regional influences seeming not large enough for their image and power.

In this context, the Western information tries to persuade us that Putin's determination is not just negotiation of

peace, and the minor gains thereof, but the conquest of Ukraine via its unconditional subjugation. The Russian political establishment, however, insists that it was merely striving to achieve the strategic safety of their country - a demand that was neglected and laughed at by the West, thus pushing Russia toward the now-evident military action.

And again, what should the consumers of the news take as irrefutable truth, if the word 'irrefutable' could be relevant at all in this context? The interminable mutual recrimination between the Russian and Ukrainian leaderships is also a cognitive problem. We the TV viewers and radio listeners, turning from outdated but still readable newspapers to our speaking boxes or cell phones, want to hear something that is at least approximated to the truth we are seeking, but, alas, we continue hearing mutually exclusive stories of those much-talked-about anti-Russian sanctions, which in the Western vocabulary are tremendously effective, but which do not work at all if interpreted by the Russians. Maybe things are simpler: those who want to support Russia lie in their own winning way, and those who counter Russia are lying as they think is best for them. Cynicism has no limits when it comes to these weird wars!

South Ossetia - Georgia's Northern Ireland



Russian and Georgian soldiers talk prior to the Russo-Georgian war in 2008. By Dimitar Dilkov/AF/Getty Images

BY MICHAEL GODWIN

This month, Georgian political leader Irakli Kobakhidze started a referendum to determine if people would be in favor of a military campaign against Russia. "Let the people say whether they want to open a second front in Georgia against Russia," he announced. The move, as he later stated, was just a stunt to frame his opponents.

However, the move galvanized a portion of the populace, as well as the West. In a poll conducted by the author on social media with over 600 participants, more than two thirds wished to see Georgia take up arms against Russia, underlining Georgia's long-standing ambitions to reclaim its territory, taken from them by the Kremlin's force of arms.

This seizure is unlikely to come without additional cost. Some Georgians have the notion that should those living in the occupied territories want to exclude themselves from Tbilisi's affairs, so be it. If they wish to exempt themselves from being Georgian, they say, then there

While the people in the occupied territories will eventually come out from the shadow of the Kremlin, it may be a better decision to let this occur naturally

is no love lost through the decades of mistrust and conflict. Despite this, the potential for conflict remains.

Last week, rumors circulated on social media that Georgian army units were moving towards Tskhinvali. While these were quickly put down to false information, it highlights an issue that Georgia will likely have to reckon with should they attempt to reunite with their territorial brethren.

This reunification is not unprecedented. One of Georgia's closest allies has a similar experience. The UK spent decades fighting, thousands of lives, and millions of pounds working to bring their Irish neighbors into the fold. The United Kingdom's history during The Troubles are recognized to have spanned from the 1960s and into the late 1990s; however, the roots go much deeper.

Tension between the Irish and the English is as old as the two nations themselves. More modern sources cite conflict as far back as the 17th century. The Ossetians in Georgian territory have similarly had differences with other Georgians dating as far back as the unification of

the Georgian state in the 18th century. In the 20th century, the two came to blows, seeing troops sent in to establish governmental control.

After the 2008 war, South Ossetia has attempted to gain some semblance of legitimacy. However, only Russia, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Nauru, and Syria recognize it as a nation - hardly a credible friends list. They have also struggled with infrastructure, development, and internal security, as Moscow has largely turned its back on the small mountainous pseudo-republic.

The prospect of reclaiming this territory comes with issues mirroring The Troubles in Northern Ireland. Resistance, assimilation, and long-term insurgency

all combine to give Georgia more than what it may bargain for. Tbilisi, for all its well-meaning and the fact that life in Tskhinvali would almost certainly receive an upgrade for reuniting with their former brethren, may want to pass on such a reunion.

Bringing South Ossetia back into the fold would most likely result in a long and drawn out simmering conflict, something the nation can surely do without. The breakaway region, long occupied and steeped in the false narrative pushed by the Kremlin, is convinced Tbilisi is set on destroying their cultural identity.

Any attempt to change the public perception of our neighbors in the northern mountains would be a long journey of

assimilation and fighting disinformation. This warped view has become so ingrained in the latest generation of young Ossetians that it could be decades before they change their beliefs. This, combined with social strife and potential armed resistance, sets the stage for igniting the entire region in another war.

While the people in the occupied territories will eventually come out from the shadow of the Kremlin, it may be a better decision to let this occur naturally. To attempt to rip the proverbial bandage off could stir more problems than it solves. At the same time, it is Georgia's responsibility to let them see the light of democracy and Western values, and lead them home on their own accord.

The prospect of reclaiming the territory in Tskhinvali comes with issues mirroring The Troubles in Northern Ireland



Two young boys smile at British soldiers on patrol on Ulster Street in Belfast on April 20, 1971. By Chris Ware/Getty Images

"Putin closed the window Peter the Great opened" - Interview with Former US Ambassador to Ukraine William Taylor



William Taylor. Photo by Pavlo Gonchar/LightRocket, via Getty Images

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

An ambassador to Ukraine under three different presidents, Former US Ambassador to Ukraine William Taylor, attendee of the McCain Institute, George W. Bush Institute and the Economic Policy Research Center 2022 Tbilisi Conference on September 5-6*, spoke to Radio Free Europe's Georgian Service about how Russia's war has changed the shape of Ukraine and Ukrainians as a nation.

