





# TI Georgia: GD Outspends All Other Electoral Subjects

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

## PACE to Observe October 26 Elections with 32-member Delegation

BY TEAM GT

A 32-member delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), headed by Iulian Bulai (Romania, ALDE), will travel to Georgia from 24 to 27 October to observe the parliamentary elections, alongside observers from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the European Parliament, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and the OSCE Office for Dem-

ocratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

The delegation will meet leaders and representatives of political parties and coalitions, the Chairperson of the Central Election Commission, the Head of the Anti-Corruption Bureau as well as representatives of civil society and the media, before observing the ballot on 26 October.

A representative of the Venice Commission – the Council of Europe’s group of independent legal experts – will provide legal support during the visit organized by the PACE Elections Division.

Transparency International Georgia (TI Georgia) assessed the funding for the 2024 parliamentary election campaigns of the eight most prominent political parties, finding that Georgian Dream has outspent every single one of them.

Spending more than all other parties combined, their campaign outgoings totaled 13.4 million GEL through donations since the beginning of 2024.

Concerns regarding a complex system of corruption have been raised, as many GD donors benefit from public procurement contracts and state-mandated subsidies.

Prior to the elections, political entities received donations totaling 18.8 million GEL, with 53% of the total expenses incurred by GD, primarily on advertising.



# Ukraine Latest: Zelensky Preparing Plan to Endure War despite Mass Desertion

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

President Volodymyr Zelensky tasked the Ukrainian authorities to develop proposals for an internal action plan to help the country withstand the war, a source close to the President’s Office told the Kyiv Independent on October 23.

The source said the document will address military, political, economic, and other areas, including certain decisions regarding law enforcement. The plan is expected to be prepared and presented to the Ukrainian public by the end of 2024.

"The goal is to do everything possible to maintain unity and achieve results in various areas of the country’s development," a source in Zelensky’s team told BBC.

The plan is reportedly not an alternative to Zelensky’s “victory plan,” and provides for steps to be taken by Ukraine itself. The victory plan includes a defense aspect, non-nuclear deterrence of Russian aggression, economic growth and cooperation, and post-war security architecture. It is also comprised of three classified addenda that have been shared with international partners.

Ukraine’s president said that his victory plan “can bridge the gap between the current situation and a successful peace summit.”

### NORTH KOREAN TROOPS ARE IN RUSSIA, US DEFENSE SECRETARY CONFIRMS

Nearly 3,000 North Korean soldiers have been sent to Russia support the Kremlin’s war in Ukraine, and “thousands more” are expected to follow, Reuters reported this week, citing South Korean intelligence.

“There is evidence that there are DPRK (North Korean) troops in Russia. What exactly are they doing? Left to be seen. These are things that we need to sort out,” US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin

said in Rome on October 23.

Austin’s comment comes as the first public confirmation by the US of previous statements by Ukraine and South Korea. The two nations say Russia is planning to involve thousands of North Korean troops in its full-scale war.

It is said that the troops have been dispersed to multiple training facilities in Russia and are adapting to the local environment.

North Korea has denied the reports, while a Kremlin spokesperson gave an evasive answer on the issue.

### UKRAINE STABILIZES SITUATION IN TORETSK

Ukraine has managed to stabilize the situation in Toretsk in Donetsk Oblast, but the Russian army continues to concentrate its forces in the eastern part of the town, Anastasiia Bobovnikova, a spokesperson of the Operational Tactical Group Luhansk, said on Wednesday, the Kyiv Independent reports.

Toretsk lies some 35 kilometers north of occupied Donetsk. The town became one of the hottest spots in Donetsk Oblast in recent months as Russian troops continue advancing in east Ukraine.

“The situation in Toretsk has relatively stabilized. Ukrainian forces are now holding the demarcation line unchanged. The enemy is still entrenched in the city’s eastern parts,” Bobovnikova said. “We are holding back their further advance and will defend the town as long as possible.”

### UN: RUSSIAN INVASION SENDS UKRAINE POPULATION PLUMMETING BY 10 MILLION

Ukraine’s population has declined by around 10 million people, or about a quarter, since the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion in 2022, says the United Nations, pointing to the exodus of refugees, a collapse in fertility, and war deaths as the causes.

The invasion has accelerated an already evident population decline that began before the war, the UN agency notes. That number drop matches a trend seen



President Zelensky. Photo by Simon Wohlfahrt/Bloomberg via Getty Images

across much of Eastern Europe, but the conflict has worsened the situation.

6.7 million Ukrainian refugees are now living abroad, primarily in Europe, while the birth rate is currently at around one child per woman, which is one of the lowest in the world,” the UN official added.

### AL JAZEERA: UKRAINE’S ARMY IS FACING A DESERTION CRISIS

This year, Ukraine has seen an unprecedented rise in desertion among soldiers, attributed to poor frontline conditions and prolonged service, Al Jazeera writes. Reports indicate that at least 30,000

prosecutions for desertion have occurred, significantly higher than in previous years. Morale is low, with troops enduring heavy fire and inadequate rest, leading some to prefer prison over the uncertainty of continuous combat. The Ukrainian government has decriminalized first-time desertion attempts, provided individuals return to duty.

As the war drags on, with estimates suggesting tens of thousands of Ukrainian military losses, the army faces critical manpower shortages, exacerbating the situation. Analysts highlight mental and physical fatigue among soldiers, alongside inadequate weaponry, as con-

tributing factors to the increasing desertion rate.

### NATO NONCOMMITTAL ON UKRAINE’S MEMBERSHIP

Though Russia’s gains have been incremental, its steady forward movement is slowly progressing — and Ukraine is pleading for Western help on a larger scale.

Yet NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte has remained noncommittal about Ukraine’s path to joining the alliance even as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky presents a “victory plan” that hinges on his country becoming a full member before the war ends.

Zelensky said on Wednesday that his “victory plan” could bring peace to the country by next year. However, many of Ukraine’s NATO allies have stopped short of publicly voicing their support for the country completing the accession process while Russia’s invasion continues.

Speaking to reporters on Wednesday at NATO headquarters in Brussels, Rutte was non-committal about Ukraine’s path to membership, saying the priority at this stage is to put Ukraine in a position to negotiate the best possible deal in any future negotiations with Russia.

“We are in close contact with allies, with Ukraine, to see how we can take next steps,” Rutte said, declining to provide details.

Securing NATO membership is the first point in Zelensky’s five-point victory plan, which he has presented to the Ukrainian parliament.

But NATO makes its decisions by consensus, and many allies — including the US and Germany — refuse to allow Ukraine in while fighting continues because they fear the Article 5 obligation would drag them into direct conflict with Russia.

At their summit in Washington in July, NATO’s 32 members declared Ukraine on an “irreversible” path to membership in the Western military alliance, but the question of how fast the process will move went unaddressed.

# CRRC's Koba Turmanidze: "Georgian Dream would have won these elections easily if they hadn't passed the 'Russian' law"

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We are losing both our workforce and the future engine for democracy. This is the situation that was created under Georgian Dream's rule, and these conditions hold significance for the upcoming election.

## WHO DO YOU THINK WILL WIN THE ELECTION THIS WEEKEND?

It is still difficult to say. Lots of individuals are still undecided and are trying to make up their minds and choose between a few opposition forces and the ruling party. This is how we Georgians approach elections. A lot of people have not yet decided, and we may have some surprising results.

## HOW HAS THE SITUATION WITH EMIGRATION CHANGED?

The trend has been upward for the past few years. Annual numbers of emigrants are growing. That's a bad sign. People are unhappy about the economic hardship in Georgia. The economy as a whole is not suffering, but the economic wealth has not been distributed fairly, and this is why people are trying to find better places to live. There just aren't opportunities for young people here. Jobs have not been created, especially for young people, to bring in a good enough income. At the same time, there are easier and bigger opportunities to be found by going to the European countries and staying there. The combination of these two factors has increased the emigration of Georgians significantly.

## HOW RICH OR POOR IS GEORGIAN SOCIETY RIGHT NOW?

About 20% of the population is living below the poverty line. One thing is poverty, another is dependency on the state. We have an aging population, and a big part of it is on the state pension, or getting social aid, which is another form of state dependency. When you have a big segment of the population so dependent on the state, it is hard to

achieve a big economic breakthrough. On top of that, you have emigration of younger cohorts.

## WHAT WOULD YOU DESCRIBE AS POOR IN GEORGIAN TERMS?

We have an old system. Poor people means that people don't have monetary income, and they cannot feed themselves. Those people get social aid. Social aid is survival money, not a substantial amount, about 60 GEL per month. It is symbolic aid to very poor families. Usually, they have some monetary income, but they try to hide it in order not to lose their aid.

## ARE PEOPLE HAPPY WITH THE RULING PARTY OR NOT?

The Georgian Dream supporters see a lot of the world through their party's lens, i.e. in much better terms than those who are not party supporters. You will see that their supporters are happier with Georgian Dream's policies. Their supporters believe that Georgian Dream is a pro-European party and is taking our country to the European Union. This is what Georgian Dream is telling voters. But, of course, the opposition supporters look at the situation in a dramatically different way.

