



FOCUS

ON TURNING CHALLENGES INTO OPPORTUNITIES

We speak to Efes Georgia GM Ertan Kurt on how Efes Georgia made a success of 2020

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COVID/Restrictions Update: New Decisions on COVID Restrictions See Society, Business Sector Protesting

BY ANA DUMBADZE

Since the epidemiological situation has improved in some regions of Georgia, the government has decided to lift certain restrictions in February and in March, yet many others remain in place.

On January 22, the Interagency Coordination Council announced new decisions regarding the coronavirus-related restrictions countrywide.

Based on the decision of the Council:

- Municipal transport, schools, shops and trading facilities will be reopened in Batumi, Zugdidi, Poti, Gori and Telavi from February 1. On weekends, during February, there will be no transport, and food outlets and shops will continue in a take-away/delivery only regime;

- From February 1, outdoor eateries will be opened in Adjara, but the organization/celebration of weddings or other large parties will still be forbidden; Eateries in other regions will continue to operate in a take-away/delivery only regime;



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Image source: iStock

Holocaust Remembrance Day events organized by Israeli House in Georgia

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Celebrated Poet Davit Tserediani Receives National VazhaPshavala Award

CULTURE PAGE 11

GALT & TAGGART CREATING OPPORTUNITIES									
Markets									
As of 25-Jan-2021									
STOCKS	Price	w/w	m/m	BONDS	Price	w/w	m/m		
Bank of Georgia (BGEO LN)	GBP 11.58	-4.9%	-4.3%	GEORG 04/21	100.61 (YTM 4.19%)	-0.1%	-0.2%		
Georgia Capital (CGEO LN)	GBP 5.11	-7.1%	-0.4%	GEORG 04/21	101.22 (YTM 1.00%)	-0.0%	-0.5%		
TBC Bank Group (TBCG LN)	GBP 12.24	-6.0%	-	GRAIL 07/22	106.57 (YTM 3.10%)	-0.0%	+0.8%		
				GEBGG 07/23	105.44 (YTM 3.70%)	+0.1%	+0.2%		
COMMODITIES	Price	w/w	m/m	CURRENCIES	Price	w/w	m/m		
Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	55.88	+2.1%	+8.5%	GEL / USD	3.2993	+0.2%	+1.0%		
Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	1 855.93	+0.8%	-1.5%	GEL / EUR	4.0058	+0.7%	+0.6%		
				GEL / GBP	4.5113	+0.8%	+1.8%		
				GEL / CHF	3.7176	+0.4%	+1.1%		
INDICES	Price	w/w	m/m	GEL / RUB	0.0438	-1.6%	-0.7%		
FTSE 100	6 638.85	-1.2%	+2.1%	GEL / TRY	0.4452	+1.1%	+2.3%		
FTSE 250	20 350.41	-1.4%	-1.0%	GEL / AZN	1.9411	+0.2%	+1.0%		
DAX	13 643.95	-1.5%	+0.4%	GEL / AMD	0.0064	+1.6%	+3.2%		
DOW JONES	30 960.00	+0.5%	+2.5%	GEL / UAH	0.1172	+0.5%	+1.6%		
NASDAQ	13 635.99	+4.9%	+6.5%	EUR / USD	0.8236	-0.5%	+0.4%		
MSCI EM EE	163.42	-4.4%	+1.6%	GBP / USD	0.7312	-0.6%	-0.8%		
MSCI EM	1 410.20	+3.8%	+12.3%	RUB / USD	0.8885	-0.3%	-0.1%		
SP 500	3 855.36	+2.3%	+4.1%	CHF / USD	0.8885	-0.3%	-0.1%		
MSCI FM	2 582.32	-1.7%	+0.2%	RUB / USD	75.3486	+1.8%	+1.6%		
GT Index (GEL)	1 582.68	-	-	TRY / USD	7.4064	-1.0%	-1.9%		
GT Index (USD)	1 208.13	-	-	AZN / USD	1.6988	-0.1%	-		

How Beeline Bid Farewell to 2020

Saying goodbye to last year's difficult 2020 and meeting the new 2021 with renewed energy was particularly significant and different this year than in previous years. Let's see how companies try to increase employee motivation using the example of Beeline.

Beeline made a fun video to summarize 2020, where, instead of actors, the employees adapted the roles. The video describes the challenges overcome in the past year, the experience gained, and the numerous interesting discoveries. The company

believes that despite the difficulties, the distance has brought employees even closer, and that by caring for and supporting each other, they will succeed in developing.

Before the New Year, each employee of Beeline found a big and beautiful box outside their door, a magic gift set sent as a surprise from the company which was highly praised and also made a significant contribution to creating a positive mood in 2021.

In 2020, all COURSERA and LINKEDIN courses were available free of charge to



all Beeline employees. The most hard-working employees of 2020, those who passed the most online courses, were gifted KINDLE PAPERWHITE.

At the end of the year, despite still being in remote mode, the Beeline HR team, as per tradition, decorated a Christmas tree for its staff.

At the end of the year, a traditional

meeting was held in a new format: online, where employees summed up 2020 together, thanked each other, and wished each other a Happy New Year. No-one expected such an emotional gathering online; however, seeing all the employees at the same time brought a sea of positive emotions, and everyone saw once again how much they miss each other.



COVID/Restrictions Update: New Decisions on COVID Restrictions See Society, Business Sector Protesting

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- From February 1, shops and shopping centers will reopen in Tbilisi, Kutaisi and Rustavi;
- From February 1, all airlines will resume flights to all destinations, in compliance with regulations;
- Indoor and outdoor fairs will be able to open in all cities from February 15;
- From March 1, it is planned to restore schools and transport in Tbilisi, Kutaisi and Rustavi;
- From March 1, it is planned to open kindergartens and return students to universities and vocational schools, although the deadline may change;
- The night curfew remains in force until March 1, with movement prohibited from 21:00 to 05:00;
- All other restrictions remain in force, including restrictions in ski resorts;
- Intercity transport will remain limited to car and taxi;
- Face masks, queues, social distancing, etc. will still be mandatory for facilities that open.

Regarding the resumption of international flights from February, Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development Natia Turnava said that flights will be carried out in accordance with the rules of all medical protocols.

"Resumption of flights does not mean that from February 2 our skies will be filled with aircraft; it will take time," the Minister noted, clarifying that procedures need to be followed and resumption of air traffic with countries where the infection rate is high will not be reintroduced immediately.

Vice Prime Minister Maia Tskitishvili further emphasized there are no plans to open ski resorts from February 1 due to the risk of high mobility, which will promote the rapid spread of infection.

PROTESTS

The government's latest decisions to keep certain restrictions in place led to protests from civilians, opposition politicians, and business sector representatives. Several protest rallies were held during the week, with protesters demanding the lifting of restrictions imposed during the pandemic.

Demonstrators noted that if the government does not do so, the protests will continue, because "these restrictions are destroying the country's economy."

In response, the Prime Minister stated that changes to the restrictions would be considered if the infection rate countrywide falls to 4% and stays there for seven consecutive days.

"When the community transfer rate will be 4% for seven consecutive days, we will be able to carefully and prudently reopen the economy. The current trend gives us grounds to be cautiously optimistic. That is why we need to start a discussion today on lifting the restrictions earlier if the trend is maintained for the coming week, as we managed to do last summer. It primarily applies to Tbilisi, Kutaisi and Rustavi. Reference is made here to education institutions to make sure that our children go to classes. It also relates to a gradual reopening of municipal transport, so that the achievements made as a result of our joint efforts in the last two months are not jeopardized. What is most important, we should do our best to maintain this achievement in a stable manner until we start a gradual reopening of the tourism sector. The economic team, led by Maya Tskitishvili, Deputy Prime Minister of Georgia, has been holding meetings with businesses for several days already to make sure that the reopening is sus-



Image source: Livepress

tainable, prudent and, most important, safeguarded," the PM said.

SUPPORT FOR THE BUSINESS SECTOR

On Wednesday, Economy Minister Natia Turnava announced that the government, as part of its measures to support Georgian businesses, will launch the Fitness Center Subsidy Scheme to provide relief to fitness center operators.

"In order to support fitness center operators, the government will subsidize interest rates for their loans. We also take into consideration that the fitness industry cannot be opened in February, which is why we will include it in the state program 'Produce in Georgia,' which is designed to help industries most in need to overcome financial difficulties arising from the suspension of their operations during the pandemic," she said.

Produce in Georgia, implemented through a government initiative, aims to provide funds for and support businesses in the local production market.

Back in August, the government announced that Produce in Georgia would support six new economic activities in order to specifically tackle the economic hardships caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

The ban on fitness centers, intercity public transportation, swimming pools, as well as the restrictions in place for Georgia's ski industry, have been kept in effect until further notice.

NEW CASES

Currently, the epidemiological situation in the country appears relatively stable. Georgia is recording 700-1000 new cases on average daily, with the capital, Tbilisi, still in the leading position in terms of virus spread, followed by the Adjara and Imereti regions.

On Wednesday, Georgian Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani tested positive for coronavirus.

He wrote on Facebook that he "feels well and is undergoing treatment at home," noting that he went into self-isolation after contact with an infected individual.

"After contact with the infected individual on January 23, I moved to self-isolation. The PCR test today confirmed today I have contracted Covid-19. I feel well at this point and hope to return to my usual way of life soon. Let us take care of each other and follow the recommendations of the Ministry of Health as much as possible to avoid risks," he wrote.

This week, the death toll on a daily basis has decreased to a minimum 12 and maximum 25 fatalities.

Notably, the number of recoveries is relatively high, with at least 1000 cases daily.

At this point, there are approximately 6,920 active cases of coronavirus in the country.

VACCINATION

Regarding the vaccine, health officials vow only WHO-authorized and highly trustworthy vaccines will be imported to Georgia at the end of February.

"We are expecting the vaccine to arrive at the end of February. We have already sent a request to all clinics and medical institutions to provide a detailed list of all their staff in order to properly plan the vaccination process," stated Health Minister Ekaterine Tikaradze, adding that no vaccine will be imported into the country that will not have high trust status. She also noted that the vaccination of 60% of the population, as is planned, is sure to help increase economic activity.

EU Supports ECHR Judgment in Georgia-Russia Case

The European Union has reiterated its support for the territorial integrity of Georgia, responding to a judgment by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) Grand Chamber on 21 January in the inter-state case concerning the armed conflict between Georgia and the Russian Federation in August 2008, and its consequences.

The Georgian government had asserted that certain administrative practices of the Russian Federation had breached the European Convention of Human Rights



in the context of this armed conflict.

