

FOCUS

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Leather bags as unique as their wearers

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Covid Update: EU Grants Millions to Georgia to Defeat COVID

BY NINI DAKHUNDARIDZE

The European Union in times of celebration and need, stands by Georgia's side. It is said that real friends are especially revealed during hard times, and in support of that theory, on December 14, the EU announced a €60 million (approx. GEL 240 million) grant to assist Georgia in coping with the COVID-19 pandemic.

This is the first payment of the EU's €75 million (approx. GEL 300 million) 'COVID-19 Resilience Contract for Georgia', through which the EU will support the country's Anti-Crisis Economic Plan.

This contract goes back to September 29, when EU Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement Olivér Várhelyi and the Prime Minister of Georgia, Giorgi Gakharia, signed two financing agreements worth €129 million. One of them was the 'COVID-19 Resilience Contract for Georgia.'



Worth €54 million in grants, another agreement signed back in autumn was the 'EU4 Integrated Territorial Development' program, targeting the economic development of regions

outside the capital. Both agreements aim to assist Georgia in coping with the COVID-19 outbreak and its impact on the country's economy.

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Markets									
As of 14-Dec-2020									
STOCKS	Price	w/w	m/m	BONDS	Price	w/w	m/m		
Bank of Georgia (BGEO LN)	GBP 11.90	-0.2%	+13.3%	GEORG 04/21	101.34 (YTM 2.96%)	-0.6%	-0.4%		
Georgia Capital (CGEO LN)	GBP 5.17	-3.4%	+14.8%	GEORG 04/21	101.68 (YTM 1.61%)	+0.1%	-0.2%		
TBC Bank Group (TBCG LN)	GBP 11.86	+1.0%	+5.0%	GRAIL 07/22	105.52 (YTM 4.08%)	+0.2%	+0.5%		
				GEBGG 07/23	105.60 (YTM 3.73%)	-0.8%	+0.4%		
COMMODITIES	Price	w/w	m/m	CURRENCIES	Price	w/w	m/m		
Crude Oil, Brent (US\$/bbl)	50.29	+3.1%	+17.6%	GEL / USD	3.2866	+0.5%	-0.3%		
Gold Spot (US\$/OZ)	1 827.35	-2.9%	-3.3%	GEL / EUR	3.9912	+0.5%	+2.3%		
				GEL / GBP	4.3770	-0.0%	+0.7%		
				GEL / CHF	3.7121	+1.0%	+2.9%		
INDICES	Price	w/w	m/m	GEL / RUB	0.0445	+0.2%	+4.2%		
FTSE 100	6 531.83	-0.4%	+3.4%	GEL / TRY	0.4185	-0.1%	-2.8%		
FTSE 250	19 764.02	-0.8%	+2.6%	GEL / AZN	1.9333	+0.5%	-0.3%		
DAX	13 223.16	-0.4%	+1.1%	GEL / AMD	0.0063	-1.6%	-6.0%		
DOW JONES	29 861.55	-0.7%	+1.3%	GEL / UAH	0.1180	+1.5%	+0.7%		
NASDAQ	12 440.04	-0.6%	+5.2%	EUR / USD	0.8236	-0.3%	-2.5%		
MSCI EM	1 250.45	-0.2%	+5.2%	GBP / USD	0.7502	+0.4%	-1.0%		
SP 500	3 647.49	-1.2%	+1.7%	RUB / USD	0.8867	-0.4%	-2.8%		
MSCI FM	2 557.26	+1.3%	+6.6%	RUB / USD	73.8789	+0.3%	-4.5%		
GT Index (GEL)	1 582.68	-	-	TRY / USD	7.8540	+0.6%	+2.6%		
GT Index (USD)	1 208.13	-	-	AZN / USD	1.6987	-0.1%	-0.1%		



Tbilisi Mayor Presents Apartment to a Family from the Africa Settlement

BY ANA DUMBADZE

Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze is gifting an apartment to a family from Tbilisi's Africa settlement, whose photos were spread on social media this week during the process of dismantling of buildings by the Tbilisi City Hall. Kaladze wrote about it on his Facebook page, noting that no-one lived in the illegally constructed buildings, which were dismantled on Tuesday. He added that other illegally constructed facilities are also located in the surrounding area, in which families do live, although these have not been dismantled.

"I say with full responsibility that not a single person lived in these buildings under deconstruction. Lands have been looted in the surrounding areas, and there are illegally constructed buildings where certain families live. No-one has touched those houses or those people," he said.

With regards to the photo of a father and son watching the process of dismantling the buildings which spread in social media, the Mayor said that despite the

released disinformation, they do not live in the buildings that were dismantled Tuesday, but live nearby and were merely watching the developments in the neighborhood.

"Later, photos of me and my children were attached to their photo. I can't be angry about it, and I'm not surprised," Kaladze said. "What else can you say to such people? Such behavior is their choice. The main thing for me this time is that when I can help, I help. Heroism is a man alone raising six children. That father is a hero and it is very important for me to support him. I found out in the evening what conditions he lives in, and my personal gift, on behalf of my family, will be an apartment for his family."

"Against the background of so much hatred, slander and lies, the happiness of this family is the result of today for me," Kaladze wrote.

For the record, on Tuesday, a confrontation occurred between law enforcers and the population in Tbilisi's Africa settlement, where Tbilisi City Hall employees started dismantling illegally constructed buildings. Locals were trying to prevent workers from completing their work.

8 persons detained during the confrontation were later released.

Escape Theater-like Reality with the Tbilisi International Festival of Theater

BY NINI DAKHUNDARIDZE

The Tbilisi International Theater Festival was to be held for the 12th time in 2020. Actors from different parts of the world were to come and present a variety of performances for the Georgian audience. However, a lot of planned events have since turned into "should have beens" and "supposed to have happened" in the last year of the global pandemic. But when everything else fails, art is usually what comes to aid humanity. Having first delayed the event in hopes that they would still be able to physically implement it after some time, if the pandemic situation stabilized in the country, the organizers of the Tbilisi International Theater Festival finally decided to adapt to the existing reality and offer festival performances online, and it is running from December 15 to December 22.

"The program was ready in March, and we hoped the situation would be better by September. But it started to get worse in September, so we decided to do it anyway and do it remotely. Theater is neither an online art nor a modern dance: theater needs an audience; it is a form of live communication. The play you see online and the one you see live leave radically different impressions. The "presence" of the spectator where there

is a creative act is essential. This greatly determines the fate of the play as well. But this time we had only one way to go.

"Holding a festival online can come from several desires: to comfort people and keep the continuation of the festival, and to encourage. Someday, many years in the future, when we look back at history, what we will see is that even in the conditions of this 'war,' theater and culture did not give up," the festival organizers told Marketer.

The plays have come from the Georgian regions, from Poti and Telavi to Tbilisi, as well as from international stages: The UK, Germany, and Poland. The festival features everything from a modernization of Shakespeare's Othello, to a revival of the unbearable of the twentieth century in a play based on Nino Kharatishvili's work titled The Eighth Life (for Brilka).

On Thursday, Of Riders & Running Horses from the UK was streamed. It is a stirring and visceral dance event by Still House, created as a communal animation of urban spaces. Six female dancers and a live band conjure a new kind of old dance, an insistent rhythm, a joyful step into what it means to move together.

"The music is a rider and we are running horses," reads one of the reviews.

On Wednesday, Songs of Lear went online. "Songs of Lear seems to have already passed into legend, even though it's only a work in progress," writes The Guardian of Shakespeare's masterpiece

as recreated by the Polish theater Song of the Goat. The ensemble members have chosen crucial scenes from King Lear to weave a story out of gestures, words and music. Each song is a starting point for another 'dramatic poem'.

Some of the festival highlights that are still to come: Lisa's Cake from the Tbilisi Movement Theater, The Damned (THE DEATH OF GODS) from Polish performers, and the final performance of this year's festival, on December 22: The Pelican, from Tbilisi's Theater on Atoneli.

The performances are available online for 24 hours and are free of charge on the festival's webpage, allowing theater enthusiasts to escape a reality that is more and more becoming like a tragedy itself.

ABOUT THE FESTIVAL

The Tbilisi International Festival of Theater was founded by Tbilisi Municipality, on initiative of Tbilisi Mayor Gigi Ugulava in 2009. The festival runs every year at the end of September and beginning of October, and is one of the major events in the international life of Georgia. It is fast becoming one of the main performing arts events in the South Caucasus, attracting the attention of the best-known, creative, provocative and innovative theater productions from around the world, a meeting point of Europe and Asia, of many countries and places in one of the most beautiful, warm, unique theatrical and cultural Tbilisi, capital of Georgia.



Covid Update: EU Grants Millions to Georgia to Defeat COVID

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The plan is composed of measures to reduce the negative effects of income loss, aimed at preserving jobs, supporting businesses and strengthening the healthcare system. The overall goal of the support is to help citizens and businesses in Georgia recover from the impact of the pandemic.

The payment follows the EU's transfer of €100 million (approximately GEL 400 million) in loans for macro-financial assistance on November 25. Both of the payments are part of the wider GEL 1.5 billion EU support package for Georgia, which also focuses on support for the health sector, social sector and economic recovery.

"The EU continues to stand firmly by Georgia during the pandemic. This GEL 240 million grant payment is a key part of the GEL 1.5 billion assistance package that the EU and Team Europe mobilized last spring. They are aimed at helping the government respond to the pandemic and support Georgian citizens to cope with the serious challenges so many are facing these days," said Carl Hartzell, EU Ambassador to Georgia.

This disbursement was approved after the Government's Anti-Crisis Economic Plan, economic policies, public finance

management and budget transparency had been verified. The remaining funds will be disbursed based on an assessment of government measures, including the delivery of social assistance for vulnerable households, support to businesses who have retained jobs, and an increase in the number of beds in Intensive Care Units.

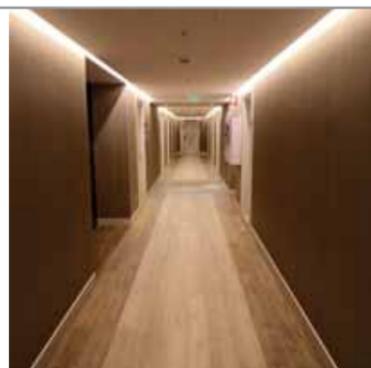
Over the last two months, Georgia looks to have been going through its "peak" phase of pandemic infections, with case numbers progressively rising, and at one point reaching almost 5,000 cases daily. Having held the elections, and as people started protesting its results in the street, the restrictions were tightened again at the end of November as the country saw a surge of COVID cases, continuously recording over 4000 cases a day. It can be said that the national curfew from 9pm to 5am, and the closing down of all but essential institutions, has reduced the spread of the virus, or rather, its speed. Currently, Georgia takes 43rd place in the world by the number of infections (201,368, at the time of writing). On Thursday, 2981 new cases were registered in the country, 31 new deaths and 2001 recoveries.

