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WEEKLY BILINGUAL
NEWSPAPER IN GEORGIA

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GEORGIAN GLASS PRODUCTS WILL BE SOLD ON THE ITALIAN MARKET

Thirteen different types of glass products produced in Georgia will be exported to Italy. For this purpose, a group of experts from the Italian group “Societa di Santa Aerallba” visited Ksani glass factory.

“Within the framework of the Association Agreement with Europe we have deep and comprehensive free trade with EU countries. This is an example of the result we expected.

More entrepreneurs will have the op-

portunity to export their products to the EU market if they meet appropriate quality standards”, said Deputy Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development Ketevan Botchorishvili.

At the initial stage, 25 million bottles will be exported to the Italian market. This number is expected to increase. Georgian glass products are exported to Turkey and Azerbaijan as well. Currently, 280 people work for the company.



GEORGIA MAY IMPLEMENT ESTONIAN MODEL OF TAX SYSTEM

The government has started active work on tax liberalization. At a meeting on Friday, the Prime Minister said the government is holding a discussion on establishing a tax system inspired by the Estonian model.

“The point is that profits, which will be created in the economy, shall be taxable only in the case of distribution and

issuing dividend. And, if the profit will be re-invested, companies do not pay income taxes. This will help to mobilize the potential investment resources”, said the Prime Minister. Related consultations are scheduled for several parliamentary groups. The bill will be submitted to the government in the near future, after which it will be sent to parliament for voting.



GEL 5 MILLION FOR PROJECT “PLANT THE FUTURE”

365 hectares of new orchards will be planted in Shida Kartli as part of the Agricultural Projects Management Agency program “Plant the Future.” Fifty-one beneficiaries have already received funding from the project. Eight hundred thirty-five hectares were cultivated to plant new orchards and create an irrigation system for the whole country. The total financing capacity of the program is more than GEL

4 million. The Agricultural Projects Management Agency together with the Ministry of Agriculture started Plant the Future in 2015. In 2016, GEL 5 million will be spent on its various initiatives. Within the program, a 1,000-1,200-hectare modern garden and 30-40 modern nurseries will be arranged, which will contribute to the local market, decrease import dependency, and potentially boost export growth.



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COUNCIL OF EUROPE REPORT HIGHLIGHTS PROBLEMS OF GEORGIAN MINORITIES

GIORGI CHAPIDZE (BULGARIA)

Confrontations between different ethnic groups based on religious confessions and the usage of hate speech and hostile rhetoric toward national minorities have intensified in Georgia, according to a new report from the Council of Europe published on January 13, 2016. The report, which focuses on the national minorities of Georgia, was authored by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Nils Muižnieks and the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. It states that the country has taken some positive legislative and policy steps toward guaranteeing minority rights. Several aspects of the implementation process of Georgia's Antidiscrimination Law are also endorsed by the Advisory Committee. However, the European Council underlines problematic issues which the Government of Georgia must address.

In line with the findings of the report, guaranteeing the rights and standards contained in the Antidiscrimination Law is not ensured. One of the main obstacles facing law enforcement is the Georgian Orthodox Church. It is noted that the Georgian Orthodox Church is not always tolerant toward minorities. Minority representatives feel offended by the notion of a "proper Orthodox Georgian." The establish-

ment of the "State Agency for Religious Affairs" likewise was not welcomed by some sections of Georgian civil society.

There is a lingering perception among some officials and sections of society that minorities (especially ethnic minorities) constitute a potential security threat. Thus hate speech prompts the establishment of an intolerant social environment. Moreover, the Advisory Committee reported on discriminatory attitudes amongst the police and of the disproportionate use of force several instances during peaceful demonstrations. These cases have not been independently or completely investigated. Despite the fact that state institutions continue to provide support for the cultural activities of national minorities, such as printing several newspapers in minority languages, this effort is not sufficient to ensure equality among groups. Furthermore, the quality of some TV-programs broadcasted in minority languages is low and thus these programs don't attract much attention. In addition, the 12-15 minute news programs, which provide summaries of regular one-hour national news programs, can't be an attractive source of information. As a result, state minorities living in the regions near state borders tend to watch neighboring countries' media products. This may lead to the polariza-

tion of public opinion about the country's geopolitical choices, something which poses a threat to social cohesion.

The Advisory Committee reported that roughly 300 schools provide the possibility of receiving an education in Azerbaijani, Armenian, or Russian language, however, the quality of education in these schools remains below average. This is due to that fact that teachers are insufficiently trained in dealing with multilingual education environments. Outdated textbooks, in which the history and identity of national minorities is not represented or is related in a stereotypical way, is one reason behind low educational standards. The Council of Europe recommends the Government of Georgia raise awareness about the Antidiscrimination Law especially among minority communities and ensure that they have sufficient information about guaranteeing their rights.

Another problem is a usage of "Islamophobic" statements in television and print media and referring to Georgian Muslims as "Turks." There are also reports about hostile acts on ethnic grounds against Azerbaijanis and Kists.

According to the Advisory Committee's survey ethnic minority Georgian citizens living in border regions stressed the lack of civil integration, whereas some government officials con-

tinued to express the view that national minorities, particularly those living in the border regions, tend to think about making their careers in the neighboring country. This viewpoint is not shared by the committee representatives. The Council of Europe calls on the Georgian government to take legislative and policy measures in order to guarantee the social integration of these people.

Beside these implications, the Advisory Committee further notes that ethnic minorities are disproportionately represented in local public administrations and expresses the need of ensuring their equal participation in decision-making processes on a local level.

What political and legislative steps are taken by the Government of Georgia to address the problems noted in the Advisory

Committee report? The governing body's hope to solve these problems is based on the "State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and Action Plan for 2015-2020" which was adopted on August 17, 2015. The new strategy is based upon the principle of ensuring equality, minorities' full-fledged participation in all spheres of public life, and the protection of their cultures and identities. According to the Government of Georgia, this strategy was discussed with the "Council of National Minorities", representatives of local civil society, ethnic minorities, and international organizations.

The Georgian government adopted the Law on State Language in July 2015, which implies the necessity of using minority languages in the public administrations of municipalities populated by ethnic minorities. The Action Plan for 2015-2020 includes activities ensuring the implementation of the Antidiscrimination Law and raising awareness about antidiscrimination standards. The Ministry of Justice of Georgia plans to conduct trainings about the redress mechanisms of the Antidiscrimination Law. Besides this, the Government of Georgia clarifies the necessity of promoting the representation of national minorities in public administration. The Ministry of Justice of Georgia is organizing the internship program in the Community Centers located in the minority inhabited regions for the national minorities of Georgia, which is planned for 2016-2017. Whether the government's new strategy will ensure minorities' full-fledged integration in public spheres or not will be detected in the Advisory Committee's successive report.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE



WHO IS BEHIND THE TERRORIST ATTACKS IN ISTANBUL?

SOPHIO TSKRIALASHVILI (TURKEY)

On January 12, a suicide bomber blew himself up in Sultanahmet Square, Istanbul's tourist center, killing 10 people and injuring 15. Most of those killed were German citizens. Shortly after this tragic act, President of the Republic of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan has made a statement referring to the terrorist as a Saudi-born, 28-year old Syrian citizen named Nabil Fadli. Erdogan also referred to him as a member of ISIS.

About an hour after the accident it was reported that the distribution of records of the explosion would be banned. This was justified by national security and public order concerns.

ISIS has organized several terrorist attacks in France, Germany, Egypt, Yemen, Tunisia, the United States, the United Kingdom and many other countries. However, the incidents in France and Turkey were among the bloodiest attacks. In the case of Turkey, ISIS terrorism started in May 2013 with a bombing in the Hatay region. After that, in March 2014 there was an explosion in the Nighdes region. In June, the Turkish embassy was under attack. In January 2015, Sultanahmet Square. In May, Adana and Mersin. In June, the Diyarbakir attack. In July, a number of people were killed in Suruchi region and, on January 12, 2016, terrorists again targeted Sultanahmet Square.

It is worth noting that the target was the Turkish state as well as Germany. With one blow the terrorists "punished and warned" two states. The act of "killing

two birds with one stone," once again struck at Turkey and Europe.

Turkey became a target of terrorists after it joined the coalition against ISIS and the war in northern Syria. The recent attack is widely seen as revenge for these actions.

Istanbul is the continuation of attacks carried out against Diyarbakir, Ankara, and Suruchi. But the writing on the wall is different; it may be due to different motivations, or the bombings attributed to the interests of various countries and organizations. If the terrorist attack in Istanbul served the interests of ISIS, it can be described as a warning to Ankara. However, in Ankara the terrorists wanted to cause internal unrest and political destabilization by death to the population.

