



**FOCUS**  
ON PLASTICS AND  
CIRCULAR ECONOMY  
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MEPA launch new project 'End  
Plastic Pollution in Georgia' **PAGE 9**

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## "Putin Is a Politician. His Job Isn't to Be Correct, It's to Win the Fight" – Prof. Samuel Greene on the Tucker Carlson Interview

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

Samuel Greene is professor in Russian politics at King's College London. Prior to moving to London in 2012, he lived and worked in Moscow for 13 years, most recently as director of the Center for the Study of New Media & Society at the New Economic School, and as deputy director of the Carnegie Moscow Center.

His most recent book, co-authored with Graeme Robertson, is *Putin v the People: The Perilous Politics of a Divided Russia*. Radio Free Europe/RL's Georgian Service sat down with him to discuss Putin's latest interview with ex-Fox News presenter Tucker Carlson.

"We've all been listening to Putin talk for a very long time. And, maybe 20 years ago, we would listen to him for information," he tells us. "But now Putin communicates in order to encourage certain kinds of behaviors among both his friends and his opponents. And that's the light in which I would see this interview with Carlson: He has things that he wants to achieve, and he finds it easier to achieve them if Russian voters and elites, American and European decision makers, behave in a certain way. These conver-



The Tucker Carlson interview with Vladimir Putin. sations with people like Tucker Carlson are designed: He knows who's listening and he's trying to play with that. He sees the US, where there is a Congress that is struggling to pass Ukraine supplemental aid, that has probably one chance to do so before the election submerges everything in American politics, and he sees an opportunity to activate that portion of Congress that is either skeptical about support for Ukraine,

or that can be made skeptical. It's no coincidence that that portion of Congress is elected by the kinds of people who watch Tucker Carlson, and, by putting this idea out there that we can have a negotiated settlement, that maybe it is not in the American interest to keep supporting Ukraine, Putin is trying to push into what is frankly a relatively open door for him."

Continued on page 5

Prepared for Georgia Today Business by **GALT & TAGGART** CREATING OPPORTUNITIES

As of 14 Feb 2024

Markets				COMMODITIES			
	Price	w/w	m/m		Price	w/w	m/m
<b>BONDS</b>				Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	81.60	+3.0%	+4.2%
GRAIL 07/28	91.40 (YTM 6.29%)	-0.2%	-0.7%	Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	1,992.33	-2.1%	-2.8%
SILNET 01/27	100.50 (YTM 8.18%)	+0.2%	+0.3%				
TBC 06/24	99.59 (YTM 6.91%)	+0.0%	+0.2%				
CURRENCIES				STOCKS			
					Price	w/w	m/m
GEL / USD	2,6462	-0.4%	-0.6%	Bank of Georgia (BGE LN)	GBP 38.70	+3.5%	-0.9%
GEL / EUR	2,8388	-0.8%	-2.6%	Georgia Capital (CGEO LN)	GBP 11.22	+0.5%	+5.8%
GEL / GBP	3,3269	-0.8%	-2.0%	TBC Bank Group (TBCG LN)	GBP 28.35	-1.0%	-0.7%
GEL / CHF	2,9886	-1.6%	-4.2%				
GEL / RUB	0,0289	-0.7%	-4.3%				
GEL / TRY	0,0859	-1.0%	-2.9%				
GEL / AZN	1,5565	-0.5%	-0.7%				
GEL / AMD	0,0066	-0.2%	-0.3%				
GEL / UAH	0,0695	-1.6%	-1.0%				
EUR / USD	0,9322	+0.4%	+2.1%				
GBP / USD	0,7958	+0.5%	+1.5%				
CHF / USD	0,8860	+1.3%	+4.0%				
RUB / USD	91,5791	+0.3%	+3.6%				
TRY / USD	30,7533	+0.5%	+2.2%				
AZN / USD	1,6995	-0.0%	+0.1%				
AMD / USD	403,0400	-0.1%	-0.3%				
INDICES							
	Price	w/w	m/m				
FTSE 100	7,568.40	-0.8%	-0.7%				
FTSE 250	19,003.89	-0.5%	-1.0%				
DAX	16,945.48	+0.1%	+1.4%				
DOW JONES	38,424.27	-0.7%	+2.2%				
NASDAQ	15,859.15	+0.7%	+5.9%				
MSCI EM EE	43.81	-0.2%	+0.3%				
MSCI EM	998.86	-0.4%	+0.3%				
SP 500	5,000.62	+0.1%	+4.5%				
MSCI FM	2,313.81	+0.3%	+1.1%				



## A Protected Area Worth 767,590 GEL to be Created on 15 Hectares in Guria

BY MARIAM MTIVLISHVILI

**A** bill has been initiated in the Parliament of Georgia, according to which a protected area is to be created in Guria. 15,310 hectares in the Chokhatauri and Ozurgeti municipalities will be given the status of national park, and a new protected area – the Guria National Park – will be created. The bill also recognizes that an administration will need to be established for the Guria National Park, at which no more than 20 people will work.

## No Bomb Found on Grounded Kutaisi Plane

BY ANA DUMBADZE

**T**he presence of an explosive device on the Kutaisi-Barcelona flight was not confirmed, Irakli Karkashadze, head of the Airport Association, said.

The plane of the Wizz Air airline, flight W66417, carrying out a Kutaisi-Barcelona flight yesterday, took off from Kutaisi International Airport at 12:45, but returned to the airport shortly after takeoff following a bomb threat. On landing, all 148 passengers were evacuated to safety and were provided with appropriate services at the airport.

The counter-terrorist units of the State Security Service, together with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, promptly implemented all the necessary and urgent special measures stipulated by the protocol in accordance with the bomb threat. An investigation is underway.

Kutaisi International Airport announced that the airport is operating as usual and is serving flights without interruption. The Kutaisi-Barcelona flight took place on the same day at the later time of 19:00.

“Kutaisi International Airport has fully returned to the normal rhythm of operations and we will continue to receive aircrafts. No other flights have had any delays regarding this particular aircraft. The relevant services are completing the procedures and I am sure they will make a statement themselves, although according to the information available to us, the notification received is not confirmed at this moment”, – Karkashadze said.

## Batumi Named Among the Best Travel Destinations in Europe in 2024



Image source: Tripadvisor

BY ANA DUMBADZE

**E**uropean Best Destinations has named Georgia's coastal city of Batumi among the 5 best tourist destinations in Europe in 2024.

In the rating published by the organization, Batumi ranks fifth among the 20 most popular tourist destinations in Europe. The travel platform advises travelers to head to Batumi, along with popular destinations in France, Spain, Italy, and Switzerland, in 2024.

“Safe, green, friendly, romantic, rich in gastronomy, Batumi will be the trendiest tourist destination in 2024 for travelers who are interested in getting the best experience in Europe at the best price,” read the article shared by prestigious publications Forbes, Wanderlust and the Viaggi travel platform.

The European Best Destinations article focuses on Batumi as the winner of many awards and as an outstanding safe tourist

destination in Europe. The travel platform named Europe's trending destinations for 2024 as a result of a survey of more than a million travelers worldwide.

European Best Destinations is the leading independent organization in Europe, which was created for the promotion of culture and tourism in Europe. It actively cooperates with EDEN network member tourist destinations recognized by the European Commission (EDEN Network – European Union of Tourist Destinations, in which 90 European destinations have been selected by the European Commission based on tourism services and respect for the environment), and with over 500 tourism organizations worldwide.

The organization's main portal, European Best Destinations.com, which is one of the most popular tourist websites in Europe, provides travelers with information about various tourist destinations. European Best Destinations named Batumi among Europe's safest destinations in 2020, and “Europe's best hidden pearl” in 2022.

# Ukraine Latest: Explosions in Kyiv, Dnipro, Zaporizhia and Lviv; Europe Urges Congress to Approve Aid for Ukraine



Ukrainian soldiers prepare Soviet-era artillery as Russia-Ukraine war continues in the direction of Kreminna, in Donetsk Oblast, Ukraine. Source: Anadolu/Getty Images

COMPILED BY ANA DUMBADZE

**D**ue to the launch of “Caliber” missiles from the Black Sea and the launch of missiles from Russian Tu-95ms bombers, an air attack warning was announced throughout the entire territory of Ukraine this week, Ukrainian media reported.

Officials in Kyiv reported an overnight offensive on the capital, with missiles approaching from “different directions” and air alerts sounding for two hours. No casualties were reported.

The mayor of Kyiv, Vitali Klitschko, said that the sounds of explosions were heard in the capital and that air defense is activated in Kyiv. The mayor asked the residents of the capital not to leave their shelters.

