



## FOCUS

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# Petra Sea Resort LLC and Accor Sign an Agreement

**P**etra Sea Resort LLC and Accor, a world leading hospitality group, have signed an agreement to open a new hotel complex, which will include over 250 branded investment apartments under the Pullman Living brand, and over 300 Pullman Residences on the territory of the upscale seafront development "Petra Sea Resort", located in Tsikhisdziri, Georgia. This complex will be the first project of the Pullman brand on the Georgian coast of the Black Sea.

Pullman Residences are the smart solution for today's global travelers and business leaders, and provide a place to call home in some of the world's most impressive destinations. Becoming an owner means enjoying extensive private facilities and a curated residential living experience that delivers the exacting level of quality and service that Pullman connoisseurs expect.

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Prepared for Georgia Today Business by GALT & TAGGART

As of 26 Dec 2023

Markets			COMMODITIES				
	Price	w/w	m/m		Price	w/w	m/m
GRAIL 07/28	92.01 (YTM 6.07%)	+1.0%	+6.7%	Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	81.07	+2.3%	+0.6%
SILNET 01/27	100.22 (YTM 8.29%)	+0.2%	+1.4%	Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	2 067.81	+1.3%	+3.3%
TBC 06/24	99.58 (YTM 6.65%)	+0.2%	+0.3%				
STOCKS			CURRENCIES				
Bank of Georgia (BGE0 LN)	GBP 39.30	+6.8%	+12.8%	GEL / USD	2.6880	+0.2%	-0.7%
Georgia Capital (CGEO LN)	GBP 10.16	+1.6%	+2.0%	GEL / EUR	2.9681	+0.8%	+0.2%
TBC Bank Group (TBCG LN)	GBP 28.75	+1.6%	+4.4%	GEL / GBP	3.4204	+0.1%	+0.3%
				GEL / CHF	3.1440	+1.0%	+2.6%
				GEL / RUB	0.0291	-1.7%	-0.0%
				GEL / TRY	0.0916	-0.7%	-2.2%
INDICES			GEL / AZN				
FTSE 100	7 697.51	+0.8%	+2.8%	GEL / AMD	1.5820	+0.2%	-0.8%
FTSE 250	19 630.95	+1.6%	+6.4%	GEL / UAH	0.0066	+0.4%	-1.8%
DAX	16 706.18	-0.2%	+4.2%	GEL / UAH	0.0718	-	-4.3%
DOW JONES	37 545.33	-0.5%	+6.1%	EUR / USD	0.9056	-0.6%	-0.9%
NASDAQ	15 074.57	+0.5%	+5.8%	GBP / USD	0.7859	+0.1%	-1.0%
MSCI EM EE	44.78	+0.4%	+7.1%	CHF / USD	0.8537	-0.8%	-3.3%
MSCI EM	998.53	-0.0%	+1.9%	RUB / USD	92.3211	+2.0%	+3.6%
SP 500	4 774.75	+0.1%	+4.7%	TRY / USD	29.3208	+0.8%	+1.6%
MSCI FM	2 260.56	+0.7%	+4.7%	AZN / USD	1.6990	-	+0.1%
				AMD / USD	404.2000	-0.2%	+8.5%



არ გამოიყენო პირმოთქნიკა!

## No to Fireworks! Take Care of the Environment

**A**head of New Year, a night in Georgia that sees the skies filling with midnight explosions – some of which are commercial displays, others being fired from balconies – an ongoing international campaign is calling for people to abandon the noisy tradition for the sake of their pets and the environment. Fireworks create highly toxic gases and pollutants that poison the air, the water and the soil, making them toxic to birds, wildlife, pets, livestock – and people.

The colors of fireworks are the result of chemistry and physics made visible. Specifically, fireworks' colors depend upon solid metal salts and chemical explosives that create colors when heated to the correct temperatures. Additionally, to produce the oxygen needed for an explosion, many fireworks contain oxidizers known as perchlorates. These can dissolve in water, contaminating rivers, lakes and drinking water. Do not use fireworks, take care of the environment!

## New Year Gala Concert to Take Place at First Republic Square



**A** Gala Concert will be held on New Year's night at the First Republic Square in Tbilisi, – Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze announced at the municipal government meeting this week. Kaladze noted that other festive events will take place at Dedaena Garden and

in Orbeliani Square, with concerts, Christmas fairs, entertainment for children, and theatrical shows “uniting Georgian and European cultures and traditions.” Popular musical bands and ensembles, Eurovision and Voice project participants, dancers, and the National Symphonic Orchestra will take part in the gala concert.

### POLITICS

## RUSI's Peter Roberts on the Potential Losses in Russia's Long Game

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

**P**rofessor Peter Roberts is a Senior Associate Fellow, having been Director of Military Sciences at the Royal United Services Institute between January 2014 and November 2021. Radio Free Europe/RL's Georgian Service sat down with him to discuss the ways of the Ukrainian war and the potential outcomes.

**TO ECHO THE TITLE OF YOUR POPULAR PODCAST – HOW MUCH HAS THE WESTERN**

### WAY OF WAR EVOLVED SINCE THIS WAR BEGAN?

The Western way of war is a concept that many people have held to be fixed, being about maneuver, about expeditionary warfare, about high technology, speed and tempo, air power, about precision. It's an idea that held sway with most of the Western powers since probably the 1980s, and if we look back to 2003, 2004, that was probably the high point and the end of that concept. Thereafter came a series of very difficult engagements for the West, a series of lessons which they should have learned from, and perhaps some of them did - that maneuvering, time and speed don't necessarily work

# Ukraine Latest: Russia Vows to Retaliate If EU Gives Frozen Assets to Kyiv; Majority of Kherson without Electricity Due to Shelling

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

**R**ussia on Thursday vowed to retaliate in kind if the European Union moved ahead with plans to hand profits generated from Russia's frozen assets to Ukraine. The EU is considering reallocating income generated from around \$300 billion of frozen funds from Russian central bank reserves, amid mounting pressure to help support Ukraine's war-torn economy.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's air force said Thursday that it shot down 34 out of 35 Russian drones launched in an overnight assault on 12 Ukrainian regions. Officials also reported three killed in Russian strikes on mines in the Donetsk region.

### MAJORITY OF KHERSON WITHOUT ELECTRICITY DUE TO SHELLING

Shelling by Russian forces on Tuesday has “badly damaged” the infrastructure of the city of Kherson, says its governor. In a Telegram post, cited by both the Kyiv Independent and BBC Russian service, the Kherson oblast governor, Oleksandr Prokudin, wrote that “70% of subscribers” had been left without electricity.

“Due to yesterday's Russian shelling, the energy infrastructure of Kherson was severely damaged. 70% of subscribers remain without power supply,” he wrote.

“The power engineers are already working. Now they are determining the extent of the damage, and then they will immediately begin emergency restoration work. It's difficult to say when they will be completed.”

A railway station was one of the buildings struck in the attacks. Ukrainian officials claim it came as a train was set to evacuate residents, killing a police officer and injuring four other people.

Ukraine's armed forces commander has said his troops remain in an area of the eastern town of Marinka despite Russia's assertions that Moscow is in control of the settlement. Capturing Marinka would amount to Moscow's most significant battlefield gain since May.

### RUSSIANS LIKELY WAITING FOR THE GROUND TO FREEZE BEFORE INTENSIFYING ATTACKS ON AVDIIVKA

The White House believes Russian troops are waiting for the ground to freeze over in order to intensify offensive operations around the war hotspot of Avdiivka in eastern Ukraine.

“We have seen that the Russians are ...



Aftermath of a Russian military strike in Kherson. Source: Reuters

and continue to intend to want to conduct offensive operations, particularly in the east around this place called Avdiivka,” National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby told reporters Wednesday.

“We have every reason to believe that as the ground freezes towards the end of January and into February, that will make it easier for Russian forces to move,” he added.

Russian and Ukrainian sources continue to report on the impacts of challenging weather conditions on offensive and reconnaissance operations throughout the front, analysts at the Institute for the Study of War note, “even as reported freezing and snowy winter conditions in eastern Ukraine offer the prospect of better conditions for maneuver.”

Russian forces are conducting offensive operations around Avdiivka in a bid to wrestle control of the strategically-placed town in Donetsk from Ukraine.

“Ukrainian defenders continue to restrain the enemy, who does not abandon attempts to surround Avdiivka,” Ukraine's military said in a Facebook update Thursday.

### OTHER IMPORTANT UPDATES:

A Russian politician calling for peace in Ukraine has been denied the chance to run for president. Russia's central election commission refused to accept the former regional legislator, Yekaterina Duntsova's initial nomination by a group of supporters, citing errors in the paperwork, including spelling. After losing Wednesday's appeal against the commission's decision, Duntsova said she would start working on the creation of her own political party that would stand for “peace, freedom and democracy.”

