

Celebrate Zero Waste Day

From 1pm on March 30, at Cafe Mziuri in Vake, we are all invited to celebrate Zero Waste Day together.

The International Day of Zero Waste is an annual event facilitated by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and the UN Human Settlements Program (UN-Habitat). This day underscores the importance of strengthening waste management globally and emphasizes the need to promote sustainable consumption and production patterns.

At the event, you will discover:

- Educational activities and games related to waste management for both children and adults. The Environmental Information and Education Center, along with CENN, will conduct workshops, quizzes, and offer thematic prizes for students aged between 8 and 16.
- A secondary clothing and book



exchange corner – Bring clothes and books that you no longer need and exchange them for other items you desire.

- Separation corners and processing enterprises that will collect the plastic bottles and waste paper you bring.
- An exhibition featuring eco-businesses.

Attendance is free.

The event is organized with the support of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and Norway, under the initiative: 'LEAD: Leadership, Equality, Advocacy, Democracy,' within the framework of the project End Plastic Pollution in Georgia, implemented by CENN, in partnership with the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia.

The event is being supported by the European Union, as part of the 'Georgia Climate Action Project.'

Georgian Dream Submits Its Homophobic Bill, CoE Says Political Manipulation of LGBTI Community Has No Place in a Democracy

BY TEAM GT

Georgia's ruling party Georgian Dream this week submitted its planned homophobic bill.

At the briefing held at their party office on March 25, the executive secretary of Georgian Dream, Mamuka Mdinardze, said that they will initiate constitutional changes, where "guarantees of family values and protection of minors will be clearly written". However, at this stage, the ruling majority, together with the European Socialists loyal to it, do not have the necessary 113 votes to accept the constitutional amendments.

Mdinardze noted that the ruling party will, in the near future, also initiate more specific changes in "several dozen laws," which will be "guaranteed" to be adopted this year. Making changes to the law requires a maximum of 76 votes, which Georgian Dream has.

Of the constitutional amendments, Mdinardze said, this concerns Article 30 of the Constitution, where the definition of marriage is defined. He claimed that a third article will be added to this article, with the following content: "The protection of family values and minors is ensured by the constitutional law of Georgia, which is an integral part of the Constitution of Georgia."

Mdinardze noted that the draft constitutional law "On Family Values and Protection of Minors" consists of 8 points:

1. Based on the legislation, only such a relationship similar to marriage can be regulated, which provides for the union of a man and a woman who are at least 18 years old.

2. Adoption or foster care of a minor is allowed only by married spouses or heterosexual persons in accordance with the Constitution and legislation of Georgia.

3. Any medical intervention related to the change of human sex is prohibited.

4. The document issued by the state or local self-government indicates only the female or male gender that corresponds to their genetic data.

5. Any decision of a public authority or a private person that directly or indirectly restricts the use of concepts defined by gender is invalid.

6. Gatherings aimed at promoting same-sex family or intimate relationships, incest, adoption or foster care of a minor by a same-sex couple or a non-heterosexual person, medical intervention



Mamuka Mdinardze. Source: GD

related to gender reassignment, or the non-use of gender-specific concepts are prohibited.

7. It is prohibited to distribute work, program or other material with such content which is aimed at promoting same-sex family or intimate relationships, incest, adoption or foster care of a minor by a same-sex couple or a non-heterosexual person, medical intervention related to sex change or the non-use of gender-specific concepts.

8. It is prohibited to provide information in the educational process of a public or private educational institution that is aimed at promoting same-sex family or intimate relationships, incest, adoption or foster care of a minor by a same-sex couple or a non-heterosexual person, medical intervention related to sex change, or the non-use of gender-specific concepts.

At the same time, Mdinardze said he does not rule out the possibility of banning Pride outright.

"If their assembly serves the protection of rights and the expression of freedom, neither their assembly nor that of others can be prohibited. But if you want any gathering to be about Pride and you want anyone to popularize and publicize this topic, in this case it will be prohibited," he said.

Mdinardze noted that if the opposition does not support these constitutional amendments, they will reflect these norms in different laws. When asked whether these constitutional changes are being initiated because it would be unconstitutional to make changes to laws without amending the constitution, Mdinardze answered that they "will not adopt unconstitutional changes."

Interestingly, there is no research by any authoritative scientific organization that says any kind of "propaganda" can change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. Yet Georgia, primarily

initiated to amend the Constitution and to adopt a new constitutional law on 'Protection of Family Values and Underaged Persons,' Mijatovic told the Council. "It is reflective of the entrenched harmful stereotypes and prejudice against LGBTI people which still prevail in segments of Georgian society, including some politicians, and is capable of having a strong, negative impact on the human rights, safety and well-being of LGBTI people and defenders of their rights. It also represents the political manipulation of LGBTI-phobia in the run-up to the elections, which I have previously condemned, and which should have no place in a democratic society, based on the rule of law and respect for human rights of everyone."

With LGBTI people continuing to be the target of hate crimes and pervasive discrimination in Georgia, as well as the regular occurrence of LGBTI people being denied their right to peaceful assembly, Mijatovic has repeatedly called on the Georgian authorities to commit to a zero-tolerance policy and practice towards all forms of discrimination, and incitement to discrimination and violence, against LGBTI people.

"In recent months, I have followed the increasingly stigmatizing rhetoric used by some politicians to undermine the legitimate work of human rights defenders and civil society in Georgia," she noted.

"I therefore call on the Georgian authorities to fully respect their human rights obligations, as a member state of the Council of Europe, including with regard to protecting the human rights of LGBTI people and ensuring an enabling environment for the activities of civil society and human rights defenders. I urge all politicians in Georgia to resolutely denounce the use of LGBTI-phobia or any other discriminatory rhetoric in electoral campaigns.

"I stand in solidarity with all those who advocate for and defend the human rights of every member of Georgian society, including LGBTI people, and who work for a peaceful country and society committed to equality and the human dignity of all."

Khatia Dekanoidze, a deputy of the opposition EuroOptimists party, claimed Georgian Dream are using such topics to distract society, but that it will not work.

"I'm sure this was invented only to try to discredit the opposition, which will not happen, because the citizens of Georgia are worried about completely different problems," she said.

"People are not worried about this topic, only Georgian Dream talks about it and no-one else," she claimed. "This is a part of the propaganda, it is a continuation of what is meant to keep Bidzina Ivanishvili in power at any cost, but I think it will simply become a failed project on the part of Georgian Dream."



Tbilisi Pride supporters in front of the Parliament of Georgia in 2021. Source: Tbilisi Pride/X

Ukraine Latest: Russia Escalates Attacks, Blames Ukraine for Moscow Terrorism

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

Russia has escalated its attacks on Ukraine in recent days, launching several missile barrages on the capital Kyiv, and hitting energy infrastructure across the country in apparent retaliation for recent Ukrainian aerial attacks on the Russian border region of Belgorod. Such sporadic attacks, however, have been common throughout the war.

On day 763 of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the situation in terms of fighting was as follows:

At least one person was killed and 19 injured after Russia attacked Kharkiv, Ukraine's second biggest city, with what officials said could have been a new type of guided bomb. The airstrikes caused widespread damage, hitting several residential buildings and damaging the city's institute for emergency surgery.

Other parts of the country also came under Russian attack, with a further three deaths reported from shelling and drone attacks in the south and northeast, among them a 12-year-old boy. A ballistic missile strike on the coastal territory of Mykolaiv injured eight people.

Ukraine's air force chief Mykola Oleshchuk said Russia launched 13 Iranian-designed Shahed drones, 10 of which were brought down in Kharkiv, Sumy and Kyiv regions.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky visited troops in the northeastern Sumy region bordering Russia, where he met soldiers recovering from injuries and visited newly built defense lines, including trenches, dugouts, firing and command and observation posts.

He urged Ukraine's allies to speed up deliveries of warplanes and air defense

systems following Wednesday's Russian attacks. "Bolstering Ukraine's air defense and expediting the delivery of F-16s to Ukraine are vital tasks," he said in a statement on social media.

