

FOCUS

ON "PUTIN'S GEORGIA"

If nothing changes, Georgia will become Belarus, says Gennady Gudkov, former FSB officer and State Duma deputy

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Bidzina Ivanishvili

Parliament Adopts Party Ban Law with Unanimous Vote

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

Georgia's Parliament has passed a legislative package for banning political parties with increased and tightened rules in its second reading, with all 79 MPs voting in favor.

The amendments target so-called 'successor parties' that resemble banned political groups. Under the revised law, the Constitutional Court will be able to prohibit a party if its "declared purpose, essence of activity and personnel composition" mirrors those of a previously cancelled organization.

A primary change in the second reading cuts the court's decision deadline to just 14 days, regardless of whether it is an election period. Previously, the law allowed up to nine months for non-election periods.

"This is a logical deadline," said ruling party

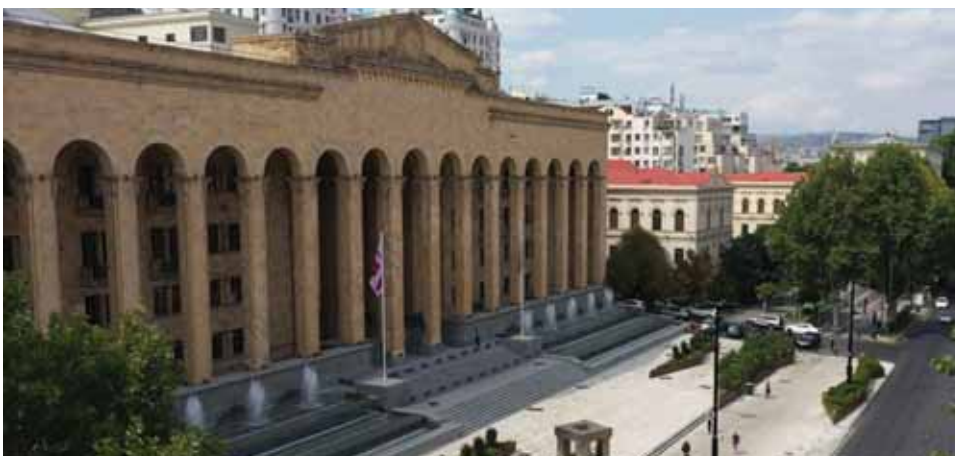


Photo: Tbilisi Local Guide.

MP Tornike Cheishvili. "The Court will already have ruled on the parent party, so establishing the identity of the successor's activity and composition won't take much time."

The package amends both the 'Law on Political Unions of Citizens' and the 'Law on the Constitutional Court' and now proceeds to a final reading.

GALT & TAGGART CREATING OPPORTUNITIES									
Markets									
As of 29-Apr-2025									
BONDS					STOCKS				
	Price	w/w	m/m			Price	w/w	m/m	
GEORG 04/26	95.80 (YTM 7.22%)	+0.3%	+0.0%		Lion Finance Group (LFGD LN)	GBP 59.45	+7.2%	+5.9%	
GRAIL 06/28	98.74 (YTM 8.15%)	+0.0%	+0.1%		Georgia Capital (GCGO LN)	GBP 16.46	+10.2%	+6.1%	
GERGG 9 1/2 PERP	98.41 (YTM 9.39%)	-0.0%	-0.5%		TBC Bank Group (TBCG LN)	GBP 46.90	+8.2%	+10.2%	
SILKNET 01/27	100.86 (YTM 7.83%)	+0.6%	-0.6%						
TBC 8.894 PERP	96.55 (YTM 11.40%)	-0.1%	-0.7%		COMMODITIES				
TBC 10 1/4 PERP	98.11 (YTM 9.89%)	+0.9%	-0.9%			Price	w/w	m/m	
					Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	64.25	-4.7%	-12.7%	
					Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	3 317.41	-1.9%	+7.5%	
INDICES					CURRENCIES				
	Price	w/w	m/m			Price	w/w	m/m	
SP 500	5 560.83	+5.2%	-0.4%		USD / GEL	2.7480	+0.0%	-0.6%	
FTSE 250	19 809.72	+3.0%	-0.3%		EUR / GEL	3.1292	-0.3%	+4.5%	
DOW JONES 30	40 527.62	+3.4%	-2.5%		GBP / GEL	3.6840	+0.6%	+3.0%	
Russell 2000	1 976.52	+4.6%	-2.3%		EUR / USD	1.1387	-0.3%	+5.2%	
FTSE 100	8 463.46	+1.6%	-2.3%		GBP / USD	1.3409	+0.6%	+3.6%	



Photo: Fox Business.

Ivanishvili Dropped from Bloomberg Billionaire Index after Major Asset Loss

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

Bidzina Ivanishvili, the founder of Georgian Dream and former Prime Minister of Georgia, has been removed from Bloomberg's Billionaire Index after a noticeable decline in his fortune.

The Bloomberg's latest data suggests Ivanishvili's net worth has dropped to \$3.6 billion, excluding him from the list, which only features individuals with

assets exceeding \$6.3 billion. Estimates suggest Ivanishvili lost \$3.2 billion in just the first three weeks of April. Although he no longer appears in the top 500 richest individuals, Bloomberg's terminal continues to monitor and calculate Ivanishvili's assets.

The development took place after the U.S. Treasury Department imposed sanctions on Ivanishvili on December 27, 2024. However, it remains unclear whether these sanctions directly affected the reported drop in his wealth across all financial platforms.

Majority of Georgians Expect Economic Crisis and Struggle with Basic Needs



Photo: Shutterstock.

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

ACT research published the findings from a new survey, revealing that more than half of Georgians fear an imminent economic crisis, with 56% saying it has either already begun or will hit within six months.

The report draws a negative picture of personal financial well-being, revealing that 36% of respondents say their economic situation has become worse in the past six months. Daily hardships are commonplace, with 47% of citizens struggling to buy basic groceries, while 55% have difficulty affording medicine and medical services.

"The limitation of financial resources critically affects people's daily, basic needs," the report declares.

Majority of people put the blame largely on the government, with 44% of respondents saying those in governmental charge are responsible for the country's worsening living condition. Meanwhile, 29% admit personal responsibility, acknowledging their own role in the crisis.

"Ultimately, it is clear that there is an expectation of economic downturn among the population, which affects their financial plans and spending priorities," ACT states. "The main focus is placed on essential needs for survival, while relatively non-essential areas, such as travel, leisure, and entertainment, become less of a priority."

Armenian President Expresses Hope for Peace with Azerbaijan, thanks Georgia for Support



BY TEAM GT

Armenia and Georgia have maintained active and multifaceted relations. The relationship between the two is based on strategic cooperation, democratic values, the sovereignty of our countries, and the Christian values and future vision of our two brotherly nations, – Armenian President Vahagn Khachaturyan noted during joint statements following his meeting with Georgian Dream-elect President Mikheil Kavelashvili.

The Armenian president claimed that high-level meetings continue, and cooperation between various state institutions is developing and deepening.

"In recent years, we have experienced unprecedented activity in our cooperation. The Strategic Cooperation Agreement laid the foundation for further deepening our mutually beneficial partnership. The statements recognizing each other's territorial integrity from both Georgia and Armenia are crucial for ensuring peace and prosperity in the South Caucasus. Georgia-Armenia relations are developing in both bilateral and multilateral formats.

"Today, my colleague and I addressed many topics on the Armenia-Georgia agenda, including political and economic issues, as well as various matters related to sports and youth affairs. We also discussed regional stability and long-term peace. Armenia stands firmly on the issue of prosperity and development and

will continue its efforts in this direction," Khachaturyan stated.

He also mentioned that the text of the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace agreement has been agreed upon and is ready to be signed.

"We hope to establish peace with Azerbaijan. Armenia greatly appreciates Georgia's support on this issue, your efforts directed toward peace and prosperity, and we welcome your initiative to establish a trilateral platform and your role in this vital matter.

