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## FOCUS

### ON WORLD HEALTH

Acknowledging the dedication and professionalism of Georgia's healthcare workers when responding to the challenges of COVID-19

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Image source: National Library of Georgia

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## How Beeline is Dealing with the Impact of COVID-19

INTERVIEW

Companies country- and worldwide are struggling to cope with the spread of COVID-19, from protecting their staff to keeping their clients happy, supplied and comfortable. With those challenges in mind, GEORGIA TODAY sat down with Andrzej Malinowski, Chief Executive Officer at Veon Georgia, to find out how one telecommunications company has been dealing with the crisis.

### HOW DID THE REALITY AT BEELINE CHANGE WITH THE SPREAD OF THE NOVEL CORONAVIRUS IN THE COUNTRY?

If we look at the company as at a living thing, which in fact it is, I would emphasize two aspects of the change: the spirit of our company is digital, so it was not much of a change in this regard when we decided to take our work home, as we've been working from any convenient location for a long time now, while the body of our company, in the sense of the teams working in all our locations: head office, corporate sales office, call center, data center, retail network, was really comfortably located in these offices. With pandemic spread it was the soul,



this digital part of our way of work, that played a dominant role. We decided to switch to fully remote work at the early stage of the outbreak, and thanks to that amazingly fast execution, absolutely every single Beeline employee who can work from home was transferred to remote work. I would like to underline one really important matter though: our industry requires some of our team members to work outside

(not from home, not from the office) no matter what. Network maintenance has to be managed "hands on" by our engineers. Those colleagues of ours are unsung heroes of the pandemic and I would like to use this opportunity to express my appreciation and respect. We've been doing everything we can to keep them safe as they do their jobs.

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# Daily Signal: Georgia is America's Proven Ally in Fighting Common Challenges

BY GT TEAM

The Daily Signal, the American political media news website, has devoted an article to the important partnership between the US and Georgia.

"The South Caucasus nation of Georgia has become an important partner for the United States on a range of critical global issues," claims the author of the article, Anthony B. Kim, who is a researcher of international economic issues at The Heritage Foundation.

"The small but strategically located nation is on the front lines of efforts to contain Russian expansionism, and has contributed thousands of troops to support US efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Now, the country is partnering with the US in the fight against the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic," the author further notes.

In addition, he emphasizes the importance of the Richard G. Lugar Center for Public Health Research in this partnership.

Central to that partnership is the Richard G. Lugar Center for Public Health Research—a US-funded research lab on the outskirts of the nation's capital, Tbilisi—which was founded 'with the aim of limiting the spread of disease in the region and dealing with deadly patho-

gens left over from the Soviet Union's bio-warfare program.' In operation since 2013, the lab has now become a key resource in the fight against the coronavirus, 'testing hundreds of samples and turning results around in under 24 hours.'

In the author's words, "the practical health partnership between the United States and Georgia has had broad benefits for the people of a country that is growing fast but remains one of the poorest in Europe."

As highlighted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2019, "Despite the challenges of rebuilding after the fall of the Soviet Union... Georgia has persevered and has become a model country for public health and global health security."

In dealing with the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, as US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degnan recently pointed out, Georgia has taken proactive steps to "contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus and minimize its impacts."

As of today, Georgia has only three fatalities from the pandemic.

"As in past crises and challenges, Georgia is proving in the current pandemic to be a dependable ally for the United States. Located at the strategic geopolitical crossroads of Europe and Asia, the country stands out as one of the most notable emerging economies in the world," the article further reads.

Since 1996, when The Heritage Founda-



Image Source: The Daily Signal

tion began including the country in its annual Index of Economic Freedom, the Georgian economy has moved up from the ranks of economically "repressed" to "mostly free."

According to the latest edition of the index, Georgia's economic freedom score is well above the regional and world averages, and multiyear reforms to open markets, cut regulation, and simplify taxes

have led to the modernization and upgrade of the country's economic system.

In fact, the country this year replaced the United States as the 12th-freest in the world.

The author emphasizes that this is an important year for Georgia-US cooperation, with a number of significant economic projects, including the construction of a stalled deep water port on

the Black Sea, a possible free trade agreement between the two countries, and ongoing efforts to deepen defense ties, both bilaterally and through NATO.

"America's enduring relationship with Georgia, based on shared values and common interests, is strong and highly beneficial to both countries," the author concludes.

. Author: Anthony B. Kim, The Daily Signal



## An Open Letter to the Gov't & People of Georgia

The COVID-19 pandemic and associated economic crisis is unfolding at an unprecedented pace and has pushed the world economy into a recession. The impact will be worse than the global financial crisis and economic damage is mounting across all countries. As an open economy that relies on tourism, trade, and remittances, Georgia is particularly vulnerable to this pandemic.

The Georgian authorities, stakeholders across the public and private sectors, and the Georgian people have responded in an extraordinarily resilient and cooperative manner. Swift and decisive actions from the onset have proven critical in

containing the virus' spread so far and have since received well-deserved international praise. Support schemes for business and vulnerable groups have been initiated and recovery plans are being designed. Fiscal prudence and the buildup of reserves in recent years make the Georgian economy better prepared to address the economic impact of the crisis. Combined with a legacy of structural reform achievements, a strong response without jeopardizing the country's future is now possible.

Nonetheless, given the unprecedented nature of this crisis, major investments and financial support will be needed to properly equip the health sector for the

challenges ahead, leave no one behind, support vulnerable business and households to withstand the shock, continue vital infrastructure investments, bridge the gap in the country's finances, and prepare for recovery towards economic resilience.

To overcome this pandemic, we need a coordinated health, social, and economic policy response. We, the Asian Development Bank, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the European Union and the European Investment Bank, the Federal Republic of Germany through KfW, the French Republic through the Agence

française de Développement, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank Group are working together to ensure rapid support to Georgia and are currently discussing a substantial financial relief package to help the authorities respond effectively to this unprecedented crisis. Many other development partners are similarly preparing support packages for the people of Georgia.

As Georgia's Coat of Arms so appropriately puts it, there is truly 'strength in unity'!

Selim Cakir, Resident Representative for Georgia International Monetary Fund; H. E. Diégo Colas, Ambassador of the French Republic to Georgia; Maciej

Czura, Head of Regional Representation for the South Caucasus European Investment Bank; Catarina Bjorlin Hansen, Regional Director, Caucasus European Bank for Reconstruction and Development; H.E. Carl Hartzell, Ambassador, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Georgia; H.E. Hubert Knirsch, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Georgia; Sebastian Molineus, Regional Director for the South Caucasus World Bank; Shane Rosenthal, Country Director for Georgia Asian Development Bank; Supee Teravaninthorn, Director General, Investment Operations Department - Region II Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

## How Beeline is Dealing with the Impact of COVID-19

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### HOW DID BEELINE RESPOND TO THE PREVENTION OF THE SPREAD?

The most important part was to implement measures to protect our team: ultimately, we moved all our people to remote work. As long as the stores were open, all the necessary equipment was provided to our retail teams across the country to minimize the risk for them and for our customers visiting the stores. Now, with stores closed, we encourage our customers to stay home and use our digital channels - the MyBeeline application with more than 1 million downloads is in fact our store inside the phone. Our customers have all the services at their fingertips. Moreover, using the MyBeeline app gives our customers access to products available inside the application only. The same with our most recently completely redesigned website. In other words, Beeline

customers don't even have to go to street terminals to pay for services: everything can be done from the app. Our application even works when the phone is offline and when there is no money on the balance. Some of the other popular applications, of banks for instance, are also "zero rated" so our customers can use those without internet consumption. It's our way of saying: stay home, stay safe.

### WHAT ARE SOME OF THE INITIATIVES YOU ARE SUPPORTING BOTH WITH YOUR EVERYDAY ACTIVITIES AND OUTSIDE THE USUAL BUSINESS?

After numerous countries declared a lockdown of their airspace, many of our customers got stuck abroad with limited chance of communication with loved ones back home. Within hours, already working from home, our business operations team and roaming specialists created free internet pack-

ages for those subscribers, so they could stay in touch. As a foreigner living in Georgia and having my entire family in Poland, these kind of actions really appeal to me on a personal level, but what matters most is that we were the first to reach out to our customers with help. It made me really proud to see how we've reacted. We made governmental hotlines toll free for our customers: we know how important it is to have quick access to credible information, so calling COVID hotlines is free for Beeline customers. We all share our admiration for the Georgian medical personnel, the true heroes of the pandemic, and we were searching for a way to support them in the most direct way possible: to identify an actual problem those extremely hard working people face, and solve it. It turned out that with public transportation restrictions, many of the medical personnel struggled to make it to their place of work - hospitals and other medical

facilities. We promptly contacted a transportation company and arranged minivans to pick up nurses from their homes and transport them to the hospital and back home after work. It's a small way to express our appreciation to the medical community.

### WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE ROLE OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS DURING THIS CRISIS?

Connectivity is the name of our business: telecom companies keep people connected. Our key role is to do everything we possibly can to ensure connectivity, and we are determined to do so.

### IS THERE ANYTHING THAT THE CRISIS HAS TAUGHT YOU SO FAR? SOME NOTABLE OBSERVATIONS?

On a personal level, I think the biggest lesson is how weak we humans are versus nature, but on a more positive note:

how much we can achieve as a society when the actions are smart, well planned, well-coordinated and well-executed. I'm impressed with the discipline of the vast majority of Georgians and with the way this enormous crisis was approached by the respective authorities. From a professional perspective, I'm proud of each and every one of my teammates: we continue serving our customers in times of massive challenge, we've been doing this from day one of the outbreak and we will not stop until we are back to normal. Last but definitely not least, I'm really happy to know the vast majority of the Beeline team is not exposed to risk, because of their work: whoever can work from home, works from home. Those staying at home and not working have a lot possibilities to grow their skills, and our online learning platform SaVVy is accessible from any location and I'm glad to see many of my colleagues using it. We will survive this and come back stronger.

