



FOCUS ON GEORGIA'S EU CANDIDACY

Going to print one day before the decision, we look at what was said and done leading up to the momentous decision for Georgia's future

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Agriculture Innovation Mission for Climate More Than Doubles Investments to \$17B, Partners to 600+, and Innovation Sprints to 78 at COP28

COMPILED BY KATIE RUTH DAVIES

The Agriculture Innovation Mission for Climate (AIM), a global initiative spearheaded by the United Arab Emirates and the United States, this week announced more than doubling of investments, partners, and Innovation Sprints in transformative climate-smart agriculture and food systems innovation, at the 28th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28).

With the support of over 600 government and non-government partners, AIM for Climate announced an increased investment of more than \$17 billion, up from \$8 billion at COP27. The increased investment comprises over \$12 billion from Government Partners, with contributions from Australia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Denmark, the Dominican Republic, the European Commission, Finland,

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BONDS		Price	w/w	m/m	COMMODITIES		Price	w/w	m/m
GRAIL 07/28	88.01 (YTM 7.16%)	+0.4%	+3.0%		Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	73.24	-5.1%	-10.1%	
SILNET 01/27	99.18 (YTM 8.67%)	+0.2%	+0.5%		Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	1,979.54	-2.0%	+2.0%	
TBC 06/24	99.43 (YTM 6.89%)	+0.0%	+0.3%						
STOCKS		Price	w/w	m/m	CURRENCIES		Price	w/w	m/m
Bank of Georgia (BGE LN)	GBP 33.95	-0.7%	-0.0%		GEL / USD	2,6700	-0.6%	-0.8%	
Georgia Capital (CGEO LN)	GBP 9.86	-3.3%	-2.2%		GEL / EUR	2,8803	-0.7%	+0.1%	
TBC Bank Group (TBCG LN)	GBP 27.90	+1.6%	+2.2%		GEL / GBP	3,3535	-0.9%	+1.9%	
					GEL / CHF	3,0457	-0.7%	+2.1%	
					GEL / RUB	0,0296	+1.7%	+2.7%	
					GEL / TRY	0,0919	-1.0%	-2.3%	
					GEL / AZN	1,5728	-0.4%	-0.6%	
					GEL / AMD	0,0066	-0.7%	-1.2%	
					GEL / UAH	0,0721	-1.4%	-3.4%	
					EUR / USD	0,9264	+0.0%	-0.0%	
					GBP / USD	0,7960	+0.3%	-2.7%	
					CHF / USD	0,8753	+0.0%	-3.0%	
					RUB / USD	90,2730	-2.2%	-2.2%	
					TRY / USD	29,0289	+0.3%	+1.6%	
					AZN / USD	1,6990	-	-0.0%	
					AMD / USD	402,8500	-0.1%	+0.4%	

Ukraine Latest: Kyiv Attacked; Russia Slams Zelensky, Saying 'Everyone is Tired of the Beggar from Kyiv'



Medics carry a wounded person after an apartment building was damaged during a Russian missile strike in Kyiv. Photo by Gleb Garanich/Reuters

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

Over 50 people have been injured after Russia targeted the Ukrainian capital Kyiv with ballistic missiles overnight, city officials said Wednesday.

A hospital, school, kindergarten, morgue and residential buildings were damaged in the attack. Kyiv's Mayor Vitali Klitschko said on Telegram, with the latest update stating that 53 people were injured. Twenty of them, including two children, were hospitalized as a result of the strikes.

The strike on the capital comes a day after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was in Washington Tuesday to meet President Joe Biden and US lawmakers in a bid to secure a large tranche of additional emergency funding, amid discontent among some Republicans over continuing aid.

Biden and Ukraine's other allies have warned that a cessation in aid could lead to a victory for Moscow, but time is running out for a deal in the Senate this week. Zelensky said of the meeting in Washington that positive signs from lawmakers did not equal a positive result.

"I said exactly what I wanted to say. I

feel support from President Biden's administration, I also felt it from senators today - we talked about it. And we talked with the speaker. All these signals were there. They were more than positive. But we know that there are words, and there is a concrete result. We will wait for a better result," he said.

RUSSIA SLAMS ZELENSKY, SAYING 'EVERYONE IS TIRED OF THE BEGGAR FROM KYIV'

Russia's ambassador to the US slammed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's trip to the US this week, stating that "everyone is tired of the beggar from Kyiv."

"Zelensky's trip turned out to be empty," Ambassador Anatoly Antonov said on the Russian Embassy's Telegram channel.

"It was not possible to convince them that Ukraine is more important than the security of the United States. Everyone is tired of the beggar from Kyiv," Antonov claimed.

The US also announced on Tuesday further, sweeping sanctions on more than 250 individuals and entities accused of helping Russia to evade sanctions imposed on it following its invasion of Ukraine. It also announced a new package of weapons and equipment for Kyiv.

Antonov said the measures would not work, and would not help Ukraine, saying that "restrictions and supplies of military products will not affect Russia's foreign policy priorities."

"The anti-Russian steps announced today - new sanctions and another shipment of weapons - are nothing more than an attempt to put a good face on a bad game. Nothing will help

Zelensky," he added.

"The Americans risk getting even more bogged down in the quagmire of the Ukrainian conflict," he said.

RUSSIA BOMBS ODESA - CHILDREN AMONG THE INJURED

Russian forces bombed the Odesa region, which resulted in destruction - rescuers are working on the spot, Ukrainian media reports, based on the State Emergency Situations Service.

Reportedly, as a result of the attack, a fire broke out and 11 nearby buildings were damaged. 11 people, including 3 children, were injured. The attack on Odesa was carried out using drones, and the air alert in the district lasted for more than 6 hours.

GERMANY TO MAINTAIN SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE DESPITE BUDGET PRESSURES

Germany will continue to support Ukraine for as long as necessary despite adjustments and cuts to its budget, Chancellor Olaf Scholz said at a press conference on Wednesday.

This includes weapon deliveries, financial support for Ukraine's budget and assistance for Ukrainian refugees in Germany, Scholz explained.

If the situation in Ukraine changes, "we will have to react," which could include requesting an emergency exception for Germany's budget, he said. This would allow Germany to expand its monetary support for Ukraine.

Finance Minister Christian Lindner said 8 billion euros (\$8.6 billion) was currently allocated for "direct, bilateral support for Ukraine" in 2024.

SUPPORT UKRAINE FOR 'AS LONG AS IT TAKES,' EU CHIEF URGES BLOC

The European Union's chief executive called on Wednesday for the bloc to support Ukraine as long as it takes, her remarks ahead of a key European leaders' summit standing in sharp contrast to Hungary's criticism of giving more aid to Kyiv.

Hungary is opposed to granting Ukraine more financial aid and has threatened to veto plans to advance Kyiv's EU membership bid at a summit of the bloc's leaders in Brussels on Thursday and Friday.

"As the war drags on, we must prove what it means to support Ukraine for as long as it takes," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen told the European Parliament ahead of the leaders' summit.

Her Commission has proposed that the summit takes a decision this week to start EU membership talks with Ukraine once it meets the four outstanding conditions set out previously to advance Kyiv's EU hopes. The Brussels EU executive suggested that could happen in March.

Von der Leyen said on Wednesday the laws Ukraine passed last week, including on national minorities, an issue raised by Hungary, cleared three of the remaining tasks, meaning that only one was missing: a new lobbying law to rein in oligarchs.

While EU officials and Budapest say they may work around Hungary's opposition to a proposal to give Ukraine 50 billion euros (\$54 billion) in economic aid through 2027, advancing Ukraine's European aspirations requires unanimous backing of all the bloc's 27 states.

Aslan Bzhania: The West Wants Our Capital to Be Not in Sokhumi, But in Tbilisi



Aslan Bzhania, the so-called "president" of occupied Abkhazia, claimed that the West, in the form of the United States and European countries, does not want to see Abkhazia as part of the world, Russian media reports.

"They want our capital to be not in Sokhumi, but in Tbilisi, and they are working systematically to make it happen. They need this in order to show the world the insignificance of recognition of our sovereignty by the Russian Federation, as well as to show Georgia and other countries of the region that the key to solving problems is in their pocket. They are doing everything to prevent any development in Abkhazia," Bzhania said.

He claimed that Abkhazia should strive to become a part of the world's different architecture, the new security system, which is built on "mutual respect, recognition of sovereignty and integration with allies".

"That's why we are with Russia! For this reason, we are focused on building such a relationship with it. Abkhazia turned out to be part of the global crisis

together with Russia. All of Europe was plunged into this conflict. Manpower reserves, property reserves and the wealth of European countries are being wasted and have already been wasted, and the special military operation in Ukraine has entered the final phase of the decisive conflict. I think there is no need to explain that the result of the bloody tragedy that happened there is not far away," said Bzhania.

After the Russo-Georgian War, on 26 August 2008, the Russian President Dmitry Medvedev signed decrees recognizing the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as sovereign states. The Georgian parliament unanimously passed a resolution on 28 August 2008 formally declaring Abkhazia and South Ossetia Russian-occupied territories, and naming the Russian troops there "occupying forces." Russia established diplomatic relations with both Abkhazia and South Ossetia and Russian troops were placed in both. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that a military presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia was necessary "to prevent Georgia from regaining control."

Tbilisi: "European City" to Be 2024 New Year Slogan

"Tbilisi - European City" will be the slogan of the 2024 New Year festive activities, which will commence with the main New Year Tree lighting celebration on Rustaveli Avenue at 8pm on December 15 and continue until January 7, said Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze at the municipal government meeting.

Kaladze elaborated on other activities planned for the holidays. He said the New Year village would open on December 16 in Orbeliani Square to host various attractions for children, performances, concerts and a Christmas Market.

Mayor Kaladze invited everybody to attend the festive events.

"I assure you that our capital will be very beautiful this holiday," he said.



