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The First Salvo: US Sanctions Georgian Judges

BY MICHAEL GODWIN

In a shocking show of diplomatic force, the United States has laid down sanctions in the form of visa restrictions against four key Georgia judges. The Department of State's head Anthony Blinken says that the action is based on credible information the judges are "involved in significant corruption." Not only the judges, named as Mikheil Chinchaladze, Levan Murusidze Irakli Shengelia, and Valerian Tsertsvadze, but their family members as well are now forbidden from entering the US or any US territory, indefinitely.

"There is no time limit on these designations," a statement from the embassy in Tbilisi reads. "Section 7031(c) does authorize waivers of, and exceptions that may permit an individual to travel under certain circumstances." The statement released on Wednesday states "the judges abused their public positions by participating in corrupt activity that undermined judicial and public processes, offered benefits to and/or coerced judges to decide cases in favor of political allies, and manipulated judicial appointments to their benefit."



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Image source: Win Mcnamme/Getty Images

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As of 03 Apr 2023

Markets				STOCKS			
	Price	w/w	m/m		Price	w/w	m/m
GRAIL 07/28	85.80 (YTM 7.33%)	+0.1%	-2.5%	Bank of Georgia (BGEO LN)	GBP 27.60	+6.4%	-6.0%
GEBGG 07/23	100.13 (YTM 5.51%)	+0.1%	-0.1%	Georgia Capital (CGEO LN)	GBP 7.90	+3.5%	-6.0%
GEOCAP 03/24	98.13 (YTM 8.26%)	+0.1%	+0.1%	TBC Bank Group (TBCG LN)	GBP 22.65	+2.5%	-8.1%
SILNET 01/27	97.81 (YTM 9.06%)	-0.0%	-0.5%				
TBC 06/24	98.29 (YTM 7.25%)	+0.0%	-0.2%				
COMMODITIES				CURRENCIES			
	Price	w/w	m/m		Price	w/w	m/m
Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	84.93	+8.7%	-2.0%	GEL / USD	2,5500	-1.0%	-2.6%
Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	1 984.65	+1.4%	+6.9%	GEL / EUR	2,7804	-0.0%	-
				GEL / GBP	3,1603	-0.0%	+0.9%
				GEL / CHF	2,7890	-0.8%	+0.6%
				GEL / RUB	0,0325	-3.0%	-6.1%
				GEL / TRY	0,1327	-1.6%	-4.1%
INDICES				CURRENCIES			
	Price	w/w	m/m		Price	w/w	m/m
FTSE 100	7 673.00	+2.7%	-3.4%	GEL / AZN	1,5023	-0.9%	-2.5%
FTSE 250	18 879.41	+1.9%	-5.3%	GEL / AMD	0,0066	-1.0%	-2.7%
DAX	15 580.92	+3.0%	+0.0%	GEL / UAH	0,0692	-0.7%	-2.4%
DOW JONES	33 601.15	+3.6%	+0.6%	EUR / USD	0,9175	-0.9%	-2.4%
NASDAQ	12 189.45	+3.6%	+4.3%	GBP / USD	0,8055	-1.0%	-3.0%
MSCI EM EE	33.36	+6.8%	-0.3%	CHF / USD	0,9125	-0.3%	-2.5%
MSCI EM	989.18	+2.6%	+0.1%	RUB / USD	78,3824	+1.9%	+3.6%
SP 500	4 124.51	+3.7%	+1.9%	TRY / USD	19,1963	+0.6%	+2.1%
MSCI FM	2 141.70	+1.0%	-0.1%	AZN / USD	1,6975	-	-
				AMD / USD	388,7500	+0.1%	+0.2%



COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and first lady Olena Zelenska arrived in Poland for an official visit Wednesday, to strengthen ties with a neighboring country that has played a big role in galvanizing Western military and political support for Kyiv against Russia's full-scale invasion.

Zelenskyy held talks with Polish President Andrzej Duda and Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki. Discussions focused on the security policy, as well as "economic cooperation, political dialogue and historical issues," the Polish government said.

This is Zelenskyy's first official visit to Poland.

Poland has been one of Ukraine's closest and most important allies in the fight against Russia's invasion, pledging key military aid to Kyiv and sending some of its Soviet-era MiG-29 fighter jets, the first of which arrived in Ukraine Tuesday.

"We handed over four MiG-29s in the past few months and are in the process of handing over another four. Six more

are being readied," Duda told a press conference after he and Zelenskyy held talks.

"There is a temptation, fueled by Russian propaganda and disinformation, for a ceasefire as soon as possible at all costs, and, consequently, to make peace with Russia ... which in fact will mean that Russia will take the Ukrainian land which it now occupies," Duda said. "There must be no agreement for that. The politics of appeasing Putin — carried out for years by many European leaders — has borne poisonous fruit."

"Russia won't win with Europe when Poles and Ukrainians stand united," Zelenskyy added. "We are going to enjoy peace together in everything, in the EU and NATO," he said.

US APPROVES \$2.6 BILLION FOR UKRAINE IN LATEST SECURITY ASSISTANCE PACKAGE

The Biden administration approved a new security assistance package for Ukraine worth \$2.6 billion.

The latest military assistance package, the 35th such tranche, is valued at \$500 million and comes directly from US arsenals. The remaining \$2.1 billion is funded by the Pentagon's Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative.

Since Russia launched its full-scale inva-

Ukraine Latest: Zelensky in Poland to Strengthen Bilateral Ties, Lukashenko in Russia to Do the Same

sion of Ukraine last year, the US has provided more than \$35.1 billion in support. "Russia alone could end its war today. Until Russia does, the United States and our allies and partners will stand united with Ukraine for as long as it takes," Blinken wrote in a statement.

PUTIN SAYS US IS PARTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR 'TODAY'S CRISIS IN UKRAINE'

Russian President Vladimir Putin placed the blame partly on the United States for the ongoing war in Ukraine.

"Relations with Russia and the United States, on which global security depends, are unfortunately in a deep crisis," Putin said in a speech at the Kremlin, claiming that "US support for the coup in Kyiv in 2014 led to today's crisis in Ukraine." He added that the US is responsible for contributing to the degradation of bilateral relations between Moscow and Washington.

"We have always been in favor of building relations between our countries on the principle of equality and respect for sovereignty and each other's interests and the interference in each other's methods. We will be guided by that approach in the future," Putin said.

"Of course, this is an event that does not contribute to the strengthening of

stability, security and predictability on the European continent. This creates an additional threat for us and it obliges us to take the necessary measures to re-balance the entire security system," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters in Moscow.

"Everything that is necessary to ensure our safety will be done," he added, declining to provide further details.

PUTIN NOW HAS 'MORE NATO' ON HIS BORDERS, ALLIANCE CHIEF SAYS

"Finland now has the strongest friends and allies in the world," NATO's Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said Tuesday as he welcomed the Nordic nation into the fold of the Western military alliance.

He said he's "deeply proud" to welcome Finland into NATO, making the country its 31st member, adding that "at times like these, friends and allies are more important than ever" as the alliance continues to wrestle with support for Ukraine as its war with Russia rages on Europe's doorstep.

Before Russia invaded Ukraine last February, it sent a list of proposals to the alliance, calling on it to roll back its deployments of troops and weapons to Eastern Europe, and for it to guarantee that Ukraine would never become a member of the group.

Russia has long objected to NATO's expansion but its war in Ukraine has only made the group more desirable for European countries close to Russia which are outside the group.

Finland, which shares around 800 miles

of land border with Russia, had enjoyed decades of military nonalignment but applied to join the military alliance fearing an aggressive, seemingly expansionist Russia on its border.

With Ukraine watching Finland's fast-tracked entry to the alliance, and with Sweden likely to follow, Stoltenberg said the door remains open to prospective members, though he didn't mention Ukraine by name.

"President Putin wanted to slam NATO's door shut. Today, we show the world that he failed.

Instead of less NATO, he has achieved the opposite. More NATO. And our door remains firmly open."

PUTIN AND LUKASHENKO MEET IN MOSCOW TO DISCUSS THE UNION STATE

Russian President Vladimir Putin met with his Belarusian counterpart Aleksandr Lukashenko in Moscow on Wednesday and Thursday, where the deepening of defense ties was firmly on the agenda.

The leaders discussed progress in developing the "Union State," a union between Belarus and Russia aimed at deepening economic and defense cooperation, as well as "the security concept of the Union State."

Analysts at the Institute for the Study of War said Tuesday the Kremlin "will likely attempt to coerce Belarus into further Union State integration. The Kremlin may pressure Belarus for more integration concessions under the rubric of defending the Union State from claimed Western military and/or terrorist threats," the ISW said.

