

FOCUS ON PULLMAN RESIDENCES

A new era for coastal living in Tsikhisdziri

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Georgian Market Offers Numerous Opportunities, and EFES Georgia is Grabbing Them Successfully in 2024

INTERVIEW BY TEAM GT

GEORGIA TODAY spoke to Veli Dinçel, General Manager of EFES Georgia to find out how the company has been excelling in 2024.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE FIRST HALF OF 2024 FOR YOUR COMPANY?

Well, I would say that the year 2024 turned out to be interesting and full of challenges.

In 2024, we launched new and highly successful brands on the market, and we have already started several big corporate responsibility projects. To further reduce the impact on the environment, we started working on a number of green initiatives aiming at the creation of a better world for future generations.

Compared with 2023, we can confidently state that the company has experienced overall growth for our business. In particular, the beer category within key accounts has shown impressive expansion in 2024 so far. Furthermore, we have observed a moderate increase in the HoReCa segment,

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Veli Dinçel, General Manager, EFES Georgia

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|--|--------------------|-------|-------|-----------------------------|-----------|-------|--------|--|-------|
| Prepared for Georgia Today Business by | | | | | | | | | |
| As of 24-Sep-2024 | | | | | | | | | |
| Markets | | | | | Markets | | | | |
| | Price | w/w | m/m | | Price | w/w | m/m | | Price |
| BONDS | | | | | | | | | |
| GEORG 04/26 | 94.62 (YTM 6.40%) | +0.4% | +0.4% | Bank of Georgia (BGEO LN) | GBP 38.50 | -2.5% | -11.6% | | |
| GBAIL 04/28 | 98.60 (YTM 6.90%) | +0.5% | +0.7% | Georgia Capital (GCEO LN) | GBP 9.27 | -4.3% | -7.5% | | |
| GEBOG 9/12 PERP | 98.20 (YTM 9.26%) | +0.2% | +0.2% | TBC Bank Group (TBGG LN) | GBP 26.70 | -5.0% | -11.4% | | |
| SILANET 01/27 | 100.88 (YTM 7.95%) | +0.6% | +0.9% | | | | | | |
| TBC 10/775 PERP | 100.33 (YTM 1.50%) | -0.0% | +0.1% | COMMODITIES | | | | | |
| TBC 8.894 PERP | 96.15 (YTM 11.08%) | +0.2% | +0.3% | Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl) | 75.17 | +2.0% | -4.9% | | |
| TBC 10 1/4 PERP | 98.92 (YTM 10.61%) | +0.5% | +0.2% | Gold Spot (US\$/OZ) | 2 657.10 | +3.4% | +5.8% | | |
| INDICES | | | | | | | | | |
| SP 500 | 5 732.93 | +1.7% | +1.7% | USD / GEL | 2,7248 | +0.9% | +1.0% | | |
| FTSE 250 | 20 770.12 | -0.8% | -2.0% | EUR / GEL | 3,0462 | +1.5% | +0.9% | | |
| DOW JONES 30 | 42 208.22 | +1.4% | +2.5% | GBP / GEL | 3,6516 | +2.7% | +2.5% | | |
| Russell 2000 | 2 223.99 | +0.8% | +0.2% | EUR / USD | 1,1180 | +0.6% | -0.1% | | |
| FTSE 100 | 8 282.76 | -0.3% | -0.5% | GBP / USD | 1,3413 | +1.9% | +1.5% | | |



Emzar Zenaishvili

Emzar Zenaishvili – A Man of the Olympic Family

BLOG BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

The history of the Georgian Olympic games started in the late 1950s, but its first stone was laid in 1989, with the first meeting of its initiative group, the Georgian National Olympic Committee (GNOC). This came at the time of the Soviet breakup and in the aftermath of that painfully memorable day of the 9th of April. At those difficult times of political turmoil and drastic socio-economic changes in the life of our people, the Georgian patriots and lovers of sport truly bit the bullet and gave a strong impetus to the Olympic movement in Sakartvelo.

Among those heroic initiators of the movement was Emzar Zenaishvili, a talented author and well-known sports journalist, and the current general secretary of GNOC. It is hard to believe that he has joined the ranks of Georgian octogenarians, still working with vigor and zeal, doing the most valuable service to Georgian sports in general, and to the Olympic Committee in particular.

Zenaishvili turned 80 on September 10, and his birthday was noted with the timely appearance of two books about his life, penned by him but conceived and edited by his true comrade-in-arms, the famous Paata Natsvlishvili, and published by the Petite Publishing House in Tbilisi. Emzar is himself the author of three wonderful books, replete with many a tale about our contemporary athletic life, bringing a new earthiness and directness to sports prose in general. He has nine summer and eight winter Olympic games under his belt – each time having been one of the leaders of the Georgian team at the Games. Zenaishvili has participated in numerous sessions and congresses of the International Olympic Committee in the capac-

ity of the member of the Sports Journalists World Association. As a specialist of Oriental Studies, after graduating from the Tbilisi State University, he published several scientific papers on the subject of Persian culture and history, and worked as the First Vice-President of Georgia's Tennis Federation and the President of the Shevardeni Sports Association.

Decorated by the Order of Honor of Georgia, Zenaishvili has selflessly dedicated all his life to the idea of building up sports in the new Georgia on the ruins of the former Soviet Union, so that his beloved Georgian compatriots would feel less painfully the crucial changes occurring in the country after the disintegration of the USSR. Having found the best chance of self-expression in building and promoting national sports, he has done his utmost to help the sporting life in Sakartvelo flourish to the utmost so that Georgian athletes have a chance to be among the best in the world. Without an iota of exaggeration, his role is significant in what Georgia is currently achieving at the Olympics.

Thanks to his shrewdness and natural acumen for sports business, his opinion has always been listened to with great heed, and respectfully taken into consideration, to the benefit of the local Olympic movement. Also priceless are his efforts to proliferate the idea of sports among Georgian youth. Indeed, it is hard to match Emzar Zenaishvili's tireless exploits in the development of Georgian sports, and the results are at hand.

Together with his wonderful longtime colleagues Leri Khabelov, Elguja Berishvili, Mamuka Khabareli, Nino Salukvadze, Tengiz Gachechiladze, Paata Natsvlishvili and others, Zenaishvili is still at the national Olympic wheel, using his incomparable experience and interminable love for sports to the benefit of his beloved Georgian people and the entire Georgian sports community.

Minister of Culture Thea Tsulukiani Resigns

BY TEAM GT

The longest-serving minister of the Georgian Dream government, Thea Tsulukiani, has announced that she is leaving her position as Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth and is preparing to become a party deputy. Tsulukiani will take sixth place in the list of candidates for deputy of the Georgian Dream party.

Tsulukiani, who was initially appointed as the Minister of Justice (2012-2020), has been the Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth of Georgia since 2021.

A lawyer by profession, Tsulukiani is known as among the most loyal figures of Georgian Dream. She is renowned for her attempts to establish party control over subordinate agencies, as well as



arbitrary dismissal of employees, facts which were often followed by protests and lawsuits against her decisions – with the plaintiffs often winning these cases.

“Tomorrow is my last working day,” Tsulukiani said during her speech at the anniversary evening of director Gizo Jordania.

US: Kobakhidze's Invitation to Biden's Reception Canceled Due to Anti-Democratic Actions of Georgian Gov't



BY TEAM GT

The US Embassy in Georgia on Wednesday confirmed that the Biden administration had refused to hold meetings with the Georgian delegation and had canceled the invitation of Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze to the UN General Assembly reception. “The Biden administration canceled

Prime Minister Kobakhidze's invitation to the annual reception of the UN General Assembly and refused to meet with the Georgian delegation due to the Georgian government's anti-democratic actions, misinformation, and negative rhetoric about the United States and the West,” the US Embassy told Netgazeti.

On September 25, US President Joe Biden hosted world leaders and high-ranking UN officials at a traditional reception in New York.

The Prime Minister of Georgia was

also invited to the reception, although then Voice of America reported on the cancellation of his invitation.

Voice of America writes, based on sources, that the US administration also refused all meetings with the Georgian delegation, and that Jake Sullivan, the National Security Advisor of the White House, also refused to meet with Prime Minister Kobakhidze.

During a meeting with Georgian journalists in New York, Kobakhidze labeled the situation as ‘not serious.’ He said the reception invitation had been sent three days prior, but was later revoked. He claimed the move was intended as support for Georgia's opposition.

Before leaving for the UN General Assembly, Irakli Kobakhidze had met with US Ambassador Robin Dunnigan in the government administration and expressed concern about the sanctions imposed by the US. Kobakhidze claimed that “with this decision, the American side had reached a critical line, which, if continued, might lead to a qualitative review of Georgia's position towards Georgian-American relations”.

