

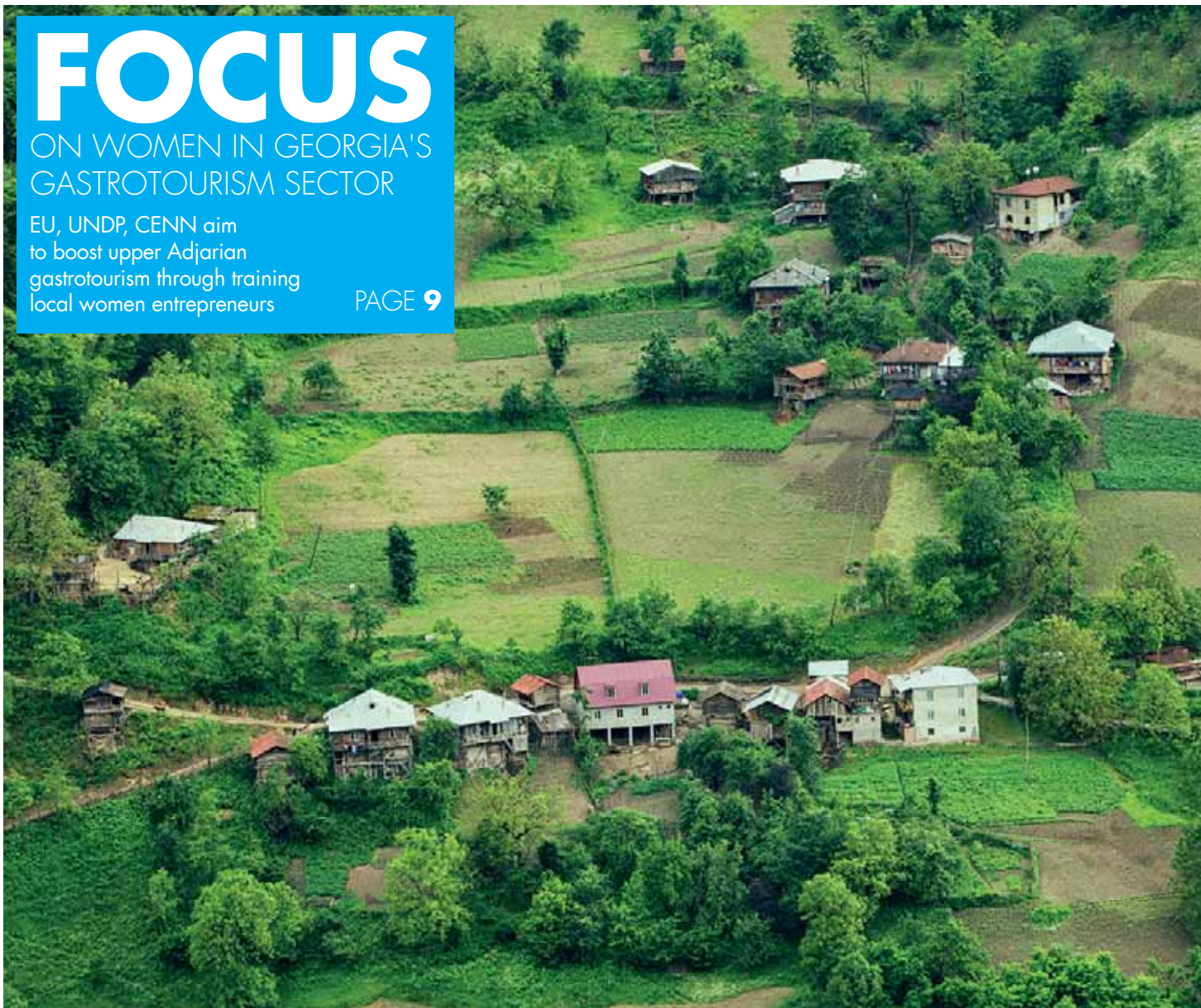


FOCUS

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New Israeli Ambassador Hadas Ester Meitzad on Developing Israel-Georgia Relations through Culture and Business

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW BY EREKLE POLADISHVILI

With H.E. Ran Gidor ending a chapter of successful four-year ambassadorial work in Georgia on behalf of his homeland Israel, now an exciting new chapter is about to begin. Newly appointed Ambassador Hadas Meitzad is taking on the responsibility of continuing this centuries-old relationship between two historically linked countries - Israel and Georgia. Her experience and knowledge, especially in the field of political-military diplomacy, is sure to have positive effects. GEORGIA TODAY is the first media outlet she chose to give an interview to.

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German Ingenuity in Georgian Education: Professor Dr. Wolfgang Herrmann

SOCIETY PAGE 11

Prepared for Georgia Today Business by GALT & TAGGART

As of 14-Nov-2022

Markets				CURRENCIES			
	Price	w/w	m/m		Price	w/w	m/m
BONDS				GEL / USD	2,7136	-0.5%	-1.9%
GRAIL 07/28	80.17 (YTM 8.54%)	+5.3%	+4.8%	GEL / EUR	2,8027	+2.6%	+4.1%
GEBGG 07/23	100.63 (YTM 5.05%)	+0.0%	-0.1%	GEL / GBP	3,1895	+1.6%	+2.5%
GEOCAP 03/24	93.84 (YTM 11.28%)	+0.1%	+0.3%	GEL / CHF	2,8760	+4.1%	+4.2%
SILNET 01/27	92.76 (YTM 10.54%)	-0.1%	-0.6%	GEL / RUB	0,0443	+0.2%	+1.4%
TBC 06/24	98.12 (YTM 7.02%)	+0.2%	-0.2%	GEL / TRY	0,1458	-1.4%	-2.0%
				GEL / AZN	1,5977	-0.5%	-2.0%
				GEL / AMD	0,0068	-0.7%	-0.2%
				GEL / UAH	0,0739	-0.3%	-1.3%
				EUR / USD	0,9683	-3.0%	-5.9%
				GBP / USD	0,8506	-2.1%	-5.0%
				CHF / USD	0,9434	-4.6%	-6.2%
				RUB / USD	61,2140	-4.8%	-2.6%
				TRY / USD	18,5912	+0.8%	+0.1%
				AZN / USD	1,6989	-0.1%	+0.1%
				AMD / USD	895,9200	+0.1%	-1.8%
COMMODITIES							
Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	93.14	-4.9%	+1.6%				
Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	1 771.40	+5.7%	+7.7%				
INDICES							
FTSE 100	7 385.17	+1.2%	+7.7%				
FTSE 250	19 622.25	+5.7%	+15.2%				
DAX	14 313.30	+5.8%	+15.1%				
DOW JONES	33 536.70	+2.2%	+13.2%				
NASDAQ	11 196.22	+6.0%	+8.5%				
MSCI EM EE	30.11	+8.4%	+30.3%				
MSCI EM	939.78	+4.7%	+8.9%				
SP 500	3 957.25	+4.0%	+10.4%				
MSCI FM	2 037.33	+3.1%	+5.2%				

Assassination Attempt on Israeli Businessman Itsik Moshe in Tbilisi Foiled

Itsik Moshe, a long-time resident of Georgia, was to fall victim to an assassination attempt, it is claimed.

The State Security Service released information Tuesday, stating that an attempt to kill an Israeli citizen planned by a criminal group in Georgia was detected and prevented by the Counterintelligence Department of the State Security Service. According to their information, persons with dual citizenship of Pakistan and Iran-Georgia have been arrested as a result of the operative search measures and investigative activities.

62-year-old Itsik Moshe is the president of the Georgia-Israel Business Chamber and the founder and head of the Israeli House.

He claims that he still does not know the details of who planned to kill him. He suggests the assassination attempt on him is likely related to his work and was motivated by anti-Semitism.

"I have been working in the Eastern European region for more than 30 years - my work is related to the representation of Israel, Israel's relations with