# COVID-19 in Georgia: The Legal Issues You Need to Know

**M** G Law Office, through the contribution of partners Archil Giorgadze and Nicola Mariani, joined by senior associates Ana Kochiashvili, Tamar Jikia, associate Mariam Kalandadze, Junior Associate Ana Jikia and Paralegal Lasha Machavariani is partnering with GEORGIA TODAY on a regular section of the paper which will provide updated information regarding significant legal changes and developments in Georgia. In particular, we will highlight significant issues which may impact businesses operating in Georgia.

Today the world is facing a global challenge that it must overcome promptly to prevent the further spread of the novel virus COVID-19 ("COVID"). The outbreak of COVID first occurred in Wuhan, China in 2019, and has spread worldwide since. On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID to be a pandemic.

The first confirmed case of the spread of COVID in Georgia was identified on 26 February 2020 and since then the number of patients has increased although at rates lower than some of the hardest hit countries. This triggered the adoption of several corresponding governmental regulations to prevent the spread of COVID. On 21 March 2020, the President of Georgia adopted Decree No. 1, which was later approved by the Parliament of Georgia and which declared a state of emergency on the whole territory of Georgia until 21 April 2020 (the "State Emergency Decree").

The State Emergency Decree restricts the following rights guaranteed by the Constitution of Georgia: (i) human liberty; (ii) freedom of movement; (iii) right to personal and family privacy; (iv) right to fair administrative proceedings; (v) right to property; (vi) freedom of assembly; and (vii) freedom of enterprise. The State Emergency Decree stipulates that specific limitations to the above listed rights will be provided by the decree of the Government of Georgia (the "GoG"). On 23 March 2020, the GoG issued Ordinance N181 regarding Approval of Measures to be Taken for the Prevention of Spreading of the New COVID-19 (the Ordinance on COVID-19). Since its adoption, the Ordinance on COVID-19 has been amended multiple times to address the rapid changes and challenges of the existing situation in the country.

The GoG has recently strengthened the security measures and established the Operations Office to be able to better respond to the spread of COVID. The Operations Office will be authorized to establish exceptions to certain restrictions established by the Ordinance on COVID-19. The head of the Operations Office will be appointed and its regulations will be adopted by the Prime Minister of Georgia.

While the GoG takes steps to prevent the spread of COVID, restrictive measures have put a strain on businesses, preventing them from being able to satisfy their obligations under contracts. This article aims to provide answers to frequently asked questions and provides general guidance on legal issues around the COVID-19 pandemic.



Negotiations should be carried out in good faith with the aim of preserving the agreement



## GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATIONS

In light of the above restrictions, businesses are suffering major losses as forced closure of businesses have significantly disrupted their processes and have put performance of contractual rights and obligations under question. Therefore, frequently asked questions in these cases relate to force majeure clauses or other provisions or legal concepts that companies may rely on to avoid defaults on their contractual obligations.

The answer to these questions depends on the particular circumstances and the drafting of the relevant contractual provisions. Due to lack of similar events having taken place previously, there is little to take from experience on how to handle business relationships during epidemics or pandemics. The obvious route would be engagement in direct negotiations with contractual parties with a view of reaching mutual understanding. If such negotiations are successful, it could result in a better position for both parties as they will avoid litigation costs and termination of the contract.

The parties could agree on any commercially acceptable outcome, including extension of performance deadlines, temporary suspension of contract, reduction of price or even termination of the contract. Before proceeding with negotiations, the businesses would be advised to: first, examine the relevant contract, second, evaluate its options and third, seek legal advice, if necessary. Depending on the outcome of the parties' negotiations, legally effective and enforceable agreements may be required to document the terms reached in those negotiations.

The threat of default on their obligations has become a real risk for businesses, especially ones subject to forced closure. Accordingly, we are seeing contractual parties invoking two major concepts to address this risk: force majeure and adaptation of contracts to the changed circumstances.

## FORCE MAJEURE AND THE EFFECT OF COVID-19

Force majeure refers to a defense under which a party may be relieved from liability for non-performance if unforeseeable circumstances beyond the party's control prevent or delay the party from fulfilling its obligations under a contract. In Georgia, force majeure clauses may be explicitly set forth in a contract, but it can also be invoked as a matter of Georgian law.

Contractual Clauses: The specific contractual provisions shall be reviewed first to determine whether COVID-19

rises to the level of a force majeure event. The clause may specifically name epidemics or pandemics as events of force majeure or provide a general list of events. It is a question of interpretation of the clause whether the parties intended the present events to be covered.

In addition, any procedural requirements established under the contract must be followed, such as a requirement to give notice of its intention to rely on the clause to the other party within particular timescales, including any formalities required for the service of notices. Some clauses may also require updates to be provided and/or an express obligation to mitigate.

Force Majeure under Georgian Law: The Georgian law does not expressly define the notion of force majeure. The Georgian Civil Code (the GCC) provides a similar notion of "overwhelming force," which is treated as a synonym of the notion of force majeure by Georgian courts and commentators. The Georgian courts construe Article 401 of the GCC as a provision containing the overwhelming force/force majeure rule. The case law of the Georgian courts suggests that such impediment to the performance of a party's obligation under Article 401 of the GCC is (i) beyond parties' control and will, (ii) is extreme and inevitable by its nature, (iii) was not foreseeable at the time the contract was made, and (iv) materially influences or makes it impossible to perform contractual obligations in due time.

Given the unprecedented nature of the virus outbreak and/or the actions of governments around the world in response, it is likely that the virus would constitute a force majeure event, since by its nature it is extreme and inevitable; it is beyond the parties' control and was not foreseeable in terms of those contracts that were concluded prior to the outbreak of the virus. The material influence or impossibility of the performance of the obligations should be assessed on a case-by-case basis. If the imposed restrictions prevent the party from fulfilling contractual obligations, the virus could qualify as a force majeure.

Notably, it is for the party seeking to rely on a force majeure clause for non-performance or late performance to satisfy a court or other tribunal that this is the effect of the clause. In unprecedented circumstances like the present, the courts may declare that a particular event, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, is a force majeure event faced by the parties, who have encountered genuine difficulties in performing their obligations. However, as noted, such parties will still need to show that their non-performance, or late performance, was

truly outside their control and could not have been prevented or mitigated.

It is noteworthy that the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) issues assessments of specific events. Namely, CCI studies the relevant application and issues its assessment within 10 business days, unless additional documents are requested. Assessment of CCI is based on the specific facts of each case and will either confirm or deny the existence of force majeure events over a specific period of time. The service fee is at least GEL500 and could be higher in certain cases. CCI's assessment is only one of the forms of evidence that may be submitted to a court. It may have a higher weight as evidence; however, it is not an absolute guarantee that the defaulting party will be released from liability due to force majeure.

Consequences of Force Majeure: The purpose of the force majeure clause is to exempt the party from liability for the non-compliance or delayed performance of its contractual obligations. The particular effect of the force majeure depends on the impact of the force majeure on the affected party's ability to perform its contractual obligations.

If a party has been impacted by the pandemic and ensuing governmental restrictions, it may be entitled to (i) unilaterally avoid performance thereof and terminate the contract, if performance is no longer possible or the non-defaulting party has lost interest in performance; or (ii) extend the time for performance established under the contract and perform the primary obligation after the force majeure events end. If the party shows that their non-performance, or late performance, was truly outside their control and could not have been prevented or mitigated, it is excused due to overwhelming force/force majeure and the other party to the contract cannot have a claim arising out of the breach of the contract, including a claim for penalties or damages.

## FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE OF CIRCUMSTANCES

The unprecedented nature of the outbreak, as well as the restrictions that followed, have placed contractual parties under different circumstances compared to those that existed at the time when they entered into a particular contract. Georgian law envisages a particular remedy in these situations and allows parties to request a renegotiation of the terms of the contract. The nature of this remedy is to help the party whose conditions have worsened to achieve those economic results from the contract that it would have achieved had the circumstances remained unaltered. The aim is not avoidance of performance, rather facilitation to reach a mutually beneficial solution.

The remedy is set out in Article 398 of the GCC, according to which if the circumstances that constituted grounds of conclusion of a contract change, or if the understandings which constituted the grounds for the conclusion of the contract prove to be wrong, the party for whom such changed circumstances has a detrimental effect is entitled to request from the other party adjustment of the contract to these changed circumstances.

Requirements to Rely on this Remedy: According to the case law of the courts of Georgia, a party may request adjustment of the contract to changed circumstances if the following criteria are met:

- such change of circumstances occurred after conclusion of the contract;
- the change of circumstances could not have been foreseen and it was beyond the control of the party requesting amendment of the contract;
- the changed circumstances extremely aggravate the performance of the contract;
- causal link exists between the change of circumstances and the complication



In unprecedented circumstances like these, the courts may declare the COVID-19 pandemic a force majeure event

of aggravation of performance; and e) a risk for change of circumstance shall not be allocated to any of the parties under the contract.

Procedures for Relying on Article 398: A claim regarding adjustment of the contract due to a fundamental change of circumstances should be made immediately after such circumstances occur and the failure of a party to initiate renegotiation may cause the unenforceability of their right.

The amendments to the contract may have a specific time duration, depending on how long the grounds mandating such amendments last. The clear example of such "special" period would be the duration of a state of emergency and the related restrictions. The parties to the contract are free to make any mutual amendments. However, as a general rule, the idea of negotiations shall be the solution of consequences suffered by the party due to fundamental changes of circumstances. The negotiations should be carried out in good faith with the aim of preserving the agreement. If a party uses the existing situation to trade for benefits that are not related to the changed circumstances, such party may be considered not to be negotiating in good faith.