## MANY PEOPLE SAY: "WE WILL VOTE FOR GD, AS THEY GUARANTEE US PEACE, BUT OUR PENSIONS ARE TOO LOW."

Yes. This is a problem right now. People tend not to think about the social and economic issues, but they may decide to depend on invented problems. For example, they see peace, but it is not because Georgian Dream established peace: this how Georgia would be no matter who was in power. It does not mean that if Georgian Dream loses, there will be a war, which is how they are having the situation portrayed to them. The unfortunate reality of this is that the Georgian Dream campaign is not about real-life issues, but about made-up issues and propaganda.

## IS THE OPPOSITION

## ADDRESSING THE CONCERNS OF THE PEOPLE ABOUT EVERYDAY LIFE?

Well, all the opposition parties have powerful words right now; they say things, promise things, come up with programs and ideas. They are promising a lot, but the issue is credibility. We are used to a lot of promises from all parties, including the ruling party, that just don't get fulfilled. Yes, the opposition is trying to address those issues. There could be a problem of credibility, though, as words are cheap, as we know.

## THE RULING PARTY PLANNED TO GET MORE VOTES BY PASSING ITS ANTI-LGBT LAW. DOES THAT RESONATE WITH GEORGIAN SOCIETY?

It's hard to say. Georgian Dream would have won these elections easily if they hadn't passed the "Russian law," which they call the foreign influence transparency law, and if they hadn't raised the question about the LGBTQ+ community at all. They were doing fine; they had achieved EU candidate status; the economy is doing well enough, and, as they say, we have peace. They could have attributed these positive things to themselves and won without contest. But they started initiating a law which most of the population didn't like- not saying that people are overwhelmingly against the LGBT law, but it doesn't matter that much to them. And to compensate for this dissatisfaction, especially with the Russian law, which really upset a significant part of the population, they started making up war scenarios that no one can dispute, like the EU candidate status, economic benefits, better social protection of individuals, to things that are hard to see, measure and even understand, inventing the "global war party" which is "fighting against us"; inventing that Western countries are pushing us to attack Russia and to open a second front. There is no evidence for

that, and no reason to mobilize their supporters around issues that don't matter and which cannot improve people's lives at all, because they simply don't exist.

## WHY DID THEY DO IT?

It is a mystery, especially seeing as they had a clear path to another four years in power. In early spring, they just started making enemies out of nowhere.

## WILL THE INTRODUCTION OF THE "RUSSIAN LAW," IF IMPLEMENTED, AFFECT A LOT OF PEOPLE?

Despite government power and propaganda, in our surveys, the ruling party never achieved the majority for this law. They want this law to at least control civil society and to eliminate troublemakers and to control the foreign money which comes into these organizations. And this is clearly a Russian approach.

## WHAT ROLE DOES THE CHURCH PLAY IN THIS SITUATION?

From our surveys, we clearly see that the Church is the most trusted institution. Because of the high trust in the Church and the Patriarch, the Church's attitudes, whether directly or indirectly expressed, are important to Georgia's believers. The Church is powerful, and at the same time smart not to put all its eggs into one basket. They are playing a smart political game by not showing their support for any one political force, as they want to get the best deal possible.



Image from CRRC's report on 'The spread of anti-Western narratives by the government on Facebook'

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\* Koba Turmanidze has been working for CRRC-Georgia since 2007. He holds a Ph.D. in Comparative Politics from Central European University. CRRC-Georgia is a non-governmental, non-profit research organization which collects, analyzes and publishes policy relevant data on social, economic and political trends in Georgia. CRRC-Georgia, together with CRRC-Armenia and CRRC-Azerbaijan, constitutes a network of research centers with the common goal of strengthening social science research and public policy analysis in the South Caucasus.  
The three centers were established in 2003 by the Eurasia Partnership Foundation (EPF) with financial support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. In 2013, CRRC-Georgia and CRRC-Armenia were registered as independent non-commercial legal entities.

# Rondeli Foundation: Narratives about Georgia in Russian Pro-Gov't Media

BY THE RONDELI FOUNDATION TEAM

What follows is a brief overview of narratives about Georgia in the Russian pro-government media.

The review is based on the weekly monitoring of stories on federal channels (Channel One Russia, NTV, etc.), news put out by major online media (Gazeta.ru, RIA Novosti, Russia Today, etc.), and stories shared on more localized online media and Telegram channels.

One of the main narratives encountered daily in the Russian media is US interference in Georgia's internal affairs. Georgia is traditionally portrayed as a country that, although fighting for independence, invariably falls under the influence of larger states (United States, EU members, third countries). The pro-government media outlets claim that the main goal of the United States is to rig the October 26 elections and organize a "color revolution" that will bring to power a government under its control. The main source of such news is the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service, which, from time-to-time, releases statements about US plans. These statements form the basis of numerous publications and stories on television. Russian government officials, such as the Press Secretary of the Russian President, Dmitry Peskov, also speak about the interference of Western countries, which further contributes to the spread of the discourse. The list of specific claims against the US is constantly growing, and includes the transfer of "hundreds of billions of dollars to support Russophobia," the train-

ing of observers who must, at any outcome, report violations during the elections, the bribery of international organizations, shadow negotiations with the opposition on a new government, etc. Perhaps the most widespread allegation is that there are many NGOs working in Georgia (a total of 30,000, as cited) whose true goal is to serve the interests of the US. USAID and the Soros Foundation are mentioned among such "foreign agents".

The opening of a "second front" in Georgia for the war with Russia: In justifying the adoption of the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence, Georgian authorities have, since at least May 2024, been talking about the importance of sovereignty and the risk that the West will open a "second front" in Georgia for the war with Russia. In the summer, the story began to acquire details: the opening of a "second front" was allegedly an unofficial demand of the EU-Georgia negotiations.

The Russian pro-government media has eagerly quoted statements by Georgian Dream members about the "second front," and published reports that develop this idea. As a result, the possible opening of a "second front" is being referred to by Russian officials, such as the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov.

With the parliamentary elections approaching, this topic has acquired a new aspect: it is now reported that if the opposition wins, it will open a "second front" in Georgia within days. The Russian media in general actively quotes Georgian Dream leaders: half the articles tagged "Georgia" in major online media outlets simply reiterate statements from figures like Irakli Kobakhidze and Bidzina Ivanishvili. Georgian Dream is portrayed



Source: RIA NOVOSTI

as a party that is not particularly sympathetic to Russia, but which cares about the interests of its own citizens (including the right to live in a peaceful country).

Contrasting the "overwhelming majority" of Georgian citizens with the "paid" supporters of European integration: The Russian press seeks to avoid demonizing all Georgian citizens, as it does, for example, in the case of Ukrainian citizens. On the contrary, they create the impression that the overwhelming majority of citizens support the policies of Georgian Dream. These citizens are said to welcome the law On Transparency of Foreign Influence, as they care about the country's sovereignty, and the law On Prohibition of LGBT Propaganda, since they are very religious and adhere to "traditional values." A small percentage of young people, they say, fooled by the West or even paid to go to rallies, participate in protests. A popular technique here is to interview a Georgian expert

(often, one and the same person gives comments to several media outlets at once), expressing the sentiments of the "ordinary people".

However, a number of Georgian citizens are portrayed by the Russian media in an unambiguously negative way, particularly the present and former presidents. Of Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili, the Russian pro-government media outlets say she is a "Western agent", and spread misinformation about her alleged French citizenship. At the heart of this approach was the "Heir Tutti Dolls" show aired on Channel One Russia, one of Russia's largest federal TV channels. In the nearly hour-long show, every facet of Zurbishvili's biography was made a cause for accusations: from her foreign education to her wearing of "tasteless jewelry". Of former President Mikheil Saakashvili, criticism of whom in pro-government media has a long history, dating back to the Georgian-Russian conflict in 2008, they say

he is an "American appointee." Pro-government media allude to his mental illness, and emphasize strange situations involving the ex-president, sharing video footage of him chewing his tie, as well as attempting to contact his team from the roof of a house. When Georgian Dream began attributing responsibility for the events of 2008 to Saakashvili, and expressing a desire for a tribunal against the United National Movement, pro-government media quickly backed this narrative.

Comments are also made about Georgian citizens fighting on the side of Ukraine. Regular reports about mercenaries in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict zone are part of a larger state narrative convincing citizens that Russia is at war not with Ukraine, but with the global West. However, it is the volunteers from Georgia who are regularly mentioned in the pro-government media, seeing them credited with particular brutality. Incorporating the narratives described, the pro-government media outlets claim that most volunteers support Saakashvili, and receive funding from America. However, even in this case, the media seek to emphasize that such people are a minority, that "sensible" citizens of Georgia understand the danger of joining the Ukrainian Armed Forces, and dissuade others from doing so.

Russian pro-government media depict recent developments in Georgia as a conflict between Western forces seeking to undermine the country's sovereignty and true patriots united under Georgian Dream. The pro-governmental media also aim to suggest that the majority of citizens support government decisions, and that opponents are merely a small, bribed minority.

