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MEP Rihards Kols on Holding Russia Accountable and the Need to Mature Georgia's Politics

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

Rihards Kols is a Latvian politician of the National Alliance who was elected member of the European Parliament (European Conservatives and Reformists Group) in 2024. Radio Free Europe/RL's Georgian Service sat down with him at the Tbilisi International Conference to get his view of the current affairs.

THE PANEL DOWNSTAIRS WAS CALLED 'HOW TO HOLD PUTIN RESPONSIBLE, ACCOUNTABLE.' HOW LIKELY IS IT THAT PUTIN WILL BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE AND WHAT DOES IT DEPEND ON?

Realistically, of course, it might take years. It's not like the Nuremberg Tribunal, when a country instantly capitulated and the leadership was arrested and tried. Since ICC's inception in 2002, they have issued 38 arrest warrants, and 17 are still at large, so less than half have been arrested. I think the most important principle of this is impunity.

Continued on page 4



MEP Rihards Kols

GALT & TAGGART											
Prepared for Georgia Today Business by											
As of 10-Sep-2024											
Markets					Markets						
	Price	w/w	m/m		Price	w/w	m/m		Price	w/w	m/m
BONDS											
GEORG 04/26	94.26 (YTM 6.56%)	+0.1%	+0.9%	Bank of Georgia (BGEO LN)	GBP 41.00	-8.1%	+2.6%				
GBAIL 04/28	90.09 (YTM 7.04%)	+0.3%	+1.7%	Georgia Capital (GCEO LN)	GBP 10.00	-	-				
GEBOG 9 1/2 PERP	97.89 (YTM 9.25%)	-0.2%	+0.1%	TBC Bank Group (TBCC LN)	GBP 28.55	-2.6%	+2.0%				
SILNET 01/27	100.16 (YTM 8.29%)	+0.1%	+0.3%								
TBC 10 1/2 PERP	100.31 (YTM 5.28%)	-	-0.3%	COMMODITIES							
TBC 8.894 PERP	95.89 (YTM 11.07%)	+0.0%	+0.1%	Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	69.19	-6.2%	-13.1%				
TBC 10 1/4 PERP	98.32 (YTM 10.61%)	-0.1%	-0.2%	Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	2,516.73	+1.0%	+3.5%				
INDICES											
SP 500	5,495.52	-0.6%	+2.8%	USD / GEL	2,6949	+0.2%	+0.1%				
FTSE 250	20,656.14	-0.7%	+0.2%	EUR / GEL	2,9697	-0.0%	+1.0%				
DOW JONES 30	40,736.96	-0.5%	+3.1%	GBP / GEL	3,5225	-0.1%	+2.4%				
Russell 2000	2,097.44	-2.4%	+0.8%	EUR / USD	1,1020	-0.2%	+0.9%				
FTSE 100	8,205.98	-1.1%	+0.5%	GBP / USD	1,3080	-0.3%	+2.5%				



Vassilis Maragos, Head of the EU Delegation to Armenia and European Commission Vice-President Margaritis Schinas. Source: EUneighbourseast

EU and Yerevan Initiate Dialogue on Visa Liberalization for Armenia

BY TEAM GT

This week, European Commission Vice-President Margaritis Schinas visited Yerevan to initiate a political-level dialogue on visa liberalization. Upon arrival in Yerevan, he was welcomed by Vassilis Maragos, Head of the EU Delegation to Armenia. During his visit, Schinas met with Armenian President Vahagn Khachaturyan, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, and Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan. The discussions also covered various aspects of the EU-Armenia Partnership Agenda.

“The start of the visa liberalization dialogue at the political level with Deputy Prime Minister Mher Grigoryan underscores the EU and its Member

States’ commitment to strengthening the robust partnership with Armenia,” stated a press release from the EU Delegation to Armenia. “The goal of this dialogue is to eventually eliminate the visa requirement for Armenian citizens for short-term stays in the EU, contingent upon Armenia implementing significant reforms in areas such as travel document security, border and migration management, public order, and fundamental rights related to freedom of movement.”

The EU Delegation noted that this dialogue with Armenia will be a multi-year process, conducted in close cooperation with EU Member States to monitor progress and reforms.

During his visit, Vice President Schinas also engaged with students at Yerevan State University, discussing recent advancements in EU-Armenia relations and future prospects based on shared values.

CoE Commissioner for HR: Georgia’s Parliament Should Refrain From Adopting Anti-LGBT Law



Michael O’Flaherty. Source: Wikipedia

BY TEAM GT

The Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, Michael O’Flaherty, addressed a letter to the Speaker of the Parliament of Georgia, where he asks the members of the Parliament to refrain from approving the draft law “On Family Values and Protection of Minors” passed in the second reading on September 4, 2024, – the Council of Europe reports.

O’Flaherty also calls on members of parliament to work with national and international partners to protect the rights of LGBT people, fight discrimination against them, and refrain from using rhetoric that stigmatizes LGBT people.

The Commissioner emphasizes that the bill provides a legal basis for discrimination against LGBT people and is against the European Convention on Human Rights.

According to his own assessment, the bill “continues to stigmatize and discriminate against LGBT people by listing sexual orientation and gender identity alongside incest.”

He further states that the content of the bill is similar to the constitutional bill “On Family Values and Protection of Minors” registered in the Parliament on April 3, 2024, in connection with which the European Commission for the Protection of Democracy through Law concluded that “the proposal to adopt this text against LGBT people in Georgia threatens to further strengthen the hostile and stigmatized atmosphere.”

“According to the well-established case law of the European Court of Human Rights, a democratic society rejects any stigmatization based on sexual orientation. Such a society is built on the equal dignity of individuals and is strengthened by diversity, which it perceives not as a threat, but as a source of enrichment”, states the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe.

Georgia Secures 1:0 Victory Over Albania, Leads Nations League Group



Image source: ეროვნული ნაკრები

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

The Georgian national football team won 1-0 against Albania in UEFA’s Nations League, making Georgia the leader of the group.

The crucial goal was scored by Giorgi Kochorashvili, after which the team’s defense did its best to prevent their rivals from scoring.

Georgia’s next group game will take place on October 11th, this time against Ukraine.

M4EG in Georgia: EU-Supported Contest Sends Winner to Startup World Cup

BY TEAM GT

Twelve innovative Georgian startups competed at the Georgian Startup Summit and Startup World Cup Regional Competition held in Batumi at the end of August.

This year’s champion, TelAgri, is a startup that

facilitates connections between farmers and experts to share knowledge and experiences. As the winner, TelAgri will travel to Silicon Valley in October to represent Georgia at the Startup World Cup.

The summit’s goal is to enhance Georgia’s startup ecosystem, offering local startups valuable exposure and support.

The event was organized by Startup Connect, with backing from the European Union in Georgia and UNDP Georgia, as part of the ‘Mayors for Economic Growth’ (M4EG) initiative.



The winning team. Photo by Irakli Dzneladze/UNDP

Ukraine Latest: Thousands of Ukrainian Soldiers Killed in Kursk: Putin Punishes all on Way to "Kursk Victory"

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

In a dramatic escalation of the ongoing conflict, Russian forces have dealt a severe blow to Ukraine's military capabilities, according to the latest reports from Moscow. The Russian Defense Ministry claims that Ukraine has sustained approximately 11,400 casualties since its incursion into the Kursk region. The Russian military reported the destruction of 89 Ukrainian tanks in just one day, highlighting the scale of the ongoing battles and the significant losses suffered by Ukrainian forces. The high casualty figures and extensive destruction of military hardware reflect the intense and high-stakes nature of the conflict, with both sides engaged in a protracted and costly struggle over key territories.

As the situation continues to evolve, these developments mark a critical juncture in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, with significant implications for the military dynamics and overall strategy in the region.

Russian forces are now fighting back Ukraine's incursion in Kursk, more than a month after Kyiv's troops stunned Vladimir Putin and seized a large swathe of the Russian region.

The counterattack started along Kursk's western edge, allowing Russia's more combat-experienced troops to reportedly take back several settlements in the past 48 hours, the US-based think tank the Institute for the Study of War said.

Major General Apti Alaudinov, who commands Chechnya's Akhmat special forces fighting in Kursk, said that Russian troops had gone on the offensive and taken back control of about 10 set-

tlements in Kursk, TASS reported.

"The situation is good for us," said Alaudinov, who is also deputy head of the Russian defense ministry's military-political department.

"A total of about 10 settlements in the Kursk region have been liberated," he said.

Last week, Volodymyr Zelensky said his forces controlled 100 settlements in Kursk over an area of more than 1,300 sq km (500 sq miles), a figure disputed by Russian sources.

Ukrainian forces are fighting back, and have initiated new attacks of their own, the ISW said.

The update from Kursk comes as the US and the UK pledged nearly \$1.5bn for Ukraine in humanitarian aid, assistance and loan guarantees during talks in Kyiv, but could not clear the use of long-range missile strikes inside Russia.

Volodymyr Zelensky has been pleading with Kyiv's allies for months to let Ukraine fire Western missiles, including long-range US ATACMS and British Storm Shadows, deep into Russian territory to limit Moscow's ability to launch attacks.

RUSSIA LAUNCHES ANOTHER MASSIVE STRIKE ON UKRAINE'S POWER GRID

Russian forces attacked energy infrastructure in six regions in the past 24 hours, Ukraine's energy ministry said on Thursday.