In case it is established that the fundamental change of circumstances occurred, but the parties cannot adjust the contract, or the other party refuses to adjust its terms, then the party relying on Article 398 may terminate the contract.

\* \* \*

In light of the present circumstances amid the spread of the virus, it is strongly advisable that the arising contractual issues be resolved amicably. The respective legal mechanisms discussed above should be implemented with great diligence. It is highly recommended to explore other routes and remedies, either under contract or through variations to contracts with other parties, and to seek legal advice early, since determining the effect of these mechanisms is a highly fact-sensitive exercise.

\* \* \*

Note: this article does not constitute legal advice. You are responsible for consulting with your own professional legal advisors concerning specific circumstances for your business.

MG Law is the first full-service law firm in Georgia to be founded by international partners. The firm advises a diverse group of Georgian and foreign companies, financial institutions, investment funds, governments and public enterprises. Among many other areas, the firm primarily focus on the following sectors: Banking & Finance, Capital Markets, Arbitration & Litigation, Labor & Employment, Infrastructure and Project Finance, Energy Law, Real Estate, Tax and Customs, Investment Law, Corporate Law, and Cryptocurrency & Blockchain.

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# NATO Membership: The Macedonian Experience



INTERVIEW BY VAZHA TAVBERIDZE

As the North Atlantic Alliance welcomed Macedonia as its 30th member country, The Georgian Institute for Security Policy spoke to Professor Alexander Natsev in Skopje to discuss the both the journey and future implications that Macedonia's NATO membership entails. Our first question concerned Georgia. We asked: While Georgia and Georgians would no doubt heartily congratulate you and your country on its accession, they might still wonder when their time will come. We don't differ much in democracy rankings and reforms, and Georgia has put in a considerable shift in Afghanistan and Iraq. But despite that hard work, we still seem to be unable to step into NATO's open door. What's your take on this?

"That's a pretty good question," Natsev

answered. "It should be looked into via a geopolitical context. I know Georgia is pretty active in a lot of peace operations; one of the biggest contingents in Afghanistan actually came from Georgia, and there was always an offer to enlarge this contingent, to send even more soldiers. I think the open door policy of NATO still stands, but the allies have to take into account numerous geopolitical implications; Georgia's proximity to Russia and everything that happened is a serious obstacle to proceeding forward; its close proximity to Russia puts it in a Russian area of influence for some allied countries. The answer to your question is that Georgia is mainly suffering for geopolitical reasons. That is why it is not yet a NATO country, which also applied to us because if we had not had this political problem with Greece, we would have become a member in 2008."

**MORE THAN TWO-DECADES OF WAITING AND FINALLY, YOU'RE**

**A NATO MEMBER. WHAT'S THE FEELING INSIDE THE COUNTRY?**

Indeed, we have been waiting 27 years for it. It started in 1993 with the unanimous decision of the Republic of Macedonia to join NATO. And today there's a wide political, social consensus in our society; the vast majority of political parties are for NATO and EU membership. Maybe there was a slight disappointment in the country in 2008, you know, the Bucharest Summit, when we were blocked by Greece and we did not become a member, despite us probably being the most prepared country to join.

**GREECE HASN'T CHANGED ITS STANCE REGARDING THE NAME OF THE COUNTRY. DOES THE PRICE THAT YOUR COUNTRY HAD TO PAY WEIGH HEAVILY ON MACEDONIAN SOCIETY'S MIND?**

After the Bucharest Summit in 2011, we made a case at the International Court

of Justice in the Hague and in 2011 the court ruled in favor that Greece had violated the interim accord which was signed between our two countries in 1996 and which stated that Greece would not block Macedonia's accession into international organizations. The ICJ reached a verdict which said explicitly that Greece had no right to block the accession to NATO in 2008. But still it was just a judicial decision and had no political implications; so we had to wait until 2018 when we signed the Prespa agreement which actually resolved the naming issue and we had the opportunity to continue our NATO integration process. What is interesting here is that before the agreement was signed, there was a massive campaign from the government which is still ruling, that there should be a referendum; most people boycotted it and it failed; but then the government tried to find a 2/3 majority in parliament for the agreement to be adopted with Greece. They pushed and finally got 81 votes; that's how this agreement came to life; there was a big disappointment, there was a massive protest against the decision, but it was recognized by the international community. The opposition, however, claims that this agreement contains too many concessions and when they come to power they will try to rectify some of these injustices. To be frank, that agreement was made in a pretty exhibitionist manner by the ruling party because they had no strategy to solve the problem.

**WHAT DO YOU EXPECT RUSSIA'S REACTION WILL BE AT SEEING YET ANOTHER BALKAN COUNTRY ACCEDING INTO NATO? DO YOU EXPECT ANY REPERCUSSIONS?**

No. Since they enjoy a rather limited influence here, they have been quite diplomatic when it comes to this matter.

Earlier this year, there were some leaked documents which came from a meeting between the representatives of the MFA and the previous Russian ambassador; he was heard speaking harshly about our joining NATO, future implications, and that it will be a legitimate target for Russia's operations. But I expect nothing significant because Russia does not have a lot of backing here in the public; they have an embassy with a small number of staff but not a lot of diplomats. In essence, they did not and do not have a voice to share with the public about our NATO enlargement. So, no, we don't expect things to get complicated in that matter with Russia.

**HOW DOES MACEDONIA BECOMING A NATO MEMBER COUNTRY AFFECT THE BALKAN SECURITY ARCHITECTURE?**

I think in the Balkans, the situation is not going to change drastically because fortunately most of our neighboring countries are already NATO members: Albania is a member, Greece is, Bulgaria is. Only Serbia has declared it is not seeking NATO membership but their strategic objective is to be NATO's partner; Croatia is here, Slovenia is here; almost all the countries and regional powers. Turkey is also a member; Bosnia is an official partner; so when it comes to the region, I think everyone here is pro-NATO, apart from Serbia because of their bitter history with bombings and the fact they still can't get public support to ask for NATO membership. In terms of the changing security architecture here, I'm not expecting any big changes.



## Kutaisi Mayor Steps Down



BY ANA DUMBADZE

Kutaisi Mayor Giorgi Chighvaria has resigned. He posted the respective statement on social media, announcing his decision to leave politics.

"In November 2017, by the decision of a large part of the Kutaisi population, I was honored to become the

elected mayor of Kutaisi. It was great confidence, as well as a huge responsibility. Since then, my team and I have launched many important projects and completed many of them. Even though my term of office is not over yet, I decided to step down and leave politics. However, I will not leave my city and I will remain its big supporter. I would like to thank my fellow citizens for their trust. I wish good luck, peace and success to my city!" reads the statement.

## Atlantico: Georgia's Positive Development Must Be Recognized & Encouraged

BY ANA DUMBADZE

Atlantico, a French news website, has published an article in which it emphasizes that the European Union, despite its internal dissensions, must not forget that it must encourage economic and democratic stability at its borders. The author of the article, Bruno Alomar, discusses the example of Georgia.

"Allow me to highlight a very particular example, that of Georgia. Of course, it would be self-evident to stress the geostrategic importance of the Black Sea, at the EU's doorstep. Such is the evidence that in August 2016 it gave rise to the so-called "3 Seas Initiative" (Adriatic, Baltic, Black) in order for its 12 members, under Washington's favorable eye, to limit Russian influence in the region and to cooperate in the fields of energy and transport. At a time when the EU has, for the time being, given up negotiating a comprehensive trade agreement with both China and the United States, it should be recalled that it has a DFTA (Deep Free Trade Agreement) with Georgia which provides for close economic cooperation between the two players," the author notes.

The article further underlines the desire expressed by the Georgian authorities, including President Salome Zurbishvili, at the highest level to become a member of the EU.

"Beyond the past and the wishes of the



Source: Atlantico. Image: © TIMOTHY A. CLARY / AFP

Georgian authorities relayed by a pro-European population, without prejudging what future relations with the EU will be, it is not useless to look at the performance of a country like Georgia. They are rather flattering, both economically and politically," reads the publication.

The author claims that economically, Georgia can be proud of its performance, which has improved significantly in recent years, as the World Bank's assessment shows.

The measures taken by the Georgian Dream led Government have drastically reduced its poverty rate from 32.5% in 2006 to 16.3% in 2017. More significantly, the improvement of the World Bank's "doing business" indicator ranks Georgia 7th in the world.

"At the political level, the progress made in recent years has been significant. A key point to remember is the significant reduction in corruption.

According to the Business Anti-Corruption Portal (an NGO funded by the European Commission, the German-Nordic EU countries, and which serves as a reference for international organizations), "corruption presents a very low risk for foreign companies wishing to invest in Georgia". It is also not neutral to point out that according to the Corruption Perception Index (NGO Transparency International), in 2019, and with general elections to be held in 2020, Georgia is at the same level as EU states such as Poland or the Czech Republic, and well ahead of EU candidates (Serbia, Albania and Kosovo)," reads the article.

The author concludes: "From all this a conclusion emerges. The EU, all to its internal dissensions, must not forget that it must encourage economic and democratic stability on its borders. The positive development of a country like Georgia must be understood, recognized and encouraged."

# Georgia's Trade & the First Great World Pandemic: the Bubonic Plague of AD 541-544

BY EMIL AVDALIANI

**A**s the world continues to experience deep negative effects of the novel Coronavirus, it is interesting to look at various global pandemics which affected Georgia.

The first great pandemic, which is well documented in historical sources, is the bubonic plague, also referred to as the "Plague of Justinian" or the "Justinianic Plague" which occurred in AD 541 and essentially had several consecutive outbreaks throughout next several centuries. It is thought the plague originated in the territory of modern day Ethiopia and then spread to the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantine Empire) reaching Constantinople (the capital of the empire) in 541, before moving out into the rest of the Empire.

