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Press Conference Highlights: Anticipation Builds for the International Tourism and Business Forum 2024

BY KESARIA KATCHARAVA

On July 30, the Sheraton Grand Tbilisi Metekhi Palace in Tbilisi was abuzz with excitement as it hosted a press conference announcing the forthcoming International Tourism and Business Forum 2024, slated for October 22-23. This press conference marked a significant moment in the lead-up to the forum, which aims to position Georgia as a key destination for investment and tourism on the global stage.

The press conference featured distinguished guests, including the renowned TV presenter Ahmed Mulla Talal, who traveled to Tbilisi to emphasize the forum's significance. Hisham Hadad, a beloved TV personality in the Arab world, joined the press conference via Zoom, highlighting the event's importance and offering his wholehearted support.

Pro Vision, the event's organizer, has a storied history of raising awareness about Georgia through various high-profile events. This year's forum is expected to host 100 companies from the Gulf countries, spanning investment, brokerage, and tourism sectors.

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GALT & TAGGART CREATING OPPORTUNITIES										
Prepared for Georgia Today Business by										
As of 31-Jul-2024										
Markets					Markets					
BONDS	Price	w/w	m/m	STOCKS	Price	w/w	m/m			
GEORG 04/26	93.34 (YTM 8.32%)	+0.4%	+2.0%	Bank of Georgia (BGEO LN)	GBP 45.80	+3.6%	+12.2%			
GBAIL 04/28	88.40 (YTM 7.50%)	+0.4%	+0.2%	Georgia Capital (GCEO LN)	GBP 10.70	+1.9%	+0.2%			
GBGG 9/12 PERP	97.75 (YTM 8.65%)	+0.1%	+0.2%	TBC Bank Group (TBGG LN)	GBP 31.00	+8.6%	+18.5%			
SILNET 01/27	99.91 (YTM 8.42%)	+0.1%	+0.2%							
TBC 10/775 PERP	100.16 (YTM 13.32%)	+0.1%	+0.0%							
TBC 8.894 PERP	95.77 (YTM 11.48%)	+0.1%	+0.4%	Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	80.72	-2.2%	-6.8%			
TBC 10/1/4 PERP	98.39 (YTM 10.65%)	+0.1%	+0.2%	Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	2,447.60	+2.1%	+5.0%			
INDICES					CURRENCIES					
SP 500	5,522.30	+1.8%	+0.9%	USD / GEL	2,7125	-0.4%	-3.0%			
FTSE 250	21,600.71	+3.1%	+6.8%	EUR / GEL	2,9368	-0.5%	-2.2%			
DOW JONES 30	40,842.79	+2.5%	+4.3%	GBP / GEL	3,4876	-0.7%	-1.4%			
Russell 2000	2,254.48	+2.7%	+1.1%	EUR / USD	1,0826	-0.1%	+0.8%			
FTSE 100	8,367.98	+2.6%	+2.5%	GBP / USD	1,2856	-0.4%	+1.6%			



Jaime in Georgia. Source: Georgian National Tourism Administration

Jamie Oliver Starts Promoting Georgia's Gastrotourism

BY MARIAM MTIVLISHVILI

The world-famous chef Jamie Oliver visited Georgia as part of the marketing campaign of the Georgian National Tourism Administration. He has since begun sharing videos, stories and photos about Georgian tourist destinations and Georgian dishes on various online platforms.

"I was invited here by the Georgian

National Tourism Administration. I'm having the best time in Georgia," Oliver notes in one video. "I have been traveling around the world for many years, but look and enjoy – I learned a lot in Georgia. Not only will you find delicious food, but meet amazing people. It inspired me to cook a new recipe. I will 100% come back to Georgia again. Thanks for the hospitality."

Jamie Oliver's followers, through social channels, have the opportunity to follow the chef's culinary adventure through Georgia.

Law "On Transparency of Foreign Influence" Enters into Force



Georgian Parliament. Source: FB

BY TEAM GT

All the norms of the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence, which oblige non-governmental and media organizations to register with the National Public Registry Agency as an organization carrying the interests of a foreign power, are in force from today.

Registration in the register becomes mandatory for all organizations with more than 20% of their income coming from abroad.

Based on the law, at the time of registration, it is necessary to reflect information about the source, amount and purpose of any monetary amount and property value received within the previous year.

Further, the applicant must provide information on the amount and purpose of any money spent during the previous year.

In addition, by the order of the Minister of Justice, the Department of Financial Declaration was established

in the National Public Registry Agency. The tasks of the department are to maintain the register of organizations carrying out the interests of foreign forces and ensure publicity, as well as to support the persons authorized by the Ministry in activities provided for by the law "On Transparency of Foreign Influence".

The law passed by the Parliament "On the identification of the organization carrying out the interests of a foreign power" gives the Ministry of Justice the authority to conduct research and study-monitoring of the issue at any time.

Avoiding registration as an organization carrying out the interests of a foreign power, or not filling out the declaration, will result in the organization being fined to the amount of 25,000 GEL. The law also provides for the following types of fines: - 10,000 GEL if the organization does not fill out the application form within 10 working days from the entry on the website of the Ministry of Justice; 10,000 GEL for not correcting mistakes in documents within a specified period; 20,000 GEL for committing a legal offense as determined by the Ministry.

Press Conference Highlights: Anticipation Builds for the International Tourism and Business Forum 2024



Continued from page 1

These participants will have a unique opportunity to immerse themselves in Georgia's business environment, explore favorable investment conditions, and discover the country's rich tourism potential.

During the press conference, the event organizers outlined an ambitious agenda for the forum, featuring public speeches, panel discussions, and B2B meetings. Experts from various fields and agencies are set to present detailed information about Georgia, offering foreign guests invaluable insights into the country's economic landscape and investment opportunities.

A major highlight of the forum will be the participation of local business representatives, who will engage in B2B meetings designed to establish new business contacts and attract potential partners. These interactions are anticipated to foster significant investments aimed at business development and the creation of new products, thereby enhancing Georgia's economic profile.

Ahmed Mulla Talal, famous took the stage to emphasize the critical role of such forums in promoting Georgia as

a premier investment and tourism destination. He reflected on the success of previous forums, noting the exponential growth in participation since the event's inception in 2022. Talal pointed out that the doubling of participants each year underscores the growing interest in Georgia's economic potential and the increasing recognition of the country as an attractive destination for investors and tourists alike.

Hisham Hadad also, participating via Zoom, expressed his enthusiasm for the upcoming forum and his strong belief in Georgia's potential. He commended Pro Vision for their relentless efforts in raising international awareness of Georgia, thereby attracting global attention to the country's investment and tourism opportunities. Hadad's involvement added a significant layer of prestige to the press conference, further highlighting the importance of the forthcoming forum.

In addition to these notable speakers, the press conference featured detailed presentations on the logistical arrangements and the comprehensive schedule planned for the forum. Attendees were given a glimpse into the array of activities and discussions that will take place,

all aimed at fostering meaningful exchanges and collaborations between local and international participants.

The forum's historical context was also discussed, highlighting its evolution since the first event in November 2022, which saw participation from 40 bloggers and 10 investment companies. The subsequent year, the event hosted 40 investors, reflecting a steady increase in interest and participation. This year's forum, with its anticipated 100 participants, is set to be the largest yet, underscoring the escalating appeal of Georgia as a vital economic and tourism hub.

