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Lame Duck Georgian President Saakashvili Just Got Plucked



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Georgia's 'Gifted' October 2013 in the Works

An interview with Art Director Katie Dolidze

Fall 2013 seems very promising for those who appreciate art. After years of silence the International Festival of Arts in Honor of Michael Tumanishvili – Gift – is back. Its art director Katie Dolidze is happy to grant Georgians with the festival again. She has been nourishing the event for over a decade. Even though the festival experienced a few years of fall out, it still is the 'it' art event of the year.

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US Marines Train Georgian Soldiers in Agile Spirit-2013 Drills



Georgia: U.S. Marines Launch Month-Long Military Exercise to train Georgian Troops for further Deployments to Afghanistan and possibly Mali.

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Lame Duck Georgian President Saakashvili Just Got Plucked

By HYMAN KAMENOWSKY

On March 21, the Georgian Parliament passed constitution amendment limiting presidential powers with the vast majority of votes. Georgian President Mikhael Saakashvili will no longer be able to sack the Georgian Parliament with one swift stroke now that the amendment was passed with 135 votes.

People have been wondering who was going to win the big showdown in the Georgian Parliament on March 21, 2013. Well, it depends on who you ask and still there are those who think Saakashvili's ability to land on his feet is like a cat. No doubt Saakashvili will try to make a big thing of the fact that none of the United National Party's (UNP) MPs voted for the Constitutional-changes which, essentially, strip the President of his power to dissolve Parliament and appoint a new government of his choosing – at least not in the test vote, anyway. Yet, moments later, every last one of them sided with the majority Georgian Dream coalition

in the real vote - the one which counted.

SO WHAT HAPPENED?

UNM house leader Davit Bakradze was clearly uncomfortable with the position in which he found himself and stated that if Saakashvili were to pull the trigger in that loaded gun he had in his back pocket, and sack the standing government, then he would play no part in the President's new government.

Perhaps he was mindful that if such a thing were to happen then, as Georgian political scientist Alexander Tvalchrelidze warned, the pitchforks would be out up at the Presidential palace with Saakashvili on the pointy end being forced out of office and made to sign his own resignation letter there and then. Some pundits were even predicting that there could again be crowds and blood in the streets.

Yes folks, what comes around goes around, as such the dire popularity ratings for Saakashvili and his UNM fall guys - those who he has said would fall on their swords to protect him – and they too have much to lose once all that has

transpired in the last years finally gets investigated. You see, all of the lies and bad mouthing of his own government in the Western media and in the European corridors of power are all about protecting him, or protecting those that have made their fortunes by being part of the network of patronage. No-one else matters now, and the president is likely looking at saving his own hide than trying to have a smooth transition of power on the best of terms. He has dragged down the good name of his country in order to protect himself in the process.

Failing everything else he even duped 23 unwitting fools from the European People's Party to put their names to a litany of lies which, he believed, would somehow force the Georgian government to cave in to his every whim. He even tried his darndest to drag Angela Merkel and Manuel Barroso into the ring to stand in front of him or fall on his behalf. They were spectacularly silent about the whole thing, and who could blame them for wanting to keep their distance from this fading star.

In his final act Saakashvili met with all of his UNM

"mates" to tell them what to do about the impending debate and vote about the constitutional changes. There was no doubting that these changes were both necessary and wanted by all sides (except for one person), but Saakashvili got Bakradze to ask for a "test vote" before the actual vote. Why? What would be the point of having a test vote where the opposition all - deliberately - vote against something, something which they said (almost in the same sentence) that they would support when the real vote came?

Their reason? To show the world that the Georgian Dream needed their votes. That's all. In truth the Georgian Dream wouldn't have needed their votes if the October 2012 parliamentary elections had been completely fair, especially in the regions when ethnic minorities are more representative and were more prone to intimidation. Some estimates have the UNM support level at only 5% these days, but that's a whole different story.

So, the debate is not only about the constitutional changes. As Bakradze himself said everyone agreed on the "sub-



stance" of the changes - they just didn't want to miss this one last opportunity to score some political points with the new government. An hour or so of speeches and arguments for and against the test vote gave way to a mass exodus by the UNM lawmakers who went into a group huddle (no doubt around a telephone to their glorious leader) before returning to the floor. A minor game of ping pong followed and then Usupashvili and Bakradze went off for a small discussion - Usupashvili finally declaring that they weren't going to fight one whim with another so he granted the UNM their pointless test vote, probably in order to let them save face, before the final vote was taken wherein the whole house were unanimous in their support for the amendments to go through.

It is clear now that Saakashvili is a spent force in the Georgian political sphere, a "has-been" and will not be remembered for the good things he did

in office but for his deviance, and for having started a war over the breakaway region of South Ossetia in 2008. The sitting president would be wise to settle back and relax a little in his final months - let the government get on with running the country and leave the UNM in the hands of Bakradze, who seems to be much more capable of rebuilding their popularity than Saakashvili. That won't be easy as there are still difficult times ahead for his less capable colleagues, e.g the increasingly twitchy Vano Merabishvili and Mayor Gigi Ugulava but, for the sake of Georgia, we should wish him well and try to support his efforts. It is time to turn the page and start a new chapter in the modern development of Georgia, admit past mistakes, hold those who committed serious crimes responsible, and look to the future with a clear purpose to build a modern country that will really shine out as a beacon of democracy.

Held Indefinitely Over Supplying Lubrication for American M4 Assault Rifle

By EMMA BAIRAMOVA

In another apparent miscarriage of justice in Georgia Giorgi Keburia, a businessman whose products are used by the US military and the Georgian government, appears to have been falsely imprisoned by the previous government because, despite the high reputation of his cost saving products, his political views were unacceptable.



curity benefits, as they included a lubricant for the highly accurate US made M-4 Assault Rifle supplied to the Georgian Army.

Keburia repeatedly presented his products to Georgian ministries and various state structures, but they were rejected for some unknown reason. "Our proposals received no response. Now I know that elite corruption was evident at the highest level," Keburia told the Georgian Times. "Despite all our efforts, the only company which purchased our products

was Madneuli Gold Mining, and only after they invited American experts, who approved our product's quality after a series of tests."

LOCK AND LOAD

MPC produces a special lubricant for the M4, a modern American assault rifle which the Georgian military purchased from Bushmaster Firearms International in 2008. The weapon's operating and maintenance specifications explicitly call for the use of the FP-10 lubricant, which is only manufactured by MPC. Nevertheless, Keburia was blocked at every turn, even after investing heavily in branding between 2007 and 2010. He connects his rejection with what he describes as his "oppositional mood" and his frequently vociferous public statements. As a result he began to have financial problems, prompting him to find a co-partner with exclusive authority who could invest in the

business. That man was Nikoloz Osikhmashvili, who had close ties with Defense Minister Bacho Akhalaia (his niece became Akhalaia's wife).

"My minimum requirement for a prospective partner was that they invest 20,000 USD. My new partner well understood that he could make a handsome profit without doing a single day's work, so this was more than a fair sum. Nevertheless, I agreed to the mere 13,000 USD that he offered," explains Keburia, adding that there was no juridical documentation of the transfer of this money because both parties had known and trusted each other for years. Keburia even became the godfather of his child.

After six months of working together Osikhmashvili suddenly demanded his money back in full, which came as a surprise to the fledgling businessman. "I told him that he could take the money out if the company turned a profit, or if

another partner replaced him. In addition to cash, we still had an inventory valued at 12,000 GEL, and I asked him to redeem part of his money from there in stock."

CRIMINAL CHARGES

After Keburia refused to hand over this money, which he did not physically have, Osikhmashvili filed criminal charges, accusing him of fraud and the illegal extortion of 13,000 USD, despite having already received a portion of this amount. Osikhmashvili declared in the Georgian Prosecutor's Office that no MPC company existed and it had not registered a representative office in Georgia. The Prosecutor's Office contacted MPC's U.S. office and it was informed that Keburia was indeed its exclusive representative in Georgia. However, without considering this, on July 12, 2012 the court sentenced Keburia to two months pre-trial detention, on criminal charges which

carried a penalty of 6 to 9 years if he would be found guilty.

During Keburia's first trial, on August 20, 2012, the judge ordered a further two-month detention, whilst allowing the accused to make a statement. Soon afterwards Osikhmashvili sent letters to MPC's US office and its representative in Eurasia, in which he accused Keburia of fraud and betraying him as a partner and stated that no company could do business with him. It was now clear to that Osikhmashvili was attempting to persuade the company that he had a close relationship with members of the Georgian government and therefore it would be better for them to continue cooperating with him and not Keburia. In response, MPC demanded that Osikhmashvili present a copy of the court judgment sentencing Keburia for these alleged crimes.

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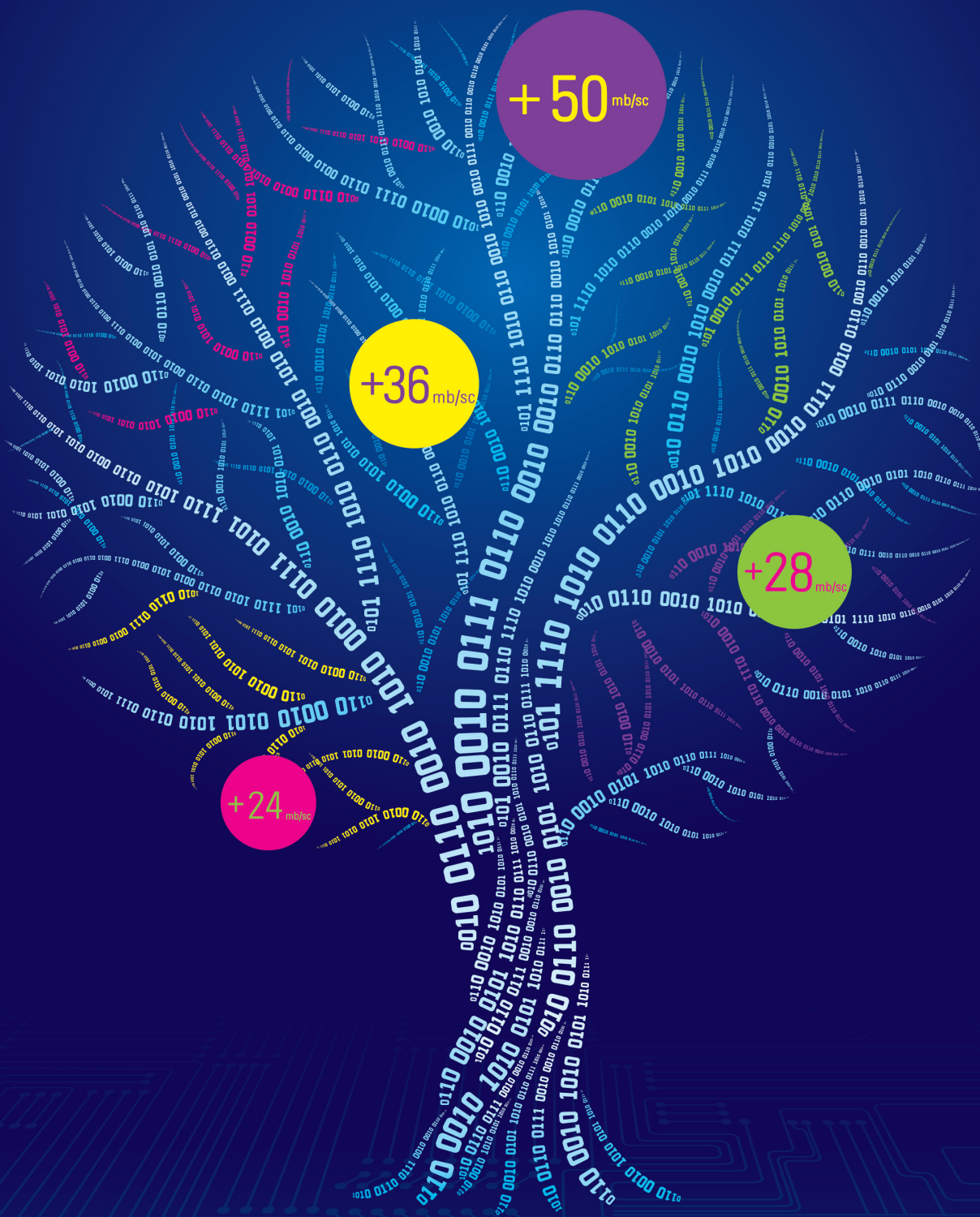
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Georgia Categorizes its Visitors

By LISA TONAKANYAN

Georgia has changed the system of foreign visitors' registration. All visitors will now be divided into three categories. However, the novelty causes some apprehension to callers – they fear the change will toughen issuing Georgian visas.

