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FOCUS ON REMEMBRANCE & SUCCESS PAGE 9

Israeli representatives begin European Holocaust Remembrance tour in Georgia and celebrate 75 years of the success of Israel

Untimely Conflict. How the Disruption of Reconstruction in Kyiv Puts Ukraine's Relations with a Key Ally under Attack

BY ARTEM HOROVENKO FOR DAILY.RBC.UA

The competition for the reconstruction of Kharkiv Square in Kyiv was held back in 2007. The competition was held, the winner paid the city almost \$14 million and spent another \$10 million on design and other preparatory work, but the city authorities, after almost 5 years of inactivity and violations, revoked the land allocation and unilaterally terminated its lease.

RECONSTRUCTION OF DISCORD

"Kyiv Terminal" company won the competition for the reconstruction of Kharkiv Square organized by the KMDA.

The plan for the reconstruction of Kharkiv Square provided for the appearance of a new transport interchange, which would completely solve its carrying capacity. The city government, Kyiv Avtodor and Kyiv Metro were responsible for this part of the project.

In turn, the investor's duty was to build an office-hotel center, retail premises, a parking lot for 500 cars and a bus station.

"Kyiv Terminal" paid more than \$14 million



The breakdown of reconstruction in Kyiv puts Ukraine's relations with a key ally under attack (photo: facebook.com)

dollars to the city alone for the right to implement the project and lease the land. The investor suffered about \$10 million more in direct costs and losses for detailed calculations of the

reconstruction project, the lease of plots of land intended for reconstruction, and the involvement of architects, including foreign ones.

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BONDS		Price	w/w	m/m	STOCKS		Price	w/w	m/m
GRAIL 07/28	85.87 (YTM 7.33%)	+0.1%	-0.8%		Bank of Georgia (BGEOLN)	GBP 27.65	-0.7%	+2.0%	
GEBGG 07/23	100.03 (YTM 5.81%)	-0.1%	+0.0%		Georgia Capital (CGEOLN)	GBP 7.70	-2.2%	-3.0%	
GEOPAP 03/24	98.05 (YTM 8.39%)	-0.0%	-0.3%		TBC Bank Group (TBCGLN)	GBP 22.10	-3.3%	-6.8%	
SILNET 01/27	97.94 (YTM 9.02%)	-0.0%	-0.3%						
TBC 06/24	98.28 (YTM 7.28%)	-0.0%	-0.2%						
COMMODITIES		Price	w/w	m/m	CURRENCIES		Price	w/w	m/m
Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	85.61	+0.8%	+3.4%		GEL / USD	2,5250	-0.8%	-2.4%	
Gold Spot (US\$/Oz)	2 003.62	-0.8%	+7.2%		GEL / EUR	2,7555	-1.1%	+0.1%	
					GEL / GBP	3,1332	-1.5%	+0.7%	
					GEL / CHF	2,7955	-0.4%	-0.5%	
					GEL / RUB	0,0310	-3.4%	-8.8%	
					GEL / TRY	0,1308	-1.1%	-0.0%	
INDICES		Price	w/w	m/m					
FTSE 100	7 785.72	+2.0%	+0.5%		GEL / AZN	1,4883	-0.7%	-2.3%	
FTSE 250	18 956.05	+0.7%	-2.1%		GEL / AMD	0,0065	-0.5%	-2.3%	
DAX	15 655.17	+0.3%	+1.5%		GEL / UAH	0,0684	-1.2%	-2.4%	
DOW JONES	33 684.79	+0.8%	+5.6%		EUR / USD	0,9164	+0.4%	-2.5%	
NASDAQ	12 031.88	-0.8%	+8.0%		GBP / USD	0,8049	+0.6%	-3.2%	
MSCI EM	34.15	+1.3%	+4.1%		CHF / USD	0,9033	-0.3%	-1.9%	
MSCI EM	996.25	+0.9%	+4.3%		RUB / USD	81,5249	+2.7%	+7.1%	
SP 500	4 108.94	+0.2%	+6.4%		TRY / USD	19,2999	+0.4%	+1.7%	
MSCI FM	2 134.90	-0.1%	+0.4%		AZN / USD	1,6967	-0.0%	-0.0%	
					AMD / USD	387,6700	-0.3%	-0.1%	

Ukraine Latest: US Launches Investigation into Intelligence Leak



Aerial view of the United States military headquarters, the Pentagon. Source: defense.gov

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

The US Defense Department is launching an interagency investigation into the source and the damage potential of a trove of classified documents that were leaked onto social media over the past few days. The White House said the apparent leak will not impact US security and intelligence assistance to Ukraine.

The documents contained sensitive information on not just Ukraine, but China, the Middle East and Africa, according to reports. They also revealed the rate of expenditure of Ukraine's S-300 air defense systems and a timeline suggesting when they would be depleted — and that they are running dangerously low.

Graham Allison, Harvard's Douglas Dillon professor of government, said the

Ukrainian government has said its military is "killing ten times as many Russians as Russians are killing Ukrainians." But the intelligence leak suggests, instead, that there are four times as many Ukrainians killed, he told CNBC's "Squawk Box Asia."

The classified documents that surfaced on social media last week include details on Ukraine's air defenses and plans for a spring offensive against Russian troops. Allison called this a "big loss" for Ukraine, as information about its air defenses "make it possible for Moscow to bring its aircraft and bombers back into the fight."

LEAKED INTEL DOCUMENTS SAY UKRAINE MAY SOON RUN OUT OF CRITICAL AIR DEFENSES

One document, dated Feb. 23, and marked "Secret," warned that Ukraine's S-300 air defense systems, which are from the Soviet era, would be depleted by May 2 at their current rate of expenditure,

according to reporting by The New York Times. It isn't clear, however, whether that rate of expenditure has since slowed or sped up.

"Without a huge influx of munitions, Ukraine's entire air defense network, weakened by repeated barrages from Russian drones and missiles, could fracture, according to US officials and newly leaked Pentagon documents, potentially allowing President Putin to unleash his lethal fighter jets in ways that could change the course of the war," the Times wrote.

The intel leak may force Ukraine to change some of its military plans related to its anticipated spring offensive, according to a report. The legitimacy of the Pentagon documents is still being verified.

EASTERN UKRAINIAN CITY OF AVDIIVKA IN 'TOTAL RUIN,' LESS THAN 6% OF PREWAR POPULATION LEFT

The eastern Ukrainian city of Avdiivka has been reduced to "total ruin" by Russian shelling, Donetsk regional governor Pavlo Kyrylenko said.

"The Russians have turned Avdiivka into a total ruin," and those who still live there "risk their lives every day," Kyrylenko wrote on Telegram.

The city's prewar population of 32,000 has been reduced to a mere 1,800. The governor reported that a Russian airstrike hit and destroyed a multistory building on Monday.

"Fortunately, there were no casualties as all the residents of the building evacuated in time," he said.

WORLD BANK PRESIDENT CONDEMNS RUSSIAN DETENTION OF WALL STREET JOURNAL REPORTER

World Bank President David Malpass strongly criticized Russia's detention of American Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich, who has been charged with espionage by the Russian government. Gershkovich, his family, The Wall Street Journal, and the Biden administration strongly reject the charges and have demanded his release.

"It's a brazen act by Russia. It violates press freedom, freedom of the press, which the World Bank Group has long recognized as vital. That includes the safety of journalists," Malpass told reporters.

"Press freedom increases transparency and accountability. It keeps a check on governance, it exposes corruption, transmits ideas, promotes innovation," he said, adding that he hoped Gershkovich is released and reunited with his family as soon as possible.

'CLOSEST TOPICS' DISCUSSED BY PUTIN, LUKASHENKO DURING MEETING IN KREMLIN APARTMENT

Presidents Vladimir Putin and Alexander Lukashenko addressed "the closest topics" when they met in the Russian leader's official apartment in the Kremlin earlier this week, the Pul Pervogo Telegram channel close to the press service of the Belarusian president said on Sunday.

"After the talks and a working dinner in the Kremlin, the leaders continued

communication in the Kremlin apartment. Naturally, they discussed the closest topics," Pervogo said.

On April 5, the two presidents held one-on-one talks in the Kremlin and attended a meeting of the Supreme Council of the Union State of Russia and Belarus on the following day.

The President of Belarus told Russia's defense minister on Monday that he wanted guarantees that Moscow would defend his country if it was attacked, the state-owned BelTA news agency reported.

BelTA cited Lukashenko as making the remarks to Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu during a meeting in the Belarusian capital Minsk.

Lukashenko was cited as saying that he had previously discussed the matter with the Russian President, who he said had agreed with him that such security guarantees were necessary and needed to be formalized.

"In general, it sounded at the talks (with Putin) that in the case of aggression against Belarus, the Russian Federation would protect Belarus as its own territory. These are the kind of security (guarantees) we need," Lukashenko was quoted as saying.