The regulations will loosen up from December 24 in an attempt to make the holidays in unprecedented times as normal as possible. From January 3, however,

it is planned to bring back the restrictions: closing all but essential shops and businesses, and limiting public transportation.

Some European countries see the holiday season as the time to tighten the regulations further, as cases seem to still be surging. Leaders in Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and the Czech Republic by Wednesday had announced that bans on large gatherings and the closure of nonessential businesses would be imposed over the second half of December into January. The UK was planning on letting up to three households meet indoors for a five-day period over Christmas, but that may change now that the British Medical Journal (BMJ) and the Health Service Journal (HSJ) warned that Prime Minister Boris Johnson's current plan would cost many lives in the near future.

The first vaccine shots have been given in Canada and the United States, as the latter surpassed 300,000 virus-related deaths. On Wednesday, the US recorded the highest daily number for new coronavirus since the pandemic entered the country, but as experts in both the US and the UK warn that the pandemic is still very much not over, there is a sense of a possible light at the end of the tunnel now that the mass vaccinations have begun.



30 sqm studio type premium apartment for sale in Batumi on the 30th floor of the newly completed "Alliance Palace" overlooking the sea and old Batumi. The apartment, which has its own kitchen, is renovated and fully equipped with appliances, dishes and hotel inventory to Courtyard by Marriot standard.

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Unity Through Security: Assumptions, Opportunities, Suggestions. Part 2

ANALYSIS BY VICTOR KIPIANI,
GEOCASE, CHAIRMAN

Discussing regional cooperation has become increasingly frequent at different forums or gatherings in the Black Sea region, and this rising interest is absolutely logical given the geopolitical and geo-economic developments the region is witnessing. In general, many bilateral or multilateral papers have been dedicated to relations in the Black Sea region.

This tendency is of course welcome, but there remains the feeling that the Black sea region is still not being paid a quality and level of attention commensurate with current events. Many also feel that the region is undervalued, and that the responses to certain challenges that have been proposed to date do not reflect the region's true geopolitics, an opinion that we share.

The importance of the Black Sea region as a geopolitically distinct space is undeniably great if we consider the Black Sea's status; the maritime transport arteries that cross it; its proximity to two large normative camps; its role as a vital gate on NATO's eastern flank; and, finally, the region's role as a 'safety locker' for Western security between Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Even this short list would be enough grounds to increase the essential recognition of the Black Sea region in terms of international and regional security.

In a word, it is urgent that regional efforts towards a Black Sea format of cooperation be intensified, and the sooner the better. That said, these efforts should be pursued with appropriate levels of caution and observation, with every risk being carefully calculated. Such a balanced approach is dictated by the region's specificity, particularly considering ongoing geopolitical (and not ethnic) conflicts, the problem of Russian occupation and Russia's aggressive policy, the peculiar legal status of the Turkish Straits, and so on. It would indeed be inadmissible for these rather important circumstances to limit the priorities of those Black Sea



Image source: bsec-organization.org

states that are striving towards integration with Western geopolitical civilization. What must also be considered is the fact that, in order to better outline the Black Sea region, any initiative must unambiguously do away with the supposed ostensible weakening of Western strategic interest in the region: every step taken by parties interested in the proper development of the Black Sea region should debunk any doubts over its 'peripherality' and 'secondary status'.

At the same time, it is essential that actions to establish a Black Sea 'free unity' be in alignment with the principles of modern diplomacy; that they be as compact and purposeful as possible; that they be flexible and immediately adaptable to regional challenges; and that they represent a modern multilateral and regional-thematic model fitted to real scenarios.

Considering all this, we believe that the signing of a Black Sea declaration would be a proper step in the right direction. Such a document would underline the unity of interests of Black Sea states as well as the United States' firm and irreversible interest in our region. It is noteworthy that, along with the other issues that its signature would imply, such a declaration made by a strategic ally would

send another strong signal that the West does not recognize Russia's 'zone of influence' in the Black Sea region, and does not recognize any other revisionist or authoritarian country's view of it.

By mentioning the uniqueness and specificity of the Black Sea region in the format of complex measures directed towards common Eurasian stability, the Black Sea declaration, on its own, would be a step towards the establishment of stability and peace in the region. The declaration should also define grounds for the repeated assessment and revision, if required, of regional security principles. Doing so would give a green light to defining a new and regional *modus vivendi* in alignment with current times.

We would also consider it vital to draw the attention of the declaration's participants (declarants) to the need to attract additional investments in the region. A preliminary 'warm-up' idea for declaring a large-scale regional project might for example be a 'Black Sea Prosperity (Development) Network', whose aims we would consider including the mobilization of financial resources for the development of regional infrastructure, decreasing dependence on certain energy resources and carrying out social

and environmental programs.

One of the advantages of the Black Sea Declaration format lies in its freedom from formalized structures, and at the initial stage this format should exclude the creation of standing institutions. At the same time, in order to ensure proper coordination, it would be advisable to hold regular high-level summits between the heads of the declaration's members and high-ranking US officials. In order to do so, as a kind of 'work in progress' note, we would suggest a 'Black Sea Declaration [Number of Members]+1' format. We believe that the role of such regular summits would be to support the independence of the region's countries as well as their sovereignty and territorial integrity; the summit's participants would also discuss regional geopolitical (pseudo-ethnic) conflicts and other issues of general regional security, international terrorism, cyber security, illegal migration and other relevant topics.

It would be advisable for the declaration to underline US activity in different regional projects, from defense to culture, as this would serve as a strong lever for the region's integration with Western shared political unity.

We also believe that a Black Sea Dec-

laration should prepare the ground for future trade agreements, properly configured for a regional scale of coverage, or even for the establishment of one or several complimentary trade blocs.

CONCLUDING STATEMENTS

New threats in the Black Sea region indisputably increase the relevance of Georgia's efforts, and those of its international allies and partners, to minimize regional risks and attempt to neutralize some of them. Achieving this process requires adequate levels of competence, courage, purposefulness and vision, as well as leadership.

To repeat it again: there is a prevailing assumption that the world currently lacks the resources and readiness to rapidly progress along the most desirable path. It is certainly true that we hear many declarations and considerations where considerable part of them seems lacking specificity and a proper connection to reality. Our extraordinary, non-standard times demand extraordinary, non-standard approaches. What is certain is that Georgia and its strategic ally and other partners are currently at a 'historic turning point', and that a successful outcome is our common and long-term interest, as well as a matter of honor.

A Theoretical Perspective on the South Caucasus

OP-ED BY EMIL AVDALIANI

When the second Karabakh War ended, some long-term developments could be singled out to highlight the staggering pace of geopolitical changes in and around the South Caucasus, leading to a definitive trend of undercutting the democratic ideals and concrete achievements made by the region's states.

Take Armenia: its young democracy, with high hopes especially after the 2018 revolution, will now be more dependent on Russia. Here, it is not whether the democratic model is better or not, but rather the need to underline the incompatibility between an aspiring democracy and a large non-democracy such as Russia. Armenian leadership will now have to make extensive concessions to Moscow, which in many cases will involve backtracking in democratic values. Building a fair political system simply cannot go hand-in-hand with the Russian model.

The Karabakh War also signals a regress in Western peacemaking standards. The Western approach to conflict resolution, based on parity rather than geopolitical interests, has been trumped by a Russian alternative. Moscow is not looking



towards a definitive resolution of the conflict (a tradition Moscow has pursued in other territorial conflicts), but rather towards its protraction, but under its close watch so as to increase its geopolitical influence. From a Russian perspective, the country will continue to influence Armenia and Azerbaijan, even to a much larger extent than it was before. The war also indicates the end of Armenia's attempts to have a multi-vector foreign policy, which was already under immense pressure. Continuous failures were present all along the road, but the biggest manifest has been an over-reliance on Russia. The 2016 fighting showed the limits. Armenian politicians tried to build ties with other regional powers afterwards, but the Russian influence remained incremental. The growing reduction in

the symmetry of this alliance culminated in the 2020 war with Azerbaijan, when the limits of Yerevan's maneuvering abilities were underlined. The war also essentially killed any remnants of multi-axial policy efforts: from now on, Armenia's dependence on Russia will be more pronounced, with no viable geopolitical alternatives.

The three South Caucasus states are

divided by larger regional powers, which signals the increased fracturing of the region. The return of Turkey and the increased presence of the Russian military may also mean the resurrection of a great power competition, where military power, infrastructure projects as well as economic strength are all translated into actual geopolitical influence, harming accessibility to the region and limiting hopes for a long-term conflict resolution.

The time when the West viewed the South Caucasus as a monolithic entity is gone. A diversified foreign policy should be applied, allowing an adaptation to the changing circumstances on the ground. Policy toward each state of the region should be different, and the West should become more geopolitical in its approach. Turkey's recent suggestion to create a six-nation pact involving the South Caucasus states, plus Russia, Turkey and Iran, is a good indication of Western political regress from the region.

Western regress has been in play for quite some time already; the Karabakh War has just burst it open to the public. The West's need to be more proactive is now critical. Much will depend on the US and its new administration, but the West will have to seek a certain, even if limited, understanding with Turkey to salvage the deteriorating situation in the South Caucasus.

To Secede or Not to Secede?

