



FOCUS

ON PEACE IN UKRAINE

Peter Dickinson on why a deal with Moscow could endanger Ukraine and its neighbors

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Peter Dickinson, Editor of the Atlantic Council's Ukraine Alert service

Andrey Kurkov: "Putin has reached the upper limit of geopolitical machismo, and he will remain there until he dies"

INTERVIEW BY TATJANA MONTIK

Andrey Kurkov is a Russian-language Ukrainian writer, screenwriter, essayist, and publicist who is banned in Russia but is the most published, translated, and read Ukrainian author in the world. His works have been translated into 30 languages. His novel 'Picnic on Ice' became one of the first post-Soviet bestsellers in the West. The translation of his novel 'Grey Bees' (2018) outsold novels by Stephen King.

Andrey Kurkov is known for his unique style, combining elements of black humor, absurdism, melancholy, and social satire. Kurkov's books are characterized by unpredictable plots and vivid, memorable characters, who often find themselves in unusual situations.

After the start of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Andrey Kurkov wrote several notable works reflecting the war and its consequences: 'Diary of an Invasion' (2022) and 'Our Daily War' (2024), which offer readers reflections and observations on the ongoing war and its impact on Ukrainian society.

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Russian President Vladimir Putin. Photo by Vyacheslav Prokofyev

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GALT & TAGGART CREATING OPPORTUNITIES									
Markets									
	Price	w/w	m/m		Price	w/w	m/m		
BONDS									
GEORGIA 04/26	95.57 (YTM 7.84%)	-0.1%	-0.0%	Lion Finance Group (BIGED LN)	GBP 53.80	-	-5.4%		
GRABL 04/28	98.24 (YTM 8.32%)	+0.3%	-0.3%	Georgia Capital (GCEG LN)	GBP 13.92	+3.4%	-7.9%		
GEBOG 9/12 PERP	98.65 (YTM 9.39%)	+0.2%	-0.2%	TBC Bank Group (TBCCG LN)	GBP 42.80	+0.7%	-2.9%		
SILNET 01/27	100.80 (YTM 7.87%)	+0.1%	-0.7%						
TBC 8.894 PERP	96.66 (YTM 11.55%)	+0.6%	-0.8%	COMMODITIES					
TBC 10 1/4 PERP	97.14 (YTM 10.13%)	+0.1%	-3.8%	Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	66.26	+2.1%	-8.2%		
				Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	3 423.98	+6.6%	+13.3%		
INDICES									
SP 500	5 158.20	-4.6%	-0.0%	USD / GEL	2,7463	-0.2%	-0.9%		
FTSE 250	19 250.01	+1.4%	-3.3%	EUR / GEL	3,1619	+1.2%	+5.5%		
DOW JONES 30	38 170.41	-5.8%	-9.1%	GBP / GEL	3,6743	+1.2%	+2.5%		
Russell 2000	1 840.32	-2.2%	-10.5%	EUR / USD	1,1515	+1.4%	+6.4%		
FTSE 100	8 275.66	+1.7%	-4.3%	GBP / USD	1,3379	+1.4%	+6.6%		

Ukraine Latest: US Expects Territorial Concessions from Russia, Ukraine in Potential Peace Deal

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

US Vice President JD Vance announced on April 23 that Washington has put forward a "very explicit proposal" for a peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine, reiterating that the United States may withdraw from the peace process if both parties refuse to engage.

Speaking to reporters during a visit to India, Vance emphasized that the moment has come for Kyiv and Moscow "to either say yes, or for the United States to walk away from this process."

"We've engaged in an extraordinary amount of diplomacy and on-the-ground efforts," he said. "We've made a real effort to understand both Ukrainian and Russian perspectives. I believe we've crafted a very fair proposal."

Vance stated that the time had come to take "if not the final step, then one of the final steps," urging all sides to agree to end hostilities, freeze territorial lines "somewhere close to where they currently are," and work toward a long-term diplomatic solution.

He also acknowledged that any agreement would require both sides to relinquish control of certain territories. While future borders may not align precisely with the present front lines, he said, he underscored the urgent need to halt the fighting and establish a ceasefire.

In response to Vance's remarks, a spokesperson for the UK Prime Minister's Office told AFP: "We support US-led efforts to bring about a lasting end to the war. That is what everyone wants. Ultimately, the decision must rest with Ukraine."

These comments follow reports suggesting that the US is prepared to recognize Russia's de jure control of Crimea and its de facto authority over occupied areas in Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions, as part of a proposed settlement.

Moscow occupies roughly 20% of Ukraine's sovereign territory. This includes Crimea and parts of the Donbas region occupied in 2014, and additional territories taken after the start of the full-scale war in 2022.

President Volodymyr Zelensky has rejected the possibility of recognizing Russian hold over Crimea.

US President Donald Trump has said his country will abandon the ceasefire effort in the coming days unless progress is made.

Earlier, a source close to French President Emmanuel Macron told AFP that "respect for Ukraine's territorial integrity and its European aspirations are very strong demands of the Europeans."

The source added that while French, British, and German officials were meet-



Donald Trump. Photo by Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images

ing with American and Ukrainian envoys in London for ceasefire talks, "the objective remains to build a common approach that the United States could present to the Russians."

UKRAINE INSISTS ON UNCONDITIONAL CEASEFIRE AT LONDON PEACE TALKS

A Ukrainian delegation met with European officials and US Special Envoy General Keith Kellogg in London on April 23 to continue discussions on a potential peace process.

"During our meeting with US Special Envoy General Keith Kellogg, we had a constructive exchange of views on the path to peace," Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha announced on X. "Ukraine wants the war to end more than anyone else in the world. We are committed to working together to achieve this goal."

The London gathering, initially planned as a high-level ministerial summit involving the US, UK, Germany, France, and Ukraine, was notably scaled down after US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and US Special Envoy Steve Witkoff declined to attend.

Reuters reported that Rubio withdrew from the meeting following Ukraine's submission of a document to European partners on April 22, in which it declared it would not engage in territorial negotiations until Russia agrees to a "full and unconditional ceasefire."

Following the talks, Andriy Yermak, head of Ukraine's Presidential Office, reiterated Kyiv's stance: "An immediate, complete, and unconditional ceasefire should be the first step toward initiating negotiations for a just and lasting peace."

Yermak also stressed that Ukraine would stand firm on its "principled positions," which are rooted in national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Despite the absence of Rubio and Witkoff, the UK Foreign Ministry reported that "significant progress was made on reaching a common position," and said all parties reaffirmed their support for US President Donald Trump's stated commitment to achieving a just peace.

The London talks followed a summit in Paris on April 17, where senior Trump administration officials presented a controversial peace proposal to Ukrainian and European representatives. The plan reportedly includes US recognition of Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea and a prohibition on Ukraine joining NATO—two major demands made by the Kremlin.

TRUMP SAYS 'NOBODY IS ASKING' UKRAINE TO RECOGNIZE CRIMEA AS RUSSIAN

President Donald Trump asserted on April 23 via his social media platform, Truth Social, that the United States is not pressuring Ukraine to recognize

Crimea as Russian territory, following widespread reports that a proposed US peace deal would include formal recognition of Moscow's annexation.

"Nobody is asking President Zelensky to recognize Crimea as Russian territory," Trump wrote. "But if he wants Crimea, why didn't they fight for it eleven years ago when it was handed over to Russia without a shot being fired?"

Trump's remarks came just one day after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky firmly rejected the possibility of recognizing Russia's control of Crimea, calling the issue non-negotiable.

"There is nothing to talk about. This violates our Constitution. This is our territory—the territory of the people of Ukraine," Zelensky said during an April 22 press briefing in Kyiv.

In response, Trump criticized Zelensky's stance, calling it "harmful to the peace negotiations with Russia" and claiming Crimea "was lost years ago under the auspices of President Barack Hussein Obama" and "is not even a point of discussion."

However, Trump's claim that Crimea was annexed without force is demonstrably false. In 2014, armed Russian troops in unmarked uniforms occupied Ukrainian government buildings and military installations in Crimea. One Ukrainian soldier was killed during the seizure, and dozens more were detained or assaulted. The annexation, widely condemned by the international community, was a clear violation of international law.

Trump further argued that Russia had longstanding military interests in the region, noting the presence of major Russian submarine bases in Crimea prior to the annexation. He accused Zelensky of using inflammatory rhetoric that hampers diplomatic progress.

"He can have peace, or he can fight for another three years before losing the whole country," Trump warned. "I have nothing to do with Russia, but have much to do with wanting to save, on average, five thousand Russian and Ukrainian soldiers a week, who are dying for no reason whatsoever."

Despite criticizing Russia's refusal to de-escalate the conflict, Trump has thus far avoided taking significant punitive measures against Moscow, including major sanctions.

UKRAINE STRIKES RUSSIAN DRONE PRODUCTION FACILITY OVER 1,000 KILOMETERS FROM ITS BORDER

Ukraine's military announced on April 23 that it conducted a long-range strike on a Russian facility producing combat drones, located more than 1,000 kilometers (621 miles) from Ukraine's border.

Independent news outlet Astrareported earlier in the day that a Ukrainian drone had targeted the Alabuga Special Eco-

nomics Zone, sharing footage allegedly showing a drone being shot down.

Russia's Defense Ministry confirmed that its air defenses intercepted a Ukrainian "airplane-type" drone in Tatarstan at approximately 12:20 pm local time, but did not provide further details or mention Alabuga specifically.

According to Ukraine's General Staff, the strike was carried out by the country's Unmanned Systems Forces in coordination with other branches of the military. The targeted facility, located in Russia's Republic of Tatarstan, reportedly manufactures up to 300 Iranian-designed Shahed drones and their Russian variants, known as Gerans, each day. These drones are frequently used by Russia in attacks on Ukrainian cities and infrastructure.

The strike marks one of Ukraine's deepest incursions into Russian territory since the full-scale invasion began in 2022. Ukraine first hit targets over 1,000 kilometers away last year, including a strike 1,800 kilometers (1,118 miles) from the border in Russia's Murmansk Oblast.

