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IN GEORGIA
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Corona Updates: Georgia Continues to Lead COVID-Restricted Life, with Measures Lightened

BY ANA DUMBADZE

During the past week, the decreasing trend in new coronavirus cases has been stably maintained. A significant decrease in the number of coronavirus-related deaths is also particularly noteworthy, with the country having reported between 5 and 10 fatalities on average during the last seven days.

THE STATISTICS

During the past week, 500-800 new cases on average have been reported daily against the background of expanded testing, with the Georgian capital Tbilisi recording the highest number of COVID-19 cases, followed by Adjara and the Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti regions.

Georgia's total case tally now stands at 264,158 since February last year, of which 256,024 people recovered and 3321 died.

At present, active cases of COVID-19 stand at 4787. 2083 of those individuals are being treated in hospitals, of which 960 are stationed in Tbi-



lisi, 160 in Adjara and 448 in Imereti. 456 patients are in a critical condition: 188 in Tbilisi, 47 in Adjara and 119 in Imereti. Ventilators are currently being used to keep 129 patients alive. A

further 386 individuals are in quarantine, of which 219 are located in Tbilisi and 100 in Adjara.

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

As of 08-Feb-2021

Markets				Markets			
STOCKS	Price	w/w	m/m	BONDS	Price	w/w	m/m
Bank of Georgia (BGEO LN)	GBP 11.66	-0.5%	-9.5%	GEOROG 04/21	100.33 (YTM 5.07%)	-0.3%	-0.5%
Georgia Capital (CGEO LN)	GBP 5.41	+4.0%	-2.7%	GEORG 04/21	100.90 (YTM 1.61%)	-0.2%	-0.6%
TBC Bank Group (TBCG LN)	GBP 12.78	+3.6%	-3.5%	GRAIL 07/22	107.16 (YTM 2.58%)	+0.4%	+1.1%
				GEBGG 07/23	105.94 (YTM 3.46%)	+0.4%	+0.4%
COMMODITIES				CURRENCIES			
Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	60.56	+7.5%	+8.2%	GEL / USD	3.3180	+0.4%	+0.6%
Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	1 830.81	-2.6%	-1.0%	GEL / EUR	3.9984	+0.4%	-0.8%
				GEL / GBP	4.5581	+1.0%	+1.8%
				GEL / CHF	3.6930	+0.2%	-1.0%
INDICES							
FTSE 100	6 523.53	+0.9%	-5.1%	GEL / RUB	0.0447	+3.0%	+0.4%
FTSE 250	21 086.55	+3.4%	+0.1%	GEL / TRY	0.4692	+2.1%	+4.6%
DAX	14 059.91	+3.2%	+0.1%	GEL / AZN	1.9518	+0.4%	+0.6%
DOW JONES	31 385.76	+3.9%	+0.9%	GEL / AMD	0.0064	-	-1.6%
NASDAQ	13 987.64	+4.4%	+6.0%	GEL / UAH	0.1200	+1.9%	+2.8%
MSCI EM	1 399.81	+2.8%	+3.4%	EUR / USD	0.8298	+0.1%	+1.4%
MSCI EM EE	167.65	+5.4%	-2.5%	GBP / USD	0.7277	-0.6%	-1.3%
SP 500	3 915.59	+3.8%	+2.4%	CHF / USD	0.8989	+0.2%	+1.5%
MSCI FM	2 572.50	+2.6%	-3.0%	RUB / USD	74.3006	-2.4%	+0.2%
GT Index (GEL)	1 582.68	-	-	TRY / USD	7.0731	-1.7%	-3.8%
GT Index (USD)	1 208.13	-	-	AZN / USD	1.6987	-0.0%	-0.0%

Georgian Citizens Now Able to Work in German Agriculture Sector Seasonally



BY ANA DUMBADZE

Georgian citizens will be able to be employed in German agriculture seasonally, for a maximum of 90 days, the Ambassador of Germany to Georgia Hubert Knirsch said after a meeting with the Minister of Health today.

Georgian citizens will be able to work legally in Germany for three months from April 1. The number of citizens is indefinite; however, work is defined only in the agricultural sector.

"We are starting a project that involves the employment of Georgians in the agriculture sector of Germany seasonally. The information campaign

will be launched both online and through the Labor Agency.

"This is not an immigration project, but rather a temporary seasonal job in Germany that lasts a maximum of 90 days in the field of agriculture. We are sure that many people in Georgia are knowledgeable in this area and will be able to contribute to the German agriculture sector. Germany does not implement this project with all countries: we are starting it with Georgia. For the first time in a long time, we are inviting a labor force from another country. I am looking forward to the results of this project," said Ambassador Knirsch.

Registration is open from February 15 and will last throughout the year.

Job seekers should initially register on the special registration portal <http://workabroad.gov.ge/>.

PACE Georgia Monitors Express Deep Concern at Illegal Sentencing of Georgian Citizen

BY ANA DUMBADZE

The co-rapporteurs of the Parliamentary Assembly for the monitoring of Georgia, Titus Corlăteanu (Romania, SOC) and Claude Kern (France, ALDE), on Tuesday expressed their deep concern at the illegal sentencing of Georgian citizen Zaza Gakheladze to twelve years imprisonment by the "court" of Tskhinvali.

"This is an illegal sentence by an illegal court. We call for the immediate release of Mr. Gakheladze. In this respect, we wish to underscore Russia's responsibility as the country in control over the Georgian region of South Ossetia, as established by the European Court of Human Rights in its judgment of 21 January 2021," said the two co-rapporteurs.

They went on to reiterate the full support of the Parliamentary Assembly for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia within its internationally-recognized borders.

The "supreme court" of the self-proclaimed republic of South Ossetia sentenced Georgian



citizen Zaza Gakheladze, residing near the occupation line, to 12 years and 6 months in prison.

The Tskhinvali court convicted Gakheladze on two counts: Article 317 of the Russian Criminal Code (encroachment on the life of a law enforcement officer) and Article 322 (illegal crossing of the state border).

On February 9, it was announced that the same "court" of occupied Tskhinvali ordered two months of pre-trial detention for another Georgian citizen, Ramaz Begeluri, a resident of Gugutiantkari village of Gori Municipality. Representatives of the occupation regime illegally detained him on February 2.

Corona Updates: Georgia Continues to Lead COVID-Restricted Life, with Measures Lightened

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NEW SAFETY REGULATIONS - PUPILS MUST WEAR FACE MASKS IN 5TH - 12TH GRADE

Wearing face masks will be mandatory for pupils of the 5th-12th grades in all schools, the Minister of Education Mikheil Chkhenkeli announced on Tuesday.

The Minister explained that this move is aimed at contributing to the positive dynamics and the decreasing trend in coronavirus cases.

"It will be mandatory for students in the 5th to 12th grades in all schools to wear a face mask. Detailed instructions will be distributed to the schools, and all schools will communicate with the parents. Everything is being done to maintain the good dynamics that we already have. This is good news, but it needs to be ongoing," the Minister said, adding that parents themselves should provide their children with face masks for school.

Schools in Rustavi, Tbilisi and Kutaisi will resume the educational process in classrooms on February 15, while other schools countrywide were allowed to open their doors on February 1.

OCCUPIED TSKHINVALI LIFTS COVID RESTRICTIONS

The RES news agency has reported that all restrictions imposed on mass events, including celebrations, funerals and memorials, due to the coronavirus, have been lifted in the Russia-occupied region of Tskhinvali.

The de facto information committee said the relevant decision was made at a meeting of the operational headquarters, chaired by de facto President Anatoly Bibilov.

"It was the right decision to resume the educational process in schools. Now it is possible to remove the restrictions on holding mass events. There is no doubt that necessary sanitary measures are being taken in all institutions and organizations," Bibilov said.

Since the beginning of the pandemic in occupied Tskhinvali, 2901 cases of coronavirus have been confirmed, while the virus has claimed the lives of more than 60.

Georgia continues to lead a COVID-restricted life, although the measures being taken are now lighter. While public transport and all types of shops have reopened, and schools are due to open on Monday, the nationwide night curfew is still in effect.

THE VACCINE

The percentage of the Georgian population saying it is ready to be vaccinated ranges between 40% - 47%, Deputy Minister of Health Tamar Gabunia announced this week.

She noted that public distrust towards the vaccine is common in all countries; but in Georgia, an active information campaign on vaccination will start at the end of February when the first doses of the COVID-19 vaccine are imported to Georgia, with hopes of changing the public attitude.

Gabunia added that presently, nine institutions are ready for the Pfizer vaccination, while the process of selecting other institutions is ongoing.

Reportedly, the first doses of the Pfizer vaccine,

which has tested over 95% effective against the coronavirus, will arrive in Georgia by late February. Based on the National Plan for Vaccination, the first doses will be administered to healthcare workers. The target group for vaccination will be adults aged above 18, including those who already recovered from the COVID-19 infection.

The Deputy Minister of Health noted that 14,000 individuals have been selected in Georgia to be vaccinated for coronavirus at the first stage, and all of them are medical workers.

Vaccination will be carried out in the cities of Tbilisi, Batumi and Kutaisi.

She noted that the Pfizer vaccine is recommended for individuals over 19 years of age, while the AstraZeneca vaccine, which is expected to arrive in Georgia in March, is recommended for individuals 16+.

"No data is yet available about vaccination efficiency in children," Gabunia noted.

RECOVERY PLANS

"Economic growth, jobs and investment promotion are the top priorities of the Georgian government, and business support is of great importance in this process," said Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia at a government meeting with large employers this week.

The meeting focused on the steps that need to be taken by the joint efforts of both the government and business sector to maintain a competitive position, and the potential for rapid economic recovery in the post-pandemic economic recovery phase.

It was noted that in order to overcome the difficulties caused by the pandemic as soon as possible, and to ease the existing restrictions more boldly, it is crucial to enforce the established rules and regulations, including the proper use of face masks and maintaining social distance.