"I served in Ukraine twice," he says. "The first time was in 2006-2009. Even then, there were arguments from political parties on both sides. One side would argue that Russia was the model that they wanted to go towards, the other side argued that 'no, it's Europe that we want.' It was a legitimate debate.

"In 2014, when Russians tried to annex Crimea and invaded Donbas, that began the real change, the real unification. It

drove Ukrainians together into realizing more and more that Russians are not their brothers, that the Russians are actually invading, and killing Ukrainians. In 2022, this horrible invasion by Russia crystallized all that had been going on.

"I have been struck by the hatred that Ukrainians now have for Russians, not just Putin. Putin has created on his border a hostile nation that will remain hostile for generations - he didn't consider Ukraine a nation at all, and that's his major blunder. The nation that he didn't think was there has resisted him, has kicked him back out of their capital. How could he make that mistake? I don't understand it. But he has now learned that Ukraine is indeed a nation, and it is defending itself. It is now not even a debate about NATO or the EU: There's virtually no-one in Ukraine who wants to follow the 'Russian model.' So it has changed things dramatically."

IN AN EARLIER INTERVIEW, YOU CLAIMED THERE WAS A RACE BETWEEN THE WEST PROVIDING WEAPONRY AND RUSSIA STRENGTHENING ITS TERRITORIAL GAINS. OVER A MONTH ON, IS THE RACE STILL ON? AND IF IT IS, WHO IS AHEAD?

It's still ongoing. There are races going on in men, material and morale. The Ukrainians continue to have volunteers coming in, men and women, and they have to turn people away, because they want people with some military experience. On the Russian side, they may now be recruiting prisoners. They're trying for Libyans, Syrians, North Koreans, the private sector of the Wagner Group. Wagner is trying to hire people into their group to go and fight in Ukraine. The Russians are having a hard time. Recruitments are way down. And now President Putin has just said he wants more, he's going to increase the size of the military, he says, because the he can't get the work done with the people

he's got already. But mobilization will create a political backlash against him and against his regime, could even destabilize his regime. So on the men, I would say the Ukrainians have the edge. The race on material - The Russians have constraints there, too. The Western nations that are a broad coalition that United States has led - Europeans, Canadians, Japanese, South Korea and Australia, New Zealand, others, that coalition is denying Russia the components of their weapons. There's an export ban on the different microchips and components that the Russians use in their weapons systems. They are now short of them. And they've used 70-80% of the precision-guided munitions that they started out with. So they're now having to go with dumb bombs artillery that is indiscriminate, not precise. The weapons that the Ukrainians are now getting from the United States, from the Germans, Brits, Poles, are getting stronger, longer, more capable. We've seen a turning point with these weapons, with HIMARS, that has had a real effect. Is it decisive? We don't know yet. But what we do know is that the weapons that are coming into Ukraine are going up. And that's part of that race. The last point in that race is morale. The Ukrainians clearly have the edge on morale. And the Russian soldiers, some don't even know why they're there.

HOW SENSIBLE DO YOU CONSIDER IT TO HAVE THE APPROACH, "WE WILL WAIT OUT RUSSIA UNTIL IT RUNS OUT OF AMMUNITION?"

We won't do it. It's not a sensible approach, we won't wait until they run out of ammunition, because they have tons and tons and tons of old ammunition and weapons, older tanks that they've had in store that they've dusted off and cranked up again. And Russia has a lot of soldiers, a lot of young men they can recruit. They've got 140 million people, and Ukraine has 40 million. So in the long term, waiting is not a good strategy.

The Ukrainians are now pushing for a breakthrough, and are at least taking back some portion of the South. It may not be a breakthrough, it may be gradual, it may be a slog. But the Ukrainians have been very smart on their military strategy.

YOU SAID "PUTIN DOESN'T GET TO CHOOSE" WHEN TO SIT FOR TALKS, THAT HE'LL HAVE TO BACK DOWN AND RETREAT. AND THAT BEGS THE QUESTION, HOW DANGEROUS IT IS LEAVING PUTIN WITH NO CHOICE BUT TO RETREAT?

There are people who say that we have to give Putin a way out, off-ramp, a way to save face. Some European leaders have said we shouldn't humiliate him. I believe the way to make Putin stop this war is for the Ukrainians to win on the ground, and the United States and NATO need to provide the Ukrainians with the weapons and the ammunition to be able to do so. When the Ukrainians push the Russians back, maybe to the line that existed on February 23, maybe farther, but when they are pushed back...

IS THAT A 'WHEN' OR AN 'IF'?

I think it's a when - I believe in the Ukrainians, for the reasons we talked about earlier, but it may take time. The Russian military is stretched already so they may run into big problems in the South. They may lose a lot of their soldiers on the western side of the river in Kherson, where those bridges that they used to travel or resupply have been knocked out. If those 25,000 Russian soldiers on the western side of the Dnieper River and Kherson are captured, that could be a trigger for a collapse. It could have a domino effect that could lead to a sudden collapse and then Mr. Putin's options are to talk. He may say, 'no, actually, I would like to talk to the USA.' But President Zelensky has said that he is not interested in talking until they are out.