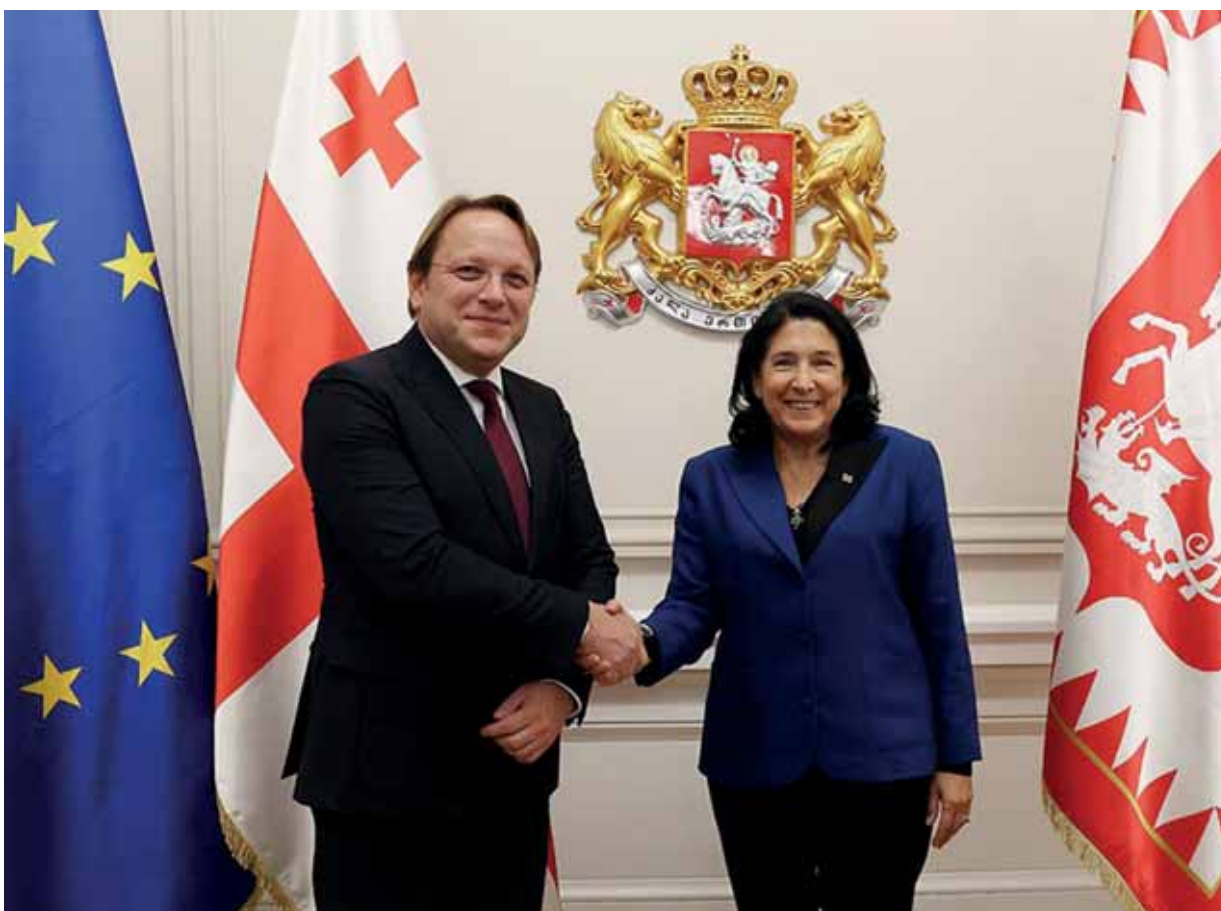


friendly countries. Recently, the anti-Semitic wave has intensified. We had a global forum in Jerusalem last week and maybe all this is related to that... when you are Jewish, many countries and people don't need many reasons not to love you," he said.

Moshe notes that he did not know at all that his assassination was planned until yesterday, and after the public statement of the State Security Service of Georgia, at the end of the day, he received a call from the President of the State of Israel, Isaac Herzog, and was told to take care of himself.

"If I had suspected anything, of course I would have informed the Georgian and Israeli sides. Until yesterday, I did not know anything was planned. It doesn't take much to motivate the enemy, there is a lot of anti-Semitism in the world against Israel, Jews in general, accompanied by an increasing number of actions- increasing by more than 50% per year. All Jews are at risk abroad. The first call I received was from the President of Israel, who said that he is very proud of my work, he asked me take care of myself," Itsik Moshe told Rustavi 2.

European Commissioner: We Came with Very Clear Objective: We Want to Help Get Georgia Ready for EU Membership



EU Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement Olivér Várhelyi with the Georgian President. Source: 1tv.ge

BY KETEVAN SKHIRTLADZE

EU Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement Olivér Várhelyi visited Georgia this week. Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili and the European Commissioner met in person and extended format, which was followed by a joint press conference. The dynamic of the implementation of the European Commission's recommendations and Georgia's significant progress toward European integration were the main topics discussed at the meeting. It

was highlighted that 2022 has seen an abundance of bilateral visits, which reiterates the high level of political dialogue between the EU and Georgia. As Garibashvili remarked, the authorities are ready to fulfill assumed responsibilities in order to achieve rapid progress on the path to EU membership, and a number of important steps have already been taken in this direction.

Várhelyi emphasized that he sees the steps taken towards the implementation of the 12 recommendations of the European Commission, although the country will have to "work a lot" to show its readiness for EU candidacy.

"I see the development, the economy

is booming, I went through the city and it is obvious to everyone that the economy has been developing over the last year. Progress can be seen," Várhelyi said.

He stated that he came to Georgia for the first time not only with the mandate of the European Commissioner for the issues of neighborhood policy but also for enlargement.

"During this period of difficulties that we are facing, and this new geopolitical pressure situation, Georgia has shown us very clearly that joining the European Union is a strong and solid goal of Georgia, and for this long-term stability and peace are needed. We have heard this

message and I have come not only to say that we have heard this message but also to inform you that we are ready to fulfill this request," he said.

Várhelyi noted that the vast majority of the population of Georgia supports joining the European Union, and this is a very strong mandate not only for the government but also for the entire political elite, adding that for this it is necessary to fulfill the EU's 12 recommendations.

"We came with a very clear objective: we want to help to get Georgia ready to become a member of the European Union within our generation," he said. "In the coming weeks and months, we will have to work very hard and we need Georgia to work very hard to demonstrate its readiness to become a candidate country. However, I also have to underline that, of course, this can only come true if the whole country, the whole of Georgia, and all Georgians, inside or outside the country, work for this common goal.

"I am convinced that history never offers the same chance twice. So, we need to grab it and make it happen. Of course, to be able to do that, we will need delivery on the 12 priorities. We need a clear track record of their delivery. I am very pleased to see that steps have already been taken, and very important decisions and proposals are being made and prepared in the Parliament. I see that the Government is very active in working to complete the actions for achieving the 12 priorities."

He added that the faster Georgia fulfills the 12 recommendations, the faster it will advance on the road to Europe.

"The faster Georgia fulfills these points, the faster the citizens of Georgia will receive the benefits that come by the granting of candidate status. We have no time to lose," he said.

Várhelyi stated that in light of Russia's war in Ukraine, the European Union needs reliable partners and allies in the fields of security, economy and, above all, energy. He noted that Georgia can be such a partner.

"The Black Sea is the center of our

plans. The Black Sea power cable is very symbolic for everyone. Historically symbolic to the extent that it will connect Georgia and the Caucasus with Europe. It is also symbolic because, against the backdrop of Russia's war, Ukraine needs reliable partners and allies, be it in the fields of security or economy, but most of all in the energy field. Georgia can be such a reliable partner and ally. We create partnerships around us, and the message I brought to Georgia is this: We want to have a partnership in terms of reliable energy supply from Georgia, and through this initiative, energy security will be established in Georgia, the Caucasus and Europe. With this cable, we will be able to fulfill this goal," he said.

Várhelyi added that the digitized deep-sea cable is also connected to this project, the results of which will be tangible soon. "I hope new ideas will emerge. A few days ago, I heard that Georgia is going to build an electricity terminal, which will create additional opportunities and productivity for Europe. We are interested to explore this opportunity and see how we can expand our partnership and cooperation.

"We see that work has begun on the Black Sea, we are participants in this process, and I hope that it will not only connect the Black Sea but also in other directions... and trade will grow, as it once was between our regions," he said.

President of Georgia, Salome Zurbashvili, also met with Várhelyi, at the Orbeliani Palace. They discussed Georgia's European perspective, the candidate status issue, and implementing the EU's 12-point recommendations, focusing on the necessity of depolarization.

"The objective of my visit is to assist Georgia in its EU integration process. In this regard, we wish to move forward with you," stated the European Commissioner. After meeting with the president, Várhelyi Tweeted: "We support Georgia to meet its commitments to the 12 priorities. EU strongly & consistently reaffirmed its support for Georgia's sovereignty & territorial integrity."

Caring for the Environment & Having Fun - Carrefour Launches a New Children's Campaign



Carrefour, owned and operated by Majid Al Futtaim in Georgia, is launching a new campaign aimed at teaching children to care for the environment and have fun at the same time. The initiative is part of the brand's commitment to better the lives of its surrounding communities, and reflects its desire to operate in an environmentally and socially responsible manner.

For the children's campaign, Small Changes - Big Impact is one of the main mottos. Customers will be able to purchase one-of-a-kind eco-friendly game cards that teach children to care for the environment through play.



The cards feature eco-heroes who care about cleanliness and improving the environment, of which there are 24 in total. Each eco-hero teaches one eco-friendly habit. For instance, "Tuta" teaches us to "reduce waste and buy only as much as we need."

The game is easy to use so that children can bring their eco-heroes to life and play. On each card, there is a special QR code which can be scanned by any mobile device to download the app.

The Joykis game will be available across all Carrefour branches in Georgia from November. In addition, customers will be able to purchase merchandise related to the game, including an eco-heroes story book, fun mugs, and a 'magic box'

containing a special eco-card that, after planting, will sprout a real plant.

The price of the cards are 3 GEL, however, for every purchase of 5 GEL at Carrefour stores, the price of a card is just 30 tetri. When paying via Bank of Georgia, customers will receive a discount on a doubled number of cards.

Whilst collecting all 24 Joykis eco-heroes, users must not forget to scan their MyCLUB - Carrefour's loyalty programme, through which accumulated points can be used to purchase any product in Carrefour.

Carrefour has been at the forefront of championing reduced plastic use through educational campaigns, community vol-



unteering activities, and incentive programmes. Throughout its 10-year presence in the Georgian market, Carrefour has introduced a number of environmental campaigns and innovations. The retailer now offers electronic receipts as well as a wide selection of reusable bags as part of its continued focus on sustainability.