The PM spoke about the consequences of the restrictions imposed in the country since November and said that the stabilization achieved by the current regulations has given the country the resources to carefully restore tourism, which is one of the main driving forces of the country's economy, and "add oxygen" to the economic recovery process.

In addition, he said, structural economic reforms will continue in the country, capital expenditures will increase, privatization of state property will accelerate, along with the systemic reform of state-owned enterprises to bring their management closer to the highest standards of corporate governance.

Gakharia reaffirmed readiness to personally engage in the process of resolving issues important to large employers, and to be a guarantor to resolve any problematic issues within the law as soon as possible, including the smooth implementation of projects in the face of pandemic difficulties.

"Economic growth, job creation and the promotion of foreign direct investment are our top priorities, as they are all directly linked to a rapid recovery from the global crisis. I'm always ready to hear concrete proposals from you, and you should know that the door of the government administration is open for your involvement," the PM told the 40 attendees on Monday, representatives of large businesses operating in various fields.



Cour
Pénale
Internationale
International
Criminal
Court

The Trust Fund for Victims (TFV) at the International Criminal Court (ICC)

Trust Fund for Victims at the Int'l Criminal Court Approves Victim Assistance Program in Georgia.

The Trust Fund for Victims (TFV) at the International Criminal Court (ICC) has approved a

Victim Assistance program in Georgia. TFV will soon issue a solicitation for the provision of the assistance program to conduct psychological rehabilitation, physical rehabilitation, and material support for the victims of the armed conflict of 2008, the August War, in Georgia, through TFV funding.

Within this context, the ICC/TFV has announced a call on Expressions of Interest (EOI) from qualified and interested organizations. Through this announcement, TFV calls on competent and qualified organizations to express their interest.

The assistance services requested, modalities, and the minimum qualification criteria are outlined here: <https://www.icc-cpi.int/get-involved/Pages/expressions-of-interest.aspx>

Reference Number 128881

And here: <https://www.ungm.org/Public/Notice/121344>

Interested organizations should submit their Expression of Interest, as well as all required documents, by e-mail, to Tender.7@icc-cpi.int, by **1st March, 2021**.

CENN with the Support of the British Embassy Launches a New Project on Food Waste

When throwing out the leftovers of your meal, there is always a hesitation caused by the thought that someone, somewhere, is craving the food you are about to discard. However, the data, especially in the light of the pandemic, shows that food waste is a much bigger problem globally than it is a mere moral issue.

As a result of the pandemic, the poverty levels are expected to rise to up to 125 million, and 2020 marks the most severe increase in global food insecurity, impacting vulnerable households in almost every country. This is happening while we are already wasting about a third of the perfectly edible food produced each year. Food waste is caused by overproduction, spoilage, and overbuying, among other reasons, and it is one of the biggest contributors to climate change, accounting for 8% of the Greenhouse Gas emissions, according to FAO's (Food and Agriculture Organization) 2015 study.

In Georgia in particular, over 40% of waste is organic waste, a large portion of that being food. This is according to the morphological studies of landfills in Georgia conducted by CENN in 2016 and 2018.

Food waste holds the largest portion of waste in landfills and dumpsites throughout the country, contributing to a significant amount of GHG emissions.

Unlike many other countries across Europe and the West, Georgia does not have food banks, nor does it have a legal framework to incentivize food donations for recovery and redistribution of food to the vulnerable groups. This is evident most in the case of business taxes: businesses still have to pay profit tax (15%) and VAT (18%) on donated products. There is an exemption of corporate profit tax, if donating to charitable organizations, which is valid if the total deductible amount does not exceed 10% of the net profit made by the organization during the preceding calendar year.

For this reason, quite a high amount of food waste is being generated, instead of it being redistributed to those who need it most.

This level of inefficiency in our food systems has significant negative environmental, social and economic implications. What worsens the situation is the rise of poverty due to the global pandemic. It is in this vast exasperation that CENN, with the support of the British Embassy, is kicking off a new

project Sustainable Food Systems for Climate Resilience, which will also launch the 'Say No to Food Waste' campaign.

The project will contribute to the reduction of the country's GHG emissions by initiating dialogues between private and public sectors and as a result advocating relevant policy changes at the governmental level. For this reason, CENN is putting together a Food Waste Working Group comprised of key actors in the food industry affected by this issue.

Starting this month, CENN launches the 'Say No to Food Waste' media campaign to urge people change their behavior and consume more responsibly to reduce food waste. The 'Say No to Food Waste' campaign strives to achieve an "awakened" culture, the members of which will act more responsibly in support of their own surroundings. GEORGIA TODAY, ever eager to support a good cause, is one of CENN campaign's media partners.

Presently, one third of the fruits and vegetables globally do not make it to our grocery store shelves because they are rejected to avoid consumer complaints of a bad quality or unattractive product. It takes 50 liter of water to



produce one orange. More than 820 million people go hungry every day, and climate change is increasingly harming agriculture. Saving ugly fruit and veg-

etables isn't just a question of ethics, it is a question of resources. Remember that looks don't matter... Not wasting food, does.



Image source: hyetert.org

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW BY
VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

WAS IT ALL A CHARADE OR REALLY ABOUT KARABAKH?

This week marks three months since the second Karabakh war truce was declared. And as the dust settles, it is becoming increasingly apparent that despite all the Russian post-war swagger, the power balance is not the same in the South Caucasus region. Professor Georgy Derlugian of New York University Abu Dhabi, has written extensively on the matters of post-Soviet conflict ever since the turbulent 90s. GEORGIA TODAY sat down with him to talk about the second Karabakh war and its implications for the region.

"Russia is obviously not a winner in the South Caucasus, not at the moment," the Professor tells us. "For the first time in two centuries, the historically Russian sphere of influence was successfully invaded and the invasion proceeded to an almost total defeat of Russia's client state. Conspiracy theories proliferate, as they always do in such confusing moments. Yet it defies credulity that the splendidly named Mr. God Nisanov could buy in the Moscow's upper echelons more than a tacit protection of his own bazaar interests, or, for that matter, that Mr. Putin really believes in the nefarious powers of George Soros over the hapless Armenian populists."

THE PUBLIC PRONOUNCEMENTS FROM SVR CHIEF NARYSHKIN; THE KOMMERSANT NEWSPAPER'S DETAILING THE PRESENCE OF TURKISH ADVISORS AND SYRIAN MERCENARIES; THE MARATHON NIGHT TALKS IN MOSCOW ON A CEASEFIRE IMMEDIATELY BROKEN, THE RUSSIAN MILITARY HELICOPTER SHOT DOWN IN THE LAST MOMENT.

Moscow is now trying to wrestle a longer-term victory from the jaws of a short-term defeat. For a while, it seemed the Russian strategic thinkers could not decide whether they should risk a confrontation with the brazenly assertive Mr. Erdogan (of course, it was him) or cut the losses and find virtues in a newly-found isolationism. Russia first, Russia alone — but where does it end for them?

Hardly by chance, Mr. Putin in the last month has thrice invoked the 1988 pogrom in Sumgait. This could not be merely a nod to the Armenians. Mr. Putin sees his historical mission in reversing the effects of Soviet collapse, and at least not allowing its repetition. The USSR did not collapse because of the arms race with the West, the defiance of Poland, or the internal democratic movement. The trigger was in ethnic conflicts that Moscow could not control. The chain reaction started in February 1988 in Sumgait, which was, by all evidence, a spontaneous event. The indecisive reaction of Mikhail Gorbachev, however, signaled that ethnic violence could usefully serve to disrupt central control and undermine Moscow's local prefects. Such considerations could be behind Mr. Putin's sudden decisiveness on Karabakh.

MOSCOW'S DONATIONS-BASED APPROACH TOWARDS ABKHAZIA AND SOUTH OSSETIA, AND NOW POSSIBLY KARABAKH TOO: IS IT A GAIN OR A LOSS?

Do you mean economic aid? I do not know in any detail the economic situation in Abkhazia, but you might be right: it is not self-sustaining and thus a burden on Russia. Such burdens, however, might not be large in the grand scheme of things. By many indications, Moscow is now intent on making at least Armenia economically sustainable by opening up

POLITICS

Professor Derlugian on the Aftermath & Implications of the Second Karabakh War

the railroad connections closed in the last thirty years and, of course, imposing more Russian control points.

Armenia is now essentially a military protectorate, and even more so Karabakh. But the best protectorates are those which can pay for their upkeep. The Soviets were never good at this: it was a command economy of local bureaucratic bargaining for subsidies (recall how Soviet Georgia functioned). Good precedents are found on the other side of the Cold War divide. Think of South Korea or Israel. Speaking of command economies, Israel was also a socialist state, in many respects much more socialist than the USSR. The United States offered Korea and Israel the opportunities which were taken, to a great effect. There is much literature in the historical political economy about how exactly certain (usually small) countries could have exploited the situations of their geopolitical protectorate to advance their economies. My colleague Dan Slater, after comparatively studying the post-1945 performance of East Asian countries, wryly concluded that nothing concentrates the minds of elites better than a gun pointed to their head. It seems that Armenia now meets this historical condition. Will the Armenians manage to come up with more effective elites? I do not think that Moscow would mind, given what they now face in Belarus or, god forbid, Kyrgyzstan.

TURKEY ENTERED THE MILITARY ARENA IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS FOR THE FIRST TIME IN ABOUT 100 YEARS. HOW DOES IT CHANGE THINGS?

Mr. Erdogan is a gambler who plays aggressively at several game tables simultaneously, really, anywhere he can insert himself. Moreover, his style is vertiginously aggressive and opportunistic. Had this been football (and we know he is a football fan), such a game would have provided a great spectacle. But since Mr. Erdogan is a dictator presiding over an internally divided and geopolitically surrounded country, with potentially vulnerable finance; because he has made myriads of enemies and continues making them at a breathtaking rate, I would not bet on Mr. Erdogan. His recent

foray into the South Caucasus is likely to remain an episode that might not last.

