



Photo by Ezz Gaber

FOCUS

ON GEORGIA'S DASHED EU HOPES

EU Leaders: If Georgia does not change its current course, we cannot endorse opening EU accession negotiations

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"The King is Naked!" - Declan Donnellan's Oedipus Rex as a Timely Denunciation of Power in Crisis

BY IVAN NECHAEV

In an era of political discontent, when voices demanding justice rise with intensity, Oedipus Rex, directed by Declan Donnellan, arrived in Tbilisi like an ominous mirror held up to power. Opening the GIFT 2024, the Georgian International Festival of Arts, on November 3rd and 4th at Silk Factory Studio, this production transformed Sophocles' ancient tragedy into a striking allegory for contemporary context of corruption and accountability. While it doesn't rely on trendy immersiveness or interactive effects, Donnellan's production placed the audience in an ironic role, part of a "crowd scene" gathered by the government to witness a quest for justice that ultimately, and tragically, reveals its own corruption. Set against the backdrop of the recent parliamentary elections and ongoing protests in Tbilisi, Oedipus Rex couldn't be more relevant.

As the GIFT Festival celebrates Georgia's unique cultural identity, this staging of Oedipus underlines the festival's international reach by evoking the universal relevance of themes like civic responsibility, integrity, and the high price of denial.

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Photo by the author

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GALT & TAGGART										
CREATING OPPORTUNITIES										
Prepared for Georgia Today Business by										
As of 06-Nov-2024										
Markets					Markets					
BONDS	Price	w/w	m/m	STOCKS	Price	w/w	m/m			
GEORGIA 04/26	94.11 (YTM 7.20%)	+0.3%	-0.5%	Bank of Georgia (BGEO LN)	GBP 40.05	+7.8%	-2.0%			
GLOBAL 04/28	98.71 (YTM 7.64%)	+0.0%	-2.1%	Georgia Capital (GCEO LN)	GBP 10.00	+3.5%	-1.0%			
GERGG 9 1/2 PERP	97.39 (YTM 9.73%)	-0.4%	-0.8%	TBC Bank Group (TBGG LN)	GBP 27.05	+6.1%	-4.2%			
SILNET 01/27	100.41 (YTM 8.16%)	-0.1%	-0.4%							
TBC 8.894 PERP	95.64 (YTM 11.78%)	+0.1%	-0.4%							
TBC 10 1/4 PERP	98.31 (YTM 10.61%)	-0.0%	-0.6%							
				COMMODITIES		Price		w/w m/m		
				Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)		77.46		-4.3% +8.2%		
				Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)		2 648.54		+0.2% +2.7%		
INDICES					CURRENCIES					
	Price	w/w	m/m		Price	w/w	m/m			
SP 500	5 859.85	+2.9%	+4.2%	USD / GEL	2,7230	-0.9%	+1.0%			
FTSE 250	20 817.19	-0.2%	-0.4%	EUR / GEL	2,9705	-1.5%	-0.5%			
DOW JONES 30	43 065.22	+2.6%	+4.0%	GBP / GEL	3,5548	-1.0%	+0.5%			
Russell 2000	2 248.64	+2.5%	+3.0%	EUR / USD	1,0909	-0.6%	-1.5%			
FTSE 100	8 292.66	-0.1%	+0.2%	GBP / USD	1,3059	-0.2%	-0.5%			

Ukraine Latest: First Clash between Ukrainian and North Korean Soldiers in Kursk; Biden Rushing Aid to Ukraine before Trump Takes Office



North Korean soldiers. Photo by Wong Maye-E/AP

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

The first clash between Ukrainian fighters and North Korean soldiers was seen in the Kursk region this week.

Anonymous sources of Ukrainian intelligence confirmed this news to the Financial Times on November 5. The source did not reveal specific details such as where and when it happened, and what was the result.

"So far there is no talk of major clashes," one anonymous source told the publication, indicating that the conflict "happened in a district of the Russian Federation, about 600 square kilometers of which is controlled by the Russian army." One such area in Russia is the Kursk region, which Ukrainian troops entered from the Sumy region on August 6. Since then, they have maintained a significant foothold deep within enemy territory.

On November 4, Andrei Kovalenko, the head of the Counter-Disinformation Center (CPD) of the Council of Security

and National Defense of Ukraine, reported the alleged first clash between the North Korean and Ukrainian military through Telegram.

"The first group of soldiers from the People's Republic of Korea has already come under fire in the Kursk region," Kovalenko wrote, without specifying any other details.

Russian instructors are said to be teaching North Korean soldiers in the Kursk region how to use different types of combat drones.

"The Russians are training North Korean soldiers and officers for modern warfare. They will be used in battle. North Koreans in Russian military uniforms will be enrolled in Russian units in the Kursk region. They will learn the principles of using FPV (First Person View) drones and reconnaissance drones, including Lancets," Kovalenko told Ukrainska Pravda.

The Main Military Intelligence Department of the Armed Forces of Ukraine claims 12,000 North Korean soldiers have entered the territory of Kursk since October 23, among them 500 officers and three generals.

The upper house of Russia's parliament has voted in favor of ratifying a treaty between Russia and North Korea which includes a mutual defense clause.

In response, South Korea is to supply Ukraine with weapons, Korea's President Yoon Suk-yeol announced. North Korea's involvement in the war presents a threat to the South, as it gives Pyongyang combat experience and sees them rewarded with sensitive military technology transfers, Yoon said.

Yoon also held a call with United States President-elect Donald Trump and discussed forging closer ties with the US across all areas of security and economics, sharing his concerns over North Korea's deployment of troops backing Russia.

HERE ARE OTHER KEY BATTLEFIELD DEVELOPMENTS AS OF THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 7:

- A Russian drone attack badly damaged an apartment in Kyiv's Holosiivskyi district early on Thursday. No injuries have been reported.

- Air defense units destroyed 38 of 63 Russian drones launched overnight Tuesday, Ukraine's air force said.

- Russian forces have captured two more settlements in eastern Ukraine, Russia's Ministry of Defense announced, naming them as the villages of Maksymivka, just north of the town of Vuhledar, and Antonivka, near the town of Kurakhove, further north. Ukraine reported fighting around both villages in the eastern sector of the 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line, saying its forces repelled two attacks near Maksymivka and a village near Vuhledar in the Donetsk region and did not acknowledge that either had fallen. The General Staff of Ukraine's military also reported a "tense" situation around Kurakhove, with 39 Russian attacks on Ukrainian positions.

UKRAINE HITS RUSSIAN NAVAL BASE IN DAGESTAN FOR FIRST TIME, SOURCE SAYS

Ukraine's military intelligence was behind a drone attack on the city of Kaspiysk in Russia's Dagestan Republic, targeting a Russian naval base, a source in the agency told the Kyiv Independent on Nov. 6.

At least two vessels, missile ships Tatarstan and Dagestan, were damaged in the attack, and possibly also several small Project 21631 ships, sources said.

Dagestan authorities reported intercepting a drone attack over Kaspiysk, a port city at the Caspian Sea around 1,000 kilometers from the front line (600 miles), on the morning of Nov. 6.

Andrii Kovalenko, the head of the counter-disinformation center at Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, also said on Telegram that a Russian naval base was hit.

"Russian Navy ships are stationed in Kaspiysk," he said. The base is home to Russia's Caspian Flotilla, as well as Russian Marines and Coastal Troops.

Sources said that the targeted fleet was involved in strikes against Ukraine, and the 177th Marine Regiment stationed there was deployed in combat in Kherson and Zaporizhzhia oblasts.

While Russian authorities claimed to have intercepted a single drone in the skies, a video shared on social media appears to show another drone hitting its target, resulting in a large explosion.

The incident took place roughly 15 kilometers from a local airport, the Mash news channel claimed, identifying the drone as a Ukrainian A-22 Flying Fox drone.

The nearby Makhachkala airport has suspended operations for an indefinite period due to the incident, local authorities said.

ZELENSKY CALLS FOR TRUMP TO KEEP SUPPORTING KYIV

Donald Trump claimed victory in the US presidential election on Nov. 6, shortly before crossing the threshold of the 270 Electoral College votes needed to win.

Donald Trump is now likely to call Russia's Vladimir Putin and tell him to "stop the war", a former American diplomat has said.

The incoming US president is "going to make a phone call to Putin as quickly as possible and tell Putin that he needs to stop the war, that the fighting has to stop, and that there has to be peace," Kurt Volker, former US special representative for Ukraine negotiations, said.

Trump's return to the White House could spell uncertain times for Ukraine, as there are fears he might withdraw support for the besieged country and cut a deal with the Kremlin.

Trump made no mention of Russia's war against Ukraine in his speech, but highlighted that the US had seen "no wars" during his first presidential term.

"We had no wars, for four years, we had no wars. Except we defeated ISIS," Trump proclaimed. "They said 'he will start a war.' I'm not going to start a war; I'm going to stop the wars."

Ukrainian war-time president Volodymyr Zelensky has congratulated Trump on his win, and urged the Republican to keep supporting Kyiv against Putin's invasion.

The current US administration, expecting a more frugal handling of Ukraine from Trump, is now rushing military aid worth \$9bn to Kyiv before Joe Biden exits office in January.

"The administration plans to push forward... to put Ukraine in the strongest position possible" before Trump enters office, a senior Biden administration official said.



Photo: The Government of Georgia

Kobakhidze Attends European Political Community Summit

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze is attending the European Political Community (EPC) Summit in Budapest, Hungary, organized by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, with approximately 40 countries participating.

Kobakhidze will discuss primary issues concerning Georgia's current political situation and its relations with the EU,

emphasizing the timeliness of the summit, which is taking place right after the US presidential elections.

The Georgian government reports that Kobakhidze will take part in a thematic panel addressing current developments in Georgia's EU integration, as well as in the final plenary session. It is also said that he will engage in discussions with European leaders regarding Georgia's foreign policy and its pending EU membership status.

The 5th EPC Summit will focus on Europe's security challenges, with a particular emphasis on economic security and interconnectedness.

