



Photo by Natela Grigalashvili

FOCUS
ON LIA BAGRATIONI
A Georgian artist catching the mood and shifting rhythms of daily life **PAGE 10**

In this week's issue...

Ukraine Latest: Ukraine Reports 'Massive Attack' on Energy Infrastructure

NEWS PAGE 2

EP Adopts Resolution Calling for New Elections, Sanctions on GD Officials & Judges

POLITICS PAGE 3

GD Nominates Mikheil Kavelashvili as Presidential Candidate

POLITICS PAGE 6

The Black Friday Frenzy Hits Us Too

BUSINESS PAGE 6

YOLO Your Go-To for Corporate Gifting and Team-Building

BUSINESS PAGE 8

COP29: A Step Forward or a Missed Opportunity for Climate Action?

SOCIETY PAGE 9

Reimagining Disability through Film: Stories that Break Barriers and Build Bridges

CULTURE PAGE 9

MEP Malgorzata Gosiewska, One of the Fiercest Critics of Georgian Dream, on What Georgia Should Expect Next

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

The EU High Representative, Josep Borrell, announced the deployment of a "technical mission" to Georgia, aimed at "analyzing the situation on the ground," and investigating reports of electoral fraud and irregularities. The goal is to assess what happened and take appropriate further measures to prevent future violations that disqualify Georgia from EU accession, - Deputy Speaker of the Polish Sejm, MEP Malgorzata Gosiewska, tells Radio Free Europe's Georgian Service, in an interview given prior to the resolution on Georgia being passed. "The European Union wants to keep the door open for Georgia, but it is the government that is closing it by breaking the law, violating fundamental principles, and falsifying elections.

"This is why I strongly advocate for the non-recognition of the election results, a stance also supported by President Salome Zurbishvili. These elections have raised significant concern in Europe, which is why we cannot remain indifferent," she says.



Continued on page 5 MEP Malgorzata Gosiewska. Source: wiadomosci.onet.pl

GALT & TAGGART										
Prepared for Georgia Today Business by										
As of 27-Nov-2024										
Markets					Markets					
BONDS	Price	w/w	m/m	STOCKS	Price	w/w	m/m			
GEORG 04/26	94.90 (YTM 6.85%)	+0.2%	+0.8%	Bank of Georgia (BGEO LN)	GBP 40.05	+7.8%	-2.0%			
GBAIL 04/28	89.18 (YTM 7.54%)	+0.5%	-0.8%	Georgia Capital (GCEO LN)	GBP 10.00	+3.5%	-1.0%			
GEBOG 9 1/2 PERP	99.05 (YTM 5.59%)	-1.0%	+1.0%	TBC Bank Group (TBGG LN)	GBP 27.05	+6.1%	-4.2%			
SILNET 01/27	100.95 (YTM 7.88%)	+0.4%	+0.4%							
TBC 8.894 PERP	96.48 (YTM 11.58%)	+0.5%	+0.3%							
TBC 10 1/4 PERP	100.04 (YTM 10.61%)	+0.8%	+1.3%							
				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							
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%			



Georgia's national rugby team in action. Source: FB

Go Georgia! This Week's Sporting Achievements

BY TEAM GT

Georgia's basketball, taekwondo, and rugby teams all secured resounding victories this week. Let's look at the highlights.

The Georgian National Basketball Team hosted Finland during the EuroBasket 2025 on Sunday, competing in Group G qualifiers alongside Serbia and Denmark, concluding with a victory of 81:64.

The team secured a 17-point victory, highlighted by an exceptional performance from team captain Tornike Shengelia. The rival team's new addition, Kameron Baldwin, contributed 22 points. This triumph improved Georgia's standing in the group.

The next qualifying matches are set to take place in February 2025 against Denmark and Serbia.

Georgia's national Taekwondo team recorded a historic victory in Bosnia and

Herzegovina, competing in the G1 category.

The tournament featured 22 countries, with Zurab Kintsurashvili and Beka Kvantaradze each securing gold medals, while Vitali Gelade won a silver, achievements that place Georgia in the top standing.

The accomplishment marks the first time the Georgian national team has won the gold at a G1-level tournament.

Georgia's national rugby team secured a decisive 22:7 victory against Tonga in their final November test match at the Mikheil Meskhi Stadium, concluding the 2024 season with an impressive finish.

No team scored during the first half, but Sandro Todua made a breakthrough in the second half, with Luka Matkava successfully converting it. Matkava also added three points with a penalty kick. Giorgi Schelidze made a debut for the national team during this match.

Georgia and Tonga have played against each other eight times, with six victories in Georgia's favor.

Georgian Dream Calls off EU Accession Negotiations



PM Kobakhidze. Source: bloomberg

BY TEAM GT

Irakli Kobakhidze announced on Thursday evening that Georgia would be holding off negotiations for accession to the EU until 2028. "We have decided not to raise

the issue of opening negotiations with the EU until the end of 2028," he said. "Additionally, we will decline any budget grants from the European Union until that time. The end of 2028 will mark the point when Georgia will be adequately prepared, economically, to begin negotiations for EU membership in 2030."

Ukraine Latest: Ukraine Reports 'Massive Attack' on Energy Infrastructure



People take shelter inside a metro station in Kyiv during a Russian military attack on Thursday/ REUTERS

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

Russia targeted energy infrastructure in several Ukrainian cities in a "massive" overnight attack using cruise missiles, Ukrainian officials said Thursday morning.

Explosions were heard in the cities of Odesa, Kropyvnytskyi, Kharkiv, Rivne and Lutsk that morning, Ukrainian news outlets Zerkalo Tyzhnya and Suspilne said.

"Energy infrastructure is once again being targeted by the enemy," Ukrainian energy minister Herman Halushchenko said on Facebook.

"The enemy continues to attack Kharkiv with missiles," that city's mayor Ihor Terekhov wrote on the Telegram channel. Odesa regional governor Oleh Kiper urged residents to stay in shelters.

OTHER KEY DEVELOPMENTS ON THE 1,008TH DAY OF THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR ARE AS FOLLOWS:

- Russian forces have taken control of the settlement of Nova Illinka, close to the embattled Donetsk region town of Kurakhove in eastern Ukraine, according to Russia's Ministry of Defense.

- A Russian drone attack on Kyiv has wounded three people, two of whom were hospitalized, officials in the Ukrainian capital said.

- Russia is pressing ahead to put its Sarmat intercontinental ballistic missile – part of its strategic nuclear arsenal – on combat duty, according to state-run news agency TASS.

- Ukraine's air defenses downed 36 of 89 Russian drones launched in attacks overnight Thursday, while Russian air defense systems destroyed 22 Ukrainian drones, both sides reported.

KULEBA: PUTIN 'WON'T ACCEPT ANY TRUMP PEACE DEAL' AS HE IS 'OBSESSED' WITH CRUSHING UKRAINE

Vladimir Putin will not accept a peace deal pushed by US president-elect

Donald Trump, because the Russian president is "obsessed" with "crushing" Ukraine and exposing the weakness of the West, Ukraine's former foreign minister has warned.

Dmytro Kuleba – who resigned in September – warned that Mr. Trump instead risks collapsing Ukraine's front lines if his administration decides to starve Kyiv of military aid.

Warning that Putin still believes he "can snuff out Ukrainian statehood," he told Politico: "Ukraine is a personal obsession for Putin, but crushing Ukraine is also a means to accomplish his grand goal – to show the world how the West is incapable of defending itself or what it stands for."

It came as Ukrainian officials said an experimental new ballistic missile fired by Russia at Dnipro last week carried multiple dummy warheads but no explosives. Mr. Putin has called the Oreshnik intermediate-range ballistic missile strike a successful test and claimed it reached its target – a missile and defense facility.

UKRAINE SHOULD LOWER FIGHTING AGE TO 18, SAYS US

Ukraine should consider lowering the age of military service for its soldiers to 18 from 25, a senior US administration official said.

Speaking on the condition of anonymity, the official said Ukraine was not mobilizing or training enough new soldiers to replace those lost on the battlefield, according to Reuters. "The need right now is manpower," he said.

"The Russians are in fact making progress, steady progress, in the east, and they are beginning to push back Ukrainian lines in Kursk... Mobilization and more manpower could make a significant difference at this time as we look at the battlefield today."

However, a source in president Volodymyr Zelensky's office said the country did not have what it needed to equip the troops it was mobilizing now.

"Right now, with our current mobilization efforts, we don't have enough equipment, for example armored vehicles, to

support all the troops we are calling up," the source said. "We cannot compensate for our partners' delays in decision-making and supply chains with the lives of our soldiers and of the youngest of our men."

TRUMP PICKS LONGTIME ADVISER KEITH KELLOGG AS SPECIAL ENVOY FOR UKRAINE AND RUSSIA

President-elect Donald Trump has picked Keith Kellogg, a highly decorated retired three-star general, to serve as his special envoy for Ukraine and Russia.

