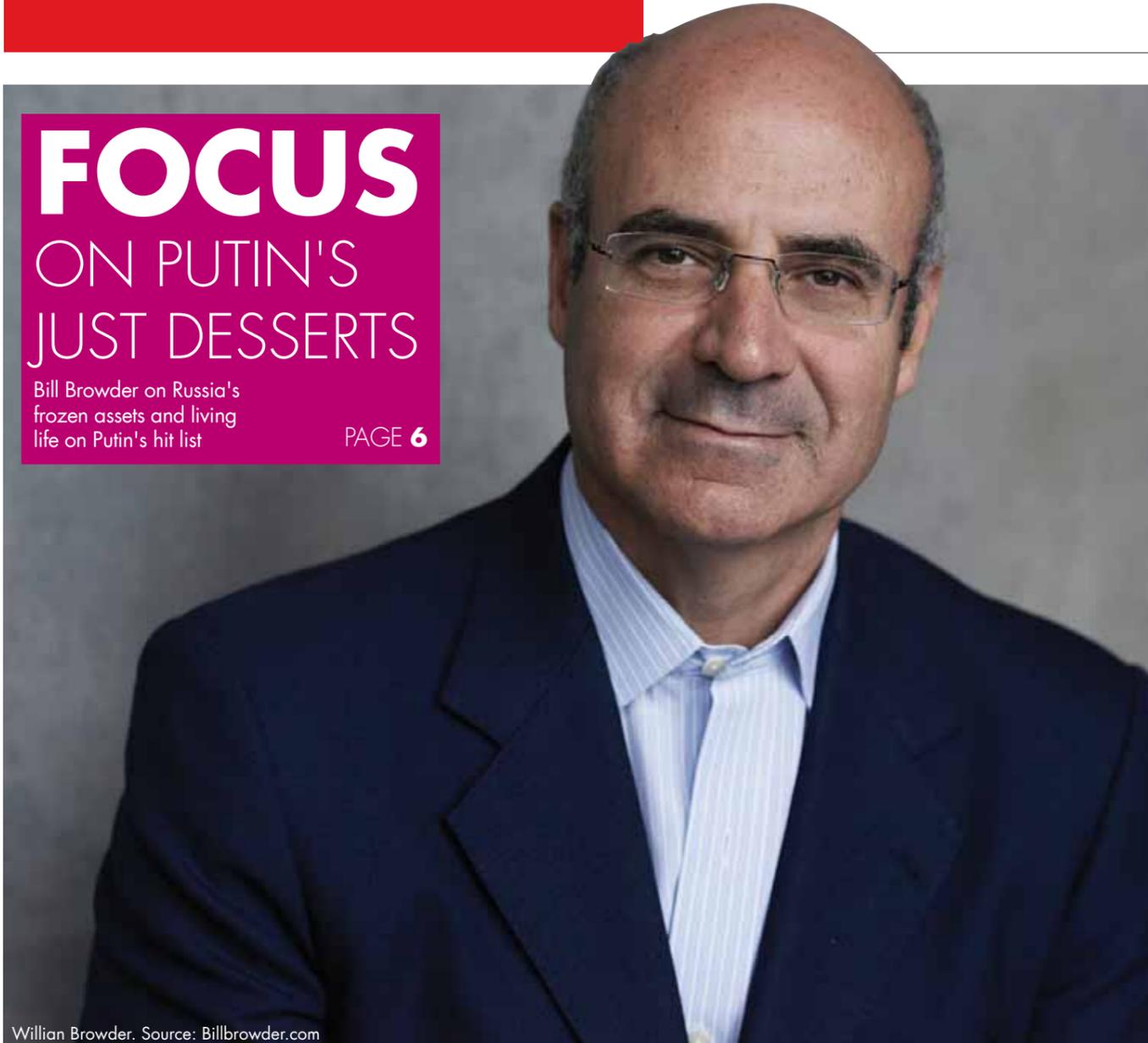


## FOCUS ON PUTIN'S JUST DESSERTS

Bill Browder on Russia's frozen assets and living life on Putin's hit list

PAGE 6



William Browder. Source: Billbrowder.com

# Sairme Wellness Resort: Redefining Hospitality with Sustainable Luxury

BY MARIAM MIVLISHVILI

Sairme Wellness Resort's nominations (Europe's leading resort, Georgia's leading resort) for the World Travel Award is a testament to its dedication to excellence in hospitality, and it invites travelers from around the world to contribute. With voting now open on the World Travel Award's website, visitors have the opportunity to contribute to the recognition of this outstanding resort in the heart of Europe.

The commitment to sustainability and eco-friendliness is evident in Sairme Wellness Resort initiatives. The resort prioritizes eco-conscious practices, enabling guests to enjoy the natural beauty of the region.

Sairme Wellness Resort is located in a mountainous subtropical zone, south of Kutaisi, 950 m above sea level, and belongs to the Baghdati municipality.

Continued on page 8



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Prepared for Georgia Today Business by GALT & TAGGART

As of 23-Jan-2024

Markets				COMMODITIES			
	Price	w/w	m/m		Price	w/w	m/m
<b>BONDS</b>				Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	79.55	+1.6%	+0.6%
GRAIL 07/28	91.87 (YTM 6.14%)	-0.1%	-0.2%	Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	2,029.28	+0.0%	-1.2%
SILNET 01/27	100.32 (YTM 8.25%)	+0.0%	+0.1%	<b>CURRENCIES</b>			
TBC 06/24	99.47 (YTM 7.08%)	+0.1%	-0.1%	GEL / USD	2,6628	+0.2%	-0.9%
<b>STOCKS</b>				GEL / EUR	2,8903	+0.0%	-2.4%
Bank of Georgia (BGE LN)	GBP 37.15	-4.9%	-5.5%	GEL / GBP	3,3781	+0.6%	-1.0%
Georgia Capital (CGEO LN)	GBP 10.52	-4.4%	+3.5%	GEL / CHF	3,0563	-0.9%	-2.6%
TBC Bank Group (TBCG LN)	GBP 28.60	+0.7%	-0.5%	GEL / RUB	0,0300	-0.3%	+3.1%
				GEL / TRY	0,0883	+0.1%	-3.9%
				GEL / AZN	1,5661	+0.1%	-1.0%
				GEL / AMD	0,0066	+0.2%	-0.9%
<b>INDICES</b>				GEL / UAH	0,0710	+1.3%	-0.8%
FTSE 100	7,485.73	-1.0%	-2.8%	EUR / USD	0,9213	-0.2%	+1.5%
FTSE 250	18,992.62	-1.0%	-3.3%	GBP / USD	0,7882	-0.4%	+0.1%
DAX	16,627.09	+0.3%	-0.5%	CHF / USD	0,8702	+1.0%	+1.7%
DOW JONES	37,905.45	+1.5%	+1.4%	RUB / USD	88,7253	+0.5%	-3.9%
NASDAQ	15,425.94	+3.2%	+2.9%	TRY / USD	30,2637	+0.5%	+3.5%
MSCI EM EE	41.86	-1.3%	-6.2%	AZN / USD	1,6990	-	-
MSCI EM	969.97	-1.0%	-2.2%	AMD / USD	404,2000	-0.1%	-0.1%
SP 500	4,864.60	+2.1%	+2.3%				
MSCI FM	2,293.79	+0.0%	+1.7%				

# Hydrogen Plant to be Built in Batumi Industrial Zone



BY MARIAM MTIVLISHVILI

**T**he head of the Georgian Oil and Gas Corporation, Giorgi Chikovani, within the framework of his visit to the Adjara region, held a meeting on the issue of locating a

green hydrogen plant in Batumi.