"We also addressed a variety of international issues, including both territorial disputes and global matters. I want to express our commitment to deepening the brotherhood, friendship, and mutual cooperation between Georgia and Armenia for the benefit of both nations," declared the Armenian President.

Russia Resumes Direct Flights to Occupied Abkhazia after 30-Year Hiatus



Source: UVT Aero

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

For the first time in three decades, Russia has resumed direct regular flights to occupied Abkhazia, a move widely condemned by the Georgian government as a violation of international norms and Georgian sovereignty.

The inaugural flight on the Vnukovo-Sokhumi route is being operated today by UVT Aero, which advanced its original May 3 launch due to unexpectedly high demand. Two additional Russian carriers, Ifly Airlines and NordStar, are also planning routes to Sokhumi, with departures

from Moscow and Krasnoyarsk.

Georgia's Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development, Levan Davitashvili, strongly denounced the flights, declaring, "Our position is unequivocal: Georgia condemns the operation of the Sokhumi Airport in violation of international norms." He emphasized that this stance is not Georgia's alone, noting that the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) also does not recognize the airport's operations, as Georgia's Civil Aviation Agency cannot conduct necessary safety inspections in the occupied region.

"This contradicts ICAO principles and Georgia's Law on Occupation," Davitashvili said, stressing that several of the

airlines involved are under international sanctions. "We are talking about the operation of sanctioned companies. Although our ability to influence them is limited due to the territory's occupied status, our position remains absolutely clear to the international community and to Russia."

When asked whether Georgia would take any retaliatory measures against Russian carriers operating flights to Tbilisi, Batumi, or Kutaisi, Davitashvili reaffirmed that no airline violating the Law on Occupation would be allowed to operate in Georgia. "All tools at our disposal are being used. This is an occupied and unrecognized territory, and we act accordingly."

Ukraine Latest: US and Ukraine Sign Long-Awaited Minerals Deal

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

Kyiv has signed a deal with the US to share profits from the future sale of Ukraine's mineral and energy reserves, after months of tense negotiations.

The deal aims to provide an economic incentive for the US to continue to invest in Ukraine's defense and reconstruction, as well as to address Washington's concerns over the amount of aid it has already contributed.

Ukraine is believed to have vast reserves of critical minerals like graphite, titanium and lithium, which are highly sought after for use in renewable energy, military technology and infrastructure.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said the deal showed both sides were committed to lasting peace and prosperity in Ukraine.

The minerals deal will also see the establishment of an investment fund to spur Ukraine's economic recovery from the war.

According to the statement from the US Treasury on Wednesday afternoon, the newly created US-Ukraine Reconstruction Investment Fund recognizes the "significant financial and material support" the US has given Ukraine since Russia invaded in February 2022.

The US Treasury secretary said in a video statement that the deal would help "unlock Ukraine's growth assets."

The language of the announcement shows much more solidarity with Ukraine than has thus far been seen from the

Trump administration.

It refers to "Russia's full scale invasion" and adds that "no state or person who financed or supplied the Russian war machine will be allowed to benefit from the reconstruction of Ukraine."

The Kremlin has not yet responded to the agreement.

For Kyiv, it is seen as essential to accessing US military aid. Ukraine's Deputy Prime Minister Yulia Svyrydenko, who flew to Washington to ink the deal on Wednesday, said in a post on X that the new fund would "attract global investment into our country."

Listing the deal's provisions, she said it would involve projects in minerals, oil and gas, although the resources would remain the property of Ukraine. The partnership will be equal, on a 50:50 basis, she added, and has yet to be ratified by lawmakers in Kyiv.

Under the deal, the US will contribute new assistance to Kyiv, including air defense systems.

President Donald Trump has repeatedly pushed for the agreement as a prerequisite to offering any future security guarantees to Kyiv. And while the draft of the deal indicates Ukraine will be giving Washington access to some of its natural resources in return for future US security assistance, it is significantly less than what Trump had wanted, which was to get paid back for all US military aid given since the start of the war.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has managed to eke out some concessions from Washington. The initial agreement was due to be signed in February, but fell apart following a heated exchange at the White House when

Trump accused Zelensky of "gambling with World War Three."

The breakthrough comes days after Trump and Zelensky held a face-to-face meeting on the sidelines of Pope Francis' funeral, and as talks between Moscow and Washington over a possible ceasefire in Ukraine grind on.

Phoning into the NewsNation network on Wednesday evening, Trump said he had pressed Zelensky at the Vatican City to seal the deal.

"I was telling him that it's a very good thing if we can produce a deal that you sign it," he said, "because Russia is much bigger and much stronger. Russia is just chugging forward."

The US president said the deal would recuperate the multi-billion dollar US assistance to Ukraine since the war began and "much more, in theory."

"So I went to them and said, 'Look, we got to get rare earth.' They have great rare earth, meaning certain minerals, materials," said Trump. "They have things that a lot of places don't have. It's a big asset that they have."

The agreement comes amid a US trade war with China, where 90% of the world's current rare-earth stocks are sourced.

RUSSIA ANNOUNCES BEGINNING OF 'DIRECT TALKS' WITH UKRAINE

Russian President Vladimir Putin's proposal for a ceasefire on Victory Day is the beginning of direct talks with Kyiv, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on April 29 during a press briefing.

"Our proposal, which President Putin voiced, is the start of direct negotiations, without preconditions. In this situation,



US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and Ukraine's First Deputy Prime Minister Yulia Svyrydenko sign the natural resources deal. Source: US Department of the Treasury

a ceasefire (for 30 days) is seen as a precondition," Lavrov said.

It is not clear if Lavrov meant direct negotiations would begin at the time of the ceasefire, or if Putin's announcement of it marked their commencement.

Ukrainian officials have not yet commented on Lavrov's statement.

Putin claimed Russian forces would cease all hostilities from May 8 until midnight on May 11 to mark the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe.

Ukraine retorted by calling for a full and unconditional ceasefire, a proposal that Moscow continues to reject.

FIGHTING UPDATES

Russian drones attacked Ukraine's Black Sea port of Odesa early on Thursday, killing at least two people and injuring five, the regional governor said. The attack sparked fires and damaged residential dwellings and infrastructure.

In Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city in the northeast, the mayor said another Russian drone had struck a petrol station in the city center, triggering a fire.

Ukraine's SBU security agency claimed responsibility for a drone strike on a defense manufacturing facility in Russia. The strike on the Murom Instrument-

Building Plant, 300km east of Moscow, sparked a fire and damaged two buildings.

Russian air defense units destroyed 34 Ukrainian drones overnight, Russian news agencies reported, citing the country's Ministry of Defense.

Ukraine's top military commander, Oleksandr Syrskii, said Russian forces have significantly increased the intensity of their combat activity in eastern Ukraine, despite Moscow declaring a three-day ceasefire from May 8-10.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said some small groups of Ukrainian soldiers were still holed up in basements and hideouts in Russia's western Kursk region. Moscow claims it expelled Ukrainian forces from the border region over the weekend.

The Kremlin said at least 288 civilians were killed during Ukraine's months-long incursion into Kursk.





South Korean lawmakers, citing their country's intelligence agency, said about 600 North Korean troops have been killed fighting for Russia against Ukraine, out of a total deployment of 15,000.


United States lawmakers have asked the Department of State to brief them about Russia's use of Chinese fighters in its war in Ukraine, saying that Moscow could only employ Chinese mercenaries with Beijing's "tacit approval."

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Gennady Gudkov: If nothing changes, Georgia will become Belarus

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

If nothing changes, Georgia will become Belarus, - says Gennady Gudkov, former FSB officer, former State Duma deputy, and one of the few Russian politicians who publicly distanced himself from the Kremlin back in what he calls the "golden era" of Putin and Medvedev.

Branded a terrorist in his homeland, Gudkov now lives in exile. In this interview with RFE/RL's Georgian Service, he explains why he considers Georgian Dream an ally of the Kremlin, why Putin will never tolerate democracy next door, and why he believes that only unity among Georgians can save the country from becoming Russia's next satellite.