EU aid will not change the war's outcome, the Kremlin has said. It added that such spending would only hurt Europe's economy.

Russia's foreign ministry spokesperson, Maria Zakharova, has warned that a move by Japan to hand over Patriot air defense systems to Ukraine would have “grave consequences” for Russia-Japan ties.

Poland is getting closer to ending the trucker blockades of several border crossings with Ukraine, says the country's prime minister, Donald Tusk. Polish drivers have been blocking several crossings with Ukraine since 6 November, demanding the EU reinstate a system whereby Ukrainian companies need permits to operate in the bloc and the same for European truckers to enter Ukraine.

The Russian foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, has held talks in Moscow with his Indian counterpart, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, and said progress had been made on plans for Russia and India to jointly produce military equipment. Jaishankar added that he expected the Russian president, Vladimir Putin and the Indian prime minister, Narendra Modi to meet next year.

Russia's newest howitzers will be deployed “soon” against Ukrainian forces. The head of the state-owned defense conglomerate Rostec, Sergei Chemezov, told the RIA news agency that testing of the new self-propelled artillery units, named Coalition-SV, had been completed and mass production had already started, with the first pilot batch to be delivered by the end of this year.

Two people were killed in Russia's overnight drone attacks on Odesa, according to updated figures posted on Telegram by the Odesa oblast governor, Oleh Kiper. A 17-year-old was among the wounded and remains in hospital.

Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine's president, has thanked “all Ukrainian warriors” in a post on X. He also re-emphasized the priority for Ukraine “to strengthen our country, defend our people, and bolster our positions in all areas”.

that way, particularly with the enduring campaigns they experienced over 20 years in Iraq and Afghanistan. And one thing Ukraine has bought out very strongly is the return to conventional high-end warfare that, in a sense, was largely forgotten after Korea and Vietnam. Long, protracted, grizzly fighting. The idea that it could be fast was a very selective approach from the West that said, “Hey, we can make war happen swiftly, and with good results.” And Ukraine has drawn out enough for many Western allies and indeed, their militaries, to say, “Okay, we need to go back to an industrialized scale of readiness and preparation, of training, manpower, and capabilities,” and not forget

some of those conventional arms that that many in the West wanted to sacrifice so that they could invest in cyber, in space and all that new technology that was thought to be battle-winning, but really hasn't delivered.

There's a real dilemma in western militaries, because they are prepared to fight short, sharp wars, high technology wars, but they're facing this dilemma that that's not how the enemies are fighting. The fact the enemy gets a vote has largely been forgotten in Western military mindsets.

### BECAUSE THE ODDS WERE SO MUCH IN THE WEST'S FAVOR?

Absolutely. And although the odds were always in the West's favor, you could see these lessons coming out in Iraq and Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, there was an alliance unmatched across history in terms of military capability- that had more computing power than the rest of the world, that had intelligence and analysis, that owned the air and had the most sophisticated technology by generations, not just by decades. Yet they were beaten by a force of five to 10,000 fighters who were riding around on horseback, building bombs in mud huts and fighting with World War Two weapons.

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# Varhelyi: Candidate Status Not a Gift, Result of Work by People and Gov't Over Many Months

Candidate status is not a gift, it is the result of the work done by your people and your government over many months, said Oliver Varhelyi, European Commissioner for Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement, in a video address at the Ambassadors Conference 2023.

Varhelyi noted that Georgia belongs to the European family, and the work should continue to advance on the EU integration path.

"You are in the pre-New Year, pre-election period when we celebrate Christmas and prepare for the New Year. Allow me to congratulate you on the European Council's decision to grant Georgia the status of a candidate country for the European Union. This is not a gift, it is the result of the work done by your people and your government over many months, however, this great work must continue to advance you towards the European Union.

"From our side, we will continue to support you on this amazing path. The European Union is already the largest donor to Georgia. We will allocate up to 100 million euros through our annual programs to bring Georgia closer to the European Union. In the coming weeks and months, the focus will increase on the country's compliance with EU legislation.

"Moreover, we want to accelerate the implementation of economic and investment plans and its flagship projects. Within the plan, we have already mobilized 1.8 billion euros in the form of loans, guarantees, grants and budgetary support. The mentioned plan includes preparatory works for the Black Sea underwater electric cable and an investment grant of 20 million euros for an



optical fiber cable.

"All of these are vital to strength the ties between the EU and the South Caucasus. Also, I am glad that within the framework of the mentioned plan, we helped more than 65 thousand Georgian small and medium enterprises to fully receive the benefits of a deep and comprehensive free trade space.

"By continuing on a strong course of reform, Georgia will benefit even more from the economic opportunities that our partnership can bring. However, the EU is much more than a successful economic partnership. It is also a peace project that defends democracy and freedom like no other. I believe that you will contribute to

this project and be part of it," said Varhelyi.

He repeated that the European Union will continue to work with Georgia on the path of European integration.

"2024 will be another decisive year. Your country will hold elections. Presumably, the geopolitical challenges will not be abating either. At the same

time, with the necessary determination and following the 9 steps of the Commission's enlargement report, we will continue to work with Georgia on the EU path. Georgia belongs to the European family. Allow me to wish you a successful and fruitful 2024, which will bring us closer together. I wish you a Merry Christmas," he said.

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# Gov't Publishes Action Plan for Fulfillment of European Council's Defined Steps, Opposition Says Plan Is "Weak"



BY TEAM GT

The Georgian government this week published its action plan for the fulfillment of the European Commission's newly-defined 9 steps.

The EU requires the following of Georgia:

1. Fight disinformation and foreign information manipulation and interference against the EU and its values;
2. Improve Georgia's alignment with the EU's common foreign and security policy;
3. Further address the issue of political polarization, including through more inclusive legislative work with opposition parties in Parliament, notably on legislation;
4. Ensure a free, fair and competitive electoral process, notably in 2024, and fully

address OSCE/ODIHR recommendations. Finalize electoral reforms, including ensuring adequate representation of the electorate, well in advance of election day;

5. Further improve the implementation of parliamentary oversight notably of the security services. Ensure institutional independence and impartiality of key institutions, notably the Election Administration, the National Bank, and the Communications Commission;

6. Complete and implement a holistic and effective judicial reform, including a comprehensive reform of the High Council of Justice and the Prosecutor's Office, fully implementing Venice Commission recommendations and following a transparent and inclusive process;

7. Further address the effectiveness and ensure the institutional independence and impartiality of the Anti-Corruption Bureau, the Special Investigative Service and the Personal Data Protection Service. Address Venice Commission recommendations related to these bodies, in

an inclusive process. Establish a strong track record in investigating – corruption and organized crime cases;

8. Improve the current action plan to implement a multi-sectorial, systemic approach to deoligarchization, in line with Venice Commission recommendations and following a transparent and inclusive process involving opposition parties and civil society;

9. Improve the protection of human rights including by implementing an ambitious human rights strategy and ensuring freedom of assembly and expression. Launch impartial, effective and timely investigations in cases of threats against safety of vulnerable groups, media professionals and civil society activists, and bring organizers and perpetrators of violence to justice. Consult and engage with civil society, allowing for their meaningful involvement in legislative and policymaking processes and ensure they can operate freely.

The government has outlined the following actions to be taken:

- Develop an Action Plan for the Communication Campaign of the Government of Georgia in order to promote the EU and its values.

- Implementation of the Action Plan.
- Improve alignment rates with the EU's positions under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).

- Based on applicable practice, continue active cooperation with the relevant structures of the EU in order to prevent Georgia's territory being used to circumvent EU sanctions, including continuous regular reporting from the Finance Ministry of Georgia to the relevant agencies of the European Commission (FISMA, DG TAXUD), the US, and the UK, through the existing communication channels, concerning the compatibility of customs operations with sanctions against sanctioned and sensitive customs codes.

- Engaging all parliamentary political parties in working formats related to European integration and other fundamental reforms. Continuous cooperation with civil society (within the framework of the memorandum with the Georgian National Platform) on matters pertaining to the Georgia EU Agenda.

- Invite a long-term OSCE/ODIHR observation mission to the 2024 elections.
- Create working formats for effective cooperation between the relevant agencies of the government and observation organizations.



For Georgia party representatives. Source: GT

- Adopt amendments concerning party/ election financing in the Election Code (prohibiting donations from legal entities to political parties, reducing the annual expenditure ceiling as percentage of GDP).

- Promote regular dialogue with all parliamentary political parties and NGOs to improve the practice of oversight.

- Replenish the composition of the Parliament's Trust Group.

- Create a working format for matters of judiciary and prosecutorial reforms, with participation from all parliamentary political parties and NGOs,

- Update the relevant legislative amendment.

- Adopt the relevant legislative amendment.