US Sec of State Announces Designations against 4 Georgian Judges

On Wednesday, Secretary of State Blinken announced designations against four individuals associated with the Georgian judiciary. These four judges abused their public positions by engaging in significant corrupt activity. Their actions undercut judicial and public processes by offering benefits to or coercing judges to decide cases in favor of political allies and manipulating judicial appointments to their benefit, - US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degnan said, responding to the public designations of four Georgian judges.

She added that the rule of law requires a legal system where cases are decided fairly and impartially, based on facts, evidence and law, not because of a late night phone call, not because of a bribe, not because of intimidation or other pressure.

"Secretary of State Blinken announced

designations against for individuals associated with the Georgian judiciary. The State Department determined, based on credible and corroborated evidence, that these individuals abused their public positions by engaging in significant corrupt activity. Their actions undercut judicial and public processes by offering benefits to or coercing judges to decide cases in favor of political allies and manipulating judicial appointments to their benefit. Their corruption undermined rule of law and democratic processes, damaging the Georgian public's faith in the independence of one of the most important democratic institutions.

"Under United States law, credible evidence of significant corruption such as this results in designations. These designations prevent these individuals and their immediate family members from traveling to the United States. At last week's summit for democracy, President Biden reaffirmed the US strong

commitment to fighting corruption and strengthening rule of law. Over 100 countries, including Georgia, join President Biden in endorsing this commitment, because we all understand that rule of law is about more than words. It's about justice and justice is the main principle upholding freedom and democracy.

"Rule of law requires a legal system where cases are decided fairly and impartially, based on facts, evidence and law, not because of a late night phone call, not because of a bribe, not because of intimidation or other pressure. Every Georgian citizen deserves justice, rule of law and the right to a fair and independent judicial process, regardless of his or her wealth, or family or political connections.

"These designations today reflect the importance the United States places on countering corruption. Corruption and judicial interference obstruct Georgia's European integration. The United States

continues to support Georgia and its citizens in your European aspirations. This action was taken with achieving that goal in mind. These designations also demonstrate our continued support to the hardworking, capable, honest and professional judges throughout Georgia, many of whom I've had the pleasure of meeting. They should be allowed to do their jobs and administer the law free of pressure, intimidation and interference.

"For years, the United States has been urging the Government to make meaningful reforms within the judiciary, and we applaud the progress made over the years, often with US support.

"But as many have acknowledged, including the Government, there is more work to be done to ensure that Georgia citizens have the strong judicial institution that you deserve.

"These judicial reforms are in Georgia's interest, and they are necessary for Georgia to achieve the Euro-Atlantic future

Georgians have long pursued, to win the fight against corruption, to achieve the stable, prosperous Euro Atlantic future the people of Georgia have chosen. Georgia needs a truly impartial, independent judiciary.

"The designations announced against four corrupt individuals demonstrate the United States' firm commitment to combat corruption and to help the people of Georgia succeed in building the democratic society you so clearly want and deserve", said the Ambassador.

On Wednesday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken tweeted: "Today, I designated four Georgian former and current officials for significant corruption, making them ineligible to enter the United States. We stand with the government and people of Georgia in their efforts to advance transparency and democratic governance."

Read more on this story on georgiatoday.ge

POLITICS

The Fragile South Caucasus

ANALYSIS BY EMIL AVDALIANI

The South Caucasus is a fragile region security-wise. Cross-border insecurity and various sorts of extremism have proved from time to time to be a region-wide problem. In connection with the geopolitical fragility of the region, other interesting developments are taking place which mean that the South Caucasus has entered a different era amid the war in Ukraine, US-China competition, and growing cooperation between Iran and Russia.

The construction of an order of exclusion in the South Caucasus, based on a loose understanding among regional



Image source: aze.media

powers, means that the balance of power concept has made its way back. Realism has prevailed against the liberal world order, which seems increasingly threatened by growing external opposition, internal troubles, and declining authority/prestige (the troubles a chaotic US withdrawal from Afghanistan left the country in is a good example). For Iran, Russia, Turkey, and China, the balance of power idea is a concept which resonates well with each of these states' historical experiences. Each has always positioned itself as a civilization state as opposed to the Western concept of nation-states. The four have similar geographic dilemmas which, over the course of the past several centuries, informed their behavior and still continue to haunt the countries' political classes. Encircle-

ment by enemies is a constant feature in the nationalist discourses. Balance of power for Iran, Russia, Turkey, and China is a safe refuge partly because it is what these civilizations always did, how they survived, grew, and evolved into a dominating force in their respective neighborhoods. Pursuit of dominance made them averse to the universal march of liberalism and the US influence. It continues to serve as the biggest single motivator behind their increasingly concerted efforts to limit the West's influence.

Thus, the future of the South Caucasus will be shaped by geopolitical visions, immediate goals, and the wider priorities of Iran, Turkey, Russia, and, to a certain degree, China.

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Putin's Ex-Speechwriter on His Pick for Putin's Successor

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE FOR RFE

Political consultant Abbas Gallyamov was one of Russian President Vladimir Putin's speechwriters from 2008-2010. In an interview with RFE/RL's Georgian Service, he talks about the back-and-forth with the Russian leader over drafting a text, and his perhaps surprising pick for Putin's successor. Last week, the Russian Interior Ministry added to its wanted list the self-exiled former speechwriter, who is known for his analyses of political and social developments in Russia and the Kremlin's ongoing invasion of Ukraine.

"I never communicated with Putin directly," Gallyamov tells us of his time serving under Vladimir Putin. "I was not the top speechwriter; only the top one has the right to speak to the President personally. I was high-ranking, though, present during meetings, both public and private, behind closed doors. My general impression was that he was a very good manager. Very rational, very logical; you really couldn't imagine him at that time doing what he's doing now. He knew how to ask questions, he was careful not to press on people when listening to their answers - because when you're a big boss, and you express your own opinion, then all the other people try to support your opinion instead of expressing theirs, so he was careful to avoid this.

"When the war started, I wondered how this man whom I knew many years ago had turned into what he is now. Back then, I saw him working on subjects



Abbas Gallyamov. Image source: CNN

which were very important but still not of crucial importance, they were not something on which his political life depended, not existential threats, so to say, not something like relations with NATO, or relations with the Russian opposition, who is trying to overthrow him. Back then, he was not dealing with personal attacks against him. And at that time he could afford to be rational. But now that it has come to something that he could be blamed for, or him doing something wrong, he has quickly turned into somebody irrational and very emo-

tional. Displaying strength is his fetish, he cannot imagine himself looking weak."

IN YOUR TIME AS ONE OF HIS SPEECHWRITERS, WE HAD THE PUTIN POST-MUNICH SPEECH, POST BUCHAREST SUMMIT AND POST THE WAR IN GEORGIA. AND HE WAS A DIFFERENT MAN BACK THEN, YOU SAY?

At that time, the dominating agenda was the agenda of modernizing Russia; the moralization of Russia. It was Medvedev who was imposing this at that time, try-

ing to update Russia, to make it more modern. He was trying to improve relations with the Western world. And the Obama - Medvedev relations were good. Putin was dealing only with the economy. Of course, he was influencing policy, but it was behind closed doors; it was not a thing I could see. I was present only at the meetings that were official but with no journalists allowed. Still, these were official meetings, with official protocols, minutes and so, and he didn't discuss politics much there. A couple of times, I made speeches for when he was speak-

ing at the conferences of the ruling party. He was giving political appraisals, political estimations, but still, he was careful not to intervene, publicly, into the sphere of responsibility of the president.

DID HE GIVE YOU POINTERS AS TO WHAT HE WANTED TO SPEAK ABOUT?

There were very rare cases when he took care of the text beforehand, actually - just two, three, maybe four texts a year. The majority of texts, he didn't check before; we just wrote them with the administration in general, with ministers, deputies who are responsible for these fields. We'd prepare the speech, give it to him, and he would look at it in the car, on the way to the event, maybe half an hour beforehand. Sometimes, even when he was entering or about to begin speaking. He speaks very easily, it wasn't a problem for him: he starts reading the text, and then he sees that he wants to add something, so he lifts his eyes, and he speaks to you all on his own, then he goes back to the text. So he didn't need to take great care of our texts beforehand. It was very rare for him to check the draft and then give it back to you. Only the main speeches were like this.

WHICH SPEECHES DID YOU GET TO WRITE? WHO WAS WRITING THE SPEECHES ON FOREIGN POLICY?

One can't claim any speech given by the President as "yours". It's always a collective work. You write it, several other people look at it, add some ideas. It's always a collective work, never the personal work of one person.

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xeme

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Xeme restaurant is located on the 31st floor in The Biltmore Tbilisi Hotel

The name of the restaurant Xeme speaks for itself, as it means the arctic fork-tailed gull.