In conclusion, the press conference on July 30 set a promising stage for the International Tourism and Business Forum 2024. It underscored the event's pivotal role in showcasing Georgia's economic and tourism potential, while also fostering new business relationships and investments. With high-profile participants, a comprehensive agenda, and an unwavering commitment to promoting Georgia, the forum promises to be a landmark event in the country's ongoing efforts to establish itself as a significant player on the global economic and tourism stage.

Belgian Company Jan De Nul Wins Tender for Anaklia Port Construction

BY TEAM GT

The winner of the international tender for the construction works of the marine infrastructure of the Anaklia Deep Sea Port has been announced.

The large Belgian company Jan De Nul, one of the "Big Four" in the dredging industry, was selected, the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development reported.

After negotiations, Jan De Nul, one of the largest European companies in the world, will undertake the deepening of the harbor's water area and the construction of a breakwater.

"The tender commission, which included international consultants, chose Jan De Nul as the best among the three participating companies, all of which are European and possess an excellent global reputation. These companies control 80% of the world's dredging fleet.

Jan De Nul, founded in 1938, has a turnover of EUR 2.5 billion and employs over 7,000 people. The company has been actively involved in major projects such as the Panama Canal expansion and has carried out or is currently undertaking projects in various regions, including Europe, the Gulf, and Africa.

"The Anaklia Deep Sea Port is a strategic project for Georgia, intended to connect the transport systems of Europe



Anaklia Port project. Source: Georgian government

and Asia and serve the cargo flow in the Middle Corridor, the shortest and safest route between the West and the East.

"The port aims to significantly boost Georgia's economy, attract international investments, and create thousands of new jobs. It is expected to enhance the competitiveness of not only Georgia but also other countries along the Middle Corridor.

"The first ships are expected to arrive at Anaklia Deep Sea Port in 2029, which will boost the cargo flow through Geor-

gia's transport and logistics infrastructure.

"The capacity of the port's first phase will be 600,000 containers per year, with an indicative value of 600 million USD," the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development stated.

The state owns 51% of the share of the port of Anaklia, and the private partner, which is a Chinese company sanctioned in the US, owns 49% and the right to operate the port.

Ukraine Latest: Ukraine Stops Largest Russian Drone Attack, Kyiv Receives Long-awaited F-16 Fighter Jets

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

Ukraine's air force repelled one of Russia's largest long-range drone attacks of the war overnight Tuesday, shooting down all 89 drones launched at Kyiv. The attack primarily targeted Kyiv and the surrounding region.

Military spy agency spokesperson Andriy Yusov said in televised remarks that Russia had used a "significant" number of decoy drones that were not loaded with explosives to try to deplete Ukraine's air defenses and also to identify their locations.

The latest drone attack was the seventh conducted in the capital in July, and "one of the biggest attacks by Shahed-131/136 strike drones," the Ukrainian air force said.

Some 11,500 residents sheltered for safety in metro stations as the drones came in several waves from "all possible directions."

There was limited damage to civilian and critical infrastructure, but debris damaged the roofs, windows and facades of 13 private residences in the region, according to local authorities.

It comes after Ukrainian forces struck a Russian storage facility for weapons and military equipment in the Western region of Kursk, 62 miles northeast of the Ukrainian border and 435 miles from Odesa, where Ukraine's navy is headquartered.

The military said it was working to assess the damage inflicted from the latest in a series of strikes by Kyiv in that area. Russian air defenses were engaged to counter the attack, but explosions were visible at the target locations.



Firefighters work at a site of a residential building damaged during a Russian drone strike. Source: Reuters

Russia's defense ministry said it had destroyed one incoming drone and a Ukrainian Neptune-guided missile over the Kursk region in addition to 18 drones over four other Russian regions and the Russian-occupied Crimean peninsula.

RYIV RECEIVES FIRST F-16 FIGHTER JETS IN LANDMARK MOMENT FOR ITS AIR FORCE

Ukraine has received the first batch of long-awaited F-16 jets in a landmark moment for the war-torn country as it tries to rebuild its battered air force.

The fighter jets, built by Lockheed Mar-

tin, have been on Ukraine's wish-list for a long time because of their destructive power and global availability. The jets are equipped with a 20mm cannon and can carry bombs, rockets and missiles.

"F-16s in Ukraine. Another impossible thing turned out to be totally possible," Lithuanian foreign minister Gabrielius Landsbergis said on X.

Denmark has committed to donating 19 jets in total, while The Netherlands has promised to deliver 24 aircraft. Both countries have been driving forces behind an international coalition to supply Ukraine with F-16s.

RUSSIAN MILITARY BEGINS THIRD ROUND OF DRILLS TO TRAIN TROOPS IN TACTICAL NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Russia has begun a third round of drills with tactical nuclear weapons, as part of an intimidation strategy to limit support for Ukraine from Western allies.

The drills are to feature units of the central and southern military districts armed with Iskander short-range missiles, according to Russian officials. They will practice receiving nuclear weapons from storage and deploying them to designated launch areas.

The maneuvers will also include air force units that will arm their warplanes with nuclear weapons and perform patrol flights.

Tactical nuclear weapons include bombs, warheads for short-range missiles and artillery munitions and are meant for use on a battlefield.

Russia continues to hemorrhage soldiers on the front line, and have now sustained an estimated 550,000 casualties since its invasion of Ukraine.

Moscow officials say about 190,000 people have volunteered so far this year to fight in Ukraine, compared with 490,000 contracts signed in 2023.

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Georgia's Reformatted Foreign Policy: For Greater Practicality, for Greater Effectiveness. Part 2.

ANALYSIS BY VICTOR KIPIANI,
GEOCASE CHAIRMAN

In the past, we have devoted several publications to the functional and structural reorganization of the Georgian foreign affairs agency. This is one big topic, the importance of which goes far beyond diplomacy, and which is directly and immediately related to ensuring the country's effective national security and reputation.

This time we want to discuss only those characteristics that we consider appropriate in the development and implementation of Georgia's foreign policy. We would like to add that such appropriateness does not fall only into the frame of "want or don't want". The point is that it is dictated by the very modern realities that we briefly discussed at the beginning of the article (see last week's issue of GT).

THE FLEXIBILITY AND ADAPTABILITY NEEDED TO ADAPT GEORGIA'S FOREIGN POLICY TO REGIONAL OR GLOBAL CHALLENGES

We have already mentioned the excessively transactional nature of international relations. The most important characteristic of this approach, as in business, is to make a concrete decision on a concrete issue taking into account the so-called "costs and benefits". At the same time, it is equally possible that such a decision could change as a result of a change in the views of a political leadership or their expectations of diplomacy.

We should remember and know this and should not be surprised. Moreover, the Georgian approach should be based on the same principle, which includes a correct reading of "our" and "their" practical needs and a mutually beneficial overlap. This is the handwriting suggested by the egoistic environment around us, in which necessity and practicality dominate over futile idealism and useless romanticism.

REAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY

What is known in political science as realism, for us it is the politics of seeking and exploiting real opportunities.

Such a policy requires a rational perception of the regional or global contradictions around us and, as a result of the



Garibashvili, Ivanishvili and Kobakhidze following their foreign policy speeches in May. Source: cepa

proper management of such contradictions, manifests itself in practical results useful to us. In other words, the existing contradictions should not alarm us, should not frighten us. On the contrary, we should use them as an opportunity to realize our interests through their mutual balancing and opposition.