RUSSIA PLANS TO REVAMP AIR DEFENSES, BOLSTER PROTECTION ALONG BORDER WITH FINLAND

Russia will increase its air defenses along its north-west border with Finland in response to Helsinki's NATO accession, a Russian air force commander said in an interview.

Russian air defense forces have been challenged by Ukrainian strikes, and the country aims to revamp and reform them following the experience it gained in the war so far, Lieutenant General Andrei Demin told Russian newspaper Red Star in an interview, according to Reuters.

Finland's new NATO membership means that the Western military alliance now occupies an additional 830 miles along Russia's border.

"In these conditions, the air defense forces are working out issues of protecting the state border in the north-west of the country in accordance with the increased threat level," Demin said, according to a Reuters translation.



United Airports of Georgia Adds Eight Flights for Easter

The United Airports of Georgia will appoint additional eight domestic flights to Mestia, Batumi and Ambrolauri in connection with the Easter holiday on April 13-22. Natakhtari-Mestia tickets cost 90 GEL,

while Natakhtari-Ambrolauri tickets cost 50 GEL. Children under the age of three are free to fly, while those under the age of twelve receive a 30% discount.

Tickets may be booked and purchased at ticket.vanillasky.ge.

President Awards Participants of April 9 Rally, March 7-8 Rally

Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili has awarded honor medals to Nana Makharadze (participant of the April 9, 1989 rally) and Nana Malashkhia (participant of the March 7-8, 2023 rally) for their strong and active civil positions in Georgia's national liberation struggle and country's European future, and for promoting society's patriotic spirit.

"I'd like to award two people: Nana Makharadze, whose picture has crossed borders and is known worldwide as the face of April 9. The second is Nana Malashkhia, who has emerged as the face of Georgia's European future," the President stated.

She claimed that this medal belongs to all the women who have fought and continue to fight for Georgia's independence and future.



The Rebuttal: "Georgian Dream" Responds to US Sanctions

BY MICHAEL GODWIN

The decision involving a visa ban is discretionary, which means that the person who is denied a visa does not have the right to evidence.

- David Kramer, former senior US State Department official and Executive Director of the George W. Bush Institute. Following this week's announcement by the United States Department of State that four of the nation's top judges would be barred from entry into the United States, the ruling party "Georgian Dream" has dug in and defended the judiciary. Despite repeated claims that the quartet were steeped in rampant corruption, Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili and his GD colleagues have not only stood by their sanctioned friends, but also announced that the government stands by them too.

The United States has yet to formally respond to the counter accusations of the ruling party. Multiple members of "Georgian Dream" have demanded Washington provide evidence for its accusations of corruption. Others more hilariously have suggested that, in fact, it is the US that is corrupt by tapping their communications, while simultaneously admitting that they made these deals that, in all likelihood, were leaked by deputies and whistleblowers that have yet to come out.

Most notably, Former Prime Minister and leader of the party "For Georgia" Giorgi Gakharia posted to social media succinctly, saying "we're witnessing a dangerous blurring of the line between



Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili. Photo Credit: Reuters via WSJ

the Party & Judiciary." However, the most interesting part of this may lie on the surface. Why would the United States, with an innumerable number of other interests that are likely far more pressing than four aged and obese jurists, bother filing sanctions and making such a publicly viral announcement?

The threat is to far more than the judges themselves. While the fight against corruption is ongoing and still important, the sanctions mark a significant warning to the ruling party and the national leadership. Like a shot across the bow of a ship to warn of impending transgressions, the United States, arguably one of Georgia's greatest political and economic backers, has likewise warned its friend

not to cross into dangerous waters. "As the head of government and the ruling party's leader, I fully back all judges," Garibashvili stated after a closed door meeting with the Supreme Council of Justice. "I have also informed the honorable judges that we will be fully supportive. We shall do everything possible to defend the court's independence from interference or pressure." Naturally, unwilling to let those that are already linked to his party's leadership, the Prime Minister will not let his corrupt friends down.

Additionally, more Georgian Dream blunders continue to "prove too much" as the old lawyers' saying goes. Chairman of the Georgian Dream party Irakli

Kobakhidze, famous for his inability to properly groom himself, willingly or unwillingly shared that he too was a target of corruption. "I won't specify the content yet, who it was and what they asked for, to keep it in our arsenal, but actually, I can repeat that there were phone conversations with me and they asked for something that surprised me," he said.

"They demanded from me a very gross violation of the constitution, legislation, etc. They demanded it for political interests." According to him, this unnamed, mysterious figure asked him to commit an act in "direct, blatant violation of the constitution, it was about the judicial system." Of course, if someone were to call Kobakhidze with such demands, it would only be because he was known to commit such acts on demand, and was reliable in his readiness to do so.

Kobakhidze also made statements that mirrored the sentiments of his party that the United States is targeting Georgia's independent court system. This comes despite the missions, and billions of dollars the US and its European partners have invested over decades to establish such an independent judicial system to begin with. Kobakhidze called the sanctions an attack on the country that was made from an "emotional background."

The US, while certainly the target of low-hanging fruit arguments about imperialism, would not make half-baked remarks and issue administratively laborious sanctions packages against these judges and their families unnecessarily. The US's title for being a notorious spend-thrift when it comes to foreign programs may or may not be well deserved, but when it comes to intelligence and foreign

diplomacy, these proverbial warnings shots are not taken lightly. For Georgian Dream officials to try and sheepishly laugh off the matter is more telling than the sanctions themselves.

However, rather than try and avoid a tidal wave, Kobakhidze stresses the importance of capsizing the boat ahead of time. "This cannot be appealed in Georgia. It could theoretically be appealed in America, I don't know how appealable this particular act is, it's up to the local jurisdiction," he states. To him, taking the legal battle to the United States is the better place to fight his battles, not focusing on internal or regional issues.

Despite this political squabbling, the signal from the United States, the European Union, and all of Georgia's pro-Western allies is clear: fix yourself or be forgotten. The collective West must prevent Georgia from sliding back into the maw of the Kremlin, come hell or proverbially high waters. US and EU leaders must convene to ensure Georgia and its overwhelmingly pro-Western citizenry are not held hostage.


It is clear that as long as political puppet master Bizina Ivanishvili and Georgian Dream continue their rule, the idea of becoming an EU candidate, much less a member, is impossible. But the West should not act brashly. Surgically-targeted financial sanctions and restrictions by both the US and EU aimed at the assets of Ivanishvili and his party's elite are needed to truly put pressure on the government without inadvertently hurting the nation. If Europe, the US, and the free world are serious about tackling the oppressors in the world, these steps must be taken to save Georgia.




More on this story on page 6.


Xeme

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



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You Can Reform a System but Not a Judge

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

Countries have always been broken down into categories: developed, economies-in-transition and underdeveloped. Eventually, 'underdeveloped' was substituted by the politically more correct 'developing' – a euphemism that is still in active use. Where might Sakartvelo be on that scale? How about 'economy-in-transition,' just to avoid the less attractive 'developing'? Fair enough, but the doubt will always be there as to whether Georgia, as developed as it is now, is capable of carrying that much load. The wishful thinking is 'Yes', but it is not only the economy that determines whether a nation is developed or developing; it also is the level of its cultural and political development, and the fairness and efficacy of its court system.

The recent loud punishment by the American administration of four Georgian judges by means of declaring their inadmissibility to the territory of the United States was an overwhelming message, signaling the unfitness of our current court system in the parameters of contemporary human rights and democracy. This is quite an accusation, especially toward somebody who happens to be a judge by both position and vocation. If proven guilty, that judge has their life marred forever. Anything could be thought and imagined. When word is out, it will have its effect whether you want it to or not. Nothing can stop the human imagination: Once corrupt, always corrupt! Isn't this awful? And each of these judges with already fairly or unfairly



Image source: Guardian.ng

stained reputations, now suffering under the worst possible suspicion, is a human being with mother and father, siblings, wife, kids, friends, neighbors, colleagues and of course those living under their rulings and sentences. This is practically an earthquake!

Should we the people of Georgian society ignore it, carry on as usual, asking others to mind their own business? Or should we look into this dire situation

more deeply, with a genuine sense of democracy and respect for human rights? This is one way to treat this embarrassing circumstance. Another model of public behavior in this case might be to continue our blind belief in the American political culture, and this particular government is suggesting it entertains an unambiguous faith in those infallible American ideals we recently adopted and loyally carried through all those

post-soviet struggles and strife.

The bottom-line here is that today's Georgian court system is considered as faulty as was 10-15 years ago, and before, for that matter. After we got rid of our socialist economy and communist ideology, numerous things changed in this country, as they did in other former soviet republics, except one thing: The court. Courts have remained a problem everywhere. Many of the former soviet

nations have turned out to be incapable of building a political-influence-free court system. And why is that?