"IF PUTIN REMAINS IN POWER, HE WILL EVENTUALLY ATTACK ARMENIA, KAZAKHSTAN AND GEORGIA." - YOU WRITE. WHY WOULD HE ATTACK GEORGIA, WHILE GEORGIAN DREAM IS STILL IN CHARGE?

Because any country that has a chance or a tendency to build democratic power is extremely dangerous for him. And Georgia right now is in a transitional state, between the past and the future. We're seeing it start to move backwards, back toward authoritarian rule. And if Putin remains in power in the Kremlin,



Gennady Gudkov. Source: vice

you must understand—he will not tolerate a world where he hasn't defeated Ukraine, defeated NATO, defeated the entire democratic coalition. That's how he defines victory in this war. Any territorial gain, any concession made to him, he sees it as victory. And after that victory, over Ukraine and the West, he will immediately begin consolidating control over the South Caucasus. Georgia. Armenia.

What will he do? First he'll try peaceful means. The people in power in Georgia and Armenia must be his people, people who follow his orders.

MANY WOULD SAY THAT'S ALREADY HAPPENING.

Partially, yes. That's the first method Putin uses: to dictate his will to those in power. If they refuse to carry out his will, they will be overthrown. It could be a coup, an armed uprising, orchestrated unrest, anything. If that doesn't work, there will be war. Direct occupation.

AND IF THEY DO FOLLOW ORDERS?

Then he'll help them stay in power for as long as possible. And under his instruction, they will build totalitarian regimes—in Georgia, in Armenia, and beyond. That's already partially happening in Georgia.

WHICH BRINGS US TO AN UNCOMFORTABLE PARADOX:

GEORGIAN DREAM SAYS, "IF WE STAY IN POWER, THERE WON'T BE A WAR; IF WE LOSE, RUSSIA WILL INVADE AGAIN."

If they are Putin's puppets and carry out all his instructions, there won't be war. But Putin will still pursue his objectives by any means. Let me emphasize: Georgian Dream, under Putin's direction, will lead Georgia into a totalitarian system, into human rights violations, bans on protests, bans on freedom of speech. There will be new prisons. There will be political prisoners. Elections will be abolished. Local governments will be dismantled. Civil society organizations eliminated. Georgia will become a totalitarian state. Everything that happened in Russia will be applied here—only faster.

YOU WROTE THAT IVANISHVILI IS TURNING GEORGIA INTO A CONTINUATION OF PUTIN'S RUSSIA. WHAT PARALLELS DO YOU SEE WITH THE RUSSIA OF THE 2000S?

There were mass protests in Russia back then—hundreds of thousands on the streets. But the authorities took a hardline approach. The same is happening in Georgia: protests are being broken up, people arrested, the foreign agents law was passed. More laws are coming. Next will be restrictions on rallies and demonstrations. Then will come laws on "undesirable organizations," and so on. Georgia must understand that Belarus

has already gone down this road. Putin doesn't need to send troops into Belarus anymore—he already controls it. He's effectively occupied it. He stripped Belarus of its sovereignty, of its independence. The country has no agency left. Lukashenko now fully carries out Putin's will.

Without resistance, Georgia will become Belarus. It'll just turn into an extension of Belarus. There'll be some local tsar who travels to the Kremlin for briefings, for orders, maybe even to receive subsidies.

Only unity among the Georgian people, only a clear pro-European direction, only strong international support can stop Putin.

HOW EXACTLY CAN UNITY HELP?

If there is unity among the people, if their will is clear, and if it's backed by Europe and the international community, then Putin will see that. If he sees hesitation, a divided population, some in support and some not, then he will pressure Georgia by any means necessary, to push it into totalitarianism.

BASED ON KREMLIN STATEMENTS ABOUT GEORGIAN DREAM, HOW IS THE PARTY PERCEIVED IN MOSCOW?

Georgian Dream is perceived as an ally of Putin. And Ivanishvili is considered a respected person in the Kremlin.

RESPECTED LIKE LUKASHENKO?



The Kremlin sees Ivanishvili as a figure who yields under pressure, makes constant concessions, and is capable of carrying out Moscow's will

More or less, yes. Every ruler has their own style. But overall, the Kremlin sees Ivanishvili as a figure who yields under pressure, makes constant concessions, and is capable of carrying out Moscow's will. And let's not forget, there's a lot of business involved. These people in the Kremlin, they're about money. Not about principles, not about the people, not about the nation's interests. Just money.

Since Ivanishvili is a businessman and an oligarch himself, I'm sure there's more than just political cooperation involved. There are most likely serious business interests too.

HOW EFFECTIVE HAS THE WEST BEEN? DID THEY UNDERESTIMATE IVANISHVILI THE WAY THEY DID LUKASHENKO?

Yes. Everyone underestimated him. Even your humble servant here thought Georgia, yes, with flaws and missteps, was still moving towards democracy. We all assumed the situation in Georgia was better than it is.

But I understand the issue. There is no serious negotiation process between Georgia and Europe. Ivanishvili doesn't want one. And if he doesn't want it, then the institutions—diplomats, parliaments, governments—don't push it.

And that is the big problem. Because Georgia's security, Armenia's too, depends on strong alliances with the United States and Europe. Right now, probably more with Europe than the US. Only they can be the real guarantors of security in the Caucasus.



If Putin remains in power in the Kremlin, he will not tolerate a world where he hasn't defeated Ukraine, NATO, and the entire democratic coalition

"Resistance Platform" Members Meet EU Ambassador, Diplomats in Georgia

BY TEAM GT

Members of the "Resistance Platform" formed around Georgia's fifth president, Salome Zurbishvili, met with the EU Ambassador and representatives of the diplomatic corps in Georgia. Zurbishvili claimed that this introductory meeting served to familiarize the ambassadors with the platform's operational format. She stated that the platform is preparing for parliamentary elections and the formation of a coalition government, expressing hope that upcoming elections will be announced soon due to significant instability within the ruling party.

Zurbishvili emphasized that this was the first meeting in this format, where the Resistance Platform presented its working procedures and introduced its members to the EU representatives. She highlighted the platform's openness to newly established parties

willing to adhere to its principles and its coordination with various societal segments, including business, culture, NGOs, and protest groups. The platform aims to develop political positions collaboratively and aspires to prepare for a coalition government.

She underscored the importance of being prepared not only for the elections but also for the subsequent formation of a coalition government, noting that Georgia has limited experience in this area. Zurbishvili mentioned that the experiences of countries represented at the meeting indicate that forming coalition governments is challenging, and early preparation reflects the seriousness with which they approach the future.

Zurbishvili also noted signs of instability within the ruling party, providing hope that the country is on a path leading to new parliamentary elections. Additionally, the discussion touched upon the EU's policy towards Georgia, with Zurbishvili acknowledging differing positions among EU member states but emphasizing their attentive observation of current developments in Georgia.



On Certain 'Nuances' of the Tariff Policy

ANALYSIS BY VICTOR KIPIANI,
CHAIRPERSON OF GEOCASE

The often-forgotten word 'tariff' is gaining newfound relevance, taking on a special meaning and significance. The groundwork for this renewal was laid during President Trump's administration. We are likely only in the early stages of the 'reincarnation of tariffs,' and the ongoing discussion on the modern nature of trade wars offers much promise for both academic and practical circles interested in the issue.

BACK TO TARIFFS

Once straightforward in its use and effect, tariff policy has become more nuanced, ambiguous, and multi-layered. To borrow from a famous work, the phenomenon of modern tariffs and related trade relations has developed its own range of complexities, akin to 'Fifty Shades of Grey.' This diversity is reflective of the specificity of our era and the increasing prevalence of certain phenomena in international ecopolitics, namely:

- (1) Economic nationalism or autarky;
- (2) The 'weaponization' of economic pressure tools;
- (3) The use of trade instruments as coercion (some might even use the term 'extortion') to achieve external goals.

These and several other related economic 'theoretical schools' or 'political handwritings' are shaping the geo-economic system for the emerging geopolitically 'disorderly order.' In this environment, economics will increasingly serve the agenda of gaining global or regional dominance, and economically 'defensive' or 'offensive' wars could become the norm in the aforementioned 'disorderly order.'