We have a detailed account of the suffering and the extent of the plague written by 6th century historian Procopius of Caesarea. In one of the sections of his History of Wars, Procopius described the symptoms of the disease in the following manner:

"But with the majority it came about that they were seized by the disease without becoming aware of what was coming either through a waking vision or a dream. ... They had a sudden fever, some when just roused from sleep, others while walking about, and others while otherwise engaged, without any regard to what they were doing. And the body showed no change from its previous colour, nor was it hot as might be expected when attacked by a fever, nor indeed did any inflammation set in, but the fever was of such a languid sort

from its commencement and up till evening that neither to the sick themselves nor to a physician who touched them would it afford any suspicion of danger. It was natural, therefore, that not one of those who had contracted the disease expected to die from it. But on the same day in some cases, in others on the following day, and in the rest not many days later, a bubonic swelling developed; and this took place not only in the particular part of the body which is called boubon, that is, "below the abdomen," but also inside the armpit, and in some cases also beside the ears, and at different points on the thighs."

The "Justinianic Plague" impacted the whole Byzantine Empire. As this was the period of great conquest of North Africa, Italy and parts of Spain led by Justinian's generals, the empire constantly needed fresh troops to be sent for the defense of newly-recovered territories. The plague killed the population in their tens of thousands, and many scholars suspect an even bigger impact. It is also likely that food production across the empire was severely damaged. The disruption led to the military and economic weakening of the Eastern Roman Empire.

The modern day Georgian territory represented one of the primary regions of competition in the 6th century. The great war of 541-562 was waged in/over Lazica, what is nowadays western Georgia. Surprisingly, we do not have written sources indicating the spread of the pandemic on the eastern Black Sea shore. However, it is plausible that the disease would have entered the region via the high mobility of people transferring the infection, among them Byzantine troops.

Moreover, the modern western Georgian territory also represented an important trade outpost, and as the history of major pandemics shows, trade ports and vessels, along with merchants, represented the easiest way to spread diseases. Various written sources indicate that Lazic merchants had close contacts with ports in Asia Minor.



The "Justinianic Plague" impacted the whole Byzantine Empire. Image source: Medievalists.net

Trade was indeed the easiest and quick-

est way to spread infections, in this case the bubonic plague. Moreover, Georgia of the time was also one of the economic outposts between the Black Sea region and the Eurasian steppes, where the Byzantines had close economic contact with the Sogdian merchants, people living in Central Asia with a powerful merchant class spanning the northern Eura-

sian plains. There is even archaeological evidence of Sogdian products, found in the northern Caucasus and on the eastern Black Sea shore.

Thus, it is likely that the bubonic plague reached the western Georgian territory, as the latter was a focus of imperial competition as well as active trade relations.

## Innova Invitro The Place Where Parenting Dreams Come True



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# ISET ECONOMIC INDICATORS



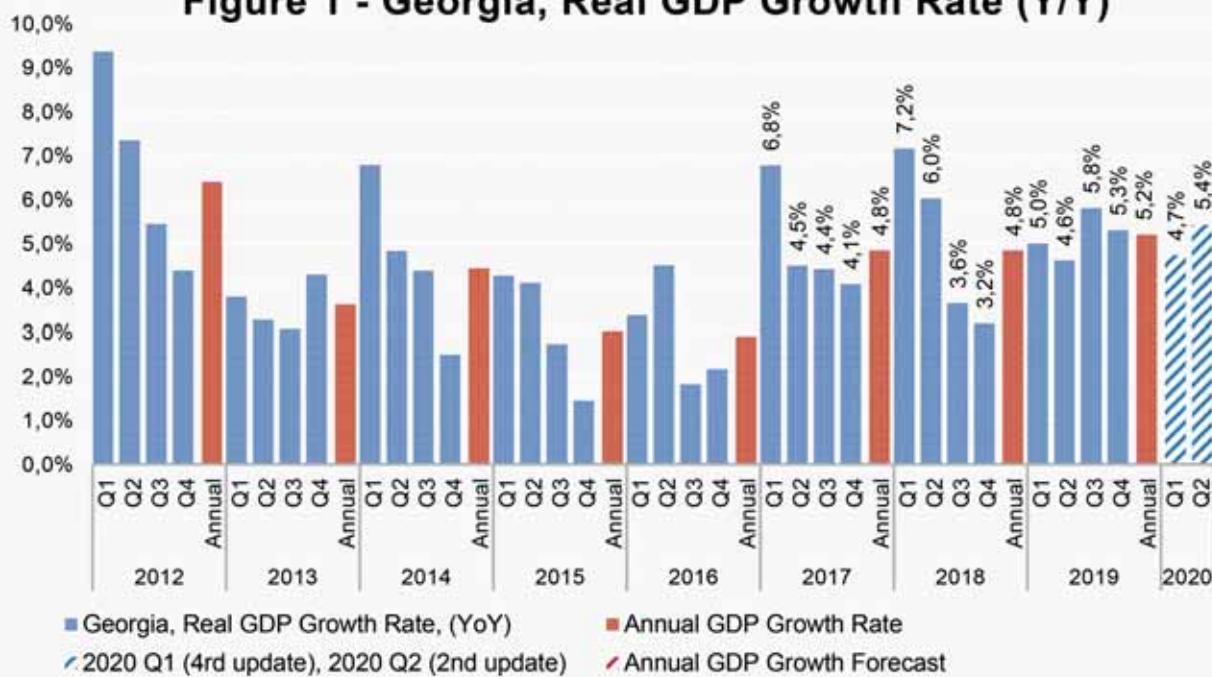
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GDP FORECAST

For more: [WWW.ISET-PI.GE](http://WWW.ISET-PI.GE)

## Georgia's Growth Prospects before COVID-19, & How Things Might Change

Figure 1 - Georgia, Real GDP Growth Rate (Y/Y)



Scenario 1: 10% decrease of net money transfers in the remaining months of the year (March-December)	Scenario 2: 30% decrease of net money transfers in the remaining months of the year (March-December)	Scenario 3: 50% decrease of net money transfers in the remaining months of the year (March-December)
-114	-372	-629
Net change in consumption spending due to money transfers decline*		
-570	-1,857	-3,146
Net change as a share of household total real consumption spending**		
+0.3%	-2.6%	-5.5%

### TOURISM

Decline in tourism and related businesses – tourism arrivals and receipts are expected to decline sharply as a result of the numerous travel bans, and due to precautionary behaviors. By February, international visitor trips had already declined by 0.6% annually, while the number of tourist stays (overnight) experienced a relatively moderate 4% yearly growth. In terms of international visitor trips, among the top 10 countries, the largest decline in trips was observed in Armenia (-18.2% YoY), Russia (-25.0% YoY), Iran (-8.7% YoY), and in India (-9.9%), and there was a decline of 59.5% yearly in China. According to our preliminary calculations, the Georgian economy lost between 3-9% of potential tourism revenue in February. Since tourism industries account for 11.3% of Georgia's GDP (GNTA 2018), and this share has had an increasing trend over the last three years (2016-18), a direct hit to the industry will substantially impact GDP. The GDP losses associated with the following scenarios have been calculated below:

### REMITTANCES

Decline in remittance inflows – since all countries will suffer economically in the aftermath of the health and oil price crises, we expect significant slowdown in remittance inflows from the rest of the world. The remittances decline will hit Georgia particularly hard as it is among the top receiver countries of foreign transfers. For instance, in 2019, money transfer inflows accounted for 9.8% of GDP. Various scenarios for just how much Georgia is set to lose in monetary inflows are presented in the table below:

### GROWTH SPILLOVERS

The spillover effect on other sectors – a drop in demand for goods and services in the region, in China, the EU, and in the US, will affect the overall economy via trade and production linkages. While it is difficult to predict how Georgia's economy will react to a global shock of such magnitude, some preliminary estimations may already be determined. Georgia's growth rate over the last 20 years correlates notably to several neighboring economies. One of the greatest correlations is, unsurprisingly, with Russian economic growth. In order to discover how a slowdown across the world's top economies will affect Georgia, we

have followed three economic scenarios relating to major world economies, as reported by Orlik et al. (March 6, 2020, Bloomberg.com). The numbers reflect growth rate changes relative to the baseline (no virus outbreak).

### PRODUCTION

Production disruptions – domestic production will suffer as a result of forced business closures and the inability of workers to get to work, as well as disruptions to trade and business as a result of border closures, travel bans, and other restrictions on the movement of goods, people, and capital. The overall impact on production may be mitigated by the fact that in some sectors (particularly in manufacturing) production can be ramped up in later periods to compensate for lower production (providing closures do not last too long).

### FISCAL AND MONETARY POLICY

Georgia's public finances are in a tolerable enough shape to handle a crisis. Public debt to GDP ratio is not very high (44.9% in 2018), and the government budget deficit is also below 3% of the GDP. One of the most important tools in overcoming the crisis and achieving a fast recovery could lie in increased fiscal expansion. Georgia's government has already announced its boosting capital expenditure (CapEx) projects, aimed at providing additional economic incentives.

While other countries push for fiscal stimulus and monetary expansion, Georgia is facing uncertainties in terms of inflationary expectations. As discussed, this limits NBG's ability to stimulate the economy under the current circumstances. Annual inflation in January-February was 6.4%, significantly higher than the 3% target. Going forward, a sharp decline in aggregate demand would reduce the pressure on inflation, while a depreciating nominal effective exchange rate will exert upward pressure. Therefore, the possibility to reduce the monetary policy rate depends on which effect will dominate in the future. In the meantime, NBG is approaching IMF to increase access to funding under its Extended Fund Facility program. Alongside the additional funds from other international donors, this will positively affect the economy, strengthen the nominal effective exchange rate and, consequently, curb inflation.