Ukraine's General Staff confirmed "hits and explosions in the target area," though the full extent of the damage is still being assessed.

"The strike is a justified response against a strategic military site used to support Russia's aggression and terror against Ukraine and Ukrainian civilians," the statement read.

According to Andrii Kovalenko, an official with Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, over 6,000 Shahed-type drones were produced at the Alabuga facility last year, alongside thousands of decoy drones designed to overwhelm Ukrainian air defenses.

Russian forces continue to launch hundreds of drones on an almost nightly basis, targeting civilian areas and critical infrastructure across Ukraine. These attacks have intensified in recent months, as Moscow continues to reject a US-backed proposal for a 30-day ceasefire, which Kyiv insists must include a halt to strikes on civilian infrastructure.

Volodymyr Zelensky has called for a temporary freeze on long-range drone and missile attacks, but Kremlin officials have dismissed the idea.

RUSSIAN ATTACK ON KYIV ON THURSDAY KILLS 9

Russian forces launched a major missile and drone attack on Kyiv early Thursday, killing at least nine people in the city, and injuring more than 60, the Ukrainian authorities said, in the deadliest strike on the Ukrainian capital since last summer. Explosions could be heard throughout the night; clouds of brown smoke rose over the city as the sun came up. One missile hit a two-story building with eight apartments where emergency workers hunted for survivors Thursday morning.

Georgia to Send Delegation to Vatican for Pope Francis's Funeral

BY TEAM GT

Pope Francis, the spiritual leader of the Roman Catholic Church and a global advocate for peace and social justice, passed away on Easter Monday, April 21, at the age of 88. He died at his residence in the Vatican's Casa Santa Marta, leaving behind a profound legacy of humility, interfaith dialogue, and compassion for the marginalized.

In response to his passing, Georgia has announced it will send an official delegation to the Vatican to attend the Pope's funeral, scheduled for April 26. The delegation will be led by Mikheil Kavelashvili and will include both government and ecclesiastical representatives, according to a statement released by Kavelashvili's press service.

Among the senior officials accompa-

nying him are Minister of Foreign Affairs Maka Botchorishvili and Head of Government Administration Ketevan Kvinikadze. The Georgian Orthodox Church will also be represented by prominent clergy, including Metropolitan Gerasime—Chairman of the Patriarchate's Department for External Relations and Administrator of the Zugdidi and Tsaishi Diocese—and Protospyter Giorgi Zviadadze, Rector of the Tbilisi Theological Academy and Seminary.

In a heartfelt letter addressed to Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, Dean of the College of Cardinals, the Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia, Ilia II, expressed his deep sorrow over the Pope's passing: "To His Most Reverend Eminence, Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, Dean of the College of Cardinals, With great sorrow, we have learned of the passing of His Holiness, Pope Francis. Please accept our heartfelt condolences,



Pope Francis in Georgia for the first time, 2016, with Patriarch Ilia II. Source: euronews

and kindly convey our grief and sympathy to the hierarchy of your Church, the clergy, and the faithful – to all those for whom his memory is dear."

The Patriarch also highlighted the strong spiritual and cultural ties that had developed between the Vatican and the

Georgian Orthodox Church during Pope Francis's papacy:

"We would also like to note our deep gratitude to Pope Francis. Since 2014, Georgian liturgical services have been held in a church in Rome that was granted for our use through his decision.

Following his official visit to Georgia, as a sign of his profound respect toward our country and Church, he invited the choir of Tbilisi's Holy Trinity Cathedral to perform in the Sistine Chapel. Through this, he introduced the world to the unique Georgian culture – polyphonic chanting and traditional folk songs."

Ilia II praised Pope Francis as a global figure of great humility and moral leadership:

"It is universally acknowledged that His Holiness Pope Francis was a person endowed with many talents, distinguished by his humility, his strong support for social projects, and his active advocacy for global peace. We express our deep respect for him and pray for the repose of his immortal soul."

As the world prepares to bid farewell to Pope Francis, Georgia joins the international community in honoring a life dedicated to faith, unity, and the service of humanity.

Opposition Slams OSCE Chief's Silence during Georgia Visit, Citing "Weaponized Neutrality" amid Political Crisis



OSCE Secretary General Feridun Sinirlioglu on his visit to Georgia. Source: FB

BY TEAM GT

As OSCE Secretary General Feridun Sinirlioglu continues his official visit to Georgia, tensions have flared between the organization and the country's opposition. The Coalition for Change announced its refusal to meet with Sinirlioglu, accusing the OSCE of legitimizing Georgia's ruling authorities and failing to confront the deepening political crisis.

In an official statement, the Coalition cited the OSCE/ODIHR's assessment of "serious violations" during the October 26 elections, which they said have "undermined public trust in Georgia's

electoral process." The Coalition condemned the Secretary General's engagement with what they called an "illegitimate government" without addressing these concerns.

"This silence is being weaponized by the regime in a way that mirrors Russian propaganda, aimed at legitimizing their anti-democratic and anti-Western agenda," the Coalition declared.

They described Georgia's political landscape as one marked by "constitutional backsliding, electoral fraud, the torture of peaceful protesters, and the unlawful detention of citizens." In such a context, the Coalition argued, the Secretary General's failure to acknowledge the crisis only reinforces the ruling party's rhetoric.

"Clarity and consistency are vital to

overcoming the regime and realizing the Georgian people's historic aspirations," the statement continued. The group added that their position has been recognized by international partners, contributing to the activation of the Vienna Mechanism against Bidzina Ivanishvili's regime—previously invoked against Belarus and Russia.

Despite the boycott, Sinirlioglu is proceeding with a full diplomatic agenda. He has already met with Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze, Foreign Minister Maka Bochorishvili, and other senior officials. Discussions focused on regional security, cooperation with the OSCE, and the situation in Georgia's occupied territories.

"The Prime Minister thanked the OSCE Secretary General for his visit to Geor-

gia and close cooperation," the government administration stated. Both sides emphasized the importance of peace and stability in the South Caucasus and Georgia's role in fostering dialogue.

The Secretary General also visited Georgia's Central Election Commission, where Chairman Giorgi Kalandarishvili outlined upcoming reforms: "The CEC is working to introduce large-scale electronic technologies and ensure a transparent and professional election process in line with international standards."

Sinirlioglu, reaffirming the OSCE's support, said: "Stability here in Georgia is vital both for its people and for the wider region's security and stability."

He praised the long-standing partnership between Georgia and the OSCE and highlighted the ongoing work of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM), especially in Ergneti, as a model of effective dialogue.

"Our engagement is and will continue to be guided by the needs of the people

on the ground," Sinirlioglu said.

The Secretary General is scheduled to visit the Odzisi crossing point near the occupation line to assess the humanitarian and security situation firsthand. Meetings with other political actors, including the Lelo party, are expected as his visit continues.

Foreign Minister Maka Bochorishvili said: "Two regions of Georgia—Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region—remain under Russian occupation, with Russia continuing to violate Georgia's territorial integrity. It is essential that discussions on Georgia within the OSCE framework persist, and that every effort is made to resolve the conflict through peaceful means. As we mark the 50th anniversary of the OSCE's founding, we firmly believe the organization must be equipped to safeguard Europe's security. To achieve this, OSCE member states must uphold international law and remain dedicated to the principles upon which the organization was established."



OSCE Secretary General Feridun Sinirlioglu on his visit to Georgia. Source: FB

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"Five Minutes to Midnight": Why a Deal with Moscow Could Endanger Ukraine—and Its Neighbors

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

It will be a historic disgrace for America... Ukraine is now in a position where either it will lose American support or it will agree to a very dangerous peace that will place the country's future in question, - says Peter Dickinson, Editor of the Atlantic Council's Ukraine Alert service and Publisher of Business Ukraine magazine, in an interview with RFE/RL's Georgian Service.

In this conversation, Dickinson discusses what a "peace at any cost" might mean for Ukraine, how America's withdrawal has reshaped Europe's strategic reality, what hangs in the balance for President Zelensky—and why any deal with Moscow could spell disaster far beyond Ukraine's borders, including for countries like Georgia.

WHERE DO WE STAND? HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE SITUATION AT THE MOMENT?

It's difficult to make a decisive comment because things are changing so fast. But it seems clear that the Americans are committed to pushing Ukraine into a very unfavorable peace agreement, that Trump has prioritized ending the war and doesn't really care what that means long-term. He's chosen the path of least resistance, which is to appease Putin and bully Zelensky. He's going to continue down that road. He's not going to offer a good or just peace. So Ukraine is in a position where either it will lose American support, or it will agree to a very dangerous peace that will place the country's future in question. It's facing a very difficult choice right now.

WHICH ONE DO YOU THINK IS THE LESSER EVIL?

It depends on what they can achieve in talks with Trump. If we look at the different things on offer, the continued occupation is already accepted—Ukraine has already accepted they cannot liberate those territories militarily. So that's not a major issue. The Crimea issue, of course, is a much bigger problem. But again, America is saying, "We'll recognize it, but you don't have to"—that's also very painful. But first of all, it will be a disaster for America. Europe won't follow the lead, even China won't recognize Crimea as Russian. That leaves the United States together with five or six other countries in the world, all of them pariah states. It will be a historic disgrace for America, but Crimea would still be internationally recognized by



He's chosen the path of least resistance, which is to appease Putin and bully Zelensky. He's not going to offer a good or just peace



Peter Dickinson, Editor of the Atlantic Council's Ukraine Alert service

most countries as Ukrainian.

I think the main issue is still security guarantees. That's 99% of everything, and there's nothing really concrete being offered yet. The talks will still hinge on what Ukraine can achieve there.

WOULD IT BE FAIR TO SAY THIS DEAL WILL ALSO DECIDE PRESIDENT ZELENSKY'S POLITICAL FATE? CAN HE SURVIVE SIGNING THIS DEAL IN ITS CURRENT FORM?

If it's seen to be a surrender, then he will not survive. And I think he is well aware of that. He wouldn't sign something that he understands places the country's future under threat. And I don't think he'll agree to anything that would mean that his political career is over. He would understand that would be foolish.