In short, the topic of a globally emerging (or transforming) economic system is certainly vast, and I have addressed several aspects of it in previous publications. This time, I will focus on the trade or 'coercive' side of tariff policy. To that end, I will discuss issues that will serve as a reminder for the informed reader and provide useful material for those now interested in the nuances of tariffs for further research.

AS A PREFACE, I WILL SAY...

We should not view the shift away from an integrated global economic system as Trump's 'exceptionalism.' The process began much earlier, and its recent acceleration emerged from the search for ways to address economic inequality. The fundamental issue was understanding the proper balance between the pros and cons of a market economy. Relying solely on market instincts and blind faith in self-regulation has deepened social inequalities in developed countries, fueling the rise of various social vices. The stability of the middle class, along with the knowledge and skills it accumulated over the years, has been jeopardized.

Moreover, the competitiveness of advanced industrial systems was threatened as industrial capacity shifted to developing countries, drawn by cheap labor and minimal costs. Alongside economic factors, 'undisclosed' motivations for this relocation included the search for jurisdictions with more lenient regulatory standards (including labor rights).

The response to these trends is reflected in the new industrial policy legislation enacted in the U.S. and some Western countries. The goal was clear: protect the domestic market, implement protectionist measures, and stimulate national production through state subsidies and other programs.

Despite this reaction, the lost years have left a negative impact. The necessary balance between the state and powerful corporations, which should have served major purposes—such as national security, economic self-sufficiency, and social resilience—has been disturbed. As a result, additional measures became necessary, though these measures may



President Donald Trump holds up a chart while speaking during a "Make America Wealthy Again" trade event at the White House on April 2, 2025, in Washington, D.C. Photo by Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images

have caused their initiators to lose sight of the appropriate scale and significance.

U.S. TARIFF POLICY ON A DOCUMENTARY BASIS

The focus on contemporary U.S. tariff policy is understandable: the current White House administration is considered the primary architect of the 21st-century tariff vision.

I have already noted the plurality and nuances of this vision. However, for clarity in considering specific issues, it is important to address the documentary origin of this vision—the official source of its formal justification.

In January of this year, a document titled 'America First Trade Policy' was published on the White House website (America First Trade Policy).

The essence of the document was explained by the priorities outlined in this 'policy paper,' which included:

- (1) The American economy;
- (2) The American worker;
- (3) America's national security.

Based on these priorities, it was stated that trade policy is a critical component of national security and necessary for reducing dependence on other countries. It was also noted that to achieve these objectives, the U.S. would resort to 'appropriate measures,' with tariffs playing a particularly important role.

While other 'measures' or issues (trade agreements, exchange rates, intellectual property, etc.) are discussed in the aforementioned policy paper, tariffs remain a central focus. The administration directly addresses the role of tariffs in international negotiations and in correcting existing 'inequalities.'

TWO DIFFERENT VERSIONS OF THE 'TRADE WAR'

The trade confrontation during Donald Trump's first presidency and the attempts to initiate a trade war during his second presidency illustrate the evolution of the U.S. approach to tariffs.

Notably, during the first presidency, the tariff issue primarily aimed at resolving trade differences. The agreement signed with China was intended to address the trade imbalance between the two countries and eliminate unacceptable practices by China.

However, Trump's approach did not fully succeed. In the context of the trade imbalance, China partially (by 60 percent) fulfilled the promise of additional American product purchases (amounting to approximately \$200 billion). As a result, the so-called first phase of the U.S.-China trade agreement was not followed up.

In contrast, starting January 20, 2025, tariff pressures have expanded beyond narrow trade issues and are now aligned with a foreign policy agenda. The connection of tariffs to non-economic issues, such as illegal immigration into the U.S. or the importation of illegal drugs, reflects the universalization of the tariff instrument. Returning to the America First Trade Policy document, tariff pressure, framed by economic nationalism, is now seen as part of U.S. geopolitical interests, which has reshaped the concept of tariffs

into a tool with both economic and foreign policy components. This transformation signals a fundamental shift in tariff and trade relations that is likely to persist.

THE DOUBLE EFFECT OF TARIFFS...

The tariff policy discussed here, along with its potential continuation, has faced intense criticism. Opponents widely highlight both the negative effects already observed and the expected consequences. In this article, I will focus on a few key aspects of the anti-tariff campaign.

(1) U.S.-China Geopolitical Rivalry: The primary geopolitical target of the tariff policy launched by Trump is China. However, opponents of raising tariffs against China argue that, if the tariff war yields any real results, they will mostly be negative.

A key economic concern is the interconnectedness of U.S. and Chinese export-import markets. Disrupting this interconnection would harm both the U.S. and China, as well as the global system. Furthermore, the tariff war may inadvertently help China enhance its reputation as a responsible, predictable player on the world stage. Amid current disinformation and propaganda, especially given the United States' complicated relations with its allies, China will likely exploit this opportunity. In particular, China may work to deepen cracks in the system of alliances surrounding the U.S., weakening one of its major pillars—its alliances.

(2) Economic 'Sub'-Text: With its tough tariff policy, the White House administration aligns itself with the trend of economic nationalism, responding to other countries with protectionist measures based on the principle of mutual benefit while trying to stimulate domestic production.

However, achieving these goals solely through tariff rates not only complicates the problem but could potentially exacerbate it. At first glance, while tariff increases boost budget revenues, they also burden American consumers. Higher tariff rates:

- will inevitably raise the prices of imported goods,
- affecting the average American's budget (around \$1,000 to \$1,200 per year),
- which will contribute to inflation as excess money flows into the economy,
- raising the cost of U.S. products made from expensive raw materials, reducing their export competitiveness,
- and causing stock market declines due to negative consumer sentiment.

This economic chain reaction could ultimately lead to harmful consequences. China, on the other hand, may not emerge with a 'complete victory' from the tariff war. The Chinese economy faces risks from debt burdens—essentially a 'debt trap.' Coupled with overheating in the real estate market, this creates high risk.

China must maintain high production levels, especially with its domestic consumer market on the brink. Thus, access to export markets remains crucial for Beijing. Restricting the U.S. market for



In this environment, economics will increasingly serve the agenda of gaining global or regional dominance, and economically 'defensive' or 'offensive' wars could become the norm in the aforementioned 'disorderly order'

Chinese goods due to tariff increases represents an economic, political, and social risk for the Chinese government.

(3) Institutional Procedures: Critics of the new tariff policy also point to institutional weaknesses in its implementation.

Although President Trump has the legal grounds to make unilateral decisions under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (1977), the lack of proper consultation with the Cabinet and federal agencies could undermine the institutional framework of U.S. governance. This concern is especially relevant given the loyalty-driven formation of Trump's administration, which fosters near-unconditional decision-making.

A chart that shows the "reciprocal tariffs" the US is charging other countries is on display at the James Brady Press Briefing Room of the White House on April 2, 2025 in Washington, DC. Photo by Alex Wong/Getty Images

LESS PR, MORE RESULTS

Tariff policy, like sanctions policy, is as much an art as a science. Neither can magically produce results unless implemented within the right context, under the right conditions, and with careful management. Tariffs, in particular, resemble a scalpel—the improper use of which can be harmful.

I won't delve into economic nationalism and protectionism (having addressed these topics in previous publications), but I will note that tariffs, when used to protect and stimulate national produc-

tion, must be applied correctly and interact synchronously with other economic components.

To prevent unfair practices by global players, it is essential to strengthen alliances with global partners. However, we are now seeing a confusion of the concepts of 'ally' and 'rival,' which undermines the effectiveness of tariffs in trade confrontations with revisionist countries.

When discussing tariff management, I'd like to emphasize the importance of operational and technical issues. For instance, imposing higher tariffs on specific goods related to national security sectors—defense, energy, healthcare, etc.—may be necessary.