# Georgia's Security: A Few Considerations for the Public. Part 1



ANALYSIS BY VICTOR KIPIANI,  
GEOCASE CHAIRMAN

The harmful challenges to our security have not decreased, but rather increased in number. This is both unfavorable and, in some cases, downright embarrassing. Of these, the first and foremost is the degradation of Georgian state institutions and, alongside this, the neutralization of Georgian state and political thinking: not only is the activity and initiative of decision makers no longer encouraged, but being in the line of decision makers itself has become risky. Another case is when, during a conversation about security, you reproach your opponent with the exclamation "Do you want a war?" Here, too, the existing situation has equated contemporary Georgian security policy - save for some enthusiasts and specialists in this field - with inaction, immobility and tolerance under the guise of "peace policy". And this is when the processes around us dictate the exact opposite attitude.

The current election campaign negatively affects the national political discourse, leading to a paralysis of critical thought on pressing security issues. In response, fostering a vibrant, professional discussion within academic and analytical circles has become essential for uniting opinions and maintaining dynamic thinking. This effort aims to integrate thoughtful discourse into Georgian state policy over time. Until then, the intention is to provide readers with traditional or experimental insights for public discussion.

gian state policy over time. Until then, the intention is to provide readers with traditional or experimental insights for public discussion.

## THE SECURITY DILEMMA: BALANCING ON THE EDGE OF "WAR OR PEACE"?

"Security dilemma" is one of the particularly amorphous concepts in international relations. Academia has been trying to define the boundaries of its range since the 1950s, although these numerous attempts have not done much to shake the amorphous nature of the "security dilemma."

The essence of the mentioned concept, transferred to our case, is simply formulated as follows: how clear and bold Georgia should be in declaring and implementing its security doctrine in order to achieve the two goals equally: in particular, in order to effectively strengthen its own defense capabilities, on the one hand, and on the other hand, by such strengthening, not to inadvertently upset the regional balance and not to give neighbors such an impression of its real intentions as to cause escalation.

In more detail, the proposed understanding of the "security dilemma" has a number of critical components, including maintaining the desired balance between military capabilities for defense and attack, avoiding the role of "proxy" in an era of renewed great power competition, etc. These and other sub-questions require competent and continuous discussion by specialists and decision-makers.

In the context of this publication, we decided to link the above-mentioned dilemma with the metaphor "war or peace" well known to Georgian society. However, if approached with a healthy, non-speculative attitude, the "security dilemma" will remain a central concern for Georgia's security system and any future political force for the foreseeable future.

## REGIONAL MYSTERY

The Black Sea region and the South Caucasus, as its natural extension, has become an obvious field of competition between global and regional actors. Had it not been for the war in Ukraine, the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, the hot phase of the conflict in the East and a number of other factors that weighed down Georgia and its neighbors with conflicting geopolitical interests, this would have been hard to imagine just a decade ago.

In this small region, various influences—cultural, economic, military, and diplomatic—are converging, leading to efforts to establish a new balance of power in the South Caucasus. Currently, the area is in a "geopolitical fog," which could clear under several scenarios. While many topics are relevant, this article will focus specifically on key issues concerning Georgia's security.

## BLACK SEA POTENTIAL

The processes taking place in the wider Black Sea region are unique in that various opportunities are increasing along with the growth of threats. In fact, it so happened that if it were not for the cri-

ses known to readers, the models of practical security policy the discussion of which is already possible today, would have remained merely theoretical.

One of the possible models is the creation of a systemic and institutionally organized Black Sea security alliance of the Black Sea countries (obviously, with the exception of the Russian Federation) - "mini-NATO on the Black Sea".

In today's security landscape, mini-alliances, or minilateralism, are emerging as effective means of ensuring stability and deterrence through collaboration among geographically close countries to address common threats. This approach has been tested in the Indian and Pacific regions and could similarly benefit the Black Sea area. A Black Sea mini-alliance would represent a rethinking of traditional security concepts and could serve as a complementary mechanism to larger alliances like NATO. Additionally, this alliance could extend its focus beyond military defense, as seen in discussions around initiatives like the Black Sea Declaration.

It is also worth considering turning a systematic approach into another impetus for the development of the Georgian military and industrial complex, as well as the creation of the defense and economic (including advanced technologies) infrastructure necessary for the functioning of the aforementioned alliance.

Such an alliance in the Black Sea region has solid preconditions formed in the last decades, which envisaged and still envisage today regional formats of cooperation. In this respect, the contribution of various Georgian authorities, and in some cases even a proactive stance, should be noted. Today, along with the restoration of Georgian proactivity and on the wave of processes taking place in the vicinity of our country, the Black Sea region requires a transition to a new level of cooperation - institutionally more integrated security.

Despite the political and geopolitical diversity of the region, the Black Sea mini-alliance is equally relevant and interesting. Why?

(a) Prior to the formation of a formalized bloc, regional association can be initiated in the form of a single network and with a gradual increase in such cooperation and integration;

(b) In addition to the multilateral or bilateral security and defense ties we have already mentioned, the proposed mini-alliance allows for the development

of a system of horizontal linkages among the participating countries;

(c) I have mentioned diversity and with this in mind I think that the proposed format makes it possible for such countries to join it which on the foreign policy field follow the line of so-called "balancing";

(d) Such model will be as de-ideologized as possible and the unity of member states will be based on a common understanding of the risks and threats in the region.

Regarding analogs, I mentioned the Indian and Pacific Ocean regions (e.g., QUAD or AUKUS), although Europe is not lagging behind this trend ("Ljubljana Triangle" consisting of Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine or coordination of five Nordic countries in the format of the Nordic Defense Cooperation). The emerging triad of Azerbaijan, Pakistan and Turkey also deserves attention. It is a fact that all examples are peculiar in their own way and have a "character" dictated by the geographical context. It is clear that from this point of view the Black Sea mini-alliance will differ only in its specific characteristics.

## ON THE PECULIARITIES OF SYNCHRONIZATION WITH PARTNERS

The strengths of the Georgian security model largely depend on the establishment of the Western geopolitical order in the region: the more "US and EU" in Georgia and its neighbors, the easier it will be to manage the repelling of malicious threats to our country. This is an axiom and therefore needs no further proof.

It is crucial to ensure that both Georgia and its partners strengthen the South Caucasus's role within the broader Black Sea region. Achieving the understanding that Georgia's security is essential for regional stability, and that regional security is key to overall development, should be a priority. Georgian state and political thought should broaden the focus of national security beyond just Georgian interests, highlighting Georgia's functional importance in modern international relations to enhance its relevance to partners.

From this perspective, many individual issues come together for consideration. Next week, in Part 2, I will be focusing on a few of them.

Continued in next week's GT.

## Enhanced Support for Renewable Energy in Georgia

On 17 June 2024, the amendments to Resolution N556 of the Government of Georgia regarding the Support Scheme for Production and Use of Energy from Renewable Sources and Capacity Auction Rules (the Resolution) came into force. This article provides a brief overview of the Resolution and assessment of the significant changes introduced by these amendments.

### BACKGROUND AND FRAMEWORK OF THE RESOLUTION

The original Resolution was adopted by the Government of Georgia on 7 December 2024 to align with the objectives outlined in Article 11 of the Law of Georgia on "Promoting the Generation and Consumption of Energy from Renewable Sources" (the Law). Article 11 stipulates mechanisms such as supportive schemes to promote renewable energy development, including investment aids, reduced tax rates, and special green and premium tariffs. Thus, the Resolution serves as a key instrument for implementing the

Support Scheme for the Production and Use of Energy from Renewable Sources (the Support Scheme), which aims to encourage and facilitate the use of renewable energy.

The Support Scheme is applicable to energy projects that qualify as public-private partnership projects under the Law of Georgia on "Public-Private Partnerships," as well as to those that do not fall under this classification. It includes ongoing projects that were in the feasibility study phase as of the date of the resolution's enactment but excludes projects that were already in the construction phase prior to this date.

### KEY FEATURES OF THE SUPPORT SCHEME

The Support Scheme consists of measures designed to support the construction and operation of power plants with more than 0.5 megawatts of installed capacity (the Power Plant). The Support Scheme features a contract for price difference (the CfD) — an agreement between the capacity auction winner or directly selected entity and the JSC Elec-

tricity Market Operator (ESCO). Under the CfD, ESCO compensates for the price difference if the day-ahead market price during the support period is lower than the tariff specified in the CfD. Conversely, if the day-ahead market price exceeds the tariff, the selected entity must pay the price difference to ESCO.

The Support Scheme includes a support period of 15 years following the commissioning of the power plant, varying by the type of renewable energy source:

- Hydropower Plants: 8 months (September to April)
- Wind Power Plants: 9 months (August to April)
- Solar Power Plants: 12 months (all year)
- Power Plants Using Other Renewable Sources: 12 months (all year)

### SIGNIFICANT AMENDMENTS TO THE RESOLUTION DIRECT SELECTION PROCEDURE

Prior to the amendments, the Support Scheme was exclusively available to entities selected through capacity auctions.

The amended resolution introduces a dual selection process for beneficiaries:

- Capacity Auction Selection: Entities can still be chosen through competitive bidding.

- Direct Selection: The Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development (the Ministry) is now empowered to directly select beneficiaries of the Support Scheme, thereby enhancing the efficiency of the selection process.

