



FOCUS

ON THE FINAL FIGHT

Georgia's last week before the European Union's decision on candidacy

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INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

In the 2024 edition of Politico's influential people ranking in Europe, former Georgian Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili is recognized as an oligarch and disrupter, ranking eighth. It marks the first time a Georgian has been included in the list.

Although Ivanishvili appears to have retired, he wields significant control over Georgia's ruling party, Georgian Dream, and seeks to shift the country's allegiance from the EU to the Kremlin, according to Politico.

The ranking is divided into three categories: doers (executive power), dreamers (idea drivers), and disrupters (those likely to bring unexpected changes). Radio Free Europe/RL's Georgian Service sat down with its editor Zoya Sheftalovich to find out why Ivanishvili is on the list and who else was considered.

HOW DOES THE LIST GET MADE? WHAT ARE THE CRITERIA THAT COME INTO PLAY?

The list gets made by the Politico newsroom, and I was the person who was in charge of gathering the details and writing the profiles. From early



Bidzina Ivanishvili. Source: AP

September, we started having meetings with groups of journalists and experts in various topic areas. We've got several Georgia experts on our

staff, who were among those who contributed to these meetings. We started with a long list of 40 or 50 politicians.

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BONDS		Price	w/w	m/m	COMMODITIES		Price	w/w	m/m
GRAIL 07/28	87.67 (YTM 7.24%)	+1.7%	+2.1%	Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	78.03	-2.4%	-8.1%		
SILNET 01/27	98.88 (YTM 8.78%)	+0.1%	+0.3%	Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	2,029.42	+0.8%	+2.8%		
TBC 06/24	99.63 (YTM 6.46%)	+0.2%	+0.5%	CURRENCIES		Price	w/w	m/m	
STOCKS		Price	w/w	m/m	GEL / USD	2.6875	-0.7%	-0.7%	
Bank of Georgia (BGE LN)	GBP 34.60	-	+0.4%	GEL / EUR	2.9123	-1.8%	+0.3%		
Georgia Capital (CGEO LN)	GBP 10.10	+1.2%	+7.2%	GEL / GBP	3.3951	-0.7%	+2.3%		
TBC Bank Group (TBCG LN)	GBP 27.10	-2.9%	-2.2%	GEL / CHF	3.0754	+0.0%	+2.2%		
INDICES		Price	w/w	m/m	GEL / RUB	0.0294	-3.3%	+0.7%	
FTSE 100	7,512.96	+0.7%	+1.3%	GEL / TRY	0.0928	-0.9%	-2.6%		
FTSE 250	18,361.25	-0.4%	+2.1%	GEL / AZN	1.5819	-0.7%	-0.8%		
DAX	16,404.76	+2.7%	+8.0%	GEL / AMD	0.0067	-0.8%	-1.1%		
DOW JONES	36,204.44	+2.5%	+6.3%	GEL / UAH	0.0735	-1.5%	-1.5%		
NASDAQ	14,185.49	-0.4%	+5.2%	EUR / USD	0.9228	+1.1%	-1.0%		
MSCI EM EE	42.71	+2.7%	+7.2%	GBP / USD	0.7916	-0.0%	-2.0%		
MSCI EM	980.24	+0.3%	+3.4%	CHF / USD	0.8728	-0.9%	-2.9%		
SP 500	4,569.78	+0.4%	+4.9%	RUB / USD	91.2097	+2.4%	-1.6%		
MSCI FM	2,176.24	+0.9%	+0.0%	TRY / USD	28.9416	+0.1%	+1.9%		
				AZN / USD	1.6990	-	-0.1%		
				AMD / USD	402.2400	+0.2%	+4.4%		

European Heritage Days Conclude 2023 Season and Unveil Theme for 2024 – “Routes, Networks and Connections”

The European Heritage Days initiative is celebrating the end of this season's activities showcasing the rich tapestry of cultural, historical, and artistic treasures that define the heart and soul of Europe and shape its collective identity.

From mid-August to early November 2023, tens of thousands of events across Europe served as open doors to Europe's heritage treasures for the public, offering an immersive experience of the tangible and intangible aspects of our shared cultural legacy. Under the pan-European theme “Living Heritage”, this year's events encouraged participants to engage with cultural traditions and practices, as well as knowledge and skills that have been passed down through generations.

“This year's European Heritage Days have been a celebration of ‘Living Heritage’ in every sense of the word,” said Salome Jamburia (Georgia), the newly elected Chair of the European Heritage Days National Coordinators Assembly. “We've witnessed local communities come together to share their stories, traditions, customs and practices, creating a vibrant mosaic that reflects the resilience and continuity of European culture.”

Throughout the 2023 season, visitors

to the European Heritage Days had the opportunity to explore heritage sites, museums, and landmark monuments, gaining insights into the living history that surrounds them. Participants across 48 countries were also treated to a diverse array of activities, including guided tours, workshops, exhibitions, and performances, that showcased the vitality of Europe's cultural heritage. From craft days in Skansen, Sweden, and exploration of art of chalcography in Saint-Denis, France, to guided tours in Ukrainian at Villa Borghese in Rome, Italy, and uncovering archaeological treasures in Münster, Germany - the “Living Heritage” theme allowed for a dynamic exploration of the ways in which the past continues to shape the present.

“The European Heritage Days 2023 season may have concluded, but the spirit of ‘Living Heritage’ lives on in the hearts and minds of those who participated. As we bid adieu to this year's festivities, we are thrilled to unveil the theme for the upcoming year: ‘Routes, Networks, and Connections,’” Jamburia added.

Preparations for the next year's events are already underway, with organizers gearing up to create an engaging and enriching experience for participants in 2024. The European Heritage Days initiative invites communities, heritage



sites, and cultural institutions to join forces in exploring the 2024 pan-European theme “Routes, Networks, and

Connections.” European Heritage Days are being celebrated in 48 European countries and

can sometimes bear a different name: “Tag des Denkmals” (Austria), “Journées du Patrimoine”, “Open Monumentendag” (Belgium and Netherlands), “Muinsuskaitsepäevade” (Estonia), “Tag des offenen Denkmals” (Germany), “Kulturális Örökség Napjai” (Hungary), “National Heritage Week” (Ireland), “Kulturminnedagene” (Norway), “Kulturarsdagen” (Sweden), “Heritage Open Days”, “Open House London”, “Doors Open Days” and “Drysau Agored” (United Kingdom).

Launched by the Council of Europe in 1985 in France, the European Heritage Days have been organised as a joint initiative of the European Commission and the Council of Europe since 1999. They are prepared under the supervision of National Coordinators in the signatory countries to the European Cultural Convention. Within each country, a network of regional and local authorities, civic and private groups and thousands of volunteers are in charge of organising events. At the end of every edition the Assembly of National Coordinators meets in Strasbourg to share their experiences, present local success stories, and plan for the year ahead. Salome Jamburia (Georgia) was elected the Chair of the Assembly of National Coordinators at the latest session in November 2023 for a period of two years.

Ukraine Latest: Ukraine Signals Shift toward Defense as Analysts Ask Whether ‘Failed Counteroffensive’ Is Over

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

Ukraine signaled Monday that it is shifting its military tactics toward a more defensive footing after an analysis of Russia's resource capabilities and as winter approaches.

Ukrainian presidential advisor Mykhailo Podolyak noted Monday that “on the front line and in the cities, we are already moving to a different tactic of warfare — effective defense in certain areas, continuation of offensive operations in other areas, special strategic operations on the Crimean peninsula and in the Black Sea waters, and significantly reformed missile defense of critical infrastructure.”

Resources will be directed to increasing domestic arms production, he said, and speeding up negotiations with allies to increase equipment supplies for the “new stage” of Ukraine's offensive operations.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky said last week that winter “as a whole, is a new phase of war,” with freezing temperatures making fighting far more difficult and the defense of critical energy infrastructure far more of a priority. Zelensky also signaled that the fortification of all front lines needed to be accelerated.

The shift has prompted some analysts to question whether the change reflects that Ukraine's counteroffensive, launched back in June but failing to make as much progress as hoped, is over.