I might have the answer, at least an answer with a grain of truth to it. It is not the reform as such that will put things straight on this most formidable side of our statehood. No! It is the way the citizens, among them the future judges, are being brought up by their respective families, traditions and societies; the human ideals that their education and spirituality are based on; the national history they have read and lived through, and all those little things their parents and grandparents whispered into their ears from their very infancy all the way to their adulthood. Just imagine for a second that we have indeed reformed our court system ideally, having received something absolutely pristine and impeccable, based on the laudable western experience, within which our Georgian judges have become operable, who have purified themselves of any political influence and instructed to behave as their colleagues are behaving in the West.

But what is the guarantee that the self-same Georgian judges will behave as their western counterparts in accordance to their best knowledge, will and conscience, when left face-to-face with the incipient ruling they are supposed to make? The guarantee is zilch, nothing, nulla, niente! The only guarantee of their judicial fairness is their honest judiciousness, which does not come with a reform of the system. It only comes with their education, conscience, spirituality and personal purity. And this may only happen if a judge was born into and brought up in that kind of society. Period!

More on this story on page 6.

China's Agnostic World Order

ANALYSIS BY EMIL AVDALIANI

New geopolitical orders usually reflect the victors' aspirations. They are often created to forestall future challenges and therefore are in nature hegemonic and as such, perhaps it is impossible for them to be perfect at fitting the interests of all powers. New orders become most penetrating and all-encompassing when an element of ideological competition is present. In other cases, a new order could be limited in scope and simply involve military arrangements blocking the challenger.

China's order could be agnostic, in the way that Beijing would not be interested in the internal affairs of other countries, and at the same time appreciative of some core elements of the liberal order. Free trade, and open and traversable oceans, could be embraced by China. This means that the requirements for being included in the liberal camp will be viewed as increasingly burdensome, while the Chinese approach will appear more attractive.

Though the Chinese have not revealed a detailed plan of how they see the future world order, increasingly, as the official documents and speeches of China's top leadership suggest, Beijing is becoming more confident and forward looking when it comes to China's place in the world. The construction of a Sino-centric world order where the West's power is

seriously curtailed, is now being actively pursued.

The Sino-centric world is one revolving around China where the latter is central not only in an economic sense but also in establishing the norms of state-to-state relations. China is trying to build a new system where traditional Western-led alliances are replaced by a global web of partnerships. Unencumbered by formal obligations, China might actually find many supporters of this much decentralized system.

The Chinese world order is also about ideas. Though the country has never experienced the equivalent of Westphalian ideas in relations with its neighbors, the Sino-centric world view *tianxia*, or "all under heaven," has been a driving force behind China's outlook. Defeats in the nineteenth century forced China to revisit its vision of state-to-state relations. The idea of the nation state so alien to the Chinese historical experience is now cleverly appropriated by the Communist Party to attain strategic goals such as national unification and non-intervention into China's internal affairs.

The Chinese leadership is looking far beyond securing the country's borders and is setting its gaze on much of Eurasia. In other words, as China's ambitions grow, the idea of sovereignty also undergoes changes. Increasingly for Beijing, securing sovereignty is about becoming dominant in key aspects which define the superpower. Whether it is attaining geopolitical goals in the Middle East or gaining

a greater say in major international organizations, this is all now seen as serving China's sovereignty.

The Chinese leadership understands that the struggle for global supremacy is not only about positioning itself as a foremost military power. Idea, legitimacy, wealth and effective leadership are just as crucial for attaining that cherished global role. Only a clever combination of these goals can bring China the expected results. On the economic front, China has already

following the first harsh waves of the Covid-19 pandemic, when global economic growth was sluggish, China fared relatively well. However, a powerful economy is not only necessary for the well-being of the Chinese population but also for changing how others behave. In this, China is not doing anything different from what other big powers have done historically. The US,

fore constitutes an important step for China to reshape the global order according to its own design.

Linked to the powerful economy is wealth, that is, showing how advanced and prosperous the Chinese economic model is. For the Chinese, there is nothing unusual in being wealthy and economically all-powerful.

Indeed, from ancient times, China has been considered a foremost economic power. The Romans, Byzantines, Sasanians, Arabs and other West Asian powers all tried to establish close land and maritime contacts with China. Marco Polo, Ibn Battuta and other Eurasian travelers underlined the opulence of Chinese cities, their size, and the industriousness of the Chinese people. The present Chinese advancement is therefore a

return to historical normalcy, which was just briefly (for a century) interrupted by a century of setbacks.

Emil Avdaliani is a professor of international relations at European University in Tbilisi, Georgia, and a scholar of silk roads.



proved its efficiency, as shown in the relatively mild effects that the 2008 financial crisis had on the country. Even

Russia, the EU and even smaller actors all use economic measures to turn opponents into more pliable actors. China's punitive behavior towards Australia, Lithuania and others fits into this logic. The ability to change others' political behavior there-

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The NATO Bucharest Summit – 15 Years On

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA
TAVBERIDZE FOR RFE/RL

This week marks the 15th anniversary of the NATO Bucharest Summit of 2008, in many ways a seminal moment for both Georgia and Ukraine, as their hopes to get the NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) were dashed and they were given a vague membership promise instead – that, one day, they would get there. Radio Free Europe's Georgian service spoke to Volodymyr Ohryzko, then Foreign Minister of Ukraine, who was right in the thick of it all back then, to share his recollections.

WHAT'S THE LEGACY OF THE 2008 BUCHAREST SUMMIT?

The legacy is that the political will of some NATO member states wasn't, unfortunately, on the side of Ukraine and Georgia. Why? Because at that time, our German and French friends were occupied by the idea that Russia could be transformed into a liberal, democratic state.

In my view, it was a strategic mistake made by both Germany and France, because we, Ukrainians, like the Georgians, very well understand what it means to be inside Russia, and to be Russia's neighbor. It means being an object of aggression or a "younger brother" at best.

I remember arguing with some Western colleagues, saying they were making a huge mistake in not thinking ahead, not analyzing the situation and what was going on in Russia. And Russia and Putin did understand that, and took full advantage of it to do what they wanted. And soon after the summit, we saw Russia invade Georgia, in August of 2008.

The reaction of the Western world was shameful. Immediately after the invasion, I flew to Washington, to speak to then Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, and I said, "Look, Ukraine will be next if there isn't a policy rethink towards Russia." I said "it's not a theoretical threat, it's a real, tangible threat!"

Unfortunately, her reaction was not as pragmatic as I hoped it would be. I proposed the American side sign a bilateral security agreement, like the United States have with close allies, South Korea and Japan, etc. The answer was not very promising. She told me: "Look, Vladimir, frankly speaking, it's absolutely not possible that Russia will invade as big a country as Ukraine. Georgia is small, and we can imagine they were in no position to defend themselves. But Ukraine is practically impossible to invade and try to occupy."

Their philosophy was far from the reality, from understanding what Russia meant to do, and this is what we are now

paying for with our own blood.

PRIOR TO THE SUMMIT, WERE THERE ANY TANGIBLE HOPES THAT UKRAINE STOOD A REASONABLE CHANCE OF GETTING A MAP? AND IF SO, WHAT WERE THOSE HOPES BASED ON?

January that year, I remember meeting then Secretary General of NATO, Jaap De Hoop Scheffer, and I brought him a letter signed by President Yushchenko, Prime Minister Tymoshenko and Speaker of the Parliament, Yatsenyuk. I can't say that he was very happy with this letter, because he said "Look, we have just three months for this? Okay, we will start our consultations. What is very important is the position of the United States."

That's why we organized many consultations on the various levels with the States. The last one was the visit of President Bush to Ukraine prior to the summit meeting. We heard voices from Berlin and Paris, but nevertheless hoped that the leading role of the US would be in support, because the US was and still is the motor of NATO. They told us that they would support us. And that is why our hope was, I will say, not groundless.

ANY BEHIND-THE-SCENES STORIES THAT YOU WANT TO SHARE THAT SHED LIGHT ON THE DECISION-MAKING?

What I remember I found remarkable is that Putin came in, and even at that time stated that "Ukraine is not a state, it's a failed state, it is territory of Russia," that we are the same nation as Russians. And he repeated this many times there, to various delegations. Some delegations thought him a little bit crazy. But nevertheless, it didn't change Madam Merkel and Mr. Sarkozy's position. And due to their unwise approach, we weren't given MAP. Had we been given it, I am convinced that the attack on Georgia wouldn't have happened, the Crimea annexation wouldn't have happened, Donbas and this full scale war that were are fighting today could have been avoided.

THERE'S A FAMOUS SARKOZY QUOTE THAT IT WAS THE FIRST TIME AMERICA DIDN'T GET WHAT IT WANTED FROM NATO. HOW BIG WAS THE CONTRIBUTION OF CHANCELLOR MERKEL AND PRESIDENT SARKOZY THEMSELVES, AS POLITICAL LEADERS, IN THAT?