Macron, Scholz, and Tusk: Georgia Risks Losing Support for EU Accession



Donald Tusk, President Macron and Olaf Scholz in Berlin. Photo by Michael Kappeler/AP

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

Reuters reported that French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk

discussed their concerns regarding Georgia's political landscape. In a joint statement released under the Weimar Triangle, the leaders stated that they could not support negotiations concerning Georgia's EU integration without concrete reforms and measures.

"If Georgia does not change its current course and show real commitment to

reforms, particularly by repealing recent legislation that conflicts with European values, we cannot endorse opening EU accession negotiations with Georgia," the statement declared.

The leaders emphasized that for EU accession to progress, Georgia needs to align its legislation with European standards and values.

The Harder They Fall...

OP-ED BY MARK REIN-HAGEN

There's an old story about boxer Max Baer, "Cinderella Man," a heavyweight known for his arrogance as much as his power, who once found himself thrown back by a right hook from Tommy Loughran, who he considered beneath him. A dazed and incredulous Baer spat out his mouth-guard and said, "This guy?"

It's a sentiment shared by me and, I imagine, by tens of millions of Harris supporters this morning. Internal DNC polls had it all wrong, as did the Harris campaign and nearly every Democratic strategist and liberal pundit. Our instincts were off, and our expectations were dashed. Today, many of us are reeling in disbelief as we slowly recover from the agony of watching Kamala Harris's shot at the presidency unravel.

So how could we have lost, especially to "this guy", someone we'd long since pegged as unfit, unstable, even un-American. How could Kamala lose to Donald Trump, a figure we on the left see as a punchline-turned-threat, with twice-impeached baggage and enough personal scandals to sink a porn career?

The knee-jerk explanation, which I felt most of the evening, that "half of America has lost its mind" is tempting, but misses a larger point: liberal America's echo chamber just isn't as in tune with everyday folks as it thinks. Over the years, that dissonance has cost the democratic party dearly, and this is just the latest blow. So, what happened?

Sure, Harris had her tactical missteps: picking a progressive running mate who didn't deliver a key state or with key voters, sticking too close to Biden's record, and labeling Trump a "fascist,"

which felt like an insult to his supporters too. Her strategy leaned heavily on celebrity endorsements while struggling to clarify Harris's personal appeal and positions. Her failure to address her past controversial stances with anything other than canned lines like "My values haven't changed" left many feeling unconvinced. But those were just tactical stumbles. The real problem ran much deeper.

Let's start with the main liberal blind spot: a conviction that things in Biden's America were going just fine, and that anyone who disagreed was uninformed, brainwashed, or plain stupid. Rising grocery prices? "Check the Fed data," was often the response. Immigration crisis? What immigration crisis? Biden's health and mental acuity are just fine, by the way, and anyone saying otherwise is "being a Troll." Everything the right-wing media says is "Fake News" (Lab Escape Theory) and everything the left-wing news says (COVID School Closures) is gospel truth.

Harris's frequent mention of her tough-on-gangs stance, for example, completely missed the border issue's larger, unspoken concerns: it wasn't about crime, it was community strain, feeling like an outsider in your own hometown, and most of all, housing prices.

This tone-deafness might've sounded smart to lefties talking to each other on social media, but for regular working-class folks, it came across as elitist, dismissive, and out of touch. They know full well the neo-liberal elite doesn't give a shit about their fears, needs, and aspirations.

The one thing they want, R.E.S.P.E.C.T., the left refuses to give them because the left is convinced it knows better. About everything.

More than that, there was the cultural divide, with the Democrats often feeling



Donald Trump. Source: FB

like the party of social mandates and tortured jingoistic terminology. Gender transitions for kids (restricted in most of Europe), and athletes crossing over to compete in women's sports, required D.E.I. training and loyalty statements/oaths... and BTW, I had to sign one, so don't tell me they don't exist. Americans raising concerns about anything relating to race or LGBTQ+ got labeled as transphobes, racists, and reactionaries. But was that fair?

Most people just want to go about their lives without being told they're villains for questioning new norms. The left, in a majority of American minds, has become the scolds and the moralizers, fixated on cultural issues and wielding identity politics like a hammer in whack-a-mole. And then there was Trump, rallying around simple freedom to "live and let live," his brash defiance contrasting sharply with liberal pieties and resonating with voters who felt cornered.

Lastly, the left approached Trump as a dire existential threat to democracy, not as a politician whose policies should be outdone by BETTER and more popular policies. Indeed, the "Trump is a fascist" label opened the door to blatantly and reductively anti-democratic moves by the left, such as courtroom brawls to strike him from ballots or legal charges too convoluted for anyone to follow. Rather than beating him with a clearer, better platform, liberals went all-in on pretentious self-important *resistance* politics. Trump, to our surprise and horror, shrugged it off; if anything, the drama only added to his renegade allure.

For many of us, Harris represented stability, decency, and forward-thinking policy, and fears of Trump's foreign policy, economic protectionism, and populist brinkmanship were real. But as a Harris supporter, I can't ignore the truth that the left seems to lack the humility to reflect, the savvy to realign, and the grit to seriously challenge Trump's appeal to the working class and America of both today and tomorrow.

In the end, to a clear majority of voters, the Democrats became the party of high-handed moralism, tone-deaf elitism, and finger-wagging virtue. While it might've felt righteous, that shit sure doesn't win elections. Especially with the minorities no longer being, as of now, reliable and consistent base voters for Dems.

I voted for Harris out of genuine concern for the country's direction under another Trump presidency, but I worry that the bloviating left-sphere on social media and the liberal establishment lacks the humility and foresight to course-correct. For Democrats to win back the public's trust, we need to meet voters where they're at: talking less, listening more, and showing them genuine R.E.S.P.E.C.T.

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When “Good Enough” Is No Longer Enough: Western Indifference to Georgia's Election Irregularities



Georgian protesters rally against the election results. Source: chathamhouse

BLOG BY RYAN SHERMAN

The damning statements might have splashed front-page headlines around the world: “A Sophisticated, Widespread, and Well-Orchestrated Scheme,” says OSCE Spokesperson; “Party-Organized Intimidation and the Feeling That Big Brother Is Watching,” Describes OSCE Official; “Vote-Buying and Double Voting Before and During Elections,” Says Senior OSCE Observer; “Intimidation Inside and Outside Polling Stations,” OSCE Monitor Reports. But they did not. These quotes, taken directly from an October 27 press conference held by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) at the Radisson in Tbilisi, were issued less than 24 hours after polls closed in Georgia’s 2024 parliamentary elections.

The OSCE’s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), widely seen as the gold standard for election observation, deploys expert teams to monitor elections across member states. Shortly after the dramatic press conference, the OSCE released a preliminary report highlighting issues including voter intimidation, procedural irregularities, undue dismissal of citizen complaints, restricted access to audits, unilateral decisions by the election commission, and last-minute changes to the electoral framework.

Public statements like these, coupled with such a report, would be enough to plunge any EU country into crisis, yet, many major outlets like The Guardian and Reuters downplayed their gravity, adding that the OSCE stopped short of labeling the election “fraudulent.” Not a single major outlet included this critical clarification: assessing the legitimacy of an election falls outside the OSCE’s mandate.

It bears repeating: the OSCE does not have the authority to label an election “fraudulent,” a fact reiterated at the OSCE press conference and clear from their Election Observation Handbook. Their limited role is solely to assess whether the voting process aligned with interna-

tional standards, using a methodology based on representative sampling. And their assessment was damning.

There is also good reason to believe, on both methodological and empirical grounds, that the situation in the field was significantly worse than what OSCE observations captured.

Though the OSCE does not publish the number of stations observed, some quick math gives us a general idea. With only 529 monitors at their disposal, placed in teams of two at randomly chosen sites, no more than 265 of 3700 total stations could have been observed from open to close — that’s 7% of stations.

An OSCE spokesperson noted in an email exchange that 2,000 polling stations were observed by the mission, implying extensive travel by observers among stations. While increasing sites visited, this would further reduce observation time to less than 7% of total time spent at open polling stations. Generalizing from limited data in a context as diverse as Georgia raises immediate sampling worries; concerns that are amplified by the stark differences in regional voting patterns reflected in the election results. The OSCE report itself flagged irregularities in 24% of stations, underscoring the high variability across the electoral landscape. Simply put, the more diverse the environment, the harder it becomes to ensure representative sampling.

Moreover, the abovementioned “sophisticated, widespread, and well-orchestrated scheme” (as described by an OSCE representative) raises the possibility that monitors themselves, two non-Georgian-speaking observers per station, conspicuously marked by OSCE vests, may themselves have influenced site-specific processes and behaviors.

Speculation? Not at all. Numerous other reports and data points bear out these worries, many of which stand in contrast to the OSCE’s limited positive assessment that “the voting process was generally well-administered within polling stations.”

Take for example the stream of social media footage, showing numerous infractions, illegal activities, and even chaos inside stations. These videos include: Confrontations within polling stations;

Attempts and multiple voting; Attempts to vote with someone else’s identification; Voters accompanied to voting booths; Election workers struggling with mismatched IDs; Individuals being forcefully removed for calling out infractions; Verbal and physical confrontations; Voting secrecy violations; and, last but not least, the notorious electoral tracking lists (compilation1, compilation2). These are described at length in written reports, and many more videos can be found tagged under the Facebook hashtag #მეცხეგეყალბება (“I saw fraud”).

Indeed, so crucial are the OSCE findings to international perceptions of the election, perhaps we should be most surprised that, despite a “well-orchestrated scheme,” so many irregularities slipped into plain view of international monitors.

According to a commissioned report from Dr. Hans Gutbrod of Ilia State University, we should not expect to find a “single smoking gun” but “a dozen daggers” to account for the “multi-pronged assault on election integrity” in last week’s parliamentary elections. This is typical of how modern electoral manipulation operates. His comprehensive analysis consolidates multiple quantitative and qualitative lines of evidence to capture a “multi-pronged strategy” to suppress the opposition and manipulate the outcome of the election.

