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## Azerbaijani Ruling Party Wins Majority in Parliamentary Elections amidst Reports of Violations

BY TEAM GT

**A**zerbaijan's ruling party and independent candidates believed to be linked to the government have secured a majority in Sunday's snap parliamentary elections amidst reports of electoral violations.

The snap elections on Sunday ended with the ruling New Azerbaijan Party securing a majority in parliament with 67 seats, according to Turan.

Turan reported that 45 seats went to independent candidates, which many believe are linked to the government.

The Civic Solidarity Party secured three seats, while Justice, Law, Democracy won two seats. Both parties are believed to have ties to the government.

All other parties that managed to secure representation in parliament won one seat each: Republican Alternative, National Independence, Democratic Reforms, Fatherland, Great Establishment, Great Azerbaijan, National Front, and Democratic Enlightenment.

Continued on page 2



The elections in Azerbaijan. Source: OSCE/ODIHR

GALT & TAGGART											
Prepared for Georgia Today Business by											
As of 03-Sep-2024											
Markets					Markets						
BONDS	Price	w/w	m/m	STOCKS	Price	w/w	m/m				
GEORG 04/26	94.16 (YTM 6.58%)	-0.1%	+0.8%	Bank of Georgia (BGEO LN)	GBP 14.80	-0.6%	+7.5%				
GBAIL 04/28	89.87 (YTM 7.10%)	-0.2%	+1.5%	Georgia Capital (GCEO LN)	GBP 10.00	-2.0%	+0.8%				
GBGG 9/12 PERP	98.11 (YTM 9.36%)	+0.1%	+0.4%	TBC Bank Group (TBGG LN)	GBP 29.30	-5.5%	+6.5%				
SILNET 01/27	100.02 (YTM 8.36%)	+0.0%	+0.1%								
TBC 10/75 PERP	100.31 (YTM 6.54%)	-0.0%	+0.1%	COMMODITIES					Price	w/w	m/m
TBC 8/84 PERP	95.88 (YTM 11.24%)	-0.0%	+0.2%	Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	73.75	-2.3%	-4.0%				
TBC 10/1/4 PERP	98.41 (YTM 10.61%)	-0.1%	+0.0%	Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	2,492.91	-1.3%	+2.0%				
INDICES											
	Price	w/w	m/m	CURRENCIES		Price	w/w				
SP 500	5,528.93	-1.7%	+3.4%	USD / GEL	2,6899	-0.2%	-0.7%				
FTSE 250	20,808.56	-1.7%	-0.1%	EUR / GEL	2,9704	-1.4%	+0.5%				
DOW JONES 30	40,936.93	-0.8%	+3.0%	GBP / GEL	3,5258	-1.3%	+1.7%				
Russell 2000	2,149.21	-2.4%	+1.9%	EUR / USD	1,1043	-1.3%	+1.2%				
FTSE 100	8,298.46	-0.6%	+1.5%	GBP / USD	1,3114	-1.1%	+2.4%				



## EU Condemns Georgian Parliament's Hasty Adoption of Controversial "Family Values" Legislation

BY TEAM GT

The European Union criticized the Georgian Parliament's swift adoption of the "family values and protection of minors" legislative package, condemning it as rushed and detrimental to fundamental rights. EU Lead Spokesperson Peter Stano stated that the package risks further stigmatization and discrimination while lacking public consultation and adherence to European standards. He urged Georgian authorities to reconsider the legislation, emphasizing that it could strain EU-Georgia relations and halt the country's EU accession process.

The proposed amendments, which include restricting media content and prohibiting promotion of same-sex relationships and gender-affirming measures, face scrutiny as Georgia's October 26 general elections approach.

On Tuesday, Beka Davituliani, an MP from the ruling Georgian Dream party,

emphasized the importance of balancing the protection of LGBT rights with measures to shield minors from what he termed "propaganda."

"The measures include restricting access to television productions that children should not have access to at an early age. This is the task of this law. This is to protect our future generation while not infringing on anyone's rights," he said.

His comments follow the party's introduction of legislative amendments aimed at "strengthening family values" centered on heterosexual unions and implementing protections for minors.

The Georgian Parliament resumed discussions on this amendment package on Monday. The proposed measures include restrictions on media content for children, and prohibitions on promoting same-sex relationships, adoption by same-sex couples, and gender-affirming treatments.

To pass these amendments, the ruling party will need to secure at least 113 out of 150 seats in the upcoming October 26 elections.

## Georgian Prime Minister Brands President "UNM's Puppet"

BY TEAM GT

On Wednesday, Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze labeled President Salome Zurbishvili as a "minor player" and a "puppet of the United National Movement (UNM) opposition," insisting that she had "no remaining functions or responsibilities" in her position.

In an interview with Imedi TV, Kobakhidze referred to a Constitutional Court ruling from the previous year, which precipitated an impeachment vote against Zurbishvili, claiming her continued presence in office was solely due to opposition backing.

"The legitimacy of her role is nonexistent following these events," the Prime Minister emphasized.

Kobakhidze also reflected on the 2018 Presidential elections, pointing out that while Zurbishvili won in the second round, she was deemed "unacceptable to the public" and won based on promises to prevent the UNM's return to power.



PM Kobakhidze

"When your legitimacy is entirely dependent on the UNM, it means you have none. Zurbishvili came into office with a different agenda but is now relying on the very force she opposed, demonstrating her lack of authority. There is no personal, political, or electoral legitimacy remaining," Kobakhidze said,

claiming that Zurbishvili's term was nearing its end.

When asked about the possibility of Zurbishvili declaring the October 26 elections illegitimate, Kobakhidze dismissed this, calling the outcome "guaranteed." He added, "this will be her final task, and she will not succeed."

## Georgia's Giga Ochkhikidze Wins Gold in Men's Shot Put F53 at Paralympics Games Paris 2024

BY TEAM GT

Giga Ochkhikidze, a Georgian paralympic athlete, won a gold medal in the Men's Shot Put F53 at the Paralympics Games Paris 2024. Ochkhikidze also set a world record

by putting the shot 9.66 meters.

The Georgian Paralympic team now has two medals. Earlier, Ana Japaridze won bronze in taekwondo.

Giga Ochkhikidze became the second Paralympic athlete in Georgian history with a gold medal.

Zviad Gogotchuri was the first paralympic gold medalist in men's under 90 kg judo to win gold, at the Rio Paralympic Games.



# Azerbaijani Ruling Party Wins Majority in Parliamentary Elections amidst Reports of Violations

Continued from page 1

Central Election Commission head Mazahir Panahov reported that voter turnout was just 37.27%, the lowest ever for parliamentary elections in the country's independent history.

The final results of the snap parliamentary elections will be announced by September 22.

The opposition Musavat Party, which fielded 25 candidates in the elections, did not secure any seats in the parliament. The party's central election headquarters stated that the elections were conducted without a democratic environment conducive to free and fair political competition, with unequal opportunities for all political forces, restrictions on freedom of speech, media, expression, and assembly, as well as pressure and repression against journalists, political activists, and government critics on social media.

"Voter turnout was extremely low. The voting was marked by widespread violations, including multiple votes by the same individuals and groups, ballot stuffing, and pressure on observers. These violations were documented, and videos have been circulated online," they said.

The document also says that the elections did not meet international standards or Azerbaijan's obligations to international organizations it participates in. Musavat demands the annulment of the elections, the implementation of reforms, including electoral reforms, to build a rule-of-law state and democratic society,



Azeri President Ilham Aliyev votes during parliamentary elections in Baku, September 1, 2024. Official website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan/Handout via REUTERS

and the holding of new parliamentary elections.

Another opposition party, the Republican Alternative (ReAl), secured one seat in parliament from 12 candidates. Party board member Erkin Gadirli was re-elected for a second term.

One of ReAl's leaders and a candidate

for parliament, Natig Jafarli, said that "every successive election in Azerbaijan is worse than the previous one."

"We again witnessed an electoral process with numerous violations. But I want to offer a slightly different perspective," Jafarli said. "These elections have once again shown that the Azerbaijani

government's administrative resources are insufficient for achieving a clear and confident victory.

"Voter turnout was only 37 percent. They couldn't even reach 40 percent. This should be a wake-up call for the Azerbaijani authorities. They need to understand that despite all their resources,

including ballot stuffing and 'carousel voting,' achieving only a 37-percent turnout is a tragedy for the country's future," he said. "Each time elections are held at such a disgraceful level, public trust in the electoral system is eroded. This poses a threat to the future of the Azerbaijani state."

Opposition party the Azerbaijan Popular Front (PFPA) boycotted the elections, citing the government's refusal to ensure fair and equal conditions for all candidates. The party has not participated in any elections since 2015.

The early parliamentary elections, which took place in the Republic of Azerbaijan on 1 September, were held within a restrictive political and legal environment, devoid of competition, EU Lead Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Peter Stano said, citing the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission.

"Despite a voting process that was orderly and assessed to be overall efficiently run, serious irregularities and omissions of important safeguards were observed, particularly in the vote count, raising questions about the integrity of the process," Stano said. "The OSCE/ODIHR mission further noted that the elections took place against the background of continued repression of dissenting voices."

The European Union called on the Azerbaijani authorities to take on board and implement the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations in relation to these and previous elections. "The EU stands ready to assist in this process," Stano added.

# Ukraine Latest: Top Diplomat Kuleba Resigns Following Poltava Tragedy

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba resigned Wednesday, following an announcement last week from President Volodymyr Zelensky that a cabinet reshuffle was imminent.

On Thursday, Ukraine's parliament approved President Zelensky's nominee Andrii Sybiha as its foreign minister, replacing Dmytro Kuleba as part of the biggest government reshuffle since the full-scale Russian invasion.

Kuleba's resignation came as at least seven people were killed and 35 injured in an overnight strike on Lviv, city mayor Andrii Sadovyh said Wednesday morning.

A child and a medical worker were among the dead, and others are in critical condition, he said.

The attack happened a day after two ballistic missiles blasted a military academy and nearby hospital in Poltava in Ukraine, killing more than 50 people and wounding more than 200 others, Ukrainian officials said, in one of the deadliest Russian strikes since the war began.

The missiles tore into the heart of the Poltava Military Institute of Communication's main building, causing several stories to collapse.

The missiles hit shortly after an air-raid alert sounded, when many people were on their way to a bomb shelter, Ukraine's Defense Ministry said, describing the strike Tuesday as "barbaric."

Poltava is about 350 kilometers south-east of Kyiv, on the main highway and rail route between Kyiv and Ukraine's

second-largest city, Kharkiv, which is close to the Russian border.

