Energy Efficiency: The Sleeping Giant of Climate Mitigation

BY AMY JONES

With climate change a huge concern for the future, discussions often revolve around the reduction of gas emissions rather than how societies can save energy. However, energy efficiency is a method that not only tackles environmental issues by minimizing energy consumption, it also brings about positive changes in health, education and the economy.

From 11 - 13 February, EU4Energy and the International Energy Agency (IEA) held a EU4Energy policy forum, focusing on energy efficiency in buildings. Bringing together experts and policymakers from around the world, attendees were able to expand their knowledge and draw on experiences from other countries in the region. GEORGIA TODAY sat down with speakers Armin Mayer and Brian Dean from IEA to discuss energy efficiency in Georgia and the world.

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Discover as You Ride: Where.ge to Publish Georgian Bus Onboard Magazine

George Sharashidze, the Publisher of Where.ge and Shalva Khutsishvili, CEO of the Georgian Bus

The CEO of the Georgian Bus Company, Shalva Khutsishvili, and George Sharashidze, the Publisher of Where.ge, an English language guidebook, have signed an agreement according to which the latter has become the official publisher of the Georgian Bus onboard magazine.

The magazine will be published quarterly and will give passengers the most important and up-to-date information about Georgia.

Georgian Bus is one of the leading transport companies in the country, ensuring the travel of 95% of international and local passengers from Kutaisi International Airport to Tbilisi, Batumi, Gudauri, and Svaneti. In addition, Georgian Bus is the exclusive transport partner of WizzAir, with 73% of international tourist flow coming from Europe.

Direct flights to new destinations are scheduled to be launched this summer, and Georgian Bus is looking forward to welcoming and serving the resulting increased number of passengers.

Currently, the company caters for approximately 15,000 passengers per month. The given number is expected to increase to 25,000 in the high season this year.

Khutsishvili announced that clientele of Georgian Bus will be served with brand new buses, launched two weeks ago. He accentuated the significance of the memorandum with Where.ge for making the trips around the country maximally comfortable, informative and interesting for passengers.

“This is a big achievement and responsibility, giving us the chance to pass on accurate information regarding the country’s multiple sightseeing opportunities to visitors through our content” Sharashidze told us. “Our agreement with Georgian Bus contributes to the development of Georgia’s tourism industry, as only accurate, relevant, and updated information can support the country’s multiple sightseeing opportunities is given to visitors through our content.”

NATO & Partner Defense Ministers Gather in Brussels

The defense Minister of Georgia, Levan Izoria, took part in a two-day series of meetings with defense ministers from NATO allies and partners in Brussels, February 13-14. NATO declared that the talks centered on “pressing security challenges, including Russia’s violations of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. Ministers will discuss efforts to strengthen the Alliance’s deterrence and defense, and review NATO missions in Afghanistan, Kosovo, Iraq and the maritime area. Burden-sharing and NATO-EU cooperation will also be high on the agenda.”

On Wednesday, Izoria met with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and Deputy Secretary General Rose Gottemoeller. The main topics during the meeting included, according to the Ministry of Defense’s Twitter account, Georgia’s unwavering aspiration to NATO membership, increasing public support for NATO in Georgia, and the upcoming NATO-Georgia exercises in March. This year will be the first NATO-Georgia exercise where Georgia leads the planning and execution process. Secretary General Stoltenberg will visit Georgia during the exercises.

While in Brussels, Izoria also met with US Ambassador to NATO Kay Bailey Hutchinson. Izoria called the meeting “very interesting and meaningful,” and noted that they discussed a series of bilateral issues, including “the perspectives of Georgian membership in NATO and NATO’s Open Door Policy” that was recently implemented in relation to North Macedonia and previously Montenegro, as well as defense plans for 2019, Georgia’s Defense Readiness Program (GDRP), fair distribution of budget and resources, multinational exercises, and the “Total Defense” concept.

After meeting with Hutchinson, Izoria held brief meetings with the defense ministers of Bulgaria and Romania, thanking the Bulgarian Embassy in Tbilisi for being an “effective contact point” between Georgia and NATO and thanking Romania for its faithful support of Georgia’s territorial integrity and sovereignty. Earlier in the day, Izoria and his staff sat down with the Lithuanian delegation for bilateral consultations. “Lithuania expressed continuous support to Georgia in areas of military training and education, stratom, cyber security, and implementation of the substantial NATO-Georgia Package,” said the Georgian Ministry of Defense.

The day before the ministers descended on Brussels, retired US Army Lieutenant General Frederick Benjamin Hodges III was interviewed by Voice of America. Hodges, who served as commanding general of US Army Europe (USAREUR), from 2014 – 2017, recommended that NATO invite Georgia to the Alliance during the next summit.

“Georgia should be an Alliance member because it can improve the situation in terms of security. In addition, Georgia has done everything that it was required to do. He also emphasized the positive reputation of Georgian soldiers according to which “Georgia wants to fight (alongside) Georgians because they are so good. So, they have nothing to prove. Now, it’s the turn of the Alliance to take the next step and invite Georgia to be a NATO member.”

In other news coming out of the NATO meetings in Brussels this week, it was announced that the Embassy of Poland in Tbilisi will replace Bulgaria as the official contact point embassy between NATO and Georgia for the next two-year term.

