Audit Office: a 3rd of Trees Planted in Tbilisi in 2015-2016 Dried Up

BY THEA MORRISON

One-third of the trees planted in Tbilisi in 2015-2016 have dried up, the report of Georgia’s State Audit Office (SAO) reads.

The SAO added that Tbilisi City Hall spent the budgetary money allocated for tree-planting inefficiently: GEL 24,730,300 on planting around 398,000 trees.

The report reads that according to the 2015 project of Tbilisi Mayor’s Office, they were to plant 400,000 trees: 200,000 in spring and 200,000 in autumn.

Yet the SAO says in spring 2015 only 72,043 trees were planted and in autumn City Hall purchased 326,100 trees, in total planting 398,143 trees in 2015 instead of the agreed 400,000.

Moreover, in 2016, Tbilisi City Hall planted only 13,000 instead of the agreed 20,000.

SAO says Tbilisi City Hall could not fulfill the undertaken responsibilities properly, which resulted in unproductive spending of the capital’s budgetary funds.

The report also listed other shortcomings, adding that Tbilisi City Hall did not select appropriate areas for planting trees in.

The audit also revealed that City Hall purchased greeneries through simplified procurements instead of competitive tender, which would have saved budgetary money.

SAO added that the contract made with the company responsible for the works was ineffective as it did not envisage replacement of dried trees with new ones.

“The majority of planted trees near the Oncology Center have dried up or no longer exist. The spending of the Mayor’s Office in this regard was ineffective,” the report of the State Audit Office reads.
10-Year-Old Runs Away from Khashuri to See Tbilisi Zoo

Giorgi Nozadze, a 10-year-old boy who went missing from his hometown Khashuri, in Shida Kartli region, was found by police patrol of officers in the capital city of Tbilisi on Wednesday.

As reported, the boy had never seen Tbilisi Zoo and decided to come himself, travelling from Khashuri to Tbilisi by train. Giorgi lost his way and was unable to find the zoo, while he was walking along Aghmashenebeli Avenue, patrol police officers noticed him and, on questioning him, discovered he had run away from home. Police found and contacted Giorgi's parents and his father came to Tbilisi to take his son home.

BY THEA MORRISON

Iberia TV Accuses Gov’t of Pressure

T he journalists of Georgia’s local and private broadcaster, Iberia TV, have accused the government of pressure. The statement from staff was released by the Head of the news service, Vakho Khuzmiashvili, who called on the government to stop “illegal actions” against Omega Group, the main financier of the TV channel.

Khuzmiashvili noted that Omega, the main donor to Iberia TV and its companies, are suffering financial hardship.

“Omega Group is a victim of dumping, which creates serious financial problems for Iberia TV,” the journalists working for the channel suspect this is a deliberate attempt to force the channel to stop broadcasting with free editorial policies,” the statement says.

Earlier, Archil Gamzardia, Iberia TV journalist, had spoken out about the pressure on free media.

“There is an assumption that the government is trying to block the financing source of Iberia TV by affecting its main donor company,” he said.

Georgia’s most opposition-minded broadcaster, Rustavi 2, reports that the Omega Group suffered a $100 million loss after multinational company British American Tobacco “violated the laws on competition and tobacco control.”

Omega Group General Manager Levan Aghdgomelashvili told Rustavi 2 that Tbilisi City Court had ruled in their favor; however, the Appeals and Supreme courts did not uphold this decision.

Aghdgomelashvili claims that local and international business operators deliberately brought Omega Group to a crisis, and is calling on the authorities to investigate the case.

Eliso Kiladze, Editor-in-Chief of the newspaper Qrionika Plus, says this is another attempt by the government to cut financing of the private television channel in order to silence it.

Kiladze says the upper instance courts ruled in favor of Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili’s business partner British American Tobacco, adding that Omega Group was refused their compensation of $100 million.

Business Ombudsman Irakli Lekvinadze says he is well aware of Omega’s disputes but says no discussions have yet been held regarding the claims of Iberia TV.

British American Tobacco Corporate Manager, Zviad Skhvitaridze rejects the accusations of Omega Group.

“The total income of all tobacco companies on the Georgian market during the last 10-11 years does not amount to $100 million, so the claims from Omega Group that they had such a huge loss is absurd,” he stated.

The statement of TV company Iberia was followed by a sharp response from Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili, who named the broadcaster’s claims “meaningless.”

“I reiterate that it is beyond the bounds of possibility. The government, which has ensured that new TV stations can register and commence broadcasting in a matter of days, cannot accept these accusations. No one can compromise the achievement of ‘media freedom’ under our government. I say with full responsibility that things like this cannot possibly be happening,” the PM stressed.

On February 21, the journalists of Iberia TV held a meeting with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and provided them with detailed information about the recent developments.

The Executive Director of the Georgian Journalists’ Charter, Natia Aghdgomelashvili, stated after the meeting that they are watching the process carefully, adding that Iberia is not the only TV accusing the government of undue pressure.

“We know that Rustavi 2 and TV Pirveli had the same claims as Iberia TV, which underlines that the media has, as a strong business, does not exist in Georgia,” she stated.
Shiny & Clean: The Future We Hope for in Georgian Taxi Services

OPED BY TIM OGDEN

Like life itself, taxis in Georgia are a box of chocolates: you never know what you're going to get. Your driver might be one of the many in the city who smells as though he and water have never met (it's a sort of stale sweat meets cigarettes and eye-wateringly bad breath sort of odor), whose car looks like it survived the war of 2008, with an engine that runs on gas of some description, and sounds as though it may explode at any moment. But you may also find yourself, as I once did, being driven by a young man who studied at Chester University – “Don’t look at me like that,” he told me in flawless English as my jaw punched a hole in the floor: Chester is a good university, but the mad bugger told me he absolutely enjoyed driving his taxi and so didn’t want to apply for any other job; I bet his parents were less than happy.

The cars from taxi companies are generally the best, since there’s less chance of the driver trying it on with their female passengers; if I had a Lari for every time my wife has told me taxi drivers have played the usual Georgian flirting card of ‘You are so beautiful’ and then expressed angry disappointment when she reveals she’s married to a foreigner, I’d be as rich as Croesus. The standard of driving might also be marginally better, but any longer distance journeys outside of the capital generally mean one has to roll the dice of getting transport which is nothing more than a Georgian man with a cheap ‘TAXI’ sign on the roof of his ageing car.

This is really one of the main reasons why I want to see taxi services regulated in Georgia, and why I hope the introduction of regulated ‘official’ cars at Tbilisi International Airport spreads throughout the land. I was very nearly killed last year by a reckless taxi driver trying to show off to my wife and our friend (an incident I recounted on these pages over a year ago), and have been frequently frightened by many others with no other outlet for their testosterone.

In the long run, entirely regulated taxi services will be good for the country, but their introduction at the airport will see some short-term benefits too. There is nothing more frustrating or embarrassing than meeting friends and family new to the country at the airport and then escorting them through the mass of shouting, unwashed and unkempt men wanting to overcharge them for a relatively short journey; you can see them wondering where the hell they’ve come to. One of them even had the impudence to grab my brother’s arm when he visited the country two years ago, and he’s a shy sort of chap: the good impression thermometer reached an absolute zero from the start for him, and I doubt he’s alone.