AZERBAIJAN'S STRATEGIC PATIENCE AND MILITARIZATION APPROACH ENABLED THEM TO ACHIEVE THE TARGET THEY WANTED. IS IT A DEMONSTRATION THAT IT'S THE WAY TO GO FOR OTHER COUNTRIES?

With a family name like mine, am I in a position to afford doubts in Azerbaijan? What you call strategic patience rather seemed indecisiveness, if not worse. Baku held the military advantages all along. The Armenians in the static defensive positions around Karabakh became sitting ducks. All those trenches elevated in the Armenian imagination to a matter of patriotic faith could not be abandoned for either a counter-offensive or tactical retreat. The Armenians in Karabakh got stuck, while Baku was shopping for military hardware. Still, it took an external game-changer to finally dare to realize the strategic advantage. Mr. Erdogan at the recent victory parade in Baku stood tall as big brother watching. It was probably easy to get him in, but how do you get him out now? By letting a Russian military garrison next to the Turkish one on your own presumably sovereign territory?

WHAT IS THE FUTURE FOR KARABAKH AND ITS STATUS?

This one's easy: creative ambiguity, as the Western diplomats call it. The Russian troops will stay in Azerbaijan and in Armenia as long as Karabakh exists and there are ethnic Armenians there surrounded by Azeris. Which means forever, i.e. another 25-50 years, which for many of us means forever.

WHAT ARE THE LESSONS FOR THE WEST ON HOW GAMES ARE PLAYED IN THIS REGION?

No lessons. Presumably, the Western diplomats and military, as good professionals, know it all and understand it all. Their (in)action is a matter of political will and strategic possibility. Evidently, they see in the Caucasus neither much opportunity nor much threat. The Western politicians might want to cut to size either Mr. Erdogan or

Mr. Putin, depending on their current assessment of the world situation. But could they? This is an earnest question, what can they afford to do?

AND THE IMPACT FOR TBILISI?

For now, everyone in the South Caucasus will have to exist in the geopolitical orbits between Moscow and Ankara. If anything, the Second Karabakh War revealed that the whole region is much closer to the Middle East than the far-away West.

It seems, however, imperative to stop thinking solely as being someone's periphery and under something's impact. Georgia, or all of us, must find ways to rationalize the governance structures, to get out of the usual local politicking, to build more attractive countries. Historically, it has never been safe or easy living in the Caucasus. Yet the legend of Caucasus life somehow emerged and became a reality, because art, film, lifestyle, food and wine create their own ephemeral yet also lasting realities. Why? Because humans need emotions. It is crucially important to learn to generate good emotions. Take my sociologist's word for it.

DOES THE POTENTIAL NAKHCHIVAN CORRIDOR AND BORDER WITH TURKEY THREATEN GEORGIA'S TRANSIT COUNTRY STATUS?

I think the Georgians can be quite safely assured they will remain a transit country, since the Nakhchivan corridor appears in a very uncertain proposition if one looks only at the physical map. And that is before we even start considering the political projects and actual economic potentials of Armenia and Azerbaijan, Turkey and Russia, Iran and China. This question needs another conversation, and I am afraid I am not an expert on this. There might not be anyone in the world right now who really knows such answers.

Regarding Georgia, the question is in what geographical directions will your territory be traversed? East to west, north to south, or both, and also diagonally? And how much do you benefit from those transit routes? This is an earnest question to which I would like to know the answer myself.

The Weird Political Spectrum

OP-ED NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

A certain number of political parties in Georgia enjoy some funny names, far from the traditional way of denominating a political entity. On one hand it's a bit of fun, yet it also symbolizes the strangeness of political behavior in this country. Our political map has been motley ever since the demise of socialism here. Literally hundreds of social movements have officially registered themselves as political parties, claiming a say in the life of the Republic. Nobody knows how much good they have brought to the people of Georgia, and certainly most of them have never been held accountable for their political activity.

A story of this multitude in the political arena should be marked by memorable episodes of their (useless) fight to grab the helm of the nation, but it seems their political compass has failed them in most cases. Debilitated by communist ideology and incapacitated by the socialist ways of doing business, the soviet



From the 2020 elections. Image source: transparency.ge

people could not immediately suggest any optimal ways of coping with the new era of development brought on by the downfall of the communist regime and the advent of capitalism, hence the overwhelming desire among the population of that time to dash towards politicking in search of a better life, instead of taking care of the failing economy. For them, the newly introduced western democracy was a bunch of outlandish political principles, based on liberalism: the rule of

law, separation of powers, open society, market economy, private property, human rights, civil liberties, political freedoms, social contract, constitutionality, etc. The political philosophy based on these principles is called liberal democracy, which could hardly have made any sense at that particular point in time. And those who had spent seventy years in the patient expectation of communism could not have even suspected that liberal democracy would become the most

enduring and commonplace political system in the world today.

Sakartvelo is one of the foremost countries on the planet which was made an experimental venue for playing with liberal democracy as the best way for the nation to achieve new heights of modern development. Has it worked? Partially. But for its fully mature advancement, we need to have in the country a fully matured political spectrum, comprising a reasonable constructive opposition at any stage of the multi-partisan political life in the land, not the weird huddle of political wannabes who chronically doubt the election results, no matter how fair and transparent they were; more so if they failed to get elected.

One reason this "immaturity" is so often seen here is that the rules of the game used in constructing a healthy political milieu in the country happen to be flagrantly unfair. Unfair meaning that the interaction between the political powers in the spectrum is based not on the thought of benefiting the nation to the utmost, but on the petite desire of survival and furtherance of their partisan aims.

This is at least the thought that has

been forged in my analytical consciousness in the last thirty years as a result of watching the national political process. Take, for instance, the reactionist position in the current struggle for power of the 'old regime' which is so thirsty for the revanche that any possible means in their hands looks good enough to justify the cherished end. And one of those cherished ends of theirs smells like revolution, shored up by a radical oppositional attitude which totally ignores the traditional left-right dimensions in political controversy, and presses only on self-adopted infallibility.

Conclusively, I would love to corroborate the suggested grasp of the situation with the fact of refusal by the legally and popularly elected political parties to use their mandates for the genesis of a practicable political conversation in favor of their electors within the walls of the Republic's legislative body. Instead, our political rebels want to continue their futile act in the streets of Georgia. Thank God, among them, we see supporters of syncretism in politics, preferring neutrality and pursuing the goal of reconciliation between the feuding powers that be.

Foreign Policy during the Biden Presidency: Probabilities & Realistic Expectations. Part 1

ANALYSIS BY VICTOR KIPANI,
CHAIRMAN, GEOCASE

Predictably, there has been much recent discussion in Georgian media over the political line of the Biden administration, as well as over the possible developments of US policy, and several potential scenarios have frequently been forecast. These discussions are of course particularly necessary given the overall importance of US foreign policy to the formation of a system of international relations, and of the defense by our main ally of our country's interests within the framework of the US-Georgia strategic partnership.

We are therefore keenly attuned to any unusual, essential or uncertain changes in US foreign policy, and also have particular expectations. Every change or political U-turn in Washington is directly linked to the present Georgian state and its prospects for development. In addition, these changes send messages to other forces in the region; miscommunicating or misjudging these messages could easily lead to a strengthening of harmful tendencies and the further limitation of Georgian or Western interests.

Scholars and analysts of foreign affairs in Georgia are actively analyzing the Biden administration's foreign policy. This topic is regularly covered in Georgian print media as well as on television, but it is one that can never be published or discussed too much, as every new word or opinion could lead parties to pursue their analysis, re-evaluate their attitudes towards this or the other issue, or encourage the correction of already "reserved" decisions or approaches. This article was written with this in mind. Certain opinions expressed in it will seem quite debatable to many readers, and it is hoped that it will encourage the further development of this discussion.

RECENT ZIG-ZAGS

America's foreign policy for the past few decades has been notorious for the zig-zags of its development. This is no-one's fault, and does not betray a lack of consistency, but is simply the result of the constant real-world shifts of the international order between different stages of the post-Cold War era. In order to better perceive the problems linked to implementing a "Grand Strategy," it would suffice to remember that, over the past three decades alone, the world (and US foreign policy alongside it) has

greatly evolved since the end of the Cold War. A unipolar world gave way to the stage of the war against global terrorism, and the current stage is that of great geopolitical confrontation. Under these circumstances, developing and following a stable foreign policy naturally became extremely challenging. The absence of a systemic approach was also compounded by the very unusual and unpredictable factor of Donald Trump's presidency, which was characterized by decisions based upon personal perceptions of global issues and their "transactional" value. This enflamed existing challenges even further, and created fertile ground for new risks.

Contemporary American researchers are trying to draw comparisons between the country's most recent foreign and diplomatic policies and present or past teachings. This academic study is particularly focused upon the Obama-Trump-Biden triangle, since these presidencies mark the period when new elements emerged in US policy towards "the rest of the world". Under Biden, this process will most likely acquire new contours, and the global coronavirus pandemic has of course also contributed to changes which have shifted the relatively stagnant old postulates of the international system away from a "dead point" to enable and activate a rearrangement of the global economic agenda (albeit on a still mostly theoretical rather than practical level).

The evolution of the international system and the influence of US foreign policy on this process is naturally an inexhaustible source of discussion, publication, interest and passions. In the end, this process creates a multitude of print or electronic materials in which different authors attempt to prove, academically, the alignment of this or that "strategy" with one of the four main schools of US foreign policy (Jefferson, Jackson, Hamilton, Wilson). But what makes this task even more difficult is the fact that modern progressive, libertarian, realist, liberal-internationalist schools of thoughts have been added to the so-called list of "classical" schools, rendering any discussion of "who's right and who's wrong" not only confusing but in some cases even pointless.

Genuine interest has of course driven us towards such disputes, in many of which we have certainly taken part, and we would like to confirm our deepest respect for academic research and recognize the need to support and perfect the application of schools of thought to practical politics. And yet it should be mentioned that the acridity of current

challenges requires any such theory to be applied as closely as possible to concrete reality and to be refined in order to permit real decision making, as well the establishment of an organic link between expert observation and specific tasks.