But if ISIS is not the author of this explosion (despite statements by Erdogan it is not confirmed), then the attack may be in the interests of other organizations. The Turkish press recalls that last year in the same location a terrorist blast killed a police officer. The act was implemented by Russian citizen Diana Ramazova.

Last week Istanbul police arrested three Russian citizens suspected of links to terrorist groups. As the BBC reports based on the statements of local police, all of them are likely to be members of ISIS.

The Russian Federation in an official statement expressed concern and called on the world to undertake more anti-terrorist operations. This "cynical and



inhuman crime ... once again shows the ruthless international terrorism," read the statement. Although there are Russian suspects, Russia's guilt is not clear. Moreover, Russia and Turkey have very tense relations after the retaliatory imposition of a variety of economic sanctions. Such an act of terrorism will damage Turkey's tourism sector, and could (however improbably) be seen as a warning from Russia.

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Turkey has assessed the incident as a strategic and tactical blow. Shortly after the explosion, Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany called on citizens to refrain from visiting the Republic of Turkey. This is a very big blow to the state from a tourism point of view, because the largest

groups of tourists to Turkey are citizens of the Russian Federation and Germany. In 2014, 23.6 million tourists visited Turkey in total, out of which the largest number visited from Germany, 21.5 percent (5.1 million in total) and 15.6 percent from Russia (3.7 million in total).

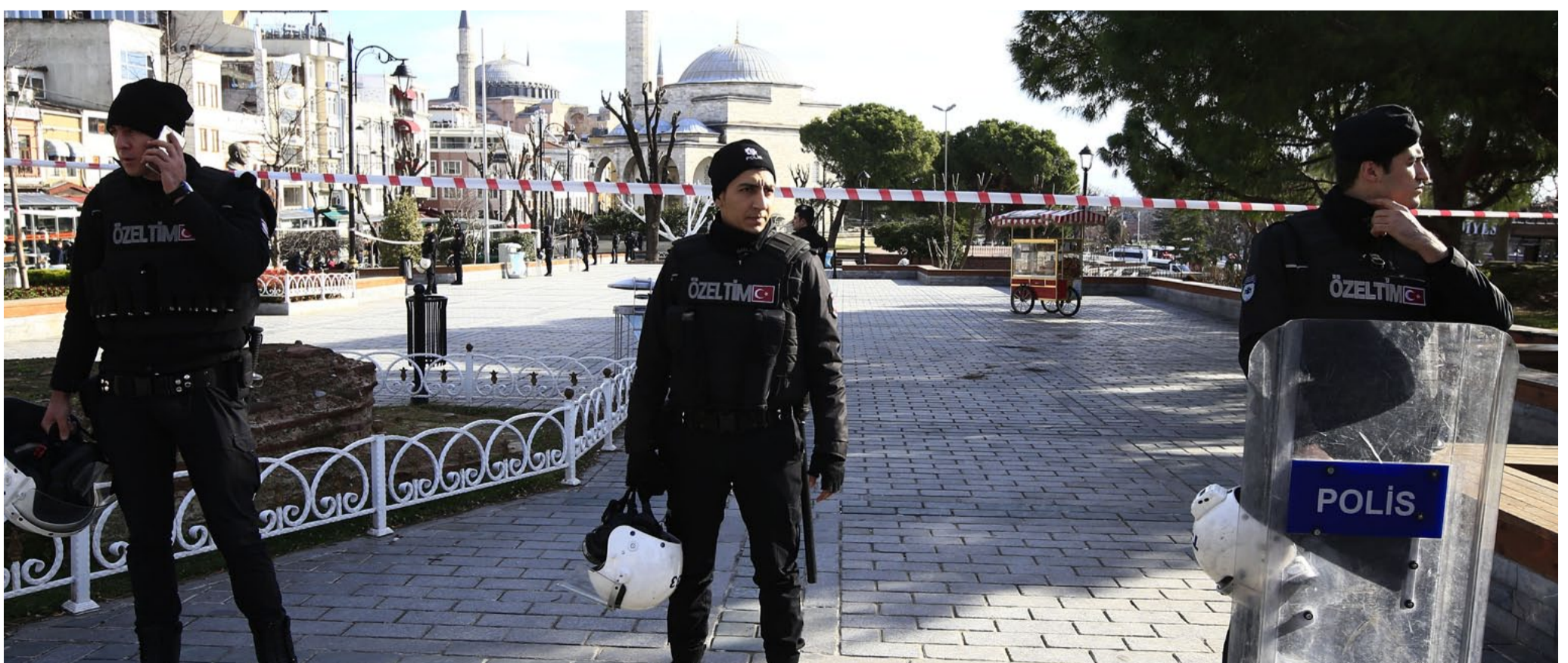
According to the latest developments in Turkey, the explosion may have been linked to the "Kurdistan Workers' Party" (PKK), which have already admitted its guilt in the explosion in the Turkish city of Cinar on Saturday. Innocent civilians were the victims of that terrorist attack; one police officer and three children.

"Our goal is not to attack innocent people, we express our deep regret over the incident," the PKK said in a statement, but noted that the attacks against Turk-

ish security forces will continue. The PKK is gaining strength in Syria, but given that the Istanbul attacks were directed mostly toward tourists, the PKK's role in this attack is unlikely.

In the last six months, there have been terrorist attacks on major cities in Turkey, a war in the southeast of the country, and deepening violence in general. The Turkish government accused ISIS of carrying out the Istanbul attack, recognizing the inadequacy of its policy toward Syria, and said that the reception of 2 million refugees and an open-border policy hits back like a boomerang.

Turkey has a number of security problems. Now it is essential for the country to have reliable protection of its borders. Stability must be maintained to prevent similar incidents in the future.





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ABKHAZIA'S DE FACTO GOVERNMENT TO JOIN RUSSIAN SANCTIONS AGAINST TURKEY

EKA PKHOVELISHVILI (POLAND)

The defacto government of Abkhazia will join Russian sanctions against Turkey. The Prime Minister of the defacto Republic of Abkhazia, Arthur Mikvabia, signed the statement confirming sanctions on January 11. Implementation of the order is assigned to the First Deputy Prime Minister of the defacto Republic of Abkhazia Shamil Adzynba and Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Serikov.

The information was made available on the defacto government's website. According to the statement, possible economic measures will be devised by January 20. In particular, the de facto government plans to ban the import of certain goods from Turkey as well as impose controls on Turkish organizations.

As the statement argues, the sanctions are provided for by "The alliance and strategic partnership agreement" signed with Russia in 2014. According to the statement, Abkhazia will take measures to restrict the activities of organizations under the jurisdiction of the Republic of Turkey as well as companies controlled by Turkish citizens. Abkhazia will ban the activities of Turkish non-bank credit organizations. Moreover, Turkish companies will not be allowed to take part in investment projects until 2018.

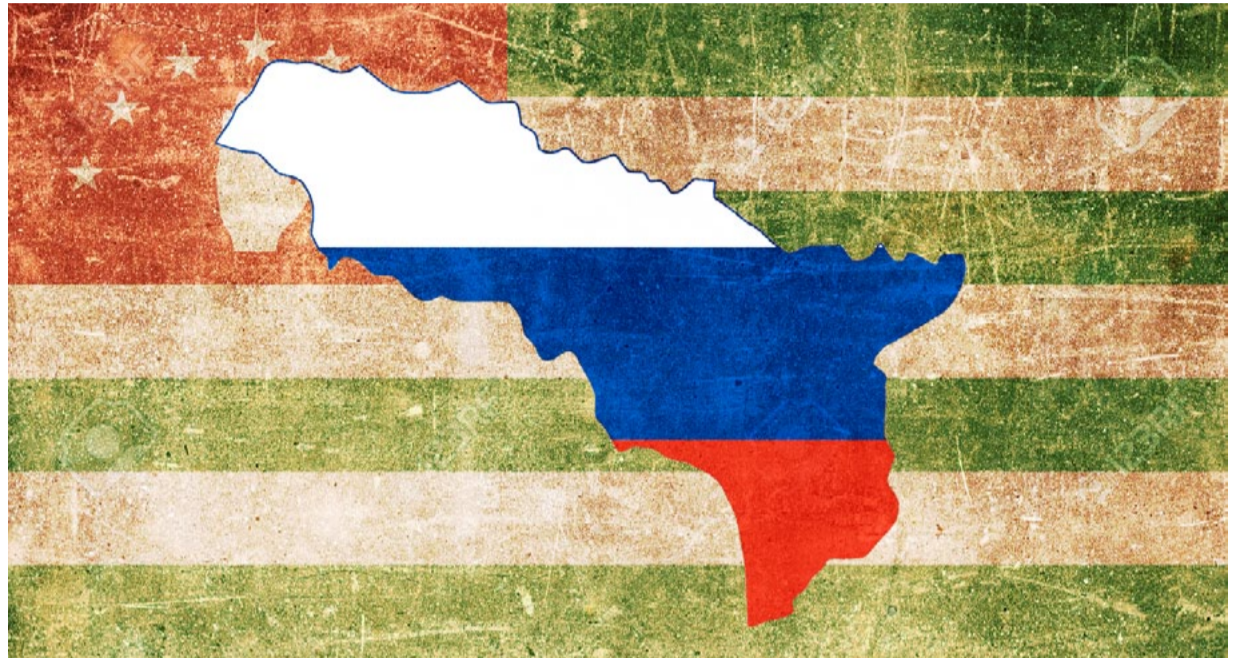
Relations between Turkey and Russia have been strained since Turkey shot down a Russian Su-24 just on November 24. Ankara claims the plane violated its airspace and did not respond