One concern consistently raised over regulating taxi services is that it will put many people out of work when they fail to pass the re-vamped driving test or when their vehicles are declared unsafe and unsuitable for use in a service industry. That’s a matter for the government to deal with, I’d say – as awful as it might be for a horde of ageing Georgian men to suddenly be unemployed, I’d rather reach my destination in one piece – and if Georgia wants to impress as a tourist destination, then the taxis around the country had better become as shiny, efficient and clean as those sitting outside the airport.

Georgian Actor Irakli Kvirikadze among Europe's 10 Emerging Young Actors

Young Georgian actor Irakli Kvirikadze, best known for his leading role in “Hostages”, received a European Shooting Stars Award at the 68th Berlinale International Film Festival. Irakli was named among Europe’s most talented and promising actors who have already gained popularity in their own countries and are ready to be introduced to the international film industry.

The European Shooting Stars is one of the most successful programs of the European Film Promotion (EFP), which promotes European Film and advocates European actors worldwide. This program has put a spotlight on once aspiring actors such as Carey Mulligan, Alicia Vikander, Pilou Asbaek. Irakli Kvirikadze, along with the other ‘Shooting Stars’, took part in a workshop program where the actors were introduced to the press, casting directors, producers and other influential people attending Berlinale 2018. The program was topped off with a grand ceremony at the Berlinale Palast.

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Russia & Israel in Syria

Russian leaders would not be entirely able to forestall future Israeli involvement in Syria

if not in Israel's total engagement in Syria, then at least in some actions which could limit Iran's power. In fact, days before the Israeli strikes in Syria, at a January 30 meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow, Netanyahu said that "[t]he most important thing is to make sure that we understand each other and that we don't shoot down each other's planes."

Indeed, the question as to whether or not the Israeli involvement in the Syrian conflict will be confined to solely maintaining its own security along the borders was raised by some analysts in Russia over the past two days. Overall, the tone of the Russian media towards Israel remained muted on the Israeli air strikes. None of the major media outlets covered the story, which is likely to remain active.

The Kremlin is in an increasingly difficult position as it tries to maintain good relations with both Iran and Israel, both of which share deep differences.

A number of political commentators believe that there is nothing new as Israel has always wanted to destroy military build-ups near its borders and the action was quite foreseeable considering Netanyahu’s comments during his last visit to Moscow late January. At the same time, Russians are wondering to what extent the Kremlin will go in allowing Israel to carry out targeted actions on Syrian soil. With these latest airstrikes, it has become clear the Israeli military engagement could in fact evolve into something more serious, out of Russian control. And the Russians are keen to keep the balance in Syria.

Indeed, on a much wider lever, the Israeli airstrikes also show how ineffective the Russian efforts to maintain a dominant position in the Syrian battlefield have become. With the Turkish operation in Afrin, north Syria, it has become clear that Moscow is unable to forestall the increase of Ankara’s influence. Similar problems already existed with Iranian moves before, but now the Russian efforts to maintain its major ally, Iran, might eventually unravel the dominant role of Russia in Syria.

Some Russian pundits, however, suggested that since Moscow has been wary of Israeli threats, its major ally, Iran, might eventually come to the conclusion that the Kremlin is in a more difficult position as it tries to maintain good relations with both Iran and Israel, both of which share deep differences.

The stability of Georgia’s position in the CPI over the past several years (and its worsening in 2017) indicates that, in the Corruption Perception Index 2016, Georgia’s score was 57 and it was ranked 44th among 180 countries. In CPI 2012, Georgia had 52 points (51st place), in 2013 - 49 points (55th place), in 2014 - 52 points (50th place), in 2015 - 52 points (48th place).

In the ranking, 100 points indicate the lowest level of corruption while 0 is its highest level. "The stability of Georgia’s position in the CPI over the past several years (and its worsening in 2017) indicates that, after Georgia made certain progress, its government needs to step up its anti-corruption efforts," the report reads.

This year, New Zealand and Denmark retained their top positions. Global anti-corruption organization Transparency International (TI), released its annual Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI 2017) on February 21, which shows that Georgia is ranked 46th among 180 countries with a score of 56 points. In CPI 2016, Georgia’s score was 57 and it was ranked 44th among 176 countries.

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Ghosts & Illusions in Abkhazia
(Part 2 of the Adventure)

BY TOM DAY

We really got the feeling we were being watched during our time there; from men in cars who seemed a little out of place, to one sitting at the other end of the restaurant to us with no food at any time while we were there, looking in our direction, but not daring to catch our eye.

There was an atmosphere in Abkhazia which echoed the not-so-distant Soviet times. People seemed to be ever so slightly afraid, and it was as if they had been told not to talk to tourists about anything to do with the Georgian conflict. The convenient gap in memory was apparent in everyone we talked to. The first man we talked to was a taxi driver. We asked him to tell us what happened during our time in Abkhazia. He pretended to have no recollection of Russian-backed troops murdering and forcing out hundreds of thousands of Georgians. It was as if it had never happened.

One day we were being questioned in a taxi by, what I am certain was an undercover FBS agent. It was overwhelming and the shock of being asked such a question, which I could tell he had been previously informed about, caught me off guard, and I think I gave away that he was right. I don’t know if we succeeded in convincing him otherwise, or whether he just didn’t see us as a threat, but we managed to avoid further questioning during our time in Abkhazia.

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**GEORGIA TODAY interview views UN Resident Coor- dinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Georgia, Niels Scott, on the challenges it is facing.**

**HOW WOULD YOU ASSESS GEORGIA'S CONTRIBUTION TO INTERNATIONAL PEACEKEEPING MISSIONS?**

Georgia is one of the leading troop contributing countries, with two peacekeeping missions currently in very sensitive areas, including Afghanistan, keeping stability in the region. Considering the fact that the country is facing many challenges of its own, it's fantastic how Georgians have gone on peacebuilding missions. I was astounded when I saw the figures and the tremendous effort made by Georgians over more than two decades.

**WHAT DO YOU SEE AS GEORGIA'S MAIN CHALLENGE IN ADVANCING BETTER LIVING CONDITIONS?**

We have a number of impressive reforms taking place in Georgia. Public administration is improved and, in fact, it's a role model for other countries. We have decentralized the government, allowing people to be pushed towards communities where decisions are being made. You have a lot of people in Georgia living in remote areas, and I think it very important to encourage rural and mountainous areas to encourage developing and retaining their populations. They have been living for generations and love their places, and the worst scenario would be if they had to leave. There are amazing success stories in every region, with people making small or medium enterprises in rural areas. Economic growth in Georgia has been steady compared with neighboring regions, and Georgia has succeeded in reducing the number of poor people making a living, and this is not an insigni- ficant achievement. The number of tourists visiting Georgia is also growing rapidly. But there needs to be balance between economic growth and social development, meaning there might be economical growth, but the entire population should benefit from it.

**WHAT AREAS IN GEORGIA MUST BE IMPROVED?**

Education is an investment, particularly preschool education, which of course forms the individual. Primary and Secondary education are also important: having teachers with appropriate qualifications and retaining and promoting good teachers. Economic growth needs to be supported by education. Vocational education also needs to be promoted to increase the ability to bring relevant skills to the labor market. In various surveys, businesses reply that finding well-trained labor is the challenge. Parents in Georgia sometimes think that their children should go to university to study science, law or medicine but the result may be a surplus of doctors and lawyers.

There are really good examples of countries worldwide where it is actually very popular to have vocational education, allowing students to get a job faster than some people in more specialized fields.