CNN: Georgia Proudly Holds the Title of the Birthplace of Wine

CNN published an article about Georgian wine titled "The Story of Georgian Wine - Marked by 8000 years of continuous vintage."

The article reads that "Georgia proudly

holds the title of the birthplace of wine. Grounded by 8000-year-old foundations, contemporary Georgian winemaking is sustained by a triumvirate of elements: clay, culture, and connection.

"The Georgian terrain, gifted with a

temperate climate conducive to vine cultivation, has become home to over 525 indigenous grape varieties. The famed Alazani River Valley, framed against the backdrop of the Caucasus Mountains, is a winemaking haven, with its combination of well-drained, mineral-rich soils and high altitude contributing to the distinctive flavours and aromas typical of Georgian wines," reads the article.

The article says that the country's strategic location facilitated trade connections with Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, enabling its wine to travel far and wide.

"And with Qveri now designated a UNESCO National Monument of Intangible Cultural Heritage, Georgia's ancient winemaking practices continue to have global appeal," it says.

The article also talks about Georgian cuisine, wine festivals and wine tours in Georgia, which attract both Georgian residents and tourists alike.



Agriculture Innovation Mission for Climate More Than Doubles Investments to \$17B, Partners to 600+, and Innovation Sprints to 78 at COP28

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Germany, Guatemala, Honduras, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Lithuania, Mexico, Morocco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Romania, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine, United States, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, Uruguay, and Vietnam, and over \$5 billion investment from Innovation Sprints.

AIM for Climate introduced 27 Innovation Sprints, initiatives led and self-funded by partners to achieve expedited results in agricultural and food systems innovation. There are now 78 Innovation Sprints in total, more than double what was announced at COP27, aligned with one or more of AIM for Climate's Innovation Sprint focal areas: Smallholder Farmers in Low- and Middle-Income Countries; Emerging Technologies; Agroecological Research; and Methane Reduction.

The investments in the AIM for Climate initiative are enabled and supported by a coalition that has more than doubled in partners to over 600. This diverse group includes governments, businesses, academia, non-profits, think tanks, and more.

The new investments, partners, and Innovation Sprint announcements were made by AIM for Climate co-leads US Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack and UAE Minister of Climate Change & Environment, Her Excellency Mariam bint Mohammed Almheiri, at the UAE Pavilion at COP28. These announcements underpin AIM for Climate's progress in significantly increasing investment in and other support for climate-smart agriculture and food systems innovation over the period of 2021 to 2025.

Dignitaries at the event emphasized the urgent need for innovative approaches in agriculture and food systems to con-

front the climate crisis. Additionally, they highlighted the importance of investing in climate-smart agriculture and food systems, demonstrating how AIM for Climate partners and Innovation Sprints are driving innovation through new investments.

Through these collaborative efforts, AIM for Climate demonstrates a commitment to developing sustainable and resilient agricultural practices to address climate change and global hunger.

The remarks at the event reflected the ongoing discussions at COP28, revolving around the intersection of climate change, food systems, and agricultural innovation.

"We are witnessing tremendous progress in transforming the global food and agricultural systems at COP28, which has placed the theme at the heart of the Presidency agenda," Her Excellency Mariam bint Mohammed Almheiri said. "The world has rallied together for the implementation of the 'COP28 UAE Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture, Resilient Food Systems, and Climate Action,' with 134 nations endorsing it, in addition to support gained from non-state partners. The significant traction gained by AIM for Climate is another step in promoting climate-smart agriculture, driven by innovation and advanced technology, which is critical to strengthening productivity and building sectoral resilience."

"As we convene at COP28, I am pleased to announce our new investments and partnerships under the AIM for Climate initiative," US Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack said. "Together with the UAE and our global partners, we are dedicated to meeting our climate goals, enhancing food security, and building a sustainable future for our planet. This partnership embodies our shared commitment to accelerating investments in transformative food systems and climate-



smart agricultural innovations, and we look forward to working with everyone on the road to COP30. Our joint efforts are not just about climate-smart agricultural advancements, but about nurturing ambition, catalyzing action, and fostering hope towards a more sustainable, resilient, and prosperous world for all."

AIM for Climate was launched by the President of the United States at the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26). AIM for Climate recognizes the wide range of participants necessary to achieve its goal and seeks to draw on diverse knowledge, experiences, and cultures.

27 Agriculture Innovation Mission for Climate (AIM) Innovation Sprints were announced at COP28:

COP28 ACTION AGENDA ON REGENERATIVE LANDSCAPES

The COP28 Action Agenda on Regen-

erative Landscapes is co-chaired by COP28, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), and Boston Consulting Group and supported by the UN High-Level Climate Champions. With a \$500 million investment, the partnership aggregates, accelerates, and amplifies existing efforts and new commitments from top food and agriculture players to transition large agricultural landscapes to regenerative agriculture by 2030. This initiative aims to translate commitments into tangible action and projects, benefiting people, climate, and nature.

TRANSFORMATIVE AGRI-FOOD PROCESSING UNIT IN ONICHA-UGBO, DELTA STATE, NIGERIA

The development of a ground-breaking \$500 million Agri-Food Processing Unit in Onicha-Ugbo, Delta State, Nigeria, promises to revolutionize food manufacturing, empowering local farmers,

fostering self-sufficiency, and elevating living standards. This transformative initiative will instill confidence in farmers to expand cultivation, secure financing, and transition from subsistence to commercial sales. The unit is poised to significantly transform the agricultural landscape, driving economic progress, and catalyzing positive change in the region's socio-economic fabric.

SCALING SUSTAINABLE SUPPLY CHAINS

ADM is powering sustainability across the industries in which we participate. With a total investment of \$350.4 million, ADM's efforts span their business and value chain, and include enrolling 4 million acres of regenerative agriculture by 2025; investing broadly in fermentation technology that powers new plant-based products; a \$350 million investment in feedstock for renewable diesel; and \$400,000 in support for the Lifesaving Education and Assistance to Farmers (LEAF) Program in Kenya.

MICROBES FOR ENHANCING VOLUME AND STABILITY OF SOIL CARBON

By harnessing the power of microbes, Loam Bio unlocks the opportunity for gigatonne scale carbon removal from the atmosphere, while increasing soil health and productivity in agriculture. \$105 million has been committed to catalyze the market for high quality, robust carbon removal and sequestration in broadacre cropping soils. By 2025, this will be deployed into upscaled manufacturing capacity, continued product development and R&D to launch products for new crop types and microbes, as well as farmer education and extension activities to drive adoption of the technology around the globe.

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Putting a Foot on the Doorstep of Europe

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

In 1920, the free and independent Sakartvelo strived for membership in the League of Nations, but our newly born democracy was not admitted to the then most prestigious international body due to the lack of supporting votes. This was a case that saw Georgia aspiring to membership of a good union of nations, but being rejected in cold blood. Right after this, in 1921, the beaten Democratic Republic of Georgia loathed to become the part of the USSR, but was forced to do so, pulled inexorably into the despised caboodle called the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. It's plainly heartbreaking: when you want it, you get an axe, and when you hate it, they drag you in.

It took Georgia almost 70 years to break away from the tentacles of the communist soviet regime and breathe in once again the fresh air of national freedom and independence, right after which the idea was born that Georgia should become a member of NATO. It has yet to happen, although the dream of joining the ranks of free, powerful and prosperous European nations has never faded. The possibility of membership is currently in abeyance, especially as a consequence of the war in Ukraine, but Georgia is still poised to become a member of the Alliance in the wake of the widely popular



Pro-EU march attended by the President of Georgian on December 9. Photo by Katie Ruth Davies/GT

eastern expansion of the Organization. Meanwhile the list of Georgia's memberships in some of the most prominent international organizations, among them the UN, IMF and OSCE, has been happily augmented and, finally, we are at the doorstep of the famous European Union.

Well, it has taken us a little longer than we had expected it would, but better late than never, as the saying goes. What was supposed to happen is happening right now, the anticipated result looming on

the horizon this week; the announcement due just a day after this newspaper goes to print. It no longer makes sense to continue discussing all the pros and cons that were the subject of exacerbated discourse among various political forces. We are all tired of those interminable recriminations, concerning who did (or didn't do) what to achieve the great goal. The only thing that really matters now is that this nation emerges a winner out of the entire din and bustle.

Nothing was easy in the preliminary

EU-Georgian formal intercourse, which was to turn into a love-affair and warranted marriage. In the compounded process, demands were to be met, duties to be fulfilled, and areas to be covered, among those, democracy, rule of law, judicial reform and fundamental rights as the most important priorities. Naturally, the nation, having been boiling in the authoritarian socialist political broth for quite a while, needed some time and stamina to pull itself together and face the new democratic capitalist reality with

dignity and self-control. To become a well-thought-of member of the totally novel socio-political and economic bunch is a huge deal, one which necessitates numerous changes within and beyond the extant body of rules, precepts, manners, dogmas and regulations.

The EU membership candidacy justifies the popular adage that being a Georgian means being a European: it fortifies the chance of our westernization and reveals some light at the end of our geopolitical tunnel. What else can we do? After all, it's only 30 odd years that Georgia has nursed this cherished idea of marrying into the western family of nations. Let's now live up to the expectations of our future household! Could Sakartvelo survive without the much-talked-and-thought-about status of candidacy of the Union? Probably! But we are not talking just about survival: The whole pepped and elevated discourse is about the guarantees of our national security, about the inviolability of our state borders, about a fitting environment for our spirituality, about the survival of our indigenous cultural values, about the winsome governance of our political life and our economic efficiency. There are both the sense and promise in our hearts and minds that all of this will be taken better care of in closeness to and in cooperation with the West. This is exactly why we are so enthusiastically congratulating each other with what has now become a big word - Candidacy.

EU Ministers Approve Enlargement Conclusions ahead of the European Council



to renewable energy and energy efficiency, notably with assistance from the Moldova support package," the Council's conclusions said.