More troublesome still, days after the election, Edison Research (an authoritative US-based market research firm specializing in election polling) published an analysis of the discrepancy between its exit polls and official CEC results, indicating a difference that “cannot be explained by normal variation alone and suggests local-level manipulation of the vote.” A day earlier the data analytical firm HarrisX came to a similar conclusion, based on the analysis of its polling, stating that the discrepancy “cannot be explained by statistical variance.” Pro-government news outlets and Georgian Dream spokespeople have dismissed these polls by saying they were funded by opposition parties, failing to mention that these firms are well-respected international pollsters.

Pre-election violations, also noted in the OSCE report, were documented and

published ahead of the elections by Transparency International. An October 21 report detailed a systematic strategy to manipulate the upcoming electoral process, while an October 24 report described Georgian Dream’s financial dominance, outpacing all other parties combined, much of it through donations from individuals tied to public contracts, raising concerns of systemic corruption.

The results by local monitoring NGO ISFED, using parallel vote tabulation, align with the CEC’s official results, suggesting any manipulation would have needed to occur before ballots were cast. The ISFED report also documents widespread voter intimidation, bribery, ID confiscation, data misuse, and multiple voting, concluding that the election “cannot be seen as truly reflecting Georgian voters’ preferences.” Similar findings were reported by other local monitors, including WeVote and the Georgian Young Lawyers Association.

Outside of Viktor Orban, no EU leader has recognized the Georgian Dream victory, and yet statements from Western political heads have been mixed, with many expressing vague concern and calling for further investigation — a tepidity that would be untenable if a similar situation had unfolded in a country closer to home.

Some Western commentators have been quick to re-apply a cookie-cutter geopolitical analysis from afar. Anatol Lieven, Director of the Eurasia Program at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, implies a Western conspiracy, framing the backlash not as genuine expression of outrage, but as an orchestrated effort pre-planned to topple the government. Lieven demands “proof of large-scale rigging” substantial enough to “reverse the official results” — an inversion of any sensible standard.

Lieven’s logic is like catching a student cheating repeatedly throughout an exam yet declaring the overall test valid, assuming the remaining answers were completed honestly and in good faith. According to Lievan, election fraud in Georgia is par for the course; something to be expected and largely dismissed. Only after exhaustive quantification, it seems, are we permitted to object. This level of

proof is virtually impossible to meet, especially given that such evidence would need to come through a court system heavily influenced (see also: Georgia’s Clan of Judges) by the ruling party itself.

In Lieven’s assessment, a vast segment of Georgian people are apparently empty vassals in a geopolitical game, able only to express thoughts implanted by a meddling West. While both patronizing and reductive, this opinion also betrays a profound ignorance of the legacy of Georgian intellectual thought itself, whose liberal ideals and European aspirations are embodied in household names of great poets, thinkers, and luminaries, such as Dimitri Kipiani, Niko Nikoladze, Akaki Tsereteli, Ilia Chavchavadze, Iakob Gogebashvili, Noe Jordania, Otar Chiladze, Akaki Bakradze, Merab Kostava, and many others.

The reality on the ground is that Georgian institutions are suffering lasting damage in the midst of a widespread campaign to undermine the electoral process. Decimation of public trust in the elections has deprived the process of its essential foundation. This betrayal of the Georgian people risks the frightening possibility of plunging Georgia into a volatile social and political crisis.

And yet, Georgia holds not only EU candidate status; integration with the EU is enshrined in its very constitution, and every major political party claims this as their ultimate objective. Europe, therefore, not only has standing, but an ethical imperative to insist that its partner and aspirant member state uphold democratic standards and re-run the elections.

Editorial should close with a final sense of direction, yet I find myself at a loss. The way forward is unclear. I am reminded of the words of Otar Chiladze: “Our duty here is this: to leave darkness; to overcome darkness.” The repercussions of this election will unfold over the years ahead. The full extent of the damage is yet to be understood. Ultimately, any resolution must come from within Georgia itself, and will require Europe’s good faith engagement and meaningful commitment. For now, our responsibility can only be to document events accurately and thoroughly, in the hope that clarity might eventually contribute to a better outcome.

Matthew Bryza on Georgia's "Depressing" Election Results

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

Everybody assumes that Georgian Dream's normal electorate is about 35%, - Matthew Bryza tells Radio Free Europe/RL's Georgian Service. "So it's fair to ask how was it able to grow its share of the electorate so substantially. It's a convenient number, because it shows that even if the opposition had been unified, it wouldn't have been enough to defeat Georgian Dream...if that's the correct number."

We asked Bryza, a former United States diplomat and nonresident senior fellow with the Atlantic Council's Global Energy Center, to share with us some of his diplomatic and strategic expertise regarding Georgia's recent elections.

"President Zurabishvili's statements about the election having been fraudulent and manipulated through various Russian tricks is a powerful one. She's really going out on a limb like never before, and pushing herself even further away from Georgian Dream," he notes. "Clearly, there have been all sorts of strange and unfair practices going on, not only in the pre-election media campaigns, but as seen in reports of intimidation of voters, particularly in rural areas, but also in urban areas. An investigation needs to happen to figure out how much of that increase of 20% or more in Georgian Dream's electorate is real."

"I just find it depressing that Georgia is not in a better place. That this is the trajectory it's been on. During the time I was serving President Bush, we really did believe that Georgia was going to be crucial to the whole broader Middle East effort, even though Georgia is merely adjacent to it, for setting an example for how you transform your country into a market economic democracy. It's so disappointing."

DID THE US AND EUROPE HANDLE ALL OF THIS AS WELL AS IT SHOULD OR COULD HAVE?

The US and Europe are not responsible for Georgia. Georgians are responsible for Georgia. Ultimately, we're observers and supporters on the outside, and we deeply, sincerely believe that all of the US's strategic interests in the region, which aren't that extensive, are best met if Georgia is a democracy, a successful one, because a strong democracy prevents friends of Moscow, like the ones that are increasingly dominating in Georgia, to skew the rules and to allow Russian influence to expand, which is a temptation for Putin. That's why it's the responsibility of Georgia's opposition to unify and to fight. And it still seems unable to do that, which is frustrating. But what can the US do? Send troops to Tbilisi? No.

WHAT ABOUT SANCTIONS?

Could be. You have to wait and see, as the US side has said, what is ultimately explained or how it's explained, how Georgian Dream's electorate expanded beyond 50%. There could definitely be sanctions if it's determined that the election results were not fairly tabulated, but at the end of the day, it seems like the reflex of Georgian politicians is to look outside for solutions to their problems. Inside is the only place to do that. The United States really believes, at least in this day and age, in not interfering directly in an election or in the politics of a country. But we want to support democratic evolution. From Putin's perspective, by supporting



In President Bush's time, we believed Georgia would be crucial to the whole broader Middle East. How depressing that Georgia is not in a better place today



Matthew Bryza. Source: apa.az

democracy, we're undermining Russia's interests. But that's the way to go.

CAN GD USE THIS ELECTION TO GAIN LEGITIMACY AND CONTINUE MOVING IN THE DIRECTION THAT WE'VE BEEN MOVING, AS, SO THEY CLAIM, "IT'S THE SOVEREIGN WILL OF THE GEORGIAN PEOPLE"?

That argument is fair enough as long as the election is an honest one, right? And in the Georgian system, it's conceivable that a 35% majority could become a ruling minority coalition. That happens in many, many countries. But when you've got President Zurabishvili so openly saying "I do not recognize these results as legitimate," and she's getting enormous media coverage in the US and throughout Europe, that makes it very difficult for Georgian Dream to claim this was a legitimate victory. I mean, she has a lot of authority. I realize she seemed a bit tainted when she became Georgian Dream's presidential candidate, but that makes her current messaging maybe even more credible.

Also, beneath the surface of your question, there's an assumption that I agree with, that, over time, people will lose interest and Georgian Dream will be left on the playing field to push the system in the direction it wishes, which, again, goes back to the same point: it is in the hands of the Georgian people, not necessarily through street demonstrations, it would be best if via parliament and through elections, if you're unified in the opposition. But I also take the point that if the rules are stacked against the opposition, well, it's hard to succeed in an election and in parliament, if they were to go into it.

CAN YOU SEE IVANISHVILI CUTTING A DEAL WITH THE WEST, ESPECIALLY WITH THE US, IF NOT TO TURN A BLIND EYE, THEN AT LEAST TO TAKE IT AS-IS, IN FEAR OF EVEN WORSE ALTERNATIVES?

I don't know. Right now, for the first time in a Georgian election, I'm hearing global news networks deeming Georgian Dream a "pro-Russian party." And that's because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. People are finally waking up to understand what Russia's goals are in the broader region. In the short term, it'll be hard for Ivanishvili to do that, but in the longer term, it's possible.

What I always ask myself is, why did he bother to come back to Georgia? What's driving him? You could say it's fame and fortune and political ambition, but he himself left politics. He's behind the scenes, although everybody knows he's the most powerful person. Why take on all this hassle and all this exposure? Why not just live your life with your billions and be happy? So I don't really understand what's driving him. I don't think it's that he's simply a Russian puppet or for that new, shady law that allows funds, without much examination, to be transferred back into Georgia. I just don't understand his motivation. It could be that he's tied to

some oligarchs, and so many of them have that exact vision. They want to be the visionary statesman. They want to leave a legacy in history. But I don't know. I've only met Ivanishvili once, and I have no real feel for him personally.

THE EU SAYS IT'S OUT OF THE QUESTION THAT THERE WILL BE ANY SORT OF POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT WHEN IT COMES TO EU INTEGRATION. PRIME MINISTER IRAKLI KOBAKHIDZE, THOUGH, DOES NOT SEEM TO SHARE THAT NOTION.