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The Georgian Presidency - Peace Doves or Conflict Instigators?



President Giorgi Margvelashvili and Salome Zurabishvili. Image sources: Agenda.ge and IPN

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

Like I was looking into a crystal ball, I knew the republic would be in trouble when it shifted from presidential to parliamentary status a little over 10 years ago. Georgia is closer to Europe both territorially and spiritually than to the United States, but the American model of state structure, including one court with two functions, a president as the chief executive, and the legislature with firmly set-in checks-and-balances, would have been the most optimal form of governing the Georgian nation.

I apologetically consider the movement to parliamentary status one of the most vivid examples of our political mismanagement, because while attempting to emulate European political subtlety is an extremely agreeable thing to do, it came too early for Sakartvelo. This political culture needs far more maturation before it becomes fit enough to turn Georgia into a Euro-style game player. The American way of politicking is just as fine as the European, and exactly as hard to emulate, but I think it could still work better in this country. What we need here is a strong leader's iron gloves, checked and balanced by means of fair and equal division of power, just as it is in the States. Moreover, on a legislative

level, even the American-type bipartisan political system could have been much more practicable in Georgia than the multi-party jambalaya we are overwhelmed with right now; the best remedy to abridge the political talk and augment public business of the day. The current way of doing politics here needs a lot of repairs and renovations, otherwise, the overloaded and overly sharpened political agenda might totally displace our economic schedule and have a pernicious effect on our traditional but still amazingly functional culture. Take for instance the headaches the current Georgian government has had in the last decade because of the two presidents we've had in Georgia's time

as a parliamentary republic - formal heads of state who have no political or legal power, just formal protocol obligations to carry out at their own leisure. These non-functional presidents were elected with the tremendous support of the ruling party. Not even in the wildest imagination would they have been granted even a single electoral vote had they been running on their own. It was only thanks to the recommendations and endorsements of the mentioned party that they found themselves comfortably ensconced on their presidential thrones with a happy chance to occupy the most convenient, relaxed and entertaining political post in the country. And what happened in reality? The moment they

had safely filled in the invidious sinecure at the top, they both wanted to feel like real presidents and claim actual power, forgetting that they would never have been chosen by the people if not for the ruling party's unequivocal support to have them elected. On the other hand, even an impotent presidency has a chance to do something good for the nation, like defusing the ongoing tension and polarization that is killing our chance to work productively. Conversely, in both cases, the contradiction within the nation's everyday life hit a high, seeing the presidents creating more uninvited conflict in the political field, turning them into the worst adversaries of the government. Now the question is how beneficial or detrimental that kind of presidential behavior is for the nation, not just for the administration, because the discomfort created by the ceremonial presidents for the government is not as important as a good job done for the motherland. Any government of any country in the world wants a cooperating formal head of state, because otherwise the government becomes distracted from their main business and loses time and energy which should be spent on taking care of the nation. Any government in the world could be criticized for the work they are doing, but the conflict with even ceremonial presidents adds to the government's pain in the neck so badly that correction of the harmed state of affairs often becomes impossible. I have always wondered if the state security service creates a modeled profile of potential presidents in advance, just before they are given the job they so desperately aspire to.

The First Salvo: US Sanctions Georgian Judges

Continued from page 1

However, the US will not pursue any further legal action against the corrupt judges, saying Georgia itself must do so on its own accord. Concurrently, US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Dignan released a video where she included information that the aforementioned individuals were found to be "offering benefits to or coercing judges to decide cases in favor of political allies and manipulating judicial appointments to their benefit." In short, certain people in power were undermining the very rule of law in the nation. While this may come as a shock to some, it should be of little surprise to those following the political corruption plaguing the country. Some of these judges have reportedly been linked to both accused oligarch and political player Bidzina Ivanishvili, as well as several questionable actions by the legislature to derail European Union integration efforts. Additionally, the appointment of more judges considered "friends" of the corrupt judges was not blocked but encouraged. The steps taken by the US, while an admirable step towards encouraging Georgia along the Western path, is unlikely to have the desired effect. The complaining and smearing of US officials has already been seen from members of Georgia's ruling elite, including ad hominem attacks against Madam Ambassador herself. Incapable of facing the proverbial music, the nation's leadership has not and is unlikely to now face their wrongdoing and admit that they should take alternative steps. Following riots in the streets last month that rocked the country, making headlines across the world in the process, the geopolitical trajectory of the country has come into question. Authorities in Tbilisi,

previously praised for their exhaustive efforts at Western, EU, and even NATO integration, seem to have begun to undo this progress. As a result, this has led to accusations by both domestic and international observers and political figures that Georgia's leadership is working towards a future closer with Russia. This all comes after a significant spat between long-time ally of Georgia Member of European Parliament Viola von Cramon and several top members of the Georgian Dream party. During a visit to the capital, von Cramon noted that the "Georgian Government betrayed Georgia, betrayed its constitution, its European future, its people." She took additional steps to declare her support for the majority of Georgians that refuse to become a part of "the Russian world." Unable to let the opportunity slip away, several Georgian Dream MPs, as well as Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze, and Deputy Speaker of the Parliament Archil Talakvadze, all lashed out against the MEP. Their claims alleged that von Cramon had "no desire for the development and progress of Georgia" and that she "had come to discredit Western policy." Despite the MEP having devoted much of her personal and professional time to working with Georgian officials to help Georgia become an EU candidate state, the Georgia Dream asserted that Georgia was a country of laws. The recent sanctions against four of the top judges in the country, with the power of many more legislators, jurists, and legal "influencers" in the nation, seem to fly in the face of these accusations against von Cramon. The country is not the hallowed beacon of European jurisprudence as Georgian Dream MPs would like to believe, but is still suffering from problems that should have been solved and shed years ago. The weaponization of law may be the single great-



Still from the announcement video by US Ambassador Dignan. Source: US State Department

est roadblock to furthering Georgia's Western ambitions. This begs the question; what are the steps to right the proverbial Georgia ship? The obvious first phase includes the cessation of political 'mudslinging' between Georgian Dream and the various opposition voices in the country. The smears do nothing to promote bipartisan legislation and aid the fight against corruption, and in fact often encourage those in the ruling party to dig in deeper. While this is closer to dream than possibility, others, including Europe and the US, must be ready for the future narrative from Georgian Dream and its allies in power. Naturally, the potential for a positive outcome in the next EU assessment of

Georgian candidacy is abysmally low. These aforementioned sanctions as well as the actions of the ruling party are unlikely to encourage European leaders to vote in favor of Tbilisi's attempts, and the resulting fallout has to be anticipated. The ruling party, based on previous rants, will assuredly be painting themselves the victims at the hands of an unfair EU and claiming that Europe doesn't actually want Georgia. As a result, Russia can be presented in a favorable light - the warm mother to the cold European father. While nothing could be farther from the truth, the opportunity to play the injured party cannot be missed and will be touted as a reason to pursue alternatives to Brussels. It's at this point that the legislative bodies of the

country will likely begin to disconnect from European influence. After this, sanctions will only be the first salvo. In what could easily be called a mirror of Russia's bastardization of the legal system, Georgia's leading officials continue to play the games they learned from their Soviet forerunners. While one can only hope and pray that the sanctions by Washington, the critiques from Brussels, and the pleas from voices at home convince the nation's leadership to adjust their course. In the words of Ambassador Dignan, these voices are not to simply attack those in power, but to show a "firm commitment to combating corruption and assisting Georgians to succeed in building the democratic society you so clearly want and deserve."

Putin's Ex-Speechwriter on His Pick for Putin's Successor

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AT THE APRIL 2008 BUCHAREST NATO SUMMIT, PUTIN TALKED ABOUT KOSOVO, UKRAINE AND GEORGIA'S NATO OPERATIONS. IT WAS THERE THAT HE FIRST CLAIMED THAT UKRAINE WASN'T A COUNTRY PER SE. ANY IDEA WHO WORKED ON THAT SPEECH?

At that time, his chief speechwriter was the same as now - Dmitry Kalimulin. So since it was on foreign policy, it would be a combination of speech writers, Kalimulin and the foreign policy directorate at the Administration of the President. Sometimes, very seldomly, in very rare cases, Lavrov himself would take part in the writing. Now, currently, at the foreign policy directorate they have Ushakov, who is a presidential aide on foreign policy.

WHY DID YOU RETURN TO PUTIN'S TEAM AS A SPEECHWRITER, BACK IN 2008?

I knew I would get a promotion, that I would work in a much higher position than during the previous time I was there, that I'd be writing speeches for Putin. I knew that, in general, the country was changing. It was like some bright future was in front of us. Nobody could predict at that moment that Russia would turn into the kind of fascist state that it is now.