AND IF THE OPTIONS ARE ACCEPTING A VERY UNFAVORABLE DEAL OR ACCEPTING THE REALITY OF LOSING US MILITARY SUPPORT—DO THE UKRAINIANS HAVE THE LUXURY OF THE LATTER? CAN OR WILL THEY KEEP FIGHTING?

Yes. 100%, no question. They are ready for it. They've become more and more ready for it every day. They're becoming more and more aware that it's a distinct possibility, that we are approaching that point. And the Ukrainians know that it will be a disaster—it will be catastrophic for the West in general. It will cost a lot of lives, a lot of land, a lot of destruction. I can't portray it in a positive light, but if it has to happen, Ukraine would rather do that than accept a peace which will condemn the country to a slow death.

THE CEASING OF ALL WESTERN—NOT JUST AMERICAN—MILITARY SUPPORT IS VERY LIKELY TO BE ONE OF THE DEMANDS THAT PUTIN WON'T BUDGE ON. IS THAT THE "SLOW DEATH" SCENARIO YOU'RE REFERRING TO—SIGNING THAT DEAL?

It is. That would be the slow death. Ukraine's military has improved a lot. Its military-industrial complex has dramatically increased. It's now able to

produce around 40% of its military needs domestically, and they expect that to increase to 50% by the end of this year—a lot of it is very good equipment, especially the drones and electronic warfare systems, which are really world-class. So Ukraine can produce a lot itself now, but it's still heavily dependent on Western military support. I think Ukraine's looking to provide 50% themselves and hoping Europe will step up and help close the gap if the US withdraws.

DO YOU EXPECT EUROPE TO ACTUALLY MATCH THE PLEDGES THEY'VE BEEN MAKING?

Well, if you base your opinion on experience, you'd say: no way, no chance. They won't do anything, because they've been saying this for three years now and didn't do it. But I would also say that where we are today is fundamentally different than where we were even six months ago. Now Europe has lost America's security guarantee, for the first time in 80 years. Europe is now thinking, "We are on our own. We're naked, we're exposed." That is a fundamental change.

So if there was ever a moment for them to finally act, it's now. They are facing an almost immediate, looming threat from Russia, and there is no one to protect them now except the Ukrainian army. It's either Ukraine fights the Russians, or they do—and they're not ready. They have very limited military forces. And I think there's also a big morale issue here: I don't think Europeans are psychologically ready to defend themselves at all. Ukrainians had eight years of low-scale warfare to arrive at that psychological readiness. Europe has had none of that. Their bubble is being shattered—America is no longer the guarantor of Europe. That's clear. I think no one would rely on America. So, to answer your question: past experience says Europe won't do it, but today's reality says they might. They probably should.

SPEAKING OF SECURITY GUARANTEES, I THINK IT'S FAIR TO ARGUE WE HAVE A BENCHMARK OF WHAT BAD SECURITY GUARANTEES OR ASSURANCES LOOK LIKE IN THE BUDAPEST MEMORANDUM? HOW WOULD THIS PEACE

DEAL COMPARE TO IT?

I think it looks quite similar. All this talk of vague security guarantees, where crucially, America is not going to participate—we're talking about European countries providing these guarantees—it looks pretty weak. Initially, when Ukraine was talking about security guarantees, that essentially meant NATO membership. NATO was always the benchmark. But who trusts NATO now? Who trusts America to live up to its NATO collective security obligations?

Publicly, of course, everyone says NATO's still the same as it always was. But privately? We're not sure anymore. If we're talking about a hybrid incident—an Estonian border town is seized, or something happens in Poland or Finland—is America going to go to war? Probably not, frankly. So NATO itself becomes uncertain. We no longer know what a real security guarantee looks like. And now we have talk of a "coalition of the willing," which frankly is very confusing, because no one knows what they're willing to do.

WHAT'S THE EXTENT OF THAT WILLINGNESS?

Exactly. The coalition of the willing does not know the extent of its willingness. No one has answers to how exactly they are going to deter further Russian aggression. What is the mandate? What are these troops going to do if they're sent to Ukraine? What are the rules of engagement?

It always comes back to the same fundamental question: what happens when they're attacked by Russia? Do they fight back? Do they hide? Do they do nothing? That's such a fundamental issue—you're sending troops into a war zone, and you don't know how they'll react. About 50 countries are nominally part of this coalition of the willing, and yet only five or six are saying they'll send troops. That in itself is telling.

HOW THEN DO YOU MAKE PUTIN HONOR WHATEVER DEAL THERE IS, AS UNFAVORABLE AS IT MIGHT BE? HOW DO YOU ENSURE THAT PEACE, BOUGHT AT SUCH AN EXORBITANT PRICE, REMAINS PEACE?

I think the most realistic potential—I



The most constructive thing the West can do is to patrol the air, secure the skies above Ukraine

don't rule out the idea of having Western troops on the ground, better they were there than not—but the most constructive thing the West can do—and when I say the West now, I'm not including America. I mean Europe, Canada, Japan, Australia, which is still a formidable coalition—is to patrol the air. Provide Ukraine with a sky shield. Secure the skies above Ukraine.

They could deploy a strong aviation contingent to protect at least western and central Ukraine from missile and drone attacks. It would allow for investment, for life to continue, for defense industries to grow. You wouldn't cover everything—Kharkiv, for example, is right on the border—but you could shield everything west of the Dnipro River.

If the airspace is closed and protected, the next challenge is stopping Russia on the front lines. That can be done with more support for the Ukrainian army. No European army will do that. So the task must be getting Ukrainians the support they need—investing heavily in Ukraine's military-industrial complex. A future battlefield would be dominated by drones and electronic warfare, with a monitored "dead zone" of 20 kilometers, where anything that moves gets hit. That's the future.

WHAT WOULD SUCH A PEACE DEAL, ESPECIALLY THE CRIMEA RECOGNITION AND LEGITIMIZING RUSSIAN LAND-GRABS, MEAN FOR OTHER COUNTRIES IN RUSSIA'S NEIGHBORHOOD, ESPECIALLY FOR THOSE WHO ALSO HAVE TERRITORIAL CONFLICTS / OCCUPIED TERRITORIES?

It's five minutes to midnight for those countries, so to speak. It's time to get very serious about re-arming and preparing for the worst, frankly. If Russia achieves such a favorable peace in Ukraine, it will mean it will plan other conquests, likely to finish the job in Ukraine, as it were, either by completely subjugating the country, or installing a puppet government in Kyiv. Ukraine's fate would be very dark, but then the Russians would go further. It's hard to imagine a scenario where a triumphant Putin didn't want to go further, if he succeeds in Ukraine. He will be validated in his entire imperial agenda; he will be seen as a victor not only by Russians, but also by a large part of the international community, certainly by the Global South. Russia will have Ukraine's wealth at its disposal and be in a vastly stronger position, while the West will be much, much weaker; demoralized, discredited. So, in this perfect storm scenario, it is almost inevitable that Russia would go further, and that the countries in the immediate neighborhood would all be in danger and would need to take extreme measures and expect the worst in the short-term—Russia trying to reverse the verdict of 1991.

Andrey Kurkov: "Putin has reached the upper limit of geopolitical machismo, and he will remain there until he dies"

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The author recently finished the third part of his war diaries.

Kurkov continues to write articles and essays for international media, providing commentary and analysis on the war and Ukraine. In Georgia, readers can get acquainted with his war diaries and the novel 'Penguin,' which have been translated into Georgian (originally 'Смерть постороннего,' sometimes translated as 'Death and the Penguin') and published under the title 'პინგვინი' (Pingvini) by Intelekti Publishing.

ANDREY, ARE YOU USED TO LIVING IN WAR CONDITIONS? IS IT POSSIBLE TO LEARN TO GET USED TO WAR?

Everyone to whom war comes will either flee or get used to it. The majority of us have gotten used to it, as, while six million have fled, they also regularly come back. There are huge queues at the borders, hundreds of thousands of people every day. Mostly, these are people who live in Poland, Germany; fewer travel to the rest of Europe. But there's also a lot of movement within the country. In Kharkiv alone, there are 250,000 displaced people from Donbas, Kherson, and the Zaporizhzhia region. Though Kharkiv is bombed every day, it's just easier to find housing in big cities than in Uzhhorod or Lviv, where there are fewer such opportunities. About 28-30 million continue to live in war-time conditions.

WHAT IS YOUR WORK SCHEDULE LIKE? DO YOU TRAVEL ABROAD OFTEN?

I usually spend around ten days a month abroad, although I've reduced that now. There are invitations, but I'm refusing more often these days. I was supposed to fly to the USA in May, but I decided not to go.

FOR POLITICAL REASONS?

Partly, yes. I find it difficult to understand what I can do in Trump's America right now.

IS THE MAIN PURPOSE OF YOUR TRIPS TO MEET READERS?

Yes. I have a third book coming out about life during the war. It's non-fiction. I travel with it to various discussions, lectures, and meetings, including with our refugees.

DO YOU NOTICE THAT PEOPLE'S PERCEPTION OF THIS WAR ABROAD HAS BECOME DULLED?

It's perfectly normal. People's psyche can feel empathy for a while, but if nothing changes, they become despondent and their attention switches. Every other conflict that flares up anywhere on the globe further reduces interest in and attention on Ukraine.

IS IT POSSIBLE FOR YOU TO ENGAGE IN CREATIVE WORK, TO WRITE FICTION, DURING THE WAR?

"Over the past two and a half years, I finished the novel 'Bannoe Delo' (The Bathroom Affair), which I started before the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine.



Andrey Kurkov. Source: the author himself.

It's the third historical detective novel about Kyiv in 1919, about the second Bolshevik occupation of Kyiv. The first two novels have already been published in various languages. I finished it in November and wrote it on-and-off. Since then, I haven't written any new fiction. I dream of returning to fiction, but it's just not working for me right now, so I'm focusing on documentary prose," Kurkov tells us.

In his novel 'The Last Love of the President,' which was published in 2004, Kurkov aptly described the future relationship between Russia and Ukraine, and even predicted the poisoning of presidential candidate Viktor Yushchenko. It is hard to forget the scene in which Putin's audience with the presidents of other countries takes place in an ice hole with freezing water, so that only a few participants can withstand the harsh test. We ask him if he perhaps underestimated the Russian president in his writing.