ISET-PI has updated its Georgian real GDP growth rate forecast for the first and second quarters of 2020. Here are the highlights of this month's release:

### HIGHLIGHTS

- The annual real GDP growth for 2019 amounted to 5.2%, while the real GDP growth rate reached 5.1% year-on-year for January 2020.
- Before taking into consideration the negative consequences of COVID-19 on the real GDP growth forecast, ISET-PI predicted 4.7% and 5.4% growth for the first and second quarters of 2020 respectively, based on data from January 2020.
- Consequently, the annual growth in 2020 was expected to be 4.8% in the worst-case scenario, and 5.9% in the best-case or an average long-term growth scenario. Our middle-of-the-road scenario (based on the average growth in the last four quarters) predicted a 5.2% increase in real GDP.
- After considering the negative impacts of COVID-19 on Georgia's economy, via tourism, remittances, trade, and restricted

domestic production and service provision due to the strict social-isolation measures, the real GDP growth is expected to decrease notably, depending on the length and severity of the pandemic.

- It is projected that the real GDP may decline by 0.82 percentage points if there is no international, outbound, or domestic tourism between March-May of 2020. While it could reach 1.87 and 5.37 percentage points if the restrictions last until July or December, respectively.
  - Taking into consideration the correlation between the growth rates of Georgia and its partner countries, and Bloomberg's real GDP growth scenarios of change for the world's leading countries, Georgia's real GDP growth in 2020 could vary from 0.82% to 3.91% (assuming a 5% baseline growth).
  - Based on various scenarios of net decline in money transfers (from a 10% to a 50% decline), the share of household real consumption spending (considering the exchange rate and inflation) may change from +0.3% to -5.5%.
- Read on for the possible effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Georgian economy.

### CONSUMPTION AND INVESTMENT

Decline in domestic consumption due to behavioral and policy changes – i.e. people staying home as a precaution or as a requirement. Moreover, currency depreciation and possible price spikes (due to herding behaviors and potential disruptions in supply chains) are expected to have a negative effect on consumption and investment. Household consumption accounts for 66.7% of the Georgian GDP (Geostat, 2018). A significant reduction in household consumption (e.g., spending on transportation, clothing, electronics, and domestic services) would therefore result in an overall slowdown of GDP growth. Decline in domestic investment – uncertainty and deteriorating business sentiments will stall business investment decisions. Expectations of a global recession could become self-fulfilling if 'business-as-usual' does not resume in the next few months. If companies expect a slowdown in demand, they will also delay investment, and GDP will decline further. Investment (gross fixed capital formation) accounts for approximately 28% of Georgia's GDP.

Table 1. Net effect of the coronavirus crisis

	Effect on GDP (percentage points)				Tourism revenues (mln. USD)
	Transport	Accom. and food services	Travel companies	Total change in GDP	
Scenario 1: no international, outbound or domestic tourism in March-May 2020	-0.18	-0.36	-0.28	-0.82	-514
Scenario 2: no international, outbound or domestic tourism in March-July 2020	-0.41	-0.82	-0.64	-1.87	-989
Scenario 3: no international, outbound or domestic tourism in March-December 2020	-1.19	-2.34	-1.84	-5.37	-2,010

Note: after the periods indicated in each scenario, tourism is assumed to immediately recover to the 2019 levels. Source: Geostat, NBG, authors' calculations

	Real GDP annual growth change in 2020 compared to the baseline scenario, pp				Real GDP growth in 2020, assuming a 5% baseline
	Russia	Germany	US	Georgia	Georgia
Scenario A: Outbreak causes localized disruption	-0.9	-1.2	-0.2	-1.09	3.91
Scenario B: Widespread contagion	-3	-2.8	-1.3	-3.09	1.91
Scenario C: Global pandemic	-4.8	-3.6	-2.4	-4.18	0.82

Source: Bloomberg, authors' calculations

# On Liberty Bank's Fight against COVID-19



The world has been battling the COVID-19 pandemic for over three months now. In Georgia, the first case was reported on February 26. Private companies have been involved in the fight against the pathogen from the very beginning, with Liberty Bank being one of the first.

From the very first day of detecting the virus in Georgia, Liberty set up special working groups to strictly monitor the day-to-day safety of employees and customers. The biggest challenge has been the maintenance of distance in the service centers.

The vital challenge for Liberty was minimizing the customers' need to visit the bank. To this end, Liberty will soon launch a new product whereby the holders of social cards will be able to exchange card payments for cash on partner companies' sites. That is, the customers shall use the payment terminals at Aversi, PSP, Pharmadepo pharmacies and Nikora supermarkets as a form of temporary, mini ATMs.

Prior to that, customers can benefit

from the facilities offered by the Bank's back office.

To further curb the spread of the coronavirus, Liberty has enhanced remote services to better coordinate its customers on the recent modifications to its services, allowing them to stay home. The company believes that such practices are indispensable for ensuring customer safety amid the deadly pandemic.

Adhering to the official recommendations has been of paramount importance to Liberty, as the bank serves a large number of pensioners who are considered most at risk of contracting COVID-19. To further ensure their safety, Liberty has initiated several programs. As of March 3, an altered system has been operating for the issuance of pensions throughout Georgia, allowing persons to withdraw their pensions from more than 550 ATMs, without the need to visit the service centers.

And that's not all: in the fight against COVID-19, Liberty has launched a GEL 100 million program with its own resources, aimed at supporting elderly persons (70+). The bank issued April's

pensions in advance. Pensioners could instantly use the accrued amount when paying by card. And for cashing out, a special schedule was devised to avoid crowding and possible queues.

A special website, myliberty.ge, was created to allow customers to check their schedules. Other Liberty channels and information center 08 have likewise been involved in providing this information to retirees.

As part of the company's efforts to facilitate staying home, important steps were taken for all social card holders - cards that expired during this period were extended for three months. The validity period for PIN codes has also been extended so that users no longer have to visit the bank.

Another vital step in tackling the hardships caused by the pandemic has been the introduction of a grace period on the loans that Liberty offered to legal and natural persons. The bank created a special website allowing its customers to check the decisions pertaining to their altered individual schedules.

Liberty also changed the rules for paying utility bills. The service has become free through all remote channels: mobile or internet banking, remote service center, telephone payment and fast money transfer.

In addition to all these changes, Liberty has joined the youth initiative 'Let's Help the Elderly' and has funded around 600 older persons.

As a company that values its social responsibility, Liberty has already invested GEL 1,365,000 in support of COVID-19 prevention, protection of the highest standards of consumer safety, the introduction of preferential products and services and ensuring shelters for



children and the elderly.

Social distancing should be a priority for everyone today. Starting April 6, Liberty began offering its users online home-

based lessons. The projects for 60+ persons including dance, sport and computer courses will now be available online, and "Life Goes on at Home".



## Coronavirus Job Losses Could Hit Four out of Five People Worldwide

BY ELENE DZEBISASHVILI

Millions of jobs around the world came to an abrupt halt amid the struggles to contain the coronavirus outbreak. The job losses keep multiplying at a dizzying rate, threatening the long-term livelihoods and wellbeing of millions.

The UN agency International Labor Organization (ILO) has been looking at the global impact of the coronavirus, saying around 200 million people could end up jobless.

The ILO's preliminary assessment on the potential threats to economies caused by the COVID-19 pandemic says "a total of 81% of the global workforce of 3.3 billion

people have had their workplace fully or partly closed. The outbreak is expected to wipe out 6.7% of working hours across the world during the second quarter of 2020."

Different sectors of the economy have been hit in different ways. With travel restricted and social lives put on hold, the industries that suffer the most include accommodation services, manufacturing, wholesale and retail, and real estate and business. More than 1.24 billion persons are employed in these industries worldwide. For small and medium companies, as well as for people who rely on their everyday social activity to earn income, the coronavirus crisis can prove existential.

"Workers and businesses are facing catastrophe, in both developed and developing economies," ILO Director Guy Ryder said. "We have to move fast, deci-



sively, and together. The right, urgent measures could make the difference between survival and collapse."

Calling the coronavirus crisis 'the most severe' since World War Two, the ILO puts forward a myriad of policy options to mitigate the crisis and facilitate strong recovery. ILO expresses hope that nations can succeed at devising internationally coordinated policy responses that alleviate the economic fallout across the global economy. They could do so primarily by "providing a human-centred approach to growth and development, including by triggering policy levers that both stimulate demand and protect workers and enterprises".

ILO also stressed the need to engage in social dialogue with workers and employers, which is vital for building public trust and support amid the global crisis.



Granulation, filigree, nielo, different styles of enameling, the setting of precious stones: all these jewelry forms have been developing on the ancient territory of Georgia since the fifth century B.C., - says Vaja Kutateladze, top designer and Golden Artist of Tsvara Jewelry Company. "Reflecting all the epochs, even through the shadows of very difficult centuries, the techniques never lost relevance. The antique

jewelry technologies, just like the great cultural achievement of the Georgian nation, belong to us all: to our country, society, to the friends of our country, to our future friends, to the entire world. Today, we have this very special opportunity to extend the lives of these unique technologies through modern and innovative approaches and to continue history," he noted.

Tsvara is a Georgian jewelry company producing modern designed jewelry

## Tsvara Jewelry: Past Wonders Reignited

pieces according to ancient jewelry-making techniques. Professional painter, scientist and main designer, Vaja Kutateladze has put to use his many years of scientific research and rich experience in the field of Jewelry Art, to, together with his sons, create outstanding, modern and uniquely designed jewelry items, based on the following technologies: granulation, enamel, filigree, nielo; pieces produced in gold and silver, and others ornamented with diamond, ruby and zircon. The aim of the Kutateladze family business is to promote the unique and antique jewelry culture of Georgia.

It is important to emphasize the significant and difficult work put in by Kutateladze, who dedicated over 40 unique years of his life to the restoration of ancient Georgian jewelry traditions. Through these years, Kutateladze managed to access the ancient keys of Jewelry Art and, based on ancient traditions, to develop new and modern technical approaches, better suited to our century.

