

GT

GEORGIA TODAY

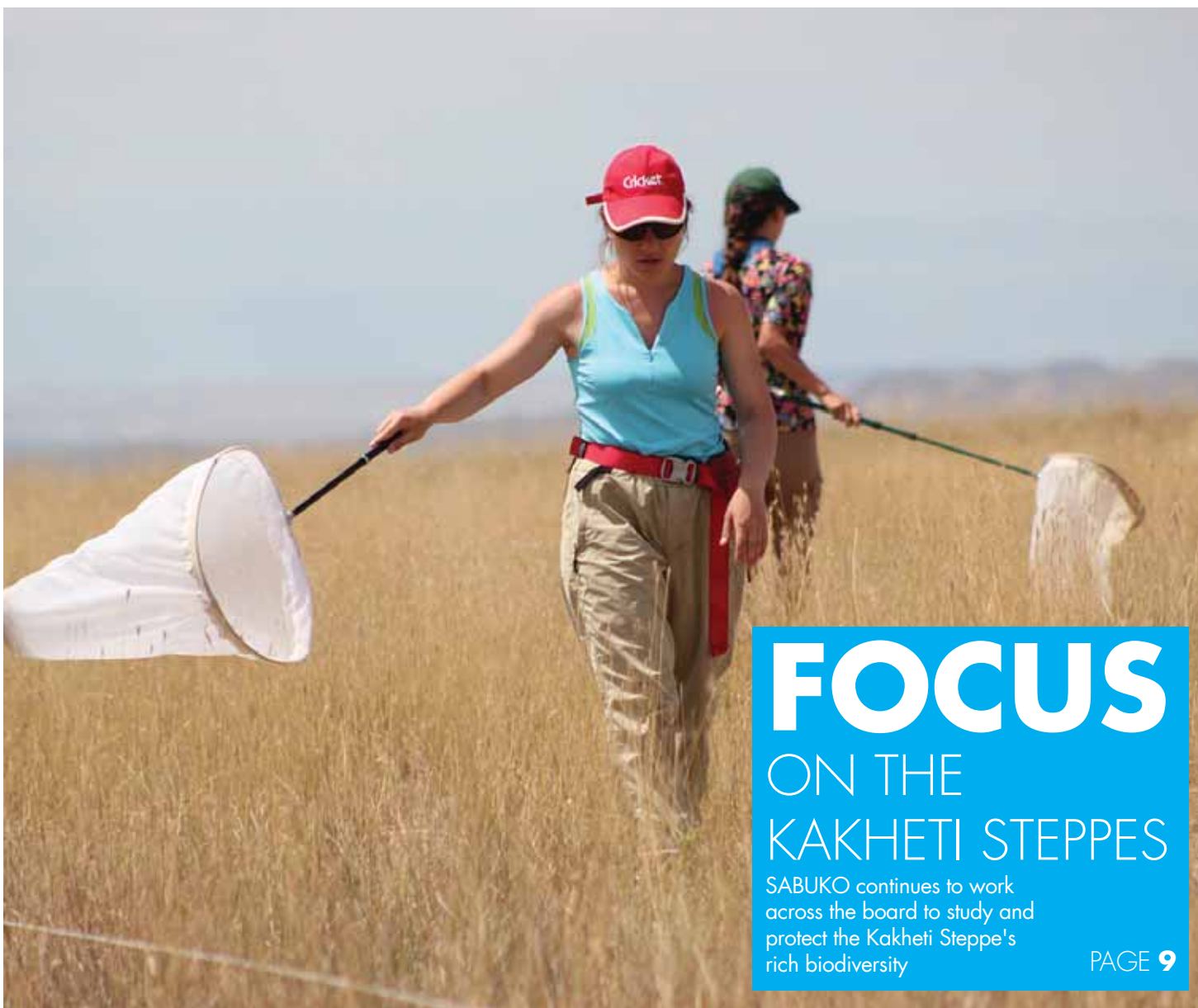
ISSN 1512-4304



www.georgiatoday.ge Issue no: 1417

● SEPTEMBER 22 - 28, 2023 ● PUBLISHED WEEKLY

PRICE: GEL 2.50



FOCUS

ON THE KAKHETI STEPPES

SABUKO continues to work across the board to study and protect the Kakheti Steppe's rich biodiversity

PAGE 9

In this week's issue...

Ukraine Updates: Zelensky Calls for Russia to Lose UN Veto Power; Moscow's Losses Rise in South

NEWS PAGE 2

Government Forecasts 5.2% Economic Growth for 2024

NEWS PAGE 2

Where.ge To Hold Panel Discussion on Sustainable Tourism Development in Georgia

NEWS PAGE 3

Don't Discuss Cooking Recipes with a Cannibal - Bruno Tertrais on How to Defeat Putinism

POLITICS PAGE 5

Oktoberfest 2023 is here! The authentic German festival is being hosted with real German beer Löwenbräu

BUSINESS PAGE 6

World Vision Georgia Empowering Youth for Positive Change

SOCIETY PAGE 7

Gardenia Shevardnadze – Bringing People and Nature Back Together

SOCIETY PAGE 8

Exploring Culinary Excellence: The Journey of Chef Giorgi Tigishvili

SOCIETY PAGE 11

The National Bank of Georgia and the Western Sanctions

BY TEAM GT

After the chairman of the ruling party, Irakli Kobakhidze, called the possible seizure of accounts for the former Prosecutor General Otar Partskhaladze "unconstitutional," the National Bank changed the procedure for implementing the sanctions regime. The changes on the order of the President of the National Bank of August 8 were introduced on September 19.

The order is signed by Natia Turnava, acting President of the National Bank.

The only citizen of Georgia who has been subjected to international financial sanctions is former Prosecutor General Otar Partskhaladze.

The National Bank published a statement regarding the mentioned change.

"Since February 26, 2022, according to the instructions of the National Bank of Georgia, the financial institutions of Georgia have been fully operating in accordance with the financial sanctions imposed by the USA, the European Union and Great Britain against the Russian Federation.

Continued on page 4



Image by Kote Iantbelidze

Ukraine Updates: Zelensky Calls for Russia to Lose UN Veto Power; Moscow's Losses Rise in South

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has called for the United Nations Security Council to remove Russia's veto power, arguing that "this will be the first necessary step."

During a speech at Wednesday's UN Security Council meeting, Zelensky said Ukrainian soldiers are doing on the battlefield "at the expense of their blood" what the UN Security Council "should do by its voting."

However, any attempt to reform the Security Council would require the assent of the existing five permanent members of the powerful Security Council, otherwise known as the P5, that includes Russia, the United Kingdom, France, the United States and China.

Zelensky also called for former President Donald Trump to share his peace plans publicly if the former US president has a way to end the war between Ukraine and Russia, though he cautioned in an interview Tuesday that any peace plan where Ukraine gives up territory would be unacceptable.

ON THE GROUND DEVELOPMENTS

A Russian drone attack hit an oil refinery, sparking a fire in the central city of Kremenchuk on Wednesday, a Ukrainian military official said. Also, a series of explosions reported in occupied Crimea on the same day were the work of Ukrainian forces, Ukrainian Defense Intelligence confirmed. Elsewhere, saboteurs were responsible for an attack on an airfield near Moscow on Monday, according to Kyiv. Ukrainian Defense Intelligence said Wednesday that "unknown saboteurs blew up two airplanes and a helicopter in the Moscow region."

RUSSIA SAYS IT INTERCEPTED 22 UKRAINIAN DRONE ATTACKS, INCLUDING 19 OVER THE BLACK SEA

Russia intercepted 22 Ukrainian drone attacks early Thursday, Russia's Ministry of Defense said on Telegram.

"Air defense systems destroyed 19 Ukrainian UAVs over the Black Sea and the territory of the Republic of Crimea, one over the Kursk region, one over the



Photo by Kevin Lamarque | Reuters

Belgorod region and one over the Oryol region," the ministry said.

No casualties or damage have been reported so far by the Russian defense ministry or Russian regional officials.

Ukrainian officials have not yet commented on the strikes.

RUSSIA'S REDEPLOYMENT OF TROOPS TO THE SOUTH WEAKENS BAKHMUT DEFENSE, UK SAYS

Moscow's attempts to bolster its forces in the southern region of Zaporizhzhia has left its units in the Bakhmut area of Donetsk more vulnerable, according to Britain's Ministry of Defense this week.

"Recent redeployments of Russian airborne forces from Bakhmut to Zaporizhzhia in southern Ukraine have likely weakened Russia's defenses around Bakhmut," the ministry said in an intelligence update on X, formerly Twitter.

In the past week, Ukraine claimed to have liberated the villages of Klishchivka and Andriivka, a few miles south of Bakhmut, in the Donetsk region. Russia said the settlements are in a "gray zone" and are still being contested.

Britain's Defense Ministry observed that Ukraine's "tactical success brings Ukrainian forces closer to the T 05-13 road, one of the main supply routes into Bakhmut from the south" but it noted that "Russia continues to hold the rail-

way line which runs along an embankment between Klishchivka and the T 05-13, creating a readily defendable obstacle."

RUSSIA'S LOSSES APPEAR TO BE MOUNTING IN SOUTHERN ZAPORIZHZHIA REGION, ANALYSTS SAY

Russian losses in the southern Zaporizhzhia region of Ukraine have increased significantly as Ukraine's counteroffensive makes gains, according to an analysis from the Institute for the Study of War, released late on Tuesday.

Ukraine has reported a number of advances in the last week in the south and east, with the recapture of two villages — Andriivka and Klishchivka — just south of Bakhmut in Donetsk. It's a notable victory, although Russian officials say the settlements are still being contested.