Trump made the announcement on his Truth Social account, and said "He was with me right from the beginning! Together, we will secure PEACE THROUGH STRENGTH, and Make America, and the World, SAFE AGAIN!"

Mr. Kellogg, who is one of the architects of a staunchly conservative policy book that lays out an "America First" national security agenda for the incoming administration, will come into the role as Russia's invasion of Ukraine enters its third year in February.

The 80 year-old retired army lieutenant general has long been Trump's top adviser on defense issues, served as national security adviser to Vice President Mike Pence, was chief of staff of the National Security Council, and then stepped in as an acting security adviser for Mr. Trump after Michael Flynn resigned.

BIDEN READIES \$725M ARMS AID PACKAGE FOR UKRAINE

The Biden administration is preparing a \$725m weapons package for Ukraine, two US officials told Reuters yesterday, as the outgoing president seeks to bolster the government in Kyiv before leaving office in January.

An official familiar with the plan says the Biden administration plans to provide a variety of anti-tank weapons from US stocks to blunt Russia's advancing troops, including land mines, drones, Stinger missiles and ammunition for High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS).

Parliament Expresses Confidence in the Gov't, Presents New Ministers



Bidzina Ivanishvili and PM Kobakhidze in parliament. Source: FB

BY TEAM GT

Georgia's Parliament on Thursday morning expressed its confidence in the government. The cabinet of the renewed ministers unanimously accepted the confidence of the parliament with 84 votes, after which the national anthem was played.

At the plenary session of the Parliament, Irakli Kobakhidze, who was nominated for the post of Prime Minister, came out and introduced the government program to the Georgian Dream deputies. After that, Mamuka Mdivaradze, the leader of the majority, made a speech.

No questions were asked to Kobakhidze during the plenary session. After Mdivaradze's speech, voting was held and the parliament session ended.

Before the session, the Georgian Dream MPs listened to the ministerial candidates in the format of committees and factions.

No opposition MPs attended the session - all opposition parties call the parliamentary elections held on October 26, 2024, fraudulent and do not recognize the results.

The Prime Minister introduced three new ministers to the new government. Foreign Minister Ilia Darchiashvili, Justice Minister Rati Bregadze, and Agriculture Minister Otar Shamugia have resigned. They have been replaced by members of parliament.

The members of the new government are:

Levan Davitashvili - First Vice Prime

Minister, Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development;

Lasha Khutsishvili - Minister of Finance;

Davit Songhulashvili - Minister of Environment Protection and Agriculture;

Vakhtang Gomelauri - Minister of Internal Affairs;

Irakli Chikovani - Minister of Defense, Vice Prime Minister;

Anri Okhanashvili - Minister of Justice;

Tea Akhvediani - State Minister for Reconciliation and Civil Equality;

Mikheil Sarjveladze - Minister of IDPs, Labor, Health and Social Protection;

Aleksandre Tsuladze - Minister of Education and Science;

Tinatin Rukhadze - Minister of Culture and Sports (it is planned to separate the Ministry of Sports, which will be headed by Shalva Gogoladze);

Maka Bochorishvili - Minister of Foreign Affairs.



EP Adopts Resolution Calling for New Elections, Sanctions on GD Officials & Judges

BY TEAM GT

The European Parliament has adopted a resolution calling for new elections in Georgia and sanctioning Georgian Dream officials and judges.

The full resolution:

"We call on the European Union and its member states to impose personal sanctions on the officials and political leaders in Georgia responsible for the democratic backsliding, electoral violations, administrative violence and abuse of state institutions, among them Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze, Tbilisi Mayor and Secretary General of the ruling Georgian Dream party Kakha Kaladze, Parliament Speaker Shalva Papuashvili, and Georgian Dream Chairman Irakli Garibashvili, which will also apply to judges who have made politically motivated decisions; we reiterate our call on the Council and the EU's democratic partners to immediately impose targeted personal sanctions on Ivanishvili and freeze all his assets within the EU for his role in undermining the political process in Georgia.

"The international community should not recognize the results of the elections; while refusing to recognize the elections,

we call for the re-organization of parliamentary elections within one year - in an improved electoral environment and by an independent and impartial election administration, under diligent international observation, in order to ensure a truly fair and transparent electoral process.

"We underline that respect for fundamental rights is vital for meeting the EU's visa liberalization criteria, and call on the European Commission and the Council to review the visa-free status granted to Georgia, with its possible suspension if EU standards on democratic governance and freedoms are deemed not to be met;

"We call on the EU to strictly limit official contacts at EU level with the Georgian government and parliament;

"We call on the Council, the Commission, the EEAS and the new HRVP to conduct a comprehensive review and revision of the EU policy towards Georgia;

"We call on the Commission to use the frozen €120 million in support intended for the Georgian authorities to support Georgian civil society, in particular the non-governmental sector and independent media, which are increasingly under pressure from the ruling party;

We welcome the proposal by the High Representative, Josep Borrell, to this effect," the document states.

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The Black Dot of Protest: Symbolism in Tbilisi's Political Struggle



A protestor in Tbilisi. Photo by Erekle Poladishvili

BY IVAN NECHAEV

In the charged political landscape of Georgia, symbolism plays a potent role in shaping resistance. The dramatic gesture of opposition representative Davit Kirtadze splashing black liquid on Central Election Commission (CEC) chief Giorgi Kalandarishvili during the announcement of contested election results is a striking example. Referring to the black dot as a "dark spot," Kirtadze wielded this simple but powerful image as an indictment of perceived electoral malpractice. This act exemplifies how minimalist symbols—like a black dot—can amplify dissent, especially in the volatile interplay between politics, public trust, and protest in Tbilisi.

In an era of visual bombardment, where protest often takes the form of sprawling murals or social media campaigns, the humble black dot on a white background stands as an unlikely yet profound symbol of resistance. Its simplicity is its strength, its ambiguity its power. But how did this minimalist image become a universal emblem of defiance?

THE ANATOMY OF DEFIANCE: ONE DOT, INFINITE MEANINGS

Symbols of resistance often come laden with complex designs or evocative imagery, but the black dot on a white background takes an entirely different approach. It eschews ornamentation for simplicity, achieving its power through the tension between what is present and what is absent. This stark contrast not only draws the eye, but also invites the mind to grapple with its profound implications. Beneath its minimalistic façade lies a rich and layered meaning that resonates across artistic, political, and psychological dimensions.

THE WHITE CANVAS: THE SILENT DOMINANCE OF CONFORMITY

The white background in this symbolic pairing is far from neutral. Its expansiveness evokes the oppressive totality of

dominant systems—ideologies, norms, or structures that insist on conformity. White, often associated with purity or neutrality, transforms into an overwhelming force in this context, a metaphorical expanse that erases individuality.

The blankness of the white canvas reflects a silence that demands compliance. It embodies the "norm" that marginalizes dissenting voices and obscures alternatives. In authoritarian regimes, this whiteness is the imposed homogeneity, where deviation is suppressed, and difference is feared. Against this silent tyranny, the black dot becomes a rupture—a defiance that cannot be erased.

THE BLACK DOT: PRESENCE AS RESISTANCE

In stark contrast to the engulfing whiteness, the black dot emerges as a bold act of defiance. Its small size belies its significance; it interrupts the canvas, challenging its dominance with an assertion of existence.

The dot's circular shape, often associated with unity and completeness, subverts its surroundings. It is a reminder that even the smallest act of resistance—an individual voice, a whispered protest—can disrupt the most pervasive systems. The blackness of the dot carries its own symbolism: it absorbs light, refusing to reflect or conform to the environment around it.

AMBIGUITY AS A STRENGTH

One of the most striking qualities of the black dot is its ambiguity. Unlike symbols that deliver specific messages, the black dot allows for a multitude of interpretations. This ambiguity is its power. It forces the viewer to engage with it, to impose meaning, and in doing so, it becomes deeply personal to each observer.

The Individual vs. the Collective: To some, the black dot represents an individual standing firm against an oppressive system. It is the person who refuses to remain silent, even when surrounded by forces that seek to suppress.

Erasure and Reclamation: Others may see the dot as a mark of erasure—something that was once deleted or forgotten

but now reclaims its presence. It is a defiance against historical amnesia or deliberate acts of cultural suppression.

The Scream in Silence: For others, the dot might symbolize a scream—a condensed, silent outcry against overwhelming forces. Its silence is deafening, drawing attention through its refusal to elaborate.

RESISTANCE BY REDUCTION: TRACING THE RADICAL POWER OF THE BLACK DOT

The black dot—a humble, unassuming mark on a white background—has emerged as a potent symbol of defiance. Its simplicity, however, belies its rich historical and cultural significance. The black dot's power lies not in its complexity, but in its reduction of meaning to its core, challenging systems of power, artistic norms, and political oppression. From the radical experiments of Suprematism to the quiet defiance of protest art, the black dot's journey through history reveals its enduring capacity for resistance.