WHEN DID THE BREAKING POINT COME, WHEN YOU TOLD YOURSELF - I DON'T WANT TO DO THIS ANYMORE?

The real breaking point was in 2014, when I left civil service, and decided I would never go back to working for the state. 2014, right after Crimea. The second breaking point was 2018, when I decided I had a conflict with the Kremlin - I was already working as an independent political consultant, but I still had a relatively normal relationship with the Presidential Administration. But in 2018, the situation started changing from bad to worse for them; their ratings went down and the protest sentiment started growing in the country - knowing this, they started tightening the screws on those who were publicly criticizing them. They were telling me I'd get no contracts if I didn't speak a certain way, that I'd starve, have no money to feed my family. They didn't threaten me with prison at the time, just that I would lose all my contracts and would be unable to work as a political consultant in Russia. That's when I moved my family to Israel. The last breaking point for me was the beginning of this war. As soon as the war started, and I started criticizing it, all my [Russian] contracts were cancelled.

WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF THE CURRENT SPEECHES PUTIN DELIVERS? LET'S TAKE HIS LATEST, THE STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS.

The State of the Union address was a big disappointment - no substance at all. He has changed the mode of writing politics. Previously, words worked and there were no other means of making politics work. Now it's totally different - you can't win a war by speaking, as words mean very little. Every time he speaks, people want to hear something which shows he's going to change something in his behavior, but every time he just confirms he's planning to do the same as he was doing before. Everyone knows this won't lead victory or results. People understand that he's moving towards an abyss, into an impasse. They wait for his new plan, plan B, but then he speaks about plan A again, complaining about the USA, about NATO, about the Ukrainian fascists again, and people feel disappointed. So this is the chief



Abbas Gallyamov. Image source: El Mundo

problem with his speeches. In the last one, he was trying to normalize the war, to suggest it is under control. It was just psychotherapy. The audience saw that he was ignoring reality. They know reality is not allowing him to fulfill the aims he had, so he should either change the aims or change how he is moving. And he's still doing the same old thing.

The only thing interesting in that speech was his mentioning the future elections, because everyone thought he'd impose martial law on the country, and the elections would be canceled. But he confirmed there will be elections, and did so one year ahead of those elections. No speechwriter would write this, its Putin himself, because this is a question which deals with him directly. It's his own business. He, personally, for some reason, decided to say this. What does he mean? This was the only interesting moment in that speech.

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC DEMAND FOR CHANGE MOTIVATED BY? DO THEY WANT SOMETHING CHANGED IN ORDER TO WIN THIS WAR, OR DO THEY WANT TO SEE THIS WAR ENDED?

If Putin manages to win the war, great: The public wants to get back to the pre-war state, when everything was relatively peaceful. The rules of the game were clear then: no sanctions, you could earn money, and if you shared this money with Putin's elites, you'd have no problem. And then, when you go on your pension, you could spend the rest of your life in Florida or other places in the West. That strategy was clear. Now it has come to an end. People don't understand why, because nobody believes in all this stuff about NATO or Ukrainian fascists. Everybody understands that this was something which could easily have been avoided. People really feel that if he doesn't change something, if he doesn't stop what he's doing now, it will ultimately lead to a revolution. And the whole system will collapse. None of the elites want this. They want stability. It's not about morals and ethics; the Russian elites are absolutely immoral. They're very practically minded. If you could win the war and tighten the screws and make everything like it was before, great, but you can't win the war. And if you insist, you will lead us to revolution. Stop - You can't win the war. Let us do something else. Let us negotiate. Let's stop the war. Let's end the sanctions, let's normalize the situation in the country. We don't want this Prigozhin with his sledgehammer running around and threatening us. So this is the general feeling - this situation became absolutely abnormal. It's heading towards some kind of collapse. Nobody understands how this collapse will work, but everybody feels that it's coming.

IS THIS REVOLUTION A FOREGONE CONCLUSION OR DEPENDENT ON VICTORY / DEFEAT IN UKRAINE?

If Putin manages to snatch victory out of jaws of defeat, then revolution will not be on the agenda, though it will hap-

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If he doesn't stop what he's doing now, it will ultimately lead to a revolution. And the whole system will collapse

pen at some point, because the conflict between society and the government will still be there. Some 30% of the population of Russia is already educated enough, smart enough, modern enough to demand a say in the political process; they want to take part in the decision-making process and the government is refusing them. So, there is an existential clash that sooner or later will come back, but for some time, this victory will legitimize Putin. It worked for at least four years after Crimea. This new victory won't work so long - maybe half a year, maybe one year, the emotions of victory will heal the wounds in society, yes, but they still suspect that perhaps the future is not as bright as the official propaganda is telling us, but still, of course, they will celebrate the victory.

IN HIS SPEECH, HE SAID: "IT'S A WATERSHED MOMENT FOR OUR COUNTRY, IN OUR HISTORY." CAN HE RALLY RUSSIANS AROUND THE WAR CAUSE?

No. His whole legitimacy is based on the premise that he's strong, and that he always wins. And failure to win the war that he started would show that he's no longer as strong as we thought he was. The magic would disappear. Erosion of his legitimacy would speed up. Within a year or two, he will be hated, an old dictator, an old tyrant. And when he loses that support, he'll face an elite coup, or a military coup, some kind of action from the elites.

WHO WOULD START THIS COUP AND WITH WHAT SUPPORT?

If he cancels the elections, within one year he'll become totally illegitimate, and the regime will continue becoming more and more oppressive. At this moment, I think the military might start it. For them, it's very important to gain back the self-respect which suffered a severe blow in Ukraine. Right now, they are like "who are we? We are losers." And instead of winning that prestige back in Ukraine, they will turn on Putin. But it's absolutely impossible now. For the army to act, he should become a hated dictator, absolutely illegitimate. If he cancels the elections, the process will start. The army would not revolt against a person who was officially elected, who has a strong base of support - it's like

magic for the army, but if this happens and he becomes illegitimate, a hated tyrant, at that moment the army might try to regain self-respect by saving the nation from the dictator. If he doesn't win the war, there is no reason for 51% of Russians to vote for him. He would get much fewer votes, he'd have to falsify the results, and he might lose the military in doing so.

HISTORY TELLS US FALSIFYING RESULTS WOULDN'T BE HARD IN RUSSIA.

Technically, it's not. The question is, if people believe in your victory, as in 2011, as in Belarus, two years ago, as during many color revolutions.

NOW ONTO PUTIN'S POTENTIAL SUCCESSOR. DO YOU THINK HE'S DESIGNATED ANYONE?

Judging by what's been going on in Russian politics in the last couple of months, it's Medvedev again. At the end of December, Putin appointed him as deputy of the Presidential Commission for Military Industrial Cooperation, which gives Medvedev a lot of power, and he is very active there, intervening in the sphere of influence of the current government.

I think he'll appoint him as Prime Minister in the coming months, when he understands that his new offensive has failed. If he manages to win, he won't change anything. He'll be responsible for the victory himself. But when he feels he's failing, he'll change the government, appoint Medvedev again, but this time make him a political Prime Minister, not a just technical one like before. Putin will give him powers to control law enforcement and the military, and tell him: "Go ahead, win the war. Now you're responsible for it. You have time before the elections in December, go win it."

By doing this, Putin shifts the responsibility onto this person, onto his future successor, as he doesn't want to bear the responsibility for a defeat. He is the strongman - for him, being responsible for defeats is the worst thing imaginable. He wants to make himself not to blame for this, at least in the eyes of himself, his friends, his entourage, history. So from this point of view, it's better to be responsible for an unsuccessful choice, for a mistake in choosing the successor - "Yes, I chose the wrong successor, but I'm not responsible for the defeat in the war." And if Medvedev loses and is defeated, it's already Medvedev's defeat, not his, and in this case, he might try to come back and say, "I'm sorry, he let me down, now I'll have to start all over again."

WHY MEDVEDEV? IT'S NOT 2008, WHEN THE WORLD SAW HIM AS MORE LIBERAL, MORE MODERN-MINDED. NOW THE ENTIRE WORLD SEES HIM AS AN ALCOHOLIC CLOWN. WHAT KIND OF PRIME MINISTER WILL HE MAKE?

In September, I wrote a report on Putin's successor. Medvedev was not on the top of the list. There were others. But there is our logic and there is Putin's logic. I see that he has been strengthening Medvedev again, and that's why I'm now thinking it will be Medvedev. I think Putin just trusts Medvedev more than others. There are a lot of loyal people around Putin, but he hasn't tested their loyalty like he has Medvedev. Medvedev was the only one who was above Putin for four years, he was Putin's boss. He fulfilled their agreement and then he gave him back the throne. This is the most important thing from Putin's point of view.