Poland’s Ambassador to Georgia, Marcin Maszkiewicz, noted that “Poland has always been a faithful friend of Georgia,” and expressed his hope that the role would allow Poland to help facilitate Georgia’s continued process of NATO integration, while strengthening the relationship between the two countries.

The contact point embassy model was developed in the early 1990s, “to support the Alliance’s partnership and public diplomacy activities” in partner countries, says NATO. The functions of the contact point embassy include serving a public diplomacy role and providing support, as needed, in implementing Alliance activities with partners.
Marneuli Mayor Resigns, Facing Criminal Charges

BY SAMANTHA GUTHRIE

Marneuli Mayor Temur Abazov was arrested in June 2018 on charges of abuse and inhuman treatment towards one of his constituents, Echim Alakhverdiev. Three other men have also been charged with abuse: United National Movement MP Azer Suleymanov, a Georgian Dream member of the Marneuli City Assembly, Ramin Alakhverdiev (no relation to the incident), and a relative of Abazov’s identified by the initials EG.

On June 13, 2018, Abazov was charged with the offense of insulting Alakhverdiev’s wife at the instruction of someone else, whose name he demanded. “After that, Suleymanov, Ramin Alakhverdiev and EG, physically abused him,” the Prosecutor’s Office reported.

Badly beaten, E. Alakhverdiev was then taken to a local restaurant by Tefik Chodorov, another member of the Marneuli City Assembly, where Abazov was waiting. “As soon as they arrived, Abazov spat at Alakhverdiev, forced him to turn on Facebook live and verbally insult his own wife,” then Abazov forced the man to urinate in a glass and wash his face with it, according to the Prosecutor’s Office.

Abazov was held in a local jail from his arrest on June 13, 2018, until December 2018, when he was released on a 10,000 GEL ($3,752) bail at the approval of the Rustavi Regional Court.

Two months after his release, on Wednesday, Abazov addressed the Marneuli City Assembly with his resignation from post as mayor. “It is necessary to consider that a person acting as a defendant in a legal case should not perform the duties of a civil servant before the final verdict is delivered in the criminal case. This is the only reason I am resigning. I will continue the legal dispute to prove my innocence,” said Abazov. The former mayor maintains that the entire incident “was a well-organized provocation and there is no evidence or facts about my involvement.”

Abazov was suspended from office pending the trial, replaced ad interim by Deputy Mayor Zaur Tabatsadze. Accomplice Azer Suleymanov was also charged with physical abuse, but as a member of Parliament, he is protected by immunity and was not detained. The Prosecutor’s Office brushed off the charges against him, saying it was not serious and his role as an MP would not be affected. Chairman of Parliament Irakli Kobakhidze, however, sent a letter to acting Chief Prosecutor Mamuka Vasadze encouraging him to fully investigate the charges regardless of party affiliation or political position. “It is necessary to punish each participant in the incident,” said Kobakhidze.

Abazov is also a member of the ruling Georgian Dream party. Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze, Georgian Dream Secretar y General, affirmed at the time of his arrest that everyone must be held accountable for their actions, regardless of which party they represent.

Scholarships Given to Bright Pupils at Okrokhana School

BY KETEVAN KVARATSHELIYA

Okrokhana, a small village on the outskirts of Tbilisi, though very close to the capital city, represents quite a leap between the urban and the rural, with residents living as much as they do in any rural Georgian village—which includes the regular appearance of cows and chickens walking the lanes and many houses in a dilapidated condition. The pupils of the local school (Public School #28) face a number of challenges with regards to the condition of their building, despite having a wonderful team of motivated and oft-trained teachers engaged in the daily teaching process, doing their best with what they have. With the Ministry of Education budget stretched to capacity and beyond, this often means that parents, generous donor individuals or organizations to make a real difference to schools and the lives of pupils in Georgia.

Okrokhana School is lucky enough to count on the generosity of one such generous initiative.

David Bejuashvili, founder of the nonprofit organization New Life, established in 2014, has launched a scholarship for three Georgian schools, offering 300 GEL per academic month to the three most successful students of each school. The Okrokhana School counts itself among the lucky chosen few.

On February 12, Bejuashvili met this year’s winning students personally congratulating them on their success. GEORGIA TODAY attended the ceremony and spoke to him and to the Principal of the school, Giuli Khakhkheli.

“Even though we have a wonderful team of well-qualified and experienced teachers, who do their utmost to ensure our pupils receive a high-quality education, the location and general social conditions of the community of Okrokhana raise a number of issues,” Khakhkheli told us. “There is the social stereotype that if a school is not located in the city center, it will be unable to provide the right education. There are only 135 pupils at our school this year, and unfortunately the living conditions of the majority of them are far from satisfactory.”

Khakhkheli emphasized the importance of the wonderful initiative of scholars to motivate children and encourage them to dedicate themselves to their studies. “There is lack of such projects in Georgia,” she said. “That’s why when the opportunity was offered me to do it at our school, I could barely believe it was real. It represents an incredible opportunity for our students.”

Further comments came recently when members of the Tbilisi and ex-pat community, headed by GEORGIA TODAY’s Katie Ruth Davies, donated books and equipment to set up a small library in the school, something which before that moment the local children had only dreamed of.