**HOW HAS GEORGIA MET THE SDG DEVELOPMENT GOALS?**

Georgia is taking the SDG [Sustainable Development Goals] very seriously. These are the 17 goals and 169 targets that all UN countries agreed on. In terms of what we call nationalization, Georgia actually chose to make some of the targets tougher than the global ones. For example, reducing poverty. The level of poverty in Georgia is high, with a lot of people in agriculture where there is not overall high productivity yet. So people are for now trapped in a low-income situation. Agriculture is an important priority for the government: and that's why the SDGs are so useful in helping to make sure that people working in these lower income areas are not left behind and to create harmony between economic growth and social equity.

**ODDITIES IN THE GEORGIAN PRESIDENCY**

It is odd that Georgia is being ruled by a president with little power, not by three, as is common in most countries. Georgia does not need that many layers of management. This is a sheer waste of national energy, which is depleted, as it is evoking without being able to provide extravagance! Excessive administrative efforts and infiltration with a big government, a waste of conveniences and blunders, and on top of that, they do not understand the eyes of the friendly western world which would never put up with our irrationality in ruling the nation.

So much for the political side of the current Georgian presidency... On a purely human, let's call it man-to-man, the weird presidential activity and works thereof has instigated a huge amount of frustration in those unpleasantly surprised strongmen, without whose sincere trust and leading hand the guy would never have resided on the enviable throne of the Republic, although visibly symbolic and clearly protocol-oriented. Hence, the onset of a crippled relationship with the ruling party and nonspeaking terms with the present government! Did this exceedingly lovely and completely appreciative man need this unlimited nauseous head-ache? Probably not.

So, why can't we go back to the presidential model of ruling this nation, so that the future Georgian presidents are real again? I mean Presidents, not Kings and Queens and Emperors, and certainly, not those regular dic- tators with the annoying desire to remain coziely enounced on the top forever.
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GD Majority Overrides President’s Veto on Broadcasting Law Amendments

BY THEA MORRISON

Ruling Georgian Dream (GD) MPs have overridden Georgian President Giorgi Margvelashvili’s veto on amendments to the Broadcasting Law, which gives the state-financed Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) more independence and power as well as the right of commercial advertising. At the parliament session on February 21, 83 MPs voted to overthrow the veto, while 15 lawmakers, mainly from the opposition parties, were against.

The parliamentary majority has overruled all vetoes of President Margvelashvili so far, as they have 16 MPs in a 140-member legislative body and form the supermajority. In order to overcome a presidential veto, the votes of at least 76 MPs are needed.

According to the amendments, the GPB will no longer have to announce public procurement calls when purchasing media products or services, as it has been lifted from its obligation to observe the Law on Public Procurement. Furthermore, as a result of the amendments, the powers of the nine-member Board of Trustees have been reduced: now they will need the Director General’s consent to carry out reforms.

The GPB, whose financing increases proportionally to the state budget, will no longer have to return unused funds to the state budget. It has also been given the right to finance start-ups and innovative television, radio and online products.

Last year, the broadcaster received around 44.4 million GEL from the state, while in 2016, it was financed with 44.5 million GEL. In 2018, the funding of the GPB has been increased by 5.695 million GEL, amounting to 52.100 million GEL.

President Margvelashvili vetoed the bill last month. He attached motivated remarks to the bill and returned it to Parliament for reconsideration. He had two main complaints, which referred to the GPB’s right of commercial advertising and the issue of state procurements.

Georgian Parliament Speaker Irakli Kobakhidze, stated that the aim of the amendments was to avoid embezzlement of tens of millions of GEL from the budget.

Kobakhidze said the GPB has zero rating and claimed that the money spent so far on its financing had been embezzled.

“The amendments adopted by Parliament aim at changing the situation,” the Speaker added.

Giorgi Abashishvili, Head of the Presidential Administration, slammed the ruling party for overcoming the veto, saying their main aim was not the issue itself but confronting the President.

“Overiding the presidential vetoes has become the tradition of the ruling team. By adopting this law, corruption risks are created and the different media outlets are put in unequal conditions. It is unfortunate that the government does not understand this,” Abashishvili stressed.

The opposition, private media outlets and NGOs disapproved the changes to the Law on Broadcasting from the beginning, saying granting advertising rights to the GPB will harm the media environment in the country, and the broadcaster should no longer receive funding from the state budget following the amendments.

In late January, 37 Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) operating in Georgia called on Parliament not to overrule the veto, while a few days ago, up to 60 media organizations urged MPs not to support the amendments to the Law on Broadcasting.

Hungary’s Policy Could Cost her Membership in the EU

BY DIMITRI OCLABERIDZE

Minister of Foreign Affairs of Luxembourg Jean Asselborn believes that the policy of the Hungarian government could cost Budapest membership in the European Union. He stated this in a telephone interview with the Hungarian edition of Magyar Nemzet, a major Hungarian newspaper.

Earlier, in an interview with the German edition of Der Tagesspiegel, Asselborn criticized the Hungarian legislative initiative “Stop Soros” and urged the European Commission to initiate a sanction procedure against Hungary.

“I do not hate Hungary,” Peter Siyarto [note: a Hungarian politician who has been Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade since September 2014] or Victor Orban [a Hungarian politician and jurist, current Prime Minister of Hungary, in office since 2010]. We’re not talking about individuals, but about basic principles, values, laws and respect for human dignity in every EU member state,” Asselborn said.

“We can’t punish non-governmental organizations that help asylum seekers. Such methods are used only by authoritarian regimes, unworthy of a democratic European Union,” the Luxembourg Minister added.

Asselborn noted that he had a perfectly normal relationship with his Hungarian colleague Siyarto. “I have no anger that could affect our relations; as I said, it’s about principles and values; Hungarian politics defines the principles of the European Union.”

The Luxembourg Minister noted that he could not understand the thinking of the Hungarian government and warned that his policy could cost Budapest dearly.

“The Hungarian people should understand that if they have a government which does this, it might cost them membership in the EU. I would be very sad if that happened,” Asselborn said.

During his state-of-the-union speech at the weekend, Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orban doubled-down on his objection to Muslim refugees entering the EU and reiterated his claim to be the protector of European culture and Christianity.

His speech referred to “dark clouds” over Europe as he warned that the continued flow of Muslim refugees would result in an “occupied Europe” that would lead to the eventual collapse of the West.

In response to Orban’s incendiary speech, Luxembourg’s Foreign Minister Jean Asselborn compared the fire-brand Hungarian PM to a dictator.

Head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary, Peter Siyarto, called his Luxembourg colleague Jean Asselborn an “idiot” with insane ideas. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban recently said his government would oppose the efforts of the EU and the UN to expand migration around the world, as “Islam will soon knock on the doors of Central Europe.”

The European Commission is preparing a decision on a lawsuit against Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic in the European Court for failure to comply with the decision of 2015 on the resettlement of refugees from Greece and Italy on the EU quota.
Georgian Startup Chosen from 7000 to Pitch to Investors in California

BY TOM DAY

Georgia Startup VReX Immersive Inc. has been selected, along with 50 others, out of 7000 worldwide startups to pitch their ambition to investors at Silicon Valley in California. On 14 February, VReX was accompanied by 49 other startups and, given one minute to pitch to investors, the most impressive achievement for them, and for Startup Grind in Tbilisi.

VReX has been an active participant in the Tbilisi Startup Grind chapter and received some seed funding from the Georgian Innovation and Technology Agency (GITA). They are expected to expand greatly in the coming year, and GITA are working with them closely.

