



FOCUS ON IVANISHVILI

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Corona Update: Restrictions to Remain until February 1

BY ANA DUMBADZE

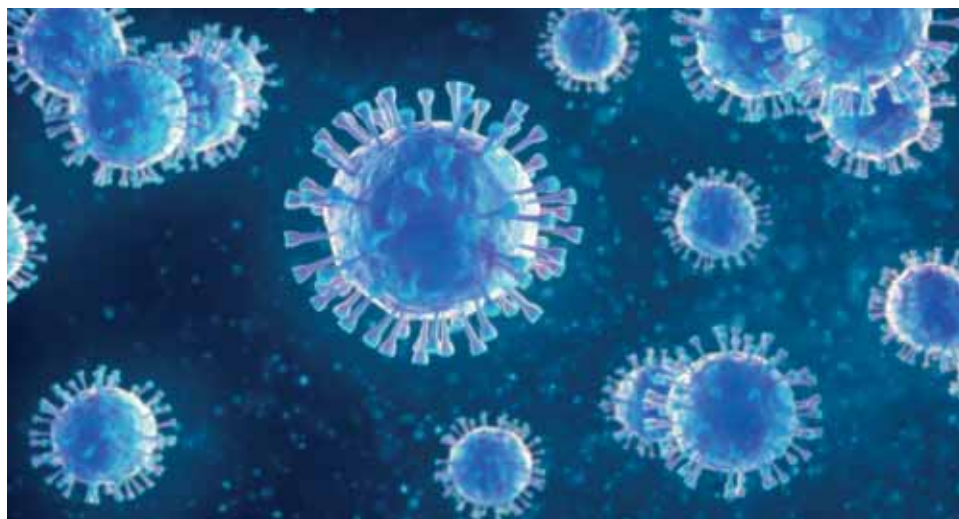
The epidemiological situation in Georgia appears relatively stable as we welcome the new year, with the number of new cases detected daily reducing from over 3000 pre-Christmas to 1500-2000 on average this week, against a background of intensive testing. The country's capital Tbilisi remains a hotspot in terms of the virus spread, with at least 500 newly detected cases daily.

The above decrease in new cases can be considered the result of current regulations and restrictions in force across the country. Accordingly, the government on Monday decided to further expand the period of restrictions and announced that the current COVID restrictions will be maintained until February 1.

THE CURRENT RESTRICTIONS CLARIFIED

Shopping malls will be allowed to open and function in compliance with the regulations from February 1, with employees having to be tested for coronavirus.

Restrictions on the operation of municipal and intercity public transport (trains, buses and minibuses), and on shops and both outdoor and



indoor markets, have been extended until February 1, despite suggestions that they would be freed mid-January. Municipal and intercity traffic has been banned since November 28, 2020, with only cars and taxis allowed.

Government representatives note that they will use the period before February 1 for active meetings with representatives of the business sector to ensure safe opening in February for both transport and businesses.

VACCINATIONS

Regarding the vaccination plan, on Tuesday, Health Minister Ekaterine Tikaradze announced that the Georgian population will be vaccinated with Pfizer "in the near future." She made the relevant statement during a meeting with US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degnan.

The Minister of Health informed the American diplomat in detail about the epidemic situation in Georgia.

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GALT & TAGGART									
CREATING OPPORTUNITIES									
Prepared for Georgia Today Business by									
As of 11-Jan-2021									
Markets					Markets				
STOCKS	Price	w/w	m/m	BONDS	Price	w/w	m/m		
Bank of Georgia (BGEO LN)	GBP 12.30	+0.8%	+3.9%	GEORG 04/21	101.07 (YTM 2.94%)	+0.0%	-0.6%		
Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	55.66	+8.9%	+11.4%	GEL / USD	3.2950	-0.3%	+0.3%		
Georgia Capital (CGEO LN)	GBP 5.40	+0.9%	+3.4%	GEL / EUR	4.0035	-1.1%	+0.7%		
Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	1 843.89	-5.1%	+0.2%	GEL / GBP	4.4527	-0.7%	+2.5%		
TBC Bank Group (TBCG LN)	GBP 13.06	+4.0%	+9.7%	GEL / CHF	3.7013	-1.4%	+0.3%		
				GEL / RUB	0.0442	-0.5%	-1.8%		
				GEL / TRY	0.4405	-1.0%	+5.5%		
				GEL / AZN	1.9384	-0.3%	+0.3%		
				GEL / AMD	0.0063	-	-		
				GEL / UAH	0.1171	+0.8%	-0.3%		
				EUR / USD	0.8230	+0.8%	-0.3%		
				GBP / USD	0.7399	+0.4%	-2.2%		
				CHF / USD	0.8903	+1.0%	+2.0%		
				RUB / USD	74.6668	+0.5%	+0.4%		
				TRY / USD	7.4779	+0.7%	-4.7%		
				AZN / USD	1.6988	-	-0.4%		



Lithuania Approves Sakartvelo as Georgia's Official Name

BY NINI DAKHUNDARIDZE

Lithuania has approved "Sakartvelas" (Sakartvelo) as the official Lithuanian name for Georgia. This means that from now on, Georgia will be referred to as Sakartvelas, the country's name in its native tongue, in all official Lithuanian-language documents.

"Sakartvelas is the official name now," Audrys Antanaitis, Chairman of the State Commission of the Lithuanian Language (VLKK), told BNS.

"Sakartvelas" has been an alternative term for "Gruzija" for the last two years. The decision was made on December

21 of last year to stop referring to Georgia as "Gruzija," completely replacing it with "Sakartvelas".

"We needed a transition period to see if the public would accept the name," Antanaitis told BNS. "Obviously, it took root incredibly quickly. I predicted [that it would take] 20 years, but it took two years. It was really unexpected. As such, we decided to bring this process to a conclusion. Sakartvelas has become the official name," he said.

Georgian politicians and diplomats earlier asked Lithuanian officials to change the name, saying that "Gruzija" reflected the Russian name for the nation. Although the official name has changed, "Gruzija" can still be used in the public domain.

Georgia Unveils Memorial to Victims of Russian Occupation

A memorial dedicated to victims of Russia's ongoing occupation of Georgia's two regions has been erected in Tbilisi's Ponitchala district.

Entitled 'Memorial to the Victims of Occupation', the sculpture, created by Irakli Tsuladze, depicts two bronze figures, male and female, separated by a multi-layer glass barrier.

Tsuladze told the news agency GHN that working on the installation had been both emotional and interesting.

"Two people stand on different sides of an imaginary border. Woman and man, epitomizing the mainspring of existence. The theme of occupation is important and very emotional for our country. But it's not just about the occupation; it's a global theme, a separation of love brought about by an invisible wall and barbed wire. This is an allegorical work," the artist said.

Tbilisi City Hall announced a competition for the memorial in April 2019. However, the competition found no victor, and another was announced in July that year, which Irakli Tsuladze won.



Georgia Marks National Flag Day

BY ANA DUMBADZE

Georgia marks its National Flag Day on January 14, but large-scale events are not planned this year due to the COVID pandemic. The State Council of Heraldry calls on citizens to set and raise the national flag on their balconies or roofs to honor Georgia's statehood.

The current flag was used by the Georgian patriotic movement following the country's independence from the Soviet

Union in 1991. By the late 1990s, the design had become widely known as the Georgian historical national flag.

A majority of Georgians supported the restoration of the flag, and in 1999 the Parliament of Georgia passed a bill to change the flag. However, it was not endorsed by the President, Eduard Shevardnadze. It was adopted in the early 2000s by the main opposition party, the United National Movement led by Mikheil Saakashvili, as a symbol of popular resistance to Shevardnadze's rule, as well as a symbol of the Rose Revolution.

The flag was adopted by Parliament

on 14 January 2004. Saakashvili formally endorsed it via Presidential Decree No. 31 signed on 25 January, following his election as President. 14 January is annually marked as Flag Day in Georgia.

"One of the main symbols of our statehood, the flag of Georgia inspires the patriotic spirit and great pride in each of us," the Prime Minister of Georgia Giorgi Gakharia said in connection with the Day of the State Flag of Georgia.

The Prime Minister is convinced that the time is not far when this symbol of Georgian statehood will be erected next to the flags of the member states of the European family.

Corona Update: Restrictions to Remain until February 1

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"We are actively cooperating with Covax and we have made some progress. Namely, in the near future, it will be possible to vaccinate the population of Georgia with Pfizer," Tikaradze said.

During the meeting, Ambassador Degan assessed the steps taken to contain COVID-19 in Georgia.

"We had a very useful meeting, where I received updated information about the plans of the Georgian government to manage the pandemic in 2021. It is important to have a clear vaccination plan, not only in Georgia and the United States but around the world, to ensure the safety of our community and to rebuild the economy and open schools as soon as possible," the Ambassador stated.

To ensure the maximum safety of citizens until the vaccine is available, Tbilisi City Hall ruled that starting January 10, taxi drivers in the Georgian capital must undergo coronavirus testing every two weeks. Further, they will be obliged to carry and show the test results to patrol police when performing their duties.

Paata Imnadze, Deputy Head of the

National Center for Disease Control, said this Wednesday that more than 6,000 taxi drivers have been tested for coronavirus so far, and the number of positive cases is less than 1%.

"More than 6,000 taxi drivers have been tested, and it seems that the number of cases of infection is less than 1%. The number of tests at markets has also increased: 4,000 tests have been conducted and the number of cases there is also less than 1%. Further, over 2,000 representatives of different religions have been tested and the number of cases is about 1%," Imnadze said.

Despite the decreased numbers of newly detected cases, Health Minister Tikaradze projected a third wave of coronavirus in Georgia is expected to start in the second half of February.

"When the world is talking about a third wave, of course, Georgia can be no exception. We need to use the global experience regarding a potential third wave, not only in the preparedness component, but also in the control phase, in order to minimize the spread of infection. We need to focus on this and be more effective in infection retention. We expect a third wave to hit Georgia late February," she said.

Trump Impeached for 'Inciting' US Capitol Riot



Source: The BBC

The US House of Representatives has impeached President Donald Trump for "incitement of insurrection" at last week's Capitol riot, reports the BBC.

Ten Republicans sided with the Democrats to impeach the president by 232-197.

However, his trial in the Senate will not happen until after Democrat Joe Biden is inaugurated as the new US president next week.

Mr. Trump is the first president in US history to be impeached twice.