Eurasia Group founder and president Ian Bremmer commented Monday that “Ukrainians have shifted to building defensive fortifications, putting an end to the failed counteroffensive.” Analysts at the Institute for the Study of War noted Saturday that “poor weather conditions continue to slow the pace of Ukrainian



Photo by Viacheslav Ratynskyi / REUTERS and Russian combat operations across the entire frontline but have not completely halted them.”

FOREIGN SECRETARY: BRITAIN TO CONTINUE SUPPORTING UKRAINE ‘FOR AS LONG AS IT TAKES’

British Foreign Secretary David Cameron said Tuesday that the country would continue its support for Ukraine.

“We will continue to support Ukraine for as long as it takes,” he told the House of Lords during a monthly question session. Since February 2022, the UK has committed to economic and humanitarian support worth more than £4.7 billion (\$5.9 billion) to Ukraine, Cameron noted.

He also said the level of support for Ukraine would remain the same, or even be enhanced, going forward.

RUSSIA REPEATS THAT IT IS READY FOR NEGOTIATIONS WITH UKRAINE

Moscow has repeated that it is ready for

talks with Ukraine, with the Kremlin's spokesman claiming Russia would prefer to negotiate through “political and diplomatic means.”

“The President has repeatedly said that the main thing for us is to achieve our goals [in Ukraine],” Kremlin Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov told RTVI, Russian state news agency Tass reported.

“And, of course, we would prefer to do this primarily through political and diplomatic means. That's why we remain ready for negotiations.”

Peskov again reiterated Moscow's criticism of Ukraine for pulling out of previous negotiations. Kyiv has said it won't hold talks with Moscow while Russian troops remain on its territory.

The Kremlin representative also commented on a report in the Izvestia newspaper, which stated that negotiations between Moscow and Kyiv could resume on the territory of one of the Western countries — for example, in Hungary. Peskov said that the idea could theoretically materialize.

ZELENSKY, TOP US OFFICIALS TO MAKE CASE FOR UKRAINE FUNDING

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky and top aides to US President Joe Biden will make their case to US senators on Tuesday about why a fresh infusion of military assistance is needed to help Ukraine repel Russian invaders.

US officials have said the United States will spend all it has available for Ukraine by the end of the year, a dire prediction that comes as Kyiv has struggled to make major advances in its 2023 counteroffensive against Russia.

Biden's administration in October asked Congress for nearly \$106 billion to pay for ambitious plans for Ukraine, Israel and US border security, but Republicans who control the House with a slim majority rejected the package.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a close Biden ally, announced on Monday night that the administration has invited Zelensky to address senators via secure video as part of a classified briefing on Tuesday “so we can hear directly from him precisely what's at stake in this vote.”

In addition, a variety of top Biden officials, including Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Secretary of State Antony Blinken, are expected to brief the senators on Tuesday.

Zelensky told Reuters in a November interview that despite the slow going, Ukraine would try to deliver battlefield results by the end of the year and that he remained sure Kyiv would eventually have success in the war despite difficulties at the front.

But the stalled drive to get US assistance has alarmed the Biden White House, which fears a failure to help Ukraine further would increase the likelihood of Russian victories.

RUSSIANS MAKING ‘CREEPING ADVANCES’ AROUND MARINKA IN DONETSK

Over recent weeks, Russian forces have

made “creeping advances” through the ruins of Marinka, a front line town in Donetsk in eastern Ukraine, the UK's defense ministry noted Tuesday.

“Russia now likely controls most of the built-up area. However, Ukrainian forces remain in control of pockets of territory on the western edge of the town,” the ministry said on X, formerly known as Twitter.

“Marinka has been on the front line since 2014. With a pre-war population of 9000, it is comprehensively ruined — drone footage suggests that the vast majority of buildings have been reduced to rubble,” the ministry added.

Russia's renewed efforts against Marinka are part of its recent offensive in which it is “prioritizing extending Russia's control over the remaining parts of the Donetsk Oblast [region] — highly likely still one of the Kremlin's core war aims,” the UK said.

FINLAND EYES SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN ARTILLERY PRODUCTION FOR UKRAINE

Finland could soon produce a “significant” amount of artillery ammunition for Ukraine, according to the country's Defense Minister Antti Häkkinen.

“The plans are ready ... to increase ammunition production in a significant way,” he said in a Google-translated interview with the Iltalehti newspaper, adding that “the purpose is to support Ukraine even more strongly than now.” Häkkinen said that a decision on production would be made “very soon, probably before Christmas.”

Finland was the latest country to join the Western military alliance NATO earlier this year, ending decades of military non-alignment.

Helsinki approved its 20th military aid package, worth around 100 million euros (\$108.1 million) for Ukraine in November. It brings the total amount of aid provided to Kyiv to around 1.5 billion euros.



PISA Study: Georgia Ranks 67th among 81 Countries in Reading Comprehension



MOMA Tbilisi to Host Photographer Ana Gogvadze's Exhibition – Why Europe?

On December 14, Ilam Zurab Tsereteli Museum of Modern Art (MOMA Tbilisi), located at 27 Rustaveli Ave. will open the personal photo exhibition of photographer Ana Gogvadze – “Why Europe?”

For several years, photographer Ana Gogvadze has been traveling in a wheelchair throughout European countries and creating a series of photographs that tell us about the daily life of peo-

ple living in different European cities. Each photo shows us how close, familiar and direct Europe and Europeans are, who are unfortunately often presented as alienated. Ana's photos clearly show the attitude of people to each other, to the environment, to the city where they live. The photo series is distinguished by one special detail: the author takes all the photos from one perspective, from the wheelchair, which adds a special importance to the photos. At the photo exhibition, spectators

will see people from Paris, Stockholm, Berlin, Amsterdam, Vienna, Rome, Strasbourg, Brussels and Madrid, each with different but common values.

The exhibition is organized with the support of the European Union. Partners of the event are: “Ketari” Foundation and information campaign supporting European integration “Akhla”, which is implemented by “Coalition for Information Reliability”.

Attendance is free. The gallery is wheelchair accessible.

In the 2022 survey of the Student Assessment System [PISA], the results of Georgian students in mathematics and reading/reading comprehension worsened by 8 and 6 points, and in natural sciences – improved by 1 point.

In particular, Georgian students scored 390 points in math skills. This is 8 points lower than the 2018 survey. In mathematics, girls showed better results [393] than boys [387]. Out of 81 countries, Georgia surpassed only 19 in mathematics and took the 62nd position.

In terms of reading comprehension, the indicator of Georgian students is 374 points, 6 points less than in 2018. There is a big difference between girls and boys in reading comprehension – if the average grade of girls was 392 points, the average grade of boys was 357. Out of 81 countries, Georgia surpassed only 14 and took the 67th position.

Regarding natural sciences, compared to 2018, Georgia advanced by one point and scored 384 points. There is also a gender difference here – the average

score of girls is 391, and that of boys is 377. Here, too, out of 81 countries, Georgia surpassed only 14 and took the 67th position.

Regarding the category of students with the best performance, there are only 1.3% of students, and in the last two, that is, the category of students with the lowest performance – more than half, 51.1%.

In comparison with other republics under the Soviet occupation, Georgia fell behind the surveyed territories of Ukraine [18 out of 27 districts] in all three categories, surpassed Azerbaijan only in natural sciences, and fell behind Moldova, Kazakhstan, Lithuania and Estonia in all three categories.

PISA [Programme for International Student Assessment] is a study conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, in which 15-year-old students take part and take a test in three categories – reading comprehension, mathematics and natural sciences.

81 countries participated in the PISA 2023 study.

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Zoya Sheftalovich, Politico's Global Playbook Editor on Battling for the Soul of Europe, and Ivanishvili Holding Georgia Back

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And, obviously, things change - elections happen, people die... Prigozhin was one of the people on our list, but he was killed. So in September, we started with a long list, and then we narrowed it down over the course of several months to see who was still powerful, who wasn't. There were a few people who had been on that initial list, but unexpected elections happened and the outcomes of those elections changed the way things panned out. So, for instance, Donald Tusk winning the Polish election was a big game changer.

