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FOCUS ON GEORGIA IN THE UNWTO

Georgia's candidate for Sec-Gen of the UN World Tourism Organization, Zurab Pololikashvili, has been nominated for a second term by the Executive Board

PAGE 3



In this week's issue...

PM: Only WHO-Authorized Vaccines Will Be Imported to Georgia

NEWS PAGE 2

Coronavirus: Georgia Records 1137 New Cases, 17019 Tests Performed

POLITICS PAGE 3

Enguri HPP: Challenges & Opportunities for Georgia's Electricity Sector at the Start of 2021

ISSET PAGE 7

Violence in Prisons: Public Defender Calls on Authorities to Enhance Management Mode

SOCIETY PAGE 9

Violence in Prisons: Public Defender calls on Authorities to Enhance Management Model

SOCIETY PAGE 9

European Mints for Georgian Money

CULTURE PAGE 11

Georgian Wrestlers' Success at Grand Prix de France

SPORTS PAGE 11

Biden Sworn in as 46th President of the US, Harris Becomes First Woman VP

BY NINI DAKHUNDARIDZE

Resting his right hand on the Bible that has been in his family for 127 years, Joe Biden recited the 35-word oath of office on Wednesday afternoon, becoming the 46th President of The United States. The DC ceremony was administered by Chief Justice John Roberts Jr. and attended by three US former Presidents: Barrack Obama, George W Bush, and Bill Clinton, along with their wives, Michelle Obama, Laura Bush, and Hillary Clinton. The oldest living former president of the country, Jimmy Carter, did not attend the ceremony, but sent his regards. Unsurprisingly, now former President Donald Trump was not one of the prominent guests at the inauguration in the White House. The former President and First lady, refusing to follow tradition, left DC hours before the ceremony. His Vice President, Mike Pence, did not follow, and attended the inauguration.



Continued on page 2 Source: The New York Times. Image source: The LA Times, The BBC

STOCKS		Price	w/w	m/m	BONDS		Price	w/w	m/m
Bank of Georgia (BGEO LN)	GBP 12.18	-1.0%	+3.7%		GEOROG 04/21	100.70 (YTM 4.02%)	-0.4%	-0.7%	
Georgia Capital (CGEO LN)	GBP 5.50	+1.9%	+9.6%		GEORG 04/21	101.25 (YTM 1.35%)	-0.1%	-0.3%	
TBC Bank Group (TBCG LN)	GBP 13.02	-0.3%	+8.5%		GRAIL 07/22	106.58 (YTM 3.15%)	+0.4%	+0.9%	
					GEBGG 07/23	105.33 (YTM 3.76%)	-0.1%	-0.4%	
COMMODITIES		Price	w/w	m/m	CURRENCIES		Price	w/w	m/m
Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	54.75	-2.6%	+4.8%		GEL / USD	3.2943	-0.0%	+0.7%	
Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	1 841.26	-0.1%	-2.1%		GEL / EUR	3.9785	-0.6%	-0.7%	
					GEL / GBP	4.4748	+0.5%	+1.2%	
					GEL / CHF	3.7018	+0.0%	+0.0%	
					GEL / RUB	0.0445	+0.7%	-	
					GEL / TRY	0.4403	-0.0%	+2.8%	
					GEL / AZN	1.9379	-0.0%	+0.7%	
					GEL / AMD	0.0063	-	-	
					GEL / UAH	0.1166	-0.4%	-0.1%	
					EUR / USD	0.8280	+0.6%	+1.5%	
					GBP / USD	0.7359	-0.5%	-0.4%	
					CHF / USD	0.8908	+0.1%	+0.8%	
					RUB / USD	74.0251	-0.9%	-1.9%	
					TRY / USD	7.4790	+0.0%	-1.9%	
					AZN / USD	1.6999	+0.1%	+0.1%	
INDICES		Price	w/w	m/m					
FTSE 100	6 720.65	-2.1%	+2.9%						
FTSE 250	20 639.34	-0.7%	+2.6%						
DAX	13 848.35	-0.6%	+1.6%						
DOW JONES	30 814.26	-0.6%	+2.1%						
NASDAQ	12 998.50	-0.3%	+1.9%						
MSCI EM	1 709.99	-0.3%	+4.4%						
MSCI EM EE	1 358.98	+0.7%	+7.1%						
SP 500	3 768.25	-0.8%	+1.6%						
MSCI FM	2 626.82	-1.2%	+1.4%						
GT Index (GEL)	1 582.68	-	-						
GT Index (USD)	1 208.13	-	-						

Reps of Georgia's Business Sector Demand Re-opening to Save the Economy

Fifteen business associations on Wednesday released an open letter addressed to the Government of Georgia, specifying the extremely serious problems the economy is facing amid the pandemic, and expressing their concern as to a further aggravation of the situation unless the restrictions are lifted.

To assist the government in the process of gradual reopening, the signatories of the letter introduced a six-point plan aiming to save the Georgian economy.

Outlining the needs that need urgent addressing, the business associations state that hotels, restaurants and shopping malls should be opened in Georgia, because otherwise, according to the

forecast of specialists, many will not be able to survive the crisis.

Transport and air traffic should be restored too, they add, albeit with strict adherence to all relevant safety measures.

Businesses operating in the ski industry demand the opening of the winter season on February 1, together with tax benefits.

The authors of the initiative believe that non-compliance with these points will cause irreparable damage to Georgia's economy as a whole; the majority of the establishments will simply not survive. The aim of the statement is to call on the government to take urgent and effective action.



PM: Only WHO-Authorized Vaccines Will Be Imported to Georgia

Only those vaccines that have authorization from the World Health Organization will be imported into the country, Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia stated during Thursday's Cabinet meeting.

The Head of Government, in discussing the national action plan for vaccination, pointed out that all stakeholders took part in its development, including experts, international partners, field specialists, epidemiologists, doctors, the Public Defender, and others. The plan, which will be approved today, seeks to make sure that 60% of the population are vaccinated by the end of 2021.

"At the previous Cabinet meeting, the Health Ministry was instructed to finalize the national action plan for vaccination, to make sure that it is approved by today's Cabinet meeting. The relevant working group was created on December 15 to bring together all stakeholders, including experts, international partners, field specialists, epidemiologists, doctors, the Public Defender, and others. And today we must review and approve this plan that seeks mainly to make sure that 60% of the population are vaccinated by the end of 2021," Giorgi Gakharia said.

The PM noted that the highest-risk target groups will be vaccinated first. "Alongside its key goal, equally impor-



tant is the plan's technical aspect, including timeframe and target groups to vaccinated in stages according to this timeframe. The highest-risk target groups will be vaccinated at the initial stage, meaning medical personnel, long-term care facility residents, our senior citizens aged 75 and over, and then all our citizens aged between 65 and 75," Gakharia stated.

Technically, Georgia is ready to receive any authorized vaccine, the Head of Government added.

"The development of this plan is of key importance. Georgia, along with our European partners, is a member of the COVAX platform designed to supply countries with vaccines. Georgia, as early as 5-6 months ago, applied on this platform for 1.5 million vaccines in the nearest future. And we also transferred necessary financial resources. The key goal now is to make sure that our healthcare system is ready for vaccination of this

magnitude in the course of one year.

"Technically, Georgia is ready to receive any authorized vaccine. You must be aware of the importance of a cold chain and maintaining necessary temperatures in this process. Georgia is ready to receive vaccines in both technical terms and from the point of view of retrained medical personnel. This plan fully meets the present challenges, and we are, in fact, ready to start vaccinating in the foreseeable future.

"In addition, the Government continues bilateral negotiations with vaccine manufacturers, though there is one thing we must keep in mind. Only those vaccines that enjoy authorization from the World Health Organization will be imported into the country, and that is our and our European partners' principled stance, which stands for looking after the safety and health of our citizens," Giorgi Gakharia stated.

Biden Sworn in as 46th President of the US, Harris Becomes First Woman VP

Continued from page 1

Shortly before President Biden was inaugurated, Kamala Harris was sworn in as the Vice President. The 55-year-old American Senator from California is of Indian and Jamaican descent. This background has her breaking a number of records: she is the first woman, the first black woman, and the first Asian woman to break through the racial and gender "glass ceiling" in US politics, reaching a position that was, for too long, considered a "whites only" territory. This indeed already makes history, but with the Senate split evenly between the two parties for the first time since 2000, it looks like the Vice President will often be the decisive voice. On Wednesday, the Vice President brought the Democratic party's total tally of seats in the Senate to 50, the same number that the Republicans are holding, as she swore in two Democratic senators from Georgia, Raphael Warnock, and her successor from California, Alex Padilla. VP Harris means an advantage for the Democrats as the VP has the power to break ties, being the President of the Senate. In a situation that is extraordinary, the chamber and its two top senators, Democrat Chuck Schumer and Republican Mitch McConnell, have not yet agreed how exactly the branch will operate.

The unusual situation is not exclusive to the Senate. The swearing-in ceremony of the new president usually sees hundreds of thousands of people gathering at the Capitol, but due to the new norms of the pandemic, there were no crowds in DC, only 200,000 flags laid out on the National Mall, representing the Americans that would be there if the coronavirus were not. In a sad moment of history, the streets of Washington were filled with 25,000 National Guard troops, on the lookout for the rioting of Donald Trump supporters, who hail themselves as patriots but who for many seem more like terrorists.

In an inauguration ceremony like no other, some traditions still prevailed. The new President and Vice President went on with the inaugural tradition, started by former President Jimmy Carter in 1977, leaving the presidential limousine and walking down Pennsyl-

vania Avenue, to the White House. Biden and Harris, separately, took the walk with their families. Having given an interview, and said hello to Mayor Muriel Bowser of Washington, President Biden entered the White House for the first time since his departure as the VP four years ago. One of the traditions that did not prevail was a predecessor president inviting his successor for a customary visit to the White House before the inauguration.

In a reimagined ceremony, there was only a small group marching in Washington, including the drumlines from the University of Delaware and Howard University, the alma maters of the new president and vice president. Jennifer Lopez emotionally sang "this land is your land, this land is my land," Lady Gaga performed the national anthem, and young inaugural poet - the youngest at the age of 22, in fact, - read a poem titled "The Hill We Climb" that she finished after the Capitol riot on January 6.

Biden, who has sought the office for a little over 30 years and entered it in the midst of global and national health, economic and political crises, said at the inauguration ceremony that not every disagreement has to be "a cause for total war," referring to the political division of the nation that escalated into serious violence in the past weeks.

"Politics doesn't have to be a raging fire, destroying everything in its path," said the President in his speech. "We must reject the culture in which facts themselves are manipulated and even manufactured," announced Biden, marking a new era for both fractions of the US.