For Carrefour, social and educational projects remain a priority, driven by the goal of raising awareness of environmental issues among the younger generation. The brand actively continues its sustainability journey in Georgia - just as it does in each country it operates, as part of its efforts to set the standards of a sustainable, responsible business.

A Charity Evening with Olena Kravets in Support of Ukraine

ADVERTISEMENT

The cruel war is still going on in Ukraine and we simply cannot be inactive in our support in the rear and on the creative front around the world. As such, we are continuing to donate from wherever we are and support the Ukrainian people.

We present and invite you to join us at a charity evening with Olena Kravets on November 24 at the Golden Tulip hotel.

The event is organized by the 'Welcome to Georgia! National Tourism Awards' project, and offers a creative and warm meeting with Olena Kravets, seeing her present the program "Solo. Reading prose and ourselves."

An atmospheric literary and musical evening awaits, filled with ironic and deep texts, together with warm conversations with Elena about all of us, about our ups and downs, about life and its meanings, especially within

these hard times for Ukraine, Ukrainians and all people who #StandWithUkraine.

Every story you hear will become a movie in your imagination...

The program includes stories by different authors, as well as direct communication with Olena as a woman, an actress, a wife, a mother...

Your questions, her answers, literature and the voice of the heart... You will feel the pleasant aftertaste of this evening for a long time to come.

The evening will be crowned by the amazing voice of Nino Katamadze, whom we all love so much.

Join us on November 24 at 19:00 in the Golden Tulip hotel.

The fee for attending the event is 200 GEL. The amount can be transferred to the following account: GE54BG0000000533933913

The money received will be transferred to the charity fund of Nino Katamadze and Olena Kravets herself. Registration Link: bit.ly/3UQr2IF

NATO: Ukrainian Defense Probably Caused Fatal Explosion in Poland, Zelensky Blames Russia

BY ANA DUMBADZE

Poland and NATO moved to de-escalate tensions Wednesday, a day after a missile landed in Poland and killed two people. The incident sparked fears that the war in Ukraine could spill beyond the country's borders.

Because Poland is a member of NATO, the 30-member military alliance, a strike on the country could mark a pivotal moment in the war in Ukraine, depending on what actually happened.

Authorities are still investigating the source and cause of Tuesday's explosions near Poland's border with Ukraine.

Polish President Andrzej Duda and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said the blast, the first such strike

in Poland amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine, was probably the result of a Ukrainian air defense missile gone astray, not the result of a deliberate Russian attack.

Even still, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said: "I have no doubt that it was not our missile or our missile strike."

The blast in Poland came as Russia bombarded Ukraine with about 90 missiles Tuesday, according to Zelensky. It was one of the most extensive such barrages since the February 24 invasion, striking such targets as energy infrastructure and apartment blocks.

New information from US intelligence community indicates that the Poland explosion was from at least one or as many as two Ukrainian missiles that went off course, said a person familiar with the intelligence.

NATO and Duda blamed Russia for the

incident regardless. Zelensky joined them, saying that "Russian aggression took the lives of two Polish citizens." Parts found at the site would not necessarily have provided immediate answers, as many of Ukraine's air defense systems are of Russian origin.

ZELENSKY: MILLIONS IN UKRAINE WITHOUT POWER AS LIFE IN KHERSON SLOWLY RETURNS TO NORMAL

Ukraine's already damaged energy system was hamstrung again after Tuesday's heavy barrage of air attacks. Millions of people throughout the country are without steady power and are experiencing emergency blackouts and stabilization outages, Ukraine's President said during his nightly address.

People are experiencing the blackouts and outages in 18 regions and the city of Kyiv, he said, adding: "We are doing every-

thing to restore electricity."

He said workers were also trying to restore the water supply to the Mykolaiv region, where pipes left broken from attacks have left people with salty and yellow water.

The residents of newly liberated Kherson have no water, no internet connection and little power.

Ukrainian authorities are working to return the city to "normal life," the head of the regional military administration, Yaroslav Yanushevich, said Saturday in a video message, adding that the city, oblast and district military administrations had arrived in the city and started duties.

"The national police and the security service of Ukraine have also taken up their duties. The State Service for Emergency Situations is clearing mines. We are working for the return of the city to normal life," Yanushevich said.

Residents who had left Kherson are advised "not to rush to return until stabilization measures are completed," police said.

Gen. Mark A. Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, on Wednesday called Russian efforts to target Ukraine's electrical grid a "war crime," adding that "over a quarter of Ukrainian civilians" are now living without power as the country enters the coldest months of the year.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Milley, who addressed the media shortly after meeting virtually with almost 50 counterparts working to equip Ukraine militarily, shared the assessment that Russia's attacks would only solidify international resolve to keep Ukraine well-armed.

"Russia could end this war today, Russia could put an end to it right now, but they won't," Austin pointed out.

The Dwindling War Concerns



Image source: IherPhoto via Getty

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

The erstwhile heat, fear and exaltation caused by the war in Ukraine have recently been dwarfed by the chaos in the oppositional National Move-

ment in Georgia. Both the public and media have gotten tired of talking about the war, having instead been transfixed by the internal political fluids and passions. The war is still raging, showing no signs of coming to any logical end, and Sakartvelo is adamantly keeping its neutral peaceful position, trying to demonstrate its balanced attitude to both sides, gradually losing

Ukraine as a friend and unsuccessfully attempting to make an ally out of Russia; blowing hot and cold, despite the current political climate dictating we be clear and sharp, and that we perhaps make reckless choices. But we can't, because this might mean us going to war.

Half of our local experts, watching and analyzing this runaway war, readily pre-

dict Russia's complete and final surrender and ousting from the invaded lands. The other half would say that Russia will not give in that easily, and if it does back off, it will only be used as a tactical move to ready for an even more powerful assault.

The problem is that we the people have no idea which opinion is right or wrong; true or false. As such, we see the best way to act is to listen to foreign opinion, but that can't be 100% reliable either. Another sizable problem is that some of those commentators want to perpetuate the idea that if Russia wins the game, Ukraine will be gone as a geopolitical unit and Russians will continue invading the world in an even rasher way, and if Russia loses and is driven to her existential limits, she might use her nuclear potential, exploding the globe in a Shakespearean to-be-or-not-be fashion.

None of this seems believable enough to rely on in further expressions of opinion. It's likely nothing will happen to the world, nobody will drop a nuclear bomb, Russia will never invade Europe, and Ukraine will survive to rise from ashes. Scaremongering has become trendy; apocalyptic predictions having become a norm. I could put it very plainly if not sagely: International diplomacy has to go after Georgia's well-known example of being a balanced actor, not making waves, taking care of its own people and business, insisting on peaceful coexistence, developing its own country and not poking its nose into somebody else's affairs. Wars have sometimes been fair

and justified, but the proxy war on Ukrainian territory is a plain piece of cynicism directed like a poisoned arrow right into the heart of both Russia and Ukraine. The world around them, which wants to give the impression that it is involved and feels hurt because the young labor force and genetic fund of both nations are being annihilated, has, however, yet to demonstrate a keen interest to stop the damned thing, and is now gradually losing interest in the developments as they take place.

Look at us in Georgia, for instance: the talk of politicians, journalists and citizens has moved from the theme of war and its possible consequences for Sakartvelo, and has started concentrating more and more on the circus going on within the depths of the United National Movement of Georgia, which the other day somebody called the "national disunion movement." In a way, the attitude could be justified, because we do need to be concerned more with the business of our own nation than that of someone else's. And if this is true, all is OK in this country: our politics, social life and economy are the first and utmost. The war will end someday soon and the globe will be safe too, and the big talk about a possible nuclear conflagration will come to a reasonable finale. Meanwhile, Georgia will be peacefully getting ready for a better life, using for this its entire politeconomical arsenal in the habitual peaceful way, biting the bullet bravely and wisely, as it has been doing since February, which is very, very good.

"Georgia Has a Lot to Be Proud of" - USAID's Erin Elizabeth McKee on Georgia's Potential as a Beacon of Democracy

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE FOR RFE

The last time I was here was in the 1980s, - Erin Elizabeth McKee, Assistant Administrator in the Bureau for Europe and Eurasia at USAID, tells Radio Free Europe. "Georgia should be very proud of how far it's come. The country feels transformed, there is a vibrancy, more color. And a feeling of hope, despite what we know are very hard times, both economically and from a security perspective. And I have been overwhelmed by the hospitality and the generosity of the Georgian people.

"My message to the people of Georgia is: You should be very proud of what you've accomplished in the last 30 years," she says. "And I am proud also to say that USAID has been a partner with you along this journey to ensure that Georgia has a free, independent, democratic, prosperous and secure future. And what I saw in the two days I was here is that that is fully possible. I've been proud to see how much our partnership with the United States and the people of Georgia has supported the remarkable transformation that I've seen here."

WHILE HERE, YOU LAUNCHED SOME NEW PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS. CAN YOU TELL US MORE ABOUT THEM?

Yes. I drove here from Armenia, and we stopped in Marneuli to launch a new partnership that we have with Geo Hospitals - a skills development program in partnership with the private sector. We're working with key industries and investors to identify what skills they need to ensure that their business can prosper and so they can hire Georgian citizens, not in Tbilisi, but in the communities where they're making those investments.