It's not a points-based system where we award X number of points for this criteria, or Y number of points for that criteria. It's about what people in the newsroom are feeling, and a lot of it has also to do with the general theme of the list. To me, the 2024 theme was elections, the EU election, the US elections, and a huge number of elections going on around Europe and beyond. India goes to the polls, the UK will probably have an election, etc. 2024 will be quite a seismic year, and the theme of 2024 is going to be about how mainstream politicians in various countries deal with the increased surge in far right and far left support. And it was about the battle for the soul of Europe and battle for the souls of individual countries.

That was the context surrounding the Georgian question, because obviously we've got a real moment for Georgia where it's an EU candidate country, it's on the accession track. In some ways, it's fortunate it is tied to Ukraine. And so it felt to me like it was part of this push and pull of something that's going to be happening a lot in 2024: which direction will countries go in? And who is pushing them in those directions? To me, Ivanishvili was a really important person to highlight. Georgians, in all of the polls, strongly support EU membership. There's overall backing for Western values in many ways, democracy and rule of law. But Georgia as a country is being held back, and the person who's holding it back is Ivanishvili. But who does he answer to? Who controls him? To whom does that power actually belong? Who wields it? Or in whose benefit is it being wielded? It's open speculation. People say Ivanishvili owes his fortune in large part to forces in the Kremlin, and that the interests he serves are in line with Kremlin interests, and that it's in the Kremlin's interest to lure Georgia away from the clutches of the EU and lead it down the path of Russian influence. That is really the reason why Ivanishvili was put on the list: to highlight that Georgia is at a crossroads. Georgia and its people are trying to walk down



If Georgians continue down the path of resistance, then there could be a bright future ahead for Georgia that's eventually going to see it in the EU



Zoya Sheftalovich, Politico's Global Playbook Editor

one path, and Ivanishvili is pulling them in the other direction.

GEORGIA WANTS EUROPEAN INTEGRATION, BUT IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN IF IVANISHVILI WILL ALLOW IT TO PURSUE THAT PATH. WHAT HAPPENS IF HE DOESN'T?

It really depends on Georgia and the Georgia population. We've seen what happened over the past year when the government went too far, when Georgian Dream went too far. We saw Georgians take to the streets en masse in protest against the foreign agents' law. The thing that we know with dictators is that they only have power as long as they have power - as their power is not derived from elections, they don't have that power confirmed and they don't necessarily have deep support in public sentiment. And so when you see that facade slip, things can change. We saw that in many countries and in the Soviet Union, where it looked like someone was untouchable, until they weren't. That could be the case with Ivanishvili. If Georgians continue down the path of resistance, then there could be a bright future ahead for Georgia that's eventually going to see it in the EU.

AND IF HE ALLOWS IT, WILL HE BE TAKEN OFF THE DISRUPTERS LIST?

We have a different list every year, and Ivanishvili has made his maiden voyage on the political 28. Looking ahead to 2024, it's set to be a particularly consequential year. That is why he has the potential in 2024 to be among our top disrupters. If

that opportunity is not taken, if Georgia is not able to get its foot in the EU door, then things will change and political will will change. There is a degree of benefit that Georgia is currently deriving from being coupled with Ukraine in terms of how the membership accession talks are being carried out. But whether that is still the case in 2025, if they don't take the opportunity that they've been given, that'll be another question.

DID IVANISHVILI HAVE TO BEAT A LOT OF COMPETITION TO GET ON THE LIST?

He was someone I was thinking about. I wanted to have a Georgia on the list. I am myself a Ukrainian, and the perspective that I bring to the coverage is obviously slightly Eastern-European skewed. It hasn't been in the past, because different people are in charge of the list every year. Georgia is a really interesting country, and it was high time for Georgian coverage. The president was also an option - she's pro-Western and is fighting against her own government in order to push Georgia in the EU direction. Yet, this isn't a list of the people we like most, nor a list of people we like the least: It's always the people who actually have the most power. And, I mean, prove me wrong. I don't know of a single Georgian, who has more power than Ivanishvili.

WHAT ABOUT OTHER EUROPEAN CANDIDATES FOR THAT LIST?

Putin is always a consideration. He was a notable absentee on my list. I felt Putin was the obvious choice. Putin has been on the list before, he was on our list last

year. And I know he's a finalist for the Time Magazine Person of the Year as well. But ultimately, when I look at why Putin remains in power, why he has been able to consolidate his power the way he has, it is about his enablers. It's the people who enable him to remain in power. If it was a list of who has killed the most people, he'd obviously be high up on that list. But when I was deciding where to put people and who to leave off the list, I decided to make a statement: Putin is in power because people like Elvira Nabiulina and Sergey Lavrov allow him to wage his war. Nabiulina is a huge enabler of the regime and a key figure in keeping the Russian economy stable and allowing Putin to continue to do what he is doing. She is an excellent technocrat, and very, very good at her job, and all of the effort that she has put into keeping the Russian economy afloat has been quite spectacular in terms of the results that it has reaped. That's why I wanted to highlight her role: people like her have a huge role to play. And they are the reason Putin has been able to get to where he has gotten to. He's not a genius. I don't buy this Western narrative about Putin being some sort of like evil genius. I don't think he's a masochist. I don't think he's particularly smart. He is just very good at finding people and putting them around him, and ensuring loyalty and shoring up his support, shoring up his coffers, making sure that he gives just enough red meat to his electorate to keep some of them happy. I was bored of Putin being on these lists, because I think he gets too much credit, and it allows people like Nabiulina, who are enabling the system, to be able to slink into the sunset when he goes and pretend



Georgia as a country is being held back, and the person who's holding it back is Ivanishvili

that "oh, we were on the western side all along, I was bringing it down from the inside the whole time." No, you weren't.

EVEN BLACK PR IS PR. DOES THAT NOT APPLY HERE AS WELL PERHAPS? THOSE YOU THINK IVANISHVILI IS CAVORTING WITH MUST SURELY BE PLEASED WITH HIS APPEARANCE ON THE LIST, AS PROOF OF HIS DEDICATION?

It is a catch-22 situation, but my goal is to expose those trying to stay under the radar. And I think that's what Ivanishvili has really been trying to do. He's still very much active politically, but he has been trying to convince us he's just been tending to his dendrological garden for the last however many years. Anytime I can shine a bit of a light into the darkness, I'm ready to do so. Perhaps there is a degree of pleasure that comes from having that notoriety, from having that recognition? Probably. Some people really do enjoy the fact, and maybe Ivanishvili himself is quite pleased to have finally been recognized as the guy behind the scenes. But I think, ultimately, we can't second guess ourselves as journalists about whether by covering someone we're giving their ego a boost.

SOME LEADING FIGURES IN GEORGIAN DREAM RUBBISHED THE LIST, WHILE THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PARTY CLAIMED IT WAS "A SHAMEFUL, PAID FOR" ARTICLE, AND THAT FORCES ARE OUT TO TARNISH HIS IMAGE AND LEGACY. WHAT WOULD BE YOUR RESPONSE?

It's a common perception people have about the media that we've got someone pulling our strings. But our ownership structure is public. Politico is owned by Axel Springer Germany. Indeed, I was the person who compiled the list, I made the shortlist, I narrowed down the shortlist, I wrote all of the profiles, I spoke with our internal Politico folks. We've got journalists who have worked in the region, who know the region, who understand the region. I don't have a horse in the race in Georgia. I don't hate Georgia at all. I think it's an incredible country.

SO ALL THE HATE MAIL SHOULD COME STRAIGHT TO YOU?

Straight to me. I honestly welcome it. I like making people feel something. Sometimes it's the things that people feel they don't like to feel, because it's uncomfortable having a light shone into a particular corner of the dark recesses of one's soul. But that's my job. As a journalist, I'm not trying to make friends. Nor am I trying to make enemies: I'm just trying to reveal something to our readers and inform our readers of who these people really are. I would say that the vast majority of those who read the Politico 28 profiles would not have known previously who Ivanishvili is. And I think it's important for people to know. That was my goal - to get people thinking and talking.



