



Reference Price on Medicine to Be Introduced in 2023

At this week's government meeting, members of the cabinet discussed amendments to the Law of Georgia on Medicines and Pharmaceutical Activities and draft laws pertaining to it.

In particular, reference prices will be introduced in 2023, with the state defining a maximum limit and any charges above it prohibited, a widely used practice worldwide. This reform seeks to increase access to quality medicines and ensure fair prices and a competitive and transparent pharmaceutical market. As preliminarily estimated, reference prices

will reduce medication prices by an average of 40%.

At the initial stage, reference prices will apply to medications for chronic diseases. Gradually, however, the price regulating mechanism will expand to cover other groups of medicines as well.

Notably, on the initiative of the Georgian Government, the Turkish pharmaceutical market opened up in March 2022, resulting in a 60-80% reduction of medication prices in Georgia. Consequently, almost 100,000 Georgian citizens will save up to 200 million GEL. As for the introduction of reference pricing, it will further improve access to medications.

Universal Healthcare Program to Cover Rehabilitation after Stroke, Traumatic Brain and Spinal Cord Injury



Minister of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia, Zurab Azarashvili, after a meeting of the government, stated that the country's Universal Healthcare Program will now cover rehabilitation after stroke, and traumatic brain or spinal cord injury.

As Azarashvili noted, annually, approximately 6000 patients with this diagnosis are referred to medical facilities. The annual program budget of the program is around 11 mln GEL.

Rehabilitation after stroke, traumatic brain, and spinal cord injury will allow patients to timely restore functional

abilities and avoid the development of severe limitations.

The program covers the full rehabilitation course.

"The program is quite comprehensive and therefore very important," Azarashvili noted. "In addition to rehabilitation, the Ministry is working on the introduction of a new model to prevent after-stroke severe complications. In case of a stroke, the emergency medical brigade will react with maximum promptness and, according to indications, will transfer a patient to concrete clinics, where they will be provided with rapid aid. This model will enable us to avoid post-trauma complications requiring rehabilitation or causing severe outcomes for the patient."

Ukraine Latest: Russia on the Retreat from Kherson

BY ANA DUMBADZE

The Russian defense minister, Sergei Shoigu, has ordered the country's troops to leave Ukraine's city of Kherson, the only regional capital captured by Moscow since the invasion began in February.

As details of Russian troop movements remain unclear, some Ukrainian senior officials cautioned against celebrating too soon until a fuller picture of the situation on the ground could be assessed.

The retreat came as Ukrainian forces pressed their advantage on Russian positions on the western side of the Dnipro River, including around the key town of Snihurivka, and after a key Russian-installed official in Kherson was reported to have died in suspicious circumstances.

In televised comments, Russian General Sergei Surovikin, overall commander of the war, said he had recommended the withdrawal of Russian troops from the west bank of the Dnipro River, citing logistical difficulties.

"Kherson cannot be fully supplied and function. Russia did everything possible to ensure the evacuation of the inhabitants of Kherson," Surovikin said.

"We will save the lives of our soldiers and the fighting capacity of our units. Keeping them on the right (western) bank is futile. Some of them can be used on other fronts," Surovikin added.

In recent weeks, Russia has been transporting civilians away from Kherson as the Ukrainian troops move ever closer to the Russian-occupied city.

Their retreat marks a major victory for Kyiv in the battle for south-east Ukraine, one that robs Moscow of its biggest military achievement of the war and changes the calculus for both sides as the conflict heads into winter.

By retreating from the city, which sits on the northwestern (right) bank of the Dnipro River close to its Black Sea delta, Russia aims to reinforce its defences on the other side of the river, where it has been building defensive lines for weeks.

As such, Western officials expect that while Ukraine will be able to recapture the Dnipro's north-western bank by the end of November, Russia will be able to hold the other side.

Kherson's recapture will give Kyiv leverage as it lobbies Western governments to step up supplies of arms, ammunition, and financial support.

"It is encouraging to see how the brave Ukrainian forces are able to liberate more Ukrainian territory, the victories, the gains the Ukrainian armed forces are making belongs to the brave, courageous Ukrainian soldiers," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said on Wednesday. "But, of course, the support they receive from the United Kingdom, from



NATO allies and partners is also essential... We will continue to support Ukraine."

US ASKING UKRAINE TO SHOW OPENNESS FOR PEACE TALKS TO CALM FEARS OF LONG WAR

The Biden administration is said to be quietly encouraging Ukraine to publicly show a willingness for negotiations with Russia in order to calm fears in some countries over the broader fallout of the grinding war, the Washington Post reported Saturday, citing officials familiar with the developments.

The Biden administration is not pushing Kyiv to actually sit with Putin, but wants to assuage global concerns over the war's impact on the cost of living, the Washington Post noted.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has said repeatedly that his country won't enter talks to end the conflict as long as Russian President Vladimir Putin remains in power.

According to the report, while Washington is not trying to persuade Ukraine to open negotiations, it hopes to preserve continued support for Kyiv from countries that fear the consequences of a lengthy war.

Officials said Washington agrees with Ukrainian officials that Putin is not serious about negotiations, but Zelensky's ban on holding talks has worried some countries in Europe, Africa and Latin America that are feeling the impact of the war through rising food and fuel costs.

In the US, rising inflation has been tied to the war, according to the report.

Polls have shown that support to continue financing Ukraine's war effort is dropping among Republicans in Washington, and midterm elections this week could result in pushback against further aid packages that have already amounted

to over \$18 billion since the war started in February.

A survey published Thursday by the Wall Street Journal found that 48% of Republicans think the US is doing "too much" to help Ukraine, compare to just 6% in March.

Some progressive Democrats have also called for diplomacy to avert a drawn-out conflict.

National security adviser Jake Sullivan was in Kyiv on Friday, where he declared that the administration intends "to ensure that the resources are there as necessary and that we'll get votes from both sides of the aisle to make that happen."

He also placed responsibility for ending the war with Moscow, saying "Russia could choose to end it by ceasing its occupation of Ukraine, and that's precisely what it should do from our perspective."

A spokesperson for Zelensky did not respond to a Washington Post request for comment, while a US State Department spokesperson said: "Actions speak louder than words. If Russia is ready for negotiation, it should stop its bombs and missiles and withdraw its forces from Ukraine."

"The Kremlin continues to escalate this war," the spokesperson said. "The Kremlin has demonstrated its unwillingness to seriously engage in negotiations since even before it launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine."

When Putin annexed some occupied Ukrainian territory in September, Zelensky said he will only negotiate with a new Russian president.

And his presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak warned Friday: "Any 'concessions' to Putin today — a deal with the Devil. You won't like its price."

"If Russia wins, we will get a period of chaos: flowering of tyranny, wars, genocides, nuclear races," he said, according to the Post.

Wanderlust Magazine Names Georgia as Most Desirable Emerging Destination 2022



Wanderlust, the UK's leading travel magazine, has named Georgia as the "Most Desirable Emerging Destination 2022."

This year, the magazine asked its globe-trotting readers to name the places, people, and travel brands that most captured their imagination.

As noted in the results published by Wanderlust, Georgia was voted the most desirable emerging destination in the world.

"We at Wanderlust have had Georgia on our radar for a while now, as we've explored its Caucasus mountains, Black Sea beaches, and thriving wine scene. In fact, archaeologists have even traced the world's first wine

creation back to 6,000BC Georgia. Of course, we can't forget its historical capital Tbilisi, with its eclectic mix of architecture reflecting the city's complex past. Georgia is certainly a rising star in travel, and we're sure it's going to shine brightly," the magazine notes.

Georgian Ambassador to Great Britain Sophie Katsarava and representatives of the Georgian national tourism administration collected the prize at the Wanderlust Travel Award.

Wanderlust helps readers plan trips by sharing information about destinations through the site. In social networks, Wanderlust has up to 200 thousand subscribers, and each of their articles is read by up to 100,000 people.



General Sergey Surovikin (left) and Russian Minister of Defense Sergei Shoigu (right). Source: Russian Defense Ministry / TASS

BY MICHAEL GODWIN

The popular 1988 song “Мы Уходим!”, in English meaning “we’re leaving,” by the Russian band Kaskad is a classic that references the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. After a brutal 9-year war, the Kremlin’s troops were forced to abandon the Middle Eastern country with little to show for their bloody struggle. It is also a succinct framing of the Kremlin’s recent announcement to leave the only regional capitol they have captured since the launch of their “special military operation” in Ukraine.

On the evening of November 9, a status meeting was held between General Sergey Surovikin, supreme commander of all Russian and pro-Russian forces involved in the “Special Military Operation” in Ukraine, and the Minister of Defense Sergei Shoigu. While Surovikin explained that the situation was “stable” on the front, he also conceded that things

were not tenable in the southern front. After his presentation, the two senior officers agreed to the decision to withdraw their forces from the Kherson city and the right bank of the Dnipro River in Ukraine and fortify their positions on the left bank.

“Kherson cannot be fully supplied and function. Russia did everything possible to ensure the evacuation of the inhabitants of Kherson. Kyiv strikes at the Kakhovskaya hydroelectric power station and creates a threat of flooding of vast territories,” Surovikin said. “It is proposed to take up defensive positions along the left bank of the Dnieper. Keeping a grouping of troops on the right bank is futile.”

According to Surovikin, the Ukrainian troops continue to attack schools, hospitals and civilians in Kherson, who have been evacuated to the other Dnieper bank. Due to the circumstances and problems with the supply of Kherson, the general claims, and the adjacent settlements on the right bank of the Dnieper, it is advisable to organize the defense on the left bank of the river. This deci-

Russia Says “Мы Уходим!” (We’re Leaving) to Kherson

sion will preserve the combat capacity of the troops, he insists.

According to Sergei Shoigu, the defense in Kherson’s direction is stable, but “there are its own peculiarities.” He also agreed with the decision to proceed with the withdrawal of the troops, and the task will reportedly be completed as soon as possible. The two general officers agree to their belief that Kyiv plans to destroy the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant and flood the Dnieper’s surrounding areas, which they say represents a great threat to the Russian army and its people in the region.

Surovikin claimed that from August to October, Ukraine lost more than 9,500 soldiers, including over 300 “foreign

mercenaries.” The losses of the Russian army, he states, are 7 to 8 times less than the losses of the Ukrainian army. Despite this, more than 115,000 will be instructed to leave the area following the order to withdraw. Surovikin says other areas on the front are stable, and claims some areas are targets for small offensives.

It is most likely that the retreat to the left bank of the Dnieper is real, and not a feint as some online have speculated. It is not impossible that Russia may stage a great ruse to engulf the Ukrainian troops, but the situation may not allow for such an opportunity. As such, the key item to watch for is the way the withdrawal is conducted.

