

The Georgian Times

NO 1 NEWSPAPER IN GEORGIA THE GEORGIAN TIMES MEDIA HOLDING

No 3 (1494) Monday, March 4, 2013 Weekly Newspaper, International Edition - Published by "The Georgian TIMES" Media Holding Since 1993 www.geotimes.ge



Russia to Lift Ban on Georgian Wine

The on-site inspection of 44 Georgian wine and mineral water companies has been completed. Georgia is now waiting for Russia's decision to lift its trade embargo imposed back in 2006 because of alleged food safety concerns –not to mention punitive political motivations that contributed to the decision – which severely impacted Georgia's export market.



On p. 2

Rubber Stamp and Phone Justice Continues to Pollute the Court System

On p. 5

Visa Liberalisation Action Plan - "A guidance instrument for the road ahead"

On p. 6

A Turkish Culinary Invasion

On p. 13

Saakashvili Expresses "Regret" for Saying "Something Incorrect"



On p. 2

An interesting story emerged in Georgia last week. The so-called lame duck President Mikhail Saakashvili claimed during a news conference that both TBC Bank and Liberty Bank are being sold to Russian banks, citing information he'd received from the National Bank of Georgia. While that press conference was still ongoing Liberty Bank put out a statement on their Facebook page that this information was "wholly inaccurate".

Priorities: Foreign Investments vs. Local Land Ownership

Tsnori, 110 kilometers east of Tbilisi – a chilly and rainy and grey morning has started for newly arrived foreign farmers. Now that the fields have been seeded down, it is time to plan the new crop year. Punjabi farmers from India have settled in the regional town for the long

term. They are looking forward to making their future and putting down their own roots in the agricultural settlement of approximately 6,000 inhabitants.

On p. 4

Saakashvili, Ivanishvili May Meet on Monday



PM Ivanishvili is ready to meet President Saakashvili on Monday morning as offered by the latter, PM's office said in a brief statement on Friday evening.

On p. 6



Georgian Identity Fights the Façade of "New Life for Old Tbilisi"

On p. 13

Saakashvili Expresses “Regret” for Saying “Something Incorrect”

TBC Bank and Liberty Bank are being sold to Russian banks: REALLY!?

By HYMAN KAMENOWSKY

An interesting story emerged in Georgia last week. The so-called lame duck President Mikhail Saakashvili claimed during a news conference that both TBC Bank and Liberty Bank are being sold to Russian banks, citing information he'd received from the National Bank of Georgia. While that press conference was still ongoing Liberty Bank put out a statement on their Facebook page that this information was “wholly inaccurate”. TBC Bank later did the same. In fact both banks took particular exception to the quoted remarks, which were rather strange mistakes for a President of a country, who has an interest in promoting such rumors.

The President was asked before the end of the press conference about Liberty Bank's refutation of his story and responded that, “I'll only be glad if it's not true... and I hope it will not become true in future either.” He was then forced to “eat crow”, and expressed “regret” for saying “something incorrect” – but continued to insist that his story was substantially accurate. He said that he had gained his information about Liberty Bank from the National Bank of Georgia, but added that “I know for sure that there are talks ongoing [to sell] TBC Bank”, implying that a Russian bank was the intended buyer.

The President “knew for sure” that TBC Bank was being sold to the Russians because his nearest and dearest friends had told him so. They also told

him the same about the other bank, so maybe he should've taken a clue from that. In a written statement issued shortly thereafter TBC Bank stated: *“The Georgian President has just stated in televised remarks that TBC Bank has been purchased by one of Russia's largest banks – Alfa Bank. We want to officially state that TBC Bank is not now holding, and does not intend to hold, negotiations about the sale of its shares with Alfa Bank or any other bank in the near future”.*

Misha is no fool, but he is hell bent on presenting himself as the most “anti-Russian” person on earth in all things, thinking this will regain him public support. This leaves him wide open to being made to look foolish, as his judgment is being clouded by his misguided desire to try and rebuild the fortress of power and impunity which he lost so convincingly in the October parliamentary elections. His weapon-of-choice in this regard is to continually try and paint the Georgian Government as some kind of Kremlin sub-division: to which one might comment, after seeing who owns most of Georgia after his own mass privatization program ... and “it takes one to know one!” Saakashvili is no longer even pretending to be a President of and for the people of Georgia, trying his best to “cohabit” with the new government elected by the same people of Georgia against his wishes. .

BURIED SKELETONS

However there are genuine reasons to be concerned about the conduct of Georgian banks. TBC is considered as one of the

most solid and secure banks in Georgia, but many skeletons are buried in its proverbial closet. Nobody locally is willing to dig them up – as this could bring networks of patronage (“roof”) crashing down. But if Georgia wants to be a democracy, it will have to hold its institutions accountable sooner or later.

One question which remains to this day concerns the late Badri Patarkatsvili and international speculator George Soros. Why did Soros buy into the bank and then sell out – and why did Badri buy what Soros sold? It was rumored at the time that these transactions may have been somehow linked to Sistema, the Russian investment company, and Kremlin-approved Russian and East European banks. One of Sistema's top management was responsible for much of the banking sector activity related to Georgia, having studied finance in the United States and was said to have worked for an American-based bank for some time. This person had links with Yuri Luzkhov, the former Moscow Mayor.

It is necessary to understand how the fall of Georgian President Shevardnadze impacted Russian networks of influence (in politics, business, intelligence and special services) to fully appreciate how highly-institutionalized these networks were and how they were linked to organized crime. Some of these same networks went on to support the new regime installed after the Rose Revolution, thus increasing their own power, albeit at the expense of public accountability.

The same self-serving circles had previously offered var-

ious project proposals to the Georgian government which Shevardnadze wasn't interested in. Under Saakashvili, however, the rules of the game changed. Georgia was wide opened for business – and soon flogged off to dubious offshore companies with sordid motivations, strangely enough controlled by these same corrupt networks. For obvious reasons, it is now being asked how many of these people who did so well out of Saakashvili are still bankrolling his ego, and what lengths they will go to ensure their hands remain in the till.

MOTIVATIONS

As with Saakashvili's “something incorrect,” much of what is said in this town is half truth or outright lie. False rumors planted in the media by the outgoing President's PR machine damage the reputation of Georgian business. When the subjects of such stories are banks, the Georgian business climate and national security as a whole suffer. The president appears to be trying to destroy these banks by persuading investors to avoid them... to cause a run on these banks which will cause them to come knocking on his door begging him to ride to their rescue.

WELL-OILED PR MACHINE

Saakashvili's actions and words continue to be echoed around the world thanks to his well-oiled PR machine, and this is yet more evidence that the President and his United National Movement seek to cause as much trouble for the State as possible in order to bring the new Government down. Ev-



eryone on the ground in Georgia knows that this is what they are up to, including the US Ambassador who has somehow managed to remain impeccably diplomatic about the Nationals' tactics. The Nationals are up to no good, and Misha is now feeling the strain of his past sins so much that he has become a danger, not only to the country but to himself ... and those who will support him to the bitter end.

While calls for cooperation ring around our ears from all and sundry this clearly cannot happen while such falsehoods are perpetrated by one side or the other. An investigation should be carried out to determine from where this particular piece of misinformation, about the sale of the Liberty and TBC banks, originated. The lion's share of the planted rumors is some of the president's closest allies and advisors. Many, including those working in Missions and International Financial Organizations, know: his paranoia has an insatiable appetite.

Saakashvili has an innate tendency to make poor and often dangerous decisions when the going gets tough. His comments about the banks could be seen as foolish and, could even have damaged the Georgian economy, but even the greasiest cogs in his PR machine must've paused in disbelief this time as they, perhaps for the

first time, saw his most paranoid thoughts and actions being used against him during the course of the same press conference.

A day later the United National Movement PR machine had all but ground to a halt. Saakashvili jumped in his car and drove himself and his wife to the airport, refusing the protection of the State Protection Service which is assigned to him for life. This made-for-TV show of recklessness must've made his most hardened supporters blush. The fact that the Georgian Public Broadcaster was invited along to film the whole stunt speaks volumes. The President seems unaware that his actions are being perceived by the public in exactly the opposite way to the one he intends – as what they really are, not what he intends them to be.

President Saakashvili has claimed many Western progressive reformers as his political heroes, including Lee Kwan Yew and Margaret Thatcher. Maybe history will actually equate him with another – Paul Deschanel, leader of the Progressive Republican Party of France either side of the First World War. Elected President of France in 1920 he was forced to resign after a matter of months, after a series of incidents such as receiving ambassadors practically in the nude and walking out of a cabinet meeting into a lake, fully clothed.

Russia to Lift Ban on Georgian Wine

By LISA TONAKANYAN

The on-site inspection of 44 Georgian wine and mineral water companies has been completed. Georgia is now waiting for Russia's decision to lift its trade

embargo imposed back in 2006 because of alleged food safety concerns –not to mention punitive political motivations that contributed to the decision – which severely impacted Georgia's export market.

The visit of Russian food safety specialists to Tbilisi following negotiations held in Moscow earlier this year came with high expectations. The parties arrived to discuss and work out technical details for Georgian products to regain their place on the Russian market.

Subsequently an agreement was reached for on-site inspection of wine at wineries and water at bottling plants before its export.

Six members of Russia's Consumer Rights Organization “Rospotrebnadzor” arrived in Tbilisi on February 25, 2012. Three full working days were

devoted to checking up on the quality of local beverages and sanitary conditions in different factories. They inspected the products of 45 winemakers and mineral water producers in the capital and Georgia's eastern regions of Kakheti and Kartli.

“Only half the number of

the companies wishing to return to Russia's market was examined at this stage by three teams of inspectors. One team headed to Borjomi and Nabeglavi bottling plants – and the other two visited wineries in Tbilisi, Kakheti and Kartli.

Continued on p. 7

The Georgian TIMES

1 English-Language Newspaper in Georgia

First published in 1993.

The Founder and the President Malkhaz Gulashvili. Tel: (+995) 577 461 046

The Georgian Times Media Holding.

12, Kikodze str, Tbilisi, Georgia. Tel: (+995 32) 2934405,

E-mail: office@geotimes.ge; <http://www.geotimes.ge>

Publisher:
Nana Gagua
Tel.: (+995) 555 293 003
E-mail:
gul@geotimes.ge

Editor-in-Chief:
Ian F. Carver
Tel: (+995) 555 547 695
E-mail:
editorinchief@geotimes.ge

Deputy Editor:
Dali Bzhalava
Tel: (+995) 593 337 334
E-mail:
editor@geotimes.ge

Director:
Kakha Maskharashvili
Tel: (+995) 551 501 313
E-mail:
director@geotimes.ge

Contributions to The Georgian TIMES are welcome. If you are interested in submitting an article or news item, ect. please contact; Tel/fax: (+995 32) 2934405

SOCAR'S LATEST TECHNOLOGY BRINGS HIGH CLASS SERVICE



The vast majority of Georgian drivers are using natural gas as their fuel of choice due to the high-quality and the consistent availability of safe, European-standard natural gas stations on the market. Their choice is clear – SOCAR. Known for upholding these values, SOCAR gas has been a staple in Georgia since early 2012, when it opened its first gas station.

On February 22, Mr. Mahir Mammadov , General Director of SOCAR Energy Georgia, special guest “Galileo”, representative of Osvaldo Del Campos and other guests opened SOCAR’s latest gas station at 84 Guramishvili Street, where the Kakheti highway meets Isani bridge in Tbilisi.



SOCAR’s new gas stations are equipped with the latest generation of gas compressor equipment. Produced by Argentinean firm Galileo, the stations ensure the quickest and safest gas dispensing experience for customers.