“We are extremely grateful to everyone who donated to our library, and to Mr Bejuashvili for choosing to help our school pupils,” she said, adding that among the various initiatives and bouquets. The principal of the school stated that the process of choosing the beneficiaries was totally transparent and unbiased and that the scholarship will be given to different students each academic year.

At the meeting with the students, David Bejuashvili congratulated the recipients of the financial aid and awarded them with certificates and bouquets. As to why he had chosen the Okrokhana school to feature among his beneficiaries, Bejuashvili said that he had recently moved to Okrokhana with his family and wanted to do something to help the local community.
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The Lucifer Effect: How to Turn Georgian Judges Good

BY ARCHIL SIKHARULIDZE AND TEMURAZ SIKHARULIDZE

Georgia has a plethora of issues needing attention and reform, but there is probably no topic as significant and crucial as the judiciary. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Georgian governments have been trying hard to build a comprehensive, sophisticated, independent and, most importantly, publicly trusted judicial system. Unfortunately, these attempts have been unsuccessful, largely due to the lack of reforms and the ruling political powers to give up such a strong and influential mechanism, a tool still widely used by ruling regimes in non-democratic states to oppress and punish counterparts.

The current rulers, Georgian Dream, are today pushing for another grand reform that, in theory, should finally put into the judiciary some widely accepted, recognized and embedded democratic standards such as the check-and-balance model. This process is check-full of controversy due to a number of highly questionable decisions that have so far been made, among them the appointment of judges who are blamed for unlawful past judgements in extremely sensitive and scandalous criminal cases. The majority of local and foreign experts and INGOs expressed their astonishment at the appointments and are calling on the government to show political will to truly reform the system.

In the wake of such turbulence, Irakli Kobakhidze, Chairman of Parliament, poured fuel on the fire during a TV appearance on February 5 where he commented on the appointments, stating that those judges who had misdemeanors in the past had in fact been “made good” precisely as a result of environmental changes. These remarks were considered by some as unacceptable and unethical. But if we put political and ideological rivalry as well as populism aside, it is obvious that Kobakhidze’s statements perfectly fit into the social psychology paradigm and reflect a working policy that, at the end of the day, must be pursued with minor changes.

The Lucifer Effect: How Good People Turn Evil

Social Psychology is a field that studies the influence of social processes and environment on people’s behavior. It basically argues that individual behavior is not determined solely by a human being’s personal character, ethics, values and attitudes observed and is highly sensitive to external impacts and, in pressure that independent variables such as environment or a stressful situation may have. Human beings are not, by default, “bad” or “good”, meaning that their behavior is not pre-determined by nature but rather conditioned by a set of internal and external characteristics that may force “good” people to turn “bad” and “bad” people to turn “good”.

One the most prominent representatives of the Social Psychology school is Stanford University Professor, Philip Zimbardo, who argued these ideas in his prominent work The Lucifer Effect (TLE), How Good People Turn Evil. Zimbardo takes a look at the so-called Stanford Experiment and misbehavior of American soldiers in the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. He is confident in his judgements that the cases prove the significant role of the system and environment on the behavior of individuals who had previously never had records of violence and misconduct but who were keen to engage in such actions once affected and pushed by external factors.

Irakli Kobakhidze’s comments may sound cynical and irrelevant, but actually the creation of a healthy, free, independent and transparent environment/ system is crucial for the establishment of publicly trusted institutions that will contribute to a judicial system that supports “good” people and keeps away and/ or sets a working framework for the “bad”: Kobakhidze raised the important issue of systemic change but did so in a non-diplomatic manner and without explanation.

Applying the Framework

Before arguing the steps the government needs to take to achieve a successful reform, we should speak about at least two important issues that are frequently overlooked.

Readiness to Obey

While debating the judicial system reform, analysts often undermine the importance of the Georgian mentality and political culture. Representatives of Georgian society, as well as elites, frequently talk about building a publicly trusted institution, but, factually, neither side is really ready to contribute to the building. This reality is determined by the widely perceived notion that unfair and free court is a court that makes “respective” judgements which are acceptable for everyone. But this is practically impossible, as the “loser” always opposes and questions the judgment made and, thus, questions the judiciary. Furthermore, representatives of Georgian society have no general culture of obeying court decisions unless they are victorious. As such, at the end of the day, the demand for an impartial, fair and free trial is never-ending.

Another obstacle is the local political culture that, according to the best traditions of Georgian mentality, is tolerant only towards those institutions which are politically and ideologically acceptable and beneficial. Mikhail Saakashvili’s regime had no issues with the corrupt judicial system of the time until it was subordinated to the political elite. Yet, representatives of the former ruling movement are dissatisfied with this less but still corrupt institution under Georgian Dream governance. The unwillingness of local political powers to give up the judiciary as a political mechanism prevents the establishment of a truly independent institution.

Thus, it makes no sense to debate judicial system reform unless we bring significant changes into the Georgian mentality and local political culture.