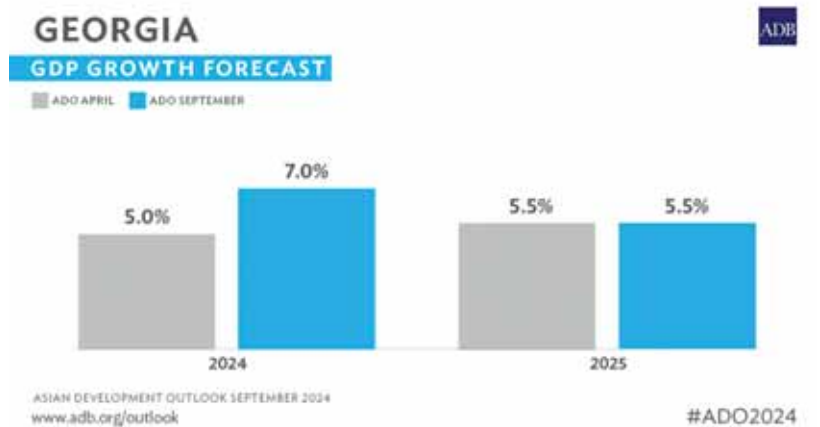
In May of this year, the honorary chairperson of Georgian Dream, Bidzina Ivanishvili, refused to meet the US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs James O'Brien, who was visiting Georgia.

ADB Raises 2024 Growth Forecast for Georgia

Rapid expansion in services coupled with higher domestic consumption has accelerated Georgia's economic growth in 2024, according to a new Asian Development Bank (ADB) report.

The Asian Development Outlook (ADO) September 2024, forecasts Georgia's gross domestic product (GDP) to grow by 7%, a notable increase from the earlier projection of 5% growth made in April 2024. The outlook for 2025 remains unchanged, with an anticipated growth of 5.5%.

The Caucasus nation's economic growth was propelled by a 9.7% increase in transport and storage, 8.5% in accommodation and food services, 12.2% in information and communication, and 9.6% in finance and insurance services. Domestic consumption which became the main driver of growth, helped expand



domestic investment. Unemployment fell to 14% in the first quarter of 2024.

“Georgia's economy continues to show steady progress despite geopolitical risks,” said ADB Country Director for Georgia Lesley Bearman Lahm. “This

bodes well for the country's ability to continue strengthening regional connectivity, supporting the private sector, developing human capital, and investing in climate-resilient agriculture.”

Inflation slowed in the first half of 2024

reaching 1.1% but rose again in June to 2.2%. This was mainly driven by increased transportation costs, owing to unstable oil prices, and elevated prices for tobacco and alcoholic beverages. A relatively stable policy helped keep prices from rising faster.

During the first half of 2024, an 18.5% increase in revenue helped erase the fiscal deficit. The balanced budget and a relatively stable lari contributed to a reduction in the ratio of public debt to GDP to 38.9% in the middle of this year, down from 39.2% a year earlier. Meanwhile, money transfers fell by 30.3% in general, while those from the Russian Federation plunged by 71.4%, even as they were partly offset by higher inflows from the United States and Europe.

Risks to the current account include domestic policy uncertainty and geopolitical risks, which may exacerbate exchange rate pressures. In addition,

potential disruption to trade from the knock-on effects of the Russian invasion of Ukraine could hit supply chains, creating inflationary pressures from higher commodity prices.

ADB has supported Georgia since 2007 and is one of the country's largest multilateral development partners. ADB's loans, grants, and technical assistance to Georgia total \$4 billion. ADB's new 5-year country partnership strategy with Georgia aims to help the nation develop into a green and inclusive regional gateway, support sovereign and private sector investments, policy reforms, capacity building, climate resilient infrastructure and regional integration.

ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from the region.

Ukraine Latest: Putin Issues Nuclear Warning to West over Potential Mass Attack on Russia

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

President Vladimir Putin warned the West on Wednesday that Russia could use nuclear weapons if it was struck with conventional missiles, and that Moscow would consider any assault on it supported by nuclear power to be a joint attack.

The decision to change Russia's official nuclear doctrine is the Kremlin's answer to deliberations in the United States and Britain about whether or not to give Ukraine permission to fire conventional Western missiles into Russia.

Putin, opening a meeting of Russia's Security Council, said that the changes were in response to a swiftly changing global landscape that had thrown up new threats and risks for Russia.

"It is proposed that aggression against Russia by any non-nuclear state, but with the participation or support of a nuclear state, be considered as their joint attack on the Russian Federation," Putin said.

"The conditions for Russia's transition to the use of nuclear weapons are also clearly fixed," Putin said, adding that Moscow would consider such a move if it detected the start of a massive launch of missiles, aircraft or drones against it.

RUSSIA CAN ONLY BE FORCED INTO PEACE, ZELENSKY TELLS UN SECURITY COUNCIL

World leaders were this week in New York City for the 79th United Nations General Assembly to discuss global issues and highlight their countries' priorities.

The UN Security Council held a special meeting on Ukraine, where Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called



President Putin. Source: 1tv.ge

for action over "talks" to discuss the maintenance of Ukraine's peace and security.

"Putin has broken so many international norms and rules that he won't stop on his own. Russia can only be forced into peace," Zelensky said.

Russian forces keep targeting Ukraine's energy resources and could soon target nuclear power plants, he warned, saying he recently received a report that Putin plans to attack the country's nuclear power plants and infrastructure.

"Russia has destroyed all our thermal power plants and a large part of our hydroelectric capacity. This is how Putin is preparing for winter, hoping to torment millions of Ukrainians ... Putin wants to leave them in the dark and [force] Ukraine to suffer and surrender," he said.

Zelensky warned that any missile or drone strike or any critical incident in Ukraine's energy system could lead to a "nuclear disaster."

"God forbid Russia causes a nuclear disaster at one of our nuclear power plants. Radiation will not respect state borders,"

he noted, adding that the end of the war "will happen not because someone got tired, not because someone traded something with Putin; Russia's war against Ukraine will end because the UN charter will work. It must work. Our Ukrainian right to self-defense must prevail."

ZELENSKY'S "VICTORY PLAN"

Zelensky this week is expected to fully outline his "victory plan" to US President Joe Biden, before sharing it with both presidential candidates, Donald Trump and Kamala Harris, US lawmakers, and international partners. The plan is likely to include Kyiv's repeated request to use Western long-range missile systems on targets inside Russia. The Ukrainian leader has been seeking permission to use British-French-made Storm Shadow missiles on Russian territory, with UK support, but negotiations with the US are ongoing, as the weapons use some US technology.

STOLTENBERG SAYS UKRAINE'S FUTURE IS IN NATO

NATO Secretary General Jens Stolten-



President Zelensky at the UN General Assembly. Source: X

berg, who will be stepping down from his role on October 1, posted on X about his meeting with the Ukrainian president.

Calling Zelensky his "good friend," Stoltenberg said they had agreed that "Ukraine's future is in NATO".

Stoltenberg added: "We will continue to work together to bring that day closer, and to help Ukraine prevail in its fight for freedom."

TWO KILLED, 12 INJURED BY RUSSIAN GUIDED BOMBS IN EASTERN UKRAINE

A Russian guided-bomb strike on Ukraine's eastern city of Kramatorsk on Wednesday killed at least two people and injured 12 more, including three children, according to Vadym Filashkin, the Donetsk region governor.

Russian troops used three highly destructive bombs in the attack on the town center that damaged two apartment blocks, shops and cars, Filashkin posted on Telegram, according to Reuters. He wrote:

"This is another Russian war crime and


another sad reminder that there are no absolutely safe places left in the Donetsk region."

FIRST 60 VEHICLES DELIVERED TO NATIONAL GUARD OF UKRAINE WITH EUAM SUPPORT

The European Union Advisory Mission to Ukraine (EUAM Ukraine) has handed over 60 soft-skin vehicles to the National Guard of Ukraine (NGU).


These vehicles will support NGU units conducting stability policing in liberated and adjacent territories in the Kherson, Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kharkiv, and Mykolaiv regions. The handover will enable the NGU to carry out its duties and help restore the rule of law and public trust.




This marks the first handover within an €8 million project, funded by the Kingdom of the Netherlands and implemented by EUAM. The project aims at strengthening the operational capabilities of Ukraine's civilian security sector to stabilize liberated and adjacent areas and ensure their full reintegration into Ukrainian society.




EXPLORE OUR BELOVED CITY FROM THE BIRD VIEW

Xeme restaurant is located on the 31st floor in The Biltmore Tbilisi Hotel





THE BILTMORE
TBILISI

The name of the restaurant Xeme speaks for itself, as it means the arctic fork-tailed gull.

29 Rustaveli Avenue, 0108, Tbilisi, Georgia / T: +995 322 72 72 72 / Info.bhtg@biltmorecollection.com

UK Ambassador: "The UK is not walking away from Georgia, but cooperation will be based on the level of trust that we have"



British Ambassador to Georgia Gareth Ward

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

Newly appointed British Ambassador to Georgia, Gareth Ward, joined the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in 1996, and served as the British Ambassador to Vietnam from August 2018 to July 2022. His expertise includes roles such as Deputy Director and Head of the China Department (2014-2017) and Consul General in St Petersburg (2010-2013). Ambassador Ward began his diplomatic career in 1998 as Second Secretary (Political) at the UK Embassy in Moscow. Radio Free Europe/RL's Georgian Service sat down with him this week to discuss the UK's ongoing concerns about Georgia, kicking off with a positive run-down of the bilateral ties linking the two countries.

"I first visited Georgia 25 years ago, and I've witnessed its development over the years. Last week, we received excellent news: direct flights will resume between London and Tbilisi, making travel much easier for tourists and businesspeople alike," he tells us.

