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"A City Full of Death" - Marita, 13, Electrocuted in Vake Park's Newly Renovated Fountain

BY KETEVAN SKHIRTLADZE

On October 13, in Vake Park, three teenagers had skipped classes to play. Their ball fell into the pool of the newly renovated fountain, which had been officially opened by Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze just the day before. Andria Lortkifanidze and Lazare Lobzhanidze both went in to try and grab the ball. Both collapsed in the water due to the electric current from an unseen damaged cable. 13-year-old Marita Meparishvili went in after them to pull them out and fell prey to the same current. Devi Mezurnishvili, a Vake Park landscaper of five years, despite feeling the electricity hit his own body hard, managed to pull out the boys, then Marita, all of whom were rushed to hospital.

13-year-old Marita died from the injuries she had received. "The girl was brought in with cardiac arrest and resuscitation measures were unsuccessful," said the doctor.

Andria and Lazare were discharged from the clinic a few days later.



Image source: netgazeti

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Markets		Price		w/w		m/m	
BONDS							
GRAIL 07/28	76.33	(YTM 9.50%)	-2.3%	-6.7%	Bank of Georgia (BGEO LN)	GBP 20.30	+2.7%
GEORG 07/23	100.91	(YTM 4.78%)	+0.2%	-0.2%	Georgia Capital (CGEO LN)	GBP 6.16	-0.6%
GEOPAP 03/24	93.59	(YTM 11.22%)	+0.0%	-0.6%	TBC Bank Group (TBCG LN)	GBP 17.80	+1.8%
SILNET 01/27	93.34	(YTM 10.33%)	-1.9%	-3.4%			
TBC 06/24	98.27	(YTM 6.86%)	-0.4%	-0.6%			
CURRENCIES							
					Price	w/w	m/m
					GEL / USD	2.7586	-1.1%
					GEL / EUR	2.7147	+0.3%
					GEL / GBP	3.1328	+1.6%
					GEL / CHF	2.7685	-0.7%
					GEL / RUB	0.0445	+1.6%
					GEL / TRY	0.1484	-1.1%
					GEL / AZN	1.6255	-1.3%
					GEL / AMD	0.0068	-1.1%
COMMODITIES							
					Price	w/w	m/m
					Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	91.62	-4.8%
					Gold Spot (US\$/Oz)	1 650.09	-1.2%
INDICES							
					Price	w/w	m/m
					FTSE 100	6 920.24	-0.6%
					FTSE 250	17 502.84	+2.1%
					DAX	12 649.03	+3.1%
					DOW JONES	30 185.82	+3.4%
					NASDAQ	10 675.80	+1.3%
					MSCI EM EE	23.52	+3.6%
					MSCI EM	865.77	-2.2%
					SP 500	3 677.95	+1.8%
					MSCI FM	1 937.65	+0.0%

"A City Full of Death" - Marita, 13, Electrocuted in Vake Park's Newly Renovated Fountain

Continued from page 1

On October 12, Tbilisi City Hall announced that the rehabilitation of the small cascade and round fountain in Vake Park was officially complete. The water supply system had been completely changed, and modern technology, which is automated, had been installed, along with a lighting system.

Devi Mezurnishvili, the Vake Park landscaper who pulled the three minors from the fountain, spoke of his part in the tragic incident to journalists.

"I was nearby, working. I heard a scream, people asking for help. I went into the water and saw the three children submerged and unconscious. I didn't realize the water was electrified until I got in. I forced myself closer and almost died there myself to save those children.

"People helped me to get one child out. Then I turned around to approach another. It was slow going. The strength of the electricity wouldn't let me get close. I was able to get the second boy out. I turned to get the third one and knew time was running out. People were shouting and demanding the fountain be turned off. It was impossible to get to her. I couldn't reach her."

He noted that the voltage was particularly strong towards the center of the fountain, exactly where Marita was.

Mezurnishvili added that he gave the children first aid.

"There were a lot of people, and everyone was trying to help. The ambulance came immediately, and they continued to help the three children. They took the girl to the hospital, then I heard that she had died," he said.

An eyewitness to the incident confirmed that it was difficult to get the teenagers out of the water because "the current was hitting even the man who went in to help them."

WHO TO BLAME

THE SCHOOL?

According to Georgian law, if a student does not show up for school, it is the school's responsibility to contact the parents and inform them.

"These particular children did not show up for their class in the morning at School 55. As per the regulations that require the tutor to inform the parents about a child's absence in school, the tutor informed the children's parents through a chat that the children had not shown up," said the Deputy Minister of Education, Tamar Makharashvili.

THE MAYOR?

Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze stated that all those responsible will be punished.

"It is a horrible fact. We are all saddened. An investigation has been launched, all the relevant agencies are involved and, of course, those responsi-



Image source: netgazeti

ble will be punished accordingly, within the law," he said.

When asked if he sees the responsibility of City Hall in the teen's death, Kaladze said:

"Of course [I see responsibility]. This is a most important topic, the hardest topic. We are all saddened. This is a huge responsibility," he said.

Citizens gathered at Tbilisi City Hall, demanding that the Mayor and City Hall take responsibility for the incident.

"Freedom Square shines on New Year's Eve with the message that this is a city full of life. In reality, this is a city full of death," said art critic Teo Khatishvili, who was participating in the rally.

Protester's demanded Kaladze's resignation.

The opposition and part of society demand political responsibility from Kaladze because he ceremonially opened the fountain just one day before the teenager's death.

Giorgi Noniashvili, a member of the political opposition party European Georgia, told TV Pirveli, "We all understand that Kakhi Kaladze did not go there and cut the wire himself, but there is a political responsibility."

"When we talk about taking political responsibility, it does not happen only because of political differences. This happens primarily because political responsibility is a kind of insurance to preventing such tragedies in the future," said Saba Buadze of the Lelo party.

The participants of last Thursday's rally stated their belief that Kaladze sacrificed Marita's life in "another corrupt scheme." Participants also blamed him for "wasting the country's budget in a corrupt way, and constantly threatening the lives of the city's residents."

THE CONTRACTORS?

"13 million was spent on the rehabilitation of the Vake Park fountain. The company that won the tender was Green-

service+, whose head was arrested by Georgian Dream itself in 2013!" the rally organizers pointed out.

The rehabilitation works of the fountain in Vake Park were carried out by the company Greenservice+ on the order of City Hall. In 2022, the company received tenders worth more than 5 million from Tbilisi City Hall alone.

HEAD OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION SERVICE OF TBILISI CITY HALL?

On Wednesday, Giga Gigashvili, head of the Environmental Protection Service of Tbilisi City, resigned.

"Due to the tragedy, my deputy is currently under arrest. I, as the head of the service, of course, feel moral responsibility for the official actions of my deputy, of all employees. Therefore, I consider it necessary to leave my position. I will fully cooperate with the investigation in order to establish the truth of what actually happened on the day of this tragedy and to answer all the relevant questions that exist among society," he said.

THE 9 ARRESTS

On Tuesday, five days after Marita's death, Kakha Muradashvili, Deputy Head of the Tbilisi Police Department, announced that nine people had been arrested.

Lasha Purtsvanidze, the head of Greenservice+, and the deputy head of the Environmental Protection Service of Tbilisi City Hall are among those arrested.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs launched an investigation under Article 240 prima of the Criminal Code, which refers to the violation of safety rules, which resulted in less serious or serious injury to health. According to the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, in the course of ongoing investigative proceedings, the case was re-qualified under Article

240 (1) I and II parts of the Criminal Code of Georgia, which implies a breach of safety regulations at electric facilities that result in death. The committed crime envisions from 4 to 7 years of imprisonment.

"None of those arrested has pleaded guilty, and they are using the right to remain silent. No-one is refusing what is necessary for investigative actions, but they weren't even expecting to be arrested. At this stage, we do not even know what the accusation is," Revaz Acharadze, the lawyer of the arrested employees of Greenservice+, told media outlet Interpressnews.ge on Tuesday. "Based on the interests of the defense, I cannot say anything specific, I am waiting for the case materials," he added.

The Prosecutor's Office of Georgia filed charges against those persons arrested in the case of the Vake Park tragedy, including the Greenservice+ head Lasha Purtsvanidze and deputy head of Environmental Protection Service of Tbilisi City Hall Giorgi Vakhtangashvili, with facts of official indifference, indifference committed in the enterprise, violation of the safety rules during work which led to the loss of human life, and the facts of making, inciting the making, and using of a false official document.

The Prosecutor's Office of Georgia expressed its condolences to the family, relatives and friends of Marita Meparishvili due to the gravest tragic incident in Vake Park, and stated.

"At the initial stage of the investigation, charges were filed against the deputy head of Environmental Protection Service of Tbilisi City Hall, the director of Greenservice+ LLC, the contractor of the same company and one employee, the subcontractor firm of Greenservice+ LLC - New Metal Design representative, two craftsmen hired by New Metal Design and the director and expert of Mshen-expert LLC.

"Two criminal episodes were identified within the ongoing investigation at the Ministry of Internal Affairs. First: on October 22, 2021, between the Service of Environmental Protection of the City Hall of Tbilisi Municipality and Greenservice+, an agreement on state procurement was signed, the subject of which was the rehabilitation works of fountains and cascades in the area of Vake Park in Tbilisi.

On August 26, 2022, the parties signed an act of acceptance and handover, by which the Environmental Protection Service of the City Hall accepted the works performed on the central fountain. After this, in September 2022, despite the fact that the rehabilitation works on the central fountain were completed, the deputy head of the Environmental Protection Service of the City Hall, the project manager of Greenservice+ verbally requested that some additional works be carried out on the central fountain, namely wrapping the black water pipes connected to the electric motor with stainless white tin material. The project manager of Greenservice+ informed the director of Greenservice+ about this, and on his instructions, the mentioned work was ordered to the representative of the subcontractor firm New Metal Design. The latter, in turn, assigned the work to two craftsmen hired by New Metal Design. The supervision and control of the work was to be carried out by the contractor of Greenservice+.

"On September 22, in the morning hours, the above-mentioned craftsmen arrived at the central fountain, brought the wrapping tin material and started working on it. In the course of the work, the craftsmen violated the safety norms of the work procedure, in particular, in order to fit the stainless tin on the water pipes, they removed the metal grid for wrapping the electric motor, and when fixing it back, they inserted a high-voltage electric cable between the concrete surface and the metal grid. Because of this, the insulation of the electric cable was damaged and the current leaked into the water.

"The director of Greenservice+ presented the completed work to the City Service without conducting an appropriate inspection, and the deputy head of the Environmental Protection Service of the City Hall accepted the said work without an appropriate inspection. Further, the representative of the subcontractor firm of Greenservice+ did not verify the work performed by the craftsmen hired by them. Meanwhile, the producer of the works of Greenservice+ did not provide appropriate control over the said activity. If the mentioned persons had performed their duties properly, the fact of damage to the electric wire would have been detected and the result would have been avoided," the Prosecutor's Office wrote.