In case of selection through the capacity auction, the capacity auction commission (the Commission) is tasked with ensuring compliance of applications with the Resolution's requirements. Under the amendment, the selection of the applicants for direct selection procedure is undertaken by the Ministry itself. Selected applications are forwarded to the Government of Georgia (the Government) for approval.

Granting the Ministry the authority to directly select applicants streamlines the process significantly. By bypassing the Commission's review, the Ministry can expedite decision-making, leading to faster approvals and a more efficient

overall selection process. This direct approach enhances the agility of the procedure, ultimately benefiting all stakeholders involved.

### TECHNICAL-ECONOMIC FEASIBILITY AGREEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION AGREEMENT

Upon government approval of an application, a Technical-Economic Feasibility Agreement (the Feasibility Agreement) is signed between the Government and the interested entity. The Feasibility Agreement stipulates that a CfD can be executed if the conditions specified in the Feasibility Agreement are met. Additionally, the recent amendments have introduced an Implementation Agreement as a new procedural step, which formalizes the relationship between the Government and the project implementer after fulfilling the Feasibility Agreement requirements. The Implementation Agreement is new step in the procedure which sets the additional requirements on the stage of implementation of the project.

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# David Satter: "There will be no negotiations. By holding onto the occupied regions, Russia has its foot on Georgia's throat"



David Satter. Source: buzzfeednews.com

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

**A**merican journalist and historian David Satter is the author of numerous books about the collapse of the Soviet Union and Russia (Age of Delirium: The Decline and Fall of the Soviet Union; Darkness at Dawn: The Rise of the Russian Criminal State; It Was a Long Time Ago and It Never Happened Anyway: Russia and the Communist Past; Never Speak to Strangers and Other Writing from Russia and the Soviet Union). A correspondent for the Financial Times and one of the first journalists to investigate the involvement of Russian special services in the Moscow apartment bombings at the beginning of Putin's rule, he was expelled from Russia in 2013. RFE/RL's Georgian Service met with Satter to discuss the Russia-Ukraine war and the new dynamics of Georgia-Russia relations. We kicked off the conversation by asking about the Russian people and their sense of responsibility for all that's happening in Ukraine.

"Those signing up are signing up in some cases because they feel they have little alternative to support their families and themselves," Satter says. "The Russian people don't understand, for historical reasons, the importance of respecting the rights of others. They were victims of the Soviet regime, without a doubt, but they also supported that regime, because Russia has a messianic mentality. Russia has the mentality of a movement, not of a state, not of a normal country. In a movement, the individual doesn't matter; people take their sense of individual self-worth from their participation in the movement, and it's difficult for them to break with that movement, because this is how the psychology of the country has been distorted. Under other conditions, Russians could behave very differently, and one of the ways to create those other conditions is for Russia to be defeated in this war."

**DO YOU HAVE ANY EXAMPLES WHERE, IN RUSSIAN HISTORY, THEY BEHAVED DIFFERENTLY?**

The serfs were freed after the Crimean War. After the Russo-Japanese War, Russia got a constitution for the first time. And the defeat in the Cold War, if we want to speak about that, at least gave the possibility of putting an end to communist ideology, if not communist practices.

**BUT ISN'T THAT ALL DOMESTIC? WHAT I MEANT WAS THE RESPECT OF BORDERS AND OTHER NATIONS.**

No. That has never been. The fact that many, many Russians and other people were victims of the Soviet regime doesn't mean that every aspect of their psychology was healthy. Far from it. Russia

is in many ways a sick country, and it's sick because of what was done to the Russian people historically. They were slaves. And then, after a brief period, they were enslaved a second time by the communist regime. This had a terrible effect on people's personal lives, on their psychology. I'll give you a simple example: After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russians became obsessed with sports. When it appeared that Russia was no longer a great power, people expressed their desire for victory, for glory, for collective action, by rooting for the Russian sports teams. And they became really obsessed with this. If there was a Russian victory, everyone on the bus was elated. After all these years of oppression, in which people did suffer, and in which many Russians behaved very nobly, but the majority did not, they've become psychologically conditioned to think in terms of participating in some great crusade, and deriving a sense of self-worth from being part of this crusade. I mean, the average Soviet citizen was not a citizen: he was a builder of communism.

This mentality definitely always existed. And the economic transformation of Russia after the fall of communism did not change it, because there was no underlying change in the attitude toward the individual. And when Putin needed to use this mentality to save him and his corrupt circle, that mentality was there. It just had to be mobilized. It hadn't changed.

**IN AN ESSAY OF YOURS YOU UNDERLINE AN OUTLANDISH STATEMENT FROM PUTIN THAT 99% OF RUSSIANS WOULD BE WILLING TO SACRIFICE THEIR LIVES FOR THEIR COUNTRY. WHAT DO YOU THINK THE ACTUAL NUMBER IS?**

I don't think any Russian really wants to sacrifice their life, but they are certainly ready to, and they accept this eventuality if it happens. I think the percentage of those we see fighting in Ukraine, the wave upon wave signing up and nobody stopping to think about the senselessness of it - compared to Western society, that percentage is pretty high.

**SO WHEN A RUSSIAN SOLDIER IS SENT INTO THAT MEAT GRINDER, AS PER THE MILITARY TERM, ARE THEY DYING HEROICALLY, OR DO THEY HAVE SUCH A SLAVISH MENTALITY THAT THEY SIMPLY CANNOT DISOBEY ORDERS?**

They can't imagine disobeying orders, but they are also convinced that this is heroism. They're propagandized, and everyone else thinks likewise; very few of them have the strength to think for themselves, because it's the mentality of a movement, especially so in conditions of warfare.

**WHAT IMPACT DOES THAT MENTALITY HAVE ON NON-RUSSIANS,**

**ESPECIALLY WHEN IT COMES TO THE NEIGHBORS, SUCH AS GEORGIA?**

There's a potential for herd mentality everywhere, including the United States. The difference is that, for example, in the US, there are democratic institutions which keep these movements under control. In Russia, the country is the movement.

But in Georgia, even in Soviet times, maybe because of Georgian traditions, maybe because of the kind of country Georgia is, we have always seen people striving for independence, and displaying more skepticism than we see in Russia. But that doesn't mean that in the right conditions, that kind of mentality cannot be fostered in Georgia. It can be, up to a point, but not to the degree that it is in Russia.

**WHAT IMPACT WILL THE EVENTUAL OUTCOME OF THE UKRAINE WAR HAVE ON GEORGIA?**

Well, if Russia wins, the demands on Georgia will intensify, of course. There will be no political independence for Georgia, and there could be further occupation. If Russia loses, it's a completely different situation. Georgia will have the chance to recover its occupied territories.

**THOSE ARE TWO MAXIMALIST SCENARIOS, WHERE RUSSIA OUTRIGHT LOSES OR OUTRIGHT WINS. LET'S ALSO CONSIDER A FROZEN CONFLICT OR SOME SORT OF SHAKY CEASEFIRE WHERE NOBODY CLAIMS VICTORY.**

In that case, where Russia does not come out of it a triumphant conqueror ready for the next conquest, it would at least give Georgia some breathing space.

**AHEAD OF GEORGIA'S ELECTIONS,**

**THE RULING PARTY SAID WE SHOULD "APOLOGIZE TO OUR BROTHERS IN SOUTH OSSETIA AND ABKHAZIA," TRY TO WORK ON REINTEGRATION, AND THAT IT GOES HAND IN HAND WITH HAVING GOOD RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA. WHAT WOULD THAT LOOK LIKE IF IT EVER CAME TO FRUITION?**

Well, it would be total subordination. There would be a Belarus-type governance. In that case, if Russia were victorious in Ukraine, and if Georgia tries to repair its relations with Russia, it will be strictly on Russia's terms. There will be the appearance of national independence for Georgia, but not the reality.

**AND THE REINTEGRATION OR REUNIFICATION OF GEORGIA?**

Not if Russia wins in Ukraine.

**CAN ONE HAGGLE OUT THOSE REGIONS WITH RUSSIA BY TRYING TO COZY UP TO THEM?**

No, no, no, no. They aren't interested in negotiating; they're interested in domination. By holding on to those regions, they have their foot on Georgia's throat. They don't want Georgia to have the conditions to be able to assert its full independence.

**WHAT IF GEORGIA TURNS ITSELF INTO A BELARUS-LIKE ENTITY? COULD THE OCCUPIED REGIONS BE GIVEN AS A REWARD FOR LOYAL SERVICE?**

No. Russia doesn't give out rewards. We know this. They have no motivation to do so. If you already turned yourself into a vassal, why should Russia reward you? This is a movement with a mission, and giving rewards to those it dominates is not part of that mission.

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# Reflection of the UN's Work in Georgia and Goals ahead for United Nations Day

INTERVIEW BY SHELBI R. ANKIEWICZ

**A**head of United Nations Day on October 24, GEORGIA TODAY interviewed the newly appointed UN Resident Coordinator Didier Trebucq to reflect on the progress the organization has made within Georgia, and to hear about its goals moving forward.

United Nations Day was established in 1945 and commemorates the official creation of the UN. On October 24, various events were held throughout Georgia, including a panel discussion on digital innovation aimed at young people. Additionally, Tbilisi's well-known TV Tower was lit up in blue to celebrate the organization's 79th anniversary.