Must Dos

We should express and keep in mind three basic assumptions. The first: there is no way we can build a judiciary that is fully trusted by all, meaning that we will never have a system that is acceptable for everyone; hence, we need to learn to obey judgements unless they are clearly partial. Second, we need to make it clear to local political powers that the judiciary is not a subordinated-to-the-ruling-council political mechanism or weapon. Finally, we cannot afford to fire every judge who has a past misconduct. Georgian society does not have the human resources required to repeat Saakashvili’s period formula of “fire everyone and hire new staff”. As such, we must work with those people who are “left today.”

Based on these three pillars, the government should push for systemic and environmental change, meaning that “good” people are not pushed to do bad and “bad” people are turned “good” or are kept out of the system. Those judges who had a strong background of misconduct must be severely punished and expelled from the judiciary, while others are given chance to prove their professionalism and devotion to the new democratic standards. The idea of life-long judges must be temporarily abandoned. The existing political reality and human resources are not enough to pursue this approach. Rather, we need a long-standing project, perhaps “judge of the future”, which will prepare a new generation of professionals who will be appointed on a life-long basis later on. These decisive ensure that the most prominent complaint “guilty judges” are punished, others are given a second chance, relatives of vic tims get at least minimum justice and are given chance to prove their professionalism and dedication to the truly trusted system. Georgian society has time to establish a functional judiciary with trusted life-long judges.

By and large, the judiciary reform is probably one of the most relevant and sensitive topics today. Kobakhidze’s arguments are not particularly novel; moreover, his views totally fit into the Social Psychology paradigm which argues for a healthy system and environment to prevent “good” people turning “bad”: the “bad” may turn “good” if they are put into such conditions. Georgian society needs not only to reform the judiciary but also to reform the political culture. Furthermore, it needs to recognize that we cannot simply fire everyone who doesn’t comply with the new democratic standards. Georgia lacks the human resources required to fire those who deserve it (within reasonable and existing limits) while continuing to cooperate with others. The idea of life-long judges must be postponed in order to prepare a new generation of public servants to be appointed according to the approach later on.
Is it Worth Keeping Abkhazia Switched On? The Enguri Dilemma

OPED BY ZAZA JGARKAVA

In just a few weeks, the leading energy colossus of the country, Enguri Dam, will grind to a halt. To be more precise, it will be switched off for the huge rehabilitation works that are underway. Preliminary information suggests that it will take 3.5 months as the 1.5 km tunnel connecting the turbines (which are on occupied territory) with the dam will undergo “capital repair.” The project’s estimated budget is 27 million GEL and EUR 25 million, money allocated to Official Tbilisi by donor countries.

The de-facto leaders of the occupied territory were informed about the planned rehabilitation in 2018. For 3.5 months, they will be unable to receive free electricity and will have to look for alternative sources. A month ago, in mid-January, the separatists came forward with an initiative to hold a closed meeting with officials from Tbilisi whereby they asked for guarantees, demanding that electricity be supplied. The discussions revolved around importing the energy from Russia and Tbilisi footing the bill. It is unknown if we will need to import that electricity from Russia, but the separatists did get a guarantee that Anklav wouldn’t be left in the dark. We are also unaware of the costs that Georgia will need to cover in order to supply the occupied territory with energy for 3.5 months, but considering the appetite of the separatists, we can image it would equal a few million.

Today, residents of the occupied territories are paying 1 Tetri (40 Russian Kopecks) per 1 kWh, while legal entities pay 3.5 Tetri (85 Kopecks). In the rest of Georgia, the cost of 1 kWh is between 14.5 and 23 Tetri. And since nobody in occupied Abkhazia has paid for electricity for the last 25 years, it shouldn’t be difficult to calculate the colossal expenses that the Georgian annual budget suffers in keeping the occupied territories supplied. Another problem for Georgia is that the use of electricity on those territories is increasing. Today, about 180 thousand people reside in occupied Abkhazia, and the usage of energy per capita equals to that of Belgium and Japan. Recent statistics suggest that the annual usage has reached 2 billion kWh. Strange, isn’t it? How can Japan, being among the top three leading economies in the world, and occupied Abkhazia, with literally no economy at all, use the same amount of energy? It seems that the laws of mathematics don’t work in Anklav and we are dealing with a phenomenon.

The electricity generated from Enguri Dam is lost without trace in Abkhazia, and if we take advantage of our knowledge of the laws of constancy and conservation of energy, we will understand that the only place the energy could be stored is Russia. That same Russia from which we are planning to purchase the energy in spring, which means that we will be paying 10 times more for energy that was produced by Enguri Dam to keep the occupied territory lit.

The fact that providing the occupied territories with free energy can’t last much longer is already being openly discussed in Tbilisi, but Abkhazia doesn’t have enough resources to pay for it and Abkhazian media says that the breakaway regime isn’t planning to allocate the relevant expenses in their annual “budget.”

“As it turns out, Georgia is negotiating with Russia whether or not the latter will supply us with the needed amount of electricity. And who knows at what expense. In light of this, our government does nothing other than talk about its partnership with Russia. What do we need the government for?” – wrote one Abkhazian on social media. Others wrote that Russian military bases are being supplied with energy from Abkhazia, and the voltage is so low that the electric appliances hardly work.