The state-of-the-art natural gas compressor does not require a compressor station since it is placed in a micro box equipped with the latest fire prevention and safety technology. SOCAR gas stations provide special services such as tire pressure gauges, external wash and cabin cleaning, and other services. A 24-hour a day market is open for customers at every station.

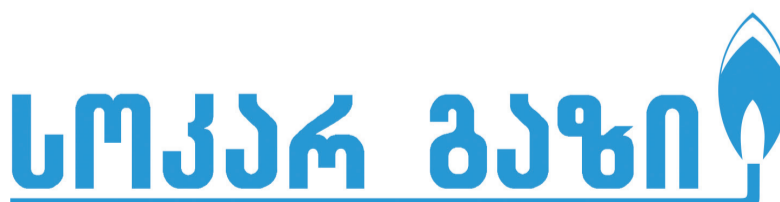
25 people are employed at new stations. overall.

SOCAR has been a leader in the auto fuel industry since it debuted on the market in 2006. As Georgia’s largest taxpayer, the company is devoted to bringing comfort and full satisfaction to each and every customer.



At present, 101 of SOCAR’s European-standard gas stations are providing full comfort and high class service in strategic areas throughout this important transit country.

A strong and steadfast partner of Georgia, SOCAR continues to invest in the country and create full-time jobs for hundreds of proud citizens.



WWW.SOCAR.GE

Priorities: Foreign Investments vs. Local Land Ownership

By LISA TONAKANYAN

Tsnori, 110 kilometers east of Tbilisi – a chilly and rainy and grey morning has started for newly arrived foreign farmers. Now that the fields have been seeded down, it is time to plan the new crop year. Punjabi farmers from India have settled in the regional town for the long term. They are looking forward to making their future and putting down their own roots in the agricultural settlement of approximately 6,000 inhabitants.

There is much interest in the influx of experienced foreign farmers to Georgia, especially those settling in the eastern part of the country which is renowned as Georgia's cornucopia and wine producing region. The Georgian Times travelled to Tsnori to talk to one of the many Indians now living there. Expectations do not always live up to reality, instead of meeting a middle-aged farmer dressed in national Punjabi attire and turban wrapped around his head, a young man in his early twenties in a dark jacket and jeans presented himself as one of Georgia's newest farmers.

Ravneet Kang, from the Punjabi city of Moga, didn't give the first impression of a person living off the land. He moved to Georgia with his parents in August 2012. Since then he has learned the Georgian alphabet and he never forgets to take along a Georgian-English dictionary when he leaves the house. This Indian farmer mixes a few Georgian words in his English while telling his story. He is also well-versed in the culture and language of his newly adopted country.

As a graduate of business management, armed with a degree from an Australian university. Kang has plunged himself into agriculture and mechanical engineering. After graduating from high school in Australia, he spent six months in his motherland. But not seeing many opportunities, he decided to come to Georgia when he learned that there was inexpensive farmland at bargain prices.

As Kang explains, the price of land in Georgia depends much on the location and quality of soil, access to irrigation, drainage and markets. It fluctuates between 1,000 and 3,000 USD per hectare. However, he claims that it's not uncommon to find land at such a reasonable price in India as well, albeit in most cases it is not arable or only for industrial use.

"That's why our farmers are moving to Georgia. Upon arrival to Tbilisi, I was advised to travel to Tsnori, as the land was claimed to be fertile and inexpensive. After meeting with some locals who later informed me about some land plots for sale, I decided to purchase 5 hectares of land from 8 or 9 private proprietors and consolidate it into one commercially viable operation. Later, I added an additional



8 hectares in Tsnori and 12 in Melaani. I leased another 36 hectares and now I am growing a combination of wheat, barley and garlic," Kang said, while showing his plots scattered about stretches along the Alzavani valley.

An immense plot that Kang owns has already started sprouting up – green leaves of garlic contrast sharply with the neighboring idle worn out, and nutrient depleted land that has been so neglected that it hardly can produce a lush crop of weeds. In good and bad weather he travels around 10 kilometers that separates Tsnori from his fields to check the progress of his hard work since the October planting season. "Back then I helped my workers to sow crops; we planted four hectares with barley and one hectare with garlic, so now I'm a real farmer, not only a land owner," he proudly said adding that an agricultural life has always been his passion and he wants not only to earn money but contribute to the development of Georgia's agricultural sector as well.

But not all are so enthusiastic with the new arrivals and their good intentions and commercial aspirations. As Davit Murtazishvili, 34-year-old unemployed local resident told GT, "If it was left up to me, I'd prohibit foreigners from buying our ancestors' land. It is passed on from father to son, how can we just sell it? Money is dust; this land is the only treasure we have and we don't need Indians here; Georgian farmers can work their plots alone."

"Look at this land to your right and in front of my plot. It has not even been plowed, it just stands idle. Is this the way Georgians respect their land? I know many locals don't have money to work it but why do they mind if a foreigner comes and does what locals either cannot do or are unwilling to do on their own?" Ravneet Kang said.

The Georgian Times conducted a quick survey by talking to ten Tsnori residents about the importance of retaining local ownership of land versus foreign investment. Seven preferred to keep the land and remain "stewards of their land" while the remaining three respondents did not oppose selling land to foreigners. Nevertheless, the vast majority of respondents think positively about their Punjabi

neighbors and only one considers Georgian agriculture should be only for Georgians.

Tsnori recently attracted public attention when demonstrations erupted against the new foreign landowners. The population of the small town called for the government to stop the sale of land to such investors. In response the authorities made a statement trying to convince locals that the process will be banned until corresponding amendments are made to the law on land ownership.



The National Agency of Public Registry told GT that the existing law does not forbid foreign companies owning land in Georgia. According to article 4 of the law On Ownership of Agricultural Land, only a Georgian citizen or household, as well as a

foreign legal entity registered in Georgia may hold a proprietary right to an agricultural land plot. The process of registering the land under a new proprietor can take about four working days and cost only 50 GEL (documents can be made available the same day for 150 GEL more).

Meanwhile, Dimitri Kumsishvili, Deputy Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia announced that no

do not have statistical data showing how many hectares out of this total were purchased by foreigners but we have ceased selling land to foreigners," the Ministry of Economy told GT.

However, on the ministry's electronic auctions webpage there are six current offers to sell agricultural land in Rustavi, Tetrtskaro, Gori, Batumi and Mtskheta. The only stipulation for participating in the auction is having your company registered in Georgia – those legal entities registered abroad are excluded. Statistical data provided by the Public Registry describe that in 2012 the number of newly registered companies in Georgia totaled 43,934 while the same figure in 2011 reached 54,081.

It is becoming apparent that major share of companies registered in Georgia were actually founded by foreigners, or at least foreign owned companies. Aside from the rich traditions of agriculture throughout various periods of Georgian history, it does now appear that foreigners have some insight into the future of agriculture that locals do not, and perhaps to a greater degree than many of those claiming to be experienced Georgian farmers.

NEWS

Russian MFA Comments on Meeting Between Georgian, Russian Diplomats

By CIVIL GEORGIA

Meeting of Georgian PM's special representative for relations with Russia Zurab Abashidze and Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin in Prague on March 1 was "constructive", which made it possible to make progress on "number of practical issues," the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

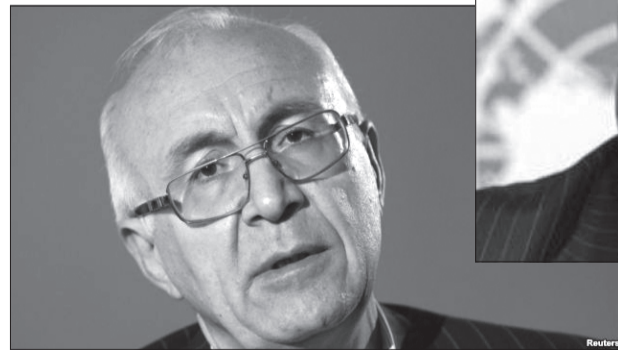
"It was noted [during the meeting], that positive developments have taken place in number of areas in relationship between the two countries in recent months. High level contacts have taken place. President of the Russian Federation received Georgian Patriarch Ilia II. Georgian and Russian Prime Minister met briefly in Davos. A meeting between Georgian and Russian parliamentarians was held in Strasbourg [on a sideline of session of Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe]. These developments have created positive atmosphere necessary for resolving practical issues of bilateral relations," Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement on March 2.

"A group of experts from [Russia's state consumer protection agency] RosPotrebNadzor visited Georgia in late February to study conditions for resumption of export of [Georgian] wines and mineral waters [to Russia]. [The two diplomats]

have exchanged views on land and air transportation," the Russian Foreign Ministry said, adding that an agreement "to restore intensive operation" of Zemo Larsi-Kazbegi border crossing point between the two countries was "noted with satisfaction".

It also said "possibility of easing existing visa regime" for the Georgian citizens was also discussed. Georgia unilaterally lifted visa rules for the Russian citizens in late February, 2012.

"Mutual interest for establishing more active contacts in science and healthcare have been expressed," the Russian Foreign Ministry said.



"It was stressed during the conversation, that meetings in this format do not touch upon set of issues which are being discussed at the Geneva Discussions on security and stability in the Trans-Caucasus," the Russian Foreign Ministry said, adding that Geneva talks are important format, including for providing

predictability of situation in this region.

"It has been agreed that issues related to upcoming 2014 Sochi Olympic Games would be discussed by national Olympic Committees of the two countries," the Russian Foreign Ministry said. Georgia's government has announced that Georgia would take part in Winter Olympic Games in Sochi next year.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said that the next meeting between Abashidze and Karasin would take place either in late May or in June.

The meeting in Prague was the second

steps have been undertaken in respect of trade relations, which should contribute to resumption of Georgian export to the Russian market."

"In parallel, work is underway on restoring transportation links, in particular restoration of regular flights," Abashidze said.

"The Russian side is considering easing existing visa regime" for the Georgian citizens, he said.

Abashidze said that possible easing of visa rules would probably apply to "certain categories"; he, however, also said that no timeframe of when it might



happen had been specified during the talks.

Abashidze also said that science and healthcare were identified as two additional areas, which should become part of discussions in frames of this bilateral dialogue.

"Importance of Geneva Discussions and the necessity to continue these Discussions in frames of internationally agreed format has been stressed during the meeting," Abashidze said.

Rubber Stamp and Phone Justice Continues to Pollute the Court System

By DALI BZHALAVA

The Georgian Court system was subject to political pressure prior to last year's parliamentary elections, in which the Georgian Dream coalition gained a majority in parliament and the ruling United National Movement was toppled after effectively running a one party state for the 8 years. This article will discuss many of the charges made against the juridical system during that period.

It is alleged by many that the scales of justice in Georgia are still unbalanced. Verdicts are handed down not according to the law or evidence but the



commands of the prosecution and the previous political elite. There is a saying that "judges are the prosecutors' rubber stamp". Despite the change of government, this is still the popular perception.

The courts and the prosecutor's office, long accused by opponents of the previous government, human rights defenders and others of "unconditional and top down obedience", are at last under scrutiny for their excessive abuse of power. Officers of the court have basically followed the instructions of the Georgian president and his party since the Rose Revolution, continuing the tradition of the previous regime. The dossier of one sided verdicts is massive; often these are politically motivated, ordered from the top, in direct support of former and still serving officials of the former government. The true motivations for such miscarriages of justice are self-evident.

Former Defence Minister David Kezerashvili is now being charged with the illegal takeover and seizure of the Imedi TV Company and massive mis-

appropriation of funds, at least 10 million GEL. There are many allegations of specific abuses of power in this case – which does not even touch upon the wide range of crimes his own colleagues accused him of committing during the 2008 Russian-Georgian war.