Ukrainian media said loud explosions were also heard in Dnipro, Zaporizhia and Lviv.

According to the information available at time of going to press, urban infrastructure was hit in Zaporizhia and one person was confirmed injured, while other injuries are yet to be confirmed.

Ukraine's air force said it destroyed 13 out of 26 missiles launched by Russia in a Thursday morning attack, including one Iskander ballistic missile and 10 cruise missiles.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said in his nightly address Wednesday that he had held a meeting with top military brass, manufacturers and intelligence officials on countering the threat

from Russian drones.

Around half of the country's electronic air defense and warfare systems are produced domestically, he noted, adding that a ramp-up of production is needed. He touted the impact of the international drone coalition, which the Netherlands said it would join.

Addressing the Wednesday report from the Ukrainian military that it sunk a Russian landing ship in the Black Sea, Zelensky said that Kyiv's forces had increased security on the waterway, which is one of Ukraine's key trade routes.

“This is important. Step by step, we will clear the Black Sea of Russian terrorist objects,” he claimed.

### RUSSIAN OIL DEPOT HIT IN DRONE ATTACK, KURSK GOVERNOR SAYS

A fire erupted in Russia's iron-ore-rich region of Kursk, after a Ukrainian drone struck a local oil depot, according to a Google-translated update from regional Governor Roman Starovoit on Telegram.

There were no casualties as a result of the incident, he said, citing preliminary information.

Russian and Ukrainian energy infrastructure has been increasingly targeted in recent weeks, raising concerns about global hydrocarbon security, which have already been stoked by the war in the Middle East.

### US DEFENSE SECRETARY AUSTIN PLEDGES CONTINUED SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on Wednesday said Washington would continue to support Ukraine, amid uncertainty over whether the House of Representatives will pass a bill to provide Kyiv with \$61 billion worth of aid.

“The United States continues to stand foursquare with Ukraine. And America will continue to support Ukraine's principled fight against Putin's imperial aggression,” Austin said.

Austin was speaking virtually at a meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, which was formed in April 2022 to coordinate support for Ukraine and discuss developments in the war.

Supporting Ukraine is “the right thing to do” and just standing by was “not an option” for “people of principle and governments of conscience,” Austin said.

It comes as tensions over funding for further aid for Ukraine have reached



David Cameron urged US lawmakers to vote for the \$95bn security aid package for Ukraine and other countries

boiling point in the US, with various Republican lawmakers opposing a bill that would provide monetary support to Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan.

Austin also said supporting Ukraine was central to national security interests and that the outcome of the war would “define global security for decades.”

NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg, urged the Republican-controlled US House of Representatives to pass a “vital” military aid package for Ukraine, warning lawmakers that China would be emboldened if Russia won its war.

The British foreign secretary, David Cameron, also urged US lawmakers to vote for the \$95bn security aid package to Ukraine and other countries. “Britain has announced its support package for the next year, the European Union has announced their package for the next year. And I urge members of Congress in the United States who will be looking at this today to vote for the package.”

### UKRAINE MILITARY POSTS VIDEO OF PURPORTED HIT ON RUSSIAN WARSHIP

Ukraine's military said it sank a Russian landing ship in its latest sea drone attack against Moscow's Black Sea fleet. Ukrainian military intelligence released video on Wednesday that it said showed several naval drones approaching the Ropucha-class large landing ship Cesar Kunikov off the coast of Crimea, before the damaged ship was shown turned on its side and sinking.

**Ukraine's air force said it destroyed 13 of 26 missiles launched by Russia in a Thursday morning attack**



# Georgia on National Geographic's 2024 Travel List



## Cyanide Case: Archpriest Giorgi Mamaladze Released from Prison

**A**rchpriest Giorgi Mamaladze has been released from prison.

His lawyer Giorgi Phant-sulaia says the archpriest's release from prison happened through the Parole Commission. Mamaladze had about 1 year and 9 months left to serve.

"I can confirm that it happened. He was released through the Parole Commission a few hours ago. We don't have

official details, but I can confirm that he was released. He had about 1 year and 9 months left to serve in prison," Phant-sulaia said.

Mamaladze was arrested at Tbilisi International Airport on February 10, 2017, before his departure to Germany. At that time, the Catholicos-Patriarch Illia II was in a Berlin hospital for gall-bladder surgery. According to the prosecution, police acted on an anonymous tip and found cyanide on his person and

an "unregistered handmade firearm" at his residence. The prosecution did not name the intended victim, the Patriarch's secretary, Shorena Tetrushvili, until March 8.

Mamaladze's trial occurred behind closed doors, and recordings of the plot provided by the prosecution were not released to the public. On September 5, 2017, Mamaladze was found guilty of premeditated attempted murder and sentenced to nine years in prison.

BY MARIAM MTIVLISHVILI

**N**ational Geographic has named its 20 best adventure destinations of 2024, seeing experts from the global community of National Geographic identifying Georgia as one of the best tourist destinations.

"Among our annual top destinations, you'll find the streets of Paris, the snowy mountains of the Caucasus in Georgia, the ancient rock art of Algeria," writes National Geographic.

Along with the information, a video about skiing in Ushguli was uploaded on the National Geographic page and describes Georgia with the following: "Skiing tour among the UNESCO monuments in Georgia".



### The Biltmore Tbilisi Hotel Honored with UN Global Compact Corporate Sustainability Award for Decent Work and Economic Growth

A comprehensive initiative the 'Empower Workforce, Drive Growth' project has been undertaken by the organization. By emphasizing the principles of fair employment, job creation, and sustainable economic practices, a contribution is being made toward the realization of SDG 8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth.

The team at The Biltmore Tbilisi Hotel aspires to create a positive impact on their employees, the community, and the overall economic landscape. They aim to foster an environment where everyone has the opportunity to thrive and contribute to the sustainable development of our society.

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T: +995 322 72 72 72 / info.bhtg@biltmorecollection.com

# President Zurabishvili, FM Darchiashvili Representing Georgia at the 2024 Munich Conference



BY TEAM GT

President Salome Zurbashvili and Foreign Minister Ilia Darchiashvili will take part in the Munich Security Conference, representing Georgia.

“The president has received an official invitation from the international conference in Munich and intends to participate,” the Georgian president’s administration said, although they did not answer the question as to whether Salome Zurbashvili has the government’s permission to visit.

Georgian Dream says that in attending, Salome Zurbashvili is violating the constitution once again.

“Once again, she violates the constitution and stirs up radicalism. At the same time, there is a campaign asking why the Prime Minister is not going to the Munich Conference – because his political statement was that his first visit would be to Brussels, the capital of Europe. Various representatives from different countries take part in such conferences, including the Munich Conference, and there will be many foreign ministers, as well as the

Georgian foreign minister,” said GD MP Mamuka Mdinaradze.

Past prime ministers Irakli Garibashvili, Giorgi Gakharia, and Mamuka Bakhtadze participated in the Munich Security Conference. This year, the representative from the government will be the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The 60th anniversary Munich Security Conference is being held on February 16-18.

Ahead of this year’s event, the Munich Security Report 2024 was published. The Eastern Europe chapter of the document, whose authors are Nicole Koenig and Leonard Schutte, talks about the challenges of democracy in Georgia. The report says while Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova are trying to integrate with the West, “Belarus remains Russia’s only ally in Eastern Europe.”

“Russia may not have been able to bring Georgia, Moldova and the Western Balkans into its camp, but it is still trying to prevent their Western integration. Pro-Russian oligarch and founder of Georgia’s ruling party, Bidzina Ivanishvili, is responsible for the country’s recent democratic backsliding and distancing from the European Union against the wishes of the majority of Georgian society,” the report says.

## Two Employees of Militia Department Arrested for Murder of Georgian Citizen in Occupied Gali



Temur Karbaia

A criminal case was initiated against three employees of the militia department, two of whom were arrested, for the murder of Temur Karbaia, a citizen of Georgia, in occupied Abkhazia, the “prosecutor’s office” of occupied Abkhazia reports.

The case against Albert Zarakua, Viator Abshilava and Davit Kvekveskiri was initiated under two articles of the criminal law code – on charges of group intentional infliction of severe bodily harm and abuse of official authority using violence.

Based on the “prosecutor’s office” report, on December 6, 2023, policeman Davit Kvekveskiri brought drunken Karbaia to a police station in Gali, where he conducted an illegal search without witnesses.

“At the end of the search, Karbaia started using obscene words towards Kvekveskiri, as a result of which Kvekveskiri hit him.