The ministry said via Telegram that the attacks had temporarily disrupted the work of power substations in at least three of these regions.

Russian drones inflicted significant damage to the northern Ukrainian town of Konotop's energy infrastructure in an overnight attack that injured at least 14 people and cut electricity to the settle-

ment, local officials said.

Rescuers were working to restore power in the town, which had a pre-war population of about 83,000. Regional officials said there had been 10 explosions during the attack and Mayor Artem Semikhin said the power system was in critical condition.

"At the moment, energy workers are doing everything they can to provide electricity to the hospital and the water supply system," he said in the early hours of Thursday. "Hospitals continue to operate."

EU AT UN SECURITY COUNCIL: UKRAINE HAS LOST UP TO 80% OF ITS PRE-WAR THERMAL ELECTRICITY PRODUCTION CAPACITY

On 10 September, the Head of the EU Delegation to the United Nations, Ambassador Stavros Lambrinidis, speaking in New York at the UN Security Council on the Maintenance of International Peace and Security, repeated the EU's call on Russia to immediately halt its illegal war of aggression, including its unrelenting air strikes against Ukraine's civilians and civilian and critical infrastructure.

On 26 August, Russia launched an unprecedented number of 236 missiles and drones. On 3 September, at least 55 people were killed and 328 injured in Poltava alone.

"It has hit residential buildings, hospitals, schools, power plants and playgrounds. This is unacceptable under any circumstances. Ukraine has lost up to 80% of its pre-war thermal electricity production capacity. It is clear Russia is attempting to pile the pressure on the Ukrainian people ahead of a cold winter," Lambrinidis said.

He said the EU is "very concerned" by the recent reports indicating that Iran



The Russian counterattack begins in Kursk. Source: Newsweek

has supplied Russia with ballistic missiles and called upon all countries, including the DPRK and Belarus, to refrain from any actions that may amount to complicity in Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

Lambrinidis also highlighted the fact that Russia has cut off an estimated 1.5 million Ukrainians from humanitarian aid, and called on Moscow to respect its obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights law in the territories it temporarily occupies. "While it wages a war of aggression, Russia shows no concern for the welfare of civilians in the areas it temporarily occu-

pies," Lambrinidis told the UN Security Council.

UK TO PROVIDE £600 MILLION IN SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE

British foreign secretary David Lammy has announced that Britain will provide a further £600 million of support for Ukraine as he visited Kyiv with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

The British government said it would provide £242 million of funding, including for humanitarian needs, and £484 million in loan guarantees for World Bank lending to Ukraine before the end of the year.

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MEP Rihards Kols on Holding Russia Accountable and the Need to Mature Georgia's Politics



MEP Rihards Kols

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That cannot prevail. This is the lesson we learned from the sacrifices the world had to make during WW2. This is a moral duty. No matter how long it takes, they will always be accountable for their war crimes, crimes against humanity. There are still trials ongoing for the Nazi collaborators aged 100+ that are still alive. They're being told there's no excuses for what they've done, and they are tried.

This principle that impunity cannot prevail is especially important in Russia's case, because we know from the violent history of the country, be it Tsarist Russia, the Soviet Union, or the modern day Russian Federation - it is a country that relishes in impunity, waging wars, and being aggressive. Why? Because there's no accountability. That emboldens their citizens, too, and then things like Bucha and Irpen happen. Those soldiers are criminals; they have no honor. They see that they can commit crimes and not be held accountable because their leader, their country, will protect them.

HOW MUCH OF YOUR RESOLUTENESS CAN BE PUT DOWN TO THE FACT YOU ARE FROM LATVIA, A COUNTRY WHICH WOULD PROBABLY BE IN DANGER ITSELF IF RUSSIA WERE TO PREVAIL IN UKRAINE?

There is a narrative that if Ukraine fails, the Baltics are next. Don't buy into it. We're in NATO. How can you separate something that is a unified entity, where everyone at all the summits so far has said "not an inch." You won't stop the aggression with appeasement, but there are politicians in the West that think that if you appease the tyrant, then maybe you can have partial peace. Yet, again and again, Putin has shown he's ruthless; he has indicated that he's going to play the patient game, to outlast the West and, actually, compared to the West, he is putting the money where his mouth is. His economy is a war economy. His military industry is working 24-7, delivering 3 to 4 million shells a year, while, where Europe's combined military capabilities massively outweigh Russia's, it is struggling to deliver 1 million shells.

We have to be critical of ourselves. There are a lot of flaws in our policies. There is hesitation. And I always say to my Western colleagues that nothing provokes Putin more than showing weakness. Hesitation is seen as a weakness by the Kremlin. The only policy that Russia understands is strength. Reagan is becoming very popular for his stance during the 80s and 90s. Peace is only possible through strength. And this is exactly how we have to do business with Russia.

Strategically defeating Russia means crippling its economy and military capabilities so that it cannot endanger neighboring countries in the future. It might be even a buffer zone at the expense of Russia's territory. The problem is there is as yet no consensus in the West what that "strategic defeat" will be.

WHAT'S AT STAKE FOR GEORGIA NOW?

Georgia is diverting from the path that it enshrined in its constitution as its people's ambition for Euro-Atlantic integration, including membership in NATO and the EU. This path has become increasingly rocky over the past months. Georgia had candidate status granted it, through mere luck, I would say. Right now, of course, there won't be any moves from the EU - up until the elections and even after the elections. The ruling party's initiatives I cannot describe as anything than pushing Georgia back into Russia's orbit.

HOW HAS THE EU HANDLED THIS AFFAIR SO FAR? AND WHAT SHOULD ONE EXPECT IN THE FUTURE FROM BRUSSELS?

Every member state has the right to submit a proposal, so I cannot predict what might be put on the table, but I think the EU rhetoric right now is that nothing is off the table when it comes to Georgia. I'm hearing politicians in Europe saying there should be individual sanctions applied on those who voted on or drafted the "Russian foreign agent law." Freezing the visa-free regime is, in my personal opinion, a path we should not go down, because, what's the logic of it? Who gets punished? The Georgian people. And that is something that will damage the EU's credibility. The bottom line for this topic is it will be a decision made by each member state. There has to be a consensus, but it's certainly not just wagging fingers.

WE REALIZE THE POTENTIAL COST FROM THE GEORGIAN POINT OF VIEW. HOW IS IT SEEN FROM EUROPE'S POINT OF VIEW? DO THEY REALIZE THEY MIGHT BE LETTING GEORGIA GO INTO THE RUSSIAN ORBIT?

That phrasing implies that it is us who determine it, as if, with our decisions, we're going to turn Georgia into Russia. What I'm seeing here is, and I would call it a curse for Georgia, is that "the principle winner takes all" is something that defines politics in Georgia. And that's an issue. If you want to be a mature democracy, that principle should be abandoned. Just last year, I met the opposition parties. They were contradicting each other on different policies, on different topics I will not name. I was left the wondering whether, no matter who wins in the upcoming elections, say the ruling party loses and the next one gains the same amount of support as the ruling party, they might not just do the same to their opposition? The track record shows it. And maybe that's the mentality. I don't know. But this is something that needs to be discussed within the political circles. "Are we ready to step past these differences and actually get to work? Even if we don't agree on everything?" In Latvia, we have a multi-party system. In the last parliament, we had a coalition of five parties. It's not easy, but that's the cost of it, and that's Georgia's citizens' decision to make.



'We the People' & Democracy

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

There is big talk in the world's mass media about the pros and cons of democracy. Most of us, the more or less civilized part of humankind, believe that democracy is something humely agreeable and politically valuable, and there is nothing better out there to substitute it (at least so far!).

Many suggest that democracy, in general, does not provide for a desirable level of political stability, usually causing recurrent modifications of policies of governments. American scholars go even further. Some of them argue that the American Constitution might very well be the root of the current American defective politics, saying that the United States' main law of the land "is in trouble, being essentially anti-democratic and, in this day and age, increasingly dysfunctional" (New York Times).

The American Liberals and Conservatives claim each is "a hazard to the Constitution," corroborating this statement by the fact that each newly-elected president, based on the functioning law, can and does annul the rules and ordinances that were signed and adopted in their own time by the previous chief executive, especially so if the predecessor represented the other side of the legislative aisle.

The selfsame scholars suggest that the

USA is in serious trouble because it is egregiously difficult, and at times even impossible, to introduce an amendment to 'We the People'. They don't even exclude the possibility of a new constitutional convention and the prospect of secession of a bunch of states, if push comes to shove, hoping that "any divorce, if it comes, will be peaceful."

A New York Times article by Jennifer Szalai suggests that the current American constitution could accelerate the end of American democracy: "The argument that what ails the country's politics isn't simply the president, or Congress, or the Supreme Court, but the founding document that presides over all three, has been gaining traction, especially among liberals. Books and opinion essays critiquing the constitution have proliferated... Americans have long assumed that the Constitution could save us; a growing chorus now wonders whether we need to be saved from it." Wow! The gravity of these words triggers a number of mind-boggling thoughts.