"As the UN family, our projects are concentrated on five broad areas: governance, including strengthening legal and institutional reforms and enhancing the protection of human rights; economic development; equitable and inclusive access to quality, resilient, and gender-sensitive services; support to conflict-affected vulnerable persons; and climate change," Trebucq tells us. "We also do some specialized projects, but primarily focus on those areas. We target more vulnerable groups, such as women, children, persons with disabilities, refugees, migrants, conflict-affected populations, and others, to assist them. In the education field, telemedicine is important too.

"In April 2024, a four-year joint program was launched by the United Nations Development Program, the World Health Organization, and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe to improve air quality and public health outcomes related to air pollution with EUR four million in EU funding," he says. "150 companies in the packaging cluster were supported in their transition to a green and circular economy through the EU-UN Initiative for Private Sector Competitiveness in Georgia. About 1,500 internally displaced and conflict-affected women benefitted from the EU4Dialogue project and became more self-sufficient and successful. The ENPARD-4 project strengthens inclusive and sustainable growth and enhances the well-being of people and communities living in Georgia's rural areas.

"We look at these areas from different perspectives," Trebucq notes. "The legislative level gives direct support to people, and community projects are implemented by various NGOs. The collaborative efforts aim to address the country's immediate challenges and long-term developmental needs. At present, our assistance to Georgia is over \$50 million each year, and we try to provide additional funds on top of this."

## WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CURRENT DIFFICULTIES OR ROADBLOCKS THE UN IS FACING IN GEORGIA?

The past few years have been especially hard due to the extreme uncertainty and massive risks, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, food insecurity, inequalities, and the challenges of climate change, all of which demand the UN's attention.

The UN has been a strong supporter of Georgia's efforts toward inclusive, sustainable, and equitable development. Georgia has achieved a lot. It's an upper-middle-income country, but this is a moment when Georgia has new growth opportunities. Georgia has a vast area of resources with educated people, and



Didier Trebucq. Source: UN Office

is in a strategic location that bridges Europe and Asia. This is to say nothing of the hydro-power sector. Georgia must turn some of these assets into improved production and manufacturing that benefits all. Development needs to reach more people, leaving no one behind, to eventually further reduce extreme poverty, especially in rural areas. That's the main reason we're supporting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in various countries, including Georgia.

I believe Georgia will take this opportunity to progress and demonstrate the benefits of development to its people.

## WHAT AIMS AND ACHIEVEMENTS WILL BE DECLARED FOR GEORGIA ON UN DAY?

On United Nations Day, several aims and achievements related to Georgia's partnership with the United Nations will be highlighted. First is the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The UN

system in Georgia works collectively to achieve the SDGs, focusing on sustainable development, greater well-being, capabilities, and social equality for all Georgians. Another focus will be the UN's support and partnerships to achieve various national priorities, including economic well-being, health, human rights, education, agriculture, industry, environmental protection, gender equality, effective governance, and the rule of law. Also, the Summit of the Future and ground-breaking the Pact for the Future.

## WHAT WAS THE SUMMIT OF THE FUTURE EVENT AND WHAT ROLE DID GEORGIA PLAY?

The Summit of the Future, held at the United Nations Headquarters on September 22-23, offered an opportunity for change to respond to today's and tomorrow's challenges. At the Summit, world leaders adopted a Pact for the Future, which includes 56 concrete actions to address pressing global issues. It outlines

a new vision and commits to accelerating progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, integrating climate action with development efforts, reforming the UN Security Council and international financial architecture, promoting international peace and responsible use of new technologies, and empowering youth. The Summit also adopted a landmark Declaration on Future Generations, pledging to prioritize the well-being of future generations. The Summit endorsed a Global Digital Compact, outlining a bold vision for digital cooperation and Artificial Intelligence governance to accelerate sustainable development.

Georgia actively contributed to global discussions and participated in the Summit side events. Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze's address at the Summit of the Future, highlighting peace, security, and digital cooperation, reflected a commitment to multilateralism and collaboration on shared global issues.

We especially welcome the national commitment to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 in collaboration with the international community.

This summit could pave the way for future gatherings focused on similar themes, ensuring that global governance remains responsive to emerging challenges.

## WHAT AREAS OF DEVELOPMENT FROM THE PACT FOR THE FUTURE PERTAIN TO GEORGIA, AND HOW WILL THEY BE EXECUTED?

All themes covered by the Pact, including peace and security, sustainable development, climate change, digital cooperation, human rights, gender, youth, and the transformation of global governance, are relevant to Georgia. For example, addressing climate change is a significant aspect of the Pact, aiming to mobilize finance for adaptation and renewable energy investments. This is particularly relevant for Georgia, where reducing carbon footprints and promoting renewable energy sources is crucial for sustainable development. The Pact promotes digital cooperation to enhance governance and facilitate development. Here in Georgia, this could involve initiatives aimed at improving digital infrastructure, which is crucial for healthcare, for example. It can also help ensure broader access to online resources, services, and innovation, thus creating social equity and economic opportunities. The Pact emphasizes a commitment to achieving the SDGs, which align with ongoing UN efforts in Georgia to enhance social equity and well-being. This includes mobilizing resources and strengthening stakeholder partnerships to advance development goals.

The Pact for the Future offers a comprehensive roadmap for addressing pressing global issues and inequities through an inclusive lens. By focusing on digital cooperation, intergenerational justice, youth empowerment, peace reforms, human rights, and financial inclusivity, the Pact seeks to address current challenges while strengthening societal resilience against future economic, environmental, and social shocks and crises. This initiative will revitalize and build upon existing efforts of the Sustainable Development Goals.

## WHAT ROLE OR ACCOMPLISHMENTS ARE YOU HOPING TO FULFILL AS THE NEWLY APPOINTED UN RESIDENT COORDINATOR?

The UN has a certain role in helping the country overcome hardships and promoting development and progress. As we are starting a new cycle of design of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) for 2026-2030, we need to work more on strategic priorities to link the Sustainable Development Goals and development policies at the national level and work together as a UN system to reach accurate results that reflect the needs of the current stage and the priorities of the country's development. I see my role in creating a conducive environment for collaboration, where UN agencies can come together and develop joint strategies, strengthen partnerships with all stakeholders to accelerate the SDGs, and build a more resilient, equitable, and inclusive future.

I wish all the Georgian people, the Government of Georgia, and our national and international partners a happy United Nations Day!

# Winterize!

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

This is our third time escaping the white season of Svaneti for warmer Tbilisi. Our reasons for doing this have been several. We don't get any guests at the guest house in winter: they all go straight to Mestia for the snow sports, and the trekking trails which attract them to us are closed. Water and electricity both suffer much more in winter: indeed, on the day of our departure, with snow coming down much of the night and that day, the power was off more than on. And the stress we feel from these challenges is also much higher.

The closing of our shop while we're away will have less impact on the village this time. This is because our neighbor and friend has opened a Spar shop on the main road, which, frankly, we're delighted with, as it's a big sign of progress and hope, and daring too. If he can keep it open all winter, he'll have no competition from us.

Weeks before we leave, I make a list of things to do to get the house ready for our absence. Some of these are really important, like eliminating the chance of water in the unheated buildings (cafe too) freezing in the toilets and faucets and cracking them. Bitter experience... Once the water is turned off, I can then empty out the toilets with a large rag, and also physically disconnect all faucets from their walls and drain them. Of course, if I don't reconnect these before turning the water back on in the spring, every wall connection (at least 17 of them) will gush water into the surrounding space! Now, the water is free to freeze in its plastic pipes, which don't crack or burst from this. We have several large tanks of water left in the house, as well,

too large to freeze, and available for any short mid-winter visits I might make.

We also turn off all electricity in the house. The only exceptions to this are our chest freezer, still in use, and power to the video cameras and their modem, through which I can observe what's happening around the house exterior, live and recorded.

Empty and clean the three fridges; leave their doors propped ajar to deter mold buildup. Harvest everything planted, especially potatoes, cabbages, herbs, carrots, melons, pears and apples. Plant garlic for next spring. Sort the potatoes into small seed ones for next year, and everything else for eating. Put the sacks of them onto cardboard, and cover them with plastic and old blankets to stop them from freezing.

Separate list of things to pack and take. The harvested food; other perishables from the shop; our own clothes and personal items. I'm a big practitioner of list-making. It helps me break big tasks into smaller, more manageable ones, prioritize things, and add new items while crossing off done ones.

Make sure the fences are in good repair, as I described last week. Keep the destructive big domestic critters out!

Close all windows, draw all curtains shut. Strip the beds and store the bedding away safe from mice. Padlock the front gates as we leave, and give spare keys to a neighbor. Fond farewells. We'd not be doing this at all if infrastructure conditions in winter were better; but we do actually have the luxury of this choice, and don't take it for granted: we have worked hard to own an apartment in Tbilisi to retreat to.