Just a few hours after taking the oath of office, President Biden sat down in the Oval Office, to sign 17 executive orders, all meaning to undo the politics of now-the-former President Trump, including his response to the pandemic, environmental approach, anti-immigration policies, and more.

On his first day in office, Biden moved to order the agencies to review over 100 environmental regulations that Trump had enforced, and recommitted the US to the Paris Climate Agreement, the international accord for preventing and minimizing the effects of global warming. Trump's great efforts for America



to leave the World Health Organization are now undone, as the President sent Dr. Anthony Fauci, the country's number one infectious disease expert, to participate in the WHO's annual executive board meeting. The Trump-established ban on travel to the US from several predominantly Muslim and African countries has now been lifted, and the construction of Trump's wall halted, ending anti-immigration policies legislated during four years of Trumpish Republicanism. To put it in the words of Ian Kelly, the former US Ambassador to Georgia: "Joe Biden makes America America again."

As The New York Times wrote about the relief of many regular Americans, I took to my own social platforms to see what my friends from the US were saying about their new president. While Generation Z representatives merely shared official pictures of the inauguration day, as well as celebratory, cheerful memes, with captions like "This is a good day," older American citizens expressed in posts how they felt.

"I woke up today with the feeling like it was the Christmas Day, and a wonderful miracle was about to happen," Anna, 48, told me from New York.

"I wasn't prepared for the huge sense of relief and the emotion of this day! Our first female Vice President. It took me a bit to stop the tears. Praying for Peace, tolerance, compassion and appreciation

of diversity in our country!" Joy, 52, from Illinois wrote on her page.

"[I am] breathing a sigh of relief and [am] full of joy. (I definitely cried today).

We watched a woman - a woman of color no less! - sworn in as the new Vice President of the United States of America today!!! Biden delivered a beautiful speech with such a strong focus on unity. When Jennifer Lopez sang, "this land is your land, this land is my land," there was a stirring in my soul... Garth Brooks's Amazing Grace was simply amazing. (I think I mentioned I cried?) I'm hopeful. Now the real work begins. Let's do this!" Leigh, 30, from Illinois said in a social media post.

The coming to power of the Joe Biden administration at the head of the US government not only brings special hope to at least half of Americans, but also raises special expectations in Georgia. Politicians and experts expect, for example, the emergence of a new perspective in terms of rapprochement with NATO; more response to Russia's aggressive policies; and more democracy for Georgia. Unlike their opponents, the Georgian Dream party does not expect to receive more critical remarks from Washington.

The Prime Minister of Georgia, Giorgi Gakharia, on inauguration day congratulated Joe Biden on the US Presidency. He noted on his official Twitter page that Georgia is looking forward to the

next stage of strengthened cooperation between the two countries.

"Congratulations to Joe Biden on becoming the 46th President of The United States. We're grateful to you for championing the US-Georgia strategic partnership over the years. We look forward to the next chapter in strengthening our cooperation and protecting democracy & freedom around the world," PM Gakharia tweeted.

In addition, the PM congratulated Kamala Harris on taking up the position of the Vice President of The United States.

"Congratulations to Kamala Harris on her historic accomplishment as the first woman in the United States history to serve as the Vice President. The US is an exceptional friend to Georgia & I look forward to working with you to further strengthen the partnership between our nations," reads the PM's tweet.

Throughout its intense history, America has been both more polarized, and certainly more united. The newly elected President Biden in his presidential oath, above all, vowed to redeem the division among the Red and Blue Americans. Although now separate, these are the colors that make up the American flag. May the country be, again and always, as its pledge of allegiance to the flag, and the republic for which it stands for, goes: "one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

UNWTO Re-Elects Zurab Pololikashvili for Post of Secretary-General

BY NINI DAKHUNDARIDZE

During the 113th session of the UNWTO Executive Council, held in Madrid, Georgia's candidate for the position of Secretary-General of the UN World Tourism Organization, Zurab Pololikashvili, was nominated for a second term by the Executive Board.

While the Georgian ruling candidate had made himself available for a second run, the Kingdom of Bahrain had nominated Shaikha Mai bint Mohammed Al Khalifa for the position.

The newly-elected Secretary-General will be approved at the General Assembly session in the second half of 2021, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia. Pololikashvili's second term will begin in 2022 and last through 2025.

"The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, David Zalkaliani, the Chairman of the Committee on Sectoral Economics of the Parliament of Georgia, David Songhulashvili, and members of the Georgian delegation attended the meeting of the Executive Board of the organization in Madrid. The Prime Minister of Spain

Pedro Sanchez and the candidate for the UN Secretary General for Tourism Zurab Pololikashvili addressed the participants of the session", - reads the statement of the Georgian MFA. Within the framework of the session, Georgian Minister of Foreign Affairs David Zalkaliani held a meeting with the Spanish Interior Minister, Fernando Grande-Marlaska.

The meeting was a hybrid event, combining in-person and virtual participation, according to the UNWTO statement. The Committee brought together tourism leaders from around the world, as well as UN agencies and representatives from civil society and the private sector. Among many topics discussed in Madrid during the two-day event, one of the key issues debated was how COVID vaccines could help restart global tourism.

The organization has made a Facebook announcement regarding Pololikashvili's reelection.

"The #UNWTO Executive Council has voted for Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili to lead #UNWTO for four more years, with Members backing his vision for the 'restart and rethink' of tourism.

The election concluded the 113 #UNWTOEC where we advance and lead the #RestartTourism" campaign reads the UNWTO Facebook post.



Image source: UNWTO



Coronavirus: Georgia Records 1137 New Cases, 17019 Tests Performed

BY ANA DUMBADZE

In the last 24 hours, 1,137 new cases of the virus were detected, said Berdia Sichinava, Deputy Chief of Operations at the Interagency Coordination Council, at a briefing at the Government Administration on Thursday.

"As part of the intensive testing, 17,019 tests were conducted across the country from Wednesday to Thursday, including 9,840 antigen tests and 7,179 PCR tests.

The tests revealed 1,137 new cases of the virus in the last 24 hours. The total number of confirmed cases since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in the country is 251,071. In the last 24 hours, 1,179 people have recovered from the virus, bringing the total number of recoveries to 238,101. Unfortunately, we have 11 new cases of coronavirus deaths in the last 24 hours. A total of 2,998 people have died from the virus since the pandemic began to spread in Georgia," he said.

The Georgian capital Tbilisi recorded the highest number of 477 Covid-19 cases within those 24 hours, followed by the

Imereti region with 164 cases and the Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti region with 118 cases.

Out of 1,137 new cases of infection detected in the country Wednesday-Thursday, 477 cases were reported in Tbilisi, Adjara 64, Imereti 164, Kvemo Kartli 65, Shida Kartli 85, Guria 13, Samegrelo - Zemo Svaneti 118, Kakheti 95, Mtskheta-Mtianeti 27, Samtskhe-Javakheti 18, Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti 11.

Currently, there are 735 critical patients, of whom 219 require mechanical ventilation.

The Trump Tribulations

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

I have always wondered if Donald Trump has ever regretted that he once chose to be the President of the United States of America, seemingly the land of the most developed and shining democracy of all time and peoples. Why on earth did the guy need this huge pain in the neck while he was enjoying life full-time? Wasn't he rich and handsome and famous enough to have been happier than any other man in the world? Then why did he inflict this uninvited pain on his endlessly felicitous self?

Writing this peace, I am not prepared to look into the amply available reading matter or tons of video-taped material on the topic, nor will I consult an expert of the theme. I just want to get it off my chest by meditating on this weirdly painful chunk of human history, definitely not only the American. Something terribly wrong has happened to my beloved America, and that 'something' might easily be considered fatal, uncorrectable, and irrecoverable.

This bizarre part of history is being written as we speak, and the feather point might well be soaked in the wrongly colored

ink. Nobody expected Donald Trump to be so instantaneously tailored from a wealthy astute business personality into a political animal of monstrous size. The metamorphosis happened against all imaginable odds, and behold, it has all of a sudden worked to the benefit of the American people, having filled many empty pockets and stuffed a lot of thin purses.

The project of turning America back to the status of its habitual greatness was given a powerful impetus. Understandably, the American democrats, especially the radical dems, hated him so much that they wanted to bury him and his novel policies the very first day of his White House residence. Meanwhile, Trump's presidential achievements cannot be hushed and ignored: he must be given his share of credit for his outstanding headship to speed up the building and distribution of anti-corona vaccines; his triumphal ingress in politics has widened the America First patriotic movement; he has put on a normal footing the centuries-old damaged relations between the Arab world and Israel; thanks to him, the US stock market has been resuscitated and the economy has started performing; he has fortified the country's southern borders; in his helpful hands, the US trade deals have started working to the benefit of the American people;



Photo by MANDEL NGAN/AFP via Getty Images

he reached the historic peace deal with the militant Afghan forces; he eradicated threats to national security by eliminating some of the aggressive forces; he established the space force as the sixth ramification of the American military power; he has proved himself as the most pro-life leader in the nation's history.

Having all the above under his thick but not very durable belt, he has been dragged through the stomach-churning

impeachment ordeal at the discretion of the raging dems, who have tried him in vain, having been vehemently frustrated due to his exoneration by the Senate. President Trump, who has never touched one dollar of the American people's money, having waved his legally earned and morally deserved presidential salary, has fallen victim to the second attempt of impeachment by the democratic forces of the American legislature on the fla-

grantly doubtful grounds of inciting the insurrection.

Just listen to the epithets used to describe the sitting President of the United States: arrogant, idiot, incompetent, ignorant, narcissistic, egotistical, racist, terrorist, fascist, secessionist, insurrectionist and white supremacist. There must be something absurdly wrong in this maliciously ferocious avalanche of words, addressed to America's Chief Executive. After four years of attacks on the part of the egregiously mendacious means of mass communication, he has now found himself ambushed by corporate America too, shutting him off from almost every social network in the country. Just imagine, the POTUS gagged and locked out from the public domain! And finally, the worst thing that could have happened to the wounded lion: the members of his own pride have betrayed him at the crucial nick of the historic time: the so called RINO's (republicans in name only). Trump was and will always remain a truly unpredictable leader, but his utterly unconventional ways of ruling the nation have caused all those barely tolerable tribulations, brought on him forcefully and arbitrarily, his political nemesis having had almost no reason to treat him so viciously, and the nation itself having no idea who they have lost.