"The ECHR ruling clearly concludes that after 12 August 2008, the Russian Federation, exercising effective control over South Ossetia and Abkhazia, violated several provisions of the Convention," the European Union External Action Service said in a statement, published on 22 January.

"Achieving justice and accountability is an important part of conflict resolution and the EU calls upon the Russian Federation to ensure the proper follow-up of the ruling," the statement said. "The European Union is fully commit-

ted to supporting conflict resolution, which also requires efforts to address the legacy of past conflicts, including through its engagement as co-chair in the Geneva International Discussions, the efforts of the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia, and the crucial role played on the ground by the EU Monitoring Mission".

The European Union firmly supports the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders, the statement said.

Tbilisi Rally-Goers Demand the Gov't Open the Country

BY NINI DAKHUNDARIDZE

This Sunday saw crowds of civilians protesting the government's extension of COVID restrictions in the center of Tbilisi. Prior to that, on January 22, the government's Coordination Council announced new decisions on the COVID restrictions, according to which public transportation, along with schools, will remain closed until March 1 in Tbilisi, Kutaisi, and Rustavi. This, perhaps not all that unexpectedly, angered many in the capital and beyond. On Sunday afternoon, in front of the Chancellery, civilians organized a protest, demanding the reopening of public transportation. The demonstration organizers, in the description of the Facebook event, said it was a "protest against the government." Their other demands were to reduce the curfew, and to open schools, kindergartens, mountain resorts, and theaters.

"Nobody is raising their voice, and [the government's] behavior has become uncontrollable," reads the description. Giorgi Vashadze, member of the 'Strategy: David The Builder' party, joined the rally to show his overall frustration with the still-imposed COVID "lockdown." According to him, the government is

imposing too many unreasonable restrictions on the country.

"There are many senseless restrictions, and I'm breaking one of these restrictions today. I have test results in my hand, according to which I am healthy, and yet I have to be locked up due to a reckless decision of the government," he said during the rally.

He also talked about the CPR test, which was the reason he was supposed to be at home.

"I was in America, where I took a PCR test, and there I had no problem moving around. I arrived in Georgia and was told to go into a 12-day quarantine, even though I called the hotline, said I did the test, I'm healthy, told them I was willing to do it again, seven times even, if you just let me out. They said no; told me to stay home. So, I'm demonstratively violating the order," said the politician, adding later that "these are senseless, irrational restrictions, and there are many such meaningless restrictions."

Although protesting, Vashadze did not seem to be in favor of a total reopening.

"You cannot forget businesses, the economy, leave citizens unemployed and hungry, and sit contentedly in a chair, saying 'this is the best option.' Therefore, I am demonstratively violating one of the irregular rules that they have set, the precedent of which is very few in the world," Vashadze said.



Image source: Radio Tavisupleba

The peaceful protest on January 24 was attended by leaders of several political parties, as well as representatives of business associations, mountain sports, arts, and more.

The same day, separately, an initiative group of parents held a rally in Mziuri Park, Tbilisi, where they demanded a clear plan from the authorities on when

and how they plan to open schools and kindergartens.

"Once again, we felt cheated and abandoned because we really could find no other way," one of the organizers, Nino Robakidze, told Radio Tavisupleba.

"We are interested in whether teachers, resource officers, and doctors have been trained [ahead of the March 1 open-

ing]. Is the infrastructure ready? Children with special needs are a separate topic. These children are extremely distressed because the online learning model doesn't work for them. Nowhere is the voice of the children who are left out of these online tutorials heard. There's a lot we're being kept in the dark about. We don't know what the strategic vision is. That's why we want the decision-makers to feel this pressure from us," she said.

Titled 'Open the Country,' the peaceful rally in front of Parliament ran smoothly until a group of activists started disobedient activities near the government building, then marched to the Georgian Dream HQ and deliberately broke the curfew, holding signs proclaiming: "People are hungry", "Keep your hands off the activists", "You will not save the rigged elections," and "Freedom to Irakli Fangani".

Irakli Fangani was an activist detained by police in Batumi that day. The reason for his arrest was his having thrown garbage over Irakli Chavleishvili, a former opposition member, and currently an independent member of the Supreme Council of Adjara. Fangani said on Monday that he apologized for what he had done, but if it had to be done again, he would do it.

The police, surprisingly, were not quick to fine the protesters for violating the curfew.

Times Correspondent in Moscow Marc Bennetts on Navalny's Arrest & Its Implications

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

The Navalny Odyssey goes on, and with the Russian opposition leader detained and facing 3.5 years in jail, tens of thousands of Russians took to the streets to protest. Needless to say, the Russian police responded in trademark fashion: a massive crackdown that ended up with more than 3000 protesters detained. What's next for the Russian Patient? What should the West, the Kremlin, and the lesser actors of Near Abroad expect from the man who, for many, is shaping up to succeed the current Tsar on the throne? The Georgian Institute for Security Policy spoke to Marc Bennetts, Times Correspondent in Moscow, on Navalny's arrest and its implications.

HOW BIG A THING IS NAVALNY'S ARREST IN THE WEST, AND IN RUSSIA ITSELF?

It has obviously pushed his international standing to unprecedented heights. I don't think he's quite a household name in the West, but he's getting there. Newspaper headlines used to call him a Kremlin critic or Russian opposition leader; now they name Navalny as if they expect you to know who he is. That's always an indication of how famous someone has become, and obviously, this newfound portion of his fame dates from August when he was poisoned with novichok. Being poisoned with novichok is always a good headline, always a good way to ensure someone becomes famous internationally. Within Russia, both his poisoning and his return have not been covered much by state media: in some talk shows they've mentioned him, but usually along the lines of "he's a traitor to Russia, he's a pawn of the West. Vladimir Soloviov called him nazi scum. But it's big news here as well, one that the state media tries to downplay as much as it can.

HAS HIS STATURE GROWN IN RUSSIA?

It's difficult to say with Navalny, because Russia isn't a democracy in any way; it pretends to be a democracy, but it's obviously not genuine, so how do you judge



Image by Maxim Zmayev/AFP via Getty Images

his stature? How do you judge his popularity? We can do it with opinion polls, in which 2% of Russians said they would vote for him to be president. But then his supporters point to the fact that 2% of Muscovites also said they would vote for him to be mayor before he was allowed to run an election campaign in 2013 for mayor, and yet he gained almost 30% of the vote officially, amid rumors that the vote was rigged. One thing is clear: his investigations into corruption are massively popular, I mean more than 85 million people have seen his latest video about Putin's Palace.

HOW WILL THAT VIDEO AFFECT THE SACRED RUSSIAN MYTH ABOUT PUTIN BEING THE GREAT LEADER THAT HAS NO INTEREST IN MATERIAL WEALTH, AND THAT HE'S ONLY PRIMARILY PREOCCUPIED WITH BRINGING GREATNESS TO HIS NATION?

Again, it depends on who you are. For opposition supporters watching it, it's nothing new. They've never questioned the narrative that Putin is corrupt and massively obsessed with wealth. For Navalny, the main question is for how many Putin supporters or people who are wavering will it prove a tipping point when they see this display of massive wealth. Not even just massive. It's hard to describe. There's a joke going around in Russia now that Gelenjik has been discovered in Putin's Palace. It's unprecedented levels of wealth.

IS NAVALNY PERCEIVED AS A POTENTIAL HERALD OF CHANGE? IF HE WERE TO SUCCEED, WOULD CHANGE COME TO RUSSIA?

There's already a significant number of Russians who feel that Navalny is a potential successor to Putin, and who would like to see him succeed Putin, and

I think we can judge how threatened the Kremlin feels by the mounting attacks on him. Parliamentary Speaker Volodin said recently again that Navalny is a pawn of western intelligence, that he was sent to interfere in Russia's elections. I think the Kremlin feels threatened, I mean you don't send a massive contingent of riot police with dogs to meet a mere blogger at the airport. It's obvious they're spooked.

THE CALL HE MADE TO ONE OF HIS WOULD-BE ASSASSINS, WHICH THE MAN ACTUALLY ANSWERED, DOESN'T EXACTLY FLATTER RUSSIA'S SECRET SERVICES, DOES IT?

I think it underlined how unprofessional they've become. There's always been this image in the West of ultraprofessional, cold-hearted FSB/KGB killers, and, in the end, it turned out to be a guy living in this not particularly nice area of Moscow in a not particularly nice flat, who was sent around the world to smear a deadly nerve agent around his underpants. It does reveal a degree of degradation in the Russian security services. The FSB agent that Navalny spoke to was pitiful, and he would never have been able to have an operative role in the KGB.

HOW HAS THE WESTERN IMAGE OF NAVALNY CHANGED SINCE THE POISONING?

Well, he has support in the West. We've seen quite a few editorials this week stating that "bravery like this needs to be supported by the West." So far, there hasn't been much examination of his nationalist past, though, which I think is starting to happen now, and will emerge if he ever looks genuinely like toppling Putin. I think the most Navalny can hope for at the moment is people power forcing his release, which would be a massive victory for him and his team.

CAN IT TRANSLATE INTO MORE ROBUST SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA? CAN WE EXPECT SOME SORT OF NAVALNY LIST, OR DO YOU NEED TO DIE TO HAVE YOUR OWN MAGNITSKY LIST?

The Biden Administration has indicated that it's going to take a tougher position with Russia, and it's highlighted that the Navalny case is part of this. So, I guess anything is possible. Just recently, one

of Navalny's allies in London published a list of eight people he said Navalny wants to see the West impose serious sanctions on, which included people like Abramovich and Usmanov, and this considering the former is already not allowed to live permanently in Britain anymore.

COULD THINGS LIKE THE NORD STREAM PIPELINE FIGURE INTO THIS EQUATION? COULD MORE SCRUTINY OF RUSSIA, NAVALNY'S BECOMING MUCH MORE PROMINENT AND SO ON, HAVE A BEARING ON THE PIPELINE PROJECT?

The pipeline project is almost finished now, so sanctions would basically involve turning the taps off, which would be a big step for Germany. It depends how serious a signal they want to send the Kremlin.

REGARDING THAT NATIONALIST PART, IT'S SAFE TO SAY THAT NEITHER GEORGIANS, UKRAINIANS NOR MOLDOVANS HAVE FORGOTTEN NAVALNY'S COMMENTS ON THE POST-SOVIET CONFLICTS. IS HE A CHANGED MAN NOW?

