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A destroyed Russian tank outside Sudya. Photo by Yan Dobronosov for AFP/Getty Images

FOCUS ON THE KURSK OFFENSIVE

Emil Kastehelmi, OSINT analyst and military expert, discusses the Kursk Offensive, now and looking ahead

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Occupation Forces Again Illegally Detain Georgian Citizens

BY TEAM GT

Representatives of the occupation regime illegally detained a Georgian citizen in the vicinity of occupied Akhgori this week.

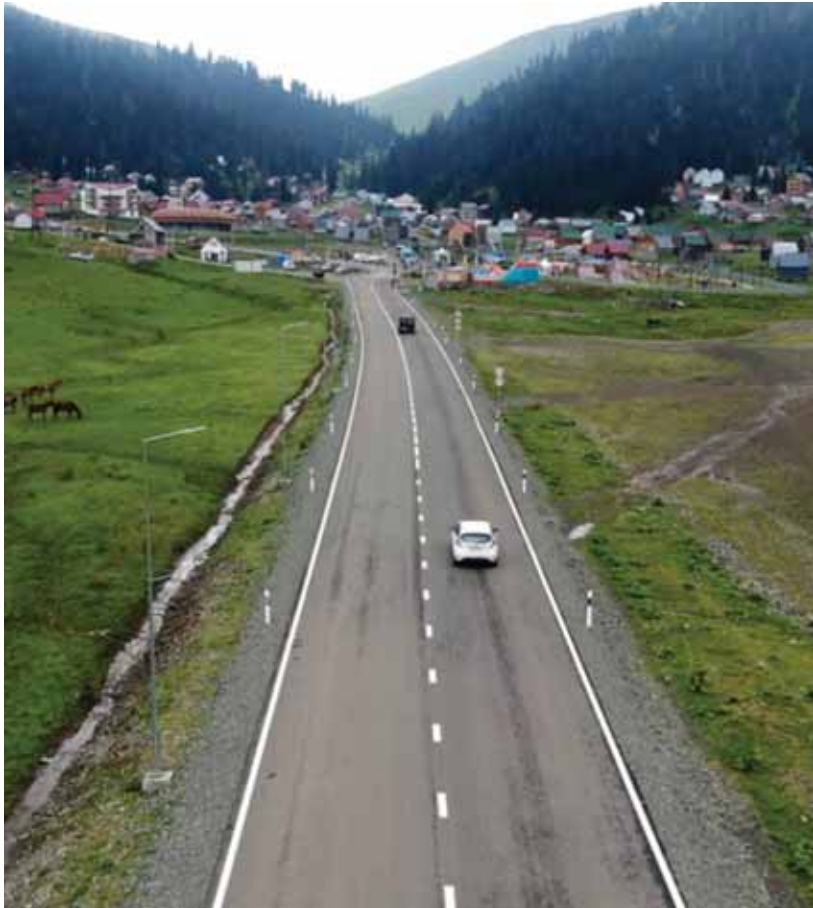
The State Security Service said that upon receiving information about the incident, they activated the "hot line" operated by the European Union Monitoring Mission.

"Information about another fact of illegal detention was immediately reported to the co-chairs of international discussions in Geneva and international partners. All available mechanisms have been activated to have the illegally detained Georgian citizen released in the shortest possible time," reads the information.

On Wednesday, occupation forces also unlawfully detained two Georgian citizens in Otabaia village in the occupied Gali region.

"The occupation forces bear full responsibility for the destructive actions carried out in the occupied regions of Georgia and along the Administrative Boundary Line (ABL)," the SSG said.





The road to Bakhmaro

Roads Department Completes Reconstruction of 18km Road to Bakhmaro Resort

BY TEAM GT

The Roads Department of the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure announced the reconstruction of the 18-kilometer-long road leading to Bakhmaro Resort in the Chokhatauri municipality of the western

Guria region has been completed. The project comprised the reconstruction of asphalt-concrete road cover, installation of traffic signs, and the arrangement of other infrastructure. "The movement of vehicles is now safer and more comfortable, and travel time has been reduced. Reconstruction works were financed with GEL 19.2 million from the state budget," the Roads Department said.

Wizz Air's 6,000,000th Passenger Awarded

BY MARIAM MTIVLISHVILI

On Wednesday, the Director General of United Airports of Georgia, Irakli Karkashadze, celebrated Wizz Air's 6,000,000th passen-

ger by honoring student Anna Machavariani with a symbolic gift. Machavariani received a bronze mock-up of Kutaisi International Airport along with a €200 voucher. Karkashadze highlighted that Wizz Air has maintained its leadership in the Georgian aviation market since 2018 and expects this trend to continue into 2024.



Irakli Karkashadze awards Anna Machavariani

Forbes: The Future is in Batumi



A northern-facing view of Batumi

BY MARIAM MTIVLISHVILI

Forbes has highlighted Batumi's burgeoning tourism sector in a new article, noting the city's diverse tourism offerings, advancing infrastructure, and

investment-friendly environment. Titled "The future is in Batumi. The Georgian city is becoming the business center of the region," the piece emphasizes how Batumi is evolving into a major regional business hub, showcasing its potential for growth in real estate and economic opportunities. "The interest of investors is not sur-

prising, considering that Georgia, as a country with a European path, has one of the most liberal tax systems in the world. In addition, the Batumi Free Economic Zone provides an opportunity for tax benefits and simplified administrative procedures, attracting entrepreneurs from various fields," the article reads.

New Road to Connect the 3 South Caucasus Countries



The highway will connect the South Caucasus. Source: Agenda.ge

BY TEAM GT

This week, the Roads Department of Georgia announced an international tender for the construction of new roads that will connect Georgia with Armenia and Azerbaijan. This project, to be financed through a €250 million loan from the European

Investment Bank (EIB), involves the construction of key road sections as part of the East-West and South-North international corridors. The project includes the Rustavi-Red Bridge road section extending to the Azerbaijan border and the Algeti-Sadakhlo road leading to the Armenia border. It will involve building 61.3 km of a four-lane concrete highway equipped with an external lighting system, 26 bridges, and 11 traffic junctions, all

designed to meet international road safety standards. The construction has been divided into four lots, with two tenders announced so far. Work is set to begin in 2025 and is expected to be completed within 30 months. This effort will be co-financed by the EIB and the Government of Georgia. The World Bank has supported the design phase of the road sections, which was carried out by a Dutch company.

Ukraine Latest: Kursk Incursion Continues; Ukraine Captures 92 Settlements

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

Ukraine's attack on the Savasleyka airbase in Russia's Nizhny Novgorod Oblast on Aug. 16 destroyed three Russian planes and damaged around five others, a military intelligence source told the Kyiv Independent on Aug. 21. Russian warplanes based at the Savasleyka airfield include MiG-31K aircraft, a carrier of Kinzhal ballistic missiles that Russia uses to attack Ukraine.

The source told the edition that the kamikaze drones operated by Ukraine's military intelligence (HUR) destroyed a Russian MiG-31K/I and two Il-76 aircraft, and damaged about five aircraft, possibly including one more MiG-31K/I.

The previous strike on the Savasleyka airbase, carried out by HUR on Aug. 13, hit a Russian fuel and lubricants warehouse and damaged a MiG-31K/I plane, the source told the Kyiv Independent.

Explosions were also reported at the Borisoglebsk and Baltimore airbases in Voronezh Oblast overnight on Aug. 14. Ukraine's General Staff confirmed the attack, saying that Su-34 fighter-bombers, Su-35 fighters, and other aircraft were based on the three airfields.

Eleven MiG-31K/I aircraft, an Il-76, five Mi-8 and Mi-24 helicopters were stationed at the Savasleyka at the time of the strike, the source said, citing the agency's satellite images.

Ukraine's Commander-in-Chief, Oleksandr Syrskyi, said that Kyiv had advanced between 28-35 kilometers into Russia's Kursk Oblast as the unprecedented incursion entered its third week. According to Syrskyi, Ukraine has captured 1,263 square kilometers of Russian territory and 93 settlements.

RUSSIA HAS DROPPED 27 GUIDED BOMBS ON KURSK OBLAST, UKRAINE'S MILITARY CLAIMS

Russian aircraft have dropped 27 guided aerial bombs on settlements in embattled Kursk Oblast, Ukraine's General Staff said in its latest update on Aug. 21.

President Volodymyr Zelensky said Moscow launched a total of 750 guided aerial bombs on Ukrainian cities and villages last week.

Guided aerial bombs, while having a shorter range than missiles, are cheaper to produce and are launched from aircraft within Russian territory or Russian-occupied territories, beyond the reach of the Ukrainian air defense.

Russia also continues shelling border settlements in Ukraine's Sumy Oblast, which borders Russia's Kursk Oblast, including the villages of Porozok and Poznia. Ukrainian authorities are planning to evacuate a total of 45,000 residents from the region amid intensified Russian attacks.

Air Force Commander Mykola Oleshchuk published a video on Aug. 21 purporting to show Ukrainian pilots' attacks on Russian troops who are "actively occupying civilian facilities" in Kursk Oblast.

"We see everything, we know everything. Our precision bombs will get you everywhere," Oleshchuk said.

Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said on Aug. 14 that Ukraine's military is creating a "security zone" on Russian territory to protect Ukrainian border areas. Vereshchuk said that Ukraine would be conducting humanitarian operations in the area, including creating safe corridors for civilians to evacuate — both toward Ukraine and to other parts of Russia.

International humanitarian organizations will also be allowed to enter the area to support the civilian population

and monitor the situation, she added.

RUSSIA PLANS TO RESPOND TO UKRAINE'S KURSK OBLAST INCURSION, MILITARY INTELLIGENCE SAYS

Russia is planning to respond to Ukraine's operation in Kursk Oblast, Vadym Skibitsky, the deputy head of Ukraine's military intelligence agency, said during an event in Kyiv on Aug. 21, Lb.ua media outlet reported.

"The operation is ongoing. Russia is planning a response. There are plans, we know about them. Our government and military leadership know about them so they can continue it (the operation) and disrupt the (Russian) plans," Skibitsky said.

Skibitsky said Kyiv's incursion into Kursk Oblast will "change a lot" in the world's attitude towards Ukraine.

President Zelensky said that Ukraine would not have needed to launch the incursion into Kursk Oblast if partners had allowed Kyiv to use Western-supplied long-range weapons against targets on Russian soil.

Ukraine did not disclose preparations for an operation to the country's allies because the world might consider it crossing Russia's "strictest of all red lines," he said.

Kyiv said that rather than capturing Russian territory, the incursion aims to protect Ukrainian lives by preventing cross-border attacks and diverting Russian reinforcements.

KREMLIN TRYING TO CONVINCING PUBLIC THAT UKRAINIAN TROOPS ON RUSSIAN SOIL IS THE 'NEW NORMAL,' MEDUZA REPORTS

The Kremlin is using state media and propaganda to convince the Russian public that Ukrainian troops on its soil are the "new normal" as it comes to terms



Photo by Roman Pilipey / AFP via Getty Images

with the idea it may not be able to push Kyiv's forces out in the immediate future, Meduza reported on Aug. 21.

Citing sources close to the government, the outlet says three narrative lines have been drawn up and are being pushed out — an acknowledgment that Ukraine did indeed cross the border into Kursk Oblast, that they will inevitably be defeated, but that this will take time and the Russian public needs to be patient.

Two sources close to the Russian presidential administration said that inside the Kremlin, the initial shock at the incursion has now passed, and people have since "gotten used to it."

The Kremlin expects a "quite optimistic" scenario of several months of fighting to regain the territory, and efforts now are aimed at placating the Russian population and getting them used to this timeline.

BOTH UKRAINE AND RUSSIA UNABLE TO LAUNCH MAJOR OFFENSIVES, PENTAGON REPORT SAYS

Ukraine and Russia both lack the means to mount major offensives, the US Defense Intelligence Agency said in a quarterly report covering the three-month period ending June 30, quoted by Bloomberg on Aug. 21.

Suggesting the war is headed for a stalemate, the report says that despite

the stalled US aid package passed earlier this year, Ukraine is only capable of defensive operations.

In turn, Russia does not have the resources to "threaten a deeper advance into Ukrainian-held territory, such as Kharkiv city," the report claims.

Following the end of the period covered by the report, Ukraine launched its surprise incursion into Russia's Kursk Oblast.

The report echoes sentiments aired by US officials in public.

Mark Milley, the former Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, said on June 21 that negotiations are needed to stop Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, but Russian President Vladimir Putin "cannot be trusted."

In a talk at Princeton University, Milley said that, from a military perspective, the war was now at a stalemate, with Russia unable to achieve its original goals.

"It is unlikely that anyone will be able to achieve a political solution through military means," he said in the comments reported by Voice of America.

"Therefore, both sides should recognize this and look for an alternative method to solve their political problem, and that would be a negotiation."

Source: The Kyiv Independent

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Emil Kastehelmi on the Kursk Offensive Now and Looking Ahead

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

Emil Kastehelmi, OSINT analyst and military expert at BlackBird Group, an OSINT group based in Finland, sat down with Radio Free Europe/RFL's Georgian Service to look at the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the Ukrainian army's latest offensive.

"The Kursk offensive is most likely the 'Ukraine summer offensive of 2024' - it's not just a border incursion anymore. If we look at the gained square kilometers, it's been a success," Kastehelmi tells us. "It has succeeded better than last year's summer offensive, and it's the biggest offensive on Russian soil since World War II. It's also historically a very significant event.

"But then when we look at what has actually materialized there, Ukraine has got a lot of square kilometers, but mainly consisting of small Russian border villages in the countryside. They got the town of Sudja, but that's only of around a five to six thousand population, so it's a really small town. And movement has slowed. Ukraine is still making some progress, getting a village here or there, but there's no rapid expansion of the area of control anymore. So it's still not necessarily the best case scenario for Ukraine. They likely wanted to gain even more in those early days, but the Russians managed to scramble their defenses so they could defend Korenevo and block some of the important roads."

HOW MUCH OF A STRATEGIC VALUE DOES THIS OFFENSIVE HAVE, MILITARILY AND GEOPOLITICALLY?

Geopolitically, a lot - all wars are fought on the land, but nowadays they are also fought in the information space. And in the information space, this has been like a nuclear bomb, shifting the attention from Ukrainian problems to Ukrainian achievements. It has also shown the world that Russia, even though it has the upper hand in Ukraine, still suffers from problems which will be hard to answer in full anytime soon, be it securing their own borders with enough manpower, or the lack of capabilities in their military intelligence - the intelligence side couldn't provide an early warning, or maybe they did, but the leadership didn't react. It wouldn't have been the first time in military history that even though the intelligence side is working, the leadership is not.

Going back to the strategic points - it may convince Ukraine's allies that Ukraine is still capable, and it most definitely proves to Ukrainian citizens that Ukraine is capable of offensive



In the information space, this has been like a nuclear bomb. It has really shifted attention from Ukrainian problems to Ukrainian achievements

actions. But I doubt that any Western country will be so impressed they agree to send a thousand more tanks. That's not going to happen.

On the ground, there is the difficult point that there is really not much at the strategic level to accomplish in the Kursk region. You have operational opportunities where there have been good achievements, but when we look at the big picture, the land that Ukraine has taken in Kursk, at some point Russians will be able to stabilize it. And it hasn't really changed the bigger picture of the war. It's like a secondary area almost, because the main issues for Ukraine are still present in the east. Russia is still able to continue its offensive, at least in the main focus points in the east, especially in the directions of Pokrovsk and Toretsk.

WE'VE SEEN CRITICISM LEVIED AGAINST UKRAINE THAT, BY EMBARKING ON THIS OPERATION, THEY ACTUALLY WEAKENED THE FRONT LINE IN THE EAST.

We at Blackbird Group have been looking at the unit movements, and, at the moment, it seems that at least some elements that have been fighting on the eastern front may have been transferred to Kursk. Ukraine is putting a lot of resources into the Kursk offensive. And, of course, one of the main problems of the offensive is that Ukraine didn't stop the Russian advance before starting the Kursk operation.

As we have seen in Kursk, Ukraine still has strategic reserves, but it decided not to use them in the east to stabilize the situation, and instead to go to Kursk. It's understandable that the soldiers on the ground, and analysts, criticize it, because Russia has been making relatively large gains [in the east]; there have been quicker-than-usual advances in the Pokrovsk direction. And Pokrovsk, Toretsk, they have a larger meaning because they are the logistical hubs, the largest cities in that area. So after those, maybe Russia can push forward. For example, will Russia want to go to the Dnipro Oblast after the fall, after the fight for Kursk? There's a multitude of problematic scenarios. It's understandable that, for political reasons, Ukraine really doesn't want Russia to advance into new oblasts, because you never know, maybe they'll get the idea that this is Russian soil too, as they have proclaimed in other oblasts.

SOME SAY KYIV IS TRYING TO CREATE A BUFFER ZONE, OTHERS THAT THEY ARE USING THIS KURSK OFFENSIVE AS A DISTRACTION FOR RUSSIA, THEN PLAN TO ATTACK ELSEWHERE. LET'S DISCUSS BOTH SCENARIOS.

The buffer zone idea is understandable. Ukraine has been worried about the border villages [near Sumy]. So, by moving the area of control to the Russian side, they will of course also move at least some of the fighting to the Russian side, and thus protect Ukraine's own infrastructure and villages.

In the current situation, it may not be worth it, though. More frontline has been created, about 70 to 90 kilometers of new frontline that Ukraine has to control, and it will eat up more Ukrainian resources, more brigades. There's always a trade-off in order to protect your own. And we have to remember that this offensive into Kursk, even though it has been operationally successful in some areas, it hasn't been cheap for Ukraine, and it has also taken casualties, lost equipment, and it will continue to do so. Russians are most likely taking more casualties, but then they have the luxury to

SO, THE DISTRACTION SCENARIO COULD SEE RUSSIA



Emil Kastehelmi

MOVING TROOPS TO GET BACK THE TERRITORY AND THUS ALLEVIATING PRESSURE ON THE EAST, OR COULD SEE RUSSIA PREOCCUPIED IN KURSK AND UKRAINE LAUNCHING ANOTHER OFFENSIVE ELSEWHERE.