This year was different in that the first big snow started a couple of days before we left. At least the roads remained mostly clear of it, being still too warm for it to settle on them and not melt. But



the fall trees had not had time, or wind, to let them shed their leaves. So it was really a case of winter starting before autumn was over. Even as we left, it continued to snow, down to more than an hour's drive below the village, before this reluctantly gave way to rain on most of western Georgia. I'd had to bang the branches of all the fruit trees the day before, bowed almost double from their weight of wet snow, so they wouldn't break off. Tarpaulin on the car the day before we left, so I wouldn't have to brush off the night's snow.

And we were off in the morning, not panicking, in good time, because we were ready. Goodbye, Svaneti, for now. We wish you a good winter season, the right amount of snow, strong electricity and flowing water, time to finish your potato and other harvests and store your firewood. Hunker down and take heart.

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

# Enhanced Support for Renewable Energy in Georgia

Continued from page 4

(forty thousand United States Dollars) or its equivalent in EURO multiplied on installed capacity of the plant.

## NEW BANK GUARANTEE REQUIREMENTS

The amendments also introduce new procedures for submitting bank guarantees. Project implementers are now required to provide guarantees on each stage of execution of agreements with the Government. Thus, the applicant provides two types of guarantees to ensure compliance with obligations defined by the Feasibility Agreement and the Implementation Agreement:

- Pre-construction Guarantee: This ensures obligations outlined in the Feasibility Agreement are met.
- Construction Guarantee: This guarantees fulfillment of the obligations specified in the Implementation Agreement.

Prior to the amendment, the applicants were required to provide both guarantees on the stage of execution of the Feasibility Agreement. Now, one guarantee is provided after execution of each, the Feasibility Agreement and the implementation Agreement. Furthermore, the amount of the both Pre-construction and Construction Guarantees have doubled and amount respectively:

- Pre-construction Guarantee: USD 20,000 (twenty thousand United States Dollars) or its equivalent in EURO multiplied on the installed capacity of the plant.
- Construction Guarantee: USD 40,000

## IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

On 23 August 2024, the Ministry issued Order N1-1/323 regarding the announcement of the direct selection of beneficiaries of the Support Scheme (the Order). Key details of the Order include:

- Start Date for Receiving Applications: 9:00 a.m., 2 September 2024
- Fixed Tariffs for the Scheme:
  - Hydroelectric Power Stations: 6.5 US Dollar Cents
  - Wind Power Plants: 6.0 US Dollar Cents
  - Solar Power Plants: 5.6 US Dollar Cents
- Deadline for Submission of Applications: 6:00 p.m., 31 December 2024

## CONCLUSION

The amendments to Resolution N556 represent a significant advancement in the support framework for renewable energy development in Georgia. By introducing direct selection procedures, new Implementation Agreements, and stricter financial guarantees, the government aims to enhance operational efficiency and attract increased investment in the renewable energy sector. These changes not only streamline the application process for potential beneficiaries but also reinforce accountability and foster a more sustainable energy landscape in the country.

GEORGIAN HOSPITALITY SERVICES GO THROUGH GLOBAL STANDARDS




ONE STEP CLOSER TO PARADISE




# How the European Union Supports Georgia in Implementing Reforms in Food Safety

BY NINA KOPALEISHVILI

According to official data, approximately 40,000 cases of human food poisoning or disease are registered annually in Georgia. However, the actual numbers are much higher. Food may contain various chemical substances due to consumption of which a person may not be poisoned at once, but in case of systematic intake, they may develop some severe disease.

Ensuring food safety is based on the "from farm to fork" principle, in which each chain has its share of responsibility, starting from the producer and ending with the consumer. The National Food Agency is the main controlling body that detects violations and, if necessary, suspends the business operator's activities.

The European Union has been supporting the development of Georgia's food safety standards for many years. These standards are implemented in all developed countries and are based on universal food safety principles. Their implementation helps our country not only to ensure safe food but also to produce products for exporting to the EU market, which has 27 countries and more than 500 million consumers.

Within the framework of various large-scale projects, the European Union helps our country to strengthen the capacities of state institutions, agri-food laboratories, food business operators, and other interested parties responsible for food safety. In addition, it supports various information campaigns on food safety and consumer rights throughout the country.

## THE ROLE OF THE PRODUCER AND THE STATE IN ENSURING FOOD SAFETY

The National Food Agency is Georgia's leading authority for food safety control. The agency controls entrepreneurs and food throughout the country and disseminates relevant information to the public about identified violations and threats.

Depending on their activity profile, every business operator has specific requirements on what they should pay

If you spot food safety violations, report to the National Food Agency hotline - 1501

attention to ensure safe food. General obligations include compliance with hygiene and sanitary standards at all stages: production, processing, and delivery. Compliance with the HACCP principle, which involves hazard analysis and determining critical control points, plays a vital role in food safety. In addition, there are requirements regarding the chemicals allowed to be used in production.

The National Food Agency inspects business operators proactively, within its plan, based on identified threats and reactively - based on information provided by the consumer or various organizations. If a violation is detected, the agency offers the business operator a mandatory recommendation(s). If the detected violation is not corrected within the stipulated period, it is possible to extend the period; however, in case of disobedience, the agency is obliged to fine the entrepreneur. If they are dealing with a violation that cannot be eliminated without stopping the production process, the agency has the authority to do so, providing fines.

The agency's control results are published on their webpage <https://nfa.gov.ge/Ge/StateControl>. Here, you can see the inspection results of any enterprise or product you are interested in.

## THE ROLE OF CITIZENS IN ENSURING FOOD SAFETY

Ensuring food safety is based on the "from farm to fork" principle, which means that the responsibility for food safety starts with the entrepreneur and ends with the consumer.



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Initially, food can be safe but become hazardous during processing, shipping, sale, storage, and preparation. The consumer's responsibility includes purchasing the product at an officially registered merchant, checking the expiration date on the etiquette, storing the perishable product in the refrigerator at the appropriate temperature, etc. Naturally, both the producer and the consumer must follow hygiene and sanitary norms.

It is also essential to share civic responsibility. In 2023, with the support of the European Union, the Center for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia (CSR DG) conducted a sociological survey to determine how much the pub-

lic is informed about the importance of food safety. Citizens were asked if they had taken any action in case of detection of violations of food safety, to which the majority answered in the negative.

However, half of the respondents who responded, indicated that they achieved a positive result. 99% of these responses were expressed directly in the shop or catering establishment by filing a complaint with the business operator, and it was found that the problem was resolved between the business operator and the customer as a result of direct communication without the state's intervention. This is proof that great importance is attached to civic activity.

The hotline of the National Food Agency -15 01 is worth mentioning separately. Calling it is confidential, and any citizen has the right to contact the agency at any time upon discovering a violation of food safety. The agency is obliged to respond promptly to such appeals and inform the consumer about the result.

## THE ROLE OF THE EU SUPPORT IN THE FIELD OF FOOD SAFETY IN GEORGIA

After the special mission of the European Commission visited Georgia in 2008, reforms in food safety were defined as one of the prerequisites for the association agreement between the EU and Georgia. Accordingly, the country actively began to implement the necessary reforms: a strategy was developed, a framework law was adopted, and eventually, an association agreement was concluded between the parties.

Under the association agreement, a long-term ambitious plan for rapprochement with the European Union was signed. This plan provides for the rapprochement of Georgian legislation with the normative acts of the European Union every year until the end of 2028. As of June 10, 2024, our legislation was close to 134 out of 200 acts, although not all of these statutory acts have yet come

into force - this will take some time, but the process has begun.

The reforms mentioned above in the country were followed by institutional development, first of all, the National Food Agency, starting with infrastructural support, ending with capacity-building activities and sharing European experience, which is necessary to meet the new requirements.

The European Union, the organisations operating directly in the member states of the European Union, has been significantly contributing to this. This support continues to this day, and it means tens of millions of euros, a significant part of which is directed to the systemic level and a relatively small part to support the projects of entrepreneurs and non-governmental organisations working in food safety.

Food Safety is Everyone's Responsibility and Right!

- Sources:
- Booklet "European integration of Georgia and food safety", Center for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia (CSR DG), 2024.
  - Studying the knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of the Georgian population regarding food safety and ongoing reforms in this direction (quantitative and qualitative research reports), Center for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia (CSR DG), 2023.

The EU-funded project "Support to the Food Safety and SPS sector in Georgia under ENPARD IV" is co-financed by the Embassy of Sweden in Tbilisi, the Czech Development Agency (CzDA), and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (UN FAO). The Czech Development Agency and the UN FAO implement the project. This article has been produced with the assistance of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the Czech Development Agency and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.







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# “The High Yellow Note” and the Higher Powers of the Arts

BY LILY FÜRSTENOW

The High Yellow Note is a quotation of Van Gogh that inspired curator Bice Curiger for her next exhibition at the Fondation Vincent van Gogh Arles. She emphasized that through this “high yellow note,” Van Gogh was “able to attend... [it] is not about yellow paintings, it’s about the attitude and it’s about expressionism which is not inside but in the outer realm; it’s all about emotion.” We met Bice Curiger for an interview during the Berlin Art Week on the occasion of the exhibition curated by her at the Schinkel Pavillon dedicated to the work of German artist Sigmar Polke.

