



Image source: OC-Media

FOCUS ON A NEW BILL

Is the Georgian gov't following in Russia's footsteps? PAGE 5

Retired Combat Pilot Greg Bagwell on the Power of the F16

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE FOR RFE/RL

If I was a Russian pilot with 100 hours training in an aircraft, I am going to be shit scared of getting airborne and wondering whether there's an F16 up there - Greg Bagwell, retired Air Marshall and combat pilot, the UK's Air Commander for four years and current President of the Air and Space Power Association, told RFE/RL's Georgian Service. We sat down with him to talk more about the war and the weapons and tactics being chosen in fighting it.

NOT MUCH HAS GONE ACCORDING TO PLAN FOR THE RUSSIANS IN THIS WAR. WHAT ARE THE REASONS BEHIND RUSSIA'S FAILURE TO ESTABLISH UNCONTESTED AIR SUPREMACY?

You could argue they never thought they needed it, that they thought this would be over quickly, that they would destabilize the country with very little fuss. That was the first thing that went wrong.

Continued on page 6 An F16. Source: britannica.com



In this week's issue...

Ukraine Updates: EU Announces New Russia Sanctions Package as the West Continues to Drag its Feet on Fighter Jets
NEWS PAGE 2

Saakashvili and the Future of Georgian Stability
POLITICS PAGE 3

Why Are the Turkish Presidential and Parliamentary Elections Important?
POLITICS PAGE 4

Shangri La Tbilisi Sponsors The Bakuriani-2023 In Georgia
BUSINESS PAGE 7

Terabank Summarizes the Results of Small and Medium Businesses
BUSINESS PAGE 7

The Fight to Save the Turkish Animals Caught in the Earthquake
SOCIETY PAGE 8

The Tiny Name of a Tiny Flower
CULTURE PAGE 11

Markets							
	Price	w/w	m/m				
BONDS							
GRAIL 07/28	88.75 (YTM 6.53%)	-0.1%	+0.7%	Bank of Georgia (BGE LN)	GBP 27.15	+0.6%	+2.1%
GEBGG 07/23	100.24 (YTM 5.44%)	-0.1%	-0.4%	Georgia Capital (CGEO LN)	GBP 7.60	+0.5%	+3.4%
GEOCAP 03/24	97.23 (YTM 8.90%)	-	+1.8%	TBC Bank Group (TBCG LN)	GBP 24.45	-0.8%	+11.1%
SILNET 01/27	98.30 (YTM 8.89%)	-0.1%	+1.1%				
TBC 06/24	98.54 (YTM 6.90%)	-0.1%	+0.2%				
CURRENCIES							
				GEL / USD	2,6569	+0.7%	-0.7%
				GEL / EUR	2,8495	+0.7%	-1.7%
				GEL / GBP	3,2245	+1.7%	-1.4%
				GEL / CHF	2,8902	+1.7%	+0.2%
				GEL / RUB	0,0360	-2.2%	-7.2%
				GEL / TRY	0,1410	+0.6%	-0.9%
				GEL / AZN	1,5673	+0.8%	-0.5%
				GEL / AMD	0,0067	+1.1%	-0.0%
				GEL / UAH	0,0721	+0.7%	-0.6%
				EUR / USD	0,9326	+0.0%	+1.0%
				GBP / USD	0,8238	-1.0%	+0.7%
				CHF / USD	0,9195	-0.9%	-0.8%
				RUB / USD	73,9938	+3.2%	+7.2%
				TRY / USD	18,8429	+0.1%	+0.3%
				AZN / USD	1,6972	+0.0%	+0.0%
				AMD / USD	394,5500	-0.3%	-0.5%
COMMODITIES							
	Price	w/w	m/m				
	Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	86.61	+6.9%	+1.6%			
	Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	1,853.49	-0.7%	-3.5%			
INDICES							
	Price	w/w	m/m				
	FTSE 100	7,947.60	+1.4%	+1.3%			
	FTSE 250	20,124.52	-1.4%	+0.9%			
	DAX	15,397.34	+0.3%	+2.1%			
	DOW JONES	34,245.93	+1.0%	+2.2%			
	NASDAQ	11,891.79	+0.0%	+7.3%			
	MSCI EM EE	33.59	+1.5%	-1.6%			
	MSCI EM	1,013.53	-0.1%	-1.6%			
	SP 500	4,137.29	+0.6%	+3.5%			
	MSCI FM	2,195.79	-1.3%	-1.2%			

Ukraine Updates: EU Announces New Russia Sanctions Package as the West Continues to Drag its Feet on Fighter Jets

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

Heavy shelling in eastern Ukraine continues, with Kherson, Bakhmut and Donetsk reporting multiple injuries and at least one death.

A new report from the Conflict Observatory, in partnership with Yale University's Humanitarian Research Lab, alleges Russia has forced more than 6,000 Ukrainian children into "re-education" camps.

The report, titled "Russia's systematic program for the re-education and adoption of Ukraine's children," outlines what it calls the Kremlin's systematic efforts to abduct children, prevent their return to Ukraine, and "re-educate" them to become pro-Russia.

NATO members are also in Brussels for their last day of talks, during which they pledged to continue support for Ukraine. Still, despite months of pleas from Kyiv for fighter jets, getting them appears unlikely.

RUSSIA HAS LOST HALF OF ITS BEST TANKS IN THE UKRAINE WAR

Russia is estimated to have lost about half of its mightiest battle tanks in its unprovoked war against Ukraine, according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

Russia's pre-invasion fleet of T-72B3 and T-72B3M main battle tanks stands at about 50% of its pre-invasion levels, and it has about a third of its pre-war fleet of T-80BV and T-80BU tanks, according to the British group.

"Industrial production continues but remains slow, forcing Moscow to rely on its older stored weapons as attrition replacements," said John Chipman,

International Institute for Strategic Studies Director-General and Chief Executive, during a launch event of the annual Military Balance report.

SECRETARY AUSTIN SAYS IRAN IS WORKING TO EXTEND RUSSIA'S WAR IN UKRAINE

US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin told NBC News that Iran is working to extend Russia's war in Ukraine by supplying the Kremlin with additional weapons.

"I think Iran is working to extend this conflict unnecessarily and inflict casualties on civilians," Austin told NBC's Courtney Kube on the sidelines of the NATO defense ministerial.

Austin added that, so far, the US has identified Iranian drones used by Russian forces in Ukraine but has yet to see Iranian ballistic missiles.

"We don't put it past Russia to request that from Iran. The Ukrainians will soon be getting some Patriot batteries and I think that will be very helpful in addressing any capabilities like that in the future," Austin said, adding that the Kremlin has also reached out to North Korea for weapons.

NATO VOWS IT WILL STEP UP SUPPORT FOR BOSNIA, GEORGIA, MOLDOVA

NATO has said it will step up support for Ukraine and other partners at risk, namely Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, and Moldova, it said in a statement after a meeting of the alliance's members in Brussels.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg hailed pledges of continued and doubled-down support for Ukraine by members of the 30-country alliance, including "more heavy weapons and military training," the statement said.

The meeting included approving new guidelines for NATO defense planning,



Image: Yasuyoshi Chiba | AFP | Getty Images

which Stoltenberg said "reflects the reality that we live in a more dangerous world. With Russia's aggressive behavior, the persistent threat of terrorism, and the challenges posted by China."

"It will drive the capability changes for the years to come," he added. "And ensure that our deterrence and defense remain strong and credible."

EUROPEAN COMMISSION OUTLINES NEW SANCTIONS PACKAGE AGAINST RUSSIA TARGETING EXPORTS, OLIGARCHS

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced details of the EU's tenth sanctions package against

Russia for its war in Ukraine, which is subject to the approval of EU member countries. The restrictions target export bans worth 11 billion Euros (\$11.78 billion), exports of dual use and advanced tech goods, as well as Russian propagandists.

The sanctions feature new measures to prevent circumvention, von der Leyen said in a statement, including tracking oligarchs who try to "hide or sell their assets" to escape sanctions.

"We now have in place the toughest sanctions ever introduced by the European Union. And we have to ensure that they are rigorously applied," the statement said.

"We will track oligarchs trying to

hide or to sell their assets to escape sanctions. And together with Member States we will set up an overview of all frozen assets of the Russian central bank held in the EU. We need to know where these are located and how much they are worth. This is crucial in view of the possible use of public Russian assets to fund reconstruction in Ukraine."

"Together, we are tightening the screws on Russia," von der Leyen said, calling on member states to swiftly adopt the package. "Our aim is to have, together with our G7 partners, further significant sanctions in place by 24 February — exactly one year after Putin launched his imperial war."

The Georgia and Armenia Tech Hub Summit 2023

BY MARIAM MTIVLISHVILI

On March 16, the Georgia and Armenia Tech Hub Summit 2023 was held at the Tbilisi Marriott Hotel.

Its main sponsors were GEORGIA TODAY and Tbilisi Marriott Hotel. The conference was organized by the Georgia-based Klein & Patsulaia and Armenia-based Klein & Iskandaryan.

The regional Tech Hub Summit is among the first of its kind. Representatives from three American firms—DataArt, the Cambridge Massachusetts-based Quantori, and Innovecs, were invited as speakers. The German-based Devexperts, also present, has many offices around the world, including in Ukraine and Bulgaria, but does not currently operate in Armenia. All four companies collaborate with Georgian technical universities, however, and in some cases have their own R&D centers.