"When we talk about bilateral relations between the UK and Georgia, economic ties stand out. The London Stock Exchange plays a significant role here, with many of Georgia's largest banks represented. London and the UK are key sources of investment for Georgia.

"In terms of security, the UK has consistently supported Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, not just through words, but also through concrete actions.

There is a concerning narrative surrounding democracy in Georgia

We collaborate with the Georgian military and provide assistance in cyber security, understanding the challenges posed by Russia's presence.

"Education is another vital area. Many Georgian students benefit from British education at universities, and the British Council teaches thousands of Georgians, including teachers, to ensure English is accessible in schools across the country," the Ambassador notes.

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THE DEVELOPMENTS SEEN IN THE COUNTRY OVER THE LAST YEAR?

We are concerned about some of the recent political developments in Georgia. We have said publicly that we think that the foreign influence law damages civil society and independent media, and that it's not compatible with the Euro Atlantic pathway. There is also a law which has just been passed in the third reading, the so-called family values law. And again, we've said publicly that we are concerned by that law. We believe it discriminates against certain communities, and that it's not in line with European values.

There's also, I would suggest, a concerning narrative surrounding democracy. At the moment, for instance, there's lots of criticism of the West, the role of the West in European security. And also, probably the most concerning thing of all, is the suggestion that opposition parties should be banned in Georgia.

I've been to Georgia many times over the years, and I see this country as a very democratic, pluralistic country. I've worked in China, I've worked in Vietnam, which are one-party countries, and it's obvious to me that Georgia is a pluralistic political culture. I would say that the reason why Georgia has such a good reputation in the West is because it has reformed and supported democracy over a 20-year period, and we don't want to see it sliding backwards.

HOW MUCH OF THAT REPUTATION IS STILL INTACT?

This year, clearly, there have been some setbacks, and we can't wish those away. But Georgia is about to have an election, and this is an opportunity for Georgia to demonstrate its democratic credentials to the West. This is a year of elections globally. We had an election in the

There's always criticism of gov't from the third sector in the UK. It's a normal part of the democratic process

UK, and we had a change of government. Democracy requires effort. It doesn't just continue by itself. And that's what we're hoping to see in Georgia in the next few months.

THE ALIENATION BETWEEN THE FOREIGN DIPLOMATIC CORPS AND THE GEORGIAN GOV'T HAS REACHED A POINT WHERE A NUMBER OF AMBASSADORS ARE ACTUALLY RELUCTANT TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE RULING PARTY. ARE YOU AMONG THEM?

I've only been here six weeks, and the task of a diplomat, first and foremost, to my mind, is to identify the sources of power and to communicate and influence. I have been meeting with senior representatives of the Georgian Dream government, ministers, parliamentarians. And I've also been meeting with opposition figures, opposition parliamentarians, opposition politicians, which is normal, good practice. I've had a wide spectrum of contact, although only in Tbilisi so far. I need to get out and speak to more people in the towns and villages.

THOSE HIGH-RANKING GOV'T REPRESENTATIVES YOU MET - WHAT DID THEY SAY TO JUSTIFY THEIR ACTIONS AND CURRENT RHETORIC?

I'm not going to go into detail about the private conversations I've had, but there are arguments out there we can look at. For instance, the argument that civil society is dangerous and may be plotting

to overthrow the government. Or that foreign influence is entering society through NGOs. I don't see any evidence of that, and I don't accept the argument - NGOs and independent media are an essential part in any democratic society. There's always criticism of government from the third sector in the UK. It's a normal part of the democratic process.

Some people also talk about the threat to traditional values coming from Western culture. And again, I reject it. I come from a country which has its share of problems, which has a society raising issues and debating hot topics, but, fundamentally, tolerance and human rights and the rule of law are the basis for our society. And when I'm here in Georgia, it feels similar. This feels like a tolerant society where different religious groups and different ethnic groups and different social groups can live together. So I don't believe that there is some existential threat to traditional values.

AND WHAT OF THE NARRATIVE ABOUT A "GLOBAL WAR PARTY" ENCOURAGING GEORGIA TO GO TO WAR WITH RUSSIA?

I know a lot about Russia's behavior. I worked in Russia for 10 years of my life, in the 1990s, 2000s and 2010s, and my own understanding of Russia's approach has improved. We see their methods, which started in 2008 and continued in 2014 when Russia invaded Crimea and then Donbas, and now the whole of Ukraine, and not just those techniques of hot war, but also hybrid attacks. In the UK, we've experienced the nuclear and radiological poisoning of our citizens, and there have been sabotages across Europe. I think the facts speak for themselves: that Russia is the aggressor, and we, the rest of Europe, are coming together to strengthen ourselves and strengthen our resilience. The important thing from a UK point of view, is that we are standing together with our European and NATO allies and are clearly saying that international law should be respected. The borders of Ukraine, the borders of Georgia should be respected, and we will stand with Ukraine as long as it takes.

RUSSIA HAS BEEN QUITE VOCAL ABOUT THE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN GEORGIA. THEY'VE OFFERED NAUGHT BUT GLOWING PRAISE OF THE GEORGIAN GOVERNMENT'S POLICIES. WHAT CONCLUSIONS CAN BE DRAWN FROM THAT?

I tend not to draw my conclusions from Maria Zakharova and other sources of disinformation, but I think it just reinforces that Russia is trying to pressure all European countries with its narratives, and we need to have strong media and strong civil society and strong governments to resist that pressure.

RUSSIA IS NOT THE ONLY GREAT POWER VYING FOR INFLUENCE IN THE REGION - CHINA IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY PRESENT. ANY WORDS OF WISDOM FROM YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE?

I would say that the economic integration of China into the global economy

Georgia has a good reputation in the West because it reformed and supported democracy over a 20-year period. We don't want to see it backsliding

has brought lots of benefits to the UK and other countries. And so, if Chinese tourists want to come to Georgia, then I think that's excellent. They can join the British tourists and the Turkish tourists and the others. And China has also got a good record of infrastructure construction that has pushed forward the Chinese economy. If Chinese contractors are building roads in Georgia, then that's good for the Georgian economy. The risk is, and this applies to China as much as it does to other countries, is to ensure that in Georgia's economy, you don't allow any strategic sector to be monopolized by one or another partner, because that gives those partners excessive leverage. There should be diversity in the economic strategy.

HOW ROBUST HAS THE WEST BEEN IN ITS RESPONSE TO THE FLOW OF ANTI-WESTERN SENTIMENT COMING FROM GEORGIA'S RULING PARTY?

Well, the UK is not part of the EU, so I'm not going to comment on the approach the EU is taking. The US has taken its own approach. In the UK, we have been expressing our concern about these trends to Georgian politicians and leaders. We still want to have a deep partnership with Georgia, one based on both interests and values, and we really hope that after the election, whoever wins, that that party or group of parties will return to a constructive relationship with us, where we can keep building trust and keep supporting each other.

AND IF THAT RELATIONSHIP DETERIORATES, ESPECIALLY AT THE EXPENSE OF VALUES, WHAT IS THE UK'S APPROACH GOING TO BE?

Numerous different scenarios are possible. But we do need to have a shared values, to maintain trust and continue that deep and broad relationship that we currently have. If we have less trust, we will have a slightly different type of relationship. The UK is not going to be walking away from Georgia. We will continue to cooperate, but we will base that cooperation on the levels of trust that we have.

Georgian Market Offers Numerous Opportunities, and EFES Georgia is Grabbing Them Successfully in 2024



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encompassing the beer and CSD categories. Our beer and CSD production, compared to the same period of 2023, increased significantly.

AT THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR, THE COMPANY OFFERED GEORGIAN CONSUMERS A NEW VARIETY OF GEORGIAN PREMIUM CRAFT BEER, TAATI NEIPA.

The portfolio of the Taati brand already includes two types of beer: the well-known Taati New Zealand Pils and the novelty of the year - Taati NEIPA. NEIPA is a New England Indian Pale Ale, distinguished by its aroma and moderate bitterness. The beer is brewed using four types of high-quality malt and three selected flavor hops. The special brewing method gives unique characteristics to the beer.

BECK'S IS BACK ON THE GEORGIAN MARKET WITH A VERY INTERESTING "BECK'S IS BACK" CAMPAIGN. HOW DID THE CONSUMER RECEIVE RETURN?

Beck's is quite an interesting brand and is much more than just beer. Beck's is a lifestyle, innovation and courage. We have very good feedback from our consumers, as Beck's is NI German beer. Brewed according to the 'beer purity law', Beck's is made with only three ingredients - malt, hops, and water.

A NEW VARIETY OF NATAKHTARI ZIGZAG WAS ADDED TO THE PORTFOLIO OF



NON-ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES. WHAT LEAD TO IT?

We always try to offer innovative products tailored to our consumers. We used the same approach in this case. We made the decision as a result of consumer research. This time, the research showed a growing demand for refreshing and citrus flavors, and the obvious favorite in this regard was the lemon and lime mix. As a result, the new Natakhtari Zigzag flavor mix with lemon and lime was added to the portfolio of non-alcoholic brands, characterized by fresh, citrus notes. The variety of flavors deepens our connection with our loyal consumers, since each new flavor is created according to their diverse wishes and demands.

