



FOCUS

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Kesaria Abramidze Murdered Just Hours after Parliament Adopts "Family Values" Bill in Third Reading

BY TEAM GT

Transgender model and public figure Kesaria Abramidze was confirmed dead on Wednesday.

The model was killed at her apartment in Didi Dighomi just one day after Georgian Parliament adopted the bill 'On Family Values and Protection of Minors' in its third reading with 84 votes.

According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the murder suspect was arrested after a hot pursuit. Beka Jaiani, born in 1998, was arrested on charges of premeditated murder committed under aggravating circumstances based on gender. The crime is punishable by 16 to 20 years of imprisonment or life imprisonment.

Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee of German Bundestag, Michael Roth, responded to the news with condemnation: "Those who sow hatred will reap violence. Kesaria Abramidze was killed just one day after the Georgian parliament passed the anti-LGBTI law. I am deeply shocked and call on the ruling party 'Georgian Nightmare' to immediately withdraw the shameful law."



Continued on page 2

Kesaria Abramidze. Source: Mtavari Arkhi

GALT & TAGGART									
CREATING OPPORTUNITIES									
Prepared for Georgia Today Business by									
As of 17-Sep-2024									
Markets					Markets				
BONDS	Price	w/w	m/m	STOCKS	Price	w/w	m/m		
GEORGIA 04/26	94.27 (YTM 8.80%)	+0.0%	+0.4%	Bank of Georgia (BGEO LN)	GBP 39.50	-3.7%	-6.9%		
GBAIL 04/28	98.17 (YTM 7.03%)	-0.1%	+0.9%	Georgia Capital (GCEO LN)	GBP 9.30	-1.0%	-1.6%		
GEBOG 9/12 PERP	97.91 (YTM 9.20%)	-0.0%	-0.1%	TBC Bank Group (TBGG LN)	GBP 28.10	-1.6%	-7.6%		
SILNET 01/27	100.24 (YTM 8.26%)	+0.1%	+0.3%						
TBC 10/775 PERP	100.36 (YTM 1.50%)	+0.0%	+0.1%						
TBC 8.894 PERP	95.92 (YTM 11.08%)	+0.0%	+0.1%	Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	73.70	+6.5%	-7.5%		
TBC 10/1/4 PERP	98.43 (YTM 10.61%)	+0.1%	-0.2%	Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	2,569.50	+2.1%	+2.5%		
INDICES					CURRENCIES				
SP 500	5,634.58	+2.5%	+1.4%	USD / GEL	2,7008	+0.2%	+0.6%		
FTSE 250	20,944.60	+1.4%	-0.5%	EUR / GEL	3,0015	+1.1%	+1.4%		
DOW JONES 30	41,606.18	+2.1%	+2.3%	GBP / GEL	3,5543	+0.9%	+2.3%		
Russell 2000	2,205.48	+5.2%	+3.0%	EUR / USD	1,1114	+0.9%	+0.8%		
FTSE 100	8,309.86	+1.3%	-0.0%	GBP / USD	1,3161	+0.6%	+1.7%		



Photo: EU4Digital

Georgia Ranks 41st Globally in the World Bank's Open Government Index

BY TEAM GT

Georgia has placed 41st in the World Bank's Open Government Index, attaining a 59% score on a scale of 100, per the evaluation metrics of the Index.

Georgia preceded countries such as Poland, Hungary, Albania, Montenegro,

Turkey, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine, and Moldova.

The country is the eminent leader among neighboring countries while, in the broader context, ranking behind only Baltic states among post-Soviet states.

The World Bank's database is derived from the research conducted by the World Justice Project, an international civil society organization devoted to 'advancing the rule of law' globally.

Ivanishvili Proposes Apology to "South Ossetia" for the 2008 War

BY TEAM GT

Bidzina Ivanishvili, leader of the ruling Georgian Dream party, last weekend suggested that Georgia should apologize to Ossetians for the 2008 war with Russia. Speaking at a campaign event in Gori, he claimed that the National Movement, led by former President Mikheil Saakashvili, was responsible for igniting the conflict, and that Georgians should express regret for the suffering caused.

The war in August 2008 resulted in Russia recognizing the breakaway regions of "South Ossetia" and Abkhazia as independent states after a five-day military engagement. While Russia has asserted control over these regions, most of the international community still regards them as Georgian territory.

Ivanishvili described the Saakashvili administration as a "criminal regime" acting under foreign influence. He pledged

that, following the upcoming elections on October 26, those responsible for instigating the war would be held accountable, and this would lead to a formal apology from the Georgian people.

Saakashvili is currently serving a six-year sentence for abuse of power. His United National Movement party condemned Ivanishvili's remarks as shameful and treacherous, stating that they serve Russian interests.

Girchi party MP Sandro Rakviashvili countered Ivanishvili's stance, claiming that families of fallen soldiers and the population have nothing to apologize for, as they were the victims of Russian aggression. He emphasized that the focus should not be on apologies, but on the realities of the conflict, and urged voters to critically assess Ivanishvili's statements and motives in the lead-up to the election.

De-facto Sokhumi authorities welcomed Ivanishvili's statement "if it is supported with real steps," while the occupation regime in Tskhinvali linked it to Georgia's upcoming Parliamentary elections.

Ukrainian House in Tbilisi Marks One Year of Support and Solidarity

With the support of the German Government and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Ukrainian House in Tbilisi marked its first year of providing a vital space for Ukrainian refugees and the local community.

The anniversary event brought together Ukrainian refugees and representatives from the German and Ukrainian Embassies, UNDP, UNHCR, CARE Caucasus, civil society, and international organizations. The celebration also featured an arts and crafts exhibition by Ukrainian artists and artisans.

Nils Christensen, UNDP Deputy Resident Representative in Georgia, addressed the participants and guests with welcome remarks.

"The Ukrainian House is more than a service hub—it's a welcoming space offering a home away from home," he noted. "Over the past year, thousands, including women and children fleeing the war, have received the support they need."

Representatives from the Georgian-Ukrainian Platform highlighted the achievements of the Ukrainian House over the past year, while CARE Caucasus shared the results of an entrepreneurship support programme, which provided funding, consultancy, and technical assistance to nearly 40 refugee entrepreneurs, primarily from Ukraine.

"Germany is proud to support Ukrainian refugees as they rebuild their lives with courage and resilience," said Esther Lena Wagner, Deputy Head of Mission at the German Embassy to Georgia. "The Ukrainian House in Tbilisi offers a much-needed platform for socio-economic services tailored to Ukrainian nationals. In the face of a devastating war, this space symbolizes unity and cooperation between nations. As Ukraine's largest supporter in Europe, the people of Ukraine can build on Germany's support in the long term. We will remain by Ukraine's side."

Since opening in September 2023, the Ukrainian House has welcomed up to 4,000 visitors, hosted more than 150 cultural and social events, and

provided a diverse range of services, including language courses, psychological consultations and therapy, art and drama classes, and thematic workshops. Additionally, it has set up a referral system for Ukrainian refugees to access socio-economic services provided by state agencies and civil society organizations.

The Ukrainian House offers free workspace to Ukrainian non-governmental organizations and volunteer groups supporting Ukrainian refugees in Georgia. It also serves as a centre for cultural exchange, fostering integration and strengthening Georgian-Ukrainian ties.

Background Information
Support for the Ukrainian House in Tbilisi is part of the 'Improving the Rule of Law and Access to Justice for All' initiative, funded by the German Government and implemented by UNDP. Through this US\$1.6 million project, UNDP and Germany enhance the capacities of Georgia's rule of law institutions and promote legal empowerment and socio-economic resilience among disadvantaged communities.

Georgian Parliament Approves Amnesty Bill in Final Vote

BY TEAM GT

The Georgian Parliament has passed the Amnesty Bill in its third reading, receiving 84 votes in favor. Initiated by the ruling Georgian Dream faction, the bill was presented by Rati Ionatamishvili, chair of the Human Rights Protection and Civil Integration Committee.

The Georgian Dream faction says its primary goal is to mitigate the risks of rising crime rates and repeat offences.

With the law's enactment, over 1,000 prisoners will be released, and more than 5,000 inmates will benefit from various aspects of the amnesty. The initiative also extends to individuals on probation, affecting approximately 22,000 probationers, with around 7,000 expected to be released from the probation system immediately upon the law's implementation.

The amnesty applies to crimes spec-



ified under Article 300 of the Criminal Code. It stipulates that, for certain offences, victim consent is necessary, with clearly defined terms and procedures. Additionally, individuals must have no prior convictions for intentional crimes to qualify for amnesty in specific cases.

Provisions of the amnesty include full exemption from criminal responsibility

and punishment, as well as sentence reductions of one-half, one-quarter, and one-sixth. Probation terms will also be shortened by one year for eligible probationers.