Similar charges of abuse of power, corruption thievery and bribe taking have been brought against Gigi Ugulava, the Tbilisi Mayor. The prosecution has requested his suspension from duty and demanded that he be required to file bail of 1 million GEL, on the grounds that he is a potential fugitive from justice who should be barred from leaving the city.

However these two cases are developing differently. Judge Giorgi Arevadze issued a warrant for the arrest of Kezerashvili, who had fled Georgia after the parliamentary elections. However he allowed Ugulava to walk free from the courtroom pending the results of the ongoing high-stakes investigation, although the evidence and witness testimony presented were equally damning in both cases.

"The Prosecutor's Office expected this decision, but it is still regarded as arbitrary," said main prosecutor Mr. Koba Kubilashvili, following the release of Ugulava. He added that he doesn't expect the Court of Appeal to respond positively to the prosecutor's bail request due to the culture of impunity. "The Prosecutor's Office has changed now, but the other side of the legal system, the court, remains the same. The judges are still under the influence of the former government; they are there to serve UNM party members," Kubilashvili claims. This is not an isolated opinion. Lia Mukhashavria, Chair of the "Human Rights Priorities" group, says that the prosecutor made a test case out of Ugulava. "It made clear that the court is biased. The Prosecutor's Office did not demand the arrest of Ugulava, it was merely the right thing to do, but the court did not make Ugulava step down even when he is charged with such serious crimes.

"Before the October 2012 elections Judge Arevadze sent everyone who came before him

to jail if the Prosecutor's Office demanded it. Now he sets all those politicians criminally charged free, either with or without bail, in spite of the seriousness of the charges they face and the substantial evidence there is that they should be indicted."

In the post Rose Revolution period an array of domestic and international human right organisations have openly talked about the endemic selective justice in Georgia, citing unfair sentences and a conviction rate which is among the highest in the world, nearly 99 percent.

Prior to the elections the Supreme Court recognised this threat to its integrity and conducted a survey of public confidence in the court system. This concluded, surprisingly, that public confidence in the courts was high, but since the elections prosecutors have received more than 8,000 letters demanding judicial reviews of various cases. Obviously, either the survey was flawed or the scales of justice in Georgia have tilted.

The increasing number of appeals of last resort now being made to the European Court of Justice in Strasbourg by Georgians underscores the lack of impartiality of the Georgian court system. Even the US State Department has reported that the Georgian court system has become one of "Phone Justice" – in which judges make their decisions on the basis of phone calls they receive from the Prosecutor's Office or powerful politicians. Much attention is now focused on the claims of the executive branch that judges have now been released from pressure from the Prosecutor's Office and can work independently

and make fair judgments. This may be true, but it does not mean that judges who owe their positions to the previous regime have any motivation to desert their friends. Giorgi Arevadz and others remain totally loyal during cases where former officials are involved.

In the decisions being made now, while sometimes the reverse of what would have been expected before the elections, still serve the interests of the same group of people. In December 2012 the court rejected a prosecutor's request and instead of imprisoning Alexander Khetaguri, Nika Gvaramia, Kakhaber Dameraia, George Nemsitsveridze and Devi Kandelaki, former high-ranking officials charged with illegal business activity, falsifying documents and demanding large bribes, released them on bail. Such crimes carry penalties of from 11 to 15 years behind bars, and there was felt to be a significant likelihood that if freed they would destroy or tamper with evidence and intimidate witnesses, but a plea agreement saw them released, possibly to do exactly this.

Tea Tsulukiani, the new Minister of Justice, has her own questions about how the courts have functioned over the past few years. "I would like to ask the Chairman of the Supreme Court, why is it that the 30 cases of former officials heard in court so far have all been set before the same 4-5 judges? These judges are Giorgi Goginashvili, Gela Badriashvili, Merab Jorbenadze, Giorgi Arevadze and sometimes Nato Khujadze.

Reform has now commenced and judges can now ensure that the juridical sys-

tem is based on impartial decisions and cleanse the system of the judges who soil their profession," she says.

Matters are going further than this. The parliamentary majority has raised the question of impeaching the Supreme Court Chairman on the basis of all that has transpired in the courts since 2004 and the questions asked after the parliamentary elections. Article 42 of Georgia's organic law states that at least one-third of the total number of members of parliament must sign any parliamentary motion for the dismissal of the Supreme Court Chairman. Only after receiving the assent of the majority can parliament dismiss the Supreme Court Chairman. However, Eka Beselia, Chairperson of the Parliamentary Human Rights Committee, says that discussions have already begun regarding the impeachment of current Chairman Kote Kubashvili. She says that the Prosecutor's Office has already told her that certain judges illegally obtained their positions. All those involved in such cases will be held responsible, including the Supreme Court Chairman, who authorised them.

"We are dealing with a flagrant violation of the constitution, the appointment of unauthorised persons as judges. The Code of Practice states that in such cases all decisions made by those judges are to be reviewed. I cannot say if this will become grounds for the impeachment of Kote Kubashvili but we will continue to study this issue carefully," says Beselia.

Nevertheless, Kubashvili does not consider the possibility of his impeachment serious. "Such allegations are groundless. A politician has the right to make baseless statements, but I do not have that right," he says, claiming that all the judges had a proper juridical education under the terms laid down in the current Constitution. The Chairman of the Georgian Young Lawyers Association also believes that discussing impeachment is incorrect.

"Even if it is determined that the judges of the Supreme Court were illegally appointed, I don't see any reason for discussing the direct impeachment of the Supreme Court Chairman. Impeachment procedures against him should be exceptional and of the alleged violations should be clear and well defined," says Kakha Kodjoridze.

Visa Liberalisation Action Plan

- “A guidance instrument for the road ahead”

By SABA GVETADZE

On February, 25 2013 the European Union commissioner for Home Affairs Cecilia Malmström presented the Action Plan on Visa Liberalization (VLAP) to Georgian Authorities. The document represents a further step towards the final goal of full visa liberalization allowing visa-free travel for Georgian citizens between Georgia and European Union members states.

The Action Plan was presented after almost nine months of Visa Liberalization Dialogue, which was launched on 4th of June, 2012. The main aim of the process was to examine all the relevant conditions in establishing visa-free travel. The start of the Dialogue was the result of the Warsaw Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit (September, 2011) and represents the “commitment to closer cooperation and increased mobility in a secure environment with its Eastern neighbors, including Georgia” (The European Commission Press Release: IP/12/561, Brussels, June 4, 2012).

Speaking beside Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, Commissioner Malmström de-

scribed the contents of the Visa Liberalization Action Plan as a document “which identifies the measures that need to be adopted and implemented by Georgia” during the press conference.

The European Commission describes the contents of the Action Plan as the document which concentrates on four main blocks of measures dealing with “document security, border and migration management, public order and security, and relevant external relations issues” (IP/13/156, Brussels, Feb. 25, 2013). The full original text of the document is not yet accessible. However, according to the European Commission the action plan contains two main benchmarks the first of which concentrates on the policy framework, including legislation and structural planning schemes.

The second benchmark is more demanding in terms of concrete outcomes. The Action Plan outlines a set of requirements that need to be achieved for secure visa-free travel environment and describes expectations for effective and sustainable implementation the necessary measures in the pursuit of further development of the Visa Liberalization process. In the years ahead, it is up to the Georgian society to familiarize itself with the responsibility the EU has granted. The Action Plan is directly issued to the Georgian

government but this does not minimize the role of civil society to maintain pressure over political powers to effectively implement the Plan.

Commissioner Malmström regarded Georgia’s previous reforms as being in line with its full commitment “to the European integration agenda” and underlined the importance of effective domestic political cooperation between different political powers. The commissioner voiced the European Union’s assessment of Georgia’s role in the region by saying that “Georgia has so far been an example in the region and that the European Commission hopes very much that it will remain so.” Moreover, the commissioner expressed the EU’s support to the cohabitation process between the President and Georgian Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili in finding a “smooth and pragmatic solutions” for the challenges that Georgia currently faces.

The policy areas outlined in the Action Plan that need enhanced attention include strengthening preventive actions towards corruption and organized crime, and ensuring the protection of private data, anti-discrimination and minority rights. Moreover, necessary judicial reforms need to be carried out with the aim of creating a truly independent and democratic judicial system (The



European Commission Press Release IP/13/156, Brussels, Feb. 25, 2013).

President Saakashvili evaluated possible visa-free relations with the European Union as an “historic breakthrough for the citizens of Georgia” referring to the importance of Georgia’s proximity to the EU. The president views the Visa Liberalization Action Plan as one more significant step towards enhanced cooperation on the Association Agreement and the Free Trade Agreement with the EU.

The areas of the EU interests mentioned above are of crucial importance and represent the main values, around which the member states are united. Moreover, the Action Plan sets the goals not only for the improvement of democratic power sharing principles but for the creation of a more secure living environment for the citizens of Georgia as well. The EU clearly understands that establish-

ing the visa-free movement of people between the EU and Georgia in the current situation might result in a rapid increase in the emigration rate from the country.

The president mentioned how “more people have been returning to Georgia than leaving each year since the Rose Revolution, with the exception of 2008. We had a positive balance in terms of migration.” The National Statistics Office of Georgia has reported a negative balance of migration in the following years: 2003, 2006, 2007 and 2008. However, data collected in 2004, 2005, 2009, 2010 and 2011 demonstrates that the migration balance was positive. Moreover, it is in the best interests of Georgia to maintain a positive balance of migration. By granting the Action Plan on Visa Liberation, the EU seeks to create a healthier democratic environment in the country and eliminate the push

factors that contribute to emigration from Georgia.

Georgia welcomes the Action Plan with its own expectations to the European Union. The Plan encourages the government to actively fight against corruption and continue working to strengthen judicial bodies. However, the government and the Georgian citizens expect increased political support from EU officials and place great importance on the upcoming Third EU – Eastern Partnership summit (Vilnius, Lithuania) to be held in the fall of 2013.

In an editorial published in European Voice, Edward Lucas suggests that the EU show that the Union is “successful, open and reliable”, while recommending that the union “stop punishing people in the Eastern Partnership countries for the sins of their governments. Visa liberalization and free trade have a huge psychological effect and undermine autocratic regimes and their narratives” (A Chilly Summit, Feb 28, 2013). Further successful cooperation of Georgia with the union will greatly improve the commitment of other young democracies towards the Eastern Partnership as well.

Saba Gvetadze is a student of European Politics, Common Law and Market Regulations at the University of Flensburg, Germany

NEWS

Saakashvili, Ivanishvili May Meet on Monday

By CIVIL GEORGIA

PM Ivanishvili is ready to meet President Saakashvili on Monday morning as offered by the latter, PM’s office said in a brief statement on Friday evening.

It emerged earlier on Friday that efforts were underway to arrange a meeting between Saakashvili and Ivanishvili as both of them expressed readiness to meet each other.

PM Ivanishvili told a government session earlier on Friday that he had offered President Saakashvili to meet on March 1, but the President declined citing tight schedule and a planned foreign trip. “He said he will be busy till Monday,” Ivanishvili said.

President’s spokesperson, Manana Manjgaladze, said in response that after Mikheil Saakashvili expressed readiness earlier this week to hold a meet-



ing, the PM offered to meet on Friday, “but it’s not possible because of President’s schedule.”

“The President offers to hold a meeting on Monday morning; the President reiterates that he’s ready to meet the Prime Minister wherever the

latter wants,” Manjgaladze said. “It was the President’s initiative to hold the meeting and blaming the President for thwarting the meeting is completely incomprehensible. The President plans number of important foreign trips, but he is always ready to constructive-

ly and actively contribute to developments in Georgia... It is in the President’s interest next week to start with constructive dialogue and agreement. Lots of issues have been accumulated and it is the obligation of the President and the Prime Minister to do everything in order

to diffuse misunderstandings.”

