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# Energy Geopolitics: Why Gazprom is Coming to Georgia

By DR. VAKHTANG MAISAIA

Last month we were informed that “mild cooperation” had begun between the Russian energy giant Gazprom, in the person of its President, Alexei Miller, and the Government of Georgia, in the person of Fuel and Energy Affairs Minister Kakha Kaladze. The two recently met in Brussels to discuss this in more detail, and though the negotiations were secret it subsequently emerged that Gazprom intends to supply Russian natural gas to Georgia and transit it through Georgia to third countries.



Georgia usually consumes about 2 billion cubic metres of gas annually. Gazprom supplied about 0.3 billion cubic metres of this in 2014, representing about 25%, the rest being supplied by the Azerbaijani state energy corporation, known as SOCAR. Georgia receives about 0.5 billion cubic metres of the SOCAR gas as a transit fee from the South Caucasus Pipeline, but the agreement concerning this expires next year, at which point Azerbaijan could impose new terms on Georgia. There are several reasons to believe that it will do so: the geopolitical relationship of the two countries has altered, economic crisis has erupted in both countries and SOCAR is seeking to expand its activities to the point of monopolising the Georgian market.

SOCAR Georgia Gas is mainly concerned with importing natural gas into Georgia and constructing and restoring gas pipelines. Its main revenues come from the Shah Deniz gas deposit and the ACG oil field. However it recently reduced the

volume of gas it sends to Georgia for domestic consumption for three to six months, without compensating Georgia with a consequent price reduction. As for the other SOCAR subsidiary operating here, SOCAR Georgia Petroleum, we need only note that the first SOCAR fuel station anywhere was opened here in Georgia, in 2008, rather than in Azerbaijan. As of 2014 there were at least 110 filling stations in Georgia, these forming the company’s largest retail fuel station network. SOCAR Georgia Petroleum was fined for price-fixing in July this year by the Georgian Competition Agency.

We know that a second round of negotiations between Gazprom and Georgia was held earlier this month. However this was not confirmed by the Georgian government. This might be because the two parties have entirely different interests, missions and goals. It may also reflect the fact that Gazprom, which controls the

entire production cycle (geological exploration, extraction, production-processing, transit and selling) of the gas it exports is not exactly a transparent corporation: its corrupt practices have made it the target of economic sanctions from the EU community and USA.

If Gazprom and SOCAR, ostensibly rivals, made a deal between themselves they could monopolize the energy markets at regional level, leaving no room for either to offer a better deal to a client country. This is why Georgia is seeking to make separate deals with both parties now. Concrete evidence of the need for this has been provided by the Caspian Energy International Media Group, which stated: “According to the official release by Gazprom, the parties discussed issues of mutually beneficial bilateral cooperation in the energy sector. In particular, they negotiated the resumption of natural gas supplies to Azerbaijan by Gazprom. Back in 2009, Gazprom

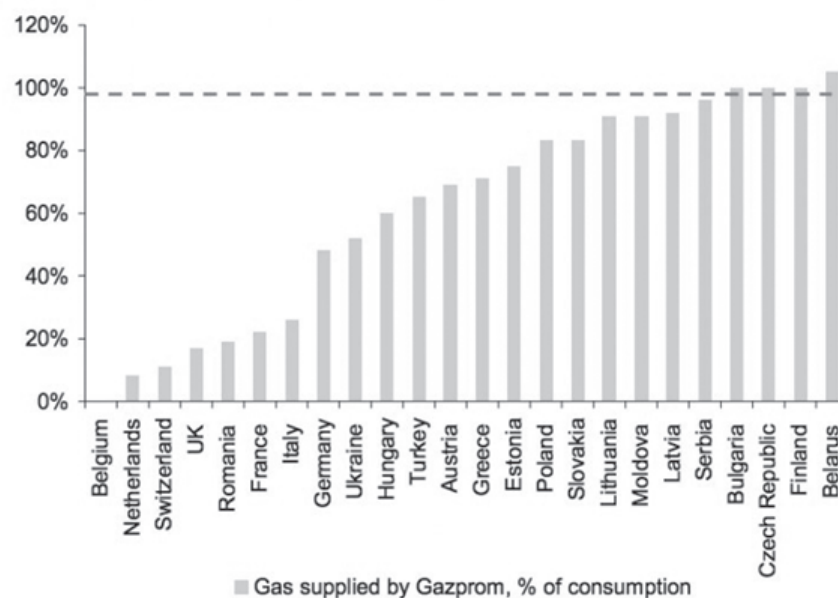
and SOCAR signed a gas purchase-sale contract, under which supplies started in 2010. An addendum to this contract was signed in 2012. In 2013, the volume of natural gas sup-

plies from Azerbaijan to Russia amounted to 1.4 billion cubic metres. In 2014, the volume of shipments fell to 0.21 billion cubic metres. No supplies were carried out in 2015”. Azerbaijan and Russia are currently undertaking a geopolitical rapprochement. This further increases the likelihood of the two state-owned energy companies doing a deal which would deprive any country of choice of supplier or price. The Georgian government understands that the country needs to diversify its energy deliveries and occupy a greater market segment itself. As Kakha Kaladze said, “We should not depend on a single supplier. Larger gas supplies from the Russian Federation at compet-

itive prices are not ruled out. Georgia would like to buy more Russian gas”. However this strategy is also very dangerous. If the two gas companies choose to make their own deal, they are not going to respect any agreement one of them makes with a mere consumer. SOCAR is aware of the details of the Georgia-Gazprom deal and is plotting its next move, which is much more likely to benefit SOCAR and Gazprom than Georgia itself.