For Official Tbilisi, Enguri Dam is a real dilemma. For them, the events of last year, when the pipeline of one of the turbines broke and the entire occupied territory was saved from a catastrophe only miraculously, it is undeniable that in order to avoid it in future, this rehabilitation is much needed. However, wasting the budget of Georgia is no less of a catastrophe for us. If we continue supplying electricity for free, the Enguri Dam will stop bringing any economic benefits for Georgia, and there will come a day when we will need to examine if it is worth us investing millions of Lari to keep Enguri working. In this current situation, the lifecycle of the dam is getting shorter and shorter. In the end, the costs of its rehabilitation will exceed all limits and neither Georgia nor the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) will consider it worth the investment.
Our Recurrent Educational Vicissitudes

By Ketevan Kvaratskhelia

E ducation per se is a global problem, but in Georgia, it has been one of the acutest issues since the communist era. The Ministry of Education here is a very big deal, and it regularly uses its overwhelming power to introduce changes in the system, maintaining its everlasting authority in dictating to the nation what to learn and how. Meanwhile, the effect is mix, and changes continue from generation to generation and from minister to minister.

Discussions on the topic are ubiquitous, the internet buzzing with comments and families lost in thought. I too am sailing that boat. The other day, I found a couple of minutes of rare leisure time and from minister to minister.

The State is using a lot of taxpayer's money on the primary, middle and higher education of the generations, and it is natural that the State wants to know if spending is justified. Therefore, checking the knowledge and skills of high school graduates seems to be indispensable – you spend money, you want to know what you get for that money. Isn't this natural? On the other hand, a scary number of high-school students fail the obligatory Skills Test, even those who have gone through special drills in the hands of expensive private tutors.

Listening to public comments, one can hear a quite different opinion. Some say the Skills Test is optimal and necessary for the future of our country. Others would try to prove that it is the pant corrupt and unfair test that has ever been invented because kids are tested in matters that are not taught in school; still others would connect the abstraction of the Skills Test with the possibility of reinstating corrupt examinations, and some would substantiate their point with the argument that no good education is possible without enough money to actually run the schools.

Controversy is hot, characteristic for a young and developing democracy like ours, but controversy alone will not save the day. Facts push us to believe that education in Georgia is suffering a sudden and ignominious failure, and faced with this seemingly insurmountable debacle, the nation has to find a way out without delay. The cancellation of the earlier experimental Skills Test might be one endeavor to cope with the difficulty of the situation.

Well, it might work, and it might not, but trying is always good. At least it never hurts. The entire world is living in an educational experiment and only a few nations have had some success in reining in the process and optimizing the results. What do we need our education for after all? Probably, to make a better living, and if this is true, it is worth continuing to experiment with it. It feels good that we are not alone in our confrontation with modern enlightenment demands and exigencies. All the nations of the world are dragging their educational feet in the same boots. What might help here, though, is to know that pumping our kids with the maximum of useful information in the minimum of time and then turning the yielded product into general and private wellbeing so that translation of knowledge into money is recognized as the bottom-line.
Statistics Show Crime on the Rise in Georgia

BY AMY JONES

Statistics published by the Ministry of Internal Affairs have shown an increase in crime in Georgia. The figures released on 6 February show that the number of murders remained unchanged in 2018 compared to 2017. However, there has been an increase in crimes involving bodily harm (14.8%), human rights and freedom violations (23.2%) and crimes against property (8.8%). In particular, reported cases of domestic violence have increased by 22.2%. The Ministry of Internal Affairs believes this to be a result of increased public awareness and confidence in the police.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs has pledged to publish crime statistics monthly, representing improved crime monitoring and government transparency. Until this year, they had not published crime statistics since 2006. "The numbers not only determine the real crime state of the country," reads a statement published by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, "it is important to take the content of registered crime, the practice of crime accounting, police performance indicators and other factors into consideration."

However, some believe that the statistics reveal a crime hike in Georgia. European Georgia, an opposition party, released a statement condemning the ruling party Georgian Dream: "The numbers do not represent the any enforcement at all." Consumers should also be informed about the advantages of energy efficiency. It's important that the market and consumer behavior changes to profit from the possibilities of energy efficiency and the money it can save in the long term. Most countries are hovering just above the least available technologies because that's what consumers see," says Dean. "Consumers buy something that's less efficient if they don't have more information.""Tactics such as energy efficiency labels help to educate and change behavior. "If consumers can see they're paying a product that can save them energy and therefore money, they’re more likely to buy it," says Dean. "That's a real opportunity in Georgia."

Despite its advantages and potential savings, energy efficiency has often been neglected as an effective method to reduce energy consumption. "There's a massive untapped potential that's invisible to most people," says Mayer. "It (energy efficiency) doesn’t get the credit it deserves.""For example, Tbilisi's Mayor, Khalida Kaladze, last week re-zoned one historic apartment block in Tbilisi with little consideration of the energy that was spent to build the original blocks and that will be used to construct new apartments."