MANY ALSO THINK THAT RUSSIA CANNOT ALLOW ITSELF TO BE DEFEATED HERE. IF WE WERE TO PUT EQUATION MARKS SOMEWHERE, WHERE DO WE PUT THEM? RUSSIAN DEFEAT EQUALS THE COLLAPSE OF THE RUSSIAN STATE, RUSSIAN DEFEAT EQUALS THE COLLAPSE AND REMOVAL OF PUTIN?

It's a very good question, one I don't know the answer to. What I do know is that when the Ukrainians push the Russians back, when Putin has to make a decision about negotiations, when he wants to come to the table after he has been defeated, pushed way back on the battlefield, when that happens, the dynamics will change in Moscow, in the Kremlin; the dynamics may change across Russia. The Russian people may conclude that they were lied to - this actually was a war, not a "special military operation."

DO YOU THINK THEY GENUINELY BELIEVE THAT?

No, I don't think so. But like other people around the world, it's easier for them to just go along with it, so as not to have to face the music, even if they know that the music is bad for them. There is oppression, the security forces, the police, the internal pressure on anyone who says that this is actually a war. You go to jail in Russia for saying it's a war. But do they know it? Of course, they know it. But they're not saying it out loud.

Going back to your question about what happens to Putin's regime, it's up to the Russians. It may be up to the Russian security council which may say, "Mr.



If those 25,000 Russian soldiers on the western side of the Dnieper River and Kherson are captured, it could trigger a collapse

Putin, we have a 'dacha' for you. Your family will be fine. We've got this." Or maybe it will be more violent than that. I don't know. That's up to the Russians. What we do know is we, the US and NATO, and this Western alliance, need to give Ukraine the support so they can get there. And then it's up to the Russians.

SPEAKING OF COLLAPSES, A MAN WHO CONTRIBUTED IMMENSELY TO THE COLLAPSE OF THE PREDECESSOR OF THE MODERN RUSSIAN STATE PASSED AWAY LAST WEEK. THE WALLS THAT THE WEST ASKED GORBACHEV TO TEAR DOWN - HAS PUTIN REBUILT THEM? ARE THEY EVEN HIGHER TODAY?

He's built walls to essentially keep Russians in. He's tried to wall Russia off from the world, and he glories in it, and he wants to maintain Russia being able to feed itself, to prosper without contact with the West. Peter the Great opened up Russia to Europe, and President Putin has closed the window for Russia that Peter opened. Those walls that President Reagan demanded Gorbachev tear down, President Putin has built up again. And those walls are very high.

BUT THE LOCATION HAS CHANGED.

Right. The wall is now on Russia's borders, it moved east. What happens to the nations on the western side of that wall? They're not in Russia. Ukraine is a good example and so is Georgia. And we know where Ukraine wants to go. We know where Moldova wants to go. Those countries in that gray area have to decide where they want to go. We know that Mr. Putin thinks that Russia is really in charge of, owns, dominates, Ukraine, because Ukraine is "not a real nation," so he thinks that the wall should be there. But the Ukrainians disagree.

IT'S HARD TO MAKE UP YOUR MIND OR DECIDE YOUR FUTURE WHEN SOMEBODY IS USING YOUR LAND TO BUILD A DITCH AROUND HIS FORTRESS. IT'S NOT SO EASY FOR GEORGIA, UKRAINE AND MOLDOVA.

It doesn't happen quickly, but it can happen. Of course, Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova are at different stages, and can make decisions on their own. But it certainly can happen.

* This year's international conference "Slava Ukraini", hosted in Tbilisi, focused on Ukraine. Experts, leaders and policymakers from the United States and Europe held high-level discussions about Ukraine and Georgia, the future of NATO and the EU, and democracy in general, given ongoing Russian military aggression and disinformation.



Putin has created on his border a hostile nation that will remain hostile for generations - he didn't consider Ukraine a nation at all, and that's his major blunder

Dr. Stefan Meister on Germany's Guilt Trip and Georgia's Failing Leadership

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

Dr. Stefan Meister has been the head of German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP)'s program on international order and democracy since August 2021. From 2019 until then, he worked as director of the Heinrich Böll Foundation's South Caucasus Office in Tbilisi. Radio Free Europe's Georgian Service sat down with him during the McCain Institute, George W. Bush Institute and the Economic Policy Research Center 2022 Tbilisi Conference on September 5-6.

LET'S BEGIN WITH GERMANY. AFTER SEEING THE PHOTO OF THE VERY CRUDELY STITCHED TOGETHER CABLES THAT GAZPROM PUBLISHED ON TWITTER TO "EXPLAIN" WHY THEY AREN'T SUPPLYING GAS TO GERMANY, I DON'T WANT TO BE OVERLY BLUNT, BUT I HAVE TO ASK THIS - HAS GERMANY BEEN HAD?

I think the Kremlin has understood that Germany is the weak spot in Europe. It created not an interdependence, but a dependence. We have now learned that we are more dependent on Russian gas than Russia is dependent on our payment, that we are a vulnerable society and that we have a leadership that has no understanding where it's going. I think this war has changed the perception of Russia in Germany, among the German [political] elite and society. It's a game-changer. I think it's for the first time that Germans understand that this is about our security. We did not understand it in 2008. We did not understand it in 2014. Now, we finally understand it, we have the "Zeitenwende" speech of Mr. Scholz and the military spending of 1 billion Euro.