American history textbooks have not changed in the last 150 years, if only in their more colorful and excessively sophisticated cover designs. The younger generation, hearing the above argument, are still drawing on texts that have been considered a historical truth for quite a while, stretching over tens of generations. If this kind of public dispute persists and finally leads to the revision of the quarter-of-a-millennium old Amer-

ican Constitution, then a myriad of things may change in the United States, including the way democracy is interpreted as "a system of government by the whole population or all the eligible members of a state, typically through elected representatives."

Incidentally, would the famous political wisdom by the great Abraham Lincoln be revised too? I mean his yet undying aphorism "A government by the people, of the people, for the people." No transformation of the now-archaic political rhetoric or reconsideration of current political perceptions would surprise me now. Why should the critique of the American Constitution be so shocking anyway? It has served its time, and might now be altered as contemporary life demands and dictates.

Szalai continues: "In 1787, when 55 delegates convened in Philadelphia to revise the Articles of Confederation, they ended up embarking on a project that was much bigger in scope." And newer too, I would say! Well, if the revision was possible then, at the end of the 18th century, why should it be impossible nowadays when the reasons for change are more acute and straightforward? The American system of government, reflected in thorough details of the constitutional text, is as strong today as it has ever been, and yet, it is Man-made and by Man will it be changed as long as life suggests the change, but not to the detriment of the American people, only to their benefit!

Olympic Champions Lasha Talakhadze and Geno Petriashvili on GD Election List



Lasha Talakhadze and Geno Petriashvili

BY TEAM GT

Athletes have been included in the parliamentary list of Georgian Dream this year. Irakli Kobakhidze named the first team, which includes weightlifter and three-

time Olympic champion Lasha Talakhadze, as well as freestyle wrestler and Olympic champion Geno Petriashvili.

Party Chairman Bidzina Ivanishvili was number one on the list.

The Georgian Dream electoral team is as follows: Bidzina Ivanishvili, Irakli Kobakhidze, Irakli Garibashvili, Shalva Papuashvili, Mamuka Mdinardze,

Thea Tsulukiani, Lasha Talakhadze, Vaktang Turnava, Maka Bochorishvili, Geno Petriashvili, Sozar Subari, Mariam Kvlivishvili, Anri Okhanashvili, Nikoloz Samkharadze, Eka Kiknadze, Shota Berekashvili, Levan Makhashvili, Mikheil Kavelashvili, Giorgi Gabunia, and Lika Shartava.

The parliamentary elections of 2024 will be held on October 26.

On Some Relevant Aspects of Contemporary US Foreign Policy: 2024 Presidential Elections and Georgia's Expectations. Part 2

OP-ED BY VICTOR KIPIANI,
GEOCASE CHAIRMAN

In the fierce competition between the Western and anti-Western axes - which is further complicated by the so-called peculiar behavior of the Global South - our partners should remember that there is virtually no geopolitical "vacuum" left in the world. In other words, as soon as one military-political grouping lessens its focus on a particular country or region, its rival immediately takes over the vacated space. Today, such substitution has become particularly easy due to information warfare and so-called gray operations, as well as the promotion of growing ethno-nationalism and authoritarian populism.

This is why (and not only) the current debate in US political and analytical circles about a rational foreign line requires a balance between the so-called "internationalism" and "conservatism" so that the interests of the US and its partners are not harmed. The "audit" we have mentioned aims at both theoretical and practical solutions to this very complex problem. We will not bore the reader with conceptual theses and on the basis of various sources we will characterize the American foreign policy revised at the intersection of "primacy" and "prioritization" as follows:

(1) Maintaining active participation in global processes and close cooperation with partners;



Donald Trump. Photo by Hannah Beier/Bloomberg/Getty Images

(2) A deterrent military capability that would make anyone reconsider open aggression not only against the country but also its partners due to the expected dire consequences - the so-called "deterrence by denial"

(3) Realignment of the international order, including by increasing the capac-

ity of international institutions. In the same context, resuscitating the role of the UN Security Council and neutralizing the "veto trap";

(4) Proactive diplomacy - in exchange for the so-called "endless wars"; At the same time -

(5) The rejection of "endless wars"

does not mean nullifying the role of military force, but rather using it with reasonable self-restraint, when and in a way that is unavoidable and serves understandable, acceptable and realistic goals;

(6) Greater flexibility in the implementation of economic enforcement measures, including the implementation of

the so-called "smart sanctions".

Which line the Americans will develop, this or another, we will obviously see in the not-too-distant future. Here it should be taken into account that it is difficult to accurately predict current events. However, certain contours are already emerging, which gives Georgia's foreign office and other political institutions an opportunity to observe, analyze and properly react to them. How well we fulfill this task is a big puzzle in itself. We have already talked about the necessary conditions and principles of its realization many times and will not overload this article with their repetition.

Let us now briefly address a couple of relevant sub-questions of the topic discussed above.

TRUMP "REPEATEDLY" AND THE EXPECTED CHANGES?

Donald Trump's second presidency is being awaited by everyone with some inexplicable excitement. This is not surprising since the 2017-2021 version of Trump was actually charismatic. At the same time, it is pretty hard to say with certainty that the "second version" of President Trump will be a replica of his first presidency. Most likely - no. And the reason for this is not only in the current US, but also in the global root processes. By the way, there is no single assessment of the policies associated with Trump's first presidency, and the direction of foreign policy at the time has several different explanations.

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GEORGIAN HOSPITALITY SERVICES GO THROUGH GLOBAL STANDARDS









On Some Relevant Aspects of Contemporary US Foreign Policy: 2024 Presidential Elections and Georgia's Expectations. Part 2

Continued from page 5

There is virtually no doubt that the 2024 US presidential election is about more than just the personality of the White House occupant. Much more is expected here, namely the clarification or redefinition of the "national interests" of this global player. And this is so important because the US "national interests" have and will continue to have a great influence on the system of international relations.

Here, we intentionally leave out two aspects:

(1) The chance of Trump winning the election due to the inclusion of Kamala Harris in the presidential race;

(2) Trump's possible influence on Georgia's domestic and foreign agenda: due to "using" the issue by the Georgian political spectrum for power and narrow partisan purposes.

Thus, we will mention, with a few remarks, the changes in the foreign policy of this country expected as a result of the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States, which also deserve Tbilisi's attention.

First, there is the question of the depth and content of such changes. The fact is that even today the core of the Republican Party (as well as the current Republican faction in the Senate) is made up of neoconservatives and supporters of the "primacy" we mentioned. It is clear that the balance of power within the party may change, but the status of this event is exactly as we have described it here.

Second, it should be said that Donald Trump looks at world politics and relations largely through the eyes of a businessman. Accordingly, for him, "partnership" relations with a country are measured by geo-economic rather than geo-strategic factors. In other words, the economic benefit and practical function of a particular country will be central to his administration. It is worth noting that while discussing the security and competitiveness of our country, we have repeatedly discussed the role of such a function and goal for Georgia, its relevance and the need for constant renewal.

Third, Trump's (like his two predecessors) "enthusiasm" for economic coercive measures in foreign relations, be it sanctions, control over technology exports, the US dollar as the world currency, tariffs, etc., to some extent should be taken into account by us, especially against the background of sharply deteriorating Georgian-American relations.

Fourth, it is likely that in geopolitically traditional geographies for the US (Europe, the Middle East, the Korean Peninsula), Trump will attempt (to the extent possible) to shift the burden of security and the balance of power to local actors. The direction of the People's Republic of China is the only one where compromise is less likely. Against the background of the recent intensification of Georgian-Chinese relations, naturally, this aspect is relevant for us.

Of course, the factors highlighted in this part of the article have many offshoots and modifications. Moreover, this list is not exhaustive to fully characterize the US foreign policy and the Trump's influence on Georgian-American format. However, we believe that these notes also provide official Tbilisi with sufficient material for an in-depth judgment and an adequate response.

Post Scriptum: The widespread talk about expectations for Donald Trump's re-election is no accident: Trump is unusual as a person and a politician. That will prepare the world for a surprise if he returns to the White House. We have already talked about this and other aspects in some detail. We believe that the presidency of Kamala Harris promises us no



Kamala Harris. Photo by Erin Schaff/POOL via Getty Images

fewer discoveries. This view stems from a deficit in the current perception of Harris as a prominent political figure, as well as her modest activism in the foreign arena.

Indeed, the contours of foreign policy during the Harris presidency are now difficult to predict. However, given the content of this article - drawing on a variety of sources and assessments - we felt it necessary to create a brief "CV card" of the Democratic presidential candidate's various key themes. Specifically:

(a) China: Harris's policy presumably will not be particularly different from Biden's. She will continue to strengthen alliances in Southeast Asia and favor a line of cooperation and competition in US-China relations. What is particularly noteworthy here is how the new US industrial (in practice protectionist) policy and the so-called "Tariff War" will continue.

It is also likely that China's influence in the region will continue to be counterbalanced by deepening relations with India, which - along with geopolitical considerations - will be facilitated by Harris's background;

(b) Trade: As noted, the protectionist line established during Biden's presidency will largely be maintained. Emphasis is also likely to be placed on limiting the influence of monopolies and protecting intellectual property.

Here, we will add that the attitude of a possibly "democratic" White House to free trade agreements of special interest to Georgia is very vague.

(c) Middle East: Israel's security will not lose relevance. However, more attention will be paid to the humanitarian side of the process, especially with regard to the condition of the Palestinians.