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Political Culture – a Cultivable Commodity

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

Normally, the character of the struggle between the ruling power and its opposition determines the tempo and content of the entire political process in the country. And unless the first-and-utmost consequence of that struggle is the wellbeing of the governed, the entire socio-political hullabaloo is not worth a dime. Therefore, to make the process adequately workable and fruitful, the presence of a reasonable framework of political intercourse, otherwise described as a political culture, is indispensable. One of the readily available definitions of political culture says that it is a particular pattern of orientation toward political actions in which a political system is embedded. If this is true, then trust should be the most fundamental ingredient of political culture, without which productive communication in the political process becomes almost impossible. Political culture is also notably defined by indigenous traditions, values and a psychosocial environment.

Modern political scientists argue that the stability of any political regime depends on its political culture being congruent with its national cultural and political structure, including its role in determining the nature and potential of citizenship, political stability, preparedness for inevitable change, welfare policies, building of public opinion and structuring political representation. Now, the question is if there is a way to cultivate national political culture so that it may work more effectively. No



Image source: We Are / Getty Images

doubt there is, but the cultivation of anything requires certain predictable resources, resources which should be available in Sakartvelo as they are elsewhere in the world, although the tissue of political culture may vary from nation to nation.

To nurture political culture in this country, we must in the first place promote the basic general values of our people, grounded in our history, economy, religion, customs and habits that have endured centuries and which have successfully survived to continue catering to our contemporary demands in the most merciful fashion. When all is smooth and good around, political culture seems

to work more efficiently, because the temperature of controversy in the political process becomes lower, and emotionality is better curbed, thus encouraging our politicians to look smarter and more elegant in the currents of political socialization, in the eyes of their western evaluators. In times like this, public opinion stability is also a helper, creating many favorable prerequisites for fostering positive electoral attitudes. In strained and troubled times, attitudes change and the political process becomes overwhelming, invading every inch of personal space - family, church, school, peer groups, mass media, governmental structures, and social institutions. To

wit, there is no social or private physical or intellectual power that could stop the avalanche, except the level and quality of political culture. This is why society has to be not just casually supportive of nonstop rearing and endorsing the high-quality and meaningful political culture, but it has to be in control of the ways and means of inspiring and reassuring its nonstop boosting.

Our western friends and partners can only set an appropriate example for our breeding our own elevated national political culture; they can cheer and hearten us; they could even sponsor some helpful measures to develop it to a certain extent. But nobody can culti-

vate it for us: This is our job to do with our own hands. Political culture is a living organism which has to be taken care of through active participation, the expression of opinions in a gentle, thoughtful way, avoiding overreaction and the usage of caustic language. Political culture is not something perfunctory or ephemeral that can be ignored: It is a fundamental asset on which the nation's chance to survive stands and needs to be kept in balance.

If we are building a so-called civic society, we have to be sensitively concerned about our political culture and the direction it is headed for. It cannot be conditioned only based on our current exigencies and demands: It has to be considered both in retrospect and prospect so that we have a clear view if it is functional in this country. And if it is not, something urgent and drastic has to be done in this respect on a broad national level. Our future simply depends on how strong and effective our political culture is. Good political culture would reject the playful attitude of politicians to the public and their habit of juggling with words and ideas when talking to people; strong political culture will not tolerate unbridled political comments and deceitful attempts to beat private targets.

People are becoming better and better educated, and their overall progress is so much accelerated that they are no longer willing to deal with politicians who are off the standards of positively operating political culture. It is high time for all of us to know how to serve our national interests in unison with our personal good, and for this, our political culture needs to be accordingly cultivated and kept on a high pedestal.



Long Live Our European Future! - President to Join Public March on December 9

The President of Georgia said she will join the public march planned by non-governmental organizations on December 9. She made the announcement while giving a speech at a reception for young athletes in the Orbeliani Palace.

The public march is scheduled in Tbilisi for December 9. As Giorgi Mshvenieradze, Director of Democracy Defenders, noted, the main goal of the march is for Georgian society to once again send its voice to Europe before the status is discussed.

He claimed that for this purpose, civil society organizations are meeting the ambassadors of all 27 states and conveying to them the wishes of more than 70 civil society organizations.

"When we already have a positive recommendation from the European Commission regarding the status, thanks to the Georgian people, it is important for this strong voice to once again reach the leaders of all 27 EU states from Georgia.

"For this purpose, we, civil society organizations, are meeting with the

ambassadors of all 27 states and we are conveying to them the desire of more than 70 civil society organizations to support Georgia in this decision. Since some states are skeptical about this issue, they need to hear additional arguments why they should support Georgia. It will be a big signal to send a strong message from Georgia, which is planned in the form of a march.

"More than 70 non-governmental organizations have written to the foreign ministers of all 27 states. We are meeting ambassadors today, we have met before and we will meet in the future. We will try to ensure that all of them have our letter before the meeting of the foreign ministers", said Mshvenieradze.

He added that the march will start on December 9, at 14:00, from Republic Square and will move to Europe Square, where the world's largest EU flag will be unfurled.

"Every citizen will be able to participate in the march, regardless of political opinion. The main thing is to support the EU membership," Mshvenieradze noted.

Charles Michel: I Reaffirmed to PM Garibashvili the EU's Commitment to Georgia



The EU welcomes the continued efforts to advance on the reform agenda and the action plan to address the steps necessary, European Council President, Charles Michel, tweeted after meeting with the Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili late last week.

EUCO President says Georgia's commitment to the EU path remains strong. "Georgia's commitment to the EU path remains strong. And I reaffirmed to PM Irakli Garibashvili the EU's commitment to Georgia. The EU welcomes the continued efforts to advance on the reform agenda and the action plan to address the steps necessary, in the interest of the Georgian people," Michel tweeted.

The Government Administration says that at the meeting held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, the parties discussed the process of European integration of Georgia and the agenda of reforms.

"Attention was focused on the positive recommendation of the European Commission on the granting of candidate status to Georgia.

The Prime Minister informed the President of the European Council about the reforms already implemented by Georgia on the road to European integration. Garibashvili highlighted that Georgia continues the successfully started process of implementing the recommendations of the European Union. The government has a specific vision for each reform, he

noted, the corresponding action plan, the deadlines for implementation have been written, and in this process the government works in coordination with the representatives of the European Union.

He added that the progress made by Georgia was confirmed by the European Commission, and now the country is waiting for a positive decision from the European Council on granting of EU candidate status.

PM Garibashvili thanked Charles Michel for his help and support in the process of implementation of the EU recommendations and emphasized the importance of the further support of the President of the European Council on the path of European integration.

The New Economic "Autarchy": on a Few Fundamental Global Trends and Important Expectations. Part 2

ANALYSIS BY VICTOR KIPIANI,
GEOCASE CHAIRMAN

The post-Cold War period is reflected in the pace of globalization not only by the fragmentation of trade and financial ties, but also by a significant reduction in the stability and sustainability of the existing geopolitical order. Basically, these two sides of the coin are now so intertwined that fluctuations in politics directly affect the economy, and vice versa. We have also said that the relationship and interdependence of such fluctuations (with the lifting of specific means mentioned in this article) is most clearly seen in low- and middle-income countries. The established reality is that security policy or politics in security has almost become the unquestioned determinant of economic progress. It is from such "subordination" that modern economic nationalism or the new economic autarchy - a separate and largely closed economic policy of a particular country - is born.

Judging by the current trends and public speeches of high-ranking officials, we are dealing with such a phenomenon as a new type of economically secure state. The April 2023 speech of White House National Security Advisor Jack Sullivan is very telling in this regard. In his speech, he spoke at length about the contradictory relationship between the free market and economic security and made some very notable points. In particular, according to Sullivan, the complete and uncontrolled delegation of economic processes to the open market and its players:

(a) has weakened the national security of the United States of America; and that

(b) total dependence in global economic ties is abused by others to achieve their economic or geopolitical objectives; as well as -

(c) economic liberalization by previous United States administrations has not only failed to achieve peace and stability, but has also led to the rise of China and critical vulnerabilities in the global supply and delivery chain.

