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WEEKLY BILINGUAL
NEWSPAPER IN GEORGIA

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The newly stated step is definitely a catalyst to advance relations. Leaving the USSR, Georgia faced plenty of domestic and foreign problems and challenges. Russia's presence placed Georgia in considerable danger and Russia's external interests had a great impact on Georgia's foreign policy. Georgia commenced the balancing of its foreign policy and turned to the West, aiming at integrating into its organizations and having deeper contacts with the US.



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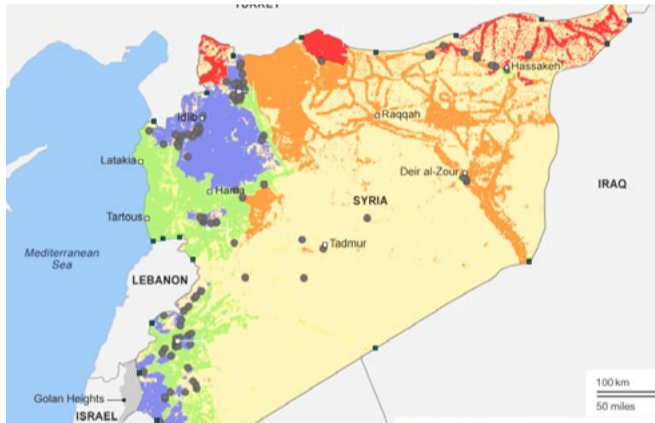
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POTI FREE ZONE

POTI FREE INDUSTRIAL ZONE

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TEIMURAZ SHA



EUROPEAN UNION • GEORGIA

The European Union (EU) is a economic and political union of **28** member states that are located in Europe

- Total area - 4,324,782 km²
- Population - 508 million
- Total GDP - \$18.624 trillion (18,2% of World GDP) | GDP per capita - \$35,849

CHRONOLOGY OF RELATIONS

| | | | | | |
|--|---|--|---|--|---|
| 1999 Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) between EU and Georgia was signed | 2004 European Union involves Georgia into European Neighbourhood Politics | 2006 Georgia-European Union Action Plan within the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) | 2008 EU launches Eastern Partnership initiative with post-Soviet states (Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia Azerbaijan) | 2013 EU grants Georgia with the Visa Liberalization Action Plan (VLAP) | 2014 EU and Georgia sign Association Agreement (AA) and a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) |
|--|---|--|---|--|---|



¹Requested reforms, which are mentioned in the Association Agreement (AA)

THE EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD INSTRUMENT (ENI) 2014-2020

The strategic framework, key results and indicative financial allocations for the EU's bilateral cooperation with Georgia in 2014-2017 are set out in the Single Support Framework Choose translations of the previous link. The three priority sectors are:

- Justice reform
- Agriculture and rural development
- Public sector reform

This is complemented by support for aligning Georgia's laws with EU legislation across all sectors, implementing the Association Agreement/Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, support to organisations making up civil society

Georgia's indicative financial allocation for 2014-2017 is **€410** million.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS*

| | | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|--|---|
| ≈2016 Visa free regime to be established between EU and Georgia | ? IPA funds available to help Georgia prepare for membership | ? European Commission approves sustainability of the AA | ? Georgia submits its application for EU membership | ? EU offers Georgia Key Action Plan; starts negotiations | ? EU candidate status for Georgia |
|---|--|---|---|--|---|

* The model of integration of the current EU membership candidate states



EU - GEORGIA TRADE STATISTICS

The EU is the main trade partner of Georgia. 26.1% of its trade takes place with the EU, followed by Turkey (17.2%) and Azerbaijan (10.3%). For the EU, trade with Georgia accounts for 0.1% of its total trade. with a total turnover of EUR 2.6 billion in 2014.

Annual average growth 3.4%-b.

The EU imports from Georgia focus on mineral products, agricultural products, base metals and chemical products. In 2014, the EU imported from Georgia goods to the value of EUR 657 million.

THE EUROPEAN UNION

TURKEY

AZERBAIJAN

THE MAIN MESSAGES OF GEORGIA TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

ANA ZANKALIANI

Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili visited Brussels on February 9 and 10. The Prime Minister set the meetings with the leaders of EU countries and Commissioners. Foreign Minister Mikheil Janelidze and State Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration Davit Bakradze were accompanying Kvirikashvili as part of the Georgian entourage.

Prime Minister of Georgia, Giorgi Kvirikashvili, met the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, on February 9 in Brussels. According to Mr. Tusk's press statement, the two politicians talked about the upcoming parliamentary elections in Georgia and agreed that a free and pluralistic media, environment, as well as an open and vibrant political environment are prerequisites for the country's success. "Continued reforms of the judiciary, rule of law and human rights are important priorities and I underlined the EU's readiness to assist. It is crucial that criminal investigations and prosecutions be evidence-based, transparent and impartial, in line with the commitments of the Association Agreement," said President Tusk.

Visa-free travel for Georgian citizens was also discussed by the EU and Georgian politicians. The European Council President congratulated Georgia on the outstanding reforms undertaken in this process. Mr. Tusk assured Mr. Kvirikashvili that the European Union will continue to give

its firm support for the territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognised borders. "I share Georgia's concerns about the continued implementation of the so-called "treaties" between Russia and Abkhazia and South Ossetia," he added.

The Prime Minister also met the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker. The main topics of the meeting at the European Commission were the timely finalisation of the visa liberalization process and the new priorities of the association agenda. Mr. Kvirikashvili and Mr. Juncker also discussed the DCFTA. The Prime Minister noted that trade relations with the EU were reinforced during the previous year and a half. Mr. Kvirikashvili thanked Mr. Juncker for his strong support to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia and expressed hope for his personal support in successful finalisation of the visa liberalisation process.

Minister and Commissioner for the ENP and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes Hahn, approved of the successful implementation of the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan by the country and noted that Georgia is one of the leading states of Eastern Partnership Initiative. The parties discussed new fields of cooperation within the frames of renewed European Neighbourhood Policy and emphasised the need for extended dialogue in that area. Hahn described the meeting with Kvirikashvili as,

"productive and friendly."

"We are close to the final decision," said the European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, Dimitris Avramopoulos. He said this within his joint statement with Mr. Kvirikashvili and Mr. Hahn. The European Commission highlighted in its December report that Georgia fulfilled all undertakings envisaged by the Action Plan on Visa Liberalisation and achieved positive results.

The Prime Minister also conducted meetings with the EU Special Representative, Herbert Salber. The parties emphasised the importance of joint efforts and expressed their hopes for the creation of constructive environments during the next round of Geneva negotiations.

Development of the Georgian energy sector and becoming a member of the EU Energy Union were the main discussion topics between Mr. Kvirikashvili and the Climate and Energy Commissioner, Miguel Arias Cañete, during their meeting. Pursuant to Mr. Kvirikashvili, the Government of Georgia encourages projects directed to production of renewable energy, the aim of which is to make Georgia a regional leader in terms of green energy production. They also discussed the first pilot project of the wind power plant as well as the importance of the Southern Gas Corridor and South Caucasus Pipeline, which is part of the Shah Deniz project. During the meeting, it was noted that



these projects will guarantee the deepening of the economic partnership, reinforcement of energy security, economic development and stability of the region.

Discussions concerning the development of Georgian energy sector were continued at the meeting between the Prime Minister of Georgia and the Vice-President of the European Commission and Commissioner for Energy Union, Maroš Šefčovič, which ended the two-day trip to Brussels.

Mr. Kvirikashvili summarised his visit to Brussels during the Cabinet's meeting. "We briefed the commissioners on the processes taking place in Georgia, and the reforms related to the Association Agenda. We also conveyed the message that successful completion of the visa liberalization process is crucially important to Georgia. We discussed this in a detailed manner with the President of the European Council, Donald

Tusk, the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, and the European Commissioners. We convinced them that Association Agenda-related reforms in Georgia are proceeding at full speed and this process cannot be hampered," he noted.

Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, briefed the media on Tuesday the 9th of February on the topics of the week's Defence Ministers' meeting.

The Secretary General underlined NATO's commitment to helping Georgia move towards membership in the Alliance. "Georgia is pursuing domestic political and security reforms, which are bringing Georgia closer to NATO," Stoltenberg said. Meetings of the North Atlantic Council (NAC) at the level of Defence Ministers, was held at NATO Headquarters on the 10th and 11th of February where Georgia's Minister of Defence, Tinatin Khidasheli, also presented.



NATO STRENGTHENS DEFENSE MECHANISMS IN EUROPE

EKA PKHOVELISHVILI

The meetings of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Defense Ministers were held on 10-11th February in Brussels. The main issues of the ministerial were the events taking place in Syria recently and the security concept of NATO in regards to new threats. During the meeting, issues such as terrorism, the refugee crisis, migration, the threat from Russia, and Russia's involvement in the Syrian crisis were also discussed.

As NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, would expect, defense ministers approved a new plan, which aims at the strengthening of the alliance's Eastern flank. According to Stoltenberg, additional decisions will be made in July, during the Warsaw Summit.

"We have agreed on the principles on NATO's defense and deterrence capacity in order to modernize them. According to the decision, they approved a new multinational force to beef up defense of frontline alliance members which are mostly at risk from Russia. The new force will be multinational to make clear that an attack against one ally is an attack against all allies, and then the alliance as a whole will respond," Stoltenberg stated at a news conference following the first session of the two-day defense ministers' meeting.

As Stoltenberg explained, the

reason for strengthening the deterrence system in the Eastern flank is to address a security task caused by Russia's aggressive actions.

The Defense Minister of Georgia, Tinatin Khidasheli, also attended the summit. Within its framework, a NATO-Georgia Commission conference, and the meeting of Georgian Defense minister and NATO Secretary General, was also held.

According to Khidasheli, "Georgia is participating as a full partner of NATO and, therefore, is involved in the discussions concerning the strengthening of security measures." Among them, and, as Khidasheli pointed out, the most pivotal for Georgia, is security system in the Black Sea region, of which a need became acute following the events in Crimea.

Within the context of Black Sea regional security, Georgia was referenced several times by the NATO Secretary General. He also underlined NATO's commitment to helping Georgia move towards membership in the Alliance.

"We are working with Georgia as our close partner. The cooperation is part of NATO and Georgia's close relations and, of course, it is in the line with the challenges that we see in the Black Sea region," Stoltenberg pointed out.



Stoltenberg said that all the allies support the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders. He once again called on Russia to change its intentions to make Abkhazia and South Ossetia independent states.

"Abkhazia and South Ossetia are parts of Georgia," he said.

US President Barack Obama plans to significantly increase heavy weapons, military techniques and other equipment in the NATO member states in Central and Eastern Europe. This step will be taken by White House in

order to implement strategy directed towards the containment of possible Russian aggression in the region.

Moscow's answer to the strengthening of NATO's eastern flank is seemingly indifferent. Russian political analysts say that they are not worried about a renewed arms race as NATO acts as a deterrent and poses little threat to nuclear-armed Russia.

"I think the expansion of NATO itself is more of a geopolitical challenge to Russia because this means the expansion of the U.S.-led alliance zone of influence. Russians would say a zone

of security, others would say a zone of protection," said Carnegie Moscow Center Director, Dmitri Trenin.

It is obvious that increased military potential of Europe will be a signal to Vladimir Putin that the West is still suspicious of his intentions in the European region. This is a long-term answer to the post-Cold War European security system and reflects the situation in which NATO quickly adapted to the new challenges while Russia has become a more difficult player. This is a sign that the West still remains committed to continue the policy of containment of Russia and strengthen the partnership with European countries, including Georgia.

It will be interesting the effect of the strengthening of the Eastern flank. In July, the NATO Summit in Warsaw is a priority for the Georgian government, because there is a possibility that Georgia will finally receive the MAP – the Membership Action Plan. In the context of constraint relations between NATO and Russia, the Alliance does not need to hurry to give an MAP to Georgia. However, it should be noted that Georgia has a lot of work to fulfill all its obligations and demands. It is necessary for Georgia to continue democratic reforms in the country. The main requirement for the membership of the alliance is to create a proper environment for security systems, including the freedom of the court and speech. In addition, the Government should not slow the Euro-Atlantic integration efforts due to the frustration in Georgian society caused by a slow pace of integration in the Western institutions.



RELATIONS BETWEEN GEORGIA AND IRAN - CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

GURAM PTSKIALADZE

Georgia and Iran made an agreement, annulling the visa regime between the two countries. The agreement is brought into force after February 15, as stated by the Iranian embassy in Georgia. They added that by abolishing the visa-free regime, trade relations have declined in recent years and has halted the growing number of tourists.

As the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia's website reports, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, David Jalaghania, met Iranian ambassador, Abas Taleb Fari, on February 8 and said that Georgia intends to cancel the visa regime with Iran. Meanwhile, the Georgian Prime Minister had a talk with the president of Iran. In addition to discussing the visa-free regime, the sides emphasized the importance of stable cultural relations and wished the relations in tourism will be improved in the near future.

Cancellation of the visa regime by the Georgian side includes the following amendment: citizens of the Islamic Republic of Iran who own acting ordinal passports, will have a right, to stay in Georgia for 45 days without a visa.

The Deputy of Ambassador of Iran claimed that Iran took into consideration Georgia's circumstances while making a decision on putting into effect visa

regime, again considering the West's position and Georgia's will to integrate into Western organizations.

The newly stated step is definitely a catalyst to advance relations. Leaving the USSR, Georgia faced plenty of domestic and foreign problems and challenges. Russia's presence placed Georgia in considerable danger and Russia's external interests had a great impact on Georgia's foreign policy. Georgia commenced the balancing of its foreign policy and turned to the West, aiming at integrating into its organizations and having deeper contacts with the US. After the August war in 2008, when Russia intended to weaken Georgia, the official Tbilisi was determined to increase the quality and quantity of its foreign policy. As Russia recognized the existence of de facto Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent countries, Georgia reordered its regional foreign policy. At that time, the US started the "Reset Policy" toward Russia, aiming at promoting relations with the Kremlin; at the time, the US wanted Russia's support in Libya and Russia wanted to enter the world trade organization with the help of US. By doing so, the stable links between US and Georgia declined and the importance of South Caucasus for the US decreased on an international agenda. That

lead Georgia to seek the other potential ally in the region and reinforce its ties with other regional powers.

To reach their goal, the Georgian government decided to broaden the spectrum of its foreign policy by coming up to Iran. For Iran, gaining an influence on the South Caucasus is one of the top foreign priorities so as to settle in the region as the powerful actor. The main obstacle of achieving its intentions is the West's politics towards Iran, sanctioning its economic activities, halting its growing potential. Intensifying relations with Georgia seemed prolific for Iran in such circumstances. The reasons that hampered the countries' relations initially was Georgia's obvious course toward the West and its impact on Georgia's decision making. From Iran's point of view, having close ties with the country who wants more contacts with its enemies, appeared to be a factor that hindered relations. Iran constantly had a fear that the US might have used its power to use Georgia as a bridge-head against Iran. The Iranian side was concerned with its relations with the little South Caucasian country.