In televised remarks during a meeting with UNM lawmakers and senior aides, among them Secretary of National Security Council Giga Bokeria, President Saakashvili said on Friday that he was ready for an “issue-based” and “serious”

dialogue with the Prime Minister.

“It is absolutely obvious that the country is now in the mode of political crisis,” Saakashvili said. “We want the country to get back on track of development and for that reason we are ready for a broad, open, flexible, comprehensive dialogue on all the issues, including on constitution.”

In a brief written statement on Friday evening, PM office said: “Today President’s administration made the statement that Mikheil Saakashvili was offering Bidzina Ivanishvili to meet on Monday morning. The Georgian Prime Minister once again agrees and expresses his readiness to meet the President.”

After the October parliamentary elections, Saakashvili and Ivanishvili met twice – once in the presidential palace on October 9 and then in January at a reception in the Georgian Patriarchate on the occasion of Orthodox New Year.

A Round Table of Ethnical Minorities and Government Officials

By TINATIN GOGOLADZE

Low levels of education and social integration along with language barriers and hate speech: these were some of the main problems highlighted as difficulties for Georgia's ethnical minorities at the Radisson Blu hotel on February 26, 2013. The Ethnic Diversity for Cohesive Development conference was the largest gathering of representatives of ethnical minorities, government officials, and international political figures in nine years.

Organized by the public movement "Multinational Georgia" in cooperation with the Dutch Embassy, the meeting aimed at underlining the results of the latest research on ethnical minorities in Georgia and facilitating direct dialogue between the Georgian government and representatives of the country's various ethnic groups. Guests included Georgia's Parliamentary Speaker, eight ministers, three heads of parliamentary committees, seven parliament members, various international organization workers and 18 representatives of Georgian ethnical minorities.



During the conference, representatives and experts identified and discussed a range of challenges, but the difficulties and cracks found on every level of the state educational system was most concerning to the meeting participants. Poor translation of books, lack of teachers, a new generation of professionals in the educational system, ineffective bilingual education are only some mentioned on the long list of issues that make the current Georgian education system ineffective for ethnical minorities.

Nino Revishvili, Head of Policy and Program Development Department of the Ministry of Education and Science, reported on the on ongoing

changes and projects in the ministry. "For ethnical minorities it is especially important to provide high quality education. There have been many issues that have been criticized in the educational system and the ministry is currently working on them," Revishvili announced. "We are approaching the mid-term evaluation of our reforms and I hope that the ministry will be cooperate with NGOs and representatives of ethnical minorities during the second stage of the reforms," she added.

As Revishvili explained, interested parties are now well informed about the cracks in the system, making their engagement in solving problems much more

productive, adding that the first area the Ministry of Education and Science is planning to address is preschool education. "It is clear that pilot versions of our kindergartens that are operating in several regions of Georgia are not enough to prepare [ethnical minorities] for school education. There also have been shortcomings in terms of physical education in schools and lack of teacher qualifications."

Nonetheless, she noted that the ministry has seen positive results in the improvement of Georgian language knowledge among youth of ethnical minorities. "Based on the national exam statistics, students have demonstrated having a good knowledge of the Georgian lan-

guage. Consequently they have higher chances to enroll in universities," Revishvili concluded.

Bella Osipova, a representative of the Public Defender's office, told that another major concern is the lack of representation of ethnic minorities in mass media. "Media coverage of ethnic minority groups' issues is one-sided and not objective. TV news focuses mainly on ethnic conflict or religious holidays and in print media there is a huge amount of hate speech directed at minorities. They are represented as second class citizens in Georgian society or closed social groups," explained Osipova, adding that while minority topics are covered in the media, representatives of the same minorities are rarely seen on television.

According to Osipova, the role of the public broadcaster in minority integration issues is very important, since they present news reports in Abkhazian, Ossetian, Azeri and Armenian languages. However, an informative vacuum has been created because news programs go on air late at night and early in the morning and each minority language has only ten minutes of news reports. "There are many complaints from regional minorities about the lack of in-

formation and about their problems going unaddressed. In order to overcome these obstacles it is essential to develop regional journalism, and increase journalists' qualifications," the Public Defender representative added.

Arnold Stepanyan, the chief of "Multinational Georgia" considers that the conference was a first step in facilitating overall communication with the newly elected government and hopes that this platform will develop and hasten the process of studying and addressing ethnic minority problems in Georgia.

"In order to reach out to the previous government, we had to use international intermediaries. We held a similar conference in 2004, but not one of the invited officials showed up. Direct communication with government officials is much more productive and we are pleased that this time officials actually came to listen to our concerns and expressed readiness to cooperate. The blackmailing attitude of quantitative advantage is no more acceptable in the current reality. Our wish is to create a strong highly responsible, socially educated community that will participate in the development of Georgia," Stepanyan concluded.

Russia to Lift Ban on Georgian Wine

Continued from p. 2

The inspection tour started out with a visit to the Wine Laboratory, where Russian experts demonstrated how quality control is completed from start to finish. Scores of wines were checked to determine if their quality meets international standards. Moreover, it was determined to be higher than it used, at least before the ban," Levan Davitashvili, head of the National Wine Agency told the Georgian Times.

He said that the continuing process of resuming Georgian products on the Russian market depends to a large extent on the successful completion of the first visit of Rospotrebnadzor's inspectors. "If things go off without a hitch, another delegation of Russia's Consumer Rights Organization will visit Georgia in a week or two," Davitashvili explained.

However, everything was proceeding smoothly, or at least until Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili made a statement at a meeting with the press on February 26. The president's remarks came as a



surprise to many but were not totally unexpected. He said that "[Gennady] Onishchenko (Chief Sanitary Inspector of Russia) does not have enough respect for us to come here in person. Instead he sent a delegation to Georgia and now our bureaucrats and representatives of wine-making companies are standing on their hind legs. Wine factory representatives are filling the glasses of the Russian officials with trembling hands and all the while are looking into their eyes to see whether they like it or not... I don't understand why we are still living in the Soviet era and haven't ridden ourselves from this in-

feriority complex. Why must we always please them?" Saakashvili stated as he accused the Rospotrebnadzor's specialists of corruption.

The reaction of the Russian Chief Sanitary Inspector followed in quick succession – in a flash. "If humiliations of our Russian specialists and other actions taken to impede their normal work will not stop, then there is the possibility of cutting short the visit of our delegation, [an option] which will remain on the agenda," Onishchenko declared.

Such actions of the president were quickly picked up by the press and even the next day, in

order to clear the air, Georgian officials and MPs leveled scathing criticism and questioned his motivations. "Saakashvili continues using rhetoric, which is making worse our already complicated relations with Russia," Davit Usupashvili, the Chairman of the Parliament told a group of journalists.

Davit Kirvalidze, Minister of Agriculture in his turn assured that the Russian market was very important for Georgia and Saakashvili's "insulting" and "irresponsible" remarks create artificial obstacles and cast doubt on the efforts of the new government's effort to open up Georgian goods to the Russia market.

That same day, Patriarch Ilia II, head of the Georgian Orthodox Church who is highly regarded in society, both in Georgia and Russia, received the delegation of Rospotrebnadzor. He supported efforts to normalize relations and said that the return of Georgian wines and mineral waters to the Russian market "will contribute to normalization of difficult relations" between the two former Soviet republics.

Onishchenko, satisfied with

the tone of Georgian officials and the sincerity of the clergy announced on February 28 his plans to personally arrive in Georgia after the group of experts from his office finishes inspecting Georgian products and submits a detailed report on the quality of wines and mineral waters. Russian sanitary inspectors left Georgia on March 1 making no official statements. It is expected that their report will soon be completed.

Meanwhile local winemakers look forward and hope to be allowed to compete again in one of the biggest markets for their product. They believe that Georgian beverages will again be found on Russian store shelves and regain the popularity they used to have in the period of the Soviet Union. Already Georgian products have great name recognition and it is just a matter of maintaining high quality products.

Georgia's wine export dropped from 81.4 million USD in 2005 to 29.2 million USD in 2007, though in 2012 this figure increased to 65 million USD. In terms of mineral water, after

Russia's embargo, it initially dropped, albeit insignificantly. However, Georgian mineral waters soon found new markets. According to Department of Statistics, in 2005 the export totaled 32.5 million USD and in 2012, it reached 59.3 million USD, almost a two fold increase.

The possible lift of Russia's ban on Georgian wine and mineral water was one of the issues discussed between Zurab Abashidze, the Georgian Prime Minister's special representative to Russia and Grigory Karasin, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister in Prague, Czech Republic. This was the second direct meeting between the official representatives of the two countries since the unfortunate Georgian-Russian war in 2008. The two countries held their first direct talks about bilateral relations in Geneva, Switzerland, in December, 2012.

It is hoped that with the re-entry of Georgian wine to the Russian market that relations between these two countries will improve; this will be a win-win situation for all stakeholders and will also yield a political dividend.

Can Political Cohabitation Work for Georgia?

An Analysis of Alternative Power Sharing Agreements

The power sharing arrangement best described as “cohabitation” between the new Georgian government led by Bidzina Ivanishvili and his opponent President Mikheil Saakashvili is deteriorating and leading the country towards destabilisation.

The term cohabitation has an Ancient Greek origin and describes the process within which several antagonistic and rival political groups coexist by trying to reach consensus despite their ideological differences. Georgians know however, that there are many alternative meanings to such terms in practice. Democracy often develops straight into dictatorship. Just think of a herd of wild cattle, restless and sensing danger.

The current situation in Georgia is very similar to the attempt at “cohabiting” that took place in post-Tsarist Russia in the wake of the “Bourgeois Revolution” of February 12, 1917. At that time the “Bolsheviks” and “Mensheviks”, the two rival factions within the Russian Social-Democratic Party which had seized power, exercised bipolar governance. The distribution of power was almost identical to that of today’s Georgia: the “Bolsheviks” controlled local governments and held a majority in the “people councils”, while the “Mensheviks” controlled the central government and military. This cohabitation was an utter failure, and resulted in the Bolsheviks conducting their successful coup d’état on October 25, 1917 and beginning their 70 years of bloody rule.

In present day Georgia, the ruling Georgian Dream coalition controls the central government, military and security structures while the opposition United National Movement, led by the president, retains control of local government and the courts, at least for now.

distributed between the country’s various ethno-religious groups, who were principally Maronite Christian and Shia and Sunni Muslim. Each had their own sphere of influence, but in reality this distribution of power greatly favoured the Christians, despite the fact they were only a minority of

the inability to reach a compromise on constitutional amendments and a breakdown in negotiations between David Usupashvili, new Speaker of Parliament and President Saakashvili.

It is becoming even more apparent that the continued rivalry over foreign policy pri-



Another noteworthy example of cohabitation gone wrong was seen in Africa in 1989. In Angola, a country which had experienced prolonged political strife and foreign invasions by Cuba and South Africa, a temporary consensus was reached between the ruling, communist-backed MPLA and the rival UNITA movement. The breakdown of their cohabitation led to renewed violence and an all-out civil war that would go on to claim tens of thousands of lives.

Lebanon provides a similar example. In 1946, when it became an independent country, political power in Lebanon was

the population. This cohabitation came to an abrupt end in 1976, when over a decade of clan warfare broke out between the rival groups.

These are not the only examples of unsuccessful attempts at cohabitation, but they do demonstrate vividly that the whole idea, at least on a national political level, is a myth. The current situation in Georgia suggests that this latest experiment at cohabitation will prove no more successful than the examples given.