- Initiate legislative amendments in order to implement the Venice Commission's recommendations published on December 15.

- Hold meetings with all parliamentary parties and NGOs to discuss the annual reports of these institutions.

- Approve the deoligarchization plan after consultations with parliamentary political parties and NGOs. (Note: On November 22, 2023, within the framework of the Memorandum of Cooperation, the Parliament presented and discussed the action plan at the 3rd Joint Conference held together with the Georgian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum).

- Hold meetings with parliamentary political parties and NGOs in order to ensure the effective monitoring of the implementation of the deoligarchization plan.

- A joint meeting of civil society, international organizations, and state institutions. At the meeting, the Draft 2024-2026 National Human Rights Action Plan will be discussed.

- Approve the Draft 2024-2026 National Human Rights Action Plan after consultations with parliamentary political parties and NGOs;

- Hold meetings with civil society organizations concerning ongoing investigations. Submit comprehensive information about investigations to the European Commission.

- Hold regular meetings with NGOs in order to promote their engagement in law- and policymaking processes.

Gakharia's Team: GD Plan is weak  
The For Georgia party, led by Former Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia, has responded to the recently published Georgian government's action plan for the fulfillment of the European Commission's newly-defined 9 steps, calling it "weak."

"Yesterday, during the holidays, when almost no international partners are present in the country and it is impossible to find out their position, Georgian Dream published a weak plan.

"In a historic process for the country, before the decisive elections, the publication of such a content-weak plan is an additional motivation for our team to join the working groups, and once again present specific initiatives related to fundamental reforms, which have already been presented to the Speaker of the Parliament and international partners, to use all levers to force the implementation of the recommendations and, in case of non-implementation of the recommendations, to clarify once again to the public the real intention of the Ruling Party.

"We express our readiness to participate in working groups and call on the authorities to start work immediately. Past practice has made it clear that Georgian Dream should not be left alone," reads the statement.

## From Political Luck to Social Bliss and Economic Comfort

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

A little over a century ago, Sakartvelo was lucky enough to obtain national independence and enjoy its share of freedom and democracy, but for only three years, and with plenty of flies in the ointment. That was purely political luck, which ended up in massive emigration, bloodshed, poverty and the obviolation of the idea of liberty. Although the Democratic Republic of Georgia was recognized by all key powers of the time as a modern self-governing autonomous establishment, it turned out to be vitally impotent to keep its people sufficiently fed and clad, socially happy and economically stable.

No sooner had the fledgling democracy fallen, there came a new power to take the helm of the country. That was also political "luck" - a period which lasted 70 years. The Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia became a part of the USSR, which sought no international recognition, having promulgated its rubber-

stamped statehood and formal constitution within the Soviet empire. Yet nor did this new formation give enough social bliss and economic comfort to the Georgian people, although the entire soviet period was packed full of promises of a good life and radiant future.

Time lapsed and Georgia once again received a chance to be an independent democratic state, right after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The breakup of the Empire was roaring and tumultuous. Georgia was set free, as were all other soviet republics, and was left to its own devices, which meant that the free people of the liberated-from-the-communist oppression nation were to take care of themselves without any hope to be subsidized as they were when the USSR was alive. On the contrary, the de-Sovietized and embittered Russian Federation did its possible worst to snatch away huge chunks of Georgia's historical territory, thus weakening the former ally to the point of misery.

Notwithstanding all those difficulties, Georgia managed to recover from ruin and desolation, building all over again a society which could be called, without

any pangs of conscience, sovereign and democratic, amply endowed with freedom of speech. And again, this was sheer political luck. The rebuilt and renewed Republic was recognized by the entire world as an independent entity, as a member of the United Nations and many other international bodies, recently awarded with the title of candidate state for membership in the European Union.

The progress is clear and present, but, amazingly, even this obvious sociopolitical and economic advancement has not provided the country with a high enough standard of living to keep all of us within this country happily working away for our amply-nourishing bread-and-butter - the amenities and endowments that the contemporary people need for full happiness and reasonable exhilaration.

Where does the blame lie for this, a goal lost on the way from fleeting political luck to stable social contentment and economic coziness? We cannot reprimand nature, because Georgia is located in one of the most favorable geographical areas of the world; we can't insist that we are a lazy people, because we



Georgians standing to greet the delegation of the Second Socialist International visiting the First Democratic Republic of Georgia in the autumn of 1920. Source: National Archives of the Ministry of Justice of Georgia

have clearly sweated and toiled throughout the millennia; we can't prove to anybody that we lack freedom for self-employment and consequential development; there is no way to blame our education or any other particular field of human activity. Then, what on earth is happening to us? Why are so many of us poised and ready to find a way, be it legal or illegal, to leave the country and find means of survival beyond its boundaries, all while there is no count to the folks of other nationalities who want to settle and flourish here, buying land and real estate, opening businesses and vigorously making their way into

our social tissue and economic life? The situation is completely incomprehensible. We have nothing against taking in new blood and sharing our wealth and culture with whoever wants to nest here, but we also want our people to stay here and find the way to a better life. Is this possible? An economist might give a complicated and scientifically corroborated answer to this question. My own suggestion is that there is air enough, land enough, sun enough and water enough in this land to apply our wits and talent to, with which to build a good life. As the saying goes, if there is a will, there's a way, too.

# To Reflect, To Reminisce, To Apprehend: A Summary at Year-End

OP-ED BY VICTOR KIPIANI,  
GEOCASE CHAIRMAN

In this short essay, we cannot say anything different from what has already been said; what the reader has heard or read many times before. So, let us assume that this is how we talk to ourselves, but aloud, so that others can hear. This statement is a disclaimer of a kind, so that the following considerations will not be regarded as a claim to any discovery, but as merely an attempt to bring together those few very important principles, statements or theses which we already know but which we find so difficult to firmly establish in practice. Without them, we will use up a lot of energy, expectation and enthusiasm "going around in circles" on the path of our country's development, just when that energy, expectation and enthusiasm should be translated into useful action.

## RECOGNIZING AND OBJECTIVELY EVALUATING THE PAST

Underestimating the political formations and leaders of all previous generations is harmful to the country's reputation and development. It is unacceptable that every new official power tries to rewrite the country's past or to start counting history from the time it came to power (from scratch). This cannot be characterized otherwise than as a lack of political culture, a deficit of statesmanship, a prerequisite for vicious practices. Georgia's overall success and progress can only be seen as a combination of success and progress that began in the past. Only in this way will we come closer to establishing healthy political traditions, respect for each other in public affairs, participation and, where necessary, fair criticism and condemnation.

## A CONVERGENCE OF PROCESSES INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY

Once again, let us remind ourselves of the well-known thesis about the inseparability of domestic and foreign policy, especially in current conditions. It is very difficult, maybe even impossible, to take out of the country what you have not created through the domestic political process, or what you have created but in such a way that it is not suitable for "export". In the external arena, any particular ruling power can only show off its success inside the country, its well-deserved authority and reliability in the eyes of its own society. Otherwise, you can't "sell", can't deceive, can't impose a fiction either on your own people or on others.

## PRAGMATISM AND RATIONALISM OF GEORGIAN POLITICS

Given the current and future challenges of the Georgian state, the main guideline for the activities of any (any!) state formation should be the practicality of the political process, tangible economic benefits and security considerations based on real opportunities.

Despite different ideological or partisan views, all political actors operating



It is very important that Georgia be not only a consumer but also a contributor.



Source: theguardian

in a country should be united to bring the average citizen two main outcomes: (a) greater prosperity and (b) greater security. All other goals or objectives are merely "productive" and based on these two.

## PROPERLY "PERCEIVING" THE SITUATION

As the world enters a phase of new confrontations, a pedantic and dispassionate analysis of the situation is a necessary skill for the defense and viability of the Georgian state.

At such times, decisions or actions dictated by traditional Georgian romanticism or idealism are risky, and sometimes irreversibly destructive. Abandoning finally "rose-tinted glasses", we must learn to consider our own interest with maximum benefit and determine the algorithm of actions to achieve it without emotions. Bringing this approach to the status of a "cult" in state policy will help us move smoothly and relatively safely through international politics imbued with immense selfishness and the "geoculture" of trade.

## THE MIDDLE CLASS

One of the key conditions for the sustainable development of the political system and the country is the existence of a self-sufficient, free middle class with a critical opinion.

Despite repeated attempts to bring this social stratum into decline in modern times, there is no doubt that along with a solid constitutional mechanism and a healthy political tradition, the guarantor of the country's resilience and sustainable development is the middle class. It is also only through it and with its support that political radicalism, social populism and the cheap manipulation of public sentiment can be effectively contained.

## INSTITUTIONS, INSTITUTIONS, INSTITUTIONS

Taking the policy and decision-making process outside of institutions not only harms the current quality of Georgian politics, but also jeopardizes the country's national security by undermining trust in the institutional process, nullifying the credibility of the civil service and causing civil servants to lose confidence.