to repeated warnings. Moscow insists that no warnings were issued. Russia broke off military contacts and cancelled its visa-free regime with Turkey. Furthermore, Turkish companies are no longer allowed to operate in Russia. As was expected, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev's statement said nothing about the "Turkish Stream" natural gas pipeline project or the planned construction of the Akkuyu power station in Turkey, nor any changes to Russia's participation in the projects.

Turkey has been one of Georgia's closest economic and political partners since the latter regained its national independence in 1991. Currently, Turkey is Georgia's largest trading partner, with a 15.4 percent share of Georgia's total trade turnover. Turkish companies also actively cooperate with Russian-occupied Abkhazia. After Russia, Turkey is Abkhazia's second-largest trading partner.

Trade between Abkhazia and Turkey is carried out despite the fact that in 1996 Turkey joined other countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States in imposing an economic embargo against Abkhazia. Since 1999, defenders of the Georgian embargo arrested 60 ships that were illegally crossing Georgian waters en route to Abkhazia. Turkey explains its active role in Abkhazia as being due to private business interests.

One can consider the fact that the Abkhazian community in



Turkey has lobbied for the establishment of good neighborly relations with Abkhazia. It is obvious that Turkey wants to be a leader in the Caucasus region. Undoubtedly, it wants to increase political and economic influence in Abkhazia. However, Turkey's confrontation with Russia would not be desirable, especially as new energy projects between Russia and Turkey would deepen their relationship. It is impossible for Turkey to increase its power in Abkhazia without confronting Russia. Despite having a favorable neighborhood and economic relationship with Georgia, Turkey has continued its activities in Abkhazia without considering Georgia. Turkey's economic activities in Abkhazia have advantages: It contributes to the strengthening of the Abkhazian economy and reduction

of the influence of Russia.

Despite these positive results, Georgia may benefit from Abkhazia joining Russian sanctions against Turkey. In case of their implementation, Turkish companies will not be able to work in the occupied territories. In addition, if Russia does not compensate the economic losses to Abkhazia, Georgian-Abkhaz relations can move to a higher level.

For Russia, the main political player in Abkhazia, the emergence of a competitor is not to be accepted. This opinion is confirmed by the fact that Abkhazia's decision to impose sanctions against Russia was made after the visit of Russian presidential aide Vladislav Surkov. It is also noteworthy that over the last few years Russia has been trying to smother Turkey's activities in Abkhazia. An example is Turk-

ish companies being forced out from the Tkvarcheli coal mines.

In addition, Russia is trying to weaken Turkey's religious and educational activities in Abkhazia, which will not have a positive effect on the economy. Nevertheless, Abkhazia is expected to cover losses caused by the termination of relations with Turkey with increased Russian support.

Russian-Turkish confrontation will be directly reflected in the Caucasus region. Under such conditions, Georgia needs to pursue a cautious diplomacy, in particular, intensifying relations with Turkey.

It is unlikely that, following sanctions, Turkey will continue its humanitarian relations with Abkhazia. Turkey will likely hold a rigid attitude toward Abkhazia and seek to deepen relations with Georgia.



HOW THE OIL PRICE DROP WILL AFFECT GEORGIA

GURAM PTSKIALADZE (BULGARIA)

The price of oil is falling on the global market. The price of Brent Crude, the leading global price benchmark for Atlantic basin crude oils, has fallen by 6.7 percent down to 28.94 US Dollars per barrel. Such a fall hasn't occurred since February 2004, when the WTI (West Texas Intermediate) oil price declined by 5.38 percent to 29.52 US Dollars per barrel. According to the most recent data, one ounce of gold currently fetches 36 barrels on the market. In the last ten years, the average was 15 barrels per ounce of gold.

The falling price of crude has had a negative effect on US oil companies. In the last 15 months, the oil price decreased by 70 percent and raised the risk of bankrupting US oil producers.

Law firm Haynes & Boone stated that more than 30 US companies went bankrupt, with their entire debt surpassing 13 billion US dollars. Consulting Firm Cowen & Co predicts that US oil companies will be forced to slash budgets by 51 percent compared to 2014.

As reported by The Wall Street

Journal, if oil prices maintain such a low level (on average 30 US Dollars per barrel), by 2017 one third of American oil corporations will be bankrupt.

Several factors have brought about dropping oil prices just since December. One cause is the huge gap between demand and supply. Demand for oil has fallen while supply remains at the same level.

Besides, the downturn in prices has been caused by falling indexes on the Chinese stock exchange, leading to financial panic in other countries. China is the second-largest consumer of oil, outweighed only by the US. China accounts for 12 percent of the whole world's oil consumption, and its reduced demands on oil (as reported by Barclay, China used 510,000 barrels per day last year, whereas it is predicted daily oil consumption will be 300,000 in 2015) has an influence on the global market.

"China has been one of the biggest oil consumers in recent years and if we exclude it out of oil market, the results will be very negative", claimed Ab-

hishek Deshpande, chief oil analyst of Natixis.

Evaporating sanctions on Iran will further push the price downward. In accordance with the nuclear agreement between the West and Iran, the Islamic Republic should only develop atomic energy for "peaceful" purposes. On the assumption that sanctions are fully removed, Iran will receive frozen accounts consisting of 50 billion dollars and will be able to export oil, supplying 500,000 barrel each day.

Some experts anticipate that getting rid of sanctions will push oil prices downward. Iran will start exporting its oil on the market, where oil supply already exceeds demands. As the UN's international atomic energy agency stated, they will discuss whether Iran fulfilled its obligations and, if approved, Iran will be able to export its oil without restrictions.

"For now, it is not an appropriate time for returning Iran on oil market even for Iran itself", believes an analyst with Phillip Futures. Having abolished sanctions on Iran, the price could fall to 20-25 US Dollars per barrel.

While the oil market faces a mismatch between supply and demand, China's diminished demand increases the gap. One more factor in declining oil prices is the US's redundant reserves. In addition to this, a strong US dollar plays an important role in curtailing crude oil prices as it cuts down prices on goods. Providing the fact that goods prices on the global market are listed in US Dollars, a strong American currency reduces these prices.


The trouble, though, is that apart from India and a wobbly China, demand is not looking promising anywhere this year. Europe is unlikely to see a repeat of its relatively strong oil demand growth in 2015. Although America's economy continues to grow, tightening fuel-efficiency standards cap the upside. Drivers in the Middle East, where fuel use rose last year, are more likely to keep their cars off the road after their governments raise petrol prices or eliminate fuel subsidies altogether to shore up public finances.

Taking into consideration all the above mentioned, oil de-


mands expected not to rise in the near future. Another leading factor in the sharp price drop of crude oil is that OPEC, a cartel of oil producers, is unwilling to stabilize oil markets. This risks making the situation even worse.

The current situation on the oil market should partly have a positive effect on Georgia, as it is an oil importer. Thus a lower price benefits the Georgian economy. Prices on fuel are expected to lessen, meaning less money will flow out of Georgia. However, the already-mentioned strong US Dollar will have an unfavorable result for the Georgian Lari.

As for more potential negative outcomes, Azerbaijan and Russia, two main oil exporters and vital trade partners for Georgia, could see problems from reduced oil prices. Both of them have direct investments in Georgia, with half of the country's inbound remittances coming from Russia. The two neighbors are important players on the Georgian export market. Henceforth, if Russia and Azerbaijan are affected by fluctuating oil prices, there will be an impact on Georgia, too.