However, within this very peculiar "equation," it is unlikely that the security of the Jewish state will lose its traditional priority for US policy. It should also be taken into account that Harris's husband is Jewish, which, although indirectly, will still have a certain load.

(d) The Russian-Ukrainian war, perhaps the most notable issue for Georgia in Harris's approach. Especially since the ongoing war in Ukraine has equally become an integral component of both external Georgian and internal Georgian politics.

Judging by the statements made so far, the likelihood of Harris' "tolerance" for Russia's aggressive policy is practically zero. At the same time, the unity and further strengthening of the North Atlan-

tic Alliance remains the cornerstone of the declared policy of the Democrats.

It is clear that this brief summary is completely insufficient to create a complete picture of future processes, but it does provide some insights - for us and for our region.

WHO SHOULD WE TALK TO? WHO SHOULD WE "DEAL" WITH?

Of course, the formation of US foreign policy is a multidimensional process involving various institutions and centers of influence. Thus, the answer to the question of who Georgia should talk to in the heart of our strategic partner is banally simple: to everyone.

At the same time, it is impossible not to emphasize the public or non-public side of American foreign policy, where, despite the wide participation, different actors have different weight. In this regard, the role of the US president should be mentioned in particular. Emphasizing this role is logical not only as a natural extension of what was said above in the article, but also given the conditions of the undoubtedly outstanding influence that the presidential institution undoubtedly has in the development and implementation of the country's foreign policy.

This outstanding feature is the result of many decades and is characterized by many stages and milestones in its development. It is obviously impossible to recount this story within the scope of this article, and that is not our goal. We will, however, focus specifically on two recent court cases that focus on the greater autonomy of the US president's role in foreign policy. Both cases concern President Trump, one involving the possible unauthorized use of classified files at the Florida state level and the other at the US Supreme Court level in the Trump vs. United States dispute in criminal prosecutions over the scope of the former president's immunity after the presidency expires.

Let's leave out the details and focus only on some of the findings of the United States Justice that resonate with the issue of the discourse in this article. Specifically, the court categorized presidential powers as follows:

(a) Authorities within the "core of his official duties" during which the president enjoys "absolute" immunity;

(b) Authorities in "outer perimeter of his official responsibilities" where presidential immunity is "presumptive"; and

(c) Authorities in "unofficial activities"

where immunity does not exist, but there is one inconvenient "but" related to the difficulty of drawing a clear distinction between "official" and "unofficial" activities.

This approach by the justice, which does not limit the rights of the president, has led to the notion of an "imperial president" in US analytical circles, with US Supreme Court Justice Sotomayor referring to "a president above the law" in her dissenting opinion.

We will leave the discussion of legal nuances to legal experts. It only remains to note that the recent questioning of the president's role indicates a further increase in his influence on foreign and security policy. This is another signal for official Tbilisi and something that needs to be comprehended, especially when in Georgian circles we hear rather irresponsible statements about the US domestic political or electoral process. The thing to remember here is that the political system of the West, and the US in particular, is not as businesslike as some of us imagine and would like it to be.

WE, THEY, AND WE TOGETHER...

We will begin this part of the article with the words of the prominent Georgian diplomat Alexander Chikvaizde: "A small country cannot afford the luxury of making a big mistake." Indeed, this very simple phrase contains both a profound content and an urgent appeal in terms of shaping Georgian policy.

And the attitude of certain political circles in Georgia towards external (as well as internal) issues serves not only to overturn modernity, but also to overturn our historical past and rewrite it in "obscure handwriting".

The current situation, however, equally demands, on the one hand, a correct assessment of the adversary, since relations with it best reveal one's own weaknesses, and, on the other hand, appreciation of the partners, since their uncompromising assessments are the best measure of true support. Understandably, it is not easy to realize this in practice, but at the same time it is extremely necessary for the implementation of "Georgia's policy of realistic possibilities".

From the perspective of Georgian policy, a number of challenges arise in connection with our partners. Moreover, the genesis of these challenges cannot be attributed to the Georgian side alone. In order to keep the main line of this article, let us briefly say this: one of the main tasks of Georgia's foreign and

domestic policy is to ensure that the country not only does not fall out of the priorities of our Western partners, but also that it becomes more established among them in the process. According to the latest Pew Research poll in the United States, the picture in this regard is not particularly encouraging. The fact is that, speaking of "spheres of influence," only 50 percent of respondents considered reducing Russian influence to be a foreign priority for the United States, which indicates a borderline sentiment in society. However, speaking about the geographies of "primary" and "peripheral" interests, it is necessary to constantly remind our partners: marginalization (even unintentional) of a country of such importance as Georgia as a "periphery" ultimately damages the unified and integral security system in the format of global geopolitical competition.

Here, we would add that in today's world we are not required to subordinate Georgian politics to strict moralistic criteria. It would be much better that the effectiveness of such politics in a specific context is also determined by the appropriateness of specific actions (in this sense, for example, Israel of the 1950s and 1960s offers us "best practices"). And another controversial consideration: it is not always possible to find the right and consistent balance between modernizing one's own system on the one hand and democracy on the other. Here, too, rational prioritization is essential, and when the balance is broken, it should be restored as soon as possible. A "policy of realistic possibilities", in which the art of forced compromise is an organic part of an effective policy, should be oriented towards this result.

It is an inexorable law of geopolitics: avoiding a greater evil often leads to a lesser one; the space between "good" and "bad" has narrowed considerably. Today this policy is called pragmatism in "international jargon". It has openly taken its place among the large and medium-sized actors, and it is time for Georgia to start adopting this approach, especially in light of such challenges, whose management according to our interests does not always achieve a match between "goal" and "ideal", and one or another decision or step is explained by some tactical consideration at the given moment.

A number of historical precedents demonstrate tactical expediency without abandoning strategic objectives. For example, the category of pragmatic compromises includes the West's alliance with the USSR, the US-initiated "breakthrough" with China in 1970 to break the alliance between the USSR and the People's Republic of China, or the use by many Western countries of the undemocratic regimes of many third countries for Cold War purposes.

It is likely that at this stage of history and for the foreseeable future, Western politics will continue to be guided by "tactical" considerations. It is clear that the handwriting - "the end justifies the means" - cannot meet the spirit of idealism, but the goal, very difficult against the background of authoritarian or hybrid regimes of the Eurasian space, cannot be achieved otherwise. All the more so if it is to be achieved only according to standardized, publicly declared norms, with "white gloves".

The combination of factors mentioned in this and the previous article is quite remarkable from the point of view of building an effective Georgian policy and appropriate environment. This is the world of new standards into which our partners have entered. Now it is our turn: to learn and properly implement these new standards in time to realize Georgian and our common interests.

Global Auto Import Expands with New Branch in Gori

BY MARIAMI RAZMADZE

Global Auto Import, an automotive importer dedicated to expanding its customer base while providing an easy and personalized car-buying experience, opened yet another branch, this time in Gori, on September 6. The new branch is located in the heart of the city (on Stalin Ave. N13) and ensures the highest quality services in the shortest possible time.

Global Auto Import was founded in 2017 and, since then, has facilitated the purchase and transportation of vehicles, motorcycles, and other machinery from nine ports across the United States, as well as certain ports in Canada and Hawaii.

Since its establishment, the company has guaranteed the best possible services to those looking to buy quality vehicles. Every member of the company's expanding staff shares this passionate and disciplined mindset and is someone customers can trust with choosing, transporting, and purchasing their cars.

"This year, Global Auto Import opened its fifth store in Georgia," Maiko Marjanidze, Director of Business Development at Global Auto Import, tells us. "From now on, our services will also be available in Gori, where a new conceptual space has been introduced for more advanced auto dealerships so as to ease our clients' bidding experience at leading American auctions."

Company representatives claim that the expansion of Global Auto Import is



Global Auto Import opened a new branch in Gori on September 6

designed to enhance their core mission of delivering prompt and precise service by tailoring support to meet client needs as smoothly as possible.

Tinatina Gvelesiani, Director of Operations, extends her and the company's gratitude to their clients for their continued support: "A brand new branch of

Global Auto Import has opened in Gori, and we are more than happy to assist our clients by offering the most convenient and reliable experience. We

appreciate the trust of our patrons, as each new branch symbolizes their loyalty and serves as a motivational drive for us," she says.



Four co-organizers of the Women Career Mentorship Hub project. Photo from Irina Mamulashvili

BY SHELBI R. ANKIEWICZ

The Women Career Mentorship Hub is a new project that provides one-on-one sessions to help young Georgian women navigate the job market post-graduation.

Sponsored by the British Embassy in Tbilisi and the Chevening Scholarship Alumni Fund, this project aims to support women in the third or fourth year of their bachelor's degree, or those who recently graduated in two or less years. Irina Mamulashvili is one of the co-organizers and the international relations specialist for the project. According to her, the project helps by discussing challenges, opportunities, and aspirations, developing confidence in women, making them aware of their intended industry, developing resumes, CVs, motivation letters, interview techniques, and more.

The project began in July and will run until January 2025. It was started by four Chevening alumnae, Irina Mamulashvili, Pikria Elizarashvili, Irma Matoshvili, and Naiko Sadunishvili. The Chevening Scholarship is a program run in the United Kingdom that allows anyone to apply for a fully funded master's program in the UK. Mamulashvili said the program highly

focuses on networking, especially amongst alumni, which is how the Women Mentorship Hub came to be.