Many of these units have not been

rotated out in a long time, and, as Surovikin stated, have been partially or mostly cut off from consistent resupply. Ukraine has launched a long streak of both successful and unsuccessful assaults on Russian positions. Regardless of their outcome from the Ukrainian side, on the Russian side they are sapping supplies, morale, and manpower.

The Russian command has had several days, if not weeks, to plan this withdrawal and left bank fortification operation. If this is done in a coordinated and organized manner, this will show a very different side than what was witnessed during the haphazard route in Kharkiv. It may also indicate a reform in organizational command structure and morale.

Additionally, a sharp eye should be kept on what attacks Russia will launch to cover up this event. The Kremlin will already have a very difficult time spinning this to be palatable by the Russian public. Massive missile, drone, or another significant offensive (less likely) must be done to wash out the press feed and keep the populace supportive of the “special military operation” in Ukraine.

While what exactly will happen is unknown, Russia’s way of war is telling. The narrative to the Russian people, the finger-pointing in the Kremlin, and the white-washing of the withdrawal should all be closely observed. This is likely the largest Russian retreat in years, if not decades, and as such, the ripples of it will resonate in the military, political, and likely the social spheres.



Russian troops in Kherson city. Source: AP file photo

PM Garibashvili Participates in the Roundtable Discussions Investing in the Future of Energy at the 27th UN Climate Change Conference

Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili took part in the roundtable discussions Investing in the Future of Energy at the 27th UN Climate Change Conference.

The Head of Government addressed the discussions’ participants and spoke about the importance of developing sustainable energy sources.

Garibashvili emphasized that it is important to invest more in alternative-clean, accessible, and sustainable-sources of energy in order to overcome existing challenges.

Global energy demand is growing, he noted, and the ongoing energy crisis has

clearly shown how important it is to diversify energy sources.

According to the Prime Minister, Georgia is actively working and has taken important steps toward transforming the energy sector and ensuring greater investments in the field of clean and sustainable energy.

The current geopolitical context has further brought to the fore Georgia’s key strategic location. Georgia can play an important role in diversifying transport routes and ensuring Europe’s energy supply, the PM claimed.

To this end, work is underway on the idea of installing a submarine power cable in the Black Sea to connect Georgia and

Europe. This strategic project envisages the creation of opportunities for transitioning renewable green energy between the EU and the South Caucasus Region.

Garibashvili emphasized that, through joint efforts, countries can make a historic difference, ensure an energy future, and secure long-term positive changes to global climate change.

The discussion was cochaired by President of the Arab Republic of Egypt Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. The participants also included President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, the leaders of several countries, and representatives of various private companies.



MEPs Reiterate Call on Georgian Gov’t to Release Ex-president Saakashvili & Allow Him to Undergo Proper Medical Treatment Abroad

Members of the European Parliament reiterated their call on the Georgian authorities to release former president Mikheil Saakashvili and allow him to undergo proper medical treatment abroad.

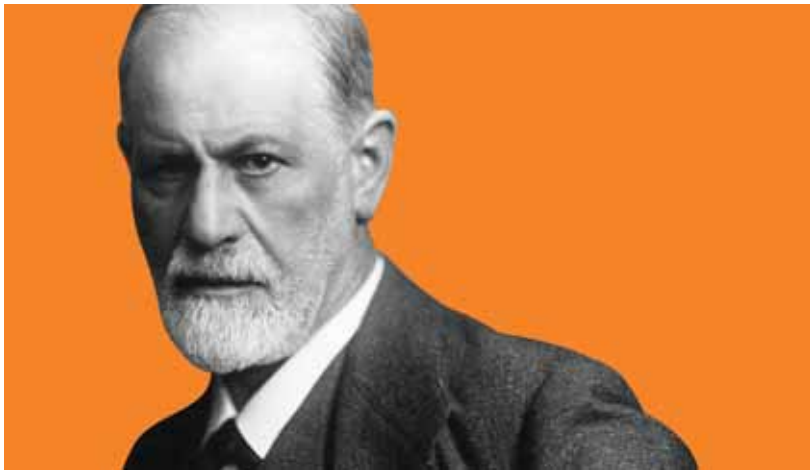
“{We} reiterate our call on the Georgian authorities to release the former president Mikheil Saakashvili and allow him to undergo proper medical treatment abroad on humanitarian grounds and as a means of reducing political polarization,” reads Georgia AA implementation report with com-

promised amendments approved by the Foreign Committee of the European Parliament.

The Foreign Committee of the European Parliament supported the report on the implementation of the EU Association Agreement by Georgia with compromise amendments. The report has 47 supporters, 5 opponents, while 2 MEPs abstained.

For the record, Saakashvili’s lawyer Shalva Khachapuridze stated on a live broadcast of the Georgian Times that the third president of Georgia had been diagnosed with tuberculosis and dementia.

If Grandpa Freud Were Alive



Psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud. Image source: freud.org.uk

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

The esteemed and universally appreciated Sigmund Freud would have called it a real psychoanalytical haven had he come across today's Georgian political spectrum as one of

his subjects of observation. The entire gamut of uttered words and deeds done by this generation of Georgia's more or less noticeable politicians could have served as absolutely invaluable samples to be scrutinized, evaluated and preserved for this nation's posterity and detailed consideration. I wish I could resurrect the great scholar to bring him in and have him do the job. Yes, we need to

have handy the most powerful scientific instrument to finally understand what kind of ideological and philosophical species these people represent. Alas, the scholarly giant and his disciples are no longer around, but his famous school of psychoanalysis is, and we can use its still functional ways and means to study the insights of these people's psyche and the tribulations of their mental depths.

At first sight, it might seem easy to judge their individual images, as well as the entire motley army of Georgia's political "fauna," without any psychological tools, just by their external effects: body language, manner of speaking, not to mention the content and their power of persuasion. I've got to say very frankly, and regretfully too, that in that circle, I cannot name even one figure, either male or female, who I would describe as attractive enough to charm and lead the electorate. All of them look and sound very hard to be believed in and relied on, especially those so desperately jumping out of their skins to grab power.

I would love to give a sign to their local and foreign coaches and sponsors that they have made a very flimsy and doubt-

ful choice in trusting the future of our political life to the current actors in the process, who are quite simply despised by the people. It is obvious that the electorate has become almost allergic to those overly but vainly talking heads, none of whom suspects that people are tired, very tired, of lending them an ear. In the last 30-something years, I have never seen such indifference in our public towards the activity of contemporary Georgian wannabes in their goals to change something and train the collective thinking of our people in the opposite direction.

Notwithstanding the frequent pollings of opinion, I have yet to come across any serious socio-psychological analysis of what is actually happening in the minds of those who give their vote to our future rulers. Values are confused and the entire political process has lost clarity. I have asked around numerous times, and at various occasions, if there is at least one person they trust enough to follow, and the answer I receive is a mere shrugged shoulder and sour face.

In times like this one, my mind always jumps back to 1960s America. People

adore and go for attractive politicians, and I mean attractive in every humanly possible way. The Kennedy syndrome of that time played a crucial role in choosing the next would-be leader of the nation. The American people on both political sides were so overwhelmingly charmed by that image, they wanted the man in the white House as if they were part of one of the greatest Hollywood shooting grounds.

The Georgian political opposition is bending over backwards to see themselves in the capacity of the powers that be, but they are not well enough versed in what kind of a personality it takes to achieve the difficult goal. I am not saying they necessarily need to turn themselves into a 'Kennedy' to start possessing our hearts and minds, I am just hinting at the indispensability of a certain dose of human attractiveness in addition to smarts and love for power, to influence the public opinion so much that they become willing to give their votes to get them there. This is why I'm saying that they might need some Freudian help to straighten out their warped business. It could really help, couldn't it?

Minister of Foreign Affairs of Czech Republic: Putin's Terrible Aggression Showed Us that We should Provide more Help to Georgia



The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, Jan Lipavsky, during his visit to Georgia, stated at a press conference that the relations between Georgia and the Czech Republic can be described as excellent. He added that diplomatic relations between those two countries are based on very strong ties.

He outlined the importance of more support for Georgia and those countries affected by Putin's aggression.

"Putin's terrible aggression has shown us that we need to find more help for Georgia, as well as for the countries affected by Putin's aggression, Georgia and Ukraine, which are striving to join the European Union. Taking this into account, we discussed the situation in occupied Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which we consider to be an integral part of Georgia. I would like to once again express my unwavering support for the territorial integrity of Georgia," Lipavsky said.



Image source: CNN

South Caucasus – A Global Perspective

BY EMIL AVDALIANI

The world is experiencing a gradual shift from unipolarity to multipolarity, and it touches upon the South Caucasus and the three Eurasian powers around it – Iran, Russia, and Turkey. Moreover, the region's geography puts it under the radar in Beijing, which means that there is some level of emerging Chinese influence in the South Caucasus. Furthermore, no story about the geopolitics of this crucial region can be complete without understanding the drivers behind the US' and EU's policies. Therefore, the South Caucasus is witnessing tectonic changes in the global distribution of power.

Indeed, the changing global order affects the South Caucasus in multiple ways. It causes deep fracturing within the region when each of the three small states is associated with one of the regional powers or a distant great power. The process has accelerated over the past several years, with the roots going back to the early 2000s, though it could also be argued that it all began following the implosion of the Soviet Union in 1991. Now the intense fracturing of the South Caucasus prevents the establishing of a comprehensive vision for security and development of the region. And this concerns not only the West and the projects it supports, but also puts limits on Russian and Turkish visions for unencumbered trade and energy flows and unhindered operation of railway, road and pipeline infrastructure. But while the deep fracturing impacts all large players, it is the collective West, due to its geographic distance and resistance from the regional players, that loses the

most. Indeed, despite critical differences Iran, Russia, and Turkey have freer hands in attaining their geopolitical goals in the South Caucasus. Geographic proximity aids profusely, as do close cultural and historic connections. But most of all, the three are motivated by the need to limit the Western presence. This was well evident during and in the wake of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, when Ankara, Moscow, and Tehran were mostly in line regarding the Western interests.

I call this process "regionalization," whereby the three regional powers tend to exclude third powers from the region and deal with security and economic matters of the South Caucasus separately from the established norms which underpinned the liberal world order since 1990s. This concerns methods of peace making, economic and military cooperation. These norms have been formulated in the age of liberal ascendancy and upheld ever since by the collective West. Now they are intensively disputed.