The innovation was introduced to the public in March, 2013. According to the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs, there will be A, B and C categories of visitors. As the MIA explains, the A category will be given to tourists; their stay in Georgia can last from 24 hours to one year. B category visitors is for transit purposes and allows being on the



territory of Georgia for less than 24 hours after crossing the state border. Visitors traveling for any other purpose will be included in category C, which is made up of citizens of neighboring countries who live near the borders and frequently

cross the Georgian border for a period of less than 24 hours, for industrial, commercial or other reasons.

As it appears from the MIA statistic data in January-February 2013 more than 565, 600 visitors came to Georgia. This

figure has increased by 37.2 percent in comparison to the same period in 2012. The vast majority of visitors (231,500) are from Turkey. The number of Azeri citizens coming to Georgia averaged 128, 300; there were 101,300 travelers from Armenia, 54,400 – from Russia, 14, 400 – from the EU, and 6,200 – from Ukraine and Iran each. Georgia has a visa-free regime with all the above-mentioned countries.

The MIA also informed that the number of tourists during the first two months of 2013 reached 206,418 (31.3 percent of the total visitors), transit – 70,299 (12.4 percent) and visits for other purpose reached 288, 895 (51.1 percent).

However, it remains unclear just how the Ministry collects these figures since the purpose

of the visit is not currently registered at borders crossings. Ladyslaw Marek, a tourist from Poland, crossed the Russian-Georgian border through the northern checkpoint at Lars. As he told the Georgian Times, "I was never questioned about the reason for my visit to Georgia. "The custom officers only asked me whether I had ever been to Abkhazia or South Ossetia; he looked through my passport and returned it without any further questions," he said.

A citizen of Egypt Hany Kadry Saleeb came to Georgia in search of business opportunities in mid March, 2013. "At the Tbilisi International Airport I just filled in an application, wrote my name and passport number, paid the money and got my visa. They didn't ask

me anything, even the purpose of my visit," he told the GT.

He expressed hope that the new system of registration of foreign visitors will not influence on visa procedures. "The visa regime between Georgia and Egypt is simplified to the utmost at the moment – we get our visas upon arrival instead of applying for them in the Embassy of Georgia in Cairo. So if everything remains the way it is now, it will be great," he stressed.

According to the airport's custom officers, the procedures of visa issuing did not change. "Everything is the same here. Visitors who can get their visa upon arrival and do not face any sort of problems," the representative of custom service told GT.

Caucasus Film Festival Breaks Down Barriers Within the Region

By TINATIN GOGOLADZE

The second Caucasian film festival, a four-day event was launched in Tbilisi's Literature Museum on March 22. The museum's small room, little screen and projector on the table was packed with foreigners and Georgian viewers. Although the festival itself is still quite new, the high level of public interest is the result of unique selection of films offered by the organizers of the screenings. Through their work, directors from Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia gave different visions of their neighboring countries and how to break down artificial borders between them, one of the main aims of the festival.

"This festival wouldn't have been held if there weren't so many interesting directors

in this fascinating region using their talent energy and youth to make new documentaries and fiction films which show the world around them as they see it," said David Moran Ambassador of the United Kingdom in Georgia said at the opening of the event.

The idea of Caucasus Film Festival came to Cler Dellesar a French diplomat who was collaborating with the British Embassy in Georgia. Collecting interesting movies produced in the region seemed like a very promising idea to her. The event's chief organizers Tina Lagidze and Nestan Nidzharadze selected the movies from the different countries in cooperation with the British and Dutch embassies in Georgia.

As Nidzharadze explained, unlike the first festival held in 2012, this year's screenings included not only Caucasian directors' works but European film makers whose movies were about the region: "We are proud



to present Ineke Smith's work "The Aviatrix of Kazbeg" and also a documentary by Patrick Cazals "Hurricane Kalatozov."

Angel Semura, Deputy Ambassador of the Dutch Embassy thinks that for small countries it is twice as hard to make someone notice them. "In order to be noticed we have to interact a lot with our neighbors to look for common features and common history. I truly believe that if we look for

features that you have in common the traditions that are common will make relations easier between countries. Thus this festival is very important for the region."

Throughout the screenings of the documentary and feature films, a mix of contemporary and retrospective art offered the opportunity to gain insights of the region's history. "Flourishing Abkhazia" was the opening documentary of the




festival. Shot in 1941, the film was kept in the national archives of Georgia. Although the film is a classic example of Soviet propaganda, it still gives viewers who have never been there the opportunity to see Abkhazia in the distant past and untouched by war. The Georgian National Archive with the help of the EU delegation also restored and provided the film festival with "Chronicle of South Ossetia", a documenta-

ry covering events from 1930-1950 and thus gave access to unique material that was previously unavailable for public viewing.

The interesting film choice, unique materials, representatives of different countries and growing public interest in the Caucasian Film Festival is certain to help the festival grow from a small one room with a projector to larger venue and a bigger audience.



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US Marines Train Georgian Soldiers in Agile Spirit-2013 Drills

By HYMAN KAMENOWSKY

Georgia: U.S. Marines Launch Month-Long Military Exercise to train Georgian Troops for further deployments to Afghanistan and possibly Mali.

An Australian journalist and his American colleague visited the Georgian military base on March 21, 2013 where they observed US Marines, from its Black Sea Rotational Force contingent, training Georgian military personnel in counterinsurgency techniques, presumably to be used for upcoming deployments to Afghanistan and possibly Mali.

The tour was part of a public affairs program to promote "Operation Agile Spirit 2013", an intensive month long joint live munitions training exercise at the Vaziani military base located near Tbilisi, Georgia.

Despite being questioned about Afghanistan, Marine's public affairs officer, 1st Lieutenant, Hector Alejandra said the training is about an upcoming deployment as a crisis deployment force.

Lieutenant Ajenadra also claimed the exercises are aimed at improving military capabilities between the United States and Georgia to deal with any humanitarian missions that may arise in the region.



Tim Byrnes, who is in Georgia to research for some articles on the current Georgian political situation for Australian media, said the US marines appeared to be well-experienced.

"Most US personnel I spoke with confirmed they had served and seen combat in Iraq and Afghanistan," Byrnes said.

Mr. Byrnes, Australia's leading researcher on the Soviet Battle of Stalingrad, saw combat as a journalist during the 2008 Russia-Georgian War in South Ossetia for Australian media outlet Skynews and Sydney's Fairfax media.

He has also been invited to present his experiences at the Australian National University (ANU) and the Australian Uni-

versity of New England (UNE).

Byrnes said he saw to see the effects of the conflict because he was given exclusive access to South Ossetia by the Russian Government.

"And since the war I have returned to the region to conduct further research and analysis with the assistance provided by the Moscow and Tbilisi administrations," he said.

The US Marines and many of the Georgian soldiers had personal experience with ambush techniques used against them by insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan.

According to some US Marines, the deadly Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) built by insurgents are the most suc-



cessful strategy used against them and other Coalition forces.

IEDs are placed mainly along roadsides and other concealed places and are detonated by fighters either by remote control or 'tripwires' and pressure plates.

Byrnes said the IEDs are the leading cause of death for Coalition forces and are having a negative impact on the morale of these troops.

The US Marines are training the Georgian military on how to effectively deal with IEDs and it is thought this training will be useful should Georgian troops be deployed to other combat theatres around the world, such as the potential EU's military

training operation in Mali on the African continent.

Recently, Irakli Alasania, the Georgian Defense Minister shared with the local media plans to send "a limited number of trainers" to this worn torn country.

It is also being discussed as to how they would help with demining operations, an area of specialization that Georgia excels because of its recent experience in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Alasania said that Georgia "has very good experience" in mine clearance operations.

After riding in the back of a Military transport with helmet and body armor with a group of 20 Georgian journalists, Tim Byrnes arrived to the mock up

forward operating base on the outskirts of the Georgian capital Tbilisi.

"Along the way we saw the modern facilities, sample road checkpoints being set up, as the Georgian troops would be manning in Afghanistan and other potential NATO and EU combat operations.

The Vaziani training base is an old, former Soviet airbase, and would have been one of the front-line bases in case a war would have broken out between NATO and the former WARSAW pact members, including the Soviet Union.

Reinforced plane and bomb storage hangers and earth protected storage sites can still be seen there.

ENP 2012 Progress Report on Georgia – A Compulsory Guide for Further Integration

By SABA GVETADZE

The 2012 European Neighbourhood Policy Country Progress Report on Georgia was published by the European Commission on March 20, 2013 in Brussels (Europa Press Releases RAPID MEMO/13/246). At the same time, the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton published the annual "Neighbourhood Package", consisting of a joint communication that assesses the European Neighbourhood Policy implementation in 2012, a report on the "Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity" with Southern Mediterranean, an Eastern Partnership progress report, 12 country reports including one on Georgia, and a statistical annex.

The report represents a general overview and analysis of EU-Georgian relations throughout 2012. Georgia's current primary goal for the country is to establish the EU-Georgia Association Agreement, which includes negotiations over the Deep and

Comprehensive Free Trade Area.

The EU Association Agreement (AA) represents a treaty between the EU and a non member states and international organizations (Articles 217-219, Treaty on Functioning of the EU). The Agreement creates a framework in many different areas of cooperation, such as political, economic, social, and cultural and security issues. Currently Georgia is pursuing active talks upon acquiring the Association Agreement. The Visa Liberalization Action Plan, which was presented to Georgian authorities on February 25, 2013, was considered to be a major step towards the agreement. This was due to the "significant progress that Georgia had made during 2012" in its efforts to reinforce the democratic institutions and pursue peaceful power transition process.

The report evaluates the 2012 October Parliamentary elections as a positive step the country has taken in the development of the relations with the EU. Moreover, the Union appreciates the reforms carried out to strengthen the justice system as well as advance sectoral reforms and regulatory approximation to the EU acquis. However, the Commission mentions later in the report that the judicial system needs further reforms in order to bring "criminal justice policies and practice



in line with Council of Europe standards"; to achieve fair trial norms; and ensure that policymakers to take into account the recommendations of the Public Defender's Office.