Additionally, in practice, production may shift from target countries to third countries (e.g., Mexico, Vietnam), which could enter U.S. or European markets at favorable tariffs. Here, a reasonable tariff policy should:

- (a) Set tariffs based on the 'Chinese content' of products from third countries, and
- (b) Clearly communicate to such countries that excessive foreign production and 'content-based detachment' jeopardize local industries and national security.

Finally, economists rightly point out that tax exemptions, an efficient procurement system, and government subsidies should complement reasonable tariff policies. What is most important, however, is strengthening global alliances and partnerships, especially with the United States. In this regard, the initiative for a trade defense system, similar to NATO, should remain relevant. By identifying common risks and threats, such a system should focus on:

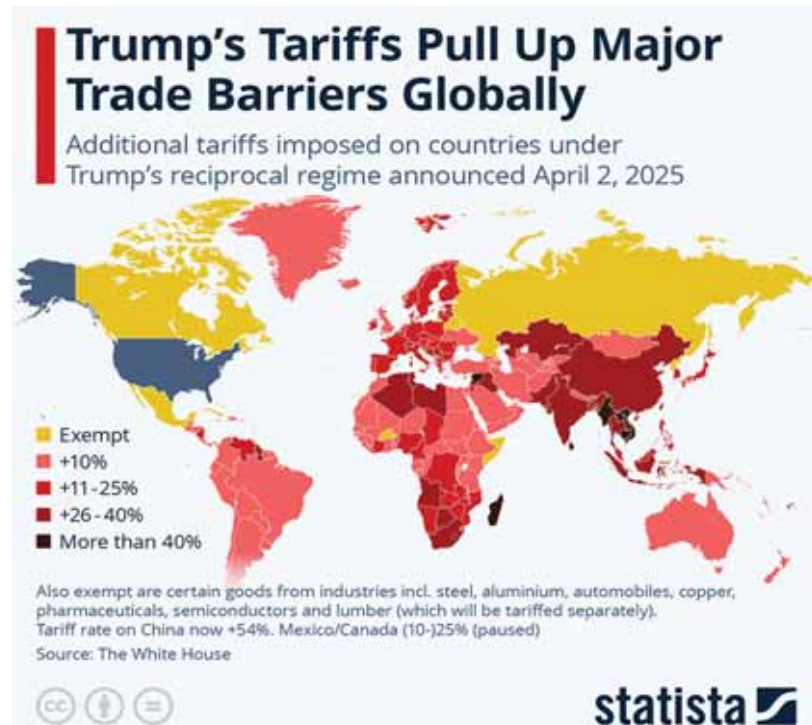
- (1) Technology export controls,
- (2) Investment screening, and
- (3) Procurement and supply of critical mineral resources.

"THE STRUGGLE TO CONSOLIDATE POSITION"

I chose this subtitle intentionally, as it paraphrases the 'struggle for survival.' Rather than continuously questioning, 'What will happen to us?', our country should strive for development and consolidate its position in a 'disorderly world' with increasing competition. Therefore, the prevailing mood should be one of progress, active action driven by future agendas, and the pursuit of leapfrogging development.

The picture unfolding today reflects a highly uncertain and fragmented international system. We may be entering a 'new normal'—one that demands much more from small countries in terms of competitiveness and resilience.

Given the processes described here, we can no longer fully rely on a 'geopolitical nanny.' It is neither promising nor advisable. It is far better to depend on our own resources and forge mutually beneficial relations with the outside world, taking into account the nuances of the modern geopolitical landscape. It is time for Georgia to adopt a policy grounded in realistic possibilities.



Source: statista

Pioneering New Frontiers: Promoting Georgia in Asia and Shaping the Future of Global Tourism



Mrs. Ekaterine Jikidze, founder of Guide of Georgia LLC

FEATURE BY MRS. EKATERINE JIKIDZE

As global tourism reshapes in the post-pandemic era, destinations that embrace innovation, inclusion, and strategic expansion are emerging as leaders. Georgia, with its captivating landscapes, cultural depth, and renowned hospitality, is uniquely positioned to become one of those leaders. While we've already seen a rise in travelers from the Middle East and India, the next major step is clear: expanding into Asia's most powerful outbound market—China.

This year, Georgia made history by participating for the first time in OTM Mumbai 2025, South Asia's leading travel trade show. Representing Guide of Georgia LLC and our nation, I had the honor of introducing Georgia to a dynamic Indian market eager for new experiences. The enthusiasm and curiosity shown by

our Indian partners proved that Georgia's tourism story is just beginning to unfold on the Asian stage.

Building on this success, we are now preparing for ITB China this May 2025—a landmark event where Georgia will be showcased to China's top travel professionals, tour operators, and digital platforms. This will be another "first," and one that signals our readiness to embrace new opportunities, forge new partnerships, and diversify our inbound tourism portfolio. I must mention that we always keep hand on pulse, see the opportunities and catch them. That is how we are successful and pioneers in bringing different nations to Georgia.

FROM THE ARAB MARKET TO ASIA: A PROVEN APPROACH

Years ago, Guide of Georgia LLC was among the first to identify the opportunity in the Arab tourism market. At a time when few in the industry recognized its potential, we developed customized, culturally sensitive packages for Gulf

travelers—halal food options, Arabic-speaking guides, private tours, and family-oriented services.

That early initiative helped shape Georgia into a top destination for Arab tourists. Today, many of them return frequently, invest in property, and speak of Georgia as a second home.

This model of early market entry, cultural understanding, and high-value service design is what we now aim to replicate in China. We are not starting from scratch—we are building on a blueprint that has already delivered measurable results.

BUILDING THE BRIDGE: LOCALIZATION, TRUST, AND EXPERIENCE

Chinese travelers are digitally connected and culturally discerning. To earn their trust, Georgia must localize—not just translate. That means offering Mandarin-speaking guides, partnering with Chinese tour agencies, enabling payment platforms like Alipay and WeChat Pay, and

showcasing Georgia on Chinese travel channels like Ctrip, Mafengwo, and Xiaohongshu.

But above all, we must tell stories that resonate—about Georgia's ancient winemaking traditions, its mountain villages, its hospitality rituals, and its unique place at the crossroads of Europe and Asia.

This isn't just marketing—it's about creating real cultural connection, and that starts with respect, research, and readiness.

A VISION BEYOND BORDERS

Our presence at OTM Mumbai and our upcoming participation in ITB China are not isolated events—they are part of a broader, long-term vision. Georgia has the potential to become a strategic hub for East-West tourism. As travelers seek destinations that offer safety, authenticity, and soul, we can present Georgia as a new kind of global destination: one

that is proud of its heritage and open to the world.

CONCLUSION: LEADING GEORGIA'S GLOBAL TOURISM JOURNEY

As the founder of Guide of Georgia LLC, I've always believed in leading through innovation. Whether welcoming Arab travelers years ago, building family and luxury tourism, or now championing our presence in Asia, my goal has always been to elevate Georgia's global profile.

This is more than a business initiative—it's a national mission. With bold leadership, strategic collaboration, and cultural intelligence, we can ensure that Georgia doesn't just follow global tourism trends—it sets them.

And I am honored to help lead that journey—today in India, next month in China, and in the future, wherever opportunity calls.



Mrs. Ekaterine Jikidze with His Excellency and Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Vakhtang Jaooshvili, in the Republic of India

Georgian SMEs Step onto the European Stage after Completing Trade Fair Readiness Program

BY TEAM GT

More than 50 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) this week gathered to celebrate the successful completion of the Trade Fair Assistance for SMEs in Georgia Program—the culmination of an intensive, skill-building journey led by the Visionest Institute. This milestone marked more than just a graduation; it represented a step forward for Georgia's growing presence in European markets.

Focusing on key industries such as fashion, children's apparel, and leather goods, the Program gave Georgian businesses the essential tools, knowledge, and confidence to compete internationally. Participants learned to navigate the complexities of global trade, enhance



Photo by UNDP/Nino Zedginidze

their product offerings, and tap into valuable new markets.