The title of the exhibition is Sigmar Polke. The Native Forest Floor. Higher Powers Command: Show Polke! It should be understood both figuratively and literally, ironically referring to the breeding ground of the artist’s biography, which was so intertwined with that of both post-war Germans. “The Higher Powers” on the other hand, is Polke’s ironic and critical allusion to symbols of artistic inspiration like muses or else and the common tendency to exaggerate some abstract creative forces that one vaguely perceives but believes to be of higher influence or destination.

Known for his eclectic and experimental approach to painting and media, Polke’s artistic style is marked by a blending of high and low culture, often incorporating irony and satire. Polke’s works challenged traditional boundaries, embracing what he coined as “Capitalist Realism”—a critique of consumerism and mass culture, paralleling the Western pop art movement while addressing post-WWII German identity. Polke frequently employed a mix of unconventional materials like printed fabrics; objects attached to the medial surface, creating layered, abstract compositions that evoke a sense of visual playfulness while often confronting serious social and political themes. His use of raster dots, reminiscent of commercial printing, and his manipulation of photographic imagery lent his work a distinctive fusion of painterly gesture and mechanized reproduction, highlighting the fluidity between image and reality.

As Bice Curiger writes in her book Sigmar Polke. Alles Fließt: Die Photo Copie GmbH, while observing his works, the eye “concentrates either on the image as a whole, or on the singular details, the raster dots... that mark the boundary between something and nothing... Here also come up the ‘misprints’ as a motive.”

One witnesses the “atomization of the images... a radicalization of material and visual nature. It is the introduction of free particles, pigments and lacquer, it is the inclusion of up to now untouched micro- and macro universes.” Not only the innovative raster dot painting style but undoubtedly Polke’s signature wit attracts the viewers of all generations up to now: e.g. the painting Gangster, 1988, represents the artist in underpants wide opening his coat, the inside of which is filled with robbed trophies on offer and indulging the onlookers in voyeuristic instincts, here as in painting it’s all about seeing and making visible. Likewise in Carl Andre in Delft, 1968, the art-historical references of Polke to the visual imagery of the Delft tiles rendered by the artist in intricate hand-painted patterns in cobalt blue on a white background all arranged in a Carl Andre signature grid structure emphasizes the contradiction between the minimalist, geometric forms of tiles arranged in grid-like patterns against the flowing decor ornaments characteristic for the Delft tiles.

Besides important paintings such as Carl Andre in Delft, 1968, Die Schmiede (Smithy), 1975, Gangster, 1988, Flüchtende, 1992; or the later pigment painting Lapislazuli, 1992, a collection of photographs from the 1960s/70s—the majority of which are in fact unique—are being shown at Schinkel Pavillon for the very first time. They in particular give a fascinating insight into the vibrancy of the youth movement of the time, and the fundamental unmooring of the German post-war status quo it set in motion. In Dr. Bonn, 1978, a civil servant sits in front of his desk with his face obliterated, about to commit suicide using a slingshot. On the wall in front of him hang the striking mugshots of two RAF (Red Army Faction) members. Sicherheitsverwahrung, 1979, captures the arrest of a woman in the style of a comic strip. Approaching the canvas one then recognizes that it is adorned with fine gold chains, safety pins and trinkets.

Bice Curiger, who knew Sigmar Polke personally emphasized that the term Capitalist Realism coined by Polke is still excessively relevant for contemporary societies and that the artist who was famous for his tongue-in-cheek wit used to analyze the evils of society and injustices that were inherent in the so-called “Heimische Waldboden” (home forest floor) contaminated by consumerism of the post-war era after all the atrocities of the Nazi rule and the Second World War devastations.

For her as a curator art is something that reveals the unseen, discovers, brings to light and illuminates. Therefore the choice of the title ILLUMInations for

the 54th Venice Biennale that she curated in 2011. It was not so much about “nations” but more about illuminating those blinded by nation-driven craze. As she emphasized art “has to do with experiences we share – nation as a community, ILLUMInations of artistic community – an ideal that has to be protected and that we can debate more freely in the politics or in the every day life relationships”

Bice Curiger was one of the first curators who discovered for the Western art world the works of iconic Georgian painter Niko Pirosmani and exhibited them in Kunsthaus Zürich back in 1995.

According to her recollections “it all started with AICA art critics association meeting in 1989 Leningrad and due to food shortages the conference was moved to Tbilisi where she first saw Pirosmani’s paintings in the State Museum. She was so impressed by the authenticity of Pirosmani’s paintings that she looked for his catalogue raisonné when she was back in Zurich in a Communist bookshop. The Exhibition in Kunsthaus Zürich was called “Signs of Wonder. Niko Pirosmani and the Contemporary Art” and along with paintings by Pirosmani included works by Cindy Sherman, Mike Kelly, Jeff Koons, Katarina Fritsch.

“I wanted to create 6 chapels where I included in each chapel the works of Pirosmani in the middle of the exhibition space 70 m long and 80 m wide where you put architecture,” she tells us. “We had to negotiate it all with the director in Tbilisi, the works arrived accompanied by Jonni Akhobadze, he took care of them and the museum invited him to stay a week or two to learn new techniques of restoration and the Kunsthaus then bought a computer and some instruments for restoration that we offered to the museum (in Tbilisi).

“The exhibition idea was: here’s a young generation of artists who aren’t minimal artists, not abstract artists but trying to have certain directness in their artistic language like Pirosmani, who was painting to attract immediate attention, in the dark tavernas speaking and reaching out to public looking for directness, and that was the nominator to bring these together.

“I wanted to put him into the context of contemporary art, something that has fallen down from the sky and you don’t really know, to take him away from the label of naive artists. Because “naive” is already looking down at someone who has no education and this is already the wrong approach. To put him on the same level as contemporary artists was a very important aspect of the exhibition. And then you tell the story, where it is coming from, you tell his biography and we showed the films which are beautiful films, it’s always more the question of the context...”

Like any artist whose creativity is based on sincerity and profound observation of reality Pirosmani’s work is as relevant for us today as back in the twenties when he was rediscovered by the Zdanevich brothers, in 1995 within the context of contemporary artists of the time in Kunsthaus Zürich as well as now with our societies. His archaic almost archetypal imagery is stylized and his protagonists are set in rural or urban contexts with almost theatrical postures, yet their directness and immediacy appeals to the hearts of the viewers.

Maybe “the perspectives in the landscapes are not rendered according to the classical laws of composition,” as art critic Alexander Kamensky points out in the introduction to Niko Pirosmani catalogue, but the “feeling is rendered unmistakably and the emotion is flawlessly true.”

The flatness of the paintings emphasizes the medial surface, the wax cloth on which color pigments are applied in



Bice Curiger

brisk brushstrokes and the process of painting becomes a means of rendering reality captured by Pirosmani in a poetic way transforming and sublimating everyday genre scenes and human gatherings during harvests, feasts, hunting, fishing or else into timeless rituals of celebration of togetherness, humanity and nature.

According to Bice Curiger who wrote about the artist in ‘Niko Pirosmani. Wanderer between Worlds’: his “plasticity results from skillfully employed smearing of the paint, which caused the background to shine through, or by using the black as the contour line: for example in “Nurse with a Child” where the painter left the black of the ground exposed around the figure of the baby. Dark line contours stand in contrast to the reduced palette of colors: fresh white, pale pink and bright blue... fairy-tale atmospheres filled with secrets waft around many of Pirosmani’s paintings. But we are by no means looking into an unreal world; on the contrary we are participating in a shared more profound recognition.”

Recently, as a contemporary ongoing homage to Pirosmani, Ciprian Adrian Barsan initiated the Table Project supported by artists. Some of the participants have been Tadao Ando, who designed a table, Andro Wekua, Adrain Ghenie and Georg Baselitz who made respectively portraits of Niko Pirosmani, Kiki Smith and other artists. The idea goes back to

Pirosmani himself whose dream was to buy a house in the center of Tbilisi with a samovar on a big table around which artists irrespective of nationality, gender, age or class belonging would meet up, drink tea and discuss art. This wish sadly never came true in Pirosmani’s lifetime, but hopefully now, a hundred year later, contemporary discussions and dialogues on art would inspire artists of today leading some of them “to attend” this vague and mysterious, unattainable “yellow note,” something exceeding one’s capacities and requiring an artist to go beyond in search of artistic expression to explore the new boundaries, probably something outwardly and hardly attainable, that any painter reaches for in the constant search during the creative process but very few manage to achieve.

The exhibition Der heimische Waldboden. Höhere Wesen befehlen: Polke zeigen! is curated by Bice Curiger, it was initiated and organized by Schinkel Pavillon and will be on display at the Fondation Vincent van Gogh Arles from 1 March until 19 October, 2025. Bice Curiger is the Artistic Director of Fondation Vincent van Gogh Arles, editor of the Parkett Art Magazine and among others curator of the 54th Venice Biennale that took place in 2011. Exhibition The High Yellow Note will take place at Fondation Vincent van Gogh Arles between 5 Oct. 2024 - 9 Feb. 2025



# Otar Taktakishvili 100: A Memorial to Timelessness through Music

REVIEW BY IVAN NECHAEV

The centennial celebration of Otar Taktakishvili, one of Georgia's most revered composers, unfolded at the Tbilisi Opera and Ballet Theater, offering a night of immersive retrospection and reverence. The program, a rich tapestry of live performances interwoven with recorded archival footage, created a multi-layered journey through Taktakishvili's musical landscape. It was a reminder of his lasting influence on Georgian classical music and the universal nature of his compositions, which transcend both time and space.