The attack happened as Ukrainian forces sought to carve out their holdings in Russia's Kursk border region after a surprise Ukrainian incursion that began August 6, and as the Russian army hacks its way deeper into eastern Ukraine.

## UKRAINIAN GOVERNMENT NEEDS 'NEW ENERGY', SAYS ZELENSKY OF THE RESHUFFLE

Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky said Wednesday his government needed "new energy" during a major reshuffle that saw the foreign minister and several others hand in their resignations.

"We need new energy. And these steps are related to strengthening our state in various areas," said Zelensky, when asked about the reshuffle and foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba's future.

"I am very grateful to the ministers and the entire cabinet team who have been working for Ukraine, for the sake of Ukrainians, for four and a half years, and some of them have been our ministers for five years," he added.

A source close to the presidential office told AFP that Zelenskiy and Kuleba "will discuss and decide" his future post.

The announcement came a day after several other ministers and officials resigned in one of Kyiv's most significant government reshuffles since Russia invaded two and a half years ago.

Kuleba - the face of Ukrainian diplomacy during the war - is the most senior of the ministers to offer to step down.

The 43-year-old has held the post since 2020 and, since Russia's 2022 attack, has travelled the world to advocate for west-



Ukraine's former Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba

ern support for Kyiv and sanctions on Moscow.

The president reiterated a call to Kyiv's partners. "Every one of our partners around the world who helps Ukraine with air defense is a true defender of life," he said.

Zelensky also said that "anyone who convinces partners to provide Ukraine with more long-range capabilities, enabling us to respond justly to terror, is working to prevent such Russian terrorist strikes on Ukrainian cities."

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said that Germany will not slacken its military support for Ukraine.

## RUSSIA WARNS 'DON'T CROSS RED LINES' AHEAD OF US-UKRAINE MISSILE DEAL

Moscow has warned the US not to cross a "red line" by giving Kyiv missiles that would be among its longest-range yet.

Washington and Kyiv are close to an agreement which would see Ukraine given Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missiles (Jassm), capable of reaching targets deep inside Russia, US officials said.

Jassms have a range of about 370 km compared with the US-made ATACMS missiles that Ukraine currently possesses, which have a range of about 305 km.

Russia has repeatedly warned that supplies of long range missiles to Ukraine would breach its red lines. Fearing an escalation of the conflict, Ukraine's allies have been reluctant to supply and, when they have, it is with the caveat that they not be fired at Russian targets.

On Wednesday, Russia's foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, said he wouldn't be surprised if the US yielded to Ukraine's demand for the weapons, adding that Volodymyr Zelensky was "egging on" the West.

"But they should understand - they are

joking about our red lines here. They shouldn't joke about our red lines," Lavrov warned.

## EU CALLS RUSSIAN SHELLING OF POLTAVA 'ANOTHER TARGETED BLOODSHED'


The European Union has shared its grief with the families of the victims killed this week by two Russian ballistic missiles targeting Poltava, in Ukraine. This attack killed more than 50 people and injured over 200.

"It is yet another targeted bloodshed that proves Russia's determination to continue with its brutal war against Ukraine and its people, trying to cause the highest possible loss of life and inflict large-scale devastation," EU Lead Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Peter Stano said in a statement.





He highlighted that for the past two and a half years, Russia has been continuously terrorizing Ukraine's population "with indiscriminate missile and drone attacks across Ukraine's territory, cowardly aiming mostly at civilian targets".

"This only underlines the need for Ukraine, in accordance with its legitimate right to self-defense under the UN Charter, to be able to effectively fend off such heinous attacks launched from military platforms in Russia and push the aggressor back," Stano said.


According to Stano, the European Union remains committed to stepping up the delivery of military support, including air defense systems and ammunition: "These deliveries strengthen Ukrainian self-defense, save innocent lives, and reduce the level of the destruction in Ukraine."



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# Defense Sector Review with Mercury Strategic: Winning Hearts & Hashtags - How Online Messaging Shapes Modern Conflicts



A Ukrainian police officer checks his smartphone following a missile strike in Kyiv. Source: AFP

The role of social media, digital messaging platforms, and the ubiquity of personal smartphones in modern warfare has fundamentally transformed the landscape of conflict reporting and intelligence gathering, offering both unprecedented opportunities and significant challenges. As evidenced by recent conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza, and the Sahel, these digital platforms are no longer secondary or peripheral tools; they are central to both the conduct and the perception of warfare. Open-source intelligence (OSINT) derived from social media and the digital footprints of combatants has increasingly become a critical element in understanding not just the tactical and strategic dimensions of conflicts, but also the informational battles that accompany them.

The ongoing war in Ukraine stands as perhaps the most illustrative example of how social media and smartphones have revolutionized conflict reporting and intelligence operations. When Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, global newsrooms, intelligence agencies, and defense analysts did not have to wait for official military briefings or embedded reporters to describe the unfolding battlefield. Instead, a torrent of smartphone footage, satellite images, and geolocated tweets provided a near real-time chronicle of the war's progression.

The rise of Telegram in Ukraine and Russia has been particularly notable. Pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian channels regularly post updates about troop movements, equipment losses, and airstrikes, often faster than official news outlets.

These posts—often from civilians on the ground—are quickly analyzed by OSINT experts and shared with the broader public. For example, during the battle for Kyiv, citizens used their smartphones to film and post images of Russian convoys, which were subsequently geolocated by OSINT analysts to provide precise locations. This open-source geolocation played a crucial role in informing Ukrainian defense tactics. The conflict has produced a trove of OSINT materials, from intercepted communications on platforms like Zello to smartphone videos that have been cross-referenced with satellite data.

Beyond Ukraine, Israel's operations in Gaza also reflect the growing integration of digital platforms into military strategy and media narratives. During the recent series of conflicts, and indeed the ongoing combat operations, between Israel and Hamas, the social media landscape became a battleground for hearts and minds. Both sides engaged in sophisticated information campaigns, aimed not only at their respective domestic populations but at a global audience. Hamas utilized Telegram and WhatsApp to release footage of missile strikes, often exaggerating their effectiveness, while Israel responded with its own well-oiled social media machine, using Twitter and YouTube to showcase its Iron Dome interceptions and the precision of its airstrikes.

Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers themselves played a role in this digital war. Some soldiers, particularly younger conscripts, have posted footage of combat operations on TikTok and Instagram, giving the world a front-row seat to their experiences. This has allowed global

audiences to see the conflict through a very personal, often emotional, lens. However, this openness has also presented vulnerabilities. Analysts have noted instances where footage posted online revealed Israeli troop movements, potentially endangering operational security. Conversely, Hamas and other militant groups have used digital messaging apps like Signal and encrypted communication channels to coordinate operations while avoiding detection from Israeli intelligence.

In the Sahel, a region plagued by insurgencies and fragile governments, the rise of social media as a battlefield tool has mirrored global trends but with distinct regional characteristics. Insurgent groups such as Boko Haram, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and Islamic State affiliates have weaponized social media to both recruit followers and spread their ideologies. WhatsApp and Telegram have become key communication tools for coordinating attacks, with insurgents often moving faster than government forces thanks to real-time, encrypted messaging.

For government forces, social media platforms offer a critical tool for countering these insurgent narratives. For example, the French military has used Twitter to document its operations in Mali, seeking to legitimize its presence and win support among the local populace. In 2020, as France faced growing calls to reduce its military footprint in the region, French officers frequently posted updates and shared images of captured militants or seized weapon caches on social media. This was part of a broader information strategy to counter anti-French sentiment driven, in part, by insurgent messaging online.

The ability of insurgent groups to shape narratives in the Sahel is compounded by the lack of formal media infrastructure in the region. With limited access to traditional news outlets, many locals rely on social media platforms for their understanding of the conflict. In this context, the lines between OSINT and propaganda become increasingly blurred, as both state actors and insurgents vie for control of the digital narrative.

While these platforms have provided opportunities for intelligence gathering and real-time reporting, they have also introduced significant challenges. Disinformation has become a persistent problem in all of these conflicts, with false reports often circulating widely before



A soldier uses a mobile phone as he sits inside a military vehicle outside Myanmar's Central Bank during a protest against the military coup, in Yangon, Myanmar, February 15, 2021. Source: REUTERS/Stringer/File Photo/File Photo

being debunked. In Ukraine, for example, both pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian actors have engaged in disinformation campaigns aimed at shaping international opinion. Russia's use of deepfakes—doctored videos that appear to show Ukrainian leaders surrendering or fleeing—has been particularly troubling. Meanwhile, in Gaza, misleading images and exaggerated casualty figures are routinely posted online, complicating the task of journalists and analysts trying to report accurately on the conflict.

Despite these challenges, the influence of social media on conflict reporting and intelligence is undeniable. According to a 2022 Pew Research Center study, 48% of U.S. adults say they get their news from social media “often” or “sometimes,” while 29% report that they “rarely” use these platforms for news. Among younger audiences, these numbers are even higher, with 42% of people aged 18 to 29 reporting that they regularly get their news from social media. These trends are mirrored in Europe, where a 2022 Reuters Institute report found that 53% of people use social media to follow the war in Ukraine.

For military officials and intelligence agencies, this new media landscape represents both a boon and a burden. On one hand, the vast amounts of open-source data available on platforms like Twitter, TikTok, and Telegram offer valuable insights into enemy tactics, troop movements, and public sentiment. On the other hand, the sheer volume of information—much of it unverified—can

create confusion and lead to intelligence failures.

For instance, during the early stages of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, there were numerous reports on social media of Russian defections and mass surrenders. While some of these reports were later verified, others proved to be exaggerated or false, creating an inflated sense of optimism among Ukrainian supporters and potentially influencing military decisions on the ground.

The global proliferation of high-quality smartphones with impressive camera resolution and relevant social media platforms has irrevocably altered the way wars are fought, reported, and understood. As OSINT continues to evolve, it will become even more integral to military operations and conflict journalism. Governments and militaries around the world are increasingly incorporating social media monitoring into their intelligence processes, and the lessons learned from Ukraine, Gaza, and the Sahel will undoubtedly shape future strategies. As conflicts continue to play out both on the ground and in the digital realm, understanding how to navigate this complex information environment will be critical to success on the modern battlefield.

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

## The United States, As Is

BLOG BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

A couple of days after my Russian curiosity stint, I found myself in the United States, and it was nothing like our weird northern neighbor. Covid-19 had blocked my twice-a-year routine American trips, and it was just about time to get a somewhat procrastinated new glimpse of the world's still-most-powerful country, a citizen of which I happen to be. Incidentally, citizenship doesn't mean possible bias in evaluating the picture I came across this time around.