The bill does not extend to individuals convicted of serious offences, including murder, drug trafficking, sexual crimes, robbery, terrorism, corruption, organized crime, and other grave violations.

Kesaria Abramidze Murdered Just Hours after Parliament Adopts "Family Values" Bill in Third Reading

Continued from page 1

Georgian President Salome Zurbashvili also took to social media to express her sorrow.

"A terrible murder—a denial of humanity! If only this could awaken our society, which is mired in hatred; hatred that allows the enemy to manipulate and weaken us. The death of this beautiful young woman should be humanizing and Christianizing us. Let this tragedy lead to meaningful change," the President wrote.

The bill 'On Family Values and Protection of Minors' was presented by Rati Ionatamishvili, chair of the Human Rights Protection and Civil Integration Committee, who claimed that the initiative "aligns with the values that Georgian society demands."

The newly adopted law addresses several areas, including marriage, adoption, foster care, medical procedures that alter a person's biological sex, the designation of gender in official documents, and

education. It also regulates issues related to public demonstrations and labor relations. Additionally, the legislative package introduces enforcement mechanisms to ensure the law's proper implementation and establishes May 17 as a day dedicated to "the sanctity of the family and respect for parents."

The law defines marriage as a voluntary union between two individuals of different biological sexes to create a family. It prohibits the recognition or registration of any other type of union as marriage under Georgian law.

Beka Davituli, 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.

EU CONDEMNATION

At the beginning of September, the EU 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 at the time 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.

High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security, Josep Borrell, also responded to the adoption of the law this week, calling on Georgia to recall it.

"The Parliament of Georgia has passed this law which will undermine people's fundamental rights and increase dis-

crimination and stigmatization. I call on Georgia to withdraw this law, which takes the country further away from the road to the European Union," he wrote.

BRITISH EMBASSY: THE LAW UNDERMINES FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS

"The legislative package on 'family values and protection of minors' undermines fundamental human rights, including the freedom of expression and assembly, and creates the risk of further stigmatization and discrimination of part of the Georgian population," the British Embassy in Georgia wrote in a statement, expressing its regret that the legislative package was adopted "in disregard of the advice of the Venice Commission that it should be completely revised and its adoption should be suspended."

"We call on the Georgian authorities to review the legislative package 'On Family Values and Protection of Minors,' which, together with the 'Transparency of Foreign Influence' law, restricts the

rights of both civil society and individual Georgian citizens, and calls into question the long-standing relations between Britain and Georgia," the statement reads.

MICHAEL ROTH: ANTI-LGBTQ LAW IS AN OBSTACLE ON GEORGIA'S EU PATH

Michael Roth criticized the adoption of the law 'On Family Values and Protection of Minors' via X.

"Georgia has a proud history of diversity and respect for minorities," he wrote. "This legacy is why Georgia belongs in the EU. The anti-LGBTQ law and hatred against sexual minorities are an obstacle on Georgia's path to the EU. It must be stopped. Thanks to all brave human rights defenders and activists."

He added in a separate post on Thursday morning: "A message to all my friends in Georgia who are sad, shocked and angry. Please never forget: When they go low, we go high. October 26 is the opportunity to put an end to this horror peacefully and democratically."

Ukraine Latest: 1 mln Killed, Wounded in Russia's Full-Scale War in Ukraine, WSJ Reports

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

Kiyv and Moscow have mostly avoided commenting on the casualties their forces suffered during the full-scale war, which has been ongoing for two and half years. Yet, a "confidential Ukrainian estimate from earlier this year" put Kyiv's losses at 80,000 soldiers killed and 400,000 wounded, the Wall Street Journal (WSJ) wrote this week, citing undisclosed sources.

President Volodymyr Zelensky presented a much lower number of military fatalities in February: 31,000. He did not reveal the number of wounded troops.

Western intelligence estimates cited by the WSJ placed Russian losses at up to 200,000 dead and 400,000 wounded. This is close to Kyiv's estimates on Moscow's casualties, which is over 635,000 killed and wounded as of September 17.

Leaked Pentagon documents reported on by The Economist in July suggested that Russian losses could be even more serious, with the highest estimate standing at 728,000 troops killed, injured, or captured.

Moscow has not disclosed its casualties during the war. The last figure provided by Russian authorities was 5,937 soldiers killed as of September 2022.

NONE OF UKRAINE'S PLANS TO END THE WAR ENVISAGES CEASEFIRE, CEDING TERRITORY, PODOLYAK SAYS

None of the plans Ukraine is developing to end Russia's war envisages a ceasefire or ceding territory to Moscow, Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to the Presidential

Office, told Current Time on Tuesday.

Podolyak's statement echoed a recent comment of Dmytro Lytvyn, an advisor to President Volodymyr Zelensky, who dismissed a Bild article saying that Kyiv was allegedly ready to freeze the conflict as part of its "Victory Plan" as "fake."

"(Freezing of the conflict) will not lead to the end of the war, but will only lead to Russia gaining the opportunity to accumulate additional resources and proceed to the third stage (of the war) with more mass killings of civilians in Ukraine," Podolyak said.

"There are no concepts of ceding territories, there are no concepts of freezing the conflict," he added.

Kyiv has repeatedly rejected any ceasefire or temporary break in hostilities, saying it would only provide a window of opportunity for Russia to regroup its forces.

Last month, Zelenskysaid that Ukraine's operations in Russia's Kursk Oblast were part of his "Victory Plan."

The other aspects of the plan include Ukraine's participation in the global security infrastructure, pressuring Russia to end the war through diplomatic means, and an economic aspect, Zelenskysaid.

RUSSIA REPORTEDLY EXECUTES POW WITH SWORD, KYIV APPEALS TO UN, RED CROSS

Ukraine's Ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets said on Tuesday that he had appealed to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the United Nations in response to a photo that allegedly shows the execution of a Ukrainian prisoner of war (POW) by Russia.

On the morning of September 17, a photo of a Ukrainian soldier apparently having been executed, with a sword in

his chest and the inscription "For Kursk," appeared on social media. Remnants of gray tape are visible on the soldier's hand.

The photo shows his bloodied body lying on the road against the backdrop of damaged vehicles and a house with broken windows. The exact location is unclear.

"The level of barbarism and blood-thirstiness is impossible to comprehend," Lubinets wrote on his Telegram channel. The ombudsman stressed that such actions are a flagrant violation of the Geneva Convention on the Treatment of Prisoners of War.

Later in the day, the Prosecutor General's Office said that the alleged execution of a Ukrainian soldier took place in the town of Novohrodivka in Donetsk Oblast. Ukrainian authorities have not yet established the time when the alleged execution took place.

The investigation is ongoing to establish the circumstances and identify the people responsible for the crime. The pre-trial investigation is being conducted by the Security Service of Ukraine's (SBU) investigators in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, the Prosecutor General's Office says.

There have been multiple reports of Ukrainian POWs being tortured or killed while in Russian captivity since the start of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine. As of September, the Prosecutor General's Office said 28 criminal investigations were underway regarding the execution of 62 Ukrainian POWs.

RUSSIAN ATTACK INJURES 4 FIRST RESPONDERS IN KHARKIV, AS UKRAINE MARKS RESCUER'S DAY

Russian forces attacked the city of Kharkiv



Photo by Kostiantyn Liberov/Libkos/Getty Images

with guided aerial bombs on Tuesday, injuring at least seven people, local authorities reported.

The city's Kyivskiy district came under attack, according to Mayor Ihor Terekhov. Four first responders are among the injured, he said. September 17 marks Rescuer's Day in Ukraine.

Another two civilian men, aged 19 and 25, also suffered injuries, Kharkiv Oblast Governor Oleh Syniehubov said.

In an interview with the Ukrainian media Interfax, the head of Ukraine's State Emergency Service Andrii Danyk said that as of July, 93 emergency workers had been killed and almost 400 wounded since the beginning of the war.

RUSSIAN TROOPS TAKE CONTROL OF UKRAINE IN EASTERN UKRAINE

Russian soldiers captured the Ukrainian

city of Ukrainsk in the eastern Donetsk region on Tuesday, Russian state-run RIA news agency reported.

Russian troops raised their flag on a mine ventilation shaft on the outskirts of the city, it added.

BOTH UKRAINE AND RUSSIA REPORT THE SHOOTING DOWN OF DRONES

The Ukrainian air force has said it shot down 34 of 51 Russian drones launched overnight Wednesday.

Air defenses were employed in five regions, Kyiv said.

Russia's defense ministry, meanwhile, said its systems destroyed 16 Ukrainian drones over the Bryansk and Kursk border regions overnight.