The name of the company, "Tsvara," comes from the name for an ancient technique "granulation" ("tsvarnami"; Georgian). Granulation is considered a significant example of Georgian cultural

heritage and represents the country no less proudly than Georgian dance, Georgian polyphonia, and Georgian wine and cuisine.

Granulation means covering any targeted object, form, or designed item with tiny globules of silver or gold. The key to the beauty of it is that these globules are applied one-by-one, by hand, as no mechanical process can achieve the same quality. In the national museums of Georgia are various examples of royal and sacred jewels created through granulation, dating back to the 5th century B.C. Founders, Kutateladze's sons David and

Levan, themselves professional jeweler-artists, set up Tsvara Jewelry Company some four 4 years ago. The impressive range of Tsvara Jewelry's Silver Line can be found in 25 trade galleries and artshops throughout Georgia, as well as in Tsvara's personal shop and various online sale areas.

At the Tsvara Company workshop, thousands of handmade jewelry pieces are being borne of creative human initiative, by combining the energy of fire and precious metals in a beautiful blend of the past and present centuries' achievements.





# Transcending Classroom Walls: UCMAS Workshop Goes Online for GEL 10

The unfortunate spread of the coronavirus has left us no choice but to embrace the times. With the restrictions on classroom learning, helping our kids advance with their mental development is the need of the hour. To this end, UCMAS Georgia has decided to offer its courses online.

UCMAS is the world's leading mental math program for children. Based on Abacus training, the program envisages boosting key cognitive skills, including focus, memory, problem-solving and critical thinking abilities. The interactive and highly entertaining nature of learn-

ing helps build enthusiasm for lifelong learning in kids.

A one-month UCMAS online workshop will offer 8 sessions, 2 times per week, for just GEL 10 per session.

### LEARNING IS NO LONGER LIMITED TO THE CLASSROOM WALLS

Engage your child positively by enrolling them for a one-month UCMAS Online workshop at 10 GEL per session and let them experience the power of Abacus-based mental calculation learning.

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# Vectoring In: Etseri, Svaneti

BLOG BY TONY HANMER

March 30, 2020: One thing I'll say about the onset of The Virus: It gives me, and no doubt millions of other writers, plenty of new material. Especially given the daily changes in everything around the world, with which one can hardly keep up.

My last night's confused dreams included the idea of a set of concentric, or nesting, circles representing the spread of the virus from first patient to now (ongoing). It will be a different set for each one of us in the world; I'll demonstrate my set. The picture also illustrates this.

The outermost circle, 1, is the start: mild alarm, initial infections, the jump from Wuhan to outside the city to beyond China and into the whole world; this is in itself a continuing process, getting bigger and bigger.

Inside this we have circle 2: people I've heard of but never met or don't know personally getting infected. For me and many, the first of these was actor Tom Hanks and his wife, Rita Wilson, diagnosed on March 12, with Sophie

Trudeau, wife of Canada's prime minister Justin Trudeau, at about the same time. Next was the Prince of Monaco, followed by Prince Charles, and shortly after him the UK's Prime Minister, Boris Johnson. This list too will be ongoing. The virus is clearly demonstrating its disinterest in one's wealth, status or any other distinctions between the most powerful and the poorest of the world!

Circle 3 is what we might call two degrees away from me (from the popular idea of 6 degrees of separation between any two people on earth): friends or relatives of my own friends or relatives, all of whom I have met and/or know personally. The first one of these to come to my attention was the mother-in-law of one of my friends who died of the virus in the UK on March 29.

Circle 4 is only 1 degree away from me: my own friends or relatives, whether near to or far from me in physical distance, except members of my own household. None of these are infected yet, so far it's an empty set, and long may it remain so.

Circle 5 is also 1 degree away: people I know personally but located inside my own home. For me, this could only be my wife, as no one else lives with us and we have no children.

Finally, Circle 6 contains only one person: me.

As the circles move inwards and grow in populations, one's own sense of impending dread (though not necessarily doom!) also grows, unfortunately. It's likely just a matter of time for circles 1-4 to contain someone for each of us on the planet, although some of us, a majority or not, may entirely escape having anyone in circles 5 and 6. We can all hope so.

It's good to remember, consciously and regularly to remind oneself and one's near and dear, that infection with The Virus is by no means an automatic death sentence! People are not only getting infected in huge numbers daily, and quite a lot of those dying, but also RECOVERING, almost certainly with some degree of antibody-powered future immunity as a bonus. Many factors influence this, from one's age and general health to where one lives and access to good medical help there and timing of treatment, making a nice multi-dimensional graph of probabilities when combined. And there is such a concerted effort to understand and best combat the disease as well, all around the world.

This set of circles does help someone graphically- and literarily-minded like me put things in perspective, quantify



and qualify the awful process of The Virus making its way around the world. Sort of like how naming one's fear can diminish, though not entirely abolish, it. We need all the help and hope we can get in these difficult days, no?

Tony Hanmer has lived in Georgia since

1999, in Svaneti since 2007, and been a weekly writer and photographer for GT since early 2011. He runs the "Svaneti Renaissance" Facebook group, now with nearly 2000 members, at [www.facebook.com/groups/SvanetiRenaissance/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/SvanetiRenaissance/)

He and his wife also run their own guest house in Etseri: [facebook.com/hanmer.house.svaneti](http://facebook.com/hanmer.house.svaneti)

# 31 Years Since April 9 Tragedy

BY ANA DUMBADZE

31 years have passed since 9 April 1989. The April 9 tragedy (also known as Tbilisi massacre or Tbilisi tragedy) refers to the events in Tbilisi, when an anti-Soviet demonstration on central Rustaveli Avenue was dispersed by the Soviet Army, resulting in 21 deaths and hundreds of injuries.

The protesters were led by the Independence Committee of Merab Kostava, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Giorgi Chanturia, Irakli Bathiashvili and Irakli Tsereteli, who demanded the punishment of Abkhaz secessionists and restoration of Georgian independence.

Several minutes before the raid, in an effort to prevent bloodshed, the Catholicos-Patriarch of Georgia, Ilia II, asked the people to enter the temple and pray. The protesters, however, didn't move. Shortly after the Patriarch's address, the troops started approaching the Parliament building. Armed with entrenching shovels and blunt weapons, soldiers under the com-



mand of Colonel-General Radionov started brutally routing the protestors. The riot police also used chemical gas.

Those who ultimately sacrificed their lives for Georgia's freedom are listed below, most of them women, many of them under the age of 30.

- Aza Adamia, 22
- Natia Bashaleishvili, 16,
- Eka Bezhaniashvili, 15

- Nato Giorgadze, 23
- Tamuna Dolidze, 28
- Tina Enukidze, 70
- Nino Toidze, 25
- Zaira Kikvidze, 61
- Manana Loladze, 33
- Tamar Mamulishvili, 50
- Venera Metreveli
- Mamuka Nozadze, 22
- Nana Samarguliani, 31

- Marina Chkonia-Samarguliani, 31
  - Eliso Chipashvili, 25
  - Tamar Chovelidze, 16
  - Nodar Jangirashvili, 40
  - Mzia Jincharadze, 43
  - Manana Melkadze, 23
  - Gia Karseladze, 25
- On April 10, in protest against the onslaught, Tbilisi and the rest of Georgia went out on strike and a 40-day of national

mourning was declared. People brought a large number of flowers to the place of the killings to pay respect to the deceased.

On April 9, 1991, the second anniversary of the tragedy, the Supreme Council of Georgia declared Georgian sovereignty and independence from the Soviet Union based on the results of a nationwide referendum.

In the same year, one of the leaders of the protest movement Zviad Gamsakhurdia was named the first democratically elected President of Georgia.

A memorial to the victims of the tragedy was opened at the location of the crackdown on Rustaveli Avenue on November 23, 2004.

The night of April 9 remains in the history of Georgia as one of the most tragic but at the same time heroic dates, when the whole country united to fight for its independence.

April 9 is now remembered as the Day of National Unity, an annual public holiday.

On this day, all Georgians remember our heroes and once again thank them for bringing freedom and independence to the country.



# A Georgian NYC Based Psychotherapist Talks Coronavirus

INTERVIEW BY NINI DAKHUNDARIDZE

**A**ngelina Akhvlediani (PhD, LMHC) is a Georgia-born mental health professional now based in New York City. In her 22 years of practice, she has specialized in anxiety, depression and relationship issues, but she recently had to switch to an unusual platform to counsel her patients – remotely. At time of writing, the state of New York has 149,316 confirmed coronavirus cases, a lot of those in the doctor's home district of Brooklyn. While 13,000 have already recovered, 6,268 have died from the virus. In an interview with GEORGIA TODAY, Dr Akhvlediani talks about the NYC rush, the social recession, and gives tips on dealing with the anxiety of self-isolation.

## WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT HOW NYC IS HANDLING CORONAVIRUS?

Sadly, the streets in Brooklyn and all throughout NY still seem busy. There is a mountain of evidence showing that social distancing is the only way to protect ourselves and everybody around, but so far, it has not been much acknowledged by the people here. Until now, we thought that in any medical emergency, doctors would prescribe the needed medication or perform the necessary surgery, and the issue would be solved. Now, for the first time ever, our well

established expectations/ideas how to deal with a medical emergency have had to change. Medication and surgery are being replaced by our own behaviour: the most sophisticated medicine today is self-isolation and social distancing. This is not something that is easy to adjust to, hence the crowded streets and devastating number of deaths. We have to remind ourselves that every behavior is a learned behavior and it is a must to start exercising social distancing. The notion that isolation is inconvenient and the desire to keep your routine as a mother, person of faith, or neighbor, needs to be reframed. It is not about how convenient or unpleasant social distancing is; it is about being responsible for your own health/protection, and by doing this, you can take care of others, from your loved ones to the doctors and nurses serving in the local hospitals.