This goes hand in glove with the country's trajectory towards EU candidacy,

to ensure that certifications and standards, in this instance for skilled nurses, are able to meet those standards. I have heard this is a critical gap in Georgia's healthcare industry. The rest of the world usually staffs about four nurses to one doctor. In Georgia, you have four doctors to one nurse. The skills industry is vital and needs to be able to deliver quality care to people and support an industry that is critical for good governance to be able to demonstrate that healthcare services can be delivered in the communities where they're most needed.

I also traveled to Gori, where we launched our new, 'resilient communities' activity. Let me explain a little bit what we see from our perspective and what we learned from those that live along the administrative boundary line. We think that what they need is a better opportunity to restore their livelihoods, to have an economic opportunity to provide for their families and "Build a Better Life," under the threat in the shadows. Those living along the administrative boundary line (ABL), which we could see right there, even from the highway, under that shadow, need to be able to improve their lives and provide for their families, for their children. It is critical to be able to ensure a better future and hope for them. The program we launched in partnership with the Ministry of Community Development and Infrastructure, as well as the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment, is to identify those key sectors where we, in partnership with the national and local government, can attract the private sector, upskill these communities, and provide better livelihoods as well as access to more markets, and ensure that they can realize that dream of a better tomorrow.

HOW MANY WILL BENEFIT FROM THIS PROJECT?

We are working in 11 municipalities along the ABL with this project initially, and it's valued at about \$24 million over the next five years. This is not just a USAID contribution, it's in partnership



Image source: RFE

with the Government of Georgia, their contribution and investment, as well as the private sector. So the order of magnitude, if we're successful, will be far beyond just \$24 million.

THIS IS A TURBULENT TIME IN GEORGIA. WE HAVE SOME "DEFECTORS" FROM THE RULING PARTY CALLING INTO QUESTION WHAT MOTIVATIONS THE US MIGHT HAVE BEHIND THEIR DIRECTIVES. HOW DIFFICULT DOES IT MAKE YOUR EVERYDAY WORK HERE AND YOUR DEMOCRACY PROGRAMMING PROJECT?

It's a given fact globally that civil society organizations, particularly grassroots and local civil society organizations, truly represent the voices of the people they serve. And they are a vital component to a thriving well-functioning democracy. They participate and alert local government and national government to what the priorities of the people are, whether it's better education, chil-

dren's rights, environmental issues, ensuring that elections are free and fair, and providing that conduit and platform between the people and their government. And so civil society should not be attacked. We don't always have to agree with the opinions they offer, but that voice, and that engagement, and that partnership between government, civil society and the people, is the hallmark of a well-functioning and thriving democracy.

That closing of Georgia's civil space is of deep concern to us. But we continue to support civil society organizations throughout the country to ensure that that pillar of democracy remains strong and resilient. Yesterday, we launched a new Local Governance Program worth \$20 million. It's going to work in 22 municipalities, hand in glove with local government, civil society, and the people, to create that platform and demonstrate to other municipalities, who may not be selected to participate in the program, that this partnership ensures that the voices of the people are heard, and that democracy can deliver. And when we say

deliver, that results in greater economic opportunity, the attractiveness of the private sector, investment in the citizenry for better skills, better schools, better service delivery, whatever the priority of the community may be. And that is the focus of both that program and our intervention, to try and remedy what we see as the closing of civic space right now in Georgia's democratic aspirations.

IN THE NOT SO DISTANT PAST, GEORGIA WAS REFERRED TO BY THE US AS A BEACON OF DEMOCRACY. DO YOU STILL THINK THAT'S THE CASE?

I think Georgia has the potential to be a bright spot. A free, prosperous, secure and fully independent democracy. There's some work to be done. The reform agenda, and particularly the 12 recommendations made by the European Commission to ensure that Georgia's path towards EU candidacy proceeds, needs to be paid attention to. Georgia, as I said at the outset, has come so far.

I had to remind my team on the ground here in Georgia that, when they raise this question, it's important to stop and look at just how far Georgia has come.

I've served in many regions around the world, and many countries around the world. And I would say that Georgia still has a lot to be proud of. Democracy takes work, not just work on the part of the government; it's also work on the part of the people, full citizen participation, raising their voices, making sure that civil society is supported, making sure that underrepresented portions of the population or minority, the ethnic communities, are also part of the full participation in a democracy. And that's our work. We're still working on that in my own country. And so I would say that the potential for Georgia to become a beacon of light is still present, prevalent, and absolutely possible, and we stand ready to support the Georgian people and the Government of Georgia to realize that potential and certainly become fully free, prosperous, independent, and secure.

New Israeli Ambassador Hadas Ester Meitzad on Developing Israel-Georgia Relations through Culture and Business

Continued from page 1

“Since the age of 18, I’ve been serving my country through different platforms,” the Ambassador tells us. “I served in the air force for eight years and then I joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. After going through the basic training, cadet course, I was sent for my first posting in Japan, Tokyo, which was an incredible experience, because I mostly dealt with and learned a lot about the use of soft power in diplomacy. My second posting was in the UN, where I had a very wide portfolio, and where I dealt with matters such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). I was honored to take part in the negotiations about the SDGs on behalf of the state of Israel. It was fascinating process to see all the members of the UN negotiating about the future of humanity, and what should be done to ensure a better future for us all. Later on, I dealt with core national affairs, the Middle East. I dealt a lot with the UN Security Council, affairs related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, to the Iranian nuclear file, the wars in Syria, Libya, Yemen. In between, I also held some positions in ministries, and my last one was as Chief of Staff of the Political Director.

“Generally speaking, I would say that my field of expertise has been in political-military diplomacy. I have dealt with this region in the past, for quite some time, and I’m very happy now to be here in Georgia; to deepen my knowledge about the Caucasian area and to learn more about Georgia and the region.”

THIS YEAR GEORGIA CELEBRATES 30 YEARS OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL. COULD YOU SUM UP THE PAST THREE DECADES?

I’ll not be able to sum up 30 years of diplomatic relations, but I can briefly go over the main pillars of those relations. The first is the people-to-people relations. The embassy has been working a lot to ensure that the cultural exchange between two countries is both intense and comprehensive, because at the end of the day, exposure of the Georgian people to Israeli art, literature, cinema, and for the Israelis to Georgian culture, is what builds a very strong and solid network and platform.

We canceled the visa regime few years ago, and now Georgia is enjoying around 200,000 Israelis on a yearly basis, who come here to enjoy the landscape, food



We’re looking at very impressive growth. A lot of Israeli companies will find Georgia very interesting. We will look for ways to assist in the matchmaking

and hospitality. For Israelis to come and experience Georgia affects very much the strength of the relationships formed, and I’m happy to say that it also contributes to the economy here.

We work a lot in the economic field, and here I’m talking about where Israel can assist and contribute to the Georgian economic wealth. One of the main tools we’ve used and still use very much is MASHAV. MASHAV is Israel’s center for international development, and what we’re doing through them is showing our expertise, our experience in relevant fields, and here in Georgia that is a lot about agriculture, as well as education, about accessibility in entrepreneurship or education for persons with disabilities. A lot of focus has been put on building capacities for locals to become entrepreneurs or innovators in both rural areas and in the heart of Tbilisi. We also have the Israel Chamber of Commerce, which is very active in trying to enhance and contribute to the mutual trade and commerce between the two countries.

The governmental relations are extremely good, unaffected by whomever is in the government in Israel or in Georgia. Throughout the last 30 years, there has been a constant dialogue between Israel and Georgia. We just had elections in Israel this week, and I’m certain that after the new government is sworn in, and because we had quite a pause because of the pandemic, we will soon see even more high level visitors coming over from Israel.

The friendship between Israel and Georgia dates back to way before the 1990s, but what’s more interesting for me now is what we should expect in the coming future economically, culturally, militarily, and beyond.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR GOALS HERE AS AMBASSADOR.

As Ambassador of Israel to Georgia, of course my main task here is to deepen and to extend our relations. In culture, expect to see two Israeli plays that are to be produced here in local theaters in the coming weeks. We will continue to support and to encourage cultural exchange between the two countries, recognizing the importance of art in creating true understanding between people.

The second thing is economy and trade. Here, we’re looking at the very impressive growth numbers and different projects that are being announced, and I believe a lot of Israeli companies will find Georgia very interesting. We will look for ways to assist in the matchmaking and to see that more and more commercial operations are taking place. The



I wish Georgia the same thing I wish my own country: To remember the importance of tolerance and pluralism, in both society and the country’s political system

embassy focus is going to be on entrepreneurship and innovation. We believe that this is something that Israel has added value from best.

I mentioned bilateral governmental relations. Prime Minister Garibashvili was in Israel a few months ago, on a very successful visit. He met then-Prime Minister Naftali Bennet and then-Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, who then became prime minister, and it gave them an opportunity to discuss in a very open and frank manner the latest geostrategic development here and in the Middle East. And as I said, I’m quite certain that after the government in Israel is sworn in, we will see a renewal of such high-level visits and exchanges.