At the same time, in order to identify realistic policy opportunities, we believe it is organically necessary to:

"DESENTIMENTALIZE" THE IMMEDIATE PROCESS OF FOREIGN POLICY MAKING, WHETHER COVERT OR PUBLIC

In other words, practical results require practical and sometimes unpopular methods and steps. Their only justification and measure is a tangible result, and the biggest obstacle to such a result is our own stereotypes or archetypes. We believe it is mandatory to get and understand the stereotypes or archetypes of the other side (regardless of whether it is a friend or an enemy). We talked about this in detail when, while discussing the forms of actual Georgian diplomacy, we considered the so-called diplomacy of empathy.

Since we have mentioned the stereotypical vision, let us express some opinions about those aspects that have a significant impact on the foreign policy of our allies and partners today, and if they are not taken into account, Georgia's foreign policy vector will lose its much needed practicality. In particular, we are talking about the fact that:

The foreign policy of the current stage has come under particular pressure from the domestic political conjuncture

The process of principal foreign policy decisions is practically governed by the mood of the electorate of a particular country and, accordingly, by the need for power. Moreover, in many countries of interest to us, the substantive side of the process has shifted from populism to radicalism, and from ethno-nationalism almost to extremism.

Since we have mentioned the dominance of nationalism in foreign (and not only) political handwriting, it is impossible not to mention the "rationales" that are sometimes skillfully and sometimes not so skillfully used by practicing politicians:

(a) an emotional element manifested in national unity and civic mobilization in making and implementing controversial decisions;

(b) a political element indicating a high willingness to address the existing problem; and

(c) an element of policy-making itself that helps maximize state opportunities and multiply resources.

We believe that by reasonably gathering and incorporating these elements into Georgia's political line, we must have a realistic expectation that the other

side will also utilize them.

ADAPTATION TO THE BALANCE OF POWER AND TIMELY READJUSTMENT WHEN IT CHANGES

The global balance of power between geopolitical centers requires constant professional observation and impartial, unbiased assessment. Here too, the manipulation of propaganda clichés and outdated stereotypes aimed at one's own constituents or external audiences should be a thing of the past.

At the same time, regardless of whatever shift in the balance of power, we believe that the Georgian foreign policy will still have clear priorities in the near and mid-term future as a constant:

(a) continuous development of bilateral relations with the U.S. as a strategic ally to introduce new opportunities and new formats of cooperation;

(b) "export" of European political culture and values to Georgian reality and integration into political Europe through real actions;

(c) an established working relationship with China, subject to the necessary predictability of its results;

(d) managing relations with Russia, whether in an anti-crisis, crisis or post-crisis situation.

It is also clear that however great and sincere our desire to master the creation of such a political line, it must be based on at least two basic premises, namely: (1) an economically self-sufficient national system and (2) the deparatization and "disintoxication" of foreign policy by infusing it with intellectual content, meritocracy, and competence.

THE REGION FACTOR IN THE BIG FOREIGN POLICY PICTURE

We have already talked about the role and significance of regional processes in the wide format of Georgia's foreign policy. There would probably be no need to mention this aspect again if it were not for the complex knot of South Caucasian geopolitical and geo-economic interests.

At the same time, it is precisely this complex regional background that gives us a unique opportunity to assert our role in the South Caucasus as an integral part of the wider Black Sea region, which will contribute to the competitiveness and capacity of the Georgian state, i.e. its functionality and effectiveness. The

realization of this in Georgian politics has been taking place already in the 1990s and has been reflected in practical solutions. However, the achievements of the past are no longer sufficient today, and they will be completely nullified tomorrow if we do not constantly act to update this function.

To use a famous phrase of a famous politician, our task should be to become an "indispensable nation" in a wide region which means that the country should become not only one of the hubs of transport routes, but also a center of knowledge about the region for the rest of the world, a "soft power" in terms of disseminating best practices and standards, a diplomatic arbiter or mediator to resolve conflicting interests. It is to this task (and not to the misunderstanding we see) that the national energy and corresponding material resources should be directed. This work should have been started yesterday, so that tomorrow it would not be futile.

Therefore, the redistribution of power at the junctures of West and East or North and South on a global scale is still an ongoing process and will continue until the world international system finds a new "balance point."

Given the existing difficulties and high degree of unpredictability, the foreign policy of our country should clearly outline conceptually its own, so-called "Georgian Path".

In transforming the views and recommendations expressed in this article into practical solutions and actions, it is the conceptually renewed approach that should sensibly and comprehensively address global and regional contradictions. Moreover, with their qualified understanding (and, obviously, the growing institutionalization of the Western vector in the internal and external lines) and the support of the modern political (non-existent?) elite, Georgian public diplomacy should assert its multi-priority in external positioning. It is a fact that the country is faced with a demand for the creation of a new type and spirit of politics, which, among other things, requires radical personnel, and structural and functional reorganization of the country's foreign policy agency. Without fulfilling this demand, the modernization of the Georgian state in a democratic regime will remain an unfulfilled Georgian dream for a long time to come.

UAE and World Health Organization to Initiate Urgent Medical Evacuation of 148 Palestinians to Abu Dhabi



PRESS RELEASE

As part of its unwavering humanitarian commitment to the brotherly Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, the United Arab Emirates, in partnership with World Health Organization (WHO), has announced an urgent initiative to evacuate 85 sick and severely injured Palestinians, including cancer patients in need of extensive treatment, accompanied by 63 family members to Abu Dhabi from Ramon airport in Israel, via the Karam Abu Salem crossing.

This initiative demonstrates the urgent need for humanitarian intervention and reaffirms the UAE's steadfast commitment to supporting the people of Gaza amidst the catastrophic situation. The UAE's various lines of communication continue to facilitate the humanitarian efforts to assist the people of Gaza, and extend a helping hand during their time of need.

Her Excellency Reem Al Hashimy, Minister of State for International Cooperation, said: "At this critical time, the urgency of our mission to evacuate

injured Palestinians to Abu Dhabi cannot be overstated.

This unprecedented route reflects the gravity of the situation and our resolute commitment to alleviating the suffering of the people of the Gaza Strip and to ensure the arrival and distribution of relief through all available means, including land, sea and air. This initiative stands as a testament to the UAE's enduring and historic support for the Palestinian people, guided by our unwavering dedication to providing immediate relief and advancing peace in the face of immense adversity."

The Ambassador underlined that, to date, the UAE has welcomed 709 patients from Gaza, along with 787 of their family members, to receive medical treatment. This follows the directives of His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, UAE President, to provide care for 2,000 injured and cancer patients from Gaza.

"This significant scale-up in our efforts demonstrates our solidarity with the Palestinian people and our determination to alleviate their suffering and ensure urgent, sustainable, unhindered delivery of aid, at a wide scale and through all possible means. We remain resolute in

our collaboration with international partners to ensure that our aid reaches those in desperate need," Her Excellency added.

"For his part, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus Director-General of the World Health Organization, said: "We are thankful to the UAE for supporting the evacuation of sick and injured people from Gaza to receive the urgent care they need. We hope this paves the way for the establishment of evacuation corridors via all possible routes, including the Kerem Shalom and Rafah crossings to Egypt and Jordan, and from there to other countries. We also call for evacuations to the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, to be restored. Thousands of sick people are suffering needlessly. Above all, and as always, WHO calls for a ceasefire."

Notably, to date, the UAE has provided over 40,000 tons of crucial aid, including food, relief, and medical items, through 8 aid ships, 337 flights, 50 airdrops, and 1,271 trucks. The fourth UAE relief ship arrived in Al-Arish this week, marking the eighth shipment of aid, which carried 5,340 tons of humanitarian supplies, and is the largest shipment since the launch of the relief operations.