GEORGIA

The Council took "good note of the genuine aspirations of the overwhelming majority of Georgian people towards EU membership". It welcomed the overall good legislative framework, institutional setup and vibrant civil society, including watchdog organizations.

At the same time, the Council calls on Georgia to demonstrate a clear commitment to EU values, continue to progress on the reform agenda and fulfil the conditions specified by the Commission "inclusively, meaningfully and irreversibly", in order to further advance towards future EU membership.

The Council acknowledged in particular the overall progress on public administration reform, public procurement and economic reforms. It also welcomed the overall preparation of Georgia to assume the obligations of membership and encouraged a sustained level of alignment with EU acquis and standards, further deepening the sectoral cooperation with the EU, on the basis of enhanced implementation of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. It also encouraged Georgia to continue fulfilling the visa liberalization benchmarks.

The Council called on all political actors in Georgia to demonstrate constructive cooperation and dialogue, overcome polarization, and refrain from actions that could further deepen the political tensions and hamper the country's democratic institutions and reform agenda.

The Council reiterates that the proper functioning of democratic institutions, and reforms related to justice and the rule of law, should remain a priority for the country. It also reiterates that Georgia needs to enable the full respect for fundamental rights, including freedom and pluralism of the media, the right to freedom of opinion, assembly and expression, and protection of LGBTI persons from intimidation as well as violence and discrimination.

On 12 December, the Council of the European Union approved conclusions on enlargement for the six Western Balkans partners, Türkiye and – for the first time – Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia.

In the conclusions, the Council says that it took note of the European Commission's reports of 8 November 2023 on Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia and its recommendations, and looks forward to the forthcoming discussion of the European Council on this matter on 14-15 December, in Brussels.

UKRAINE

The Council commended the substantial progress that Ukraine has made towards meeting the objectives underpinning its candidate status, despite the fact that

Ukraine is under attack.

The Council welcomed Ukraine's progress achieved in comprehensive and consistent implementation of rule of law and judicial and public administration reforms, and encouraged Ukraine to continue decisively on this path, which remain vital for strengthening Ukraine's resilience and for further progress in the enlargement process.

The Council welcomed that the legislative and institutional framework on fundamental rights is in place and the alignment of Ukraine's media legislation with the EU audio-visual media services acquis.

Concerning the fight against corruption, the Council welcomed progress in ensuring the independent and effective functioning of the anti-corruption institutions.

"Ukraine should continue to further strengthen its anti-corruption institutions and measures, and further improve its track record on investigations and convictions, including high-level corruption cases," the conclusions said.

MOLDOVA

The Council commended the substantial progress that Moldova has made towards meeting the objectives underpinning its candidate status, in the face of significant challenges arising from Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and hybrid actions against Moldova itself.

The Council acknowledged Moldova's clear commitment to its reform process and decisive steps taken, and underlined the importance of maintaining sustainable and tangible reform progress, notably in the areas of the rule of law, justice

and fundamental rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities.

The Council encouraged Moldova to continue advancing on comprehensive justice reform, including the vetting process, as well as the fight against corruption, with a focus on strengthening relevant institutions and building further a solid track record of investigations and convictions, including high-level corruption cases. The Council welcomed Moldova's systematic approach to delogarchization and encouraged it to continue the implementation of the action plan.

The Council commended Moldova's efforts to enhance its energy security and independence of supply. "Moldova needs to further increase its generating capacity and enhance measures related

"A Watershed Moment" - Politicians, Experts Hopeful for Positive Decision on Georgia's EU Candidacy



BY ANA DUMBADZE (ON 14/12, PRIOR TO THE EU'S DECISION ON GEORGIA'S CANDIDACY)

December 15 marks a watershed moment in the modern history of Georgia – on this day, the EU is expected to announce its official decision regarding giving the country EU candidate status.

The importance of this decision for the country's economy and brighter future lies in the fact that the EU is Georgia's largest trading partner, and provides on average over €100 million to Georgia annually in technical and financial assistance.

Additionally, the EU remains firmly committed to its policy of supporting Georgia's territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, as well as engagement with the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, in support of longer-term conflict resolution. Since 2008, an EU Monitoring Mission has operated in the vicinity of the administrative boundary lines.

In the 2023 Enlargement Package, the European Commission recommended opening accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova, and to grant candidate status to Georgia, on the understanding that Georgia will then take certain steps.

The "Georgian Dream" government states that if Georgia receives the status, it will be primarily thanks to their work, while many experts and representatives of EU countries name the enthusiasm and will of the people and geopolitics as the key in this regard. People's strong will towards EU integration was once again clearly confirmed during the rally supporting European integration (July 2023) and rallies opposing the adoption of "Russian Law" (March 2023) in Tbilisi.

Overall, Georgian and foreign politicians, public figures and experts are optimistic regarding the EU decision, claiming that the country and its people deserve the candidate status, and being a part of the European family is the common will of the Georgian people.

The recent NDI survey published on December 11, reveals that Georgian citizens are bound together by a shared commitment to European and Euro-Atlantic integration. The new survey, which was conducted before the European Commission's November 8th decision, reaffirms the unwavering dedication

of the Georgian people to European integration, with an impressive 79% expressing support for EU membership. Over the last year, public opinion trends show a significant increase in favor of political and economic cooperation with the EU.

Before the final decision is announced, predictions regarding candidacy looked pretty optimistic:

Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili on Wednesday expressed hope the European Council's decision would be "positive" not only on granting Georgia the European Union membership candidate status but on opening accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova.

In her address at the closing event of the campaign Our Voice to Europe, which called on European leaders to grant Georgia the EU status, Zurbishvili noted the EU candidacy for Georgia would be the "beginning of a new life - entering the European family".

The President launched a signature campaign titled Our Voice to Europe on November 8, following the European Commission's recommendation to the European Council to grant the country the EU candidate status.

The petition was signed by more than 45,000 citizens, including currently imprisoned former President Mikheil Saakashvili and the representatives of the UNM party.

Zurbishvili highlighted that "any setback" on Georgia's EU path would be "a step forward" for Russia, adding decisions regarding Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova would be "a very serious message from the EU amid Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine."

"Any setback, any step back, is a step forward for Russia. This is the message that I want to send to our European friends, as well as to our American friends, because their decisions also regarding the war in Ukraine these days will send a very serious message. None of us - neither we here, nor you where you are - have the right to concede anything to Russia today. This is a crossroad. Georgia has gone through many stages to get here. This path did not start today, or yesterday, or on November 8, nor when we were given European Perspective last year: It started when we entered the OSCE with Zurab Zhvania's [late former Georgia's PM] famous speech at the Council's meeting [where Zhvania said 'I am Georgian, therefore I am European'];" President Zurbishvili noted.

The good news is that Georgia is advancing towards membership, stated the EU High Representative for Foreign Policy and Security, Joseph Borrell.

"Enlargement is our most important foreign policy. As a foreign policy official, enlargement is a precious, fundamental issue for me. We have had obligations to many people for a very long time, and we must hurry and fulfill them. What we have to do is to keep our promises, avoid disappointment and fulfill the expectations that have been created. Georgia is doing well. So far, all the analyses and proposals from the Commission have been very positive. We encourage Georgia to continue on this path," the EU High Representative declared.

Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili on Wednesday addressed Charles Michel, the European Council President,



Borrell: We have had obligations to many people for a very long time, and we must hurry and fulfill them

Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the European Commission, Pedro Sánchez, the Spanish PM whose country chairs the Council of the EU, and leaders of the bloc's member states to back his country's EU candidacy in a "watershed moment" for its integration this week.

Expressing his "sincere gratitude" to the officials for supporting Georgia's EU aspirations, the PM in a letter highlighted the June 2022 decision by the European Council to grant his country European Perspective had opened an "entirely new chapter" in relations with the bloc.

Expressing his "firm belief" that the EU would continue standing by Georgia by making "another historic decision" to grant the country candidate status at the end of this week, Garibashvili highlighted the move would put Georgia on an "irreversible track" towards accession negotiations to become a full-fledged member of the EU.

"This is a watershed moment for Georgia's European future, and equally for the credibility of the EU's enlargement policy as a geostrategic investment in peace, stability, and prosperity in the whole of Europe," he noted.

"We have been hearing for a long time that the decision would be merit-based. The merit is obvious, and there is no backdrop but to expect only a positive decision," said Georgian Parliament Speaker Shalva Papuashvili, emphasizing that Georgia deserves EU candidate status.

"The internal debate between different EU countries does not pose any obstacle to making a merit-based rather than out-of-spite decision regarding Georgia, i.e. when someone does not support something, the others get back at it by not supporting Georgia's EU candidate status. The Georgian population expects the decision to be fair and no reoccurrence of the unfairness that happened last year," he said.

EU Ambassador to Georgia, Pawel Herczynski, addressed the Georgian nation before the announcement of the decision on December 15: "Your voice is

clearly heard in Brussels. Hopefully, it will be heard in the 27 capitals of the EU. I hope that our member states will follow the recommendation of the European Commission. As we all know, such historical decisions in the European Union require unity and consensus," he declared.

US Ambassador to Georgia Robin L. Dunnigan said she was also "optimistic" about the December 15 decision.

"I'm very optimistic and hopeful that the vote in mid-December will be positive. Ultimately, it's the Council's decision, but I hope it's positive. It is an important step forward in integration with the EU. It's also an important step forward regarding Georgia's NATO aspirations," she noted.

Among the experts, Vano Chkhikvadze, Head of the Open Society Foundation's European integration program, based on his own sources, said he was almost 100% sure that the decision regarding Georgia would be positive.

"A positive answer will come due to the great support of the Georgian people for the EU. If not for the people's protest, the government would not have applied for membership [in March 2022], and if it were not for the people's protest, the Georgian government would have passed the "Russian Law" [the Foreign Agents of Influence Law], which would have closed the way for European integration," he claims.