Gazprom’s interest in Georgia relates to its desire to transit produced and purchased in Iran via Georgian territory. Gazprom has had an interest in Iran’s South Pars gas field since 1997, having invested more than \$2 billion in it, and it announced on Thursday that it was exploring ways to cooperate more closely with Iran in the energy sector. Alexei Miller has welcomed Iranian Deputy Vice President for Economic Affairs Ali Agha Mohammadi to Moscow to discuss bilateral energy issues, and according to a subsequent Gazprom statement, “Special attention was paid to global energy market trends and strategic partnership within the Gas Exporting Countries Forum.”

Import Dependency on Gazprom

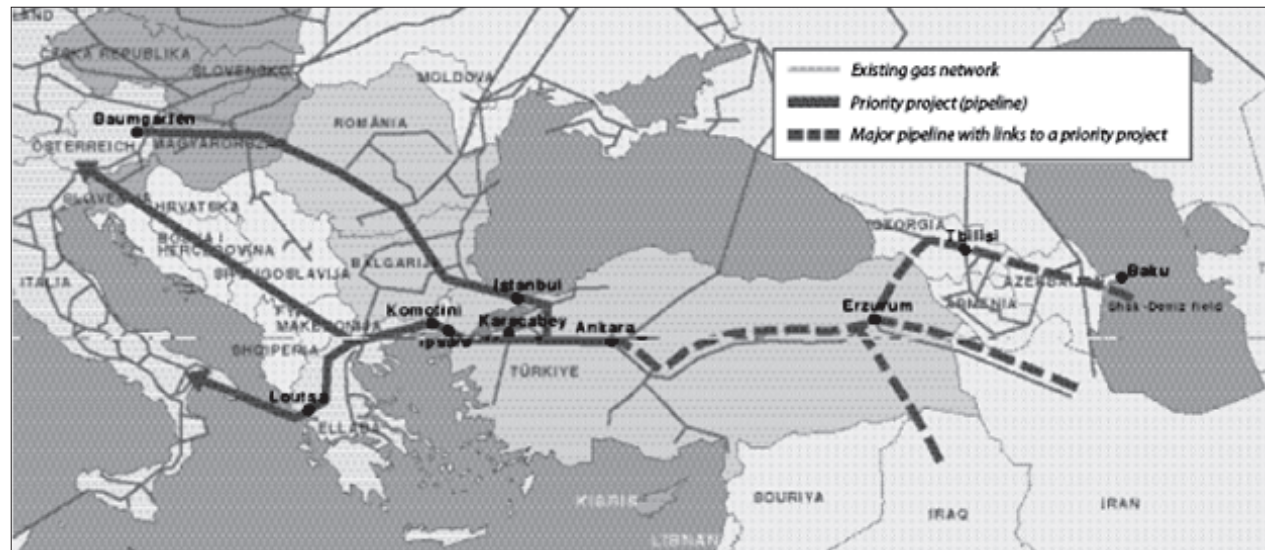


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The Founder and the President Malkhaz Gulashvili. Tel: (+995) 577 461 046  
The Georgian Times Media Holding.  
12, Kikodze str, Tbilisi, Georgia. Tel: (+995 32) 2934405,  
E-mail: office@geotimes.ge; http://www.geotimes.ge

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

Executive Editor:  
Mariam Toidze  
Tel.: (+995) 577 727 207  
E-mail:  
editor@geotimes.ge

Copy Editor  
Rumwold Leigh  
Tel: (+995) 599 501 452  
E-mail:  
rumwoldleigh@netscape.net

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

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





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## GEORGIAN PM MEETS AZERBAIJANI PRESIDENT IN BAKU



Georgian PM Irakli Garibashvili made an unannounced visit to Baku on October 10, where he met President Ilham Aliyev during his few hours of stay in the Azerbaijani capital.

Georgian PM's office said that bilateral cooperation and security issues in the region were discussed during the talks, which lasted for three hours.

"The Georgian PM noted good neighborly relations between the two countries. Importance of deepening cooperation in infrastructure, energy and transport sectors was stressed," the Georgian PM's office said, added that that the Azerbaijani President will visit Tbilisi "in near future."

Azerbaijani President's office said that "the successful development of bilateral relations was noted with satisfaction."

"Importance of implementing joint projects in energy, transport and infrastructure sectors was also discussed," it said.

PM's foreign trips are usually pre-announced by his office, but it was not the case this time. and stability."

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## ENERGY MINISTRY SAYS GEORGIA OPEN TO GAS SUPPLY TALKS WITH GAZPROM



Georgia will consider gas supplies from Gazprom on top of what the country is already receiving from the Russia's state-controlled energy giant if the proposal is commercially viable, Georgia's Energy Minister, Kakha Kaladze, said.

Georgia receives most of its gas supplies from Azerbaijan; it also receives, as a transit fee, 10% of gas shipped by Russia to Armenia through a pipeline running via Georgia.

Kaladze, who is also Deputy PM, met Gazprom chief executive, Alexei Miller in Brussels on September 25.

"Gazprom is already in Georgia. We receive natural gas from Russia for years already... and I think these relations will continue," Kaladze told journalists after attending a groundbreaking ceremony for construction of an electricity substation in Marneuli on October 10.

"Our main gas supplier is Azerbaijan, which is our strategic partner," he continued. "But any developed country thinks of diversifying its energy supplies. We are not talking about additional supplies only from Russia; we are also actively working in respect of Iran."

He said that at the meeting with Gazprom CEO in Brussels, he discussed possibility of increasing gas shipments through North-South pipeline through which Russia supplies gas to Armenia.

"It is important for us to have this pipeline maximally loaded, because it will give us more gas [as a transit fee]. In addition, if private companies [in Georgia] want, they also can buy gas from Russia," Kaladze said.