The anti-Americanism in France and Germany was and still is very high, despite the fact the Americans freed Europe from the Nazis, and later Germany from Soviet rule. And let's not forget that economic interests rule the game, and trading with Russia was something they were very fond of. Even now, after this huge invasion of Russia and



The ex-Foreign Minister of Ukraine, Volodymyr Ohryzko

Ukraine, many Western companies are still present in Russia, using this opportunity to get bigger profits than before. Sometimes economic interests are much higher than geopolitical ones, not saying anything about morality.

OUR THEN PRESIDENT CALLED THE SUMMIT DECISION "BETTER THAN MAP", WHILE YOURS SAID IT WAS "NOW JUST A FORMALITY UNTIL UKRAINE GETS MAP IN DECEMBER." WHAT WAS THAT OPTIMISM BORNE OF?

There was some optimism, and I can explain why. Because we got the so-called annual National Program, which in fact was some kind of MAP, the same criteria to fulfill, but not binding. Our Western colleagues told us at the time: "Let's start with the rulebook. It's not about the name of this plan, it's about what to do, about the essence of what we are doing. So, let's start doing practical things."

This decision was very well taken in Moscow, as a sign that the West, first of all, was thinking about the position of Moscow, taking into account the wishes of Moscow; seeing we were pushed down to the second rate issues; where Russia matters, but all others, Ukraine, Georgia, don't. We were begging them: "Please open your eyes and analyze not the 'let's be friends' statements from Putin, but the mentality and history of the Russian

population; please analyze the events that took place inside Russia, for example, in Chechnya - please do not forget the city of Grozny destroyed."

Unfortunately, it fell on deaf ears. The example of Georgia was also a very pessimistic one, because three months after this Russian invasion, the West went back to business as usual.

IN 2017, YOU SAID THAT THE TIME WILL COME WHEN THE ROLES ARE REVERSED AND THE WEST WILL BE BEGGING FOR TBILISI AND KYIV TO BECOME NATO / EU MEMBERS. AND THAT UKRAINE IN 20 YEARS WILL BECOME A SUPER STATE AND THE BACKBONE OF THE NEW EUROPE. HOW FAR OFF IS THAT TODAY, GIVEN WHAT'S HAPPENING?

I'm an optimist. I do understand that, even now, we have some politicians in Europe who are still hesitant, who are still thinking, "we'll make a new attempt to democratize Russia, to make Russia liberal." I remember in this sense a very simple example of Ukraine's past, three months before Ukraine proclaimed its independence, when President Bush Senior came to Ukraine and said "Ukrainians please do not be so nationalistic."

THE "CHICKEN KYIV" SPEECH?

Exactly. "Be with Gorby, Gorby's a good guy." But, there are some objective rea-

sons for the history, there are some objective rules. And that is why the Soviet Union disappeared so easily, so quickly, and became a thing of the past. In my view, the Russian Federation today is not merely walking, but running down this same path. It is very weak inside – the Russian economy, after the sanctions, will probably endure for a few years more. The Russian elites, the people around Putin, are weighing up their options: Do they want to stand with Putin in The Hague? The population inside Russia is also starting to open their eyes, and let's not forget that Russia is not only made up of Russians; today there are many dozens of nationalities who have the right to self-determination. That is why I believe that the days of Russia are already numbered. I believe that very soon, especially after the very effective actions of Ukraine's army, Putin's regime will be over.

What will come next? My understanding is that it will likely be a smaller Russia, reduced to the historic Muscovy, surrounded by many other entities that today are part of Russia. Many politicians in the West are still thinking that somehow Russia will exist in the future. In my view, it is the wrong approach. That is why I hope that Ukraine, Georgia, Eastern European countries in the future will really form a new center of power inside the EU and inside NATO. And in this sense, our future is, I am pretty sure, very positive.

US Department of State Publicly Designates 4 Judges "Due to their Involvement in Significant Corruption"

COMPILED BY KETEVA
SHKIRTADZE

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken this week released a statement on the public designations of judges Mikheil Chinchaladze, Levan Murusidze, Irakli Shengelia and Valerian Tsertsvadze.

According to the statement, the above individuals had abused their positions. "The US Department of State is publicly designating Mikheil Chinchaladze, Levan Murusidze, Irakli Shengelia, and Valerian Tsertsvadze under Section 7031(c) visa restriction authorities, due to their involvement in significant corruption.

"These individuals abused their positions as court Chairmen and members

of Georgia's High Council of Justice, undermining the rule of law and the public's faith in Georgia's judicial system.

"The United States continues to stand with all Georgians in support of democracy and the rule of law and will continue to promote accountability for those who abuse public power for personal gain. We stand with all judges who have the integrity and courage to act impartially and independently.

"Officials designated under Section 7031(c) of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2023 (Div. K, P.L. 117-328) ("Section 7031(c)") and their immediate family members are ineligible for entry into the United States," reads the statement.

The US Embassy in Georgia made additional clarifications, noting that these are visa designations that prevent these indi-

viduals (and their immediate family members) from entering the US based on credible information that those identified are involved in significant corruption.

"Those designated and their immediate family members are ineligible for entry into the United States. There is no time limit on these designations. Section 7031(c) does authorize waivers of, and exceptions that may permit an individual to travel under certain circumstances.

"The Secretary of State has credible information that the individuals designated were involved in significant corruption related to their current and former judicial positions. Their corruption undermined rule of law and democratic processes in Georgia.

"Information is gathered from a variety of sources, including open sources. Credible information was obtained that 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.

"The information we have gathered meets the required standards under US law to deny them entry to the United States. It is up to the authorities in Georgia to investigate corruption in its own country," reads the information released by the Embassy.

US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degan responded personally by saying: "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."

Degan 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. 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.

"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," she said.

"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

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US Department of State Publicly Designates 4 Judges "Due to their Involvement in Significant Corruption"

Continued from page 6

law is about more than words. It's about justice and justice is the main principle upholding freedom and democracy.

"These designations 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 Georgians 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.

Secretary Blinken wrote on Twitter that they stand with Georgia's government, and people in their efforts to advance transparency & democratic governance.

"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," US Secretary Tweeted.

Senator Jim Risch responded to the occasion, noting that the "Designations are long-overdue, but very welcome. I will continue to support the desires of the Georgian people to move to a more democratic and transparent future," he tweeted.

Vedant Patel, Principal Deputy Spokesperson at the US Department of State noted that they have reliable information that these persons were involved in significant corruption.

"Over the past 30 years, we have become strategic partners, working together on a shared vision for Georgia to fully integrate into the Euro-Atlantic family," Patel said. "We have reliable information that these individuals have been involved in significant corruption related to their current and former judicial positions. This corruption undermined the rule of law in Georgia and undermined democratic processes. It damaged public trust in democratic institutions and officials of Georgia."

RESPONSE FROM THE JUDGES AND RULING PARTY

Foreign Minister of Georgia, Ilia Darchiashvili, sent a letter to US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken noting the decision of the US State Department to designate judges was made public without any evidence, and as such is "completely incompetent and irresponsible."

Georgia Today offers the letter unchanged:

"Dear Mr. Secretary, on behalf of the people and the Government of Georgia, I would like to extend my highest considerations and assurances of our commitment to the strategic partnership between Georgia and the United States of America. We have been informed that the US Department of State took a decision to publicly designate three incumbent and one former judge of the independent Georgian judiciary.

"Firstly, I would like to remind you of the most dire legacy inherited by the 'Georgian Dream' in the judiciary in 2012 when it assumed power. The reality on the ground was indeed grave: the court system had effectively been incorporated into the prosecution as its subdivision, transforming it into another link in the repressive machine of the authoritarian regime in place at the time; over 99% of cases heard ended in convictions; more than 300 thousand citizens were tried in court; elite corruption was permeating the judiciary as well as other spheres, the authorities were committing systemic crime. Under the conditions of an unjust and repressive judiciary the prison population swelled to 25 thousand, while the practice of systemic torture and inhumane treatment towards those incarcerated became rampant. As a result, mortality rate among the incarcerated reached the unprecedented high levels. After the 'Georgian Dream' assumed power, the number of prisoners decreased two and a half times. The



Levan Murusidze, one of the judges sanctioned by the US. Source: gov.ge

mortality rate plummeted tenfold. Additionally, after assumption of power by the 'Georgian Dream', pre-trial detentions decreased threefold, administrative convictions decreased threefold, the number of accepted motions for investigative actions halved, bail rulings decreased 20-fold, number of fines issued decreased fivefold, etc.