WHAT ABOUT PRIGOZHIN AND KADYROV? WHAT

ARE THEIR DESIGNS?

Kadyrov, in his prime, wanted to be the chief, the leader of the Russian Muslim world, but now he's not thinking about expansion. He's got a lot of problems. The military defeats which the Russian army suffered in Ukraine, they hit Kadyrov hard. For many years, it was believed that these guys were the world champions, and now they're beaten by guys from the neighborhood. And, of course, as with Putin, there were no other sources of legitimacy for Kadyrov beyond feeling that he's strong, resolute and unbeatable - now everybody knows you can beat him. His main worry right now is keeping Chechnya under control.

Prigozhin is a marginal player. He couldn't control his emotions; he was too ambitious, and he created too many conflicts, which became a problem for Putin as he started losing the loyalty of the army. Prigozhin's activity is being curtailed, and he is under pressure. I wouldn't say his game is over. No. If the Russian army fails again, Putin will have no-one to rely on except Prigozhin, and this might give him a second chance.

Prigozhin won't be able to become an independent player, so he is becoming a junior partner to Sechin and Patrushev's team of Russian Siloviki, who are trying to work in favor of escalation of the conflict, and working in favor of introducing martial law and canceling the elections, just to try to hold on to this situation for as long as possible, without any strategy.

WHERE DOES THE RUSSIAN OPPOSITION FIGURE IN ALL OF THIS?

The Russian opposition is either in prison or abroad, so the only and best thing they can do is unite and start working on a candidate for the presidential election, and start campaigning. They need to show they are still alive, and should start working on the program of the future, to show people that there is somebody thinking about the future. Everybody is so preoccupied with tactics, with the current situation, that there is a total lack of a vision of the future in the country, and you cannot make a revolution unless you show people a bright future ahead.

WOULD THE REVOLUTION INVOLVE NAVALNY?

Yes. He is now like a battery on charge. He's in prison. He isn't responsible for the current collapse, and people still remember him as Putin's chief enemy. So when the regime collapses, it would be the natural reaction of people to turn in the direction of Navalny and ask what he thinks, what he has to say. He may well become a Russian Mandela.

SUPPOSING NAVALNY'S RUSSIA DOES MATERIALIZE, WHAT WOULD ITS FOREIGN POLICY LOOK LIKE?

It would be a normal, peaceful country, just like it was in the 90s. I am totally sure that all this Russian imperialism, all this Russian strategy based on conflicts with the Western world, has exhausted itself now. Everyone feels this has led us into serious trouble. It's like post-war Germany, and this feeling is growing. In the end, when this feeling becomes overwhelming, the regime will collapse. Nobody will want a repeat of it. The demand for peace is growing. And it's already, even according to official polling, now stronger than the demand for continuation of the war.

WHAT WOULD THAT MEAN FOR OTHER CONFLICTS IN THE POST-SOVIET REGION, FOR EXAMPLE, TRANSNISTRIA AND GEORGIA?

Russia wouldn't like to intervene anymore. Sending soldiers abroad would become something like a taboo.

The Fragile South Caucasus

Continued from page 2

This process will take place within the context of the Western need to focus its attention simultaneously on the Indo-Pacific region and the war in Ukraine. The changes will reverberate across the South Caucasus, which has never been a foreign policy priority for the US, but nevertheless was regarded as an important juncture between East and West. The diminution of America's interest or perhaps even influence will be proportionally

substantiated by the growing position of the Eurasian powers in Western Asia and the South Caucasus in particular.

The region is and likely will continue to be plagued by the lack of coherence in the US and EU policies over governance and security issues. These are far more important than economic policies where Brussels and Washington more or less find some common ground. Both also agree on some basic elements of the South Caucasus' importance in the regional connectivity. But the slowness with which the EU's and NATO's

eastward expansion takes place brings about disillusionment among the political elites of the South Caucasus states (Georgia primarily).

The South Caucasus is also an increasingly fractured region. Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia now have more divergent foreign policy paths than before. Some interests surely coincide, but they are tactical, more immediate in nature than long-term. Divergent foreign policy views led to radicalization of partnerships into alliances and dependencies. The process has long

been in the making, but was finalized with the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. Turkey and Russia positioned themselves as higher-status powers, while Armenia and Azerbaijan are increasingly reliant on them. Fracturing of the region is also helped by extreme securitization, when the region's states are primarily concerned with border defense, foreign troops' presence, and rival alliances that may harm their interests. The process is accelerating and is unlikely to subside in the near future. Securitization has

also driven Georgia's foreign policy thinking, but the country's close ties with the EU/NATO and the US are not as cohesive as in the case of Armenia's and Azerbaijan's relations with their allies.

This growing fragmentation is challenging the general security and the development of infrastructure in the region. Improvement of connectivity happens only if it is supported by one of the major powers. Fragmentation also means that holistic approaches to the South Caucasus do not work.

SOCIETY

"Nobel" - The School of Mental Arithmetic, Now in the UK



Knowledge and intelligence top the characteristics of human beings. They enable one to maintain a clear mind in their daily life. The increasing development of abacus and Mental Arithmetic in the whole world has benefited many people. "Nobel" school offers an international, online program of Mental Arithmetic, which helps children develop both hemispheres of the brain equally. Nobel school promotes whole brain development by stimulating both sides of the brain by using an innovative mental math program and utilizing the Abacus as a teaching tool.

The program represents a scientific method for mental development based on the performance of arithmetic operations, with the performance of each exercise requiring maximum focus and simultaneous involvement or use of various skills, leading to equal, synchronous development of both hemispheres of the brain.

Notably, Nobel courses are popular in many countries, and at this point, the online course has been introduced in the UK.

To find out more about the benefits of Mental Arithmetic for children and Nobel school's success abroad, GEORGIA

TODAY spoke to Anano Chkheidze, Head of Marketing.

WHAT IS MENTAL ARITHMETIC AND HOW DOES IT DIFFER FROM ORDINARY ARITHMETIC?

Mental Arithmetic is one of the most effective ways to speed up the mental development of children. The methodology is based on training with arithmetical operations in mind, although the benefit is not in oral calculation, but as a result of training, in the equal and harmonious development of both hemispheres of the brain, which improves the child's analytical, logical and systematic thinking, perception of cause-and-effect relationships, proper communication, quick memory, creativity, intuition and many other skills.

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES FOR CHILDREN OF LEARNING MENTAL ARITHMETIC?

The goal of Mental Arithmetic is to help children overcome life's challenges more successfully and realize their intellectual potential as much as possible. The main way of doing so is the equal development of the right and left hemispheres of the brain and the ability to use them simultaneously. To explain more precisely, Mental Arithmetic is able to do this in

the following ways:

Asymmetric use of hands - Children begin mental arithmetic by learning to use a special tool (Soroban in Japanese). Both hands participate in the exercise process, but different fingers on different hands. These actions are so asymmetric that the brain is unable to automatically duplicate the movements of the hand on the other hand, and is forced to actively work on both hands during the exercise. Since different hands are controlled by different hemispheres of the brain, both hemispheres are equally active during counting exercises.

Transferring the real calculator into the imagination - The second important idea of the methodology is to free the child from the calculator over time and gradually switch to the calculator imagined in mind instead of the real one. Imagination is controlled by the right hemisphere, mathematical operations by the left. Therefore, performing operations in the mind with an abacus again and again forces both hemispheres of the brain to work synchronously, but this time on more complicated tasks. Working on an imaginary calculator also activates the parts of the brain that are responsible for concentration and memory.

Development of fine motor skills - The third interesting detail is the small size of the calculator. The abacus is arranged in such a way that performing operations on it with fingers automatically develops fine motoric skills. In addition to this, the training in so-called "speedwriting" also increases the flexibility of the fingers. The fact that the development of fine motor skills is one of the best ways to accelerate the mental progress of young children has already been scientifically proven and is actively used in

various educational programs.

HOW DO CHILDREN SEE THE BENEFITS OF MENTAL ARITHMETIC IN PRACTICE?

Most students didn't realize the benefits of mental arithmetic at the beginning of their study and they just enjoy a quick calculation, though parents do see how their child develops mentally, how much progress they have made in school, they see that their child also discover new talents, interests, notice that they are more concentrated, etc. There are many Mental Arithmetic courses around the world, but our curriculum is built on modern, international standards, which helps to use this method even faster.

WHERE IS THE SCHOOL LOCATED AND HOW MANY STUDENTS DOES IT CURRENTLY HAVE? IS ONLINE LEARNING POSSIBLE? FROM WHAT AGE ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

The methodology is intended for children aged 4 to 15 years. Our schools are located in several locations in Georgia, however, we have online training worldwide. The school has been operating for five years, but we introduced online learning about two years ago, right after the pandemic started. Distance learning was very new at that time and unusual for parents, however, we were able to easily and painlessly adapt online learning to children comfortably and quickly, so that the number of students increased at a record rate during that period.