The Country Report mentions the active participation of Georgia in the Geneva discussions and its attempts to negotiate with de-facto government representatives of the country's breakaway regions. The EU also expects Georgia to "maintain and improve constructive participation" in the discussions and seeking ways to enhance trade relations and take "pragmatic and constructive steps" to support investment across the administrative boundary line. The

first crucial action would be reviewing the Law on Occupied Territories. Concerning the legal system, the Commission suggests adopting more comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, which will eventually ensure that the rights of minorities (ethnic as well as religious) are well respected.

Moreover, the improvement of the living conditions of internally displaced persons (IDPs) with the engagement of the EU is highly assessed in the report. However, the EU gives a concrete list of actions Georgia needs to follow for better cooperation.

Firstly, the shortcoming which were identified by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions

and Human Rights (ODIHR) in electoral law need to be improved before the 2013 Presidential election and 2014 local elections are held. The Union's positive assessment of the 2012 Parliamentary elections is no reason to neglect the need to improve electoral law. However, the EU has expressed hopes that the 2013 Presidential elections will be no less successful.

Secondly, the Commission reminds Georgia that the Constitutional amendments should be carried out by the consultations on a domestic as well as international level by engaging the Venice Commission and taking into account the its recommendations.

Thirdly, the Report echoes the recent criminal prosecutions and advises to conduct them "in a transparent and impartial manner, free of political motivation" in order to prevent any selective justice. Moreover, the Commission expresses concerns about the use of torture and ill treatment in the penitentiary system and analyses the structural failures to be the reason of the above-mentioned crimes. The EU suggests ensuring more effective internal as well as external monitoring process of the penitentiary system in order to detect and prevent any kind of ill-abuse of power.

The report supports media

pluralism and independence as well as freedom of speech and opinion – the basics for the co-operation with the EU. On the legal side of the issue, the Union expects Georgia to "implement the law on transparency of media ownership".

During recent months, the EU has observed active changes in Georgian legislation, the development of the new power-sharing agreement and transform of power from one political party to another. The EU has always supported democratic changes in Georgia and had always advocated the enhanced cooperation with the country. The Union has mentioned multiple times that they cooperate with the authorities of Georgia and not with a single political party. It is very important for every citizen of the country to put pressure over the government institutions to carry out the responsibilities they have been awarded. The Country Report on Georgia holds more than just suggestions of the European community. The report reflects the way the EU perceives current political developments in the country and the Union's attitude towards domestic affairs. The report is the assessment as well as guide for Georgia – a compulsory guide towards the Association Agreement and further cooperation.

Thirty-seven New Cases in Georgian Measles Outbreak

By LIKA MOSHIASHVILI

Thirty-seven new cases of measles have been reported in Georgia in the last week, taking the toll to 250, (211 in Tbilisi) with 103 patients hospitalized, the National Centre of Disease Control and Public Health Center (NCDC) informs. Measles cases are likely to continue over the next 2-3 months, with hundreds of more cases expected. Health officials say "vaccination is the only solution to bring the outbreak under control."

"Approximately 20 patients are presently being treated in our hospital. We declared quarantine a few weeks ago and

it will probably last until the end of April," stated Ketii Chiqovani, a doctor at the hospital for infectious diseases. "Since January, 133 measles cases have been registered in our hospital," she told The Georgian Times.

As Khatuna Zakhshvili, head of the Transmitted Disease Department of NCDC comments there is an outbreak of the measles in the country. "There are more cases compared with previous years," she noted.

In 2012, there were only 31 measles cases registered in Georgia; over the last few years the number of measles cases in general was no more than 30-40 each year.

"The cause of the spread of the disease is the failure of the

measles immunization effort in 2008," stated Paata Imnadze, head of NCDC.

Measles, also known as Rubeola or morbilli, is a highly infectious illness caused by a virus - a viral infection caused by the *rubeola virus*. The virus spreads very fast and easily and it is passed on through direct contact with an infected person.

"Typical symptoms of measles include fever, cough, conjunctivitis and a rash. Complications are quite common even among healthy people, and around 20% of reported measles cases experience one or more complication," said Imnadze. "These can include ear infections, vomiting and diarrhea, pneumonia, meningitis and serious eye disorders," he

added.

The initial symptoms of measles appear around 10 days after one is infected and they generally last for up to 14 days. The measles rash usually appears a few days afterwards and disappears after 4-5 days. The disease may also lead to serious complications, including blindness and even death.

"Unfortunately, it is most infectious before the rash is visible so people tend to spread the virus before they realize they have it," Zakhshvili explained. "It's fairly easy to catch if you haven't been vaccinated and come into contact with someone who has the infection, which is why epidemics often occur among school-children," she continued.

As the NCDC's website re-

ports, this year most of the cases affected people in age group of 20-29. Thirty measles cases have occurred among 1-4 year-old children, 27 cases among 15 to 19 year-olds, and 17 cases among infants who are less than one year old.

According to Ketii Chiqovani there is no specific treatment for measles and it depends on the complexity of the disease of each case.

"People who have measles should lie in bed, rest, drink liquid and control their temperature. If a person has symptoms of measles he/she must immediately go to a doctor," she advised.

As Chiqovani explained, if a person is hospitalized with the virus he/she usually needs a transfusion and antibiotics.

"We have enough reserves of all the necessary medicines in the hospital," she said in an interview with GT.

Due to the increased number of measles cases, free vaccination of people from 6 months to 30-years of age is under way in Georgia. Vaccination for 1-7 year-old children is mandatory.

"The most effective way of preventing measles is measles, mumps and vaccination. In these cases the body of a person has built up immunity to the virus," Imnadze explains.

According to Zakhshvili if all the planned activities will be conducted properly and the public will follow doctors' recommendations, the number of measles cases will be reduced by autumn.

New People's Movement Develops Recommendations for Government

By TAMAR TCHOKHONELIDZE

People's movement Lazarus held its first public meeting at the Rustaveli Theater on March 19, where its members set forth its demands for the new government and make sure it lives up to all its promises in the post election period.

Headed by the poet and public figure, Revaz Amashukeli, Lazarus, was founded after the last year's parliamentary elections by His Holiness and Beatitude Catholicos Patriarch of all Georgia Ilia II. Lazarus seeks to represent a political and non-commercial union established by honored representatives of art, science and culture. The movement monitors and analyzes the current processes in the country and develops recommendations for the Georgian government and policy makers.

Amashukeli opened the meeting by stating that although the parliamentary elections changed who held power in Georgia, the country has still faces many challenges. "There are still many problems that need to be solved in our country. That's why we have gathered today in this hall in order to remind the politicians about

those issues and give them our recommendations," the head of the movement addressed the meetings attendees gathered in the hall of the Rustaveli Theater. Besides the members of the movement, other representatives of the civil society were among the speakers of the meeting.

Elbert Batiashvili, member of the movement, mentioned that the former government had sold off too many plots of lands to foreigners in the regions of Georgia. "Georgians are very hospitable and foreigners are always welcome to Georgia, but it is unfair how most of the plots of lands in the regions are given to Arabs, Indians, and Chinese etc. while ethnic Georgians, known for their agricultural activities from ancient times, are left without land," Batiashvili stated.

Nana Kakabadze, chairperson of the non-governmental organization "Former Political Prisoners for Human Rights", talked about the creation of a commission, which would conduct political and legal evaluations of the nine-year governance of the previous government. "This commission will be a political party, which will demand that the current government adequately reacts to the wrongdoings of the previ-



ous one and to keep its promises concerning the restoration of justice," Kakabadze said.

Former political prisoner Vakhtang Maisaia, who holds a PhD in political sciences, labeled the activities of the previous government "fascism of the XXI century". He talked about the dreadful conditions he had to endure while imprisoned. "I can say that the situation in the prisons under the management of the former government was like the one in Saarbrücken concentration camp during the Nazi Holocaust. Parliament should work out a memorandum which will

include those wrongdoings and all the offenders should be punished accordingly," Maisaia stated.

"Still many questions need to be given adequate answers like the illegal confiscation of property and cleansing of ethnic Georgians by the former government. All these issues must be investigated properly as the current power should justify people's confidence," Kakha Kakhishvili, director of the Elections and Political Technologies Research Centre said.

Demographic problems were also reviewed during the meeting. Anzor Totadze, de-

mographer and member of the movement, talked about the catastrophic demographic situation in Georgia.

"While in 1980-1989 the birth rate ran as much as 433,000 births, from 2000-2009, it decreased to a low of 53,000 births. In simple terms the birth rate was decreased by 8.3 times during these difficult years. The most alarming demographic situation is found in Georgia's regions, where many young people leave their villages because of the economic problems. They are migrating to urban areas in seeking jobs. The mortality rate far exceeds

the birth rate in many regions. According to the study by the United Nations, by 2050 Georgian's population, which is currently estimated at a high of 4.5 million, will decrease by one million," stated Totadze, who also discussed the recently established Demographic Regeneration Fund of Georgia, which is developing a special social and economic program in order to improve the demographic situation.

NB: The same social problem was confirmed last week by GT in an article that quotes Office of National Statistics in claiming that Georgia's population stands at 4.5 million, but according to Avtandil Sulaberidze, Director of the Institute of Demography and Sociology at Ilia Chabchavadze State University, Georgia's population dropped below 4 million for the first time in 2003 and currently stands at 3.77 million.

Aleksandre Tsintsadze, deputy head of the movement, mentioned an array of problems in sphere of education, science, culture and religion. "More attention should be given to these spheres as loss of the spiritual values is irreparable. Studies in historiography and linguistics must be promoted, literature publications should be restored," Tsintsadze said.

Debatable Impact of Prisoner Amnesty in Georgia

By EMMA BAIRAMOVA

In the run-up to the 2012 Georgian parliamentary elections the incumbent government resorted to using a bag of dirty tricks in an effort to discredit their political opponents. One of its most effective ploys was fuelling fear of a possible increase in crime if the United National Movement was defeated at the ballot box. Such fears priest following a massive amnesty of prisoners by Georgia's new government, but their release is not likely to have a significant impact on crime in Georgia.

It is no secret that one of the major achievements of the former government was decreasing the level of crime in the country, and existing fears were exacerbated when the new government promised a large-scale amnesty, which has resulted in the release of more than 8,000 prisoners since January 2013. An additional 2,000 prisoners have been personally pardoned by the Georgian president during this period. 150 of these 10,000 released prisoners have since been sent back to prison for committing new crimes. According to the Interior Ministry, nearly 70 of these were amongst the 2,000 pardoned by President Mikheil Saakashvili.

RAMIFICATIONS OF PRISONER AMNESTY

BBC reporter Damien McGuinness, in an article of January 30, 2013, entitled "Safest city's crime fears as inmates freed from jail," claimed that Tbilisi's reputation of being nearly crime free was now in jeopardy as almost 5,000 inmates

had been freed from jail. Since this article appeared much has been written in the Georgian media about the potential impact of the amnesty on the crime rate, reflecting the assumption that releasing prisoners increases crime, although many of the prisoners released under the recent amnesty or pardon had either been jailed for their politi-

many prisoners being released. However the figures may be deceptive. Repeat offending is taking place, a problem familiar in Western countries where custodial sentences are imposed less frequently, but reoffending rates there are higher than in Georgia. Furthermore, many of the crime figures reported in recent years are dubious at best as many

were reported, 123 (or 33.61%) more than in last February. In January 2013 drug related crime increased by 56.3% (201 crimes) over January 2012. But one reason for this is that the number of cases under investigation has also significantly increased. In 2011 law enforcement bodies investigated only 22% of residential burglaries, and in 2012



cal convictions or had simply not had the financial means to "plea bargain themselves out of jail".