Despite of this, taking into consideration that they had feeble levers to have any pressure over Georgian government, Tehran implemented pragmatic politics

in relations with Georgia. The Russo-Georgian war was a key event that defined Georgian-Iranian latter-day future. On the one hand, joining sanctions against Iran, Russia damaged its closer ties with the Islamic Republic. Iran, in fact, did not condemn Russia's actions in the war and later, but it did not recognize independence of de facto Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Iran remained neutral not taking any side in the Russo-Georgian conflict. Georgia praised Iran's actions and the reputation and prestige of Tehran went up in the eyes of Georgia.

Evidently, Iran remains a mighty regional power, having big ambitions in the near East, Central Asia, Afghanistan and Pakistan, although, its influence over South Caucasus is smaller and unsteady. This is partly due to the main powers in South Caucasus, Russia and Turkey, creating difficulty for Iran in bolstering its position. Secondly, Iran keeps an eye on the Near East and Central Asia rather than on the Caucasus, however, Iran has one awkward concern in its relations with Azerbaijan, and its ethnicity in the northern part of Iran, thus it has a combustion effect on irredentism and remains the sword of Damocles for Iran.

Above mentioned August events changed the political situation to a greater extent in the region. It became noticeable that

Russia had sustained its dominance and so Iran carried on with cautious politics in the region in order to avoid crossing Russia's vital interests. Showing more interest in the region stems from the fact that Turkey, one of the opponents of Iran, increased its influence and potential in the region. Iran does not want Turkey and Armenia to improve their relations, especially given that Iran has better relations with Armenia than with Azerbaijan, despite having closer historical, cultural and religious ties. During the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Iran took the Armenian side and they have had good relations in economic and political aspects since then. Analysing the Iranian policy toward them, it goes without saying that the state prefers to act in consideration of national safety rather than religious sentiments.

International events have affected the Iranian-Georgian relations and the different orientation of each country makes it tough to broaden relations in a greater spectrum. Georgia yearns to entering EU and NATO, while the West and Iran see each other as threats, constantly opposing each other. One relevant example of this is, in 2008, the Georgian government accepted the US's proposal to extradite Iranian citizens blamed for bribing and cheating. Iran made it clear that Georgia's



steps were not welcome and it terminated the affinity between Georgia and Iran. With the aim of making the situation better, the Georgian foreign minister, Grigol Vashadze, made for Tehran in January 2010 to meet the Iranian president, Ahmadinejad.

Worsening relations between Iran and the West, and the maintenance of sanctions have had a negative impact on Iranian-Georgian relations. As a result, Georgia cancelled a free visa regime with Iran in 2013 due to some pressure from the West. Since Georgia implements Western policy to some extent, the Georgian government assumed that, by doing so, they would please the Western allies. After having abolished the free visa regime, the ties between Iran and Georgia have decreased and trades diminished. The warming of Iran-Western relations will have a positive impact on Georgia, allowing the country to deepen ties in several spheres. As for Iran, it will be less frightened by the potential threat coming from the

Western side through Georgia.

In line with the article published on June 20, 2013 by The Wall Street Journal, despite economic sanctions, Iranian citizens' investments in Georgia are gradually growing. In particular, the article states that Iranian capital has created 150 small and medium-sized enterprises in order to bail out from Islamic revolution defenders. It is noteworthy that the number of Iranian tourists was reduced due to the abolishment of the visa-free regime. In addition to this, Georgia started freezing the bank accounts of certain Iranian individuals listed in the UN's resolution. The United Nations imposed sanctions on Iran in December 2006 because of its nuclear program. These sanctions banned trade with Iran on certain types of tools, as well as bank accounts for individuals and companies connected with the nuclear program. In June 2010, the UN Security Council imposed more severe sanctions on Iran and, on June 5, adopted a resolution under which the man-

date of expert groups observing the sanctions on Iran was prolonged until July 9, 2014.

The current economic relations between Georgia and Iran consists of energy resources. To decline dependence on Russian energy and economy, Iran seemed to be the perfect companion, one whose energy resources was considered as an alternative import source. There was a prelude to this, when Iran provide substantial assistance for Georgia after Russia cut off the natural gas supplies in 2006. In spite of the pressure from the Kremlin, Iran prolonged natural gas shipment to Georgia at low prices. The two parties advanced relations in terms of economy in the latter two decades. Both countries agreed on the abolishment of the two-sided taxation system, attracting investments and increasing relations in trade.

As a result of introducing a visa-free regime, Iranian trade and tourism in Georgia had grown substantially. Import created USD\$99, 4 while the number of

Iranian tourists surged to 89'170 people in one year. Trade between the two countries was increased by USD\$118.5 million. Iranian business advanced its positions in Georgia as well.

Iran is very prudent when it comes to its relations with Georgia, as far as the Iranian political establishment is not willing to be affected by United States' increased influence. This fear is expected to be diminished when Iran's relations with Western countries gradually becomes less harsh. Iran-Georgian relations are therefore predicted to rise. Georgia may position itself as a mediator between the adversary parties with the purpose of stabilizing their relations.

From a Russian perspective, improved Iran-Georgian relations will harm the Kremlin's strategic interests in south Caucasus, given that the Russian Federation is seeking the absolute hegemonic position in the region and perceives the third party's increased influence in a negative light. Iran is able to become an alternative

energy source for Georgia, therefore take credit in decreased energy dependence on Russia. Diversifying energy import sources is a matter of pivotal importance for Tbilisi in its current volatile geopolitical landscape.

The visa-free regime will increase the number of Iranian tourists, benefitting the Georgian economy. The sanctions imposed under the influence of the Western institutions have considerably decreased Iranian investments, import index and the number of tourists in Georgia, as well as damaging the countries' relations in the broader context.

It is explicit that the visa-free regime will result in increased number of tourists, more investments, augmented index of import-export trade, strengthening of the cultural bonds and political cooperation between Iran and Georgia. The lifting of the sanctions will grant more independence to Iran for advancing its position in south Caucasus, and because of this reason, Georgia appears to be a strategic partner.



Business Lunch

Every Weekday from 12:00 to 16:00

25 GEL

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MENU

Monday

Soup of The Day
Green Seasonal Salad
Chicken Schnitzel
Creamy Raspberry Cake



Tuesday

Soup of The Day
Mexican Salad
Pizza Margarita
Lemon Cheesecake

Wednesday

Soup of The Day
Greek Salad
Tiflis Burger
Profiterole



Thursday

Soup of The Day
Green Salad
Pasta Carbonara
Cherry and Chocolate Cheesecake

Friday

Soup of The Day
Tomato & Cucumber Salad
Pork Shashlik
Vanilla Icecream

3, Gorgasali str. 0105, Tbilisi, Georgia

“CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES” IN SYRIAN CONFLICT

GIORGI CHAPIDZE

At the Munich Security Conference, major powers have agreed on nation-wide “cessation of hostilities” in Syria to begin in a week’s time. The ceasefire or pause in the warfare was announced by United States Secretary of State John Kerry, and Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov. This agreement evoked thoughts of a collapsed Geneva peace talk at the beginning of February. Some diplomats speculate that this is only progress on paper as it only aims to pave the way for the actual truce and get the warring sides back to the Geneva peace talks. It also remains vague as to whether the agreement includes Russia’s bombing of Aleppo that is frequently seen as the Kremlin’s support for Syrian government forces and Assad regime.

An agreed ceasefire implies several conditions, such as providing aid to besieged areas in Syria, and implementing actions in order to create a background for the United Nation’s plan for political transition. The 17 members of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) reached an agreement to accelerate and increase aid distributions to displaced civilians. John Kerry, however, hesitated to call it a ceasefire and described this agreement as a “pause” in fighting. Even agreed ceasefires were not honored by the parties

involved, and the Syrian people do not have high expectations for the agreed terms.

The United Nations special envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, stated that the Syrian conflict is very complicated and can’t actually end with a ceasefire. Despite this, he believes that both sides will abstain from using heavy weapons which will help make a big difference.