The main advantage of Nobel is its teachers, who are selected with special care and undergo special training after selection. It is very important for us that together with the transfer of knowledge,

they can create such an environment for children that will further contribute to the development of children's skills and abilities.

AS WE KNOW, NOBEL SCHOOL IS ALREADY WORKING IN THE UK.

Yes. At this stage, we have more than 1500 active students, of which many immigrants attend our classes from different countries. We have been launching online courses in the UK over the past few months and are particularly focused on this project. With the experience accumulated over these years and observing the results of our students, we aimed to give the children living in Great Britain the opportunity to develop their potential with the knowledge of professional Georgian teachers and help create a very successful future. We like to facilitate the integration of children of different nationalities with each other, establishing ties. We offer a one-month free trial learning course. We are sure that those who attend our classes will quickly see results, and we try to make these courses available to as many children as possible. For this reason, the cost is low and the quality is very high.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR FUTURE PLANS.

Our future plans are to introduce Mental Arithmetic to the world and benefit as many children as possible. We plan to first of all fully cover the English-speaking audience, especially Great Britain, and then to actively take Georgian, high-quality, profitable services to as many countries as possible. Mental Arithmetic will make our following generation to stride towards a higher goal.



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Keynote Speaker



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World Water Day – Water: Life, Pleasure, Nature



Academician Givi Gavardashvili at the opening of the seminar - after this paragraph.

TRANSLATED BY KETEVAN SHKIRTLADZE

To recognize the International Day of Protection of Water Resources, the Tsothe Mirtskhulava Water Management Institute of the Georgian Technical University (GTU) and the Organization of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) of the consultative status of Ecocenter for Environmental Protection (Ecocenter), held a scientific seminar on March 22.

With the motto, "Water - life, pleasure, nature," students and teachers of Tbilisi public and private schools No221, No159, No63, No128 (GEO SKY SCHOOL and "Green School"), specialists of the Ministry of Environment Protection and Agriculture of Georgia, and LLC "Georgian Amelioration" were invited to join the celebration. Guests from Armenia counted Professor Oganesh Tokmajian, Mamuka Jangavadze, founder of "Future Technologies" LLC, and Director Davit Jorbenadze. Guests were also invited from the Office of the Permanent Coordinator of the United Nations in Georgia.

The scientific seminar was opened by the director of the Tsothe Mirtskhulava Water Management Institute, academician, doctor of technical sciences, and professor, Givi Gavardashvili addressed. "International Water Day was established by the UN Assembly in 1993, and this year is its 30th anniversary," noted Prof. Gavardashvili.

"Indeed, today is a remarkable day for our planet and, of course, for our country, including our institute, which was established in 1925 as the Transcaucasian Water Management Institute, and was officially registered in 1929.

"During the 94 years of its operation, the institute changed its name many times, it was the Transcaucasian Water Management Institute, then the Institute of Hydrotechnics and Melioration, the Institute of Water Management and Engineering Ecology of the National Academy of Sciences of Georgia, then, after the reforms, the Institute of Water Management of the Georgian National Academy of Sciences, and finally the Tsothe Mirtskhulava Water Management Institute of GTU.

"The institute can be called the alma mater of water resources studies, environmental protection, engineering ecology, hydromelioration and reliability and risk studies of hydrotechnical structures," Gavardashvili said.



Shorena Kupreishvili during the presentation

"National and international scientists such as academicians Tsothe Mirtskhulava, Otar Natishvili, professors Nina Varazashvili, professor Aleksandre Didebulidze, one of the founders of GTU, professor Ioseb Buachidze are actively working in the scientific study of water resources, with them university rector, 1958-1973, Mikheil Gagoshidze, the first Georgian director of the Water Management Institute, 7th in rank, Tamaz Zhordania (Deputy Minister of Construction in 1981-1987), - Giorgi Voinich-Sianozhenski, Zurab Eristavi (Deputy Head of the Water Management Division), and Levan Kiknadze (head of the division in the Ministry of Construction)," he noted.

"The institute is currently working on a budget topic, 'Integrated management of water resources taking into account climate change,' which echoes the directives of UNESCO's 8th program, among which the motto - 'The security of water resources in the XXI century of the world' is one of the main themes.

"One of the directions in this topic is the quality of drinking water and the development of the methodology of rational use. Here, we mean to lay the foundation for the use of technical water in our country, by which we mean that used for watering lawns and washing cars, not drinking water. This requires the preparation of a normative document, as well as the creation of a new economic network for its technical implementation, which will lead to greater economy in water use," Gavardashvili highlighted.

"The second direction - the majority of high-rise dams in Georgia are built in the mountain and mountain front landscapes, where water reservoirs are located in the catchment basins of rivers. Erosion, floods, landslides and avalanches are actively seen in these places. As such, it is necessary to build active gullies with innovative environmental protection hydrotechnical structures. We have already taken the first steps in this direction, building an innovative snow avalanche structure in the alpine zone at 2,538 meters above sea level in Gudauri, and, to regulate Debris flow, we built a Debris flow regulation elastic Barrage in channel riverbed of the Kvemo Mleti River, 1,650 meters above sea level.

"At the same time, we are training young staff, which is evidenced by the successful defense of the dissertations of four of our employees at the Faculty of Construction in 2022. Many thanks to the Rector of the Georgian Technical University Professor Davit Gurgenidze for his help and cooperation," Gavardashvili concluded.

During the celebratory seminar, Head of the Institute's Natural Hazards and the Environment department, academic doctor of Geography, chief scientist Robert Diakonidze introduced the attending public to the role of natural disasters in the case of mechanical pollution of water resources; Head of the Seas and Basins Department of Water Management at the Institute of Georgian Technical University, Chief Scientist Irina Iordanishvili, introduced the guests to the geomorphological features of the territory of Georgia, which determine the rich and diverse types of water resources. She noted that on the 69,700 square kilometer territory of Georgia, there are 26,060 rivers, among which 7,951 are in eastern, and 18,109 are in western Georgia; 860 lakes, 20 large irrigation canals, up to 60 glaciers, and numerous underground waters, artesian pools, thermal and mineral waters.

"There are 51 water reservoirs in the territory of Georgia, constructed in mountain and foothill regions is due to their significant water resources and their high energy potential," Iordanishvili noted. "These reservoirs in the headwaters of rivers at high points are highly efficient and have a low negative impact on the environment. They enrich natural landscapes and encourage recreation and tourism, and increase agricultural productivity by irrigating land."

Chief Scientist Shorena Kupreishvili, Head of the Irrigation and Drainage Department and academic doctor, spoke to the seminar guests about the wetlands of Kolkheti.

"The total area of wetlands of Kolkheti is some 225 thousand hectares, on which it is necessary to carry out complex capital reclamation works to best utilize the space agriculture. At the same time, the full and effective exploitation of the Kolkheti region significantly depends on the widespread hydrographic network, riverbeds (both natural and artificial) and the regulation of the runoff formed during the harvesting of intensive precipitation.

"To develop a system of complex measures for the reclamation of Kolkheti's heavy wetlands, important research works have been carried out by many scientific institutions, a challenge met by the Tsothe Mirtskhulava Water Management Institute of Georgian Technical University, under the leadership of Professor Givi Gavardashvili," Kupreishvili noted.

Spotlighted during the seminar was the arrangement of the field stent for the study of the innovative three-way combined drainage (Georgia patent with certificate # GE P 2005, 3573 B) was carried out under the grant project No40/35 - "Research of new alternative drainage measures for the Kolkheti plain on the example of three-way combined drainage" with funding (doctoral student Maka Guguchia; scientific supervisor, academician Givi Gavardashvili 2013-2014). To carry out field experiments on the three-way combined drainage, a research polygon was organized at the test base



Tamriko Supatashvili conducting experiments

of Didi Jikhaishi Agrarian College of the Samtredia district of the Technical University of Georgia. The conducted studies and obtained results showed that since 2013, the drainage has worked and there has been no swamping in the entrance area of the yard. The research conducted by Ana Gavardashvili in the direction of water resources management is also important - on the Black Sea, and Natia Gavardashvili - on the Vere Gorge, whose project proposals won a grant competition.

Tamriko Supatashvili, a scientific

cells into the atmosphere. Water evaporates from the epidermis (peridermal transpiration). Transpiration ensures the movement of water and substances dissolved in it from the roots to the leaves. The plant's ability to evaporate water protects the plant from overheating. Transpiration changes under the influence of environmental factors. The amount of transpiration is determined by the intensity of transpiration. Determining the intensity of transpiration by weight method is an important process," she said.