The EU4Energy Initiative covers all EU support to improve energy supply, security and connectivity, as well as to promote energy efficiency and the use of renewables in the Eastern Partner countries Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. It does this by financing projects and programmes that help to form energy markets and to reduce national energy dependence and consumption. Over the longer term, this makes energy supply more reliable, transparent and affordable, thus reducing energy poverty and energy bills for both citizens and the public sector. Find out more: www.eu4energy.eu

Luxury French Bakery & Sweet-Maker ‘Ladurée’ Launched in Tbilisi

BY KEKEVAN KVARTSCHHELIYA

One of the most luxurious and historical French bakeries, Ladurée, has entered the Georgian market and welcomed its first guests in February 2019 at 21a Ahashidze Street in Tbilisi. The history of Ladurée began in 1862, when Louis Ernest Ladurée from southwest France opened a bakery in Paris at 16 Rue Royale. Today, it is famous for its incredible assortment of pastries and delicious macaroons. The brand is present in the largest cities around the globe, including London, Milan and Tokyo. The Ladurée team aims to recreate the Parisian air in every branch of the bakery wherever it is in the world. And now, Georgian customers are also being given an opportunity to taste a selection of unique seasonal classic flavors of macaroons and other sweets, and to spend a pleasant time in an authentic, super fascinating French atmosphere.
Illusions Museum to Open in Tbilisi

BY MARIAM MERABISHVILI

This is a space where you can laugh, scream, take pictures and do many other things that are usually forbidden in museums. In the historical and tourist part of Tbilisi, the globally renowned Illusions Museum is to open a branch at 10 Bethlehem Street on March 9. It is set to offer many interesting visual and intellectual experiences, combining perspectives, optical and other types of illusion, and a “play room” where visitors can try out some didactic games.

The first Illusions Museum opened in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, in 2015. This was soon followed by openings in the Zadar Museum, Ljubljana, Vienna, Muscat, Belgrade, Kuala Lumpur, New York, Toronto, Berlin, Athens, Dubai, Hamburg, Kansas, and now Tbilisi makes it 23.

Head along with your kids or friends and learn about human vision, perception and science through the static and interactive installations. The concept of the Illusion Museum is radically different from the classical understanding of the word “museum” and it offers a unique new space that is designed for entertaining cognition. The Illusion Museum’s illusion collection aims to simultaneously encourage an observer, surprise and make them think about their own feelings.

The opening of one in Georgia was thanks to Sarke Group. “Our original idea in 2016 was to set up a ‘Holozeum’, or hologram museum, with co-funding from Startup Georgia,” said Natalie Ananiashvili, Head of Marketing of Sarke Group. “That project was a miniature of what it is today. We chose a museum building and saw that the potential was much greater than just a Holozeum, and so the idea for the Illusion Museum came about.”

She notes that visitors can find out about human vision, perception and science through attractive and entertaining installations.

“The museum also has a gaming room and a souvenir shop where visitors of all ages can play, compete, learn something new and buy original gifts such as fun wooden didactic toys and puzzles that develop and stimulate creativity.

“The museum collection consists of more than 70 exhibits based on knowledge of science, mathematics, biology and psychology. You can find information and explanations about installations next to the exhibits. The narrative language will be Georgian, English and Russian. The technical support for the museum in Tbilisi comes from our Croatian counterparts. The exhibits have already arrived from different cities and are being installed ahead of the March 9th opening,” Ananiashvili says.

The museum is intended for all generations and will have the facilities to host birthday parties for 5-15-year-olds, with a program including a tour of the museum, didactic games and puzzles. Corporate events, meetings and presentations will also be possible.

“The Tbilisi Illusions Museum is part of a global project and does not differ from one country to another,” Ananiashvili notes. “The only difference is in the format size. In relatively small museums, there is naturally not enough space to exhibit every room or attraction that other bigger museums have. Yet the Tbilisi museum format is more than 400 m² and so will offer visitors the complete collection of Illusion Museum exhibits.”
From the Miry Clay: Etseri, Svaneti

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

This is a first. Among our current group of guests for two weeks, seven foreigners based in Tbilisi, are a couple from Nizhniy Novgorod (formerly Gorky), Russia, who have uprooted themselves in the process of meeting some of their Georgian cousins, and resettled in Mtskheta. She is a potter, with dreams of helping to revive this ancient industry and art in the country’s old capital.

And they have brought with them an electric potter’s wheel, proper clay and all the necessary tools! Local children are getting their hands into it with great gusto, hand-building all manner of exotic things and creatures every day after school, and a few of the older ones are also trying their hand at the wheel.

This takes me, too, back to my first ever time at this art. I joined the local Potters’ Guild of my town in Canada, Stony Plain, Alberta, in 1986. A requirement was that every new member take at least one wheel course, and also buy their clay and glazes through the guild, which offered facilities and firing in their big gas-fired kilns. I became an avid potter, as well as a sculptor and founding member of the Sculptors’ Association of Alberta.

I must have had a stroke of beginner’s luck, because after years of watching potters on TV or live, the very first time I sat at a wheel myself, a small stoneware vessel emerged which was good enough to keep. I have it to this day, here at home in Etseri. If anyone else has experienced the sheer magic of not only watching, but successfully centering and making something from a lump of the featureless mass, you know what I’m talking about.

Then the work must be dried slowly enough to prevent cracks, until it reaches the state we call “bone dry”. At this point, however, it can still be broken with ease (being its most fragile), and even dissolved back into a pliable state and reused.