One of the main considerations here is that Russia conceptualizes the Syrian “moderate opposition” as terrorist forces while the West condemns the Kremlin for propping up Bashar al-Assad’s regime by destroying its opposition. Some politicians state that if Russia will not halt its air strikes on opposition forces in certain areas, any ceasefire is deemed to be a failure. The international community can’t ensure aid provision in case of Russian airstrikes. Despite being so explicitly important, the issue is not negotiated with Russian representatives, as Sergei Lavrov argues that the Russian military campaign will continue. Russia intervened in the conflict in 2015 to defend the Assad regime after opposition gained considerable advantages. In spite of claiming that Russia would bomb ISIS, the Kremlin’s major effort is to destroy the FSA – Free Syrian Army. The FSA is the major opposition group founded by

defected Syrian Armed Forces officers and they strive to topple Assad and bring down the regime. After Russian involvement the conflict turned in favor of Assad.

Nowadays, the Syrian army under government control and backed by Russian forces is advancing toward Syria’s largest city Aleppo. The Syrian army is capable of seizing the city currently controlled by the opposition. Leaders state that Russia should halt its support to provide the city with the humanitarian aid it needs.

The main goal of the agreement is to encourage all forces to cease hostilities. Aid organizations hope that they will have the chance to deliver goods in hard-to-reach areas. Starvation is often used as a tool in combat campaigns to achieve objectives sooner. This agreement does not include ceasing strikes on Islamic State or al-Qaeda’s Syrian branch, al-Nursa. Both organizations are deemed to be terrorist entities by both Western countries and Russia. The situation becomes acute as Lavrov stated that the ceasefire doesn’t include halting airstrikes on terrorist groups, as Russia says it is doing in Aleppo. Islamic State and al-Nursa are the targets for Syrian governmental forces concentrated mainly in Damascus and in the central and western parts

of the country. Assad forces also combat with moderate opposition – rebel groups positioned in the north and east of Syria. Russia fights against the rebellious opposition groups, while Western politicians condemn the Russian Federation for not targeting actual terrorist organizations ISIS, and for their role intercepting other coalition forces trying to destroy Jihadists.

If Russia halts its major offensives directed at the Syrian “moderate opposition,” this does not mean that the door automatically opens for humanitarian aid groups. There is no guarantee as to whether Assad’s forces will comply with the ceasefire and pause their warfare, because even Russia doesn’t have that kind of leverage over the Assad regime. If they suspend attacks there are several rebel groups which may violate the ceasefire, therefore, the tangible outcome of the peace talks seems to be extremely moderate and vague.

Vitaly Churkin, Russia’s permanent representative in UN, illustrated the Kremlin’s stance in his speech after failed Geneva peace talks earlier this month, stating that Russia can’t stop airstrikes unilaterally as there is no guarantee of the opposition groups also halting their offensives. He underlined that, during the peace talks, the parties were negotiating when, “the opposi-

tion delegation walked out.” He added, “Unfortunately, it seems to be encouraged by some of our Western colleagues.”

Taking into consideration the ongoing situation in the country and several parties’ involvement in the ground battles and airstrikes, some politician believe that even this agreement can be considered a successful step. If any group of the conflict fires there is a possibility that the major foreign powers, Russia and the USA, would have to violate the ceasefire as well to defend strategic objectives. However, this is heavily dependent on the intensity of the violation; it may require immediate involvement and therefore ending the ceasefire, or keeping negotiated terms may be more strategic. One condition is quite explicit though: whoever will break the ceasefire is expected to suffer diplomatic costs and may be excluded from the successive peace talks. There is a possibility that the extremist groups will benefit from the cessation of hostilities as they do not have to execute negotiated conditions. Furthermore, it is presumed that Russia and Assad will use this ceasefire to extend their actions and defeat opposition, appealing that they [the Western forces] are fighting with the terrorists. This agreement, then, helps Russia to advance its positions in the conflict.



ANAKLIA PORT - TRADING ZONE BETWEEN CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA

TAMAR UMPRIANI

The process of building a new deep-sea port in Anaklia will start in June 2016.

A special government committee announced the winning company, Consortium of Anaklia Development, as the company responsible for building Anaklia Port, on February 5th following a two year selection process. According to Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili, this new port will be a stimulant for the crucial world project, "Silk Road," and hopes that construction will be completed before the deadline. winner company, "Consortium of Anaklia Development" on February 5, after two years of selection process," as the responsible company for building Anaklia port. According to the Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili this new port will be a stimulant for the crucial world project "Silk Road" and hopes that the building works will be completed before the deadline.

The Consortium of Anaklia Development includes several companies including, TBC Holding of Georgia, and Conti International of the USA. Conti International has almost a century of history in the field of infrastructure and industrial capital projects. Other companies include Moffat and Nichol, involved in port design, and Maritime Business Solutions, one of the largest Dutch port transaction companies.

The first tender for port was announced in 2014. Of the 14 applicant companies, only 7 were chosen by the government's special committee, and only two could present their proposed programs in the final round. Consortium of Anaklia Development

was joined in the final round by Georgian businessman Temur Karchava, who presented a collaboration of his company, Anaklia Port, and Chinese company, Power China.

According to Vice-Prime Minister Dimitri Kumsishvili, the committee had special criteria for the companies, each of which was an important benchmark to qualify for the project.

Firstly, the companies had an obligation to present a guarantee of finances from the bank and a minimum deposit of USD\$20 million. The companies were then required to present a technical pre-conception of the port, including designs and a clear plan for its realization. The third criterion was a financial plan based on methods to gain potential partners and creating a stable financial base for the port. Finally, legal components including comments and advice about investment agreements were required.

Under this agreement, the investor will be responsible for the secure construction, operation and maintenance of the port until the contract time of 49 years has passed. After such time, the port's ownership will be returned to the government. give the port back to the government. It was also mentioned that the investor company is obliged to take care of and protect the environment around the port territory.

"We aim to lay the foundation of the new port and inter-connect Georgia and the industrial world. With the government of Georgia, we will work hard to reduce the trade distance between Europe and Asia to increase the country's economy and help other

Caucasus countries to develop as well" said Kurt Conti, the president of Conti International. Mamuka Khazaradze, Georgian businessman and representative of TBC Holding applauds this progress by saying that, during this endeavor, thousands of people will be employed during the construction work.

According to the agreement, the port will be built in 9 phases. It will be spread over an area of 400 hectares and will start operating within three years, after reaching conductance of 7 million loads. The final rate of loading will be around 100 million per year after construction has finished.

Reaching this result will raise the opportunity for realization of the "Silk Road" in Georgia. Active ports in Batumi and Poti can't work full-time because of low levels of technology and lack of ocean depth.. Most liner vessels take a stop in Turkey, at Istanbul port, where the load is distributed to smaller ships and then brought into Georgia. It's troublesome for big companies as it uses up a lot of time and money, so they prefer avoiding collaboration with Georgian ports.

Compared to last year, the capacity of the containers increased by 18.4% in 2014 and reached 480,000 TEU of which 80% was received in Poti port. Despite the progress, the geographical circumstances of active ports can't allow large ships to enter and dock. As well as the lack of ocean depth, the cities are already densely populated, which interrupts the transport of the loads. According to international standards, ports should be

ready for quick shipping of loads and be able to transport them on time. What's needed is new internal and external infrastructure for the routes.

"Success of Anaklia port is of great importance to our country's international relationships and for its economy. We will mark our place in the history of the "Silk Road" and reinforce our image to the entire world," said Vice-Prime Minister Kumsishvili.

The actual initiation of the new port comes from Karchava. He had businesses in Russia until 2008, but after that he established several companies in Georgia including Anaklia Port and Anaklia Eco Park.