Also speaking at the summit were representatives from two universities: Georgia's Ilia State University and the Georgian campus of San Diego State University.

As the Klein law firm has offices in Georgia (Klein and Patsulaia) and Armenia (Klein & Iskandaryan), they wanted to find foreign companies that were operating in both markets. At first, there seemed to be hardly any. It came as a surprise, since it made logical sense



that neighbors in the Caucasus would have common business interests. After a deeper look, however, they found that, in fact, in the tech sector there are a lot of businesses working in both markets to tap into the large and booming tech talent.

One of the main themes discussed at the summit was the many subsidy programs and tax incentive schemes for the IT sector carried out in an effort to try to attract investments.

"We wanted to have a conference where we would talk about business, technology, and investment in universities," said Daniel Klein Co-Founder of Klein & Patsulaia, Klein & Iskandaryan. "I think this summit was really interesting, because it featured some of the best topics for Armenia and Georgia. We're confident we will see very interesting prospects going forward."

"Our team believes that communication and education drive innovative ideas," said administrative assistant at Devexperts Georgia Nata Vazhinskaya. "We're focused on building an environment where professionals can freely share their expertise. To do that, we sponsor and take part in international and local professional IT events; organize internships, internal courses and mentorship programs; partner with university programs and conduct workshops for students; and support and manage free events for IT specialists."

The organizers are already planning a follow up Summit for the spring.

Saakashvili and the Future of Georgian Stability



Former President Saakashvili lies in bed during a court video session in Tbilisi. Source: REUTERS/Irakli Gedenidze

BY MICHAEL GODWIN

Georgia's jailed ex-President Mikheil Saakashvili is seen on a screen on a video call from a medical clinic, presenting himself for a court hearing. His legal team has been fighting to have him relinquished to a more well equipped facility abroad over his rapidly deteriorating health. However, these demands have seemingly fallen on deaf ears.

Saakashvili, who led the country during some of its more turbulent years between 2004 to 2013, is incarcerated, serving a six-year charge. This charge, according to him and his supporters, is politically motivated, and unsupported by law.

"If I'd predicted such a rapid invasion [of Ukraine], and also my torture and poisoning in prison, I wouldn't have come back," he said on a note that was reportedly passed to his legal counsel. "I'm afraid of the West's loss of interest in the war. And I'm afraid of my death in prison, and it's inevitable if I do stay here, because it would be a major vic-

tory for Putin."

While his detention upon arrival was heavily protested, not only by locals but also European politicians, it's the recent verdict that raised the stakes. A Tbilisi City Court under Judge Giorgi Arevadze did not grant the request for the reprieve or release of former President despite his ongoing medical issues. The political opposition in the United National Movement political party, as well as Strategy Aghmashenebeli, have walked out of Parliament, refusing to take part and calling their supporters to "street action."

Saakashvili's precarious situation has not only garnered the support of local activists, but also outspoken politicians in Europe and Ukraine. Both have called on Tbilisi to relent and allow the veteran politician to seek care elsewhere. Both Kyiv and Brussels have asked that he potentially be released due to a part of law that cites inmates being remanded to medical facilities in the instance of severe illness.

But Official Tbilisi, and the ruling party in government 'Georgian Dream', have harshly refused. Irakli Kobakhidze, chairman of Georgian Dream, lashed out at the European leaders, saying that he is annoyed by talk of the former President.

"It's really infuriating that there is so much talk about Saakashvili," he stated, mirroring prior statements that are likely to damage the reputation of the country in the eyes of the European Union.

This damage to the country's facade would not only further stagnate economic development, but also hinder Western involvement. And some damage has already been done. The visible frustration by the ruling party over the status of a political opponent, poorly disguised as indifference, is not a good look.

All of this leads to a general increase in dissatisfaction with the current government. The problems also stem from a lack of faith in the electoral process in the country. In an International Republican Institute (IRI) poll from the 2021 municipal elections, the population was split, with 32% saying the elections were "sufficiently flawed that you would doubt the accuracy of the results" or that they were "not at all free and fair." Another 32% said they were "completely free and fair" and another 25% admitted that there were "some problems, but [they were] reasonably free and fair."

With so much popular doubt about the electoral process, it leads to the question; where does this point in the country? Can Georgia unify and bring both the ruling party and the opposition together to serve the people? Or will the division tear the country apart and plunge it into the darkness and uncertainty witnessed in the 1990s?

While many have clamored for the national leadership to change its course, lest they be left behind by the West, others say it will take significant action. One such individual, a retired American military officer and former senior member of the US Embassy staff in Tbilisi, remaining unnamed, says it's "it's revolution or bust." According to the US combat veteran and former armored reconnaissance commander, the activities of Georgia Dream are causing the country to spiral down the drain.

From trading verbal blows with the US Ambassador and EU leaders to the ongoing involvement of former Prime Minister of Georgian Bidzina Ivanishvili in political combat, the individual says the future is looking bleak. With few other candidates offering any real change, Georgian Dream has the country right



Saakashvili supporters in Tbilisi demand the ex-President's release. By Vano Shlamov/AFP/Getty Images

where they want it. The opposition, he says, isn't doing themselves any favors. All the other political players are either marred by previous transgressions or are too unknown and don't have the 'weight' to bring in the votes. This leaves only someone with the name of Saakashvili to rally enough support. However, most people would agree that while the deplorable state of Saakashvili is heartbreaking to watch, they still don't want him in power.

The variability and potentially volatility of introducing a new ruling party is outweighed by the constant that is Georgian Dream. The situation is much like the stability and predictability of the Soviet era, where, while the situation was poor, it was stable and a known constant. This complacency is noted by politicians of other former-Soviet states.

The Baltic states are a prime example of this. Despite years of turbulence from the proverbial ripping out of the Russian umbilical cord, they managed to not only

integrate in the EU, but also NATO and other European economic and political organizations. Their economy continues to flourish, and their security is virtually guaranteed.


For the future of Georgia, change is inevitable. Just as Saakashvili withers away in a clinic bed under the watchful eye of the best security resources the country can provide, so too does the hope of EU acceptance wither for Georgia. However, unlike the former President, the country is not doomed to a fate of relegation: There is still hope for the Jewel of the South Caucasus.




The nation cannot rest on its laurels having pulled itself from a faltering post-Soviet country in the 1990s and early 2000s. There is still an immense amount of work to do, even if that means significant change and overhauling improvements. But therein lies the prize, the fruit gained from the excruciating labor of political, judicial, educational, military, and economic reforms.


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Why Are the Turkish Presidential and Parliamentary Elections Important?

BLOG BY ZURAB
BATIASHVILI FOR GFSIS

Presidential and parliamentary elections are planned in the Republic of Turkey on May 14, 2023. Why are these elections important and what can we expect from them?

2023 marks the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Republic of Turkey, and the upcoming elections are expected by many to feature as a sort of referendum; a turning point that will determine what the future of the country of 85 million people will be in the short term perspective, as well as in the long run.

Indeed, these elections may turn out to be the most important and dramatic in the history of the Republic of Turkey. Turkish citizens will have to choose not only between the current conservative, centralized government and a diverse, relatively decentralized opposition, but also decide what form of government Turkey will have. The opposition promises that if they win, the country will return to the parliamentary governance system, they will return millions of Syrians living in the country, and they will solve the economic challenges facing Turkey (they published a 244-page plan for this goal on January 30).

These elections will also decide whether the nearly 22-year rule and political course of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party will continue. It should be noted that during this time, the ruling party has won 13 elections and 3 referendums held in the country, among them, the 2017 referendum, thanks to which Turkey switched from a parliamentary to a presidential system of governance.

These elections coincide with a Turkey facing multiple economic challenges, and this factor may have a significant impact on the election results. Among the setbacks are high inflation, devaluation of the Turkish Lira, and increased unemployment. These problems traditionally harm the rating of the acting government in Turkey. If we look at the results of the last local elections in 2019, we can see that the victory of opposition representatives in the big cities (Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, etc.) was mainly related to economic difficulties, although, in this case, the support of opposition candidates by pro-Kurdish forces was

also an important factor.

However, the government is well aware of the importance of the economic situation in relation to the outcome of the elections. Erdogan has already begun serious preparations to alleviate the economic hardships of ordinary voters. He mobilized tens of billions of US dollars within the country and abroad to maintain the exchange rate of the Turkish Lira (for this purpose, the Central Bank of Turkey in the past year, allocated 108 billion US dollars) and, with various regulations, is trying to regulate the increase of prices, especially with regard to food and rental prices. In January, it significantly increased the minimum wage – from 5,500 Lira (about 300 US dollars) to 8,500 Lira (about 450 US dollars).

These measures have had their positive effects, and Erdogan's rating, and that of the ruling party, increased by several points, seeing them mainly taking the votes of undecided voters. However, no-one knows how long it will be possible to maintain the exchange rate with these methods, the devaluation of which is perceived by the majority of ordinary voters as an economic crisis. From this, we can say that whichever power wins in these elections, its main issue will be the country's economy.