Yet Russian President Vladimir Putin this week told a group of military pilots that plans by Ukraine's allies to send Kyiv F-16 fighter jets would not alter the situation on the battlefield. He said the F-16s would be "legitimate targets," wherever they might be.

Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski said Poland would double its contribution to a Czech-led plan to buy ammunition for Ukraine, though he declined to say how much Poland was contributing.

FSB CHIEF, CITING NO PROOF, BLAMES UKRAINE AND US FOR MOSCOW TERROR ATTACK

Russia's intelligence chief on Tuesday directly blamed Ukraine for orchestrating the assault on the Crocus City Hall concert venue with Western help, alleging, without evidence, that Kyiv "trained militants in the Middle East."

The accusation by Alexander Bortnikov, the head of Russia's Federal Security Service, or FSB, seemed intended to deflect attention from his agency's failure to prevent the attack, in which at least 139 people were killed, and to fan anti-Ukrainian rhetoric even as officials presented an increasingly convoluted narrative of what transpired Friday night.

"We think the act was prepared by the radical Islamists, but of course, the Western special services aided them," Bortnikov told state media reporters, singling out the United States and Britain. "And the special services of Ukraine have a direct relation to this."

Ukraine has strongly denied having any involvement in the attack. On March 7, the United States issued a warning of



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy inspected newly-built defences in the Sumy region. Source: Ukrainian Presidential Press Service via AFP

a potential terrorist attack in Russia, urging Americans there to avoid mass gatherings, based in part on intelligence reporting about the possible activity inside Russia of the Islamic State-Khorasan (ISIS-K), the Afghanistan and Pakistan arm of the militant group. Russian President Vladimir Putin, speaking to the FSB board a week ago, dismissed that warning as an attempt by the West to "destabilize Russia."

The Islamic State has claimed responsibility for the attack, and Russia has charged four suspects, all citizens of Tajikistan, with carrying out the rampage. Bortnikov on Tuesday confirmed that the United States had passed on information about a potential attack but said it was "of a general nature."

"We responded to this information and took appropriate measures to prevent such things," Bortnikov said. "Unfortunately, the actions we carried out in rela-

tion to specific groups and specific individuals — this information was not confirmed at that time," he added. He did not provide any details about what groups the FSB had targeted.

After Russia's military intervened in Syria beginning in 2015 to support Bashar al-Assad against Islamist and opposition militias, including the Islamic State, the FSB focused on the threat Islamist extremists posed to Russia.

UKRAINIAN NAVY SAYS A THIRD OF RUSSIAN WARSHIPS IN THE BLACK SEA HAVE BEEN DESTROYED OR DISABLED

Ukraine has sunk or disabled a third of all Russian warships in the Black Sea in just over two years of war, the navy spokesman said Tuesday, a heavy blow to Moscow's military capability.

Ukraine's Navy spokesman Dmytro Pletenchuk told The Associated Press

that the latest strike on Saturday night hit the Russian amphibious landing ship Kostiantyn Olshansky that was resting in dock in Sevastopol in Russia-occupied Crimea. The ship was part of the Ukrainian navy before Russia captured it while annexing the Black Sea peninsula in 2014.

Pletenchuk previously announced that two other landing ships of the same type, Azov and Yamal, were also damaged in Saturday's strike along with the Ivan Khurs intelligence ship.

He told the AP that the weekend attack, which was launched with Ukraine-built Neptune missiles, also hit Sevastopol port facilities and an oil depot.

Russian authorities reported a massive Ukrainian attack on Sevastopol over the weekend but didn't acknowledge any damage to the fleet.

Sources: AL Jazeera, The Washington Post, AP.



The Biltmore Tbilisi Hotel Honored with UN Global Compact Corporate Sustainability Award for Decent Work and Economic Growth

A comprehensive initiative the 'Empower Workforce, Drive Growth' project has been undertaken by the organization. By emphasizing the principles of fair employment, job creation, and sustainable economic practices, a contribution is being made toward the realization of SDG 8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth.

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29 Rustaveli Avenue, 0108, Tbilisi, Georgia
T: +995 322 72 72 72 / info.bhtg@biltmorecollection.com

The Second Anniversary of the War in Ukraine: Assessments, Conclusions, Observations. Part 2

BY VICTOR KIPIANI,
GEOCASE CHAIRMAN

There is no doubt that the West has fully realized the danger that the ongoing war in Ukraine poses to Western institutions and the system of international relations. It has realized it, but has not yet been able to fully reflect it in real actions.

After the sanctions-related, essentially world economic war I, the Western coalition resorted to a number of other measures to prevent Russian revisionism, ranging from political to military. Despite this, it seems that even today Russia is acting more purposefully to win in Ukraine than the West is to ensure that the Ukrainians win. The unprecedented consolidation of our partners and allies and those of Ukraine around a common agenda is beyond doubt. At the same time, it is also noticeable that this consolidation is not always reflected in timely and sufficient practical action. Thus, it is no surprise that the coalition is critically required to adapt adequately to the real needs of the war so that aid to Ukraine is not focused on its survival but on tangible success.

Another, more significant challenge that a prolonged war in Ukraine could exacerbate is the contradictory domestic political processes in the Western countries themselves: radical and populist trends are leading Western society towards isolationism. Added to these are factors (and sometimes phobias) such as fear of nuclear escalation with Russia, lack of mobilization resources to respond to the Ukraine crisis and other external crises, fluctuations in the world economy (including vulnerability of food and energy security), and information warfare.

We do not want it to be seen as ironic to assert that the war in Ukraine pushed the West out of its dormant state or "comfort zone" for nearly three decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The lessons of the Russian-Georgian war of 2008 and the annexation of Crimea in 2014 have been comprehended superficially, and the response to them has been insufficiently principled, too slow, too little. The impression was created that the West treated the countries bordering the Russian Federation strategically, but did so with insufficient conviction and in an insufficiently focused manner. As a result, the concept of so-called "strategic ambiguity" emerged in the Western doctrine, which implied activity without leaving the already mentioned "comfort zone".

As we have already mentioned, February 24, 2022 made such a half-way geopolitics impossible. It became necessary to make principled, bold and convincing decisions. It became necessary, however... This is the "however" we very briefly explained above, and with the help of which Russian aggression in the neighborhood (so far - in the neighborhood) is actively trying to get geopolitical-geo-economic dividends. One source recently noted that by a prolonged war in Ukraine we will achieve the separation of Russian society from Russian imperialism, which is equally debatable and possible. But given the existing internal and external contradictions, it is also questionable how ready the West is for a prolonged war. Therefore, for Ukraine's partner countries, the imperative of rapid and full-scale mobilization of both military and political resources remains unshakable: it means the earliest pos-



Several people were injured as missile debris fell in Kyiv this week. Source: Getty Images

sible end to the war with the most desirable outcome.

Proper navigation of the "war of narratives" is also important for the success of the West's result-oriented policy in the war in Ukraine. In this respect, the assertion that Russia's interest in the outcome of the war in Ukraine is greater than the West's seems to be a classic example of disinformation. As trite as it may sound, we believe that this view has some basis in fact. At the same time, even more damaging is the discussion in certain media and expert groups where key priorities of the US and the EU are seen as competing with each other, such as: Ukraine or the Middle East or, say, Europe or the Indo-Pacific.

Any other, undesirable development of processes in Ukraine or failure in the war is not only Kyiv's failure: on the one hand, it will be very harmful for the reputation of the Western political and security system, and on the other hand, it will strengthen revisionist and expansionist tendencies all over the world.

Let us recall the recent statement of William Burns, the Head of the US Central Intelligence Agency: "For the United States to walk away from the conflict at this crucial moment and cut off support to Ukraine would be an own goal of historic proportions" (Foreign Affairs, January 2024).

The Russian threat to post-Soviet countries, along with other stereotypes, was assessed by a very unusual criterion, especially by EU members. In particular, the reality of the threat was assessed based on: (a) the geographical distance of a country from Russia and (b) the intensity of business relations with Russia. It is clear how both circumstances influenced the perception of danger and the formulation of practical policies.