SUPREMATISM AND THE AVANT-GARDE: THE BIRTH OF MINIMALIST REBELLION

Kazimir Malevich, the founder of Suprematism, revolutionized art in the early 20th century by rejecting representational forms. For Malevich, art was no longer about mimicking reality but about exploring the pure essence of ideas. While his Black Square became a definitive icon of this movement, Malevich also used isolated geometric shapes, including dots, to convey his philosophy of reduction.

In Suprematist theory, the black dot transcended its physical form. It was no longer "just" a dot, but a disruption of materialism, an assertion of pure thought. Malevich's geometric abstractions were radical acts of rebellion against the conventions of realism and the capitalist commodification of art. By reducing reality to its elemental shapes, Malevich sought to liberate art—and by extension, society—from oppressive systems.

The black dot, in this context, becomes a symbol of infinite potential. It represents a point of origin, a rupture from tradition, and a gateway to new possibilities. This conceptual weight gave the black dot a unique power: a rebellion not just against artistic norms, but against the materialist ideologies that those norms upheld.

MINIMALISM AS PROTEST: THE 20TH CENTURY'S SILENT REVOLUTION

Building on the legacy of Suprematism, mid-20th-century minimalist artists embraced reduction as a form of defiance. Their work rejected the emotional excess of Abstract Expressionism and the decorative nature of traditional art, opting instead for stark simplicity.

Agnes Martin: Martin's serene grids and delicate lines reduced art to its most essential components. Her work, though understated, was a quiet rebellion against the commercial and bombastic art market of the time. Martin's meticulous approach to simplicity encouraged viewers to slow down and find meaning in absence.

Ad Reinhardt: Reinhardt's black paintings pushed minimalism to its limits. These works, which appeared monochromatic but revealed subtle variations upon close inspection, forced viewers to confront the tension between what is visible and what is not. Reinhardt's art was a statement against commodification, emphasizing that true art resided beyond material consumption.

Yayoi Kusama: Kusama's obsessive use of dots transformed them into tools of resistance. Her polka-dotted environments were not merely aesthetic, but deeply political, challenging perceptions of space, identity, and the body. Her dots became a feminist critique of patriarchal systems, and a declaration of individual agency.

For these artists, the act of reduction was inherently political. By stripping away the extraneous, they exposed the structures of power and meaning that underpinned society. The black dot, in their hands, became both a critique of excess and a symbol of liberation.

PROTEST ART: THE POLITICAL POWER OF MINIMALISM

The black dot's journey into political resistance is perhaps most vividly illustrated in the Polish Solidarity movement of the 1980s. As Poland's communist regime tightened its grip on dissent, activists turned to minimalist symbols to communicate their resistance.

Dots, crosses, anchors, and other simple marks became clandestine tools of defiance. These symbols were small enough to escape censorship, yet powerful enough to rally opposition. The black dot, in particular, served as a metaphor for the individual's resistance against the overwhelming force of the state.

This minimalist approach to protest art highlighted the power of reduction in political contexts. The simplicity of these symbols made them accessible, reproducible, and difficult to suppress. A single dot on a wall, a pamphlet, or a lapel became an act of rebellion, carrying a message of defiance that transcended language and cultural barriers.

BLACK INK AS A DOUBLE METAPHOR: DEMOCRACY AND DECEPTION

Davit Kirtadze's act of throwing black liquid—an unmistakable visual metaphor—was rooted in two interconnected grievances:

The Breach of Ballot Secrecy: Opposition parties claimed that ink marks, visible on the reverse side of certain ballots, compromised voter anonymity in the October 26 election. This technical flaw was not merely a logistical oversight but a symbolic rupture, casting doubt on the fairness of the voting process. In this context, the ink transformed into a black dot of mistrust, embodying allegations of systemic corruption and manipulation.

A Mark of Reproach: The "dark spot" accusation directed at Kalandarishvili personalized the broader criticism against Georgia's electoral system. The black liquid became a visual shorthand for political betrayal, with Kirtadze positioning it as an indelible mark on the CEC's credibility.

The black dot, both literally and metaphorically, became a tool to highlight what protesters saw as the erosion of democratic principles under the ruling Georgian Dream party.

In Georgia, as in many cultures, black is associated with mourning, loss, and condemnation. By splashing black liquid, Kirtadze evoked a sense of national mourning for what the opposition viewed as a failed democratic process. The "dark spot" was not merely a personal insult, but a cultural indictment of a system veering away from

transparency and accountability.

The stark simplicity of the act—a black liquid against a white shirt, evoking the dot-on-white-background motif—played perfectly to the demands of social media, where bold, minimalist visuals capture attention and provoke dialogue. The incident inspired discussions and memes, turning the black liquid into a meme-ready symbol for broader grievances against Georgia's political system. This transformation from protest to cultural symbol underscores the enduring power of minimalist imagery in modern resistance.

SYMBOLIC PROTEST AS A CALL TO ACTION

While Kirtadze's act was undeniably effective in drawing attention, it also raises questions about the ethical dimensions of such gestures.

Legitimacy of Tactics: By splashing liquid on Kalandarishvili, the protest blurred the line between symbolic resistance and personal attack. While the act was framed as a critique of the system, it also risked alienating segments of the population who might view such gestures as overly confrontational or inappropriate.

Simplicity vs. Oversimplification: The black liquid as a metaphor for corruption and betrayal is powerful, but also reductive. Critics might argue that boiling complex electoral issues down to a single gesture risks oversimplifying the systemic challenges facing Georgian democracy.

Despite these complexities, the black liquid's symbolic potency cannot be denied. It galvanized opposition voices, brought international attention to the contested election, and reinforced the idea that minimalism can carry profound political weight.

Just as a black dot on a white background interrupts the void, Kirtadze's gesture disrupted the monotony of political theater, demanding that the grievances of opposition voices be acknowledged. The act connects to a broader legacy of Georgian protests, where creative and symbolic resistance has historically played a role in pushing for change—from the peaceful Rose Revolution to today's contested streets and ballots.

A MARK THAT ENDURES

The black dot on a white background leaves an indelible impression—not just on paper, but in the minds and hearts of those who encounter it. It teaches us that minimalism can carry maximal impact, that silence can scream louder than words, and that even a single mark can challenge the status quo.

Its legacy lies in its universality and adaptability, reminding us that resistance need not be grandiose to be powerful. Sometimes, all it takes is one dot to change the narrative, to question the dominant order, and to inspire infinite meanings.

NOTE: This article has been redacted for the newspaper. Read the full version on georgia.today/ge



A protestor in Tbilisi. Photo by Erekle Poladishvili

MEP Malgorzata Gosiewska, One of the Fiercest Critics of Georgian Dream, on What Georgia Should Expect Next

Continued from page 1

IT SEEMS THAT THE EU AND GEORGIA ARE AT AN IMPASSE. WHAT STEPS SHOULD WE TAKE NOW?

It must be said outright that it is Georgia that finds itself in a difficult situation. The EU should not have recognized the results of the last elections. It cannot accept Georgia's anti-democratic and anti-citizen policies or the actions it undertakes. There can be no acceptance of election rigging, unlawful arrests, persecution of the opposition, the detention of political prisoners, aiding Russia in circumventing Western sanctions (e.g., through smuggling), or anti-Western and anti-Ukrainian rhetoric. Above all, we cannot turn a blind eye to the adoption of legislation that is incompatible with EU standards and significantly restricts Georgian society. I am referring, for instance, to the Georgian parliament's adoption of the so-called foreign agents law modelled on Russian legislation.

Until the current Georgian authorities revise their foreign and domestic policies and begin to uphold the law, they may face isolation from the democratic Western world. It is necessary to meet the nine points outlined by the EU, repeal the adopted law, and refrain from other actions that undermine fundamental rights and the rule of law to return to the path of accession. Reports have clearly emphasised that the elections failed to meet standards and that there is a marked democratic crisis.

Every government, and I repeat—every government, even the best, when operating without any checks or oversight and removing all opportunities for criticism or evaluation of its actions, becomes distorted and naturally moves toward dictatorship. This is even more true when power has been in the hands of someone from the outset who lacks any scruples and who views the state through the lens of their own mafia-like interests.

IS THERE ANY ROOM FOR AN AGREEMENT BETWEEN BRUSSELS AND IVANISHVILI? FOR EXAMPLE, REGARDING THE TWO CONTROVERSIAL LAWS?

I am convinced that as long as Georgia refuses to return to the "democratic path," no agreement will be possible.

The current government, "installed" by Moscow, will never act in the interest of Georgia or its society. They must be seen as the "long arm of Moscow," which is hostile to Georgian society and poses a danger to Europe as well.