At the meeting, various technical, infrastructural and legal issues related to the construction of the green hydrogen plant and the use of green energy were discussed. With the participation of the parties involved in the project, the area where the hydrogen plant will be located has already been selected.



## Georgia Appoints New Ambassadors in Israel, China, Kuwait and Jordan

**G**eorgia has new ambassadors to Israel, China, Kuwait and Jordan. Zaza Kandelaki, who was previously the Ambassador of Georgia to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, was appointed as the Ambassador to the State of Israel, replacing Lasha Zhvania.

Noshrevan Lomtadze will be the Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of Georgia to the State of Kuwait. The

government administration reports that from June 2021 until now, he worked as the director of the Department of International Economic Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia. He will replace Konstantine Zghenti at the post.

The newly appointed Ambassador to China is Paata Kalandadze, replacing Archil Kalandia. Before being appointed as the Ambassador to the People's Republic of China, Paata Kalandadze was the Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary

Ambassador of Georgia to the United Arab Emirates.

Archil Dzuliashvili will be the Ambassador of Georgia to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. He replaces Zaza Kandelaki at this post. Archil Dzuliashvili held the position of Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of Georgia to the Republic of India.

Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili met the newly appointed ambassadors face to face Tuesday.

# Ukraine Latest: Russia Blames Kyiv for Downing Plane Carrying Ukrainian POWs



The plane crash. Image source: AFP

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

**A**Russian military transport plane crashed Wednesday in a border region near Ukraine, and Moscow accuses Kyiv of shooting it down, saying all 74 people aboard were killed, including 65 Ukrainian prisoners of war headed for a swap. Russia offered no evidence and Ukraine did not immediately confirm or deny it.

In a statement, the Russian Defense Ministry said the Il-76 transport plane was carrying 65 POWs, a crew of six, and three Russian servicemen. It said Russian radar registered the launch of two missiles from Ukraine's Kharkiv region that borders Belgorod.

Video of the crash on social media from the Belgorod border region of Russia showed a plane falling from the

sky in a snowy, rural area, and a massive ball of fire erupting where it apparently hit the ground.

Kyiv was initially silent as details of the plane crash emerged Wednesday morning. Later, Ukraine's intelligence agency confirmed that a prisoner exchange had been scheduled but did not take place.

It said that it did not have "reliable and comprehensive information about who exactly was on board the plane nor how many."

The "Ukrainian side was not informed about the need to ensure the safety of the airspace in the area of the city of Belgorod in a certain period of time, as was repeatedly done in the past," the agency added.

Separately, Ukraine's armed forces said in a statement they would continue to "control the airspace to destroy the terrorist threat" of strikes crossing the border from Belgorod into Ukraine's Kharkiv region.

**RUSSIA SAYS PRISONER EXCHANGES WILL CONTINUE EVEN IF IT MUST "DEAL WITH THE DEVIL"**

Russian prisoner exchanges will continue, a senior Russian official said Thursday, despite Wednesday's plane crash that saw 65 Ukrainian prisoners of war killed, alongside nine Russians, prompting further tension and hostility between Moscow and Kyiv.

"We cannot abandon our guys," Tass reported the head of the State Duma Defense Committee Andrei Kartapolov as saying when asked whether prisoner exchanges would continue following the incident.

"We will talk even with the devil, work even with the unclean, but we need to get our guys out. We have no other choice," he said.

Prisoner exchanges are a thorny subject between Russia and Ukraine, although both sides have a vested interest in carrying out sporadic swaps of prisoners

of war. Many prisoners remain in custody months after their initial capture.

**KREMLIN SAYS IT WILL AGREE TO INTERNATIONAL INVESTIGATION — IF KYIV ADMITS PLANE ATTACK WAS A CRIME**

The Kremlin said it would agree to an international investigation into Wednesday's plane crash in the Belgorod region that killed 65 Ukrainian prisoners of war if Ukraine admits to committing a crime in shooting the plane down.

Ukraine has not admitted responsibility for the crash, in which all on board died, and called for an international investigation into the incident, accusing Russia of "playing" with the lives of POWs.

**OTHER KEY DEVELOPMENTS THIS WEEK INCLUDE:**

At least 18 people were killed and more than 130 wounded in massive Russian

airstrikes on Ukraine on Tuesday, Volodymyr Zelensky said. The air raids mostly targeted the two largest cities: The capital, Kyiv, and Kharkiv in the east. Ukraine's president said more than 200 sites were struck, including 139 dwellings.

Russia's military is carrying out probing attacks with barrages of missiles and drones in an attempt to find weaknesses in Ukraine's defenses while US funding for security assistance is tied up in Congress, Celeste Wallander, a Pentagon assistant secretary of defense, has said.

The Hungarian prime minister, Viktor Orbán, said he had invited Sweden's prime minister to visit and negotiate his country joining the NATO military alliance, a process that Hungary and Turkey have delayed. Turkey's parliament, though, voted on Tuesday to accept Sweden as a NATO member.

Western allies aren't supplying Ukraine with enough ammunition and air defense missiles, Ukraine's foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, has said in an interview with German media. Russian attacks on Kyiv and Kharkiv on Tuesday "clearly show the need to provide more anti air defense systems, as well as more surface-to-air missiles". As for the ground war, "insufficient quantities of artillery munitions has been a problem from the start," he said.

Kuleba said he was still in talks with the German government about receiving Taurus cruise missiles, even after the lower house of the German parliament voted a week ago against delivering them. "We'll never give up," Kuleba said.

The finance minister of Germany has said it can't keep up Ukraine's defense capabilities on its own in the long term and that others will need to increase bilateral contributions.

"20 Days in Mariupol," Mstyslav Chernov's chronicle of the besieged Ukrainian city and the international journalists who remained there after Russia invaded, has been nominated for best documentary at the Oscars.

Poland and the Baltic states are calling for import bans on Russian aluminum and liquefied natural gas (LNG) for the European Union's 13th package of sanctions against Moscow over its Ukraine invasion, a Polish official has said.

# 4000 Abkhaz Artworks Lost in Sokhumi Blaze, Georgia Offers Support to Restore What Can Be Saved



The blaze at the Sokhumi National Gallery. Source: Abkhazia Ministry of Culture on Telegram

BY TEAM GT

The “Golden Fund” of Abkhaz artists was destroyed in a blaze in Sokhumi last weekend, and more than 4000 pieces of art were lost. Flames were seen erupting from Abkhazia’s National Art Gallery at around 3:30am on Sunday, January 21. Eleven fire crews arrived at the scene and had the fire put out by 7am.

The “Minister of Culture” of the occupied Abkhazia region, Dinara Smyrni, said the fire that broke out in the central

exhibition hall of the Sokhumi National Gallery had led to “an irreparable loss for our national culture.”

Suram Sakania, director of the art gallery, said 4,000 pieces of art had been burned or severely damaged by fire and then by water in the firefighting process, including approximately 300 works by Alexander Chachba-Sherwashidze. Only 200 works were saved from the entire Gallery collection.

The “president” of the self-proclaimed republic, Aslan Bzhania, visited the gallery after the fact and instructed the prosecutor’s office to conduct a thorough investigation to determine the cause of the fire. Sakania claims firefighters had

told him the fire started on the roof of the building. “Apparently, there was a short circuit in the electrical wiring,” he said.

Although local scholars said the de facto local authorities had been notified of the risk status of the Gallery following a fire there in 2014, and had been asked to look into improving storage and safety conditions, “minister” Smyrni claimed there had been no such communication.

The President of Georgia, Salome Zurbishvili, quickly called on the international community to protect the cultural heritage of Georgia in the occupied territories.