About Tomorrow – Remembering Yesterday while Bearing in Mind the Present Day. Part 2

ANALYSIS BY VICTOR KIPANI,
CHAIRMAN OF GEOCASE

As a result of the Russo-Georgia war of 2008 and the annexation of Crimea, Russia's exclusivity, in their view, seemed to be unchallenged in their "near abroad". But this status was still fragile, which from time to time has been confirmed by Georgian and Ukrainian cases. The Second Nagorno-Karabakh War and, as a result, the November 10 agreement of the previous year, shifted Russian interest in the neighborhood to a sort of geopolitical cohabitation. Quite important geographical zones have emerged, where Moscow has to coexist with the interests of other countries or agree on certain "cooperative" formats concerning such interests.

At the same time, it should be noted that, just like Marquez's Chronicle of a Death Foretold, it is inadmissible to loosen up vigilance in respect to Russia's current capabilities. Despite the repeated "Foretold Chronicles" of the Russian power factor in recent years, its geopolitical decline has become a slow process, and even in "death" it is impressively "revived" from time to time, affecting not only the immediate neighborhood but also political events further out. For example, in recent years, Moscow's geopolitical stance has been projecting hard and soft power in the Middle East, the Balkans, and North Africa. The manifestation of Russian interventions has been substantially diversified – starting with increasing the capabilities of its Expeditionary Armed Forces and continuing with external interventions in the form of a "public-private partnership" (for example, in some cases the use of forces like the well-known Wagner Group).

From the world's point of view, one of the most popular research questions has remained as a dilemma since the times of Barack Obama: is Russia a global or regional superpower? This question has been the subject of many interesting papers and public discussions in international relations and in regional intersections, however, we believe that there is still no unequivocal, convincing answer.

But for us, as a country in the immediate neighborhood of Russia, the question of another formulation is much more relevant: is there a small probability beyond public statements that our country will remain the object of some kind of compromise between the West and Russia ("deal" is certainly not the right word)? Hopefully not. We believe the answer is no. But plausible evidence around the issue requires the effective and timely steps that we have already mentioned in this article. Otherwise, there will still be a high risk that the

country will be torn between two major political-normative camps and a gray area will continue to exist for many more years. This, in turn, may at some point lead to strategic uncertainty (internal political turmoil, social stagnation, etc.) and to a negative demonstration effect in the eyes of the world (e.g., limiting transit potential, diminishing investment attractiveness).

Such convincing action and purposefulness towards the ongoing regional processes by both Tbilisi and its allies will ultimately advance our partnership. It will help us to use our unified resources more effectively for restraint, sustainability, and communication. The unity of these components does not only mean raising military standards, per se. Certainly, in the overall picture – and specifically in the military one – the objective of security is a top priority. However, the result of the Georgian-Western concentrated effort is the depiction of a much bigger and more complex outcome: to make Georgia analogous to West Germany or South Korea in the south of Eurasia. Achieving this high-level task requires solving a number of internal and external factors, institutional development, and perfection. This is how the country should be prepared to function fully in the conditions of long-term (hopefully not so long?) coexistence with an unfavorable environment.

SOMETHING THAT MUST BE DONE BY OURSELVES

The support of the international community and Georgia's allies and partners is tremendous for the final success of the Georgian cause. Certainly, along with this support, there are issues that can only be dealt with and resolved by the citizens of our country.

Within the list of such issues, we must follow the established rule and order to be able to single out the main ones based on which the rest are built. Sure, it is difficult to enumerate all the priorities in one piece as it is a subject of much wider discussion and such discussions are not uncommon in Georgian society nowadays.

But we will be joining those expansive discussions with the present article and draw the reader's attention to some still topical, critical issues.

ABOUT THE ROLE OF SOCIETAL PARTICIPATION

Identifying the right priorities in society and consolidating around them remains a major challenge. We cannot agree with those who claim that Georgian society is too polarized. In our opinion this statement is invalid, because radical polarization also requires at least a few value systems which would lead to a concentration of a certain segment around this or that system. This is especially true when at one stage or another there are no clear outlines of a national or state

ideology from either the government or the opposition, and without a clear party system and party programs, party ideologies, and a systematic approach with regards to state-building making the use of such a profound word – "polarization" – a nearly hollow sound. Thus, when some marginal or "mainstream" political groups and the media outlets that support them (there is still a long way before we reach the real media) ennoble certain challenges by garmenting them with "the incompatibility of political views", "a conflict of systemic views" or any other grandiloquent language, it is nothing but the inability to offer a solution for tomorrow and a lack of courage to explain the reasons.

These reasons are probably multifaceted, but their main essence is the ignorance of a significant part of the political class, lack of desire and will to develop their own knowledge and skills, and objective inability to offer new and reasoned solutions. Moreover, looking at the current picture, one gets the impression that our political culture is stuck in the deep past, and there is practically no power and desire of self-renewal and rejuvenation left at the hands of the active figures (those who claim to speak on behalf of society). Without adapting to the modern standards of political life, the qualitative development of the country is practically a doomed attempt.

In such a situation, the main purpose of a healthy, balanced and responsible public discourse is to prepare a proper constructive background for changing political standards. The consequent result of this process is the accumulation of the necessary dose of "internal pressure", which leads to the regeneration of the Georgian political field and the establishment of the necessary political signature of the country.

And another point of view: We believe that the contribution of any political power in the development of the country should be determined not by the statistical index of parliamentary mandates, but by the number and scale of state initiatives and the degree of their implementation. Statistics come and go, and in historical memory their duration is short, while initiatives with profound and long-term results carry, in fact, a universal significance.

ROBUST INSTITUTIONS ARE THE FACE OF THE COUNTRY

When reviewing international challenges, we focused on the role and purpose of the country's institutional arrangement. In this section, we would like once more to emphasize that, no matter how successful and diverse Georgia's foreign cooperation may be, the country's resilience, strength, and development are nourished by its internal resources, including, above all, a proper state institutional arrangement and the integrity and soundness of public service.



Image source: qs.com

In order to achieve any goal, it is necessary to establish professional public-official standards once and for all, which excludes the selection and promotion of human resources on the basis of political or party affiliation. Today the situation is relatively better in this respect, although it is still sadly far from a public service culture which is based on a prestigious, trustworthy, and real meritocracy. The dominance of those "adorned with attributes" should end in the country, and the way to govern the nation – and, consequently, to responsibilities and obligations – should be opened to talented, brilliant, people with genuine intellectual potential. "Brain drain" from the public service should be replaced by a "brain inflow".

Here we would like to note that for the sake of an authentic authority, it would be good if the legal requirement for holding a high state-political position would be defined by service in the country's armed forces. It is also necessary to think about increasing the prestige of the Georgian National Special Services by recruiting highly-qualified personnel. Also, the new role and purpose of our foreign service and diplomacy needs to be reconsidered, which requires full-fledged and courageous measures in the personnel and structural part. These and other steps will either be planned and implemented as soon as possible – or never.

One of the necessary determinants of this whole process is the fact that many state institutions have the need to "find" themselves again. Some need to be reminded of their immediate functions, while some others, considering the modern reality, need to define new functions and modify existing ones. We think that it is impossible to elaborate further on this issue in this article at this stage but any such detailed "breakdown" in practice will be made possible only once we are firmly established on several inviolable principles for the service of the country and national affairs.

GEORGIAN "SOFT POWER" – MYTH OR REALITY?

It depends on our ambition – as well as on sensible and rational contemporaneity built on ethnocultural and national state heritage. The first is not difficult for us: the culture is historically rich and gives Georgians a deserved sense of pride. The second one is problematic: due to the long break in the line of statehood, besides, due to internal conflicts, external aggression since the restoration of independence as well as great changes in the world in such a brief period of history, the final outline of the modern Georgian state has not yet been completed.

One of the main – but not only! – conditions for the successful completion of this process is to find the functional purpose of our country and its usefulness in the regional or international arena. The basis for this was founded in the 90s of the last century, although this process later was slowed down. However, it must be renewed and the need for it can be explained by two main arguments: first – a state with a functioning purpose is a source of mobilization of its internal resources and their periodic renewal; second – international-regional usefulness contributes to the need for external attention and assistance that help mitigate threats and risks.

In addition to the above, success in the external and internal arenas is a matter of dignity not only for Georgian society, but also for our country's international allies and partners. A successful walk on this path will be the most compelling and convincing answer to the skeptical question: how right were our choices in moving through challenges and setbacks, as well as our reforms and changes? Moreover, the success of the Georgian case will be equal to the effect of the "soft power" of Georgian origin, which can create a very specific and interesting historical example in the formation of a new order of relations.



Giorgi Gakharia Appoints Tskitishvili, Zalkaliani Vice PMs

BY ANA DUMBADZE

Minister of Infrastructure Maia Tskitishvili and Minister of Foreign Affairs Davit Zalkaliani have been appointed Deputy Prime Ministers. Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia stated about it at Thursday's government session, noting that Tskitishvili will hold the post of First Deputy Prime Minister and will oversee the economic direction of the government.

"In order to overcome the global eco-

nom crisis, and because the country needs to be economically ready for 2024 and, most importantly, to make a deserved application for full membership in the EU, we need coordinated work in this direction, and today I would like to present Ms. Maia Tskitishvili as the First Vice Prime Minister and the curator of the economic direction," he said.

Gakharia noted that in the light of the goals set by Georgia and the challenges the country is facing, foreign relations are of special importance.

"Especially today, when important events are developing in the region, international relations are becoming

more and more important. It is critically important for us to respond to the occupation, to integrate the country into international organizations, to apply for full membership in the European Union by 2024, to further integrate into NATO. Accordingly, Davit Zalkaliani will be the second Vice Prime Minister," Gakharia added.

Maia Tskitishvili, a Georgian economist and politician, has served as a Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure since 2018.

Davit Zalkaliani was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2016; previously he held the position of First Deputy Minister.