It is likely that these and some other stereotypes are to some extent still relevant today and continue to influence decision-making implicitly. However, after the "forced awakening" mentioned in this article, our partners should conclude that:

(1) The ongoing war in Ukraine will determine not only the future of countries in a geopolitical vacuum due to the collapse of the Soviet Union, but also the future of European and Euro-Atlantic unity; Furthermore,

(2) A prerequisite for this future prospect is to pool military and economic resources and turn them into a real deterrent force; as well as -

(3) It is one thing to meet the current needs of the Ukrainian resistance, and another to fulfill the corresponding tasks

from a strategic point of view.

Among such tasks is to propose and implement an effective security mechanism for Ukraine (as well as for Georgia) immediately after the end of the war.

In this regard, several options are being considered in various circles, namely:

1) The so-called Israeli model, the brief essence of which is to arm Ukraine so that the country can defend itself independently;

It should be taken into account that such a security analogy is not accurate. The point is that, unlike the Ukrainian scenario, in the case of Israel: (a) the country has its own nuclear weapons as the main guarantor of the security of the Jewish state; (b) security and defense cooperation between the United States and Israel has been uninterrupted for more than fifty years, including the provision of state-of-the-art weapons; (c) the practice of Congressional support for Israel has become an unwritten rule; and (d) Israel plays a prominent role in the Middle East.

2) So called Individual security, i.e. such an option when Ukraine formalizes security and cooperation with one or another country within the framework of bilateral relations:

This mechanism is already working, and Ukraine has already signed bilateral cooperation with several countries. Obviously, this approach has positive sides, after all, this option is better than nothing at all, but the bilateral format has certain disadvantages compared to multilateral formats. These disadvantages are mainly related to a possible inability to attract sufficient resources and lack of the necessary political weight.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that, despite the frequent use of the word "guarantee" by Ukrainian official circles, the Western signatory partners are cautious in this part and remind us that we are actually talking about "commitments" rather than "guarantees". Naturally, this caution has a political and legal explanation.

3) Security mechanism on the part of the European Union:

It is probably one of the most ambiguous and uncertain security arrangements available globally. From this perspective, the European Union still has much to prove, both in terms of maintaining a Common Defense Policy and in terms of establishing the EU as a weighty and self-sufficient actor in matters of security and defense. It is worth mentioning that Article 42.7 of the Lisbon Agreement, which deals with common defense, has been invoked only once (in Paris in a famous terrorist attack in 2015) and is

unlikely to serve as a solid precedent.

4) Membership in the North Atlantic Alliance:

The outcome of the Vilnius summit disappointed Kyiv. It is a fact that Ukraine had been waiting for an official invitation to join NATO and, in all likelihood, will expect the same at the next summit in Washington.

Given the current stage of the war and the world conjuncture, it is difficult to speak with certainty about the justification of this expectation. It is likely that the issue will be assessed again and again through the prism of traditional risks and internal processes of Western countries.

Here we will only briefly note that the invocation of NATO's famous Article 5, on the condition that it is properly analyzed, does not mean that the alliance's member states will automatically move into a mode of military confrontation with Russia. Moreover, on the basis of the same Article 5, in order to minimize risks, several practical recommendations have been made in recent years, first with regard to the occupied territories of Georgia and then of those of Ukraine. It is also a fact that the eastern flank of the alliance requires equal attention along its entire perimeter. And this requires that alliance's member states also assess threats and risks uniformly, without a "transactional" conjuncture.

Georgian "policy of opportunities" in the context of the ongoing war

War is a disaster. War is a tragedy. War is immoral. Its vicious essence can be characterized by many other epithets. We will not say anything new here, nor will we tire the reader with a conversation devoid of practical content.

Now, in the final part of the article, we would like to outline some of the main issues: and this is along with the assessments made about the second anniversary of the war in Ukraine. These mentions are related to several rationales of the Georgian case which, against the background of the war in Ukraine, require our proper attention, assessment and action.

Russia's large-scale aggression in Ukraine allows us to "return" or, if you like, to reopen the Georgian topic to the international agenda with new force and emphasis. Now already in the midst of providing even more realism to real politics and the aforementioned "forced awakening". It sounds somewhat bitter, but we believe that the occupation and de facto annexation of Georgia, as well as the deserved positioning of our country in the security system, could not

arouse due attention and empathy in recent years. Something more resonant, large-scale, even tectonic, should have happened. Russia's renewed invasion of Ukraine and the events that followed created the preconditions for the re-appearance of the Georgian problem in the international narrative.

We have mentioned several times in this article and will repeat at the end that the war in Ukraine has confronted the West with fundamental choices and essential decisions. We would also formulate the question as follows: will the created circumstances lead to the birth of a new West, one that will have the desire, the will and the ability to take the role of a leader in the real solution of problems? And this is relevant for Georgia insofar as it creates the basis for such proposals with our partners on issues of our own security and resilience, which were unimaginable to talk about and think about for many years. To put an end to the "geopolitical and strategic uncertainty" mentioned in the article, together with some aspects, it is time to take extraordinary measures, including the realization of guarantees of lasting and long-term security for Georgia.

The international political factors of the ongoing war require a rethinking of many fundamental questions of international law and order. Among them are the effectiveness of international institutions, humanitarian issues, effectiveness of sanctions, investigation of crimes according to international classification and punishment of criminals, realization of frozen assets, etc. These and other problems are not only academic but also practical for the Georgian side. While large and medium-sized countries can afford the luxury of deviating from international norms, small countries see the strength of these norms and adherence to them as an important protective barrier for their national interests.

In addition to changing the perception of modern military tactics and strategy, the war in Ukraine has had a serious impact on the global economic conjuncture. Therefore, the topic of conversation is vast, but now we will mention only one specific aspect, which is related to the supply-delivery channels that existed before the war (and before the pandemic). Of particular importance to us is the growing relevance of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Road project, also known as the Middle Corridor, which, in fact, was given a significant competitive advantage due to the increased riskiness of the Northern Corridor as a result of Russian aggression. Obviously, the realization of this historical project better demonstrates Georgia's role (emphasizing its much-needed functional utility).

Any war falls under the category of crises. The world has entered an era of crises. Managing them and minimizing their harmful impact requires a constant and proactive response. For us, as a country with few resources in every possible sense, democratic resistance seems a relatively optimal form of response. This general phrase, of course, includes several specific components, whether it is the economics of crises, sound institutions, an inclusive political process, or a socially solidary society.

The war in Ukraine is probably not close to being over, nor is the balance of power in the system of international relations close to a new point of equilibrium. Therefore, both we and they, all of us, will have to talk to each other many more times to share our assessments, observations and conclusions.

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Defense Sector Review with Mercury Strategic: An Analysis of the Terror Attack in Russia

Russian security forces outside the burning entertainment center in Moscow, Russia. Source: AP Photo



On March 22, at approximately 19:55 Moscow time, a group of at least 4 assailants approached the Crocus City Hall entertainment complex, located in Krasnogorsk, a western suburb of Moscow. Reportedly wearing a mixture of civilian clothes and some military attire, they were armed with military rifles, including an AK-12 service rifle. Walking in the east entrance, the Tajik attackers take a deep breath and let loose the first shots of what will be one of the worst terrorist attacks in Russian history.

Their first volley resulted in at least nine visually confirmed casualties. After gaining their initial foothold unopposed, the group turns south, maneuvering towards the main entrance. Pushing past security checkpoints and metal detectors, at least ten civilians are killed by point-blank gunfire. Interestingly, the teams seem to move systematically, as if the lack of opposition and the routine work of civilian executions were part of their expected work. Pushing towards the music hall, more casualties are brought down as crowds make their escape, and evacuation orders are in full swing.

Despite this, the attackers continue their offensive. At approximately 20:05, they breach into the music event hall. With cold demeanor and gloved palms on their rifles, they continue to exact their toll. Of note, one of the assailants, unarmed and with only a backpack, is seen attempting to set fire to the building. The others, with shoulder-fired rifles, continue their horrific work on the innocent civilians attempting to vacate the premises.

At roughly 20:13, the assailants begin to exit, pulling off their objective and leaving the fires to grow. With the blaze soon raging, rescue attempts are hindered and law enforcement are unable to ascertain the whereabouts of the sus-

pects. Additionally, civilians trapped in the building are subjected to smoke and debris, causing more casualties. Much of the attack is recorded on cell phone, security camera, and social media recordings.