According to the official crime statistics for the period between November 1, 2012 and March 1, 2013, in other words since the October 2012 parliamentary elections, there has indeed been an increase in crime. Offences such as petty robbery are taking place on various streets and residents claim that such a level of crime has not existed for many years in Tbilisi. People are now locking their doors more often and taking added precautions in light of so

crimes went unreported.

Taking the official data at face value, 59.7% more crimes were committed in Georgia in November 2012 than the previous November. These included 139 car thefts. In December 40.7% more crimes were committed than had been in December 2011. The crime rate began declining in January, but it still saw 19% more crimes than January 2012. February 2013's crime rate was also 15% greater than in February 2012. In January-February 2013 there were 142 residential burglaries, a 140% increase over the same period last year. In February 489 drug related crimes

this figure was 31%. Now far greater proportions of crimes are being addressed by the MIA and its agencies rather than ignored, and this is inevitably reflected in the recorded crime statistics.

One must question whether releasing prisoners has created these increases or whether the crime rate reported before November 2012 was accurate. Gia Abashidze, a Georgian pundit, says that "The figures clearly show that the number of prisoners in Georgia exceeded all norms for countries of a similar size. Moreover, many Georgian prisoners were convicted without either forensic or witness evi-

dence being presented: their verdicts were based on the testimony of a single police officer." Abashidze advises experts to review the legal procedures and sentencing policies of the previous government before drawing conclusions about the prison amnesty.

There are fundamental differences between the Georgian and European legal and penal systems. Thousands of people in Georgian prisons would never have been imprisoned in Europe because the offences they are alleged to have committed are not regarded as crimes in Europe and are therefore not punishable with a custodial sentence.

Furthermore, according to court statistics of the period 2004-2012, in nearly 99% of cases which went to trial the defendant was found guilty. The judges bowed to the prosecutors' wishes nearly in every instance. To put this in perspective, even in Soviet times the conviction rate was only around 80%. To make matters worse, due to widespread plea bargaining real criminals who had money were freed while ordinary people without money ended up in prison for relatively minor offences; sometimes for no offence at all.

Consequently it is fair to conclude that the Georgian judiciary was not independent, the criminal and penal codes were unfair, the judicial system was riddled with corruption and that those people imprisoned for minor offences or nothing at all had every right to be released under the prisoner amnesty.

Irakli Gharibashvili, the Interior Minister, maintains that claims of a significant increase in crime are exaggerated and being spread by political opponents. When reporters showed him the above-mentioned official figures at a press conference on March 19, Gharibashvili responded that they are not precise and accurate indicators have not yet been defined. He also said that in 2010 and 2011 there had been a significant improvement in the crime rate but the figures for 2007, 2008 and 2009 almost coincide with those for the cur-

rent year.

"All these rumors have been created by the fact that, as a result of an amnesty in 2013, 8,357 people were released from prison. But in addition 2,000 were pardoned by the president, among whom were people who had committed serious crimes," the minister said. He emphasized that there will be no increase in crime in Georgia or any other destabilization and that he would be the guarantor of stability in the country.

"As minister I am fully responsible for the present situation in the country and the MIA has full control of it. An increase in petty theft was recorded in October and November of last year but these crimes are now being investigated seriously. Those set free under the amnesty will be sent back to prison if they commit another crime," Gharibashvili stated.

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) does not trust the official figures of the MIA. Unlike the police, the Ministry of Justice reckons that the number of robberies has not actually increased and the crime situation cannot be considered dangerous. In August 22, 2012 the MoJ showed journalists the results of Gallup research which stated that out of the citizens of 143 countries in the world Georgians considered themselves the most secure. The Ministry is sure that the situation today is not very different.

The analytical department of the MoJ does not agree that car thefts have increased. "Stealing 500 cars in two months is unrealistic. All this talk of increases or decreases in crime is just speculation, since the official statistics are merely a record of the crimes which are reported to the police," said the MoJ's Otar Kakhidze.

In conclusion, the prisoner amnesty is not likely to have a significant impact on crime in Georgia. Much that is being reported seems to be politically motivated, designed to make the new government's amnesty policy seem shortsighted, spread fear and make Georgians turn against the new government and bring back the old.

Held Indefinitely Over Supplying Lubrication for American M4 Assault Rifle

Continued from p. 2

Keburia believes that his partner thought he could steal the business with impunity and had the unwavering support of certain powerful members of the then ruling government. They were in a position to influence the court's decision and keep him locked up for as long as was necessary to steal the business. "Nikoloz's intention was to execute all the documents in his name and thus obtain my exclusive rights. His letters concerning this are in the Prosecutor's Office. Someone wanted to put me in jail and inherit my exclusive rights to sell MPC products in Georgia."

PEOPLE IN THE SHADOWS

According to Keburia's lawyer, Emzar Paksadze, a very influential person must have stood behind all this because in such cases the accused may be released on bail, and the guarantors were serious and respected people, who should have been acceptable to the court, but Keburia was not released. What makes this case

even more interesting is that it is a civil matter, not even criminal in nature.

Keburia's friend, MP Nikolas Laliasvili of the Christian Democratic Party, asked Murtaz Zodelava, the Public Prosecutor at the time, to release him under administrative procedures until the conclusion of the court proceedings. But Zodelava responded that Keburia was a "transnational trickster", ahead of any judgment of the court.

Keburia claims that such a statement is very revealing. "We did not ask for anything which is not standard judicial practice. Meanwhile, complaint letters about me were being sent to the MPC office in the USA with demands that my exclusive rights be terminated," he adds.

On January 4, 2013 Keburia was released from prison on bail while an investigation is conducted. Based purely on the testimony of his former partner and his partner's sister, he had spent 6 grueling months in prison, where he was tortured. The investigator assigned to this case was Marika Giligashvili from the Isani-Samgori detective depart-

ment. Keburia maintains that the investigator actually represented the prosecutor and repeatedly accused him of something he did not do. During his seven-hour interrogation the authorities repeatedly tried to force him to admit his guilt rather than ask him to give his version of events.

Keburia says that his former partner was waiting for him to plead guilty so that he could send this plea to the MPC office so it would cancel his contract and deal instead with Osikhmashvili and the former Minister of Defence. "If even one point of my testimony is not true then I plead guilty! I am not a lawyer, but I know that any charge requires proof. I demand an investigation into this case and am ready to cooperate with justice. On what basis was I arrested ... but the unsubstantiated allegations of one man?"

TIME IN DETENTION

During his detention Keburia was severely beaten three times. Every prisoner in Gldani prison number 8 was treated the same way, he says. Everyone had to

go through a hellish isolation period. The screams of prisoners being beaten, raped and crying in other cells could be constantly heard.

"For 8 hours we had to stand on our feet, then Oleg Patsatsia came in with other jailers and began to beat us all. The ones who fell down would be beat harder. I was beaten in the prison bath by 15 people for half an hour without any reason. They would beat us with truncheons. All the cells were bugged, to prevent someone from telling his lawyer information about the abuses - these were typical concentration camp tactics. Eventually I was transferred to a cell where I only shared with one person and was not beaten after that. My cellmate was Koba Matkava, who was charged with organizing a terrorist attack. He is another of those arrested illegally on false charges and I would like his case reinvestigated, too. I was told that I would never get out of the prison alive. If the government of the country had not changed I would have had no chance to prove my innocence and I do not know what

would have happened to me. I also thank my friend Will Van Der Weide, a Dutch Businessman who strongly supported me in those terrible days and showed an example of true friendship," says Giorgi Keburia.

A different judge has now been assigned to Keburia's case as the previous judge was biased, only following the instructions from above. The current appears to be neutral in my case. Osikhmashvili, my former partner, continues to give intricate testimony and the court takes it into account, as it should, but also allows Keburia needs to be allowed present his side of the case - and all facts considered. Giorgi Keburia says that he does not need to name and shame the former officials involved in his case but just wants to know who was behind all this. After the court makes its judgment he will make a complaint backed by evidence and will ask that the guilty parties be held responsible for his illegally inflicted psychological and moral trauma. He says that by so doing he will finally bring the case to an end and justice will be served.

"My field of business is defense-related. My former business partner was close to the former defense minister. Based on this, I draw the logical conclusion that my imprisonment was advantageous for a certain patron of Nikoloz Osikhmashvili. I'm not saying that Bacho Akhalaia personally intervened in this case, but it is obvious that someone from the MOD wanted me removed and tried to use Osikhmashvili to remove me from the business. The Ministry of Defense has conducted a lot of illegal transactions relating to materials and weapons procurement. These were inside deals and they did not need a stranger coming along and learning too much about how they worked and the links, and especially someone like me, a member of the United Opposition - and known for not being shy of openly sharing my views. It is clear that they wanted to obstruct my business, greed was the motivation. It is necessary to open a new investigation, as all the details of my case will be revealed and those guilty be held criminally responsible," Keburia concludes.

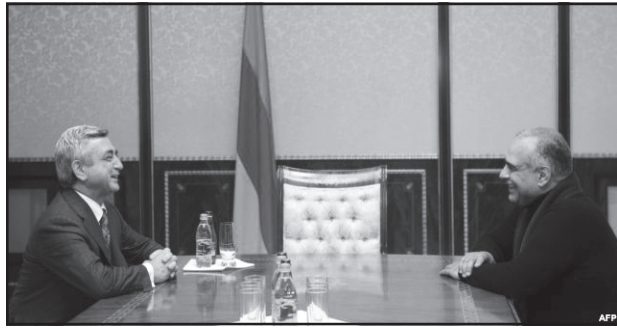
No End In Sight To Armenia's Postelection Standoff

By RFE/RL's Armenian Service

One month after the Armenian presidential ballot in which incumbent Serzh Sarkisian was reelected for a second term, his closest rival, Raffi Hovannissian, might have backed himself into a corner from which there is no face-saving exit.

A former Armenian foreign minister, U.S.-born Hovannissian, 53, has failed to mobilize mass public support for his claims that the outcome of the ballot was rigged in Sarkisian's favor and he himself is the rightful winner. In addition, his categorical rejection of Sarkisian's proposals to increase the opposition's role in decision-making and his maximalist rhetoric with regard to Nagorno-Karabakh are likely to have irritated and alarmed the international community, which delivered a generally positive assessment of the vote.

True, the OSCE election monitors too have questioned the accuracy of official figures giving Sarkisian 58.6 percent of the vote compared with 36.7 percent for Hovannissian. They highlighted in particular the "implausibly high" (over 80 percent) voter turnout in 144 precincts where Sarkisian polled 70-80 percent of the vote. By contrast, in 249 precincts where turnout was under 50 percent, Hovanni-



Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian (left) in a meeting with his top challenger, Raffi Hovannissian, in Yerevan on February 21

sian received more than 50 percent of the vote in 155 and Sarkisian in only 40.

But the international community—including Russia—has accepted the official results and extended formal congratulations to Sarkisian. Moreover, Armenia's Constitutional Court has rejected appeals by Hovannissian and another of the eight candidates, Andreas Ghukasian, to annul the election results.