Specifically about Georgia, he said not so long ago that he regretted the offensive terms he used to describe Georgians. He said he regretted those, but he hadn't changed his opinion on the war. I mean, he certainly has a nationalist past, and he has expressed objections to Putin's foreign adventures, but not on moral terms. He didn't say "we shouldn't be bombing Syrians because it's bad that women and children die," he said "we shouldn't be bombing Syrians because it costs too much and we should be fixing our roads in Voronezh or someplace else instead." To be fair, foreign policy is something he really hasn't spend much time on, because it's not really relevant at this point. I mean, he's not going to take power next week. Then again, when asked a few years ago what his ultimate aim for Russia was, he said he would like it to be a vast kind of "incomprehensible Canada." He's in favor of a Western system of government, and he's also said that he doesn't consider NATO to be a threat to Russia, which is obviously a very radical departure from what the Kremlin is saying.

A Victory for Georgia! Then Why Was the Kremlin Celebrating?

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

Wewon against Russia! – was the gist of the lion's share of headlines in Georgian media last week, be it print, television, online or social, after the European Court of Human Rights delivered its long-awaited judgment on the case “concerning the armed conflict between Georgia and the Russian Federation in August 2008 and its consequences”. But now that the dust has settled somewhat, a couple of unanswered questions still loom. What exactly is Georgia going to gain from it, politically or diplomatically? Instead of denouncing a judgment that so explicitly proclaims it the perpetrator of human rights violations, the Kremlin seems to be no less satisfied with the result, if the official statements are anything to go by. Why? And no less important than the two above, will Russia pay compensation to those whose lives it ruined? The Georgian Institute for Security Policy discussed this and more with Kanstantsin Dzehetsiarou, Professor of Human Rights Law at the University of Liverpool.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN TAKEAWAYS OF THIS JUDGMENT? WHAT DOES IT BRING THE INVOLVED SIDES?

There is good news and bad news, especially for the applicants, for the Georgian authorities. Obviously, the good news is that the ECHR satisfied almost all complaints that they had; almost everything that the Georgian government complained about, the ECHR found substantiated. We're talking about numerous administrative practices here, plenty of violations of all types of rights. Administrative practice is that there was state-sponsored ill treatment, for example; that there was a case of ill treatment that was on such a large scale that it was not possible to argue that the government didn't know or didn't support it. So, that is a very good news for the applicants. The Court also found that there were cases of administrative practice of detention, arbitrary detention and that the Georgian prisoners of war were ill-treated. However, there is also bad news: that the court didn't find itself in the position to review any human rights violations that happened between the 8th and the 12th of August 2008, during the period where active hostilities were taking place. Everything that happened between the 8th and 12th was deemed to be outside the view of the ECHR, and the reasoning for that is very ad hoc, unclear, and

requires further clarification. One of the paragraphs actually reads that it is too complicated to really establish who is doing what in these circumstances, and therefore we decide not to do it at all. The court effectively said that there are numerous victims, the situation was chaotic, and therefore we are deciding not to deal with this issue: let international humanitarian law sort it. It's very difficult to bring anyone to real responsibility for the violation of international humanitarian law; there is no court, no effective mechanism of implementation. When we don't have a proper mechanism of implementation of international humanitarian law, the victims just don't have any other option than to rely on the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights.

SO DID THE COURT'S ACTION AMOUNT TO SHIFTING RESPONSIBILITY AWAY FROM ITSELF?

In a way, yes. I don't think there was a significant legal reason that would prevent the Court from finding jurisdiction of the Russian Federation, of Georgia, or both, in the circumstances. It's the first time in history when the ECHR said that a territory that would otherwise be under convention protection was removed from this convention protection. We're talking about the extraterritorial application of the Convention with regards to the territory of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which are at least de jure territory, part of Georgia, and Georgia is a member of the Convention, the contracting party to the Convention, and therefore for all other aims and purposes, this territory and the people living there would be protected by the Convention. However, the court decided that since the situation was so messy and chaotic for four days, these people stopped enjoying protection under the Convention.

WHAT DO YOU THINK WAS THE RATIONALE BEHIND THE COURT'S DECISION?

Only pragmatic reasons can be found here. The court doesn't have the resources or time to investigate the facts. Judge Keller mentioned in her concurrent opinion that the Court doesn't have enough fact-finding capacities to investigate. So, basically, the Court is ill equipped to decide on cases where active hostilities are taking place.

COULD THERE BE A GEOPOLITICAL LAYER IN PLAY AS WELL?

Well, this is only speculation. We can

hardly know what the court was thinking. What you suggest is that they were cautious because the Russian authorities are unhappy about what's going on in the Court, but it's difficult to establish that as a fact, and the Court would never say so. The official position is at least to some extent appropriate: the Court thought it was not a one-sided occupation from Russia, that there were some faults, the bombardment of Tskhinvali, for example; there was some prior faults on Georgia and the Court thought it not its place to judge who was right and who was wrong in this war.

BOTH RUSSIA AND GEORGIA WILL USE THE JUDGMENT FOR FURTHERING POLITICAL AND DIPLOMATIC INTERESTS. WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE STATEMENT PUBLISHED BY THE RUSSIAN MINISTRY OF JUSTICE?

It's obvious that the Court found plenty of violations in the treatment of Georgians by the Russian Federation, but the Russian Ministry of Justice conveniently didn't mention that. But that's no novelty; they pulled that trick before with Ukraine. It's very one-sided: when there's no victory, they find a minuscule aspect that can serve their interests. In Ukraine vs. Russia, of 14 claims, three claims were rejected, and the Russian Ministry of Justice does what? It says that Russia came out as a winner. I don't think it's a win for Russia: they were rooting for that, of course, saying it's not the Court's area; it's the law of war, etc.; however, the Court was very clear that there were plenty of violations of human rights.

WHAT HAPPENS IF RUSSIA SAYS IT DOESN'T AGREE AND WON'T COMPLY, AS IMPLIED IN THE MINISTRY'S STATEMENT?

From the legal standpoint, when the European Court of Human Rights delivers the last part of the judgment that it found numerous violations, and Russia will have to pay compensation, it creates an international obligation that Russia will have to pay this money. This is the legal reality. But we have to consider the realpolitik world, and whether Russia will pay is a big question. Usually, Russia pays in cases of individual applications, say, if my rights are violated by Russia and I go to Strasbourg, then Strasbourg tells Russia to pay me 10,000 Euros, it is likely they will pay. But not always. The case of Yukos is an infamous example of that, when Russia was asked to pay almost 2 billion Euros and didn't. In interstate cases, the states usually don't pay when it's politically sensitive. The government thinks that people, voters, will see it as a sign of weakness if they



are forced to pay their opponent, and that is not politically advantageous for the government.

IS THERE ANY LEVERAGE TO MAKE RUSSIA COMPLY?

Strasbourg has no military force: they cannot freeze assets, they cannot do anything to force anyone to comply. So execution is predominantly voluntary. If the state does not execute, the Committee of Ministers will issue a statement of its concerns and there will be a lot of diplomatic pressure. It might end up in a discussion or in some other sort of negotiations.

Russia is not alone in resisting execution. A couple of years back, the ECHR delivered a judgment of just satisfaction in the case of Cyprus versus Turkey, and the Court gave quite significant compensation to those Cypriots who had to leave Northern Cyprus when Turkey occupied it. President Erdogan said that Turkey was not prepared to pay any compensation in this case.

HOW MUCH LEVERAGE CAN THIS CASE BE IN INTERNATIONAL DISCUSSIONS/NEGOTIATIONS WITH RUSSIA?

It is now in black and white that the Russian authorities violated really fundamental rights after the territory was occupied, and the decision of an international court has confirmed that. How much more political pressure it can add on Russia, I don't really know to be honest. It's obviously a victory for Georgia, and I would sincerely congratulate all the lawyers who worked on this. It's a huge achievement for them and for those Georgian victims whose violations have been recognized. Of course, said victims are probably more interested in getting

monetary compensation, and hopefully some of the victims at some point will get something. It doesn't sound very reassuring, but those are the limitations of international human rights law.

AS MUCH AS THE COURT AVOIDED SIFTING THROUGH WHO WAS RIGHT AND WRONG IN THE 2008 WAR, IS ITS FINAL JUDGMENT YET ANOTHER ARROW IN THE GEORGIAN ARSENAL TO CONFIRM THAT RUSSIA WAS INDEED AGGRESSIVE?

That is a very difficult question, and I think the ECHR was in pains not to answer this question. It is an arrow; a really small one that would suggest that once Russia assumed occupation, it continued violating human rights. That is what the judgment boils down to. The ECHR was a little concerned with the first bombardment of Tskhinvali, and of course Russia then entered the territory of a neighboring state. This initial controversial action gave Russia a good excuse to claim it had to intervene, and if it was Russia just out of blue entering the territory of Georgia, I think this judgment could have had a totally different tone. That is not to say it won't have far-reaching consequences though: the court's treatment of the fact that it cannot intervene when the war is ongoing is troublesome. It needs to be seen how it plays out in cases like Ukraine versus Russia, the Netherlands versus Russia. Even more interesting is how this will play out in Armenia versus Azerbaijan, because in that case, the situation was comparable to some extent and the period of hostilities was much longer than in Georgia. So that might be problematic, and we will need to wait and see.

Rebooting the American Dream

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

It happened at last: the Elephants out and the Donkeys in! I wish the father of the American cartoon and ruthless satirist Thomas Nast was alive to see what's going on with his historic zoo-political creations. The poor innocent animals! They have no clue of the magnitude of abhorrence and opprobrium that has overwhelmed the powers they symbolize. Dems and Reps have never loved one another, but neither have they disgusted each other as much as they do today.

Something totally unexpected has happened to America. It has been badly fractured, and I have a very simple reason to explain the newly-formed socio-political chasm: the rich have become astoundingly richer and the poor have grown staggeringly poorer, hence the awe-inspiring popular desire to equalize people; from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs. But this is a Marxist economic principle,

interpreted as the free access to and distribution of goods, capital and services. As a result, a sense of unbridled odium has taken the country over, threatening the welfare of the famous American middle class, which took centuries to get to ticking at a steady pace.

America, as we have always known it, is a competition-based socio-economic system, involving both the flaws and the merits of capitalism, which has worked very effectively in the last quarter millennium, and even longer, to tell the truth. Throwing in a little comparison, the biggest paradigm of the socialist economic order perished right in front of our eyes in the very recent past, which we thought would serve as a free lesson of what communism can run into if you stubbornly and groundlessly believe in it.

On top of this purported economic reason, bad memories of racism have relapsed in the States to shock the nation to the backbone. And finally, America actually elected a very extraordinary president who could in no way have been everybody's cup of tea as a leader of the

nation because of his nonpolitical background, churlish character, boorish manners, affluent lifestyle, prickly conservatism, entrepreneurial decision-making, and from-the-hip-shooting disposition, although his presidential achievements may not be denied recognition.