He got the idea for the port years ago. After in-depth analysis and soil studies, he suggested the idea to the last president of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili. As Karchava says, the main reason that building Anaklia port is necessary is that the largest canyon in the Black Sea lies exactly at the territory of Anaklia. The water depth there reaches 20.5 metres, while it's only in Batumi its 14m and 8.5m. Another advantage of Anaklia is that it's an uninhabited territory and has a geographical location where special sea protecting structures don't need to be built nearby.

This idea must have been the driving force for the winning tender. Karchava has close connections to Chinese companies and one of them, Power China, has been his company's partner. This would have been considered a priority for the government since China will be the biggest user of the new port, so building the port without the interest of China is

useless.

However, after the presentation of the Consortium of Anaklia Development, the situation changed. During the interviews, Karchava mentioned his consortium problems to the local government. He blamed the government for intentionally suggesting unacceptable conditions for his partner companies and added that they could not collaborate if the government continued the same restrictions. He planned to talk about the conditions more extensively after the tender would be over, but until now, he hasn't made any remarks about it.

The port of Anaklia will be shortest route from China to Europe. As the most sold products in Europe are made in China-passing through the new port on the Silk Road route, arrival times will be reduced by two weeks. The route has already gained interest, and China has already invested \$40 million into it. The port will encourage, not only the economy of Georgia, but regional economy too. It will lead to effective industrial trade between the Caucasus region and Central Asia, and will open up opportunities for countries without a seaside and ports, like Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbek. Due to this agreement, the Consortium of Anaklia Development will also develop a free industrial zone, which will support local businesses and help to gain foreign investments.

In the announcement of economy, the ministry of Georgia said that 3'400 people will be employed during the construction process, and another 6'200 people will be employed following construction.



CZECH COMPANIES ARE INTERESTED IN INVESTING IN GEORGIA

Prospects of economic cooperation between Georgia and Czech Republic were discussed at the meeting of the Vice Prime Minister of Georgia, Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development Dimitry Kumsishvili and the Czech Minister of Industry and Trade, Jan Mládek.

The Ministers discussed bilateral economic and trade relations, steps made in the direction of enhancing those relations and the prospects of deepening of cooperation in such fields as trade, investments, transport, energy, environment protection, agriculture, intellectual property protection, etc. Prospects of enhancing of trade relations between the two countries were particularly highlighted during the meeting and the great interest of developing the trade relations in

both countries was particularly stressed. Investment opportunities in the different sectors of Georgian economy for Czech investors were also covered during the conversation. Czech Minister noted the progress made by Georgia under the EU Association Agreement including the successful implementation of reforms within the framework of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area and emphasized the importance of successful fulfillment of the recommendations provided in section IV of the visa liberalization action plan.

Deepening of the cooperation in the field of civil aviation was also covered during the conversation which would result in resuming the direct flights between Tbilisi and Prague.

As it was noted at the meet-

ing, an official visit to the Czech Republic of the Prime Minister of Georgia, Giorgi Kvirikashvili is scheduled in February and Georgia-Czech business forum shall be held within the frames of this visit. It was highlighted that such forums will encourage representatives of Georgian and Czech business sectors to develop successful bilateral business relations and cooperation.

Vice Prime Minister of Georgia, Dimitry Kumsishvili expressed gratefulness to the Minister of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic, Jan Mládek for his participation in Tbilisi Silk Road Forum 2015 and invited him to participate in the Tbilisi Silk Road Forum 2016, which is the second forum to be held in the same format in November, this year.



THE BILL, “OFFENDING RELIGIOUS FEELINGS,” HAS A DISCRIMINATORY CHARACTER

IRAKLI PAVLENISHVILI

The Human Rights and Civil Integration Committee has considered and supported a bill proposed by MP Soso Jatchvliani, stating that, “offending [of] religious feelings,” becomes punishable. After the committee considering the bill adopted the following wording - “a person’s religious feelings abuse results in a fine of 300 GEL, in case of repeated fine 600 lari. Desecration of religious sanctities and religious buildings will be fined with 500 lari. “The bill caused a resonance in Civil sector.critically met to initiating of this bill, Public Defender of Georgia Ucha Nanuashvili. Who announced that this bill is against freedom of expression and fair state principle. He added that this bill harms democratic development of country.

The Human Rights and Civil Integration Committee has considered and supported a bill proposed by MP Soso Jatchvliani which states that, “offending [of] religious freedoms,” becomes a punishable offence. After the committee considered, the bill was amended to adopt the following wording: “Abuse of a person’s religious feelings results in a fine of 300 GEL, and 600 Lari in case of a repeated offence. The desecration of religious sanctities and religious buildings will be penalized with a fine of 500 Lari.”

The bill created quite a resonance in the civil sector, and was met with criticism from Public Defender of Georgia, Ucha Nanuashvili, who announced that the bill is, “against freedom of expression and the fair state principle.” He added that this bill will

harm the democratic development of the country.

Doubts about the bill as hate speech directed law is strengthened as the initiator of this bill is MP Jatchvliani. Who is well-known by his odious acts including xenophobic-homophobic. In addition, the author of this bill is the director of Demographic Development Fund, Zviad Tomaradze, Levan Vasadze’s fellow, who is also known with strongly conservative and obscurantist views. This reinforces the view that the bill adoption is serious threat to the secular and democratic society. In fact, persons whose religious feelings abuse will be brought to justice will be members of Georgian orthodox church.

Doubts about the bill classing it as a ‘hate speech-directed law’ are strengthened given the initiator’s history of xenophobia and homophobia. In addition, the author of the bill is Zviad Tomaradze, the director of the Demographic Development Fund, well known for his strongly conservative and obscurantist views. The men behind this bill have reinforced the public view that this is a serious threat to a secular and democratic society.

Adoption of such a law in a society where obscurant and radical sentiments are high can become very dangerous, as seen in the violent demonstrations of May 17th, 2013. A law is in place to dictate what is mandatory for all members of society; it is incapable of creating or obscuring a union between man and God, therefore proving faith to be the individual right of each citizen, not the competence of the state.

This bill will create a fertile ground for strengthening fundamentalism, not allowing space for discourse, criticism, and different views. The constitutional order dictates that believers and non-believers alike have the right to feel at home all over Georgia. Given that God is an abstract notion, the main source of legitimacy of the constitution has to come from the Georgian nation, which consists of many people with very different world views and confessions.

Freedom of speech is a constitutional principle which may be restricted on the basis of simultaneously existing two reasons. The first when it threatens to public order and, second, it must not have social-political cost of view. Public order in Georgia isn’t under threat nowadays a fortiori for this reason. also this bill has political cost because it may restrict political opinion. Accordingly, it can be said that this bill has unconstitutional nature especially If we take into account the thesis determined by Constitutional Court that position, values and ideas can not serve as the basis for restricting freedom of expression. The state is obliged to protect objectively identifiable interests and not subjective feelings and sentiments. Religious feeling in itself is not objectively identifiable interest But the subjective sense of citizen because The religion is highly personal and subjective issue.

Freedom of speech is a constitutional principle which may be restricted under the basis of two simultaneously existing reasons: when it threatens public order,



and when it does not have a social or political cost. Public order in Georgia is not currently under threat, therefore granting full freedom of speech to its citizens.