"No, quite the opposite!" he replies. "Although his machismo at that time manifested itself almost harmlessly, now it has grown into a kind of fascist machismo, into a desire to kill, destroy, and prove to everyone that he doesn't care about anyone. And the way he humiliated Trump now is the finale. He first humiliated NATO, humiliated the European Union, and now the American president, who stated that he was the best negotiator and could end the war in a day. Now Putin has no one left to humiliate. He has reached the upper limit of geopolitical machismo, and now he will remain there until he dies."

DO YOU BELIEVE THAT THIS WAR WILL NOT END AS LONG AS PUTIN IS ALIVE?

Yes, I believe so, and have been saying so from the very beginning.

IF YOU WERE GRANTED AN AUDIENCE WITH TRUMP, WOULD YOU HAVE ANY PERSUASIVE ARGUMENTS TO CONVINCE HIM NOT TO STOP AID TO UKRAINE?

Trump is not a man of arguments, and I don't think that any meeting of mine with him could be even minimally productive. I think that only good psychologists and psychoanalysts can calculate who from the Ukrainian side he needs to meet with and how to prepare that person so that they implant their ideas into Trump's head and mouth. Because that's exactly how it happens. An economic advisor implanted tariff war ideas into Trump. If someone from Ukraine can skillfully put reasonable words into Trump's head that aid to Ukraine should not be stopped, then everything will work out.

TRUMP CLAIMED THAT ZELENSKY WAS ONE OF THE THREE PEOPLE WHO STARTED

THIS WAR. HOW WAS THIS PERCEIVED IN UKRAINE?

Firstly, no one in Ukraine takes Trump seriously. I saw it as another of his typical phrases, just like the one where he said that Zelensky is a dictator, with 4 percent support. In principle, there's no point in reacting to these statements, because it seems that Trump himself doesn't remember what he said even yesterday.

IN ONE OF YOUR SPEECHES, YOU SAID THAT THIS WAR IS NOT THE FIRST MILITARY CONFLICT BETWEEN UKRAINE AND RUSSIA. FEW OUTSIDE UKRAINE KNOW ABOUT THIS. CAN YOU TELL US MORE?

The first major battle was the Battle of Poltava in 1709, when Hetman Mazepa sided with the Swedish King Charles XII against Peter the Great. It was a battle for the Ukrainian dream of independence. And the 1918-1921 period saw the same situation. The idea that there was a civil war throughout the post-imperial Russian space is a myth. On the territory of modern Ukraine, there were two wars simultaneously: the war against Ukrainian independence, declared in August 1918, and the war of the Reds against the Whites. In Russia, there was only a civil war, while in Ukraine, the Polish, German, and three Ukrainian armies participated, two of which fought against each other, Petliura and Skoropadsky. Moscow's goal has long been to destroy independent Ukraine and turn it into a part of Russia.

THE SAME PICTURE EXISTED IN GEORGIA AT THAT TIME, TOO.

Absolutely! And now we're seeing the continuation. Only this war is being waged on three levels: for territory, against national identity, which allows Ukrainians to defend their territory, and a geopolitical war of an alliance of dictatorships against the democratic West.

IN GEORGIA, THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN WAS BUILT ON ANTI-WAR RHETORIC. IMAGES WERE USED OF PEACEFUL AND PROSPEROUS GEORGIA AND BOMB-DAMAGED UKRAINE. HOW DID UKRAINE REACT TO THIS? DID IT CHANGE UKRAINIANS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS GEORGIA?

Actually, this information didn't receive much attention. Disappointment in Georgia came earlier, when Georgia refused to return the anti-aircraft systems that Ukraine had transferred to it in 2008.* And after the protest reactions against the illegitimate elections ended without any results, Ukraine stopped discussing Georgia.

HOW LIKELY IS IT FOR A PRO-RUSSIAN PARTY TO COME TO POWER IN UKRAINE, WHICH

COULD SIMILARLY PLAY ON PEOPLE'S WAR FATIGUE?

First, we don't have such a party, and it doesn't even exist potentially, because any party that demonstrates even an element of pro-Russian narrative will provoke very strong aggression from the minority of radical patriots. I don't think any politician would risk standing with such ideas, not only in an election, but even to the point of posting a video on YouTube. Ukrainians will never admit that they are tired of the war, even if you ask them directly.

SO, UKRAINIAN RESISTANCE WON'T RUN OUT AS QUICKLY AS PUTIN HOPES?

We have the energy to resist. We definitely have enough for a year, perhaps even for another two years. At the same time, it's important to understand that we only closed the borders for men, while pensioners, women, and children, those who are tired and can no longer live in war conditions, can leave freely. However, many have returned from abroad. Some people who returned to Ukraine have died in bombings—in cities like Dnipro, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia. Still, there is constant movement within the country and across its borders. Many are relocating away from frontline areas or going abroad, although the latter has become less common. Financial assistance across EU countries has decreased, living conditions have worsened, and housing is scarce. People, especially mothers with children, now understand that they won't receive enough support to settle and wait out the war.

That's why I firmly believe a pro-Russian party has no chance of coming to power—neither during the war nor afterward. At most, a liberal party could emerge later, one that supports peace or compromise to some extent. But I don't see a scenario in which Ukraine follows a path similar to what happened in Georgia.

ON ONE HAND, UKRAINE IS A NATION OF INDIVIDUALISTS AND HETMANS—A POLITICAL CULTURE WHERE THE RISE OF AUTOCRATS OR DICTATORS IS FUNDAMENTALLY AT ODDS WITH THE NATIONAL CHARACTER. ON THE OTHER, WE'RE SEEING A WAVE OF AUTHORITARIANISM GAINING GROUND ACROSS EUROPE. COULD UKRAINE FACE A SIMILAR THREAT?

It's important to remember that Yanukovich did manage to establish an authoritarian, pro-Russian regime here—but it collapsed after just three years. Something like that could theoretically happen again, but it wouldn't last. Ukraine has a deep-rooted tradition of resistance to centralized authority—it's a country where anarchy has historical roots. People here won't blindly accept a leader as a divinely appointed figure, as is often seen in Russia.

DID THE BRUTAL SHELLING OF SUMY DURING THE PRE-EASTER WEEK AFFECT PEOPLE? DID FEAR INCREASE?

After that raid in Sumy, they also bombed a bakery where Easter cakes were being baked! But no one is fleeing Sumy. There's no exodus from other frontline zones either. People are simply getting angrier and angrier, and the psychological wall between Russia and Ukraine is getting higher and thicker.

WHAT IS THE DANGER OF TRYING TO NEGOTIATE WITH PUTIN?

In the West, pragmatic politicians perfectly understand that no agreements with Putin are possible. They don't talk about it, but are waiting for changes in personnel in the Kremlin, hoping that it will be possible to negotiate with other people who will need not only to change Russia's image, but also to rebuild the



In Ukraine, any party that demonstrates even an element of pro-Russian narrative will provoke very strong aggression from the radical patriots

economy, society, and mentality of Russians.

WHEN WILL THAT HAPPEN?

Once, in China, I was asked when Russia would become democratic, and I replied that it would only be possible after Russia learns to be democratic from a democratic China, since China can become democratic from the top down, on the command of the Communist Party, while Russia cannot; it can only become so under the influence of its "big brother," which is China.

HAVE YOUR BOOKS BEEN PUBLISHED IN CHINA?

Yes. Only one book was not allowed, due to censorship: my diary about the war. But censorship did allow 'Grey Bees.'

IS IT ALREADY POSSIBLE TO TALK ABOUT THE DIVORCE OF EUROPE AND AMERICA?

No, there can be no talk of that. What is happening now, this American mess, will end within three to four months. Everyone in America understands that Europe is needed by America both as a market and as a partner in geopolitical operations. And Europe is not going to break ties with America because of Trump; it will patiently wait for the next president and the next regular or snap elections.

CAN YOU GIVE ANY USEFUL ADVICE TO YOUR READERS IN GEORGIA?

It's difficult for me to give any advice to representatives of any nation. I think that Georgians have always behaved with dignity: fearlessly and courageously. It is only now that we are observing that the young political elite of the country has turned out to be corrupt. This fact does not speak of any national or mental changes, but rather of the fact that Russian corruption and pseudo-pragmatism are winning in Georgia right now.

* It is indeed true that Georgia refused to transfer the "Buk" air defense systems to Ukraine—systems that Ukraine had originally provided to Georgia for use during the 2008 war.

This was reported in January 2023 by the Chargé d'Affaires of Ukraine in Georgia, Andriy Kasyanov. According to him, Ukraine had appealed to Georgia not only regarding the air defense systems but also the "Javelin" anti-tank missile systems that had been supplied to Tbilisi by the United States. The U.S. not only approved the transfer of these weapons but also offered to replace them with newer systems.

However, the Georgian government firmly declined. The Georgian Ministry of Defense stated that the "Buk" systems had been purchased by Georgia in 2007 for a multi-million dollar sum and were not supplied free of charge by Ukraine. Regarding the transfer of weapons to Ukraine, the Georgian government has consistently reiterated its position of not providing military aid, in order to avoid being drawn into the war.



No one in Ukraine takes Trump seriously. Trump himself doesn't remember what he said even yesterday



Image source: smartcase.ge

Tourism from Israel Up, Driving Growth in Georgia's Travel Revenues

BY TEAM GT

Georgia's tourism industry saw a significant boost in the first quarter of 2025, with Israel emerging as a key contributor to the sector's growth.

According to the latest data from the National Bank of Georgia, tourism revenues from Israeli visitors skyrocketed by 73.7% compared to the same period last year, reaching \$114.2 million. This surge coincided with a 72.9% increase in the number of Israeli travelers, totaling 80,896 visits between January and March.

Israel wasn't the only country to show strong growth. Neighboring Azerbaijan also posted an impressive 19.8% jump in revenue, while Saudi Arabia recorded a 12.3% increase, indicating a broader regional trend of rising interest in Georgia as a travel destination.