New Yorkers are always rushing somewhere and now it seems like they are rushing to die. It doesn't matter how kind your intentions are when you go out, since the final outcome will always be the same: you either jeopardize your life, or someone else's. We have to take responsibility for our actions, because now more than ever we can change the fatal outcome of this virus.

## DO YOU KNOW WHAT THE SITUATION OF GEORGIAN IMMIGRANTS IS LIVING IN NEW YORK CITY? MANY OF THEM ARE STAYING IN THERE ILLEGALLY. DO THEY HAVE ACCESS TO MEDICAL CARE?

The current standard of care is the same for natives and emigrants, undocumented and documented patients.

## WHAT CHANGES DO YOU EXPECT IN PEOPLE'S OUTLOOK AS A RESULT OF COVID-19?

Like any other epidemic, COVID-19 can have a strong impact on mental health. We can expect to see a significant increase in anxiety and depression, and a wave of PTSD.

## HAS THE DEMAND FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL HELP INCREASED SINCE THE VIRUS EMERGED IN THE UNITED STATES?

The Office of Mental Health in NY very swiftly moved to telemedicine, and patients did not have any gap in their treatment. The requests for possible treatment are rising. I don't have the exact numbers, and it's likely even the OMH doesn't have them yet. The reality is that patients with anxiety are in stress mode on a daily basis, which makes them more "ready" for real crises. Also, a large number of people with different mental challenges were already receiving treatment, and their rational coping strategies have been developed at some level. This is why you won't see much immediate change. The results of the current pandemic's effect on mental health will be more apparent 3 to 6 months from now.

## HOW CAN WE BETTER COPE WITH THE ANXIETY THAT COMES WITH SELF-ISOLATION?



I would advise to look at social distancing and isolation in perspective; to constantly remind yourself that you do it for a greater purpose and that you're saving your life and your loved ones' lives. We are social creatures and we need social interaction and face-to-face relationships, which is strictly limited in isolation. We need to try our best to stay active, do small tasks, reach out by using modern technology as much as possible, bring back an old, forgotten hobby or develop a new one, read the book you wanted to read two years ago... Again, we constantly have to remind ourselves that it is not about if social distancing is fun or not, it is about the reality that it doesn't matter how difficult and unpleasant isolation is, it still is the only way to survive right now. The emotional complications which will follow social distancing can be dealt with and treated, so we can't downplay the need

for isolation because of this.

## WHAT IS "SOCIAL RECESSION" AND WHAT CAN THE OUTCOMES OF IT BE IN THE POST-PANDEMIC WORLD?

Social recession is a term similar to economic recession and presents the impact of a pandemic on mental health. People cope with their stress through their personal relationships, which are on hold now. We have a sense of belonging to our family, work, faith, or friend groups. Our 'normal' is to be engaged in relationships with all those groups. Of course, changing all of this will have an effect on our emotional well-being. This is why it's so important to reach out, and to be connected virtually as much as possible. There is no question that face to face relationships are better, but we do not have the luxury to choose what is better; we need to figure out how to survive.

# Isolation Diaries #1: Online Events to Keep up Your Social Life



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\*\*Tasting Party (TBA) Post Co-VID\*\*

BLOG BY AMY JONES

**I**t's been almost one month now since I spoke to someone other than my dog in real life. One month since I laughed with friends face to face, one month since I walked past people in the street without distancing myself from them, and one month since I ate khinkali.

We've never experienced so much collective change in such a short time span before, and it can be a challenge to keep yourself busy, happy, and healthy at home.

The past weeks have seen me reach new levels to keep myself entertained at home. Some days, isolation ages me by fifty years as I pickle vegetables, make jams, and knit on my sofa. Other days, I throw myself into cleaning or do a YouTube exercise video in the garden. And sometimes, I lie in bed and watch Netflix the whole day.

From now on, I'll be sharing my weekly tips on how to stay calm and busy during isolation in this column. You can expect to find everything from online events to recipes, and mindful techniques to craft ideas.

So, welcome to the isolation diaries.

This week, to help avoid becoming a total social recluse and couch potato, I've found the best events in the coming days being held online in Tbilisi and around the world.

## ONLINE EVENTS CALENDAR

**10 April, 7PM - 11PM: Stay Home Brew Day**

Lokal Tbilisi, a co-working space, and Tbilisi-based craft beer Megobrebi Brewery are holding a brewing session to teach you how to make your own homebrew beer in four hours. Crack a few beers open as you watch and consider it your Friday night happy hour.

**11 April, 10PM: Nakadi Track Release Live**

Georgian-American artist Nakadi is releasing a new track during a live performance on Saturday. If you are missing the Tbilisi club scene, you can enjoy Nakadi's dub minimal, breaks, and house beats from your living room dancefloor. The performance will be streamed on YouTube.

**14 April, 8PM: Tbilisi Virtual Pub Quiz**

The popular pub quiz held at Wooland's Speakeasy on Tuesday nights has gone online during lockdown. There are no teams, instead you log into an online trivia platform and compete as yourself. There's a Zoom room running simultaneously so you can heckle the other contestants.

**14 April, 4PM: The Economics of Covid-19**

Perhaps not the most relaxing choice of event, but it's important to keep up-to-date with the news and understand the economic impacts of the virus. The New Economics School is running a series of online lectures where speakers from around the world address economic issues surrounding the pandemic. This session will be presented by Rainer Heufers, Founder and Executive Director of the Center for Indonesian Policy Studies.

**Monday to Friday, 9PM: the Great British Home Chorus**

British choir conductor Gareth Malone is organizing a home choir which you can join from your sofa. Despite the name, anyone, anywhere, can take part. Taking on classics such as "You are my Sunshine", Gareth has a knack for making singing fun. The rehearsals are live on YouTube.

**17 April, 12AM: 'Closer in Crisis' Benefit Concert**

Musicians are coming together (figuratively, not literally – stay home, folks), to perform a benefit concert to raise money and awareness for COVID-19 mental health programs and services. Organized by Sound Mind, Chadwick Stokes of Dispatch, Taylor Goldsmith from Dawes, Foy Vance, Jade Bird, Langhorne Slim, Ballroom Thieves, and Alex the Astronaut will perform. The concert will be streamed on YouTube.

**Every Thursday, 10 PM: National Theater at Home**

For the next eight weeks, the British National Theater will show one of its most popular productions on Thursday nights. The performances are available online for one week, so you can make every night a theater night if you want. Shows include One Man, Two Guvnors with James Corden, Jane Eyre, Twelfth Night, and Treasure Island. You can find them on YouTube.

# WHO Head Thanks Georgian PM for Message to Health Workers on World Health Day

BY ANA DUMBADZE

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization, thanked Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia for his message and kind wishes to health workers and the population on World Health Day, April 7.

"Thank you, Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia, for sending such a wonderful message to the people of Georgia and

especially to health workers on World Health Day yesterday. Together, against COVID19! Solidarity!," WHO head tweeted.

On April 7, on the occasion of World Health Day, the Georgian PM published photos of health workers fighting coronavirus on social media, thanking them for their professionalism and hard work.

"Today is World Health Day. I want to wish the people of Georgia and the world's determination, hope and good health. We have endless appreciation for doctors, healthcare workers and all professionals who are heroically fighting



the invisible enemy," Gakharia tweeted. World Health Day is a global health awareness day celebrated every year on 7 April, under the sponsorship of the

World Health Organization, as well as other related organizations. In 1948, the WHO held the First World Health Assembly.

It is a day to celebrate the work of nurses and midwives and remind world leaders of the critical role they play in keeping the world healthy.

# Two Ends of a Sugarcane



Image source: PenWin/Getty Images

OP-ED BY NUGZAR B. RUHADZE

Lucky are those married couples who appreciate their connubial ties and don't resent looking at each other 24/7, trying to enjoy every second

of their secluded family life, turning it into an idyllic getaway from the regular daily routine, taking no notice of the deprivations brought about by the newly imposed curfew and quarantine, never feeling tired of one another's constant presence, and seeking satisfaction only in available variables and solely by affordable means.

Aren't they lucky to be living in the era of this global viral invasion, seemingly worse than the assault of those familiar cinematic aliens? What else could have given them a chance like this to voluntarily succumb to their re-burgeoning love affair?

At the same time, I pity those marital captives who have never wanted to spend

unforeseen long hours together and are now compelled to tolerate each other's company day in, day out. One can hardly imagine a stronger terminator of our corporeal immunity than our disheartening imagination, which carries enough power to eliminate the last vestiges of hope and the hardly scintillating light of happiness.

I deduce that of those two familial stands, rejecting hatred and inviting love seems to be the best healer of the day, no matter how miserable, hungry, thirsty, fearful, constrained, astonished and sickened we feel due to our mandatory solitude, which has totally dimmed our reality, temporarily though it is. What a preposterous coronation of our existentiality!

But I don't really care. Not because I have already lived my share of years and have bored myself to death with the motley palette of my lifelong experience; nor because I am fearless like an animal and intrepid like a medieval knight. No! I am just busy, very busy. That's all! I am busier now than ever before. For instance: I am doing more classes online now than at any other time in the past; I am currently prepared to answer ten times as many questions of my students and disciples than they desired to ask even in the times of our physical interactions; I have assiduously dusted the once forsaken covers of about twenty bulky books I have always wanted to read through and never had time to embrace; I am more than poised to give a new impetus to a couple of linguistic projects I had stalled because of the shortage of time;

I have not written to my dearest old friends in a long while and now I have profusely taken to my beloved epistolary genre of a private streak; in my salad years, as a young dreamer and romanticist I used to translate Georgian and English poetry back and forth and I have now revived my drooping poetic spirits to once again put my pen to this art of intrinsic magnificence; not to forget to mention, my balconies have never seen me workout so abundantly, but today they happen to be the witnesses of my sweating in pursuit of a vigorous lifestyle.