The issue was raised at a parliamentary hearing on October 10, when opposition lawmakers from the Free Democrats party were meeting deputies of various ministers, among them Deputy Energy Minister Ilia Elovshvili. FD MPs, like lawmakers from another parliamentary opposition party, UNM, have expressed concerns over possible gas purchase from Gazprom.

Deputy Energy Minister Elovshvili told opposition lawmakers that relying fully on a single country in terms of energy supplies, no matter how friendly this country might be, is not a right policy.

"We should try to have as many sources of supply as possible," he said.

"I want to remind you that during the winter period we rely on electricity supply from Russia and it has been the case for decades already," the Deputy Energy Minister said.

"But I want to stress that we should not in any way damage our relations with Azerbaijan, because we have long-term contracts with Azerbaijan and this helped us in the most difficult times," he continued.

"Up until now Russia has not expressed interest in engaging in serious commercial negotiations [over gas supplies]. We will definitely speak to them, we will see what they have to offer – it will be open and transparent process," Elovshvili said.

"There will be no problem whatsoever in [Gazprom] gas supply if it is commercially acceptable and provided that we don't become dependent on such supplies."

After being pressed again on the issue by FD MP Zurab Abashidze, who criticized possibility of gas supply from Gazprom, which he described as the Kremlin's foreign policy tool, Elovshvili responded by referring again to the fact that Georgia has been purchasing electricity from Russia's state-controlled Inter RAO for decades already during the winter period.

"Inter RAO is 'Gazprom' in electricity," the Deputy Energy Minister said. "Last year we bought 800 million kWh electricity from Inter RAO – 7 percent of our total consumption. Electricity provided by them was the cheapest, so I would ask a rhetoric question: shall we refuse to buy electricity under acceptable terms just because it comes from Russia and shall we go and buy it from Turkey, which will cost us much more?"

"I absolutely agree with you that it is inadmissible to fully switch on [Gazprom] gas or to buy significant amount of gas on terms, which will not be profitable. But if we receive this gas in an amount that would not pose threat to us, it will be an additional source of supply," Elovshvili said.

"If their terms are better or the same as we now have with other suppliers, it will be acceptable," he said.

"The process will be open and transparent, based on our pragmatic interests," the Deputy Energy Minister said.

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## DEPUTY FM SAYS GEORGIA TOLD BY U.S. NOT TO RUSH INTO FULL-SCALE COOPERATION WITH IRAN

Georgian Deputy Foreign Minister, Davit Dondua, said the U.S. has asked Tbilisi to "refrain from full-scale cooperation" with Iran until Tehran fully complies with the Vienna nuclear deal reached in July.

"We have permanent contacts with our American colleagues, who are asking us to refrain from full-scale cooperation with Iran and from becoming open [for Iran] for now – until all the commitments agreed in Vienna are fulfilled and until Iran is given final green light," Dondua said on October 9.

"We are telling our American and other friends that we remain committed to the policy and sanctions pursued by [the West] in respect of Iran, but you should also take into consideration specifics of Georgia's situation. Iran is a regional state, our important partner, including from the economic point of view, and we want some sort of space for maneuvering," Dondua said.

Speaking at a meeting with lawmakers from the opposition Free Democrats party in the Parliament, the Deputy Foreign Minister also said that there was one case when Georgia had to decline a request from an Iranian air carrier to launch operations in Georgia after the U.S. advised Tbilisi against it.

Dondua, however, also said that there was a separate case when Tbilisi, "based on our pragmatic interests", allowed another Iranian airline to launch operations in Georgia although the U.S. was not encouraging such decision.

"We've done it without damaging our relations either with the U.S. or European partners," the Deputy Foreign Minister said.

He did not specify, but the only Iranian air carrier, which currently operates flights between the two countries, is ATA Airlines.

"Hopefully Iran's isolation will soon be over," he said, adding that although it will have positive effect, it may have "certain not so positive" side as well and Georgia "should be ready for this."

Reuters reported on October 9 that the U.S. has "privately reminded foreign governments and U.S. bankers that sanctions against Iran remain in effect, cautioning against a rush by Western companies to invest in Iran's oil industry and other businesses until the country fully complies with the July nuclear agreement" reached between Tehran and the P5+1 – the U.S., China, Russia, France, United Kingdom and Germany.

In a statement in July the Georgian Foreign Ministry welcomed Iran nuclear deal as "an important step towards international peace"

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## NDI POLL ON MAYORS' PERFORMANCE, OTHER LOCAL ISSUES

Tbilisi mayor, Davit Narmania, is among those three mayors, who have net-negative performance ratings, according to NDI-commissioned poll, which surveyed respondents in nine out of twelve self-governing cities, where mayors were elected in last year's local elections.

The poll, which was fielded by the Caucasus Resource Research Centers (CRRCC) for the U.S. National Democratic Institute

(NDI) in a period between August 8 and September 10, focuses largely on local government and broad range of other local issues; it has a margin of error plus, minus 3%.

Of the three mayors who scored negatively, Narmania has the largest net-negative rating of 24 percentage points. While only 12% of respondents approve his performance, 36% rate his performance as poor; 44% are "neutral" and 7% say they "do not know."

Narmania won slightly over 46% of votes in the Tbilisi mayoral race in June, 2014 elections, which including total of 14 candidates. Falling short of outright victory in the first round, Narmania defeated the UNM opposition party's candidate in the runoff with 72.47% of votes.

The mayor of Gori, the main city of Shida Kartli region, Zurab Jirkvelishvili, has the second largest net-negative rating of 12 percentage points with 7% of respondents approving his performance, 19% disapproving and 31% are neutral.



Performance by Giorgi Ermakov, mayor of Batumi, resort and port city on Black Sea coast in Adjara region, is rated by 15% of respondents positively and 19% are of opposite view; 39% are neutral.