Constitutional Court Chairman Gagik Harutiunian ruled last week that neither candidate produced sufficient evidence to substantiate his allegations of fraud.

Central Election Commission Chairman Tigran Mukuchian for his part commented that he does not recall any previous appeal to the Constitutional Court for which so little corroborating evidence was adduced. Judge Felix Tokhian asked Hovannissian's lawyer, Karen Mezhlumian, why

so few precinct election commission members representing Hovannissian refused to sign the official protocols enumerating the number of votes cast for each candidate. Mezhlumian seemed unable to provide a convincing explanation.

At the same time, the nine Constitutional Court judges acknowledged there is widespread public distrust in official vote results. In a carefully worded sentence, they blamed this on a "combination of political, economic and administrative resources."

Ever since the preliminary election results were made public, Hovannissian has engaged in maximalist rhetoric without offering a clear strategy for securing the annulment of the election outcome. He has also scrupulously avoided any confrontation with police that could escalate into violence.

Meeting with Sarkisian on February 21, three days after the vote, Hovannissian suggested three alternative courses of action: that Sarkisian acknowledge him as the rightful election winner; that Sarkisian call a repeat presidential ballot; or that Sarkisian schedule a preterm parliamentary election in which all the 131 mandates would be allocated under the proportional system. Predictably, Sarkisian rejected those alternatives and Hovannissian withdrew the offer last week.

The authorities for their part made several counterproposals that Hovannissian rejected in turn. The first was that Hovannissian personally head an ad hoc parliamentary commission on constitutional reforms which the opposition has been pushing for. Then on March 11, Galust Sahakian, a deputy chairman of the ruling Republican Party of Armenia (HHK), said the authorities are also ready to appoint representatives of Hovannissian's Zharangutun party and other opposition groups to oversight bodies such as the parliament's Audit Chamber and the State Commission on the Protection of Economic Competition. The authorities might even consider letting opposition members head those bodies, Sahakian said.

On March 10, Hovannissian embarked on a hunger strike on Yerevan's Freedom Square, declaring that Sarkisian will be sworn in for a second term only

"over my dead body." The Armenian leadership dismissed that statement as blackmail and deplored Hovannissian's rejection of an invitation to meet again with Sarkisian. "We note with regret Mr. Hovannissian's refusal to examine all outstanding issues comprehensively and in detail," Sarkisian press spokesman Armen Arzumani said. "We can only hope that Mr. Hovannissian has correctly evaluated the situation and is soberly conscious of dangers stemming from the de facto rejection of dialogue."

Parliamentary speaker Hovik Abrahamian, who managed Sarkisian's reelection campaign, met with Hovannissian late last week to propose a dialogue on how to resolve the standoff. He told journalists afterwards that the Armenian authorities are ready to make "reasonable" concessions, but stressed again that Hovannissian's calls for fresh presidential or parliamentary elections remain "unacceptable."

The Armenian authorities are, moreover, by no means the only object of Hovannissian's ire. He has lashed out at Russia and at the European People's Party and at the head of the Armenian Apostolic Church, for their endorsement of Sarkisian's reelection. (The church had also urged Hovannissian to end his hunger strike and opt for "more constructive ways" of political struggle, eschewing "manifestations of intolerance and hatred.")

And in a move that could

have serious repercussions, Hovannissian has said he does not recognize the authority of the OSCE's Minsk Group that seeks to mediate a peaceful political solution to the Karabakh conflict. One of the main provisions of his election program was a pledge to recognize the break-away region as an independent state.

Hovannissian has consistently affirmed that he is acting on behalf of the Armenian people in defense of their will, as reflected in the hypothetical real distribution of votes. But popular support for him appears to be crumbling. Attendance at his public meetings in Yerevan has vacillated between 5,000 and 10,000, compared with the tens of thousands who turned out to back a similar protest by former President Levon Ter-Petrosian in the wake of the February 2008 presidential ballot.

The weekly "168 zham" editorialized on March 16 that "Raffi has not yet found the formula for transforming a wave of protest into a political struggle." It said that failure is destroying the faith and expectations of thousands of people. Another former presidential candidate, Soviet-era dissident Paruyr Hayrikan, questioned the wisdom of Hovannissian's hunger strike. "As a means for political struggle, a hunger strike has never made a difference in the world," Hayrikan commented to the daily "Zhamanak."

Baku Leans On NGOs As Presidential Election Nears

By Kenan Aliyev and Robert Coalson, RFE/RL

Harsh suppression of opposition protests. A crackdown on foreign-funded NGOs. And a formal request to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to downgrade its Baku office.

The government of Azerbaijan has been on the offensive in recent weeks, an effort that activists say is intended to seize control of the political landscape ahead of the October presidential election.

OSCE Secretary-General Lamberto Zannier discussed Baku's request to downgrade its mission with President Ilham Aliyev during a visit on March 15. The Azerbaijani government's letter says the request to reduce its status from a "mission" to a "project-coordination office" was made because of the country's "significant progress" over the 13 years since the office was opened.

Vafa Guluzadeh, a former government adviser, sees the move as an effort to cut off anticipated OSCE criticism of the upcoming election. In the past, the OSCE has consistently rated Azerbaijan's elections as not free and unfair.

"This is not about current relations. It is about future elections. It is difficult to predict whether the OSCE will recognize the election or not. There may be concern about this, and so they want to transform the OSCE into an obedient structure," Guluzadeh said.

NGO CLAMPDOWN

Hafiz Hasanov, head of the Baku NGO Law and Development Social Union, agrees, say-

ing he thinks the election-monitoring arm of the OSCE will not be invited to assess the October poll.

Aliyev, who has been president since 2003 and who pushed through a 2009 constitutional change that allows him to continue running for president indefinitely, is widely expected to be awarded a third term in October.

The move to downgrade the OSCE office comes in the wake of the March 14 arrests of three activists, including a program officer of the U.S.-funded National Democratic Institute's (NDI) Baku office. Azerbaijani state press had earlier reported that the NDI was financing a "Facebook revolution," a charge that the U.S. Embassy in Baku has staunchly denied.

Kenan Aliyev and Robert Coalson, RFE/RL During a recent tour of the United States intended to drum up support for Azerbaijan as a "stable partner" sandwiched between theocratic Iran and authoritarian Russia, ruling party lawmaker Samad Seyidov, who heads Azerbaijan's delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, said the new restrictions on NGOs are intended to counter threats to stability.

"Unfortunately, from different sources, we can see a lot of interference. Just a few months ago, 22 so-called representatives of some NGOs were arrested by security services in Azerbaijan. Why? Because they are going to blow up the American Embassy and the Israeli Embassy," Seyidov said.

The point man in Baku's offensive has been presidential chief of staff Ramiz Mehdiyev. He gave a blistering interview to



In recent months, Azerbaijan has seen streets protests, many of which have been broken up by police

state media on March 15 in which he predicted that Aliyev will win the October election and said numerous "fake NGOs" were interfering in Azerbaijan's internal affairs. He called them "threats to national security" and said the authorities should investigate and shut them down.

Mehdiyev, 74, is at the heart of an ongoing scandal involving leaked videos that show an official of the ruling Yeni Azerbaijan Party purportedly selling seats in the legislature and saying she will pass the money on to "master Ramiz."

Mehdiyev — reportedly the country's powerful gray cardinal — may be feeling pressure to assure Aliyev the domestic political situation is under control following an unusual wave of protests since the beginning of the year. This week that unrest spread into the oil sector, with up to 2,000 oil workers protesting against low wages and poor working conditions.

The move against the OSCE has raised eyebrows, however.

The Vienna-based organization approved the Baku mission's mandate four months ago and its budget was passed only weeks ago. In addition, the head of the mission, Turkish diplomat Koray Targay, is an outspoken supporter of Aliyev.

In an interview on March 15, Targay said "the government is on a good path in every respect. In terms of democratization, in terms of increasing the effectiveness of the rule of law, combatting corruption, combating transnational crimes like human trafficking, the government's policies are good."

He noted the OSCE had budgeted 115,000 euros (\$148,000) for election-related projects, mostly targeting young people. But he stressed the projects were to be carried out in cooperation with the presidential administration and the Central Election Commission.

UNRESOLVED KARABAKH CONFLICT

Nonetheless, on March 9,

everything," Mollazade said.

"No contact within the framework of the Karabakh community. No contact between parliamentarians, even within international organizations where we have delegations — for example, in Euronest or the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe."

Although Baku's relations with Moscow are strained — Aliyev and Putin have not held a bilateral meeting in more than five years — the administration's increasingly isolationist policies seem to mirror those of Putin's Russia. Baku's letter to the OSCE strongly echoed the reasoning Russia's Foreign Ministry used when Moscow ejected the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) last September.

The U.S.-funded NDI relocated its Russian staff to Lithuania for fear of possible persecution after Moscow asked the USAID to leave.

Ruling party lawmaker Seyidov said in Washington that Baku is offering "a new narrative" in relations based on "moral support."

"If we are thinking about the future of our nation, if we are thinking about stability in the region, we have to have our roots in the West. This is a new dimension, a new narrative in our communication with Europe. Two years ago, 10 years ago, we asked, 'Help us.' And this year, today, we are asking not about money, not about [pipeline] routes, not about pipelines," Seyidov said.

"We have everything. What we are really asking about is moral support, political support. That would be a really great conjunction between East and West, between Azerbaijan and the United States of America."

Israel Welcomes Georgian Tourists

By LISA TONAKANYAN

Israel wants more tourists from Georgia – both to increase its income and to strengthen cultural ties between the two countries. Despite various visa violations Tel Aviv has expressed a readiness to facilitate the issuing of visas for groups of Georgian visitors.

Two percent more Georgians visited Israel in 2012 than in 2011. The Israeli Consulate issued 4,443 visas last year, but only 850 were given to groups of tourists. Ambassador of Israel to Georgia Yuval Fuchs is not satisfied with these figures, and held a meeting with local travel agencies at the Holiday Inn Hotel on March 19 in order to discuss ways of increasing the number of Georgian visitors to Israel, and vice versa.

The Ambassador says that such tourism contributes to the economy of Georgia as well as Israel and both countries are trying to encourage visitors. “The Embassy and Consulate are ready to cooperate with local tour operators in order to facilitate the issuance of visas for tour groups. From now on we will have direct contact with each other,” he said at the meeting, organised by the Georgian Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, the National Tourism Administration and the Israeli Embassy.

Fuchs emphasised that tourism is not only a good source of income but also improves cultural relations between the two nations. “I have here Shota Rustaveli’s *The Knight in the Panther’s Skin* in Hebrew, and it’s not just a translation – Rustaveli

lived in Jerusalem and probably died there. We share a culture, history, heritage and holy sites; there is a Georgian community in Israel and there are many Georgian Jews, so it’s not only about deriving benefits from economic interrelationship,” he told the Georgian Times.

The commitment to make it easier to obtain Israeli visas has brought joy to many tour operators and travellers. Travel agencies have hailed the Embassy’s decision and hope it will yield results in the near future.

“We expect the initiative of the Embassy to simplify the entire process. Previously, when groups of tourists went to Israel for Christmas and Easter we had to send a stack of papers to the Ministry of Interior Affairs of Israel and wait for their approval or refusal of the applications, even though in the majority of cases we faced no problems. But since 2011 the visa regime has been toughened for Georgians, probably due to an occurrence which staggered even us – almost all the passengers on one particular flight overstayed in Israel illegally,” Via Travel’s Tamar Berelashvili told GT.