Through a Facebook group, the four women, all from different industries, met and decided to create a project that would be impactful in Georgia. Mamulashvili tells GEORGIA TODAY that since they didn't have anything in common in terms of their backgrounds, they looked for what was missing in the country. She said they stumbled upon career mentorship, an established practice in the UK, which helps people with job direction and their experiences post-graduation.

"Women are the target of many gender-based stereotypes. Many people are experiencing these challenging first steps in their career journey, and we as students went through this and know how it works," Mamulashvili says. "We know how challenging and important it is to get good guidance through this time."

Many universities offer career days or one-time initiatives for jobs; however, Mamulashvili said there isn't anything consistent. To apply for the program, students need to complete the required Google Form application that has technical questions and priority fields such as STEM, IT, and AI, business and finance, politics and international relations, media and communication, climate change and

Women Career Mentorship Hub to Support Young Women Entering the Job Market

sustainable development, law, and gender studies. Afterward, the applications are considered, and 30 women are selected and paired with a mentor.

Mamulashvili tells us that there are around 16 mentors, and each will have two to three mentees to conduct individual, peer-to-peer learning sessions. The learning format will depend on various factors such as meeting in-person, or online, and how often. According to Mamulashvili, they want the project to be as flexible as possible, so all participants are comfortable.

All mentors are volunteers and previous recipients of the Chevening Scholarship. This is to give back to Chevening's ideology of forming connections between people. Mamulashvili said all mentors have been in their career field for at least a few years, allowing them to share their experiences and relatable insights with current students and graduates.

"We've had a great amount of people show their interest in becoming mentors, which is great because we see that they still want to share and transfer their knowledge, skills, and experiences to empower other women," Mamulashvili tells us.

The project aims to help those most vulnerable through career searches and development, which is why Mamulashvili says they will have 50% of participants from regions across Georgia. She says these students in particular may need more mentorship, and that they are not looking for those who already

have experience in an industry, but those who are motivated and ready to face challenges.

Khatuna Gogvadze is a mentor for the project, an educational neuroscientist, and co-founder of Kaikona, a space that conducts workshops for people to focus on personal growth and compassion for themselves. She graduated as a Chevening Scholar alumnae in 2022 from the University College of London and Birbeck University, where she studied interdisciplinary studies in human behavior, education, and psychology. She said she applied for the Chevening Scholarship two times before she was finally accepted.

Through her years of study, Gogvadze says she realized that "education is just a tool, not an end goal." As part of her scholarship requirements, she had to do a follow-up assignment after her program, of which she decided to translate an introduction neuroscience education book from English to Georgian. She said this was the most solid way to share her knowledge to ensure others would gain from it.

"In life, you can have a lot of experiences and grow in the sense of training and professionally, but you don't really feel fulfilled unless you can contribute and give away what you have learned," she says.

After conducting a workshop for girls in STEM, Gogvadze said she received various emails from girls who were interested in pursuing STEM or the field of science. Gogvadze tells us she saw clarity in this, that the girls were seeing

themselves achieving a career in the field, even though it is not heavily supported. According to Gogvadze, the Women Career Mentorship Hub lets her talk about her field from a woman's perspective and as a mom, showing the differences between women and men who go through the same thing.

For Gogvadze, she partly sees this program from an evolution perspective. She explains a theory where people are standing, without being able to see what's in front of them, and there's no tree to climb for a higher view. Therefore, the people support each other by standing on each other's shoulders and telling one another what they see. Through the mentorship program, metaphorically, Gogvadze says they are helping young women by letting them stand on their shoulders.

"We, as mentors, will ground space for the women," Gogvadze says. "Mostly in Georgian culture, women get to be the caretaker, and it's okay to do that too; I'm doing it, and I love my son, but there are more things you can experience and see in life. We can be the shoulders for them that they might not have."

The mentorship program will run from October to December, with a closing ceremony at the British Embassy. Applications for the program run until September 22 and can be found on the project's Facebook page. At the moment, the project has a definite end in January, but co-organizer Mamulashvili says they are hoping for further partnerships and donors so the project can continue with a larger number of applicants.

Moving from a Linear Present to a Circular Future - Why a Circular Economy Matters for Georgia



Photo: UNDP/Giorgi Shengelia

BLOG BY DOUGLAS WEBB, UNDP RESIDENT REPRESENTATIVE IN GEORGIA

When you talk to young Georgians, it's immediately clear how passionate they are about being change agents and how much responsibility they are willing to take. This determined and pragmatic generation, raised in the era following the fall of the Berlin Wall, is shaped by greater personal freedoms in a context of growing global uncertainties, chief amongst these being the omnipresence of climate change. They see their mission as building a new world grounded in fresh principles.

As Young Climate Ambassador, Salome Noniashvili says: "Wherever we live, it's our responsibility to take care of nature and address environmental issues in our communities."

This summer, hundreds of young people from across Georgia joined summer schools and green camps organized by UNDP and various civil society organizations. Many of them come from regions hit by climate-induced disasters like floods and landslides, while others have endured the ravages of armed conflict. Despite their diverse backgrounds, they share a common vision - Georgia's youth

are committed to creating a greener, cleaner planet and are ready to take action.

"We want a green, clean, and healthy planet!" shared the eco-camp participants, Anastasia Kvaratskhelia and Zura Jogiashvili.

The challenge now is how Georgia can meet this generational demand and what opportunities the country has to fulfil the aspirations of its youth.

The circular economy offers a solution to the pressing challenges of climate change, pollution, hyper-consumerism, and resource depletion. Research shows that this model could meet human needs using only 70 percent of the materials we currently consume, potentially reducing global demand for resource extraction by a third. By rethinking how we use resources, the circular economy aims to balance human consumption with environmental preservation, benefitting both people and the planet. [Source: UNDP Climate Promise: What is circular economy and why does it matter?]

Despite its promise, only 7.2 percent of the global economy currently operates on circular principles. The dominant economic model remains linear, following a 'take-make-waste' approach that exceeds ecological limits and threatens environmental health.

The urgency is clear: in 2023, global municipal solid waste production reached 2 billion tonnes, with projections show-

ing an increase to 3.4 billion annually by 2050. Much of this waste is managed unsustainably. [Source: World Bank]

Progress is often slow even in countries with significant potential for circular practices. This hesitation is partly due to insufficient investment and the immense societal (not least political) effort required to transform national economies.

Amid these challenges, UNDP's visionary approach can make a significant impact. By helping countries like Georgia make bold, transformative decisions, UNDP can pave the way for a sustainable future.

GEORGIA'S CIRCULAR ECONOMY CHALLENGE

Georgia's circularity rate is a mere 1.3 percent, far below the global average of 7.2 percent and the European average of 11.5 percent. This low rate indicates that the country relies on virgin resources instead of recycling and reusing materials. [Source: Circularity Gap Report 2023]

In the past decade, plastic production and imports have surged by 71 percent, leading to widespread illegal dumpsites, especially in rural areas. [Source: World Bank, 2023] Plastic makes up more than 95 percent of litter on Georgia's Black Sea beaches. In 2020 alone, up to 93 percent of plastic produced and imported in Georgia ended up as waste, exacerbating environmental pollution. [Source: EU/UNDP EU4EMBLAS project]

Several challenges hinder Georgia's transition to a circular economy, including inadequate waste management infrastructure, limited government support, high costs for startups and investments, and a lack of awareness and incentives among private companies.

However, there are reasons for optimism. Georgia's private sector is eager to access European markets, leveraging opportunities from the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with the EU and the country's recent EU candidate status. These opportunities come with quality standards in both production and packaging, making eco-friendly and circular practices essential for Georgian companies to remain competitive.

Georgia's vibrant civil society also provides hope for the country's circular future. In recent years, environmental



UNDP's visionary approach helps countries like Georgia make bold, transformative decisions and pave the way for a sustainable future

sustainability and rights have gained prominence on the civil society agenda, drawing attention from the media, activists, and local communities. [UNDP: Fostering Environmental Justice in Georgia, 2024.]

Additionally, around 90 percent of Georgia's population, especially its motivated youth, is well aware of climate challenges, even if this awareness doesn't always lead to action. [UNDP: What Georgians Know about Climate Change, 2021]

Finally, Georgia's relatively small economy and remarkable experience with speedy and efficient reforms offer a unique opportunity for quick systemic transformations to introduce nationwide circular solutions.

HOW UNDP HELPS DRIVES THE CHANGE

Transitioning to a circular economy requires a complete rethink of legislative frameworks, production and consumption patterns, and entrepreneurship. Recognizing this, UNDP actively supports Georgia on this transformative journey. Our efforts focus on engaging the public, private, and civic sectors, while also bringing in resources and pioneering expertise from the European

Union, Norway, and Sweden.

• Together with Sweden, we are supporting the development of a National Roadmap to a Circular Economy, slated for adoption by the Government by the end of 2024. This roadmap will provide a clear framework with actionable strategies for developing a national circular economy model.

• Additionally, we are working with Georgia's Government, including the Inter-Ministerial Coordination Board on Circular Economy, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture, and the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development to enhance their capacities in key circular economy areas, such as green public procurement.