The result of this dangerous spiral is the alienation of citizens from their own



Georgia's people should realize the need for change with their hearts and minds

country and their attempt to exercise their political rights and freedoms in the form of radical, uncontrolled civil protest.

## GOVERNMENT AND (OR) POWER

Government does not always equal power, and power, unfortunately, is not always acquired by formal government.

At the same time, the phenomenon of power has a much greater bearing and its only acceptable form is embodied in properly and legally functioning institutions. The basis of modernization of the country is functional (not nominal, imaginary or conditional) institutionalism. Thus, the institutional distribution of power and modernization of the country are inseparable and form a single organic whole.

This equal unity is an essential condition for our national-state existence. As a result, any deviation from the relationship between power and functional institutions renders action illusory and the achievement of real results for development a dim prospect.

## REFORMS ARE FOR US, NOT FOR THEM

Real reforms should also serve real purposes - honestly, not hypocritically. And, at the same time, any reforms should be carried out primarily for the benefit of the state's own society, really improving its condition and the country's competitiveness. As a result, a reform which aims only to win the hearts of others or to gain favor with the "protocol record," means discrediting the essence and meaning of reform (and thus the necessary changes).

Therefore, we should realize the need for change with our hearts and minds; it must become a thorough and open demand, and we should want it to happen, again, for the citizens of Georgia - the ultimate beneficiary of any healthy reform. It is also important that the beneficial results of changes are felt not only by the "elite" layer, but also by the average citizen on a real and daily basis.

Moreover, the necessary changes in time and space are among the main conditions for the mobility and capacity of a small country. Immobility, adaptability, and weakening of national-state and societal ambitions will be fatal in today's complex world.

## ANALYZING, LISTENING, COLLEGIALLY

The insufficiency of these three components inevitably leads to a complete absence of informed decisions or a significant deficit thereof. However, without them, we cannot even talk about well-considered policy actions.

At the same time, informed, i.e. knowledge-based, decision-making necessarily involves respect for and systematic parity with academic opinion and the consideration of scientific assessments by public administration bureaucracies. Without such participation and interaction, the activities of the Georgian state will be significantly impaired.

## TO BE RELIABLE, TO BE HELPFUL

A small country is very peculiar: on the one hand, it does not bear the burden of defining the system of international relations, and on the other, the possible consequences of a system defined by others may turn out for a small country to the detriment of its own interests.

We should also bear in mind that "interests of influences" and "hegemonic aspirations" are inherent in any international system, and there is no prospect of changing this or establishing a different hierarchy of relations in the foreseeable future. Therefore, our attitude should be relevant and always realistic.

When talking about relevance and realism, the baselines need to be satisfied: reliability and helpfulness. Without these two, achieving the self-sufficiency necessary for a country's security, economic sustainability and development - only relying on "approval," "permanent endowment" and "geopolitical babysitting" by

others - will become a futile and frustrating experiment. Thus, it is very important that our country be not only a consumer but also a contributor within the limits of its capabilities. Moreover, in the process of constantly and continuously asserting the place that belongs to it, it must act even on the edge of those capabilities.

## REJECTING UNHELPFUL STEREOTYPES AND DARING TO EMBRACE INNOVATIONS

Which, above all, means rethinking and radically revitalizing the existing models of modern governance, national security, defense and economic components.

We have spoken and written about this issue many times before. And here, in the form of a brief thesis, let us repeat that a unified security system, of course, includes its traditional - military, economic and diplomatic - pillars. However, the uniqueness, identity and capabilities of Georgian security are unthinkable without a few necessary fundamentals, namely: An open society, firmly based on inclusiveness, an economy with equal starting opportunities and free from a "sectarian" (i.e. "closed", tailored to the undeserved interests of a "select few") structure; The rule of law (not law in its narrow and formal sense); Democracy (a system better than which Mankind has not yet invented) as proof of our competitive place in the civilized community; Meritocracy that provides space for the potential of intelligence and law-abidingness; Restoring institutions and maintaining their effectiveness, including through depoliticization-eliminating the influence of parties.

All this requires maximum mobilization of public will, not only in the long term, but also on a continuous basis. A culture of "moving thought" fueled by intelligence, knowledge, awareness and the proper taste should pave our way in the coming decades in the Georgian space based on healthy ambitions - where room for regressive clichés, ingratitude and meager obedience standards will be minimized as much as possible. Provincialism is a great misfortune. It is one thing when it happens to an individual and becomes his personal tragedy, and quite another when it spreads over the national body and becomes the trial of the whole country. In such a case it must be tamed in time and given its place.

# Despite Protests, Abkhazia Transfers Bichvinta Property to Russia, Beginning the "Annexation" of Georgia

BY TEAM GT

The de facto parliament of Georgia's occupied region of Abkhazia on December 27 voted to transfer ownership of the Bichvinta country resort to Russia, a decision supported by 25 out of the 28 deputies. Despite protests from various groups, including activists, civil society, and opposition forces, the parliament passed the decision during the night. Local critics argue that the move "ignores the constitution of the Republic of Abkhazia," while the Georgia side states it is an illegal alienation of Georgian property and marks the beginning of the annexation of Georgia. The de facto government claims that only the buildings will be transferred with a 49-year lease, but the draft agreement suggests the transfer of 186 hectares of land and 115 hectares of sea space to Russia. The decision has sparked public outrage, with protesters gathering at the parliament building demanding an annulment.

Despite prolonged protests from Abkhaz activists, civil society and opposition forces, the de facto parliament of Abkhazia met on December 27, during the night, and at 6 o'clock in the morning made a decision to transfer the Bichvinta resort to the Russian Federation.

The decision was supported by 25 of the 28 [total 35] deputies present.

The Abkhazian community and activists who opposed the decision gathered at the de facto parliament building on Tuesday to hold a protest rally, and, in updates posted on social media, said they would not leave until the "shameful" decision was annulled.

The de facto government claims that only the buildings of the resort will be transferred to the ownership of the Rus-



Protesters outside the Abkhazian "parliament" building. Photo by Anaid Gogoryan/RFE/RL

sian Federation, with a 49-year lease, not the land on which the buildings stand. Yet, according to the draft agreement, 186 hectares of land and 115 hectares of sea space are to be transferred. Because part of Abkhazian society, among them the oppositional and even less politicized, was against said agreement, it took more than a year for the Abkhaz parliament to ratify the law on consent to transfer the Bichvinta territory to Russia.

The Bichvinta complex in the Gagra district of Abkhazia was built in the late 1950s at the request of then-Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev. Also known as Pit-sunda, the town was originally founded by Greek colonists in the 5th century BC, and became an important political and religious center in the Middle Ages. Since Soviet times, it has been one of the Abkhazian region's main coastal resorts.

Russia has been pushing Abkhazia for ownership for a number of years, and the separatist parliament's finally doing so is the illegal alienation of Georgian property, indeed, it is being assessed by Georgian politicians and experts as the

beginning of the annexation of Georgia. Nikoloz Samkharadze, the Georgian Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee Chair on Wednesday strongly condemned the illegal transfer of Bichvinta to Russia.

"The Abkhaz de-facto parliament ratified late at night the transfer of territory of Bichvinta to Russia. We strongly condemn this illegal act and declare all [...] actions carried out during occupation null and void," Samkharadze said in a social media message.

The Georgian official emphasized the act would be "remedied once Georgia restores its jurisdiction over Abkhazia".

The chairman of Georgia's European Democrats party, Paata Davitaia, said that "at dawn, the so-called separatist parliament, violating the regulations of parliament, fearing the people, used Bolshevik methods" to ratify the agreement on the transfer of Bichvinta country house to the Russian Federation. He noted the agreement was signed with a reservation- if this property falls into the hands of a third party, the agreement will be canceled.



Bichvinta. Image source: northcaucasusland

"I call on the Government of Georgia to start an investigation on this matter. To inform our partners that the President of Russia, who is wanted by the prosecutor's office in The Hague, is appropriating Georgian property.

"This is the beginning of the annexation of Georgia. The Russian Federation has already 'legally' begun to reshape the territories occupied by it," Davitaia stated.

"Ratification of the agreement on the transfer of Bichvinta summer house to the Russian Federation by the Abkhazian de-facto parliament represents yet another unlawful step and continuation of the illegal occupation of Georgia's inseparable regions that grossly violates the principles of international law," the Georgian Foreign Ministry wrote on Wednesday.

"We urge the international community to adequately react to yet another illegal step of the Russian Federation against Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Ministry calls on the Russian Federation to respect Georgia's

sovereignty and territorial integrity and fulfill its internationally-taken commitments, including the EU-mediated August 12, 2008 ceasefire agreement," reads the ministry's statement.