“The fire that destroyed the Sokhumi National Gallery in occupied Abkhazia is a tragedy for all of us. I am sorry for what is a direct result of the neglect of cultural identity by both the de facto leadership and the Russian occupiers. I call on the international community to restore attention to the protection of our cultural heritage in the occupied territories,” she wrote in a post published on X.

On Tuesday, the Georgian National Museum expressed its sorrow over the incident that occurred on January 21 and stated its readiness to engage in the restoration efforts for exhibits damaged

by the fire.

“The museum is ready to assist the art gallery specialists in restoring the damaged exhibits. For this purpose, the National Museum is ready to establish a special group composed of restorers from the Shalva Amiranashvili State Art Museum,” the National Museum announced.

Getting there first, Olga Lyubimova, the Minister of Culture of the Russian Federation, said that the fire was a “real tragedy” and a “humanitarian disaster” for Abkhazia, and announced that Russia will be sending its own specialists to help with the restoration work.



Fire crews fight to put out the burning artworks. Source: Abkhazia Ministry of Culture on Telegram



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# On Georgia's Candidate Status for European Union Membership: Some Practical Considerations and Observations

ANALYSIS BY VICTOR KIPIANI,  
GEOCASE CHAIRMAN

Much has been said about the historical significance of the European Council decision of December 14, 2023, and much will be said in the future. Given the political and legal, economic, moral and social nature of the EU membership candidate status for Georgia, this is absolutely understandable. Moreover, now there will be more to say and evaluate, after all, our country is still in the process of fulfilling the conditions set by the European Union, which should create prerequisites for the start of membership negotiations.

Despite the abundance of comments, let us dwell on some practical aspects of the December 14 decision. We believe that mentioning them is necessary not only to fully understand the importance of the EU's support for Georgia as a Caucasian country in the medium and long term, but because this decision also helps us to fully characterize possible reforms within the EU and its expansion to the East.

In our opinion, the "markers" corresponding to the historical decision of Georgia's European partners are formed as follows (the proposed sequence in no way indicates the determination of any priority among them. We are merely presenting them for the judgment of the audience, and, for us, each of them separately has a great purpose):

## A STRATEGIC COUNTERATTACK

We believe that the decision of December 14, 2023, as regards Georgia and Ukraine and Moldova, demonstrates the intention of the European Union to abandon the so-called "deaf defense" and move to a "strategic counterattack" in our complex Caucasus region.

Accordingly, if we recall the early statements of a number of Georgian politicians and researchers who viewed the decision on the candidate status, in addition to its meritocratic nature, also in the geopolitical dimension, we can say that the peripetias before and after the decision justified the forecast of such a "dualistic" approach. And it came at the right time: In today's world, too much preoccupation with the idealism of today makes it difficult to grasp the reality of tomorrow, let alone overcome the challenges that will have accumulated by then.

Thus, the conclusion drawn from the Georgian end of the coherent European integration process is very likely that



Georgia's Government Administration Building, illuminated in the colors of the EU flag. Source: Facebook, Georgian government

said decision is equally important for the European Union, as it emphasizes its strategic vision towards one very complex geopolitical space of Eurasia, and it means taking (co)responsibility for the future of the same space.

## A DECISION OF PRINCIPLE

The decision repeatedly mentioned in this article demonstrates the unity of the EU Member States in taking decisions of principle. Undoubtedly, the stated position with regard to Georgia (as well as Ukraine and Moldova) is particularly valuable against the background of Russian aggression in Ukraine and in the context of current events on the Eurasian continent.

It is a fact that skeptics envisioned a possible crack in unity, and not without reason. This skepticism was largely "fed" and is still being "fed" by the challenges posed in Western democracies in general, and by the growing voice of radicalism and populism based on these challenges.

## SELF-SUFFICIENCY

We believe that the officially stated position on eastward enlargement reflects the EU's desire to establish itself as a self-sufficient geopolitical player. We think that this message from the Euro-

pean Union was addressed not only to the revisionist countries of the international legal order in its East, but also to the United States of America.

We have chosen the word "self-sufficient" here after some thought, i.e. we want to say that with such decisions the EU is trying to find its own voice in relations with both competing and partner geopolitical actors. At the same time, such an attempt should not (and cannot) be interpreted as a separation of the European Union from the United States in European affairs. Nor can it be regarded as an indicator of European autonomy doomed from the start to failure.

## THE EU CODE OF CONDUCT

The ideological or conceptual burden of the decision of December 14, 2023 is enormous without exaggeration. It is the European Political Union's response to a gross violation of the order established after the Second World War: The inviolability of that order is based, above all, on the inviolability of internationally recognized borders.

Therefore, this EU decision, like the 2030 enlargement policy document, is a kind of constitutional basis for the geopolitical anatomy of international legal norms and order in Europe. The declaration by European partners of their

"code of conduct" is a stated counterbalance to the "code of conduct" aimed at expanding their own geopolitical-geoeconomic Lebensraum, the so-called "livingspace", in violation of international norms, including in the neighborhood. Since we have already mentioned the coherence of the European integration process, in order to ensure "two-way traffic" within it, the Georgian side should necessarily take into account:

1. With the granting of candidate status to Georgia, it is highly likely that the geopolitical "content" of the issue has been finally exhausted or, at least, sharply reduced. Accordingly, on the way to the opening of negotiations on the country's accession to the European Union, it is unlikely that the "turbo mode" will be turned on by our European partners. This time, the country's successes will be largely merit-based, and measured on a strict meritocratic scale. Simply put: The change required for European integration must be real, not "fake change", "half change", "pseudo change" or "quasi change".

2. The fulfillment of the conditions set by the EU for the start of negotiations, besides the essential importance of their implementation, also requires a timely and well-established communication policy, not only at the EU level, but also

in the capitals of the EU member states. We believe that we gained some experience in this during the final stretch of becoming a candidate. However, the impression remained that this line of communication was not complete and coherent and was more like speeding up on a straight line to the finish line. This approach, already for the second time, this time in the process of fulfilling the nine conditions, is risky and are highly unlikely to work. Therefore, the nuances of correct and systematic communication with the Europeans should be taken into account from the very beginning. Given the hesitations of the electorate and isolationist political tendencies in several EU member states, this is all the more relevant.

In addition, another significant circumstance requires separate emphasis: It must be realized that after obtaining the candidate status and before starting membership negotiations (and, of course, during the negotiation process itself), the space for "emotional diplomacy" (e.g., "standing on two feet" vs. "standing on one foot" and other political overtures of the epistolary genre) will also be limited. In general, we have already talked about tomorrow's agenda of Georgian diplomacy and, with high probability, we will talk about it specifically again in the near future. Therefore, here, and this time we will save the reader's time and patience, our generalized call in this article is again to "deromanticize" national political thought and pursue realistic Georgian politics.

Provided that the call for realism is fulfilled, one should also take into consideration that the EU is planning to reform itself, which should keep this rather clumsy structure from turning into a second United Nations, and enable it to meet modern challenges. Here we should mention the so-called "Roadmap" for reforming the European Union by spring 2024. Needless to say, we should not only observe this process, but go along with it with our own reforms at home, which will ultimately create a better way for us to adjust to a renewed European Union and adapt to its written and unwritten rules ("Operating Code").

This and many other opinions, their reminding and voicing, obviously in order to be taken into account in the process, are of practical benefit for the continuation of European integration in Georgian reality by deeds, not words. Naturally, there are several participants in this process. However, the degree of our participation is, of course, the main and determining factor. In this respect, our modernity is indebted to the past and accountable to the future.