Fifteen were downed over Bryansk and one over Kursk, the ministry said on Telegram.

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Michael Roth: After October 26, Tbilisi Will Become the True Capital of Europe Again



Michael Roth. Source: sakartvelosambebi

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the German Bundestag, Michael Roth sat down with Radio Free Europe/RL's Georgian Service to discuss his "unwelcome" visit, the upcoming elections, and the impact the results of those elections may have on Georgia's European perspective.

THE PRO-GOVERNMENT MEDIA DUBBED YOUR VISIT AS "THE ARRIVAL OF AN UNWELCOME GUEST." THAT MUST FEEL QUITE IRONIC, CONSIDERING IN GEORGIA THERE IS A SAYING THAT "ALL GUESTS ARE GOD-SENT."

I feel very welcome in this amazing country. I met so many people, kind people, great people. I enjoyed the hospitality. Okay, maybe for the ruling party and for the government I'm not welcome, but Georgia, this great country, is much more than just one party and the government. And maybe the government misunderstands something: criticism is the essence of a vivid democracy. I feel extremely familiar with many, many civil society activists, opposition politicians here in Georgia who are also not welcome, but they stay here. And I will come back, I promise.

GEORGIA'S RULING PARTY SEEMS TO BE EXPECTING AN APOLOGY FROM YOU. ARE YOU GOING TO APOLOGIZE?

I'm a bit surprised. Why should I apologize? Maybe it's for the government to apologize for stigmatizing minorities, for criminalizing the young generation for demonstrating on the streets and demanding freedom, democracy, European values. The overwhelming majority of the Georgian population is in favor of Europe. And that's why I came here.

YOU RECENTLY SAID "DIALOGUE IS KEY." AND IT'S HARD NOT TO AGREE. BUT WITH WHOM?

My whole political life, I've been involved in foreign policy, European policy. I travel a lot, and everywhere I go, I meet government, parliamentarians, opposition, civil society and media. Except one country: Georgia. In Georgia, the ruling party was not willing to receive me. They



The people know this is the perfect moment to choose between democracy and authoritarianism

refused to meet me. Okay, but again, Georgia is much more.

I met the President. I'm really privileged because I meet her quite often. She is a defender of freedom and democracy, and is a famous for her bravery in Europe. I met the leaders of the opposition parties and I met many, many civil society activists. I didn't have the impression that I was isolated. But my impression is that the government and the ruling party is going to isolate this wonderful country.

ARE YOU GOING TO CONTINUE KNOCKING ON THEIR DOOR, SEEKING COMMUNICATION, OR HAVE YOU GIVEN UP ON THEM?

I never give up. My motto, in 26 years of political engagement, is always that dialogue is key. It's always better to talk to each other than just about each other. And, of course, with the strong support of our embassy, I have tried to fix some appointments, but they say they are too "busy" for me. But if I understood the public statements right, they are just not willing to meet me. There's a difference.

YOU HAVE SAID THAT AFTER THE ELECTIONS, GEORGIA WILL EITHER CONTINUE ON THE PATH TO THE EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE, OR IT WON'T. WHAT HAPPENS IF GEORGIAN DREAM WINS? DOES THE WEST HAVE A CONTINGENCY PLAN?

I'm not here to support the opposition. I'm not here to support the government. I'm just here to promote our European commitments. That means democracy, rule of law, respect for minorities, freedom. That's key. And that's exactly what

the European Union, what the overwhelming majority of member states of the European Union, expect from Georgia. I know the government tries to paint me as a fringe voice, but I speak on behalf of the vast majority of the German Bundestag. My view on the anti-democratic policies here in Georgia is exactly the same as what the EU Commission, the EU institutions, are sending as a clear message to Tbilisi.

HAVE YOU GIVEN ANY THOUGHT TO HOW THE RULING PARTY USES YOU AS A "PERFECT VILLAIN" FOR ITS NARRATIVE? "A GAY MAN WHO INSULTS THE CHURCH AND INTERFERES IN OUR DOMESTIC AFFAIRS." IT TIES IN WITH THE IMAGE THEY WANT TO SELL TO THE PUBLIC OF "THE DECADENT WEST."

I know this manipulation from other authoritarian regimes. It's always the same goal: to demonize, to raise questions about my personal integrity. I can deal with that. I'm not worried. I'm worried about the people and their situation, the critical people, the civil society activists here in this country.

To be honest, I find this attempted manipulation a bit funny. This is a ruling party who says it expects that the vast majority of the Georgian population will support them again, and yet it has such little self-confidence. I'm a simple politician. Come on. I'm not the devil. And again, here, when I'm on the streets, when I'm in restaurants, the people are so kind, because they know me and they discuss topics openly with me. I enjoy my time here.

IF THE PEOPLE DO GO OUT AND VOTE, AND GEORGIAN DREAM WINS, DOES IT LEGITIMIZE IT? AND DOES IT MEAN THAT GEORGIAN PEOPLE SUDDENLY, APPARENTLY, DON'T WANT EUROPE ANYMORE?

I trust the people here, and that's why I expect free and fair elections. And this is the most important elections ever in the history of independent Georgia. And I'm quite sure that the people know this is the perfect moment for a choice between democracy and authoritarianism; between the European way of life or the Russian way of life; between a place in the very heart of Europe, or isolation. And the Georgians are smart,



We shouldn't punish Georgian society for the mistakes the government makes

the Georgians are self-confident, and so I will trust them and I'm quite sure that after the 26th of October, Tbilisi will become the true capital of Europe again, and we all will be extremely grateful that the people here voted for the Euro-Atlantic perspective of the country.

NOT TO CAST A SHADOW ON YOUR ADMIRABLE OPTIMISM, BUT DO YOU HAVE ANY CONTINGENCY PLAN IF THAT DOESN'T HAPPEN?

My whole political life, I have believed in the strength of democracy and freedom. I'm an optimist. We have a very, very strong, very, very powerful tool: the EU perspective. And if the ruling party continues with its anti-democratic policy, I don't see any chance that Georgia will join the European Union. And this is not just my conviction, this is not just my view: this is the view of the vast majority of political leaders in the European Union.

I don't want to speculate. But I expect the government to listen carefully to the people. And it's better not to criminalize the young generation, but to listen to them to understand what they expect. And then there is a chance to bring this amazing country back on track. And that's what I want and that's why I'm here.

THERE IS A FEAR IN GEORGIA THAT SOMETHING MAY DERAIL THE EU-GEORGIA VISA-FREE AGREEMENT. WHAT ARE THE CHANCES OF THAT?

I'm strictly against it. We shouldn't punish Georgian society, especially the young generation, for the mistakes the government and the ruling party make. I very much hope that all political leaders in this country understand the very clear message: You have to meet the conditions of the European Union. I'm very grateful for the moderation of Madam President here. She agreed with the political leaders of the opposition on a "charter." And that's exactly what the European Union expects, and that's what I expect from the future government.

YOU MET LEADERS OF THE OPPOSITION. DID YOU HAVE ANY WORDS OF ADVICE FOR THEM YOU CAN SHARE WITH US?

Just to keep their promises and to bring this country back on track. That's what the people expect. The situation is quite difficult. I'm also a party politician, and election campaigns are the moment for competition. But now is not the time to discuss higher salaries, higher pensions, the details of infrastructure. These questions are very important, yes, but this election is a referendum on the Euro-Atlantic perspective of Georgia, a state-

ment that they do believe in the strength of democracy, the rule of law and freedom. And afterwards, they should start a very tough discussion about the future of the welfare state, about infrastructure, about education, and so on. But now they need to focus on the guiding principles for the future of the country. Is the future a European one or an isolated one?

ONTO THE ROLE RUSSIA PLAYS IN ALL OF THIS. THE RULING PARTY SUGGESTS THAT IF PEOPLE DON'T VOTE FOR THEM, THERE MIGHT BE ANOTHER WAR. IS THAT NARRATIVE WORKING?

It's a tactic. Georgian society should take the chance it won't happen. This is a window of opportunity. The West, including my own country, made many mistakes when it comes to Georgia's EU and NATO perspectives. And for the very first time in European history, we opened the doors of the European Union to Eastern Europe. Georgia should grab this chance, because I'm not sure how long the window will be open. These opportunities are in the interests of the people. I remain optimistic that there is a real chance to bring this country closer to the EU. And that's my impression because 20% of Georgian territory is still occupied by Russia.

This country has many, many friends and allies all over the world, and it's very important to have friends and allies which express their solidarity, not just paying lip service. We need friends who stand with this country if this country is at risk, if this country is under pressure. And EU membership is the best self-insurance for the country against Russian imperialism, which is a big, big threat. It makes me sad to see laws like the "foreign agent" law, which are so like instruments and measures taken by authoritarian regimes to stigmatize the critical part of their society.