Despite some declines from key markets like Russia (-17.2%), Turkey (-8.8%), and the European Union (-4.8%), the overall tourism revenue for Georgia in the first quarter hit \$826 million, marking a 2.3% year-on-year increase.

Here's how tourism revenue from Georgia's top source countries stacked up in Q1 2025:

- Russia: \$141.8 million (↓17.2%)
- Israel: \$114.2 million (↑73.7%)
- Turkey: \$107.1 million (↓8.8%)
- European Union: \$103.2 million (↓4.8%)
- Azerbaijan: \$48.6 million (↑19.8%)
- Ukraine: \$33.7 million (↑2%)
- Armenia: \$28.2 million (↓10%)
- Iran: \$27.2 million (↓8%)
- Belarus: \$15.9 million (↓3.8%)
- Saudi Arabia: \$8.7 million (↑12.3%)
- Other countries: \$197.4 million (↑6%)

The data shows shifting trends in source markets, with growing reliance on regional and Middle Eastern countries to offset lower revenues from some of Georgia's largest historical partners.

ADB Deploys Almost \$40 bln for Development Across Asia and the Pacific in 2024



BY TEAM GT

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) committed \$24.3 billion from its own resources in 2024, coupled with \$14.9 billion in co-financing in collaboration with its partners, to help Asia and the Pacific solve a range of complex development challenges.

ADB's financial and operational results were published Thursday in its Annual Report 2024. The report summarizes how ADB supported its developing member countries (DMCs) to make progress toward sustainable, inclusive, and resilient development.

"With our increased financial firepower and a sharper strategic focus, ADB is turning commitment into concrete results," said ADB President Masato Kanda. "We are financing more affordable and efficient energy and transport systems, supporting a vibrant private sector that creates better-quality jobs, and strengthening basic services in education, health, and social protection. Together with our partners, we are building a brighter future for the next generation in Asia and the Pacific."

The \$24.3 billion comprised loans, grants, equity investments, guarantees, and technical assistance provided to governments and the private sector.

To build on the 1 million direct jobs it generated in 2024, ADB committed \$4.8 billion through its private sector projects and programs—up 28.5% from 2023.

Collaborations with governments, financial institutions, and investors supported enabling business environments, deepened capital markets, and increased trade.

The report documents ADB's evolution towards becoming a bigger, better, and more effective development bank. Milestones include capital management reforms that will enable ADB to expand its operations by 50% over the next decade, a major update to the institution's corporate strategy, and a record \$5 billion replenishment for the Asian Development Fund, ADB's largest source of grant financing for operations in its poorest and most vulnerable DMCs.

ADB also deployed a range of financial and knowledge support during the year to create more productive and resilient food production systems, reduce the damaging impacts of extreme weather events, and to reverse environmental degradation and biodiversity loss.

ADB assisted DMCs to implement critical reforms to improve public financial management, address fiscal risks, and promote social and economic development through better domestic resource mobilization and budgeting.

ADB is a leading multilateral development bank supporting sustainable, inclusive, and resilient growth across Asia and the Pacific. Working with its members and partners to solve complex challenges together, ADB harnesses innovative financial tools and strategic partnerships to transform lives, build quality infrastructure, and safeguard our planet. Founded in 1966, ADB is owned by 69 members—49 from the region.

ARDI Insurance and Liv Hospital Group Form Strategic Alliance to Enhance Cross-Border Healthcare for Georgian Patients



BY KESARIA KATCHARAVA

In a bold move that promises to reshape the landscape of cross-border healthcare in the South Caucasus, ARDI Insurance JSC, one of Georgia's premier insurance providers, and Liv Hospital Group, a globally recognized leader in premium healthcare based in Turkey, have signed a comprehensive strategic partnership agreement. The memorandum of understanding (MoU), signed in Tbilisi at the Hotel Pullman, lays the foundation for an innovative collaboration aimed at expanding access to world-class medical services for Georgian patients.

At the core of this partnership is a shared vision to eliminate financial, logistical, and informational barriers that often prevent patients from seeking advanced care abroad. The partnership offers ARDI-insured individuals exclusive discounts and benefits at Liv Hospital facilities — including a 30% reduction on all medical services, waived robotic surgery fees, 50% off cancer screening programs, and seamless access to virtual consultations through the Healthverse PanoramicWEB platform.

LIV HOSPITAL'S COMMITMENT TO GEORGIAN PATIENTS

Liv Hospital Group, founded in 2013 in Istanbul, has grown into one of Turkey's most advanced hospital networks, combining cutting-edge medical technologies with personalized care across specialties like oncology, cardiology, orthopedics, regenerative medicine, and robotic surgery. Today, it operates six hospitals across Türkiye and four internationally — in London, Baku, Budapest, and Dubai.

Ms. Meri Istiroti, Group Coordinator of Liv Hospital Group, underscored the significance of Georgia as a strategic partner in Liv Hospital's international vision: "Georgian healthcare is also developing in parallel with the medical changes and innovations happening globally. We see a lot of collaboration on both sides — in medical education, through partnerships with local universities, Legal Hospital, and our colleagues in the Georgian medical community."

According to Istiroti, while many Georgian patients choose to undergo treatment abroad due to access to advanced technologies and techniques, affordability remains the biggest barrier:

"As there are patients who prefer to have their treatments abroad, we believe ARDI Insurance will be a good partner for us. Even though we have other insurance agreements in place, ARDI has taken a courageous step forward — not only to facilitate insurance coverage but to ease patients' lives by helping them afford medical treatment and diagnosis abroad."

MAKING ROBOTIC SURGERY ACCESSIBLE

Among the most significant elements of the partnership is the inclusion of robotic surgery — an area in which Liv Hospital is internationally recognized. Through the partnership with ARDI, patients are now able to access robotic procedures without paying additional fees, effectively leveling the cost with that of traditional laparoscopic surgeries.

As Istiroti explained, there has been no cultural resistance to robotic procedures among Georgian patients. Instead, the barrier has been largely economic: "There's no stigma at all. Once patients receive more information about the post-operative process — how quickly they recover, how minor the difficulties are compared to conventional surgeries — they prefer and want to utilize this technology. Especially in high-risk cases like cancer, if they can get better quicker and with fewer complications, of course they prefer to use it."

She emphasized that this is exactly why Liv Hospital pursued a closer relationship with ARDI Insurance: "It's a financial challenge patients have to overcome. That's why we made this step toward partnering with ARDI — so that our advanced surgical technologies are not just a privilege for a few, but a solution that ARDI-insured patients can realistically access."

PATIENT EMPOWERMENT THROUGH DIGITAL TOOLS

A notable feature of the collaboration is the use of Healthverse PanoramicWEB, Liv Hospital's augmented reality consultation platform. This digital tool provides prospective patients with a virtual experience of the hospital before they even leave Georgia. They can meet their doctor, consult with translators, and navigate the facilities — all online — making the eventual transition to treatment smoother and less intimidating.

"We are very happy that, as Liv Hospital Group, we are serving ARDI's insurance holders with this new agreement," Istiroti said. "We are offering significant discounts on treatments and diagnostics, and a 50% reduction for cancer screening programs. Through Healthverse PanoramicWEB, patients can connect with their doctors and translators, explore

the hospital virtually, and get reliable information before deciding whether to come to Istanbul for treatment."

ARDI INSURANCE: BRIDGING BORDERS FOR GEORGIAN HEALTHCARE

For ARDI Insurance, the partnership is part of a broader, long-term vision to provide cross-border medical access that is seamless, affordable, and customized to patient needs.

Mr. Mikheil Japaridze, General Director of ARDI Insurance, described the Liv partnership as a vital part of ARDI's expanding international service strategy — one that has already seen a surge in patient interest and volume: "See what the Lord has in store for us. The availability of services will increase among our partners. Yu's Fault has now joined our partner network. I hope that the Russians will also help us, our insured, if necessary, to have more choice."

In practical terms, the partnership with Liv Hospital addresses key logistical barriers, from travel and language to treatment navigation. ARDI has even had to expand staff to meet the growing demand for treatment abroad, especially in Türkiye: "After launching our international services, we had to bring in an additional staff member just to manage the demand. There is a very high volume every day — the demand far exceeded our expectations."

Japaridze emphasized the logistical coordination ARDI now provides — organizing flights, transfers, and translation services: "There's still a door barrier, a gate, a language barrier, a geographical barrier... Our team and our partners simplify those barriers. When people see that everything is arranged — the tickets, the transfers, the treatment — they feel more confident seeking care abroad."

A REGIONAL MODEL FOR CROSS-BORDER HEALTHCARE

While ARDI continues to explore additional partnerships in countries such as Israel and the United States, Türkiye remains the most in-demand destination for Georgian patients due to its proximity and established medical infrastructure.

"Turkey is close, and there's high demand. We also offer services within Georgia using the same insurance models, but the demand is clearly stronger for treatment in Türkiye. So we are responding directly to what our insured members are asking for."

The strategic partnership between ARDI Insurance and Liv Hospital Group signals a new era in patient-centered, internationally integrated care. With shared values of innovation, transparency, and accessibility, the collaboration sets a precedent for how healthcare and insurance providers can work together to meet the rising demand for quality treatment abroad — without compromising affordability or experience.

It is a partnership not just built on services, but on the belief that every patient deserves a choice, and every barrier to treatment can — and should — be removed.





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Keti Zhvania, Public Relations and Digital Communications Manager of EFES Georgia, has been Named a UN SDG Pioneer

BY TEAM GT

Keti Zhvania, Public Relations and Digital Communications Manager of EFES Georgia, has been named the SDG Pioneer 2024 by the UN Global Compact Network Georgia in the category of large local or international companies. The winner was selected by an independent jury composed of representatives from the UN Global Compact Board, the United Nations, and the non-governmental sector.

As a reminder, the 'Corporate Sustainability Award - Business for SDGs' was organized by the UN Global Compact Network Georgia with the financial support of Sweden for the 7th time this year. At the annual ceremony, in addition to the SDG Pioneer Award, winners were recognized across six key categories. Based on the evaluation of an independent jury composed of Georgian and international members, EFES Georgia received awards in two nominations within the large business category - 'Decent Work and Economic Growth' and 'Responsible Consumption and Production'.