The mayor of Georgia's second largest city, Kutaisi, Shota Murgulia, has 18% positive performance rating with the same number of respondents viewing his performance negatively; 46% are "neutral".

The mayors of Akhaltsikhe, Telavi, Ozurgeti, Mtskheta, and Zugdidi have net-positive ratings, but like the four other cities surveyed, the number of those respondents in these five cities who were neutral exceeds those who have either a positive or negative view about performance of their mayors.

The mayor of Akhaltsikhe, Giorgi Kopadze, has the highest net-positive performance rating of 21 percentage points, followed by Mayor of Telavi Platon Kalmakhelidze (14 percentage points); Mayor of Zugdidi Irakli Gogokhia (13); Ozurgeti Mayor Beglar Sioridze (8), and Mayor of Mtskheta Avtandil Nemsitsveridze (3).

Only 13% of respondents agree with a statement that the local government is making changes that matter to them and 46% - disagree; 34% are neutral.

47% of respondents said that living conditions in their cities or villages stayed the same since June 2014, when the local elections were held; 43% responded that conditions got worse and only 9% said that conditions improved.

The survey also shows that interaction between citizens and elected local government officials – mayors; heads of municipalities (Gmgebeli), and members of local councils (Sakrebulo), is infrequent.

Only 6% of respondents reported having ever been contacted by local council members and 3% by mayors' offices. According to the survey knowledge of the work of the local self-governing bodies was also low.

But the poll also shows that despite limited interaction, those who did engage with local government officials reported them as competent (69%) and respectful (88%).

According to the survey, respondents rate highly the performance of emergency medical services and public service halls, one-stop shops where citizen can get multiple services from various state agencies under the single roof.

Majority of respondents also believe that their village or town is safe (83%) and a good place to raise children (72%).

Respondents in Tbilisi were asked about planned Panorama Tbilisi, a controversial large-scale project for construction of multi-functional complex on the hillside in the old part of the capital city, which is backed by billionaire ex-PM Bidzina Ivanishvili. The plan is strongly opposed by preservationist groups, who argue that this overscaled project will destroy Tbilisi's historic setting.

41% of those respondents in Tbilisi, who had heard about Panorama Tbilisi project, disapproved it, 32% approved, and 26% had no opinion.

Respondents nationwide were also asked about the location of Parliament.

Currently, parliament has two buildings – one is a newly built chamber in Kutaisi and another one is in Tbilisi, where committee hearings are held. Although the GD ruling coalition wants to completely relocate parliament back to Tbilisi, it requires a constitutional change which cannot be introduced without the support of UNM opposition lawmakers, who are in favor of keeping the building in Kutaisi.

71% of respondents nationwide said that the Parliament should be located in Tbilisi; 20% were in favor of keeping it in Kutaisi.






Among the cities where the poll was fielded, only in Kutaisi were the majority of respondents (54%) in favor of keeping the parliament building in Kutaisi.

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## Customers' idea about ideal lottery

-  There must be a wide variety of prizes;
-  It would be good to win several times;
-  Receive the prize the moment you win;
-  The rules must be easy;
-  In case of cash prizes, decide myself what to buy.

Having taken into consideration your wishes  
“Averssi” **grand lottery** has begun!

### The prizes are



The lottery will be held on the 20th of November 2015 in the broadcast of “Rustavi-2”,  
after “Kurier” 18:00.



**PRESIDENT APPOINTS OPPOSITION PARTY LEADER AS HIS POLITICAL ADVISER**



President Giorgi Margvelashvili appointed Pikria Chikhradze of the opposition New Rights Party as his political adviser.

Chikhradze, a long-time politician and former lawmaker, said she stepped down as chairperson of the non-parliamentary opposition New Rights Party and as president's adviser she is also "suspending political party activities".

President Margvelashvili said he has shared values with Chikhradze, whom he praised as "a very qualified person with serious political experience."

"The reason why I agreed to become a political adviser at the president's office is because I think – and not only I – that Giorgi Margvelashvili is one of the persons, if not the only, who are taking meaningful and impressive steps towards development of democratic institutions," Chikhradze said.

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**PENDING VERDICT, CONSTITUTIONAL COURT SUSPENDS LAW ON BANKING SUPERVISORY AGENCY**



Nine-member Constitutional Court decided with 5 votes to 4 to suspend application of the disputed law on banking supervisory agency, Batumi, October 12, 2015. Photo: Constitutional Court

As an interim measure, pending final verdict, the Constitutional Court suspended application of a disputed legislation, dealing with operation of newly established banking supervisory agency.

The nine-member Constitutional Court adopted the decision on October 12 by a narrow margin of 5 votes to 4.

39 lawmakers from the opposition UNM and Free Democrats parties lodged on September 22 a joint complaint with the Constitutional Court, arguing that the newly adopted law, establishing the Financial Supervisory Agency, is unconstitutional. As an interim measure, the applicants were also requesting to suspend enforcement of the disputed law, pending court's final verdict.

The Financial Supervisory Agency has been established after banking oversight functions were removed from the National Bank of Georgia (NBG); the head of the agency and its board members were approved by the Parliament in September.

Bill, removing banking supervisory functions from NBG and transferring them to a separate agency, was adopted by the Parliament in July, but it drew criticism from international financial institutions, business associations, opposition parties, a group of civil society organizations and from the central bank itself.

President Giorgi Margvelashvili vetoed the bill in late July, but the Parliament overturned it on September 3.

In their joint complaint, the opposition lawmakers argue that the removal of banking supervisory functions from the central bank deprives the latter of its constitutionally defined goal of supporting "stable functioning of the financial sector."