From the beginning, Georgian Dream has pursued only Russia's interests, which align with its own. Therefore, it is difficult to talk about any agreement with them. Ivanishvili should not be considered a partner for dialogue with the democratic world. This individual should long ago have been subjected to complete isolation, both politically and economically.

YOU HAVE CALLED ON THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT



Until the Georgian authorities revise their foreign and domestic policies, they may face isolation from the democratic Western world

TO COMPLETELY ISOLATE GEORGIA'S CURRENT GOVERNMENT. WHAT DO YOU THINK THE POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES OF SUCH AN APPROACH COULD BE?

I will do everything in my power to ensure that my appeal is implemented by the European Parliament. If dialogue does not yield results, other instruments must be used. It cannot be the case that the rulers of Georgia implement Moscow's policies on one hand, while simultaneously drawing European funds and deceiving the largely pro-European Georgian society with claims of pursuing a European direction.

I support suspending the funding of programs and halting diplomatic visits. However, I believe that support for civic organizations, those advocating for independence, and independent media, should be maintained or even increased. Long-term sanctions should target Georgian officials and politicians. Military aid and EU funding should also be suspended.

Given the outright violation of electoral laws, election rigging, and suppression of peaceful protests, I believe the visa-free regime should be suspended, and the accession process to the EU should be halted. Only decisive steps and actions by the EU can stop the "thuggish" tendencies of this government.

SOME ARGUE THAT THIS COULD PUSH GEORGIAN DREAM EVEN CLOSER TO RUSSIA, AS THEY WOULD HAVE NO OTHER OPTIONS.

Could they get any closer? Georgia's current authorities are already entirely under Russia's influence, so what more could happen? On the other hand, strong isolation from the EU, economic sanctions, and restricting movement for those connected to and aligned with Georgian Dream would have the desired effect. They should deeply feel the consequences of their policies. They feel untouchable because there are no repercussions from the international community. So it's important that there is a clear and decisive stance from the Western world—total non-cooperation with those who fail to comply. Ivanishvili and Georgian Dream are fully aware of the Georgian people's pro-European sympathies. They also know exactly what an official departure from this path would lead to. I believe they also remember how this ended in Ukraine in 2013.

MANY ARGUE THAT SUSPENDING THE VISA-FREE REGIME WOULD PUNISH THE GEORGIAN PEOPLE RATHER THAN THE GOVERNMENT.

The suspension of visa-free travel will unfortunately result in certain difficulties for ordinary Georgians, but it is primarily intended to target those in power who undermine the principles of a democratic state.

This is, unfortunately, a painful consequence of their actions. We do not want to punish society; however, there is no other option if we wish to compel Georgia's current government to reverse its chosen policies. An effective remedy is often bitter and unpleasant, but it restores health. Similarly, in this case, a severe sanction is intended to bring about changes that will benefit all Georgians.

THE "WAR OR PEACE" NARRATIVE WAS A KEY STRATEGY FOR GEORGIAN DREAM DURING THE ELECTION. WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO THOSE THE GOVERNMENT IS TRYING TO CONVINC THAT RUSSIA MIGHT INVADE WITHOUT THEM IN POWER?

This is undoubtedly a propaganda tactic designed to intimidate the Georgian population. The fact is, this invasion has already been ongoing for quite some time. The official government is closely tied to Russia, with economic, political, and social affairs happening with the knowledge and consent of the Kremlin.



MEP Malgorzata Gosiewska. Source: FB



I support suspending the funding of programs and halting diplomatic visits

Moreover, Russian troops already occupy territories that belong to Georgia. So what kind of invasion is Georgian Dream trying to scare people with?

If Vladimir Putin desires, he can initiate a full-scale war at any moment, regardless of who is in power. That is why the European and pro-Atlantic direction is so crucial—it is important for society to understand this. Only by participating in NATO and EU structures can Georgia increase its security. However, this requires prior democratization of internal processes, the building of a strong civil society, severing Russian influence, and reforming state institutions.

HOW DOES THE WEST—ESPECIALLY EUROPE—HANDLING THE WAR IN UKRAINE INFLUENCE HOW THE AVERAGE GEORGIAN PERCEIVES IT?

Research shows that, unlike the government, Georgian society is in solidarity with Ukraine. After all, it has also experienced Russian aggression. We saw that in Tbilisi, during the first months of the full-scale war in Ukraine, there were spontaneous anti-Russian demonstrations. Ukrainian flags were hung throughout the city, and anti-Russian slogans appeared on walls. Grassroots initiatives collected funds for humanitarian aid from the beginning of the invasion. Ukrainian flags also appeared during protests against the introduction of the so-called foreign agents law.

We know that nearly 70% of Georgians consider Russia an enemy (according to the Caucasus Research Resource Center

survey from April/May 2024), and 56% blame Russia and Vladimir Putin for the war in Ukraine.

I am convinced that the average Georgian sees an opportunity in this ongoing war. Ukraine's victory and the defeat of Russia's imperial ambitions provide hope for changes within Georgia, a sentiment often emphasised by Georgians in conversations with me.

Furthermore, the EU's sanctions against Russia—though imposed quite late—demonstrate that the global community is reacting. In my opinion, this reaction is, of course, too slow, but it exists. It is worth noting that my country, Poland, was the first in Europe and the world to offer military and humanitarian assistance. Thus, Poland's reaction can be described as immediate, made possible by the leadership of Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and President Andrzej Duda.

Similarly, the Polish people responded promptly during the 2008 invasion of Georgia, as did the late President of Poland, Lech Kaczynski, who gathered leaders from five other countries and flew to Tbilisi. Recently, President Andrzej Duda also declared his readiness to visit Tbilisi if necessary.

WHAT MESSAGE DO YOU HAVE FOR THOSE WHO HAVE SPENT THE LAST DAYS AND NIGHTS PROTESTING ON THE STREETS OF TBILISI?

I want to tell my friends in Georgia and all the protesters not to give up. Your dedication and sacrifice will bring results; I am confident they already are. You inspire faith in the victory of democratic forces, build unity and solidarity, and strengthen social bonds.

Just as the "Rose Revolution" and the victory of pro-Western reformer Mikheil Saakashvili were possible in 2003, change is possible now as well. I urge you not to give up and to stand firm. Hold on to your values and fight—there is no other way.

As Ovid once said, "Dripping water hollows out stone, not through force, but by persistence." The Georgian people, who rightly demand fair elections, a Western political course, self-determination, and transparency in political life, have support within the EU structures. We stand in solidarity with you! The

course of events now depends on the stance of the Georgian people.

We can see how global politics have shifted in recent days following the victory of a Republican candidate in the United States. Resistance, protests, and rejecting injustice do make a difference.

My dear friends, do not stop fighting for freedom and democracy. Resist the pro-Soviet government that isolates and enslaves you. Do not become hostages of the Kremlin, as has happened in Belarus. You have the right to decide for yourselves and to be part of a free, democratic world.

You can live in a lawful and fair state, grow in accordance with your dreams and expectations, and, most importantly, be the masters of your own country. Do not succumb to discouragement or to hostile, pro-Russian forces. I believe that your determination will lead to the victory you seek!

Look also to those who, despite severe persecution, have not capitulated, like Mikheil Saakashvili. There are others like him. I believe that their steadfastness will contribute to the rebirth of a new Georgian state and society!

Let me conclude with the words of Marshal Józef Piłsudski, one of Poland's founding fathers, and a proponent of uniting the efforts of nations subjugated by Russia to collectively resist Russian imperialism and achieve independence together: "Only those who have firm convictions and act on them, regardless of the consequences, are worthy of being called human."

Saqartvelos gaumarjos!



As Ovid once said, "Dripping water hollows out stone, not through force, but by persistence"

GD Nominates Mikheil Kavelashvili as Presidential Candidate



Georgia's soon-to-be president, Mikheil Kavelashvili

BY ANA DUMBADZE

MP Mikheil Kavelashvili is Georgian Dream's candidate for the presidency of Georgia. Bidzina Ivanishvili, honorary chairman of Georgian Dream, spoke about the decision at a briefing held at the party office.

"The Parliament of Georgia appointed the elections of the President of Georgia, which will be held in an indirect manner in accordance with the current version of the Constitution," Ivanishvili noted. "On December 14, the president of Georgia will be elected by an electoral college consisting of 300 members, in which the solid majority, based on the decision of the Georgian people, is held by our political party Georgian Dream. Therefore, it is clear that the candidate supported by Georgian Dream will occupy the post of the President of Georgia.

"I am glad to inform you that in accordance with the decision of the political council of the party, I am presenting the candidacy of Mikheil Kavelashvili for the post of the President of Georgia. Mikheil Kavelashvili does not need a special introduction to the public. For years, as a successful athlete, he defended the honor of Georgia," Ivanishvili said. "Misha was a

seasoned member of the Georgian football team, he is a multiple champion of several countries. His football career is connected with Tbilisi Dinamo, Vladikavkaz Alanya, Manchester City, leading Swiss football clubs.