We spoke with Keti Zhvania, Public Relations and Digital Communications Manager of EFES Georgia.

KETI, CONGRATULATIONS ON RECEIVING THE 2024 SDG PIONEER AWARD IN THE LARGE BUSINESS CATEGORY FROM THE UN GLOBAL COMPACT NETWORK GEORGIA. WHAT ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITY DOES THIS RECOGNITION BRING FOR YOU?

The 2024 SDG Pioneer Award in the large business category, granted by the UN Global Compact Network Georgia, highlights that EFES Georgia, together with its employees, is actively contributing to the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Georgia. It is especially important that the winners were selected by an independ-

ent jury composed of representatives from the UN Global Compact Board, the United Nations, and the non-governmental sector. This recognition is, of course, an additional responsibility. The SDG Pioneer Award is a source of pride for me personally and for EFES Georgia as well. Since joining the EFES Georgia team in 2018, I have shared the values of our company and have been highly motivated to engage in sustainability initiatives — and I intend to continue doing so in the future.

MORE BROADLY, WHAT DOES CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY MEAN FOR EFES GEORGIA?

For EFES Georgia, corporate sustainability is a declared priority, fully aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. For over 16 years, we have been implementing various projects in the field of corporate responsibility. Therefore, the awards we've received for sustainability reflect the recognition of our ongoing efforts and affirm that we are moving in the right direction. In general, corporate responsibility at EFES Georgia encompasses several key areas, including caring for employees and the community, environmental protection and sustainable resource use, ensuring fair labor conditions, ethical business practices, and more. We consistently strive to align our operations with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

EFES GEORGIA ALSO RECEIVED AWARDS IN TWO LARGE BUSINESS CATEGORY NOMINATIONS: 'DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH' AND 'RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION.' COULD YOU TELL US MORE ABOUT THE COMPANY'S EFFORTS AND ACTIVITIES IN THESE AREAS?

The company continuously strives to ensure that these efforts are not one-off initiatives but rather are embedded in our strategic vision and supported by formal documentation. We were honored to win in two highly significant categories.

For us, our employees and their well-



being are top priorities. EFES Georgia actively supports the professional development of its team members by creating individual growth plans. The company promotes equal opportunities and rights for all employees, ensuring their health, well-being, and safety. For example, EFES Georgia offers a comprehensive health insurance package and covers 100% of maternity leave. We have a formal Code of Ethics and an Ethics Committee in place. We treat all colleagues fairly and equally, regardless of their characteristics.

Regarding the second nomination, this award reflects our ongoing efforts across multiple sustainability projects. The company prioritizes the efficient use of resources during production, the implementation of waste management systems, the reduction of environmental impact, and the development of a sustainable supply chain.

Since 2012, we have been operating a biological Wastewater Treatment Plant, which fully complies with EU standards and requirements.

In addition, we have a very important update, which refers to the company's transition to the use of renewable energy. This implies transferring all energy sources and the production process to electricity obtained from renewable sources.

Among other environmental initiatives, EFES Georgia was the first company in Georgia to join the National Forestry Agency's program 'Forest Friend', and we fully fund the restoration and maintenance of approximately 12 hectares of forest land.

For years, we've also implemented a variety of environmental protection initiatives, including energy efficiency and conservation programs, waste management, sustainable use of natural resources,

and awareness campaigns on environmental issues.

Additionally, I'd like to highlight our GO Green entrepreneurship program, which we launched in partnership with Impact Hub Tbilisi and Startup Büro. The program aimed to promote sustainable entrepreneurship in Georgia and empower startups and individuals working in this direction.

WHAT OTHER UPCOMING INITIATIVES DO YOU HAVE PLANNED IN THE AREA OF CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY?

Going forward, we are committed to continuing and expanding our activities aimed at strengthening a decent work environment, contributing to the economic growth of both the company and the country, and further promoting responsible consumption and production.

SOCIETY

Professors Sachs & Khonelidze on the Same Page



Professor Zurab Khonelidze. Source: FB

BLOG BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

One of the world's most celebrated intellectuals, Jeffrey Sachs, maintains that through joint efforts, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia could function more effectively on the international stage than they might if acting independently. He emphasizes the importance of regional cooperation in the geopolitical space known as the

South Caucasus. This significant statement by the renowned American economist, political analyst, and ecologist was recently made on Georgian television and was promptly reflected in the press, for our politically overcharged public to hear and appreciate.

Meanwhile, the rector of Sokhumi State University and president of the Georgian Academy of Pedagogical Sciences, Professor Zurab Khonelidze, has been nurturing this very idea for the past thirty-odd years. Yet he finds it difficult to garner as many adherents to it as the

idea evidently deserves. His trilingual hardcover book is the result of extensive and strenuous work in the fields of political science and international relations. Ambitiously titled *The Georgian Paradigm of Peace*, the book has already been translated into twelve languages and is gradually attracting international attention. At the same time, the author has long been lecturing in various countries on the subject, masterfully elucidating the concepts in his truly thought-provoking and extremely topical piece on modern geopolitics.

The introductory words of the book are so striking that one is compelled to continue reading in search of the solutions it offers: "For Georgia, the thirty years of non-systemic dismantling of the Soviet system, and the nation's state-building course, have turned out to be full of contradictions. At the outset of the post-Soviet space transformation, we, like several other countries, were betrayed by our political intuition, having not been able to escape the 'mines' planted by the empire, especially the imposed ethno-political conflicts, whose tragic consequences still affect the Georgian state and society."

Sakartvelo's geopolitical, social, and economic problems were not accumulated overnight. They have always existed and continue to compel the Georgian people and their various leaders to turn the wheel of history in a direction that will presumably give the nation its long-deserved chance at a better life. The cur-

rent status quo of the country's impaired territorial integrity cannot—and should not—be tolerated by this nation. The author is doing his utmost to find a cure for Georgia's temporary division, its political maladies, and moral distress, thereby reinstating its organic unity.

Sokhumi State University is represented in the United States by the prominent Georgian political scientist Lasha Kasradze, whose academic background is in international relations and security studies, holding an MA from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. Kasradze has thoughtfully endorsed *The Georgian Paradigm of Peace* by Zurab Khonelidze. A couple of months ago, thanks to Lasha's personal efforts, Professor Jeffrey Sachs's valuable comments were brought to the attention of Georgian TV viewers. I am more than certain that expert Lasha Kasradze had a deep, preliminary conversation with Jeff Sachs about Georgia and Professor Khonelidze, who firmly believes that the three South Caucasian nations should combine their social, political, and economic efforts to achieve their most valuable and elevated national goals, especially on the international stage.

What a happy coincidence! Both professors—American and Georgian—happen to be on exactly the same page when it comes to major geopolitical philosophy and decision-making.

With that formula strongly in mind, Professor Khonelidze believes that the Georgian people and their political lead-

ers should not dramatize the current situation in the country. It is not the reality around us that kills the joy, he argues, but rather our attitude toward that reality. Instead, they must believe that "where there is a will, there is a way." The solution, he continues, lies within us: in our way of thinking, in a novel reconsideration of Sakartvelo's role in the international arena, and in its additional functionality among the nations of the world.

The book includes a sizable segment titled *University Diplomacy*, which begins with the history of the Georgian educational tradition and diplomatic heritage. It then introduces university diplomacy as a new form of international relations and a new kind of diplomacy, concluding with a chapter entitled *Let's Learn Peace*. Indeed, Sakartvelo has learned how to make peace with the rest of the world and how to allow its good people to live in lasting peace. Professor Zurab Khonelidze's book may well serve as a real manual on how to preserve that peace—and make it even more enduring.



fAlke

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

May I complain for a minute?

I seem to have quite a sensitive ear. Having heard a song a few times, I can then karaoke it on-key. Our first Samsung clothes washer (in Svaneti) had a tune it played when the cycle was done, but one note was a bit off. Forever. It jarred horribly on my ears. The new one we bought, for our Tbilisi place, is the same brand, but a few years newer, AND with that wrong note corrected. Whew.

Now, there's an American guy's voice doing a LOT of the commentary on my wife's Facebook feed (much less on mine, and I have my phone on mute most of the time anyway). It's got some special twang and intonation to it that, designed or not, seems to get right under my skin. I can pick his speech out from anyone else's instantly; and, sorry to say, I hate that voice with a passion. Something "smarmy" about it, I don't know.

I fully expect that no one is being paid to sit there and spout whatever gossip or drivel is shoved in front of him. Much more likely is that he's an AI voice, based off a real man for sure, but for a long time now just cobbling together the words and sentences from a given text.

There's an element of doubt, though, because I don't think I've caught him in an error of intonation or pronunciation which points him out as "computer speech on a learning curve." None of what science is calling the Uncanny Valley, something about computed visuals

or speech which doesn't sit right enough for the average human to accept it. I know that AI is indeed "learning" and "improving" in these matters; for now, at the drop of a hat, I can still distinguish fake from real photos and videos online. Either the image contradicts what I know to be true about the real world, or, especially with videos, it doesn't either move or present correctly.

The gap is closing, though. Does anyone wonder, with a language as nearly phonetically perfect as Georgian, whether the AI woman's voice on Tbilisi buses is reading Georgian WORDS or just LETTERS? The latter would be so much easier to do in this language than in English, because of the pronunciation chaos which IS English, a borrower from so many other world languages, with several deep layers to its structure. It's why you could hardly have a spelling competition in any other language than English, too (although they have dictation-to-text competitions in French). Give any Georgian preschooler who knows their alphabet any word in the language, properly pronounced, and they'll be able to spell it perfectly. Try THAT with English!

I know that when photography was discovered (its bicentennial is in 2026!), painters of the day denigrated it with fury. Realist painters reacted similarly as Impressionism took hold. As did film photographers during the advent of digital image capture. But all of these pairs or sets of art have continued to coexist with each other; film photography shuddered on the cliff's edge, then took a giant step away and is now booming again. Will AI arts of all forms—spoken word, still images, silent video, video with full audio and so on—merely should



Tony Hanmer. Photo by the author

der its way in among its older siblings, or kill any of them off, partially or outright? This is my question.