• With funding from Norway, we are running pilot initiatives and awareness campaigns to reduce plastic pollution, promote recycling, and foster sustainable entrepreneurship. These initiatives bring together leading civil society organizations like the Caucasus Environmental NGO Network (CENN) along with partners from the public and private sectors.

• Our partnership with the European Union supports Georgian production companies, especially small and medium-sized enterprises in adopting sustainable production models aligned with European best practices. Initiatives like establishing Georgia's Packaging Cluster, with support from the EU and UNDP, have led to numerous success stories. Many enterprises have introduced new production lines or revamped their operations to incorporate sustainable practices, such as producing reusable packaging or recycling plastic waste.

GAZING INTO THE FUTURE

These first steps signal Georgia's shift from a linear present to a circular future. Importantly, they give the younger generation, including students, civic activists, and startup entrepreneurs, the opportunity to lead in raising awareness and testing circular solutions. The endpoint is the full normalization and integration of these solutions into regular and standard practices. Layered experience of young people is already equipping them for their future roles as decision-makers, tasked with building a more sustainable and resilient future for all.



Photo: UNDP/Giorgi Shengelia



Photo: UNDP/Gela Bedianashvili

A Quarter-Century Glance Back. Introducing 'Geosynchronicity,' A Film about Me



BLOG BY TONY HANMER

Having devoured all the scant information I could find in print on Svaneti in English and Russian from outside Georgia in the 1990s, it was time to visit this place which had captured my imagination. I did so, for only four days, in July 1999. Just over 25 years later, I still remember the piercing of my heart with beauty as we ascended the green foothills from

Jvari into Upper Svaneti. The road was terrible, and we didn't know that we were being driven into a lions' den, the Aprasidze clan possibly lying in wait for any unprepared and naive travelers. Somehow we made it past them and were then convoyed on to Mestia by the first Svans I ever met, who also put us up at their guest house. Dali Japaridze, here's looking at you. Eventually, still single, in 2007, I bit the bullet and prepared to move to Ushguli, Svaneti's and Europe's highest village. The locals were enthusiastic, and at my request for something to do gave

me the job of teaching all 51 of their school-age children English. This I accepted with pleasure, and still had high amounts of time daily to explore, take photographs as winter settled in, and meet everyone.

Two winters on, I was married to Lali Skhirtladze from Kakheti, eastern Georgia, who knew what she was getting into: eventually, a permanent move to Svaneti. Here we are. A guest house and shop keep us going, and the massive landscapes sustain my soul.

One of my new friends in Tbilisi from a few years ago, photographer and filmmaker Mehrdad Ruien from Iran, once asked me for a short interview. In his words, "When I met Tony, I was amazed to see his love for Georgia, especially Svaneti. His form of photography has been inspiring for me too. Therefore, by hanging out more with him, I got the idea to bring this passion of his for Georgia and art in general onto the screen to introduce it to others. The original plan was to have a 2-3 minute, very simple interview at his apartment, but as our team grew, the length of the production and the whole project grew, to the extent that we ended up with 'Geosynchronicity.'"

This 22-minute film sums me up nicely as an artist; I'm very pleased with the

results. You can view it here: <https://youtu.be/ndfKitNi92M>

There IS a mid-credits clip too!

I congratulate Mehrdad on this production, and am very grateful to him for all his hard work and creativity in bringing this film to life. You can find him online at: <https://www.facebook.com/leonardo.rouiin>

My boss at Georgia Today, publisher George Sharashidze, got a sneak preview of the film and has these kind words to say:

"The biggest Svan of all Svans - that's how I introduce Tony Hanmer to people. It is impossible for a person born thousands of kilometers away, on another continent, to come to Georgia, connect his life with the mystical mountains of Svaneti, and there not to be a real artist, a real creator living in this person. For many, Svaneti is the coldest part of Georgia, both climatically and because of its really cold nature, landscape and high mountains, but for someone like Tony Hanmer, Svaneti can be warm too, and at all times of the year. It is the warmth coming from Tony's heart that has warmed the hearts of many Svans; even in the cold winter this genius person managed and still manages to transfer warmth and love to young and old. I am glad that Tony Hanmer has been writing about

Svaneti from Svaneti for the newspaper GEORGIA TODAY for many years now, and this is one of the important factors why they love and read this newspaper. Thank you, Tony, for loving Georgia and Georgians, for more than 500 articles written about Svaneti, for hundreds of unique photos, which are truly a work of art and best represent the most beautiful corner of Georgia. While watching the film, I remembered all of Tony's articles and photos, the years when Tony was starting to fall in love with Svaneti and all his 'Svan vacations,' which became an integral part of his life. Thank you for everything, Tony!"

Thank YOU, Mehrdad the film director, George (GT publisher), Katie Ruth Davies (GT editor), Svaneti, Georgia, and my dear wife Lali... for being part of this ongoing journey together with me. I'm rich.

Tony Hanmer has lived in Georgia since 1999, in Svaneti since 2007, and been a weekly writer and photographer for GT since early 2011. He runs the "Svaneti Renaissance" Facebook group, now with over 2000 members, at www.facebook.com/groups/SvanetiRenaissance/. He and his wife also run their own guest house in Etseri: www.facebook.com/hanmer.house.svaneti

CULTURE

Between Georgian Heritage and Austrian Precision: Arpeggione's Debut in Georgia

BY IVAN NECHAEV

On the evening of September 8, 2024, the Tbilisi Conservatoire Grand Hall became the site of a rare and significant musical occasion. The Austrian chamber orchestra "Arpeggione" made its debut in Georgia. The presence of Irakli Gogibedashvili, who has spent much of his career in Austria, added a layer of personal resonance to the event. It was, in a sense, a homecoming for the violinist, whose dual identity as a Georgian musician working abroad mirrored the thematic tensions of the evening's program. What stood out, however, was the understated nature of this concert. It was not a bombastic or overly celebratory affair, but rather a restrained and measured tribute. The orchestra's repertoire for the evening, which included works by Mozart, Schoenberg, Rossini, Saint-Saëns / Ysaÿe, Pasculli, and Tchaikovsky, alongside Otar Taktakishvili's compositions, was carefully curated. This selection seemed to signal an intention to bridge Georgian and European musical traditions without forcing the contrasts too starkly.

OTAR TAKTAKISHVILI: A CENTENARY REFLECTION

Otar Taktakishvili remains a towering figure in Georgian music, his compositions deeply embedded in the national consciousness. The concert's dedication to the 100th anniversary of his birth was a fitting opportunity to revisit his work, and to place it in a broader international context. Taktakishvili's music, which blends traditional Georgian folk motifs with Western classical structures, holds a certain duality. It is as rooted in place as it is open to the influence of global trends in composition, particularly those of the mid-20th century.

The orchestra's performance of Taktakishvili's music highlighted these elements, but it did so with a sense of restraint. There was no over-exaggeration of the folk elements, nor an overemphasis on the European modernist aspects of his style. Instead, the musicians struck a balance, allowing the piece to speak for itself. In this, one sensed an awareness of Taktakishvili's complex legacy—not only as a national composer but as a figure whose music continues to navigate the delicate relationship between tradition and innovation.

A GLOBAL CONVERSATION

The remainder of the evening's program provided an interesting counterpoint to Taktakishvili's music. Beginning with Mozart, the concert opened on familiar, even canonical ground. The orchestra's rendition of his work was precise, offering a faithful interpretation that showcased their technical ability without seeking to reinvent the material. This was followed by Schoenberg, whose distinct tonal challenges brought a modernist weight to the evening. Schoenberg's Violin Concerto, performed by Eliso Gogibedashvili alongside the Arpeggione Orchestra, was one of the most challenging pieces in the program, both technically and interpretively. The concerto is notoriously difficult for soloists, requiring not only immense technical precision but also an understanding of Schoenberg's twelve-tone technique, which abandons traditional tonality. The complexity of the concerto lies in its angular lines, shifting textures, and seemingly dissonant passages, which can make it difficult for audiences to grasp on an emotional level. Gogibedashvili's performance was marked by its control and clarity, particularly in navigating the intricate passages that define Schoenberg's style. Her playing was deliberate, avoiding the temptation to romanticize the music, instead allowing its intellectual rigor to



Eliso Gogibedashvili, Nurhan Arman and Arpeggione. Photo by the author

come to the fore. The dialogue between the soloist and the orchestra, under the direction of Nurhan Arman, was handled with precision. Rather than forcing a narrative onto the music, the performers seemed content to let the piece speak for itself—a reflection of its austere modernism and Schoenberg's break from traditional forms.

It was, without a doubt, a demanding performance for the audience as well. The violin concerto, with its lack of tonal resolution and fragmented structures, does not lend itself easily to casual listening. Yet, in the context of the evening's program, it served as a reminder of the shifting boundaries of classical music in the 20th century, and the ways in which composers like Schoenberg challenged audiences to rethink their relationship to sound and structure.

Rossini's contributions offered a lighter, more playful atmosphere, while the inclusion of Saint-Saëns and Ysaÿe introduced moments of virtuosity, particularly for the soloists, who were given ample opportunity to display their technical prowess. These works served as a reminder of the orchestra's versatility, handling the nuances of each piece with careful attention to style and interpretation.