In order to better explain U.S. foreign policy to our readers, these requirements would have encouraged us to simplify this foreign policy by formulating it in the following way: Washington's desire and readiness to play an active role on the world stage. It is noteworthy, however, that the degree of this activity varies according to different levels, and that the geographical area of declared US involvement is comparably wider or smaller. However, it is significant that, in general, these changes have only been voiced, since the flow of global affairs as well as the special role of the United States in world stability and the avoidance of large-scale cataclysms has been, and is, unprecedented.

Taking these agreements and predictions into consideration, we would like to touch upon the already defined and possible accents of the Biden administration's foreign policy, particularly as identifying, analyzing and properly understanding them is so important for the health of Georgia's domestic policy and for the real effectiveness of her foreign policy. In other words, we must arm ourselves with all the knowledge we need to better pursue Georgia's national interests.

SPECIFICITIES OF THE NEW ADMINISTRATION'S FOREIGN POLICY COURSE

Personal Character

Against the background of the Obama and Trump administrations, the foreign policy course of the new Biden presidency will naturally be distinguished by several elements. Yet, that said, we believe that we should not expect too radical a change. This is quite a bold assumption, but we will try to explain why we believe this to be true.

For lovers of theoretical parallels, we will begin by noting that the new president does not belong to this or that foreign policy school of thought or camp. His very rich history of international relations points to his inclination for private contacts and links, which must be especially interesting for Georgians. Accordingly, it will presumably be difficult over the next four years to distinguish (as we have been used to doing in the past) a so-called US "Grand Strategy" on the foreign stage with orderly form and



Illustration by Eleanor Shakespeare for TIME

content. Obviously, by the end of the Biden presidency, academic circles will eagerly start to define a "Biden Doctrine." This is only natural: every president of the American super-state leaves his mark. However, we believe that placing such a doctrine into any kind of ideological "ism" will be difficult, and that it will mainly be a mixture of already tried and modified components. The main question is how orderly and effective this doctrine will be, and this only time can show.

Inner Flows

Among America's foreign policy schools of thought, realism has always been prominent thanks to many distinguished scientists or scholars (Morgenthau, Waltz, Mearsheimer, Walt and others). However, when seeking to define a practical policy, this very interesting and prestigious school (in its different forms) has always fallen under the different influences of international liberalism. Objectively speaking, this prioritization has its historical explanation (the bitter experiences of two world wars) as well as its practical justification and benefits. None of these can be rejected, particularly as the mere attempt to do so would be a great injustice.

It is noteworthy that, already at the beginning of the Obama presidency, the "World Policeman" approach began to be revised, and several theories acquired a conceptual form under Trump. During the "ups and downs" of both periods, we spoke in many publications of a certain renaissance of realism (and as some refer to it: egoism) in foreign policy, and we will not stop here to mention this again. The question now is: will the United States continue to withdraw from participating in global processes, or will it go back to its usual activity under Biden? This is a very important and interesting question for the world, and has deep meaning for Georgia.

A quick answer to this question would be that, in our opinion, neither of the two above-mentioned expectations will completely come to pass, and that the Biden administration's foreign policy course will mostly be intermediate. Explaining the reasons for this format

is difficult, but we will try to do so nevertheless.

Let us begin by considering the degree of inertia of this or that foreign policy course of a country of such scale and role as the US; this also touches upon opposition to radical change by a state machine acting with the same inertia and "dominant" experts acting in an organized manner. As a so-called "Bidenish" counterweight to such opposition, we would consider the formation of the new administration (especially the State Department, National Security Council and other levels of the security system), but our expectations in this regard can be no more than moderate when we remember that many key figures of the new administration were already employed under Obama. By the way, an evaluation of the current personnel policy concluded that the election of Biden is a "third term" of Obama's presidency. This comparison is no doubt an exaggeration, but it should be considered from the point of view of the Black Sea region and Georgia (not forgetting the useless "restarts" and general caution of the Obama era).

It is a fact that pragmatic analysts unhesitatingly believe in the need to "revolutionize" relations between the United States and the Black Sea region and Georgia. They and we (and others) will presumably see over the next two years at the most whether we are right to expect our strategic ally to properly evaluate this issue and begin to act.

Here we should mention the importance of the need for systemic and large-scale co-operation with U.S. and Western analytical and research centers. The assumption that decisions are solely based upon the information circulating through official Western channels is off-the-mark: regarding this or that issue, decisions are very often already made before they reach formal processes, and we Georgians should therefore be more proactive during the initial stages, or else our partners will struggle to achieve the "cumulative efficacy" that we need.

Continued on georgiatoday.ge and in next week's GT.

Navalny - a Legend about the Other Russia

ANALYSIS BY DAVIT BRAGVADZE,
GEORGIAN INSTITUTE
FOR SECURITY POLICY

Poisoning, medical treatment in Germany, a return to Moscow, imprisonment - This news made Alexei Navalny especially popular both in the Russian Federation and abroad. Today, he is a much more famous person in the West than he has ever been. He is also actively discussed in Georgian society. This article, like its author, has no ambition of establishing absolute truth. Nor that all the necessary issues will be posed in it and all of them will be answered properly. This article is an attempt to understand who Alexei Navalny is, what role he plays in the political life of modern Russia, what impact his success can have on us, or in general, what chance he has to achieve this success. Undoubtedly, today Navalny is no longer a mere Russian oppositionist. Huge protests in major cities across the Russian Federation, even in -50-degree weather; thousands of protesters detained by law enforcement agencies, imprisonment: the process that we have all witnessed lately can be boldly called the "Navalny Factor."

One might think that there is nothing special about this. In Putin's Russia, there have been such large protests and mass arrests before. However, the "Navalny Factor" is a much more powerful and likely prolonged process. This is a cautious assumption, given that we have seen large rallies before, although so far we have not seen a political leader who could not be assassinated and then returned to Russia after treatment. Navalny's role doubled following the assassination of Boris Nemtsov at the Kremlin walls in 2015. After Nemtsov's elimination, Navalny is virtually the only politician now creating problems for the Kremlin. The ongoing processes from August 20, 2020 to the present day show that today he is a source of inspiration for the Russians who oppose the regime, and a symbol of the struggle.

The events surrounding Navalny remind us of the legend of the "other Russia," a Russia whose existence many believe is very different from the "First Russia" that seems to exist somewhere but no one has ever seen. Anti-regime activists, cultural or sports workers, who often make statements worse than the most chauvinistic and xenophobic Russian politicians do, are named as the embodiment of the "other Russia". The "other Russia" does not exist yet. It will only be possible to see it if its political system is healed. Is Alexei Navalny the person who will be able to achieve this? To answer this question, we need to look at his past statements.

Georgians still painfully remember his statement made in 2008, in which he named the whole nation as a rodent, and demanded the bombardment of the territory of Georgia with cruise missiles. Even Georgians who do not know Russian are well aware that the words "Georgians" (Грузины) and "rodents" (грызуны) are alliterative in Russian. The merit of Alexei Navalny in this is huge. Although other Russians used the same words, we remember most painfully this chauvinistic statement made by him at a most difficult time. Navalny had a similar stance on the occupation of Crimea. He said that "Crimea will not be able to return to Ukraine because it is not a boomerang that is being thrown here and there". Navalny's approach was discussed by Andrei Ilarionov in a 2015 letter - "Against Putin, but in support of the Empire. The dark side of the opposition". We think that a detailed review of the letter is not necessary. The author's position is also clear from its title. Navalny, like other Russian opposition figures, does not like Putin, but he has nothing against the Russian Empire. In this sense, they first accuse Putin of impoverishing and weakening the empire. How much has Navalny's position changed since 2008? This is really hard to say. Navalny's answer to this question can be found in the archives of 'Radio Echo of Moscow,' dated April 10, 2013, where Navalny answers the questions of Ukrainian activist and journalist Aider Mujdabaev. Quote from the letter:

Question: Did you really call Georgians "rodents," or is it just attributed to you?
Navalny's answer: I was asked about this many times, but I'll answer again. Yes, I named Georgians as "rodents" in a Facebook post about the war, which I regret. It's not nice and generally, it leveled the whole post. As for the rest, I still think the same.

Only one conclusion can be drawn from this answer. Five years after the war, Navalny regrets the epithet he used, but has not changed his stance on the Russia-Georgia war. Seven years have passed since that answer. Has Navalny's position on the war changed? We have not heard Navalny's response to this. However, we have a comment from a member of his closest entourage, Vladimir Milov. He repeated these words in a number of interviews, including in a conversation with the Georgian Institute for Security Policy on October 9, 2020. According to Milov, he, like Alexei Navalny, supports the territorial integrity of Georgia, but does not support a forceful way of restoring it. According to him, many years have passed since the developments, he and Navalny have argued a lot about this issue, and finally the position of the latter has changed. For him, revising the borders of the post-Soviet space is unacceptable. As mentioned above, Milov is a close associate of Navalny, and he could not



Image source: Timecom/Moscow City Court via AP

have made a similar statement (repeatedly) without Navalny's consent. Hopefully, Navalny himself will tell us soon, at least in the form in which he told us that he regrets using an unethical epithet towards Georgians.

Another issue that we must address is the conspiracy theories about Navalny. Some people are convinced that Navalny is a Western agent; others believe he is Putin's successor and they are preparing the ground for his coming to power. Navalny's recent film turned out to be particularly thrilling. In the two-hour film, which can be boldly described as a masterpiece of journalistic investigation, the authors show us Putin's real lifestyle, which is far from the myth that Russia's "last emperor" lives in an ascetic way and does not care about his personal well-being. In Navalny's film, Putin's entourage was completely revealed. We saw the palace with a closed flying zone, which includes theater, casino, exclusive furniture and even an underground hockey field. We saw vineyards and wineries, golden toilets and many other elements of luxury.