The ISW noted in its analysis that "Russian and Ukrainian sources credited superior Ukrainian combat coordination, more precise artillery fire, and stronger electronic warfare systems for recent Ukrainian advances south of Bakhmut amid continued discussions of significant Russian losses in the area."

ZELENSKY AND EU LEADERS DISCUSS FREE ACCESS OF UKRAINIAN AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS TO EU MARKET

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky discussed the possibility of providing free access for Ukrainian agricultural products to European Union countries during a meeting with several EU leaders on Wednesday.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, Romanian President Klaus Iohannis, Bulgarian Foreign Minister Mariya Gabriel and Zelensky met on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York.

The talks were primarily focused on "preserving the single market principle and free access of Ukrainian agricultural products to the EU market," according to the office of the Ukrainian Presidency.

Zelensky noted that "the Joint Coordination Platform for Export and Transit of Ukrainian Agricultural Products" has been established, and that it serves as "an effective mechanism for maintaining an ongoing dialogue." He added that it resolves "all problematic issues in the field of agricultural products."

Zelensky emphasized the importance of protecting "the competitive advantages of each EU member in conditions of free trade."

In particular, Zelensky discussed "finding effective solutions in the field of logistics, increasing the capacity of ports, including the Black Sea port of Constanta, and river transport on the Danube River" with Romanian and Bulgarian officials.

The participants discussed alternative transportation routes through Romania and Bulgaria, which would "significantly increase transit volumes and reduce the burden on the domestic markets of these countries," the Ukrainian Presidency office said.

"Over 60% of transit of Ukrainian grain that passes through the EU's Solidarity Lanes" is through Romania, Zelensky said.

The so-called "solidarity lanes" — established by the EU in May 2022 — are designed to provide alternative land routes for the export of Ukrainian grain after Moscow blockaded docks in the Black Sea region.

The measures include new border posts, flexible customs checks, logistics support, prioritization of Ukrainian agricultural exports and new storage facilities on the EU's side of the border.

CANADIAN PRIME MINISTER URGES ACTION OVER RUSSIA'S "ILLEGAL WAR"

Canada's Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, called Wednesday for action to be taken over Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"We need to be one hundred percent clear about what is happening right now. A permanent member of this Security Council, Russia, has launched and continues to wage an illegal war," Trudeau said at Wednesday's United Nations Security Council meeting.

He criticized Russia for using its veto right within the Security Council "to facilitate this war and these violations of the principles of the United Nations."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky made similar comments earlier Wednesday calling for Russia's veto power to be stripped — saying it's making it impossible to stop the war.

For example, in September 2022, Russia vetoed a draft resolution that would have condemned its seizure of Ukrainian territories and called on it to withdraw from Ukraine.

Russia, which has defended its veto power, is one of five permanent members of the powerful Security Council.

"We must take action to stop the tragic deaths and violence, including sexual violence, caused by this unjustifiable invasion," Trudeau said. "We must not let the world return to a place where might makes right. We must make sure borders mean something, even when a neighbor has a bigger army."



Source: commersant.ge

Padalko: Georgia-Russia Ferry Service to Launch This Year

BY MARIAM GORKHELASHVILI

Traffic between Turkey, Georgia and Russia will start this year, — Vladimir Padalko, vice-president of the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, announced after the meeting of the Russian-Georgian Business Council. According to him, the meeting also discussed the issues of restoring railway traffic between Georgia and Russia and reducing the prices of Russia-Georgia air tickets. TASS reports the information.

"We talked about Turkey-Georgia-

Russia ferry services in the maritime sphere. "A ferry designed for 150 vehicles and 300 passengers will be put into operation, which will operate almost throughout the year," said Padalko, adding that the issue of railway communication between Georgia and Russia was also discussed at the meeting.

"If we manage to restore the railway connection, will it be through the new routes offered by Ingushetia, or will we restore the old route through Abkhazia?" This will be a turning point," he said.

He also noted that an appeal was sent to airline companies about the reduction of the prices of Russia-Georgia and Georgia-Russia air tickets.

Lari Hits 2.65 Exchange Rate Against USD in Bloomberg System

BY MARIAM GORKHELASHVILI

Decrease in Georgia's Sub-sistence Minimum: Drop of 4.7 GEL in July 2023
During the day Wednesday, the national currency's exchange rate against the US dollar in the Bloomberg trading system reached 2.65.

Within the span of a minute, the rate settled at 2.6473, with the official bank rate standing at 2.6412. This indicates a 0.6-bit devaluation, signifying a decrease in the value of the national currency relative to the US dollar.



Government Forecasts 5.2% Economic Growth for 2024

BY MARIAM GORKHELASHVILI

The government's economic growth forecast for 2024 stands at 5.2%.

According to the key economic and financial indicators outlined in the proposed changes

for the 2023 budget, the base scenario projects a 5.2% increase in real GDP and an 8.4% rise in nominal GDP for 2024.

In the base scenario, the nominal GDP is expected to reach 85,370.6 million Georgian Lari (GEL), equivalent to 32,460.3 million US Dollars (USD) in 2024.

Projections for 2024 anticipate a GDP

per capita of 8800.1 dollars. In terms of inflation, the forecasts for 2024 are as follows:

- The consumer price index is slated to be 2.8% during the middle period.
- By the end of the period, the consumer price index is expected to reach 3%.
- The GDP deflator is projected to be 3%.

New Era, New Approach

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

The Georgian parliament on its way to the impeachment of Georgia's functioning president is a weird juridical image in itself, but it is also fun to watch. In the first place, we have never had a chance in the history of our freely and democratically living Sakartvelo to witness a political event of this nature and dimension. Secondly, it is a fortunate moment in the social life of our people, given that we are gathering some moths and maturing as a nation, that, with the help of this kind of political experience, we can become a modern nation with a bunch of western ideas in our ancient mind and some civilized practices under our senescent belt. And thirdly, we can't help but react to the breaching of our decreed rules because, in the ideal scenario, nobody stands above the law in a pluralistically organized society like ours.

Life is so packed with various of funny vicissitudes! In the happy pre-election era, this president was remarkably tame, nice, loyal, pliable, malleable and as easily led as a sheep. She would do anything the government desired and prompted her to undertake. The lady looked so tolerant to any step taken by the ruling power that the opposition hated her with all its revolting guts. She was literally led by hand by the government through all those complicated socio-political labyrinths of the Republic, presenting her to the doubting public as a fresh and only mana from the sky, to work as the best peacemaker in our overstrained and polarized soci-

ety. It was truly difficult to listen to thousands of oppositional epithets in her address, often sounding like the roughest possible language and ear-swirling diatribes this nation had ever heard before.

And all of a sudden, her shockingly unexpected metamorphosis fell on our poor heads. As if changed at a single swish of the magic wand, our lady president, elected in unbearable societal pains and with enumerable public fits and starts, neutralized by the ruling party, turned into a vested enemy of Georgia's current government, for which presidential animosity was the last thing it could imagine. Her unforeseen preponderance towards the viciously radical opposition was taken like thunder from the sky, but it became next to impossible for the government to stop the avalanche of the president's lashes of criticism, directed at the surprised administration like poisoned arrows. Notwithstanding the constitutional ban on the president's foreign policy activities without the governmental nod, the lady insisted on independent interaction with foreign political leaders, thus flagrantly breaching the main law of the land, all this having ended in the logical finale of bringing the recalcitrant head of state to the highest political legal case, called impeachment.

The whole thing is so trivial if not facetious! There is a system for managing this country, based on law and discipline, and if we call ourselves a serious state, guaranteeing our peaceful and successful development, then the officially and democratically adopted rules for ruling the country have to be honored and observed, subduing all personal endeavors and ambitions to



President Salome Zurbishvili. Source: Instagram

remain in history as a man or a woman of consequence. Even if she is right in her attempts to do some good for this nation, it should all be done within the framework of what the entire world calls law. If we deviate from the functioning law and we wink at the fact, then we are draining all our efforts to westernize ourselves down the tubes.

On the way to joining European civilization, the number one condition to reach the destination is an unequivocal observation of the officially adopted code of our social, political and economic behavior. Otherwise, what's the difference between the soviet socialist Georgia and the one we are enjoying today? On the whole, it is good that we

are capable of reacting to the president's deviation from the constitution the way we are reacting. This is the advent of a new era. This is the beginning of a new approach. What else is the freedom of political thought and democracy we are so adamantly building in this country? Isn't America doing the same exact thing to its current president?

GEORGIAN WINE FESTIVAL 2023
7 OCTOBER
 12:00-19:00
SION STR. SHARDENI

Georgian Wine Festival 2023

TRANSLATED BY MARIAM MTIVLISHVILI

Georgian Wine Festival 2023 together with Maidan Group will be hosted for the fifth time on October 7.

Traditionally, on this day, Georgian tastes, aromas, sounds and diverse entertainment program will unite hundreds

of local and foreign guests in one space. Small, medium and large wine cellars present their products to the guests. In addition to wine, the festival will also present various types of traditional Georgian products: bread, churchkhela, dried fruit, cheese, honey and others. The festival includes exhibition-sale and tasting;

Guests coming to the Georgian Wine Festival will be able to taste high-quality

products and discover unknown wine types, or new entrepreneurs.

The festival will be packed with a variety of entertainment programs throughout the day.

The Georgian Wine Festival on October 7 promises you unforgettable impressions and a pleasant mood.

The event will start at 12:00 and end at 19:00.

Attendance is free!

Where.ge To Hold Panel Discussion on Sustainable Tourism Development in Georgia

The team of tourist guide Where.ge has invited special guests to join them for a panel discussion on the "Development of Sustainable Tourism in Georgia" at the Hilton Garden Inn Tbilisi Riverview hotel in Ortachala on September 22.

Guests will be welcomed by publisher of the Where.ge tourist guide George Sharashidze, after which the panel discussion on The Development of Sustainable Tourism in Georgia will begin, moderated by Georgia Today's Erekle Poladishvili.