## Georgia on the Shortlist for 2024 EU Prize for Contemporary Architecture

Tbilisi Urban Forest (Narikala Ridge Forest), Georgia, is one of 40 works shortlisted from 362 nominations from 20 different countries by the Contemporary Architecture/Mies van der Rohe Awards (EUMies Awards) jury.

The awards are given every second year to works completed within the previous two years by architects from Creative Europe participating countries. They recognize and commend excellence and innovation in the field of architecture.

The Narikala Botanical Garden is located in the very center of the capital. It was created in the mid-20th century by Soviet biologists, who planted pine monocultures to reduce erosion and cool the city. The ageing plantations have in the past few years begun suffering significant die-off from pests and fungi, posing a fire hazard and public safety risk.

In 2020, the city of Tbilisi initiated a project to repopulate the Tbilisi Urban Forest with a biodiverse palette of endemic and climate-adapted species. A new approach to afforestation that

combines ecology, technology and aesthetics was created and tested in Narikala.

This February, the EUMies jury, counting Frédéric Druot (chair), Martin Braathen, Pippo Ciorra, Tinatin Gurgidze, Adriana Krnáčová, Sala Makumbundu and Hrvoje Njiric will announce the finalists. Then, the jury members will visit these works and make their final decision.

In April, the Architecture and Emerging Winners will be announced, and the awards ceremony will take place in May at the Mies van der Rohe Pavil-

ion in Barcelona. The Architecture Prize winner and the Emerging Architecture Prize Winner will receive €60,000 and €30,000 respectively, and they and the project supporters (those who commission the buildings) will also receive a sculpture recognizing their essential contributions to contemporary architecture.

Highlighting today's shared culture of architecture throughout Europe

The 40 works shortlisted are examples of how architects continue to undertake the endeavors to design responsibly, ethically and environmen-

tally. They also highlight the importance that architecture, urban planning and governance need to work together in an even stronger way to achieve long term city projects.

The jury frequently referred to "ambition" considering that architecture is an activity of public interest and must be designed ensuring high-quality living spaces and built environment for everyone. Among the 40 selected works, an important number are transnational projects, and half of the selected works are located in relatively small cities and towns.

# Tbilisi Evictions Raise Anger

BY TEAM GT

**O**n Kekelidze Street in Tbilisi, National Enforcement Bureau officers spent most of Tuesday trying to evict a family- the Khatiaishvili -from their place of residence.

The police sought to break down the entrance door but found it welded shut, as supporters and relatives mobilized near the house to prevent representatives of the National Bureau of Enforcement from evicting the family. Several people were detained, including activist Irakli Kakabadze and a number of journalists covering the event. One of the family members fainted during the eviction and had to be hospitalized.

The Khatiaishvili's claimed they had already paid more than they borrowed to the private debtor demanding their removal, including additional interest, and told journalists they had no intention of giving up the apartment, however, the eviction was successfully concluded by 6pm.

Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze con-



Source: Netgazeti

demned the behavior of the protestors, stating that "Physical violence is wrong and categorically unacceptable, and such people who physically assault our employees while they are performing their duties must be punished. With the involvement

of relevant agencies, we will act in accordance with the law."

On January 24, an eviction procedure was planned on Shalva Dadiani Street, and on January 26 - on Zandukeli Street, but the National Enforcement Bureau said it was temporarily postponing the eviction of the Kakiashvili family on Dadiani Street in Tbilisi following the large-scale protests Tuesday, recognizing the fact that the family there is socially vulnerable and that two minors live in the house.

They noted that they would continue to communicate with the parties to reach an agreement.

"On the basis of Article 31 of the Law on Enforcement of Georgia, the National Bureau of Enforcement postponed the eviction, since the family is socially vulnerable and two minors live in this house.

"Considering their interests, they were given extra time to solve the issue. The Enforcement Bureau will continue to communicate with the parties in order

to bring the case to a voluntary and amicable end," the Bureau explained.

"Despite the decision, the citizens and family supporters gathered at the site say they are not going to disband. They think that delaying the eviction procedure means their victory and the government's failure."

One of the family members, Mariam Kakiashvili, stated that in 2014, she borrowed 5,000 dollars from a private moneylender, which she was unable to pay back, and finally, the apartment was sold at auction and bought by the private moneylender from whom she had borrowed the money.

Kakiashvili claims the seller asked her to pay approximately 20-25,000 dollars, and said that moving to rented accommodation is not a possibility for her. She also explains that she is a war veteran and mother of three, and lives in the house with her two minor children. She has asked to be given a reasonable deadline to be able to pay off her financial obligation.

Zurab Japaridze, Georgian politician and co-founder of Libertarian party Girchi - More Freedom, opined to journalists: "The debt needs to be paid in any case. Without any mechanism to force a person to pay, no one will pay a debt. The entire banking system and economy is based on this."

The President of Georgia, Salome Zurbishvili, responded angrily to the evictions on social media: "Evicting people in winter is prohibited in all European countries! Human rights and European values are everything!" she wrote.



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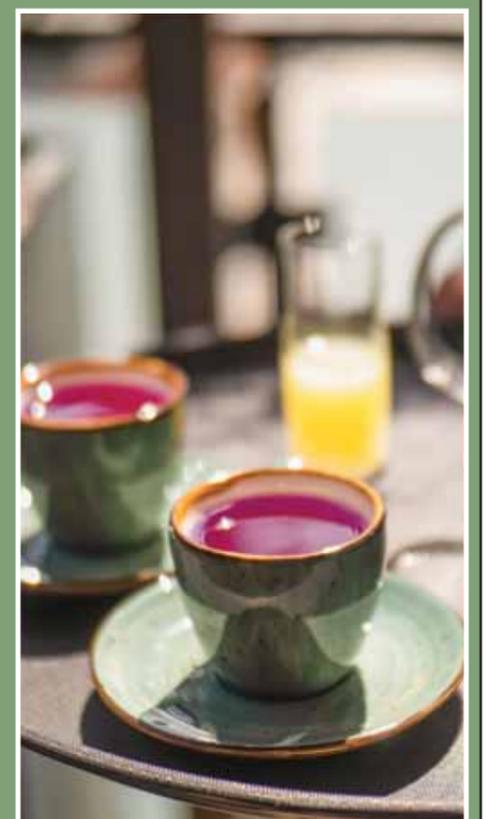


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# "It Will Happen" - Bill Browder on Handing Over the Frozen Russian Funds to Ukraine

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

**W**illiam Browder, CEO of Hermitage Capital Management, Head of the Global Magnitsky Justice Campaign and author of Red Notice, was the largest foreign investor in Russia until 2005, when he was denied entry to the country and declared "a threat to national security" for exposing corruption in Russian state-owned companies. When, in 2008, his lawyer Sergei Magnitsky uncovered a massive fraud committed by Russian government officials that involved the theft of \$230 million in state taxes, he was imprisoned and tortured to death. Since then, Mr. Browder, who is also on Putin's "hit list," has sought justice outside of Russia with a global campaign against human rights abusers and highly corrupt officials. The United States was the first to impose targeted sanctions, with the passage of the Sergei Magnitsky Accountability Act in 2012, followed by the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act in 2016. Canada, the UK, the Baltic states, the EU and Australia have passed their own versions of that act. Radio Free Europe/RL's Georgian Service sat down with Browder to get his take on giving the frozen Russian funds to Ukraine, life on Putin's hit list, and Putin's just desserts.