Among other factors, he also mentions the EU's geopolitical interest and desire not to disintegrate the "Association Trio" of Ukraine-Moldova-Georgia. "All this affects the final decision of the European Commission," Chkhikvadze said.

Former member of the Georgian Dream coalition, former politician, Davit Zurbishvili, said that if the decision towards Georgia is positive, the credit will be given in this order:

- To the public support for European integration - "which is very strong and visible and this is an important factor";
- To President Salome Zurbishvili - "Her merit is real on this path and people understand it well";
- To the government.

Zurbishvili refers to the opposition "as more or less expressing the moods of the people" in the first item of this list.

Since the March rallies related to the so-called Law on Agents, international partners drew a line between the authorities and the people of Georgia, claiming that "the Georgian people deserve to receive the status" regardless of any un-EU-esque errors made or spoken by the ruling party. Now, the EU decision is expected to prove whether the efforts and dedication of the Georgian people has been rightfully appreciated, and, as PM Garibashvili noted, whether the EU is truly committed to making good on its promises for peace, stability, and prosperity for the whole of Europe.



Adults With Disabilities Under State Care Will Now Live in Family-type Homes



BY NINA KOPALESHVILI

The social protection sector of Georgia meets the year 2024 with important news – within the framework of the initiative carried out with the help of the Government of the Czech Republic, persons with disabilities living in large boarding houses in Dusheti and Martkopi municipalities will move to new, family-type homes. This support is part of the large-scale assistance of the Czech Development Agency, which aimed to promote the start of independent living of the beneficiaries under state care and, by working on relevant legislative initiatives, to support the Government of Georgia in the process of deinstitutionalization.

ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES WILL LIVE IN A NEW ENVIRONMENT

Even though the deinstitutionalization process for adults with disabilities in Georgia began in 2010-2011, due to its

complexity, the process is still ongoing. In 2020, at the initiative of the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia and the Agency for State Care and Assistance for the Victims of Human Trafficking, within the framework of a project funded by the Czech Development Agency, Caritas Czech Republic developed a 2023-2030 strategy and action plan for independent living and deinstitutionalization of persons with disabilities which were approved accordingly by the Ministry in 2023.

Experts in the field in close cooperation with their Czech counterparts, and the State Care Agency of Georgia and the Ministry of Health of Georgia, defined the main work directions, assessed the individual needs of the beneficiaries with a complex approach, and prepared the relevant standards. As a result, some of the beneficiaries, who until now lived in the boarding houses in Dusheti and Martkopi, moved to new family-type homes, where each of them now benefits from community-based services.

"In Georgia, the process of deinstitutionalization of large boarding houses and developing appropriate alternative care services has been successfully underway for several years. This process is in its final phase, and the few remaining boarding houses are going through the process of deinstitutionalization. Notably, new alternative care support services have been created, where the beneficiaries of the mentioned boarding houses can continue their lives in an independent environment, according to their interests and wishes," – notes Tamar Kurtanidze, Head of the Department of Social Protection, IDPs and Labor Policy, Ministry of Health of Georgia.

IMPORTANCE OF THE DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

Maguli Shaghashvili, Caritas Czech Republic's project expert, tells us that the most crucial part of Caritas Czech Republic's vision was that the work at the first stage started not with documents but with an assessment of the people living in Dusheti and Martkopi boarding houses – "we had to study their interests, needs, attitudes, and wishes."

At the initial stage of the project, a multidisciplinary team consisting of psychologists, occupational therapists, social workers, doctors, and psychiatrists was formed. This team worked both with the beneficiaries and with the boarding house staff.

"It was important to understand the attitude of persons with disabilities regarding the change of residence and their respective fears. Unfortunately, many of them ended up in a boarding house right from the maternity home, not because of the family's economic problems but because of the stigma in society. That is why it would be a big mistake not to look at the process of deinstitutionalization from their perspective. This evaluation showed us how

to set up the service properly."

Initially, Caritas Czech Republic started working on the deinstitutionalization strategy and action plan with the Ministry of Health of Georgia and the State Care Agency of Georgia. Further discussions with the community of persons with disability and service provider organizations continued. As a result of this cooperation, the parties have established a strategy that primarily considers the prevention of institutionalization – what type of support a child, an adult, and their families need in order not to be at risk of institutionalization.

"That's why we worked with the state to create a deinstitutionalization prevention mechanism that combines local and central government resources. Supportive services are important for prevention. In this regard, the service of a personal assistant, the standards of which have already been approved by the state, is also essential," – says Maguli Shaghashvili.

IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY-TYPE HOMES FOR ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES

At this stage, there is one type of alternative housing for adults with disabilities – small family-type services, in which 5-6 people live. When more people and additional staff are crowded into these types of homes, a structured environment fosters the establishment of institutional care. With this in mind, Caritas Czech Republic with the financial aid of the Czech Development Agency, procured, rehabilitated, and handed over six family-type houses to the State Care Agency to transfer adults with disabilities living in the large boarding houses of Dusheti and Martkopi.

"Deinstitutionalization of large boarding houses is a complex process that requires a lot of effort from all involved parties. The mentioned is not just a physical transfer of institutionalized beneficiaries from large housing to alter-

native services but a major social transformation, meaning starting a new life and realizing the rights of persons with disabilities, and also systemic changes. To complete this process, to ensure sustainability and irreversibility, it is necessary to strengthen the institutionalization prevention mechanism and provision of alternative and supportive services," – says Maguli Shaghashvili.

With the support of the Government of the Czech Republic, Caritas Czech Republic has been working for many years to protect the rights of persons with disabilities and provide them with appropriate services. Since 2020, we have been implementing a large-scale initiative within the framework of which we have been supporting the Government of Georgia in the process of deinstitutionalization. The mentioned envisaged the development of appropriate legislation and the provision of family-type homes and services for persons with disabilities under state care.

"Since 2020, Czechia has been supporting the Government of Georgia through our partner Caritas Czech Republic to establish a new national system of alternative social care for adults with disabilities. The main objective was to create conditions for transforming services from large boarding institutions to more convenient and appropriate family-based premises for persons with disabilities. I know that the first clients were already transferred from large institutions, and they are pleased as far as I know. I do hope that the quality of their lives will improve significantly," – says Jana Zelingerova, the Head of the Development Cooperation, Embassy of the Czech Republic in Georgia.

This material was prepared as part of a project funded by the Official Development Assistance of the Czech Republic and implemented in partnership with the Czech Development Agency and Caritas Czech Republic.

Georgia Meets the Year 2024 with Strengthened Primary Healthcare

For Caritas Czech Republic, the year 2023 has turned out to be particularly important. At the end of the year, along with other essential activities, we summarized the results of the four-year initiative to strengthen primary healthcare in Georgia. As a result of the project, the country now has updated clinical protocols and guidelines, qualified family doctors, and IT solutions supporting family doctors working throughout Georgia.

WHY PRIMARY HEALTHCARE

Primary healthcare is the most important sector of the healthcare system, through which it is possible to prevent diseases, promote public health, and manage acute health problems and chronic illnesses that cause premature mortality.

Caritas Czech Republic has been improving the quality of primary healthcare services in Georgia since 2017, when the Czech and Georgian governments agreed to cooperate to work on primary healthcare reform together.

Considering the mentioned cooperation, within the framework of a four-year initiative carried out with the support of the Czech Development Agency, Caritas Czech Republic and the Ministry of Health of Georgia cooperated in the following areas: improving the quality of primary healthcare services through the development of primary healthcare quality management tools, creating centralized IT systems for primary healthcare management, and updated qualification standards and requirements for primary healthcare personnel.

"The project included such important activities as the establishment of an electronic information system for primary healthcare, as well as relevant training courses, which allowed family doctors throughout the country to be equipped with relevant skills. Both directions are essential because, as you know, primary healthcare reform is underway in the country, and the activities mentioned above laid a foundation for the correct progress of this reform. I hope the project will continue and include not only the

pilot municipalities but also all the regions of Georgia and will lay the foundation for significant success for primary healthcare reform in Georgia." – Gvantsa Gasviani, Head of the Department of Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia

At the end of 2023, Caritas Czech Republic and the Ministry of Health of Georgia summarized the results of the mentioned project, about which we will tell you more in our article below.

UPDATED CLINICAL PROTOCOLS AND GUIDELINES

To correctly manage common diseases in primary healthcare, the latest, evidence-based clinical protocols and guidelines must guide family physicians. Within the framework of the project, Caritas Czech Republic retrained family doctors in Dusheti and Zugdidi municipalities according to updated clinical protocols. They have also provided supportive supervision to fully implement clinical protocols in practice.

As a result, the clinical competences of the medical staff of rural ambulatories and the quality of production of medical documentation improved, the patient registration system was adjusted, medical personnel started to use electronic medical records in a test mode, and the involvement of nurses in the management and prevention of common problems in primary healthcare improved.

Goderdzi Todua has worked as a family doctor in the rural ambulatory of Narazeni village of Zugdidi municipality since 2001. He and his colleagues serve a total of 3,400 patients – children, adolescents and adults:

"Through the training sessions of Caritas Czech Republic, my colleagues and I could devote more time to medical education, get acquainted with the latest information, and improve our qualifications. This help was vital and timely, and I am glad I had the opportunity to be involved in it."

Nato Shengelia, Caritas Czech Republic's project expert says that the project



will play an essential role in strengthening primary healthcare, which is especially relevant in the context of the future planned primary healthcare reform in the country:

"The activities carried out within the framework of the project will contribute to expanding the professional competencies of family doctors and nurses to provide comprehensive services, improve teamwork, correctly assess the patient's condition, and, if necessary, organize a referral. We are glad that during the project, we had the opportunity to interact with medical professionals in urban and rural ambulatories who are motivated to provide high-quality medical care, and we contributed to their knowledge and skills."