The founder of Iveria Tour, Nino Tsomaia, confirmed that such things have happened. “We once had two tourists who never returned from Israel after our company took them there. After Easter 2012 group visas were refused to all Georgians, as serious violations had occurred during the holiday itself. Since December we have dealt only with individual travellers. However I do think the restrictions on providing visas for groups of Georgians was politically motivated, as many Russians also break the law but they do not need visas



now,” Tsomaia told GT.

Tamar Bachaleishvili, 58, visited Israel on an 8-day tour in 2011. She says that she applied for her visa in February but her application was only accepted by the Israeli MIA in April – exactly two weeks before the departure date. “The most tiring and irritating thing was the uncertainty – I didn’t know whether I was going or not. There were 22 of us waiting for a decision, and unfortunately seven didn’t get a visa. I think all this was linked to the arrest of some Israeli businessmen. This year I’m also going to visit Israel, and I have already sent my documents to the agency. I was not asked to present any documents confirming my job this time,” she told GT.

The Ambassador of Israel has called on everyone to stop speculating about why the visa regime was tightened in 2011 as “this is getting us nowhere”. He

didn’t deny that there were problems with visas in 2011 but maintained this had nothing to do with politics. “There’s no room for speculation. The only reason the Israeli MIA refused visas to groups from Georgia was the surprising number of tourists who stayed illegally in Israel. No country can tolerate this. We want more tourists, but, of course, not at the expense of an influx of illegal immigrants. If we can avoid this in the future I do not see any problem with issuing visas for groups,” Yuval Fuchs told us.

The Ambassador added that the only thing which has changed at the moment is the procedure – from now on the Israeli MIA will discuss the application with the Consulate before a decision is made, so the Consulate can provide some input to this process. “This is important, as we’ll get to know the tour agencies and

they will know us, and if they have a problem or question or any difficulties they can approach us. The idea is to improve the direct communication between us. This is a trial period for the change and we hope it will facilitate the procedure,” he stressed.

He emphasised that 2012 had been a very good year for the two countries – many high-level meetings had been held and there had been an obvious improvement in bilateral relations. The Ambassador also denied that relations had ever been strained, saying that all the talk about this is merely “speculation”.

Nonetheless, it is undoubtedly true that since 2008 there has been increasing tension in official Israeli-Georgian relations. In that year Israeli defence firms extensively involved in the Georgian military’s modernisation pulled out of deals with Tbilisi just days before the Russo-

Georgian war broke out, and began selling arms to Russia instead. Then-State Minister for Reintegration Temur Yakobashvili, a Georgian Jew, called the Israeli move “a disgrace.”

WikiLeaks subsequently published an e-mail from an analyst at the US-based intelligence firm Stratfor alleging that Russia and Israel had reached an agreement back in 2008 under which Jerusalem provided the Kremlin with the secret codes for Georgia’s UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles) in exchange for information on Russian-made Iranian missile defence systems. Israeli technicians had worked on Georgia’s UAV programme, but these UAV’s were never paid for. Relations deteriorated further in 2010 after the setting up and jailing of Israeli businessmen Ron Fuchs and Zeev Frenkiel, who were charged with attempting to bribe the Georgian Deputy Finance Minister in an effort to reclaim 90 million USD owed them by the Georgian government. This was a ploy by the government to get out of paying its legal debts. Both men were pardoned in late 2011, after signing an agreement reducing Georgia’s payout to only 37 million USD.

Relations only began normalising at the beginning of 2012, after the visit of Grigol Vashadze, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, to Tel Aviv, where he discussed with Avigdor Lieberman, his Israeli counterpart, the possibility of introducing visa-free travel between the two countries. The Ambassador of Israel has stated that initially this agreement would only apply to the holders of diplomatic and service passports, but it is now ready to be signed.

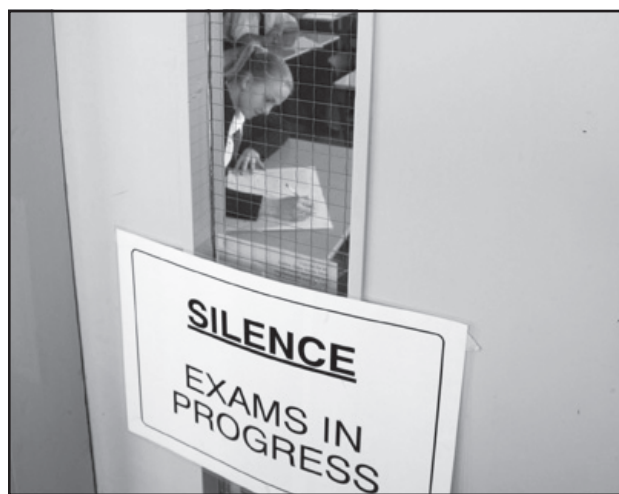
Assess More?!

By KENDRA PARADIS

I mentioned earlier about the pressure teachers feel to show the success of their teaching methods and be held accountable for the work they produce. This accountability has most notably been attained through assessment of both their students’ knowledge and assessment of their ability to convey that knowledge to the students.

Below I have discussed several types of assessment that classrooms should embrace to aid teachers in fostering students who can pass standardized exams by remembering what the learning process is really about: learning. There are two types of assessment; summative, which can be described as assessment of learning and formative which embodies assessment for and assessment as learning. All of these forms of assessment should be used in the classroom simultaneously to keep learning in context and purposeful in a long-term sense.

Summative assessment is the sum of learning. It is the cumulative amount of understanding and knowledge a student has gained from any particular unit



of study. Assessment of learning is cut and dry standardization; used to prove proficiency and mastery of the material. Often the result of solely relying on this type of assessment on students can be downright dangerous. It leaves no room for differentiation of any kind, natural and organic inquiry, or imagination. It often labels some of our brightest as bad students because they simply aren’t the specific type of student the exam is testing for. It might measure knowledge but then makes even that arbitrary by making everyone strive for a number; a score.

Furthermore it lacks the

scope and range to demonstrate the skills and knowledge that have been acquired. The product of assessment of learning is not only stress but the good old “stuff-and-flush” method where students cram in all the information for the sole purpose of passing the exam and after to function is complete, promptly forget everything. The finality of such assessments leaves no chance for students to improve leaving them not only ranked against each other and labeled but feeling unable to change the course of their learning for the better. That’s not learning. Although it does seem to be the

only efficient way to assess in a large scale- within the larger context of a state education system- it certainly cannot be the only way we assess our students on a day to day basis in our classrooms.

Formative assessment is the form of learning. This can take on a multitude of forms (see what I did there?!) Formative assessment tells both the teacher and the student where everyone stands at any point in the learning process toward the goal. Where do you need to revise learning, where do they need to review more? Assessment for and as learning stresses the process; the journey not the destination. It allows everyone to be their best- eliminating stress- and actually allows learners to become better by reflecting and acting accordingly. Using this strategy students are given ownership and responsibility for their learning and improvement; being in the driver’s seat makes them brave about telling teachers what they need so the classroom becomes a collaborative space.

The purpose is to collect a wide range of data about student performance rather than leaving it all to one last do or die test. Assessment of learning starts from the beginning of learning to build a framework of what students can already do in order to root further learning in a wider context and make the process a continuum. This strategy is not only vital to students in the journey of their own learning but crucial for teachers to decide what steps to take mov-

ing forward. Using formative assessment can help teachers hit the experiential learning cycle more naturally and reinforce skills and knowledge that has already been attained so students feel a high sense of purpose and necessity in their learning. Following this cycle of assessment teachers can chart the progress of students and monitor the assumptions and reassessment of their original understanding of material covered in units of study.

While assessment for learning is arguably almost more helpful for teachers than students, assessment as learning is the ultimate assessment strategy made for and by students themselves. Assessment as learning is the highest emphasis of the importance in the process of learning. Students can see the importance and lack of danger in taking risks regularly and can modify their actions and understanding according to what is happening in these activities. This is a powerful tool for students to take part in the educational processes around them; becoming more and more aware of exactly what is expected of them and how to become better learners and be successful in any classroom. Students can become masters of metacognition to assess and reassess their actions and understandings and modify accordingly placing their learning into a continuum themselves.

In formative assessment the most important piece of the puzzle is making the criteria for suc-

cess clear to students. Rubrics are essential way to guide students through the process by giving them the security of knowing exactly what will be expected of them in what would generally seem like a risky and stressful situation. Students can use rubrics to assess themselves as they navigate through tasks and also to assess their peers in a collective effort to reach the goals. Rubrics take all the insecurity and guess work out of assessment and expose the wizard from behind his big dark curtain putting the process of learning center stage.

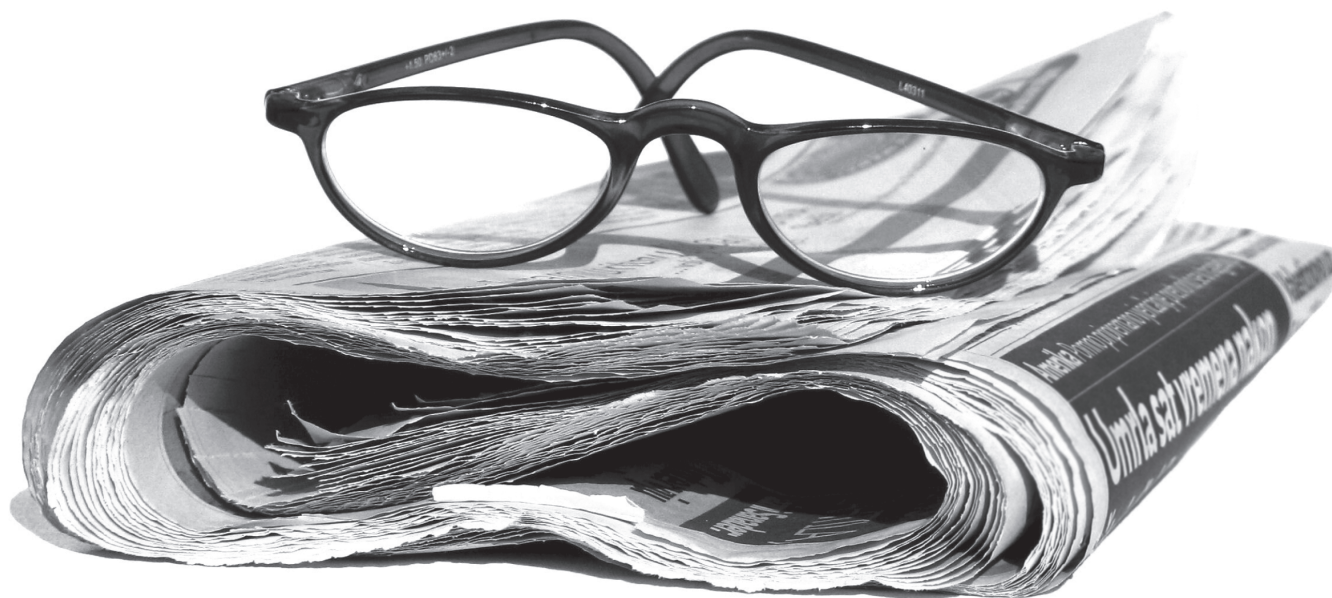
Summative assessment exams are both an inevitable step in the regulation and standardization of education and the mode by which real improvement of classroom teaching and overall learning is destroyed. By focusing on the pressure to achieve, classrooms become blinded by the tunnel vision of passing those looming high-stakes exams and begin to teach only for this purpose. Assessment is a scary word which puts off both teachers, who often feel attacked and defensive and students, who feel stressed and often discouraged but it doesn’t need to be that way. Assessment can happen in a classroom in order to help teachers and students, to encourage risk taking, highlight and enlighten the process of learning, or even without any knowledge that it’s happening. Above all, assessment should be seen as a tool which helps students to learn better and even more so teachers to teach better.