But you know, this is just catching up to the reality, not getting ahead. We have a Chancellor at the moment in Germany who is not leading on this war; it's the US who is leading on the Western response, but our Chancellor is risk averse. And there is no strategy, there is no mindset or cultural change. It's just a speech, and spending for defense. Russia has been a major challenge for European security since the end of the world war. It's a revisionist power. It's not like the Soviet Union, the status quo power; it will go further. So you really need a completely different thinking and mindset. And I don't think that Germany is ready yet to take the lead and to do what is really necessary.

NORD STREAM ENDED UP A GEOPOLITICAL PROJECT AFTER ALL, INSTEAD OF JUST ECONOMICAL. WHY DID THE GERMAN ELITE SPEND SO MUCH TIME CONVINCING THE REST OF THE WORLD THAT IT WASN'T?

To be honest, I think this was a refusal to believe the reality. You're sitting in your comfort zone, you modernize the energy system on cheap Russian gas, and your whole industry ends up depending on that Russian cheap gas. You don't want to give it up, of course, because it's



I was advising the German foreign office for 10 years and the German Chancellery for 14. Many of the things happening now are things we warned them against

nicely. It's comfortable. There was a war in Karabakh? But it's far away. There is something happening in Donbas? It's not our country. We were sitting in our comfort zone. Nobody wanted to tell society that our geopolitical environment, our security, had already changed. Leaving that reality was not easy. Even if experts were saying, "if you don't act now, the price will only grow." And I think that this is exactly what happened, starting in 2008.

NOW, GERMANY IS LEFT WITHOUT RUSSIAN GAS. AND WHEN THE WINTER COMES, AND THE PROVERBIAL PURSES HAVE TO BE TIGHTENED, HOW MUCH IMPACT IS IT GOING TO HAVE ON SUPPORT TOWARDS UKRAINE IN GERMANY?

I think we have reached the peak of support for Ukraine in German society, perhaps in the whole of Europe, except for the Baltic States and Poland. The people increasingly feel the costs of this war and of the sanctions. There is this global crisis after the pandemic, too, and I think this was also within Mr. Putin's calculations. Our societies are much more vulnerable than Russian society. There is a vulnerability in our elites, they are really afraid of the winter, and that the pressure from society will push for a compromise, to put Ukrainians under pressure to work towards negotiations, and for us to lift parts of the sanctions. I think the threat is there. I think our societies are afraid of losing their living standards, losing their comfort, even if we are still pretty rich compared to other societies, which also suffer from the energy crisis, from the pandemic era and so on.

WHAT DOES THIS WAR SPELL FOR MERKEL'S LEGACY? WILL IT BE TARNISHED? I'VE HEARD PEOPLE DUB HER FRAU CHAMBERLAIN.

For me, it's really difficult that Angela Merkel does not agree that she made mistakes. She publicly very clearly said she did not make any. Her legacy is much more problematic than we thought. When

she left, we thought of her as a leader of the free world. But I think she made a lot of compromises on Russia. Without Germany and France, Russia would have gone further in 2014, so what she did in crisis management was important, but as a person with an East German background, speaking the Russian language, understanding how the Russian system functions, I would even blame her more for not doing certain things. I think that's the main German problem - not doing things. Not leading, not stopping the pipeline, not becoming less dependent on Russian gas. Part of her legacy will be that she kept this illusion of a comfort zone, both in terms of economy and security.

SHE ALSO SAYS SHE STANDS BY THE 2008 BUCHAREST SUMMIT DECISION EVEN TODAY. WAS IT A BLUNDER NOT TO SUPPORT GEORGIA AND UKRAINE'S MEMBERSHIP BIDS?

It was a mistake. You need to understand that the security situation in this region has comprehensively changed. And you need to build up security alliances with countries like Georgia and Ukraine, and help to modernize their armies, help to supply them with weapons, and to give different kinds of guarantees, especially when you are not willing to offer them NATO membership for reasons like conflicts on the soil and so on. But I think we now know that outside of NATO, there is no security anymore. That's the lesson we learned. So I think, yes, it was a mistake at that point. But it was also a mistake made out of ignorance. There was a lot of ignorance.

Since 2014, the US has done a lot to modernize. NATO did a lot to modernize the Ukrainian army. Membership perspective for the EU for Georgia, at a time when there was really a reform government, when there was really a change, would have made a difference. These are mistakes which our leader and our leaders have made. I was advising the German foreign office for 10 years and the German Chancellery for 14 years. Many of the things happening now are things we warned them against. Now, when people ask, "why didn't we listen to the Baltics, to the Poles and so on?", it's not hard to answer them. We would hear them out, but we wouldn't listen,



We have a Georgian government which has no interest in integration into the EU, as doing so will challenge their power position



Dr. Stefan Meister, head of German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP)'s program on international order and democracy

we didn't want to listen - the things they were telling us didn't fit into the reality we had created, they were, once again, refusing the truth. And I think it's lip service to now say "oh, we should have listened." At that time, we had different interests - we didn't want to have a conflict with Russia, we wanted to get resources from Russia. Not only Germany did that, many other countries did too. We didn't want to get into a bigger conflict. We didn't want to step into Russia's sphere of influence. And that invited Russia to do more. I feel bitter about it. It's not a great feeling to be vindicated, when you know they could have listened at the time, but they didn't want to. There's no pleasure in it.