EURO 2024 WAS SPECIAL FOR GEORGIANS, AND NATAKHTARI BEER OFFERED A VERY INTERESTING AND ORIGINAL CAMPAIGN TO FANS OF THE GEORGIAN NATIONAL TEAM. TELL US MORE.

Natakhtari beer has been contributing to the development and popularization of Georgian sports for about 15 years. It has been a friend of the fans for a long time, and has been involved in many activities and campaigns. 2024 was a historic year for Georgian football. With the overflowing joy, we wondered what come out as most important to Georgian football fans. We chose to create a platform where fans could express their feelings, giving them the opportunity to translate their emotions into action and share these with the public. The brand asked: "What would you do for the Georgian national team?" and three winners

were given tickets to attend the Georgia-Czech Republic match. The most important thing was that more than 5000 ideas came to us completely unexpectedly. It made it difficult to identify the best initiatives, but the high number was a great success for the brand.

WHAT OTHER IMPORTANT ACHIEVEMENTS CAN YOU NAME CONCERNING CORE BRANDS?

A fun beer competition was organized by the famous British digital publication LAD Bible. A special challenge was arranged among the beers of the countries participating in Euro 2024, where the winners were identified by three characteristics - taste, packaging and history. It was important that only one beer brand was selected from each country, Georgia was represented by Natakhtari beer, which brought great success to the country and took 4th place. "The country should be proud of you" - this is how LAD Bible assessed Natakhtari beer.

We also ran a very successful campaign with Karva, celebrating the 15th summer of the brand. We created a separate website - ganikarve.ge - which made loyal Karva consumers more active. It has already been established that Karva has become the main guide for young people at summer music festivals and other entertaining events.

EFES GEORGIA CONSIDERS ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AS THE MAIN DRIVER OF ITS ACTIVITIES. WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR REDUCING ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT AND DEVELOPING GREEN PRODUCTION THIS YEAR?

To further reduce environmental impact and promotion of green manufacturing, the company focuses on initiatives such as (1) supply chain optimization to reduce transportation emissions, (2) implementation of innovative waste reduction and recycling programs. In our enterprise, we do not produce such waste that ends up in the trash can: everything is subject to recycling. Our company is a member of the United Nations Global Compact, and this helps us to integrate modern principles of sustainability into our business development.

TELL US MORE ABOUT EFES GEORGIA'S TRANSITION TO RENEWABLE ENERGY.

Transitioning our production to renewable energy means shifting all energy sources and production processes to electricity from renewable sources, including solar, wind, hydro, or geothermal energy. EFES Georgia became the first Georgian company to use the mechanism for the purchase and cancellation of certificates of origin of electricity obtained from renewable sources. With this mechanism, which has been operational since 2023, companies are given the opportunity to confirm that the electricity they consume is fully or partially from renewable sources.

We believe that promoting the production and consumption of green energy is important for reducing dependence on fossil fuels. We encourage other representatives of the industry to use the same mechanisms so as to reduce environmental impact and create a greener, more sustainable future, and to increase the demand for green energy, which will ultimately encourage appropriate investments in the field of renewable energy generation.

TELL US ABOUT OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVES.

Based on public support and inter-sector partnerships, we support various environmental efforts, including the National Forestry Agency's "Forest Friend" program, within the framework of which we fully financed the restoration and maintenance of the forest on an area of approximately 12 hectares. In the municipality of Rustavi, we implemented the project of a separate collection of plastic

and engaged in educational and awareness-raising campaigns in this regard.

In addition, environmental principles have been implemented in our company for years, such as energy efficiency and energy saving, waste management, sustainable use of natural resources, environmental awareness raising, etc. Since 2012, a biological wastewater treatment plant has been operating in our factory. This technology is recognized worldwide as one of the best for breweries.

Our entrepreneurship program "GO Green," which we implemented last year in cooperation with Impact Hub Tbilisi and Startup Büro, assists the promotion of sustainable entrepreneurship in Georgia and the strengthening of startups/companies/individuals in this direction.

WE HAVE HEARD A LOT ABOUT WHAT EFES GEORGIA IS DOING IN THE FRAMES OF THE ENTREPRENEURSHIP SUPPORT PROGRAM. WHAT ARE YOU DOING NOW AND WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS TO PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS IN OUR COUNTRY?

Kicking off last year and aiming to promote sustainable entrepreneurship and strengthen startups, existing companies and individuals, this year EFES Georgia, in collaboration with Impact Hub Tbilisi, is launching the most large-scale, innovative, and youth-oriented social entrepreneurship program - Social Impact Award 2024. For the first time, the SIA Georgia will be conducted in close partnership with SIA Turkey. With the support of EFES Georgia and Anadolu Efes, participants from both countries will have the opportunity to meet, exchange knowledge, and form international partnerships.

The finals of the Social Impact Award will be held on October 7. The winning teams will receive financial support for implementing their social business ideas and participate in the Social Impact Award international summit in Germany.

HOW WOULD YOU ASSESS THE COMPETITION IN GEORGIA AND THE GEORGIAN BEER MARKET IN GENERAL?

High competition is good for consumers and for the development of the market as a whole. This is not my opinion; the importance of competition has been

proven by centuries of experience in different markets. In times of high competition, consumers get better quality, more diverse products and services tailored to their needs from companies that are involved in the competitive struggle. Competition in Georgia is high due to the large number of players. Despite this, EFES Georgia is the clear market leader in the beer and lemonade sectors.

WHAT IS THE EXPORT POTENTIAL OF THE INDUSTRY AND WHAT IS THE COUNTRY DOING ABOUT IT?

Currently, EFES Georgia exports beer and lemonade to 23 countries. The direction of export in our company has been developing over the years, both in terms of volume and quantity of markets- it is one of the main priorities and prospects for our growth. From this point of view, we intend to increase our investments and export Georgian products to other countries. Also, we want to activate communication with customers in existing export countries to increase the awareness of our brands and strengthen our position in the markets.

WHAT'S AHEAD FOR EFES GEORGIA?

The year is not over yet, and we are planning many more interesting activities. EFES Georgia will present another series of its leading beer brand Natakhtari, which will be sold in limited quantities. The packaging of the new series will be decorated with the characters of the iconic Georgian poem "The Knight in the Panther's Skin" brought to life by the hand of the modern Georgian artist Davit Machavariani. This time the heroes of the poem will be depicted visually and with aphorisms on different packages. This year, we improved and made this project even more innovative. By scanning the QR on the can, it becomes possible to see each hero from a different perspective with the help of the Augmented Reality.

At the end of September, Oktoberfest will start in Georgia with our licensed brand Lowenbrau. Compared to last year, this year's festival will be large-scale and public. Lowenbrau is one of only 6 breweries eligible to participate in Oktoberfest. Come on September 28-29, in Dedaena Park, join us and celebrate a real German festival with real German beer.



PULLMAN Residences - A New Era for Coastal Living in Tsikhisdziri

BY KESARIA KATCHARAVA

In an exciting development for Georgia's real estate and tourism sectors, the prestigious PULLMAN brand is set to debut along the stunning Black Sea coastline.

The Petra Group is launching a luxurious hotel and residential complex in Tsikhisdziri as part of the larger Petra Sea Resort project. This initiative not only introduces a world-class brand to the region but also aims to bolster local investment and tourism, significantly contributing to the economy.

A LANDMARK AGREEMENT

The journey to this moment began last year when the Petra Group secured an agreement with ACCOR, the parent company of PULLMAN. This strategic partnership signifies a commitment to bringing high-quality hospitality to Georgia, aligning with the country's goals to enhance its tourism profile. Following the agreement, extensive preparatory work has been completed, allowing for the official launch of PULLMAN Residences. This development offers prospective buyers the chance to purchase PULLMAN-branded residences at an early stage of construction, securing a premium property in a prime location.

UNDERSTANDING THE PULLMAN BRAND

PULLMAN is synonymous with upscale and exceptional service in the hospitality industry. Managed by ACCOR, which owns over 40 brands and 5,500 hotels worldwide, PULLMAN's entry into Georgia signals a significant enhancement to the local property market. Prospective buyers will not only invest in luxury living but also become part of a globally recognized brand, ensuring that their investment appreciates over time. PULLMAN's reputation for high-quality service and customer experience is expected to resonate strongly in the Georgian market, attracting both local residents and international visitors.

WHAT PULLMAN RESIDENCES WILL OFFER

Designed with an emphasis on comfort and luxury, PULLMAN Residences will consist of two distinct blocks of residences, each thoughtfully designed to provide an exceptional living experience. Here are some key features and amenities that will be available:

LUXURIOUS LIVING SPACES

Each residence will boast high-end fin-

ishes and state-of-the-art amenities. The interiors, crafted by an internationally recognized design firm, will emphasize modern elegance and comfort. Spacious layouts will ensure that residents enjoy ample living space, while large windows will provide stunning views of the Black Sea, allowing natural light to flood the interiors.

COMPREHENSIVE AMENITIES

Spa and Wellness Center: These dedicated spaces will provide a range of treatments and wellness programs, ensuring that residents have access to relaxation and rejuvenation options right at their doorstep.