ON A PERSONAL NOTE, WE HEAR YOU ARE QUITE DISILLUSIONED WITH GERMAN POLITICS. WHAT'S NEXT FOR YOU?

I'm not quite sure, but I promise the Georgian people they can count on me. Now I'm a political enemy, but I won't be running again in the German parliament - not after 27 years in politics. But you can do a lot, not only as a politician - also as a citizen. And I have the privilege to have so many friendships here in this country that I will come back, be it as a politician, as a private person, or as a representative of an organization. What I also promise is that I will write a book and the people of Georgia, the brave people of Georgia, will play a very important role in this book.



Georgia should grab this chance, because I'm not sure how long the EU window will be open

US Imposes Visa Restrictions on 60+ Georgians Involved in "Undermining Democracy"



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken. Photo by Benoit Tessier / POOL / AFP via Getty Images

BY TEAM GT

On Tuesday, the US State Department announced that it would impose visa sanctions on 60 Georgian citizens – government, business and law enforcement officials – for “undermining democracy” in Georgia.

The USA imposed sanctions on two officials of the Georgian government: the head of the Department of Special Tasks of the Ministry of Internal

Affairs, Zviad (Khareba) Kharazishvili, and one of his deputies, Miller Lagazauri, who, during peaceful protests against the ‘Foreign Influence Law’ carried out a violent response leading to human rights violations.

“We’re also imposing sanctions on two Georgian leaders of the extremist group, Konstantine Morgoshia and Zurab Makharadze, for serious violations of human rights, including violent attacks on Georgians who were exercising their right to peaceful assembly,” the statement said.

Overall, the US State Department is taking measures to impose visa restrictions on more than 60

Georgians and their family members who participated in damaging the roots of democracy in Georgia.

“Among them are government and municipal officials who abused their power to limit the fundamental freedoms of the Georgian people, businessmen involved in corruption, individuals who spread disinformation and promote violent extremism, law enforcement officers who participated in the beating of demonstrators, and members of parliament who played a crucial role in the promotion of undemocratic legislation and restriction of civil society,” the US statement reads.

Secretary of State Anthony Blinken says the State Department is concerned about the violation of human rights and anti-democratic actions in Georgia and will continue to consider additional measures in response.

“The United States supports the right of Georgians to assemble, express and peacefully protest without fear of violence, intimidation and suppression,” Blinken noted.

On Tuesday, Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze held a meeting with US Ambassador Robin Dunnigan. Despite Kobakhidze expressing his respect for Dunnigan, he shared concerns about the US State Department’s decision. The PM emphasized that the visa restrictions on citizens and sanctions are “troublesome.”

He informed the ambassador that such decisions undermine US-Georgian relations and said that future actions could lead to a reevaluation of the dynamics between the two countries.

At a press briefing, the PM suggested that the imposition of sanctions during the pre-election period appears to be “aimed solely at influencing the elections,” and expressed his belief that “the response from Georgian voters will be both clear and resolute.”

Kobakhidze described the sanctions as both frivolous and unfortunate, emphasizing the effort made to reach out to partners despite recent tensions in Georgian-American relations, particularly due to the former US ambassador’s controversial role.

“We have made it clear that we are open to discussions on any topic, yet such measures, particularly in this pre-election context, are counterproductive. We recognize that certain American institutions feel a need for de-oligarchization. However, the only purpose these steps serve is to influence the elections. I anticipate a decisive response from Georgian voters that will render the collective National Movement a thing of the past.

“No-one can revive that regime which brought war, destruction, corruption, torture and murder to our country. I urge all parties to acknowledge the weight of their responsibilities in potentially empowering such a regime,” Kobakhidze stated.

Armenian PM Commends Georgian Gov’t for “Promoting Regional and Int’l Stability”



Prime ministers Kobakhidze and Pashinyan

BY TEAM GT

The cooperation between our countries has elevated to a higher, strategic partnership level as of January, – stated Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan during a joint press statement with his Georgian counterpart, Irakli Kobakhidze, on his official visit to Georgia this week.

Pashinyan emphasized that the strategic partnership agreement serves as an effective mechanism rooted in mutual interests, principles, and democratic values.

The Armenian Prime Minister noted that both Georgia and Armenia have unconditionally recognized each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty, which he described as “a significant factor in achieving stable, long-term, and sustainable peace in the South Caucasus.”

He further elaborated that Armenia has made progress during challenging negotiations with Azerbaijan regarding the delimitation and demarcation processes. As a result, Armenia and Azerbaijan have signed an agreement reflecting the values enshrined in the 1991 Almaty Declaration.

“This signifies that the basis for this process will involve defining administrative boundaries between the former Soviet republics. We anticipate making

practical advancements shortly within the framework of the Armenia-Georgia border delimitation process.

“After two years of negotiations, Armenia and Azerbaijan have managed to agree on 80 per cent of their peace and relations establishment agreement,” Pashinyan said, going on to express Armenia’s commitment to finalizing the already agreed-upon regulations for establishing diplomatic relations and addressing other significant mutual interests.

He emphasized that unblocking economic infrastructure and facilitating full operations is crucial for stable economic development – a priority for his government.

“Our vision is encapsulated in the peace project’s crossroads, which our government developed and presented to our international partners during a conference in Tbilisi.

“Dear Prime Minister, I sincerely believe that we have a historic opportunity to resolve conflicts in the South Caucasus and establish sustainable peace in our region. I am also convinced that Armenia and Azerbaijan are not the sole beneficiaries of this peace. Georgia and Turkey stand to gain as well. In light of these challenges, our government will persist in its efforts to maintain peace in the region. We commend the Georgian government’s contributions to fostering regional and international stability and peace,” he concluded.



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EcoVille's Global Plans and How Founder Tigran Okhanyan is Helping Shape Georgia's Solar Energy Future



Tigran Okhanyan

BY MARIAMI RAZMADZE

A Multinational leader in renewable energy, EcoVille Holding, was founded in 2015 and focuses on solar energy, energy trade and e-mobility. Its solar branch, EcoVille Solar, has been designing, constructing, and maintaining solar systems for residential, commercial, and industrial clients for almost a decade. EcoVille has partnerships with top-tier solar manufacturers and installed over 170MW for 10,000 customers.

EcoVille Georgia, established in 2020, is one of the country's fastest-growing companies with branches operating in

the United States and Armenia, and the goal to expand to Switzerland and Uzbekistan in 2025. Volta Energy and Arion Motors are holding companies, specialized in energy trade and e-mobility. EcoVille Holding's notable and rapid growth highlights its innovative



approaches to renewable energy. To learn more about the company's plans, challenges, and journey, GEORGIA TODAY met the founder, Tigran Okhanyan.

"My career was kickstarted in hydro-power development in Armenia, long before EcoVille was founded," he says. "I quickly realized renewable energy was the future, as I learned more about it, and by 2010, I believed in solar energy's potential to become the world's largest energy source. Due to this passionate interest, I attended every conference on the topic."

Okhanyan notes that this was a pivotal point, when solar photovoltaic technology was getting more advanced and, as a result, more affordable for commercial and residential use.

"Identifying the limitless capabilities of solar power, I wanted to make it accessible to everyone," he tells us.

Since the beginning, EcoVille's mission has been customer satisfaction by prioritizing quality service, continuous professional development of our staff, and using top-tier products

"For years, these principles have been driving our success," he says.

WHAT ARE ECOVILLE'S PRIMARY PRODUCTS AND SERVICES, AND HOW DOES THE COMPANY STAY AT THE FOREFRONT OF INNOVATION?

EcoVille specializes in Solar photovoltaic systems for commercial, residential and utility-scale users. These systems make it possible for Georgians to generate



their own electricity as well as make a profit out of them. We also offer solar heating systems for both personal and commercial use. To stay ahead, we constantly invest in technological advancements and customer service, ever-growingly improving our performance to meet the constantly growing energy demand.

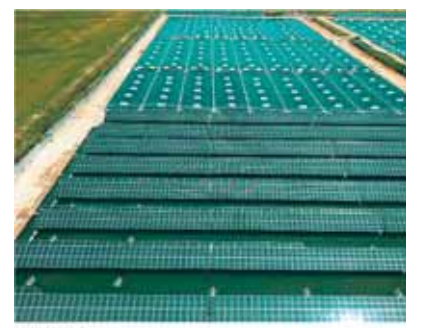
TELL US ABOUT THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES YOU FACE ON THE GEORGIAN MARKET AND HOW YOU ADDRESS THEM.