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High Quality German Beer will now be Produced in Georgia

By EMMA BAIRAMOVA

On March 19, the Georgian Beer Company Ltd. and Germany's Bitburger Braugruppe signed a cooperation agreement at an official ceremony. The agreement gives Georgian Beer Company Ltd. the right to produce the German premium brand König Pilsener on licence at the Zedazeni brewery, in strict accordance with the standards and technologies of the original and Germany's beer purity law, the Reinheitsgebot.



states that their bottling process of König Pilsener is fully consistent with the requirements of the German party and that the Germans will control

offers its customers a totally natural beer, and we will manufacture it the same way. Bitburger's directors are from the seventh generation of the Si-



What are your company's priorities?

Our main priority is to expand our production and development in Eastern European countries, where we see huge potential for our brand. I think Georgia is a country with such potential.

When did you get the idea of partnering with a Georgian company?

A few months ago we met our Georgian colleagues, and after seeing their brewery we were impressed by how effectively they worked and how well they use brewing technology. In just seven months, Zedazeni has created the optimal conditions for the production of beer and made its brand one of the strongest on the market. Zedazeni has proved that it is the best company in the Georgian market. We decided to use their power, technology and method of working to develop our own brand. We believe they have the potential to create a product of excellent quality. Before I came here I knew Georgia was a wine country but also well versed in producing quality beer. We knew that we could offer a desired product which would meet the demands of Georgian consumers. Looking at the beer brands on the Georgian market, I can say that they do not meet the needs of consumers. Now they will be able to get a real quality product at the right price.

So you believe you represent an excellent product?

Certainly, I'm sure it will be a beer available in top quality

What are your advantages over your competitors?

We consider all our competitors worthy, but we have an advantage - our products' unique quality. The most important thing for us is the quality of the product, and this is because we respect and take into account consumer needs.

Who first came up with the idea of partnering with Bitburger?

The idea occurred to both sides almost simultaneously. The Germans first toured our brewery, which covers a two acre site, to inspect our technology and methods of beer production, and then they offered cooperation. They themselves were surprised that the agreement could be reached in only a few months.

Mr. Reimer, your product brings a new beer quality to Georgian consumers, does it not?

Together with our Georgian brewery partners we offer an excellent product which has a great history and background in Germany. The aim is to offer a product which combines an acceptable price for the consumer with great quality. Georgia is

gian company to receive a license from the manufacturers to produce such a high quality premium beer. We have invested five million USD in additional brewing equipment in response. Our workers have been to Germany for further training in the industry and the German company now has personnel based here who supervise the process of beer production. The ingredients from which the beer is produced include no additives - we merely use natural German malt, German hops and natural Georgian water, which is of higher quality than German water. Our German partners have organised tastings to determine the difference between Georgian and German beer, and these results have been 50/50, i.e. half of the tasters preferred the Georgian beer and the other half the German. It is also very important that we are using the latest technology, dating from 2011 and 2012. In cooperation with a highly qualified company, we will offer Georgian consumers a natural, lively beer.

Will you export the beer to other countries? Is this tech-



Bitburger brewery (Bitburger Brauerei Th. Simon GmbH) is a large German brewery founded in 1817 by Johann Wallenborn. Bitburger ranks third among German breweries, with annual sales of 3.86 million hectolitres in 2008.

Continuing the unchanged family tradition which has prevailed in Bitburg since 1817, Bitburger Premium Beer is brewed by only the most experienced brewers, who have been around for seven generations

Bitte ein Bit!" (A Bitburger please!) is a phrase heard about 3 million times a day around the world - at least that is how many Bitburger beers are consumed in more than 60 countries every day. In Germany, Bitburger beer is the most popular of those on tap. Its ingredients are simple: water, malt and hops.

The Zedazeni brewery

the beer quality. The Georgian company thinks that the agreement is important for the development and strengthening of business and partnership relations between the two countries and will contribute to the growth of exports whilst increasing general awareness of Georgian beer.

GT interviewed Vasil Sulkhaniashvili: General Director of the Georgian Beer Company Ltd., and Andreas Reimer, Head of International Business of the Bitburger Beer Group, on the occasion of signing this historic agreement.

Mr. Sulkhaniashvili, does Georgia have a tradition of producing beer for other countries?

This is the first instance of a Georgian company being given a license to bottle high quality beer. As you know, **Bitburger** is one of the leading companies in this industry and



mon dynasty, which has produced beer for 150 years. For us it is very important fact that we have become the first Geor-

nically possible?

We have the right to export our products to neighbouring countries, including Russia.

brewing our product with the same raw materials used in Germany and the production process will also be the same.

restaurants. After a few days you will see the product on the market and it will surprise and delight Georgian consumers.

Georgia's 'Gifted' October 2013 in the Works

By TAKO AGARASHVILI

Fall 2013 seems very promising for those who appreciate art. After years of silence the International Festival of Arts in Honor of Michael Tumanishvili – Gift – is back. Its art director Katie Dolidze is happy to grant Georgians with the festival again. She has been nourishing the event for over a decade. Even though the festival experienced a few years of fall out, it still is the 'it' art event of the year.

Film Actors' Theatre in Honor of Michael Tumanishvili will be hosting a marvelous event this year. Katie Dolidze is the Art Director of the theatre again, she is back to her office and that's where she hosted the Georgian Times for an interview, and posters, awards, photos are looking at you from the walls. This woman has lived a lifetime of cinematography, theatre, acting, events, awards, worldwide tours. She took Georgia across the borders, showed its genius to the world. Throughout her entire life she has been fighting for what she believes in. She has been out there her whole life. Katie doesn't lack the strength, experience, or creativity. Her crew has seen the world only because she had a will, she found a way. She believed in Georgian art enough to work her life off to do her country proud. She is a living pride and accomplishment of Georgian national art.

How did it start?

The idea of the festival appeared in 1989. After seeing the plays by Robert Sturua and Temur Chkheidze, "Don Juan" by Michael Tumanishvili, great figures like William Burdett Coutts, co-founder of the greatest international art festival - Fringe (Edinburgh) and Ian Scobie, producer of Perth (Australia), were surprised that a country producing such amazing art didn't have an art festival of its own. While visiting Tbilisi they had an idea of an international art festival. You couldn't just "do" a festival back then; there was nothing you could do without Moscow granting permission. These guys didn't care; they were enthusiastic enough to be willing to travel

here via turkey, or elsewhere, so Moscow would never even know. "We'll call it Gift and we'll make it happen" they said.

GIFT DIDN'T HAPPEN IN 1989, BUT APRIL 9TH DID.

That year was very unfortunate for Georgia. Political events consumed everything, so the idea was just dropped at the time. The Soviet Union collapsed, there was a war. It was not the time for art.

Who wrote the project?

It was Ian Scobie, a very famous figure in Australian art world and one of the directors of the Australian art festival Adelaide. He had written a step by step project – one year preparation – from October to October. On the last page of the last October there was a line by him – "but now it's too late". I actually showed this project to Zviad Gamsakhurdia (Georgia's first democratically elected president), he was pleased and eager to show his country to the world. But the war destroyed all the plans.

What happened to the project?

It was 1993 that the talks about the festival surfaced again. Then the war started. The festival was dropped again.

How did it finally happen?

In 1996, after years of silence, Gift was under discussion. Eduard Shevardnadze's ordered the festival to be included in the state budget and give it the state's endorsement. We were sponsored by the government and in 1997 finally the first Gift was on. Unfortunately my older colleagues tried their best to disrupt the festival and they managed to accomplish that; in 1999 the festival was no longer a state event. They were unhappy about the festival carrying Michael Tumanishvili's honor; with opening his statue in front of the Film Actors' Theatre. But frankly, they could have honored whoever they wanted; they just didn't have the guts to do it.

Was it the only betrayal the festival went through?

No, every year something popped up out of Georgian envious mentality. This festival is like a battle field. Every year I get to talk to the festival's international board of directors (Vanessa Redgrave, Peter Brook,

Hilary Wood, Thelma Holt, Oleg Tabakov, Anatoliy Vasilyev) and discuss with them the problems that are caused by specific people each year. This festival was the first event that made Georgia famous. Journalists from Financial Times, NY Times, Guardian, Washington Post, Scotland on Sunday, Evening Standard, were invited to the festival. These people took Georgia to a higher, better, brighter level. They wrote beautiful pieces about the festival in a beautiful country with the talented people and encouraged the world, that it was safe to visit Georgia. I don't understand why anyone would go against the event that brings stars like Vanessa Redgrave in the country, offers performances, shows, plays, concerts. It's just sick Georgian mentality that does it.

As I remember Al Pacino was to come to the first Gift as a guest.

Yes, we were negotiating about it with his manager. Al Pacino had no idea where is Georgia, but his manager wrote a letter on Al's behalf, saying "I always wanted to come to Georgia to see Russia". It caused a huge disturbance. An American lady Maria Barlett, who worked for Shevardnadze, got infuriated by an American mistaking Georgia with Russia. So she threatened them with publishing the letter in NY times. Maria was simply in love with Georgia. She even wrote an anthem for Gift. At the end, I told Al's lawyer that an apology was not necessary, but to have him record the greeting video for the opening and we would have been all set. He did record the video for us waving the hand smiling and appealing "Buena Fortuna". I think sooner than later Al Pacino shall come to Gift, but not as a movie star, but with his semi documentary project. He made a movie "Looking for Richard". It's his research about the Richard the Third, it's very fascinating. So we'll see how it goes.

What else was special about the first Gift in 1997?

It was beautiful! We started marching from the freedom square up to philharmonic, where we saw a beautiful performance staged by Sandro Mrevlishvili. Peter Brook also greeted the festival with his greeting video, as

well as Al Pacino sitting in front of the camera with his tie loosened up. We issued the newspaper as well, giving the insight of all the events of the first festival. It was very unique. I'm still proud of that paper.

How did it go the next year?

In 1998 a very young group

political orientation. 2008 was a very cruel and sad year for the country. The war with Russia devastated the entire nation. In 2009 not only the government no longer funded the festival, but the city Mayor Gigi Ugulava granted "my young friend at the time" Eka Mazmishvili a new

having the jazz event. It was great part of Gift's money that they used for their event.

ALL THESE YEARS YOU SEEMED TO BE FIGHTING FOR GIFT.

I always will. It's my baby. It was a scandal in IFEA (international festival and events association). I brought it up to IFEA and they stood by me. Georgian board of directors just went with it. That's what makes this country "the world of slaves" up to this day. My only request for the new government was to let me have Gift back. I'm looking forward to it this year. According all the laws Eka Mazmishvili's festival will never be a member of IFEA. It (since some people are already invited) will take place in September, because October is mine. We will have an outstanding Gift this year.

I have heard big names are coming. Can you name them?