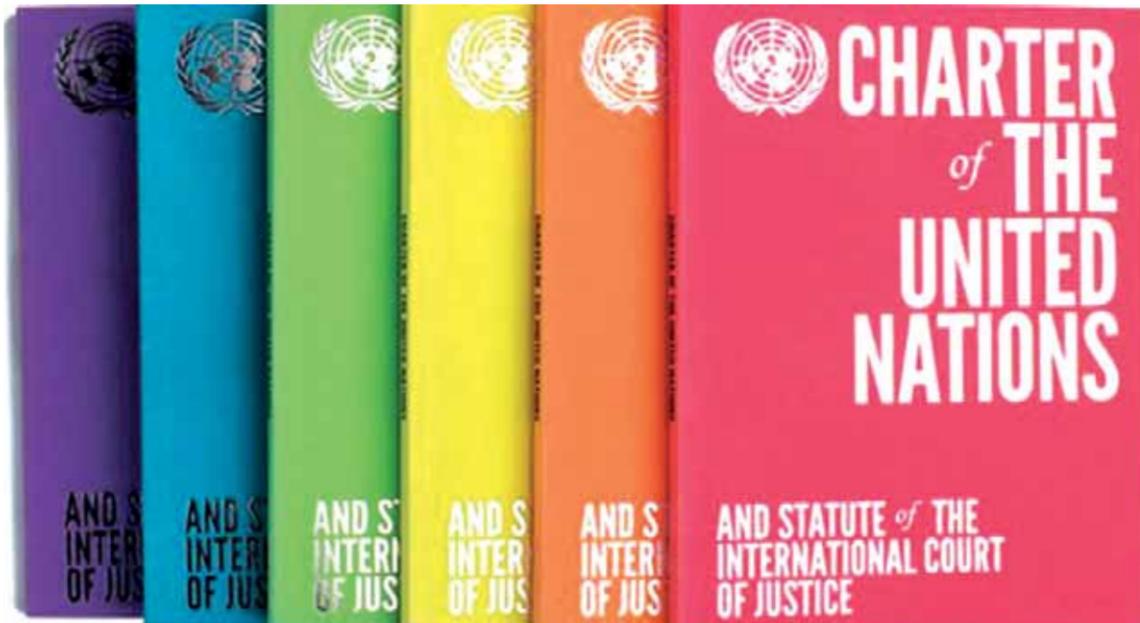


Image source: undispatch.com

OP-ED BY LEVAN KIPIANI

The choice between the self-determination of a group of people and the territorial integrity of the state has arguably been among the oldest false dichotomies of international law and politics. Being absent from the world's agenda for quite a while, the controversial topic blatantly re-emerged on the geopolitical surface at the beginning of the 20th century. The US President and former professor of political science Woodrow Wilson is widely credited to be the one who resuscitated the right to self-determination. He suggested that it would be a good indicator for recognizing the democratic consent of smaller nations, by a series of plebiscites in the territories, whose fates remained unknown after the fall of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires. The concept of self-determination subsequently continued to evolve and grow on the international stage through the period of decolonization, and has since been the source of a persistent controversy concerned with the idea of territorial integrity.

In the modern days, numerous conflicts have derived from territorial disputes and are justified by the right of the people to self-determination. In the array of examples, among them Kosovo, Transnistria, Crimea, and the recently trending case of Nagorno-Karabakh, people are trying to justify their wish to secede, relying on this right. This principle, however, has multiple problems, due to

the given concept of self-determination being often abused due to uncertainty of the international law.

Speaking of international law, the principle of self-determination was accepted by the Atlantic Charter in 1941, and after few years was introduced in the UN Charter. Pursuant to Article 1(2) of the 1945 UN Charter, the main purpose of the UN is "to develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace". To the detriment of the Charter, there is no clarification of the context for self-determination, thus it can be interpreted as a right of the people to full independence, autonomy, federation state, full assimilation or protection.

Furthermore, there is no explanation as to how the decision on self-determination should be made, and there are no provisions present with regards to the enforcement mechanism for this right. The Charter also mentions the concept of nation on many occasions, but does not define what factors actually constitute a nation. In addition to this, Article 1(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights states that "all peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right, they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development". Once again, the lack of definition of peoples acts in detriment to the understanding of the given provision.

The given principle of self-determination offered by the UN Charter clashes

with the notion of territorial integrity offered by the same body. According to Article 2(4) of the UN Charter Article, that emphasizes the importance of territorial integrity, "all members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations". The given principle is considered as a cornerstone for international security and stability, which is arguably in confrontation with the principle of self-determination, that by virtue involves secession from the state.

Therefore, we come to terms with a reality where the international documents highlight the importance of the principle of self-determination and territorial integrity in arguably equal scale. To raise concerns even more, the international instruments do not explicitly determine whether secessions are legal or not. This for some might advocate for the claim that everything that is not prohibited is in fact legal. This line of thought is arguably a direct cause of the frequent international instability and primary threat to territorial integrity.

As discussed above, the paradoxically contradicting principles have both been arguably enshrined in international law, creating ambiguity in determining which claim is the superior in terms of legitimacy. Thus, this dilemma is often very convenient from a political point of view. It provides states with the opportunity, as professor Theodore Christakis describes, to "ride two horses at the same time". In reality, this translates into states sometimes embracing the self-determi-

nation of some groups, while proclaiming that the principle of territorial integrity prevails at home or in the territory of friends and allies.

This "two horse" principle is well illustrated in the case of Crimea. Russia has, for a prolonged period, been a prominent advocate of the principle of respect for territorial integrity. This was especially visible in the 1990s when confronting the separatist attempts in Tatarstan and Chechnya. Contrary to the firm stance it took in the 1990s, Russia resorted to claiming that the principle of self-determination of Russian speaking populations in Crimea prevails over the territorial integrity of Ukraine. In 1995, the Russian government even took the initiative to submit to the Heads of State of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) a "Memorandum on the Maintenance of Peace and Stability in the CIS". In this document, Russia, Ukraine and the remaining CIS States declare, among others, that they "shall [...] take measures to put a stop to any manifestation of separatism" and "bind themselves not to support separatist movements and separatist regimes in the territory of other States members if they arise".

Fast-forward to the future: Russia's official position in relation to secession has arguably undergone significant changes. This is well illustrated by the fact that in 2008, Russia put forward, for the first time to our knowledge, the theory of "remedial secession" in order to justify its decision to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Interestingly, Professor of International Law Marcelo Kohen highlights the equilibrium in terms of the double standards applied by both camps, Russia and its counterparts on the other side of the "iron curtain". He underlines that the Western states have been actively promoting the break-up of states and imposing a culture of force in international relations, thus weakening the framework of international law and the system of collective security. He brings the examples such as the support towards the secession of South Sudan and Kosovo as few of many more.

Examining the historical experience, as well as at the international legal framework, one might conclude that secession is in fact not prohibited by international law and is quite easily applicable in the current geopolitical realities. This in fact stresses the bigger importance of at least an adequate theory or simply a theoretical guideline, that should be relied upon while analyzing the supposed superiority of the self-determination of a group of people over the territorial sovereignty of the state.

Allen Buchanan, one of the most prominent scholars amongst the theorists of

secession, offers a very pertinent theory for this context. He believes that only one type of theory can approve the idea of unilateral right to secede, the "Remedial Right Only Theory". According to it, the right to separate is a right to a remedy of last resort, against serious and persistent injustices. Provided that the injustices are severe, the right of the territorial integrity can be evaded.

Further according to his theory, the right of self-determination can be granted to various cultural groups under certain conditions. Buchanan does not merely grant more importance or credit to the groups simply based on a nationality, religion, linguistics or ideologies; he emphasizes that secession is justified only if a certain group needs to protect itself from obliteration. He used the Kurdish case as an example to illustrate his argument for the Remedial Right Only Theory. The second argument of Buchanan's justification for separation is if the group of people needs to protect itself against internal colonialism or regional exploitation. His third justification addresses instances in which the group recovers a territory that was illegally taken from them, such as the Baltic States, which were previously annexed by the USSR.

Wolfgang F. Danspeckgruber is yet another expert that does not see the straightforward denial of the right to self-determination as the answer to stability and peace. As he elaborates, such a rigid policy will merely increase the likelihood of conflict escalation. Danspeckgruber, who is a founding director of the Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination at Princeton University, states that the struggle for self-determination is seldom a zero-sum game between the group and the center, but rather a more global matter. He continues that since the recognition of new countries has become quite rare, there is a need to redesign the international system to support the clarification and understanding of the provisions that deem self-determination possible. This in fact is in line with Buchanan's theory, since he also advocates for the importance of redesigning international law on self-determination, and actively promotes other alternatives to secession, such as autonomy.

To sum up, it could be concluded that the principle of territorial integrity is in general prevailing the right of the people to external self-determination, despite the later not being a rare occurrence. However, the aforesaid lack of clarity in the international legal framework and the un-uniform geographical outcomes of often very similar cases might envisage certain changes in the international law or even the introduction of a new governing institution in the future.

Georgia Announces 6 Month Extension of Authorized Period of Stay to Foreigners

BY ANA DUMBADZE

The Government of Georgia previously extended the period of exit for foreigners until December 31, 2020, and that date has now been extended to July 1, 2021.

Foreign citizens without a residency permit who were in the country legally on March 14, 2020, have been in the country for more than 365 days, and were not able to leave the country due to the closure of borders, may remain until July 1, 2021, with no penalty.

The above information was released by the US Embassy in Tbilisi.

"The US Embassy does not provide recommendations to US citizens on how to manage their personal immigration status in Georgia. However, out of an abundance of caution, US citizens should assume this date will not be extended further, and therefore should start making

appropriate arrangements now. One option may be to depart the country prior to July 1 and apply for permission to re-enter under an appropriate program offered by the Government of Georgia (for example, as a business traveler, remote worker, or student). Another option may be to pursue a residency permit. Please note, however, that the Embassy is currently unable to provide notarial services in connection with a residency permit application," reads the statement published by the Embassy.

Further, the Embassy released the following information in order to assist foreign citizens:

"Actions to Take:

Visit our Embassy webpage on COVID-19 for information on conditions in Georgia and resumption of routine consular services.

Reduce your risk of contracting COVID-19 by following the Centers for Disease Control's (CDC's) latest recommendations. Visit the CDC Travelers Health Page and consult the CDC's Travel Health Notice for Georgia."



Georgia's Political Ups & Downs

BY ANA DUMBADZE

This week, the political life of the country was full of unexpected events and developments. A number of opposition members were heard making critical comments against diplomats, in particular, the US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degnan, the EU Ambassador Carl Hartzell, and German Ambassador Hubert Knirsch, who are involved in the negotiations between the ruling party and the united opposition, accusing them of a pro-government course.

"This government will definitely be overthrown, and the US, EU ambassadors will apologize for their anti-Georgian behavior," declared Nika Gvaramia, the former First Deputy Prosecutor General and the founder of opposition-minded Mtavari Arkhi TV.

Gvaramia claimed the incumbent government is trying to imprison him in order to stop his critical statements against the policy of the ruling party Georgian Dream.

"If I have to go to prison, I will go," he said. "It will be an honor now, as all normal people are behind bars, having been imprisoned by this government. This TV channel will not stop. This government will definitely be overthrown, and these ambassadors will apologize for their anti-Georgian behavior. Their facilitation is just a way of appeasing their administrations that they have eased the conflict. This is a shame, and this is exactly what is damaging the West. Neither Irakli Kobakhidze, the son of Russia's official agent and a slave of the Russian project, nor Bidzina Ivanishvili, should talk to me about anti-Western behavior, nor should the facilitators, whose work remains vague," Gvaramia stated.