Therefore, the South Caucasus is deeply interrelated with the ongoing changes in the global order. China and the US are entering a period of intense competition, which almost borders on evolving into open rivalry. This is taking shape in a number of ways, but perhaps a crucial area where China challenges the US and which makes it significantly different from the Soviet Union is Beijing's successful rivalry in the technological sphere. Serving as a backbone to the US economic and military dominance, China's growing pace of technological development would impact America's ability to sustain its unrivaled military position in the air and oceans. What also sets Beijing apart from previous challenges to Washington's position is the sheer size

of the Chinese economy. This reverberates across multiple fronts of competition. Chinese money dissolves the Western resistance, bites into vulnerabilities the Eurasian states have, effectively undermines America's preponderance and most of all its ability to garner necessary support from the allies. Furthermore, China's military resurgence directly impacts America's positions in the South China Sea and the larger Indo-Pacific region, where Beijing has invested billions in constructing or operating multiple ports, from the eastern shores of Africa to the countries near India. Dominance over immediate waters would give China the ability to challenge the US in global waters.

This global picture is essential for our understanding of how the South Caucasus is evolving. Perhaps a major takeaway would be that no single power is now able to build an exclusive zone of influence over the region. Talks of Russia's invincibility have proven wrong time and again, and in light of grave defeats in Ukraine, Moscow's position is especially shaky, as Turkey and the re-invigorated collective West make inroads into the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process traditionally dominated by Russia.

But there is also a question of smaller players Azerbaijan is now more confident, Armenia weakened, while Georgia is trying to play a more nuanced diplomatic game with the West and its neighbors. The age of the unipolar moment (Moscow's influence) in the South Caucasus has now ended, ushering in a period of brusque changes which could change the entire geopolitical foundation of Russia's position.

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

An Optimistic EU Ambassador on Georgia's Bright Future



Pawel Herczynski, Ambassador of the European Union to Georgia, meets Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

My message to the Georgians is Gamarjoba. And I'm really happy to be here. I'm really happy to be here in a truly historic moment for Georgia, a moment in which Georgians need to take really decisive steps. And I sincerely hope that those steps will be taken, so that when I leave, in four years' time, Georgia will be much closer to the European Union, and will be very firmly on the path of European integration, which should translate into a more stable and more prosperous Georgia – says Pawel Herczynski*, Ambassador of the European Union to Georgia, appointed in September 2022, his words of optimism kicking off Radio Free Europe's interview with him.

JUST HOW TOUGH IT IS, BEING AN EU AMBASSADOR IN GEORGIA?

Let me say in a very open and straightforward way that I was not offered this job, nor appointed to this post: I specifically applied for this job. I competed with many others who wanted this job, and I consider myself the lucky one, because in the end, I got it.

It has always been my dream to represent the European Union in a place where the European Union really matters, and to do it at a moment when things can really change. So the place and the timing is perfect from my point of view, because I really want to be part of a success story, not to be part of a failure of historic proportions. My problem is that, unfortunately, this does not depend on me, and does not depend on the office that I'm heading: It depends on the Georgian political elite. But the moment is now and everything is possible, and I'm here in order to assist, in order to support, and I sincerely hope that things will develop in a positive way.

gian political elite. But the moment is now and everything is possible, and I'm here in order to assist, in order to support, and I sincerely hope that things will develop in a positive way.

YOUR PREDECESSOR CLAIMED HE BECAME PHYSICALLY EXHAUSTED DURING HIS TIME IN GEORGIA BECAUSE OF HIS INVOLVEMENT IN THE GEORGIAN POLITICAL DEBATE. HIS PREDECESSOR HARDLY EVER SAID ANYTHING. SO... HOW'S YOUR HEALTH SO FAR?

It's excellent. I know that my predecessor really wished Georgia well, and he was doing everything he could to assist Georgia. I only arrived two months ago, and I'm full of energy, full of goodwill. And in excellent spirits. Of course, these have been a very busy two months for me. I've reached out to all or nearly all interlocutors on the side of the government, on the side of the opposition, on the side of civil society and NGOs, and we are now meeting the business community. We have meetings with think-tanks and academia. So it's a very busy period. But I'm really excited. And I'm thrilled that I can be part of this amazing journey that Georgia is on now.

VERY ENVIABLE OPTIMISM, IF I MAY SAY SO. YOU'VE CLEARLY FAMILIARIZED YOURSELF WITH THE ENVIRONMENT HERE, SO, IF I WERE TO ASK YOU FOR ONE WORD TO DESCRIBE THE GEORGIAN POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT, WHAT WORD WOULD YOU CHOOSE?

You're making my job really difficult. Can it be two words? Good, then: Bright future. That's what I have in mind for Georgia.

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS A MAJOR CHALLENGE WHEN IT COMES TO GEORGIA'S EUROPEAN INTEGRATION? WHAT'S THE BIGGEST BARRIER WE HAVE TO OVERCOME?

Maybe you'll be surprised by my answer, but I think that the biggest challenge is to truly believe that this is doable. I have spoken to many interlocutors from the left to the right, and I think that when it comes to strategic objectives, everyone is on precisely the same page.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES MEANING WHAT, IN THIS CASE?

Long-term vision; Georgia's membership in the European Union. Everybody wants that, but with the European perspective

that was granted to Georgia in June, and with the assessment process that will happen next year, the time to act is now. And it's doable. I think it's achievable. The window is open. The moment is now. What is needed is all stakeholders, all the political elite in Georgia, working together in order to deliver on the 12 recommendations.

AND FOR THE TWO MONTHS THAT YOU'VE BEEN HERE, HAVE YOU SEEN ANY PROGRESS ON THOSE?

The work is ongoing in the Georgian parliament. Our message to the ruling party is be open, be transparent, be inclusive. Inclusive, here, does not only mean to send an invitation for others to participate, but also to take into account the proposals that are coming from the opposition. And to the opposition, it means stay engaged, be constructive, take part in the exercise for the common good. What is needed now is for everyone to work together to build bridges across the political divide.

DO YOU SEE THE DESIRE TO DO THAT FROM THE PARTIES INVOLVED?

I think the desire is there. Because, as I said, everyone, when it comes to the

long-term strategic vision, is on exactly the same page. But still, I have to confess it is difficult. And I think it is difficult for everyone to bridge the divisions, to overcome those divisions and to work together for the issue that should be an issue of national priority, European integration.

IS THERE ANY SORT OF STRICT DEADLINE ATTACHED TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS? WHAT HAPPENS IF WE DON'T FULFIL THEM IN TIME?

This is a process. Some recommendations will be easier to fulfill than others. What is very important is that we see a very serious approach, a very responsible approach, and a will on the part of everyone to deliver.

When it comes to the concrete timelines for the 12 recommendations, assessment will be done within the so called enlargement package. When it comes to Georgia, it means that in the spring, the European Commission will assess Georgia's progress in terms of its implementation of reforms. This will be a very heavy exercise, involving all stakeholders. The formal report will most probably be issued around October next year. And then the European leaders, which means the presidents and prime ministers of the 27 Member States, based on the opinion of the Commission, will discuss the issue and maybe suggest further steps. This should happen sometime from October to December next year.

NOT MUCH TIME LEFT, THEN.

I think there's a lot of time left. We are talking one year, and one year is a long time in order to prove that you are serious. And as I said, it is doable, you just need to believe in it. All the Georgian political leaders should believe that this is doable. This is achievable. What is needed? Serious work, constructive work on the part of everyone in order to prove that Georgia's politicians are serious about EU integration. And one year is a long time.

ONE OF YOUR PREDECESSORS WAS COMPLAINING ABOUT THE POLARIZATION IN GEORGIAN SOCIETY EVEN SOME EIGHT YEARS AGO. DO YOU HAVE ANY VISIONARY IDEA, FROM THE EU, ON HOW TO HELP GEORGIA OVERCOME THIS PARTICULAR CHALLENGE?



We are talking about strong state institutions, a clean business life; we are talking about fighting corruption

Georgians need to help themselves overcome this. What I can say is simply a common sense message: Georgia is not the only polarized country, polarization is part of the normal democratic system. Look at the elections in Brazil, a couple of days ago. Look at the United States, look at most of the countries in Europe, look at my own country. There are very often deep divisions among political parties, and these divisions are part of a normal democratic life. The issue is, however, that on some priorities that are of huge importance, that are of national interest, there is a need to bridge those divisions to work together in order to deliver. And Georgia needs this now, today, in the next weeks and months, because of this unique window of opportunity that has been opened with Georgia being granted European perspective. It might not be open forever. The geopolitical situation is very beneficial to Georgia. And it's for Georgians to reap the benefits of this geopolitical situation and to act decisively and to act now. It's for the Georgians to do the homework. No-one can do it for them, and no-one can do it instead of them. It's for the Georgians to demonstrate that they're serious.

ON THE 12 CONDITIONS, AGAIN: DEOLIGARCHIZATION. THE GEORGIAN POLITICAL ACTORS HAVE NO QUALMS ABOUT POINTING FINGERS AT EACH OTHER. COULD WE BRING SOME CLARITY INTO THIS?

This clarity should be worked out between the Georgians. What we in the EU would like to happen not only in Georgia, but in many countries, and especially in countries that have post-Soviet legacy, is a limit to the excessive influence of rich business people on political life. And, actually, this makes sense not only when it comes to democracy, but also when it comes to a proper business environment. Politics and business should be separated. We are talking about strong state institutions; we are talking about a clean business life; we are talking about fighting corruption, high level corruption. And it is, again, for Georgians to decide how they want to approach this issue. And we as the European Union, are not pushing or trying to impose any model or any solution. It is for all the Georgian political parties to decide how they want to tackle this issue.

* Before joining the EU Delegation to Georgia, Ambassador Herczynski was a Managing Director for Common Security and Defense Policy and Crisis Response in the European External Action Service in Brussels. His previous postings include serving as Ambassador of Poland to the EU Political and Security Committee in Brussels, Deputy Permanent Representative of Poland to the United Nations in New York and Deputy Director of the EU Department in the Polish MFA.



Image source: TV1



It's for Georgians to reap the benefits of this geopolitical situation and to act decisively and to act now

Georgia's Cultural War: Georgian National Unity



"Supreme Leader" of the Georgian National Unity group Giorgi Chelidze. (Photo via Reginfo)

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW BY
MICHAEL GODWIN

Many Georgians, particularly the youth and post-Soviet generations, have found themselves at odds with the nation's political scene. Asking anyone in the country will elicit a wide range of symptoms and diagnoses to the socio-political ailments facing Georgia. However, one group has taken a far different position as to what needs to change.

Giorgi Chelidze is the leader of Georgian National Unity, one of the nation's more polarizing organizations. Depending on who is asked, he is either a hero or a villain, a unifying figure or a radical extremist. Despite spending several years in prison, he has taken again to the political sphere to continue his work. GEORGIA TODAY spoke with Chelidze about what motivated him to follow this path, his response to "hate group" accusations, and what his plans for the future include.

AUTHORS NOTE: The opinions expressed in this article are solely the opinions of the individual interviewed and do not represent the positions of the author or GEORGIA TODAY.