As a photographer, writer and artist, I've dabbled in AI-generated still images from my text prompts, and similarly generated written pieces (a whole article for GT, once, in which EVERY word was plagiarized. I checked). And then I walked away, not getting hooked, preferring my own art made my way. That said, I did marvel at the first piece the Guardian online paper posted as an example of pretty good AI-generated writing.

Human-made art, using whatever tools, still has a mind and heart behind it. "Art" produced "solely" by AI is, so far, by definition, mindless, soulless (yes, a couple of weeks ago, the news was that an AI had passed the Turing Test in which a person can't tell if it's another person or a machine). Step by step... into who knows what. But you, owner or producer of that particular American male voice on social media, kindly keep it out of my ears.

By the way: all these disturbing images are phone selfies modified in Photoshop.

I know how to get the same effects using film and a darkroom, though... including "solarization," or the Sabattier Effect.

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

CULTURE

Clockwork Love in a Broken City: A Post-Soviet Ballad of Grief and Grace at Gabriadze Theater

BY IVAN NECHAEV

In the crooked heart of Tbilisi's Old Town, beneath the tilted clock tower that ticks like a metaphor, something quietly radical is unfolding onstage. 'Alfred and Violetta,' a puppet play first imagined in 1981 by the legendary Georgian artist Rezo Gabriadze, has returned (complete with English subtitles)—not as a museum piece, but as a haunting, deeply personal act of creative inheritance. Spearheaded by Leo Gabriadze, the late master's son and the current artistic director of the Gabriadze Theater, this revival breathes new life into a work that already defied theatrical conventions. And in doing so, Leo is not only keeping his father's legacy alive—he is reshaping it.

Rezo Gabriadze was many things: screenwriter, painter, director, sculptor, and above all, a poet of the inanimate. His puppets were never just puppets; they were emissaries of emotion, bearers of tiny heartbreaks, and symbols of cultural endurance. The reimagined 'Alfred and Violetta,' completed during the last year of Rezo's life and premiered after his death in 2021, is a signature moment in the intergenerational relay.

FROM 19TH-CENTURY PARIS TO 1990S TBILISI: A LOVE STORY REDRAWN IN RUINS

The bones of the play remain rooted in La Dame aux Camélias and Verdi's La Traviata—tales of doomed passion and social cruelty—but Leo and Rezo chose to relocate their narrative to the volatile streets of 1990s Tbilisi. It was a deliberate, even audacious move. Gone are the gilded salons of Paris. In their place: Mtatsminda's decaying balconies, flick-

ering lights, and the psychological dust of a post-Soviet collapse. The city is not just a backdrop; it becomes a character—a wounded witness to Alfred and Violetta's fragile affair.

This new setting transforms the love story into something more than a melodrama. It's a meditation on survival and loss in a country struggling to reassemble its identity. 'Alfred and Violetta' becomes, under Leo's direction, a quiet lament for a generation caught between ideologies and love letters.

By setting the play in 1990s Georgia—a decade of civil unrest, darkness, and hunger—Leo and Rezo don't just localize a European story, they reframe it as a parable about emotional resilience in the face of systemic collapse. 'Alfred and Violetta' becomes an allegory about what love and nostalgia means in a world coming undone. The lovers are not simply tragic figures; they are emblems of the Georgian psyche during one of its most fractured eras.

This temporal shift invites a re-examination of memory. Is the play a tribute? A ghost story? A reckoning? Perhaps all three. In taking up the reins of his father's final vision, Leo is also asking: how do we inherit a poetic worldview without embalming it?

LEO GABRIADZE: THE HEIR WITH HIS OWN GRAMMAR

Leo is not merely a caretaker of his father's theater; he is a dramaturge of memory, sculpting the space between homage and reinvention. Where Rezo pioneered a cinematic approach to puppet theater—incorporating close-ups, fragmented narratives, and evocative soundscapes—Leo refines these innovations, adding psychological shading and generational urgency. His version expands the emotional geography, and subtly



Photo by Gabriadze Theater

modernizes the language of the puppets.

This is not a replica. It's a re-translation of a visual and emotional idiom that belongs to both father and son—but in different dialects. Leo, who has a background in film direction and visual storytelling, integrates a contemporary sensibility that aligns with Georgia's shifting cultural rhythms. The revival does not simply memorialize the past; it asks what the past means now.

SILHOUETTES OF LONGING: PUPPETRY AS EMOTIONAL LANGUAGE

What makes this production so devastatingly effective is its fidelity to the craft

of puppetry as a vehicle for raw feeling. Gabriadze's puppets don't speak, even when they speak. Their eloquence comes from movement, gesture, and silence—an echo of nonverbal performance traditions across the world, from Japanese Bunraku to Czech marionette theater. The puppeteers—listed in this version as both "animators" and "puppeteers"—are invisible but essential, choreographing sorrow with minimalist precision.

One unforgettable image: a single autumn leaf slowly drifting down onto Alfred. It carries the weight of a season lost. In that brief moment, the leaf becomes Violetta's last message—a trace of life, of something once vibrant

now gone. Leo lets it fall long and without spotlight. He trusts the audience to feel the stillness. He choreographs time itself, not gestures. And in that falling leaf, grief becomes tangible.

MUSIC, MEMORY, AND THE GHOSTS OF GEORGIA

The musical score, composed by Leo himself, adds another layer of intergenerational dialogue. It's a score that likely straddles traditions—drawing from Georgian tonalities while gesturing toward operatic intensity. In Leo's hands, music does not underscore the narrative so much as punctuate its emotional topography.

The visual world, designed by Rezo, remains striking in its surreal minimalism. The now-iconic wry house and wobbly clock tower onstage mirror the real ones just outside the theater's doors. They seem whimsical at first glance, but under Leo's lens, they become tremulous symbols: instability, tenderness, and the uneasy passage of time.

Critical acclaim for 'Alfred and Violetta' has been resounding, with many hailing it as a triumph of emotional minimalism and visual ingenuity. But what truly distinguishes this version is its intergenerational courage. It's easy to replicate a master; it's far harder to respond to him with your own voice—especially when that master is your father. Leo Gabriadze's staging is therefore not just a theatrical event, it is a blueprint for cultural continuity. It suggests that the small stage on Shavteli Street can still contain epic questions: How do we mourn? How do we remember? How do we continue?

In this love story between puppets, a city, and a father-son duet, the answer is whispered through silence, string, and shadow.

From Tamara de Lempicka to Tamta Melashvili: A Continuous Journey of Cultural Exchange



Magdalena Wojdasiewicz, Director of the Polish Institute in Tbilisi

BY TEAM GT

The Polish Institute's Director in Tbilisi Speaks on Cultural Legacy and Future Collaborations

The Polish Institute in Tbilisi stands out as an example of how cultural initiatives can help build meaningful connections. The institute recently attracted attention for hosting a retrospective of the renowned Polish-born artist Tamara de Lempicka in Tbilisi.

This successful exhibition is just one example of the institute's continued efforts to deepen the centuries-old bond between the Polish and Georgian people. From architecture to archaeology, literature to fine arts, the Polish contribution to Georgian culture is profound, with many Polish exiles finding a second home in Georgia over the past two centuries.

We sat down with Magdalena Wojdasiewicz, Director of the Polish Institute in Tbilisi, to discuss these cultural ties and explore the institute's latest initiatives, including its partnership with Tbilisi's inaugural Book Fair.

IN MARCH, GEORGIAN ART LOVERS HAD THE RARE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE TAMARA DE LEMPICKA'S RETROSPECTIVE IN TBILISI, ORGANIZED BY YOUR INSTITUTE. WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO BRING IT TO GEORGIA?

My Georgian friends inspired me to bring Tamara de Lempicka's work to Georgia. After visiting her exhibition in Poland together, we shared the dream of intro-

ducing her art to Georgian audiences. It became a reality, and, thanks to our partners Vere Gallery and Reach Art Visual, the exhibition was a great success.

TAMARA DE LEMPICKA WAS A TRUE COSMOPOLITAN AND ONE OF THE MOST RENOWNED FEMALE ARTISTS IN THE WORLD. SHE TOOK GREAT PRIDE IN HER POLISH HERITAGE AND ACTIVELY SUPPORTED POLAND DURING WORLD WAR II. WHAT WERE THE KEY CONNECTIONS BETWEEN TAMARA AND POLAND?

She was, indeed, a citizen of the world, but primarily due to historical circumstances. She was forced to flee twice—first from Bolshevik Russia, and later from the horrors of World War II. Tamara spent her childhood in Warsaw, surrounded by the Polish cultural elite, which was deeply patriotic, especially as Poland at the time was divided among three occupying powers. Warsaw was the capital of "Congress Poland"—a nominally autonomous region within the Russian Empire. As Poles maintained a strong sense of national identity and repeatedly fought for independence, this environment had a profound influence on her sense of Polishness. She married a Polish nobleman, Tadeusz Lempicki, spoke only Polish to her daughter, Kizette, and, during World War II, she made significant efforts to raise funds to support the Polish resistance. Although she did not return to Poland for political reasons, she reportedly regretted this decision for the rest of her life.

YOUR INSTITUTE HAS DONE A LOT TO STUDY AND SHARE

THE LEGACIES OF POLISH ARCHITECTS, ARTISTS AND PUBLIC FIGURES WHO MADE IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTIONS TO GEORGIAN CULTURE. DURING THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES, MANY POLISH INDEPENDENCE FIGHTERS WERE EXILED BY THE RUSSIAN TSARIST REGIME TO GEORGIA, WHERE THEY FOUND A SECOND HOME. CAN YOU TELL US MORE ABOUT THE PROJECTS FOCUSED ON THE SHARED HISTORY BETWEEN OUR NATIONS?