One caveat to that, of course, is that the presidency of the European Union recognized the election and showed up. Orban is Vladimir Putin's best friend in the EU, of course. I don't think Kobakhidze is lying [when he says EU integration is a priority for them], but it's dishonest. It's shrewd politicking. There's a paradox in that even if Georgian Dream only received 35% of the vote, let's say it got up to 40, that 80% of Georgians want to be in the European Union, and NATO for that matter. So what accounts for that huge difference between the 35% of Georgian Dream supporters and 80% of all Georgians? That leaves 45% of Georgians who don't support Georgian Dream and want to get into the EU.

I think the answer is the way Georgian Dream ran the campaign. They keep on paying lip service to how they want to get into the European Union. They terrify Georgians with those images of destroyed Ukraine and tranquil Georgia, but at the same time continue to take these steps that the EU rejects, knowing that they get political cover at home by saying, "we want Georgia = to be in the EU eventually." And who knows, maybe they do eventually want Georgia to be in the EU, but certainly not now, or they wouldn't be behaving in this way. It certainly won't happen during their tenure.



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Photo: Paytm

Annual Inflation Rate Reaches 0.3% in October

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

The Consumer Price Index increased by 0.3% in October 2024 compared to the previous month, marking it as the annual inflation rate, the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat) reports, with core inflation rising by 1.2%.

The categories most severely affected by the inflation rate are as follows:

Restaurants and Hotels: Prices, primarily driven by accommodation and cater-

ing services, rose by 7.6%, with a 0.26 percentage point contribution to the overall inflation rate. Each contributing sector saw increases of 10.4% and 6.8%, respectively.

Education: The sector underwent a 5.0% price increase, contributing 0.25 percentage points to the overall inflation rate.

Other Services and Products: Prices in this category experienced an increase of 5.8%, contributing 0.3 percentage points to the overall inflation rate. Primary areas of influence were personal effects, with 24.5%, and insurance, at 12.9%.

Edelweiss to Launch Direct Zurich-Tbilisi Flights in April 2025



BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

The Swiss Embassy in Tbilisi announced that Swiss airline Edelweiss will commence direct scheduled flights between Tbilisi and Zurich from April 12, 2025.

The new route provides passengers a convenient traveling option, with direct connection between Georgia and Switzerland.

The embassy shared the news through social media and encouraged interested individuals to seek detailed information on company's website. The development will not only enhance tourism but also enhance cultural and economic ties between two countries.

Borjomi Wins Zenith Global Water Drinks Awards 2024

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

Borjomi was titled Best Drink in Can Packaging at the 2024 Zenith Global Water Drinks Awards in Frankfurt, which took place during the 21st International Water Congress, with 15 winners chosen from 120 contenders, marking the brand's third win at the event. The new can packaging of Borjomi will be launched in Georgia shortly.

Zenith Global, a prominent company assessing beverage products with 30 years' experience, recognized the merits of Borjomi alongside brands such as Coca-Cola, Danone, and Icelandic Glacial Water.



Zestaponi Ferroalloy Plant, Chiatura Management Company Halt Operations Due to "Difficult Economic Situation"



BY TEAM GT

Zestaponi Ferroalloy Plant and Chiatura Management Company of Georgian Manganese, a producer and exporter of ferroalloys and manganese ore, have suspended operations until March 1 following a "significant decline" in silicomanganese prices on the global market and decreased demand over the

past two years.

In a statement published on social media, Georgian Manganese linked the complete stoppage of the production process in Chiatura to the "radical protest" of the residents of the village of Shukruti.

Georgian Manganese cited "difficulties" for Chiatura Management Company in supplying ore "due to picketing by local residents", which it said had "paralyzed seven out of twelve mines" in the western town.

The Plant will enter temporary management, with production capacities "completely shut down" and ferroalloy production halted, Georgian Manganese said, adding employees would be paid 60% of their salary during the period and "maintain their full insurance benefits."

The company added that management "remains hopeful for an improvement" in global market conditions, which it said would allow for an earlier resumption of operations.



Plant Based Treaty-Georgia activists

Daily and Magniti Merge to Form Georgia's Largest Supermarket Group

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

Zedzeni Group, known for its beverage production on both domestic and international markets with beers and non-alcoholic drinks, has joined forces with Daily Group to

establish Georgia's largest supermarket by combining their strengths in retail and beverage production. The group holds 30% of the country's retail market with over 1,600 stores nationwide, running brands like Daily, Ioli, Kalata, Spar, and Magniti.

This new establishment significantly contributes to Georgia's retail sector with its expansion and product range.

Andro Chichinadze's Heroic Western Crusade of Healing and Helping

BLOG NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

He's barely over 28, and the guy has already gone through numerous vicissitudes of life, one of them having a huge bearing on his shining personality. He is ready to ask, and it will be given to him; he is desiring to seek, and he will find; he is determined to knock, and the door will be opened to him. Andro Chichinadze of Tbilisi, Georgia, is a professional actor with a special theatrical education and the specific qualification of cinematographer. As he puts it, films have been his lifelong passion, but how truly smart of him to have revisited the theater stage in the strong belief that theater would contribute tremendously to his cinematic future. In his own words, a moment of sudden and great revelation visited him to help him make this brilliant decision to put together these two differing and mutually complementing ways of artistic storytelling.

As fate would have it, three years ago, Andro received a very serious injury from a deafening explosion at a shooting ground, which left him in a state of disconnect with reality, generating an overwhelming sense of existence in a surreal milieu. Using medical terms, one could describe the resultant condition as derealization mingled with depersonalization. The trauma seemed enormous, the disorder grave, and the challenge almost insurmountable.

Psychologically speaking, the disorder had to be handled professionally and without delay. The athletically built,



Andro Chichinadze. Source: filmmakers.eu

handsome young man, with the looks of a typical Western frontiersman, found himself on the brink of giving up on his beloved trade of movie-making in order to take care of his health and functionality. All was done in good faith and sequence. The gradual recovery moved on its way, and, little by little, the boy returned to his habitual way of life.

Yet something was still wrong with the mind. And this is exactly when it all started. Believe it or not, Andro Chichinadze found relief in the mountains! Says

he: "The high-altitude environment offered me a unique refuge and perspective, serving as a very important component of my healing process. The serenity in nature helped me reconnect with myself and regain my sense of clarity, which had been elusive to me for such a long time." Amazing, isn't it? And the continuation of the story is even more exciting.

The experience was outstanding in terms of its transformative character, and, as a result, Chichinadze made up

his mind to venture into the morally elevated and physically challenging mission of climbing seven mountain peaks, including Everest, Kilimanjaro and Elbrus, and, based on the acquired experience, to create a documentary, recording the details of his heavenly expedition. The preliminary title of the future documentary is "The Journey of Transformation", the "transformation" being that the extensive and venturesome crusade turned into prevailing evidence of resilience and self-discovery, attesting to the

hope for renovation even at the harshest moments of losing the will to live.

Why a film? Because the film would provide the best language of communication between the healing power Chichinadze had discovered and the patients who are compelled to fight the same disorder he suffered. Andro couldn't have found a stronger source of hope or a sharper means of inspiration for his fellow humans. He says he believes that recovery is right behind the closest curve thanks to the magic the mountains exude. Yes, the spectacular mountains, his incredible supporter in the virtuous deeds of this Georgian Good Samaritan.

Andro says that, as an actor, he understands the importance of storytelling, and its power to encourage the interconnection between people and their mutual empathy. By sharing his journey, he hopes to encourage others to seek for their own remedial ways to convalescence, and to remind them that they are not in heart-breaking solitude in their tenacious fight for life. How very Western!

I remember the renowned western journalist, America's true darling Katie Couric's heroic struggle to rescue her husband from a lethal disease. After he had succumbed to colon cancer, his courageous wife vehemently propagated the idea of timely colon checkup, thus alerting others all over the world towards the cunning ailment. Andro Chichinadze is exactly the same kind of a warrior for saving human lives, the only difference between him and Katie being their dwelling place. This model of behavior definitely makes Sakartvelo an organic part of Western culture. Hurrah to this wonderful similarity between us and the West!

A Treasure Stash

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

I remember once, when I was about 30 years old, adding the number of houses or apartments I had lived in to that point. My father had been a mechanical engineer, working on power plant construction and rising to the level of site manager. When a project was finished, we would move as a family to a new location. This was my life in the UK, eastern Canada, Rhodesia, central and western Canada, before I set off on my own travels. So it was 30 homes in as many years, a 1 to 1 ratio. I added several more countries of "residence for 6 months or longer" to the original three, then finally got married in Georgia and began to settle down. Now, thankfully, the frequency of our moves has decreased drastically. Enough was enough, especially with my no longer

being single or as young.

While moving has been a part of my whole life, and thus not a huge stress for me, some things do emerge for scrutiny. One is that I'm a hoarder, a collector by nature, perhaps in attempts to add continuity to my life across whole continents. I do also throw things away which have served their purpose or become technically redundant, such as those bags and bags of old computer cables which no longer connect anything to anything else. Old clothes I haven't worn for some years. Even physical books (at least those which I am able to replace with electronic versions!). Eventually, the detritus adds up, and my wife urges a purge. I concur.

One of the things I have succeeded in gathering, even now into one place, is most of my writings. These go back to two short stories I wrote when I was 7 and 9 years old, in Rhodesia, heavily leaning on what I had read to that point, but also somehow my own to some

degree. I brought these back with me from my last trip to Canada, a couple of months ago. Also, there are decades of notebooks of various size, because I will always be scribbling something down on paper with pen or pencil. Newspaper articles for the Stony Plain Reporter and, later, copies of my first set of pieces for Georgia Today.

There's one notebook I will always treasure, from my late father: a tiny little clip-open binder to which you can add pages of hole-punched paper, the cover made by him and my stepmother of leather after the original one wore out. A slightly larger crocodile-leather blank book I picked up 2nd hand here in Georgia, intending to fill with something valuable or special and as yet waiting its turn. This is the only one which has any real monetary value at this point, little though that may be. Lots of A5 or pocket notebooks, so I'm always ready when inspiration strikes. Notes from my travels, especially the many trips to Svaneti before I moved there in late 2007. Photographic, story idea and fractal programming notes. Phone numbers, shopping lists, to-do lists. A bookmark-flat titanium pen (a Kickstarter project I supported) for convenience, inserted into the current notebook.