As simplistic as the suggested talk might seem to some of us, fact is a fact is a fact: America has seemingly stopped being the habitual earthly paradise for the peoples of the world. Moreover, it is gradually turning into something like a brewing carbuncle that may at any time burst and spew the rotten seepage that nobody could even have imagined being accumulated so abundantly in the beautiful and magnetic American organism, balanced on the ideals of the much-spoken-about American Dream.

America is scarily raging and frightening the world with its out-of-the-blue unpredictability. But make no mistake: there is still some room for the selfsame American Dream to reboot itself and take a new, even a more vigorous turn. The American Dream is not just a trivial human dream. It is a model of mind-



set which works effectively in some of us and yields into zero productivity in others. Its palpable viability totally depends on us humans. America is not yet done with, as the awoken and poisoned-tongued nemeses of this outstanding geopolitical experiment would say at the moment of its accidental and temporary downturn. America is still very much alive and kicking, and it will soon recover from this mindboggling limbo. Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives, radicals and moderates are only the components of the system – nothing else, sometimes playing a fair

game and sometimes foul. Let's call them the political variables. And the US itself is a permanent value, based on its main law, called the Constitution of the United States of America: 'the land of the free and the home of the brave'.

The civilized world has recognized the strategic partnership of America and Sakartvelo (Georgia), which is a notable milestone in the life of our miniature country, so it is irreversibly natural for our nation to wish its partner a happy survival and further ascendance on the ladder of bliss and plenty, being part of which is our manifest destiny.



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Financing the Circular Economy for an Accelerated Post-Covid-19 Recovery

OP-ED BY DARIUSZ EDWARD
PRASEK & SOLOMON PAVLIASHVILI

The transition to a Circular Economy (CE) is at an early stage even in the most developed countries of the world. Nowadays, the world economy is only 8.6% circular, compared to 9.1% two years ago. The global pandemic caused by COVID-19 has further contributed to the economic downturn and shone a spotlight on the resilience of global value chains, which have become increasingly complex and globalized in recent decades.

Georgia has initiated the development of the circular economy strategy and took some important steps to include, for example the introduction of the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR). On its road to circularity, Georgia should benefit from the experiences of more advanced economies, and form strong partnerships, such as the ongoing program supported by the Government of Sweden and implemented by the Georgian Society of Nature Explorers 'Orchis,' in order to choose the most optimal path to the transition to a circular economy (CE). Project promoters and developers targeting CE will also need to structure their strategy so it becomes attractive to financial institutions. The financial sector, particularly from a de-risking perspective, can be a catalyst in unlocking opportunities, while supporting clients in reorienting their business strategies. Companies that shift towards a circular model can increase their medium-to long-term competitiveness, becoming more appealing to financial institutions in terms of funding and financial support, while creating a positive impact within local communities. But first let's go back to the start.

The circular economy concept is gaining attention in light of increasing consumption and resource use by a fast-growing population with rising standards of living. This is a new economic model that represents sustainable progress towards efficient green growth. Due to its expected environmental, climate, social and economic benefits, the circular economy is not only being strongly promoted by the EU institutions, as well as a growing number of national and local governments, but it is also attracting increasing attention from the business community and from public and private financiers. With the general objective of replacing the 'end-of-life' concept with an economic system that closes material loops, Georgia has recently embarked on an accelerated path to transition to a circular economy.

The ongoing program being implemented by Orchis, within the framework of the 'Keep Georgia Tidy' project and supported by the Government of Sweden, has already raised much needed awareness about the circular economy,



and provided recommendations to various groups of stakeholders, including policy makers, financial institutions and project promoters on how to accelerate the implementation of circular economy principles at various levels of economic activity. This program is the basis for the accelerated shift to circularity. It is also a vital contribution to fulfilling Georgian commitments under the Association Agreement with the European Union.

With the concerted efforts of the government, civil society organizations such as Orchis, academia and international partners, particularly the Government of Sweden, Georgia has also initiated the development of a CE strategy, and a roadmap for a comprehensive approach from multiple points of view. These include production, consumption, waste management, secondary raw materials, innovation, investments, and ongoing initiatives in different sectors, by different players, and at different stages of the value chain or different stages of development. The implementation of this strategy would entail the concerted efforts of many actors to create a conducive environment, but above all will call for practical implementation of projects. Project developers will need to structure projects in such a way that they become attractive for financial institutions, so that the developers are in a position to raise financing not only through concessionary means, but also on the open market.

The circular economy plays a crucial role in helping companies and governments build back better from the COVID-19 pandemic. Financial institutions can support businesses to capture new growth opportunities and build resilience to future shocks. This is why many banks and funds are actively helping clients to transition to new CE models, financing circular deals and investments, and strengthening the knowledge base in this area. While there are costs involved in this transition, the increased resilience gained should result in long-term material gains for everyone involved.

The last two years have seen a steep increase in the creation of debt and equity instruments related to the circular economy. While no such fund existed in 2017, by mid-2020, ten public equity funds focusing partially or entirely on CE have been launched by leading providers, including BlackRock, Credit Suisse, and Goldman Sachs. Since 2016, there has been a tenfold increase in the number

of private market funds, including venture capital, private equity and private debt, investing in circular economy activities. A similar trend is visible in bank lending, project finance, and insurance.

Existing examples provide early indications as to how the circular economy can create value for asset managers, banks, and other financial services firms. They demonstrate its potential to attract inflows. The circular economy can help meet demands from regulators and other stakeholders. In addition, building CE expertise and know-how can help financial institutions to engage with corporate clients, for whom the circular economy has increasingly become a boardroom topic.

Now is the time for finance to capitalize on this momentum and help accelerate the CE transition. While the recent growth in financing is promising, far more capital and activity will be needed to scale the CE and fully seize its opportunity. All aspects of finance will play an important role in bringing forward the transition to a circular economy. Investors, banks, and other financial services firms have the scale, reach, and expertise to stimulate and support businesses to make the shift. This is not just about investing in perfectly circular companies or divesting from extractive ones, but about engaging with and encouraging companies in every industry to make the transition.

Obviously, the key issue for the financial sector is risk and how it can be managed. When measuring risk, two main factors have to be taken into account:

- Credit-worthiness of the borrower (or the risk profile of the project);
- Value of the collateral (e.g. underlying assets or contracts).

As new circular business often does not have a strong track record, these companies can easily be labelled as high risk. Often, initial investments to innovate and access the market are high, which may have implications for margins in the short run, but can lead to a quite profitable company in the longer run. The value of the collateral is measured by the market value of the company, where the valuation of assets (and their residual value) plays an important role. Asset valuation in a linear system is quite different from valuation in a circular system.

It is clear that the current development is an opportunity for Georgia to create and shape the market. The government

needs to scale the circular economy by setting direction, providing incentives, financing infrastructure and innovation, and using blended finance mechanisms to de-risk investments and attract private sector capital. This approach should be met based on the experiences of other countries to both follow their successes and avoid their mistakes.

There is a general consensus among many experts that in spite of the fact that there are several examples of effective EU nations, such as the Netherlands, Denmark and Finland, and regional policies which support the increasing 'circularity' of economic systems, the existing policy frameworks and skills of the policy makers are insufficient to achieve a meaningful acceleration for the transition to a circular economy. Various expert groups have identified several key recommendations for financial and non-financial policy makers, project promoters and public authorities to achieve concerted actions in the acceleration of the circularity measures as part of the recovery measures from the economic downturn caused by COVID-19.

One of the common themes in these recommendations is the need to develop taxonomy, standards and metrics for CE, to enable better assessment of circular risks versus linear risks. Also, social and environmental benefits of CE economy should become explicit, quantifiable and disclosed, and should be taken into account in financing decisions. The experts also stress the role of public authorities and the need to increase their capacities. Public authorities, on all levels, can provide incentives to promote circular economy models via, for example, public procurement, subsidies, taxation and funding. They have the legitimacy and means to reward positive externalities. Work also has to be undertaken to set CE performance requirements for products and services.

There is also a need for partnerships, cooperation and coordination between various stakeholders. Weak policy coordination remains a common feature across countries. At the governmental level, responsibility for the areas of policy relevant to CE tends to be distributed across more than one ministry. Often, existing decision-making structures and processes do not deal effectively with cross-ministerial topics. Better coordination and cooperation between governing bodies would result in addressing the above issues. Policy coordination requires the involvement of stakeholders outside government. The importance of involving private-sector stakeholders, both employers and workers, in policy decisions and in the design of skills development measures, is essential.

It is also essential to strengthen national and local governmental policies to support the widespread implementation of circular business models through, among other things, setting quality standards for recycled and reused materials, or by

pushing for innovative initiatives. Further work is required to ensure circular business models become the best option for companies willing to gain competitive advantage and maintain their market share, while aligning their goals with society's goals. Barriers both at the company level and along the value chain, as well as from a policy perspective, still persist. Overcoming these obstacles and seizing these opportunities is key for the transition towards a more sustainable and competitive economic model.

The recovery measures from COVID-19 proposed by governments present an opportunity to seek greater circularity in supply chains, which can act both to improve resource efficiency and resilience for businesses (by building greater resilience to supplier risks), and society (by reducing environmental risks). Circular value chains also help to advance climate mitigation via reduced primary material production and opportunities to shift consumption towards product-service and other circular business models. This opens an opportunity for governments to require both clear actions towards alignment with environmental policy objectives, as well as disclosure of climate-related risks as conditions for financial support through recovery policies. Governments can catalyse this shift by attaching conditions on stimulus packages to increase the uptake of these technologies, as well as through targeted innovation policies.

The circular economy is a blueprint for a more resilient economic system that could drive significant economic, social and environmental benefits for all stakeholders. Private investment will play a key role in financing this transition, offering the potential for competitive returns while reducing waste, preserving natural resources, and addressing climate change.

The circular economy encourages innovation, decouples economic growth from resource inputs, and is a powerful contribution to achieving global climate targets, which is imperative. It offers many benefits in terms of environmental impact, resource-saving, cost-cutting and economic growth. This major change in our economic model will foster the emergence of new business models and create substantial opportunities for the companies able to respond to this trend.

The ongoing program is implemented by CSO Georgian Society of Nature Explorers Orchis within the framework of the "Keep Georgia Tidy" project supported by the Government of Sweden.