VReX Immersive Inc. currently uses its state-of-the-art virtual reality technology for tourism development and has a lot of virtual-reality experiences created for Georgian destinations. At a recent international tourism show in Madrid, the Georgian National Tourism Administration had VReX’s technology on show. It outing other VR platform there, and had people forming long lines in anticipation of experiencing the Tourism of Economy attended and suggested that all tourism centers in Georgia should use their technology to promote destinations.

Georgia Today caught up with Startup Grind’s Colin Day and VReX CEO Nikoloz Gogochuri for an interview, before they set off to the event.

COLIN, PLEASE START BY TELLING US ABOUT STARTUP GRIND AND WHY YOU LAUNCHED IT HERE IN TBILISI?

I’m a digital marketer with clients in the US and I figured I would do something useful in the startup community so I started the Startup Grind. The government’s doing a lot of great things here, there are all these programs, but at the heart of the entrepreneurial process is a community of entrepreneurs.

The idea of a startup was very new when we began; nobody had heard of it here, but the world back then I think we began very successfully, hosting a couple of events which led to some good connections and relationships between people. Recently, we ran a retreat to bring together some of the key startups and some support providers to look at where Georgia has been developing over the last few years.

The driving force we came away with was to get some acumen stories, so I focused a lot of my energy on the process of developing a number of lead startups, showing them ways they could connect with the people they need to.

It became very clear that it’s important to connect with resources outside of Georgia because nobody has really grown big technology companies or startups here, so we’re interested in connecting with companies that are starting companies here from other countries; one of the reasons is it’s inexpensive and the policy environment is very supportive of business in general, and also people just like it here; there are a lot of cheap cities that are really dangerous or not as interesting, not as beautiful, so this combination of being an amazing, wonderful place with a lot of things going on and being safe and having a good business environment is a winning combination. I think if more people knew Georgia existed, then more would come.

H ow M AY W E M O V E F R O M L OC A L

GEORGIA TODAY captured with Startup Grind’s Colin Day and VReX CEO Nikoloz Gogochuri for an interview, before they set off to the event.

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It became very clear that it’s important to connect with resources outside of Georgia because nobody has really grown big technology companies or startups here, so we’re interested in connecting with companies that are starting companies here from other countries; one of the reasons is it’s inexpensive and the policy environment is very supportive of business in general, and also people just like it here; there are a lot of cheap cities that are really dangerous or not as interesting, not as beautiful, so this combination of being an amazing, wonderful place with a lot of things going on and being safe and having a good business environment is a winning combination. I think if more people knew Georgia existed, then more would come.

HOW M A Y W E M O V E F R O M L OC A L

GEORGIA TODAY captured with Startup Grind’s Colin Day and VReX CEO Nikoloz Gogochuri for an interview, before they set off to the event.

COIN, PLEASE START BY TELLING US ABOUT STARTUP GRIND AND WHY YOU LAUNCHED IT HERE IN TBILISI?

I’m a digital marketer with clients in the US and I figured I would do something useful in the startup community so I started the Startup Grind. The government’s doing a lot of great things here, there are all these programs, but at the heart of the entrepreneurial process is a community of entrepreneurs.

The idea of a startup was very new when we began; nobody had heard of it here, but the world back then I think we began very successfully, hosting a couple of events which led to some good connections and relationships between people. Recently, we ran a retreat to bring together some of the key startups and some support providers to look at where Georgia has been developing over the last few years.

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Germany Deports 65 Georgians for Violating Visa-Free Rules

BY THEA MORRISON

Germany has deported 65 Georgians who violated visa-free rules and stayed in the country longer than permitted (90 days in any 180-day period), said Georgia's consulate in Germany. Citizens of Georgia who asked for asylum in Germany were also expelled. “65 citizens of Georgia who violated the visa regime of being in the EU territory, were deported from the Federal Republic of Germany yesterday,” the consulate informed.

The information was also confirmed by several Georgians living in Germany who wrote in Facebook that citizens of Georgia who were subjected to extradition, had been deported to Georgia. Rhine- Westphalia and Baden-Württemberg.

According to the Facebook messages, “there are plenty of cases in the administrative court and all the cases were resolved today.”

Georgian media reports that among those deported are those living in Germany for 10 years who had been waiting for asylum. The official reason of this “mass” deportation is an agreement between Germany and Georgia which means deportation of Georgians who violate the visa-free regime.

The General Consul of Georgia in Frankfurt, Kazakhstan, responded to the deportation of Georgian citizens from Germany by saying that the deportations of Georgians from other countries, including those who had refused to allow asylum.

The General Consul added that the new seized computers of the company will take place on March 21.

“We do not know exactly who is in the list, because the German side is not obliged to inform us who they are going to deport,” according to Chkhikivishvili, no violations of citizens’ rights were reported by the Federal Republic of Germany.

T

the foodie revolution in Tbilisi started in 2011, when young Georgian chef Meriko Gubeladze opened her fusion restaurant Shavi Lomi.

“We wanted our restaurant to be original: Georgian cuisine with a twist. The same taste but different ingredients. Our goal was to evoke some kind of emotion from customers once they’d opened the menu. Surprise, disappointment, anger — anything. So, we began to look for a chef but struggled to find someone qualified. Back then, the industry was very small: behind what is now; in those times the State allowed us to learn things that put my skills ahead of the people I hired at the time. So, despite my plans to the contrary, I returned to the kitchen as chef myself, and Black Lion was born. It was a huge success. Back then in the day, the pioneers of Georgia’s culinary scene were focusing on filling the vacuum of European style cooking and introducing that culture; but no one was focusing on reviving Georgian food. So, in that sense, we were definitely the first to do so.”

So began our discussion with the revolutionary Ms Gubeladze, who speaks English.

HOW DO YOU BALANCE IT WITHOUT HAVING TO COOK EVERYTHING?

I’m proud of this restaurant. We’ve managed to create a brand that’s retained its presence for more than a decade. Our previous location in Sololaki was once a very popular place for restaurants, but unfortunately, it went to waste, even hosting the President at one point. I believe that we’ve decided a current location: it’s terrible for restaurants, but we still find the reservations piling up. I’m proud of this brand and believe it’s a must to create a household name. Of course, I was at a very authentic and upscale Mexican restaurant for a while. That experience for me: I was very blown away and inspired. I don’t know if the people got lazy, or the quantities produced are super minute, but it’s becoming increasingly difficult to find decent quality produce. I’m not talking about fruits and vegetables, as when they are in season the quality is usually sublime, but about meat and dairy products. Slowly, the industry is catching up and moving forward, but it’s definitely taking its time.

SO ARE THERE ANY SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES THAT YOU’VE ENCOUNTERED RECENTLY?

I’ve been told there could be a huge market for Georgian agricultural produce due to the high quality, but there’s a lack of infrastructure to meet the demand. What solutions do you see for this continuous innovation, and never bored.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE YOUR LEGACY TO BE?

I’d like to open another restaurant, one that is very food oriented with an open kitchen. The main focus would be on food, not on the interior design or anything like that. We’ll be if we want, but that is the next project; to make sure I keep the Georgian cuisine continuously innovating, and never bored.

WHAT ARE YOU GOALS FOR THE FUTURE?

“Without you, we discussed the revolution, with our guests as the traditional Georgian chicken soup, khilkhara. As long as you can recognize the taste as khilkhara, I don’t understand why anyone would choose a different kind of ingredient, i.e. mist, terragon, whatever, used in the cooking process. But the younger generation are relentless in their complaining.

SO WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY TRADITIONAL?