The applicants also claim that the disputed law violates constitution in terms of presidential powers as the president has no role in selecting and appointing board members of the new agency, which is in charge of banking system oversight.

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**PRESIDENT WANTS GOVT SESSION OVER 'ENERGY SECURITY'**

President Giorgi Margvelashvili has formally asked the government to hold a session with his participation to discuss "situation in Georgia's energy security and energy transit sector."

In a letter to the government, chief of president's administration asks the cabinet to consider including this topic in the agenda of next government session, which, it says, will also be attended by President Margvelashvili and secretary of the National Security Council Irine Imerlishvili.

The President's request comes after Energy Minister, Kakha Kaladze, said that Georgia may seek additional gas supplies from Russia's state-controlled energy giant Gazprom, causing concerns of opposition parties.

Georgia receives most of its gas supplies from Azerbaijan; it also receives, as a transit fee, 10% of gas supplied by Russia to Armenia through a pipeline running via Georgia.

Georgian Energy Ministry said late last week that Tbilisi was open for talks with Gazprom on possible gas supplies for private entities in Georgia in order to, as Energy Minister Kaladze and his deputy put it, "diversify" energy supplies for the country. Kaladze, who met Gazprom chief executive in Brussels in late September, reiterated in separate remarks for number of times since then that private entities might be interested in purchasing Russian gas if the price is acceptable.

After the Georgian Energy Minister spoke about possible gas supplies from Gazprom last week, PM Garibashvili made a brief and unannounced visit to Baku on October 10, where he met Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, triggering speculation in Tbilisi that the surprise visit aimed at mending ties after potential fallout caused by Tbilisi's suggestions over Gazprom gas supplies.

PM Garibashvili has strongly denied speculation and said on October 12 that Tbilisi's relations with Baku will remain "friendly and strategic" and dismissed talk of "diversification, replacement of Azerbaijani gas" supplies as "utterly absurd".

The PM reiterated remarks when he again spoke about the issue at a government session on October 13.

He also said that talks with Gazprom are of "technical" nature aimed at negotiating possible increase of transit of natural gas to Armenia via Georgia, which, he said, is in Tbilisi's interest as it would result into more gas for Georgia as a transit fee.

Unlike the Energy Minister, PM Garibashvili did not mention need to diversify gas supplies or possibility of purchase of Russian gas by private entities in Georgia.

According to the Georgian Energy Ministry, the country consumed total of 2.1 billion cubic meters of natural gas in 2014 of which only 200 million cubic meters were from Gazprom, supplied to Georgia as a transit fee, and the rest came from Azerbaijan. Gazprom puts the figure of its supplied gas to Georgia in 2014 at 300 million cubic meters.

This is the second time President Margvelashvili has requested the government to hold a session with his participation. The previous time, when he called for the cabinet session to discuss foreign policy related issues in November 2014, the request was snubbed by the government.

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**ICC PROSECUTOR REQUESTS TO OPEN PROBE INTO AUGUST WAR**

The prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) requested to authorize investigation into war crimes and crimes against humanity allegedly committed during the August, 2008 war in Georgia.

Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda filed the 160-page request, detailing alleged crimes attributed to the Georgian, Russian and South Ossetian sides, before a three-judge panel on October 13.

The judges of pre-trial chamber of The Hague-based Court have to decide whether or not to authorize the Prosecutor to open the investigation.

If authorized, it would be the first investigation by the ICC outside Africa.

"If ICC judges grant authorisation to proceed, I will open an investigation... [which] will be conducted with full independence and impartiality," ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda said.

"Over time, based on the evidence collected by my investigators I will then request ICC judges to issue either summons to appear or arrest warrants against those my office believes to be most responsible for alleged atrocity crimes committed in Georgia, no matter who they are," she added.

The Prosecutor wants her investigation to cover a period from July 1, 2008 – over one month prior to the war's start – to October 10, 2008, when Russia withdrew troops from the areas it was occupying in Georgia beyond breakaway South Ossetia.

Unlike Georgia, Russia is not a state party of the Rome Statute, which established the ICC in 2002.

In her request to open the investigation, Prosecutor Bensouda identifies following crimes, which the prosecution "reasonably believes" fall under the jurisdiction of the ICC:

"Killings, forcible displacements and persecution of ethnic Georgian civilians, and destruction and pillaging of their property, by South Ossetian forces (with possible participation by Russian forces)";

"Intentionally directing attacks against Georgian peacekeepers by South Ossetian forces; and against Russian peacekeepers by Georgian forces."

ICC Prosecutor's request to the judges is accompanied by a confidential annex, which includes a list of "persons or groups that appear to be the most responsible for the most serious crimes, with an indication of their specific role."

On the first set of alleged crimes, the Prosecutor says that

there is "a reasonable basis to believe" that the South Ossetian forces forcibly displaced between 13,400 and 18,500 ethnic Georgians; deliberately killed between 51 and 113 ethnic Georgian civilians, and destroyed or heavily damaged over 5,000 dwellings of ethnic Georgians.

"The attack was systematic in nature since it was launched pursuant to the policy of South Ossetian leadership to forcibly displace ethnic Georgians from the territory of South Ossetia," reads ICC Prosecutor's request to open the investigation.

In this context, if the investigation is authorized, the prosecution will also be looking into possible role of the Russian forces.

The Prosecutor says that available information "indicates that South Ossetian forces would not have been able to carry out a campaign to forcibly expel the remaining ethnic Georgians civilian population... but for the occupation of Georgian territory by Russian armed forces."



The Prosecutor, however, also says that it will depend on the evidence collected in the course of possible investigation whether individual criminal responsibility is attached to members of the Russian armed forces for acts allegedly committed by South Ossetian forces.