It can be boldly said that this journalistic investigation intensified the protest and raised the temperature. However, the film also raised questions. How did Navalny's drone manage to penetrate a closed flying zone and shoot the palace? Where did he get the finances for expensive 3D modeling? What human resources were spent on an investigation of this scale, and so on. The "Western agent" Navalny, with the help of his "bosses", would probably find money for all this, but he could hardly get into the palace, where "even a bird can not fly in without permission". The fact that Navalny has moral support of the West does not mean that he is a project of the West.

According to the other version, Putin is preparing to leave, creating the illusion of changes for the people, and preparing Navalny as his substitute. This is also evidenced by the fact that he is preparing for changes to the Russian legislation, according to which a former president cannot be prosecuted. If this is correct, then it is not difficult to answer the above questions. Financial, human resources, or even penetrating a closed flying zone becomes entirely possible. Yet another question is posed here: why should Putin want to go absolutely dis-

credited? We can assume that he is really preparing to leave, even though the constitutional changes he has made exclude the logic of this version, but leaving absolutely discredited? It lacks all logic.

According to yet another account, not Putin himself, but the system is preparing Navalny as a successor. This question is often posed in relation to Putin's Russia. Did the system create Putin, or did Putin create the system? Everything indicates that Putin himself is the first-born of the system and not the other way around. One might really think that the system intended to replace him, but it is still hard to believe that his replacement is being looked for "outside".

All these versions remain a simple conspiracy theory due to the lack of sufficient evidence. Conspiracy theorists also find it hard to believe that the "almighty" Russian special services failed to kill Navalny with poison. But it is very easy to look back and see that this is not the first time such a thing has happened. In 2004, Anna Politkovskaya was poisoned, like Navalny, but survived. In 2006, it became necessary to fire a shot in order to kill Politkovskaya. Navalny was first poisoned in 2017, in which he lost 80% of his eyesight. In 2018, Sergei and Yulia Skripal were poisoned, but survived. There is a reality behind the conspiracy theories. In this reality, the protest against the regime in Russia is growing; the economic situation is deteriorating; those who dare to take to the streets are detained - even the only leader of the opposition is detained. In such a reality, the sympathy for Navalny is growing both in Russia and the West, but he needs support to succeed. Clearly, his support is growing, but it is almost impossible to say exactly how much.

In the 2013 Moscow mayoral election, Navalny received 27% of the votes. The election showed that his voters were mainly concentrated in the central and southwestern parts of Moscow, in the most high-income and highly educated districts. After that, Navalny was not allowed to participate in the elections. Seven years later, it is impossible to generalize this data, although we can assume that given the recent trend, the number of supporters is growing, and they mainly represent the middle class, not only in Moscow but throughout Russia, at least in big cities, because we see a wave of

protests everywhere, from St. Petersburg to Vladivostok.

Navalny in the Kremlin remains a wish as yet. It is not worth insisting that he will be able to come to power. Let us suppose, however, that this happened. Then what should we expect from him? The main line of Navalny's activism is related to fighting against corruption. His video blogs and journalistic investigations deal mainly with this topic. Navalny accuses Putin of impoverishing the country and misappropriating most of the country's resources. Navalny criticizes the so-called subsidy policy, due to which, solid financial resources flow from the federal budget to the North Caucasus, the occupied territories of Georgia, Crimea, and then disappear without a trace. Once in power, Navalny's main task should be fighting corruption, improving the system (as much as possible), improving the economic situation of the country, and getting rid of the Western sanctions. Obviously, all of this will take a lot of time and resources. Accordingly, Navalny is less likely to pursue a policy of expansionism. Clearly, it is hard to imagine that his coming into power would automatically lead to the cessation of funding for Georgia's occupied territories, the withdrawal of the occupation troops from Georgia in order to save costs, and the restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity. Even with the greatest desire (we do not yet know to what extent this desire exists), Navalny will receive a heavy legacy from Putin. In parallel to this, Navalny will have to improve relations with the West, and this is not just about sanctions. It must be a vital task for him in order to achieve real results inside the country. The world needs to see that in the Kremlin not only a person changed but also the way of thinking. "You will not grasp Russia with your mind", but there is no other logic from this perspective. Should we root for Navalny or not? Clearly, yes! First, because Navalny means change and change is always a chance, especially in Russia and especially for us. In this situation, we cannot do a lot, except to hope for the possibility of real change in Russia, to hope that Navalny will create these real changes, both for Russia and for the nations oppressed by the Kremlin, because there is simply no other possible alternative on the horizon.

BUSINESS

Georgian Statistical System Named among Top 20 in European Countries

BY ANA DUMBADZE

For the first time in history, the Georgian Statistical System was named among the top 20 in European countries, in the Open Data Inventory (ODIN) Report 2020, reports Georgian National Statistics Office (Geostat).

The organization 'Open Data Watch' has published its fifth Open Data Inventory (ODIN) report, which evaluates the official statistics of countries around the world based on various criteria.

Based on the ODIN overall assessment

of the Georgian Statistical System, in 2020, Georgia earned 69 points. At the same time, the country's rating has improved and ranks 8 places higher compared to the previous rating, and Georgia has moved from 39th to 31st place among the countries of the world.

The report shows Georgia outstrips 12 EU countries (Italy, France, Belgium, Portugal, Romania, Hungary, Luxembourg, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Latvia, Malta) and for the first time in history, was named among the top 20 European countries.

Based on the same report, Georgia also outperforms developed countries such as Japan, the United Kingdom, China and Indonesia. At the same time, by

ranking Georgian Statistical System is at the same level as the ranking of countries such as Austria, Switzerland and Mexico.

The purpose of ODIN is to provide an objective assessment of the coverage and access to official statistics based on the open data definition. For almost five years, Open Data Watch has been describing and evaluating data by countries in the world.

Evaluation elements by categories and criteria are available on this link

In 2020, open data evaluations were conducted in 187 countries, covering 22 statistical categories and 65 indicators. Based on the assessment, Georgia is the



Image: Open Data Watch. Source: Geostat

leader in the region and ranks first place. The assessment covers the main areas of economic, social, demographic and environmental statistics, such as national accounts, population and demography, employment, unemployment and price statistics, education and healthcare, gender statistics, crime statistics, poverty

rates, public finances, external trade, tax balance, agriculture, environment, energy, etc. The evaluation methodology for each indicator is posted on the Open Data Watch website.

The ODIN 2020 report, which includes data on Georgia, was published a few weeks ago, announces Geostat.

EU-Supported Keda LEADER & ENPARD Khulo Projects Organize the Online Business Forum: Invest in Mountainous Ajara



Fridonhouse – Milisi Village



Hill Inn – Dandalo Village

Modern digitalism, strengthened by the COVID restrictions, pushed many events to take on remote platforms. The “Invest in Mountainous Ajara” business forum was one of the few such events that succeeded in having active participants despite it being online. Many interested parties across the country joined the event through ZOOM and Facebook LIVE to be a part of Keda and Khulo LAGs’ Upper Adjara Business Forum “Invest in Mountainous Ajara” on February 3-4, implemented with the support of the European Union. The event was organized in the framework of the EU-funded ENPARD projects “Keda LEADER” and “ENPARD Khulo” by the implementing organizations CENN and Caritas Czech Republic, in partnership with the Tbilisi Startup Bureau.

The event was opened by the Minister of Agriculture of Ajara, Giorgi Surmanidze, Program Manager for Rural Development, Civil Protection and Crisis Management at the EU Delegation to Georgia, Ketevan Khutsishvili; CENN Executive Director, Nana Janashia, and

Head of Mission of Caritas Czech Republic in Georgia, Jan Blinka.

“Ajara is one of the target regions of the EU’s rural development program,” said Ketevan Khutsishvili. “We work together with the Government of Ajara, partners, and local civil society organizations to create new economic opportunities, increase employment, and promote economic diversification in rural areas. More importantly, the aim is to make these new opportunities sustainable so they will continue to function beyond the EU funded programs.”

“The Keda LEADER project has been successful in promoting inclusive rural growth and improving the well-being of rural communities via the implementation of innovative approaches, which generated diverse employment opportunities. The aim of the business forum is to stimulate investments and business partnerships, which will contribute to strengthening local economic activities,” said Nana Janashia, CENN Executive Director.

The Business Forum aimed to help local entrepreneurs expand business networks, support economic diversifica-

tion and stimulate investments and innovations in Mountainous Ajara. The event focused on two main themes, Agriculture and Tourism, and entailed panel discussions and business-to-business (B2B) meetings.

The economic potential, opportunities, and challenges were also discussed during the event, which was attended by local entrepreneurs, leading businesses in both sectors, international organizations and representatives of the government. A facilitated networking also took place within the forum, where companies and the audience members had an opportunity to register for the evening networking session and to present their work to the ENPARD beneficiaries. Several companies registered, among them TBC and Georgian Travel Guide, and presented new opportunities to the beneficiaries.

During the forum, the participants had an opportunity to meet innovative and successful businesses in the tourism and agriculture sectors in Upper Ajara.

The theme of the panels focused on innovations and the future trends within which entrepreneurs showcased individual projects:

THE FUTURE OF FOOD

Korpa Ltd. constructed an innovative, energy efficient, and multifunctional greenhouse in the town of Keda, producing microgreens, high value wheatgrass oil, organic chickens/eggs, plant oils, and potted plants, which are then sold to restaurants, hotels, and fitness and yoga centers, mainly in the Ajara region and in Tbilisi.

Other Keda and Khulo LAGs beneficiaries also joined the event, giving presentations about their business achievements and seeking further networking opportunities. Among them was Chateau Iveri, Varjanisi Village, headed by Merab Beridze. With the support of the Keda LEADER project, the Beridze family turned their business into a high-class ethno-style hotel with a winery.

The vine planted on the slopes of Varjanisi has been cared for by the Beridze family for more than a century, and the cellar preserves the ancient tradition of wine aging. They offer various touristic services: accommodation, meals, experiencing local cuisine, folk art and crafts, and wine tasting. The Beridze family have been actively involved in the family business and hosting domestic and international tourists for many years.