The attack lasted less than 20 minutes, but has at the time of printing caused 133 confirmed fatalities and over 120 injuries, some of which continue to be critical in nature. Russian police, firefighters, medical personnel, and other security forces rushed to the scene, however, several of the assailants made their

escape. Heading southwest in a white Renault sedan, the four confirmed suspects were intercepted by Russian security forces, surrendering after a tense standoff. All four now await trial.

Shortly after the incident, the Islamic State in the Khorasan Province, a regional branch of the Islamic State terrorist group active in Central Asia, issued a statement claiming responsibility. They claim via their own internal information body that "The Islamic State dealt a strong blow to Russia with a bloody attack, the most violent targeting it in

years. Security sources told Amaq Agency [ISIS internal news branch] that a coordinated attack was launched by Islamic State fighters, on Friday, on a large crowd of Christians in the city of Krasnogorsk on the outskirts of the capital, Moscow."

While the attack represents a harrowing and sobering reminder that non-state actors continue to influence the security landscape in the Russo-European landscape, several key points set this incident up to be more than just a brutal, senseless attack.

During the attack, and recorded on

much of the video that displays the attackers, there appears to remain an interesting dynamic. While three of the four-man group are armed and equipped with rifles, at least one remains behind the group, issuing new magazines and kit to assailants as they ply their bloody trade. Additionally, this individual seems to be equipped with demolitions and incendiary kits, resulting in the inferno that later caused more casualties and much of the structural damage.

The security at the location, according to reports and observations, prior to the attack was minimal, with only private security officers on duty. This is notable, as the United States "shared this information with Russian authorities in accordance with its longstanding 'duty to warn' policy," US National Security Council spokesperson Adrienne Watson said. Following this warning, Russian President Vladimir Putin called the intelligence data "provocative" and said that "these actions resemble outright blackmail and the intention to intimidate and destabilize our society."

Alexander Bortnikov, Director of the Federal Security Service of Russia, claimed that the US, UK, and Ukraine were "behind the attack". Much of the Russian government has mirrored these statements, however, state-media did report that there had been a string of ISIS-related incidents. Russian security forces were reported to have engaged and eliminated cells that had been planning similar attacks in both the Kaluga region southwest of Moscow, as well as in the Ingushetia in the North Caucasus.

With Washington stressing they had no information to doubt the claims of ISIS, all available intelligence on the preparation and execution of the attack points to the terror group as the perpetrators. This invites the question - what can security, intelligence, and defense leaders do to prevent similar events?

While establishing static security posts and employing security officers are a cost consuming endeavor and often unwelcome by many event staff, they provide an initial and imperative deterrent to most overt assailants. These privately employed security personnel also require upgraded and enhanced training, beyond that which is commonly seen as adequate. Deterrence is the best first line.

With target intelligence data flowing from various sources, they absolutely must be assessed and categorized regardless of the source of the information. In this situation, the timeless adage of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" could have saved lives, and enhanced the response of law enforcement. An unbiased filtration of incoming intelligence is key to correctly categorizing threats.

With hindsight, it's difficult to firmly state if these would have stopped or curtailed the gunmen in Moscow outright beforehand. However, there is no doubt that it would have created a more positive security situation and facilitated the elimination of the threat either during or shortly after the event. For professional defense, security, and law enforcement officials, this acts as a sad reminder of the importance of readiness, the fight against complacency, and positioning of resources in an age that faces threats from multiple sources.



Russian emergency services sift through the burnt wreckage of the entertainment center. Source: Russian Emergency Ministry Press Service via AP

Defense Sector Review is an analysis of the regional and relevant security and defense issues by the team at Mercury Strategic Services, a defense consulting, training, and advisory company based in Tbilisi, Georgia and at www.mercstrat.com.

Georgia, Israel, World Jewry - 35 Years Since the Beginning of Relations

A delegation led by the head of the friendship group of the Israeli parliament and the chairman of the Knesset economy committee is to visit Georgia.

The delegation will be hosted by the "Israeli House" and the Israel-Georgia Chamber of Business. For the 35th anniversary, within the framework of relations between Georgia, Israel and world Jewry, "Israeli House" is kicking off preparations for various events. Among them, together with the Israel-Georgia Chamber of Business, a global business forum is planned, which, after the Covid pandemic and hostilities in Israel, will give impetus to bilateral business.

During the visit, the Israeli delegation will thank the Georgian society for its contribution to support towards Israel, solidarity, and deepening of bilateral relations. The delegation will also hold a meeting with the Ministry of Agriculture on the issue of real cooperation in the sphere.

Before the delegation's visit, Itsik Moshe, the head of "Israeli House", wrote a letter to the Prime Minister of Georgia, Irakli Kobakhidze, requesting he take the lead in this important business forum, within the framework of which issues should be progressed and economic relations should be given new life. To prepare for the forum, the delegation, together with the group of friendship with Israel in the Parliament of Georgia, will hold a working meeting with the Israel-Georgia Chamber of Business.

The Israeli delegation also includes the general director of the ruling party Tzori Siso, Shmuel-Hai Eliran vice-chairman of Jewish National Fund, KKL and parliamentarian member of the economy and agriculture committee, Sasson Guetta who will speak about the issue of intensifying cooperation in the field of agriculture between the two countries and the potential that appeared in Israel after the war.

As Itsik Moshe points out, the events planned by "Israeli House" this year will be held within the framework of 35-year



relations between Georgia, Israel and world Jewry, and will be not only a summary of the path traveled, but also an assessment of new perspectives and provision of expert information to the parties on the potential of cooperation.

In the context of the relationship between Georgia, Israel and World Jewry, it is important that Georgia was the first country in the Soviet Union which host World Jewry organizations, including WUJS (World Union of Jewish Students) and JAFI, the Sokhnut-World Jewish Agency. Itsik Moshe represented both authoritative organizations in the Soviet Union. It was under his organization 35 years ago, under the Soviet regime, that the leaders of world Jewry visited Tbilisi and the first bilateral ties were established. These were, in fact, the first ties with the Soviet republics.

Itsik Moshe, head of "Israeli House", believes that the 35-year relations have clearly shown the parties that for the real implementation of ties, it is necessary to establish the correct format of cooperation and the priorities of the parties. In this context, according to Moshe, it is important to note that after the almost complete return of Jews to Israel, which was a natural process, a necessary condition for tomorrow's real, smooth relations is the agreement on four terms: "Georgia", "Israel", "citizens of Georgia" and "Israelis". And relations between them should be conducted in this format. There is indeed progress in this regard, and for this achievement, which serves bilateral and mutual interests, Moshe thanks the respective friendship groups in the Knesset and Parliament.

"The world is currently going through a difficult time. There are challenges facing Israel and its friendly countries as well. The "Israeli House" works in 18 countries and aims to strengthen solidarity with Israel, which is also reflected in the legislation of friendly countries. The second direction is the promotion of bilateral economic relations, which will also give a boost to the economy of friendly countries," Itsik Moshe says.

AIM Startup: Paving the Way for Startup Success Amidst Shifting Global Trends



AIM Startup, a key initiative of AIM Congress, is set to serve as a focal point for startups to capitalize on insights from 2023 and the future trends which will shape the industry in 2024. With AIM Startup, visionary tech entrepreneurs can bridge gaps in resources and investments, empowering groundbreaking ideas to thrive. Attendees can expect 1-on-1 mentorship, opportunities to win up to \$60,000, and connections with industry giants.

With the Startup ecosystem gaining momentum in the ongoing year, AIM Startup promises to bring investors and startups on the same platform to achieve economic harmony globally.

As per the Global Startup Ecosystem Report 2023 (GSER 2023), Silicon Valley retained its top position in the startup industry worldwide, followed closely by New York City and London. Notable shifts include Los Angeles and Tel Aviv climbing to number 4 and number 5, respectively, and the remarkable entry

of Singapore into the top 10, soaring 10 places from the previous year's rankings. Miami made a remarkable climb to number 23, advancing ten positions.