In a video released after the vote in Congress, Mr. Trump called on his followers to remain peaceful, and did not mention his impeachment.

"Violence and vandalism have no place in our country... No true supporter of mine would ever endorse political violence," he said.

What You Give to Others... An Exclusive Interview with Bidzina Ivanishvili

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW BY
GEORGE SHARASHIDZE

We interviewed Bidzina Ivanishvili on 9 January but, at the respondent's request, we publish this interview only after the dissemination of his statement about his final departure from politics. The idea of an interview was conceived in early January, when I, running some personal errands in the entrepreneurial registry, accidentally discovered that Bidzina Ivanishvili had transferred a sizeable portion of his wealth to the Cartu Charity Foundation (see the list of assets below). I believe that this interview answers all questions that readers may have about Bidzina Ivanishvili's philosophy of life, his charity, business, money, and wealth.

"If memory serves, it was in an interview with your Entrepreneur magazine that I mentioned my decision to donate at least 90% of my wealth to public and national causes," Mr Ivanishvili tells me. "However, this statement did not receive adequate feedback from the media or society at the time. In reality, we are dealing with a logical continuation of the process I decided on much earlier, even mentioning it to you in an interview 18 months ago. By the way, in addition to the interview with you, I revealed my intentions to several international publications, though my statement never received an adequate response. Frankly, I never tried to push it either."

Both then and now, the media and the public overlooked the large-scale act of charity that took place on 30-31 December - one large enough to be called a monumental Christmas gift. These assets are estimated at over one billion GEL, maybe even up to a billion USD. Like I said earlier, I learned about these transactions by sheer accident, which motivated me to get in touch with you. Yes, some media outlets critical of the authorities tried to show the donation of an asset to the foundation in a bad light, but even that topic was not picked up by the media. I am honestly surprised that neither the government's PR services, nor neutral media outlets have tried to bring this topic to light. We asked him to explain.

"I have the same question and, just like you, I cannot answer it," he replies. "It is what it is, and unlike you, George, I accept this reality calmly. As for the opposition media, they, just like you, have come across a full list of the list of assets handed over to the charity foundation on 30-31 December, of course, fathoming the scope and positive potential alike, though spreading information about the transfer only of those assets that they, in their shortsightedness, believed to show the issue in a bad light and leave narrow room for blatant speculations - and just turning a blind eye to the rest. Why, they wouldn't betray their own principles by putting in a good word in for me, would they? [Smiles.] Yet, remembering how the Hippodrome issue backfired at them, they quickly realized that cutting the issue of money laundering out of whole cloth was out of their league, which is why this whole brouhaha quickly died down, as you put it succinctly."

This week, Mr Ivanishvili stated that he is leaving politics for good to return to his pre-2011 lifestyle, that is, to a time when he was not particularly fond of publicity. In fact, there is only one interview, given to Vedomosti in 2005, before his coming into politics. In that interview, a section from which was published by the Georgian media as well, he described his views on philanthropists, categorizing them into those who advertise their charity to score material dividends, and those who do good in secret. Yet even secret, silent charity he believes to be



beneficial for the benefactor, in line with Rustaveli's famous aphorism "What you give to others, you will keep, whatever you don't, you will lose." The way I see it, he is trying to say that the ultimate beneficiary of charity is the benefactor, because charity grants enormous spiritual comfort to the benefactor. I asked him if he still holds this belief today, 15 years after that interview, with much more charitable experience to his credit.

"Vedomosti removed those passages from the final publication without coordinating with me, which is why, around that time, we asked Kviris Palitra to fill in the gaps, and that must be the version you are quoting."

"Of course, I have not changed my mind," he says. "On the contrary, as years go by and as I gain more experience, my conviction grows ever stronger. I strongly believe that no material good comes even close to the spiritual comfort you experience when helping the needy, your people and country. And it's not just about material resources, nor does the scope of unconditional charity ensure one's spiritual contentment. Because of particular circumstances, I was given a chance to help a large group of people and the country in general for a long time, continuously. But I don't think that the moral contentment this process has given my wife and I is special or superior in any way over the feelings of those who take their time and make an effort to help an elderly person with a cane cross the street, even though it may make them late somewhere. It is human nature that any honest step taken toward assisting others and making their lives easier fills us with enormous positive energy, because the desire to do good is a natural urge of any healthy person."

Yet, on closer examination, his years-long philanthropy features one recurring characteristic, a signature style, if you will. Even though he never held back, and confirmed today that the benefactor is the ultimate beneficiary of any charity, he never tried to have the foundation finance projects that place the benefactor on a pedestal, as it were. For the most part, he focused on supporting existing cultural and material heritage created by ancestors or previous generations but on the verge of destruction, such as churches and monasteries, centers of education or culture. This approach features certain components of humility and anonymity, when billboards promote the existing brands instead of he who supports them, such as the Opera House, theaters, universities. This approach is not "advantageous" by any stretch - if the word advantageous applies to philanthropy at all - because some "pragmatists" may argue that resources spent this way are wasted. Mr Ivanishvili has paved hundreds of kilometers of roads with his money, roads that are subject to wear and tear, require periodical renovations, and therefore do not really "make a mark." And that is probably why

he ended up repaving some of them. The same is true of sewage systems and waste disposal infrastructure, and roofing for 11,000 households in the Sachkhere District. While preparing for this interview, I came across some exciting TV materials that were unfamiliar to me, such as the former army sanatorium in Tskaltubo, where veterans of the Abkhazian war were supposed to live and yet the state could not afford to take care of the facility - which Mr Ivanishvili roofed with his own money and saved from destruction. He also donated to Georgia 400 tractors fully equipped for ploughing and planting, for the purchase of which he had to borrow half of the purchase amount.

"To be honest, the only thing I've been trying to do since the very outset, something that my involvement with politics has made impossible, is making sure not to advertise my charity work as much as possible," Mr Ivanishvili tells me. "As for other priorities, I let the rest go with the flow, the way I saw fit - that is, using and channeling resources into urgent causes I believed would be impossible without said resources or, if delayed, would be dead in the water. We launched the Kutaisi International University project, for one, only after making sure to renovate already operating educational centers. You call this approach my signature style. So be it. Let's call it my signature style. I'm fine with it."

During the World Economic Forum in Davos in early 2020, Global Citizen and Forbes published a joint study into the world's largest philanthropists, with Warren Buffett and Bill Gates and his wife at the top of the list, having respectively donated 16% and 9% of their wealth to charity over the previous 5 years. The list also features Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg and his wife who donated 1.2% of their wealth. With this information in mind, the statement on Mr Ivanishvili and his wife eventually donating at least 90% of their wealth to charity and public causes is like a bolt out of the blue. It is unmatched in its scope worldwide, indeed. I asked him for specifics about his unprecedented decision to channel his personal wealth toward philanthropic causes.

"It may look like a bolt out of the blue, as you put it, to those who, for whatever reason, are stubborn enough not to believe what they actually see with their own eyes—that which can be easily verified whenever they please," he says. "I never compare myself to other philanthropists, to aim at some benchmark target. In fact, this is the first time I've heard such detailed information about others. We all have our own paths and, as we Georgians like to say, Godspeed! I have never swayed from the path of my own values, principles, and conscience - be it in politics, in business, or in the cause we are discussing now. I made my choice long ago, and I am sticking to it. I've always believed that it is the great-

est joy to be able to benefit a common cause when you can afford it, using your personal hard-earned material or intangible capital, be it money or public trust and approval. That's why I - without false modesty and pretense - can repeat word for word everything I said in that first interview with you: The most valuable thing I have done in terms of charity is my participation in politics because, under the previous government, this decision put not just my wealth but my and my family's lives at stake. Consequentially, because my involvement in politics contributed to and made it possible peacefully to remove a regime thriving on abusing people, and to set the stage for the country's irreversible peaceful and democratic development - entering politics must be the most valuable thing I've done in my life."

His resignation before the expiration of his term was an equally unprecedented decision in contemporary global politics. At any rate, I cannot cite a precedent. Although the tradition of democratic transfer of power on the basis of election results has become routine in the civilized world, losing an election implies that the defeated government wanted to win and, correspondingly, to continue to rule, relinquishing power only because the people decided otherwise and decided against extending its mandate. In my view, Mr Ivanishvili's case is also unique in that for the second time now, he is voluntarily relinquishing power at a time when he is at the peak of democratic, that is, popular legitimacy: no-one is challenging him, and he is legally entitled to it.

"My involvement with politics had concrete goals and objectives, as discussed in detail in my statement," he notes. "After reaching them, I decided to leave politics for good. I never considered myself a typical politician per se, in the classic sense of the word. Everything that comes with politics, especially successful politics, such as power, privilege, publicity, etc, only made me feel uncomfortable because of my character and, honestly, I couldn't wait for this period in my and my family's life to end."

"At the same time, let me emphasize that I in no way mean to demean politics as a profession," Mr Ivanishvili tells me. "I believe that it is one of the most serious, responsible, and honorable lines of work. Throughout these years, I have encountered many politicians both on our team and in the international arena, and I have a great deal of respect for the vast majority. Any profession, including politics, has its own dialectics of nature and motivational aspect, so to speak, which means a chance of self-realization and a healthy ambition to lead the country in the right direction, also prospects of career growth, and decent remuneration, if anything. These are absolutely normal motivational aspects of any profession, and politics cannot and should not be an exception. Otherwise, a politician cannot succeed. And a laggard is no good for himself or his country. It's just that I had a different starting point and motivation for entering politics, and all of the above were naturally missing from the sphere of my interest. I felt obligated to pay my dues to the country and people, which would be impossible without my direct involvement in politics, which is why I said in advance that it was a temporary measure, that I had no intention of staying in politics long. As soon as I saw that my mission was accomplished, I left politics for good, even though I was forced to come back once again, and that was also due to my high sense of responsibility. I couldn't let myself fail to finish what I had started, and quietly keep living. My recent letter explains all that in detail, so let's not overburden our readers."

Returning to the topic of philanthropy, I note that people just love counting other people's money. It is known for a

fact that, over the years, the Cartu Foundation, and Mr Ivanishvili and his family as its sole donors, has spent over 3 billion USD on charity, as evidenced by the annual reports of Deloitte, one of the Big Four accounting networks recognized by the World Bank. A few days ago, the foundation published a long list of assets donated on his decision from private ownership to the charity foundation; and, of course, all these material assets, in line with applicable legislation, must be used for the goals set forth in the foundation's charter and will be spent on ongoing and planned philanthropic projects. In this context, I have two interconnected questions for him: Is it correct to say that you granted the charity foundation all material assets owned by you through various legal entities? If so, how much financial resources will you and your family own after this transaction?