This initiative was part of a larger effort under the "Inclusive Access to Markets" project—a four-year, €5.16 million col-

laboration funded by the European Union and implemented by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in partnership with the Estonian Center for International Development (ESTDEV).

With €5 million in EU funding and an additional €162,000 contributed by UNDP, the project aims to empower Georgian SMEs to grow beyond their borders by strengthening value chains and fostering

export readiness.

At its heart, the project seeks to build lasting, tangible opportunities that help Georgian enterprises grow and succeed beyond their borders. It supports SMEs in showcasing their products at international trade fairs and business-to-business events, offering both financial and technical assistance to boost their visibility and competitiveness in EU markets. The initiative also focuses on building export capacity through improved lead generation, targeted market positioning, and strategic value chain development.

By identifying and addressing the key constraints that limit international growth, the Program lays the foundation for long-term commercial success. The expected outcomes are ambitious but achievable: increased exports to EU and European countries, and stronger, more competitive value chains that can drive sustainable economic growth in Georgia.

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FANTA



One Bite at a Time



Photo by the author

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

One bite at a time. That's how you eat anything bigger than you are. In the case of garbage removal, one big BAG at a time.

Saturday, April 26, as I write this, has been one of quite a few garbage collection days spread out over some years at Dighomi Meadows, near Green Diamond, where my wife and I live. Organized by Anna, who founded DM, today saw about 12 of us work for nearly four hours from 10am. She brought large bags, gloves, hats, water, snacks, a rake and hooked pole. We added our enthusiastic numbers: mostly Georgians from school age to adult, a Kazakh family, and me.

"Safety is Job One!" Anna reminded us, and also told us not to pick up any-

thing we felt uncomfortable with. We started at the DM sign near one of the area's large ponds, concentrating on the surrounding area first. Bags quickly began to fill.

Glass, metal, paper, disintegrating styrofoam, and especially the omnipresent plastic, in so many forms. It does slowly break down in sunlight, some types of it, but still it remains in the environment for years, flaking away. Chemicals from it can leach into the ground. Animals can eat it and choke, or die from an inability to pass it.

Our efforts had immediate, heartening effect, as whole areas began to appear with no trash visible at all, especially at the pond's edge and nearby. Looking much better. In warmer weather, I would not hesitate to go into the water in trunks: a shower at home is minutes away, after all! The water isn't the cleanest, but it's not filthy either, and I'm good with that.

A bit cold yet, though. Soon, maybe.

We moved on towards the other ponds behind the main soccer fields, these mostly manmade in the process of illegal digging and dumping of large-scale waste years ago. Here, up to 7 or 8 terrapins at a glance were visible, sunning their cold reptilian blood on logs in the water. Frogs were croaking everywhere. The odd woodpecker hammered.

A car driven by people who work for tene.ge (recycling) appeared, and one of them did a video interview of Anna, which seems like it will be most useful for publicity.

We raked or hooked whatever we could reach from the water's edges; in some places bank steepness or slipperiness hindered, but we did what we could.

We identified a field of pretty blue flowers as flax, a plant which apparently composes the oldest surviving example of textile work in the world, up to 35,000 years old, found in a cave near Kutaisi. Anna also showed us wild asparagus, about which my wife was delighted to hear, she who is so fond of foraging field and forest. In turn, I was able to tell Anna that we had already found tqemali (sour plums), still small enough to be seedless, and had used them to make our year's first chakapuli stew! Plus the beautiful deep purple irises we had found growing in several places, likely seeded from cut flowers thrown away. Here, at least, treasure from trash.

We ended up filling about 20 large bags with our findings, said our farewells and congratulations, and went our separate ways. I was delighted to participate in cleaning up my own neighborhood, and hope to do this again, especially with even more volunteers. But really, anyone can do this every time they walk here;



Photo by the author



Photo by the author



Photo by the author

and this should become our habit, always taking an empty bag and returning with it full. So easy!

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



Photo by the author



Photo by the author

Tbilisi to Build Modern Animal Shelter as Stray Population Surges

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze announced that the construction of a new, modern animal shelter will soon begin in the Gldani district, in response to the growing challenge of stray animals in the city. The facility will operate 24/7 and feature a surgical unit, laboratory, post-op care, and other essential infrastructure.

"This is a serious issue for the city and its residents," Kaladze said during a municipal government meeting.

"Although the Tbilisi Animals Monitoring Agency actively conducts spaying and neutering surgeries, the animals reproduce rapidly, and our current shelter cannot keep pace."

Kaladze also pointed to widespread abandonment of pets as a key driver of the problem. "Unfortunately, there are many cases where animals are simply left on the streets by their owners," he said.

Kaladze concluded the statement with optimism: "Through humane methods and expanded spay/neuter programs, we believe the number of stray animals will significantly decrease. Our goal is a future where all animals have homes."



Mayor Kaladze. Source: TV1

Investigation Launched into Borjomi Market Fire in Tbilisi

BY TEAM GT

A large fire broke out early Wednesday morning at the Borjomi Railway Station market in Tbilisi, destroying several shops and forcing a temporary closure of one of the city's busiest local trade hubs. The cause of the fire is still under investigation, with early speculation pointing to an electrical fault.

BACKGROUND

The Borjomi Railway Station market, located near the Didube district, has been a vital commercial center for decades, especially for small traders and local farmers selling food, clothing, and household goods. Known for its vibrant atmosphere and accessibility, the market also serves as an informal meeting point for commuters using nearby transport links.

THE INCIDENT

Emergency services were alerted around 5:15 am on Wednesday. The Emergency Management Service said over a dozen fire engines were dispatched to contain the flames, which engulfed a significant portion of the western wing of the market. The fire was brought under control after more than three hours, with no casualties reported.

However, initial estimates suggest that dozens of vendors lost their stalls and merchandise in the blaze. Smoke was visible from several kilometers away.

REACTIONS FROM AUTHORITIES

Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze expressed his concern and promised swift assistance.

Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze visited



the scene later in the day and vowed to launch a reconstruction initiative:

TRADERS REACT

Many traders who arrived at the market in the aftermath of the fire were in tears as they tried to assess the damage.

"I lost everything — all my stock was new for the holiday season," said Maia Tsiklauri, who has run a clothing stall at the market for over 12 years. "There was no warning, no help in time. We need answers and real support, not just promises."

Another vendor, Levan Grdzeldidze, echoed her frustration: "This market feeds hundreds of families. We're not just worried about our goods — we're worried about our futures. We need compensation and a proper fire prevention system when it's rebuilt."

WHAT'S NEXT?

City officials confirmed that a temporary market space would be provided nearby

for affected traders, and compensation measures are being discussed. An official investigation into the cause of the fire is ongoing, with results expected in the coming days.

As authorities assess the damage and traders count their losses, the incident has reignited debates about market safety standards and infrastructure conditions in Georgia's capital.

FIRE AT ELIAVA MARKET. 2022

Fires at marketplaces across Georgia have become strangely frequent in recent years. In 2021 and 2022, a major fire broke out at the "Eliava Market," leaving many vendors without their means of livelihood. There were even suspicions that the fires had been deliberately set to serve business interests. However, the investigation did not confirm these suspicions, attributing the fires to negligence instead. Vendors who suffered severe losses received only 3,000 GEL each in compensation.



ASB Georgia Launches "Girls Must Say No" Campaign against Gender-based and Domestic Violence

BY TEAM GT

ASB Georgia has officially launched the "Girls Must Say No" campaign, aimed at raising awareness and combating violence against women, men, and domestic abuse.

As a key part of the initiative, informational stickers have been placed in 900 public buses across Tbilisi, spreading an empowering message to thousands

of daily commuters. These eye-catching visuals encourage women and girls to speak out and firmly say "no" to any form of violence — while also urging the public to take responsibility and report abuse when they witness it.

The campaign serves as a vital step toward building a safer and more informed society, reminding everyone that silence enables violence, and action can save lives.

So next time you step onto a Tbilisi bus — keep an eye out for the stickers, and remember: Girls must say NO to violence.