"Under the previous government and its court system the Georgian people were unable to find justice within the state, having to appeal to the European Court of Human Rights. During the period from 2004-2012 the Strasbourg Court received 5 416 applications from Georgia. As a comparison, during the period from 2013-2022 the same indicator decreased to 1132 cases. From 2009-2012 the European Court heard approximately 4 000 applications against Georgia. As of 2023 only 147 such cases are pending, which is the best indicator since Georgia has become the member of the Council of Europe. It is noteworthy, that under the previous administration the key figures responsible for creation and construction of a criminal judiciary, Mikheil Saakashvili and Zurab Adeishvili, have not been sanctioned by any state. Furthermore, regrettably, they enjoyed and still enjoy guarantees of personal immunity.

"The stark drop in the number of appeals to the Strasbourg court, as well as the aforementioned statistical data, clearly indicate that systemic problems were eradicated in Georgian judiciary after 2012, which is the direct result of the political will, as well as the four waves of judiciary reforms implemented by the

'Georgian Dream'. Georgian citizens are now able to effectively protect their rights within the Georgian state. The judiciary has become functional and today it provides with the opportunity to effectively defend one's rights.

"The government had repeatedly appealed to critics of Georgia's current judicial system to identify specific court cases that they believe have been ruled unfairly. However, critics have so far failed to present any evidence of such rulings. A striking example of bias by the critics of the judicial system is the decision of the Strasbourg Court in the case of the 'Rustavi 2' TV channel. The ruling states that, on the contrary, Nika Gvaramia, the then general director of 'Rustavi 2', exerted pressure on the court. The ruling notes, that 'groundless attacks in the media perpetrated by the director general of 'Rustavi 2' against the judge can be regarded as an unlawful attempt to influence the decision of the court, and these attacks in general can contribute to undermining the authority of the judiciary'. Let us remind you, that representatives of opposition parties and non-governmental organizations, opposition-owned media outlets, the former president, the former public defender, as well as individual representatives of the diplomatic corps actively participated in an attempt to damage the reputation of the court in connection with the 'Rustavi 2' case.

"The Georgian court is perceived as one of the most advanced one by the citizens of Georgia and by international research. According to the 'IPSOS FRANCE' survey ('Assessment of Judi-

cial Reforms in Georgia'), 55% of the population of Georgia think that the court is fair, 52% express trust in the court, and 51% think that the court is independent. Because of the government's ten-year work and implemented reforms, Georgia ranks high in international rankings. In the 2022 index of the rule of law of the 'World Justice Project', Georgia ranks number one in the Eastern European and Central Asian region. According to the Corruption Perception Index of 2022, Georgia is the leader in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region, and for the first time in the history of the index, Georgia is among the top 20 countries in Europe and ahead of 11 EU member states.

"At the same time, work on judicial reform continues with the Venice Commission to further strengthen the independence and transparency of the judiciary and to make the legislation even more complete.

"Therefore, taking into consideration the existing reality, the decision of the US State Department to designate judges, which was made public lacking any evidence, is completely incomprehensible and unacceptable. We express hope that the State Department will either provide relevant evidence or reconsiders its decision. Otherwise, the Georgian state and the Georgian people will perceive this as the pressure exerted on the independent judiciary of a sovereign state and as gross interference in its activities, which will be deemed detrimental to the long-standing friendly relations between Georgia and the USA."

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34 Years Since the April 9 Tragedy

BY ANA DUMBADZE

Thirty-four years have passed since 9 April 1989.

To mark the occasion, politicians, civil sector representatives and citizens gathered on Rustaveli Avenue in Tbilisi to honor the memory of the victims of the April 9 tragedy.

They claim that the country's struggle for independence still continues today, with the main aim for Georgia to become a part of the European family.

The April 9 Tragedy (also known as the Tbilisi Massacre or Tbilisi Tragedy) refers to when an anti-Soviet demonstration on central Rustaveli Avenue was dispersed by the Soviet Army, resulting in 21 deaths and hundreds of injuries.

In the aftermath of the brutal attack, hundreds of peaceful protesters were poisoned by gas and many of them



severely injured.

On April 10, in protest against the onslaught, Tbilisi and the rest of Georgia went out on strike and 40 days of national mourning was declared. People brought

a large number of flowers to the place of the killings to pay respect to the deceased.

A year later, on 9 April 1990, Georgia adopted its Declaration of Independence.



On April 9, 1991, the second anniversary of the tragedy, the Supreme Council of Georgia declared Georgian sovereignty and independence from the Soviet Union based on the results of a nationwide referendum.

In the same year, one of the leaders of the protest movement, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, was named the first democratically elected President of Georgia.

Untimely Conflict. How the Disruption of Reconstruction in Kyiv Puts Ukraine's Relations with a Key Ally under Attack

Continued from page 1

All these costs and losses were confirmed by an independent appraiser - the international company Baker Tilly. The involvement of an independent appraiser to confirm the costs and losses of the investor was a requirement of the city authorities.

Representatives of the KMDA recognized the existence of the investor's rights to compensation for losses, and even made "compromise" proposals on their part regarding their compensation. Moreover, the legislation of Ukraine and the agreement on mutual protection of investments of Ukraine and Great Britain directly oblige the observation of investor's rights in such cases. However, a series of investor settlement initiatives have faced sabotage from the city government.

LAWSUITS

The case went to court, which the investor won in 2019. The judges ordered the KMDA to pay the investor \$14 million dollars paid to the capital authorities and another \$10 million dollars in direct damages, but refused to compensate the lost profit.

KMDA did not comply with the court's order. In 2021, the authorities decided to file an appeal.

In May 2021, the Northern Court of Appeal overturned the 2019 decision,



erroneously determining the statute of limitations. Therefore, already in October 2021, the Supreme Court canceled the decision of the Northern Court of Appeal and restored the investor's rights to compensation for damages.

Around the same time, they turned to the British Embassy for support. As a result, a representative of the embassy was present at every session of the Supreme Court.

A NEW ROUND OF CONFLICT

After the start of full-scale Russian aggression, "Kyiv Terminal" offered the city authorities a chance to conclude a peace agreement. The investor was ready to completely waive his monetary demands in exchange for the fact that

after the end of martial law, the city and the investor would agree on a plot of land on which the investor would build an infrastructure facility necessary for the war-damaged infrastructure of Kyiv, at his own expense.

But this did not suit the officials. The next court session in this case will be held on April 25.

Obviously, those responsible for the failure of the investment project and reconstruction of Kharkiv Square are still working in the KMDA. It is likely they are so afraid of liability that they fail to settle disputes and settle agreements with the investor every time.

The interest of the officials is not only not to bear responsibility for the investor's money that was "lost" in the capi-

tal's budget, but also for the budget money that was allocated and written off for the preparation of the city's transport infrastructure for the 2012 European Football Championship.

It is also worth noting that a campaign to discredit the company's investor coincided with the new round of court proceedings. It has been going on for six months, despite the fact that no official body in Ukraine, Great Britain or the West in general had and does not have any complaints against the investor.

"The accusations against the investor were activated precisely after in July

2022, in a court case in Ukraine; his Ukrainian company was offered to conclude a settlement agreement, according to which the investor waives his monetary claims, including those that were already awarded to him by the court of first instance," says Wolf Theiss partner Taras Dumych.

In any case, the dispute must be settled within the country. An international court with an investor from Great Britain, which is one of Ukraine's most important military allies and post-war investors, is especially out of place for Ukraine right now.



US Department of State Publicly Designates 4 Judges "Due to their Involvement in Significant Corruption"

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The Prime Minister of Georgia, Irakli Garibashvili, declared full support to every judge.

"As a Head of Government and ruling party official, I declare full support to every judge. The court of law has become independent and free from internal and foreign country interventions during our governance. Of course, no intervention and no influence on judges is acceptable. It is absolutely unacceptable to me, to us all, especially when referring to a sovereign court and judges of a sovereign country. I also reassured our honorable judges of our full support. We will do our utmost to have the independence and freedom of the judiciary protected from any interference and pressure. It is our declared policy and main goal that we have strived for since our team came to power. Everyone is well aware that we carried out fundamental reforms in the judiciary over the past 10 years to make the court of law the way it is today - independent and free. No interference is acceptable in a sovereign court of a sovereign country, and we should not let it happen, be that internal, from the government or any other wing, or external - coming from other countries. I wish to reaffirm judges of our support," stated Garibashvili.

Lifetime Judge of the Court of Appeals, Levan Murusidze, who along with 3 other judges, was sanctioned by the US said that the US Embassy has hidden an attempt to hijack the judiciary.

He noted that the goal of the sanctions was to cause problems in the judicial system so that there would be chaos, and the judicial system would be subordinated to the American Embassy.

"The judiciary is being hijacked by accusations of corruption for which there is no evidence. The Ambassador said

that justice is not night calls and bribes. I don't know what to say, if the Ambassador knows that I make calls at night, it means they eavesdrop on me. No evidence can be presented that corruption takes place. The US Embassy has been making a hidden attempt for years to seize the judiciary. Sanctions on me or not, it is important that Georgia does not lose its sovereignty, and the US Embassy does not seize the judicial system," Murusidze said.