"I understand that both questions are of high public interest, and I appreciate your tactful humor," he says. "As for the assets, my wife and I have decided to donate all material assets—except those with credit or other obligations, those difficult for the foundation to manage—to the foundation without delay, on one condition: The purpose of the assets cannot be changed in the process of management or alienation, because most of them are not ordinary business projects but ones focusing on the development of individual branches, or even entire regions, and designed to bring about positive processes in various economic segments, including in tourism."

I point out that several international business media outlets, including Forbes and Bloomberg, assess your wealth at about 5.5 billion USD.

"Those are outdated numbers, to put it mildly," he informs me. "They are from 10-15 years ago. I have not worked with Forbes in over a decade, for example. At first, they, with my consent, studied the source of my capital, and I had no problem with the data published by them. But in recent years, I have no idea what they calculate and how because I no longer supply them with information. As for Bloomberg, I have never worked with them, though they too publish their own data."

"I disengaged myself from active business long before taking up politics, around the time when I gave my first and last interview to Vedomosti. As a representative of the business press, you know that profiting from a small or large business alike is impossible without full engagement in its administration. Some think that bigger and smaller businesses require different approaches, but there is actually almost no difference in terms of approach. Unless you are involved in risk assessment, investment decision-making, monitoring of market specifics and trends, and unless you make quick, effective decisions, your facultative business engagement is guaranteed to leave you with losses, an axiom that any businessperson will confirm. And what happens to money entrusted to someone else is perfectly illustrated by the recent scandal involving me and a large Swiss bank of nearly impeccable international reputation. Consider yourself lucky if you avoid losses. Consequently, my capital could not have grown over these years, even theoretically."

"As for expenses, calculations here are just as simple. As mentioned by you and confirmed by public information, Cartu Foundation has spent 3 billion USD on various charity projects. However, our family has also been privileged to be part of another honorable mission, one we have never discussed and, if not for your question, would probably never be discussed in the future. For almost 30 years, our family has been supporting a large group of friends and acquaintances on an individual basis. Given the unemployment rates and absence of functioning social and medical infrastructure, espe-

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What You Give to Others... An Exclusive Interview with Bidzina Ivanishvili

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cially in earlier years, people encountered numerous insurmountable difficulties, from health-related issues to living conditions and basic needs. We could, of course, cover these expenses through the charity foundation - there is nothing illegal about it - but I insisted on bypassing the foundation in this case. I didn't want a subjective factor to emerge in the process of spending amounts accumulated for public causes, even from the foundation's founder and sole donor. The foundation has scrupulously observed charter criteria. The foundation's reputation had to remain spotless, and no exceptions could be allowed, an additional benchmark we set for ourselves. Consequently, we kept said expenses away from the foundation, instead covering them separately over these years. Add to these sizeable expenses the financial resources spent on politics and projects dedicated to the long-term development of various economic areas - those already transferred to the foundation and referred by you as social entrepreneurship - and you have about a billion USD. I will not engage in debates whether or not these expenses qualify as traditional charity - they more likely do not - despite the fact that the amount of capital spent on the development of tourism infrastructure, for example, is sometimes at least twice the current market value of assets created with this capital."

I suggest he is referring to Paragraph Hotel, as discussed during our first interview.

"Not just Paragraph Hotel, though it is a very illustrative example," he replies. "In excess of 127 million USD was spent on its creation and development, yet its market value fluctuates between 50 and 60 million USD, which is why the charity foundation will count this site as its asset based on its market and not investment value, notwithstanding the fact that our investment is at least twice its current market value. Equally disproportionate is the Panorama project, with our investments amounting to twice its current market value. As for the Dendrology Park in Shekvetili, which cost tens of millions of dollars, besides me being labeled as nothing short of an enemy of Mankind, it was never viewed as a commercial project in the first place.

"[That leaves me with roughly a billion and a half in capital]. A part of this amount was already transferred to the charity foundation on 30-31 December, as reflected in the list obtained by you and intended to be published along with this interview. As for other business projects financed by the Co-Investment Fund, and excess capital from these projects, we will free these assets from strictly technical credit and other burdens characteristic of business dealings, and then transfer them to the charity foundation, either as immovable property or as monetary resources after sales. The same is true of the collection of oil paintings which is also part of said excess capital. A portion of the collection has already been sold, and the money has been transferred to the foundation. The same will happen to the assets generated from selling the remaining paintings. Alternately, we may not wait for sales and hand a part of the works over to the foundation."

In his 2012 interview, Mr Ivanishvili said, "Money has never been important to me. I don't think that a person needs billions. Excess money is like excess weight." Many find these words hard to process, and rightly so, because most people have a hard time grasping the meaning of "excess money," because it is generally believed that there is never enough money. Still, now that he continues taking consistent steps toward losing "excess money," or, as he referred to it, "excess weight," I asked him how much he "weighs" today and how much

in financial resources do he and his family keep for personal needs from that billion and a half?

"This billion and a half will be used in full for charity. And this very process started on 30-31 December 2020, when the assets mentioned by you were transferred to the foundation. It is an irreversible process that will continue in installments. My wife and I will keep 200 million USD available as free assets besides the billion and a half. To my children I will leave enough not to lose motivation for full self-realization and development, in which living off dividends may be an obstacle," he says.

I ask how his children have taken this decision.

"They fully agree with my position, and the decision was made in coordination with them," he tells me. "I'm happy that my children are so ambitious and creative, and I am convinced that they will succeed independently from me. Most importantly, I gave them a quality education and, equally importantly, total freedom of choice. We wanted them to choose future vocations on their own, because it is just as important to love what you do as it is to succeed. As for my take on excess money, my children and I are on the same page.

"By the way, the passage with the excess money/weight analogy was also removed by Vedmosti from my interview, and nor did Forbes publish it in my short interview in the same year of 2005."

Given the volume and diversity of the donated assets, they will be quite difficult for the foundation to administer. I asked Mr Ivanishvili if he thinks he'll have to reinforce the foundation's management with qualified human resources.

"Time will tell. As for asset administration, once the assets are transferred, it will be up to the foundation, meaning that some may be sold right away, and others may continue to be capitalized on. Still, I believe that they should be alienated soon, to transfer from the foundation to business. Naturally, it does not mean getting rid of an asset prematurely or selling it cheap—if a business offer is much lower than the asset's market value, the foundation will continue its management until an acceptable offer is made. In the case of hotels, it may be better to alienate them for a few years, because their value will increase alongside political stability and the country's economic growth, and that will ultimately have a positive impact on the quality and scope of the foundation's planned and ongoing charity projects."

I then ask if he thinks it would have been better, instead of transferring the assets to the foundation now, to have donated matching amounts of money earlier, to allow the foundation to launch projects of its own.

"I have a clear answer to this question," he says. "By making this decision, I saved the foundation from a blow, because I didn't want anyone to cast a shadow over the foundation's idea, so I intentionally opted to take the fall. You probably remember the torrents of criticism and dirt hurled at me for tourism projects on the Black Sea coast and Tbilisi. My opponents passed off development for destruction and my charity for avarice. That's why I choose to be their target instead of the foundation. But now that I am leaving politics for good, I am more confident and at peace taking this decision."

It is known for a fact that, given the scope of Mr. Ivanishvili's philanthropy, his capital has been steadily decreasing over the years, and yet the international media has been stubbornly assessing his wealth at 5-6 billion USD, give or take. Most likely, they mean the total value of securities owned by him in the past, calculating their worth based on their stock quotes. Yes, he stopped working with these publications, and he does not confirm the validity of their data. But I point out to him that he must have been aware

of these statistics. Why, then, I ask, has he not corrected them and told them that he has "gone poor" and does not "weigh" that much anymore, contrary to what they claim by inertia?

"Simply because I don't think I have 'gone poor,' George," he says. "My capital is free from private ownership by one Georgian to serve all of Georgia, each Georgian, and my family and I are, after all, co-owners of everything that the foundation has created or saved, aren't we? If so, how can I 'go poor'? What I have given away has never been more 'mine' than it is now, because now no one, not even I, can embezzle it or waste it. Thus, only what you give to others is ultimately yours, and that's the wisdom and greatness of Rustaveli. At least, that's how I, one Georgian, and my wife and children, read it.

I ask if he feels uncomfortable about his passive stance possibly encouraging authoritative publications to publish incorrect information for years.

I may feel somewhat uncomfortable, but it never really mattered to me much," he notes. "I believe that giving to assist one's country and people, and their future, is the best investment one can make. But I also understand that Forbes or Bloomberg will probably beg to differ."

Mr Ivanishvili has said repeatedly that doing business in Georgia is not his goal, meaning not only business projects focusing on social aspects more than on fast returns on investment, such as the large infrastructural initiatives in Shekvetili, Abastumani, or Ganmukhuri, for example, but also Cartu Bank, now property of the charity foundation.

"Yes, indeed," he confirms. "Speaking of the bank, Cartu Bank has never attempted aggressive efforts and campaigns in the Georgian market, never sought to monopolize the market, and never agreed to serve state accounts, instead always working toward a healthier banking system in Georgia. Suffice to say, in 2001, we bought out the liabilities of Absolute Bank and this way actually saved the then banking system.

"I, though a shareholder, have never received dividends from Cartu Bank. And the bank, over the years, has given 55 million USD from its profits to charity.

"As for Elita Burji LLC, an unprofitable company for years, I had to subsidize it because I simply had no time personally to manage it. And the company, because of heavy investments in construction technologies, was unable to make a fast return on investment on its own. But for me, as mentioned earlier, introducing modern technologies and improving the country's business environment is far more important than doing business.

"I still feel that way, and this is exactly why, on my wife's initiative, we have been investing heavily in tourism infrastructure for several years now. Hotel infrastructure of this level may not be necessary today or even tomorrow, but it will benefit the country years from now, when high-spending tourists, including year-round visitors, will flock to Georgia as it grows capable of hosting events of global importance independently.

"I understand that, given heavy investments and the scarcity of the market, such projects will not bring in proportional commercial revenues. But I also understand that this is what Tbilisi and the country need, which is why, to me, these are far more than standard commercial projects. The same is true of Cartu Bank, Elita Burji, and other businesses."