America is America, and that will hardly ever change. This is a never-ending land of rich vegetation and desert sand, stern snow-capped mountains and green fertile fields, with millions of miles of man-made roads and sporadic spots of clustered skyscrapers in-between, plus the famous two-storied urban structures belonging to the rural middle-class.

The country is developing at a dizzying high velocity of three percent annual GDP growth, never losing its internationally recognized status of world leader, at times qualified by political analysts as a global hegemon. This is a political culture that is based on its almost 250-year-old Constitution as the main law of the land, its famous Bill of Rights, of the

same age, the keystone of its judicial system, and the even older Declaration of Independence as the Bible of the American political morality. These well-known firm and weathered prerequisites of the American state structure are so strongly written in stone that the current generation of politicians are all made secure from the pernicious effect of any bungles or misjudgments they might conceivably perpetrate. The American political, social and economic stronghold makes an impression that it is utterly foolproof. Indeed, the country seems to be safely navigating via the masterfully tuned-up autopilot initiated by its founding fathers two and a half centuries ago.

And yet, in our glaringly changing modern world, there are certain shortcomings that pop up to hold American society back from its traditional progress towards a habitually guaranteed high-quality lifestyle for the majority of its people. For instance:

1) The upcoming presidential elections. Described by the media as fateful, the November elections may very well put democracy on the line, so that by the end of the year, the States, and the entire world for that matter, might look shockingly different, thus threatening the American fair-state status quo. It is persistently predicted that the famous American democracy and free speech, as well as the American-dictated inter-



The American flag. Source: disruptmagazine

national order, might soon be put to the severest possible test. In a word, all that is in store for the American citizenry as a consequence of the relentlessly approaching elections is something that might change the country forever, signaling to the world that nothing will ever be the same again.

2) Judges. Historically speaking, judges in America have always been taken, by Americans of every generation (since the very first English settlement in the New World right at the start of the 17th century), as the fairest and highest druid—one possessing the human fates in their own powerful hands. Not any longer! It is said that nowadays even a judge can fall under political influence in the bipartisan fight between Democrats and

Republicans. Faith in truth and fairness was the rock on which the American judiciary system was built, and if it falters, America might stop being that beacon of democracy it has been for the last four hundred years.

3) Immigration! Any textbook of national history would maintain with confidence that the United States of America was made up of immigrants from all over the world, which is an irrefutable truth. Immigration per se has determined the strength and greatness of this new nation. All of us American citizens are immigrants, or the progeny of immigrants, and it has always been an honorable title. Not any longer! Immigration has become the subject of insurmountable strife in the States, which might very well be

conducive to a serious national split. Some would even fearfully suggest that the situation might instigate of a civil clash. Immigration created this great nation, but now it is killing it!

Washington is today full of electoral strain and political belligerency, threatening the process of fair and free elections. This means that any losing party will inevitably blame the winning one for having wronged the process, which, for its part, can trigger civil unrest. This is a commonly heard prediction, especially in America, where elections have been elevated to the rank of something divine. This way or that way, the future of America has never been in the hands of a voting citizen as firmly as it is today. It is only a thoughtful and educated voter who will decide which way the nation goes. Incidentally, the same is very true in the case of Sakartvelo.

Naturally, not all that catches the eye in today's America can be mentioned in one short article, like for instance, the egregious inflation, the homelessness in the streets of big cities, tens of millions without medical insurance, frequent involvement in somebody else's wars. And still, America will survive, as it always has. Americans know how to use the current weaknesses and failures to the best of their advantage. This is simply part of this socio-political culture - turning evil into good.

# On Some Relevant Aspects of Contemporary US Foreign Policy: 2024 Presidential Elections and Georgia's Expectations. Part 1

OP-ED BY VICTOR KIPIANI,  
GEOCASE CHAIRMAN

There is much discussion today about how contemporary international processes are characterized and what might be the content of the new order that is still taking shape. We hear many interesting opinions and comments in this regard. In our view, what we are witnessing and where the said formation is heading, we would briefly and aptly call at worst "disorganized order" and at best "unplanned order".

Obviously, neither option will comfort us, because in either case, it's the substance that matters. And the substance is that the world is searching for a new point of equilibrium, a process characterized by deep divisions, disharmony and renewed confrontation between the great powers on systemically important issues of international relations.

It is also worth noting that against the background of ongoing wars and conflicts, open mention of the use of brute force has become a "protocol necessity" of conversations, making 21st century relations resemble medieval ones. The bludgeon and the shield were naturally replaced by sensory weapons, and by said similarity we do not mean the methods and means used and employed, but rather the dominance of the force factor and its almost unlimited use.

## "FRAMEWORK" FOR THE CONTEXT

Here, we will note the convergence of the modern stage with the "spirit of the Middle Ages" under several fundamental circumstances:

- (1) Weakening of the role of the state and activation of other competitors (private or/and unofficial military associations, "borderless" corporations, technological and media giants, etc.);
- (2) The increasing influence of non-state actors on the creation of global "rules of behavior";
- (3) Fragmentation of social unity and destruction of the consolidating ground;
- (4) Institutionalization of information warfare;
- (5) Blurring the boundaries between the "hot" and "cold" phases of a military conflict;
- (6) Enhancing the role of domestic security to deter extremism and radicalization;
- (7) Economic dysfunction and inequality at both the interstate and intrastate levels;
- (8) Extensive use of economic coercion and protectionist measures (embargo, sanctions, export controls, tariffs, etc.) to achieve foreign policy goals.

Here we will add that the moral behavior or position in the interaction of countries at this time is only a fictitious myth, which since the establishment of the category of the state is confirmed by the relevant historical material. The more absurd it is today to talk about moral norms where "everything is allowed" for the satisfaction of one's own ego, and for this purpose, taking into account the power and resources of a particular actor, the blatant "privatization" of the global agenda has become the rule. Thus, all actors have developed their own understanding of what is "right" and what is "wrong", resulting in a significant weakening of international law and institutions. Moreover, we mentioned adapting understandings and standards to suit ourselves and, in the same spirit, 'High and Mighties' offered actors with weaker resources their interpretation of "right and wrong" for sharing. The result of this deformation has been an erosion of trust and authority of large countries, a refusal to be a so-called "role model" for others. However, medium and small countries also followed the same trend (at least those who had the courage, talent and ability to do so) and established the style of opportunism, populism, transactionalism, simply put, "business" politics as the leading line in foreign policy.

All of the above is noteworthy, as it is directly related to the renewal of the foreign policy of Georgia's Western partners, including the United States of America, in terms of a greater focus on its real, practical and tangible results.

Furthermore, current and expected trends are important for Georgia insofar as they are relevant for:

- (1) better understanding and predicting the actions of strategic partners by the Georgian side, as well as -
- (2) the effectiveness of an adequate "policy of realistic possibilities for Georgia".

## ABOUT THE SYSTEMATICITY AND CONSISTENCY OF THE APPROACH

Today there is a process of formation of new centers in the global balance of power. This process is the reason for the challenges in determining a new equilibrium point, which we have already mentioned. In such a confrontation and struggle, the



Image source: foreignpolicy.com

firmness, systematicity and consistency of the Western approach are of fundamental importance. Otherwise, the reality will be the words of former US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates: "I don't think anyone is afraid of us anymore," which obviously meant that they are no longer reckoned with.

The confrontation between the West, including the United States, on the one hand, and Russia and China (not to mention other members of the anti-Western axis) on the other, differs significantly from the Cold War period. The point is that today much less attention is paid to ideological clichés, and the main emphasis is placed - openly and overtly - on the geographies of influence. Therefore, the opposing sides are much more straightforward about their stated goals and ways to achieve them.

To give a concrete example, the consistency and firmness of the US approaches has a direct impact on its reputation and image in the eyes of its allies around the world. Once the unity of the abovementioned components secured the achievement of success in the marathon confrontation with the Soviet Union. Even today, the task and its essence have not changed, despite the fact that both the global context and the composition of the anti-Western bloc are different.

Strengthening of reputational image includes specific actions - public or non-public, or even their combination, and specifically with regard to Georgia - such public measures on the part of the US as initiation of a number of legislative acts (MEGOBARI Act, Georgian People's Act, Black Sea Security Bill (this is more in the regional sense), etc.) and open declaration of consistency and systematic foreign policy. Obviously, we are also well aware that one thing is a declaration and another is practical implementation, which is affected by the specifics of current processes and also the psychology or political handwriting of political leaders.

Moreover, such public actions serve as a turning point in the information war. From this point of view, if the West, in particular the US, "face the truth" - they are significantly behind in Georgia, and the hybrid conflict coming from inside or outside the country is becoming more and more uncompromising. Thus, a strong comeback to the information space requires a lot of effort. For the same purpose, it is not enough to only appeal to the "rule of law" and "democracy", because, as we have already said, competition in the modern version, instead of ideological clichés, is largely based on the redistribution of spheres of influence.

It is also very important, when speaking of the reputational source of consistency and firmness in foreign policy, to say: in such times, the most important basis is the soundness of one's own political system and its attractiveness in the eyes of others. This type of soft power cannot be completely replaced by any - be it military, financial or any other form - of manifestation.

## AN "AUDIT" OF US FOREIGN POLICY?

Talks about realigning the United States' foreign policy emphasizes and adapting them to modern realities are not only the outcome of this year's presidential election in the country. In our view, the intensification of this process coincides with the Obama presidency and was particularly marked by the Russian-Georgian war of 2008.

Since then, there have been many attempts to put an ideological spin on US foreign policy in the form of its "focus on the average American," "democracy versus autocracy," or some other appeal. By far, perhaps the most heated debate is about how active foreign policy should be, should this activity be global or selective?

requires a rational solution from our partner, and the process involved is much more complex and calls for rethinking a number of key issues.

Let us begin by stating that the United States of America, in terms of its role and influence in the world, is naturally the hegemon. At the same time, we think it is right to call, exactly in order to preserve a healthy hegemony - which is in the interest of the stability of the system of international relations - that it is advisable to distance US foreign policy from excessive egocentrism.

Instead, we would refer to a possibly more effective approach that involves seeing and conceptualizing current processes in the world not only from the perspective of Western maximalism, but also through the eyes of others. Assessing the problem from all possible angles becomes all the more adequate when we remember that the clichés of the Cold War and the post-Cold War order no longer work, and clinging to them is only counterproductive. By the way, Donald Trump's 2017-2021 presidency, if it stands out in any way, is notable for reviving a number of taboo topics and making them the subject of public - often uncomfortable - discussion.

Modern US foreign policy requires greater unconventionality. As has been said, this is not only in the interests of our strategic partner, but also in the interests of global stability and, among other things, the national and state interests of Georgia. That is why it is important to us that our country not fall into the peripheral geography for the United States and at least be as relevant as it has been for the past three decades.