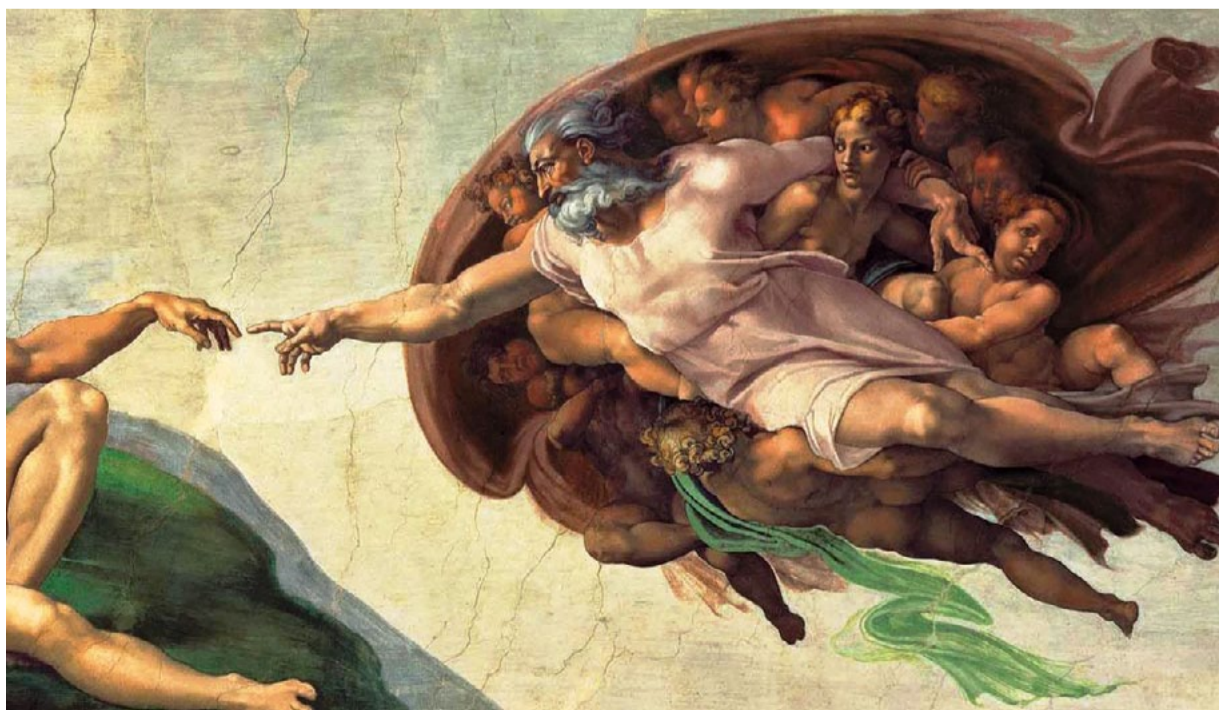
In comparison, the bill itself has a political cost, as it may restrict political opinion. It can be considered unconstitutional in nature when taking into consideration the thesis determined by the Constitutional Court stating that, “Position, values, and ideas cannot serve as the basis for restricting freedom of expression.” Furthermore, it also states that, “The state is obliged to protect objectively identifiable interests, not subjective feelings and sentiments.”

Religious feeling itself is not an objectively identifiable interest; it is highly personal, and therefore the subjective sense of the citizen.

by this bill People who have faith in god become in a privileged position compared to other citizens who dont have any religious affiliations.This approach violates the principle of fair state.In explanatory note of this law is emphasized that in Georgia confession which is mainly objective of religious feelings abuse is Orthodox Church. A

country where the most trusted institution is orthodox church, where patriarchate is annually awarded with agricultural lands and millions of dollars by the state, And where there are many cases of religious fanaticism, Emphasis should be placed not on legal encouraging of fundamentalism and inadmissibility of different view, But on defending of speech and freedom of expression and religious pluralism.

Under this bill, those with religious faith become privileged compared to citizens with no religious affiliation. This approach violates the principle of a fair state. This law is emphasized when it is noted that, in Georgia, the main abuser of religious feelings is the Orthodox Church. Ironically, the Orthodox Church is also the most trusted institution in the country. In a country where the patriarchate is annually awarded agricultural lands worth millions of dollars, and where there are many cases of religious fanaticism, emphasis should be placed, not on the legal encouragement of fundamentalism and inadmissibility of a different view, but instead on the defense of freedom of expression and religious pluralism.



MORE PEOPLE INFECTED WITH SWINE FLU THAN ANNOUNCED

NINI JAPARIDZE **EXCLUSIVE**

13 people died of Swine Flu in Georgia. The virus becomes more and more familiar to us. If for two months we heard about the virus from TV, now we see the results with our eyes. Among the infected people could be not only our distant acquaintances but our friends, relatives and sometimes even the family members. Several days ago, I experienced the virus by myself. As my health condition was pretty serious emergency decided to hospitalized me immediately. Hospital was full of patients of different age. The situation was similar in almost all hospitals. Number of questions came to me and one of the most important is that how many people are really infected. Is it possible that the National Center of Disease control hiding numbers? by doubts has been strengthened with the interview of American Jeffrey Silverman who was saying that the Swine Flu could be produced artificially. Amiran Gamkrelidze is the head of the National Center of Disease control center. he denied all the accusations.

Thirteen people in Georgia have died from swine flu' as the virus becomes more familiar to us. We have heard about it on television for two months and now we see it with our own eyes. Among the infected people are not just our distant acquaintances, but also our friends, relatives and sometimes even close family. Several days ago, I experienced the virus for myself. My health condition was pretty serious, so emergency decided to hospitalize me immediately. The hospital was full of patients of different ages [with swine flu'] and the situation was the same in many other hospitals. A number of questions came to me, one being 'how many people are really infected?' Is it possible that the National Center of Disease Control is hiding the numbers? Doubts have been strengthened following the interview with American, Jeffrey Silverman, who said that swine flu' could be spread artificially. Amiran Gamkrelidze, head of the National Center of Disease Control, has denied all accusations.

Mr. Gankrelidze, last week, American Journalist Jeffrey Silverman assumed in the interview with Observer that Lugar Laboratory might be taking apart in the production of the H1N1 swine flu' virus. What do you think of that?

Information spread by this man



is not true. I have commented about this issue several times before, both for Georgian and foreign televisions. I can repeat again that the Lugar Laboratory is a high class biomedical research center, and it has nothing in common with Silverman's accusations.

A high class biomedical research center can also conduct secret studies can't it? Silverman thinks that the swine flu' might be spread in public artificially and on purpose.

No way, not at all.

In February the number of infected people increased to 357 infected per 100'000 people. Does it mean that an epidemic is on its way?

These numbers vary according to the week. For example, in the fourth week the number of infected people was equal to 357, while in the fifth week the number was lower, at 310. The information is being analyzed on Mondays, although we assume that the result in the sixth week will be much better. Unfortunately there are patients whose

conditions are pretty difficult, but in many cases they were late to ask for medical help. Hopefully there is no epidemic and the worst time is over now.

What are the criteria to establish whether or not there is an epidemic? Why does 500 per 100'00 people infected equal a crisis ,but 357 per 100'00 does not?

Criteria vary according to the diseases. In Georgia, it was estimated that the critical number for swine flu' is 500, and in Russia's case, the number was 1000. In Ukraine's case, it is 700. Each country has its own threshold [depending on population size].

I came across research by the World Health Organization. In 2009 when the virus was first tracked, 4000 people were infected. The organization said that it was an epidemic. In Georgia currently, the number of infected people is much higher, but no one is saying that this is an epidemic, why?

This is a good question; I'll try to explain. The reason is that in 2009 the situation was absolute-

ly different. The viral epidemic comprised the number of countries and it was very aggressive. Since 2009 many things have changed. Now people have immunity; there is a vaccine and we know how to fight this virus.

There is a huge difference between 2009 and 2016. Which group of people has the strongest immunity against this virus?

Vaccinated people have a better immunity of course, although there is no 100% guarantee. The level of protection might range from 80 -85 %. There are some groups which are encouraged to undergo the vaccination process. They are elderly people and those who have the chronic diseases.

Does this mean that the vaccination is free of charge?