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO ESTABLISH THIS ORGANIZATION?

As a result of 70 years of communist rule and 30 years of liberal rule, Georgia was included in the top five dying nations, and it is assumed that by 2050, ethnically, by blood, the number of Georgians will be halved. The country is occupied and not only by Russia. It has territories seized by all four neighbors. Apart from the occupation of Abkhazia and Samachablo by Russia, creeping occupation continues every day. Most recently, Turkey allegedly took six hectares of land from us under the motive of changing a river bed, while it has already seized Artun, Artaan and Oltis and the treacherous government signed off on it.

In 2005, Armenia, captured the Lore-Tashir region and occupied the Arpi National Forest Park and the Hujab monastery complex, on which the previous and current authorities are silent. In 2017, they wanted to officially transfer this land to Armenia, but we exposed and foiled this treacherous plot. Azerbaijan, in addition to the fact that it captured Hereti, has recently additionally occupied some monasteries of the Davit-Gareji monastery complex.

The country has the worst economic and social situation: according to the ratings, we are the unhappiest country in the region, where every fourth child is hungry, and due to the lack of vitamins, talented Georgian children find it difficult to make sense of what they read. In

the region and in relation to Europe, food, utility bills, fuel, medical expenses are the most expensive in our country. Bank interest is the highest, with the absolute majority of the population now in debt. Georgians are fleeing the country en masse and people of foreign races, nation, and ethnicity are taking their place.

Almost all strategic objects and natural resources of the country have been sold: gold and precious stone deposits, gas and oil, manganese, fresh and mineral waters, and others. When there is nothing left to sell above and below the ground, they sell their land not only here to foreigners, a process which has also been temporarily stopped thanks to our participation. It was stopped, but, in the literal sense of the word, fertile Georgian land is cut and sold abroad.

I got involved in the political life of the country from an early age. However, I had a turning point in Sakartvelo when I got to know the work of the first and last legitimate president of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, and his loyal comrade Merab Kostava, both of whom are considered national heroes of Georgia.

I became interested in the reasons for their overthrow and murder, and that's how I learned about international Jewry, which almost simultaneously led to the appearance of fascist and national socialist ideology in my life. I read works by Benito Mussolini, Adolf Hitler, Julius Evola, Friedrich Nietzsche, Ernst Junger Schroem, as well as Grigol Robakidze and Konstantine Gamsakhurdia, the philosophical fathers of Georgian fascism. I learned that about 45,000 Georgians fought on the side of Germany in the Second World War to liberate their homeland from the communist red plague. I learned that humanity is divided into races and that Georgia is the origin and beginning of the white race.

After learning the truth, I realized the only way to save the motherland and the only way to return the old greatness and power of Georgia, which is our historical and divine right. I decided to form the fascist movement "Georgian National Unity" and quickly implemented it.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine made us decide to create a civil defense organization, "Georgian National Peace", whose task is to provide volunteer support to the Georgian armed forces and, if necessary, start a partisan movement. Despite the fact that we registered the organization due to the request of the treacherous government and the opposition, the ministry of defense, whose duty is to train us, does not give us an answer, in violation of the law, to our official statement, so we started preparing ourselves.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE CURRENT SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SCENE IN GEORGIA?

I have already told you about the nation's

most difficult social and economic background. As for the political situation, on April 9, 1991, Zviad Gamsakhurdia restored Georgia's independence, but on January 6, 1992, traitors violently overthrew it with the help of external forces - Communist Russia and the liberal West. They killed him. Since then, the country has been ruled by a junta - a political establishment of communists and liberals, working simultaneously for communist Russia and the liberal West.

Today, there are two main political forces in the country: "Georgian Dream", the so-called government, which is a follower of Marxist ideology and is officially a member of the Socialist Party of Europe, and the opposition "Party of the United Nations", not a national party, because this party has nothing to do with nationalism, and are a bearer of liberal ideology. They are officially a member of the European People's Liberal Party. The rest of the parties, who are active on the political surface, are the descendants of these two parties and are more or less connected with them.

Both of these parties are playing a double game - politically and economically they are working on a fully communist Russia, ideologically on the wing of liberal Westerners bound to communist Russia, and with the methods of hybrid war - with multiculturalism, religious sects, drugs, perverted sexual relations and promiscuity, they methodically destroy the Georgian nation, so that then all four neighbors and especially communist Russia can easily conquer us. Both of them jointly destroy any national movement that gains support in the nation.

This is how Merab Kostava, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Guram Sharadze were killed in the recent past. They saw that our movement had gained sympathy in the nation, immediately they put me in

prison for several years, where they punished me in inhumane conditions in order to retaliate, punish and physically and psychologically break me. The fate of our country, our nation, which is the origin of the white race and has a divine mission, is at stake!

SPECIFICALLY, WHAT ARE THE GREATEST HINDRANCES TO ADVANCEMENT THAT THE COUNTRY FACES?

The first is legal, the second is ideological. In 1921, Soviet Russia occupied Georgia and annexed it, which was recognized by the whole civilized world, including the League of Nations, as occupation and annexation. In 1945, the United Nations was created, which declared itself the legal successor of the League of Nations and recognized all its decisions.

In 1991, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the only future president of Georgia, the national hero of Georgia, restored (and did not announce) the restoration of Georgia's independence on the basis of May 26, 1918, that is, he restored the Democratic Republic of Georgia of 1918-1921, although after his overthrow, the traitor Shevardnadze, and as a result of the betrayal of the military junta, the United Nations declared Georgia the legal successor of Soviet Georgia of 1921-1991, which means that Georgia is still occupied and there is no freedom. A mistake was made by the UN, and as in the case of the Baltic states, we did not declare ourselves as the legal heirs of Soviet Georgia.

Second, from 1992 until now, legally, Soviet Georgia, which is opposed to the referendum of April 9, 1991, is ruled by illegitimate governments. The continuation of the junta by traitors to the motherland, the Marxist and liberal mob, has led to the country being plundered, built, destroyed, and laid waste to. The only remedy for both of these problems is fascism, which includes the soul, mind, will of the race, the nation as a whole, and it unites the political, economic, religious, traditions, customs, morals and moral issues, and, together, can immediately and totally solve all problems at the same time in the shortest possible time!

SOME HERE HAVE CALLED YOU A "HATE GROUP" OR AN "EXTREMIST ORGANIZATION." WHAT IS YOUR REACTION?

Let's review this question in two parts: Juridical and political-ideological. First, fascism isn't judged by any international juridical norm, standard, or tribunal. Only German National Socialism was judged by the Nuremberg tribunal. Our fascist movement "Georgian National Unity" and the civic self-defense organization "Georgian National Squad" are juridically and officially registered organizations, based on Georgia's law, and use Georgian historical ethnographic symbols.

Nobody registers and gives juridical status to "extremists". Exactly this is real democracy, when in a country there ought to be different ideological organizations. The unsociability of this clearly shows the tyrannical faces of Georgia's

Communist and Liberal political elites. That prosecution and terror, physical attacks, false criminal and administrative cases against members of the organization are carried out by the current "Democratic State". We have already given a procurator's official document, which has 400 pages, where all of these, with union of agreed claims, are undisputedly alleged.

As I know, you are from the United States of America. Despite the fact that National-Socialism is restricted by the Nurnberg tribunal, is there American National-Socialist party registered in the USA, which uses the Swastika as symbol? Everything else is political-ideological evaluation.

Now, let's move on to the political-ideological evaluation. Those who call us hate inspirers and extremists, causing the destruction and decline of Georgia is on their conscience. The Georgian nation will evaluate who are the extremists, sellers and traitors of this country. I'd like to add some words about the spilling of poison by our opponents against us. As Adolf Hitler said: 'poison spilled by the enemies of the nation seems our glory to me.'

MOVING FORWARD, WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE "WAY AHEAD" FOR YOU AND YOUR GROUP?

First of all, it is necessary for the Georgian nation to be imbued with fascism, with a nationalist spirit. As the only president of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, said: "Nationalism" has been turned into a buzzword by socialists, communists, cosmopolitans, degenerate national nihilists. Nationalism is condemned in the world by those amorphous, untraditional, denationalized conglomerates that have no history, no self-contained culture; who want to turn humanity into a homogeneous mass, driven only by beastly instincts and interest in material values.

It is extremely important and urgent for the security of the country to turn the civil defense organization based on national consciousness into a strong, accountable force. As Napoleon taught us, a country protected by an army is not invincible, but a country protected by a nation is. A clear example of this is the Ukrainian "Azov" and "Kraken" units. Unfortunately, we had intended to form such an organization a little earlier, which was prevented by my imprisonment for several years. Although, it is not too late and we have already started training.

As for the political side, "Georgian National Unity" will be officially and legally registered as a political force in the future, which will restore the legal national governance through elections, the democratic republic of 1918-1921 and the Georgian nation - God's children, returning to the beginning of the white race, to the splendor and glory that is the historical and divine right of our nation.

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The Georgian National Unity group rendering the Nazi salute. Photo from the group's Telegram

Colonel Richard Kemp on Putin's Nuke Threats & the Possible Western Response

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

Richard Kemp has spent most of his life fighting terrorism and insurgency, commanding British troops on the front line of some of the world's toughest hotspots, including Afghanistan, Iraq, the Balkans and Northern Ireland. He is now a writer, journalist, media commentator and motivational speaker. He provides strategic consultancy services on leadership, security, intelligence, counter-terrorism and defense. Radio Free Europe spoke to him about the Ukraine-Russia war.

WHAT SHOULD WE EXPECT OF THE NEW BRITISH PM? WHAT WILL THE CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP MEAN FOR UKRAINE WHEN IT COMES TO UK SUPPORT?

When he was Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak was a strong supporter of Boris Johnson's extremely strong support for Ukraine. And everything I've seen of Sunak, everything he has said, suggests to me that he will be just as strong a supporter, and Britain will remain one of the strongest allies that Ukraine has in the world.

SO KYIV SHOULDN'T BE WARY THAT AS THE WAR DRAGS ON, THE FOCUS IN THE UK WILL SHIFT TOWARDS MORE DOMESTIC MATTERS?

There's always a risk, of course, the longer a war drags on, and the more money it costs, and the more it has an impact on people in Europe as a whole, not just Britain, the more problematic it becomes to continue to support it. And we've seen the impact of this war in Europe on the European population. Obviously, compared to Ukraine and Ukrainians, it just doesn't compare, we're not the people losing their lives. But Europeans are having their livelihoods undermined by the increase in the cost of living as a direct result of the war. And that's something that takes its toll. And I think it's a problem that's going to get worse as the winter goes on. Britain is in a better position than most because we don't rely so much on Russian energy. But of course, the market price of energy goes up for Britain just as it does for everybody else. So, I wouldn't say there's going to be unwavering support from the population, but I think certainly the British government will do all it can to keep Britain as firmly behind Ukraine as it has been up till now.