In practice, with this emphasis, we have had a significant expansion of the traditional understanding of "security" (which implied the prevention of war, terrorism, etc.), with the result that security now includes food supply, energy self-sufficiency, inflation management, climate change, etc.

Moreover, statements made at a number of economic alliance forums and gatherings suggest that the so-called Washington Consensus, in place for some time after the end of World War II and the Cold War, has been replaced by a New Washington Consensus. According to opinions circulated in different sources, the updated version of the mentioned "consensus" implies both a rejection of

the prioritization of market over security and maintaining a balance between the two. This theoretical paradigm is actually difficult to imagine. It is all the more difficult to put it into practice because this approach, called "de-risking", is, in fact, as new as the well-forgotten old one - proper management of the economic process by minimizing its vulnerability as much as possible. It should be assumed that this result is reflected, inter alia, in reasonable state control and management of market processes, examples of which we clearly see in some countries of the European Union and Asia, e.g. in Japan.

To summarize this view, let us say that the security of the economic system is based on a single and indivisible, so-called holistic approach and includes mutual harmonization and synergy of measures in different areas. Given the complexity of modern challenges, this is even more critical. Let us add that market players, despite their ability to adapt to global shocks and their flexibility, do not have the basic ability to manage geopolitical risks, which in modern conditions has, almost without alternative, a dominant subject of international relations - a state or a union of states.

EXCESSIVE SANCTIONS "APPETITE": A RISK FOR GLOBALIZATION?

However strange the proposed wording may sound, one very specific problem has arisen in recent years in relation to the application of sanctions. Let us try to briefly explain what its essence is.

The fact is that sanctions, as a universal means of overcoming wrong, are used today with little thought. Moreover, the relentless pursuit of sanctions has created a "sanctions industrial base", as if the excessive number of sanctions and their use without strategic thinking could help alter the policies and behavior of the target actor. As a result, the "overdose" of sanctions has prompted many countries (including those that violate international law) to consider establishing financial systems that would allow them to bypass US dollar-dominated payment channels. Such efforts, of course, again lead to a weakening of globalization.

The promotion of economic coercive policies, the popularization and indiscriminate use of sanctions as an immediate response has, in fact, significantly undermined the foundations of meaningful economic policy. For their part, excessive and ill-considered punitive practices and global harmonization of the rules of economic behavior favor "me" over "we" and reduce economic resilience in the face of growing global challenges.

IN ORDER FOR US TO REALIZE...
...we have presented a small overview of economic trends, including selected opinions and assessments. Yes, the Georgian



Image source: linkedin

economic system is very small, and this smallness is probably one of the obstacles to its rapid growth. However, it is also a fact that in the modern world "smallness" does not mean exclusion and isolation. Moreover, it is precisely the interconnectedness of global economic channels (like the law of "communicating vessels" in physics) and the effect of a wide spillover of global shocks that made the division into "big" and "small" more conditional, at least in economics.

Therefore, when determining Georgia's economic policy, it is necessary to constantly monitor the processes taking place around us in order to critically assess them and determine the actions that we should implement, guided by sound rationality.

Taking this into account, we would like to summarize some (already well known) considerations. This thinking is only at the "amateur" level and, clearly, when discussing such a topic, the qualified assessment of representatives of professional circles has a very different importance and weight. In any case, to promote the stability and self-sufficiency of our country's economic system, its competitiveness and real growth, we should think and care about:

- Wider integration with developed economies. This will be of practical importance for qualitative improvements in our trade and financial flows, as well as for the transfer to us and adoption of advanced technologies and knowledge.

- Expansion and diversification of the export market. It is well known that holding on to a particular market is economically vulnerable and risky from the point of view of national security; Accordingly, the more sources of "expenditure" and "income" there are, the more space and freedom for nation-state development. All this is connected, inter alia, with free trade agreements and trade associations.

With the rise of economic nationalism in the world, we should also think and care:

- Not only about the quantitative, but

also about the qualitative side of investment. Given the current global and regional threats, we believe it is unacceptable to consider any investment as desirable for our country. It is time to learn how to differentiate and choose them. For this purpose, we consider it advisable to review investments and introduce a mechanism for their so-called "screening" at the legislative level. We would also like to note that many developed economic systems use this method today.

- Timely channelling of necessary resources into the country's intellect. Without ensuring "intellectual self-sufficiency" in this way, we are doomed to witness the outflow of so many valuable human resources from Georgia and thus exhaust our competitiveness and growth potential in the near future.

In addition to the above, we would consider the following as practical measures:

- A large and separate place should be given to the issue of economic security in the national security doctrine of Georgia. This special attention, again, is dictated by the modern and multifaceted understanding of the concept of "security" mentioned in this article. We must agree that national security is unthinkable without a unified set of economic measures, because no one in this world will consider and speak as honorable partners with the weak, the poor and those reaching out for help.

- The direction of economic security in the format of the National Security Council should be strengthened. As one of the possible developments, we do not rule out the separate creation of an Economic Security Council or its institutionalization within the system of the National Security Council.

- When talking about the structural approach, we would also mention as a possible subject of discussion the introduction of the position of the Minister of Economic Security in the Government of Georgia with the corresponding supervisory scope and functions.

- Whether under the auspices of the

Economic Security Council or the Minister of Economic Security, one of the main tasks should be to continuously monitor and analyse the risks and threats to Georgia's economic security. This process should be objectively reflected in a periodic document on economic threats (similar to the current practice in the European Union). Among other necessary issues, the document will assess short-, medium- and long-term risks to the country's economic security, as well as recommended measures to minimize and manage them.

- In addition to the doctrinal approach, the appropriateness of legislation ensuring economic security (e.g. Georgia's Act on Economic Security) should be discussed. In working on such legislation, special attention should be paid to, inter alia: (a) coordination of government agencies in times of crisis; (b) rapidly realigning global or regional delivery and supply from one system to another, and to reduce overdependence on one system; (c) promoting modern innovation in critical sectors.

We realize that there is much to talk about in this regard and many more key aspects could be mentioned. However, it is a fact that all of them can only be realized in conditions of normalization of relations within the country. We would like to reiterate what has already been said many times: the country has neither the "luxury" nor the resources to continue functioning within the framework of "political business-making", a process that has transcended institutions, centred only on the static harmful imperative of preserving and gaining power.

The Georgian political and social elite, those who understand that elitism is first and foremost equated with responsibility, openness and self-criticism, are required to saturate the internal and external lines with meritocracy, knowledge and informed decisions. Today, the country faces a practically non-alternative task: to invest in its own functional competitiveness, efficient security and inclusive development in order to regain its place in the existing "disorderly order".

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<p style="font-weight: bold; font-size: 1.2em;">CAR RENTAL</p>  <p style="font-weight: bold; color: white;">Toyota Prado</p> <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red; font-weight: bold;">55\$</p>	 <p style="font-weight: bold; color: white;">Mercedes Viano</p> <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red; font-weight: bold;">50\$</p>	 <p style="font-weight: bold; color: white;">Mercedes Sprinter</p> <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red; font-weight: bold;">70\$</p>
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"Discover Your Profession" - Olga Babluani Now a Dedicated Media Advocate for Vocational Education

involving specialists from various disciplines, including experts from different institutions. Following a particularly intriguing brainstorming session, I contemplated the need to share this topic with a wider audience. Convinced of its importance, with the support of the Ministry of Education, becoming an agent of change, a compact yet impactful film series titled 'Discover Your Profession' was produced."

In Georgia, there still exists a stigma surrounding vocational education, colloquially referred to as the "secondary" choice (often dubbed "proftech" during Soviet times). Shockingly, 70% of parents prefer their children not to pursue vocational education. Yet on the market, 80% of the demand goes to vocational jobs while only 20% of jobs require people with higher academic education.

"The private sector continually seeks professionals (from craftsmen to hospitality, services, gastronomy, and beyond). How could working be belittling?" Olga asks. "As the French poet Arthur Rimbaud once said, 'Life blossoms with working,' emphasizing the intrinsic connection between one's profession and personal fulfilment. A poet and an artist said this. It is plausible to explore a convergence of creativity and labor, witnessing the transformation of any individual's work. When you leave your comfort zone, you evade the shackles of societal expectations. This is when autonomy and self-governance become paramount. Your profession is your freedom."