Jaba Samushia Elected to the Position of Acting Rector of TSU

Mr Jaba Samushia was elected acting rector of Tbilisi State University (TSU) on Thursday. He was the only candidate for the position.

The acting rector was elected by the Academic Council by secret ballot, with the majority of members, for a term of no more than 6 months.

The process took place amidst a tense protest of students at the university, the security service being mobilized on the spot.

The students gathered at the 107th auditorium to demand a change to the procedure for electing the rector, construction of a dormitory for students, and a housing subsidy. They claim Jaba Samushia was pre-selected for the position of acting rector and had been congratulated on his appointment to the



Image source: Netgazeti

position in advance.

"This process is illegitimate. They can't keep an eye on the students and quietly appoint a rector appointed by the government to the university. Solidarity for the students, freedom for the university," said Saba Kerkadze, representative of the Student Movement.

TSU rector Giorgi Sharvashidze applied to the Academic Council for his resignation on October 7.

Erdogan Agrees with Putin to Form Natural Gas Hub in Turkey

BY ANA DUMBADZE

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said on Wednesday that he had agreed with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin to form a natural gas hub in Turkey.

Speaking to members of his AK Party in parliament, Erdogan said Putin had said Europe can obtain its gas supply from the hub in Turkey.

"Turkey will also be a natural gas hub. At the last meeting, we agreed with Putin on this issue. We will create a hub here with gas coming from Russia," he said.

Erdogan said there was growing concern in Western countries amid the energy crisis, and added that Turkey "doesn't have such a problem".



Ukraine Latest: Putin Declares Martial Law in 4 Illegally Annexed Regions of Ukraine

BY ANA DUMBADZE

Russian President Vladimir Putin said martial law will be introduced across the four Ukrainian territories he illegally annexed last month. Military officials will take direct responsibility for civilian government function in the Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia regions, Putin said at a meeting of his security council on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, pro-Kremlin separatist officials warned that the war's front line could soon reach the Russian-controlled city of Kherson, and they ordered residents to leave Wednesday morning in anticipation of a major Ukrainian push to retake the city, Russian state media reported.

THIS WEEK'S KEY DEVELOPMENTS

Kyiv's air defenses have shot down multiple Russian missiles above the capital, the city's mayor said Wednesday on Telegram. Melinda Simmons, the UK's Ambassador to Kyiv described hearing, from a bomb shelter, the air defenses kicking into action. She described the atmosphere in the capital as "calm".

The fight for Kherson could begin in the "very near future," a pro-Russian separatist official said Wednesday morning. At least 50,000 inhabitants will be transported out of the city, including to Russia, in an operation that pro-Moscow authorities say will take about a week, Russia's RIA Novosti news agency reported.

A Western official who spoke on the condition of anonymity said Russian forces are still defending on the western side of the Dnieper River, but are withdrawing some civilians. "These are not the actions of an occupying force that is confident in its ability to hold lines," the official added.

Russian attacks are causing "massive

blackouts," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Tuesday, adding that 30% of the country's power stations have been damaged by Russian attacks since Oct. 10.

He held a meeting on the country's energy system on Wednesday amid increasing fears of power outages in the winter. Moscow continued attacks on Ukraine's energy grid this week, hitting a power facility in Kyiv three times Tuesday, a presidential aide said.

BATTLEGROUND UPDATES

NATO anti-drone systems will be delivered to Ukraine in the next few days, Jens Stoltenberg, the alliance's secretary general, said Tuesday in Berlin. The air defenses will be capable of countering Iranian-made drones, he specified, after Ukraine accused Russia of using the weapons to barrage its capital on Monday. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said he was ready to submit a "bag of evidence" to prove the drones' origin, Reuters reported, and he proposed severing diplomatic ties with Tehran completely.

Major elements of Russia's military leadership are "increasingly dysfunctional," the British Defense Ministry said Wednesday. Four of the five generals responsible for directing the Russian invasion in February have been dismissed from their posts, and there is a growing shortage of officers capable of organizing newly mobilized reservists.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Moscow has no plans to expand military mobilization and warned a direct clash with NATO would lead to "global catastrophe."

At a news conference in the Kazakh capital Astana, Putin said the "partial mobilization" he announced last month, which the defense minister said aimed to recruit 300,000 soldiers, was finishing and would be over within two weeks.

So far, 222,000 of the 300,000 reservists the Russian Ministry of Defense said would get called up have been mobilized, Putin claimed.



Putin signs off on martial law for Ukraine's newly annexed regions.

A total of 33,000 are already in military units, and 16,000 are involved in the "military operation" in Ukraine.

EU COUNCIL SETS UP MILITARY ASSISTANCE MISSION IN SUPPORT OF UKRAINE

The EU Council this week agreed to set up a Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine (EUMAM Ukraine). The aim of the mission is to contribute to enhancing the military capability of Ukraine's Armed Forces to effectively conduct military operations, in order to allow Ukraine to defend its territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, effectively exercise its sovereignty, and protect civilians.

In response to Ukraine's request for

military support, EUMAM Ukraine will provide individual, collective and specialized training to Ukraine's Armed Forces, including to their Territorial Defence Forces, and coordination and synchronization of member states' activities supporting the delivery of training.

"Today, we step up our support to Ukraine to defend itself from Russia's illegal aggression. The EU Military Assistance Mission will train the Ukrainian Armed Forces so they can continue their courageous fight. EUMAM is not just a training mission, it is clear proof that the EU will stand by Ukraine for as long as is needed," stated Josep Borrell, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

EUMAM Ukraine will operate in the

territory of the EU member states and will have its Operational Headquarters within the EEAS in Brussels in order to ensure overall coordination at the strategic level. Vice Admiral Hervé Bléjean, the Director of the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) within the EEAS, will be the Mission Commander.

The mandate of the non-executive mission will initially last two years, and the financial reference amount for the common costs for this period will be EUR 106,700,000.

The mission will ensure coordination with member states' bilateral activities in support of Ukraine, as well as with other like-minded international partners, and will be open to the participation of third states.

POLITICS

The South Caucasus Inches Closer to Peace

BY EMIL AVDALIANI

Armenia and Azerbaijan seem to be inching toward a comprehensive peace deal by the year-end. Hints in the media have been circulating for months, with various representatives from the Armenian leadership signaling a high probability of progress on the peace deal.

In the latest statements, the Armenian side was unequivocal. Armen Grigoryan, Secretary of the Security Council, said that Armenia and Azerbaijan had agreed to sign the peace deal by the end of December. A long-disputed border dispute may also be resolved in the coming months.

Simultaneously, positive noises have emerged from Azerbaijan's key ally, Turkey. The country's foreign minister announced that Azerbaijan and Armenia have already reached an agreement on the principal points of a peace treaty. And remember, this all comes just a month after the two sides engaged in heavy clashes, and less than two years since Azerbaijan won the 2020 war over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Exactly what the treaty will include is not yet clear, but based on recent statements from the two capitals, it seems likely to include mutual territorial recognition, a major achievement. This will effectively mean that Armenia will rec-



Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan met in a fourth meeting mediated by the European Council President Charles Michel in Brussels, on August 31.

ognize Nagorno-Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan's territories. In return, it will hope to get special language and other cultural rights for ethnic Armenians living in the enclave.

This seemingly unexpected development is, in fact, a result of months-long diplomatic efforts spearheaded by the West. Since the war in Ukraine, the US has actively re-engaged the South Caucasus and delivered progress in Armenia-Azerbaijan talks. Just recently, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with Azeri President Ilham Aliyev and

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in separate talks on October 11, emphasizing the need for peace and hailing practical steps toward an agreement.

More importantly, the European Union has significantly upped its game in the region following Russia's aggression in Ukraine, and now seeks to push back against the Kremlin's self-interested "peacebuilding" efforts, including its military buffer force between the two sides. France, always supportive of Armenia, has been especially active in calling

for an agreement. In a recent statement, President Emmanuel Macron accused Russia of purposefully instigating instability between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Russia is obviously unhappy. While most of its attention is focused on conquering Ukrainian territory, the war has caused a serious decline in Russian influence; the South Caucasus is a good example. Overstretched militarily, Russia is unable to control the ripple effects, with local actors now seeing opportunities for a more active foreign policy. Azerbaijan has used a more coercive approach toward Armenia, while the latter turned to India for large military equipment purchases. Turkey has emerged as a significant winner, pushing for its own rapprochement with Armenia, while the latter has questioned Russia's treaty commitment to its defense.

The vacuum in the South Caucasus is real, and the West has much to gain if it uses the opportunity. In early October, the EU agreed to send a special mission to the border of the two countries. It is not certain what the mission might accomplish in practical terms, beyond building confidence and perhaps even facilitating the border delimitation process, but the move is notable anyway because it signifies a shift from Russian-to EU-mediated efforts. Indeed, over the course of this year, all summits of Armenian and Azerbaijani heads of states were held exclusively under EU auspices. Prisoner of war exchanges were also mostly the result of American, European

or Georgian mediation.

Russia has been absent. This worries the Kremlin, but it can do little more than make angry statements from the sidelines. The Russian Foreign Ministry's spokesperson Maria Zakharova recently commented that the EU is trying to undermine Moscow's efforts to help.

This may now mark the start of a new era, with the end of the so-called post-Soviet period and Russia's notion of regional hegemony. A peace deal will also, of course, remove the need for Russian peacekeeping troops on Azeri soil once the current agreement expires in 2025.

Yet, a deal will not guarantee peace. For this to happen, both Armenia and Azerbaijan will have to learn the art of making concessions. Moreover, Azerbaijan's often coercive strategy will make it difficult to attain a stable peace. Armenia, meanwhile, is thinking of challenging the existing military imbalance by increasing defense spending and building military-industrial connections with states other than Russia.

The growing evidence of the potential deal is nevertheless highly promising, signaling a major shift from Russian-dominated efforts to Western-led initiatives. With Russia militarily overstretched, it might be unable to reverse its loss of influence in the South Caucasus.

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

The Mayor's Burdened Shoulders

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

When all is OK and the overall sense of happiness within our societal tissue seems to be seamless and intact, nobody is morally ready to accept and digest a tragedy, and tragedy can strike at any point in time. The latest saddening event happened in Tbilisi, seeing a wonderful child die as a consequence of an outrageous accident, and it has had the heaviest bearing on all of us members of society, jerking us out of our habitual way of life.

The picture was routinely trivial: children were playing on the edge of the newly-renovated Vake Park fountain and dropped a ball into it, but, in trying to retrieve that ball out of the water, they were struck by electricity. One lost her life in her heroic attempt to save a friend. This is the briefest and plainest account of the excruciating disaster. Screams, tears and broken hearts eventuated at the internment of the beautiful girl, and will stay forever in our hearts and minds, though it is already in the past.

What lies before us, like a tornado, is the pressing necessity to solve the mystery of the event. Was it human error, a terrorist act, or providence turned cruel? Could it be all of these in one? Of all the tiring guesswork, one expansion has materialized most vividly, and that is the



Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze visits one of the two survivors of the Vake Park tragedy which took the life of 13-year-old Marita Meparashvili

political witch-hunt. In cases like this, all cultures seem to head the same way, Georgia no exception: A scapegoat needs to be found and the shoulders to put the blame on provided as soon as possible, so that the nation and all its vivacious components can let the dust settle.