There are several areas of concern as to how the current arrangement is actually developing. These namely include

the seemingly subversive actions of the opposition led by the president. They are tireless in their attempts to harm Georgia’s image in the international community. It has worked to be a reliable, stable and respected nation and a player on the international scene. An example of the latter was Saakashvili’s candid statement after his meeting with Azerbaijan’s President Ilham Aliyev in which he alleged that Moscow created a special political movement led by tycoons of Azeri origin (Sadikhov, Alekperov, and others), especially designed in overthrow the Azerbaijani gov-



ernment and to further agitate the ethnic Azeri population of Georgia to demand independence.

Other examples include Saakashvili’s recent press depiction of Georgia as a failed state whose weakness will pose a political problem for Russia. His veiled threats of a possible coup d’état on April 19, 2013, the same day that the United National Movement plans to hold a mass protest rally against the new government in front of the old Parliament building in Tbilisi, underscores his adamant position to maintain an adversarial position and scuttle any attempts at real and productive compromise.

By Dr. Vakhtang Maisaia – *ex-political prisoner, USIA Alumni, an international defense fellow and doctorate student at the U.S. Air Force Academy (1998), graduate from GIPA and George C. Marshall College of International and Security Studies, a Counselor at Georgian Mission at NATO HQ and a rapporteur to the NATO IS PASP Security and Defense Economics Directorate (2004-2008), visiting Professor at Bratislava State University and “Caucasus International University”, director of the “Georgian Times” Strategic Studies Center “Azri”.*

The recent ultimatum sent by Prime Minister Ivanishvili to President Saakashvili effectively declares “political war” on the president for undermining Georgia’s stability and political development. Saakashvili’s ill-advised response to this statement demonstrated that his only interest is to regain power and re-establish a one-party system of elites.

This is not to suggest that Georgia is on the verge of another revolution or civil war. But simply that given the failure of previous attempts at political cohabitation in various countries, it would not be surprising if this one also ultimately fell apart.

Saakashvili Speaks of ‘Threat’ Facing Azerbaijan and Georgia

By CIVIL GEORGIA

After visiting Baku, President Saakashvili said that Russia was preparing the same “scenario” for Azerbaijan, which was applied against Georgia in last year’s parliamentary elections when, as he put it, “oligarchs, Russian funds, blackmailing and provocations” were used.



“I have seen what a huge threat we, us and Azerbaijan, are facing, because a diaspora has been established in Russia

with [Soyun] Sadikov in it, who is a native of Gardabani [town in Georgia’s predominately ethnic Azerbaijani populated

Kvemo Kartli region] and a wealthy Russian so called businessman; [Lukoil president Vagit] Alekperov and some oth-

er Russian billionaires were also included in that [group], which aims at applying exactly the same scenario in struggle against the guarantor of Azerbaijan’s independence, the President [Ilham Aliyev], that was applied in Georgia’s October elections - with use of money, oligarchs, Russian funds, blackmailing and provocations,” Saakashvili told journalists in the Tbilisi airport upon arrival from Baku on Thursday evening.

“Sadikov is native of Gardabani and he has also stated that he would struggle for autonomy for Azerbaijanis in Georgia,” Saakashvili said.

Sadikov was the chairman of ethnic Azerbaijanis union of Russia, AzerRos, since 2000 and is its honorary chairman since January, 2013. He is the member of Russian President Vladimir Putin’s “trustees”

In his remarks Saakashvili also mentioned release from prison of Vahagn Chakhalyan, an activist from Georgia’s predominantly ethnic Armenian populated region, who was serving a prison term for charges related to weapons, armed hooliganism and acts against public order. Saakashvili said that Chakhalyan, whose release from prison under the amnesty

he condemned, “throughout these years has been demanding Javakheti’s autonomy.”

“So I want to tell our society to think over these issues. It reminds me of 1990s. When last time there was talk of Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli autonomy? There were no such talks for past eight-nine years. I am not at all glad that I am talking about it right now... If we had not released Chakhalyan, we probably would not have spoken about it now,” Saakashvili said.

“We all should be careful now. We need coordination in the region. I am going for an official visit to several destinations in our neighborhood, including to Turkey. Under the constitution the President leads the foreign policy; in this case our foreign and domestic policies are interlinked and I am going to perform this function very actively regardless of who creates what obstacle to me,” he said.

The Euro's House Divided

By JEAN PISANI-FERRY

BRUSSELS – The European Commission's latest economic outlook paints a disheartening picture: unemployment rates close to or above 5% in Austria, Germany, and the Netherlands in 2014, but above 25% in Greece and Spain and roughly 15% in Ireland and Portugal. In the same year, per capita GDP is expected to be almost 7% above its pre-crisis level in Germany, but about 7% below in Ireland, Portugal, and Spain – and a terrifying 24% below in Greece. So the deep economic and social divide that has emerged within the eurozone is expected to persist.

Such a gulf within a monetary union cannot be sustained for very long. As Abraham Lincoln said, “a house divided against itself cannot stand.” The same monetary policy cannot possibly fit the needs of a country that is in depression and another that is at or close to full employment. Indeed, the single most important question for the future of the eurozone is whether the gap between

prospering and struggling members is being closed.

The optimistic reading is that, despite no sign of improvement in the labor market, economic performance has in fact started to improve, and an adjustment process is under way. The proof, it is often argued, is that external deficits have contracted substantially.

External accounts clearly matter, because they reflect the balance between domestic saving and investment. Until 2007, imbalances within the eurozone largely resulted from too little saving and/or too much real-estate investment, resulting in a growing accumulation of private debt. So the contraction of external deficits is a sign that a correction is under way, and the rebalancing is impressive. In Spain, Portugal, and Greece, the deficit has been reduced by more than seven percentage points of GDP since 2007, and in Ireland the current-account balance has swung into surplus.

The problem, however, is that a large part of this improvement reflects collapsing domestic demand, which has plummeted by around one-quarter in Greece and Ireland since 2007, and by one-eighth in Spain and Portugal. Investment in equipment – the key to strengthen-

ing productive capital in the tradable-goods sector – has generally suffered even more.

To be sure, demand contraction was inevitable in these countries, given that they were living far beyond their means; no economy can permanently sustain a rate of demand growth exceeding that of GDP. But what we have seen since 2007 is an overshooting of the contraction in consumer demand and domestic investment. This cannot be regarded as a success.

The news is better on the export side. Despite a grim environment, exports/GDP ratios have increased significantly in all four economies.

Ireland was known to be a very reactive, outward-oriented economy. But it's not only Ireland. Confronted with domestic economic collapse and a stagnant European environment, firms in Greece, Spain, and Portugal have turned to overseas markets and significantly increased their countries' shares of eurozone exports to the rest of the world.

Spain's performance in foreign markets is especially impressive. On the eve of the euro's creation, its exports outside the EU were just a quarter of French non-EU exports; now they are half the French

level.

The question, to which a clear answer may be impossible, is how much of these exports are for profit and how much are for survival – and thus whether strong trade performance can be sustained. This brings us to the issue of price and cost adjustment.

During the euro's first decade, the countries that are now struggling recorded persistently higher wage and price inflation than those in Europe's north. To recover and return to both internal and external balance, they must not only close the cost gap, but actually reverse it, thereby generating the trade surpluses needed to repay the foreign debt that they accumulated in the meantime.

The news on this front is mixed. Since 2007, labor costs have roughly stagnated in Greece, Spain, and Portugal (though the mix of wage cuts and productivity gains varies from country to country), and have contracted by 8% in Ireland, whereas they have increased by more than 10% in Germany. So a rebalancing is under way.

Contrary to stereotypes, for example, real wages in Greece have declined by 6% annually over the last three years. The



problem, however, is that prices have generally proved much more rigid, declining only in Ireland. In the rest of struggling Europe, price adjustment is barely noticeable. Firms, especially in sectors sheltered from international competition, have retained market power and have increased prices in response to the rising cost of capital.

The result is that the process of internal devaluation, as economists call it, is occurring very slowly. Employees have suffered wage cuts, but prices have not declined accordingly, so their loss of purchasing power is higher than it should be. Likewise, economies have not recovered lost competitiveness, so employment, especially in the traded-goods sector, is lower than it should be.

Austerity and reforms were supposed to deliver rebalancing within the eurozone. And

so they have, at least insofar as external balances are concerned. But, despite visible progress on the export front and noticeable labor-cost reductions, this rebalancing is mostly the result of the same collapse in domestic demand that is driving mass unemployment.

Ultimately, perhaps, all the pain will pay off. But societies may lose patience in the meantime. This should be enough to prompt a reassessment. The issue is not whether fiscal consolidation and external rebalancing are necessary – they are. It is how to make them politically and socially sustainable.

Jean Pisani-Ferry is Director of Bruegel, an international economics think tank, Professor of Economics at Université Paris-Dauphine, and a member of the French prime minister's Council of Economic Analysis.

Sheryl Sandberg's Good Fight

By NAOMI WOLF

NEW YORK – Is it always offensive to advise women to change something about themselves in order to ensure that they can achieve their goals? To suggest the need for any self-scrutiny on women's part is a minefield; the safe ground is to urge that we remain focused only on fighting all-too-real gender discrimination. But sometimes it is necessary to cross the minefield.

Sheryl Sandberg, the chief operating officer of Facebook, has done something pretty gutsy. She has written a manifesto about breaking the glass ceiling, called *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*, and is drawing fire for it, because she argues that women often sabotage themselves.

Critics are already attacking Sandberg on the grounds that she is blaming the victim. Anne-Marie Slaughter, who wrote a much-read article about the glass ceiling last year, has sought an open debate about where the problems lie. Others, unfortunately, attack *ad feminam*: Sandberg is rich and powerful, so how can her advice be useful to struggling, underpaid everywomen?



Sandberg is seeking not just to raise consciousness, but to forge a social movement. She wants her “Lean In” circles – all-women spaces to be supported by corporate workplaces – to teach women negotiation, public speaking, and other skills, all merged with upbeat collective support.

I know that this seemingly trivial approach is actually a solid recipe for success. I co-founded a similar program called The Woodhull Institute; by teaching these skill sets, and adding mutual support in an all-female space, our alumnae – whether from barrios or Ivy League universities – quickly

and dramatically outpaced their peers.

At first, however, they struggled to identify their own often-remarkable achievements in publicly making a case for themselves. That effort felt so socially transgressive to them that they found it almost painful. So the opportunity to learn and practice speaking and negotiating skills is hardly inconsequential for women's advancement.

Indeed, as Sandberg rightly stresses, no one trains women in something as simple but critical as speaking in a strong, declarative voice. The range of inflections that are culturally

valued in women's voices (especially young women) are those that often undermine their authority in the workplace. So they often start presentations in an apology, use girlish inflections, and end statements with question marks. But sounding fetchingly unsure about what you are describing is not an effective way to pitch an idea to a potential investor, publisher, or constituent.

The same hard-to-address truth also goes for body language, to which Sandberg also rightly pays attention (as reflected in her book's title). The talented young women I trained had great difficulty at first sim-

ply standing straight and tall; they often projected a lack of confidence physically, or simply looked as if they would rather be anywhere else than in the spotlight. Young men from elite backgrounds, by contrast, learn to project physical confidence as part of their birthright – just as they learn to speak in assertive, declarative voices and claim their achievements.

So here is another tough fact: Institutional battles to redress women's underrepresentation in land ownership, politics, and so on must be coupled with individualized leadership and skills training for women, ideally in an atmosphere of mutual support in which women learn from peers how to achieve and enlarge their own goals.

This model shows amazing results for women, in contexts ranging from Smith College to the Grameen Bank to all-women job-training programs such as Nontraditional Employment for Women, which trains women to break into highly skilled and high-paying, but traditionally all-male, blue-collar jobs. Likewise, Grace Belgravia, an all-female club, is attempting to rival the clout of London's elite men's clubs.