In the era of rapid technological advancements and emerging economies, it is important to raise awareness about these developments. Georgia is currently facing a "brain drain," and addressing these issues is crucial. The emphasis today is on the social integration of the younger generation, as the country undergoes significant growth and grapples with the complexities of employment.

WHAT INFORMATION DOES THE NEW TV PROJECT PROVIDE?

The information presented is highly rational and essential, addressing a wide range of insights related to society. The films depict both public and private vocational institutions, showcasing role-model students sharing their own experiences. The educational journey involves not only teachers but also key figures in various sectors, and representatives of state entities or private companies. Basically, it features everyone engaged in these fields, seeing them serving as beacons, guiding us on where and how success can be achieved in today's job market, and ensuring a guarantee of employment.

Truth be told, this is just a small step, and the challenges beneath the surface are often more complex than those visible above. However, it is crucial to initiate active dialogue and explore priorities and needs. If newcomers, even in small numbers, find the desire to discover their own path, they should try, take risks, and not be afraid to explore their future. And parents should not hinder their children's professional aspirations but rather encourage them to pursue their dreams.

I would like to mention the proactive work and professionalism of our dedicated team. Beyond the intricate and time-consuming process we have traversed, hats off to Nino Meiparishvili, the director of the film. She stands out not only for her excellent professionalism but also for her exceptional ability to uncover the best results. My gratitude goes to her for this achievement, as well as to Mariam Rakviashvili for her support and to everyone who has been with us on this journey.

WHERE CAN WE FIND THIS DOCUMENT?

For me, the ideal case would be if all media outlets in Georgia provided infor-

mation for all audiences. Unfortunately, media polarization is at its peak. But social networks have come to our aid: anyone can already watch all three episodes on the "No Time to Sleep" Facebook page. They will also be broadcast on 22 regional TV channels and on Imedi TV National Channel (our partner media). I trust regional media will draw more attention over the next few years. A large audience is there, and its use as a valuable source of information is undeniable. One thing is certain: active communication has already been established with them, and what we have accomplished (with the support of the International Migration Organization) has been seen by many viewers and this is not a small number for Georgia.

WHAT ELSE IS NEW IN YOUR LIFE?

I grew up in a cinema family, practically living in the world of film, and film was almost an allegory of life for us. Whatever I do is closely related to my personal experiences and a significant part of my genuine interest, so I can say it's beyond family tradition.

Allow me to share a bit about Ana Uru-shadze, a truly versatile woman film director. I had so many interesting discussions with her about drama or the peculiarities of life, that I agreed to participate in her upcoming movie.

A month passed, and as I reflected, I realized that when I could not physically see Ana in the process of filming, I no longer saw myself on the stage either. Despite the fact that it featured a very original scenario and a well-presented character, I declined the role in the end. My heart aches, but I know that today my place is not there. This is my first time, publicly discussing an offered role, but this moment was exceptional. When you know that a very interesting thing is being unveiled, but your intuition tells you - this is not your place.

As the mastermind behind impactful educational programs such as "No Time to Sleep" and "A Farewell to Arms," along with the numerous education and training forums, Olga Babluani is now gearing up to launch three compelling documentary series. These upcoming projects aim to further amplify the promotion of vocational education.

Olga has served as not only the author and producer but also as the anchor of the above-mentioned initiatives. Curious minds may wonder: What inspired her to delve into the field of vocational education, and what exciting prospects does the new project hold?

"A year ago, I decided to initiate a forum on professional education at the House of Writers," Olga tells us. "The project was carefully planned over a month,

UK and Georgia: Sharing Expertise and Best Practice in English Language Teaching and Assessment

The British Council, the UK's international organization for cultural relations and educational opportunities, and the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, organized an English Language Teaching and Assessment Conference on 2 December with the attendance of the high-level representatives of the British Embassy, Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, and the British

Council Director Georgia and Eastern Partnership Lead Zaza Purtseladze. The Conference brought together government representatives, assessment specialists, English teachers, educational leads, and researchers. The event served as a pivotal platform for fostering dialogue, knowledge sharing, and professional networking within the fields of English language education and assessment for the UK and Georgia.

The conference helped raise aware-

ness of the pivotal role played by the English Strategy for Secondary Education in Georgia in elevating the quality of teaching and assessment and foster in-depth discussions on the direction of the British Council's efforts in enhancing English language teaching and assessment in Georgia.

Moreover, it served as a platform for constructive dialogue among Georgian and UK professionals, aimed at exploring teaching and assessment solutions tailored to local needs while upholding global standards.

A key planned outcome of the conference was the attainment of a shared understanding regarding the importance of aligning national standards, curriculum, delivery, and assessment to enhance learning outcomes.

The English Language Teaching and Assessment Conference serves as a vital platform for knowledge sharing and collaboration, ultimately contributing to the advancement of English language education and assessment in Georgia.

"The British Council's mission is to build connections, understanding, and trust between people in the UK and countries around the world," said Zaza Purtseladze, British Council Director



Georgia: "The English language serves as a bridge that connects us all, allowing us to share experiences and ideas, and this conference is a testament to our dedication to this mission. This conference is a unique platform that brings together educators, practitioners, and experts in English language teaching and assessment. It is a space for collaboration, learning, and innova-

tion and serves as a testament to the close partnership between the British Council and the people of Georgia. We are proud to work hand in hand with government bodies, educational institutions and teachers across the country to promote English language proficiency, and this conference is a celebration of our shared achievements and aspirations."



New Partnership between Embassy of France and UNICEF Aims at Strengthening Child Rights in Georgia



UNICEF and the Embassy of France launched a partnership initiative aimed at advancing child rights across Georgia. The program – Strengthening Child Rights in Georgia - is designed to build the capacity of specialists in child rights, support professionals in delivering quality services for children, and strengthening Child Rights Centers at state universities as key institutions for knowledge creation, dissemination, training and child rights-related activities.

The program will cover three inter-related directions to support the implementation of the Code on the Rights of the Child, deepen understanding of the rights of children and expand engagement for upholding these rights. Its key objectives include:

STRENGTHENING CHILD RIGHTS CENTERS

Enhancing the capabilities of Child Rights Centers at universities in the regions in building and disseminating knowledge on children's rights among profession-

als, educators, lawyers, academia, local governments, civil society representatives, parents, youth, and children. The initiative will also focus on empowering young people to lead work at the Child Rights Centers

DEVELOPING A NEW MASTERS (MA) PROGRAM ON CHILD RIGHTS

Supporting the development of a new MA program at partner universities to prepare professionals addressing diverse challenges faced by children. A dedicated

inter-disciplinary MA program on child rights will provide in-depth knowledge and understanding of the specific legal, social, educational, psychological and policy issues concerning child rights.

DEVELOPING THE CONCEPT OF SPECIALIZED CHILD JUDGE

The project will initiate a dialogue with the relevant stakeholders and elaborate a concept of a specialized child judge in close collaboration with the Supreme Court of Georgia and relevant partners. This will further strengthen the justice agenda for children and support implementation of the Juvenile Justice Code and the Code on the Rights of the Child.

To achieve the above results, UNICEF, in collaboration with the Embassy of France in Georgia, will work with a range of partners including the Parliament of Georgia, Supreme Court of Georgia, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Internal Affairs, General Prosecutor's Office, Legal Aid Service, Ministry of Education and Science, National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement, High Council of Justice, High School of Justice, selected universities, bar associations, youth boards and organizations, civil society organizations, schools, and other relevant ministries and agencies.

The project will leverage the expertise and experience of specialists from France through diverse interventions, including workshops, training sessions, and prac-

tice-sharing sessions.

Advancing child rights is a priority of France which has been a long-standing partner of UNICEF all across the globe.