WHAT WOULD THIS POTENTIAL FALTERING OF SUPPORT TRANSLATE INTO WHEN IT COMES TO KYIV'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE

WESTERN GOVERNMENTS? COULD WE SEE A SCENARIO WHERE THE WEST, PERHAPS NOT SO GENTLY, NUDGES UKRAINE TOWARDS SOME SORT OF UNFAVORABLE SETTLEMENT?

I think the longer it goes on, the more problematic it all becomes. And I do believe that Ukrainian successes make a difference when it comes to the level of support. Up until August, when Ukraine launched its successful counter-offensive in Donbas and around Kharkov, there was a bit of a wavering because people were suffering. And I would stress again, when I say people in Western Europe or Eastern Europe are suffering, I don't, by any means, compare it to the suffering of the people in Ukraine, it's a different form of suffering. They're not dying, they're not being wounded, they're not being driven out of their houses, but, nevertheless, in terms of lifestyle and important aspects of their lives, they are suffering. But when they see the fruits of what they have given to Ukrainians, both in terms of the sanctions, and in terms of finance, they can see that there is some success coming from it all. And I think if Ukraine is able to keep up the momentum in the war, the level of support is likely going to be easier to maintain.

LET'S ALSO DISCUSS THE EFFECTS OF THE WAR DRAGGING ON FOR THE OPPOSITE SIDE. DO WE EXPECT THE RUSSIAN RESOLVE TO FALTER?

In the earliest days of the war, Russia had some very big successes, not so much in their initial attempt to end the war quickly and bring down the government in Kyiv. That failed. But they did have big gains in the south, including, of course, Kherson, as the first major city they took. But then, since August, we've seen Russia being effectively humiliated by Ukraine. And that, of course, must have an effect on the level of support in Russia for the war. And we've seen open criticism by some of Putin's main allies, not criticism of Putin openly, but of the way the war is being conducted, which amounts to the same thing. If that continues, if Putin is not seen to have gained some significant success sometime in the near future in Ukraine, then support might falter. That doesn't necessarily translate into any change, though, because Russia is not a democracy; the politicians don't have to take much notice of what the people say. But I think there is a risk for Putin that some of his elites within Moscow will become disillusioned with what's going on. And I do appreciate the extreme difficulty for even the elites, whether it's in the armed forces, or in the intelligence services, or among the oligarchs, among government members, to bring Putin down if they want to, but I do think that becomes a possibility if the war doesn't

change, if the Russians aren't able to bring any more successes.

WHAT WOULD CONSTITUTE A SUCCESS FOR PUTIN AT THIS POINT?

Well, I suppose there are two possible successes for Putin. One is to launch a significant counter-offensive on his own, driving the Ukrainians back, take Kharkiv, secure the whole of Donbas and push the Ukrainians from the territories that they've recently retaken. That would be a success if he's able to achieve it. The second would be if President Zelensky came to terms with him. In other words, if he were to agree that "okay, you can have Donbas, you can have the territory you've captured, and we will have peace." Either of those two would represent a success for Putin.

I think we're now in a situation where, unless Zelensky loses support in the West, and therefore loses access to funds, to weapons, to ammunition, which is not looking that likely at the moment, he and the Ukrainians will continue to fight on. We could be in for a long war, in which neither side is going to secure victory. And we could be in for a very, very lengthy war of attrition. And, of course, if that happens, then the prospects for loss of Western support do increase.

There's talk of Putin, maybe in desperation, because he can't achieve success elsewhere, and because Zelensky won't come to terms, using nuclear weapons, or chemical weapons. If he does become so desperate that he doesn't see an alternative, he might use, for example, battlefield nuclear weapons against Ukrainians in the hope that that it will undermine Ukrainian morale. It also depends how he uses them - to attack the battlefield with nukes is not necessarily going to be game changing. If, on the other hand, if he decided to use battlefield nuclear weapons on a city, killing 1000s upon 1000s of Ukrainian citizens, that could be something that has an effect on Ukrainian morale, and which undermines the Ukrainian will to fight. But, equally, it could have the opposite effect.

Putin will be aware that he can't just press a button - he has to give the orders through at least five levels of command before a nuclear weapon is used. And he is aware that at each stage, it's possible that the order could be refused. Now that wouldn't be a very healthy situation for the person that refused it, but it could be an end for Putin too. And Putin knows that if he gives the order to use nuclear weapons, and it's not obeyed, then he's in pretty serious trouble in terms of his future as President.

AND IF THE ORDER IS OBEYED? WHO'S TO SAY HE'LL LIMIT HIMSELF TO JUST ONE STRIKE IF IT DOESN'T BRING



THE DESIRED RESULTS?

That means we're in an area we have no experience of. The only nuclear weapons use was on Japan in 1945, when the Americans dropped a bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and these were bombs not aimed at a military situation, but aimed at the civilian population and stopping Japan from continuing to fight. If Putin uses one tactical nuclear bomb, and it doesn't have the desired effect, it becomes much easier for him to use another and another. And continue doing so until he's wrought huge destruction across Ukraine. But even if the use of nuclear weapons against Ukraine succeeds, let's say, it does result in Ukraine coming to an agreement with Russia, then I think it is still the end of Putin. Because the world, the Western world, NATO, the US, cannot simply sit back and watch that happen.

WHAT WOULD YOU EXPECT THE WESTERN RESPONSE TO BE?

I think the West would have to respond. And that response cannot just be a bit more sanctioning. I believe they would have to take military action, a NATO attack. Not necessarily involving all members of NATO, but certainly involving the US, UK, probably France, and possibly Eastern European countries. But a NATO attack that has a significant effect, for example, sinking the Russian fleet in the Black Sea, something of that sort. I don't think there would be a response in kind, a nuclear response from the West, or bombing a Russian city. I think it would be a naval target, possibly Russian air bases.

WW3, THEN. THE VERY REASON THE WEST DID NOT CLOSE THE SKIES ABOVE UKRAINE WHEN THEY WERE ASKED TO A FEW MONTHS AGO. WHERE DO WE GO FROM THERE?

It will mean a widening of hostilities between Russia and NATO, it might mean Russian counterattacks against NATO countries. But I'm as confident as I can be that this is something that will have been planned for, and is now being planned for, before it's necessary for NATO to carry out any kind of strike against Russia. It's quite hard to see how a nuclear strike could take place without a response and without NATO also making a significant defense of its own territory. Short of a Russian nuclear strike against NATO countries, which of course has to be a possibility at any time, what we've seen is that Russia does not have

a very capable army. And if you compare the forces between NATO and Russia, there's not much question about who's going to come off a winner.

PUTIN AND HIS CIRCLE ALSO KNOW THAT THEY DON'T STAND A CHANCE AGAINST COMBINED NATO FORCES IN CONVENTIONAL WARFARE, THAT THEY WOULD BE HOPELESSLY OUTMATCHED. SO WHY WOULD THEY WANT SUCH A FIGHT?

They could get non-nuclear missiles or even nuclear missiles through NATO defenses and hit NATO cities, particularly in the east. That is a possibility. And it's something that could well happen. And I think it's something that people will obviously need to prepare for, if the decision is taken to react to a nuclear attack in the way that I've described, and it might be that NATO commanders think the price is too high.

WHAT HAPPENS IF WE SEE SOME SHRUGS, SOMEBODY GIVES AN AWKWARD SMILE. AND THEY SAY, "WELL, IT'S NOT IN A NATO MEMBER COUNTRY. WE ARE VERY SAD, AND IT'S UNACCEPTABLE, BUT WE ARE NOT GOING TO REACT TO IT."

That's a distinct possibility. I hope it isn't the case, I would hope that if Putin uses nuclear weapons, and particularly if he uses nuclear weapons that kill a lot of civilians, then the NATO Response will be a significant one. If he simply carries out a nuclear detonation somewhere, let's say at sea, as a demonstration of his capability, I don't think something like that is going to result in a NATO counterattack. But let's say he fires a nuclear weapon into the center of Kyiv, or something, NATO is much more likely to respond. If it doesn't, if there is no response to a nuclear strike that kills a lot of people, then I think Putin will have called NATO's bluff. And he'll have shown what he believed, that NATO is a paper tiger. And he's seen evidence of that in the ignominious NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan. He's seen the way the French ran out of Mali, after years of investment. He's seen Western weakness, NATO weakness, and American weakness. And he thinks that they are weak. I think if there wasn't a response, in the case of a significant nuclear strike, then that would be confirmed. And I think it could well be the end of NATO.

Tbilisi Hosts Forum "Nuclear and Radiological Security of Black Sea Region in Conditions of New Threats and Changing Environment"

The 4th Tbilisi International Forum "Nuclear and Radiological Security of the Black Sea Region in the Conditions of New Threats and Changing Environment" was held in Tbilisi.

The First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, Lasha Darsalia, addressed the participants, emphasizing the international community's joint and concerted efforts to fight the threat of weapons of mass destruction and their proliferation.



One of the focuses of the conversation was the deteriorating security environ-

ment in the region, which is caused by Russia's military aggression against Ukraine. The First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs singled out for special mention the threat posed to nuclear power plants and nuclear infrastructure in Ukraine, which hinders the full implementation of on-site verification activities by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Darsalia also spoke about the occupied territories of Georgia, where the absence of control mechanisms creates fertile ground for various types of illegal activ-

ities, including the spread of terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and related materials and technologies.

In conclusion, the First Deputy Minister noted that Georgia is fully aware of its responsibility to the international community and is trying to contribute to the strengthening of the existing nuclear security architecture.

The forum is organized by the "Civil Council on Defense and Security Issues." Co-organizers are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, the State

Security Service of Georgia, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia and the Nuclear and Radiation Safety Agency. Due to the Russian military aggression and the ongoing war in Ukraine, discussions are held within the framework of the forum between the government, civil society, international organizations, academia, and experts. Participants will discuss such issues as nuclear and radiological security, priorities for non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and challenges and opportunities of the wider Black Sea region.

Int'l Tourism Business Forum Organized by Pro Vision Highlights Georgia's Tourism Potential



Aya Estate, which seeks as its goal to bring more investments to Georgia.

The event saw speeches by keynote speakers and presentations from four different sectors: Government & NGOs, Real Estate, Tourism & Hospitality, and Education. Among them were the Owner and Director of Pro Vision and Aya Travel, Mr. Bassam Jaafar, and his business partner, Dr. Fawad Qasim Wasil.

The forum was opened with a video showcasing Georgia's tourism potential, its spectacular landscapes, and tourist attractions, which are beautiful year-round. After that, speakers from various fields addressed the audience, and discussed the current situation in the country's hospitality industry, the importance of tourism for Georgia's economic prosperity, and possible measures to further develop the field and attract more visitors and investors.