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ECHR Decides on 2008 August Georgia-Russia War



Photos from the Grand Chamber hearing on the case Georgia v. Russia.
Credits: Council of Europe / Sandro Weltn

In Thursday's Grand Chamber judgment in the case of Georgia v. Russia the European Court of Human Rights held, by eleven votes to six, that the events occurring during the active phase of hostilities (8 to 12 August 2008) did not fall within the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation for the purposes of Article 1 of the European Convention on Human Rights; by sixteen votes to one, that the events occurring after the cessation of hostilities (following the ceasefire agreement of 12 August 2008) had fallen within the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation; by sixteen votes to one, that there had been an administrative practice contrary to Articles 2, 3 and 8 of the Convention and Article 1 of Protocol No. 1 to the Convention; unanimously, that the Georgian civilians detained by the South Ossetian forces in Tskhinvali between approximately 10 and 27 August 2008 had fallen within the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation for the purposes of Article 1; unanimously, that there had been an administrative practice contrary to Article 3 as regards the conditions of

detention of some 160 Georgian civilians and the humiliating acts which had caused them suffering and had to be regarded as inhuman and degrading treatment; unanimously, that there had been an administrative practice contrary to Article 5 as regards the arbitrary detention of Georgian civilians in August 2008; unanimously, that the Georgian prisoners of war detained in Tskhinvali between 8 and 17 August 2008 by the South Ossetian forces had fallen within the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation for the purposes of Article 1; by sixteen votes to one, that there had been an administrative practice contrary to Article 3 as regards the acts of torture of which the Georgian prisoners of war had been victims; by sixteen votes to one, that the Georgian nationals who had been prevented from returning to South Ossetia or Abkhazia had fallen within the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation; by sixteen votes to one, that there had been an administrative practice contrary to Article 2 of Protocol No. 4 as regards the inability of Georgian nationals to return to their homes; unanimously, that there

had been no violation of Article 2 of Protocol No. 1; unanimously, that the Russian Federation had had a procedural obligation under Article 2 of the Convention to carry out an adequate and effective investigation not only into the events which had occurred after the cessation of hostilities (following the ceasefire agreement of 12 August 2008) but also into the events which had occurred during the active phase of hostilities (8 to 12 August 2008); by sixteen votes to one, that there had been a violation of Article 2 in its procedural aspect; unanimously, that there was no need to examine separately the applicant government's complaint under Article 13 in conjunction with other Articles; 1. Grand Chamber judgments are final (Article 44 of the Convention). All final judgments are transmitted to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe for supervision of their execution.

Further information about the execution process can be found here: www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/execution. For more on this story, go to georgiatoday.ge.

Georgia in the Context of US-China Competition

ANALYSIS BY EMIL AVDALIANI

China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a near-trillion US dollar Chinese initiative aimed at linking the Indo-Pacific region with the vast European market, and Georgia's geographical position as the shortest way from China to Europe, has given a promising start to Georgia-China relations.

Today, however, not all is as rosy as back in 2017 when China and Georgia signed a free trade agreement and the Georgian government hoped the country's position on the Black Sea, with several ports such as Batumi, Poti and the then-planned Anaklia deep sea port, would turn the country into a logistics hub not only for the entire region but also for the expanding BRI. Georgia also hoped to use its main land transport road, the East-West Highway, and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) railway, which link the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea and Turkey, as focal points in its emerging strategy of positioning itself as a major transit route. Fostering closer ties with China was also seen as a vital component of Georgia's quest to balance Russia's regional influence, and as a hedge against Russian military moves in occupied Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The hopes for improvements in trade have not yet been realized. While there has been a steady increase in overall numbers, statistics show that for China, Georgia serves mostly as a raw material base, with trade dominated by the export of copper and various chemicals to China. Georgia's hopes of using the vast Chinese market for higher value chain products has not materialized. Similarly, concerns over shady practices have increased, especially tied to how Chinese companies have been awarded contracts. One illustrative case concerns Powerchina's subsidiary Sinohydro, which won a €26.3 million (GEL95 million) tender for the reconstruction of a 42-kilometer section of the Khulo-Zarzma road in Georgia.

Furthermore, it has become apparent to policymakers in Tbilisi that China

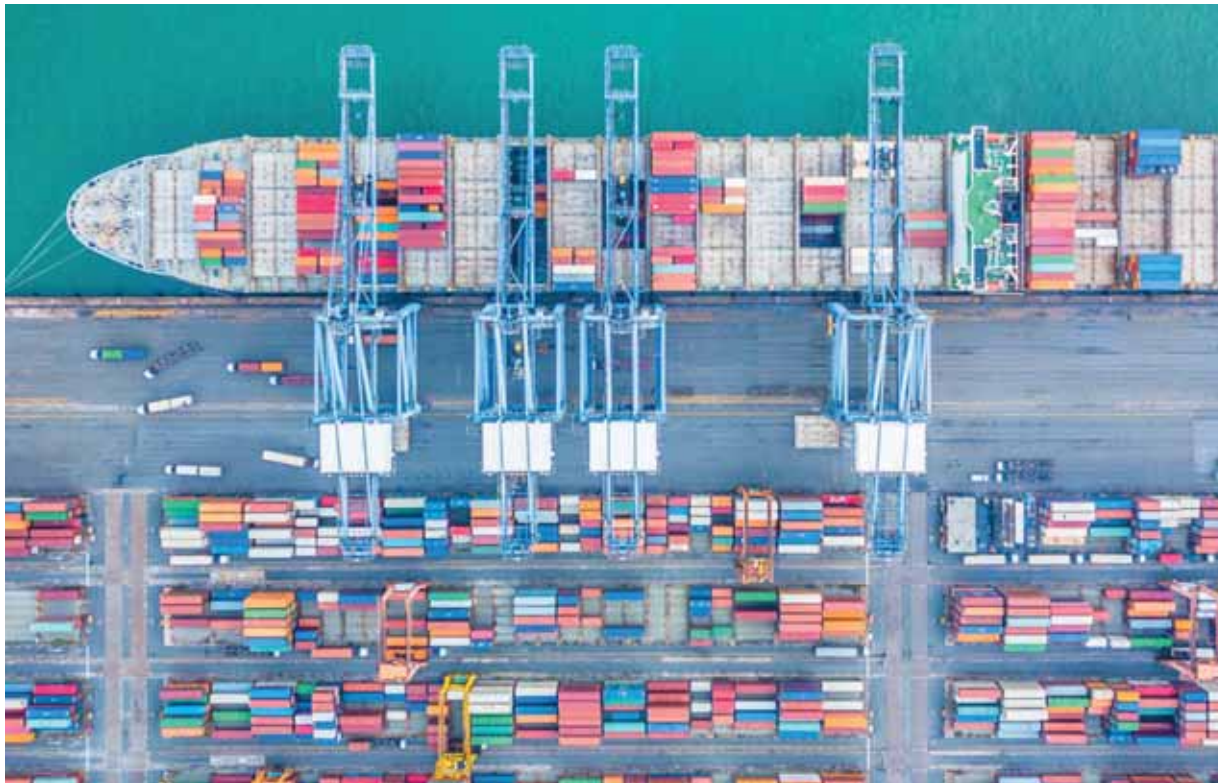


Image source: fpri.org

will not compromise increasingly important relations with Russia because of its business interests in Georgia. For example, China has abstained, and generally been unhelpful, on key diplomatic issues critical to the Georgian side. It repeatedly failed to back Georgia's UN vote on refugees forcefully expelled from Abkhazia and South Ossetia by separatists and Russian troops. It also repeatedly failed to denounce de-facto presidential or parliamentary elections held in Georgia's occupied territories. China has also stayed silent on Russian cyber-attacks against Georgia over the last few years, as well as on Russian "borderization" policies in South Ossetia. Its Ministry of Defense even announced that it would participate in the Russian-led "Kavkaz-2020" exercises, alongside troops from Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

In September 2020, the Chinese state media outlet China Daily questioned the utility of the US-funded Lugar Laboratory being located near Georgia's border with Russia, and alleged that it both

represented a biohazard risk to Georgia, and that Georgian citizens were being unwittingly used as test subjects.

Though increasingly disenchanted with China, Georgian leaders are still trying to walk a diplomatic tightrope, keen to not draw ire from China. But as the American stance on China hardens, it will be more and more difficult to maintain this balance.

The balancing act is also unsustainable because of Georgia's NATO/EU membership aspirations, the cornerstone of its geopolitical orientation, which are an irreconcilable irritant for China, especially as the Alliance expands its scope to face down China's growing military ambitions in the Indo-Pacific region.

At this point, criticizing China openly would cost Georgia a lot, which means that Tbilisi taking a firm stance on Taiwan or on human rights issues is not likely. But as tensions ratchet up between the West and China, we should expect Georgia to side more firmly with the West, not only politically, but also increas-

ingly economically, by embracing Western 5G technologies as well as trade and investment standards. The recent memorandum of understanding signed between the US and Georgian governments on using technologies based on Western standards, reinforces the emerging tilt.

This fits into the overall ambivalence of the Chinese position regarding the South Caucasus. The country's ambassadors to the region's three states, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, often announce how important the Caucasus is, but Beijing's investment policies and general political moves reflect little of the expected grand geopolitical thinking.

But to consider China's position, we need to look at the bigger picture. For China, the South Caucasus holds a modest role. Trade with the states is growing, but the numbers are not as high as one could have hoped for. Geography matters in understanding the limits of Chinese engagement. Unlike Central Asia,

the South Caucasus does not border on China, and unlike Central Asia, the region does not represent a primary security concern for Beijing either.

Furthermore, China's stance on the region cannot be disengaged from Beijing's position on the Black Sea. In fact, China's evolving vision of the South Caucasus is contingent upon what it can garner in the Black Sea. The latter is strategically located, providing connection to Eastern, Central, Southern Europe, and Russia. It also allows access to the Mediterranean through the Bosphorus and Dardanelle Straits. Being involved in this sea would offer serious geopolitical opportunities to China, but much depends on energy availability. As the demand on oil and gas resources in China increases, so does Beijing's quest to find new energy sources and safe avenues for import.

As trends indicate, the Black Sea does not stand out in this regard. So far, Chinese companies have shown little interest in investing in the Black Sea littoral states. It could be suggested that the reason is the unknown scale of gas and oil deposits in the Black Sea, hence negligible Chinese investments in its hydrocarbons and the limited significance of the Black Sea as a transit route for China's growing energy demands.

Additionally, the Black Sea littoral states, with the exception of Russia (although even the latter exports gas and oil to China from its deposits in Siberia), have little to no direct energy trade with China. Overall, the resource potential of the Black Sea is too uncertain to merit deeper Chinese involvement. Even with Turkey, which recently made gas findings in the Black Sea, the Chinese stance is unlikely to change, as the potential gas deposits would mostly be consumed by Turkey's growing internal demands.

Thus Georgia-China relations should be seen in the light of US-China competition. Georgia will have to stick to the western practices, though occasionally there will arise questions regarding Chinese economic activities in Georgia. Overall, Beijing's interests in the country will remain limited to a few important infrastructure projects, and no change in the grand strategic vision is likely to take place.

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The ISET Policy Institute (ISET-PI, www.isetpi.ge) is an independent think-tank associated with the International School of Economics at TSU (ISET). Our blog carries economic analysis of current events and policies in Georgia and the South Caucasus region ranging from agriculture, to economic growth, energy, labor markets and the nexus of economics, culture and religion. Thought-provoking and fun to read, our blog posts are written by international faculty teaching at ISET and recent graduates representing the new generation of Georgian, Azerbaijani and Armenian economists.

