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Out, But Not Done: Georgia's Determination for a European Future is as Strong as Ever

BLOG BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE FOR THE SPECTATOR

To all things an end. But what a journey it has been! Nay, a crusade! If you had told me a month ago that Georgia would make it into the EURO 2024 play-offs, defeating Portugal on the way, I'd have called you mad. Indeed, over these last two weeks, especially after the historic 2:0 win against Portugal, we Georgians all went a wee bit mad – and that's considering we weren't the most level-headed bunch to begin with. Deliriously, we danced, we sang, we shouted and chanted and cried tears of joy. With Georgia being the cradle of wine (seriously, look it up if you don't believe me: We "invented" the thing!), it's perhaps unsurprising that copious amounts were consumed. All the while, we had to endure Americans perplexed at what the "State of Georgia" was doing at the Euros, seeing some asking on social media why other states such as Florida or West Virginia couldn't send THEIR soccer teams over too.

Continued on page 11



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As of 03-Jul-2024

Markets				Markets			
GEORGIAN EUROBOBDS	Price	w/w	m/m	GEORGIAN STOCKS	Price	w/w	m/m
GEORG 04/26	91.66 (YTM 7.79%)	+0.0%	+0.5%	Bank of Georgia (BGEQ LN)	GBP 40.95	+3.5%	+9.2%
GRAL 06/28	88.24 (YTM 7.89%)	+0.1%	-0.8%	Georgia Capital (CGEO LN)	GBP 10.28	+8.2%	+9.1%
GEBGG 9 1/2 PERP	97.47 (YTM 10.15%)	-0.3%	-0.9%	TBC Bank Group (TBCG LN)	GBP 26.45	+4.1%	+2.1%
SILKNET 01/27	99.85 (YTM 8.44%)	-0.1%	-0.1%				
TBC 10.775 PERP	99.98 (YTM 10.57%)	+0.0%	-0.0%	COMMODITIES			
TBC 8.894 PERP	95.5 (YTM 10.93%)	+0.1%	+0.3%	Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	87.34	+2.5%	+11.5%
TBC 10 1/4 PERP	98.14 (YTM 10.71%)	-0.1%	-0.4%	Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	2 356.20	+2.5%	+0.2%
INDICES				CURRENCIES			
SP 500	5 537.02	+1.1%	+4.8%	USD / GEL	2,7950	-1.5%	+0.1%
NASDAQ	18 188.30	+2.2%	+8.1%	EUR / GEL	3,0131	-0.5%	-1.0%
DOW JONES 30	39 308.00	+0.5%	+1.9%	GBP / GEL	3,5581	-0.5%	-0.4%
Russell 2000	2 047.70	+1.3%	-0.9%	EUR / USD	1,0786	-1.0%	+1.1%
FTSE 100	8 171.12	-0.7%	-1.1%	GBP / USD	1,2742	-0.9%	+0.5%



A Georgia fan launches a punch towards a rival supporting Turkey. Source: Reuters

UEFA Fines Georgian Football Federation 30,000 Euros and Turkey 25,000 Euros for Confrontation Between Fans

BY ANA DUMBADZE

After a confrontation between Georgian and Turkish fans at the stadium before their match, UEFA announced fines of 30,000 euros (\$32,200) for the Georgian football federation and 25,000 euros (\$26,900) for Turkey.

Fighting broke out among fans inside the Dortmund BVB Stadion before the Euro 2024 match between Turkey and Georgia on June 18. Around 40 fans from

each set of supporters were involved in the brief scuffles and police moved between them, a Reuters reporter inside the stadium said.

UEFA has also fined its tournament co-organizer Germany for failing to stop selfie-seekers from coming onto the field to get photos taken with Cristiano Ronaldo at the European Championship.

The total amount of fines levied across the 36-game group stage, including some that were previously announced, was almost 1.3 million euros (\$1.4 million) across 22 of the 24 national federations at the tournament. Only Slovakia and Spain were exempt.



Image source: NATO

Georgia to Participate in the NATO Jubilee Summit Scheduled for July 9-11 in Washington

BY TEAM GT

Georgia will participate in the NATO jubilee summit scheduled for July 9-11 in Washington, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia reported.

The Georgian delegation will be headed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, Iliia Darchiashvili.

“The Minister will take part in the meeting of foreign ministers scheduled on July 10 in the format of partner countries. Iliia Darchiashvili will also attend other events planned within the summit

and hold bilateral meetings. It should be noted that according to the program of the summit, the participation of partner countries is provided at the level of foreign ministers, therefore, the Minister of Foreign Affairs from Georgia has been invited to participate in the summit in Washington,” reads the information.

Washington invited Foreign Minister Iliia Darchiashvili to attend the NATO summit from Georgia, with Department of State Spokesperson Matthew Miller telling journalists asking about it: “We call on the Georgian Dream government to quickly take steps to return Georgia to the Euro-Atlantic path, as its people want, and as it is indicated in the constitution.”

BBC: Georgia Leave Germany Having Earned Respect from their Opponents After Fairytale Progression

BY ANA DUMBADZE

Georgia leave Germany having earned respect from their opponents after a fairytale progression to the knockout stages in their debut major tournament, read the article published by the BBC after Sunday's EURO 2024 match Georgia vs. Spain. “They were urged to show no fear by

manager Willy Sagnol – a former Bayern Munich and France full-back – and they did not, driving at Spain's backline on the counter-attack, dribbling with fearlessness and taking risks throughout,” the article reads. The BBC noted that Spain had two extra days to prepare for the match and were able to make 10 changes in their final group game.

“However, their supporters were certainly pleased with what they saw, remaining in their seats after full-time to chant to the backdrop of a drum and applaud

the Georgia players.

“They were given an unforgettable memory when Georgia beat Portugal in their final group game – but this was a step too far against elite opposition,” the article reads.

Georgia faced Spain in the round of 16 of UEFA EURO 2024 on June 30 in Cologne, Germany. Despite scoring the first goal, Georgia ultimately lost to Spain with a final score of 1:4, seeing them bidding a dignified farewell to the European Championship.



Source: FB

Local Initiatives Help Restore Cultural Heritage and Foster Community Engagement in Conflict-Affected Regions

The European Union and UNDP support Georgia's civil society to promote peaceful conflict transformation. Efforts focus on building confidence among divided communities, assisting internally displaced people, and fostering social and economic progress in conflict-affected regions. Over the past four years, the EU4Dialogue project has catalyzed more than 40 civil society initiatives improving local livelihoods and encouraging community engagement in sustainable and equitable development.

On 27 June, UNDP representatives

visited Georgia's Samegrelo region to review the progress of several civil society initiatives promoting local growth and community engagement.

In Zugdidi, they attended the official opening of newly restored mosaic murals relocated from the village of Rukhi, adding a new tourist landmark to the region. The restored murals, ‘Lady in Red,’ ‘Summer in Samegrelo,’ and ‘Musicians,’ are exemplary pieces of 20th-century public art heritage shared by communities across the conflict divide. Their restoration involved Georgian and French experts from the ‘Mosaica Studio’ Crafts Development Centre and the Ribirabo Foun-

datedion, supported by the EU4Dialogue project. Local youth from the conflict-affected regions actively participated in the restoration, assisting the experts and learning the craft.

The visit continued at the consultation center established by the Charity Humanitarian Center ‘Abkhazeti’ (CHCA), offering psychological support and counseling on various social services to people living on both sides of the conflict divide. In its first six months of operation, from January through May 2024, the center provided over 120 face-to-face consultations and received more than 360 calls on the hotline.



Photo: UNDP/Leli Blagonravova

Ukraine Latest: Dnipro in Mourning as Russian Missile Strike at Kindergarten Kills 5

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

Ukkraine's city of Dnipro held a day of mourning after a Russian missile and drone attack killed five people and wounded more than 50 this week, including a 14-year-old girl.