This is why our expectation that American policy finally frees itself from nostalgia for the past and fully refocus on current and future challenges is relevant. Accordingly, along with the use of economic influence, it is desirable that American interest in us and in our region be represented by more than just proactive diplomacy. Together with diplomacy, it must be constantly emphasized and reminded that strengthening the security of "supposedly peripheral" but partner countries with US assistance simultaneously strengthens its own security.

This reasoning is based on a new concept defined by the search for the right balance between "primacy" and "prioritization". Its essence can be summarized as follows:

- (1) In a military or economic sense, what is the vital national security interest of the country?
- (2) According to this interest, which geographic regions of the world are considered to be of substantial (primary) interest and which are considered to be of non-substantial (peripheral) interest?
- (3) Based on such division, to what extent is a country self-sufficient in terms of resources to be equally active in primary and peripheral geographies?

Needless to say how relevant this topic is not only from the American, but also from the Georgian point of view, especially in connection with the specifics of the South Caucasus and various geopolitical claims to our region.

In any case, it is a fact that the proposed equation

To be continued in next week's GT.

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# Air Vice-Marshal Sean Bell on Who's Outmaneuvering Whom in the War

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

**F**ormer RAF Fighter Pilot, Air Vice-Marshal Sean Bell is the SKY News military analyst, co-host of the RedMatrix Podcast, and proud Ambassador for the RAF Association. Radio Free Europe/RL's Georgian Service met with him to ask about the ongoing Kursk incursion and what we can expect from Ukraine and Putin going forward.

"You gamble when you go to Las Vegas and you don't know what the odds are, so you've no influence on the outcome, you just gamble your money away. But this was a very well-planned military operation and it carried a lot of risks," Bell tells us. "There's no doubt that President Zelensky and his team will have war-gamed this several times, looked at it, planned for the worst, hoped for the best. It was intelligence-led, almost certainly not just Ukrainian intelligence, but also potentially some of Ukraine's allies helping to work out how best to achieve their objectives."

"Now, you only carry out such operations if there's a clear idea what it is you want to achieve, because simply invading Russia would appear to be very difficult. Ukraine has taken about 0.3 percent of Russian territory. Russia is vast, and although a couple of Ukrainian friends of mine said 'we hope to see a Ukrainian flag planted in Moscow,' clearly that's rather fanciful. It has been verified as an attempt to force President Putin to be embarrassed and humiliated - 'Mr. Security,' as he branded himself, has now presided over the first invasion of Russian soil since 1941."

"Kicking the Ukrainian soldiers out needs battle-hardened troops, requiring Putin to bring troops up from the Donbas region. Ukraine doesn't have a massive oversupply of troops, and they will end up paying a price if Putin brings in troops, but I suspect Putin is asking himself 'Am I really threatened by this enclave in Kursk and potential expansion to Belgorod? No, I am not. I will focus my effort in Donbas. I've got 10 to 12 weeks before winter settles to try to seize as much of the Donbas region as possible. And then I'll move north and deal with this enclave, when I'm no longer on the offensive in Donbas and I have resources to spare.'"

## SO WHO IS OUTMANEUVERING WHOM HERE? PUTIN SEEMS TO BE MAKING SURE UKRAINE'S ELITE AND BEST FORCES ARE TIED UP IN KURSK.

Absolutely right. In effect, he's fixed those forces up there. From a military perspective, there is a lot of danger in Ukraine's approach. What we don't understand is the political potential of it, because history suggests that Russian

leaders can very swiftly be brought down internally if they seem to be overstretching. President Putin started this invasion of Ukraine expecting it to be over in a matter of days, maybe weeks. We are now two and a half years in. Russian people are being fed a diet of lies, but their sons and fathers are returning home in body bags, hundreds of thousands of Russian people are going home badly injured, missing arms or legs. It's very difficult to hide such truth from the Russian people now, not when you've got 120,000, maybe more, Russians who've been evacuated from the front line. All of them will be talking about how painful it is. And the Ukrainians have been mounting drone attacks across the country, taking the fight to Russia, making sure, domestically, Russians realize they are at war. All of that will ramp up pressure on President Putin. What we don't know is if it will be enough to worry him?

## IF RUSSIA DOES AS YOU SUGGESTED, WHAT WOULD UKRAINE'S RESPONSE BE?

One of the challenges Ukraine has faced throughout this is being the smaller nation, having fewer resources available, both manpower to fight and money to wage war with. Ukraine has had to find a different way of fighting that avoids attritional warfare. What Russia is doing effectively in Donbas is grinding forward. All accounts suggest they are taking massive casualties, well over 1,000 a day. Even Bakhmut, which was described as the bloodiest battle since World War II, had less than 1,000 casualties a day. And it does sound as if Russia can't recruit 1,000 a day now. It doesn't want to run another mobilization, so it is just pushing really, really hard. It doesn't care how many soldiers get killed. How does Ukraine beat that? Well, part of it is that it inflicts the maximum possible pain on Russia, so that when they do achieve whatever objectives they have, they are vulnerable to a Ukrainian counterattack.

The other way they can do it is to fight what we call "asymmetrically." What is the thing that Russia will not risk losing and might stop the war for? One of those things is Crimea, the Port of Sevastopol, Peter the Great - there's a lot of history behind it. I'm not suggesting for one minute that I think Ukraine is capable of taking Crimea, but what it is about is putting that seed of doubt in President Putin's mind that it might be vulnerable. To do so, you would have to get rid of the Black Sea Fleet, and Ukraine has quite effectively done that. You'd also have to threaten the lines of communication into Crimea, such as the Kerch Bridge. Ukraine has demonstrated that it's able to take that out. You'd also have to be able to attack the surface-to-air missile systems and the radars on Crimea that provide part of the defenses. Ukraine has also done that. So, I think there are ways in which Ukraine might be trying to pile up pressure asymmetrically. And I think that's what they're trying to do with the Kursk region as well: taking



Air Vice-Marshal Sean Bell

some land and embarrassing Putin, and therefore forcing a slightly different approach.

There's a massive border between Russia and Ukraine, and it will be very difficult for Russia to properly secure it. If you put a soldier every six feet, which is not particularly dense, you'd need up to a million soldiers. So that's not possible. It is a vulnerable border, and therefore taking the fight to Russia is quite a clever tactic if you're looking at the center of gravity. I have no way of knowing what Ukraine is actually going to do, but finding ways to fight differently, using drones to attack Russia's oil infrastructure, using drones to attack airfields and logistics supply hubs, inventing their own ballistic missile, which we understand that Ukraine has done - it's well on its way.

## IS PUTIN SUSCEPTIBLE TO PRESSURE, THOUGH?

He's undoubtedly a person who's going to hunker down, particularly because he's in his 70s and he clearly he wants to go out with a legacy; he wants to see a big statue of himself in the Great Hall. He clearly set out wanting to make Russia great again. He wanted to stop the expansion of NATO. Well, NATO has expanded precisely because of what he's done. Russia is not great again: Russia is a pariah on the world stage. And President Putin himself has been indicted by the International Criminal Court. So things aren't going his way at all. And

the prospects for Russia economically are looking worse and worse. That is where the bigger threat to President Putin lies, when the people around him finally go, "this isn't right, this is not sustainable. This is one man's ego."

## THE KURSK AND BELGOROD INCURSIONS CROSSED PUTIN'S "RED LINES." HOW BOLD CAN UKRAINE AFFORD TO GO?

That leads to a much bigger question, not just about how bold Ukraine can be, but about how bold the West can be in supporting Ukraine. At the start of this, Ukraine had old Soviet equipment and so it was inevitable it was going to get trapped in a war of attrition which it wouldn't be able to win. What the West said at the end of WW2, after tens of millions of people died, was that it was not the way we want to fight in the future. What we want to do is use technology. It costs a lot more money, but we want to use technology. And now the West has decided that by using technology, by being smart, by using intelligence, and using drones, you can minimize the casualties and maximize the effectiveness. You don't necessarily need to blow up a whole headquarters to stop it working; you can take out the electrical power. At the start of this war, the West was the answer to Ukraine's prayers. Ukraine is not a member of NATO, could never reasonably expect the West to help, and the West was very reluctant initially, because it was scared it was going to be dragged into a war against Russia. And President Putin was very effective at ruffling that nuclear saber, because he knew and knows today that if the West was actually to properly get involved, for example, by putting a no-fly zone up, Russia would have no answer to it: Russia's advances would stop in a heartbeat. Putin knew that he had to keep the West out of the war, so he rattled that nuclear saber. But every step of the war, Ukraine has demonstrated it wasn't going to get taken over. It asked for tanks, the West went, "oh, not sure." The UK stepped forward with Challenger 2, and the rest of the world stepped up. We had the same conversation about long-range weapons, "oh, that might be dangerous." Eventually, Storm Shadow, ATACMS were given. The same with jets, "oh, we're not sure." F-16s have now been

provided. Every step of the way, Putin has rattled that saber, said that the West is taking risks, but nothing has happened. And now, Ukraine is operating on Russian territory. And actually what it proves is "what can Putin do?" If he launches a nuclear weapon, where will he send it? Will he launch into his own territory to take out Ukraine? That would be a disaster for him, bombing his own territory. Would he launch a nuclear weapon into Ukraine? The irony would not be lost on Putin - if he wants to make Russia great again, pressing the nuclear button is not the way to do it. I'm a veteran of the Cold War, and it was always called "mutually assured destruction - MAD," because once you start a nuclear war, nobody can win and everyone gets wiped out. Putin's ideal legacy, which I think is really important to him, is to be seen as the savior of Russia, the savior of the former Soviet Union. Being the master of its destruction is not the future he sees.

## WOULD HE REALLY START AN ALL-OUT NUCLEAR WAR BY TARGETING UKRAINE WITH A TACTICAL NUCLEAR MISSILE?

In the UK, we have this phrase, "you can't be a little bit pregnant. You either are, or you're not." You either use nuclear weapons or you don't. The effect of those nuclear weapons depends on the size of them, but it's still a significant escalation. Putin would be playing with fire if he did that. At the moment, there's no suggestion that any of these nuclear weapons are being moved around, being made ready for use. So this is more rhetoric-based, and Putin's got a history of that.

## SHOULD WE EXPECT MORE F-16S ON TOP OF THOSE THAT WERE PROMISED? HOW HAS UKRAINE PERFORMED SO FAR IN THE SKY SINCE THEIR ARRIVAL?