US Suspends More than \$95 mln in Direct Aid to Georgian Gov't



US Congress. Photo by Gage Skidmore/Flickr

BY TEAM GT

The anti-democratic actions and false statements of the Georgian government do not comply with the norms of membership in the European Union and NATO, and so the US is suspending more than \$95 million in direct aid to the Georgian government – reads the statement of United

States Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, distributed by the State Department Wednesday.

Blinken's statement notes, however, that the US will continue to support programs and activities that benefit the Georgian people by strengthening democracy, the rule of law, and economic development.

"On May 23, following anti-democratic actions by the government of Georgia, I announced a comprehensive review of bilateral cooperation between the United States and Georgia," Blinken

writes. "As a result of this review, the United States is suspending more than \$95 million in aid that would have directly benefited the Government of Georgia.

"The anti-democratic actions and false statements of the Georgian government do not comply with the norms of membership in the European Union and NATO. While we are suspending assistance to the Government of Georgia because of these actions, the United States will continue to support programs and activities that benefit the Georgian people by

strengthening democracy, the rule of law, and economic development.

"During more than 32 years of friendship and partnership between our countries and peoples, the people of the United States have allocated more than \$6.2 billion in aid, which has contributed to the development and strengthening of Georgia's economy and democratic institutions. Our aid has contributed to equipping and training the Georgian Defense Forces and Coast Guard, building schools and hospitals, and training teachers, civil servants and medical professionals. We will remain loyal to the Georgian people and their Euro-Atlantic aspirations," Blinken said.

US Senator Ben Cardin noted that "The recent actions of the Georgian government, especially the adoption of the Russian-style Foreign Agents Law, are a direct attack on civil society and independent media. The suspension of aid benefiting the current government reflects our country's strong commitment to stand by the Georgian people and support their democratic aspirations."

US Senators Jeanne Shaheen and Jim Risch stated that they welcomed the decision to suspend bilateral aid to Georgia in response to the Foreign Agents Law, which "will be used against civil society and human rights organizations fighting for a free and democratic future.

"The Government of Georgia unreasonably believed that rejecting the democratic aspirations of its citizens would not affect its relations with the United States," they added.

In response to the news, Lithuanian MP Žygmantas Pavilionis said, "The 'Georgian Nightmare' is so busy opening all the doors for Beijing and Moscow that on the same days it closes all the doors of Washington and Brussels, as well as other friendly capitals of the transatlantic family, where the Georgian nation really deserves to be."

At time of going to press, the Georgian Government had yet to comment.

Helsinki Commission Calls on Anthony Blinken to Impose Sanctions on Ivanishvili



BY TEAM GT

The Helsinki Commission is calling on US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken to impose sanctions against Bidzina Ivanishvili.

Their letter, which is signed by Congressmen Joe Wilson, Steve Cohen, Richard Hudson and Mark Wiese, is being distributed by media.

"We are writing this letter to urge you to take more urgent and decisive action regarding the current situation in Georgia," the congressmen write. "We welcome your recently announced policy of visa restrictions against those who undermine Georgia's democracy and human rights, and believe it is a strong step towards holding accountable the increasingly authoritarian and anti-democratic government in Tbilisi. However, the pace and gravity of the events on the ground tell us that more needs to be done urgently to protect the population of Georgia."

The commission claimed the time has come to impose sanctions against Bidzina Ivanishvili and his entourage.

"We believe that the time has come to start the process of imposing individual financial sanctions against the main foci of corruption and evil influence in Georgia, namely, Bidzina Ivanishvili and his entourage. It should be clear that the main agents of corruption and evil influence in Georgia, who are in contact with anti-Western elements, will not be able to freely hunt the Georgian people and attack their democracy at will. To paraphrase Hack, the assistant secretary of state's testimony

before the Foreign Affairs Committee, all tools are on the table. Now we have to use them," says the Helsinki Commission.

The Helsinki Commission also urged the State Department that to act against call centers.

"Furthermore, we know that a significant source of black money that supports Georgian Dream's disorderly and harmful patronage system comes from fraudulent call centers located all over the world, some of them located in friendly countries – which are mainly based on fraudulent and illegal activities. These call centers appear to be hubs of cooperation between corrupt agents in Georgia and their other kleptocratic partners in Russia, and it is likely that the same call centers have been mobilized in various ways in Georgia in recent months to harass and intimidate members of civil society, democracy activists, and the political opposition and their families.

"The illegal income these call centers generate is the main source of various corruption networks in Georgia, Russia and abroad, and helps maintain the disturbing system of political economy that has led to Georgia's recent anti-democratic and anti-Western turn. It is also likely that the same networks are sources of income that support Russian corruption networks and enable sanctions evasion systems.

"Therefore, we believe it is imperative that the State Department, in cooperation with US and friendly foreign law enforcement agencies, take swift, immediate, and systematic action against these call center networks and other similar international efforts to destroy or disrupt their operations," the letter reads.

The Congressmen say Congress is ready to support such moves.

"We believe that these actions will complement our bill, the Act on Strengthening and Mobilizing Georgia's Accountability, Resilience and Independence, the MEGOBARI Act. The mentioned bill will contribute to the strengthening of democratic practices, human rights and the rule of law in Georgia, and will once again confirm the commitment of the United States of America to support Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration and to oppose the influence of authoritarian regimes, especially Russia," the congressmen said.



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Bassam Jaafar Discusses the Upcoming International Tourism and Business Forum 2024

BY KESARIA KATCHARAVA

On July 30, 2024, the Sheraton Grand Tbilisi Metekhi Palace was abuzz with excitement as it hosted a pivotal press conference for the International Tourism and Business Forum 2024. This major event, scheduled for October 22-23, aims to place Georgia on the global map as a premier destination for investment and tourism. To gain deeper insights into the forum and its implications for Georgia, we spoke with Bassam Jaafar, the Owner and Director of Pro Vision and an honorary member of the Global Council for Business and Trade.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FORUM FOR GEORGIA

The International Tourism and Business Forum 2024 is more than just a high-profile event; it represents a crucial opportunity for Georgia to assert its position as a significant player in the global tourism and investment sectors. Bassam Jaafar underscores that this forum is designed to elevate Georgia's profile by highlighting its economic potential, cultural richness, and welcoming business environment. "This event is a strategic platform for Georgia," Jaafar explains. "It's not merely about showcasing what Georgia has to offer but about setting the stage for future collaborations and investments that can drive long-term growth."

Jaafar believes that the forum's ability to attract international attention and investment is pivotal. By bringing together global business leaders, policymakers, and tourism experts, the forum will provide a comprehensive view of Georgia's potential. The event is expected to catalyze discussions that could lead to significant investment opportunities and partnerships that will benefit Georgia's economy in the years to come.

GEORGIA'S UNIQUE POSITION IN GLOBAL TOURISM AND INVESTMENT

Georgia's location at the crossroads of Europe and Asia offers it a unique advantage in the global market. Jaafar highlights this geographical advantage as a critical factor in Georgia's attractiveness to international investors and tourists. "Georgia is positioned strategically at the intersection of two major continents, which provides it with unparalleled con-

Georgia's recent efforts to streamline business regulations and improve the investment climate make it an even more attractive destination

We need to ensure that the forum leads to concrete results and actionable plans that can benefit Georgia in the long term

nectivity and access to diverse markets," he notes.

The country's blend of historical allure, scenic landscapes, and progressive economic reforms further enhances its appeal. Jaafar points out that Georgia's recent efforts to streamline business regulations and improve the investment climate make it an even more attractive destination. "The reforms in Georgia have created a more favorable business environment, which is essential for attracting foreign investment," Jaafar says. "Coupled with its rich cultural heritage and natural beauty, Georgia offers a compelling proposition for global stakeholders."