Pasculli's oboe concerto, performed by

Christoph Hartmann, stood out as a particularly challenging piece. Known for its technical demands, the piece requires extraordinary breath control and dexterity, both of which Hartmann demonstrated with relative ease. His performance was controlled and precise, but without overt displays of virtuosity that might detract from the integrity of the work itself.

THE INTERPLAY OF LEADERSHIP

Conductor Nurhan Arman, who has an extensive international career, was likewise instrumental in guiding the orchestra through the evening's contrasting pieces. His approach was subtle, opting for an interpretation that allowed the music to unfold naturally rather than imposing dramatic gestures. Arman's direction was most effective in the transitional moments—between the classical precision of Mozart and the modernism of Schoenberg, and between the playful lightness of Rossini and the introspective qualities of Taktakishvili. Violinist Eliso Gogibedashvili's performance, was marked by its precision and clarity. Schoenberg's and Ysaÿe's compositions, known for their technical demands, require a performer to balance complexity with expressiveness, and

Gogibedashvili managed this with understated elegance. There were no unnecessary flourishes or grand gestures—just a focused, disciplined performance that allowed the music to breathe. Similarly, Christoph Hartmann's oboe playing in Pasculli's concerto was technically impeccable. His control over the instrument, particularly in navigating the rapid passages and extended phrases, was evident throughout. Yet, much like the rest of the evening, there was a sense of restraint—an avoidance of overt display in favor of a more thoughtful, measured interpretation.

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE AND SUBTLE DIPLOMACY

In many ways, the concert as a whole can be seen as an act of cultural diplomacy. Supported by the Ministry of Culture and Sport of Georgia, it brought a celebrated Austrian ensemble to a Georgian stage for the first time, creating a space for cross-cultural engagement. However, this engagement was not overtly stated or dramatized. Instead, it unfolded quietly, through the careful selection of works and the orchestra's thoughtful interpretations. The presence of Taktakishvili's music alongside Western composers raised questions about the place of Georgian music within the broader European classical tradition. Yet, the concert did not provide definitive answers. Instead, it left space for reflection, allowing the audience to consider the ways in which Georgian music exists in dialogue with European traditions, without necessarily being subsumed by them. As the final notes of Tchaikovsky's serenade faded, the concert came to a close not with grand gestures, but with a quiet sense of resolution. There was an understanding, perhaps, that this evening was not meant to dazzle or overwhelm, but rather to reflect on the subtle interplay between tradition and modernity, between Georgia and the wider world.

'April' by Dea Kulumbegashvili: The Harrowing Symphony of Guilt and Resistance in the Georgian Landscape



Still from the movie

REVIEW BY IVAN NECHAEV

Dea Kulumbegashvili's latest work 'April,' awarded the Special Jury Prize at the Venice Film Festival, solidifies her position as one of the most significant voices in contemporary cinema. Following the profound international success of 'Beginning,' Kulumbegashvili delves deeper into her stylistic and thematic universe with April, using her signature contemplative style to explore isolation, vulnerability, and human resilience. In this essay, we will examine the intricacies of April, its thematic weight, and Kulumbegashvili's unique cinematic voice.

DEA KULUMBEGASHVILI'S CINEMATIC EVOLUTION: FROM 'BEGINNING' TO 'APRIL'

Dea Kulumbegashvili, the critically acclaimed Georgian filmmaker who stormed onto the international scene with Beginning, has returned with an even more daring and introspective follow-up in April. Her debut, praised for its minimalist aesthetic and unnerv-

ing tension, left some critics skeptical of her Haneke- and Reygadas-inspired visual tropes. However, in April, Kulumbegashvili transcends her influences, constructing a haunting, original visual language that is both eerily detached and violently intimate.

With a style rooted in extended static takes, distant figures engaged in inaudible yet crucial conversations, and disquieting moments of sudden violence, April is a brooding examination of a woman's entrapment in both body and mind. The film's esoteric quality is reminiscent of auteurs like Jonathan Glazer and Angela Schanelec, blending the uncanny with the mundane in a manner that refuses to provide clear resolutions. It's a bold, uncompromising work of art that challenges its audience to confront the unspoken traumas of its protagonist—an obstetrics doctor who becomes ensnared in the cyclical violence of her own desires and societal expectations.

NINA'S STRUGGLE: A REFLECTION OF FEMALE SUBJUGATION IN RURAL GEORGIA

The narrative centers around Nina, played with stark emotional restraint by Ia

Sukhitashvili, an obstetrician working in a provincial Georgian hospital. Her career—dedicated to the intimate and life-altering task of delivering babies—takes a dark turn when a newborn dies under her watch, triggering a professional investigation into her medical practices. This inquiry threatens to reveal her clandestine work: providing illegal abortions and birth control to women in rural villages, where such services are unofficially banned, despite abortion being legal in Georgia up to 12 weeks.

What sets April apart from other films addressing abortion and reproductive rights is its refusal to settle into familiar political rhetoric. This is no 'Happening,' where the woman seeking the abortion is given sympathetic foregrounding, nor is it a retreat of the oppressive abortionist narratives seen in '4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days' or 'Vera Drake.' Nina is not portrayed as a hero or a victim in the conventional sense. Rather, her actions—though justified on the surface—are rooted in a deeper, more disturbing personal pathology.

As the film unspools, Nina's life is revealed as one of self-inflicted violence. She engages in masochistic sexual encounters with men she picks up on

country roads, and her work as an abortionist becomes less about principle and more about sublimating her own unresolved traumas. This unflinching portrayal of a woman who oscillates between control and submission, guilt and desire, is profoundly unsettling. The Georgia Kulumbegashvili presents is a place where modernity is a façade. Beneath the veneer of up-to-date medical facilities and professional accountability, the age-old patriarchy still reigns, and women's bodies remain, at their core, battlegrounds for male power and prejudice.

THE HAUNTING OF NINA: THE MONSTROUS METAPHOR

The film's most visually arresting and symbolically charged element is the faceless, grotesque creature that appears intermittently throughout the story. Its decaying, cadaverous form moves slowly through blackened, oily water, juxtaposed against the distant sounds of children playing. This figure, never fully explained, is a recurring motif in Nina's internal and external world—a specter that stalks the rural landscapes and gloomy interiors she inhabits.

One might interpret this creature as a manifestation of Nina's guilt and self-loathing, a monstrous symbol of the lives she has ended or perhaps the child she might have lost. However, Kulumbegashvili leaves its meaning deliberately vague, inviting the audience to grapple with its unsettling presence. The creature is at once unnerving and pitiable, an embodiment of Nina's fractured psyche, forever trapped between her desire for autonomy and the overwhelming forces of her past and present.

SOUND AS A VESSEL FOR INTERNAL TURMOIL

If the visuals of April disturb with their clinical precision and strange beauty, the sound design amplifies the film's emotional and psychological dissonance. Lars Ginzler's layered soundscape, combined with the eerie score by Matthew Herbert, plunges us into Nina's fractured world. The heightened sound of laborious breathing, the incessant barking of dogs, the grinding gears of her car—all echo the unnerving pressure of rural Georgian life. These elements create a nervy intensity, a constant reminder that Nina's outer composure is a fragile mask for her inner chaos.

Herbert's score, played on instruments

made from bones, creates a primal, organic resonance that feels as if it emanates from the very earth beneath Nina's feet. This sonic atmosphere transforms April into something more than a visual narrative; it becomes an auditory experience of Nina's pain and alienation. The sound design blurs the line between reality and the uncanny, echoing the surreal horror of Nina's personal journey.

A CINEMATIC TOUR DE FORCE: LONG TAKES, HIGH STAKES

Kulumbegashvili's directorial vision is one of extreme patience and precision. April unfolds at a slow, deliberate pace, allowing tension to simmer beneath the surface without ever boiling over. As in Beginning, the camera remains static for long stretches, watching from a distance as characters move through scenes that feel almost mundane—until they don't. In one particularly harrowing moment, Nina performs an abortion on a kitchen table, her patient's body hidden off-screen, but her mounting anxiety palpable in every sound and movement.

The film's pacing, its refusal to rush through these excruciatingly intimate moments, forces the audience to confront the full weight of Nina's decisions. There is no escape from the emotional and moral complexity of her situation. By withholding conventional cinematic cues, Kulumbegashvili creates a world in which the unseen is as important as what is visible; a world where silence is often louder than dialogue.

A VISION OF DESPAIR AND RESISTANCE

April is not a film that provides easy answers. It does not offer closure, redemption, or catharsis. Instead, it presents a stark, unflinching portrait of a woman on the brink of collapse, caught in a web of societal expectations, personal trauma, and the unrelenting passage of time. In the end, Nina's struggle is not just against the oppressive forces of the patriarchy or the limitations of her profession—it is a battle with herself, with the monstrous manifestations of her own guilt and desire.

Dea Kulumbegashvili's April solidifies her place among the most challenging and visionary directors of contemporary cinema. It is a film that demands attention, patience, and, above all, empathy—a work that haunts the viewer long after the final frame fades to black.

Batumi Archaeological Museum Closed for Repairs amidst Ongoing Concerns

BY TEAM GT

The Batumi Archaeological Museum, a cultural treasure trove located on Chavchavadze Street in Batumi, has been closed for the past three months due to significant concerns about the building's structural integrity. The closure, which came as a result of frequent water accumulation in the museum's basement, has raised questions about the safety and preservation of its unique artifacts.