For the no longer vigorously fussing political opposition, woken up from their

summer slumber and already readying for a winter hibernation, the overwhelming national tragedy played the role of a resuscitator. They then smelled out the fattest and the tastiest victim to dine on in the person of the current mayor of Tbilisi, known for his tireless struggle to rebuild the city as one of the most comfortable spots to live in the region,

if not the world. A monstrous campaign has now been worked up against him, blaming him, just him, for what God sent to Georgia as one of the worst tribulations it has known of late. Our handsome, young, popular and uncannily industrious town leader is viciously being turned into a threat to our society and the destroyer of our best hopes.

Without further deliberation on the topic, I would like to raise a question: What does the political figure of the mayor of one of the most populous cities in the world have to do with a tragic death in the old, beautiful and salubrious Vake Park? If a city service, or any attached link to it, fail to do a good job, should the mayor's head roll? If yes, let's get done with it. But we, the electorate, have every right to know what is wrong here and what is right; the mayor's resignation or his staying in power. There can't be any in-between judgments here. The issue is so tremendous that it possibly deserves a referendum. And this is not about some mayor of some city losing some sinecure: This is about our and our children's future. What is the correct way to continue living after this tragedy has taught us this terribly bitter lesson?

Concerning the advantage-taking politicians, I could assure them with reserved and reasonable enough confidence that the advantages seized the way they do will not pay off. Things like this do not constitute the competitive advantage they spend their lives looking for. A political advantage to find and use is not usually built on human tragedies. Human tragedies are only meant to be shared and alleviated, not used to grab political points or in order to push the current good mayor aside and take his place, while we, the electorate, have no clue at all if the new incumbent will do a better job for his city dwellers than the mayor we have now.

Attack of the Drones: A New Page in Warfare



Ukrainian Lieutenant Anton Galyashinskiy holds a drone used for carrying explosives during a practice session on the outskirts of Kyiv. By Ionut Iordachescu/AFP via Getty Images

BY MICHAEL GODWIN

Anyone aware of the ongoing war in Ukraine has been inundated with amateur and social media footage of the fighting. From humorous footage and dances, to fierce helmet-mounted camera clips of intense combat, the public has been giving an up-close-and-personal view of Russia's stalling "special military operation." A unique tool commonly used by filmmakers, journalists, and hobbyists, small commercially procured drones, have been the source of much of the footage.

Either purchased by the individual soldier, donated by supporters around the world, or a part of the defense procurement system, these platforms have been used in a variety of roles by troops along the front. The simplest application of the smaller airframes is for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR). While the range on small quadcopter drones is limited, the ability to get a bird's eye view of the terrain and the enemy positions to the immediate front is a battlefield leader's dream come true.

An extension of the ISR capability is the ability to adjust and correct artillery fire. Normally, the artillery support for advancing infantry has to be handled by a forward observer. This individual is tasked with helping the gunners, often

a significant distance behind the front line, make corrections to their impacts so as to be more accurate. However, this individual is restricted to only what is in direct line of sight. With these small ISR drones, the same top-down view is afforded to the observer and the artillery crews for live feed of their attacks, making adjustments near instant.

While being an eye in the sky is incredibly advantageous, another devilishly devious application of this technology is munitions delivery. In its earliest form, soldiers created improvised claw-like devices that were able to grasp a grenade or small bomb, with the claw action being released when above the target. The live video feed watches as the explosive falls onto the unsuspecting victim down below. Newer developments have made attachments that connect to the small drone and even large drone airframes capable of carrying multiple large munitions.

While other uses have been seen in isolated cases, these examples have shown that even a small and cheap drone off the shelf can be a game-changer for warfighters. However, as with many unique developments in warfare, how these systems will be formally introduced in military formations has yet to be seen. With a wide variety in application and size, the drone will likely be dispersed across various units or cause new ones to be raised.

For smaller, mostly unarmed drones for ISR usage, the inclusion into platoon

or rifle company units is more straightforward. The drones are man-portable in small pouches or bags and can be fielded by soldiers with only a few days training. With low costs and training times, the lead time for these platforms to be introduced to NATO infantry and reconnaissance units is an easy first step.

For larger armed drones, these may be additions to battalion-level assets. Drone platforms such as the Aerorozvidka R18 require more maintenance, training, and a larger crew to service them. According to the company's website, the R18 is "a vertical takeoff and landing octocopter that has eight lifting screws and can carry several kilograms of payload." The airframe is capable of carrying not only anti-personnel munitions, but also anti-tank.

Other drones have also made an immense presence on the battlefield. So-called "kamikaze" or "suicide" drones have been used to terrifying effect by both sides. These drones, as their nicknames suggest, detonate upon impact with their target. Guided by video terminals and launched by man or vehicles portable platforms, these require their own introduction to military units.

Because of their terminal nature, the operators need not worry about retrieving the drone upon mission completion. Drones such as the Switchblade 300 and 600, produced by American company AeroVironment, Inc., and the now infamous Sahel-136 (Geran-2 in Russia) produced by Iran Aircraft Manufacturing Industrial Company (HESA) are the most popular to consider. For smaller man-portable systems like the Switchblade 300, teams at the company or battalion can handle the task.

Larger drones such as the Switchblade 600 and Sahel-136 require more complex and larger launching platforms, making them only vehicle portable. This may pave the way for specific units, battalions or companies in size, to be tasked with the maintenance, deployment, targeting, and piloting of these systems. Just as the advent of the tank and the machine gun opened up new roles on the battlefield, so might the massive introduction of drones create new fields in military communities.

For Ukraine, Aerorozvidka drones have had immense success on the front lines. The commercially popular DJI drones,

produced by Shenzhen DJI Sciences and Technologies Ltd, a state-owned technology company in China, have seen wide usage by both sides, but primarily by Russian troops. The systems have been largely abandoned after the AeroScope drone tracking platform launched.

AeroScope allows a user to view and track DJI drones in real time, causing several users in the war zone to be targeted and eliminated by artillery fire. While the software is designed for the government and police to protect secure sites, it has forced drone manufacturers like Aerorozvidka to innovate. DJI in the meantime, insisting that their drones are for civilian use only and not to be used by the military, has suspended business in both Russia and Ukraine. Despite this, alternative methods of procurement continue.

The use of drones, despite attempts to minimize their effectiveness by some, is here to stay as a new component of military doctrine. Implementing them into the military task organization and equipment framework is imperative.

Building training and continuing education institutes, establishing military supply chains, and creating the necessary units should be near the top of defense officials' list. In addition, countering these threats comes with new advantages.

From drone guns to anti-drone radar jamming software, new infrastructure comes with the technologies. Time-tested solutions, such as the barrage balloons of WWII, may provide a cheap alternative to expensive anti-air artillery and shoulder-fired missiles. Drones specifically designed to hunt down and attack other drones may even become the natural evolution of this new wave of warfare.

Witnessing this latest development in battlefield technology and the way warfighters, commanders, and engineers handle the change is continuously fascinating. As each side in Ukraine attempts to outdo the other, Georgia, NATO, and others furiously take notes. What comes of this new wave, and what it births next, will be the watchword for defense analysts, industry experts, investors, and governments for decades.



An R18 drone with munitions. Photo from Aerorozvidka NGO

Graham Allison, Former Pentagon Planning Chief, on Putin's Nuclear Potential and Ukraine's NATO Bid

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

Prof. Graham Allison, 82, is one of the leading political scientists in the United States. A security and nuclear expert, he served as the dean of the John F. Kennedy School of Government and director of the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard University. As the planning chief at the Pentagon, he coordinated the US strategy toward the successor states of the Soviet Union after the end of the Cold War. Radio Free Europe's Georgian Service sat down with him to discuss Ukraine and US-Russia relations now and moving forward.

YOU COINED THE TERM "THUCYDIDES' TRAP" TO DESCRIBE THE CHINESE-AMERICAN RELATIONSHIP, WHEN A RISING POWER CHALLENGES THE ESTABLISHED ONE. DO YOU HAVE AN EQUALLY APT TERM FOR US-RUSSIA RELATIONS, WHEN A FALLEN POWER TRIES TO RE-ESTABLISH ITSELF AND CHALLENGES THE ESTABLISHED ONE?

If we think of Japan, in 1941, it was rising, and the US responded in a way that actually strangled Japan, with conditions in which Japan felt itself threatened and insecure. It saw them lash out at Pearl Harbor. I think there's at least a bit of an analogy there to what Putin felt he was facing as NATO became more visibly present in his total surround, including Ukraine, which he has some mystical attachment to, believing it part of Russia.

EARLIER THIS MONTH, THE CRIMEAN BRIDGE WAS BLOWN UP. PUTIN RESPONDED BY BOMBING ENTIRE UKRAINE. WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

If Putin is forced to choose between humiliating defeat or escalating the level of destruction, there's every reason to believe he'll choose the latter. As you step up the level of destruction, the first step is bombing infrastructure. That's what he's doing now, even though he



Ukraine doesn't have a government that functions other than as a war government. They are going to have to try to build a government that can run a society and an economy, something that it was unable to do successfully before



Prof. Graham Allison, former Pentagon Planning Chief

doesn't have as many smart bombs as he would like, so they are not as carefully targeted. One up that ladder of destruction is killing people. The Western narrative, and especially Zelensky's, has asserted that Putin is killing a lot of civilians. Actually, he's not been killing very many, if you think about it in historical terms. If he wanted to kill children, if he wanted to kill 1000s of people, he could bomb Kyiv, there's nothing preventing him from sending bombers to bomb Kyiv, or from striking Kyiv with 100 missiles. In the first instance, he's going after infrastructure, because he wants to freeze Ukraine. Right on up is killing people, then after that comes chemical weapons, and then after that comes nuclear strikes.

It's a very ugly picture. And even though a humiliating defeat for Russia, in Ukraine, would not, I believe, be existential for Russia, because Russia can survive without Ukraine, I think it will be existential for Putin. And, as President Biden said in private remarks which were made public last week, he thinks we're stumbling along the path to that point for Putin.

IF THERE IS A TARGETED NUCLEAR STRIKE IN UKRAINE, WHAT DOES IT SPELL FOR UKRAINE, RUSSIA, THE REST OF THE WORLD?

It's the question which President Biden and all of his national security team have been asking; a question that Europeans are asking, and they should be asking. We've had seven decades without the use of nuclear weapons in war. It's remarkable. It's an accomplishment. The nuclear taboo has emerged slowly, but it has emerged. And, fortunately, states have refrained from the use of nuclear weapons. But Putin certainly has the capability to conduct a nuclear strike. He would have reason, in his view, to conduct a nuclear strike, if he thought there was some chance that it would allow him to come out as a victor rather than a loser. Putin doesn't think of himself as a loser and will be desperate to find some way out if he's backed into a corner. If he should do this, we will be living in a new world. How the US and

its Western allies will respond is not certain. A lot would depend on what is targeted by the nuclear weapon. He could use a "demonstration bomb," just blow up something in the forest or in the Black Sea. He could hit a military target. He could hit a city. Last week, he said Truman dropping the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were his precedent. The bomb the Americans dropped on Hiroshima killed 140,000 people. So a nuclear strike on Kyiv with a tactical nuclear weapon, that could deliver the same blast. 15 kilotons, like the Hiroshima bomb, could kill quite a lot of people. What would the response be to that? I believe Washington has been working through a whole menu of options.