Our customers are potentially everyone, meaning anyone who consumes electricity. As a company, we see a great potential in Georgia, however, the lack of awareness about solar energy and its benefits pose significant limitations. Many customers do not fully understand the financial and environmental benefits of renewable energy, which is normal for new markets. To solve this issue, we invest a lot in educational activities, such as seminars, presentations, videos, and marketing campaigns that raise awareness of the advantages and risks. We also provide the highest quality services to strengthen trust in our company, as well as in solar energy in general. While this is a challenge, addressing it helps us establish ourselves as leaders in the field.

WHAT ARE THE COMPANY'S OBJECTIVES FOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE GEORGIAN AND GLOBAL MARKETS?

In the short term, we plan to raise awareness about solar energy in Georgia and continue providing our high-quality service. Long-term, through our educational efforts, we want EcoVille to be the top choice for solar systems in the country, measuring up to our reputation in Armenia.

Globally, we want to become the leading EPC company in the solar market. I'm excited to explore opportunities in Georgia, there are many potential partners and projects. Currently, we're negotiating with many stakeholders, with goal to build long-term collaborations.



SOCIETY

Adishi at Last. Part 3: On Our Way

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

Having finally seen the Svan village of Adishi for the first time in my 25 years in Georgia, it was time to continue the adventure to more new territory with the Polish trekking group, arranged by Barents, which had begun at our house and was now more than halfway through its tour. We set off in improving weather from the early morning rain, buoyed up by hopes that it would stay dry. (We already had Klement guiding us; now we just wanted Klement to guide us as well. In addition, I privately named the group "Poles with poles").

Our first part, through the morning, was not far off level. We stopped for a break at a famous old isolated church, famed for its attraction for childless or especially son-less couples. Here was a perfect example for me of the mix or uneasy coexistence of ancient Georgian Orthodox Christianity and even more ancient paganism or animism.

For the church's annual festival, which was not long ago by the evidence, couples desiring a son bring long poles and stand them up next to the church. Subtle symbolism... Then they sacrifice male goats or sheep, hanging them from a nearby metal scaffold and leaving their heads and skins on the ground. A photo of all this together sums it up nicely. In

any case, I wish them fruitfulness. On we walked.

Ushba eventually appeared in all his glory, unclouded, off in the distance far beyond dwindling Adishi. But this was the last I would see of him this day, as clouds then gathered around his typical shyness. At least we still had Tetruldi and Georgia's highest mountain, Shkhara, to accompany us.

The promised horses and their owners were waiting for us to mount them for our Adishchala river crossing; and most necessary they were. Klement went over first, and shot a photo of each of us. Despite my best efforts, in the fast flow my left foot got completely submerged and soaked; thus my grimace in my photo, which apparently won the "Expressions" competition. Satisfied with the pyrrhic victory, I wrung out my sock and continued, expecting it would not do me much harm. And I took down the phone number of one of the horsemen, in case at our day's summit, I decided to turn back. He would take me not only back across the river, but all the way back to Adishi if necessary, based on my legs' condition. (This was changeable, and I realized that uphill were harder than downs. One more push, then...)

Now began our main ascent, up to around 2800m, on a winding and zig-zagging path. We filled our water bottles on the way with icy, delicious, safe-from-animals spring water.

At the top, views of the two mountains



and three glaciers strung between them impressed us with their enormity. While I was photographing a waterfall emerging from near the base of the Tetruldi glacier, beside it also came a small avalanche, evidence of the ongoing summer melt which is typical. Hopefully evidence of nothing more alarming than that. We did hear the roars of several other, larger, avalanches on the hidden far side of the mountains as well. These events seem to be as shy as Ushba is of being seen by human eyes, in my own visual experience.

Then, at lunch, I decided: I would press on, with more than 90% of the remaining 7 km or so being downhill, easier on my legs, which were less sore than I had

expected by this point. I phoned my horseman, thanked him, cancelled my need of his assistance, and we continued. I knew it was a risk, but I was up for it.

We descended from our glorious views to walk alongside the river canyon far below, and towards the end of the trek stopped for drinks at one of a couple of cafes in Khalde. While I didn't have much time or energy for photos at this point, I know that Khalde was completely obliterated by Russian Imperial forces during its resistance to their rule in the 19th century, long after Georgia as a whole was absorbed by that empire. About 60 people were massacred and all the village's towers destroyed to boot. It is only now slowly gathering resolve and rebuild-

ing. More power to it.

Last push down, to the top end of Ipari. Here would be my final overnight stay with the group, at a new guest house and restaurant where two rivers meet and roar together. I cannot comment on the rooms of the house as, being an unexpected additional guest, I opted to sleep using my mattress and sleeping bag on the balcony. But the restaurant is beautiful, all in stone and wood, with many traditional items on display, including the only complete stone grain-grinding apparatus I have seen. An important reason to stay here, aside from more good food, is that the grandfather of the host family has the keys to Svaneti's most important church, called the Church of Kvirike, which hosts the world-famous annual Kvirikoba festival in late July... the team would go there, while, I, not yet up to the further solo walk I had planned in Ushguli, left them at this point, with great thanks. My gamble had paid off, I had a whole load of new photos and memories, and Adishi disappeared off my bucket list.

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

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Living in Harmony with Nature: SABUKO Prepares Documentary about Nomadic Shepherding



BY ANA DUMBADZE

Considering the importance of preserving and protecting natural resources, the role and contribution of organizations that work tirelessly in this direction becomes even more valuable. One such organization operating locally, known for its dedicated work promoting conservation of wildlife in Georgia and encouraging the sustainable use of natural resources, is SABUKO, the Society for Nature Conservation and Birdlife Partner in Georgia.

Following the successfully implemented first phase of the project in Georgia's Kakheti region 'Restoring Gallery Forest and Grasslands in the Iori River Valley,' now, SABUKO, along with its partners, is implementing the second phase, which is building on the progress made by the completed ELSP-funded Iori River Valley project, scaling up grassland restoration and continuing work with the pastoralist community.

The first stage of the project focused on the Chachuna Managed Reserve, located in Georgia's Dedoplistskaro municipality, which has faced severe degradation due to unregulated grazing. The second phase expands to include the Chachuna Managed Reserve, Kotsakhura Range, Samukhi Protected Areas, and Vashlovani Protected Area, covering a total of more than 25,000 hectares.

Prioritizing both ecological and socio-economic wellbeing, the project tackled the revitalization of 25,000 hectares of steppe grassland within the Iori Plateau. Implemented in various stages, this initiative aims to restore land health, promote biodiversity, and empower local communities through sustainable grazing practices. These areas have been used as winter pastures for centuries, but, due to the excessive number of sheep, the ecosystem is losing its ability to self-restore, which leads to soil erosion. That's why quick and professional action is needed now to stop this process and save the country's unique biodiversity. As a result of the measures implemented by SABUKO, pasture restoration and protection of local unique species has noticeably improved.

SABUKO has chosen a way of cooperation and raising awareness about the importance of preserving and protecting natural resources through various informational and educational activities. The education team at SABUKO works in various directions and plans awareness

raising programs for different target groups, looking to increase participants' understanding and value of natural resources through trainings, face-to-face meetings and communication on the individual level.

As part of this awareness-raising campaign, SABUKO, in collaboration with production company Wingmen, has started shooting a documentary about the life of local shepherds.

Aleksandre Mikeladze, the project manager, shared with GEORGIA TODAY that the documentary will explore the everyday lives of local shepherds and the various aspects of sheep farming, including the challenges they face, and the traditional practices involved in preparing Guda cheese, shearing sheep, and processing wool for weaving fabrics and clothing. He added that the film will also highlight the socio-economic conditions of local shepherds and provide a platform to promote their products in a way that supports income without increasing the number of sheep. Nomadic herding has long been a traditional activity for the mountainous regions of Georgia; a farming method that involves herders and farmers traveling from place to place



with their flocks of animals, seeing the herders obtain wool, meat, hide, and dairy products from the livestock.

Shepherds stay and take care of their sheep in winter pastures until around April or May, after which they move to the summer pastures on foot, along with the sheep— one of the most memorable moments and sights in the mountains of Georgia. In summer, from the protected areas of Kakheti, where SABUKO is implementing its landscape restoration project, Tush shepherds and sheep move to Tusheti.

The documentary will depict this adventurous and exciting journey, highlighting its challenges, difficult conditions and relief, the number of sheep that need to be taken care of. In short, the beauty and severity of a shepherd's life.

"With this documentary, we aim to showcase and raise awareness about

local shepherding traditions, such as making Guda cheese—a Georgian cheese with a unique taste and flavor, made from sheep's milk in the Tusheti region—and weaving beautiful, colorful carpets from sheep's wool. The film will also highlight their products, including dairy items and woolen carpets and clothing. It may inspire younger generations to learn these crafts and help preserve these valuable traditions," Mikeladze explains.