SOME POLITICAL PARTIES HAVE BECOME MORE ANTI-WESTERN THAN EVER BEFORE; THEY BLAME THE US AND EU FOR TRYING TO DRAG GEORGIA INTO THE RUSSO-UKRAINIAN WAR. WHAT’S YOUR OPINION?

I will start by saying that I believe that

the course for Georgia has been set, and that course is EU membership. I’ve heard it from the Prime Minister, the various ministers, as well as the heads of the opposition parties here. And it is also coming from the Europeans, from the German chancellor, who sent a comment about Europe being “spread from Lisbon to Tbilisi”.

For Israel, the EU is a very important partner. In fact, the EU market is our first trade market. Israel is cooperating with the EU on each and every one of its programs in the fields of science, technology, education. There is also lot of mutual exchange that both sides benefit from a lot. The US is our strongest ally, and I think it’s always very important to remember who your allies are, especially in more complicated times. Our alliance with the US is not just a security or defense kind of alliance, but is also based on the fact that we share lot of values. We also work together in other countries, for example here in Georgia. MASHAV, the Israeli aid agency, has ongoing cooperation that has been

happening now for many years with USAID. In all of my meetings so far with the American Ambassador Kelly C. Degnan, as well as with her team, I was very much impressed by the high level of professionalism, as well as devotion and commitment to the Georgian people.

POLARIZATION IS ONE OF THE MAIN ISSUES FACING OUR COUNTRY TODAY, SEEN IN POLITICS, SOCIETY, AND MEDIA. WHAT WOULD YOU ADVISE AS AN AMBASSADOR FROM A COUNTRY WHICH ALSO STRUGGLES WITH THIS ISSUE?

Democracy isn’t always easy, but there is no alternative. Coming from a country that just went through its fifth election in a very short period of time, I don’t think that I’m in a position to give any advice. I will say that I’m wishing Georgia the same thing that I wish my own country: To remember the importance of tolerance and pluralism, in both society and the country’s political system.

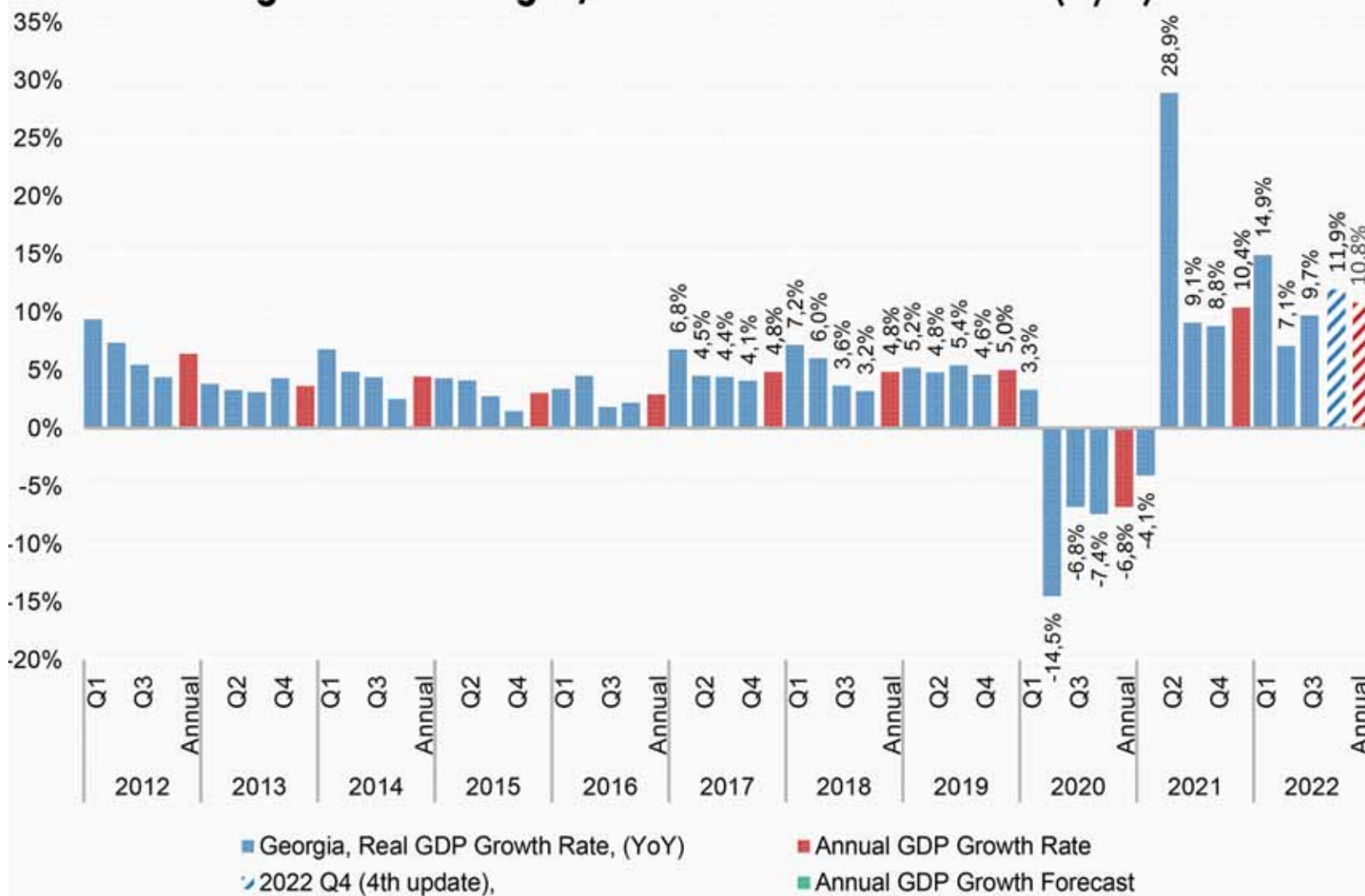
ISET ECONOMIC INDICATORS

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ISET GDP Forecast | Annual Growth to Reach Highest Value in Years, Driven by Migration, Tourism, and Trade

Figure 1 - Georgia, Real GDP Growth Rate (Y/Y)



imports. Therefore, a global increase in the price of metal will likely cause improvement to the Georgian economy, whereas an increase in the price of agricultural products will be damaging. In annual terms, metal prices as well as agricultural raw material prices decreased by 16.3% and 10.8% respectively in September. On the balance, adding the PMETA and PRAWM indicators to the model thus decrease the growth forecast for both quarters.

INFLATION

In September, the annual inflation of consumer prices amounted to 11.5%, which is notably higher than the targeted 3%. Approximately 5.1 percentage points of CPI inflation were related to higher food prices (this was driven by the hike in food prices worldwide – FAO Food Price Index increased by 5.2% yearly¹). Furthermore, increased fuel prices made a notable positive contribution (1.1 ppts) to the annual inflation measure. The latter trend is mostly a reflection of significantly increased oil prices on the global market (Euro Brent Spot Price (COP) increased by 20.5% yearly). There are two factors giving us a reason for optimism on inflation: (1) oil prices started to decrease from their peak earlier in the year and (2) GEL exchange rate appreciated against the currencies of the main trading partners. Meanwhile, the measure of core inflation amounted to 7.5%. Overall, CPI related variables had a slight negative contribution to the GDP forecast.

CONSUMER CREDIT

The other group of variables that had an important impact on the GDP growth predictions is related to the consumer credit. In September 2022, the total volume of commercial banks' consumer credit increased by 30.3% yearly and 1.0% monthly (despite strict monetary policy due to the high inflation). The volume of commercial banks' short-term and long-term consumer credits increased by 11.2% and 30.9% respectively in annual terms. Only foreign currency short-term consumer credit experienced a notable annual decline of 34.4%. Furthermore, short-term consumer credit decreased by 1.9% monthly, while long-term consumer credit increased by 1.1% compared to the previous month. Overall, the variables related to consumer credit still have had a slight negative impact on the growth forecast.

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

BY DAVIT KESHELAVA AND
YAROSLAVA BABYCH

ISET-PI has updated its real GDP growth forecast for the fourth quarter of 2022 and the first quarter of 2023. Here are the highlights of this month's release:

- According to Geostat's updated estimate, Q3 2022 growth rate stands at 9.7%. As a result, the real GDP growth estimate for the first nine months of 2022 is 10.2%.

- As a result of the update, ISET-PI growth forecast for Q4 of 2022 was changed to 11.9%. ISET-PI's first forecast for Q1 of 2023 puts GDP growth at 3.9%.

- Based on September's data, we expect annual growth in 2022 to be 10.8%. Historically, our model's forecast based on September data is rather accurate, but this year the number is most likely slightly overestimated. This is because the current shock (the war, sanctions and large-scale in-migration) had not had relevant analogues in the Georgian data in the past.

- In addition, the National Bank of Georgia revised its expectation for the real GDP growth up from 9% to 10% in 2022 (very close to our current annual forecast). According to the Monetary Policy Report (4th edition), among the reasons behind the upward revision is the stronger-than-expected impact of increased migration to Georgia from regional countries and significantly

increased revenues from exports of services (mainly from tourism). However, in the future, when the political situation stabilizes in a region, a similar growth of foreign inflows is unlikely. The real GDP growth forecast for 2023 is around 4% (revised down from 4.5% based on the 3rd edition of the Monetary Policy Report).