"Even before starting his political activities, Mikheil Kavelashvili always uncompromisingly expressed his principled position on all issues important for the country. During the last eight years, Mikheil Kavelashvili was engaged in successful political activities, he was one of the outstanding members of our political team, especially in the last few years, he made a great contribution to protecting the national interests of Georgia and strengthening the country's sovereignty," Ivanishvili concluded.

The election of the President of Georgia is scheduled for December 14, and the inauguration is scheduled for December 29. This year, for the first time, the president will be elected indirectly by an electoral college consisting of 300 members.

Mikheil Kavelashvili, born in 1971, is a Georgian politician and former professional footballer. He is the co-founder of People's Power party.

He moved into politics in 2016, and was elected to the Parliament of Georgia in the Georgian Dream party, before leaving to co-found the People's Power party.

The GD MP is known for his anti-western and conservative sentiments.

BUSINESS

The Black Friday Frenzy Hits Us Too

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

Black Friday, otherwise known as a shopping extravaganza, has reached us in Sakartvelo too, having become one of the most market-savvy days on our retail agenda. This time around, it hits on 29th of November. This is the first Friday after the last Thursday of November, that famous Thanksgiving celebration. The Black Friday commercial tradition originated in America and has today gone far beyond its boundaries, knocking even on our doors, bringing about numerous trade deals and merchandise discounts.

Could there be anything better than slashed prices on almost every salable item before the New Year rolls in? The emulation of Black Friday by our tradespeople might be a tremendously attractive idea, but the question is if it is always sensible to go so enthusiastically after a good example: in the first place, Georgia might inadvertently turn itself into yet another contributor to environmental pollution on Black Friday, which already sees tons of quickly generated waste needing to be discarded in a very short period of time. Secondly, on top of the ecological price we are paying, Black Friday's emotional consequences are similarly momentous. It is well-known that the pressure becomes awfully forceful in expectation of the sale event. This culture of urgency can also lead to the impulsive purchasing of goods, goods which are often not at all needed. Thirdly, Black Friday bargains, based on their innate character, inspire overconsumption, which is the root of all purchasing evils.

Incidentally, to counterbalance Black Friday, certain agile brains have invented a new trend in sales promotion philosophy, called Green Friday, suggesting solid markdowns on eco-friendly items. This picture could repeat itself in Georgia too, what with our proclivity to readily copycat the Western means and ways. There are other rational ways to con-



Black Friday in the US. Source: nytimes

struct more watchful Black Friday discounts around the world, including in Georgia, although the Steals & Deals' tricks and ruses in Sakartvelo might not be as subtle and sophisticated as they are in the contemporary West. But we are catching up!

The purchasing mindset we see during sales events such as Black Friday, encompasses a variety of different buying behaviors. For instance: go for indispensable items only, planning well in advance; invest in durable, high-quality goods to

lessen the probability of waste; and look for firms with eco-friendly initiatives. These and other tips will help quite seriously if kept in mind at all times.

The big shopping season is here, and it's the same in Georgia. We've got to be ready for it, which means Black Friday is only useful for people who know what they're doing. To be one of those smart buyers, we need to do our homework and learn what's really worth it. With huge crowds, crazy discounts, and sales everywhere, it's all about knowing

how to navigate the madness.

That said, Black Friday also faces public skepticism, with many wondering whether the discounts are truly significant, leading us to hesitate before opening our wallets. This doubt is not entirely unfounded. At the same time, the psychological pressure to experience Black Friday deals firsthand also plays a role. And, in addition to everything else, Black-Friday-a-la-Georgia has triggered disputes about consumerism and its clash with traditional Geor-

gian values.

Indeed, Black Friday in Sakartvelo is a fascinating example of how global marketing marvels might be planted in new cultural soils, but while it makes shoppers feel happy, it also suggests a number of frustrations. For our local consumers, the aim is not to weaken the critical eye. Regardless of how we choose to respond—whether embracing or questioning Black Friday—it's clear that the event has become a lasting fixture in our culture.

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FANTA™



YOLO Your Go-To for Corporate Gifting and Team-Building

Finding the right gift for colleagues and partners doesn't have to be complicated. The YOLO platform—EventsGuide and Experience Gifts—offers a fresh take on corporate gifting, replacing traditional presents with meaningful experiences that create lasting memories. Whether it's a personalized voucher or a team-building activity, YOLO ensures every experience gift stands out.

With options starting at just 50 GEL, YOLO provides a wide range of experiences to fit any occasion or budget. From unique workshops like ceramics or wine painting to thrilling activities like paragliding or boxing, YOLO has something for everyone. For companies looking to bring teams together, corporate event packages start at 400 GEL and include tailored activities to strengthen connections and celebrate achievements.

WHY DOES YOLO WORK FOR CORPORATE GIFTING?

Unique Experiences, Not Things:

Instead of giving standard material gifts, YOLO lets you offer something meaningful – experiences. Whether it's a color therapy, a cooking class, a wine casino or an outdoor adventure, these gifts leave a lasting impression.

Simple and Seamless:

YOLO's updated website makes finding the perfect gift quick and easy. Explore up to 100 unique experiences, purchase



digital vouchers, or order beautifully wrapped packages delivered directly to your recipient's door.

Perfect for Teams and Events:

YOLO's team-building and corporate event packages are ideal for fostering collaboration and celebrating success. Whether it's a masterclass, a dinner, or an activity-filled day, these experiences are designed to bring teams closer together.

Options for Every Budget:

With gifts starting at 50 GEL and event packages from 400 GEL, YOLO ensures quality experiences are accessible to businesses of any size.

A BETTER WAY TO GIFT

YOLO is changing the way we think about corporate gifting by focusing on emotions and experiences. With a commitment to innovation and a growing selection of options, YOLO is making gifting simpler and more memorable.

By providing high-quality experiences, YOLO enables companies to enhance brand loyalty, strengthen relationships, and create lasting impressions. Whether it's for corporate rewards, team-building events, or client appreciation, YOLO's curated experiences elevate the gifting process and foster meaningful connections.

Discover ideas for meaningful gifts and events at YOLO's website.

Celebrate milestones, strengthen teams, and create lasting memories – with YOLO.

SOCIETY

Tbilisi Int'l Film Festival Kicks off on December 1

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

The 25th Tbilisi International Film Festival, supported by TBC Concept, Mastercard, and a number of international organizations, is set to open on December 1 at Amirani Cinema, with the recent Georgian film Holy Electricity by Tato Kotetishvili.

The competition program will cover five feature and 15 short films in the fiction category and showcase six feature-length and

nine short documentaries. An international jury panel will select winners consisting of experts from Turkey, Hungary, and Switzerland. Feature documentaries particularly will be picked by professionals from Germany, France, and Lithuania.

Alongside competitive sections, the festival will feature special events like the European Forum, the Academy of European Cinema, and the Student Film Section.

The festival will conclude with the traditional award ceremony celebrating the best films across multiple categories.



Photo: Tbilisi International Film Festival

Germany to Georgia - Education through Research



Abandoned railway station in Armenia on the Ijevan-Dilijan line. Source: Max Weber Georgia Office.

BY SHELBI R. ANKIEWICZ

The Max Weber Stiftung Foundation Georgia Branch Office educates the public through monthly presentations, and supports researchers by providing information about the South Caucasus and Germany.

Launched in 2023, the Georgia Branch Office is a part of the wider Max Weber Stiftung Foundation. It's one of the leading agencies that supports German research in humanities and social sciences abroad. Its first institution was created in Rome in 1888 as the 'German Historical Institute in Rome.'

There are 11 autonomous institutes

worldwide that serve as a bridge between the host country and Germany. This creates an international dialogue and collaboration for a network that contributes to the internationalization of science. The Georgia Branch Office offers many opportunities for the public, among them discussions on history, scholarships, internships, and chances to participate in conferences locally and abroad.

The office also offers the public a digital library, with e-books, electronic databases/info systems, e-journals and scientific articles. The only requirement to use them is to register an account at the office.

Once or twice a month, the office holds a lecture on a certain topic related to the South Caucasus. The Georgia Branch Office is based in Tbilisi, but also hosts guests and covers topics relating to Arme-

nia and Azerbaijan. On November 27, a talk was given by PhD Student Eviya Hovhannisyán, who is studying at the Institute of Archeology and Ethnography NAS RA in Armenia. It was titled 'Ijevan-Dilijan Friendship Construction: An Anthropological Research on the Armenian Railway System in the Late Soviet Period.' In Armenia, the railway system is independent from the state, and is still owned by Russia.

Hovhannisyán explained her pilot study, and about how the Transcaucasian railway system was created by Russia as a strategic way of connecting the Black and Caspian seas. During the early and mid-20th century, the railways brought Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia together through trade, and since the railway system generated its own income, it was a great way for the regime to maintain control over the three nations.