IS A NUCLEAR RESPONSE ON THAT MENU?

Washington would say everything is on the table. But a nuclear response seems to me to be highly unlikely, and I would say ill-considered, since the question would then be how Putin would respond in turn. You have bad options and worse options, no good options. And that's why there's such an intense effort now to persuade Putin that this is a really bad idea, including for him, for his country, for the world. He's got to figure this out for himself, in terms of both what the US and the West would do in response, and also advice I'm hoping he's getting from some of the people he trusts more, like China.

IN AN INTERVIEW WITH DER SPIEGEL A FEW MONTHS AGO, YOU SAID "WE WILL HAVE TO END THE WAR WITH THE DEMON," AND THE EXAMPLES YOU BROUGHT WERE HOW ROOSEVELT AND CHURCHILL SAT DOWN WITH STALIN, AND NIXON WITH MAO. HOW WOULD THAT KIND OF 'DEAL WITH THE DEVIL' LOOK WHEN IT COMES TO PUTIN?

If you read President Biden's comments, they're clearly thinking about off-ramps. That's the way Washington thinks. My optimistic scenario would be that in the next month or two, one gets to a stalemate, probably somewhere along the

current Line of Control, probably with Ukraine controlling most of what's west of the of the Dnieper and the other river near Kherson, and Russia controlling most of the other side. The fighting declines to a low level, like what happened in 2016 - 2020 in the so-called independent republics of Donetsk and Lugansk. And at that stage, Putin thinks he has enough to declare that he's been successful. He's got his land bridge to Crimea, he's taken in some additional territory. So he says he's been successful. And we say we are successful, because we say Ukraine survived as a free and independent country, it's not giving up any of its territory. It claims it's going to recover those territories at some point, but not today. And Ukraine will focus on building a successful country, which will be extremely hard to do, but for which they have a moral claim on the West for major financial support. My good news story would be that this continues for a year or two or five. I remember the story of East and West Germany, West Germany never gave up its claim to East Germany, it just showed what a free society could do, relative to a Soviet-controlled autocracy, or North Korea and South Korea, or more relevant for Ukraine, the Baltics. Putin's playbook in Ukraine looks to me taken directly from the communist playbook. In the Baltics, at the end of World War Two, they held sham referenda, they annexed Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia and called them Republics of the Soviet Union. The West did not recognize the Soviet Union's claim to those territories, and, in time, they emerged as free states. That can take a long time, unfortunately, but since the alternative would be something even worse, I would regard that as an optimistic scenario.

UKRAINIANS CAN LOOK NORTH AT FINLAND, AND HOW THEY PROBABLY AREN'T GETTING KARELIA BACK. OR THEY CAN ALSO LOOK AT SOUTH AND NORTH KOREA, WHERE, DESPITE ALL THE ADVANCEMENTS OF ONE, THE OTHER IS STILL NOT WILLING TO REJOIN. HOW WOULD THE WEST SELL THAT SCENARIO TO UKRAINE?

Ultimately, it'll be up to Zelensky and his colleagues to conclude they are at a point that this is to their maximum advantage. How they make that calculation will be substantially affected by what happens on the battlefield. If things grind to a stalemate, we'll see. And if Putin is credible, in striking infrastructure and civilian targets, all still short of nuclear. And if this emerged as the prevailing view in Europe, which it is, though not for the Baltics, not for Poland.

I'm searching for a silver lining here. Because, generally, I think the more likely outcome is that we continue stumbling down this road to something that could be really quite catastrophic. If Putin conducted a nuclear strike, especially on a military target, in a way that had a meaningful impact, then there's nothing preventing him doing a second or third, or fourth. He has 1900 tactical nuclear weapons. There's enough to go around when he's already guilty of striking and killing people with one, unless we find a way globally to respond, so he feels he made a mistake. But again, he's not given to recognizing mistakes.

That said, Putin is rational. And serious. But he entertains a number of ideas that are unrealistic, one of which is that Ukraine doesn't exist as a country. We can now see there's a very vigorous number of people who think of them-



The impact of what Putin has done to Russia, its place in the world, its economy over the longer run, its status as a European country, is huge

selves as Ukrainians, and are prepared to fight for it. He's been very surprised by that. Any serious person in the world will say, "you survived, you even stole a little territory, but at what price? This was a huge strategic blunder." The impact of what he's done to Russia, its place in the world, its economy over the longer run, its status as a European country, is huge. The strategic-thinking Russians, of whom there are many within the Putin regime, and anybody looking at this with clear eyes, would say, "if you're calling this a 'victory,' you'd better hope you don't have another 'victory.'"

THAT MORAL CLAIM YOU MENTIONED EARLIER, THAT UKRAINE WILL HAVE ON THE REST OF THE WEST, DOES IT INCLUDE THEIR NATO BID?

I believe the answer is no. NATO has established a set of criteria for NATO membership that Ukraine hasn't met, and won't be able to meet for some years. And since NATO membership requires a unanimous vote among the NATO members, I think the likelihood the members would vote for it is very low. It is unrealistic at this point, partly because of the ongoing conflict, partly because they don't have a government that functions other than as a war government. They are going to have to try to build a government that can run a society and an economy, something that Ukraine was unable to do successfully before. Before Putin got there, Ukraine was not doing very well. If you look at the numbers of all the former Soviet states that emerged after the disappearance of the Soviet Union, only one had per capita income less than it was when in the Soviet Union: Ukraine. They've had a lot of internal problems and they have a lot of work to do in building their country. But if they can be half as successful in building their country as they have been in defeating Putin's attempt to erase Ukraine from the map, they'll do pretty amazing stuff. I'm a believer. And I would say they certainly are.

We'll see. With respect to the EU, there will be a faster track. And I think that one should be worked on. They'll have powerful claims to have some equivalent of what is always called the Marshall Plan, very substantial financial assistance. Currently, they are financially a basket case, I think they get \$5 or 6 billion a month, simply to pay the bills for the West. Unless the West comes forward with financial assistance, both for survival and for rebuilding the country, they don't have much of a chance. We all have a stake in this.

Modern Security Dilemma: Georgian Polyhedron. Part 2

ANALYSIS BY VICTOR KIPANI,
CHAIRMAN OF GEOCASE

Mutual defense agreements (see Part I) may also be considered one of the facets of Georgian security. We have extensively discussed their practical benefit and acceptability in the past and now, we will only limit ourselves to discussing its yet another facet.

Discussions of late cursively touch upon a possibility of a neutral status for Georgia. The discussion of this issue as one of possible options of the security system is not only superficial, but also politically loaded. Even more, the word "neutrality" is associated with a particular geopolitical and foreign course of the country, which, in our view, is incorrect and represents an attempt to avoid a deep consideration of the problem.

We will consciously avoid detailing the issue of neutrality. We think that the thematic discussion of this issue requires a calm, solemn and unbiased environment. However, since we are talking about the Georgian polyhedron in terms of security dilemma, we will still outline several aspects in the form of (rhetorical) questions alone for, at least, facilitating further argumentation.

For example, one of the aspects necessary to discuss is how relevant (in the context of specificity of current international relations) the word "neutrality" is to the current reality? Apart from sounding unpleasant to the ear, what is its practical and real substance in the conditions of interdependence and interconnection of the current world? Even more, in case of desire to behave "neutrally," what is the mechanism of realizing this desire? We do not talk here about a mere declaration of the status, the creation of a political-legal fiction, but about ensuring tangible (not nominal) and international guarantee. Does the existing environment create a true space for "neutrality" when "authenti-



Image source: ssg.gov.ge

cally" neutral countries are either the echo of historical legacy or the result of World War II? Let us reiterate: we limit ourselves here to posing questions alone, although raising a proper question already means a job half done.

Let's go back to the term in this brief insert about the aforementioned particular facet. Instead of largely fictional "neutrality," would a "military nonalignment" not denote the particular essence better? In terms of minimizing threats, is the nonalignment of the country with the parties to the conflict that particular substance which "neutrals" are looking for? And if this is so, then, we think, it is a topic for real discussion. Especially given that the war waged as a result of Russia's aggression against Ukraine has exposed a so-called course of balancing in foreign policies of a number of coun-

tries: domination of political-economic-humanitarian agenda by maximally minimizing a military component. Again, this is proposed as a discussion topic alone in the context of Georgian security dilemma.

And last but not least. One should take into account that when discussing the possibility of a "neutrality" formula, we should bear in mind that a guarantor of neutral status is the country in question itself, its security system and defense forces. Without this firm prerequisite and a high degree, sustained material and financial provision, neutrality, be it self-declared or recognized by others, may be a mere form without substance. It is a fact that in any case, this or other aspects require a comprehensive and competent consideration for drawing out correct conclusions.

SECURITY DILEMMA: CONTINUED

When considering security issues, one can often hear accusations that the discussion of the proposed theme by invoking realism is devoid of norms of ethics and humanism. This accusation is, of course, unfounded, while the link between realism and ethics has been discussed in our previous publication.

The main message here is not that when discussing the problem, we should ignore moral and ethics, but that the preoccupation with moral-ideologized teachings must not hinder one from correctly seeing and solving the problem itself. This is even more topical in Georgia's case, where excess "isms" in the field of security must not cause us to waste scarce resources and precious time unproductively and must not be used only for

gaining the sympathy of voters and the "hearts" of the partisan media. In light of the existing and future challenges, romanticizing, so characteristic for the "Georgian political school," with excessive nostalgia for the past and camouflaging present and future inactivity or inability, will not be handy either. This is nothing but a clumsy attempt to mask the absence of preventive and proactive politics.

To put it simply: artificially pitting realism against ethics in foreign policy, and particularly in a modern security environment, is extremely counterproductive. It is unacceptable. We do not say that in its approach to threats, the Georgian state should totally ignore ethics and moral. No, of course not. Nor do we call for indulging in excessive geopolitical empathy, but we suggest using it proportionally, which, as a rule, is very beneficial for navigating in foreign and security realm.

To put it even simpler: politics that rests on useless idealism and excessive theorizing does not allow for comprehensive discussion of numerous topics of international and foreign policy, including of issues such as modern specifics of relationship of large and small countries. As a result, Georgian politics, in terms of its tangible benefit, real purpose and necessary result, will only be harmed from a viewpoint of practicality. We should remind ourselves, time and again, that the space between expediency and universal virtue in attaining the goal is narrowing in the conditions of modern security dilemma: rationality of expedience is increasingly narrowing the space of operation based on values alone.