Dining Options: A variety of restaurants and lounges will showcase both local and international cuisines. This will create a vibrant dining scene that caters to all tastes, whether residents are looking for casual meals or fine dining experiences.

Swimming Pools: Both indoor and outdoor pools will cater to leisure activities throughout the year. These will be complemented by poolside lounges and cabanas, enhancing the overall resort-like atmosphere.

Common Areas: Elegant lobbies and lounges will create inviting spaces for residents to socialize and unwind. These areas will be designed to foster a sense of community, encouraging residents to connect with each other.

FAMILY-FRIENDLY FEATURES

Recognizing the importance of family-friendly amenities, PULLMAN Residences will also include children's play areas and recreational facilities. These spaces will provide opportunities for families to spend quality time together and ensure that younger residents have plenty of options for entertainment and social interaction.

INVESTMENT AND RENTAL MANAGEMENT

For those looking for long-term investment opportunities, PULLMAN Residences will offer a rental management service managed by VALOR HOSPITALITY. This arrangement guarantees stable income while providing professional management to maximize rental potential. Owners will have the option to rent out their residences when not in use, allowing them to generate income while retaining the benefits of ownership.

Additionally, every residence owner will be enrolled in the ACCOR loyalty program, granting exclusive privileges across ACCOR's vast network of hotels and resorts. This program includes benefits such as discounted stays at other ACCOR properties, room upgrades, and



PULLMAN Residences in Tsikhisdziri access to members-only events, further enhancing the value of ownership.

MORE ABOUT TSIKHISDZIRI

Tsikhisdziri is not just a beautiful coastal location; it is also conveniently situated just 15 kilometers from Batumi. This proximity to urban attractions, combined with natural wonders such as Mtirala National Park and the Batumi Botanical Garden, enhances its appeal as a tourist destination. The PULLMAN Residences will seamlessly integrate into the extensive amenities of the Petra Sea Resort, which spans over 20 hectares and includes a private beach, shopping areas, and family-friendly entertainment options.

The region surrounding Tsikhisdziri is rich in culture and natural beauty. Visitors can explore historical sites, sample local cuisine, and participate in various outdoor activities, such as hiking and water sports. The combination of cultural richness and natural beauty positions Tsikhisdziri as an attractive destination for both tourists and investors.

ECONOMIC IMPACT AND JOB CREATION

The total investment in PULLMAN Residences exceeds \$100 million, marking a significant boost to the local economy. Construction is set to commence in September 2024, with a projected completion date by the end of 2028. During the construction phase, over 500 jobs will be created, followed by an additional

250 permanent positions once the project is operational.

This substantial job creation will support local communities and stimulate economic growth in Tsikhisdziri and its surroundings. The introduction of such a renowned brand is expected to draw more investor interest to the Black Sea coast, enhancing Georgia's reputation as a premier destination for luxury tourism.

THE BROADER ECONOMIC CONTEXT

The investment in the PULLMAN Residences aligns with Georgia's broader strategy to develop its tourism sector and attract foreign investments. By partnering with an internationally recognized brand, the Petra Group is positioning Tsikhisdziri as a key player in the regional tourism market. This will not only benefit local businesses but also contribute to the overall economic development of the area.

The launch of PULLMAN Residences heralds a transformative era for Tsikhisdziri and the Black Sea region. By marrying luxury living with exceptional hospitality, this project promises to elevate the local tourism landscape and attract both local and international investors. As the project progresses, it is anticipated to create lasting economic benefits and solidify Georgia's position as a top-tier destination for luxury experiences.

Nata Gelashvili, Head of Marketing at Petra Group, expressed enthusiasm for the project: "We are excited to introduce PULLMAN Residences to Georgia, believing it will redefine the hospitality experience in our region." With a commitment to excellence and guest comfort, the PULLMAN brand is poised to make a significant impact on the Black Sea coast, ushering in a new era of luxury living and investment opportunities.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

As Tsikhisdziri continues to develop as a prime location for tourism and investment, the PULLMAN Residences will play a crucial role in shaping its future. The project not only promises to enhance the aesthetic and cultural landscape of the area but also aims to set a new standard for luxury living in Georgia.

The growing interest in the Black Sea coast, particularly in areas like Tsikhisdziri, reflects a broader trend towards premium real estate investments in emerging markets. With its breathtaking views, cultural heritage, and luxury offerings, Tsikhisdziri is poised to become a significant player on the global tourism map.

As the PULLMAN Residences project unfolds, it will undoubtedly attract attention and admiration from potential buyers and tourists alike, reinforcing the appeal of the Black Sea as a destination for those seeking luxury, comfort, and a vibrant lifestyle.

Shangri La's Birthday: A Memorable Celebration Like No Other



Georgian band Mgzavrebi

Shangri La in Tbilisi celebrated its birthday in grand style on September 12th, 2024, delivering an unforgettable evening of luxury and entertainment.

From the moment guests stepped inside, they were welcomed by performers in stunning costumes, setting the tone for an exciting night.

Outside, the Moving Theater amazed

everyone with breathtaking air acrobatics, where performers seemed to float and soar effortlessly. Inside, an elegant dance show featuring women in sharp tuxedos added a touch of sophistication to the night's festivities.

The night's energy peaked with a performance by the beloved Georgian band Mgzavrebi. Known for their eclectic sound that fuses traditional Georgian folk with modern rock, they took the stage with unparalleled passion. Their soulful melodies and heartfelt lyrics resonated with every guest, evoking emotions that ranged from nostalgia to exhilaration. The crowd couldn't resist joining in, singing along to fan favorites and dancing in sync with the rhythmic beats, making the performance a core highlight of the evening.

No celebration is complete without a grand cake, and Shangri La didn't disappoint. A massive, delicious birthday cake was unveiled, alongside a spread of gourmet treats and drinks that satisfied every palate, adding to the indulgence of the night.

Shangri La's birthday celebration of 2024 was nothing short of spectacular. With an impeccable blend of art, music,

and surprises, it once again confirmed its status as Tbilisi's premier entertainment destination.



Georgia Introduces Favorable Tax Treatment for Online Gambling Operators Targeting Foreign Players

BY TEAM GT

In a strategic move to attract foreign investment and strengthen its position in the global gambling industry, the Parliament of Georgia (the Parliament) recently passed amendments to the tax laws governing online gambling (the Amendments). Adopted on 27 June 2024, the Amendments introduce more favorable tax conditions for entities operating online gambling websites in Georgia for foreign players, and are set to come into effect on 1 December 2024. By reducing the tax burden and fostering a more competitive environment, the Parliament aims to draw international operators and elevate Georgia's profile in the global gaming market.

In light of the Amendments, this article provides an overview of Georgian regulatory framework for online gambling operators targeting foreign players and the specific tax regulations that will apply to these activities.

PERMIT FOR ONLINE GAMBLING OPERATORS

Online gambling in Georgia is governed by the Law of Georgia on Organizing Lotteries, Games of Chance, and Other Prize Games (the Gambling Law). The Gambling Law sets out the regulatory framework for the industry, covering areas such as the issuance of permits, information disclosure, and the protection of players' rights. Under the Gambling Law, all operators of online gambling websites shall hold a permit issued by the Revenue Service of Georgia (the Revenue Service). The Revenue Service, as the regulatory authority, oversees all

matters related to gambling in Georgia.

To obtain a permit for online gambling, the permit seeker shall first obtain the authorization certificate from Random Systems Georgia to ensure compliance with relevant international standards and Georgian legislation. Random Systems Georgia is a company appointed by the Revenue Service for implementing and operating the electronic gaming business control system. For this purpose, the Random Systems Georgia monitors gaming products and services of Online Gambling Operators in Georgia. After the authorization certificate is issued, the permit seeker shall apply to the Revenue Service.

Once the permit for operation of online gambling is obtained, the Amendments allow permit holders to utilize two internet domains. However, in such cases where two internet domains and websites are utilized, one domain and website must be exclusively for Georgian players and the other for foreign players.

FEES TO BE PAID BY THE PERMIT HOLDER

Permits for operation of online slot salon and online casino may be issued either to holders of permits for land-based gambling or to new applicants who do not possess such permits. The annual permit fee solely for slot website is GEL 1,000,000. For an online casino, the annual permit fee is GEL 5,000,000.

However, to operate online sportsbook targeting solely foreign players, in addition to permit for online operations, the operator shall also secure a permit for a land-based sportsbook and maintain at least one land-based location. Consequently, the annual permit fees are as follows: GEL 30,000 to GEL 300,000 for the land-based sportsbook, depending



Online roulette. Source: premiumtimesng

on the location on the territory of Georgia, and GEL 100,000 for the online sportsbook. In addition to the annual permit fees, the operators of land-based gambling are subject to additional quarterly fees. Therefore, operator of online sportsbook will be required to pay quarterly fee from GEL 250,000 to GEL 300,000 depending on the location of land-based facility within Georgia.

TAXES TO BE PAID BY THE PERMIT HOLDER

Tax Regulations for Slot Salons - The Tax Code of Georgia governs taxation of gambling operators. For land-based slot salons, the taxable base is the Gross Gaming Revenue (GGR), which represents the difference between the total bets received from players and the winnings paid out to them. Generally, the

slot salon operator is subject to a 15% corporate income tax rate. However, according to the Amendments, GGR generated from foreign players is taxed with 5% instead of 15%.