The all-female peer group's emphasis on supporting women to be strong and achieve their goals is critical, as two young

leaders, Courtney Martin and Katie Orenstein (both Woodhull Institute alumnae) recently noted. But, to realize Sandberg's vision of a social movement in which all-female groups support their members' efforts to make their own paths successful, we need to overcome obstacles in our own thinking.

The “post-feminist” view that there is no longer a need for all-women spaces needs to be challenged. There is also the question of how workplaces should respond if all-male groups wish to convene as well. My own view is that there is nothing wrong with some same-sex gatherings in a private setting, whereas in public contexts, discrimination is discrimination. Sandberg will have to explain her position on this issue.

A more pressing obstacle, in a sense, is institutionalized feminism, which often finds it more comfortable to blame well-known villains and attack those who dare to call attention to women's need to learn for themselves the skills of securing and wielding power.

It's time to move on. Surely we need both the broad social analysis and the leaders who will take it upon themselves to help the next generation of women entrepreneurs and workers to speak for themselves and get what they deserve.

*Naomi Wolf is a political activist and social critic whose most recent book is *Vagina: A New Biography*.*

Accordions Are Underrated

BY TAKO AGARASHVILI

Surprising things happen in Tbilisi. Everybody got used to Georgians being late everywhere, but a sound guy being late for the Underground Man (Shawn Basey), an American accordionist playing at a little rock club was annoying at first. Let's face it: people don't stage accordion performances.

Any journalist would agree to doing an article about an American guy playing a very (to us) Soviet instrument accordion. Yet, in live it was much more than what words can describe. With its unusual, zesty, interesting, charismatic, and very Tom Waitsy-kind of street rock underground "sugar topping" sound this American guy playing an accordion accompanied with a Georgian guy playing the guitar (Dato Adamashvili) is quite the performance.

The Underground Man was raised in Oklahoma and worked as a "Compliance Officer" in Colorado. He teaches English at a private school - English Language Learning Center in Saburtalo. He also authored his first book - "How It Ends" and it will be released in about three months. He is planning to sell it in local book stores as well. He compiled his life experiences into a book and is working on the second book now which will include his experience in Georgia.

Eastern culture was always the subject of his interest. Shawn has been in Georgia since 2009. He came here first with the Peace Corps - a US Government volunteer program - to help out at a youth center in Bolnisi, a small town southwest of Tbilisi.

Was it what you expected?

It was rough, because at first I was living in Sagarejo, training for two months. Then I moved to Bolnisi for two years.

How was the village life?

I had a host family, we were communicating with a little Russian. The very first day my host showed me around. After seeing the living room and all the common rooms, he took me to this room and said - now here is the arsenal. So there was a whole array of fire arms, bullets and camouflage stuff everywhere. The guy turned out to be with the Georgian SWAT team. That shocked me, but he was a cool guy, a great wine-maker.

We were pretty strange things to them. It was four of us. And they showed us around a lot. They were showing off with their American guests. It is a very show-off culture. When you are a guest you get shown off a lot. Once I got to Bolnisi I was no longer a guest.



I was part of the atmosphere.

What village things did you do?

There were famous Georgian "supras". We went with my host father to a water melon farm and brought some water-melons home. No one saw us.

Did you steal them?

Well, I don't know. We may have. The village was a lot of fun. I had hard times, but it was a positive experience and great fun.

Did you commute to Tbilisi?

After I started dating a Georgian girl I did commute as much as I could.

How did that go?

It was the time when I was really tired of Georgia. The village life had worn me out. So either I had to get married or break it off all together and leave. I was in love with this girl, but at the time I thought I wasn't ready for the marriage. I had a long distance relationship before and it was the happiest relationship I have ever been in, but I didn't want to do it again. I'd rather actually see the girl; rather than communicate with her on different portals.

So I left Georgia and traveled to Europe for a year. It ended when my grandmother got sick. She was dying and I flew back home. My grandfather was there with her all the time and it was amazing seeing them so in love at their age after living a whole life together. He had Alzheimer's. So every time he left the room he had forgotten that she was dying. He kept singing the song - "I'll get by as long as I have you". That's when I realized that I had made a mistake. I shouldn't have left Georgia and the girl I loved. I learned my lesson. I think that there is no such thing as being prepared for marriage. If you are in love you should get married. If you have a good wife you will make it through the good times and the bad. But

when I came back, it was already too late. She was in a relationship with another guy.

How do you enjoy Tbilisi culture and a city life?

I learned much more about Georgian culture in the village, then in Tbilisi. Tbilisi is under a lot of western European influence and not necessarily in positive ways. Georgians watch movies and try to act like that. They don't realize that it's not really how it life is abroad. I think instead of investing all the money in Signagi - the artificial town, it's not a real town and Shardeni - the Barbie doll, Georgian government could build town centers in different villages to show very interesting real places. It would be much more interesting and useful to show the real face of Georgia.

When it comes to the city life, I go to underground bars a lot. Shardeni is not for me. I like more artsy places such as Cannudos, TNT rock club, Amarcord, etc.

No clubbing?

No, I don't like clubbing. Guys go to clubs to meet girls for sex. Girls go clubbing and dress up to show off in front of other girls. Besides I'm not a good dancer so I'm out of the competition considering that Georgian guys are really good dancers.

You didn't meet anybody?

Whoever approached me in the club here was a hooker. I find it funny, that hookers are dressed modestly, and girls who are virgins dress up like hookers. It still is a surprise to me, as well as the fact that in order to get a girl to meet up with me for a cup of coffee I need to chat with her for like three months on Facebook.

How long are you planning on staying here?

I have no plans. Georgia taught me not to have plans because Georgians cancel everything they plan in advance. So as long as I enjoy my stay here,

make money and have my accordion thing going, I am willing to stay here. I quit working for a corporate job. I'm up for following my dream.

Why accordion?

Everyone plays guitar.

Tell me the story

I learned how to play the accordion when I was in Bolnisi. I used to play the piano so I knew how to deal with one part of the instrument, so I learned on my own how to handle the rest. And I loved it. I have a family in Louisiana, so I spent all my summers there and I was constantly exposed to blues and jazz music. I also used to play the Clarinet and Saxophone. Then I taught myself the piano. Now I don't remember how to play the piano but it helped me learn to play the accordion. Nobody played blues on accordion. That's what I'm

doing now. It's strange but I think it's also great. My first song was a Russian one - Katusha. I knew how to play it on the piano, so I learned how to play it on my accordion.

Your music seems to be having a Tom Waits' influence.

Yes, it does. When I learned to play, I knew I didn't know how to sing, so I figured I could try singing with Tom's voice and sing his songs. He is more than a musician, he is poet. I like Russian singer Visotsky also. His voice is almost not musical - that it is musical. I also have an influence of Russian folk music. They use the accordion a lot. I mostly do the covers, I only wrote 2-3 songs of my own, one of which I dedicated to that Georgian girl I fell in love with.

Did your accordion travel with you around the Europe?

Yes, it was great. I used to play a lot. I played at parties, with friends, in the bars, in the streets for money or buzz. I loved it.

Did you play for your grandmother?

Yes, but she was unconscious at the time. We didn't know how she would react to loud music. But I used to play for my grandfather and his friends in the retirement home. These old people loved it. I'm not sure if he remembers it, but others certainly do. I played their song at her funeral.

What was the first place you played in Tbilisi?

It was in Divan. I played in Divan in Kiev, so when I saw Divan here I tried it out and it worked. Now I play at TNT club on Tuesdays and Amarcord on Fridays.

Where did the Under-

ground Man come from?

The idea for the Underground Man comes from Dostoevsky's "Notes from the Underground," one of his shorter books that more fully explains his own brand of existentialism. The Underground Man is a man lost in today's society, without purpose or meaning, but yet refuses to lash out against those he feels are responsible for his emptiness of existence. That perhaps the Randian selfishness that has been proclaimed by modern society as a thing of virtue is actually a castle of lies, built on a foundation of fear and self-loathing that can only rot a society from the inside, only building it up in the same way a termites add more 'structure' to an already standing building. The overwhelming materialism of today's society has destroyed us as human beings and we have to re-identify the main things of importance that can keep us from being machines and keep us as creatures of passion and love.

What is your state of mind?

I might be a little old starting my artistic career, but Charles Bukowsky published his first book when he was 49. One of his poems "Roll the Dice" told me that you can lose your girlfriend and job; you should follow your dream or "you will be alone with the gods and your nights will flame with fire". You have to follow your dreams. Corporate workers are never memorized; it is people of art that get immortalized. If you don't try doing what you really want to do, you are nothing. You must follow your dreams. That's my religion.

NEWS

Queen Elizabeth has Stomach Bug, Cancels Trip

BY Reuters

Britain's 86-year-old Queen Elizabeth has cancelled a planned trip to the Welsh city of Swansea because of a stomach upset, Buckingham Palace said on Friday.

"She will be assessed in the coming days but her majesty is currently spending the weekend at Windsor as usual," said a palace spokesman, referring to her official residence.

The spokesman added the monarch, who had been due to attend a military ceremony in the south Wales city on Saturday, was experiencing symptoms of gastroenteritis, an infection of the stomach and bow-



el caused by bacteria or viruses.

The Queen marked 60 years

on the throne last year and remains hugely popular in Britain.

Caucasus Travel Show 2013 launches in Yerevan

By ARM RADIO.AM

The twelfth international Caucasus Travel Show 2013 launched today at the Armenia Marriott Hotel in Yerevan. Armenian Deputy Minister of Economy Ara Petrosyan, USAID Armenia Mission Director Karen Hilliard, Ambassador of Argentina to Armenia Diego Ernesto Alvarez Rivera, Vice-President of the Armenian Association of Travel Agents Yeghishe Tanashyan, the Head of the Tourism Unit of the Yerevan Municipality Maria Baraghmanyan, and the President of the World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations Felicitas Wressnig



Armenian Deputy Minister of Economy Ara Petrosyan

delivered remarks at the opening ceremony, which was attended by representatives of the Armenian government, the international community, the local tourism industry and other stakeholders.

The Caucasus Travel Show (CTS) is a two-day international tradeshow that promotes tourism opportunities for Armenia and traditionally brings together about 18,000 visitors from the capital Yerevan and other provinces. Since 1999, the CTS has served as a meeting place for local tour operators and other representatives of the sector to establish new partnerships. Besides tour operators, exhibitors include travel agencies, hotels and resorts, airlines, tourism educational institutions, NGOs, tourism-related magazines and information agencies.

This year's event features 75 exhibitors, of which 58 are from the 11 provinces. Organizers expect international visitors from Turkey, Georgia, Greece, Egypt, Argentina, the United Arab Emirates and other

countries interested in Armenian tourism. On March 1 and 2, the exhibitors will have the chance to establish new business contacts with local and international tourism providers, obtain updated information about the field and available tour products, represent their businesses, and sell their tour packages and services.

This year the CTS also features a job fair for students and alumni of Armenian educational institutions specialized in tourism and a familiarization trip for international visitors.

The event is organized by the Armenian Association of Travel Agents (AATA) and the Armenian chapter of the American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA). The USAID-funded Enterprise Development and Market Competitiveness (EDMC) Project is the main partner of the event this year. Through EDMC, USAID is supporting the participation of tourism providers from the provinces, as well as assisting with the job fair and enhancing tradeshow marketing efforts.

Is Armenia On The Brink Of A 'Barevolution'

By RFE/RL's Armenian Service

For the fourth time in 17 years, a defeated Armenian presidential candidate has openly denounced the outcome of the ballot as rigged and declared himself the legitimately elected president.

The candidate in question is U.S.-born former Foreign Minister Raffi Hovannisian. According to official returns, he polled 36.8 percent of the vote, compared with 58.6 percent for incumbent President Serzh Sarkisian.