The Russian Air Force is much better equipped than the Ukrainian Air Force, and Russia should have established air superiority over the whole of Ukraine. It was not able to do so. As a result, despite having only a few aircraft and having to hide them away, Ukraine's air force has remained pretty robust. It's not very effective, because it hasn't got very many aircraft, but it has survived.

Let's be clear, though. F-16s aren't the answer to Ukraine's prayers - they are old aircraft, the most recent ones were built in 1991, so 30 years ago, but they are a significant jump in technology compared to what Ukraine had. In terms of numbers, my understanding is Ukraine has been promised about 80 so far, with President Zelensky asking for nearly 200. But the problem here is not the aircraft, the problem is the pilots. I'm a pilot. I could sit in virtually any airplane, go up, down, left, right, slow. That's not difficult. Operating that incredibly complex piece of machinery with radar, defensive aids, weapons, target solutions, infrared solutions, the lot - this requires a huge amount of training, and also a lot of experience. Even when you are combat ready on a front-line jet as I was, you are the worst pilot on the squadron. You're like a young kid who's just passed his driving license. You need three years of experience flying the jet before you're considered to be a good front-line pilot.

Ukraine right now is trying to get used to flying these F-16s. It's put some of its most experienced pilots in, but they will still need a long time to get used to the aircraft. The issue for Ukraine is not the number or lack of aircraft, it's the pilots, and tragically, in an incident a couple of days ago, a pilot was lost, which means they've got one less pilot that's trained and ready to fly in the F-16s. The challenge is getting the pilots trained up - there's no point sending more aircraft in; they'd just be target practice for the Russians.



The Ukrainians have taken the fight to Russia, making sure, domestically, Russians realize they are at war. All of that will ramp up pressure on President Putin

# Jerome Akel on Carrefour Georgia's Back to School Campaign, 12th Anniversary, and Franchise Prospects



INTERVIEW BY KESARIA KATCHARAVA

Carrefour, which Majid Al Futtaim owns the exclusive rights to operate in Georgia, remains a benchmark for outstanding customer service and community engagement. As the brand transitions into the new season, we had the opportunity to speak with Jerome Akel, the Country Manager of Carrefour Georgia. In our discussion, Akel shared valuable insights into the company's strategic initiatives, upcoming campaigns, and franchise opportunities, offering a clear view of how Carrefour plans to expand its market presence and further its commitment to customers and local communities.

## MR. JEROME, COULD YOU PROVIDE AN OVERVIEW OF CARREFOUR GEORGIA'S KEY INITIATIVES FOR THE UPCOMING MONTHS?

As we transition from summer, our primary focus is on preparing for what comes next. During the summer months, people often travel for vacations, so our efforts are geared towards supporting them upon their return. This includes helping families and individuals transition back to their routines, particularly as they prepare for the school year.

## WHAT ARE THE MAIN HIGHLIGHTS OF CARREFOUR GEORGIA'S BACK TO SCHOOL CAMPAIGN THIS YEAR?

This year, we have significantly intensified our focus on the Back to School campaign. Unlike last year, when we combined our anniversary celebrations with Back to School activities, we have opted to dedicate our efforts exclusively to this campaign. Our goal is to be a key support resource for our customers in September as schools resume and families restock their homes. We are offering exceptional deals on electronics, stationery, school bags, and food. We understand that September is a critical time for families, especially those with children, who are particularly vigilant about their spending.

## WHAT TYPES OF SCHOOL SUPPLIES AND EDUCATIONAL PRODUCTS ARE FEATURED IN THIS YEAR'S BACK TO SCHOOL PROMOTIONS?

Our Back to School promotions feature a comprehensive range of school supplies available across all our locations. With over a hundred stores, even our smaller Carrefour outlets are well-stocked with essential items. From school bags and stationery to pens, pencils, pencil cases, and bottles, we offer these products at highly competitive prices. For example, notebooks are available for less than 3 GEL, and school bags can be purchased for under 5 GEL. Additionally, we offer attractive deals on mobile phones and laptops, with

some models priced around 800 GEL from reputable brands. Our selection also includes tablets starting from 199 GEL, providing a range of options to suit different needs and budgets. We believe these offerings will provide substantial value for families.

## COULD YOU PROVIDE DETAILS ABOUT THE DRAWING COMPETITION FOR CHILDREN? WHAT ARE THE PARTICIPATION GUIDELINES AND REWARDS?

We are pleased to announce a drawing competition as part of our Back to School campaign. Running from August 21 to September 12, this competition invites children to draw their ideal school and submit their artwork at any Carrefour hypermarket. Each participant will receive exciting school-related gifts from Carrefour. This initiative not only celebrates creativity but also underscores our commitment to enriching the back-to-school experience for families. We are looking forward to showcasing the creativity of our young customers and rewarding their efforts with these special gifts.

## HOW HAS CARREFOUR INCORPORATED FEEDBACK FROM PAST BACK TO SCHOOL CAMPAIGNS INTO THIS YEAR'S OFFERINGS?

Carrefour has actively incorporated feedback from past Back to School campaigns to refine and enhance this year's offerings. We have carefully reviewed customer input regarding product selection, pricing, and shopping experience. This year, we have expanded our range of school supplies based on popular demand, ensuring that we offer a broader selection of high-quality and affordable items.

Additionally, we have streamlined our in-store layout to make it easier for customers to find what they need quickly and efficiently. We have also leveraged partnerships with well-known figures, such as Georgian football players, to increase engagement and visibility. Our focus on competitive pricing has been informed by feedback on customer spending habits, particularly during the back-to-school period. By addressing these insights, we aim to provide a more tailored and satisfying shopping experience that meets the needs of families and students.

## WITH CARREFOUR'S 12TH ANNIVERSARY IN THE GEORGIAN MARKET APPROACHING, WHAT SPECIFIC EVENTS OR ACTIVITIES ARE PLANNED FOR THE CELEBRATIONS? WHAT CAN CUSTOMERS EXPECT?

With the coming of Carrefour's 12th anniversary in the Georgian market, we have planned an array of exciting events and activities to mark this significant milestone. The celebrations will officially begin in the latter half of September, strategically timed to follow our Back to School campaign, ensuring a seamless experience for our customers, without

any overlap.

Throughout the month, we will showcase over a thousand items with substantial discounts of up to 60%. This extensive range will include a variety of products such as food, frying pans, televisions, washing machines, textiles, and many other household essentials. Our goal is to offer exceptional value across a broad spectrum of categories, reflecting our appreciation for our customers' loyalty over the years. In addition to these discounts, the month will be filled with additional surprises and special promotions. While we are keeping the specifics under wraps for now, customers can expect a series of exclusive offers and engaging activities designed to enhance their shopping experience. We encourage everyone to stay tuned to our social media channels, where we will regularly unveil updates and details about these exciting offers.

## WHAT ARE SOME OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT MILESTONES CARREFOUR HAS ACHIEVED OVER THE PAST 12 YEARS IN GEORGIA?

Over the past 12 years, Carrefour has celebrated a series of significant milestones that underscore our substantial growth and enduring impact in Georgia. Today, we proudly employ over 3,090 individuals, with nearly all of our workforce—approximately 99.8%—being Georgian. This high level of local employment reflects our deep integration into the Georgian economy and our commitment to contributing to the community.

Carrefour has been enthusiastically embraced by Georgian society, establishing a robust presence across the country. Our footprint extends well beyond Tbilisi to key cities such as Batumi, Kutaisi, Gori, Zugdidi, Telavi, Poti, and Marneuli. This widespread presence highlights our dedication to serving customers throughout Georgia and adapting to regional needs.

Looking ahead, we remain committed to further expanding our reach into additional regional areas. We are actively responding to strong local demand and continue to seek opportunities to enhance our service and offerings in communities across the country. This ongoing expansion aligns with our mission to provide exceptional retail experiences and support local economic development.



Jerome Akel, the Country Manager of Carrefour Georgia

## WHAT ARE THE KEY ADVANTAGES FOR ENTREPRENEURS INTERESTED IN BECOMING CARREFOUR FRANCHISEES IN GEORGIA, GIVEN CARREFOUR'S 12 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE IN THE MARKET?

Carrefour's extensive experience allows us to manage a variety of store sizes and formats effectively. Larger store formats provide more opportunities for diverse product offerings, events, and customer engagement. We are focusing on expanding through local partnerships and franchises, leveraging our proven business model. We seek Georgian entrepreneurs who either own existing stores or wish to operate new Carrefour-branded stores. This approach helps maximize their investment and connect with our customer base.

## CAN YOU OUTLINE THE PROCESS AND REQUIREMENTS FOR SOMEONE INTERESTED IN OPENING A CARREFOUR FRANCHISE?

Interested parties can apply directly through our website. We carefully evaluate potential locations to ensure that investments are well-spent and that franchisees achieve a good return on their investment. It is crucial for us to maintain competitive pricing for our customers, so we work to ensure that our franchise partners successfully implement Carrefour's commercial strategy.

## WHAT TYPES OF SUPPORT AND RESOURCES DOES CARREFOUR PROVIDE TO ITS FRANCHISEES, PARTICULARLY IN TERMS OF

## TRAINING AND OPERATIONS?

Carrefour offers comprehensive support to franchisees, including access to products, promotions, and our communication and loyalty programs. Training and operational support are vital to ensure consistency between Carrefour branches and franchise locations. We work closely with franchise partners, providing team training and commercial support as needed.

## HOW DOES CARREFOUR EVALUATE THE POTENTIAL OF VARIOUS REGIONS IN GEORGIA FOR NEW FRANCHISE LOCATIONS?

While location is important, the entrepreneur's capabilities are crucial. We assess their ability to build a team and engage effectively with customers. Based on these factors, we use specific tools to evaluate and differentiate locations to identify the most promising opportunities.

## IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE TO ADD ABOUT CARREFOUR GEORGIA'S CURRENT CAMPAIGNS, ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS, OR FRANCHISE OPPORTUNITIES?

As Carrefour Georgia continues to advance with its current campaigns, anniversary celebrations, and franchise opportunities, we want to emphasize our ongoing commitment to nurturing talent and expanding our team. We are actively seeking motivated and skilled individuals to join us in opening new stores and working closely with our partners. We offer a range of career opportunities that come with competitive remuneration packages and accelerated career development paths. Whether you are embarking on your professional journey or contemplating a career change, Carrefour provides a dynamic environment where you can thrive. We are dedicated to helping you unlock your potential and grow within the retail sector. If you are passionate about retail and eager to be part of a leading organization, we encourage you to reach out to us. We are enthusiastic about welcoming new talent and look forward to supporting your career aspirations as we continue to expand and enhance our presence in Georgia.