It seems that, despite his years-long business management experience, he did not establish profitable businesses in Georgia. But profitability is one of the key criteria for success in business. I ask him about it.

"I agree with you and admit that I am not happy when it comes to the profit-

ability criterion," he tells me. "Of course, it would be better for businesses to generate higher profits. In the case of the bank, it would have been better to attract greater investments, but unfortunately, it never happened, and I am not happy about it, of course. Apparently, I did not pay due attention to it, especially after entering politics.

"Yet, besides the lack of attention, the poor effectiveness of my business companies was also due to the fact that I have never tried to use excess financial resources to create any type of obstacles for Georgian business. On the contrary, I always wanted to help the market and improve the economic environment as much as possible, which is why I never focused only on business profitability. I honestly wanted to help the country and choose a business activity not based on its profitability, but on its usefulness to the country."

I point out that that is exactly why Entrepreneur magazine praises the completed and ongoing large-scale projects implemented by the Tourism Development Fund in Shekvetili, Abastumani, and downtown Tbilisi as the best examples of social entrepreneurship and refers to him personally as a social entrepreneur.

"As mentioned above, this term best describes projects aiming not to do business and seeking fast returns, but to do something new in the country, to help the country, and motivate others. And that is the goal of social entrepreneurship, after all. This has been my attitude, and I don't regret it, because in Shekvetili, for example, we already have several small and medium-sized hotels that sprang up after the construction of top-notch tourism infrastructure around Paragraph. As a businessman who has not received profits proportional to his investments, and who has failed to create a profitable business, I am not happy, of course, because a business should pursue commercialization and bring in profits. But as a son of this country, I am surely happy because the Black Sea Region of Guria, Tbilisi and Abastumani, and prospectively Tskaltubo, now have a new opportunity to develop."

Even though we are having an apolitical interview, and our magazine focuses exclusively on economics and business, I couldn't avoid talking about his political experience, especially political management. Is there a difference between business and political management? I ask. I also wonder how successful he has been in achieving his goals on the political front. He says that, in Georgia, he is less interested in profitability, the key measurement of a business. I wonder if he feels the same about politics.

"Yes, I have already mentioned that attention and focus are mandatory preconditions for a successful business," he answers. "I had the same attitude toward politics. But while neglecting business, I was fully focused on politics, and results would not hesitate to follow, with positive and virtually irreversible achievements in every direction, one of the key factors influencing my decision to distance myself from politics once and for all."

Wherever you give it your best and focus to the fullest, you have maximal results. This is what happened in business and later after Mr Ivanishvili's coming into politics, though he was forced to neglect his business activities, which is why, as he says, he has been unable to expand Cartu Bank's investment portfolio and to transform Elita Burji into a profitable company, right? In business terminology, it is called opportunity cost, or alternative cost, meaning that by giving priority to one alternative, we undermine other alternatives. However, the New Testament and Christianity teach us that what matters is not the result but intention and desire, sincere desire.

"Exactly," he agrees. "The decision in favor of politics may have hurt my busi-

ness - and using the interesting term suggested by you - I ended up paying high opportunity cost. But, deep inside, I always strove to give it my all on both fronts, to put to work my capabilities equally.

"In politics, like in business, my worldviews and attitudes have been decisive: Doing what others could not do without me and staying as long as it is necessary.

"Although I was forced to return to politics for two years when the team's unity and idea were jeopardized, now that my decision to leave politics is final and irreversible, I feel much more at peace, because the team I'm leaving behind is ready to answer for its actions and, if need be, to hold others accountable," he concludes.

As I mentioned at the beginning of the publication, the conversation with Bidzina Ivanishvili took place on 9 January. I went to the interview with the intention of talking about issues pertaining to "ordinary charity" but after a detailed conversation and, moreover, after perusing his extensive letter, I am left with the impression that the portrait of Bidzina Ivanishvili - a Georgian philanthropist of the largest scale - lacks a very important accent: If the essence of charity is the voluntary and selfless giving of goods, legally obtained through private initiative and personal effort, for public benefit, then we are dealing with a person who not only donated 95% of his material capital for public benefit and the common cause, but also used the trust of the people - that is, his own symbolic capital - first to free the country from dictatorship, then to prevent its recurrence; and today, he is giving up the power generated as a result of this trust through democratic procedure, once again - voluntarily and unselfishly, which, I strongly believe must be considered a truly unprecedented case of political charity, as evidenced by his every step in Georgian politics since October 2011. He entered politics not to seek power but to return to the people the power captured by others. He entered politics to pay his dues, and he has made a point of not using any benefit or privilege that comes with power, except the privilege of serving people. He came to apply his charity to this front too, and now is on his way back home victorious, with his dues paid in full.

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BIDZINA IVANISHVILI: POLITICIAN, PHILANTHROPIST, BUSINESSMAN

Bidzina Ivanishvili founded the Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia political union in 2011 and united almost the entire opposition spectrum under its aegis. In the 2012 parliamentary elections, the Georgian Dream Coalition claimed a sweeping victory over the then ruling party, the National Movement, led by Mikheil Saakashvili. The Georgian Dream received full popular support and, despite the fear and terror raging at that time, an unprecedented number of voters declared support for Bidzina Ivanishvili and his political team, an event consequently recognized as a peaceful revolution at the ballot box.

The Georgian Dream's victory in the 2012 parliamentary elections set the stage for the country's fundamental democratic transformation to carry out the complex process of establishing law and order without institutional shifts - the architects of the violent system, whose culpability has never been questioned by international partners, were brought to justice, with the country's state institutions and bureaucracy, freed from political pressure, growing far more effective in their operations. In particular, former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, who continues to evade justice as a fugitive, was repeatedly convicted of several

Continued on page 6



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MEP Marketa Gregorova on the EU's Eastern Partnership Plans

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

As Russia's President Putin tries to demonstrate his peacemaker credentials by trying in vain to make the Armenian and Azerbaijan leaders shake hands (quite literally), and the US is once again occupied with impeaching their 45th President, the Georgian Institute for Security Policy sat down with MEP Marketa Gregorova to discuss the EU's plans and designs for the Eastern Partnership region and, inevitably, the Russian factor in it.

The European Union renewed its sanctions on Russia recently, but since Russia is showing no apparent signs of acquiescing on the Ukrainian issue, we wondered if perhaps a stricter and more hard-hitting set of sanctions would be in order, including more big names in there and industries that can actually force Russia and the Kremlin's heads to reconsider their position. We asked Ms Gregorova for her opinion.

"There is no new development, so it would be very difficult to argue for strengthening sanctions at this point. Also, we don't have a single foreign security policy like other countries do; we have 27 foreign and security policy priorities, which often complicates things when you want to deal with other entities or countries such as Russia, because there might be a common will of not letting them do whatever they want, but there are still 27 countries who need to decide on it. You can't really single-handedly unilaterally decide on something if there is no new development, because you can't really argue for that on your domestic field in front of your

voters, since it doesn't have an impact solely on Russia. We are still the biggest economic bloc in the world, so let's say using diplomacy through economic tools is the biggest thing we can do. We can't and we won't use military measures or anything like that: what we can do is pose economic sanctions.

HOW HAS THE PANDEMIC AFFECTED ISSUES SUCH AS THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP AND DEEPER INTEGRATION INTO THE EUROPEAN UNION? HAVE THEY MOVED DOWN THE AGENDA BECAUSE EVERYBODY IS PREOCCUPIED WITH THE PANDEMIC?

I would say the region itself didn't really let anyone forget about it. Of course reignition of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was very unfortunate. Then there was how people stood up against Lukashenko in the summer, and the elections in Georgia, and, of course, we know how complicated it was. Moldova was probably one of the few who didn't have many problems. At the last plenary session, we had a discussion on the whole Eastern Partnership region, which indicates that we do follow it and we do care. However, the pandemic may have slowed things down at the beginning, and from my personal point of view, this could have helped fuel some problems.

WHAT WERE YOUR PERSONAL TAKEAWAYS FROM THAT LAST PLENARY ON THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP?

For me, it was disappointing. Even though I said it's important that we discuss the whole region, the Parliament was afraid to make a resolution on Nagorno-Karabakh, because, of course it's very con-

troversial with the various sides involved. Even though I understand that, it just shows how in these foreign affairs we tend to be so divided. Among the 27 foreign policies that we have, we can't really agree on a common approach, and so in the end Nagorno-Karabakh wasn't solved or helped by the European Union. It's disappointing that we can't really act as a European Union, and we still act as the European Economic Society which was the predecessor to the EU, but this is not about economics anymore.

HOW IS THIS NON-COMMITAL APPROACH GOING TO PLAY OUT IN THE LONG-TERM WHEN IT COMES TO THE EU'S REPUTATION?

I think we need to change this approach. Otherwise, well, I don't want to assume what might happen in the future of course, but our influence might become meaningless to everyone, because whenever we claim that we'll help, it will mean nothing, which is something I don't want to see. I want the EU to have a stronger voice, because we actually often bring to the table the rational middle ground approach, not a zero-sum game from wall to wall, which I think is important and positive, and I don't want to lose this just because some people are too afraid to act.

DO YOU THINK IT WAS A LESSON FOR THE EU? DID IT LEARN ANYTHING, OR DID IT WANT TO LEARN ANYTHING FROM IT?

I think we learned a lot actually. Not enough; don't get me wrong - I would also push for more, but it's not like the EU did nothing. We very strongly held Turkey back, and actually threatened



Image source: Imedi

Turkey with sanctions if it gets involved more, and the same applied to Russia. If Nagorno-Karabakh becomes a fighting field between Erdogan and Putin, then those who suffer will be the citizens of Armenia and Azerbaijan. We were really trying to hold these big powers back so that there is a normal field for the two smaller countries to discuss how to deal with the situation, and through the Minsk Agreement platform.

WHAT IS GEORGIA'S EASTERN PARTNERSHIP FUTURE? THE EP APPROACH WAS A TAILOR-MADE ONE TO GIVE EACH COUNTRY A PATH TO MOVE FORWARD ON. WHAT ARE THE INCENTIVES FOR GEORGIA NOT TO STRAY FROM THE EU INTEGRATION PATH, AND WHAT ARE THE DEMANDS FROM BRUSSELS?