PRO VISION'S ROLE AND OBJECTIVES AT THE FORUM

As the Owner and Director of Pro Vision, Bassam Jaafar's involvement in the forum is driven by the company's mission to facilitate meaningful connections and promote strategic growth. Pro Vision is committed to showcasing how it can support Georgia in leveraging its assets for greater economic and tourism development. "Our role is to bridge the gap between Georgian businesses and international investors," Jaafar explains. "We aim to demonstrate how Pro Vision can help maximize Georgia's tourism infrastructure and investment opportunities."

Pro Vision will play a key role in organizing and managing various aspects of the forum, including facilitating networking sessions and ensuring that discussions are productive and relevant. Jaafar emphasizes that the company's objective is to help create an environment where new partnerships can thrive and where actionable strategies can be developed. "We are focused on driving practical outcomes from the forum, ensuring that the connections made and the discussions held lead to tangible results for Georgia," he says.

EXPECTED IMPACT OF THE FORUM ON GEORGIA'S GLOBAL POSITIONING

The International Tourism and Business Forum 2024 is anticipated to have a profound impact on Georgia's global positioning. Jaafar expects the forum to significantly enhance the country's visibility and attractiveness to international investors and tourism operators. "By showcasing Georgia's strengths and opportunities, the forum will help to elevate the country's profile on the global stage," he notes. "This increased visibility can lead to greater interest from international stakeholders and pave the



way for new investments and tourism initiatives."

The forum is also seen as a catalyst for future projects and partnerships. Jaafar believes that the connections made during the event will be instrumental in fostering long-term growth and development. "The forum will not only highlight Georgia's potential but also set the stage for future collaborations that can drive economic progress," he adds.

KEY FACTORS FOR THE FORUM'S SUCCESS

For the International Tourism and Business Forum 2024 to be successful, several key factors will be crucial. Jaafar highlights the importance of high-quality discussions and presentations. "It's essential that the forum addresses the interests and concerns of potential investors and tourism stakeholders," he says. "The content of the discussions needs to be relevant and impactful."

Networking opportunities will also play a significant role in the forum's suc-

cess. Jaafar stresses that creating an environment where meaningful connections can be made is vital. "Effective networking can lead to valuable partnerships and collaborations," he explains. "Ensuring that participants have ample opportunities to connect and engage is crucial."

Lastly, the ability to generate actionable outcomes will be a key determinant of the forum's success. Jaafar emphasizes that translating discussions into real-world opportunities is essential for achieving the forum's objectives. "We need to ensure that the forum leads to concrete results and actionable plans that can benefit Georgia in the long term," he concludes.

VISION FOR GEORGIA'S FUTURE IN TOURISM AND INVESTMENT

Looking to the future, Jaafar is optimistic about Georgia's prospects in tourism and investment. He envisions a scenario where Georgia is not only recognized for its natural and cultural assets but

also for its vibrant and investor-friendly business environment. "Georgia has the potential to become a leading destination for both tourism and investment," Jaafar says. "By leveraging the momentum from the forum, we can drive significant growth and development in these sectors."

Jaafar's vision includes seeing Georgia emerge as a key player in the global market, with a strong reputation for attracting international investment and tourism. "The forum is just the beginning," he notes. "We have the opportunity to build on this momentum and position Georgia as a top destination for global stakeholders."

The International Tourism and Business Forum 2024 promises to be a landmark event for Georgia, setting the stage for increased international engagement and economic growth. With influential leaders like Bassam Jaafar guiding the way, the forum is poised to make a significant impact on Georgia's global standing and future development.



Georgian Riviera on the Black Sea from Lisi Development

The new resort area is located in Buknari, a unique location between the sea and the mountains, featuring a distinctive subtropical climate. It is just a 7-minute drive from the Batumi exit. Lisi Development owns a 9-hectare plot of land in Buknari, and the development will be carried out gradually, considering low building height and density.

The first phase of the project includes a hotel-apartment complex with an indoor swimming pool, a restaurant, a sports field, and green areas. This phase is scheduled for completion in 2025. Currently, the construction of a 108-room hotel and related infrastructure is actively

underway, with a total investment of \$20 million.

The hotel-type apartments will be delivered in a turn-key condition, including full renovation, furniture, kitchen, and necessary accessories. The project includes hotel-standard rooms ranging from 35 to 70 square meters. The complex is situated directly along the sea coast, and each apartment offers views of both the sea and the mountains.

As with all its projects, Lisi Development is committed to green approaches, low-density development, and creating human-friendly environments and infrastructure. In 2010, the company developed Lisi Green Town residential complex in Tbilisi, which now includes three

residential areas and a villa area.

This development features seven parks and a commercial area with all necessary services such as a pharmacy, supermarkets, and a gym. Lisi Development's introduction of green approaches is evident in its 80/20 principle, where only 20% of the project area is occupied by buildings, and the remaining 80% is devoted to greenery and additional infrastructure. This principle results in 70 square meters of space per person, which is 7.7 times higher than the World Health Organization's standard.

The company aims to establish this standard in the Buknari project in Adjara, intended for family recreation and attractive from an investment perspective. It

is important for Lisi Development to maintain and enhance the existing green cover in Buknari. Their goal is to create a model project on the Black Sea, which will become the new Georgian Riviera.

The general plan and architecture of the resort area have been developed in collaboration with British architectural studios, marking Lisi Development's another international collaboration. The company has previously worked with world-renowned architectural firms, such as the Dutch company UN Studio on the Lisi Green Tower project. In the third district of Lisi Green Town, two new buildings of different architecture are under construction. The company is working on a residential house designed

by the legendary Spanish architect Ricardo Bofill and Lisi Garden House designed by the well-known British company Architects of Invention, both to be completed by the end of 2024.



Lisi Green Town

Natakhtari Fund Presented its Twelve-year Activity Report to the Public

From 2011 to the present, the Natakhtari Fund, through the professional support of the local non-governmental organization Association Our Home-Georgia, has helped up to 700 young people with 1,092,593 GEL. As a result, hundreds of young people without parental care have started to live independently and many are building successful careers. All of this is provided by the 3 main priorities of the Natakhtari Fund: education, employment and psychological support.

For 12 years, the Natakhtari Fund has allocated resources to the needs relevant to each beneficiary. During this time, with the help of the fund:

- 72 young people have received higher education or are currently studying in higher education institutions.

- 355 beneficiaries received vocational education.
- More than 235 young people learned the craft and went through an internship with a master of different directions.
- 690 beneficiaries received individual services from a psychologist.

According to today's data, 90% of the young participants in the project are employed, with over 70% holding stable jobs.

With the initiative of the Natakhtari Fund and the Association Our Home-Georgia, a social program for supporting young people who have left the state care system was established in 2018 in the Rustavi Municipality City Hall and is still functioning. Within this program, beneficiaries were provided with 1200 GEL per year, which

they could use for higher education, transportation costs, and purchasing household items. In the last 6 years, the program has become quite demanding, and the budget has gradually increased. Starting in January 2025, each young person will receive 2000 GEL instead of 1200 GEL. In addition, the education and transportation costs of students who have left the state care system will be covered by other relevant programs. The beneficiaries of the program will be able to use the 2000 GEL allocated by the social support program to pay rent and/or purchase household items.