INFORMATION SYSTEMS FOR PRIMARY HEALTHCARE

The activities carried out within the framework of the project included the creation and implementation of several centralized electronic systems, the most important of which were the COVID-19 laboratory system (CovidLab) and the two-way integration engines necessary for the exchange of information between medical institutions and laboratories involved in the process of the CovidLab.

The project also created an electronic system for unified queuing, telemedicine, and referral in the healthcare sector – www.booking.moh.gov.ge, which Geor-

gia's population used to make advanced online reservations for vaccination against COVID-19. In addition, using the information systems created within the project and their integration with the state electronic systems made it possible to manage the entire process of laboratory samples and vaccination during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The project also worked on creating and testing a unified medical health record system in the primary healthcare sector, which made it possible to collect medical information and use it with the patient's consent by different doctors for correct diagnosis and treatment planning.

Creating a management information system for primary healthcare facilities and digitising medical records was another vital direction of the project funded by the Czech Development Agency. The electronic system already serves several medical institutions in real-time mode.

It was also piloted in several municipalities, after which the main task was to use it throughout the country and further develop it.

It should be noted that in close cooperation with the Ministry of Health of Georgia, our experts also worked on various legislative documents, the timely approval of which will lead to the complete removal of paper carriers from the health sector and the digitalisation of processes.

Aleksandre Turdziladze, Caritas Czech

Republic project expert notes that the project covered 46 medical institutions, including 142 medical personnel employed in rural areas from Dusheti and Zugdidi municipalities:

"Ultimately, the whole country will benefit from the project, as the results of all components will be handed over to the Ministry of Health of Georgia."

Ekaterine Meskhrikadze, head of Caritas Czech Republic's Georgian Office, notes that carrying out such an important project for our country was a great honor for Caritas Czech Republic's team:

Before the initiative's implementation, the primary healthcare system needed more evidence-based tools and approaches to improve the quality of medical care. With the support of the Czech Republic, the quality of medical services will be ensured, which will be measured by standardized clinical tools and technological solutions introduced exclusively for Georgia."

CARITAS CZECH REPUBLIC SUPPORTS THE HEALTH SECTOR OF GEORGIA

With the support of various donor organizations, Caritas Czech Republic supports the Government of Georgia in implementing healthcare and social protection reforms. Our activities in the healthcare field includes improving the quality of primary healthcare services, supporting the early detection and prevention of oncological diseases, ensuring the quality of maternal and child healthcare services, and developing and implementing IT solutions for managing the primary healthcare system.

This material was prepared as part of a project funded by the Official Development Assistance of the Czech Republic and implemented in partnership with the Czech Development Agency and Caritas Czech Republic.



Agriculture Innovation Mission for Climate More Than Doubles Investments to \$1.7B, Partners to 600+, and Innovation Sprints to 78 at COP28

Continued from page 3

EXPANDING CLIMATE SMART TOOLKIT WITH INNOVATIVE RNA CROP PROTECTION

GreenLight Biosciences is developing and commercializing climate smart biopesticides that are effective, easy to use, and environmentally friendly. GreenLight has invested \$100 million to launch its first series of products by 2028, including a solution to the number one threat to bees, and is advancing exploration into additional segments such as weed control. These efforts promise to protect farmers' yield on over 6 million hectares and improve bee survival up to 70% while respecting biodiversity.

THE VISION FOR ADAPTED CROPS AND SOILS

The Vision for Adapted Crops and Soils (VACS) aims to foster more resilient food systems, with an initial focus on the African continent. VACS seeks to boost agricultural productivity and nutrition by developing diverse, climate-resilient crop varieties and building healthy soils. Through bilateral and private sector partnerships, VACS will mobilize resources for agricultural R&D with both direct and in-kind contributions. VACS has invested \$100 million in new funding.

LOCAL, CIRCULAR ANIMAL FEED AND BIO-FERTILIZER SOLUTION ADDRESSING PLANETARY AND PEOPLE HEALTH AT SCALE IN RWANDA

Increasing sustainable nutrition while delivering a positive environmental impact, Food Systems for the Future and partners will build and operate Africa's first automated insect protein production facility. The Kigali-based facility will upcycle the City's organic waste into a protein-rich feed input as well as a soil-enriching biofertilizer, reducing Rwanda's reliance on both soy-based feed and chemical fertilizer. Consequently, it will support the poultry and aquaculture industry's ability to produce affordable and accessible protein while also reducing CO2 emissions. Supported by proven global technology, local business acumen, and the national Rwanda government, the \$55 million project will come online in 2025.

INVESTING IN PRODUCT PATHWAYS FOR LOW-CARBON BIOFEEDSTOCKS

United Airlines Ventures along with Tallgrass and Green Plains Inc. - Blue Blade Energy will invest up to a combined \$50 million to develop and commercialize a novel sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) technology. They will be finalizing development of this technology over the next two years. If successful, Blue Blade aims to commence construction of a pilot facility in 2024, followed by a full-scale facility that could begin operations by 2028.

SCALING CLIMATE SMART AGRICULTURE WITH CARBON FINANCE

Mati Carbon's mission is to enable climate resilience for smallholder farmers by improving crop productivity and using direct benefits transfer from carbon removal economics. Spreading rock dusts in farm lands removes carbon dioxide by accelerating the natural weathering process and improving crop productivity for smallholder farmers. Mati Carbon is investing \$50 million over 4 years with a focus on developing scientific robust, scalable, and cost effective carbon removal that will benefit the smallholder farmers in the global south.

SCALING-UP INNOVATIVE CLIMATE ADAPTIVE PRACTICES AND TECHNOLOGIES FOR SMALLHOLDERS IN BANGLADESH

BRAC and the Syngenta Foundation for Sustainable Agriculture aim to forge a Smallholder Action Coalition for Climate Adaptation (SACCA). A total of \$50 million will be invested from 2024-2028 to



implement large-scale climate action programs. The initial project in Bangladesh plans to support one million smallholders (>35% women) to diversify their farms and adopt climate-smart innovations.

UNLOCKING FOOD SECURITY IN AFRICA WITH SUSTAINABLE ENERGY SOLUTIONS

GENESIS aims to pioneer the wide-scale deployment of sustainable, efficient, and scalable solar-powered drip irrigation and solar thermal systems to empower local farmers and enhance maize production in Nigeria and decarbonize dairy production in Zambia. GENESIS plans to invest at least \$50 million for the next two years, through 2025, for these solutions across Zambia and Nigeria. As part of the program, training will be provided on efficient agricultural practices, solar panel installation, and operational system management with a particular focus on women empowerment.

WATER AND ENERGY FOR FOOD MENA REGIONAL INNOVATION HUB

Water and Energy for Food (WE4F) in the MENA region provides financial support, technical assistance, and investment facilitation to scale Small to Medium Size Enterprises (SMEs) that impact all sectors of the nexus (food, water, energy). Up to 50 innovators are supported with up to \$250,000 each to reach 750,000 smallholder farmers and end-users, of which 25% are women. Until mid-2025, WE4F seeks to leverage and expand upon the \$33 million mobilized so far.

ADDRESSING GENDER INEQUALITY THROUGH CLIMATE ACTION IN AGRIFOOD SYSTEMS

The CGIAR and 20 partners are leveraging \$31 million USD over 4 years (2023-2027) to ensure that climate innovations in agrifood systems are designed to work for women and rolled out in ways that address underlying gender inequalities. The Sprint will accomplish this by: 1) testing new climate innovations that address both climate change and gender inequality, 2) promoting more widespread, inclusive uptake of climate solutions, and 3) developing metrics to measure progress towards these goals.

FROM FOOD WASTE TO FOOD ACCESS

The Global FoodBanking Network (GFN) is the only global organization that recovers and redistributes food surplus at scale and engages member food banks in nearly 50 countries. GFN will accelerate food insecurity and hunger reduction through four key mechanisms: mapping and leveraging food loss and waste data, quantifying the environmental benefits of food recovery, scaling technological and logistical solutions to increase food bank capacity, and expanding their policy research to drive food systems change. GFN estimates that with an investment of \$31 million from 2021 through 2025, these combined interventions could reduce food loss and waste by a total of 5%, which corresponds to a reduction of 7.5 million metric tons of CO2e. However, GFN will need scaled viability and investment in the food recovery and redistribution model to achieve these bold and critical goals.

CLOUD TO EDGE CLIMATE SMART AGRICULTURE

Veea and partners are directing \$30 million to climate smart innovation for smallholder farms in Nigeria. This sprint combines the Veea Edge Platform with LoRaWAN sensors to provide "ground truthing" of soil condition, microclimate, and other indicators of crop health. This data is integrated with Tingo Agri-Tech "NWASSA" cloud platform, fusing local with cloud data, and leveraging AI to provide small-holder farmers actionable insight to maximize productivity and carbon capture. It will minimize resource utilization and optimize the supply chain to reduce waste and maximize crop value.

CARBONNOW VSI: PIONEERING SCOPE 3 EMISSION REDUCTION IN FOOD, BEVERAGE, AND FASHION

Locus Agriculture aims to make food and fashion products more sustainable by using non-GMO biological soil inoculants that reduce N2O emissions by over 30%. This method also increases nitrogen use efficiency and yields by over 10%, while building back soil organic carbon stocks by 7.5 mtons CO2e/hectare versus conventional practices. With promising results on more than 120,000 hectares in 2022/2023, Locus and partners are looking to expand to 0.5-1 million hectares abating up to 6 million mtons CO2e. Locus Agriculture has invested over \$8 million with a further \$12 million earmarked for the next two years, for a \$20 million total investment.