SPEAKERS AND TOPICS

Tamar Koriauli, first deputy of the Head of Georgian National Tourism Administration, will introduce the concept of sustainable tourism and its economic benefits;

Kenan Ince, General Manager of Turkish Airlines, will discuss the protection of natural resources and minimizing pollution through responsible practices such as eco-friendly

transportation;

Karoly Lakatos, GM of Hilton Garden Inn Tbilisi Riverview, will bring 'Protecting natural resources and minimizing pollution through responsible practices such as eco-friendly accommodation' to the table;

Levan Bokuchava, York Towers International Sales Director, will talk about 'Building sustainable infrastructure without harming the environment', and;

Giorgi Chikorashvili, Natural Resources Manager (Society for Nature Conservation) will introduce the fascinating tourism pull of birdwatching and supplementary feeding stations for vultures.

After the panel discussion, the Where.ge team is set to host a delightful business lunch, allowing participants to connect and continue the discourse on the issues raised during the panel discussion.

There will also be an exciting prize draw, with numerous fantastic prizes up for grabs, including two Turkish Airlines roundtrip tickets to Istanbul.

where.ge to go where.ge to stay where.ge to eat where.ge to drink where.ge to buy



Sustainable Tourism Development in Georgia
22 SEPTEMBER 2023



where.ge to go where.ge to stay where.ge to eat where.ge to drink where.ge to buy

The National Bank of Georgia and the Western Sanctions



Image source: Tikhonova Yana/Shutterstock

Continued from page 1

"We remind you that the Georgian financial sector operates in full compliance with the requirements stipulated by the sanction regimes. Georgia has never been and will not become a place to evade sanctions in the future.

"In addition, in this process, there is a first precedent when such sanctions were applied to a citizen of Georgia.

"Every citizen of Georgia is protected by the Constitution of Georgia. The National Bank of Georgia, guided by the Constitution of Georgia and the principle of innocence, believes that international sanctions cannot be applied to a Georgian citizen, unless there is a judgment of conviction issued by the Georgian court against him.

"In order to fully realize the rights and

freedoms of the citizens of Georgia guaranteed by the Constitution of Georgia, the National Bank of Georgia developed and implemented an amendment to the order of the President of the National Bank of Georgia dated August 4, 2023 N208/04, according to which the sanctions regimes provided for in this rule apply:

1. a) on a citizen of Georgia, if a judgment of conviction has been issued by the court of Georgia in connection with the basis of the sanctions imposed on him;

2. b) on a legal entity registered in Georgia, the share of which is owned by a sanctioned Georgian citizen (s), if a judgment of conviction has been issued by the court of Georgia in connection with the basis of the sanctions imposed on him.

"The National Bank of Georgia, in the event of detecting signs of crime during the oversight process, is obliged to immediately inform the relevant authorities for further response.

"The National Bank of Georgia will carefully study and take special control over each possible case of sanctions evasion and risks.

"The National Bank of Georgia is ready to provide international partners with information about the details of the mentioned decision," reads the statement of the National Bank.

"Otar Partskhaladze is a Georgian-Russian businessman and former statesman who served as the Prosecutor General of Georgia in 2013.

"On 7 November 2013, Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili appointed Partskhaladze as Prosecutor General.

He resigned due to allegations that he had been convicted of robbery in Germany in 2001.

"In November 2018, he was charged with beating the former head of the State Audit Office, Lasha Tordia, in May 2017, and granted 5,000 GEL bail. He has been involved in several other high-profile incidents. Several days before his resignation, Partskhaladze admitted to assaulting a police officer in 2010.

"On 24 February 2021, Partskhaladze received Russian citizenship. From September 2022, he was recorded in the Russian Federation Unified State Register of Entrepreneurs and owned shares in Russian-based company.

"On 14 September 2023, the United States sanctioned Partskhaladze for "operating or having operated in the management consulting sector of the Russian Federation economy." According to the US State Department, Partskhaladze "worked with the Russian Federal Security Service to influence Georgian politics and society to benefit Russia."

On Wednesday, two vice-presidents of the National Bank of Georgia, Papuna Lezhava and Archil Mestvirishvili, left the board due to Turnava's September 19 directive.

As per the Organic Law on the National Bank, the Board of the National Bank of Georgia is comprised of a total of 9 members. It had 7 individuals, with 4 positions held by executives, including the acting president and three vice-presidents. The law stipulates that the board is not authorized to function if its membership falls below 5. As such, the board is not currently operational.

"The highest body of the National Bank is the Council of the National Bank, which consists of 9 members. If the number of members of the Board of the National Bank falls below 5, the Board of the National Bank is not authorized to perform its functions. In this case, the vacancy must be filled no later than two months after the occurrence of this fact," the law states.

Come December 2023, Robert Singletry will also be stepping down from the board of the National Bank. As a result,

according to parliamentary law, there will be just one member remaining on the board.

Levan Khabeishvili, the opposition United National Movement (UNM) party chair, urged citizens to assemble on Rustaveli Avenue in downtown Tbilisi on Wednesday night to "agree on an action plan."

Khabeishvili said that the involvement of everyone against the current government, which "protects Russian spies," was vital.

"We are not going to hand over our country to these Russians. If it is physically necessary, of course, we will fight; we will defend ourselves and respond adequately," he said.

The opposition and the ruling Georgian Dream party lawmakers had clashed in Parliament several times throughout the afternoon.

The incident started after the opposition MPs came to Irakli Kobakhidze while he was giving comments, and accused him of being a Russian spy.

The supervisors tried to ease the tense situation, but the confrontation continued for some time. The opposition chanted "Russians". Other deputies of Georgian Dream moved to the lobby with Irakli Kobakhidze shortly after the incident began.

The opposition left the hearing as a sign of protest, while Tea Tsulukiani, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth Affairs, went on to report to Parliament within the Ministerial Hour format.

Meanwhile, Bank of Georgia and TBC Bank, both of whom are on the London Stock Exchange, announced they will continue to comply with the requirements related to the international sanctions regardless of the decision of the National Bank.

"We comply with and will continue to comply with the requirements related to the sanctions of the USA, the European Union and the United Kingdom," the Bank of Georgia said.

"We are acting and will continue to comply with the requirements of the sanctions imposed by the USA, the European Union and the United Kingdom," TBC Bank said.



Parliament Rejects De-Oligarchization Law in 3rd Reading

The Georgian Parliament has decided not to pass the draft law on de-oligarchization after discussing it in its third reading.

The ruling Georgian Dream party

cited the removal of the European Union's request for such legislation as a reason for not pursuing it further.

Instead, the ruling team intends to submit the draft of a de-oligarchization action plan to the Venice Commission for review by the end of the week.

Azerbaijan Launches Operation against Nagorno-Karabakh, Demands Surrender

Azerbaijan said on September 20 that its military measures in Nagorno-Karabakh were continuing for a second day, having launched what it calls "anti-terror" operations in the enclave.

The Azerbaijan defense ministry said the operation began hours after four soldiers and two civilians died in landmine explosions in the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

Azerbaijan on Tuesday, September 19, launched a military operation against the breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh region, warning it would "continue until the end" in the territory, over which it has fought two wars with neighboring Armenia. The above is largely related to Russia's (the traditional power holder in the region) involvement in the war against Ukraine.

Fears of a fresh war in the volatile Caucasus region have been growing recently, with Armenia accusing Azerbaijan of a troop build-up around the disputed Armenian-majority territory. Separatists said Azerbaijan on Tuesday pounded



Sources: The BBC, Le Monde

the mountainous territory with artillery, combat aircraft and attack drones, and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan called it a "ground offensive."

Nagorno-Karabakh authorities say 27 people have been killed, including two civilians, and many more wounded since the offensive began.

Baku has said it is prepared for talks, but insists "illegal Armenian military formations must raise the white flag" and dissolve their "illegal regime".

Azerbaijan and Armenia first went to war in the early 1990s after the fall of the Soviet Union. Then in 2020 Azerbaijan recaptured areas in and around Nagorno-Karabakh before a truce was agreed and monitored by Russian peacekeepers.

Ethnic Armenians in Karabakh appealed on Tuesday for a ceasefire and for talks to start. But it was clear from the Azerbaijani ultimatum that Baku's aim was to complete its conquest of the mountainous enclave.

Don't Discuss Cooking Recipes with a Cannibal - Bruno Tertrais on How to Defeat Putinism

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE FOR RFE/RL

Paranoia is raging in Russia, and it's not only about the regime. If we want to influence something in Russia, the political future of Russia, we can't do it without the support of leading opposition figures, and there's no certainty these figures will be liberals, - Bruno Tertrais, Paris Strategic Studies Fund researcher, told RFE/RL's Georgian Service while attending the 7th Tbilisi International Conference organized by the EPRC, Bush and McCain Institutes.

"To defeat Putinism, it's useful as a template to look at the fight against Putinism, and our dealings in future with Russia, via a medical analogy," he tells us. "First of all, you have to isolate yourself from contagion. I think Putinism is a disease, a type of a political disease. And what happens next, after the war? Well, we can put the sick person, Russia, in the isolation ward, literally cut off, or amputated, from all possible connections, maybe with just a bit of trade, but isolated, so that it heals at some point, which might take decades. Maybe we'll have to build a wall. And I don't know what it would mean, for a country like Georgia, which still has to trade with Russia, which wants to be trade corridor. It may be a problem for countries such as that. Another way is to help the sick person produce antibodies, like helping the liberals, the opposition, the less nationalist forces, and in that way contribute actively to healing the Russian body.

WHAT WOULD THAT BE CALLED IN MEDICAL TERMS? THERAPY?