A separate problem is how we should try to manage, at least, with relative success, the challenges of the modern security dilemma; what methods or approaches should we apply to adapt or adjust to this extraordinary and hardly predictable environment so that to maintain our main national priority, the country's security, as intact as possible. We will discuss that with our reader more in future.

BUSINESS

Submission of Greening Project Now to be Mandatory Countrywide for Construction Permit

The Draft Spatial Planning, Architectural, and Construction Activity Code submitted to the Sector Economy and Economic Policy Committee with the first reading establishes the mandatory submission of a greening project in order to receive a construction permit, countrywide.

The Draft was submitted by Maia Bitadze, who then spoke about the essence of the initiative: "The rule has been successfully applied in Tbilisi since 2019. The submitted change envisages the recognition of greening projects as an integral part of the construction permit, namely, it regulates that the construction design shall be enclosed with a spatial arrangement and greening project planned for the construction site, which may also envisage the planting and maintenance of the area," she stated.

The Committee discussed yet another Draft Spatial Planning, Architectural and Construction Activity Code submitted by the Deputy Economic Minister, Nino Enukidze, with the first reading.

The Draft simplifies the administrative proceeding related to the modification of urban construction plans approved without the concept, namely, a person wishing to modify the planning on their land plot will have the opportunity to modify the urban construction plan without the obligation to develop a concept for the whole settlement.

The Committee approved both Drafts.



The Importance and Benefits of Diagonal Cumulation between Georgia, Türkiye and the EU



The Free Trade Agreement has allowed Georgia to benefit from the Diagonal Cumulation between Georgia, Türkiye, and The European Union.

The Diagonal Cumulation mentioned in the title functions between more than two countries. As Georgia, Türkiye and the EU have established free trade regimes and recognize the same rules of origin for processing non-preferential raw materials, goods originating in Georgia will receive the benefits of preferential trade when imported into Türkiye or the EU. Further, goods originating in Türkiye and the European Union may be used to produce a final product in Georgia, and this product will be considered to have originated in Georgia. Note, this agreement applies only to non-agricultural products.

The USAID Economic Security Program and the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia conducted research together with the development consulting company PMCG and revealed the most promising sectors and value chains that can benefit from the arrangement.

To discuss this important and complex matter, we reached out to Deputy Min-

ister of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia Genadi Arveladze, research team leader and Sector Lead in Trade Policy at PMCG Mikheil Janelidze, and Georgian business representative and Manager of the Georgian Construction Materials Cluster Mariam Tsaishvili.

Arveladze told us that from April 29, 2021, due to the introduction of the diagonal cumulation between Georgia, the European Union, and Türkiye, it is possible to introduce export products made in Georgia using industrial raw materials and intermediate products imported from Türkiye to the European Union market under the free trade regime.

Accordingly, the diagonal cumulation creates many opportunities for those companies that want to export the products created using the attractive business environment of Georgia, and Türkiye raw materials, to the European Union with zero import tariff. This will be an additional incentive for investors to choose Georgia when looking for a location, even in cases when the import of raw materials and intermediate products becomes necessary. This will increase both investments and exports in general, and with the European Union in particular.

With the implementation of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) with the European Union, a consumer market with a high purchasing power of 500 million with a free trade regime was opened for Georgian products.

If we look at the post-implementation results of the DCFTA, we can see that it has brought significant positive results. In particular, as a result of the successful agreement with the EU, this union represents a growing export market for Georgian products. Before the implementation of the DCFTA, Georgia origin products (export without re-export) constituted 68% of total export to the EU. Now this figure has increased by 21% and stands at an impressive 89%.

Arveladze also talked to us about how Georgia has made significant progress in the process of legislative convergence on trade and trade-related issues with the European Union. In general, based on the obligations stipulated by the DCFTA, according to today's data, Georgian legislation was approximated to 60% of the EU legal acts envisaged by the DCFTA.

As a result, more and more harmless and safe products are appearing on the Georgian market. The quality of infra-

structure is being consistently improved, the competitiveness of Georgian export products is on the rise and demand is up in the European Union and other countries, which contributes to the growth of exports. The customs procedures are further simplified, and are approximated to the customs legislation of the European Union. It is also worth noting that, this year, the EU procurement market was opened for local companies, which means that Georgian companies were given the opportunity to participate in tenders announced by the central bodies of the European Union.

Genadi Arveladze emphasized the importance of the forum on "Diagonal Cumulation between Georgia, Türkiye and the European Union - Trade and Investment Opportunities" held on September 9 with the support of the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia, the USAID Economic Security Program and other international and local partners. B2B meetings between representatives of the private sector of Georgia and Türkiye were also held within the frames of the forum.

Arveladze also mentioned that Georgia is one of the leading countries in the world in terms of ease of doing business.

"Currently, products of Georgian origin can enter 1/3 of the world's consumer market under the free trade regime, which represents a consumer market of 2.3 billion. Considering that operating costs in Georgia are significantly lower, we can say that investors in Georgia can easily and competitively gain access to the desired markets. Along with this, Georgia offers additional incentive mechanisms to investors in the manufacturing sector."

This supports what Mikheil Janelidze said in a discussion of the research 'Investment and Export Promotion Via Diagonal Cumulation Between Georgia, Türkiye and the European Union.' He mentioned how, as part of the research, the team studied production factors of the selected products and considered the advantages and benefits Georgia provides for Türkiye: Factors like electricity, human capital, and taxes.

"Based on these factors, many Turkish companies have already moved their production to Georgia, mainly in the direction of textiles," Janelidze noted.

"Other sectors can follow this example and transfer their production to Georgia, which will be mutually beneficial, both for Türkiye, which will be able to increase their production and make it more efficient, and for Georgia, which means additional direct foreign investments, new knowledge, and technologies in production, inflows, new jobs, and increased exports."

Janelidze added that the private sector can use the research results to develop specific business plans and determine the profitability of manufacturing products in Georgia.

He also lists value chains, industries and possible final products that, according to complex quantitative and qualitative research, have the greatest potential, such as plastic, aluminum, and cotton value chains. The study provides example products such as packaging materials, personal protective equipment (PPE), furniture, textiles, clothing, footwear, building materials, bicycles, vehicle parts, and household electronic appliances.

The research results match Mariam Tsaishvili's personal forecast that she based on the existing business environment. In her opinion, as manager of the Georgian Construction Materials Cluster, in the first stage of diagonal cumulation, plastic and aluminum will be in highest demand.

"Today, Georgia does produce quality products, unfortunately," Tsaishvili notes. "Quantity is not as high as it can be, but as a result of the Diagonal Cumulation, entering the EU market will contribute to improving the quality of Georgian enterprise. Bringing Georgian products into compliance with European Union standards and, accordingly, increasing competitiveness, will, in turn, ensure business stability and the perspective of the country's economic development."

While discussing the benefits of Diagonal Cumulation between Georgia, Türkiye, and the EU, Tsaishvili says that after receiving the certificate of origin, companies will enjoy tax benefits, and the production price will become even more competitive in the international market.

"This will encourage the diversification of manufactured products, and, in the long run, it will contribute to the creation of new Turkish-Georgian enterprises."

New Regulations for the Business Sector: Photo and Video Surveillance

PROVIDED FOR GT BY
MG LAW OFFICE

Pursuant to new regulations in Georgia, by June 1, 2023, certain companies must ensure compliance with the requirements relating to photo and video surveillance of their facilities. Particularly, on March 2, 2022, the Government of Georgia adopted a new No. 101 ordinance "on the approval of the technical features of automatic photo and/or video equipment and the regulations of their operation, as well as the list of buildings and structures on the outer perimeter of which automatic photo and/or video equipment must be placed/installed" (the "Ordinance").

The Ordinance entered into force on the date of its signing, but the Ordinance gives the companies a transition period to ensure the placement/installation of a video surveillance system (The "System") with specified requirements in accordance with the Ordinance.

The objective of this Ordinance is to prevent crime, protect public safety and property, and provide legal control of matters pertaining to the installation of the System.

TO WHOM DOES THE ORDINANCE APPLY?

The Ordinance specifies the list of real properties on which automatic photo/video equipment must be installed.

The Ordinance requires the System to be implemented if:

(i) The activities conducted in the real property are, inter alia, wholesale trade, retail trade, accommodation facilities (including hotels and motels), food and beverage services (including restaurants, bars and so on); and

(ii) the taxable turnover of the mentioned activity subject to value added tax ("VAT") exceeds 500,000 GEL over a continuous 12-month period.

Furthermore, regardless of the VAT-taxable turnover of the respective activity, a company is required to install the System if it conducts any of the following activities listed in the Ordinance, for instance: inpatient medical facility, cigar bar, market/fair, shopping center, an operator of lotteries, games of chance and other prize games, gas station or gas station complex, authorized pharmacy, micro-financing organization, currency exchange operator, lending entity, general educational institution, etc.

INSTALLATION OF THE SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM

The Ordinance requires at least two video cameras to be installed on the outside of the property at the main entrance, but if the property has a spare entrance, one video camera must also be installed at each spare entrance.

The video cameras must be strategically positioned so that anyone entering or leaving the area may be identified.

Moreover, the owner of the real property is obligated to place an adequate warning notice in a visible area in accordance with the legislation of Georgia.

REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORITY

The Surveillance System's compliance with the regulations will be checked and approved by a representative authority, by the 112 Public Safety Command Center (the "Center"). Any company that is required to install the Surveillance System must also register on the following portal: www.camera.mia.gov.ge (the "Portal").

The Company shall submit an application to the Center through the Portal. Upon submission, the act of installation (the "Act") certifying the conformity of the installed System with the requirements of the Ordinance is issued.



Furthermore, the Center has the authority to check and verify by its own decision or by a statement submitted by a regulatory body, whether the System is installed in compliance with the applicable law, at any time.

INFORMATION GAINED FROM THE SYSTEM

Pursuant to the Ordinance, the owner of the property is obligated to make continuous and uninterrupted video recordings with the System. The information obtained as a result of the recording, along with other relevant records, for not less than 30 days and not more than 6 months, must be stored in a secure location and presented to the Center upon justifiable request.

It is essential to emphasize that saving,

storing, or processing the gained information shall be done in compliance with the rules regarding the protection of personal data.

CONSEQUENCES

Non-compliance of the System with the Ordinance is an administrative offense, with the consequence that a person will be issued a warning. Failure to resolve the issue within 30 days after getting the notice is also an administrative offense punishable by a fine. The fine is 3,000 GEL at the time of publishing this article.

Overall, the new Ordinance stipulates new obligations for the business sector, and each company to whom the Ordinance applies is obligated to install the System no later than 1 June, 2023.

ISET ECONOMIC INDICATORS

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ISET GDP Forecast | In the Eye of the Storm: Driven by Strong External Sector, Economy Expected to Show Double-Digit Growth in 2022

BY DAVIT KESHELAVA
AND YASYA BABYCH

ISET-PI has updated its real GDP growth forecast for the third and fourth quarters of 2022. Here are the highlights of this month's release:

HIGHLIGHTS

- ISET-PI's forecast of real GDP growth for the third quarter (July-September) of 2022 decreased by 0.1 ppt to 16.4% compared to the last month's prediction. The third estimate for the fourth quarter (October-December) growth forecast remains unchanged at 17.3%.