The role of the network of Polish Institutes all over the world is to connect people through culture. In the case of Georgia, the bond between the Polish and Georgian people has deep historical roots and a long-standing tradition. Many Poles found a second homeland in Georgia, contributing their scientific and cultural expertise. The architecture of Tbilisi stands as a lasting testament to the Polish presence, visible in nearly every corner of the city.

One of the most prominent figures in Tbilisi's architectural history was Aleksander Szymkiewicz, who served as the city's municipal architect in the second half of the 19th century. He taught aspiring architects and artists, introduced scholarships for technical students, and designed some of Tbilisi's most iconic buildings, including the Rustaveli Theater, the Conservatoire, the Silk Museum, the Supreme Court of Georgia, and the Tbilisi Funicular Station, among others.

Another key figure was Henryk Hryniewski, a researcher of Georgian cultural heritage and co-founder of the Georgian Academy of Fine Arts. Hryniewski created illustrations for the works of Ilija Chavchavadze and designed the iconostasis for the Kashveti Church. He also decorated the former Noble Bank building, which now houses the National Library of Georgia. In recognition of his contributions, the Polish Institute recently established the Hryniewski Reading Room in the library, which hosts an extensive collection of Polish-language books.

In 2021, the Polish Institute, in collaboration with the University of Warsaw, established the Polish-Georgian Archaeological Mission, named after Stefan Krukowski, the first Polish archaeologist to conduct archaeological research in Georgia during the early 20th century. This mission has made significant discoveries recently, including the identification of the oldest proof of Kutaisi's history, which dates back to the 14th century BC—earlier research had placed this evidence to the 8th century BC. This discovery places Kutaisi among the longest continuously inhabited cities in the world.

Many Polish artists also played an important role in shaping Georgian culture. Undoubtedly, the most famous are the Zdaniewicz brothers, who were among the pioneers of both the Georgian and European avant-garde in the early 20th century. They are credited with discovering Pirosmeni and introducing his works to Europe.

Another key figure in the avant-garde movement was the Polish painter Zygmunt Waliszewski, who began his artistic career in Tbilisi. His works are now displayed at the National Museum in Kraków, and the Polish Institute has recently published the first monograph on Waliszewski in the Georgian language.

The long-standing friendship between our two nations and the enduring influence of Polish figures on Georgian cul-



Excavations in Kutaisi. Photo by Krukowski Georgian - Polish Interdisciplinary Research Center

ture set a high standard for us. While these achievements continue to guide and inspire us, we are dedicated to carrying this work forward. Together with Georgian society, we are eager to further support cultural exchange and strengthen the bonds between our peoples.

THE POLISH INSTITUTE IS RENOWNED FOR PROMOTING POLISH LITERATURE IN GEORGIA AND INTRODUCING GEORGIAN WRITERS TO POLISH AUDIENCES. RECENTLY, GEORGIAN AUTHOR TAMTA MELASHVILI'S BLACKBIRD BLACKBERRY WAS AWARDED THE BEST BOOK OF THE YEAR IN POLAND. AS YOUR INSTITUTE WAS THE MAIN PARTNER FOR TBILISI'S INAUGURAL BOOK FAIR, WHAT WERE THE HIGHLIGHTS OF POLISH LITERATURE AT EXPO GEORGIA FROM APRIL 10-13?

Indeed, the Polish Institute was a main partner of the Tbilisi Book Fair, which we are very proud of. Everyone can agree that the inaugural book fair was a great success. Since our founding in 2018, we have worked to ensure the presence of Polish literature on the Georgian book market. To date, we have supported the translation of dozens of titles, including



several novels by Polish Nobel Prize laureate Olga Tokarczuk, published by Intelekti Publishing. At this year's Book Fair, we presented the Georgian translation of Tokarczuk's book, *Empusium* (the Georgian title is *Empusebis nadimi*) for the first time.

In addition, we hosted a discussion on the significance of translators and translation, highlighting the mutual exchange between languages. The Polish Institute is dedicated to promoting Polish literature in Georgian, but we also support the presence of Georgian literature in Poland. We are particularly proud to promote Tamta Melashvili, whose book was a major success in Poland last year. We see these efforts as a form of solidarity—building bridges between our nations through literature.



Tamta Melashvili. Source: The Polish Institute in Tbilisi

Echoes from the Courtyards: Dasta Avala and the Cultural Resonance of Forgotten Tbilisi Songs



Photo by the author

BY IVAN NECHAEV

On Wednesday night, the tight interior of Backstage76, nestled on Giorgi Chanturia Street, transformed into something far older and far more alive than its modern bones might suggest. It became a verandah in Sololaki, a half-open door in Avlabari, a night-window in Ortachala. For one hour, the newly-formed ensemble Dasta Avala summoned the spirits of a forgotten Tbilisi — not the mythical, museumified one, but the everyday city of Ladino lullabies, Armenian waltzes, Georgian chants, and Azerbaijani modes.

A MULTILINGUAL ARCHIVE OF EMOTION

The ensemble's name — Dasta Avala — hints at something elusive. "Dasta" suggests a gathering, a touch, a hand. "Avala," in Persian-influenced Georgian, implies both falling and arrival. The ensemble, born from the vision of French musician Zoé Perret, is exactly this paradox: a soft landing of what once fell into silence.

Opening with sparse, mournful, nostalgic lullabies, sung in the soft hush of Zoé's violin-accompanied voice, the concert was not a performance, but a séance. Perret, whose years in Georgia have imbued her interpretations with a rare intimacy, does not try to domi-

nate the material: she lets it breathe. Her vocals — understated, honest, sometimes even deliberately fragile — do not modernize these songs: they remember them.

Beside her, David Khositashvili's guitar is less accompaniment than threadwork, stitching rhythmic embroidery with gentle counterpoint. Ivane Mkrtchyan, a master of the double-reeded Armenian instrument, played like someone in conversation with ghosts. His duduk, rich in microtonal melancholy, turned the air



Photo by the author

into something dense, almost fog-like — memory made audible. Nazi Chavchavadze, on doli and daira, offered a contrapuntal life-beat to that fog: the sound of steps, of doors closing, of women dancing in slippers.

A CITY REMEMBERING ITSELF

The repertoire avoided cliché. This was not a tourist set-list. These were the side-Bs of the city's musical memory — songs passed down in kitchens, lost in translation, revived from archival snippets, and oral testimonies. Many had no clear origin. Some slipped between languages mid-verse. The harmonic tension felt like the very essence of Old Tbilisi: a city never fully resolved, always humming with the beauty of its contradictions.

The multiculturalism here wasn't decoration. It was structure. Rather than performing separate "ethnic" songs in sequence — a common pitfall in multicultural programming — Dasta Avala wove the lineages together, letting the similarities clash and the differences harmonize. If the concert had a thesis, it was this: Tbilisi was never monolithic, and its monolith lies in that.

Dasta Avala is not engaging in folkloric nostalgia. They do not reconstruct; they resurrect. And in doing so, they pose a subtle political question: What does it mean to remember a city through its most fragile voices? Through songs sung by minorities, by women, by those who



Photo by the author

left or were made to leave? There is an ethics to their work — a refusal to monumentalize, a preference for intimacy over grandeur.

It is rare to leave a concert feeling like you've unlearned something — unlearned what you thought music from this region

was, unlearned what performance means, unlearned the borders between languages and styles. Dasta Avala invites exactly this unlearning. And in its place, they offer a slower, deeper, more generous understanding of this city and its polyphonic soul.

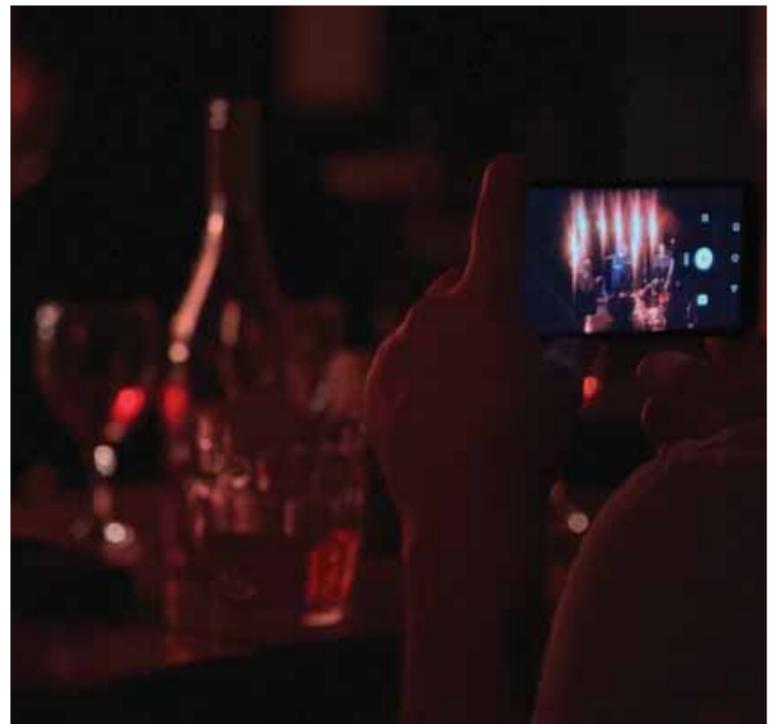


Photo by the author



Georgian Painter and Architect Zurab Tsereteli Passes Away at 91

BY TEAM GT

Zurab Tsereteli, the renowned Georgian-Russian sculptor, painter, and architect, passed away in Moscow on April 22, 2025, at the age of 91 due to heart failure.

Born in Tbilisi in 1934, Tsereteli rose to prominence during the Soviet era, becoming known for his monumental and often controversial public artworks. His career included roles such as Art Director for the Soviet Foreign Ministry and Chief Designer for the 1980 Moscow

Olympics.

Tsereteli graduated from the Tbilisi Art Academy in 1958, and his remarkable works include the iconic Saint George Monument located at Freedom Square in Tbilisi.

Among his most notable works are the 98-meter-tall Peter the Great statue in Moscow, the "Tear of Grief" monument in New Jersey commemorating the victims of the September 11 attacks, and the Chronicle of Georgia monument in Tbilisi.

Tsereteli served as President of the Russian Academy of Arts from 1997 until his death and was a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador.



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