The United States was among the first international partner on Wednesday to condemn Abkhazia's decision.

"We condemn the illegitimate attempts to transfer land in the occupied Georgian territory of Abkhazia to Russia" a State Department spokesperson told Turan. az's Washington correspondent.

"Russia's ongoing occupation of 20 percent of Georgia's territory undermines Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The United States continues to call on Russia to uphold its obligations and commitments in the 2008 ceasefire agreement and UN Charter," a State Department spokesperson told the same news outlet.

Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili also strongly condemned the land grab by Russia, and also called on the international community for "a strong and urgent reaction."

## RUSI's Peter Roberts on the Potential Losses in Russia's Long Game

Continued from page 2

So this idea that the Western way of war, as they envisaged it for 30 years, could endure and would succeed, was deeply flawed and problematic. But very few people accepted that. For all the announcements after Ukraine that Germany would rearm, that the UK would invest more money, you see very few states living up to it- Poland, a few of the Nordic states, certainly the Baltic states, but very few big powerhouses of European militaries. They can't seem to convince their populations or themselves that this is a moment where they need to really invest.

**PRIOR TO THE COUNTER-OFFENSIVE, IT WAS WIDELY ADVOCATED THAT UKRAINE WOULD SUCCEED WITH THE COMBINED ARMS MANEUVER. INSTEAD, AS ZALUZHNY TOLD THE ECONOMIST, WE'VE ENDED UP IN A WW1 SCENARIO. WHY?**

The combined arms maneuver is only a way of fighting. Instead of fighting as dismounted infantry or in an artillery battle, you fight with all the arms together: engineering, artillery, infantry, plus airpower, plus Long Range Strike initiatives. The difference is that the West expected to use the maneuver to move forces around the battlefield, to attack enemies in cohesion, punching through enemy lines. Ukraine did that on several occasions, doing a brilliant job of attacking Russian commander control, but not so well at severing supply lines or attacking their deep areas. And that's where we saw success in the counter-offensive late last year. The problem is that it requires a very good understanding of the adversary, which Ukraine has, but I'm not sure the rest of the West does, and of the geometry. The battle lines in Ukraine are thousands of kilometers long- the mountains, rivers, weather, the farmland and fields, the hedgerows, all

prevent that kind of punch-through maneuver. And Russia has done a very good job of building defensive arrangements that prevent a breakthrough, which means that you are now fighting for ground, 100 yards at a time, back to WW1 movements going to and fro. That's not to say that advances can't be made, that you can't defeat the adversary. It just means that we go back to a timeline the West doesn't like, which is a long, slow, grinding, unpleasant timeframe full of death and destruction, with bloody battlefields that really make unpleasant fighting conditions, if fighting conditions can ever be pleasant. It's a really difficult thing, conceptually, for many Westerners to get their head round. They want a single punch with an Armored Fist to break through fences, break out the other side, and then spread out and defeat the Russians. And the Ukrainian General Staff have been pretty clear about this, have been under huge pressure not just from their own politicians and society, which one would expect, but also from Western generals and Western governments to make some kind of amazing breakthrough, as if this was suddenly possible. I just don't see there's a way to bring that to fruition.

**WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE RUSSIAN AND WESTERN CULTURES OF WAR?**

Essentially, the Russian General Staff was seduced by the Western approach we're talking about, and indeed, their attempted raid on Kyiv at the start of the war was exactly that- a lightly armored Special Forces convoy supported by air power and armor that was to take key areas, decapitate the government, and effectively sever the snakehead and carry out a regime replacement. This is hugely familiar to anyone who's lived in the West. So they tried desperately to make that happen. And Ukraine had a superb reaction to that, holding them off and



Peter Roberts. Source: Norwegian Institute for Defense Studies

defeating them. What I think saved the Russian offensive in many ways was the fact that the secondary part of their plan was to fix in place and hold in position. The majority of Ukrainian military in the east of the country ended up in an artillery war, a very Russian way of war: long, slow, monotonous, very attritional, less reliant on command and control, less reliant on thinking, and more reliant on the sheer weight of firepower, on destruction, and no thought to the consequences. That in many ways symbolizes the Russian way of war, which has been successful, but which is enormously wasteful. It held in place the Ukrainian military, and then made those huge incursions into Ukraine, taking enormous amounts of land, but then were ultimately brilliantly held off by Ukraine's defense.

The Russian way of war is a long, 5-10-year game, an attritional fight to exhaust the enemy. It's not about beating them; it's about being able to exhaust the enemy to the point at which they want to give

up. And this is exactly what Russia is doing. It's hitting the centers of population, the electricity supply, water, gas- all these things that make life acceptable during wartime, the Russians are now eroding away. That's where they're attacking whilst holding the line. This is how they hope to bring Ukraine to its knees.

**COMBINED WITH ATTEMPTS TO OUTLAST THE WEST AND WESTERN RESILIENCE.**

Yes. This is why Russian and Chinese ways of conducting war have been more successful than the West's, because they have a longer term view. We know there'll be a real problem if President Trump retakes office: his relations with the Russians will probably mean much less support for the Ukrainians, while the Europeans don't have enough firepower, war stocks, or production capability to match what the US has been giving. And there's a timeline problem here- the West has a short attention span. We see very little of that continued support going on now; we see the Poles, once the hardest of allies for Ukraine, holding up supplies with trucker strikes on the Ukrainian border, preventing hundreds of lorries of ammunition, food and water, all the things that Ukraine needs to sustain its fight, being denied and delayed. Time is really on the Russian side. It is willing to throw away lies, to throw away money, because it knows that if it can outlast the attention span of the West in political terms, in societal terms, then it will eventually be able to take Ukraine and Georgia and the rest of the Caucasus.

**YOU MEAN IN ITS ENTIRETY?**

Indeed. If Putin and the Russian people are successful in Ukraine, I think we will see them push further in Georgia. I wouldn't be surprised if they annex outright, or simply become the major power broker across the Caucasus.

If the West wasn't as distracted, I think it would be impossible. But there are a

variety of things playing against Ukraine that make this difficult. First is the potential election of President Trump and the end of US support for Ukraine, that might happen sooner than we wish. Second is the political timeline for the West and the loss of interest. Third, I think the sanctions against Russia have not been effective. And there hasn't been an uprising among the global community for Ukraine. You look at those who are applying sanctions on Russia, and those supplying arms to Ukraine: they're effectively the same group of countries, less than 15% of the world's population. None of the Global South, none of South America, very few in Asia, are providing Ukraine with support. So only one fifth of the world stands behind Ukraine- not by GDP, by population. Without the support of the wider international community, Russia sees itself as having pretty much a free rein, and as a place where it is pitted once again against NATO.

On the other hand, the Ukrainians are better fighters, are more technologically adept, have plans in hand to use their technological capabilities in a far more sophisticated way. They are continuing to make gains, not just accepting a line of control, and they are continuing to push. They've taken huge losses, but they've started not only to rebuild, but to mass manufacturing, and have arrangements now with Western arms suppliers to start producing inside Ukraine. This is probably going to be about who can out-produce fastest. And we know from the history of Ukraine's military industrial complex that once they get geared up, they will be unstoppable.

I very much hope that we will see a slow but gradually increasing pace in Ukraine's military advances to kick the Russians out. The best Ukraine can do at the moment is to keep fighting, and fight hard, the gains made the crossing of the river Dnieper were superb and showed the world the fight's not over yet.

# Petra Sea Resort LLC and Accor Sign an Agreement

Continued from page 1

The new complex will be designed according to the demanding technical standards and design concept of Pullman Living and Pullman Residences brands. The special feature of the complex will be not only its location on the first line of the Black Sea, but also the vast infrastructure – restaurants, bars, lounge areas, spa and fitness center, indoor and outdoor pools, meeting and event areas, as well as its own beach.

“We are happy to announce that we have signed an agreement with Accor and will develop Pullman-branded accommodation within Petra Sea Resort. We are convinced that Pullman apartments and residences will be an attractive investment product as well as sought-after residential properties for both foreign and local investors. We are also convinced that the addition of this and other premises within Petra Sea Resort will contribute to the development of tourism sector in Adjara region,” says Tinatin Kalandariashvili, Head of Petra Sea Resort project.

Petra Sea Resort is an upscale seafront mixed-use development located on the Black Sea coast, 15 km from Batumi. Spread over 20 hectares of land, it is the only master-planned residential complex of this scale in Georgia, which includes international branded hotels and residences, over 30 apartment buildings, vast recreational infrastructure, a private



beach, and a marina.

“Accor, as a global leader of Branded residences, and a leading operator in the popular extended stay market, has been keen to ensure its presence in Batumi, where we noticed a growing demand for such a product. We are proud to introduce Pullman Living and Pullman Res-

idences, Accor’s premium brands, on the beautiful Georgian coast of the Black Sea and to continue to expand our footprint in Georgia. We are grateful to our partner for their trust and cooperation and are looking forward to the implementation of this exciting project,” notes Alexis Delaroff, Chief Operating Officer

of Accor New East Europe.