# Vista Garden: Invest in Prestige

Luxury living is often misaligned with monochromatic schemes, banality, and monotony, however, Vista Garden breaks this stereotype by offering a high-end residential community where modern elegance is intertwined with vibrant recreational areas. Covering 20,000 square meters, 80% of the area is dedicated to peaceful recreational spaces. The core vision of this rare living complex development is to combine luxury with natural serenity. The project offers an unparalleled living experience and promises plenty of investment opportunities in the region.

The developer, York Towers, established in 2016, is a global luxury real estate development company committed

to building high-end residential properties that offer exceptional and multifaceted lifestyles. With 13 offices across nine countries on three continents, the company has brought 21 projects to life and runs eight ongoing ones. The company's successful projects include Tbilisi Terrace, Outlook Forest, and Bianca Batumi. With a proven history of predicting future trends, York Towers is becoming a leading player in the industry through its innovative approaches.

The recent rebranding of Vista Garden has enhanced its appeal, not only to potential homeowners, but also to investors. With an estimated long-term gain of 2.53x over 10 years, the project promises substantial returns. Its commitment to luxury, sustainability, and high-quality



living standards ensures lasting value appreciation and attractive rental yields.

Vista Garden promises more than financial returns through the strategic benefits of a multicultural lifestyle in a rapidly growing area of Georgia. Its focus on sustainability and variety of residential options is deemed a strong investment opportunity.

Vista Garden offers significant possibilities for buyers due to its strategic location in Tabakhmela, just 20 minutes outside of Tbilisi, a popular vacation spot suggesting a high rent demand.

Diverse property options (from grand apartments to opulent villas) that naturally attract different types of investors, luxurious amenities (spacious parks, swimming pools, fitness centers, commercial hubs, restaurants, co-working spaces), and strong return on investment (ROI) - with an expected annual price appreciation of 8%+ and prospective annual income of 12%+ - and various partnerships with global brands make it the best investment in the region.

Real estate investments of \$100,000 or more can lead to permanent residence

in Georgia and enjoying similar benefits to those of native residents, a fact which appeals to international investors. Vista Garden's investment potential also lies in the growing Georgian economy and the country's attractiveness to tourists, which make it perfect for both personal use and rental income generation.

Vista Garden is a very alluring option for those seeking a combination of urban convenience and tranquility, as well as for investors pursuing secure real estate opportunities with attractive ROI and a strong market reputation.

## SOCIETY



Eli Chakvetadze, Product Development Manager

INTERVIEW BY MARIAM  
MTIVLISHVILI

## Sairme Resort – An Innovative Spa Center that Has Earned Its Place among Europe's Top Resorts

troenterological, and dermatological care. Additionally, it offers effective solutions for endocrinological, gynecological, neurological conditions, and various oral mucosa issues. The waters' therapeutic benefits help restore vital functions and contain lithium, which can enhance emotional well-being.

The resort features three hotels, a variety of dining options, and numerous activities, including Zip Line, Compak Sporting, Rope City, Jeep Tours, Bicycle Services, and Hot Rides through Sairme Forest. It also offers a Resort Polyclinic, Spa, and Wellness Center to complete the experience.

The mild climate and unique landscape of Sairme are an ideal environment for active and passive climate and landscape therapy.

### HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE OPERATION OF THE SAIRME RESORT IN THE GEORGIAN MARKET?

Sairme Resort stands out as a premier destination in domestic tourism, attracting around 35,000 Georgian visitors annually. Our appeal to local vacationers is driven by a diversity of offerings, includ-

ing relaxation, medical treatment, recovery, rehabilitation, adventure activities, and corporate events.

We actively promote ourselves on the international tourism stage, welcoming both group and individual travelers from various different countries.

### WHAT SERVICES DOES THE RESORT OFFER?

Sairme Resort is designed to cater to vacationers of all ages and interests, offering a range of customized experiences. In addition to our comfortable accommodations, we provide a variety of services and activities:

- Health and Rehabilitation Spa Center: Enjoy therapeutic thermal waters with up to eighty different treatments, including both open and closed thermal pools.
- Compak Sporting: Experience this international sport with five shooting positions featuring static and moving targets. Our "Compak Sporting" facility is equipped with modern British gear and Beretta-type weapons, with target colors designed for better visibility against the environment. Bike Tours: Explore the stunning landscapes of Sairme on a bike, combining exercise with breathtaking

views to elevate your mood.

- Zip Line: Feel what it is like to fly on the longest zip line in Transcaucasia, an 800-meter descent from the mountains that offers a thrilling yet safe flying experience.

- Rope City: Test your skills in our aerial obstacle course, featuring convenient climbing options, high-quality equipment, and guidance from our instructors. This adventure is perfect for friendly or corporate competitions.

- Jeep Tours: Take a drive off-road with our buggies on two exciting routes—a one-hour obstacle-filled course and a two-hour alpine adventure.

- Horseback Riding: Enjoy the mood-boosting and emotionally enriching experience of horseback riding or engage in hippotherapy sessions for therapeutic benefits.

- Sairme Bakery: Treat yourself to our unique assortment of breads and cookies, including Saferavi, Ajiki, and 16-grain bread.

- Dining Options: Savor diverse and themed menus at our restaurants.

- Evening Entertainment: Delight in live music performances each evening in the lobby, featuring soothing keyboard

and violin melodies.

In short, the current range of additional services at our complex is as described, though our team is continuously working to enhance and expand these offerings. As a result, our services will gradually become more flexible and diverse.

### WHAT NEWS AND OFFERS SHOULD THE COMMUNITY EXPECT FROM SAIRME RESORT?

As previously mentioned, the distinctiveness of Sairme Resort lies in its healing drinking and thermal springs. We are actively focusing on wellness as a core aspect of our offerings. To cater to those who need to prioritize their health, we are offering a 20% discount to guests who present a doctor's recommendation letter.

Additionally, we are excited to expand our specialized health programs, including tailored courses designed for different health needs.

One such program addresses "manager's syndrome" or chronic fatigue—a condition characterized by persistent physical and mental fatigue lasting for at least six months, which does not improve with rest and worsens with stress.

We offer two treatment courses for this syndrome: a three-day cycle and a more comprehensive seven-day cycle. Given the prevalence of this condition in the 21st century, Sairme Resort provides an ideal environment for relaxation, healthy eating, essential treatments, and engaging physical activities tailored to individual interests.

### TELL US ABOUT FUTURE PLANS.

Since its rehabilitation began in 2010, the resort has continually introduced new features and improvements each year. We have both short-term and long-term development plans that we will reveal over time.

Currently, I can share that we are committed to further improving our healing offerings. With the support of the European Thermal Cities Association (Ehhta), which we hosted in April, we are integrating various international practices to elevate our services.



Sairme Resort has been officially recognized by the European Spa Association (ESPA) as an innovative spa center among one hundred spas from twenty European countries. Sairme Resort, a modern wellness center, was built at the source of thermal water. Its team of experienced professionals offers up to eighty different types of healing, rehabilitation, prophylactic and relaxation procedures. To find out more, GEORGIA TODAY talked to Eli Chakvetadze, Product Development Manager.

### TELL US ABOUT SAIRME RESORT. WHAT MAKES IT STAND OUT?

Sairme Resort's primary appeal lies in its distinctive medicinal and thermal waters. Nestled in Europe's largest resort area, the resort benefits from a unique subtropical mountain climate with high oxygen levels, and ozone saturation. Located in a region with up to 60 mineral springs, we have extensively studied five of these, whose healing properties have been validated by research from the German STORCH Water Consulting international laboratory. These waters can be used individually or in combination for treating, rehabilitating, and preventing a range of ailments.

With years of expertise in treatment, Sairme Resort excels in urological, gas-





## Council of Europe Opens to Signature First Ever Global Treaty on AI

BY TEAM GT

The Council of Europe Framework Convention on artificial intelligence and human rights, democracy, and the rule of law (CETS No. 225) was opened for signature today during a conference of Council of Europe Ministers of Justice in Vilnius. It is the first-ever international legally binding treaty aimed at ensuring that the use of AI systems is fully consistent with human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

The Framework Convention was signed by Andorra, Georgia, Iceland, Norway, the Republic of Moldova, San Marino, the United Kingdom as well as Israel, the United States of America and the European Union.

Council of Europe Secretary General Marija Pejcinovic Buric said: "We must ensure that the rise of AI upholds our standards, rather than undermining them. The Framework Convention is designed to ensure just that. It is a strong and balanced text – the result of the open and inclusive approach by which it was drafted and which ensured that it benefits from multiple and expert perspectives. The Framework Convention is an open treaty with a potentially global reach. I hope that these will be the first of many signatures and that they will be followed quickly by ratifications, so that the treaty can enter into force as soon as possible."

The treaty provides a legal framework covering the entire lifecycle of AI systems. It promotes AI progress and innovation, while managing the risks it may pose to human rights, democracy and the rule of law. To stand the test of time,

it is technology-neutral.

The Framework Convention was adopted by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers on 17 May 2024. The 46 Council of Europe member states, the European Union and 11 non-member states (Argentina, Australia, Canada, Costa Rica, the Holy See, Israel, Japan, Mexico, Peru, the United States of America and Uruguay) negotiated the treaty. Representatives of the private sector, civil society and academia contributed as observers.

The treaty will enter into force on the first day of the month following the expiration of a period of three months after the date on which five signatories, including at least three Council of Europe member states, have ratified it. Countries from all over the world will be eligible to join it and commit to complying with its provisions.

## Local Youth in Ozurgeti and Ambrolauri Fight Against River Pollution



BY TEAM GT

Banners with the messages "Every thoughtless step eventually turns against us" and "Trash should be in bins, not in rivers" are now displayed along the rivers in Ozurgeti and Ambrolauri municipalities, Georgia.

With the support of the European Union and the Caucasus Environmental Non-governmental Network (CENN), local youth have created eye-catching banners featuring QR codes that link to short videos showing pollution levels of each river.

Trained through the Georgia Climate Action project, young people spent seven months researching river pollution and waste management issues. Forty people attended thematic training sessions on climate change and assessed the condi-

tion of rivers in their municipalities and planned awareness campaigns, which included informational meetings, creating slogans, and producing informational videos.

Sixteen-year-old Nini Megrelidze, one of the project participants, said: "Our goal was to identify places that are attractive to tourists and where people can enjoy their time, and to check whether there are trash bins along the riverbanks and how polluted the surrounding areas are."

"There are two major rivers in Ambrolauri—Krikhula and Ritseula. Although they are considered relatively clean, there are certain spots along the banks where trash is frequently left. This significantly pollutes the surrounding area, and sometimes waste even ends up in the water," said another participant in the project, 29-year-old Salome Abutidze from Ambrolauri.