It would be a light therapy. Then we could have radiotherapy, where we actively promote a regime change in Russia. That's the first possible strategy. I'm not saying that I favor one over the other, but I think these are choices that will present themselves to Western countries. Very soon, I hope. And we have to think ahead. At this point, I'm more in favor of isolation. I think that Russia is leaving Europe, Europe is leaving Russia, and we have to separate for a while for our national health.

AND THE AMPUTATION BIT?

Well, that's the extreme. Amputation is if you want to finally defeat Russian imperialism, then you need to contribute to the dismantlement of the Empire. Now, I'm of two minds about that. This



We want a lesser evil. Any leadership that agrees to live peacefully with its neighbors, even if it's an autocrat, will already be progress



Europe is leaving Russia, and we have to separate for a while for our national health

is not the game that a European leader can easily play. It's an extreme strategy. I'm not sure I would recommend European leaders to contribute to it. I think the debate will be more on whether the Russian empire crumbling is dangerous or not, and how dangerous. We had those debates at the end of the Soviet Union. By default, Western leaders prefer stability. In the longer run, however, instability may be better than stability, and just overcoming that troublesome period of time. Ultimately, the future of Russia is for the Russians to decide, though.

WHAT'S THE CONSENSUS AMONG THE WESTERN CONSILIUM? WHAT'S THE PREFERRED COURSE OF ACTION RIGHT NOW?

Not enough people in government think about these long term issues. Those who think about them, unfortunately, too often believe that things can go back to normal with Russia. They start by saying, 'Russia will always be our big European neighbor, and we have to live with it, so can we find some kind of way to reconcile Russia's security interests with ours?' That's a default way of thinking for many in France or Germany. I think it's misguided. It comes from a background which is deeply ingrained in Western European capitals. We have a long history with Russia; Russia has sometimes been a foe, sometimes a friend, but we have to live with them, because they are our neighbor. My own take on this is, well, it's more complex than that. First of all, we are truly living a historic moment. Second, the split between Ukraine and Russia means that it will be a different Russia from the one we used to live with as Western Europeans in the past. Hoping to go back to normal ways with the Putinist system is a dream, we need to abandon. There is a lot of wishful thinking. Not because many Western European leaders love Putin, no. But you know, I think that it often takes wars to open eyes, and certainly the war in Ukraine, even more than the war in Georgia, has opened many eyes. But they're not yet clear-eyed about the future.

YOU DID MENTION THAT, ULTIMATELY, THE FATE OF RUSSIA WILL LIE IN RUSSIAN HANDS. BUT IN ALL THESE MEDICAL APPROACHES, BE IT THERAPY OR AMPUTATION, WHO IS THE DOCTOR? WHO IS THE SURGEON IF AMPUTATION IS NEEDED?

Too often in the past, Western countries have thought that they hold the key to the future of such and such a country. I think we should refrain from, or at least be very cautious about, thinking that way. There is a lot of paranoia in Russia, not only in the regime, but whatever we do, if we are to proactively affect Russia's future political life, we cannot do



Bruno Tertrais. Image source: RFE/RL

it without the consent of leading opposition figures, who will not always be liberal. It's about choosing between several different bad outcomes. We want a lesser evil. And politics is often about choosing the lesser evil. Maybe there won't be many Liberal Democrats in Russia, or at least, they won't be in a position to construct a credible future for Russia in the next 10-20 years. Maybe we'll have to deal with other people. I think anything less evil than Putin would already be some kind of progress. Any leadership that agrees to live peacefully with his neighbors, even if it's an autocrat, will already be progress.

YOU MENTIONED FRANCE'S STANCE TOWARDS RUSSIA. WHAT IS MACRON'S CURRENT MODUS OPERANDI WHEN IT COMES TO THE UKRAINE WAR?

Macron came to power with illusions about France and Russia, illusions about Putin. What happened is that he realized how treacherous Putin has been, that he cannot trust Putin anymore. And he has realized that the fate of Ukraine is connected with the future of Europe. And because he has an ambitious European agenda, Ukraine has to be part of it. So it has been a long journey. I'm not sure it's entirely complete. And I'm not sure it ever will be, because he still mentions this idea of a new European security architecture which Russia will be part of. And I think that deep down, he still believes that Russia was treated badly at the end of the Cold War. At least he came to power with this idea, as misguided as I think it is, and I would not be surprised if he still thought a little bit that way.

WHY DOES EVERY WORLD LEADER, CONSIDERING PUTIN HAS BEEN IN POWER FOR 20 SOMETHING YEARS, COME TO POWER BELIEVING IN THE PROSPECTS OF REACHING SOME SORT OF AGREEMENT WITH PUTIN? WHY DON'T PEOPLE LEARN FROM THEIR PREDECESSORS?

Every leader thinks they can do better than the previous one, and hopes that they can succeed where the previous one failed. The evolution of Putin between '99 and 2022 was slow, and many Western leaders didn't have to deal with it on a day-to-day basis, and so didn't real-

ize how things were changing. Granted, you can say Putinism was already there in '99. But from Western European eyes, it was not always that obvious. Putin was very good at reflective control, at making you believe that you should place your bets with him.

LOOKING BACK ON FRENCH PRESIDENTS, HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE SARKOZYAN DIPLOMACY OF 2008?

Well, I think the reality of what he was able to achieve is much less important than the perception he has in his mind. I think he genuinely believes that he stopped the war. And I think that, in a way, Putin probably made him believe that. And a lot of people still think that Macron could have done, and that Macron did try to do, what Sarkozy reportedly did. So coming back to 2008: Was it a good thing for the President of the European Union, who happens to be Sarkozy, to come to Georgia and try to do something? Yes, absolutely. And by the way, it placed Georgia and the Georgian-Russian relations on the mental map of many Europeans, at least in France. But I think that any person having covered the events from France will also tell you that whatever Sarkozy thinks he may have, at least partly achieved, he did not follow through on, and that's a typical politician. "Oh, I've done this, next problem?"

LET'S LOOK AT SARKOZY'S LATEST INTERVIEW. HOW MUCH DOES WHAT HE SAID RESONATE TODAY WITH THE AVERAGE FRENCH CITIZEN OR, MORE BROADLY, IN WESTERN EUROPE?

The Sarkozy interview was interesting in two ways. One is that his views are so marginal in the French public debate. It's actually quite astonishing that he still holds them- the views he expressed about Russia, about what Ukraine's future is, etc. These were mainstream views two years ago, before the war, that Ukraine should be a bridge, should be neutral, and the fact the former French President still holds those today is really quite troubling. So people are asking, is it about money? Is it about naiveté? Is it about preserving his own legacy? We don't know. But it was interesting to see a former president still holding such views today, publicly. Two, the good news is that even though there are still some



Some thought the Sarkozy interview might open a can of worms, but it didn't. We've been immunized against Putinism to a large extent

people in the French elite who hold the same view, it didn't have an effect. Some of us thought the Sarkozy interview might open a can of worms, but it didn't, and it means that, overall, I think we've been immunized against Putinism to a large extent. However, if something happens, like the election of Trump, or Zelensky dies in a helicopter accident, something that changes the perspective, then, just like in the US, by the way, those calling for a deal, for a compromise, will be heard again. I insist this is not specifically a French thing. This is everywhere, except in the former Soviet Union countries.

WE HAVE BITTER, HISTORIC REASONS NOT TO BE ECSTATIC ABOUT FINDING COMPROMISES WITH RUSSIA. HOW LIKELY IS A DEAL WITH PUTIN OVER UKRAINE, THOUGH? WHAT LEVERAGE IS THERE TO BE SURE HE FOLLOWS THROUGH?

I had an op-ed published in the French press this morning and I call it the impossibility of a deal. It's to counter the voices that are increasingly being heard that "a counteroffensive is costly in human lives, isn't it time to think about compromise?", and so on; to remind the French public that neither Kyiv or Moscow are interested in a substantive negotiation, period; that any kind of grand bargain is impossible between Zelensky and Putin, because Putin has sought to destroy the Ukrainian nation. And, you know, there's a saying in France: You don't discuss cooking recipes with a cannibal!

Oktoberfest 2023 is here! The authentic German festival is being hosted with real German beer Löwenbräu

Oktoberfest 2023 has begun, and Löwenbräu is bringing the authentic Bavarian festival spirit to Georgia. Thanks to the #Lowenfest contest on social media, enthusiasts had the opportunity to showcase their creativity and passion for both the festival

and the Löwenbräu brand. The best contestants enjoyed a unique event and competition, and the winner, Lasha Qamadze, will go to Oktoberfest in Munich. A combination of vibrant music, engaging games, delicious food, and of course, the distinguished German beer Löwenbräu, created an actual Oktoberfest mood

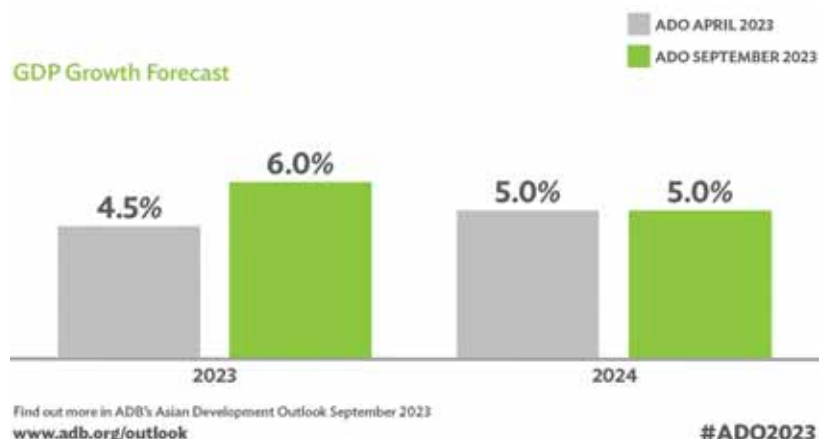
at the event. Nikoloz Khundzakishvili, the Corporate Affairs Director of EFES Georgia, emphasized the cultural significance of the event, stating, "Oktoberfest is one of the world's most beloved celebrations. We decided years ago to hold Oktoberfest annually in Georgia. We are trying to

develop the culture of beer consumption, the beer industry, and, of course, Oktoberfest is a celebration of meeting friends, sharing emotions and joy. Oktoberfest without Löwenbräu is unimaginable, as it's Löwenbräu that is the host of this festival in Georgia." Oktoberfest is a 200-year-old Bavarian

tradition that has become a global celebration of beer, food and culture. Beer lovers from all over the world gather here every year for an unforgettable Munich experience. Löwenbräu is one of the 6 breweries allowed to participate in Oktoberfest. It should be noted that Löwenbräu has been sold every Oktoberfest since 1810.