We hope that showcasing local traditions and sharing them widely will help increase the popularity of authentic natural products made by shepherds, thereby improving their economic conditions. As a result, fewer sheep may be needed to sustain their livelihoods, reducing the impact of grazing on grass cover. This would provide a better opportunity for the unique biodiversity in the Kakheti steppes to recover and thrive.

Promoting ways to live and make a living in harmony with nature is one of the central themes of this documentary," Mikeladze explains.

He mentions the upcoming launch of a branding initiative, supported by a marketing company, aimed at promoting the project area. Test versions and samples are currently in development, he adds.

The documentary is expected to be released already next year.

GEORGIA TODAY also spoke to Tatuka Tchumburidze, Executive Director of production company Wingmen, who noted that the main aim of the documentary was to depict and raise awareness about the real daily life of the shepherds and the challenges they face in their work, including the threats unsustainable grazing poses to the unique biodiversity of the Iori Plateau.

"This documentary can serve as a guide both for the local population in terms of how to treat nature carefully and still get and income, and for organizations working on environmental issues, to follow SABUKO's example and take into account the activities it is already implementing on the spot," Tatuka Tchumburidze says.

"In this documentary, we present multiple perspectives: those of the shepherds, the business interests, and the necessary measures to strengthen and develop Georgian business while ensuring that these activities do not harm nature. This approach makes the documentary both engaging and authentic. It will also highlight valuable Georgian resources and important traditions, helping shepherds showcase their products, an area where they truly need support," she explains.

One of SABUKO's main goals is to create a brand that brings together sheep products made by local farmers, increasing sales and reviving traditions such as knitting with wool and making sheep milk products. This effort could support tourism, preserve cultural heritage, and provide local jobs, encouraging people to stay in their villages instead of moving to cities. It may also help shepherds reduce flock sizes, which would lessen the impact on grasslands and benefit the unique habitats of the Kakheti ecosystem.



Unveiling the Challenges and Opportunities for Youth in the Tserovani IDP Settlement

In a detailed and revealing study, researchers have examined the engagement of youth within the Tserovani Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) settlement, focusing on their interactions with local governance and access to municipal services. This research highlights the significant challenges faced by Tserovani's youth and suggests potential solutions to improve their situation. Conducted through a combination of focus group discussions and interviews with key stakeholders, the study provides a comprehensive view of the current landscape for young people in this unique community.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Tserovani, established after the 2008 war with Russia, is one of the largest IDP settlements in Georgia, with a population ranging between 6,000 and 9,000 residents. Despite its proximity to the capital city, Tbilisi, which facilitates commuting, the settlement faces numerous systemic and infrastructural challenges that impact its residents, particularly the youth.

Gvantsa Ichkiti and Nino Jibuti, the researchers behind this study, aimed to evaluate the accessibility of municipal programs and services for youth in Tse-

rovani. Jibuti explains the motivation behind their research: "We have been working with young people across various regions, and we noticed a significant lack of information about displaced youth. Tserovani was chosen because it represents a major IDP settlement where understanding the challenges and aspirations of young people could provide valuable insights."

KEY FINDINGS

The research uncovered a mixed scenario for the youth in Tserovani. While there are some opportunities available, such as access to a library, sports classes, and cultural groups, several critical gaps remain. The settlement lacks more diverse recreational facilities, such as cinemas and theaters. For those who are not enrolled in school, activities are minimal. As Ichkiti notes, "There are no entertainment facilities like cinemas or theaters, and for those not attending school, there are virtually no activities available."

Access to health services is another pressing issue. The settlement's residents, particularly the youth, face challenges due to limited local job opportunities and the necessity of commuting to Tbilisi for employment. The administrative overlap between Mtskheta and Akhalkgori Municipalities adds another layer of

complexity, affecting the allocation of resources for youth programs.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To gather comprehensive data, the researchers employed a rigorous methodology, including focus group interviews and key informant discussions. Two focus group interviews, one conducted online and one in-person, engaged 15 local youths aged 14-29. Additionally, interviews were held with representatives from local municipalities and non-governmental organizations. Jibuti describes the approach: "We aimed to understand the accessibility of municipal services for youth and identify barriers to effective engagement. The data collection involved analyzing public information requests, reports, and secondary sources."

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

The study faced several limitations that affected the research process. Jibuti highlights a major challenge: "One significant limitation was the scarcity of reliable data about the Tserovani IDP settlement. The existing studies were outdated and did not accurately reflect the current situation. This made it difficult to perform a thorough analysis."

Ichkiti adds, "The imprecise and out-



Nino Jibuti



Gvantsa Ichkiti

dated statistics posed challenges in quantitative data analysis. Additionally, the focus groups were limited in representativeness because the discussions were confined to the Tserovani context. Despite this, the responses from participants provided valuable insights."

BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study identified several barriers to effective youth engagement in local governance. The lack of up-to-date information about municipal services and the absence of mechanisms for evaluating service effectiveness were significant issues. Jibuti notes, "Residents often learn about services through verbal communication rather than official sources. This lack of accessible information hinders their ability to fully engage with available programs."

Ichkiti points out another challenge: "People frequently find it difficult to discuss problems openly when they know their opinions are being recorded. This reluctance can affect the quality of the data collected. However, our experience allowed us to navigate these challenges and extract meaningful insights."

To address these issues, the study proposes several recommendations. Jibuti suggests, "Local leaders should focus on improving coordination between different sectors to address systemic issues. There needs to be more attention and resources allocated to youth programs, and community efforts should be supported."

Ichkiti emphasizes the importance of using the research findings to drive

change: "The study has highlighted serious concerns and potential solutions. We plan to use these insights to advocate for improvements and present evidence-based recommendations to relevant stakeholders."

FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this research provide a critical examination of youth engagement in the Tserovani IDP settlement. The study's insights offer a roadmap for addressing the identified challenges and improving the quality of life for Tserovani's young residents. By focusing on enhancing infrastructure, improving access to information, and fostering better coordination among stakeholders, there is potential for significant positive change in the settlement.

In conclusion, the research underscores the need for targeted interventions and collaborative efforts to better support the youth in Tserovani. As local leaders and policymakers consider the study's recommendations, there is hope that the issues identified will be addressed, leading to enhanced opportunities and a brighter future for the young people of Tserovani.

For more details, people can contact jibuti-nino@gmail.com and g.ichkiti@gmail.com. To read full text for detailed findings.

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Center of Contemporary Art to Engage Citizens on Environmental Issues

BY SHELBI R. ANKIEWICZ

The Center of Contemporary Art (CCA) is determined to engage citizens with environmental issues in Georgia through workshops, exhibitions, presentations, and 'an informal master's degree.'

Established in 2010, CCA was founded by Wato Tsereteli, an artist who studied film in Georgia and photography in Belgium. He returned to Georgia in 1999 to create educational platforms supplemented by other creative outlets, such as workshops, residencies, exhibitions, and more. To bring this idea to life, he launched 'Creative Mediation,' an informal master's program for those interested in actively working on social and ecological projects.

The master's program, which has been ongoing for at least ten years, recently started its new cycle. As part of the introduction week, a three-day event was held for the public at the Goethe Institute in Tbilisi. Tsereteli says the event's focus, 'From Me to We,' was to

engage listeners about the current climate issues and to address the low understanding regarding this topic in Georgia.

"We are proud of our nature, but we are not aware [of the climate]. Generally, Georgia is like a book that has yet to be read," says Tsereteli. "Its totalitarian past had a totalitarian interpretation of landscape and everything. But when it collapsed, there was no new interpretation. We have all kinds of values, but we don't see them, and we don't take care of them."

The event took place from September 17-19 and involved more than ten Georgian and international speakers who gave talks. Topics ranged from raising awareness about professions, disciplines, and issues within ecology.

Tsereteli tells GEORGIA TODAY they invited international guests from Denmark after CCA representatives visited the country this past summer and were amazed by the high-quality involvement and participation of volunteers in Georgian society.

According to Tsereteli, "something so lost and damaged in [Georgia] is on the highest level there."

Simon Dalsgaard is the head program

coordinator of the Danish Cultural Institute in the South Caucasus. He gave a lecture at the event on a Danish case study about self-organization and the volunteer culture throughout the country. He said more than 90% of the country are members of one or more volunteer-based organizations.

During his talk, he presented the history of this information, and explained how Danish society benefits from it. Afterward, there was an interactive discussion on how the local community in Georgia can become more active in volunteering, and how to build trust so that future projects also involve those whom they affect. He said that, for him, the focus is meeting people face to face and including those in the decision-making process who will be influenced by the change.