### CULTURE

## The Black Sea Photo Project and the Ongoing Battle of Georgia's Documentary Filmmakers

BY SHELBI R. ANKIEWICZ

The Black Sea Multimedia Photo Project presents over a decade-long project of people and scenes from various countries around the Black Sea to depict similarities and contrasts between them.

Hosted by the Design Institute and Kolga Tbilisi Photo, the project will be on display September 6, at the Design Institute. The project creators are Ioana Calinescu and Petrut Calinescu, photographers and co-founders of The Center for Documentary Photography in Romania. The project, which started in 2010, began with Petrut and his longing to explore other countries bordering the Black Sea.

Petrut tells GEORGIA TODAY that he was born in the seaside city of Constanta, Romania, and always desired to see what else was around the Black Sea. Rather than looking to the West, where he says many people wanted to go at the time, he turned his attention to the East. He wanted to explore the prejudices and stereotypes often associated with the area.

The project includes works from Bulgaria, Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, and Romania. Friday's event will be showcased through zines, experimental publications, and rolling photographs. Ioana notes that when the rolling film is shown, guests guess what country the photo is from to see if they can spot differences, and more often than not, it's not so easy to tell.

Petrut claims there is still a fear of the Black Sea. People see it as dangerous

because of its past. With their project, however, they want to show that it's a normal place, and one often prepared for tourists, a place where people go to enjoy the sun and feel at peace.

"This a fantasy place. The Black Sea can be a fairytale world where you see things you didn't expect to see, and this is why we don't make too many plans," says Petrut. "We prefer reality rather than doing our own research."

Often, photographs for Petrut and Ioana start with a trip, where they stop at every beach or road along the way, which is what they did while visiting the Georgian coast. They say they scout for smaller areas away from resorts because the atmosphere is more intimate. Petrut says there's also less mess and lower visual noise. Even Romania and Georgia are drastically different from each other, and each is heavily different now from what they looked like in 2010.

There's one particular photograph that Petrut says sticks in his mind: two women fishing off a concrete walkway in the Black Sea. He says that the shot is interesting because the women are participating in a field predominantly run by men, but also because they are dressed like they are going to "walk down the boulevard in Paris." He captured the photo when one of the women looked like they had caught a large fish; however, her line was just stuck.

Another aspect of the project which is ongoing in 2024 is how the Black Sea is being affected by the war in Ukraine. Petrut says the impact is rather invisible, and it's difficult to capture photos of beaches in Ukraine since most of them are blocked off for the military or deemed as secure areas. However, the project does document military tensions surrounding the sea. He says it is strange



Profile of Anna Dziapshipa. Source: East European Film Bulletin

in Romania to see the military mix with the sea, because it is a place most people view as an escape from regular life, a place of liberty.

"It's a holiday, people are going to the beach, and next to them are 20 armored vehicles waiting in line," Petrut tells GEORGIA TODAY. "There isn't anything happening at the moment, but you can guess that in some other place, there is something happening. Something is in the air."

While the Black Sea Multimedia Photo Project is displayed in Tbilisi, Georgian filmmakers and other creatives continue to struggle within the country. Anna Dziapshipa is a director, producer, and board member of the Documentary Association of Georgia (DOCA) who has been in the industry since 2008. For years, she says there has been an ongo-

ing battle between filmmakers and the Georgian National Film Center because of documentary films and their association with politics.

She says up to 500 filmmakers have boycotted the center because of an administration change in 2023. Dziapshipa says the Center is associated with mistrust and censorship, which filmmakers don't want to be a part of, so collaboration has been put on hold. She says only those who received funding and grants before the administration switch have continued developing their projects.

However, for the other creators, the international market is needed, which she says is only accessible with support from the person's home country. Dziapshipa tells GEORGIA TODAY that documentaries give an opportunity to dive deeper into lost concepts or those

that are underestimated. Due to this, she says it is a vital form of storytelling that requires a large amount of time and empathy.

"It concerns real stories and real people," says Dziapshipa. "In this oversaturation of the imagery and flow of constant information, it creates a subjective perspective of certain issues that are so much biased in the media, for example, and you would need some deeper reflection about it."

Dziapshipa notes that many documentaries and projects are co-produced with creators from different countries. She says the industry is based on this, and while she is open to collaborating with others, she wants Georgian voices to be heard.

"It's important to tell our own stories because we are part of it," she says. "We will find a way to do that in any circumstances."

Dziapshipa and Salomé Jashi, a documentary filmmaker known for her piece, 'Taming the Gardens', are board members of DOCA, an association that unites documentary filmmakers. They are also co-founders of Sakdoc Film, which promotes documentaries as an art form, helps creators produce documentary films, supports those within the industry, and established Georgia's first documentary pitching forums. Dziapshipa says filmmakers are in a 'breathing period' until October, when Georgia will have their elections.

The Black Sea Multimedia Photo Project will be open on September 6 at the Design Institute in Tbilisi from 18.00. The Romanian Cultural Institute has cofinanced the project through the Cantemir Program—a funding framework for cultural projects intended for the international environment.

# Symphonic Spectacle in the Heart of Georgia: Tsinandali Festival's Dazzling Confluence of Mastery and Nature

BY IVAN NECHAEV

In the scenic heart of Georgia's wine country, where the gentle hills of Kakheti cradle the storied Tsinandali Estate, the Tsinandali Festival has emerged as a cultural beacon, illuminating the region's growing significance in the global classical music landscape. This year's festival, a celebration of unity and artistic excellence, reached new heights with a spellbinding concert that brought together some of the most celebrated names in classical music.

Under the velvet sky of a late summer evening, the Tsinandali Amphitheater—a marvel of acoustical design set amidst the estate's lush gardens—played host to a performance that will undoubtedly be etched into the annals of Georgian cultural history. The Pan-Caucasian Youth Orchestra, under the baton of the illustrious Gianandrea Nosedà, delivered a masterclass in orchestral performance, featuring violin virtuoso Joshua Bell and soprano sensation Chen Reiss. The program, an exquisite pairing of Henryk Wieniawski's Violin Concerto No. 2 in D Minor, Op. 22 and Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 4 in G Major, offered a profound exploration of the human spirit's complexities—both its fiery passions and its yearning for celestial peace.

## A STAGE SET BY HISTORY AND NATURE: THE TSINANDALI FESTIVAL

Before delving into the intricate details of the performance, it is essential to appreciate the Tsinandali Festival's context and its rapidly ascending stature in the global classical music scene. Established as a platform for cultural exchange and artistic excellence, the festival, which opened on August 31 and continues until September 8 this year, has quickly become one of the most anticipated events on the international classical music calendar.

The Tsinandali Estate itself is a site of immense historical and cultural significance. Once the home of the 19th-century Georgian aristocrat and poet Alexander Chavchavadze, the estate has long been a crossroads of Eastern and Western cultural influences. The estate's conversion into a world-class venue for classical music, while preserving its historical charm, symbolizes Georgia's commitment to fostering cultural dialogue and its aspiration to serve as a cultural bridge between Europe and Asia.

This year's festival is particularly notable for its emphasis on nurturing young talent through the Pan-Caucasian Youth Orchestra, an ensemble comprising the finest young musicians from across the Caucasus region. This initiative not only



The Pan-Caucasian Youth Orchestra. Photo by the author

highlights the region's rich musical heritage, but also fosters unity among the diverse cultures of the Caucasus, underscoring music's role as a universal language.

## VIRTUOSITY EMBODIED: JOSHUA BELL AND WIENIAWSKI'S VIOLIN CONCERTO NO. 2

The first half of the evening belonged to the incomparable Joshua Bell, whose performance of Wieniawski's Violin Concerto No. 2 was nothing short of revelatory. Wieniawski, a composer renowned for his virtuosic demands on the violin, created a work that is as technically challenging as it is emotionally rich. Bell's interpretation was a masterclass in balancing these dual demands, delivering a performance that was both technically flawless and deeply expressive.

From the concerto's opening Allegro moderato, Bell's violin soared with a clarity and brilliance that immediately captivated the audience. The intricate interplay between the soloist and the orchestra, under Nosedà's meticulous direction, brought out the conversational nature of the piece, with Bell's violin lines weaving seamlessly in and out of the orchestral fabric. His execution of the virtuosic passages, filled with rapid runs and complex double stops, was nothing short of awe-inspiring, yet what truly set his performance apart was his ability to infuse each note with emotion, creating a narrative that spoke directly to the listener's soul.

"The Romance: Andante non troppo," the concerto's lyrical second movement, saw Bell's violin take on a more introspective tone. His sound, warm and inviting, filled the amphitheater with a sense of intimacy, as if he were sharing a personal story with each member of

the audience. The movement's cantabile lines, played with exquisite phrasing and a delicate touch, resonated with the natural acoustics of the open-air venue, creating a moment of profound beauty that felt almost suspended in time.

In the final movement, 'Allegro con fuoco - Allegro moderato (à la Zingara),' Bell unleashed the full range of his technical prowess. The movement's Zingara theme, characterized by its lively rhythms and fiery character, was brought to life with an energy and precision that left the audience breathless. Bell's performance here was a dance of virtuosity, his fingers flying across the fingerboard with dazzling speed, yet never losing the sense of joy and spontaneity that defines the piece. The orchestra, perfectly in sync with Bell, provided a vibrant and dynamic accompaniment, matching his intensity at every turn.

## THE SUBLIME AND THE TRANSCENDENT: MAHLER'S SYMPHONY NO. 4

Following the interval, the concert transitioned from the virtuosic intensity of Wieniawski to the contemplative grandeur of Mahler's Symphony No. 4 in G Major. This symphony, one of Mahler's most accessible yet profoundly philosophical works, explores the themes of innocence, death, and the afterlife, culminating in a vision of heaven as seen through the eyes of a child.

Gianandrea Nosedà, one of the most sought-after conductors of our time, brought his deep understanding of Mahler's complex emotional landscape to the fore, guiding the Pan-Caucasian Youth Orchestra through a performance that was both deeply moving and meticulously crafted. Nosedà's interpretation was marked by a profound sensitivity to the symphony's shifting moods, from the pastoral serenity of the opening



Joshua Bell, Gianandrea Nosedà. Photo by the author

movement to the otherworldly tranquility of the finale.

The first movement, 'Bedächtig. Nicht eilen,' opened with a simple yet evocative theme, played with a sense of lightness and grace that belied the deeper undercurrents of the music. The orchestra's woodwinds, in particular, shone in this movement, their clear and bright tones blending beautifully with the strings to create a soundscape that was both lush and transparent. Nosedà's pacing was deliberate, allowing the music to unfold naturally, with each phrase building on the last to create a sense of narrative progression.