MERCHANDISE TRADE

In September, Georgia's exports experienced an annual 40.0% growth. This was mainly driven by increased export/re-export of motor cars (increased by 122% YoY, which is 14.7 ppts), copper ores and concentrates (increased by 29% YoY, 4.2 ppts), ferro-alloys (increased by 18% YoY, 2.4 ppts), cigars, cheroots, cigarillos and cigarettes (increased by 385% YoY, 2.1 ppts), and electrical energy (increased by 212 times, 2.1 ppts). In contrast, exports of hazelnuts and other nuts (decreased by 47% YoY, -3.1 ppts), and Telephone sets, including telephones for cellular networks or for other wireless networks experienced annual decline (decreased by 70% YoY, -0.8 ppts). It is notable that dramatic increase of the goods export is mainly a reflection of higher prices, as the volume of exports increased more modestly, by 21.1% yearly.

During this period, the import of goods increased by 13.8%, driven by an increased import/re-import of petroleum (mostly driven by higher prices), petroleum gases, coke-bitumen and wheat flour. In contrast, imports of cop-

per ores and concentrates experienced an annual decline. In the same time, the volume of imports decreased by 1.5% yearly. Consequently, the trade deficit shrank by 3.1% yearly (it is the first time in 2022 that the deficit of the merchandise trade experienced an annual decline. While the deficit has been widening on average by 39% in January-August 2022), and amounted to 561.1 million USD. Overall, trade related variables still had a notable positive contribution to the GDP growth forecast.

REMITTANCES

In September, remittances increased by 84.6% annually and reached 387.2 million USD. The main contributors to this increase were Russian Federation (contributing to over half of the overall growth, 64.5 ppts), Kyrgyzstan (7.0 ppts), Armenia (3.7 ppts), Belarus (3.0 ppts), Germany (2.4 ppts), Kazakhstan (2.0 ppts), USA (2.0 ppts), Tajikistan (1.4 ppts), Italy (1.1 ppts), UK (1.0 ppt), and Uzbekistan (1.0 ppt). Whereas money inflows decreased from Ukraine (3.8 ppts), Azerbaijan (1.6 ppts), Greece (0.7 ppts), and Moldova (0.3 ppts). Overall, the significant increase in remittances flows made a positive contribution to the growth forecast.

TOURISM

Tourism arrivals and receipts notably recovered in September of 2022 after a sharp decline in 2020 and a recovery process in 2021. In September, the number of international visitors increased

by 147% yearly, while the increase in tourist numbers (visitors who spent 24 hours or more in Georgia) amounted to 116.7%. Overall, recovering numbers of visitors and tourists, along with an increase in touristic spending has made a positive contribution to the growth forecast.

REAL EFFECTIVE EXCHANGE RATE (REER)

REER depreciated by 2.1% monthly and appreciated by 18.3% yearly in September. Moreover, the GEL/EUR, GEL/USD, and GEL/TRY real exchange rate appreciated (except GEL/RUB, which depreciated by 11.7%) compared to the same month of the previous year by 31.7%, 12.7%, and 42.6% respectively. The Lari Real Exchange Rate (RER) depreciated in monthly terms with respect to the currencies of the major partner countries - Euro (EUR) (by 1.0%), Russian Ruble (RUB) (by 2.9%), Turkish Lira (TRY) (by 3.4%) and US Dollar (USD) (by 2.0%). Overall, REER-related variables had a small negative contribution to the real GDP growth projections.

WORLD PRICES

The other variables of interest in our growth forecast were Metals Price Index (PMETA) and the Agricultural Raw Materials Index (PRAWM). Metals form a significant share in Georgia's exports, while food and oil are among the main

¹ However, annual increase in food price index has decreasing trend.

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"We are happy to offer an important

new service to Android users. Google Pay and its application Google Wallet, which has a high standard of security, will make the process of payments around the world even more convenient for them," Terabank said.

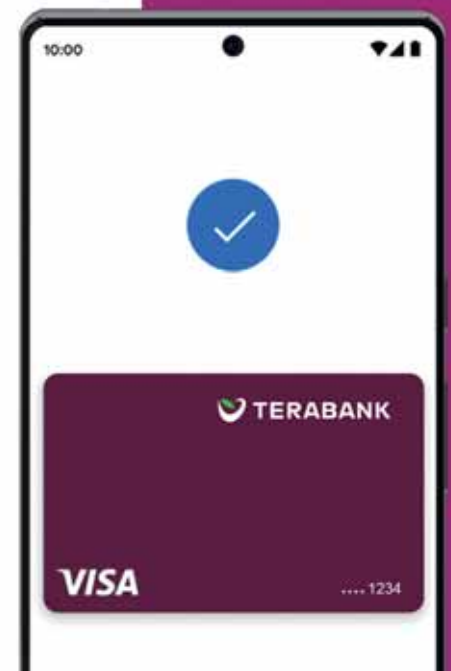
Google Wallet is protected with the most modern settings. These include two-step verification, Find My Phone, remote data wipe, etc. With the help of privacy settings, the user controls his personal data and determines who can see and use them. In addition, Google Pay does not share the card number with the business when paying with Android which means that transactions are securely encrypted before, during and after payment.

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EFES Georgia Presents a New Entrepreneurship Program at PechaKucha Night Event



Together with "Startup Bureau" and "Impact Hub Tbilisi", EFES Georgia hosted PechaKucha Night Tbilisi event. The company presented a new entrepreneurship program as well.

The concept of the event is "Going Green". The representatives of different companies spoke about their own experiences, how their organizations are working to make Georgia, the region and the world a better place. Each company that was presented at the event contributes to making the world greener and strives to make it better by changing people's habits. The creative ideas and initiatives were discussed on PechaKucha Night for a bigger impact.

Sustainable development is one of the priorities for EFES Georgia. The company is currently working on several projects which aim to protect the environment and resources,

as well as improve the environment for the future generation of Georgia. In accordance with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, sustainable development is a priority for EFES Georgia.

The aim of EFES Georgia's Entrepreneurship Program is to support Georgian visionaries and entrepreneurs for the sustainable development of the country. EFES Georgia is running different environmental projects, including wastewater treatment, plastic reduction, energy efficiency, etc.

"As a responsible company, EFES Georgia decided to contribute to the development of the innovative ecosystem of the country, as the industry is one of the organic parts of the innovative ecosystem. Due to the fact that this issue is fragmented in our country, the involvement of corporations in this matter is one of the prerequisites for success. Hence, we decided to start a new entrepreneurship

program, which aims to collect ideas in the field of environmental protection, circular economy. The acceleration and transformation of these ideas into startups will be funded by EFES Georgia," states Nikoloz Khundzakhvili, Corporate Affairs Director at EFES Georgia.

PechaKucha was created in Japan in 2003 by renowned architects, Astrid Klein and Mark Dytham. The word "PechaKucha" is Japanese for "chit-chat".

Now in almost 1300 cities, PechaKucha Nights are informal and fun gatherings where creative people, innovators, entrepreneurs, changemakers get together and share their ideas, projects, works, thoughts in the PechaKucha 20x20 format – a slide show of 20 images, each auto-advancing after 20 seconds. It's non-stop and each speaker has got 400 seconds to tell their story, with visuals guiding the way.

Luca Polare Ice Cream Already Available in Hypermarkets

Luca Polare's packaged ice cream is now available in all Goodwill hypermarkets. The company started producing packaged ice cream last year

to sell in its own network, but, due to high demand, they decided to develop the brand's industrial line and started cooperation with Goodwill.

"The brand has acted in accordance

with the market requirements and the wishes of our customers at all stages of development, and the industrial line and development is the exact result of this," says Tea Tabagari, Director at Luca Polare.

"In Luca Polare branches, guests now have the opportunity to buy their favorite flavors in liter packs and take them home!

"Due to the great demand of our customers, we decided to produce packaged ice cream in liter packs. At this stage, the packs can be purchased in all our large branches. We do not rule out that our ice cream will also appear in supermarkets and become even more accessible to our loyal customers," she adds.

"We often saw customers taking away a large amount of ice cream in cups, and we decided to make it more comfortable for them to do so as part of our friendship, and now they have the opportunity to enjoy Luca's ice cream at home and outside," says Ani Tsitskishvili, head of public relations and marketing.

Luca Polare is a chain of ice cream parlors that offers up to 70 types of ice cream and exclusive coffee. The brand has been operating on the Georgian market for 13 years and is currently represented in 5 cities throughout Georgia, with 12 branches in Tbilisi, 1 in Rustavi, 4 in Batumi, 1 in Kobuleti, and 1 in Kutaisi.





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EU, UNDP, CENN Aim to Boost Upper Adjarian Gastrotourism through Training Local Women Entrepreneurs



Women from Highlands of Adjara

BY KATIE RUTH DAVIES

With the support of the EU and UNDP, within the ENPARD initiative, CENN has successfully rounded up its 'Boosting Entrepreneurship Opportunities for Women through Promoting Women-led Gastronomic Tourism in Mountainous Adjara' project, the main goal of which was to support the empowerment of local women in the social and economic directions. In addition, the project aimed to support sustainable development and green growth in highland Adjara by promoting the development of the gastronomic tourism sector. "For the last couple of years, CENN has been actively contributing to the economic development of mountainous Adjara through its interventions in the local business market," says Nana Janashia, CENN's Executive Director. "We believe that empowering people living in the mountainous regions of Georgia is key to the equal socio-economic development of the country as a whole."