- Geostat recently published its preliminary estimate of real GDP growth for August 2022, which currently stands at 10.5%. As a result, the real GDP growth estimate for the first eight months of 2020 is 10.3%.

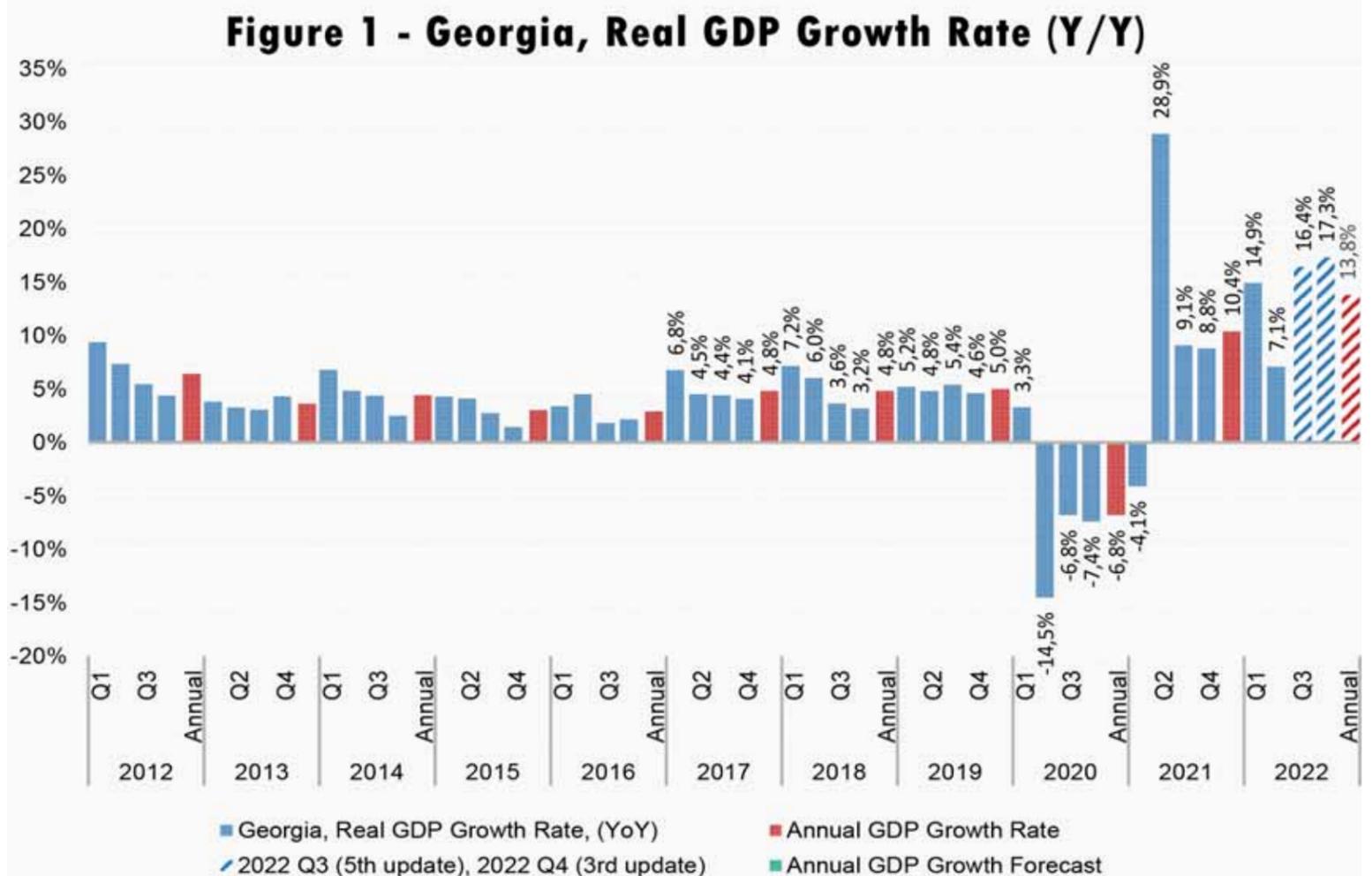
- Based on August's data, we expect annual growth in 2022 to be 13.8%. This number is most likely overestimated by the model at the current point in time. This is due to the fact that war, sanctions and large-scale in-migration had not had relevant analogues in the Georgian data in the past.

VARIABLES BEHIND THE GDP GROWTH FORECAST:

Merchandise Trade

In August, Georgia's exports experienced an 40.4% annual growth. This was mainly driven by increased export/re-export of motor cars (increased by 167% YoY, which is 22.4 ppts), cigars, cheroots, cigarillos and cigarettes (increased by 584% YoY, 2.7 ppts), electrical energy (increased by 7689 times, 2.7 ppts), copper ores and concentrates (increased by 16% YoY, 2.6 ppts), and mineral or chemical fertilizers, nitrogenous (increased by 291% YoY, 2.2 ppts), wine of fresh grapes (increased by 26% YoY, 1.6 ppts), precious metal ores and concentrates (increased by 182% YoY, 1.6 ppts), live bovine animals (increased by 95% YoY, 1.1 ppts), and waters, mineral and aerated waters, containing added sugar (increased by 53% YoY, 1.0 ppts). In contrast, exports of ferro-alloys (decreased by 53% YoY, -5.9 ppts), hazelnuts and other nuts (decreased by 63% YoY, -1.6 ppts), and waters, natural or artificial mineral and aerated waters, not containing added sugar (decreased by 13% YoY, -0.5 ppts) experienced annual decline. It is notable that dramatic increase of the goods export is mainly a reflection of higher prices, as the volume of exports increased more modestly, by 17.3% yearly.

During this period, the import of goods increased by 39.7%, driven by an increased import/re-import of petroleum (mostly driven by higher prices), motor cars, precious metal ores and concentrates, and copper ores and concentrates. Furthermore, the volume of imports increased by 19% yearly. Consequently, the trade deficit widened by 39.3% yearly, and amounted to 743.1 million USD. Overall, trade related variables still had



a small positive contribution to the GDP growth forecast.

Remittances

In August, remittances increased by 63.1% annually and reached 334.3 million USD. The main contributors to this increase were Russian Federation (contributing to over half of the overall growth, 35.8 ppts), Armenia (7.7 ppts), Kyrgyzstan (5.7 ppts), Belarus (3.9 ppts), Kazakhstan (3.7 ppts), Germany (2.5 ppts), USA (2.2 ppts), Italy (1.4 ppts), Tajikistan (1.4 ppts), and UK (1.1 ppts). Whereas money inflows decreased from Ukraine (3.7 ppts), Azerbaijan (1.1 ppts), Moldova (0.3 ppts), and Greece (0.3 ppts). Overall, the significant increase in remittances flows made a positive contribution to the growth forecast.

Tourism

Tourism arrivals and receipts notably recovered in August of 2022 after a sharp decline in 2020 and a recovery process in 2021. In August, the number of international visitors increased by 178.5% yearly, while the increase in tourist numbers (visitors who spent 24 hours or more in Georgia) amounted to 135.8%. Overall, recovering numbers of visitors and tourists, along with an increase in touristic spending has made a positive contribution to the growth forecast.

Real Effective Exchange Rate (REER)

REER appreciated by 4.6% monthly and 20.2% yearly in August. The Lari

Real Exchange Rate (RER) appreciated monthly with respect to the currencies of the major partner countries - Euro (EUR) (by 2.7%), Russian Ruble (RUB) (by 6.2%), Turkish Lira (TRY) (by 4.9%) and US Dollar (USD) (by 2.8%). Moreover, the GEL/EUR, GEL/USD, and GEL/TRY real exchange rate appreciated (except GEL/RUB, which depreciated by 10.2%) compared to the same month of the previous year by 32.5%, 15.0%, and 46.8% respectively. Overall, REER-related variables had a small positive contribution to the real GDP growth projections.

National and Foreign Currency Deposits

The other group of variables that experienced notable monthly and yearly changes in August and made a small positive contribution to the Q3 and Q4 forecasts, was the volume of National Currency Deposits in commercial banks. The largest yearly increase was observed in National Currency Demand Deposits - 42.1% increase relative to the same month of the previous year. The second largest yearly increase was experienced within National Currency Time Deposits with Maturity Less than 3 Months - a 37.7% increase year-over-year. Indeed, we can see from the forecast that an increase in National Currency Deposits-related variables had a positive contribution to the GDP growth projection.

The annual growth was relatively moderate in the case of Foreign Currency Deposits in commercial banks. Deposit

Dollarization increased by 1.3 ppts (monthly) to 57.4%.

World Prices

The other variables of interest in our growth forecast were Metals Price Index (PMETA) and the Agricultural Raw Materials Index (PRAWM). Metals form a significant share in Georgia's exports, while food and oil are among the main imports. Therefore, a global increase in the price of metal will likely cause improvement to the Georgian economy, whereas an increase in the price of agricultural products will be damaging. In annual terms, metal prices as well as agricultural raw material prices decreased by 12.8% and 6.6% respectively in August. On the balance, adding the PMETA and PRAWM indicators to the model thus decrease the growth forecast for both quarters.

Inflation

In August, the annual inflation of consumer prices amounted to 10.9%, which is notably higher than the targeted 3%. Approximately 4.6 percentage points of CPI inflation were related to higher food prices (this was driven by the hike in food prices worldwide - FAO Food Price Index increased by 7.7% yearly¹). Furthermore, increased fuel prices made a notable positive contribution (1.1 ppts) to the annual inflation measure. The lat-

ter trend is mostly a reflection of significantly increased oil prices on the global market (Euro Brent Spot Price (COP) increased by 42% yearly). However, the same variable decreased by 10.3% monthly. Hence, there are two factors giving us a reason for optimism on inflation: (1) oil prices started to decrease from their peak earlier in the year and (2) GEL exchange rate appreciated against the currencies of the main trading partners. Meanwhile, the measure of core inflation amounted to 7%. Overall, CPI related variables had a slight negative contribution to the GDP forecast.

Our forecasting model is based on the Leading Economic Indicator (LEI) methodology developed by the New Economic School, Moscow, Russia. We have constructed a dynamic model of the Georgian economy, which assumes that all economic variables, including GDP itself, are driven by a small number of factors that can be extracted from the data well before the GDP growth estimates are published. For each quarter, ISET-PI produces five consecutive monthly forecasts (or "vintages"), which increase in precision as time passes. Our first forecast (the 1st vintage) is available around five months before the end of the quarter in question. The last forecast (the 5th vintage) is published in the first month of the next quarter.

¹ However, annual increase in food price index has decreasing trend (June - 23.5%, July - 12.9%, August 7.7%, and September 5.5%)

COP27 and Georgia's Ambitious Goals to Help Combat Climate Change

BY KATIE RUTH DAVIES

The 27th Climate Conference for Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) will take place in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, from 6-18 November. It will be yet another chance for world leaders, politicians, experts, and many other different groups among international society to discuss climate crisis on a global level.