Furthermore, a 5% income tax rate is imposed on funds withdrawn by individuals from slot websites. The operator shall withhold such tax when disbursing the winning amount to the player. The recent Amendments exempt the withdrawals of foreign players from such 5% tax, effectively reducing their overall tax burden and potentially increasing their net earnings from such activities.

Tax Regulations for Sportsbooks - Generally, the taxable amount of online sportsbook operators for corporate tax purposes is total bets made. The online sportsbook operator shall pay 7% profit tax on all bets. However, according to the Amend-

ments, for online sportsbook operators whose websites target foreign players, the taxable amount is GGR (not total bets made) and such GGR is taxed at 5%. Additionally, according to the Amendments, foreign players who win and withdraw money from online sportsbooks, are exempt from the withholding income tax, consequently, creating a tax-free regime for foreign players in Georgia.

Tax Regulations for Casinos - For corporate income tax purposes, the taxable base for online casinos is the GGR. The Standard tax rate for GGR generated from Georgian players is 15%. However, the Amendments have introduced a tax rate of 5% for GGR generated from foreign players. Additionally, a 5% personal income tax is levied on funds withdrawn by individuals from online casino, with the operator responsible for withholding this tax when disbursing winnings. According to the Amendments, foreign players are exempt from this 5% tax on withdrawals, effectively lowering their tax liability and potentially increasing their net earnings.

In conclusion, the Amendments set to take effect on 1 December 2024 mark a significant shift in Georgia's regulatory landscape for the gambling industry. By introducing more favorable tax conditions for entities that operate online gambling for foreign players, Georgia aims to enhance its attractiveness as a hub for online gambling. These changes reflect Georgia's move to stimulate foreign investment, promote economic growth, and strengthen its position in the global gambling market. As the implementation date approaches, stakeholders will need to stay informed and adapt to the evolving regulatory framework to fully adapt to the opportunities these Amendments present.



GEORGIAN HOSPITALITY SERVICES GO THROUGH GLOBAL STANDARDS







ONE STEP CLOSER TO PARADISE











The 'SOS Plastic' Competition Awards Ceremony - Empowering the Next Generation through Eco-Consciousness



Photos by UNDP/ Vladimir Valishvili

BY KESARIA KATCHARAVA

In a significant milestone for environmental education in Georgia, the 'SOS Plastic' competition concluded with an inspiring awards ceremony held on September 24-25. This initiative, a collaboration between CENN, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and Norway, successfully engaged approximately 300 students from 20 schools across the country in innovative activities aimed at reducing plastic waste. The competition was launched within the the End Plastic Pollution in Georgia project.

EMPOWERING YOUNG ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCATES

The 'SOS Plastic' project was designed not only to raise awareness, but also to empower students to take tangible action against plastic pollution. Over the span of three months, students devised creative strategies to analyze and reduce their schools' plastic consumption. Activities included conducting audits to assess their plastic footprint, establishing separation boxes, and setting up water dispensers to minimize the use of single-use plastic bottles.

UNDP's Tamar Siradze emphasized the importance of the initiative, stating, "What we saw in this project was a remarkable opportunity for students and teachers to explore their own impact and develop practical solutions. The engagement and creativity displayed were truly inspiring." This statement encapsulates the essence of the project: fostering a sense of responsibility among students regarding their environmental impact.

SCHOOLS MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN SUSTAINABILITY

The awarding ceremony celebrated three standout schools: Tbilisi Public School #169, School Genius of Tbilisi, and Vazha-Pshavela Public School #9 from Gori. Each winning school received a voucher worth 2,300 GEL for an electronics store, along with UN certificates for both students and teachers.

Nato Gaboshvili, Director of Tbilisi Public School #169, highlighted the transformative nature of the project: "The Eco Club has been incredibly active since 2016, and through this competition, we saw a heightened awareness about plastic waste not just among our club members but throughout the entire school

community." Her pride in the students' achievements is palpable, reflecting a broader trend of growing environmental consciousness in Georgian schools.

Keti Jikia, Head of the Eco Club, shared how the competition altered daily habits: "Our students have replaced single-use plastic cups with reusable ones, showcasing a real change in behavior." She noted that these changes went beyond just practical measures; they represented a shift in mindset that could have lasting effects. Jikia emphasized the role of educators in facilitating this change: "I thank the organizers. I thank our directorate, and of course, the students who were direct participants in the project. That's awesome."

Lela Bedoshvili, Head of the Eco Club and math teacher at Gori #9 Public School, shared:

"We actively participate in various environmental initiatives, and our eco-club has achieved notable success. Last year, we won the energy efficiency competition, which was an exciting opportunity for the school. Within the SOS Plastic campaign, we measured the impact before and after the campaign, and the results showed a significant reduction in plastic consumption within the school. Our activities engaged students of all ages, even involving younger classes in hands-on projects to teach them about the 3R principles (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) and waste management. Additionally, we partnered with a recycling company to collect and recycle large quantities of plastic, a practice the school plans to continue."

INNOVATIVE INITIATIVES ACROSS SCHOOLS

One particularly noteworthy achievement came from 169 School, where students developed a mobile application aimed at tracking individual plastic footprint. Mariam Aburjania, a member of the Eco Club at Veni School, explained, "We conducted many trainings and created an application that helps us monitor our plastic usage and encourages our peers to recycle." This innovation not only showcases the technological skills of the students but also reflects their commitment to fostering a more sustainable school environment. The app is currently in the implementation phase, and the students are excited about its potential impact.

The enthusiasm at School Genius was equally noteworthy. Vera Kublashvili, the school director, emphasized the importance of this initiative: "We are

creating a good future for Georgia. Children are aware, and this is not a one-time campaign." She acknowledged the desire among students to make a difference, saying, "You see the desire of the students to do something good and right, and you support them."

Students at Genius, like Ana Khvedelidze, spoke about their learning experiences. "I learned many new things from these activities that will be useful in my life," she noted. Ana took her newfound knowledge home, explaining the reduction of plastic consumption to family members and classmates. Her engagement illustrates how the project has fostered a culture of awareness beyond school walls.

Ketevan Feikrishvili, the head of the Eco Club at Genius, shared insights into the club's journey: "Environmental campaigns are important. As we started working enthusiastically, we made an action plan to reduce plastic waste." She emphasized that this initiative served not only to engage students but also to raise the voice of the non-school community, highlighting the need for collective action against plastic pollution.

Students at Gori #9 Public School described their activities "We conducted a survey among our pupils about their behaviour trends, which gave us interesting insight into people's attitudes and behaviour, based on which we then designed specific activities to target pupils' behaviour," noted Natali Geladze.

KEY TAKEAWAYS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Nana Takvarelia, the project head, articulated the broader goals of the End Plastic Pollution project. "The project has been implemented since December of the previous year and includes four main



directions," she explained. "First, we provided tailored training for stakeholders involved in the plastic production and consumption value chain. Our aim is to reduce waste generation through education and awareness."

Takvarelia underscored the critical importance of mentorship in the campaign: "Each school had a mentor assigned to help them in the direction of waste management and to guide them in implementing their action plans." This support ensured that schools could effectively assess their unique challenges and develop tailored solutions.

She further explained, "Through the competition, we evaluated activities based on sustainability, real results, and the effectiveness of information campaigns. In the future, we plan to conduct training on waste management and plastic waste in twenty additional schools," Takvarelia added, indicating the initiative's potential for growth and expansion.

Moreover, she highlighted the project's relevance in the broader context of environmental issues facing Georgia: "The generation of plastic waste is very acute. Considering that in our country, for example, we do not have sanitary landfills, and in the last 10 years, the import and production of plastic in Georgia has increased by 71 percent." This alarming statistic underscores the urgency of initiatives like "SOS Plastic," aimed at fostering long-term change.



In addition to school initiatives, the project features a campaign aimed at businesses. "We have selected 10 businesses that had the goal or wanted to reduce single-use plastic consumption and switch to green procurement," Takvarelia shares. These businesses receive training on how to minimize plastic use and adopt green procurement practices. "We are trying to raise awareness specifically in the direction of the circular economy," she adds.

A BROADER IMPACT

The End Plastic Pollution project is part of the larger 'Leadership, Equality, Advocacy, and Democracy' (LEAD) program, which focuses on empowering communities and addressing environmental challenges in Georgia. The collaborative effort highlighted the critical importance of engaging educational institutions in sustainability practices.

The project has garnered attention not just for its immediate impact, but also for its potential to influence long-term environmental policy and practices in Georgia. With a 71% increase in the import and production of disposable

bility among school communities. Ketevan Feikrishvili added, "It was gratifying to see students recognize the significance of their actions and actively seek to educate others."

Through thematic exhibitions and digital campaigns, students worked tirelessly to raise awareness about plastic pollution within their communities. Their efforts included creating informative posters, organizing cleanup days, and even engaging local businesses to support their initiatives. This approach illustrates how education can serve as a powerful catalyst for community change.

LOOKING AHEAD

As the 'SOS Plastic' competition concludes, the momentum continues. With plans for future training sessions and continued engagement with schools and communities, the lessons learned and the relationships built through this initiative promise to extend far beyond the classroom.