In the upcoming elections, the political forces are grouped as follows:

1. The ruling coalition, known as the People's Alliance, includes, in addition to Erdogan's conservative Justice and Development Party, the far-right Nationalist Movement Party. Together, they hold 335 mandates in the 600-member parliament;

2. A rather diverse opposition union known as the National Alliance (sometimes referred to as the "Table of Six" due to the number of parties included within it), which includes parties of six different orientations (left-center, Kemalist, right-center, and conservative). Together, they hold 174 seats in the Turkish Parliament;

3. The left-wing pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party, whose leader Selahattin Demirtas has been imprisoned since 2016, serving a sentence on charges of producing propaganda in favor of a terrorist organization. The legal process is ongoing against this political party itself on charges of separatist activities. Currently, the People's Democratic Party in the Turkish Parliament holds 56 mandates. Recent public opinion polls show that



the ruling party is still the most popular, and will most likely take most of the votes. However, it is clear that it will not be able to form a majority on its own. Here, it will be of decisive importance to what extent its partner, the Nationalist Movement Party, will be able to overcome the 7% barrier required to enter Parliament (according to the polls, today the party is at the mentioned limit), and how many of its representatives will have mandates within the legislative body.

The complex, mixed (majoritarian-proportional) electoral system of Turkey allows, for example, in the case of receipt of 42% of the votes, the formation of a majority in the parliament. However, for this, it is necessary to win in those governorates where the population is relatively small. Such places are mainly provinces of conservative sentiment, where the ruling party is traditionally strong.

The official candidate for the presidential elections of the current ruling party is, of course, the current president Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The opposition has not yet nominated its own unified presidential candidate (and are expected to do so on February 14).

Among the possible candidates was Ekrem Imamoglu, the charismatic Mayor of Istanbul from the left-centrist Republican People's Party, who in 2019 was able to mobilize the votes of a large number of citizens of both conservative,

left-wing, and Kurdish origin in the country's largest city, while defeating the official candidate of the ruling party.

However, after Imamoglu was sentenced to prison and ceased his political activity, the opposition was left with a dilemma. Active internal debates and consultations are ongoing in the opposition on the selection of a common presidential candidate.

According to the results of the public opinion poll, at the moment Erdogan is still ahead and needs around 8-10% to be able to win in the first round. Otherwise, a second round will be scheduled with an interval of two weeks. If this happens, it will be decisive who will be supported by the pro-Kurdish "People's Democratic Party", which has distanced itself from the ruling party. Those votes are not guaranteed for the opposition candidate either, however. If the candidate is left-leaning, his or her chances of getting those votes increase, but if the unified candidate of the opposition is a right-wing nationalist, then it will be difficult to mobilize Kurdish votes.

Nor can it be ruled out that one competing force will win the presidential elections and another will win the parliamentary elections. In this case, a fierce confrontation will likely take place. Here, we should also take into account that after the transition to a new system of governance, this will be the first precedent of tension between different

branches of government, and no-one can say how it will end.

Issues related to foreign policy are not the main topic of these elections, and when the majority of voters make their choice, foreign policy matters will be of less importance.

However, due to Turkey's military-political and economic weight, the Turkish presidential and parliamentary elections have an international dimension. The opposition promises that in case of victory, the country's main objective will be the acquisition of full membership in the European Union. Turkey currently has the status of a candidate member, although the process of accession negotiations was suspended for political reasons. President Erdogan favors a more balanced foreign policy, which we have seen throughout his rule.

The Turkish presidential and parliamentary elections, the country's foreign and domestic policy, as well as the economic situation there, are also important for Georgia, as its largest trading partner for many years now has been the Republic of Turkey (as of 2022, the volume of bilateral trade increased again and amounted to 2.8 billion US dollars).

Considering all the above-mentioned factors, we can assume that the presidential and parliamentary elections in Turkey will be a tense but extremely interesting process, and certainly one to watch.



European Parliament: Saakashvili's Ongoing Detention is "Ivanishvili's Personal Vendetta"

BY ANA DUMBADZE

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the condition of the former president of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili, urging the authorities to pardon and release him.

Further, the European Parliament resolution calls for imposition of sanctions against Bidzina Ivanishvili.

The resolution underlines the fundamental role that oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili has played in Mr. Saakashvili's ongoing detention "as part of a personal vendetta".

"Therefore, Parliament reiterates its call on the Council and democratic partners to consider imposing sanctions on Mr. Ivanishvili for his role in 'the deterioration of the political process in Georgia,'" reads the resolution.

577 MEPs supported the resolution, 33 voted against it, and 26 abstained.

Bloomberg: Credit Suisse paid Georgian Billionaire \$210 million

Credit Suisse Group AG says it has paid \$210 million to date to billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili in a long-running legal saga, Bloomberg reports.

The bank has paid the sum "over time for the proceedings across all the plaintiff's accounts," a spokesperson for the Swiss lender said by email. The statement didn't reveal a figure for the ongoing trial in Singapore, or give a time frame for when the money was paid out in a case of fraud that was only detected in 2015.

"The statement is the most detailed admission yet of how much the legal wrangling is costing Credit Suisse globally and emerged amid closing arguments at a two-day hearing in Singapore, which will mark the end of a trial that began in September.

Georgian tycoon Bidzina Ivanishvili sued the bank's trust unit for \$800 million in damages and lost income he said he would have made over the years if his money had been safely invested. Patrice Lescaudron was convicted in



2018 for fraud over a scheme he ran to take money from Ivanishvili's accounts to cover growing losses among other clients' portfolios.

Credit Suisse Trust has consistently argued that its responsibility was limited to administration of the assets belonging

to Bidzina Ivanishvili and that it was the tycoon, or his Georgian business adviser, who called the shots on investment decisions and should be liable for any losses. Lescaudron was a lone wolf who hid his crimes from colleagues, according to the bank," reads the information.

On the "Agent of Foreign Influence" Bill and Its Disastrous Consequences for Georgia



Image source: oc-media.org

BLOG BY KAKHA GOGOLASHVILI, GFSIS SENIOR FELLOW AND DIRECTOR OF EU STUDIES, FOR GFSIS

In the last few days, it came to light that one of the, to put it mildly, Eurosceptic political groups had created and submitted to Georgian Parliament a draft law that, similarly to the Russian Federation, aims to label non-governmental organizations that receive funding from foreign states, associations, or international organizations as "agents of foreign influence" and impose a number of restrictions upon them (90% of these organizations are funded as mentioned).

However, the bill has yet to be made public. According to the information obtained by Radio Liberty, its main provisions include the following principles: All non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entities, including all non-governmental organizations, that receive 20 percent or more of their yearly funding from a "foreign power" will be considered agents of foreign influence, as will television channels that receive 20 percent or more of their yearly funding from a "foreign power" and mass media organizations, including newspapers and online media outlets, that receive 20 percent or more of their yearly funding from a "foreign power". This strange and somewhat confusing terminology - foreign power, is used to refer to branches within foreign state government systems, citizens of foreign countries, legal entities that are not based/founded in Georgia, and organizations, including foundations, that are established under the law of foreign states and/or international law.

According to this bill, it will be mandatory to register such organizations in a separate register of "agents of foreign influence". They will also be subject to administrative penalties for avoiding registration in the relevant database and will be subject to a special regime of financial monitoring by the state.

A very similar sort of law was adopted by Russia in 2012, which was highly criticized and deemed as discriminatory in resolutions adopted by the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. 61 non-governmental organizations in Russia filed an appropriate lawsuit in the European Court of Human Rights of the Council of Europe, which, in a decision issued on June 14, 2022, accused the Russian government of violating several conventions of the Council of Europe as well as a convention adopted under the auspices of the United Nations as a result of this law.

In the justification of the issued decision, the court used the conclusions of authoritative organizations such as the Venice Commission, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, and other influential international human rights organizations. All these organizations point out that the main articles of the law, which refer to the concept of "agent of foreign influence", separate registration of such organizations, special monitoring measures and a special regime of inspections, the method of financing, etc, are discriminatory and unfair, and cannot be justified by arguments regarding national security concerns. With this ruling, the Court of Human Rights of the Council of Europe sought the repeal of the aforementioned law and the payment of adequate damages of more than one million Euros to 61 non-governmental organizations as a result of the harm to their reputation.

A similar law was also passed in 2017 by the Hungarian government, which has recently taken a more Eurosceptic stance. The Court of Justice of the European Union has since discussed the matter at hand, and as a consequence, the court's ruling called for the repeal of the discriminatory law by the Hungarian government. As is well known, the decisions of the Court of Justice of the European Union are final, irrevocable, and binding on the member states.

Aside from Hungary, no other EU member state has such a discriminatory approach regarding the sources of funding of organizations. An exception is seen only in regard to the control mechanisms established for the prevention of terrorism and financing of international crime, which exist in all democratic countries and have nothing in common with the bill proposed in Georgia.

I want to underline the fact that the Georgia-EU Association Agree-

ment (2014) states the following in the preamble: "...WILLING to contribute to the political, socio-economic and institutional development of Georgia through wide-ranging cooperation in a broad spectrum of areas of common interest, such as the development of civil society, good governance, including in the field of taxation, trade integration and enhanced economic cooperation, institution building, public administration and civil service reform and fight against corruption, the reduction of poverty and cooperation in the field of freedom, security and justice necessary to effectively implement this Agreement and noting the EU's readiness to support relevant reforms in Georgia..."; That is, with this note, the government of Georgia agrees to cooperate with the European Union for the development of civil society, which in itself implies (as it happens in the case of all other types of cooperation) the granting of EU funding in projects implemented by local non-governmental organizations to support reforms. Based on this record, any lawyer would view the "agents of foreign influence" law as an attempt to undermine the spirit of the Association Agreement and the basic principles of cooperation.