In a world faced with a growing energy crisis, record greenhouse gas concentrations and increasingly extreme weather events, COP27 aims to build on the outcomes of COP26 to deliver action on an array of issues critical to tackling the climate emergency, from urgently reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, building resilience and adapting to the inevitable impacts of climate change, to delivering on the commitments to finance climate action in developing countries.

Upon approval of the Paris Agreement in 2017, Georgia joined 191 Parties and committed to contribute towards the goals of the Paris Agreement: Among others, to hold the global average temperature increase well below 2°C, and to pursue efforts to limit it to 1.5°C compared to the pre-industrial level. Under the Paris Agreement, Georgia has a commitment to formulate an "Updated NDC" at least every five years. In addition, Georgia is expected to show progression with regards to emission reduction targets or policies and measures with each update, and to strive for net-zero GHG emissions in the second half of the century.

In 2021, Georgia adopted the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) and submitted it to the Secretariat of the UNFCCC, setting an unconditional climate mitigation target of 35% below the 1990 level of its domestic total GHG emissions by 2030. "Domestic" excludes emissions from land-use, land-use change, and forestry. Georgia has also committed to a target of 50-57% of its total GHG emissions by 2030 compared to 1990, with international support.

In order to ensure fulfilment of the NDC targets, Georgia developed the National Climate Change Strategy 2021-2030 and Climate Action Plan 2021-2023. The Strategy presents climate actions across sectors to deliver the NDC objectives, with the focus on achieving Georgia's climate mitigation targets, while the Action Plan includes detailed measures and investments, roles and responsibilities, output indicators and estimated costs, and sets out the climate change mitigation policy in the following sectors: Energy Generation and Transmission, Energy Consumption in Transport, Energy Consumption in Buildings, Energy Consumption in Industry and Industrial Processes, Agriculture, Waste Management, and Forestry.

"It is positive that Georgia has adopted these key strategic documents: the NDC, Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan to fight climate change," notes the Ambassador of the European Union to Georgia, Pawel Herczynski. "Now, it is important to make sure that these are implemented and that all sectors of the economy contribute to the common objective defined by the NDC. The European Union and Team Europe are happy to support Georgia in reducing its carbon impact through the provision of expertise and investments in sectors such as waste management, water management, climate smart agriculture, sustainable rural development, and energy efficiency. It is also our common responsibility, living in this beautiful country, to improve our behaviors to reduce our carbon impact, and to protect our health and the unique nature around us."

The goal of Georgia's NDC is to support the sustainable and balanced devel-



Pawel Herczynski, Ambassador of the European Union to Georgia

opment of the country, equally taking into consideration climate change, environmental and socio-economic challenges, yet, as Nana Janashia, Executive Director of CENN, points out, "the implementation of NDC objectives is still slow and needs more coordinated and persistent action across all sectors, as well as active climate communication and engagement."

With this in mind, we asked Nino Thandilashvili, Deputy Minister of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia (MEPA), what Georgia's goals will be at this year's COP event.

"At COP27, Georgia will concentrate on promoting the initiatives declared by our country at COP26, as well participating in different working groups and platforms of the conference to enhance Georgia's position," she tells us.

We asked her what expectations Georgia has, and what others have of Georgia.

"COP27's main target will shift from pledging to implementing, now that Article 6 (carbon markets) of the Paris Agreement is complete and operational. The conference will concentrate on goals that clarify support measures for loss and damage from climate catastrophes, make finance flows a reality, and ensure a managed and just transition to an economic model based on low-emission and climate-resilient development," she notes.

"The linking and delivery of climate finance and implementation will be the main challenge and something to look ahead to. Georgia's main priority is to ensure equitable geographical representation within the constituted bodies of the UNFCCC, something which we proposed at COP26," Thandilashvili tells us.

On Georgia's motivation, she says: "Georgia is a member of Eastern European countries group, which is made up of both developed and developing countries. For various reasons, in many UNFCCC mechanisms, this group is under-represented, which makes it problematic for countries like us to be heard."

"However, we believe that efforts cannot be effective unless the perspectives of developing countries in all regions of the world are considered. Therefore, at the COP26 negotiations, Georgia underlined that working groups should take into account the principle of equitable geographical representation."

Maia Tskhavaradze, Head of the Climate Change Division at MEPA, adds to this point.

"The highest priority for us is to ensure 'Equitable Geographical Representation under the Constituted Bodies under the Convention,' and we expect intensive negotiations in this direction at COP27," she notes.

"This item is important not only for Georgia, but for all Eastern Europe and Non Annex 1 (developing) countries. Currently, developing countries of our region are entirely excluded from mem-

bership to the Technical Executive Committee, and we have less access to membership on the Standing Committee on Finance and the Warsaw International Mechanism Executive Committee than the developing countries of every other region. Although we will continue to negotiate to reform these bodies on an ad hoc basis, Georgia believes the only equitable way to prevent such discrimination in the future is to address this issue in an overarching way," she says.

Deputy Minister Thandilashvili notes that Article 6 of the Paris Agreement is also a priority for the Georgian government, as the power of markets can "help Georgia achieve its collective goals under the Paris Agreement."

"At COP26, the parties reached a common vision on carbon market development, with the spirit of establishing robust enabling mechanisms for private sector engagement," she says. "And Georgia already took steps toward this when we signed bilateral agreements with the Swiss Confederation and Japan regarding carbon trading. Georgia is a member of the Article 6.4 Supervisory Body, and there will be a lot of work ahead for us to operationalize this mechanism effectively."

Another area of interest, Thandilashvili tells us, will be climate finances, specifically, such mechanisms as the Guidance of the Green Climate Fund; Review of the Adaptation Fund; Review of the functions of the Standing Committee on Finance; and the composition and working modalities of the Standing Committee on Finance.

Observation of the impacts on Georgia's population of extreme weather events induced by climate change over the last decades has revealed the following vulnerable groups requiring urgent adaptation measures: children and adolescents, women, elderly persons, persons with disabilities, persons with chronic diseases, and eco-migrants displaced as a result of disasters caused by climate change or those who are threatened to be eco-migrated due to climate change.

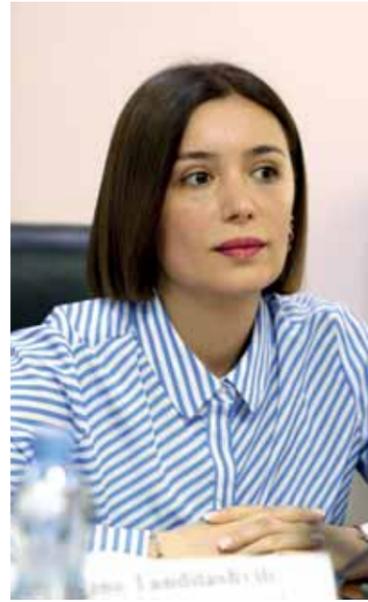
"In order to increase the adaptive capacity of the country, we have started scaling-up the Multi-Hazard Early Warning System and the Use of Climate Information in Georgia, which includes development of hard and soft infrastructure, as well as Data Management for EWS operations," MEPA's Maia Tskhavaradze notes.

We ask Nana Janashia and Nino Thandilashvili how they rate the business, civil and education sector engagement towards climate change processes in Georgia to date.

BUSINESS SECTOR ENGAGEMENT

"The business sector has an enormous role in driving global climate change," Janashia tells us. "Achieving the ambitious, aspirational long-term goals of the Paris Agreement will require a major increase in effort by the business community in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, developing and deploying technologies, delivering finance, building resilience and pursuing adaptation. A growing number of new businesses in the world have focused specifically on green and clean sectors. However, there has been relatively little attention on the crucial relationship between businesses and the government for climate implementation in Georgia. Hence, the business sector's engagement in addressing climate change and promoting green growth is still low in Georgia. Challenges for private sector engagement on the environment include a lack of evidence on environmental and economic outcomes and a lack of benefits to addressing environmental issues e.g., cost savings and reduced risks."

Therefore, she adds, it is "high time" that the government engaged the private sector to mobilize green investment, promote green private sector develop-



Nino Thandilashvili, Deputy Minister of Environmental Protection and Agriculture

ment, and harness skills and knowledge for addressing climate change in Georgia.

"Efforts should include developing clean infrastructure, reducing energy and water use, improving the climate resilience of cities and communities, and supporting natural capital and ecosystems," Janashia concludes.

"Business sector activism towards climate change is increasing," Thandilashvili tells us. "MEPA actively seeks consultations from different stakeholders, among them from the business sector, during the development of different strategic documents or laws and regulations."

EDUCATION SECTOR ENGAGEMENT

"The Georgian education sector's engagement in climate change processes is also growing," Thandilashvili claims. "And it is not limited by the participation of individual experts in climate-related projects or programs, but in some cases even sees institutes or universities getting involved. The introduction of environmental related, including climate change issues, training courses at the school level, as well as the initiation of university climate change programs, have significantly increased the education sector's wish to take part in climate issues."

"Education is a crucial component of climate change mitigation and adaptation. Increasing environmental awareness of and education on the climate crisis can contribute to effective adaptation and mitigation and to achieving climate change objectives," CENN's Janashia emphasizes.

GEORGIA'S TARGETS

By 2030, Georgia plans to mitigate the GHG emissions from the transport sector by 15% from the reference level; Georgia's updated NDC supports the development of low carbon approaches in the building sector, including public and touristic buildings, through encouraging the climate-goals oriented energy efficient technologies and services;

By 2030, Georgia plans to mitigate the GHG emissions from energy generation and transmission sector by 15% from the reference level; Georgia's updated NDC supports the low carbon development approaches of the agriculture sector through encouraging climate smart agriculture and agritourism;

Georgia's updated NDC supports the low carbon development of the industry sector through encouraging climate-friendly innovative technologies and services, in order to achieve 5% of emission limitations comparing to emissions projected by the reference scenario;

Georgia's updated NDC supports the low carbon development of the waste sector through encouraging climate-friendly innovative technologies and services, and through effective implementation of separation practice and principles of circular economy;

By 2030, Georgia intends to increase the carbon capturing capacity through the forestry sector by 10% compared to 2015 level; Georgia's updated NDC sets the implementation period for Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan between 2021 and 2030, through identification of individual mitigation measures contributing to achievement of the sectoral goals.

With its updated NDC, Georgia takes a commitment to fairly contributing to the global efforts against climate change, taking into consideration national circumstances, resources and capacities. Georgia recognizes that it is vital for the world society to share the required efforts against global warming in a fair and equitable manner.

CIVIL SECTOR ENGAGEMENT

"Civilian engagement in climate change processes has been active for a number of years, and it is only increasing," Nino Thandilashvili tells us. "Non-governmental organizations actively participate in climate-related activities, in some cases as opponents to the Ministry, in others as partners," she says.

However, Nana Janashia thinks that "Civil engagement in national climate policy design and formulation in Georgia is rather low due to a multitude of reasons: lack of understanding of climate policy processes, institutions and actors; weak strategies for policy engagement; lack of valid data and inadequate use of evidence; poor communication approaches; and working in an isolated manner and a limited capacity over policy influence. CSO engagement at the local level in the country's regions is even lower."