Accor is a world leading hospitality group offering experiences across more than 110 countries in 5,500 properties, 10,000 food & beverage venues, wellness facilities or flexible workspaces. The Group has one of the industry’s most diverse hospitality ecosystems, encom-

passing more than 40 hotel brands from luxury to economy, as well as Lifestyle with Ennismore. With more than 380 extended stay hotels under 14 global brands, Accor is the world’s largest player in the category outside the United States, with a high concentration of properties across Europe and Asia.

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# CENN & USAID Economic Security Program Promote Circular Solutions in Georgia



Sharing success stories of recycling plastic to motivate businesses and citizens to follow in their footsteps

At the end of the event, the journalists who participated in the joint grant competition of the CENN and USAID Economic Security Program and prepared media products on the possible ways of plastic waste reduction and recycling were awarded.

The B2B event brought together up to one hundred stakeholders. Among the attendees were representatives of the Georgian government, waste recycling businesses, HORECA and other private sector, local and international organizations, and the media. Every participant had the opportunity to engage in the discussions, share thoughts, and talk about today's challenges and opportunities.

"Recently, we've been getting close to a systemic approach to waste management," said Giorgi Guliashvili, President of the Waste Management Association. "Plastic pollution is a global challenge, including in Georgia. Sadly, we couldn't start systemic collection and recycling of plastic waste until now, and I believe that such initiatives, including those of the private sector and NGOs, and their involvement in this process, is of utmost importance. For our part, we, the representatives of Waste Management Association, are ready to support them on this path, to receive and recycle the plastic waste. The rate of plastic production is still higher than its recycling rate, and we welcome all such initiatives and events aimed at strengthening circular solutions. This is crucial for more sustainable economy and for the future of our country."

Plastic waste is fast becoming a widely recognized problem. While getting rid of plastic waste is the primary environmental problem, the majority of plastic waste does not get reused or recycled, and while the majority of types of plastic are in fact recyclable, most municipal governments do not have the infrastructure in place to carry out this energy-intensive process.

Against the background of these challenges, the development of a "circular economy" is crucial for the future of our planet and the environment. Circular economy is based on the notion of maintaining the value of products, materials and resources within the economy for as long as possible, consequently minimizing the generation of waste which is produced. This concept helps to shape an essential part of the EU's plans to develop a sustainable and more resource efficient economy, with plastics forming one of the top five priority areas to be addressed.

To raise awareness on this crucial matter and contribute to sharing experience on reducing plastic waste, CENN, with the support of the USAID Economic Security Program and the European Union, on December 22 in Tbilisi hosted a B2B Networking Event on Plastic Reduction Opportunities and the Recycling Landscape. The event was held within the framework of the project "Empowering People for Circular Solutions in Georgia", which is implemented by CENN with the support of the USAID Economic Security Program.

This event aimed to facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration among stakeholders involved in the circular economy sector with the help of interactive sessions.

"The USAID Economic Security Program, in collaboration with CENN, has been implementing the awareness-raising campaign on reducing the use of plastic, minimizing plastic waste and using alternative ways instead," Maia Nizharadze, Representative of USAID Economic Security Program, said. "As part of this campaign, over three months, many awareness raising materials were prepared, such as articles, TV coverage, etc., to inform the public about solutions to reducing plastic and using alternative methods. The B2B event held at the end of the campaign aimed to let various sectors of society, private companies, government representatives, and NGOs among them, to share their knowledge and experience on this matter and draw up future ways of cooperation to continue creating a more sustainable economy together, with joint forces."

The forum was opened with welcoming remarks by the Deputy Head of the Department of Waste and Chemical Substances Management, Irma Gurguliani, the Chief of Party of USAID Economic Security Program, Marika Shioshvili, and the Deputy Director of CENN, Nino Shavgulidze.

After the welcoming remarks, the event hosted two thematic panel discussions, where the representatives of the government, private, and non-governmental sectors spoke about the possibilities of solutions for the country's circular transition. The participants of the first panel focused on the future policy of the country in terms of integration with the European Union. Opportunities for plastic packaging processing and manufacturing were also discussed.

The second panel discussion was devoted to the presentation of private sector initiatives, where both HORECA

and other private sector representatives shared success stories of plastic reduction.

The parties involved in the discussion highlighted the need to strengthen sustainable solutions, especially now, with Georgia having received the EU Candidate Status. And, with sustainability being among the main priorities on the EU agenda, introducing "green" solutions and reducing plastic waste will be an important step to get Georgia closer to membership of the European Union.

"We organized many awareness raising activities during this period, with the

participation of both the civil sector and private businesses. We tried to share as many success stories of recycling plastic in this period as possible, to motivate other businesses and ordinary citizens to follow in their footsteps," Ana Petriashvili, Communications Specialist, CENN, noted. "Today's B2B event also hosted the awards ceremony of journalists with exciting ideas about circular solutions. Such interest from the public gives us hope that the circular economy will further develop in Georgia, with all sectors of society acknowledging their share of responsibility in this process."





# Piel Naturals Premium Products Will Soon Be Available in Gulf Countries, Piel Naturals' Shop Opens in Kuwait



TRANSLATED BY MARIAM MIVILISHVILI

**F**or the first time in the 8000-year history of winemaking and viticulture in Georgia, company Piel Naturals has created a premium line of face care products with a unique formula of grape seed oil of the Georgian, endemic Rkatsiteli.

"Falling in love with one touch" - that's what the customers called the unique facial nourishing day cream with grape seed oil formula grown in the microflora of Georgia, which, thanks to the natural antioxidant properties of its constituent ingredients, is an ideal regenerator and radiant skin product.

This product, even for users with sensitive skin types, solves their biggest problem: finding the perfect nourishing product for their skin type, made from

98% natural ingredients, vegan, gluten-free, silicone-, paraffin- and paraben-free, not tested on animals.

An analogue of this product has not yet been created in Georgia. Georgian grape seed oil is not used by any global brand in the production of cosmetics. The unique formula was created by Tamar Lomadze. At the same time, the product is distinguished by the fact that it is 100% handmade, its packaging is eco-friendly, presentable, a map of the united Georgia and a Georgian vines are printed on it, which causes a feeling of patriotic pride among Georgian citizens, and a great interest from foreign tourists.

Further, the products are internationally competitively priced, and citizens of Georgia can enjoy them at an exclusive half price at any time, because the company's goal is to enable all citizens of Georgia to enjoy using the unique product of grape seeds grown on the

land of their own country.

The company's plan for the next two years, they say, is to go into large-scale production and open Piel stores in at least ten countries under the franchise model. This will increase the company's cash flow, which will be used to build a large cosmetic factory in Natakhtari, for which the company has already purchased land. The number of employees in Georgia will increase from its current 50 people, 95% of whom are women. The goal of the company is to promote the economic independence and strength of women in Georgia. With the increase in production, the number of economically independent women will increase tenfold. Also with the increase in production, a new industrial field will be developed, the raw materials processed by wine enterprises on the market will be fully utilized, and Georgia will export grape seed cosmetics to the world market for the first time in history.

The product Piel Naturals created received a great response from both Georgian citizens and foreign customers. These products excited the citizens of the Arabic country so much that in January 2023, they decided to open a chain of Piel stores in Kuwait, as well as in Dubai and Saudi Arabia. The company was officially registered in October, and very soon the first Piel store will be opened in Kuwait, where the unique products created by Piel will be appreciated and present Georgia in a new direction. There are also ongoing negotiations with Switzerland and Italy.

The product was highly praised by the American ambassador, Kelly Degnan. At the 4th of July event dedicated to the American Independence Day, Ambassador Degnan revealed that her beauty secret is this cream, which Piel gave her



in the spring. Delighted with the product, she said that she recommended the company to the president of the country, Salome Zurabishvili: "I am sure that Salome knows about your product, but I wanted her to know about it and have this gift from me," she said while talking to the founder of the company.

In spring, Piel Naturals also presented samples of their product at the International Exhibition of Cosmetic Formulators in Barcelona, where they were impressed by the texture of the product, because it is very difficult to create a formula whose texture is as soft and light as silk, without synthetic additives and silicones.

The product was tested on 100 volunteer users immediately after its creation, and 100 of them reported that they really liked its texture, skin tone and softness after using these products.

"To raise awareness of the product, many little packs of grape seed cream

were produced, many of which were given away as gifts to our loyal customers," the company states. "In addition, we test this product on the spot for all customers throughout the year at all ten of our locations, and offer 1 month trials at the most budget price, thus giving many customers the opportunity to try the product. Users have repeatedly mentioned that this product is a "fall in love with one touch" one. All this increased product awareness and sales. Those who try it once will never stop and will become regular users of this product, no matter how demanding or sensitive their skin type is.