Mr Dariusz Edward Prasek is a Doctor in Environmental Engineering, Member of the United Nations Advisory Board on Circular Economy, Independent Expert on Development Financing at IDB Invest, International Expert in Environmental, Social and Governance Areas

Mr Solomon Pavliashvili is a Doctor of Economic Sciences, Professor, Deputy Minister of Environment Protection and Agriculture

Bitcoin Declared 'Dead' 3x Less in 2020 Compared to 2019, Least Times in 7 Years

Data presented by cryptocurrency trading simulator Crypto Parrot indicates that Bitcoin 2020 obituaries were 13, a drop of 68.29% from 2019's 41 deaths. Last year's Bitcoin deaths represented the lowest number since 2013. Since the asset's inception in 2010, there have been death declarations totaling 382.

Death declarations linked to negative happenings around Bitcoin

In 2018, Bitcoin was declared dead 93

times, while in 2017, it recorded the highest obituaries at 124.

Interestingly, 2017 recorded the highest Bitcoin deaths, the same year the asset hit \$20,000, an all-time high at that period. It is important to note that the all-time high was mainly influenced by the retail investors and the initial coin offering frenzy.

The Crypto Parrot research highlighted several instances that contributed to Bitcoin's death declarations. According to the research report:

"Overall, Bitcoin's death declarations have come in the wake of the asset facing negative attention like massive price correlations. The mainstream media and leading economists initially took the lead in casting doubt about the asset's future. However, with institutions embracing Bitcoin, the narrative appears to be changing."

Although Bitcoin has achieved a lot more than expected, the asset still has a long way to go. It is bound to face more obstacles over the years.



Carrefour Launches its First Store in Telavi. The Brand Introduces its Unrivalled Shopping Experience to Georgia's Kakheti Region



Carrefour, owned and operated by Majid Al Futtaim in Georgia, on January 22 introduced a new store to Telavi – the first store in the Kakheti eastern province and its 40th store in the country. This physical expansion

reinforces Carrefour's position as a trusted partner of numerous communities throughout Georgia.

The new supermarket — located in the city of Telavi on Alazani Street 77 — is offering customers an unforgettable shopping experience and a wide variety

of high quality food products and household goods. These include food, healthy foods, baby care, hygiene and personal care items, as well as exclusive Carrefour private label products.

Christophe Orcet, Country Manager of Carrefour Georgia, says "Our ongoing physical and digital expansion in Georgia remains a key priority. As a brand built from the region, for the region, we wish to be as close as possible to our customers and our communities, bringing them convenient and unparalleled shopping experiences and unbeatable value."

Carrefour's growth — particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic — further underscores its commitment to increasing Georgians' accessibility to quality products at exceptional value by creating more convenient and safe shopping environments for more customers.

Carrefour's dedication to the development of the local economy has been clear, demonstrated through numerous important achievements in 2020 which include maintaining jobs despite the pandemic; expanding digital offerings with convenient and safe delivery; establishing the Carrefour loyalty programme MyClub; and introducing a self-checkout system to ensure maximum safety.

Additionally, Carrefour opened 20 new stores countrywide in 2020, creating jobs for more than 2,000 people and helping to raise the employment rate. As such, it maintained its position as one of the largest job creators in the local market.

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the brand has shown exemplary care and dedication to the safety and well-being of customers. Among the steps taken, the expansion of digital and delivery services and introduction of self-checkout systems in its branches to offer a contactless option and prevent long queues.

Recently, Carrefour enhanced its online presence and expanded its delivery service by partnering with non-food delivery



app Vendoo, and food-delivery apps Glovo and Wolt.

These partnerships have allowed customers the convenience of shopping from the safety and comfort of their own homes during the pandemic.

Further, Carrefour continues to actively

participate in different charity projects including Red Cross Campaign to 'Support Socially Vulnerable Elderly'. Once again this underlines the brand's commitment to creating better living conditions for members of society and to improve their lives.



Pipia vs BGEO: Additional Disclosure Granted

TRANSLATED BY ANA DUMBADZE

Following a public hearing held on 12 January 2021, regarding an application by Roman Pipia for additional disclosure from BGEO Group Limited (formerly BGEO GROUP PLC), in the legal proceedings brought by Mr. Pipia against BGEO in the Commercial Court of the English High Court, the Court has issued its judgment, obliging the Defendant to give additional disclosure. BGEO had resisted disclosure of the mobile phone used by its former CEO, Irakli Gilauri, but the Court said the device had to be delivered up to be searched.

It is Mr. Pipia's case that the actions of BGEO in relation to Rustavi Azot LLC have caused him significant damages. The amount claimed by Mr. Pipia in his amended claim, is minimum USD393 million.

The above information regarding the case, due to its high importance, was published on the official website of the London Stock Exchange.

The Court's decision following a public hearing on 12 January 2021 represents a crucial and decisive moment in the dispute which started four years ago, as the recent judgment regarding the disclosure of the mobile phone used by BGEO former CEO Irakli Gilauri, in favor of Roman Pipia, is expected to play significant role at the final trial scheduled

for April, when the judge of the English High Court will make the final decision.

Accordingly, the above ruling by the Court can be considered a crucial process for the final result.

Georgian businessman Roman Pipia claims that through a series of cunning transactions orchestrated by the Defendant ("BG UK"), he was unlawfully deprived of a Georgian fertilizer plant worth hundreds of millions of dollars. BG UK denies any wrongdoing, indeed, any involvement in the events subject to this dispute.

The judgement published on the official website of the English High Court reads:

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Mr. Pipia is a Georgian businessman who claims that at the times material to this claim, he held and managed various business interests through a number of corporate vehicles of which he was the ultimate beneficial owner, including Rustavi Azot LLC ("Rustavi Azot"), Agrochim SA ("Agrochim"), and Loyal Capital Group SA ("Loyal").

Rustavi Azot, a company registered in Georgia, is at the center of this claim. Mr. Pipia's case is that until August 2016, it owned and successfully operated a production plant producing nitrogen based fertilizers, and that the production plant was one of the largest industrialized businesses and employers in Georgia.

BG UK is a company incorporated in



England and Wales, and the parent holding company of JSC BGEO Group ("BGEO Georgia"), a company incorporated under the laws of Georgia. BGEO Georgia in turn is the parent holding company of JSC Bank of Georgia ("BoG"), also a Georgian registered company.

In summary, the events giving rise to the disputes between the parties arise out of the following transactions entered into between 2011 and 2016.

In 2011, Rustavi Azot and Agrochim entered into a USD 100 million general credit line agreement (the "GCLA") with BoG. The loans advanced by BoG under the GCLA were secured by a series of mortgages and pledges over Rustavi Azot's property.

On 27 June 2014, Loyal entered into a USD 100 million facility agreement (the "EWB Facility") with East West United Bank of Luxembourg ("EWB"). The EWB

Facility was secured by various pledges over the issued shares in Agrochim and other companies controlled by Mr Pipia, and their respective dividend accounts.

In 2015 and 2016, Mr Pipia sought to restructure the GCLA and the EWB Facility. His case is that a "Fixed Asset Valuation Report" of Grant Thornton Akhvlediani LLC, prepared in connection with that proposed restructuring and dated 31 December 2015, valued the "Fixed Assets" of Rustavi Azot at approximately USD 388,488,000 or GEL (Georgian lari) 930,390,000.

On 22 August 2016, BoG appointed Tbilisi Auction House Limited (the "Auction House") to sell the assets of Rustavi Azot by auction. The appointment of the Auction House purported to be an appointment of a "Specialist".

On 24 August 2016, EWB exercised its pledge over Agrochim's shares by serving a Default Notice and Voting Rights Suspension Notification pursuant to the terms of the EWB Facility. Mr Pipia says that he thus lost control of Agrochim and Rustavi Azot.

On 1 September 2016, an auction was held of the property and assets of Rustavi Azot (the "Auction"). The starting price was GEL 199,328,134.40. There were two bidders: BoG and JSC EU Investments Limited ("EUI"). EUI's bid of GEL 235,078,134.40 was declared winning. The Auction is currently the subject matter of litigation before the Georgian courts.

Following the Auction, EUI entered

into an option agreement with Rustavi Carbomide Limited (another company that Mr Pipia claims is ultimately owned and controlled by him), and a lease agreement with Rustavi Azot. Both of those agreements were terminated by EUI in November and December 2016 respectively.

Thus as the situation stands at present, the fertilizer plant is now under the control of EUI, and Mr. Pipia's companies appear to have no contractual or other rights in respect of it. Mr. Pipia says that these events entitle him to various delictual causes of action against BG UK under the Civil Code of Georgia. BG UK denies any wrongdoing of its Re-Amended Defense and Counterclaim denies any "involvement in the GCLA, the Auction, or the dispute that has arisen from it", and advances a number of factual and legal defenses, as well as a counterclaim under two Release and Indemnity Agreements which it alleges preclude Mr. Pipia from bringing this claim.

Mr. Pipia says that two particular individuals are central to the events in issue: Irakli Gilauri ("Mr. Gilauri") and Avtandil (or Avto) Namicheishvili ("Mr. Namicheishvili").

On 23 October 2020, Mr. Pipia issued this application. The Application Notice seeks an "Order for additional Extended Disclosure from the Defendant."

The full text of the judgement can be viewed at: [https://www.bailii.org/cgi-bin/format.cgi?doc=/ew/cases/EWHC/Comm/2021/86.html&query=\(Pipia\)](https://www.bailii.org/cgi-bin/format.cgi?doc=/ew/cases/EWHC/Comm/2021/86.html&query=(Pipia))

Transforming Challenges into Opportunities

Interview with Efes Georgia GM Ertan Kurt

Everyone says 2020 was a year of ongoing challenges for businesses. We spoke to Efes Georgia GM Ertan Kurt to find out how his company made a success of it anyway.

HOW WOULD YOU CHARACTERIZE WHAT THE 2020 PANDEMIC WAS LIKE?

2020 turned out to be a year of unprecedented challenges for business and the whole world. Many economies, including Georgia's, have suffered greatly. That is why 2020 can be named 'the year of turning challenges into opportunities,' since crisis situations often help us discover new chances and new possibilities. We had to think about many things at that time. We had to keep up the pace of production and sales. We had to take care of the safety and well-being of our employees. We had to export products to the different markets and at the same time, we had to maintain a high level of quality. This year has been tough for everyone, and I think companies need to think more about how to bring more value to their customers.

Kurt tells us that despite the COVID-19 pandemic, they implemented almost every project that they had planned.

"During 2020, our production did not stop; on the contrary, we offered products to customers focused on their needs and demands. We kept listening to our consumers to find out what they required from brands. With this in mind, we started a new limited series of Natakhtari with special packaging, inspired by Shota Rustaveli's 'The Knight in the Panther's Skin.' We also released Natakhtari with a thermochromic label and a series of special seasonal limited editions: 'Natakhtari Amber' and 'Natakhtari Green.' 'Karva Radler' is the first beer mix in Georgia with lemon and lime, also launched in 2020. It is also very exciting to brew Lowenbrau and Staropramen in Georgia. We've been trying to replace imported products locally over the last 15 years, and we've succeeded."