It is necessary that the Parliament of Georgia takes these circumstances into account and does not allow such a bill to even be put to a vote (which would be a great shame for our entire society and damaging for the country and its European future). If it does happen, the Venice Commission will deem it unfavorable, the European Parliament will criticize it, the European Commission will consider it as a setback for democracy, and, most importantly, results will be transferred as a relevant record in the new recommendation of the European Commission on granting Georgia candidate status for membership, which will be published in September of this year. Conclusively, Georgia will fail to receive the long-awaited candidate status, and it will be unclear as to how much longer we will have to fight and fix the resulting damage.

Hopefully, this topic will be actively and professionally covered by Georgian human rights organizations and lawyers. In addition, I hope that appropriate attention will be given to this matter by the entire civil society of Georgia.

 A promotional poster for the 8th Official Ceremony of the Welcome to Georgia! National Tourism Awards. The poster features a background image of a theater stage with a red curtain. Text on the poster includes:

- WELCOME TO GEORGIA** national tourism awards
- 8TH OFFICIAL CEREMONY OF THE WELCOME TO GEORGIA! NATIONAL TOURISM AWARDS**
- CELEBRATE GEORGIAN TRADITION AND YOUR PERSONAL SUCCESS OF TOURISM & HOSPITALITY**
- FEBRUARY 28, 2023**
- Theatre Tsiskvili Group, Beliashvili st 99**
- OFFICIAL SUPPORTERS** (logos for BDO, INDEPITIAL AUDITOR, THEATRE, SHUMI WINERY, Tbilisi City Hall, Georgia, and the Ministry of Tourism and Sport)

Retired Combat Pilot Greg Bagwell on the Power of the F16



Continued from page 1

Based on what they say they can do, you would think they'd be more than a match for Ukraine, and potentially more than a match for the West. But, actually, that's never been borne out. On the surface, they might have the capabilities, the numbers, but if you don't have the logistics support, the networks, the data management, the supply chain, the armament interface, the sensors, and perhaps even more importantly, the level of training, then your very expensive, very capable machine isn't able to perform at the highest level of its function. What we've seen, particularly from the Russian Air Force, is that they don't have the skills to get the full potential from their platforms, because their training is rather regimental, formulaic; because they have set processes and procedures. The West doesn't fight like that. We're far more fluid. We have the networks and the sensors, and like to fight a far more fluid battle. Russia's not good at that. It's good at military mass and pushing and overwhelming, as proven in Syria and elsewhere, but in Ukraine they met someone that is thinking far more cleverly than they are, and they're not able to catch it. So I think that is a key part to why we haven't seen Russian airpower. They're also probably quite fearful of Ukraine, and being shot down in Ukraine, losing one of their high-end, rather expensive and rather modern pieces of equipment and compromising the intelligence. That's why they're relying on either indiscriminate attacks or long range missiles that only have a certain effect against fixed targets, which more often than not tend to be civilian in nature.

WHAT'S THE REASONING BEHIND THE WEST NOT SENDING THEIR F16S TO UKRAINE?

I say we should, but there is a perception, falsely, in my view, that aircraft cross some red line as to what is acceptable to Russia in order to support Ukraine. And, of course, Russia would want that impression to go on, because the last thing they need a western aircraft troubling them over the skies of Ukraine. I think the view is that aircraft can be

offensive in nature and clearly strike a lot deeper and can go into Russian territory. There's the assumption that Putin will see that as a step too far and will react potentially very disproportionately. And there is a concern that it might drag other nations, NATO, into the conflict. Everyone's trying to avoid escalation. And that's the question here: Are we, in gifting aircraft, going to push Russia into a very different response either against Ukraine or potentially against supporting nations? But I don't think so. As much as Russia doesn't want to see a modern aircraft on the front line, I don't think it's going to push them into doing something irrational.

I think if jets are used in a limited role, particularly for the defense of Ukraine, it can't be seen as escalatory: It's merely giving the tools to a nation for it to defend its sovereign borders, in accordance with international law. There's nothing there that you can pick holes in. Some thought tanks were a step too far, but we've busted through that glass ceiling.

WITH THE TANKS, THE WEST DRAGGED THEIR FEET, THEN CAVED. WILL WE SEE A REPEAT WITH THE JETS?

We were talking very early on last year about potentially gifting MIG 29s from former Eastern European Soviet bloc nations to Ukraine. That fell foul because Poland didn't want to gift them directly and asked America to effectively be the third party agent, but America didn't want to be seen as the agent. There are diplomatic issues in the background here about what can and can't be gifted. There are multiple nations that can donate F16s. It doesn't have to be America, America just has to give permission. F16s aren't the only answer. But because of what it can do, because of how many there are, because of the fact that we can have multiple donors, so no one or two nations would necessarily be singled out, it offers a really strong case for why that aircraft is potentially the right answer. It may be in the calculation of the US President that as long as he's not the person that gifts the aircraft directly, then it might be acceptable.

Unfortunately, we're seeing a diplomatic political dance here to get to a place where everyone can go. It frustrates

me because it takes time to learn about a new aircraft and all the systems and situations you'll need. Ukraine will do it far faster than normal, yes, but the tanks will be going in soon, and as it stands, they'll be going in without air support. We're trying to help Ukraine fight this war in phases, without giving them all the tools they need.

GIVING UKRAINE JUST ENOUGH NOT TO LOSE AND NOT ENOUGH TO WIN?

Yes, that's the danger here. Nobody but Russia wants to see Russia win. Their losing might be enough to put all the problems onto Putin, for a regime change, for the collapse of that particular organization. But that would be paid for in the lives of Ukrainians. That's a moral step that I struggle to accept. If we were to give them the tools now, they could get to that position far more quickly. There is a danger here that people are making a calculation that by drip feeding just enough, they won't lose, but they won't necessarily win, and that gives time for other things to take place and maybe a resolution will be made. That's a very strange way to fight a war against an aggressor who's broken every international law. I really struggle with that position.

We shouldn't just see this as how to win the war that's coming this spring; we need to think about how we can win peace too. Having enough aircraft with the longevity to go for the next 10 - 15 years is just as important a consideration. And I think Ukraine would be wrong to think too short-term: If we're going to do this, let's do it properly: Let's make sure that they've got a solution for the next decade too.

WHAT ARE THE TRAINING / LOGISTICAL HINDRANCES BROUGHT UP AS AN ARGUMENT AGAINST GIFTING THE F16S? HOW LONG WOULD IT TAKE TO TRAIN UKRAINIAN TROOPS TO LEARN?

If you were a combat pilot already, had already flown the MiG 29 in combat, and let's be honest, Ukraine right now has some of the most experienced combat pilots in the world by dint of the last year, and I hope many of them are still

going strong, then somebody of that caliber would be able to transfer on to a new aircraft within about six to eight weeks. Now that's quite aggressive, but doable with virtual reality simulation, by not having to learn every trick in the book and every system - they could do the basics. Essentially, all airplanes fly the same. Up, down, left, right; the same throttles; go forward, go faster, come back, go slow. Using the radar, employing the weapons, locking up targets requires a little bit of finesse, but you won't be surprised to know that modern Western aircraft have got that down to a relatively fine art. So it is learnable in a relatively quick time.

Slightly more difficult is the maintainers learning how to keep the airplane serviceable, make it work, get the weapons on it - that takes some time. But, again, it's not rocket science. With virtual reality, a maintainer could be sat there with a camera on his head with somebody back wherever talking him through the processes. There are lots of different ways that we could make this work. And modern aircraft these days, it's not about lifting the hood and getting your wrench out and mucking about and hitting it with hammers. It's mostly box in, box out.

My personal opinion is that this has been used as an excuse as to why they can't be sent because it's a rather convenient excuse. They've been fighting now for a year; they could have done the full course twice over. So let's stop using the reason that there's not enough time and get to the real truth, which is when are you going to get the courage to do what's right, because the training will happen. Ukraine will make it work - if they can learn how to operate three different main battle tanks in a few months, they can learn how to operate an F16.

JUST HOW MUCH OF A GAME-CHANGER WOULD WESTERN-MANUFACTURED FIGHTER JETS BE? CAN UKRAINE GET BY WITHOUT THEM?

Ukraine has clearly been an incredible nation in so many different ways - not only the resilience of the entire nation to just keep going, but to be able to effectively dull a country of so much greater in size, aggression, military might, etc. and hold them at bay. I mean, it's unbelievable. In many ways, Ukraine is its own worst enemy, because we don't see how desperate the situation is when everyone thinks Ukraine is achieving great victories. There are times when they have, but actually, they are still under extreme pressure. Half the problem is trying not to oversell how well Ukraine has done, even though they have done extremely well. They've clearly been able to match the Russian Air Force to a large extent, on the terms that they can, though some of these longer range missiles are harder to attack. And yes, some of that is done through Surface to Air Systems rather than air to air systems. I'd like to believe Ukraine will find a way no matter what. So it isn't a deal breaker, but I think the risks are too high of them losing if we don't help them to the maximum extent.

TELL US MORE ABOUT THE F16.