Peter Brook's theatre is going to open the festival this year with the play "Le Costume". Also his daughter's "Irina's Dream theatre" shall be staging. How nicely odd is that name?! We are very pleased. She is bringing a trilogy. Finnish circus is invited, Dimitry Krinov's "Laboratory" with four astonishing plays. We will also have a tribute dedicated to outstanding figures that are no longer with us like Natela Urushadze, Ramaz Chkhikvadze, Gogi Gegechkori, Guram Sagharadze, etc. They all were honored with the special prize in the name of Michael Tumanishvili. This year Dimitry Krinov shall receive the special prize. I won't name the Georgians; I'd rather keep it a surprise. We shall have a ballet performance "the Angels of Gift" on the little stage in front of the Tumanishvili theatre. We will have grand performances for the foster care kids. Like I said it shall be marvelous.

One of the foreign board director's Thelma Holt is friendship with Vanessa Redgrave, Ralph Fiennes, Harvey Keitel, Tim Burton, and Daniel Craig. I'm hoping we can get a couple of them to come to the festival. Also we are expecting Joe Wright and his beautiful Indian sitar player wife (Norah Jones' sister). So yes, coming Gift is looking pretty dazzling.



was already in the government – Zurab Zhvania, Michael Saakashvili and others. It was obvious that Shevardnadze was leaving his power to the successors. And that's when I heard the first lie. They promised us finances and stood us up. I jeopardized my entire family, to find the money for the festival.

Who was the biggest force against the festival?

It was Zurab Chiaberashvili (former Mayor) and the lady at a Culture Department Nata Machaladze. They simply cut out the festival not seeing its purpose. That's when the international board of directors wrote letters to Michael Saakashvili explaining the meaning of the festival. Mary Lomia made sure Saakashvili would actually get to the letters. He granted the permission to hold Gift in 1998. The festival was on ever since up to 2007. Mr. Saakashvili attended the last festival. He had dinner with Andrey Kanchalovsky and other prominent guests. At the closing gala, he named me an angel of the festival. He stated how important this festival was for the country and that we shall keep on having it.

What changed?

The government's crack-down on protest on November 7, 2007 changed my political views. And the festival was a victim of it my change in po-

festival to substitute Gift. Substituting the international art festival is just unheard of. The art world has never seen such thing. I didn't even know it, until I received the letter from Peter Brook, asking me why we changed the name Gift to something else. He couldn't possibly imagine that he was invited to a different festival. It is unacceptable. They stole the idea, the guests, even the timing. I simply got punished for changing my political views. Most surprising was that my foreign colleagues were fighting against it, but Georgians who I made the directors (David Doiashvili, David Turashvili and others) were quiet. They accepted all that was happening - the art going under the politics. I can never live with it, not in this lifetime. Eka Mazmishvili offered me to be the art director of her festival. How can I be the art director of the festival stolen from me?!

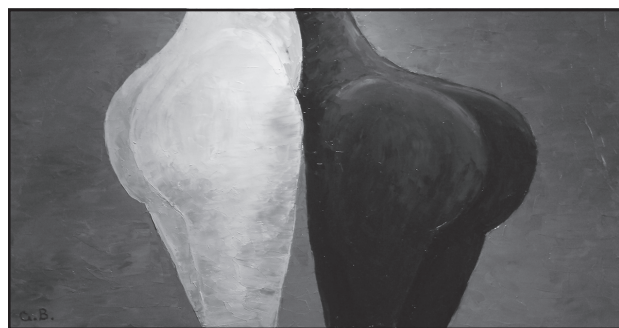
Gift had a huge impact on the country. I started from nothing and built up a reputation and gained an honor. All these people – artists, directors, actors, crews, dancers, singers, performers – loved coming to Gift. It even started the series of Jazz Festival. This is the first time I'm going to say this, but yes!! In 1997 it was Gift that became "the gift" for eastern promotion. These guys got paid hugely for

A Georgian Artist's First Exhibition to be Held in London

By GT staff

"Golden Fish", "Black Camomile/Daisy", "Dancing Fir-trees, which are Cold in Winter", "The Broken Iron Wires of the Concentration Camps", "Pompous Bridge in Mtskheta with the postscript: We Should not Drown Past in the Water, it needs Sun", "Dancing Ballerina with postscript: When you look from beyond, you are irritated/ seduced, and when you look from above, you irritate/ seduce", and "A Promise Given on the Background of a Big, Red Sunset: We will be Nice! These are Gocha Baghatrishvili's still lives, portraits, landscapes... about a 100 paintings in total.

As a professional military teacher, Mr. Baghatrishvili has been painting since 1980, though



his paintings have never been exhibited in Georgia. His first exhibition will be held in London from June 14-27 in an art gallery on Oxford Street. The exhibition is supported by a Georgian lady Natia Abramia, who has been supporting talented Georgian artists for many years and strives to introduce them to the world.

As Baghatrishvili explains, his paintings are philosophical, and for this reason it is important that

western artists and art critics evaluate his work.

"My paintings are very philosophical and I want foreign audience to see and evaluate them because in Georgia very few understand my paintings," says the artist.

Baghatrishvili's paintings are set apart from others in that his include a specific perception of the universe and the main characteristic feature is that the paintings have captions, which is a very

rare among such paintings.

"When an artist wants to explain a work of art, it should not be a secret for other artists or art critics for years. It is also much better to add descriptions to the pictures, and my painting called for instance "A Golden Fish" has no postscript, but there are 12 forks, one with blood stains, and the Bible, around the fish. No doubt, everybody can understand the content of the painting, and the bloody thing is Judas. We don't stop praying and asking Jesus to give prosperity to us, though all the while we are thinking about food and eating, despite that God teaches us to be kind, to serve justice and be good to our brothers and sisters.

His "Dancing Ballerina" it has the caption: "When you look from beyond, you are irritated, and when you look from above, you irritate", which is a typical human modesty: we need to remember that when we look



on people from above that we irritated. I painted a ballerina as an embodiment of a human being.

In my opinion, the work called "A Concentration Camp" is very important as it depicts the great world tragedy. On the picture one can see the inclined cross with plate marks according to which the prisoners in the camps were divided into groups of Jewish, homosexuals, politicians, etc. I broke all wires of the concentration camp in my painting to express how such crimes and cruelty should never happen again," Baghatrishvili explained.

And one more painting: "A promise given on the background of a big red sunset: We will be nice!" The painter describes that he has drawn to two paintings, one with a man standing with his back to the red sunset, and encouraging the mankind to save the planet, and the other painting about a promise of the human being to the sunset that he will be nice to nature and take good care of the world's resources.

Londoners will have the opportunity to evaluate Gocha Baghatrishvili's art in June, 2013.



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TOURISM

It's Time to Save the Planet!

By TAKO AGARASHVILI

Earth formed approximately 4.54 billion years ago, and life appeared on its surface within one billion years. Since the first life appeared, the planet has just been giving and giving to all the livings. It has been the mean of subsistence to every breathing/growing/existing creature out there. All the species got so comfortable with it, that hardly anyone ever thought about giving something back to the planet Earth.

Living in the XXI century it's scary to imagine how much we, all of us, have taken from it and how many times we have done something to support it.

Now is the time – proclaimed the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in 2007. 2.2 million Residents of Sydney participated by turning off all non-essential lights. Following Sydney's lead, many other cities around the world adopted the event in 2008. The event has since been held in many countries world-wide. They launched the 'I Will If You Will' (IWIIW) campaign to encourage positive action for the environment. They don't limit us – livings –

with actions. They encourage us to think bigger, to involve people or groups, simply to contribute to the planet that has been nourishing everything that has ever been conceived. Be creative, inspire others to do a little or big, but a giving gesture to protect the planet. The 'I Will If You Will' campaign spread over 50 countries, generating momentum behind Earth Hour's push to be an ongoing movement for change.

Preparations across the globe kicked off for Earth Hour 2013 with the creation of the world's first Earth Hour Forest in the East African nation of Uganda, to fight against the 6,000 hectares of deforestation that occurs in the country every month.

People all over the world have actually been involved in this project. Georgians have gotten used to being left out of worldwide events because life here is hard enough, not to spend it on the cause happening somewhere else. This event has reached us, we don't have to fly somewhere spending a bunch of money and time. It has been here since 2009. It has been getting bigger and bigger. More and more people, organisations have been getting involved in different ways – sponsoring, supporting, advertising, accommodating, etc.



The leading names are: the Ministry of Environmental Protection of Georgia, United Nations Office in Georgia, Caucasus Environmental NGO Network (CENN), the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in Georgia, the Sheraton Metekhi Palace Hotel (Tbilisi and Batumi),

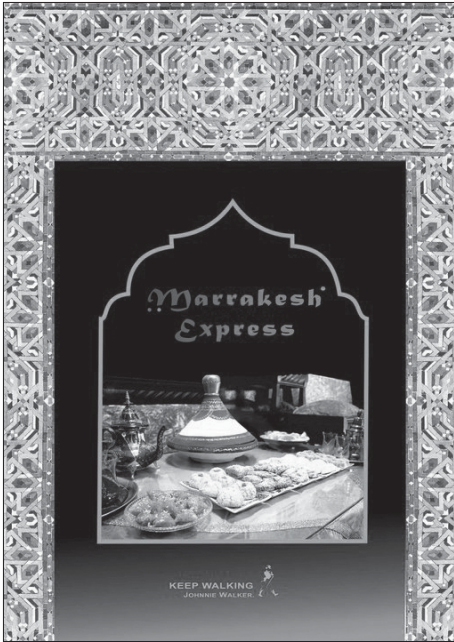
New Light, Beeline, Gulf and Georgia Today. On March 22, these organizations held a press conference each of the representatives making a speech explaining and calling for the cause. Logo "60+" is green now, like candles and ribbons the project is using.

This is the time when we can make the change. This is not doing a favor; this is making the world a better place, the world that we live in, we are a part of, all the human kind and living species should stand together to better the planet.

At the press conference at

Sheraton Metekhi Palace on March 22nd the head of the Ministry of Environmental Protection of Georgia Khatuna Gogaladze encouraged us not to do it as a one-time event, but to turn it into a life style. "Let's make a habit out of saving, supporting, and protecting the planet." March 23 was the day for the Earth Hour 2013. Gogaladze, Inita Paulovica (UNDP Georgia), Anne Nemsitsveradze-Daniels (CENN), Nino Isakadze (Sheraton), Tata Morchiladze (New Light), Nino Jibladze (Gulf) and Maia Tsereteli (Georgia Today) reached out to the media and asked the country to turn off the lights on March 23rd from 8:30 PM to 9:30 PM.

The essential buildings and public places in Tbilisi, Batumi, Rustavi, Gori, Kutaisi, Zugdidi, Bolnisi, Tkibuli and Telavi went dark for an hour including: Tbilisi TV Broadcasting Tower, Peace Bridge, Narikala Fortress, Rustaveli and Agmashenebeli Avenues in Tbilisi, Municipal Buildings, UN House, Sheraton Metekhi Palace and Sheraton Batumi Hotel, and many more. These prominent women also invited citizens to join them at the event dedicated to the Earth Hour in Round Garden for candle lighting, photo exhibition and a live concert. We all saw how Tbilisi looks dark together on March 23rd at 8:30 pm. It was a fascinating, a little spooky, yet felt just marvelous knowing that we all were there for the great cause.



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