In the second movement, 'In gemächlicher Bewegung. Ohne Hast,' Mahler introduces the spectral figure of 'Freund Hein,' symbolized by a solo violin tuned a whole tone higher than usual. This eerie, otherworldly sound was played with haunting beauty by the concertmaster, whose performance added a layer of mystery and foreboding to the music. Nosedà's handling of this movement was masterful, balancing the whimsical and the macabre with a deft touch that kept the audience on the edge of their seats.

The third movement, 'Ruhevoll (Poco adagio),' was the emotional heart of the symphony. This slow movement, with its deep sense of serenity and contemplation, was played with a warmth and richness that filled the amphitheater with a palpable sense of peace. The strings of the Pan-Caucasian Youth Orchestra were particularly moving here, their sound enveloping the audience in a warm embrace that seemed to merge with the surrounding landscape. Nosedà's interpretation was deeply introspective, allowing the music to speak directly to the listener's heart, evoking a sense of spiritual calm that was both powerful and healing.

The final movement, 'Sehr behaglich,'

brought the symphony to a close with the introduction of the soprano soloist, Chen Reiss. Singing the text of the Wunderhorn song 'Das himmlische Leben,' Reiss's voice was pure and radiant, perfectly capturing the childlike innocence and joy of Mahler's vision of heaven. Her performance was a revelation, blending seamlessly with the delicate orchestration to create a moment of transcendent beauty that left the audience spellbound. Nosedà's conducting in this movement was marked by a gentle restraint, allowing Reiss's voice to take center stage while the orchestra provided a subtle and supportive accompaniment.

## TSINANDALI AS A SYMBOL OF UNITY AND ARTISTIC EXCELLENCE

The Tsinandali Festival, with its unique setting and world-class performers, offered an unforgettable musical experience that transcended the boundaries of the concert hall. The combination of Wieniawski's fiery concerto and Mahler's contemplative symphony created a program that explored the full range of human emotion, from virtuosic brilliance to spiritual peace.

Gianandrea Nosedà's direction, coupled with the talents of Joshua Bell and Chen Reiss, brought these works to life with a freshness and vitality that resonated deeply with the audience. The Pan-Caucasian Youth Orchestra, composed of young musicians from across the region, played with a maturity and sensitivity that belied their years, making a powerful statement about the unifying power of music.

In the tranquil surroundings of the Tsinandali Estate, where the boundaries between the stage and the natural world seemed to blur, this concert was a testament to the enduring power of classical music to evoke, inspire, and transform.

# Adishi At Last. Part 2: Being There

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

Look around. The village of Adishi is crowned by Mt Tetnuli, but is more destroyed than whole as far as its buildings go. Half-ruined towers and wooden or stone skeletons of houses are everywhere; the towers especially a shame. One of the most prominent ones, near the top of the village with a stream running past it, has half of its intricate top detail gone and cracks running down its entire length; and no roof, like most of them here. It could come down with the next hard frost, water getting in, turning to ice and shattering it. So my main first impression of Adishi is of sorrow. There are a number of guest houses running, which is a good sign, but the sheer effort of bringing materials up here and renovating is daunting. We returned to Nino and Tarzan's guest house for a great supper and bed.

The early morning brought sounds of rain over the dull roar of the Adishchala river, along with the ongoing presence of my aforementioned upper leg pains from the over-fast exertions of the day before. If this continues, I thought, I'll change my plans, not trek with the group, and just stay here a day or two more to get to know the village better. After all, starting a 17 km up-and-down slog with pain at the start is not wise; and if I don't even have good views, just rain coming down on me, what's even the point!

But after a good breakfast with the group, both my leg pains and the rain had actually stopped. I had asked Nino to arrange the little church just above her house opened for those of us who wanted to see inside it, and a few others joined me there.

The church interior matches the rest of Adishi for sad condition. Its dark frescoes, once no doubt magnificent, are half gone, scratched out, some fallen plaster, some moisture damage. But there are many ancient icons too, all labelled, and I was

allowed to photograph anything I wanted. No flash, of course! A single burst of camera or video lighting can measurably fade paint. So I upped my camera's light sensitivity and shot away happily, dazzled by the magnificence of the painted and tooled gilt-on-silver masterpieces of folk ecclesiastical art. Everyone noticed how much work would be needed to restore or even just preserve this church. It must be done with great care by experts to not make things worse.

I asked Nino about a school. The nearest one's in Ipari, she said, 9 km away, and a minivan takes the 4 or 5 school-age children down and back every day. At least they have a ride... but doing this in mid-winter would be no fun.

I made my decision to continue for the morning and see how my legs (and the weather) would do. We said our goodbyes and set off, 18 of us, led by Klement in front and Irakli behind, towards the Adishchala Valley, and horses waiting to take us across the river, which otherwise we could not manage for its depth



and speed. That crossing might be a good place to decide, onwards or back, based on my needs. Adishi receded behind us, step by step.

To be continued...

Tony Hanmer has lived in Georgia since 1999, in Svaneti since 2007, and been a

weekly writer and photographer for GT since early 2011. He runs the "Svaneti Renaissance" Facebook group, now with over 2000 members, at [www.facebook.com/groups/SvanetiRenaissance/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/SvanetiRenaissance/). He and his wife also run their own guest house in Etseri: [www.facebook.com/hanmer.house.svaneti](http://www.facebook.com/hanmer.house.svaneti)

# Beyond the Conventional: The Art of Jibson Khundadze at Tsinandali Estate



Photo by the author

BY IVAN NECHAEV

As the Tsinandali Festival unfolds, another significant cultural event is taking place within the historic walls of the Tsinandali Estate—a comprehensive exhibition of Jibson Khundadze's work. Running from September 1 to November 10, 2024, this exhibition offers a rare glimpse into the mind of an artist who not only navigated but transcended the challenges of Soviet isolation, emerging as a pivotal figure in the new wave of Georgian visual art. Khundadze's work is a testament to the power of individualistic expression, challenging the boundaries of traditional artistic formats.

## NAVIGATING AND OVERCOMING SOVIET ISOLATION

Jibson Khundadze's artistic journey is inextricably linked to the political and cultural climate of his time. Born during the Soviet era, Khundadze was subject to the same restrictions that stifled the creative expression of many artists in the Soviet Union. Yet, where others saw obstacles, Khundadze saw opportunities for reinvention. His art became a medium for subtle resistance, employing a unique conceptual language that defied the homogenizing tendencies of Soviet realism.

The Tsinandali exhibition underscores how Khundadze's work emerged as a response to these constraints. The isolation imposed by the Soviet regime necessitated a self-reliant form of creativity, which Khundadze embraced. He crafted a distinct visual lexicon, informed by a keen awareness of global art movements but rooted in a deeply personal and local context. This synthesis of global and

local elements became a hallmark of his style, allowing him to convey complex ideas without conforming to the ideological expectations of the time.

## THE VERSATILITY OF FORM AND CONCEPT

Khundadze's refusal to adhere to any particular artistic format is one of the most striking aspects of his work. The Tsinandali exhibition showcases this versatility, presenting a range of media, from paintings and drawings to mixed media and installations. Each piece reflects Khundadze's ongoing dialogue with the medium itself, as well as with the viewer. The absence of a single, unifying style in his oeuvre is not a sign of inconsistency, but rather an indication of his commitment to exploring the full spectrum of artistic expression.

For instance, Khundadze's use of mixed media often blurs the lines between painting and sculpture, challenging the viewer to reconsider their preconceived notions of form. His installations, on the other hand, transform the gallery space into an immersive environment, where the boundaries between art and reality are deliberately obscured. This fluidity of form is not merely a stylistic choice but a conceptual strategy, aimed at engaging the viewer in a more dynamic and participatory experience of art.

## A CONCEPTUAL APPROACH TO GEORGIAN IDENTITY

Khundadze's work is also deeply informed by his Georgian identity, which he explores in both direct and oblique ways. The exhibition at Tsinandali is particularly significant in this regard, as the estate itself is a symbol of Georgian cultural heritage. By situating his work within this historic context, Khundadze invites viewers to reflect on the intersections between past and present, tradition

and innovation.

His approach to Georgian identity is neither nostalgic nor romanticized. Instead, it is characterized by a critical engagement with history, culture, and memory. Khundadze often employs symbols and motifs drawn from Georgian folklore, architecture, and landscape, but these elements are always recontextualized within a contemporary framework. This recontextualization serves to challenge static notions of national identity, presenting it as something dynamic and constantly evolving.

For example, in one of the installations at the Tsinandali exhibition, Khundadze incorporates traditional Georgian patterns and textiles into a modern, abstract composition. The result is a visual dialogue between the old and the new, the familiar and the unfamiliar. This interplay not only reflects Khundadze's own complex relationship with his cultural heritage, but also encourages the viewer to consider their own position within this continuum.

## THE ROLE OF THE VIEWER IN KHUNDADZE'S WORK

A crucial aspect of Khundadze's artistic practice is his emphasis on the role of the viewer. His works are not meant to be passively observed, but actively engaged with. This is particularly evident in the Tsinandali exhibition, where the layout and design of the space encourage movement and interaction. The viewer becomes a participant in the creation of meaning, as they navigate through the various pieces and installations.

Khundadze's emphasis on viewer interaction can be seen as a response to the alienation and passivity often associated with Soviet-era art. By contrast, his work fosters a sense of agency and empowerment, inviting viewers to bring their own



Photo by the author



Photo by the author

experiences and interpretations to the table. This democratization of the artistic experience is a key element of Khundadze's vision, one that aligns with his broader commitment to breaking down the barriers between art and life.

## A NEW WAVE IN GEORGIAN VISUAL ART

Jibson Khundadze's exhibition at Tsinandali Estate is more than just a retrospective; it is a celebration of an artist who has consistently pushed the boundaries of what art can be. His work represents a new wave in Georgian visual art, characterized by its conceptual depth, formal versatility, and critical engagement with identity and history.

As visitors to the Tsinandali Museum explore Khundadze's works, they are not

just witnessing the evolution of an individual artist but also the broader trajectory of Georgian art as it navigates the complexities of post-Soviet reality. Khundadze's work reminds us that art is not merely a reflection of the world but a powerful tool for shaping it, for challenging the status quo, and for envisioning new possibilities.

In this way, Khundadze's exhibition is not just an artistic event but a cultural milestone—one that invites us to reconsider the role of art in our lives and its potential to inspire change. As the exhibition runs alongside the Tsinandali Festival, it serves as a poignant reminder that Georgia's cultural renaissance is not limited to music and performance, but extends to the visual arts in profound and transformative ways.



Photo by the author



Photo by the author



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