At the moment, it seems that Russia has been forced to pull reserves to the Kursk area, but Russia should have enough troops to at least continue their main efforts, especially in Donetsk, and in parallel control the situation in Kursk. One possible scenario could be that the Russians simply spend just enough manpower to stop Ukraine in Kursk and freeze the situation. They could decide that it's not really worth beginning bigger counterattacks in the area and to leave Kursk as it is and focus on the east, where Russian political goals lie at the moment. It has been a difficult area for them to advance into, and now they are making gains there it would be surprising if they gave that up in order to start counterattacks in the Kursk countryside.

SO SUDJA IS NOT WORTH THE MASS?

Right. Of course, it's a problem for the Russian government, but even if Ukraine occupies a certain part of Kursk, when you look at all of Russia, it's still a small part. So the Russians can be like, "ok, we can sustain this, and let's just continue full steam ahead in Ukraine." And, of course, Ukraine has committed a lot of forces to Kursk, and it's beginning to be a pretty expensive and heavy distraction operation. Ukraine still has reserves, tank brigades for example, but it's really difficult to say if those can be bunched up into a group that has enough force to effectively take on the Russians in other areas. For example, in the Zaporizhzhya area, there are the same problems. The same goes for Melitopol and Berdyansk - a lot of Russian fortifications. They didn't really succeed last year, and I doubt it would succeed now, especially when Ukraine has used a lot of its force in Kursk. So, it may be a distraction, but at the moment I think it's less likely that

they will begin another large-scale operation somewhere else. I wouldn't say it's impossible, but I find it unlikely.

JUST HOW LONG CAN UKRAINE SUSTAIN THIS, PLAYING ON TWO FRONTS?

It depends what Ukraine has decided. If it has decided it will give up square kilometers in Donetsk and exchange them for land in Russia, then this can go on for some time. It's not like the Russians are making any great breakthroughs. They are accelerating their pace of advancement, but it's not at absolutely each level.

Ukraine is still a large country. And it most likely hasn't had so many casualties that battalions would lose their combat capabilities. The attrition levels are still most likely manageable. So, Ukraine can still continue its offensive in Kursk for some time.

A WIDELY DISCUSSED ASPECT HAS BEEN THAT UKRAINE CAN USE THIS OFFENSIVE AND TERRITORY IT GAINED IN THE UPCOMING NEGOTIATIONS AS LEVERAGE. HOW POTENT A BARGAINING CHIP WOULD THAT TERRITORY BE?

It depends how long they plan to continue the operation, but as a general rule, I would maybe compare the Ukrainian control in Kursk for what Russia controls in Kharkiv. The sizes of the areas are comparable, but it's clear that even if the Ukrainians expand their control, even if they doubled the size, it would still be really difficult to try to use that as a bargaining chip, for example, for larger Ukrainian cities that have fallen during the war. It's extremely unlikely that by exchanging Kursk, they would then get, for example, a corridor to the Azov Sea.

POLITICALLY, HOW HUMILIATING WOULD IT BE FOR RUSSIA TO LEAVE THIS TERRITORY IN UKRAINIAN HANDS EVEN UNTIL NEGOTIATIONS? WHAT'S THE COST?

If they leave it in Ukrainian hands until



We shouldn't overestimate the humiliation factor - The Kremlin... may prioritize success in Ukraine over the political nuisance of Kursk

the negotiations, we shouldn't overestimate the humiliation factor. It is, of course, humiliating, but most likely it wouldn't really affect the power dynamics that much. The Kremlin will not fall because Ukraine has these areas, and I think that politically they may prioritize success in Ukraine over the political nuisance of Kursk. Of course, some civilians will be angry, there'll be civilians in Russia who say, "how can a foreign power continue invading Mother Russia?" But then again, when has the Kremlin really cared about the naggings of ordinary civilians? It's a dictatorship, it doesn't have to.

WHERE ARE THE RED LINES FOR RUSSIA? THIS WAS SUPPOSED TO BE ONE OF THE BIGGEST, AND IT APPEARS IT'S NOT AS RED AS PREVIOUSLY THOUGHT.

That's very true. The discussion of the red lines has been really interesting, because they have been continuously tested and, right now, there are no hard red lines to be seen that might trigger Russia to do something on another level - Western tanks were the red line, Western fighter jets were the red line, invading Russia with a multi-brigade operation was apparently a red line. So it seems that Russia is making empty threat after empty threat.

IF YOU'RE SITTING IN THE WEST, IF YOUR COUNTRY SUPPORTS UKRAINE, WHAT CONCLUSIONS DO YOU DRAW SEEING RUSSIA BEING INVADDED AND STRUGGLING TO MOUNT AN EFFECTIVE COMEBACK?

It's interesting that this is something that Ukraine decided to do. It surprised Western allies at a high level, and it shows that Ukraine is capable of surprises and that it is thinking outside the conventional frames of operations. It may not always be a logical or good thing - it is still to be seen if it ends badly for Ukraine, because there are risks. But at least it shows that Ukraine is ready to take action, it's ready to do what it wants, and it can also outplay Russia, at least locally, which is an important thing to show.

I've been pretty critical and doom-saying, that's also partly because I'm Finnish and we are said to be unable to find joy in anything. But there are so many dimensions in this situation.

IT'S BETTER TO ERR ON THE SIDE OF REALISM.

Yeah, it is. The operation is still ongoing. There might be more surprises ahead. There can be new directions, there can be new developments. And there's still the possibility that Russia will switch even more heavily to Kursk for political reasons if Ukraine is able to bait them by taking even more land, because we know that the Russians may not always be logical either. So there's still a lot of possibilities that could develop.



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PM: We Will Ensure that GD Wins Parliamentary Elections With a Constitutional Majority

BY ANA DUMBADZE

We will do everything necessary to ensure Georgian Dream will win the October 26 parliamentary elections with a constitutional majority – our task is to keep the opposition within the limits of approximately 30 mandates, and I think there is a very good chance of this, Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze said. He noted that, according to Gorbi research, Georgian Dream lacks just 6 mandates for a constitutional majority and said that, before the elections, “this deficit can easily be eliminated”. “The opposition does not recognize the Gorbi study, and yet they unite one after the other in order to somehow try to overcome the 5% barrier. If they think

they’ll have no problem crossing the barrier, why are they uniting so? They know what the real picture is. We also have our studies and the picture is similar. Let’s take the Gorbi study – I recalculated and we get 107 mandates, the opposition gets 43 mandates, which means that we are currently only 6 mandates short of the constitutional majority. I think this shortcoming can be easily eliminated. We are free to get a constitutional majority. For this, it is important to be mobilized as much as possible and to conduct the right campaign. Doing so will easily see us obtaining 113 mandates in parliament. The Gorbi data tells us this; data provided by our company tells us this,” Kobakhidze said. GORBI published the results of a public opinion survey on the order of pro-government Imedi TV company last Thursday which saw Georgian Dream forecast to get 59.3% of the votes.

Kaladze Criticizes President Zurabishvili's Transparency Law Lawsuit



President Zurabishvili. Source: IG

BY TEAM GT

Kakha Kaladze, Mayor of Tbilisi and Secretary General of the ruling Georgian Dream party, condemned President Salome Zourabichvili’s decision to file a lawsuit against the transparency law on foreign influence, calling it “illogical.” Kaladze highlighted the contradiction, noting that Zurabishvili had previously criticized the Constitutional Court, which ruled last year that she had

violated the constitution with her unauthorized visits to Europe. “When President Zurabishvili violated the constitution, she made statements against the Constitutional Court. Now, filing a lawsuit with the same institution is illogical,” Kaladze claimed. He further suggested that the issues surrounding the transparency law were not solely domestic but also influenced by external forces. “We are told that transparency is detrimental, and that transparency itself is somehow un-European. Transparency is essential, and we are committed to

advancing our country and its European integration,” Kaladze asserted. Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze also weighed in on the matter, emphasizing on Monday that there was “no alternative to transparency.” He criticized efforts to undermine transparency, describing it as unacceptable to attempt to stage and fund a revolution in the country. “The controversial law in question mandates that non-commercial legal entities and media outlets must register as “pursuing the interests of a foreign power” if they receive more than 20 percent of their funding from abroad.

The Disparity of the Globalized World

BLOG BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

Whether we want to admit it or not, the world is already globalized, and reversing the process is hardly conceivable, although the approach to globalization is quite versatile in today’s world – some of us think it is good and others are convinced that there is something wrong with the entire idea. In determining whether the Earth is a globalized place or not, various attitudes and evaluations pop up. For instance, if we look at the way we are clad, the world might seem utterly globalized: your shirt might be made in Turkey, jacket in Italy, shoes in Spain, trousers in Korea, socks in China, tie in France, pants in Bangladesh and singlet in Nigeria. But if we are in Russia by any chance, as I am right now, the globe might sooner appear dissimilar than homogeneous. 99.99% of the folks we behold in the streets of Russian towns are of Caucasian race, which tells us how far away Russia is from the fact of the world’s globalization, but all those Russian pedestrians, hurrying somewhere, are dressed in jeans and T-shirts, sneakers and slippers, many of them, both men and women, in shorts; girls in pervasive miniskirts or leggings, most females in scanty or see-through dresses, which says that even Russia appears flagrantly globalized.