The F16 has good radar, it can fly well above the majority of the Russian sound systems in the area, apart from the very,

very specialized ones. It has a weapon system tied to that radar that can engage the vast majority of Russian aircraft long before they can attack it. The F16 doesn't have the quite the same stealth characteristics of something like an F35 or F22. But I've fought against the F16. I've had the odd trip in one but I've also fought against it. It's tiny, hard to see on radar, even harder to see in the air with the naked eye. The F16 is not called a viper for nothing: It's a vicious, nasty, dangerous little airplane. And if I was a Russian pilot with 100 hours training in an aircraft, I'd be nervous about whether my weapons would really work, because I've never been allowed to use them in training or wartime; I'd be shit scared of getting airborne and wondering whether there's an F16 up there.

If we can take Russian airpower and limit its influence on the battlefield and over Ukraine in general, that gives Ukraine breathing space, which is then going to allow the Combined Arms effect of the artillery, the HIMARS, the tanks and everything else, to operate without any concern about what's above. That will be hugely powerful.

If Putin needs to think long-term about what he's going to end up showing his few allies: That the Russian equipment is no good, that Western airpower and ground power is ultimately way better than the Russian kit. It's going to send powerful messages to his allies about what they should be buying or what they can trust. And it's going to send ripples through an army and an air force that suddenly no longer has confidence in its equipment.

HOW DETRIMENTAL COULD IT BE FOR UKRAINE IF THE WEST REFUSES TO SUPPLY THOSE JETS?

If the West chooses to limit its help to tanks, it sends a very poor message to Ukraine. It says, "we'll help you as much as we can, but we're not going to give you everything." And that will not help Ukraine's morale or their belief that we've got their back, and we should have their back. I think it will also send a strong message to Russia that there is actually a red line. And if Putin pushes hard enough he can force us to modify our behavior. And in that way he wins, because he keeps Ukraine at a level he thinks he can get away with.

By giving the jets, we do two things: We embolden Ukraine, and we frighten Russia. They don't come into Ukraine very much as it is, but when you've got an F16 up there with an AIM-120 AMRAAM [Advanced Medium Range Air to Air Missile], you'll be lucky to see any of them. It's going to modify Russian behavior in the air. It won't stop them firing missiles from hundreds of miles away. It won't stop s400 Surface to Air Systems engaging from outside Ukrainian soil. But it's going to send a powerful message to Russia that the West is not going to back down: "It's about Ukraine not losing, and if you want to keep doing this, you're going to come up against the full might of Western industry and equipment, and we have a lot more than you do. And if that's the way you want to go, then you will lose and you will be so weak that you won't be able to stay in power; you will not be able to carry on the way you are with your international politics."

SHANGRI LA TBILISI SPONSORS THE BAKURIANI-2023 IN GEORGIA



bilities competed in different disciplines and gave it all to achieve their goals. Despite the competition, the participants enthusiastically cheered each other on. Nino Sabashvili, who uses a wheelchair, won and took the transitional trophy to Kareli for one year. The second place went to the totally blind Natalya Gorgisheli from Tbilisi, and the third place went to the visually impaired Fotina Khuroshvili from Tbilisi. The winners were awarded with diplomas and medals.



The Bakuriani-2023 para-skiing championship among girls is starting to become a good tradition in Georgia. Being part of the "Active life is my nature" project, it was the second time for the championship, which was held in the Bakuriani village, organized by the Youth Media Union and with the general sponsorship of entertainment

center Shangri La Tbilisi. Started last year, the event gathers women with disabilities for team and individual sport competitions. Women with disabilities living in Tbilisi, Rustavi, Marneuli, Gori, Zugdidi and Kutaisi came for the para-skiing championship, which included participants who were totally blind, deaf, with spinal cord injuries, disabled and wheelchair users.

This year, women suffering from breast cancer from the organization "Europa Dona" were added to the team. Also, for the first time, the administration of the Nadzaladevi district was involved in the project, sending a team of 3 people to Bakuriani and giving them a great opportunity to participate in the championship. The championship was held in a very exciting atmosphere. 18 girls with disa-

Terabank Summarizes the Results of Small and Medium Businesses

Terabank has summarized the portfolio of small and medium businesses and the results of the projects implemented in this direction in 2022. The bank published positive and growing indicators in terms of this strategic segment which was also positively influenced by initiatives supporting small and medium businesses.

Last year, Terabank significantly increased business financing: the credit portfolio increased by 28.4%, and the deposit portfolio - by 61.8%. As for the total number of micro, small and medium business clients, this indicator increased by 32%.

During 2022, Terabank continued to intensively continue its partnership with state funding programs which had a positive effect on the growth of the corresponding credit portfolio. In particular, 18% of the loans issued by the "Produce in Georgia" programs come to Terabank. In cooperation with the Rural Development Agency, Terabank financed a total of 70 businesses, thereby supporting the development of local manufacturing and tourism industries, employment and the growth of the country's economy.

For Terabank, the year 2022 was particularly distinguished by activities promoting small and medium businesses. One of them was an online business catalog which included 100 Georgian businesses and was posted on Terabank's website and Facebook page. The catalog served as a kind of guide and introduced Internet users to the products and services of Terabank's small and medium business customers. With its help, any interested person had the opportunity to view the catalog, contact the manufacturer, purchase the desired product and become a participant in the success of the business.

In 2022, Terabank continued with its successful initiative of holding informational meetings with business customers throughout Georgia in order to familiarize them with the bank's products and services, the programs of "Produce in Georgia" and the Rural Development Agency, preferential loans and other opportunities. In order to share useful information and knowledge, webinars were

actively held for business customers. A total of eight webinars were held in 2022 on topics such as digital sales, strategic planning and financing, agribusiness management, labor shortages, renewable energies, etc.

During the last year, Terabank worked actively

to raise the awareness of and the promotion of its business customers. The bank presented their activities through mass media and its own digital media channels.

In 2023, supporting small and medium businesses remains an important priority for Terabank. In

the process of development of this direction, special attention will be paid to offering agro and startup loan products, the promotion of women and young entrepreneurs and the implementation of supporting initiatives for this part of the community.

TERABANK PUBLISHES 2022 RESULTS FOR SMALL AND MEDIUM BUSINESS

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Georgia and the End of the Post-Soviet Era. Part 1

ANALYSIS BY EMIL AVDALIANI

In this article, I will try to single out some geopolitical processes that are nowadays affecting Georgia and the South Caucasus in general. These trends are of a long-term nature and often attract far less attention in the Georgian analytical and scholarly circles. The importance of these processes is, however, unequivocal – it can be said that the post-Soviet era in the South Caucasus has ended and a new period characterized by many challenges and opportunities has begun.

Today, crises and hostilities surrounding Georgia have a negative effect on the security of the country. It is hard not to agree with this opinion. However, as will be shown below, this chaotic situation could also help to elevate Georgia's geopolitical role in the region, and in the long term, could facilitate the country's further approximation with Western (EU) institutions.

Let us start with the Western policy towards the Black Sea region. In light of the ongoing war in Ukraine, NATO and the European Union are preparing for a more active role in the wider Black Sea region. This does not mean that Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia will definitely join NATO and the European Union in the near future, although it can be said for



Image source: beachmeter.com

sure that the military-economic activity of the West will increase dramatically. The infrastructure projects announced at the moment and the granting of EU perspective/candidate status to Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia clearly indicate one thing: A new phase of confrontation between the West and Russia has begun, where the Black Sea region and the South Caucasus will take center stage.

Today, Georgia plays a far bigger role in the Black Sea region than it did before 2022. The reason is simple: The collective West needs direct land connection to the Caspian region, Central Asia, and China, which bypasses Russian territory.

Georgia is practically the only corridor for this, and though it was an important player until 2022, against the background of the currently changing trade and transit routes, the country's role has significantly increased. It can be safely argued that Georgia has never been in such a comfortable transit position in its history. Neither in the 1990s, nor in the 19th century, when oil was exported from Baku to Georgia's Black Sea ports, nor in the golden age of Georgian history, when at the beginning of the 13th century, during the reign of Queen Tamar, the Georgian kingdom controlled regional trade routes.

However, caution is needed here. In

the modern era, Georgia should not only be an attractive transit country, but rather should start thinking beyond its role as a transit geography. Transit is important and should be a major tool in the positioning of the country. But it should not be the sole cornerstone of foreign policy. In today's changing geopolitical situation in the wider Black Sea region, Georgia is presented with much more opportunities to strengthen its role, which should include the use of other foreign policy components along with the geographic transit.

A second important process is taking place in the immediate neighborhood of

Georgia. Azerbaijan, victorious in the second Nagorno-Karabakh War, faced a difficult reality. Its lightning military success and subsequent pressure on a weakened Armenia caused great resentment in Iran. Baku and Tehran entered into a long-term and, most importantly, much larger-scale rivalry. Where, since the 1990s, the threat to Azerbaijan has come only from Armenia, from now on, Baku's careful gaze is on both the western and southern borders.

There is no doubt that Azerbaijan and Iran will try to maintain pragmatism in their bilateral relations, but as time goes on, it will become increasingly difficult to do so. From the point of view of the Islamic Republic, a kind of Turkic-speaking arc is being established along its northern border, and the only missing link for its complete formation is Armenia's southernmost Syunik province.

Iran's opening of a consulate in Kapan (an important city of Syunik) in 2022 was a political message that Tehran would oppose border changes in the South Caucasus and more specifically in Armenia. To this should be added Iran's annual military exercises near the border of Azerbaijan, and Tehran's much strengthened economic and political relations with Armenia.