He then said he believes US and EU Ambassadors to Georgia, Kelly Degnan and Carl Hartzell, should "Stop talking about him and other political prisoners."

"I get a stab in the back from the Western institutions like the Strasbourg Court. Ambassador Degnan's deputy says that Giorgi Rurua [co-founder of Mtavari TV] is the head of an armed gang and his imprisonment is not a shame, but that what I do is," Gvaramia said.

He claimed that the "US and EU Ambassadors' behavior harms the West, as they are involved in the trade of the captives and exchange of prisoners to satisfy the interests of Georgian Dream."

The Founder of Mtavari Arkhi noted he believes said ambassadors should state publicly that Georgian Dream has political prisoners, instead of acting in



EU Ambassador Carl Hartzell.
Image source: twitter.com

the interests of the government.

"This is a shame and is anti-western," he said, adding that it is surprising that someone mandated Ambassador Kelly Degnan to attend the first sitting of the 10th Parliament last Friday.

Nika Gvaramia further called on the opposition not to participate in the ongoing negotiations between the government and the opposition, facilitated by the US and EU ambassadors to Georgia.

The German Ambassador to Georgia responded with surprise to the critical comments made against the diplomats.

"It's surprising what we hear about diplomats these days, how they argue with insistence and imagination. None of the diplomats offered themselves by force, and this will not happen in the future.

"We have been addressed again and again by opposition parties in recent years. We were told that they are a pro-Western opposition and we, the diplomats, should help them.

"At the same time, it must be said that the Western idea is not expressed in one party or one person, but is the idea of governance and freedom in accordance with the Constitution. That's why Georgia introduced a parliamentary system after Mikheil Saakashvili's rule; that's why the Parliament is so important and diplomats became more active in promoting dialogue between the parties, which will advance the democratic development of Georgia.

"I do not want to talk about certain individuals and their expressions. Those who speak characterize themselves, and the public can evaluate these expressions.

"Georgia has passed the test of democracy. These elections were not the peak of democratic development in Georgia. Improvement and reforms are necessary. Decisions should be made in Parliament.

"I have been following this process, and I think that these loud attacks on diplomats have exactly this basis. We are witnessing a confrontation within the opposition," the German Ambassador said.

"Everyone has the right to their own opinion," said US Ambassador Degnan. "However, there is a difference between opinion and fact, and the fact is that Georgia does not have a better friend than the United States."

She was asked about the critical views expressed by the representatives of the opposition towards the ambassadors, and replied noting that the US Embassy has been working hard for 30 years to help Georgia improve its healthcare, education, and security, to diversify its economy, and to create jobs for Georgians.

"What other evidence can we present to show we care? That is the truth. No matter who has the power, our commitment to Georgia's success will not change," she said.

On Tuesday, the leader of the opposition United National Movement, Grigol Vashadze, announced that he was leaving the party. The decision was a surprise even for his teammates.

He claimed he does not agree with the tactics chosen by the majority of the party leadership and employed without consulting the party members. He also expressed concern about the "campaign of attacks and insults" against the heads of the diplomatic missions of the strategic allies.

"I have decided to resign from all positions and leave the party," he announced. "This step is very difficult for me, but I do not see any other option. Since January 2017, over four years, I have been trying to do everything possible to strengthen the party, to keep it as the main opposition force, and as a result,



Nika Gvaramia, founder of opposition-minded Mtavari Arkhi TV.
Image source: oc-media.org

obtain a mandate from the Georgian citizen to return to power. I think we have achieved a lot, but there are facts that I categorically cannot tolerate. I do not agree with the tactics chosen by the majority of the party leadership without consulting the party members. The lack of party strategy is even more unacceptable to me. It only plays into the hands of the Georgian Dream. I cannot tolerate the fact that such odious figures are around and inside the party, whom we passed to the past long ago, who will never regain the trust of the electorate," he stated.

Vashadze wrote that he does not understand what the purpose behind the attacks against diplomats is, nor who launched them.

"This is the greatest damage to Georgia's relations with the United States, the European Union, and EU member states. It seems as though the participants of this campaign do not realize that an attack on an ambassador is the same as an attack on the state they represent, a state that has been guarding our territorial integrity together with the citizens of Georgia since it gained independence. I apologize to our friends!

"I will not continue to list the problems, because the party members themselves talk about them in private conversations. For me, being in the minority or even alone is not a problem. The problem is that I cannot be where I do not see the opportunity and desire to learn from mistakes. I may be wrong. I think we will judge the future very soon," Vashadze wrote on social media.

On Wednesday, Parliament Speaker Archil Talakvadze and Parliamentary Majority leader Irakli Kobakhidze held a meeting with the EU and US Ambassadors. The topic of the meeting was the negotiations between the government

and the opposition.

Four rounds of talks between the opposition and the government ended without any result achieved. It is unknown when the next round will be scheduled. Currently, the opposition parties still refuse to take up their mandates obtained during the elections, as they believe the results were rigged by the incumbent government; however, some of its members have recently showed a more "loyal" approach towards the issue of entering the Parliament of the 10th Convocation, for instance, Aleko Elisashvili, the leader of the party 'Aleko Elisashvili - Citizens.'

"I hope and have a reasonable expectation that a number of parties will be involved in the parliamentary work in the near future," Chairman of Parliament Archil Talakvadze told journalists after the meeting with the US and the EU ambassadors.

He called on the opposition to use the dialogue not for categorical demands, but in the interests of the country.

"The clock is ticking, and doors are starting to close, and everyone has to realize that," EU Ambassador Carl Hartzell told reporters when commenting on the talks between the opposition and the government.

He noted that he will not judge the decision of political parties, because, at the end of the day, it is for every party to draw their own conclusions as to what is the right way forward.

"We continue our efforts; we are having talks with different sides to see whether we can find a common ground that would lead to a broad-based agreement in the end. I'm absolutely convinced that Georgia needs a parliament that is able to function and take responsibility for the very tough decisions needed to deal with COVID-19, and everything else happening," the EU Ambassador stated.

The Regional Geopolitical Sextet

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

GEORGIA TODAY is not just our darling to simply read and enjoy information on a hearsay level: First and foremost, this multifaceted weekly gazette is a powerful tool for carrying Georgia's political and cultural word to humanity. All of us here at GT - the founders and publishers, editors and contributors, designers and proofreaders, photographers and webmasters - are called to let the planet know what Georgia is all about, and what we think is good or bad, and right or wrong from our national viewpoint.

A couple of days ago, I came across an unbelievably interesting piece of information in the press: according to the current leader of Turkey, it is possible in the South Caucasian region to create a platform of six countries to develop mutual cooperation between the nations of the region, part of which might be Azerbaijan, Turkey, Russia, Iran, Georgia, and Armenia, provided Hayastan nurses

a desire to be one of the players of the suggested regional geopolitical sextet. Brilliant! Farsighted! Outstanding! The only slight misgiving that I might have with this geopolitical ingeniousness is that the mentioned idea, if fairly judged, may not be considered a purely Turkish political thought, although the initiative might very well be reckoned as Turkish.

The fact of the erroneous origination of the idea itself will be unfair to Georgia at a minimum, because it was first sounded here as early as the end of the 20th century, right after the Abkhaz conflict. Its author happens to be Professor Zurab Khonelidze, the current Rector of the Sokhumi State University. Originally, the idea of handling the South Caucasus regional geopolitical space more rationally and practicably, based on a new neighborhood policy and a renovated format of regional cooperation, was reflected in his quite well-known trilingual (Georgian, English and Russian) book, titled 'Choice of Georgia'.

The repeated wider-scale presentation of this extremely interesting idea took place in 2013 at the Georgian National Academy of Sciences, during which the

rationality and effectiveness of the idea once again came to the surface for even broader and more detailed discussion to the benefit of the entire world in general, and the South Caucasus in particular. Zurab Khonelidze's book emphasizes that the new geopolitical format in question may very well have not only the configuration of a sextet, but a quintet, quartet or even a threesome, fitting into the situation in the region that might be topical at any particular stage of development.

Nothing could be more welcome than the coincidence of useful thoughts of functioning politicians and active political scientists, but not without giving credit to any party's contribution. One of the most eye-opening excerpts from the Khonelidze project, named 'South Caucasus - Geopolitical Space' would serve as a clear corroboration of usefulness of such coincidences: "With the creation of an absolutely new reintegration project, based on the effect of the powerful appeal of the general welfare, the radical sentiments in South Caucasus will be replaced by the balanced interests of regional states and the external forces that have to be considered. The



Professor Zurab Khonelidze, the current Rector of the Sokhumi State University. Source: Facebook

result is not a victory over anyone, but a new approach to world trade and integration in the global community." So, the world will probably be a winner if the global political forces manage to widen and integrate the South Caucasus geopolitical space, aiming at solving the extant regional problems, including the ever-smoldering conflicts.

Such ideas have certainly been suggested and probed on various occasions in world history, but their implementation has never come to tangible fruition; however, they have been thoroughly reflected in the research and works of a Georgian scientist and diplomat. The

idea is now sitting in front of us in the form of a geopolitical initiative by the world-caliber leader and politician, which might be directly conducive to the creation of a new peace space in the South Caucasus region. Incidentally, Georgia and its current position might allow giving it the priority of the most instrumental player, as Professor Zurab Khonelidze insists in his book. As a matter of fact, Khonelidze must be given the privilege of having politicized the word 'space' by using it in a propitious geopolitical context. However, the usage of the newly coined term will have to be trusted to world politicians and diplomats.