The reality is changing every day but we are not keeping up. Now we are talking about what might happen, why we need to supply weapons. Why are we not planning ahead? One month, half a year. What's next for Georgia? What's next for Moldova? We are not doing it. Again.

THERE WAS A PARTICULARLY FOREBODING REMARK FROM SCHROEDER RECENTLY. HE SAID THAT WHEN THE WAR ENDS, GERMANY WILL GO BACK TO RUSSIA'S DOOR, BECAUSE THE WEST DOESN'T HAVE THE LUXURY TO TURN ITS BACK ON RUSSIA, THAT IT WILL BE 'BUSINESS AS USUAL.' DO YOU SEE THAT HAPPENING?

I'm not so sure. Our societies don't want to lose their welfare, and our living standards will go down because of these current crises. We are living in a different reality. There is recognition of this reality. We understand it's about security. But we will always have a tendency toward appeasement. And we will always have a tendency to fake things in a way that is not too costly. We have a wrong cost benefit calculation, in my opinion: We think if we appease, if we make a compromise, if the other side wins, then we win too, then it might be get better. But we don't understand that Russian thinking is win-lose, not win-win. And if we don't catch up to this reality, our costs will only grow.

WHAT IS THE FOUNDATION OF THIS PERPETUAL GERMAN RELUCTANCE TO STAND UP TO MOSCOW?

I think it's a cultural change that happened after World War 2 within German society and the elites. It's a kind of pac-

ifism. It's a kind of anti-war behavior. And it has also become a very rich society, which loves its comfort. It's not really flexible enough to keep up with the reality. It has historical roots with all this guilt complex, and gratitude to Gorbachev. It's also a lack of strategic culture - what we've seen since 2000, in Germany, is an increasingly bureaucratic culture. And it is increasingly an economics-ation of our whole policy, and we lost our great thinkers in military strategy.

HOW DO YOU THINK GEORGIA'S FUTURE WILL BE SHAPED BY WHAT IS HAPPENING NOW IN UKRAINE?

I think we see a major change in the entire post-soviet region now, and I would say Russia is accelerating the decline and fall of its own empire. With this war, it has destroyed the Russian empire. My question is, which other players will shape the future of the South Caucasus and Black Sea region. Is it Europe? The US? Turkey? Iran? China? Georgia now has this potential EU candidate status which is linked to domestic policy. But how serious is this? I think it's serious if Georgia does its homework, but it's a long-term process. I think it is something Georgia really needs - a perspective into Europe, but Georgia also needs to have short-term measures in terms of its own security and economic development. And at the same time, we have the Karabakh war, which will bring forward the energy and connectivity issue, and all this will really affect the future and reality in this region. For me, it's a question whether the US is really willing to return to this region as a player. I am rather skeptical about that to be honest. And is Europe ready to keep up in the neighborhood and do what's necessary? I also have my doubts about that. Then we have a Georgian government which has no interest in integration into the EU. Doing so will challenge their power position. Because integration into the EU means working with the rule of law, having independent media, working on the election system, and I think it's exactly what would cost them the next elections. And I think that people who make the decisions here are afraid of losing power, because it could be about their own security. And that's the problem now: There is a government ruling over people who want integration into Europe, but this government has no interest in it, and it opens room for the Russian side to maneuver in and impact Georgian politics.

PM Meets with State Minister of UAE for Economy and Trade, Discusses Cooperation between Two Countries

Irakli Garibashvili, Prime Minister of Georgia, met Ahmed Ali Al Sayegh, State Minister of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for Economy and Trade on September 13.

The meeting was focused on the cooperation existing between the two countries in various areas of the economy. It was noted that the political dialogue pursued between Georgia and UAE has advanced upwards, as evidenced by the high-level visits in countries.

Topics discussed by the dignitaries included the favorable business environment existing in Georgia. It was noted that a number of projects are imple-



mented in the country with investments from UAE and their increasing number is gratifying. It was also noted that preliminary talks will commence in the coming months for concluding a Free Trade Agreement between the nations. As the Prime Minister of Georgia noted, the establishment of a Free Trade Zone will create a supporting climate for promoting and advancing economic and trade relations between Georgia and UAE.

Garibashvili expressed his gratitude to the UAE Government for granting a visa-free travel arrangement to the citizens of Georgia.

Ilia Darchiashvili Attends 39th Meeting of Council of Foreign Ministers for Democracy and Economic Development – GUAM

BY SOPHIE HODLER

Ilia Darchiashvili Attends the 39th Meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers for Democracy and Economic Development – GUAM. Source: Ilia Darchiashvili

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, Ilia Darchiashvili, attended the 39th Meeting of the GUAM Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs (CMFA), within the framework of the 77th Session of the UN General Assembly in New York.

Alongside the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan Jeyhun Bayramov, the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs

and European Integration of the Republic of Moldova Nicu Popescu, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Dmytro Kuleba, and the Secretary General of GUAM Altai Efendiev, also participated in the meeting.

The Ministers of Foreign Affairs considered various issues, including political, sectoral, and organizational cooperation.

During the 39th Meeting of the GUAM Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, the parties signed a protocol on rules for determining the country of origin of goods to the Agreement on Establishment of Free Trade Area between the participating states and the Convention of the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development – GUAM Member States on Mutual Assistance in Consular Matters.