"I am not scared. I have lived an honest life, I have not broken the law, and if now they won't let us into the US or EU, I will survive, like my grandfather, who has never been there," he noted.

OPPOSITION RESPONSE

The leader of Strategy Builder, Giorgi Vashadze, spoke about the imposition of sanctions on the Georgian judges, claiming that Georgian Dream has "lost any moral basis to call itself the government of Georgia."

Vashadze pointed out that the West saw very clearly that the Georgian people not only want the European Union and NATO, but are ready to fight for it, which was demonstrated on March 7-9.

"This is only the beginning. I would like to first of all to appeal to Bidzina Ivanishvili - stop falsifying the will of the people, Georgian Dream has lost any moral basis to call itself the Government of Georgia. The USA and the European Union stand by us," he said.

Gakharia, the leader of the For Georgia party, said the US decision is a clear message that responsibilities will be personalized.

"Sanctioning of Georgian judges by US is a clear signal that responsibilities will be personalized for everyone who undermines Georgian democracy and rule of law. Now, Ivanishvili must come out and take his personal responsibility!" the former PM tweeted.

Georgian, Azerbaijani, Romanian, Hungarian Officials Discuss Black Sea Submarine Cable Project



Georgian, Azerbaijani, Romanian, and Hungarian officials gathered in the Georgian capital Tbilisi on April 7 to discuss various stages of the implementation of the Black Sea submarine electricity cable project, a new transmission route to deliver green energy from Azerbaijan to Europe.

Georgian Economy Minister Levan Davitashvili delivered the preliminary findings of the project's feasibility study and reviewed the next steps in its execution. He noted that preliminary technical surveys on the Black Sea Submarine Cable Project showed that it would be

successfully implemented.

State Secretary in the Romanian Ministry of Energy, George Niculescu, said he believes "this project represents an opportunity for the countries located in the Caspian Sea, as well as for those in Europe, to be better interconnected in exchanging renewable energy through this cable."

Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Peter Siarto, noted that they "are looking for diversification, we are looking for green solutions as well as environmentally friendly solutions, therefore, this project is of crucial importance for us because, in the long term,

it can ensure the security of a supply of electricity to Hungary."

EU Ambassador to Georgia, Pavel Herczynski, pledged that "as the European Union, we are firmly behind this project. We want this project to have a regional dimension and we sincerely hope that in several years, South Caucasus will become a very important source of energy to the EU."

The Black Sea submarine cable project will be implemented with the support of the Georgian government and the cooperation of the Georgian and Romanian transmission system operators "Georgian State Electric System" and "Transelectrica". On December 17, 2022, a strategic cooperation agreement was signed between the governments of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania and Hungary on the development and transmission of green energy. One of the important issues of the agreement was the Black Sea submarine cable project - once the project is implemented, a 1,195-kilometer cable will be connected to Romania (1,100 km underwater and 95 km land cable), which will allow the countries of the South Caucasus and Romania to take advantage of the expanded export opportunities and conduct trade, taking into account the hourly prices of the electricity market.

At this stage, "Georgian State Electric System" consulting company CESI is carrying out a technical-economic study of the project. In the future, within the framework of the project, environmental and social impact assessment and geophysical and geotechnical studies of the Black Sea bed will also be carried out. Through them, the possibilities and best ways of practical implementation of the project will be determined.

From Holocaust to 75 Years of Success



Israeli House is launching a series of events as a sign of solidarity with Israel. The first country will be Georgia, and then it will continue to Europe and end in Jerusalem, at the Tower of David.

In order to take part in the events, members of the Israeli Knesset from the coalition, as well as leading figures of the opposition, have already arrived in Georgia. The delegation includes the head of the Knesset friendship group with Georgia, chairman of the economy committee David Bitan, from the opposition former minister and current Knesset member Michael Biton, former Knesset vice-speaker, and former head of the Georgia Friendship Group Hilik Bar.

The visit of the delegation started with

a trip to the Georgian Schindlers Park, the memorial and the 30-meter painting of Anne Frank in Varketili, and will continue throughout different regions of Georgia.

As part of the solidarity action, an event dedicated to the 75th anniversary of the State of Israel "From the Holocaust to Success" is planned, to which members of the Government of Georgia, Deputy Speaker of the Parliament of Georgia Avtandil Enukidze, Head of the Friendship Group with the Parliament of the State of Israel Givi Mikanadze, Chairman of the Economic Committee of the Parliament Davit Songulashvili, other officials from Georgia, and Israeli businessmen, tourist companies, Jewish organizations are also invited.

According to Itsik Moshe, founder and

head of Israeli House, which is active in 10 countries, the example of Georgia shows that the representation of real Israel and public diplomacy became a real bridge to establish ties to the other side. This has also been confirmed by the number of visits from the Knesset to Georgia.

A meeting of the Israeli delegation with the chairman of the Israel Friendship Group and various committees is planned.

During the visit, the Israeli delegation, in cooperation with Israeli House, will hold events about these topics: 90 years from anti-Semitic laws in Germany to the present day; 75 years since the Independence of the State of Israel was Declared; 34 years of relations between Israel, Georgia and world Jewry; 10 years of "Israeli House NET" activities in

Georgia and Europe with international organizations, WZO, AEPJ, EAI, GIL.

"In 1948, after 2000 years of exile, we gained our forces and restored the state," Moshe notes. "Today, after 75 years of independence, Israel is a living example to the world of how to recover from destruction and become one of the leading countries in the world. Israel is a leader in high technology, medicine, science and progress. But unfortunately, we are still faced with growing anti-Semitism today.

"We must not forget:

"In 1933, when another wave of anti-Semitism broke out, the world was silent, and 6 million Jews were killed.

"In the 15th century, when anti-Semitism was rampant in Spain, people were silent - and this led to expulsion from Spain

and great casualties.

"In the 21st century, we must not be silent because we have a strong country and we must fight against anti-Semitism all over the world.

"The ways to deal with it are proper information and the initiation of studies against anti-Semitism in the education system," Itsik Moshe says, adding: "On the one hand, we will strengthen relations with friendly countries like Georgia. On the other, we will mobilize a million Israelis in the Diaspora who are ambassadors for Israel to defend ourselves against anti-Semitism.

"We have a message mainly for small nations: The main thing is not to remember, the main thing is not to forget. The main thing is the motherland, everything else is the rest."

Hungry Young Minds: The Urgent Need for a School Nutrition Program in Public Schools in Georgia

BLOG BY NINO JIBUTI

Hunger in the classrooms is on the rise in Georgia. Every child deserves to get a fulfilling education and exercise the right to adequate nutrition. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recognizes that all children up to 18 years of age are human beings in their own right, and as such are entitled to inalienable rights inherent to human dignity, including the right to healthy food and adequate nutrition, the right to non-discrimination, and the right to consider their best interests in all matters that affect them. According to CRC Article 27, children and young people should be able to live in a way that helps them reach their full physical, mental, spiritual, moral, and social potential. However, despite the CRC being ratified in Georgia in 1989, the particular right to adequate food and nutrition remains as an unaddressed issue.

According to the National Statistics Agency, in 2020, 549,000 students were enrolled in public schools (see chart #1). A recent study surveyed 77% of the students and found that 42% of them have at least once gone hungry when attending classes, while 35% were "always hungry." According to the estimates, 189,690 children (under the age of 18) are living below the poverty line.

In Georgia, children often arrive at school already hungry. This in turn is putting an extra burden on teachers, who are spending more time dealing with the effects of hunger in the classroom and less time teaching. Going without food in the morning has a direct impact on children's behavior, as it lessens concentration. The issue worsened during the Covid-19 pandemic and since then the majority of the public school cafeterias have remained closed. It should be noted that even before the pandemic, the cafeterias at schools provided only simple snacks for teachers and students: There was no possibility to get nutritionally balanced meals even

before the pandemic.

Yet, since 2008, the budget of the Ministry of Education has increased by 3.8 times from GEL 457 million to GEL 1.7 billion, and while this has had real results in terms of the quality of most children's education in Georgia (Ministry of Education and Science in Georgia), the nutritional side remains unaddressed.

Addressing hunger among school children is an urgent issue that requires understanding the context at the local level, unlocking the political will, planning, and coordinating cross-sectoral cooperation. By acting collectively, Georgia can give every child the opportunity to create a healthy and vibrant future for themselves.

Georgian schools have no statutory obligation to provide meals, nor to ensure that students are sufficiently fed, not even socially disadvantaged students. Almost three-quarters of Georgian schools do not have cafeterias, forcing children to either bring food from home or purchase often low-quality food in shops or bakeries located nearby, often



Image source: Antoni Shkraba/pexels

undermining children's nutrition.