"If you're building a new hiking trail in the mountains, talk to people living in the villages there, ask for their advice and invite them to visit and take part in the trail work," Dalsgaard tells GEORGIA TODAY. "It's all about bringing together people who want the same kind of change, designing the best solutions together, and creating a community around the project."

For the public, the event was a chance to learn about ecological issues, see solutions or starting points to solve them, and to show the complexity of life and nature. For the master students, it was an inspiration for the potential projects they could create.

The 'Creative Mediation' master's program lasts three months and is project-based participation. Each person who enrolls is expected to research, develop, and implement a social and ecological project by the end of the program. Throughout the three months, all workshops and seminars are shown publicly through a presentation or exhibition for the general public to learn about the issues and findings.

Galaqtion Eristavi, CO of CCA, says the program is a way for people to find new roles and workplaces within society. He tells us that implementing something requires a large amount of effort from everyone involved, but through the master's, students can see the work that needs to be done in an inspiring way. He adds that solving ecological issues creatively is not something that can be started and finished; it requires more behavior and reflection.

"Painting you can do, not moving from the chair, but creating new social structures needs movement. This is very visible here, of how complex and big they can be," Eristavi says.

Tsereteli notes that artists always have to deal with the future, and they use this mindset to spread the word and raise awareness about climate change and ecological issues. He believes that art-work is the environment around people, and everything related to it. To Tsereteli, artists can use various modes of thinking, such as intellect, mistakes, accidents, imagination, etc., and combine or switch them to find alternative results to problems.

"Art is a scientific method of creative research," Eristavi says.

Over 200 people have studied the master's program since its launch in 2010. The New Democracy Fund supports the program, and the Goethe Institute supported the 'From Me to We' event. The program is designed differently each time, this year it started with a trip to Uplistsikhe and the three-day event. There will be more public events throughout the next three months to learn about ecological issues and awareness.

Italian Conductor Beatrice Venezi Shines at Georgia's "Night Serenades" Festival

In a dazzling display of musical talent and cultural exchange, Italian conductor Beatrice Venezi has brought her exceptional artistry to Georgia as part of the renowned "Night Serenades" festival. Founded in 1982 by the celebrated Georgian violinist Liana Isakadze with the support of the Italian Embassy in Georgia, this international music festival has been a significant cultural event, and Venezi's participation underscores its continued prominence.

The "Night Serenades" festival, which has become a cornerstone of Georgia's cultural landscape, has recently featured a series of remarkable concerts. Following two impressive performances in Batumi and Borjomi by the esteemed Italian accordionist Mario Stefano Pietrodarchi, the festival's grand finale was held at the Tbilisi State Conservatoire, with Beatrice Venezi as the centerpiece of the event.

Beatrice Venezi's career is a testament to her exceptional talent and influence in the world of classical music. With a background in piano, composition, and conducting from the Milan Conservatory of Music "Giuseppe Verdi," she has held prominent positions, including Advisor to the Italian Minister of Culture for Music and Artistic Director of the Taormina Arte Foundation at the Ancient Theatre of Taormina. Her previous roles also include Principal Guest Conductor of the Orchestra della Toscana, Principal Conductor of the Orches-

tra Milano Classica, and Principal Conductor of the Orchestra Scarlatti Young. Her involvement as Principal Guest Conductor of the Puccini Festival in Torre del Lago further highlights her esteemed position in the classical music arena.

Venezi's global reach includes collaborations with prestigious orchestras such as the Orchestra del Teatro La Fenice, the Orchestra del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, and the New Japan Philharmonic. Her extensive performance history, comprising over 160 symphony concerts and 50 opera performances, underscores her versatility and dedication.

Reflecting on her role in the "Night Serenades" festival, Venezi noted the unique challenges and opportunities of performing in different cultural contexts. "Yes, it can be quite a challenge because there are so many differences related to musical culture. The way of performing certain pieces and the taste for certain music can vary widely," she observed. Despite these challenges, she expressed her enthusiasm for sharing Italian music with Georgian audiences. "I'm very happy to bring Italian music here," she added, highlighting the importance of cultural exchange and her role in bridging musical traditions.

A significant aspect of Venezi's work is her commitment to advancing female leadership in the arts. She remarked, "When we talk about leadership, we often think of a man. This happens in



many countries, including Italy. It was surprising to me because Italy is in the heart of Europe. There are significant differences between Southern and Northern Europe." Her advocacy for gender equality is reflected in her preference for using the term "conductor," which she views as a gender-neutral designation. "I want the role to be defined by skill and not by gender," she explained, emphasizing her belief in merit-based recognition.

Venezi's innovative approach to classical music includes a focus on blending

different musical styles to attract new audiences. She believes that integrating classical music with genres such as jazz or soundtracks can rejuvenate interest in the genre and engage a broader audience. "Classical music is sometimes perceived as boring or outdated, but we need to open our minds and explore how to attract new audiences to this genre. Mixing classical music with other styles can be beneficial and help engage new listeners," she said.

Her experience in Georgia, particularly at the Tbilisi State Conservatoire, has

been marked by warm hospitality and enthusiastic audiences. Reflecting on her time in Tbilisi, Venezi shared, "The hospitality has been great, and the audience is very warm. I really enjoy Tbilisi. I remember my first visit in 2016 or 2017 when I performed at the Opera House. I had the chance to explore and experience the beauty of the country. I always look forward to coming back here, as I feel at home." Her fondness for Georgia highlights the meaningful connections she has made and the cultural richness she has encountered.

Shakespeare's Dreamland in Flames: Robert Wilson's Tempest Ignites Tbilisi Theater Scene



Photo by the author

BY IVAN NECHAEV

As the grand opening of the 2024 Tbilisi International Festival of Theater, Robert Wilson's masterful production of *The Tempest* brought not just a play, but a transcendent experience to the Rustaveli Theater. A visual architect of modern theater, Wilson graced the performance with his presence, magnifying its weight for Georgian audiences. The legendary director's arrival in Tbilisi became a historic moment, where art and magic fused under the spell of Shakespeare's enchanted island.

A TALE OF FORGIVENESS AND SHADOWS: WILSON'S VISION OF THE TEMPEST

At its core, *The Tempest* is often reduced to a fantastical tale, yet Wilson daringly engages with Shakespeare's simple yet profound theme of forgiveness. While many contemporary directors seek to complicate the moral simplicity, Wilson

leans into its fairytale elements, allowing the dreamscape to flourish. His production masterfully balances the magical and grotesque—two worlds he often excels in merging—allowing the audience to not only witness a moral fable, but to experience a visceral, emotional conflict in which human vulnerability and rage manifest in every contorted movement on stage.

The tale of vengeance turning to grace becomes a mirror of human contradiction in Wilson's hands. The characters aren't merely pieces on Shakespeare's chessboard but tormented souls, each carrying deep psychological scars. With an emotionally complex Prospero—played with a mix of delicate grace and wearied authority by Veselin Mezekliev—Wilson brings the story closer to the contemporary world. In the bleakness of revenge, he finds the innocence of hope. As Tom Waits' haunting "Innocent When You Dream" underscores key moments, Wilson invites the audience into a world suspended between justice and mercy, dream and nightmare.

HELL IS EMPTY, BUT THE DEMONS LAUGH: ABSURDITY MEETS REDEMPTION IN WILSON'S UNIVERSE

Wilson's approach to *The Tempest* is uniquely marked by its treatment of absurdity. His world is teeming with demons—not grotesque fiends, but pitiable, childlike figures whose rage is as misguided as it is dangerous. Caliban's desperation, Antonio's scheming—they're not monsters of pure malevolence but lost souls trapped in their own psychological shipwrecks. This portrayal highlights a key aspect of Wilson's craft: humanity, in all its grotesqueness, is still redeemable. These "devils" are figures we recognize—jealous, desperate, and full of human flaws—but it is precisely in these flaws that Wilson finds the possibility of salvation.

In the post-pandemic, post-aggression world of the 2020s, these stranded characters become metaphors for a global audience still grappling with its own crises. Their emotional shipwreck is ours. Their quest to find forgiveness and redemption speaks directly to a society

fumbling for a return to some sense of "normalcy." But Wilson's message is not just about returning; it's about embracing the journey of brokenness and difference that defines us. His Prospero is not just the orchestrator of magic, but the wise figure who guides us through chaos toward catharsis, showing that salvation is less about control and more about acceptance.