At the event, Pro Vision's efforts to promote tourism and general development and prosperity in Georgia were also noted, including its constant relationship with foreign companies, its introducing Georgia and its market to them, and its organizing various promotional events to raise awareness. The Tourism International Business Forum was also a part of these efforts.

Bassam Jaafar, Founder of Pro Vision, briefed the audience, including foreign guests and bloggers, about the country's tourism potential, and encouraged them to travel to Georgia and experience all this themselves.

Dr. Fawad Qasim Wasil, CEO of Aya Estate, talked about the innovations the company brings to the local real estate market.

The presentation of Aya Estate held as part of the event saw Rusudan Nanava, Legal Partner of Aya Estate, discussing the real estate market in Georgia, which, she noted, is a "fast-growing industry," and Aya Estate's current and planned activities. Among the new projects, the Floating Island is noteworthy and is expected to make Georgia an even more interesting destination for tourists.

The Floating Island project was presented by engineer Imad Jaafar, who



noted that it is a significant innovation in the Georgian marine industry.

GNTA Head Deputy Tamar Koriauli also addressed the audience and emphasized the importance of supporting tourism and investments in the country's economy. She also expressed satisfaction at Georgia's post-pandemic economic recovery, including in terms of tourism and an increasing number of foreign visitors.

GNTA Business Development Manager Otar Margoshvili introduced the guests of the forum to Georgia's international recognition and rankings, and emphasized its position in terms of ease of doing business (Georgia is ranked 7 among 190 economies in the Ease of Doing Business Index, according to the latest World Bank annual ratings), and presented the country's diverse possibilities in terms of MICE Tourism - Georgia as a MICE destination.

The forum also focused on the art of

investment and the importance of introducing innovations and digital technologies in this regard. As such, the company VIRTU was presented at the event, allowing customers to get rental income in a flexible way.

From the education sector, Aya Education was presented at the event, with its representatives expressing readiness to collaborate with the local educational institutions and share experiences, for more well-educated young generations to come.

Several memorandums were signed as part of the forum. Aya Education signed a memorandum with the Guram Tavartkiladze Tbilisi Teaching University (GTUNI) and Aya Estate with Gulf Realty and construction company Gumbati and the company Super Group.

It is noteworthy that the International Tourism Business Forum is planned to be given an annual character, with a focus also on the regions.

On November 5, an international tourism business forum was held in the Pullman Hotel Tbilisi, aimed at attracting foreign investments to Georgia and assessing the prospects of tourism development and the real estate market.

Within the framework of the business forum, about 10 investment companies and up to 40 bloggers visited Georgia to get acquainted with the local business environment, favorable investment opportunities, and the country's tourism potential, in addition to its reforms and planned measures in different directions. The bloggers were asked to prepare stories for promotion on the Arab market.

The international tourism business forum was organized by the company Pro Vision, the founder of Aya Travel, and their business partner.

The supporters of the project included the National Tourism Administration of

Georgia, the Georgian Tourism Association, the Samtskhe-Javakheti Destination Management Organization (DMO), Hotel 'Pullman' and the Lopota Hotel and Resort.

The forum brought together experts and practitioners from a wide range of industries of tourism, investment, and real estate. The audience included international delegations of leaders, CEOs, and top managers from all around the world.

The event hosted its participants as a platform for facilitating networking between companies and individuals over a series of meetings. Representatives of the local business sector invited to the large-scale international business forum had the opportunity to establish new business contacts and attract partners and/or investments for business development and/or new product creation through B2B meetings.

Along with other companies operating in the field, the forum also presented

Pro Vision Managers on Expectations Related to Their Activities on the Georgian Market

Continued from page 1

When asked to assess the local business environment and cooperation with other companies, he claimed that Pro Vision doesn't take them as competitors, "because we bring to the country what they need, thus doing common and mutually beneficial work for the economic development of Georgia."

"This is the development of the Georgian companies that motivates investors to invest here. That's why we don't consider local businesses as competitors. We are only competing with ourselves in order to do something better," he added.

Mr. Bassam Jaafar also noted that the company is constantly focused on bringing innovations and modern technologies, and the Floating Island project is also a part of this direction.

"Imagine that, in a few years, the country will boast such a modern tourism attraction. Official proceedings to get the necessary permits have already been started, after which we'll be able to start obtaining funds and investments more intensively. Our goal is to do it here in Georgia and further strengthen the country's tourism potential," he stated.

Dr. Fawad Qasim Wasil, who has been living in Georgia almost a decade, noted that Aya Estate is not actually a brokerage or real estate company, but an investment fund, the activities of which are aimed at attracting foreign direct investments to Georgia.

"Over the next few years, Aya Estate is planning to continue to attract foreign investments actively to help the country prosper. Further, we're planning to build a floating island, which is an innovation for the entire world, to create even more tourism opportunities for Georgia than Gulf, Dubai. The movable island will be arranged in Batumi, in the Black Sea, and we're planning to complete this project in the next few years. We believe that it will make Georgia an even more interesting destination for tourists from all over the world.

"Moreover, we're planning to set up a center to help Georgian students go on exchange programs in the UK, America, and Europe, to assist them in receiving more diverse knowledge from the leading educational institutions worldwide.

"Importantly, we're planning to bring industrial zones to Georgia, which itself will also increase the economy," Aya Estate's CEO explained.



Business Chamber of Asian and Gulf Countries – Connecting Bridge Between Eastern Countries and Georgia



Business Chamber of Asian & Gulf Countries recently introduced to the public the set goals, ambitious plans, and the important accents that are actual in the economic and socio-cultural life of Georgia. Business Chamber, during its existence already managed to achieve some results and planning and implementation of such measures, which will significantly contribute to the development of the Georgian economy in the near future.

The Business Chamber is an organization with a strong structure, which unites large-scale representation, significant opportunities, and, most importantly, ongoing strategic projects. As the First Vice President of the Business Chamber of Asian & Gulf Countries, David Tsir-

dava notes not only business but also social and cultural directions are important for them.

It is interesting how the Business Chamber of Asian & Gulf Countries unites 46 countries and how the organization plans to unite both the private and public sectors around a better perspective. We offer an interview with David Tsirdava.

WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THE FUNCTIONS AND DUTIES OF THE 46 COUNTRIES AND HONORARY CONSULS UNDER THE BUSINESS CHAMBER AND HOW ACTIVE ARE THEY IN CONNECTION WITH THE BUSINESS CHAMBER?

One of our missions is to strengthen representations in all 46 member coun-

tries of the Business Chamber and to maintain direct communication channels between business entities and governmental and non-governmental agencies. The Honorary Consul of the Business Chamber is already represented in 13 of the mentioned 46 countries. The function of the consuls is to connect the local governmental or private sectors with us. In this regard, I would like to mention our visit to Jordan a few days ago, within the framework of which, some innovations have been implemented. At the same time, I would also highlight Kuwait, with which, through our honorary consuls, the implementation of economic and cultural events becomes possible.

AS FAR AS I KNOW, YOU ARE PLANNING TO VISIT KUWAIT IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS. IF IT IS POSSIBLE, CAN YOU SHARE WITH US THE DETAILS OF THE MENTIONED VISIT, WHAT MEETINGS ARE SCHEDULED AND WHAT GOALS THEY SERVE?

As it was mentioned, in order to maintain direct communication channels between governmental and non-governmental agencies of different countries, establishing new connections means new opportunities for our organization.

We are expanding our existing contacts more and more in this direction. This meeting, in fact, is a preparation for celebrating 30 years of diplomatic relations between Georgia and Kuwait. By December, the Georgia-Kuwait Economic Forum and cultural events are being organized, thanks to which it will be possible to present the culture of Kuwait in Georgia, and to present the culture of Georgia in Kuwait. This will make it possible, in the future, for not only representatives of the business sector, but also people working in the field of art and culture to communicate with each other more.

SPECIFICALLY, WHAT CURRENT PROJECTS CAN YOU FOCUS ON BOTH IN THE ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL-SOCIAL DIRECTION?

Promotion of Asian & Gulf countries and deepening of close cultural-educational relations based on tolerance is one of the most important for our organization. Accordingly, we have defined in our strategic priorities establishing close cooperation between countries through the implementation of sociocultural measures.

The organization has developed a project called "Educated Young People for Successful Business". The project aims to promote peace, youth education, and

sustainable development in Georgia by supporting conflict-affected communities. The purpose of the Business Chamber is to initiate and stimulate the development of business skills and social entrepreneurship among young people affected by the conflict. The target group of the project is ethnically Georgian, Abkhazian, Ossetian, Azerbaijani, and Armenian young people living in Georgia, who will acquire business skills, study the tourism potential of Georgia and work together with specialists on common business projects. Our goal is for these young people to see each other and show the whole world an example of how one can live in peace and love in one region and carry out economic activities together.

TO WHAT EXTENT DOES THE BUSINESS CHAMBER HAVE STATE SUPPORT AND DOES A FORMAT OF MUTUAL COOPERATION EXIST?

Since the signing of the Association Agreement with the European Union, the focus has been on economic forums, which allow representatives of the business sector to see each other, share their experiences, get to know potential partners and, finally, develop more.

Against the backdrop of the Russia-Ukraine war, today Georgia is facing a global challenge. There was an opportunity not only to use our country as a logistics corridor, but also to increase the export market. According to various research, it is established that both the export direction and other economic parameters are improved. The government is actively working to increase the competitiveness of local private sectors. Accordingly, the state cooperates not only with the Business Chamber of Asian & Gulf Countries, but also with other business associations and carries out an open-door policy. The announced economic forum and cultural event in December is the result of close cooperation with state agencies.



Arms for Armenia: Yerevan Goes Shopping for Security

BY MICHAEL GODWIN

Armenia is no stranger to conflict. Since its independence in 1991, the country has been in a state of war, conflict, or tense ceasefire with its neighbor Azerbaijan on a near constant basis. It's 44-day war with Baku in late 2020 forced it to cede virtually all of the contested region of Nagorno-Karabakh, or Artsakh to the Armenian populace, to Azerbaijan. The aftermath of this humiliation caused uproar at home.

As daily skirmishes continue along the new border, including a multi-day conflict that left more than 200 people dead, Yerevan has a need for might. Russia has largely left the country to its own devices. Despite a massive arms deal that fell through due to Moscow's dire need for supplies in Ukraine, Armenia has gone shopping with anyone who will open its proverbial doors. While many have avoided this call so as to not anger oil-rich Baku, some have seen this as an opportunity to cash in on this seemingly never-ending war.