But go to any of the myriad Orthodox churches that are scattered around, literally in their hundreds along the interminable Volga River, not to mention in Moscow and St. Petersburg, and one immediately knows for sure that Russia has nothing to do with the globalized world. Incidentally, speaking about the church life here, it seems as aged, stern and puritanic as it has been for centuries in the demanding Russian Christian Orthodox realm. Strolling along the old streets of Moscow, inevitably passing by the truly impressive, but eternally stigmatized, Kremlin walls and towers, one can’t help thinking that nothing will ever change here and become akin to the rest of the world, although globalization seems to be at a stone’s throw from that eye-sore called the Lenin Mausoleum. One doesn’t have to enter it (although curiosity might eat one alive) to believe that the creator of the monstrous Soviet Empire and the nonsensical communist dystopia is no longer operational, but it might shatter the nervous system of any passerby thinking that Lenin now lays there in state only for the world to witness that he might someday rise again. Having left the weathered and inexplicably intimidating Red Square to find myself among the newly built bunch of Moscow skyscrapers, I wouldn’t even know that I am not in Manhattan if I were not reminded that it is the Russian capital that is trying to impress me, home to 12,719 high-rise buildings, 22 of which



The author in Moscow. Photo by Nina Vinci.



stand higher than 183 meters. Impressive, isn’t it? And this is a city view which speaks volumes about Russia’s factual modernization and incipient globalization. The new Moscow doesn’t have anything to do with the old Stalinist-era Seven Sisters, designed almost a century ago. The sight of those aged soviet architectural giants, topped with those inevitable steeples, make me think that Russia is still there in the epoch of a socialist daydream, but the new world of those eye-catching western-style skyscrapers definitely confirm my suspicion that Russia is changing; making massive strides towards the pinnacles of what we are used to calling the globalized Earth. When you are physically here, nothing leads you to contemplate the military conflicts happening in the contemporary world, unless you catch momentary sight of them on a TV screen. This is the only discrepancy between the real world, that suggests to a visitor this is a nice place, and the one where drones fly above and the streets are scattered with our fallen fellow humans, left waiting to be interred by the remaining Good Samaritans. Nobody knows what will happen next, even in the near future, but for now, there is peace here in the big old and new Moscow, even while, somewhere not very far from here, somebody is likely dying as I write this. And the globalized world, which is yet ominously disparate and dumb, can’t help it. Isn’t it funny? Bitterly funny?



Maqro Development's Evolution from Visionary Beginnings to Strategic Expansion



Maqro Construction's "Green Budapest" project marked a significant milestone in the company's journey. Launched with the ambition to redefine urban living, Green Budapest featured a host of amenities designed to enhance residents' quality of life. "Our vision for "Green Budapest" was to create a residential environment that not only meets but exceeds modern living standards," Deputy General Director Oguz Kaan Karaer explains. "We wanted to integrate green spaces, fitness facilities, and recreational areas to foster a vibrant community."

The project included playgrounds, a basketball court, and a running track—features that were rare at the time in Tbilisi. By waiving maintenance fees for the first year, Maqro Construction aimed to offer residents a risk-free introduction to these amenities. "We believed that by eliminating initial costs, we could showcase the true value of our community and build trust with our residents," Karaer adds.

To enhance its focus on people-centered development, Maqro Group has strate-

gically separated Maqro Development from Maqro Construction. This separation allows Maqro Development to concentrate exclusively on delivering outstanding residential environments, adhering to the high standards and strategic vision originally set by Maqro Construction. Meanwhile, Maqro Construction is directing its efforts towards essential infrastructure projects, such as two major road construction ventures and the development of a new ice skating center. "These infrastructure projects are pivotal in enhancing urban connectivity and providing valuable recreational facilities," explains Karaer. "By focusing on these areas, Maqro Construction supports broader urban growth and contributes significantly to community development." This approach ensures that while Maqro Development remains dedicated to its core mission, Maqro Construction continues to advance infrastructure that complements and supports the company's overall vision.

ADVANCEMENTS AND INNOVATIONS

Building on the resounding success of Green Budapest, Maqro Construction

has elevated its vision of luxury urban living with the launch of Green Diamond. Introduced in 2014, Green Budapest was a groundbreaking project for Tbilisi, setting a new standard with its European-style residential complex featuring 350 fully fitted apartments. The project was notable for its emphasis on minimizing post-move-in disruptions, offering complete kitchens and bathrooms, advanced technical amenities, and soundproofing to ensure a comfortable living experience from day one. The development also embraced green living, a basketball court, and playgrounds, enhancing the residents' quality of life.

Building on the lessons learned from Green Budapest, Maqro Construction's Green Diamond project, launched in 2016, represents a significant leap forward. Encompassing approximately 70,000 square meters and 1688 apartments, Green Diamond integrates advanced features and upscale materials to elevate the residential experience. Located in Dighomi, just 8 km from Tbilisi's city center, Green Diamond combines luxury with green living, featuring extensive amenities like swimming pools, sports grounds, and educational facilities,



ties, setting a new benchmark for modern residential living in the city.

In addition to these design improvements, the partnership with Mitsubishi for high-quality lift systems in Green Diamond stands as a testament to Maqro Construction's dedication to excellence. "Our collaboration with Mitsubishi was a strategic decision to incorporate top-notch technology and ensure the utmost reliability in our developments," Karaer elaborates. "By integrating their advanced lift systems, we are able to provide a smooth and efficient experience for residents, reflecting our commitment to incorporating the best possible solutions into our projects."

Moreover, Maqro Development remains steadfast in their initial promise to deliver exceptional living environments. As part of their ongoing commitment, the company will continue to offer renovations and updates to their properties, ensuring that residents benefit from the latest in design and technology. "We are dedicated to continuously improving our developments and providing our residents with the highest level of comfort and modern amenities," Karaer emphasizes. "Our promise to deliver ongoing renovations and enhancements is a core part of our mission, and we are committed to maintaining that standard across all our projects."

This approach not only highlights Maqro Development's focus on technological innovation and quality but also underscores their dedication to long-term resident satisfaction. By staying true to their initial promises and continually investing in property upgrades, Maqro Development aims to redefine luxury living and uphold their legacy of excellence in the real estate market.

DYNAMIC PRICING

Maqro Development's dynamic pricing strategy has played a crucial role in the success of their residential projects, offering significant benefits to early investors. For instance, with Green Budapest, initial prices began at \$700 per square meter and increased to \$1,500 during pre-sales. Today, these units are valued between \$2,500 and \$2,750 per square meter on the secondary market. Similarly, Green Diamond started at \$700, rose to \$1,350, and now averages around \$1,500.

"Our dynamic pricing model has proven successful in the past," notes Karaer. "By providing early-bird pricing and gradually adjusting it, we attract early investors who become almost like partners

in the project." This approach not only rewards early adopters with substantial returns but also aligns their interests with the company's growth.

FUTURE PROJECTS

Maqro Development is advancing its ambitious vision with two major projects in Georgia: one in Tbilisi and another in Batumi. The Tbilisi development, set in the Samgori district near the Ministry of Internal Affairs, will be the largest of its kind in the city, featuring 4,000 apartments. This project will also include a nursery school children's pool, indoor fitness center, emphasizing the company's commitment to community and family-friendly amenities. Karaer, a key figure in the project, highlights the improvements: "With new Tbilisi project, we took a deep dive into the feedback we received from our earlier projects and implemented several significant upgrades," including larger, aluminum windows for better natural light and expansive views and sliding doors".

Meanwhile, the Batumi project, which continues the green concept championed in Tbilisi, aims to introduce similar sustainable and eco-friendly features. "Our goal with the Batumi project is to provide a comprehensive residential experience that caters to both families and individuals," Karaer explains. This development will stand out by emphasizing greenery and nature, in contrast to many other major Batumi projects that focus exclusively on the seaside.

Additionally, as the company has a practice of offering pre-sales to reward its loyal customers, and Karaer elaborates on this approach: "We offer pre-sales exclusively to our loyal customers who have previously invested in our projects. These clients follow our developments closely and continue to do business with us because they know investing at the early stages ensures a guaranteed profit. As our projects' sale and rental prices increase significantly over time, early investment is highly advantageous. Until the end of 2024, pre-sales will be reserved solely for our existing customers, with official sales set to commence in 2025."

While the Tbilisi project showcases Maqro's dedication to integrating green living with urban convenience, the Batumi development will extend this vision by incorporating innovative environmental design and green spaces, reinforcing the company's holistic approach to sustainable urban development across both cities.



Do Not Go to Georgia Till You Read This

OP-ED BY HELENA BEDWELL

Think wine, think food, and you may well think of the great French viticultural areas, Burgundy, Bordeaux, or even Italy. Think skiing and you may think of Austria. Think ancient history and Greece comes to mind; mountain climbing and Everest. “Newcomer” Georgia features rarely in such lists, and yet, beyond the first, it could rightfully feature in all of the above and more.

Yes, it is true the US state of Georgia is no longer mistaken for this beautiful country at the crossroads of Western Asia and Eastern Europe. As the slogan says, “If you think of wine, think Georgia.” Georgia has often been described as “the cradle of wine in the world” by those who acknowledge its long history. And it’s fair, as the country can now trace its wine industry back to the early Neolithic period thanks to the discovery of wine-grape seeds in an amphora.