The Russian aerial raid targeted kindergartens, schools and hospitals, and sparked major fires across the city, Dnipro city mayor Borys Filatov said. Photos of the fatal attack showed windows of a shopping mall blown out, raining shards onto the street.

Volodymyr Zelensky slammed the Russian attack and renewed his call for long-range weapons to stop Russian guided bombs.

"There is only one way to end this terror: By providing Ukraine with more air defense systems and by enabling longer-range strikes on Russian terrorist bases, particularly their airbases," he said.

The war, now in its third year since Russia invaded its neighbor, has killed more than 10,000 civilians and wounded around 20,000 others, the United Nations says.

RUSSIA DISMISSES TURKEY OFFER ON PEACE TALKS

Vladimir Putin's spokesperson has ruled out a suggestion by the Turkish president that he could help mediate peace talks. Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan told Vladimir Putin that Ankara could help end the conflict in Ukraine.

But a spokesman for the Russian president appeared to dismiss the suggestion, saying Mr. Erdogan could not act as an intermediary in the war.

Speaking to Putin on the sidelines of a security summit in Kazakhstan Wednesday, President Erdogan said he believed a fair peace was possible, with an outcome that suited both sides.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov later ruled out any role as a go-between for the Turkish leader.

"No, it's not possible," Peskov told the Russian TASS news agency.

It was not clear why Russia was opposed to such participation by Erdogan, as he has managed to maintain good relations with both Russia and Ukraine throughout the conflict.

RUSSIA LAUNCHES ANOTHER ATTACK ON UKRAINE'S SECOND-LARGEST CITY

Ukraine's second-largest city of Kharkiv came under attack again on Wednesday afternoon, said its regional governor Oleg Sinigubov.

Sinigubov said "at least three strikes" were reported by security forces in a northeastern district of the city.

Two private houses were destroyed and a child was rescued by emergency workers, he said, while a grass fire broke out at another home.

No casualties were reported, yet one person was killed and another four were wounded in other Russian attacks in the Kharkiv region, officials said.

Kharkiv regional prosecutors said one person was killed and two wounded in an attack in the village of Borova that also damaged ten homes, stores and an administrative building.

Meanwhile, Volodymyr Zelensky's senior aide Andri Yermak said Kyiv was not ready to compromise with Russia and it would never give up any territory seized by Putin's forces since February 2022.



Dnipro after the attack. Source: REUTERS

"We are not ready to go to the compromise for the very important things and values... independence, freedom, democracy, territorial integrity, sovereignty," he said.

Moscow has stepped up its attacks on Kharkiv since it opened a new front in the northeastern region nearly two months ago.

KYIV LAUNCHES ATTACK ON PUTIN'S BLACK SEA NAVAL BASE

Ukraine launched an overnight drone attack on Vladimir Putin's Black Sea naval base, where Moscow's once-revered fleet is hiding.

Kyiv fired two sea drones at Novorossiysk, which were shot down by Russian defenses, according to the Russian ministry of defense.

Satellites detected large fires in the area of the Novorossiysk port, which is one of Russia's largest and serves as a major outlet for crude oil and oil product export and transit in Russia's south.

ZELENSKY THANKS US FOR NEW \$2.3BN AID PACKAGE

President Zelensky has welcomed the news that the US will send an additional \$2.3bn (£1.8bn) in security assistance to Ukraine.

US defense secretary Lloyd Austin said

yesterday that Washington would soon announce the aid package, which includes anti-tank weapons, interceptors and munitions for patriot and other air defense systems.

It came as he met Ukrainian defense minister Rustem Umerov at the Pentagon.

In a post to social media, Zelensky said the "critical items" will strengthen troops and "improve our battlefield capabilities".

"We count on continued US assistance to strengthen Ukraine's defense and enable us to effectively counter Russian aggression and protect our people against Russian terror," he said.

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Council of Europe Congress: Statement by the Monitoring Committee on the Situation in Georgia

MEDIA RELEASE

The Monitoring Committee of the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, meeting in Tbilisi, Georgia, on 2 July, released the following statement:

"The Monitoring Committee reaffirms its full support to the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders, while 20% of Georgian territory is occupied by Russia.

"At the same time, the Monitoring Committee is deeply concerned by the tensions and increasing polarization within Georgian society, fueled by the adoption of legislation which does not align with European democratic norms and standards. This situation has already been the subject of critical opinions from the Venice Commission and statements by the Council of Europe Secretary General and by the Congress President and also led the EU to halt the accession procedure for Georgia. The Committee is also highly alarmed by the excessive use of force, violence and intimidation campaigns against demonstrators, members of parliament, journalists and civil society activists.

"It reaffirms its commitment to sup-



Monitoring Committee of the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, meeting in Tbilisi. Source: CoE

porting Georgia's democratic development. The polarization of society and clear signs of democratic backsliding, which undermine democratic stability, compel all political forces in the country to engage in dialogue reflecting the

European aspirations of Georgian people. The Monitoring Committee calls for such open and inclusive political dialogue to take place, as it is essential for creating an environment in which all citizens, regardless of their political

views, can participate actively, freely, and equally in public life at all levels, with respect for democratic principles and human rights. It trusts that this dialogue will lead to a renewed commitment to consolidating democracy

in Georgia."

In the spirit of such a dialogue, members of the Monitoring Committee met with national and local representatives of the ruling party, of the opposition and of civil society.



Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev. Source: FB

Azerbaijan President Calls Snap Parliamentary Election

BY TEAM GT

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev on Friday called snap legislative elections for September, a technical step to avoid the poll coinciding with the COP29 climate conference that Baku is to host later this year.

Lawmakers last week asked Aliyev to dissolve the country's legislature, the Milli Majlis, and call early polls two months ahead of schedule, citing the need to avoid staging the election during the major international climate conference.

COP29 will run from November 11-22

in the oil-rich nation.

On Friday, Aliyev issued a decree ordering the dissolution of parliament, which is dominated by his Yeni (New) Azerbaijan party.

"Early elections of the Milli Majlis of the Republic of Azerbaijan should be scheduled for September 1, 2024," the decree stated.

The elections are widely expected to extend Aliyev's grip on power.

None of the elections held in Azerbaijan under Aliyev's two-decade rule have been recognized as free and fair by international observers. Indeed, Baku has faced strong Western criticism for persecuting political opponents and suffocating independent media.

Islam Flexing Muscles in Russia

OP-ED BY NUGZAR. B. RUHADZE

Isn't it interesting that what some of us tend to qualify as a terrorist act, those who we call terrorists consider as an expression of their spiritual will and protection of their habitual way of life and cause? The world remembers the March 22 terrorist attack at the Crocus City Hall concert arena in Krasnogorsk, near Moscow, perpetrated by Islamists of Tajik origin, which killed more than 130 innocent citizens of Russia and injured hundreds more. It was one of the worst terrorist attacks in Russia since the disastrous Beslan school siege in 2004. Instantly after the attack, ISIS claimed responsibility for the heavy casualty assault beyond its habitual zone of action in South Asia. It is presumed that the Islamic State Khorasan Province attacked Russia due to Moscow's interaction with the Taliban and ceaseless involvement in anti-ISIS operations in Syria.

On June 16, there was another disturbance, organized by allegedly Islamist terrorists, in the Rostov penitentiary, where they took the convoy guards hostage.

The third deadly terrorist attack that took place in Russia happened less than a fortnight ago in the cities of Derbent and Makhachkala of the Dagestan Autonomous Republic, seeing Islamist terrorists vandalizing and setting a church and synagogue on fire, having murdered a clergyman. As a result of the confrontation between police and the extremist guerillas, the terrorists were annihilated on the spot, but at the same time, 21 other people died too, including policemen and civilians. Surprisingly, a son of a high-ranking Dagestani official was among the terrorists, now arrested, but the fact of his family's complicity is far more mind-boggling



The Crocus attack. Image source: ilkha

than the case of his imprisonment.