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TBILISI CITY HALL PLANS TO ARRANGE CENTRAL CYCLE TRACK IN VERE GORGE

TAMAR CHAPIDZE **EXCLUSIVE**

Mayor of Tbilisi David Narmania recently spoke with the *Observer* about a range of social topics including Tbilisi car park, damaged roads, air pollution, and damage caused by the 13 June flooding disaster. Here are the highlights of the interview:

First of all, I would like to ask about the resumption of the car park. While presenting the annual report you said that the city would add new buses. Can you tell us when this program will be implemented?

We have been actively working on the replacement of the municipal transport since April. We have worked productively with international financial institutions. European Bank for Reconstruction and Development [EBRD] will provide financial support for the bus fleet replacement.

We have set out a specific plan, and everything will be developed according to plan. The tender will be announced in the near future. EBRD is directly involved in the preparation of tender documents; accordingly they set out the technical procedures for the tender. We think that this summer new buses will come. In the beginning, we are talking about 150 buses equipped with natural gas power. At the same time, we are working on creating a new network scheme with the support of EBRD.

Traffic in Tbilisi streets is worsened by road rehabilitation and the excessive number of vehicles. How is City Hall going to solve this problem?

Based on our research, the traffic jams in Tbilisi have three main causes: it is a growing fleet [of vehicles], incompetent drivers and pedestrians. In addition, the ongoing road rehabilitation and reconstruction work should be noted, which also inhibit the movement of transport. We are going to implement projects which make the transportation system less congested. A series of regulations have been enacted within the competence of the City Hall. For example, moving is limited for cleaning vehicles in rush hours. We plan to introduce a traffic application which would deliver drivers more information. We also think the awareness campaign is important in order for traffic in the capital to become more disciplined. When

all the rehabilitation works are finished, which are being held in a different place, it will also contribute to better movement in the capital's streets.

It should be noted that police officers are daily involved in moving regulations on the roads that significantly reduce the severity of traffic jams. The problem of traffic jams are in all big cities and not only in Tbilisi. Every day 500,000 vehicles are moving in the capital and their number is increasing. We think that we have planned activities that significantly relieve the problem.

As for road and infrastructure works, it should be noted that Tamarashvili, Dadiani, Akhvediani, and Gogebashvili streets have been restored capially, as has the 12 km road from Temka to Tbilisi Sea. For the redistribution of city traffic it is planned to arrange a Krtsanisi-Shindisi connecting road system from the airport bridge to Lochini Bridge, as well as a road from Kakheti highway to Tbilisi Sea. We have already started building an overpass on Pushkin Street! We all need to understand that Tbilisi will soon be developed in terms of infrastructure. As you know, the capital will soon have a land use master plan.

Speaking to reporters, you said that the delay in the rehabilitation of roads was caused by improper activities of contractor companies. What is the situation now with regard to this issue?

There were cases when the problems arose from individual companies, but the companies were fined and this issue is not settled in the city any more.

Society concerns the fate of homeless people on the streets asking for help. What is the City Hall doing in this case?

In 2015 we have been able to significantly increase social and health care programs. Four new social service programs have launched, 500 socially unprotected families have benefited from 500 GEL for one-time assistance for newborns, and around 850 people with disabilities under the age of 18 have benefited from aid. Also, it is notable in the frame of the project "utility subsidy", 38,000 vulnerable families spent GEL 19 million, instead of GEL 9.5 million, as it was in previous years.



Real steps have been taken to solve homeless issues; we built a capital asylum for the homeless, targeting 240 beneficiaries that really will improve the living conditions of these people and the environment.

On January 11 you discussed the issue of air pollution with the Prime Minister. How do you plan to work on this issue?

In 2010 Tbilisi joined the "Covenant of Mayors" with other cities of Europe and took a voluntary commitment to reduce the negative impact of carbon dioxide and promote renewable energy use through energy efficiency.

To fulfill the obligation, the City Hall has prepared the "Sustainable Energy Action Plan", which includes the activities of transport, buildings, municipal infrastructure (street lighting, waste disposal), and green space development sectors. According to this plan, carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions should be reduced by at least 20 percent and Tbilisi should become a green city with a background of sustainable ecological development by 2020.

What's new about the greenery program?

It is important, for the first time in the history of the city; an en-

vironmental strategy came into force. In addition, 2.5 million square meters in various areas was awarded "recreation zone status." During the year, planting activities have been implemented. One hundred thirty squares and gardens have been rehabilitated and 101 squares and gardens are being arranged.

And the last question: what will happen to Mziuri and Tbilisi Zoo that were damaged after the June 13 disasters?

We have prepared the river Vere spatial territorial development concept. According to the concept, an educational center, a sports complex, forest park, hiking trails, and cycling tracks will be arranged in the Vere River valley and the surrounding area. The education center will be built on a 20,000 m² area and will be equipped with conference-seminar rooms and informal study spaces, a library, and student dining places. Around the sports complex Mziuri area there will also be a gym, swimming pool, mini-football, basketball and volleyball grounds, a yoga hall, and other sports centers. In addition, the upper part will be used for the arrangement of extreme sports infrastructure, including hiking trails, mountain bike trails, rock climbing areas,

pedestrian bridges, and so forth.

The plan also considers the arrangement of central lanes which will begin from the Heroes Square to the University Maglivi campus, therefore, the way will connect the majority of higher education institutions. In the case of Heroes Square, with the underground adapted with bicycle lanes, it will be possible to easily connect the project area of all parts of the Heroes' Square. Also, it will be possible to connect the right side of Mtkvari to the Heroes Square.

According to the concept, the forest-park will be stretched on a 300,000 m² area, and the Tbilisi Zoo and Mziuri territories will be connected by two "green bridges." In addition, the zoo area will appear in a small branch of the river Vere and small lakes will appear at the zoo area, which will contribute to the park and on the other hand will have a reservoir function. The concept also includes recommendations to hold activities in terms of a project-specific city plan and engineering-environmental protection.

A monument dedicated to the 13 June disaster will be arranged on the area which will be perceptible from all the parts of Vere territory.

GOVERNMENT IS STRENGTHENING CARE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND SPECIAL NEEDS

The state will begin helping people with disabilities and special educational needs to solve their unemployment problems. To tackle these problems, the Employment Department has been created within the Social Service Agency. The aforementioned department will help individuals find employers and provide them with labor. All this will be done by a group of consultants.

Implementation of the Supportive Employment Service has been launched by the initiative of the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Science. The public was informed about this by the deputy ministers of Health and Education. A group of consultants will work in the employment service. Currently, 11 people are in the process of being selected, one employment coordinator and 10 employment consultants. Consultants will be trained with the help of European experts, which will raise their qualifications to the levels found in countries with relevant experience.

“The project’s main goal is to make less competitive groups, first of all the people with disabilities, more active in the labor market. The ministry is involved in the process with Social Service Agency and our goal is to have an employee in Tbilisi and in every regional center, who will work directly with these groups. Their main task will be to explore and consult disabled people, determine their skills whether they are ready or not to be involved in this process. Besides, they will connect the citizens with the employer to establish normal communication and then, if necessary, retrain this people so they will feel comfortable in the work environment,” said Deputy Minister of Health Zaza Sopromadze.

Existence of such services and state support is extremely important for individuals with disabilities and special needs. In many cases they live secluded lives; society’s attitude still limits their desire and ability to keep in touch with the outside world. The state’s increased activities will spur important changes in

their lives. Adapting the environment and giving them the opportunity for personal and professional development will help their integration into society.