GIGATONNE - RAPIDLY, FAIRLY, AND EFFECTIVELY TACKLING THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Gigatonne trains and resources teams worldwide to reduce, remove, and avoid GHG emissions, while providing jobs, food, and energy security to people in the bottom 20% of the socio-economic bracket. Teams develop scalable prototypes in food waste management, zero emissions transport networks, renewable energy, regenerative agriculture, land use, and carbon sequestration. Gigatonne is raising a \$15 million Global Fund with their coalition partners to support the work of teams whose sustainability is bolstered by "Super Credits" which emphasize radical transparency.

INDOOR VERTICAL RECIRCULATING AQUACULTURE SYSTEM SHELLFISH PRODUCTION

Maine Shellfish Developers and the Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Research have spent six years developing a proprietary vertical recirculating aquaculture system and micro-algae feed formulations for on-land oyster cultivation, insulated from runoff, pollution, and climate risks. By combining food-safe industrial waste to produce micro-algae, renewable energy to drive pumps, and a recirculating aquaculture system, this system will be cost effective and net negative in comparison to protein production through poultry, beef, pork, and finfish farming. This sprint is investing \$7.4 million from 2024-2026.

REGENERATING SOIL WITH RUN TIAN

The Run Tian project is a transformative initiative to advance soil health in the Huang-Huai-Hai region of North China,

demonstrating the agronomic and economic viability of reduced or no-till field management. Syngenta Group, The Nature Conservancy, and partners aspire to transition 800,000 hectares of Chinese farmland to sustainable practices by the end of 2023. The sprint commits over \$5.27 million in investment: \$3 million have been invested in the two work streams since 2020, and over \$2 million are planned for further investment through 2025.

ACCESSIBLE DIGITAL MEASUREMENT FOR CLIMATE-SMART AGRICULTURE

Agerpoint Capture is an AI-powered spatial intelligence app for smartphones and tablets that digitally measures and monitors crops and forests. Agerpoint is investing \$5 million to make the app more broadly accessible on lower-cost devices by the end of 2025 and to advance machine learning analytical models. This expansion will further democratize access to digital plant health and growth metrics, particularly for smallholder farmers and landowners, providing better data transparency and traceability for climate-smart agriculture.

AGROSPACE: REVOLUTIONIZING REMOTE SENSING FOR FOOD SECURITY

Enterprise Neurosystem is awarding \$5 million USD of in-kind resources to AgroSpace, the winner of the AIM for Climate Grand Challenge: Leveraging the Power of AI and Machine Learning, to develop the project "Revolutionizing Remote Sensing for Food Security." The

seaweed bloom on the planet, sargassum, from a source of Caribbean methane and ecosystem destruction into an agricultural yield enhancer, an award winning worldwide first seaweed-based cosmetic emulsifier, and a leather alternative. Millions of hectares can be treated, reduce nitrogen use, and avoid methane when sargassum rots. Carbonwave and partners are mobilizing \$4.38 million to develop, demonstrate, and deploy their Sarga Agriscience extract to increase crop yields 4-12% for a 3-15X ROI for farmers.

METHANENOW: TACKLING CH4 EMISSIONS IN RUMINANT LIVESTOCK AND PADDY FIELDS

Locus Agriculture's low-cost non-GMO biologicals cut enteric methane by 20-80% in university trials while showing significant animal health & productivity improvement. This reduction if realized globally is equivalent to 0.5 billion mtons CO2e. The same platform inhibits methanogens and can potentially improve nutrient efficiency in rice. Locus has invested over \$3.5 million in research and development and are looking for co-development/funding partners to finish development and deploy commercially at scale.

FROM RAIN TO GRAIN: CLIMATE INTELLIGENT SOLUTIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE FARMING

This sprint focuses on climate-smart agriculture by reducing food loss, waste, and adapting to climate change. Ignitia will develop a database for AI-driven



prize from members of Enterprise Neurosystem includes a year of Kove Software Defined Memory (Kove:SDMTM), Red Hat RHODS subscriptions, Equinix Bare Metal Infrastructure, AWS Cloud Credits, IBM Cloud Credits, and one-on-one access to the Enterprise Neurosystem experts to provide assistance on their AI, Data Science, Software, and Hardware projects. As a result, AgroSpace developed its first digital agriculture product IrriSmart, which uses satellite data and analyses of weather patterns to measure soil moisture content and water consumption in plants, determining irrigation schedules for farms and regions. Leveraging data from NASA and the European Space Agency, IrriSmart helps farmers maximize their crop yield using minimal water.

SCALING SMALL-SCALE DAIRY FARMER ENTERIC METHANE MITIGATION THROUGH CLIMATE FINANCE

Reducing the methane-intensity of milk is critical to achieving climate change goals and feeding a growing population. This sprint will reduce the methane-intensity of milk in Ethiopia by using climate finance to incentivize dairies to provide methane-reducing, climate smart products and services to their smallholder farmer suppliers. RTI International and partners will leverage \$5 million of public and private sector support to develop and operationalize a scalable model suitable for smallholder farmers in developing countries.

LOW COST, HIGH VOLUME SARGASSUM EXTRACT FOR CROPS

Carbonwave is transforming the largest

insights, including climate risk scoring, and build strong strategic partnerships with food supply chain stakeholders for scale. With an investment of \$3 million, the expected impact includes empowering 1 million individuals in Sub-Saharan Africa, promoting behavior change for sustainable farming, reducing yield losses by 20-25%, and cutting down CO2 emissions through efficient practices.

ACCELERATING AFRICAN WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN CLIMATE ACTION

The yawning gender gap in African agricultural research and development and women farmers' low uptake of climate innovations hinders Africa's capacity to cope with climate change. This \$2.5 million initiative will increase numbers and experiences of African women leading equitable climate solutions. Over the next two years, this initiative will build a pool of confident, capable African women equipped to lead climate research, enhancing their ability to influence policy changes for improved smallholders' livelihoods.

CUTTING FOOD WASTE TO REDUCE LANDFILL METHANE EMISSIONS

Food waste causes an estimated 10% of global greenhouse gas emissions. To reduce food waste, California strawberry growers and three large retailers have partnered with The Pacific Coast Food Waste Commitment to identify where and why food is wasted in the fresh strawberry supply chain and pilot innovative solutions to mitigate food waste hotspots. This sprint is investing \$150,000 with the aim to increase investment to build out the pilot recommendations.

Aesthetics Center Per Te Turned Two Years Old



BY MARIAM MIVILISHVILI

Aesthetic center Per Te turned two years old, and celebrated its anniversary with more employees and new offers for customers at the restaurant Emocia. Per Te continues to work on even more diverse offers and consumer packages for the public, and

promises many innovations in 2024 with an even bigger team. To find out more, GEORGIA TODAY talked to the founder and executive director of Per Te, Natia Abulashvili.

PER TE OPENED DURING THE PANDEMIC BUT, NEVERTHELESS, VERY QUICKLY GAINED THE LOVE OF THE PUBLIC. CAN YOU TELL US WHAT THE SECRET IS OF THE SUCCESS OF

YOUR AESTHETIC CENTER?

Our team is distinguished by its qualifications and loyalty to our customers. Our main goal is to offer each person who comes to Per Te the highest quality procedure they want and, most importantly, to do so with the latest equipment and the best products. Each of our employees is a result-oriented professional in their work, which also ensures the trust of customers and their love for Per Te.

TELL US ABOUT THE CHARITY PROJECTS ACTIVELY IMPLEMENTED BY PER TE.

Our charity projects aim to empower women who are beneficiaries of the Women's Foundation "Femina", victims of violence, single mothers and the socially vulnerable. Several times a year, Per Te organizes, free of charge, a variety of theoretical and practical courses for those who want to have their own profession, get a job easily and become

economically independent. We actively take care of the employment of our graduates, retaining those who successfully complete their studies with us as employees, and it should also be noted that we cooperate with various aesthetics centers, which are also very eager to employ women trained by us.

IN PARALLEL WITH THE CHARITY PROJECTS, PER TE OFFERED A NUMBER OF INNOVATIONS TO CUSTOMERS IN 2023, INCLUDING "BUSINESS CONSULTANTS." TELL US ABOUT IT AND THE OPPORTUNITIES IT PROVIDES.

As a result of successful completion of our training courses and the knowledge gained from us, many women have been able to open their own beauty salons both in Georgia and outside the borders of the country. The idea arose to start a "business consultant" project, within the framework of which I would share my experience with those who are interested and give them the basic knowledge they would need to start their own business and purchase quality equipment.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR FUTURE PLANS AND THE OFFERS THAT PER TE IS SET TO OFFER ITS LOYAL CUSTOMERS.

Since our team is focused on continuous growth, in 2024, we promise our customers a lot of new things. It is planned to expand our aesthetics center, as well as to add new employees to our team and to offer customers all procedures in the field of aesthetics. In addition, we will definitely continue to implement charity projects and start courses for anyone who wants to join.

Notable is our partnership with the online platform "You only live once", where our company is represented as a service provider, offering services that can be purchased both for yourself and as a gift for someone else.

Our New Year include many interesting discount packages for customers. And in order for the public to know all about it, they just need to follow Per Te's Facebook and Instagram pages!

International Sanctions Risk Management Takes Center Stage at EDDWISE Training Event



BY MARIAM GORKHELASHVILI

In a two-day training event held on November 20-21, EDDWISE, the dynamic consulting services provider, brought together high-profile speakers to delve into the intricacies of international sanctions risk management. The event aimed to foster knowledge exchange and the sharing of practical experiences to attain maximum compliance with international sanctions.

Distinguished figures graced the stage as main speakers during the comprehensive training sessions. Notable among them were David Charlton, the Director

of Pop & Co. UK, Jean-Paul Duvivier from Ferrari & Associates, Francesco Giumelli, a Professor at the University of Groningen, and Noemi Klein, an expert in the fight against financial crime. Guiding the discussions was Professor Thomas Biersteker of the Geneva Institute, a leading international expert on sanctions, who served as the event's moderator.

The training delved into the nuances of sanctions risk management, encompassing discussions on existing sanctions regimes, evasion schemes, and the critical importance of adherence.