UNICEF has been active in strengthening the child rights culture in the country, as well as in creating and disseminating knowledge on child rights locally and nationally amongst the government, professionals, parents, youth, and children themselves. The Code on the Rights of the Child of Georgia further emphasized the role of the government in the realization of child rights, outlining the need for specialization of professionals in child rights to support the delivery of child-friendly services.

UNICEF supported the establishment of Child Rights Centers in a number of State and private universities. The Centers aim at promoting child rights and strive to become sustainable platforms for child rights teaching and promotion.

ABOUT UNICEF

UNICEF promotes the rights and well-being of every child, in everything it does. Together with its partners, it works in 190 countries and territories to translate that commitment into practical action, focusing special effort on reaching the most vulnerable and excluded children, to the benefit of all children, everywhere.

For more information about UNICEF and its work for children, visit www.unicef.org/georgia/

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- THE CHRISTMAS TREE LIGHTING CEREMONY IN THE LOBBY ON **DECEMBER 8TH, 17:30**, HOTEL LOBBY
- CHRISTMAS MARKET BY IWA GEORGIA ON **DECEMBER 9, 10:00 - 18:00**, IN THE GRAND BALLROOM
- SHERATON X SOCIETY TBILISI EVENT, ON **DECEMBER 9, 22:00**, IN MEETINGS BY ATI
- CHRISTMAS EVE GALA DINNER IN THE ATI ROOFTOP RESTAURANT ON **DECEMBER 24, 18:00**
- GATSBY STYLE PARTY, SHERATON X SOCIETY TBILISI, ON **DECEMBER 29, 21:00**, IN MEETINGS BY ATI
- NEW YEAR'S EVE GALA DINNER AT ATI ROOFTOP RESTAURANT ON **DECEMBER 31ST, 21:00**
- NEW YEAR'S EVE PARTY AT CRAFT HOUSE ON **DECEMBER 31ST**

Concrete in the Abstract



Participants' portrait, clockwise from top left: artist Ani Abramidze; gallery owner Holly Moyer; artists Oksana Vinogradova and Uta Gaga; curator Michelle Gagnon

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

The Exchange Gallery has just opened its third and last show for 2023, titled *Concrete* and featuring works in or about this medium by three artists. The theme follows the previous two, *Wires* and *Rust* (the latter including 16 of my photos), collectively titled *Elements of Tbilisi*; so, definitely going with an industrial vibe for 2023. I was present at the well-attended opening on the evening of December 2. It runs until the 30th of the month.

Ani Abramidze is working in film pho-

tography (remember that? Not dead yet by any means); primarily cyanotype. Her small monochrome prints of concrete subjects are twinned by cyanotype collages on clear film, an altogether more unusual medium. Cyanotype is one of the 19th-century photographic processes which needs a contact, as opposed to a projected, print from the negative original. In other words, you can't use a small negative in an enlarger to get a big print: your negative and print will be the same size, as the negative is pressed onto the photographic paper under glass and the light is shone through onto the paper to expose it. If I were going to buy one of her pieces (which I'm considering), I would get both versions, the monochrome and the obvious cyanotype. My favorite

photo of hers features a column with "ori kotsna" (two kisses in Georgian) painted in graffiti into it.

Oksana Vinogradova from Moscow has the only work in the show featuring actual, physical concrete: found objects, primarily. This includes "Metropolis Botanica", three collages with pieces of the medium and other found materials. She also has had three sets of wire-connected concrete chunks suspended from the ceiling of the gallery to its floor, for viewers to wander through and observe.

Finally, Uta Gagua an illustrator, who works at the Animatory in Tbilisi, has a series of five large prints of computer-drawings based on photos of concrete subjects in Tbilisi. These he plans to release in strictly limited signed editions. One of



his images, of a building detail on a street near the Marjanishvili Metro stop, has zero horizontal, vertical or even straight lines in it, wonderfully whimsically wonky. Uta is also busy developing his own animated film, for which I have seen a pitch, and it looks to be fascinating.

Gallery curator Michelle Gagnon recalls considering the show's theme and wondering how on earth she would find enough artists in Tbilisi working in or about this esoteric medium to pull something together. "Then they just started 'coming out of the woodwork', and here we are!"

Concrete, interesting fact, is actually a vastly much older material than most people realize, going as far back as the Nabateans in what is now Syria and Jordan, about 6500 BC. (They built Petra.) It consists of an aggregate (nowadays a mix of sand and gravel) held together with liquid cement, which then solidifies in a few hours and gives it permanence. Indeed, concrete is one of the few things actually strengthened, as opposed to being corroded, by salt water. Examples of it from Roman times about two millennia ago have been preserved in this way in shallow sea areas. It is the second most commonly used substance in the world, after water, and the most used

building material in the world. (It is now being improved to make it much less carbon-intensive by various experimental techniques and additives, to greatly lessen its negative environmental footprint. This is because it is a major contributor to carbon release).

Exchange Gallery will have more shows next year, and we wait eagerly to see what themes they will choose, involving primarily artists based in the Caucasus.

Exchange Gallery and Corner House Coffee

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Tel. +995 599 05 40 37

hello@caucasuscultureexchange.org

www.caucasuscultureexchange.org

Open Tuesdays through Saturdays 11 am to 7 pm.

Exhibition closes December 30.

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.svaneti2

Monopoly with a Georgian Twist

BLOG BY SHELBI R. ANKIEWICZ

Georgian's two favorite things have come together: luxury brands and the Georgian culture.

A new product has been created by a French entrepreneur, Sonny Brahmi, who has been living in Georgia for the past two years. It's a new version of the classic board game everyone knows, Monopoly. Except now, it's called Monopolia and has tokens such as khachapuri and khinkali on the board instead of a dog or penguin.

According to Brahmi, the concept of the product was of course inspired by the original game, but he wanted to find

a way to incorporate Georgian attributes luxuriously since that's what he specializes in. I think it's safe to say his idea was accomplished.

The new board is made of wood, so it's not foldable like traditional games that are kept inside a box. Instead, Monopolia is created specifically to be hung on a wall or put on a shelf. However, if you're the kind of person who doesn't want to look at a boring Monopoly game board all the time, the backside of the board is customizable, so the buyer can put whatever photo, design, or color they want.

The production team is partly comprised of specialty designers who will customize your board to whatever your heart desires within two days. This is where the luxurious part comes into play. However, even though this might

sound like a nice concept, I think people living in Georgia will be more excited about the new components on the game board.

In the traditional game, the spaces that players land on are utilities, properties, railroads, etc. In Monopolia, it works the same with rules, but the spaces that players land on are named after places in Tbilisi, such as Chavchavadze, Vake Park, Marjanishvili, etc. So, while I was playing the game, it was fun to say that I owned Pekini Avenue and Abashidze Street!

In addition to the names of the different places, the currency used is even made to look like the Georgian Lari and has both Georgian and English translations written on it. However, the best part of the "Georgian" flare is the characters, or silver tokens, that each player uses as an identifier. In Monopolia, you can be a khachapuri, khinkali, a man drinking wine, qevri (clay pot used for making wine), or a botsa (container used for holding wine).

Since this is a new concept that just launched, Brahmi wanted to find a way to spread the word about his product and decided to host an immersive version of Monopolia called "Les Soirées Monopolia." On December 4, I showed up to the fourth floor of Stamba, where all creative events take place. Brahmi greeted me while I grabbed a welcome glass of wine.

The event had various vendors and partners who had volunteered some of their products, including the winery, Shumi. They offered three variations of wines to guests and next to the glasses were cheese charcuterie boards to enjoy as a break between sips. In the front of the room was a table set up with items



Guests playing Monopolia at "Les Soirées Monopolia" on December 4.
Photo by Mariam Kartvelishvili

related to the game that guests could purchase, such as scarves, ties, home decorations, etc., and a set up for the Sakartvelo Insight Podcast.

The first hour consisted of networking with people until the event started. We then entered the main area of the room, which was surrounded by 360 screens projecting scenes from Monopolia. There were around eight tables, each set up with four to six chairs, and each guest was asked to take a seat and play the game.