At the same time, Zarakua and Abshilava entered the department, who, together with Kvekveskiri, used physical violence against Karbaia by hitting different parts of his body, as a result of which Karbaia received injuries to the chest, four ribs were broken, and he had bruises on the upper and lower eyelids of his right eye”, the “prosecutor’s office” of occupied Abkhazia reports.

After the beating, Karbaia was taken to a temporary detention center without legal grounds, from which he was released on December 7.

Temur Karbaia died in a clinic on December 9.

According to the prosecutor’s office, on February 10, employees of the Gali department of the “ministry of internal affairs,” Zarakua and Abshilava, were arrested.

“Suspect Kvekveskiri D.B. did not show up, his whereabouts are unknown,” the so-called prosecutor’s office said.



Image source: Gettyimages

## Azerbaijan, Armenia Accuse Each Other of Opening Fire, Report Casualties

BY TEAM GT

Azerbaijan and Armenia this week accused each other of opening fire and provocation on the border, and both reported casualties and injuries.

“On February 12, as a result of another military provocation by the Armed Forces of Armenia, a serviceman of the State Border Service of Azerbaijan was wounded. This provocation from the

Armenian side deals a serious blow to the peace process between Azerbaijan and Armenia. In the conditions of stability of the last 4-5 months, such provocative actions clearly contradict the declared peace messages of Armenia,” the statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan reads.

According to the agency, two servicemen of the Armed Forces of Armenia, who violated the ceasefire regime and tried to provoke on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border, were killed. They said Armenian forces had fired at its troop positions along a northwestern section of the border, about

300km from Nerkin Hand.

Armenia denied that any such an incident took place, and reported that four of its soldiers were killed and one wounded.

“Units of the Azerbaijani armed forces discharged fire from small arms towards the Armenian combat positions in the vicinity of Nerkin Hand [a village],” Armenia’s Defense Ministry said in a statement.

Azerbaijan claimed that it had launched the “revenge operation” after Armenian forces had earlier opened fire across the heavily militarized border further north.

# "Putin Is a Politician. His Job Isn't to Be Correct, It's to Win the Fight" – Prof. Samuel Greene on the Tucker Carlson Interview

Continued from page 1

The second strategic element of the audience is domestic. While most Russians, of course, will not watch Tucker Carlson, Russian state media has spent a lot of time talking about this interview and Carlson's visit. With this, the Kremlin propaganda aims to show that, in fact, Putin has friends in the West, and that he's not isolated.

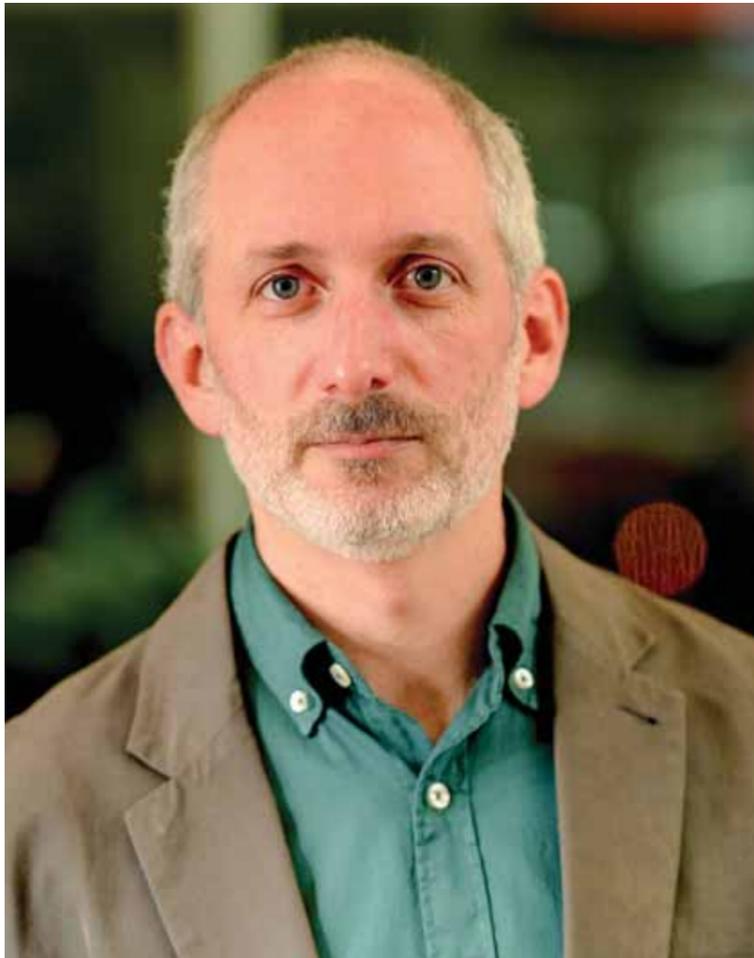
The other thing he's doing comes right after the decision not to register Borys Nadezhdyn, the anti-war candidate, in the presidential elections. By telling Carlson and the American public, and the Republicans in particular, that there might be an avenue to de-escalate relations with Russia, he's also telling the portion of the population that will not have the chance to vote for Nadezhdyn that "maybe I'll take us in a better direction, eventually." Whether or not you believe it is another question, but I think he finds it useful to have that degree of ambiguity about what Russia's future and the future of the war might look like.

**GIVEN THIS STRATEGIC LAYER, PUTIN KNOWING HIS AUDIENCES, BOTH EXTERNAL AND DOMESTIC, IT'S FAIR TO ASK WHAT EXACTLY TUCKER CARLSON IS GOING HOME WITH HERE.**

Carlson has painted himself into a corner. He doesn't have a platform that is going to promote him, doesn't have Fox News behind him, and so he has to find opportunities to promote himself, and he clearly sees provocation as the way to do that. And what could be more provocative than an interview with Vladimir Putin? I think it really is as simple as that. For Carlson's purposes, Putin is a means to an end, a wedge that he's trying to drive into the heart of American politics and say, "you're being lied to. You're being told that Putin is a monster. Does he look like a monster? I'm sitting down next to him, he didn't try to kill me. I drank my cup of tea. There was no polonium in it. I'm allowed to leave the country. I'm not in the cell next to Evan Gershkovitch. And look, I even got to ask a question about him."

**FOR VAST SEGMENTS OF THE INTERVIEW, WE SAW THE RETURN OF PUTIN THE HISTORIAN. HOW WOULD HE FARE IN AN ACTUAL, OBJECTIVE HISTORY EXAM, DO YOU THINK?**

I'm a political sociologist, not a historian, but if this performance were submitted to me as an essay, like that essay he wrote in 2021 about the unity of the Russian, Belarusian and Ukrainian peoples, well, we have a term called cherry picking, hunting for evidence that supports your particular argument. What we always ask people to do is to consider the counter argument - if you're going to test a hypothesis, you want to leave room for your hypothesis to be wrong. And I don't think we see a lot of evidence of Putin doing that, but in his defense, and that's the one time I'll say that sentence, he's not a social scientist, he's not a historian: He's a politician. His job isn't to be correct, it's his job to win the fight, and so cherry picking from his perspective makes sense. And he does it very well.



**IS HE SHOEHORNING HISTORY TOWARDS HIS OWN GOALS, OR ARE HIS ACTIONS INFORMED BY HIS INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY?**

I am a social scientist, and so I actually do want to know what's true. And I look at the available evidence, and I recognize there's a lot of evidence that's not available to me. And so it's actually difficult for me to answer that question. Had you asked me three years ago whether Putin was an ideologue, whether he was driven by a sense of identity, history, mission, whether he really believed in all of these stories about the continuity of Russian history and that was what was driving him, I would have said, "I don't think so," I would have said that he is pragmatic and is driven by, first and foremost, a kleptocratic logic, a logic of capital accumulation and power in the political economy. When we look at what's happened over the last two years and the sacrifices that Putin has made on Russia's behalf in the service of this war, in a way that doesn't make Russia richer, doesn't make Russia safer, then it becomes a little bit harder to make the argument that Putin is driven exclusively by rational calculations. At least allow for the possibility that he is driven by a sense of historical mission, imperialism, identity, ideology. Exactly how that fits together? I don't know. I'm not his psychologist, thankfully. But if you go back to his speeches in February 2022, they are all over the place: He talks about very contemporary issues having to do with NATO, about very historical issues, going back to the christening of Rus, he talks about Soviet heritage, he talks about World War Two. This means that for a significant portion of Russian society, you've got something to latch onto, right?