A statement by EDDWISE said: "One of the main goals of EDDWISE is to ensure maximum support for both

financial and non-financial sectors in this critical area, so they can operate and adapt to a fast-changing environment. EDDWISE provides consulting services to help the combating of financial crime, including both anti-money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT). Services offered by EDDWISE include the conducting gap of analyses of policies and procedures related to anti-financial crime, as well as support in the introduction and enhancement of essential supporting technologies, and the delivery of targeted training courses.

Sanctions risk management training also fits well with one of the company's core purposes: to increase the level of knowledge about international anti-financial crime standards. This means disseminating information about sanctions imposed by the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) of the US Treasury Department, as well as sanctions imposed by the United Nations, the European Union or the United Kingdom, as well as discussing practical examples and effectively managing the risk associated with these sanctions regimes.

The issue of sanctions has always been an important topic. However, because of the political and economic turbulence of the last couple of years, its importance has become even more apparent, and EDDWISE considered it essential to respond to this. The two-day detailed training on sanctions risk management



was led by invited experts who have many years of experience in the field, including in OFAC, the UN, and foreign financial institutions. It should be noted that EDDWISE will carry out similar initiatives in the future, the company plans to hold at least two trainings per year, which will deal with issues of combating financial crimes.

Here, on behalf of the company, we would like to thank FSVC, whose active

support was essential in the organization of the training. Also, we thank the invited expert speakers, guests and participants. We would like to especially thank the Acting President of the National Bank of Georgia, Ms. Natia Turnava, for attending the training, for her support of this initiative and for emphasizing the importance, to the Georgian financial sector in particular, and to the country in general, of adherence to international sanctions."

With the Support of the EU, Georgia Takes a Step Forward in the Sectoral Reforms on Official Control in the Areas of Food Safety, Veterinary, and Plant Protection



Through the support of the European Union (EU) and Sweden, under the EU-funded ENPARDIV project “Support to the Food Safety and SPS Sector in Georgia”, the Czech Development Agency (CzDA) and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (UN FAO) continue supporting Georgia’s reforms on the improvement of Food Safety, Veterinary, and Plant Protection sectors. With this in mind, the parties organized a three-day workshop on the EU Regulation 2017/625 to provide guidance and support for implementing Official Control Regulation #625 in Georgian legislation. With donors’ support, experts from the Czech Republic and Italy were invited to con-

duct the workshop, attended by Georgian policymakers, regulators, and field specialists. The event was held at Sheraton Grand Tbilisi Metechi Palace.

Tbilisi. November 27-29, 2023 – The workshop marked the initial step in the European Union’s comprehensive assistance in implementing the Official Control Regulation in Georgia and the content of the sessions was designed to respond to Georgia’s existing relevant challenges. The first two days of the event were dedicated to the EU Regulation 2017/625 on Official Control – general content, requirements, and its implementation in the field of Plant health with a combination of the EU Regulation 2016/2031. The third day of the workshop mainly concentrated on the possible

application of the EU Regulation 2017/625 in Georgia.

Denis Reiss, Programme Officer for Sustainable Food Systems at the Delegation of the European Union to Georgia, delivered the opening speech at the event. Mr. Reiss thanked the workshop organisers for supporting Georgia within the initial steps in approximating its official control legislation in the fields of food safety, veterinary, and plant protection to the European Union:

“Such an approach will certainly efficiently protect the health of crops while safeguarding the farmers’ revenues, the biodiversity, and the environment and ensure the quality of plant products and safety of food and feed made from plants cultivated by responsible farmers and related food business operators. This initial step not only reflects the commitments taken by the Government of Georgian under the DCFTA with the European Union aiming at extending and diversifying the market access of Georgian agricultural products but also considers the latest development of the implementation of the “farm to fork strategy” in the EU with a 50 % reduction target in the overall use of and risk from chemical plant protection products and a 50% reduction in the use of hazardous pesticides by 2030”.

Within the workshop, the Czech plant protection experts, Mr. Michal Hnízdil and Mr. Petr Vaculík held sessions focused on plant protection interpretation/implications of the mentioned EU regulations for plant protection official controls and included information about the EU and Czech experience. Afterwards, the FAO consultant, Mr. Ruggero Urbani, a food safety expert from Italy, delivered sessions about the possible application of the EU Regulation 2017/625 in Georgia. Over 40 professionals from Georgia’s

food safety, veterinary, and plant protection fields participated in the event.

“The Czech Republic still has fresh experience with the implementation of EU Regulation 2017/625 and EU Regulation 2016/2031, which are so closely linked to the quality of life of the country’s inhabitants, and we are therefore pleased that Czech experts, who have been involved in the implementation of above-mentioned regulations, can offer their experience, knowledge and share it with Georgian professionals and partners,” said Blanka M. Remešová, the Head of EU Funded Project in Georgia, Czech Development Agency Projects.

Following the participation in the workshop, Tengiz Kalandadze, Head of the Primary Structural Unit of the Agriculture, Department of Food Policy of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia, shared his thoughts:

“As you know, Georgia has a Deep and

to join forces with our Czech colleagues, under the ENPARD programme financed by the European Union and Sweden, to support this process, which will be very important for Georgia’s future”.

Within the framework of the commitments taken by the Government of Georgia under the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area Agreement (DCFTA) with the European Union, according to Georgia’s legislative approximation plan to the EU, next year, the country should implement the EU Regulation 2017/625 on official control in the fields of food safety, veterinary and plant protection. The mentioned means that Georgia’s state control in terms of food safety, veterinary, and plant protection should be brought closer to the relevant legislation of the European Union. The workshop organized by the CzDA and FAO on November 27-29, 2023, is part of the European Union’s large-scale support to Georgia in this direction.



Comprehensive Free Trade Area Agreement (DCFTA) with the European Union, within which the Georgian side is obliged to approximate its legislation towards the EU. Today, we are discussing one of the most important regulations, EU Regulation 2017/625, which covers such issues as food safety control, animal health, plant health, organic production, and geographical indication. I thank the donor organizations for cooperating with us and bringing highly qualified experts to help us approximate our legislation to the EU.”

Javier Sanz Alvarez, FAO Programme Coordinator, explained that during the process of approximating the food safety standards in Georgia to those of the European Union, it is vital to have the regulatory framework in place:

“The regulation of the official control system is a cornerstone of Georgia’s full food safety system. We are very happy

The European Union supports rural development in Georgia through its ENPARD Programme. Aiming to reduce rural poverty, ENPARD has been implemented since 2013. The Programme started by supporting the development of national agriculture potential. Afterwards, it concentrated also on creating economic opportunities for rural populations in Georgia. Since 2021, the Programme has also been working on improving food safety in the country, with additional support from Sweden, and having FAO and the Czech Development Agency as the main implementers of this food safety component under ENPARD IV.

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EFES Georgia Kicks Off Activities to Support the Natural Renewal of the Forest in the Tianeti Region



EFES Georgia has started activities to support the natural renewal of the forest in the Simoniantkhevi forest area, Tianeti. The company's employees engaged in forest cleaning and tree-planting activities together with the representatives of the National Forestry Agency of Georgia and volunteers. EFES Georgia will also take care of the long-term maintenance of the restored area within the framework of the Forest Friend program.

EFES Georgia is the first company to have joined the Georgian forest care

platform - Forest Friend. Beer EFES Special will take care of 12 hectares of forest renewal in the Tianeti forest district as part of the Forest Friend project. As a result, 36,000 trees will be planted and greenhouse gas emissions will be reduced. Of note is the fact that consumers of EFES Special automatically become project participants.

"Achieving sustainable development goals stands as a crucial and primary focus for EFES Georgia, particularly in the realm of environmental protection," Ketevan Zhvania, the Public Relations Manager of EFES Georgia, says. "EFES

Georgia was the first company to join a volunteer program dedicated to the preservation of Georgia's forests. Through the Forest Friend initiative, EFES Special beer is dedicated to the restoration of a 12-hectare area in the Tianeti forest region. The beer not only offers consumers a unique experience but also aligns its communication and essence with an environmental cause. A QR code on the beer bottle allows users to automatically become participants in the project, fostering a sense of connection as a friend of the forest."

"The Forest Friend volunteer platform,

launched by the National Forestry Agency this summer, received quick support," says Natia Iordanishvili, Deputy Head of the National Forestry Agency. "EFES Georgia is proudly the first company to embrace the role of a Forest Friend and will oversee the rejuvenation efforts in the Tianeti forest area. Over the next three years, 12 hectares will be restored, creating a forest ecosystem that closely mirrors nature. This initiative serves environmental, social, and economic purposes, especially due to the proximity to Lake Sioni, making it a valuable recreational asset."

The aim of Forest Friend is to bring the community together to address the challenges confronting Georgia's forests, and to provide people with the chance to appreciate and safeguard these natural treasures. Developed with financial backing from the Biodiversity Financing Initiative of the United Nations Development Program (BIOFIN), and in collaboration with the National Forestry Agency, the platform invites both indi-

viduals and businesses to contribute to the restoration of Georgia's forests through volunteering or financial support.

As of today, the Forest Friend platform boasts 969 registered volunteers, with individual donations totaling 454, and corporate donations reaching 64,923 GEL. Essential equipment and materials, valued at 29,000 Euros, have been purchased for forest restoration efforts. Stay tuned, as upcoming forest restoration projects planned for 2024 will soon be added to the platform.

EFES Special is a special beer series crafted using special brewing techniques. Through long brewing, cold filtering, and careful cultivation, the beverage gains a delicate and smooth flavor. With its distinctive packaging, delightful taste, and light color, this beer promises a new experience for consumers. Notably, the product's essence revolves around an environmental campaign - purchasing a new EFES automatically makes you a friend of the forest!