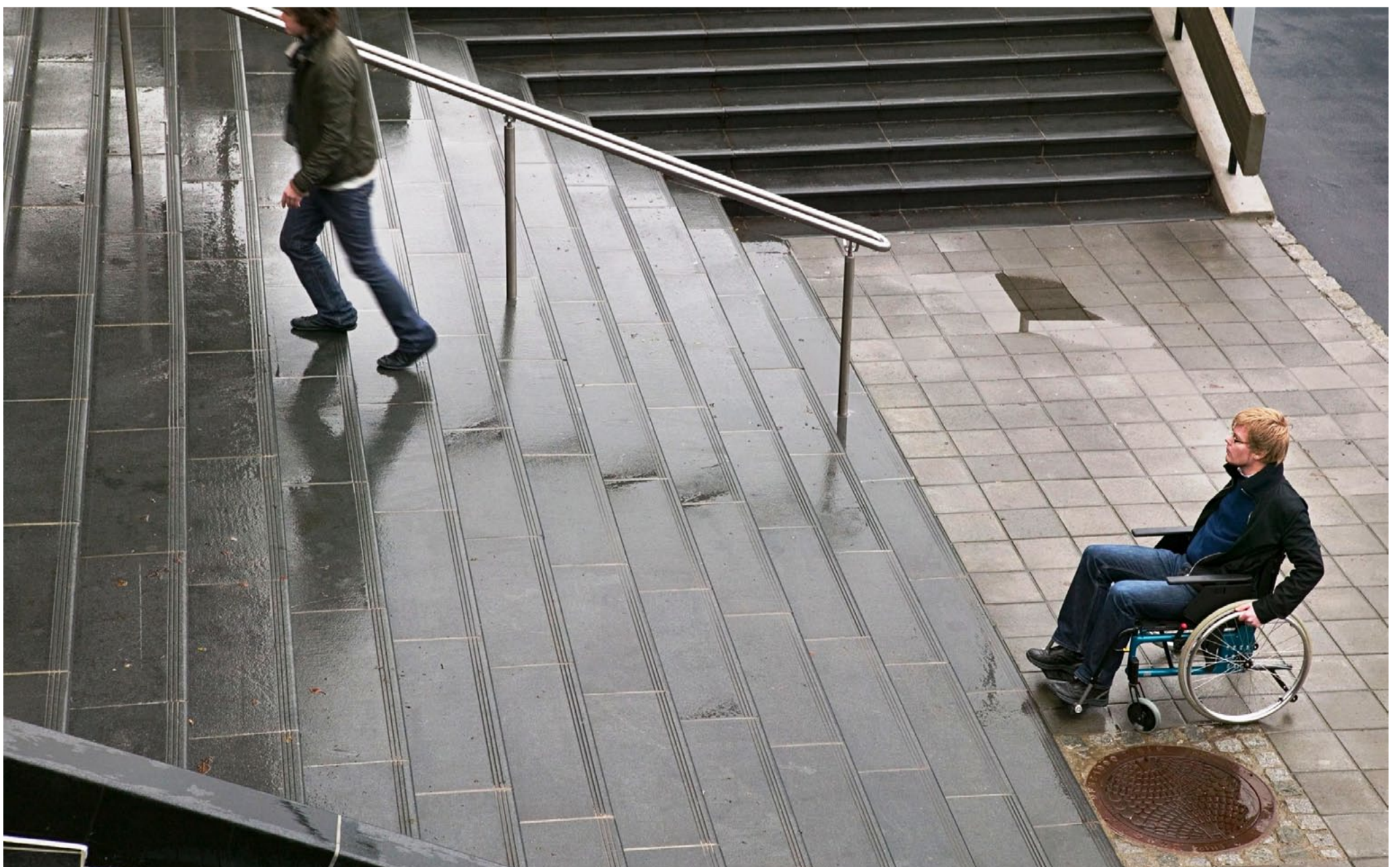
However, before their case is brought to the employment stage, these people must get education. Special environments and conditions are needed for this. According to Deputy Minister of Education Ketevan Natriashvili, the implementation of inclusive education” in Georgia was launched in 2013 and 426 individuals have been enrolled in vocational schools to date. Approximately 40 percent of these people have graduated. However, only 31 are employed. Consequently, there remains a need to promote employment.

Before employment and vocational education, school education is necessary. The lack of schools for individuals with disabilities, special needs, and transportation difficulties remains a problem. However, there are changes in this direction. In December of last year, with the support of the City Hall under the “Inclusive Education Ac-

cess” program, two adapted minibuses were transferred to four schools to serve students with special needs. During this year, the transfer of six more minibuses is expected. According to the Mayor, millions will be spent on adapting municipal buildings and spaces over the next three years. “At a government meeting the 3-year program has proven to adapt municipal buildings and spaces, according to which all municipal buildings and spaces will be adapted. 14,000,000 will be spent on this during three years”, said Mayor David Narmania.

Also, there are changes in other areas as well. Two children’s homes - one at Nutsubidze street and the Kojori Disabled Children’s Home, will be gradually deinstitutionalized. The children living there will be placed at alternative small family homes. On the basis of a memorandum signed between the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, the Social Service Agency, and the United Nations Children’s Fund, new alternative, small-scale services will be created for under-

privileged children and those with severe and profound disabilities. Care provided by the state intensified in recent years. In early 2014, the government affirmed the Government Action Plan for 2014-2016 for providing equal opportunities for people with disabilities. The plan aims at creating necessary conditions, as much as possible, for the full integration of such individuals in society. The government plan includes: non-discrimination policies, involving disabled people in decision making, creating a legal rights regime in accordance with international standards, raising public awareness of issues connected with disabled persons, providing access to continuous and quality education at all levels for people with special educational needs and health care access to people with disabilities, providing equal rights of employment and self-employment, and creating an individual database of people with disabilities. For the implementation of all these goals, various measures are planned to be accomplished by 2017.



ICE SCULPTURES MADE BY VETERANS USHER IN WINTER FUN

Ice Sculpture Festival in Bakuriani presented the works of veterans for the first time in the sixteen-years tradition. The theme of this year was the peace. The festival was organized by the State Service for Veterans Affairs and aims at raising awareness about the veterans work among youth.

The festival opened on January 6 and ended with the concert and various entertainment on January 13.

Concert was held with patriotic-themed songs by ensemble "Kartvelebi" and the group "Bani". There were no winners announced in this year's festival. The prizes and certificates were awarded to all participants by Irakli Shikhiashvili, the head of Veterans Affairs Service.

"It is important and very symbolic that those people who fought for the territorial integrity of Georgia, now made sculptures on peace. With this exhibition, we wanted to show that the veterans, who are always ready to sacrifice their own lives to defend their homeland, are the brilliant creators: artists, painters, sculptors," said Shikhiashvili.

Shikhiashvili expressed his willingness to promote the heroism of the veterans among young people and to show their talent and success.

According to him, the veteran should always be a man of inexhaustible energy power to ensure that they are constantly fighting for their country for a better future. At the closing ceremony, Shikhiashvili thanked veterans

for their effort in creating the ice sculptures.

"Peace" was the main slogan of the festival, which attracted the attention of the public gathered in Bakuriani. The event was attended by the children and young people as well as older generations.

The representative from Georgian Orthodox Church also addressed the audience: "I congratulate our veterans successful completion of the festival, they know the price of peace. This is great, that except carrying the weapons, Georgian warrior is able to create such a beauty."

Although the ice sculptures was difficult to do, the veterans did their best to bring warmth to people's hearts in these cold days and raised the Christmas mood.



THE UNDP TO CELEBRATE ITS 50th ANNIVERSARY

In 2016, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) will celebrate its 50th anniversary.

UNDP came into being in 1966 as a merger of two predecessors: the Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance, and the United Nations Special Fund.

Today, fifty years later, UNDP is as relevant as ever: leading the UN development system in over 170 countries and territories and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life.

To mark the occasion, UNDP is hosting a Ministerial Meeting on 24 February 2016. Ministers from all UN Member States are invited.

The Ministerial Meeting will be an occasion for Member States to celebrate UNDP's past, and

chart a course for the future of global development.

Participating Ministers will share their vision for how UNDP, over the coming decades, can best contribute to countries' efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Ministerial Meeting will look ahead to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Ministers will be given a platform for sharing with peers their vision for the successful implementation of Agenda 2030, and their views on UNDP's role as a partner in achieving the SDGs.