"The focus at Davos was on the war in Ukraine, and the most important issue was the confiscation of the Russian Central Bank reserves, which have been frozen since the beginning of the war," he says. "We all see the EU and US financing of the war has come under strain in recent months, and it's put a lot of focus on what other sources of funding there are. And, of course, the \$350 billion of frozen Russian Central Bank reserves could potentially be that. At the World Economic Forum this year, this was a topic which was brought up as a realistic possibility. The British foreign secretary, David Cameron, openly supported it; the foreign ministers of Poland, the Czech Republic, Lithuania also supported it; the United States is now warming up to it. It was a very different conversation than I had a year ago at Davos on the same topic."

## IN PRACTICAL TERMS, HOW DO YOU SEE IT HAPPENING?

It must be done in unison by all the major allied countries. There's a big fear that if the US were to do it by itself, for example, then the US dollar would become a less attractive currency than the euro. But different countries are working at different speeds to come up with a political consensus, legal justification, etc.: The single most important issue at Davos was getting everybody active at the same time, though I suspect that we're going to see a lot more open discussion about this at the G7. The other thing I should point out is that the Ukrainian government and the Ukrainian president are now talking about it too. In the past, you had Zelensky talking about tanks, long range missiles, F-16s. Now this financial aspect is becoming his and other ministers' regular talking point. Previous discussions were on this money being used for reconstruction, a very optimistic thought - you can't reconstruct Ukraine if they've lost the war. And so there's now a much greater sense of urgency about using this money for the defense of Ukraine, because you can't reconstruct a country that can't defend itself. It's all



William Browder. Source: Billbrowder.com moving in a logical direction. I don't think it's going to be resolved in the next weeks or months, but I think that as the US election approaches, with Donald Trump talking about cutting off funding for Ukraine, this is potential insurance that could be put in place before the US election. And it's a much more attractive proposition for Putin to pay than the taxpayer.

## WITH THE PROPOSAL BEING SO ENTICING, WHAT ARE THE ARGUMENTS OF THE NAYSAYERS?

The first argument is that there is no legal precedent to doing this, that we'd be playing by the same set of lawless rules that Putin does. But there is historic precedent: The US did this after WW2 with German Nazi assets, and again after Iraq invaded Kuwait and froze confiscated Iraqi assets. The only difference between this and those situations is that the war is not over yet. And the war probably won't be over for a long time to come. The one aside of the story is that Russia's assets are protected by sovereign immunity and you can't touch them. But the other side of that argument is that Ukraine's well-being is protected by something called the Law on Countermeasures, whereby the country inflicting monetary damage on another is liable for economic damages. With two laws in conflict with one another, there's legislative change that's needed to make it clear that there can be no legal claims afterwards, because the law on countermeasures trumps the law on sovereign immunity.

Then some naysayers incorrectly claim people will abandon the euro or the US dollar, but it's hard to imagine anyone abandoning those currencies because there's nothing left. These are the liquid reserve currencies of the world! You can have countries like China and Saudi Arabia keeping their money in Iranian

rials or Argentine pesos, but they have to, the US, EU doesn't.

The third argument is that if the West confiscates Russian Central Bank reserves, then Russia will confiscate Western assets. That's also a false argument, because the Bank of England isn't keeping rubles on deposit in the Bank of Russia. Nor is the Federal Reserve. Yes, there are corporate investments in Russia, but Russia already started expropriating those investments long before this ever happened: Hyundai had a \$3 billion plant expropriated in St. Petersburg, Carlsberg had their brewing facilities expropriated. German gas companies have had their assets expropriated. And so it's nonsense to say that's a risk.

## WHAT ABOUT THE GROWING UKRAINE FATIGUE?

This solves that problem because people won't have to tire of funding Ukraine, as someone else will be funding it. But I would also point out that in my meetings in Davos with leaders, I saw no fatigue among the former foreign secretaries, foreign ministers, people in the State Department, at the government level. There is fatigue at the population level, public interest fatigue, because a war going on for two years doesn't generate the same amount of emotion. But at the government level and closer you get to Ukraine? No - if you're sitting in Lithuania, say, you know you might lose your country if you don't do everything you possibly can to help Ukraine, as at the moment they're defending the rest of Europe.

## WAS DAVOS 2024 A WIN OR FAILURE FOR UKRAINE?

I'd say it's been a big win. I think the frozen central bank reserves are probably among the most important things out there. And I was frankly surprised that it took the Ukrainians this long to elevate that to the top of the agenda.

Money is what makes the world go round, money is what protects, money buys weapons - money is crucial. And it's a very easy point to make. I don't think anyone would argue that Russia shouldn't pay up. I don't think anyone would object. The ones who object in Western countries are the bureaucrats, the ones that just don't want to do something new, because new is scary. At the end of the day, financial necessity will force this to happen.

## SO YOU SEE THIS AS INEVITABLE?

This is the same thing as tanks, long range missiles and F-16s. When we first started talking about them, they could never happen, and then people slowly warmed up to it. And then eventually, it happened. I don't see how this cannot happen, frankly.

## THE WEST SAYS THEY WILL STAND BY UKRAINE "AS LONG AS IT TAKES." HOW LONG IS THAT?

Sadly, I think it's going to be a very long time. I know how Vladimir Putin behaves, and he's a man who's not going to give up. And I know the danger to the Ukrainians of losing, which is total catastrophe, and so they're not going to give up. The Ukrainians have a great ability to fight, even with limited resources. If you give them the resources, they can definitely take care of the Russians. We're seeing a lot of that: There's no more risk from the Black Sea Fleet, is there? A year ago, we were worrying about world food shortages and shipping grain out of Ukraine. That's no longer an issue.

## AND THE WESTERN WILLINGNESS AND RESOLVE TO STAY IN THE FIGHT?

Europe has to support Ukraine, because if Europe doesn't support Ukraine, we're going to end up with a much bigger land war. And I think that the people in most defense ministries and most governments understand that.

## YOU CALL YOURSELF PUTIN'S NUMBER ONE ENEMY. IF THAT'S SO, HOW COME YOU'RE STILL WITH US?

For many years, they tried to get me back to Russia in order to torture and kill me in their own prison; they used their Interpol and extradition requests and arrest warrants and surveillance, and so on. And I was able to successfully evade it all. They haven't tried to shoot me yet; they might still do that. You just have to get on with life. One thing I can say is that I'm not changing my approach toward Russia, which is what everybody else does, which is why Putin is able to get away with it. I'm not going to do that. They killed Sergei Magnitsky, my lawyer, in 2009, and tried to cover it up. I won't stand for that.

## HOW MUCH EFFORT ON YOUR BEHALF DOES IT TAKE TO SURVIVE? IS IT SOMETHING YOU NEED TO BE CONSCIOUSLY AWARE OF AT ALL TIMES?

Well, you can't be totally vigilant every minute of every day, every year for 15 years. It's like living in a war zone: You figure out when the bombs are coming in, you go to the shelter. And I have spent a lot of money, I have a lot of lawyers, a lot of professionals in other areas, assisting me. And yes, it has taken a lot of energy. But I've expanded my energy and I haven't in any way made any mistakes.

## WITH THE PROBLEMS PUTIN HAS TO DEAL WITH NOW, HOW HIGH DO YOU THINK YOU ARE ON HIS LIST OF PRIORITIES?

I am high on his hit list, but there are other people that are higher: Zelensky, Navalny. But this is very much like Salman Rushdie and the fatwa that was issued. Putin's mind is on the war right now. They've issued a decree, which is to Kill Bill Browder. It's a Kremlin fatwa, and it's not going away, and I have to live with that.