The 2023 Needs, Resources, and Report of the Natakhtari Fund indicate the following:

In 2023, a total of 30 young people received necessary services. All participants benefited from intensive psychological counseling, with 6 undergoing a full course of psychotherapy. Last year, 8 young people received scholarships to support their independent living. 1 individual received financial assistance to purchase household appliances. 2 others were provided with medicines for chronic illnesses and also underwent medical diagnosis and necessary treatment. 4 entrants received professional consultation, and the service provider covered the preparation costs. 15 young people were included in the SOS Children's Villages Georgia Aflatoun program, which prepares youth for independent living, improves life skills, and enhances employability.



In the end, as a result of the activities implemented by the Natakhtari Fund, 30 young people received services in 2023, with 25 of them being employed. In addition, 15 beneficiaries have already been able to start living independently with the help of the fund.

The Natakhtari Fund, founded in 2011, aims to prepare youth without parental care for independent living by providing education and employment assistance. The project is carried out in collaboration with an experienced non-governmental organization, Our Home – Georgia. In the process of preparing young people for an independ-

ent life, it is important to provide them with psychological services: psychological counseling, psychodiagnostics, and, if necessary, psychotherapy. For each young person, the resources are allocated according to their individual needs. Within the framework of the project, the types of assistance to the beneficiaries are the provision of housing, support for receiving professional or higher education, coverage of utility costs, payment of travel expenses, purchase of textbooks and daily household items, financing of medical research and treatment, purchase of medicines, etc.

IFC Anchors Green Bond Issuance by Georgia Global Utilities to Improve Water Services for 1.3 Million People in Georgia

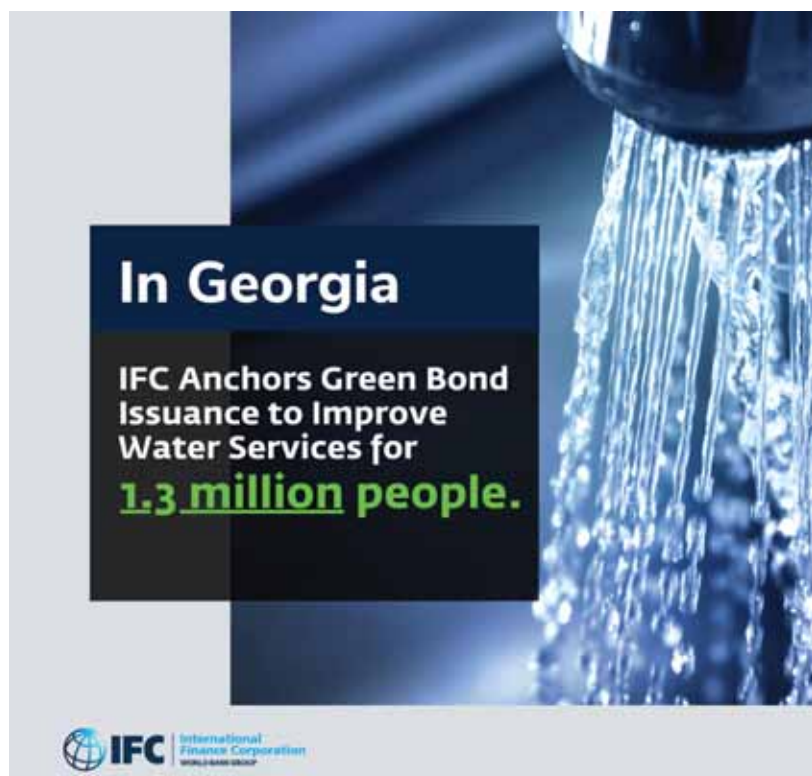
PRESS RELEASE

IFC is anchoring a \$300 million green bond issuance by Georgia Global Utilities through a subscription of \$40 million, to improve outdated water infrastructure and equipment and expand the country's water network. This issuance, the largest ever by a Georgian private company, is expected to lead to enhanced water services for 1.3 million people, approximately 35% of Georgia's population.

Access to, and delivery of, quality and efficient potable water services remain a challenge in Georgia as the country's aging water infrastructure carries high water leakage rates, estimated at nearly 70% in some areas, and requires significant capital investments. This green bond issuance is expected to help address these challenges.

Georgia Global Utilities (GGU) is the country's largest privately-owned water supply and wastewater utility company, serving the capital Tbilisi, and cities of Rustavi and Mtskheta. In 2022, the company was acquired and is now majority-owned by Aqualia, a leading global water company that is the fourth largest in Europe and ninth largest in the world by population served.

Proceeds of the bond issuance will be used to refinance GGU's existing loans to establish a sustainable capital structure and finance the company's green capital expenditures program, which



aims to reduce water losses, improve energy efficiency, and connect approximately 40,000 new customers to water services by 2028.

The bond will be listed on the Euronext Dublin exchange. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Asian Development Bank, and German development finance institution DEG

are also participating in the bond issuance.

Aqualia's Chief Financial Officer, Isidoro Marbán, emphasizes that the bond issue "will serve, among other things, to improve Georgians' access to a safe and reliable water supply and to adapt the country to the adverse effects of climate change. In this sense, the collaboration

with IFC represents an encouraging precedent for future joint agreements in geographies of mutual interest to IFC and Aqualia."

Despite reforms and some improvements, Georgia's domestic capital market remains shallow, with total corporate bond issuances of just \$800 million in 2023, primarily driven by financial institutions. Thus, companies need to tap international capital markets. The issuance is expected to facilitate financing that is not readily available domestically to infrastructure corporates in Georgia and attract new investors by highlighting the potential of sustainable capital markets instruments.

"Investing in upgrading infrastructure is crucial to improve water utility services in Georgia. IFC's anchor investment in this green bond issuance aligns with our commitment to mobilize capital for climate-friendly projects, while promoting sustainable growth and improving critical services for thousands of underserved citizens," said Ivana Fernandes Duarte, IFC's Regional Manager for the South Caucasus.

To boost private sector growth in Georgia, IFC has provided around \$2 billion in long-term financing since 1995, including nearly \$1 billion mobilized from partners, in 62 projects in financial services, agribusiness, manufacturing, and infrastructure. IFC has also supported over \$394 million in trade through its trade finance program and implemented several advisory projects focused on private sector development.

ABOUT IFC

IFC, a member of the World Bank Group, is the largest global development institution focused on the private sector in emerging markets. It works in more than 100 countries, using its capital, expertise, and influence to create markets and opportunities in developing countries. In fiscal year 2023, IFC committed a record \$43.7 billion to private companies and financial institutions in developing countries, leveraging the power of the private sector to end extreme poverty and boost shared prosperity as economies grapple with the impacts of global compounding crises. For more information, visit www.ifc.org or www.ifc.org/water.

ABOUT GEORGIA GLOBAL UTILITIES

Georgia Global Utilities (GGU) manages the water supply systems of Tbilisi, Mtskheta, and Rustavi (GWP) and operates energy facilities. GGU owns several hydro power plants with a total installed capacity of 149 MW, including the Zhinvali hydro power plant, the second largest with a reservoir in Georgia. Since 2022, 80% of the company's shares are owned by the Spanish company FCC Aqualia, a leading entity in the European water supply market, and 20% by the investment holding company Georgia Capital. GGU is committed to sustainable development and environmental responsibility, focusing on green initiatives and strategic investments in the water and energy sectors.

The Shangri La Team-Building Hike from Juta to Roshka

The spirit of adventure and teamwork recently soared to new heights as the Shangri La Tbilisi team embarked on an exhilarating hike from Juta in the Kazbegi region to Roshka in Khevsureti. This journey, which they had been planning for some time, took place on June 27th and showcased both their dedication and the stunning beauty of Georgia's mountainous regions.