In contrast, major Chinese ecosystems experienced shifts, with Shenzhen dropping 12 places, Beijing slipping two spots, and Shanghai down by one. Indian ecosystems witnessed upward mobility, with Mumbai tied at number 31 and Bengaluru-Karnataka and Delhi ascending to number 20 and number 24, respectively. Zurich's entry into the top 30 marks

Europe's most significant year-on-year improvement, reflecting the dynamic and evolving nature of the global startup ecosystem.

In 2023, investors showcased a discerning focus on diverse sectors, with Fintech leading at 14% of total investments, indicative of the surging demand for digitalization and innovation in financial services. Healthcare followed closely, constituting 13% of total investments, with a notable emphasis on digital healthcare and AI-based medical solutions. A heightened awareness of environmental concerns propelled investments in Climate Technology, representing 8% of the total, driven by sustainable technology and environmental protection initiatives. Consumer Goods attracted 7% of total investments, reflecting the evolving preferences and trends in consumer demands.

The AI sector, with a staggering market value of \$130 billion in 2023, anticipates a compelling Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 37% from 2023 to 2030.

Meanwhile, The Tracxn 'Geo Annual Report: UAE Tech 2023' reveals a thriving tech startup landscape in the UAE, with total funding reaching \$638 million in 2023. Focusing on different stages, seed-stage investments amounted to \$223 million, early-stage funding secured \$240 million, and late-stage funding stood at \$175 million in 2023. Top-performing segments included Fintech, Environment Tech, and Blockchain Technology, raising \$174 million, \$168 million, and \$167 million, respectively. Notably, Abu Dhabi-based tech startups raised \$54 million,

showcasing the city's growing significance in the tech ecosystem.

All these insights point towards an upward trajectory for startups in 2024, hence making AIM Startup one of the most important events for the investors, startups and partners to be a part of.

The AIM Congress, a flagship event of the AIM Global Foundation, and under the theme "Adapting to a Shifting Investment Landscape: Harnessing New Potentials for Global Economic Development," is organized with the support of the UAE Ministry of Industry and Advanced Technology and with the Abu Dhabi Department of Economic Development as lead partner. The event will be held from May 7-9, 2024, in Abu Dhabi, and is expected to attract a diverse audience, including government entities, private businesses, international and regional civil society organizations, associations, and academic institutions from around the world.



SABUKO: Importance of Education and Raising Awareness to Mitigate Human-Wildlife Conflict

Focusing on Strengthening of the Agency of Protected Areas and Administration

Considering the importance of preserving and protecting natural resources, the role and contribution of organizations that work tirelessly in this direction becomes even more valuable.

One such organization operating locally, known for its dedicated work promoting conservation of wildlife in Georgia, and encouraging the sustainable use of natural resources, is SABUKO, the Society for Nature Conservation and Birdlife Partner in Georgia. SABUKO aims to raise awareness about the value of nature and the importance of protecting it.

To prevent the conflict between humans and nature, SABUKO has chosen a way of cooperation and works with local communities, finding the best results come through direct contact and joint efforts.

Following the successfully implemented first phase of the project 'Restoring Gallery Forest and Grasslands in the Iori River Valley,' now, SABUKO, along with its partners, is implementing the second phase, which is building on the progress made by the completed ELSP-funded Iori River Valley project, scaling up grassland restoration and continuing work with the pastoralist community.

For achieving sustainable management of pastures and the restoration of natural resources on the ground, strengthening of the rangers of relevant protected areas and their administration, and their active involvement, is of utmost importance. Keeping this in mind, the Education team of SABUKO works in various directions and plans awareness raising programs for different target groups.

The team aims to increase understanding and valuing of natural resources by people through trainings, face-to-face meetings and communication on the individual level.

They also seek to inform the new generation about the importance of preserving and restoring natural resources and, for this, cooperate with schools and develop various materials which can assist teachers and other educators during their lessons.

The SABUKO team, on March 25-26, organized first aid trainings for rangers in Dedoplistskaro in order to inform them about providing first aid in the wild, both to visitors to the protected areas and to each other, as they have to



work in the field, in risky conditions, surrounded by wild animals, and having such a knowledge is important.

GEORGIA TODAY spoke to the educational team of SABUKO for more detailed information.

Vako Tevdoradze, Education Program Manager, elaborated on the recent educational activities and programs of SABUKO aimed at spreading knowledge about environmental protection.

"Our work is very diversified. On March 25-26, our team organized first aid trainings for rangers from three different protected areas included in our project territory: Vashlovani Protected Areas, Chachuna Managed Reserve and Nugzar Zazanashvili Samukhi Multipurpose Use Protected Area.

"One of the most important parts of our work is to strengthen the administrative body as a whole for more efficient management of protected areas. Rangers are the first to meet visitors to the protected areas, and so they must be well-equipped and educated in case of emergencies. The first aid trainings were directly tailored to their needs in wildlife, such as snake bites, injuries, burns, etc. Once all of them are trained, all three protected areas will have rangers who can provide necessary first aid to anyone in need," Vako tells us.

He also elaborated on yet another educational initiative of SABUKO - Rangeland Management Course at Ilia State University, through which students can learn more about biodiversity and pro-

tecting it.

"Rangeland Management Course is taught at Ilia University, led by Marinus Gebhardt, our Grassland Restoration Manager. It is an optional subject and allows students to acquire diverse knowledge in this direction. Through this course, they also learn pasture management principles and other necessary thematic matters," he notes.

Regarding schools, Vako points out that, in spring, special emphasis is placed on those schools that are related to the SABUKO project area, two schools from Dedoplistskaro and two from Zemo Alvani.

"The pupils we'll work with this semester are directly related to our project territories, as some of their parents are shepherds, some of them own a sheep, etc. And, of course, we'll try our best to inform them about the work of SABUKO and why pasture restoration is important. Direct communication with pupils and using modern methods of education to increase their knowledge is a priority for us," he said.

The SABUKO Education Program Manager also highlighted the need to raise shepherds' and farmers' awareness about the importance of rotational grazing and the conservation of natural resources, which has been achieved through individual, intensive communication with them by the SABUKO team.

"We, the educational team, together with our field officers and other experts, visit their farms often to talk about the

importance of rotational grazing and sustainable pasture management, which obviously increases their trust and awareness of the issue. They already know us well and trust us more, which makes us happy. When conducting various studies, we try to show them that their opinion matters. Researching their thoughts, attitudes and needs is a relatively new method here, and that's why we need to communicate with them properly. A survey on human-wildlife conflict is also part of this. The survey results will be available soon and we'll know more about shepherds' needs and the problems they face in the wild," he says.

"We also try to often bring them informational materials about rotational grazing, etc., written in Georgian and Azerbaijani, as in our project area, there are more ethnic Azerbaijani farmers and shepherds than Georgians. We also bring such informational materials as illustrations to their children, as shepherds often live there with their whole families who all look after their sheep. It's sad, because it means their children miss school, or don't go to school at all, and we want to help them learn to read and write in both Georgian and Azerbaijani.

"Of course, these awareness-raising materials are prepared in as simple and understandable a language as possible, so that it is easy for everyone to grasp and understand.

"With such small but significant steps, we are approaching our main goal - ensuring harmonious co-existence between humans and wildlife, and minimizing the human-wildlife conflict," he tells us.

Eka Arsenashvili, Education Program Officer, elaborated on their activities aimed at raising awareness and spreading knowledge about the proper relationship between human and nature, and mitigating the impacts of the existing conflict among them.

"We, the SABUKO team, actively cooperate both with the representatives of the administration of the Agency of Protected Areas and its rangers, conducting various trainings. A few months ago, we visited the administration of Vashlovani Protected Areas and introduced the biodiversity field guidebook for rangers. We spoke to them about the possible challenges related to biodiversity, be it venomous species, reptiles, birds of prey, etc., and shared our experience with

them. We often have such meetings and presentations with rangers and other representatives of the Agency of Protected Areas, because close cooperation and raising awareness about the issues of mutual concern is a key to tangible results," Eka tells us.

She also elaborates on the SABUKO for Schools project launched last year, which is divided into two parts for easier communication: the "Autumn Challenge" and the "Spring Challenge." The "Autumn Challenge" ended in February, while the "Spring Challenge" has just started. Several outdoor activities are planned as part of the Spring Challenge. Field trips are especially inspiring for all target ages.