"Also, many foreign tourists send their friends who came to Georgia to our locations to buy this product repeatedly. The product has earned the trust of customers because the company manufactures products in accordance with the international ISO standard, and this year it successfully passed the audit."

## Global to Local: Parki Ar Minda Hosts Int'l Green Film Festival to Highlight Sustainability and Environmentally Friendly Practices



People join to watch one of the documentaries hosted at the International Green Film Festival. Photo by Mikheil Matko

BY SHELBI R. ANKIEWICZ

**N**on-profit Parki Ar Minda is an eco-educational group which this year played host to the annual ECO-CUP International Green Film Festival, held on December 16 and 17 in Tbilisi. The festival went from early afternoon into late evening and featured six documentaries that focused on topics about pollution, climate crisis and solutions to solving it, the loss of biodiversity, and how the tourism industry affects ecosystems and agriculture. Co-founder of Parki Ar Minda, Tatiana Remneva, said they were glad the non-profit was able to participate in the event.

"We're very happy with the partnership we have, we think it's very beneficial for

everyone. Showing documentaries about these topics is very beneficial to raising awareness and to inspiring people to make changes in their everyday lives and businesses," she told GEORGIA TODAY.

Each year, ECO-CUP organizes a green film festival in a different country, and this is the first time Parki Ar Minda has been involved in hosting it. Remneva notes they have had a partnership with the company for some five years, and when they were looking for the next country to host the festival, the Georgia-based organization approached them. Parki Ar Minda assisted in picking the documentaries - they were given a list that they were able to choose from, and Remneva said they tried to pick ones with global issues that were also important to Georgia.

Each documentary was followed by a discussion led by a local expert on the given topic to tie the films into what is



People participate in a workshop at the festival led by Anastasia Laukannen. Photo by Mikheil Matko.

happening locally within the country. Remneva tells us that all the documentaries were international, coming from the United States, Canada, Austria, Belgium, etc., and since they didn't have the time or resources to fly over the directors of the films themselves, bringing in local experts was the next best thing. In the future, Parki Ar Minda hopes to have more time to prepare for the event and would like to do open calls for Georgian directors, so they, too, can showcase their work.

An eco-activist and founder of Tene Company Sandro Liliashvili was one of the discussion initiators at the festival. His company focuses on creating environmentally friendly USB chargers and cables from recycled waste. He said he has a strong passion for the plastic-free movement, because the material, although powerful, is being used incorrectly.

"It is a unique material that lives almost for an eternity, and somehow we need

to become smarter, to figure out how to not eliminate plastic, but to live in harmony with nature while using it for our needs," said Liliashvili.

Liliashvili prides himself on creating a product that isn't single use, as it can be used for at least a year, but figuring out what to do with it afterward always bothered him. Through experiments and trying to figure out how to reuse cables after they "go bad," he discovered that in 90% of cases, only the head of a charger goes bad, not the cable or the USB adaptor that plugs into the block. Therefore, he found a method to only change the head once it goes bad, so the rest of the electronic can be reused instead of thrown in the waste.

The eco-activist said the festival acted as an important space for people to share knowledge about the environmental situation in the world, and noted he has hopes that the documentaries will become

known to many because they are interesting and always keep people wondering what's going to happen next. He adds that it's important to watch and understand the details to comprehend what's going on in the world around us.

"I grew [there, watching those films], understood many things, people, attitudes," said Liliashvili. "I saw many places in the world that I cannot see from Georgia; saw with my own eyes to understand what is happening all over the world."

The six documentaries shown were: Plastic Fantastic (Germany, 2023, Dir: Isa Willinger), Duty of Care (Belgium, 2022, Dir: Nic Balthazar), All that Breathes (UK, US, India, 2022, Dir: Shaunak Sen), The Last Tourist (Canada, 2021, Dir: Tyson Sadler), Matter out of Place (Austria, 2022, Dir: Nikolaus Geyrhalter), and Common Ground (US, 2023, Dir: Joshua Tickell and Rebecca Harrell Tickell).

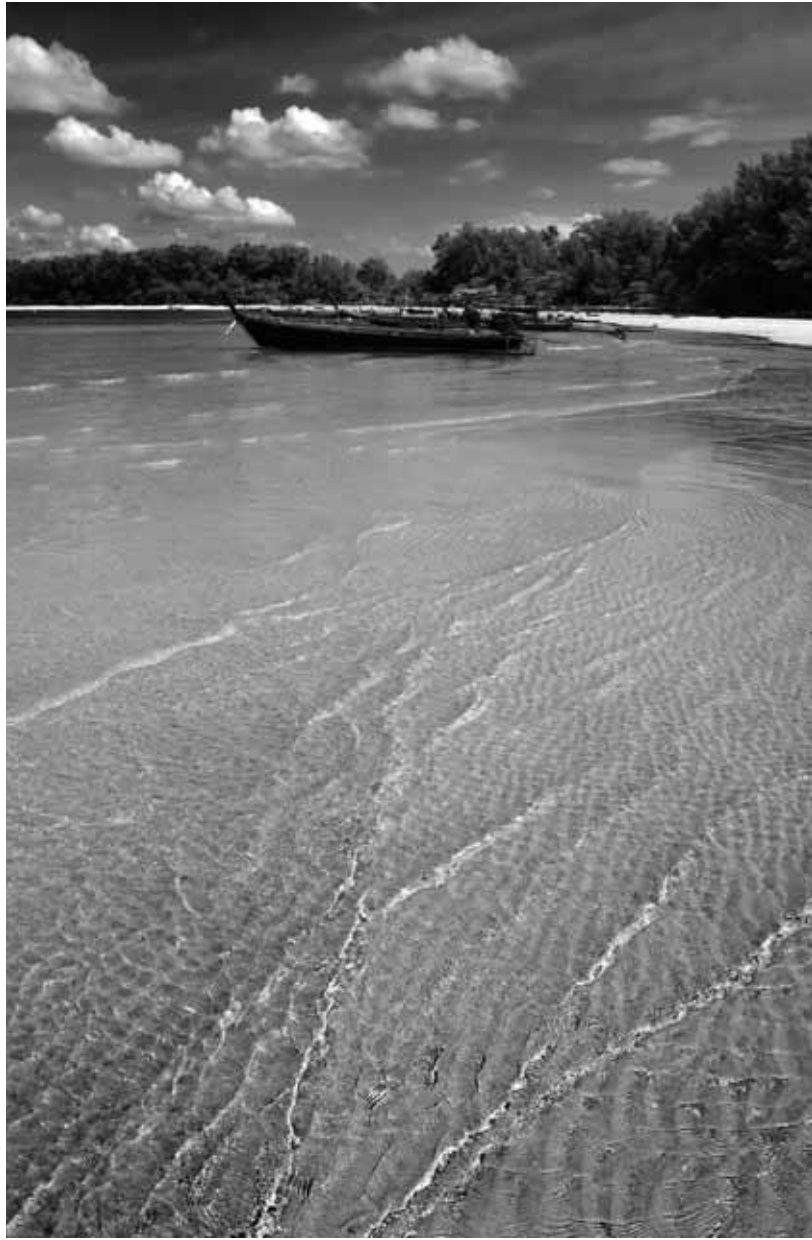
Remneva said the event was free to the public and around 200 people showed up over the two days. In addition to showing documentaries, Parki Ar Minda also hosted two special events for guests to participate and physically engage in - the presentation of results from the Eco-Exchange program that was funded by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and a workshop entitled "That's your place in the system" held by ECO-CUP co-founder Anastasia Laukannen.

The experts who held discussions after the documentaries are as follows: Sandro Liliashvili; Isa Willinger the director of "Plastic Fantastic"; Nino Toriashvili and Sandro Chitanava from Nature Conservation Georgia; Nikoloz Doborjginidze, an expert in regenerative agriculture; Data Tsintsadze, the founder of Data's Garden and the Napirze project; Levan Asatiani, a project manager of UNDP program "Improving the Rule of Law and Access to Justice for All"; and Mariam Pesvianidze and Tatiana Remneva, the founders of Parki Ar Minda.

# Thai'd Up



BLOG BY TONY HANMER



**B**ack now in chilly Tbilisi. Although the pilot on our flight from Istanbul had mentioned “clear skies” in his destination weather report, it was actually sleet which greeted us as we got into our taxi. Huge contrast from two weeks of wearing silk shirts, swimming trunks and sockless Crocs on tropical Phuket island, Thailand! A holiday my wife and I and our Svan friends will never forget.