Enguri HPP: Challenges & Opportunities for Georgia's Electricity Sector at the Start of 2021



BY EREKLE SHUBITIDZE & GURAM LOBZHANIDZE

According to the last four years' data, Georgia has a chronic electricity deficit in ten months out of twelve, with the country showing an electricity surplus only in May and June (and, occasionally, in April and/or July). Despite the COVID-19 crisis dampening electricity demand in the country, 2020 was no exception. After two months, May and June, were characterized by a positive generation-consumption gap, since July 2020 Georgia has been generating less electricity than required to cover consumption.

To fill this deficit, Georgia imported energy from Azerbaijan, Russia, and Turkey. Considering the depreciation that has been hitting the national currency, imports have become increasingly costly in GEL. If Georgia wants to lower energy expenditure and be energy independent from other countries, while working to increase energy efficiency, it needs to increase its energy generation potential. The rehabilitation of the Enguri Hydro Power Plant (HPP) can significantly contribute to this cause.

According to Levan Mebonia, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Enguri HPP Ltd, every year, water that could

allow the generation of an additional approximately 250 million kWh of electricity is being lost from the tunnels because of leaks, since the 1st, 2nd, and 5th turbine pipelines are damaged. After the rehabilitation, which will last three months (mid-January to mid-April), these leaks will be partially eliminated, and the HPP is expected to generate an additional 100-120 mln kWh of electricity yearly.

The Ministry of Finance prepared a report about the costs and benefits of the Enguri HPP's 'Energy generation and consumption of Georgia (Jan-Apr) rehabilitation,' which states that the project will cost 96 mln GEL. However, after the rehabilitation, HPP maintenance costs are expected to be halved, and the expected profits from this project over a 15-year period amount to 264 mln GEL.

Figure 1 shows the energy generation by Enguri HPP and other generation sources, as well as total energy consumption in the period from January to April over the last 5 years. One can notice that in this part of the year, as mentioned above, Georgia has historically had a negative generation-consumption gap in the electricity market, forcing the country to import electricity to satisfy the excess demand. In addition, the chart demonstrates that the Enguri HPP contributes a significant amount of energy to total generation. During the rehabilitation, when the HPP stops operating,

total energy generation is expected to decline by about 300 mln kWh over the entire period.

HOW HARD WILL THIS BE FOR GEORGIA?

In winter, the energy generated by Enguri HPP is almost solely consumed in Abkhazia. So, the rest of the Georgian regions should not be significantly affected by the HPP's closure.

From the Abkhazian perspective, however, this is a much more concerning development. The Government of Georgia (GoG) and the government of the separatist Abkhazian region operate within the framework of an informal 1997 agreement, according to which Abkhazia is entitled to consume 40% of all energy generated by the Enguri HPP, with the rest (60%) being reserved to be consumed by the rest of Georgia. However, in recent years, Abkhazian consumption has been steadily rising, reaching a consumption level equal to almost 100% of the HPP's energy in winter and 55-60% in other seasons. The situation in the January-April period is the most critical. Since 2015, during the January-April period, Abkhazia has been consuming significantly more than 100% of Enguri's generation and, in three out of the last four years (2017, 2019, and 2020), more than the electricity generated by Enguri and Vardnili HPP combined (Figure 2).

To cover the deficit, Georgia has been purchasing electricity, usually from Russia, and redirecting it towards Abkhazia. The main factor behind the increasing trend in Abkhazian consumption is the low price of electricity in the region compared to the rest of Georgia; where Telasi prices range between \$0.04-0.07 per kWh, the Abkhazian population enjoys significantly lower electricity prices at \$0.0063 per kWh. This stimulates inefficient energy consumption and increased demand from:

a) Households and companies: due to the relatively lower prices of electricity, the population in Abkhazia has little incentive to increase the efficiency of

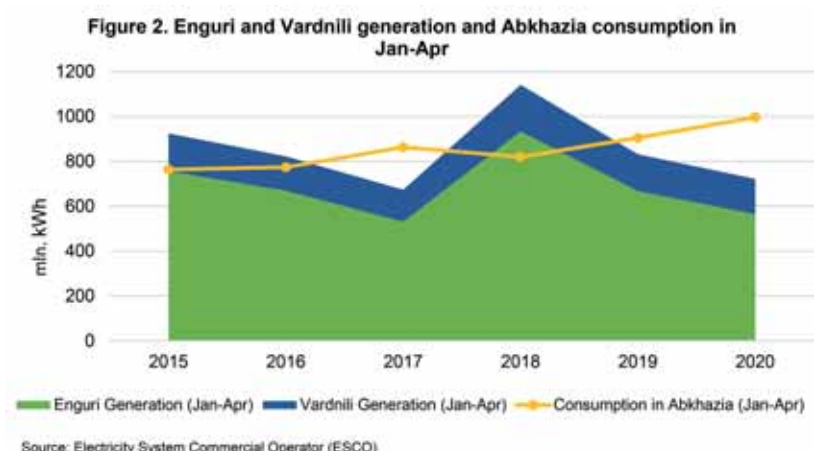
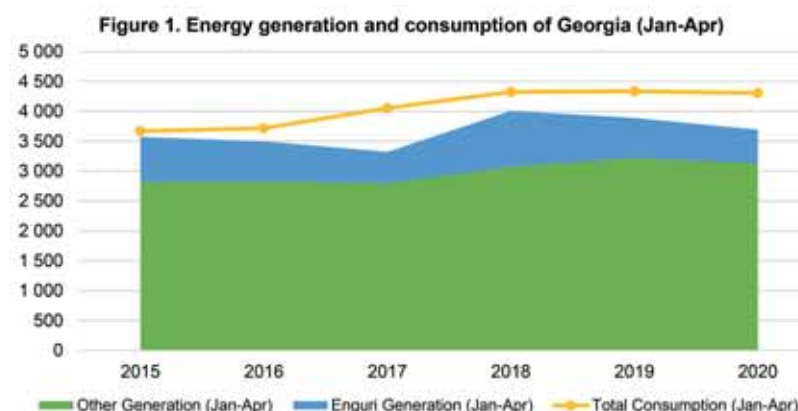
June, and banned imports of equipment for crypto farms. In addition, the population is now receiving electricity by schedule. During the day, there are hours during which electricity is not supplied to the general populace, negatively affecting people's day-to-day lives.

These prohibitions may temporarily attenuate the energy consumption problem in Abkhazia, even though they will not eliminate it completely. For a permanent solution to the electricity consumption problem, Abkhazia's decision-makers should first ensure that fees are set at a higher level, and second, take care of the fee collection problem. As the director of technical operations for Chernomorenergo, Ruslan Kvarchia, claimed, only 54% of electricity fees are collected. In previous years, the Georgian government offered to install meters in Abkhazia. However, Abkhazia's decision-makers declined the offer.

As mentioned above, after the rehabilitation of the Enguri HPP is finished, it will generate 100-120 mln kWh more electricity, which should narrow the energy gap between consumption and generation. In addition, as the increased flow of filtration water will be eliminated, energy consumption for the operation of the pumps will be reduced. Vehicle operating costs will also be reduced. However, we cannot be sure that the recent regulations in Abkhazia will last after the Enguri HPP becomes operational again. It is possible that after the HPP starts to generate energy as before its closure for rehabilitation, Abkhazia's decision-makers will revert to policies that incentivize inefficient practices in terms of electricity consumption. In this case, Abkhazia might quickly consume this additional electricity and further exacerbate its energy security issues, along with the rest of Georgia's.

To help prevent Abkhazia's inefficient electricity consumption in the future, the Government of Georgia might want to consider promoting an updated agreement, establishing clearly that Abkhazia will need to pay a market price for electricity consumed beyond the amount agreed in 1997. In addition, as the dangers of the status quo have now become clearer to Abkhazia, the Georgian government could reiterate its offer to help install meters on Abkhazian territory.

Ultimately, whether or not the rehabilitation project will have long-term benefits or will be just a one-off gain will depend on whether or not, and if so, how, the Georgian government and the self-proclaimed Abkhazian government will take this chance to update the 1997 informal agreement in a way that benefits both sides.



Georgia's Perspectives in Medical Tourism – Barriers & Challenges

ANALYSIS BY NINO MIKAVA

The global growth in the flow of patients and health professionals, as well as capital funding and medical technology, has given rise to a broadly defined, rapidly growing, multi-billion industry of medical tourism. In the last decade, the medical tourism sector has captured particular interest globally.

Nations' governments around the world have foreseen significant economic development potential in the emergent industry of medical tourism. Moreover, medical tourism is a source of lucrative foreign revenue for countries, inducing growth of economy, an opportunity to participate in global healthcare, to have better healthcare standards, to enhance the development of technically advanced and specialized medical services, better knowledge exchange, to turn around the brain drain: retaining or bringing back local healthcare professionals for political and social benefits. For these reasons, medical tourism has attracted the interest of large hospitals in Georgia too.

According to the experts, Georgia has great potential and perspectives in both medical tourism and wellness tourism. The country's healthcare sector is indeed competitive in a number of medical services (cardio surgery, plastic surgery, dentistry, etc.); private clinics have excellent success rates regarding these medical services, state-of-the-art equipment, qualified health professionals and a lot of experience. Furthermore, in the above-mentioned directions, the country is price-competitive vs. other regional medical tourism destinations like Turkey and the UAE. Considering these factors and its geographical location at the cross road of Europe and Asia, Georgia has the potential to become a medical tourism hub in Transcaucasia and the region.

The development of tourism is one of the key areas in reforms that the Georgian government introduced in 2016. These reforms target the promotion of high-quality sustainable tourism development and the transformation of Georgia into a four-season tourism destination.

It is well known that in comparison with other branches of tourism, medical tourism has special features that support the competitiveness of the sector:

- o Long stays of patients (due to treatment-based services, the amount of time spent is more than in the case of other tourism products, and for some procedures patients need to travel to the country of treatment more than once);

- o Typically, patients very randomly travel alone: most frequently one attendant accompanies them;

- o There is a higher specific expenditure due to the specialized services and tools and the high labor need of health tourism;

- o Lower seasonality; the services of health tourism are usually independent of the weather.

Moreover, the total number of international visitors (tourists, transit and one-day arrivals combined) arriving in Georgia increased at a CAGR of 21.7% over 2008-17 and reached a record 7.5mn persons in 2017. In recent years, number of tourists visiting Georgia has been increasing drastically. To illustrate, in 2018, the number of international visitors was 8.7 mn (growth rate 17% compared to 2017) and in 2019, reached 9,357,964 persons (7.8% growth rate compared to 2018) (source: Department of Tourism).