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

SOCIETY

The Fight to Save the Turkish Animals Caught in the Earthquake



BY KATIE RUTH DAVIES

The combined death toll in Turkey and Syria from the powerful and devastating 7.8 magnitude earthquake that hit on February 6 has now risen above 41,000. And as people are still being rescued from the rubble, a parallel rescue operation, one less well documented, has been ongoing: The one to save the animals.

Nilgun Engin, animal activist, organizer of the Ankara Save Chapters and Regional Liaison for the Middle East and South Africa, Animal Save Türkiye and endorser of the Plant Based Treaty, spared a few moments away from the tragic chaos to tell GEORGIA TODAY what the situation is like on the ground.

HOW DID THE EARTHQUAKE AFFECT PEOPLE'S PETS?

It's sincerely impossible to describe the scale of the destruction in Turkey and Syria. After one week, many now say that multiple neighborhoods and perhaps cities have been wiped off the map. It's so hard to describe what happened without tearing up. So many different things happened to pets. There are birds and mice, for instance, who are kept inside cages. This instantly limited their ability to escape when the earthquake hit and the buildings collapsed, even after, if they survived. Dogs and cats had more chances to get out, but they panic, and sometimes go into hiding in the rubble, which makes it even harder to locate and rescue them. Sometimes, when a building is not safe to enter (after assessments made by the search-and-rescue specialists), no-one is allowed to go inside even if the building is standing. At that point, even if you can see a pet sitting looking out a window, you can't do anything. If we're lucky and can get a crane onto a street with no road blocks, we can reach the pet from outside

and take it out the window, unless the animal gets scared and runs deeper into the building. Sometimes, we come across animals on the streets and roads. A week on since the earthquake and, all this time, no animal outside was able to find any food or water. For such animals, it comes as pure relief when we approach with water for them to drink.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION ON THE GROUND?

It is utter chaos and utter suffering. The human death toll is reported to be around 40,000. The United Nations estimates that this figure will double. But the animal loss is unreported and undocumented, unfortunately. As if that's not enough, since the first quakes, around 2500 more earthquakes have occurred in the same areas, with 3-4-5 magnitudes in variation, and they keep happening.

No-one is saying that they are not okay, though. Everyone says that they are "doing fine," just so as not to distract one

another's focus. We will cry about everything later.

HOW ARE YOU (AND OTHERS) HELPING?

We're all super focused on the tasks we have listed. Animal Save Türkiye is a group of 20 people with all kinds of jobs. We normally live in Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir, but now we are working in shifts to go to Kahramanmaraş, Gaziantep, Malatya, Adıyaman, and Hatay (Antakya), and wherever else our help is needed. We are delivering pet food, pet carriers, as well as water, food, blankets, baby formula, diapers and hygiene supplies for the survivors. We provide rescue transfer support to animals in need. We have rescued and transferred dozens of cats, as well as several dogs and birds, from several cities. As of February 13, we have rescued 35 animals in total and almost all of them have been brought to safety, while some are in the process of transportation. While one group sets up a mobile soup station, others continue their search for the lost or left animals. Surviving animals are being brought back to Ankara and Izmir to safety, as the next group loads the supplies and items and heads back into the disaster zone.

Many of our friends are risking their lives to enter damaged buildings to rescue animals, but this is something we feel we must do. We work in shifts and give veterinary care to the animals that are being rescued from collapsed buildings or found wandering the streets. We are searching for homes for animals that lost their owners or need special care, while a part of the team stays in the areas working with local vets and rescue teams. They feed the stray animals and take in the animals after they're seen by a vet. We take each and every animal that we find or rescue to a vet for a preliminary check to see if the animal is able to be transported, because in some cases the journey can take 20 hours by car due to road blocks and heavy winter conditions. Not even the weather is on our side. Our non-mobile teams are supporting

us online, taking calls for help; forwarding them to the respective team on the ground; managing the social media accounts where we receive dozens of reports, tips, news and calls; sharing what we've been doing and updates about the calls that have been dispatched; fundraising; communicating with vets for medical procedures for the rescued animals; coordinating the adoption procedures for the rescued animals with volunteering new homes, and probably many more things that I cannot think of at this moment.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES FACING YOU NOW?

Search and rescue coordination is extremely difficult considering the scale of the disaster. The number of organizations and initiatives for animal search and rescue is clearly not enough. For instance, when we reach a call for help, the animal in need might have run off or got lost under the rubble. No-one is able to keep up with all the scared, lost or wounded animals. Insufficient cooperation also harms our efforts, as we end up wasting our energy, time and resources answering such calls for help.

WHAT CAN WE IN GEORGIA DO TO HELP?

Even sharing this interview would be a great help. We are working hard under very difficult circumstances, surrounded by death and suffering. Yet, we want to continue our efforts for all animals, whether lost in buildings or left on farms. We want to be able to keep sharing positive stories. We can use all the support and visibility we can get, because it will matter for each and every cat, dog, bird, mouse, horse and sheep. After following our efforts, if you wish to contribute in a way, please consider donating via our GoFundMe account and sharing the incredible stamina and patience that our teams have been displaying.

The link for our GoFundMe account: <https://www.gofundme.com/f/help-animal-save-turkey>

THE ISET ECONOMIST

A BLOG ABOUT ECONOMICS AND THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

www.iset-pi.ge/blog

The ISET Policy Institute (ISET-PI, www.iset-pi.ge) is an independent think-tank associated with the International School of Economics at TSU (ISET). Our blog carries economic analysis of current events and policies in Georgia and the South Caucasus region ranging from agriculture, to economic growth, energy, labor markets and the nexus of economics, culture and religion. Thought-provoking and fun to read, our blog posts are written by international faculty teaching at ISET and recent graduates representing the new generation of Georgian, Azerbaijani and Armenian economists.

Air Quality in Georgia: Need for Urgent Policy Solutions



Photo by Shermazana

BY EREKLE SHUBITIDZE,
GURAM LOBZHANIDZE,
MARIAM TSULUKIDZE

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) database, in just 2019, 5,220 people were estimated to have died due to air pollution in Georgia. In other words, according to such estimates, there are 130.6 ambient air pollution-related fatalities per 100,000 Georgians annually – a significantly higher number than most western European countries, and even higher than Armenia and Azerbaijan in the region (Figure 1).

AIR POLLUTION - COUNTRY OUTLOOK

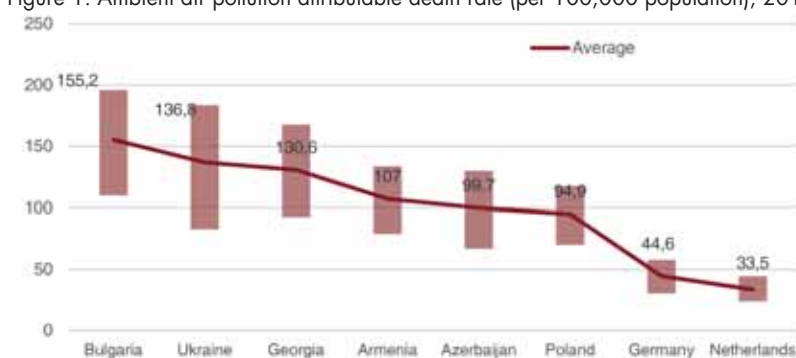
According to the Center on Emission Inventories and Projections (EMEP), around 82% of Georgia's total particulate matter (PM) emissions derive from the industry and energy sectors (mainly wood consumption for heating) (Figure 2). Agriculture was responsible for emitting 86% of ammonia, industry caused 95% sulfur oxide emissions, while 93% of carbon monoxide emissions came from the transportation and energy sectors. Thus, policymakers should pay special attention to these notable sectors.

Compared to other European countries, Georgia has significantly worse indoor and outdoor air pollution (World Bank, 2020). On a yearly average, particulate matter concentrations are greater than those deemed safe for human health. Respiratory diseases associated with air pollution are also increasing in urban areas because of emissions in cities.

AIR POLLUTION IN TBILISI

Economic growth and rising income

Figure 1. Ambient air pollution attributable death rate (per 100,000 population), 2019



Source: WHO database

levels are likely to urge people in rural areas to transfer to safer fuels for cooking and heating, and to improve indoor air quality. Nevertheless, the problem of outdoor air pollution cannot be self-correcting, at least in the short term. Rather immediate increases in economic activity and rising car ownership are expected to cause greater air pollution in Georgian cities until the trend reverses.¹ Looking at the growth dynamics of the number of vehicles in Georgia, the trend is linear and upward-sloping: Car ownership has been constantly increasing, by approximately 70,000-80,000 units per year.² Notably, data from Geostat also highlights that only 7% of the vehicles owned in 2021 were hybrid or electric (significantly, the growth rate of the share of hybrid/electric vehicles in the total is decreasing).

As another contributing factor, the Georgian population is distributed unevenly, with most people living in the capital (approximately 60% in 2022, according to Geostat data). Notably, around one-third of all vehicles are owned by the population of Tbilisi.

Pollution from vehicles is not the only source of air pollution in Tbilisi. The industry sector also egregiously contributes to total emissions throughout the city.³ Tbilisi typically dominates most economic and non-economic parameters among the cities of Georgia, thus, the fact that it is the most polluted city in Georgia hardly comes as a surprise. The data on air pollutants in Tbilisi shows that pollution has increased continuously over the last three years (Figure 3). In 2020, there was a significant drop because of Covid-19; with lower traffic and limited operation of factories there were reduced emission levels in that period. Nevertheless, one cannot claim that there is a significant downward trend.