"The levels of civil society development in Georgia are different," she adds. "Common characteristics of the vast majority of CSOs include poor skills, low competencies and no experience due to insufficient development support and a lack of local initiatives. CSOs in the regions tend to be more focused on service provision and do not engage in policy development, as they lack the necessary skills, incentives and resources to do so. Institutional stability and financial viability continue to be a challenge for CSOs due to limited access to information, networks, qualified professionals and other critical skills and resources."

She notes the work CENN, with the EU-supported project EU-CAP, has been doing to combat these challenges.

"CENN works nationwide and engages with CSOs and other actors at national and local levels in 10 municipalities of the four target regions of Guria, Imereti, Racha-Lechkhumi and Kakheti, to create and empower regional multi-stakeholder Climate Action Groups (CAGs) and launch locally-owned participatory processes for increased climate resilience and improved water security," she tells us.



"Tusheti, our Heritage"



BLOG BY TONY HANMER

This was the title of a competition held in 2022 by the Georgian National Trust, brainchild of long-term Georgia patriot Peter Nasmyth. Invited for my first visit to the Trust's headquarters for the winners' awards ceremony on October 15, I went with great anticipation. The competition

was for residents of the Tusheti province, who are doing the most to preserve and maintain the local heritage, whether this be tangible or intangible.

The National Trust of Georgia, running along similar lines to the one in the UK, which manages and supports heritage there, is housed in a fully renovated old house in Avlabari, Tbilisi. Showing me around, Peter told me that this restoration took over two years of the Trust's ownership of five years to complete, and unearthed many surprises along the way.

"We were scraping back the layers of paint on the walls in the two main-floor rooms, and this revealed not only some lovely stenciled wall designs, but also two Persian fireplaces which had been completely covered up!" he said.

Elsewhere, pottery fragments and worm-holed but still heavy and solid beam sections were left on display. The entire roof, and much else, needed replacing, but all has been done in materials and styles which nicely complement the original design of the house, which is several centuries old. As an example of what can be done to restore old architecture in Georgia, it's a magnificent showpiece for the Trust.

On to the awards, plaques to affix to the houses of the winners. These were as follows:

- Marine Mikeladze, wool/felt and knitting
- Ilia Chrelashvili, architecture
- Mariam Kachidze, Tsova-Tush language and the Tusheti brand (audio/video archive, folklore)
- Levan Mikeladze, cuisine
- Ia Nekervauli, architecture
- Salome Idoidze, architecture
- Pati Mishidze, architecture/museum/photographic archive
- Lili Murtazashvili, wool/felt and museum

Manana Bukurauli, Tsova-Tush poetry
Georgian and Tsova-Tush singing and dancing complemented the theme of the day, along with local food and wine. Old photos from Tusheti, as well as drawings of the local architecture with its unique slate watchtowers, adorned the walls. The guests were mostly Georgians, and Peter hopes that they will have come away with pride in what can be done by them and their country-folk to preserve Georgia's cultural heritage. Building by building, a story, photo and song at a time, this can be done; every such effort makes a difference. People can buy a membership in the Trust to help support its work, as in the UK.

Tusheti almost entirely empty for the winter, its residents leaving for lower locations before the snows close it in; hardly anyone chooses to stay for this long, harsh season of complete isolation. What is also amazing is that its flourishing tourism industry is being developed with hardly any electricity, this being supplied chiefly by solar panels and a few fueled generators. My own visit there a couple of years ago revealed rather scary roads (our unflappable driver had had many years' experience), towers, and landscapes which took in magnificently far, far distances right from the road. Fortress-like villages made all of slate, most beautifully preserved in their original forms, added the human element. But modernity is also threatening to come in and change things, in the form of new highway projects and insensitive modern architecture which will irrevers-



ibly alter the unspoiled look of the province.

Other parts of Georgia will also have similar opportunities to show off their efforts to maintain their cultural heritage. This ancient little country is unique everywhere, in song, dance, costume, architecture, cuisine, landscape, language or dialect, and more.

The National Trust headquarters also has several rooms to rent for heritage-minded individuals, contact details below.

The National Trust of Georgia
33 Mepe Solomon Brdzenis Street 0103, Tbilisi

Board Members: Peter Nasmyth-co-chair; Marine Mizandari-co-chair; Maia Kipshidze, Irakli Kordzakhia, Catherine

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www.facebook.com/hanmer.house.svaneti



CinéDOC Tbilisi Hosts Masterclass with Veteran Filmmakers

BY MICHAEL GODWIN

Georgia has seen an increase in its youth and grassroots independent filmmaking scene. With increased resources and growing interest from film hubs in Europe, more prospective directors have debuted with their own local material. Acting as a conduit for this is CineDOC Tbilisi.

CinéDOC Tbilisi is the first film festival in Georgia to be supported by the Creative Europe Program of the European Union, and is the main international documentary film festival of the Caucasus region. While acting as a connection for experienced filmmakers and university or youth programs, they also host new film screenings, debates, question-and-answer sessions, and master classes with leading figures. Further, CineDOC Tbilisi says they aim “to be a sustainable platform for regional and international documentary filmmakers, showcasing a compelling selection of thought-provoking documentary films.”

The organization held a documentary film editing workshop in the Shota Rustaveli Theater and Film University last week, where a pairing of documentaries was presented for the students and guests. Niels Pagh Andersen and Dana Bunescu, two experienced filmmakers from Denmark and Romania respectively, presented their work, followed by a discussion session. The two



Filmmakers Dana Bunescu (left) and Niels Pagh Andersen (right).
Source: CinéDOC Tbilisi

works, “Evropa” and “Outside,” offered the viewers insight into using various editing and videographic devices to enhance the viewers’ experience.

“Evropa,” directed by Dana Bunescu and Razvan Radulescu, follows the journey of a group of German film students as they tour Ukraine in the wake of the Maidan Revolution. While the original goal of filming the revolution eluded them, they take it upon themselves to film everything they can in hopes of salvaging their project. Traveling to the infamous site of Chernobyl, they find their way changing, with unexpected encounters and new friends made.

The second film, “Outside,” directed by Olha Zhurba, shows the life of a young boy on the streets of Kyiv. At only 13,

Roma took part in the Maidan Revolution, engaging police with rocks and firebombs, with nowhere to call home. As he grows up alongside other wayward youth, the director and Roma share updates in the boy’s life that show someone with their identity taken from them and left outside the frames of normal society.

Following each film, the veteran directors shared insights into the films, which they used to elicit emotions in the audience that elevated the connection to the characters. For “Evropa,” the lengthy shots of the young German students put the viewer in the position of being with them, in the situations themselves, such as when, in one instance, the camper van being used by the students becomes

stuck in the mud near a village. With the amount of footage being shot, the entire process of finding someone to assist them and then pulling the camper out is filmed in a “found footage” presentation. Each frustrating minute of waiting to find the right villager, the equipment, and communicating with no translator or shared language is caught on film. The emotions and constant anticipation is felt by the viewer, sharing the fraught emotions of the boys as they pantomime their wishes to the locals. Finally, in true village fashion, the students are invited to have dinner with the two local residents after their vehicle is recovered. In an evening of revelry and memory sharing, the group shares moments together that many in the audience related to with Georgia’s mirrored traditions of hospitality. As the film closed, viewers shared thoughts, critiques, and technical questions with director Dana Bunescu.

In the following screening, Ukrainian filmmaker Olha Zhurba’s “Outside” is presented with consulting director and seasoned filmmaker Niels Pagh Andersen. The film follows the childhood of a young boy, Roma, who is left in an orphanage in Kyiv. During the Ukrainian Revolution in 2014, 13-year-old Roma slipped out to the front line. Becoming a popular figure amongst the resistance as they battle brutal police attacks, his popular image clashed with his near-homeless life.

Growing up, Roma becomes integrated into the “street life” of petty crime and substance abuse. He settles into living

with his brother, who also exists on the fringes of society and handles their ostracized status in his own gritty way. Roma seems intent on finding some semblance of family, meaning, and place in a world that appears to have robbed him of all these at a young age, replaced by sheer survival and violence.

The film’s use of archival footage, security camera captures, and often black screen imagery bring out an almost criminal existence for the young boy. Scenes of walking in abandoned or remote places, avoiding the lights of police patrols, give viewers an uncensored glimpse into Roma’s harsh life. Additionally, the use of a black screen gives the audience a feeling of Roma never truly being able to connect with the speaker (the director) despite years of communications.

These films, while taking place outside of Georgia, seemed to find a place in the hearts of the viewers. During the discussion periods following both films, the audience included personal stories, scenes from their own lives that had a connection to the events in the films. Clearly, the goals set out by the directors visiting Tbilisi were attained, if not exceeded. The emotions were palpable.

CineDOC Tbilisi, together with the filmmaker guests in both instances, appears to have left the audience both inspired and introspective. True to their mission, CineDOC Tbilisi shows thought-provoking documentary films for the next generation of filmmakers in Georgia.

Bringing Life back to Georgia’s Historic Landmarks: EU and UNDP Assist Parliament to Carry Out Thematic Inquiry



Spectacular Georgian fortresses, castles and towers are the focus of a Parliamentary thematic inquiry that studies the potential to revitalize disused historic monuments. The inquiry looked into ways to bring new life to historic sites, using their cultural value for redeveloping surrounding areas. It explored policy approaches for sustainable protection and preservation of historic heritage and studied the role of national and local authorities, the private sector and civil society in designing conservation and management tools.

Initiated by the Parliamentary Culture Committee with assistance from the European Union (EU) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the inquiry engaged leading Georgian experts and representatives of the public, private and civic sectors.

The results of the four-month exercise were discussed on 18 October, at a presentation and a photo exhibition event attended by representatives of Parliament, Government, civil society, business and international organizations.

Parliament Chairperson Shalva Papuashvili; Chairperson of the Parliament Culture Committee, MP Eliso Bolkvadze; and UNDP Deputy Resident Representative in Georgia Anna Chernyshova addressed the participants, and MP Alexander Elisashvili and invited expert Tatia Ghvineria presented key findings and recommendations.

Following this discussion, the final report of the thematic inquiry will be published at the end of October.

“Every inch of the Georgian soil is filled with ancient history dating back thousand years,” Chernyshova noted. “Some key cultural landmarks already make

Georgia stand out globally and attract millions of tourists a year. Some others require restoration and preservation for generations to come. Parliament has a significant role and effective mechanisms to ensure that economic and redevelopment initiatives associated with historic heritage help protect and conserve priceless landmarks and raise public awareness about their value.”

The Parliament of Georgia introduced thematic inquiries in 2018, aiming to strengthen its oversight function and engage civil society, academic research institutions and expert communities in parliamentary activities. Since then, thematic inquiries covered a range of important areas, including environmental concerns, business development, pandemic response, and cultural heritage. The EU and UNDP are assisting this effort as part of their broader support for parliamentary democracy in Georgia.



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