If what motivates you is Orthodox Christianity, then there's that for you, there's something for everyone. He doesn't need you to believe in all of it, he just needs you to believe in some of it. And I do think that that is a strategic element to all of these historical narratives; it's just putting things on the table, like a buffet, for people to take what they want and be satisfied. What he personally believes out of it? Maybe all of it, maybe none of it.

**THE PARALLEL WITH POLAND WAS INTERESTING, WHEN HE SAID THAT IT WAS INVADDED BECAUSE IT WAS UNCOOPERATIVE WITH NAZI GERMANY. HOW IRONIC IS THAT, GIVEN HIS OWN ACTIONS IN UKRAINE?**

He has a very strange relationship with irony. I'm not sure he really gets the concept. As a result, he's not very self-reflective about it. There is a long standing view, and a certain now core segment of the Russian foreign policy establishment, that believes that what matters in the world is great powers, and that no states are fully sovereign.

**OR, TO PARAPHRASE THE BOOK HE LOVES, 1984, THAT ALL STATES ARE SOVEREIGN, BUT SOME ARE MORE SO.**

Yes. Putin had been clear about this idea for a long time. He looked at people like John Mearsheimer in the United States, who would agree with him that if we want to keep the world from descending into war, what we need to do is limit the sovereignty of small powers, because big powers naturally compete and feel insecure if smaller powers in the neighborhood begin to align themselves with

others. And so you need to limit this balancing behavior, you need to create spheres of influence. "These big wars would not have happened if the Poles had understood their place in the world, and then maybe we wouldn't have got into World War Two. And if we can get the Ukrainians to accept their place in the world, maybe we can avoid WW3" - that's the story he's trying to tell.

When you put it that way, even John Mearsheimer would blush, but he's reflecting a significant tradition and really now the core tradition in Russian foreign policy, this is what people like Karaganov have been telling him. So that's the least surprising part of the interview to me.

**HE PROMISED RUSSIA HAS NO TERRITORIAL CLAIMS TO POLAND, LATVIA OR OTHER COUNTRIES ON THE CONTINENT, UNDER THE CAVEAT THAT "THAT THEY DID NOT ATTACK RUSSIA." GIVEN THAT HE PREVIOUSLY PROMISED NOT TO INVADGE GEORGIA OR UKRAINE AND SUBSEQUENTLY INVADDED BOTH, HOW MUCH STOCK SHOULD ONE PLACE IN SUCH A PROMISE?**

You answered your own question. We are all old enough to remember when Putin said he would not invade Ukraine. Repeatedly, on numerous occasions, and including after 2014. So, again, this kind of communication is strategic. From Putin's point of view, what's the purpose of telling anybody the truth? He may not at the moment have intentions, but who knows what his intentions are. He doesn't know what his intentions are. Life is complicated, things can change. But if the purpose of communication is to get people to behave in a certain way, then you tell them what you need to tell them to get them to behave in that way. And whether or not that happens to be true is entirely irrelevant.

**AS THE THREAT OF RUSSIA ATTACKING A NATO COUNTRY BECOMES EVER MORE REAL, MIGHT HE FIRST STOP TO MOP UP THE LEFTOVERS OF 2008 IN GEORGIA, OR "DENAZIFY" MOLDOVA?**

The answer to that question depends on whether or not Russia needs territory, or if it needs more conflict. And if what it needs politically is conflict, then he will look to see where the softest target is and he'll go for that. When he decides it's time to open another front, or if there's a ceasefire with Ukraine, or if Ukraine looks like it's becoming too costly, he might look elsewhere. It's a bit of a fool's errand to try to predict based on anything that Putin says, or based on patterns of previous behavior. The focus needs to be on building reliable deterrence, first and foremost in Europe, then helping other countries in the region to build reliable deterrence.

**BUT IF THE CHOICE IS BETWEEN CONFLICT AND TERRITORY, WOULDN'T THE EASIEST CONFLICT ALSO GIVE HIM THE EASIEST MEANS OF ACQUIRING TERRITORY?**

Right. But, again, he may have gone into Ukraine because the Ukrainian territory

itself is important to him - "I need to return Ukraine to the motherland." If that's the case, then maybe northern Kazakhstan is vulnerable, because of its history. And maybe Poland is less so because in Russian history it is less than grand. But if it's about conflict, then maybe he doesn't care which specific piece of territory he takes, he's just going for easy pickings.

**AND IF YOU WANT TO CREATE A CONFLICT WITH NATO AND ONE UP NATO, YOU DON'T CHOOSE GEORGIA, BECAUSE IT WILL LIKELY WASH ITS HANDS OF GEORGIA AS IT DID IN 2008, RIGHT?**

I think the conflict is with the West more broadly, I think NATO was a little bit of a red herring. In fact, in a lot of ways, the EU was more important to Putin's thinking than NATO is - the war in Ukraine began as a result of a deep and comprehensive free trade agreement between Ukraine and the European Union, not because of NATO membership. NATO membership became real as a result of that war, not the other way around. So given that Georgia has membership perspective in the European Union now, as difficult as it may be, given the current government in Georgia, it is still something that Europe might be expected to respond to. How the US responds probably depends on who happens to be in government at the time. But if you look at how the war has been weaponized for domestic politics and explain to people it's about conflict between Russia and the West, if what you want to do is to keep that conflict running, because it justifies everything that you're doing domestically, you need quick fuel, right? Then you probably need to push westward and not eastward.

**HOW CONCERNED SHOULD TBILISI AND CHISINAU BE? BECAUSE WHILE NATO COUNTRIES HAVE A SECURITY UMBRELLA, THESE TWO HAVEN'T EVEN GOT A HAT.**

I think they are concerned, and they're dealing with that concern in different ways. Moldova has, in the last two years, been the victim of aggression, and there has been creeping aggression in Georgia continually since 2008. That's never stopped. The current government in Georgia has chosen one way of dealing with it, and the government in Moldova has chosen a very different way of dealing with it. They might both feel a little bit lucky that Russia is so bogged down in Ukraine that there isn't a whole lot they can do. But if I were in the Georgian or Moldovan governments, I would be very nervous about what my life will look like if there is a ceasefire in Ukraine. I would be moving as quickly as possible along the EU integration route. And the EU itself will probably end up pushing NATO, because even though the EU is not a defensive alliance, it does obligate EU member states to come to the defense of other EU member states. And so, informally, NATO membership is actually quite important to the European Union, in terms of its own sense of safety, especially after 2008 and 2014, and 2022, as Brussels has come to understand that there is an actual geopolitical element.

## Shipping Violation Fines to be Made Tougher in Georgia's Ports



BY MARIAM MTIVLISHVILI

**T**raffic rules in Georgian ports, as well as safety norms and fines for marine pollution, are about to get tougher.

According to the explanatory card of the draft law discussed in Parliament

this week, the submitted amendments correspond to the resolution adopted on December 31, 2018, which defines the security rules of ships sailing under the flag of Georgia and ports located in Georgia.

The initiator of the bill is the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia, and the author is the Maritime Transport Agency of Georgia under the same ministry.

## In 2023, \$346 mln Worth of Clothes Imported into Georgia



BY MARIAM MTIVLISHVILI

**A**ccording to GEOSTAT, in 2023, the amount of clothes imported into Georgia increased and the value of clothes amounted to 346 million USD, which is 68 million more than the data of 2022.

In 2023, the main importing countries were:

- Turkey - \$143 million worth of clothing
- China - \$56 million worth of clothing
- Spain - \$48 million worth of clothing
- Italy - \$28 million worth of clothing
- Germany - \$10 million worth of clothing

## Natia Turnava Participates in the Sturgeon Capital Georgia Investment Summit



BY MARIAM MTIVLISHVILI

**N**atia Turnava, the Acting President of the National Bank of Georgia, took part in the Sturgeon Capital Georgia investment summit this week.

During the summit, Turnava spoke about one of the primary tasks of the

National Bank of Georgia- promoting innovation in the financial sector. She also announced that the launch of the first open finance APIs (programming interfaces) is planned for the end of August 2024.

Natia Turnava thanked the organizers and expressed her hope that the event organized by Startup Connect and supported by the USAID Financial Innovation Program will promote much promising cooperation.



## Boosting Georgia's Art Market, 5th BI Auction Competition for Young Artists Kicks Off This Weekend



BY KATIE RUTH DAVIES

**F**ive years have passed since BI Auction held its first event for Georgia's young artists, inspired by the many young artists they had met along the way through their art auctions, artists that had little hope of future recognition or success until BI Auction announced its first competition in November 2019. While the pandemic put a stop to most activities, BI Auction kept going, putting their competition online, seeing the BI Auction team working even harder 'for Art, Artists and Art lovers.'