Olga Kharashvili reporting

employee of the innovative group of the Institute, and an academician doctor of agroengineering, at the seminar presented a report on the topic: "Water quality control."

She talked about basic control parameters in water; the physical, chemical, and physico-chemical characteristics, then showed the schoolchildren present practical examples - experiments to determine the acidity in water by means of a pH meter (by an Israeli company) and how to determine iron content by means of a portable spectrophotometer (by HACH, USA).

Olga Kharashvili, candidate of technical sciences and senior scientist gave a speech to the school students, noting that water is an essential vital component for normal plant development.

"Water helps photosynthesis, absorption of nutrients, and the maintenance of cell turgor," she told them. "The plant mainly evaporates water from its leaves. Through the gills (gill transpiration), steam is released from the mesophyll

To demonstrate transpiration, she did an experiment, with a flask, and a weighed rubber stopper with a plant leaf attached. The result showed the intensity of transpiration - that 42 g of water was evaporated by the plant leaf in 38 minutes.

At the next seminar, Professor Oganesh Tokmajian, director of the Scientific Research Institute of Water Resources Problems and Hydrotechnical Structures from Armenia, Mamuka Jangavadze, the founder of "Future Technologies" LLC, and Inga Arindauli, a specialist of "Georgian Amelioration" Ltd, etc., spoke.

Academician Givi Gavardashvili rounded up the event by once again congratulating the attending public and schoolchildren on International Water Day and wishing them many successes in the rational use of water, one of the main natural resources of the country. In the hydrotechnical laboratory of the institute, the participants of the seminar took a group photo, and school students were given souvenirs and certificates of participation in the seminar.



General photo of the workshop participants in the hydrotechnical laboratory



Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development

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Green Guria - CENN Launches New EU-funded Rural Development Project to Benefit Rural Communities' Social and Economic Development



BY KATIE RUTH DAVIES

A new EU-funded project "Green Guria - Supporting Local Democracy and Rural Development for Inclusive and Resilient Green Growth" was launched in Guria by CENN, Young Pedagogues' Union, Institute of Democracy and Keda Local Action Group (LAG). The project opening event took place in Ozurgeti Techno Park and was attended by representatives of local authorities and civil society organizations and different members of the local community. The project aims to reduce poverty and improve the economic and social environment and living conditions of vulnerable rural communities in the Guria region.

"The European Union has been financing the rural development program in Georgia for 10 years," Ketevan Khutsishvili, Program Manager for Rural Development, Civil Protection and Crisis Management of the Delegation of the European Union to Georgia, noted. "Within the framework of this program,

the main financing of the EU is in the state budget of Georgia, followed by the financing allocated to international and non-governmental organizations. It is within the framework of this financing that we are pleased that a rural development program will be implemented in all three municipalities of Guria over the next three years, which is aimed at identifying needs based on rural priorities and allocating financial resources for these needs, which will be provided by the joint work of the local population, non-governmental sector, business and local government. We very much hope that the involvement of local communities will contribute to a better future in the Guria region."

Guests attending the launch were introduced to the project's goals and designed activities to strengthen and support the Guria region's rural and economic development. The event participants also received information about the public-private sector cooperation opportunities planned within the project.

Over three years, the project will operate in Guria's Ozurgeti, Lanchkhuti, and Chokhatauri municipalities. The project will establish Local Action Groups (LAGs)

in these municipalities and develop local development strategies that prioritize the needs of gender, youth, and vulnerable groups. The project will also promote sustainable practices and diversification of the local economy, and empower women, youth, and civic organizations and communities.

The project plans to carry out the following activities:

- Establishing and building the Ozurgeti, Lanchkhuti and Chokhatauri LAGs based on the EU "Leader" principles.
- Participatory development of gender, child and vulnerable group (VG)-sensitive Local development strategies in the Ozurgeti, Lanchkhuti and Chokhatauri municipalities, based on RBA.
- Greening and diversifying the rural economy via the implementation of innovative and replicable projects.
- Promoting civic participation and empowering women, youth and local CSOs to defend the rights of their constituencies and advocate for the provision of quality public services for VGs and fair and sustainable post-COVID recovery.

The project, set to last three years, is being implemented as part of the Euro-

pean Neighborhood Program for Rural and Agricultural Development ENPARD IV.

WHO WILL BENEFIT?

Target and beneficiary groups of the project are the local communities of Ozurgeti, Lanchkhuti and Chokhatauri municipalities, local authorities, regional authorities, farmers, enterprises, tourist service providers, educational institutions and youth, tourists and visitors, and media organizations at the local and regional levels.

WHAT WILL THE RESULTS BE IN THREE YEARS' TIME?

- The project will improve participatory bottom-up mechanisms for the community's development. 3 LAGs will be established - one each in Ozurgeti, Lanchkhuti and Chokhatauri, with private, public and civic sector representation, with specific focus to encourage equal gender and youth participation.
- The project will develop Local Development Strategies that will be particularly sensitive and responsive to the needs of different genders and youth and will ensure that actions and approaches are environmentally sensitive.
- The project will offer opportunities for rural economic diversification and inclusive green growth through supporting projects that meet local needs and prevent the depopulation of villages. These projects will help to create an eco-system by improving (a) the competitiveness of the agricultural practices and forest use; (b) the diversification of local economic activities; and (c) the quality of life in rural areas by increasing access to public services and infrastructure and/or improving the management of natural resources.
- Civic participation will be improved

and accessibility and quality of state public services for particularly disadvantaged, remote and depopulated rural areas by empowering women, youth and civil society, introducing digital and social innovation in rural services, facilitating multi-stakeholder issue-based dialogue, and demonstrating effective civil partnerships between the civil society and local authorities. Local youth and women-led initiatives and advocacy campaigns will be supported that promote EU values, participatory local democracy, gender equality, climate action and green post-COVID recovery.

"I would like to thank the European Union for the assistance provided to Georgia," Nana Janashia, Executive Director of CENN, said at the launch. "CENN has been involved in the ENPARD program for more than seven years, and the projects implemented within the framework of this program have brought significant development to Georgia's municipalities. We are glad that, this time, we have the opportunity to start a village development project in Guria. This region has great development potential and the project will work in this regard. We believe that the development of municipalities will be possible through cooperation and involvement with local businesses and civil society."

At the launch event, speeches were also given by Ekaterine Zviadadze, Head of the Policy Coordination and Analysis Department, MEPA; Giorgi Urushadze, State Representative, Guria; Giorgi Ghurjumelidze, Vice Mayor of the Ozurgeti Municipality; Maia Kutubidze, Vice Mayor of the Chokhatauri Municipality; and Eka Gujabidze, Vice Mayor of the Lanchkhuti Municipality.

Representatives of the European Union, local self-government and civil society, and local entrepreneurs attended the launch event.





Georgian Actors to Feature in the New Netflix Movie – “Extraction 2”

In the summer of 2023, a new Netflix action movie – “Extraction 2” is to be released.

Georgian actors Tornike Gogrichiani, Andro Japaridze and Tina Dalakishvili will partner Chris Hemsworth in the film.

Irakli Kvirikadze, Levan Saginashvili, Tornike Bziava and other Georgian actors will take part in the movie along with them.

According to the description of the film, the main character Tyler Rake confronts a Georgian gangster and tries to rescue a family from his captivity.



Chris Hemsworth and Tina Dalakishvili

Green Zones to Be Made Obligatory in New Construction Projects



Georgian Parliament is considering amendments to the Spatial Planning, Architectural, and Construction Activity Code in the third reading, – Parliament announced this week.

“The amendments will require the inclusion of a greening project with modern environmental standards in documents submitted for developing a detailed development plan and issuing a construction permit.

“This will make the existence of a greening project a mandatory requirement in the construction process throughout the country, promoting the emergence of new green spaces, improving the environmental situation, and preventing

chaotic development.

“The draft law also establishes the definition, terms, and conditions of the greening project,” the Chair of the Environmental Protection and Natural Resources Committee, Maia Bitadze stated at today’s briefing.

As Bitadze noted, the proposed changes aim to make the greening component an integral part of the construction process nationwide. She believes that the bill will promote the creation of new green spaces, enhance environmental conditions, and prevent haphazard development. The draft law outlines the definition, terms, and conditions of the greening project.

Bitadze noted that the greening project approach has been successfully imple-

mented in Tbilisi since 2019, and its positive results are already visible. The draft law proposes that the obligation to submit a greening project will not apply to individual residential houses. The bill will take effect on January 1, 2024.

Municipalities must determine the types of green plants to be planted within their administrative boundaries, as well as the rules and conditions for planting green plants, issuing permits for cutting green plants, and implementing their compensatory planting, by January 1, 2024.