THE DANCE OF LIGHT AND DARKNESS: PERFORMANCE, SOUND, AND MOVEMENT IN WILSON'S TEMPEST

One cannot discuss Robert Wilson without acknowledging his mastery of visual and sensory storytelling. His stage design, stark yet rich in its simplicity, allows the actors' physicality to speak louder than words. The light becomes a character in itself, shaping and reshaping the emotional texture of the play. Marcello Lumaca and Christian-Simon Petru's lighting design, alongside Dario Felli's evocative soundscape, weave a world that feels perpetually suspended between reality and fantasy. The ethereal island where *The Tempest* unfolds is bathed in shifting tones—warm glows of hope juxtaposed against cold, harsh shadows of despair.

Wilson's minimalistic staging is no mere backdrop, but a canvas that pushes the audience to focus on the actors' movements, each one pregnant with meaning. Prospero's deliberate, almost mechanical gestures reflect the weight of power and the emotional toll of relinquishing it. Every actor, from Caliban to Miranda, becomes a dancer in a surreal ballet of rage, guilt, and redemption. The choreography of emotions is a hallmark of Wilson's style—where each movement, like a note in a symphony, plays its part in the larger theme of transformation.

And then there's the music. Tom Waits' eerie lullaby "Innocent When You Dream"

haunts the production, a bittersweet melody that pulls the audience into the dreamscape Wilson has constructed. Its whimsical innocence contrasts sharply with the twisted fates of the characters, underscoring the fragility of forgiveness in a world that seems incapable of escaping its own darkness. Yet, in this contrast, Wilson finds profound beauty: innocence exists even amidst the grotesque, and it is this very juxtaposition that gives *The Tempest* its emotional weight.

THE QUIET POWER OF LETTING GO: WILSON'S FAREWELL GESTURE

In Wilson's hands, the climax of *The Tempest* is not a thunderous grand finale but a quiet, powerful act of release. As Prospero relinquishes his magical powers, Wilson himself seems to be bidding farewell—not just to the play, but to the world of control he's so meticulously constructed. The act of letting go, of stepping away from the world one has shaped, becomes the ultimate expression of forgiveness. For Prospero, it's a release from vengeance; for Wilson, it's a statement about the artist's role in creating and then abandoning their creation.

For the Tbilisi audience, this production was not just theater—it was an encounter with a modern magician at the height of his powers. Wilson's presence added an undeniable weight to the evening, reminding the world of his unique ability to transform the stage into a space where dreams, nightmares, and human emotion collide. His interpretation of *The Tempest* will undoubtedly linger in the hearts and minds of those who witnessed it long after the curtain falls. A testament to the timelessness of Shakespeare and the boundless creativity of Wilson, this production speaks to the core of what it means to be human—flawed, hopeful, and always on the verge of redemption.

Navigating Memory and Identity: A Cinematic Double Feature at DOCA Film Club's Season Opening

BY IVAN NECHAEV

On September 16, DOCA Film Club opened its new season at Amirani Cinema in Tbilisi with a thought-provoking double feature that foregrounded intimate explorations of memory, collaboration, and identity. The two Georgian films, 'It Will Be Better Before' by Keto Kipiani and 'Ever Since I Knew Myself' by Maka Gogaladze, share an underlying concern with the passage of time, the malleability of perspective, and the ways in which personal narratives are constructed and reconstructed through the lens of filmmaking. Both films, though different in approach, emphasize the central role of filmmaking as a means of reflecting on the self, with the camera serving not merely as an observer, but as a medium for dialogue between the filmmaker, their subjects, and the audience.

'IT WILL BE BETTER BEFORE' – A REFLECTION ON ARTISTIC COLLABORATION AND PERSONAL EXPRESSION

Keto Kipiani's 'It Will Be Better Before' presents itself as an almost confessional personal essay film that is less about telling a linear story and more about revealing the tensions and complexities that arise within the collaborative filmmaking process. The film's origins as a joint project between two directors mark it as a meta-commentary on the fluidity of creative ownership. The five-year gap between the film's initial conception and its final iteration—re-edited secretly by one of the directors—introduces a layer of emotional complexity that challenges our conventional understanding of collaboration.

The film stands as a visual manifesto of control and artistic self-realization. By re-editing the film without the other director's knowledge, Kipiani taps into



Photo by the author

an inherent desire to reclaim personal authorship. The fragmented narrative and visual choices in the final cut create a feeling of dislocation, offering a direct parallel to the shifting relationships between the co-creators. In many ways, the film becomes a dialogue with itself, with the new editor both engaging with and challenging the earlier version of the film.

Kipiani's use of the essay film format lends itself to a process of personal catharsis. In this way, the final product resembles more of a diary entry, an unfolding confession, than a finished narrative. It reflects on how artistic projects evolve, often diverging from their

original intentions, shaped by the emotional and intellectual growth of their creators. As the camera lingers on moments of seemingly banal abandoned and natural landscape, intercut with intimate narration, the viewer is drawn into an almost voyeuristic relationship with the filmmaker's psyche, watching her emotional arc unfold in real-time. The film embodies the impermanence of artistic visions, suggesting that creation itself is not fixed but an evolving negotiation of identity, collaboration, and power.

'EVER SINCE I KNEW MYSELF' – IDENTITY FORMATION



Still from the movie 'Ever Since I Knew Myself'

THROUGH MEMORY AND EDUCATION

If Kipiani's film looks inward, into the intricacies of collaboration and personal creative struggle, Maka Gogaladze's 'Ever Since I Knew Myself' takes us on an outward journey, exploring identity through intergenerational dialogue and the educational spaces that form Georgian youth. Gogaladze's film centers on her conversation with her mother, a dialogue that frames the dualities of memory and identity. This personal narrative is juxtaposed with her observations of children across Georgia as they engage in the arts and education, making the film not only an exploration of the self but also an inquiry into how identity is shaped by social and educational forces.

Gogaladze's use of time as both a narrative and thematic device becomes central to the film's structure. The conversation with her mother anchors the film in two temporalities: the past, as recalled through childhood memories, and the present, as these memories are revisited and reconstructed. The film becomes a time-traveling experience where personal recollections interact with the social realities of Georgian educational systems. By transitioning between personal memories and the observational scenes of children learning music, dance, and art, Gogaladze underscores the importance of cultural continuity and change, drawing attention to how these systems shape the identities of future generations.

The film's observational style is reminiscent of Frederick Wiseman's documentary approach, where the camera quietly observes without overt intervention, allowing the audience to draw their own conclusions about the environments being presented. The children, immersed in creative activities, become symbols of a cultural lineage in which Gogaladze herself is embedded, connecting her own journey with that of Georgia's evolving educational system. In this context, the film speaks not only to the shaping of the individual but also to the role that

art and education play in the formation of national and cultural identity and use of authoritarian approach in education.

Moreover, the film's contemplative pacing allows space for reflection, both on the part of the filmmaker and the audience. The process of observing children learning creative disciplines becomes an allegory for the ways in which our identities are continually formed and re-formed through engagement with the world around us. This examination of childhood education offers a critique of the ways in which systems of knowledge and culture are passed down, raising questions about the forces that influence the trajectory of our lives.

CINEMATOGRAPHIC TECHNIQUES: INTIMACY AND DISTANCE

Both films make striking use of cinematographic techniques to enhance their themes of intimacy and identity. In 'It Will Be Better Before,' the handheld camera work and grainy footage heighten the sense of emotional rawness and immediacy, as if the viewer is witnessing a deeply personal process of self-examination. Kipiani employs jump cuts and disjointed editing, mirroring the fragmented nature of her collaboration and the eventual rupture between the two directors. The viewer is left piecing together a narrative that is as much about what is unseen and unsaid as it is about what is on screen.

In contrast, Gogaladze's observational style in 'Ever Since I Knew Myself' is marked by long, steady takes that create a sense of temporal fluidity. The camera lingers on the children as they move through educational spaces, giving the audience time to absorb the significance of each gesture and interaction. The film's measured pacing allows it to act as a meditation on time and growth, underscoring the slow, often invisible process of identity formation.

PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

Both films challenge the audience to reconsider the ways in which identity is formed, whether through the act of artistic creation, personal memory, or the social structures that shape us. Kipiani's 'It Will Be Better Before' is a study in the personal and the private, drawing the viewer into the mind of the artist as she grapples with the complexities of collaboration and authorship. In contrast, Gogaladze's 'Ever Since I Knew Myself' offers a more expansive view, situating personal identity within the broader context of cultural and educational systems.

Together, the films presented at DOCA Film Club's season opening invite a deeper reflection on how cinema itself functions as both a mirror and a window—reflecting the inner life of its creators while offering insights into the external forces that shape our identities. The Q&A sessions that followed screenings provided an opportunity to engage with the filmmakers directly, adding another layer of interpretation and meaning to these already deeply personal works. As the new season of DOCA Film Club begins, these two films set a powerful tone for the cinematic explorations to come: films that challenge, provoke, and inspire reflection on the connections between self, society, and the art of filmmaking.



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