International Creative Festival – AD BLACK SEA is Back



After a two-year hiatus, the international creative festival – AD BLACK SEA was back. On September 16-17, the annual festival was held

in the city of Batumi and brought together people interested in advertising and marketing. The program proved equally interesting for experienced professionals as well as beginners and students.

The two-day festival program was packed with seminars, workshops, panel discussions and an evening program. The culmination of the festival was the awards ceremony, where the pre-selected international jury revealed winners in 11 categories.

The festival was held for the sixth year and is very popular in the region. Its purpose is to unite the countries of the Black Sea basin around this platform, to share knowledge and experience with each other, and to strengthen the role of Georgia in the region. The increase in the scale of the festival from year to year points to the successful implementation of this goal, and for the sixth festival in a row, despite the two-year pandemic pause, the organizers expected a record number of visitors.

It should also be noted that according to the decision of the festival team, Ad Black Sea will no longer accept Russian and Belarusian works and guests. Ukrainian colleagues, however, benefitted from a special condition making it possible for them to participate in the competi-

tion for free, and to attend the festival at half price.

More than 1000 delegates attended the festival this year.

In total, 500 works from 7 countries were presented at the festival.

The 11 competitive categories were:
ADVERTISING CAMPAIGNS
BRANDED CONTENT & VISUAL STORYTELLING
DESIGN & BRANDING
DIGITAL & MOBILE
DIGITAL & MOBILE craft
FILM
FILM CRAFT
MEDIA
OUT OF HOME
PRINT & PUBLISHING
CREATIVE EFFECTIVENESS

The jury awarded gold, bronze and silver awards to the best works. At the end of the festival, the Association of Georgian Communication Agencies summarized the scores of the whole year and revealed

the best Georgian agency and design studio. Agencies collect points during the year at various international festivals.

In the seminar program, speakers were invited to the festival from Great Britain, Spain, Germany, Turkey, USA, Poland, Ukraine, etc. Among the guests were high-level professionals who shared their invaluable experience and knowledge with the delegates and discuss relevant and important topics for the industry.

One of the most titled and honored creative directors of the advertising industry, Sir John Hegarty, whose book was translated into Georgian for the first time this year, at the initiative of the festival's founder, participated in the festival online.

Ad Black Sea 2022 is a professional celebration and a reset of sorts for industry representatives. The organizers hoped to make up for the two-year hiatus by giving the delegates enough emotions and inspiration to last until next year.



Israeli House to Present the Biblical Route on Jewish New Year

TRANSLATED BY ANA DUMBADZE

Israeli House will present the Biblical Route of Jewish Cultural Heritage to the general public on September 25, the Jewish New Year. The route is agreed with the European Association for the Protection and Promotion of Jewish Culture and Heritage (AEPJ) operating under the auspices of the Council of Europe, and the main route, the Caucasus direction, is part of the EU program.

Israeli House is a member organization of AEPJ and, on the recommendation of the Ministry of Culture, officially oversees the European Route of Jewish Cultural Heritage certified by the Council of Europe in Georgia.

The aim of the new route is to make the Jewish Heritage Route interesting and attractive to the world and for it to be presented on behalf of AEPJ at world tourism exhibitions.

It is planned to train guides who will tell visitors in detail about the history of the First and Second Temple eras in the South Caucasus, in particular, about the entry, resettlement, migrations, stay in Georgia and Azerbaijan and, finally, return to the homeland of Jews. The route will start from Jerusalem, continue to Mtskheta, include Tbilisi, then Azerbaijan (Baku, Quba), then Georgia again - Oni, Lailash, Tbilisi, and finally Jerusalem. The historical excursion covers a period of almost 3,000 years, from the reign of the biblical King David, the



period of forced exile from the Jewish homeland, and Aliyah. Therefore, the new route developed by the Israeli House can tentatively be called "from Jerusalem to Jerusalem".

In order to popularize the Biblical Route, Israeli House also applied to the World Tourism Organization.

The European route of Jewish cultural heritage certified by the European Council has already become an integral part of tourism. Now, Israeli House and before that its partner organization - Israel-Georgia Chamber of Business, have been working since the 1990s to attract tourists from Israel

and world Jewry to Georgia. For this purpose, in 1999, the head of the Chamber of Business, Itsik Moshe, in agreement with the Department of Tourism of Georgia and the Ministry of Tourism of Israel, opened a representative office of Georgian tourism in Israel, which played an important role in

attracting tourists from Israel. According to preliminary data, the number of visitors from Israel is expected to reach 200,000 this year, which exceeds the peak before the pandemic - the data of 2019. Moshe suggests that, with joint efforts, it is possible to strengthen cultural tourism in Georgia, and increase the number of visitors from Israel to 400,000 within a few years. He has already discussed this topic with the management of the Georgian Tourism Administration.

On November 7, the presentation of the Biblical Route in Jerusalem is planned, and on December 18, within the framework of Hanukkah, Israeli Week, the first participants will walk the route. Next year, it is planned to introduce the route to European countries.

According to Itsik Moshe, the Route of Jewish Cultural Heritage operating under the auspices of an international organization is another effective tool for deepening relations between Georgia, Israel and world Jewry, which has been served by the Israel-Georgia Chamber of Business and the Israeli House for years.