"This February, the 5th Competition Ceremony is being held, accompanied by an exhibition and a live auction event for the artworks of young artists," says Bengü Akçardak Küçük Co-Founder of the BI Auction. "In the past eight years, we have proudly seen and felt that every initiative

we did had a great impact on the market, especially our auctions for Contemporary Art and for Young Artists, which motivated market players and garnered interest from art lovers, as well as boosting dynamics in the field. We are proud to see almost every day a new exhibition or event for young Georgian artists not only in Tbilisi, but also abroad, especially those of our competition winning artists."

BI Auction was the first art auction company in Georgia, established in 2016. The company aim is to promote Georgian art and artists and to grow the market. BI Auction 'for ART' organizes two big auctions each year, and in eight years has held over 15 events and presented more than 750 paintings from 200 Georgian painters. In every auction, the collection is selected from among thousands of paintings from well-known legendary artists of Georgia, and from promising young artists too.

Head along to see the exhibition of young artists on Saturday, February 17, at IArt Gallery, Uznadze 13, Tbilisi.



# First Institute of Design in the Region Opens in Tbilisi

TRANSLATED BY MARIAM MIVLISHVILI

The opening event of the Institute of Design will be held on Saturday, February 17, at 17:00, at Uznadze 82. The Institute of Design is a regional educational research institution for students and professionals focused on creativity and design. The mission of the Institute of Design is to share design knowledge and creative skills, and to teach others how to solve problems with their own creative resources and the right design.

The Institute of Design started accepting students from February, giving students and professionals the opportunity to study via short and long-term courses, workshops and master classes.

Areas of study cover the full spectrum of design: from sketching to prototyping, from design history to design programs, and from concept creation to design. The Institute of Design teaches art, structural thinking, strategic design, graphics, all types of motion animation, color, craft, design history, virtual real-

ity, and any direction that involves design.

The institute has brought together around 100 Georgian and foreign specialists working in the field of design-professionals who create the culture of the creative industry. The best representatives of the field will share their theoretical and practical knowledge with a new generation and a wider audience.

The main focus of the Institute of Design will be social projects.

"We believe that education should be accessible to everyone. Accordingly, we will announce scholarship and financial assistance programs for talented young people, we will help students to participate in practical work, and we will cooperate with the private and public sector to find internship and employment for our students," says the founder of the Institute of Design, Nino Egadze.

The Institute of Design is located in Old Tbilisi, on five floors of a 19th century historical building. In addition to academic activities, the internal and external spaces of the institute will be a gathering place for various educational and cultural events and meetings. A bookstore with thematic books and exhibition spaces will be opened there.



The institute has an advisory and supervisory board that helps the team to properly conduct educational and creative processes and achieve long-term goals. Council members are: Nika Kurdiani,

Giorgi Sharvashidze, Giorgi Kharabadze, Irakli Baidashvili, Davit Lortkipanidze and Giorgi Bokhua.

Partners of the Institute of Design are Georgian and international private and

public institutions, art festivals, museums, media organizations, and publishing houses.

Address: D. Uznadze st. #82, Tbilisi <https://designinstitute.ge/> Contact@di.ge

## SOCIETY

# A Well-Deserved Moment in Georgia's Fertility Field



Photo by Demiko Loladze

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

Here goes a story: In 2011, just a year before the previous Georgian government was out and the substitute was in, a building in Tbilisi was evacuated and traded off, it having been one of myriad other

properties sold at briskly and covertly negotiated prices. That was the time of the famous household phrase 'All can be sold but the conscience', coined by one of the economic biggies of the erstwhile administration.

In that much spoken-about edifice of historical value, in downtown Tbilisi, the famous Zhordania Institute of Reproductive Medicine had been happily and fruitfully harbored, long-led by Professor

Archil Khomasuridze, who was extracted from the elite Moscow medical circles and put in charge of the institution by the government of the time. The Zhordania Institute was a governmental medical enterprise with the immensely consequential mission of improving the national demographic picture, and so the unexpected commercial deal involving the old luxurious premises came like a bolt from the blue for Khomasuridze, a weathered professional and the only recognized inheritor of Zhordania's medical heritage: Kicked out of his Vera haven, he, for a short while, retained the directorial position at the privatized institute with limited decision-making rights. Certainly, the merited and ambitious doctor, with tens of years of experience under his belt and thousands of created young lives, could not afford to move elsewhere. However, he eventually mobilized all his trusted medical cadres, finances and administrative potential to build a new clinic, which is currently functioning perfectly well, but not in the impressive building the Zhordania adherents were used to working in.

Rehoused, Khomasuridze kept on giving children to the demographically disturbed nation, continuing his lifetime goal to perpetuate his distinguished predecessor's good name in this country and beyond, organizing all kinds of scientific conferences, writing books and making public appearances on the subject. He fought like a tiger to acquire permission to have a memorial board dedicated to Joseph Zhordania mounted on the wall of the former institute named after him. This might sound plain and formal as a measure, but, in actuality, the event carries a huge symbolic weight so as not to let the great man's image and deeds be lost to the national memory. Incidentally, right under the Zhordania memorial board (created by sculpture Gia Japaridze), on the pavement, the Archil Khomasuridze Star was inaugurated the same day, thus emphasizing for good the valuable and as yet too faintly appreciated but extremely treasured medical succession between the renowned teacher and the deserving disciple of outstanding value.



With the Zhordania memorial board now lighting up the wall in the very heart of the capital, justice has been done, so the ending is happy. Good for all of us! Incidentally, the Joseph Zhordania memorial, the book about him (by Sister Euphemia Tzsertsvadze-Mshvenieradze), the Archil Khomasuridze star, and the octogenarian doctor's birthday (he turned 82 on February 11) was masterfully shaped into one giant celebration, which included young doctors of the field, whose enthusiastic and poignant appeal to their famous mentor became the real talk of the town. And the pearl of the day? A medical conference on contemporary reproductive medical problems, vividly confirming that the Zhordania & Khomasuridze Institute of Reproductology is not just another clinic in Georgia providing medical assistance to the country's man and women, desperately seeking parenthood, but is part of vigorously developing the precious field, based on modern scientific achievements, and proliferating the indispensable medicinal knowledge not only among medical personnel, but among the entire population.

What does all that have to do with the life, work and name of Professor Joseph Zhordania? The only fair and righteous

answer is that the prominent Georgian medic could have been long forgotten if not for the nonstop tireless efforts of his spiritual and professional successor, who did all his possible and impossible best to have the nation preserve the great Georgian clinician's prodigious legacy, turning it into modern-day medical philosophy, practice and system, assisted by his wonderful fellow-workers, among them doctors Lali Pkhaladze and Nino Museridze, the former having taken care of the scientific conference and the celebrations thereof, and the latter having brought to life the fairest decision of the year - the Zhordania memorial board and the Khomasuridze star. It seems not only fairy tales delight us with happy endings, but sometimes real life also suggests the same kind of finale.



# Nikoloz Shurgaia on Sadagi and the Challenges of Protecting Georgia's Natural Environment



Nikoloz Shurgaia, Sadagi

INTERVIEW BY KATIE RUTH DAVIES

**T**hroughout 2023, GEORGIA TODAY shared the great work being done by the Sadagi team and the citizens and school groups it has inspired toward environmental protection in Georgia. To kick off 2024, we sat down with the man behind the organization, Nikoloz Shurgaia, to find out more about how Sadagi came about, what its goals are, and where inspiration comes from when facing the day-to-day challenges of caring for the environment.

"I started my career at a lemonade factory in 1992, while in the second year at Tbilisi State University," he tells us. "In 1994 I moved into banking. A combination of luck and the absence of people with knowledge of contemporary banking in a recently liberated post-Soviet country helped me to quickly advance to managerial positions. In 2002, I left for the UK to do a two-year MBA Program at the London Business School, and after graduation, I worked in London, Moscow, Minsk, Baku and Tbilisi, mostly as bank CEOs and on bank supervisory boards.

"I remember my worries and wishful toasts about cleaning up the littered staircases from the mid-1990s. I have a memory of my granddad sorting out a pile of metal rods and wires, which I had failed to tackle. Seeing the cleanliness of Britain and internalizing the merits of wholeheartedly serving one's community, and, importantly, ditching the stereotypes and falsehoods of Soviet propaganda, helped me to start a video blog about books and shortly thereafter Sadagi."

## WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO DEVELOP SADAGI?

We started Sadagi in May 2021 following Eka's (my wife and life partner of over 30 years) and my return to Georgia in November 2020. I had observed with greater intensity than before, as a short-term visitor, that my homeland had made great strides since 2002, yet our com-

munities still lacked many basic habits and attitudes. There was preparatory work which lasted for several months on the background of our adaptation to living in our homeland and starting the Video Blog About Books in December 2020, where a dozen volunteers and I reviewed useful, impactful books.

Over thirty of my friends and acquaintances responded positively to the idea of starting a not-for-profit environmental organization funded by its members. The first heated discussion, where starting the organization was decided, took place in February 2021 at our friend Luka and Tamuna's, holiday home in Timotesubani village, near Borjomi, following a casual clean-up of the vicinity. I am blessed by having many friends and also to have met wonderful compatriots who had experience of participating in and organizing cleanups. Tako and Tata, two of my newly acquired friends and helpers, had been among the leaders of Geocell's Movla clean-up initiative. They and quite a few other new members joined with zeal and helped in various ways. We are grateful to writer Dato Turashvili, one of the team members from the outset, for coining the organization's name - Georgia Cleaners' Guild (Sadagi is a Georgian abbreviation and means "a working day"). Dato also recorded the inaugural video to support the cause.

## WHAT IS SADAGI'S GOAL, HOW WILL YOU ACHIEVE IT, AND WHAT CHALLENGES ARE THERE ON THE WAY?

Sadagi's purpose is to inspire and educate our citizens to turn Georgia into a clean, orderly and even more beautiful place - it's a colossal goal. To clarify our aspirations and measure progress, we developed a project named the Georgia Cleanness Index. As a manager and a citizen deeply committed to Sadagi's purpose, I realize that we need reliable short-term and long-term metrics of success for the team and for our citizens. Visible signs of progress are immensely motivating. Painful facts about the extent of pollution and also occasional failures, which inevitably happen, if treated



A Sadagi clean-up

responsibly, are the best teachers. Facing reality, assessing what we should have done better, and what is to be done, is paramount. Two of the primary parts of realizing Sadagi's multi-dimensional purpose, which we have noticed clearly while working, are: alleviating polarization with unity around the common goal, and helping communities to take the ownership and responsibility for our own country and the problem of our making.

## DO YOU LINK YOUR WORK WITH THE UN'S SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS?

Yes. Sadagi activities are in varying degree related to Sustainable Development Goals:

N6 - Clean Water and Sanitation - by cleaning the water and soil, promoting not littering;

N8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth - by helping the tourism and export industries in creating a better image of Georgia and also creating jobs;

N9 - Sustainable Cities and Communities - by engaging thousands of volunteers from various communities in cleaning up and protecting the environment;

N12 - Responsible Consumption and Production - by promoting more responsible consumption;

N13 - Climate Action - by promoting general environmental awareness and by planting trees (non-core activity which we also pursue);

N16 - Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions - by promoting unity and reducing polarization of the society.

## YOU HAVE CELEBRITY SUPPORTERS LIKE KATIE MELUA. HOW DID YOU INVOLVE THEM AND HAS IT HELPED BOOST INTEREST?

Katie is a wonderful person whom I have known for more than 15 years. Living in

London was a privilege which united me with many gifted, purposeful and good-hearted people - British, Georgian and international. Katie embraced the idea immediately and became a founding member in summer 2021. Last summer, while visiting Georgia for the first time after giving birth to her first baby, Katie, her family and visiting friends from London contributed to a cleanup in Kiketi. Katie's parents Alex and mother Tamara are also our good friends and avid supporters of Sadagi.

## IN 2023 YOU RAN A PROJECT INVOLVING SCHOOL CLEAN-UPS LED BY PUPIL GROUPS. IS THAT SOMETHING THAT COULD BECOME LONG-TERM?

This is a project of which I am very proud. The first stage involved over 1000 pupils in 24 schools located in 11 municipalities in Samegrelo, Shida Kartli, Kvemo Kartli, Kakheti, Tbilisi and Samtskhe-Javakheti. Our partners, Team of the National Teachers' Award, and leader teachers that were nominated for the award, were instrumental to making it happen. We have a nice collaboration, which warms my heart, really.

We conceived this project as a multi-year activity run in several stages each. It is to run each year from September to July. In the first year we culminated on June 5, World Environment Day, with over 100 schools in all municipalities of Georgia participating. We were happy to hear that many other teachers and schools were expressing an interest. The next round of cleanups was held in November. Many of the schools joining stage 2 were those that have been partnering with the USAID Civic Education Program. The teachers and pupils who ensured the success of stage 1 and various other schools, inspired by the trailblazing teachers, also joined us.

## HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS?

It is not easy to rate ourselves. Sadagi's progress should be measured in various dimensions, such as: engagement of volunteers; support by various communities, including donations from individuals and businesses; number and breadth of activities carried out; number and depth of engagement of followers; and most importantly - the impact on the environment of Georgia and change of the public attitude towards keeping our beautiful country clean. The last two are the most difficult to measure.

It seems we have done okay in most of these directions:

3000+ volunteers have participated in the cleanups;

Sadagi has conducted over 40 activities, mostly cleanups some of which have lasted for two and three days, in almost all regions of Georgia;

We have collected over 400,000 liters of litter;

We have received considerable support from over 100 members and non-member contributors;

7000+ people follow Sadagi's social media pages;

Maia, the Sadagi communications manager, has circulated hundreds of photos and videos which have received hundreds of thousands of impressions. 100+ videos of people from different professions have been shot by David, Sadagi Director, raising awareness regarding environmental issues.

These are results of the first three years, which have been achieved by two full time staff, two part-timers and a dozen volunteer administrators. Our team has just added a manager experienced in the not-for-profit sector, and one part-timer has moved to a full-time position. The growth of donations, sponsorships and membership fees in December and January has been very encouraging. But these are still early days. A charity organization such as Sadagi is capable of rapid growth. My recent transformation from a part-timer into a full-timer Chief Cleaner will help. I find this work extremely invigorating.

## WHAT'S NEXT FOR SADAGI?

Currently, we are focused on continuing the project with teachers and pupils, continuing regular cleanups with companies and volunteers all across Georgia, and improving various parts of administration. The nearest new objectives are to make two projects happen - the Georgia Cleanness Index and another large project which we are developing with a partner commercial organization. Much more will follow. Stay tuned.



Nikoloz Shurgaia at a clean up



Katie Melua helping to clean up in Kiketi

Together, to the best of our abilities!

# CENN with Support from UNDP and Norway, and in Partnership with MEPA Launches New Project “End Plastic Pollution in Georgia”



happy that we can work together with both CENN, UNDP and the Georgian government to achieve sustainable economy and ‘greener’ future,” she said, adding that Norway, having a long-standing dedication to sustainability and the global fight against plastic pollution, is more than ready to share its international expertise with its Georgian partners.

“In accordance with the Constitution of Georgia, everyone has a right to live in a healthy environment, and be informed about environmental issues. This new project serves exactly that purpose, and we’re happy to help the state institutions ensure enforcement of those human rights,” she stated.

MEPA’s Alverd Chankseliani in turn praised the long-standing partnership with CENN, UNDP and Norway in the battle against plastic pollution, and expressed readiness to continue the fight within the new project.

“Plastic pollution is a global challenge and a very serious issue,” he said. “To mitigate its serious impacts on human health and the environment, various measures are being implemented worldwide, including circular solutions. Of course, Georgia is no exception and we need to tackle and prevent plastic pollution through all the existing measures. Georgia, since joining the EU

see the circular economy as the only viable feature both economically and environmentally. Civic education and public awareness is a crucial element. The citizen is a key factor. If individuals are not able to respect their neighbors with regard to waste, we won’t go far,” he concluded.

Nana Takvarelia, Head of the new project, noted that nowadays, plastic pollution is devastating economies and environments globally, as well as human health. The project implemented by CENN aims to help the government of Georgia in its transition towards the circular economy in the country, which “is crucial for the healthy and clean future of the generations to come.”

“The circular economy, which is based on two key principles - resource optimization and is the only beneficial and profitable solution both economically and environmentally,” Takvarelia noted.

Throughout the year, CENN, together with its partners, will work actively to inform society about possible threats of plastic pollution and the importance of circular economy as an enabler of sustainability. The project also includes conducting tailored trainings for different actors involved in the plastics value chain.

The event featured a thematic panel discussion, where government repre-

BY ANA DUMBADZE AND  
SHELBI R. ANKIEWICZ

Plastic pollution remains a challenge globally, and Georgia is no exception. Taking into account the threats and visibly alarming changes related to climate change, CENN, with the support of the United Nations Development Programme and Norway, and in partnership with the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture (MEPA), has launched a new project “End Plastic Pollution in Georgia” to help the country advance towards a circular economy and “green” solutions.