A child's academic success is a key to their overall well-being. While in school, children learn not only academic material, but also social skills, knowledge about their health, and other essential life skills. Children gain more control of their futures when they are able to succeed in school. But there are certain factors that may hinder their ability to learn. When a child comes to school hungry, they may find it difficult to focus and get through the day. For some, once they

finish their classes, they return home not knowing when they'll get their next meal. The found effects count the following:

- Impaired focus
- Higher chance of repeating a grade in elementary school
- Impaired cognitive ability
- Language and motor skill difficulties
- Trouble adapting to the workforce as an adult
- Fatigue and stress

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Negative Values



BLOG BY TONY HANMER

I've just been going through all my surviving original photographic material which was NOT among the stuff lost in our garage fire of January 2022 in Svaneti. Soon after the fire, I remembered a large plastic

storage box full of negatives and slides which had perished utterly. But then this small suitcase of other work appeared in our house, miraculously reminding me that the loss had not been total.

True, all but maybe a single roll of Svaneti negatives burnt up. But much of these, too, had been scanned already, and the scans survive on various hard drives. (A set of which I MUST now

move to a rented safety deposit box in Tbilisi, physically distancing them from the other set, which I keep here at home. Best practices for copies of valuable documents!)

Going through what was in this suitcase today, I was amazed at what negatives, slides and prints I still do have. Most of this work is from the UK and Canada; the Zimbabwe, Venice and Indonesia negatives are also gone, while scans of them again survive. So it's very much a mixup.

Three slides of the August 1991 coup attempt against President Gorbachev surfaced; these I had not even remembered, and they're not the most important ones, but they are something. A very thin original monochrome negative of my musical partner playing guitar in August 1992 reappeared. And many other less precious but still significant rolls, from my early years in Georgia (1999 through about 2004).

Having recently been introduced to a young man who is one of Georgia's up and coming analog photographers, I now have a connection to someone with that vital space, a darkroom. Here is where negatives are printed, under a deep red safelight for black and white (the paper is unaffected by this light) or, much harder to accomplish, in total darkness for color. He seems to be working chiefly in black and white.

You can also do other, more unusual things with photographic paper. Photograms are one technique. You put objects, ranging from translucent to opaque, between the enlarger's light source and the paper, and exposing it gives a negative on the paper. You can even project such photograms by putting something like a leaf skeleton, a feather or a thin flower right in the 35mm negative holder, and focusing the light onto the paper. Man Ray was a famous exemplar of this technique nearly a century ago.

Or, if you briefly turn on the full room light part-way through developing your



paper in its first chemical bath, this somewhat randomly reverses half the paper's tones. This is called the Sabatier effect, or less correctly solarization. Results vary from print to print, but some of my very favorite pieces are ones I have made this way, using negatives now lost. At least I can scan the prints, and make digital copies of them this way.

We are only three years away from the bicentennial of the birth of photography, which was in 1826 in France. This should be a huge event: it deserves to be. From those humble beginnings we have moved to stable black and white negatives; color negatives and slides; the miniaturization and mass-production of cameras making photography (from the Greek for "light-painting") available for the masses. And then to digital photography; computational photography being used in smartphones; and now images which are being made more and more by AI interpreting text prompts, getting more and more as photographically realistic as photos themselves. Each leap mostly unimaginable

from the perspective of those before it.

I seem to have come by my own interest in photography genetically: my great-great-great grandmother on my father's mother's side was the great Julia Margaret Cameron, Britain's most famous woman photographer of the 19th century. Given a box camera when already in her 60s, she exposed its hand-coated glass negatives for 2-3 minutes each to give portraits of many of her day's famous people, of whom the most well-known is Charles Darwin. Imagine the command: "Stay still, don't even BLINK, for three minutes!" I have it easy...

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 Etsferi: www.facebook.com/hanmer.house.svaneti

Hungry Young Minds: The Urgent Need for a School Nutrition Program in Public Schools in Georgia

Continued from page 9

There have been some tentative steps taken to address this issue in Georgia. For instance, in 2015 the Minister of Labor, Health and Social Affairs approved non-binding national recommendations entitled 'Healthy and Safe Nutrition at School' which outlined school nutrition standards in detail and forbade the sale of snacks in schools. The document states that it is necessary to consume food from each of the four groups every day: 1) fruits and vegetables, 2) grains and cereals, 3) milk and dairy or their substitutes, and 4) lean meat, poultry, fish, eggs, legumes, nuts, seeds. The document also describes healthy snacks, important minerals, vitamins, and relevant types of food, and lists the types of products or components that need to be minimized in school meals, such as fats, sugars, and salts.

These recommendations have yet to be executed. Further, a report on the global survey of school meal programs in which Georgia participates (for no reason) publishes the products that are recommended to be included in school

meals to ensure healthy and balanced meals at schools (see Chart #2).

Providing lunch at school for students is a common practice in developed countries. In the United States, the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is one of the most effective approaches that a state can offer as social protection to students and parents, recognizing that malnutrition has detrimental effects on children's development at an early age. NSLP is a government-assisted meal program operating in public schools for students, which provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost, or free lunches to children each school day. For example, in the UK, a typical school meal costs about £2 (GEL 8.6) and is usually paid for by a parent, in advance, online. The meal includes a main course containing fruits and vegetables, protein (for instance, meat, fish, cheese) and carbohydrates (for instance, rice, pasta), a dessert, and a drink. There are rules about how the food is prepared; for example, there are limits on the quantity of fried food. In addition, children are eligible for free school meals if their annual household income is below £7,400

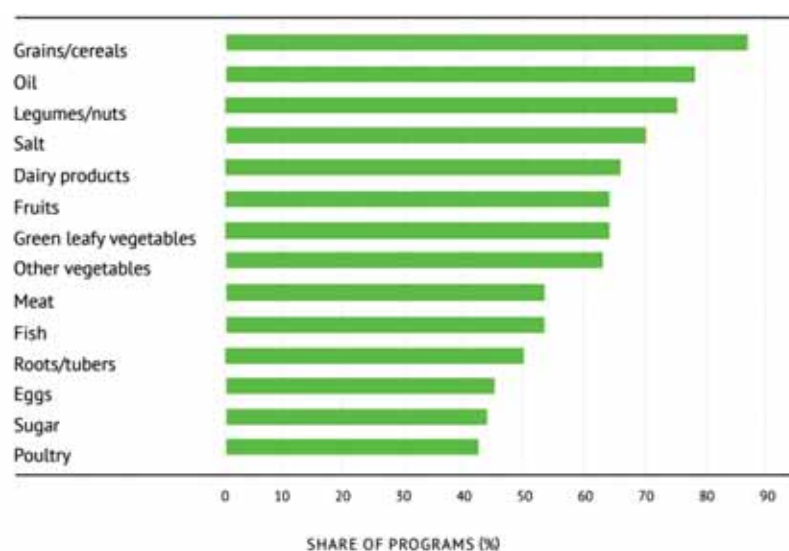


Chart #2. Global Survey of School Meal Programs (GCNF), 2021

(approximately GEL 32,000) excluding benefits, or if they receive certain welfare payments - a threshold, based on which more than one in five schoolchildren (1.7 million) in England were eligible for free meals in January 2021.

In Georgia meanwhile, children from socio-economically disadvantaged families are mostly left without food during the school day. In Georgia, it is estimated that it would cost 2,27 GEL (1 US Dollar) per student per meal, a cost of around 70,994.154 GEL per year. There are different models that can be developed to address this issue. The most feasible and cost-efficient is the means-tested approach which the UK implements - providing meal vouchers to disadvantaged families, while those that are not below the poverty threshold can get the same meal but the parent has to pay for it.

UNICEF Georgia has advocated for this issue, and some progress has been made in this regard. Namely, in 2022, in partnership with Parliament and the Ministry of Education, Science and Agriculture, a commitment for the

School Nutrition Program was secured through: Assessing the situation; developing school nutrition standards; developing training courses for school managers; and carrying out a feasibility study in one region. However, no tangible results have been achieved so far. Despite international organizations such as UNICEF advocating this issue in Georgia, there has not even been a pilot program tested.

The proposed meal programs address the three main pillars: education, health and nutrition inequality, and agriculture. It is crucially important the national government prioritizes this issue and provides necessary support to ensure provision of nutritional meals in public schools.

- The Ministry of Education, along with other actors in the process, should develop an action plan (2023-2025) based on the UNICEF-proposed model which creates a sustainable model that employs a multisectoral approach.
- Launch a pilot program which will help them to elaborate the program

before it is launched throughout Georgia.

- Start with centralized administration of the program and then delegate it to the municipalities. Provide respective guidelines and recommendations along with technical support as needed.
- Provide capacity-building and technical training to the school staff who will be responsible for administering the program.
- Coordinate with other fields - non-profits, schools, and researchers. Ensure supply chain management - connecting farmers to schools.
- Learn best practices from foreign countries that already have experience in successfully administering the program.