Bitadze also noted that the Committee, together with donors and experts, will assist each municipality in being prepared for the effective implementation of the law’s requirements.

The Expat Lifestyle: Thomas Burns, Fixing Georgia’s Electronics as the Country Fights to Choose Light over Dark

INTERVIEW BY KATIE RUTH DAVIES

Our regular column “The Expat Lifestyle” sees us out and about meeting expat business owners who have chosen to make a life in Georgia. We’ll be finding out about their lifestyle, hobbies, culture, likes and dislikes about Georgia, and how this life compares with that abroad. For our latest interview, GEORGIA TODAY sat down with Thomas Burns, who settled here after falling in love with the country in his university years. Thomas now has a family and a successful family-run computer repair business, and tells us he is hopeful that, with all the good there is in Georgia, its people will ultimately



Thomas Burns

choose the West and a path toward “the light.”

WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO GEORGIA?

I first came to Georgia in 1998, fresh out of university, and ended up staying for several years before returning to the US for graduate school. I moved back to Georgia in 2014, met my wife the next year, and we’ve been here ever since.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS AND BACKGROUND IN THE FIELD.

Our family runs Mariam’s Computer Repair, where we fix all sorts of laptops, phones, and other electronics. My daughter Mariam and I have always loved working on electronics, so it was a natural progression to make it into our family business. We love solving problems for our clients, but even more we love helping them build a more rewarding and productive relationship with their technology. This is really the philosophy behind Mariam’s Computer Repair.

As an offshoot of our repair business, we also have a YouTube channel (@

WorkshopNation) where I restore a lot of vintage Soviet technology here in Tbilisi. This tech is sadly disappearing from the world, and we are doing our best to save what we can and educate people about this particular era of electronics. There’s so much history in these devices.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR FAMILY. ARE THEY ALSO THRIVING HERE IN GEORGIA?

My wife and I live with our two girls (5 and 14) and my wife’s parents. Our oldest daughter, Mariam, is a student at the Newton Free School and absolutely loves it. Our youngest, Claudia, goes to an international kindergarten where she meets kids from all over the world, which is something that’s important to us.

WHAT ARE YOUR MAIN LIKES HERE?

The community aspect of living in Georgia is really what brought me back here, the social fabric is very tight. Absolutely everyone understands that family and children take precedence over everything else. This makes for a wonderful environment for children to grow up in: it’s

safe, and the education system is structured so that the children form very close friendships early in life that last forever. The fact that there is so little bullying in schools here is a truly remarkable social achievement that the rest of the world should learn from.

WHAT WOULD YOU CHANGE ABOUT GEORGIA IF YOU COULD?

Georgians have made so much progress since the dark years of the 1990s. But even with this progress, it’s heartbreaking today to see so many families struggling to survive. So many young people move overseas to start a career simply because there are so few opportunities here at home. I don’t know what the solution is, but I look forward to a time when Georgians who study well, work hard, and give back to their communities can count on being able to raise a family in Georgia without worrying about basic survival. Georgians deserve this.

ARE YOU HERE FOR THE LONG-TERM, DO YOU THINK?

Georgia is home. My wife is from here and I’ve effectively immigrated. The kids



I look forward to a time when Georgians who study well, work hard, and give back to their communities can raise a family in Georgia without worrying about basic survival

are fully bilingual and we’ve got such a wonderful group of friends here. At some point sometime soon, however, I expect we will need to spend a few years in the US to be closer to my side of the family for a bit. But I don’t see a scenario where we don’t return to Georgia. No-one leaves Georgia forever.

HOW DO YOU SEE GEORGIA A FEW YEARS FROM NOW?

Georgia finds itself today at an important crossroads that will define its progress for generations to come. One road leads backwards to the darkness and corruption of the Soviet Union. The other road leads to a future of growth, justice, and mutual prosperity alongside its American and European partners. My hope is that after so much hard work and sacrifice over the past 30 years, Georgians will choose the path of light.



This is a wonderful environment for children to grow up in: it’s safe, and the education system is structured so that children form very close friendships early in life that last forever

Family Connections Displayed and Awarded at the Tbilisi Photography and Multimedia Museum



BLOG BY TONY HANMER

Family Connections was the theme of a recent photographic competition held by EU Neighbors East and Fotofestival from Poland, hosted by the Tbilisi Photography and Multimedia Museum. It was open to professional photographers from six countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. From about 400 entries, a shortlist of 18, so three from each country, was chosen by an international jury.

All 18 photographers had their series of photos projected onto large screens at the Museum, hosted by its cofounder, Nestan Nizharadze, for the gala night of the winners' announcements. All work was of a very high standard, some in color, others in black and white. All of the shortlisted photographers had been invited as well, and the EU Ambassador to Georgia, his excellency Pawel Herczynski, gave a speech and presented the winners with engraved acrylic trophies, and a €1000 cash prize for each.

During his main interview, the Ambassador said, "We are here to celebrate a very important competition. We will give six awards to photographers from six Eastern Partnership countries for the best pictures focusing on family and family connections. Of course, family is extremely important for our values, for our societies, and I'm very happy that the EU has been part of this great adventure; I'm looking forward to the celebrations."

In his congratulatory speech, he added, "Through this photo contest, we are

proud to showcase the EU's commitment to fostering cultural exchange and promoting the power of photography as a tool for reflection and change. The theme of family and family connections highlight the importance of our shared values and the role family plays in shaping our societies. Congratulations to all the photographers for their creative and inspiring interpretations."

The six national winners and their series titles and short descriptions are as follows:

Armenia - Nazik Armenakyan, "My War (Fragmentary Experience)". Above all a mother: the photographer's personal story when her eldest son was mobilized in 2020.

Azerbaijan - Orkhan Azimov, "Remote from Education". A glimpse into the lives and struggles of children in a remote mountain village of Azerbaijan.

Belarus - Pasha Kritchko, "Belarusian Connections". Portraits of family connections among Belarusians driven into exile by the events of 2020.

Georgia - Natela Grigalashvili, "The Final Days of Georgian Nomads". A documentary project exploring the lives of nomad families in mountainous Adjara.

Moldova - Katerina Shosheva, "Sem'ya [Family]". A cross-section of time: intergenerational relationships through the eyes of one family, her own.

Ukraine - Marysia Myanovska, "Oh, Brother, Where Art Thou?". Fragments of lives and memory in the urban ghetto: a project dedicated to her brother.

The jury, whose difficult task it was to choose the shortlist and then the final winners, were:

Lars Boering, director of the European Journalism Center foundation (EJC) and

founder of Triggertale.com, a platform for visual communication and storytelling, and Emma Bowkett, Financial Times Weekend Magazine and a curator focused on lens-based arts and contemporary visual culture; Arianna Rinaldo, a freelance professional working with photography at a wide range, the former artistic director of Cortona On The Move, an international photo festival of visual

narrative; Karolina Gembar, photographer and researcher, whose work revolves around issues such as home, belonging, migration, changing lands and identities; and Milica Saracevic, press and strategic communication officer at the European Commission.

"I'm very honored and happy to have been part of the jury," Arianna Rinaldo noted. "It was an opportunity to look at a part of the photography world which I don't usually see on a daily basis. Most of us in the photo world are very much focused on western Europe and the western world. So this opportunity was opening a window to a world that we really need to discover more."

"In the works that we were able to look at, there was a variety of stories and styles. It was really quite eye-opening to be able to see how people from Eastern Europe communicate their sense of the Family and Connections theme, a surprising and refreshing view compared to what we're used to looking at."

"I think the theme is so important, especially at this time in history; we're all coming out of the pandemic, where the idea of connecting with people has changed a lot: we had to stop connecting," she said. "So being able to reinterpret and rethink what that means is really quite a challenge."

"The idea of family, of course, is really quite interesting. Family is a structure that we all think we know; but also, through the works that we received for the contest, we can discover that family is sometimes not what we think it is. It's something that's more open, more versatile, more flexible. I think these years of confinement and crisis in relation-

ships, among people, have really helped to recreate and redefine the idea of family. And photographers, through their personal work, are observing the world, they really help us open our eyes to different situations."

"I have to say, I'm very impressed with the quality of work that was submitted to the contest," Karolina Gembar said. "I've never really had such a great chance to look at the work from this region especially. I saw two trends. One is the political engagement of many photographers, and the fact that they've done their research and they are very conscious socially and politically. The other thing is how devoted they are to portraying their region and working in their locality and community. This is something I feel is very valuable."

All 18 shortlisted photographers are to be applauded for the interpretation and quality of their work, representing the Family Connections theme for their countries and personal lives. Many thanks too, to Kato Otashvili, Content & Media Relations Expert for the EU's Eastern Partnership, who most helpfully supplied me with much valuable information for this article.

<https://tpmm.ge/en/>

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