The project, supports MEPA to increase the knowledge and capacity of stakeholders and the general public concerning circular models for plastic waste management.

The project launch event took place on February 9 at Radisson Blu Iveria Hotel. Key figures Douglas Webb, UNDP Resident Representative a.i. in Georgia; Rebecca Lie, Deputy Ambassador of Norway to Georgia; Alverd Chankseliani, Head of Waste and Chemicals Management Department (Ministry of Environment Protection and Agriculture of Georgia); and Laurent Nicole, CENN Executive Director, delivered welcome speeches at the launch, out-

lining their goals and plans for the initiative in Georgia.

Douglas Webb welcomed the launch of the project and emphasized the need and importance of such initiatives worldwide to tackle climate change. He expressed satisfaction to continue the UNDP’s long-standing partnership with MEPA and CENN, “an organization at the forefront of environmental protection efforts,” to improve and increase the country’s environmental resilience and energy efficiency.

“This project aims to mitigate the environmental impacts of plastic, the need for which has never been greater, and to promote circular economy among the Georgian population,” Webb noted. “For this, having common sense and involving the public is crucial. This project also aims to raise awareness among society regarding the importance of keeping the environment clean. On behalf of the UNDP, I’d like to thank our partners – MEPA, CENN, and Norway, for their valuable work and partnership with our organization on the path to sustainability and circular economy.”

Deputy Ambassador Rebecca Lie highlighted the urgency of the issue and the need for timely action in terms of mitigating plastic pollution in Georgia.

“We are already late, there is a lot to do, so I think we should start as soon as possible. It’s an urgent issue and I’m



This project aims to mitigate the environmental impacts of plastic, the need for which has never been greater, and to promote circular economy among the Georgian population

Association Agreement, has an obligation to develop the modern system of waste management, which also includes plastic pollution prevention.

Now with the country having received Candidate Status, for which we are very thankful to the EU, we have even more responsibilities in this regard,” Chankseliani added. “The project End Plastic Pollution in Georgia, funded by the Norwegian government, serves these purposes, and we’re very thankful to our partners for their dedication and efforts. CENN has much experience in waste management, and I believe that with our cooperation, the project will be successful, helping Georgia to advance towards a “green” future and a more sustainable economy.”

Executive Director of CENN Laurent G. E. Nicole, talking about Georgia’s recycling culture, emphasized the need for civic education and raising public awareness in the battle against waste.

“We, at CENN, are forever committed to achieving sustainability. Our vision is to preserve our planet’s resources for future generations. We

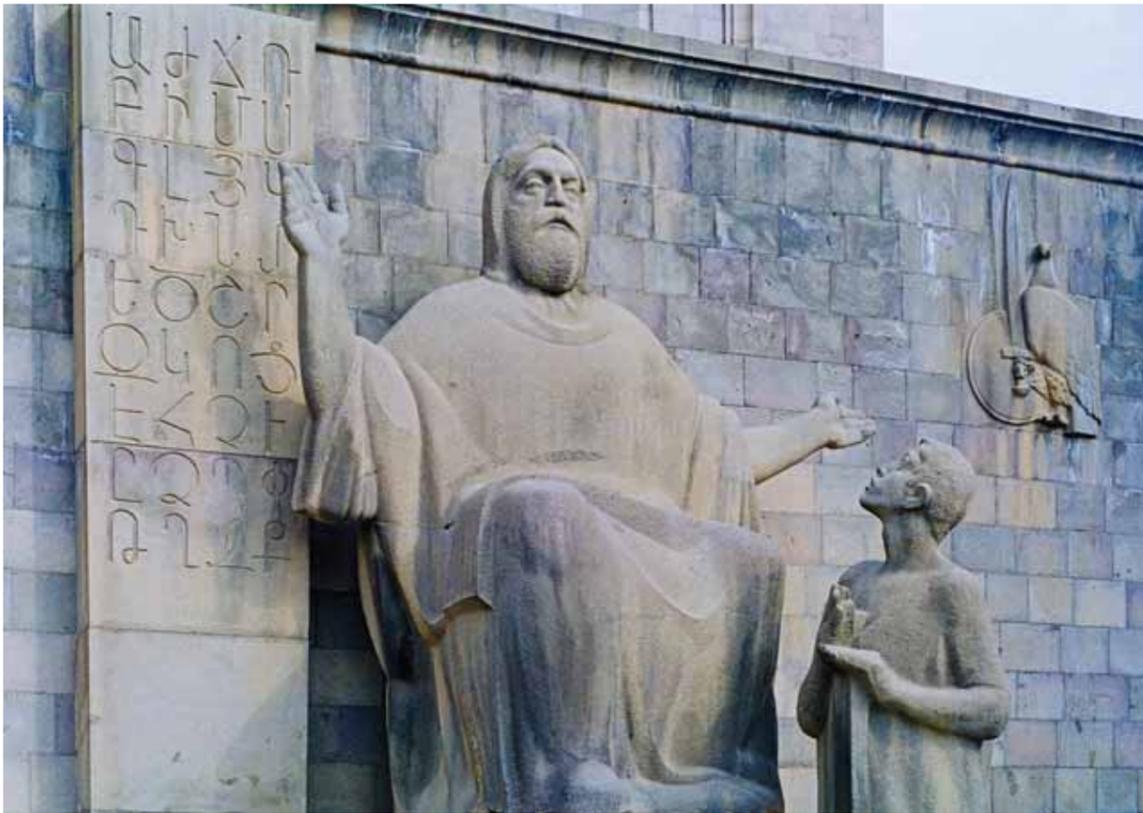
sentatives, as well as those from the private and non-governmental sectors, explored concrete solutions for the circular economy in the country. Experts in the field addressed challenges in plastic waste management, modern approaches, and successful examples implemented in Georgia. The event concluded with an announcement of the plastic waste reduction campaign for businesses and organisations. Selected 10 businesses and organisations will work with CENN and experts to conduct waste audit, develop concrete interventions to reduce plastic consumption and procurement. Follow this link to register for the campaign: <https://www.cenn.org/end-plastic-pollution-in-georgia-pledging-campaign/>

The launch of the End Plastic Pollution project marks a significant milestone for Georgia as it takes a crucial step towards transitioning to a circular economy and furthering its European integration efforts.

Photos: UNDP/Gela Bedianashvili  
CENN/Giorgi Bejashvili



# Yerevan Memories



BLOG BY TONY HANMER

It's been 23 years since I went on my first trip to Armenia. Now, as my wife and I prepare to go together for my second time, I remember.

2001 was a huge date in the Armenian calendar: The anniversary of the year the country officially became Christian, in 301, the first to do so before Rome (315) or Georgia (337). This was its 1700th anniversary, and tourists flocked. I took a train and, as I remember, back then was required to get a visa in advance. I would always choose rails over a bus, to either Armenia or Azerbaijan, or for any international travel, if available, simply because by bus or car, you have to get out and go through passport control, usually with your luggage. By train, they come on and visit you. Plus, if it's an overnight-length trip, I always sleep better on a train than I do on a bus or in a car. Though, granted, in 1999 and the early 2000s, this was a somewhat stressful experience for me the first few times, always between Tbilisi and Baku. They came into my 4-berth cabin, in which I was often alone, and shut the door—three of them! And they would try to scare me into giving them some money. “You have to get off the train.” “Why?!” “You have too much camera equipment.” “OK, just to clarify, you mean the train will continue without me?” “Yes...” “No, I'm not getting off.” “Hmph! We'll be back!” All in Russian. They never did return; tried it maybe once more; and my battle with this particular version of corruption was won. Stressful, but so worth it. Things are different now, thankfully.

I have checked online, and Canadians can now get a visa upon arrival at any entry point, and Brits don't need one at all. My wife, Georgian, doesn't need one either. Nice and easy.

I was there for a few days last time, staying with a British-Armenian friend, who took me around. Echmiadzin, the

most important church in the country. Garni and Geghard with their amazing ruins. Yerevan's Vernissage shopping area, where I picked up some Armenian flag postage stamps printed upside down. The Mesrop Mashtots Museum of ancient

Manuscripts, also called the Matenadaran. Wonderful, but too brief.

That last location bears some expansion. Mesrop Mashtots, long a nationally revered saint, is the person who invented the Armenian alphabet, in about 405 AD.