Georgia - Economic Trends and Prospects in the Developing Caucasus and Central Asia



Growth has moderated but remains robust, supported by tourism and financial inflows. Growth moderated from 10.6% in the first half of 2022 to 7.6% a year later as industry contracted by 0.7% and agriculture by 2.3%, and despite strong growth in construction at 15.1% and services at 10.2%. Expansion in services reflected increases of 14.0% in wholesale and retail trade, 15.7% in accommodation and food services, 44.2% in information and communication, and 17.2% in arts, entertainment, and recreation, much of this reflecting a recovery in tourism. On the demand side, growth came from strong domestic demand, reflecting high con-

sumer spending on goods and services, particularly by Russian migrants, and continued revival in investment and tourism. Foreign direct investment remained high at nearly \$500 million in the first quarter of 2023, and the unemployment rate declined by more than 3 percentage points to 17.3%. Such encouraging figures prompt this update to raise the growth forecast for 2023 but not for 2024, in light of an expected return to growth potential and possible fallout from slowing global expansion (Table 2.1.4). Inflation has fallen below target, helped by a relatively stable Georgian lari and prudent macroeconomic policies. With inflation year on year continuing to

decline to 0.3% in July 2023, average annual inflation slowed from double digits throughout 2022 to 4.0% in 2023 to July despite increases of 7.3% for food, 24.9% for rental housing, and 12.1% for hospitality. Apart from a high base in 2022, slower inflation reflected lower import prices and transport costs with increased transit volume, strong foreign currency inflow that supported the lari, continued fiscal consolidation, and tight monetary policy that kept the policy rate high at 10.25% despite a 0.25% cut in August. Core inflation—which excludes food, nonalcoholic beverages, energy, regulated tariffs, and certain transport charges—slowed from 6.9% in December 2022 to 3.2% in July 2023. The National Bank of Georgia, the central bank, increased reserves to more than \$5.0 billion, which the International Monetary Fund declared adequate. With inflation decelerating, this update cuts inflation forecasts for 2023 and 2024. A small budget surplus in the first half of 2023 reflected strong revenue and ongoing fiscal consolidation. Revenue increased by 18.4% over the first half of 2022, outpacing 15.2% growth in public expenditure that saw substantial social spending and capital outlays for priority public infrastructure. Public sector debt remained low, equal to 39.8% of GDP, as strong economic growth and a relatively stable lari boosted GDP. While three-quarters of this debt is in foreign cur-

rency, much of external debt is on concessional terms or at fixed interest rates. The current account deficit narrowed sharply from the equivalent of 13.3% of GDP in the first quarter of 2022 to 3.2% a year later. This reflected soaring money transfers and higher service surpluses from travel and from information and communication technology. Money transfer inflows, following a record high in 2022, increased in the first 7 months of 2023 at an annual rate of 27.5% to \$2.7 billion, nearly half of it coming from the Russian Federation. In the same period,

merchandise exports increased by 15.7% on strong vehicle reexports, and imports rose by 19.0% on high domestic demand and a relatively stable lari against the US dollar. In the first half of 2023, revenue from tourism increased by 57.9% year on year to reach \$1.8 billion. Downside risks to the current account include, aside from domestic political polarization and geopolitical risks, a possible weakening of external demand, rising global interest rates that could constrain capital inflow, and a widening investment-savings gap.

Table 2.1.4 Selected Economic Indicators in Georgia, %

Strong growth and lower inflation in the first half of 2023 prompt a higher growth projection for 2023 and lower forecasts for inflation in 2023 and 2024.

	2022	2023		2024	
		Apr	Sep	Apr	Sep
GDP growth	10.1	4.5	6.0	5.0	5.0
Inflation	11.9	6.0	3.0	4.0	3.5

GDP = gross domestic product.
Source: Asian Development Bank estimates.

World Vision Georgia Empowering Youth for Positive Change



BY MARIAM GORKHELASHVILI

Since its establishment in 1996, World Vision Georgia has been at the forefront of transforming lives and strengthening communities across the country. With a dedicated focus on child welfare, youth empowerment, and community development, the organization has become a leading force in champi-

grams to the specific needs and challenges faced by communities in these areas. By engaging with local populations and understanding their individual circumstances, World Vision Georgia is dedicated to implementing solutions that are not only effective but also sustainable in the long run. "World Vision has been actively engaged in strengthening the youth sector in Georgia by empowering adolescents and youth for their welfare," says Irakli Giorbelidze, Youth Program Coordinator.

petitive job market. The project spans 24 months and encompasses a range of activities designed to enhance entrepreneurial and career management practices. SKYE Net's objectives are two-fold. Firstly, it seeks to empower young change-makers in these three countries, providing them with the tools to turn their innovative ideas into sustainable social businesses. Secondly, the project focuses on accelerating youth-driven social entrepreneurship, with a particular emphasis on green and digital economies. This forward-looking approach not only addresses current economic challenges but also prepares young people for the industries of the future. Key actions under SKYE Net include supporting youth social entrepreneur startups, promoting access to existing business support schemes, and establishing a transnational platform for knowledge-sharing among youth in Armenia, Georgia, and Moldova. By engaging with private and public actors, educational institutions, and youth organizations, SKYE Net aims to create an environment

encouraging the development of thriving social enterprises. "With the support of the European Union the project SKYE Net will last for two years, establishing 10 new clubs throughout Georgia and supporting 20 young people in developing their business activities and ventures," Giorbelidze states. World Vision Georgia places a strong emphasis on providing nonformal education, building technical skills and entrepreneurial business techniques as a catalyst for positive change. The organization operates 50 (SKYE) knowledge and skills development clubs throughout the country. These clubs serve as hubs where young people can acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in the job market and embark on entrepreneurial ventures. By providing practical education and technical expertise, World Vision Georgia is directly contributing to reducing youth unemployment rates. It is noteworthy that the organization is actively involved in the creation and support of Youth Councils throughout

the country, which aims to encourage youth participation and engagement in the local decision-making process at the municipal level. Currently, 7 Youth Councils, uniting more than 150 qualified youth, are already functional, giving them the opportunity to address essential needs and be the voice of youth in their community. Additionally, through World Vision's support, young boys and girls participate in exchange programs and study visits abroad, enabling them to advance their knowledge and gain valuable experience that they can apply in practice. Furthermore, World Vision actively promotes civic activism among school-aged children. By instilling a sense of social responsibility and community engagement from an early age, the organization is nurturing future leaders who will play a crucial role in shaping a more inclusive and tolerant society. World Vision Georgia's impact extends beyond its direct initiatives. Through being a reliable partner and with the support of diverse donors, the organization has been able to assist schools and youth in the rural areas, create a modern and inviting learning environment for them, as well as offer youth exchange programs, summer camps, and other enriching experiences.

Currently, World Vision is responsible for empowering and building the capacities of more than 5,000 young people. Looking ahead, the organization aspires to expand its reach, covering a larger area and offering even more projects to empower young people in Georgia. Through their tireless efforts and strategic collaborations, World Vision Georgia continues to pave the way for a brighter and more inclusive future for the youth of the country.

World Vision Georgia's unwavering dedication to child welfare, youth empowerment, and community development has made a significant impact on the lives of countless individuals across the country. Through strategic initiatives like SKYE Net, the organization is not only addressing immediate challenges but also preparing young people for the industries of tomorrow. By focusing on education, civic activism, and community partnerships, World Vision Georgia is creating a legacy of positive change that will endure for generations to come. As they look towards the future, their vision of a healthy, inclusive environment with a wide range of opportunities for all children in Georgia remains at the forefront of their endeavors.



oning the rights and opportunities of the most vulnerable in society. Over the past 25 years, the organization has actively worked towards creating a healthy and active society for children, characterized by inclusivity, tolerance, and equal opportunities for all. This long-term commitment has established World Vision Georgia as a reliable development partner for both national and local governments, as well as for a wide range of civil society organizations and stakeholders. The organization is serving Georgia's most vulnerable children and their families through transformational development and long-term commitment to communities. World Vision Georgia operates in the following regions: Imereti, Kakheti, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Tbilisi, Mtskheta-Mtianeti, Kvemo Kartli, Samegrelo, and Ajara. The targeted approach allows the organization to tailor its pro-

"The core aim of our project is to provide an environment where young people act as full-fledged members of society, are involved in civic activism, and feel competitive in the labor market. Unemployment is a serious problem in Georgia, and to address this issue, we offer nonformal educational initiatives in this field, including recurring year-long programs aimed at fostering entrepreneurship among the youth." Recognizing the pressing issue of youth unemployment, which currently stands nearly at 34% in Georgia, World Vision Georgia launched the SKYE Net project (Skills and Knowledge for Youth Empowerment Network) within EU4YOUTH Program. Funded by the European Union, this initiative aims to equip young individuals aged 18-35 in Armenia, Georgia, and Moldova with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in today's com-



Gardenia Shevardnadze – Bringing People and Nature Back Together



Photos by Zakaria Chelidze

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
BY ANA DUMBADZE

Gardenia Shevardnadze is one of those destinations that should be on your “must-visit” list during your time in Tbilisi – a tranquil garden wonderland tucked away in the otherwise dull hills at the edges of the city near Tbilisi Sea. With its workshops, café, bursting-with-life greenhouses, lily ponds with circling goldfish, flower shop, and charming garden packed full of diverse plants and colorful flowers, it is a magical mecca for gardeners, and in fact anyone with an appreciation for beauty and the secrets of nature. As soon as you walk in the door from the dusty road, the calm and soothing embrace of green nature envelops you. Wander the winding gravel paths and relax. Whether you simply want to unwind and grab a moment of peace, or you’re seeking to add some greenery to your balcony, plant some seeds, get help landscaping your garden or office, get some advice from the well-trained and friendly staff on plant care, or to buy a unique hand-made gift for a loved one, Gardenia is the place to be.