I also started brooding over my healthy diet, balanced out with the most salubrious ingredients ever, but this is not easy at all to afford, and still, I will probably go with it for as long as I continue making a living. And I do! Only, I do it online, toiling my guts and wits off over the internet. What else am I up to? Oh, it almost escaped my mind: I am making music by playing the accordion and refreshing my piano skills with the help of online lessons. On top of all that, I have always wanted to watch all the Oscar-winning movies, but this was practically impossible due to my incessant busyness, and here we go at last: I am enjoying a movie a day as a minimum and nothing will get in my way. Who should I thank for this exceptional souvenir? Of course Her Monstrous Excellency, as bittersweet as its time of advent has turned out to be. But we cannot expect both ends of a sugar cane to be sweet. The proverb is Chinese, by the way!

# CoRonization

BLOG BY VALENTINO BROCCOLI

From Russia with love. This is what can be read under the two tricolour hearts on the sides of the Kamaz trucks leaving the IL-76 planes that have just landed in Rome. The TV show that comes from the neighbor's window praises their arrival. And my neighbor, in his own way, praises something else.

Perhaps even he didn't accept that until some time ago, Putin had not bought our Romagna peaches due to the sanctions that Italy, together with the EU, had carried out after the start of the war in Donbas and the annexation of Crimea. Sanctions expired on January 31, 2020. But, even if everything is silent now, after six years Crimea is still annexed and Ukraine is still invaded. That's why those military green Kamaz with the RU logo don't fascinate me, even though I'm a big fan of military green.

Last summer, while Ingushetia and North Ossetia sped by the window of the Kia Rio that was taking me from Chechnya to Georgia, I saw a lot of pov-

erty. Along the streets; on the facades of the soviet blocks; in the eyes of street vendors standing on the gravel; in the flip-flops three sizes too big worn by the children sitting on the steps. Especially when I was driving in line to get out of Vladikavkaz, between one Kamaz and another, I remember wondering about hospitals conditions there. Fortunately for me, I didn't have the opportunity to find it out.

But curiosity remains, so I start writing to my contacts here and there around the old USSR. For a moment, I chat simultaneously with a Chechen, a Ukrainian, and a couple of Russians. I know, it seems like a joke told at birthday parties after six or seven glasses of Sangiovese wine. But these are not times to laugh. The first cases of coronavirus have arrived in Grozny and Moscow, too. And there, people are very worried because their hospitals "В плохом состоянии" are not very good.

They send me some pictures and some personal stories. At first, I can hardly believe it. Some photos cannot be true: they look like mine taken in Chernobyl some summers ago. Others must be taken from the deeper, more rural and more



distant Russia. Then I try to mediate. Because Russia is great, immense, and not all the hospitals might be so bad. There must certainly be some more upscale ones. The ones that Putin takes pictures of. And those where it costs a lot for an intravenous drip. I'm a teacher. Over there, I would earn 37,500 Rubles per month. More or less 400€. No. Luxury wouldn't be for me. I should hope to go under the right knife, or rather, not

to go under it at all.

Now, if many of their hospitals are in such disastrous conditions, what help can they give to our hospitals which are among the best in Europe and beyond? Personally, I find it hard to believe the fairy tale "From Russia With Love". And I hardly believe that we will not be asked for the bill once the emergency ends.

In my opinion, Italy is one of the most beautiful, appreciated, desired countries

in the world. And I had confirmation of this last summer, coming down from the Chechen Caucasus, when my driver listened full volume to Toto Cotugno. Or the other night, when I saw the Tbilisi Tower in Georgia illuminated in green, white, and red. This is why, as soon as I saw the knobby tires of those Kamaz rolling on Italian soil, I thought of a real colonization. Indeed, given the times, I would call it "coronization".

# Interview with an Artistic Couple: Beka Sakvarelidze & Mariam Shakarashvili



INTERVIEW BY NINI  
DAKHUNDARIDZE

**B**eing together is very important for us. We stand by each other and we balance each other. Despite the fact that our characters and art style are strictly differentiated, our viewpoints and ideas coincide. We don't have separate personal or creative lives: we are both entirely engulfed in art. Art was what connected us in the first place. We respect each other's personal space, each other's individualism. This whole process gives us great pleasure and fills our life. —artists Beka Sakvarelidze and Mariam Shakarashvili tell GEORGIA TODAY. In an ongoing series of interviews with artists, for which we were invited by BI Auction, we met the artistic couple to find out where the two young artists meet in their differentiated individuality.

## WHO FIRST INTRODUCED YOU TO ART? HOW AND WHEN DID YOU START PAINTING?

Beka: My genes played the biggest role in establishing me as a painter. My father was the pioneer here, and he had me follow him in the pursuit of art.

Mariam: My first encounter with art is also associated with my father, who always paid attention to my longing for painting. Then it was Valer Marghishvili,

a dear family friend and a wonderful painter who gave me painting classes and so grew my interest in art.

## WHO HAD THE BIGGEST IMPACT ON YOUR WORK EARLY ON IN YOUR CAREER?

Beka: Early in my career, it was Murtaz Japaridze, the head of Zestaponi Painting School. He facilitated the first steps of my artistic career. Then, later, of course, there were several professors at Tbilisi State Academy of Arts who stimulated not only my technical skills as an artist but who also helped me develop freedom to think outside the box, being flexible to the new and depict this in my visual works.

Mariam: My painting teacher at Gori Painting School, Gulnara Chitadze, played a big role in my personal development and the style of my works. Then my professors at Tbilisi State Academy of Arts impacted me greatly and the people I got to meet with during this period: Gia Gugushvili, Aleko Adamia...

## DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE ARTIST/MOVEMENT?

Beka: There are many important painters and among them, I would name Piet Mondrian, who is considered one of the founders of Abstract painting.

Mariam: Each movement is important in its own way because art always depicts the contemporary reality. I would name cave painting and of course the 20th

century, which has the reflections of cave painting but is totally rethought, reshaped and represented in a different context.

## HOW IMPORTANT DO YOU DEEM PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION IN SHAPING AN ARTIST?

Beka: It's very important. However, it is not the determinant. It's important because the detailed correctness of the work defines its visual and, cultural-educational value.

Mariam: Professional education is important because during it we get to know the works of interesting painters that leave marks on us. It can help us find ourselves. But then I guess there's a different kind of honesty in the works of self-taught painters.

## DID YOU HAVE TO OVERCOME ANY CHALLENGES IN YOUR PURSUIT OF ART?

Beka: Following art, like any other business or a way of life which grows from your spiritual or mental state and represents your desired future, is, of course, pleasantly hard. No matter how hard something is though, if it brings you the perfect outcome and compliments the needs of your soul and intellect, it all becomes about enjoying what you have created.

Mariam: The process of me forming as an artist has been ongoing since my early childhood. Of course I had to overcome a lot of difficulties. But these are the difficulties that the world sends to us in order to make us stronger. These challenges are the paths that lead us to different shores.

## WHAT WOULD YOU SAY ABOUT THE CONTEMPORARY GEORGIAN ART SCENE? WHERE DO WE STAND ON THE WORLD ART MAP?

Beka: Georgia's current place on the world art map was conditioned by the cultural hunger our country had to go

through. This cultural hunger necessitated the fast re-shaping of the future and adjustment to the novelty of the world. Today, art is mostly defined by matter and so the fight for self-establishment and realization on the international stage for a developing country like Georgia is still a big challenge.

Mariam: In my opinion, the contemporary Georgian art scene is very worthy. I know a lot of artists who have represented Georgia and themselves pretty well. Naturally, there are some problems but that is normal and I prefer to stay concentrated on the good side.

## WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST INSPIRATION TODAY?

Beka: The fast dynamics of the world and the unlimited possibilities of development.

Mariam: My biggest inspiration is the dynamics and path that I and my personal "me" go through together; the problems I and me overcome. I observe how that "me" reflects on everything and it gives me the biggest impulses.

## WHAT DO YOU THINK IS ART'S MAIN MISSION?

Beka: The spiritual and intellectual awakening of humans.

Mariam: I don't know what art's mission is, but I know what an artist's mission is. Art is a way to express oneself, a portal that connects us to the outer world. We are the transmitters of our deepest desires and impulses.

## WHAT DO YOU WANT TO TELL PEOPLE THROUGH YOUR ART?

Beka: I'm not trying to tell people anything through my art. My works, independently from me, find their own ways.

Mariam: Well, I try to find the perfect moment to depict my inner state. Then my artworks find their own ways to connect to people who can relate to the same impulses. Of course, you cannot reach everyone's heart, and that's not my goal.

## HAVE YOU EXPERIMENTED WITH ANY OTHER ART DIRECTION?

Beka: I think an artist unites in himself everything and while you're in the middle of finding out about the world or how it works, it's hard to follow one particular path.

Mariam: I'm surrounded by art and I live in art entirely. So, painting, performance, and installation are only ways to express myself. That's how I depict myself today.

## THE MODERN ART SCENE IS EVER-CHANGING. WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF PAINTING IN THIS REALITY?

Beka: If the artwork is highly valuable, it doesn't matter what kind of direction it has taken: it will always be valuable. Painting is just one of many ways to express your inner longing and searching for something and it will always be associated with novelty.

Mariam: The future of painting is connected to the future of the world that is why it's so interesting. We can only make guesses about it.

## WHAT ARE YOUR FUTURE PLANS?

Beka: I want to transform my ideas into reality but a lack of finances are keeping me from doing that at the moment.

Mariam: An artist should always be young, at any age. That is what I wish for them and what I advise them: stay forever young, accept novelties and filter them to your advantage. Never stop moving.

## DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR ARTISTS JUST STARTING UP?

Beka: Don't follow the trends with your eyes closed, mindlessly.

Mariam: An artist should always be young, at any age. That is what I wish for them and what I advise them: stay forever young, accept novelties and filter them for your advantage. Never stop moving.



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