This small South Caucasus region, green and mountainous, has long been a surprise to new visitors, and those grape seeds aren’t the first time that Georgia has shifted the history of mankind. Georgia hit the headlines with the discovery of a 1.8-million-year-old cave-man named Zvezha, and his companion Mzia. The discovery of their bones upended the commonly told history of evolution, which has long been questioned and revised. It was enough to put Georgia at the center of the archaeological world.

Georgia is marketing itself as one of the oldest civilizations – with some justification. Tourists who visit may come for the specific reason of tasting the flavors of the natural wine. Georgia’s so-called Orange Wine has been gaining appeal because it complements the equally unique-tasting food produced locally.

The Silk Road nation of only 3.6 million people has been trying to restore its economy and its agricultural products, especially its wine markets. Its main trade partner Russia imposed an embargo in 2006 and then it fought a five-day war in 2008 over the breakaway Georgian region of South Ossetia. The government since then has spent a lot of resources and time on promoting the country, and the results have been astonishing, seeing tourism exceed expectations, a diversification in wine sales internationally, and



Chef Jamie Oliver in Georgia

advertising of the historical country clearly paying off.

When the then very eager to penetrate the Western world government said in 2011 that the country expected as many as three million visitors by the end of the year, 50% more than the previous year and the highest figure since 2003, it did not sound particularly believable. Then the prediction for 2015 went up to five million, and it happened. Tourists have flooded the country and, under the new leadership, which inherited an already smooth sailing tourism ship, much has been done, if not undone.

Statistics show that, in total, the country’s tourism administration spent over 10 million lari on advertising alone in 2023, while Q1 2024 brought \$807mln in revenue. In 2022, as many as 200 bloggers were sponsored to hashtag and post a status on Georgia. It is quite a number for the country, which still has problems of poverty, and whose many infrastructural projects are still highly dependent on foreign aid. I would not be so concerned about it if not for one detail which has been concerning me over the years.

The golden steps taken by the previous administration to spotlight unknown Georgian food, hospitality and popular landmarks have been somewhat marred by the curse of modern times: Influencers. Yes, with trendy hype, influencers can make everything cheap, and it rarely hits the target: only scrollers. Georgia certainly does not need further such promotion: The world has learned that its wine is ancient, its land is blessed, and khachapuri is a tasty, waist-expanding but unforgettable dish. Meanwhile,

Georgians are fleeing the country trying to find better work, and the country’s agricultural markets and production are showing the struggle.

Further, mass Russian immigration has proven to have backfired on the country after the government opened its gates wide to the war deserters and simply those who had had enough of Russia. Russians are smart. They quickly grasped the opportunities and began opening cafes and restaurants, as well as offices, thanks to the one-year stay loophole, thus pushing up the prices of housing, rent and commodities.

Fatigue is being felt in Georgia – shortages, no motivation to work, and tourist places that lack professionalism.

Let us elaborate on the conditions, such as bad infrastructure, practically no decent bathrooms, bad sanitary conditions in the medium and affordable-range hotels and roadside campsites, and the unbelievable catastrophic condition of the street animals. Some hikers are even told to equip themselves with dog deterrent devices, and there are no clear instructions about what to do when a tourist is bitten by a stray dog or finds a puppy in distress.

A traditional culinary feast and a celebration of music, friendship, food, and wine – it is every bit as epic as it sounds and looks. I remember personally inviting you, years ago, to the presentation of my first 2019 cookbook. When people visit Georgia, they rarely want to leave. This is a fact, and the tourism administration obsessively jumped on this opportunity and began years of budget spending on repetitive articles about

discovering something new (though it has already been discovered and historically proven). Even the wine museums have acknowledged it, and even the Museum of Natural History has changed its artefact exhibition to acknowledge that humans not only walked from Africa, but Homo erectus lived here in Georgia. Khachapuri and Pkhali are already in-demand dishes, and many Georgians and non-Georgians have opened restaurants abroad to prove it.

Then why waste money repeatedly promoting something people already know? I have tried to point this out to them, but I did not get a clear answer. In 2018, when I became a member of the Norwich Vegan and Vegetarian Annual Market, I was one of the first, if not the first representatives of my country, to present a table with well-known Georgian goodies such as Tkemali (plum sauce), walnut bajhe, a vegan Georgian starter platter, and Georgian cornbread. I was quite amazed at how welcome those dishes were. People are always looking for new flavors, so I jumped at this chance and asked my country’s tourism representatives to help me attend other markets too, as my capacities were not enough. After some negotiations with a friend who worked there, I got some brochures, a few souvenirs and year-old calendars. I never went back to them.

Then I published my first Georgian cookbook, then my vegetarian and vegan one, and my third one on gluten-free and lactose-free. After spending years marketing my books, I know that the secret to success is good contacts and that buyers need to know where they can get the

ingredients, how they can travel to Georgia, and whether there are any package tours, such as vegan tours. Is anything there gluten-free? Any allergy warnings?

There. Bingo. This is where the secret is. Where are the Georgian agricultural ministry and tourism industry to make sure that, after years of spending money on unnecessary articles, money is now spent on something which will bring tourism and food promotion back into shape?

My patience finally ran out when I saw the government had once again begun a new money-wasting campaign, seeing famous chefs-turned-influencers given contracts to campaign in Georgia. There is nothing wrong with it as such, but once again it is about this being a “newly discovered country.” This is how the famous Jamie Oliver begins: “Who has heard of the Georgian supra სუპრა?”

His video, which is made in conjunction with the tourism association, features Jamie walking around the polished streets of Tbilisi, its markets, and visiting a few villages. To be honest, it is all nicely scripted. Nothing wrong with that, apart from the fact the market he is walking around and presenting people as happy traders in is all set for demolition and those “happy traders” are soon to be evicted. Many expats have been reporting on it in their blogs, as has the local press, and some have started a campaign to protect the Dezerter’s Bazaar and its traders. No one told Jamie this, and the next chef or celebrity they employ will likely know nothing of it either. Jamie was simply driven around the country, and meetings were arranged with favored chefs and local pinpoints.

The Georgian supra is already renowned. What Georgia needs now is money spent inside the country on improving the infrastructure. Have you seen the poor conditions of the roadside eateries and their bathrooms? Have you seen the condition of the stray dogs and cats, how Georgians treat them? Have you seen the kids and older people begging, digging in the garbage bins?

My op-ed does not include the political and economic side of the damage the recently adopted laws have caused the country, but is rather about the human side of Georgia, the way it is portrayed abroad. Millions spent, zero empathy.

Khinkali and Khachapuri are not something unknown. It’s time to make, and promote Georgia as, a civilized country. Have you heard of anything I just said, dear Jamie and other Instagram influencers? Obviously not.

CULTURE

Up Close

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

From very early on in my decades-long exploration of photography, macro (close-up) work has been one of my great interests. But this, too, has its subdivisions of approach.

One can use a tripod, in windless conditions, and take many shots of the subject, changing only the point of focus incrementally for each shot. Then, with the wonders of computational photography, assemble all these into a “focus stacked” shot, in which only the areas of each frame which are in focus are selected (except for a blurred background if you desire). You end up with much more of the subject in focus than any single shot can offer. This is super for photographing insects (if they’re dead, so, not moving) or completely motionless other subjects.

You can also put the aperture on its smallest setting, in an attempt to maximize depth of field (amount in focus) in one shot; again, usually on a tripod as

this will slow down shutter speed and risk camera shake, unless you up the ISO (sensitivity to light).

Or you can do it the way I usually do. I try for a very NARROW area in focus, allowing shutter speed and ISO to be at their best for hand-held work with little grain. This is not only much easier than the other approaches above; it also allows for abstraction, dreaminess, fantasy, and direction of the viewer’s eye to only what is sharp in the frame. Plus, there is much to be said for out of focus elements such as spiderwebs refracting light, dewdrops, and much more.

Either in my own garden, or wherever I have found myself over the years, my minimal-focus approach to close-up photography has served me well and brought delight, starting with 35mm film (1978-2008) and then into digital (2008-present). Currently, I am observing the garden’s flowers here in Svaneti, in the low horizontal light of morning or evening which backlights the whole spread at once. I allow one flower out of a group, or even just one part of a flower, to get that focus. Usually, I have to do some cropping to remove un-



essary edge busyness which can distract the eye and lead it out of the frame, instead of its staying put.

Bees come and go, and I photograph their shadows against the flower petals for the first time ever, rather than the busy creatures themselves, as they gather pollen before returning to my neighbor’s many carefully maintained hives. This discovery shows me that there is always something new, which I have either never seen or simply never captured before. I even get a couple of shots of a butterfly feeding on the same flowers, though I’m at a loss to identify either flora or fauna in this case.

My technique sometimes feels lazy: no tripod, no sets of images to combine. But then I remind myself how freeing and



simply fun it is, and go back to it, guiltless. My sight has been altered.

Working with such small subjects (assuming you have the right lens to focus that close) also means that you can find interesting material almost anywhere. Have a garden? No, you live in an apartment? How about a single house plant? Not even that? Start off with fresh fruit or veggies that you have on hand. Or just go out for a walk, to the nearest park. Focus as close as you can, fix the focus there, then move the camera (or even your phone!) around and see what that close focus shows you as it comes into view. Keep the aperture wide open (assuming you have this much control). If you don’t have a way to manually adjust



these things, though, you’re missing out on a lot of simple creative joy. It’s not hard to fix, though: usually a free app for the phone will get you there.