Georgia's healthcare market is quite unique in the world, as more than 90% of hospitals and clinics are private, for-profit organizations. Georgia's Universal Healthcare financing system cannot be



Image source: surrogacybabygeorgia.com

considered lucrative for the provider sector. According to the statistical guide published by Georgia's National Center of Disease Control and Public Health, in 2018, 273 hospitals were functioning in the country. Total bed stock consisted of 15,909 beds, and the bed occupancy rate was 51.3% (1872), suggesting capacity underutilization. The same issue is accentuated in a report published by Galt & Taggart in 2020, showing that the last six years' average bed occupancy rate was 50%, dropping to 49% in 2019. Moreover, the average duration of hospital stays was five days, which illustrates the fact that, very frequently, ambulatory sensitive care conditions are treated in hospitals in Georgia. Consequently, management in the hospital sector faces problems in the raising of funds to invest in quality improvement or for the innovative development of medical services. One of the best solutions for these problems is to develop medical tourism in Georgia.

Currently, medical tourism in Georgia is at the development stage. Private clinics' efforts in search of potential "source countries" and attracting medical tourists is fragmented, not governed at the system level, totally relying on the hospital sector and mediator firms, making it precarious with regards to patient safety, and detrimental for Georgia's image as a destination country on the global market.

With the aim of exploring the potential and perspectives of Georgia in medical tourism, in the scope of healthcare facilities, medical services and customer service, and to identify barriers and challenges for medical tourism development in the country in the healthcare sector and at the system level, research was conducted in the University of Georgia (in the scope of a doctorate program). In line with the research goals, a qualitative study of in-depth interviews was conducted with major stakeholders of the medical tourism industry in Georgia: representatives of local and international medical tourism industry stakeholders, top managers of hospitals engaged in in-demand specialties (multi-profile, plastic/cosmetic, reproductive, cardiology, dental and oncologic specialty clinics), the president of the Medical Tourism Association, the president of the Medical Tourism Council, a representative of the Partnership Fund, a representative of the Ministry of Health, representatives of the National Tourism Agency, and others.

DOES GEORGIA HAVE PERSPECTIVE IN MEDICAL TOURISM?

100% of respondents of the research gave a positive answer to this question. According to the opinions of medical tourism facilitators and other respondents, Georgia has a real perspective to become a hub of medical tourism in the

Caucasus region. Moreover, in Georgia, medical services such as cardio surgery, plastic/cosmetic surgery, assisted reproductive services and dentistry, are highly developed. The country has highly qualified specialists, a competitive advantage in Caucasus region and in comparison to post-Soviet Union countries. Top managers of international medical tourism facilitators claim there are many good clinics in Georgia which can compete with Turkey's medical facilities, in quality of healthcare services and especially in price.

At present, the majority of medical tourists come from Azerbaijan, Chechnya, North Ossetia, and Ingushetia. Recently, an increasing number of patients has started to arrive from Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, and medical providers are working to attract patients from Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, etc. According to the results of the research, source countries of medical tourists arriving in Georgia differ by type of medical service provided. To illustrate, for oncological and cardio surgery services, patients mainly come from Azerbaijan, Armenia, Chechnya, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan. Furthermore, for cosmetic surgery services and hair transplantation, patients come from Israel, Russia, Belarusia, Kazakhstan (Acta area), Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and Qatar.

In the scope of the research, data was requested from respondent health facilities on the number of foreign patients in 2017-2019 (three years, by country and by service type). However, only nine clinics (seven multi-profile clinics and two reproductive clinics) were able to provide the requested information. Based on this statistical analysis, the total number of patients from Russia was 9015 (33%), from Azerbaijan 8295 (30%), from Armenia 1589 (6%) and 8216 (31%) from other countries. Clearly, regional movement is observable in Georgia.

However, in terms of assisted reproductive service providers, the situation is different. Statistical analysis demonstrates that 23% of foreign patients coming to Georgia for such services in 2017-2019 came from China, 15% from the USA, 14% from Israel, 7% from Sweden, 4% from Australia, 4% from India, and 33% from other countries worldwide.

For dental services, patients mainly come from Israel, Qatar, and Kuwait. Opportunistic medical tourism is quite common in dentistry, with travel agencies offering a combination of treatment and travel to tourists coming to Georgia.

As to what motivators shape patients' decision to travel to Georgia for treatment, all respondents said the same: an optimal combination of price and quality. Patients from bordering countries and post-Soviet Union countries come for better medical quality. The quality is higher in Turkey, but since the cost of

traveling and treatment there is also higher, patients prefer Georgia. For Armenian patients, price is the determinant of travel. Medical services are well developed in Armenia, especially cardio surgery and plastic surgery, but prices for treatment are higher (cardio-surgery is, on average, 50% higher in cost in Armenia). In assisted reproductive services, the legal framework is more favorable in Georgia for commercial surrogacy and in-vitro fertilization.

The main barriers for medical tourism development in Georgia were identified as Georgia not being positioned as a medical tourism destination country on the global market; a lack of standardization in medical service providers due to the government's weak role in regulation and monitoring of medical quality; the extremely low number of internationally accredited providers in the hospital sector, which can result in low trust levels in customers; the inexistence of a strategy for medical tourism development or the government's engagement and integrated efforts among state entities; the absence of direct flights with target/source countries, plus the low quality of services and relatively high prices of tickets; the weak legal framework with regard to protecting foreign patients' rights; the low levels of malpractice insurance owned by specialists in the hospital sector; and the lack of guarantees and reimbursement of damage for complicated cases.

Second-level barriers in the provider sector are: low levels of qualification and awareness regarding medical tourism among the management of medical facilities; the lack of communication, collaboration and cooperation among managers of clinics involved in this direction; problems related to inadequate communication skills, lack of operativeness and flexibility of personnel in medical facilities; delayed response or provision of a treatment plan (instead of providing in 24-48 hour interval); the language barrier (especially in low-skilled medical personnel, nurses, etc.); the pricing policy for medical services for medical tourists- the inexistence of a determined, competitive pricing policy in the sector; and the low utilization of various channels to attract medical tourists.

Third-level barriers are: low levels of cooperation and coordination among medical tourism mediators and medical facilities, given the small number of facilitator companies and agencies on Georgia's medical tourism market working on inbound medical tourism; and problems responding to medical tourists' various religious-cultural specifications.

According to the respondents interviewed, regulations and control regarding medical quality in Georgia are weak. There is a lack of standardization of medical services in the hospital sector; with little incentive for providers and regulations to improve the quality of care. However, with regard to international accreditation of medical facilities, there were differing opinions among the respondents. Likewise, there was a difference between what literature shows about requirements in this regard, and how respondents perceive needs. In particular, one-third of respondents found it absolutely necessary for medical facilities to possess international accreditation in order to develop medical tourism in the country, whilst the remainder did not perceive it as a necessity. In Georgia, only one clinic, Medi-Club Georgia, is accredited by the international accreditation agency JCI.

Based on the research results, using SWOT analysis, directions for a development strategy were identified:

1. Positioning the country as a medical tourism destination on target markets and globally.
2. Development and implementation

of target and niche medical services for medical tourism.

3. Elaboration and implementation of a five-year plan for medical tourism development by the government; and strengthening the government's engagement in the process.

Improvement strategy:

1. Integrating the efforts of clinics and hospitals for medical tourism development;

2. Improvement of quality of medical services, standardization, accreditation;

3. Increasing the qualifications of medical personnel in communication skills and foreign languages.

Diversification strategy:

1. To organize international conferences and info-tours to introduce the country's medical tourism potential;

2. To penetrate new target markets;

3. To strengthen online activities on target markets.

Defense strategy:

1. Development of air travel, implementation of direct flights;

2. Development and improvement of general infrastructure in the country;

3. To strengthen guarantees for medical tourists.

According to the results of the study, the following recommendations were elaborated for medical tourism development in Georgia:

1. It is essential to position and promote the country on target markets to have Georgia recognized, globally, as a medical tourism destination.

2. The government must elaborate an appropriate strategic plan for medical tourism development, to strengthen its role and engagement, and be in a leadership position to integrate the efforts of various stakeholders.

3. The government should provide centralized regulation, medical service quality control, and standardization of medical services. For this purpose, it is essential to establish an accreditation system of healthcare facilities. Moreover, international accreditation of clinics should be encouraged by introducing financial stimuli.

4. Coordination and cooperation among medical tourism facilitators and healthcare facilities should be improved. Furthermore, the management and administrative personnel of clinics should be trained to increase qualifications and awareness about the requirements and specific features of medical tourism.

5. Cooperation between medical facilities and spa-resorts of the country should be encouraged to integrate the services of both sectors.

6. In order to improve the accountability of statistical data about medical tourists, it should be mandatory for medical facilities to register information about foreign patients in a pre-defined form.

7. To develop the medical tourism direction, it is important to establish direct flights with target countries.

To conclude, Georgia has considerable potential for medical tourism development. Its healthcare sector is quite competitive in the region and the country has the perspective to become a hub of medical tourism in the Transcaucasia region. However, there are number of significant barriers to overcome and challenges to respond to. Georgia, as a medical tourism destination country, should be put on the international medical tourism radar. In turn, this goal needs the united efforts of a governmental team and various stakeholders of the industry. A medical tourism development strategy should be developed and implemented with the consideration of all the above-mentioned barriers, challenges and factors.

Given extremely intense competition in the medical tourism industry, globally, experts find appropriate for Georgia to identify its role and occupy respective niche on an international market.

Operation 'Back to Life': How Israel is Leading the World's Vaccination Campaign

OP-ED BY AMBASSADOR
RAN GIDOR

Coronavirus knows no borders, as has become all too clear, and countries the world over are all facing the same challenges to public health and their economies. We, at the Israeli Embassy in Tbilisi, welcomed the recent announcement by Ekaterine T'ikaradze, Minister of Health, that the Georgian population would be vaccinated soon thanks to the COVAX mechanism and other international channels.

From the outset of the pandemic, Israel emerged as a leading nation in the global fight against coronavirus, learning from the experiences of others and sharing its own with the world. It made the tough choices early on, closing borders and schools, shuttering businesses, and limiting all non-essential activities, and sustained a burst of innovation surrounding the pandemic that included start-ups and drive-through testing centers, through to telemedicine and vaccine research. Israel's success in responding to the pandemic has continued into 2021, and the country now boasts the highest per capita vaccination rate of any country in the world, outpacing all others by far.