POLICIES IN PLACE

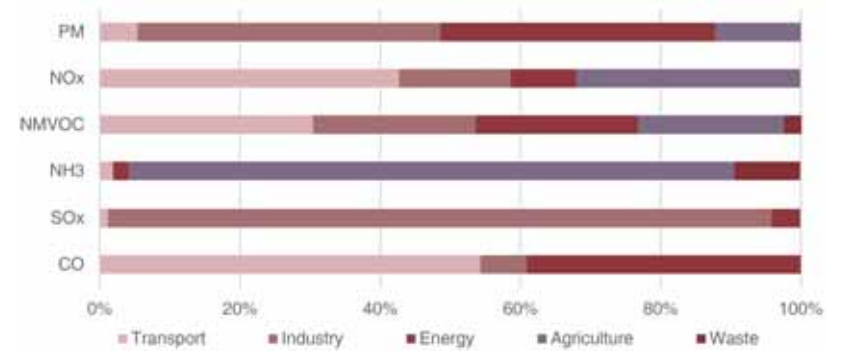
The Government of Georgia has actively been working to improve air quality control in Georgia. The policies implemented in recent years include regulating the emission of hazardous substances from the industry, transportation, and construction sectors, a focus on urban planning, and promoting green spaces in urban areas.

The regulation of industry-released emissions includes instructions regarding the control of potential accidents at industrial sites and the procedures firms must go through during accidents to minimize the emission of hazardous into the atmosphere.⁴ In July 2018, the Government of Georgia introduced the air quality standard, which determines the target levels for different atmospheric substances. The ordinance also identifies that information on air quality should be publicly available in the form of an annual report. Moreover, information about the concentration of pollutants in the air should be updated, at least daily, and if possible, in some regions, even hourly.⁵

Multiple steps were also introduced to reduce vehicle-induced emissions. The first step towards reducing such emissions was the fuel quality control mechanism. Within this mechanism, the sulfur content in petrol and diesel decreased by 25 times and six times, respectively (from 2012 to 2017 and from 2012 to 2019, respectively). Since 2017, Georgia has used Euro 5 standard petrol. Furthermore, in 2018 there was no trace of lead detected in numerous gasoline samples.⁶ Since 2016, the policy has also tried incentivizing consumers to switch to modern electric or hybrid vehicles. Namely, the excise tax on hybrid cars less than six years old more than halved, while the same tax on old fuel-combustion vehicles doubled or even tripled (depending on the car's age). The tariff on the import of electric vehicles was also reduced to zero. As a result, the import of hybrid cars increased by 20 times in 2018 compared to 2015. Furthermore, in 2017, the excise tax on petrol imports doubled, and diesel almost tripled. Consequently, petrol and diesel fuel consumption reduced by 10% in 2017.⁷ Finally, in 2018, a modern, effective, and mandatory periodic roadworthiness testing system for all categories of vehicles was introduced and implemented to reduce hazardous emissions from older vehicles.

POLICY CHALLENGES AND THE

Figure 2. The share of economic sectors in the total emission of pollutants into the air in Georgia, 2019



Source: Ambient Air Quality, 2021

NEED FOR URGENT SOLUTIONS

Despite various policies, including air quality plans in several big cities, the country still needs to reach its targeted pollution levels, which necessitates additional policy measures. From simple anecdotal evidence, it becomes clear that the technical inspection enforcement mechanism still needs to be revised.

Furthermore, as highlighted, the share of electric and hybrid cars in the total fleet is still negligible, while the trend for car ownership keeps increasing. Therefore, urban transport policies and practices play a critical role in incentivizing the reverse of increasing car ownership and helping switch to municipal transport.

Alongside car ownership, the booming construction sector has also been replacing green spaces, contributing to increasing dust levels in the atmosphere.⁸ Moreover, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in part redirected the Asian trade route to Georgia, thus increasing road traffic and the emissions from diesel-fueled trucks (Leijen, 2022).

Thus, first and foremost, technical inspections must be adequately enforced, and the rules should become more stringent. At the same time, the necessary infrastructure for electric vehicles should be implemented, in a timely manner, to incentivize their use. Furthermore, policymakers should pay special attention to the development of green public transport to decrease the popularity of private car ownership and reduce traffic jam-induced air pollution.

Besides which, residential buildings should not substitute green spaces, instead they should be widely incorpo-

rated into their construction. Policymakers should also impose, and follow, more stringent regulations for construction-induced air pollution and ensure the provision of more green spaces for citizens.

Additionally, if road transit increases throughout the country, the authorities should demand either air pollution filters for cars or install emission absorbers across highways.

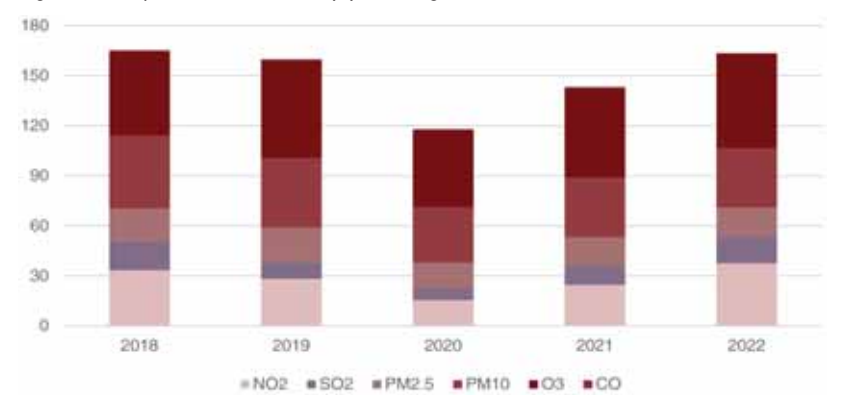
Beyond these factors, it is essential to increase awareness among people about the severity of the topic. This would encourage them to take social responsibility for air pollution and require policymakers to press for more radical policy changes.

Finally, it is of utmost importance that the country develops a green growth strategy that incorporates air quality issues and helps Georgia comply with the European standards of living, thereby creating a safe environment for future generations.

CONCLUSION

International and local research has demonstrated how air pollution can impact human health drastically. Furthermore, a preliminary analysis has shown that the number of Georgian policies to combat air pollution and avoid pollution-induced diseases and fatalities are insufficient to reverse negative trends. Notably, economic growth, without considering the green growth agenda, would in fact worsen the situation. Therefore, preventive measures, both societally and from policymakers, should be taken simultaneously to avoid fatal consequences.

Figure 3. Air pollutants in Tbilisi by years, mg/m³



Source: Authors' calculations based on Air Quality Portal data

¹ The environmental Kuznets curve hypothesis suggests that environmental pollution increases at the beginning of economic growth. However, economic growth allows environmental remediation when it passes a certain income level.

² Info.police.ge

³ Metallurgical industries, mineral industries, toxic waste management, chemical industries, food industries, storage and distribution of oil and oil products, etc. Source: <https://air.gov.ge/>

⁴ <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/1119518?publication=0>

⁵ <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4277611?publication=0>

⁶ https://air.gov.ge/en/pages/4/6?news_event_id=1

⁷ Air Quality Portal.

⁸ Residential Real Estate in Tbilisi, 2022.

Reproductology, the Savior of Sakartvelo



Professor Archil Khomasuridze at the conference dedicated to him last week.

BLOG BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

No doubt all of us need a doctor's help, but there is one particular speciality in the medicinal world which our Sakartvelo needs more than anything else to survive: Reproductology! Some might think

this another tongue-in-cheek statement from me, but it's not. Reproductology is needed in Georgia more than any manganese ore, trade with Turkey, peace with Russia, American help, European precepts on human rights and democracy, return of our annexed territories, tanks and rockets, sporting medals or the notorious rivalry within our multiparty political spectrum. And why is that? This nation has plunged into a

demographic lethargy; it has to open its tightly closed eyes and energy valves as soon as possible, and start multiplying without any delay.

Daringly visualizing Georgia's future, nothing makes sense if the saddening UN prognosis that this nation might in the near future start dwindling away is made real. There is no loftier obligation for ethnic Georgian men and women than to get married and embark on rear-

ing new sons and daughters for the nation in big numbers. Sadly, not all those men and women are healthy enough for reproduction, though, and this is exactly where Human Reproductology comes in as the provider for Georgia's existential necessity.

The conception and construction of the Department of Reproductology, Obstetrics and Gynecology at the Ivane Javakishvili Tbilisi State University by Professor Archil Khomasuridze was one of the most notable and appreciable steps, purposefully undertaken by this Georgian doctor with immense professional experience under his belt. The never-tiring Khomasuridze, who has just turned 81, went even further by organizing a Medical Residency Program in the popular subject of Reproductology, giving a unique chance for young doctors to grow and learn. Both the Chair and the Program enjoy a powerful clinical basis, called the Archil Khomasuridze Institute of Reproductology, which has been up and running in Tbilisi for the last ten years. Before, for almost thirty years, Khomasuridze was at the head of the famous Zhordania Institute of Human Reproduction, having given life to thousands of infants and having granted the bliss and honor of motherhood to just as many women.