Thai-ing One On

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

You wouldn't just decide to go on a two-week holiday with just anyone, even from among your friends. This might make or break the relationship! But when our former hosts in Mestia, Vitia Chartolani and Roza Shukvani, suggested that we pick a tropical destination to explore together during Georgia's winter, we were all in. These are people we've known and been close friends with since they put us up as new English teachers in their home and guest house in 2011, and we already knew that this would work well. Their younger daughter, Anna, mid-20s, also joined us. They wanted Thailand, and I jumped at the chance to return there since a conference some years ago in Bangkok, whereas for my wife it was her first time. Phuket, though, just the island: this would be enough. We began planning from Svaneti.

Tickets (through Istanbul); multiple accommodations. I gave the group a list of places to mull over. We had a budget, distance and privacy constraints, quiet, good ratings. We settled on a condominium with three rooms and three bathrooms, for the five of us, for about \$30 per person per night. A couple of km walk from a great beach, good for exercise. Ideal, checked all the boxes.

Now we're here, on this island of about half a million people, the smallest province of Thailand, with 32 smaller islands as part of it. Rainy season is over, temperatures are up to 30 C, it's mixed sunny and cloudy. I holidayed last in this part of the world exactly 30 years ago, visiting my parents in Indonesia when my father was building a power station on Java. There is much to remind me.

The Andaman Sea is wonderful, warm; waves few. Lali is eating mangoes with every meal to make up for lost time. We've also sampled jackfruit (which can weigh more than I do), dragonfruit, lychees, mangosteen (largest citrus in the family), galangal, papaya, limes, our own breaded squid and sautéed prawns. A cheap noodle bowl called "hot chicken" which should have warned me: too spicy for me to eat except cooled in the fridge. Had some exotic flavors of Lay's crisps (nori seaweed; a mix of peanuts, lime, chili and basil). Drunk a passionfruit smoothie. Mother and daughter want to learn how to swim, and are making first steps, so the calm water is just right.

Been on an all-day speedboat tour to several islands, snorkeling, monkeys on the beach, isles rising up vertically from the sea, buffet lunch, paddling in a clear plexiglas kayak, looking into a cave where bird's nests for "that" soup used to be harvested. Beautiful traditional wooden fishing boats everywhere, as well as million-dollar yachts. Magic. I shoot up



to 400 or so photos a day and don't have time to process them before the next day begins. I can highly recommend Andaman Surprise tour company, who hosted us very well on this adventure.

The humid warmth means an occasional whiff of rotting vegetation, but that's just something to get used to, like the cow-smell of my barn in Svaneti when we had bovines in it. The place is bursting with life. New bird sounds in the night; crickets to remind me of Zimbabwe. Tiny crabs scuttling across the

sand, too light to leave a trail, too fast to even try to catch. Motorbikes everywhere, mostly no helmets; lots of women drivers as well as men. Buddhism followed by Islam, Christianity a tiny third. Electrical wires in terrifying tangles, but there's power, and good internet too.

Still on the list: trying to get a silk suit tailored; maybe visiting the 45 m high Big Buddha and a place where tigers are reared, possibly an overnight canoe trip on a lake. Views from higher places. We're here to rest, most thankful for the

opportunity for which we have worked hard. More details to follow.

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

UNICEF and Gov't of Georgia Review Work of the Center for Psychological and Social Services for Children Victims of Violence



in July 2022 the Center has supported up to 190 children, victims of sexual violence. The Government of Georgia committed to establish a second such center in Kutaisi for beneficiaries in the western part of the country by the end of 2024.

UNICEF continues to support the government in sharing best practices and identifying effective methods in relation to the work of the Centre. To further this endeavor, UNICEF has invited Bragi Gudbrandsson, renowned as the architect of the Barnahus model, and a Member of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, and Emma Harewood, co-founder of the first UK Barnahus, to support the government in further strengthening the Center.

During the visit, the experts will engage in a dialogue with Georgian government officials, civil society organizations, staff of the Center for Psychological and Social Services for Children Victims of Violence and other stakeholders. The primary objective of their visit is to review existing practices, discuss achievements and challenges, and propose effective solutions. Additionally, the experts will share insights from their extensive experience regarding the implementation of the Barnahus model in various countries.

"It has been a wonderful experience to learn about the achievements made to protect and support child victims of sexual abuse in Georgia. I have met dedicated and capable professionals here who are striving to do even better. We have shared the experience of Barnahus



in many European countries with Georgian colleagues to help them to improve the justice system, child protection and health services and to better support children and their families," Gudbrandsson says.

UNICEF continues working collaboratively with the Georgian government, civil society organizations, and other partners to create a safer and more supportive environment for children in the country.

Violence against children can have a lifelong impact on children's lives. During the investigation of violence cases,

children have to go through a long and stressful process at various institutions for interrogations, forensic, medical and other examinations. The evidence has shown that when this happens, it can be very traumatic for the child. This re-victimization can even have more harmful effects on the child than the abuse itself. The repeated interviews carried out by people that are not specifically trained in forensic interviewing are likely to distort the child's account of events by suggestive questioning and have a detrimental effect on criminal investigations.

UNICEF, with the Government of Georgia, supported by the Government of Estonia, has analyzed the work of the Center for Psychological and Social Services for Children Victims of Violence in Georgia and its support to children. This child-friendly, multidisciplinary model, launched by the Agency for State Care and Assistance for the Victims of Human Trafficking of the Ministry of the Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Affairs with the support of UNICEF and the Government of Estonia, aims to protect children, victims of sexual violence,

from re-traumatization and to bring investigative actions and rehabilitation programs into one space.

The Center is based on the famous "Barnahus" model, which originated in Iceland in 1998 and since has been replicated in most European countries. Other Government agencies involved in the development of the Center in Georgia include the Administration of the Government, Ministry of Internal Affairs, General Prosecutor's office, Legal Aid Service and Levan Samkharauli National Forensics Bureau. The Court has a crucial role in supporting the establishment of common practice in line with the Barnahus standards. Since its opening

CULTURE

Reveal of "May These Ashes Be Light," English Edition

BY SHELBI R. ANKIEWICZ

A collection of Georgian poems, short stories, and non-fiction from writers under the shadow of the Soviet Union have been compiled into an English-translated book, for those around the world to finally have access.

"May These Ashes Be Light" debuted on December 7 at Ilia State University's Ligamus bookstore and cafe. The book is a compilation of works by various Georgian authors, all of whom were forced into silence during the Soviet Union. Both translators of the book, Ryan Sherman and Maia Tserediani, spoke at the release, along with Editor in Chief of Intelekti Publishing, Zviad Kvaratskhelia, former Director of Writers' House of Georgia, Natasha Lomouri, and Poet and Proprietor of Writers Bar H2SO4, Paata Shamugia.

Sherman is a project manager and lecturer at Ilia State University, who moved to Tbilisi in 2018. He visited the country from 2012 to 2014 when he was a part of the Peace Corps, then after meeting and marrying his Georgian wife, Tserediani, they decided to move permanently to the country. The two of them have translated short stories and poems in the past, but this is their first attempt at publish-

ing and translating a book, one that they both deem as important.

"That's a story we really want people to know in the West, put into the right context, and to bring Georgian voices to the world," said Sherman.

Sherman said the authors who are normally associated with breaking the Soviet shadow are Russian writers, so Georgia's story has not been widely told. Georgia is a sub-ethnic group of the Soviet Union that has very different experiences compared to other countries. According to Sherman, most people associate Georgia with Stalin, and assume the country was an allied partner of Moscow, whereas, historically, Russia invaded Georgian land and the government that wasn't executed fled into exile.

Sherman and Tserediani agreed the book was very difficult to translate because it's such a serious topic, and in every line, people are pouring their hearts out by declaring what was happening to and around them. It was an emotionally draining project, and in hindsight, they say they are glad to have been able move on to new things. The message Sherman feels is most important from the book is that a government can force people to do many things, even things people don't want to do.

"Tyranny has this ability to find evil in any society and maximize it, and also find the worse part of ourselves and bring that to the fore - it brings out the worst



Ryan Sherman reading from 'May These Ashes Be Light' at the book's debut. Photo by Genka Fotograf

in people," said Sherman.

May These Ashes Be Light is an anthology created of pieces selected by the editors. Some pieces were co-decided with Sherman and Tserediani, primarily poetry, because that's how the book first started. It was supposed to be a collection of poetry, but after feedback from people and realizing how many of the pieces were being appreciated, other works were added.

Sherman says that Georgia's main mode of literature is poetry, but the reason more people worldwide don't know about it is because of translation difficulties. He says that Georgian literature

has remained widely undiscovered because of this, and many people are ignorant of some of the greatest poets who have written for generations in their homeland.

Inna Darbinyan is a linguistics student at Ilia State University. Sherman teaches one of her classes, "Spoken English," which is how she discovered the book and the release event. She has read the book in Georgian and now intends to read the English version to compare the interpretation of translations.

"I've heard a lot about this book, and he [Ryan] was also talking about it during our sessions and I really have an

interest in Georgian and foreign literature," said Darbinyan. "It's really interesting to me how foreign people see Georgian literature and understand it."

This project first came into effect because of Sherman's position at the Museum of Repressed Writers at the Writers House. He was working there when a project originated about the repression of Georgia's soviet path and the people who had been exiled or forced into hiding. Simultaneously, Sherman was working at the US Embassy, which was one of the funding sources for the museum.

While holding these positions, he was deemed as the point person to work with the staff at the Writer's House to find their objectives and do their reporting. He started to attend the House more frequently, which is how he began translating poetry, eventually leading to the book it is today.

May These Ashes Be Light can currently be found at local shops, including Intelekti Publishing, Parmassus Bookstore, Kutaisi Airport, and more. The first one is only being published throughout Georgia, but there are plans for a second book to be released next year which will be self-published on Amazon for people to purchase worldwide.

"These writers are so compelling and talented," said Sherman. "It's long overdue, this introduction of Georgian literature."



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