I do also make occasional notes in my iPhone, but still prefer the current pocket-size paper notebook, its inside cover always inscribed with my name and email address in case it gets lost. Writer's block seldom seems to affect me, for which I am most glad.

No less prolific and successful a writer than Stephen King, who, in "On Writing", states that there are only two things necessary to become a writer, or to improve as much as one can if one is already a writer of whatever caliber: 1) Read a lot. 2) Write a lot. That's it, the whole list. Since I have been doing these



since my early schooldays, I hope that something will come of my scribbles, my jottings-down. In any case, while I have brains for the task, it's a big part of my life.

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

Tackling Climate Change: Understanding the Causes and How You Can Help

BY KATIE RUTH DAVIES.
SOURCE: COP/UN

As the effects of climate change become increasingly urgent, and with COP29 just days away, it's more important than ever to understand the underlying causes of greenhouse gas emissions. From the energy we use to the food we produce, our daily choices significantly affect the planet's health. In this article, following on from last week's introduction to COP, we're looking at the main contributors to climate change, which include power generation, manufacturing, deforestation, transportation, food production, building energy use, and consumption habits. By shining a light on these factors, we can better appreciate the urgent need for us all to take up sustainable practices and unite for collective action to tackle the climate crisis. Not sure where to start to make your contribution? Read on!

GENERATING POWER

Burning fossil fuels for electricity and heat accounts for a substantial share of global emissions. The majority of electricity is still generated from coal, oil, or gas, releasing carbon dioxide and nitrous oxide - potent greenhouse gases that trap heat in the atmosphere. In contrast, just over a quarter of global electricity is produced from renewable sources like wind and solar, which emit little to no greenhouse gases.

How can I help? Switch off lights and appliances when they are not in use. Use public transport instead of cars whenever possible, and consider carpooling if driving is necessary. Advocate for your city to adopt eco-friendly public transportation and for your government to invest more in renewable energy sources like wind and solar.

At home, use less energy by reducing your heating and cooling use, switching to LED light bulbs and energy-efficient electric appliances, washing your laundry with cold water, or hanging things to dry instead of using a dryer. Improving your home's energy efficiency, through better insulation for instance, or replacing your oil or gas furnace with an electric heat pump can reduce your carbon footprint by up to 900 kilograms of CO₂e per year.

Change your home's source of energy - switch to renewable sources such as wind or solar. Or install solar panels on your roof to generate energy for your home. Switching your home from oil, gas or coal-powered energy to renewable sources of energy, such as wind or solar, can reduce your carbon footprint by up to 1.5 tons of CO₂e per year.

Switch to an electric vehicle - If you plan to buy a car, consider going electric, with more and cheaper models coming on the market. In many countries, electric cars help reduce air pollution and cause significantly fewer greenhouse gas emissions than gas or diesel-powered vehicles. But many electric cars still run on electricity produced from fossil fuels, and the batteries and engines require rare minerals which often come with high environmental and social costs. Switching from a gasoline or diesel-powered car to an electric vehicle can reduce your carbon footprint by up to 2 tons of CO₂e per year. A hybrid vehicle can save you up to 700 kilograms of CO₂e per year.

MANUFACTURING GOODS

The manufacturing and industrial sectors significantly contribute to emissions, primarily through fossil fuel combustion for energy in producing items like cement, steel, electronics, and plastics. Industrial processes, including mining and construction, also emit greenhouse gases, with many manufacturing machines



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running on fossil fuels.

How can I help? When designing or building a new house or home or business project, choose your construction materials thoughtfully. Think about how your materials are transported and try to reduce the environmental impact (dust, waste products, transportation distances) as far as possible.

CUTTING DOWN FORESTS

Deforestation for agriculture, pastureland, and other purposes leads to significant emissions as trees release stored carbon when cut down. Approximately 12 million hectares of forest are lost each year. Forests play a crucial role in absorbing carbon dioxide, and their destruction limits nature's ability to mitigate atmospheric emissions. Together with agricultural and land-use changes, deforestation is responsible for about a quarter of global greenhouse gas emissions.

How can I help? If you or someone you know uses a wood stove to heat the home or cook, aim for a modern eco-friendly wood stove and only burn biomass products as recommended by the Biomass Association of Georgia.

USING TRANSPORTATION

Transportation is a major source of greenhouse gases, primarily due to fossil fuel use in cars, trucks, ships, and planes. Road vehicles contribute the largest share, primarily through gasoline combustion. Emissions from ships and planes are also on the rise, with transportation accounting for nearly a quarter of global energy-related carbon dioxide emissions, and trends indicate a significant increase in energy consumption for transport in the coming years.

How can I help? Walk, bike or take public transport - The world's roadways are clogged with vehicles, most of them burning diesel or gasoline. Walking or riding a bike instead of driving will reduce greenhouse gas emissions -- and help your health and fitness. For longer distances, consider taking a train or bus. And carpool whenever possible. Living car-free can reduce your carbon footprint by up to 2 tons of CO₂e per year compared to a lifestyle using a car.

Consider your travel - Airplanes burn large amounts of fossil fuels, producing significant greenhouse gas emissions. That makes taking fewer flights one of the fastest ways to reduce your environmental impact. When you can, meet virtually, take a train, or skip that long-

distance trip altogether. Taking one less long-haul return flight can reduce your carbon footprint by up to almost 2 tons of CO₂e.

PRODUCING FOOD

Food production generates emissions from various sources, including deforestation, land clearing for agriculture, and methane emissions from livestock. The use of fertilizers and manure also contributes to greenhouse gases, alongside the energy required for farming equipment and fishing boats, often powered by fossil fuels. Additionally, emissions arise from food packaging and distribution, making food production a significant factor in climate change.

How can I help? Eat more vegetables! Eating more vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds, and less meat and dairy, can significantly lower your environmental impact. Producing plant-based foods generally results in fewer greenhouse gas emissions and requires less energy, land, and water. Shifting from a mixed to a vegetarian diet can reduce your carbon footprint by up to 500 kilograms of CO₂e per year (or up to 900 kilograms for a vegan diet).

CONSUMING TOO MUCH

Our consumption patterns, how we use energy, travel, eat, and dispose of waste, contribute significantly to greenhouse gas emissions. Household consumption of goods such as clothing, electronics, and plastics accounts for a substantial portion of global emissions. The wealthiest individuals carry the greatest responsibility; the richest 1% of the global population is responsible for more greenhouse gas emissions than the poorest 50%.

How can I help? Reduce, reuse, repair and recycle! Electronics, clothes, plastics and other items we buy cause carbon emissions at each point in production, from the extraction of raw materials to manufacturing and transporting goods to market. To protect the climate, buy fewer things, shop second-hand, and repair what you can. Plastics alone generated 1.8 billion metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions in 2019, 3.4% of the global total. Less than 10% is recycled, and once plastic is discarded, it can linger for hundreds of years. Buying fewer new clothes, and other consumer goods, can also reduce your carbon footprint. Every kilogram of textiles produced generates about 17 kilograms of CO₂e.

Clean up your environment - Humans,

animals and plants all suffer from land and water contaminated by improperly discarded garbage. Use what you need, and when you have to throw something out, dispose of it properly. Educate others to do the same, and participate in local clean-ups of parks, rivers, beaches and beyond. Every year, people throw out 2 billion tons of trash. About a third causes environment harms, from choking water supplies to poisoning soil.

THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE: A GROWING CRISIS

As greenhouse gas concentrations rise, global surface temperatures also increase. The last decade (2011-2020) has been the warmest on record, with each successive decade since the 1980s being warmer than the last. Hotter temperatures lead to more heat-related illnesses and create conditions for wildfires. Severe storms are becoming more intense and frequent, while climate change alters water availability, increasing droughts and threatening food production.

WARMING OCEANS AND LOSS OF SPECIES

The ocean absorbs most of the heat from global warming, with rates of warming significantly increasing over the past two decades. Rising sea levels threaten coastal communities, while ocean acidification endangers marine life. Climate change poses risks to the survival of species on land and in the ocean, with extinction rates increasing rapidly.

How can I help? Support organizations focused on ocean conservation and participate in local clean-up efforts to protect marine environments.

FOOD INSECURITY AND HEALTH RISKS

Extreme weather and climate changes contribute to a global rise in hunger and poor nutrition, threatening fisheries, crops, and livestock. Additionally, climate change leads to health issues, including respiratory problems and mental health challenges.

How can I help? Volunteer with local food banks or community gardens to support food security initiatives and raise awareness about sustainable food practices.

Plant native species - If you have a garden or even just a plant or two outside your home, check for native species. Use a plant identification app to help. And then think about replacing non-natives, especially any considered invasive. Plants, animals and insects depend on each other. Most insects will not eat non-native plants, which means birds and other species lose a food source. Biodiversity suffers. Even a single tree or shrub can offer a refuge - just remember to skip insecticides and other chemicals.

Throw away less food - When you throw food away, you're also wasting the resources and energy that were used to grow, produce, package, and transport it. And when food rots in a landfill, it produces methane, a powerful greenhouse gas. So purchase only what you need, use what you buy and compost any leftovers. Cutting your food waste can reduce your carbon footprint by up to 300 kilograms of CO₂e per year.

POVERTY AND DISPLACEMENT

Climate change exacerbates poverty, displacing millions each year due to weather-related events. Vulnerable communities are often the most affected, with many refugees originating from countries least equipped to adapt to climate change impacts. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for fostering sustainable solutions that protect both the planet and its people.

How can I help? Advocate for climate justice and support policies that protect vulnerable populations.

CONCLUSION

By making mindful choices in our daily

lives, we can all contribute to fighting climate change and preserving the planet for future generations. Every action, no matter how small, matters. Together, we can build a more sustainable world. Remember, your efforts do make a difference.