Vaccinations against the flu' are not mandatory, and therefore are not free, however during last three years, we have provided it to 12'000 people for free. These people are living on dialysis and the majority of them belong to the vulnerable groups.

There are number of people who live in different regions. They don't have many chances to call the doctor whenever they need to do so In some villages, there is still snow while in others there are problems with communication. Are you taking this into consideration? Could the number of infected people be higher?

No, it can't be, and I'll explain why. We are measuring the number of infected people with the help of a specific instrument. This tool is calculating the average distribution of infection in the country. This instrument is verified by the American Disease Control Center and World Health Organization.

Mr. Gamkrelidze, I visited the national center of disease control and I found out that among it's neighbors, Georgia has the best situation. How would you comment on this?

This information is not constant; it's changing all the time. However, this year, Georgia had the average number of complications for the region.

NEW LIFE FOR GORDA AT RENEWED OPERA AND BALLET THEATRE

On February 12, the Tbilisi Opera and Ballet Theatre presented a ballet show by David Toradze, called *Gorda*.

Prior to the show, an exhibition was held in the Blue Hall, portraying the history of the ballet.

Gorda has been restored by the head of the ballet troupe, Nina Ananiashvili. The scenery is by David Hays, costuming by Anna Kalatozishvili, and conducted by Revaz Takidze.

“Half a century ago *Gorda* was first performed and now it is really gaining a second life. I am very pleased that the restoration works on this ballet started last year. I wish that the Opera and Ballet Theatre will be overcrowded, not only during the premiere screenings, but at other times too. We would like to wish success to the ballet,» said the Minister of Culture and Monument Protection, Mikheil Giorgadze.

Gorda was first staged in 1949 by Vakhtang Chabukiani, on the music of Georgian composer, David Toradze. The choreographer and a legendary ballet dancer performed the main role himself. *Gorda* was presented in the theatre's repertoire for decades.

In 1973, a fire completely de-

stroyed the theatre stores including all of the performance painting and costumes. Ballet heads had to restore some of the performances, including *Gorda*, which premiered again in 1974. Under the direction of Zurab Kikaleishvili, *Gorda* rose again by the end of 1996.

The Opera and Ballet Theatre was officially renewed on January 30 this year.

The theatre renovations started in 2010 with the financial support of the Kartu Foundation. The main architect of the project is Leri Medzmariashvili.

The building underwent internal and external restoration works, including foundation strengthening roof restoration with copper foil, expansion of the orchestra pit, installation of ultra-modern video, audio, lighting and intercom systems, and full restoration of the hall chairs. The hall also had its gold pleating restored, and was equipped with top class instruments, including two concert grand pianos. The Jansung Kakhidze rehearsal room was transformed and a new veranda added to the exhibition space. The external and internal facade was restored to its original appearance and the look of

the Opera House was sustained.

Of significant importance was the restoration of the Austrian crystal chandelier made of 600 lamps, created by Nodar Ergemlidze. Overall, about 12'000 units of the crystal details were missing from the whole chandelier lighting system, all of which were replaced by the Kartu Foundation from the Swarovski company. The Swarovski company did not actually produce those particular crystals anymore and so a custom order was created. The theatre curtain was printed by the German company Geriets and the Ministry of Culture according to Sergo Kobuladze's sketch.

Repairs were conducted for 6 years, and involved hundreds of employees from the Kartu group. The entire restoration cost approximately \$40 million.

The Opera House purchased two powerful Panasonic projectors which will increase the value of the play.. The Tbilisi Opera and Ballet Theatre now has technical capabilities such that it is now ranked one of the best world-class operas.

Ballet *Gorda* premiere shows will be continued on February 13 and 14 as well.



MATVEY WEISSBERG: TO BE AN ARTIST IS FATE

NINI MACHAVARIANI **EXCLUSIVE**

The National Museum of Georgia is hosting the exhibition of a Ukrainian artist, Matvey Weissberg. "Wall, the Wall and the Other," was opened on February 12 and will continue until March 6. The exhibition is an attempt to strengthen relations between Georgia and Ukraine.

The exhibition, organized by the National Museum, Gallery Vanda, and the Kiev Art Union Ducat, presents up to 100 paintings performed by the author in the last 15 years. One of the distinctive series From January 28 "Wall, the Wall and the Other," is dedicated to Kiev Maidan events. The exhibition was held in Ukraine, Poland, the UK and the US. In addition, the exhibition presents: "Judea Desert" (2001), "Wall" (2011) and "Giotto Allegories."

The idea to call the exhibition "The Wall" came from the artist's studio, where there is a huge space to fill with drawings. Accordingly, a series of paintings gives an impression of the wall. "The wall has different meaning in art," Weissber said in a conversation with Observer. "For example, the wall of mourning and the weeping wall. Sometimes the name comes from a literary creation or from life events."

The Ukrainian artist is known for his paintings, as well as his graphics and book illustrations. In 1990, the author held his first personal exhibition at the Art Museum in Kiev. Since this time, he has held more than 50 individual and group exhibitions at galleries such as the Berlin Wall

Museum in Berlin, the Ukrainian Institute in New York City, the House of Europe in London, and the Polish Sejm in Warsaw. The artist's works are exhibited in Kiev, Vilnius, Berlin, Chicago and Berkeley at various museums.

In childhood, he was very fond of painting, growing up in his mother's art studio where he mastered the basics of painting very early in life. All his paintings were hanging on the wall of his house. The first major painting he created at the age of 10. "I remember very well my first childhood drawings. I had painted everything in the house except the ceiling, but if I could reach there, I would paint it too," he said of his childhood. "I loved to paint my father because he was bald. First, I was painting circle, then hair, and then I was painting face. My dad was my favorite model," said Weissberg.

He first visited Georgia in 2012, and he spoke about his journey with great love. The artist expected that many visitors would come to the exhibition, and, after the exhibition opening, his expectations were proven. He is proud to represent Ukraine and Ukrainian people in Georgia.

"As a rule, people speak with love about Georgia and this is true. I love Niko Pirosmani, who has long been known for his creativity. I attended his first exhibition, which was held in St.Petersburg. I like this country and the people. Specifically, Tbilisi reminds me of Jerusalem with its antiquity, and the spirit of

the temples. Tbilisi is more similar to Jerusalem, for example, than Rome. I have many friends in Georgia and it is always pleasant to meet them "he said.

Weissberg's studio is located in the old hostel of the Kiev Conservatory. He began there years ago, and the studio location has not changed. He loves to work in the morning, before the sun reaches his studio. Every day he paints for 4 to 5 hours, working on the details of the drawings until he gets tired.

"Every time, I work intensely. Some believe that I work quickly, but I think slowly. It is a great happiness, when you have the opportunity to go there every day and do your work, but from time to time I have difficult situations which prevent me from working. In life there are times when people have to work longer and longer and in the initial stages it is necessary," he said.

The Ukrainian artist likes being in his studio, which is located on the 7th floor. He has his working environment arranged to see a view of the old district of Kiev and sometimes he paints that landscape.

Weissberg thinks that the artist should live so as not to be sold on various temptations so that he is can be unashamed. "To be the artist, it is not a simple thing; it's fate, which is to be passed and thus to be lived. In our time, there are a lot of foundations, and winning the prize does not mean that you can stop. Artists need a lot of work in order to cultivate and develop their art."



WHAT ARE THE DISADVANTAGES OF CURRENT EXAMINATION REFORMS?

MARI TABATADZE

The registration process for Entrance Examinations for 2016 started on February 9 and the initial stage will end at 6pm on March 15.

Currently, the registration process includes a number of important innovations. This year, for the first time, applicants will have to pass exams with a partial electronic form. The format change provides for the delivery of electronic test; an applicant will read the task on a computer screen. As for answering the questions, nothing has changed; every student, as usual, will be able to select or write down the answers on the answer sheet.