HOW HAS THE PANDEMIC CHANGED EFES GEORGIA?

All changes and transformations happened quite smoothly, since we identified three primary, clear priorities at the

very beginning of the pandemic: Assuring the safety of our people, supporting our community, and ensuring business continuity. We did it in accordance with the recommendations and regulations of the WHO and the Government of Georgia. In early March, those employees who do not need to work in the field or in production moved to remote working. The production process became automated to the greatest possible extent, without human participation. We also reduced working hours and travel areas for field groups. External visitors were prohibited from entering the factory and administrative offices. The complete disinfection of industrial equipment, products and vehicles took place on a daily basis, for which special mobile groups were set up. Field workers, including distributors, were provided with gloves, masks, and hand sanitizers. In addition, informational posters regarding preventive measures against COVID-19 were placed in our brewery and other spaces, and special educational training was provided for our employees. These consistent measures minimized possible complications. Most importantly, despite the pandemic, we retained our employees and their salaries were not affected by the changes caused by COVID-19.

During this period of remote work, we had several initiatives to improve communication with our employees and to keep their motivation high. I personally held remote 1to1 meetings with all the managers and supervisors to listen to them individually and discuss all relevant business topics in detail. To keep the team spirit high and facilitate the information flow, we have regular Online Happy Hours and Online staff meetings.

IF WE CONSIDER LAST YEAR FROM A BUSINESS POINT OF VIEW, WHAT WAS THE SALES RATE AND HOW MUCH DID THE EXPORT VOLUME CHANGE?

As the hotels and restaurants were closed, consumers switched to home consumption. We shifted our investments timely to serve consumers where they were present, and strengthened our market position in 2020. Production did not stop, went according to plan, and sales remained stable. In addition, most importantly, the customers remained loyal to the company.

Our exports in global markets is growing by the year. Currently, our beer and lemonade are being exported to 23 countries. The direction of exports in our company has been developing for years, both in terms of volume and in the number of markets, and is one of our highest priorities and most promising areas for business growth. We are going to increase investments in this direction and export Georgian products to more countries, and to intensify consumer communication in existing export countries to raise awareness of our brands, thereby strengthening our market position and awareness of Georgian brands abroad. We are also prepared to work with the government to enhance Georgia's exports on international markets in the future.

YOUR COMPANY IS DISTINGUISHED IN CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY, HAVING RECEIVED NUMEROUS CSR AWARDS. HOW MUCH HAS THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC AFFECTED YOUR RESPONSIBLE DOING OF BUSINESS?

Efes Georgia has been implementing projects in the field of corporate social responsibility since 2008. But things have changed, and CSR standards have changed and improved as well. I think the pandemic pushed us to move to another stage and to restart our CSR. Efes Georgia won the Corporate Responsibility Award 2020 in the category of Decent Work and Economic Growth. As for public support, we have been assisting the most vulnerable groups in the fight against COVID-19. In total, the company has spent more than 200 thousand GEL on the implementation of pandemic support projects under the auspices of its CSR program. We provided financial assistance for the STOP-COV Fund and a two-month supply of disinfectants to the Infectious Diseases, AIDS and Clinical Immunology Research Center. We also handed over rapid tests (SARS-CoV-2) to the government for preventive measures. Moreover, the company, in cooperation with the Georgian Bartender's Association (its partner organization), provided financial assistance to bartenders. Around 500 bartenders who were left unemployed, received supermarket vouchers. Efes Georgia also



distributed free products to people over 70, families below the poverty line, employees of the government's 'Hotline 144' Center, quarantined citizens, and our distinguished doctors.

What is important is that we managed, and despite such changes, continued previous projects regarding corporate responsibility. The Natakhtari Fund supports beneficiaries according to their individual needs, with psychological consultation, rent, essential medicines, and resources required for remote learning. The company financed the Fund beneficiaries who lost their jobs. I would like to highlight this part of our CSR we are especially proud of. We established the Natakhtari Fund almost 10 years ago, and during the COVID-19 period, we increased our efforts there as well. The Fund aims to both empower and take care of adolescents without parental care and prepare them for an independent life. Since 2011, the Fund has helped up to 600 beneficiaries, more than 300 of whom gained employment, and more than 270 received higher education. These results were achieved through the unique methodology used by a project implemented by the NGO Association Our Home - Georgia. An individual development plan is created for each beneficiary, and the amount is allocated according to their specific needs. According to the goals of the fund, adolescents and young people receive care until their full independence.

I would also like to mention some of

our CSR projects in the direction of environment protection. In 2012, we launched a wastewater treatment plant, which provides high-quality treatment of water resources used in the production process and significantly reduces the impact on the environment. In addition, in 2014, we received an energy management system certificate ISO: 50001. The company regularly delivers environmental training, constantly conducting both internal and external environmental impact assessments. Finally, our investments in improving environmental standards and implementing an effective waste management system have borne fruit and, in 2018, we received a special CSR award in the field of Environment Protection, and our wastewater treatment system has become a showcase for the Georgian bottling industry. It was a good start and, in the following years, in terms of corporate responsibility, we received three different awards.

WHAT HAS THE WORK DURING THE PANDEMIC TAUGHT US?

Working in a pandemic has taught us to listen to each other better, to become more customer-oriented, and to value relationships in general. I am optimistic that this challenge will recede, and we will slowly return to the usual rhythm of life. For me, as well as for Efes Georgia as a whole, the main lesson is that we need to transform challenges into opportunities. So, we continue to brew joy and to offer various novelties to our consumers.

Re|Bank Continues to Support Homeless Animals



Because of the lockdown regulations, homeless animals have been left without food sources. Re|Bank decided to buy food for those animals and distribute it to the organizations and initiative groups that take care of stray animals countrywide: Homeless Animals Club, Initiative Group 'For Lonely Animals', and Animal Liberation Georgia.

"Pandemic and winter together have made it impossible for stray animals to get any food. The donation received from Re|Bank will be distributed in Tbilisi to the people who take daily care of homeless dogs and give them shelter. Re|Bank's initiative is a good example of social responsibility and is vital to the homeless animals and their carers," says Nana Dzirtkbilashvili of 'Homeless Animals Club'.

"We want to thank Re|Bank for donating food to our annual charity event 'Become Santa for Homeless Animals' which is aimed at collecting food donations and distributing it countrywide to feed the homeless cats and dogs," says Tiko Kviliashvili, representative of 'Animal Liberation Georgia'.

"On behalf of our team, I would like to thank Re|Bank for being a socially responsible company and helping stray animals in need. The closure of work spaces and restaurants has left homeless animals without food. On the highways and in the countryside, they suffer even more. The food donated by Re|Bank will be distributed to several regions to feed the homeless. We hope that this collaboration will be a good example of how taking care of homeless animals can become a part of the company's CSR direction," says Mariam Tsertsvadze, co-organizer of the initiative group 'For Lonely Animals'.

This is not the first time that Re|Bank has taken care of stray animals. In October 2019, the Bank funded the building and equipping of a veterinary room in the Dog Organization Georgia shelter, in which the basic diagnosis, vaccination and first aid treatment for stray dogs is provided.

Re|Bank is a retail sub-brand by PASHA Bank that started operating in Georgia in August 2019. Alongside its standard banking products, it offers an innovative installment and credit card Top|Card to the customers.

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UNDP Issues over \$300,000 in New Grants for Civil Engagement

BY NINI DAKHUNDARIDZE

Civil engagement is one of the keys to a country's success. The United Nations Development Program has issued new grants, which in total amount to over \$300,000, aiming to encourage participation in local government.

In a bid to foster government accountability and support civic activism, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has issued grants worth a total of \$315,000 to 18 civil society organizations in six Georgian regions: Imereti, Mtskheta-Mtianeti, Kvemo Kartli, Guria, Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti and Racha-Lechkhumi-Kvemo Svaneti.

The grants, a part of a Danish-funded \$4 million program to support good governance, are the result of a competitive call for proposals to foster greater participation by citizens in decision-making and implementation at the local level. To its very core, the UNDP works to empower those who need it the most, especially in

the above-mentioned six regions of Georgia, where particular ethnic groups and women are those most in need. The grants thus focus on promoting the engagement of women, youth and ethnic minorities. "As a result, UNDP will fund 11 projects, each worth some USD 30,000, that will engage 3,000 citizens in 31 municipalities," the organization announced.

"Civic engagement is vital to ensure that local governments respond to local needs," said UNDP Head Louisa Vinton. "Getting citizens involved is still a challenge in Georgia, however, so our aim is to help create space and tools for local communities to have a say in matters that affect them."

The successful proposals will boost and expand civic participation, including petition writing and participation in municipal boards of advisors; this includes creating a dedicated online platform to collect and disseminate knowledge about participatory practices, and, above all, strengthening collaboration between the civil sector and local self-government.

In Imereti, the chosen civil society projects will create a discussion space for local authorities, civic activists and busi-



Image source: UNDP

ness, as it focuses on assisting citizens in taking a more active part in planning municipal budgets. In Kvemo Kartli, UNDP grants will be used to fund activities by local youth initiative groups and promote volunteering and social media platforms to address social issues, while in Guria, the UNDP grant will aid the local "Participation Academy" in organizing educational programs in decentralization and public engagement. In Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, local organizations will help submit public petitions to address the most pressing social and economic issues and protect vulnerable groups: internally displaced persons, people with disabilities, and the elderly and children without family care.

Adopted back in December 2019, Georgia's national Decentralization Strategy 2020-2025, created with UNDP support, has increasing citizens' participation and engagement in self-governance as one of its goals. This is precisely the goal of this initiative. And, hopefully, that goal, when completed fully, will bring some good outcomes. It doesn't take an expert to know that many of Georgia's problems would be solved with higher civil engagement.

BTU to Create Online Scientific Journal in Partnership with Int'l Research Centers, & Award for Science in Business & Technology

BY ANA DUMBADZE

The Journal of Business and Technology is a scientific journal of Business and Technology University, the first issue of which will be published at the end of 2021. The journal is published annually, in an online format with open access, and will be in English, so that leading international scientific circles can access it. The publication includes scientific materials and publications related to business and technology.

The editorial board of the journal is staffed with top international scientists,

including Webster University (USA), Leiden University (The Netherlands), Tallinn University of Technology (Estonia), Henley Business School (UK), Newcastle Business School (UK), Steinbeis University (Germany), Cologne University of Technology (Germany), Polytechnic Institute of Bragança (Portugal), and the representatives of the United Nations Center for Artificial Intelligence and Robotics. Rector of Business and Technology University, Professor Nino Enukidze, and Director of the Research Center, Professor Zviad Gabisonia, are members of the Editorial Board from Georgia.