Three Islamist terrorist attacks in Russia in the last three months! Statistically speaking, this is an alarming frequency! Yet, the Russians keep taking those terrorist punches, and, most worryingly, they can't do much to stop the vicious assaults.

Incidentally, the Russian people refused to believe that Islam was behind all those attacks, looking for a scapegoat elsewhere, including in Ukraine. But such presumptions were farfetched, as, in reality, the Islamic State has set foot on Russian soil, and may well see Russia as a favorable venue for its further activity.

Nobody can say with confidence right now if the Russian state is at this time capable of successfully challenging the Islamic terror on its territory. Yet, a question arises: Why should Islam be Russia's adversary at a time when Russia is confronting the West and is supporting Muslims everywhere, including the Palestinian cause? It seems ISIS loathes Russia's negative attitude towards the creation of Islamic Caliphates and Vilayets, be it on Russian territory or elsewhere. When it comes to their cause, ISIS will not hold off from undertaking

anything they think fit to serve it. Some Russian regions, like the Dagestan Republic, have unnoticeably turned into propitious sites for Muslim fundamentalism, where Islamic traditions and way of life are taking deep roots to influence the indigenous population and create favorable preconditions for achieving their cherished goals, apparently achievable only through terror.

As recently noted in the Russian press, observant experts have long been sending heads-up signals to the Kremlin that Islamic fundamentalism was gathering power in those regions, but the Russian government remained flagrantly nonchalant to the warnings—a grave mistake, although there might be a fair justification for that offhand attitude in the war in Ukraine and complete displacement of attention towards the West as it supports the Ukrainians in their conflict with Russia. It is not for us to judge the way the Russians are trying to solve their current problems, but reminding the world, including ourselves, of the situation in one of the most powerful nuclear nations of the world wouldn't hurt. We have to be aware of what's happening around us.

The Privilege of Our Generation: A Gateway to Understanding Georgia's Democratic Transition

BY IVAN NECHAEV

The English translation of Zurab Zhvania's seminal work, *The Privilege of Our Generation*, opens a crucial window into the political evolution and democratic aspirations of Georgia, offering invaluable insights for scholars, politicians, and students interested in transitional societies. First published in Georgian in 2005, this book compiles Zhvania's influential lectures from 2002-2003, delivered to master's program students at the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs. With this English edition, scholars, politicians, and students worldwide can now access Zhvania's profound insights into democratic governance and political theory.

Zurab Zhvania, a cornerstone of Georgia's post-Soviet political scene, envisioned this book as a synthesis of his rich political experience and theoretical reflections on democracy. The text is rooted in the transcripts of his lectures, maintaining the dynamic classroom atmosphere. Supplementing the lectures are some of Zhvania's most significant speeches, providing a fuller picture of his democratic vision.

Widely used in Georgian educational institutions, *The Privilege of Our Generation* serves as a crucial training resource for students of public administration and journalism. The English translation omits certain annexes found in the Georgian editions, such as biographical details and

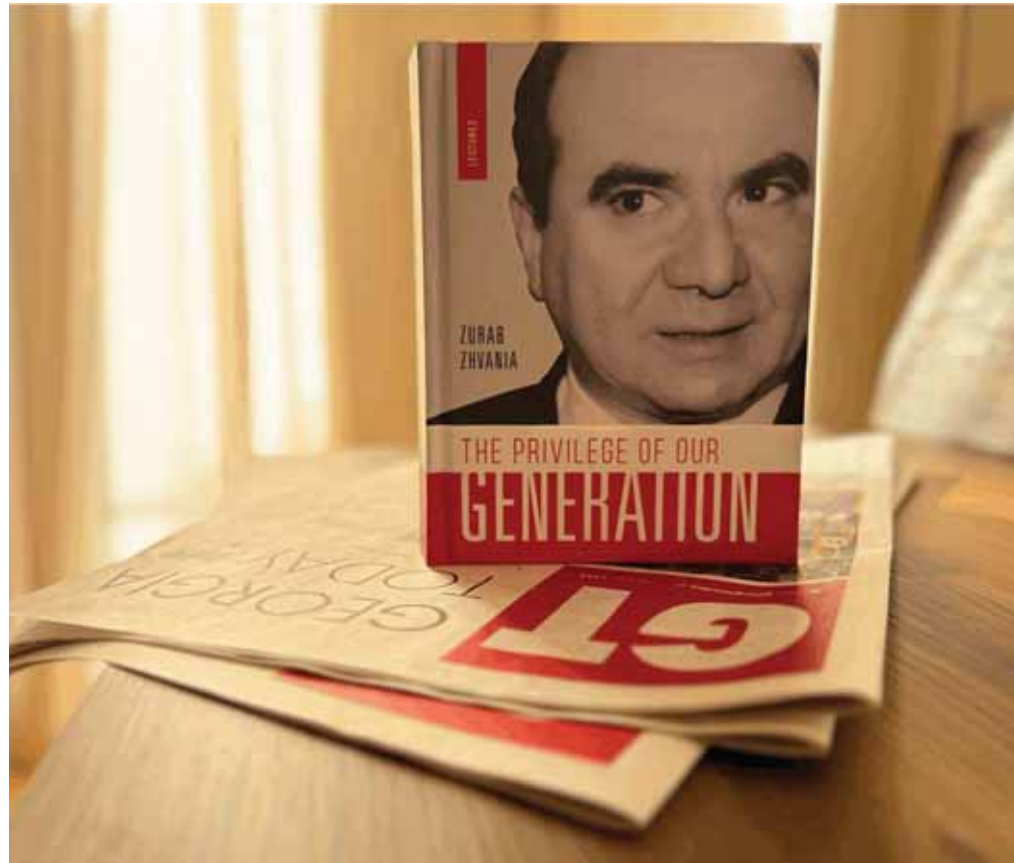


Photo by the author

universally recognized documents like the Magna Carta. This streamlined version focuses on delivering Zhvania's core teachings to an international audience already familiar with these foundational texts.

The creation of this book was a testament to collective effort and dedication. Students and colleagues contributed to transcribing and organizing Zhvania's lectures, ensuring the authenticity and integrity of the material. This collaborative spirit highlights the communal commitment to preserving and sharing Zhvania's intellectual legacy.

The Privilege of Our Generation is more than a historical document; it is a guide for understanding the intricacies of democratic transition. Zhvania's insights into governance and the challenges faced by emerging democracies are invaluable for anyone studying political science or involved in shaping democratic institutions. His work emphasizes the continuous and participatory nature of democracy, a message as relevant today as it was in the early 2000s.

The recent release of Zurab Zhvania's *The Privilege of Our Generation* in English is a significant milestone in the global discourse on democracy. It provides readers with direct access to Zhvania's thought-provoking lectures, offering a detailed exploration of Georgia's political evolution and the broader challenges of democratic transition. This publication not only honors Zhvania's legacy but also serves as an essential resource for understanding the complex journey towards democratic governance in transitional societies.

PM Congratulates Georgia's US Partners on Independence Day, Says He Wishes to "Restart Relations"



Iwant to congratulate the United States of America, the American people, our American partners on Independence Day. This day is especially important for us, - Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Kobakhidze told journalists at an event held in connection with the Independence Day of the United States of America.

The head of the government noted that there were several years that had damaged the relations between the two states, and the Georgian side wanted to restart the relations.

"The United States of America plays an important role in the world, therefore, special importance is attached to this day. This day is especially impor-

tant for us, due to the fact that we have a strategic partnership with the United States of America. I would like to repeat once again that it is our desire to restart relations. There have been some years that have damaged relations between the two states, but I am optimistic. We are on standby, waiting for the next steps.

"I don't want to go into specifics, however, I think that in the coming year, it is possible that we will see such steps on the part of our partners that will qualitatively improve relations, which both countries need so much. I believe so. This is needed both by the United States of America and Georgia equally," said the Prime Minister.