On the second set of alleged crimes, the Prosecutor seeks to look into Georgia's claims that two of its peacekeepers were killed in an attack on a checkpoint at the village of Avnevi on August 7, 2008, and Russia's allegations that Georgian forces attacked peacekeepers' headquarters in Tskhinvali just after the midnight on August 8, killing ten Russian members of the peacekeeping troops. The Georgian authorities told the Prosecutor that the Russian peacekeepers had lost their protected status because they took direct part in hostilities by providing South Ossetian militias with the coordinates of Georgian troops and also by making infrastructure of the Russian peacekeepers' headquarters available for South Ossetian military positions.

ICC prosecutor's request for authorization of investigation comes after more than seven years of "preliminary examination" of the case.

"Preliminary examination", which was launched on August 14, 2008, is the phase during which ICC Prosecutor's Office assesses if its own investigation should be opened; at this phase it also assesses whether crimes falling under the ICC jurisdiction may have been committed in a given situation and whether genuine investigations and prosecutions are being carried out by the authorities of respective states.

The ICC Prosecutor said that despite challenges and delays, until recently the investigation by the Georgian authorities was advancing, but it stalled in March.

"The Government of Georgia officially conveyed in writing that national proceedings in relation to the alleged crimes occurring in the context of the August 2008 armed conflict had been indefinitely suspended," reads the ICC Prosecutor's request, filed before judges.

During the preliminary examination by the ICC prosecutor, the Georgian authorities have been citing lack of access to alleged crime scenes in the breakaway region as one of the reasons behind the delays in the investigation.

In a letter sent to the ICC Prosecutor on March 17, 2015, the Georgian government said, that further progress in its investigation was prevented by "a fragile security situation in the occupied territories and in the areas adjacent thereto, where violence against civilians is still widespread". It also argued that launch of prosecutions of crimes related to the 2008 war could trigger "aggressive and unlawful reactions by the occupying forces" and would "prompt certain backlash from the groups engaged in the violence across the conflict lines". It also cited concerns over safety of witnesses of alleged crimes, since they reside close to South Ossetia and are at high risk of being subjected to threats and arbitrary detention by the South Ossetian de facto authorities.

Georgian Justice Minister, Tea Tsulukiani, said on October 8, after the ICC first announced about its prosecutor planning to request for the probe, that Tbilisi is interested in "full investigation" of "ethnic cleansing" of ethnic Georgians.

She said the Georgian Chief Prosecutor's Office was actively cooperating with ICC prosecutor.

"But the only thing that we could not do is that we have no access to the occupied territories and the involvement of Prosecutor Bensouda in the process, I hope, will help to address this issue," said the Georgian Justice Minister, who visited The Hague in late September, where she met the ICC President, Judge Silvia Alejandra Fernández de Gurmendi.

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**GEORGIAN PARLIAMENT SPEAKER VISITS CHINA**



Georgian Parliament Speaker Davit Usupashvili, who is visiting Beijing, met head of China's parliament Zhang Dejiang on October 14.

Usupashvili is in Beijing to participate in the two-day Asian Political Parties' Special Conference on the Silk Road, which is hosted by the Communist Party of China.

"Cooperation between our two countries has intensified in recent years," Usupashvili said. "We are ready to engage in specific projects, which will be beneficial for the both countries... Georgia is a small country, but has a significant location, which can serve as a link between Asia and Europe."

According to the Georgian Parliament's press office, during the meeting Usupashvili thanked his Chinese counterpart for supporting Georgia's territorial integrity, spoke about relations with Russia, ongoing "occupation" of the Georgian territories by Russia, and also noted that despite of challenges Georgia continues on its path towards the European integration.

Meanwhile Tbilisi will be hosting the first Silk Road Forum on October 15-16, which the Georgian government is co-organizing with the Chinese government. 800 participants from about 31 countries, among them 300 representatives from China, will be attending the two-day forum in Tbilisi, according to the Georgian government. The Chinese delegation is led by governor of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region Xuekerat Zakir.

Georgia's PM Irakli Garibashvili, who visited China in September, said in his speech before the UN General Assembly earlier this month that that Georgia is "developing strong economic and trade relationship with China."

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**EIB LENDS EUR 100 MLN TO GEORGIA FOR WASTEWATER INFRASTRUCTURE IN KUTAISI**



The European Investment Bank (EIB) is lending Georgia EUR 100 million to finance wastewater collection and treatment infrastructure in country's second largest city of Kutaisi.

The loan will be used to fund rehabilitation and extension of the municipal sewerage system and the construction of a mechanical biological wastewater treatment plant in Kutaisi.

According to EIB the total project cost, which addresses water supply and wastewater investments in several municipalities in western Georgia, is EUR 280 million, co-financed with EUR 172 million by the Asian Development Bank (ADB); the project also includes grants from the Neighbourhood Investment Facility (EUR 4.75 million) and the Eastern Partnership Technical Assistance Trust Fund (EUR 3.25 million).

ADB approved USD 108 million loan for Georgia to finance improvement of water supply system in Zugdidi and sewerage system in Poti, towns in Samegrelo region in western Georgia, in December.

"Water and sanitary infrastructure is high on the EIB's agenda in Georgia, in line with the government's priorities. We have already financed a number of projects in this sector across the country, and this is another loan with a major environmental and health dimension," said EIB Vice-President László Baranyay, who is in the Georgian capital to participate in the first Tbilisi Silk Road Forum on October 11-16.

On October 14 EIB announced about lending EUR 15 million to ProCredit Bank Georgia to finance projects by small and medium enterprises.

EIB, which opened its South Caucasus regional office in Tbilisi less than six months ago, has signed loans for EUR 548 million in Georgia since it started its operations in the country in 2010.