Ministers will participate in high-level debates on how to translate the ambitious global commitments into action and results. The agenda will include both plenary and smaller thematic sessions on the following

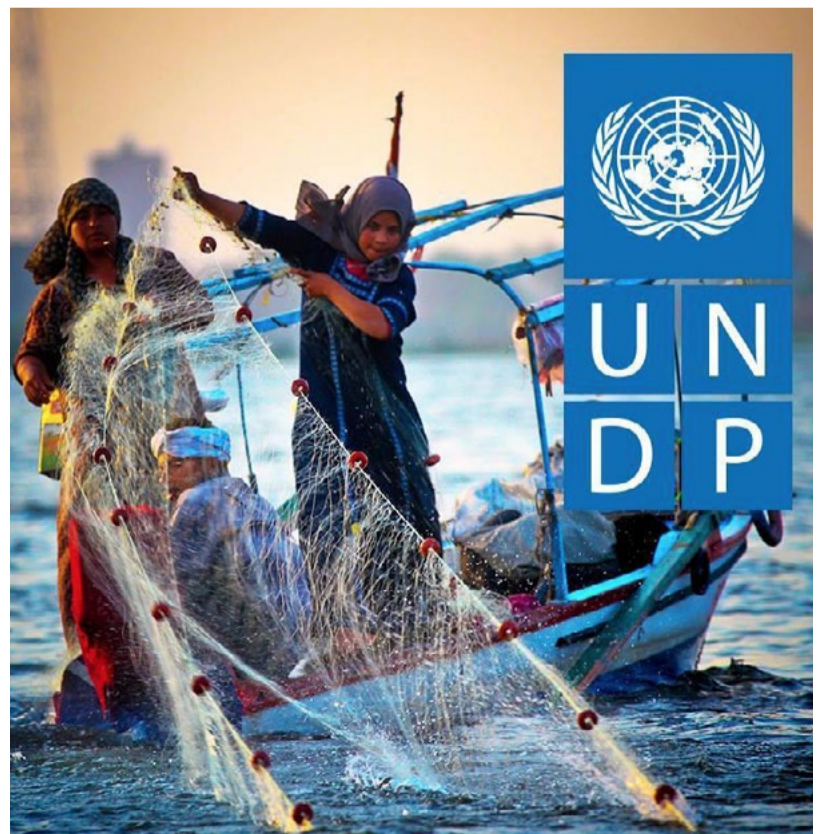
themes: eradicating poverty – leaving no one behind; Protecting planet, sustaining development; ending violence, building peace; managing risk, building resilience

The event is expected to generate a shared understanding of the greatest challenges and opportunities in carrying out Agenda 2030, and of UNDP's role as a partner in implementing the SDGs. UNDP will use the conclusions and recommendations that emerge from the discussions to guide its future work.

Ministers from all UN Member States are invited. Participation by Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Planning, Development or Finance is expected. The event will be hosted by the UNDP Administrator. The UN Secretary-General is expected to take part.

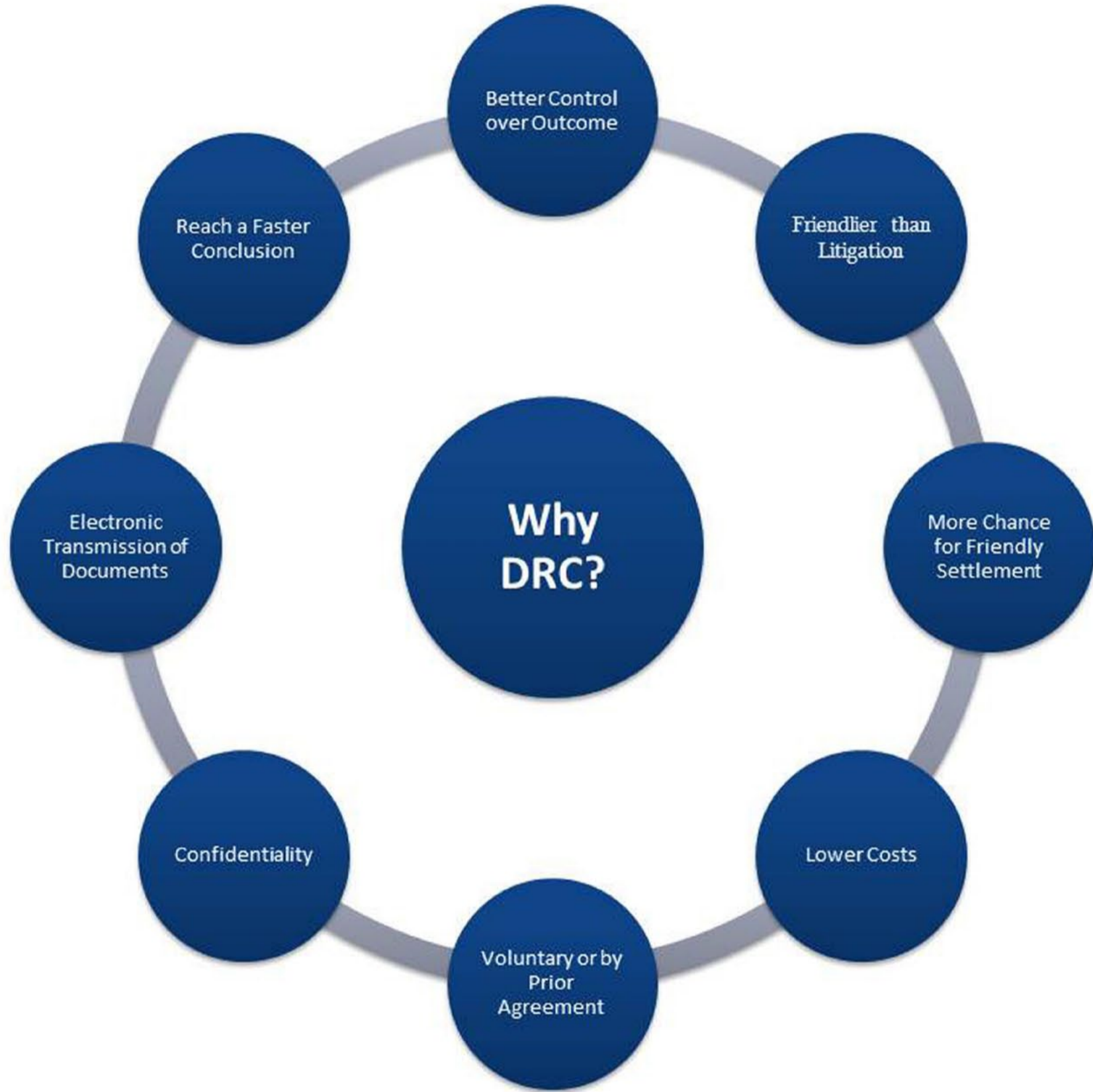


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NINO ANANIASHVILI PLANS TO STAGE MORE COMPLEX BALLET

NINI MACHAVARIANI

Tbilisi Opera and Ballet Theatre will open on January 30 with Zakaria Paliashvili's opera "Absalom and Eteri." The first ballet performance is scheduled for February 12, when "Gorda" by David Toradze will be performed.

In March, the troupe will perform the premier of "Swan Lake." Other contemporary ballet performances are also scheduled. Concert tours will be held throughout the year, and the program will close with the performance of "Giselle." This ballet season is shaping up to be busy and exciting.

Nina Ananiashvili, artistic director of the State Ballet of Georgia, said in an exclusive interview with Observer that well-known performances will be staged. However, she is also willing to stage more complicated ballet performances, for example, MacMillan's "Manon."

"The troupe has increased; I have a lot of good young ballerinas. That's why I think that we can perform more difficult ballets like 'Raymonda' and 'Sleeping Beauty.' I believe that the company is ready to cope with these difficulties. As for the ballet dancer, foreign dancers perform solo numbers from different countries of the world. The troupe has become international," said Ananiashvili.

The main novelty of the season is the renovated hall, which is decorated with a Sergo Kobuladze curtain. The historical parts of the building as well as the interior have been renovated. The most important aspect is the stage of the theater, which is equipped with newer, more modern capabilities. The scene is ruled by a computer system, which has a unique sound and lighting sys-

tem. The updated device allows for quick changes of scenery and the orchestral chamber is decorated with the highest quality wood-configured hall acoustics.

"When I visited Georgia with the tour, I do not remember a single case when I danced without an injury because of the floor. But after that, Alexander Lomidze ordered good flooring specially for the Opera House, which was the best one in the post-Soviet space", says Nina Ananiashvili. According to her, the most disappointing thing nowadays is that the troupe does not have a working space to hold workshops. "This problem must be resolved urgently, as it will be difficult for the theatre to exist without this", states the troupe's Prima ballerina.

Georgian ballet dancers lack ballerinos due to the mentality of the country. However, this attitude partly changed due to the success of Vakhtang Chabukiani, but ballerinos still carry a stigma in Georgia.

As for the head of the troupe, Ananiashvili started the year with very special news. She was named by the British newspaper The Telegraph among the twelve greatest ballerinas of all the time, earning great pride for Georgia.

Nina Ananiashvili's work schedule is very busy. She starts in the early morning with trainings and continues with professional meetings. After the opening of the theater she cares for many organizational matters. Her work finishes at 8 pm, after which she spends time with her child. Each day she spends one and a half hours training; during ballet performances she spends 4-5 hours onstage.

The Prima Ballerina has several interesting phrases to describe

her life. She believes that Murphy's Law is appropriate for describing today's world. According to Murphy's Law, talented people work on themselves to improve their shortcomings.

"There is an assumption that if a person is successful and a genius artist, he is necessarily a bad person. My whole life is opposed to this idea. For some reason this provision was born, but I'm trying to prove the contrary, that an honest, polite and calm person can succeed too. If you are a talented person, there will appear a person who was looking for you. There are people who are really looking for talent, and we should believe in it", says Ananiashvili.