Beauty surrounds us. Slow down, look close and it might just jump out and tickle you from a few inches away.

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 Etsner: www.facebook.com/hanmer.house.svaneti

A Dance between Fragility and Resilience: The Art of Chubika

BY IVAN NECHAEV

Nino Chubinishvili, known in the art world as Chubika, has always navigated the delicate line between the poetic and the political. Her latest exhibition, *What Would It Mean to Leave Tip-Toe Dancing? Maybe I Should Remain a Butterfly in the War?*, hosted by TBC Concept in collaboration with the David Kakabadze Foundation, presents a visual and emotional journey that invites viewers to contemplate the tension between beauty and conflict, fragility and strength. This exhibition, spanning two contrasting yet complementary floors, is not just an exploration of the artist's mind but a mirror to our own existential struggles.

FROM HAUTE COUTURE TO SCULPTURAL NARRATIVES: CHUBIKA'S EVOLUTION

Chubika's journey from costume design to contemporary art is essential to understanding the multi-layered nature of her work. Trained at the Tbilisi State Academy of Arts and later at the prestigious Institut Français de la Mode in Paris, Chubika's early career was marked by collaborations with fashion icons like Kenzo and Pierre Cardin. However, her artistic instincts always pushed her beyond the confines of fashion. In her hands, costumes became more than just garments; they were narratives—stories woven into fabric and texture, extending into the very soul of the characters they adorned.

This background in fashion is unmistakable in the sculptural installations on the first floor of the exhibition. The precision, the attention to detail, and the tactile nature of these pieces evoke the world of haute couture, yet they transcend it. Here, Chubika's sculptures are not static objects; they are imbued with a life of their own, capturing moments of intense emotion and history. Each sculpture is a question posed to the viewer, an invitation to delve deeper into the layers of meaning that Chubika has so meticulously crafted.

A FRAGMENTED TALE: THE HANDMADE BOOK TO ELENE

Ascending to the second floor, the tone of the exhibition shifts dramatically. Here, we are introduced to *To Elene*, a handmade book created by Chubika in 1998 and dedicated to her daughter. This book is not just a personal memento; it is a fundamental piece in Chubika's artistic legacy. Comprising a series of graphic sketches, the book tells a fragmented tale where the protagonists—Elene and her doll Ingrid—move through a world unbound by linear narrative. The sketches, drawn in an imaginary visual language, speak of things that words could never fully express, preserving truths that are pure, unfiltered, and free from interpretation.

In presenting this book, Chubika offers a window into the intimacy of motherhood, where the boundaries between artist and mother blur. The act of creating this book was an act of preservation—an attempt to capture and convey the inexpressible to her child. Yet, in its presentation to the public, it becomes a universal experience, a tale of love, memory, and the complexities of parenthood.

NAVIGATING THE SPACES OF WAR AND PEACE

The exhibition's title poses two poignant questions: *What Would It Mean to Leave Tip-Toe Dancing?* and *Maybe I Should Remain a Butterfly in the War?* These questions are more than mere thematic elements; they are existential inquiries that resonate deeply in today's world. The first question can be seen as a reflection on the artist's role in society—whether to remain in a state of delicate creation, removed from the harsh realities of the world, or to engage with these realities head-on. For Chubika, who has lived and worked in the liminal spaces between fashion and art, this question is particularly pertinent. Her work is a dance, not just of grace and beauty, but of negotiation—balancing the need for expression with the demands of a world in conflict.

The second question, *Maybe I Should Remain a Butterfly in the War?*, introduces a stark contrast. The butterfly, a



Photo by the author



symbol of ephemeral beauty and transformation, is juxtaposed with the violence and chaos of war. This image is both haunting and defiant, suggesting that beauty and fragility can be powerful forms of resistance. In a world where destruction seems inevitable, Chubika's butterfly does not flee, but remains,

wings outstretched, embodying the paradox of survival in the face of annihilation.

THE GHOSTS OF GOSLAB: MEMORY, IDENTITY, AND ART

To fully appreciate Chubika's work, one must consider her involvement with

Goslab, the informal multimedia art collective that emerged in Tbilisi during the turbulent 1990s. Goslab was more than just an artistic group; it was a response to the socio-political upheavals of post-Soviet Georgia. For Chubika, the collective was a crucible where ideas of memory, identity, and transformation were explored through radical experimentation.

The influence of Goslab is evident throughout the exhibition, particularly in the way Chubika engages with themes of memory and identity. *To Elene* can be seen as a continuation of Goslab's legacy—a deeply personal work that captures the universal experience of navigating a world in transition. The sculptures and installations on the first floor evoke the sense of dislocation and uncertainty that defined the post-Soviet experience, yet they also offer a space for reflection, for reconciling with the past and imagining the future.

THE ENDLESS DANCE OF INTERPRETATION

What Would It Mean to Leave Tip-Toe Dancing? Maybe I Should Remain a Butterfly in the War? is an exhibition that defies easy categorization. It is a work that demands engagement, that asks the viewer to grapple with the complex questions it poses. Chubika's art is not about providing answers but about opening up spaces for reflection and dialogue. In this sense, the exhibition is not just a collection of works but a living conversation between the artist, the viewer, and the world they both inhabit.

As we move through the spaces of the exhibition, from the sculptural narratives of the first floor to the intimate pages of *To Elene*, we are invited to consider our own positions in the dance of life. Do we remain on tiptoe, balancing delicately in a world of uncertainty? Or do we spread our wings and confront the chaos head-on, embracing the fragility and beauty of our existence in the midst of war? This is the power of Chubika's art—it is a dance that never ends, a dance that continues to evolve as we move through it, leaving us with more questions than answers, and a deep sense of the complexity of being.

A Name That "Is": The Eternal Presence of Irakli Sutidze

BY IVAN NECHAEV

The Georgian Museum of Fine Arts is currently hosting a retrospective exhibition, "IS 70," which marks what would have been the 70th birthday of Irakli Sutidze, a towering figure in Georgian visual arts. Curated by Ketevan Kordzakhia, this exhibition is more than a tribute; it is a profound exploration of Sutidze's legacy, a celebration of his enduring influence, and a thoughtful reconsideration of his work in the broader context of Georgian and global art history. Sutidze passed away on April 19, 2024, yet through this exhibition, his presence continues to resonate deeply, not just as a memory but as a living, breathing force in contemporary art.

A JOURNEY BEYOND THE CANVAS: THE CONCEPTUAL REBIRTH OF IRAKLI SUTIDZE

The title of the exhibition, "IS 70," is a clever play on Sutidze's initials and the verb "is." Here, the artist is transformed into a universal presence—an eternal "he" who transcends time and place. This conceptual framing invites visitors to engage with Sutidze not merely as an artist from the past, but as a figure whose



Photo by the author

relevance and influence continue to shape the present. The exhibition recontextualizes Sutidze's oeuvre, presenting it as a living, evolving narrative rather than a static collection of works.

TIMELESSNESS IN PAINT: SUTIDZE'S UNIQUE ARTISTIC VISION

Irakli Sutidze was a leading figure among the 1980s generation of Georgian artists, known for his poetic rejection of the immediate realities of Georgian life. Instead of focusing on the urban and social issues that preoccupied many of his contemporaries, Sutidze's work exists in a timeless, meditative space where the past, present, and future converge. His paintings, with their soft color palettes and exaggerated objects, are not bound by specific cultural or historical contexts; they are abstracted explorations of universal themes, offering view-



ers a chance to engage with the deeper, more existential questions of human existence.

LUMINOUS MASTERY: THE ART OF LIGHT AND LAYERING

One of the hallmarks of Sutidze's work is his mastery of oil painting, particularly his innovative use of translucent layers and color radiance. His paintings possess a unique luminosity, as if light itself emanates from the canvas. This technique is not just an aesthetic choice but a conceptual one, reflecting Sutidze's desire to diffuse the darkness of Georgian history, particularly the turbulent 1990s. His paintings are meditative escapes, inviting viewers into a world of sacred and mythological signs where time seems to stand still. This luminous quality is central to Sutidze's artistic language, making his work instantly recognizable and deeply resonant.

RETHINKING SYMBOLS: SUTIDZE'S DIALOGUES WITH THE PAST

Sutidze's work is characterized by a profound engagement with the symbols and heroes of world cultures. Unlike many of his peers, who were focused on the immediate socio-political landscape, Sutidze sought to connect his art with broader, more universal themes. His paintings often feature symbolic objects and figures that are abstracted and open-ended, allowing viewers to project their interpretations onto the work. This approach creates a dialogue between the artist, the work, and the viewer, making each encounter with Sutidze's art a deeply personal experience.

THE ARTIST'S WORLD: A TANGIBLE LEGACY

One of the most striking features of "IS 70" is the inclusion of Sutidze's personal belongings, his ark, saddles, letters, and photographs, alongside his paintings. These objects are not mere accessories; they are integral to the narrative of the exhibition, creating a *mise-en-scène* that brings the artist's world to life. By presenting these everyday items alongside his art, the exhibition offers a holistic portrait of Sutidze, emphasizing the inseparability of his life and work. This approach allows visitors to connect with the artist on a deeper level, experiencing not just his art but the environment that shaped it.