## DO YOU SEE FATE EVER CATCHING UP WITH HIM? HIM GETTING HIS JUST DESSERTS SERVED?

Putin's biggest risk is not any individual, but the collective individuals of Russia. He has basically robbed everybody of financial resources for 23 years now, going on 24. He's now robbing many, many young men, hundreds of 1000s of young men, of their lives. Women have lost their husbands, children have lost their fathers, mothers have lost their sons. And, in the meantime, the entire economy of Russia has collapsed. They claim everything's going swimmingly, but that's just not true. It's a mess. I see images of the heating systems breaking down all across Russia, they have no heat, no hot water, because the maintenance money was reallocated to the war.

## SO YOU DON'T SUBSCRIBE TO THE TENET THAT THE RUSSIAN ECONOMY HAS ENDURED THE SANCTIONS AND WILL HAVE ENOUGH MONEY TO FUND THIS WAR?

That is Putin's spin, specifically designed for Western policymakers. They say, "if the sanctions aren't working, maybe we don't need any more sanctions." It's not true. Oil and gas revenue, which is Russia's main revenue, has gone down by 24% between this year and last. Their central bank reserves - \$350 billion frozen, the oligarchs' money is frozen. They can't get access to the capital markets. Almost every Western business has fled the country. A million able-bodied, able-minded young men have fled the country. That's not a good situation.

## IF YOU WERE TO DESIGN A FITTING PUNISHMENT FOR PUTIN, WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE?

I think the Russian people can design it when they finally get the guts. Let the Russian people figure out what to do with Putin. I'm sure they have some good ideas.

## YOU WROTE: "EVERY RANDOM PERSON I BUMP INTO IN DAVOS SAYS 'BILL, YOU WERE SO PRESCIENT TELLING US PUTIN WAS A CROOK AND MURDERER SO MANY YEARS AGO'. IT WAS SO OBVIOUS TO ME AND SO MANY. TRAGEDY THAT IT TOOK THE WORLD SO LONG." WHAT CAUSED THAT GEOPOLITICAL BLINDNESS?

I think there was huge economic interest in not acknowledging the truth in Britain, there was a huge amount of money sloshing around from oligarchs, and everybody wanted a piece of it. In Germany, the entire industry was running off of cheap Russian gas. It's just greed: Pure, narrow greed. And you had the economic entities dictating defense and foreign policy in a very destructive way. That's what led to the situation we're in today.

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邦泰維

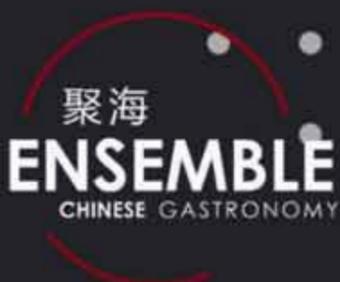
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# Sairme Wellness Resort: Redefining Hospitality with Sustainable Luxury



Continued from page 1

It is actually the biggest resort in all of Europe and Caucasus, with greenery spread over 60 hectares of land, and six different healing springs that can simultaneously cure 64 different illnesses. Sairme Resort has been renowned for decades, even though infrastructural development to accommodate modern tourists was only initiated in 2011.

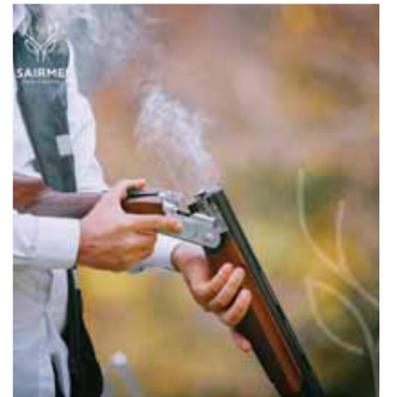
The redevelopment project was completed in 2018. Construction of the Sairme Hotel, which features 152 rooms and accommodates 390 people (and this is just half of the total potential capacity of Sairme) was also a part of the project. The landscape was additionally modernized to include convenient recreational, shopping and dining locations.

The resort's rehabilitation center boasts cutting-edge equipment provided by the



German company Kraft, enabling a wide array of rejuvenating procedures. This health center is accessible to guests around the clock, offering therapeutic, cardiology, and urology services, along with a modern laboratory and ultrasound equipment.

The Sairme redevelopment project encompassed the construction of mineral spring buvettes, a dining center, café, bar, and a market center. Additionally, the project involved the development of a garden, the establishment of the 28-kilometer-long Baghdati-Sairme highway, and the renovation of roads throughout the town.



## We're Not Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf!

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

Let's state right from the start that the so-baptized Artificial Intelligence (AI) is the alleged big bad wolf. Big, because the current presumptions are that it might bring about tremendous changes to our life on Earth, and bad, because the living preanalytical tendency contains certain scary conjectures connected with its fast and vicious development, and whatever that may have in store for all of us, the current and future dwellers of our wonderful planet. I personally am absolutely fascinated by the handy capabilities of Artificial Intelligence, which is already showing itself off in various fields of human activity.

The other day, I was listening to one of the speeches made at the World Economic Forum in Davos, and I could not believe my ears, listening to the amazing translation performed by AI – its pleasant clarity of voice, precision of vocabulary, uncanny imitation of the voice of the speaker, and the exact accentuation of every syllable in the translated text. Indeed, it made one think that it's just about time to surrender to the intimidating, but at the same time very helpful, power of AI.

On the other hand, it is also a fact that fictional texts and poetry are at this point considered to be a level of written human thought not yet achievable for AI. Why is that so? One understanding is that, notwithstanding the amazingly developed capabilities of AI, it is still trying to catch up with the intricacies of the human mind,

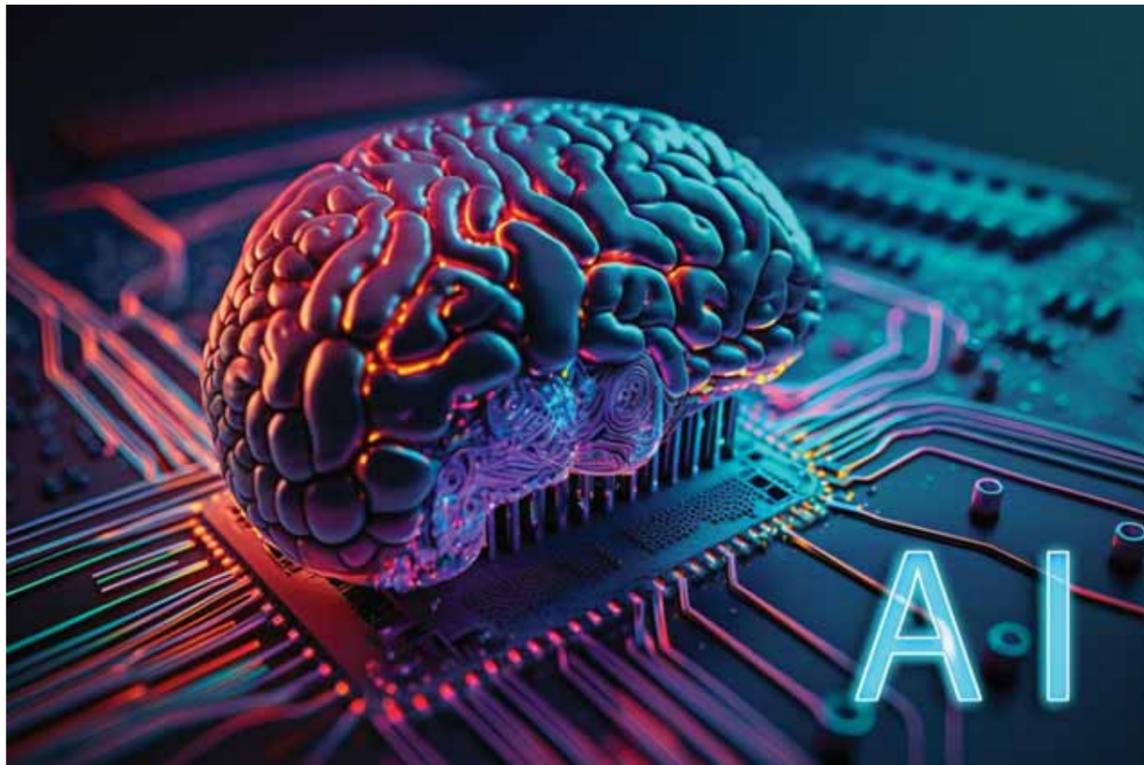


Image source: incubator.ucf.edu

the depths and aptitudes of which are still the subject of intense scientific research. As developed as it already is, AI will have to go another mile, maybe more, to perceive, and most importantly, precisely reproduce in another tongue, the human-brain-level poetic and other fictional, artistic descriptions of life.