Returning to the same beach (Naiyang) from our rented condo time after time gave us a slightly deeper familiarity with it, and looked me as a photographer to dig a bit into what this 1 km or so stretch of sand and sea had to offer. The pattern-seeker in me, too, woke up and began to look around.

The slope of sand to sea is very shallow here (unlike, say, Batumi). As the tide was in a different position each visit, I had a chance to explore its effects on the sand. Although I was as far from the pure, unrelieved sands of a desert as I could be, here at the shore there was wonderful variety displayed in the textures made by the endless ebb and flow of the water. Although there were people, flotsam and jetsam and other irregularities moving all around too, I did my best to eliminate these distractions from my frames. I was looking for pure form, especially that which would look equally good in either full color or black and white.

I have already mentioned the miraculous once-per-tide textural play of the tens of thousands of tiny beach crabs as they excavated holes for themselves in the sand. Each hole's sand they would compact into tiny balls, much smaller

than a pea, and throw or drag these out of the hole... in PATTERNS. When you looked up from one such hole and saw half of the width of the whole beach covered with these designs, it was awe-inspiring. If I was a David Attenborough, I would have the resources to cordon off a small section of the beach, set up a camera on a tripod, and make time-lapses of each crab at work, and end by slowly zooming out to the whole magnificent scene of thousands of parts. I can see it in my mind's eye, even if I can't film it.

Also, I noticed the momentary shadows made by the very end of each incoming wavelet on the sand an inch or less below it. Thank God for digital cameras: I could take frame after frame of these events in search of a few which were perfect examples of what I was seeing. Again, color was not necessary, a distraction even from the forms I was seeing and shooting. Delight, not possible on a beach of bigger waves. It was the very shallowness of the water which gave me what I was looking for.

I ended up with some shots trying to show everything together, with a wide-angle lens: the tiny wavelets and their shadows on the sand just under the water; textures of wave-stirred sand; sun and reflections on water in the middle distance; and finally, at the top, furthest away, old wooden fishing boats and the horizon, with a bit of clouds perhaps. People intruded only occasionally for scale, or I used just their walking legs at the top of a few scenes.

THIS is what makes me happy as a photographer: decoding the patterns of a particular place, whether it be Svaneti's

snow textures or seawater interacting with fine sand. These might be fine details, but they are worth noticing and recording. I'm not shooting for anyone else's enjoyment, only my own; but if someone else finds pleasure in the results too, then I've also succeeded in communicating something to others. Magic.

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/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/SvanetiRenaissance/). He and his wife also run their own guest house in Etseri: [www.facebook.com/hanmer.house.svaneti2](http://www.facebook.com/hanmer.house.svaneti2)



# World of Black and White

BLOG BY TONY HANMER  
FOR WHERE.GE

**G**eorgia's fall colors are yet in full glory as I write this, but snow is hard on their heels in the highlands... wind will bring all those leaves down, to carpet the ground. This is my least favorite time of year, because it looks the most dead to me; mostly brown. Then proper snow will eventually cover everything, bit by bit. Almost all color will disappear, leaving bare tree trunks and branches and mountains. The main palette will indeed shift to monochrome. But in this, too, there is great beauty. I hardly use color at all in my winter photographs, sticking to pure black and white without the distraction of all the hues which characterize the other three seasons. We are left with form, tones, and the need for more care-



ful pictorial compositions; and a tendency towards minimalism too. It needs a shift in approach. I welcome it.

For the driver, conditions can be quite different too. It was recently announced that for certain designated mountain roads in Georgia in winter, snow tires and/or chains will become a requirement should conditions mandate them. This is something North Americans are used to in mountainous areas too. It can force drivers to adapt to local conditions and cut down on accidents and the need for rescues. I remember this difference snow tires made on my previous vehicle, a Toyota 4Runner, in Svaneti. Using them, I did not need chains even once, which was a huge relief, as chains are frustrating to put on (the temporary plastic ones are simply a waste of time and money: I have seen them break on friends' tires during a first use more than once. Plastic gets too brittle in the cold, generally, for such forceful use).

My winter driving experience in Upper

Svaneti showed me that the road clearing still leaves some snow on the road surface. Before long, the weight of car tires on this turns it to ice; so you have to be much more careful, slow and watchful. It can be learned, but practice is always a good idea, as well as factoring in much more time than clean-road driving would allow. It was a statistical fact in Edmonton, Canada, when I lived there, that the onset of winter always brought more accidents, as young drivers had their first such experience and everyone else had to adapt to the seasonal conditions. Then things would stabilize. If you are leery of your vehicle's capabilities here, or your own, you can always hire a driver with their own 4x4 and leave the work to them.

As for sports... hiking in the highlands gives way to snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, and the downhill sports, including skiing, snowboarding and snowmobiling.

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# “We Pray for Our Warriors” – Christmas Celebrated in Ukraine on December 25 for the First Time



In 2023, Ukraine celebrated Christmas for the first time, along with the majority of local churches, on December 25, according to the New Julian calendar. Primate of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine Epifaniy recalled the spiritual meaning of the holiday and wished Ukrainians Christmas joy and a victorious New Year. The Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Ukraine recorded a special video greet-

ing, which was published on the OCU YouTube channel on December 24. The video was filmed inside a church decorated in honor of the holiday. “The Nativity of Christ calls for a rethinking of life views and reminds us of the eternal Christian values: faith, love, truth are the guides of stability and the foundation of our struggle,” Epifaniy said. The clergyman wished that the spir-

itual content of the holidays would inspire everyone to continue to work steadfastly to bring victory closer. “And the driving force in this will be love for our neighbors and trust in our defenders,” he said. Epifaniy also wished that the carols should be heard by everyone – and especially by soldiers, “enveloping them in the warmth of Christmas, warming them in body and soul.”



Davit Tserediani. Source: Intelekti

## Georgian Poets: A Poem by Davit Tserediani

TRANSLATED FROM GEORGIAN INTO ENGLISH BY KETEVAN TUKHARELI

Where does our temporal,  
Transcient go?  
Not that, which we  
Will give to the earth,  
Take to heaven,  
But the small pieces of  
Sadness and sudden horror,  
That which made us  
Trouble, respect,  
Which we mixed in a  
Smile called the  
Wonderful words.  
Look, snow! It nearly  
Touches the pillow  
At the head of the bed.

\*\*\*  
Georgian poet Davit Tserediani, praised as a “great translator,” contributed significantly to bringing German- and French-language poetry to Georgian audiences, as well as to promoting Georgian culture internationally. Tserediani, who passed away in 2019, received accolades such as the Givi Margvelashvili German-Georgian Culture Award in 2017 and posthumously the Vazha-Pshavela Prize, adding to his honors, which include the Shota Rustaveli and Ilia Chavchavadze state prizes and the Saba Award for Lifetime Contribution to Georgian Literature. His translation work encompassed renowned figures like the Brothers Grimm, Goethe, Heine, Rilke, and Celan since 1981.

# World of Black and White

Continued from page 10

Georgia has three principal winter sports areas: Bakuriani and Gudauri, both several hours’ drive from Tbilisi, and Svaneti (both Hatsvali and Tetnuli resorts), which is a full day’s drive and higher up too. So, whether you are looking for a day, weekend, or a longer period, modern equipment and conditions await you. As these areas have been operating since Soviet times, they are quite built-up and serious in quality, a nice alternative to facilities elsewhere in Europe. For the more adventurous...heli-skiing

and other more extreme sports are also available, with their corresponding prices. During one of my winters living in Ushguli, in about 2008, the village greeted a large helicopter coming from Oni in neighboring Racha. From it emerged a group of 14 German skiers, who were paying 700 Euros per hour for this privilege. Broken down to 50 Euros each per hour, I am sure that they felt that this was a good deal. The mountainsides might look almost vertical, but there are people who welcome such challenges. I will always watch, with no envy. Downhill skiing was always too expensive for

me in Canada, so I never learned it at the proper young age. But my parents, they met when my mother observed my father skiing bare-chested in Austria. So you never know what might happen. I would still like to see a regular winter festival here in Georgia. This might be sports-focused, as is being done already, but there are other possibilities too. Edmonton in Canada, and Harbin in China, have been famous for decades for their annual snow- and ice-carving events. Igloo-building is a thing I would love to try, and to see others doing. And there are the all-ice hotels in northern Scandinavia as well.

Three friends of mine, founding members of the Sculptors’ Association of Alberta, in the late 1980s, made the record largest ever snow sculpture in the world at the time, in Syracuse, NY, USA. They arranged for all the snow being cleared from a city parking lot to be put into a rectangular wooden form before they arrived. Then they took away the boards, and cut the resulting cube into a multi-story-sized polar bear. Our season of being cold enough for this kind of thing might be short here, but in the mountains, a thing to consider. Winter, welcome!



Photo by Tony Hanmer



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**ADDRESS**  
1 Melikishvili Str.  
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