Research studies conducted at BTU will be published in the online scientific

journal. At this stage, up to 20 professors of the university are working on various studies, the results of which will be summarized and reconciled, and accordingly, the first issue of the journal will be prepared. At the same time, people affiliated with BTU will have the opportunity to collaborate with the magazine from around the world.

One of the main purposes of publishing a journal is to stimulate young scientists. That is why a special section will be created dedicated to the publications of BTU masters, doctoral and postdoctoral students.

In addition, the Research Center of Business and Technology University is setting an annual bonus for the promo-

tion of scientific research and science: The Science Prize, awarded during the academic year in the field of business and technology, following evaluation of the activities carried out by the scientist, their published papers and various activities. A specially created group of scientists and international experts representing various advanced research centers and institutions around the world have set the award criteria for scientific activity, which includes the number and quality of scientific papers performed at a high scientific level and generally recognized, the rating of published publications, research citation indexes, contributions to the development and promotion of research and more.

A scientist who obtains a science award in the relevant field will be awarded the title of Laureate of the Science Prize of Business and Technology University, will be given a laureate diploma, and will also receive a cash prize.

The first award ceremony is scheduled for the end of 2021.

'Digital Economy in Georgia and the Region, Models for its Development' is a series of studies planned by the BTU Research Center, to be conducted in partnership with international partner centers and scientific institutions.

The Center for Macroeconomics and Development Research in Washington, DC, the Center for Economic Studies at the Canadian Academy of Sciences, the Technical University of Munich, the Free University of Berlin and other high-profile research centers are in partnership with professors from Business and Technology University.

Negotiations on cooperation and joint research have already been completed with leading American, European and Asian universities, research centers and industry organizations. Surveys will be conducted during 2021 and will be published as a single report at the end of the year.

At this stage, cooperation within the internationalization of research has taken place with the following universities and organizations:

- Technical University of Munich (Germany);
- Free University of Berlin (Germany);
- Louisiana State University (USA);
- Henley School of Business (UK);
- Kaunas University of Technology (Lithuania);
- University of Tartu (Estonia);
- University of Granada (Spain);
- Brookings Institution (USA);
- Center for Economic Studies, Canadian Academy of Sciences;
- Macroeconomics and Development Research Center, Washington;
- Israeli Research Centers.

In the field of digital economy and digital management, studies will cover the following sectors: Green Technologies and Renewable Energy, Digital Silk Road, Global Pandemic Management with Digital Technologies, FemTech, Fintech, AgriTech, Education Technologies, Artificial Intelligence, and more.



From Here, Where: Etseri, Svaneti

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

It's been just over a year since The Virus began dominating the scene, creeping up from mildly concerned reports of a new disease in a single Chinese city to the worldwide monster it is today. Even my relatively isolated village of Etseri has had its handful of cases; even I have been infected! (Mildly, in December, my wife not, and over it now.)

Of course, we are not an island; and anyway, being an island would not have saved us, as nowhere is cut off enough from the rest of the planet to have remained untouched.

The new "mildly concerned" is about the new strains mutating (as viruses do). Will they be more deadly; of greater concern, because more dangerous, will they be more infectious? As for the vaccines being developed in their hundreds, will the new strains be as susceptible to them, or less so?

Will the vaccines be equally available everywhere, or less so in poorer countries, as already seems to be the case? How can this be improved?

Then there's the misinformation, and the Conspiracy Theories, and the lies, which can be just as widespread as the subject of their chatter. People in my village, too, include someone who thinks

it's a Masonic plot; others, that it's all a hoax; some insist that they're not at any risk of being infected or infecting others, so why wear a mask at all, law or no law? (Here, we lean heavily towards no law). Well, okay, let's say that you don't have The Virus... until, surprise, you do.

My own infection likely came from one of the twice-monthly shop-restocking trips I make to Zugdidi, often with my wife, but lately alone for her ongoing protection. It's a city of some tens of thousands and, though I wear a mask everywhere, that only lessens the risk, it doesn't make it zero. Those few percent of possibility, multiplied by the number of trips, make the probability more and more likely.

We try to enforce a strict masked policy for all shoppers, insisting that they not enter maskless; but the number of guys who show up drunk and unable to be reasoned with makes this quite a challenge. Usually, we refuse them entry in an inebriated state anyway; but we haven't yet called the local police because that would escalate things to a level of likely permanent hostility and, well, we live here. Besides, local law "enforcement" personnel are all related to half the population, as people here are, so they may be fairly reluctant to entangle themselves in "domestic issues". Complicated.

School, as in every small community, reopened recently, with a Temperature Check at the door for all, young and old,



entering the premises every day. SO much better than online lessons, which all hated: these were perhaps better than nothing, but Not a Lot.

Winter here has been so mild that we have had hardly any issues with water to the house freezing. In any case, the new pipe connection to the house is a few tens of meters long instead of over 250, so it can be dealt with much more

easily with boiling water and salt. But the lack of snow is a worry. The huge Enguri hydroelectric dam is emptier than I have ever seen it in 21 years here. Its level does usually go far down in the winter, with increased energy load for our heaters and decreased water inflow, this pattern then reversing itself in summer and autumn. But we are at a new low now, with so little snow that one

cannot see how the level will return in just one cycle of seasons. As high as Ushguli, 2200 m above sea level and Europe's highest village, there was RAIN in mid-January, which no one living there had ever seen before.

Our last guests in the house left mid-February, as The Virus was going worldwide. Tourism in the whole country has taken a huge wallop, and needs to remain cut off for the visible future anyway. So, a massive economic downturn, things affecting each other. You hardly want to think about all of it together; the strain will bear down on you and take your breath away. You go on, one day at a time. Or... not, but that too is something no-one wants to contemplate. Keep Calm and Something Something.

How anyone manages to Keep Calm without an eternal perspective, though, I don't know. I cling like a drowning man, but I cling, and don't drown. I can look this in the face and not go crazy. For which I am grateful.

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 nearly 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



BY ANA DUMBADZE

Media has a drastic influence on society's way of thinking. Nowadays, when our reality is overwhelmed with heavy politics, shows of a cultural and educational format are much needed for society in order to give them a break and keep them thinking about the essential values in life. Such TV shows also have a significant influence on the right upbringing and development of our young generation. Further, media functions as a major area of influence for business and communication.

The show 'No Time to Sleep' has the

right marketing strategy, and a creative and new informational style influenced by a merging of French-Georgian culture. With that in mind, GEORGIA TODAY spoke to Olga Babluani, author, producer, and host of popular TV show 'No Time to Sleep,' to find out more about the role of media in the mentioned processes and the need for long-standing shows like hers.

'NO TIME TO SLEEP' HAS HAD A SPECIAL PLACE IN GEORGIAN MEDIA FOR SEVERAL YEARS, AND FEEDBACK IS CONSISTENTLY POSITIVE. TELL US HOW YOU DO IT.

The media in Georgia is incredibly polarized, in fact, the media panorama is occupied by political wars, where a fight

No Time to Sleep: A New Word in the Country's Creative Media

without rules is going on. We're finding it difficult to get out of the post-Soviet system, and all this is well-reflected in the media.

Georgia is a big country, in which its centuries-old history, including the Soviet period, is clearly visible. Identity is shaped when we know our history; when we know who we are so we can understand where we're going. The show 'No Time to Sleep' has a cultural-educational format, the main purpose of which is to provide viewers with the information they need. We discuss any topic, except politics, and at the same time present the personal character of our guests with a free approach. I've come from a cinematography background; high quality, internationally acclaimed copyright cinematography, experience which contributes to the aesthetic quality of my TV show.

IS THE SHOW A JOINT PRODUCT OF YOU AND IMEDI TV?

For more than a year, Imedi TV has been participating in the creation of the show. It was not like that from the beginning. We also cover a small number of commercial topics that fit into the concept of the show. It needs to be interesting for our viewers, just like the non-commercial topics, for example, culture. Both enliven each other. We have partners as well as international organizations who see the need and essence of the show.

HOW WOULD YOU ASSESS THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA TODAY, IN THE AGE OF 21ST CENTURY TECHNOLOGIES?

In Georgia, 85% of the population receives information from television. Imagine this happening in the age of technology. Television has the greatest communication role and has a complete monopoly on the mental horizon. Media plays a big role in shaping public opinion in all countries, but with us, this is even more emphasized: based on what Georgian viewers watch in 24 hours, there can be two or even three TVs buzzing in each household. Western media, in one way or another, takes into account the psychological, moral and physical condition of the viewer in order to maintain public balance. In Georgia, this side is completely excluded. The course of the country is oriented towards the West; yet, the media is completely disconnected

from Western information and lifestyle coverage. Until this topic becomes a priority, it will be difficult to assess the reality we live in. "We will get to know ourselves against the background of difference" is a good phrase from a Georgian educator.

I've recorded interviews with many foreign celebrities for the show, including actor Vincent Cassel, nationalist party leader Marine Le Pen, author of the iconic movie Béatrice Dalle, writer Frederic Beigbeder... and others. Viewers will hear such interviews infrequently, and will soon forget because it's a rarity. The Marine Le Pen interview is interesting in that it follows a discussion of European nationalism, and the media grabs the topic. Nationalism is the most acute issue today and concerns Georgia by ricochet. We must be part of the global information field! The events that take place in the world affect us too. This requires an independent media and an educated young generation. Let me take the example of France again: a financial group of just a few people owns leading French TV and magazine publications. These people do not invest in non-profit business; they need an information field to pursue their own interests. But there is a limit that should not go beyond civil action. This, in addition to the fact that part of the intelligentsia and educated youth rationally evaluate events, meaning that, despite efforts, common sense is not lost. The media remains at the service of the people for now, and people have the opportunity to evaluate and analyze information.

We Georgians are very talented and creative people. There are a lot of young people who can create a new TV product: the media needs to present modernity.

YOUR STYLE AS A PRESENTER IS VERY DISTINCTIVE. DURING AN INTERVIEW, YOU ESTABLISH A VERY STRONG RHYTHM.

My style is part of my character. Rhythm gives dynamics everywhere and in everything. The main driving charge is internal energy. I write the script for the show, and I'm well aware of the information about the guests and I treat them almost like actors in the cinema, when the cameras are turned on and the recording process starts, I move to a completely

different dimension. When on stage, I can hear absolutely nothing. I have a very good team, they know me well, though it is not easy. They are very strong professionals and we support each other.