Meeting with Sarkisian on February 21, Hovannisian suggested three alternative courses of action, all of which Sarkisian rejected: that Sarkisian acknowledge him as the rightful election winner; that Sarkisian call a repeat presidential ballot; or that Sarkisian schedule early parliamentary elections in which all of the 131 mandates would be allocated under the proportional system.

Hovannisian's Zharangutian party won just five seats in the May 2012 elections, down from seven in 2007.

On February 28, Hovannisian plans to convene a large-scale "national rally" in Yerevan to launch a "prolonged struggle" to "return power to the people." He dubbed that process a "barevolution," a wordplay on the colloquial Armenian greeting "barev" (good day). The hallmark of Hovannisian's election campaign was approaching potential voters in the street to talk to them.

In some respects, the current situation recalls that of five years ago, when former President Levon Ter-Petrosian de-

nounced as falsified the official results that gave him just 21.51 percent of the vote compared with 52.82 for Sarkisian. Ter-Petrosian and his supporters set up a tent camp on Yerevan's Freedom Square. Tens of thousands of people attended daily

cent for Sarkisian. But no one showed up in the small town of Goris, where Hovannisian was scheduled to speak on February 27.

Of Armenia's opposition parties, only the Armenian Revolutionary Federation-Dash-

nisian, the way some did in sympathy with Ter-Petrosian in 2008.

The modest attendance at Hovannisian's Yerevan rallies led political commentator Tatu Hakobian to observe that Hovannisian is finding it diffi-



Serzh Sarkisian speaks at a rally in the Kotayk region in January

rallies in his support.

Ter-Petrosian, too, appealed to the Constitutional Court — without success — to annul the vote. The standoff ended on March 1, 2008, when police and security personnel first launched a dawn raid to expel protesters from Freedom Square, then that evening confronted protesters elsewhere in the city. Ten people died in the resulting violence.

†Hovannisian, by contrast, has convened just three post-election meetings in Yerevan, on February 20, 22, and 24. On all three occasions, attendance was in the thousands rather than tens of thousands. A larger number of people turned out on February 23 in smaller provincial towns and in Gyumri, Armenia's second-largest city, where Hovannisian polled nearly 70 percent of the vote, compared with 23 per-

cent for Sarkisian. But no one showed up in the small town of Goris, where Hovannisian was scheduled to speak on February 27.

Of Armenia's opposition parties, only the Armenian Revolutionary Federation-Dash-

naksutian has thrown its support behind Hovannisian. Ter-Petrosian has said he is convinced the vote was rigged and that Hovannisian won but has not committed his Armenian National Congress (HAK) to join the protests.

cult to mobilize the optimum level of support. Public Council Chairman Vazgen Manukian, Ter-Petrosian's closest rival in the 1996 presidential election, predicted that "there will be meetings, but they will peter out.... People will become disillusioned with Hovannisian."

Ter-Petrosian, for his part, told a HAK meeting last week that Hovannisian lacks a clear plan of action that would force the Sarkisian administration to cave in. "I see words, I see speeches, but there is no action, no plan of action," the former president said.

Hovannisian has hinted that he will appeal to the Constitutional Court to annul the election results and schedule a repeat ballot. But as the daily "Hayots ashkhar" pointed out on February 26, it is not clear what evidence of election fraud



"I can only say that at the cost of my life, I will not permit even one drop of blood to be shed," the daily "Aysor" quoted Raffi Hovannisian as saying

Hovannisian could present to the Constitutional Court, given that he demanded ballot recounts in only a handful of polling stations. According to Central Election Commission Chairman Tigran Mukuchian, Sarkisian would still have had enough votes to secure reelection outright even if the commission had accepted Hovannisian's demand to invalidate the official vote results in 118 of the 2,000 precincts.

In his interviews over the past week, Hovannisian has consistently stressed that the percentage of the vote he garnered and the support shown for his efforts to have the vote annulled reflect the maturity of Armenian civil society and the intensity of people's desire for democratic change. At the same time, he has affirmed that he will do all in his power to prevent a repeat of the bloodshed of 2008.

"I can only say that at the cost of my life, I will not permit even one drop of blood to be shed," the daily "Aysor" quoted him as saying.

Meanwhile, Sarkisian is in a strong position given the gen-

erally positive assessment of the vote by international monitors and the fact that both U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and European Union President Jose Manuel Barroso have offered formal congratulations on his reelection.

There is, however, one factor that could impel Sarkisian to seek some kind of accommodation with Hovannisian and that is the danger that Azerbaijan might launch a major offensive to win back the breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh region in order to avert the (admittedly remote) possibility of Hovannisian coming to power in an orange "barevolution" and making good on his campaign promise to recognize the territory as an independent state.

It is not clear whether the hint by parliament Chairman Hovik Abrahamian that Sarkisian is open to "reasonable proposals" from Hovannisian and could even offer him a government post was made with that worst-case scenario in mind.

Whatever Sarkisian's motives, it is unlikely Hovannisian would be tempted by such an offer.

Drug Addiction Grows by Over 1,000 in Azerbaijan

By NIGAR ORUJOVA, Azernews

27,910 drug-addicted people were registered in Azerbaijan in 2012, with 1,878 of them recorded for the first time, according to official estimates.

Figures of the narcology center under the Azerbaijani Health Ministry show an increase in the number of the officially registered drug addicts from 26,716 in 2011 and 25,489 cases in 2010. Thus, the number of officially registered drug addicts has increased by over a thousand annually in the past three years.

Some 528 of the registered drug addicts in Azerbaijan are women, which is almost unchanged compared to 2011 when 511 women were registered.

Most of the drug-addicted women are aged 30-44. The majority of male drug addicts are of the same age.

There are 3,767 drug addicted persons in the 25-29 age group and 1,247 in the 18-25 category. There are no registered drug addicted people under 18 in the country.

However, the unofficial number of these people is higher many fold, experts believe.

RISK OF INFECTION

The 2012 World Drug Report of the United Nations Of-



fice on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) indicates that injecting drugs carries a high risk of infection with blood borne viruses such as HIV, hepatitis C and hepatitis B, and the sharing of contaminated needles and syringes is an important mode of transmission for those viruses, which pose a major public health concern, incur considerable costs to healthcare services and often lead to prema-

ture death.

Of the estimated 16 million people around the world who inject drugs, about 3 million are living with HIV.

According to the Public Health and Reforms Center at the Azerbaijani Health Ministry, HIV infection is mostly found among injecting drug users in Azerbaijan.

The Azerbaijan Republican AIDS Center's acting di-

rector, Esmira Almammadova, believes that some 60 percent of Azerbaijanis were infected by HIV through injection of drugs.

According to Asif Kengerli, addictions psychiatrist of the anonymous substance abuse medical-consulting office under the Republican Narcology Center of the Health Ministry, 90-95 percent of the injecting drug consumers are

hepatitis C carriers, and all of the injecting drug users suffer from neurasthenia.

Addiction is a complex disorder characterized by compulsive drug use. There are four most common types of drug abuse, including stimulants, depressants, hallucinogenics and opioids. Each drug produces different physical effects. However, all abused substances share one thing in

common - repeated use can alter the way the brain looks and functions and harm the body.

UNODC reported that opioids continue to be the dominant drug type accounting for treatment demand in Asia and Europe and also contribute considerably to treatment demand in Africa, North America and Oceania.

In 2010, an increase in heroin users was observed in South Asia and in East and South-East Asia in particular. The observed increase is the result of revised estimates of opiate users in Asia, mainly in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in Central Asia and Transcaucasia.

According to UNODC, approximately 11 tons of heroins enter the Caucasus annually; 4 tons of that are either consumed or seized annually within the region; and 7 tons are smuggled to Europe.

According to the US government, mainly opiates are brought to Azerbaijan from Afghanistan. Afghan opiates transit Azerbaijan by three primary routes: from Central Asia and across the Caspian Sea; from Iran through the south of the country; and through uncontrolled territories of Azerbaijan. While international attention is focused on the Iran-Azerbaijan border and Caspian routes, Azerbaijani officials regularly identify the uncontrolled territories as a more significant threat.

Azerbaijan was one of the first countries in the South Caucasus to become a party to the 1988 UN drug convention in 1993. Azerbaijan also started one of the first police units that specifically targeted drug trafficking in the region.

Azerbaijanis Injured in Incident in French National Assembly File a Complaint in Gendarmerie

By TREND.AZ

Azerbaijanis injured in the incident in French National Assembly have filed a complaint to the Gendarmerie, one of the victims - head of the House of

Azerbaijan Mirvari Fataliyeva told Trend.

The two Azerbaijanis - Head of the House of Azerbaijan Mirvari Fataliyeva and Vusal Huseynov were beaten by representatives of the Armenian community at the French Na-

tional Assembly during an event titled '25 years after Sumgait: the present situation and future prospects for the people of Nagorno-Karabakh', organized by the Armenian community in France.

The Azerbaijani Embassy sent a note of protest to the



French Foreign Ministry and a letter to the president of the country's National Assembly in connection with the incident.

The Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry recently issued a statement condemning the violence against Azerbaijani citizens in France and expressing

hope that relevant authorities will take action on this issue and that the country's law enforcement agencies will promptly investigate the crime and bring culprits to justice.

The parliamentary group of friendship of the National Assembly of France with Azer-

baijan condemned the incident involving the beating of two Azerbaijanis in Paris.

French Foreign Ministry condemned the act of violence that took place on Tuesday in the National Assembly of the country, resulting in beating of two Azerbaijanis.

A Turkish Culinary Invasion

By KOBA SAMSONIDZE

Almost 900 years after King David the IV better known as David the Builder or David Aghmashenebeli vanquished the Seljuk Turks from Georgian soil, the newly renovated avenue that bears his name is home to the largest configuration of Turkish businesses in the city.

Known earlier as Mikhailovskaya, and then Plekhanov., Aghmashenebeli avenue has long been the center of Turkish life and business in Tbilisi, and today you can find Turkish teahouses, Turkish grocers, Turkish barbers, Turkish Airlines, and of course Turkish restaurants.

If you ask anyone living in a European metropolitan area what Turkish food is, the response will inevitably be *doner kebab*, more commonly known in Tbilisi as *shawarma*. The tall cylinders of mixed meats slowly rotating on a spit are found all across the city and have become the go-to street-food for people in need of a quick and filling bite, especially after a long night drinking at the bar. However the pantheon of Turkish food cannot be judged by one big name street food, and on Aghmashenebeli there are more than half a dozen Turkish restaurants



that are more than willing to expand your culinary horizons.

Most of the Turkish restaurants on the street are *Esnaf Lokantası*, or Tradesman Restaurants. Simple, fast and cheap, *Lokantası* traditionally catered to workers on the go who need a quick bite to eat at an affordable

price. Similar to a Georgian *sasadilo*, they are usually arranged in a cafeteria style where the food is already cooked and sits in steaming trays. While this means nothing is particularly hot, serving food at room temperature is how the dishes are traditionally served. Also, they rarely

have menus, instead you point to what you want at the counter and the food is brought to your table. Over the past week I ate at three such restaurants and here are my thoughts.

The first restaurant I went to, Ankara, named after the Turkish capital, is a clean, large room with tables set in rows, reminiscent of a work place cafeteria. I went there for lunch and ordered sautéed spinach, mixed vegetables and a side of red rice. I also ordered *ezogelin*, a red soup made from bulgur wheat and lentils, best enjoyed with a squeeze of lemon and dash of red pepper; a classic Turkish dish. The spinach and rice were a great and filling combination, but the steamed vegetables, which included leeks, carrots, onions and a number of other ingredients, could have used more spice.

Ankara is a classic *Lokantası*, nothing fancy, but it does not try to be. The staff is friendly, the restaurant itself is spotless, and the prices are affordable. My meal, including a soft drink cost just 13 lari. Ankara is also very popular, so don't be surprised if you are asked to share one of the larger tables with other diners.