Her greatest challenge was "Giselle." She was very nervous before the performance because she had seen how other actors performed the role previously. "For the first time, I saw 'Giselle' performed by Vera Tsignadze. I cried, I thought that she was really dead, and I remember that my aunt told me that she would continue the dance in the second act. I had only three weeks to prepare for the 'Giselle' performance, before that I performed a secondary role of Myrtle. Myrtle is a heroic character, while Giselle is romantic", recalls Ananiashvili.

The artistic director plans to stage one-act plays in Georgia, where she can also play apart and dedicate it to her teacher Raisa Struchkova.

The ballerina is attempting to transfer to the troupe all of the knowledge that she received from her teacher. She believes that on stage one should be so natural to the audience that they believe in you completely. Ananiashvili noted that she always wanted to play in a comedy, but

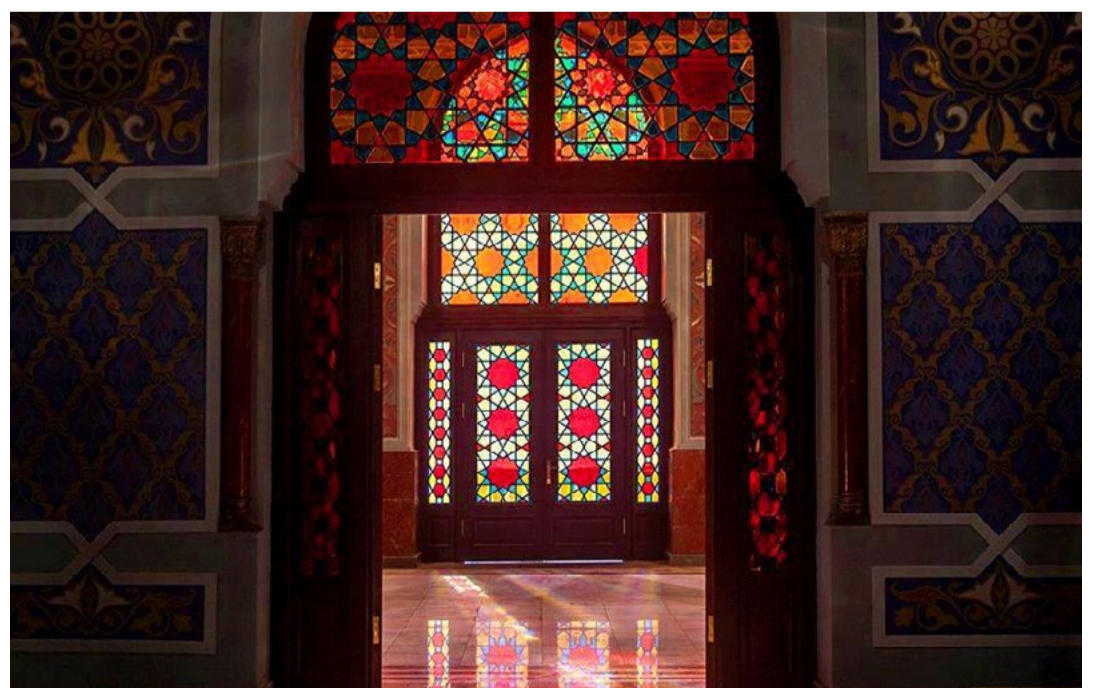
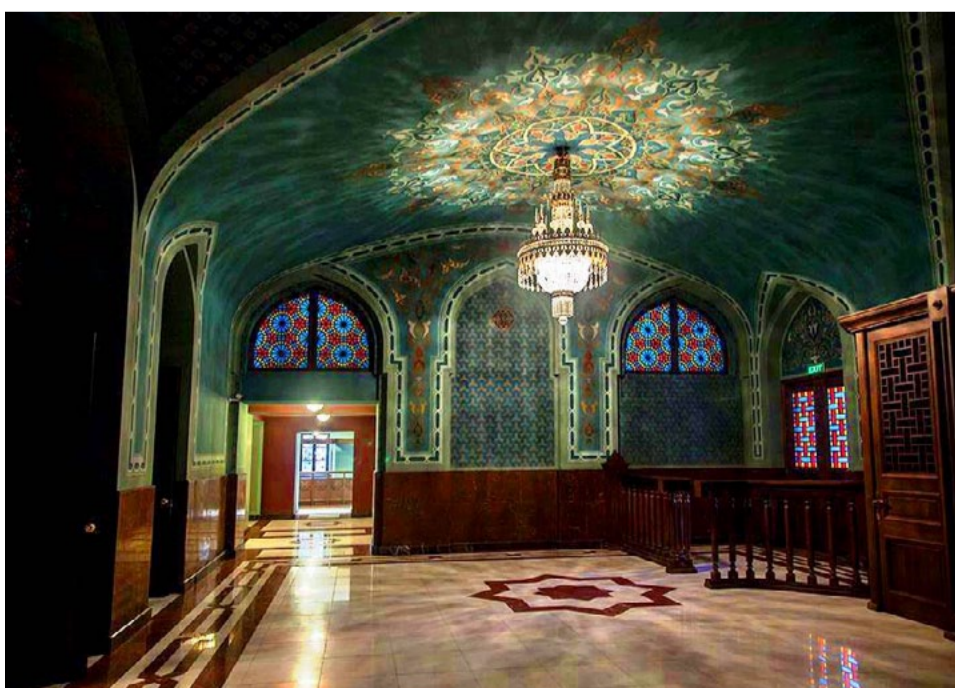


it happened that she constantly participates in drama productions.

"Probably there are a very few ballets in life which brings the pleasure, most of the time you are very much involved in the work. Especially I remember

several performances, and this feeling will probably stay with me", said the ballerina.

Nina Ananiashvili hopes that the new Opera and Ballet Theater will attract more visitors with many new and exciting performances.



IRAKLI CHIKOVANI HOLDS HIS SOLO EXHIBITION OF JAZZ PAINTINGS

NINI MACHAVARIANI

The contemporary art gallery *Sfumato Gallery* is hosting the personal exhibition of young artist Irakli Chikovani, which is called "Inversia".

Visitors to the exhibition can see the artist's recent works, which were created for this exhibition space. The exhibition was opened on January 10 and will last until January 20.

The exhibition presented works with a jazz theme; about fifteen paintings and a variety of small canvases cover a significant swath of the artist's works. Most of the works were created in 2015, while the rest of the pictures were created over the last two years.

"I started to paint at the age of seven. The school teacher of art paid attention to me; actually she discovered that I had a talent for drawing. She said that I should pursue painting seriously, after that she talked with my parents and they decided to take me to special courses. I have studied for four years at the art school", Chikovani told Observer.

There was a time when Irakli painted abstractions. Over time, the figures moved into compositions. He does not like to work in one style or work too straightforwardly; believing that this can cause the artist to enter deadlock. In his opinion, the most important criteria is the individuality of the artist, which can be combined with Impressionism, Cubism, and many other ancient and classical style elements. But in the twenty-first century, art

should be created in a completely different and individualistic style.

Irakli previously worked with two or three artists, but told Observer that he prefers to work alone. "During the work I listen to something like music, interesting lectures, or audio books" said Chikovani.

"Generally I love jazz and everything which is connected with it. Often I was watching a black and white photo of a jazzman; I have seen a lot of movies about jazz. Few people have made black-and-white artworks of jazzmen, especially in Georgia, with colorful jazz one cannot surprise. That's why I decided to do it on [jazz]", - says the artist.

It is not necessary for him to listen to jazz while working on a jazz thematic, because he has his imagination inspired by the image, which further inspires the painting.

It should be noted that he never knows how the process of creating something will develop. The outcome cannot be determined until he creates the painting itself.

In many cases the working process creates greater pleasure than what comes from calling it a finished masterpiece. Chikovani recalls: "There were occasions when I could not manage to finish a picture in one day and the next day, when I go back to work, I realized that it has been completed and is no longer required to do anything to add to it."

There are artists who want to say something, but the poetry and literature is separated from the painting. Literature needs something to say because it is in direct contact with readers. In visual art, however, everything seems to be expressed by the color, and we experience a range of emotions.

Irakli does not have one favourite artist; the list is long and constantly changing. Sometimes he likes painters with radically-different styles and genres. Artists have never observed a superficial examination of masterpieces, trying to see and understand the meaning of the truth.

He held his first exhibition in 2004 and has never stopped since. "INVERSIA" is his third personal exhibition. He is also the organizer of his exhibitions.