AN ENDURING INFLUENCE: SUTIDZE'S LEGACY IN CONTEMPORARY ART

As "IS 70" demonstrates, Irakli Sutidze's influence extends far beyond his individual works. His conceptual and universal approach to art-making has inspired a new generation of Georgian artists who continue to push the boundaries of visual art. Sutidze's ability to bridge the gap between the personal and the universal, the local and the global, has made him a pivotal figure in the history of Georgian art. His work, with its luminous quality and symbolic depth, continues to challenge and inspire, ensuring that his legacy will endure for years to come.

THE ETERNAL "HE"

The exhibition "IS 70" at the Georgian Museum of Fine Arts is not just a retrospective; it is a celebration of Irakli Sutidze's enduring presence in the world of art. Through the careful curation of his works and personal effects, the exhibition offers a deeply moving and thought-provoking exploration of Sutidze's life, work, and legacy. As visitors walk through the exhibition, they are not just witnessing the past, they are engaging with the living presence of an artist whose influence continues to resonate. In the end, Irakli Sutidze is, and will continue to be, a vital force in the evolution of Georgian art.

Mr. Giorgi Issakadze Talks about 2024 Night Serenades and Celebrating the Legacy of Liana Isakadze



CAN YOU GIVE US AN OVERVIEW OF THE DIVERSE LINEUP FOR THIS YEAR'S "NIGHT SERENADES" FESTIVAL AND THE UNIQUE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE ARTISTS INVOLVED?

This year's festival features an extraordinary collection of talent from around the world, each bringing their unique flair to the stage. We're thrilled to present a range of performances that span various genres and styles, all while celebrating the rich tapestry of global musical traditions.

LET'S START WITH THE OPENING CONCERT IN BORJOMI. WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THE PERFORMERS AND THEIR UNIQUE CONTRIBUTIONS?

The opening concert in Borjomi will be a remarkable start to the festival. We are honored to feature Mario Stefano Pietrodarchi, an Italian bandoneonist renowned for his exceptional skill and emotive performances. The bandoneon, a key instrument in Argentine tango, adds a distinctive, melancholic sound that Pietrodarchi masterfully brings to life. His interpretations of Astor Piazzolla's compositions are particularly evocative, offering a rich tapestry of sound that beautifully complements the festival's theme.

Joining Pietrodarchi will be Elvin Hoxha Ganiyev, a violinist from Azerbaijan/Turkey, whose virtuosic performances are celebrated for their technical brilliance and expressive depth. Ganiyev's repertoire, including Antonio Vivaldi's "The Four Seasons" and Astor Piazzolla's "The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires," will showcase his versatility and emotional range.

Elvin Hoxha Ganiyev is an outstanding young violinist and virtuoso, representing the esteemed Ganiyev musical dynasty, which is renowned among the leading musicians of Azerbaijan and currently based in Turkey. Elvin has garnered acclaim as a laureate of numerous international competitions and has performed on some of the world's finest stages with leading conductors. His performances are known for their unique individuality, vibrant temperament, and remarkable virtuosity.

It's also noteworthy that the Ganiyev family shared a close personal and cre-

ative friendship with Liana Isakadze and my father, Eldari. Prominent Azerbaijani musician Seyran Ganiyev, a member of this distinguished family, studied at the Moscow Conservatory alongside Liana and my father, further strengthening their bond.

We are thrilled to have Elvin join our festival. His exceptional talent and dynamic performances are sure to captivate and impress our audience.

Adding a Georgian touch to the evening, we have Mariam Kikaleishvili as mezzo-soprano, Giorgi Bugianishvili as tenor, and Mariam Bugianishvili with her soulful vocals. The Ensemble Borjomi, led by Giorgi Bugianishvili, and the Festival Base Orchestra Georgian Virtuosi, led by concertmaster Lela Mtchedlidze, will accompany these artists. Mtchedlidze's leadership brings a cohesive and dynamic energy to the orchestra, enhancing the overall musical experience.

MOVING ON TO BATUMI, WHAT MAKES THE CONCERTS THERE SPECIAL, AND HOW DO THE PERFORMERS CONTRIBUTE TO THE FESTIVAL'S ATMOSPHERE?

Batumi's concerts are a testament to the festival's commitment to diverse musical expressions. On August 23, Mario Stefano Pietrodarchi will again perform with the Festival Base Orchestra Georgian Virtuosi. The program features works by Ennio Morricone and Nino Rota, whose compositions for film are known for their emotional depth and cinematic quality. Pietrodarchi's bandoneon will provide a unique texture to these well-loved pieces, blending seamlessly with the orchestra's rich sound.

The second concert in Batumi on August 25 will spotlight Elvin Hoxha Ganiyev, whose performance of Paganini's "Caprice No. 24" is expected to be a highlight. This piece is renowned for its technical challenges and expressive potential, and Ganiyev's interpretation will undoubtedly captivate the audience with its virtuosity.

TBILISI WILL HOST SEVERAL KEY PERFORMANCES. CAN YOU ELABORATE ON THE ARTISTS AND THE DISTINCTIVE ASPECTS OF THEIR PERFORMANCES?

Tbilisi will indeed be a focal point for

the festival, featuring an impressive array of performances. On September 15, Beatrice Venezi, an Italian conductor known for her innovative and passionate approach to orchestral music, will lead the Georgian Philharmonic Orchestra. The program includes Ottorino Respighi's "Pines of Rome" and Sergei Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No.3, with Georgian pianist Sandro Nebieridze providing a stunning solo performance.

On the 17th, we celebrate Brazilian music with a diverse ensemble including cellist Lizi Ramishvili (cello), soprano Mariam Roinishvili (soprano), clarinetist Giorgi Oikashvili (clarinet), and the Festival base orchestra Georgian Virtuosi. Special guest Mariam Makarashvili will join on drums, bringing an additional layer of rhythm and flair. The evening will feature works by renowned Brazilian composers such as Heitor Villa-Lobos and Antonio Carlos Jobim, highlighting the rich and varied landscape of Brazilian music.

September 18 will feature a concert dedicated to Czech music, with Giorgi Shaverzashvili (piano) and Giorgi Khaindrava (violin) performing works by Bedrich Smetana and Antonín Dvořák. Shaverzashvili's piano technique and Khaindrava's expressive violin playing will offer a deep and nuanced interpretation of these celebrated compositions, celebrating Smetana's 200th anniversary in a fitting tribute.

HOW DOES THE CLOSING CONCERT ON SEPTEMBER 20 EMBODY THE FESTIVAL'S SPIRIT, AND WHAT MAKES IT STAND OUT?

The closing concert is designed to be a grand finale that reflects the festival's spirit of excellence and celebration. We are excited to feature Andrés Gabetta, a French violinist and conductor, a brilliant master of interpreting Baroque music in both roles, and Maurice Steger, a Swiss recorder virtuoso celebrated as the world's greatest performer of the Baroque flute. Their performance, titled "Vivaldi and Friends," will explore a repertoire that includes works by Evaristo Felice Dall'Abaco, Pietro Locatelli, and Antonio Vivaldi. Steger's playing will bring a distinctive timbre to the concert, adding a unique historical dimension to Vivaldi's compositions.

Gabetta's role as both a violinist and conductor allows for a rich and multifaceted interpretation of the concert program, blending historical insight with modern sensibilities. This concert promises to be a fitting and celebratory conclusion to the festival, showcasing the depth and diversity of the musical experience we aim to offer.

FOLLOWING THE INSIGHTS FROM THE INTERVIEW, IT'S IMPORTANT TO RECOGNIZE THE KEY SUPPORTERS AND PARTNERS BEHIND THE PROJECT

Supporters: Ministry of Culture and Sport of Georgia, Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports of Adjara, Tbilisi City Hall, Batumi City Hall, Borjomi City Hall, Embassy of Italy, Embassy of Brazil, Embassy of Czech Republic.

Hosts: Hotel Borjomi Likani, Hilton garden Inn Tbilisi.

Partners: Georgian Philharmonic Orchestra.

Support Companies: GPC Pharmacy, Yves Rocher - the founder of herbal cosmetics from France, "Piel Naturals" - Georgian handmade cosmetics brand, Brothers Khutsishvili Wine Cellar, Wine Company „GEORGIAN LEGEND”.

Media partners: Public Broadcaster Adjara, Georgian Public Broadcaster, Rustavi 2, Imedi Media Holding, POSTV, Euronews Georgia, Mediaholding "Georgian Times", Ertsulovneba TV, Media And Digital Communications Agency "Clip Art", Ambebige, "Prime Time" news agency, "Today", "Messenger", Journal "Sarke", "Adjara" newspaper, online media "Ajara Times", radio "Fortuna", website "Fortuna.ge".

As the 16th edition of the "Night Serenades" festival approaches, Mr. Giorgi Issakadze, the festival's esteemed artistic director, discusses Liana Isakadze's legacy and provides a detailed preview of the festival's vibrant lineup. This year, the festival will traverse three culturally rich cities—Borjomi, Batumi, and Tbilisi—showcasing a stunning array of musical and dance performances. In this interview, Mr. Issakadze delves into the unique styles and contributions of the participating artists, highlighting their distinct instruments and performance techniques.