Surrounded by seasonal flowers from early spring until late autumn, the smells of vanilla and cinnamon warm and comfort you in Gardenia’s small and beautifully appointed café decorated with vintage chic. Pull up a chair and enjoy coffee, tea or fresh juice, with a piece of cake or khachapuri made by very talented local bakers and served only here. For a more filling treat, we recommend the traditional Gurian mchadi (cornbread) with a piece of soft Georgian cheese, perhaps followed by fresh fruit and vanilla ice cream.

Gardenia is a popular place for those

looking for somewhere unique to host their festive events and ceremonies, and many couples have wedded here, surrounded by specially chosen and carefully displayed flowers, while countless friends have gathered to enjoy special evenings in the lap of nature on their birthdays.

Along with seeds and seedlings, Gardenia offers you the chance to buy natural honey, jam, and flavorful tea that was grown, picked and packed in Guria.

Pop into the gift shop before you leave and have a look at the vintage objects the owner has collected from sellers of vintage goods – in fact, such objects can be seen all around the Gardenia property, including colorful, glazed teapots and tea trays, painted bowls, porcelain teacups, brightly colored glassware, and original flowerpots. If you can afford to, be sure to buy a one-of-a-kind, hand-embroidered tablecloth or bag, created as part of an exclusive Gardenia project working with Adjarian women living in the Ghorjomi region. Or perhaps you’ll be tempted to buy a painting or other beautiful, crafty gift.

This wonderful place already has two decades to its name, and it continues to inspire new generations to dabble in soil or take up careers in horticulture, and even to train joe-public in floristry and gardening. To find out more, GEORGIA TODAY sat down with Gardenia founder and master horticulturalist, Zura Shevardnadze – a hardworking man with the boundless energy typical of his birth region, Guria; a man whose pure dedication to his work and goals continues to serve as an inspiration to many.

GARDENIA WILL SOON TURN 20. WHERE DID IT START AND HOW DID IT GET TO WHERE IT IS TODAY? HAVE YOU ACHIEVED YOUR ORIGINAL GOALS?

I didn’t have a concrete goal from the

beginning. I knew I wanted to have my own little garden with lots of interesting plants, lots of endangered species – varieties that were no longer popular, but old and forgotten or lost. Through my garden, I wanted to show people these varieties and tell their stories. That was the goal, and I think we are close to it today. I built everything here with my own hands, me and my employees together, on a base of swamp land that was part of a Soviet nursery. After the destruction of the Soviet nursery, its employees were given 600 hectares of land as a gift, and I bought this land, today’s Gardenia, from them. The current area is made up of 20 such plots.

WE HEARD GARDENIA IS CONSIDERED A CONTINUATION OF THE APPROACHES OF RENOWNED GARDENER MIKHEIL MAMULASHVILI. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Mikheil Mamulashvili was the first Georgian gardener to call himself a “gardener.” Before that, no such profession existed in Georgia. He was the first person before the revolution who was educated in Europe and called himself “gardener.” He is considered a founder of ornamental horticulture in Georgia. Therefore, whose, if not his, heirs are we, the “Gardenians”? All of us who take on this profession, horticulture, are the continuation of his experience and heritage, his approach to customers. He remains for us an example and role model.

WHO ARE THE “GARDENIANS” – THE PEOPLE WHO MAKE GARDENIA THE WONDER IT IS?

These people are, in most cases, my students, or those I have trained in this profession, as well as people of the older generation who worked in Soviet nurseries and have some experience. And their experience is important to us. Gardenia stands and will always stand thanks to these people. This team is not only the team working here today, but also the people who learned here, shared their enthusiasm, gained experience and then went on their way. To me, they’re still “Gardenians,” though now they might be working elsewhere. Today’s Gardenia was created by their united efforts and love of horticulture.

TELL US ABOUT THE GARDEN AND THE SPACES YOU BUILT AROUND IT. WHAT DOES GARDENIA OFFER ITS GUESTS?

People who come here are greeted by a small world, into which they can bring and entertain guests, be it with coffee and cake in our small café, or a wedding party,

and teachers can bring their students to attend our green lessons, which we’re so very proud of. We have a clay workshop, too, among other workshops, as well as greenhouses, whose every square inch is filled, year-round. Guests can buy plants, get advice on their care, participate in master classes and training programs. We have a small shop where we offer fabrics embroidered using traditional Adjarian methodology, which itself is a very special heritage. In short, Gardenia offers a plethora of interesting and varied activities to interest guests.

GARDENIA IS A PLACE WHERE WE CAN ENJOY THE COEXISTENCE OF LOCAL VARIETIES AND EXOTIC SPECIES, SOME OF WHICH HAVE SPECIAL STORIES BEHIND THEM.

Indeed. Plants should bring us some form of emotion. And they can carry a hundred times more emotion when they are connected to a person dear to us, or have a special back story before they came to the garden. Gardenia is home to many plants that have already disappeared in other gardens, many of which are a very important cultural heritage. Their existence is very precious to us, because they are connected to different people and stories. We even have plants from the time of the above-mentioned famous gardener, Mikheil Mamulashvili.

DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE PLANT HERE WHICH HOLDS A SPECIAL MEANING FOR YOU?

Yes. My teacher Zhuzhuna Avalishvili’s Water Iris, planted here by her, which

ple entrust us to organize special personal events too, such as weddings and birthdays. We’ve welcomed many guests here at Gardenia. Our team is always ready to gift our guests unforgettably beautiful events and memories, and the ideas often come from our team members themselves.

Our latest project seeks to preserve the almost lost tradition of embroidery and weaving in the mountainous Adjara region. Two years ago, with the support of the Ministry of Culture, we established an embroidery workshop in Adjara, where 40 women aged between 40 and 80 now work, weaving and embroidering. We then sell these works at Gardenia, helping them, and Georgia, to hold onto this wonderful tradition. The full income from sales of these works goes straight back to the women, so they can keep on weaving and embroidering and passing on their knowledge to future generations. We’re very proud of such projects. Gardenia’s success depends on the implementation of such initiatives. It’s a matter of corporate social responsibility.

THERE IS A DIVERSITY OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AT GARDENIA, INCLUDING GREEN CLASSES FOR CHILDREN. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR A PERSON TO GET CLOSE TO NATURE FROM AN EARLY AGE? AND HOW DOES GARDENIA HELP THEM TO DO THIS?

Sadly, our young generations living in urban environments are not close to the land, to the soil, or nature in general. We



will always be in my garden; Mikheil Mamulashvili’s “Miukhelbekia,” which he used to decorate his flower wreaths, and is very important to me; and an exemplary one for me: Veriko Nikolaishvili’s yellow-flowered Banksia.

GARDENIA ALSO SERVES AS AN ADVISOR AND HELPER IN PLANT CARE.

Yes. Our success is conditioned by the experience and knowledge we have in this field. Alongside selling plants, it is no less important for us to be able to provide our customers with the right information about caring for those plants. We’re happy to share our knowledge with them and to see them satisfied and coming back for more. We offer many affordable and exciting plants, including fruit trees, berry plants, vegetable seedlings, alongside numerous endangered species, which, along with pleasure, can also bring a profit. Raising awareness about these species and spreading information about them is a priority for us.

GARDENIA IS A HUB OF MANY INTERESTING PROJECTS AND EVENTS. HOW ARE THESE IDEAS BORN?

We’re often invited to decorate festive events, including national holiday celebrations and wine festivals. Many peo-

ple at Gardenia give that back to them – putting them in direct contact with soil, plants; giving them the chance to feel them, smell them, touch them. The main idea behind our children’s green lessons is to give them these feelings and memories. We run four lessons a day for both kindergarten groups and primary school students. Interested schools can buy tickets on biletebi.ge to reserve their visit.

For adults, we have training courses in floristry and gardening every spring and autumn. You can follow our news and offers on social media.

FUTURE PLANS?

We have no plans to expand. As a rule, people tend to be eager to expand successful businesses, but in our case, on the contrary, we’re focused on improving our services; paying more attention to our customers’ needs; offering more, and more exciting, plants; improving our training courses. We constantly strive to take care of our guests even better than before. That is how we grow and develop.

Gardenia Shevardnadze
Address: 138 Nikoloz Khudadavi Street
The café is open 10am - 10pm.
The shop is open 10am - 6pm daily, except Mondays.



The Kakheti Steppes: A Fragile Balance between a Living Landscape or a Future Desert



BY ANA DUMBADZE

SABUKO, the Society for Nature Conservation, is currently engaged in the implementation of a project titled “The Kakheti Steppes: a fragile balance between a living landscape or a future desert.”