On February 11, his birthday, Professor Khomasuridze was awarded the Tbilisi State University Gold Medal for his outstanding role in the field of reproductology, and for his exceptional efforts to strengthen this particular branch of the Georgian medical school. Khomasuridze is courageously defying his age, and vigorously continues working on the development of this valuable and indispensable medical field, being internationally recognized as one of the founding fathers of modern reproductology in the world. He is sincerely proud of his God-given share in a life that serves women's health in general, and female fertility in particular. Working under the professional motto of 'Reproductology First & Fore-

most', his medical team, with more than half a century of experience in various remedial fields and directions, does not even want to imagine that their beloved guru will someday opt to retire. It's certainly not in his character! He will never decide to leave alone the family he has nurtured with love, care and knowledge. 'They are all my kids and the inheritors of all that I own', he once told me movingly with a dimmed flash of his watered eyes.

Teamwork capability, practical and theoretical synergy, synthesis of traditional and innovative style of work, external contacts and scientific depth - these are the assets that Professor Khomasuridze puts to use in his regular labor day, which covers medical fields like gynecology, including children's and adolescents' medical problems, endocrinology, reproductology, mammalogy, urology and sexology, saying nothing about the myriad useful services they offer to the public on a daily basis. Khomasuridze is assisted by a team of highly qualified specialists in each of these fields, elegantly and successfully headed by his right hand, the clinical director of the institute, Dr. Lali Pkhaladze.

Incidentally, the same day, February 11, a scientific conference was held, dedicated to Professor Khomasuridze, and titled 'Reproductive Education in Georgia'. The reports and analytical theses that were heard at the conference were all on the highest level of contemporary medical developments in the field. How many among the 195 member countries of the United Nations might afford, and would be able to offer to its society, a medical conference of this level, all prepared and executed by local scientific cadres and based on the long-accumulated national medical lore? The delighted octogenarian professor, as young as he actually looks and feels, proudly listened to the voices of his former and current students, who have definitely lived up to their great mentor's expectations.

Natakhtari Fund Presents its 2022 Activity Report to the Public

From 2011 to the present, Natakhtari Fund, in cooperation with the local non-governmental organization Association Our Home-Georgia, has helped 660 young people with 1,042,593 GEL. As a result, hundreds of young people without parental care have started to live independently, and many are building successful careers. All of this is provided by the three main priorities of the Natakhtari Fund: Education, employment and psychological support.

For 11 years, the Natakhtari Fund has allocated resources to the needs relevant to each beneficiary. During this time, with the help of the fund:

340 young people received vocational education;

72 beneficiaries have received higher education or are currently studying in higher education institutions;

More than 220 young people learned the craft and been through an internship with a master of different directions;

660 beneficiaries received the individual services of a psychologist.

According to current data, 90% of the young participants in the project are employed, with over 60% holding stable jobs. The 2022 Needs, Resources, and Report of the Natakhtari Fund indicate the following:

In 2022, under the coordination of Association Our Home-Georgia, 20 young people received services, including intensive psychological counseling for all 20 and long-term psychotherapy for six. Seven individuals benefited from psychodiagnostics services, 13 young people received scholarships to support inde-

pendent living, and one received funding to cover transportation to college expenses. Three were provided with medicine for chronic diseases, and underwent medical diagnosis and treatment.

Two participants received funding for preparing for national exams, each studying three subjects. Ultimately, due to the activities of the Natakhtari Fund, in 2022, both enrolled in undergraduate programs, one at an elementary teacher education program and the other in a faculty of International Relations.

15 out of 20 beneficiaries found employment. During the year, the Association concluded its work with four beneficiaries, each of whom had become capable of independent living with the fund's support.

Natakhtari Fund, founded in 2011, aims at strengthening youth without parental care who have left the care system, preparing them for independent living by providing education and employment assistance. In the process of preparing young people for an independent life, it is important to provide them with psychological services: Psychological counseling, psychodiagnostics, and, if necessary, psychotherapy. For each young person, the resources are allocated according to their individual needs. Within the framework of the project, the types of assistance to the beneficiaries are the provision of housing, support for receiving professional or higher education, coverage of utility costs, payment of travel expenses, purchase of textbooks and daily household items, financing of medical research and treatment, purchase of medicines, etc.



Frozen Ripples: Leliani, Kakheti



BLOG BY TONY HANMER

We now return you to your regular, 0% plagiarized, one-writer article programming. My wife and I are in her home village for a few days; it's her mother's birthday on February 15, an event we've rarely been here for, having been in Svaneti since 2012, the time equivalent of a transatlantic flight away. Now, from Tbilisi, it's a mere flight to Istanbul by comparison.

I take the opportunity to renew my friendship with the vineyard, as I always do when here, camera in hand, lenses in backpack. The trimmed, winter-leafless vines will always remind me of grasping monster fingers from the Alien movie series, but that's just me. I get a few shots in the low midmorning light and move farther back to the dirt road behind the property.

Here something new greets me: A series of puddles with about 1/2 an inch of ice on each. Not smooth, but with forms suggesting a set of ripples on each, arrested mid-motion and frozen in place. This cannot be the explanation, because ice does not form so quickly here (it would need temperatures far lower than a few degrees below freezing for such instant results). But in my mind it's the prettier story, so we'll go with that.

I move around, avoiding positions from which my shadow enters the scenes. The contrast is high from the low sunlight, but I can work with that, shooting RAW files which have a lot of exposure latitude from brightest highlights to deepest shadows. Later, I'll convert my work to black and white to eliminate the distraction of color, and do some HDR (high dynamic range) versions to get all the detail I can in those blacks and whites.

The house dog accompanies me, but she's too small to crack the ice as she walks on it, and is never in one place for long enough to make me want to shoo her away, exploring everything with eyes and nose.

A neighbor farmer drives his tractor through, and we greet each other. I'm glad I got here first and photographed everything I wanted, as his thick back tires will certainly wreak havoc on the delicate puddles. But he has work to do,

so let him be on his way. I crouch down for some closeups of the ice, so that there will be no clues from obvious elements like grass or leaves to give scale. Sometimes that sense of mystery is just what I'm after. There is much in nature which repeats its structures on different scales; this is one of the characteristics of what are known as fractals. My simplest definition of the word "fractal", indeed, is "made of itself".

My nephew calls from his monastery in answer to my query, that we can visit him there today, so it's time to head back and announce this to my wife and her sister as we'll drive there together. That visit will likely be the subject of another article, as it's another rare thing for me and likely to contain much of interest, aside from simply seeing the young man

in his own setting. Like the puddle photos which do have an obvious size range based on visual clues, seeing Luka where he lives will give needed context to a situation which would otherwise lack it. I look forward to this, and hope that taking photos at the monastery will have no obstacles. See you all there next week, or soon.

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



CULTURE

The Tiny Name of a Tiny Flower

BY LEILA BAGRATION-BABADISHI,
TRANSLATOR: NANULI CHITASHVILI

The tiny name of a tiny flower was given to the ABC book
Written by Jakob
Written with love
Written with care
Tiny book for the youngest ones there.
The first with its odor,
softness,
and color.

The flower is embraced by everyone, and everywhere.
Its name is repeated constantly by In the words of the alphabet, like a lullaby
Like the chanting of a Canary bird
It is the most precious Jakob's gift.
Tiny flower on the cover of the book.
The flower,
the flower
Of the ABC book.



Violets. Source: gardenersworld.com

Patriarchate: Specialists working in Gelati should be replaced by a group of higher competence

The Patriarchate of Georgia issued a statement regarding Gelati Monastery, a medieval monastic complex near Kutaisi in the Imereti region of western Georgia.

According to the statement, the Ministry of Culture's advocacy of the conservation group working in Gelati today is "incomprehensible."

The Patriarchate considers that the situation is not only serious, but critical, and therefore says it is necessary to urgently change the situation and save the frescoes within.

The Patriarchate says it believes that the mentioned group should be replaced by specialists with higher competence.

The Patriarchate declares that the concurrence of the reports of international experts and Georgian scientists calls into question the expediency of continuing conservation work by the currently operating group of specialists.

According to the statement, it is necessary to carry out the rehabilitation of Gelati with a unified management plan in accordance with modern standards. "An international advisory board should be established, which, together with the country's field scientists, will closely cooperate with an integrated group of invited highly qualified and local renovators," it says.

"The Patriarchate offers open and

impartial dialogue to all interested parties.

"The crisis of the 21st century of the Gelati Cathedral began as a result of the rehabilitation works carried out in 2015-19. The roofing of the temple's wings and outbuilding was carried out with the wrong methodology, low-quality materials and an unprofessional approach. In the structure of the temple, from the works performed on the roof and the impact of natural precipitation, water seepage - infiltration started. By 2021, the paintings of the Gelati wall were in a serious condition. The process of salting and damage to the paintings appeared in the interior of the temple.

"There is nothing unclear or vague in the assessment of this period.

"Based on the created situation, it became clear that considering the complexity and extent of damage to the paintings, it was necessary to invite highly qualified foreign specialists, who would have the appropriate competence and technical resources, and who, together with local specialists, would treat and save Gelati's paintings.

"It is from this stage that today's difference in positions begins, which is connected to the work of the group invited for the conservation of Gelati wall paintings in the summer of 2021.

"Despite their work, Gelati's wall paintings have reached a critical state."

See the full story on georgiatoday.ge.



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