The museum's administration, operating under the 'Adjara Museum' banner, revealed that the decision to close the museum was based on a report from the Samkharauli Bureau of Forensic Expertise. According to the report, the building is in a state of disrepair, prompting the museum to seek further expert evaluations.

Despite the closure, the museum's valuable items remain in place. Teona

Zoidze, Director of 'Adjara Museum,' clarified that while the museum is not open to visitors, the items have not been moved. She explained that the expert's report recommended conducting additional studies to determine the best course of action. The decision to relocate the artifacts will be made based on these forthcoming evaluations. Zoidze emphasized that the current focus is on strengthening the building's foundation, with preparatory work already underway.

On August 23, 2024, a tender was announced for the preparation of design and cost documentation related to the museum's rehabilitation. The estimated cost for this work is 330,000 GEL. Georgianhouse LLC was the sole participant in the tender, offering to carry out the work for 250,000 GEL. However, the tender commission found that the proposal did not fully meet the specified requirements and requested clarifications during their meeting on September 5.

The rehabilitation process will be conducted in two stages. The first stage includes engineering-geological inves-



Batumi Archaeological Museum. Source: Batumelebi

tigations, such as hydrological studies, and a detailed technical examination of the building. The second stage involves preparing project and cost documentation based on the research findings. The supplier must also provide expert opin-

ions on various aspects of the project, including architecture, construction, and engineering geology.

As the museum awaits the commencement of these research activities and the subsequent rehabilitation work, the

preservation of its unique artifacts remains a priority. The process will ensure that the Batumi Archaeological Museum can once again serve as a vital cultural and historical resource for the community.

A Festival for the Ages: Tsinandali's Chamber Music Triumph

BY IVAN NECHAEV

The 6th edition of the Tsinandali Festival in 2024 proved once again that this Georgian cultural landmark has become an essential pilgrimage for classical music aficionados. Set against the breathtaking backdrop of the Caucasus, this year's chamber music concerts brought together a stunning array of world-class musicians for performances that bridged the intricacies of Baroque grace, the passionate depths of Romanticism, and the dazzling virtuosity of the 19th and 20th centuries. Each concert was a testament to the profound interplay between performer and composer, transcending time to create unforgettable musical experiences.

QUENTIN AND MOREAU: THE ROMANTIC MASTERCLASS

Julien Quentin (piano) and Edgar Moreau (cello) crafted an evening of sheer Romantic brilliance, opening with Felix Mendelssohn's Sonata for Cello and Piano No. 2 in D Major, Op. 58. The sonata is a masterpiece that often remains overshadowed by Mendelssohn's larger works, but in the hands of Quentin and Moreau, it became a revelation. Moreau's silken cello lines soared through the expansive melodic structures, while Quentin's piano playing exhibited a rare combination of power and finesse. Together, they brought out the dance-like lilt of the Allegretto scherzando and the emotional depth of the Adagio.

Their next offering, Johannes Brahms' Sonata for Cello and Piano No. 2 in F Major, Op. 99, highlighted their artistic synergy even further. Brahms demands both introspection and ferocity, and here, Moreau's cello echoed the brooding, stormy skies of Brahms' late Romanticism, while Quentin's playing was a marvel of dynamic shading. The Allegro vivace was performed with fiery energy, culminating in a breathtaking performance of the final Allegro molto.

To finish their set, the pair performed Niccolò Paganini's Variations on One String, on a Theme by Rossini, a showstopper that allowed Moreau to demonstrate his astounding technical command. The whimsical nature of the piece was not lost in his virtuosic brilliance; instead, it became a playful yet thrilling conclusion to a concert that spanned the emotional and technical spectrum.

BELL, DENK, ISSERLIS & CO.: CHAMBER MUSIC AT ITS PINNACLE

One of the festival's most anticipated moments was the collaboration between Joshua Bell (violin), Jeremy Denk (piano), Steven Isserlis (cello), Irène Duval (violin), Blythe Teh Engstroem (viola), and Pierre Gémisson (clarinet). Together, they performed two monumental works: Johannes Brahms' Clarinet Trio in A Minor, Op. 114, and Robert Schumann's Piano Quintet in E-flat Major, Op. 44.

The Clarinet Trio was a triumph of intimacy and complexity. Gémisson's clarinet was both dark and velvety, capturing Brahms' melancholic undertones while Bell and Isserlis navigated the rich



Julien Quentin and Edgar Moreau. Photo by the author

textures with a profound understanding of the trio's interwoven dialogue. The ensemble's unity was most apparent in the final Allegro, where the delicate balance between the three instruments achieved a sense of both resolution and wistfulness.

Their performance of Schumann's Piano Quintet elevated the evening into an entirely different emotional realm. This quintessential Romantic chamber work, composed during Schumann's most prolific period, was played with extraordinary vigor. Bell's violin shone in the Scherzo, while Denk's piano provided a vivid foundation that alternated between lyrical sensitivity and explosive energy. The hauntingly beautiful slow movement (In modo d'una marcia) was performed with such emotional clarity that it left the audience in a meditative silence before the exuberant, triumphant finale.

BORIS GILTBURG: THE PIANO AS A CANVAS OF IMAGINATION

Soloist Boris Gilzburg delivered one of the festival's most intense performances, showcasing his interpretation of two pillars of the Romantic piano repertoire: Robert Schumann's Carnival, Op. 9, and Franz Liszt's Piano Sonata in B Minor, S.178.

Schumann's Carnival was a masterful portrayal of the composer's dualities—the playful, whimsical "Florestan" and the introspective "Eusebius." Gilzburg shifted effortlessly between these contrasting personalities, capturing the fleeting nature of Schumann's genius with a remarkable blend of sensitivity and technique. The rapid tempo changes and intricate character studies were illuminated by Gilzburg's nuanced touch, culminating in the exhilarating final march.

In Liszt's Piano Sonata in B Minor, Gilzburg reached the pinnacle of pianistic drama. The sonata's vast scope, with its deep emotional range and technical fireworks, seemed tailor-made for Gilzburg's virtuosic brilliance. His interpretation was a synthesis of power and lyricism, where thunderous passages gave way to moments of intimate beauty, especially in the contrasting slow sections. By the time he reached the sonata's monumental conclusion, the audience was left breathless, in awe of both the composition and the performer.

ALEXANDER MALOFEEV: A PIANISTIC VIRTUOSO ACROSS TIME

Alexander Malofeev, another of the festival's young prodigies, offered a stunning program that began with George Frideric Handel's Suite in B-flat Major,

HWV 434 and continued through works by Purcell, Muffat, Medtner, Rachmaninoff, and Chopin.

Malofeev's interpretation of the Handel Suite was infused with an elegance that paid homage to the Baroque style, but it was his performance of the Romantic and 20th-century repertoire where he truly came alive. Medtner's Sonata-Reminiscenza, Op. 38, No. 1 allowed Malofeev to showcase his profound emotional sensitivity, and his Rachmaninoff Morceaux de fantaisie was filled with a nostalgia that resonated deeply with the audience.

The highlight of the program was Chopin's Andante spianato et grande polonaise brillante, Op. 22, where Malofeev balanced the bravura of Chopin's writing with a clarity of touch that made the work's intricate lines shimmer. His command over the instrument was nothing short of extraordinary, offering a performance that will surely linger in the memory of those fortunate enough to witness it.

KRISTÓF BARÁTI: THE SUBLIME ART OF BACH'S SOLO VIOLIN PARTITAS

In a performance that was nothing short of a spiritual journey, Kristóf Baráti tackled one of the most demanding solo violin undertakings: Johann Sebastian Bach's complete Partitas for Solo Violin (BWV 1006, 1002, 1004).

Baráti's playing was a masterclass in purity, with each partita showcasing his immaculate technique and profound understanding of Bach's intricate counterpoint. Particularly in the famous Chaconne from Partita No. 2 in D Minor, Baráti's interpretation soared. His phrasing was deeply considered, revealing the architectural brilliance of Bach's construction, and his tone throughout was warm, yet incisive, ensuring that every note spoke with clarity and intention.

The spiritual depth of Bach's music, especially in Baráti's hands, reminded the audience why these partitas have remained central to the violin repertoire for centuries. His performance was not just a technical feat, but a meditation on the transcendent nature of music itself.

FROM BAROQUE ELEGANCE TO ROMANTIC FIRE: A GRAND CELEBRATION OF MUSICAL VIRTUOSITY

The Tsinandali Festival 2024's chamber concerts were a resounding success, highlighting not only the extraordinary talents of the performers but also the timeless power of chamber music itself. From the delicate interplay between piano and strings in Brahms and Schumann to the fiery solo performances of Gilzburg, Malofeev, and Baráti, the festival offered an unmatched celebration of classical music's finest traditions.

As the festival continues to grow in prominence, it remains a beacon for cultural exchange, where the most profound musical conversations can be had between artist, audience, and the timeless compositions they bring to life. This year's chamber concerts, rich with history, emotion, and virtuosity, will undoubtedly be remembered as one of the highlights of the global classical music calendar.



Joshua Bell, Jeremy Denk, Steven Isserlis, Irène Duval, Blythe Teh Engstroem. Photo by the author



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