Building upon the successes of the previously funded “Restoring Gallery Forest and Grasslands in the Iori River Valley” project, the Kakheti Steppes project places a strong emphasis on the restoration of wildlife habitats and fostering collaboration with the pastoralist community. By reviving gallery forests and grasslands, critical habitats for focal species are rejuvenated, supporting their populations and ecological functions. Through thoughtful restoration initiatives, such as reforestation and habitat management, the project aims to preserve the rich biodiversity that thrives in these unique landscapes.

The first stage of the project covered the Chachuna Managed Reserve located in Georgia’s Dedoplistskaro municipality, which has faced a severe problem of degradation due to unregulated grazing, while the second phase covers Chachuna, Kotsakhura Range, Samukhi Valley and Vashlovani Protected Area, covering a territory of more than 60,000 ha in total.

This comprehensive initiative seeks to address critical conservation concerns within the Kakheti Steppes ecosystem. Among its primary components, pasture restoration emerges as a central focus, as these pastures are integral to sustaining the delicate ecological equilibrium of the region.

Several significant studies have been conducted within this project, serving as foundational research for conservation efforts.

These studies encompass a wide spectrum of factors crucial to understanding the ecosystem’s dynamics.

Key investigations have been conducted in areas such as insect populations, grassland composition, socio-economic considerations related to the development of a sustainable value chain, and an analysis of gender dynamics within the local community. Currently, carbon research is underway.

These studies provide a comprehensive assessment of the Kakheti Steppes’ existing conditions, forming the basis for future conservation strategies.

In the project’s forward trajectory, SABUKO has planned further studies to investigate the issue of human-wildlife conflict within the region. This research aims to identify and address challenges faced by both the local communities and wildlife.

Additionally, various interventions are being tested, building upon successful practices like rotational grazing. These interventions will encompass activities such as manure spreading to enrich the soil, targeted seeding and hay distribu-

tion to support seed banks, mob grazing for enhanced pasture health, and the innovative use of GPS-collared goats and electronic fences for wildlife monitoring.

The overarching narrative of the Kakheti Steppes conservation project revolves around the imperative of preserving this unique landscape. It is not merely an ecological endeavor but a testament to the harmony that can be achieved between human activity and the natural world.

More specifically, the following studies have been conducted as part of the Project:

- Pastures and soil composition research, conducted by botanists.
- Insect study – to determine how rotational grazing affects pastures (The above-mentioned studies were conducted by the researchers of Institute of Biology and Institute of Zoology).
- Carbon study (still ongoing) – to determine how the carbon amount in the soil changes as a result of the activities carried out by SABUKO.
- Socio-economic survey (82 farmers were interviewed) - how did the introduction of rotational grazing affect them economically, how beneficial it is for them financially, what their needs are, their opinion about the introduction of rotational grazing.
- Gender research - status of women in Azerbaijani families, farm management and needs. Women managing farms, their water needs, etc.



- The planned test interventions - through which SABUKO will evaluate the effectiveness of different measures - such as manure spraying, mob grazing - and the mobile grazing method.

- SABUKO purchased an electric fence, which has not been installed yet- it is yet to be determined how will it affect grass coverage.

- Sowing - spreading the seed bank on the pastures to enrich them. Hay has also been purchased and it will be sowed during the season.

- Tracking of sheep and goats with GPS will continue as part of monitoring, to determine their routes.

- Drone monitoring is planned in October to determine pasture quality.

- Education research - Education research - to determine the quality of farm management and wildlife coincidence.

To find out more details about the first three important studies regarding pastures - Pastures and soil composition research, insect study, and carbon study, GEORGIA TODAY spoke to the field specialists and researchers who conducted them.

Giorgi Chikorashvili, Natural Resource Manager at SABUKO, told us that within the botanical part of the research, botanists studied 150 points, i.e. 50 clusters, and their composition.

“Botanists studied three dominant types of vegetation in the research area, as well as many other existing vegetation species. They also studied coverage rates in the area to determine how degraded this or that pasture was. Such a detailed study will be useful for the future successful introduction of rotational grazing, in all further activities and test interventions planned by SABUKO, such as mob grazing or sowing, as well as for other field professionals and experts for further research over the years. 90% of data received from the study has already been processed, botanists have completed their work, and now we’re starting to analyze the data. Once this time consuming process is completed, we’ll have comprehensive general conclusions based on the study,” he tells us.

On the insect study, we spoke to Eka Arsenashvili – Educational Officer at SABUKO and also Researcher of the Institute of Ecology, invited research assistant of the Caucasian Barcode of Life (CaBOL) project.

“The purpose of the Insects (Arthro-



pod) research in SABUKO project area is to monitor habitat recovery after changes in grazing management. It is known that arthropods (insects, spiders) are one of the best organisms for environmental monitoring due to their diversity and rapid response to environmental changes.

A large-scale methodological study for the research of arthropods and the collection of primary data was carried out during the field season of 2023, the purpose of which is to assess the species and quantitative diversity in the study area and to compare it with the material collected in the same area by the same method four years later. The final goal of monitoring is how the types of pasture management affect the species diversity and quantitative richness of arthropods.

The research was carried out on several different management types of grassland:

- An area where rotational (alternative) grazing was introduced,
- Strictly controlled area where grazing is prohibited,
- Meadows where rotational grazing will be done in the next season
- Control area where the grazing process goes on as usual and is not subject to any intervention.

The collected material is stored at the Institute of Ecology of Ilia State University with the support of the CaBOL project. The material needs taxonomic processing in the entomological laboratory, after which we will know the data of the first year.

It is worth noting that an important scientific sample was collected during the field season of the first year, which is confirmed by the discovery of several new species that were not recorded from the territory of Georgia until now. The data has not been published yet, we are waiting for a complete analysis of the material and a final report on the mentioned topic,” she told us.

Nika Marsagishvili, a carbon researcher at SABUKO involved in the carbon study, Forester and Soil Scientist, told us that as the study is still underway, they don’t have final results and conclusions yet, however, he elaborated on the relevance and importance of determining the organic carbon content in soil.

“Why is it important to study carbon

in soil in today’s world? Because it is organic matter that accumulates/stores in the soil as a result of animal and plant decomposition, and it is an important component of the global carbon cycle, regulating the transition of carbon dioxide (CO₂) between the soil and the atmosphere. Carbon in soil affects soil fertility, water catchment functions, erosion and, most importantly, helps the environment maintain biodiversity. Scientists in many countries around the world study carbon in soil to understand how human activities affect the environment and climate. They use world-leading technology and equipment to observe and monitor carbon content in real time. And, by examining all of this, it becomes possible to more firmly evaluate land use, forestry, agriculture and other similar types of factors in relation to forest and soil, by tracking their stocks.

“Further to the research conducted, it is necessary to identify and implement the goals and outcomes that need to be achieved to enhance carbon in soil sequestration, which is the process of collecting and storing CO₂ in the soil. The above will help mitigate climate change by reducing the amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere. Carbon research can also provide valuable information to improve soil health and productivity, which can be useful for producing more organic products for food security,” he notes.

Nika says soil sampling is done according to the World Soil Science Methodology (WRB), where each detail is described step by step: how modern methodologies are used to properly dig the profile, take samples and classify the soil.

“In the excavated soil profile, we describe the soil horizons and their main characteristics. And then we take soil samples for laboratory analysis, where the amount of carbon stock is determined for each horizon, and then, by means of appropriate formulas, we determine what carbon stock we have in the overall profile,” he tells us.

In the upcoming years, SABUKO is expected to bring even more benefits to both wildlife species and the local population through its dedicated work, various-profile researches and innovative approaches, supporting economic activities and preserving Georgia’s unique natural resources at the same time.

Death Comes Calling



BLOG BY TONY HANMER

Last week, I wrote about an overnight stay in Kutaisi, Georgia's 5000 year old second city, to pick up some guests and deliver them to our house in the mountains. There was some hard rain as I descended from Etseri to Jvari and towards Zugdidi, overflowing the drainage channels onto the road in the flatlands, and occasionally bursting through the night's quiet in the city too.

But that rain in west Georgia's lowlands became snow on the tops of the mountain wall opposite Etseri, as the next day revealed. In early September?! Indeed.

It wasn't until the morning of that next day, though, taking photos of the unexpected boon of a change in weather and landscape, that I saw what was looking back at me when I examined the mountain wall. What, or who.

Next to the position of the now-melted Dancer, whom I gave his own story in

Georgia Today a long while ago, the light snow on the Wall had picked out the face of a huge skull: eye sockets, nose hole, and ghastly grin. I took my shot, and now I can hardly look away. The raw digital file proves what I saw; all I did was crop it and strengthen the contrast. There is Death, in all his awful finality. He takes up about 1/3 of the cropped image's height and width, and is looking to the upper left corner of the frame. He was destined not to last for more than some hours or days, forming from light early snow which would melt quickly.

I don't choose what comes to me; I just see it, and take photos. Sometimes the subject is a happy or beautiful one; other times, one to wring the heart and bring dread. "Death" is hardly something which most people would choose to hang on their wall, but I admit to being fascinated by this image, as well as noticing its grimace and horror.

I had to add Death to the story of the Dancer, because the ending of that story branches. One direction has the Dancer avalanche down and killing the four young

men who assail him with shovels to try to improve the fortune of Etseri for the coming year. (The inhabitants of Etseri really used to do this, leaving his one leg pointing right at the village). There is much weeping and wailing at the loss of the village's brave but foolish youths; and a common funeral for all of them together.

The other ending sees the Dancer relent and only wound the young men, to teach them a lesson, which after several more years of attempts, they get. They survive. But the Dancer had been planning to kill them.

It is Death who actually carries out endings in our world and my written one, who persuades the Dancer not to go down that path of no return. The villagers' revenge for the youths' deaths might just be to attack his very underlying land with their shovels, not just his snow-based form. This would change the topology which makes him form each midsummer, and prevent him from reforming at all ever again. He, who has reappeared every July for centuries and could expect as long a life ahead of him, would suddenly be gone for good.