The world is talking about the merits

and flaws of Artificial Intelligence with a certain leaning toward apprehension, though its advantages and disadvantages seem to be more or less balanced out. The current distinguished tendency of thought and action among both the creators and users of AI is to concentrate on the advantages rather than on the shortcomings, which is characteristic

for any developmental process. Among the most highly evaluated compensatory features are the capability of AI to restructure human life without reshuffling it too painfully and detrimentally, saving us time and pre-eradicating all possible delays, industrializing and rearranging all kinds of vital processes so as to better streamline human labor and effec-

tively systematize the final result, conveniently assisting humans to mechanize their habitual set of actions and most repetitive of tasks.

One of the most salient but conceivably surmountable weaknesses of AI is its overly expensive employment in real life. The costly implementation opportunity means procrastination of application, which might, as a knock-on effect, be conducive to ensuing financial and operational damages. AI may also cause the loss of a considerable number of jobs, saying nothing of other disadvantages, like its deficiency in those sentimental qualities so abundantly prevailing in the human psyche. Add to this its lack of imagination, absence of inventiveness and inspirational capability, and the picture of this greatest contemporary human invention will be complete.

There are also some explicit worries that might bother us in terms of AI development, and that is the flimsiness of security in protecting online data privacy, and the evident prospect of students cheating in all kinds of tests and examinations. And how about the potential for humans to become worthless in the workplace? Bad, and yet tolerable when compared to the absolutely unbearable possibility of the production of humanoid robots, who may be overly cruel and relentless in their aggression towards us human beings.

Fortunately, these are, as yet, all products of our scared to death imagination, so, on a more optimistic note, I say we should not be afraid of the approaching "big bad wolf," and should reach for that better usage of this intelligence, which is not artificial but natural, like ours.

# Raimond Palace: Balancing Gastronomic Delights with Budget-Friendly Comfort



modations, ensuring a unique and memorable experience for guests. Its strategic proximity to the Didveli skating track adds to its allure, granting easy access to recreational activities and captivating views.

The hotel's restaurant provides guests with a unique opportunity to embark on a gastronomic journey with their loved ones. Accomplished chefs present an array of unique flavors, promising an unforgettable dining experience.

In the midst of the winter price surge in Bakuriani, Raimond Palace stands out as a beacon of affordability and excellence. With its eco-friendly ethos, distinctive interior design, prime location, and exceptional culinary offerings, the hotel emerges as the top choice for those seeking a memorable stay in the resort area.



BY MARIAM MTIVLISHVILI

**D**uring the winter season of 2023-2024, the surge in prices for hotels and restaurants in the Bakuriani resort area became a prominent concern for Georgians. GEORGIA TODAY interviewed representatives from Raimond Palace's marketing service, shedding light on their efforts to maintain affordability while surpassing competitors in quality.

Raimond Palace prides itself on being eco-friendly, evident in the materials used in its construction. The majority of the interior furniture is crafted from wood, providing guests with a tangible connection to the forces of nature and enhancing the hotel's unique interior design. The hotel's versatile ambiance caters to various purposes, serving as a venue for important events and offering a tranquil space for relaxation. The distinctive interior composition of Raimond Palace distinguishes it from other accom-



## UNDP and the Czech Government Launch a Euro 100,000 Project Benefitting 3,000 Residents of the Machakheli Gorge

**T**he United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Czech Government have launched a new initiative aimed at supporting the Machakhela Protected Landscape, a recently designated protected area in the Ajara Autonomous Republic of Georgia.

The 16-month project, funded with Euro 100,000, seeks to strengthen the administration of the Protected Landscape, formulate a comprehensive management and operational plan, and introduce a functional urban and spatial planning system. This integrated approach is designed to bolster sustainable economic activities in the region while preserving its rich environmental and cultural heritage. The project will continue until March 2025 in close partnership with the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia and Khelvachauri Municipality.

On 24 January, H.E. Petr Kubernát, Ambassador of the Czech Republic to Georgia, and Douglas Webb, UNDP Resident Representative a.i. in Georgia, discussed the new project and further steps towards sustainable development and green growth.

Ambassador Kubernát emphasized the Czech Republic's commitment to supporting Georgia across various critical areas, with a particular focus on environmental protection and biodiversity conservation.

"The Czech Republic stands as a steadfast ally for Georgia, dedicated to fostering a sustainable environment and



advancing green technology. In partnership with UNDP and local authorities in the Ajara Autonomous Republic, we are delighted to contribute to the enhanced environmental protection of the Machakheli Gorge—a true biodiversity gem in Georgia celebrated for its unique Colchic Forests," the Ambassador noted.

Douglas Webb, UNDP Resident Representative a.i. in Georgia, underscored the pivotal role of protected areas in advancing green economic development.

"Protected areas serve to deliver environmental and economic advantages by preserving biodiversity and fostering tourism opportunities. The meticulous

management of these areas is crucial to fully harnessing their potential, benefitting both people and the planet," he said.

The Machakhela Protected Landscape was established in 2022 largely thanks to the collaborative efforts involving UNDP, the Czech Government and the Ajara Autonomous Republic Govern-

ment. It spans 4,294 hectares encompassing the Machakheli River and its lower tributaries, nine villages of the Khelvachauri municipality, and part of the state forest in the Machakheli Gorge.

Noteworthy for its distinctive forest and river habitats, as well as a rich cultural landscape featuring historical and cultural heritage sites, the Machakhela Protected Landscape has a direct connection with three protected areas safeguarding the UNESCO-protected Colchic Rainforests – Kintrishi, Machakhela, and Mtirala national parks, known as a 'slice of the Amazon in Eurasia.'

The effective management of the Machakhela Protected Landscape is expected to catalyze the development of environmental tourism, promote sustainable farming, and create environmentally friendly economic opportunities for more than 3,000 residents of the local villages. Significantly, a well-functioning protected area will regulate construction projects in the region, ensuring an environmental perspective in the face of rapid infrastructural development.

UNDP's support for the Machakhela Protected Landscape follows a series of similar initiatives funded by the Czech Republic, Japan, the European Union, and the Global Environment Facility. These collaborative endeavours extended to assisting in the establishment and growth of the Machakhela National Park and promoting biodiversity monitoring, alongside rural development projects designed to benefit the residents of the villages nestled within the Machakheli Gorge.

# Georgian Firsts. Part 2.



BLOG BY TONY HANMER

The year 2024 sees me celebrate a quarter century since I first visited Georgia! Yes, in July it will be the 25th anniversary of that trip; and on December 1, the same anniversary of my moving here. In light of this, here I present some first or greatest things ever in my life which happened to me in this country.