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Cafe Mziuri Faces Uncertain Future amid City Hall's Decision to Auction



BY KESARIA KATCHARAVA

From its inception, Café Mziuri was envisioned not just as a business venture, but as a catalyst for social change. Its founder's Ana Goguadze's vision was clear: To create a space where social entrepreneurship could thrive, benefiting both the local community and the park itself. The cafe's commitment to sustainability is evident in its operational model, where profits are reinvested into the infrastructure and community-oriented projects. This approach has garnered widespread support from non-governmental organizations, corporate sponsors, and the community at large, all united in their admiration for Café Mziuri's positive impact.

However, recent developments have cast a shadow over Café Mziuri's future. Tbilisi City Hall's decision to auction the building housing the cafe has sparked concern and dismay among its loyal patrons and supporters.

CAFE MZIURI'S VISION OF SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

When Ana and her team took over in 2016, they faced a daunting task: Revitalizing a dilapidated building and unkempt park into a thriving community hub. Through tireless effort and community support, they succeeded in transforming the space into what it is today.

"Our concept was to establish a cafe whose profits would support the operational activities of Mziuri," Ana explains.

The initiative not only revitalized the physical space but also reinvigorated community spirit, drawing patrons from across Tbilisi who valued the cafe's mission.

"It was a stagnant recreational zone where nothing was being done," recalls Ana Goguadze, reflecting on the park's state before their initiative took root. Determined to breathe life back into Mziuri Park, Ana and her team organized the Children's Sun Festival, an event that she believes marked a turning point in raising public awareness about inclusion. "At that time, parents were hesitant to take their children out in wheelchairs," she explains, highlighting the festival's impact in fostering a more inclusive community spirit.

Despite initial success with the festival, Ana and her team faced the challenge of maintaining momentum in the park beyond these sporadic events. Their solution came in the form of Café Mziuri, housed in an abandoned building within the park. Proposing a self-sustaining model of social entrepreneurship, Ana approached the Mayor of Tbilisi with a vision to reinvest cafe profits into park maintenance and community projects. Supported by NGOs, companies, and local residents, they transformed the dilapidated space into a thriving hub of activity.

CITY HALL'S DECISION TO AUCTION

Recent developments have shaken the foundation of Café Mziuri's existence. A letter dated June 13, 2024, from the property management agency to the cafe's team delivered a harsh blow: The city administration, citing the need to mobilize funds, has decided not to renew the cafe's contract. This decision has left its patrons and supporters dismayed, fearing the loss of a space that has become integral to the fabric of their lives.

According to City Hall's press office, this decision follows the expiration of the cafe's lease, which had previously been extended multiple times. City Hall says it aims to create a competitive environment where various parties, including the current operators of Café Mziuri, can participate to develop the space further as a social enterprise.

"The contract has expired, which has been extended multiple times in previous years," the City Hall's press office



Ana Goguadze. Photo by Aleksei Serov

said. "This time, City Hall has decided to put it up for auction to create a competitive environment. Anyone with the opportunity to develop it as a social enterprise can participate." They further assured that Café Mziuri would remain dedicated solely to social enterprise purposes, ensuring continuity in its mission of community enrichment and sustainability.

CONCERNS AND RESPONSES

Ana and her supporters, however, question the fairness and transparency of the decision-making process, as it is still unclear what type of auction it will be, what criteria will be used to judge it, who will oversee it, and who will make the final decision. There is also confusion stemming from the fact that Ana cannot recall anything like this ever happening to any social enterprise. Ana emphasizes, "This work requires knowledge, observation, experience, which should not be conducted as a competition."

"Every two years, an independent audit highlighted our efforts, consistently showing that we were exceeding our obligations," she says. For instance, where the contract stipulated 60 events over two years—encompassing children's programs, youth engagement, presentations, and charity endeavors—they not

only met but exceeded this target, organizing 91-110 events.

The future of this beloved social enterprise hangs in the balance. Supporters hope that the city will recognize the cafe's broader impact beyond its commercial value and consider alternative solutions that allow it to continue its mission of inclusivity and community engagement. Supporters have rallied behind Ana's efforts, signing petitions and urging the city administration to reconsider its decision. Ana herself has called for a meeting with Mayor Kakha Kaladze, seeking answers and advocating for the preservation of Mziuri as a social enterprise.

COMMUNITY IMPACT AND SENTIMENT

"Café Mziuri has turned into a small model of a country with European values, where everyone finds their place based on their interests," Ana passionately affirms. With the community's unwavering support, she remains hopeful that Café Mziuri will weather this storm and continue to serve as a beacon of hope in Mziuri Park for years to come.

Ana Zeragia, a regular guest, reflects on the cafe's significance: "Thanks to Ana, such a place has been created that everyone finds something positive in." Reflecting on the collective effort behind

Mziuri's existence, Zeragia acknowledges, "Concrete places are created by people."

Indeed, the park is not just a result of Ana's vision alone, but also a testament to the dedication of an entire team. "The great work put in here is not only the merit of Ana, but also of the whole team that we love," Ana emphasizes. It is this collective passion that has made Mziuri not just a park, but a cherished community hub where diverse lives intersect. As Ana Zeragia explains, "To disappear, or even to change the team will radically change everything." In her words lies a plea to safeguard the essence of Café Mziuri—a sanctuary that has woven itself into the fabric of Tbilisi's cultural landscape and into the hearts of all who have been fortunate to visit it.

HOPE AND UNCERTAINTY

As the fate of Café Mziuri hangs in the balance, the community remains hopeful yet determined. For many, Mziuri represents more than just a cafe; it symbolizes resilience, community spirit, and the power of collective action. Whether it continues to serve as a beacon of inclusivity and cultural exchange will depend on the outcome of ongoing discussions between its supporters and the city administration.

In the words of Ana Goguadze, "This space as it is today is not the result of my work alone. People joined me, believed in me, believed in the idea of a new Mziuri." The fight to preserve Café Mziuri is not just about a physical space, it's about preserving the values of community, inclusivity, and cultural vibrancy that have made it a beloved institution in Tbilisi. Supporters hope that public support will influence the outcome, ensuring that Café Mziuri continues to thrive as a symbol of inclusivity and community engagement in Tbilisi.

Café Mziuri's journey from a neglected corner of Mziuri Park to a vibrant community hub exemplifies the power of social entrepreneurship. As it faces challenges from Tbilisi City Hall's decision to auction its building, the cafe stands resilient with its supporters, determined to continue its mission of inclusivity and community enrichment. The coming months will undoubtedly be critical for Café Mziuri and its supporters, as they navigate through uncertainty and advocate for the preservation of this beloved institution.

1st Stakeholder Meeting of the European Union Supports Women Empowerment Project

MEDIA RELEASE

The Business and Technology University (BTU) and the European Business Association (EBA) proudly organized the first large-scale Stakeholder Meeting within the framework of the EU-funded "Women Mentorship in Tech Programmes" project. This transformative initiative is a significant step towards enhancing digital human capital in Georgia, particularly for girls and women. The event took place at Pullman Tbilisi Axis Towers.

Featuring keynote speeches from esteemed figures such as Mr. Nicholas Cendrowicz, Head of Cooperation of the European Union to Georgia; Prof. Dr. Nino Enukidze, Rector of the Business and Technology University; and Ms. Irina Sak, Vice President of the European Business Association, the Stakeholder Meeting set a promising tone for the initiative's objectives.

The EU-supported "Women Mentorship in Tech Programmes" project in Georgia aims to engage 1,100 beneficiaries and 320 mentors over three seasons, promoting regional diversity by selecting at least one-third of participants from regions outside the capital. Five-month-

long mentorship sessions will be organized in five key tech directions, including cybersecurity, front-end development, graphic design, digital marketing, and UX/UI design. The project's first session starts in July, involving 100 mentees and 70 mentors selected based on a fair and transparent selection process.

The Stakeholder Meeting covered various topics related to the project's objectives, including enhancing ICT proficiency and career prospects for women in Georgia. The project emphasizes both hard and soft skills development, empowering women to compete in local and international job markets. Through industry-driven courses, the initiative contributes to achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in Quality Education, Gender Equality, Decent Work and Economic Growth, and Partnerships to achieve the Goal.