Within the framework of the project, entrepreneurs and women interested in entrepreneurial activities living in Khulo and Keda municipalities were trained in the direction of gastronomic tourism. 24 local women participated in the training course, which included interactive trainings, study visits, and practical workshops. The training modules covered gastronomic tourism as an important part of cultural tourism; the role of gastrotourism in the development of the

Local women are the key drivers of the tourism sector

country's economy; gastrotourism and sustainable development; modern trends; best practices and challenges; gastronomy and the potential of Adjara; creation and development of gastro-tourism products; and using digital technologies to develop gastro-tourism products.

"Upper Adjara has become one of the most in-demand travel destinations in Georgia, promising as it does unique tourist experiences," Janashia notes. "Mountainous villages of regions such as Keda and Khulo have a variety of gastro and wine tourism opportunities to offer, which is why it is essential to foster human capital development and tourism product diversification in order to fully utilize the local market potential."

"As part of the EU and ENPARD-funded project in Keda and Khulo, we are supporting local women to improve their entrepreneurial skills, as they are the key drivers of the tourism sector there," Janashia adds. "By empowering local entrepreneurs in diverse social and economic directions, as well as promoting the development of the gastronomic tourism sector in the region, we support the sustainable development and green growth of highland Adjara."

"Development of mountainous, remote areas in Georgia has been a priority for the UNDP for decades," Nodar Kereselidze, National Project Manager of the UNDP Project. "Improving Rural Development in Georgia" told us. "This is especially important for reaching out and addressing the pressing needs of the vulnerable population, youth, women, minorities and other disadvantaged. Under the ENPARD III program, one of the reasons to work in the Keda and Khulo municipalities was to complement and increase the impact of the activities of the Local Action Groups (LAGs) established with the support of the European Union. In the scopes of one of UNDP's direct interventions, 'Supporting Rural Women-Led Businesses,' CENN was awarded with the contract with the aim to boost entrepreneurship opportunities for women through promoting women-led gastronomic tourism in mountainous Adjara."

During the course of the project, women living in rural areas presented pilot ideas, of which the best six were selected. The authors of the best ideas were awarded grants to purchase the necessary equipment to implement their projects for the creation and development of local gastrotourism products.

The winners were, from Keda Municipality:

1. Naira Diasamidze - Baklava Master-class



Naira Diasamidze, Project Beneficiary

The mountainous villages of regions such as Keda and Khulo have a variety of gastro and wine tourism opportunities to offer

2. Guguli Chagalidze - Gastro Blog and Sunday School with "Zebo"

3. Indira Beridze - Cafe-Museum in Zvare

From Khulo Municipality:

4. Iamze Meladze - Improvement of the services of the guesthouse "Karati" in gastrotourism

5. Tsiuri Solomonidze - National Folklore and Gastronomy

6. Asmat Tunadze - Tkklapi Production

GEORGIA TODAY heard from two of the many beneficiaries. The first, Asmat Tunadze from Festili, told us how she expects her project to benefit her region and Georgian gastrotourism in general.

"My winning project is 'Development of Khulo Tkklapi as a Gastrotourism Product.' Tkklapi is a fruit leather which you can roll up and eat," she informs us. "By implementing this project, I will promote the development of Tkklapi, well-known as part of Georgian cuisine, in particular Tkklapi made in the highlands in Khulo, into a gastrotourist product."

"The implementation of my project will help the local population to solve the traditional problem of selling its surplus fruits, meaning many families will receive additional income. Of course, this will not happen through my project alone, or even just thanks to the Tkklapi drying machine I bought for the project, but when people see the success of my project, others will start similar activities based on the possibilities my project opens."

We asked Asmat about the benefits taking part in this initiative had given her.

"As a person interested in entrepreneurship, the project gave me the opportunity to train in this direction," she answered. "Within the framework of the project, I received trainings on the latest trends in gastrotourism, gastrotourism in the highlands of Adjara, and digital marketing, through which I can raise awareness."

She tells us that, as part of the training, study visits were made to different parts of Georgia, where the beneficiaries discovered the successful activities of other entrepreneurs.

"It was also important for me, as a beginner entrepreneur living in Khulo municipality, to meet eight successful women from the nearby Keda municipality, with whom I'll be able to cooperate in future."

"The benefit of participating in this project was not only my pilot idea win-

ning, but the important knowledge and experience I gained from the trainings and study visits. Many thanks to CENN and the EU and UNDP. This project gave me an incentive and I hope to go on to be a successful entrepreneur in the future," Asmat enthused.

Next to talk to us was Naira Diasamidze of 'Adjarian Baklava,' whose winning project aims to produce and popularize traditional Adjarian Baklava and local confectionery, as well as to entertain tourists.

"Within the framework of this project, I purchased equipment that allows me to provide high-quality service and comply with business standards in the making of Adjarian Baklava," Naira told us.

"With financial support of the European Union's ENPARD program, UNDP is actively supporting rural development needs throughout the country with a primary focus on improved governance and policymaking, as well as addressing economic, social and environmental challenges," UNDP's Nodar Kereselidze told GEORGIA TODAY. "In Adjara A/R, UNDP has supported the advancement of institutional and a strategic framework for improved rural service delivery, and provided direct interventions, among them business and green matching grants, smart villages, digital transformation, and strengthening urban-rural linkages. As a result, in Adjara A/R at this stage, among other outcomes, more than 200 new, permanent jobs have been created (46% for women), over 300 rural micro business have increased their capacities, 10 inter-territorial development partnerships have been formed, and over 150 households benefit from renewable energy/energy efficiency projects."



Gastronomic experience from Highlands of Adjara

24 local women participated in the training course, which included interactive trainings, study visits, and practical workshops

Svaneti: Lessons Learned, Part 2



BLOG BY TONY HAMER

Continuing my series on what this great, high, faraway province has taught me in the 15 years I lived there, now writing from Tbilisi. This time we will jump the gun a bit and turn our attention to the most eagerly awaited and perhaps always shortest season of all, Spring.

Winter has been long and harsh. Up there, we consume a lot of firewood and electricity both, mostly for heating, although my wife and I typically use more electricity than wood. This is because we have the heaters anyway, bought second-hand years ago, and we also don't have the logging rights OR

forest experience that local Svans typically do. Our firewood has typically come from all the leftovers when building things like the café (a lot of scrap wood results from this). The rest has been logs delivered by oxen-pair, every 2nd year or so, which need at least a year of drying once they're chain-sawed and split, to minimize their creosote output and maximize efficiency when we burn them. Now, with the arrival of spring, as things warm up, the electrical and firewood loads both lessen. We also do as much cooking as possible using electricity, instead of the wood-burning stove, being that it's free!

Late winter has given us Lamproba, the joyous Svan festival of burning torches, commemorating an important military victory, tied to the changing Easter calendar which really heralds the seasons'

change. White's dominance gives way to all the greens the eye has been longing for for nearly half a year, and then all the colors of wildflowers one after another. The bees get busy outdoors as well, following the long dormancy in their hives. Snow-melt briefly turns our slightly sloping fields into virtual swamps as it pours off and down towards the waiting Enguri River.

Spring... time to get busy in the garden, probably the main work difference. Once the snow has gone, usually in April, the now much darker ground soaks up sunlight in the lengthening daytime, thaws quickly, softens and warms up. Manure from the cows can be spread, and plowing done. Formerly this was another oxen-pair job, but increasingly we see it done using gasoline-powered small or large implements, either hand-steered by a walker, or ride-on ones if the farmer can afford such. Potatoes are the main perennial crop, but also corn, squash, beans, onions and other herbs.

My wife loves having flowers, so she plants a lot of these as well. The fruit trees need pruning, either by handsaw or secateurs (a variation on scissors). Our temperate fruits include apples, pears, plums sweet or sour, cherries ditto, raspberries, strawberries, quinces a bit lower down than where we live. Walnuts are very popular too, an important crop, though ours, a wedding present as seedlings, are still not mature enough yet. Some hazelnuts, but these more wild than cultivated. There's weeding to do too, and letting the cows do most of their eating in village fields. These are opened several at a time for local herds to graze on, then closed one after the other and



their hay allowed to grow up for the coming winter. Eventually the cattle will be going outside the village for their main summer daily grazing, but those higher pastures are not yet free of snow.

We check what if any damages have been wrought by the loads of snow, chiefly to fences, which may have sagged or outright fallen over in sections. There may be need to either pound back in oak fence-posts if these have worked loose, or replace them altogether if their pointed ends have started to rot after the years of life they typically give. We may also need more wire and fence-slats for the repairs. Cows or pigs will get in wherever they can, so the fight against them must be vigilant!

The whole local world is waking up, stretching, returning to life. But as I write this, our village of Etseri is still seeing

above-freezing temperatures during the day, and not much below freezing at night. The shortest day of the year, just before the last week of December, and the first snow to stay and not melt, are still ahead. So all that winter is yet to come. And this time, aside from its stark monochrome beauty, writing in my dressing gown in our centrally heated Tbilisi apartment, I will miss it not a bit.