I grew up in Imereti, so I’ve definitely taken a lot of inspiration from there; Megrelian cuisine is another of my favorites, so too has definitely influenced my cooking. As things like khikhali and khachapuri, while today are authentic parts of our cuisine, they are not, to a great extent, traditional for Georgia. Lots of other countries have them but in different shapes and form. To that end, I believe that Imeretian and Megrelian food is a lot more authentic and unique to Georgia. Lots of other countries have them but in different shapes and form. To that end, I believe that Imeretian and Megrelian food is a lot more authentic and unique to Georgia.

On the whole, while Georgian cuisine does offer some unique dishes, it’s more an amalgamation of fusion of a variety of styles.

Definitely. There’s a lot of influence from around the world, the key is to make perfect sense if you look at the history books. We were invaded by Turks, Arabs, to name but two examples, so of course we have been influenced by them.

You mentioned that your original plan was to run with the knowledge that the restaurant industry is a very demanding one. If we still want to face it out so you don’t fall out of love your passion?

I think I was lucky. At the age I got into this industry here, I couldn’t imagine myself on my feet cooking for 13 hours a day. So what I was doing was designing dishes with my staff members, never being on the one doing the cooking myself, which allowed me to limit the amount of stress and enjoy my job. Cooking is definitely a profession that comes with a lot of stress and physical pressure, so my best advice would be to never quit, or anything like that. We’ll see if it works, but I’m definitely a foodie philosophy.

THROUGHOUT MY TRAVELS IN GEORGIA, I’VE NOTICED A LARGE VARIETY OF STYLES?

Of course, there is an old fashioned still lingering thing to this, so, trying to keep everything as the same how our great-grandmothers served it.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY TRADITIONAL?

Presentation and flavors. Look at the traditional Georgian chicken soup, khilkhara. As long as you can recognize the taste as khilkhara, I don’t understand why anyone would choose a different kind of ingredient, i.e. mist, terragon, whatever, used in the cooking process. But the younger generation are relentless in their complaining.

SO ARE THERE ANY KINDS OF CHANGES THAT YOU BRING INTO THE MENU USING DIFFERENT HERBS TO CREATE TRADITIONAL FLAVORS?

Indeed. What I mean is that if you call something “kharcha,” you should recognize it as that, and cook it in a manner that ensures the signature taste remains. How you get there, be it through combination X, Y, or Z of ingredients, is what makes things interesting. That process is what holds the key to the individuality of each restaurant: it shouldn’t be the hostage of tradition.

Another thing that we are trying to do, and not just us but chefs across Georgia, is to bring back a lot of traditional dishes that were lost during communist times. By “lost,” I mean that people stopped cooking them as the culture of birth and cutlet took over. We lost a lot of different kinds of cheeses and grapes, amongst other things. Today, a lot of us chefs are trying to find the old recipes and bring them back into everyday life. There’s a lot of work left until we achieve collective success in this goal, but we’re definitely getting there slowly but surely.

THE WINING AND DINING CULTURE DEVELOP SINCE YOU GOT BACK FROM THE US:

Oh, it’s changed a lot. As I said, back then it was pretty much static. Now, and this is probably a result of the opening up of the country and the great influx of tourism. That is seen in altered appearance of Georgian cuisine today. We continued this on this trajectory for a while. The impact of tourism had a lot to do with this change.

The youngsters are bringing more and more diversity into the field and pushing for a loosening of traditions. Of course, there is an old fashioned still lingering thing to this, so, trying to keep everything as the same how our great-grandmothers served it.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY TRADITIONAL?

It’s a very unpopular place for restaurants, so it’s in season the quality is usually sublime, but about meat and dairy products. Slowly, the industry is catching up and moving forward, but it’s definitely taking its time.

I think that this should be a government goal. They should encourage farmers, providing them with assistance, a lot of money and effort needs to poured into this industry, but unfortunately, they are not doing this at the moment. There are some surface-level changes going on but it’s not enough.

However, I’ve noticed a large influx of foreigners with greater know-how, entering the agriculture market, producing high quality goods like aged cheeses, bread, vegetables, it’s a great source of education for the locals. I also noticed small quantities of city boys and girls moving to villages to change their urban diets, to grow their own cheeses and vegetables. So there’s definitely a lot of potential, but we need to reinvest and direction to ensure we get there.

ARE THERE ANY SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES THAT YOU’VE ENCOUNTERED RECENTLY?

In its entirety left a huge lasting impression for me: I was very blown away

I was at a very authentic and upscale Mexican restaurant for a while. That experience for me: I was very blown away and inspired. I don’t know if the people got lazy, or the quantities produced are super minute, but it’s becoming increasingly difficult to find decent quality produce. I’m not talking about fruits and vegetables, as when they are in season the quality is usually sublime, but about meat and dairy products. Slowly, the industry is catching up and moving forward, but it’s definitely taking its time.

I’ve been told there could be a huge market for Georgian agricultural produce due to the high quality, but there’s a lack of infrastructure to meet the demand. What solutions do you see for this continuous innovation, and never bored.

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Tbilisi Hosts Scientific Conference on Modern Multiple Sclerosis Management

BY SOPIO JAVAKhISHVILi

Hotel Radisson Blu Iveria hosted a scientific conference on "Modern Principles of Multiple Sclerosis Management". The conference was organized under the aegis of the pharmaceutical company Roche Georgia and is connected to the introduction of the innovative drug Ocrevus (Ocrelizumab) onto the Georgian pharmaceutical market.

Professor Ludwig Kappos, Head Physician of the Department of Neurology and Outpatient Clinic at the University Hospital of Basel, was invited from Switzerland to participate in the conference. The conference was also be attended by representatives of the medical field, and media.

Ocrevus is the first and only therapy approved for both primary progressive and relapsing forms of multiple sclerosis.

“The approval of Ocrevus in Georgia is a significant moment for the Georgian patients with Multiple Sclerosis,” explains Nina Gamagrava, Medical Director of Roche Georgia. According to her, despite available therapies, some patients with relapsing forms of Multiple Sclerosis continue to experience disease activity and disability progression and require modification of treatment. “Ocrevus is a new choice for them. And patients with primary progressive multiple sclerosis, who have never had an approved treatment, will have the opportunity to be treated with this therapy. Ocrevus has the potential to transform the treatment of both relapsing forms of MS and primary progressive MS.”

The goal of the Scientific Conference is to launch Ocrevus for multiple sclerosis treatment, as a “modern medicine achievement for Georgian patients.”

Multiple sclerosis is a chronic, progressive neurological disease. That affects an estimated 2.1 million people worldwide. The first symptoms occur between 20 and 40 years, and that is why multiple sclerosis is the main cause of non-traumatic disability in younger patients. There are several forms of disease:

• Relapsing-remitting MS (RRMS) is the most common form of disease (80-85%) and is characterized by episodes of new or worsening signs of symptoms (relapses) followed by periods of recovery (remission). Remission typically lasting from a few months to a few years.

• The majority of people who are diagnosed with RRMS will eventually transition to Secondary progressive MS (SPMS) in which they experience steadily worsening disability over time. Relapsing forms of MS (RMS) include people with RRMS and people with SPMS.

• The Primary Progressive MS (PPMS) is a debilitating form of the disease marked by steadily worsening symptoms but typically without distinct relapses or periods of remission. Approximately 15% of people with MS are diagnosed with primary progressive form of disease.