On April 30, 2015 the Ministry of Culture celebrated the International Day of the World Jazz Theatre and hosted jazzman Ron Carter in Tbilisi. During the event, the foyer featured a closed exhibition of Chikovani's drawings.

Now he makes plans for the future. In his opinion the artist should offer a renewed idea in every exhibition. The subject of the exhibition must be different and will take some time to develop. Each of his three solo exhibitions was totally different thematically.

The artist would like to thank all those who visited the exhibition, and promises to offer even more exciting exhibitions in the



GEORGIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM ACCEPTS SIGNIFICANT LEGISLATIVE CHANGES

In December 2015 the Parliament of Georgia adopted a package of legislative changes aimed at higher education and academic research to solve the current problems, and prepare the groundwork for a fundamental change.

The need for legislative changes is due to several reasons. For years, scientists did not have determined status, rights and obligations, they could not participate in the management and in training of researchers, they were not able to take part in university management and in the study process.

After the implementation of the legislative changes it is expected that the scientific and research units will get legal status, the structure and functioning of the research institutions will be de-

termined at the legislative level, the status of the scientist will be restored in the university, the link with teaching and research will be strengthened and there will be an evaluation system for the scientific and research units.

It should be noted that the notion of joint degree and the specification of the University concept will support the harmonization of the Georgian higher education system in the European educational space.

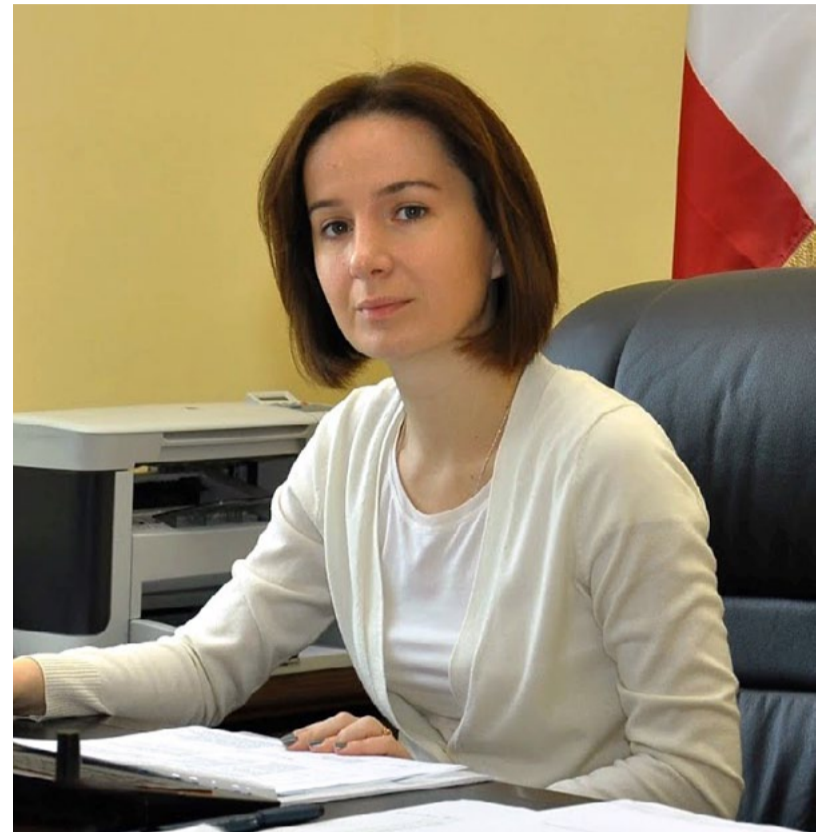
Teachers' education takes an important part in legislative changes, which provides secondary schools with trained teachers equipped with modern knowledge and skills.

Minister of Education and Science of Georgia, Tamar Sanikidze discussed the action plan for the implementation of the

legislative changes with the members of the Rectors Council on January 13. The Action Plan promotes active involvement of the university and the scientific and research units.

At the meeting the council determined the responsible agencies and individuals on different activities as well as the relevant dates.

Given the fact that the legislative changes enforce the demands of universities and scientific research units to actively participate in a number of changes, Rectors Council also discussed a number of large-scale conferences on the issue, where the participants will discuss specific activities related to the conceptual and practical issues and establish common approach acceptable to all stakeholders.



UNIVERSITIES IN GEORGIA MIGHT SOON INTRODUCE ANTI-PLAGIARISM TECHNOLOGY

Everything new is well-forgotten old; this notion is approved, when students in Georgia prepare their coursework. Although this does not apply to all students, many of them take the works of the alumni and just copy and paste their work. Without indicating any sources, students use the works from other authors, online journals and etc. Academic staff finds it difficult to control plagiarism, due to the

large number of the tasks and students.

Accordingly, the system on which the ministry started negotiations, will significantly eliminate this problem and improve students' academic performance.

On January 15, Polish company *Plagiat.pl* visited Georgia. The company is a leader in the anti-plagiarism software market in Poland and Romania. Company CEO Sebastian Kavchinski with

his delegation met with the Deputy Minister of Education and Science of Georgia, Giorgi Sharvashidze and shared their experience. Polish company serves more than 230 universities in the world. Plagiarism is a global problem and a threat to the quality of education. The company's mission is to protect the standards of higher education to prevent plagiarism among students and doctoral students. *Plagiat.pl*

representatives are in the advisory body, made the law mandatory verification of all graduate and undergraduate thesis. Georgian academic space eradicate plagiarism and education to improve the quality of education and the Ministry expressed his readiness to get acquainted and to share the successful experience of other countries. However, it should be noted that the program is costly and might require other changes

to be implemented in the field of higher education. It is already a good sign that the Ministry got interested in anti-plagiarism software, but more effort is needed to solve this problem, as it should be addressed in a timely manner. The project is very beneficial not only because it serves the qualification of the students and researches, but also to the development of education in Georgia, according to international standards.



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ZAZA PACHULIA'S TWENTIETH DOUBLE-DOUBLE OF THE SEASON AND THE HUNDREDTH OF HIS CAREER

VAKO KIPIANI

NBA All Star voting ends on Monday. Many Georgians support Zaza Pachulia's bid to play in the game. However, due to the lack of information, there was the problem of an incorrect hash tag and repeated voting by some accounts, which was automatically annulled and the recent activity not reflected in the final voting.

The NBA announced on January 14 the All Star voting's interim results. According to the new results, Zaza Pachulia is back in eighth place with 299,584

votes. We do know that the game will feature three of the league's top forwards, Kobe Bryant - 1,533,432 votes, Kevin Durant - 774,782 votes, and Draymond Greene - 499,947 votes. The All Star Game will be held in Toronto on February 14. Now, on to discussion of Zaza's brilliant play. Zaza Pachulia notched his twentieth double-double of the season in Cleveland, outdueling each of the opposing centers. However, Dallas was defeated by three points, 107-110.

This was the one-hundredth

double-double of the Georgian center's NBA career. He started and played 32 minutes, making four baskets and 6 free throws.

The Georgian center collected 14 points, 12 rebounds, 3 assists, and 1 block. Pachulia overshadowed Cleveland center Tristan Thompson, who ended the meeting with 2 points and 6 rebounds.

Russian Timofey Mozgov, another Cleveland center gathered 10 points and 9 rebounds. A noteworthy moment was when Zaza Pachulia dunked over LeBron James.



SPORTS NEWS



Basketball

Duda Sanadze scored 29 points in an NCAA game between San Diego and Portland. He made seven of nine shots (three of five from three-point range) and six of seven free throws.

Water Polo

The Georgian National Team finished their play at the European Championships in Belgrade, Serbia, taking fourth place in Group C. Italy took first. Georgia was defeated by the Italians in the last match by a score of 21-1. Misha Baghaturia scored the only goal.

Romania - Georgia 12: 6
Germany - Georgia 11: 9



Georgia - Italy 1:21

Rugby

The rugby club "Firals" presented their presidential candidate for the GRU elections which will be held on January 24 at the hotel "Courtyard Marriott". The former captain of the national team, Ilia Zedgenidze, who played for the team for 13 years, received 64 votes. At this stage, there are

two nominated candidates: Gocha Svanidze and Zedgenidze.

Tennis

Georgian tennis player Nikoloz Basilashvili will play against Swiss tennis player Roger Federer in the first round of the Australian Open. The meeting will be held on January 18.

Football

German Bundesliga II outsiders Duisburg travelled to Turkey. Giorgi Chanturia, may leave the team Duisburg this Winter and move to the Dutch club Heracles. Heracles is in fourth place with 30 points in the Dutch championship.





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