The idea for the Ijevan-Dilijan rail line was first brought up in the late 19th century, but due to the landscape of the region and the unknowns of taking on such a 'megaproject', construction didn't commence until 1971. The railway took 15 years to construct and only ran until 1994, due to the Karabakh War and damage from a landslide. Hovhannisyán noted that it was under construction longer than it was running, but emphasized that it did offer benefits during its short run.

"It gave people the opportunity to try out new professions, such as tunnel construction, track maintenance, managing the stations, and others," Hovhannisyán

noted. "Armenia, back then, didn't have these jobs in any institutions: they went to Tbilisi to learn them."

There were around 25,000 people who worked on the creation of the railway, and since it took 15 years to complete, those who came from abroad - Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, and other countries - to work on it, never left; choosing to stay and start families. Hovhannisyán mentioned that a former railway worker told her that the salaries were high then, 300 to 350 rubles, but there was nowhere to spend the money, because there was no infrastructure around the railway, only that which was specially built for the workers.

Such projects were good for the USSR, because they were an easy source of propaganda, Hovhannisyán noted. Many poems from workers and posters were produced that celebrated the positivity of creating such infrastructure.

The first train ran on August 9, 1986, from Ijevan to Dilijan, and then on to Kakavadzor. The headline the following day in the newspaper, Soviet Armenia, celebrated the 'major achievement and progress' for the country's economy.

"...and let the joy of the local residents of the Aghstev Valley be undimmed, let them not worry that the whistle of the train may disturb their night's sleep. If they see what this railway will bring to Armenia, the train whistle will sound like a sweet lullaby to them. [...] This railway is not very long, but its benefits are obvious. It will reach the Pacific Ocean on

one side and the Baltic coast on the other. It is endless, because it will connect the steel veins of the endless Soviet Union. This is our strength."

The line has not been active since it ceased operating in 1994. However, it is still under ownership, and certain stations have watchmen to ensure the stations and line remain intact. Hovhannisyán said some of the villages on the line house Azerbaijani refugees, while other areas have been abandoned and looted. In Ijevan, the railway runs under the city through a tunnel, where children play even though the electricity is still on.

According to Hovhannisyán, there was discussion from the government about what to do with the railway after the Second Karabakh War. However, there are not yet enough funds to take on the enormous amount of renovation required. Hovhannisyán claims it would be in the interest of Armenians to have it running again, because it would boost the economy, strengthen growing relations, and open communication with neighboring countries.

The fascinating talk took place in a room in the Max Weber Foundation Georgia Branch Office, with light refreshments offered before and after. All of the monthly talks are in English, with the exception of the upcoming one in December, due to the speaker's language proficiency. Prior to each lecture, there is a place to register on the office's website (mwsgeorgia.hypotheses.org) to secure your seat.

COP29: A Step Forward or a Missed Opportunity for Climate Action?

BY TEAM GT

With this year on track to become the hottest on record and the first to surpass 1.5°C of global warming, did COP29 meet its climate targets? The United Nations Climate Change Conference, held over two weeks from Monday November 11 in Baku, Azerbaijan, concluded on Sunday, November 24, running two days longer than scheduled.

The conference took place at the Baku Olympic Stadium, a venue that, despite its name, has never hosted the Olympic Games. Around 60,000 delegates attended, most of whom flew in, likely exceeding their personal carbon budgets for the year. Notably, Greta Thunberg adhered to her no-fly policy and instead organized a protest in Tbilisi, against COP29 taking place in Azerbaijan. The conference venue featured a stunning glass entrance and sounds of Azerbaijani folk and classical music to welcome delegates. It also provided highly efficient bus shuttle services and enlisted 3,000 volunteers—selected from 16,000 applicants—who underwent months of training to assist throughout the event.

In terms of regional developments, Georgia and Azerbaijan discussed establishing a green energy corridor across the Black Sea to connect with the European Union. A new report, titled *Cooperation in North-west Azerbaijan and Eastern Georgia*, was also released, aiming to address wildfire risk management. Additionally, Georgia made its debut with a pavilion at the conference.

COP29 was dubbed the “Finance COP,”

with climate finance being a key topic of discussion. A protestor advocating for workers' rights at the Global Day of Action outside the Plenary Hall stated, “The Global North has to pay up for all the damage it has done to the planet!” Poorer nations, which contribute the least to emissions, are often the hardest hit by climate change, and are calling for accountability from the wealthier nations responsible for most emissions. Previously, a commitment was made to mobilize \$100 billion annually by 2020 to support developing countries (later extended to 2025). At COP29, however, parties agreed to a “New Collective Quantified Goal for Climate Finance,” aiming for developed nations to mobilize \$300 billion by 2035. Representatives from the Alliance of Small Island States and Least Developed Countries walked out during the meeting, dissatisfied with the text, with one representative stating, “No deal is better than a bad deal.”

One of the key outcomes of COP29 was the agreement on a high-integrity carbon market under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement. This includes transparency requirements and protections for Indigenous rights. However, Carbon Market Watch raised concerns about the accountability of the agreement, noting the lack of deadlines and penalties for non-compliance. One investigation reveals that less than 10% of carbon credits lead to real emissions reductions.

A major setback at COP29, however, was the lack of progress on phasing out fossil fuels. The conference saw the participation of 1,773 fossil fuel lobbyists, including representatives from fossil fuel companies within national delegations. Big Agriculture was also well represented, with 204 lobbyists, 40% of



Activists demand world leaders negotiate a Plant Based Treaty

whom were part of country delegations, gaining direct access to diplomatic negotiations.

Another disappointment was the failure to make meaningful progress on transforming food systems. Food accounts for approximately one-third of total greenhouse gas emissions, and animal agriculture is responsible for one-third of methane emissions. Yet, food systems were not given the attention they deserve at COP29. Steven George, an Earth Observation Engineer, highlighted the importance of agricultural transformation during a press conference on November 22, stating: “While the phase-out of fossil fuels is absolutely necessary, the IPCC Climate Models assume there will be a transformation of Agriculture, Forestry, and Other Land Use (AFOLU) from a carbon source to a carbon sink by 2030. Even if we halted fossil fuel use today, emissions from our food system alone would still push us beyond the 1.5°C and 2.0°C targets.”

Carbon sinks, which are crucial for absorbing CO₂, are collapsing (one article finds that almost no CO₂ was absorbed by plants and soil last year), and scientists like Johann Rockström have been

calling for a food systems transition. However, world leaders seem reluctant to move away from the luxury of animal products, despite the unsustainable environmental impact.

Interestingly, when climate-damaging animal products are served at climate conferences, it rarely sparks controversy. COP28 in Dubai provided an array of sustainable, plant-based food options, including an entirely plant-based food park. In contrast, COP29 took “huge steps in the wrong direction,” according to Kimmy Cushman, scientific advisor for the Plant Based Treaty campaign. Despite plant-based organizations having meetings with the conference organizers to ensure inclusive, climate-friendly vegan options, delegates found the sustainable food offerings severely lacking. Animal products were even mislabeled as vegan, with dairy cheese, and even salmon marked as vegan, as well as chicken and canned beef labelled as vegetarian, which the staff later claimed was due to a “printing mistake” and a shortage of labels. Furthermore, plant-based milks for coffee came with an additional surcharge of up to \$3.50, while

coffee itself cost around \$10 per cup—a frustrating barrier for those wanting sustainable options or those who are lactose intolerant. After the organization ProVeg International met with the catering organizers, the vegan food labeling was corrected, and more vegan options were made available during the second week of the conference.

On a positive note, the only vegan café in Baku, Manipura Café, endorsed the Plant Based Treaty, calling on COP29 to negotiate an agreement to transition to plant-based food systems. “We want the whole world to be vegan,” says Mammad, the café manager. This raises an important question for climate justice—when we speak of justice for all, does that include non-human animals?

Every year, billions of sentient animals are bred and killed for food. Animal agriculture is responsible for 83% of land-use change, yet it provides only 18% of the world’s calories. We are producing more than enough food to feed the entire planet, but much of it is fed to farmed animals for products that are not necessary for human health and, in fact, are harmful. Meanwhile, 20,000 people die from hunger every day. Animal agriculture also comes at the expense of the physical and mental health of slaughterhouse workers, who endure horrific working conditions.

As COP30 approaches in Brazil next year, it will mark 10 years since the signing of the Paris Agreement. It’s clear that while progress has been made in some areas, much work remains to be done to address the climate crisis comprehensively, including transforming our food systems and ensuring that all sectors of society—human and non-human—are included in the conversation.

CULTURE

Reimagining Disability through Film: Stories that Break Barriers and Build Bridges

BY IVAN NECHAEV

In a world where storytelling shapes perceptions and dismantles prejudices, the partnership between Chai Khana and MAC Georgia emerges as a beacon of inclusivity. Their ambitious film project, spotlighting the lives and experiences of people with disabilities, is rewriting the narrative surrounding disability in Georgia. With 38 films crafted through a competitive process, and 15 selected for online publication, this initiative is both an artistic triumph and a social revolution.