So, listening to his grim counsellor, he pulls back a little, releasing bruising hurt instead of giving the youths into Death's hands, sparing the village from life-changing bitterness.

I am realizing more and more that my photographically-based Svaneti fantasy stories may continue to grow and get richer as more details emerge and find their way through my camera lenses. Another question I have is: do those who see the images in the stories simply discover what is there for those with vision and wonder? Or does their capacity for such sight draw, or even cause, the images, with all their underlying physical realities of water vapor or geology? This, too, I will try to answer.

In the meantime, I gasp at what comes to my own eyes, sometimes beautiful,



sometimes inspiring awe or even terror, record it, and seek a place for it in the mythology I am writing. Do I ever wish I didn't have this gift?

Never.

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 over 2000 members, at www.facebook.com/groups/SvanetiRenaissance/. He and his wife also run their own guest house in Etseri: www.facebook.com/hanmer.house.svaneti

Georgia Ranks 65th in the World in Digital Quality of Life

Surfshark's 5th annual Digital Quality of Life Index (DQL) ranks Georgia 65th in the world, improving by two places from last year. Out of the Index's 5 pillars, Georgia performed best in e-security, claiming 43rd place, while facing challenges in internet quality, ranking 102nd. The nation ranks 48th in internet affordability, 55th in e-infrastructure, and 80th in e-government. In the overall Index, Georgia surpasses Armenia (69th) and Azerbaijan (74th). In Asia, Georgia takes 20th place, with Singapore the leader in the region.

"In many nations, 'digital quality of life' has merged into the broader concept of overall 'quality of life'. There's no other way to look at it now that so many daily activities, including work, education, and leisure, are done online. That's why it's crucial to pinpoint the areas in which a nation's digital quality of life thrives, and where attention is needed, which is the precise purpose of the DQL Index," says Gabriele Racaityte-Krasauske, Surfshark's spokeswoman.

GEORGIA'S INTERNET QUALITY IS 27% LOWER THAN THE GLOBAL AVERAGE

Fixed internet averages 30 Mbps in Georgia. To put that into perspective, the world's fastest fixed internet, Singapore's, is 300 Mbps. Meanwhile, the slowest fixed internet in the world, Yemen's, is 11 Mbps.

Mobile internet in Georgia averages 44 Mbps. The fastest mobile internet, the UAE's, is 310 Mbps, while the world's slowest mobile internet, Venezuela's, is 10 Mbps.

Compared to Armenia, Georgia's mobile internet is 22% faster, while fixed broadband is 58% slower. Since last year, mobile internet speed in Georgia has improved by 9%, while fixed broadband speed has grown by 6%.

IN GEORGIA COMPARED TO OTHER COUNTRIES

Georgians have to work 1 hour 57 minutes a month to afford fixed broadband internet. While this is less than average, it is 7 times more than in Romania, which has the world's most affordable fixed internet (Romanians have to work 18 minutes a month to afford it).

Georgians have to work 1 hour 4 minutes 45 seconds a month to afford mobile internet. This is 4 times more than in Luxembourg, which has the world's most affordable mobile internet (Luxembourg-

ers have to work 16 minutes a month to afford it).

GEORGIA IS 43RD IN THE WORLD IN E-SECURITY, 9 PLACES HIGHER THAN LAST YEAR

The e-security pillar measures how well a country is prepared to counter cybercrime, as well as how advanced a country's data protection laws are. In this pillar, Georgia outperforms Armenia (74th) and Azerbaijan (64th). Georgia is prepared to fight against

cybercrime, and the country has some data protection laws.

GEORGIA IS 55TH IN E-INFRASTRUCTURE AND 80TH IN E-GOVERNMENT

Advanced e-infrastructure makes it easy for people to use the internet for various daily activities, such as working, studying, shopping, etc. This pillar evaluates how high internet penetration is in a given country, as well as its network readiness (readiness to take advantage of Information and Communication Technologies).

Georgia's internet penetration is high (91%, 37th in the world), and the country ranks 74th in network readiness.

The e-government pillar shows how advanced a government's digital services are and the level of Artificial Intelligence (AI) readiness a country demonstrates. Georgia's e-government is below the global average.

GLOBALLY, THE INTERNET IS MORE AFFORDABLE THAN LAST YEAR

Fixed internet is 11% more affordable than last year. On average, people have to work 42 minutes less a month to afford it.

Mobile internet is 26% more affordable than last year. People have to work 41 minutes less to afford it.

METHODOLOGY

The DQL Index 2023 examined 121 nations (92% of the global population) based on five core pillars that consist of 14 indicators. The study is based on the United Nations' open-source information, the World Bank, and other sources. This year's study includes four more countries than DQL 2022, reaffirming Surfshark's commitment to global representation. Georgia's full profile in the 2023 Digital Quality of Life report and an interactive country comparison tool can be found here: <https://surfshark.com/dql2023?country=GE>

Surfshark is a cybersecurity company focused on developing humanized privacy and security solutions. The Surfshark One suite includes one of the very few VPNs audited by independent security experts, an officially certified anti-virus, a private search tool, and a data leak alert system. Surfshark is recognized as the Independent's Editor's Choice for Best Value VPN 2023. Visit our research hub at: surfshark.com/research



Image source: gdnonline

THE INTERNET IS AFFORDABLE

Exploring Culinary Excellence: The Journey of Chef Giorgi Tigishvili



In the realm of gastronomy, Chef Giorgi Tigishvili's journey is a testament to the power of passion, dedication, and a relentless pursuit of perfection. With every dish he crafts, he paints a story that speaks of tradition, innovation, and the warmth of Georgian hospitality.

Join us at the Shangri La Birthday party on September 28, and be welcomed by a special buffet from our chef.



In the world of gastronomy, a skilled chef is not just a cook, but an artist who crafts delightful experiences with every dish. Such is the story of Chef Giorgi Tigish-

vili, whose culinary journey began over 13 years ago. Starting as a sous chef in the restaurant industry, Giorgi's passion for food ignited a pursuit of excellence that has taken him through various cui-

sines and accolades.

Hailing from Tbilisi, Georgia, Giorgi's initial steps into the culinary realm were taken in the prestigious Ethno Tsiskvili restaurant. It was here that he recognized his desire to delve deeper into this world, an aspiration that led him to explore diverse culinary traditions from around the globe. Along this path, he enthusiastically participated in professional competitions, fine-tuning his skills and expanding his knowledge.

European, Asian, and the ever-enchanting Georgian cuisines became Giorgi's playgrounds. With each cuisine, he honed his techniques and refined his palate, mastering the art of blending flavors, textures, and traditions into culinary symphonies.

"In Georgia, the guest holds a paramount role. Each guest is promised to relish the delectable delights of Georgian cuisine and Georgian wine. I adhere to this principle, aiming to treat all our guests with flavorsome, eco-friendly, and wholesome dishes," Giorgi says.

As the leader of his culinary brigade, Chef Giorgi Tigishvili brings forth a medley of gastronomic wonders each month through Shangri La restaurant Specials. His unending quest for inspiration and intriguing combinations is a testament to his dedication to pleasing the palate of every guest. The restaurant at the Shangri La entertainment complex consistently receives rave reviews for its exquisite cuisine, a feat attributed to Giorgi's creative prowess.

For Giorgi, the location of the restaurant within the historical heart of the city, offering a breathtaking view over the Bridge of Peace, serves as his ultimate motivator. The captivating panorama acts as a canvas for his culinary creations, inspiring him to infuse his dishes with not just taste, but also visual delight.



PUBLISHER & GM
George Sharashidze

COMMERCIAL DEPARTMENT
Commercial Director:
Iva Merabishvili
Marketing Manager:
Natalia Chikvaidze

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT:
Editor-In-Chief:
Katie Ruth Davies

Journalists:
Ana Dumbadze,
Vazha Tavberidze,
Tony Hanmer,
Nugzar B. Ruhadze,
Mariam Gorkhelashvili,
Mariam Mtvilishvili,
Erekle Poladishvili

Photographer:
Aleksi Serov

Website Editor:
Katie Ruth Davies

Layout:
Misha Mchedlishvili

Webmaster:
Sergey Gevenov

Circulation Managers:
David Kerdikashvili,
David Djangigava

ADDRESS
1 Melikishvili Str.
Tbilisi, 0179, Georgia

Tel.: +995 32 229 59 19
E: info@georgiatoday.ge
F: GeorgiaToday

ADVERTISING & SUBSCRIPTION
+995 555 00 14 46
E-mail:
marketing@georgiatoday.ge

Reproducing material, photos and advertisements without prior editorial permission is strictly forbidden. The author is responsible for all material. Rights of authors are preserved. The newspaper is registered in Mtatsminda district court.

Reg. # 06/4-309



HÔTELS &
PRÉFÉRENCE
HUALING TBILISI
ჰოტელს & პრეფერენს
ჰუალინგ თბილისი



Hotels & Preference Hualing Tbilisi is a 5 star Business Category Hotel with French touch located on the shorelines of the famous Tbilisi Sea, a perfect gateway to clean, fresh air, relaxing atmosphere and an exceptional panoramic view of Tbilisi hills and beautiful recreation park.

With a very welcoming interior, the hotel offers 246 guestrooms and suites, a wide assortment of delicious dishes, a 800 m2 ballroom and seven additional meeting rooms - perfect venues for holding conventions, seminars, workshops, incentives, exhibitions, fashion shows, weddings, corporate parties, New Year celebrations and other varieties of events. Recreation Center - Be Pure with 25 meters indoor swimming pool, Jacuzzi, Gym and SPA center.



For more detail information, please contact us: +995 322 50 50 25; info@hotelspreference.ge