There are two big topics which have come up since the March 8 agreement: the case of political prisoners and what to do with them, and the independence of the justice system, which has always

been questioned. Now, of course, we also have problems regarding the elections in October, and whether they were fraudulent or not. There are people questioning it, and that's always a problem for democracy, because you have to trust your institutions otherwise they will fall: they are built on the trust of citizens. These are issues we'll be happy to help with. This is, of course, if Georgia lets us, and if the government is willing to take its own steps. In any case, it's something we can incentivize, offering help with observers or reviewing how the elections went, or if there are any questions about the political prisoners. Naturally, we will be happy to assist in any evaluations; however, this needs to be solved, otherwise there is a risk that there could be a situation with always having a government that is going forward and an opposition that is trying to block everything. How democracy should work is that both sides try to argue together and create a compromise, and of course that is not happening, which is not positive for Georgia's European aspirations.

What You Give to Others... An Exclusive Interview with Bidzina Ivanishvili

Continued from page 4

serious felonies by Georgian courts of all three instances; the former Prime Minister was convicted on several criminal charges and served a seven-year prison sentence; the former Minister of Defense and Internal Affairs is serving a prison sentence for numerous violent crimes, including torture and inhuman treatment; the former justice minister and General Prosecutor, convicted of several grievous crimes, is an internationally wanted fugitive.

After winning the elections, Bidzina Ivanishvili served as Georgia's prime minister for a year. In November of 2013, he resigned, keeping his promise made publicly before entering politics, though never fully distancing himself from politics and periodically assisting the Georgian Dream's team with consultations.

In 2017-2018, the ruling party encountered problems threatening to affect the state's proper functioning. The truth of the matter is that the winning coalition in the 2012 elections was, from the very outset, an eclectic multiparty unity of groups mechanically gathered around leaders with different political backgrounds and values. These parties, with the exception of the Georgian Dream, possessed virtually no electoral resources besides loud and eloquent names (the Republican Party of Georgia, Free Democrats, the National Forum, the Conservative Party of Georgia, Industry Will Save Georgia, the Social Democratic Party of Georgia, the Green Party of Georgia), instead relying on the supporters of the Georgian Dream party and consequently making a miniscule contribution to victory. Over time, most of these parties and leaders left the coalition, yet the Georgian Dream, until recently, could not transform into a value-based monolithic unity either, because it remained eclectic even within the scope

of one party. This periodically served as the basis for intraparty crises and could have caused the team to face a real danger of dissolution, had the problems deepened. In May of 2018, Bidzina Ivanishvili was forced temporarily to return to politics as the party's Chairman to solve precisely this systemic problem. Of course, he could have held the post of Prime Minister in parallel with the position of party leader, which would have made perfect sense in light of his political weight among the public and the laws of ordinary politics. However, for the second time in his biography, he deliberately refused this privilege, which constitutes living proof of the fact that Ivanishvili has never yearned to take power, let alone tried to hold on to it. He always focused on neutralizing threats

and solving problems of importance to the public. This is precisely what happened in this case as well: In the 30 months with Ivanishvili at the helm of the party, every problem stemming from the coalition legacy was successfully overcome. Old-school leaders left the team, to be replaced with committed, qualified young members, significantly renewing, revitalizing, and strengthening the party, while molding it into a homogenous, modern political team. And success was soon to follow: In the free and democratic elections of October 31, 2020, the Georgian people put their trust in the Georgian Dream for the third time in a row. This was followed by Bidzina Ivanishvili's decision to permanently leave politics and his resignation as the Party's Chairman on January 11, 2021.

List of Property Transferred to International Charity Fund Cartu

List of Companies in the Tourism Development Fund of Georgia LLC and the Property in Their Ownership - Ownership Transferred

Nº	Owner	Land Area	Construction Area	Apartment / Commercial Area
1	Tbilisi City LLC (Tsekavshiri)	7,743	54,037	
2	Sololaki Rise LLC (Project Sololaki)	32,039	140,000	-
3	Sololaki Hills LLC (extension of Sololaki, suspended)	16,734	-	-
4	Tabori Resorts LLC (Tabori, golf)	402,010	46,744	-
5	Georgian Eco Transport LLC (cableways)	121	1,879	177
6	Business Development LLC (Mtsvane Kontskhi)	57,547	51,074	3,606
7	Business Development LLC (Mtsvane Kontskhi)	1,941	-	-
8	Business Development LLC (Tsikhisdziri)	18,222	-	-

9	Seaside LLC (Chakvi)	9,253	-	491
10	Black Sea Resorts LLC (Shekvetili Hotel Paragraph)	151,144	64,518	-
11	Black Sea Riviera LLC (Ganmukhuri/Anaklia)	33,951	21,647	232
12	Tsartkela LLC (51% share, Abastumani)	18,545	26,142	-

List of Additional Property - Ownership Transferred

Nº	Owner	Address	Property Area	Land Plot Area
1	Business Center LLC	Tbilisi, Sololaki Alley, the area belonging to the Business Center	12,847	30,772
2	Cartu Group	Tbilisi, 300 Aragveli Street	506	18,467
3	Cartu Group	Tbilisi, 39a Ilia Chavchavadze Avenue	7,615	4,126
4	Cartu Group	Tbilisi, near Kakheti Highway	-	12,300
5	Cartu Group	Tbilisi, the hillside near Tskhvedadze Street	-	881
6	Burji LLC	Tbilisi (Production space)	Production space	21,034
7	Elita Burji LLC and the area belonging to Isani Cartu	Tbilisi, Beri Gabriel Salosi Avenue	5,136	79,978
8	Elita Burji LLC	Poti, Guria Street	81	-
9	The area belonging to Laguna Vere JSC and 69 Kostava LLC	Tbilisi, Kostava Avenue	19,486	43,870
10	Sea View Resort LLC	Batumi, Groboedovi Street	911	792
11	Bolnisi Tuff LLC	Bolnisi District, village of Talaveri	Production space	40,000
12	Land plots belonging to Didveli JSC	Borjomi District, Bakuriani, Didveli	-	13,513
13	Cartu Bank JSC	Tbilisi	-	-
14	Cartu Insurance JSC	Tbilisi	-	-

Ownership Being Transferred:
1. Bakuriani complex - 7,625 (property area) - 88,801 (land plot area)
2. Hotel in Signaghi LLC (70% share)

Check out Bidzina Ivanishvili's farewell statement on georgiatoday.ge

About Tomorrow – Remembering Yesterday while Bearing in Mind the Present Day. Part 1

ANALYSIS BY VICTOR KIPIANI,
CHAIRMAN OF GEOCASE

The past year of 2020 was not just another year. Its dramatic nature showed us once again, and quite severely, the full intensity of the challenges that could arise when several large-scale crises occur at once. In fact, in parallel with the distortion of the international political line, economic imbalance and inadequate governance systems, the global pandemic has further exposed old scars and added new, hitherto unknown, traits to the already familiar picture.

The natural result of this process is the study of the risks and dangers posed by the pandemic, their ongoing diagnoses, and the search for effective ways to solve the crisis. Undoubtedly, it is important to deepen academic knowledge while working on the issues raised, but it is much more difficult and takes great responsibility to adapt the relevant knowledge in such a way so that it can help to actually address urgent concrete issues.

“FROM THIRD TO FIRST”: TIME AND NECESSITY

Georgia is facing a multi-component task that needs to be solved. We must analyze with equal accuracy both the dynamics of global and regional trends and the anatomy of domestic challenges and determine the impact of the interrelationship of the first two and their effect on the third. Also, to determine with a minimal margin of error the forms of national consciousness and institutional development corresponding to world events. This task is aggravated by the fact that in parallel with finally overcoming the remaining, so-called Soviet legacy, the urgent objective is to materialize the idea of modern Georgian national-state unity oriented not merely towards tomorrow (time flies fast even without looking back), but the day after tomorrow.

We have mentioned before the uselessness of theoretical exercises detached from practice. However, it is also a fact that the success of any affair is based on understanding its conceptually correct beginnings, substantiating the principles that define the system, and finding the optimal point of intersection between historical memory, current process, and future mosaic. It is only possible with this condition to achieve what we often talk about: the formation of a systemic vision of the country's development, the consolidation of society around it and, already for this time and generation, performing a modern miracle of our nation – jumping from the third world to the first.

Since the purpose of this article is not just a call and a reminder, we will try to

point out some essential circumstances or factors without which long-term and consistent state development remains a hostage of routine puzzles, and national energy, talent and resources are consumed to overcome a daily, endless whirlpool of “one step forward, two steps back”. Overall, we may end up receiving an illusion “filled” with deceptive victories and ostensible successes “achieved” in one single circle. Of course, something like this is not in any of our interests: one of the main guarantees of our overall success is natural unity.

THE ENVIRONMENT THAT IS FORMED AROUND US

The more modest the role of Georgia in modern global processes, the greater the impact of these processes on the present-day life and development of our country. Such an inverse relationship would not be difficult to explain if not for the rearrangement of international relations from already well-known foundations to new, yet undeveloped and quite complex, risky, and, in many ways, muddy and untested beginnings.

We talked about this process many times over the past year, and in several articles have tried to specify and discuss its signs and peculiarities. Also, we have repeatedly related this process to Georgia's agenda, defining as to how certain relationships are connected to key directions and what should be the purposeful response of Georgia; or what type of prevention should be in place to reduce the harmful effects of global trends as much as possible, and how to keep up with positive trends and make the most of any benefits.

The list of issues to be discussed in this regard is extensive. However, for now we will focus on just a few to highlight their natural bond with our country. We think we should unconditionally consider the role and weight of the great powers in the new system of international relations – as well as their relationships in the global and regional contexts. Such significant attention to the “constellation of the First World” carries a simple rationale: regardless of the various teachings, schools, or practical doctrines in international relations, the nature and content of these relationships were based on one simple and unequivocal factor and will remain so in the future. This factor is in the global geopolitical and geo-economic scene of “the powerful ones of this world”: the power of global and superregional states and their impact on processes and outcomes. Even though it is true that the theorists and practitioners have often “colorized” different stages of the twentieth and this century with fascinating doctrinal titles, behind them stood the laws of realism imbued by the world of Hobbes. We would not make this discus-

sion any simpler by simply stating that power always rises. Of course, this is not always the case, but for the most part it is. And we must be ready for that, both for the ideology corresponding to Georgian realism and for the correct and adequate adaptation of the national resource to this ideology.