ISET ECONOMIC INDICATORS

International School of Economics at TSU



For more: WWW.ISET-PI.GE

ISET GDP Forecast | Decline in Global Oil Prices Drives Trade Balance & Inflation Rate Improvements in Georgia

BY DAVIT KESHELAVA
AND YASYA BABYCH

ISET-PI has updated its real GDP growth forecast for the fourth quarter of 2020 and the first quarter of 2021. Here are the highlights of this month's release:

HIGHLIGHTS

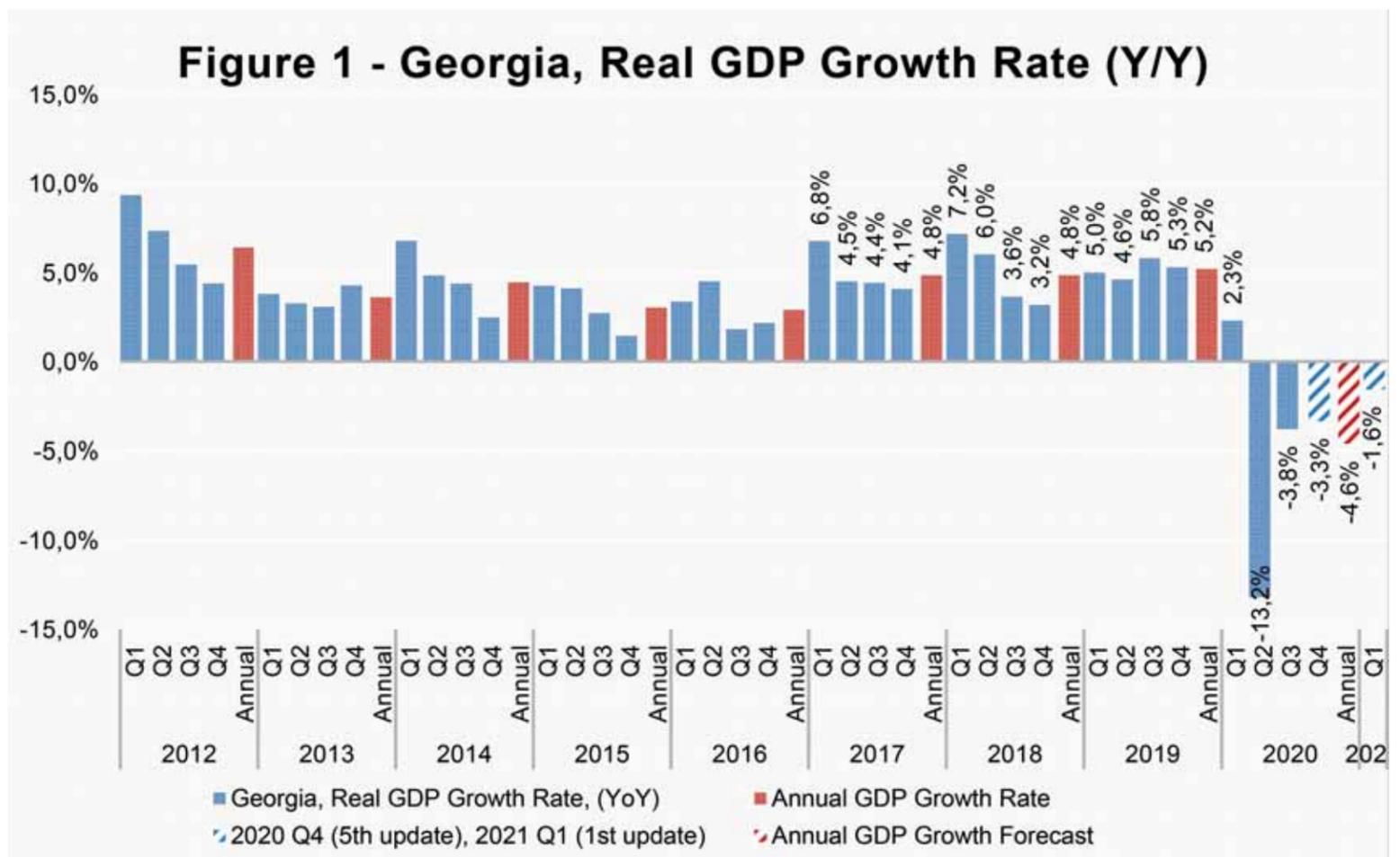
- The real GDP growth rate amounted to -3.9% year-on-year for October 2020. Consequently, the estimated real GDP for the first ten months of 2020 was -5.1%.
- Recently, GeoStat released its preliminary estimate of real GDP growth for the first and second quarters of 2020. The Q1 and Q2 growth rates were revised downward to 2.2% (by 0.1 ppt) and -13.2% (by 0.9 ppt) respectively.
- As a result of the update, the growth forecast for Q4 of 2020 remained unchanged, at -3.3%. ISET-PI's second forecast for Q1 of 2021 puts GDP growth at -1.6%.
- Based on October's data, we expect annual growth in 2020 to be -4.6%, which is 0.2 percentage points lower than the previous forecast.

According to ISET-PI's recent forecast, GDP growth in the first quarter of 2021 decreased from -1.4% to -1.6%. This correction can mostly be explained by GeoStat's downward revision of the Q1 and Q2 growth rates (by 0.1 and 0.9 percentage points respectively). Otherwise, from the standpoint of the October data, several variables changed significantly, which affected the growth predictions.

NATIONAL AND FOREIGN CURRENCY DEPOSITS.

The first set of variables with a moderate effect on our forecast relates to national and foreign currency deposits in commercial banks. All categories of national currency deposits (except currency in circulation) experienced growth in annual terms, while declining on a month-to-month basis in October. In particular, national currency demand deposits saw an annual increase of 3.5%, while time deposits increased by 73.6% annually. Consequently, national currency total deposits increased by 27.1% yearly. In the same time period, time deposits decreased by 0.6% in monthly terms, while demand deposits and currency in circulation decreased by 4.2% and 9.2% respectively compared to the previous month.

In contrast to domestic currency deposits, foreign currency total deposits increased relatively moderately by 19.4% compared to the same month of the previous year. In the same time period, nearly all categories of foreign currency deposits increased by more than 10% annually. The annual growth of foreign currency deposits is mainly driven by the sharp depreciation of the national currency. Nevertheless, growth rates are still pronounced even after excluding the exchange rate effect. As a result, deposit dollarization increased by 0.6 percentage points monthly and decreased



by 1.7 percentage points yearly. Despite the positive annual trends, deposit-related variables still had a slight negative contribution to real GDP growth based on our model.

VAT TURNOVER.

As far as other variables of interest, VAT turnover in October decreased by 3.8% yearly and increased by 13.8% monthly. Consequently, this variable had a negative contribution to real GDP growth.

REAL EFFECTIVE EXCHANGE RATE.

In October, the real effective exchange rate (REER) appreciated slightly by 0.8% monthly and largely remained stable in yearly terms. Notably, the lari real exchange rate depreciated with respect to the euro and dollar by 0.6% and 0.7% respectively in monthly terms and by 10% and 5.5% respectively in yearly terms. In contrast, REER appreciated with respect to the two major trading partners: Turkey (by 2.4% monthly and 17.1% yearly) and Russia (by 1.4% monthly and 11% yearly). Depreciation of the REER is typically associated with domestic export goods gaining competitiveness on foreign markets, but it also translates into increased prices on imported goods. Overall, REER-related variables had a small negative contribution to the real GDP growth projections.

FOREIGN TRADE.

In October, Georgia's exports experienced a slight 2.2% annual decline,

which was mainly driven by decreased export/re-export of motor cars and trucks and alcohol spirits to Armenia; motor cars, tobacco, and carbon steel rods to Azerbaijan; motor cars, medicines, natural grape wines, and mineral waters to the Kyrgyz Republic; and ferro alloys and frozen lamb/goat meat to Iran. At the same time, Georgian exports to China (due to increased export/re-export of precious metals as well as copper ores and concentrates), and Saudi Arabia (due to increased export of living animals) increased substantially.

During this period, the import of goods decreased by 23.5%, driven by a reduction in petroleum and fuel product imports from Russia (mostly due to a significant annual reduction of crude oil prices on the international market). Among other affected imports were: motor cars from the USA; copper ores and concentrates from Brazil; oil coke bitumen and paving slabs from Iran; and motor cars from Germany. In contrast, Georgian imports of precious metals and concentrates from Armenia; oil and copper ores and concentrates from Azerbaijan experienced yearly growth. Consequently, the trade deficit shrank dramatically by 34.8% yearly, and amounted to \$393.5 million. Overall, trade-related variables had a positive contribution to the GDP growth forecast.

MONEY INFLOW.

After a significant slowdown in remittance inflows in the beginning of the

year, money inflows have been on the path to recovery since June. In October, remittances increased by 18.6% annually and reached \$181.7 million. The main contributors to this increase were Ukraine (by 151.9% YoY, contributing 4.3 ppts), Italy (by 30.9% YoY, 4.2 ppts), USA (by 39.5% YoY, 3.9 ppts), Greece (23.6% YoY, 2.5 ppts), Germany (by 74.6% YoY, 2.2 ppts), Azerbaijan (by 145.1% YoY, 2.1 ppts), and Turkey (by 26% YoY, 1.4 ppts). Whereas money inflows decreased from the Kyrgyz Republic (by 83.1% YoY, -1.7 ppts), Russia (by 7% YoY, -1.7 ppts) and Kazakhstan (by 44% YoY, -0.9 ppts). The recovery of remittance flows made a significant positive contribution to the growth forecast.

INTERNATIONAL VISITS AND TOURISM.

Tourism arrivals and receipts declined sharply as a result of numerous travel bans, as well as due to precautionary behaviors on the part of potential tourists. In October, the number of international visitors decreased by 92.5% yearly (driven by Russia [-17.1 ppts], Azerbaijan [-17.4 ppts], Armenia [-16.8 ppts] and Turkey [-10.2 ppts]), while the decline in tourist numbers (visitors who spent 24 hours or more in Georgia) amounted to 88%. Overall, dramatically declining numbers of visitors and tourists, along with a sharp decrease in touristic spending, has made a significant negative contribution to the growth forecast.

INFLATION.

In October, annual inflation of consumer prices amounted to 3.8%, which is only slightly higher than the targeted 3%. Notably, inflation converged to the targeted value at the end of 2020. Approximately 1.5 percentage points of CPI inflation were related to higher food prices (5.4% annual increase), while tobacco prices contributed 0.4 percentage points (13.5% annual growth). However, decreased oil prices (16.7% annually) made a notable negative contribution (0.6 ppts) to the annual inflation measure. The latter trend is mostly a reflection of significantly weakened oil prices on the global market (Europe Brent Spot Price (COP) decreased by 32.7% yearly). Overall, CPI-related variables had a positive contribution to the GDP forecast.

Our forecasting model is based on the Leading Economic Indicator (LEI) methodology developed by the New Economic School, Moscow, Russia. We have constructed a dynamic model of the Georgian economy, which assumes that all economic variables, including GDP itself, are driven by a small number of factors that can be extracted from the data well before the GDP growth estimates are published. For each quarter, ISET-PI produces five consecutive monthly forecasts (or "vintages"), which increase in precision as time passes. Our first forecast (the 1st vintage) is available around five months before the end of the quarter in question. The last forecast (the 5th vintage) is published in the first month of the next quarter.