Schools from both Tbilisi and the regions are involved in this initiative, Eka tells us, from Kakheti (Dedoplistskaro and Alvani, Racha, Imereti, Mtskheta-Mtianeti, Kvemo Kartli).

"Our main goal is to strengthen the environmental direction at schools and communicate with pupils and teachers properly, delivering the right messages about taking care of the environment.

"We try to share the right knowledge in the environmental direction, because it often happens that many topics are misinterpreted in schools. Not only about environmental pollution, but also about biodiversity. Sometimes it happens that teachers don't like animals (e.g. insects, snakes, reptiles and amphibians) and then they pass it on to the students. This is what we want to eliminate and we want to make everyone fall in love with our unique wildlife and teach both students and teachers to discover its inhabitants.

"Gradually, depending on our capabilities, it is planned to further increase the number of schools. At this point, 15 schools are involved in the spring challenge. The first challenge, called "Remember us" has already been sent, the main goal is for schools to get to know SABUKO and for us to get to know representatives of different schools.

"We are glad that we have quite good feedback both from students and their parents. There are representatives of many different ethnic groups, such as Georgians, Kists, Azerbaijanis, etc. In short, the environment is very diverse and we have to try to be diverse when communicating with them, which is interesting in itself," she notes.

Georgia Red Cross Society Continues Humanitarian Progress across the Country

INTERVIEW BY SHELBI R. ANKIEWICZ

Providing the Georgian government with humanitarian aid since 1918, the Georgia Red Cross Society (GRC), a non-profit organization, continues to make progress in its established field.

The organization, which has been around for over 100 years, has worked throughout the country in both independent and Soviet times. Deputy Secretary General Kakha Mamuladze at the GRC headquarters in Tbilisi has been working with the society for around 25 years, as a volunteer worker and with his current status. He says the organization has a unique role to play in the humanitarian direction.

"Many decrees and sub-laws in the country are tailored toward the GRC, which gives us specific roles in governmental and non-governmental sectors," he tells GEORGIA TODAY. "We have 38 branches across Georgia that are equipped with staff and volunteer members. Each branch has different directions, depending on the location and need of the given area, but each branch has the goal of assisting the government with humanitarian issues."

Most countries worldwide have a Red Cross or Red Crescent Society to aid their

government. Red Crescent acts as the same organization with synonymous goals, principles, etc., however, the name 'Red Crescent' is primarily used in predominantly Muslim countries, rather than 'Red Cross.'

The Red Cross European Union notes the seven fundamental principles that were adopted in 1965 by the International Red Cross-Red Crescent Movement: Humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity, and universality. However, GRC has three main directions on which they focus their attention: Disaster management, health and care, and national society development. Mamuladze tells us their humanitarian assistance in health and care includes mental health and psychosocial reports, professional home care, first aid, blood donation, and more.

All 38 branches in Georgia focus on these directions, but if extra expertise is needed in a certain direction, then the volunteers at that branch will receive more training in that given area.

GRC is the only non-governmental organization in Georgia that has governmental laws that are tailored toward them. This is needed for the organization to support the government, whether its local authorities or central government, in the humanitarian direction. Mamuladze said all Red Cross and Red Crescent societies around the world are



Deputy Secretary General Kakha Mamuladze at the GRC. Source: FB trying to achieve this level of legislation, so they can provide more assistance to their countries.

In addition to legislation, Mamuladze explains that there is a governmental decree, previously the presidential decree, in Georgia, that states that when disaster happens within the country, regardless of its size, the government is to determine which governmental office is responsible for what. Since GRC holds legislation, they are included in the list.

When providing examples of this scenario, Mamuladze said GRC was sent to Shovi last year as part of the task force after the landslide hit.

Most of the GRC consists of volunteers. "They make up roughly 80% of the organization and are the base and play a big role in assistance and volunteer training. Anyone aged 18 or older can be a volunteer, and the organization provides free, on-site training in the direction of interest."

The organization has achieved many things over the years, but the biggest success was the president of the GRC, Natia Loladze, becoming one of 20 worldwide board members of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). To continue success, several years ago, she then became the vice president of IFRC.

"For us, of course, the Georgia Red Cross has never been in this spot, especially with a Vice President. There are only four vice presidents, and one is from the Georgia Red Cross, which is huge," said Mamuladze. "It's a big window to the international direction and we're lucky that we have this. We are still developing, and never imagined being in this spot."

In addition to this progress, as of one year ago, the organization now has an official office. Mamuladze explained how the GRC also has actively engaged its

staff and volunteers, so volunteers are now knowledgeable enough to train other, newer volunteers.

"I see a huge development because I remember how the Red Cross was at that time and where we are now. It's a huge bonus," Mamuladze said.

Moving forward, the organization intends to continue its current programs and projects, such as home care, first aid, branch development, and more. They intend to enact two new directions, including climate change with the implementation of a new project and cash support. Mamuladze said various humanitarian organizations are moving toward cash support, not only with boxes but to deliver specific cash and voucher assistance to those in need.

The IFRC, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and other Red Cross Societies from outside countries, such as Norway, Sweden, and Austria, are the main donors and supporters of the GRC. Mamuladze said he is happy when he sees the light on volunteers' faces after they have helped people; it's a reason why he and many like him do their jobs.

"I think everybody, every human, wants to do kind things, good things. Especially when you are young, you think you can change the world and turn it around," said Mamuladze. "It is human nature to want to support others."

Disasters Commensurable with the Size of Structures

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

In my lifetime, I have travelled back and forth over the legendary Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore a couple of hundred times, always looking through the windshield of my car up at the elegant design of the unique construction and down on the murky serene waters of the Patapsco River that flows into the Chesapeake Bay. I always gave due tribute to the creators of one of the world's most famous facilities ever built over water by human hand. The beautiful and terribly helpful bridge was there before, yet now there remains just an ugly vestige of it, sticking weirdly out of water which seemingly deplores the loss of its erstwhile gorgeous guardian. The bereft river no longer looks as fascinating as it did when the Key Bridge was there, filling the scenery with widely recognizable elegance and shining magnificence. Something very big and significant has gone under water in America, in the twinkle of an eye; something awfully American has been buried into heartbreaking oblivion right out of the blue. And the extent of the damage is absolutely commensurable with the size of the structure.

All the resulting fuss and investigative efforts seem awfully miserable against the backdrop of the hurt human imagination and broken hearts. As an old Baltimorean from the famously quaint Fells



The Singapore-flagged container vessel named Dali, heading out of Baltimore Harbor bound for Sri Lanka, lost power and plowed into the Francis Scott Key Bridge at about 1.30am on Tuesday. Six workers were killed. Source: REUTERS

Point, I want my Bridge back, but alas, the remaining span of my life will never see that happen. While it may be nothing more than another tragedy in our endangered world, it truly hurts. The recent Crocus Center massacre in Russia is no less a human calamity, taking so many innocent lives. It seems like those two absolutely different and far removed from each other tragedies distantly echo and reverberate in unison

somewhere in the cosmic space, where we all belong, and where our Zodiacal lineups and combinations reign not always in our human favor. I wonder if Russians and Americans are at this moment of simultaneous tragic instant thinking that all of us, just all of us, are equally vulnerable in this God-governed world of ours, leaving us no idea where the next disasters will come, or why. I am not hinting at anything mysterious

here. I am just saying that catastrophes are both manmade and could have been eschewed if the humans, so peevisly and brainlessly tinkering with our mother-earth, thought better.

It is probably not only world peace and international trade, political interaction and economic exchange, diplomatic endeavors and technological achievements that unite us, but tragedies too – former, current and future disasters that

need to be handled, and handled they could be if those hands were joined in one tight human grasp. The world is not safe and never will be from Crocuses and Key-Bridges – today, in Russia and America, tomorrow, anywhere else around the globe.