Our spending habits have a direct impact on the environment. You have the power to choose the products and services you support. To reduce your carbon footprint, favor companies that prioritize responsible resource use and are committed to cutting emissions and waste. If your savings are being invested, whether through a pension fund or other investments, they could be supporting industries like fossil fuels or deforestation. Ensuring your money is invested in sustainable businesses can significantly reduce your environmental impact.

Take action and encourage others to do the same. It's one of the fastest and most effective ways to make a difference. Talk to your neighbors, colleagues, friends, and family. Let business owners know you support bold actions, like plastic-free products, sustainable packaging, and zero-emissions vehicles. Every conversation can spark change.

Appeal to local and world leaders to act now. Climate action concerns all of us. No one can do it all alone - but we can do it together.

THE CASE FOR CUTTING ANIMAL AGRICULTURE AS A MEANS FOR CLIMATE CONTROL

For the past 27 years, the United Nations Climate Change Conference managed to ignore the cow in the room. Last year, at COP28 in Dubai, UAE, things started to change, albeit not necessarily in a good way. Despite food systems accounting for a third of global greenhouse gas emissions, the discussion around this topic has only just begun. Even if we decide to keep fossil fuels in the ground from now on, the emissions from the food system alone will still take us beyond the 1.5 degrees Celsius global temperature rise limit of the Paris Agreement. With the science being clear, the animal agriculture industries can no longer hide the cow in the room, so they are resorting to either downplaying their impact on the climate or, worse, portraying the cow as a climate solution hero.

"But we won't achieve the Paris Agreement's goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees unless we prioritize tree planting, and eliminating animal agriculture should be our final step!" This paraphrased comment from a recent Plant Based Treaty Georgia workshop raises important points. Animal agriculture is the largest single source of human-caused methane emissions, a gas about 80 times more potent than CO₂ but with a much shorter atmospheric lifespan of around 12 years. 36% of anthropogenic methane emissions come from farmed animals, making it the single largest source of this greenhouse gas. Thus, cutting methane emissions is our most effective—and perhaps only—chance to stay below a 1.5°C increase. If we stopped farming animals for food, we could free up 75% of agricultural land for restoration, including tree planting, which takes decades to mature.

Some animal farmers argue that the same land can't be repurposed for human-edible crops, but this is case-specific and often serves as an excuse. Even if it were true, that land could simply be rewilded instead of used for animal farming, highlighting a mindset that commodifies nature. When planting trees, it's crucial to use native species to support local ecosystems. Similarly, cultivating a diverse range of plant foods is essential for maintaining healthy soils and a resilient food system, rather than relying on monocropping, which leaves us vulnerable to disease outbreaks.

Asylos and Rainbow Migration: UK Should Remove Georgia from 'Safe' List in Light of new LGBTQI+ Law

BY TEAM GT

Following Georgia's contested elections, from which the Georgian Dream party claimed victory, concerns will only deepen over the deteriorating situation for LGBTQI+ people in the country, Rainbow Migration representatives stated this week.

"In the run-up to the election, the Georgian Dream party ran an explicitly anti-LGBTQI+ campaign that sought to instrumentalize homophobia for political gain, particularly through the introduction of new repressive legislation that severely restricts the rights of LGBTQI+ people," they write.

The legislative package on the Protection of Family Values and Minors was adopted by the Georgian parliament on 17th September, and signed into law by the Georgian parliament's speaker Shalva



Papushvili of the Georgian Dream party on 3rd October, after Georgia's President refused to do so.

In the UK, concerns have been mounting over the inclusion of Georgia on the list of 'safe' countries, from where protection and human rights claims will be declared automatically inadmissible in all but exceptional circumstances. The previous Conservative government added

Georgia and India to its 'safe' states list in April 2024, despite widespread evidence of rights violations against minorities in both countries, an issue raised by Lords during scrutiny on the regulations.

"There's mounting evidence of the danger that LGBTQI+ people face in Georgia, and the situation has only worsened in recent months," said Minesh Parekh, Policy and Public Affairs Manager for Rainbow Migration. "We urge the new government to remove Georgia from the list of 'safe' countries where it can return people to, and to signal to the world that it will not tolerate anti-LGBT hate."

In November 2023, the UK government announced that draft regulations were being laid to add Georgia – along with India – to the list of 'Safe States' under section 80AA of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 (as amended by section 59 of the Illegal Migration Act 2023). In December 2023, the Country

Policy and Information Note: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression, Georgia V1.0 was published, and on 17th April 2024, Georgia – along with India – was added to the list of countries from where protection and human rights claims will be declared automatically inadmissible, in all but exceptional circumstances. This change was made through statutory instrument; the new statutory instrument could impact claims made on or after the date that section 6 of the Illegal Migration Act (IMA) comes into force and before section 59 is in force, as well as those claims made after section 59 of the IMA is fully in force.

The UK House of Lords Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee, as well as civil society organizations in the UK and internationally, have expressed serious concern at the addition of Georgia to 'safe states' lists, highlighting that it raises the risk that individuals with well-founded claims may be sent back to ill-

treatment or persecution.

A recent commentary issued by Asylos and Rainbow Migration, alongside research report by Asylos covering the situation of LGBTQI+ people in Georgia, reveals the incoherence of considering Georgia to be a 'safe' state within the international protection content, highlighting that the Home Office's Country Policy and Information Note:

Failed to fully acknowledge the normalized role of hostile rhetoric by public officials in encouraging societal violence towards LGBTQI+ people, not only 'occasionally' or in the context of Pride events, but in everyday life.

Minimized information pointing to the existence of entrenched negative societal attitudes and violence towards LGBTQI+ people.

Failed to fully take account of information demonstrating repeated serious failures in the Georgian authorities' ability to protect LGBTQI+ persons and hold perpetrators of violence to account.

CULTURE

Venetian Echoes in Tbilisi: Davide Amadio and the Georgian Sinfonietta Revive the Baroque Era

BY IVAN NECHAEV

The Rustaveli National Theater's Small Stage became a portal to another world on November 1, where renowned Venetian cellist Davide Amadio and the Georgian Sinfonietta unveiled the timeless elegance of Venetian Baroque music. This concert, titled 'Venetian Baroque', opened the 10th Tbilisi Baroque Festival, a milestone event supported by the Italian Embassy and the Shota Rustaveli State Drama Theater. Presented on period instruments, this evening showcased music by some of the Venetian masters; Albinoni, Platti, Galuppi, Vivaldi, Tartini, and Marcello, imbuing the Tbilisi air with echoes from the canals of Venice.

UNFOLDING VENETIAN ELEGANCE: A THOUGHTFUL PROGRAM

Venetian Baroque music, with its refined expressiveness and meticulous structuring, captures a world of contrasts: the grandeur of Venice's opulence, tempered by its contemplative introspection. This curated concert offered a journey through the most evocative works of the era, beginning with Albinoni's *Sinfonia a Cinque*, and concluding with Vivaldi's stirring *Cello Concerto in D minor*. The program traced an arc from restrained lyricism to more dramatic gestures, each piece selected to reveal the nuanced world of Venetian Baroque.

Opening with Tomaso Albinoni's *Sinfonia a Cinque* provided a smooth entry point, gently inviting the audience into the stylistic contours of the evening. The piece's transparent harmonies set the stage, allowing the following compositions, particularly Platti's *Cello Concerto in D major*, to delve deeper into the emotional core of the Baroque repertoire. The carefully chosen pieces not only displayed Venetian musical aesthetics, but also built a balanced narrative that shifted from lively orchestration to the more introspective tones of Tartini and Marcello.

DAVIDE AMADIO: A STUDY IN ARTISTRY AND CHARISMA

Davide Amadio's appearance was perhaps the evening's defining element, bringing a unique artistic gravity to the Tbilisi stage. Amadio's reputation as a cellist extends from his technical precision to a deeply nuanced interpretation,

and both were in full force during this performance. His rendition of Platti's *Cello Concerto in D major* offered a subtle balance of strength and lyricism, particularly evident in the *Allegro* sections, where he conveyed both lightness and intensity. In the *Adagio*, Amadio's playing seemed almost confessional, capturing an intimacy that reflects the introspective tendencies within Baroque music's grandeur.

Amadio's interpretations of Vivaldi's *Cello Concerto in C major* and *D minor* were equally telling. The rapid passages of the *C major Concerto's Allegro* illustrated his agility and control, a contrast to the restrained beauty he brought to the *Andante* movement of the *D minor Concerto*. Here, Amadio uncovered Vivaldi's talent for integrating lyrical fragility with structural complexity, reminding the audience of Baroque's layered subtlety. His performance went beyond virtuosity; it seemed to reanimate the historical and emotional landscape of Venetian music itself.

GEORGIAN SINFONIETTA: A REFINED ENSEMBLE WITH INTERPRETATIVE DEPTH

Amadio's performance would not have reached its full resonance without the Georgian Sinfonietta's supportive, refined accompaniment. As Tbilisi's premier chamber orchestra, the Sinfonietta's engagement with Baroque repertoire is characterized by attentiveness and clarity, qualities that were essential for this concert's success. Accompanied by Giorgi Kuzanashvili, who alternated between theorbo and Baroque guitar, the ensemble navigated the concert's transitions, from the buoyancy of Albinoni's *Sinfonia a cinque* to the solemnity of Tartini's *Cello Concerto in A major*, with a unified yet dynamically responsive approach.

The Sinfonietta's collaboration with Amadio found its most compelling expression in Galuppi's *Concerto a Quattro in c minor*, a piece that shifts between a sober *Grave* and an animated *Allegro*. In the Georgian Sinfonietta's hands, Galuppi's characteristic balance between shadow and light was fully articulated, their precise handling of rhythmic patterns enhancing the harmonic tensions at the heart of the piece. The orchestra's work in Marcello's *Concerto Grosso in e minor* provided another example of interpretative insight, with the ensemble's restrained handling of the *Minuetto* underscoring Marcello's intent to contrast joy and solemnity.