"Today more than ever, we support the Georgian people's aspiration to join the European Union. One way to achieve this goal is by encouraging citizens' engagement in democratic and economic processes. In 2024, this means advancing digital inclusion, especially for women. By supporting initiatives such as 'Women Mentorship in Tech Programs,' we aim to empower women in the digital age by addressing gaps in the infor-

mation and technology sector," said Nicholas Cendrowicz, the Head of Cooperation at the Delegation of the European Union to Georgia.

"Business and Technology University gratefully acknowledges the support and resources extended by the EU. Our endeavour is deeply rooted in our dedication to fostering women in technology nationwide and our unwavering social objective to empower them. Through teaching, mentorship, and skill development, we are equipping women with the tools they need to thrive in the digital age and contribute to the country's economic development," said Prof. Nino Enukidze, Rector of Business and Technology University.

The event saw participation from various stakeholders, experts, mentors, potential partner companies, and interested individuals committed to promoting gender equality and digital inclusion in Georgia.

ABOUT THE EUROPEAN UNION

For more than 30 years, the European Union has built a close partnership with Georgia, supporting its development through knowledge and experience sharing, expertise, innovation and financial support. The relationship between the EU and Georgia is based on shared values of peace, freedom, democracy, human



Image source: BTU

rights and inclusive economic growth. More about the EU's support in Georgia <https://eu4georgia.eu/the-european-union-in-georgia/>.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The EU-funded "Women Mentorship in Tech Programmes" project, coordinated and implemented by Business and Technology University (BTU) and executed in collaboration with Lithuanian Women Go Tech and the European Business Association (EBA), aims to enhance

digital human capital in Georgia. Specifically focusing on girls and women, the project advances gender equality and bridges the skills gap in the ICT sector. The initiative aligns with the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 and Gender Action Plan III, addressing digital inequalities among women and men. By addressing digital inequalities, the initiative not only benefits individual women but also contributes to the overall economic growth and stability of Georgia.

The 'Meliora 2024' Awards – Celebrating Corporate Social Responsibility



Georgia's Responsible Business Awards - Meliora 2024. Photo courtesy of the organizers

BY KESARIA KATCHARAVA

On July 2, the Tbilisi History Museum 'Karvasla' played host to one of the most significant events in Georgia's business calendar: 'Georgia's Responsible Business Awards - Meliora 2024.' This annual awards ceremony, supported by the European Union, highlights the exemplary efforts of companies dedicated to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in Georgia. The event was a grand affair, attended by representatives from the diplomatic corps, international CSR experts, and key figures from various industries. These leaders came together to celebrate and recognize companies that have made significant strides in implementing sustainable and responsible business practices. The atmosphere was one of anticipation and pride as the best CSR projects and companies of the year were announced.

THE WINNERS: CHAMPIONS OF CSR

The night belonged to the winners, whose projects set new benchmarks for CSR in Georgia. The awards were categorized

into nine distinct areas, highlighting different aspects of corporate responsibility. Here's a closer look at the champions of the evening:

- Green Initiative**
Large Company: Tegeta Holding, for their project 'Green Standard.'
SME: Polyvim, for their project 'Green Initiative.'
- Responsible Employer**
Large Company: Basisbank, for their project 'Responsible Employer.'
- Supporting Communities**
Large Company: Hilton Batumi, for their project 'Supporting Communities.'
SME: Clip-art, for their project 'Book Club.'
- Cross-Sector Partnership – Shared Responsibility**
Large Company: Zgapari, in partnership with the association 'Life Change,' for the project 'Professional Orientation and Empowerment of Youth in State Care.'
- Transparency and Report on CSR and Corporate Sustainability**
Large Company: TBC Bank, for their 'Sustainability Report 2022.'
- CSR Manager of the Year**
Winner: Natia Sirbiladze, from Exact-pro.
- Responsible Large Company of the Year**
Winner: TBC Bank.

VOICES OF LEADERSHIP

Eka Urushadze, Director of the Center for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia (CSR DG), underscored the importance of the Meliora awards. "Contests like Meliora significantly support businesses, both in the implementation of diverse CSR projects and in strengthening their positive image and reputation. Additionally, developed corporate social responsibility practices bring us even closer to European standards of business management," she remarked. Adding to this, Nicholas Cendrowicz, Head of Cooperation Section at the Delegation of the European Union to Georgia, highlighted the broader impact of CSR: "The Meliora awards are a good example of the EU working with Georgian civil society and business associations to embed responsibility and sustainability into the core strategies of Georgian businesses. It demonstrates that responsible business conduct leads to long-term financial success as well as social good," he stated.

THE ROLE OF CSR DG

The Center for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia (CSR DG), instrumental in organizing the event, has been a pioneer in promoting CSR in Georgia. Established 29 years ago, CSR DG

has initiated numerous projects, including the corporate social responsibility program. It was the first organization in Georgia to prepare and publish a Sustainable Development Report according to the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) standards. Moreover, CSR DG developed the first Georgian-language manual on CSR, created the CSR Knowledge Hub, and established the CSR Stakeholders Forum.

The CSR DG's commitment to advancing CSR is evident in their continuous efforts to support and guide businesses in adopting sustainable practices. Their work ensures that Georgian companies are not only aware of international CSR standards, but are also capable of implementing them effectively. By doing so, CSR DG helps to create a business environment where social responsibility is a core value, fostering a culture of ethical business practices and long-term sustainability.

THE EUROPEAN UNION'S COMMITMENT

For more than three decades, the European Union has partnered closely with Georgia, fostering knowledge exchange, innovation, and providing financial assistance. This partnership is grounded in

alignment not only enhances the reputation of Georgian companies, but also opens up new opportunities for international collaboration and investment. By embedding CSR into their core strategies, Georgian businesses can contribute to a more sustainable and equitable future, both locally and globally.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The 'Meliora 2024' awards both celebrated the achievements of Georgian businesses in CSR and also served as an inspiration for others to follow suit. By integrating CSR into their core strategies, businesses contribute to a more sustainable and equitable future for Georgia.

The event highlighted how CSR initiatives could drive positive change, improve community well-being, and ensure environmental sustainability. The recognition of these efforts motivates other companies to adopt similar practices, creating a ripple effect that benefits society as a whole.

The winners of the Meliora awards demonstrated that responsible business practices are equally beneficial for society and businesses themselves. Companies that prioritize CSR tend to enjoy enhanced reputations, increased customer loyalty, and better employee



shared values, such as peace, freedom, democracy, human rights, and inclusive economic growth. The EU's support for the Meliora awards underscores its commitment to promoting CSR as a means to achieve sustainable development in Georgia.

The EU's involvement in the Meliora awards also reflects a broader strategy to encourage Georgian businesses to align with European standards. This

engagement. These advantages translate into long-term financial success and resilience, proving that doing good is indeed good for business.

EVENT SPONSORS

The success of 'Meliora 2024' was also made possible by the support of sponsors, including UN WOMEN, Moore, Element Holding, and Sarajishvili. Their contributions highlight the collaborative effort required to promote and sustain CSR initiatives.

The involvement of these sponsors underscores the importance of collective action in advancing CSR. By pooling resources and expertise, organizations can amplify their impact and drive more significant progress towards sustainable development goals. The Meliora awards serve as a powerful reminder that when businesses, civil society, and international partners work together, they can achieve remarkable outcomes.

The 'Meliora 2024' awards were a testament to the power of responsible business practices. They highlighted the significant impact that companies can have on society and the environment through their commitment to CSR. As Georgian businesses continue to innovate and lead in this field, the future looks promising for sustainable development and corporate responsibility in the region.

The awards not only celebrated current achievements but also set the stage for future advancements in CSR. They encouraged businesses to strive for excellence, to be transparent in their operations, and to be accountable for their impact. As more companies embrace these values, the positive effects will extend far beyond the business sector, contributing to a more just, sustainable, and prosperous society for all.