Mediator Professional Day Celebrated in Georgia

On December 14, 2019, the Mediators Association of Georgia, a legal entity under public law, was established for the first time in Georgia. Its presentation took place on February 19, 2020 at the Rooms Hotel. The Ambassador of the European Union to Georgia, Carl Hartzell, and the Permanent Representative of the United Nations Development Program in Georgia, Louise Winton, congratulated the public on the official launch of the Alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanism. December 14 has since been declared the Professional Day of the Mediator, and this week, for the first time in Georgia, Mediation Week was celebrated, with various types of interesting events dedicated to the representatives of the profession.

GEORGIA TODAY spoke to the Chairman of the Mediators Association of Georgia, Mr. Irakli Kandashvili.

HOW WOULD YOU EVALUATE GEORGIA'S FIRST YEAR OF MEDIATION?

Mediation is a new word in the Georgian reality. It's a truly unprecedented reform

of the last decade, which allows the parties to the dispute to resolve the conflict themselves. The year 2020 was full of challenges for the newly established association and profession, but we can confidently say that Georgian mediators coped with all the difficulties with dignity, and we were able to take a number of effective steps in this short period. And all the steps taken during the year were aimed at the development and future of the profession.

WHAT WOULD YOU SINGLE OUT IN THE IMPLEMENTED ACTIVITIES?

The simultaneous introduction of a new profession and its institutional recognition requires the solid infrastructural arrangement of the organization, as well as increasing public awareness and gaining credibility. We took equally effective steps in this direction during 2020, in particular, Georgian mediators already have a working environment in the form of an office. We've been able to develop European standards for entering the profession with the involvement of foreign experts, which builds public confidence in the qualifications of those in



the profession, as well as the European Code of Professional Ethics and Disciplinary Rules. We agreed on the obligation of annual professional development training courses for mediators, therefore, the public knows that they are meeting mediators whose knowledge is based on high professional standards, who are trained annually and whose activities are based on ethical standards. We also introduced a platform for online remote

production of mediation, which was an effective step in the development of the profession in time and space against the background of the global pandemic.

Increasing awareness of mediation in society is a priority for the Association, and in this direction a Memorandum of Cooperation was signed in 2020 with representatives of various public and private sectors, with the support of which the mediation development and estab-

lishment process in Georgia will continue successfully. Among them, our priority is to introduce mediation as an alternative dispute mechanism in secondary and higher education, for which we have a specific action plan, which we will consistently implement in 2021.

WHAT CHARACTERIZES MEDIATION? WHAT DISTINGUISHES IT FROM OTHER DISPUTE RESOLUTION MECHANISMS?

Mediation is the only alternative dispute resolution mechanism that allows the parties, taking each other into account, to be able to reach and reach a mutually beneficial agreement. With the development of mediation, a culture of rational dialogue and social peace has been introduced in Georgia.

I would like to use your newspaper to congratulate each mediator on this professional day and wish them professional success and development! Remember that behind us stands the good name, credibility and collective reputation of the profession, and our professional activity today is tomorrow the day of the mediator profession!

Berry Successful: A Farmer Boosts Profits & Positivity in an Adjarian Community



This culture, raspberry, blackberry, drastically changed the future of the agriculture development.

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

In the high-mountain village of Dioknisi in Khulo, people have cultivated potatoes for years, but one farmer, Guram Dzirkvadze, a self-taught agronomist, has completely changed the Dioknisi villagers' view on agriculture, managing to convince them that cultivating raspberries would be a much more lucrative and easier affair than cultivating potatoes. The enterprise has been a resounding success, with Guram himself becoming The Man to Know and consult on these matters in the entire Adjarian region; a farmer who sees the agricultural development of Dioknisi village in the field of berry, stone fruit and viticulture.

"Adjara is a land-starved region," he tells us. "Potatoes are sown in wide fields, where each resident has a land area of 2000 - 2500 square meters. Therefore, it makes no sense to cultivate potatoes here. At the same time, it's a cheap product, it cracks the soil, and it needs frequent irrigation. The raspberry and blackberry orchards give a rich harvest even in a small area, they do not crack the land and they help the bees."

Today, raspberry has already been cultivated on three hectares, and the business has connected many families in the village. The berries also gave them profit.

Dzirkvadze's future goal is to create an unfertilized organic raspberry farm in the village, the product of which will enter the EU market in addition to the

Georgian market.

"For three years now, I've been picking raspberries several times per season, including in December," he says. "We don't use any fertilizer; nature and the climate bring such a quality product. We had no idea these berries would 'like' this place so much. When I first planted raspberry, everyone was surprised, but in the first year, I realized that it was possible and would be a good source of income. This culture has radically changed the future of agricultural development in our region; here, potato planting has now been almost totally replaced by this. The difference between income and profit is huge, 15 times more profit. First, the cost is almost zero: it is planted once, and after that we need no nitrogen and as I said, no fertilizer. You do not need to sow, you do not worry about anything, and the demand for the product is huge."

THE WHOLE VILLAGE IS INVOLVED, AND WE ARE TOLD THERE IS INTEREST FROM NEIGHBORING COMMUNITIES AS WELL.

I realized that if only I had raspberries, and it would not spread and expand, it would make no sense. Therefore, we also worked on saplings. We brought 15,000 saplings and distributed them at

half price. In our village alone there are intensive orchards (up to 3-4 hectares), although saplings have been taken to other villages too. I'm sure that in a few years, my village will become the "center of raspberries".

ARE PEOPLE SATISFIED?

Why shouldn't they be? The source of their income has increased; women, family members are employed, including kindergarten teachers and a number of people of different professions. They pick it, hand it over in the evening, and I take it to the market in Batumi. This year, we were able to produce 20-25 tons of raspberries in three seasons. With the help of the Czech Development Agency, we bought a refrigerated van, and we already transport the product to the market at a lower price. This is a big leap for us. I therefore thank the Czech Republic, the Embassy and the European Union.

BESIDES RASPBERRIES, YOU ALSO HAVE GRAPES, DON'T YOU?

"Yes, we have a total of 10-12 varieties of table grapes. We have exemplary grape plots, and provide information on how table grapes can be developed. Among the varieties, we have Saba's Pearl, Black Magic, Prima, and Italy. Therefore, I have grapes to bring to the market until the end of September. We have a plum orchard too. After setting up the orchard, I bought 40 apple and pear seedlings at the market. Then I asked for co-financing to add different varieties of plums and pears to the orchard. We also have local old varieties. We collected these crops all together and are still looking for old, good varieties. I hope that after seeing this fruit, people will be interested in them."

For the Dzirkvadze family, it is important not only to produce, but also to change the local lifestyle and empower the economic situation of the local population. It is said that based on the support from the European Union, the population have at last been convinced that they can be employed in their own country and still earn a decent income.

"We already have a trend that young people want to study in the field of agriculture; that after gaining knowledge, the experienced ones return to their land. This makes me happy, because it will strengthen the village, and a strong village is a strong city and country," notes the farmer extraordinaire.



The source of income also increased. Everyone is employed.

Discover & Explore – "Virtus" at the High School of IB-Mthiebi Boarding School



The High School of the IB-Mthiebi boarding school contains three branches of modern education: the School of Technical Sciences, the School of Natural Sciences, and the School of Humanities, with students in classes based on their interests and talents.

During the pandemic period, IB-Mthiebi is offering students an online study process and a variety of educational projects, with an academic curriculum oriented on theoretical knowledge development, as well as developing students' analytical and critical thinking abilities. In the frames of our cooperation with Georgian and European Universities, the IB-Mthiebi curriculum is based on universities'

academic curriculum, and supports students in preparing for future student life.

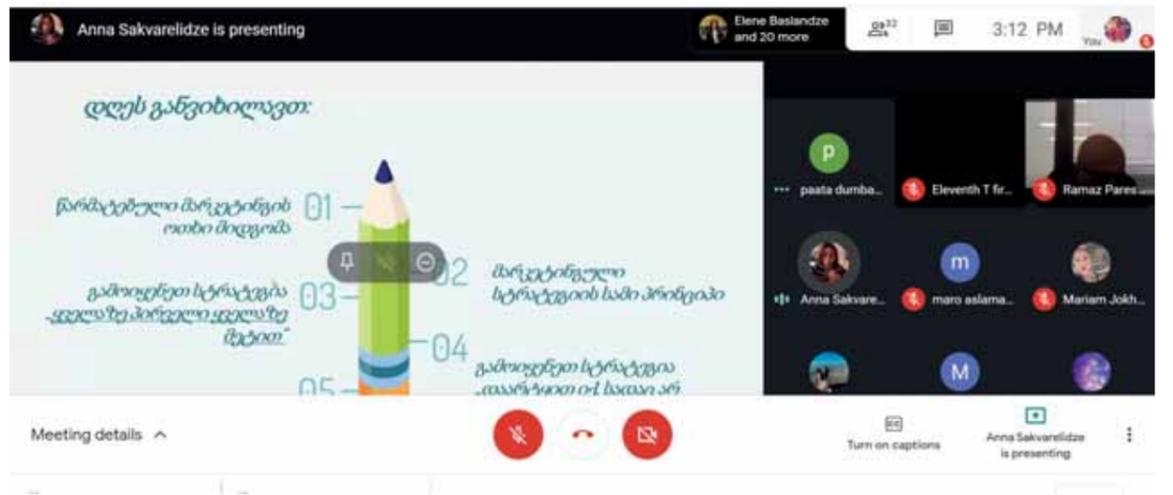
In 2015, the High School launched the "Virtus" academic project, aimed at the strong development of students' academic and creative skills in cooperation with the Georgian-American University, The Caucasus University (CU), and the Grigol Robakidze University (GAU).

During the three-week Virtus project, students carry out research in different academic fields according to the class they are in, under the supervision of their teachers, university lecturers, and students.

What in Virtus has the strongest impact on students' academic development? What are the expectations after completion of the three-week project?

First, through Virtus, the High School aims to create a school-university link to help high school students understand the university education structure, system, and requirements.

Second, school students become better-aware of academic programs they might



face at university.

Third, school students study how to carry out research independently, but under the supervision of experienced tutors, who provide a fruitful direction through the selection of printed or online / internet based academic sources.

The next aim of the project is to instruct school students how to write a research abstract and find or discover information that was unknown before: scientific news!

Another important goal of the project is to teach students how to follow the rules and requirements of scientific

research, how to avoid plagiarism, and how to find reliable sources for their paper-based work.