HOW IS THIS YEAR'S FESTIVAL DIFFERENT FROM PREVIOUS YEARS?

This year's festival is certainly unique, as it is the first one without our founder, Liana Isakadze. We bid farewell to a remarkable personality and an excep-

tional musician, whose contributions to Georgian culture and the global music scene were profound. We remember her not just as a prodigy full of talent but as someone whose exceptional musical intuition and poetic sense touched us deeply. While we are filled with great sadness at her passing, the joy of connecting with the Georgian public brings some solace. This festival is undeniably marked by a significant loss for Georgian culture and for all of us.

Despite this, the festival continues, as it was Liana's life's work. Her dedication to this festival, along with the many great musicians who have participated, has shaped its legacy. We are committed to maintaining the festival's multifaceted and genre-rich program. Like Liana, who embraced a wide range of music from jazz to romantic pieces and tango, this year's festival will showcase a diverse and rich program. We will present seven concerts across three cities: Borjomi, Batumi, and Tbilisi.

21 AUGUST
BORJOMI | Borjomi Likani Hotel

23, 25 AUGUST
BATUMI | Batumi Drama Theater

15, 17, 18, 20
SEPTEMBER
TBILISI | Tbilisi State Conservatoire

Founder of the Festival
LIANA ISSAKADZE

Artistic Director
GIORGI ISSAKADZE



'Siren Call' Exhibition in Batumi: Voices from the Sea Demand Compassion and Justice



Nini Turiashvili

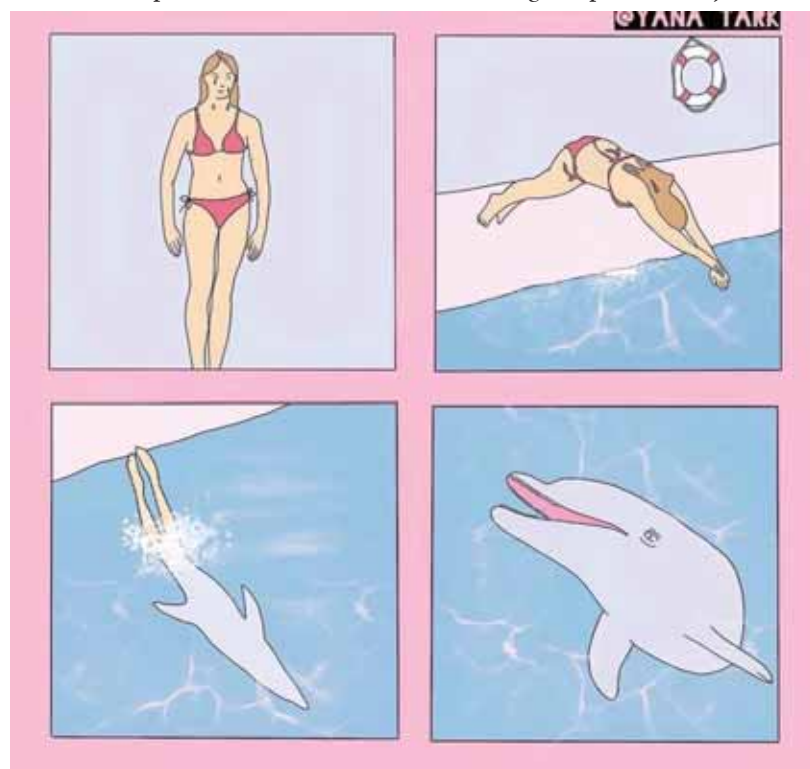
BY TEAM GT

Can art save lives? It seems like the activists of Vegan Georgia think it possible. The exhibition 'Siren Call,' opening August 30 in Batumi, has a very specific subject — aquatic animals and their troublesome existence in our modern world. GEORGIA TODAY sat down with Oleg Ozerov, Vegan Georgia Vice President and curator of the project, and Nini Turiashvili, Vegan Georgia President, to talk about the reasons and expectations behind this event.

HOW DID YOU COME UP WITH THE IDEA OF MAKING A PROJECT DEDICATED SPECIFICALLY TO AQUATIC ANIMALS?

Oleg Ozerov, Vegan Georgia Vice President and curator of the project: It's not the first exhibition we've organized, but it's our first project devoted to this very special and very fragile group of animals. Aquatic animals are by quantity the most killed and most neglected by habit. Fishermen and farmers don't even count their casualties by number of individuals, but by tons. Fish and other sea inhabitants account for the vast majority of all the animals killed in the world annually. And the problem is even deeper than their mindless extermination by industrial fishermen net: The

problem is human attitude. Science tells us that the closer physiology we have with certain animals, the easier it is for us to put ourselves in their place and thus feel compassion. Since it's quite hard for people to associate with aquatic animals, they are the most "outsider" among all the animals killed for food. And animals killed for food in their turn account for up to 97% of all animals



killed in the world. This is why we feel it extremely important to speak out for them, and precisely about nautical creatures. At least, in the ranks of this project.

DO YOU BELIEVE THAT ART, AIMED AT KINDNESS AND RESPECT, CAN CHANGE THE WORLD?

Nothing and no one can change the world in one day. Nor can art. I believe that art can help a person feel and think. All the revolutionary transformations on our planet began from this tiny spark. And you never know which project or even artwork can ignite the fire. One of the moments when I really became interested in animal rights was when I saw an "anti-fur" sticker in the bus. It was many years ago, but I still remember the moment. Art has the capacity to highlight some things which, in everyday life, full of routine and chaos, we often tend to put in the attic of our reflections. Bringing these thoughts and feelings to the surface is one of the goals this project can achieve.

WHAT ARE THE OTHER GOALS OF THIS EXHIBITION?

The art scene is generally very close to the animal rights scene in terms of deep emotional connection, empathy, and tendencies to philosophical research. Entering and developing this scene with our antispeciesist approach is a great adventure which we are going through together with all the amazing people we meet on our creative way, making collaborations and building communications. Even if no one at all goes vegan or engages in animal advocacy after visiting the show, for us, it is still important to converge with the art circles. We are being open minded in so many artistic activities, and artists are able to be exposed to our values and beliefs in a common and comfortable way. In the case of this project, we provide artists from all over the world the chance to express their views on the problem of the exploitation of aquatic animals. Animals don't have a voice in our society, so humans — artists in our case — and their art become the voices from the sea, demanding compassion and justice.



Oleg Ozerov

WHY DO YOU FIND IT IMPORTANT TO HOLD SUCH A SPECIAL EXHIBITION TODAY, AND WHY IN BATUMI?

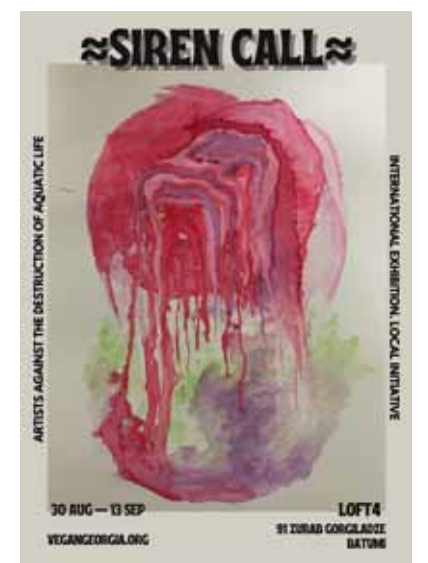
Nini Turiashvili, Vegan Georgia President: Holding this kind of event has high importance today, because the whole world is facing an ecological crisis and a historical turning point in terms of animal rights. We opened the first vegan exhibition in Georgia on November 1, 2023, on World Vegan Day. And this year, we decided to hold the exhibition in another city, and we chose Batumi, one of the most beautiful seaside towns yet unfortunately one that is closely associated with the destruction of marine life and pollution of water supplies. At the same time, Batumi is the largest tourist center, where many artists gather, who are also interested in veganism and ecological issues. Unfortunately, in Batumi, there is a dolphinarium, an object of cruel entertainment that is incompatible with the civilized world, against which we have had many activities over the years. We would like to dedicate the exhibition to the fight against the dolphinarium and the oppression of marine life in general.

HOW DO YOU SEE THE GOAL OF THIS PROJECT?

The main goal is to raise public awareness of the idea of animal freedom through art. The essence of the exhibition is for the population to know more information about veganism, about the dolphinarium and, in general, about the unfair side of animal exploitation, about an eco-friendly lifestyle. Our extraordinary works of art will guide visitors on this educational journey.

THERE ARE MANY CREATIVE PEOPLE AMONG VEGAN GEORGIA ACTIVISTS AND THEIR SUPPORTERS. IS THERE ANY CONNECTION BETWEEN THE INTEREST FOR VEGANISM AND ARTS, IN YOUR OPINION?

In my life experience, veganism is often really connected to different kinds of art. I'm a self-taught artist myself, and I think my close connection with art has had some influence on the formation of my worldview and personal characteristics. In general, veganism, like art, involves non-conformism, perceiving reality from a different perspective, and the ability to be brave. I think it is precisely these essential similarities that make it possible for many artists to choose a vegan lifestyle.



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