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**UNM MPS' DRAFT STATEMENT ON RUSTAVI 2 TV VOTED DOWN IN PARLIAMENT**

Parliament voted down on Friday a draft statement tabled by opposition UNM party, expressing "concern over government pressure" on Tbilisi-based private broadcaster, Rustavi 2 TV, which is in a court battle over ownership dispute.

"Obviously coordinated actions by the executive and judicial branches of the government against Rustavi 2 TV pose threat to the existence of [the broadcaster], hugely damage media pluralism and freedom of expression and, consequently, country's Euro-Atlantic integration," reads the statement, which was rejected by the Georgian Dream parliamentary majority group.

Parliamentary debates over the proposed text, which started on October 15 and continued for a second day on October 16, were aired live by the Rustavi 2 TV.

U.S. 'Expresses Concerns to Georgian Govt' Over Rustavi 2 TV Case

President: Recent Developments in Georgian Media 'Triggers Serious Questions'

Media Advocacy Coalition's Statement on Rustavi 2 TV Ownership Dispute

Rustavi 2 TV Accuses Govt of Blocking Its Funding Deal

One of Ex-Owners in Court Bid to Reclaim Rustavi 2 TV

Court Orders Rustavi 2 TV Asset Freeze

Civil Society Groups on Court's Order to Freeze Rustavi 2 TV Assets

During the debates UNM lawmakers claimed that a lawsuit by Rustavi 2 TV's one of the former co-owners, Kibar Khalvashi, who wants to reclaim his shares in the broadcaster, is in fact an attempt by ex-PM Bidzina Ivanishvili and the current government to take over the opposition-minded television station. They were describing Khalvashi as Ivanishvili's "puppet" and "stooge".

UNM lawmakers say that "taking over" of Rustavi 2 TV by the government would "de-legitimize" parliamentary elections, scheduled for October, 2016.

"By refusing to adopt this statement the parliamentary majority assumes responsibility for developments that will take place if political process losses legitimacy in the lead up to next year's parliamentary elections," a senior UNM lawmaker, Giorgi Gabashvili said. "[Adoption] of this statement would have signaled that at least the parliament is not part of government-orchestrated attack on Rustavi 2 TV."

UNM MP Giorgi Gviniashvili said during the debates: "I am confident that there are people within you [the GD parliamentary majority group], who understand the threat [Rustavi 2 TV is facing], but fail to confront Bidzina Ivanishvili, who wants to silence Rustavi 2 TV."

The opposition lawmakers were also claiming that judge Tamaz Urtmelidze, who is adjudicating the court dispute, is under the government's control.

On October 12 prosecutor's office filed criminal charges against mother of judge Urtmelidze in connection to a domestic incident that occurred a year and nine months ago.

Rustavi 2 TV and UNM claim that timing of initiating criminal charges, which comes after ownership dispute case was assigned to Urtmelidze, suggests that the authorities want to exert pressure on the judge using possible prosecution of his mother.

Prosecutor's office denied allegation and said that initiating criminal charges in sensitive cases of domestic incidents more than a year later is a standard procedure as parties involved are given time for out-of-court settlement.

Echoing government's position, during the debates, lawmakers from the GD ruling coalition were denying any involvement in the Rustavi 2 TV case, saying that the dispute is between the private entities; they were saying that Khalvashi, who owned the broadcaster in 2004-2006, had the right to file a lawsuit if he believes his property rights were infringed and it would be pressure on the judiciary if the Parliament adopts a statement about ongoing court dispute.

GD MP Pati Khalvashi, who is a sister of Kibar Khalvashi, said that his brother had to flee to Germany, where he was granted asylum, because he was "prosecuted for political reasons" and his businesses raided when UNM was in power. She said that UNM lawmakers were trying to mislead the public while claiming that her brother took legal actions to reclaim the broadcaster only recently, adding that Khalvashi first filed complaint with the prosecutor's office about eight years ago, but his claims about being forced to give up Rustavi 2 TV shares have never been investigated.

During the debates the GD lawmakers were also criticizing Rustavi 2 TV as UNM's "mouthpiece", but were also saying that they would also come in defense of the broadcaster if it faces threat.

"The party of executioners, which raided Imedi TV [in November, 2007] is now speaking about media freedom," GD MP Nukri Kantaria said of UNM.

"This farce that we are seeing here is like wolves speaking about the rights of sheep," he said, adding that this fuss over Rustavi 2 TV aims at preparing ground for street protests as UNM has no chance of returning back into power through elections.

"The only option left for your bosses in Ukraine [referring to ex-President Mikheil Saakashvili who is now governor of Odessa region in Ukraine] is a sniper, a terrorist act to liquidate Bidzina Ivanishvili... to trigger a chaos in the country and use that chaos

for taking power as you have no chance whatsoever [to come into power] through constitutional means," he said.

"We [GD] gave back free choice to the people, which had been taken by you [referring to UNM], and no one will be able to take this free choice away from the people anymore; those who will go beyond constitutional order, no matter who they are, will suffer broken legs and hands, and their teeth will also be broken with the use of law, with the use of even the most lenient laws... You won't be able to trigger turmoil," MP Kantaria added.

In his speech, another GD MP Zakaria Kutsnashvili distanced himself from MP Kantaria's remarks, saying that "no one has the right to threaten others in the name of law."

UNM's Gabashvili responded that GD and its government are "completely bankrupt and resort to open threats."

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**GEORGIAN MOD SAYS TBILISI COMMITTED TO NATO-LED MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN**

In a phone conversation with U.S. Deputy Defense Secretary Robert Work on Thursday, Georgian Defense Minister Tina Khidasheli reiterated Georgia's commitment to continue troop contribution to NATO-led mission in Afghanistan.