All the tables played for about an hour straight, until Brahmi made the final announcement that the winner of each table was to play the other table's winners to compete for a highly rewarding gift card. This made everyone excited and eager to win the final prize. Some gift cards were also hidden within the

game for players to find and take home.

From what I'm aware of, Tbilisi doesn't have many immersive events like this. These events are the perfect way to meet people, have fun, try something new, and put your heads together to accomplish something as a team. This is the goal Brahmi had in mind, and I think it was achieved.

Right now the board is only sold through its website, with the hopes of it being integrated into Stamba and a high-end furniture store. I truly believe that the more immersive experiences that entrepreneurs, businesses, or organizations come up with, the more people they'll attract because of the opportunities that come with them. It's also good to know that whenever there is food or beverages included, especially at a decent price, it makes everything ten times better.



Prototype of the Monopolia board game. Photo by Mariam Kartvelishvili

Médée - the Princess of the Colchis. Premiere of the New Staging at the Staatsoper Berlin



REVIEW BY LILY FÜRSTENOW-KHOSITASHVILI

In this harrowing landscape, Médée emerges as a prisoner of circumstance, her character a symbol of resilience in the face of overwhelming adversity. As she navigates the confines of her fate, the music becomes a cathartic force, expressing the tumultuous emotions that surge within her tortured soul. The arias, charged with anguish and defiance, resonate with the universal struggles of those trapped on the fringes of society.

The opera's poignancy lies in its ability to transcend the confines of time and space, drawing parallels between the ancient myth and the contemporary crises that echo through the corridors of our world today. Marc-Antoine Charpentier's composition, reimagined against the backdrop of modern strife, becomes a powerful testament to the enduring relevance of opera as a medium for exploring the depths of human experience.

As the final notes reverberate through the auditorium, "Médée" leaves an indelible mark, imploring its audience to confront the realities of displacement, imprisonment, and the indomitable spirit that persists even in the bleakest of circumstances. This production is not merely an opera; it is a poignant reflection of the human condition, a stark reminder that, in the face of adversity, the transformative power of art endures.

The whole impression is, however, quite taken down by the production by Peter Sellars, whose attempt to take the action into a contemporary refugee camp ambience appears too far fetched and thus misses the point. Additionally, the aesthetics, reminiscent of a US American

prison, are an unhappy choice, with orange prisoner uniforms, menacingly armed guards and a military vehicle having little to do with Médée's tragedy. The costumes by Camille Assaf don't add much to the characters or action, delivering looks that lack thorough background concept. Last but not least, the stage settings by world famous architect Frank Gehry with his signature silvery metal structures whimsically installed on the stage and hanged up in cloud formations above evoke the mood of unfinished haphazardness and a hastily constructed experiment of stage design rather than a well-composed setting for a baroque opera.

All of this did little justice to the 300-year-old but still up-to-date music by the French composer Charpentier, one that still speaks to the audience and touches the senses. The impression was only saved by the incredibly impressive performance of the Freiburg Barock Orchestra conducted by Simon Rattle - a genius of a conductor and unforgettable performances of the choir and the singers. Médée interpreted by Magdalena Kozena will go into history as one of the strongest and most vibrant female protagonists, portraying in her voice and acting all the anguish, desire and disillusionment a female character can give. With Reinoud Van Mechelen as Jason expressing in his every movement and tone the whole complexity of a failed lover, basking in malignity and callousness to Médée's sufferings. Princess Creuse and King Creon, performed by Carolyn Sampson and Luca Tittoto respectively, delivered unforgettable performances, adding to the protagonists' contemporary humanly traits, and timelessness to Charpentier's musical masterpiece with all its grandeur and deeply moving melancholic notes.

For the Georgian public, an opera relating to Medea, as she is generally referred to, is of particular interest and importance, because this female character is irrevocably connected to the Georgian cultural subconscious. The Greek myth about the Argonauts in search of the Golden Fleece that was treasured by the King of the Colchis is part of Georgian-Greek archetypal imagery. The Kingdom of the Colchis was situated on the coast of the Black Sea in Western Georgia, and Medea, the King's daughter was not primarily perceived as a wicked witch and murderer of her kids but a healer, a betrayed lover, an abandoned and desperate mother. Even today, most apothecary shops throughout Georgia use the symbol of Medea with snakes as a sign carrying the message of female powers and magic, while the Golden Fleece, the stolen treasure, is the eternal loss resulting from the cunning trickery of adventurous Argonauts headed by daring Jason - an ambivalent hero. A contemporary reading of this myth from Greek antiquity would however reveal to us the tragedy of a woman whose destiny is decided by men only: her father, Aietes, the King of Colchis who expulses her from the palace for helping the Argonauts; Jason, who leaves her for another woman and puts her in prison, traditional morals and common sense sticking to the male perspective that convicts and demonizes her as a murderess of her own children.

A more substantial alternative to reading this complex female character would probably suggest a closer analysis of the Medea archetype in contemporary societies. Medea as not the wicked witch but the healer, understanding the laws of nature; a woman full of passion and capable of deep emotion, ready for any sacrifice for the sake of love and a desperate mother. It is the military logics and callousness of war rationale of the male characters that lead Medea to the extreme and turn her into the monster that she becomes.

Marc-Antoine Charpentier's music, dating back to 1693, the year his work was first staged at the Opera in Palais Rooyal in Paris, contains all of these deep controversies. Maybe if Médée was staged by a woman director, the production could finally give a female perspective and vision of all the complexities and abysmal passions contained in her character. This, however, remains a question for the future.



Tamar Javakhishvili. Poet.

Georgian Poets: Tamar Javakhishvili-Amirejibi

TRANSLATED FROM GEORGIAN INTO ENGLISH BY KETEVAN TUKHARELI

Evening is coming.
Twilight goes well
With Kashveti lines
Little bird has flown
On the cross
It cannot stand on
It's legs
It is floundering
As the flag.

Happiness is not
Got.

Happiness will not
Be deserved.
Don't try to be
Happy,
If you will not
Turn all your
Life into
Being ready
For sacrifice.

Think!
Thinking is
Sent to you
From God,
Come to the
Extreme!
And the main
Is beyond!



Anselm Feuerbach - Medea (1870)



Kashveti Church. Photo by Alexander P.



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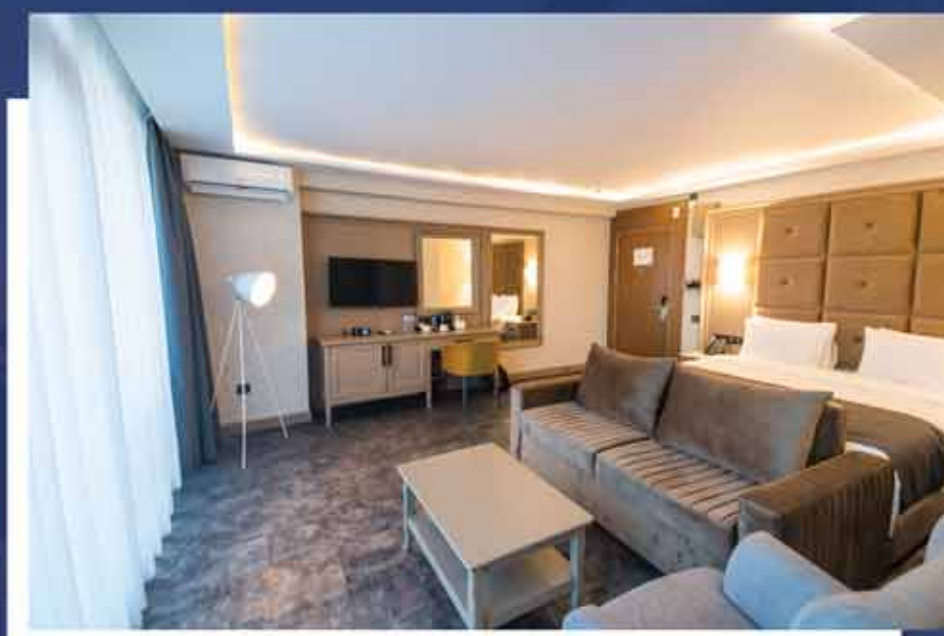
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