Another important change is that this year, for the first time, from March 15 to June 1, applicants are able to change the listed language, the chosen subject and to add a new one. However, they are not able to change cities.

Head of the National Assessment and Examination Center, Maya Miminoshvili, mentioned that similar changes are available to be implemented after these partial electronic forms of examinations. During the previous years the precise, detailed information had to have been known earlier in the year as the tests were published abroad. That is why, according to her, the system is more flexible now.

This year, besides the entrants, teachers, students and graduate candidates will also have to pass the partially electronic exams. After 2017, the National Assessment and Examination Center is planning to implement fully electronic exams.

Before these changes raise questions about the difficulties that emerge during the implementation, it is important to recall that the National Exams, according to the resolution of Georgian government, have been functioning since 2005. The implementation of the new model for Entrance Exams is still considered to be one of the most successful reforms in the country. The implemented model, which is developed by the National Examinations Centre, is a system based on fair, transparent and unified principles.

Since then, every year there have been changes. In 2005, all entrants had to take three compulsory subjects and the government provided funding, taking into consideration the results of the three above-mentioned exams. In 2006, the rules of providing government funding were changed. It was stated that the grant would be given according to Ability Test results instead of the three compulsory exams. 2007 saw the introduction of

electronic registration. Moreover, applications of the entrants were placed on the internet which enabled each of them to double check their applications online. During the following year, the role of technology increased and, in 2008, a computer-based marketing system, eMarker, was successfully implemented. The most valuable news for 2009 was that evaluators were selected through the process of competition, while the limit of minimal competence was simultaneously increased. During the subsequent years, technology has become even more important at every stage of the National Examination process including being implemented to obtain percentages of grants. In addition, entrants were enabled to indicate more educational programs in their applications. Later, the state allocated money for funding the priority fields. It is also noteworthy that in addition to the general changes, there were specific ones within the subjects, too. For example, listening was added to foreign language tests in 2014.

In spite of the fact that National Exams have an eleven year history and despite the number of system changes, it is often said that it needs to be revised. The main issue is that the school programs and national exams are

not as consistent as they should be to enable each school-leaver to pass the tests successfully.

What changes the National Examinations Center are planning regarding the above-mentioned issue is still unknown. However, more pressing questions are concerning the electronic format exams. As mentioned, the National Assessment and Examination Center is planning the transition to electronic format. Ms. Miminoshvili considers that using technologies is favorable for the efficient examination process. However, she also notes that this process presents a much greater challenge. Firstly, there are open tasks at the National Exams and in order to complete those, applicants have to physically write their answers. The issue is particularly difficult in some subjects, such as mathematics, physics and chemistry, because they demand printing formulas and symbols, which, in turn, is difficult for a lot of applicants today, because the majority of them do not have the necessary skills to perform similar tasks.

In addition, one of the most interesting issues is that it is difficult to determine how long it takes an entrant to print the tasks. Another problem involves determining which errors are print errors and which are knowledge

errors. These differences will need to be differentiated by the correctors.

As for the financial issues surrounding technology, according to Ms. Miminoshvili, there are two options. The first being to buy computers, although this is connected with significant financial resources, and the –second is for the Ministry of Education to allow the school-leavers to use Examination Center computers.

Based on the information at hand, it is clear that full implementation of electronic examinations can be described as revolutionary. Unfortunately, the process is much more difficult when we talk about National Examinations than in the case of school-leaving examinations, which do not contain tasks with open questions.

More specifically, what financial and technical resources will be needed for the launch of these programs? How will testing centers be provided with technical equipments? How will the electronic versions be protected, and what changes will there be necessary in the process of marking? All these will be known after putting the changes in action. As a result, as Ms. Miminoshvili said, an electronic form will provide an opportunity for students to have a wider variety of tasks.



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FC DINAMO TBILISI IN GOOD SHAPE

VAKO KIPIANI

The second round of the national football championship will soon resume. Teams' preparatory period has already passed. Tbilisi Dinamo held five friendly matches in Turkey, with the Georgian team winning four matches and drawing one in Antalya.

Tbilisi Dinamo won 1-0 against FC Croatia Split, with the winning goal scored by Jaba Jighauri in the 17th minute. Kvitalia and Gelashvili could have also scored, but missed the opportunity. In the second meeting, Dinamo held out against FC Bate Borisov of Belarus, winning 2-0. Lasha Parunashvili opened the corner kick and scored a beautiful header into the net. Prior to that, Mate Tsintsadze could have scored, but missed a penalty chance. The goalkeeper managed to defend the shots from the Belarus team. Five minutes after the start of the second half, Kvitalia kicked the penalty and increased the lead to two. Tbilisi still had a chance to increase the score,

but failed to improve their result. Dinamo's third opponent was the Serbian Vojvodina. Dinamo beat the Serbs 2-1. In the eighth minute of the match, newcomer Nikoloz Gelashvili opened the score. The Serbs equalized the game in 32 minutes with a penalty kick. In the second half, after several changes, the Georgian players became more active, and in the 69th minute, Jaba Jighauri scored the second goal and the game ended at 2-1.

Bratislava FC Slovan became Dinamo's fourth victims with Dinamo scoring 5 goals. The team controlled the field for the entire game. They drove the ball easily and quickly back and forth. Alexander Iashvili opened the score at 31 minutes using a penalty from the fall of Giorgi Kvilitaia. At 43 minutes, Kvilitaia made a solo raid and scored to round out the first half. In the second half, a Parunashvili-Jigauri - Chanturishvili combination finished with a goal for Chanturishvili. Soon Nikoloz

Gelashvili scored another goal taking the lead to 4-0. Between 77 minutes and 80 minutes, 3 goals were scored, 2 from Slovan and a final goal from Gelashvili, taking the game in a 5-2 victory. Finally Our Georgian team showed an offensive, beautiful and spectacular game.

The fifth game between Tbilisi Dinamo and FC Karpaty Lviv ended in a 3-all draw. The Tbilisi team was winning in the first half of the game with a score of 2-0, both scored by George Kvilitaia in the 27th minute and the 45th minute. After the 60th minute, the Ukrainians reduced the difference, and 12 minutes later, Saba Lobjanidze scored a third goal. Unfortunately, the Georgian's were unable to keep the score and allowed their competition to score twice more.

Dinamo finished the round with won 4 wins and a draw, scoring 13 total goals and conceding 6. The fans hope that the team will be able to claim a ticket to the Euro tournament. It is important

that the team keeps their balance. Adding one or two more good footballers will be of great help to the team.



WEEKLY SPORT NEWS

Rugby

The National Rugby Team Cup defeated Portugal in Lisbon in the second-round match by 29:3. Victory was gained with a bonus point. Goals were made by Giorgi Tkhalashvili, Merab Kvirikashvili, Zurab Zhvania, and Buka Sharikadze.



Football

The Georgian Football Federation has completed the negotiations with the Armenian side, it was decided that on March 1 and 3 the U-17 team of Georgia will hold two friendly matches. Both meetings to be carried at the Mikheil Meskhi stadium,

14 o'clock and our rival will be Armenia's U-18 team. Georgian team is getting ready for the European Championship elite round that will be hold in Tbilisi on 15-20 March and hence they have already played in January in Minsk.

Basketball

A champion of the U-14 teams in basketball became Tbilisi "Dinamo". The team trained by Mamuka Turashvili and Vasil Gogua defeated "Hyundai" in the final match and won the title of the best team in the capital. Dinamo defeated rival with 7-points advantage 53:60.



Judo

Avdandil Chrikishvili won gold medal in Paris at the Judo Grand Slam, while Varlam Liparteliani got the bronze medal.





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