Armenia has recently reached out to some surprising new friends. The European Union, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and the United States have all received attention from Yerevan as it seeks a variety of solutions. The EU and its OSCE have both sent missions to the region with the goal of meeting with relevant officials and observing the border area. However, Baku has raised issues with this, noting that they were never included in consultations with European officials prior to their deployment, thus making them biased towards Armenia.

All three have stopped short of providing military assistance to Yerevan, some-



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan meets with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Photo from Press Office of the Armenian Government

thing the country's leadership has been more vocal about. However, Armenia has found new potential supplies in India. A country long seen as regionally concentrated with little interest in larger interactions, their military industrial and research sector has blossomed from decades of conflict with other local competitors. With competition from China and a low-level intensity conflict continuing with Pakistan, New Delhi has opened its doors to Armenian arms interest.

Following a purchase of over \$245 million of armaments, the two defense ministers met in India to solidify relations. A meeting between Armenian Defense Minister Suren Papikyan and Indian Defense Minister Rajnath Singh in mid-October presents a more overt facade to the arms deal that is set to vastly upgrade the capabilities of Yerevan's military. The first weapons packages include some of India's newest missiles and rockets, as well as plentiful ammunition stores.



Armenian Defense Minister Suren Papikyan and Minister of the Armed Forces of France Sébastien Lecornu in Paris. Photo from Press Secretary of the Armenian Ministry of Defense

A key component of this deal includes the Indian army's Pinaka multiple launch rocket system, (MLRS). This system has seen extensive use by Indian forces along the contested border region with Pakistan since the Kargil War in 1999. According to field reports and commentary on the system's capabilities, it has been widely successful in neutralizing enemy positions on elevated mountaintops. With much of the border region with Azerbaijan being similarly mountainous, the comparable application and potential advantages are clear.

All of this has made Armenia's defense minister come out in an unusual way, calling the military out of date. Papikyan said his forces lack "modern weapons, the availability of constantly updated intelligence, and the knowledge of modern tactics." This has been evident in Armenia's recent military history. The command staff, responsible for the strategic level decisions and logistic framework, has operated on a woefully outdated, Soviet-era model.

Azerbaijan, meanwhile, has not only ventured into cutting-edge battlefield technologies but is also re-hauling their warfighting doctrine to a Western and NATO model. After the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War, President Ilham Aliyev even said his armed forces would be "based on the Turkish model, but on a smaller scale." His government has announced a massive increase in the military budget, from \$2.64 billion to \$3.1 billion in 2023. All of this is aimed at making the Azerbaijani Armed Forces into a modernized, smart, and professional force.

With another conflict well within possibility, Armenia can't afford to wait any longer in its own modernization efforts. Despite the swelling coffers of oil and gas rich Baku, Yerevan has to use all of its diplomatic tools to counter their rival's

efforts. As Papikyan says, the Armenian military "personnel, with the exception of a few elite units, had no idea what a fifth generation war was. Now they need to use the experience of these units to prepare their army for a future war."

While shopping for new weapons from India and others may help with the arsenal, the battle command mindset has to change at its core. Following in the footsteps of their enemies, Armenia may need to heed the words of the Azerbaijani Defense Minister, describing the managerial upgrades implemented after the 2020 war. "Basically, the management system has been changed. The applied innovations were very successful and this was demonstrated in the last battles," Azerbaijani Colonel-General Zakir Hasanov said while in Turkey.

This management system should model the Western "war college" model, another item Azerbaijan duplicated from Turkey. The National Defense University, a copy of the Turkish Defense University, has been established, graduating hundreds of newly minted Western-trained officers. Yerevan has to take steps to revise and establish its officer development and training program in a similar way. Using established military university models from America's West Point, Britain's Sandhurst, or France's Saint Cyr, Armenia also needs to vastly expand its overseas officer training initiatives.

Despite these changes being largely aimed at its own national defense, the reforms and arms sales are a part of the larger regional peace mission. The South Caucasus, volatile as it is, may not need to be another battlefield. The opportunity for Armenia to cut the proverbial umbilical cord with Russia, become more European in the broad sense, and be a serious player in regional security, should not be missed.

State Forest in Chorvila Village Auctioned to Ivanishvili-Associated Company



The footage shows that the forest area has already been partially covered. Screen from the story of TV Pirveli

The Georgian National Forestry Agency has leased 125,000 square meters of forested land to a company allegedly owned by the billionaire founder of Georgia's ruling party, Bidzina Ivanishvili.

On 5 November, the National Forestry Agency announced that Agro Cartu had won a 49-year lease for three plots of land near the village of Chorvila, in Imereti, Bidzina Ivanishvili's hometown.

With a winning bid of an annual rent of €32,877 (\$12,000), €0.26 (\$0.09) per square meter, the company will be obliged to set up animal shelters and breeding grounds for local birds. According to the auction records, Agro Cartu was the only

company to bid on the lands.

On Monday, TV Pirveli claimed that Ivanishvili's wife, Ekaterine Khvedelidze, fully owns Agro Cartu, and that the company already owns a breeding farm for wild birds adjacent to its recently acquired plots of land.

However, according to a 2021 Transparency International report on offshore companies in Georgia, Agro Cartu is owned by Krista Investments Limited — one of 12 companies opened by Ivanishvili between 1998 and 2016 in the British Virgin Islands, according to the ICIJ's Pandora Papers.

The forest in Chorvila is already partially covered with netting that prevents the birds from flying away.



Construction project

In the footage taken by the TV company, it can be seen that some buildings have already been built on the site and the works are ongoing, and part of the forest is covered with black chem nets. The nets are held in place by mast-like structures.

"These are chem nets, a special material that is environmentally friendly, processed by a special method and will never pose any danger to the forest or birds... No equipment entered the forest," Davit Chkhenkeli, director of the joint-stock company, told TV Pirveli.

"Why did the National Forestry Agency give the property management agency the right to transfer the forest to Ekaterine Khvedelidze, the wife of Bidzina

Ivanishvili?" a TV Pirveli journalist asked Giorgi Chachishvili, the acting head of the Forestry Agency.

Chachishvili answered that he would write down the questions and contact the journalist, while in response to one of the questions — "Were you aware of this?", he said: "I don't know if it is Khvedelidze's company or Ivanishvili's. I was unaware of this..."

After the broadcast of the story, the National Forestry Agency issued a statement, in which it notes that "for obtaining the right to use the forest, in particular, for the right to arrange an animal shelter and building", Khvedelidze's company applied to the agency on November 25, 2021, and the auction was

announced after that.

"The National Forestry Agency studied the situation on the ground. According to the agency's decision, on September 23, a public auction was held on a plot of land of 125,248 sq.m.

"In order to enjoy the said right, the Agro Cartu LLC must pay 32,877.6 GEL to the forest management authority every year and also present a guarantee amount of 6,262.4 GEL. The agreement between the National Forestry Agency and Agro Cartu was signed in October 2022," the agency adds.

The agency also mentions that the lease of special use of forests is not only a practice of Georgia, and it happens in "a number of European countries" as well.

According to the agency, the lessee is obliged to provide maintenance and protection of the forest and not to interfere with the implementation of forest restoration measures by the Forestry Agency.

"The relevant regional forestry service controls the fulfillment of the conditions provided for in the agreement," reads the statement.

It is known that at the end of last year, the 5958 sq/m forest in Bakuriani township was also transferred to Prime Minister Garibashvili's wife, Nunu Tamazashvili, for 49 years.

In addition, in 2019, the company of the wife of the former mayor of Tbilisi and the chairman of the Regulatory Commission of Energy and Water Supply of Georgia, Davit Narmania, was given 10 hectares of land near Tbilisi, adjacent to the Sabaduri Forest, with the right of disposal for 40 years.

Parting Shot: Etseri, Svaneti

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

What, for me, goes into the making of a photo which I would call one of my landscape masterpieces? Quite a lot. The photo with this article is one such.

I have photographed this scene many, MANY times over the past 12 years from the upstairs windows. Different seasons, different lightings and weathers, times of day, compositions. This last one, taken just a few days before we leave Svaneti to winter in Tbilisi for the first time, was a nice farewell for me.

Landscape pictures have two main elements in their making: the scene itself, and the lighting of it in one or more variations. You can notice the first element and then decide that now is the time, or at least take a shot for reference and keep on returning for as many versions of the second element as you like or need. You might also say that a third element will come later: your post-processing of each frame in various different ways.

We had stayed long enough in Etseri to catch the full glory of autumn here, and to boot, I drove a guest all the way through Becho, Mestia and Ushguli the week earlier. So I got to see everywhere the magnificent combination of early winter snows settling lightly on top of the fall leaf colors.

Now, while I have been inspired to shift

most of my photography in the last year or two to black and white, I do find it really hard to capture the glories of autumn without color. So I abandoned my monochrome purism in most cases these last weeks and went with what the landscapes were telling me.

Ansel Adams, America's best landscape photographer ever, shot mostly in black and white and mostly using sheet film of large sizes, up to 8 by 10 inches. His important trilogy of books on his craft is called *The Camera*, *The Negative* and *The Print*. He still has much to teach us today, though no longer alive. His idea that a finished photographic print, worthy of exhibition, may well convey more of what the viewer expects to see than "actual reality" resonates with me. Who, except the truly color-blind, sees the world all in black and white anyway, for example?

As for color photos: they may represent idealized versions of what is actually there. It can be easy to over-saturate them or perform other tricks to move them away from "reality". In these cases, we may be producing work which is better suited to being called photographic art than "pure" photography (all boundary lines here admittedly being blurred and very subjective). I usually aim for something which is saturated enough, if in color, to be true to what people see in general.

The shot of the Dadeshkeliani tower, tallest in all Svaneti, happened because I noticed the view from downstairs, first. I often look for it and a few other favorite shots. It was a day of mixed cloud and

sunshine, which can mean lighting conditions changing even by the second, so I grabbed my camera and raced upstairs before things could be altered much. This is more my style than waiting for hours for weather conditions to line up just right: I simply don't have the time for that at the moment!

Already familiar with various horizontal- and vertical-format compositions of the scene, I chose the vertical one based on colors and lighting. I know exactly where to stand to minimize the distraction of house roofs or other architecture, obscuring them as much as possible with trees in front. The diagonal slashes of color running through the scene were also key, as was the fairly plain light blue sky. Almost the whole spectrum of visible colors is present, which I admit is rare for this scene. The sprinkling of snow adding inter-seasonal drama was a perfect bonus: hours later it had receded considerably in the heat of the day.

I emphasized the colors with some light color correction and HDR (high dynamic range) processing, and it was done. Well, it only took a few seconds, plus 12 years of waiting and trying.