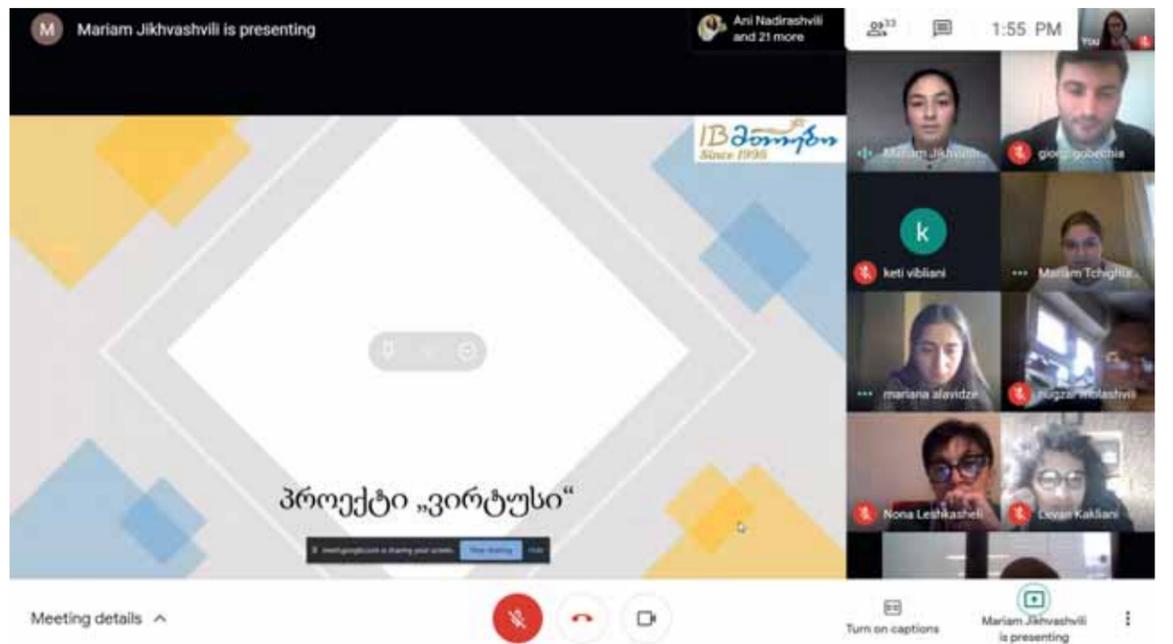
The storing of the research abstract at IB-Mthiebi's partner universities, or in other scientific institutions, is the final stage of the project, with students and their supervisors presenting electronic (PPT) abstracts to the academic staff and being graded for their work.

Recently completed projects (December 4, 2020) are currently being stored on the Google Meet Online platform. Students presented interesting research to an online audience and evaluation

committee of IB-Mthiebi academic staff and representatives of CU and GAU. The presentations were both inspiring and interesting, and all merited approval, and some gained particularly high scores.

Research topics included pandemics in history of civilizations, international systems and economics in times of pandemic, and cyber-physical reality.

The participating high school students obtained good, fresh knowledge in history, physics, math, and more, and earned excellent evaluations from the university lecturers.



EU Commits Further €55 mln for Development of Agriculture & Rural Areas in Georgia

The fourth phase of the EU's ENPARD program will provide extended assistance in the food safety and SPS sector to enhance consumer protection and promote EU exports of Georgian products. The program will also continue to support rural development to further improve living conditions for a larger proportion of the rural population in Georgia.

The EU Ambassador to Georgia, H.E. Carl Hartzell, and the Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, David Zalkaliani, this week signed an agreement to kick off the fourth phase of the European Neighborhood Program for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD IV) worth €55 million (approximately GEL 215 million). The Acting Minister of Environment Protection and Agriculture of Georgia, Levan Davitashvili, also attended the signature event. The program aims to enhance consumer protection, promote EU exports and improve the livelihoods of the rural population in Georgia. It is part of the wider assistance package mobilized by the EU and Team Europe to support Georgia's

COVID-19 recovery.

"Since 2013, the EU has been providing extensive support to make Georgia's agriculture more competitive and to improve living standards in rural areas," stated Ambassador Hartzell. "We are happy to announce our continued cooperation with the Government of Georgia under a new, fourth phase of the ENPARD program. Through this program, we hope to see more Georgian farmers, cooperatives, and small and medium-size enterprises better equipped to produce high-quality products and export more to the EU market. We will also support better infrastructure and services, growth of tourism, more effective public-private partnerships and a stimulus to entrepreneurship in rural areas, all with a view to creating new employment opportunities and to boosting economic growth."

"The ENPARD program brings concrete results for our country and particularly for our rural population," Zalkaliani noted. "As a result of this program, the quality of products, the employment opportunities for our citizens and the EU exports are significantly improving. Even more important is the implemen-

tation of this program in the pandemic context. The financial support provided to Georgia under the fourth phase of ENPARD is part of the wider EU assistance supporting Georgia's COVID-19 recovery."

"Georgia is one of the outstanding countries of the Eastern Partnership that has successfully carried out all three phases of the ENPARD program," Davitashvili claimed. "We believe that the fourth phase will be implemented successfully as well. This is a remarkable volume of assistance, €55 million, of which €31 million is going to be direct budget support. However, a very important and efficient part of the assistance is a €24 million technical and grant component, which is going to have a complementary effect on the implementation of our policy also developed in close partnership with the EU."

ENPARD IV will provide extended assistance in the food safety and sanitary and phyto-sanitary (SPS) sector to enhance consumer protection for citizens of Georgia and to promote exports of Georgian products to EU Member States. ENPARD IV will build on the



Source: eeas.europa.eu

achievements of the Comprehensive Institution Building (CIB) program and of previous ENPARD phases. It will provide further support to the National Food Agency (NFA) for improved inspection and control systems and for the continuation of the legal approximation process including enforcement of newly adopted regulations. It will also support food business operators in their efforts to adapt to the sectoral reforms.

In addition, ENPARD IV will further support rural development and will improve living conditions for a larger proportion of the rural population in Georgia, rendering the rural development sector more dynamic and effec-

tively contributing to Georgia's economic and social development. The fourth phase of ENPARD will improve the economic and social integration of vulnerable households in disadvantaged rural regions of Georgia, including economic migrants, conflict-affected people, ethnic minorities, Georgian returnees and migrants. The action will continue to enhance civic participation in the regions of Georgia through increased civil society involvement in local decision-making processes and will continue to actively promote and encourage the participation of youth and women, noting the specific needs and constraints of these groups.

The Embassy of the UAE in Tbilisi Organizes Online Lecture - "Efforts & Achievements of the UAE in Education"

On December 12, the Embassy of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in Tbilisi, in coordination with the Ministry of Education of the United Arab Emirates and the Department of Arabic Studies at Ivane Javakishvili Tbilisi State University, organized an online lecture titled "Efforts and Achievements of the United Arab Emirates in the field of Education" coinciding with the UN International Arabic Language Day observed on December 18. The lecture saw the participation of a number of academic specialists from the UAE and Georgia, as well as university students of Bachelor and Master degrees.

During the discussions, the lecturers highlighted the importance of providing future generations with technical and scientific skills in order to advance the world economy through both the public and private sectors, and noted the success of the two countries' efforts in adapting quickly to new conditions and ensuring continuous studies during the COVID-19 pandemic witnessed by the world this year, which affected various fields, including education. They further praised the smooth transition from traditional to distance learning methods, which enabled students to complete the academic year without disturbing the curricula of the educational process.

Emirati participants of the lecture touched on the following issues during their speeches:

They highlighted that the UAE presents an ambitious model in the field of higher education, which is witnessing rapid development not only at the local, but at the regional and global levels as well.



Educational institutions in the UAE are among top rated universities according to international rankings. The UAE has also become a center of attraction for many international universities and students from different parts of the world.

Moreover, use of the Smart Education method in the UAE was mentioned during the lecture, as universities there are not limited to traditional education, and have introduced smart education institutions, such as the Hamdan Bin Mohammed Smart University in the Emirate of Dubai, which took upon itself to spread

the culture of quality and scientific research through smart education, which indicates the primacy of the UAE in foreseeing the future, and working to provide adequate infrastructure to implement this type of education.

The Mohammed Bin Zayed University for Artificial Intelligence (an educational institution for postgraduate studies) focuses on scientific research and aims to provide specialized programs in the field of AI in order to support the process of scientific research and development, creation of knowledge, and the

use of artificial intelligence, by providing all academic degrees, masters and doctoral degrees, which will contribute to supporting students to reach the required intellectual level in a modern and distinguished environment.

The UAE managed, within a short period of time, to establish an excellent and diversified system of higher education. United Arab Emirates University, founded in 1976, led higher education in the UAE. Since then, the UAE has witnessed an increase in public and private higher educational institutes being estab-

lished, and a continuous improvement in the qualitative performance of existing institutes (public universities, Zayed University, Higher Colleges of Technology, private universities, American University in the Emirates of Sharjah and Dubai, Abu Dhabi University and Khalifa University of Science and Technology).

The UAE has also launched an education program of the Emirates Space Agency, which aims to establish an integrated educational and scientific structure by preparing, developing and qualifying national cadres to encourage them to work in the space sector.

The Emirates Space Agency, in collaboration with the United States Space Agency (NASA), provides the opportunity for a limited number of highly qualified Emirati students to become eligible to join the training program, alongside international students.

Moreover, western institutions of higher education are developing a presence in the UAE and currently, the UAE is home to the following international universities: French International Universities, New York University Abu Dhabi, British Heriot-Watt University in Dubai, Australian University of Wollongong in Dubai, Birla Institute of Technology and Science and other high-quality universities.

In closing remarks, Darejan Gardavadze, Professor of Arabic Language and Literature at Tbilisi State University, praised the Embassy's initiative to organize the lecture on the field of education in the UAE, going on to express her hope for the further enhancing of mutual cooperation between the two countries in the educational and cultural fields.

Gone Viral: Etseri, Svaneti

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

My set of concentric circles, each successively smaller one representing those infected closer and closer in relationship to me and ending with me, alone in the center, has closed around me like a trap. It skipped a step or two in the process: my wife doesn't have The Virus, but I DO.

I began coughing nearly two weeks ago. Fearing that this might be a recurrence of the occasional bronchitis which has sometimes plagued me since I was 16, I took myself off upstairs so that if I began hacking through the night like last year, at least my wife wouldn't have to hear it. Turns out that this was the onset of The Virus, and my speedy departure into isolation might have saved her from getting it through proximity to me. Lacking any contact with the few other infected people in the village, we suspect I got it during the last shopping run to Zugdidi, which though masked was always risky.