Georgians have many friends and partners in the world today. We have enemies as well as those who envy us: sometimes they are open and sometimes concealed. But whatever the balance or equation of friends and foes, the message of the New World Order is unmistakably read as follows: in advocating our development and interests, we must, first and foremost, rely on ourselves. And whatever is the support of the international system and law, its effectiveness and efficiency must rely on the main foundation – Georgian realism, qualified pragmatism and, in terms of values, – rationalism.

Following this introduction, we will briefly review a few sub-items.

A NEW COLD WAR?

The emergence of a new geopolitical contour in Eurasia is largely driven by the so-called Cold War between the US and China. We do not use the qualifier “so-called” here randomly. The use of these words is associated with one common mistake: equating their relations with those of the Cold War between the US and the USSR.

If we consider a few fundamental differences between these two confrontations, then we can properly understand the comparison as a mistake. Let us start with the fact that the leading line of the Cold War between the US and the USSR was overwhelmingly revealed in the rivalry between two ideological camps, while the confrontation between the US and China is not as much about ideology as about the distribution of spheres of influence mainly. China believes that the centuries-long “era of humiliation” is over, and it is time for the world to not only acknowledge their desire to be, but also to at last recognize China as a great state. A number of Chinese initiatives in recent years, both within the country and abroad, have served the purpose of achieving this goal. These initiatives are well known to readers.

Beijing's traditional official rhetoric about the non-use of force against other states is noteworthy, as is its involvement in international institutions and various projects. This activity of China became especially noticeable during Trump's presidency, and it has been followed by a reduction in cooperation by the United States in various international formats. Also noteworthy is the extraordinary attention paid to the Chinese model of governance during the pandemic, which has sparked a debate over the effectiveness of liberal and state forms of capitalism.



Image source: global-goose.com

Without going into the details of drawing a comparison between the systems, this confrontation carries one very practical significance for Georgia: we are in one of the key geographical and geopolitical areas of the Eurasian space, the macro-region of the Black and Caspian Seas. In the context of a new series of large-scale competition of states in the Eurasian space, the growth of different interests in this macro-region is inevitable. This is directly related to the urgency of our state security and public resilience, as well as to the further deepening of our strategic alliances strengthened by the Constitution, so that it acquires new forms and essence. In addition, this line of alliances must somehow, which is utterly difficult, be drawn in the constant mode of tension management and constant communication with large regional participants.

In short, Georgian realism must, in the shortest period, accommodate the two main tools for managing the coexistence of our national interests with the interests of others in the region, which lies in effective restraint and effective dialogue. We understand that the topic needs to be expanded upon, and it will be the subject of our next discussion. At this stage we will limit ourselves to a brief overview.

“MORE NATO IN GEORGIA AND MORE GEORGIA IN NATO”

We all know this phrase by heart and have been hearing it for years now. The real meaning of which, similar to a famous Georgian song, is that the present might not favor us, but the future will belong to us (and not someone else).

Clearly, the process of integration with the Euro-Atlantic Alliance is not static: it is moving forward, acquiring new elements and content. At the same time, the significant and alarming processes around our country and allies is not motionless either – they seem to be developing at a faster pace than the intensity of NATO integration statements or even the addition of a few extra elements to the cooperation package. In this sense, despite our Foreign Ministry's promising assessments, we do not think that the summary document of the last NATO summit has created the adequate effect that would be directly proportional to this period and its needs. There is a feeling that the dynamics of our membership in the Alliance has become a

subject to the “a little later, a little bit less” approach, which is detrimental to an overall Western security design in Georgia, the region, and beyond.

In all fairness, it should be noted that the lack of the desired rhythm and pace in the process cannot and should not be attributed to the political will of Brussels alone. Here again we must recall the “inverted” world left behind by the post-classic Cold War period, and the pandemic made the system of international relations even more unpredictable. The uncertainty of the general environment is compounded by the noticeable fragmentation of a single political line within the alliance itself. To illustrate this point, we will cite as examples the socio-political differences and heterogeneity between NATO countries in Western and Eastern Europe; Turkish peculiarity, “to do what will benefit Turkey in the first place”; and European “strategic autonomy” in response to Trump's famous policies. But all of these are clearly detached and far away from solving practical issues in the context of a country whose territory is occupied and its creeping expansion (say, annexation) is not interrupted, and the neighborhood environment requires the introduction of feasible (and not declarative) security mechanisms for the same country. At the end of the day, it is a question of fully considering the interests of a country that has not backed down for a single minute in its contribution to the common good.

Proper attention has been paid to the practical aspects of this particular issue in the past and is still being addressed. Here we just wanted to point out that it is now time for politically courageous decisions and effective steps. In this case as well, there are several options for our country and its allies to consider, starting with the collective and ending with regional or bilateral security systems. We have described them in previous publications. Proper readiness and realism are required to analyze each decision in a timely manner and to implement them without any hesitation. This is necessary for Georgia to have more national and more Black Sea regional stability, and not for the purpose of being perceived as a source of threat in our neighborhood.

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

The Karabakh Conflict & Georgia's Evolving Geopolitical Position

ANALYSIS BY EMIL AVDALIANI

Though a neighbor to Armenia and Azerbaijan, Georgia has traditionally expressed little geopolitical interest in being involved in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The 2020 war between Baku and Yerevan, however, changed the way Georgia viewed the conflict, and the threats emanating from it pushes Tbilisi to reconsider its basic approach towards the dispute. Several factors caused the change. The Armenian and Azerbaijani ethnic minorities in Georgia were engaged in various activities to provide direct support for the warring sides. Occasional protests too erupted, and some damages to the cross-border infrastructure were inflicted. The Georgian government now

has to work on a comprehensive strategy to limit domestic potential pitfalls arising from the Karabakh war, particularly as the conflict is far from being resolved.

Another novelty in the Georgian approach was active diplomacy, which highlighted Tbilisi's potential to play a positive role in alleviating the mutual distrust between Baku and Yerevan, and limiting geopolitical threats to regional security. The timing for diplomatic maneuvering was interesting, with world leaders notoriously absent from the diplomatic activity surrounding the conflict. Russia, Armenia's ally and a usual host to Baku-Yerevan talks, was hesitant to minimize the fighting, while Western leaders seemed mostly pre-occupied with other issues, from US elections and internal troubles in the EU, to protests in Belarus.

The latest war also burst into the open

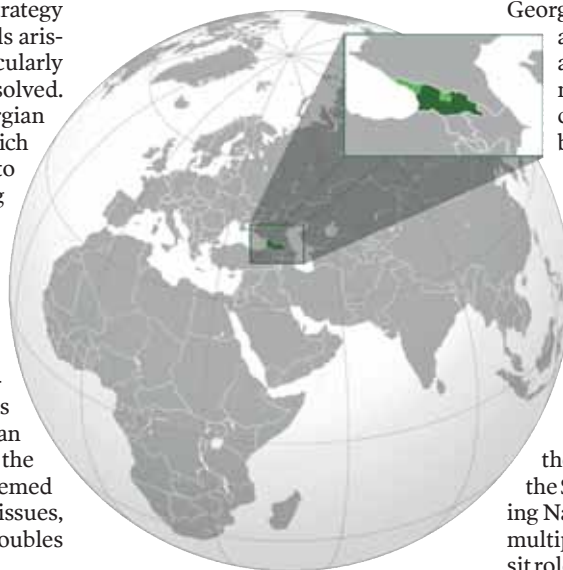


Image source: countrycodex.com

Georgia's geographic dilemma: serving as the quickest way for Armenia and Azerbaijan to receive armament from abroad, it tested the country's relations with both neighbors.

Georgia also witnessed vulnerabilities regarding the pipeline, railway and road infrastructure running from Azerbaijan to Turkey. The fighting could easily spread to the Tovuz region, as was the case in July 2020, and long-distance bombing would easily put the infrastructure out of order.

More importantly for Georgia are the larger, regional-level results of the Second Karabakh War. The emerging Nakhchivan corridor brought about multiple discussions on Georgia's transit role. Though not directly threatening the country's regional hub position, the

development nevertheless showed the need for further development of the road and railway infrastructure.

The changed military dynamic in the region as a result of the war will also have a direct bearing on Georgia's foreign policy thinking, as well as its military strategy. With a new Russian military presence, the Georgian borders are now encircled by Russian troops. This limits NATO/US military projection into the region, thereby limiting Tbilisi's membership prospects. The war's specifics (use of drones) also propels Tbilisi to adapt to the new kind of warfare. Recent plans to purchase the new technologies underline the emerging trend.

The Second Karabakh War tested Georgia internally, accentuated the country's unfavorable geopolitical position, and propelled the military and political establishment to adjust to the changing dynamics in the South Caucasus.

GM of Radisson Collection Tsinandali Estate: It's Time to Reinvent the Way Hotels Attract Guests

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW BY
NINI DAKHUNDARIDZE

The Tsinandali Estate, within the grounds of which is the Radisson Collection hotel, stands out for its unique history. Exactly two centuries ago, Prince Alexander Chavchavadze transformed the ancestral estate into a cultural-intellectual center, seeing the best writers, poets, artists of that era regularly gathering there. As such, the foundation of a rich tradition of hospitality was laid there, as was the idea of founding Georgian Theater. The Chavchavadze Palace often hosted cultural events, exhibitions, and literary evenings, and today, it continues its legacy with pride.

In an interview with GEORGIA TODAY, Elene Otarashvili, the General Manager of Radisson Collection Tsinandali Estate, and the founding partner and board member of the Georgian Business Tourism Association (GBTA), takes us back to the Estate's cultural heritage, talks about the changes they had to enforce throughout the pandemic, and sends out a few reassuring positive messages.

GIVE US A SUMMARY OF YOUR 2020. HOW DID YOU COPE THROUGHOUT THE PANDEMIC?

The hospitality industry has endured tremendous shifts and disruptions over the past year, forcing business to rapidly implement innovative trends that will reshape the future of hospitality. The COVID-19 pandemic has turned travel upside down, and the hotel industry has been forced to cope with a constantly changing landscape of traveller expectations.

The pandemic has caused a lot of damage to the global economy. However, the hotel industry found itself at the epicenter of the blow. Many hotels and tourist facilities have had to close. It can be said that international tourism has actually stopped. All this has posed acute challenges for the entire tourism sector.