Discovery of a set of infinite tiles of

the regular rep-tiles, from 2000 onwards. In two dimensions, this means tiles of the equilateral triangle and square; in three dimensions, of the cube. My favorite mathematical discovery, though I am strictly an amateur mathematician, which only adds to the delight. Details here: <https://www.behance.net/gallery/729496/Endless-Tiles-of-the-Equilateral-Triangle-and-Square>; and slightly more rigorously here: <https://sciendocom/article/10.2478/rmm-2019-0008>

First writing of a blog, <http://geosynchronicity.blogspot.com/> followed when it got full by <http://geosynchronicity-2.blogspot.com/> (both of which I used when I applied to become a regular writer for Georgia Today). Entry into Facebook, as soon as I could; and Instagram, which was late last year.

First purchases of: A cellphone (in about 2000), a computer (also about 2000, a desktop initially), and property (an apartment in Tbilisi, much later). Leaving Canada in 1989 at age 22, I swore I'd never become a slave to the usual mortgage system. I still haven't.

First time tasting churchkhela, the Georgian national sweet. This is unusual, because I saw it at the market for seven years in St Petersburg, decided that it was a "scary looking sausage," and never enquired further. My loss, rectified eight years later.

First acquisition of permanent resident status in a country of which I'm not a citizen. I already have British and Canadian passports, and could not bear to part with either of these to get a Georgian one. But being married to Lali gives me the lesser status anyway.

First time owning a cat: The short-lived Kvisha ("Sand", based on his color), a kitten which neighbors in Svaneti gave to me and Lali as a mouser. He met a sad end before adulthood when I was scything—no blood, but hiding in the long grass, his back was broken and he became a paraplegic. I tearfully applied to another neighbor for the farmer's solution at the end of a small-caliber rifle, and vowed not to get another similar pet. One such trauma is enough for me.

Switch from 35mm film cameras to digital, in summer 2008. I've never looked back. The first film shots I ever took were in 1978, when I was 11, using the family's Kodak Instamatic 126 camera. I was instantly hooked. Then I used my father's 35mm Minolta system for a few years until he bought me a Yashica with a 50mm Contax lens for my 16th birthday. With digital, it's been Canon EOS bodies all the way, from 8 megapixels to my current 24. But I grew up on film and manual focus and exposure.

Switch from PCs and Windows to a MacBook and Apple's IOS, just over a year ago. Another never-looking-back.

Same with moving from Android phones to an iPhone: I may never get a new one, but I much prefer it to those phones, which "are not the 'droids you're looking for".

Next up, some firsts from places other than Georgia...

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)



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# “Meeting Point: Mountains” Exhibition about the Cultural Region of Adjara



An attendee of the opening night of the exhibition examines one of the displays. Image by Shako Devdariani

BY SHELBI R. ANKIEWICZ

**M**eeting Point: Mountains is an open exhibition for people in Tbilisi to discover the different cultures and towns of mountainous Adjara through the eyes of photographers and researchers.

The exhibition launched its debut at the Tbilisi Photography and Multimedia Museum on January 17. The project is based on a residency program that involved various artists, researchers, and anthropologists. Mountainous Adjara was chosen as the location for the 2023 residency, since many people don't know much about the region, Ana Gabelaia, curator of the event, told GEORGIA TODAY.

“When we hear Adjara, instantly we imagine the seashore- Batumi, Kobuleti, and other popular tourist destinations, but actually most parts of Adjara are totally different from what it is near the sea,” she said.

Gabelaia has been a curator for ten years, and the main curator of educational and artistic programs at the Tbilisi Photography Museum for the past year and a half. The Tbilisi Photo Festival, a sister organization to the museum, was the initiator of the residency program. Gabelaia said the contributors were sent to Adjara to document what they saw, did, and felt, in their medium of choice.

In villages throughout Adjara, such as Khula, Gabelaia said there are mainly Muslim communities, so the traditions and culture there are different from other parts of Georgia. They wanted this to be captured, along with the different seasons of Adjara, because life is lived differently depending on the time of the year. The contributors had their choice of location within the region and the season in which to travel.

Davis Kanepes is a photographer from Riga, Latvia, who participated in the residency. His roots are in filmmaking, so this project served as his opening act in the world of photography. He spent the entire month of August in Khulo, where he unexpectedly discovered the theme of his project.

“I really was a bit surprised that there are no common meeting spaces or venues or concert halls or something in any of these villages, so people are just visiting each other at home,” Kanepes told us. “For me as a foreigner, it was very interesting to try to find how to interact with the locals.”

His exhibition, entitled “Third Places,” came from the idea of having another place that one regularly goes, to meet and interact with people. Kanepes said that he noticed the places where people meet are as diverse as their identities, and this idea was especially intriguing to him because of his work in Riga. At home, he runs a culture center, so it piqued his interest when he saw people meeting in places outside of a traditional meeting spot.

The “third places” as described through photos in his exhibition are The Bar (Khulo), The Hotel (Tago), The Mosque (Ghorjomi), The Lake (Green Lake), The Resort (Beshumi), and The Horse (Photo Saloon). During Kanepes's time there, he said his “third place” was the newspaper kiosk, for it was there he met many young people who told him stories. However, one of the most touching parts of his experience was when he discovered a local photographer who had recently passed away, Bidzina Rizhivadze, through the stories of the man's grandson, and Kanepes was able to recreate some of his work.

Looking forward, Kanepes said he wants to create a space for people to meet and

come together in Khulo, so they have a common meeting place. He believes it would serve as a motivation for young people to come back to the villages, since they would be able to interact with others and be a part of something. Kanepes also wants to bring his exhibition to Khulo, so the people there can see what they are a part of.

“One part of this project is about discovering parts of Georgia that in Tbilisi or other regions are less well known, but from the other point of view, I think it would be a reflection on the local communities with them together, seeing themselves as the heroes or characters in this story,” Kanepes said. “It might really uplift their self-esteem or their

identity, which they should continue to preserve.”

In addition to the residencies in Adjara, Gabelaia said the Tbilisi Photo Festival is opening visual education centers in remote places throughout Georgia. There are currently two that are open, and the Photo Festival is coordinating with local organizations and people to create a photo book library from people and places around the world. According to Gabelaia, these educational centers will serve as a hub for activities, among them photography courses for youth and local business owners, so they know how to photograph and create commercials for their businesses.

The exhibition has a total of nine contributors: Nestan Abdushelishvili (Georgia), Tinatin Bregvadze (Georgia), Tatia Dvali (Georgia), Davis Kanepes (Latvia), Nini Khuroshvili (Georgia), Sandro Khutsishvili (Georgia), Sandro Sulaberidze (Georgia), Giorgi Shengelia (Georgia), and Sandro Takaishvili (Georgia). The exhibition also displays photographs of the Adjarian seaside taken by Anri Tabagua, a photographer who passed away in 2023. The entire exhibition will be on display in the museum until February 10, and is free to enter.

The residency program was run in coordination with Magic Carpet, a European institution that Georgia has partnered with for at least four years. It was also supported by the Embassy of the Kingdom of Netherlands in Georgia.

Gabelaia said the residency location for 2024 will be revealed in March, and until then they will continue to work in Adjara while building their next residency program. This exhibition was curated at the Photography and Multimedia Museum because the Tbilisi Photography Festival wanted to share what they learned during this past year with the Tbilisi community.

“It's what we do, besides exhibiting, because it's a nice way to communicate with artists and also create ambassadors - they are the mediums between us and the communities that we are interested in and want to work with in the future.”



People looking at various exhibits during the opening night of Meeting Point: Mountains. Image by Shako Devdariani



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📍 Tsikhisdziri, 15 km from Batumi.



For more details about the project, contact us:  
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