Interaction between nations is often similar to interpersonal relations: When my failure feels like your own, coexistence becomes easier and cooperation more fruitful. When my fiasco means so little to you that you don't even want to commiserate, at least verbally, the world around both of us becomes scary and ominous. Understandably, the choice is not always ours, and we often depend on circumstances, but then, why are we called Homosapiens? Shouldn't we be capable of turning the circumstances that are aggravating relationships into ones that attenuate cohabitation?

If, presumably, the Key-Bridge collapse delights Russia and the Crocus tragedy pleases America, we should be ready for worse catastrophes. Intolerance, cruelty, bigotry and grudge will never pay. Stable peace and happy coexistence might only be a project of a civilized mindset, not of the primeval instinctual outlook, oriented on external physical strength and a subconscious sense of violence. Being cognizant of this wouldn't take rocket science to master, or a wiseman to rack his brain about. To know this, elementary reason is enough. Certainly, if we could avail ourselves of that elementary reason.

CULTURE

BI Auction's Meet the Artist: Lika Shkhvatsabaia



Lika Shkhvatsabaia. Source: FB

BY KATIE RUTH DAVIES

Lika Shkhvatsabaia was born in 1972 in Tbilisi, to sculpting and painting parents. She tells us her love for art comes from her childhood, inspired by the artists and people she grew up around. After graduating in Monumental Painting from the Academy of the Fine Arts of Tbilisi, she continued her studies at the International University of Siena, Italy, and now lives in Spain. GEORGIA TODAY asked to interview her as part of the BI Auction 'Meet the Artist' collaborative series.

"I have authored numerous projects and exhibitions in Europe over the years," she says. "It is both interesting and difficult, but ultimately gives me valuable experi-

ence. My last project saw me among 15 finalists for the 'Premio de Artista de Europa,' and I had an exhibition in Milan in January this year. Within the same project, there will be an exhibition in Paris in April. My personal exhibition, which was organized at Iart Gallery last year in Tbilisi, was really very special and unique – to, after all these years, present my art in my own country."

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR WORK? WHICH TRENDS IN ART OR IMPORTANT ARTISTS HAVE HAD AN IMPACT ON YOU?

My paintings are above all an emotion. Inspiration from this world, which makes me look for energy, beauty in itself to transfer to a surface and materialize it. On some occasions, my canvases have an origin in themselves and are consti-

tuted as an autonomous organism that germinates and extends through a process of net artistic development, as a work of art and as an idea in its pure state that is transferred to matter from my most creative cerebral side.

Ways of building or composing are linked to abstraction, the physical, the strength and materialization of feeling to obtain the final result of my work: Inspiring intense emotions that transmit my vision of the universe. Artists who made a great impression on me: El Greco, Velazquez, Kandinsky, Chagall, and Dufy.

NAME A PIECE OF ART YOU THINK EVERYONE SHOULD SEE IN PERSON.

Everyone should definitely see Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel in their lifetimes!

WHAT IS YOUR VIEW OF THE VIRTUAL ART SPACE, OF EXHIBITIONS, AUCTIONS AND SALES?

Physical contact with the work is fundamental for me. However, the virtual space is an indispensable part of our life, and at the same time a great comfort. As I said before, the main thing in my works is emotion and energy, to bring this to the viewer. As for selling, the artist should be free from that. The commercial side should be done by an art curator, gallerist.

HOW DO YOU POSITION YOUR ART AND YOURSELF IN THE GEORGIAN ART SCENE?

It's difficult for me to specify what position I am in as an artist in Georgia. This is just the way that one chooses as a lifestyle, and time will tell.

HOW DO YOU EVALUATE 'CHANGE' IN ART IN GEORGIA?

I think there is a lot of potential and talent in Georgian art today, along with a constant searching and changing. This is also a part of the era and time... we just have to follow our thoughts, our freedom.

WHAT DO YOU WISH FOR ART AND ARTISTS, IN GEORGIA, ESPECIALLY FOR THEIR ARTISTIC PRESENCE IN EUROPE?

First of all, I wish creative energy and great inspiration to all artists; to have all the opportunity and desire to show



their art. As for Europe, from this point of view, I believe that the main thing is to recognize yourself, your art, and to believe that you have chosen the right way.

There are a lot of wonderful artists in Europe who can't or don't have the means to work, which is very sad. There are also many weak works that have commercial success. All this together is one big movement called Contemporary Art, behind which there is a lot of work, struggle and self-discovery.



Countdown to Dubai Art Fair: Gallery FotoAtelier Features KetoMa's Works - Color Field: Force of Nature



The photoseries 'Color Field: Force of Nature,' to be put on display at the Dubai Art Fair by Gallery FotoAtelier, presents KetoMa's art photography – colorful depictions of Georgian nature interpreted through her artistic vision, with color acquiring a pictorial load in her lens and revealing her photographic eye. Inspired by Georgia's nature, its diversity, and unique locations (mountains, sea-side, fields), KetoMa expresses her sensual approach to coloring.

KetoMa's special filters accentuate the beauty of nature and the harmonic balance of places. Her photography further

explores and intensifies the juxtaposition of the artificial and the natural.

Photo series 'Color Field: Force of Nature' explores the pure beauty of the landscape, in which a particular image specifies the essence of places and its atmosphere. Tonal gradations from soft pink to red, yellow or green intensify the mystical mood of a concrete site. The whole photo series is based on KetoMa's ability to personalize a specific environment, which creates the magnificent effect of exploring the surrounding nature.

KetoMa is a photographer who works on different narratives of artistic photography. She graduated from NYIP -



New York Institute of Photography. She also successfully completed a certified program at GIPA.

Important projects include the photography festival Photoville, New York (2019), photography exhibition "My Favorite Shots", BBA, Berlin (2019), and Tbilisi Art Fair (2019).

The artist has a unique style, with a vision and aesthetics oriented on synthesizing visual research and perceptions of color. Her work blurs the line between photography and painting, and with an equally impressionist approach, she brings the original dynamics of photography to life.

SPORTS

Good Sports

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

First time ever accession to the UEFA championships, which will be in Germany this summer!

The country's rise in a few different sports since I arrived here 25 years ago has been amazing to see. The Olympics in Athens, 2004... I lugged a huge old TV of mine up to my blood brother's house in Etseri, Svaneti, for the event. It had

Georgia's recent soccer victory over Greece in overtime penalties, played to roaring crowds at home, is all the main news this week.



no remote; you had to exit your couch and turn the dial. Imagine! The thing kept changing channels without any intervention, which suggested a poltergeist, but on my asking, I was greeted with hearty laughter. "One villager has a couple of satellite dishes," Nodar told me, "and we're all connected to him. Whatever he watches, we all watch..." Eventually the neighbor bestowed the all-important remote control to another house, because he was sick of local ladies calling him during the day and demanding he change the channel to their soap opera!

But I digress. Georgia won gold in Graeco-Roman Wrestling in Athens. That's the main point. And now the satellite dishes are everywhere, so no need for such supernatural-seeming connections.

Since 2004, we've done equally well in weight-lifting and martial arts (men and women both), as well as hosting world-class winter sports events in Bakuriani and Tetnuli. Most Svan children are put on skis as soon as they can walk, like Canadian ones on skates. I have a couple of sets

of photos of this initiation in our village, memories for a family to cherish. Mestia has two ski resorts nearby, and several villages also have training ski-lift lines. I never learned to downhill ski in Canada (too expensive there), just a bit of cross-country, which is entirely different.

But our biggest sport has become rugby, with quite a few European Championship wins over the last number of years. Something about the typical Georgian male body type and mindset, as well as stellar training, is enabling Georgia to rise in this game as well as all the others I've mentioned. A strong history of military victories can't hurt either, alongside the defeats instilling an idea of battle which runs deep. Even the word for "hello", *gamarjoba(t)*, means victory.

A few nights ago, TV-less now, I waited online for news from expat friends who were watching the Georgia-Greece event. 0-0... overtime... then the penalty kick-off. The roars beginning all around our apartment block, followed by fireworks and the shooting of firearms, said it all. We were going to the championship this summer. We had beaten a larger country.

Our joy was complete.

The competition will be fierce, and I have no idea what our chances are. Ukraine is in the running too, which is also delightful. But simply to have got this far speaks volumes of how Georgia is getting back on its feet on the world scene in sports.