The presentation of the Biblical Route will be held on September 25, at 1:00 p.m., at The Biltmore Hotel Tbilisi (Address: Shota Rustaveli Ave. N29).

Official representatives (with greetings from the Knesset), the Council of Europe and the European Union, Israeli businesspersons, local tourism companies, students, lecturers, Jewish organizations, media and others are invited to the event.

Social Cohesion in Spotlight as Rukhi Community Celebrates International Day of Peace

On International Day of Peace, local civil society organizations in the Samegrelo region of Georgia came together to support people displaced by conflict and promote peace and dialogue among conflict-affected communities. The grassroots celebration at the Chemi Mordu elderly home in Rukhi village gathered women, children, small entrepreneurs and residents from the surrounding communities.

A handicrafts exhibition showcased handmade products created by local children and artisans. The event participants also joined artists in decorating the elderly home with a colourful mural, inspired by the theme of peace and social cohesion.

The celebration was organized by two non-governmental organizations supported by the European Union (EU) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) under the EU4Dialogue initiative - the women-led 'Hands for Peace' and the 'Charity Humanitarian Center Abkhazeti' (CHCA).

Both organizations assist people affected by conflict to rebuild their lives and discover new pathways for development. 'Hands for Peace' trains young women in traditional and innovative crafts to help them build their livelihoods. CHCA works to enhance human security and ensure decent living conditions for displaced persons by improving the infrastructure where they live.

"Today, we celebrate a globally shared date for all humanity to build and commit to peace above all," said Nick Beresford, UNDP Resident Representative in Georgia, attending the event. "A lasting peace is more than just the absence of conflict. It takes societies where all



Nick Beresford (right), UNDP Resident Representative in Georgia, attending the handicrafts exhibition showcasing handmade products created by local children and artisans. Photo by Nino Zedginidze/UNDP

people, old and young, women and men, are treated equally and come together to discuss and solve shared issues. That is why UNDP is working with local

partners to encourage intergenerational dialogue and enhance social cohesion." EU4Dialogue, a joint EU and UNDP initiative, reaches out to the most vul-

nerable conflict-affected populations, aiming to improve the quality of people's lives, build livelihoods, drive progress toward gender equality, promote

youth engagement and support the peaceful transformation of conflict. More information is available on the website: <https://bit.ly/3BIREv>

Glory Gates: Etseri, Svaneti



BLOG BY TONY HANMER

After last week's debacle, the first time ever it has been my fault for forgetting the date and missing a weekly article in GT since I began writing in early 2011, I have some catching up to do. (I explain: I had serialized my latest Svan Tale over 4 issues of the paper, and was renovating a flat in Tbilisi, far away from usual routines. But this is no excuse!)

Now I am back at home in Etseri, with some friends who are helping with more renovation here. One is American, the other Iranian, with a Dutch wife and toddler son. The two men have quite the skill set between them, and quite the range of tools, which the American brought up in his new minivan, now a traveling renovation machine.

We stopped in Zugdidi, last bastion of

good shopping, to stock up on food goods for their stay and also look for steel fencing materials. These will replace the house's front or entrance fence, which is currently wood posts and slats and wire. As my wife and I will be spending the coming winter on a long break in Tbilisi, we hope to make the yard as critter-proof as possible, the main culprits being cows and pigs, which will wreak great destruction upon entering. They are a stern test to any normal fence left unattended.

We tried first to find second-hand gates and fence posts for a lower price, and in this were very successful, returning to a man I've bought other useful metal items from before. The whole set of a long and medium-width gate for cars and a small one for people we found as a smart matching set, along with all the fence posts, to which we added new tough diamond-pattern mesh against the animals. Added bonus, it all fitted in the minivan! Along with everything else: tools, food, luggage and 6 bags of

cement. Up we trudged the last 110 km home, arriving for supper.

Next morning the work began in earnest. Fence and gate posts must be dug and cemented deep into the ground against possible motion and frost heave. (The ground presents 3 very different sets of conditions through the year: sodden with snow-melt runoff in spring; hard-baked in summer; and hard-frozen under deep snow in the long winter.) We already have gravel and sand for the cement to add to, with more cement to come from closer Mestia as needed. Hinges must be welded carefully into place on the gates, for both strength and accuracy. We'll also paint the whole gate and fence set against rust. I try to help as much as possible with the unskilled parts, like wetting the ground to soften it, and digging the trench into which a concrete belt for the posts and wire mesh will go to prevent piglets from digging their way under, as they are wont to do. Unused to such physical labor (no longer milking two cows

twice a day), I do what I can.

The workers are adding welded rebar rods to each gate or fence post, perpendicular to it and sticking out horizontally into each hole. When they pour in the concrete, and it hardens, this will give each post added stiffness from motion in any direction. Smart and easy, given materials and skills.

We also have to take out the old gates while working, but prop them up each night to prevent roaming bovines from forcing their way in and eating whatever they fancy, of which there is plenty of variety. They're always looking for something to supplement a fairly boring diet of hay or grass with more interesting addition, chiefly in the vegetable and fruit departments! Vigilance is needed! I dig the main fence channel

just outside the existing one but as close as possible to it, trying to avoid accusations of land-stealing and causing copy-cat behavior.