A couple of days in, my senses of taste and smell departed me, which has been frustrating. The cough failed to worsen, however. Eventually, after a week alone upstairs (my own heated room, with kitchen and bathroom adding to the independence I had), I drove myself to Mestia for a test. This was administered, mercifully, some hours after the single midday hour usually reserved for such tests. I had pleaded ignorance to the time slot, foolishly not having phoned my village's doctor in advance; they relented.

I sat outside the hospital; a nurse did the nasal swabs there and retreated. Five minutes later: "You're infected." No charge, due to my having a Georgian ID card as a permanent resident. I phoned my wife straight away with the news.

No more symptoms have developed: no temperature, nausea, diarrhea. Just what I mentioned above, and no worsening of the cough either. I took my laptop up here, and about 15 TB of hard drives with movies, TV shows, music, e-books, fractal renderings and photos on them to keep me busy. The Magti USB modem we had been using for internet took the opportunity to have its battery pop out like a little pillow. Fortunately, my phone can serve the same purpose, so that battery will wait to be replaced.

My physical symptoms are so mild, I hardly feel sick at all! My mind has been racing, though. The several calls from various health practitioners have bolstered my feeling of not merely joining the Statistical Ranks but of being cared for, of being advised how to get through this.

Today, my senses of smell and taste started making a small comeback: the aroma of the cold brew coffee I'd made a week or so ago registered, faintly! I made a cup, and could even taste it. A bit. It's a start.

I'm most grateful that my breathing hasn't got more difficult, as this must be a frightening thing in those who suffer with it. This far from a hospital, it's good not to be getting worse. My FitBit watch reminds me to move around at least 250 steps each hour for at least 8 hours, and I pace the upstairs, slipping outside when

my wife isn't going to cross paths with me. (She's been told to stay away from our school, where she's the English teacher, for two weeks too, even though she has remained symptomless, just in case. Her laptop has never worked for the multi-person video calls she was using as barely manageable online lessons; only my laptop works for these but it, too, is off-limits to her, being a possible source of infection).

I'm allowed to be anywhere in the yard, but masked. The shop remains open for anyone who wants to come. I've posted the news of my Infection on social media, feeling that trying to hide it would be wrong and useless as well. The responses there and by phone in support have been most gratifying.

Two weeks of isolation following the test are required of me, making a total of three, as I started it a week before the test. Lonely, but bearable. I will always be grateful that my case has been so mild: plenty of people younger than me have died of this thing! It's such a strange time, this year of unfolding worldwide madness, but it has only touched me lightly thus far. Meanwhile, with some days left to go, I have all the time in the world to think, pray, and be changed.

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



Gepherrini: A Product as Unique as its Wearer



INTERVIEW BY ELENE DZEBISASHVILI

Over less than a decade, Georgian leather bag manufacturer Gepherrini has become one of the fastest-growing leather accessories brands in Eastern Europe, with its products being presented in eleven countries, at 42 points of sale. Gepherrini provides high quality customizable leather bags and accessories at prices that are hard to match. Each piece is handcrafted using original, nuanced materials, resulting in a one-of-a-kind product that is as unique as its wearer.

Everyday does not have to mean ordinary. Quality materials and contemporary design make Gepherrini leather bags a joy to use and a pleasure to own. The brand appeals to the dynamic, busy, urban individual who values quality and self-expression.

We sat down with Gepherrini's co-founder, Iliia Gepherridze, to delve deeper into the brands' history, aesthetics and core values.

TELL US THE STORY OF GEPHERRINI'S CREATION.

Gepherrini was founded on August 7, 2014, by me and my wife, Sophio Khositashvili. We wanted to fill the gap in the local market, as one could scarcely find Georgian-produced handbags or accessories available at the time. Imple-

menting the idea turned out to be quite laborious; we struggled to find experienced personnel in this field. Eight months after the start of production, we released our first products.

Today, Gepherrini has a very strong team that can produce a bag or accessory of any complexity. We never compromise on quality. For the first time in Georgia, Gepherrini introduced a special quality guarantee on all products; six months for leather substitutes, 12 months for genuine leather. Our warranty service has aroused great interest and increased confidence in the brand.

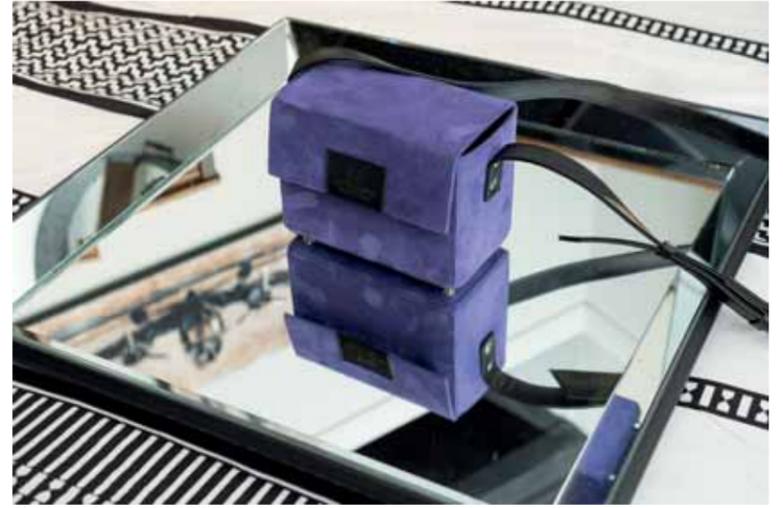
WHAT IS IT ABOUT GEPHERRINI BAGS THAT MAKES THEM STAND OUT AMONG OTHERS?

It is the uniqueness of Gepherrini's designs. Gepherrini often participates in various international exhibitions around the world and everyone unanimously agrees that our designs stand out with their elegant structures and well-designed color contrasts.

The high-quality leather used in our bags offers the optimal balance of performance and practicality. Our designers create beautiful items that stand the test of time, feel good to use, and carry your individual style effortlessly through the day.

WHAT ARE THE CORE VALUES THAT THE BRAND UPHOLDS?

When we started this company, our goal was to design fashionable bags that were affordable for women; to make sustainable, fashion-forward pieces effortless and accessible. One of our main priorities



is to always maintain affordable prices without ever compromising quality.

Our bags are elegant and practical at the same time. We produce limited series, with all pieces meticulously handcrafted through expert hands and with care. The difference is in the details; which are always elegant and practical at the same time.

And of course, our success has only been possible through always maintaining the highest quality of customer service. We always put the client first.

HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO YOU THAT GEPHERRINI HANDBAGS ARE NOT MASS PRODUCED?

It is one of the most vital things for us. The importance of craftsmanship is one of the key elements of the Gepherrini

brand philosophy. Our designers put their heart and expertise into every piece they create. This is something very special for us and, we believe, for our customers as well.

WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR THE FUTURE?

From March 2021, we plan to enter two new markets, those of Canada and China. The Chinese market is a big challenge for us, and we pay a lot of attention to it. We have been witness to the immense interest that Gepherrini has aroused in China. Were it not impossible due to the coronavirus pandemic, we would have started selling from January 2020. However, this huge success makes us incredibly proud and happy even if the processes had to be delayed.

A Wool Master Promoting a Tushetian Tradition

INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

Dimitri (Dito) Arindauli runs the wool processing enterprise "Tusheti" located in Zemo Alvani. It might not sound like much, until you are told that this enterprise is one of a kind in Georgia, supplying raw materials to local producers, where about 40 tons of wool is processed per season.

The problem of Tushetian wool processing arose after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Earlier, this precious raw material was exported to Russia. From the 1990s, it was simply thrown away or burned because they were unable to process it. The Arindaulis are the pioneers of their trade: back in 2005, Dito's father, Gogi Arindauli, established the first Tushetian wool processing plant in Georgia, where he started processing a small portion of local wool and producing yarn from it. Today, his son runs the enterprise, and in 2014, with the support of the Czech Development Agency and the Czech Caritas in Georgia, the business was expanded through the addition of necessary equipment for processing. "Tusheti" currently employs 10 people. The wool washing line and drying workshop are already operational, allowing them to fully exploit locally produced wool and also serve shepherds and wool exporters from other regions.

Arindauli himself is a man on a mission: he aims to restore Tushetian wool to its former glory. As he sits down with



GEORGIA TODAY to talk about it, you can see this has not been an easy path to thread.

"As I am from Tusheti, and we dealt with wool as a tradition, I started learning the craft," he tells us. "Then it gradually became my profession. Initially, we provided our services only to locals. We sewed wool mattresses, blankets; there was demand for tread and felt. As business slowly but surely became steadier and we got a good reputation for providing quality products, we thought about expanding, developing. We started buying machinery tools. We have a spinning line that can produce 200-220 kilos of yarn per day, but we had a problem with washing."

WHY?

We used to wash around 50-60 kilos per

day. However, the demand for wool was growing, the tourism in the country was growing, there were orders and we couldn't manage to fill them: it sometimes took us a month to do so. In addition, the wool has its own fat content. If we don't remove it, it won't get through the machines. There was no wool laundry in this region to go to and buy washed wool. Then there appeared the Czech Caritas project. They told us to look into finding a wool washing machine somewhere. We found one and I bought it, then we built the infrastructure, but first, the knowledge was needed. Just an idea is nothing; you need to know how and what to do. As a point of interest, the Czech government researched the situation in Europe concerning wool, because at first we thought to export processed-washed wool to Europe. According to

the study by Czech specialists, washed wool is very cheap and it wasn't worth working in this direction, so we were advised to instead focus on semi-processed products. With the help of the Czech government, I can now wash from 500 to 800 kilos of wool without any problem. Even if I work for a week, I already have winter supplies and I'm insured against all kinds of low-quality products.

SO IF YOU HAVE A SUPPLY OF 15 - 20 TONS OF WASHED WOOL IN THE WINTER, WHEN THE TEMPERATURE DROPS TO -5-10, YOU CARRY ON WORKING?

Yes, the weather can be quite punishing here, but I have dried, washed wool stored by that period and we just work on the machines. Our wool is pure shawl, with no admixtures, which is then pro-

cessed with natural dyes, and is used, for example, in rugs and carpets. The knitters themselves use natural dyes too.

DO YOU STILL MAKE MATTRESSES AND BLANKETS?

We make felt and felt cloaks, but our main specialization is the production of knitted thread of pure wool which is sold throughout Georgia, in special shops and workshops. There are special weavers who create products for tourists.

Those visiting the enterprise have the opportunity to learn about the different stages of wool processing: wool clearing, washing, dyeing, scotching and threading. In addition, one can purchase yarn and wool on-site. In this way, Dito Arindauli makes a special contribution to the maintenance of this craft and the production of natural wool.



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