CENN - Telling Stories and Sharing Memories through Art



"Let's continue inspiring change and setting an example."

Nana Janashia

"მუდამ ვიყოთ ცვლილებისკენ სწრაფვის მაგალითის მიმცემი."

ნანა ჯანაშია

Dedication to Nana Janashia at the exhibition

BY SHELBI R. ANKIEWICZ

An exhibition organized by CENN and GOPA Intec emphasized environmental impacts on climate change through various art mediums, while also sharing the memory of the late founder, Nana Janashia.

Working across the South Caucasus, CENN is an NGO that first started as a project, known as the Caucasus Environmental NGO Network. Since the late 90s it has grown into a large organization that works with communities, governments, and businesses to create healthy environments. Communication Specialist Magda Tsertsvadze said the exhibition, 'Landscape Tells a Story' was a part of CENN's and GOPA Intec's joint Information and Awareness-Raising Campaign on Energy Efficiency in Tbilisi, supported by the European Union.

"The idea was to communicate with the general public through different mediums of art, which showcases energy, energy efficiency, renewable energy, and

their importance in climate change," said Tsertsvadze.

'Landscape Tells a Story' was held in ArtArea on June 25 and lasted nearly a week, until June 30. There were more than 20 pieces of artwork on display from 11 Georgian artists. The works of art not only comprised of paintings, but installations, illustrations, videos, sculptures, and more.

There was an open call for artists, regardless of experience, and Tsertsvadze said the ones who were selected were

provided financial support to develop their pieces. A jury made up of people from CENN, Gopa Intec, a German energy consulting company, and an EU Delegation representative, selected the candidates based on certain criteria. Afterwards, the curator of the event, Khatuna Khabuliani, a PhD art historian, worked with the individuals to ensure all pieces represented the same concept.

The opening night, June 25, was celebrated with drinks and light refreshments, as it was also the birthday of the late founder, Nana Janashia. The exhibition was dedicated to her, partly because of her love for art. Her husband and now Executive Director, Laurent G. Nicole, says he started buying art at a young age, and his hobby rubbed off on his wife.

"When I met Nana, I immediately took her into this circle, and she started to quickly enjoy it," Nicole tells GEORGIA TODAY. "So much so that, whenever there was an art exhibition, we were invited, because people knew we were buying."

The couple accumulated so many paintings over the years that they quite literally ran out of walls. Nicole says all three CENN offices and their house are decorated with art pieces from floor to ceiling. However, they are not random pieces of artwork; rather, each of them has a story linked to it. Nicole explains how Nana became known in the art scene as



The 'Landscape Tells a Story' exhibition at ArtArea on June 25. Photo by Giorgi Bejanishvili

someone who wanted to support the next generation in achieving something.

Indeed, Nana Janashia was the initiator and spirit of CENN, the person who led all the projects. Nicole tells us that when she first started the organization, she wanted to use the environment for peace-building, "a bridge, so to speak, that would bring people together. Nicole said they originally had offices in Azerbaijan and Armenia, but over the years it became too difficult, so instead they formed partnerships in the two countries."

In an effort to unite the Caucasus countries, CENN is launching various projects to promote harmonious coexistence. Nicole says the organization's fundamentals always go back to creating communication among people, regardless of where they come from. He explains that the organization already works on bringing together children in their Green Centers from Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia, so they see it is possible to live together. One such future initiative involves establishing Geoparks, which will aim to foster regional unity through environmental collaboration.

Nicole says he believes CENN has survived for as long as it has because it was fair and committed to its work, always

seeking improvement and creating a just, equal environment. When it comes to Janashia, Nicole said she was able to talk to anyone, be they politician or a child walking the streets.

"She was just brilliant, and she had charisma; was able to engage everybody. She had friends all around the world for that," says Nicole, "Whenever she was in a group, she was leading, not because she wanted to be the boss, but because something had to move, and she was moving."

The Information and Awareness-Raising Campaign on Energy Efficiency in Tbilisi has come to an end having spent two years on various projects. The exhibition was organized by Gopa Intec and CENN, in partnership with EU-funded projects, 'Georgian Energy Sector Reform Project (GESRP)' and 'Georgia Climate Action Project (GEO-CAP)'. The project was supported by the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia. Participants in the exhibition included: Teo Burki, David Kukhalashvili, Shota Imerlishvili, Mariam Saknelashvili, Maka Kiladze, Gvantsa Panchulidze, Diego Mikava, Mariam Turabelidze, Ketevan Gamdlishvili, Elene Guramishvili, and Nika Momtselidze.



Guests engaging in conversation and refreshments on the opening night of the exhibition. Photo by Giorgi Bejanishvili

Top 40

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

Stay long enough, go deep enough in Georgia, and you'll be invited to not only a funeral feast, but the ormotsi, or 40, which takes place 40 days after death. I was just at one yesterday, in our village of Etseri, in memory of two brothers who died in a car accident in May. On the same day, there had to be a funeral in Nakra, for another young man who also died in an accident. Svaneti's had a slew of young people's passings since February, and the whole place is in agony. There are similarities and differences between these two feasts, and also between each of them and the tsli tavi, or "year after death" memorial.

Usually, the funeral meal has the least, if any, sweet food on its extensive menu: after all, this is death we are remembering. The other two feasts may have sweet food; indeed, yesterday's feast did feature various cakes and fruits, although no chocolate or other candies.

If the organizers are wise and watching the weather forecast, they will arrange for a long marquee tent to be erected.

This proved vital yesterday, as rain was coming and going while we waited some two hours in the host family's yard to be summoned to eat. Indeed, once we were all in, it started again, not very heavy but enough to have ruined everything but for the fabric shield we had.

All three feasts will have a person taking cash gifts and carefully writing down each donor's gift in a book. Yesterday, though, reminded me that I still have new things to see and learn at these events, despite having been to so many of them over the last two decades. The gift-writer had a pair of scissors at hand, with which he cut off a few hairs from the donor's beard and put them in a small glass, already half-full of such. I asked what this was about. Apparently (as I knew) the men don't shave between funeral and ormotsi, and this little cutting is a reminder that they can now start shaving or beard-trimming again. I expected to then hear that the collected hairs are then burnt or otherwise ceremonially disposed of, but no, they're simply thrown away. Interesting!

A long history of taking part in feasts in Georgia (happy and sad both) has given me a comparison list of various qualities. Another way in which yesterday's feast stood out was in its choice of man to fulfill that vital role, Tamada, or toastmaster. Above all (aside from having a good reputation in this position) he must have a booming, preferably deep voice. This one had neither vocal quality, and I can confess that, from about 3/4 of the length of the tent away from him, I could not understand a single word he said. Yes, Georgian is my 4th language; but usually I can follow along! Thankfully, as is typical at non-amplified feasts with a long rather than square space, the toasts were passed on to someone in the middle or at the far end to



Photo by the author

repeat; otherwise every word would have been lost. The rain, and the irrepressible dull roar of most of the roughly 340 of us, only made hearing harder. A microphone and speaker would solve all of this; but tradition will out. Besides, electricity is not to be assumed guaranteed. The feast itself was half farmed out to caterers from Zugdidi, a common division nowadays, and half done by local ladies, such as kubdari, the traditional Svan meat pie. At least the load was lightened for the village ladies, always a mercy. I did dare to take a quick phone photo of the heads of the two bulls and calf sac-

rificed for the occasion, sitting so prettily on their trays on the balcony. In Svaneti especially, ritual is everywhere to be found. Sadly, so is sorrow, these months.

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

A Night to Remember: The Royal Ballet Principal Dancers Enchant Tbilisi Festival



Photo by the author

Marcelo Soares as the Evil Genius brought a powerful, menacing presence to the stage, his every move filled with dark intent. Kaito Hosoya's Beno was lively and engaging, providing a buoyant counterpoint to the more somber themes. Mariam Eloskhvili, Marharyta Sodorkina, and Tea Kopaleishvili delivered strong performances, each adding depth and texture to the court scenes.