The impact of these efforts is already evident, with students and educators committed to fostering an environmentally conscious culture. Lela Bedoshvili

encapsulated this vision perfectly: "These students are the future environmental defenders of Georgia." The journey towards a sustainable future is well underway, and with continued efforts like those seen in the 'SOS Plastic' initiative, the path becomes clearer.

As these young environmental advocates develop their skills and awareness, they not only contribute to their immediate communities but also inspire others to take action. The knowledge they have gained and the changes they have implemented will resonate for years to come, making a meaningful contribution to the fight against plastic pollution in Georgia and beyond.

The 'SOS Plastic' initiative shows how important young people are in taking care of the environment. The hard work of students, teachers, and community members highlights what we can accomplish when we unite for a shared goal. Moving forward, our dedication to reducing plastic waste and promoting sustainability will help create a healthier future for Georgia and our planet for many years to come.

INSPIRING CHANGE BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

The outcomes of the 'SOS Plastic' initiative reflect a growing commitment to sustainability within schools, but they also extend to the community at large. Vera Kublashvili noted, "As educators, we play a vital role in guiding our students, and the enthusiasm they have shown is a testament to the success of this program."

The competition has not only transformed student behaviors but also instilled a sense of collective responsi-





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Back to Shatili

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

Friends of my wife and I had recently returned from where they live (Germany, his home country) to Georgia (hers), which they do periodically. Could we go somewhere for a short holiday together, they asked? “Just not the Black Sea! How about Khevsureti?” they suggested, a new place for them.

We bit the bullet and committed to going right across Georgia from our Svaneti house: a return for us, as we had both seen the area around Shatili before, but no less special for that. Two nights and three days there, with our own driver, just us two couples. They would stay in a guest house, we in our massive six-person, two-room tent. We also took most of our own food, to reduce costs, and even a small gas bottle to cook on, sleeping bags, mattresses and so on. Camping, yes please!

An 8am start from the bicycle sculpture at Tbilisi’s Republic Square got us going nice and early, heading north on the road to Stepantsminda before branching off further east. The last 40 km would be dirt road, but up until that it was all asphalt or cement.

Our driver first took us up to a hiking

place leading to the base of some mountains, famous for its three little lakes each of a different color: white, then blue, then green. The trek wasn’t very arduous at all, just long, and the four of us could set our own pace on the path and occasional rocky uphill or downhill. As we progressed, the way became more and more rock-strewn, as if giants had had a fierce battle using boulders. Ahead, the mountain wall and its glacier loomed. Below this ice mass was the white lake, a cloudy white, likely from the mineral

content of the glacial meltwater feeding it. Small, but big enough for reflections; ice cold, of course. The weather spat a tiny bit, but for now we were spared a drizzle or worse.

Then on, following signposts, back down in a loop to the blue lake, which was next. This was startlingly clear, the cleanest looking of the three, although dotted with clumps of algae. But still beautiful, its bottom clearly visible. Likely from the same glacial source as its first and next siblings, so the color change



Photo by the author



Photo by the author

was mysterious.

More path down to the third lake, the green one, also distinctly colored and well named. By now it was threatening to rain a bit harder, so the others continued apace, while I stopped at the green lake for more photos. Then I hurried on. The spitting turned into definite drizzle, but nothing worse, although it was enough to wet camera equipment if I didn’t protect it in bag inside backpack, which I did. None of us had rain gear with us (we had left it in the van), so we were all a bit damp by the time we met the driver again. No real harm done; and a whole new trek experienced, to a place I had not even heard of before.

Zig-zagging back down to the road, then onwards to Shatili itself. This gem of Georgia is something you only see as you turn a corner and practically stum-

ble into it: there’s no far-off view, just the sudden reveal. Although I had warned my wife that I wasn’t prepared to set up the tent in pouring rain, by the time we stopped, the rain had dried up, so we were able to proceed with erecting the thing before the light faded to night. The next day would give us many more adventures, which I will cover in next week’s article.

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

‘Bluebeard’: Andriy Zholdak’s Phantasmagoric Triumph Unleashes Raw, Poetic Chaos at Vaso Abashidze Stage

BY IVAN NECHAEV

Andriy Zholdak’s audacious and surreal take on ‘Bluebeard’ offered a visceral, dreamlike journey into the darkest corners of human relationships. Staged at the Vaso Abashidze State New Theater, this phantasmagoric performance was a central feature of the Georgian Showcase at the Tbilisi International Festival of Theater 2024, and it lived up to Zholdak’s reputation for extreme, avant-garde theatrical experiences. Based on a dynamic fusion of Louise Glück’s poetry, Federico García Lorca’s ‘Blood Wedding’, and the myth of Bluebeard, Zholdak’s production pushes the boundaries of storytelling, transforming these texts into a disorienting landscape of love, violence, and emotional survival.

Zholdak is no stranger to blending phantasmagoria with stark emotional realism, and in Bluebeard, he delves into the complexity of gender conflict, the disintegration of relationships, and the collapse of romantic ideals. Audiences were not merely watching a play—they were plunged into a turbulent dream-

scape of poetic chaos where survival feels more real than life itself.

A COLLISION OF MYTH, POETRY, AND LORCA’S TRAGIC FATALISM

At the heart of Bluebeard lies a collision of distinct literary forms. On paper, Glück’s contemplative and intensely personal poetry may seem at odds with the mythic brutality of Bluebeard, and Lorca’s tragic fatalism in Blood Wedding stands apart from the psychological horror of Bluebeard’s chamber of secrets. Yet, Zholdak’s genius is his ability to fuse these seemingly disparate sources into a unified, phantasmagoric vision. He draws out the shared emotional core of these works: the agonizing tension between desire and destruction, the terrifying vulnerability of love, and the relentless force of fate.

Myth as Reality: Bluebeard is not simply the murderous husband of legend. In Zholdak’s interpretation, he is an almost archetypal figure of toxic masculinity and emotional manipulation, a symbol of the abusive dynamics that continue to shape gender relations today. Played with chilling intensity by Shako Mirianashvili, this Bluebeard is less a villain and more a fractured psyche, embodying the darker sides of love and

control. The women around him, played by Nino Kasradze, Nana Butkhuzi, Mariam Balakhadze, and Elena Tavartkiladze, become figures trapped in a nightmarish, repetitive cycle of love, submission, and destruction.

Glück’s Poetic Despair: The lyrical anguish of Louise Glück’s poetry seeps into the emotional fabric of the play. In Bluebeard, the violence is not only physical, but also deeply emotional. Zholdak captures the aching sense of loss and alienation that permeates Glück’s writing, giving the production a haunting psychological depth. The stark contrast between poetic love and its violent demise plays out in agonizing scenes where the women’s internal lives are fractured, marked by a palpable sense of longing for tenderness that is never fulfilled.

Lorca’s Fatalism: Echoing Blood Wedding, Zholdak introduces Lorca’s preoccupation with fate and the inescapability of death. The cyclical nature of violence, particularly violence between men and women, pulses through the production. In Zholdak’s vision, love is doomed, and passion becomes an inevitability towards destruction. The tragic echoes of Lorca’s Blood Wedding are felt in every scene, as if the characters know their fate but are powerless to stop it.

THE DREAMLIKE AESTHETIC: A SENSORY ASSAULT OF LIGHT, SOUND, AND PHYSICAL EXTREMITY

What makes Zholdak’s Bluebeard so compelling is its ability to overwhelm the senses. The production’s non-linear, fragmented structure mimics a fever dream, where reality dissolves into nightmarish and poetic imagery. With scenography by Daniel Zholdak and lighting by Mikheil Bakradze, the visual design captures the emotional extremes at the heart of the story. The set is minimalist, but evocative, creating spaces that are both timeless and abstract, with stark contrasts between light and shadow transforming the mood from moment to moment.

Lighting and Scenography as Emotional Landscapes: The stage design functions less as a place and more as an emotional

terrain. Rooms appear and vanish as if conjured by the characters’ emotions, heightening the sense of psychological unease. Bakradze’s lighting choices are essential in crafting this unstable world, at times blindingly bright, then swallowed in suffocating darkness. The constant shifts in lighting and staging mirror the volatility of the relationships on stage.

Costumes as Symbols: Simon Machabel’s costume design is equally symbolic, creating a visual dissonance between myth and modernity. The women are both adorned in ethereal, almost bridal attire, suggesting innocence and purity, yet these garments become metaphors for their entrapment. The costumes heighten the tension between beauty and destruction, as the idealized visions of femininity are slowly undone.

Sound and Silence: Sound director Emzar Begiashvili’s score is not merely a backdrop but an active participant in the play’s emotional assault. Jarring, eerie sound effects and moments of stark silence work in tandem to create a feeling of dread. Sound becomes a tool of psychological manipulation, reflecting the internal chaos of the characters.

ZHOLDAK’S ACTORS: EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL EXTREMES

The actors, led by Nino Kasradze as Bluebeard’s wife, give performances that are physically and emotionally demanding. Zholdak is known for pushing his actors to extremes, and in Bluebeard, this extremity takes on a visceral dimension.

Kasradze’s portrayal of the wife is a tour-de-force of vulnerability and defiance, capturing the inner turmoil of a woman trying to survive the crushing emotional violence of her relationship. Her body becomes a battleground for conflicting emotions—fear, desire, resignation—resulting in a portrayal that is both harrowing and deeply moving.