People with all forms of MS experience disease activity – inflammation of the nervous system and permanent loss of nerve cells in the brain. This process can occur even if the patient does not have clinical symptoms. The main goal of treating multiple sclerosis is to reduce the disease activity as soon as possible to slow progression of disabilities. Despite available disease modifying treatments, some people with MS continue to experience disease activity and disability progression.

Ocrevus is the first and only therapy approved for both primary progressive and relapsing forms of multiple sclerosis. The effectiveness and safety of Ocrevus was confirmed by large-scale clinical trials (OPERA 1, OPERA 2, ORATORIO). Ocrevus delivers superior reduction in disease activity and risk of disability progression.

Gender Equality: Key to Sustainable Development

The Georgian Government, international agencies, civil society and the private sector have united to promote gender equality as one of the key aspects of the sustainable development agenda. The Policy Dialogue on February 21 focused on the Sustainable Development Goal on Gender Equality – SDG5, aiming to set the ways of achieving meaningful progress in political and economic empowerment of women in Georgia by 2030.

“Important work has been done by Georgia to ensure that all SDGs have gender-sensitive indicators,” said Mariam Jajanjidze, Secretary of the Inter-Agency Commission on Gender Equality, Violence against Women, and Domestic Violence, stressed that SDG5 relates to all national policies. “Following the National Agenda 2030, the country will take effective steps to increase women’s economic participation, promote equal economic opportunities for women and men, advance gender balance in decision-making, and end violence against women and girls.”

Sascha Gabizon, Executive Director of the organization “Women Engage for a Common Future” (WECF), noted the role of gender equality in the process of democratic transformation. “Real social-economic transformation requires the achievement of the SDGs by 2030 in Georgia, and the key lever is gender-equality,” she said.

“The sustainable development agenda provides Georgia with a unique opportunity to make a major step forward and eliminate gender inequalities in all aspects of life,” said Gigi Bregadze, Democratic Governance Team Leader of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Georgia, which is focused on cooperation and partnership for the SDGs. “This, however, requires the collective effort of all members of Georgian society, the coordinated work of the government, non-governmental and private sectors, and the media, supported by Georgia’s international partners,” he added.

The discussions at the meeting covered a range issues, including the low access of Georgian women to economic resources, the pay gap, unequal distribution of labor, and low representation of women in decision-making.

The participants heard from Helena Sancho, Deputy Head of Development Co-operation at the Embassy of Sweden in Georgia; Levan Avalsishvili, Programs Director of the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI), representatives of the Gender Equality Council of the Parliament of Georgia; gender experts and researchers from WeResearch and International Republican Institute (IRI).

The meeting was organized by IDFI, WECF, UNDP, Embassy of Sweden in Georgia and the Administration of the Government of Georgia.
Seven Years On: Etseri, Svaneti

By Mate Poldi

A two-day working meeting with municipalities on State Policies Combating Violence and Ensuring Well-being of Children and Families was run from February 20-22 at the Radisson BLU Iveria hotel. The event brought together municipalities from all over Georgia to agree on the roles and responsibilities of central and local governments in addressing family vulnerabilities and violence against children.

The meeting was organized by the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure and UNICEF, in partnership with the European Union. Participants included representatives of international organizations, governments, NGOs and the Public Defender’s Office.

Existing services for children and families are also scarce and insufficient. "Municipalities play a crucial role in protecting children from violence, providing support to vulnerable families and children with disabilities," said Laila O. Gad, UNICEF’s Representative in Georgia. "Municipalities are accountable to provide necessary services and are also well positioned to monitor how the rights of children and their families are protected. However, it remains a huge challenge to bring about effective responses based on the needs of children and families. Existing services for children and families are scarce and insufficient. Strengthening municipalities is critical for protecting children and families from vulnerabilities and helping them to become active citizens. UNICEF has been working closely with municipalities to develop services for children with disabilities and victims of violence, and to support them in fulfilling their duties. We commit to continuing such support in close collaboration with the central Government of Georgia and other partners," she added.

Participants of the forum discussed steps undertaken by the Government of Georgia to address violence against children and to join the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, agreeing on the crucial role to be played by municipalities in addressing the needs of vulnerable families. "The well-being of children and families concerns everyone. The recently adopted Association Agenda between Georgia and the EU reiterates the need to broaden and strengthen measures to protect children against all forms of violence. We look forward to continuing our cooperation with the government and municipalities towards this end," Head of the Delegation of the European Union Vincent Rey said. Other issues discussed at the forum were:

- Steps undertaken by municipalities to introduce internal procedures required by the Child Protection Referral Procedures and to ensure professional capacity to identify, refer and respond to violence against children at the local level;
- Different types of inclusive services at the municipal level and existing best practices to protect the rights of children with disabilities and their families;
- On-going social protection programs and services at municipal level and central level, including Targeted Social Assistance (TSA) program, the ways of improving these services and opportunities for developing social assistance schemes at the municipal level for those vulnerable groups that are out-side the TSA program.

The meeting aimed to contribute to the implementation of the National Human Rights Strategy 2014-2020 and its action plan and the development of the State De-Centralization Strategy. Moreover, within the framework of the "See Every Color" campaign, aimed at reducing stigma against people with disabilities, UNICEF carried out a contest to identify those municipalities that have the best social programs which ensure an inclusive environment for children with disabilities (adapted infrastructure, public transport, special programs and services, innovative approaches and involvement of both young people with disabilities and their parents). The top four municipalities were announced at the forum and awarded special prizes to recognize their contribution to protecting children with disabilities in the hopes of encouraging other municipalities to take up the ante by creating their own inclusive environments. Eight municipalities took part in the contest organized within the framework of the communication for social change campaign, and a jury including the parents of children with disabilities chose the following winners:

- Borjomi Municipality – for the best practices aimed at development and social integration of children with disabilities and the active involvement of children and their parents;
- Mestia Municipality – for the best practices aimed at development and social integration of children with disabilities and the active involvement of children and their parents;
- Bolnisi Municipality – for creating an inclusive and accessible environment for children with disabilities; and
- Khelvachauri municipality – for the best innovative solutions for protecting and promoting the rights of children with disabilities and their families.

Campana See Every Color was initiated by UNICEF with the support of the European Union and USAID, with active involvement of children with disabilities and their parents.
Korean Peace Marathoner on his Experience in Georgia

BY NINO GUGUNISHVILI

Dr. Song InY eup, Professor of the Korean National University, Friendship Ambassador of KoreaVolunteer Organization International (KVO International), Chief Representative of Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) recently visited Georgia together with Korean peace marathoner and writer Mr. Kang MyongKu, as a part of the Run-Eurasia-16,000km-Peace Marathon. The marathon is on from September 1, 2017- October 31, 2018. Georgia was the 9th country on their list of 18 countries to run through and they arrived in January, alongside Mr. Park HoJin, Mr. Kang MyongKu’s manager. The 14-month running marathon encompasses The Netherlands, Germany, Czech Republic, Austria, Hungary, Serbia, Bulgaria, Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kirgizstan, China, North Korea and eventually to South Korea (Seoul).

The Run-Eurasia-16,000km Peace Marathon participants say it is “the first and most difficult adventure in the long history of Mankind and serves as a chance to spread the atmosphere of Korean peaceful unification for world peace by removing the bad vestige of World War II.”