GODERDZI ALPINE GARDEN

The audience was also introduced to the Goderdzi Alpine Garden, which is situated in Goderdzi Village of the Khulo Municipality, and it is the only Alpinarium in the Caucasus region. Over the past years, the Alpine Garden has developed its infrastructure significantly, allowing for maximum comfort and the expansion of services.

GLAMPING TAGO

Glamping TAGO introduced a new concept of tourist services, founded by Jonas Shaik. The glamping facility is located in Tago village in Khulo municipality, near the cable car station, and includes a yurt restaurant/ bar and 6 tents with different categories. The project began in 2017 and will be completed in March 2021. According to Jonas’ concept, Glamping TAGO will host guests who want to relax and be surrounded by panoramic views, far from urban lifestyle.

Representatives from another successfully implemented project attended from Kokotauri Village. Through the support of the Keda LEADER project, a vermicompost enterprise was built, and the village started the production of vermicompost and its active use in plant



Chateau Iveri – Varjanisi Village



care. The method helps promote the reduction of harmful chemicals, and is produced entirely with a natural, organic process that involves providing a biomass to worms which then process the mass and produce a biofertilizer full of plant nutrients.

The audience was also introduced to the new mountain biking route which runs through the Keda and Shuakhevi municipalities. The project is the first in Georgia to meet international standards and is being implemented by the NNLE Tourism Product Development Agency of Ajara.

Due to the restrictions imposed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the event took place online via the “Invest in Mountainous Ajara” Zoom platform and Keda LAG facebook.

The project, Keda Leader, is implemented with financial support from the

EU by CENN, in partnership with the Center for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia (CSR DG), Institute of Democracy (IoD), and the Austrian Institute for Regional Studies and Spatial Planning (ÖIR).

Since June 2017, Caritas Czech Republic in Georgia (CCRG), with the support of the EU, in partnership with Croatian Rural Development Network (HMRR) and PMC Research Center, has been implementing the project “Rural Development and Diversification in Khulo Municipality” in Khulo municipality.

The EU is supporting agriculture and rural development in Georgia through its ENPARD Program. Implemented since 2013 with a total budget of EUR 179.5 million (2013-2022), the main goal of ENPARD is to reduce rural poverty in Georgia. More information on ENPARD is available at: www.enpard.ge



Goderdzi Alpine Garden



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Carrefour Partners With Wolt & Mastercard to Support Georgian Children in Need



Carrefour, owned and operated by Majid Al Futtaim in Georgia, has underlined its commitment to providing the people and communities it serves value, quality and choice, while positively impacting the lives of its customers. The brand has joined forces with leading food-delivery platform, Wolt, and multinational financial services corporation — Mastercard — to reward customers and empower young Georgians with the launch of two new campaigns.

The first of these campaigns will see Wolt, Mastercard and Carrefour come together to offer customers more access the brand's diverse range of quality products. From 8 February 2021, customers in Tbilisi and Batumi will get 10 GEL cashback on every order when they shop for Carrefour products using Wolt — which stocks over 1,000 Carrefour items — and pay with MasterCard.

The minimum order amount under this campaign has been reduced to 20 GEL, which makes ordering through the fast delivery service even more affordable.

This promotion will allow customers to enjoy a greater degree of comfort, ease and convenience; as well as increased access to a wide assortment of products available for delivery, including fresh fruits and vegetables, household items, and hygiene supplies. These products are gathered in one space, and customers can choose and buy them without leaving home, safeguarding their health and wellbeing in the wake of COVID-19.

Additionally — over the course of the campaign — Wolt-using Carrefour customers will also be gifted significant amount of cash rewards, with this money being deposited back into their Wolt accounts.

This promotion will dovetail with a social campaign initiated by Carrefour and Mastercard to support vulnerable Georgian children, while safeguarding communities from COVID-19 by encouraging the use of contactless payment. Set up to help disadvantaged students across the country, the initiative will provide less fortunate students access to the technology, devices and learning tools they need to succeed.

This campaign will see 1% of all Mastercard transactions completed in a Carrefour Georgia stores donated to SOS

Children's Village beneficiaries. These donations will be used to purchase tablets for 109 children, ensuring they are able to further their education and realise their potential.

SOS Children's Village Georgia has served to provide urgent assistance to young people across the country for over 30 years — since the 1990s. Today, the work of SOS Children's Villages has expanded to include working with young people and families in local communities; and providing access to quality education.

Igor Stepanov, General Manager of Mastercard in Georgia and Armenia, said: "When paying with Mastercard in Carrefour branches, customers will be given the opportunity to get involved and contribute to an important and significant project — the SOS Children's Village — ensuring socially vulnerable children across the country can take full advantage of the quality education they deserve to fulfil their dreams and life goals. This campaign is especially important in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, as it equips these gifted students with the tablets, devices and remote

learning tools they need to succeed. Together, we can help change their lives for the better."

Christophe Orcet, Country Manager of Carrefour Georgia at Majid Al Futtaim Retail, added: "We are all proud of our work with our dedicated partners. These collaborations remind us all of the importance of community spirit; demonstrating what we can accomplish by working hand-in-hand to change people's lives. Carrefour has always been committed to supporting the communities it serves. Whether working with Wolt, Mastercard or SOS Children's Village, we are determined to create even more great moments for everyone, everyday."

These collaborations are a translation of Carrefour's position as a trusted local partner creating value for the local industry and economy. In teaming up with platforms such as Wolt, Carrefour continues to position itself as a pioneer of tomorrow's retail; spurred on by digital growth and a commitment to finding smarter ways of operating and delivering more seamless, tech-driven shopper experiences.



Euro-Asian Transit & Georgian Finances in the Middle Ages

BY PROF. DR. TEDO DUNDUA,
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Today, Georgia serves as a busy commercial bridge to Asia, involved in numerous big projects funded by both European and Asian financial organizations. And this mirrors what took place in the past. For centuries, Georgia, while integrated with Europe through political, economic and cultural links, also had extensive ties with the economies of Asian countries.

Georgia's integration with Euro-Asian transit and finances is well reflected in the Georgian numismatics of the Medieval period. Take, for example, the 12th c. which arguably saw the biggest financial challenge when Middle Eastern countries stopped issuing silver coins (the "silver famine"). Silver bullions kept in state coffers still made the prices, but only copper money was in circulation. The ratio of silver to copper was at least 1 to 10, i.e. the total weight of copper coins could be 10 times more,



Georgian coin before "silver famine". St. Virgin Blachernitissa type coins — David IV's (1089-1125) second minting. Silver.
Obverse: Bust of Virgin orans, nimbate, wearing pallium and maphorium. Greek legend MP — ΘΥ, to l. and r. from nimbus.
Reverse: Cross in the center and marginal Georgian legend — "Christ, exalt David, the king and Sebastos [?]"
<http://geonumismatics.tsu.ge/en/catalogue/types/?type=47>

flooding the markets.

That is why everyone came to agree on a new ratio of 1 to 6, thus making their copper issues acceptable abroad. Georgians did the same. Their "irregularly" struck copper coins can be seen

with Arabic legends/inscriptions. See below for some examples.

Circle around and marginal Arabic legend — May God increase her glory, and lengthen her shadow, and strengthen her prosperity.



Georgian coin during "silver famine". Coins of queen Tamar (1184-1210) with her signature. "Irregularly" struck copper.
Obverse: Signature of Tamar in the center of a wreathed frame. Marginal Georgian legend — In the name of God, this silver (!) piece was struck in the K'oronikon 407 (=1187).
Reverse: Arabic legend in five lines — The great queen, glory of the world and faith, Tamar, daughter of Giorgi, champion of the Messiah, may God increase her victories.
<http://geonumismatics.tsu.ge/en/catalogue/types/?type=68>



Coins of Giorgi IV (1210-1223) with the legend "Giorgi, son of Tamar". "Irregularly" struck copper.
Obverse: Georgian legend in the center of a wreathed frame — Giorgi, son of Tamar. Marginal Georgian legend — In the name of God, this silver (!) piece was struck in the K'oronikon 430 (=1210).
Reverse: Arabic legend in four lines — King of the Kings, glory of the world and faith, Giorgi, son of Tamar, sword of the Messiah. Circle around. Persian legend outside the circle — In the name of the most saint God this silver piece was struck in the year 430.
<http://geonumismatics.tsu.ge/en/catalogue/types/?type=71>

The Importance of Human Capital in the Aviation Industry



Ana Kurtanidze

ANALYSIS BY ANA KURTANIDZE,
MAIA CHINCHALADZE,
AND NINO DIERASHVILI

Any robust economy is largely dependent on the functioning of one vital sector of its infrastructure - aviation. The function of civil aviation, which includes the implementation of interstate and long-distance communication, as well as meeting the needs of the population in terms of transportation, services and trade, makes it a priority pillar for the country's economy, while its special and complex technical equipment, specificity of operation, costliness of services and, most importantly, functioning in diverse economic fields, grants the aviation industry its uniqueness. It operates, on the one hand, in compliance with the legal, economic, normative and organizational principles defined by its own country, and on the other hand, adheres to the administrative, operational and economic norms of regulation dictated by international standards.

Millenia ago, humans discovered the importance of a practice that we today call elementary ergonomics, by use of which it became possible to increase labor productivity. But only in the last century has there been a leap forward in the evolution of ergonomics and the importance of the human factor.

Ergonomics, also called 'the human factor,' is a scientific discipline that comprehensively examines the capabilities of the individual in relation to his use of

technical means. When designing a workplace, specialists rely on knowledge of human anatomy and labor productivity so as to achieve maximum work potential with minimal damage to the workers' physical and mental health.

The formation of the theory of human capital is chiefly associated with the name of U. Petty, who, in 1690, pioneered the idea that capital could have an intangible form too, and termed it the 'living forces of action'. Petty described this force as an inalienable element of the country's wealth and reserves, which must participate in the elimination of social hardship.

In 1776, A. Smith asserted that knowledge and skills are the property of the worker, and not the organization he works for.