In Zholdak’s hands, the actors’ movements and gestures become more significant than dialogue. The emotional impact of Bluebeard is conveyed through physicality—the way characters interact,

retreat, or explode with rage. Silence and stillness are as important as the moments of heightened emotion, creating a performance that feels raw and immediate.

SURVIVAL AND THE BATTLE OF THE SEXES: ZHOLDAK’S VISION OF GENDER AND POWER

The central theme of Zholdak’s Bluebeard is survival in the face of impossible emotional conditions. The women in the play are caught in a seemingly unbreakable cycle of love, betrayal, and destruction. Their struggle is not just with Bluebeard but with the very nature of the love they have been conditioned to accept.

Zholdak’s Bluebeard takes a hard look at the dynamics of power in relationships, particularly the insidious ways in which love can become a form of control. The character’s survival is a question not just of physical safety but of emotional endurance—can they survive the battle for their autonomy? In this production, the battle of the sexes is a battle for psychological survival, and it is fought in a world where love has become a weapon.

‘BLUEBEARD’ AS ZHOLDAK’S PHANTASMAGORIC TRIUMPH

Zholdak’s Bluebeard is a masterclass in phantasmagoric theater, an immersive sensory experience that challenges the boundaries of conventional narrative and performance. It is not an easy watch—its emotional intensity, disorienting structure, and dark themes make it a demanding production. But for those willing to plunge into Zholdak’s surreal world, the rewards are immense.

Blending the mythic with the poetic, the brutal with the tender, Bluebeard is a haunting meditation on the collapse of love, the inevitability of violence, and the desperate need for survival in a world where relationships are governed by power. Through his use of fragmented narrative, stunning visual design, and the emotional extremes of his actors, Zholdak creates a theatrical experience that lingers long after the final scene—both in the mind and in the heart.



Photo by the author

Meet the Artist: Sofia Alazraki, Exhibiting in Georgia for the First Time

INTERVIEW

Sofia Alazraki's work involves a ritualization of inner strength and self-reflection. We sat down with the artist and designer to find out more.

WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR OWN RITUALS IN THE CREATIVE PROCESS THAT HELP YOU ENGAGE WITH THESE THEMES?

Rituals in my practice provide a sense of order, connection, and belonging, through which I navigate both my inner world and social interactions. I create personal ritualistic games—not tied to religion, but rather a self-invented mix of psychoanalysis, meditation, and raving—where I gather much of the material that later shapes my images, which can be absurd, sexy or deeply existential.

“MORNING RITUALS & DISSOCIATION TOOLS” IS THE NAME OF THE SOLO SHOW YOU ARE PRESENTING FOR THE FIRST TIME IN TBILISI IN COLLABORATION WITH GALLERY FOTOATELIER. IN THIS EXHIBITION THERE IS A RECURRING THEME OF DAMAGE AND RECONSTRUCTION, WHERE CHARACTERS NAVIGATE CONNECTION AND LONGING. HOW DOES THIS THEME RESONATE WITH YOUR PERSONAL CREATIVE JOURNEY?

My work is an infinite, ongoing conversation between destruction and reconstruction, isolation and belonging. The act of rebuilding something that cannot return to its original form, yet strives to become something new, mirrors my personal evolution. The images in the

exhibition are a selection from an intimate exercise or game I've engaged in for over four years—an internal dialogue that transforms thoughts into images as a form of journaling.

MANY OF YOUR SCENES ARE IMBUED WITH ABSURDITY, HUMOR, AND EROTICISM. HOW DO YOU BALANCE THESE ELEMENTS, AND WHAT DO THEY SIGNIFY IN THE BROADER NARRATIVE OF YOUR WORK?

I love to work with objects that often go unnoticed—things that have been used, lost, dead, broken, or empty. I cast them as actors in a theater play or a constellation, creating scenes that tell the stories of contradictory characters longing for connection yet overwhelmed by damage. The combination of these objects represents the tender clumsiness of both myself and human existence. Sometimes, I envision my images as book covers in the self-help section; other times, as graphics for a hardcore porn film, perhaps using the same three objects. I like to situate myself within the border of spirituality and un-wokeness, a space that sometimes need some sense of humor and courage.

YOU'VE HAD AN IMPRESSIVE CAREER COLLABORATING WITH EXCLUSIVE FASHION BRANDS. HOW HAS YOUR EXPERIENCE IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY INFLUENCED OR CHALLENGED YOUR INDEPENDENT CREATIVE PRACTICE? DO YOU FIND SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE TWO WORLDS?

I think both worlds complement and feed of each other. My experience in fashion has equipped me with the sharp technical tools, while my personal work creates a really safe space for exploration and



Sofia Alazraki's art

play- I love to portray some cheap bazar treasure with the light and edit of a luxury piece of jewelry. At first glance, my photos might give the impression that someone is trying to sell you something, but upon closer inspection, they're made of discarded or broken materials no one would typically want. I need a bit of both worlds to fully function, I love the conversation with other creatives in the fashion scene, but I also crave the madness of solitude and introspection that comes from working in the studio.

YOU ARE EXHIBITING IN GEORGIA FOR THE FIRST TIME. WHAT INTERESTS YOU MOST ABOUT SHOWING YOUR WORK HERE, AND HOW DO YOU VIEW THE GEORGIAN ART SCENE IN RELATION TO YOUR OWN ARTISTIC APPROACH?

The first time I visited Tbilisi, I fell in love. I had heard about its fierce manifestations, the mystery, music, street style and food. What surprised me was how much the atmosphere reminded

me of my own city, Buenos Aires. Both places, though shaped by different circumstances, seem to create from adversity, with strong countercultural and deeply underground scenes as part of their core identity. The Georgian art scene is super inspiring to me—playful, dark, genuine, and elegant, but most of all, they are the coolest hosts.

WHERE: Gallery Fotoatelier, 14 P. Ingorokva St.
Opening time: 26 September, 19:00

EU4Culture to Show Off City Diversity and Collaboration with Eastern Countries

BY SHELBI R. ANKIEWICZ

The EU4Culture Network Festival united Eastern countries through a two-day event in Gori that showcased city diversity and allowed artists from different countries to collaborate on joint projects.

Implemented four years ago, EU4Culture is a project that supports 14 non-capital cities in Eastern partnership countries including Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Ukraine, and Belarus. During that time, the project gave mobility grants to over 400 beneficiaries, allowing them to travel to European countries to work with professionals and exchange experiences. The project closed with the event, 'EU4Culture Network Festival: City Stories, Diverse Voices - Action.'

The festival's co-curator, Maka Chkhaidze, says the event reflected and summarized the work that was carried out. Most of the participants were grantees of the project, although there were also some civil society organizations present. The two-day event, open to the



Festival attendees. Source FB

public, featured performances, dance performances, audio-visual events, public talks, workshops, film screenings, and more, showcasing the diversity of the artists and their given mediums.

'Cities' was coined as the festival's main theme because, according to Chkhaidze, EU4Culture focuses on decentralizing cultural processes and their promotion in regional cities.

"Often, these processes occur somewhat underground and remain beyond

the sight of a wider audience," she notes.

The festival participants were artists with works across numerous mediums that expressed their experiences with their city and the environment in which they lived- from Gori, Kutaisi, Poti, Zugdidi, Batumi and Tbilisi, to cities in Ukraine, Armenia, Belarus, and Azerbaijan.

The closing festival did not only take place in Georgia. EU4Culture Network Manager Rusudan Ebralidze says the

first festival happened in the Ukrainian city of Vinnytsia, followed by the one in Gori, and there are to be fests in Armenia, Moldova, and Azerbaijan. She says each country has the same festival name, with a different 'subheading' (Georgia's was 'Action'), with specific topics or themes that are related to the people who live there.

"These are actions we take with the aim of changing something, be it option, the current situation, or the situation in the future," Ebralidze says.

This was the first festival implemented since the start of the EU4Culture project. Ebralidze says that for it being held in a regional city of Georgia and the artists not yet having prominent names, there was a good turnout of around 500 attendees. She hopes that even after the project ends later this year, the grantees will take the lead and continue to organize the festival themselves.

The greatest impact of the EU4Culture project was the adoption of new policy documents by municipalities and respected institutions in the participating regional cities, allowing for a vision of how culture should be developed through the next four or six years in these areas.

"Even though stakeholders or those from the private sector have a different vision for how culture should develop in each city, they have agreed to work together on the documents to reach the desired goals stated in the strategy documents," Ebralidze notes.

The project has also helped cultural professionals from non-capital cities who didn't have the self-confidence to ask for financial assistance or write application letters in English.

"I hope that people can take their knowledge and talent and stay in the towns they are from and grow the local cultural scene, rather than leave and move to the capital," Ebralidze says.

14 regional cities prepared culture development strategies, seven of which were given financial support to implement the strategies' activities. The project, running until year-end, was implemented by four cultural institutes: Goethe Institute, Czech Centers, the French Institute in Georgia, and the Danish Cultural Institute.

"Thanks to the participating artists, artistic projects, and guests, a truly rich and diverse story was created, where each participant's voices resonated clearly," said Co-curator Chkhaidze.



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