Starting at an elevation of 2,200 meters, the team ascended to a breathtaking 3,240 meters, covering a challenging 18 kilometers. The trek was filled with camaraderie, breathtaking views, and a profound sense of accomplishment as they traversed the rugged terrain together.

The highlight of the journey was proudly displaying the Shangri La logo upon reaching Roshka, symbolizing not only their physical achievement, but also their unity and spirit. This adventure not only strengthened their bonds but also provided a memorable experience that highlighted the remarkable beauty of Georgia's landscapes.

Shangri La, with its mountain-inspired logo, perfectly encapsulates the essence of reaching new heights, both literally and figuratively. This hike was a testament to the team's determination and the enduring allure of adventure.

"We sincerely thank the Shangri La Tbilisi team for their excellent idea, teamwork and dedication. You guys are great, I wish you to climb even higher and reach new peaks together,"—said Helen Keane, General Manager of Shangri La Tbilisi.



Back to Ushba

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

This mountain, my muse. He just keeps on calling out to me.

I take my camera and lenses every time I'm likely to see Ushba, such as on the road to Mestia, just in case. But there have also been a few times when I've felt "the call" to go and just see him, hopefully get some good shots, and just observe as weather changes around his magnificent double peak. These events are usually towards sunset, and usually take me all the way to the village of Becho, almost all of which can bask in Ushba's presence.

Almost, but not quite all of the 8 km length of the village. The whole hamlet of Chokhuldi, and the lower half of Mazeri too, are "cursed" by the intervening bulk of a low hill which nonetheless is suf-

ficiently high to block views of The Mountain altogether. What a torture I can imagine this to be for inhabitants of these parts! Guest houses here must surely suffer from not being able to offer their tourists the luxury of simply sitting on a balcony or in a field and watching Ushba? Sure, only a couple of minutes' drive away, there he is. But not here. Frustrating. I would never choose to live in these parts.

A few evenings ago, with no guests in our own house and some free time, I set off alone in the car with camera, lenses and tripod, towards Becho, feeling that familiar siren summons. Beforehand, though, I did sneak a peek from a few minutes' walk away from our house to see if at least the peak was visible (which it never is from our house anyway). Yes, there it was, so away I drove.

Now, there's a hairpin turn a little before the first hamlet of Becho, from which you get your first glimpse of Ushba (or not). Then another such turn in the



opposite direction will give you the first long look, and a good stopping point for first shots. From then onwards through almost all of Becho, he's yours, if he's playing.

Well, there he was at that hairpin, so I stopped and got my first frame of the evening, just in case he changed his mind; there were some clouds about, and you just never know. Then I drove on, and stopped at the river just below Chokhuldi. But in those few minutes of driving, the cloud cover increased, as it often seems to do when one wishes the opposite. Gone was the peak. I waited a while and resolved to drive to the top end of Mazeri, just past the aptly named Grand Hotel Ushba.

Another thing I was trying to achieve was the positioning of the fabled two teeth of the mountain, called Babua and Bebia (Grandfather and Grandmother), relative to the looming south peak of Ushba behind them. There is a range of

locations from which both their own appearance and this relative positioning are at their best. Where I stopped is about the far end of this range.

I have also been using my phone to take short videos and post them to my Facebook page as reels, so I shot a few of these as I waited for the cloud head which had settled onto both Ushba and neighboring Mt. Mazeri. Indeed, it did begin to lessen in size as the evening wore on towards sunset. Horses came and went, as did cars. The spot is a magnificent place for camping, with a river and forest nearby, a waterfall in the distance, and a whole ring of glorious mountain scenery to dazzle.

But of Ushba's peak, only glimpse of partiality. So I decided to drive back down a bit to change the position of Babua and Bebia relative to the mountain which had captured and ossified them. There, finally, as the sun's light was turning to orange just before it left the scene,

I got about half of the peak now in sunset colors along with those two teeth. Seconds later, all was graying. I could stay another hour or two and see what stars capes would emerge; but I wasn't dressed for the increasing chill, so decided to call it an evening and head home to my wife and supper.

Such is one of the great privileges of living in this part of Svaneti: the chance to bask in the presence of a truly great mountain so much of the time. I count it a great reward indeed.

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

Mestia Int'l Film Festival - Raising Awareness of Mountain Films



Attendees of Mestiaff enjoying traditional Georgian performances. Source: FB

BY SHELBI R. ANKIEWICZ

The Mestia International Short and Mountain Film Festival (Mestiaff) in Svaneti serves many goals, but it has a big emphasis on raising awareness about mountain films. Originally founded in 2021, this year the festival took place from July 23 to July 27.

The film genre's focal point is to tell stories about mountains and the battle between humans and nature. The festival's Head of International Relations Sali Chokheli notes that Georgia is home to various mountains, including the famous Caucasus Range, making it an ideal spot to screen films of this genre. By holding

Mestiaff in Svaneti, attendees get to explore the region's uniqueness and discover the mountains firsthand.

"Svaneti is full of folklore, pristine nature, proud and hospitable people. Every year for five days the festival provides its spectators, special guests, and jury members with mind-blowing and spectacular mountain films, in the mountain region which has always served as an attraction for filmmakers," Chokheli tells GEORGIA TODAY. "Gathering these filmmakers in this small region serves the same purpose - to use every possible chance to promote mountain films."

According to Chokheli, mountains have always prominently featured in films throughout history, yet people usually connect them with German and Austrian cinema, especially from the 1920s and 30s. In the last two decades, she says,

this genre has grown to reflect mountains in more countries, which is why they felt the need to promote what Georgia has to offer.

She tells us that the Svanetian region used to be hard to reach, but today is not, and so having the festival here serves to put it on the international map.

"Svaneti has an ancient unwritten language and breathtaking mountains, making the area even more special and attractive. It's something that people look forward to throughout the year," she says.

Mestiaff runs for five days at a time and features juries and journalists from all around the world. It is the first festival of its kind in Georgia, and one of the few short-film festivals in the country. The Founder and Director of Mestiaff is Khatuna Khundadze and the co-founder

is the Mestia Art and Culture Center.

Each year, Chokheli says they invite jury members to judge the films in the festival, people who have a history in the film industry with the utmost experience. This year's jury included Salome Demuria (Georgia), Peter Rommel (Germany), Tinatin Kajrishvili (Georgia), Dan Burlac (Romania), and Luc Hardy (France).

There are also five filmmakers chosen every year from different countries that have participated in world-class festivals such as Berlinale, Cannes, Venice and Toronto.

"The reason we invite journalists of different nationalities is to show that film journalists work for the enchantment and impact of cinema, sharing narratives that resonate, and actively shaping the evolving story of the film

with mountain-related films including documentaries and feature films, and the other half showing short films about any topic or genre to add more variety. This is then further broken down into four sections: international short films, international feature-length mountain films, retrospective screenings of Georgian short films, and a special section.

Each day there was a showing of films from around the world including Australia, China, Peru, Ecuador, Estonia, Belgium, Slovenia, Georgia, and more. On the fourth day of the festival, Award-Winning International Journalist and Director of the Board of the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, Barbara Gasser, had a masterclass and meet-and-greet with attendees.

Chokheli told us that though the festival promotes mountain filmmaking, it



Poster for the Mestia International Short and Mountain Film Festival. Source: FB



Guest of Honor, Reinhold Andreas Messner, and Festival Director Khatuna Khundadze. Source: FB

industry."