Then comes the bisque or first, low-temperature firing in the kiln, which drives out all the remaining chemical water from the composition of the clay and makes it forever impervious to dissolution in water. Glazes can then be applied, if you like; their colors may be nothing like what the next firing will show. This is usually the final firing, which takes the clay near (but not too near) to its point of vitrification, past which it would melt like glass. For earth-ware, the second firing is still a comparatively low temperature; but both stoneware and the usually translucent porcelain need a much higher second firing, up to 1400 degrees C or 2552 F, to finish them. Now they can—and sometimes do—last many thousands of years, having achieved a composition similar to rock: brittle, but very hard indeed.

I still need to see how the producers of the huge clay kvevrebis, the Georgian wine amphorae sometimes big enough to enter, actually make and then fire them. The center of this process seems to be Shrosha, near the Roki Pass separating eastern from western Georgia, with permanent displays of wares for sale from small cups all the way up to the full-size wine vessels with necks a foot or two across.

As for Georgian art pottery and sculpture, this too has been around for a very long time and awaits discovery by the enthusiast or collector. Ah, so many possibilities, so little time. But I am thrilled that new friends of mine are both introducing local Georgians to these crafts and seeking to reestablish them in their original locations. Projects dear to my heart.

P.S For videos of the children in action, please see the Hanmer Guest House FB page, details below.

Tony Hanmer has lived in Georgia since 1999, in Svaneti since 2007, and been a weekly writer 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 run their own guest house in Etseri:
www.facebook.com/hanmer-house.svaneti
WHAT'S ON IN TBILISI

CINEMA

AMIRANI CINEMA
36 Konstantini St.
TEL (+995 52) 2 99 99 55
www.kinoofushi.ge

Every Wednesday ticket: 5 GEL
February 15-21

ALITA: BATTLE ANGEL
Directed by Robert Rodriguez
Cast: Mahershala Ali, Rosa Salazar, Eiza Gonzalez
Genre: Action, Adventure, Romance
Language: Russian
Start time: 16:45, 20:00
Ticket: 13-14 GEL

CAVEA GALLERY
2/8 Rustaveli Ave.
Every Wednesday ticket: 8 GEL
February 15-21

BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY
Directed by Bryan Singer
Cast: Rami Malek, Joseph Mazzello, Mike Myers
Genre: Biography, Drama, Music
Language: English
Start time: 14:30
Ticket: 11-15 GEL

MUSEUM

GEORGIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM SIMON JANASHIA
3 Rustaveli Ave.
TEL (+995 32) 299 80 22, 293 48 21
www.museum.ge

Exhibitions:
GEORGIAN COSTUME AND WEAPONRY OF THE 8TH-20TH CENTURIES
NUMISMATIC TREASURY
EXHIBITION STONE AGE GEORGIA
ARCHEOLOGICAL TREASURE
NEW LIFE TO THE ORIENTAL COLLECTIONS

Until February 28
In the framework of the celebrations of the European Year of Cultural Heritage in Georgia the Georgian National Museum presents the exhibition WISDOM TRANSFORMED INTO GOLD

MUSEUM OF SOVIET OCCUPATION
3 Rustaveli Ave.
TEL (+995 32) 2 99 80 22, 2 93 48 21
www.museum.ge

December 11 – March 1
Exhibition
RED TERROR AND GEORGIAN ARTISTS

THE NATIONAL GALLERY
II Rustaveli Ave.
TEL (+995 32) 235 73 00

Until October 5
EXHIBITION
MASTERS OF GEORGIAN ART
Paintings of Kirill Zvanezhi, Shalva Kikodze, Ketevan Magalashvili and Eleny Akhvlediani together with Lado Gudashvili’s and David Kakabadze, giving a comprehensive picture of the diversity and aesthetics of Georgian Art.

Until February 24
FELIX VARLAMESHVI (VARLA)
SOLO EXHIBITION

For the first time, enjoy more than 60 artworks by the author from the Georgian National Museum and private collections.

KHIIDI
V Bagrationi Bridge, Right Emb.
Every Tuesday, from 15:00-21:00

Until February 20
Multidisciplinary exhibition project IN-BETWEEN CONDITIONS ‘in-between conditions’ displays 18 work contributions expressing cultural impulses affected by political or social forces.

SOLO LOUNGE
70 I. Abashidze Str.
Solo and Dedicace Gallery present: EXHIBITION HIM & HER

IART GALLERY
13 Uznadze Str.
February 14-26
OLEG TIMCHENKO’S EXHIBITION
POSTCARD

DJ. KAKHIDZE CENTER FOR MUSIC & CULTURE
12a Agmashenebeli Ave.

February 16
THE CONCERT OF ORGAN MUSIC
ALEXANDER VASADZE
Program: Johan Sebastian Bach, David German, Healy Willan and Andrew Lloyd Webber.
Start time: 20:30
Ticket: 12-23 GEL

CAFÉ MIZIURI
Mizouri Park
February 17
SAKVIARO FOR CHILDREN
Start time: From 12:00
Ticket: 13 GEL

ELEKTROWERK
2 Monk Gabriel Salosi I Turn Str.