Israel began its vaccination drive in late December 2020, and within just the first two days of the campaign, nearly 30,000 Israelis were given their first dose. Now, just a few weeks later, over 1.8 million Israelis have received their vaccination shot, and the country is on track to vaccinate all citizens over the age of 16 by the end of March.



This speedy and ambitious target has been made possible through a new deal that Israel inked with pharmaceutical companies in early January. Dubbed 'Operation Back to Life', Israel is set to receive ongoing shipments of the vaccine over the coming months, which will enable the country to reach its bold target and become one of the first countries in the world to exit from the coronavirus crisis. Moreover, by sharing its statistical data with Pfizer and the world, Israel will also play a key role in demonstrating the efficacy of the vaccine and developing global strategies to overcome the pandemic.

In fact, Israel's small population of some nine million, and its highly efficient pub-

lic health system, mean that the country is going to play an essential role for pharmaceutical companies. The success and experience of our vaccination campaign will be used to provide the critical information that pharmaceutical companies need in order to make the vaccine even more effective for other countries. By being the first country in the world to vaccinate its entire population with the novel vaccine, Israel will serve as the world's key experimental subject.

Israel's universal healthcare system is globally recognized for its efficiency and effectiveness. Israel has developed a sophisticated and high-quality level of individual patient care, and all Israeli citizens and permanent residents are guaranteed health-

care under the country's National Health Insurance Law. All Israelis can choose from four comprehensive not-for-profit health plans that provide a standardized basket of medical services, and each provider must accept all residents regardless of age or state of health. Combined, there are thousands of clinics spread across the country, ensuring that each and every local community is served. Moreover, its national healthcare services enjoy a uniquely advanced level of digitization, which will make Israel's data particularly important to pharmaceutical companies. Israel's extensive national network of medical services lies within the Ministry of Health's purview.

It was this comprehensive system of doctors, nurses, and medics that rapidly mobilized in response to the coronavirus pandemic, and which is now working towards vaccinating the entire country within a matter of months. In fact, Israel's constant and daily battle with existential threats meant that it was especially well-placed to handle an emergency of the magnitude that coronavirus brought on. The entirety of Israel's national systems thus coalesced around the crisis. The Prime Minister arranged multiple conversations with Pfizer's CEO to secure a steady supply of vaccinations. Magen David Adom - Israel's national emergency response service - continues to be at the forefront of the pandemic, having now been tasked with the responsibility of vaccinating the residents and employees of nursing homes and assisted living centers across the country. The IDF (Israel Defence Forces) similarly mobilized, assisting in administrating quarantine hotels and supplying food to families in lockdown at the height of the

pandemic, and now dedicating its own paramedics and military reserves to the current vaccination push. It is thus that Israel holds the world record for its vaccination rate and will be able to rapidly complete its inoculation drive.

The Israeli Embassy and MASHAV (Israel's International Development Agency) have also spared no efforts in supporting Georgia's fight against COVID-19. Generous Israeli donations to the Georgian Red Cross Society, the Georgia office of WHO (World Health Organization) and NCDC (National Centre of Disease Control) were much appreciated by our local partners. Moreover, MASHAV has provided funding to David Khosroshvili, a successful Georgian entrepreneur & MASHAV alumnus, towards developing an innovative software designed to help local businesses in adapting to the challenges caused by the pandemic. MASHAV has also invited senior Georgian health experts to participate in the regular consultations of a special international forum designed to share best practices.

With these extraordinary efforts, it is Israel's hope that on this year's Passover Seder night, grandparents, parents, children, and grandchildren will be able to gather together around the table once again. And when we ask the traditional question of why this night is different from all other nights, we will be able to answer: "Everything has changed; tonight we are all reclining". Similarly, the Israeli Embassy will continue contributing to the general effort designed to ensure that as many Georgian friends, colleagues and partners as possible would be able to celebrate the coming Orthodox Easter together with their loving families.

Violence in Prisons: Public Defender Calls on Authorities to Enhance Management Mode



According to the Public Defender's special report on informal governance and criminal subculture in prisons, it has become even more difficult for representatives of the Public Defender's Office to carry out visits and monitoring, Public Defender Nino Lomjaria announced today.

"There is no violence-free environment in the Georgian penitentiary establishments. This is proven by physical and psychological violence among inmates, criminal subcultures, and lengthy and often inappropriate use of solitary confinement, to name a few. Psychological violence is mainly manifested in extortion, humiliation, marginalization and other violent acts," reads the report released by the Public Defender following monitoring in Georgia's penitentiary establishments.

Lomjaria said that certain groups of prisoners, managed by the administra-

tion of the establishments and the so-called 'prison watchers', have been systematically carrying out verbal attacks, threats and aggression against other prisoners and the representatives of the Public Defender's Office.

The systemic and characteristic aspects of each institution were analyzed in a complex manner, based on information obtained during monitoring. One of the main focuses of the monitoring mission was to examine the extent and forms of informal governance in the institutions, as it poses a serious threat to prisoners' ill-treatment, which leads to violence and oppression.

"As representatives of the Public Defender, during their visits to prisons, face real threats from 'informal governors' supported by prison administrations, the Public Defender is considering the possibility of conducting preventive monitoring visits only under additional security measures. Naturally, the Office

will continue to hold individual meetings with prisoners," Lomjaria added.

A criminal subculture is particularly prevalent in semi-open establishments, where informal rulers are privileged and force other prisoners to obey informal rules. It was found that prisoners are not properly aware of their rights and responsibilities, and refuse to exercise their right to complain due to the influence of said criminal subculture and fear of repression.

Nino Lomjaria said: "We identify cases of alleged violence against prisoners and call on the government and investigative agencies to conduct effective investigations in order to monitor the cases and the safety of prisoners. We're talking about assisting prisoners to receive medical services delayed for months or years. We're talking about ill-treatment of prisoners with mental health problems; we're talking about shortcomings in the parole system, and the inconsistency of the decisions made by the commission, to name a few."

"Given all this, we call on the Georgian government to take immediate measures directed at altering the management model of the criminal subculture in prisons. We also call on the Prosecutor's Office of Georgia to launch an investigation into the cases of obstruction and threats against the Public Defender, in connection with which a proposal has already been submitted to the Prosecutor's Office," she added.

The Public Defender will provide information to the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (SPT) and the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) to visit Georgia in order to protect prisoners' rights.



Over 2,000 Foreigners Apply for 'Remotely from Georgia' Program

Over 2,000 individuals have applied for the 'Remotely from Georgia' state program, which allows foreign citizens to travel to Georgia and work remotely amid the pandemic, the Georgian National Tourism Administration announced Tuesday.

The 'Remotely from Georgia' is a state program offering citizens from 95 eligible countries the chance to work from Georgia as long as they intend to stay for at least six months.

Citizens from 90 countries have expressed their wish to participate, following the program's launch in late August. 740 persons have already arrived

in Georgia as part of the project.

Those wishing to come to Georgia within the framework of the project should fill in special forms in advance at <https://stopcov.ge/> and confirm the necessary conditions for entering the country. In addition, they must undergo a 12-day quarantine and testing at their own expense.

Applications are being reviewed within 10 working days.

"We invite citizens who are working remotely for global companies in 95 countries to come to Georgia, where they'll have the chance to fulfill their job responsibilities remotely for at least 180 days," Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia stated regarding the initiative.

Obsolescence

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

My relationship with Magti, best of Georgia's cellphone service providers, goes back to my move here over 20 years ago. Seeing that, even back then, the company covered some 97% of the country's populated areas with its signal, I signed up and got my first ever mobile phone and number. I have seldom looked back.

Even 13 years ago, when I lived in Ushguli, my cellphone became a modem when there was no other way to get internet access in such a remote place. I connected it first to my desktop computer, then a year later to a laptop, for Web-surfing and to run the blog I had back then. This led to being picked up on the morning news for the Rustavi 2 TV channel, reporting on avalanches returning immediately after the only road to Ushguli had been cleared of them, leaving us stranded (though not unprepared) for a month. And so on, with many other TV appearances since over the years, usually as a champion for the region of Svaneti and its people.

Magti has generally served me very well over the years, so this article is less a criticism and more a plea for backwards compatibility of technology. When I buy a car, and some small but significant part

fails, say the steering wheel, I don't expect to have to throw away the whole vehicle, do I? No: parts, either generic or specific to make, model and year, remain accessible to order for years or decades.

Internet has leapt through Gs (generations) in this small country with admirable speed, and we are now at about 4.5G, with internet bandwidth and quality zooming upward. Prices per megabit remain low, with "unlimited" plans at pretty good velocity remaining exactly as defined, uncapped. Currently, a week of endless internet from Magti can be had for 5 GEL. Amazing!

I used to have the little bright orange Magti modem, and it served my wife and me for years before simply being unable to handle the newer, much faster speeds and being dropped from support. Then we got a white one, and that too worked very well, nothing at all to complain about. Up to about 2.5 megabits per second was absolutely fast enough for me; I just don't need anything faster.

However, after several years, I heard a "pop" from somewhere a month or so ago, and eventually internet stopped. The noise was unexpected enough that I couldn't even realize where it has come from, until I discovered the lack of internet, and found that my modem's rechargeable battery had exploded inside, turning into a little pillow instead of the usual perfectly flat-sided rectangle it was supposed to be. At least the damage was all interior, with no other harm done to the

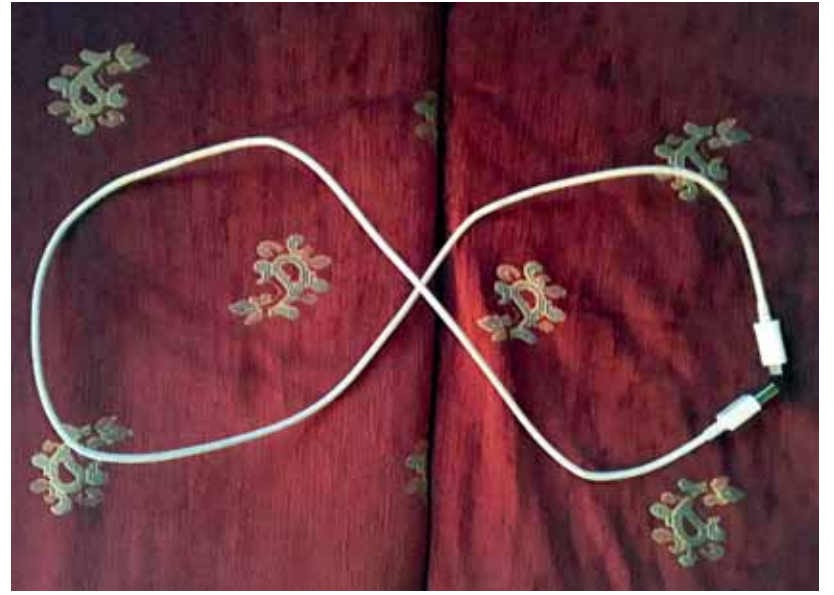
modem itself. But I would need a new battery before it would run again. In the meantime, back to my cellphone (several models newer by now) as stand-in modem.