J.B Say defined capital investment as the preparation of supplies for the next generation through education, independence and dignity. Agreeing with Smith's definition, Say maintained that useful skills and abilities are an intangible form of capital, formed by virtue of continuous human investment.

J.S. Mill calls productive labor the creator of wealth. In his view, the wealth of the country implies the skill, energy and perseverance of the workers.

According to S. Fischer, human capital is an ingrained ability in humans to generate income. Part of it is acquired at birth, but a lot also depends on systematic education and practice. Therefore, says Fischer, human capital accumulates much like physical capital.

I. Schumpeter, one of the first scholars to theorize about entrepreneurship, also engaged in vigorous analysis of the ever-increasing complexity of capital structure in view of its new intangible forms.

In the twentieth century, E. Denison developed a classification of factors for economic growth. From 23 factors, four he attributed to labor; four to capital; one to land; and 14 to the contribution of scientific and technical progress. In Denison's system, the quality of the workforce comes first, which in turn depends on the quality of education.

The function of human resource development is to take the initiative and assist in any matter related to the staff of the organization. These activities are all marked by a concern for employee well-being, as well as ensuring assistance and training in a way that provides mutual benefit for the employee and the organization.

Air traffic control in the airspace of Georgia is carried out by Sakaeronavigatsia Ltd.,

which provides air traffic services and flight safety in the take-off and landing areas of Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Batumi and Mestia airports. Independent airlines, airports and travel agencies carry out passenger and freight transportation. Educational institutions, together with civil aviation specialists, provide training and retraining of flight, engineering and technical personnel, while research institutes carry out research and design activities for aerodromes, ensure the development of aircraft flight and maintenance procedures, and work to improve air traffic control.

Independent use of Georgian airspace began in 1992. The new conditions required the refinement of the air traffic service, acquisition of modern equipment and designing new international navigation routes. The Georgian civil aviation system is composed of Georgian air carriers, airports, navigation systems and other organizations related to avia-

The same applies to the preparation of plans and maps, as well as documentation, aircraft operation manuals, etc. Knowledge in the field of the human factor is increasingly used in personnel selection, preparation and testing.

The urge to master the knowledge of human factors arose during the First World War. The optimization of industrial production was driven by the incentive to perform military duties more efficiently. During World War II, there emerged an even greater demand for refinement of military and technical management techniques. At the time, staff selection and training had risen to a scientific level.

The increased interest in the role of the human factor sprang from the rising concern for the issues of security. Applying knowledge in the field of aviation and the human factor requires taking into account the maximum capabilities of human beings.

In the aviation industry, colossal attention is paid to the safe interaction of humans with other components, with due regard for human capabilities. For instance, a complex automatic or semi-automatic system is used to disseminate or reflect meteorological information, which must provide the possibility of non-automated input of data on meteorological elements, which cannot otherwise be observed through automatic means.

In order to ensure safety and optimize human capabilities, the ability of a person to act in accordance with the safety and effectiveness measures of the aviation industry should be consistent with the human resources instructions set out in the Human Factors Training Manual.

Effective management of human resources plays a pivotal role in the functioning of modern economies. It affects the development of the country's economy as a whole. Georgia's economy has suffered significantly due to the current global crisis: in the first quarter of 2020, real economic growth declined by 1.5% compared to the same period of the previous year.

Any pandemic can hit the economy hard. During the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020, Georgia's foreign trade turnover decreased by 2.7%. In 2019, about 211,000 persons were unemployed. As a result of the crisis, the number of unemployed people is expected to reach 560,000. What remains the primary goal for Georgia is to minimize contact between people and in so doing curtail the spread of

the disease.

A free market produces not only tangible or intangible goods but also ideas. Ideas are also goods. The importance of the human factor has been mounting, with huge emphasis on the uniqueness and potential of human resources. At times as such, the role of human capital plays a crucial role in finding ways out of the economic crisis. The new mission of the human factor is to help us prepare for an innovative, robust economy.

Today, the mission of the human factor is to increase competitiveness, improve the management system, introduce effective mechanisms to minimize risks and dangers, and in this manner guarantee the most important condition - security.

It is necessary to focus on the human factor in the aviation sphere. We must first study what the human factor is and then use this knowledge to provide practical guidance for persons employed in this field. The collection and dissemination of information on human factors enables the international aviation community to ensure the safe and efficient operation of airlines.

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Maia Chinchaladze

tion services, which carry out entrepreneurial activities independently of each other and in accordance with the Law of Georgia on Entrepreneurs. The unity of their activities creates a system that is designed to satisfy the consumers' interests.

In the early stages of aviation development, many problems are related to issues such as vibration, temperature changes, acceleration, and the impact of these forces on humans. Physiologists, psychologists and physicians are well aware that human physiology and human role optimization are reflected in all aspects of human activity. Such activities include decision-making process and cognition, designing cabin controls, devising modes of communication and using software.



Nino Dierashvili



Miners Strike in Tkibuli

BY ANA DUMBADZE

A number of miners have gone on strike in Tkibuli, a mining town in west-central Georgia, Imereti region. The miners are on strike in the Dzidziguri mine, refusing to leave as a form of protest against the reduction of salaries.

Miners claim that they received halved salaries for mining, less than planned, in January.

"The company, due to non-fulfillment of the plan, decided to use the rules stipulated in the contract and not to pay more than 45 GEL per day to the miners. The most important demand is that the

miners be reimbursed for the amount specified in the plan," one miner told Formula TV, noting that the representatives of the company refuse to satisfy the miners' requirements.

In turn, Georgian Industrial Group 'Saknakshiri' responded to the miners' protest, claiming that they couldn't fulfill the plan and mined less coal than planned in January, which reflected on the salaries.

Further, the company noted that the miners on strike refused to leave the mine, which has led to a "Gross violation of safety rules and an emergency situation."

"A special commission has been set up to investigate the circumstances in which the staff failed to fulfill the work plan within the next 10 days," added the representatives of 'Saknakshiri.'

Awaiting the Vaccines: An Interview with Famous Georgian Allergist/Immunologist

BY TIKO ZURABISHVILI

It all started on February 26, 2020, when the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in Georgia. Followed by a binge of panic-buying, lockdowns, social distancing, and multiple other regulations, over 262,000 people have been infected in the country to this day. Face masks and hand sanitizers became essential parts of everyday life, we are still getting used to working and studying from home, and most people think twice before deciding to hug their loved ones.

While COVID-19 vaccines have been introduced and authorized in an unprecedentedly short amount of time, the vaccination is yet to kick off in Georgia. The country is expecting the vaccine rollout to begin by the end of February, starting with the immunization of medical staff. Since there are numerous questions and misconceptions surrounding the vaccine and the process of vaccination itself, we decided to interview famous Georgian allergist/immunologist Bidzina Kulumbegov, who thoroughly discussed the issues regarding COVID-19 vaccination and the epidemic situation in the country.

HOW WOULD YOU ASSESS 2020? DID GEORGIA MANAGE TO EFFECTIVELY HANDLE THE PANDEMIC?

Initially, the virus was not taken seriously in the world. However, the National Center for Disease Control and the Government of Georgia took appropriate steps to prevent the expansion of the virus from the very beginning. The introduction of thermal screenings at the airports and similar regulations ensured a manageable epidemic situation by spring. Since we were dealing with a new infection, its treatments were refined only by summer, which gave us time to learn from the mistakes of others. On the other hand, I think the initial stability made us think that we had defeated the virus, and people decided they could safely return to their old lifestyles. Moreover, political processes and the parliamentary election campaigns added to relaxed regulations, resulted in a worsened epidemic situation by October.

WHAT WOULD YOU POINT OUT AS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE FOR OUR HEALTHCARE MANAGEMENT?

The biggest challenge, of course, was that too many patients got infected at the same time. To be honest, we faced many logistic problems, such as ambulances arriving late. Western countries like the US, Great Britain and Belgium

also experienced similar shortcomings. However, while our healthcare system faced its limitations, our medical personnel persevered. Even though we had more hospitalizations than many European countries, the introduction of COVID hotels also helped. That's why I believe that the medical sector overcame its struggles in a worthy manner.

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSON LEARNED FROM THE EPIDEMIC CRISIS?

When the expansion of a virus starts, we should learn that the limitation of mobility and wearing face masks are two of the most important preventive measures. We saw a dramatic increase of COVID-19 cases in Batumi by the end of August. Had we closed the Adjara region before then, I think we wouldn't have faced the worsened epidemic situation later in Tbilisi and the rest of Georgia. That's why we shouldn't make the same mistake this spring. If we see an increase in confirmed cases after loosening the regulations, the government should listen to epidemiologists more.

WHAT IS YOUR PANDEMIC FORECAST FOR 2021? DO YOU FEEL MORE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE UPCOMING YEAR?

I certainly feel more optimistic about 2021, for several reasons. First of all, over 100 million people have already been vaccinated in the world. In Georgia, we are expecting to receive 700 thousand doses of vaccine from the COVAX platform. However, our ambition is to immunize at least 60% of the Georgian population. That's why we need bilateral negotiations with countries that bought more doses than they actually needed. Secondly, seasonal changes somehow affect the spread of the virus, and if we manage to vaccinate many people during spring and summer, it will win us time before autumn.

WHAT KINDS OF VACCINES ARE AVAILABLE IN THE WORLD TODAY?

There are four types of COVID-19 vaccines: protein vaccines such as Novax, viral vector vaccines (Oxford/AstraZeneca), genetic vaccines (Pfizer, Moderna), and inactivated vaccines (Sinovac). Some of them have already been authorized, while others are still under medical trials. The Pfizer vaccines, which are expected to arrive in Georgia by the end of February, have proved to be 95% effective.

SINCE COVID-19 VACCINES WERE CREATED IN AN EXTREMELY SHORT TIME, MANY PEOPLE ARE SKEPTICAL ABOUT THEIR EFFECTIVENESS



AND SAFETY. WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO THEM?