As the competition edges toward its climax, with the three winning films set to be announced in December 2024, these short films are already resonating deeply with audiences, offering intimate and powerful perspectives on disability.

In Georgian society, as in many others, the discourse on disability is fraught with stereotypes. People with disabilities are often cast either as victims requiring charity or as “superhuman” individuals overcoming insurmountable odds. This dichotomy leaves little space for authentic, nuanced representations.

Enter Chai Khana and MAC Georgia. By combining Chai Khana’s expertise in multimedia storytelling and MAC Georgia’s grassroots advocacy for vulnerable communities, the project amplifies voices that have historically been sidelined. The initiative’s premise is revolutionary: to position people with disabilities as creators, protagonists, and subjects of stories that reflect their full humanity—not just their struggles.

Through the universal medium of film, the project speaks to a society at a cross-

roads, nudging it toward empathy, understanding, and change.

‘CAPABLE’—A SATIRICAL MASTERPIECE TURNING THE LENS ON SOCIETY

Grigol Zhordania’s *Capable* is a meta-narrative unlike any other. Set in an alternate reality, it flips societal norms by depicting people with disabilities creating a short film about a “capable” character. This reversal is both humorous and piercing, exposing how mainstream society often exploits marginalized narratives for personal gain.

Zhordania’s work transcends the traditional boundaries of disability-focused storytelling, asking a fundamental question: Who has the right to tell these stories? In critiquing the commodification of disability, *Capable* invites viewers to reconsider their complicity in perpetuating harmful narratives.

‘THE LANGUAGE OF BIRDS’—A POETIC EXPLORATION OF ISOLATION AND HOPE

Salome Sagharadze’s *The Language of Birds* presents a poignant tale of a family struggling to connect. Mindia, a boy who understands birds but refuses to speak to humans, becomes a metaphor for the invisible walls that disability can create within relationships.

Sagharadze’s cinematic approach—layered with symbolism and lyrical visuals—mirrors the family’s internal chaos. The turning point, when nature intervenes to offer solace, transforms the narrative into one of reconciliation. The film is a gentle reminder that healing often requires looking beyond societal norms and embracing alternative forms of communication.

‘STAGE OF MIND’—THE THEATER AS A SANCTUARY OF BELONGING

For 26-year-old Nika, the stage is more than a platform; it’s a lifeline. Directed by Bakar Cherkezishvili and Hanna Hovitie, *Stage of Mind* captures the duality of Nika’s world: the acceptance and freedom he experiences in the inclusive theater ‘Azdaki’s Garden’ versus the stigma he continues to face outside it.

This film is as much about art as it is about society. It portrays the transformative power of inclusive spaces, where creativity becomes a tool for healing. As Nika dreams of professional success, his journey underscores the broader societal imperative to dismantle barriers and foster inclusivity.

‘TEREZA’—A PORTRAIT OF QUIET RESILIENCE

Gvantsa Mamatsashvili’s *Tereza* chronicles the daily life of a young woman with hearing and vision loss as she transitions from her hometown of Poti to the bustling capital of Tbilisi. Far from sensationalizing her experiences, the film finds beauty in her resilience and determination.

Tereza is a deeply personal story, yet its implications are universal. It challenges viewers to rethink independence—not as an absence of challenges, but as the courage to face them head-on. Mamatsashvili’s unobtrusive style allows *Tereza*’s strength to shine, offering an inspiring narrative of empowerment.

EXPANDING THE REACH OF INCLUSIVE STORYTELLING

One of the most commendable aspects of this project is its commitment to acces-



Shot from ‘The Language of Birds’

sibility. By publishing the films online for free, Chai Khana and MAC Georgia ensure that these narratives reach a wide and more diverse audience. This digital-first approach aligns with the broader global trend of democratizing media, making these powerful stories accessible to educators, policymakers, and the general public alike. The decision to announce the three winning films in December 2024 adds an element of anticipation, further drawing attention to the project and its creators.

The success of this initiative rests on the shoulders of its collaborators. Chai Khana, an alternative multimedia platform dedicated to amplifying underrepresented voices in the South Caucasus, brings storytelling expertise and a commitment to challenging the status quo. Meanwhile, MAC Georgia’s decades of advocacy for vulnerable communities provide the ethical backbone of the project, ensuring that the films remain authentic and respectful of the subjects they depict. This partnership exemplifies how art and advocacy can intersect to create meaningful social change.

BEYOND THE SCREEN

This project is not just about films; it’s about reshaping cultural narratives. The stories told through these short films serve as a mirror to society, reflecting

both its shortcomings and its potential for growth. They challenge viewers to confront their own biases and consider how they might contribute to a more inclusive world.

Moreover, these films have the potential to spark conversations that extend beyond Georgia, offering a blueprint for other countries grappling with similar issues around disability and representation.

The Chai Khana and MAC Georgia film project is a landmark achievement in both art and advocacy. By giving people with disabilities a platform to tell their stories, it not only humanizes their experiences but also elevates them as agents of change.

As the competition nears its conclusion, the films already published offer a glimpse into the transformative power of inclusive storytelling. These narratives are more than just stories—they are acts of resistance against stigma, ignorance, and indifference.

In a world desperately in need of empathy and understanding, this project serves as a reminder of what is possible when art meets advocacy. Through these films, we are invited to see disability not as a limitation, but as a lens through which to view the boundless possibilities of human resilience and creativity.

A Conversation with Lia Bagrationi



Lia Bagrationi. Photo by Natela Grigalashvili



BY TEAM GT

Each day, I felt a strong need to capture the view from my studio window. It was not driven by impressionistic motives, but rather by a desire to catch the mood and the shifting rhythms of daily life, - artist Lia Bagrationi tells us in her sit-down with GEORGIA TODAY. We begin by asking about her focus on the conceptualization of clay and multimedia projects, and recent attention-shift to painting, leading to the exciting outcome of her new series 'View from My Window.'

"My main medium has been ceramics since 2000, when I started my professional creative journey," she tells us. "From an early age, I always found painting to be fascinating. Before entering the Academy of Arts, I studied architecture,

and later, on the advice of my mentor Tazo Khutsishvili, I turned to painting. For fairly unanticipated reasons, I eventually decided to enroll in the Faculty of Ceramics. Nevertheless, my love of painting stayed a recurring theme throughout. I always kept paints and a stretched canvas in my studio. During the pandemic, I started painting more deliberately; the medium gave my work fresh conceptual clarity.

YOU NAMED YOUR NEW SERIES 'VIEW FROM MY WINDOW.' CAN YOU TELL US MORE ABOUT THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS SERIES? HOW IS YOUR SUBJECTIVE VISION EXPRESSED IN THESE WORKS?

This idea developed naturally. Each day, I felt a strong need to capture the view from my studio window. It was not driven by impressionistic motives, but rather by a desire to catch the mood and the

Pictorial solutions are always part of a larger space, content, and conceptual framework

shifting rhythms of daily life. Initially, the scale of the view dictated the perspective, as the spatial dimensions were a major consideration. The size of the space provided the initial impetus for where to begin.

YOU PRESENTED SOME OF THESE WORKS AT THE TBILISI INDEPENDENT - FRIEZE N9 CORK STREET EXHIBITION IN LONDON. WHAT KIND OF DIALOGUES OR REFLECTIONS DID SHOWING YOUR WORK IN SUCH AN IMPORTANT INTERNATIONAL SPACE PROVOKE?

This exhibition was certainly a significant collaboration for me. One of the most valuable aspects of this experience was the broad context of the show, which facilitated a dialogue with important Georgian artists from different periods, as curated by the art consultancy ReachArt Visual. This format reinforced my deep appreciation for painting as a medium.

WHAT KIND OF CONCEPTUAL RESEARCH ARE YOU THINKING ABOUT DEVELOPING IN THE FUTURE? HOW MIGHT YOUR APPROACH TO PAINTING SHAPE YOUR CURRENT WORK OR INFLUENCE FUTURE PROJECTS?

I am currently working on a new painting project where the conceptual approach remains fundamental. My artistic inquiries always start from a conceptual foundation. For example, in my solo exhibition "Sky-Turquoise, Land-Emerald, or View from My Window" at the Atinati Gallery, I presented a pictorial object exactly the size of my window. The window became the main reference point for the perspective through which I observed the series. I also introduced a self-portrait as the observing subject within the exhibition. For me, pictorial solutions are always part of a larger space, content, and conceptual framework. At least, that's how I approach it for now.