CULTURE

Georgia Celebrates International Jazz Day

BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

Last night, on the 30th of April, jazz once again took center stage in Sakartvelo. The Kavkasioni Ballroom of the Sheraton Grand Tbilisi Metechi Palace hosted an event dedicated to International Jazz Day. Incidentally, the main venue for this year's celebrations is Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, the 2025 host city, where several large-scale events are taking place — among them, a grand gala concert featuring numerous remarkable jazz musicians from across generations. The Georgian Public Broadcaster was one of the partners of the Tbilisi jazz event, alongside the Metechi Palace administration. The organizers of the evening were the renowned Tbilisi Big Band, managed by Mr. Gayoz Kandelaki, and the Tbilisi City Municipality, represented by Mr. Kakha Markozashvili. The first set of the concert featured the Big Band alongside Jason Isaacs, while the second set welcomed performances by the Big Band together with Jean-Loup Longnon and Sibel Köse.

Jason Isaacs, 57, is a self-taught British saxophonist who focuses more on vocals than on instruments. He has travelled extensively, performing in clubs and bars around the world. His first album, Fever, released in 2009, achieved considerable commercial success and was followed by numerous other releases. His favorite big band is The Ambassadors of Swing, with whom he has toured widely. It is said that Jason is also a strong cricket player, playing for the Old Record Players Cricket Club in Newcastle.

Jean-Loup Longnon, 72, is a French jazz



Image source: ciomit

trumpeter, composer, and arranger. Born into a family of writers and musicians, he studied piano and cello as a child, but later discovered jazz and taught himself by listening to the greats like Dizzy Gillespie. This prominent European maestro's albums enjoy popularity across the continent and beyond.

Sibel Köse, 56, is a Turkish jazz singer who was originally trained as an architect in Ankara. She fell in love with jazz during her student years. Since 1987, she

has actively performed in concerts, radio shows, and television programs, and has taken part in numerous international jazz competitions, even winning a prize in Poland. Her musical interpretations truly deserve attention.

The concert hall was packed with a lively and responsive audience, reacting enthusiastically to every English word spoken on stage — suggesting that the nation is quickly mastering the international language, not to mention its long-

standing love for the universal language of music: jazz. Jazz indeed has the power to unite the world. It's no surprise to hear an Englishman sing jazz or see a Frenchman "eat away" at his trumpet, but a Turkish lady delivering classic jazz pieces with a pure American accent, a distinctly Western performance style, and nuanced vocal shades was an especially pleasant surprise. One detail that stood out: Jason Isaacs didn't appear in a gaudy T-shirt and pre-ripped jeans, but

in a finely tailored tuxedo and black bow tie.

Celebrating International Jazz Day in Georgia feels entirely natural. The love for jazz and its performance is almost as old in Sakartvelo as in its homeland, though its true boom occurred in the first half of the last century. Even during the jazz-hating Soviet regime, there were always those who kept the spirit alive — spending fortunes on records and revering the Western jazz "gods" whose voices and instruments reached Georgia from across the Atlantic. Gayoz Kandelaki and his jazz comrade-in-arms, Misha Giorgadze (former Minister of Culture of Georgia), are among those whose passion, efforts, and professionalism in sharing jazz with their people know no bounds. They have organized countless jazz concerts across the country, including this one. There is a whole generation of Georgian jazz singers whose names deserve mention alongside the greats of the Tbilisi Big Band. One of the brightest among them is Maya Baratashvili, who grew up listening to and reproducing the mesmerizing jazz sounds of Ella, Louis, and other giants of the genre. Not thanking the Tbilisi Mayor's Office for recognizing and supporting them would be a grave oversight — they are doing an outstanding job in promoting jazz culture throughout the country. That's why the Tbilisi Big Band sounds the way it does, especially when joined by such wonderful guest performers, whom the Georgian public is always eager to welcome and enjoy.

Jazz & Sakartvelo — a truly Western combination, isn't it? Says the legendary Gayoz Kandelaki: "The Big Band has long been in the European Union." A quip that speaks for itself.

Balanchine Returns to Tbilisi: A Homecoming in Shadow and Light



Photo by the author

BY IVAN NECHAEV

Some choreographers build monuments; George Balanchine built architecture that breathes. At the Evening of George Balanchine's Choreography—presented by the State Ballet of Georgia at the Tbilisi Opera and Ballet State Theater—four of his seminal works were performed in succession, offering not a retrospective but a kinetic essay in neoclassicism. Carefully curated and staged by Balanchine Trust répétiteurs Bart Cook, Maria Calegari, and Ben Huys, the evening delivered a layered experience: a return not only of Balanchine's ballets to his birthplace, but of the ideas that shaped ballet's modern trajectory.

The Tbilisi dance company, under the direction of Nina Ananiashvili, approached these works with clarity, musical intelligence, and an almost reverent restraint. Conducted with alert sensitivity by Levan Jagaev, the orches-

tra supported the music—from Bach and Mozart to Tchaikovsky and Stravinsky—with a transparency that allowed Balanchine's pure choreographic architecture to shine.

A BLUE PRAYER IN MOTION: SERENADE

The evening opened with *Serenade*, set to Pyotr Tchaikovsky's *Serenade for Strings* in C Major. Created in 1934 as Balanchine's first ballet in America, it still feels like an act of invention. The famous opening tableau—rows of ballerinas in blue, palms raised toward an unseen force—acts less as exposition and more as invocation.

Nino Samadashvili, Mariam Lomjaria, and Elene Gaganidze brought a nuanced grace to the shifting feminine energies of the piece, while Filippo Montanari and David Ananeli grounded the work with a sculptural masculine presence. The piece's power lies in its unpredictability: formations dissolve and reform, as if ballet's classical vocabulary were being rediscovered in real time. Balanchine's use of asymmetry, musical

phrasing, and sudden stillness anticipates everything from postmodern minimalism to contemporary installation aesthetics.

Here, the Tbilisi dancers honored the work's internal contradictions—its combination of serenity and unease, fluidity and form—with a precision that never hardened into rigidity. The result was less about storytelling and more about sculpting time with the body.

BETWEEN MEMORY AND ECHO: MOZARTIANA

Following the intermission, *Mozartiana* (1981), Balanchine's late work to Tchaikovsky's *Suite No. 4*, *Mozartiana*, reoriented the tone into something darker, more introspective. The ballet is neither a tribute to Mozart nor to Tchaikovsky, but rather an eerie dialogue between the two—a baroque echo chamber refracted through modernism.

Nino Khakhutashvili performed the central role with quiet intensity, supported by Joshua Ninamaker and Demian Reshetniak, whose solos lent sharp, musical articulation to the play of light

and shadow. The choreography is filled with spectral flourishes: sudden arabesques that vanish like thoughts, precise turns that break just as the melody shifts.

What's remarkable about *Mozartiana* is Balanchine's refusal to romanticize Mozart. Instead, he refracts the composer through a 20th-century lens, much as Tchaikovsky did. The choreography leans into this ambiguity: canonical shapes are disrupted; musical phrases are answered with unexpected asymmetries. If *Serenade* was a love letter, *Mozartiana* is an intellectual conversation. The performance embraced this tension, never slipping into ornament, maintaining the cool integrity of Balanchine's late style.

DUALITY IN DIALOGUE: CONCERTO BAROCO

The most overtly "musical" of the evening's works was *Concerto Barocco* (1941), danced to Johann Sebastian Bach's *Concerto for Two Violins in D minor, BWV 1043*. Balanchine once said that this ballet is the music—and the dancers confirmed that axiom with a clean, virtuosic performance.

Sopho Tsintsadze and Salome Iarajuli embodied the dual violin parts with mirror-like clarity, never falling into mere mimicry. Their phrasing—sharp yet breathable—echoed the score's complex interweaving. David Ananeli provided an anchoring presence in the male role, counterbalancing the continual modulation of the female leads. This ballet strips classical dance down to its essential grammar: lines, counterlines, breath, silence. The corps de ballet moved like an extension of the music's inner logic, responding not only to rhythm but to harmonic texture. Every tendu, every pirouette, every port de bras became a sentence in Bach's invisible libretto.