In addition to the journalists, each year a guest of honor is chosen for recognition. This year's was Reinhold Andreas Messner, an Italian climber, explorer, author, and filmmaker who has completed all fourteen eight-thousand-meter peaks on Earth. This includes spots in Antarctica, Greenland, and the deserts of Tibet, Gobi, and Takla Makan. Chokheli told GEORGIA TODAY that he is considered by many to be the greatest mountaineer of all time.

The first day of the event started with a film directed by Messner titled 'Nanga Parbat: Mein Schlüsselberg.' It's a documentary that tells the story of Messner and his son's trip to Nanga Parbat, explaining in detail their journey and Messner's near-death experience. The mountaineer has been doing expeditions for several years, and as stated on his website, views himself as "a middleman for nature."

"I am interested in dialogue, shared narratives, and the cultural heritage of alpinism," writes Messner. "I assume the role of mediator between the general public and the mountains. The loner becomes the medium."

The festival is split into two parts, one

also aims to develop cultural exchange and cinematography in the country. She said the festival assists in creating a mutual understanding that advances cooperation and partnership between Georgian and foreign filmmakers. Chokheli said that she hopes Mestiaff will one day be on the same level as other A-class festivals.

The motto of this year's event was 'MESTIA: Where the Legends Meet'. The festival is dedicated to Mikheil Khergiani, who was a Georgian mountaineer and seven-time national champion known by the name 'Tiger of the Cliffs'. In 1963, he was named 'Honored Master of Sport' of the USSR for his accomplishments.

The winners and categories of the 2024 festival were:

Best Short Film: 'Frost and the Little Schoolboy' / Georgia.

Best Mountain Film: 'Oreste's Hut' / Italy.

Grand Prix: 'Allegory of the Cave' / Argentina.

Eco Prize: 'Through Rocks and Clouds' / Peru.

Jury Prize: 'Refuge' / Romania.

Special Mention: 'Tradition' / Turkey.

Beethoven, Chopin, Rachmaninoff: Rising Piano Stars Conquer the Classics in Tbilisi



Mirian Khukhunaishvili, Zhiqian Cen, Shao Ziyu, Ryan Martin Bradshaw. Photo by the author

BY IVAN NECHAEV

On a balmy summer evening, the Tbilisi Conservatoire's Grand Hall hosted a musical feast that was both a culmination of youthful talent and a testament to the power of classical music in bridging cultures. The concert, marking the closure of the IPM (International Piano Masters) Festival, featured the winners of the IPM&SEEO International Concerto Competition: Zhiqian Cen, Shao Ziyu, and Ryan Martin Bradshaw. Accompanied by the Giya Kancheli Tbilisi Youth

Orchestra under the baton of Mirian Khukhunaishvili, the evening showcased masterpieces from Beethoven, Chopin, and Rachmaninoff, offering a rich tapestry of piano concertos that highlighted the unique artistry of each soloist.

A DIALOGUE WITH TRADITION

The evening opened with Ludwig van Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3 in C Minor, Op. 37, performed by Zhiqian Cen. Cen's interpretation was marked by a profound understanding of the concerto's classical form and its Romantic undercurrents. The first movement, Allegro con brio, displayed a bold interplay between the piano and orchestra, with Cen navigating the demanding pas-

sages with precision and expressiveness. The second movement, Largo, offered a lyrical respite, where Cen's sensitive touch brought out the movement's introspective beauty. The final movement, Rondo: Allegro, was a spirited conclusion, with Cen capturing the exuberance and wit characteristic of Beethoven's finales. Cen's performance highlighted not only her technical prowess but also her ability to convey the emotional depth of the music, engaging the audience in a dialogue that transcended mere notes.

The Giya Kancheli Tbilisi Youth Orchestra, under Mirian Khukhunaishvili's direction, provided a robust and sensitive accompaniment, responding to Cen's phrasing and dynamics. The orchestra's

ability to blend and balance with the soloist was particularly evident in the concerto's more intimate moments, where the dialogue between piano and orchestra created a compelling musical narrative.

A LYRICAL JOURNEY

Shao Ziyu's rendition of Frédéric Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 2 in F Minor, Op. 21, was a celebration of lyricism and elegance. Chopin, often celebrated as a poet of the piano, requires a performer who can blend technical mastery with expressive nuance, and Ziyu rose to the occasion. The first movement, Maestoso, was characterized by its sweeping melodies and intricate embellishments, with Ziyu displaying remarkable control over the dynamic range and phrasing. The Larghetto, a hallmark of Chopin's nocturnal style, allowed Ziyu to explore the more introspective and melancholic aspects of the concerto, delivering a performance rich in emotional nuance. The concluding Allegro vivace was a showcase of virtuosic brilliance, with Ziyu's fleet fingers dancing across the keyboard, capturing the playful and exuberant spirit of the movement. Ziyu's performance was a testament to the enduring appeal of Chopin's music, resonating deeply with the audience.

dialogue between the piano and orchestra. The finale, Allegro scherzando, was a tour de force, with Bradshaw delivering the virtuosic passages with electrifying energy and precision. His performance was a fitting conclusion to the evening, leaving the audience in awe of his technical and expressive capabilities.

The orchestra, under Khukhunaishvili's experienced baton, brought out the dramatic contrasts and lush textures inherent in Rachmaninoff's score. Their playing was characterized by a deep understanding of the Romantic style, with the brass and strings particularly shining in the sweeping climaxes of the concerto. Khukhunaishvili's direction ensured that the orchestra and soloist were always in sync, achieving a seamless integration of sound.

A HARMONIOUS COLLABORATION OF YOUTH AND MUSIC

The Giya Kancheli Tbilisi Youth Orchestra, named after the famed Georgian composer, has become a vital part of Georgia's cultural landscape. Comprising young, talented musicians, the orchestra is known for its dynamic performances and its role in fostering the next generation of Georgian musicians. Under the direction of conductor Mirian



Shao Ziyu. Photo by the author

The orchestra, guided by Khukhunaishvili's expressive conducting, matched Ziyu's lyrical interpretation with a warm and supportive accompaniment. The lush string sections and precise wind lines underscored the soloist's lines, creating a rich tapestry of sound that enveloped the audience.

A ROMANTIC ODYSSEY

The concert concluded with Ryan Martin Bradshaw's performance of Sergei Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor, Op. 18, a work renowned for its lush harmonies and sweeping melodies. Bradshaw's approach to this Romantic masterpiece was both passionate and introspective, capturing the concerto's emotional breadth. The opening Moderato, with its iconic chords and expansive melodies, was played with a commanding presence, as Bradshaw navigated the complex textures and lyrical passages with ease. The Adagio sostenuto, a lyrical interlude, showcased Bradshaw's sensitivity to the nuances of phrasing and tone, creating a hauntingly beautiful

Khukhunaishvili, the orchestra has developed a reputation for its precision, versatility, and expressive playing. Khukhunaishvili, an acclaimed conductor, has led numerous orchestras both in Georgia and internationally, bringing a nuanced understanding of classical and contemporary repertoires to his performances. His leadership at the concert was evident in the orchestra's cohesive sound and their sensitive accompaniment of the soloists.

The IPM Festival, founded by renowned pianist and educator Pascal Nemirovsky, has carved a significant niche in the cultural landscape of Tbilisi. With a mission to nurture and promote young pianistic talent, the festival brings together promising pianists from around the world, providing them with masterclasses, performance opportunities, and the chance to compete in an international forum. The concert at Tbilisi Conservatoire's Grand Hall was more than just a showcase of young talent; it was a celebration of the enduring power of classical music to inspire and uplift.



Zhiqian Cen. Photo by the author



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I am Georgian and therefore I am European

Zurab Zhvania, Council of Europe, 1999