The Tbilisi Opera and Ballet State Theater Orchestra, under the baton of Levan Jagaev, provided a rich, dynamic interpretation of Tchaikovsky's iconic score. Jagaev's sensitive and nuanced conducting allowed the music to flow seamlessly with the choreography, enhancing the emotional and dramatic impact of the ballet.

The evening was a masterful blend of technical excellence, emotional storytelling, and collaborative artistry that will be remembered as a highlight of the Tbilisi Ballet Festival.

BY IVAN NECHAEV

On the evening of June 30, the Tbilisi Ballet Festival 2024 hosted an extraordinary performance of Swan Lake by the Principal Dancers of The Royal Ballet. With Fumi Kaneko as Odette-Odile and Vadim Muntagirov as Prince Siegfried, the production held at the Tbilisi Opera and Ballet State Theater was a masterclass in ballet artistry, drawing audiences into the timeless tale of love and deception.

FUMI KANEKO: A DUAL TRIUMPH

Fumi Kaneko's portrayal of Odette-Odile was a testament to her remarkable range and technical prowess. As Odette, Kaneko exuded a delicate fragility, her movements soft and flowing, capturing the Swan Queen's ethereal beauty and sorrow. Her arms, reminiscent of fluttering wings, and her exquisite port de

bras embodied the grace and tragedy of the cursed princess. Each arabesque and pirouette was executed with precision, yet imbued with a haunting melancholy that resonated deeply with the audience.

The transformation to Odile showcased Kaneko's versatility. Her Odile was a striking contrast—bold, sharp, and irresistibly seductive. The Black Swan pas de deux was a highlight, with Kaneko's technical brilliance on full display. Her fouetté turns were not only perfectly executed but also infused with a confident, almost menacing energy that captivated and enthralled. The dramatic shift from Odette's vulnerability to Odile's cunning seduction highlighted Kaneko's exceptional ability to inhabit two starkly different characters within the same performance.

VADIM MUNTAGIROV: NOBLE ELEGANCE

Vadim Muntagirov's Prince Siegfried was a paragon of noble elegance and technical excellence. From his first

entrance, Muntagirov's regal bearing and commanding presence set the tone for his portrayal. His grand jetés and cabrioles were executed with effortless grace, each jump soaring with precision and control. His classical line and form were impeccable, adding a layer of sophistication to his performance.

Muntagirov's Siegfried was not just technically superb but also deeply expressive. His interactions with Kaneko's Odette were tender and poignant, their chemistry palpable. The lakeside pas de deux was particularly moving, with Muntagirov's supportive partnering allowing Kaneko's ethereal movements to shine. His ability to convey Siegfried's inner conflict and ultimate despair through his dance brought an emotional depth to the character, making his journey from innocence to tragic realization profoundly affecting.

THE ENSEMBLE AND ORCHESTRA

The supporting cast contributed significantly to the production's success.



Fumi Kaneko as Odile and Vadim Muntagirov as Prince Siegfried / Photo by the author



Fumi Kaneko as Odette and Vadim Muntagirov as Prince Siegfried. Photo by the author



Marcelo Soares as the Evil Genius / Photo by the author

Orpheus and the Conductor: Ani and Revaz Takidze's Dialog with Beethoven's Masterpieces

BY IVAN NECHAEV

The Tbilisi Symphony Orchestra, under the direction of Revaz Takidze, presented a deeply moving performance on 29 June at Kakhidze Music Center, featuring two monumental works by Ludwig van Beethoven. The concert showcased the Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 4 with Ani Takidze as the soloist, followed by the Symphony No. 7. The concert was a testament to the orchestra's technical brilliance and emotional depth. The meticulous attention to detail, emotional depth, and technical brilliance of the musicians brought out the richness and complexity of Beethoven's music.

A DELICATE DIALOG

Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4 in G major, Op. 58, composed between 1805 and 1806, is a piece celebrated for its lyrical beauty and structural innovation. The concerto opened unusually with the piano, creating an intimate and reflective atmosphere that Ani Takidze embraced with a nuanced touch.

The first movement began with Ani Takidze's serene and introspective piano

introduction, immediately capturing the audience's attention. The orchestra's subsequent entry, guided by Revaz Takidze, was perfectly balanced, engaging in a seamless dialogue with the soloist. This interplay highlighted the conversational nature of Beethoven's composition, where the piano and orchestra seem to speak to one another. Ani Takidze's phrasing was both fluid and precise, bringing out the movement's lyrical qualities while maintaining structural clarity.

Often interpreted as a depiction of Orpheus taming the Furies, the second movement features dramatic contrasts between the orchestra's stern chords and the piano's gentle pleas. The orchestra, led by Revaz Takidze, delivered their part with dramatic intensity, setting a stark backdrop for Ani Takidze's tender responses. Her interpretation was filled with a sense of pleading and resolution, capturing the narrative of struggle and reconciliation. The dynamic control and emotional depth displayed were exceptional.

The final movement, a joyous Rondo, showcases a lively exchange between the piano and the orchestra. Ani Takidze's virtuosic technique was evident in the rapid passages and intricate fingerwork, while the orchestra maintained buoyant and energetic support. The



Photo by the author

seamless transitions and rhythmic vitality brought the concerto to a spirited and triumphant conclusion.

RHYTHMIC REVELRY

Beethoven's Symphony No. 7 in A major, Op. 92, composed between 1811 and 1812, is renowned for its rhythmic innovations and vibrant energy. Richard Wagner famously described it as the "apotheosis of the dance" due to its compelling rhythms.

The symphony opens with a majestic

slow introduction, creating a sense of anticipation. Revaz Takidze's interpretation was grand, with meticulous attention to the build-up of tension. The transition to the vivace was handled with precision, launching into a dynamic and lively tempo. The orchestra's articulation of the rhythmic motifs was crisp, capturing the dance-like spirit of the movement.

The Allegretto is characterized by a haunting rhythmic figure, one of Bee-

thoven's most famous slow movements. The Tbilisi Symphony Orchestra's performance was evocative, with a meticulous balance between the sections. The subtle interplay of themes and the underlying pulse were executed with a profound sense of inevitability and momentum. Revaz Takidze's careful shaping of dynamics and phrasing brought out the somber beauty and introspective quality of the movement.

The vigorous Scherzo of the third movement is marked by infectious energy and rhythmic drive. The orchestra delivered the presto with remarkable urgency and excitement. The trio section, with its contrasting lyrical theme, provided a brief respite before returning to the exuberant scherzo. The precision and agility of the orchestra were evident, highlighting their technical prowess and cohesive playing.

The symphony concludes with a powerful Allegro con brio. The Tbilisi Symphony Orchestra, under Revaz Takidze's direction, brought out the relentless drive and jubilant character of the movement. The dynamic contrasts and rhythmic vitality were executed with clarity, leading to a rousing finale. The orchestra's energy and enthusiasm were palpable, making for a thrilling conclusion to the performance.

SPORTS

The Happiest Nation on Earth

BLOG BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

Last Wednesday night, the entire nation, literally the whole of Sakartvelo, was out on the country's streets to celebrate its victory between Georgia and Portugal at the 2024 Euros, the 17th competition of the UEFA football championship. When the referee's whistle blew with a two-nil result in favor of Georgia, the scoreboard displayed the results that every Georgian had only dreamed of, and a moment that will live on in their minds forevermore. Thousands of hooting cars and tens of thousands of chanting fans, who were no longer in control of their emotions, took

to the streets here in Tbilisi and elsewhere to tell the world that Georgia can make it if it tries hard enough.