I would tell them that it's true that COVID-19 vaccines were created in the shortest amount of time in the history of medicine. However, we should take into consideration the financial resources mobilized to create this vaccine. In addition, lots of people were motivated to participate in clinical trials. Additionally, all the respectable companies that worked on the vaccines declare that there have been no compromises made regarding safety parameters. Multiple studies point out that these vaccines have no fatal or damaging results on the human body.

IF A PERSON IS ALLERGIC, IS IT SAFE FOR THEM TO RECEIVE THE CORONAVIRUS VACCINE?

The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines do not include the famous allergens present in traditional vaccines, such as glair, gelatin, and latex. However, another allergen, known as polyethylene glycol (PEG) was a necessary ingredient in the preparation of these vaccines. It is generally recommended that if the person is allergic, they should still get vaccinated, but

should remain under medical supervision for 30 minutes after getting their shots. If they have an allergic reaction within those 30 minutes, they shouldn't receive the second dose later.

IS IT POSSIBLE TO VACCINATE AN ALREADY INFECTED PATIENT?

They don't vaccinate infected patients, and the recovered ones can get their shots about three months after their health is restored.

WHAT CAN THE LONG-TERM CONTRAINDICATIONS OF THE VACCINES BE?

Any kind of contraindications will be revealed within a month after getting the shot. However, all documented side effects have proved temporary and manageable so far. Local reactions like arm pain, tiredness and headaches might show up, but they will be gone within 24-48 hours.

THERE HAVE BEEN NUMEROUS CASES WHEN THE CONTACTS OF COVID-19 PATIENTS DIDN'T

CONTRACT THE VIRUS. HOW MIGHT THIS BE EXPLAINED?

It can be explained with several factors. There is a hypothesis that some people have a receptor system which doesn't let the virus infect the body. Such people can be categorized as COVID-resistant. There is ongoing research to determine what contributes to such resistance. The second aspect might be that if a person gets infected, their family members start to act more carefully by keeping distance and wearing face masks. The Coronavirus is characterized by the minimal infective dose, meaning that only a number of viral particles are needed in order for someone to get infected.

A SINGLE CASE OF ONE OF THE NEW COVID-19 STRAINS WAS CONFIRMED IN GEORGIA A WHILE AGO. IS THERE A RISK OF ITS SPREAD IN THE COUNTRY?

Since we still don't have many arrivals from foreign countries, the risk is currently rather small, but after the regulations are loosened, that risk might increase.

WHAT ABOUT CASES OF REINFECTION?

There has been no documented case of reinfection in Georgia so far. On a global scale, this issue still remains vague. It is currently thought that 1 in 1000 COVID-19 patients might contract the virus for the second time. People who have recovered from Coronavirus are left with strong immunity to it for at least 6 months. This gives us hope that the chance of reinfection is very low.

AS AN ALLERGIST, YOU HAVE MANY CHILD PATIENTS. IN YOUR OPINION, HOW DOES LONG-TERM ISOLATION FROM THEIR PEERS AFFECT THEIR HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT?

It is a very serious problem. If children are allergic, too much time spent indoors might actually worsen their condition. That's why all medical experts recommend governments to open schools and educational facilities as soon as the pandemic situation improves.

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE CURRENT REGULATIONS IN THE COUNTRY?

The regulations should gradually be loosened. On the other hand, there are regulations which help in the management of the pandemic, but really damage the well-being of our society. I would point out the importance of municipal transport. People who don't have their own cars, were somewhat paralyzed in this situation. That's why the country should do everything to prevent the closure of municipal transport in the future.

Batumi Stadium Included in Poll for Top Arenas Built in 2020

BY ANA DUMBADZE

The new stadium in Georgia's Black Sea resort of Batumi has been included in a traditional survey launched by the website StadiumDB.com, which aims to show the best sports arena in the world built last year.

The latest survey includes 20 stadiums constructed worldwide in 2020. The best stadium of the year is chosen by a jury consisting of famous architects, and the winner is chosen by the following parameters: architecture, functionality and innovation.

The poll is conducted among fans, and the jury makes its own decision. Fans must select the best 5 arenas, while their favorite must be marked with 5 stars.

In addition to the Batumi Stadium, the top 20 includes arenas built in Qatar, the US, Israel, England, Turkey, Chile, Japan, Australia, Switzerland, Côte d'Ivoire, Romania, Malaysia and China.

The poll will end on March 7, and the results will be announced on March 10, 2021.

The new football stadium with a capacity to place 20,000 spectators that complies with Category IV of the UEFA standards was opened in Georgia's seaside town of Batumi, the capital of the Adjara region, back in October.



Watching Snow Fall: Etseri, Svaneti

BY TONY HANMER

I'm writing this some days earlier than necessary, unsure of how electricity and internet connection will be for a while. Heavy snow can affect them and, in contrast to the weather of last week's article, though not by surprise, it's snowing dinosaurs out there, forget the canids and felines.

Those of us with smooth corrugated metal roofs are watching the snow slide off with great relief. It builds up, in these mild temperatures, until the pressure of its own weight melts the undermost layer. Then gravity and the slope of the roof take over. The effect for us, in our big two-story house, is one of continuous white-shrouded bodies being tossed off the roof with a whoosh and a whump, as I have written before: the mafia's busy up there!

For those with painted roofs, however, the story is quite the opposite. The snow simply sticks and refuses to slide. Enough so that usually several times a winter, the owners, or kind neighbors, are forced to ascend with shovels and move the stuff by hand. An hours-long process with multiple helpers. The alternative is evident in some of the abandoned houses in our village and elsewhere. A single winter without such attention can bring the roof down under its multi-ton weight of soft, fluffy but inexorable snow. Then the weather has free access to the entire rest of the house, suddenly exposed,



and ruinous decay comes in. Rust, mildew, rot, the end writ large if slow. So much easier to prevent than to cure!

The disastrous winter of early 1987 is seared freezingly into the minds of all who are old enough to remember it. Across Georgia there were floods from the rain; but in the mountains, avalanches.

A whole hamlet of Ushguli was damaged and virtually abandoned, roofless to this day. The village was only saved from becoming a ghost town altogether by its then mayor and surgeon, who refused to leave, galvanizing the community into sticking it out and turning its fate: Anzor Ratiani, lionized still for his courage.

I am sure that some of our neighbors are thinking back now, as the snow continues to fall thickly and will do so for at least another day: what if...? Here in Etseri, you could walk out the 2nd floor windows of the house we bought onto snow. Roof-clearing crews slaved away in 8-hour brigades day and night as the

snow came for about three weeks non-stop. Opening doors in the morning, you were greeted with a white wall from floor up, the only way out to tunnel, if you were lucky enough to have a shovel indoors. Livestock was similarly locked into its barns, unreachable except by heroic feat. Power was out, of course; there were no cell phones then, and landlines were similarly cut by the weather. It's hard to imagine without going through it, which God forbid.

Nowadays we do have forecasts (usually as right as mountain weather's vagaries allow) to help us prepare. The whole situation is different, and what happened then was a once-per-century Perfect Storm, thankfully. But, although the mathematically chaotic nature of weather makes such disasters rare, their regularity is only statistical! Again, God forbid. At least we are much more forewarned now, which makes a huge difference in also being forearmed and in being able to make informed decisions. For now, we will just expect it to pass, help out the neediest neighbors on their roofs if necessary, and breathe a sigh of relief when spring comes.

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

CULTURE

Berlinale to Showcase Salomé Jashi's Documentary 'Taming the Garden'

Georgian film director Salomé Jashi's poetic documentary 'Taming the Garden' will be screened at the Berlin International Film Festival (Berlinale) this summer.

Due to the global health crisis, the Berlinale has designed a new festival format for its 71st edition, organizing two separate events: one for industry professionals and one for cinema enthusiasts.

The European Film Market, Berlinale Co-Production Market, Berlinale Talents and the World Cinema Fund will kick off the festival in March in an online format. In June, there will be a summer event with film screenings for the public, both in cinemas and outdoors.

Jashi's oeuvre has been lauded at the Sundance Film Festival for its "astonishing cinematic style".

"Humanity's desire to control the natural world is taken to extreme lengths in 'Taming The Garden.' Salome Jashi's quietly absorbing documentary charts the systematic uprooting and transportation of ancient trees from small communities in rural Georgia to the private gardens of a wealthy individual. The clash between poverty and privilege is one of several intriguing elements in a film where the offbeat subject matter and striking imagery make an entrancing combination", reads

the Sundance review.

Jashi's film conveys the artistic value of a timeless aesthetic experience, of the illuminating moments both in and out of time. She clothes the still imagery with the dynamic motion of ideas and feelings, the inner music of an image. The synthesis of these aesthetic experiences, real and imagined, point to some definite roots- the Nature that gave birth to men who so seek to destroy it.

"Jashi lets the images and the Georgian people speak for themselves. The closing credits acknowledge a roll call of villages including Alambari, Laituri and Supsa. There is no commentary or context but gradually we gain a sense of what these trees have meant to people. They are a piece of many family stories, markers of history passing, places of shelter and livelihoods that are ripe with memories", reads the review.

The idea seems to be about instigating sensation, creating colorful ambiguity that appeases the heart and the mind in equal measure, and navigating through a range of colorful metaphors. The images are endowed with power to prefigure, foreshadow or epitomize ideas and designs that greatly transcend their traditional value as concrete earthly objects. The part of Jashi's system is that "all things are in every-thing", implying the



inherent unity and sympathy of every entity with every other, by virtue of their common origin in the One. All matter has a spark of divinity.

"Trees have been fundamental in my life," Jashi says. "In my childhood, I would often go to this huge yard in my village

where many children would gather. There were several large trees there, and each had a different significance. One was for gathering around, one was for climbing on, another was a kind of symbol of strength. Trees mean a lot to me, and to others too."

Jashi's documentary has been selected alongside works by Ephraim Asili (The Inheritance), Avi Mograbi (The First 54 Years), Fabrizio Ferraro (The Luminous View), among other distinguished directors, with screenings planned for June 9-20.



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