February 15
MILLENNIAL NIGHT: DECEPTION
Line up:
20:00-00:30 - Downwell
00:30-02:00 - Obsidion
02:00-05:00 - Sarasav
03:00-05:00 - Disorder
05:00-END - Yawohl
Start time: 22:00
Ticket: 10-20 GEL

BASSIANI
2 A. Tseretelli Ave.
February 15
BASSIANI: JEFF MILLS, RANCHELL, KANCHEL, KORONO, MERCURIO, IKA
Start time: 23:00
Ticket: 20-40 GEL
English-Speaking Union Awards Sachcharee teacher as Runner-Up in Global Excellence in Oracy

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

BY KETEVAN KVARASHLIEVA

Todays News Honor List for services to the Our Georgian Today has been announced. In recognition of his long-term commitment to the English language teaching and his work with children, the Union has awarded Sachcharee teacher Ruwan Punchige with the coveted Global Excellence in Oracy Award.

Sachcharee teacher Ruwan Punchige has been a dedicated professional for many years, helping children develop their communication skills and confidence in the English language. His passion for teaching and his innovative approaches have earned him recognition from the English-Speaking Union.

Why did you decide to become an English teacher?

I was fascinated by the power of language and the impact it can have on people’s lives. I wanted to help students develop their communication skills and cultural awareness.

What has been the most rewarding experience of your teaching career?

Seeing my students make progress and see the joy in their faces as they learn and grow has been incredibly rewarding.

What advice do you have for aspiring English teachers?

Be patient, be kind, and above all, be passionate about teaching. Love what you do and your students will love you in return.

What are your future goals as an English teacher?

Continuously learning and growing as a teacher, I aspire to inspire my students to reach their full potential in the English language.

Sachcharee teacher Ruwan Punchige has been inducted into the English-Speaking Union’s Hall of Fame, an honor that recognizes outstanding contributions to the English language and cross-cultural understanding. Sachcharee, a leading international organization, has been promoting the learning of English for nearly 100 years, with the goal of fostering communication and cultural exchange on a global scale.

Prima Ballerina Nino Ananiashvili on the State Ballet’s New Program & Kekura

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

BY LIKA CHIGADZE

The Georgian State Ballet, led by Prima Ballerina Nino Ananiashvili, is to deliver a new program for the Tbilisi Opera and Ballet State Theater from 27 February to 30 June, promising distinguished productions as well as old favorites. The state ballet ensemble is currently touring Kiev, presenting a modern program to the Ukrainian audience.

Ananiashvili, a world-famous Prima Ballerina who was named among the 12 Greatest Ballerinas of All Time by The Telegraph, is met with grand celebration and admiration in many countries, where she was awarded Japan’s Order of the Rising Sun and has been directing the Georgian troupe since 2000.

Before they headed off to Kiev, GEORGIA TODAY was able to get a peek inside the opera and attend one of the rehearsals. We were warmly welcomed by the Prima Ballerina who gave us an insight into the Georgian ballet and upcoming productions.

“We have prepared a contemporary program for our Kiev tour that includes Jiri Kylians Petite Mort, Sachi Tsunai and Falling Angels, and Moshik, Waleri’s Petite Cérémonie,” said Nino. “Although all members of the ensemble are classical ballet dancers, including such homegrown talents as Kha Surmava, Nino, they have grown talents as Eka Surmava, Nutsa Gubanishvili, Ketevan Kvaratskheliya.

“Many dancers from different countries come to Georgia to be trained here, and we have created a different kind of ensemble that serves as a great stimulus,” Nino tells us. “We have dancers from Japan, the UK, Brazil, Greece, the USA and Korea. We have a lack of Georgian male dancers, and I would like to say a few words about the Georgian male dancers, and the emphasis that this is very masculine profession that requires hard work and commitment. Ballet is a highly-appreciated field and it has immense potential all over the world!”

TELL US ABOUT THE NEW PROGRAM OF THE GEORGIAN STATE BALLET.

In the 1990s, Georgia experienced hard times due to political upheaval, which is why we did not have time to perform. But now, we have many more performances, and ballet and opera enthusiasts can purchase season tickets to attend our performances and bring their kids as well.

TODAY: We have a new program with varied productions, including Laurencia by Vakhtang Chabukiani, The Sleeping Beauty and Romeo and Juliet. A lot of people living abroad told us to try to plan their trips to Georgia around our ballet shows, so we try to publish the agenda well ahead of time. And now theater and ballet enthusiasts can purchase season tickets to attend our performances and bring their kids as well.

ANYTHING ELSE TO ADD?

I’d like to say a big thank you to the friends of the Georgian Ballet. It was established 10 years ago and counts wives of foreign diplomats serving in Georgia and other foreign ballet lovers.

From time to time, they attend our rehearsals and they assist us in many ways, be it festivals, competitions or scholarships for our students to study abroad. They are great supporters. Our foreign audience is very active and loves and appreciates our performances. We, the whole team, work hard to exceed their expectations. Although currently we are doing well, I want our theater to have many more performances in the program to grab the growing interest and demand. Ballet and opera are fields of art that need no language, meaning anyone can enjoy them. So apart from sightseeing and sampling local food, we invite foreign guests to experience this part of our culture, like tourists to go to Scala or buy ticket in advance to get into the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden. When all the tickets are sold, it’s a great joy and stimulus for the troupe and dancers.

Each spectator who buys a ticket is a friend of the Georgian State Ballet and we are invited to tour the world with our theater today.”
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