At the Radisson Collection Hotel, we adopted all the crisis management measures required by international and local protocols. We developed an anti-crisis plan and adapted very quickly to the new reality, fully following the new demands of the local market and thus maintaining a balance. For this, of course, we needed systemic changes, although I can tell you that with our new approaches, we have created more demand and hosted far more guests than we first expected. We assured our guests that having a holiday at our hotel was safe. I think the pandemic has taught us all to adapt as quickly as possible to any crisis, and to overcome any uncertainty.

TELL US MORE ABOUT TSINANDALI ESTATE.

With its unique history and personal stories, Tsinandali Estate is a place that really stands out. In 2006, Giorgi Ramishvili and the Silk Road Group decided to completely restore Tsinandali Estate, the main idea being to preserve, revitalize and minimize the energy and history of the place. Radisson Collection Hotel is distinguished by its magnificent architecture, historical authenticity, and modern design elements. All this creates a special environment for guests.

It should be noted that Radisson Collection was nominated in a very prestigious international competition at the MIPIM Awards, positioning it among the top four hotels in the world for its unique architecture, design and location. Our hotel is a wonderful combination of historical part and modern architecture, designed by two very famous artists, German designer Ingo Maurer, who is often referred to as the "Poet of Light" and a Georgian artist, our very own Tamar Kvesitadze.

We have 124 rooms spread over four floors and each floor represents a season: spring, summer, autumn and winter. The hotel has multifunctional spaces, various types of restaurants and bars. Also noteworthy are the two concert halls that adorn the area, our amphitheater and ballroom, where cultural events are often held. Both halls boast a unique design and specifically-designed excellent acoustics.

We have a lot of interesting projects ahead. Our goal is to contribute to the development of Georgia as a world-class tourist destination.

WHAT MEASURES HAVE YOU TAKEN TO PROTECT YOUR GUESTS?

The most important thing for us is the safety of our guests and staff. The current situation, on our part, requires more mobilization and investment. Costs have increased, but we do not increase the cost of services because I think we need to be more flexible in this situation.

We strictly follow all the recommendations issued by the state. We have set all the established norms of physical distance in our restaurants, bars and indoor pool. From new cancellation policies to a highly controlled health and social distancing protocol, including mask enforcement, temperature screening, social distancing in common areas and low-contact check-in procedures, we have adapted to the new norms and reality.

Our advantage is having an open area, a completely healthy environment, a unique park spread over 18 hectares of Tsinandali, where more than 1,600 species of exotic plants from five continents

of the world are represented. Our wide open spaces have a sophisticated, inspiring design, and there our guests can relax comfortably in isolation.

I would like to mention that Radisson Collection has received SGS plus international certification in the field of cleanliness and safety. SGS is a leading international company in the field of inspection and testing, and their evaluation is a confirmation of our high quality and international standards.

WHAT ACHIEVEMENTS WOULD YOU HIGHLIGHT IN 2020?

At the World Travel Awards, one of the most prestigious competitions in the global tourism industry, the Radisson Collection Tsinandali estate won 'Georgia's Leading Hotel 2020.' The World Travel Awards has been awarding world-leading tourism and hospitality companies for 27 years. I would like to thank our dear guests, staff and fans who supported us during the competition. In addition, at the Welcome to Georgia National Tourism Awards, our hotel was named a finalist in two nominations: The Best Value - Premium Accommodation, and The Best Hotel of International Chain in Georgia. The award ceremony has been postponed for some time due to the pandemic, but we expect a decent victory here as well.

We faced a lot of challenges in 2020. Despite everything, we tried not to stop developing, which is why we took the experience of staying with us to a new level. The main challenge for us this year was holding the Tsinandali Classical Music Festival safely, which we managed to do successfully. We hosted world classical music stars such as Martha Argerich, Lisa Batiashvili, Nelson Gerner, Alexander Kantarov, Daniel Lozakovich, and others. We conducted the four-day busy program of the festival in full compliance with international safety norms. In the same context, we can recall the festival Jazz & Wine Kakheti 2020, which was also held successfully.

WIZZAIR CUT 19 ROUTES FROM KUTAI, AND AIRLINES REDUCED THEIR FLIGHTS. AS A RESULT, GEORGIA HAS FEWER INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS FROM EUROPEAN ORIGIN COUNTRIES. THE PUSH WORLDWIDE, INCLUDING IN GEORGIA, IS FOR DOMESTIC TOURISM. HOW HAS THIS AFFECTED YOU AND HOW HAVE YOU ADAPTED TO THE CHANGING DEMANDS?

Every crisis is an opportunity if you're able to see it. What COVID-19 did was remind us of a fundamental business principle: listen to the customer, make the guest feel comfortable, no matter the situation.

We enhanced the tourism experience of our guests through numerous customized offers, service packages, and deals to match their taste. They enjoyed our friends & family picnics in Tsinandali Estate vineyards, harvest packages, culinary masterclasses, wine degustation masterclasses, couples' retreats, special spa procedures for adults and kids; new swimming pool with amazing views of Alazani Valley, featuring a transparent, retractable roof and walls; sports activities like playing tennis, riding bicycles, and a yoga retreats; a co-working space with complimentary coffee breaks for a better remote working experience; flights by hot air balloon exclusively for our guests, giving them the opportunity to experience the beautiful landscapes of



the Alazani Valley and Caucasus Mountains from a truly unique perspective. On top of it all, we treat our dear guests to delicious Kakhetian and European dishes and offer a real gastronomic adventure.

I look to the future with hope, and think that after the pandemic, a large part of the tourists who want to travel will take the road to Georgia.

WE HEARD THERE WERE CHANGES TO THE RADISSON COLLECTION TSINANDALI ESTATE MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE. COULD YOU TELL US MORE?

From April 1, 2020, Radisson Collection Tsinandali Estate started operating as a Franchised Hotel managed by Silk Hospitality and its CEO, Jordi Kuijt. Despite a challenging year full of difficulties, we have made fundamental changes. We are much stronger and more flexible today. There is no guest request that we cannot satisfy. That is the working attitude of our whole staff.

Radisson Collection Tsinandali Estate has consistently offered top-tier flexibility for guests throughout the crisis. The "Yes I can" spirit of our outstanding service standards, and our enthusiastic and sincere attitude towards guests is our number one priority.

WILL WE ALL GO BACK TO TRAVELING TO WORK, OR WILL WE STAY HOME INDEFINITELY, CONNECTING VIRTUALLY WITH OUR CO-WORKERS, CLIENTS AND PARTNERS?

In my opinion, there is no substitute to face-to-face meetings. There really is nothing like in-person collaboration, in-person mentoring and in-person planning. There is huge demand to get on the road and get together in person. So many life events have been postponed: weddings, vacations, anniversaries. There is simply no virtual replacement for them. We have a lot of work ahead as we continue to navigate through this pandemic. But I have great confidence in the strength of this industry. Working together, there is no doubt the hospitality industry is here to stay.

I believe that once there is a vaccine available to be widely distributed, the world will begin to rebuild and recover. The desire to travel is as deeply rooted and as strong as ever. When the time is right and it's safe, we'll all be reaching for our suitcases. The human spirit is strong and resilient, and I am filled with gratitude for that.

It's wise for hotels to apply lessons learned from this year and prepare for the future of the industry beyond COVID-

19. Now that safety and cleanliness are more important than ever, it's time to adapt and reinvent the way hotels attract guests.

USING OUR PLATFORM, IS THERE ANY POSITIVE MESSAGE YOU'D LIKE TO SEND TO YOUR LOYAL CUSTOMERS AND FUTURE CUSTOMERS?

Tough times don't last. It's in human nature to forget, and to connect.

2020 was a year of staying home, postponing trips, and posting old vacation pictures on social media. This year, travellers are ready to 'seize the stay' when travel returns and they feel comfortable to take the trips they missed out on.

On the other hand, 2021 is looking very promising, as soon the world will be vaccinated. The hospitality industry is all about smiling at the guests and knowing them well; we should not forget it. I am sure that, in 2021, we will smile again at our guests, and they will smile back at us without a mask.

YOU ARE ALSO THE FOUNDING PARTNER & A BOARD MEMBER OF THE GEORGIAN BUSINESS TOURISM ASSOCIATION (GBTA). DO YOU THINK THAT IN THE POST-PANDEMIC SITUATION, WE CAN CONSIDER MICE TOURISM AS AN EFFECTIVE WAY TO ACTIVATE THE SECTOR?

Business tourism was the fastest growing, dynamic field in the tourism industry before the pandemic. The most lucrative area in tourism, the MICE tourism segment is characterized by high spending-capacity. It can be considered as a very important tool for overcoming the post-pandemic crisis, as the MICE industry plays a big role in the development and diversification of the country's economy.

As soon as MICE tourism starts gathering its strength, small business groups will start traveling first. From September, we expect to host large groups across the country. I think it is very important for us to use this real perspective. It should become a strategic task of our country. The development of MICE tourism brings such significant positive results for the country as: elimination of seasonality, increase of high-income visitors, development of tourism-related sectors, increase of awareness of the country on the world arena and its integration into the international market. I believe that Georgia has great potential to become a kind of regional center of MICE tourism on the world map.

Finally, I would like to wish you peace, happiness, health and all the best in 2021.





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Baltic Link: Etseri, Svaneti

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

Out of nowhere, a couple of months ago, came a call to my wife's phone from a country code we didn't recognize, which turned out to be Lithuania, one of the three Baltic countries dragged into the Soviet Union during World War II, now a booming EU state. The caller was interested in doing some humanitarian work connected with a school specifically in Svaneti, having been there, and had found us via our location on Google Maps. Could we talk? Sure, always glad.

The idea was to connect our school in Etseri with a similar-size one in a village (Giedraiciu) in his country. Our respective pupils would have what he called a "brain battle" via live Skype link, a quiz basically, as well as exchanging information about or schools and locations, hopefully leading to permanent friendships between the schools and their pupils. Part of the deal was a hefty donation of money from his company's charitable donations group, to be used as we saw fit for school materials for our children here. With Christmas coming up, the timing would be ideal for a delivery of presents.

We happily signaled our wish to participate and organize things from our end. Although our Magti modem's battery had recently exploded inside, turning into a little puffed out pillow (subject of a future, ire-filled article), I had been using my cell phone as the replacement modem, and this would suffice for the required internet connection if the school's internet wasn't working. Not as much bandwidth, but a lot better than nothing. My wife began making calls to children and teachers to set things up.