The exultation was something to behold. I found myself right in the midst of those victorious celebrations in the wee hours of that happy morning. It didn't cross anyone's mind even for a second to go home; the nation was up to rejoice, forgetting that which seemed trivial and mundane. People everywhere were in absolute triumphant exultation, with their wide smiles and cheerful faces popping out of car windows and sunroofs, some of them lodged firmly on the slippery hoods (amazingly, not falling out of the moving vehicles!) and in open trunks with bottles of drink in their hands. Cars with their high-beam lights on were jam-packed, but it was the most

felicitous traffic jam I have seen in my life.

I remembered my participation in something like this in Phoenix, Arizona, when I worked as a reporter for American television; I was doing a story about traditional car-cruising in Phoenix. The ongoing physical action and the extensively expressed emotions were exactly the same in Tbilisi, with only one difference: There, it was just an annual car show, yet, here, it was a nation coming together as one, bonded by their pride and joy. The excited public exuded never-seen-before unity and dedication to the Georgian national team, in no way divided or affiliated, and the millions of enthusiastically pronounced words and phrases, firmly and intentionally beat in one patriotic thought: We need to come

together to achieve the goals we all have on our minds.

Watching all that, I happily imagined what could happen if that positive national energy was used for the cause of Georgia's economic development, for instance. The answer was that Sakartvelo would one hundred percent see a result which could propel the country into one that exudes the strength and power of other Western nations.

On Tuesday, the football celebration continued in Freedom Square, the heart of hearts of Tbilisi, the delighted people marching together with as much pagantry and festivity as they could afford, this happening in spite of the fact that two days prior, Tbilisi Dinamo had lost the game to the Spaniards with a heart-breaking score of four-one. But the score

has little to do with the spiritual boost and rise of the nation: We truly did well in the prestigious and complicated European football championship. This generation of players undoubtedly deserve the respect and homage the Georgian people are paying to them. Georgian football has not seen success like this for decades, and they need and deserve every cheer they get from us. The way to glory is wrought not only with victories, but with losses too, but a loss can sometimes be as valuable as a victory in its potential for future triumphs.

This past week, I have seen the energy of our nation come together. It may seem fleeting right now, but it has the tremendous potential to be turned into a power that makes this country and nation one of the happiest on Earth.



The Georgian national team is welcomed home. Source: IG

Out, But Not Done: Georgia's Determination for a European Future is as Strong as Ever

Continued from page 1

Come Sunday, however, after the utter demolition inflicted by a ruthless and vastly superior Spanish team (even if I'll go to my grave muttering that their equalizer came via a passive offside and shouldn't have stood), the mood was somewhat subdued. We Georgians are like that. We believe we can always win, even when all the evidence points to the contrary. Then we get upset when it doesn't happen exactly the way we envisioned in our feverish dreams. But still, we danced, we sang, and we cried tears of pride, because although the defeat stung, we couldn't be prouder of the boys and what they achieved. They wrote history, leaving a mark for all to see.

Georgia was always going to be considered an ultimate underdog at the Euros. And, indeed, no word embodies Georgia's history and struggle for survival over the centuries as "underdog" does, seeing us fighting against all odds, somehow surviving and seeing multiple empires off. (Putin's Russia is the incumbent genocidal oppressor, which is why our fans, together with their Ukrainian, Polish and Czech counterparts, make sure to chant with laudable gusto at each game: "Putin Khuylo" - an insult too crude to translate). This doggedness, never-give-up attitude of our country was manifested by the national team and its brightest stars. Take Georges Mikautadze, deemed surplus to requirements at the decidedly mediocre Ajax team, only to prove his doubters wrong on the biggest stage of them all (after returning to Metz and almost saving them from relegation single-handedly, prior to the Euros). Take the rock in the defense, team captain Guram Kashia, who at the twilight of his career marshalled the defenses as if they were going into a bat-



tle. Or Watford's very own darling, Giorgi Chakvetadze, who mounted an unlikely comeback (twice!) from career-threatening injuries, to reinvent himself from a fleet-footed winger into a midfield orchestrator. Levante's Giorgi Kochorashvili can already be named as one of the biggest discoveries of Euro 2024 - and is unlikely to remain in the Spanish second tier for long. Otar Kiteishvili, double winner and the best player in the 23/24 Austrian Bundesliga, was the team's backbone and engine rolled into one - not too dissimilar to the "water carrier" role Didier Deshamps played for the

French team that were crowned world champions in 1998 - and it was far from coincidence that Kiteishvili's injury in the final game proved to be the beginning of the curtain call for a team that had already withstood relentless pressure from the Spaniards for 42 minutes, with him pulling the strings.

And what can one say about the goalkeeper, Mamardashvili? "The Georgian Wall", that giant among men, already enjoys a semi-mythical stature in Georgia. Each time he made one of those improbable saves, the nation would let out a collective sigh of relief. After his Euro performances, his transfer into one of the top European clubs seems to be a foregone conclusion and a question of when, rather than if.

Perhaps less obvious is the contribution of the team's biggest star and talisman, Napoli's Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, on whom all Georgian hopes hedged prior to the Euros. He didn't have a bad tournament per se, it's just that the nation placed sky-high expectations on its favorite son, one who had carried the team on his back so many times before. This, for good or worse, didn't happen at the Euros; it was a group effort first and foremost, and individual brilliance second. Kvaratskhelia did score the all-important opener against Portugal, however, writing his name into the annals of history. But more than that goal, it was his unsuccessful attempt (inches-wide!) to score from his own half against Spain that encapsulated all that Kvara is about: The sheer audacity, craft, vision. If the much-talked about move to PSG materializes, it will be intriguing to see whether he proves himself a worthy heir to M'bappe's throne.

And what of the man in the dugout who masterminded it all? For many in Georgia, former Bayern and France stalwart Willy Sagnol is already a national treasure. Veni, Vidi, Willy - this was the headline one paper opted for after that famous upset against Portugal. Sagnol instilled discipline, turned the team into a closely-knit group and yet, while there is little doubt that his champion/perennial winner mentality rubbed off onto

the team, he still has his doubters, a fair share of them in fact - many questioning his tactical acumen and flexibility, while some accuse him of arrogance and favoritism. And the less said about his interaction with journalists, the better - his latest outburst would have made Nigel Pearson, of the "Are you an Ostrich?!" fame, look like a blushing choir boy in comparison. There is much talk about Sagnol leaving Georgia for greener pastures as Ireland's top man at the helm, and I for one can't wait to see what Roy Keane will have to say after he sees how Sagnol reacts to critique, constructive or otherwise.

And finally - on geopolitics. For a country and people so divided and polarized, this championship proved to be a soothing balm, a healing factor that brought everyone together. For those that don't know, Georgia is at a precarious crossroads right now: While its people yearn for Europe, and have done so ever since regaining independence 34 years ago, its government, with a shadowy oligarch pulling the strings behind the scenes, seems determined to drag the country back into Russia's orbit with an array of laws aimed at curtailing civil liberties. The oligarch in question, Bidzina Ivanishvili, the nation's richest man and former prime minister, wasted no time

trying to win the national team over, pledging a hefty sum of £8.4 million (equivalent to 30 million Georgian Lari/\$11m) if they were to advance from the group stage. The Georgian team did just that, and are due to receive the prize money, but the reply from defender Luka Lochoshvili spoke volumes, when he was quizzed over whether the money provided additional motivation for the team: "It's a nice gesture, but we play for the country, not for the money."

With Georgia heading towards crucial, winner-takes-all elections in October, the national team's heroics gave the nation a much-needed respite from the politics. It also manifested, more evocatively than any political slogan ever could, where we belong: Not in Russia's backyard, subservient to the whims of a megalomaniacal Tsar, but in Europe, where democracy, freedom, rule of law and human rights are not merely empty words. And for the younger generation, who were the crucial part of the anti-government protests this spring, it once again reaffirmed the already obvious truth: It's their country, and nobody else's. And the path, too, is theirs to walk, and it leads to Europe.

In short, it has come home. "It" being Georgia, "home" being Europe. And we are here to stay.



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I am Georgian and therefore I am European

Zurab Zhvania, Council of Europe, 1999