It'll be about a 10-day process, with other, indoor projects interspersed in case of rain, which is forecast. We'll keep the guys busy, and do our best to winterize. More next week.

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



Night Serenades Director Nina Tsagareli on the Festival's 40th Anniversary

Continued from page 1

You can also find photos from her family album and remarks about her biography and artistic life. Also, the memories of her friends and her nephew - Giorgi Isakadze, the art director of the festival since 2018 and founder of the Academy of Music and Classical Ballet in Ingolstadt and Munich."

BATUMI WAS THE FIRST CITY TO HOST THE FIRST TWO CONCERTS OF THE 2022 FESTIVAL. TELL US MORE ABOUT IT.

This year's month-long festival included four concerts, masterclasses and workshops, as well as an exhibition and the presentation of the book "Celebration of Music". Two concerts were held in Batumi, Ili Chavchavadze Drama Theater, on the 25th and 26th of August, in which great soloist musician women participated. Sabine Grofmeier, a German clarinetist, was the first to present her interpretations and arrangements to the audience, which was truly interesting for them. The second concert was also enjoyable on the 26th of August. American Kate Megan, who is known as an innovative pianist, also presented her interpretations and arrangements to the audience. Both concerts were exciting, and the performers received a lot of ovations. Besides them, "Georgian Virtuosos" as the festival's chamber orchestra was also present at Batumi sessions. This orchestra, founded by Liana

and Giorgi Isakadze, is unique as every single member is a soloist. Parallel to the concerts, in the hall of Ili Chavchavadze Drama Theater, there was an exhibition of the paintings of Nino Mirianashvili, a painter-designer who dedicated this exhibition to the festival.

ON THE 17TH AND 18TH OF SEPTEMBER, TBILISI STATE CONSERVATOIRE GRAND HALL HOSTED TWO CONCERTS.

Yes. On the 17th of September, Gloria Campaner's trio performed for the audience. The trio consists of three soloists, Gloria Campaner - pianist, Alessandro Carbonare - Clarinet and Mario Stefano Pietrodarchi - Bandoneon. They presented the concert "ASTOR. The evening was dedicated to the

30-year diplomatic relations between Georgia and Italy. The next day, on the 18th of September, a great Baroque performer, French violinist Andres Gabeta, performed for the audience. It's worth mentioning that the violin he played belonged to Pietro Guarneri, who lived in the 18th century. The concert was dedicated to 30 years of diplomatic relations between Georgia and France.

TELL US MORE ABOUT THE SUPPORTERS AND SPONSORS OF THE FESTIVAL

Every year we publish a festival booklet in which we show gratitude towards all the festival sponsors and supporters who helped us for all these years. I want to thank Tbilisi City Hall, Batumi City Hall, and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports of the Adjara Autonomous Republic. For the first time in the festival's history, the French Embassy and the French Institute in Georgia supported us. And I have to mention the Italian embassy, which has supported the festival for years. The official insurance company of the "Night Serenades" festival is "Ardi". Hilton Garden Inn hosted the guests of the festival. Have to thank all the media who have shown interest in the festival. The creative group of the festival, as well as all musicians and soloists, deserve a round of applause. Most importantly, we thank our very dear and loyal audience.



Italy Seen Through the Eyes of Great Masters of Photography

From September 19 to October 31, the capital of Georgia is hosting the exhibition 'Italiae. From the Alinaris Brothers to the Masters of Contemporary Photography,' which was created on the initiative of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, and the Alinaris Photography Fund. It is implemented in Tbilisi by the Italian Embassy in cooperation with the festival 'Umbrella Tbilisi Photo.'

The exhibition, being hosted at the Zurab Tsereteli Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), features 75 photographers who capture the diversity and attractiveness of Italy, its nature, creativity and people, in photographs created using different expressive languages and techniques.

The exhibition, curated by Rita Scarton and Luca Krishenti, is divided into three sections ("Landscapes", "Works" and



"Portraits"). Each section is a complete artistic, historical and documentary excursion of different styles and genres, bringing together in one exhibition space the 160-year history of Italian photography, from photo atelier images to contemporary experimental works, and through them creating a gallery of landscapes, events and portraits of people seen from unusual angles, perfectly conveying the constant diversity of the evolving country and the fantastic complexity of Italian photography.

Among the photographers presented at the exhibition are: Vittorio Sella, Gianni Berengo Gardini, Piergiorgio Branzi, Franco Fontana, Alex Maioli, Nino Migliori, Paolo Pellegrini, Ferdinando Shana, Mario Giacomelli, Gian Paolo Barbieri, and others.

The opening of the exhibition at MOMA was attended by the Ambassador of

Georgia to Italy, H.E. Enrico Valvo, who thanked the organizers of the event for their efforts and the audience for their interest in Italian photography.

"This exhibition is a part of the large-scale cultural program the Embassy of Italy planned for this year, dedicated to the 30th anniversary of the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between Italy and Georgia. The exhibition represents Italy, its diversity, natural beauty, its people and their creations."

"The exhibition features 75 photographers and covers about 160 years of the history of Italian photography. It expresses both traditions, past and modernity of the country. I believe the exhibition will be interesting for the Georgian audience, as all the features of the Italian people I mentioned above are also characteristic and familiar for Georgians," noted the Ambassador.



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