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

USAID and UNICEF Review Covid Response in Georgia



Ghassan Khalil (center left) and John Pennell (center right) sharing thoughts during the event in Tbilisi. Source: UNICEF/Blagonravova

BY MICHAEL GODWIN

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have summarized their results following a year-long partnership. The two organizations have worked tirelessly to support the Government of Georgia in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. From September 2021 to November 2022, UNICEF and USAID say they worked to provide "critical equipment and supplies to strengthen health services; improving infection, prevention and control measures; addressing vaccine hesitancy and enhancing demand for vaccination; obtaining real time data; improving water, sanitation and hygiene services; and countering disinformation related to COVID-19 vaccination."

Headed by Ghassan Khalil, UNICEF Representative in Georgia, and John Pennell, USAID Mission Director, the

event also hosted youth groups and partners that facilitated the initiative's goals. This project was a continuation of a partnership project implemented in 2020-2021 that was also aimed at getting Georgia the equipment necessary in a rapid timeframe. The speakers reiterated their commitment to the overall objectives.

John Pennell stated that "what we accomplished fighting the pandemic also has lasting benefits for the health of Georgians, among them the training of medical personnel and oversight of the care program rollout, specifically the National Immunization Program." Being one of the first to step forward and help Georgia, Pennell notes USAID assisted with the first 100,000 doses of the vaccine. The organization also focused, throughout the pandemic, on strengthening the processes in the health sector, and partnered with other US-based health organizations for additional resources.

Complimenting Pennell's remarks, Ghassan Khalil said his team was "grateful to USAID for their tremendous sup-

port." He also reiterated the work done with the Georgian government and health workers, saying "we reached more than one million people and helped them to become more resilient and capable of coping with the impact of the pandemic."

During the event, the results of the year-long program and its benefits were on display for guests. Materially, the support provided allowed for a massive advancement in Georgia's mission to combat the pandemic, as well as future health crises, among which were 346 refrigerators and 500 cold boxes, mostly for health centers in the country's rural regions. These regions, still building their capabilities, were particularly vulnerable during the pandemic.

Because of this vulnerability, the health professionals in these communities were also given specialized training. 1,284 rural primary healthcare workers were put through advanced courses, with the help from the Nursing Association, to assist with pediatric cases. Additionally, over 1,200 facilities were outfitted with updated systems, allowing for a more rapid transfer of healthcare information

and case files, as well as reducing unnecessary redundancies and the potential for errors. This technological assistance also helped over 94,700 youth through remote medical programs and care.

Advancing this outreach, members of both the healthcare and non-healthcare workforces were given curated education on infection prevention and control techniques. Over 31,000 workers were put through this training, and more than 400,000 others had access to various COVID-19 specific resources, particularly on vaccination. This effort led to a massive increase in vaccination throughout the education industry, with more than three quarters of the community taking part.

In one example, Pennell cited the work done in the region of Guria. During his statements, he referred to the "safe drinking water in schools and clinics in Guria." 32 schools and 4 hospitals were refitted with unique water filtration systems. These systems, through a partnership with Shalom Club Guria, improved the drinking water quality for an estimated 5,000 students and teachers as well as 7,000 patients in the region's clinics.

Continuing the mission of reaching the nation's youth, the report stated that 38,234 young people benefited from hygiene messaging. Aimed at improving safe practices, COVID-19 prevention, and

general sanitation, the program had an impact on these youth, who likely shared this with families, expanding the impact. UNICEF and USAID partnered with Helping Hand, Adjara Organization of Scouts Movement, Civil Society Development Center, and Kant's Academy to amplify its reach.

The information campaign also remained a focus of the joint program. In working with key organizations such as the Communications Commission and the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, education courses aimed at media literacy have been reinforced. In concert with this initiative, efforts targeted at tackling disinformation reached an estimated 800 educators and parents, as well as 70,000 via online platforms through partnerships with Democracy Laboratory.

The event closed with a positive outlook for the future. While the health situation has improved due to these efforts, the work continues. Both UNICEF and USAID pledged their support to Georgia, as programs continue to be monitored and adjustments made as necessary. While the programs focus on a wide range of issues facing the country, the joint partnership initiative echoes UNICEF's motto; "we work for every child, everywhere, to build a better world for everyone."



The presentation of the results of the joint program, along with a panel discussion. Photo by Mike Godwin

German Ingenuity in Georgian Education: Professor Dr. Wolfgang Herrmann



President Emeritus Wolfgang A. Herrmann, Honorary President of Kutaisi International University.
Source: The Technical University of Munich

INTERVIEW BY MICHAEL GODWIN

Home to some of Georgia's oldest academic centers, Kutaisi also boasts the widely popular Kutaisi International University (KIU). Opened in 2020, it has become the epicenter for innovation in Georgia's higher learning industry. Through a strategic partnership with the Technical University of Munich (TUM), it is poised to be the academic and research capital of the Caucasus. These programs, as well as in its organizational structure and development plan, have set KIU apart from other universities in the region. This framework is part of a concept that comes from its honorary president, Professor Doctor Wolfgang A. Herrmann.

Professor Herrmann served as the President of TUM from 1995 to 2019, where his expansive governance reforms earned the institute the reputation of Europe's leading entrepreneurial university. During his 24-year term, he personally saw the appointment of more than 500 new professors, attracting the best in academic talent. GEORGIA TODAY sat down with Prof. Dr. Herrmann to explore his views on KIU, Georgian education, and the path ahead.

THE KIU INNOVATE BUSINESS FORUM WAS JUST HELD, AND FOR THIS VERY REASON, YOU

DECIDED TO VISIT GEORGIA ALL THE WAY FROM GERMANY. COULD YOU TELL US ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF THE EVENT AND YOUR EXPECTATIONS?

In the future, the fruitful interaction between academia and business is of utmost interest. It is particularly necessary in order to develop new businesses in Georgia, to internationalize business and management, and also to bring in international companies from Germany, Europe, and the United States. They need to get active in Georgia, so this forum actually intends to show the potential of the new university on one hand with its international approach and challenges, and on the other hand to make Georgia attractive for international companies. At the same time, many national companies were also present, making contact with international businesses.

KIU HAS BECOME A GAME-CHANGER IN THE COUNTRY, PROVIDING STUDENTS THE BEST POSSIBLE EDUCATION. TELL US MORE ABOUT YOUR ROLE AND THOUGHTS ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY ITSELF.

I've been running The Technical University of Munich for 24 years, so in this function I've been the longest serving president in a European university. My commitment was to introduce entrepreneurship, the entrepreneurial spirit, into the academia of the Technical University. To give you an example, when I started

as president 25 years ago, there were hardly any spin-offs coming out of University and its variety of research. Now, we have about a hundred new spin-offs every year. One spin-off that was started in 2011 now has a value of \$10 billion on the New York Stock Exchange. So that tells you that from very, very little tiny plants indeed, you can grow huge trees within a relatively short period of time.

My role at KIU is first to support, develop and foster the university internationality, in terms of interdisciplinary, number two, and its entrepreneurial spirit, number three. To start with these principles, you need international experience, which can be provided in KIU. This is achieved by the new University becoming international as soon as possible, hiring international professors, and having a good mix with national Georgian professors.

Also, having mostly Georgian students of course, but students from other countries, too, as well as by sending Georgian students to study in Germany, France, Great Britain, Israel, Japan and America, to just name the priority countries. They need to gain international experience because if you have seen how people in other countries of the world are thinking and acting, then this changes and improves your own behavior. I think these are the three principles I want to contribute to KIU, to help gain it a reputation and worldwide visibility, to the benefit of Georgia and the Caucasus region.

FOUNDING THE UNIVERSITY IN THE OLDEST EDUCATIONAL CENTER OF GEORGIA WAS ITSELF A HISTORIC DECISION AND YOU CHOSE TO BE HONORABLE PRESIDENT OF IT. WHAT IS YOUR OPINION ON THE COUNTRY ITSELF AND ITS ACADEMIC SCENE?

This is the ideal question in these difficult times that we are living in. This focuses on my view of universities. Many universities, all across the globe, do not deserve their names. They hide from everybody, they are not open-minded enough, they are not international enough. But now, in this political situation, people recognize that Georgia is a key place between Old Europe and Central Asia. Georgia is going to adopt a central role, in a geopolitical sense, in the near future.

For that reason, it is necessary that we create an international university in Kutaisi which is accepted by the academic and business communities all over. It would not suffice to have a new university that is just on a national level. Now what Georgia needs is a truly inter-

national university that can also act as the springboard between Old Europe and Central Asia. I think Georgia has been underestimated in the past 50 years in terms of its possible geopolitical role. But now, through the recent political developments, this is recognized also in the Western hemisphere.

WHAT ARE YOUR FUTURE PLANS WITH THE UNIVERSITY?

Kutaisi International University, in the midterm run, should be the most prominent university in the entire Caucasus. We should have the effect of being a role model for others in the region, but also be accepted as an international university by the best competitors in Europe and the rest of the world. That must be the goal, and for that we have to work very hard in order to develop the curricula to get the right set of disciplines. We must also find the most brilliant students by fair strictly talent-based selection processes. I think if we teach them to become international, to develop a global, open mindset, then we can get the new elite of Georgia.



Professor Dr. Herrmann speaking at TUM Asia. Source: TUM Asia



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