I have a friend from our village in Svaneti who has brought his son all the way to Tbilisi to follow the young man's dream of advancing in soccer, while still in grade school. I can only imagine what a stimulus the recent victory in this sport has done for him. The whole country is in celebration, and well-deserved too. UEFA 2024 here we come!

Tony Hanmer has lived in Georgia since 1999, in Svaneti since 2007, and been a weekly writer and photographer for GT since early 2011. He runs the "Svaneti Renaissance" Facebook group, now with over 2000 members, at www.facebook.com/groups/SvanetiRenaissance/

He and his wife also run their own guest house in Etseri: www.facebook.com/hanmer.house.svaneti

History Makers - Nation Rejoices as Shootout Victory Takes Georgia to Euro 2024

Continued from page 1

And, of course, the ecstasy was not confined to the stadium. Throughout the whole country, from the vineyards of Kakheti to the sparkling Adjara coast-line and everywhere in between, there were scenes of unprecedented delirium.

Even those without the faintest interest in football leapt, cheered, and hugged whoever was close by, as Georgia made history.

Alongside Ukraine and Poland, who also won their play-off finals, a place at the European Championships is theirs. But while there's much to anticipate in the near future, to understand the significance of Georgia's victory and the joyous bedlam that ensued, it is necessary to first look back.

Georgians made their mark on international football long before the country first played as an independent country in the early 1990s.

Indeed, in 1960, three Georgians - Givi Chokheli, Mikheil Meskhi, and Slava Metreveli - all played in the first-ever European Championships final, albeit representing the Soviet Union, who defeated Yugoslavia 2-1 in Paris.

Twelve years later, Revaz Dzodzushvili and Murtaz Khurtsilava were on the losing side against West Germany in the Euro 1972 final in Brussels, and in the 1982 World Cup in Spain, a formidable Georgian contingent, including captain Aleksandr Chivadze and Ramaz Shengelia, helped the USSR to knock out a much-fancied Scotland side in the group stage.

At club level, the glories of Dinamo Tbilisi (which in the Soviet era was effectively considered the Georgian national team) in the late 1970s and early 1980s drew global admiration.

However, since gaining independence, the Georgian national side has generally toiled to recapture such magic. Sure, there have been stars - sublime dribbler Giorgi Kinkladze is still revered at Manchester City for his winding runs around Maine Road in the 1990s, potent goalscorer Shota Arveladze was much loved in Turkey, Holland, and Scotland in the



Georgian fans celebrate Georgia's win. Source: FB

late 1990s and 2000s, while Kakha Kaladze won it all at AC Milan - but success as a national team had evaded the Georgians. Certainly, qualification for a major tournament had seldom been in the realms of the conceivable.

Until this week, whenever the topic of conversation at a Georgian supra turned to football, fathers, uncles, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers would talk fondly of these great Georgian players of a bygone age, never to return.

But now, the Georgian kids of today have their own generation of idols to tell their offspring about as the barbecue sizzles and the wine flows in the decades ahead.

Returning to the present, or at least the near present, Georgia - under French head coach Willy Sagnol - had secured a place in the play-off final against Greece after a reasonably comfortable 2-0 suc-



Georgian fans celebrate Georgia's win. Source: FB

cess against Luxembourg the previous Thursday on a soaking wet night, thanks to Budu Zivzivadze's double.

But reaching such a final was not unprecedented for Georgia. Back in November 2020, with the COVID-19 pandemic at its fearsome height and a nationwide curfew imposed, the Georgians were in the same situation.

In an eerily empty Boris Paichadze Stadium, Georgian fans, restricted to their living rooms, watched in horror as North Macedonia emerged as 1-0 victors to take their spot at Euro 2020.

A haunting failure, and the chance of a lifetime spurned - or so many of us thought.

Fast forward three-and-a-half years, and the mood was quite different - a sellout crowd in raucous mood provided a cacophonous atmosphere. If Georgia were going to fall short against Greece, it wasn't going to be for a lack of support.

Long before kick-off, supporters packed the stands, with songs reverberating round the famed arena. Their faith in this Georgian team was palpable, maybe even infectious.

They were also buoyed by the return of Napoli superstar Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, perhaps Georgia's first world-class player in the post-independence era, who had been suspended for the Luxembourg semi-final.

After a booming rendition of the national anthem, the time had come for Georgia to make history. However, it soon became apparent that this would be no stroll for the hosts. As a tense game wore on without much incident, Greece, though a pale shadow of the storied team that won the European Championships 20 years ago, were proving a stubborn opponent.

On the rare occasions Kvaratskhelia got on the ball, there were shrieks of anticipation from the home fans, only for him to be quickly subdued by the circling Greeks - sometimes fairly, sometimes not.

In a poor but somehow gripping opening 45 minutes, passes from both sides

went astray, and neither goalkeeper was seriously troubled - with the exception of Giorgi Chakvetadze's free-kick forcing Greek number one Odysseas Vlachodimos into a smart tip over the bar towards the first half's end.

Into the second half, and the script stayed much the same, with tension overcoming talent, and two hard-working teams cancelling each other out.

As the minutes passed, the hesitancy to take the risk of making a mistake grew and grew.

Nerves jangling around the country, we proceeded to extra time, where genuine chances finally did emerge.

The first two of those fell to the visitors, when in the 100th minute, a deflected shot from Anastasios Bakasetas produced an agile low save from Georgian goalkeeper Giorgi Mamardashvili.

Soon after, Mamardashvili was beaten by a towering header from Konstantinos Mavropanos, which rattled the home crossbar.

Suddenly under threat, the Georgians rallied with Zurab Davitashvili's shot then denied by the legs of Vlachodimos.

In the second half of extra time, an enterprising run from Georgiy Tsitaishvili had the home fans ready to roar, only for his shot from a narrow angle to be turned behind by the resolute Vlachodimos.

As the Polish referee sounded the whistle for full time, the football was over, and the theatre of penalty kicks awaited.

Supporters didn't know where to look. Many prayed, while others broke into chant and song.

Less than a year ago, Georgia's under-21s had suffered an agonizing penalty shootout loss to Israel in the very same stadium, memories of which were still raw among fans and some of the players alike.

But something felt different this time - no more heroic defeat: Victory was within reach.

Georgia were up first, as Giorgi Kochorashvili, following a long and surely uncomfortable wait, dispatched an

unstoppable strike into the top corner, triggering a mixture of elation and relief in the home support.

Attention now turned to Mamardashvili, the Georgian goalkeeper, who superbly thwarted the penalty of Bakasetas, sending the stadium into raptures. First blood: Georgia.

Youngster Zuriko Davitashvili then rolled in Georgia's second penalty, edging them closer to the holy grail of the Euros.

However, the Georgians' readiness to celebrate was then tempered when Giorgos Masouras expertly converted to bring it back to 2-1.

The previously uproarious vibe among the Georgians was then muted further when Giorgi Mikautadze side-footed his effort wide of target, to the sound of 50,000 groans.

Andreas Bouchalakis then levelled for the Greeks, making it 2-2.

Now fearing the worst, the home fans breathed a collective sigh of relief when Lasha Dvali bravely tucked away his penalty, after which Greek striker Giorgos Giakoumakis dragged his spot-kick to the left of Mamardashvili's goal.

This was it. Georgia were now one kick away from the big stage they longed for.

The realization seeped in around the ground that history beckoned and fans bounced with anticipation. And Kvekveskiri made no mistake as the ball rippled the net, triggering countrywide mayhem.

The subsequent (peaceful) pitch invasion produced images that will no doubt be stitched into the collective Georgian memory for decades.

At the Euros, Georgia will face Turkey, the Czech Republic, and Portugal, and fans are already plotting to follow their heroes in Germany this summer by whatever means necessary.

Between now and then, such is the power of football, it is likely the sense of togetherness and universal celebration across the country will linger. Let's hope so, anyway.

Altogether now: Saqartvelos gaumar...



PUBLISHER & GM
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Webmaster:
Sergey Gevenov

Circulation Managers:
David Kerdikashvili,
David Djandigava

ADDRESS
1 Melikishvili Str.
Tbilisi, 0179, Georgia

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

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

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