Now, the nearest Magti office to us is about 110 km away, in Zugdidi, where my wife and I do most of our shopping in twice-monthly odysseys. I took the modem there and explained that I would like to buy a new battery for it.

Oh no, they said, sorry, that device is one we haven't sold for more than a year now, replaced by something better and faster. And we certainly don't sell batteries separately for any of our models, current or defunct, in any case. Have you tried looking around the cellphone service shops in the city?

After giving them the analogy of the throwaway car with the useless steering wheel, and other pieces of my mind, I set off in search of that elusive battery. More than 10 shops and kiosks later, nothing. Only the last place I tried had something which seemed to fit, and visibly to begin charging the modem, once the seller had literally gouged a small dint into it to force it to fit the modem. Success! Or...? I rejoiced at not having to shell out another 250 GEL for the newer modem, and returned home to Svaneti.

However, I hadn't tested that new battery sufficiently when buying it. Yes, the recharge light on the modem came in, but only for about 30 seconds. Nothing I could do would induce it to stay on



longer than that. My 30 GEL was wasted, and I would be forced to acquire the newer modem, faster, yes, but unnecessarily so for me.

The Zugdidi Magti office twice failed to have any of the new modem in stock on subsequent visits, so on my wife's next trip to Tbilisi I had her pick me one up there, and am waiting patiently for her to return soon.

I get that G (generation) is a Thing with cellphone and internet service. I suppose that all I'm frustrated with, from a company which generally has offered very good service, is the lack of aforementioned backward compatibility. But then, I'm the perhaps rare customer who does not change his car, or phone, or camera, or anything else, tech or mech, more often than when absolutely necessary. No keeping up with the Jonsebi for

me! For this reason, I can hardly expect such a large and progressive company as Magti to bow to my wishes and make its old devices serviceable and useable when much newer, better ones beckon. But then, my pockets aren't infinitely deep either, and I refuse to get a bank loan for the latest bling. That's just me. I'll complain, but do what I have to to stay more or less connected.

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

Covid-infected Taxi Drivers Fined for Violating Self-isolation Rules

Two Covid-infected taxi drivers have been fined by police for violating self-isolation rules in Tbilisi, the Ministry of Internal Affairs reports.

One taxi driver, identified as G.P., has been registered as Covid-infected since January 5. Another, identified as Z.S., tested positive for the virus on January 13.

Both persons have been fined GEL 2,000 and placed under mandatory quarantine.

The MIA has issued a statement, saying that it continues to monitor the implementation of the rules and recommendations against the spread of the coronavirus in Georgia.

"The officers of the Central Criminal

Police Department fined two Covid-infected taxi drivers for violating the rules of isolation and quarantine in Tbilisi. Both citizens were fined with GEL 2000 under the article 42-10 of the Code of Administrative Offences. Both were placed in a hotel allocated for Covid-infected citizens. The Ministry of Internal Affairs calls on citizens to demonstrate high public responsibility and comply with the imposed regulations," reads the statement.

Based on the decision of Tbilisi City Hall, starting January 10, taxi drivers in the Georgian capital will undergo coronavirus testing every two weeks. Further, they will be obliged to carry and show the test results to the patrol police when performing their duties.



Bloomberg: Norway Moves to Calm Vaccine Anxiety After Elderly Deaths



Source: Bloomberg. Image: Jean-Francois Monier/AFP/Getty Images

Health authorities in Norway sought to allay safety concerns raised by the death of some elderly patients after they were vaccinated against Covid-19, saying there's no evidence of a direct link, Bloomberg reports in an article by Lars Erik Taraldsen and Naomi Kresge.

"The initial reports from Norway raised alarm as the world looks for early signs of potential side effects from the vaccines. Although doctors say it's possible that vaccine side-effects could aggravate underlying illnesses, they were expecting nursing-home residents to die shortly after being vaccinated because deaths are more common among the frailest and sickest elderly patients," reads the

publication.

"Clearly, Covid-19 is far more dangerous to most patients than vaccination," Steinar Madsen, medical director at the Norwegian Medicines Agency, said on Monday, adding that a connection between the vaccine and the deaths is difficult to prove. "We are not alarmed."

In Norway, 33 people aged 75 and over died following immunization, according to the agency's latest figures. All were already seriously ill, it said. The Scandinavian country has already inoculated almost all of its nursing home population, with more than 48,000 people vaccinated as of Monday afternoon.

The reported fatalities are well under 1 out of 1,000 nursing-home patients to be vaccinated, he said. The side effects

of immunization can, in some cases, "tip the patients into a more serious course of the underlying disease," Madsen said. "We can't rule that out."

"Other countries, including Germany and Israel, have also reported deaths in people who recently were vaccinated, without identifying causal links. Hong Kong's government-appointed vaccine advisory panel said Monday that it's seeking more data from the Norwegian and German governments on incidents involving the Pfizer-BioNTech shot, which has been approved in the territory.

"Experts on vaccines and aging had predicted early on that deaths after vaccinations in high-risk patients might cause confusion," reads the article.

European Mints for Georgian Money



This was a revival of a national minting tradition which started in the 6th c. B.C.

With no technologies left by the Soviets, Georgians had to order from Western companies both banknotes and commemorative coins. For example, banknotes dated 1995, and commemorative gold coins dedicated to the 50th anniversary of victory in World War II, were produced by the French company "François Charles Oberthure", following the Georgian design. In 2000, the National Bank of Georgia ordered from the Royal Mint, UK, silver, copper-nickel alloy and bimetallic coins dedicated to 2000 A.D. and 3000 years of Georgian statehood.

Tedo Dundua, Giorgi Dundua, Niko Javakhishvili, Ani Eristavi. Money in Georgia. Tbilisi. 2003, pp. 153, 171-174.

Collaboration of the same type existed in the past. Not because they lacked mint technologies, but for a higher level of Greek art, some Georgian (Colchian and



Iberian) rulers ordered their coins to be struck in the bilingual (Graeco-Colchian) cities of Phasis (Modern Poti, Western Georgia) or Trapezus (Modern Trabzon, Turkey).

Coin evidence and narrative clearly demonstrate that throughout the second half of the 3rd c. B.C. Bagrat Pharnavaziani, Duke of Klarjeti (Southwest Georgia), issued the coins with a proud Aramaic legend. Saurmag, the second king of Iberia (East, South and Southwest Georgia), had to deal with a revolt of the dukes. Was ambitious Bagrat among them, did he secure southern principality for himself? Perhaps, we need more records for the full picture. But still, his coins are present, ordered, maybe, from the nearest Greek community. And that could be either Phasis, or Trapezus.

logue/types/?type=16

Aka stater is an exact copy of the gold coins struck with the name of Lysimachus (after his death), Alexander's general. Aka stater was issued in the beginning of the 2nd c. B.C. Two specimens are known. Stylistically, technically and artistically, the coin is no less than its prototype.

The topography of the coin findings proves their local, Colchian origin - they were found in Trabzon/Trapezus and in Western Georgia. The name of the king on the reverse of the coin is in possessive case and can be translated (from the Greek) as "of king Akes/Aka or Akos".

Thus, Georgia's association with the West can be traced in numerous spheres of life, and minting is one of them.

Institute of Georgian History, Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University

BY PROF. DR. TEDO DUNDUA,
DR. EMIL AVDALIANI

1991 the Supreme Council of Georgia declared the independence of the country. The National Bank of Georgia was established on August 2, 1991. Since October 2, 1995, Lari, the national currency of Georgia, has been in circulation.

In history books, it is fashionable to talk about Georgia's political, military and economic ties with the West in the light of various recent agreements signed between Tbilisi and the EU/NATO, or cooperation the Medieval Georgian kings had with their western counterparts. Far smaller ties are rarely mentioned, though over millennia they have constituted a significant bond between Georgia and the West. Minting is one such sphere, and is a testimony to the country's cultural, technological and economic cooperation with the West.

Georgia's relations with the West also have a "financial" history. On April 9,



SPORTS

Tato Grigalashvili Named Best Athlete at Doha World Judo Masters

BY ANA DUMBADZE

Young Georgian wrestler Tato Grigalashvili (81 kg) was named the best male athlete at the Doha World Judo Masters, while France's Romane Dicko earned the same honorary title among women.

Grigalashvili performed 4 Ippons, which took 16.33 minutes, while Dicko managed to reach Ippon in 9.3 minutes.

The International Judo Federation applauded the Georgian athlete's performance by saying he has "displayed incredible throwing ability as well as fantastic groundwork" that "surely cements his Rising Star award in JudoFest".

The Georgian judo team participated in the first international tournament of 2021 with a total of sixteen athletes and won five medals. Vazha Margvelashvili (66 kg) took third place on the first day of the three-day World Masters, and Tato Grigalashvili (81 kg) became the champion the next day. The 21-year-old Georgian, who arrived in Qatar as the current European champion, played five matches and won all five. On the way to the final,



Grigalashvili defeated Hungarian Attila Ungar, Italian Antonio Esposito, Russian Alan Khubetsov, and South Korean Sung-

kho Lee. In the fight for the champion title, he defeated Frank de Wit from the Netherlands.



Georgian Wrestlers' Success at Grand Prix de France

BY ANA DUMBADZE

The Georgian Greco-Roman wrestling team competed at the final day of the 47th annual Henri Deglane Grand Prix in Nice, France on Monday.

Georgian athlete Giorgi Melia (97 kg) defeated his Azerbaijani rival in the final and won the gold medal, while Sulkhan Buidze (130 kg) and Guram Khetsuriani (87 kg) earned bronze medals.

Earlier, the Georgian athletes grabbed 4 gold, 2 silver, and 3 bronze medals in freestyle wrestling.

Beka Lomtadze (61 kg), Zurab Iakobishvili (70 kg), Nika Kenchadze (79 kg) and Geno Petriashvili (125 kg) won gold medals in their weight categories. Davit Tlashadze (74 kg) and Givi Macharashvili (97 kg) received silver medals. Vladimir Khinchegashvili (65 kg), Beka Buchiashvili (57 kg) and Irakli Mtsitur (92 kg) won bronze medals.

Davit Marsagishvili was the only Georgian freestyle wrestler who could not manage to bring home a medal from the tournament.



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