“We run not just for a Guinness Record, or for sportmanship, but for world peace and the peaceful unification of Korea,” Dr. Song InY eup told GEORGIA TODAY. “We want to spread peace along our route through Eurasia and we are sure our story will inspire young people to adventure and encourage them to consider world citizenship. Georgia is so peaceful, pretty and grand, lying between the Black Sea and Caucasus Mountains. Its people we met running along the road are so kind and generous,” he added.

“For me, Georgia is mystic, because it is connected with Greek mythology, especially Prometheus who gave fire to humans for the first time and was punished by Zeus, chained to the summit of Mr. Kazbeg,” said Mr. Kang. “I enjoyed running all through Georgia.”

They continued the Peace Marathon in Azerbaijan, aiming to run 45 kilometers every day, then on to Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kirgizstan, China, North Korea and ending the marathon in Seoul on October 31.

Dr. Song InY eup told us it was his first time in Georgia and he found himself so touched and impressed by the country, he came up with a poem dedicated to it.

“I was so greatly touched and impressed with the Georgian people’s kindness, the beauty of the land and quality of the wine, that I wrote a poem “Mystic Land, Georgia,” he said. “I hope your people like it and remember it as a poem of one Korean man who ran all through Georgia and fell in love with it!”

Mystic Land, Georgia

At the south of Mts Caucasus
Holding the Black Sea to the west
White clouds above our heads
Alway.
Slipping wine
Taking warmly with strangers
Treating them as guests from God
Hey, Turks, Persia, Soviets
No more here, please
This is the Republic of Georgia, forever
Handing fire to Mankind
Prometheus already left
Helped by Heracles
Still, eagles fly over mountains
How grand, the sky-penetrating Kazbeg
You are there as you’ve ever been
It’s Gergeti Chminda Sameba
That’s watched here as it’s ever been
Under the picturesque mountains
Red roofs here and there
It’s Village Signagi, isn’t it?
Hey, you
Who are dreaming of love and peace
Never hesitate to come here
Tossing round pebbles
Pretty voices, murmuring ripples
And blue waves
Why are you called “Black Sea”?
At Batumi
The foolish traveller becomes a blank
Shouting “Tamada”
We sing, sing and sing
“Tavisuplebas Dideba!”
Raise your toast high
We glorify freedom, freedom and freedom!!

(2018.1.18, at the valley of Mts Caucasus Congratulating KMK’s 5,000km on Eurasia-16,000km-Peace Marathon)


**WHAT'S ON IN TBILISI**

### THEATER

**THBLISI ZAKARIA PALASSHIISHVILI OPERA AND BALLET THEATER**

**Address:** 25 Rustaveli Ave.
**Telephone:** 2 99 04 56

- **February 23**
  - **CAVALIA RUSTISCANA**
    - **Starring:** Nana Kvaratsishvili (Sanzetta), Anzor Khishaseli (Turiddo), Eleane Janjalia (Lucia), Vano Gahualvishvili (Alfi), Irina Alekside (Lola)
    - **Directed by:** Ioseb Bakuradze
    - **Language:** Russian
    - **Start time:** 20:00
    - **Telephone:** 595 50 02 03
    - **Ticket:** 10-15 GEL

- **February 24**
  - **LABYRINTH**
    - **Directed by:** Ioseb Bakuradze
    - **Cast:** Vicky Kriebs, Daniel Day-Lewis, Lesley Manville
    - **Language:** English
    - **Start time:** 16:30
    - **Telephone:** 17:66 GEL

### CINEMA

- **February 23**
  - **BLACK PANTHER**
    - **Directed by:** Ridley Scott
    - **Genre:** Biography, Crime, Drama
    - **Start time:** 14:15, 19:15
    - **Language:** Russian
    - **Ticket:** 10-11 GEL

- **February 24**
  - **FIFTY SHADES FREED**
    - **Directed by:** James Foley
    - **Cast:** Dakota Johnson, Jamie Dornan, Mark Wahlberg
    - **Language:** English
    - **Start time:** 22:15
    - **Ticket:** 10-15 GEL

- **February 28**
  - **PHANTOM THREAD**
    - **Directed by:** Paul Thomas Anderson
    - **Language:** English
    - **Start time:** 19:10
    - **Ticket:** 10-15 GEL

### MOVEMENT THEATER

**SHALIKASHVILI THEATER**

**Address:** 37 Rustaveli Ave.
**Telephone:** 27 45 50 02 03

- **February 23**
  - **24**
    - **KRAMANCHULI**
      - **Directed by:** Ioseb Bakuradze
      - **Start time:** 20:00
      - **Ticket:** 15 GEL

### MUSEUM

- **February 23**
  - **CENTURIES GEORGIAN COSTUME AND EXHIBITION**
    - **Telephone:** 2 99 80 22, 2 93 48 21
    - **Address:** 4 Rustaveli Ave.
    - **Curator:** Levan Mindiashvili
    - **Start time:** 11:30
    - **Ticket:** 12 GEL

- **February 24**
  - **THE POST**
    - **February 9 – March 9**
      - **Collected in the country and abroad**
      - **Telephone:** 599 42 54 14
      - **Address:** 27 Atoneli Str.
      - **Start time:** 11:00
      - **Ticket:** 10-15 GEL

### CONCERTS

- **February 24**
  - **THE CONCERT OF CHAMBER ENSEMBLE GEORGIA**
    - **Telephone:** 215 73 00
    - **Address:** 5 Rustaveli Ave.
    - **Start time:** 19:00
    - **Ticket:** 50-100 GEL

### EXHIBITION

- **February 25**
  - **GEORGIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM SIMON JANASHIA**
    - **Address:** 4 Rustaveli Ave.
    - **Telephone:** 2 99 80 22, 2 93 48 21
    - **Start time:** 16:30
    - **Ticket:** 17 GEL

  - **MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS**
    - **Address:** 1 Gudishvili Str.
    - **Telephone:** 2 99 99 09
    - **Start time:** 13:00
    - **Ticket:** 11-13 GEL

- **February 26**
  - **THE EXHIBITION OF MUSEUM OF SOVIET PERIOD DÉDICACE GALLERY**
    - **Address:** 4 Rokinis Rigi Str.
    - **Telephone:** 6 68 97 86

### CAVEA THEATER

**Address:** 24 Rustaveli Ave.
**Telephone:** 200 70 07

- **February 26 – 28**
  - **CAVEA THEATER**
    - **Directed by:** Ryan Coogler
    - **Language:** English
    - **Start time:** 11:45, 22:15
    - **Ticket:** 8-14 GEL

### THE POST

- **February 9 – March 9**
  - **ZURAB KALANDADZE'S 65TH ANNIVERSARY EXHIBITION**
    - **Exhibition showcases 27 of ZURAB KALANDADZE's artworks, created in 2002-2012, the main**
    - **Contact:** 2 99 80 22, 2 93 48 21
    - **Address:** 4 Rustaveli Ave.
    - **Start time:** 11:45
    - **Ticket:** 18-20 GEL

- **December 14 – March 14**
  - **ANNIVERSARY RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION**
    - **STONE AGE**
      - **Date:** February 2 – March 3
      - **Contact:** 2 99 80 22, 2 93 48 21
      - **Address:** 4 Rustaveli Ave.
      - **Start time:** 11:45
      - **Ticket:** 18-20 GEL

### ARTIST ALEXANDER ZHVYOTKOV

- **February 2 – March 3**
  - **Solo exhibition**
    - **Date:** February 2 – March 3
    - **Contact:** 2 99 80 22, 2 93 48 21
    - **Address:** 4 Rustaveli Ave.
    - **Start time:** 11:45
    - **Ticket:** 18-20 GEL