With the infamous rivalry between Georgia and Armenia over who did what first, the Georgians are now free to keep on pushing back the date of their own first alphabet's creation, and have done so. But the Armenians have a joke. Apparently, some Georgians went to Mesrop begging for their own script, so impressed were they by that of their southern neighbors. He was eating a bowl of cold Vermicelli at the time, and said, “OK, here you go!”, and threw it at the wall. The noodles which stuck became the curly Georgian letters. Ahem.

Armenians are not called the Jews of Christianity for no reason. They believe that their alphabet has given them a strong national identity over millennia of persecution. My favorite book on the country and its people is the prize-winning, beautiful *The Crossing Place* by Philip Marsden. Here, he travels among

the whole, considerable Armenian Diaspora, scattered as a result of their genocides. Like the Jews, they have sought revenge; like them, they seem to have acquired some “iron in the soul” by what awfulnesses they have been put through. There are many books on this people, worthy though harrowing reading.

I am looking forward to this next trip, which will be a week long and show us new things. It's been too long.

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



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# Berlin Fashion Week Autumn/Winter 2024 Collections in a Glimpse and a Sneak Peek into Georgian Fashion Scene Oddities

REVIEW BY LILY FÜRSTENOW

Although women's voices are gaining strength, fashion is still mostly dominated by male designers and tastes. During Berlin Fashion Week, at least one designer, Marina Hoermanseder, managed to critically subvert the long established conventions by offering an authentic female fashion gaze and statement pieces that celebrated diversity, individuality and self-expression, without constraints.

The Marina Hoermanseder Autumn/Winter Collection 2024 thoroughly redefined gender and beauty stereotypes. With its signature buckles, hand-punched and edge-painted leather elements, the looks embody an extravagant celebration of life, exuding glamor, flair, and an abundance of sparkle. Each outfit appears bigger than life, commanding attention with its opulence. The designer's approach to fashion transcends traditional boundaries, blurring the lines between masculine and feminine.

With refined silhouettes, intricate embellishments, and luxurious fabrics, the collection embraces gender fluidity and captivates the imagination, transporting the viewer into a world of fantasy and allure. Hoermanseder's defile final look caused an extra sigh of admiration

and ovation from the public due to its spirit of female empowerment, encouraging individuals to defy societal norms of beauty: the model closing the show wore a voluminous skin-colour dress inspired by the famous curvy Venus of Willendorf kept in the Natural History Museum of Vienna. The glossy forms of this extraordinary outfit accentuated the seductive power of female curves, serene and arousing at the same time, all solemnly presented by Vivien Blotzky, the plus-size model, winner of the latest Germany's Next Top Model Casting Show of Heidi Klum.

Another highlight of Marina Hoermanseder's collection is a lego dress made up of blue, red and white glossy lego plastic parts, adorned with toy lego roses. Some might ask if all of these fairy-tale outfits are practically any good to wear. They are, no doubt, fantastic to have on with the right attitude of glamor, fun and playfulness, because they celebrate life. And wouldn't that be good enough a reason to wear any outfit? Marina Hoermanseder is a couture label. It specialises among others in cuir bouilli, a centuries-old craft technique in which two-dimensional leather is softened by water and arranged into new three-dimensional shapes. This technique, rooted in orthopaedics, was brought into the world of high fashion by the designer, who, in collaboration with local orthopaedic specialists, is keen to keep the craft alive.



Marina Hoermanseder, AW24 Runway. By photographer Franziska Krug



Danny Reinke new collection. Photo by Andreas Rentz

While Hoermanseder's current collection topic was the circus, probably referring to happy childhood recollections and a subtle critique of the media and celebrity circus that always accompanies her shows, the topic of another designer, Danny Reinke, whose work we particularly like and whose Fall/Winter 2024 collection stood out prominently in terms of workmanship and innovation, focussed on dreamworlds and phantasies. Respectively, the looks were endlessly romantic, light and incredibly authentic, making the models look like outlandish fairy-tale creatures. A bed, placed in the center of the runway (cooperation with the Schramm Home of Sleep), served as the setting for the show opening and the central prop for the defile. The first look of the collection saw the model emerging from the bed as if by magic, wearing a majestic white gown of cushions and bed linen. The follow up looks were no less striking. The whole collection is a beautiful experiment with colors: gowns, coats and suits in turquoise, reds, and orange hues with pink, creating an electrifying atmosphere. Patterns and fabric mixes give the looks captivating vibrancy. 3D-printed shapes imitate the fauna of our planet. A core element of the collection are handmade knotted pieces made of leftover local wool.

Berlin Fashion Week would be nothing, of course, without Marcel Ostertag's new Fall/Winter 24 collection that turned it all into an eternal bloom with its exotic flower prints on pinks, blacks and other swaying fabrics and accessoires. It's ultra contemporary elegant outfits are flamboyant and exude positive vibes: ethereal gowns with unexpected twists, pieces adorned with sequins, bold cut-outs and extravagant laces work real magic.

Other designers that attracted our attention were Lisa Deurer, the designer behind the LD-13 label. Her new collection focuses on the color scheme of blacks, whites, and reds, with complex

shapes like cuts, pointed shoulders and unique collars. The dramatic coats and jackets made of satin, transparent and graphic details in the form of shirts and dresses are very eye-catching. Among the highlights of the runway presentation were the sculptural shoulder cape made of fluffy mohair, the oversized scarf that offers different styling options though its multiple neck openings, as well as the final look: a knitted jacket in the shape of an oversized hand.

The Dennis Chuene AW24 streetwear looks are mostly in darker, sombre and more subdued tones. The designer met the true Berlin attitude of raw shabbiness and haphazard spirit: models walked around with smeared make-up and ravaged outfits. Edgy yet confident and subversive, Chuene's new collection has a particular focus on sustainability. The designer works almost exclusively with recycled materials. All looks are created by hand. Figure-fitted outfits, long coats, tailored silhouettes and ragged pieces are often complemented by wide, pleated trousers. The choice of materials and applications shows impressive attention to detail and precision. Unfortunately, the whole impression was somewhat subdued by the soundtrack abounding in bad language that probably intended to convey the speaker's/designer's frustrations, struggles and disappointments, yet just missed the point and evidenced a common trend of fascination with poor manners.

A brilliant example to follow is the Berlin-based Haderlump label, that in all its collections has been concerned with circular transformation and sustainable repurposing. The new "Circularis" collection for AW 24 is created in collaboration with DHL, a German logistics company providing package delivery and express mail service. Haderlump is known for producing progressive, high-quality fashion from deadstock, i.e. supposedly worthless

materials. Johann Ehrhardt, Haderlump creative director, chose to work for this collection with particularly challenging materials, such as old cow skins, which he turned into stylish biker jackets and coats. The Haderlump aesthetic was impressively showcased on the catwalk: sculptural silhouettes in dark colors with immaculately crafted details met the iconic red and yellow of the DHL logo. According to Johann Ehrhardt "working on the Circularis collection was also about combining the brand design with DHL's identity in a credible and interesting way". The Haderlump Runway show inspired by DHL signature colors and discarded workwear definitely gave the label an extra eco-conscious boost.

The Georgian young designer and fashion scene by no way falls behind the main European capitals. Creativity knows no borders. We focus today on Andro Dadiani, a queer performance artist and designer of his own extravagant outfits, which range from scandalous cross-dressing to morbid self-effacement. Due to Georgian conventional societies and intolerance towards queers, Andro Dadiani prefers to live a double life of an artist and designer, whose creative process is both a blessing, an escape from daily drudgery, and a sacrifice. Elaborate masks, effacing his features and making him unrecognisable to most viewers, are his signature elements. For his performance looks he combines stiletto boots, opulent furs, heavy fabrics combined with transparent textiles for gowns, shirts, plisse skirts, as well as glitter and sparkle for extra glamour effect. Posing for his camera and video performances sometimes like a diva, sometimes like a monstrosity outcast, he is stylish and sophisticated to the last detail. His outfits and performance costumes are all hand-made, mostly out of recycled materials, found objects and second hand revamped pieces.



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Lagidze Water, originating in 1887, is a Georgian delight crafted by pharmacist's apprentice Mitrofan Lagidze as a healthier alternative to imported lemonades. This elixir combines natural syrup with carbonated water, offering a smooth, lightly fizzy experience in flavors like lemon, pear, tarragon, leijoa, cherry, and various grapes.

Lagidze opened his first shop in Tbilisi in 1906. Cafe Lagidze became a cultural icon and a local hotspot with its vintage charm. While the original shop is long gone, it is still served in some Georgian cafes. Bazzari Orbeliani's food court provides charming settings to enjoy several flavors of this iconic Georgian beverage.

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