The second restaurant I visited was Deniz, similar in style to Ankara but slightly smaller, with a clean, almost sterile feel. Waitresses are constantly collecting dirty plates off tables, to the point that you might not

actually be completely finished eating when they first attempt to take them away.

It was lunchtime again, so I ordered a light meal consisting of yellow lentil soup, as well as sautéed eggplant, zucchini and tea. The soup was amazing, better than at Ankara, and the bread provided was fresh and sprinkled with sesame seeds, while the eggplant had a very Mediterranean taste to it, with healthy notes of garlic and olive oil. The zucchini was a bit disappointing - slightly too soft and tasted as though it had been steaming for a bit too long.

I also had a glass of traditional Turkish style tea served boiling hot in the iconic tulip shaped glasses. Anyone who has visited Turkey knows that these glasses are prone to burning your fingertips so it is best to wait a moment before enjoying. Along with a cube of sugar, it is a perfect post-meal digestive.

At 7 lari, almost half the price at Ankara, Deniz is hard to beat for a quick, tasty lunch if you are in the neighborhood. However, the layout of the restaurant is not as open or inviting as Ankara.

The final restaurant I visited was Cappadocia, another *Lokantası*, but noticeably more fancy, the tables are adorned with candles and sturdy glass breadboxes while large fish tanks add to the more opulent decor.

In an attempt to evenly compare the three restaurants I again went for lunch, and ordered sim-

ilarly. I decided on rice and beans with a soup of the chef's choosing which turned out to be another *ezogelin*. Despite the bread and rice being the best of the three restaurants, Cappadocia failed to deliver on taste, being the least impressive of the three, especially considering my meal was smaller yet equally as expensive as Ankara at 13 lari.

Although I did not eat any meat at these restaurants, they all have prominent advertisements in the windows stating their food is *halal*, and seemed to be doing brisk business shaving strips of juicy meat off the slowly spinning spit to prepare *shawarmas* for hungry diners and people on the go.

Ankara, Deniz and Cappadocia all have a similar feel, style and taste in that they attempt to recreate the *Esnaf Lokantası* of Turkey; and while they are by no means haute cuisine, they don't attempt to be. These are places for the working-class, affordable places that recreate home cooking. You can almost imagine someone's grandmother in the kitchen cooking the lentil soup with a recipe that has been handed down since the time of the Seljuk Turks and David Aghmashenebeli.

The kebabs, stuffed peppers, salads and soups are the same dishes served in homes all across Turkey, from Istanbul to Erzurum, Izmir and Ankara to Van.

While the vast empire of the Seljuks ended a long time ago, on Aghmashenebeli avenue, the Turkish occupation, albeit a welcomed culinary one, is as real as time of King David himself.

Ankara, Deniz and Cappadocia are all located on David Aghmashenebeli Ave.

Georgian Identity Fights the Façade of "New Life for Old Tbilisi"

By KENDRA PARADIS

The Historic District of Tbilisi had a place on the World Monument Fund's list of the top 100 Most Endangered Sites from 1997-2002. Today, Tbilisi is not even under consideration for the UNESCO world heritage list after an estimated third of the city's original historic structure has been demolished or modified in the last decade. Additionally, the new development has not shown a marked increase in the standard of living for local residents.

The program New Life for Old Tbilisi, implemented from 2009-2012 played a major role in the conservation question since a 2002 earthquake that brought down scores of historic buildings and left dilapidated countless more. What most people do not know - due to the lack of transparency - is that the program has nothing to do with conservation. Organizations like Democracy and Freedom Watch have been covering the reactionary movement, including actions such as the biweekly meetings and protests held last winter in Gudiashvili Square and elsewhere in the city as both foreigners and locals have become more concerned with development projects.

In an interview with The Georgian Times, Ia Ghadua, Doctor of Philology working at the Literature Museum as the curator of the unique books collection, part-time Georgian Language teacher, and staunch supporter for the conservation of Old Tbilisi explains that "There are many reasons why the building is not being carried out properly; a limited budget, lack of expertise, lack of consultations with interested and relevant parties, and a desire to make quick changes for the purpose of quick financial benefits are some examples."

More shocking still is the fact that the only functioning policy of urban planning in Tbilisi is the Tbilisi Land Use Plan, as a new Master Plan since the expiration of the last years ago, has not been drafted due to political changes.

After the haphazard privatization of the 1990s, developers have grown accustomed to the "slap two more floors on" attitude which not only disrupts historic landscapes, but puts a strain on older structures that they were not intended to withstand. This is particularly dangerous in an earthquake zone exactly the likes of which these interconnected and ambiguously shared structures reside. A lack of enforcement of construction violation penalties can be worked around or are simply ineffective as developers happily accept fines for adding extra floors to later



gain double the sum in revenue from the extra square footage.

Gutting and facadism have become the standard methods, as well as imaginative "additions" that have nothing to do with local architectural traditions or with the individual buildings' historic appearance. Both techniques are far more difficult and costly than actual conservation. Heritage districts and listing do not offer protection and unsurprisingly, there is no standardized documentation program in Georgia. Furthermore, because gutting is considered an acceptable conservation treatment, there have been cases in which "rebuilt" structures remain on heritage lists. On the other hand, there is significant pressure to de-list buildings and sell them off for new development because of

the government's priority for foreign investment capital.

When asked what the state can do to better protect the architecture of Old Tbilisi, Ghadua thinks that "the government should implement conservation/renovation projects of architectural sites following international standards. They should also encourage involvement of local and international NGOs, the local community and general public in this process."

The international standards to which she is referring are any of the four treatment approaches - conservation, rehabilitation, restoration, or reconstruction of historic architecture officially recognized by most international organizations. All four options aim at maintaining as much of the original integrity of the

structure or site as possible depending on the historical importance, the condition of the building and its proposed use.

Currently, there are no developers or construction companies in Tbilisi that specialize in any of these forms of treatment, even though dozens of students at the Tbilisi Art Academy's Conservation Institute are becoming trained graduates in the components of conservation every year. Instead, projects are carried out by regular construction workers and nearly all "renovation" projects never even consult a conservation specialist at any point during the planning or implementation stages of such projects.

"The government's intention to attract more tourists is understandable but this should not happen at the expense of demolishing the cultural heritage of the country," Ghadua explains.

Cultural heritage is in fact not only important to the Georgian community but also good for the tourist industry and overall economic development. Well-managed heritage areas with appropriate tourist infrastructure help visitors appreciate the history and culture of the area, and provide for their needs without crowding local residents. Due to tourism's inherently volatile nature, heritage-based tourism is a more stable alternative, allowing local assets to be preserved for

citizens even in times of economic downturn. On the heritage question, conservation is an important factor to maintain, understand, and appreciate a local culture through the ongoing, evolving use of the community's historic resources.

Such structures can foster local economy in their reuse for growing small business; as subdivided into offices they are perfectly-sized, affordable, and allow direct access to local clients. Genuine conservation techniques are a labor-intensive process which itself has great potential to sustainably improve the local economic situation. Lower unemployment increases household incomes which support local businesses. Both the initial costs ratio and the subsequent effects of local labor are much greater than that of materials. While construction may only seem like a temporary job, if you consider the proper maintenance of the structures, it offers substantially more than simple gutting projects have.

Ghadua was also keen to note that the struggle to conserve Old Tbilisi is in fact not limited to this particular community. These measures are important to consider in other regions of Tbilisi as well as in regional centers such as Signaghi and Mestia as projects for tourism and modernization continue to endanger authenticity.





SUNDAY BRUNCH

Gather around with your friends and family on Sundays for brunch at Tbilisi Marriott where we will cater to every family member! Sunday Brunch at Parnas captures the essence of Marriott's glamorous culinary tradition where Chef Pedro Gonzalez offers a variety of delights on the buffet with comfort cuisine combined with modern flavor. Everyone will find Sunday Brunch exciting with unlimited complimentary wines from Telavi Wine Cellar, mimosas for the ladies and kids' game room equipped with Xbox KINECT for your little one to enjoy!

Every Sunday, 12-3 PM
 Buffet - 47 GEL+VAT
 Buffet, unlimited white and red wine - 59 GEL+ VAT
 Children under 9 free of charge. Ages 9 to 13 - 25 Gel +VAT
 Special discounts for the parties 10 and more
 10% discount for our returning guests

Tbilisi Marriott Hotel
 13, Rustaveli Avenue, Tbilisi 8,
 0108 Georgia (Caucasus Region)
 Telephone: +995 32 277 92 00
 Fax: +995 32 277 92 10
 tbilisi.marriott@marriotthotels.com
 TbilisiMarriott.com



“Averssi” Dove Card Lottery has begun!

The cumulative “Averssi” Dove card is 5 years already. Besides the fact that with the accumulated amount on the card a customer is able to choose a particular prize from a catalogue, he/she is given the opportunity to take part in the lottery.

This time, “Averssi” offers you the forth grand lottery.

- 💰 Every owner of the “Dove Card” will receive 1 lottery ticket by paying 20 GEL for the product at any “Averssi” drug store and 10% of the amount paid will be returned on the card.
- 💰 For every 50 “Doves” 3 lottery tickets will be given as a present.
- 💰 For 10 “Doves” you will receive 1 lottery ticket.

The prizes are:

The main prize 5000 GEL to 5 winners

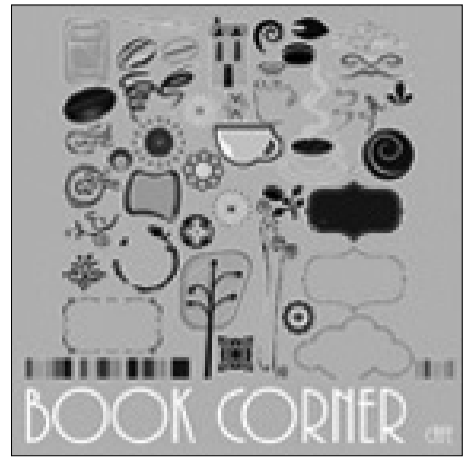
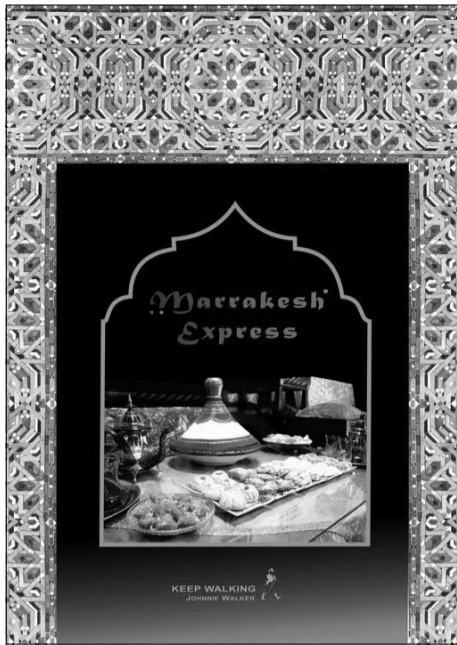
20 000 GEL 10 000 GEL to 5 winners



“Averssi”- Health and Peace of Mind
 WWW.AVERSI.GE

☎ 2-967 227





Contact us and Become our Partner
12, Kikodze str, Tbilisi, Georgia.
Tel: (+995 32) 2934405,
E-mail: marketing@geotimes.ge;
http://www.geotimes.ge

www.times.ge



ON-LINE NEWSPAPER
Georgian * English * Russian
www.geotimes.ge

The Georgian Times trilingual online portal offers the latest Georgian news and analysis in English, Georgian and Russian languages.

www.geotimes.ge

Be one of our 35,000 plus daily readers and visit Geotimes.ge today.