### THE CAFE KALA

**Address:** 4 Rokinis Rigi Str.
**Telephone:** 6 68 97 86

- **February 22**
  - **DIANSUK KAKHZIDZE TBILISI CENTER FOR MUSIC AND CULTURE**
    - **Address:** 125 Aghmashenebeli Ave.
    - **Telephone:** 2 96 12 43

- **February 24**
  - **THE CONCERT OF CHAMBER MUSIC DEDICATED TO CREATIONS OF FAMOUS GEORGIAN COMPOSER VAZHA AZARASHVILI**
    - **Contact:** 2 99 80 22, 2 93 48 21
    - **Address:** 4 Rustaveli Ave.
    - **Start time:** 16:30
    - **Ticket:** 10-15 GEL

### ASSA HALL

**Address:** 4 Rokinis Rigi Str.
**Telephone:** 577 98 58

- **February 23**
  - **Celebration Man’s Day with SOLO EXHIBITION**
    - **Contact:** 2 99 80 22, 2 93 48 21
    - **Address:** 4 Rustaveli Ave.
    - **Start time:** 12:00
    - **Ticket:** 10-15 GEL

### MZIURI

**Address:** Mzouri Cafe
**Telephone:** 2 96 12 43
Georgian Film Horizon’s World Premiere at the 2018 Berlinale

INTERVIEW BY LIKA CHIGLADZE

G eorgian film and directors are reaching new heights, proven by the number of Georgian movies being featured and screened at a number of prestigious international film festivals. Georgian director Tatinia Kajrishvili’s recent film Horizon has had its successful world premiere at the 68th annual Berlin Film Festival. The film was screened in the Panorama section of the 2018 Berlinale. The movie is the author’s second feature film to be premiered at Berlinale. Her previous feature debut ‘Brides,’ earned the Panorama Audience Award at the 2015 Berlinale. With her new impressive and authentic drama the director once again gives an insight into human relationships with their ensuing psychological nuances and sensitivities.

GEORGIA TODAY contacted Tatinia Kajrishvili and asked her to tell us about her new film.

“The world premiere was a great success,” she told us. “It was so nice that the tickets for all four screening sessions were sold out just before the film was launched. The stairs in the hall were full of spectators during the show, and the screening was followed by a discussion that lasted for more than 30 minutes!”

I n a modern world without boundaries, art has acquired new shapes and forms. The fact that fantasy and human creativity has no limit is once again confirmed by the striking works of our contemporary Georgian artist Tamar Kvesitadze. The artist, whose name has gone beyond Georgian borders, now appears on the largest online database of Google Arts and Culture, which is a huge virtual association that incorporates the artworks of world-class artists from around the world. Now, most of her works are easy to enjoy, allowing you a deeper insight into Tamar’s masterpieces without needing to visit a gallery.

Her interest in making dolls started from early childhood when the 8-year-old artist found an old doll in her grandmother’s drawer. In the 1990s, during the times of hardship in Georgia, the painter with an architectural background started making dolls to earn a living. Later, she moved to the USA where she took the craft to a new level, eventually achieving success. Today, her masterpiece of moving sculpture named Man and Woman in Georgia’s Batumi city serves as a symbol of the seaside region, annually impressing millions of tourists and locals alike.

GEORGIA TODAY talked to Tamar Kvesitadze about her latest success.

“I did not expect my artworks to appear on Google Arts and Culture; it was really unexpected news about her latest success. I was contacted by Google and I’m very pleased that my art is being showcased on this prestigious platform. I was totally impressed millions of tourists and locals alike. I really like the idea behind the sculpture.”

The architect, sculptor and painter is predominantly known for her mechanical dolls and kinetic sculptures variously combining art and construction.

“I use various tools and techniques to embody my ideas. Mechanics is one of the techniques through which I bring my art to life,” she said. “I can’t say exactly where I draw my inspiration from, since anything can serve as a source to one’s imagination. I started working with dolls 20 years ago. For some years I worked and made dolls in the USA, then, after doing it for six years, I decided to shift to making sculptures. At the time, I didn’t realize how difficult it was to assemble the whole construction and make it move and so I work with Paata Sanaia, a technical engineer and the co-author of my artworks. I’m responsible for the artistic part, while he manages the technical side.”

The artist has taken part in a number of exhibitions in many prestigious venues in different countries. Her latest most notable ones were at the Venice Biennale 2017 and the exhibition called Last Supper at Galerie Kornfeld in Berlin. “The gallery I cooperate with organized the exhibition called Supper Club. My two installations ‘Last Supper’ and ‘Caves’ were presented at the venue. Last Supper evolves around a biblical theme, with plates and dishes hung on transparent and extremely thin wires, creating the illusion that they are floating mid-air. The dishes have thin material attached to imitate shadows, giving the entire composition a 3D effect,” the sculptor noted.

Tamar works in several studious throughout Europe, yet her main fundamental workshop is located in Tbilisi. Her next exhibition will take place in Berlin in September. Although she wants to showcase her works to the wider audience in Tbilisi, currently she is extremely busy and finds it impossible to gather all her works in one place. The renowned painter also hopes to hold a grand exhibition in the near future, but prefers to focus on the place and time a secret for now.

On her well-loved Batumi mechanical sculpture, the artist told GEORGIA TODAY: “As with her feature debut, the atmospheric ‘Brides,’ Kajrishvili once again proves herself a cunning observer of intimate relationships and their fracture points,” Variety.com wrote.

The director said the working process on the film was both interesting and hard. “The shootings took place on an island on Palmo Lake. The crew had to work in the harsh conditions and freezing weather, which you can see in the film. Rain, snow, ice—all these are included in the film, adding a sad note to the whole picture. Apart from Palmo Lake, the locations were in Batumi, Kobuleti and Tbilisi. The committee of Berlinale looks for the latest works of prize-winning directors and Horizon caught their eye at the Sarajevo Festival. The film attracted massive interest among world press, with large-scale publications such as filmfuria.co.uk, the hollywoodreporter.com, variety.com, and cineuropa.org dedicating lengthy reviews to it. The film will be released in Georgia in autumn, since we want the movie to be screened at Georgian film festivals as well,” she told us.

Horizon (Horizonti in Georgian) unfolds the story of a man named Giorgi who is abandoned by his wife for another man. The director shows the emotional state of the leading hero, who tries to escape his pain by fleeing the city and settling on a remote island on Palmo Lake, near the Black Sea, which perfectly suits his gloomy mood. Giorgi finds refuge in the company of elderly Georgians who mourn the old country. The leading roles are played by famous Georgian actor and actress George Borchorishvili (Giorgi) and Ina Sukhishvili (Ana).

“Tatinia Kajrishvili’s second feature-length drama is a meticulously and consistently told story about the end of a relationship,” reads the description on Berlinale’s website. Unfolding with great serenity and in long shots, it creates an image of deeply felt loneliness. The main character’s contemplative state quickly infuses the film as it becomes increasingly unlikely that he will break out of his isolation.

And yet, in spite of all the hopelessness, the images contain great beauty. One can almost feel the cold wind blowing through the cinema, the first snowflakes, too. Ana has found somebody new. The city far away, as are all thoughts of the future,” Berlinale.de reported.

The film was hailed by international media outlets and praised by critics.

“As with her feature debut, the atmospheric ‘Brides,’ Kajrishvili once again proves herself a cunning observer of intimate relationships and their fracture points,” Variety.com wrote.

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