Photo by the author

PERIOD INSTRUMENTS: A WINDOW INTO BAROQUE SOUNDSCAPES

The choice of period instruments for the concert lent the evening an added dimension, layering the performance with the rich textures of historical sound. The natural resonance of gut strings, softer attack of Baroque bows, and tempered tuning enhanced the nuanced tonal world of Venetian Baroque. This approach was most evident in the lower-register passages, where the orchestral strings—tuned in historical pitch—echoed with a warmth and depth modern instruments often miss. Amadio's cello in particular offered a more vocal quality, its sound fluctuating between mellow softness and intense vibrato, further intensifying the pieces' emotional range.

This authenticity was especially effective in Marcello's *Concerto Grosso in e minor*, where the Sinfonietta's interplay of timbre and texture amplified the work's layered counterpoint. The historical tuning and period technique brought out an organic quality in the harmonic shifts, allowing the orchestra to maintain Marcello's intricate balance between power and finesse. This use of historical instrumentation was not a mere nod to tradition; it was a meticulously calculated choice that connected modern listeners

with the Baroque era's authentic soundscapes.

TBILISI AS A CULTURAL CROSSROADS: REFLECTIONS ON A DECADE OF BAROQUE IN TBILISI

This concert wasn't only about the music; it was a cultural bridge, linking Georgian and Italian musical heritage. By inviting Venetian musicians to showcase the city's Baroque compositions, the Tbilisi Baroque Festival highlighted Tbilisi's expanding engagement with European early music traditions. With the arrival of acclaimed artists like Jean Rondeau, Andreas Scholl, Sergio Azzolini, and Jordi Savall later in the festival, Tbilisi continues to position itself as an emerging center for historically informed performance; a discipline gaining significant traction in today's global music community.

Now in its 10th year, the Tbilisi Baroque Festival has grown from a niche interest to a mainstay in the city's cultural calendar, attracting renowned musicians and dedicated audiences. This anniversary concert, featuring a distinguished performer like Davide Amadio, underscored the festival's mission to reconnect contemporary listeners with the expressive depth of early music. By embracing Venetian Baroque, the festival reminded

Tbilisi audiences of the universality of Baroque's emotional landscape—a reminder that, regardless of time or place, the themes of longing, introspection, and joy resonate across centuries.

Davide Amadio and the Georgian Sinfonietta offered a contemplative yet powerful evening, embodying Venetian Baroque's complexity and allure. Through a carefully crafted program and authentic instrumentation, the concert achieved more than technical excellence; it conveyed the multifaceted spirit of an era. Each composition, from the stately elegance of Albinoni to the introspective counterpoints of Marcello, served as an invitation to explore the vast emotional terrain of Venetian music.

In an increasingly digital and fast-paced world, this kind of performance, which celebrates patience, historical authenticity, and nuanced artistry, is more vital than ever. As Tbilisi continues to cultivate its place on the global cultural map, the Tbilisi Baroque Festival stands as both a testament to the city's rich artistic vision and a celebration of the enduring relevance of Baroque music. This concert, punctuated by Amadio's introspective virtuosity and the Sinfonietta's textured playing, set a fitting tone for the festival's next decade; a future where music transcends both time and borders.

From Humble Beginnings to Global Recognition: The Evolution of the Georgian International Festival of Arts

BY SHELBI R. ANKIEWICZ

Conceptualized 27 years ago in Edinburgh, the Georgian International Festival of Arts in Tbilisi (GIFT) was born and has stayed strong throughout years of change to offer a platform for Georgian artists and countless performers worldwide.

Keti Dolidze is the artistic director of GIFT, as well as a theater and film director, and an occasional actress. She tells *GEORGIA TODAY* how, during the 1980s and 90s, the Tumanishvili Film Actors Theater was very popular for performances; however, since those were Soviet times, it was difficult for her and others to travel to theaters or performance centers outside of the country unless they had direct permission from Moscow. This is when Peter Brook, the founder of GIFT, decided that a festival needed to be held in Tbilisi, so others would come to them rather than Georgians having to travel.

In 1988, the Tumanishvili Film Actors Theater staged *Don Juan*, based on Lord Byron's work, at the Edinburgh Festival, where Peter Brook was in attendance. Dolidze recalls that he was deeply impressed by the production and spoke about it to others. This marked the beginning of a growing interest in Georgian arts, with Brook and prominent figures like British actress and activist Vanessa Redgrave becoming increasingly captivated by the country's creative scene.

The first year of the festival, in 1997, was held without any fees or honorariums. The only organized aspects were the flight to Georgia and transportation

during the festival, which were provided free of charge by an Iranian taxi company offering a 24-hour service.

"In '97, a rather old Georgian plane was organized by Georgian Airways," Dolidze tells us. "To this day, I'm very thankful to them, and also sorry," she adds with a laugh. "Around 220 people from 18 countries gathered at Stansted Airport and flew straight to Tbilisi. They arrived in a city facing electricity shortages, with no gas and no heating, and spent two weeks there."

At that time, Tbilisi had only one hotel, the Sheraton, but due to costs, the organizers couldn't accommodate all the guests there. As a result, nearly every visitor stayed with local families in private homes. Dolidze also recalls the festival's opening year, when a large march took place from Freedom Square to the Philharmonic Hall, with all festival participants and locals joining in.

She notes that the festival was one of the first of its kind in the region; something truly unique that brought so many people together. It set the stage for similar festivals to appear later in Azerbaijan and Armenia.

"It was an incredible celebration," Dolidze says. "And that happened because of the uniqueness of Georgian culture. Georgian film, Georgian theater: they are proof of the excellence of Georgian art. That's how it began and how it continued."

The festival is named in honor of Georgian Director Mikheil Tumanishvili. Dolidze describes him as one of the best reformers and greatest directors of Georgian theater. Born in 1935, Tumanishvili became popular during the 1950s and 60s, while he was working at Rustaveli Theater. He directed several productions



Pictured left to right: Keti Dolidze, Artistic Director Ioane (Vano) Khutsishvili from Tumanishvili Film Actors Theater, and Director Gianni Forte from Venice. Source: FB

that gained recognition at international festivals for his work, including his adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Bakula's Pigs*, a classical Georgian play.

In 1968, Dolidze joined Tumanishvili's group, and they quickly became inseparable, with him serving as her mentor and teacher. When Tumanishvili left the Rustaveli Theater, the Film Actors Theater was established in his name. Later, due to his profound influence in the field and his close relationship with Dolidze, the festival was also named in his honor.

The festival takes place over several days, this year running from November 3 to 15. It features various performances

across multiple theaters in Tbilisi, showcasing both international and Georgian adaptations. The 2024 festival includes performances such as *Oedipus Rex* by Declan Donnellan, who was awarded this year's Mikheil Tumanishvili Prize for Excellence in Art, *Phaedra: From Euripides to Racine*, from Seneca to Sarah Kane by the Shota Rustaveli State University of Theater and Film, *Lapis Lazuli* by Euripides Laskaridis, and more.

This year the festival is also welcoming a partnership with Venice Biennale College and the Italian Embassy. A competition will take place for the Biennale College, a two-year program for young artists. Emerging creatives will have the

chance to present 10-minute previews of their work, in whichever form they desire, and the selected group will develop and showcase their projects at GIFT and in Venice. Dolidze says that if all goes well, this is an initiative that will continue with future festivals.

In recent years, Dolidze notes, the festival's budget has been shrinking. With only a few sponsors able to contribute to its sustainability, she says, "Unfortunately, we are still dependent on the government." To ensure the festival's continued success, she is working closely with Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze to secure the necessary funding each year. Dolidze also expresses hope that the new Minister of Culture will be supportive of the 27-year-old festival.

Mikheil Tumanishvili once said: "The language of the theater has become more complex. New means, solutions, techniques and forms are needed. Anyone, especially the young, should be given the opportunity to courageously take the hard road of experimentation. We need to forever remember Stanislavski's words that eternal art is an endless road which requires renovating every 15 or so years."

The only time the festival was put to a halt was for nearly three years during President Mikheil Saakashvili's time in office: Dolidze says her political views differed from his, and because of that, GIFT was shut down, but when Georgian Dream came to power, the festival was revived. Another notable person associated with the festival is William Burdett-Coutts, a key figure of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe and the father of GIFT. Burdett-Coutts, Peter Brook, Vanessa Redgrave, and Sasha Waltz, a German choreographer, all sit on the festival's board of directors.

"The King is Naked!" - Declan Donnellan's *Oedipus Rex* as a Timely Denunciation of Power in Crisis

Continued from page 1

Yet for all its resonance, Donnellan's production raises a provocative question: in an era of real, tangible calls for reform, can theater still break the fourth wall as effectively as the streets themselves?

THE AUDIENCE AS WITNESSES: THE "CROWD SCENE" AS POLITICAL THEATER

Donnellan's choice to make the audience a symbolic part of the crowd assembled by *Oedipus* is a clever, if understated, tool for modern resonance. In *Oedipus Rex*, the king gathers his people to publicly declare that no stone will be left unturned in rooting out the killer of Laius, the former king, whom the gods demand be cast out to end the city's plague. Here, Donnellan's *Oedipus* delivers these declarations with fervor, standing as a charismatic ruler so adamant in his pursuit of justice that he seems almost intoxicated by his own authority. Bruno Noferi's *Oedipus* takes on an air of ecstasy as he promises to root out all corruption, leaving the audience, who know the myth's trajectory, braced for the inevitable and tragic twist.

And yet, by merely casting the audience as witnesses rather than as active participants, Donnellan refrains from creating a truly immersive experience. The setting, with its minimalist design by Nick Ormerod, does not fully transform the audience into a dynamic, protesting mob or coerce them into complicity with the king. Instead, they watch, accomplices in truth, not in action, as *Oedipus*, in his tragic hubris, leads himself toward ruin. Ironically, it is the city's real-life protests, the impassioned cries from Tbilisi's streets, that break the fourth wall more viscerally than this performance ever could.