The Georgian Ministry of Defense said that the phone conversation took place after U.S. President Barack Obama announced on Thursday about slowing the pace of U.S. troop withdrawal from Afghanistan. The U.S. will maintain its current force of 9,800 through most of 2016.

The Georgian MoD said that Khidasheli "reiterated once again the Georgian side's readiness to continue participation along with the U.S. forces in the NATO-led international mission in Afghanistan."

A phone conversation was also held between chief of joint staff of the Georgian armed forces, Major General Vakhtang Kapanadze, and U.S. Air Force General Philip Breedlove, who is NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe and commander of U.S. forces in Europe.

"They discussed plan of implementation of future mission in Afghanistan and issues of further cooperation," the Georgian MoD said.

With up to 885 soldiers Georgia is the second largest troop contributor to NATO's Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan.

Georgian troops, whose duties focus on security and rapid reaction force, are deployed at the Bagram Air Field in the Parwan province under the U.S. command; at the German army's Camp Marmal in Mazar-i-Sharif, and in Kabul.

Georgia has lost 31 soldiers in Afghanistan with the most recent death in September, 2015, when Private First Class Vasil Kuljanishvili was killed in an attack while on patrol in the Parwan province.

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**TABULA TV HEAD, TWO OTHERS DETAINED FOR STICKING POSTERS IN TBILISI CENTER**

A screengrab from Rustavi 2 TV footage showing Tabula TV head Tamar Chergoleishvili sticking a poster depicting ex-PM Bidzina Ivanishvili in what appears to be a Gazprom uniform.

Police detained on Friday head of Tbilisi-based Tabula TV, Tamar Chergoleishvili, as well as a producer of the same television station and one more activist when they were sticking posters on a fence and street light pole in downtown Tbilisi as part of a campaign against talks with Gazprom.

They were released couple of hours later and have to appear before the court as they have been charged under the code of administrative offenses.

A protest rally is planned outside government headquarters in Tbilisi on Saturday against announcement of the Georgian Energy Minister last week that Tbilisi would consider gas supplies from Gazprom on top of what the country is already receiving from the Russia's state-controlled energy giant if the proposal is commercially viable.

Chergoleishvili and two others were detained close to the Tbilisi Opera and Ballet Theatre.

The three persons face charges under the article 150 of the code of administrative offenses, according to a spokesperson for the Interior Ministry.

The charges under this article involve, among others, making graffiti or sticking poster to a fence in public space which is not allocated specifically for this purpose. The offense carries fine of GEL 50 (about USD 21).

As Chergoleishvili was sticking posters, a police officer was telling her to stop as it was a violation. Chergoleishvili was responding that she was sticking posters where other posters had already been stuck.

After she was released, Chergoleishvili said that the authorities turn a blind eye when tomatoes are tossed at houses of Constitutional Court judges, but "you go immediately behind bars as soon as you upset Bidzina Ivanishvili."

"Those are being punished who are confronting Bidzina Ivanishvili," said Giga Bokeria, one of the leaders of the opposition UNM party, who is married to Chergoleishvili.

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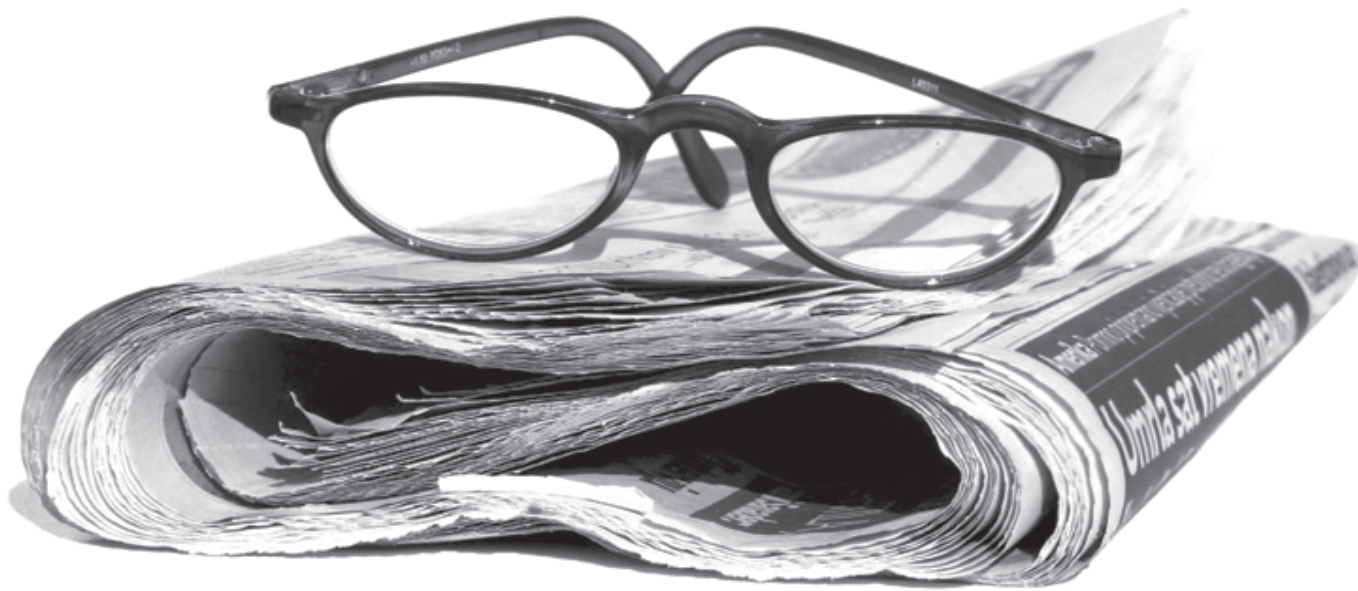


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