While hunger in schools remains a widespread issue, we must help combat this epidemic. These are some of the most important steps we individuals can take to help curb hunger both nationally and in the community, especially on the side of non-government organizations:

- Be an advocate for government programs by building awareness of childhood hunger and pinpointing tangible solutions.
- Support school programs as complementary to the national program. One option is to start breakfast clubs in schools.
- Local organizations can help schools launch and administer the program. Local non-governmental organizations can help schools administer the lunch programs and ensure their implementation. Often, non-government organizations have more capacity to ensure successful implementation of the program as opposed to national government employees and school staff.

It is proven that school meal programs work, and Georgia needs to make combating hunger in classrooms a priority!

The Pupils of Public General Education Schools by Level of Education (at the beginning of school year, thousands)

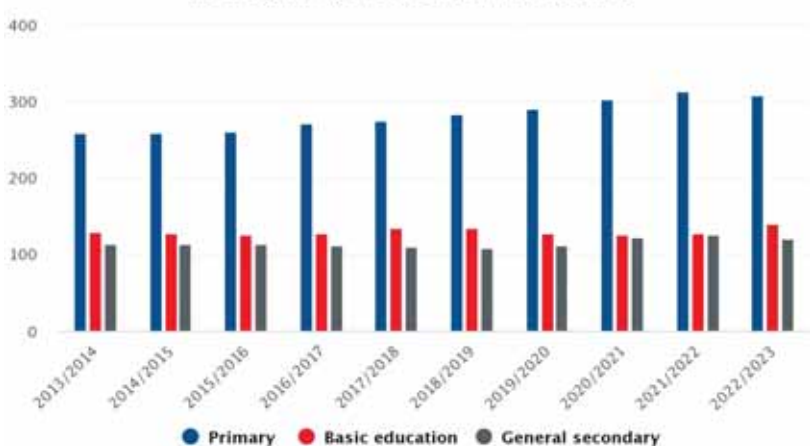


Chart #1. Number of students in public schools, GeoStat

What's New in Georgia in 2023: Bunker Tours, UNESCO Biospheres, a 'Cheese Road' & More



BY EMILY LUSH FOR HER BLOG WANDERLUSH

Looking for something new this Easter weekend? Check out Georgia's 2023 offerings below. Think new restaurants and cafes, exciting tourism initiatives, and infrastructure developments that are making remote corners of the country ever more accessible.

NEW IN TBILISI

Visitors to Tbilisi in 2023 will be greeted with a restored Vake Park and a renovated Pushkin Square. The Museum of Books finally reopened in late 2022, adding another chapter to the growing list of Tbilisi's best museums.

Tbilisi has a slew of new hotels this year, including the House Hotel Old Tbilisi and Bazaar Boutique in the renovated Atoneli Street precinct.

Those looking for a unique accommodation experience in Tbilisi will be glad to hear that Heritage Homes launched in Georgia late last year. This platform offers a curated collection of historic properties for short-term stays, giving visitors access to some of Georgia's most beautiful heritage buildings.

Joining the ranks of reclaimed spaces in Tbilisi, Satburi is a new collective of restaurants, bars and boutiques that opened on the edge of Mushtahid Garden last autumn, breathing new life into the abandoned greenhouses and orangeries there. Turns out these beautiful A-frame glass structures make for great dining rooms. Salt Restaurant and Sip Wine Bar are among the new residents.

Vintner-painter-restaurateur John Wurdeman has opened a new venue in the courtyard of the Ilia Chavchavadze Literary Memorial Museum (which itself made the news recently when it was nominated for the 2023 European Museum of the Year Award). Elegia pairs seasonal, plant-focused cuisine with natural wines. Meanwhile, John's established restaurant, Poliphonia, has relocated to a new address in Mtatsminda.

Also on the hill, Tbilisi scored its first 'artisanal khachapuri bakery' in Gunda Khachapuri. Proving that cheesy bread is indeed its own food group, Gunda dishes up some of the more obscure regional versions of the national dish – for example, Meskhetian Khachapuri made with endemic red doli wheat flour and pulled tenili cheese.

Amo Rame Bani on Aghmashenebeli Avenue is the third feather in this

popular restaurant empire's cap. Wine Factory in Vera welcomed several new restaurants including Holy, while a few more vacant spaces in the up-and-coming Plekhanovi neighborhood were converted into venues – these include Saghigino for food (try the Tvishi wine custard with seasonal berries), and for cocktails, Unfound Door Gastro Bar.

Chicos has joined the ranks of Tbilisi's trendiest breakfast spots, and Pictograma is bringing new flavors to the city with their Khevsur mountain cuisine. Kaklebi by chef Meriko Gubeladze of Shavi Lomi and Ninia's Garden fame has opened on the Tskneti Highway – the tender mtsvadi BBQ and fresh salads are absolutely worth travelling for.

NEW IN KUTAISI

An upgraded Kutaisi International Airport opened in 2022 along with the new Kopitnari Railway Station. It's now easier than ever to reach Kutaisi from Batumi or Tbilisi.

In 2023, budget carrier Ryanair is set to make its long-awaited, post-pandemic return to the Georgian market and will once again use Kutaisi as its base. Wizz Air is continuing to add more Kutaisi routes: There are now 27 in total, including new services from Brussels, Hamburg, Frankfurt, Madrid and Poznan launching in summer.

More and more restaurants and cafes are springing up in the center. Notable recent openings include Story and Piatto.

North of Kutaisi, Porto Gumati is offering lakeside bungalows in the picturesque Imeretian countryside, and to the south, Chateau Vartsikhe is the latest boutique winery-accommodation to open in Baghdati district.

The Vani Archeological Museum, a 45-minute drive from Kutaisi, also got a nod in the European Museum Forum's 2023 European Museum of the Year nominations.

ZUGDIDI NEW INDUSTRIAL ROUTE & THE PATH OF MOSAICS

Led by the Polish Solidarity Fund PL in Georgia, the Zestafoni New Industrial Route and Path of Mosaics is designed

to kick-start tourism in the industrial city. The Zestafoni Ferroalloy Plant will soon open for guided tours, and several of Zestafoni's Soviet-era mosaics have been restored by the Ribirabo Foundation.

NEW PROTECTED AREAS & HIKING TRAILS

Several new Protected Areas were established in Georgia in 2022, including the Tana and Tedzami Protected Landscape in Shida Kartli region, and UNESCO designated two Biosphere Reserves: The Dedoplistskaro Biosphere Reserve and the Three Alazani Rivers Biosphere Reserve, both in Kakheti.

Plans for a 51,000-hectare national park in Racha were revealed, and at the same time several new hiking trails were marked in the region – including a new 74-km section of the Transcaucasian Trail. It links Sachkhere in Imereti with Racha and follows a similar path to the new mountain highway.

CASTLE RESTORATIONS & NEW MUSEUMS IN GEORGIA

Staying in Sachkhere, restoration works were completed at Modinakhe Castle last year. Khuluti Fortress in Kvemo Kartli region was among the other fortifications to receive some TLC.

Georgia has several new museums in 2023, including a refurbished Oni Local Lore Museum and the new Borjomi Cavalry Museum. In Kakheti, the historic Chateau Mukhrani was restored and reopened in October. You might notice that it has regained its old, original brick-coloured facade.

NEW RESTAURANTS & WINERIES

Several interesting new wineries and restaurants have launched in rural Georgia, including Silver Lakes Farm in Telavi. Created by celebrity chef Tekuna Gachechiladze, it represents a new trend towards weekend getaways and farm-to-table experiences near Tbilisi.

Other notable openings include: Tchrebalo Cellar, a beautiful wine space in Lechkumi; Bahnhof Station, a German-style beer hall in Asureti inspired by the area's Swabian heritage; and The Social Space in Natanebi, a cool outdoor bar on the Black Sea Coast.

NEW FESTIVALS & GEORGIA'S 'CHEESE ROAD'

And now, a road of a different kind. In 2023, the US Department of Agriculture is leading a new project to link Georgia's artisanal dairy producers and create a 'Cheese Road', a delicious new tourism route much like the Wine Route in Kakheti and Tea Route in Guria.

Wine Days, a roving program of wine festivities that visited dozens of cities and towns around Georgia, and Taste Fest, a new celebration of cuisines from Racha and Svaneti regions, had their inaugural dates in 2022. It will be great to celebrate these foodie-themed festivals in 2023.

And of course Tbilisoba came back with a bang in 2022, so there is sure to be a stellar program planned for 2023. Last year it fell on October 1-2, so expect it to be on October 7-8 this year.

For more, head over to WanderLush: <https://wanderlush.org/new-in-georgia-2023/>



Bazaar Boutique Hotel 2) Piatto Cafe (Kutaisi)



Modinakhe Castle



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***Happy Easter
from Georgia Today!***