The memorial evening was an homage not just to the man, but to the narratives he built through music. Live performances, starring the Tbilisi Opera and Ballet Theater Soloists, Choir, Orchestra, and the Ensemble 'Rustavi,' were augmented by the inclusion of historical recordings. This duality—of past and present—created a poignant fusion, where the boundary between memory and immediacy blurred, immersing the audience in both a celebration of life and a meditation on the endurance of art.

## THE IMMORTAL 'MINDIA': FROM STORYTELLING TO SONIC POWER

The night began with the grandeur of Mindia, one of Taktakishvili's most significant operatic works. The Tbilisi Opera Orchestra and Choir delivered a powerful introduction, setting the tone for the evening's emotional depth. The first live aria, sung by Giorgi Sturua, drew the audience into the internal world of the tragic hero, Mindia, whose melancholic melodies carry the weight of ancient Georgian myths. Sturua's vocal interpretation was rich with pathos, bringing both vulnerability and strength to the character.

Sulkhan Gvelesiani's rendition of Chalkhia's scene and ballade from Act 2 was equally moving, as he skillfully navigated the intricate emotional layers of the role. The audience was transported to a world of myth, where Taktakishvili's compositions breathe life into ancient characters, their struggles, and desires. These live moments were contrasted by archival recordings, which introduced the historical voices of iconic Georgian singers. Recordings of Merani and Separation, featuring Zurab Anjafaridze and Zurab Sotkilava respectively, resonated like echoes from another era, threading the past into the present.

## THE MELODIC NOSTALGIA OF THE FIRST LOVE

The First Love, another cornerstone of Taktakishvili's operatic achievements, was given both live and recorded treatment throughout the evening, offering a vivid contrast between past interpretations and modern renditions. Liana Kalmakhelidze's live performance of Margalita's aria was a highlight, her voice blending tenderness and sorrow in a way that felt timeless. This was juxtaposed against archival recordings of Ertaoz's arioso by Teimuraz Gugushvili and other key arias by Imeri Kavsadze and Eldar Getsadze, creating an emotional kalei-



Photo by the author

doscope that underscored the eternal nature of love, as conveyed through music.

Kalmakhelidze's live performance imbued the role of Margalita with a contemporary resonance, while the inclusion of historical recordings reminded the audience of the different generations of artists who have brought these characters to life. The audience was left in awe of how Taktakishvili's music bridges these eras, transcending individual performances.

## IN THE STEPS OF GEORGIAN LEGENDS, RUSTAVELI AND NIKOLOZ BARATASHVILI

The evening continued with In the Steps of Rustaveli, where Vardzia and Palestina were performed by Giorgi Chelidze and the Tbilisi Opera Chorus, paying tribute to Georgia's literary and cultural heritage. The vocal performances here were steeped in reverence, not only for Taktakishvili's compositions but also for the history and landscapes they evoke. The haunting beauty of these pieces, inspired by Georgia's medieval poet Shota Rustaveli, transported listeners into the heart of Georgian identity.

The choral harmonies and orchestral interludes reverberated with a sense of ancient continuity, as if the music itself were carved into the rocks of Vardzia. The retrospective recordings that followed served to underline the lasting impact of Taktakishvili's work on Georgian culture.

A climactic moment came with Nightfall on Mtatsminda from Nikoloz Baratashvili, where Giorgi Sturua and David Gvelesiani's duet, supported by Ensemble Rustavi and the Tbilisi Opera Choir, delivered a dramatic, stirring performance. The emotional weight of this piece, which draws upon the life of Georgia's romantic poet Nikoloz Baratashvili, further showcased Taktakishvili's ability to capture the soul of a nation in musical form.

## A RETURN TO MYTH: THE ABDUCTION OF THE MOON

The evening reached its zenith with selections from The Abduction of the Moon, an opera steeped in Georgian folklore. Iano Alibegashvili's Tamar's aria was both ethereal and forceful, cap-

turing the otherworldly beauty of the moon and the tragic love story at the heart of the opera. The duet between Tarash and Tamar, performed by Khattuna Chokhonielidze and Sulkhan Gvelesiani, was a masterful interplay of voices, each singer embodying the tension between earthly desire and celestial separation.

As the final aria of The Abduction of the Moon filled the theatre, the audience was enveloped in a sense of closure and transcendence. The Tbilisi Opera Choir Orchestra brought the evening to a majestic close, their voices and instruments swelling with the weight of Taktakishvili's legacy.

## THE PILLARS OF THE EVENING

At the heart of the evening's grand success were not only the soloists but the collective forces that upheld the musical architecture: the Tbilisi Opera and Ballet Theatre Orchestra, Choir, Ensemble "Rustavi," and the steady hand of con-

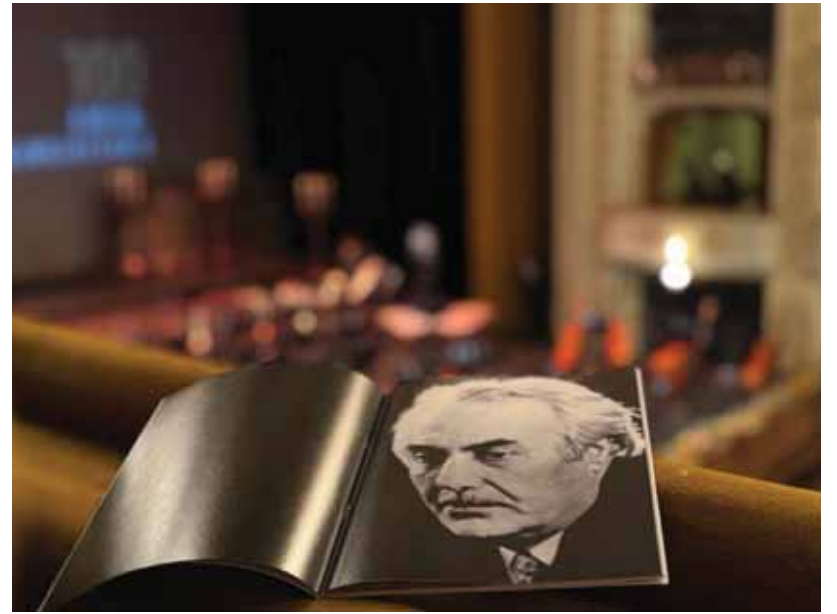


Photo by the author

ductor Zaza Azmaiparashvili. Together, they brought Taktakishvili's scores to life with precision and passion, creating a lush sonic landscape that allowed the audience to be fully immersed in the composer's world.

The orchestra, under the masterful direction of Azmaiparashvili, played with a deep sense of dynamism and control, moving seamlessly between the gentle, lyrical passages and the thunderous climaxes that define Taktakishvili's compositions. The balance between the strings, woodwinds, brass, and percussion was exquisite, each section contributing to the rich emotional tapestry of the evening. Whether in the soaring introduction to Mindia or the poignant intermezzo from The First Love, the orchestra carried the narrative, adding layers of depth and nuance to the soloists' performances.

The Tbilisi Opera Chorus, too, was integral to the evening's emotional weight. Their harmonies, rich and resonant, filled

the theatre, enhancing the grandeur of pieces like In the Steps of Rustaveli and The Abduction of the Moon. Their ability to blend power with subtlety was particularly striking in the choral sequences, where they shifted from delicate, prayer-like intonations to full-throated crescendos, evoking the timeless beauty and tragedy of Georgian folklore.

The Ensemble "Rustavi" added another layer of authenticity to the performance, embodying the soul of Georgia's folk traditions. Known for their mastery of Georgian polyphony, they wove their voices into the fabric of the evening, particularly during the deeply evocative Nightfall on Mtatsminda, where the ancient harmonies mirrored the mountain landscapes and cultural history that inspire much of Taktakishvili's work.

Zaza Azmaiparashvili's direction was the quiet force behind this evening of musical homage. His deep understanding of Taktakishvili's compositions and his sensitivity to the needs of both the soloists and the orchestra allowed for a seamless integration of live and recorded elements. His pacing was impeccable, moving between the more intimate, introspective moments and the sweeping, grand passages with a sense of inevitability that kept the audience on an emotional journey throughout. Azmaiparashvili's baton became the bridge between past and present, his leadership ensuring that Taktakishvili's music resonated as vividly now as it did a century ago.

## A COMPOSER OF ETERNITY

The program concluded with a haunting performance of Holy Mother from the song cycle based on Galaktion Tabidze's poetry, followed by the final aria from Mindia, reminding the audience that Taktakishvili's music, much like the subjects it portrays, is immortal.

Through this memorial evening, Tbilisi paid tribute not just to a composer but to a man whose work captured the heartbeat of Georgia. Taktakishvili's music, as evidenced by the seamless blend of live performances and historical recordings, speaks across generations, keeping Georgian cultural heritage alive in every note. The evening was not merely a concert but a living archive of Georgia's soul, preserved and projected into the future through the universal language of music.



Photo by the author



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