Photo by the author

A STRIKING ALLEGORY OF CORRUPTION AND DECAY

This *Oedipus Rex* confronts power's ability to corrupt, to deceive itself, and ultimately to cannibalize its own legitimacy. As *Oedipus* takes on the role of his own prosecutor, he implicates himself with every declaration of righteous justice, unknowingly stripping himself bare. The ancient ritual of self-discovery becomes a very public denouncement, and as the truth unfolds, the king, once a towering figure of authority, becomes

exposed as "naked;" guilty of the very crimes he sought to eradicate.

Donnellan's *Oedipus* holds up a promise that resonates uncomfortably with audiences used to political rhetoric: a promise of transparency, a vow to be intolerant of corruption, a declaration of relentless justice. But as the tragedy reaches its inevitable climax, the audience's role as detached witnesses forces them to confront a familiar truth: the grandiose speeches and moralistic declarations often mask deeper failings.

Donnellan's *Oedipus* doesn't bring reform to Thebes; he brings revelation, a moment of terrible clarity where the public sees him for who he truly is. In doing so, *Oedipus Rex* transcends its origins to become a cautionary tale for a world grappling with the failures of authority.

SUBTLE BUT POWERFUL: THE PRODUCTION'S MINIMALIST IMPACT

Donnellan's aesthetic is characterized by his restraint, and here, *Oedipus Rex* unfolds on a bare, almost bleak stage, where shadows and stark lighting create a sense of unease. Without the weight of elaborate sets, the audience is brought face-to-face with Sophocles' text and the raw performances of Donnellan's actors. In this space, every movement, every intonation, holds enormous weight. The set, designed by Ormerod, relies on a powerful simplicity, allowing Sophocles' words, translated by Theodor and Constantin Georgescu, to resonate in their timeless tragedy.

While some may see Donnellan's restrained, almost academic approach as lacking the visceral energy of modern immersive theater, it serves as an effective counterpoint to the performance's potent themes. Rather than pulling the audience into an interactive spectacle, Donnellan's staging leaves them to quietly observe a tragedy that they cannot stop. It's a reminder that the power of classic theater lies in its ability to hold up a mirror to society; not necessarily to immerse us, but to illuminate the hard truths we may prefer to ignore.

BEYOND THE STAGE: THEATER AS POLITICAL RESONANCE

This production of *Oedipus Rex*, supported by the Romanian State Culture Fund, features an outstanding international cast, including Ioana Andone as Jocasta and Petri Stefanescu as Creon.

Each actor channels their character's psychological complexity with Donnellan's signature emphasis on physical expression. The cast's restrained yet intense performances remind audiences that *Oedipus Rex* is more than a story of ancient Greek fate; it is a reflection on human fragility, denial, and the terrible cost of self-deception.

As *Oedipus Rex* plays out on stage, its themes reverberate far beyond the walls of Silk Factory Studio. The parallels between *Oedipus*'s reckless pursuit of justice and the political climate in Tbilisi are striking. As protests continue and the government faces mounting calls for transparency, this play, though restrained in its presentation, resonates with an ironic immediacy. Donnellan's production may not literally break the fourth wall, but its narrative cuts through, reminding audiences that true accountability is often the first casualty in the rise and fall of power.

A MASTERSTROKE OF TIMELINESS

In the end, Declan Donnellan's *Oedipus Rex* stands as a hauntingly relevant commentary on the perils of leadership and the cyclical nature of corruption. By relying on the power of minimalist staging and restrained audience involvement, Donnellan's production speaks to the enduring potency of Sophocles' tragedy in an era of tumultuous political landscapes.

As Tbilisi's GIFT Festival continues, this opening production has made a strong case for the power of classic theater to engage with our most pressing contemporary dilemmas. And in a world where public trust teeters on the brink, *Oedipus Rex* resonates as both a reminder and a warning. Sometimes, theater's greatest contribution is simply to show us, in stark, unvarnished clarity, that "the King is naked."

A Lost Era on the Big Screen: DOCA Film Club Launches New Series of Georgian Documentaries from the 1990s and 2000s

BY IVAN NECHAEV

The DOCA Film Club has unveiled a one-of-a-kind program exploring the world of Georgian documentaries from the 1990s and early 2000s, offering a rare chance to see films that capture Georgia's transition from Soviet republic to independent nation. Taking place at Amirani Cinema every Tuesday at 19:00 until the end of December, the program brings to light works that are almost impossible to find online, many of which have never been shown on the big screen and will be subtitled in English for the first time. Through this series, curators Lika Glurjidze and Luka Bedoshvili invite viewers into the everyday lives, challenges, and hopes of ordinary Georgians during one of the country's most pivotal periods.

A WINDOW INTO THE PAST

This program paints a portrait of Georgia's struggle for stability and identity in a landscape of shifting political realities, economic hardship, and social upheaval. The selected films cover themes of emigration, cultural resilience, and the transformation of Georgian society as it confronted newfound freedom and its accompanying disillusionments. Across the documentaries, filmmakers turn a sharp and empathetic lens on issues that remain deeply relevant today, from women's voices to national identity, from daily survival to the persistence of hope.

The films scheduled to screen through November and December include landmark works such as *Zahesi 708* by Tamuna Karumidze (2001), a meditation on industrial decline; *Women* by Vazha Zubashvili (1990), a probing look at the lives of Georgian women; *The bridge* (2005) and *Altzaney* (2009) by Nino Orjonikidze and Vano Arsenishvili, which explore connections and divides in a country wrestling with newfound independence; and *Power trip* by Paul Devlin (2003), a documentary that investigates Georgia's privatization struggles through the lens of a controversial American utility company.

With its emphasis on films that confront everyday survival, gender roles, the effects of emigration, and economic uncertainty, this program revives an invaluable archive that reflects not only the social reality of its time but also the enduring resilience of Georgian society.

On November 4th, the program's opening night introduced audiences to a curated set of films that delved into the 1990s, a decade marked by upheaval and scarcity. Under the theme 'The Screen that disappeared and Visual Archive, A Window through the Past: A Portrait of life in the 90s', the night's lineup offered a multifaceted portrait of life in a country adapting to radical change, where questions of identity, survival, and collective memory took center stage.

EMPTY SHELVES AND FRAYED NERVES: THE



Photo by the author

SILENT DESPERATION OF ECONOMIC COLLAPSE

In the 10-minute short 'The human and the law' (1991), directed by R. Khuntsozia, G. Rogava, and V. Begoidze, the filmmakers confront viewers with the stark reality of early 1990s economic scarcity. This brief yet impactful work turns the camera on empty grocery counters and endless lines—symbols of both material deprivation and the broader sense of loss felt across society. The human and the law captures an atmosphere of helplessness, offering glimpses of weary faces in queues and shopkeepers grappling with the "possibilities and impossibilities" of selling basic goods. This visual document reflects not just an economic crisis but the spiritual toll it took on a society that had once operated under a centrally planned, albeit constrained, system.

PHILOSOPHY AND LOSS: THE REFLECTIONS OF A NATION THROUGH THE VOICE OF MERAB MAMARDASHVILI

Nikoloz Drozdov's 'The Way Home' offers a starkly different but equally profound window into the 1990s. This 19-minute film captures the last recorded interview of Georgian philosopher Merab Mamardashvili, who shares his meditations on

the identity crisis facing both individuals and the country at large. Filmed just before his death, Mamardashvili's words transcend the immediate political turbulence to reach into universal questions about freedom, morality, and the search for meaning in tumultuous times. His reflections resonate as a kind of philosophical reckoning for the nation, as he contemplates not only the Georgian identity but the values that would define a future outside Soviet confines. In Mamardashvili's words, viewers find a nation searching for its "way home."

HOPE ON WHEELS: YOUTH, SKATEBOARDS, AND THE RESILIENT SPIRIT OF GEORGIA'S NEXT GENERATION

In Omar Gvasalia's 'Meet our children', a different tone emerges—one that celebrates the indomitable spirit of youth. This 24-minute documentary captures candid conversations with teenagers, allowing them to speak freely about their dreams and concerns while scenes of them skateboarding provide moments of carefree joy amid difficult times. Unlike the other films, which frame survival as an endless challenge, *Meet Our Children* hints at hope and transformation, giving a face to the generation that would ultimately come of age in independent

Georgia. Gvasalia's film is a refreshing reminder that, even in the bleakest environments, creativity and joy find ways to surface.

SPORT, IDENTITY, AND INDEPENDENCE: GEORGIA'S FIRST STEPS INTO THE WORLD ARENA

In Alexander Zhgenti's 'Do we need the USSR championship in football?', the familiar passion for sport becomes a lens through which national identity is explored. This 29-minute documentary examines the debate around the USSR football championship as Georgia begins its journey toward independence, showing the first steps in forging a uniquely Georgian identity. Through passionate arguments about the place of football in Georgia's national consciousness, Zhgenti reveals how the sport can serve as a unifying force; an emblem of solidarity and identity amidst the disintegration of political ties. The film captures the complex interplay of tradition and transformation, showing how even cultural pastimes like football became battlegrounds for the heart of a nation.

AN ARCHIVE OF RESILIENCE AND MEMORY

Each documentary showcased on open-

ing night is not only a historical record but a creative act of survival and witness, capturing the texture of life during a time when both individuals and the nation were searching for footing. Curators Glurjidze and Bedoshvili have crafted this series to be more than an academic survey; it is an immersive experience that invites viewers to connect with the stories of those who lived through Georgia's transition. The program is based on extensive research, allowing it to function as both an archival project and an active dialogue with the past.

As viewers attend each Tuesday screening at Amirani Cinema, they step into an immersive act of remembering—a bridge between generations. These films invite not only Georgian but also international audiences to consider how socio-political transitions shape lives, challenge identities, and spark a need for expression.

DOCA Film Club's Georgian documentaries of the 1990s and 2000s series is a profound gesture of cultural reclamation, a curated journey through two decades when filmmakers capture a nation's struggle, resilience, and hope. Through these films, memories once at risk of fading away are brought vividly back to life, asserting their relevance and resonance for today's Georgia and beyond.



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