Here, Balanchine turns ballet into visual counterpoint, and the dancers rose to the challenge, delivering a crisp, unadorned performance that allowed the music's geometry to radiate through the choreography. Photo by the author

THE GOD DANCES: APOLLO

The final ballet, *Apollo* (1928), marked a symbolic return: Balanchine's earliest surviving collaboration with Stravinsky and the first work where the contours of his mature style emerge with full force. Originally created for Serge Diaghilev's

Ballets Russes, *Apollo* has been continually revised by Balanchine, who gradually pared it down to its mythic core.

Efe Burak danced the title role with a controlled physicality, gradually evolving from raw kinetic energy into stylized grace. Laura Fernandez, Mari Elo, and Valerie Lin shaped the muses with cool, articulate sensuality—each muse a distinct voice in *Apollo*'s transformation.

Stravinsky's score—severe yet luminous—was met with choreography that is stark, almost diagrammatic. Balanchine crafts movement that echoes both the austerity of Greek statuary and the line-work of modernist design. The final tableau, in which *Apollo* leads the muses up a symbolic ascent, unfolded not as a narrative climax but as a distilled metaphor: art as transcendence through form.

THE CHOREOGRAPHIC LEGACY COMES HOME

Beyond the stage, the company has made a significant contribution to cultural memory with their 2021 documentary *In the Homeland of Balanchine*, available on YouTube. The film, featuring Artistic Director Nina Ananiashvili and Balanchine Trust répétiteur Ben Huys (a Prix de Lausanne laureate and former New York City Ballet principal), gives insight into the challenges of restaging Balanchine in Georgia during the Covid pandemic, including online rehearsals and cultural translation.

This tribute to George Balanchine is an act of intelligent embodiment. The State Ballet of Georgia is not attempting to "be" the New York City Ballet. It is discovering its own grammar within Balanchine's language—melding Soviet ballet schooling, post-Soviet resilience, and global contemporary aesthetics. Balanchine's ghost, if it hovered, did not demand reverence—it encouraged reimagining.

In a world increasingly dominated by spectacle and superficiality, Balanchine's ballets remind us that abstraction can be emotional, that structure can move us, and that modernity does not need to betray elegance. With this program, Nina Ananiashvili and the State Ballet of Georgia reminded their audience—and perhaps themselves—that ballet, when shaped by intelligence and heart, transcends nation and time.



Photo by the author



Photo by the author



Photo by the author

Theater Factory 42 Goes Bilingual: English Subtitles as Solidarity

BY IVAN NECHAEV

In a bold move that reaffirms the value of inclusivity within contemporary Georgian theater, Theater Factory 42—Tbilisi's vibrant and socially attuned performance space—announced a series of May performances with English subtitles, inviting non-Georgian speakers to engage directly with its emotionally resonant and formally inventive productions. These include *The Nose* (May 4 & 23), *The Conductor* (May 11), and *1921-1924* (May 18)—works that reflect the theater's aesthetic versatility and its commitment to current cultural conversations.

But this is more than a convenient translation service. The inclusion of subtitles signals a broader, vital shift in the Georgian theater landscape: a commitment to internationalism, accessibility, and cultural dialogue in a city where language can still act as an accidental barrier. It's a gesture that opens the doors of an intimate and turbulent art form to global audiences without diluting its emotional and political force.

Founded by Levan Tsuladze and a collective of artists seeking a space outside institutional norms, Theater Factory 42 took shape in a repurposed Soviet-era industrial building. The venue now serves as a laboratory of contemporary expression, staging performances that reflect the social, historical, and psychological tensions of Georgia's recent past and uncertain present.

Rather than proclaiming itself radical, Factory 42 thrives on immediacy. Its productions are grounded in the textures of daily life and the echoes of history, but always delivered with a language that speaks to the now. Whether through movement, music, or dialogue, this is a theater that listens closely to its time—and responds with urgency, empathy, and imagination.



Photo from Facebook page of Theater Factory 42

In works like *1921-1924*, which reflects on Georgia's brief period of independence before Soviet annexation, or *The Nose*, a satirical reinterpretation of Gogol's absurdity through the lens of modern-day disorientation, the theater addresses questions of power, memory, and identity—not from a distant ideological perch, but from within the very communities it portrays.

For expats, international students, and traveling artists, catching a Georgian play used to be a niche frustration: the language barrier left many cultural moments just out of reach. Subtitles, then, are not just practical—they're symbolic. They represent a theater that wants to be heard by outsiders, not by simply

ifying itself, but by creating shared access.

But subtitling theater is not easy. Unlike film, where timing and dialogue are fixed, live theater is fluid. Actors improvise, rhythms shift, scenes stretch or contract. Subtitlers must be precise, adaptive, and deeply sensitive to theatrical timing, all while retaining the emotional truth of the original script.

This is why not every theater can promise it. The Rezo Gabriadze Marionette Theater, for example, is among the few that guarantees subtitles for nearly every performance, while others—including the Rustaveli National Theater, Open Space Center for Visual and Performing Arts, Vaso Abashidze State New Theater, and Royal District Theater—offer them

selectively, usually during international festival periods or for selected foreign guests.

The reality is this: producing subtitles costs money, energy, and rehearsal time. It's not enough for a theater to want to be international—it must also be convinced that someone is listening. In this sense, subtitled performances are a form of social contract. The more foreign spectators show up for subtitled shows, the more institutions will feel the investment is worth it. If the seats remain empty, that contract breaks.

The Georgian Showcase, part of the annual Tbilisi International Festival of Theater, remains one of the most immersive and reliable ways to experience the

richness of contemporary Georgian theater. For years, this program has been the safest bet for non-Georgian speakers wanting to experience the country's most urgent contemporary productions. Most shows in the Showcase include subtitles, often as part of curated efforts to connect Georgian theater to global circuits. It's a reminder that Georgia is no longer on the periphery of European performance—it's in conversation with it.

Still, as any seasoned theater-goer will tell you, the most electrifying experiences often happen outside the festival circuit—in spontaneous shows in repurposed spaces, in political plays rushed to the stage in response to real-time events. For those moments, English subtitles—when available—serve not just as translation, but as inclusion.

Live theater offers something digital culture cannot: the presence of real bodies in space, the electricity of shared silence, and the risk of vulnerability. In cities like Tbilisi, where political turbulence is never far from the surface and generational memory remains raw, the theater becomes a space of both healing and confrontation.

Theater Factory 42 exemplifies this ethos—not with spectacle, but with attentiveness. It does not shout; it listens and responds. Subtitled performances are simply an extension of that listening—a way to bring new audiences into the room, not as tourists, but as co-witnesses.

A PRACTICAL NOTE FOR THEATER-GOERS

If you're planning to attend a subtitled show in Tbilisi, always confirm with the venue in advance—subtitles may be planned, but technical or logistical constraints can interfere. The more spectators ask, the more likely subtitles will become a standard, not a luxury. Because, ultimately, translation is a form of care. And in a city where art often feels like an act of survival, care is exactly what theater has always promised.

Tbilisi Named Among Europe's Most Beautiful Capitals by Travelbook Survey

BY MARIAM RAZMADZE

Tbilisi has secured a spot among the 14 most beautiful capitals in Europe, thanks to a recent poll by German travel outlet Travelbook. The results were shared by Georgia's National Tourism Administration, which emphasizes the growing popularity of the Georgian capital.

The survey was based on the responses gathered via Facebook and Instagram a more than 200,000 followers par-

ticipated, where they were asked to name the European capitals they found most beautiful or would most like to visit.

The final list features universally acclaimed destinations such as Rome, Paris, Vienna, Lisbon, London, Amsterdam, and Prague, alongside Tbilisi, which stood out for its unique charm and culture. Other cities that made the cut include Stockholm, Copenhagen, Madrid, Tallinn, Valletta, and Athens.

The recognition comes as international interest in Georgia continues to rise, positioning Tbilisi as a must-see destination in Europe.



Photo: Planet of Hotels.



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