The broad context of the show was valuable, facilitating a dialogue with important Georgian artists from different periods



Each day, I felt a strong need to capture the view from my studio window

Just Look Around

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

My wife and I recently returned from Svaneti to Tbilisi for the winter, the third time we've done this, to get a break from difficult electrical and hydrological conditions and to see everyone we've been missing in this end of the country. I'll always miss Svaneti's beauty, no less in winter, which is now in full swing there, but here we are.

We're in a new apartment to boot, which gives me the opportunity to notice what is different here from the last place we lived in. Here, we are on the 8th floor instead of the 2nd, and there's a much larger landscape in view right from the windows. I have challenged myself to find new things to photograph here too, inside and outside both. But this has been playfully automatic, not some rigid homework assignment I agree to.

A nice mix of city and nature presents itself. We're not far from the Mtkvari River, with trees still flaunting autumn colors everywhere, as well as high-rises poking through and new ones being built. Sunrise does light up several of these with its glow; and the progress of the sun in its winter-low path also changes photographic conditions hour by hour. Fog never hurts, adding mystery when it appears. Magpies are the only birds I've tried to photograph here, with a long lens, but others might appear too.

So, yes, there's plenty of beauty and contrast to notice in this big city. Pick a random location; even start right where you live, as I do. Changes of weather and season will give you new things to discover each day, and maybe more frequently than that.

Don't have time for such frivolities? Ah, I mourn for your busyness. This is part of recharging our batteries, slowing down and making new discoveries.

I also look occasionally for images in my coffee grounds, either in the bottom of my mug or (when I've made and transferred a few days' worth of cold brew) in the enamel teapot. Now, I'm not scrying for a fortune to tell itself; just scouting for exotica, things looking like other things. Which frequently turn up. Sometimes they scare me. That's OK.

There are countless experiments to try, breaking the rules, using a phone camera instead of the big digital one, playing with all the settings of focus and exposure and shutter speed and aperture. And, set free from the "tyranny" of up to only 38 frames on a roll of 35mm film (remember that? I surely do, from 1978 up until mid-2008), bounded only by the storage space on one's memory card, who cares if it takes dozens of tries to get something right?

Discard the failures, learn, count your blessings in the successes. Play, and enjoy. Photograph your family members. Turn color into black and white. Shoot at night, or in rain or snowfall. Let something be out of focus, or try to get motion blur. Under- or overexpose. Notice light



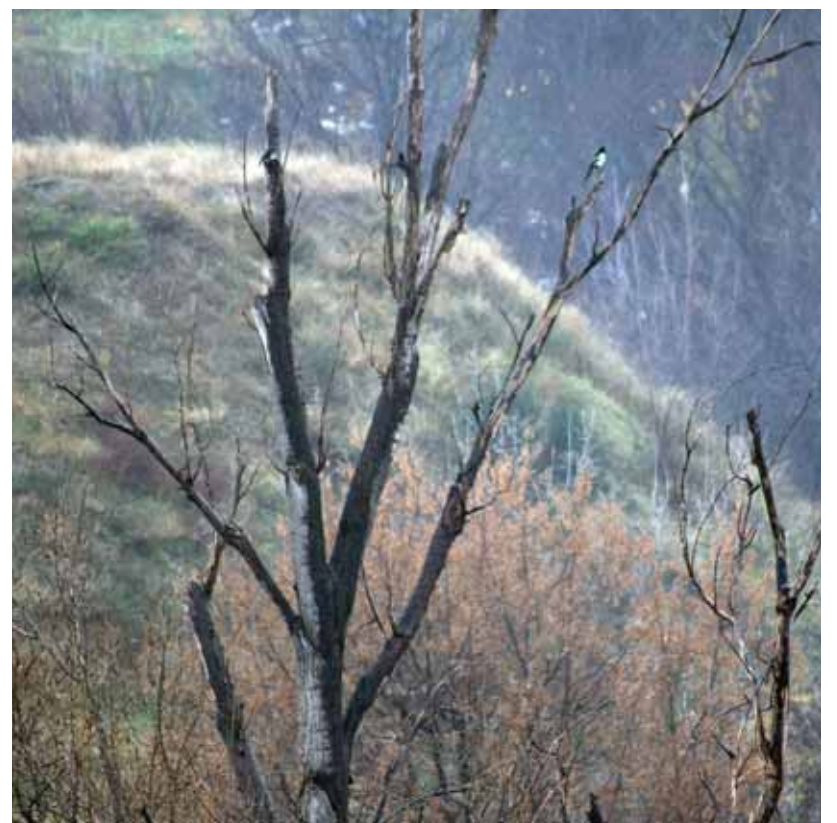
Photos by the author

reflecting off glass or plastic; shoot through a drinking glass or in a mirror. Shoot something upside down. See how many possibilities there are? Aside from the boring and narcissistic mirror selfie?

Why bother? Again, to slow down as a benefit in itself. To get your focus away from that problem you can't solve by thinking directly about it. Maybe the answer will come while you're playing instead of working too single-mindedly. History is littered with examples of such solutions coming only when unasked for.

And... just to have fun, when mostly what the world right now seems to be offering is existential stress on many scales. Thumb your nose at it: not to deny its existence, but not to let it bring you down and win.

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



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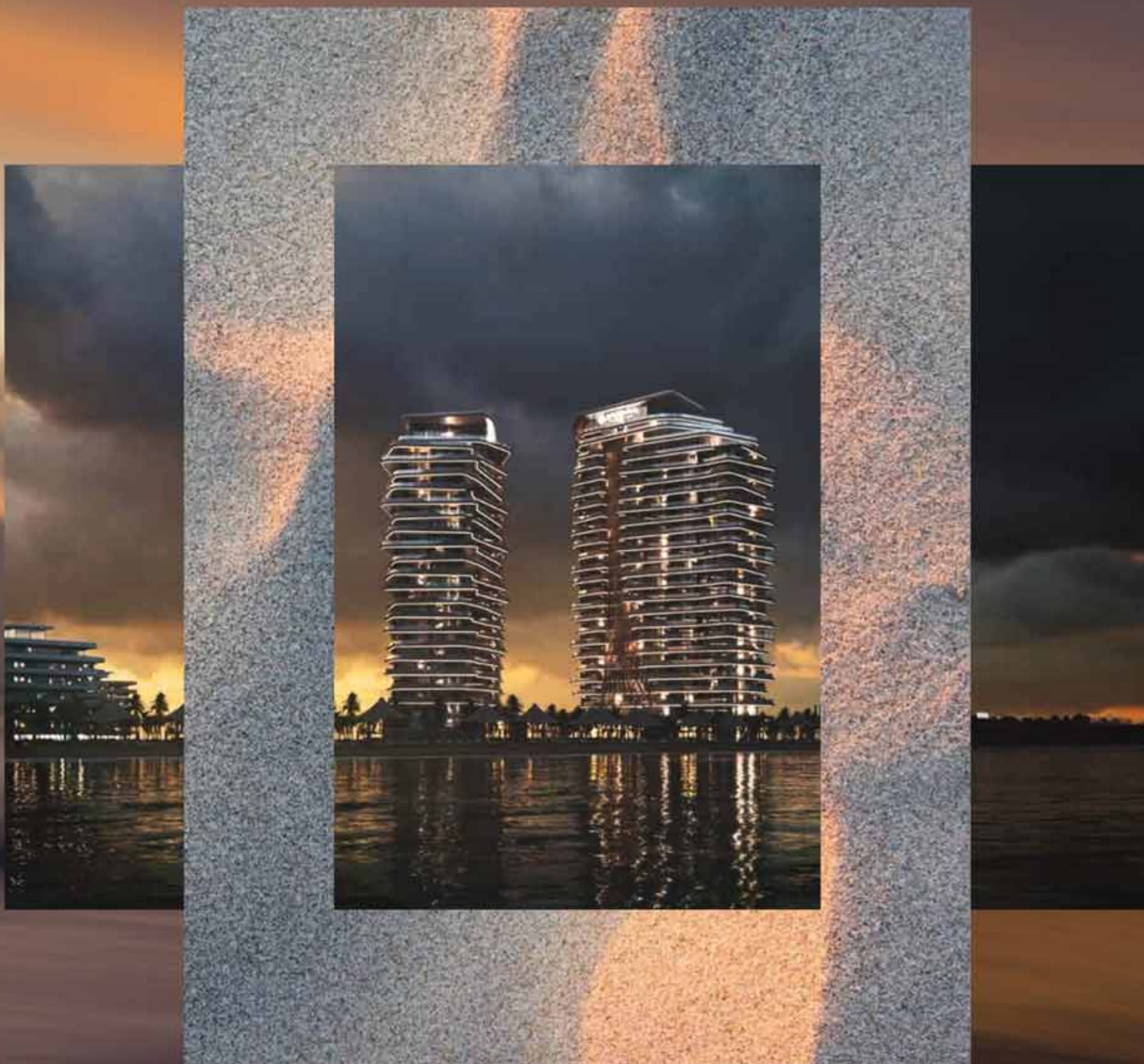
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