YOUR GUEST LIST IS QUITE DIVERSE. YOU ARE HAPPY TO INTRODUCE PEOPLE COMPLETELY UNFAMILIAR TO VIEWERS, WHICH IS OFTEN CONSIDERED A DANGEROUS MOVE, GIVEN THE RATING ANGLE.

There are many interesting people in the country, this is what a tired spectator is interested in. I'm often told: "When we watch your show, we relax, it gives us new energy, it turns out it is possible to create and do something in this country." This is a great compliment! Because the concept of the show is precisely the display of the living organism of the country in the developed context; showing off the people who create and produce in different areas. This dynamic also exists, the knowledge of which is essential and is an example for the viewer.

HOW DID THE PANDEMIC AFFECT YOU?

The pandemic has affected all spiritual beings on earth. The goal right now is to get out of the situation. When we do, it will be interesting to see what kind of a mark it will leave on us. Priorities will be rearranged as the world undergoes amazing changes. For example: The topic of Brexit is a very interesting example on the world map. Brexit is a great merit of Boris Johnson's communication talent, which I think deserves media attention in terms of education.

In Georgia, education should remain the main Marshall Plan. We need youth who are educated and progressive, with independent thinking skills and universal language, more creative on TV and in the art space. We are in the 21st century: important historical changes are happening for women. A woman's mind is appreciated. Kamala Harris is the Vice President of the US! Media, cinema, literature should destroy local clichés of women's characteristics.

Our team continues to work, I will avoid talking about future plans, you understand why - we had big plans in 2020! Psychological calmness and enjoying reality is my priority today.

Holocaust Remembrance Day Events Organized by Israeli House in Georgia

On January 27, International Holocaust Remembrance Day, several events were held under the auspices of the Israeli House, led by Itsik Moshe.

The first event was held in the office of the Israeli House in Tbilisi. The events were opened by Member of the Knesset, Chairman of the Committee, for Immigration, Absorption and Diaspora Affairs, David Bitan via live broadcast from Israel. The commemoration event was attended by academic staff and students from four Georgian universities, where the history of the Holocaust is taught on the initiative of Israeli House; by members of the Jewish community; human rights activists; Mako Ghvartadze, Member of the Board of the Tolerance and Diversity Institute (TDD); GM of the International Christian Embassy from Jerusalem, Giorgi Jijashvili; and Bishop of Tbilisi and the Senior Minister of the Baptist Peace Cathedral, Malkhaz Songhulashvili. Also attending the event were representatives from four universities: the University of Georgia, Grigol Robkidze University, Georgian American University and the European University.

Itsik Moshe addressed the audience, noting that the 6 million Jews who are victims of the Holocaust are not just statistics: for every Jew each of the 6 million is a testament, a memory, and a thought for the future.

"In just the few decades since the restoration of the State of Israel, we have built a leading country in the world. We look to those who helped us during the years of exile and the great catastrophe, the Holocaust. We also encourage them towards friendship and mutual cooperation," he said.

He spoke about the "Georgian Righteous Among the Nations," Sergey Metreveli, who was recognized by the Yad Vashem - the World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Israel.

"One of the main activities of the Israeli House is to provide more knowledge to the new generation. For this purpose, with our support, the history of the Holocaust is taught in four universities of Georgia, we have opened cabinets of Israel, and competitions for student works are held. We take the winning students to see the Holocaust Museum in Israel," Moshe said.

The Israeli House, with the support of the Knesset and Yad Vashem, made a documentary about Georgian Schindler Sergey Metreveli.

In 2020, the Israeli House, in collaboration with Oni City Hall and the European Association for the Preservation and Promotion of Jewish Cultural Heritage (AEPJ) opened a monument dedicated to the memory of the Holocaust and Sergey Metreveli in Oni.

Davit Chikvaidze, Acting Mayor of the

municipality of Oni, who wore the yellow Star of David as a sign of solidarity with the Jewish people, addressed the audience regarding this occasion. He expressed readiness for Oni to host an event in memory of the Holocaust in the future.

The evening of remembrance continued at one of the leading universities in Georgia, the Sokhumi State University, which is currently located in Tbilisi. The Israeli House is planning to arrange an Israel conference hall there, which will be permanent. The university will also begin to teach Holocaust History. Former Vice Speaker of the Knesset, Hilik Bar from Israel, participated in the event via online broadcast from Israel.

He addressed the Israeli House University Rector, Prof. Zurab Khonelidze, and thanked him for such an event.

Former Member of Parliament of Georgia, Gia Mikeladze, joined the event via Zoom, expressing solidarity with the Jewish people.

At both events, young Georgian singer Kristi Japaridze performed the Israeli national anthem, 'Golden Jerusalem' and 'Eli Eli' in Hebrew.

On the same day, Itsik Moshe took part in an event organized by the Public Defender of Georgia, dedicated to the memory of the victims of the Holocaust.

The event, organized by the Israeli House, ended with the lighting of candles. The leadership of the Israeli House



gathered at Tbilisi Synagogue in the evening and spoke about the Holocaust and Jewish identity.

The Israeli House was established in Georgia in 2013 by Itsik Moshe, the former head of the Jewish Agency and the first representative in the Soviet Union. Through public diplomacy, the organization works to establish real bilateral ties

between Georgia, Israel, world Jewry and friendly states, working closely with the members of the Israeli Knesset, the international Zionist Organizations, the European Association for the Preservation and Promotion of Jewish Cultural Heritage (AEPJ), the Council of Europe, and the European Alliance for Israel (EAI), which unites up to 100 European MPs.

Celebrated Poet & Translator Davit Tserediani Posthumously Receives National Vazha-Pshavala Award



BY RYAN MICHAEL SHERMAN

One year ago, in early January, an unfamiliar pack of highlanders passed through the arched entrance of the famous 13th-century Orthodox Sioni Cathedral on the banks of the Mtkvari River in Old Tbilisi.

The hall was already crowded with Tbilisians, among them many notable faces, all gathered to pay their respects to the writer Davit Tserediani laid in the center of the nave.

The strangers had travelled day and night from the mountain village of Latali in Svaneti to conduct an ancient funeral rite known as the Zari, a complex, polyphonic dirge without melody that rises slowly in pitch and intensity, amplifying the delirium of grief.

Under the Zari, Sioni Cathedral's lofty interior, the medieval apses and wisps of incense, briefly gave way to a much

older, and much more unsettling atmosphere.

"He took our name from our small village and made it known to the world!" the Svans repeated with pride throughout the day.

This Wednesday, on January 26, 2021, Davit Tserediani was posthumously awarded the National Vazha-Pshavala Award, given every two years to authors whose work "gains general national recognition for its artistic dignity and is imbued with the universal ideals of freedom, humanism and patriotism." His final two works were published in 2020 after his death, a collection of his poems, Parapet, and his translation of Lorca's Gypsy Ballads.

A life-long introvert, Davit Tserediani gave interviews rarely, and only at the behest of family and friends. Although frequently granted Georgia's most prestigious literary awards, he attended celebrations reluctantly, if at all, often asking his wife of 30 years, Professor Manana Gharibashvili of the Tbilisi State Uni-

versity, to accept his awards in his stead.

As if keeping with this tradition, this Wednesday, she accepted the Vazha-Pshavala Award on his behalf from President Salome Zurbishvili at a ceremony held at Orbeliani Palace.

Davit Tserediani grew up between Tbilisi and Svaneti with his mother, teaching himself languages from a young age. His father, young philosophy student Besarion Tserediani, was taken by the Soviet authorities when Davit was only a few months old.

His love of the folk literature of Svaneti and the Svan language, Georgian's Kartvelian sister-language, imbued his poetry with the authenticity and ancientness of a Georgian proto-language, to create a pure and original Kartvelian voice.

His magnum opus was his translation of Faust Part One (2012) and Faust Part Two (2018), for which he received the Givi Margvelashvili Award from the Goethe Institute for "special contributions to the cultural relationship between Germany and Georgia." In addition to three Saba Awards, Tserediani was also the recipient of the Shota Rustaveli National Award, the Saguramo Award, the Georgian National Award, the French Georgian Institute Award, and the Ivane Machabeli Award.

A new award administered by Writers' House and funded by the Ministry of Culture now bears his name: The Davit Tserediani Award for Contributions to Literary Translations.

Among his most famous translations was also the poetry of François Villon, republished as a collection in 2014, as well as a 3-book set of Grimms' Fairy Tales (1992), ubiquitous in childhood book collections. His notable early work includes Svanuris Simgherebis Kvaldakval (In the Footsteps of Svan Songs), which transforms the songs and folklore of



Svaneti into Georgian poetry.

As a literary critic, he was known for his commentary on the great poets Guramishvili, Akaki Tsereteli, and Galaktion. In his essay "This Persian Story," his original reading of 'The Knight in the Panther's Skin' envisions the great epic poem about two ancient kingdoms as a double-vision of Georgia itself.

Upon his passing, a petition quickly circulated signed by nearly all prominent Georgian literary figures demanding he be buried in the Mtatsminda Pantheon, where a free plot lay next to his close friend, the prominent translator Batchana Bregvadze. Tbilisi City Hall's refusal was cause for a minor scandal, and his remains were instead laid in the Pantheon of Public Figures at Makhata. Yet Davit Tserediani no doubt would look on all this fuss with an impatient indifference and, according to his daughter, would have preferred a modest burial next to his mother.

In his final interview in 2019, granted in anticipation of the release of his translation of Gypsy Ballads, he shared his insight into the creative process of poetry writing: "For Lorca, inspiration was necessary for poetry, yet a poem was not written under inspiration. Inspiration is like a journey from which you have impressions, or rather the scraps of

impressions... voices, images: it can be many things. But when you are writing the poem, inspiration itself can be distracting. This is when you are biting into each word, evaluating its taste, testing its colors, how they each go with one another. [For Lorca] this is when creative inspiration was not so important. But, of course, everyone writes in their own way and says things their own way..."

Davit Tserediani's poem "Mizghvna," is dedicated to his father Besarioni, a victim to Stalin's great purges. It begins "May your ashes be light." The poem moves to a memory of a beloved nun in Svaneti, the shadows of her shack and her forbidden chapel. He sees her here, leading her goat to shrubs. All at once, she disappears. Her goat spattered with bullets. Her shack burned. Her spirit then joins all those who "left behind them no graves, who became the clay to line secret tunnels, whose bones were scattered across the icy ground." In the final stanza, we are told that when the first shot is heard in the mountains, a great struggle has already taken place. The shooter is surprised. The sunlit earth of Spring is still steaming: "The end has not yet come."

Davit Tserediani is survived by his wife Manana Gharibashvili, and his two children Maia and Archil Tserediani.



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