We put together several boxes and bags of school things: stationery of many kinds, art supplies and so on. A few of the older girls came over to help us sort these into gift bags for the various classes. They began recording videos to show the Lithuanian children: Svan songs, a recipe for the all-important Svan salt spice mix, introductions to themselves and Etseri, and so on. These would go into a Google Drive folder to be shared with the other school, including lots of my best photos of the village in all seasons. I borrowed a Father Christmas costume to get into my role as gift-giver.

The big event began with introductions of our schools and villages, theirs being about 50 km away from Vilnius, their capital. The internet connections at both ends were fast enough for a group Skype



video call, so technology really came through. They showed us slides with written historical information (the school began in the 18th century) and an enviable drone video of the picturesque community, complete with forests and lake. Now, Etseri and Svaneti are nothing to sneeze at landscape-wise, but the simple exotic location we were seeing made the pupils sigh with longing for

something new. We do hope a student exchange travel holiday can be arranged!

Then came the Brain Battle, with their remotely connected children and ours in one room as two teams, debating for a minute to come up with answers to multiple choice questions of world geography and history. It ended up being close, with Lithuania beating Georgia 12-10. Not bad!

Father Christmas, locally known as Grandfather Snow, made his appearance at half-time, handing out the assembled gift bags one per participating class, for which huge thanks to the employees of the laboratory equipment company in Lithuania for their donation (<http://www.linealibera.lt/en/about-us/>). We pledged the beginning of a beautiful friendship, and are now seeking ways to move forward with next steps, such as pupils getting to know each other on Facebook and other social media platforms.

Someone connected with the Lithuanian Embassy to Georgia has also now been in touch, wondering about book donations of a work translated from their language to ours and a further visit from that embassy. Long-term, once COVID-19 has eased up enough to allow border openings, we still hope for the two-way exchange. Until then, we'll remain in touch.

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

Tim Severin's Argo on Georgian Shores



OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

December 18, 2020, was a grief-stricken instant for professional travelers of the world, and certainly for every single participant in the 'Jason Voyage' of 1984, because that sorrowful winter day, the venerated British explorer, scientist, historian, filmmaker and writer Tim Severin at age 80 departed his audacious exploratory life. Let his great soul rest in eternal piece!

Tim's legendary journeys, reconstructing the voyages of mythical, historical and literary celebrities, will forever remain in the annals of travel adventure. This was a British intellectual who wanted to dispense any doubts about the ancient Greeks entering Georgian waters in a wooden boat

called the Argo and navigated by Jason, the well-known Hellenic mythical hero. Indeed, the much-talked-about trip was elegantly replicated by Georgia's wonderful friend Tim Severin, which he and his crew performed with such precision that the public both in Georgia and worldwide were totally fascinated.

Tim fell in love with Georgia, and, having hit the Batumi coast, he emotionally quipped that the Golden Fleece sought by Jason was for him a symbol of his dedication to Sakartvelo, and carried away not by hands but in the heart. Golden words indeed!

The then-Georgian Public TV was put in charge of hosting Severin's international voyage mission, Georgia being one of the knees in the chart. The head of Georgia's state television, Nugzar Popkhadze, handled the event with his usual organizational mastery; Archil

Gogelia, the editor-in-chief of a popular sports edition, skillfully managed the coverage of the event from A to Z; Iliia Peradze, a journalist, athlete and himself an 'Argonaut,' was the heart of the entire experience; and Paata Natsvlishvili, outstanding Georgian journalist and publisher, brilliantly covered the developments thereof, having been made one of the regular Argo rowers. Only Paata could have fit comfortably into the frames of those two incredible duties!

Incidentally, Tim Severin and the members of his 1984 expedition, overwhelmed with a feeling of the sincerest camaraderie towards their Georgian fellow adventurers, returned to Georgia after 30 years to celebrate together the shared success of the Argo mission, although they had never met physically since the trip ended.

According to Natsvlishvili, the great epoch of historical voyages has come to an end, for Tim Severin is no longer with us. As true and painful as this statement might be, the name of this uniquely memorized professional voyager of the world renown will forever be carved in the minds of all those good people he met and worked with during his long and meaningful lifetime, including his Georgian fans and friends.

Tim Severin, as determined and interested as he was, built the Argo replica at Greek Island Spetses, and outlined its route based on the well-known 'Argonautica' by Apollonius of Rhodes. The final destination of Severin's nautical itinerary was the shores of the ancient land of Colchis, what is today's Georgia. Because this extraordinary trial was meant to prove the authenticity of the Voyage of the Argonauts, Severin needed to rely on certain fundamental scientific research, and his choice fell on the works



of the famous Georgian archeologist Otar Lordkipanidze.

The third day of May 1984, following brief, sea-going trials in the Gulf of Argolis, Argo set sail from the Greek town of Volos. Tim Severin added 10 Greek rowers to his 10 British ones, who were substituted by 10 Turkish rowing men, and finally 10 Georgian rowers in the Turkish waters. Paata Natsvlishvili was one of those good and strong men. With Severin's permission, he authored a book

describing the daring expedition and detailing the story of the travel of the new Argonauts in Georgia.

Incidentally, the Argo crew members went to Svaneti, where they got acquainted with the ancient method of gold extraction with the help of sheep's hide, and concluded that the myth of the Argonauts was indeed based on a real story. The news of Tim Severin's death was taken in Georgia as the loss of one of our own esteemed men.



WE'AR ART: Meet Fashion Designer Nana Kasradze



DESIGNING STYLE?

I don't think any business owner can say that they have not been affected by the coronavirus situation. We are currently doing our best to survive. I can't say how long we can realistically persevere, but I remain hopeful that the pandemic will end soon and we will survive. Creating designs has become less necessary. We only sew fluffy sportswear, because only this type of clothing is in demand. Bars and clubs are closed, parties are banned, and no-one needs to buy distinctive, and formal, or even everyday, clothes. Such is our new reality.

WHAT IS THE INSPIRATION BEHIND YOUR WORKS?

My works are inspired by traditional and Georgian clothes. Not only clothes but other expressions of art; works by Georgian artists which I later used as prints. For example, I was one of the first ones to use N. Pirosmiani's "Fisherman Boy" in shoes and a vest.

WHICH INTERNATIONAL ARTISTS OR DESIGNERS HAVE INFLUENCED YOUR WORK?

I can single out one international well-known designer whom I have always loved. Coco Chanel has been my favorite,



even my role model, since I was a little girl. I've always liked her work, as well as her approach to design: it is all so comfortable and elegant!

HOW DO YOU VIEW TRADITIONAL GEORGIAN CLOTHING? HAS IT INSPIRED YOUR DESIGNS?

I have a special relationship with Georgian clothes. I danced at the Georgian National Ballet when I was younger. Both consciously and subconsciously, these years shaped me. The idea that these old

but precious clothes could and should be transferred to a new Georgian modernity came from my experience as a ballerina. Happily, the idea turned out to be successful, and the customers got to know my brand.

WE'AR ART is a copyrighted brand/slogan with a unique philosophy: to create awareness of fashion and art. Since 2018, the WE'AR ART collection has only worked for one common 'good': raising funds through charity events and sponsoring competitions for young artists.

INTERVIEW BY NINI DAKHUNDARIDZE

I really wanted to do, additionally, I took private lessons designing women's clothes.

HAVE YOU TAKEN PART IN ANY FASHION SHOWS?

I've never been much interested in organizing an individual fashion show. But we, as the brand 'Lazeti,' did participate in Tbilisi Fashion Week twice.

WHAT IS THE MAIN IDEA OF YOUR DESIGNS/BRAND?

The main idea is to help the world appreciate and fall in love with Georgian-designed clothes. We want to share our perception of designing clothes as art with as many as possible. What serves that idea is our goal: to export good quality Lazeti products to different countries of the world.

WHAT KIND OF PERSON WEARS LAZETI?

Sophisticated and tasteful people wear our clothes. We make it our priority not to blend in with overrated trends: we try to stand out from other brands as much as we can.

WHAT IS THE FEELING YOU GET WHEN YOU SEE SOMEONE STROLLING DOWN THE STREETS IN YOUR DESIGN?

I feel myself getting unmatched levels of "happy" in these moments.

HOW HAS THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC AFFECTED YOUR BUSINESS AND

The new year for our collaboration with WE'AR ART, a copyrighted brand/slogan aiming to create awareness of fashion and art, means new interviews with Georgian designers.

In her interview with GEORGIA TODAY, Nana Kasradze, the creative mind behind the 'Lazeti' brand, tells us about the new reality of fashion design, her awakening to Georgian national clothes as a ballerina, and more.

HOW DID YOUR CAREER AS A DESIGNER KICK OFF?

After graduating, I, along with my friends, decided to set up a small factory where my designs would be turned into clothes; where we could have a small circulation and display our works in showrooms.

WHERE DID YOU GET YOUR EDUCATION RELATED TO THE FIELD YOU WORK IN? HOW IMPORTANT DO YOU DEEM PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION IN MAKING A DESIGNER?

I've been fascinated with art since I can remember. Having graduated from the Nikoladze Art School, I proceeded with my higher education in the Tbilisi University of Culture and Arts. Having figured out that designing clothes was what



NOVAT Terminates Contract with Nino Ananiashvili

BY ANA DUMBADZE

The Novosibirsk Opera and Ballet Theater (NOVAT) has terminated its contract with Georgian prima ballerina Nino Ananiashvili, a statement published on the official website of the theater announced.

"As a result of negotiations between the artistic director of NOVAT, Vladimir Kekhman, and Nino Ananiashvili, it was decided to terminate the previously con-

cluded contract by agreement of both parties," the theater said in its statement.

For the record, it was reported last week that the Novosibirsk Theater was suspending its contract with Ananiashvili as she had provided information about her cooperation with NOVAT in an exclusive interview with Radio Freedom. The Novosibirsk Theater Ballet troupe was due to meet with her in late January, according to the prima ballerina. However, the management of the theater considered that disclosing the identity of the director to the staff before an official presentation was an extreme mani-

festation of disrespect to the troupe, and temporarily suspended the contract.

"Information has been published in a number of media platforms that Nino Ananiashvili has been invited to lead the ballet troupe at the Novosibirsk Opera and Ballet Theater. The management of the theater believes that disclosing the identity of the director to the staff before its official presentation is an extreme manifestation of disrespect to the troupe.

The Georgian prima ballerina has yet to make a statement regarding the cancellation of her contract with NOVAT.



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