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

www.facebook.com/hanmer.house.svaneti



Madlena Zepter: Life as a Fusion of the Art of Living and the Culture of Giving



INTERVIEW BY NINO TSIPURIA
FOR PALITRA HOLDING

In the last week of September, the attention of Europeans was attracted by Belgrade, specifically by the opening of the new cultural center of Belgrade. Madlena Art Palace – this is the name of 7000 sq.m. cultural space that will host exhibitions, conferences, poetry evenings, various events and theater performances. The authors and implementers of this idea are the patron husband and wife Madlena and Philip Zepfers.

In 2016, Forbes magazine named Philip Zepter as the number one richest person in Serbia. They are associated with the largest investments for the development of the cultural life of Serbia – Formula 1, the Hockey World Cup, the ATP tennis competition, the Cannes Film Festival, the construction of the first private opera house in Europe, the Madlena Zepter Foundation, the Zepter Museum (opened in 1950), the Literary Award, the International Design Award, sponsorship of the publishing house, the first auction house and many other cultural events.

Today, Zepfers' investment in culture and art is worth millions. Madlena Zepter is one of the most desirable and hard-to-reach respondents for the European and American media.

Exclusively, a famous patroness in Europe tells us about her life, success and love story.

"My passion for art has its roots in my family, where art was appreciated and mutual love and humanitarian spirit were fundamental values," she tells us. "According to my philosophy, beauty is not only inherent in human nature, but is also a spiritual need to be satisfied to improve our society.

"Beauty is not a luxury or something superfluous but something necessary for humanity, for its development and identity, so much so that a truly civil and just society cannot ignore it," Zepter notes.

"Today we live in an era that, for a number of obvious and sometimes conflicting reasons, seeks the approval of taste and creativity. Beauty often becomes foreign to ordinary life and our relationship with the arts, with nature and with our own bodies is problematic. I have always tried in many ways to cope with this impover-

ishment by offering opportunities for artists and young people to 'know themselves'.

"Objects and paintings are small pieces of infinity that are captured and embodied in something tangible: it is our job to enjoy them, use them and introduce them into everyday life. In my museum, too, the works on display vary and move: the important thing is that they can be seen and enjoyed," she says.

The realization of the programs of the Madlena Art Palace started with a visual art sensation, with originality and boldness, with Chairs by Carla Tolomeo, which as an example and a guiding light for the future. Once, Carla Tolomeo told me during an interview – "I would say that everyone finds a piece of their childhood that they thought lost in the chair he or she chooses. A little paradise lost and found".

WE ASK MRS ZEPTEP, WHAT DID SHE FIND IN HER FRIEND CARLA TOLOMEO'S MASTERPIECE?

"My dear friend Giordana Mill introduced us to each other for the first time in Milan, during an arts patronage party at the Prince of Savoy for our company's 20th anniversary. Our acquaintance continued through meetings, evenings in my theater, and projects for the future," she tells us.

"One day, I went to her studio and I believe that it was then that we sowed the seeds of friendship. I fell in love with her creations and artistic vision to the point that I appointed her to chair the jury of the International Design – Artzept competition, and I chose furniture of her creation for my houses in Paris, Monte Carlo and Belgrade. Choosing Carla to produce the seats of the new theater in the Madlena Art Palace was the natural development of our common way of feeling and experiencing art, culture and beauty. And so Carla permanently contributes to the magic of the interiors of my new building. With the inauguration of her solo exhibition in Belgrade, she started what will be an example and a guide for the future exhibitions of the Madlena Art Palace."

Mr Zepter once said that 'At airports, in the streets and at exhibitions around the world, I am approached by people who, to my surprise, recognize me and thank me for doing what I do. Such words always bring tears to my eyes. I learned to think beyond the recognized, secure and established. I learned to work, but

also to live life as a dream in which many things are possible. And the more possible they are, the more real the dream.' We ask her now if she has a dream which hasn't come true yet.

"I am a dreamer, albeit a very practical and realistic one," she says. "I'm a woman who imagines a better world, who firmly believes in the function of art and who dreams about a quality of life that can enhance people's material and spiritual well-being. My work is sustained by idealism and the need to combine professional achievement with the realization of a project larger than a purely personal one. I can say that I am a lucky woman because I have realized many of my dreams through my cultural, artistic and professional projects. However, I cannot stop dreaming, because dreaming means going beyond the shackles of fear and devising a possibility to affect reality. Only someone who still has unfulfilled dreams can be satisfied. In my heart there are still dreams to be realized, but I want to keep them for the future as a motive to act and a promise of happiness."

In 2010, when she opened Zepter Museum at the heart of Belgrade, in a building dating back to 1922, which is under official state protection, Mrs Zepter presented a treasure trove with the works of nearly 200 artists, represented by 500 paintings, installations and sculptures, arranged over three floors. In this period, the Serbian capital's National Museum and Museum of Contemporary Art were both closed for renovation, and she gave people who were missing Art and Museums a chance to be inspired again. Later, she founded the Zepter International Award – Artzept, for high achievement in design and applied art, which has been awarded for 18 years now. We wonder what the most important moment for her was throughout this process; the mission.

"Creating a work on canvas, in stone, clay or metal means speaking a language older than words and connecting the world of ideas to the material world," she says. "A work of art is always a primary emanation of the spirit that exists within us even before it is transferred to the canvas or takes shape in the material.

"Existing both in the world of ideas and in that of reality, a painting is a bridge, a passage between dimensions that provides answers to the great universal enigmas and can grasp the signals that we find whose alphabet we learned in our dreams – the deepest levels of our consciousness.

"The paintings and sculptures introduce us to new realities, invite us to enter new rooms full of meaning; and they enrich them with our experience.

WE NEXT ASK HER HOW SHE MET HER HUSBAND.

"I met him in the Belgrade University Library. Meeting this courageous and charming young man was like a contact between different worlds that could compensate and unite, in a fruitful and life-giving exchange, for the creation of something new and better. Charm and confidence, idealism and openness, the splendor of a young philosopher and the innocent joy of a child, refinement and willingness to learn, good will, ability, love and understanding ... this is Philip Zepter, my partner for life. Strengthened by a deep love, we left Belgrade together to conquer the world: Vienna, Linz and

Munich, and later on sixty-five countries around the planet.

"For me, love between two people is a meeting of two personalities, a form of mutual completion. Neither of us would probably have reached our present position without the other. I would say that we brought out the best in each other. I found in Philip poetry combined with a great pragmatism that could not fail to fascinate me. In him I sensed a courageous dreamer, ready to take risks in order to realize his ideas.

DID THE GIRL WHO MET HER LOVE IN THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY IN BELGRADE IN 1972 CHANGE THROUGH THESE 50 YEARS? AND WHAT ADVICE CAN YOU GIVE THE GIRL FROM LIBRARY?

Our meeting was a moment that has marked and changed our lives. One of those moments when everything suddenly becomes different, when everything suddenly becomes silent as two hearts listen to each other for the first time. It is a magical moment in which everything stops to start again. Today, 50 years later, reason leads me to think that that magical silence was linked to the library, the environment in which our meeting took place; my heart, on the other hand, knows with certainty that that moment was the beginning of 50 years of life and work shared with joy and great success.

Witness the fact that the path we have taken has been very exciting, not only because of the professional successes of the last 50 years, but above all owing to feelings experienced at a human, cultural and social level.

The girl I was then continues to live in me and will never die. Today I would whisper to her: "You may not know it yet, but today your great love story is beginning, which will accompany you throughout your life. Go towards your future with your heart and soul open to the world".

Art & Beauty Are My Only Ideologies – these are your words and my next question is about your childhood memories. Because we all come from our childhood. Tell us about your childhood.

I was a girl fascinated by train journeys in summer, excited by my role in my mother's fashion house, in love with postcards and music, a 'little woman' who imagined her future in the world. I nourished myself with both reality and fantasy and tried to respond intelligently to the difficult and hard times of the post-war period. My parents taught me important values, and they were an example of freedom and dignity.

I inherited from my father Martin a love for beautiful things, poetry and sport. I have a fond memory of him.

My father's Slovene family, with its strong principles and northern outlook instilled in me healthy habits regarding work, order and discipline. My father was an expert in his business and loved French culture, smart clothes, Panama hats, the Red Star football club and tennis, and taught me how to overcome all the problems and difficulties of a period marked by socialist realism.

My mother Divna, coming from a large and wealthy family, passed on her ethical and aesthetic principles to me. When I was with her, I always felt relaxed and young at heart but at the same time confident, proud of myself and truly happy.

She was a sincere friend with whom, even as a mature person, I shared many beautiful moments and hours. Her presence was precious to me.

I am aware of how much my conception of life and the consolidated experiences in my childhood have marked me emotionally and intellectually.

My role models include strong women, create and independent such as Lou Salomé, Colette, Marguerite Yourcenar, Coco Chanel and Peggy Guggenheim.

YOU ARE FOUNDER AND OWNER OF THE MADLENIANUM OPERA AND THEATER IN BELGRADE, SERBIA, THE FIRST PRIVATELY OWNED OPERA AND THEATER COMPANY BOTH IN SERBIA AND IN SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE. HOW DID THE IDEA COME ABOUT?

Bringing back to life something that has ceased to exist is the most difficult of beginnings. Nothing more remained of the Zemun National Theater than the walls and the roof: the rest was just a sweet dream. When we started its difficult restoration in 1997, the impossible was the only reality we could expect.

The Madlenianum is the crowning of my life's work in culture and the result of several decades of experience gained in European countries, an experience that I wanted to transfer here to Serbia and Belgrade, and especially to the atmosphere and spirit of the old Zemun.

I believe that going to the theater also means being hosted in a welcoming environment, furnished with beautiful objects, where everything can sharpen the senses and prepare you for the show: this is the reason for collateral exhibitions, waiting rooms and targeted use of space.

This is why the Madlenianum Theater was created. A beautiful yet functional building with exhibition areas, which has given Belgrade its second theater and above all a place for opera, prose, music and ballet, and for experimenting. A place open to art where spectators can see excellent shows, visit exhibitions and enjoy beautiful and intelligent architectural solutions. There are not many cities in the world that can boast more than one opera house. Since 1997 Belgrade has been one of them!

IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WISH TO CHANGE IN THE WORLD? AND WHAT WOULD YOU CHANGE, IF YOU COULD?

I have always been committed to building the society which I believe and work in, and with the means that I consider most appropriate to obtain it. I would like a world with more love and empathy towards all mankind.

I believe in social justice, support initiatives for developing countries and help young artists and students of Serbia with scholarships; I think that art is the driving force for giving voice to human spirituality and therefore I build theaters and galleries and I am committed to promoting writers and artists; I advocate values such as loyalty, cooperation and creativity.

What would I change in the world if I could? Good question. I am not sure I could change anything, but I believe that every person must always give their best in the knowledge that they may not see the results of their efforts themselves, but will leave them to future generations.



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